



The Fatal Impact

Alan Moorehead

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Moorehead has followed up his fascinating trek into Africa (The Blue Nile & The White Nile), with a short, but equally elegant "account of the invasion of the South Pacific, 1761-1840." The hero here, of course, is Captain James Cook, with Moorehead concentrating on the voyage to Tahiti, New Zealand & Australia, & the later exploration of the Antarctic Circle & the South Pole. As acknowledged, he's drawn heavily on the historian J.C. Beaglehole's definitive volumes, as well as from other weighty sources. But this should not dismay the layman. He has the novelist's eye, not only in his firm but sensuous descriptions, but also in his stunning ability to evoke character, interweave various tales, & see a Jumble of facts & conjectures as a means of releasing whatever dramatic moments are around. The confrontation between aggressive Europeans & innocent primitive tribes affords ample opportunity. The book is a requiem for an idyllic past, moving in its picture of a wild civilization slowly eroding under the impact of commercial progress or geographical expansion, exciting in its interplay of differing psychological attitudes or customs, & developed with many crisscrossing references: Bougainville & Banks, Melville & Gauguin, the Bounty mutiny & the little known efforts of the Englishwoman Daisy Bates to save the Aborigines. A lovely, sophisticated work.--Kirkus (edited)

The Fatal Impact Details

Date : Published 2000 by Penguin Books (London) (first published January 1st 1966)

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Author : Alan Moorehead

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Chris says

excellent

Catherine says

Fascinating! I knew nothing of the settlement of Australia except they used to send convicts there, and nothing at all about Captain Cook's explorations of the Pacific islands or Antarctica. I'd read and enjoyed Mutiny on the Bounty, Pitcairn's Island, and Men at Sea, and this book filled in all the context of how these events came to happen. I just picked up Moby Dick again, because of the reference to Herman Melville, and was amazed how the background I just learned increased my understanding and enjoyment of that novel. The Fatal Impact was a joy to read just for the author's skill at story telling. A favorite gripe of mine is that they leave the most interesting history out of schools (or the textbooks make it boring), so we have to stumble on books like this on our own. Thank goodness I did. Looking forward to reading Moorehead's other books now.

David W says

Should be mandatory reading for all Australian high school kids.

James says

We think of Captain Cook as a grand explorer and adventurer living the hero's life. What we don't think of is how his explorations changed the world and continue to affect us all.

Adrian says

Exploration history. Namely what happened in Polynesia, Australia and the Antarctica after Captain Cook made landfall in each. The Tahitians and Aborigines were devastated by European contact and as bad as these are I'm not sure reading about the rape of sea life in Antarctica isn't worse. It's the same old story wherever humans go they hunt wildlife to near extinction if not outright extinction. Moorehead is great on Cook's time in Tahiti and also does justice with Australian explorers Edward Eyre and Daisy Bates.

Peter says

Always great to read about atrocities our European ancestors committed in the name of progress. I remain fascinated by the lives of Cook and Banks, which is what led me to this book in the first place. The history of the early exploration of Australia was rich and deeply interesting. By the end, I'm left with a desire to visit Australia and read Moby Dick. Though not necessarily go to Australia to read Moby Dick.

Tom says

A gem of a book. This modest effort looks at how the discoveries of white man affected inhabitants of several previously undiscovered parts of the world, principally Tahiti, Australia and Antarctica. The author draws mostly on the journals of Captain James Cook from his three voyages but brings in many sources to flesh out the story. It would be easy to dwell on the negative outcome that you know will be coming but the writing is so clear, well rounded and interesting as well as thoroughly documented that somehow at the end you feel good, and maybe even relieved that wrongs have been mitigated and the worst is behind us. Call me Pollyanna but I believe, in spite of our current political situation, we have learned a few things. First being, you can't go wrong with Alan Moorehead.

Ian Carmichael says

It's taken me a long time to get to this 1966 classic. But not long to read it once I did. Alan Moorehead has written a great popular history of Cook and subsequently Europe in the Pacific - in Tahiti and the European impact there, in Australia and the European impact there; in Antarctica and the European impact there. A rattling good read; superb use of primary sources, including the freshly released journals of Cook edited by J C Beaglehole. As well as Beaglehole's personal reading and advice.

One of his other readers was a young Robert Hughes - later to write 'The Fatal Shore'. I learned a lot, and painlessly. Even the small matter of the naming of Rosellas from Rose Hill near the first English settlement in Australia. And the fact that William Dampier's Journals were edited (in 1906) by a certain John Masefield. I might take up his story of the Nile next in this context.

Mary Byrne says

I do like the style of Alan Moorehead. The progression of this book uses as a launch pad the three journeys of Captain Cook. Firstly to Tahiti, then Australia and then the Antarctic. In each case Moorehead manages to illuminate the amazing discoveries, sense of adventure and the sheer expertise of Cook to light. At some points there is even ambling off on a description of Eyre and the crossing of Australia. But woven in with these great discoveries of the eighteenth century is an incredible sensitivity to the outcome of Cooks (and other early explorers) travels and the subsequent spread of Northern Europeans and eventually Americans to overrun indigenous societies and untouched wildlife. Cook himself saw the writing on the wall. This book was written some fifty years ago, and its message still seems relevant.

John Richards says

while reading this book it confirmed i was born a few hundred years too late.

Billy says

This was one of my first books on tape. It started me on the path to reading 205 books from BOT from 1985 until BOT went out of business in 2004. The list of 205 actually stops in 2002 so there are probably a few more to find.

Erik Graff says

Dad served part of WWII in the Southwest Pacific and my ignorance of the area had long been irksome. Consequently, Moorehead's historical account of the Euro-American penetration of the region seemed like a good place to start. Indeed, it was so good, Moorehead being an excellent narrator, that I went on to read a number of his other books.

Andrew says

Pretty good account of Cook's voyages. Old style narrative.
