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“Grateful acknowledgements to Captain Burney”: Poetry and History in Mary Russell Mitford’s *Christina, the Maid of the South Seas*

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Abstract: In 1811 Mary Russell Mitford published *Christina, Maid of the South Seas*, a poem which drew inspiration from a report in the *Quarterly Review* of the discovery of a settlement on Pitcairn Island founded by surviving mutineers from the *Bounty*. For assistance with the historical notes, she enlisted James Burney, a retired Royal Navy captain turned naval historian. Between them, Mitford and Burney drafted forty-seven notes of varying lengths which were appended to the four-canto poem in the published version. Analysis of selected notes reveals the tensions between the sensibilities of the poet and the historian, and raises questions about gender, generational, educational, and philosophical differences in the collaboration. These differences helped to shape the balance between romance and history in the emerging literature of the South Pacific.

Early in the year 1810, twenty-three-year-old Mary Russell Mitford published her first book, titled simply *Poems*. Mostly songs, ballads, and sonnets, with a few longer lays and elegies, her poems were imitative of work by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Walter Scott. An anonymous reviewer in the *Quarterly Review* for November 1810 gave her some faint praise for the “many pleasing passages scattered through her little volume, which do no discredit to the amiableness of her mind, and the cultivation of her talents,” but found that “Miss

Mitford's taste and judgment are not yet matured; that her poems ought to have been kept back much longer, and revised much oftener, before they were submitted to the public," and above all, that she has little hope of success "if she does not for ever forsake the thorny and barren field of politics, so unfavourable to the field of Parnassus" (517-8).

For her second publication, *Christina, the Maid of the South Seas: A Poem* (1811), Mitford chose a more ambitious subject, which drew on the recent discovery of Pitcairn Island, which had been settled some years earlier by former mutineers from the *Bounty*. Following the practice of Scott in such historical romances as *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1805), and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), and her own endeavours in her earlier *Poems*, she copiously annotated her text with information about the people, customs, and historical facticity of events narrated in her four cantos. In the "Advertisement" that precedes the work, Mitford expressed her "grateful acknowledgements to Captain Burney, for the friendly assistance which he has rendered her in arranging and revising her notes; an office which none would have performed so readily, and none could have performed so well" (ix-x).

This acknowledgement, little noticed by Burney scholars, credits James Burney with having assisted her in "arranging and revising" her notes to the poem. Though fulsome in its praise of Captain Burney, the acknowledgement obscures the nature and extent of Burney's contribution. Did he merely "arrange and revise" her notes, or did he provide the substance of some or all of them, as he had done in 1791 while preparing William Bligh's *A Voyage to the South Sea* for the press at the request of Sir Joseph Banks? (DuRietz, "Three Letters" 115-25). Are the notes consistent with the romantic aims of the poem—

presumably, to move the reader's sympathy for Christina in her dilemma between her love for the British sailor Henry and her duty to Hubert, to whom she is betrothed? Or do they reflect the practical concerns of a historian and explorer whose formal schooling ended, and whose maritime education began, at a very young age?¹ Do the tensions between the text and notes reflect gender, generational, or philosophical differences between the young, unmarried poet and the elder, retired sea captain? Do the notes support the implicit expectation in the poem that intercultural exchanges between native and colonizing populations can overcome cultural differences, or do they undermine that naïve hope? And finally, can the beauties of poetry and the rigorous adherence to truth in history be made to subsist in the same work of art?²

Mitford's historical romance drew inspiration from an article in the *Quarterly Review* of February 1810 which recounted the "extraordinary discovery" (*Christina* 314) of a settlement on Pitcairn Island by an American ship, the *Topaz*, which stopped there in September, 1808.³ Pitcairn had been settled in 1790 by nine mutineers from the *Bounty* who brought with them nine Tahitian wives; four Tahitian men, two with wives; and two Tubuaian men, for a total of twenty-six persons (Gray 255). After several years, five of the mutineers, including Fletcher Christian, were killed in a revolt by the Tahitian men, who were in turn killed by the remaining mutineers and their wives. The last surviving mutineer, John Adams, also known as Alexander Smith, became the patriarch of the island and, in Mitford's poem, the narrator of its history. Adams, to whom Mitford gives the more patrician-sounding name of Fitzallan,⁴ tells the story of Pitcairn Island to an audience that includes Christina, the daughter of Fletcher Christian and his Tahitian

wife Iddeah, and Henry, a British sailor on the *Topaz*, who loves Christina.

