



Why Did Joseph Banks refuse to Teach Omai to Read?

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Abstract

This dissertation delves into the fervour of exploration in the eighteenth century and all the excitement that accompanied it. Omai was the first Polynesian ever to visit England, he was welcomed into high society and quickly became a favourite among elite circles. Although much has been written about Omai, several issues exist regarding the way he has been portrayed. Omai was illiterate and, therefore, left no first-hand account of his own story, this has left his experiences open to misinterpretation and manipulation. In some accounts, Omai is used as a mere tool to prove a point in a post-colonial context. The argument put forward here, is against reducing the life story of an individual who existed at the beginning of Britain's colonial expansion to illustrate an argument that can only be understood from a post-colonial vantage point. This dissertation tells Omai's story in a chronological style focussing on his two-year stay in England, where he spent much time with Joseph Banks. From his birth, on Raiatea, to his premature death, it is Omai's opinions and feelings that are depicted for their own purposes and not to shed light onto European attitudes towards newly discovered populations. Primary source materials, especially journals from Captain Cook's Pacific voyages, have been extensively researched and used to challenge the historiographical material relating to Omai. The findings depict a man who has been portrayed as a savage, a prince, a fool, and a victim. These labels are disregarded to produce a comprehensive account of who Omai was, and what he hoped to achieve.

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Introduction

In Richard Holmes' *'Age of Wonder'*, he states that Joseph Banks caused a scandal by refusing to teach south sea islander Omai, how to read.¹ Contemporary critics accused botanist, Joseph Banks of keeping Omai as an ignorant specimen for his own study. After a short amount of research this claim is shown to be completely false, Omai did receive reading lessons, from anti-slavery activist Granville Sharp, Banks was even involved in organising them.² The claim made by Holmes is repeated in works by Patricia Fara.³ This misinformation must be challenged as Omai has been reduced to a mere literary device, used to prove the claims of a post-colonial ideology without proper consideration being given to his personal experience or the historical context in which he existed. This dissertation takes inspiration from Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* where he describes the struggle of black people against modern racism to be viewed as autonomous agents with their own intellectual history.⁴ Although Gilroy's book focusses on the experiences of the African diaspora; for our purposes, his argument is attributed to the people of Polynesia. By depicting Omai as simply a victim of colonial oppression, writers have refused to acknowledge Omai's own agency and therefore, undermined their own point. Through investigating why Joseph Banks refused to teach Omai to read, an insight into enlightenment and colonialist thinking started to emerge, with Omai at its centre. Paul Turnbull states that 'the story of Mai has been told largely in ways that illuminate what the Age of Enlightenment made of the peoples of Oceania.'⁵ This dissertation reverses this process, although no first-hand accounts of Omai exist in his own words, due to his illiteracy, there is an abundance of primary source material concerning him. From journals kept aboard Cook's three voyages to the Pacific, the works of contemporary diarists and

¹ Richard Holmes, 'Joseph Banks in Paradise', in *The Age of Wonder* (London: Harperpress, 2009), p. 50.

² Richard Connaughton, *Omai: The Prince Who Never was* (London: Timewell Press, 2005), pp. 134, 135.

³ Patricia Fara, *Sex, Botany & Empire* (Crows Nest NSW: Icon books, 2003), p. 122.

⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (New York: Verso, 1993), p. 6.

⁵ Paul Turnbull, 'Mai, The Other Beyond the Exotic Stranger', in *Cook and Omai*, ed. by Rendle-Short Francesca, (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), pp. 43-51, p. 43.

commentators, and impressive artworks. These will serve to produce a comprehensive account of Omai's life and his time in England with Banks.

The aim of this dissertation is two-fold, first is to tell a chronological story of Omai's short life. Chapter one focuses on Omai's childhood, the loss of his father and home, his expulsion from his native island, and experiences as a refugee. His witnessing of the first encounters with Europeans, his first experience of guns, and his successful attempt to join a European crew. Chapter two starts with a description of the British concept of 'otherness'; before describing Omai's time spent in England with a focus on Joseph Banks and the relationship between the two men. Chapter three opens with preparations for Omai's return home, followed by a description of the voyage to the Pacific, and finally, Omai's reunion with his fellow islanders and setting up home on Huaheine. The second aim of this work is to tell Omai's story from his own viewpoint, through a post-colonial lens. Throughout his life who did Omai see as his oppressor and when did he feel oppressed, this is particularly important as this dissertation aims to avoid hindsight. It is easy from our twenty-first century vantage point to label people as victims of an imperialist regime but that only detracts from the individuality that they possessed and serves to amalgamate them into an easily identifiable group. In removing Omai from this group, the focus will be on how, when, and by whom his cultural identity was changed.

In Forster's account of Cook's journeys, he acknowledges the use of 'O' in south sea dialect; it is added to the beginning of names and words to signify 'this is'.⁶ Omai's real name is Mai and this is how he will be referred to throughout the rest of this paper with the exception of direct quotes. There is an emphasis on the use of primary sources throughout this dissertation especially in the first and third chapters, the second chapter relies more on secondary sources as it is where the majority of the arguments concerning misrepresentation are. The primary sources are mostly journals of voyages to the south

⁶ Roderic Bowen Library and Archives: University Archive, Forster, Georg, *A Voyage Round the World: In His Britannic Majesty's Sloop, Resolution, Commanded by Capt. James Cook, during the Years 1772, 3, 4, and 5* (London: Printed for B. White, in Fleet-Street; J. Robson, in Bond-Street; and P. Elmsly, in the Strand, 1777), p. 145.

seas, these sources are considered to be largely reliable, however; the works of Bougainville and Hawkesworth are generally considered to have been exaggerated regarding the sexual behaviour of both islanders and crew.⁷ However, as this dissertation does not focus on any sexual elements present in any of the sources it is not relevant. Henry Brougham's work is biased towards Banks as a family friend and admirer also, the work was not published until 1846. George Coleman's account of his time with Mai was, as well, not published until much later in 1830. The strengths of these works, however, are that they convey first-hand accounts of people who dealt personally with Mai, Banks, and Polynesian society. Only one artwork will be analysed in chapter two, William Parry's portrait of *Omai, Sir Joseph Banks, and Daniel Charles Solander*, although many paintings of Mai exist; much of the controversy that surrounds the meanings behind these various portrayals can be explored in this one piece.⁸

One of the great problems in researching this subject is the difficulty in accessing secondary sources written by the Pacific populations. Jocelyn Linnekin claims this problem still exists as many indigenous people, especially in Hawaii and Tahiti are not only subalterns, but exist as impoverished minorities in their native lands. Until the dominant class ceases to prevent the indigenous narrative from being disseminated freely the problem will continue.⁹ This dissertation can be easily placed into context as it focusses on the lifetime of one individual who did not live to see thirty with all the research in this work focussed upon that short timeframe. The conclusion will show how Mai was a man with a complex and varied personality, who's one true ambition drove him throughout his adult life to achieve an unattainable goal.

⁷ Alexander Dalrymple, *Mr. Dalrymple's Observations on Dr. Hawkesworth's Preface to the Second Edition [of His 'an Account of the Voyages Undertaken.....for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere, etc]* (The British Library, 1773), pp. 1, 2, 3. Dalrymple was a supporter of the idea of another continent in the southern hemisphere. His book criticises Hawkesworth for focussing on gossip rather than the discovery of new land; Connaughton, Omai, p. 74.

⁸ See figure 4.

⁹ Jocelyn Linnekin, 'Contending Approaches', in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, ed. by Denoon Donald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 3-30, pp. 30, 31.

Chapter one.

This chapter explores Mai's childhood experiences, his first encounters with Europeans, and how he came to join a European vessel. As all the sources used are European, particular effort has been taken to analyse the Tahitian perspective of these events and Mai's own point of view is explored.

Mai's Childhood.

Mai was a native of the island of Raiatea, his exact date of birth is unknown but was around 1753.¹⁰ He was born into the *raatira*, a middle-class, land-owning family.¹¹ A book aimed at missionaries, published in 1799, describes the Society Islands and the cultural and religious practices of their native populations. Raiatea, like all its neighbouring islands, was a strictly hierarchical society with a hereditary monarchy. The ruling families *arii* were all believed to be directly descended from the twelve gods worshipped by Polynesians.¹² Mai's childhood would have been spent amidst religious and political turmoil. The cult of the war god *Oro* had started on his native Raiatea, the island considered to be the birthplace of Polynesian culture, and was well established before his birth. This cult, in a way that mirrored the religious upheavals that came with the protestant reformation in Europe, spread to the

¹⁰ Michelle Hetherington, 'The Cult of the South Seas', in *Cook and Omai*, ed. by Rendle-Short Francesca (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), pp. 1-9, p. 2.

