

*Redeeming memory: the martyrdoms of
Captain James Cook and Reverend
John Williams*

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Almost half a century had passed after Cook's death, when the Revd William Ellis of the London Missionary Society sat in a house in Oahu with several local chiefs, a folio edition of Cook's *Voyages* spread before him. While poring over the image of the navigator's demise together with the chiefs, Ellis observed: 'They were greatly affected with the print which represented [Cook's] death . . . I perceived Karaimoku more than once wipe the tears from his eyes, while conversing about this melancholy event.'¹ Substituting the name of a British evangelical for that of Karaimoku would change nothing in this narrative. The intended message is that times have changed: the Hawaiians have converted and adopted the civilised manners of the British. Their absorbed interest in Cook's *Voyages* supplies evidence of how they can read and write; and Ellis proudly parades the fact that even their emotions have been tamed. The chiefs are now willing to cry on account of Cook's death without celebrating it. Ellis's emphasis on how his charges had achieved the mastery of their selves was again evident when he wrote: 'More than once, when conversing with us on the length of time the missionaries had been in the Society Islands, they have said, "Why did you not come here sooner? Was it because we killed Captain Cook?"'² The Hawaiian memory of Cook was then a truly British and evangelical one. It encompassed civilised remorse, controlled grief and literary safe-keeping.

Although this chapter is not about Captain Cook, it uses the explorer as a departure point for a study of memory and replication.³ My aim is to characterise the early nineteenth-century Pacific, by discussing how evangelicals modified the memory of Cook, and re-embodied their remembrance of the navigator, in the lives of others who they hoped would become martyrs for

¹ William Ellis, *A Narrative of a Tour through Hawaii or Owhyhee* (London, 1826), p. 102.

² *Ibid.*

³ In doing this I follow broadly in the wake of Chris Healy's excellent book, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory* (Cambridge, 1997).

their cause. Evangelical theology and rhetoric are quite distant from the way we remember Cook. Yet the passage of memory into history is helpful in stimulating a closer reflection on our memories than would be possible if I were to select a thread of commemoration which we share with this period. The evangelical focus, in what follows, is also appropriate given the dramatic impact that missionaries had on the Pacific. By the middle of the century, the transformation of the Pacific islands was presented by the missionary world as its chief accomplishment.⁴ The region had been chosen by the Directors of the London Missionary Society as the first location to which missionaries should be sent, after evangelicals had been captivated by reading Cook's *Voyages*.

A study of how evangelicals used accounts of Cook to characterise their expansionist ideologies reveals how history may be used in colonialism. Evangelicals prided themselves on reconciling myth with biblical tradition and differentiating error from fact. Their narrations of Cook were consciously set against local traditions of the arrival of Europeans in the Pacific, which were said to be vague and superstitious. While making these claims about their ability to interpret the past, missionaries transported printing presses to the Pacific and reported how local people responded with awe and confusion to the possibilities presented by reading and writing.⁵ Words and histories were closely linked therefore with articulations of difference. Should we then reflect on the status of our histories of Cook? Missionary practice suggests that it is far too easy to privilege the production of rational words and empirical accounts in coming to terms with the celebrated navigator.

Analysing how an individual's life is retold and re-inscribed in the lives of others can also be the means of studying changing notions of self.⁶ By showing how evangelicals moulded the memory of Cook, erasing the negative connotations of his alleged deification, what it means to be religious becomes identifiable.⁷ In the climate of the early empire, difficulty and pain were to be cherished as signifiers of divine instrumentality; an acknowledgement of the relation between humans and the Deity was crucial in defining self. When

⁴ *Westminster Review*, 1856, p. 25. For more on the South Pacific mission see Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797–1860* (Melbourne, 1978); Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Nature speaks theology: colonialism, cultivation, conversion and the Pacific, 1795–1850' (University of Cambridge, Ph.D. thesis, 2001).

⁵ For more on the placement of literature in the Pacific mission see Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge, 1998); also Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁶ For more on the definition of the self see Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas* (Chicago, 2001).

⁷ Recent work on missionary history includes Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford, 1999), and Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, 1990).

the Revd John Williams, the most celebrated Pacific missionary, voyaged through the Pacific discovering new islands, he wrote of the loss of his children, the plots on his life, his near drowning and how he constructed a ship from scratch while stranded on Rarotonga. When he was killed and allegedly eaten on the shores of Eromanga in 1839, he ended his life of willing suffering in fitting fashion. He earned himself the title of martyr and exemplified the religious hero: an individual who underwent trials in order to allow the Deity to work. Williams was readily compared with Cook. Instead of a strangely impassioned moment of deification, the missionary was said to have taken the pain of martyrdom while in full control of his passions and in communion with God.⁸

Just as Cook's *Voyages* was important in creating the navigator's name, Williams also published what became a best-seller, under the title *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises* (1837). In its pages Williams made a case for being an explorer on a par with Cook. He wrote of Rarotonga:

This splendid island escaped the untiring researches of Captain Cook, and was discovered by myself, in 1823. It is a mass of mountains, which are high, and present a remarkably romantic appearance. It is situated in lat. 21° 20' S., 160° W. long. It has several good boat harbours, is about thirty miles in circumference, and is surrounded by a reef. The population is about 6,000 or 7,000.⁹

As Williams translated islands into numbers, he authenticated his own claim to be a discoverer and he filled Cook's chart. The created order was designed to have humans at its head. To live in unison with nature – as the islanders had done – was to oppose that divine plan.¹⁰ The heroic coloniser was the pious individual who rose against the land and put it in its place, firmly in the bounds of human control. In that process he never came under its sway, like Cook had done, in confusing the Creator and the created, and blurring the boundaries between what needed to be worshipped and what needed to submit to duty. Williams became a better Cook for a religiously awakened public.

⁸ There is a vast literature on how to die well in this period. See Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford, 1999), Doreen Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (London, 1984), Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, c.1500–1800* (London, 1991), John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death Among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-century France* (Oxford, 1981).

⁹ John Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands; with Remarks upon the Natural History of the Islands, Origin, Languages, Traditions, and Usages of the Inhabitants* (London, 1837), p. 18.

¹⁰ For more on the operation of natural theology see Boyd Hilton, *Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford, 1988), and Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven, 2000). For the placement of natural theology in the missionary project see Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Natural history spiritualized: civilizing islanders, cultivating breadfruit and collecting souls', *History of Science*, 32 (2001), pp. 417–43.

Although evangelicals engaged in what Gananath Obeyesekere has identified as myth-making, these myths were certainly not 'inflexible' with 'almost no internal debate'.¹¹ Missionaries dealt creatively with Cook's death, denouncing him as an idolater at the same time as they hoped to emulate his voyages. I do not mean to go into a full analysis of the over-heated anthropological debate between Obeyesekere and Marshall Sahlins.¹² Yet this chapter will demonstrate, in passing, that Obeyesekere's claim for the Hawaiians works with as much force for the evangelicals. The missionaries were also able to combine myth with reasoning. If this is the case both Sahlins and Obeyesekere should reflect more on their use of the dichotomous pairing of European and non-European. Forms of reasoning need to be historically particularised and located on a spectrum without being categorised under the competing terms of 'them' and 'us'. The evangelicals' relation to the site of Cook's death and the landscape of Williams's demise is reminiscent of Pacific islanders' natural historical traditions. The shared features of these approaches to the environment are forgotten in accounts that suppose that reasoning is diametrically opposed on either side of the encounter.