When reports of the *Topaz*'s discovery reached England early in 1810, the story of Pitcairn Island seemed to hold the promise of a new start in Polynesia for warweary European emigrants. Despite its early internal strife, Edward Gray contends that by 1810, "the reading public saw [in Pitcairn] a mixed-race colony that was, by all accounts, a picture of tropical harmony" (249). The story in the *Quarterly Review*, which Milford quotes in her notes to Canto III, softens the troubled racial history of the island settlement by erroneously suggesting that Christian killed himself, when in fact he was murdered in the uprising. The editors find an "awful and instructive lesson" of "divine vengeance" visited upon the mutineers for having offended the laws of their country, but the story "may also in its consequences be highly important to the natives of the numerous islands scattered over the Pacific Ocean," an ominous warning to Pacific Islanders against resisting colonization (*Christina* 314). To Mitford, the story of Pitcairn Island offered hope for humanity and a chance to reset the scene of historical romance from medieval courtyards and battlefields to newly discovered paradisiacal islands where the character of her "gallant and amiable" hero, Fletcher Christian, would be tested and his crime of mutiny expiated.

As Mitford progressed in the writing of her poem, she turned for advice to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a friend of her father, Dr. George Mitford (Inboden 140).⁵ Coleridge himself had previously contemplated writing a literary work on the "Adventures of Christian, the Mutineer."⁶ Though he never completed that work, his seafaring poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), set vaguely in the South Pacific, depicts

the cursed life of a sailor who has fallen from grace, in much the same way as Fletcher Christian is supposed to have suffered during and after the mutiny on the *Bounty* (Rennie 163).⁷ At about the time that Coleridge was contemplating a poem about Christian, Thomas Poole, a mutual friend of both Coleridge and James Burney, solicited an invitation for himself and Coleridge to dine with Burney at his home on James Street (Manwaring 221). No one in London at that time was better acquainted with both the saga of the *Bounty* and the history of the South Pacific than Burney, who was then completing the second volume of his *Chronological History of the Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean*. Coleridge himself was planning a voyage to Malta in the Mediterranean Sea, where Burney had spent three years on HMS Aquilon early in his career (Manwaring 7). Despite their differences in temperament, Coleridge and Burney had “something in common, a genuine love of literature” (Manwaring 222), especially tales of adventure and exploration. Given these points of connection, it is not surprising that Burney agreed to undertake the annotation of a maritime poem by a young lady who was, as Inboden puts it, “a protégée of Coleridge” (140).

There are forty-seven endnotes to the four cantos of *Christina*, ranging in length from a single paragraph to eighteen pages. They comprise the last 140 pages of the 332-page volume, about thirty percent of the bulk of the book. The “Notes” are not annotations in the usual sense, but rather extracts from narratives of voyages by South Sea explorers, up to and including the last voyage of Captain James Cook. The principal sources of the extracts are John Hawkesworth’s *Account of the Voyages* (1773), William Bligh’s *A Voyage to the South Seas* (1792), James Cook’s *Voyages round the World* (1777; 1784), and

Burney's own *Chronological History of the Discoveries in the South Sea* (1803-17). It is not impossible that Mitford could have assembled and read these volumes, though a letter from her to Sir William Elford, dated July 3, 1810, laments that she spent most of her days ministering to her father's needs, never writing "till candle-light," and, "considering that we keep early hours," having to retire before midnight (Harness and L'Estrange 1:110). It would have been a remarkable feat of scholarship and diligence for Mitford to master these sources and write the notes, while also composing over 2700 lines of octosyllabic rhyming verse in under one year. A more plausible explanation is that she asked Burney, possibly at the suggestion of Coleridge or Sir Joseph Banks, to select passages from his materials for the *Chronological History* and other sources for her to review, based on an early proof that she showed him. She valued not only his help, but his name in the front matter of her book. As Elisa E. Beshero-Bondar says, Burney was "an eyewitness authenticator of details about Polynesian culture in the poem," as well as "someone intimately knowledgeable of William Bligh's account of the mutiny" ("Bailing out Coleridge" 75).⁸ In a letter to her father dated March 31, 1811, shortly before *Christina* went to press, Mitford wrote that "the chief advantage [of Burney's contribution] is the comfortable assurance that we are by his means secured from all animadversion... [his] name is a tower of strength" - although she did admit to some annoyance that "our kind friend Captain Burney has not returned the proof" that she had provided for his review (quoted in "Bailing out Coleridge", 75). It may palliate in some measure Burney's delay in returning the proof to think that it was caused by his diligence in "arranging and revising" the notes to the poem.

