

# robert hughes the fatal shore

**Robert Hughes The Fatal Shore** is a compelling phrase that often evokes the profound and often brutal history of Australia's convict past. Renowned art critic and historian Robert Hughes famously explored this dark chapter in his acclaimed works, notably in his book titled *The Fatal Shore*. Hughes' detailed examination of Australia's penal colonies sheds light on the harsh realities faced by convicts and the profound impact of their stories on modern Australia. This article delves into the significance of Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*, exploring its themes, historical context, and lasting influence on understanding Australia's colonial legacy.

## Understanding Robert Hughes and His Contribution to Australian History

### Who Was Robert Hughes?

- An influential Australian-born art critic, historian, and author.
- Recognized globally for his insightful commentary on art, culture, and history.
- Known for his engaging writing style and rigorous research.

### Why Focus on The Fatal Shore?

- Published in 1987, the book is considered a definitive account of Australia's convict era.
- It offers a comprehensive narrative of the transportation of convicts from Britain to Australia.
- Hughes combines historical accuracy with compelling storytelling, making history accessible and engaging.

## The Themes of The Fatal Shore

### The Brutality of Penal Colonies

- The book vividly describes the harsh conditions endured by convicts.
- Details include forced labor, brutal punishments, and the oppressive environment.
- Highlights the resilience and ingenuity of convicts in the face of adversity.

### The Transformation of Australia

- Examines how penal colonies laid the groundwork for modern Australian society.
- Discusses the social and cultural impacts of colonization on Indigenous populations.
- Explores the paradox of a land initially used for punishment becoming a

thriving nation.

## **Colonial Justice and Human Rights**

- Analyzes the legal systems and punishments implemented during colonization.
- Critiques the dehumanizing aspects of the penal system.
- Reflects on the legacy of colonial justice and its influence on contemporary human rights issues.

## **Historical Context of Australia's Convict Era**

### **The Beginning of Penal Transportation**

- Initiated in 1788 with the First Fleet arriving at Botany Bay.
- Britain's decision to send convicts overseas was driven by overcrowded prisons and the need for a strategic foothold in the Pacific.
- The transportation period lasted until 1868, spanning nearly 80 years.

### **Life in the Penal Colonies**

- Convicts faced grueling labor in harsh environments such as quarrying, farming, and construction.
- Conditions were characterized by disease, malnutrition, and brutal discipline.
- Some convicts managed to survive, adapt, and even prosper, shaping the early Australian identity.

### **Impact on Indigenous Populations**

- Colonization led to displacement, violence, and cultural disruption for Aboriginal peoples.
- Hughes' narrative emphasizes the often-ignored perspective of Indigenous communities.
- The tragic consequences of colonization are integral to understanding Australia's history.

## **The Legacy of The Fatal Shore and Its Modern Relevance**

### **Reevaluating Australian Identity**

- Hughes' work challenges romanticized notions of Australia's history.
- It prompts reflection on themes of resilience, suffering, and nation-building.
- The book encourages a nuanced understanding of Australia's origins.

## **Influence on Historical Scholarship**

- The Fatal Shore is credited with revitalizing interest in Australia's convict past.
- It has inspired numerous academic studies, documentaries, and cultural discussions.
- The book's detailed research and vivid storytelling serve as a benchmark for historical writing.

## **Educational and Cultural Impact**

- Used in schools and universities to teach Australian history.
- Contributes to public awareness and acknowledgment of colonial injustices.
- Inspires contemporary conversations about reconciliation and Indigenous rights.

## **Key Takeaways from Robert Hughes' The Fatal Shore**

- The transportation of convicts was a brutal, often inhumane process that shaped Australian society.
- Harsh penal conditions tested the resilience of convicts and contributed to the development of a unique Australian identity.
- The colonization process had devastating effects on Indigenous populations, a reality emphasized by Hughes.
- Hughes' narrative offers a balanced view, acknowledging suffering while recognizing the resilience and adaptability of those involved.
- The legacy of the convict era is complex, influencing contemporary Australia's social, cultural, and political landscape.

## **Why Read Robert Hughes' The Fatal Shore Today?**

### **Gaining a Deeper Understanding of Australia's Origins**

- Provides insight into the nation's foundational stories often overlooked in mainstream narratives.
- Challenges simplistic or romanticized views of Australia's past.

