



PROJECT MUSE®

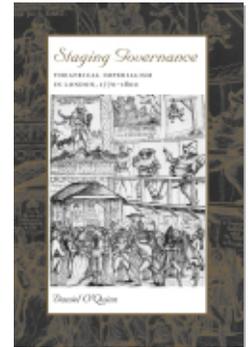
Staging Governance

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770–1800.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/60320>

Access provided at 18 Sep 2019 19:33 GMT with no institutional affiliation



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

CHAPTER

TWO

*“As Much as Science Can
Approach Barbarity”*

*Pantomimical Ethnography in Omai; or,
A Trip round the World*

IF *THE NABOB* OFFERS a glimpse of the economic and sexual anxieties that traversed metropolitan rule, then Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg's and John O'Keefe's enormously successful pantomime *Omai; or, A Trip round the World* of 1785 provides an opportunity for testing many of the most pressing concerns regarding the representation of colonial space and colonized peoples.¹ Greg Denning's reading of *Omai* describes it as "a translation into entertainment of ethnographic moments in which the European strangers confronted the otherness of the Pacific island natives, tried to describe that otherness and in that description possess them."² But as Johannes Fabian has demonstrated, protoanthropological texts from the late eighteenth century understood the relationship between parts of the world as temporal relations: "Dispersal in space reflects . . . sequence in time."³ Kathleen Wilson's recent survey of travel narratives and natural history texts from the 1770s and 1780s that attempt to deal with the knowledge acquired during the Cook voyages emphasizes that

the four-stage version of human development articulated by Scottish social scientists, which had held that human society naturally developed over time through stages based on the mode of subsistence, was well established by Cook's time. But the current emphasis on empirical observation had shown that Pacific peoples were prone to exhibit contradictory characteristics that were not subsumable under earlier primitivist or social science models. Proponents of social evolutionism following the Cook voyages tended to envision a more complex configuration of development from savagery to civilization, one that was less mechanistic, unwilling to found explanations for

social differences upon a single cause such as climate or subsistence alone and more nuanced in the understanding of history, combining spatialized and progressive notions of time and simultaneity with the perception that economic and cultural growth entailed both progress and corruption.⁴

Omai thoroughly engages with these comparativist forms of protoanthropology, but my interest here focuses on how ostensibly historically less-developed peoples were deployed with degenerate metropolitan types to generate a fantasy of variable development in the metropole. Through a series of complex substitutions, Loutherboung and O’Keefe draw equations between degenerate forms of sociability in London and specific sexual practices associated with Tahitian people that ultimately shifts the specter of aristocratic dissipation onto racialized figures of the underclass. My contention is that a crucial step in the consolidation of the middle classes requires a divagation through the combination of ethnographic fantasy and pantomimical excess that defines *Omai*’s particular proto-anthropological project.

Omai was described in one opening-night review as “the stage edition of Captain Cook’s voyage to Otaheite [Tahiti], Kamtschatka, the Friendly Islands [Tonga], &c, &c,” but such a description fails to convey adequately the strange blend of spectacle, commedia dell’arte narrative, and ethnographic observation that constitutes the pantomime.⁵ Of particular interest is the way in which two fields of representation—commedia dell’arte and ethnography—are carefully woven together because each field would seem to presuppose radically distinct mimetic registers. The lavish costume and set design were scrupulously overseen and at times prepared by Loutherboung and John Webber. Webber was Cook’s chief illustrator on the Third Voyage and everything about his participation in the production is aimed at generating the effect of ethnographic authenticity. Speaking of the pantomime’s closing spectacle, one reviewer summarized *Omai*’s pedagogical imperative:

A procession of the natives of the different islands and other places visited by Captain Cooke is here introduced. The music preserves the characteristic airs of the different people in the procession, as much as science can approach barbarity.

The APOTHEOSIS of Captain Cooke closes this most admirable assemblage of curious views.⁶

Newspaper commentary on the pantomime emphasizes the innovative assemblage of “curious views” of distant Pacific islands and peoples, but a sizable portion of the pantomime focuses explicitly on metropolitan spaces. In addition to the marae of Tahiti and spectacular views of the Kamchatkan coast, *Omai* contains detailed views of Plymouth Sound, a lawcourt in London, Kensington Gardens, Margate, and street scenes from the City. Despite the pedagogical attention to the representation of the Pacific, much of the pantomime’s action focuses on anarchic scenes of urban life in the metropole that represent the decay of British society.

The London presented to the audience of *Omai* allegorically depicts the metropole as a site of theft, avarice, corruption, and sexual vice. The specific scenes in London target legal officials, lawyers, aristocrats, Jew brokers, prostitutes, and various members of the laboring classes for pantomimic ridicule. In this representation, London is saturated with social pathogens whom we have already seen lurking around the private spaces of Foote’s comedy. However, *Omai* also presents British activity in the Pacific as the paragon of soldierly virtue that actually operates as a hygienic device for curing social ills in the empire. Put simply, two styles of British subjectivity are contrasted through the performance, and the conventions of pantomime are deployed in an innovative fashion to offer both a critique of vice in the metropole and a consolidation of virtue in the figure of Captain Cook. In the process, the native inhabitants of the Pacific islands represented in the pantomime are subjected to a series of complex refigurations. At the level of narrative, *Omai*, *Londina*, and the other Tahitian characters are not only shadowed by familiar commedia figures, such as Harlequin and Columbine, but also perform roles proscribed by commedia types. Recent criticism of the pantomime tends to see these divergent mimetic registers as supplemental disjunctures, but I wish to argue that commedia dell’arte and ethnography are part of a continuous field and that their very continuity tells us a great deal about the process of racialization not only on the London stage, but also in the imperial imaginary.⁷ This chapter demonstrates that there are nodal points where each representational field maps onto the other.

Despite Loucherbourg and O’Keefe’s careful attempts to link these mimetic registers, the audience of *Omai* played a crucial role in their ultimate accommodation. Despite their acknowledgment of the pantomime’s ethnographic merit, the critics and the audience demanded changes to the pantomime that altered its critique of metropolitan society. Loucherbourg responded to his critics by revising the pantomime on a nightly basis, and we are fortunate that a strong historical record exists

for the reconstruction of these changes. As we will see, the additions of explicitly racist performances and the reorientation of the play's deployment of sexual deviance provide very precise indicators of how Britons were dealing with the economic and social uncertainty that beset the empire in the 1770s and 1780s. In the process of developing this argument, the chapter interrogates the kinds of viewing implied by the multiform modes of display employed by Louthembourg. *Omai's* modes of display come together in a highly racialized triangle of desire whose ultimate aims are entwined with the emergent sexual economy of the middle classes. From this seemingly unimportant spectacle one can derive a set of propositions connecting middle-class self-stylization in the metropole to the knowledge practices that will come to define the second British Empire.

*Attractions on Display: Oberea's Arse, Mai's Kiss, and
Cook's Apotheosis*

Captain Cook's exploration of the Pacific took place over the three separate voyages of 1768–71, 1772–75, and 1776–80. At the risk of simplifying the history of the acquisition of ethnographic materials from the South Pacific and their subsequent dissemination in the metropolitan culture of the British, I want to isolate three separate yet entwined discursive assemblages that play a key role in the articulation of this chapter's argument.⁸ The first is the publication and reception of John Hawkesworth's *An Account of a Voyage round the World* in 1773. Hawkesworth's extraordinary text narrates the first voyage in a symptomatic fashion, and his accounts of contact between Cook's crew and the Tahitians were widely read and discussed.⁹ The response to Hawkesworth's *Account* ranged from the quasi-scientific to the purely voyeuristic, but it is the so-called "philosophical" response to the text that most interests me. The startlingly frank representation of the sexual practices of the Tahitians and of the interracial sexual activity between British men and Tahitian women, most notably between Sir Joseph Banks and Pūrea, the ostensible queen of the island, generated streams of commentary, both learned and lascivious.¹⁰ While the former took the form of fantasies of natural society, the latter took the form of biting satires aimed at Banks and other learned commentators on cultural difference, at Hawkesworth, and ultimately at the British aristocracy.