The notes to *Christina* sometimes explain an unfamiliar

word or phrase, or document the credibility of a poetical allusion, but often they plunge deeply into cultural or historical matters only touched on lightly in the poem itself. In Canto I, for example, the poet refers to the Tahitian canoes, or “ivahahs”:

There, in the self-same harbour, float
 Indian canoe and English boat;
 There gather'd soon a blooming band
 Of youthful natives on the strand;
 Clustering they sought the light canoe,
 And o'er the glassy ocean flew.
 The link'd ivahahs, side by side,
 Short poles at once, unite, divide. (16-17)

The word “ivahahs” is annotated at the foot of the page with the phrase “The double canoes of Otaheite” (Mitford 16). Despite the footnote, the couplet is further annotated at the end of the book in Note 9 (206-8) with two extracts from James Cook’s journal, published by John Hawkesworth as *A New Voyage round the World*, totaling thirty-six lines of prose (Hawkesworth 138-40). An ivahah, Cook writes in his journal, is a kind of canoe used for fishing, for inter-island travel, and for war. The largest ivahahs are more than seventy feet long, and “never go to sea single, but are fastened together, side by side, at the distance of about three feet, by strong poles of wood, which are laid across them, and lashed to the gunwales” (*Christina* 207, quoting Cook). Cook’s logbook entry particularly concerns the fitting-out of these larger canoes for use in war, as if his intended audience were British explorers and naval officers who may need to prepare themselves in the event of conflict with the Islanders. Mitford’s poem itself never mentions battles at sea, but instead describes a peaceful bay in which “float / Indian canoe and English boat.” The incongruity of the note with the

text of the poem suggests that the sensibility of the compiler of the notes differed from that of the poet.

The difference between the compiler and the poet appears again in the reasons given in the poem for the mutiny in the *Bounty*. Prior to the mutiny, Christian, “wild and frantic,” confides to Fitzallan the reason for his desperate resolution:

“Iddeah!—O what frenzied tears!
 A living pledge of love she bears,—
 Slaves to their superstition wild,
 Th’ Arreoyoys will destroy my child!
 With its first breath will seize their prize,
 Unfather’d, unrevenged it dies!
 Iddeah’s child! My first-born!—No!
 Save if high Heaven should deal the blow,
 Thou shall not die! no ruffian hand
 Shall dare apply the murdering band;
 Thou shalt not die! thy father’s heart
 Shall shield thee from the ruthless dart!”
 “Are there no means? Might we not bear
 To Britain’s coast the royal fair?
 Say, would not Bligh!” “O! name him not;
 From Nature’s scroll that foul line blot;
 He has refus’d a husband’s prayer,
 Refus’d! and fears not my despair!”—
 He paus’d—but in that pause I read

The gathering of a purpose dread. (*Christina* 74-5)
 As Christian explains to Fitzallan, he has been forced by Captain Bligh to leave his pregnant wife Iddeah and their unborn child behind in Tahiti when the *Bounty* sailed for England. According to Tahitian custom, first-born children of the *arioi* (in English, Arreoy) society, a subset of the aristocracy

that performed at religious and comic rituals, are killed at birth. Christian is sure that his child will suffer that fate, since Iddeah is an Arreoy. He has begged Bligh to take Iddeah and the child to Britain, but Bligh has refused. In Bligh's refusal to save Christian's child, Mitford provides Christian with a motive for taking control of the *Bounty* that has been lacking in all previous accounts, especially Bligh's, who blamed the mutiny on "the allurements of dissipation" available to his crew in Tahiti. Mitford's account gives Christian a sympathetic character and transforms him into the flawed hero of tragedy.

Infanticide in Tahiti had been a concern for Burney since his service as second lieutenant on Cook's second voyage. In his personal journal written in 1772-73, Burney had addressed the reports that child-murder was being used as a means to control the population of the islands:

They have some very barbarous customs, the worst of which is, when a man has as many children as he is able to maintain, all that come after are smothered: women will sometimes bargain with her husband on her first marrying him, for the Number of Children that shall be kept. [T]hey never keep any Children that are any ways deformed—every fifth Child if suffered to live is seldom allowed to rank higher than a Towtow—yet notwithstanding all this, these Islands are exceedingly populous—even the Smallest being full of inhabitants & perhaps were it not for the Custom just mentioned, these would be more than the Islands could well maintain—
(Hooper 73)

Burney's discussion of infanticide on Tahiti was an important update to David Hume's remarks on "the exposing of children" in ancient Greece and modern China,⁹ but since Burney's

journals were not published, the information was never widely disseminated. In 1791, Sir Joseph Banks asked Burney to arrange and revise Bligh's *A Voyage to the South Sea* (1792) for the press, in part because Bligh had already left England on his second breadfruit voyage. Burney expanded his journal entry of 1773 (above) into a brief discourse on the problem of infanticide, which he sent to Banks for approval and then inserted into the book that was to be published under Bligh's name (Du Reitz, "Three Letters" 122-24). Perhaps because his discussion of infanticide was buried in a book attributed to Bligh, Burney extracted his remarks *verbatim* from *A Voyage to the South Sea* and printed them in *Christina* as Note 12 to Canto II.

