

The Lieutenant

Kate Grenville

Author Background

- Birth—October 14, 1950
- Where—Sydney, Australia
- Education—B.A. University of Sydney; M.A. University of Colorado
- Awards—Vogel Award; Orange Prize; Commonwealth Writers Prize,
- Currently—lives in Sydney, Australia

Kate Grenville was born in Sydney, Australia. After completing an Arts degree at Sydney University she worked in the film industry (mainly as an editor) before living in the UK and Europe for several years and starting to write.

In 1980 she went to the USA and completed an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Colorado, where her teachers included Ron Sukenick, Robert Steiner and Steve Katz.

On her return to Australia in 1983 she worked at the Subtitling Unit for SBS Television. In 1984 her first book, a collection of stories — *Bearded Ladies* — was published.

Since then she's published six novels and four books about the writing process (one co-written with Sue Woolfe).

The Secret River (2005) has won many prizes, including the Commonwealth Prize for Literature and the Christina Stead Prize, and has been an international best-seller. (It also formed the basis for a Doctorate of Creative Arts from University of Technology, Sydney). *The Idea of Perfection* (2000) won the Orange Prize.

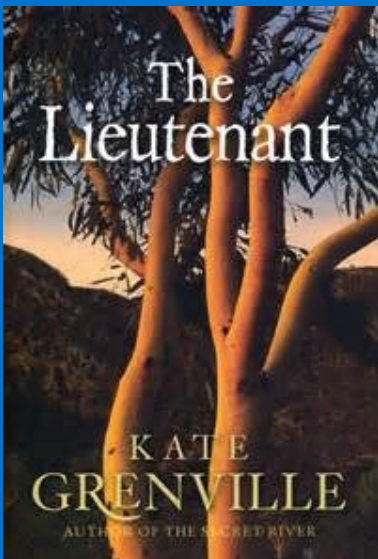
Her other works of fiction have been published to acclaim in Australia and overseas and have won state and national awards. Much-loved novels such as *Lilian's Story* (1985), *Dark Places* (1995), and *Joan Makes History* (1988) have become classics, admired by critics and general readers alike.

Lilian's Story was filmed starring Ruth Cracknell, Toni Collette and Barry Otto. *Dream House* was filmed under the title *Traps*, starring Jacqueline MacKenzie.

Kate Grenville's novels have been widely published in translation, and her books about the writing process are used in many writing courses in schools and universities.

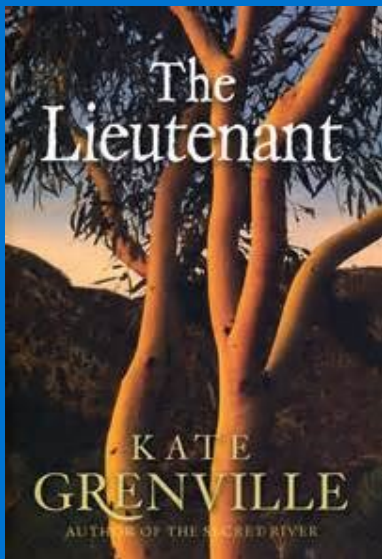
She lives in Sydney with her family.

(From the author's website.)



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Book Summary

The Lieutenant (Thornhill Trilogy 2)

Kate Grenville, 2008

Canongate U.S.

320 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780802145031

A stunning follow-up to her Commonwealth Writers' Prize-winning book, *The Secret River*, Grenville's *The Lieutenant* is a gripping story about friendship, self-discovery, and the power of language set along the unspoiled shores of 1788 New South Wales.

As a boy, Daniel Rooke was always an outsider. Ridiculed in school and misunderstood by his parents, Daniel could only hope, against all the evidence, that he would one day find his place in life. When he enters the marines and travels to Australia as a lieutenant on the First Fleet, Daniel finally sees his chance for a new beginning.

