

The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas, by Anne Salmond. London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2003. ISBN 0-713-99661-7; xxii + 506 pages, figures, maps, appendixes, notes, selected bibliography, index. Cloth, £25.00.

Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain James Cook, by Nicholas Thomas. New York: Walker & Company, 2003. ISBN 0-8027-1412-9; xxxvii + 486 pages, tables, figures, maps, photograph, glossary, bibliography and further reading, index. Cloth, US\$28.00.

The production of scholarly texts about Captain Cook dates back a half century to 1955, when the first volume of historian J C Beaglehole's celebrated edition of *The Journals of Captain James Cook* was published. Over the next twenty years Beaglehole completed companion pieces for the second and third voyages, a masterly two-volume *Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks* (1962), a widely acclaimed *Life of Captain James Cook* (1974), and numerous related essays. Immaculately researched and beautifully written, Beaglehole's works marked a decisive advance beyond the hackneyed hagiography that had characterized Cook literature up to this time.

However, it is clear that Beaglehole, while focused on the Pacific, brought an Anglocentric perspective to his work. Note, for example, the concluding words of his pathbreaking 1964 essay, "The Death of Captain Cook" (in *Historical Studies* 11 [43],

305): "In England also . . . there was a sense of shock. . . . I can think of nothing in our history of quite the same order until the news came through in 1913 of Scott's death in the Antarctic." Though very much a New Zealander, Beaglehole's claiming of English history as his own, and his comparison of his boyhood hero Robert Falcon Scott with Cook, show that he, like many white Antipodeans of his generation, never stopped thinking of Britain as "home" and heartland of the world's greatest empire.

Meanwhile, in Australia, art historian Bernard Smith was pursuing an equally humanist but ambitiously postcolonial engagement with Cook. His primary focus then, as for the next half century, was early European representations of Pacific lands and peoples. This was evidenced most dramatically in Smith's 1960 classic, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850*, and in his 1992 collection of essays, *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*. In recent years, too, Smith has coproduced three-volume collations of both the art and the charts and coastal views from Cook's voyages.

By the time of the Cook bicentenary celebrations in the decade 1969-1979, a number of other Antipodean, Canadian, and British scholars were making themselves heard on Cook-related issues. Most, however, were historians who preferred to rework well-trodden themes like imperial expansionism and scientific discovery. Few ventured far into the murky zone of Cook's rela-

tions with indigenous peoples. The last point is best illustrated by the 1979 publication *Captain James Cook and His Times*, edited by Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnston, which emerged from a 1978 conference of the same title held in Vancouver, in which only one of eleven essays directly addressed this thorny topic.

A few researchers, however, were pursuing “ethnohistorical” studies of Pacific topics. One of them, Greg Denning, an Australian trained in both history and anthropology, published in 1980 his tragic but poetic work, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774–1880*, in which he sought “to know the culture of Enata [The Men (Marquesan term for themselves)], to know the cultures of Anoe [Outsiders (Marquesan term for Europeans)], to know them in their meeting” (1980, 6). In a subsequent series of studies set around Tahiti and Hawai‘i (*Performances* [1996]), Denning further explored his interpretive style of historical ethnographic writing by focusing on the “theatre” enacted on beaches and in similar liminal spaces during visits by Cook and other early Europeans (1996, xv). Recently, in a book called *The Wonders of History-Making* (2003), he recalled the genesis of his quest for such “two-sided history”: “Fifty years ago I made a discovery that changed my life. . . . I could read all the papers that surrounded those who have come into the Pacific in the last 400 years—all the explorers, Cook, Bligh, Bougainville, La Perouse, Vancouver; all the missionaries, all the traders, all the beachcombers—not so much to tell

their stories but to see what they saw on the other side of the beach. I wanted to write two-sided history—of those who came here in the last 400 years and of the first peoples who had already been here for millennia” (2003, 2).