In this six-page note, Burney begins by identifying his Tahitian source, Tinah, who confirms that infanticide was a practice among the Arreoyoys (*Christina* 241-46). Burney adds that others have told him it was a general practice used by any family that could not support all of its children—in effect, a form of birth control:

I learnt from Tinah, in talking about his children, that his first-born child was killed as soon as it came into the world, he being then an Arreoy; but before his second child was born, he quitted the society. Such of the natives as I conversed with about the institution of so extraordinary a society as the Arreoy, asserted that it was necessary, to prevent an over-population. (*Christina* 241-42; Voyage 78)

Elaborating on his theory, Burney writes that the population of the island was estimated to be "at above one hundred thousand; the island, however, is not cultivated to the greatest advantage; yet were they continually to improve in husbandry, their

improvement could not, for a length of time, keep pace with an unlimited population” (*Christina* 243-44; *Voyage* 78). Using this proto-Malthusian logic,¹⁰ Burney arrives at a utilitarian and colonialist solution:

An idea here presents itself, which, however fanciful it might appear at first sight, seems to merit some attention:-while we see among these islands so great a waste of the human species, that numbers are born only to die; and at the same time so large a continent so near to them as New Holland, in which there is so great a waste of land uncultivated, and almost destitute of inhabitants, it naturally occurs, how greatly the two countries may be made to benefit each other . . . [if the islanders were] instructed in the means of emigrating to New Holland, which seems as if designed by nature to serve as an asylum for the superflux of inhabitants in the islands (*Christina* 244)

Mitford, however, facing the same question of infanticide, finds a different solution. For her, the practice creates the tragic circumstance that precipitates the mutiny, flight, and eventual deaths of Christian and Iddeah. For dramatic reasons, Mitford accepts the explanation that infanticide was a “superstition” particular to the Arreoyoys as the price of their exclusive place in Tahitian society, not a cultural practice intended to control population.

The fateful superstition is finally lifted in the fourth canto by the survival of Christian and Iddeah’s daughter Christina and her marriage to the British sailor, Henry, which seems symbolically to promise the end of infanticide in Tahiti.¹¹ Mitford’s solution—the harmonizing of European and Tahitian cultural practices through intermarriage—is dramatically

satisfying, but probably impractical if infanticide is, as Burney believes, a general custom driven by the political economy of the islands. The contradiction between poetry and political economy in the main text of the poem compared to the notes is never reconciled.

Another contradiction between the poem and the notes is found in Note 6 to Section XVI of Canto III. In the poem, Fitzallan recalls the first sight by the mutineers fleeing Tahiti of Pitcairn Island, which Fitzallan refers to as “The lonely Incarnation”:

We mark'd the fair isle's verdant hue,
The lonely Incarnation knew,
And joyful to the harbour drew.
For trace of foot, or work of hand,
In vain we search'd the fertile land;
A lonely desert we had found,
If desert t'were, where all around
Liv'd plant, and flower, and flowering tree,
A silent world of faëry! (*Christina* 115-16)

Indeed, the “Advertisement” at the front of the book, written by Mitford, identifies the setting of the poem to be “Pitcairn’s Island (said to be la Encarnation of Quiros)” (*Christina* x). Mitford explains that in calling the island “the lonely Incarnation,” she follows the *Quarterly Review*’s identification of Pitcairn as “La Encarnacion, or the First Island,” the name given by Pedro Fernandez de Quiros in 1606 to the first island he discovered in the South Pacific (*Christina* 311). Why Mitford preferred “Encarnacion/Incarnation” to “Pitcairn” is one of the mysteries of the poem, but it may be that, besides being more pleasing to a romantic sensibility, “Incarnation” is the eponym of a spiritual quality in a physical place, a refuge where hunted

humanity can seek a fresh start.

