

N.Z. to arbitrate between the settler and the Maori, he was here to govern, to extend the authority of the crown over the whole territory... from the Maori point of view, the Governor-settler division wasn't as important as the underlying unity.' Rob Campbell (series two) argues that the usage of 'class' in the writing of Oliver, Sinclair, Hamer and Olssen is vague and confused. A more rigorous definition is necessary: 'if our main object is the analysis of social change then we need a theory of social change'. He implies that because they decline to confront the problem of 'a theory of social change', the interpretations of 'liberal' historians lack explanatory power. They are no more than commentaries upon a reality which is assumed to be infinitely complex.

The antiquarian and the fullstops and footnotes schools of New Zealand history may be contemptuous of studies which emphasize interpretation rather than information and which have been cheaply produced. However those who are interested in understanding New Zealand should welcome the revival of Marxist critique. Academic historians may also ponder Bedggood's accusation: 'the relative under-development of Marxism in this country is more the result of a sterile university environment than the lack of a strong labour movement'.

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*Omai, Pacific Envoy.* By E.H. McCormick. Auckland/Oxford University Press, 1977. xviii, 364 pp. N.Z. price: \$21.60.

McCORMICK aimed to put on record all the extant material on Omai, and thought he had succeeded; in a wry postscript he has to add a reference to Herbert Croft's scandal-novel *Love and Madness*, in which Omai intervenes in the notorious triangle of Lord Sandwich, Martha Ray, and the Reverend James Hackman. It seems unlikely, however, that much more will turn up of any substance; the book is certainly, as the blurb claims, comprehensive. It is well-written, well-documented, and beautifully illustrated, including all known likenesses of Omai; the only production flaw is the binding, which on my copy warped as soon as it was taken out of its packing. But the book is a pleasure to read, and far superior to T.B. Clark's splendidly printed but intolerably flashy and careless *Omai: First Polynesian Ambassador*. I have not seen Michael Alexander's recent *Omai: 'Noble Savage'*, which seems to have much the same scope as this book; but I have no doubt that McCormick's work would stand up well in any comparison.

My only serious criticism is that in a praiseworthy desire to give the full background to Omai's career, McCormick rather overdoes the detail on voyages and their preparation. Omai does not appear at all for long stretches, in others he bobs in here and there; in Chapter 4, for instance, Lord Monboddo's passion for men with tails, and the Eskimos' visit in 1772-73, may be defensible as setting for the 'Noble Savage', but Banks's travels in

Iceland seem quite irrelevant. Altogether the book could have done with some pruning. But the only failure in detail I have noted is that 'Jack the Hermit' (p. 79) might have been explained as presumably the Dutch navigator L'Hermite, and the book as a whole, irrelevancies included, is most readable.

McCormick has not only combed the sources, but has welded what could have been a mere congeries of bitty anecdotes into a coherent narrative, which avoids either undue pontification and moralizing or the horrid facetiousness to which his subject is so vulnerable – nowhere better shown than in the salacious contemporary verse epistles built around the New Cythera. Although one is left with the feeling that Omai was not in the last resort a good choice (so far as there was any choosing) as an intermediary between English and Tahitian societies, McCormick is scrupulously fair and objective. One might indeed wish that he had been more explicit about his own views; for instance, in the dispute between Forster and Wales on the unfitness of Omai's English tuition and the 'cargo' with which he returned (pp. 295-300); surely an author so thoroughly in command of his material might have given us something in the nature of a judicial summation?

Omai's actual reception in England doubtless tells us more of the foibles of polite society than of himself; we do not know what he thought, only what curious observers thought that he thought. By and large the attentions paid him strike one as very shallow. Dr Johnson, as might be expected, was gruffly dismissive; Fanny Burney twittery, Banks patronising, Sandwich and his friends trivial. There is no more devastating comment on the ephemeral frivolity of the whole show than that even that amateur of celebrities, James Boswell, seems to have made no attempt to meet Omai (p. 169); so quickly did sensation fade. Only Granville Sharp seems to have taken Omai really seriously, and his concern was the interested one of Evangelicism (pp. 165-68). Those who knew the South Seas – Cook, Forster, King – did indeed show a more serious anxiety over the results of the experiment, and their forebodings were sadly just.

It is impossible to discern what really happened after Omai was left on Huahine: he was certainly not monarch of all he surveyed. By Rickman's account, there was a moment of burlesque glory at Vaitepiha Bay, with Omai riding in full armour (made for him in the Tower of London) and firing a pistol to warn off the dazzled crowd; and he may to a very limited extent have satisfied his constantly expressed desire for revenge on his Boraboran enemies. But the peirage of the Society Islands offered even fewer opportunities for upwards mobility than that of the British Isles, and despite his travels and his accomplishments, his hand organ and his electrical machine, Omai remained at best in a middling station. He may have gained some prestige from his muskets, while the ammunition lasted, but according to William Ellis they also gained him a posthumous ill-repute. (By a nice irony, the Tahitian mission eventually established itself on the 'estate' which Cook had secured for Omai.)

McCormick's last chapter, on the 'literary aftermath', turns up some very odd and entertaining stuff – probably more entertaining in his distillation than in the originals. Omai, to mix metaphors, was a very convenient peg for a number of hobby-horses, and he appears in a variety of genres – scurrilous couplets about Sandwich, Utopian science fiction, Munchausen's tales, the pornography of *Mimosa*, one of the most magnificently kitschy spectacles

ever presented on a British stage, and the quiet moralizing of Cowper's *The Task*.

McCormick has read the lot (he might perhaps find something more in Rétif de la Bretonne's *La découverte Australe?*) and summarizes them deftly. Surely for once the cliché 'meteoric' is in order: a bright flash, but fleeting; then an exhumed immortality of a kind, but a spurious immortality, a name used merely to point a moral or adorn a tale.

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*Whaowhia: Maori Art and its Artists.* By Gilbert Archey. Collins, London and Auckland, 1977. 136 pp. Illustrated, 242 figures in black and white, 8 colour plates, map. N.Z. price: \$15.

THIS handsomely produced book is the last work by one of New Zealand's great scholars on Maori art. Sir Gilbert Archey, whose publications span the years from 1933 to 1977 was well-known internationally for his carefully considered analyses of Maori art and for his rather guarded interpretations. Not for him the unfettered imagination of the diffusionists who would derive most of Maori art from civilizations far removed from New Zealand. Instead he became the champion of local development venturing no further than Polynesia itself for possible outside influences on Maori art and then conceding only a very limited range of compositional arrangements which might have belonged to a common Polynesian heritage.

He stands apart from his generation of scholars in one important respect: he was willing to credit to Maori artists the artistic achievements which he saw and admired in their art. He regarded the art 'as mature and self-confident in all phases of its stylizations and complex patterns' (p.102) and the artists as not being slaves to traditions but as men 'with independent outlook that allowed [them] to explore new lines' (p.116).

This last work plays on old themes and presents them once more for our consideration; perhaps grander in scale than before because of the lavish production in which the message is carried. There is some evidence of 'one more time from Gilbert Archey' but only because this is really his final opportunity to do so. For example, in the appendices where he compares the Kaitaia lintel with selected works in the Society, Raivavae and the Marquesas islands, he can not resist the temptation to have a 'little dig' at T.T. Barrow. He also challenges Skinner's interpretation of 'the curved end-marginal members of the door lintel composition' (p.104) as being snakes, and questions the need to seek derivations from remote sources for other features