The anonymous "An Epistle from Mr. Banks, Voyager, Monster-hunter, and Amoroso, to Oberea, Queen of Otaheite" will serve as a helpful exam-

ple of the satirical response to Hawkesworth's text, for it carefully incorporates all the typical targets. Framed by what at first appears to be learned commentary and copious textual annotation on Maohi, the Tahitian language, the poem is ultimately a burlesque on the entire ethnographic project. The poem restages—complete with citations—the key scenes of sexual practice from Hawkesworth as spectacles of Banks's pornographic desire. The reader is situated somewhere over Banks's shoulder watching Oberea having sex with Obadée, and on another occasion watching a public sex act between a young girl and an older youth that is facilitated by Oberea.¹¹ The following lines give some sense of the ambivalent presentation and reception of these scenes:

The gallant sons of Britain's warlike land,
In curious crouds around the beauty stand,
While, as she turns her painted bum to view,
With fronts unblushing, in the public stew,
They search each crevice with a curious eye,
To find exotics—where they never lie.
O shame! were we, great George, thy gallant crew,
And had we—damn it—nothing else to do,
But turn thy great design to filthy farce,
And search for wonders on an Indian's a—?¹²

I am interested in the theatrical metaphor that makes up the punch line. The suggestion that the great heroic project of exploration has degenerated into farce implies that George III's management of the theatre of the world's oceans has devolved into illegitimacy. This scene is accompanied by an engraving that deftly satirizes the advancement of knowledge as little more than a sexual spectacle. The engraving translates the entire scene to the metropole and satirizes the learned gentlemen and the women of fashion who gaze upon the tattooed markings that adorn the Tahitian woman's buttocks.¹³ The moral imperative of this critique becomes evident as the poem suddenly turns to the effect of reading Hawkesworth:

But then to print our tale! O curse the thought!
Curse those who sold,—a blush for those who bought.
Fine tales for misses!—charming table-talk!
Delightful too in each meandering walk,
Through Britain's ample plains!—the lustful squire
With ease may quench his unsubdu'd desire:—

One page of *Hawkesworth*, in the cool retreat,
Fires the bright maid with more than mortal heat;
She sinks at once into the lover's arms,
Nor deems it vice to prostitute her charms;
"I'll do," cries she, "what Queen's have done before;"
And sinks, *from principle*, a common whore.¹⁴

The suggestion that Hawkesworth's *Account* circulates in metropolitan culture as an incitement to prostitution and libertinism is, of course, hyperbolic, but it highlights the degree to which some measure of prophylaxis was deemed necessary when dealing with sexualized figures such as Oberea. Pūrea's arse is a point of fascination: it is heavily marked and yet its signification is no less eloquent in the drawing rooms of London than in the dwellings and marae of Tahiti. It would however be absurd to argue that this arse communicates in the same way in both places. The distinction is precisely one between sexual farce and regal spectacle.

Oberea's arse is important because the set of sexual signs that adhere to Tahitian bodies in this period is also active in a less visible form in the reception of Mai, known to Europeans as Omai, into London society during 1774–76.¹⁵ If Hawkesworth's *Account* is the cultural flashpoint of the first voyage, then the newspaper coverage of the daily encounters between men and women of society with a native of Raiatea named Mai operates in much the same fashion for the second.¹⁶ Mai was brought to England on Cook's second ship *Adventure* by Captain Tobias Furneaux and placed under the care of the Earl of Sandwich and Joseph Banks. In their company, he circulated in society and was presented to the king. As Rudiger Joppien has noted, the impact of his visit was widespread:

Omai was a curiosity, a visually striking personality, and a living experiment. His whole cultural background made him a provocation to Western society and a welcome test for those who believed in Rousseau's ideas about man's happy and morally superior existence in the state of nature; he was a perfect example of the "noble savage." Interest in Omai was shared by almost all quarters of philosophy and learning, and some of the leading artists of the day, including Sir Joshua Reynolds and Nathaniel Dance, made him the subject of their portraits.¹⁷

The exemplarity of this living "wonder," however, was the subject of a highly complex debate. The newspaper accounts of his stay are fascinated

by every infringement of polite behavior and the following paragraph from the *London Chronicle* sums up much of the discourse: "In respect to mental qualifications, he seems to possess scarcely any, all his observations leading to immediate corporeal gratifications, in some of which, however, he shews himself to be a *sensualist* of the first kind."¹⁸ Despite the occasional dissenting opinion that Mai exhibited a kind of natural discernment, the real debate concerned the interpretation of the sensuality ascribed to his every utterance and action.

An extensive letter to the same paper about a month later is typical in its blurring of the line between sensuality and sensibility, between desire and discernment:

He evidently has an affable, as well as a tender disposition; he possesses likewise much discernment and quickness. A mark of sensibility he shewed very lately. He was observing some anglers fishing near Hertford, and was pleased to learn in what manner they were employed; but, when he saw the hooks baited with a live worm, he turned away to avoid a sight so disagreeable, and declared his antipathy to eat any fish taken by so cruel a method. An instance of his discernment and quickness he exhibited when he was introduced to the Duchess of Gloucester, previous to his going to Hertford. The Duchess not being prepared with a present proper for Omiah, it occurred to her, that a pocket handkerchief, embellished with her coronet, might be acceptable to him; it was presented to him. Omiah immediately kissed the coronet and made a most complaisant bow to the Duchess. As this mark of his attention, politeness, and quickness was unexpected, it gained him the good graces of all present.¹⁹

The evidentiary claims of these scenes are intriguing in part because Mai acts in a manner that perfectly accords with the class and gender fantasies swirling around the notion of a man of sensibility. When he kisses the coronet on the handkerchief, he performs precisely as his aristocratic observers—and the writer of the letter—would desire, for he effectively submits to the superiority of their rank.

But this bubble of class and gender fantasy was burst a few weeks later in an equally symptomatic response in the same paper:

Politeness and sensibility, we are told, are his characteristics.—He was shocked at the idea of putting a live worm on a hook. . . . Excellent creature! who could think he had ever heard of the Aroey! (and

to which blessed society he very probably belongs) the Aroey, a society, which according to Hawkesworth, consists of two or three hundred of each sex of the Gentry of Otaheite, who live like rabbits in a warren, with this difference, that they murder every child that is born of their amours, that their refined mothers may suffer as little interruption of their pleasure as possible. Who could think Omiah had ever heard of the inhumanity of such an epicurean sty?²⁰

At one level the letter writer is simply countering the fantasy of natural society with Hawkesworth's own description and condemnation of the Arioi.²¹ But it is important to recognize that the animalization that concludes the passage encompasses more than the "Gentry of Otaheite." An implicit comparison is being drawn between "the principal people of Otaheite, of both sexes, [who] have formed themselves into a society in which every woman is common to every man"²² and the British gentry. This critique of aristocratic vice is quite specific not only because of the subtle comparison between Tahitian infanticide and the common, and often fatal, aristocratic practice of sending infants to wet nurses, but also because of the more directly scurrilous attack on the interracial contact between Mai and the Duchess of Gloucester:

He is wonderfully polite we are told; he bowed, and he kissed the coronet on the handkerchief given him by the Duchess of ——. All very clever indeed. But when Mr. B—— had his first audience of the principal Lady of Otaheite [Oberea], says the historian Hawkesworth, she tucked her petticoats up to her middle, and by way of salutation turned herself around and around. If therefore Omiah's ideas of politeness were formed in his own country, what must he have thought of the rudeness of her Grace, who did not deign to honour him with the polite salutation of Otaheite?²³

In this curious moment of cultural leveling, the writer raises a key question regarding not Mai's social performance but rather that of the duchess. Is the presentation of the handkerchief simply a more refined—or rude, depending on one's notion of politeness—version of Oberea's gesture? Both actions promise intimacy and display rank, for the marks on Oberea's arse and the coronet on the duchess's handkerchief both indicate social superiority. Mai's response would suggest that he interprets the "gift" in precisely the same way as Banks interprets Oberea's visual "gift," for he focuses his attention on the coronet. That these gifts exist on the

same continuum has important ramifications for it suggests that these cultural exchanges are inherently sexual and that their apparent distinction is akin to that between gold and paper money. In this sexual economy, Oberea shows the bullion whereas the duchess offers a form of legal tender that promises similar satisfaction. Much could be made of this because the largely middle-class assaults on aristocratic vice during the 1770s focus as much on sexual practice as on the system of economic and social credit, which not only facilitated the luxurious profligacy of the gentry but also threatened to corrupt the British economy.

The consistent deployment of Omai and Oberea in the complex debate on the dissipation of the aristocracy is crucial to a number of emergent cultural formations. As the middle classes begin to gel around fantasies of healthy bodies, racial purity, sexual rectitude, and commercial restraint, one begins to see a parallel phantasmatic investment in the sexual dissipation, disease, luxury, and racial degeneration of its class others. These negative fantasies are being applied both to British aristocrats and, in this case, to what were perceived as their social equals in the South Seas.²⁴ In this light, publications such as “Omiah’s Farewell; Inscribed to the Ladies of London,” in which Omai ostensibly details the charms of notable society women in rhyming couplets, operate as slightly naughty entertainment and as a subtle racialization of class relations. As we will see, this complex nexus of desire plays itself out in Loutherboung’s pantomime in Omai’s pursuit of the fair Londina, who stands for London’s women of fashion. But before exploring this sexual economy, I want to turn to another culturally significant moment in the reception of Cook’s activities in the Pacific and approach the play from the arse-end as it were.

