Smith has written a perceptive, authoritative and cross-culturally informed work. Its editing and presentation is excellent, with few defects: an incomplete sentence (p. 89) and an incorrect word (“then” instead of “than” at line 27, p. 81). A particular strength is the extensive quotation from the primary sources, including texts on friendship and explorer journals. By choosing friendship as her subject Smith explores the ways people from both sides of the beach came to know each other as particular individuals, even if only for a short while. Together they created something that was, as Smith argues, more reciprocal and dialectical; a relationship resembling the partial and particular one of the taio. Arguably, such gestures of intimacy have helped many colonised nations, with their legacies of inter-cultural oppression, to survive and perhaps even to prosper.


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James Morrison’s two part journal and account form one of several early visitor narratives that provide foundational texts for understanding particular ancient Pacific Islands societies. As in Morrison’s case these guests stayed long enough to become culturally competent participants in local society. They were also sympathetic observers who tried to report what they saw or experienced as accurately as they could. Also like Morrison, they were not strongly biased by past European intellectual speculations about Pacific peoples. Such writings provide a particular kind of Indigenous history, as told by outsiders with inside knowledge, that supplements the oral traditions recorded by Islander experts. The editors and their publishers are to be congratulated on producing a new and accessible version of this important work which will continue to be valued by Pacific scholars, and also by those fascinated by an eye-witness account of a famous naval mutiny.

The first half of Morrison’s text forms a self-contained journal. The first chapter commences with embarkation in England and takes the reader to the moment of mutiny and the division of the ship and crew between William Bligh and the mutineers under Fletcher Christian. The second chapter recounts the unsuccessful attempt to settle on the island of Tubuai. Morrison puts on record a fairly comprehensive survey of the observable elements of the local culture; one not subsequently described by outsiders until 1827. Chapter 3 begins with the return to Tahiti, the division between those who stayed, and those who stuck with Christian, and what Morrison and the others did during their residence amongst their Tahitian friends. Chapter 4 recounts the capture and incarceration of the Tahiti-based mutineers on the *Pandora*, their subsequent wreck and return to trial in England.

Morrison’s naval identity is prominent in the journal, especially in the earlier pages as he records nautical information such as winds and distances travelled. He also carefully notes Bligh’s behaviour, both as captain and purser, towards the officers and
men, including what he allocated as food entitlements and instances of his abusive language. Later, in Tahiti, Morrison lovingly describes in detail his construction of a vessel from local materials which he hoped to sail to England. Alongside that, he recounts the mutineers’ involvement in dynastic struggles between different chiefly families as they vied for dominance. While a fascinating narrative, he reveals certain cultural blindspots, notably when he describes any challenge to the ruling family as rebellion. Like later missionaries he could not see that this was a form of legitimate political process whereby different leaders contested for overall authority. The mutineers, operating as a military force, were key players in defeating the opponents of Pōmare II (or Tū), thereby ensuring his ultimate hegemony.

The second part of Morrison’s work is an encyclopaedic account of all those aspects of the place, the people and their culture that he happened to observe or have explained to him. He produces a huge sequence of ethnographic snapshots, taken at the time he lived there, but presented to us as if providing a total explanation of the Tahitian world since its inception in the creation. Chapter 5 lists elements of the natural and cultural world of Tahiti, including its landscape, flora and fauna, as well as types of foods and material objects. The importance of sea-oriented activities was well understood by Morrison who devotes much space to the various sorts of fishing. Chapter 6 turns to the cultural domain of Tahiti, starting with the divisions of land and of political power, the nature of the Tahitian chief, the practice of war, aspects of religion, marae and priests, and various cultural practices that came to his attention including mourning, marriage, tapu and resource restrictions (rahui). The weakest link in Morrison’s fascinating reportage is his attempt to explain religious ideas which require insight into an inner world that most outsiders find challenging to understand without years of guidance from experts. Chapter 7 continues to look at cultural elements that Morrison observed, such as buildings, canoes, gender roles in eating, foods, cooking techniques, clothing, various activities (such as sport, dance, music), illnesses, death and mourning. As the editors stress, Morrison’s account and the journal should be viewed as “codependent” (p. 8) since both work together to explain important aspects of Tahitian cultural life, such as the practice of warfare or the making of formal friendships (taio).

In their presentation of this work the editors decided to retain as much as possible of Morrison’s own writing style, complete with his spelling and punctuation. The only exception they made was to modernise any indigenous names and terms. In addition, Maia Nuku has contributed very helpful appendices listing placenames, islands, plants and important Polynesians who appear in Morrison’s pages. As the editors point out, the reading audience for this text today is vastly different and more complex from the one who bought the first limited edition of this work, including as it does both indigenous and non-indigenous readers. For Morrison, facing trial for mutiny, writing up his journal and account must have brought back pleasant and poignant memories. If it saved his life, as the editors argue, then he also ensured that those Tahitians who befriended him remain a powerful presence for us today. This work is a priceless portal into the world of all these ancestors.