I will begin by studying nineteenth-century retellings of Cook, before widening my gaze in order to take in this dialectic between the celebrated missionary and the commemorated navigator.

Religious narrations

When the King and Queen of Hawai'i died in England in July 1824, after being taken ill with pulmonary inflammation caused by their introduction to a cooler climate, their bodies were taken back to the Pacific in HMS *Blonde*.¹³ According to the missionaries, the ceremony that accompanied the return of these remains was put on at least in part because of the islanders' claim that an act of terrible revenge had been inflicted on their monarchs. The Revd George Young wrote, 'The death of their King and Queen in London, was regarded by many of them as a judgement of God, inflicted on the islands for the murder of the great Captain.'¹⁴ Captain Byron's voyage aboard the *Blonde*

¹¹ Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook* (Princeton, 1992), p. 168.

¹² For the reply see: Marshall Sahlins, *How 'Natives' Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (Chicago, 1995); also Michael Bravo, 'The anti-anthropology of highlanders and islanders', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 29A (1998), pp. 369–89.

¹³ George Byron, *Voyage of H.M.S. Blonde to the Sandwich Islands in the Years 1824–1825* (London, 1826). According to the American missionary Sheldon Dibble the monarch decided to visit London from a state of restlessness; see his *History and General Views of the Sandwich Islands' Mission* (New York, 1839), p. 87.

¹⁴ George Young, *The Life and Voyages of Captain James Cook, Drawn up from his Journals and other Authentic Documents; and Comprising much Original Information* (London, 1836), p. 462.

therefore had the specific aim of recasting the memory of the Cook tragedy in the islands. The bodies of the monarchs were deposited in lead coffins, enclosed in wood, covered with crimson velvet, and richly ornamented, with inscriptions in Hawaiian and English.¹⁵

At this time Cook's reputation amongst evangelicals had two threads to it. On the one hand, the Revd Thomas Haweis, founder of the South Pacific mission, had cherished the pages of Cook's *Voyages*. An early historian of the mission observed:

These pictures of lovely scenes, of stirring adventure, of human degradation and need . . . powerfully touched the imagination of Dr Haweis. A mission to these dusky islanders, so gentle, so favoured by nature, so likely to be so easily influenced for good, as he pictured them in his mind, had become the cherished purpose of his heart.¹⁶

In fact Cook's discovery of the islands was said to have set the stage in a divinely ordained plan for mission work. In an address composed to encourage exertions towards missionary work, the Revd George Burder wrote,

Captain Cook and others have traversed the globe, almost from pole to pole, and have presented us, as it were, a new world. . . . May we not reasonably hope that a well-planned and well-conducted mission . . . will be attended with the blessing of God and issue in the conversion of many souls?¹⁷

But at the same time as Cook's travels were thought to have been the first step in God's master plan for the unfolding of the Pacific islands, evangelicals derided Cook for losing control of himself and acting irreligiously at his death. The missionary, the Revd Hiram Bingham, wrote that Cook's death was a divine judgement for the sin of allowing the Hawaiians to adore him: 'we can hardly avoid the conclusion, that for the direct encouragement of idolatry, and especially for his audacity in allowing himself like the proud and magisterial Herod to be idolized, he was left to infatuation and died by the visitation of God'.¹⁸ Bingham went on to suggest that Cook had violated the proper relation between humans and the Deity. The missionary noted that it was vain and rebellious for 'a worm to presume to receive religious homage and sacrifices'.¹⁹

¹⁵ James Jackson Jarves, *History of the Hawaiian or Sandwich Islands, Embracing their Antiquities, Mythology, Legends, Discovery by Europeans in the Sixteenth-Century, Rediscovery by Cook* . . . (London, 1843), p. 233.

¹⁶ Richard Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society 1795–1895* (London, 1899), I, p. 117.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-one Years in the Sandwich Islands or the Civil, Religious, and Political History of those Islands* (London, 1848), p. 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The Revd George Young added, 'in this instance, our illustrious countryman suffered his curiosity to overcome his sense of duty'.²⁰ This was thought to be unusual for the celebrated voyager, who had condemned the human sacrifice of Tahiti, and whose journal contained many references to Providence.²¹ Cook seemed to have fallen prey to a momentary but consequential temptation.

Religious biographers were insistent that Cook's folly could not be compromised; the navigator was said to have consented to being adored with the full knowledge of what was happening. James Jackson Jarves who first arrived in Hawai'i in 1837 as a sympathiser of missions, and who edited the weekly paper, *The Polynesian*, wrote that Cook had observed how the inhabitants of the island worshipped him and allowed this to continue. Poking fun at local traditions, Jarves noted, 'the punctilious deference paid Cook when he first landed was both painful and ludicrous . . . as soon as he walked passed [past], all unveiled themselves, rose and followed him'. In all there were said to be 'ten thousand half-clad men, women and children' chasing or following Cook 'on all-fours'.²² These actions could not be misinterpreted and so Jarves wrote: 'The natives say that Cook performed his part in this heathen farce, without the slightest opposition.'²³ In the meantime, Young criticised those who argued that Cook's curiosity was sufficient excuse for his folly, by pointing to the fact that he allowed himself to be worshipped twice.²⁴ Cook's intention to be worshipped, and the implication that full blame for his actions should rest on his own shoulders, were a shared feature of religious narrations of his demise.

These criticisms need to be contextualised in a wider account of evangelical views of British contact in the Pacific. Navigators and travellers were often accused of neglecting to introduce local people to the benefits of religion, while encouraging alcoholism, and spreading venereal disease.²⁵ The American missionary the Revd Sheldon Dibble observed, 'Captain Cook might have directed the rude and ignorant natives to the great Jehovah, instead of receiving divine homage himself. If he had done so, it would have been less painful to contemplate his death.'²⁶ In a document written to the directors of Bible and missionary institutions, this opinion came to fever pitch with the criticism of sailors whose 'vicious practices cannot fail to subvert and banish every virtuous feeling; – whose example only teaches them to sin as with a cart-rope and who are like a swarm of destructive locusts that eat up every green thing

²⁰ Young, *Life and Voyages*, p. 421.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 421–3.

²² Jarves, *History of the Hawaiian Sandwich Islands*, p. 102.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁴ Young, *Life and Voyages*, p. 421.

²⁵ For more on the representation of mariners in this period see Jane Samson, *Imperial Benevolence: Making British Authority in the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu, 1998).

²⁶ Dibble, *History and General Views*, p. 28.

wherever they come'.²⁷ The self-presentation of missionaries as benevolent and selfless was forged in opposition to the image of godless mariners who sought their own gain. Where missionaries brought the benefits of British rule through pain and suffering, worldly mariners were said to destroy everything in their path.