As has been extensively discussed elsewhere, the deification of Captain Cook following his death in Hawaii in 1779 involved a wide range of cultural interventions that ultimately played a defining role not only in the ideological consolidation of Britannia’s imperial claim to the world’s oceans but also in the reactivation of the specter of the primitive in British colonial fantasy. Along with the extensive newspaper accounts, the Admiralty’s multiple publication of the official report of the Third Voyage in 1784 and John Webber’s accompanying engravings generated a mythic figure whose importance to the formation of British national identity in this turbulent period cannot be underestimated.²⁵ Loutherboung’s *Omai; or, A Trip round the World* capitalized on the intense public interest surrounding Cook’s death and it plays a fundamental role in Cook’s deification. The famous image of Cook being borne to heaven by the allegorical figures of Fame and Britannia above a view of Kealakekūa Bay, Hawai’i, which

circulated widely as an engraving attributed to Louthembourg, was based on a monumental painting designed by Louthembourg and painted by the Reverend Matthew William Peters for the final scene of *Omai*²⁶ (fig. 2.1). The image was first shown to the public as a part of Louthembourg's pantomime, and the context of its presentation is revealing:

The [last] scene [of the pantomime] . . . is a most extensive view of the great bay of Otaheite, the sun-set, with a view of ships at anchor, and a royal palace in front, and the people ready to receive and crown their king. A fine view offers itself of all the boats of the island entering the bay with ambassadors from all the foreign powers bringing presents, and a procession ensues, and salute Omai as an ally of Britain, and compliment him with an English sword. This is succeeded by dancing, wrestling, boxing, etc. The Clown wins one of the dancers by the present of a nail. Harlequin and Columbine, Omai and Londina, are united, and the entertainment concludes with the an *apotheosis* of Captain Cook, crowned by Fame and Britannia, with the medallions of several celebrated English naval officers in the background.²⁷

So much is happening in this scene it almost defies analysis. At one level, the view of the bay, which was based on Webber's drawings, and the immense procession of representatives from various cultures in the Pacific all dressed in costumes designed from Webber's firsthand observations are intensely ethnographic. On another level, the union of Harlequin and Columbine, of the Clown and the dancer, and of the *inamorata* Omai and Londina brings the commedia narrative to its generic closure. And then we have the extraordinarily nationalist intervention of the descending painting, which radically disrupts the performance itself and suddenly re-constructs the theatre as an exhibition space.

Despite universal approbation of the painting's "*vrai semblance* of person, of ease and graceful disposition of figure, [and] of general effect," this transformation of the theatrical space was sufficiently disruptive to prompt critical commentary.²⁸ On the one hand, some reviewers regarded the painting as distinct from and superior to the pantomime in which it is presented: "Such a picture—in point of all that constitutes the sublime of the art—the drawing and disposition of the figure—the well-expressed countenance—the perfect colouring, and the attitude of *Cook* himself—such a picture will immortalize the author as well as the subject of it—and were there no other merit in the Pantomime—would hold forth the



FIG. 2.1. After Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg and John Webber, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook*, engraving, 1794 (courtesy of the Department of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum, London)

attractions of an EXHIBITION in itself.”²⁹ But others reacted quite negatively precisely because the painting failed to take advantage of the theatre as a space for spectacle and performance: “The painting is admirable . . . but though we consider this a beautiful picture, it did not answer our ideas of an *apothēsis* or *deification*. We did not expect to see a *flat* painting—we looked for magnificence—something in perspective that would have occupied the whole scene.”³⁰ The second reviewer’s disappointment arises

from two aesthetic problems that run through the production. The first is the conflict between exhibition and enactment. In the context of the scene described here, the painting, however monumental, is less spectacular than the procession of eighty-two exotically costumed players (a substantial portion of whom are barely clad dancing girls), the physical comedy of the pantomime characters, the heroic singing of the Captain, and the ostensibly Tahitian ravings of a “mad prophet” that immediately precede the painting’s descent. The painting quite literally brings the entertainment to a close and the solemn allegory suddenly reorients the audience experience from low and often lascivious comedy to reverent nationalist elegy.

The elegiac qualities of this gesture are accentuated by the fact that the pantomime presents the audience with two Britannias. The first is embodied by Mrs. Inchbald in the magical second scene in which the beauty and nobility of Londina are first disclosed to Omai by a genie figure. The second is exhibited in the picture, as though the living breathing embodiment of the nation is now only available as a portrait of its theatrical self. Significantly, the play also presents two captains, one living and one dead, one embodied and one painted. When Mr. Brett steps onto the final scene of the pantomime, his presence is perhaps no less disruptive than the descent of the painting because he has figured nowhere in the play. But he has a crucial role because he is the one who ultimately engages with the threatening Oberea, whose sexual aggressiveness has been transformed here into malevolent sorcery:

Recitative—Captain
 Accept from mighty George our Sovereign Lord
 In sign of British Love, the British Sword
 Oberea
 Oh, Joy! away my useless Spells and Mystic Charms
 A British Sword is proof against the World in Arms.
 Captain
 Ally of Joy! Owhyee’s [Hawai’i’s] fatal Shore,
 Brave Cook, your great Orono [Lono], is no more!
 Chorus of Indians
 Mourn Owhyee’s fatal Shore,
 For Cook, our great Orono is no more!³¹

This declaration of shared peace and mourning represents something new in the discourse surrounding Oberea, for the transaction, although still sexualized, renders her passive. The phallic exchange represents the union

between the King of England and the Queen of Otaheite, but everything in the prior accounts of Oberea's sexuality has been reoriented and she has been subsumed into a sea of gender normativity. This point is evident in the design of her costume, for unlike other native women in the pantomime, Oberea's dress conceals rather than exposes the contours of her figure (fig. 2.2).

This desexualization impinges on how we interpret not only the mythic figure of Captain Cook but also his nonappearance on stage. By working through a proxy captain, the play effectively separates Cook from Oberea and hence puts any hint of their prior association into abeyance.³² If this can be seen as a prophylactic gesture, then the captain's song, which immediately follows the transfer of the sword, tells us a great deal about what is really at stake in this final scene because what emerges is a prescription for the art of living:

Air—Captain

Ye Chiefs of the Ocean your Laurels throw by,
Or Cypress entwine with a Wreath;
To prove your Humanity, heave a soft Sigh
And a Tear now let fall for his Death!
Yet the Genius of Britain forbids us to grieve,
Since Cook ever honoured Immortal shall live

Yet the Genius, etc.

The Hero of Macedon ran o'er the World;
Yet nothing but *death* could he give.
'Twas George's Command, and the Sail was unfurl'd,
And Cook taught mankind how to *live*.

Yet the Genius, etc.

He *came* and he *saw*, not to conquer, but save;
The Caesar of Britain was he;
Who scorn'd the Ambition of making a Slave
While the Britains themselves are so free.
Now the Genius of Britain forbids us to grieve
Since Cook ever honor'd Immortal shall live.³³

The newspapers unanimously agreed that Brett's performance of the captain's song, which is widely reprinted everywhere except the printed version of *Omai*, was one of the play's highlights. In her reading of *Omai*, Kathleen Wilson recognizes that this air incorporates the fantasy of the progress of nations that characterized much eighteenth-century natural



FIG. 2.2. Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, *Obereya* [*Oberea*] Enchantress, watercolor, 1785 (courtesy of the National Library of Australia, Canberra)

history.³⁴ Wilson's arguments regarding the consolidation of national identity are no doubt accurate, but this consolidation is accompanied by the parsing of the nation into racialized class categories whose characteristics are most visible in their relation to sexual vice. This parsing establishes "a finer set of gradated exclusions" that open onto a new configuration of power.³⁵ Cook's death becomes a sign not only of the preeminence of British liberty and humanity but also of a new form of imperialism, distinct from that of Alexander and Caesar, which explicitly "teaches mankind how to live." That this lesson foregoes conquest and slavery is perfectly apposite as the mercantile impulses that defined the first British Empire, and the Atlantic slave trade, which seemed to crystallize what was wrong with British colonial activity to this point, came

increasingly into disrepute. What we are witnessing here is a fundamental recalibration of the objectives of empire in which life—in all of its biological and ethnographic connotations—becomes a focus of intense cultural scrutiny.

This recalibration brings *Omai* within the purview of what Foucault described as the emergence of biopower as a mode of social regulation.³⁶ Foucault's analysis of the relationship of racialization and the regulation of populations makes only fleeting reference to coloniality, but Ann Laura Stoler argues that the full impact of this relationship can only be understood through an understanding of the negotiation between colony and metropole. Sudipta Sen's similarly expanded definition of the term "colonial" is useful because it focuses our attention on the play of normativity in the negotiation between metropolitan and colonial society that is represented in *Omai*:

My usage of the term "colonial," . . . thus follows not necessarily the linear chronology of military conquest and expansion, but along the terms of a certain regime of political reasoning inherent to the mercantilist commercial drive, a whole ensemble of articulations, measures, and policies both eristic and faithful to a certain vision of power and authority (what Foucault might call a *dispositif*) whose directions are marked at both ends: the parliamentary process in England as well as the quotidian administrative routines of the first phase of rule in the Indian interior.³⁷

Sen's focus on the Indian case is explicitly aimed at clarifying the relationship between metropolitan and colonial governmentality, but my sense is that Loutherboung's involution of London and Tahiti in *Omai* requires a similar methodological gesture. There is a certain vision of power whose ensemble of racial and sexual fantasies is endemic to the nonlinear development of an emerging form of imperial thought and which makes itself felt in the relationship between English and Tahitian subjects. That relationship is mediated by two modes of representation, one ethnographic and one pantomimical, and I believe that the way these two modes are reconciled reveals a great deal about the bodily stylization of classed bodies at this historical moment, which resonates with Stoler's attempts to produce a genealogy of biopower in the expanded field of imperial culture.