As his countrymen struggle to control their cargo of convicts and communicate with those who already inhabit the land, Daniel immediately constructs an observatory to chart the stars and begin the scientific work he prays will make him famous. But the place where they have landed will prove far more revelatory than the night sky.

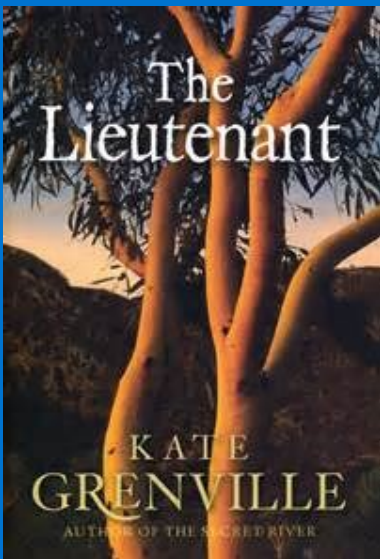
Out on his isolated point, Daniel comes to intimately know the local Aborigines, and forges a remarkable connection with one young girl, Tagaran, that will forever change the course of his life. As the strained coexistence between the Englishmen and the native tribes collapses into violence, Daniel is forced to decide between dedication to his work, allegiance to his country, and his protective devotion to Tagaran and her people.

Inspired by the notebooks of astronomer William Dawes, *The Lieutenant* is a remarkable story about the poignancy and emotional power of a friendship that defies linguistic and cultural barriers, and shows one ordinary man that he is capable of exceptional courage.

(From the publisher.)

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Author's Reading Notes

These days we can hop on a plane and be on the other side of the world in the time it takes to watch a few bad movies and eat a few bad meals. But for the first settlers to Australia in 1788 - a thousand-odd prisoners and their guards - it must have been unimaginably weird and scary.

One of them was a nerdy young lieutenant from Portsmouth, keen on astronomy and Latin: William Dawes. Because he was an astronomer, he was allowed to set up an observatory away from the main camp, and because he was interested in languages, he decided to learn to speak with the Aboriginal people when they started to visit him there. What happened next is recorded in two little blue notebooks which are now in a London manuscript library. When I first read them, I knew I'd come across an amazing story.

Being a man of science, Dawes started by collecting nouns and verbs in alphabetical order and getting excited about the ablative case. But he soon abandoned system and simply wrote down conversations between himself and his visitors, in English and the corresponding Gadigal. One visitor in particular began to dominate the notebooks: a young girl called Patyegarang.

Between the 26-year-old lieutenant and the 12-or 13-year old girl an astonishing (and I believe platonic) relationship is recorded in those worn little books. They came from different planets, and yet these two people had an extraordinary rapport. Even though they knew so few words of each other's language, they were able to have real conversations, sharing ideas, confiding with each other, joking together. The pleasure they took in each other's company still blazes off the page after two hundred years.

It was the puzzle and the power of that relationship that I wanted to explore: that, and the consequences for Dawes. After a settler was speared, the governor sent out a punitive expedition against the local Aborigines. The soldiers - among them Dawes - were ordered to kill six men, decapitate them and bring the heads back to the settlement. Hatchets and bags were thoughtfully provided.

For the young lieutenant it was a life-changing moment.

This was the story I began with, a story full of gaps and mysteries because of the sketchiness of the historical record. But gaps and mysteries are a novelist's delight.

I took the conversations in the notebooks as my starting-point, because the human drama between Dawes and Patyegarang was the emotional heart of the story. I kept the conversations word for word, only inventing a context in which they might have happened.