¹¹ Douglas Oliver, 'Norms of Tahitian Land Tenure: Ancient and Modern', in *The Changing Pacific*, ed. by Gunson Niel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 110-127, p. 114.

¹² Roderic Bowen Library and Archives: University Archive, Thomas, Phillips and others, *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean: Performed in the Years 1796, 1797, 1798, in the Ship Duff, Commanded by Captain James Wilson: Compiled from Journals of the Officers and the Missionaries, and Illustrated with Maps, Charts, and Views, Drawn by Mr. William Wilson, and Engraved by the Most Eminent Artists: With a Preliminary Discourse on the Geography and History of the South Sea Islands, and an Appendix, Including Details Never before Published, of the Natural and Civil State of Otaheite* (London: Printed by S. Gosnell, for T. Chapman, 1799). pp. xlii, 325, 343. This text is an amalgamation of other first-hand works that may not be entirely accurate however, as it was aimed at potential missionaries who needed their information to be as accurate as possible there is no reason for this book to contain any deliberate falsification.

neighbouring islands, including Tahiti. In part, the worship of this god led to Raiatea being invaded and occupied by the *Hau Fa'naui* tribe from neighbouring Bora Bora.¹³ Mai's father was killed, and the family's land seized, they were forced to seek refuge on the neighbouring island of Huaheine. The cult of Oro became a powerful force on the island of Tahiti, with new alliances and marriages being made between the islands elite and the *Hau Fa'naui*.¹⁴ Mai would have been around eleven years old at this time, fatherless and landless, he and his family were cast down the social scale and became the lower class *manahune*, and now as such owed their labour and military service to the chief of Huaheine.¹⁵ Mai found employment as a religious assistant to the Priest Tupaia, another refugee, on the neighbouring Tahiti.¹⁶ Finding steady employment and a home in Polynesian society was of the utmost importance, those who did not were the lowest class in society the *toutou*, 'common, low, fellows, who stroll about, from place to place and island to island, without having any fixed abode, or any visible way of getting an honest livelihood'.¹⁷ It is from this class that all human sacrifices were chosen, and Mai and his family would have been well aware of their precarious new position in the social hierarchy. Another element to the family's downfall would have been their possible inability to worship; Douglas Oliver explains, 'an individual of middle or lower class status maintained effective inherited use-rights only in the territory of his or her residence, or if married elsewhere only in that of his birth'.¹⁸ This would mean that Mai's family would only have had access to temple worship on Huaheine if his mother had been born there. She had likely been born there, as after being widowed she probably would have sought the relative safety of her original home and family.

¹³ Richard Connaughton, *Omai: The Prince Who Never was* (London: Timewell Press, 2005), p. 19. There is no 'B' in south sea dialect, the island is called Pora Pora, with Bora Bora being adopted during WWII.

¹⁴ Turnbull Paul, 'Mai, The Other Beyond the Exotic Stranger', in *Cook and Omai*, ed. by Rendle-Short Francesca (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), pp. 43-51, pp. 43, 41.

¹⁵ Oliver, 'Norms of Tahitian Land Tenure', p. 114.

¹⁶ Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 19.

¹⁷ RBLA: University Archive, Cook James, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed Under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Discovery; in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780. Vol. I. and II. Written by Captain James Cook. Vol. III. by Captain James King. Published by Order of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty*, 3rd ed. edn (London: Printed by H. Hughs for G. Nicol, bookseller, and T. Cadell, 1785), p. 39.

¹⁸ Oliver, 'Norms of Tahitian Land Tenure', p. 113.

First European contacts.

On June the nineteenth 1767, Mai would have been about fourteen years old, at this point his life was to change forever. The *Dolphin*, a British ship captained by Samuel Wallis, arrived at Tahiti. Soon canoes full of curious islanders surrounded the ship, containing about eight hundred people, some throwing plantain branches as a symbol of friendship. As the islanders grew more confident and perhaps aggressive around the newcomers they were met with swift retaliation, 'they grew bolder, the Indians preparing at the same time to board her, with their clubs and paddles in their hands. Our people being thus pressed, were obliged to fire, by which one of the assailants was killed, and another much wounded.'¹⁹ Relations were strained and mixed from this point, the islanders were banned from the ship for stealing, canoes were coming to the ship to trade fruit, hogs, and fowls, and the women made their first attempts at solicitation, a temptation which the crew initially resisted. By the twenty-first there were thousands of people gathered on the beach, this would account for the mixed reception received by the *Dolphin*, so many people would certainly have been from different tribes across the island and likely from different islands. On the twenty-fourth, the islanders launched an attack against the ship, with three-hundred canoes carrying approximately two-thousand men. The signal to attack was a coconut branch being thrown into the sea at which point a barrage of stones was thrown at the ship, Wallis gave the order to fire warning shots, and when that did not deter them he ordered the canoe of the chief to be shot at and destroyed, 'As soon as this was observed by the rest, they dispersed with such haste that in half an hour there was not a single canoe to be seen'.²⁰ On the twenty-sixth, and sensing another attack Wallis went on the offensive; he ordered for the canoes to be fired upon before turning the guns onto the trees driving the islanders onto the hilltop where thousands of women and children were seated to watch the battle,

¹⁹ John Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere and Successfully Performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Carteret, Captain Wallis, and Captain Cook in the Dolphin the Swallow, and the Endeavour* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1733), p. 224.

²⁰ Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty*, p. 225.

the guns were then turned onto these innocent spectators.²¹ Connaughton claims that Mai was injured in this attack, not severely, but being injured from so far away and witnessing the power of the European guns must have had an impact on his young mind.²² Having driven all the islanders away in terror, Wallis ordered that their canoes be destroyed, fifty were found, and taken apart by the ship's carpenters. This display of military superiority and malice had the desired effect, gifts were left on the beach for the crew, the sailors started to socialise with the women, ripping nails out of their ship to pay for sexual favours.²³ The Tahitian queen, Oberea, started to frequent the *Dolphin* and the senior crew members were invited to visit her home. By the time Wallis' crew left Tahiti on the twenty-seventh of July good relations had been established between the crew and the Tahitians.²⁴

Just eight months later, on April fourth, 1768, Tahiti was once again visited by a European vessel, this time a French ship captained by Louis Antoine de Bougainville. This visit was similar to Wallis' in many respects, the trading between the crew and islanders, the establishment of friendly relations, and the sailors engaging in sex with the female islanders. The main distinctions between the two visits were that Bougainville did not order any violence against the Tahitians; although this is likely because they did not attack this crew as they had Wallis'. Despite this relative peace, several islanders were killed in a bayonet attack, Bougainville promised that the perpetrators would be punished but provides no account of how, or even if, any punishment was carried out. By the time Bougainville's ship departed after a stay of just ten days, friendly relations had been fully established with the Tahitians and, an islander named Aotourou joined the crew on the return voyage to France, the first south sea islander to visit Europe.²⁵

²¹ Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty*, pp. 213, 214, 215, 218, 219, 223, 229, 230.

²² Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 13.

²³ Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by Commodore Byron, Captain Carteret, Captain Wallis, and Captain Cook*, pp. 230, 231, 233, 239.

²⁴ Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 17. Oberea was not actually queen but acting as regent for her young son. This did not stop her from entering the British imagination as a great and powerful queen of Tahiti with fanciful tales being created around her; Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by Commodore Byron, Captain Carteret, Captain Wallis, and Captain Cook*, pp. 242, 251, 253, 258.

²⁵ Louis De Bougainville, *A Voyage Round the World* (London: J. Nourse; T Davies, 1772), pp. 106, 107, 113, 115, 116, 118.

Cook's first two visits to Tahiti.

On Monday, April tenth, 1767, Captain Cook's ship *Endeavour*, carrying Joseph Banks as the ship's official botanist, sailed into Tahitian waters. Immediately the Tahitians handed over plantain branches as a sign of peace and soon began trading with the crew. When going ashore Cook remarked, 'We were received from the boat by some hundreds of the inhabitants, whose looks at least gave us welcome though they were struck with such awe, that the first who approached us crouched so low that he almost crept upon his hands and knees.'²⁶ Cook believed the islanders to be displaying behaviour of natural submissiveness in the presence of Europeans. A more likely explanation for their actions is that some of the crew had been aboard the *Dolphin* and were familiar to the islanders. Remembering the weapons used against them, crouching to avoid gunfire would simply have been a defensive measure; and they were unlikely to have been awestruck as this was the third vessel, they had seen in less than two years and they would have grown used to such sights. The official purpose of Cook's visit to Tahiti was to observe the transit of Venus across the face of the Sun.²⁷ The crew intended to stay on Tahiti for a long time, compared to the first two ships, to carry out their necessary experiments. Cook's crew began to build a fort, the Tahitians were not alarmed by this and they gladly helped; the crew were instructed to ask permission and to pay for every tree they felled to build the fort. The rest of the crew's stay was spent in scientific research, socialising with the islanders, trying to build an understanding of Tahitian culture, language, and religion. Cook had also allowed an islander, who became an indispensable member of the crew, to join the voyage to England.²⁸ A complete departure from Banks' usual demeanour is his journal entry concerning the priest Tupia, as he prepares to join the *Endeavour* crew and visit England, 'Thank heaven I have a

²⁶ James Cook, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook* (London: William Smith, 1846), pp. 36, 37, 38.