This genealogy is vitally concerned with questions of sexuality. As Foucault states, "it is . . . the privileged position it occupies between organism and population, between the body and general phenomena, that ex-

plains the extreme emphasis placed upon sexuality in the nineteenth century.”³⁸ As that which circulates between the disciplinary and the regulatory, sexuality offers a pivot from which to analyze transformations in the relationship between fantasies of class or rank and those tenuously associated with race and nation. In both the first productions of *Omai* and in its subsequent revisions, one can discern how the deployment of sexuality impinges on or enacts these transformations, but understanding their full significance requires equal attention to the space—both theatrical and geographical—in which these deployments are staged. We have already seen how the enactment of peace between England and Otaheite rectifies Oberea’s aberrant sexuality. That rectification is matched by the disembodiment of both Cook and Britannia in the apotheosis painting. If Oberea is now a body corrected, then Britannia and Cook accede to the remarkable luxury of having no body at all. In the first instance, the libertine desire formerly associated with Oberea is put on display as a correctable malady, and in the second, desire itself is obviated and replaced by a flat allegorical display of national exemplarity. As the reviewer for the *Times* recognized, this amounts to a disavowal of triumphal magnificence in favor of a form of imperial display that perhaps can be best described as museological.

Museological Strategies and Pantomimical Tactics

A brief midrun notice from the *Morning Post* is typical of much of the newspaper response to Louthembourg’s *Omai*:

To speak of it, as it now is, ’tis an assemblage of the most beautiful scenery taken from view, perhaps the most delightful in nature; it unites also the simple and the sublime, leading us from the plain Otahitean hut, to the superb mansion of enchantment. It presents us with characters so much heard of since the memorable voyages of the immortal *Cook*, and brings before us the manners and customs of the Southern world. It also gives us the most perfect resemblance of some of the finest views that Britain can produce, and for splendour and character, the dresses have not hitherto been equalled. Abounding as it now is with numerous beauties and attractions, the indefatigable manager has added more, for we are informed that the second part will this evening be enriched with many new pantomimical tricks, accomplished at a very great expence. Edwin will likewise contribute his share, by the introduction of some new songs.



FIG. 2.3. John Keyse Sherwin after a drawing by John Webber, *A Dance in Otaheite*, engraving from James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (by permission of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto)

The united beauties of this entertainment will probably be a rich treat to the holiday gentry, and a source of amusement and instruction to a higher class, and though “last, not least” we hope a mine of wealth to the spirited and liberal managers.³⁹

Ubiquitously hailed as the most expansive and expensive assemblage of painted sets, theatrical machinery and elaborate costume, the pantomime needs above all to be considered as a visual experience perhaps unrivaled on the eighteenth-century stage.⁴⁰

Loutherbourg’s costume, prop, and set designs are profoundly influenced by two figures: John Webber and Sir Ashton Lever.⁴¹ Loutherbourg’s friendship with John Webber, Cook’s chief illustrator on the third voyage to the South Seas, is evident in much of the design. The *Morning Post* explicitly recognized the importance of Webber’s participation in the production: “*Mr. Webber*, who was with Capt. Cook in his last voyage, gave the information how to dress the characters in the new Pantomime of *Omai*; and it was from that Gentleman’s drawings, done on the spot, that many of the scenes are taken. The moon light one particularly, which was much admired, we are informed, was wholly painted by *Mr. Webber*.”⁴² Aside from participating directly in the painting of sets, Webber’s drawings of Tahitian life, many of which were already in circulation as engrav-



FIG. 2.4. Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, *Dancer*, watercolor, 1785 (courtesy of the National Library of Australia, Canberra)

ings, provide clear models for many of Loutherbourg's drawings. As Joppien has carefully documented, the careful replication of Webber's landscapes also extends to his ethnographic illustrations. Webber's detailed representations of the ceremonial clothing of Tahitian women (fig. 2.3) are clearly the models for Loutherbourg's designs for the women's costumes in part 2 (fig. 2.4). The remarkable correspondence here underlines the degree to which Loutherbourg goes out of his way to represent the clothing of distinct populations with as much veracity and specificity as he can. The procession that closes the pantomime acts as a runway show of sorts for ethnically distinct fashion and demonstrates the continuing importance of clothing as an index for cultural, religious, and national identity.⁴³ This desire for cultural specificity was augmented by frequent recourse



FIG. 2.5. Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg, *Toha, Chief of Otaheite, Oedidee*, watercolor, 1785 (courtesy of the National Library of Australia, Canberra)

to Sir Ashton Lever's Museum, which was otherwise known as the Hologusicon. Lever's extensive collection of South Sea materials from the Cook expeditions was on display next door to Loucherbourg's workshop, and, as Joppien demonstrates, Loucherbourg almost certainly used various objects, vestments, and headdresses from the collection as models for his designs. For example, the neckpiece in Loucherbourg's design for *Oedidee* corresponds to a similar object in Lever's collection (fig. 2.5).⁴⁴

If we were to look only at costume design, it would be tempting to argue that the pantomime's object was to replicate via first- or secondhand observation the distinctive dress of the various South Sea islanders whose

cultures were outlined in Hawkesworth's *Account*. But there are key deformations not only in the visual material based on Webber's drawings but also in the harlequinade that indicate that the pantomime's representation of the "world" is far more complex than initial observation would suggest. First of all, the very collocation of commedia characters and historically based characters like Omai, Oberea, and Odidee should give us pause. What we are faced with are two different mimetic registers jostling in the same space. Joppien tends to see these conflicting modes as supplemental disjunctures in which naturalistic display gives way to harlequinade and vice versa. However, this implies a certain seriality, which does not arise either in the detailed newspaper accounts of the pantomime or in the published "text." Careful scrutiny of these materials indicates that the commedia elements interact simultaneously with the play's protoethnographic elements: Omai, Oberea, and other recognizable historical figures interact with Harlequin, Columbine, and other zanni in a field that is rigorously defined by the ostensibly scientific gaze of Webber and Lever. What this suggests is that these two mimetic registers are not disjunctive but part of a continuous field.

If we can imagine these mimetic registers as overlapping layers or overlapping transparencies, then the question becomes what ordinal signs are used to collate the layers. A clue to this complex process of collation lies in a subtle difference in set design that can be excavated by carefully comparing two surviving stage maquettes from the play's initial production. The first is from the sixth scene of part 1 and constitutes "A View of Kensington Gardens, from which Hyde-park is seen covered with horses gigs, &c in Rottenrow, and the coach road" (fig. 2.6).⁴⁵ The multiple paintings of trees in the wings allow for a remarkable illusion of depth and also act as frames not only for the action, but also for the parade of a series of caricatures including "an old thin city usurer, and the old dame his wife, two characters well known in London."⁴⁶ This London scene and the caricatures of London life that it contains are only as successful as they are recognizable. A similar comment could be made with regard to the preceding two scenes that stage "a view of Lord Mount Edgecumb's seat at Plymouth, and the sea-port at sun-rise" and a court of justice somewhere in the City of London, respectively. In all three cases, these scenes are the locus of extensive pantomimical trickery and of a series of projection effects. The characters ridiculed in these scenes constitute an anatomy of corruption. Scene 3, set in Plymouth, strings a series of transformation tricks targeting servants and a barrow-woman, which results in the theft of Omai's talisman. The corrupt legal officials of scene 4 to whom Omai applies for the return of his stolen talisman devolve into a chorus that

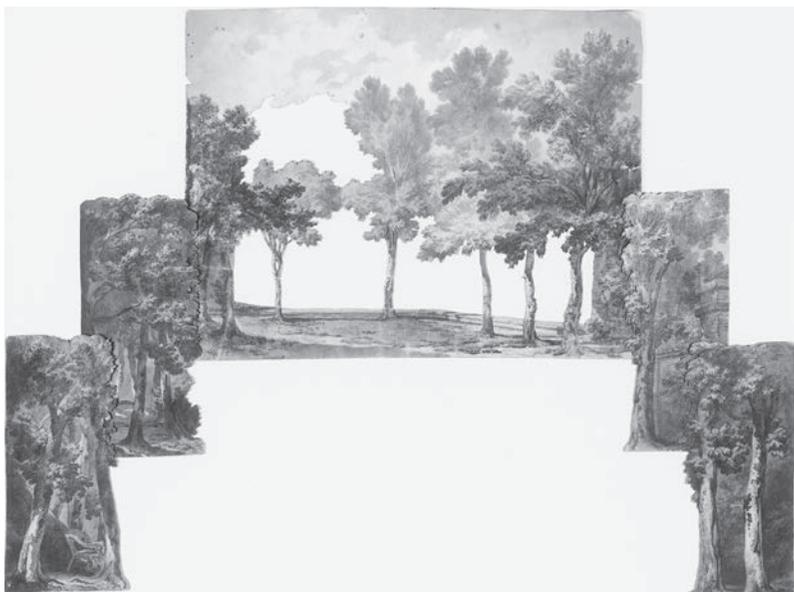


FIG. 2.6. Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, Scene model for Kensington Gardens in Omai (courtesy of the Department of Prints and Drawings, Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

begins “sneezing, yawning, dancing, whistling, laughing and crying” such that it forms a composite portrait of insanity. Scene 5 depicts Omai, Harlequin, Londina, and Columbine dodging the elaborate displays of conspicuous aristocratic consumption in Kensington Gardens. In a touch reminiscent of Foote’s critique of private credit, this scene’s principal target is a Jewish usurer working among the parading coaches and strolling gentry. Scene 6 revolves around Londina’s father’s attempt to sell her to Omai’s amatory rival, Don Struttolando, who is derided as both a fop and a class interloper. Taken together, these scenes mobilize all of the specters of metropolitan decay brought together not only in *The Nabob* but also in the daily papers.