This rhetoric explains why religious commentators on Cook's last days were quick to combine the navigator's irreligiosity with his supposed selfishness. Ephraim Eveleth, an American evangelical, wrote for instance of how Cook had insisted on a *heiau*, or sacred enclosure, being desecrated to supply the needs of his crew, just prior to his death. As payment for a piece of wood from this site, where the bones of kings and chiefs were deposited, Cook offered two iron hatchets.²⁸ Exasperated at the Hawaiians' denial of this request, Cook ordered his men to break down the fence of the *heiau* and to take it to the boats. Cook's lack of benevolence was amply proved for Eveleth by the unequal nature of this exchange. Jarves also wrote of the selfishness of Cook's crew:

[the] most cogent reason operating to create a revulsion of feeling, was the enormous taxes with which the whole island was burthened to maintain them. Their offerings to senseless gods were comparatively few; but hourly and daily were they required for Cook and his followers. . . . The magnitude of the gifts from the savage, and the meanness of those from the white men, must excite the surprise of anyone who peruses the narrative of this voyage.²⁹

In these and other ways, Cook and his contingent were demoted to the lowly rank of other travellers, characterised by greed and worldliness.

While accusing Cook of acting irreligiously and selfishly, and wanting to distance themselves from his mistakes, evangelicals wished to follow in the navigator's path. One solution to this paradox was to set about redeeming and remoulding the memory of the death. The Revd William Ellis, for instance, wrote that it will be 'gratifying for the Christian reader to know' that a missionary station has been formed in the village near where Cook was killed; and close to where the navigator was murdered 'a school has been opened, and a house erected for Christian worship'.³⁰ The physical features of the site also came under the natural theological gaze of the evangelicals. The cave where Cook's remains were deposited for a while was described thus:

²⁷ R. Ferguson, *Affecting Intelligence from the South Sea Islands. A Letter Addressed to the Directors and Friends of Bible and Missionary Institutions in Great Britain and America* (London, 1839), p. 3.

²⁸ Ephraim Eveleth, *History of the Sandwich Islands, with an Account of the American Mission Established there in 1820* (Philadelphia, 1831), p. 13.

²⁹ Jarves, *History of the Hawaiian Sandwich Islands*, pp. 108–9.

³⁰ William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches During a Residence of Nearly Six Years in the South Sea Islands* (London, 1839), IV, p. 138.

The cave itself is of volcanic formation, and appears to have been one of those subterranean tunnels so numerous on the island, by which the volcanoes in the interior sometimes discharge their contents upon the shore. It is five feet high, and the entrance about eight or ten feet wide. The roof and sides within are of obsidian or hard vitreous lava; and along the floor, it is evident that in some remote period a stream of the same kind of lava has also flowed.³¹

Evangelicals attempted to redeem Cook's mistake not just by rearranging the landmarks of the bay; they brought the site of the death securely within the boundaries of geography and science.

There was also a persistent desire to track down those who were associated with the events surrounding Cook's demise, to suggest that their behaviour had been altered under the redeeming influences of evangelicalism. Ellis wrote that there were a number of persons at Kaavaeroa, and other places in the island, 'who either were present themselves at the unhappy dispute . . . or who, from their connexion with those who were on the spot, are well acquainted with the particulars'.³² Dibble noted that, 'the heart, liver, &c. of Captain Cook were stolen and eaten by some hungry children, who mistook them in the night for the inwards of a dog'. Emphasising the contact that these men had since had with missionaries, he added that they were now 'aged . . . and reside within a few miles of the station of Lahaina'.³³ Captain Nathaniel Portlock, one of Cook's crew who later commanded a voyage through the Pacific that lasted from 1785 to 1788, first set this tradition in motion in publishing the account of his conversation with a man named Ta-boo-a-raa-nee.³⁴ This man turned out to be the brother of the chief who was killed by Cook's men, and whose death sparked the uproar just prior to Cook's death. He apparently told Portlock that 'the present king Co-ma-aa-ma-a and other chiefs were very much afraid of coming on board; dreading our resenting the fate our countrymen'.³⁵ This encounter provides an insight into an earlier attempt to track the perpetrators of Cook's death, which was shrouded in fear and regret, and which predates conversion.

Attempts to change the people and landscape of Hawai'i and to assert the superiority of Christianity are evident outside the missionary corpus. After depositing the remains of the King and Queen, Captain Byron steered for Kealakekua Bay. He noted upon meeting the chiefs of the district, 'Theft is punished, murder almost unknown, and infants enjoy all the benefits of parental love.'³⁶ Yet even in the context of all of these changes there was still more

³¹ Ibid., pp. 130–1.

³² Ibid., p. 131.

³³ Dibble, *History and General Views*, p. 31.

³⁴ Nathaniel Portlock, *A Voyage Round the World, but more Particularly to the North-west Coast of America performed in 1785, 1786, 1787 and 1788* (London, 1789), p. 309.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Byron, *Voyage of H.M.S. Blonde*, p. 198.

converting that had to be done. Byron visited the spot where it was believed that Cook's body had been burnt and took away many pieces of the dark lava that lay at the spot. According to Ellis, few visitors left Hawai'i without making a pilgrimage to the spot where Cook died. Such tours customarily included the collection of lava, the commentary of a Hawaiian guide, and the study of two coconut trees that were perforated by balls shot from the boats on the occasion of Cook's death.³⁷ Yet Byron was not content with these gestures of commemoration. He went to the royal *morai*, where the son of the high-priest of Cook's time was still in charge of relics. He described it as 'filled with rude wooden images of all shapes and dimensions, whose grotesque forms and horrible countenances present a most extraordinary spectacle'.³⁸ Viewing the artefacts of this district where Cook had been deified, Byron hastily collected some to display in Britain.

The regret of the high-priest's son at the desecration of a holy place is noted and yet paraded as a sign of powerlessness. The structures of a culture that allowed a navigator to perish were dismantled and transplanted with Christianity. By the collection of artefacts, Byron asserted the passage of time, and put Cook's folly firmly into history. At the spot where the body was burnt, he erected a cross of oak to the memory of the man. 'Sacred to the memory of Capt. James Cook, R.N. who discovered these Islands in the year of our Lord, 1778. This humble monument is erected, by his countrymen, in the year of our Lord, 1825.'³⁹ A new artefact and a new memory: the signification of a landscape and a people changed and Christianised.

The memory of Cook's death therefore stimulated a range of positions amongst evangelicals and religious travellers. His last actions were said to violate the proper ordering of creation: he had allowed himself to be worshipped, and had acted in a way that was unfitting for a British navigator. He had also displayed a selfishness that was common to all worldly explorers who sought their own gain before the conversion of the Pacific islanders. Yet evangelicals were forced to portray themselves as following in Cook's path, since the missionary enterprise rose out of the seeds of Cook's voyages. This ambiguity was resolved by their reorganisation of the site of Cook's death and the civilisation of the people associated with the events of the navigator's last days. As places and people were redeemed it became possible to atone for the past and to move beyond Cook's folly.

³⁷ Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, IV, pp. 137–8; also p. 144.

