



**ALAN**

a rediscovery

**MOOREHEAD**

Ann Moyal

# Alan Moorehead

## *A Rediscovery*

ANN MOYAL

Some content in this online publication may be in copyright. You may only use in copyright material for permitted uses, please see <http://www.nla.gov.au/copiesdirect/help/copyright.html> for further information. If in doubt about whether your use is permitted, seek permission from the copyright holder. In addition, please follow the links or otherwise contact the relevant institutional owners of images to seek permission if you wish to use their material.

Published by the National Library of Australia  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

©National Library of Australia and Ann Moyal 2005

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Moyal, Ann (Ann Mozley), 1926– .

Alan Moorehead : A Rediscovery.

ISBN 0 642 27616 1.

1. Moorehead, Alan, 1910–1983. 2. War correspondents—  
Australia—Biography. 3. Journalists—Australia—  
Biography. 4. Historians—Australia—Biography. I.  
National Library of Australia. II. Title. (Series : An  
Australian life).

070.92

Publisher's editor: Leora Kirwan

Designer: Kathryn Wright

Printer: van Gastel Printing Pty Ltd

Every reasonable endeavour has been made to contact relevant copyright holders. Where this has not been possible, copyright holders are invited to contact the publisher.

# *Contents*

Illustrations	vi
Acknowledgments	ix
Preface	xi
Chapters	
1 The Making of a Journalist	i
2 'The Prince of War Correspondents'	ii
3 Echoes of Battle	27
4 The Mediterranean Man	39
5 Gallipoli	53
6 A Love Affair with Africa	67
7 Cooper's Creek	81
8 The Australian	95
9 The Writer	111
Notes on Sources	121
Endnotes	124
Index	134



## List of Illustrations

Cover: *Portrait of Alan Moorehead* by Karl Pollak

Page ii: *Portrait of Alan Moorehead* [1965] by Louis Kahan

Page xiv: First passport to the rest of the world, with *Herald* letter 1936

Page 8: Alan Moorehead and Lucy in Rome on their wedding day 1939

Page 10: Alan Moorehead with his friend and colleague Alexander Clifford in the Western Desert, 1940s

Page 25: Letter from Alan Moorehead  
to Lord Beaverbrook, July 1946

Page 26: Field Marshal Montgomery, 1940s

Page 38: Alan Moorhead receiving the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize for  
*Gallipoli* from Winston Churchill, 1956

Page 52: Cover of *Gallipoli*

Page 63: Angus & Robertson window display of books by Alan  
Moorehead, 1956

Page 66: Alan Moorehead on the Nile

Page 80: Cover of *Cooper's Creek*

Page 88: Hand-corrected typescript page of the first draft of  
*Cooper's Creek*

Page 94: Alan Moorehead in Antarctica, 1964

Page 98: Alan Moorehead with Sidney Nolan in Shackleton's hut,  
Antarctica, 1964

Page 110: Alan Moorehead at the Great Barrier Reef, 1965

## *Books by Alan Moorehead*

*Mediterranean Front*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941

*A Year of Battle*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1943

*The End in Africa*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943

*African Trilogy: The North African Campaign 1940–43*,  
London: Hamish Hamilton, 1944

*Eclipse*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945

*Montgomery*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1946

*The Rage of the Vulture*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948

*The Villa Diana*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951

*The Traitors: The Double Life of Fuchs, Pontecorvo and Nunn May*,  
London: Hamish Hamilton, 1952

*Rum Jungle*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953

*A Summer Night*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954

*Winston Churchill in Trial and in Triumph*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955

*Gallipoli*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956

*The Russian Revolution*, Geneva: Edito-Service; distributed by Heron  
Books, 1958

*No Room in the Ark*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1959

*Churchill: A Pictorial Biography*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1960

*The White Nile*, New York: Harper, 1960

*The Blue Nile*, New York: Harper and Row, 1962

*Cooper's Creek*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963

*The Fatal Impact: An Account of the Invasion of the Pacific 1767–1840*,  
London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966

*Darwin and the Beagle*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969

*A Late Education*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970

To Manning and Dymphna Clark,  
in memory

# *Acknowledgments*

I have much cause for grateful acknowledgments to many people for their assistance and stimulus to me in the writing of this book.

I first discussed the idea of such a book with Helen Kon, Assistant Director-General and head of the National Library of Australia's Public Programs Division, and received her lively encouragement. Thereafter Dr Paul Hetherington, Director of Publications and a self-confessed admirer of Alan Moorehead's writings since his youth, invited me to write a short biography in the Library's new series, *An Australian Life*. My thanks are due to them both.

Graeme Powell, Manuscript Librarian, gave me his knowledgeable help and guidance during my research on the large collection of Alan Moorehead papers held in the Library. I have also been most ably assisted by the staff of the Manuscript Reading Room, and, as always, I have benefited from the sustained and friendly assistance of the Petherick Room librarians.

My editor, Leora Kirwan, has added meticulously and imaginatively to the book's production.

My thanks are also due to Jinx Nolan for allowing privileged access to Cynthia Nolan's papers held in the Manuscript Collection of the National Library and for her permission to publish several extracts from the correspondence of Alan Moorehead and Sidney Nolan.

Late in 2003, in the course of drafting its chapters, I had the great pleasure of a three-week residential General Retreat Fellowship at Varuna, the Eleanor Dark Foundation at Katoomba. There, in the beautiful setting of the Blue Mountains, the peaceful concentration and the wonderful food and accommodation afforded by the Fellowship, together with the company of a small group of other writers, offered singular encouragement to writing. It was an enlivening and memorable experience and a privilege which I acknowledge with gratitude.

My particular thanks are due to Caroline Moorehead who has provided me with insightful reflections about her father and her mother, and to John Moorehead for his recollections about a father who was often absent but maintained contact with his children during his travels through 'excellent letters' that gave advice and suggestions 'always worth reading'.

Other stimulus and encouraging ideas have also come from a number of people who have read and been influenced, professionally or personally, by Alan Moorehead's books. They include Sir David Attenborough, who started his career of travelling the globe and producing wildlife documentaries for the BBC after reading Moorehead's 'wonderful book, *The White Nile*'; Phillip Knightley, who, being given Moorehead's war publications *African Trilogy* and *Eclipse* to read as a young cadet on the *Sydney Telegraph*, determined to set off for Britain and a career as a distinguished journalist and writer; and Patrick Walters of *The Australian* who was profoundly influenced by *A Late Education* when he was a student at The King's School, Parramatta and set his sights on a career as a journalist, reader and traveller, all of which he has become.

Others have been very constructive and helpful to me in various ways. Jamie Mackie has been a vital discussant, reader and editor and I thank him for his invaluable contribution. I would also like to thank Professors Bernard Smith, Ken Inglis, and A.G.L. Shaw, Dr John Thompson, Dr Carolyn Rasmussen, Jan Nicholas, Mimi Hurley and Anna Lanyon for their timely and most useful communications.

ANN MOYAL

Canberra, 2004

## Preface

Across the first quarter century that blossomed after World War 2, Alan Moorehead was a literary star, one of the most successful writers in English of his day. Born in Melbourne in 1910 and educated at Scotch College and Melbourne University, he had by the 1960s built a larger international reputation than any other Australian writer. As Britain's most renowned war correspondent, the acclaimed author of a series of outstanding works on the campaigns of World War 2, the biographer of Montgomery and Churchill, a prolific international journalist, a historical writer, novelist, and a major travel writer of his time, Moorehead was a household name in Britain and widely admired in the United States of America for both his books and his articles in the *New Yorker*. At the same time, the translation of his works into a medley of European languages—French, German, Italian, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish—and into Hebrew, Egyptian, Arabic and Japanese, engaged audiences around the world.

Yet as an Australian expatriate living in Britain and Italy and a major contributor to Australian and world history, Alan Moorehead has been less recognised in his own country than abroad. By the early 1960s, several American universities, building their collections of significant writers of the twentieth century, sought to make his personal papers the core of important new Australian collections in their keeping. In Australia, by contrast, entries on Moorehead in anthologies of Australian writers and historians are scant. Few readers today are familiar with his books, and even fewer among the younger generation know his name.

During his lifetime—he died in 1983—Moorehead's books went into multiple editions. During the last decade, several of his historical works were reprinted in Britain while Text Publishing, Melbourne, reissued his outstanding Desert War collective, *African Trilogy*, *Eclipse* and his autobiographical, *A Late Education*. However, apart from



Michael Heyward's discerning introduction to the latter, Peter Sekules' overview of war correspondents in *A Handful of Hacks*, my own 'War Correspondent and War Historian Extraordinary' in *Australian Communication Lives*, and the brief echo of his name in a few edited travel writings, Moorehead has been critically overlooked.

In 1990, Tom Pocock, a younger war correspondent from World War 2, published a highly praised and illuminating biography, *Alan Moorehead*, celebrating Moorehead's career as a war correspondent and his active and adventurous life. But while it traces Moorehead's personal trajectory and his relations with wartime friends and colleagues and his wife and family (to whose private papers in London, the Moorehead family correspondence, he had valuable access), it pays scant evaluative attention to the books that made Alan Moorehead such an outstanding writer of history.

This portrait aims to redress the balance and to provide an Australian viewpoint. In this it has been greatly aided by the fact that, while Alan Moorehead's career was conducted principally in England and Europe, he ignored the eager offers received from abroad and chose to deposit his extensive personal papers in the National Library of Australia.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of the papers was a motivating force for this biography, for the National Library, and for me. However, my interest in Moorehead ran deeper. I had been given a copy of *Gallipoli* by my parents at its publication in 1956 and it moved and marked me. Nine years later, in early 1965, when Moorehead was visiting this country, I was invited by Manning and Dymphna Clark to dine at their Canberra home where this distinguished man, with his strong dark brows, his candid blue eyes, and immense vitality, was the other guest. Moorehead was then in Australia writing articles on the local fauna for the Australian press and I was on a visit from a period of residence in the United States of America. There, as Dymphna served one of her great *boeuf bourguignons*, our meeting struck lively sparks. Both of us, at one time in our careers, had worked

for that powerful and influential press proprietor, Lord Beaverbrook, Moorehead as a celebrated war correspondent for *The Daily Express* from 1939 to 1945, and I, from 1954 to 1958, as Beaverbrook's personal research assistant when this dynamic septuagenarian was preparing to become a historian with his study of the politicians and generals of World War 1, *Men and Power*.

Together we found much agreement, and some differences. Moorehead judged Lord Beaverbrook a dominant and imperious master, politically and humanly little to his liking, while I, travelling the world with him and plunging into his remarkable papers and participant recollections, found 'the Lord' an enthralling employer and rewarding friend. I did not meet Alan Moorehead again but I carried a vivid remembrance of him and his writings and, in the late 1990s, became involved in a posthumous collaboration when invited, by the Sydney publishers Mead and Beckett, to contribute captions and new boxed information to their superbly illustrated editions of his *Gallipoli* and *The Fatal Impact*. The work, full of old and new insights, confirmed my opinion as an historian that Alan Moorehead was one of the most gifted writers of history of the twentieth century.

It is time for his rediscovery.



# THE HERALD

Phone: 225

From EDITOR

April 1, 1936.

MR. ALAN MOOREHEAD.

Dear Mr. Moorehead,

I have pleasure in handing you herewith, on behalf of the Management, a small cheque which will help towards your expenses on your forthcoming voyage.

You have my best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Editor.

2

DESCRIPTION  
SIGNEMENT

Profession: *Journalist*  
Place and date of birth: *1910*  
Last name: *Moorehead*  
First name: *Alan*  
Surname: *Moorehead*  
Height: *5' 8"*  
Weight: *140*  
Color of eyes: *Blue*  
Color of hair: *Dark*  
Color of skin: *Fair*  
Special qualifications: *None*  
Remarks: *None*

3

REPRODUCTION OF PASSPORT

MOOREHEAD

CHILDREN - ENFANTS

Photo

Signature of Holder

Signature of Issuing Authority

(photo)

First passport to the rest of the world 1936  
Alan Moorehead Papers, MS5654  
National Library of Australia  
nla.ms-ms5654-0-9x-m-v1

## *The Making of a Journalist*

ALAN MOOREHEAD was born into 'printer's ink'. His journalist father, Richard Moorehead, worked sequentially for the Melbourne newspapers *The Age* and *The Herald*, while his mother, Louise (née Edgerton), was the daughter of a prosperous Melbourne printer and publisher. Alan, the youngest of three children, was born on 26 July 1910 in Melbourne in the middle-class suburb of Croydon. Together with his sister, Phyllis, and brother Bernard, he enjoyed a happy, if peripatetic family life as the Mooreheads shuttled through some dozen different houses—all with the obligatory tennis court. Moving, he reflected later of his parents, 'was a compulsion with them', but looking back he realised that 'there was great distress behind this restlessness'. His family were 'the genteel poor' and, for a journalist writing on property and investment on the low pay of that period, as his father was, their life became a humiliating struggle to keep up appearances.

Perhaps for these reasons, Alan's memory of his urban childhood, his comings and goings with the neighbourhood children and the details of everyday pastimes remained a blur. It was the Australian countryside, with its sense of infinite oldness, the dry, bare plains of the Riverina, dust rising from the horses' hooves, the scent of eucalyptus and the sheepdogs barking that he remembered from bush holidays and which coloured his happiest recollections.

His own craving for printer's ink was apparent early. He knew at the age of 15 that he wanted to be a writer. His youthful diary of 1926 proclaimed 'Seize the day' along with a firm copyright warning, 'All rights reserved. A. McCrae Moorehead'. He was educated for 10 years as a day boy at one of Melbourne's leading private schools, Presbyterian Scotch College, which, for his part, Moorehead remembered unflatteringly: 'those crowded classrooms in the long droning afternoons, those second-rate masters brought out from England with their harassed and defeated faces, those windy red brick corridors with their clanging metal shutters'. There, self-declared, he was 'a most unsuccessful schoolboy, invariably at the bottom of my class' and, short in stature (only a worrying 5 feet at the age of 16 when a much desired spurt lifted him to 5ft 7 inches), was unable to get into any of the sporting teams. He decided at an early age to set up 'a facade between myself and the world', a determination to take charge of his own destiny, and 'to make things happen'. Nevertheless it was at Scotch, with its motto, *Deo Patriae Litteris*, interpreted by the school as 'For the glory of God, for the good of one's country and for the advancement of learning', that a discerning English teacher urged him, on the strength of his essays, to consider journalism as a career.<sup>2</sup>

In 1928, Moorehead enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts degree at Melbourne University. Without financial backup and with the oncoming Depression in Australia, he provided for himself and his fees by offering to write a weekly column on university social and sporting events for the magazine *Table Talk*, an enterprise he soon transferred to the daily *Herald*. He was also editor, for a year, of the *Melbourne University Magazine* where, he remembered, 'we were all for Karl Marx and the brotherhood of man'.

His studies for the degree focussed on history—ancient history in his first year, European history in the second, and the history of philosophy in his final year. While he makes no mention of it in his writings, it

was clearly Moorehead's good fortune to be a student in his second year under professor of history, Ernest Scott, himself a former London journalist and Hansard writer, an elegant penman and researcher. Scott was remembered by Kathleen Fitzpatrick, a few years Moorehead's senior, as a splendid teacher who impressed on his students that the study of history was not the mastering of an agreed body of knowledge but 'a process of discovery—an absorbing occupation'.<sup>3</sup> This was a view that Moorehead's writing richly reflected in later years.