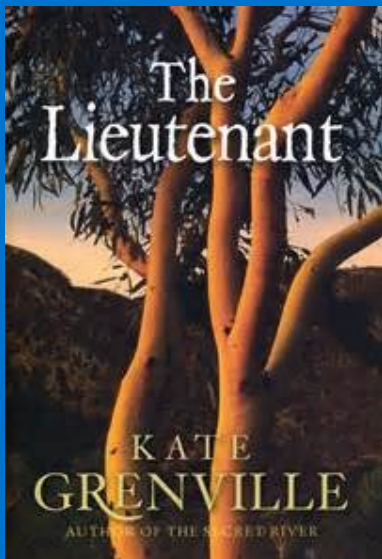
Trying to understand Dawes, I looked for help in the landscape itself, in the place where the story happened. One of the first things I did was to walk from the bay where the first camp was established, out to the point where Dawes lived in his little observatory. I could see that getting there in 1788 would have been a scramble up a steep rocky hillside, and he'd picked out the one place on the headland that was hidden from the settlement.

Standing there, I felt I could work backwards from the place, to the kind of person who might choose it. I thought he might have been a man who enjoyed his own company, and had no fear of being alone in this foreign landscape. That made sense of the man in the notebooks: earnest, yet eager to experience the new world and courageous enough to let himself be drawn into it.

Exploring the congested streets of Old Portsmouth, standing on the ancient stones of The Hard and walking about the navel dockyard, I had the same sense of discovery. It was easy to imagine a serious and rather isolated little boy growing up there, hemmed in by the narrowness of his life but hoping that somewhere out there, beyond the harbour and the sea, his future was waiting for him.

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Author's Reading Notes (continued)

Daniel Rooke isn't William Dawes. My interest in him wasn't about reconstructing history, but in telling the story of a man growing into his full humanity. It was about exploring ideas of communication, about the choices we make when confronted with the strange and the foreign. How do we speak to each other across gulfs of difference?

Dawes has fascinated other writers before me, and no wonder: when he did was astonishing and the record he left of it in those little notebooks is unique. As a starting-point for a work of imagination, the story of his friendship with

Patyegarang - something no novelist would dare to invent - seemed a gift from the cosmos.

[I'm indebted to Tim Flannery for first alerting me to the notebooks, and to the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, for permission to look at the originals.]

How the idea for the book came about

In 1788 a fleet of British ships arrived in Australia to establish a penal settlement: around 800 prisoners and some 200 marines.

One of those marines was a young lieutenant called William Dawes. Although nominally a soldier, he seems to have been a scholar rather than a fighting man - an astronomer, a mathematician and a linguist.

He set up an observatory on an isolated point of land, and the local indigenous people - the Gadigal - visited him there. He began to learn their language, recording what he learned in two small notebooks.

When I came across an extract from these notebooks in 2003, I was galvanised by the amazing story they suggested.

William Dawes

Dawes seems to have begun his language studies with scientific precision, listing verb forms ("I eat, thou eatest, he she or it eats...") and pages for alphabetical word lists. But these grids remain largely blank. What happened instead is that he began to record entire conversations between himself and the Gadigal people, and particularly a young girl named Patyegarang. Scientific detachment was swept away in something much more personal.

Between the lines of those conversations, an astonishing and perhaps unique relationship is recorded. Dawes and Patyegarang clearly enjoyed each other's company and the play of each others' minds. Across gulfs of culture, language, age and perhaps even personality, they forged a friendship that was affectionate, playful and witty.

The emotional intensity that emerges between the lines of the conversations is so powerful that some have thought that their relationship must have been a sexual one. For various reasons, my own feeling is that it was not. Dawes was in his middle twenties: Patyegarang's age is uncertain, but she was probably between about ten and fifteen. My reading of their conversations is that they enjoyed the kind of friendship that sometimes happens between a clever, subtle, confident child and an adult.

At some point in their friendship, one of the settlement's 'gamekeepers' was fatally speared. The governor sent a party of soldiers out to punish the tribe from which the attacker was said to come - neighbours of the Gadigal. Their orders were to capture and bring back six indigenous men, but if this proved 'impracticable', then six were to be killed and their heads cut off and brought back. Hatchets and bags were provided for the purpose.

