

I had my information of this transaction from the mouth of Captain Cook and those who accompanied him, within an hour or two after the affair had happened. Suppose it disagreed with Captain Cook's written journal, and printed narrative, and contained some particulars not advantageous to seamen; — what then? What reasonable man will not believe that Captain Cook would exactly relate the matter in the same order as he meant to write it afterwards; or that he would not, upon cool reflection, suppress in writing the mention of such facts as were unfavourable to his own character, even tho' they could at most be construed into effects of unguarded heat . . . The officer's orders [i.e. to shoot] appeared to me unjust and cruel. Let every man judge for himself. So much I know, that the matter was discussed in my hearing, with much warmth, between the officers and Captain Cook, who by no means approved of their conduct at that time.<sup>19</sup>

Cook had sailed on the third voyage before Forster's *Voyage* and the resulting controversy was in print. But the heat that had arisen on his own ship over the affair at Eromanga may well have discouraged him from permitting Webber to portray violent confrontations with native peoples on the third voyage.

Cook had good practical reasons to suppress such images of conflict. Not only did his instructions require him to cultivate friendship with native people, the representation of conflict with natives could have had at that time the most unpredictable results. For the contemporary political situation in England was volatile. A week before Cook sailed out of Plymouth<sup>20</sup> the American colonies had declared their independence. Radical opinion seized upon Cook's voyages as yet another attempt by England to dominate weaker societies. Cook had been instructed to return Omai to the Society Islands; the social lion had become something of an embarrassment.<sup>21</sup> Satirists had seized upon his presence to satirise the condition of English society. It would be surprising if Cook had not seen and read the most virulent of these satirical broadsides, entitled *An Historical Epistle, from Omiah to the Queen of Otaheite; being his Remarks on the English Nation*, which appeared in 1775 while he was resident in London between his second and third voyage. Omai is presented in the satire as a critic of European culture and criticises trenchantly those nations who:

. . . in cool blood premeditately go  
To murder wretches whom they cannot know.  
Urg'd by no injury, prompted by no ill  
In forms they butcher, and by systems kill;  
Cross o'er the seas, to ravage distant realms,  
And ruin thousands worthier than themselves.

As a man of Empire, the representative of George III and the Admiralty in the South Seas, Cook it may be assumed, was reluctant to allow anything to occur in the visual record of the voyage that could give credence to those kinds of sentiments.