²⁷ Richard Holmes, 'Joseph Banks in Paradise', in *The Age of Wonder* (London: Harperpress, 2009), p. 5. This was part of an international effort to measure the solar parallax and establish what distance lay between the Sun and the Earth. The next opportunity to perform these measurements would be in 1874.

²⁸ Meihana Peter N, 'My Ancestors Met Cook in Aotearoa 250 Years Ago. for Us, it's Time to Reinterpret a Painful History', (2020), 04/05/20. <https://theconversation.com/>. Tupaia guided Cook's crew safely to New Zealand where he made such an impact on the natives that they immortalised him in song, a song which is still performed today.

sufficiency and I do not know why I may not keep him as a curiosity, as well as some of my neighbours do lions and tygers at a larger expence than he will probably ever put me to; the amusement I shall have in his future conversation and the benefit he will be of to this ship, as well as what he may be if another should be sent into these seas, will I think fully repay me.²⁹ Unfortunately Tupia and his young son Tupeto died before reaching England.³⁰ By the time Cook's crew left Tahiti they had been there for three months and had cultivated meaningful and friendly relations with the Tahitians.³¹

On the fifteenth of August 1773, Cook, once again sailed into Tahitian waters with his vessels the *Resolution* and the *Adventure*. They were, again, warmly welcomed and met with disappointment as the islanders relentlessly enquired after the whereabouts of Joseph Banks, who had not joined this expedition.³² This expedition had no specific reason for visiting Tahiti other than maintaining the relationship Cook had established on his first visit. In September, whilst visiting the small island of Huaheine, Captain Furneaux welcomed Mai aboard. Cook was not pleased about this decision and stated, 'I at first rather wondered that Captain Furneaux would encumber himself with this man, who, in my opinion, was not a proper example of the people of these happy islands, not having any advantage of birth, or acquired rank; nor being eminent in shape, figure or complexion.'³³ Cook's opinion of Mai was a common one among Polynesians, Mai was dark-skinned, which marked him out as being of the lower class and he had a large flat nose for which he was mocked by his peers.³⁴ At this point, Cook was made aware of the Boraboran's violent colonisation of Raiatea and Mai's plan to regain his land from them by force.³⁵ As Mai was not on board Cook's ship the

²⁹ Joseph Banks Endeavour Journal, p. 1769 July 12th.

³⁰ Holmes, 'Joseph Banks in Paradise', p. 40.

³¹ Cook, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook*, pp. 43, 98, 104.

³² RBLA: University Archive, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World: Performed in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure in the Years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775*, The fourth edition. edn (London: Printed for W. Strahan; and T. Cadell in the Strand, 1784), p. 144; Holmes, 'Joseph Banks in Paradise', p. 47. Bank's desperately wanted to join Cook's second expedition and spent thousands of pounds on hiring assistants and buying scientific equipment. The admiralty felt he was overstepping his bounds and, at the last minute, withdrew their permission for him to join the voyage.

³³ RBLA: University Archive, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World*, p. 169.

³⁴ Connaughton, Omai, pp. 8, 85.

³⁵ RBLA: *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World*, p. 169.

two had very little to do with each other and eventually, on Saturday thirtieth of September, the *Adventure* disappeared from Cook's view and his journals.³⁶ After continuing the voyage alone, Furneaux arrived back in England in July 1774.³⁷

The Tahitian Perspective.

As a society with no written language, the Tahitian experience of their first encounters with the Europeans is lost. It is possible to speculate, however, on how they might have felt and what they would have thought about the arrival of these newcomers. James Adair traded and lived with native Americans in mainland America for forty years. In his book, *The History of the Native Americans* he states that 'the Indians are as prejudiced against the whites as the whites are against them'.³⁸ It is fair to assume that the Tahitians felt the same way about the *Dolphin* crew, they may have even viewed them as *toutou*, they did fit the criteria. They had no obvious employment or home and they had no women with them, this would have implied to the Tahitians that these men had no means with which to support wives and may have been cast out of their native society as worthless. The sight of a European vessel, so different and vastly bigger than anything they had seen before would probably have been an incredible experience and the mixed reception that the *Dolphin* received hints at what was going through the minds of the islanders. At first, no coordinated response, friendly or otherwise, was organised. However, when the full realisation of the wealth of new materials that were stored onboard the islanders launched what was probably a co-ordinated attack organised by many chiefs and priests. The *Dolphin* crew's display of military superiority demonstrated to the islanders that they could not be defeated but maybe they could be befriended and made into allies.

³⁶ RBLA: *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World*, pp. 169, 231.

³⁷ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 114, 115.

³⁸ James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (Pantianos classics, 1775), p. 8. Adair also states that the Indians only differ from Europeans in their cultural practices.

Conclusion

It is impossible to know what was in Mai's mind upon the islander's first encounters with the Europeans. Had he planned to regain his family's land before the European arrival and saw the newcomer's weapons as a means of facilitating his ambition? Or, was his witnessing and first-hand experience of gunpower the catalyst needed to plant the idea in his head? Mai had also seen Aotourou leave with Bougainville and Tayeto and Tupeto join Cook's crew. Although none of these islanders had returned, Mai had seen sailors from the *Dolphin* return to Tahiti on the *Endeavour*, so he would have known that a return trip was possible. Mai had also witnessed the Europeans being welcomed by the *Arii*, an honour resulting from their display of military prowess. As for Mai's experience with oppression, he certainly felt the oppression of the Boraborans, as Cook observed, 'his intentions towards the invaders, for revenge, rather than a desire of becoming great, appeared to actuate him from the beginning.'³⁹ Mai also may have felt oppressed by his new chief on Huaheine, it is equally likely, however, that he felt gratitude for the refuge given to himself and his family. Mai also experienced oppression in his new home, mocked for his dark skin and large flat nose. In the Europeans, Mai certainly saw potential oppressors but not of himself, he envisaged a relationship between himself and the newcomers that would drive out the Boraborans he so despised. Mai's cultural experience had already been violently disrupted prior to the arrival of the Europeans due to the complications of worship he and his family now faced; they had been driven from their home which was considered the most sacred of islands and now existed on the margins of a neighbouring society. Mai had also seen the currency change, now iron tools and nails were the most sought-after commodities his people wanted. In the Europeans Mai saw an opportunity to break free from his reduced social status and put in

³⁹RBLA: University Archive, A voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the command of His Majesty, for making discoveries in the northern hemisphere. Performed under the direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in His Majesty's ships the Resolution and Discovery; in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780. Vol. I. and II. written by Captain James Cook. Vol. III. by Captain James King. Published by order of the lord's commissioners of the Admiralty, p. 107.

motion a plan to regain his stolen legacy. He was aboard the *Adventure*, heading into the unknown with a single motive in mind.

Chapter Two.

This chapter opens by depicting the prevalent belief systems in eighteenth-century Britain regarding ethnicity; before discussing why Mai was represented as a prince. This has been chosen as an area of focus as it is uncertain why this pretence was carried out, especially as there were so many people who knew it was untrue it, and therefore, is an interesting area of debate. Banks is the next focus with a short biographical description and insight into his personality, followed by an analysis of one of the paintings depicting Mai, and a discussion of Mai and Banks' relationship.

Understanding 'Others' in Georgian England.

Two opposing theories of the development of the human species existed in eighteenth-century Europe. The first theory was the polygenist, with proponents of Lord Kames and Charles White.⁴⁰ This theory argued that humans had originated in separate tribes, and different races were effectively distinct species from one another but were still collectively human. The second theory consisted primarily of Christian doctrine supported by the teachings of Aristotle and his *Great Chain of Being and Cosmos*; it argued a monogenist approach claiming that all humans were descended from Adam.⁴¹ Supporters of this theory, Erasmus Darwin and Lord Mondobbo, argued that physical differences between the races could be explained as adaptations resulting from environmental factors; the theory of

⁴⁰ Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man* (Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1774); White Charles, *An Account of the Regular Gradation of Man and in Different Animals and Vegetables from the Former to the Latter* (London: Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, 1799).