³⁸ Byron, *Voyage of H.M.S. Blonde*, p. 200.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

Debunking myth

A brief consideration of secular accounts of Cook is useful in placing these religious narrations in perspective. For example, a cheap biography of Cook published in 1831, and aimed at the lower and middling classes, played down the events of Cook's alleged deification. Cook's mistake could have no place here, given the pamphlet's aim to instil in its readers, the 'important truth, that industry, prudence, honesty, and perseverance, are ever sure of being rewarded, even in this world'.⁴⁰ The Hawaiians' actions were said to suggest their high respect and opinion and the name 'Orono' was parenthesised, 'a title of high honour given to Captain Cook'.⁴¹ A host of other sources also drew on this rhetoric of improvement, by stressing Cook's successes and showing how they could be emulated by those dedicated to hard work. One author hoped, for instance, that Cook would soon be revered in the Pacific, with 'the rational respect and affection due by an enlightened people to him who was the harbinger of their civilisation'.⁴² Typifying self-help literature, these accounts went to great lengths in suggesting that anyone could become like Cook: 'In whatever soil genius or merit is sown, it will burst forth, according to its strength, with as much splendour as the sun from behind a cloud: if difficulties obstruct its progress, the more furious it will burn, till it is properly cultivated, and advantageously employed.'⁴³

Yet common to both evangelical and improving accounts of Cook's death was the use of the navigator's memory as a commodity. All of these writers reshaped Cook's life in order to suit their own ideology. Ironically, the use of Cook as cultural currency was characterised in these very works as a feature of the mentality of Pacific peoples. Young wrote, for instance, that when the mutineers of the *Bounty* wanted a stock of cattle in Tahiti, they 'made the demand in the name of Captain Cook; a name which operated on the natives like a charm, and made them furnish in more than three days, more than was required'.⁴⁴ Pacific peoples were thought to be in the grip of memory and incapable of rational history. This was why Dibble noted:

The *early history* of the Hawaiian nation is involved in uncertainty. It could not be otherwise, with the history of a people entirely ignorant of the art of writing.

⁴⁰ Anon., *The Life of Captain James Cook the Celebrated Circumnavigator, compiled from the most Authentic Sources* (Dublin, 1831), Preface.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴² Anon., *An Historical Account of the Circumnavigation of the Globe and of the Progress of Discovery in the Pacific Ocean, from the Voyages of the Magellan to the Death of Cook* (Edinburgh, 1837), p. 490.

⁴³ Anon., *The Voyages of Captain James Cook, Round the World with an Account of his Unfortunate Death at Owhyhee* (London, 1823), Preface.

⁴⁴ Young, *Life and Voyages*, p. 460.

Traditions, indeed, are abundant; but traditions are a mass of rubbish, from which it is always difficult to extricate truth. Very little can be ascertained with certainty, beyond the memory of the present generation, and the records of Europeans who first visited the islands.⁴⁵

Cook's arrival in Hawai'i was also said to provide evidence for the tyranny of memory and myth. Missionaries recounted how, in mistaking the navigator for the god *Lono*, islanders had come to a superstitious view of the past. They believed that a chief who 'slew his wife in a fit of passion' became 'gloomy and sullen' and left the island in his canoe; and that this chief was actually a god who would return.⁴⁶

Some religious commentators attempted to reconcile detailed descriptions of the islanders' traditions of the past with established narratives of history. Jarves wrote, for instance, how local people believed that in the reign of Kahoukapu, 'a *kahuna* (priest) arrived at Kohala. . . . He was a white man, and brought with him a large and a small idol.' Jarves then interjected with clinical precision: 'Kahoukapu reigned eighteen generations of kings previous to Kamehameha I. . . . If such were the case, it would bring the arrival of Pao [the priest] to somewhere between the years 1530 and 1630, a period brilliant in the annals of Spanish maritime discovery in the Pacific.'⁴⁷ By these means superstition was aligned with truth. Yet scripture was the prime arbiter of truth for evangelicals and provided a source of the firmest certainties. Therefore, Hawaiian accounts of their past needed to be compared with the Bible. Bingham wrote that the islanders were part of the lost tribe of Israel, who in their travels over a wide field like Polynesia, 'have lost every vestige and tradition of their literature, and of their language, and of the names of their patriarchs, kings, prophets and heroes'.⁴⁸

Despite priding themselves on coming to a rational and scriptural view of the past, evangelicals traded and moulded memory. They used Cook as a commodity for their own purposes, even as the Tahitians were supposedly beguiled by his name. While oral traditions were represented as inferior to written texts, words themselves came to have mystical power. When printing presses were transported to the region, the evangelists were jubilant in reporting on the awe of Pacific peoples. In Hawai'i, Dibble drew attention to how the monarch Kamehameha confused words with what they referred to:

The people were amazed at the art of expressing thoughts on paper. They started back from it with dread, as though it were a sort of enchantment or sorcery. A certain captain said to Kamehameha, 'I can put Kamehameha on a slate'; and proceeded

⁴⁵ Dibble, *History and General Views*, p. 14.

⁴⁶ For one example of the use of this story see Eveleth, *History of the Sandwich Islands*, p. 11.

⁴⁷ Jarves, *History of the Hawaiian Sandwich Islands*, p. 90.

⁴⁸ Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-one Years*, p. 27.

to write the word Kamehameha. The chief scornfully replied, 'That is not me – not Kamehameha.' . . . They even imagined that letters could speak.⁴⁹

These tales may be explained in part by the missionaries' dedication to the Word.

If words and histories were crucial to the orchestration of colonialism in the Pacific, it is unsurprising that retellings of Cook's life and death could be so ideologically charged. Evangelical narrations of Cook's irreligiosity and selfishness are part of a wider proclivity amongst Europeans to use Cook's name as a commodity. While biographers and historians mythologised the man and made myriad different heroes of him, they rebuked Pacific islanders for being mythical. European accounts of Cook were lauded instead as the triumphs of the press and the Word.

Being selfless

Even as evangelicals attempted to redeem Cook's memory by reshaping the physical appearance of Hawai'i and converting the inhabitants of the bay where the navigator had been slain, they urged others to emulate the great man by living a life like his and then dying for the cross instead of worldly passion. The Society's Directors decided to warn the missionaries about the power of temptation: 'there may be suspecting kings, superstitious priests, a blind and perhaps a ferocious people; [you] may be in perils often, and perhaps in deaths; [you] may expect all that hell and earth can devise or execute; . . . [you] should chiefly dread [your] own heart'.⁵⁰ To follow in Cook's wake was to ensure that the self was mastered and that temptations from within as well as without were resisted. In order to exemplify how the navigator's life could be re-embodied in the lives of those that followed him, I will focus on the story of one missionary, who was explicitly compared with Cook. The manner in which this missionary was equated with Cook can also be the lens through which we understand how the definition of the self changed in this period.

John Williams set out for the Pacific in 1817 and became by his death in 1839 the foremost missionary in the region. Despite writing many hundred lines, there is one sentence that religious writers and biographers immediately applied to his life: 'For my own part I cannot content myself within the narrow limits of a single reef'.⁵¹ This statement captured the essence of the man: a

⁴⁹ Dibble, *History and General Views*, pp. 81–2.

⁵⁰ 'Considerations recommended to the missionaries', in *Evangelical Magazine*, 1796, p. 334.