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Author's Reading Notes (continued)

Dawes was one of the soldiers ordered out on this expedition. He refused to go; was warned of the consequences of disobeying, and agreed to go; but on his return (the party having not made a single capture), he announced that he would refuse to obey any similar order if it were given. For this insubordination he risked court-martial and severe punishment.

He had earlier expressed a wish to stay in the settlement beyond his tour of duty, but he was sent back with the rest of the marines and never returned to Australia.

He spent the rest of his life working for the Abolition movement in London, Africa and the West Indies. When slavery was abolished he set up schools for former slaves and died in Antigua.

So much for the historical record, sketchy and partial as it is. As a novelist, I was gripped (as Jane Rogers and Paul Carter had been before me) by the human drama of what's suggested by it. The rapport between a young indigenous girl and one of His Majesty's marines was extraordinary one - reading about it, it's impossible not to wonder what these two people were like. They spring off the pages of the notebooks not as historical figures but living, breathing human souls.

The choice that Dawes made when ordered on the punitive expedition - a choice between his future prospects and some emotional or moral imperative - is richly enigmatic. Why did he risk severe punishment and disgrace, when doing so made no difference to anything?

Reading the notebooks, there's a strong sense of a person being transformed before our eyes. A man of science discovers another, more fluid way of engaging with the world; a detached observer becomes deeply involved not just intellectually but emotionally; a Lieutenant in His Majesty's service decides he can no longer be part of the imperial machine. In coming to know the Gadigal people, William Dawes was irrevocably changed.

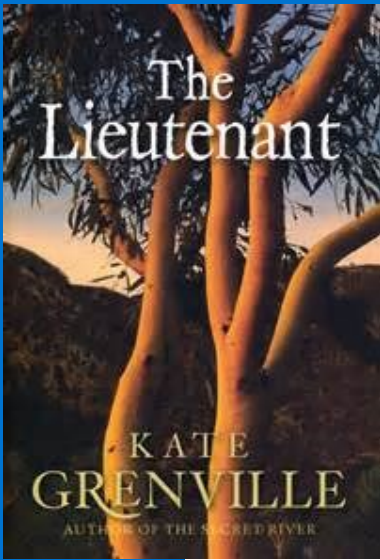
History becomes fiction

All this, then, was the raw material I had to work with in writing a novel. Without the notebooks I would never have thought to imagine a friendship like the one between Dawes and Patyegarang. Even if I had thought such a thing might have happened, I wouldn't have attempted to write it. How would you even begin to invent those unimaginable conversations?

The notebooks excited me because, for all their gaps and mysteries, they recorded, verbatim, conversations around which I could build a story. I'd have to invent the context for the conversations, and I'd have to speculate about the people who spoke the words, and I was uncertain about how appropriate it was to do that. But in the end I felt it was important to try, because this story was one that recorded an aspect of our past - shared between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians - that was hugely important. It records a moment in that shared history where mutual goodwill and generous curiosity created real understanding.

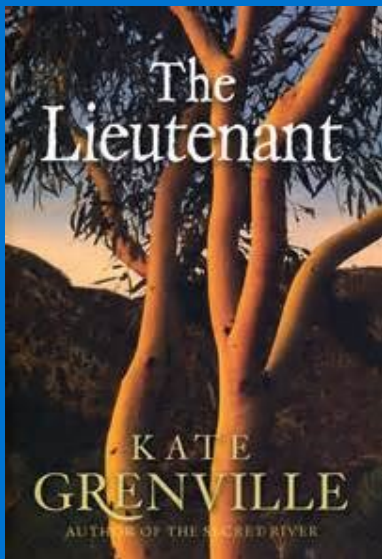
The relationship between this novel and the real events that inspired it is complex - as the relationship between any work of imagination and the world must always be.

For the first several drafts, I stuck closely to the historical sources and used the names of the real people. This was partly because the real story was more intriguing than anything I could have invented, but also out of a sense of respect for the real people and the real events. It was important to me to go as far as I could in understanding what had been recorded before branching off into speculation.