With the BA behind him at the end of 1930, Moorehead moved on, no doubt under some parental persuasion, to study for a law degree, the analytical framework of which would also bear its fruit. But sitting in the Great Hall with his final exam paper before him in 1933, he was acutely aware that he was not interested in becoming a lawyer, nor would he make a good one. With prescience and characteristic determination, he left the exam hall and his blank exam sheets and took a tram to the *Herald* office where he asked for, and got, a staff job. His career as a journalist had begun.

'I had a nose for news', he records, 'the trick of knowing just what will interest people and attract attention', and it was at *The Herald*, grappling with reports from the courts and the morgue and stories of floods and droughts, locust plagues and bushfires that periodically patterned the countryside, that Moorehead cultivated his eye for action and honed his lively short-term memory, interviewing without a pen, learning quickly that people talk more freely if you don't take notes, and, as he put it, 'rejoicing in the sour smell of printer's ink'.<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-1930s, Australia was emerging only slowly from the Depression and the need for security-shaped aspirations and a conventional style of life. But for bright, ambitious young men educated in British literature, with a mounting awareness of world history, the spread of Fascism, and of art and theatre in Europe, Melbourne loomed as a cultural wilderness where opportunities to spread one's wings and

find the stimulus and challenge of professional advancement were low. Like the later group of brilliant young Australians, Germaine Greer, Robert Hughes, Clive James and Barry Humphries, Moorehead found the atmosphere stifling, 'a land where nothing happened'. 'I yearned to go abroad', he wrote later, 'to get to the centre of things and events that I had been hearing about at second hand all my life ... To stay at home was to condemn yourself to nonentity'.<sup>5</sup>

He was not alone. His university friend, the adventurous Tasmanian Noel Monks, for a brief time the shipping news reporter on the Melbourne *Sun*, had set forth in 1935 with John Hetherington, Moorehead's colleague on the *The Herald*, to work his way to England as a crewman and—he hoped—to Fleet Street. Monks was the catalyst. Moorehead saved £500 and a year later, carrying a glowing reference from *Herald* chief-of-staff, Frank Murphy, praising him as 'an excellent all-round reporter ... with initiative, imagination and a flair for seeing the newsy side of things',<sup>6</sup> he set out on the *Ormonde* with a one-way ticket.

Moorehead would find his spiritual homeland when the passengers landed for their first taste of Europe at Toulon. 'I date my life from this moment', he wrote in *A Late Education*. 'Everything in my memory either falls into the period before I reached Toulon, or belongs to the years since then, and in fact my life abruptly took a different course that morning'.

You stepped from your boat straight onto the cobblestones, and all about you yelling women were selling oysters and mussels, lobsters and crabs, shrimps and limpets and sea urchins ... Beyond these stalls was a short open space and then the cafes began, dozens of rickety little tables in the sunshine with coloured sunshades and, sitting there, idly surveying the universe, sipping their vermouth-cassis, were the bottomless cynical French clientele. Wonderfully gay



little men, chattering like monkeys. And girls, doing things or having things done to them, right there in the open in a way that would have caused a riot back in Park Villas, Melbourne ... Beyond the cafes, the facades of topsy-turvy buildings rose up ... painted in the brightest possible pale blues and yellows with window boxes and strings of corn-cobs hanging out from the balconies to dry ... I had come home. This was what I had come for. This was where I wanted to be.<sup>7</sup>

It was 1936.

Moorehead enjoyed another strong taste of Europe after his arrival in England, travelling to France and embattled Spain with a young South African journalist he had met, and back to Germany where the Olympics were in full swing in Berlin. There he watched Hitler riding up through a forest of outstretched hands and glimpsed the rapturous look of ecstasy on the face of the young girl they had picked up. 'It was', he notes, 'the look of a girl meeting her lover'.

Professionally, fortune smiled. Networks were important. By 1937 Monks had managed to land a job at *The Daily Express*, Fleet Street's leading mass circulation newspaper owned and run by the powerful Lord Beaverbrook. By the late 1930s, the dominance of the British newspaper world by the *Express* was such that it published some 2 300 000 copies a day, while from the same stable *The Sunday Express* had a circulation touching 1 377 000. The success of *The Daily Express* took its stamp from Beaverbrook's own tried and true journalistic philosophy: 'put the cherry on top', short staccato sentences, a daily surprise, a fast pace, and a strong sense of optimism. It was also the newspaper that paid the highest wages to journalists and garnered the most talented and aspiring.

Under the legendary Arthur Christiansen's editorship, the enterprising Monks had been assigned to report on the Spanish Civil

War and, while there were no available staff jobs going at the paper when Moorehead appeared, Christiansen, alert to his master's liking for keen young men from the Empire, offered him a retainer with his expenses and payment on results, to report on events from Franco's frontier and in Gibraltar.

After six months of quietude in Gibraltar, his opportunity came at last on Sunday 30 May 1937 when the German pocket battleship *Deutschland* sailed slowly into harbour. With other foreign ships, including the British, she had been lying outside territorial waters with the declared aim of preventing foreign armaments reaching either Franco's Nationalists or the Republicans in Spain. A Republican plane, clearly identified, had appeared and dropped bombs on the *Deutschland*, killing 23 men and injuring 85 more. As 'temporary correspondent' in Gibraltar, Moorehead alone was in a position to observe the flag-draped coffins on the deck and the ambulances arriving to collect the wounded. Speculation surfaced: was Germany giving aid to Franco? Next day 'Nazi Battleship Bombed' commanded the *Daily Express* headlines.

The Moorehead Papers tell the story of the nurturing of a foreign reporter. Some 65 crisp *Daily Express* cables in the collection reveal the growing range of his activities around the covert international involvement in Spain and the responses and encouragement he received from headquarters. When, in return for the attack on her sister-ship, the *Graf Spee* bombarded the Republican-held port of Valencia, Moorehead was despatched there to identify the vessels shipping supplies to the Republicans in Valencia and Barcelona, and, in turn, the German and Italian vessels sending supplies to the Spanish Government.

On 5 July, a British ship was reported to have been torpedoed 50 miles off Barcelona. In the House of Commons, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden demanded to know where Franco's coastline guns were situated around Gibraltar. 'Make this good story', the *Express* editor-in-chief cabled Moorehead. He did. As the weeks moved on, his

despatches won front page attention. Sutton, the active hands-on editor in London, soon identified him as promising journalist material. 'Editor congratulates you on your campeasor [sic] interviews yesterday Stop', he cabled 16 August. 'I have watched your excellent work cumgreat pleasure Am anxious get story behind extraordinary series bombings torpedoing Mediterranean Stop Send early today Round up all recent incidents giving Gibraltar gossip who responsible enumerate Franco submarine strength compared cumbeginning war activities Italian submarines Stop Anxious get this piece secret war history.'<sup>8</sup> It was a timely apprenticeship for the young Australian.

Moorehead was now using the same technique for reportage that he had developed at *The Herald*. The backs of the cables he received from London bear his scrappy notes, a ship's name, a meeting place, a vivid five-word impression from which he devised his story. It was a method of rapid jotting that would prove vital to him in war. Apart from his glancing visit to Valencia and a swift trip to Barcelona, Spain eluded him. The Mediterranean was his bailiwick and, receiving instructions to find a ship to take him to the Dardanelles and Istanbul, and thence on to Athens and Minorca—long bereft of a reporter—he despatched his exclusive stories. 'Congratulations Fella', Monks cabled from his war post, 'you've done me proud'.

At the *Express*, Moorehead's reputation grew. He was appointed to the editorial staff at a salary of £10 a week, while at the end of his Mediterranean furlough, Sutton, noting his ready command of the '*Express* style' and the trust the subeditors put in his 'authoritative' stories, applauded 'the terrific work you have put in during the crisis period and the excellence of your stories'.<sup>9</sup> Christiansen had plans to employ him in London. Instead, in 1938, he notched up a prized appointment at the *Daily Express* office in Paris as assistant to the bureau head, New Zealander Geoffrey Cox. 'Moorehead always had an air of destiny about him', an Australian colleague observed dryly.





Alan Moorehead with his wife Lucy on their wedding day in Rome [1939]

Tom Pocock Papers 1987-1990, MS8377

National Library of Australia nla.ms-ms8377-0-3x-v1

Reproduced with permission from the Moorehead family

While Beaverbrook confidently predicted, 'There will be no great war in Europe in 1939', international tensions mounted. Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, the victory of Franco's forces ended the unhappy struggle in Spain. In April 1939, Italy invaded Albania and Nazi threats to Poland grew. In August, with war imminent, Christiansen selected Moorehead to start up an *Express* bureau in Rome, a European capital

exceeded only in importance by London, Paris and Berlin.<sup>10</sup> It was a far step from the courts and the morgue rounds at the Melbourne *Herald*.

When war with Germany broke out in September, Moorehead, cocksure, ambitious, with a strong streak of opportunism, was contemplating becoming a war correspondent. At 29, he was also taking a significant step into marriage. The previous year, back briefly at *The Daily Express* from his Mediterranean venture, he had met the poised and elegant Lucy Milner, editor of the women's and fashion pages, two inches taller, two years his senior and considered somewhat unapproachable. If it was not quite love at first sight, Moorehead found her challenging and attractive and totally unlike the numerous young women he had lightly courted or seduced. Monks, in a jesting letter, characterised him as 'Alan the Great Lover' and his strong libido was an aspect of his personality that Moorehead indulged throughout his life. Lucy, the clever daughter of a country doctor in Dorset, a reticent and reserved Englishwoman, highly successful professionally, was deeply in love with him. While dreaming always that he would love her as she loved him, she recognised early that he would never be the total, committed lover. Writing to him a few days after his departure to France, she recalled a historical figure who had declared to his paramour of four years his 'deep, faithful and unswerving love', adding wistfully, 'What a pity you are not like that'.<sup>11</sup>

They were married in Rome in October 1939. Eight months later, on 11 June 1940, the day after Italy declared war on Britain, Moorehead was transferred from Rome to Cairo to become the *Daily Express* chief foreign correspondent in the Mediterranean. He had been made an accredited war correspondent at the British War Office at the beginning of June and, donning his captain's uniform with its tab of bright green-and-gold and the words 'British War Correspondent' embroidered on it, he embarked upon the great formative period of his career.



Alan Moorehead [right] with his friend and colleague Alexander Clifford  
[standing, left] and military personnel in the Western Desert [1940s].

Tom Pocock Papers 1987-1990, MS8377

National Library of Australia nla.ms-ms8377-0-1x-m-v1

Imperial War Museum photograph

## *‘The Prince of War Correspondents’*

ALAN MOOREHEAD was to become the most renowned war correspondent in Great Britain. Despatched to Cairo in 1940, at a moment of supreme importance as Britain faced the Axis powers alone on land in the Middle East, he was in the right place at the right time, and through enterprise, proximity, ability and good fortune, was destined to become a key eye-witness of some of the most epic events in British history.

Australia enjoys a distinctive historical register of war correspondents<sup>12</sup> — ‘Banjo’ Paterson in the Boer War; Charles Bean in World War 1; Chester Wilmot, Damien Parer, Kenneth Slessor, George Johnston, Osmar White in the North African, European and Pacific theatres in World War 2; Denis Warner in the Pacific and Vietnam; and a band of talented others in Korea, the Gulf War and Iraq. Conditions of modern warfare have evolved and changed dramatically since World War 1, through many phases and advancing technology into short or protracted and always uncertain engagements, as death rains from the air and is delivered in diverse guise by rebel fighters. In the long history of reportage from the battlefields, Moorehead stands as one of the most pre-eminent recorders.

At the height of the war, the *New Statesman and Nation* critic, W.P. Rilla wrote of the role of the war correspondent in these terms:

'Despite the early roots of war reporting reaching back to Herodotus and Homer, there is no groove into which a modern war correspondent can fit. He is like the child learning to walk; he needs moreover to be a jack of all trades, a soldier and writer, adventurer, political commentator and artist, thinker and man of action'.<sup>13</sup> Moorehead combined all these qualities in high degree and would use them to make his mark on the international scene.

Assigned formally as *Daily Express* Foreign Correspondent Mediterranean, Moorehead was there from the start of fighting and, although a relatively junior member of Fleet Street's team, there was no question, after his first reports from the battlefield, of superseding him. He had already demonstrated to Arthur Christiansen that he had the capacity 'of seeing copy in a flower growing by the wayside'. He now joined this observational skill with a maturing understanding of the challenge, tactics, politics, endurance, and the human face of war.

The war in North Africa—the Desert War—which Moorehead covered for almost three years, was a war of swift movements, lulls, setbacks and successes. From mid-1940 until mid-1943, through the arid northern rim of Africa between Egypt and Benghazi, Tobruk, El Alamein, Tripoli, and finally Tunisia, the pendulum of battle swung back and forth as three successive British commanders-in-chief—General Wavell, General Auchinleck, and General Alexander—directed their British and Imperial forces into fierce campaigns against the Italian Army and Rommel's Afrika Korps. After General Montgomery's decisive victory at El Alamein in November 1942, the British Eighth Army drove Rommel back to Tripoli and then Tunisia, just before US amphibious forces landed to the west of Algeria and joined them to drive the Germans from North Africa.

Moorehead's first despatch from the battlefield on the Western Desert frontier of Egypt and Libya (Cyrenaica), on 4 July 1940, displayed his mettle. 'Tonight', he told his British readers, 'I can tell the first complete



story of the first three week's fighting in the Libyan desert, as it was told to me by half-a-dozen British commanders during a thousand-mile tour of the firing line'. Success was staggering at first. Within ten days half-a-dozen Italian forts and key posts were overwhelmed, with barely half-a-dozen British soldiers lost. It was, he wrote, 'the Lawrence of Arabia kind of warfare—mechanised'. 'At times the men fight in an eerie yellowish light, like the pea-soup fog of the late winter's afternoon. Sand fills the ears and nostrils.' Desert warfare, he was the first to note, 'is much like naval fighting'. Each force visited was operating as a semi-independent unit, sometimes hundreds of miles from a base. 'In half an hour', he records, 'I saw a general take his whole force of tanks and disappear over the horizon ... like an admiral in his flagship'. It was war of a distinctive kind, 'a Knights' tournament in empty space'.<sup>14</sup>

From the outset, Moorehead's writings from the battlefield were urgent and immediate, with a sense of news unfolding into history. Alert to telling detail, he wrote from the ground up, describing the various sweeps of battle, interweaving his stories with the words of the participants, the fighting soldiers, sometimes a prisoner of war, bringing the war in graphic and compelling despatches to the breakfast tables of Britain. He himself felt 'marvellously alive' in the desert. 'The first year in the desert was an *annus mirabilis* for me', he wrote later. 'For the first time in my life, I was entirely absorbed in what I was doing ... Like a backward sapling that is transplanted into a rich soil, I began to sprout with new growth'. His very Australianness was an advantage in that environment. It was the physical life of the open air, familiar from childhood holidays in the bush so that, rather more than his English colleagues, he felt at home in the Western Desert.<sup>15</sup>

'Within an hour of arriving in the desert', he related, 'ideas came crowding into one's mind, and if there was no action for days together it made no difference ... the first element of a newspaper story was always present: the element of contrast, the spectacle of familiar people (in this

case the soldiers) reacting to a strange place ... Consequently the small incident (as distinct from the set-piece battles) achieved a significance it would never have had in Europe or the tropics, and we saw it clearly, we saw all round it, we knew its beginning and its effect'.<sup>16</sup>

Keeping up a constant cover of the fast-moving action was nonetheless hard-going. The very strung-out nature of the desert war meant journeying out from his Cairo base, usually in a convoy of trucks and jeeps, to a front at times 500 miles away; steering by compass across the featureless landscape and scanning the horizon for other vehicles, friend or foe. 'Forever, the forward troops vanished ahead of us as we sat stranded in our broken vehicles', he records:

Messages went astray for days or were lost altogether. We scraped what food we could from the desert or went without. We hitchhiked when our vehicles broke down. Often we abandoned sleep in order to catch up ... It was a new kind of reporting: exasperating, exciting, fast moving, vivid, immense and slightly dangerous. And what we had to say had such interest at that time that our stale descriptions were published fully when at last they did arrive in London and New York. It was a job that was ever a little beyond one's reach.<sup>17</sup>

Moorehead enjoyed a particular advantage. Unlike, for example, that other remarkable Australian reporter, Chester Wilmot, who roamed about the desert bivouacking and reporting for the BBC—'the lowest paid correspondent in the Middle East'—Moorehead shared a flat in Cairo on the Nile's Gezira Island with Alexander Clifford, the serious and gentle English *Daily Mail* correspondent with whom he developed a deep and rewarding friendship, and his wife Lucy, who arrived seven months pregnant from London in late September 1940. They made a

congenial trio: Clifford, highly educated, a linguist and intellectual from whom Moorehead drew stimulus and knowledge and who became his inseparable partner in their wartime sorties; Moorehead, the assertive, down-to-earth, still brash, but decisive communicator, and the serene and witty Lucy. And when later, to the suspicion and envy of his colleagues, Lucy, in fierce competition, landed the job as secretary to the new Commander-in-Chief, General Auchinleck, Moorehead's range of useful contacts grew.