### **Appreciating the Human Stories Behind Historical Facts**

- Personal accounts and detailed descriptions humanize history.
- Highlights stories of survival, resistance, and hope amidst adversity.

## **Engaging with Critical Perspectives on Colonialism**

- Encourages critical reflection on the impacts of colonization.
- Promotes awareness of ongoing issues related to Indigenous rights and reconciliation.

## **Conclusion**

Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore* remains a seminal work in Australian history, offering an unflinching look at the brutal realities of the nation's convict past. By combining meticulous research with compelling storytelling, Hughes provides readers with a nuanced understanding of how Australia was shaped by its history of transportation, punishment, and resilience. Whether you are a history enthusiast, a student, or simply curious about Australia's origins, engaging with *The Fatal Shore* offers invaluable insights into the complex legacy that continues to influence the country today. The book's enduring relevance underscores the importance of confronting difficult histories to foster a more informed and empathetic understanding of national identity.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Who is Robert Hughes and what is 'The Fatal Shore' about?**

'The Fatal Shore' is a book by Robert Hughes that explores the history of Australia's colonization, focusing on the convict transportation system and its impact on the country's development.

### **Why is Robert Hughes' 'The Fatal Shore' considered a significant work?**

'The Fatal Shore' is regarded as a comprehensive and groundbreaking account of Australia's convict past, shedding light on the harsh realities faced by convicts and influencing historical perspectives.

### **What are some key themes explored in Robert Hughes' 'The Fatal Shore'?**

Key themes include colonization, punishment, survival, the social and political implications of convict transportation, and Australia's development as a nation.

### **Has 'The Fatal Shore' been adapted into other media or inspired related works?**

Yes, 'The Fatal Shore' has inspired documentaries, academic studies, and influenced Australian historical discourse, although it remains primarily a literary and historical book rather than a media adaptation.

## **What has been the critical reception of Robert Hughes' 'The Fatal Shore'?**

The book has been praised for its detailed research, vivid storytelling, and comprehensive portrayal of Australia's convict history, though some critics have debated its interpretations of the colonial impact.

## **How does Robert Hughes portray the convicts in 'The Fatal Shore'?**

Hughes depicts convicts as complex individuals subjected to brutal conditions, emphasizing their resilience and the brutal realities of the penal system.

## **What impact did 'The Fatal Shore' have on Australian national identity?**

The book contributed to a deeper understanding of Australia's colonial origins, influencing national conversations about history, identity, and the legacy of colonization.

## **Are there any recent discussions or trending topics related to Robert Hughes' 'The Fatal Shore'?**

Recent discussions often focus on its historical accuracy, its role in shaping Australian identity, and comparisons with contemporary views on colonization and justice.

## **Where can I find the latest editions or related works by Robert Hughes on this topic?**

Latest editions of 'The Fatal Shore' are available in bookstores and libraries, and related works by Robert Hughes can be found through academic databases, online retailers, and archives specializing in Australian history.

## **Additional Resources**

Robert Hughes The Fatal Shore: An In-Depth Examination of a Pivotal Historical Narrative

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Introduction: The Significance of The Fatal Shore in Historical Literature

Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore* stands as a landmark work in the realm of Australian history and colonial studies. Published in 1987, Hughes's seminal book offers an expansive and gripping portrayal of the early convict settlement of Australia, painting a vivid picture of hardship, survival, and the complex web of social, political, and cultural forces that shaped the continent's destiny. As both a historian and a critic renowned for his incisive analysis, Hughes's *The Fatal Shore* transcends mere chronicle; it interrogates the brutal realities of penal colonization while engaging readers with compelling storytelling.

This article seeks to explore the multifaceted aspects of Hughes's work, its historical significance, thematic depth, and enduring influence. By dissecting its structure, content, and critical reception, we aim to understand how *The Fatal Shore* has contributed to the broader understanding of Australia's colonial past and its ongoing cultural dialogue.

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## Background and Context: Setting the Stage for *The Fatal Shore*

### Historical Context of Penal Colonization

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the British Empire sought a solution to its burgeoning prison population. The American Revolution had cut off the previous exiled colony in North America, prompting Britain to establish penal settlements elsewhere—most notably in Australia. The First Fleet's arrival in 1788 marked the beginning of a brutal, often tragic chapter in history, characterized by forced labor, systemic violence, and the struggle for survival faced by convicts and settlers alike.