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Author's Reading Notes (continued)

I found as many references to Dawes as I could in the historical record, and researched his life as far as I could. I read his meteorological journal and his letters to the Astronomer Royal in which his voice could be heard. I researched eighteenth-century telescopes and rain-gauges, examined engravings of marines' uniforms, read a blow-by-blow account of the Battle of Chesapeake Bay.

While in the UK on other business I spent time in Portsmouth, where Dawes was born, and at the Greenwich Observatory. I spent a great deal of time on the point in Sydney where Dawes had his observatory (long since vanished, but an archaeologist showed me the rock wall where it had once been). I retraced on foot most of the path the punitive expedition had probably taken, and spent time by night as well as by day on the shores of Botany Bay, where the soldiers had tried to ambush "the Botany Bay tribe".

To try to feel something of the texture of life for the First Fleet, I pored over objects in museums - a pencil repaired with string, for example, or a chipped enamel basin - and asked a botanist friend if he could find the plant called "sweet-tea" by the first settlers. Drinking the tea I made from the leaves he sent me, with its delicately astringent aniseed flavour, made 1788 very real.

But 'real life' - whether in 1788 or 2088 - is not the same as a work of literature. Life is full of gaps of time in which nothing much happens; events which lead nowhere; events which are woven in with other events in a dense inseparable mass. To make this story work as a novel, it would be necessary to streamline, focus, and omit. It would also be necessary to go beyond the record, inventing events and imagining characters.

In moving from the historical record into a work of the imagination, I set myself two broad guidelines. The first was not to invent any dialogue between the Gadigal people and the lieutenant. I would use only what was recorded in the notebooks. The second was - as far as my knowledge went - not to invent out of nowhere. I would omit events that had really happened, I would adapt and alter real events, and I would invent beyond what was recorded, but I would - as far as possible - take the historical record as a starting-point.

So, for example, I telescoped time considerably (the main story in the novel takes about two years while in reality it took about four; the real expedition took three days where in the novel it takes two). I made no mention of important historical moments (the spearing of the Governor or the arrival of the Second Fleet, for example). I moved events that had happened at one time or place to another (the first encounter between black and white is based on an encounter that happened in Botany Bay, not in Port Jackson). I speculated about characters, taking what was known about them as a starting-point but imagining beyond what was recorded. Readers familiar with the accounts of first settlement may recognise aspects of real people in many of the characters and will recognise some recorded events.

As a novelist I have latitude to speculate, to add, to omit, to guess and even to invent. But I also have available to me all the richness of the historical record. In a tradition that goes back to Homer and beyond, I've taken events that took place in the real world and used them as the basis for a work of imagination.

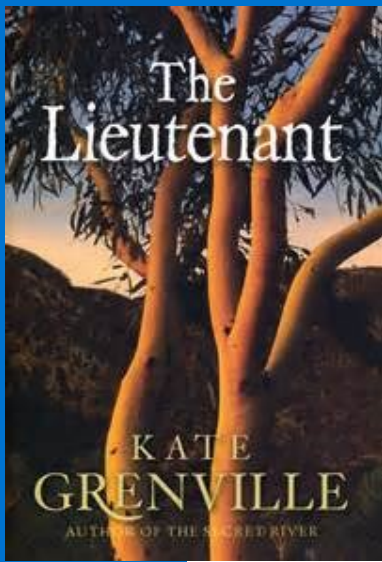
This is a novel, then, not history. But I hope that it might encourage readers to seek out the history of those extraordinary years of first settlement, and to see the continuities and discontinuities between that time and our own. The past may be a foreign country, but we can all try to learn its language.

(From author's webpage)

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Discussion Questions



1. The novel begins with Daniel Rooke's childhood during which he is keenly aware of the "misery of being out of step with the world" (p. 5). Talk about your impressions of Rooke as a young boy, finding instances of his experiences as an outsider, and consider how his childhood prepares him for the life ahead of him.