In December 1940, as Wavell launched a major attack in the Western Desert, Moorehead found himself camped outside Bardia where 45 000 Italians, routed at Mersa Matruh, were crowded and under siege. 'For three days and nights now', he told his waiting readers on 21 December, 'the guns around Bardia have been in my ears'.

Lying on open ground in this bitter wind I wake at night to see flashes against the brilliant moon and wake again at dawn to feel the desert floor trembling with the impact of high explosives ... We are all dirty, cold, unshaven and enthusiastic.

Men pressing up that filthy road from Sidi Barrani in thousands have faces caked white with dust and two staring eyes peering out under each tin hat. Sometimes, as we did an hour ago at dusk, we pressed down among icy rocks for safety. Twelve Italian bombers, playing the old game of coming straight at us out of the sunset, suddenly shot across the skyline with twelve fighters ... But ... you can't destroy an army scattered almost invisibly over hundreds of miles of desert.<sup>18</sup>

It was this capacity to record and convey a participant involvement and the noise and feel of battle that gave his vast audience a sense of



direct connection with the fighting soldiers and made Moorehead a household word in Britain. His own personal danger lent immediacy to his writing. While travelling in a convoy of armoured cars in the British pursuit of the Italians through Libya in February 1941, he was ambushed by the Italians between Barce and Benghazi. With Clifford beside him and their wounded driver, whom they had carried to safety, Moorehead tasted the threat of death. Pressed to the ground, he thought in anger, 'This is too cruel, they cannot realise what they are doing to us ... There could be no hatred or anger in the world which would want to hurt us so much'. 'I did not pray or think of my past life or my family', he wrote candidly later. 'I simply wanted to get away ... Whenever I went into danger I did it as a duty or because I thought that others were watching me.'<sup>19</sup>

This was not the general view. Colleagues saw Moorehead and Clifford as 'fearless' and as 'hustlers to get out into the forward areas'. They were mentioned in despatches for their action near Benghazi, the first war correspondents to be so honoured.

In April 1941, with General Rommel's arrival in Africa, Britain's fortune turned. The British Army was driven out of Benghazi and from most of Cyrenaica. Germany invaded Greece and Crete—though Moorehead, caught without sea transport, was not present at either of these bitter conflicts—and, in June, Wavell was replaced as commander-in-chief by Auchinleck. Late in November 1941, with the Germans in the ascendant, Moorehead transmitted his compelling account of how Tobruk fell to the enemy in a day.

There is no front line. British and German tanks have met and wiped each other out. That is all. On both sides there are thousands of prisoners, thousands of casualties ... Just this is definite ... The hard, armoured casing around both armies has been pierced and broken and the soft inner core of the

infantry, light gunners and supply columns stand opposed and at places hopelessly intermingled. Occasionally, tanks from both sides are cutting loose in this soft stuff ... It is like a shark among the mackerel.<sup>20</sup>

Written in a crisp, often conversational tone that spoke directly to his readers, his despatches offered reports of extraordinary range and vividness in which he mixed the important action of the day with an Australian lack of reverence for hierarchy, his own adventures, a sense of history, and always the eye of pity. 'It is the stillness of the dead', he wrote in one despatch, 'that is so shocking. Even their boots don't seem to lie on the ground as those of a sleeping man would ... They seem to slump into the earth with such unnatural overwhelming tiredness'.<sup>21</sup>

In London, Moorehead's communications, stretching from 1000 to 2000 words, dominated the front pages of *The Daily Express* and were syndicated in *The Times* and *The News Chronicle*. They drew cables of resounding praise from editors at *The Daily Express*—'Splendid desert stuff front paged today'; 'You're once more miles ahead of your competitors'; 'the most brilliant battle reporter the war has produced'; while Christiansen, amazed by his 'mature judgment' and 'indefatigable zest for work', crowned his Australian star 'the prince of war correspondents'. Although *Express* foreign editor, Charles Foley, knew that Moorehead and Clifford ignored their respective employer's demands for 'exclusive beats', he considered their partnership and their integrity set a standard of conduct and 'did Fleet Street good'. 'One could always begin at the beginning of a Moorehead despatch', a *Yorkshire Post* commentator remembered, 'and read it through to the end without having the need to turn back. It was a clear stream of thought and it did more than mirror events—it gave them animation and it gave them heart'.<sup>22</sup>

As campaigns and generals changed, Moorehead was soon offering keen analytical commentary on strategy and leadership and,

outspokenly, on the inadequate state of British tanks and guns compared with superior German armaments. By July 1942, Rommel, the 'Desert Fox', had carried the day eastward along the coast from Tobruk to El Alamein and was threatening to advance upon Alexandria and Cairo. Now the Australians, who had held Tobruk defiantly in the first siege from April to November 1941, 'men from the dockside of Sydney and the sheep stations of the Riverina', were pressed into service. Moorehead portrayed his fellow countrymen as 'a picture of downright toughness with their gaunt dirty faces, huge boots, revolvers stuffed in their pockets, gripping their rifles with huge shapeless hands, shouting and grinning—always grinning'.<sup>23</sup>

But Moorehead was not present to report their triumph in the struggle. As *Daily Express* foreign correspondent for the whole of the Mediterranean and North Africa he covered a domain that stretched from Kenya, the Sudan, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Tunisia to India, Ceylon, Persia and on to Baghdad. As El Alamein fell, suffering acute war fatigue from his almost daily despatch of news and feeling that he knew 'every grain of sand ... and all the moods of this monotonous yet not monotonous war', he was then on respite assignment en route to New York. His remorse at his absence from Rommel's defeat ran deep. Yet, leaving for America that August 1942, his memory was less of the triumphs and bitter disappointments of the war than of the human face of battle, 'the bare-backed, begoggled and dusty trooper perched on the open turret of his tank, having a last cigarette before he goes into action'.

At the beginning of 1943 Moorehead was assigned to Algiers, thence to report the conference of Churchill and Roosevelt at Casablanca and then on to Tunisia where, with the German success against American and British forces, the war had moved to an unexpected height. Recording the attacks and counter-attacks and the set-piece battles in those bleak hills in a series of *Express* articles on 'The Lessons of Tunisia', he reported the eventual British defeat of the Germans late in May when their commander

unexpectedly capitulated to General Freyberg of the New Zealand infantry. There was, Moorehead noted, nothing wrong with their troops, they were 'untired and well-fed'. What, he asks in his final despatch, 'can we say about this fantastic debacle?' 'The enemy', he summed up, 'lost command of air and sea, and so there was no evacuation. They had ammunition. No ... They lost command of themselves. It was the concentrated blitz, rightly timed and balanced that delivered the knock-out and turned what might have been a siege of months into a decisive battle of one day. We had genius in our army that day'.<sup>24</sup>

It was just three years since Moorehead arrived in the Western Desert to see the first shots fired in the African campaign. Now the war in North Africa had ended. It had been a war fought in a bare, parched landscape where very few civilians were involved; yet, in retrospect, all the war correspondents realised that the Desert War had a far greater impact and influence on their lives than the subsequent struggle in Europe. As it drew to its close, Moorehead saw it as 'all of a piece', and believed that 'no one commander, no one stroke of luck or judgment, no one army' had brought the British forces to final success in Tunis.

Little by little, with much bitter pain, new men and machines came in and now at last it is almost impossible to recognise the seed of this host of men. But the spirit was there in the beginning, and it made it possible.

As a spectator I would only ask that if you have praise to give it should go equally to the defenders of Tobruk and the parachutists on the Sedjenane Hills; to the dead soldiers on Halifax Pass as well as to the living in Tunis. It has been a long time.<sup>25</sup>

Authoritative, confident, cumulative in their knowledge and observation, Moorehead's despatches and reviews had an excellence that was plainly



acknowledged by the space afforded him in his newspaper. Back in England, awaiting the Second Front in 1944, he enjoyed something of his own success, mounting a *Daily Express* column on the progress of the war titled simply, 'Alan Moorehead, London'. In a letter to Moorehead's father, Arthur Christiansen shed light on the man he had elevated to special prominence. 'When Alan first came to the *Express* before the war', he confided, 'I did not dream I was taking on such a dynamic character ... But once he became a war correspondent, something happened to him. His sense of observation, his gift of words, brought the battle of the desert clearly before the eyes of everyone in Britain ... I am not flattering him, but merely telling you the facts when I say that he is regarded as pre-eminently the Number One War Correspondent of the whole British Press'.<sup>26</sup>

Moorehead was with the D-Day landing in Normandy on 6 June 1944. We can follow him through his small, worn wartime diaries, jotting down the vivid, swift word pictures that formed the scaffold of his despatches—'converted Thames barges', 'lines of tensing khaki at rail, faces peering', 'no bands, no flags', 'distance ships like grey smudges', 'balloons like dancing silver insects'. And, as he moves into Normandy with the British forces, the diaries yield up the graphic pencilled notes, 'tanks aslant, jamming roads', 'advancing over bodies', 'Germans guard each pylon', 'slit throats with razors', 'idolisation of Hitler', 'roses on graves', 'women snipers ... killed in action'.<sup>27</sup>

When, after fierce and destructive fighting, the ruins of Caen were occupied by the British on 9 September, with the loss of 400 tanks, he confronted a desolation strikingly different from anything he experienced in the desert. Yet, despite fear at times and scenes of horror, there remains a clear perception and confidence in all he writes. As the German columns are caught between two Allied thrusts at Falaise, he records:



We have begun to see the end of Germany today and here in the apple orchards and the village streets one turns sick to see what has happened to them. The best of Field Marshal von Kluge's army has met the British and Allied troops head on and they were just obliterated. Until now, I had no conception of what trained artillerymen and infantry can do and certainly this is the most awful sight that has come my way since war began'.<sup>28</sup>

He was in Paris for its liberation, though instant outgoing reportage was denied, and also in Belgium as the people rose in revolt against the German garrisons, their 'passion of hatred and exultation', he noted, less complex than the ambivalent French response. All this, he informed his faithful readers, 'is the reward for everything England has endured ... the expression of all the admiration and friendship that people in Europe feel towards England at this moment'.

Nine arduous months of fighting and reporting later, Hitler was dead and Germany's defeat was sealed with the Instrument of Surrender signed by Montgomery with German officers at Lüneburg Heath on 4 May 1945. At field headquarters, Moorehead sat at his typewriter that day to convey the portentous event to a waiting Britain.

Here on a wild stretch of heath just south of Lüneburg at precisely six twenty five pm today Montgomery signed peace with Germany. Five German officers walked into the tent and stood behind their chairs at a table over which a grey army blanket had been thrown. Presently Montgomery arrived and as he took his place at the end of the table the Germans saluted and in silence they sat down together. Montgomery took out his spectacles and in a slow careful voice—his voice is never strong at any time—read out the ... terms of surrender.<sup>29</sup>

It was Moorehead who wrote the letter to Montgomery on behalf of the war correspondents, paying tribute to the field marshal's achievement and thanking him for his deed that day. And it was Moorehead who greeted readers of *The Sunday Express* next day with his eye-witness account of the final demise of a vigorous and challenging enemy.

Germany as a country had ceased to exist. Everywhere the enemy soldiers had only one object—mass surrender to the British ... And so all day we had been watching them pouring in. Men riding bicycles. Men driving steam-rollers and tractors. Men clinging like flies to the sides of hay carts and horse-drawn wagons. And men tramping brokenly along the road. All Germans ... We saw all this in Africa, and again at times in Italy and France. But this is a colossal landslide ... This is the climax of England's war—utterly unconditional surrender—and on a colossal scale.

Viewing Moorehead's experience in the light of the Iraq War in 2003, when war correspondents found themselves 'embedded' by the military command with a conspicuous loss of independence, it is illuminating to note how British war correspondents were officially treated in World War 2. Recalling the censorship and restraints imposed on war correspondents in World War 1, they were well-served by a flow of military data. The British Ministry for Information, confronted by a struggle for national survival and one where freedom of expression was a freedom they were fighting for, publicly acknowledged the correspondents as an 'integral part of our fighting activities on land, on the sea, and in the air' and, while Moorehead reflected that 'at times the young British commanders were suspicious of war correspondents and none too keen to explain their movements to us', senior commanders provided briefings, maps and information, and

assigned reporters, enlightened by weekly briefings, were free to move around as they chose.

Major General Sir Francis (Freddie) de Guingand, in charge of press censorship and guidance as director of military intelligence in the Middle East from 1939 to 1940 and subsequently Montgomery's chief-of-staff of the Eighth Army in North Africa and Europe, admitted to the 'greatest admiration' for the war correspondents at the front, and to their integrity and the way they worked. In both theatres, he enjoyed a singularly close relationship with Moorehead, Clifford, and Christopher Buckley, the scholarly correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph* who made up something of a trio with the two close friends, all members of the War Correspondents Committee of which Moorehead was the chairman. 'We knew each other well', de Guingand recalled in his *Generals at War*, 'and had met together many a time to find a solution to some knotty problem. Once a month they would invite me to dinner, and wherever we happened to be [in Cairo], or whether in the shell and bomb destroyed area of the Normandy Bridgehead or in Brussels itself, the food and wine produced were all one could desire'. 'These people', he added putting an adroit finger on the trio's famous ability to combine the dangerous and the good life, 'certainly knew their way about'.<sup>30</sup>

Despite a tacit understanding of confidentiality and some privilege, this did not prevent the correspondents from writing critically or, as in Moorehead's case, of conveying a contextual, sometimes historical understanding of what was occurring. In North Africa, it was the distances that proved an obstacle to the best communication. 'We never "saw" a battle in the desert', he wrote later. 'The only way we could gather a coherent picture was by driving hard from one headquarters to another, and by picking up reports from the most forward units as they came through on radio telephone.'<sup>31</sup>

Moorehead in particular had the reputation of developing especially good relations with the high command. Energetic and direct, with

his tactical knowledge and striking birds-eye cover of the campaign strategies, he commanded attention. 'Most of the other correspondents', Pocock writes, 'were in some awe of him'.<sup>32</sup> Called in by the commander with the other reporters for a pre-battle briefing, he acquired the reputation of leading the questions. His manner was 'correct rather than courteous' and he appeared to be without fear. The generals responded to his directness, and his reporting won repute.