⁴¹ See figure 1; *King James Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), Genesis 1:27 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.'

evolution in its infancy.⁴² Overlapping and twisting of these theories occurred in the works of Immanuel Kant, while Lord Monboddo argued that orangutans were a human species.⁴³ Comte de Buffon stated that 'If man belonged to the class of animals, there would be a certain number of beings in nature less perfect than man, and more perfect than beast, in order to complete the gradation from a man to the monkey. But this is not the case'.⁴⁴ Blumenbach argued that all races were of the same species, European caucasians were the oldest race with all other races being de-generated later variants. It is important to state that Blumenbach did not intend the word de-generate to be an indication of inferiority, in his own studies of Africans, who were widely regarded at the time to be the most sub-human of the races or not human at all, he stated, 'they can scarcely be considered inferior to any other race of mankind taken all together'.⁴⁵ Blumenbach's work is important as it was widely published and disseminated, and he had many members of the British aristocracy attend his lectures including three English princes.⁴⁶ Such a variety of theories can be explained by the development of what could loosely be termed as anthropology up to the eighteenth-century. Margaret T Hodgson states, 'until the sixteenth-century little effort was ever made by anybody to take a long, fresh look at the way of life of any people, or to report results free of the misapprehensions attending an unswerving fidelity to tradition.'⁴⁷ Even

⁴² Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia Or The Laws of Organic Life Volume 1* (London: J. Johnson, 1794), p. 501. 'Add to these the great changes of shape and colour, which we daily see produced in smaller animals from our domestication of them; add to these the various changes produced in the forms of mankind, by their early modes of exertion; or by the diseases occasioned by their habits of life; both of which became hereditary, and that through many generations'; Lord Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (Edinburgh: J. Balfour, 1774), p. i. 'For man in his natural state, is the work of God; but as we now see him, he may be said, properly enough, to be the work of man'; Ann K. Mellor, 'Frankenstein, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 23 (2001), 1-28, p. 3.

⁴³ Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Judgement* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1914), p. 279. 'Much rather does it [nature] organise itself and its organised products in every species, no doubt after one general pattern but yet with suitable deviations, which self-preservation demands according to circumstances'; Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treatise of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Late Professor at Gottingen and Court Physician to the King of Great Britain* (Gottingen: Forgotten Books, 2017), pp. 296, 297.

⁴⁴ Comte de Buffon, *Buffons Natural History, volume* (London: J. S Barr, 1792), p. 333

⁴⁵ Charles White, *Regular Gradation of Man*, p. 42. White speculates on his investigation into differences between the races 'the European, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the African, who seems to approach nearer to the brute creation than any other of the human species.'; Blumenbach, *Anthropological Treatise*, pp. 303, 307.

⁴⁶ Mellor, 'Frankenstein', pp. 5. Blumenbach's studies were on the physical characteristics of the races, it was one of his disciples, Professor William Lawrence who attached personality traits to race.

⁴⁷ Margaret Hodgson, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), pp. 28, 33, 34, 36, 95.

with the emerging interest in other cultures, the testimonies could scarcely be relied upon. The new trend of writing travelogues was gaining popularity due to the invention of printing but they were full of factual errors and Christian piety. The growing appetite for adventure stories also served to create a warped and fantastical idea of new peoples and places in the European imagination.⁴⁸ The founding of the Royal Society in 1660 saw few members who were students of manners or culture and, as Hodgens' states 'Learned and unlearned alike chose to steep their minds in a stale decoction of cultural observations made long before by the ancients'.⁴⁹ By the time Mai arrived in England, this attitude had given way to the confusing and controversial, with so many new armchair anthropologists, ethnographers, explorers and downright fantasists vying for their share of the growing interest in the new world and beyond, it is easy to see how so many scientific and pseudo-scientific theories were being argued.

Why was Mai portrayed as a Prince?

It is into this cacophony of opposing theories that Mai was thrust when he arrived in London with Captain Tobias Furneaux. As first Lord of the Admiralty, Sandwich established himself as Mai's agent, any contact with Mai was to be made through him. It was natural, as they had already been acquainted in Tahiti, that Mai was to reside with Banks and Dr. Solander. Within days they had dressed him in finery and on the seventeenth of July, Mai was introduced as a Tahitian prince to king George III and queen Charlotte at Kew.⁵⁰ It is unclear why Mai was presented as a prince; Connaughton argues that Banks' coerced Mai into this pretence, he sought to use Mai to rehabilitate his image as he had fallen out of favour with the tabloids.⁵¹ His analysis of Nathaniel Dances *Omai, a Native of Ulaietea* portrait Mai is clearly depicted holding a Tahitian headrest, which would have been reserved for use by the

⁴⁸ Thomas Erikson Hylland and Finn Nielsen Sivert, 'Proto-Anthropology', in *A History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), pp. 1-19, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Hodgen *Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, pp. 33, 34, 188.

⁵⁰ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 115, 116.

⁵¹ Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 138.

Arii, Mai certainly would never have legitimately owned such an object.⁵² Connaughton states that the headrest must have been presented to Cook or Banks as a gift and Banks then gave it to Mai as a prop. During a visit to Lord Manchester Mai was the victim of a practical joke played seemingly in good humour. Lord Manchester owned a device that used spinning discs to give a mild electric shock to any unsuspecting victim and was used on Mai. Far from reacting in good humour, he left the party and refused to return until his friend, James Burney, promised that no more tricks would be played on him.⁵³ This is not the behaviour of a man who was intimidated by the status of those around him and would allow himself to be forced into a situation with which he was not comfortable.

Natives from the new world had been frequenting England since Tudor times with their social status having little or no impact upon their reception. The closest visitors to Mai's time were a family group of Labrador Eskimos who arrived in England in 1772; they were not represented as anything greater than priests. Despite this, they were still welcomed into high society and experienced a great deal of fame. Banks and Solander frequently visited the family of Eskimos; after Banks' disappointing trip to Labrador where he failed to meet any native inhabitants, he was grateful for the opportunity to meet and converse with the family.⁵⁴ Completely disinterested in British culture and the crowded streets of London, the Eskimos retired to the country where they engaged in hunting, the only aspect of their time in England they seemed to enjoy. Underwhelmed by their experience of English culture, they were glad to be returning home, however; just before embarking from Plymouth one of the group was struck down with smallpox, it soon spread and all but one of the Eskimos perished.⁵⁵ Although indifferent to the welcoming reception they received from all classes of English society, the fact that they were so well received proves that Mai did not need to pretend to be a prince to receive attention from high society. Banks may, however, have worried about how Mai's status within society, would reflect upon him, and presenting Mai

⁵² See figure 2.

⁵³ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 126, 138, 139.

⁵⁴ O'Brien, Patrick, *Joseph Banks a Life* (London: the Harvill press, 1987), p. 181.

⁵⁵ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 110, 111.

as a prince would guarantee interest in the Polynesian. Interestingly, in a paper by Amanda Crompton, she states that Inuit societies in Labrador had been trading regularly with European visitors and raiding settlements for at least two hundred years.⁵⁶ They were not the untainted representation of Rousseau's 'noble savage' that many would have hoped for. In a paper by Gavan Daws, he describes the concept of Freud's 'Family Romance' theory; the theory describes a child's fantasies of belonging to different more interesting parents, usually of high status. A completely normal fantasy for a child becomes a disorder if continued into adulthood. This disorder usually manifests itself with the sufferer claiming to be of aristocratic or royal birth and obsessively pursuing a birth right which has been denied to them.⁵⁷ Daws stipulates that the emerging empire-building culture of the eighteenth century provided the perfect environment for young British men with delusions of grandeur to reinvent themselves in a different place amongst different people.⁵⁸ Was Mai's re-invention of himself as a Tahitian prince a role reversal of the men described in Daws' work? Although Freud's theory at first appears to describe Mai's behaviour, further interpretation suggests otherwise. Mai, although he pretended to be a prince, never made the outright claim to be from different parents. As Mai had lost his father in childhood, it would have been more likely that his father would have become an object of intense veneration in Mai's mind.⁵⁹ Mai's obsessive pursuit of his birth right was arguably justified, he was not deluded into believing a mysterious treasure was his to rightfully claim, he was trying to regain possession of land which had legally belonged to his father and should have been inherited by him and his brothers.⁶⁰ Although discounting the idea that Mai may have exhibited symptoms of 'family romance' disorder, interesting questions into the state of his psychological condition have been raised and will be discussed further.

⁵⁶ Amanda Crompton, 'they have Gone Back to their Country': French Landscapes and Inuit Encounters in 18th Century Southern Labrador', *Inuit Studies: The Inuit in Southern Labrador*, 39 (2015), 117-140, p. 120.