2. Author Kate Grenville writes with a poet's sensibility, especially apparent in her evocative descriptions of setting throughout the novel. How does the ocean town of Portsmouth, England, with its shingle shore and soft rain shape the young Rooke? Is it a place that symbolizes for him a certain time and mind-set? Why do you think he rarely returns there?

3. "Rooke had his own sacred text in which his God made Himself plain: mathematics ... because to think mathematically was to feel the action of God in oneself" (p. 14). Why does the young Rooke feel so secure in this worldview? Consider again his early years up until his first experiences as a soldier and find evidence that supports his theory, as well as evidence against it.

4. Continue your discussion by talking about the machinery of the army and life in His Majesty's service, a life that appeals to Rooke with its rituals, brass sextant, and days and nights spent beneath the open skies. What is it that makes him finally question this life? Is it possible to be a part of this machine, and still be human? Does Rooke fully understand the implications of this loss of freedom in the name of duty?

5. *The Lieutenant* was inspired by historical events, specifically by the life of William Dawes, a scholar-soldier who sailed from England in 1788 with the so-called First Fleet to transport British prisoners to New South Wales and to set up a colony there. What are your thoughts on using historical fact in a fictional story? How accurate can the history be when filtered through an author's contemporary perspective? Does it undermine the events in any way? In reference to her last book, *The Secret River* (another novel about Australian colonial history), Grenville explained that her aim was to make her book "more true than real." Discuss.

6. In the light of these two quotes, talk about the role of fate in the novel. "He was willing to accept that this was the orbit his life was intended to follow," (p. 41) and "New South Wales was part of a man's destiny" (p. 66). Would you agree that Rooke is more passive than active in following his destiny, certainly in the first part of the novel? What does he want from his life when he signs up for the journey to New South Wales? How far does he attain this? Does he have any particular aspirations for the future or is he too limited to see that far ahead?

7. What does Rooke's father mean by "Begin as you mean to go on" (p. 45)? How does Rooke apply it to his own life?

8. Discuss the importance of Rooke's sister, Anne, in the novel. She is described as "clever enough to recognise the limits of what she understood" (p. 40). Why does Rooke consider such self-knowledge to be a gift? Would his own life have been significantly different if he had been less sure of his own intellect? Analyze the ways in which Rooke's odd intelligence hinders him.

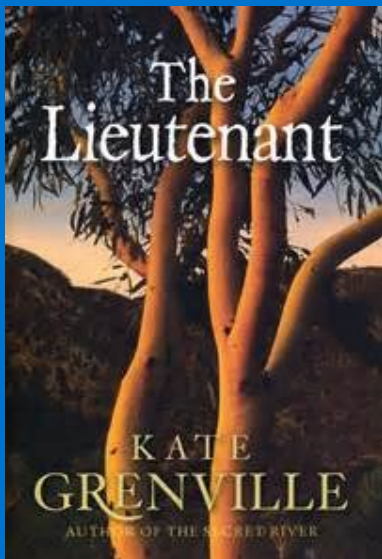
9. Explore the theme of astronomy throughout the novel and consider the reasons that it appeals to Rooke. Chart his dependence on his beloved stars as his human relationships develop, and discuss his fading interest in the appearance of the comet that was his prime reason for travelling to New South Wales. How does his love of astronomy prepare him for his dealings with the new land and people of New South Wales?

10. In many ways Talbot Silk is a foil to his unlikely friend Rooke. Compare and contrast their characters throughout the novel, especially looking into their different perceptions of reality. Talk about Silk's need to embroider the truth, and Rooke's desire to pare it down to its bare essentials. How far do you think they succeed in finding the truth, or at least the truth that they want to perceive? What do their approaches to life and the world say about their personalities? Does Silk's character change or grow during his time in New South Wales?