While he was absent from the triumph at El Alamein, Moorehead met General Montgomery personally in August 1943. It was the beginning of a friendship that would lead to his biography of the feisty general at the war's end. Back in London, Montgomery invited him to tour army camps with him in England and, after Sardinia, Moorehead followed him to mainland Italy to witness the first victories of the Italian campaign.

With Lüneburg, the demanding, dramatic years on the brink of battle were over for Alan Moorehead. In those years, this 'trim, slight figure, dark and jaunty, with steady eyes ... and a certain ruthless charm', as Tom Driberg described him at the war's end, had moved from a little-known press reporter to become a media star 'with a touch of genius'. Together with the other main British war correspondents, he was awarded an OBE in 1946 for his services as a war correspondent. 'It should have been a KI!', friends protested. In the event, it fell to his proprietor, Lord Beaverbrook, steeped in honour for his crucial role as Minister for Aircraft Production during the Battle of Britain, to offer a characteristically unembellished word. 'You were the best of all the war correspondents', he wrote to Moorehead in June 1946. 'And the millions who got a fair, exciting and accurate picture of the battlefronts from your despatches will welcome the distinction that has been given you as much as I do'.<sup>33</sup>

MAYFAIR 8482.

Savile Club,  
69, Brook Street, W.1.

July 4

Dear Lord Beaverbrook

How very kind of you  
to write. I must say that  
I never lacked for encouragement  
either from yourself or the  
paper during the whole course  
of the war.

With many thanks for  
your letter

Yours sincerely

Alan Moorehead





Field Marshal Montgomery [1940s]  
Alan Moorehead Papers MS5654, National Library of Australia  
nla.ms-ms5654-0-2x-o-v1  
War Office photograph

## *Echoes of Battle*

MOOREHEAD ONCE explained to Arthur Christiansen the difference between writing with timely speed for a newspaper and writing in a form that captured the full resonance of an occasion and conveyed it to the reader. 'We've got to give the news, quick and straight and clear. That governs everything. But the reader's power to absorb and the journalist's power to see and think and write and transmit don't keep pace with one another ... So what do we do? ... some of us say "Can I write a book? I never had time to tell the story."' <sup>34</sup>

Between 1941 and 1945 Moorehead published three books on the war in North Africa—*Mediterranean Front* (1941), *A Year of Battle* (1942), and *The End in Africa* (1943)—and in 1945 released his large sequel on the European war, *Eclipse*. Written at breakneck speed in his Cairo flat in periods snatched between campaigning, the first three books gave him that 'time'. Irregular as it was, he seized it fiercely, building on the material of his despatches, writing from dawn to dusk, marshalling an overview with breadth and penetration, transcending the censor's daily pencil, and bringing the scope and ambience of war and battle into exciting and reflective prose.

The war in Africa and the Mediterranean fell naturally into three phases. The first book, *Mediterranean Front*, subtitled *The Year of Wavell, 1940–41*, dealt with General Sir Archibald Wavell's year as

British Chief-of-Staff, Mediterranean, a command that took in five theatres of war—the Western Desert, Greece, Crete, Italian East Africa and Syria—and small sideshows like Iraq and British Somaliland. It was a year of tremendous experiments, of fast and exciting campaigns presided over by a man of tact and innovative approaches, yet a year, Moorehead summed up graphically, of ‘thrusting about in the dark; the year of bluff and quick movement [when] nobody knew what was going to happen, when whole armies were flung about from one place to another ... in a frantic effort to find a new equilibrium in the Middle East’.<sup>35</sup>

The second book, *A Year of Battle*, which Hamish Hamilton launched with 7500 copies, focussed on *The Year of Auchinleck 1941–42*, when the Desert War became ‘the year of set battles and eventual retreat’, a war of modern, more adequately equipped armies fighting ‘in a straight out issue between man and man, tank and tank, army and army’<sup>36</sup> and conducted by General Sir Claude Auchinleck, a man of contradictions, at times ruthless, yet with a mind of ‘extraordinary freshness and originality’.

The third book, *The End in Africa: The Year of Eisenhower, Alexander and Montgomery 1942–43*, covers a large arena. It stretches over Moorehead’s own visit to the USA in late 1942, a brief observing time in England, and his return to North Africa to follow the riddle of tactics and the momentous new inputs of equipment that characterised this third stage of fighting and the final despatch of the Germans from Africa in 1943.

Moorehead’s books filled an instant gap for readers who, fuelled by daily reports of action, sought overarching insights into, and interpretation of, the Desert War. There was some criticism which Moorehead accepted gladly. His friend and colleague from *The Manchester Guardian*, Evelyn Montague, invalided on leave, wrote him frankly in January 1944: ‘Your first book was plain but good; your

second was sophisticated, amusing, and not so good; this one is fretful, worried, patchily brilliant and bad ... Do come home and *not* write a book ... give yourself time to relax and take stock ... and then, when you write something, don't rush it'.

It was not a view the publisher or reviewers shared. For war, as the celebrated American war correspondent, Martha Gellhorn, insisted, 'is our condition and our history'. Moorehead's books and their study of men in all conditions of action and responsibility when the fate of the British Empire hung in the balance, were a testament to that history. Brought out by Hamish Hamilton in a collected omnibus as *African Trilogy* in 1944, the publication had immense impact. 'Alan Moorehead's eye-witness account of the African campaign', declared *The Observer* that December, 'is a classic ... Some of his battle scenes stand comparison with the famous battle descriptions of Stendhal and Tolstoy'. V.S. Pritchett, writing in *The New Statesman and Nation* declared, 'Not only has he fine control of language, a constant curiosity that keeps him ferreting out the campaign every minute of his time, and a stimulating judgment, but he has a balanced sense of perspective ... I cannot think of a more spacious and more bitterly living treatment'.

Despite imperfections, Moorehead saw the volume as 'a complete and explanatory picture' of the North African war and, awaiting the opening of the Second Front, he rejoiced in his celebration as a successful author. As author and editor Michael Heyward suggests, journalism had won Moorehead 'the kind of readership most authors only dream about'. But writing substantial war histories was a different task. Of wide dimension and peopled by generals, commanders, admirals, air force and naval personnel, world leaders and politicians, *African Trilogy* links a vast territory of campaigns, battles, strategy, planning, performance, wastage and resolve, and always the fighting men—the British, Australian, New Zealand, American, Italian and German soldiers—in their varied participation, endurance and sacrifice.

Here, as a sample, is Moorehead's account of the replacement of the Australians at Tobruk in July 1941 when nearly the whole of the Ninth Army Division was taken off and interchanged with two English brigades and a brigade of fighting Poles.

I carry still a photographic picture in my mind of the dark harbour of Tobruk. Over on the right somewhere lies the wreck of the Italian liner *Marco Polo* and another vessel that by some freak of the weather or high explosive had edged a good twenty feet of its bows onto the yellow cliffs on the southern side of the harbour. On the left lie the broken buildings of the town rising tier on tier up to the crest of the promontory which binds the harbour on its northern side. In between is the heavy darkness of the harbour itself. All around is the noise and sharp light of gunfire.

The dockside labourers straining their eyes can just make out the low hulk of a moving ship ... The decks are crowded with men in full kit. No one smokes. There is an exchange of shouted orders from the destroyer's bridgehead and answers from the quay and then the men begin filing off ...

Thousands of men have stood on Tobruk quays watching this scene while they, too, waited in full marching kit for the order to go aboard ... to go aboard and leave Tobruk and get a spell of rest and quietness and good food back in Egypt or Palestine. While they pondered ... many have thought, 'Will there be room for me?' There always was room.<sup>37</sup>

While Moorehead missed the ill-fated campaigns in Greece and Crete, his account, garnered and transformed at second-hand, of the German assault on Crete where some 27 000 British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers had been evacuated from Greece, has striking power.



Upon Suda came something that had never been seen in action in the world before—glider troops. Over the great knoll that forms the seaward side of the bay came big, troop carrying aeroplanes, drawing gliders behind them ... each glider had the wingspread of a large passenger machine. They carried ten men. As they swept up to the bay the glider pilots slipped their cables attaching them to the mother craft and floated out over the rocky hills looking for a landing place, and the men who saw them come said they were more sinister than the parachutists, stranger and more menacing. Some flew straight upon Corps Headquarters, as though they would land there, and each soldier below felt the landing would be made upon his own head. But the wings tilted just over the treetops ... The machines crashed heavily in a sharp rocky valley and the crew and passengers were killed outright.<sup>38</sup>

Moorehead's conceptual and thematic stretch in his North African books is unrivalled by any of the other war correspondents. 'We were constantly trying to outdo one another in the dispatches we sent to our newspapers, and later on, in the books we wrote', he admitted candidly. This was certainly true in his intense and intricate relationship with Alex Clifford whose books *Crusader* and *Three against Rommel* were published in wartime. But it was his fellow Australian, Chester Wilmot, who came closest to Moorehead's achievement with his commanding eye-witness book, *Tobruk 1941* (1944) and his later, documented study, *Struggle for Europe* (1951). 'Moorehead and Wilmot', the distinguished author and war observer Phillip Knightley affirms, 'tower above all the others'.<sup>39</sup>

Undoubtedly Moorehead's North African books added greatly to his wartime reputation and enhanced his standing at *The Daily Express*. Montgomery, meeting him in 1943, at once asked for copies. After the war, *African Trilogy* was translated into German

and Dutch and, timeless, circulated to new generations of readers through three reprints in Britain, from 1965 to 2000, and through Text Publishing's Australian edition in 1997. Moorehead's skill was never to underestimate his readers. His wartime books were written passionately for audiences that ranged from the generals who conducted the campaigns, through the fighting men who wanted to comprehend their own fractured stories, to a significant public which, despite long exposure to the war, wished to see it in the round. The story of the African campaigns, the critic W.P. Rilla summed up in *The New Statesman and Nation*, would go down in history as one of the great epics of mankind. 'But', he added, 'it will do so largely thanks to Mr Moorehead's account which makes one of the most remarkable books of this, or any other modern war'.<sup>40</sup>

Moorehead's fourth war book, *Eclipse*, written, as he admitted, 'in some very uncomfortable places', covered very different territory. 'Eclipse' was the code name given by the Allies to their last operation of the war in Europe and his book is a tense and compelling story of the relentless struggle that spanned British, Canadian and American military efforts to defeat the Italians in Sicily and on the mainland, and to wrench France, Belgium, Holland and the rest of occupied Europe from the Germans' grasp.

It bears once more the hallmarks of his descriptive brilliance, his pace, his sense of tension, his participation (dangerous, at times with a touch of swashbuckling), his feeling for the soldiery of both sides waging a terrible and immensely destructive war in a landscape of villages and towns. It presents, too, his overarching perception and interpretation of those dramatic campaigns that thrust in from all points of the compass, from British, American, Canadian and Russian forces, to draw the final net tight on the Axis' military machine.

Here in Europe he experienced a strikingly different war from the fleet and mobile battles of the empty desert. As the fighting moved

through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, he encountered for the first time the civilian people directly involved in war, their farms and villages and the desolation they experienced from erupting battles. In Normandy, at the battle for Caen, which the Allies had secured after a bitter struggle, Moorehead records:

We bolted for the uncertain cover of the outer suburbs, and came at once upon such desolations that one could think only of the surface of the moon. Where three- and four-storey houses had been, there were now merely hollows in the ground, row after row of immense craters ... The very earth was reduced to its original dust ... There were no longer streets or footpaths or any decided evidence that human beings had once been here and lived. There was a kind of anarchy in this waste, a thing against which the mind rebelled ... This was the end of the world, the end of the war, the final expression of man's desire to destroy.<sup>41</sup>

And at the hamlet of St. Lambert and the destruction of General von Kluge's army, he draws on one of his *Express* despatches to reflect, from a well-stocked mind, on the immense impact of British artillery and the want of reason for such carnage.

They ran in the direction of the fire [he writes of the German army] shouting that they had surrendered. They gave up in hundreds upon hundreds. There was no fight left in them any more, and now, here, you can see what is left by the battle in the warm midday sunlight. It is exactly like one of those crowded battle paintings of Waterloo or Borodino—except of course the wreckage is different ... I think I see the end of Germany here. This was their best in weapons and

men, their strongest barrier before the Rhine ... The beaten Wehrmacht is a pitiable thing.<sup>42</sup>

In Paris for its liberation, with the people's reiterative cry, '*Nous vous avons attendus si longtemps*', Moorehead was one of the first journalists to attempt to describe the attitude of the French towards their German captors during their years of occupation. As one who had worked in and loved Paris as a city more wondrous than all others, he wanted to understand why the Parisians, in many cases so compliant, had come to detest *les sales Boches* so intensely. The occupying forces, he argues, had kept the city beautiful; the people were by no means in rags; the Metro ran; most people had a bicycle; the cinemas and nightclubs were working; there was food. Under German rule, in fact, life was not only possible, it was profitable if you collaborated a little. So why now the concentrated blinding hatred? His conversations with old friends always reverted to the fact that, in an atmosphere of constant surveillance, with the Gestapo at work and the enforced betrayals and death, 'Parisians fell into a fearful and hateful silence with one another'. Paris had become divided against itself, 'and the people had lost their capacity to speak, to laugh, and their pride'.<sup>43</sup>

At the final eclipse of Germany, assailed by deep exhaustion and compassion fatigue, Moorehead arrived with the Allied troops to confront Belsen concentration camp. His descriptions, framed at first-hand of that dreadful place, are forthright. Yet his reflective judgment—as other journalists railed against the horror—appears remarkably mature. 'What we were seeing', he set down, 'was something from the dark ages, the breaking up of a medieval slave state ... It was all like a journey down into some Dantesque pit, unreal, leprous and frightening. And now as one emerged into the light again one's first coherent reactions were not of disgust or anger or even, I think, of pity. Something else filled the mind, a frantic desire to ask: "Why? Why? Why? Why has it



happened?" ' 'This is not war', he answered himself. 'Nor is it anything to do with here and now, with this one place at this one moment. This is timeless and the whole world and all mankind is involved in it ... How did we let it happen?'

His conclusion showed a wisdom honed by war: 'Be vigilant', he wrote, 'to snap the long chains that lead to the future Belsens before they grow too long'. Then 'only the mental danger remains ... The danger of indifference'.<sup>44</sup>

Moorehead's relief at the completion of his war volumes was justifiably great. 'Eclipse comes out tomorrow,' he scribbled in his diary on 25 October 1945, 'the fourth, and please God, the last of my war books. Hamilton insists it is good and is printing 30 000 ... How anyone can bear to read a book about the war at this moment is entirely beyond me'. And yet 'here they come—all the old feelings one has when a book is out: anxiety, smug satisfaction, embarrassment at what people say and, above all, a sense of relief and release'.<sup>45</sup>

*Eclipse* portrayed the end of an era, a book that would inform men and women for years to come. Introducing the Granta paperback edition in 2000, more than half-a-century later, Phillip Knightley writes, 'This account of the Allied victory over Hitler, of those many battles with strange names now dim in memory is a triumph, an inspired, sustained piece of writing by a master of his craft ... a masterpiece ... brilliant and imaginative'—words that echoed the refrain of reviewers around the world at the book's original release.

