

Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World. By Johann Reinhold Forster. London, 1778. Edited by Nicholas Thomas, Harriet Guest and Michael Dettelbach, with a linguistics appendix by Karl H. Rensch. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1996. 446 pp. US price: \$59.95. ISBN 0-8248-1725-7.

HAD THE ANGLO-PRUSSIAN natural philosopher Johann Reinhold Forster been on Cook's third voyage and stumbled on Hawai'i, he would have stared out at a people and a landscape that would have been familiar to him. He would immediately have compared the language and customs to those of Tahiti, New Zealand and Easter Island, and the volcanic forms to those of Tahiti, and found many similarities. The peoples, he would have argued, must all have migrated from the same source somewhere in southeast Asia (probably in the Malayan group of islands); the same geological forces must have produced the high volcanic islands. Comparison over a vast scale lay at the heart of Forster's methodology and he was proud of living in a culture that had the ability to make such comparisons on global voyages of scientific discovery. His *Observations of 1778*, which has been beautifully reissued by University of Hawai'i Press, is an important and early work of many comparative sciences: anthropology, zoology, botany, geology, meteorology, oceanography and linguistics. It has often been seen as a precursor of Humboldtian science, which it undoubtedly is, given the close links between Humboldt and Forster's son George. But it deserves a closer reading on its own merits as all three editors argue in their useful introductory essays on Forster's comparative ethnology (Thomas), accounts of the varying roles of women in different South Pacific cultures (Guest), and natural history (Dettelbach).

Forster boldly claimed that his 'object was nature in its greatest extent' (p.9). When Forster writes of 'nature' we realize how far the modern ecological sensibility is removed from his. A wild and unimproved landscape disgusts him; a cultivated and civilized one delights him: 'where man the lord of creation on this globe, has never attempted any change on it, there nature seems only to thrive; for in reality it languishes, and is deformed by being left to itself' (p.99). Similarly, a people who have failed to master the landscape, and live a 'savage' life in a harsh climate can share little of the physical, moral and social happiness that those who have cultivated the warmer soils possess (p.220). Thus, of the peoples of the South Pacific, the tropical Tahitians stand at the summit of development, the chillier New Zealanders reside somewhere in the foothills, while the frozen and unfortunate Pesserais (Fuegians) languish at the bottom of the valleys. Although these last peoples were unfortunate, they were still human. Forster had nothing but contempt for those who held 'the long exploded opinion, that monkeys are of the same species with mankind'. If any man persisted in this foolish opinion, Forster begged 'the whole heavenly sisterhood of Eve's fair daughters . . . for ever to exclude him from their bright circles: and in case he persists obstinate, may none but the ouran-outangs vouchsafe and admit his embraces' (p.174).

Forster's reputation is beginning to emerge from the bludgeoning it received at the hands of Cook's eminent biographer and editor, J.C. Beaglehole. Forster was on a naval ship during Cook's second voyage, but lay outside of naval hierarchy and was thus not subject to naval discipline. For naturalists on other British ships in a similar position (Banks, Darwin) their social position as unquestioned English gentlemen and their personal qualities as likeable young men steered them away from any conflicts with the officers or the captain. Forster was neither an English gentleman, nor an easygoing man, and such a combination led to inevitable conflicts with other officers and Cook himself. For Beaglehole this last was an unforgivable sin. Michael Hoare, Forster's biographer and editor, struggled all his life against this animus. In his Hakluyt Society edition of Forster's

own journal (*The Resolution journal... 1772-1775*, London, 1982) he called Beaglehole's 'slough of Forster[ian] despond' an 'imaginary Tolkienish world of Teutonic druids and fantasies' (p.75). While this was not the kind of language to endear one to the scholarly community surrounding Cook, nor to many of Hoare's fellow historians in New Zealand, it demonstrates the strength of feelings that Forster was still generating two centuries after he got on board the *Resolution*. In some ways this excellent edition of Forster's main published work stands as a memorial to Michael Hoare, who died in early 1996. Like Beaglehole, Hoare had an international reputation and he is constantly referred to by the three editors, and they have made much and profitable use both of the journals he edited and of his biography, *The Tactless Philosopher* (Melbourne, 1976). While Forster may not have endeared himself to everyone, he was a major intellectual figure in the German and British enlightenment and reading this new edition lets us witness his lively mind at work as he tries to make sense of strange and new environments and peoples in the South Pacific. We do not have many accounts of New Zealand from the eighteenth century and this is one of the most erudite and interesting. I highly recommend both it and the introductory essays.

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Infectious Diseases: Colonising the Pacific? By John Miles. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1997. 123 pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 1-877133-26-4.

THOSE WHO APPROACH this book to further their understanding of disease as an agent of colonization in the Pacific, or of the debate between the relative roles played by natural and social history in Pacific Island depopulation, will be disappointed. The title is misleading. So too is the blurb which claims that it analyses 'the absence of acute infectious diseases and the reasons for the very high susceptibility of the islander to such infections when they were introduced'. Miles himself states that the susceptibility of the Pacific Islander to epidemic diseases post-contact is 'perhaps beyond our brief' (p.98), though his last chapter does consider a 'little of this evidence'.

In this chapter, 'The End of Isolation: Some Medical Effects', he cites Arthur Thomson, military surgeon in New Zealand from 1847 to 1858 (on page 41 he gives the incorrect dates of 1843-1854 for Thomson's sojourn in New Zealand). According to Miles, Thomson lists the causes of the decline of the Maori population as: '1. Inattention to the sick 2. Infanticide 3. Sterility 4. New Habits 5. New diseases' (p.103). While these headings are elaborated on, Thomson's views are simply reported; no attempt is made at analysis. Nor does he refer to any other historical writings on the subject (Dow's *Annotated Bibliography for the History of Health and Medicine in New Zealand*, 1994, has ten entries on Thomson). Miles's discussion of the post-contact period is at best superficial.

Also slightly bizarre, in view of the book's title, is the inclusion of a map of New Zealand opposite the opening page of the chapter on leprosy. While he provides evidence that leprosy, given the Maori name 'ngerengere', was introduced to New Zealand very early in the days of European contact, it never became an important disease in the history of Maori health and colonization.

What then does Miles view as his brief? A former professor of microbiology at the