⁵¹ This became the title of a biography of Williams. See J. Gutch, *Beyond the Reefs: The Life of John Williams* (London, 1974). For more on John Williams see also: Niel Gunson, 'John Williams and his ship: the bourgeois aspirations of a missionary family', in D.P. Crook, ed., *Questioning the Past: A Selection of Papers in History and Government* (St Lucia, 1972),

striving to travel and to plot new points on the map of the Pacific. This restless spirit was useful in comparing him with Cook. Yet even as Williams voyaged through the sea, his thoughts were supposedly occupied with a very different journey. As an evangelical, he believed that the earthly life did not provide him with his home, it set a course of spiritual development that prepared his soul for heaven. This was why writers were keen to stress Williams's ordinariness. By emphasising the missionary's origins in the mechanic class, religious commentators suggested that he had become an instrument of divine agency. After his death, the Revd John Campbell described Williams with these words: 'Few men, skilled in the physiognomical attributes of nations, would have pronounced him an Englishman.' Yet having 'been once seen, he was ever after easily recognised; and you could instantly point him out, at a distance, among ten thousand men'. These symptoms of distinction were also combined with a judgement which 'although sound was neither strong, comprehensive nor exact. Its moral movements closely resembled those of his bulky frame; they were heavy and lagging – wanting in rapidity, dexterity, and decision.'⁵² To support the claim that Williams had been an instrument of God, evangelicals had to form a view of the man that allowed greatness to be found in weakness.

A similar set of tropes characterises the reception of Williams's book, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises* (1837). The *Congregational Magazine's* reviewer noted: 'To our minds there is a life, and charm in these artless, unvarnished narratives and descriptions fresh from nature and from truth'.⁵³ In apologising for the defects of his prose, Williams commented that they arose from being 'devoted either to active labour, or to the study of uncultivated dialects, the idiom, abruptness, and construction of which are more familiar to him than the words and phrases – the grace and force of his native tongue'.⁵⁴ Difficulties and hard work were essential to the life of a godly evangelist and these characteristics were paraded as signifiers of faith. Williams himself observed in his book: 'I have felt disappointed when reading the writings of Missionaries at not finding a fuller account of the difficulties they have had to contend with.'⁵⁵ That his life had been preserved through difficult times became the means of suggesting that God had worked through him. Yet this strategy might have been taken too far. According to the *Monthly Review*, Williams's career

pp. 73–95; Gavan Daws, *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-Discovery in the South Seas: John Williams, Herman Melville, Walter Murray Gibson, Robert Louis Stevenson, Paul Gauguin* (New York, 1980); Sujit Sivasundaram, 'John Williams', in Timothy Larsen, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Leicester, 2003), pp. 737–39.

⁵² John Campbell, *The Martyr of Erromanga or the Philosophy of Missions Illustrated from the Labours, Death, and Character of the Late Rev. John Williams* (London, 1842), pp. 196–7.

⁵³ Review of 'A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises' in *Congregational Magazine*, I (1837), p. 440.

⁵⁴ Williams, *A Narrative*, Preface pp. x–ix.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

has been one that constantly led him to mark the dealings of Providence towards him with more than ordinary closeness and wonder; but it is not less true, that he who orally describes his hair breadth escapes and marvellous experiences – much more he who commits his emotions to a book, where their ardour and intensity of gratitude cannot be witnessed excepting through the medium of literary truth and skill, should be wary lest he spoil the effect of the whole by a neglect of proportions and occasions – by wasting the whole vocabulary of his ecstasies on comparatively unimpressive passages of every-day life.⁵⁶

Despite this criticism, Williams's book was extraordinarily successful in forming the stereotype of the ideal missionary and godly traveller. Williams's faith was apparently evident not just in his rise to fame from lowly origins, but in his awareness of weaknesses and his triumphant celebration of difficulty. The *Congregational Magazine* praised Williams saying: 'the author of this work is entitled to a high place. He is a man of large views, great courage, strong sense, and eminently practical talents, and all his qualifications are dedicated to his work with most simple-minded thorough consecration.'⁵⁷ The *Monthly Review* compared him with other missionaries and concluded: 'none have been more eminent and successful than Mr. John Williams'.⁵⁸ Campbell noted that 'Williams' "Missionary Enterprises", alone, is of more real value than all the writings of a Clarke, a Butler, a Paley, a Chalmers, a Leland and a Lardner united.'⁵⁹ Letters were received from gentlemen of standing who wished to meet Williams and to contribute to the costs of the mission.⁶⁰ The sales of the work rocketed. His book sold 7,500 copies from April 1837 to September 1838; when a new edition came out it sold a further 6,000 copies. Subsequently a 'People's Edition' was stereotyped and published unabridged for the sake of the poorer readers at two shillings and six pence, and this version sold 24,000 copies.⁶¹ It was in this climate of acclaim that Williams could be heralded as a new Cook; a better Cook for a religious public. Evangelicals claimed that they had found a mariner who at last sought glory for God, who retained his own sense of identity and the need for a proper relation between himself and the Deity.

⁵⁶ Review of 'A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises' in *Monthly Review*, II (1837), p. 408.

⁵⁷ Review of 'A Narrative' in *Congregational Magazine* (1837), p. 440.

⁵⁸ Review of 'A Narrative' in *Monthly Review*, II (1837), p. 407.

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Martyr of Erromanga*, Preface, p. ii.

⁶⁰ Williams was proud of these letters and used them to support the claim that he had been successful. See John Campbell, ed., *The Missionary Farewell: Valedictory Services of the Rev. John Williams Previous to his Departure for the South Seas with his Parting Dedicatory Address to the British Churches and the Friends of Missions* (London 1838), p. 84.

⁶¹ Review of 'Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. John Williams' in *Eclectic Review* (1843), p. 182.

Replicating Captain Cook's death

Three years after his book was published, Williams was killed and allegedly eaten when he landed on the shores of the island of Eromanga, and it was this event that formed the nub of the comparison between Cook and the missionary. Campbell wrote of the missionary's death: 'for popular effect, for the reputation of Mr. Williams, and for the purposes of history, he died in a proper manner, at the proper place, and the proper time'.⁶² In Campbell's thinking, Cook's death also came at the climax of his career.⁶³ This is why he could write:

What Cook was in his own department, that Williams was in his; the career of the seaman shone resplendent with maritime, the career of the missionary with moral, glory . . . the one represented England's power and science, the other her piety and humanity; both had earned the confidence of their countrymen, and the admiration of mankind; – both were killed with the club of the savage.⁶⁴

This analogy between Cook's death and Williams's demise had come into such currency that a children's Sunday School book on Williams, published much later in the early twentieth century, could begin with Cook's landing at Eromanga and end with Williams's death at the same location. Despite seeming to compare the two navigators, these images draw attention to Williams's selfless character. In the first image Cook is shown standing over the Eromangans, with weapon in hand (Plate XVI). Williams's landing, however, emphasises his willing death; he does not even resist the attack (Plate XVII). Here it is the assailant who stands above, swinging a club. While Cook has not left the boat, Williams's companions are shown far in the background. The missionary's death is therefore emphatically determined and detached and unlike that of Cook. That this work started with Cook's arrival and ended with Williams's death had a powerful rhetorical thrust: Williams completed what Cook began and he did it far more sacrificially.

Accounts of Williams's death suggested, not only that he died willingly, but that his demise was pre-ordained. Captain Morgan, who was with Williams, wrote that the missionary was adamant to land at Eromanga despite his own hesitation.⁶⁵ Mr Cunningham, the Vice-Consul of Sydney, who was with him at the moment of attack wrote:

I instantly perceived that it was run or die. I shouted to Mr. Williams to run . . . Mr. Williams did not run at the instant I called out to him, till we heard a shell

⁶² Campbell, *Martyr of Erromanga*, p. 228.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁵ Ebenezer Prout, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Williams* (London, 1843), p. 578.