Hughes's narrative is rooted in this tumultuous period, weaving together archival research, personal accounts, and contemporary scholarship to offer a comprehensive picture of the early years of Australian colonization.

### Robert Hughes: The Historian and Cultural Critic

Robert Hughes (1938–2012), an Australian-born critic and historian, was renowned for his sharp wit, cultural insight, and rigorous approach to history. His previous works spanned art criticism, cultural commentary, and social history, equipping him with a unique perspective that permeates *The Fatal Shore*. Hughes's ability to blend storytelling with critical analysis lends the book its compelling power, making complex historical events accessible and engaging to a broad readership.

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## Structural Analysis: How Hughes Crafts His Narrative

### Organization and Approach

*The Fatal Shore* is organized thematically and chronologically, beginning with the origins of British penal policy, moving through the voyage of the First Fleet, and culminating in the establishment of the penal colony and its societal implications. Hughes employs a multi-layered approach, combining:

- Narrative storytelling: Personal accounts and anecdotes to humanize historical figures.
- Analytical commentary: Critical insights into the political and social forces at play.
- Cultural critique: Reflection on the legacy of colonization and its representation in Australian identity.

This structure allows Hughes to traverse vast stretches of time and space while maintaining narrative coherence and thematic depth.

### Use of Sources and Evidence

Hughes's meticulous research is evident in his extensive use of primary sources—such as letters, official reports, and convict testimonies—and

secondary scholarship. He synthesizes these sources to construct a nuanced perspective, often challenging romanticized or sanitized versions of history prevalent in popular narratives.

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## Thematic Deep Dive: Core Ideas of The Fatal Shore

### The Brutality of Penal Life

One of the central themes of Hughes's work is the extreme brutality inflicted upon convicts. He vividly describes:

- The harsh punishments, including floggings and solitary confinement.
- The grueling labor in penal settlements.
- The prevalence of disease and mortality.
- The psychological toll of incarceration and exile.

Hughes emphasizes that the penal system was designed not only to punish but to break spirits, setting the tone for the colony's brutal origins.

### The Human Cost and Personal Stories

Hughes dedicates significant space to individual stories, offering insights into the lives of convicts, soldiers, and settlers. These narratives serve to:

- Illustrate the diversity of backgrounds among convicts, from petty thieves to political prisoners.
- Highlight acts of resilience and rebellion.
- Humanize historical figures, moving beyond abstract statistics.

This focus underscores the human dimension often missing from traditional history.

### The Role of Authority and Power Dynamics

The book critically examines the exercise of authority, exploring how:

- The colonial administration maintained control through violence and surveillance.
- Power was wielded unevenly, often oppressing the vulnerable.
- The legal and penal systems reflected broader imperial ambitions.

Hughes portrays authority as both necessary and oppressive, raising questions about justice and morality.

### Cultural and Social Impact

Beyond the immediate penal context, Hughes discusses:

- The development of Australian cultural identity rooted in the penal past.
- The legacy of violence, dispossession, and resilience.
- The shaping of Australian democracy and social norms.

He posits that understanding the colony's origins is essential to grasping contemporary Australian society.

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## Critical Reception and Impact

### Academic and Public Response

The Fatal Shore received widespread acclaim for its meticulous research and compelling narrative style. Scholars praised Hughes for:

- Challenging romanticized notions of Australia's origins.
- Providing a balanced yet visceral account of colonization.
- Stimulating debate on the ethical dimensions of penal history.

Some critics, however, debated Hughes's emphasis on brutality and whether his portrayal risked overshadowing the colony's later development and contributions.

### Influence on Australian Historiography

Hughes's work is credited with transforming Australian historiography by:

- Bringing convict history to mainstream consciousness.
- Encouraging a more critical examination of colonial narratives.
- Inspiring subsequent works exploring Australia's complex history.

The book also influenced cultural representations, including exhibitions, documentaries, and educational curricula.

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## The Legacy of The Fatal Shore

### Cultural and Educational Significance

Today, The Fatal Shore remains a foundational text in Australian history. Its detailed portrayal of the colony's origins informs debates on:

- Indigenous dispossession.
- National identity.
- The ongoing impact of colonialism.