Meanwhile, American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, already a leader in his discipline and an eminent student of traditional Pacific societies, was turning toward history of a structural kind, in an effort to better comprehend cultural transformation in contact-era Polynesia. A 1978 essay, “The Apotheosis of Captain Cook” (in *Kroeber Anthropological Papers* 53–54, 1–31), was Sahlins’s first publication along these lines, and in the following years he developed this analysis of Cook’s demise at Kealakekua in three separate, wide-ranging, much debated books (*Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* [1981]; *Islands of History* [1985]; and *How “Natives” Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* [1995]). Foremost among his critics was Princeton-based Sri Lankan anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere, who in 1992 published a book under the purloined title of Sahlins’s 1978 essay, and with a subtitle that suggested that Sahlins’s narrative followed a long tradition of *European Mythmaking in the Pacific*. Especially because Cook was at the heart of this academic joust, the global media took an unprecedented interest in its many twists and turns.

Two scholars called on by both the media and academic journals to comment on this unfolding debate were New Zealand anthropologist-turned-historian Anne Salmond and Austra-

lian historian-cum-anthropologist Nicholas Thomas. Consequently, this pair began working on separate but effectively parallel research projects, dealing with relations between Cook and indigenous peoples throughout the period of his three voyages. Both writers rightly identified the absence from the Cook literature of any systematic historical anthropological analysis of the interactions between the captain and his men on one side, and the native inhabitants of the region on the other. It is to their respective recently published texts that we now turn.

Anne Salmond's *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas* represents her first venture into the wider Pacific since her graduate fieldwork on the language of Ontong Java, a third of a century ago. Following that apprenticeship, Salmond established herself as a leading commentator on Māori society and culture, first with a notable ethnographic study of hui (ceremonial gatherings), and then with inimitable renderings of the life stories and teachings of her mentors in all things Māori, Amiria and Eruera Stirling. Then came explorations into the historical foundations of New Zealand's much vaunted "biculturalism," which resulted in two acclaimed studies of early interactions between Māori and Pākehā, in both of which Cook emerged as a key actor (*Two Worlds: First Meetings Between Maori and Europeans 1642–1772* [1991]; and *Between Worlds: Early Exchanges Between Maori and Europeans 1773–1815* [1997]).

Thus, for Salmond, the book currently under review reflects both a logical intellectual development and the closure of a biographical circle. From the beginning, however, she emphasizes a real ambiguity toward the central figure in her study:

"Without doubt, Captain James Cook was one of the world's great explorers. During his three Pacific voyages his wooden ships circled the world, navigating the ice-bound fringes of the Antarctic and Arctic circles . . . edged around uncharted lands and islands, always in danger of shipwreck; and in one harbour after another, found unknown people. For any time and in any culture, these were remarkable voyages, like the journeys of Odysseus, or the Polynesian star navigators.

"At the same time, Captain Cook has become an icon of imperial history. His voyages epitomise the European conquest of nature . . . classifying and collecting plants, animals, insects and people. As the edges of the known world were pushed out, wild nature—including the 'savages' and 'barbarians' at the margins of humanity—were brought under the calm, controlling gaze of Enlightenment science, long before colonial domination was attempted" (xix).

Academic disciplinary divisions, Salmond argues, have in the past limited our understanding of Cook and his voyages. History "looks at the way the future has been shaped, within and across nations," while anthropology more often analyzes "the customs of indigenous peoples as timeless structures" (xix). Thus, historians have usually dealt with

the European explorers, while anthropologists have studied Pacific peoples at moments of contact. Such “disciplinary apartheid,” she continues, bisects and impoverishes our understanding of the dynamics of such voyages and encounters:

“This book tries to avoid the trap of Cyclops, with his one-eyed vision. It is based on the perception, shared by James Cook himself, that in his journeys of Pacific exploration, Europeans and ‘natives’ alike were only human. On each side there was savagery and kindness, generosity and greed, intelligent curiosity and stupidity. Maori, Tahitians, and other Pacific Islanders engaged with Cook’s men in ways that were defined by their cosmology and culture, just as Cook’s men were shaped by the cosmology and culture of Georgian England. With this idea in mind, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog* investigates the social background of these voyages in England and Polynesia, and their cross-cultural dynamics over time, both on board the ships and in visits to various Pacific islands” (xx–xxi).