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Family Romances: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud', *Jensen's 'Gradiva' and Other Works*, IX (1906-1908), 235-242, pp. 238-239.

⁵⁸ Gavan Daws, 'All the Horrors of the Half-Known Life. some Notes on the Writing of Biography in the Pacific', in *The Changing Pacific*, ed. by Niel Walter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 297-308 p. 300.

⁵⁹ Kim A. Jones, 'Assessing the Impact of Father-Absence from a Psychoanalytic Perspective', *Psychoanalytic Social Work*, 14 (2008), 43-58, p. 47.

⁶⁰ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 83-87.

As Mai's primary intention for visiting England was the procurement of firearms and a possible military alliance with the English Navy, the pretence was likely of his own doing as a higher social status would have given validity to his ambitions. How convincing the ruse was in the long term is uncertain, Banks' sister, Sophia was informed of Mai's true social status by one of her brothers' servants.⁶¹ If servants were aware of Mai's true identity it would stand to reason that rumours would soon start to spread. Mai's false persona was likely one of the worst kept secrets in Georgian high society.

Who was Joseph Banks?

As has already been established, Banks did not refuse to teach Mai to read, this raises the question of what sort of person was Banks, that this account of him has been allowed to develop? In Henry Broughams, *Lives of Men of Letters*, he describes Banks, a schoolfriend of his father, in an altogether favourable light. Early in his account Brougham betrays his bias for Banks saying, 'in his old age he never ceased to show me every kindness in his power.'⁶² Brougham also falsely claims that Banks was from an ancient family;⁶³ whereas the family wealth had been made by his grandfather.⁶⁴ Despite these obvious loyalties to Banks, Brougham's work affords a valuable insight into Banks' personality. Fara states 'as British gentlemen, Boswell, Johnson and Banks believed that they were superior to the foreigners they met.'⁶⁵ Did Banks consider himself to be superior to the foreigners he met? It is easy to understand why such a generalisation would be applied to an eighteenth-century aristocrat, but in the case of Banks it is arguable that it has been unfairly applied. It is well documented of Banks' childhood that he spurned his classical education, preferring instead to engage in

⁶¹ Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 122.

⁶² Henry Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters and Science Who Flourished in the Time of King George III* (London: Charles Knight, 1846), p. 340.

⁶³ Henry Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters and Science Who Flourished in the Time of King George III* (London: Charles Knight, 1846), p. 338.

⁶⁴ O'Brien, *Joseph Banks a Life*, p. 15, 16.

⁶⁵ Fara, *Sex, Botany & Empire*, p. 97.

sports. This was true until at age fourteen, whilst a student at Eton, he discovered botany. Now with a passion for a subject that almost consumed his life, he endeavoured to educate himself in the discipline by paying local women sixpence for every piece of information they taught him. This is not the behaviour of a boy with a superiority complex, although the women were not foreigners as in Fara's statement they were working class and female, they would have been much lower down the social scale than the young Banks. This did not deter him from gaining their expertise, at a young age Banks already demonstrated an appreciation for the knowledge and intelligence of people who were 'beneath' him. Later in life, when set up in his London home Brougham states, 'Foreigners as well as natives were his ever welcome guests, and it was his delight to be surrounded by the cultivators and promoters of science in all its branches.'⁶⁶ As a teenager Banks lost his father, with only one sister and no brothers he inherited his family estate in 1764, at the age of twenty-one. Already used to a privileged life Banks was now one of the wealthiest men in England, with an annual income of six thousand pounds.⁶⁷ Brougham gives an account of Banks' attitude upon gaining his inheritance, 'And now it was that the great merit of this distinguished person shone forth. With all the incitements which his age, his figure, and his station naturally presented to leading a life of idleness, varied only by the more vulgar gratifications of sense or of ordinary ambition and with a fortune which placed these gratifications in ample measure within his reach, he continued steadily devoted to scientific pursuits, and only lived for the studies of the naturalist.'⁶⁸

At age twenty-six Banks joined Cook's first voyage to the south seas as official botanist aboard the *Endeavour*. On April 13th 1769, the ship landed on the Island of Tahiti.⁶⁹ Banks immediately struck up a rapport with the Tahitian's, but his journal betrays a condescending attitude towards the islanders after a disagreement over stolen property, 'we returned to the ship admiring a policy at least equal to any we had seen in civilised countries, exercised by people who have never had any advantage but meer natural instinct uninstructed by the

⁶⁶ Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters and Science*, pp. 339, 362.

⁶⁷ O'Brien, *Joseph Banks a Life*, pp. 28, 29, 30.

⁶⁸ Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters and Science*, p. 342.

⁶⁹ Holmes, 'Joseph Banks in Paradise', p. 1.

example of any civilizd countrey.⁷⁰ Although, Banks could have intended this to be a compliment, Michelle Hetherington argues the noble savage concept was far more likely to have been accepted by the educated upper classes.⁷¹ Being of the upper classes it is likely that Banks was attempting to illustrate Rousseau's theory. In response to the shooting dead of an islander due to petty theft he recorded his and many of the crews feelings, 'guilty no doubt in some measure of the death of a man who the most severe laws of equity would not have condemnd to so severe a punishment.'⁷² One of the longest entries Banks made in his journal was a description of a forty-four foot high pyramid on the island. Clearly amazed that the islanders could have built such a monumental construction without metal tools he states several times that it was comparable to the craftsmanship found in Europe.⁷³ This is not a condescending attitude to take and Banks' scientific mind was intrigued by what he saw.

At age thirty-five Banks became president of the Royal Society, a position he held for forty-one years. During this time, he supported the careers of many young scientists such as; William Herschel, Mungo Park and Astley Cooper. For these and many others he organised expeditions, allowed access to his personal library, promoted their work, and had them admitted into the Royal Society. Banks never would have allowed women to join the Royal Society; but he certainly admired intelligent females and endeavoured to secure Caroline Herschel a salary for her massive contributions to her brothers work.⁷⁴ This is maybe the best representation of Banks' personality; he was a facilitator. He strove for greatness in others and for the advancement of science in all its forms. This would explain why he supported Mai's pretence, he was aware of his ambitions and characteristically facilitated Mai in any way he could. It is likely that Banks did consider himself to be superior and expected people to remain in their place, but to be the type of person who would actively forbid the education of another he would have to be cruel and controlling. Banks was

⁷⁰ Joseph Banks Endeavour Journal <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0501141h.html> accessed 01-04-20, p. 1769 April 14th.

⁷¹Michelle Hetherington, 'The Cult of the South Seas', in *Cook and Omai*, ed. by Rendle-Short, p. 4.

⁷² Joseph Banks Endeavour Journal, p. 1769 April 15th.

⁷³ Joseph Banks Endeavour Journal, p. 1769 June 29th.

⁷⁴ Holmes, 'Joseph Banks in Paradise', pp. 54, 105, 180, 213, 214, 307, 384. Caroline Herschel was the first female scientist in Britain to receive a professional salary, £50 a year.

anything but these two things; David Andress' description of Banks' attitude not only captures the man but the time in which he lived, 'Sir Joseph Banks, like so many leading lights of his generation, drew no distinction between the advancement of humanity and the interests of the British Empire.'⁷⁵

Mai and Banks.

Through his relationship with Banks Mai's two years spent in England were amongst the upper echelons, he dined frequently with the Royal Society, met 'the best people', attended the theatre, opera, and became rather obsessed with English fashion, running up extensive tailoring bills.⁷⁶ During his stay Mai had several portraits painted by distinguished artists. One such portrait was by William Parry, this painting depicts Mai, Banks, and a seated Solander posing in what is likely Banks' country estate.⁷⁷ Fara's analysis of the painting is, as ever, scathing. 'A mahogany specimen- that is how Banks and Solander seem to be regarding Omai in this picture, as he stands in silence to be examined, the overweight Solander sits at his desk while Banks, points out Omai's tattoo to Solander as well as to us, the viewers.' Fara also claims that Mai has been feminised and, therefore, degraded by being depicted in his native dress.⁷⁸ Connaughton offers a different analysis, he describes the painting as being, 'heavy in symbolism' depicting a group where none are subordinate.⁷⁹ In one sense Fara is correct, there is an uneasiness about this painting; all three men are staring into the middle distance and seemingly not interacting with one another or the viewer. This appears to be a symbolic statement, as a Polynesian, Englishman, and Swede they were representing a cosmopolitan society where different nationalities and races could

⁷⁵ Andress David, 'Joseph Banks: Traveller, Botanist, and Agent of the British Empire', (2020), 04/05/20. <https://theconversation.com/>.

⁷⁶ Hetherington, 'The Cult of the South Seas', p. 6.

