

FRANCIS BLESSINGTON

COLOURED ENGRAVING, C. 1800

He is trapped, turning away, eyes clamped, recalling
the grief of gunpowder and the pox, or his men
who were eaten in New Zealand by cannibals,
whom he forgave, shutting himself from the man
lying on the pale green ground, face-up
and tied to the pole aligning his corpse for sacrifice.

Captain James Cook has doffed his tricorn.
But does not acknowledge the native gesturing
him to the service and the forty-nine skulls
on the back platform that the man will join.
Smoke dances up like a materializing ghost
beside four squatted singers and a drummer.

Tahiti. Tuesday, 2 September 1777.