Burney, however, would have none of it. Taking on the persona of the poet, he begins the note with a disclaimer:

I have followed the document inserted in the Quarterly Review in identifying Pitcairn's Island with La Encarnacion of Quiros; yet it appears extremely doubtful whether they really refer to the same island. (*Christina* 310)

Burney supports his reservations about the identity of the two islands with an extract from a journal entry by Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, the seventeenth-century Spanish explorer who discovered La Encarnacion, in which Quiros gives an eyewitness account of the topography of the island. The journal entry was translated by Alexander Dalrymple, who refers to Quiros and his crew in the third person:

Thus they continued sailing, though sometimes with variable winds, till the 26th of January, 1606, when about three P. M. they discovered an island to the S. W. It was small, about four leagues in circuit, all flat, and level with the water; with few trees, for the greater part was sand: it has deep water, so that when very near, they could get no ground. As it was to all appearance uninhabitable, and without a port, they pursued their voyage to the westward, making to this place [Pitcairn] from the coast of Peru, just 1000 leagues, and in 25 deg. S. (*Christina* 311)¹²

Burney was very certain about the topography of Incarnation Island because four years earlier, in 1806, he had quoted indirectly in Volume II of his *Chronological History* an excerpt from Fray Juan de Torquemada's account in *Monarquia Indiana* (also translated by Dalrymple) of Quiros's discovery of Incarnation:

On January the 26th (1606) at 3 in the afternoon, a low sandy island was discovered, about two leagues in extent. There were on it a few trees, but it was almost level with the sea, and to all appearance uninhabitable. No anchorage was found . . . No name is given to this island in the accounts of Torres and Torquemada; but according to a list of names of the Islands discovered during the voyage which Quiros has given in one of his memorials, this Island, allowing it to be the first on the list, was named *La Encarnacion*. (Burney, *Chronological History* 2:274)

Both in Dalrymple's translation of Quiros's journal and in Burney's quotation from Torquemada, it is clear that the island first discovered by Quiros, and named by him Encarnacion, cannot be Pitcairn Island. Encarnacion is "all flat, and level with the water; with few trees, for the greater part was sand"; "there were on it a few trees, but it was almost level with the sea, and to all appearance uninhabitable," a description that does in fact match the topography of Incarnation Island. The island depicted in the poem, however, is a "verdant isle" with "fertile land . . . where all around / Liv'd plant, and flower, and flowering tree / A silent world of faëry!" (*Christina* 115). Burney says rather indignantly that "Nothing can be more unlike than this account of Quiros's discovery, and the description which Captain Corderet¹³ gives of Pitcairn's Island; he represents it as having the appearance of a great rock, 'rising out of the sea so high that it was seen at the distance of more than fifteen leagues'" (*Christina* 313). Perhaps Burney was a little piqued that the *Quarterly Review* persisted in confusing the two islands despite his having distinguished between them five years earlier in his *Chronological History*. He must also have realized that the

credibility of *Christina* depended upon his correcting this error, since the confusion would inevitably be noticed by reviewers who would discredit the poem on those grounds. The error in the “Advertisement” and in the text of the poem, however, was beyond his power to correct, except by adding an explanatory note. Mitford either was not aware of the contradiction, or had no desire to correct it, perhaps because “Pitcairn” was an insufficiently romantic name for her island (the name Pitcairn appears nowhere in the text of the poem). With the book already late for the press, the contradiction between the poetical text and the topographical note was allowed to stand. Another anomaly between the poem and the notes may be found in the story of Bligh’s open-boat voyage after the mutiny on the *Bounty*. In a few lines in Canto I, Mitford summarizes “[t]he suffering Bligh’s heart-thrilling tale” of a 1200-league voyage with eighteen of his officers and men:

When from his gallant vessel driv’n,
Of every earthly comfort riv’n;
Remote from kind and friendly land,
The rebels chas’d his faithful band;
Still faithful, tho’ the crowded boat
Scarce on that Southern wave can float;
Tho’ ceaseless rain, and famine’s rage,
Within, without, dire warfare rage;
Tho’ haggard, worn, and tempest-tost,
Unbounded Oceans must be crost,
Ere the sad wanderers cease to roam,
And find a country and a home. (*Christina* 27)

These lines are annotated, perhaps by Mitford, with a brief note that begins,

I will not weaken the effect of Captain Bligh’s most

affecting narrative by any attempt at abridgement, and the journal is too long for insertion here; yet it is necessary to state that Captain Bligh, commander of the *Bounty*, and eighteen of his officers and men, were turned adrift, in the midst of the Pacific Ocean, on the 28th of April, 1789, in an open boat only 23 feet long; while the mutineers, at the head of whom was Mr. Christian, possessed themselves of the vessel and stores, and carried her off to Otaheite. . . . (*Christina* 212-13)