Her opening chapter focuses on a specific cross-cultural dynamic that occurred in 1777 aboard *Discovery* at Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand. For a joke, some seamen held a mock court-martial of a pet dog obtained from local Māori, on the grounds that it “was of cannibal origin” (1). Being short of provisions, they then cooked and ate it. According to Salmond, there should be “no great cause for amazement” that, after almost a decade of visits to Polynesia, “Cook’s sailors should eat

a dog after convicting it of cannibalism” (9). By then, far from feeling sick at the thought of consuming canine flesh, the visitors’ mouths “had begun to water. They had come under Polynesian influence. . . . Cook’s men had learned to eat dogs, and much more about Polynesia. . . . it may have been that Cook’s sailors (or some of them) were no longer purely ‘European’” (8).

Relatively little attention is paid by Salmond to the British background of the wider enterprise—simply an overview of late eighteenth-century English society and some account of preparations for and the return from each voyage. And a total of only four pages is devoted to Cook’s first traversing of the equator, his first visit to South America, his first contact with indigenous Patagonians, and his first crossing of the vast eastern Pacific. Likewise, navigational aspects of the remainder of the *Endeavour* voyage, and stopovers in Batavia and Cape-town, are barely mentioned. The same minimalist pattern is reproduced for the other two voyages, especially regarding Cook’s ventures into Antarctic and Arctic waters, and his contacts with native North Americans. But then, the subtitle of her book is *Captain Cook in the South Seas*.

Salmond is thus somewhat more expansive in her descriptions of Cook’s dealings with indigenous groups at several points along the east coast of Australia and in Tasmania, in the archipelagos he called “New Hebrides” and “New Caledonia,” and in Polynesian locales where contacts were limited. Otherwise,

a feature of this book is its emphasis on the region now called “Polynesia,” in that its most comprehensive narratives concern visits to Tahiti and the Society Islands (135 pages), New Zealand (81 pages), Tonga (32 pages), and Hawai’i (42 pages). Such attention clearly reflects the lengths of time spent at these places by Cook and company, the extensiveness of their interactions with the local inhabitants, the significance they accorded to events and circumstances observed there, and the quality and quantity of their written records.

While the continuity of these core narratives is fractured by Salmond’s deference to the sequence of Cook’s voyages, her analyses of these four Polynesian cultures, and of their interactions with the intruding British, underpin her whole endeavor. Especially with respect to Tahiti and the Society Islands, she goes into creative overdrive, scouring shipboard journals, reviewing two centuries of ethnological data, penning sketches of key players, inspecting historical sites, engaging with present-day residents, and contextualizing the exchanges between Cook and local chiefs.

Nicholas Thomas’s *Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain Cook*, at least on the surface, looks very similar to the above work. Australian by nationality, but now resident in London, during the 1980s–1990s Thomas pursued field and archival research in and about the Marquesas, Fiji, Aotearoa, and Niue, and has produced publications on each. Between times he established a reputation as a leading commentator on the arts of Oceania and on the

anthropology of colonialism. He also has coproduced two significant works on Cook’s voyages—a scholarly edition of Johann Reinhold Forster’s scientific observations from his time on the *Resolution* (*Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World*, with coeditors Harriet Guest and Michael Dettelbach [1996]), and a photographic narrative about the explorer’s anchorages in the South Island of New Zealand (*Cook’s Sites: Revisiting History*, with photographer Mark Adams [1999]).

Personal reflections dot this book. Thomas recalls how, as a Sydney schoolboy in 1970, the bicentenary of Cook’s “discovery of Australia” was commemorated “on an unprecedented scale.” Such celebrations were particularly important in Australia and New Zealand, “but the perception of [Cook] as a major historical figure was equally sustained in Britain, Canada, and elsewhere.” Nor has this interest abated in recent years, “despite the discredited status of the imperial ideologies with which Cook was for so long associated” (xxxii). Many indigenous peoples, he notes, are less impressed: witness Hawaiian nationalist Haunani-Kay Trask’s references to Cook as “a syphilitic racist” (quoted by Thomas on page xxxii); or the Aboriginal Australian view of him as “a ruthlessly violent figure,” best summed up by Arnhem Land artist Paddy Wainburranga’s painting *Too Many Captain Cooks* (see Penny McDonald’s 1989 video, *Too Many Captain Cooks*). A new generation of white anticolonial scholars has also begun to consider Cook a natural target. Not our author, however: “This book aims to step behind