⁷⁷ See figure 4.

⁷⁸ Fara, *Sex, Botany & Empire*, pp. 122, 123.

⁷⁹ Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 140.

live together but had yet to develop the requisite skills to fully engage with and understand each other. On the table in the background stands three ink wells, one to represent each man, Solander holds a quill in his hand, another quill sits in the third inkwell, for Banks' use, but there is no third quill. This could be symbolic of Mai's illiteracy, the inkwell representing the reservoir of instinctive knowledge and intelligence that exists within all people, and the missing quill a representation of the necessary skills native peoples had yet to acquire to properly realise their potential; or rather the potential the English saw in them as new subjects of the empire.

Patricia Fara provides a damning assessment of Mai's social schedule, 'Banks and Sandwich organised Omai's travel and publicity arrangements. Sometimes he must have felt like the human equivalent of a performing seal.' Fara's choice of words and tone in this quote only serves to subvert the point she is trying to make; by metaphorically reducing Mai to the level of a captive animal she implies that he was incapable of acting under his own agency. One piece of evidence Fara uses, is the testimony of George Coleman Jr. Fara claims, 'As Omai visited different country estates with Banks, he was forced to participate in impromptu botanical expeditions.'⁸⁰ Nowhere in Coleman's account of that trip does he imply that Mai was forced to take part in any activity. Although he does provide evidence that supports Fara's claim that Mai was putting on a performance. Mai acted differently during his time with the teenagers Coleman and Augustus Phipps. When describing days spent with Mai on a Yorkshire estate Coleman wrote, 'his eyes sparkled; he laid down his gun and put his finger on my mouth; he then stole onwards crouching along the ground for several yards; till, on a sudden, he darted forward like a cat and sprang upon a covey of partridges, one of which he caught and took home alive.'⁸¹ Colman also described Mai's attempt at mounting a horse by chasing it and grabbing its tail. For Mai, the constant effort needed to fit in with high society must have been exhausting; the chance to socialise and be himself around boys not much younger than he was, would have been a welcome respite.

⁸⁰ Fara, *Sex, Botany & Empire*, p. 119.

⁸¹ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 155, 156, 177.

Many educationalists wanted to teach Mai to read and speak English so he could return home and teach other islanders. Mai exasperated many of his would be tutors with his complete lack of interest in their teachings.⁸² Fara's opinion of Mai's not being taught to read is derived from the quote of the Reverend Sir John Cullum, 'Banks wanted 'to keep him as an object of curiosity, to observe the workings of an untutored, unenlightened mind'.⁸³ Fara does not mention that attempts were made to teach Mai to read by the dedicated anti-slavery campaigner Granville Sharp. Granville, like most people who wanted to meet him, gained access to Mai through Sandwich not Banks. The lessons were supposed to be daily and last several hours but they were, infrequent and short. The lessons were abandoned and seen as a failure; however, Sharp did gift Mai an illustrated bible for his return to Tahiti.⁸⁴ Although Sharp was a great man surely this behaviour is far more condescending than anything Banks has been accused of. Mai was a young man, in a new country surrounded by people who wanted to entertain and converse with him, it is not difficult to understand why he avoided three hours of reading lessons every day. Sharp's gift of an illustrated bible is further evidence of his lack of respect for Mai and his culture; Mai had his own religion and was from a society with no written language. So concerned was Sharp with educating Mai and indoctrinating him into an alien religion, he made no effort to understand the man he considered himself to be helping. Banks was not a politically minded man, during the American war of Independence he maintained his friendship with Benjamin Franklin and, during the Napoleonic wars he organised the return of confiscated scientific and botanical material to their French owners.⁸⁵ As David Samwell, surgeons' mate aboard the *Resolution* wrote, 'He is not such a stupid fellow as he is generally looked upon in England. 'Tis true he learn'd nothing there but how to play at cards, at which he is very expert. He talks English so bad that a person who does not understand something of his language can hardly understand or make himself understood by him. They [Banks and

⁸² Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 134.

⁸³ Fara, *Sex, Botany & Empire*, p. 122.

⁸⁴ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 135, 259.

⁸⁵ Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 178; Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters and Science*, p. 247.

Sandwich] have made him more of the fine gentleman than anything else'.⁸⁶ Mai learned nothing of real value, it may have been the intention of Banks and Sandwich to send Mai home as an ambassador regaling his fellow islanders with his tales of British culture making them more susceptible to British incursions into their territory; or Banks may have wanted Mai to enjoy his visit to England, and did this by introducing him to the finer aspects of upper-class society.

Conclusion

Is it possible Mai felt any oppression during his time in England? From the way he behaved with his young friends it is deducible that he felt an oppressive weight upon him and a duty to conform to his new surroundings. What of the oppressive nature of being at the centre of so many debates, as Alexander Cook puts it, 'He proved a lightning rod for the expression of sentiments and anxieties regarding imperialism, civilisation and human nature.'⁸⁷ It is highly unlikely that Mai would have remained ignorant of the controversy surrounding him, whether or not he cared is unknown but it certainly would have affected him. Mai's relationship with Banks appears far from oppressive, Banks introduced Mai to English high society. Whatever Banks' motives were for this Mai certainly enjoyed most aspects of his time spent in England and his time spent with Banks, despite this he felt pressure to conform and enjoyed the opportunity to relax. Banks' lack of political interest is probably why he never made any effort to educate Mai, as one of the very few people who knew what Mai's home country was like in reality, Banks would have been aware of the futility of such effort. The men who wanted to educate Mai only wished to do so for their own religious or political reasons. To send Mai back to Polynesia as a literate Christian convert would have been beneficial only to Britain's imperial ambitions. Mai's cultural experience was mixed, he would have been changed immediately upon setting foot on English soil. His

⁸⁶ Connaughton, Omai, p. 180.

⁸⁷ Alexander Cook, 'The Art of Ventriloquism: European Imagination and the Pacific', in *Cook and Omai*, ed. by Rendle-Short Francesca (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), pp. 37-43, p. 37.

dress, language, and behaviour, all had to change immediately. Mai was not in England to educate and inform the British about Tahitian culture, thanks to their travelogues and fantastical accounts of Pacific voyages they already had decided what the culture and people of the south-seas were, Mai was in England to serve as a debating tool for scholars and as a possible ambassador for the arrival of the British into Pacific culture. This can be seen in all the paintings of Mai, he is always depicted in his native dress, or rather the dress of the *arii*.

Chapter Three.

This chapter opens with a brief look at the final arrangements for Mai's return to Polynesia; his journey and arrival home reveal more of his personality than his time in England. The interesting development of a genuine friendship between the increasingly unstable Cook and ever more hectic Mai is explored in this chapter. Mai's death is only briefly covered as the exact details are unknown and will remain so.

Preparing for the voyage home.

Mai's own purpose for visiting England was to acquire guns and ammunition, an ambition which went unrealised. In Cook's account of his first voyage, in response to an islander using Banks' gun, he states, 'As it was of infinite importance to keep the Indians totally ignorant of the management of fire-arms, he [Banks] had taken every opportunity of intimating that they could never offend him so highly as by even touching his piece'.⁸⁸ Here is proof that Mai's endeavour was doomed from the start; Cook, Banks and Sandwich never had any intention of arming him or aiding in his fight to retrieve his stolen land. Of all the items given to him for his return home he was only provided with several guns and a limited amount of powder and shot, and Cook actively forbade Mai from acquiring more gunpowder.⁸⁹ When considered against the argument made in chapter two, and Banks' facilitation of Mai's ambition this evidence is damning. When Cook agreed to sail Mai to England, he knew of Mai's intention of returning armed, and Banks was all too aware of Mai's intentions.⁹⁰ Both

⁸⁸ John Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere and Successfully Performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Carteret, Captain Wallis, and Captain Cook in the Dolphin the Swallow, and the Endeavour* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1733), p. 55.

⁸⁹ Harriet Guest, 'Omai's Things', in *Cook and Omai*, ed. by Rendle-Short Francesca (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), pp. 31-37, p. 32; Connaughton Richard, *Omai*, p. 169.

⁹⁰ RBLA, University Archive, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World: Performed in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure in the Years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775*, The fourth edition. edn (London: Printed for W. Strahan; and T. Cadell in the Strand, 1784), p. 169.

men allowed Mai to believe he could appropriate weaponry when the whole time they would be intentionally undermining his efforts. This would support Connaughton's argument that Banks was using Mai for his own advancement, Banks' reputation had suffered because of Hawkesworth's account of Cook's first voyage, in which Banks' sexual behaviour was detailed, and the south seas were falling out of favour with the public. Mai arrived at the perfect time to re-ignite the people's interest and rehabilitate Banks' image.⁹¹ Instead of guns Mai was to take home a vast and strange collection of artefacts, including a suit of armour, dolls house, animals, clothing and homewares. He was also provided with medicine for the venereal disease the Europeans had introduced into the Polynesian population.