The battles over, there was, however, to be a final coda to Moorehead's wartime writings. A year later, his biography, *Montgomery*, filled the bookstalls and was serialised in *The Sunday Express*. Moorehead had celebrated the eccentric but highly popular general in command of the British Eighth Army in North Africa in *The End of Africa*. There he observed him, 'taut, like a piece of barbed wire', as a leader who had stripped away from himself most of the diversions of life to become a



military missionary of intense commitment and concentration, but a leader 'with a magic touch with his troops'. Urged on by Arthur Christiansen, he determined to write Montgomery's life.

The two men found mutual understanding. There was something in Monty's skill in communication and outspokenness, his impatience with hypocrisy and evasion, and his simple enjoyment of the limelight that spoke to Moorehead's Australianness. They had another bond. Bernard Montgomery had spent his childhood years in Australia, coming to Hobart at the age of two when his father, Henry Montgomery, was installed as Bishop of Tasmania. There, in the beautiful surrounding countryside, Monty spent his childhood and developed as a restless, self-propelled loner who grew tough and sunburnt in the Australian bush. In 1901, aged 13, he returned with his family to London and was sent, with all the trappings of a colonial, to St Paul's School, Hammersmith. Fortuitously, at school his passionate out-of-doors interests and his active sportsmanship thrust Montgomery into prominence and to the sort of leadership and control he would choose to exercise throughout his career.

'There was', Moorehead writes, 'very little repose in his nature ... Everything in Montgomery's life was done with purpose and persisted in to the bitter and sometimes barren end'. In this lucid study, Moorehead, communicating in frequent interviews with the general, sets aside the adrenalin pace of his war books and provides a discerning portrait of the youthful Monty and the emergent soldier, stubborn, fiercely determined, rising through a military career where he did not readily forget the rebuffs and set-backs that marked his early efforts against authority. He also presents the determined, charismatic figure of the North African campaigns and the vigorous British military helmsman who confronted General Eisenhower over the crossing of the Rhine and the defeat of Germany. Through brilliance and personality, Montgomery, in his trademark black beret,

was inevitably news. 'He attracted trouble', writes Moorehead, 'as other men attracted indifference'.<sup>46</sup>

Researching Montgomery's early life gave Moorehead the opportunity to visit Australia after an absence of nearly a decade and, in the aftermath of his mother's death and the earlier loss of his brother Bernard, who died in Hong Kong at the age of 30, to reconnect with his father and his sister, Phyllis. He composed chunks of the biography sitting on the veranda of his father's home, describing for Lucy 'the white trunk of the gum tree on the left ... kookaburras, bell birds and the clear squawk of the magpies ... and a kind of peace here washed down by cups of tea'.<sup>47</sup>

He dedicated the biography to his father. 'Your *Montgomery*—your masterpiece!', Richard Moorehead responded warmly to this honour. 'You have concentrated on revealing Monty by the great and small events of his whole career and the result is a coherent and intensely interesting picture ... Your penetration and balance I confess amaze me. I have no doubt you have set your seal on your reputation with this work.'<sup>48</sup>

Many seals, in effect, had been set. Moorehead's *Montgomery*, nonetheless, was the first off the rank in a long line of biographies to be written about Britain's charismatic general, judged by many to be the most important British military leader since Wellington. Moorehead's first-hand knowledge and observation of his subject gave his book special strength and its first edition of some 53 000 copies, published in Britain and the USA in 1946 and 1947 respectively, both delighted its subject and drew critical international acclaim. Here, declared R.H.S. Crossman, is 'a character study of real importance',<sup>49</sup> while the imaginative, anonymous reviewer of *The Times Literary Supplement* caught at its distinctive style. 'The author has a mind like one of those small and enormously expensive cameras ... whatever he sees, up goes the camera, and you have, in any light, a beautifully defined picture.'

With *Montgomery*, Moorehead marked an end and a beginning, a fitting wartime closure and a literary rite of passage.



Alan Moorehead receiving the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize  
for *Gallipoli* from Winston Churchill [1956]  
Moorehead Family Collection. Reproduced with permission from the family.

## ‘The Mediterranean Man’

MOOREHEAD EMERGED from the war as a celebrity. He was elected to the International Mark Twain Society to join such assorted luminaries as Harry Truman, General Montgomery and General Alexander, Eugene O’Neil and Mrs Roosevelt, while the *Chevalier de l’Ordre de Leopold II* was bestowed upon him by the Belgians. He was also taken up by that influential hostess, Nancy Cunard, and London opened its doors to him.

He had undergone a significant metamorphosis from the brash young Australian who had arrived in England in 1936 and pushed his way to a striking career as a war correspondent. Alex Clifford’s influence had been transforming. Living and travelling together in the desert, sleeping side by side under the stars, the two friends had discussed philosophy and literature, ‘argued about Jane Austen’, talked long through the nights of international politics and the future world, Moorehead imbibing his friend’s intellectual interests and sophistication and acquiring some of his gentlemanly etiquette and sense of dress. Lucy, who represented all the things about the English which Moorehead as a new arrival most admired, had lent her particular polish and cool. Encountering him, Geoffrey Cox found Moorehead ‘completely changed—sophisticated, confident, worldly’, his former Australian accent firmly clipped.

There was another conspicuous element in Moorehead's development. From his sustained cover of fighting and his overviews of many theatres of war, he had nurtured a compelling sense of self-demand. In Cairo, working on his wartime books, he had cultivated a daily routine of rising early, reading historical works—Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and the writings of Clausewitz were among them—and writing for 8 to 10 hours a day. He was becoming something of a scholar with ideas of a vocation as a writer shaping in his mind. In London briefly, early in 1943, he outlined his thoughts of abandoning journalism to Christiansen. He was swiftly summoned by Lord Beaverbrook for a weekend at his country home at Cherkley. It was rightly said that Lord Beaverbrook was the actual editor of *The Daily Express* and Christiansen its day-by-day editorial manager, and Beaverbrook, sitting across the largest mass circulation newspaper in Britain, was not about to let his 'prince of war correspondents' slip through his net. They discussed North African reinforcements and politics briskly across two days. Moorehead, however, did not fall for his proprietor's legendary charisma, although he reported to Lucy that Beaverbrook 'would like to see me in a place of some power after the war ... where I can take a big part'.<sup>50</sup>

A year or so after the war's end, Moorehead, poised to fly to Europe to report on the appearance of peace, sought his freedom again. As he told Christiansen, he no longer 'had the heart to go on in the old way, rushing from one news event to another': the one thing he wanted to do was to write.<sup>51</sup> Lord Beaverbrook wooed him with another country weekend—drink, talk, flattery. To no avail. From that moment, Moorehead ceased to exist for Lord Beaverbrook. He never mentioned his name again.

By 1947, Moorehead's goals had firmed. Institutional pressure had to go. He made arrangements with David Astor of *The Observer*, a paper that reflected political views to match his own, to report as a 'Special Commissioner' on Greece and Italy, Germany and the USA,



and on India and Pakistan, where he interviewed the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, and other figures involved in the transfer of power back to the citizens of those two recently partitioned countries. There he recaptured the intense feeling for India which he had first experienced during his perceptive wartime reporting of the Cripps Mission for the *Express* in 1942, of which he wrote vividly in *African Trilogy*. He loved the 'sweet hunger in the very smell of the ground', and the 'deep breathing, insect calling air', and took time to visit Kashmir where he found inspiration for his subsequent novel, *The Rage of the Vulture*.

Back in Europe and Italy, friends pointed him to a rambling fifteenth-century villa for rent in the hills outside Florence, and in September 1948, Moorehead gathered up his family—Lucy, and his son and daughter, John and Caroline, (their last child, Richard, would be born in 1951)—and moved from London to Tuscany. Installed in the Villa Diana, a place of peaceful, historical beauty, Moorehead saw his dream of becoming a Renaissance man, or at least a 'Mediterranean man', take shape. 'We have been two days in the Villa Diana now', he wrote in his diary, 'it gives a strange sensation of quietude, the sense of being in the right place'.

The villa would become the subject of a collection of essays Moorehead published in 1950 as *The Villa Diana*. It had been the home of Angelo Poliziano, poet and friend of Lorenzo the Magnificent and tutor to his son. The spirit of the brilliant and predatory Poliziano still hovered about the home, which was marked by a memorial plaque at the entrance describing him as 'the greatest humanist of his time'. Moorehead's evocative article on him, 'The Ghost in the Villa', which he published in the *New Yorker*, prefigured the interest in historical writings he came to develop. It also focussed him as a writer whom the magazine's revered editor, Harold Ross, quickly sought to harness as one of the *New Yorker's* far-flung correspondents.

At the villa, the family was soon to discover the closely interwoven thread of rural Italian life. With one servant, Paola the cook, they were introduced in no time to a host of relatives, tradesmen, the wine-dealer, the olive presser, chance acquaintances frequenting the villa and unidentified children accompanied by dogs roaming through the front hall. ‘“My God”, my wife said’, Moorehead wrote in the engaging first chapter of his book, ‘“there must be an end to it somewhere”’. But there was no end in Italy. ‘No man here’, he summed up wisely, ‘is an island ... When the church bell tolls just a few yards up the hill behind the house it tolls for every man jack of us ... We die, marry and get born here with astonishing frequency, and every time something happens the bell tolls’.<sup>52</sup>

Entrancing as it was, this period of professional transition was full of challenge for Moorehead. Though publicly a successful man, praised by reviewers and colleagues, sought by the literati, and as sales of *Eclipse* and *Montgomery* raced through some 100 000 copies, Moorehead faced a deep crisis of confidence and anxiety. There was a struggle to make ends meet; *The Daily Express* had offered no grateful bonus in farewell. For a time, Moorehead wished to follow in Hemingway’s footsteps, writing novels out of action. *The Rage of the Vulture*, set in the fictional state of Kandahar as Muslim and Hindu violence engulfed India at partition, was such a one. With its decidedly cardboard characters of the Raj, it was published at the end of 1948 to both friendly and critical reviews and was later made into a film. He also began a second novel, tentatively titled ‘Céline’, drawing on the social experience of his own life in Italy. It would emerge in time as *A Summer Night*.

He and Lucy visited Hemingway, then living at Cortina with his fourth wife, Noel Monks’ former wife and their friend, Mary Welsh. Hemingway, Moorehead noted wryly, came in from shooting ducks, ‘a walking myth of himself’, cartridge belts and strings of teal and mallard

festooning his shoulder. Later, in the quiet of their conversation, he found a serious man who talked to him about books, 'always of writing, and with the humility and doubt of a writer who reads for five hours or so every day, and who writes and re-writes for as long as his brain will work, knowing that it is only a miracle that he will ever achieve a phrase, even a word, that will correspond to the vision in his mind'.<sup>53</sup> His own attempt at emulation was not successful. Working in the most congenial conditions he had ever experienced, 'complete isolation from 8.20 to 1.30, a long table, a dark room with two small bright windows', Moorehead was coming to the reluctant conclusion that he was not a natural writer of fiction.

'I think I know myself as a writer now', he confided in his diary early in 1949. 'Description of scenes, places, action: excellent. Readableness, continuity, tempo, construction: first class. Writing: often first class, sometimes better or worse. Dialogue: natural and fluent but without any wit or particular subtlety or inspiration. Characters: very bad, with the exception of occasional flukes drawn from life. Plots: hopeless.'<sup>54</sup>

The fact was, as he came to admit, his break away from daily journalism and its safe factual routine was proving 'altogether too tough'. Amid the honeyed life, and the beauty, and the *ennui* just held at bay, Moorehead, conditioned by a long, exciting and exacting war, found himself 'reduced to a state of helplessness and frustrating idleness, casting about for something to get my teeth into'. 'Time, Machiavelli says', he ruminated, 'drives everything before it. Not me'.<sup>55</sup>

In this state of self-distrust, he had the good fortune to find a distinguished ally and mentor on the other side of the hill at Settignano. There, the American expatriate art critic and writer Bernard Berenson, had lived for many years at the villa I Tatti, with his great library and a swirl of friends who flocked from all parts of the world to visit the impressive Renaissance scholar. In 1948 when Moorehead first met him,

Berenson was 83, a pale, paper-thin, highly alert figure, something of an institution, whose curiosity for people and the life of art remained vividly alive. Happily, the 38-year-old Moorehead and this highly sophisticated and knowledgeable connoisseur found rapport. 'There was a current flowing between us', Moorehead recalled, 'an instinctive liking ... he wished me nothing but good and I knew it, and as a result he became the foster-father I so badly needed'. 'I would not then, nor would I now, write anything or take any major decision without consciously or subconsciously summoning up the light precise voice, that detached and marvellously retentive mind, and instantly I know what I should or should not do.'<sup>56</sup>

Berenson had invited Moorehead to the villa because he liked one of his war books. Now, interested and supportive, he made his library available and, tuned to the younger man's aspirations, counselled him on what he might or might not write. Across the next 10 years (for he lived to be 94), Berenson kept in touch with his Australian friend, his brief letters scattered among Moorehead's papers, engaged by his travel and adventures, admiring his 'gift of easy and stimulating writing'<sup>57</sup> and following his *New Yorker* articles through his own eclectic reading. The old scholar clearly found in him, as Moorehead surmised, 'a certain freshness, perhaps, and the Johnsonian pleasure of instructing a young disciple'—and above all, affection.

In this period of self-validation, Lucy was vital. Since their days in Cairo, she had shared in the production of his books, advising, typing, editing, proof reading, indexing and later abridging some for republication. This assistance was vital to his production mill and became a *leitmotif* of their marriage. They discussed ideas. Moorehead was a receptive listener and prized her highly. She had given up her own career to become his anchor. Yet, seared by his restlessness, his *accidie* when boredom set in, she was often left on her own. As his reporting commissions took him around Europe again in the late 1940s, and back

to the Middle East, he wrote her, 'Dear Puss, I abandon you so much alone'. Through it all she remained his confidante and buttress. Serving a particular kind of man—driven, egocentric, passionate, ambitious—she managed in her letters to maintain a perfect tone of commitment, blitheness and understanding. She calmly managed his household and literary affairs, and contained her own needs.

But in 1950, overwhelmed at last by his realisation that he had not learnt to write from within himself, Moorehead returned with his family to London and took a job for eight months as Public Relations Officer at the Ministry of Defence, charged to set up an information and public relations service at a time when Britain was shaping its policy for the atomic age. Not surprisingly, the role did not suit him and served to underscore his writer's sense of waste. He also discussed the prospect of some diplomatic post in the Australian Foreign Service with the Australian High Commissioner, Sir Thomas White. White urged him on and Moorehead drafted letters to Australia's Secretary of External Affairs and the Prime Minister. Both Casey and Menzies replied cordially—Moorehead's name carried clout—but with the temporising message that openings for non-departmental officers were rare.<sup>58</sup>

Happily, his job involving nuclear affairs steered him to his next book, *The Traitors*, published by Hamish Hamilton in 1952. Subtitled *The Double Life of Fuchs, Pontecorvo, and Nunn May*, it addressed a subject of high public interest and contemporary contention. Adopting the lively factual style he mastered as a reporter, Moorehead tells a dramatic tale of the murky lives of three traitors, all brilliant physicists born between 1910 and 1913 who, after outstanding postgraduate studies, entered the highly secret world of wartime atomic research. Their appointments took them into the confidential heart of this research in three countries—Canada, the USA and Britain—from where, individually, they transferred their covert findings and knowledge



to the Soviet Government. At the war's end, Nunn May returned to a lectureship in physics at King's College, London while Fuchs and Pontecorvo were appointed to two of the top posts at Britain's new postwar atomic energy establishment at Harwell. After their capture, Nunn May and Fuchs paid for their acts of national treachery with long prison terms, while Pontecorvo and his family disappeared into Russia without a trace.