However, the very recognizability of the scenes renders them stable envelopes for pantomime’s stage magic, and this stability requires such visual spectacle to maintain audience interest in what would otherwise be little more than a routine satire of metropolitan vice. This is precisely not the case in the non-English scenes that dominate part 2. The second stage maquette is a case in point (fig. 2.7). This interior set corresponds to the Kamchatkan interior in the second scene of part 2, but it also con-

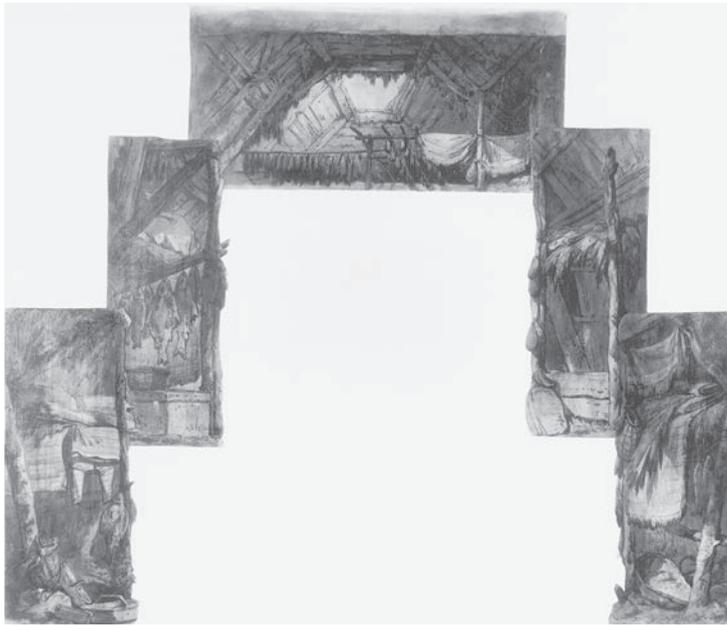


FIG. 2.7. Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, Scene model for inside a Jourt in Omai (courtesy of the Department of Prints and Drawings, Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

flates three distinct interior scenes from Webber’s engravings. The space presented is a fusion of Nootkan, Kamchatkan, and Hawaiian interiors. (figs. 2.8–10). This hybrid space is unusual in the pantomime and suggests two key distinctions. First, a fundamental distinction between the representation of picturesque exterior spaces and the representation of interior spaces corresponds to how one looks at nature and how one looks at culture. Second, non-English spaces, both interior and exterior are subject to layering and deformation in ways that the English spaces are not. The rendering of metropolitan space on stage is remarkably constrained by comparison, which will have important ramifications later in the argument, but for the moment I want to consider further the distinction between nature and culture in the non-English sets.

The process of layering is only activated in the realm of non-English culture, but it is the architecture of the London stage that structures the overlay of Webber’s views. The structure of the Kensington and the “Kamchatkan” scenes are identical: each has a backdrop with two scrims fanning out on each side of the stage. The visual effect is the same, for the



FIG. 2.8. William Sharp after a drawing by John Webber, *The Inside of a Winter Habitation in Kamtschatka*, engraving from James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (by permission of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto)

scrimms give depth and allow for concealed entrances onto the stage. Joppien's discussion of Louthembourg's knowledge of the Leverian museum is helpful here because it is clear that the Pacific manufactures painted onto the scrimms and replicated as props are not presented in the form of a wonder cabinet or a rare show. Rather they are part of an integrated "view" similar to the view of Kensington Gardens. This is important because materials collected on Cook's voyages were divided into two types: "natural" and "artificial" curiosities. The former included drawings and specimens of the flora and fauna collected at each stopping point in Cook's expedition. The latter included objects and clothing manufactured by the people with whom Cook and his crew had contact during their journey. As Adrienne Kaeppler has shown, these human manufactures were considered of less scientific importance than the "natural curiosities."⁴⁷ Institutions such as the fledgling British Museum showed comparatively little interest in artificial curiosities, and it was up to private collectors like Lever to put these objects on display. In the Holophusikon, artificial and natural curiosities were displayed without distinction, so here the line between nature and culture was effectively blurred.

This was not the case in Louthembourg's own museum venture, the Eidophusikon, which used all of his skill in stage mechanics and projection to replicate natural and specifically atmospheric phenomena. Louthembourg's and Lever's museums were not only proximate but also



FIG. 2.9. William Sharp after a drawing by John Webber, *The Inside of a House, in Oonalashka*, engraving from James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (by permission of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto)

operated at the same time. However, it is in *Omai* that Loutherboung initiates a new museological strategy distinct both from his earlier practice and from Lever's example. If we think of *Omai* solely in terms of display strategy, then what we have is an expansion of the objectives of the Eidophusikon. Like the earlier venture, Loutherboung expends a great deal



FIG. 2.10. William Sharp after a drawing by John Webber, *The Inside of a House in Nootka Sound*, engraving from James Cook, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (by permission of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto)

of scenic and machined energy in replicating views and natural phenomena. At times the stage is showered in hail, thunder erupts, and various projections are employed to imitate the movement of clouds and the sun. However, he also breaks new ground by replicating artificial curiosities as props, costumes, and interior scenes. In both cases, Webber is the primary source, but despite a tendency in Webber's images to separate the quasi-ethnographic from the picturesque, the cultural from the natural, Loutherbouurg's design tends to make the former a subset of the latter. Replicated cultural artifacts are subsumed into the all-embracing category of "natural curiosity." Hence, the interior space in the "Kamchatkan" scene is structured much like the exterior space of Kensington gardens, and religious objects in the former are viewed much like trees in the latter.

What I am describing here is a subtle form of dehumanization that had an impact on the pantomime's reception and subsequent modification. To render the Pacific islanders as natural objects designed for visual observation alone radically deprived them of agency and hence of the capacity to effect stage action. Reviews of the opening two shows of *Omai* were abundant in their praise but also indicated that the second part was less successful than the first because it was merely a series of views insufficiently tied together by pantomimical action. As the *Morning Chronicle* reports, "The new Pantomime, as before, excited great admiration. The comick business of it was somewhat altered and amended, but there is still room for improvement in this respect. It is, if any thing, too much of a shew, and not quite enough of a pantomime. At the same time, every spectator must admit that it is a splendid and exact representation of all that is interesting in Captain Cook's voyage to Otaheite, the Friendly Islands, &c."⁴⁸ The reviewer here is picking up on a fundamental tension between two modes of spectatorship demanded by *Omai*: the picturesque views and ethnographic replications associated with Pacific spaces and peoples construct a fairly passive viewing position for the contemplative spectator, whereas the stage magic of pantomime and its heavy reliance on physical theatre associated with the metropolitan scenes seem to elicit a far more direct bodily response. This is an interesting critique because the second part takes place exclusively in Pacific settings whereas the first, with the exception of the opening two scenes, is set in recognizable English locales. It would appear that the audience's interest in the views was secondary to the visual and performative trickery that dominated part 1. This tells us something about the effectiveness of Loutherbouurg's museological strategy, for his rendering of the artificial as natural enables him to

bring cultural difference to the stage as visual spectacle; but it also prevents him from activating cultural difference in performance. This is especially notable in the performance of the main Tahitian characters, who are remarkably passive in comparison with the characters overtly drawn from commedia.

Loutherbourg's solution to this perceived problem is telling. To counteract the passivity inherent to the viewing experience of the picturesque, he introduced a series of modifications to subsequent performances, including the addition of more physical trickery for the Clown, played by D'Elpini; the incorporation of more singing and dancing; and, most important, the addition of a new character designed specifically for the talents of Edwin. This new character is identified in the *Morning Chronicle* as a "Travelled native of Tongataboo [Tongatapu]" and in the printed version of *Omai* as an "Otaheitean, supposed to have accompanied Omai to England."⁴⁹ The uncertainty regarding the geographical origin and the identity of this character is important because, unlike Omai, Oberea, Odiddee, and Towha, he does not correspond to a historical personage. His physical appearance on stage is also singular: "The introduction of Edwin's song last night in the new Pantomime had an excellent effect. He was introduced in the character of an Otaheitian, who had accompanied Omiah in his voyage, and had most whimsically and pantomimically dressed himself in a piece of the habit of each country he had met with in his several voyages."⁵⁰ A note to the print version attempts to argue for the ethnographic probability of his costume by cryptically stating that "The idea of his dress was taken from Cook's Voyages, where it is said, that Omai, to make himself fine on his introduction to a Chief dressed himself with a piece of the habit of each country he had been in his several voyages."⁵¹ Dressed in scraps of clothes from all countries, Edwin is effectively a living and breathing embodiment of the hybridity evident in the layering of the Kamchatkan interior. Equal yet contradictory claims are made for Edwin's costume: on the one hand, it is seen as wholly befitting pantomime and, on the other, it is seen as a further example of the play's ethnographic veracity. Both mimetic registers are fully adequated in Edwin's costume, which allows us to comprehend more fully what is at stake in the racial fantasies that suddenly erupt from his performance. Before delving into the particulars of Edwin's song, however, we need to look carefully at Loutherbourg's other modifications to the pantomime and, specifically, to D'Elpini's performance as the Clown, in order to isolate the suture points between pantomime and ethnographic fantasy.