Mitford returns in Canto II of the poem to the post-mutiny voyage of Captain Bligh, where she describes in tragic tones Bligh's precipitous fall from power as the "Lord of a vessel" at the end of the previous day:

O Bligh! How different rose the morn
To thee, a hopeless wretch forlorn!
That ship no longer shalt thou see,
That rebel crew abandon'd thee! (*Christina* 79)

The note to these lines (perhaps by Burney) is prefaced with an apology for the brevity of poetry, and an acknowledgement of the superiority of prose in providing the most "minute and interesting circumstances" of a complicated story:

I have endeavored in my poem to adhere as closely as possible to Captain Bligh's own account of the mutiny on board the *Bounty*; but as a poetical narrative never is, nor ever can be, so clear as one in prose, and as I have been obliged to omit several minute and interesting circumstances, I subjoin the entire chapter of Captain Bligh's work, which contains the history of this most unfortunate transaction. (*Christina* 252-53)

There follows the full text of Chapter 13 of Bligh's *A Voyage to the South Sea*, which occupies seventeen pages (*Christina* 253-

69). The anomaly is that, the author having declared in the first instance that “the journal is too long for insertion here,” the author in the second instance quotes the full text of the journal. If the author of the second note were Mitford, she might have avoided the inconsistency by removing the “abridgement” of Bligh’s journal in the first note and printing the full text its place. Doing so would make unnecessary the damaging admission that “a poetical narrative never is, nor ever can be, so clear as one in prose,” a conviction that more likely belongs to Burney, not Mitford. In fact, Burney evidently felt some pride of authorship in connection with Bligh’s journal, because (as noted above) he had edited it for the press, which was published as *A Narrative of the Mutiny on Board His Majesty’s Ship Bounty* (1790), and in expanded form as *A Voyage to the South Sea* (1792). When he read from the *Narrative* to the Burney family one evening, his sister Frances wrote in her journal, “We read a good deal of Captain Bligh’s interesting narrative, *every word* of which James has taken as much to Heart as if it were his own production” (*CJL* 5:57).¹⁴ It may have been the omission of his name from the title page of *A Voyage to the South Sea* that led him to include the chapter in the notes to *Christina*. Or he may have lamented the omission in the poem of details exculpatory to William Bligh, whose friendship he sought to maintain. Whatever the reason, this anomaly suggests strongly that Mitford’s sacrifice of historical detail for poetic effect, and Burney’s desire to rehearse the epic narrative of Bligh’s open-boat voyage, arise from irreconcilable differences in the two authors about the relative capacities of poetry and prose for conveying the truth of a historical event.

To return to the questions posed at the beginning of this essay, we can see that it would be very difficult, or perhaps

impossible, conclusively to assign authorship of the notes exclusively to either Mary Russell Mitford or James Burney. Rather, critical inquiry ought to focus on the problematical collaboration between a poet and a naval historian in writing a quasi-historical romance of the South Seas. Burney's historical perspective qualifies the paradisiacal view of life in the Islands offered by *Christina*, while it raises probing questions about the intersection of European and Polynesian cultures. Mitford's use of Tahitian-language words such as "ivahah" instead of "canoe" tends to authenticate, or at least decorate, the poem, but the note creates ambiguity about whether the vessel in question is a small craft for fishing or a large one for war or inter-island travel. The practice of infanticide is examined critically in the notes and provided with a utilitarian solution, while it is glossed over in the poem through intermarriage. Mitford's reticence about the particulars of the mutiny on the *Bounty* prevents the poem from being overwhelmed by historical details, but it obliges Burney to correct the record by printing the entire chapter of Bligh's narrative as edited by himself. Even the location and topography of Pitcairn Island is thrown into confusion by Mitford's reliance on the erroneous account in the *Quarterly Review*, which Burney must correct with a quotation from his own *Chronological History*. In short, the blending of poetry and history is not always homogenous in *Christina*, but neither is it unworkable. Mitford presents us with a tragic drama in the story of Fletcher Christian and Iddeah, which is redeemed in the marriage of their mixed-race daughter to a British sailor, with a hint of hope for the peaceable settlement of the South Pacific islands. Burney tempers and complicates that vision by reminding readers, through his "arranging and revising" of the notes, that history is not a stageplay and does

not conform to our literary models for understanding human events. The product of their collaboration was a significant contribution to the small but growing genre of works that endeavored to explore life in the South Pacific Ocean.