Moorehead's book displays vivid portraits of a trio of very different men—the quiet, unprepossessing Englishman Nunn May, the well-liked emigré Karl Fuchs, and the highly convivial Italian Pontecorvo. It is rich in detail from trial records and interviews with key scientists at Harwell, and is in one sense an investigation of the roots of treachery. 'Ninety per cent of us', he enticed his readers, 'never have an opportunity of altering history'. Why these men in particular should have turned traitor, when the vast majority of their colleagues did not, was a question that needed to be answered. Searching as Moorehead's enquiry was, there was no conclusive answer. However, in the long history of espionage, *The Traitors* pinpointed a new prototype of traitor who, above society, gave away information not for money or power but for 'the good of mankind'.

The book had impact. Sir Alexander Korda used it as the basis for the film *The Iron Curtain*; it was broadcast in three parts by the BBC, while that American clarion of taste and judgment, *The Christian Science Monitor*, pronounced it 'of absorbing interest and major significance for western society'. It sold widely and, significantly for Moorehead's public reputation, it stirred political criticism in the House of Commons where it was claimed that too much information was divulged on British counter-espionage methods. Not so, said Prime Minister Churchill. 'It was high time that a truthful and substantive account of these three spy episodes was published.' 'Mr Moorehead', he added with a smile, 'has my full confidence'.<sup>59</sup>

Shored up financially and with his own confidence restored, Moorehead was content for a time to stick to his old *métier*—his journalistic best. With *The Traitors* in press, he accepted an invitation from Sir Keith Murdoch, proprietor of his old Melbourne launch pad, *The Herald*, to visit Australia and turn his expatriate eye on the country he had first left 15 years before. He arrived by ship in April 1952 to *Herald* headlines 'Famed Author Revisits Australia' and, linking up with the Australian novelist Nevile Shute, he set forth on a journey overland from Alice Springs to Darwin and on to northern Queensland.

His impressions, flowing into *The Herald* columns and as several lively articles in the *New Yorker*, would appear a year later as a part memoir, part travel book, *Rum Jungle*. For a responsive American audience delighted by this walkabout Down Under, both book and articles unfurled the incongruities of Australia and its curious fauna, the world's richest uranium mine of the title chapter, stored in an antediluvian Aboriginal land, and the brilliant life of the Great Barrier Reef. But for Australian readers, the book skimmed the surface and exposed superficial misconceptions. The literary Geoffrey Dutton judged it a failure among Moorehead's works, because he had returned to his country with a journalist's eye.<sup>60</sup> Yet for Moorehead, the experience of writing *Rum Jungle* brought him an unexpected and exhilarating sense of reconnection with his country. 'Something is happening to me', he wrote eagerly to Lucy. 'Outside me is delight in most of the things I find here. I love it. I feel so well ... I have moments of saying let's all come here—John to Geelong Grammar, Caroline to Toorak College, a house at Frankston ... trips to Java and Singapore ... There is so much I want to explore on this side of the world.'<sup>61</sup>

There was another key element in his thinking. Just before Moorehead sailed for Melbourne, his much loved companion, Alex Clifford, a friend who could never be replaced, died with Lucy and

Alan by his side, after a courageous two-year fight with cancer. He was 42. Moorehead had also suffered the loss of other close wartime colleagues: Christopher Buckley had been killed in the Korean War in the same truck as *The Times*' talented correspondent, Ian Morrison. Both Phillip Jordan, in Tunisia for *The News Chronicle*, and Evelyn Montague, the *Manchester Guardian*'s war correspondent, were dead. The loss of this brilliant brigade of experienced journalists (later increased by Chester Wilmot's death in the Comet crash of January 1954) was deeply depriving for Moorehead who saw himself as 'the lone survivor', cut off from valued professional exchange. It had, moreover, as he would publicly acknowledge in an address at *The Sunday Times* Book Exhibition during 1955, deprived Britain 'of its most valuable and experienced communicators at the very time when the mass circulation of press, radio and television burst upon the world'.<sup>62</sup> In this situation, Australia offered 'another country'.

Perhaps it was the want of enthusiasm in his English wife (who had been appalled, when Moorehead introduced her to Australia early in 1946, to discover that no one had read his books) which turned his Australian musing into a dream. He was, in the event, soon back in Europe travelling and reporting, his reputation as a discerning critic of contemporary affairs out in front. He had two more books to write which grew from, and fitted, his masterly journalistic craft. In 1954, *The Sunday Times* commissioned him to produce a series of articles on Sir Winston Churchill, to celebrate the national icon's 80th birthday that November. This produced a literary portrait which became a much published, though now largely forgotten, work titled *Winston Churchill in Trial and Triumph*. It is an excellent small book, the first short, interpretive biography of a figure then sitting as a backbencher in the House of Commons, looking back on a life of action and parliamentary participation across the reign of half-a-dozen British monarchs, from Queen Victoria to Queen Elizabeth, and 'almost always moving

against the tide'. In his easy conversational style, Moorehead adroitly maps Churchill's early life, his part in the Dardanelles campaign, his role when 'the curious sick-room hush settled over England' at the abdication of Edward VIII, his leadership and oratory in war, his famous Iron Curtin speech in Missouri, and his vast writings. There is, indeed, little in Churchill's remarkable life that he does not touch, lightly and tellingly, with his words. He reminds us that Churchill was 70 when the war ended. Mussolini, 15 years his junior, Roosevelt eight years younger, and Hitler, were all dead, while Stalin, some four years younger, had only eight more years to go. 'We have grown used to living with Churchill through many years', he writes, catching at a contemporary readership, 'and he is as familiar to us as the headmaster at school, or the captain of a ship on a long voyage'. Now, 'the story of this extraordinary life is about to pass into legend ... And it is the last lap that counts'.<sup>63</sup>

In the pattern of his life, Churchill would run through Moorehead's writings and experience like a thread. Indeed, it was Moorehead who was summoned by *The Sunday Express* from his writer's retreat in Italy in the last cold days of January 1965 to attend the great man's lying-in-state in London and the funeral at St Paul's Cathedral, and to convey the final departure of this towering figure to his countrymen.

Moorehead's second commissioned work in the 1950s was more expansive, following an invitation from *Life Magazine* to produce, first a series of articles and, ultimately, a book on the Russian Revolution. The idea was spurred by recent research at Georgetown University into documents released from the German Foreign Ministry archives that suggested that the Germans had played a decisive role in bringing Lenin to power. Moorehead, reading widely in the secondary sources, produced the articles with despatch. His extensive chronological notes on this complex piece of history and its *dramatis personae* are captured in the working notebooks among his papers and afford an instructive

picture of his methodology. His articles were serialised with fanfare in *Life* and the *The Sunday Times*, and the book *The Russian Revolution*, was published jointly by Hamish Hamilton and Collins in Britain and the United States in 1957.

'Mr Moorehead', one reviewer ventured, 'could not write badly if he tried'.<sup>64</sup> But given Moorehead's lack of first-hand research or knowledge of Russia and its language, it could be little more than an efficient and accessible journalistic account of this epic event in world history. Scholarly critics judged his bibliography *jejeune*<sup>65</sup> and his Lenin-was-a-German-agent thesis as 'little more than a burden to him'. The book, however, brought him to the attention of Australia's eminent historian, Manning Clark. 'Anyone who writes or speaks about the Russian Revolution', Clark affirmed with some feeling, 'runs the risk of his character, or his intellectual ability, being analysed in public', but the book 'had much to commend it to the general reader'.<sup>66</sup> What Moorehead did very well, he said, was 'the gossip of the Revolution'. For those who saw it as a record of the private lives of the Gapons, the Rasputins, the Nicholases, the tsarinas, 'he has written a useful and entertaining book'. It was a review that bespoke a personal regard and initiated a friendship between the two men. American scholars took it more seriously. Various reissued, *The Russian Revolution* was prescribed in 1961 as a set book in first year Contemporary History at Brown University.<sup>67</sup>

Nonetheless, well before his polished journalistic forays into Churchill and the Russian Revolution, and despite worldwide recognition as an author and biographer, Moorehead was looking for something more. He awaited the moment of personal illumination. 'I am *never* happy', he had confided to Lucy in a letter of April 1952, 'until I get a moment of inspiration. All the brightly-polished technical work like *The Traitors* doesn't really do any good. But then, where in hell is inspiration? Alex didn't have it. Nor Christopher ... Will I, one day, turn some wonderful



corner, and there it will all be—some acres and acres of inspiration staring me in the face?<sup>68</sup>

Unknowing, the impulse to create a major work, his masterpiece *Gallipoli*, was close at hand. Alan Moorehead was on the edge of the most important step of his literary career.

## Gallipoli

SEVERAL INFLUENCES brought Moorehead to this unexpected shore. Sir Keith Murdoch's invitation for him to visit Australia in 1952 had unanticipated consequences. For this meeting, he did his homework. He studied his distinguished host's career and was alert to the role Keith Murdoch had played in World War I when, as a young newspaper reporter, he had stopped at Gallipoli on his way to England and, appalled by the terrible waste of life and the management of the high command, he had communicated his critical view in an influential letter to Britain's Prime Minister and to his own Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher. Unfortunately, on this visit, Moorehead did not meet Murdoch, who was ill in hospital and soon to die, but their common link—both journalists in different wars—lingered in his mind and sowed an early seed of interest in the historic battle of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Like all young Australians of the 1920s and 1930s, Moorehead had been drilled in the story of his country's sacrifice and the courage shown during the ill-fated campaign at the Dardanelles. At Scotch College, he had stood through the ceremonies each Anzac Day on 25 April with the old generals' speeches, the *ennui*, and the little glass case of medals hanging in the school hall. 'All my life', he wrote later, 'I was brought up in Australia surrounded by my elders talking about this campaign. We were the next generation and naturally we thought all these old

men boring. I couldn't go to any little country town without seeing the white statue, the memorial hall, and then the Anzac Day parades which seemed to me just to end in drunken spree's'.<sup>69</sup> When he left Australia he swore to himself that he would 'never think again or expose myself to the idea of Anzac and Gallipoli'.

But when a visiting English friend, Lionel Fielden, came downstairs one evening while staying with the Mooreheads in Italy in the early 1950s, and produced his personal diary of the Gallipoli campaign, Moorehead was 'absolutely captivated'. The seed of inspiration took deep root. He at once began reading military histories of the Dardanelles, absorbing the memoirs of generals, admirals and politicians, as well as the official reports and despatches on the campaign. He also read such works as existed on the Turkish operations, and started gathering private papers of British and Australian soldiers who had fought at Gallipoli.

Melbourne University, he would acknowledge later, had taught him 'one vital thing—the technique of how to learn'.<sup>70</sup> Plunging into the historical sources on Gallipoli, he found he could concentrate with an absorption that would never have been possible without his academic training. Journalist turned incipient scholar, Moorehead had found his true subject for the telling. 'Now, more than at any time since the ending of the war', he jotted happily in his journal in May 1954, 'I am settled ... as far as work is concerned and probably for the next eighteen months or two years'.

He visited Turkey early in 1955 and, after discussions with the Turkish Ministry of Defence, he was given the run of their military archives with maps specially prepared for him. He had access to Atatürk's diary in the great military leader's own handwriting which, when he had it translated, turned out to be 'terribly dull'. Touring the Gallipoli Peninsula in the care of an officer of the Turkish Army's Historical Department, Colonel Sirer, who had fought at Gallipoli, Moorehead

absorbed the harsh landscape with its wild, precipitous hills, its clear light, the blue Aegean sea, and its 'compelling sense of peace', and was acutely aware that, for Australians, 'there could be no other story like it'. Two of his uncles had fought at Gallipoli and one, Frank Moorehead, aged 24, had been killed at Anzac Cove in the first rush up the beach. They found his grave in a rugged valley above the cove with a plaque upon it and, glancing round, Moorehead saw that Colonel Sirer had come to attention, his right hand drawn up smartly in the Turkish salute.

For Moorehead, it was the moment of truth, the instant when the Gallipoli campaign, as he wrote that April in his evocative *New Yorker* article, 'Return to a Legend', moved 'from legend through history, to the point where it almost seemed to have become a personal experience of my own'.

He prepared the first draft of *Gallipoli* while living with his family for nine months at a friend's olive estate on the Greek island of Spetses, close to the Dardanelles, wanting to write in the atmosphere of the campaign, and armed with 30 books from the London Library. The Dardanelles were the Hellespont of Homer, the city of Troy with its resonance of *The Iliad* on the nearby coast. Many books had been written about the old campaign of 40 years before and there was no more controversial chapter in the annals of World War 1 than the Allied attempt to take the Dardanelles by a naval bombardment and a bitter nine-month battle on the Gallipoli Peninsula that extended from 25 April to December 1915. However, no book had brought the campaign, its politics and planning, its fierce fighting, and the sweep of its human endurance and interplay, into one composite study.

In his evocative prose, Moorehead sets his story in its historical frame. Turkey, no longer the powerful Ottoman Empire of the Sultanate, for some time judged 'the sick man of Europe', was now dominated by a ruthless and unruly band of brigands and bargainers, the Young Turks, who had taken over from the old government and, in August 1914,

put Turkey up for auction between Britain and Germany. It was a situation of political and diplomatic intrigue and rivalry, wrote Moorehead, that had extreme attractions for the 'oriental' mind. The foreign ambassadors 'installed like robber barons in their enormous embassies along the Bosphorus, the Young Turks in the Yildiz Palace and the Sublime Porte, and everywhere through the sprawling decaying beautiful capital itself that hushed and conspiratorial air which seems to overtake all neutral cities on the edge of war. It was the atmosphere of the high table in the gambling casino, very late at night, when every move takes on a kind of fated self-importance, when everyone, the players and the watchers together, is engrossed'.<sup>71</sup>

Strengthened by two German battleships and a German military mission brought out to train her ragged troops, the Young Turks allied themselves with Germany. Britain and France declared war on Turkey in October 1914. Committed to assist Russia, menaced by Germany in the Caucasus, the British Government decided to attack the enemy through the back door in the Near East and to mount a naval assault that would storm the Dardanelles, move up the Sea of Marmara, capture Constantinople, and open a route through the Black Sea.

Moorehead brings his well-honed analytical skills to bear on the naval strategy masterminded by Britain's energetic young First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, and his experienced but eccentric First Sea Lord, Lord Fisher. An ambitious strategy, backed by Cabinet and the most powerful man in Britain, the Minister for War, Lord Kitchener, it relied on an armada of old battleships, a covey of submarines, destroyers, corvettes and minesweepers, and the brand new British battleship *Queen Elizabeth*. It marked, in fact, the greatest concentration of naval strength ever seen in the Mediterranean.

Through masterly portraits, Moorehead sets up his naval cast of characters: the fiery old naval seadog, 'Jacky' Fisher who wanted to go *totus porcus*—the whole hog; Admiral Carden who, launching the



assault on the Turkish forts at the entrance to The Narrows with the loss of several of the old battleships, teetered towards a nervous breakdown; his replacement, the vigorous Admiral de Robeck; the buoyant and passionately committed admiral's Chief-of-Staff, Roger Keyes, who fought to the end for the naval offensive, and the French Admiral Guépratte, whose personality and readiness to accept a subordinate role and offer every assistance, writes Moorehead, 'refreshes the whole Gallipoli story'. Faced, however, with command hesitation and the loss of ships, the decision was made in London, in March 1915, to bring in the army and initiate a land assault on the peninsula under General Sir Ian Hamilton.