CAPTAIN COOK

Plate XVI Captain Cook landing at Eromanga, from Basil Mathews, *John Williams, The Ship Builder* (Oxford, 1915)

REDEEMING MEMORY

Plate XVII The martyrdom of the Revd John Williams, from Basil Mathews, *John Williams, The Ship Builder* (Oxford, 1915)

blow; it was an instant, but too much to lose. I again called to Mr. W. to run, and sprang forward for the boat. . . . Mr. Williams instead of making for the boat, ran directly down the beach into the water, and a savage after him.⁶⁶

These actions were irrational, both for a thinking man and for the normal frame of mind that Williams possessed. This type of evidence was essential in the evangelical claim that the missionary had been led to his death in a predetermined way. The spirit that resided within him had destined that he would die and guided him to that very death. The last, incomplete entry from Williams's diary was also used to celebrate this thesis of premonition. Two days before his death Williams wrote: 'This is a memorable day, a day which will be transmitted to posterity, and the record of the events which have this day transpired, will exist after those who have taken an active part in them have retired into the shades of oblivion, and the results of this day will be –'⁶⁷ Campbell said: 'Did not our departed friend, like the prophets of old, write words which he saw not the full import?'⁶⁸ The fact that Williams did not sleep on the night before they reached Eromanga also attracted attention.⁶⁹ Williams was said, therefore, not only to have known that he was about to die; his excitement demonstrated his close communion with the Deity, and stood in contrast to how Cook lost his religiosity at the moment of his demise.

In coming to all of these conclusions evangelicals paid particular attention to the manner in which Williams mastered his body at death. It was presumed that he would have prayed like Jesus did: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.'⁷⁰ The saintliness of Williams became so well accepted, that the image of him dying while pointing to heaven became an accepted trope of evangelical thinking. Images from Sunday School books of the early twentieth century may be used to show the longevity of this tradition (Plate XVIII). Here Williams is focused on the world to come, pointing upwards and looking beyond to the heavens. This is quite unlike the manner of Cook's death. Williams's death therefore highlights the character of the evangelical martyr: an individual in control of his body to the extent that he could give it up, like Christ had at the cross. Although Campbell equated Cook and Williams, it is clear that he believed that Williams was infinitely superior to Cook. He wrote: 'John Williams will be venerated as one of the most illustrious Fathers of the New Era, – as one of the royal line of Stephen and Antipas, and other martyrs of our God'.⁷¹ And this was why

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 580.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 569.

⁶⁸ Campbell, *Martyr of Erromanga*, p. 229.

⁶⁹ See Basil Mathews, *Yarns of South Sea Pioneers for the use of workers among boys and girls* (London, 1914), p. 32.

⁷⁰ See *Evangelical Magazine* (1840), p. 298 and (1843), p. 117.

⁷¹ Campbell, *Martyr of Erromanga*, p. 243.

REDEEMING MEMORY

Plate XVIII The martyrdom of the Revd John Williams, from Albert Lee, *John Williams* (London, 1921)

progress was at the core of evangelical re-inscriptions of Cook. Williams did what Cook had done much better.

John Williams and nature

In 1841 an engraving made from wood-blocks, entitled *The Massacre of the Lamented Missionary Rev. John Williams and Mr. Harris*, appeared in London and came into wide circulation (Plate XIX). The print depicts Williams falling into the water with his left arm held up to shield his head. He is depicted looking 'with eyes turned up to heaven for that support which he well knew and felt would not fail him even in that dreadful moment'.⁷² Over him, 'ready to repeat the blow, stand two of the natives with their clubs upraised, while another by their side, is ready to pierce the heart of the unhappy missionary with his spear'. In all, about a hundred Eromangan men are shown rushing towards the ocean in 'wild commotion, every countenance expressive of the most diabolical malice and rage, armed with spears and massive and murderous clubs, made of the hard wood of the island, slings, and bows and arrows, they all seem intent on the work of death'.⁷³ The description accompanying the print urged viewers to meditate on the islanders' countenances in order to come to some idea of their sinfulness.

This engraving was produced by George Baxter, who had by this time established a reputation and won a patent for colour printing.⁷⁴ The death scene was modelled on a watercolour by J. Leary, who had been on the boat, to which Williams attempted to return before he died (Plate XX). In his engravings George Baxter apparently 'drew from nature'.⁷⁵ His first colour print was of butterflies. Robert Mudie's books, *The Feathered Tribes of the British Islands* (London, 1834) and *Man: His Physical Structure and Adaptations* (London, 1838), were illustrated by him.⁷⁶ This attention to natural detail is also evident in Baxter's portrayal of the death of Williams. The original watercolour by Leary survives, and is annotated by Baxter with such phrases as 'hilly', 'deep valley', 'the mountain not so steep', 'bushes and men running through', 'these men should be in deeper water' and 'natives – dark complexion' and, most revealingly, 'Williams should be more heavenly'.

⁷² 'The last two days of Rev. John Williams and Mr. Harris' from a description accompanying the print at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, p. 7. To help in interpreting the claim that Williams looked heavenly see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, 1987).

⁷³ 'The last two days of Rev. John Williams and Mr. Harris', p. 7.

⁷⁴ For George Baxter, see Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (London, 1988), pp. 173–8.

⁷⁵ C.T. Courtney Lewis, *George Baxter, His Life and Work* (London, 1972), p. 68.

⁷⁶ For more on this see C.T. Courtney, *George Baxter, the Picture Painter* (London, 1924). For the *Evangelical Magazine's* review of Mudie's *The Sea* see *Evangelical Magazine* (1836), p. 21.

Plate XIX The martyrdom of the Revd John Williams by George Baxter, 1841, from *The Massacre of the Lamented Missionary Rev. John Williams and Mr. Harris* (London, 1843)

Plate XX The martyrdom of the Revd John Williams: watercolour print by John Leary

These changes were necessary to make the image consonant with evangelical views of nature and death. Because evangelicals interpreted the mountains, the seas and the rocks anthropomorphically, the appearance of these objects at the moment of death could add meaning to the image. For example, Leary's watercolour had four well-defined peaks quite close to the shore; but Baxter's print had just one mountain which faded into the background. On the last day, Scripture held that 'every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'⁷⁷ For Baxter the fading of the peak on the shore of Eromanga could symbolise the passing of earthly splendour. Here Williams would be killed, while in heaven he would be crowned a martyr. In an article on mountains in the *Evangelical Magazine*, a writer noted that 'Time is every hour committing gradual, but constant depredations on those surprising monuments of almighty power . . . how should it teach us to set our affections on the things which are above!'⁷⁸

Two years after Baxter's print appeared, the *Evangelical Magazine* carried a plate depicting Dillon's Bay, Erromanga, where Williams had been slain (Plate XXI). The page following the engraving carried a description of the landscape, which presented the argument that nature was to blame for Williams's demise. It was 'possible, indeed that the wild barrenness of its rocks and hills have helped, with other more potent causes, to nurture in their bosom those habits which seem to defy, at present, the approach of the Gospel's genial influence'. The spot where Williams was slain was said to have 'a bold and very rugged coast' while the bay was said to show 'stern uncultivatedness'.⁷⁹ Leary's watercolour, with its four majestic peaks, did not present a sufficiently fallen view of the environment surrounding Williams's demise. Baxter's changes to the original image must thus be related to evangelical theologies of the mountains. The *Missionary Magazine* for 1842 noted: 'those mountain peaks are the obelisks on which, in the blood of their martyrdom, are inscribed the memorials of devoted zeal, and the glory of the gospel'.⁸⁰

But this connection between the environment and Williams's demise could also be turned on its head, by the suggestion that the Eromangans had revolted against nature in killing Williams, as opposed to conforming to its ruggedness. In an early twentieth-century missionary history of Eromanga, it was observed: 'The contrast between the beauty of the Island of Erromanga and the degradation of its inhabitants is as light and dark.'⁸¹

⁷⁷ Luke 3: 5–6, King James version of the Holy Bible.

