
Jonathan Lamb. *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680-1840*.
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001. 345p.

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Jonathan Lamb is at home in the university and at sea. In the summer of 2001, Lamb not only served as a consultant on a BBC historical adventure series that retraced part of Captain James Cook's eighteenth-century exploratory voyage through the South Seas; he also sailed six weeks on a replica of Cook's ship the HMS Endeavor, performing the labor once common to an ordinary seaman. For the past several years, Lamb has been collecting, publishing, and writing on sea narratives and sea studies: in 1994, Lamb, Robert P. Maccubbin, and David F. Morrill co-edited a special edition of the journal *Eighteenth-Century Life*, titled *The South Pacific in the Eighteenth Century: Narratives and Myths*; in 1999, along with Alex Calder and Bridget Orr, Lamb co-edited *Voyages and Beaches: Europe in the Pacific, 1769-1840* (University of Hawai'i Press), a collection of twenty essays by scholars of European, Polynesian, and settler descent, representing a variety of disciplines (including history, anthropology, Maori studies, literary criticism, law, cultural studies, art history, and Pacific studies); and in 2000, Lamb, Vanessa Smith, and Nicholas Thomas co-edited *Exploration and Exchange: A South Seas Anthology, 1680-1900* (The University of Chicago Press), which places narratives by well-known characters such as Captain Cook and Robert Louis Stevenson alongside those by lesser-known explorers, missionaries, beachcombers, buccaneers, scientists, cartographers, natural historians, and literary travelers who for one reason or another sailed the South Seas. Lamb's latest publication, *Preserving the Self*, is a culmination of this ocean of study.

In this book, Lamb sets out to chart the ways the "evolution of a self," the development of a market economy, and the attempts to map the world interrelated during "the enlargement of Britain's second empire" (3). Proffering "an alternative way of viewing and narrating" the forays of Europeans into the South Seas (4), Lamb challenges the predominant thesis that early explorers were confident, cock-sure, aggressive colonizers out merely to increase the empire's knowledge of the world and plunder the wealth of unknown peoples and cultures. In contrast, Lamb contends, these "navigators rather redoubled their ignorance than increased their knowledge" and "spread ignorance before they spread trade routes and disease" (4, 5). To support his claim, Lamb in the first chapter explores competing constructions of the *self*—not the *subject* and the implications attached to that category, as he explains in the Introduction (5)—as theorized by then-prominent

European philosophers such as John Locke, David Hume, Thomas Hobbes, Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, Bernard Mandeville, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Malthus, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, and others. Tracing the way these theories surfaced and were tested in literary productions such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Captain Singleton* (1720), Lamb explores the boundaries that divide the private and the public self, "the active, single self from the social self on whose behalf it is mobilized" (18). The idea of the *self*—and its need for preservation—was sorely tested during the South Seas Bubble following the empty paper-stock trading of the South Sea Company (formed in 1711), an event in the history of capitalism that remains instructive given the buccaneering practices of stock traders today, and it was again tested when the early South Seas explorers and navigators came face to face with, as Lamb says again and again, "nothing" in a place that was "nowhere" (75). In the name of Empire, these explorers and navigators set out to explore, chart, and map "undiscovered" regions, in the process producing narratives that introduced readers to previously unknown exotic/erotic locales and peoples, which in turn served as advertisements for these ventures and for the companies that funded them—in short, as Lamb suggests, these South Seas ventures directly contributed to the birth of capitalism.