Both precipitancy and hesitation marked the landing. Moorehead writes:

A strange light plays over the Gallipoli landing on 25 April 1915, and no matter how often the story is retold there is still an actuality about it, a feeling of suspense and incompleteness ... Hardly anyone behaves on this day as you might have expected him to do. One can think of half-a-dozen moves that the commanders might have made at any given moment, and very often the thing they did do seems the most improbable of all. There is a certain clarity about the actions of Mustafa Kemal on the Turkish side ... but for the others ... the great crises of the day appear to have gone cascading by as though they were some natural phenomenon, having a monstrous life of its own, and for the time being entirely out of control.

For the soldiers in the front line the issues were, of course, brutally simple ... Confronted by some quite impossible objective, their lives suddenly appear to them to be of no consequence at all; they get up and charge and die.<sup>72</sup>

By 8 a.m., 8000 men drawn from the countryside and cities of Australia had come ashore at Gaba Tepe, and somewhat to their left, some 3000 New Zealanders. The water ran red with blood.

At Sedd-el-Bahr, 13 miles to the south, the British troops were experiencing a carnage inflicted by the Turks on their Trojan Horse, the 'wreck ship' *River Clyde*, that was never for a moment anticipated. An unnatural stillness, Moorehead recounts, had succeeded the Allied barrage on the beach and the fortress above the slopes. 'At 6.22 a.m., the *River Clyde* grounded her bows without a tremor ... In that instant the Turkish rifle fire burst out.'

Many strange scenes occurred, he records, because the men persisted in trying to do things they had been told to do. 'The men at once came running down the gangways along the ship's sides, and as they ran they presented a target which was not unlike the line of moving objects one sees sometimes in a shooting gallery at a village fair ... Soon the gangways became jammed with dead and dying ... The sun was shining brightly.'<sup>73</sup>

Familiar with the situation from his own experience of desperate battles, Moorehead observes:

The British had now reached that point in a battle where the leaders feel they must persist in attacking although all hope has gone ... The senseless attack had to continue for a little longer until it was sufficiently demonstrated that the thing was impossible, until enough of the general pool of courage had vanished with the dead, and shock and exhaustion had overcome them all.<sup>74</sup>

From the outset, Sir Ian Hamilton's stance as Commander of the Expeditionary Forces, was one of singular detachment. The 62-year-old Hamilton, immured on the *Queen Elizabeth* and cruising offshore,

where he was cut off from direct command of what was happening on land, resolved not to interfere with his commanders and to leave the overall strategy, unless invited, to his generals in the field. It was a course that led to considerable confusion and, in the absence of adequate ship-to-shore signalling, chaos. But as the fierce fighting raged on the inhospitable cliffs and there was neither a glimmer of victory nor any clear strategy except to fight the enemy, Hamilton issued his one inspired instruction to the exposed Anzac soldiers scrambling up the cliff faces—‘Dig, dig, dig, until you are safe’.

As with his World War 2 despatches, there is an urgency and compelling presence in Moorehead’s descriptions of the hard-fought battles. Garnering his material from documentary and participant sources, he leads his readers with his unembroidered prose and his quiet control of tension.

A company of Turks was seen advancing down a ravine known as Wire Gully. There had been no preliminary bugle call, none of the usual shouts of Allah, Allah: merely those shadowy forms in the half-darkness and the long line of bayonets. The Australians opened fire from either side of the gully, and immediately the enemy bugles sounded and the charge began ... At most places the oncoming enemy had to cross two or three hundred yards before they reached the Anzac entrenchments, and so there was half-a-minute or more when they were exposed in the open and quite defenceless. Very few of them survived even that amount of time.<sup>75</sup>

With access to the Turkish documents, Moorehead enters the enemy’s domain. Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) had watched the Anzac landing and, going forward on foot from the battalion he had left resting after their

long march to the Dardanelles, he reached the slopes of Chunuk Bair and saw a party of Turkish soldiers running from the enemy in full retreat. In a moment that changed the face of war, he ordered them to fix their bayonets and lie down. At this the advancing Australians took cover and, while they hesitated, Kemal sent his orderly running to bring up his battalion. 'It was', Moorehead sums up, 'one of the cruellest accidents of the campaign that this one junior Turkish commander of genius should have been at this particular spot at this moment'.<sup>76</sup> Without him, the Australians and New Zealanders might have taken Chunuk Bair that morning and the battle been decided then and there.

As the battles raged, 'the terrible "ifs"', as Churchill described them, accumulated in London. Fisher, vacillating wildly, renounced the Dardanelles; Prime Minister Asquith prevaricated, and Churchill, who 'had made the pace hot with his very brilliancy of mind', was isolated. At the height of his struggle for Gallipoli reinforcements, he was removed in May from his post at the Admiralty.

While tension mounted on land and sea, on the peninsula a curious human adaptation was taking place. There is a poignancy and closeness in Moorehead's evocation of 'the ant heap life' of the soldiers, breathing, eating, sleeping, climbing, fighting, dying, burying their dead, living within feet of the enemy trenches; the Australians were humorous, irreverent and inventive, plunging into the Aegean to cleanse their bodies, remembering happier boyhood seas, and mixing wit and stoicism with their exhaustion and danger. 'They were not fatalists', he wrote. 'They believed that a mistake had been made in the landing at Gaba Tepe and that they might easily have to pay for it with their lives; but they very much wanted to go on living, they were all for the battle and they hoped and believed obscurely that in the end they would win.'<sup>77</sup> There was, he discerned, an intensity and 'an extraordinary cheerfulness and exaltation' among the men at the frontline. 'They had a sharp and enormous appetite for the smallest things. Living with the

instant prospect of death, all pettiness, all the normal anxieties and jealousies of life deserted them ... the past receded, the future barely existed, and they lived as never before upon the moment, released from the normal weight of human ambitions and regrets.'

Moorehead's book is by no means focussed on the Australians. It reaches across the participation and performance of the British, Irish, French, Imperial-Indian, African, and Anzac-troops, and the Turkish forces. His overarching perspective is studded with brilliant cameo portraits of the Allied and enemy commanders: the solitary, introverted, and tactically inspired Kemal; the medley of irresolute and aloof British generals—some brought out of mothballs from the Boer War—whose misunderstandings and failure to give clear orders cost countless British lives; the Anzac's popular commander, General Birdwood; John Monash, whose talents of leadership went undivined at Gallipoli; and Lord Kitchener, gloomy, firmly resisting reinforcements at the peninsula, but visiting at last in November 1915, to find Gallipoli 'an awful place'.

By September 1915, Hamilton's army was down to half its strength and Keith Murdoch's 'amazing document', with its stringent criticism of Hamilton's strategy and the loss and expenditure of men's lives, of Kitchener's untried and ill-prepared 'new army' and the 'unchangeably selfish' British generals and brigadiers, had reached the British Cabinet. Hamilton was withdrawn in October, never to serve in the field again. Arriving at Gallipoli, his replacement, the authoritative, pragmatic Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Munro, made his swift decision for evacuation.

Moorehead is perceptive, vividly alive to the experience of the young soldiers recruited in distant Australia as reinforcements and replacements at Gallipoli, going forth to a war 'from which [in their case] no one had ever returned on leave'. He writes:



Days would elapse while the new soldier ... still marvelled at things which had long ceased to be remarkable to the other men: the way, for instance, a French soldier would perch on the cliffs and sound a hunting horn as a warning to the soldiers bathing in the sea below that a shell was coming over from Asia. Or it would be some surprising act of military punctilio: a pipe band parading on the shore, an immaculate colonel, looking like some animated tin soldier from the nursery, raising his hand to salute the flag ... And always to the fresh eye there were recurring moments of release and wonder at the slanting luminous light in the early mornings and the evenings, in the marvellous colour of the sea.<sup>78</sup>

His account of the secret, brilliantly planned and gradual evacuation of Gallipoli, designed to withdraw some 83 000 men from the Suvla-Anzac bridgehead, and staged through the icy days of December 1915, with feints and stealth to outwit the Turks without the loss of a single life, brings the excitement of a thriller to his telling. One imponderable remained: the behaviour of the army itself. But, as Moorehead tells it:

The men came to their officers in hundreds and asked to be the last to leave the shore. It was nothing more than a gesture, something for the pride to feed on, a kind of tribute to their friends who were already dead, but they were intensely serious about it. The veterans argued that they had earned this right, the newer arrivals insisted that they should be given this one last opportunity of distinguishing themselves. And so there was no need to call for volunteers to man the trenches at the end; it was a matter of selection ... It was something better than sentimentality that made one

soldier say to his officer, "I hope they won't hear us going down to the beaches".<sup>79</sup>

*Gallipoli*, launched in April 1956 with a print run of 25 000 copies, was an interpretative historical masterpiece, a realisation of Moorehead's private dream. It was the first fully rounded, penetrating and visually rich study of the Dardanelles campaign and it took the literary world by storm. The *Literary Review* pronounced it 'a heartbreaking and dramatic account of folly and heroism and a brilliant analysis of the military mind'.<sup>80</sup> Eminent military men saw it as a work of outstanding interest. General Lord Freyberg, who had won the DSO for gallantry at Gallipoli and the VC in France, declared that *Gallipoli* had 'recaptured so much of the atmosphere and spirit of those adventurous months and, with its military analysis of one of the world's classic tragedies', had made 'an absorbing contribution to the history of our times'.<sup>81</sup> In the United States, General Matthew Ridgway pronounced *Gallipoli* 'a classic of military history fearlessly presenting not only the basic decisions but the reasoning with which they were reached'.

In Australia, where bookshops emptied their windows to display the book, the country's own war correspondent at Gallipoli and author of the Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918 series, C.E.W. Bean, praised the book as 'a brilliant and sympathetic reconstruction of the Dardanelles campaign'.<sup>82</sup> 'Of course you were there in 1915', Moorehead's friend and publisher Jamie (Hamish) Hamilton chided



Angus & Robertson emptied its window to display Alan Moorehead's books [1956]  
Manuscript Collection, National Library of Australia

him gaily, 'it's absurd to pretend you weren't. The book is so thrillingly alive!'<sup>83</sup>

As it happened, 1956 would prove a vintage year for books. An abundance of memorable works rolled from the presses, including Churchill's *History of the English Speaking People*, Beaverbrook's *Men and Power*, Bertrand Russell's *Logic and Knowledge*, Kenneth Clark's *The Nude*, and Rose Macauley's *The Towers of Trebisonde*, to name but a few. But there was no quibble about the most memorable of all. *Gallipoli* won *The Sunday Times* Book of the Year Prize of £1000 for an outstanding work of literature, and the Duff Cooper Memorial Prize, a new award of high prestige for nonfiction, which conferred upon the recipient the right to nominate the presenter of the prize. Moorehead chose Sir Winston Churchill. His own evaluation had vindicated Churchill's crucial part in the original planning of the Dardanelles campaign (open for so long to opprobrium in Britain and Australia) and revealed the imagination and frustration of his plan. For Churchill it was a valued gesture of recognition.

Moorehead's book would cast a remarkably long shadow. Vivid and pioneering, it rescued the old campaign internationally from its shadowy history, assessed Britain's naval, military, and political part and, for Australians, underscored the importance of their proud, deeply held national legend. In the writing of it, Moorehead, too, had also come to understand the campaign's wide significance. In a powerful epilogue, he observes, 'Gradually, with the passing of time, the great events of the war and its aftermath were falling into perspective, and the Gallipoli adventure was seen, not in isolation, but as a part of the general strategy; not as a sideshow, but as an alternative to the fearful three years that followed in the trenches in France, to the long campaign against the Turks in Mesopotamia, and to the expedition to Salonika. It was even perhaps not too much to say that if the Allies had succeeded in penetrating the Dardanelles in 1915 or 1916 the Russians would not

have signed a separate peace, and that the Revolution might not have followed, not, at all events, so soon, or possibly so drastically'.

Seen in this new light, he concludes, 'the Gallipoli campaign was no longer a blunder or a reckless gamble; it was the most imaginative conception of the war, and its potentialities were almost beyond reckoning'.

Writing in 1955 and 1956 and seasoned by war, he was also keenly alert to the enormous influence that the Gallipoli campaign had, in a practical sense, for World War 2. His points emerge crystal clear: 'It was', he sums up, 'the greatest amphibious operation which mankind had known up till then, and it took place in circumstances in which nearly everything was experimental: in the use of submarines and aircraft ... in the manoeuvre of landing armies in small boats on a hostile coast, in the use of radio, of the aerial bomb, the land mine, and many other novel devices ... In 1940 there was very little that the Allied commanders could learn from the long struggle against the Kaiser's armies in the trenches of France. But Gallipoli was a mine of information about the complexities of the modern war of manoeuvre, of the combined operation by land and sea and sky; and the correction of the errors made then was a true basis of the victory of 1945'.<sup>84</sup>

Many further studies would emerge from national and international publishing houses about the Gallipoli campaign in the ensuing half century. Moorehead's book, however, remains a classic, a work of moving and indelible vividness, an enduring archetype. His own final judgment of the work was characteristically direct. 'The old men were right', he said in an oral history interview in 1964, 'it was the military event of the century'. 'Writing it has given me more happiness than any others in its effect ... because it was going back to my roots. It was the only book where I was more interested in the subject at the end than when I began.'<sup>85</sup>

## *A Love Affair with Africa*

**A**MID THE plaudits for *Gallipoli*, Moorehead was elected to the Royal Society of Literature and, buoyed up by such public recognition, he set off on a round of travel that took him to the Middle East, Cuba and across America, where he rubbed shoulders with the novelists John O'Hara and P.G. Wodehouse and cartoonist, Charles Addams. There, too, he discussed further writing with the new editor of the *New Yorker*, William Shawn, an encounter that gave him, as he told Lucy, 'a whiff of Scott Fitzgerald's world'.

This element of surprise and delight at his acceptance in high places, and a concomitant need for reassurance, was a persistent and paradoxical part of Moorehead's character. After hard work and success, he looked for change, for escape from family commitments, and for fun. It was a pattern that bore inevitably on his close relationships and was a particular challenge for Lucy. 'I love you more than anyone else in the world', he wrote her on this journey, 'and I run away and leave you in misery. These awful departures. Stay, don't pack, don't follow. But it isn't like that. You know that in your heart. I go away only to come home, for how long now, 17 years? Isn't the coming home good? Better perhaps than had I stayed and nagged miserably. I have to work things out alone, I don't know why: and so I go away and get a sort of balance again ... I cannot ...



immediately sink myself in work, then all the frustrations and doubt rushes back at me'.<sup>86</sup>

In the event, he was to find a continuing measure of engagement and contentment in the continent where his first major work had led him—Africa. History and his early memories of that continent were to call him back. During a special wartime assignment to the Sudan and Ethiopia in 1941, he had travelled by flying boat from Cairo up the Nile to Addis Ababa and Khartoum, and on to Lake Victoria, where he had observed the beginning of the Nile's long passage to the sea. 'I conceived', he wrote later, 'that the river had a compelling and mysterious charm, that its inhabitants were a race of great physical beauty living the true idyllic life, in short that it was all unspoiled and uncontaminated—savagery with a touch of grace'.<sup>87</sup>

During 1954 Moorehead had made one or two flying visits to the African continent to indulge his 'private myth'. But late in 1956, responding to an invitation from his wartime friend, Major General Freddie de Guingand, who had retired to Rhodesia after his illustrious military career, and then to one in Johannesburg, he began a journey that took him on a safari with Lucy from Johannesburg to Khartoum, absorbing the country and its people, and examining the African wildlife that was increasingly threatened by hunting and settlement. Travelling by boat and Land Rover, he visited wildlife parks and reservations and some of the most unspoilt game country in Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, South Africa and part of the Belgian Congo. And as he travelled and talked with park directors, game wardens and a slew of gung-ho residents more inclined to shoot and stuff an animal than to preserve it, he became aware at first-hand of the effects of the poaching and hunting of wildlife, the poor state of the local parks and the disregard of governments. He decided to bring an awareness of these exotic animals and the threats to their survival to the wider world.