⁷⁸ *Evangelical Magazine* (1806), p. 457. For more on the connection between mountains and the sacred see M.H. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mt. Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (New York, 1959).

⁷⁹ *Evangelical Magazine* (1843), p. 414.

⁸⁰ *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* (1841), pp. 89–90.

⁸¹ A.K. Langridge, *Won by Blood. The Story of Erromanga the Martyr Isle* (London, 1922), p. 21.

Plate XXI The coast of Eromanga, from *Evangelical Magazine* (1843)

Just as Baxter changed the appearance of the mountains from Leary's original, he also made the water appear deeper and more turbulent. This modification might also be related to evangelical theologies of nature. The fury of the ocean could, for example, be linked to the spiritual condition of the Erromangans. A poet wrote of the natural features of the island where Williams had fallen:

But long the powers of darkness had held dominion there;
And rites of horrid cruelty polluted all the air;
And the cliffs that frown above them, and the waves that round them roll,
Spoke of wrath, and not of mercy, to the terror-stricken soul.⁸²

⁸² *Evangelical Magazine* (1844), p. 405. For the connection between the sea and the sacred see Cynthia Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea* (Athens, OH, 1977).

References to the relationship between the sea and death were widespread in the early nineteenth century. The sea was at the centre of a popular funeral hymn: 'Abide with me'.⁸³ Symbolism usually represented the dying as passing over a great sea to the eternal shore beyond. In an early book titled *Contemplations on the Ocean*, Richard Pearsall wrote that 'The wicked are like yon troubled sea, vexations to themselves and one another; they many times blaspheme God. . . . Peace is a stranger to their breasts, for the way of Peace they have not known.'⁸⁴ Therefore the connection between Baxter's furious sea and the Erromangan temperament was a real one.

The sea for the evangelical was also an important reminder of the attributes of God. The infinity of the oceans was said to be indicative of the infinity of God's love. The *Evangelical Magazine* carried a sermon preached by the late John Williams. This included the anecdote of a South Sea islander who remarked that 'the love of Christ is like the ocean. In all ages men have been taking from its waters, yet the ocean remains as full as ever; in like manner, men in all ages have been drinking of the stream of Christ's love yet there remains a fullness that can never be diminished.'⁸⁵ Evangelicals who were shocked by the death of Williams may have been comforted by reflecting on how the mysterious workings of the ocean were like the unsearchable ways of God. At his death, it was said that Williams had remained in firm control of himself, remaining at the head of creation and willing to submit to the Creator.

Trading in tragedy

Just as much as Williams emulated Cook and recast the navigator's death in an evangelical mould, there were many who followed in Williams's wake who wished to replicate the missionary's life-story. Dozens of books came off the evangelical press that served to commemorate the martyr-traveller. These ranged from philosophical treatises to boys' adventure books. John Campbell's *Maritime Discovery and Christian Missions, considered in their mutual relations* appeared in 1840 and celebrated Williams's life and his achievements in navigation and shipbuilding. Campbell published again under the title: *The Martyr of Erromanga or the Philosophy of Missions illustrated from the labours, death, and character of the late Rev. John Williams*. This appeared in 1842 and went through two further editions. He also reissued the farewell proceedings for John Williams together with an account of his death and 6,000 copies of

⁸³ *Abide with Me* by H.F. Lyte (1793–1847). For a good analysis of this hymn see J.R. Watson, *The Victorian Hymn* (Durham, 1981).

⁸⁴ Richard Pearsall, *Contemplations on the Ocean, the Harvest, Sickness and the Last Judgement* (London, 1802), p. 58.

⁸⁵ *Evangelical Magazine* (1843), p. 168.

this were published. Within the decade pamphlets celebrating Williams's life also appeared.

For the period up to 1954 I have been able to trace no fewer than ten books published on Williams.⁸⁶ Many of these were children's book and carried statements such as: 'Children like to imitate and they like to experiment. Here is an opportunity for both.'⁸⁷ Another claimed: 'Its aim is to reach boys of the Scout type, at the age when the new emotions of space-hunger, hero-worship and sex instinct are bringing them into a new world, and the age at which the majority of those who take any decisive line at all come to their decision.'⁸⁸ For the evangelical and the Christian, mechanical ingenuity was a manly trait. Male children were expected to be interested in building ships and were provided with the necessary cut-outs. They were also asked to contribute to the cost of a line of ships that were designed to send missionaries to the South Pacific: these were named the John Williams ships. By the launch of *John Williams VI*, the money was said to come from children all over the empire. This, the last ship in the line, was named by Princess Margaret.

The desire to raise a generation of missionaries of the calibre of John Williams was not restricted to Britain. The island of Eromanga and others of the region also came to serve as lasting monuments to Williams's memory. Churches were built on several islands in memory of Williams. Monuments were erected very soon after the event in Rarotonga. It was crucial that those who had caused Williams's martyrdom were converted. Particular attention was paid by later missionaries to the family of Williams's murderer. When the Gordons arrived in Erromanga in 1857 they wrote: 'Kowiwi – the murderer of Williams – was killed fighting three months before our arrival. We visited his widow, a dear little woman, living in their war cave. Kowiwi had two sons;

⁸⁶ Anon., *John Williams, the Missionary* (London, 1849); James Joseph Ellis, *John Williams, the Martyr Missionary of Polynesia* (London, 1890); Arthur John Hallam Montefiore, *Heroes who have Won Their Crown: David Livingstone and John Williams* (London, 1909); Basil Mathews, *John Williams, The Ship Builder* (Oxford, 1915); Albert Lee, *John Williams* (London, 1921); Ernest H. Hayes, *Wilamu mariner-missionary, the story of John Williams* (London, 1922); Norman James Davidson, *John Williams of the South Seas* (London, 1925); William Cecil Northcott, *John Williams Sails on* (London, 1939); Robert and Beryl Collens, *John Williams. A Sunday School Celebration* (London, 1949); Phyllis Matthewman, *John Williams, a Biography for Children* (London, 1954). On the John Williams ships see anon., *The Missionary Ship 'John Williams'* (London, 1844); anon., *The Return to England of the Missionary Ship 'John Williams' Containing an Account of her Voyages During Three Years as Related by Capt. Morgan, and Messrs. Barff, Buzacott and Mills* (London, 1847); Basil Mathews, *The Ships of Peace* (London, 1919); Mary Entwistle, ed., *Islands Everywhere, Stories for 7–9 Year-olds* (London, 1944); anon., *Our John Williams, 1844–1944* (London, 1944); J. Reason, ed., *The Ship Book, 1844–1944, Stories, Games, Poems, Models etc.* (London, 1944); Cecil Northcott, *South Sea Sailor. The Story of John Williams and his Ships* (London, 1965).