Omai as/and Harlequin

One of the most puzzling aspects of *Omai* is its explicit deviation from the pattern of the eighteenth-century harlequinade.⁵² Conventional holiday pantomime involves a frame story, derived from either fairy tales or current events, which generates a blockage that must be resolved in the embedded narrative of the harlequinade. This blockage is usually sexual, and the main characters in the frame are usually transformed into Harlequin and Columbine by fairies or other magical creatures. *Omai* does not follow this pattern because, rather than transforming Omai and Londina into Harlequin and Columbine, the commedia figures function as servants to the central couple and occupy the same theatrical space. The relationship between frame and embedded narrative is generally akin to that between constricted society and anarchic green world. In a rather unusual reversal, *Omai* opens in Tahiti, where Oediddeo's threat to Omai's right of succession and the sexual blockage between Londina and Omai are established; magically transports the characters to England; and then follows them back to Tahiti. Tahiti, conventionally understood as the epitome of natural society, is figured as a zone of dynastic uncertainty and infecundity. Once the blockage is overcome, the pantomime shifts back to the newly rectified and revived world of the frame narrative. In conventional holiday pantomime, the tricks are located primarily in the second part of the embedded narrative and are used to bring Harlequin and Columbine or the *inamorata* together. However, the first productions of *Omai* concentrated the tricks in the first section of the play, which is set largely in England. And the England it presents is remarkably unruly and disturbing. In the first scene at Plymouth, the theft of Omai's talisman as he tries to make his way through a throng of working-class characters parodies the alleged theft of British items by Tahitians in Hawkesworth's *Account*. The court seems to restore the rule of law by returning the talisman, but a constable engages in another theft as the court dissolves into sneezing and song. The sixth scene offers a view of Kensington Gardens in which "the principal characters . . . are an old thin city usurer and the old dame his wife, two characters well known in London." Other scenes involve Londina's incarceration in her father's house; in the second half, Londina's father attempts to sell not only feathers but also Columbine. Taken together, these details suggest that England is a land dominated by theft, avarice, and the moral depravity of the slave trade.

Harlequin and Columbine lead Omai and Londina through this anarchic and vicious world. What is remarkable is that the pantomime asso-

ciates this anarchy with the metropole and asserts that Omai can only come to power through a “union with the British Fair.” As Oberea claims at the end of the pantomime, Tahitian magic must give way to the magic of British might: “[A]way my useless spells and magic charms, / A British sword is proof against the world in arms.” The spatial reversal in the pantomime has effected a replacement of magic with military might such that the saturnalian world of Tahiti is literally transformed into a space of imperial normativity, where Oberea blesses the English sword, Omai accedes to middle-class subjectivity, and Cook is elevated into a god of imperialism. *Omai*’s divagation from conventional harlequinade structure allowed Loutherbouurg simultaneously to critique metropolitan society and yet to lay claim to Tahiti in a fashion that reconstructs it as the mirror of normative British society. In short, he gets to stage metropolitan corruption—located in officials of the state, in the aristocracy, and in working-class characters—and to project a middle-class fantasy of colonial governance through military domination. It is hard to tell if the plot structure is an exercise in ironic cynicism, but one thing is certain: the audience was extremely uncomfortable with the displacement of conventional pantomime trickery, and Loutherbouurg undertook a series of symptomatic revisions to assuage their concerns. It may be that the original combination of critique and projection was simply too close to the truth of middle-class desire for social control and thus too open to direct scrutiny.

Loutherbouurg’s alterations to *Omai* over the weeks subsequent to its initial performance effectively recalibrated the relationship between ethnography and pantomimical action. The following notice from the *Morning Chronicle* gives a sense of the kind of equilibrium that the public seemed to desire:

The new Pantomime of *Omai*, confessedly all-powerful in point of scenery, is now much more attractive and entertaining than at first, from the increased variety of its tricks and pleasantries. The second act is refitted, and presents more pantomime objects than before. Scarcely a scene is viewed, before which the eye is not diverted by some laughable incident, as well as interested by the true and correct exemplification of the customs and manners of the natives.⁵³

With so much of the production’s initial focus placed on the preparation of scenery and costumes, the responsibility for achieving this equilibrium fell largely to Edwin’s singing, D’Elpini’s clowning, and the eventual participation of “The celebrated *Monsieur Bouverie*, principal mechanist to

his Majesty of France . . . [who was] engaged to prepare several humourous tricks and deceptions.”⁵⁴ This increased attention to visual deception focused audience attention on the magic performed by Omai and his attendant Harlequin.

Throughout the pantomime, Omai’s talisman and Harlequin’s wooden sword transform objects and costumes in a fashion that consistently gets the better not only of Omai’s rival Don Struttolando but also of his servant, the Clown. The following description of the scene set in Kensington Garden gives some sense of the stage action:

A crowd assembles; the clown purloins a carrot, which takes a magic change; he tries a turnip, which produces a similar effect. Struttolando calls him, and a kind of confusion ensues, in which the barrow-woman loses her crutch-stick, which being taken up by Harlequin, it immediately transforms itself into the usual wooden sword for Harlequin. A song is here introduced by the barrow-woman, after which she retires, and the Clown enters, who being struck by Harlequin’s sword, his dress is transformed instantly to pair of breeches, which, rising up, button about his neck. All this enchantment is supposed to arise from a talisman in the possession of Omai, which he had from the genii to protect him from harm.⁵⁵

The tricks here are well worn, but the relationship asserted between Omai’s talisman and Harlequin’s sword has significant ramifications. Within the terms set out by the performance, the stage magic of pantomime and the spirit magic of Otaheitie are equated. This implies that the mythic envelope that imbues Tahitian life is for Louthembourg and his audience a subset of visual wonder. And this wonder is of a specific kind: namely, that associated with the stage mechanics and the bodily training of a form of theatrical performance usually deemed suitable only for children and degraded tastes. Many of the reviews that praise *Omai; or, A Trip round the World* argue that it is remarkable to find such instructive material in what is otherwise a foolish genre. The most interesting of these ambivalent reviews feels compelled to mark its disapprobation of the genre in order to mark the specific pedagogical merits of Louthembourg’s production:

Pantomime Entertainments, which are generally degraded, when put in competition with the construction of a classical drama, have frequently nevertheless very substantial claims to our respect and pro-

tection; . . . We are led into these contemplations by a retrospect of the dramatic entertainment of last night. Our imagination was excited, our understanding enlarged, and our veneration for Captain Cook was confirmed. . . . The general effects of the pantomime were instructive, interesting, magnificent, and characteristic.⁵⁶

But if we are to see *Omai* as an example of imperial pedagogy, then we must also recognize that its objectives go far beyond the promulgation of ethnographic knowledge of non-European cultures. The audience was being trained in the complex art of class ascendancy in the metropole.

Two highly significant issues emerge from the assumed adequation of myth and stage magic evinced in both the pantomime and its reviews. In an altogether different theatre, that of transcultural contact, Europeans had already developed a set of gestural signs and theatrical spectacles aimed at generating mythic qualities. If we turn specifically to the case of Tahiti, there are numerous accounts of performances staged for precisely this end. For example, in Bougainville's account, the sailors set off rockets and use their firearms in highly theatrical ways to literally stage their difference from the natives of the islands. This is nowhere more evident than in the careful manipulation of costume.⁵⁷ Clothing is always a focus for the performance of civility, and in accounts of Bougainville's voyage much is made of the native's response to the sailor's vestments. The natives seek to determine if these newly arrived creatures are the same as they are by looking underneath their uniforms. Similar scenes of performance are amply presented in Hawkesworth's *An Account of a Voyage round the World*, and it is amusing to consider what happens when the deployment of costumes, props, and tricks goes awry. The English obsession with the theft of their snuffboxes and other props of civility is intriguing in this light, for it is precisely the manipulation of less-valuable objects—trinkets and mirrors—that subtly renders the Tahitians as innocent dupes. When the Tahitians interrupt this theatrical economy of exchange by stealing valuable objects or clothes, the English sailors suddenly find themselves on the wrong side of performance. Interpreting the English concern over theft in this way sheds light on the proximity between the gestural economy of pantomime and that of transcultural communication in a scene where there is no shared language.

One could suggest that the tricks of colonial conquest are not unrelated to the tricks of metropolitan pantomime. In the former, visual spectacle is deployed to elevate European characters; in the latter, similar visual tricks are used to devalue the objects of Harlequin's wooden wrath. What

this implies is that the relationship between the agents of colonial conquest and the native audience of their spectacles of civility is similar to that between Harlequin and his comic mark. In the case of *Omai; or, A Trip round the World*, this means that D'Elpini's performance in the role of the clown is crucial for understanding how the play intervenes in the theatre of colonial contact, in part because he is Harlequin's primary target, and in part because the relationship between the two zanni or clowns reverses the racial hierarchy suggested previously.