the false certainties of both the heroic and anti-heroic biographies of the navigator, to deal with the messy actualities of the past. Cook's voyages were not blameless humanitarian ventures, nor were they purely invasive. What happened emerged from a mix of motivations. Encounters with indigenous peoples entailed both friendship and exploitation, reciprocity and imposition, shared understanding and misrepresentation" (Thomas, xxxiii).

His overriding concern is to tease out the "ambiguities and confusions of these encounters by making the most of the rich voyage journals and visual records that are our primary sources for Cook's three expeditions." Thomas recognizes, however, that these sources are "replete with intriguing revisions, omissions, misunderstandings and small cover-ups" (xxxiv). Similarly problematic is the absence of equivalent native sources, which forces researchers to rely, for example, on indigenous recollections of these events transcribed by missionaries during the nineteenth century, or anthropological observations of relationships and practices made in the twentieth century. Nevertheless: "The writings of contemporary native scholars, and oral testimony that may be obtained today, also offer many insights of direct and indirect help. What can be said about what the people on the other side of the beach thought in 1770 or 1779 is—as I will often acknowledge—inevitably speculative. At best, what is said is confident speculation. At worst, it seems preferable to air mere possibilities than pass over native pasts in silence" (xxxiv).

From the start, Thomas acknowledges the problem of how, by writing about encounters between people of the West and people of the Pacific, it becomes hard to avoid contrasting "two stereotyped cultures," to invent a "Europe" and an "Oceania" that belie the real cultural, social, and historical complexities of both regions (xxxiv). Each of these two "cultures" in reality comprised many cultures, and each of these was internally differentiated. And connecting them all was James Cook, "the single most important European protagonist, in Oceania in the eighteenth century." This navigator's life thus becomes the writer's lens "for a new look at these formative encounters that in one man's experience produced connections between the Baltic, the north of England, both east and west coasts of North America, the Thames, Tahiti, Tierra del Fuego and many places in the Pacific" (xxxv).

True to his word, Thomas casts a wide and evenly spread net. It is Cook's connections to Britain that take up the largest part of his book (78 pages), however, followed by Tahiti and New Zealand (63 pages each), and—somewhat further back—Hawai'i, Australia, Tonga, Patagonia, and Northwest America, in descending order. Concepts like "Polynesia" fail to find real traction in this narrative. Real significance is accorded only to sites and events specifically located in the spatial and temporal grid—geographical interstices versus chronological points—of Cook's professional career. But, without a doubt, Thomas has produced a new and nuanced portrait of this extraordinary voyager, one that is qualitatively

different from the numerous prior biographies. His empathy for the man and his contexts is admirable; his knowledge of the historical and anthropological materials is impressive; his sensitivity to views from “both sides of the beach” is commendable. It is “two-sided” biography at its best.

On occasions, Thomas is disarmingly original. Take, for example, his ruminations as the navigator departs Unalaska for the warmth of the Sandwich Islands. Here our writer considers that the usual portrayal of Cook’s behavior on this third voyage—“indecisive,” “detached,” “irrational,” “violent” (376)—as distinct from his alleged demeanor during the first and second voyages, needs to be rethought:

“Cook’s voyages do not exhibit any such trend. Some of the worst violence occurred in New Zealand as early as 1769, when the man was supposedly saner. And the third voyage was marked by ups and downs, not by any sort of downward spiral. The terrorism of Tonga was succeeded by relatively peaceful months on Tahiti, by brief savagery on Moorea, by trauma on Raiatea, and six months of North American contacts with native peoples that were devoid of serious violence, almost devoid of tension. . . . We understand these encounters, not by holding on to a heroic or anti-heroic notion that Cook always played the defining part, for better or worse. . . . It was the native approach to these encounters that was in some cases subtly, in others dramatically, different from place to place” (376–377).