⁸⁷ Winifred Warr, *Practical Books No 6. South Seas, A Handbook for Leaders* (London, 1947), p. 37.

⁸⁸ Mathews, *Yarns of South Sea Pioneers*, p. 2.

the younger son joined our Mission, the other son used to come sulkily about, but remained a heathen in our day.⁸⁹ In time, this 'other son' also embraced the gospel and took part in the laying of a stone for the centennial memorial of the death of Williams. The family of the murderer was therefore redeemed and this brings to mind the quest to redeem the Hawaiians after Cook's demise.

The Missionary Society did not have to wait long to see their desire of emulation fulfilled. The Gordons, who arrived as missionaries to Eromanga in 1857, were martyred, as was their successor, George Gordon's brother. The image of the first Gordon's death demonstrates many conventions used in depicting the death of Williams (Plate XXII). The Eromangan is barely clothed, in contrast to the fully clothed George Gordon, and there is a drama of light and darkness between the skin colours of the two. Gordon reaches his hands to the heavens, as Williams did before him.

Conclusions: colonising history

In the first chapter of the Revd Hiram Bingham's book, which condemned Cook for allowing others to worship him, there are some striking instructions about how evangelicals should use history. According to Bingham, in place of authentic history Pacific islanders produce accounts that are merely 'obscure oral traditions, national or party songs, rude narratives of the successions of kings, wars, victories, exploits of gods, heroes, priests, sorcerers, the giants of iniquity and antiquity, embracing conjecture, romance, and the general absurdities of Polytheism'.⁹⁰ In contrast to these histories, Bingham sets out in his book to read the records 'carefully written by men thoroughly acquainted with the people, and friendly to the truth'. At his aid are the pen and the press, science and Christianity, and all of these will lead to 'a just view of facts and motives' and enable him to 'do justice to all classes concerned, and to decide what ought to be done in like circumstances'.⁹¹ This brand of evangelical history is then a didactic one; a set of doctrines that can be used to live life in the present. Bingham explains his ability to write history as arising from his mastery of nature. In contrast to his rational mind, he says that the islanders who have no true history are 'children of nature'.⁹²

I have explored how this ideology of history was put into practice in religious accounts of Cook's death. Although Cook was said to have contradicted the proper relation between humans and the Deity and to have acted selfishly at his death, missionaries had to draw on his life in order to place themselves within the tradition of Pacific exploration. To deal with their ambiguous

⁸⁹ Langridge, *Won by Blood*, p. 17.

⁹⁰ Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-one Years*, p. 17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Plate XXII The martyrdom of George N. Gordon, from A.K. Langridge, *Won by Blood The Story of Erromanga the Martyr Isle* (London, 1922)

relationship with Cook, evangelicals modified their memory of the navigator's death by reshaping the geography and religion of the bay where Cook was killed. They called on missionaries to follow in Cook's path, and to die for the cross instead of passion. When the Revd John Williams was slain by Eromangans, his death apparently bettered the manner of the navigator's demise. Williams had died while in control of himself and with a selfless willingness to suffer.

Williams's death supported the evangelicals' providential colonialism and presented the ideal type for the missionary. Evangelicals therefore used Cook as a resource to celebrate their own success in Williams's career, and changed their account of the past. To what extent then did empire depend on shifting interpretations of past moments of expansion? The number of

commentaries on Cook's death, and the lengths that evangelicals went to to redeem his mistake, may at first appear surprising. This body of material suggests instead that we often underestimate the importance of typologies in the early nineteenth century. More work is required on the relationship between the commemoration of specific figures and the articulation of ideologies of colonialism. That there was an industrial output of works on Cook also points to the importance of histories in the definition of the empire.

Evangelicals supported their colonial activity by gesturing towards history; their approach to the past was a supremely optimistic one that chartered divinely ordained progress. Although the Hawaiians were alleged to be mythic, the missionaries hoped to train them in language by exporting printing presses, and to place them within the biblical heritage of Zion. Evangelicals believed that the whole of history worked towards the millennium when the world would be converted. They held to the possibility of winding time backwards in order to redeem the mistakes of their nation. Their obsession with progress was such that the written word was privileged above oral accounts; Christianity was said to be superior to Hawaiian myth; and Williams could be a better Cook. These observations provide the platform to reflect on the relationship between accounts of historical progress and colonial activity. Do we continue to favour supposedly rational and empirical accounts of Cook over all others? It is easy to assume that we can know more about Cook than before and that we need to dispense of myths in order to get to that truth. Such assumptions about history may indeed reveal more about ourselves than the past, just as much as this chapter suggests more about evangelicals than Cook.

Also at the centre of evangelical history was a series of dichotomies. The most obvious is that between saved and damned, and yet I have drawn attention to that between Creator and created. Williams's death was interpreted in line with the mountains and seas where he had died, because the evangelical hero was thought to read the land. This was possible only for those who respected the proper distinction between the categories of made and maker. Cook had violated those categories at the moment of his death when he allegedly received homage as a god, and the Pacific islanders were said to pay no respect to these categories by worshipping nature. The relationship between history and nature may quite easily be characterised as Hawaiian; yet evangelical attitudes towards the site of Cook's death and the site of Williams's martyrdom suggest that we need to look beyond the appearance of rational history. Evangelical naturalism seems surprisingly close to Hawaiian worship of nature. Evangelicals used rationality and empiricism with rhetorical force in the identification of their historical tradition, while valuing nature as symbol and Cook as commodity and seeming oblivious to this contradiction.

The events that followed Cook's death are curiously similar to those that followed Williams's demise. There were attempts to convert the alleged perpetrators, and the landmarks of the bay were changed as monuments and mission stations were erected. A vast literature flowed from the religious press commenting on these two navigators and the actions that led to their deaths.

Commemoration therefore combines an injunction to change the present with a retelling of the past. While this may be a peculiarly religious dimension of memory, it is important to consider whether any commemoration, particularly when it is focused on an individual, can lend itself to religious sensibilities. Religious typologies assess character against the life of Jesus: thus Williams's death was ultimately compared with the crucifixion, as was Gordon's demise. The missionaries' deaths could fall into line with a whole list of martyrdoms that went back to the early church; no individual death could be considered in isolation from these chains of representation. Cook's death was sinful because it did not fit into this hierarchy with ease.

This account of Cook may seem particularly local: it emphasises a theology of progress and a theology of nature. Yet the challenge in engaging with this story is to create both a helpful sense of distance and an active sense of presence. Distance comes easily as evangelicalism seems unimportant to the memory of Cook today. Yet distance must not sanction exclusion. How do we mould the stories of great explorers and how do we come to terms with past acts of colonialism? The evangelicals in this account were willing to send men to die to put memory right. We would probably discredit Bingham's view of history as one that has little merit. Yet it has been my aim to stimulate reflection on the way history may be used in colonialism and how we colonise history.