However, before turning to D'Elpini it is important to recognize how the adequation of stage and spirit magic performs a crucial piece of cultural inoculation. Rendering Omai's talisman and Oberea's enchantments in this way has a significant impact on how the audience constructs the spiritual and cultural life of the Pacific peoples represented in the play. Any suggestion that these are religious practices is effectively consigned to oblivion—crucially so, because there is a history of deploying Tahitian culture as a counter-memory for European religious doctrine. This is especially the case in France where Bougainville's *Voyages* was quickly incorporated into an Enlightenment critique of society. Diderot's notoriously libertine *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage* revels in the "natural" sexuality of the Tahitians and uses Bougainville's quasi-ethnographic observations to stage an assault not only on the customs of marriage but also on the moral teaching of institutionalized religion.⁵⁸ As we have already noted, a similar kind of critique of artificial society also emerged in Britain, but its libertine manifestations were simultaneously indulged and condemned as immoral often in the same publications. This type of double presentation, which leers as much as it condemns, is symptomatic of the surveillance of gender and sexual norms in the 1770s. At the time of the performance of *Omai; or, A Trip round the World* in the mid-1780s, the deployment of Tahitian figures as exemplary subjects of religious and sexual freedom has given way to a different form of exemplarity, whose terms are derived from commedia dell'arte.

Omai joins the seemingly disparate representational fields of ethnographic travel narrative and harlequinade by activating the triangle of desire at the heart of most commedia plots. Much of the action of the pantomime revolves around the *inamorata* Omai and Londina. Throughout the play Omai pursues Londina and competes with the braggart Don Struttolando for her affections. But typical of commedia narrative, the lovers are extraordinarily passive, and the primary rival is too much of a coward and a fool to push the amorous plot to a crisis. Omai and the women of fashion whom Londina allegorizes thus figure as passive sexual

subjects. This figuration diverges from a significant portion of the satirical verse on Omai's desires in the 1770s and from the totality of anti-aristocratic discourse in the period. In true commedia fashion, the passivity of the lovers is of course compensated for by their attendants. Omai is shadowed by Harlequin, Londina is served by Columbine, and Don Struttolando is pushed and pulled around the stage by D'Elpini as the Clown. The relationship between lovers and servants replicates the class structure of commedia plots, and it is important to recognize the degree to which this distinction of rank parses subjects into sexually active and passive figures. Omai and Londina are desiring subjects in the play, but the enactment of their desire and its fulfillment are performed by Harlequin and Columbine. What this means is that the passive and idealized triangle of desire is contained within a larger triangle, which is constantly erupting with lascivious gestures and direct sexual jokes.

This containment has important ramifications for the racial and class politics of the pantomime. It is important to remember that the internal triangle of a Tahitian prince, an Italian *amoroso*, and an English woman of fashion is composed of figures who are all conventionally associated with suspect or dissipated aristocratic sexuality. The potential union of Londina with Omai or Struttolando involves the threat of transculturation or interracial sexual practice. This internal circuit, therefore, carries with it the combined signification of the sexual and racial degeneration of the aristocracy. However, the sexual and racial signs associated with the internal triangle have been separated from Omai, Londina, and Struttolando and projected onto their servants, Harlequin, Columbine, and the Clown. And the specificity of this twofold operation of separation and projection is notable. Perhaps because the representation of Londina has the possibility of being the most scandalous—she could easily be construed as a direct satire on English society women—its dynamic is the most restrained. But the Omai-Harlequin relation resonates with strange transferences. As we have already seen, Harlequin replicates Omai's spirit magic with conventional pantomimical transformations, so there is some degree of commutability in the characters. Of all of Omai's character attributes, this relationship to his talisman is the fundamental sign of cultural difference from the English characters. As the play unfolds, the power of Omai's talisman is superseded by Harlequin's clapper.⁵⁹ It is as though Omai's cultural and religious identity are subsumed into Harlequin's gestural economy.

But more important is the possibility that Harlequin actually embodies Omai's negritude. At the time of *Mai*'s circulation in British society a



FIG. 2.11. J. Caldwell after William Hodges, *Omai*, engraving, 1777 (courtesy of the National Library of Australia, Canberra)

number of commentators speculated on what they considered to be his negroid features. Speculating on why Mai agreed to come to England with Captain Furneaux, one writer offered the following interpretation of his face: “[I]t is said, that a flatness in his nose, which indicated a mixture of the negro breed and his family, and made him less respectable in those islands, where blood is considered in the highest degree, contributed to make him more ready to undertake this voyage, that he might gain personal consequence from it, to compensate for this family disadvantage.”⁶⁰ The racialization of Mai here is notable as much for what it reveals about the reading of bodily signs as for what it says about the relationship between race and “family” or aristocratic privilege. It is clear that Mai is being read as someone whose family was of the first rank—in historical fact he was not an elite subject—but whose privilege was undercut by miscegenation.⁶¹ That this comes down to Mai’s face speaks on the one hand to the extraordinary interest in painting Mai’s portrait during his visit and

on the other hand to his commutability with Harlequin who frequently appears with a black mask (figs. 2.11, 2.12). The color of Harlequin's mask—or even whether he was masked—in this production remains unclear, as does the relationship between mask color and racialization, but the question posed by these details is, I believe, important because the emergent practice of racialization in the late eighteenth century is beginning to read the face like a mask for typical signs that then stand for traits of character and mentality.⁶² In this context, one is tempted to ask whether the mask plays a more active role in the history of raciological thinking than has been hitherto recognized.

As Omai's cultural and bodily specificity is leached out of his character and deposited into Harlequin, he slowly emerges as something rather different from the figure that animated the newspapers in the 1770s. He suddenly becomes a suitable sexual partner for Londina, whose sexual ex-



FIG. 2.12. Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Omai of the Friendly Isles*, pencil drawing, circa 1774 (courtesy of the Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra)

cesses have also been projected onto Columbine. This process, therefore, erases the threat of interracial desire and replaces it with an idealized yet bland fantasy of heterosexual monogamy.⁶³ But it does so not by eliminating the signs of racial otherness and sexual excess but rather by exaggerating them now as attributes of characters of low rank. So a double prophylaxis is effected—one that protects both racial and class identity—by taking the exemplary signs of excess and attaching them to figures already well worn in an economy of ridicule.

One Zanni for Another

Commedia is a particularly slippery medium for this kind of regulation of social norms, and its heavy reliance on physical theatre allows for all sorts of dissent in what has the potential to become an exercise in hegemony. This is why D'Elpini's performance as the Clown, servant to Don Struttolando, is so fascinating. Within the template of commedia types, Don Struttolando is typical of the captain figure in that he combines braggadocio and cowardice in such a way that his hyperphallic attributes reveal themselves to be a compensation for his foolish impotence. He shares a great deal with the fop in this period whose professed libertinism often acts as a front or a pretext for effeminate narcissism.⁶⁴ This helps to explain why Don Struttolando simply evaporates as a sexual threat to Omai when, as the *Town and Country* summary of the pantomime succinctly states, Struttolando is "brought over to Omai's interest" in the penultimate scene and does not figure in the sexual unions of the play's conclusion.⁶⁵ However, Struttolando's servant, the Clown, is very much present in the final scene and is the focus of the most highly sexualized cross-racial encounter in the play.

As I have already noted, this closing scene unites Omai and Londina, and Harlequin and Columbine in a rather chaste fashion, but these unions are preceded by the performance of dancing girls based on Webber's illustration of a Tahitian festival. At the conclusion of the dancing, "The Clown wins one of the dancers by the present of a nail."⁶⁶ All of the careful evacuation of interracial sexuality between Omai and Londina is abandoned here and the audience is presented with what is effectively a scene of prostitution. It is a key moment because it plays out two scenes associated with contact between Europeans and Tahitians following the publication of Hawkesworth's *Account*: one historical and one phantasmatic. The first, of course, is the scandal not only of sex between British men and Tahitian

women, which is amply documented in Hawkesworth, but also the fact that much of this sexual activity involved the exchange of “meaningless trinkets” not that distinct from the Clown’s nail. Nails were used by Cook’s men as currency for sex, and these exchanges were used not only as signs of Tahitian sexual freedom—or depravity—but also as an indication of their heterodox interpretation of British notions of property, which was often read as a form of noncomprehension, and thus of their incapacity for sovereign governance over their territory.⁶⁷ In short, this particular exchange is loaded with ethnographic and political significance.

The second implication is the insinuation, already noted with regard to “An Epistle from Mr. Banks, Voyager, Monster-Hunter, and Amoroso to Oberea, Queen of Otaheite,” that reading Hawkesworth will itself be an incitement to libertinism and prostitution. Indeed, the very title of that poem tells us a great deal, for Banks is himself being satirized as an “Amoroso” not unlike Don Struttolando. If we understand Don Struttolando as an idealized figure for Banks, then the Clown carries the negative qualities associated with his supposed libertinism. This not only transfers the sexual dissipation associated with the Banks figure onto the debased figure of the Clown, but also represents the Polynesian dancing girl as the “natural” embodiment of prostitution. If we look closely at the descriptions of D’Elpini’s performance and the few speeches attributed to the Clown, what we discern is a consistent fascination with clothing and a relentless pursuit of Londina. D’Elpini’s clothes are continually transforming and early in part 2, while dressed in the aeronautical gear of a “scientific” traveler, he comments that “the ladies with my dress would much be taken.”⁶⁸ In the first part, these obsessions are conjoined when “During [Harlequin’s] absence, the Clown enters in Omai’s cloaths, and Londina imagining him to be Omai, she lies down beside him.”⁶⁹ This moment of masquerade instantiates the Clown’s desire for Londina, and he makes a series of ludicrous attempts to woo her in the second part.