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Discussion Questions (continued)



11. Continuing this discussion, talk about the way in which Rooke deals with his arrival in New South Wales. Why does he need to quantify everything, plotting and recording the wind, weather, barometer, and thermometer? Is it a matter of carrying out his job or is this the only way he can connect with the world? How successful is he?

12. Discuss the theme of reinvention of self as it occurs throughout the novel. As Rooke moves from one place to another he constantly puts on a new face, trying to become a different person. How far is it possible to reinvent oneself, or is it more a shifting of character, a revealing of new facets? Consider Rooke's thoughts on moving into his

observatory in New South Wales: "Out here, with his thoughts his only company, he could become nothing more or less than the person he was. *Himself*. It was as unexplored a land as this one" (p. 78). How aware is he of the uncharted depths of his own character?

13. As Rooke begins his tentative relationship with the Aborigines he opens himself up to a new culture, a new universe, and discovers a different self that lies within. What is it about this new country and these new people that enables Rooke to grow as a human? And what is it about his old self—compared to Silk, for example—that enables the Aborigines to be freer with him? Talk about the difference between the person the Aborigines refer to as "kamara" and the soldier Lieutenant Daniel Rooke.

14. As Rooke and the young girl Tagaran exchange words and sentences what does Rooke discover about the nature of language? How far is he correct in his early assessment of language? "But language was more than a list of words, more than a collection of fragments all jumbled together like a box of nuts and bolts ... it required someone who could dismantle the machine, see how it worked, and put it to use: a man of system, a man of science" (p. 152). Consider his later statement: "What had passed between Tagaran and himself had gone far beyond *vocabulary* or *grammatical forms*. It was the heart of talking; not just the words and not just the meaning, but the way in which two people had found common ground" (p. 186). What has happened to make Rooke understand language as something organic, as a way of mapping a relationship?

15. Talk about the friendship between Tagaran and Rooke. Were you able to accept it as completely platonic, or were you aware of sexual undertones? How old do you think Tagaran is as it isn't specifically stated in the novel? After refusing to shoot his gun to satisfy Tagaran's curiosity, Rooke is overcome by doubt and suspicion and believes that Tagaran has been using him for information. What were your feelings about this?

16. As Rooke wrestles with doubts about Tagaran and the true nature of their friendship, his whole worldview changes. Everything that he has held to be sacrosanct about the reliability of science is now put into question. Talk about the importance of "the language of doubt, the language that was prepared to admit *I am not sure*" (p. 233). Why is it such a huge emotional step for Rooke to accept this?

17. Since his arrival in New South Wales Rooke has realized that "a man could not travel along two different paths" (p. 218). Analyze some of the ways in which he has attempted to distance himself from his duties as a soldier. Has he ever truly believed that he could continue in this role forever? Find instances of his increasing inability to stay true to both sides, the army and the Aborigines. At what point does his attempt become naive, even ludicrous?

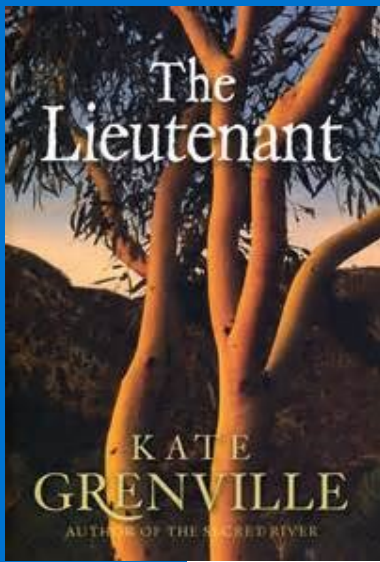
18. How far would you agree that the events of Rooke's life have been slowly moving toward his epiphany on the Botany Bay beach: "If an action was wrong, it did not matter whether it succeeded or not, or how many clever steps you took to make sure it failed. If you were part of such an act, you were part of its wrong ... If you were part of that machine, you were part of its evil" (p. 280). Consider how much he has changed since he realized, years earlier in Antigua, that "His Majesty had no use for any of the thoughts and sensibilities and wishes that a man might contain, much less the disobedience to which he might be inspired" (p. 29). With whom does his duty lie now?