Mai's Journey Home.

On July twelfth, 1777, Cook's third voyage to the Pacific set off. On board the *Resolution*, this time Cook and Mai sailed together. By this point Cook had completely changed his opinion of Mai stating, 'I much doubt whether any other of the natives would have given more general satisfaction by his behaviour among us. Omai has most certainly a good understanding, quick parts and honest principles.'⁹² Cook and Mai had even travelled the thirty-eight mile journey to the dockyards together before embarkation, and both men slept in adjoining cabins throughout the voyage.⁹³ James King recorded in his journal how saddened Mai was to be leaving England but how his eyes lit up when he thought of going home.⁹⁴ On the journey to Tahiti, Omai acted as ambassador for Cook and his crew attempting to create friendly relations with other island nations. Although an invaluable member of the crew Mai was not well suited to this role. On a newly discovered island, Mai enjoyed firing his guns to scare the natives; and when discussing the British weapons with

⁹¹ Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 137.

⁹² Connaughton, *Omai*, p. 146.

⁹³ Connaughton, *Omai*, pp. 146, 175, 178.

⁹⁴ James King, *Captain Cook's Third and Last Voyage: To the Pacific Ocean, in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780*. (Piccadilly: John Fielding; John Stockdale), p. 3.

the inhabitants of another island he wildly exaggerated, claiming their guns could destroy the entire island in a single blast.⁹⁵ When meeting with chief Kahoora of New Zealand it was revealed that, during a previous visit, Kahoora had ordered the killing of ten of Furneaux's men; to the amazement of his crew, and Kahoora's people Cook refused to act. As captain no-one dared question his decision except Mai who flew into a rage and shouted at Cook, 'Why do you not kill him? You tell me, if a man kills another in England, then he is hanged for it. This man has killed ten, and yet you will not kill him.'⁹⁶ This inaction seems strange considering Cook's behaviour on this voyage; he had become a cruel and mentally unstable captain, anyone who displeased him, islanders and crew alike, risked being flogged, clamped in irons, or shaved. This treatment did not extend to Mai however, Cook became increasingly fond of him and even allowed Mai to take two young boys from New Zealand as his personal servants.⁹⁷

Tahiti

Upon arrival in Tahiti many of the crew thought it bizarre how little Mai and the Tahitian islanders cared to see each other, 'there was nothing either tender or striking in their meeting. On the contrary, there seemed to be a perfect indifference on both sides.'⁹⁸ This behaviour changed when Mai produced some red feathers, which were now the main currency on Tahiti, the atmosphere lightened, and Mai was warmly welcomed. Upon seeing

⁹⁵ King, *Captain Cook's Third and Last Voyage*, pp. 23, 57, 58.

⁹⁶ James Cook, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook Round the World* (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1813), pp. 179, 186, 187.

⁹⁷ RBLA: University Archive, Ellis, W. *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke: In His Majesty's Ships Resolution and Discovery during the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780; in Search of a North-West Passage between the Continents of Asia and America. Including a Faithful Account of all their Discoveries, and the Unfortunate Death of Captain Cook. Illustrated with a Chart and a Variety of Cuts* (London: Printed for G. Robinson, J. Sewell, and J. Debrett, 1782), pp. 29, 39, 136, 148.

⁹⁸ RBLA: University Archive, Cook, James, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed Under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Discovery; in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780. Vol. I. and II. Written by Captain James Cook. Vol. III. by Captain James King. Published by Order of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty*, 3rd ed. edn (London: Printed by H. Hughs for G. Nicol, bookseller, and T. Cadell, 1785), pp. 8, 9.

his sister Mai was enthused and there was a warm and happy reunion between them.⁹⁹ Fara claims that Mai's family were delighted to have him returned as they had given up hope of ever seeing him again.¹⁰⁰ There is no evidence to support this statement, however, as Denning writes that upon Mai's return home he discovered that several other islanders had travelled abroad with the Spanish and had returned safely.¹⁰¹ It does not seem likely, therefore, that they would have completely given up on ever seeing Mai again. Cook wanted Mai to settle on Tahiti despite his being unpopular there, 'The people at this place did not appear much to like him, and frequently turned up their noses at him when he passed along.'¹⁰² Mai's reluctance to stay on Tahiti and his behaviour there began to anger Cook, Mai intentionally alienated the chief, after Cook had endeavoured to build relations between them. Mai insisted on socialising with the lower classes of people rather than the *Arii*; What Cook failed to understand was that the upper classes of Tahiti were allies with the Hau Fa'naui tribe that Mai was determined to oust. Mai was determined to settle on the island of Huaheine, from where he could attempt to reclaim his stolen land. Cook was well aware of Mai's desire for revenge, 'From the beginning of the voyage, this was his constant theme. He would not listen to our remonstrances on so wild a determination; but flew into a passion, if more moderate and reasonable counsels were proposed for his advantage.'¹⁰³

Huaheine

As were his instructions, Cook sailed to Huaheine to settle Mai in his new home.¹⁰⁴ Mai discovered a brother, sister, and brother-in-law already on the island. Cook made sure that

⁹⁹ RBLA: University Archive, Cook, James, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty*, pp. 9, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Fara, *Sex, Botany & Empire*, p. 124.

¹⁰¹ Greg Denning, 'O Mai! this is Mai: A Masque of a Sort', in *Cook and Omai*, ed. by Rendle-Short Francesca (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), pp. 51-57, p. 56.

¹⁰² RBLA: University Archive, Ellis, *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke*, pp. 137.

¹⁰³ RBLA: University Archive, Cook, James, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed Under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore*, pp. 22, 107.

¹⁰⁴ Cook, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook Round the World*, p. xxv.

Mai was safe, he took part in the rituals needed to secure a plot of land on which to build an English style house.¹⁰⁵ The crew constructed the house in which to keep all his new possessions, it was important to Cook that Mai had a house in which he could keep his possessions safe from the other islanders.¹⁰⁶ When a goat was stolen, Cook reacted in his, now usual, barbaric manner. He ordered houses and canoes to be burnt until the goat was returned.¹⁰⁷ During the dispute over the goat, Mai visibly sided with Cook over his fellow islanders, when the thief was caught, he swore revenge against Mai. Cook response was to have the thief chained on board with the intention of abandoning him on a neighbouring, but distant, island. By now Cook understood how pointless an endeavour it was to try to raise Mai's social status, 'Rank seems to be the very foundation of all distinction here, and, of its attendant, power; and so pertinaciously, or rather blindly adhered to, that unless a person has some degree of it, he will certainly be despised and hated if he assumes the appearance of exercising any authority.'¹⁰⁸ Cook probably felt as though he had failed when he eventually left Mai in his new 'English' home, he sailed away knowing he had failed to install Mai in any area of Tahitian society that would have been of use to English interests. That, however, was not all he cared about, and after the emotional goodbye between Mai and the crew, Cook wrote, 'Such is the strange nature of human affairs, that it is probable we left him in a less desirable situation, than he was in before his connexion with us.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ RBLA: University Archive, Cook, James, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed Under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore*, pp. 94, 96.

¹⁰⁶ RBLA: University Archive, Ellis, W. *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁷ King, *Captain Cook's Third and Last Voyage*, p.133.

¹⁰⁸ RBLA: University Archive, Ellis, *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁹ RBLA: University Archive, Cook, James, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed Under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore*, pp. 105, 106, 149, 150.

Conclusion

Whether Mai would have been better off having never visited England, is impossible to determine. It is known that Mai had plans for revenge upon the Hau Fa'naui before he embarked with Furneaux, and if he had been left on Huaheine, those ambitions would have been left as unrealised as they eventually were. Mai's entire reason for visiting England was to acquire weapons and, with the exception of a few pistols, he had failed, however he had become the most armed native of Polynesia. Mai was still as unpopular with the Tahitians, as he had been before and may have become unpopular on Huaheine after his show of loyalty to the English after Cook's destruction of their homes and canoes. Mai's treatment of other islanders on the voyage home shows his new mindset, he revelled in the power he could now wield over others with his own arsenal and wealth of material possessions. Mai's new status in society was unclear, now among the wealthiest inhabitants he still could not rise through the ranks of a society that did not allow for upward mobility. He now found himself even more marginalised than he had been before in a culture which was fast changing around him. The currency had changed from iron to red feathers, it is interesting to speculate as to why this change had occurred. Possibly the influx of Europeans had swamped the market with iron and it had lost much of its value or; maybe the return to a traditional currency was a backlash against the encroachment of European culture into the Polynesian society. Spanish imperialism was already starting to take hold, with priests being left on Tahiti, albeit temporarily and, like Mai constructing their own European style houses. Venereal diseases were also tearing through the population with inadequate medicines being sent from Europe to deal with the problem. Whatever further changes were coming to Polynesia Mai didn't live long enough to see, after several failed attempts to oust the Hau Fa'naui tribe he died of an infection in his throat before his thirtieth year.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Connaughton, Omai, p. 257.