Thomas similarly points out how,

in the days following Cook’s death, among the British survivors two distinct versions of events emerged, overlapping in their account of the facts but contradicting one another absolutely in their explanation—and, indeed, prefiguring arguments that have continued through to the present: “In one view, an angry and aggressive Cook provoked the Hawaiian violence; in the other, an unfortunately restrained Cook was a victim of his humanity” (394). With respect to the first version, Thomas responds by claiming that “there was nothing perverse or anomalous in [Cook’s] behaviour on that morning of 14 February 1779. He had fired with small shot, and sometimes with ball, during both his first and second voyages” (396). Cook also had previously taken high chiefs hostage—at Tahiti, Raiatea, and Tongatapu. What was different about Hawai’i, and what the captain and his associates failed to comprehend, was the degree to which its people depended on their ali’i (chiefs): “We might say that a king such as Kalani’opu’u was a symbol of his society’s being, but he was not an abstract symbol like a flag: his identity was intermingled with that of his subjects, he was a supreme expression of the vigour and power that—thanks to him—pervaded the gardens, the sexuality and the endeavours of the community as a whole. If this was true, in varied ways, throughout Polynesia, it was true in a powerfully accentuated way in the Hawaiian islands. Here chiefly status was awesome, and the trauma of a threat to a chief was magnified intolerably” (397).

But otherwise, much of what

Thomas writes about Cook's death has a familiar ring. If the navigator's plan to take Kalani'opu'u was inherently problematic, "it was still more so at that moment, given his own identification with Lono, the king's identification with Ku, and the threatening and destabilizing nature of his reappearance, his intrusion in the time of Ku's sovereignty" (397). Or, was it not the shooting dead of a chief by some seamen across the bay, when communicated back to the crowd around Cook at Kealakekua, which triggered the final debacle?

At this point it is opportune to turn to Salmond's account of this last act in Cook's life. Her analysis also focuses on relations between Pacific Islanders and their visitors. Initially, the former were unsure whether the British were human or not, but as they established relations with sailors, traveled on ships, and picked up English, they "sparked a process of enquiry that changed their world forever" (Salmond, xxi). While appalled by Polynesian attitudes toward property and practices like cannibalism and human sacrifice, many of Cook's men took lovers, acquired tattoos, learned languages, and savored local foods. The captain himself exchanged names and gifts with high chiefs in Tahiti, Tonga, and Hawai'i, and considered them his "friends." However: "When Cook became 'Tute' in Tahiti, and 'Kuki', 'Kalani'opu'u' and 'Lono' in Hawai'i, he became enmeshed in contradictions. As a Polynesian high chief he was descended from the gods; as a Briton he was the son of a lowly farm labourer. As a naval commander Cook was expected to stay aloof and restrained, asserting his superiority

over the 'natives'; as a high chief, he was expected to be loyal to his friends, showering them with gifts and respecting their customs. When Cook forged close associations with a number of island leaders, his relationships with his own men came under pressure, putting shipboard discipline at risk and undermining his authority" (431).

Things changed for the worse in 1777 at Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand, when Cook learned the facts of how, four years earlier, some of his men had been killed and eaten, and that some of his Māori "friends" had deceived him. He became increasingly cynical and prone to violent outbursts. On his ships he became known as "Toote"—"a passionate, unpredictable character" (Salmond, 431). Floggings of his men doubled, and Pacific Islanders were treated with unprecedented severity. Ears were cropped and high chiefs were held hostage. "At both Tonga and Tahiti, local people tried to kill him in revenge for such actions. In Hawai'i they succeeded" (xxi).

Salmond argues that the dynamics on board his ships, as much as the situation in Hawai'i, led to Cook's death. By the time of the crisis at Kealakekua Bay, she says, the captain was offside with his men, his deputy Clerke was seriously ill, and discipline was collapsing. Then, when Cook was attacked, the marines panicked and nearby boats failed to intervene. At the same time, Hawaiian beliefs about Lono, the passage of Makahiki, the quarrels between priests and chiefs, and Cook's friendship with Kalani'opu'u, all came into play. Salmond's concluding point is memorable: "In

order to understand these complex, equivocal zones of action, a two-sided historical ethnography is needed. . . . Polynesian as well as European thinking—the World of Light as well as the Enlightenment—played their part in James Cook’s death, just as Kuki’s and Kalani’opu’u’s bones were mingled. Polynesian as well as European thinking is needed again, to illuminate those cross-cultural exchanges” (431–432).