NOTES

¹ For Burney's formal education, see Manwaring, 3-4. Burney left school at the age of ten to enter the Royal Navy as a "Captain's servant" on HMS *Princess Amelia*. Thereafter, he received a "maritime education" at the hands of various captains, notably Richard Onslow and James Cook. See Frances Burney, *CJL* V (1789), 394; and Sill, "James Burney and the 'Severities' of a Marine Education," *Burney Letter* 1.

² These questions, particularly the last, are addressed at length by Ruth Scobie in ch. 3 of her book, *Celebrity Culture and the Myth of Oceania in Britain, 1770- 1823*. Scobie does not, however, question the authorship of the notes to *Christina* or discuss the tension in the notes between the two collaborators.

³ The article that Mitford read in the *Quarterly Review* of November 1810 focuses on the voyage of Antoine Bruni D'Entrecasteaux in 1792, but digresses upon the discovery of Pitcairn Island by the American ship *Topaz* in 1808. The digression was incorporated into *Christina* as note 8 to Canto 3, 313-18, with additional commentary by Mitford.

⁴ In the inset poem, "Fitzallan's Narrative," Adams declines to "avow" his patronym, saying only that "Fitzallan you must call me now" (*Christina* 58). "Fitz," meaning "son of," was sometimes used to conceal the family name of an illegitimate (or here, disgraced) child of the upper class.

⁵ For the Mitford family's relationship with Coleridge, Inboden cites Mitford, *Recollections of a Literary Life* (395). According to Inboden, Mitford and Elizabeth Barrett in their correspondence "define their roles as acolytes and would-be literary daughters of Coleridge" (140).

⁶ Coburn speculates that Coleridge “intended I think to write another tale of a Robinson Crusoe,” the story of “the single individual wandering through the world in search of expiation” Coburn I:174, n. 22.

⁷ For Mitford’s connection to Coleridge, Rennie cites *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford, Related in a Selection from her Letters to her Friends*, edited by A. G. L’Estrange, vol. 1, London, 1870, 119. For the complicated working relationship of Mitford, Coleridge, and Burney, see Beshero-Bondar, “Bailing out Coleridge,” 69-76.

⁸ Beshero-Bondar’s source is *The Letters of Mary Russell Mitford*, vol. 1.

⁹ See Hume, vol. 1, 355. Hume writes that the “barbarous practice” of child murder to control lineages and family size was practiced in ancient Greece, but that China is “the only country where this practice of exposing children prevails at present.” Hume’s statement, slightly amplified, appears in Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), and Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798, 2nd ed. 1803).

¹⁰ Thomas Malthus acknowledges in his Essay (1798) having read David Hume, Adam Smith, Richard Price, and Robert Wallace on population control, but not Bligh’s *A Voyage to the South Sea*. It is highly likely that James Burney, an avid reader, was familiar with Hume or Smith, or both. If his remarks on Tahitian population control derived from sources also used by Malthus, he may be considered “proto-Malthusian.” Burney’s plan was validated in part when, in 1856, Pitcairn Island became unsustainable and a portion of the population was removed to Norfolk Island, Australia, where its descendants remain today.

¹¹ Beshero-Bondar discusses the “generational” approach to overcoming historical conflicts in *Christina* and other literary works in which “bonds of friendship and love” grow out of “romance between a mixed-race native woman and a foreign man” (“Romancing the Pacific Isles,” 291).

¹² Burney’s extract is from a translation of Quiros by Alexander Dalrymple, who uses the third-person pronoun to refer to his subject. The assumption that Incarnation Island and Pitcairn Island were the same island appears in Dalrymple’s *Collected Inquiry into the Formation of the Chart*, which was accepted and followed by Captain Folger of the American ship *Topaz*, whose report was forwarded to England and printed by the *Quarterly Review*. De Quiros’s account was published by Fray Juan de Torquemada in the *Monarquia Indiana*, lib. 5. cap. 64, *et seq.* (Seville, 1615).

¹³ Captain Philip Carteret, HMS *Swallow*, who named Pitcairn Island for the sailor who first sighted it in 1767.

¹⁴ Emphasis in the original.