Some sense of the *lazzi*, or comic business, involved here can be gleaned from the Clown’s air in the sixth scene of part 2 that appears in the Larpent text, but which was excised midway through the pantomime’s run and replaced by Edwin’s drunken song alluded to earlier:

Air 11th—Clown
There Miss Londina lolls, how lazy!
On the green grass take your rest;
But ye Conjurors make me a daisy,
Then will she slumber on my breast.

Was I the breeze these Branches rocking,
Longing her lily leg to Note
Without Offence to her White Stocking,
I'd puff about her Petticoat.⁷⁰

The Clown's desire to become a daisy or a breeze to gain proximity to Londina's lily-white body is simultaneously suggestive and ridiculous, because it partakes of the same figural economy associated with fops such as Garrick's Daffodil.⁷¹ Here the joke is quite literal because the Clown wants to be a flower and, typical of the critical presentation of fops in the post-Garrick era, his sexual predation is undercut by signs of effeminacy. As the song continues, he threatens to "win [Londina] by surprize," and yet the insinuations of sexual assault are countered by indications that his masculinity is more than suspect.⁷² The subsequent air, also excised during Louthembourg's revisions, emphasizes that the Clown understands erotic desirability to be equatable with a lover's dancing skills and his wardrobe:

Not Spanish Struttolando,
Nor Indian Omai;
Can do what I can do
To love you, oh, may I!
I can caper, ah, ah, [*capers*] I can quaver, oh! oh! [*runs a Cantible*]
And want but a Lady to make me a Beau;
I want but a Wardrobe to dress very fine;
To get roaring muzzy, I want but good Wine.
If I had but the Money, I'd rattle at hazard,
And want but a Barber to ponder my Muzzard.⁷³

That the Clown's dancing is dubious at best and his wardrobe more imaginary than sumptuous makes him a figure of ridicule both for his theory of desire and for his erotic practice. The *Times* welcomed "the pruning away one of D'Elpini's songs, for though we think him an excellent pantomime clown, he has nothing of the *Italian* in his voice".⁷⁴ "Italian" has a double signification here for it refers both to his singing voice and to his capacity as an *amoroso*. Throughout the eighteenth century Italians are routinely associated both with libertine desire and effeminacy, so the reviewer here is picking up on the critique of the Clown and his master Don Struttolando, but he is also suggesting that D'Elpini makes a poor fop.

This burlesque of foppish libertinism was a primary element of D'Elpini's performance, and it is interesting to consider how it plays out

the critique of Banks discussed earlier. Much was made of the fact that in his famous encounter with Pūrea in which he lost his clothes, Banks took on the costume of the Tahitians. Such a moment of ethnic cross-dressing carried with it a certain sexual frisson that makes its way into the verse satires of the 1770s. As we have already seen, male libertinism is often portrayed as the impersonation of Tahitian sexual custom, and such representations neatly deploy existing figures of prostitution to critique aristocratic women. In this light, the Clown's aggressive pursuit of Londina not only enacts these former scenes of promiscuity to recall the critique of aristocratic vice, but also reorients them because Londina consistently rejects the Clown except when she thinks he is the now sexually normative Omai. What this means is that a hygienic barrier is being erected between Don Struttolando and his alter ego, the Clown, on the one hand, and Londina, on the other, that effectively trumps libertinism and saves the women of London from allegations of sexual impropriety.

Significantly, this hygienic imperative, which was so crucial to Louthembourg and O'Keefe's initial construction of the Clown's character and to D'Elpini's performance of the role, quickly became vestigial. Perhaps because D'Elpini was not suited to the burlesque of foppish behavior and perhaps because the critique of libertinism was less important than the racialization of class relations, his extended airs in part 2 were replaced with something much more disturbing and arguably more ideologically necessary. D'Elpini's rapturous pursuit of Londina was replaced by a set piece written specifically for Edwin in the character of the "Travelled Native of Tongataboo" who ostensibly travels with Omai in a coat composed of fragments of a range of native costumes. This song was singled out for praise in all of the London dailies and I would like to quote it in its entirety in order to explore thoroughly the rather different account of the career of this phantasmatic Pacific envoy:

I.
In de big canoe
I o'er the ocean cummee,
Jack and merry crew
Give good liquor ti me;
Over sand and rocks
Teach me to sail no paddle;
Teach me den to box,
So to use my daddle.
Tol lol lol, &c.

II.

Oh! I suck'd de grog,
Brandy, gin and rummee,
Vid de jolly dog,
Den to London cummee.
Vat you tink of dat,
Rice my hair did powder,
Rub my head vid fat,
Dats to make me powder.
Tol lol lol, &c.

III.

Snug as littel mouse
From de vind and veather,
Dragg'd about in house
Made of trees and leather,
To de voman fair
Up de stair I trottee,
She did sit on chair,
On de floor I squattee,
Tol lol lol, &c.

IV.

But dis lady fine
Call me ugly divil;
Guinea, glass of wine,
Den so sweet and civil,
In her spousy jump
As of kiss I beg her,
Give my head de tump,
Cry get out dam negar.
Tol lol lol, &c.⁷⁵

Each stanza offers a debased version of key details from the accounts of Mai's sojourn in London: for example, a number of papers drew attention not only to Mai's adoption of English attire but also to his lack of familiarity with the use of a chair or sofa. What we have here is a coarse parody of Mai's visit that provides overtly racist gestures that contrast quite violently with the representation of Omai elsewhere in the pantomime,

but which also stage the same hygienic imperative noted earlier with regard to D'Elpini's performance.

This entire process, however, turns on the deployment of prostitute figures adjacent to the *inamorata* both in London and Tahiti. Rather than a subtle critique of the fantasy of interracial desire ostensibly at the heart of Banks's libertinism, Edwin's song first constructs a subhuman racial type who is drunk and on the prowl in London and then stages his repudiation by "de voman fair." That the "Travelled Native of Tongataboo" receives his lessons in civility from British sailors, and a London prostitute underlines how notions of class otherness are deployed in the formation of the "dam negar." Edwin's character's proximity to the London prostitute is matched by the only instance of sexual deviance in the otherwise normative closing scene. The prostitudinal relationship established between D'Elpini's Clown and the dancing girl by the exchange of the nail effectively repeats this collocation of working-class depravity and interracial sexual practices. Significantly, all of Edwin's songs in the pantomime cast him as a lower-class figure involved in the propagation of vice. In his first song, in part 1, he is inciting the women of London to gambling and in the final song added to the play in early January 1786, he appears as a pimp, along with his prostitute Poll, fighting in pubs, interloping at a play, and finally toasting English seaman that they "May . . . always the ocean command."⁷⁶

This eruption of racial and class fantasy into the overtly ethnographic pantomime was not only called for by the audience and the critics but also embodied in the performance of a character who ostensibly stands for all types of people from the Pacific. Wearing his fragmented coat and recounting his public shaming by "de fine lady," Edwin enacts a form of racial derogation that both sexualizes and infantilizes Britain's cultural others encountered by Cook on his voyages. But in his performance, Edwin also draws explicit lines of affiliation between depraved lower-class characters and ostensibly "primitive" Polynesian subjects. The lower orders and the racially distinct exist together at a distance from normative middle-class whiteness. In perhaps the pantomime's most telling moment, Omai is witness to Edwin's song and "is driven to great Distress, and to the Exercise of his Magic Power" to flee the scene in pursuit of Londina. It is as though the eruption of racist fantasy prompts Omai to separate himself from one with whom he might be confused.

In light of Edwin's hyperembodiment of racial otherness, the palpable disembodiment of Cook and Britannia in the apotheosis painting now

becomes highly significant. It would appear that the gestural economy of D'Elpini's tricks and the minstrel-like tactics of Edwin's singing operate as the chief sites of bodily fantasy and projection necessary for the evacuation or the whitening of Cook and Britannia. Understood in this way, the leeching of almost all the sexual and racial signs from the central triangle of desire in the commedia plot implies that the threats of interracial sexuality, active female desire, and foppish masculinity embodied by Omai, Londina, Don Struttolando, and their zanni attendants are necessary as examples of potential, but reformed, alterity. Their newfound normativity is instructive for it exists adjacent to, but not part of, the apotheosis painting. In the final scene, Cook and Britannia require an altogether disjunctive form of representation to ensure that they are effectively separated from the swirling mass of sexual, racial, and class fantasy broiling on stage below them.

But if Cook and Britannia require a separate representational plane, then the seemingly opposite representational paradigms of ethnographic observation and commedia narrative do not, because, as the pantomime unfolds, ethnographic detail is carefully transformed into types not identical but rather akin to commedia types. So the careful ethnographic observation of Webber gives way to the racist posturing of Edwin. The critique of aristocratic libertinism, which was so important to early discussions of Cook's voyages and Mai's sojourn in England in the 1770s, gives way to fantasies of working-class degeneration so totalizing that they subsume signs of vice into emergent signs of racial difference. In this regard, *Omai; or, A Trip round the World* marks a signal transition in middle-class politics from the shaming of the aristocracy to the racialization of the lower orders. And hanging quietly behind all this are the quasi-scientific views of the South Seas, which allow this recalibration of racial and class fantasy to be staged as a thoroughly educational experience.