Hughes's work is used extensively in academic settings and continues to shape public understanding.

### Contemporary Relevance

In an era increasingly attentive to historical justice, Hughes's exploration of violence and resilience resonates with contemporary discussions about reconciliation and national memory. His unflinching account serves as a reminder of the darker chapters in Australia's history, urging society to confront and learn from the past.

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## Conclusion: The Fatal Shore as a Monumental Historical Achievement

Robert Hughes's The Fatal Shore stands as a monumental achievement in historical writing, blending rigorous scholarship with compelling storytelling. Its exploration of the brutal origins of Australia challenges sanitized narratives and invites a nuanced understanding of the nation's past. Hughes's critical perspective, focus on human stories, and thematic

depth have cemented the book's place as a seminal text that continues to influence historians, cultural critics, and the broader public.

In examining the legacy of *The Fatal Shore*, it becomes clear that Hughes's work not only documents history but also prompts ongoing reflection on justice, resilience, and the complex tapestry of identity that defines Australia today. As such, it remains an essential read for anyone seeking to understand the depths of Australia's colonial foundations and their enduring implications.

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Note: For further engagement, readers are encouraged to explore related works on Australian history, penal reform, and post-colonial studies to deepen their understanding of the themes presented in Hughes's *The Fatal Shore*.

## **Robert Hughes The Fatal Shore**

**robert hughes the fatal shore: The Fatal Shore** Robert Hughes, 1988-02-12 NATIONAL BESTSELLER • This incredible true history of the colonization of Australia explores how the convict transportation system created the country we know today. One of the greatest non-fiction books I've ever read ... Hughes brings us an entire world. —Los Angeles Times Digging deep into the dark history of England's infamous efforts to move 160,000 men and women thousands of miles to the other side of the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hughes has crafted a groundbreaking, definitive account of the settling of Australia. Tracing the European presence in Australia from early explorations through the rise and fall of the penal colonies, and featuring 16 pages of illustrations and 3 maps, *The Fatal Shore* brings to life the history of the country we thought we knew.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes** Brian Elkner, 1988

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**robert hughes the fatal shore: Uncorrected Proof** Robert Hughes, 2003 How Australia was born out of the suffering and brutality of England's infamous convict transportation system - the epic story of a jail that became a flourishing nation, from the landing of the first fleet in 1788 to the last, 80 turbulent years later.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: The Real Matilda** Miriam Dixson, 1999 The Real Matilda book investigates the Australian experience of women in colonial times, and asks how far Australians have moved beyond formative influences - elites, convicts, the Irish - which have led to discriminatory

attitudes towards women.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Mutiny and Maritime Radicalism in the Age of Revolution** Clare Anderson, Niklas Frykman, Lex Heerma van Voss, Marcus Rediker, 2013-12-19 This volume explores mutiny and maritime radicalism in its full geographic extent during the Age of Revolution.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: The Food and Drink of Sydney** Heather Hunwick, 2018-03-22 Sydney, famed for its setting and natural beauty, has fascinated from the day it was conceived as an end-of-the-world repository for British felons, to its current status as one of the world's most appealing cities. This book recounts, and celebrates, the central role food has played in shaping the city's development from the time of first human settlement to the sophisticated, open, and cosmopolitan metropolis it is today. The reader will learn of the Sydney region's unique natural resources and come to appreciate how these shaped food habits through its pre-history and early European settlement; how its subsequent waves of immigrants enriched its food scene; its love-hate relationship with alcohol; its markets, restaurants, and other eateries; and, how Sydneysiders, old and new, eat at home. The story concludes with a fascinating review of the city's many significant cookbooks and their origins, and some iconic recipes relied upon through what is, for a global city, a remarkably brief history.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: The Pain of Unbelonging** , 2007-01-01 Beyond the obvious and enduring socio-economic ravages it unleashed on indigenous cultures, white settler colonization in Australasia also inflicted profound damage on the collective psyche of both of the communities that inhabited the contested space of the colonial world. The acute sense of alienation that colonization initially provoked in the colonized and colonizing populations of Australia and New Zealand has, recent studies indicate, developed into an endemic, existential pathology. Evidence of the psychological fallout from the trauma of geographical deracination, cultural disorientation and ontological destabilization can be found not only in the state of anomie and self-destructive patterns of behaviour that now characterize the lives of indigenous Australian and Maori peoples, but also in the perpetually faltering identity-discourse and cultural rootlessness of the present descendants of the countries' Anglo-Celtic settlers. It is with the literary expression of this persistent condition of alienation that the essays gathered in the present volume are concerned. Covering a heterogeneous selection of contemporary Australasian literature, what these critical studies convincingly demonstrate is that, more than two hundred years after the process of colonisation was set in motion, the experience that Germaine Greer has dubbed 'the pain of unbelonging' continues unabated, constituting a dominant thematic concern in the writing produced today by Australian and New Zealand authors.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Unmapping the 21st Century** Nicholas Michelsen, Neville Bolt, 2022-07-28 The 21st century has been characterized by great turbulence, climate change, a global pandemic, and democratic decay. Drawing on post-structural political theory, this book explores two dominant concepts used to make sense of our disturbed reality: the state and the network. The book explains how they are inextricably interwoven, while showing why they complicate the way we interpret our present. In seeking a better understanding of today's world, this book argues that we need to pull apart the familiar lines of our maps. By looking beneath and across these lines, an 'unmapping' presents new insights and opportunities for a better future.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Novel Images** Peter Reynolds, 2013-07-18 Written specifically with the student in mind and focusing on a number of well-known texts, including *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Nice Work* and *The Color Purple*, the contributions in this book demonstrate how we can look critically at literary adaptations and learn to distinguish between mythical images and the reality of the process that constructed them. They argue that adaptations should not be seen as secondary or marginal, because through them we can enter into an exciting debate with the literary text itself. Originally published in 1993.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Animal Nation** Adrian Franklin, 2006 Traces the complex relationship between animals and humans in Australia. Starts with the colonial period and brings us

