

shores and attended a potlatch. Witness the Nuu-chah-nulth woman pictured weaving at the 1904 World's Fair. She was part of a group who went to demonstrate various traditional skills and to entertain the public (125). Witness the Tla-o-qui-aht Ha'wiih ranged in front of Wickaninnish's curtain in 1928 (58). They were greeting Lieutenant-Governor Lord Willingdon in Tofino. Witness the truckload of Nuu-chah-nulth men and women decked out in their crest masks and headdresses for the Alberni Dominion Day parade in 1929 (142). They are trying to make a point: "We are still here. In spite of all that you've done to wipe us off the face of this earth, we are still here." Black

has chosen to use these images, but she has missed much of the very culture and history the book claims to offer.

Not since John Sendey's *The Nootkan Indian: A Pictorial* (1977) has a single publication featured so many images of Nuu-chah-nulth people. That long-out-of-print work is a collection of early illustrations and photographs interspersed with quotes from Captain Cook's journals. Furthermore, no other trade publication has quoted Nuu-chah-nulth people so profusely. Despite its weaknesses, readers of *BC Studies*, students of anthropology and history, Nuu-chah-nulth people, and many others may want to add this book to their libraries.

*Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique:
Manufactured by Joseph Dufour et Cie 1804-05
after a Design by Jean-Gabriel Charvet*

Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales and
National Gallery of Australia, 2000

Distributed in North America by University of Washington Press.
48 pp. Illus. US\$18.95 paper.

Roderick J. Barman
University of British Columbia

THE VISITOR to the Honolulu Academy of Arts, housed in the former Cooke family mansion, will encounter a myriad of objects to charm the senses and to stimulate the intellect. In a dark corner, shielded from natural light, stands what is perhaps the most striking and unusual exhibit – a set of twenty panels, or strips, of wallpaper dating from the start of the nineteenth century. What fascinates are the scenes on the wallpaper. They represent a

panoramic view, in an open-air setting, of different Native peoples of the Pacific Islands and coasts. The scenes begin on the left, where a group of people wearing conical hats and long capes is engaged in drying fish hung from strings. The visitor from British Columbia at once exclaims: "Nootka Sound!" and that remark justifies this review of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* in *BC Studies*.

The wallpaper was produced in 1805 by Joseph Dufour et Cie (a firm located

in Maçon, France), and it was first displayed at a manufacturing exhibition in Paris in 1806. The paper sold briskly, and examples in situ, attached to their original walls, survive in France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, and the United States. The wallpaper's popularity is entirely explicable. The twenty panels, composed of woodcuts hand-painted with gouache, possess considerable aesthetic appeal. The individual scenes are deftly drawn and, viewed as a whole, possess balance and integrity. The diversity of the peoples and landscapes, the absence of the constant repetition that characterizes most wallpaper, and the delicacy of the colouring combine to delight the eye.

Attractive as it is aesthetically, the wallpaper is no less interesting in terms of its iconography. Employing what was still, in 1806, the innovative device of the panorama, Jean-Gabriel Charvet, the designer, presented views of peoples recently revealed to the European world. In composing his figures, Charvet drew heavily on the illustrations published in the several narratives of Captain Cook's voyages. This provenance, and the inclusion in the background of Panel 9 of a distant view of Cook's death in Hawaii, explain why the wallpaper has at times been termed *Les Voyages du Capitaine Cook*.

While the designs bear witness to the profound influence of Cook's voyages on the European mindset, they cannot be termed copies. Charvet's imagery derives not from what Weber, Samuel, and others recorded on paper (drawings later engraved) but, rather, from the vision of the "Noble Savage" so favoured by the Enlightenment. The figures portrayed dwell in a beneficent Nature, live in harmony with it, and clothe and feed themselves with its products. The few images not in

accord with this view are banished either to the background (as with Cook's death) or to the outer edges of the panels. This interpretation of the panels' iconography, patent from the content, is amply confirmed by the text of the pamphlet issued by the manufacturer as a key to the figures and as a guide to hanging the paper. "The figures arranged on each strip of this decoration are not only remarkable for their costumes, but interesting for the forms of their employment and, at times, admirable for their customs" (32).

The wallpaper was designed, the pamphlet proclaimed, so that "the studious man reading the history of the voyages or the specific accounts of the explorers used in these decorations, might think himself, by casting his eyes around him, in the presence of the depicted people" (33). In fact, the iconography was intended to encircle "the studious man" with images of the "other" – a world possessing the simplicity and the harmony Europe so sorely lacked. The images have little to do with the peoples of the Pacific Islands; instead, they reflect what Charvet and others wanted Europe to be. In dress, looks, and posture, the three female dancers from Tahiti appearing on Panel 5 have nothing to do with that island. They are upper-class French ladies, wearing Empire-style dress and performing a Neo-Classical dance at an amateur production in Paris. Their ultimate inspiration is the Three Graces.

Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique proves once again, if proof were needed, that what we see is largely controlled by our existing state of mind, by our preconceptions. The "other" depicted by Charvet, and sold to the well-to-do by Joseph Dufour et Cie, is benign, even admiring; but this is not so in

every instance. The pamphlet makes plain why the “inhabitants of Nootka” (34) are relegated to the very left margin of the design on Panel 1. “They are not well built and have ill-proportioned bodies. ... Their ugly faces do not appear in their natural colour being daubed with ochre and oil ... They are serious and phlegmatic but also cruel and vindictive. They eat their vanquished enemies and trade the feet, hands, skulls and other parts of the body which cannot be consumed” (34). While admiration of indigenous peoples did not prevent (and even stimulated) colonization, contempt for them justified conquest and exploitation. In the case of British Columbia,

the attitude of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* was one factor preparing the way for a bitter experience.

The University of Washington Press is to be congratulated on agreeing to distribute this study, jointly produced by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Australia (both of which own full sets of the wallpaper), in North America. While intended for an Australian audience, and while they are a bit disjointed, the contents of *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* amply reward careful study. Above all this work makes widely available an important artefact that is otherwise little known and difficult to see.

*Almost a Hero: The Voyages of John Meares, R.N.,
to China, Hawaii and the Northwest Coast*

J. Richard Nokes

Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1998.
217 pp. Illus., maps. \$29.95 paper.

By Bruce M. Watson
Vancouver Community College

TO CONTEMPORARY Frances Hornby Barkley, British mariner John Meares was a thief who had stolen and used her husband’s maps; to George Dixon, Meares contradicted and misrepresented the facts, and to Robert Haswell he was a liar. Opinions of Meares by traditional maritime fur trade historians such as F. W. Howay, W. Kaye Lamb, and even Captain John Walbran, who examined the Barkley dairies, tend to agree with Meares’ contemporaries. To J. Richard Nokes, however, John Meares was a

man “of courage, energy and vision” who “deserves better” than the place in history that historians have accorded him. Nokes, a navy veteran and longtime *Oregonian* editor, sets about to throw new light on Meares in his book, *Almost a Hero*.

Nokes re-evaluates Meares through the use of narrative coupled with an examination of the criticisms. With the deft hand of an experienced editor, Nokes mines and amply endnotes the traditional and sometimes contradictory sources (Meares, George Dixon, Nathaniel Portlock, William Douglas,