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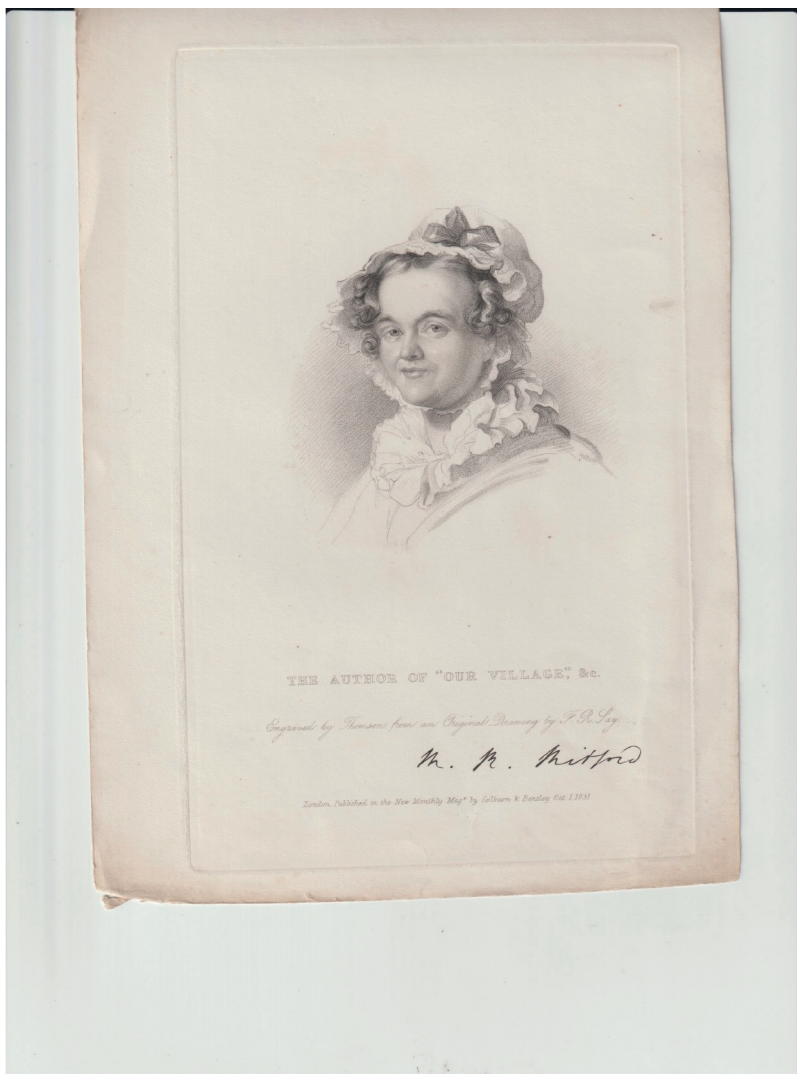


Figure 1. Mary Russell Mitford, engraved by James Thomson. The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal, vol.48 no. 7 (July 1831). Private collection.

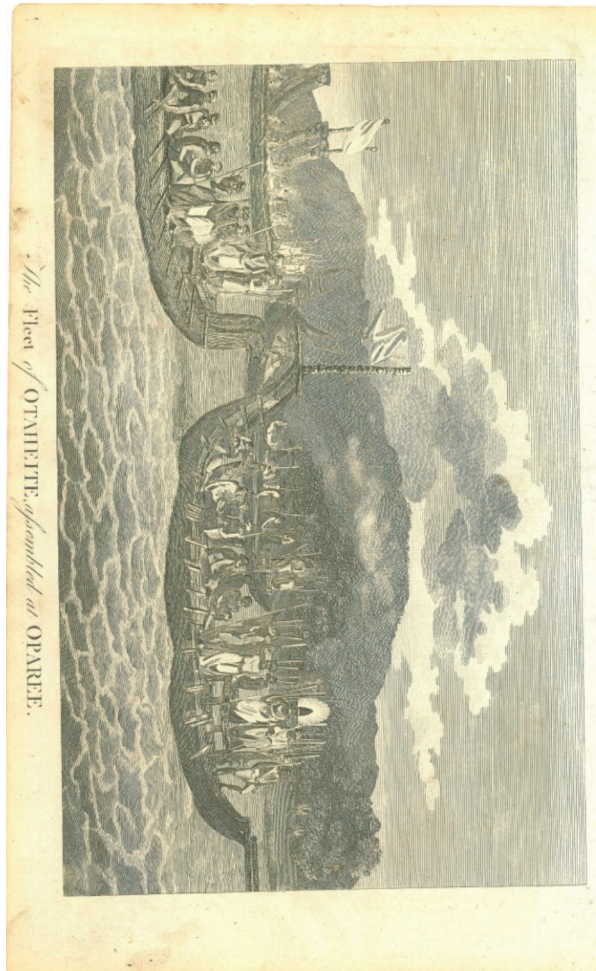


Figure 2. The Fleet of Otaheite, assembled at Oparee. After William Hodges, Review of the War Gallies at Tahiti (c.1766). Richard Bentley and Sons, London, 1883. Private Collection.