full circle to the present when native species are protected above all others.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Illuminating Lives** Bill Nasson, Vivian Bickford-Smith, 2018-09-01 In this fresh and highly readable collection of South African biographical essays, a distinguished group of authors illuminate the lives of eleven colourful and complex men and women whose personal experiences throw fascinating light on the times in which they lived. The individuals whose stories are told here are very different in time, in place and in work and at play, but are united by an abundantly rich humanity and by the fascinatingly different ways in which they navigated their existence through the uneven waters of South Africa's distant and more recent past. Including administrators and activists, sportsmen and teachers, a missionary, a pilot, a painter and a poet, *Illuminating Lives* is a wide-ranging and moving book which provides readers with striking and unexpected insights into history. Here are some intriguing South African lives well worth knowing about.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: New Perspectives on the History of Gender and Empire** Ulrike Lindner, Dörte Lerp, 2018-08-09 *New Perspectives on the History of Gender and Empire*, an open access book, extends our understanding of the gendered workings of empires, colonialism and imperialism, taking up recent impulses from gender history, new imperial history and global history. The authors apply new theoretical and methodological approaches to historical case studies around the globe in order to redefine the complex relationship between gender and empire. The chapters deal not only with 'typical' colonial empires like the British Empire, but also with those less well-studied, such as the German, Russian, Italian and U.S. empires. They focus on various imperial formations, from colonies in Africa or Asia to settler colonial settings like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, to imperial peripheries like the Dodecanese or the Black Sea Steppe. The book deals with key themes such as intimacy, sexuality and female education, as well as exploring new aspects like the complex marriage regimes some empires developed or the so-called 'servant debates'. It also presents several ways in which imperial formations were structured by gender and other categories like race, class, caste, sexuality, religion, and citizenship. Offering new reflections on the intimate and personal aspects of gender in imperial activities and relationships, this is an important volume for students and scholars of gender studies and imperial and colonial history. The ebook editions of this book are available open access under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence on [bloomsburycollection.com](http://bloomsburycollection.com). Open access was funded by Knowledge Unlatched.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: The House of the Dead** Daniel Beer, 2017-01-03 Winner of the Cundill History Prize *The House of the Dead* tells the incredible hundred-year-long story of "the vast prison without a roof" that was Russia's Siberian penal colony. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the Russian Revolution, the tsars exiled more than a million prisoners and their families east. Here Daniel Beer illuminates both the brutal realities of this inhuman system and the tragic and inspiring fates of those who endured it. Siberia was intended to serve not only as a dumping ground for criminals and political dissidents, but also as new settlements. The system failed on both fronts: it peopled Siberia with an army of destitute and desperate vagabonds who visited a plague of crime on the indigenous population, and transformed the region into a virtual laboratory of revolution. A masterly and original work of nonfiction, *The House of the Dead* is the history of a failed social experiment and an examination of Siberia's decisive influence on the political forces of the modern world.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: The Architecture of the Museum** Michaela Giebelhausen, 2003-11-08 From the Louvre to the Bilbao Guggenheim and Tate Modern, the museum has had a long-standing relationship with the city. Examination of the meaning of museum architecture in the urban environment, considering issues such as forms of civic representation, urban regeneration, cultural tourism and the museumification of the city itself. Ranging from the seventeenth century to the present day, case-studies are drawn from Europe, South America and Australia. Contributions written by J.Birksted, V.Fraser, H.Lewi, D.J.Meijers and others.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Mobility in the Victorian Novel** Charlotte Mathieson, 2015-09-13 *Mobility in the Victorian Novel* explores mobility in Victorian novels by authors including

Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. With focus on representations of bodies on the move, it reveals how journeys create the place of the nation within a changing global landscape.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Left for Dead** Eric Jay Dolin, 2024-05-07 The true story of five castaways abandoned on the Falkland Islands during the War of 1812—a tale of treachery, shipwreck, isolation, and the desperate struggle for survival. In *Left for Dead*, Eric Jay Dolin—“one of today’s finest writers about ships and the sea” (American Heritage)—tells the true story of a wild and fateful encounter between an American sealing vessel, a shipwrecked British brig, and a British warship in the Falkland archipelago during the War of 1812. Fraught with misunderstandings and mistrust, the incident left three British sailors and two Americans, including the captain of the sealer, Charles H. Barnard, abandoned in the barren, windswept, and inhospitable Falklands for a year and a half. With deft narrative skill and unequaled knowledge of the very pith of the seafaring life, Dolin describes in vivid and harrowing detail the increasingly desperate existence of the castaways during their eighteen-month ordeal—an all-too-common fate in the Great Age of Sail. A tale of intriguing complexity, with surprising twists and turns throughout—involving greed, lying, bullying, a hostile takeover, stellar leadership, ingenuity, severe privation, endurance, banishment, the great value of a dog, the birth of a baby, a perilous thousand-mile open-ocean journey in a seventeen-foot boat, an improbable rescue mission, and legal battles over a dubious and disgraceful wartime prize—*Left for Dead* shows individuals in wartime under great duress acting both nobly and atrociously, and offers a unique perspective on a pivotal era in American maritime history.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Monstrous Spaces: The Other Frontier**, 2019-01-04 This volume was first published by Inter-Disciplinary Press in 2013. *Monstrous Spaces: The Other Frontier*, is a collection of essays presented during the First Global Conference of Monstrous Geography held at Manchester College, Oxford. When examining monstrous geographies, we encounter an Other frontier, a space that runs counter to the socially constructed space of culture that at the same time includes, overlaps, and co-occupies the cultural landscape.

**robert hughes the fatal shore: Burning Bush** Stephen J. Pyne, 2014-10-07 From the time of the continent's formation tens of millions of years ago as the Godwana twin of Antarctica, Australia has been dominated by fire much as its sister has been by ice. Now Stephen Pyne, one of our foremost environmental historians, proposes a major reinterpretation of the Australian experience by using fire and Australia to explain one another. He narrates the story of how fire came to Australia and interacted with the Australian biota and its human inhabitants, while at the same time he relates the planetary saga of fire as it has been played out on this special island continent. Much as the Aborigines exploited fire to remake their environment into something more usable, so Stephen Pyne exploits fire to transform the landscape of history into something more accessible, to use its transmuting power to extract new meaning out of familiar events. Pyne traces the impact of fire, from its initial influence on the evolving vegetation of the new continent, through its use by the Aborigines and the subsequent European settlers, to the holocaust of February 1983 known as Ash Wednesday, and he shows us that the dynamic nature of fire has made it a most powerful environmental determinant in Australia, shaping both its social and natural histories. In his critically acclaimed study of Antarctica, *The Ice*, Pyne explored the myriad dimensions of the cold continent; now *Burning Bush* offers us an equally absorbing examination of a continent informed by fire.

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