The specter of J C Beaglehole haunts these two texts, and many of their pages bear the imprints of Bernard Smith, Greg Denning, and Marshall Sahlins. Nevertheless, both are fine exemplars of the historical anthropological method, and each represents a significant addition to the ever-growing library of Captain Cook books. Although on the surface they are rather similar, in reality they are quite distinct. Nicholas Thomas has produced an original “two-sided” biography of the great seafarer, while Anne Salmond has crafted a remarkable “two-sided” ethnography of his encounters with Pacific peoples. But, crucially, whereas the former argues for an overall consistency in Cook’s behavior and considerable variation in the reactions of host cultures, the latter contrasts an increasingly volatile Englishman with a predictable pattern of Polynesian responses. Two very different books—take your pick!

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Sailing in the Wake of the Ancestors: Reviving Polynesian Voyaging, by Ben Finney. Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 2003. ISBN cloth, 1-58178-025-7; paper, 1-58178-024-9; vi + 168 pages, maps, notes, glossary, bibliography, photographs, index. Cloth, US\$24.95; paper, US\$19.95.

Since the 1960s, Oceanic voyaging has become a well-developed area of anthropological inquiry. Most investigations of the subject have adopted one of three approaches. Ethnographic studies commenced with the work of William Alkire (*Lamotrek Atoll and Inter-Island Socioeconomic Ties* [1965]) and Thomas Gladwin (*East is a Big Bird* [1970]) in Micronesia, and with David Lewis’s survey of maritime practices throughout the tropical Pacific (*We, the Navigators* [1972]). Around the same time, M Levinson, R Gerard Ward, and John W Webb pioneered the use of computer simulations (*The Settlement of Polynesia* [1973] and “The Settlement of the Polynesian Outliers,” in Ben Finney’s edited volume, *Pacific Navigation and Voyaging* [1976])—an approach that was later impressively applied by Geoffrey Irwin (*The Pre-historic Exploration and Colonisation of the Pacific* [1976])—to assess the relative probability of early settlement resulting from intentional, as opposed to accidental drift, voyages. The third line of inquiry involves experimental voyaging in reconstructed sailing canoes.

For four decades, Ben Finney has been a leading contributor to experimental voyaging. He was a founder of the Polynesian Voyaging Society,

Anne Salmond. The trial of the cannibal dog. —Close. Donate this book to the Internet Archive library. —Close. Hooray! An edition of The trial of the cannibal dog (2003). The trial of the cannibal dog. Captain Cook in the South Seas. by Anne Salmond. Captain Cook in the South Seas. This edition was published in 2003 by A. Lane in London. Edition Notes. Includes bibliographical references (p. [438]-442) and index. We can recognise in Cook the qualities of the Kiwi battler which might explain his appeal to me, a New Zealander. He was a man of humble origins who rose to prominence in an 18th-century society which in normal circumstances would have firmly denied him entry. He did it through a combination of study, hard work - sometimes dangerous work - risk-taking and the fortunate patronage of men who recognised in him the qualities of good sense and steadiness they themselves lacked, or cynically thought they could exploit. Gunfire and Cook are like 18th-century condiments perched at the side of the Pacific meal table. On the first voyage at least, the Tahitians and Maori quickly appreciated the power of firearms, and Cook had no hesitation in using his guns. Anne Salmond, The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: The Remarkable Story of Captain Cook's Encounters in the South Seas. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2003. xxii + 506 pp. ISBN: 0-300-10092-2. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 22 June 2011. Christon I. Archer. Show author details. Then enter the "name"™ part of your Kindle email address below. Find out more about sending to your Kindle. Find out more about sending to your Kindle. Anne Salmond, The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: The Remarkable Story of Captain Cook's Encounters in the South Seas. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2003. xxii + 506 pp. ISBN: 0-300-10092-2.