19. Trace Rooke's emotional and moral development throughout the course of the novel ending with his death bed in Antigua. Talk about how far the lonely little boy from Portsmouth has come. Do you believe he finally found "a place, somewhere in the world, for the person he was" (p. 15)?

(questions from www.bookbrowse.com)

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Book Reviews

Grenville (*The Secret River*) delivers another vivid novel about the British colonization of Australia, this one a delightful fictionalization of the life of William Dawes, a soldier-scholar who sailed from England in 1788 with the first fleet to transport British prisoners to New South Wales. Dawes's stand-in is Daniel Rooke, a loner with a passion for mathematics and astronomy who makes a living as a marine. He joins the expedition with the hope of tracking a comet that will not be visible from Great Britain, building a makeshift hut and observatory separate from the settlement (largely so he can avoid his prison guard duties). Although food is insufficient and the marines are outnumbered by the convicts, there is little unrest, but while Daniel shifts his ambitions from identifying previously unnamed stars to discovering a language and culture unknown in England, tensions escalate between the newcomers and the Aborigines, forcing Daniel to choose between duty to his king and loyalty to a land and people he has come to love. Grenville's storytelling shines: the backdrop is lush and Daniel is a wonderful creation—a conflicted, curious and endearing eccentric.

Publishers Weekly

Intellectually gifted but socially awkward, Portsmouth schoolboy Daniel Rooke routinely isolates himself from his peers to explore the mechanisms of logic, arithmetic, and Greek. When a mentor recognizes his potential and introduces him to the study of astronomy, Rooke believes that he has found his place and purpose in life. He volunteers for the marines and signs on as an astronomer with the First Fleet sailing to New South Wales in 1788. After his astronomical studies falter in Australia, Rooke becomes friendly with a group of Aborigines, attempting to learn and transcribe their language. The bond he forms with a girl named Tagaran — who reminds him of his younger sister — takes Rooke by surprise and leads to an unexpected turning point in his life. Verdict: Rooke is a genuine, sensitive protagonist, and this new novel offers a more intimate and optimistic perspective of Australian history than Grenville's award-winning epic, *The Secret River*. Grenville displays a graceful touch with the characters and the history that so clearly move her, and her writing sparkles with life. Highly recommended for readers of literary fiction. —Kelsy Peterson, Johnson County Community Coll. Lib., Overland Park, KS

Library Journal

Veteran Australian author Grenville (*The Secret River*, 2006, etc.) poignantly depicts a man of science forced into a world shaped by action. Growing up in Portsmouth, England, Daniel Rooke is scholarly and bookish, a scientific and mathematical prodigy with minimal social skills and little interest in anything nearer to him than the stars he rapturously observes. Reaching adulthood, Daniel joins His Majesty's Marines as a commissioned officer and navigator, sailing first on a warship patrolling the colonies during the American Revolution. In 1788 he signs on in a similar capacity aboard Sirius, flagship of a fleet bound for Australia to build a penal colony. Grenville subsequently records Daniel's enthralled introduction to this new land's untamed beauty, his hopeful creation of a makeshift observatory, where he can study the mysteries of the southern skies, and his disillusioning perception of his comrade's disdainful indifference to the gentle culture of the local aborigines. An officially ordered act of aggression challenges the integrity of this paradise, destroying Daniel's utopian contentment and his chaste relationship with a beautiful native girl, Tagaran, of whom he and we learn frustratingly little. (Her age and the nature of her feelings for the compassionate Englishman would have been helpful, for starters.) Written with exemplary simplicity and festooned with gorgeous images, the narrative focuses on the meditative inner life of its main character; too many other possibilities are unexplored, too many issues unresolved. Nevertheless, readers' hearts will go out to the grieving Daniel. An involving, affecting novel that should have been even better.

Kirkus Reviews