

**Maria Nugent, *Captain Cook was here*, Cambridge University Press,
Cambridge & Port Melbourne, 2009.**

ISBN: 9780521762403

**Reviewed by Chloë Okoli
(Monash University)**

Captain Cook was here is Maria Nugent's latest work on the history of contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, focusing on the eight days Captain James Cook and the crew of the *Endeavour* spent in the Botany Bay area in 1770. Nugent uses the journals of Cook and Joseph Banks to construct a detailed narrative of the events that took place between Cook, his crew and the Indigenous people. It is a distinctive perspective on this much studied event and throughout the text there is a genuine exploration of the ways in which individual ideas and beliefs informed the actions of people involved in these events. What makes this view unique is that Nugent also explores the colloquialised concept 'Captain Cook was here' and how it has been represented and recreated in the history, art and culture of Australia over the last two centuries.

The work is divided into three sections of twelve chapters. The first chapter focuses on the actual landing and the opening encounter between the landing party and two Indigenous men. Initially, Cook threw trinkets on the sand for the men, at which point the two men shouted and threw their spears and Cook reacted by firing a shot. When one of the two men left to get a shield, he returned only to find that the landing party was already ashore. Cook then fired another shot and the Indigenous men retreated. Nugent suggests that it was the 'gap' created by the man leaving that gave the landing party the opportunity to come ashore, an action that was defined by courage not cowardice. This encounter is also examined as it is represented in art in the second chapter, where the focus is 'The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770' (1902), by E. Phillips Fox. In particular, Nugent considers how the work depicts the retreat of the Indigenous men, the outstretched hand of Cook and the British flag. Nugent argues that this representation, which emphasises

the retreat of the Indigenous men, has influenced the development of popular understanding of the landing in Australian history.

The intervening chapters focus much of the discussion on the second to the seventh day after landing. During this time there were many encounters between Cook, crewmembers and the Indigenous population, although there was no 'real' contact established as the Indigenous people usually withdrew when approached. Nugent suggests that this is a continuing method of dealing with unwelcome strangers on the part of the Indigenous people. For example, on the second day, when exploring a collection of huts, Cook, Banks and Dr. Daniel Solander, a Swedish botanist who was assisting Banks, confronted a group of Indigenous men who retreated at their advance. Nugent explains the behaviour of the men as more 'retiring' than retreating, and argues that this attitude characterised the meetings between the two groups.

The final section deals with the eighth day when Cook and his crew left the Bay, when Nugent recounts how Cook lamented that he was unable to learn much about the Indigenous people due to lack of contact. The focus then shifts from the narrative into an examination of Indigenous understandings and representations of Cook and the landing in history and art. Nugent focuses on 'We Call Them Pirates Out Here' (2006) by Daniel Boyd, who reinterpreted the E. Phillips Fox painting by recasting Cook as a pirate, the British flag overlaid with a skull and the two Indigenous men replaced with native plants called *xanthorrhoea*, or 'black boys'. This discussion is a good parallel to the discussion of Fox's work in the opening section, and presents an opposing view of how the landing has been represented. She also considers the oral histories of Indigenous people, and how the landing has been represented and understood in the stories that have been told.

Captain Cook was here is a fresh and contemporary perspective on an event that had been examined in countless ways since it occurred. Nugent rightly identifies the event as fundamental to both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' sense of the history of Australia. It is a beautifully presented work, consisting of short chapters with accompanying illustrations,

which is suitable for both an academic and general audience. The inclusion of discussions on the material culture of the landing site, in addition to more traditional text sources, demonstrates how an analysis of objects can add depth to an account of this nature. Similarly, the integration of anthropology and art criticism into the discussion provides other views of the events examined. As a narrative history, Nugent successfully chronicles the events and explores the thoughts, beliefs and actions of the individuals. However, it is by considering 'the landing' as an event, which as Nugent explains is 'Always beginning, never ending', and discussing the different ways it has been represented in history, art and culture, which makes this work unique.