CONCLUSION

Mai's childhood was explored in chapter one, from this it is inferable that he had suffered a great deal of emotional and psychological trauma. The loss of his father, home, and access to the place of worship he had known as a child. Mai became increasingly obsessed throughout his adolescence with the idea of regaining his family's land, and saw in the Europeans facilitators and potential allies. Mai was clearly naïve as to the Europeans own motives for their incursion into Polynesian society, and he did not know that his ambition was destined to fail from the start. Mai already had no clear home; he was a refugee of the lower class and mocked by his peers for his appearance; this may have been why he was chosen to go to England. Although an existing prince would have already had a secure hold in the *arii* class and influence over his fellow islanders, he would also have had his own loyalties and agendas. Mai had nothing, except an outlandish ambition which was exploitable.

Chapter two examined why Mai was portrayed as a prince, a question with no satisfactory answer. Logically it seems likely that the pretence had been Banks' idea but that Mai was more than happy to engage in the ruse, it was a scheme that was mutually beneficial to both of them. The exploration of Banks' personality shows a man with his own agenda, he did use Mai for his own ends, but that does not mean he did not care for him. Banks and Mai developed a real friendship, although as the realisation dawned on him that Banks had no intention of helping him procure arms it is likely that Mai felt somewhat betrayed by his friend. The same can be assumed for the friendship he developed with Cook; it is unfortunate that this relationship is only briefly touched upon in this dissertation as it is would be an interesting subject for further research. As Mai's story is so often told from the British perspective, his time in England is seen as a success by many as he was welcomed into the upper echelons and treated as any other foreign dignitary would have been. From Mai's perspective, however, his trip was a failure. Although he had enjoyed himself, the paltry arsenal he returned home with did not compare to his original ambition.

The voyage to Tahiti betrayed Mai's personality, for so long he had augmented his behaviour to suit his surroundings, he now had the opportunity to enjoy the relative freedom of the ship. This may have been Mai's last chance to truly enjoy himself, in England, although pretending to be a prince, he knew he was socially inferior to those around him and now he was sailing back home, where he would resume his previous social status. Mai revelled in the sense of superiority his association with the English gave him over the inhabitants of the new islands they discovered. Upon his return home Mai was largely ignored and unwelcome, it is, therefore, not surprising that he sided with the English who had treated him so well over his fellow Polynesians who treated him largely with contempt. Even his new wealth did little to raise him in society it only further separated him from his friends and neighbours by placing him in an unknown social station illustrated by his new European style house which served to separate him so visibly from the rest of society.

Vietnamese filmmaker Trihn T. Minh-ha claimed the study of anthropology to be, 'a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about them'.¹¹¹ This dissertation has tried to focus on the 'them' and even reverse the process by establishing what the Polynesians, and Mai especially thought about the Europeans. This is not an easy thing to do, for one, it feels condescending to attempt to speak for someone else, and Mai played his part so convincingly that his true feelings towards his English hosts were probably unknown even to himself. Mai's relationship with Banks being the title feature of this dissertation will always be an area for further argument. The findings show that Mai and Banks had a genuine friendship, but like all friendships it was open to deceit. There is no question that Banks did not refuse Mai an education though he clearly made no attempt to teach him anything of any real use, that does not, however mean he was exploiting Mai.

¹¹¹ Huggan Graham, 'Post-Colonialism, Anthropology and the Magic of Mimesis', *Cultural Critique*, 38 (1997), 91-106, p. 92.

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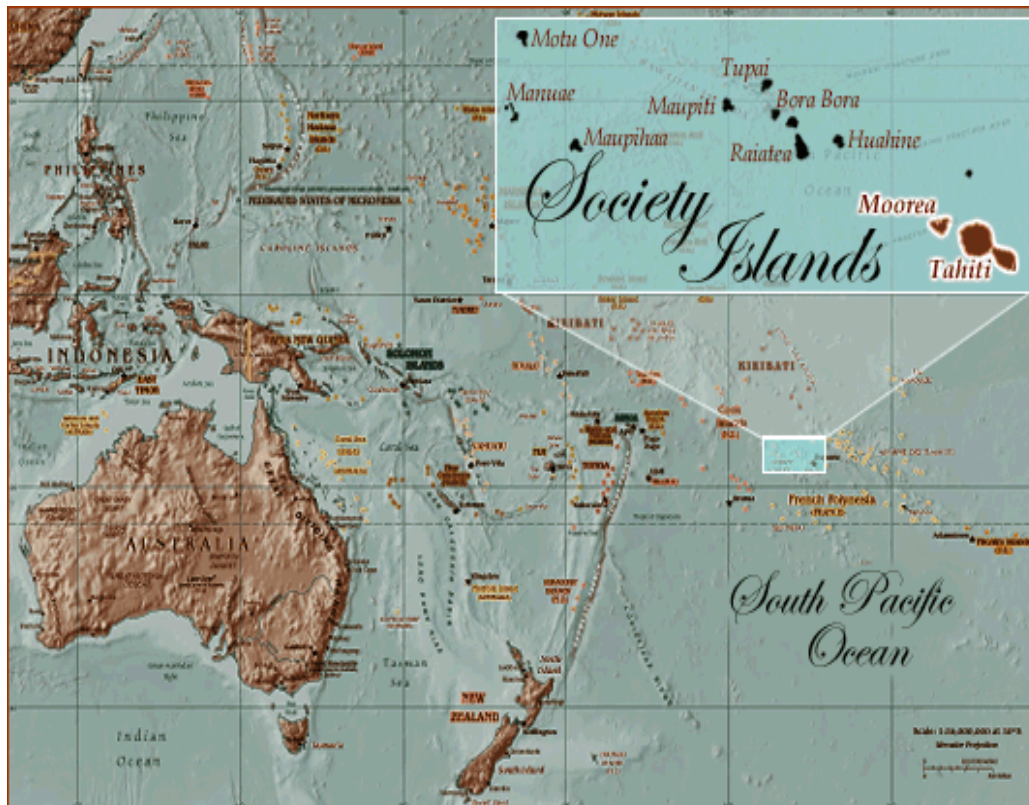
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Appendix



(FIGURE 1 MAP OF THE SOCIETY ISLANDS)

The Great Chain of Being



Fig. 1

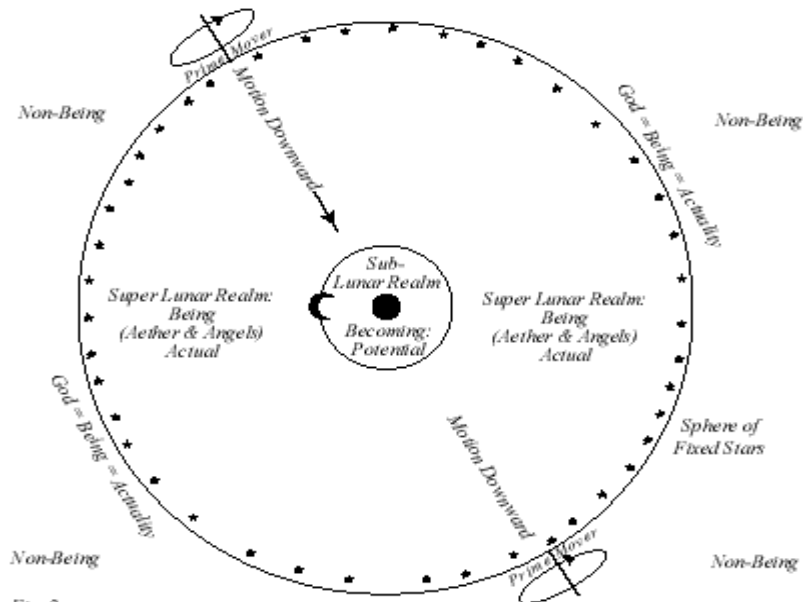


Fig. 2

Aristotle's Hierarchically ordered Cosmos

(FIGURE 2 ARISTOTLES GREAT CHAIN OF BEING)



(FIGURE 3) NATIVE OF ULITEA BY NATHANIEL DANCE.

(FIGURE 4) PORTRAIT OF OMAI, JOSEPH BANKS, AND DR. DANIEL SOLANDER. BY
WILLIAM PARRY

