Voices of the Pacific Northwest—Artifact 1.2

John Ledyard, *A Journal of Captain Cook’s Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, and in Quest of a North-West Passage, between Asia & America;* *Performed in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, and 17???* (Hartford, Conn.: Printed and sold by Nathaniel Patten, a few rods north of the court-house, 178???), p. 70-73.

[We set anchor in Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island.] On the 1st of April [1778] we were visited by a number of natives in their boats. . . . This was the first fair opportunity after our arrival that I had of examining the appearance of those unknown aborigines of North-America. It was the first time too that I had been so near the shores of that continent which gave me birth from the time I at first left it; and though more than two thousand miles distant from the nearest part of New-England I felt myself plainly affected. . . . It soothed a home-sick heart, and rendered me very tolerably happy.

I had no sooner beheld these Americans than I set them down for the same kind of people that inhabit the opposite side of the continent. [Ledyard, born in Connecticut, was familiar with the Native Americans of New England.] They are rather above the middle stature, copper-coloured, and of an athletic make. They have long black hair, which they generally wear in a club on the top of the head, they fill it when dressed with oil, paint and the downe of birds. They also paint their faces with red, blue and white colours, but from whence they had them or how they were prepared they would not inform us, nor could we tell. Their cloathing generally consists of skins, but they have two other sorts of garments, the one is made of the inner rind of some sort of bark twisted and united together like the woof of our coarse cloaths, the other . . . is also principally made with the hair of their dogs, which are mostly white, and of the domestic kind. Upon this garment is displayed the manner of their catching the whale—we saw nothing so well done by a savage in our travels. . . . Their language is very guttural, and if it was possible to reduce it to our orthography, [it] would very much abound with consonants.

In their manners they resemble the other aborigines of North-America; they are bold and ferocious, sly and reserved, not easily provoked but revengeful; we saw no signs of religion or worship among them, and if they sacrifice it is to the God of liberty.

When a party was sent to procure some grass for our cattle they would not suffer them to take a blade of it without payment, nor had we [did we get] a mast or yard without an acknowledgment [to them]. They intimated to us that the country all round further than we could see was theirs. . . . The houses we saw near this cove appeared to be only temporary residences from whence it was supposed that in winter they retired into the interior forests, and in summer lived any where that best answered the purposes of fishing or hunting.

The food we saw them use consisted solely of dried fish and blubber oil, the best by far that any man among us had ever seen: this they put into skins. We purchased great quantities of it [for] our lamps [and] many other purposes useful and necessary. Like all uncivilized men they [were] hospitable, and the first boat that visited us in the Cove brought us what thought the greatest possible [gift], and no doubt they offered it to us to eat; this was a human arm roasted. I have heard it remarked that human flesh is the most delicious, and therefore tasted a bit, and so did many others without swallowing the meat or the juices, but either my conscience or my taste rendered it very odious to me.

We intimated to our hosts that what we had tasted was bad, and expressed as well as we could our [disapproval] of eating it on account of its being part of a man like ourselves. They seemed to be sensible by the contortions of our faces that our feelings were disgusted, and apparently paddled off with equal dissatisfaction and disappointment themselves.