Most readers of Lamb's study—and there should be many—will likely find some pleasure in the vast number of anecdotes from primary journals and narratives that he quotes and discusses, for these provide 21st-century readers a glimpse into the experiences and impressions of the early Europeans who traveled the South Seas. From descriptions of various mutinies, utopian gambles, and detailed accounts of scurvy and leprosy to tales of castaways on the island of Juan Fernandez (off the coast of Chile)—some shipwrecked intentionally and some not, some left behind forcefully and some by choice; from an entire chapter (the last) chronicling English efforts to colonize New Zealand to the exploits of pirates and buccaneers such as Montbar the Exterminator, "a Frenchman so outraged by the Spanish oppression of the Indians that he dedicated his life to killing Spaniards" (72); from Captain Cook's desire to find evidence of cannibalism (he had the flesh of a warrior grilled in his ship's galley, then fed it to a Maori bystander, getting to witness just what he wanted) to Cook's later infatuated participation as fertility god Lono in the annual Makahiki festival in Kealahakua Bay, in 1779, that led to his death—*Preserving the Self* packs all the punch that lured early seamen to the seas and fascinated land-locked readers. But, more importantly, Lamb situates this wealth of material in a theoretical context that duly clarifies its total effect—these narratives dramatized the fears, anxieties, and complications experienced by a newly commercial society within a developing market economy.

While Lamb's book provides an engaging, thoughtful read, I do have some qualms with it. For one, despite The University of Chicago Press's excellent reputation, this book doesn't quite live up to its standards, as it contains a number of grammatical and mechanical errors—too many to list here. Whether these flaws are Lamb's, a result of the publisher's editorial practices, or, more likely in most cases, caused by a software glitch or a computer program that believes it can think, one cannot be certain. Sometimes the errors involve misplaced commas—e.g., “When Philip Saumarez, invokes the *je ne sais quoi* in his account of scurvy...” (126); sometimes they involve quotation marks—end quotation marks are missing on pages 148 and 156, and on several occasions a singular mark is reversed (147, 150, 285); sometimes an error is a result of parentheses use—parentheses (rather than brackets) appear between parentheses on page 63, and parentheses are unduly italicized on page 243; sometimes words are hyphenated mid-sentence—“*vir-tues*” (67) and “*ac-tion*” (205); and sometimes whole words, usually prepositions, are missing—for example, the words italicized in the following do not appear in the original: “retired conditions *of* perfect peace” (71), “Burying the sick up *to* the neck in soil...” (123), “according *to* Marcel Mauss and Marshall Sahlins” (137), “Richard Skinner, one *of* the *Bounty* mutineers” (*Bounty* correctly italicized in original; 150), “It points *to* a moral...” (188), “to give his sailors a good chance *of* recovery” (240), “crowns his story with *the* short life of Lee Boo” (255), and “the castaways were able *to* offer gifts” (277); and, finally, some words are misused: *by* for *to* in “a gulf that Denis Diderot tried by bridge with wit” (91), *falls* for *fall* in “leprosy falls easily” (159), and *be* for *by* in “the world is understood only be being out of it” (281).

Sentence-level errors aside, *Preserving the Self* could also be more fully developed here and there. While the book contains much evidence, discussing a plethora of English sailors, it remains as a result Britocentric: other European explorers (Spanish and Dutch, for instance) are not well represented; Herman Melville is the lone stand-in for American seaman; explorers of other, non-European nations are not mentioned; and given that the French to this day treat the Polynesian Islands as a colony, the book probably ought to have consulted more narratives by French explorers, too. The voices of indigenous peoples of the South Seas are heard on occasion, but Lamb should not necessarily be faulted for this—only a few had access to print then, and Lamb fortunately does include these. At times Lamb needs to develop claims more fully, such as what he means by the assertion that pirate and buccaneer communities had “the best and the worst of all political projects united in them” (73). And on a few occasions Lamb is simply wrong: both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Captain Singleton* are cited as published in 1721,

and Marlon Brando rents, not “owns,” the Polynesian island of Tētiaroa (151)—albeit, with a 99-year lease that makes for virtual ownership.

Yet, these qualms mostly concern the scope and the range of *Preserving the Self*, and should Lamb have branched out in so many additional ways it would have become a much longer—and consequently likely less focused—book. Although I have pointed out some errors, I have done so merely in order to bring them to the attention of The University of Chicago Press for future benefit. The errors are minor, and although somewhat distracting to the careful reader they hardly detract from the overall quality of *Preserving the Self*. Anyone interested in the South Seas—in narratives of exploration and “discovery,” in eighteenth-century theories of the self, in the furtherance and maintenance of empire, and in anxieties resulting from then-nascent capitalism—should read *Preserving the Self*. ✱