

INTRODUCTION

In July 1774 OMAI travelled to England with the crew of CAPTAIN COOK's second Pacific voyage. When he arrived in London he became a sensation. He was presented to KING GEORGE III and QUEEN CHARLOTTE at Kew and praised for his grace and good manners which delighted his audience. Two years later COOK returned OMAI to the South Sea Islands and he is thought to have died there three years later. In December 1785 the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden presented the pantomime OMAI: Or, A Trip Round the World.

*All extracts from this pamphlet have been taken from
EH McCormick 'Omai: Pacific Envoy' 1977*

The Indian who came on board is named Omy, though we commonly call him Jack – he is a fellow of quick parts – very intelligent, has a good memory & takes great Notice of every thing he sees – he is possessed of many good qualities – is Strong, Active, healthy & as likely to weather the hardships of a long Voyage as any of us ...

He was dressed according to the fashion of his Country, & is a very good looking man – my Father says he has quite an interesting Countenance. He appeared to have uncommon spirits, & laughed very heartily many Times. He speaks very few English words – & Capt. Furneaux a few Otaheite words. – they had got Mr Banks there, on purpose to speak to him – but Mr Banks has almost forgot what he knew of that language.

Fanny Burney, from her journal

... lusty, strong made & active. Broad chest & broad flat shoulders – legs very well made – the calf muscular & large the ancles taper [slender] but strong. His complexion much resembles that of an European, accustomed to hot climates: His features are regular – his eyebrows large & dark – His Countenance is often illuminated by a most unaffected Smile – His Hair black & dressed in the english fashion. He was dressed

in Pompadour – with white waistcoat, & he seemed as easy in our habit, as if he had been born in Pall-Mall.

Revd J. E. Gambier of Cookham

Omai, who was in the Park, called here this Morning, & says that he went to her Grace, & asked her why she let her Hair go in that manner? Ha, Ha, Ha – don't you Laugh at her having a Lesson of Attention from an Otaheitan?

Fanny Burney describing the reaction of the Duchess of Devonshire

... he had passed his time in England, only in the best company; so that all he had acquired of our manners was genteel.

James Boswell

When Omai played at chess and at backgammon with Baretti, everybody admired at the savage's good breeding and at the European's impatient spirit.

Mrs Thrale

He has passions of the same kind as other young men, but has judgement enough not to indulge them in improper excess. I do not imagine that he has any dislike to liquor ... but fortunately for him, he perceived that drinking was very little in use among

inferior people, and as he was very watchful into the manners and conduct of the persons of rank who honoured him with their protection, he was sober and modest, and I never heard that, during the whole time of his stay in England, which was two years, he ever once was disguised with wine, or ever showed an inclination to go beyond the strictest rules of moderation.

Earl of Sandwich

I might add to all the cruelties of discovery that of transporting a simple barbarian to a christian and civilised country, to debase him into a spectacle and a maccaroni, and to invigorate the seeds of corrupted nature by a course of improved debauchery, and then to send him back, if he survives the contagion of English vices, to revenge himself on his enemies, and die ...

The Gentleman's Magazine

*Of wondrous sights, OMAI tells
Of asses – apes – and Sadlers Wells!
And of our smooth cestinos!
–How he admir'd a masquerade
Was sometimes 'prentice to the trade
Of op'ras – and festinos!*

Extract from *Omiab: an Ode*