The writer and adventurer in him also wanted to convey the delights of this absorbing faunal paradise. 'Take no notice of the fact that the hippopotamus, the elephant and other animals have been described so often before', William Shawn advised him. 'Say what *you* think, and what *you* felt, write whatever you yourself found.'<sup>88</sup> He did, and his fresh, at times poetic snapshots and stories of the African fauna ignited a worldwide interest that marked him as an early international advocate for wildlife protection and conservation. In the wake of a number of his popular articles in the *New Yorker*, Moorehead's wittily titled book *No Room in the Ark*, appeared in 1959. Styled 'a literary safari of a vanishing Africa', it became a top bestseller in Britain and America, was serialised in several British newspapers and *Firago*, and was translated into four languages. There were sales of 30 000 copies in six months in Britain alone.

Moorehead's own involvement was intensely personal. Observing and recording with his camera eye, he experienced something of an epiphany when he came face to face with a large black male gorilla, 'a craggy pillar of gleaming blackness, black crew-cut hair, black deep-sunken eyes glaring towards us, huge rubbery black nostrils and a black beard'. 'I had not been prepared for the blackness of him', he wrote. 'He was the most distinguished and splendid animal I ever saw and I had only one desire ... to go forward towards him, to meet him and to know him: to communicate.'<sup>89</sup>

Africa held him in thrall. 'You simply want to watch and see and then go on again, to cross the border ... to climb the flat-topped mountain in the distance, to find another river', he explained. 'You can never really have enough.' Indeed the last chapter of *No Room in the Ark*, 'The Nile', prefigured what would become Moorehead's consuming literary interest.

Late in 1958 he made a return visit to Africa, this time in the company of Dick Waller, a geographer and traveller whom he had met

through their mutual friend Freya Stark. It was a visit that would lead him with growing passion and commitment to the writing of one of his most highly acclaimed and best remembered books, *The White Nile*. On this occasion it was as both traveller and historical writer that he undertook the task that would keep him in Africa for months at a time, across several years, and it was the unique combination of his strengths as traveller and historian that made his pioneering works on Africa so readable and compelling.

Moorehead's focus centred on the historical and geographical puzzle that had for long involved the sources of the Nile. For 2000 years, since Herodotus ascended the river as far as the first cataract at Aswan in 460 B.C., no region of the world had excited the same fascination as the mysterious source of the parent stream, the White Nile, that flows south of Khartoum, where the Blue Nile comes in from the Ethiopian mountains. 'The great brown flood', he writes, 'came pouring out of the desert forever, and no one could explain why it was that it should rise and flow over its banks in the Nile Delta in September, the driest and hottest time of the year on the Mediterranean littoral ... and continue in its lower reaches for well over a thousand miles, through one of the most frightful of all deserts without receiving a single tributary and hardly a drop of rain'.<sup>90</sup> The river was life itself, sliding along for 4000 miles from Lake Victoria to the Mediterranean and marking what had become 'the greatest geographical secret after the discovery of America'.

His central plan was to track the expeditions of the mid-nineteenth-century explorers, Burton, Speke, Livingstone, Stanley and the Bakers—those dazzlingly intrepid men (and one woman) who had pitted their intelligence and endurance to find the source of the White Nile—and holding the Nile as his focal point, to encompass the dramatic events of the last quarter of that century in north-east and central Africa as these newly accessible regions, opened by exploration, responded to European exploitation, Christianisation, and mounting European dominance.

Before embarking on this ambitious venture, Moorehead prepared 'to get into the minds of the old explorers', reading their published journals—those huge multi-volumed productions that were the nineteenth-century reader's vivid route to armchair travel—richly dramatic, intensely personal, and almost all, he found, 'distinguished by a quality of writing which makes the study of this subject a delight'.

He and Dick Waller began their expedition at Dar-es-Salaam in Tanganyika in October and embarked on a three-month journey back to the very soil the explorers had trod. They travelled daily by Land Rover and, when the tarmac roads ran out, took turns to walk in front of their transport with their young African servant amid the swishing red dust. At night they slept in the Land Rover or in guest bungalows found along the way. In British territory they met with tribal chiefs, looking for those who had met the explorers, and encountered some who could recall the experience of their ancestors passed on by word of mouth. They stood together on the shore of Lake Victoria, moved into Uganda and on to the Sudan border, and journeyed north up the Nile.

Waller, a gentle and spiritual man, was amazed at Moorehead's tremendous physical and mental vigour. He found him 'deeply immersed and enquiring', 'very methodical', 'hard on himself and others', jotting down notes, marking their maps, and imagining and reconstructing in his mind the experience of those distant explorers. At the same time, Moorehead absorbed a store of knowledge and opinion from officials and other contacts he met along the way. Stopping also to pore over documents at libraries, he amassed an abundance of geographical, historical, ethnological, anthropological, zoological and botanical information drawn from archives and old African periodicals. And into all this, he wove his own vividly fresh observations of people, places and landscape. With this booty, he retired to Freya Stark's house at Asolo in Italy to write his book.

Opening *The White Nile*, the reader is at once engaged on an extraordinary reconnaissance. A sense of excitement stirs through the pages. In his direct and lively style, Moorehead draws us into close acquaintance with the diverse explorers. There was Richard Burton with 'his questing panther eyes', the brow of a god, and the 'jaw of a devil', a man of overmastering restlessness and an erudite scholar and linguist who, at 36, was already famous as a traveller and writer in love with the Arab world and 'for whom the tinkling of a camel bell beckoned him until the day he died'. His colleague in Africa, his direct opposite and nemesis, was the highly strung but brilliant John Speke, the 'true geographer'. In 1857, this odd couple set out from Zanzibar with a vast company of men and an immense stock of equipment, to travel through Tanganyika, until Speke, in August 1858, with great excitement, sighted the first stretch of Lake Victoria that led him to the firm, spontaneous conclusion 'that the lake at my feet gave birth to that interesting river, the source of which has been the subject of so much speculation'.<sup>91</sup>

This early assertion on the White Nile's source was passionately disputed by Burton. Correct as it proved eventually, it would lead, after Speke's second African expedition with James Grant, to his untimely death in contentious circumstances in 1864, a story Moorehead unravels with insight. Speke was followed in the years 1865 to 1873 by the large, handsome Englishman, Samuel Baker, and his beautiful Hungarian wife Florence, who, starting from Khartoum, decided to seek a second source of the Nile at Lûta Nzigé. Moorehead perceives the solid, imperturbable Baker as 'a kind of fulcrum in African exploration', an independent and wealthy traveller who, unlike the other explorers, was neither commissioned nor supported by government, public institutions or a geographical society. In their search for the geographic grail in the heart of Central Africa, the Bakers found their way through the terrible swamps of the Sudd where 'no man had lived or could ever live in this



desolation of drifting reeds and ooze'. Together they faced every hazard, hardship and unanticipated obstacle with a resilience and determination that astonishes a twenty-first-century reader. 'She was not a screamer', her husband observed mildly of his wife. When heavy dew drenched her Victorian skirts and brought her to the ground, she donned men's clothing. Desperately ill from malaria, she was carried composedly on a litter, and when they ran into trouble with hostile Kamrasi tribesmen, Moorehead records, she caused an invaluable sensation by choosing that moment to wash her hair while 'the tribesmen and their families gathered round in amazement at the sight of her long golden tresses reaching to her waist'.<sup>92</sup>

Together, the Bakers discovered and named the great Lake Albert which Baker judged to be at least a western source of the Nile and, travelling on, found and named the Murchison Falls. Back in England, elevated as Sir Samuel Baker and heralded as 'Baker of the Nile', the explorer settled down to write his vivid many-volumed work, *The Albert N'yanza*, which revealed the Nile and the Sudan to his Imperial readers as more than a geographical interest—as a region of political, humanitarian and commercial importance.

But the central geographical puzzle remained. In the Bakers' wake came David Livingstone, already successful following earlier expeditions when he ascended the Zambezi River to the Victoria Falls and discovered Lake Nyasa. Livingstone was a man who had what the Arabs call *baraka*, the power of enhancing life and conferring a blessing on everyone who met him. However, he was never at his best when travelling with other white men, on whom he forced disastrously high canons of behaviour. On his own, writes Moorehead, his world 'compacted into a straight line'.

Livingstone returned to Africa to settle the problem of the Nile watersheds in Tanganyika. Lost to view for five years and broken in health, he would be found at Ujiji by Henry Stanley in 1871 with the

imperishable words delivered in that remote, lonely landscape, 'Dr Livingstone, I presume'.

Moorehead's knowing eye recognised Stanley as 'the most assiduous foreign correspondent who ever lived' and he presents a brilliant picture of the hustling American as a new kind of man in Africa, a philistine 'with the attitudes of a *condottiere* in Renaissance Italy', who did not care about anthropology, botany, geology or reform, but was out to make a name for himself. For Moorehead, steeped in the explorers' journals and travails, it was the supreme irony that it should be Stanley—this *briseur d'obstacles* who determined that Lake Victoria had only one outlet, at Jinja, with no other southern tributary that might be a true source of the Nile, and that Lake Tanganyika did not have an outlet to Lake Albert—who should solve the great geographical puzzle and turn out to be the greatest empire-builder and most efficient explorer of them all.<sup>93</sup>

For the modern reader, the romantic, larger-than-life, deeply obsessed explorers, 'the old ghosts' as Harold Nicholson dubbed them, are the enthralling heroes of the book. But at a time when Africa and its racial disharmonies were drawing contemporary attention to the dark continent, Moorehead's story was a reminder of the bizarre nineteenth-century procession of missionaries, soldiers of fortune, military men and diplomats who promoted evangelisation, power politics, corruption, exploitation, revolution, and intervention in Africa's diverse kingdoms. Here we meet the camel-riding General Gordon and his doomed resistance at the siege of Khartoum, and Henry Kitchener, the energetic young major in Gordon's service (already described by Moorehead in *Gallipoli*), who would avenge Gordon at the battle of Omdurman and reopen the way up the Nile. Here, too, in a series of character sketches described by one reviewer as 'little masterpieces', we meet the talented German doctor and scientist, Emin, whom Gordon appointed Governor of Equatoria and who managed to hold out against the tide of barbarism

that swept the Nile; and the suave, highly competent Khedive Ismail who Westernised Egypt and organised the opening of the Suez Canal.

Moorehead assembles his intricate interrelated stories, his vast sweep of politics and action into a book steeped in history and adventure, alive with incident and personalisations and coloured by barbaric, grasping and murderous African rulers. One who slips at intervals through the story is the young King Mutesa of Buganda, a slim young man of certain dignity, 'with his tonsored hair built up like a cockscomb on his head'. He had several hundred wives, and was 'a savage and bloodthirsty monster' in whose kingdom hardly a day went by without some member being executed at his command as a result of some small lapse of etiquette for which, 'wilfully, casually, almost as a game', the victims 'would be taken away, screaming, to have their heads lopped off'.<sup>94</sup>

In a rich and complex narrative, Moorehead maintains disciplined control of a vast mass of historical material, but there is nothing distant about his writing. He treads where his characters have trodden, studying their routes, soaking up the terrain, discerning their ambitions and failings. Like them, he observes the immense lakes and the great tumbling falls, the people and the flora, the limpid evenings and the brilliant searing days. And it is part of his skill as a historian and a journalist to recreate this in both an historical and his own contemporary setting and to enable us to see vividly, more than a century later, the hope, the horrors, the challenges and triumphs of his characters.

He acknowledged that it needs 'a certain amount of stamina to travel through Africa'. 'Often, on the move', he records, 'the brain reaches a saturation point, refusing to respond to the new stimuli any more, and it is not always easy to relax. Africa still surrounds you. The mosquito hovers over the bed at night and the same relentless sun comes up in the morning'.

Using the same historical skills he had honed at Gallipoli, Moorehead had traversed and interpreted much of the African continent over 40

years. On the eve of a new century, he concludes, the aged Queen Victoria could survey the scene with satisfaction. 'She ruled the river from the Mediterranean to the Mountains of the Moon. Egypt, the Sudan, Uganda—all were hers in fact, if not in name, and the Nile, for the first time in its history, was an open highway from Central Africa to the sea.'<sup>95</sup>

'Every now and then, or perhaps not often,' reflected a contributor to the *The Times Literary Supplement* when *The White Nile* saw print in 1960, 'there comes along a book that is patently a thoroughbred: a proper professional job, correct in balance, rhythm, and perspective'. This book might lack 'the haunting, classical allure of his noble *Gallipoli*, but in every page, in every paragraph, it feels right, like the swiftest of jet aircraft or the leanest of tigers'.<sup>96</sup> '[Moorehead] appears to have visited every inch of it', wrote the essayist and writer J.B. Priestley, 'and puts it before us with simplicity and power'. Many travellers' tales had been written about Africa by the time *The White Nile* appeared. Moorehead, however, had again captured unique ground in his large historical overview, his insight, and in his research and writing. 'He has picked for us the rich plums which none but African historians could see today', observed the distinguished authority on Africa, Elspeth Huxley,<sup>97</sup> but none—one is tempted to add—with such first-hand knowledge and experience of the country.

When Moorehead first considered writing this dense and wide-ranging book, he warned Hamish Hamilton, 'you will probably not want to publish this story, but I am obsessed by it'. Published with the confidence his long-time publisher and friend felt for his books, the work stirred an avalanche of praise. Both scholars and newspaper commentators grasped its breadth and compass and saw it as a book 'free, frank and thrilling', 'a prototype of what this type of work should be'.<sup>98</sup> Amid public pleasure, his friend Martha Gellhorn sent him her warm personal reassurance. 'I think it is a dream book, a humdinger',



she wrote. 'I have just realised you are a first class historian, although I have always realised you write like a bird ... And what a wonderful way of life you've found, it combines derring-do (which we all pine for) with the pleasures of the mind, your mind at work.'<sup>99</sup>

For Moorehead, it was a question of both mind and heart. Africa was in his blood. Journeying and writing, he had found a new kind of happiness and, encouraged by governors and other interested officials along the way, he turned his lens on the continent's other great river, the Blue Nile. Less paramount, less historically central than the White Nile, 'the Blue' poured quietly out of Lake Tana in the northern highlands of Ethiopia, over the spectacular Tisisat Falls and, gushing through the Ethiopian plateau to the hot plains of the Sudan, joined the White Nile at Khartoum.

In *The Blue Nile*, Moorehead steps back half-a-century from the provenance of *The White Nile* to exhume the expeditionary drives that were mounted during the last quarter of the eighteenth and the early-nineteenth centuries into the great looming isolation of Africa. The first was conducted in Ethiopia in the 1770s by the audacious British traveller, James Bruce; the second was the flamboyant, highly organised invasion of Egypt in the 1790s by Napoleon Bonaparte; and the last, the dramatic opening up of the Sudan by the Turks under Mohammad Ali and the British at the end of the nineteenth century.

Again Moorehead adopts his singular 'soaking-in-at-the-pores' technique to imagine and reconstruct his history. This time, the terrain he needed to cover was fiercely inhospitable and often approachable only by foot or boat. At times, even Moorehead's notable stamina was severely challenged. Like *The White Nile*, *The Blue Nile* is rich in landscape, characters and action. Bruce, the Scottish buccaneer who plunged into Ethiopia, driven by his own curiosity and expediency, may lack the moral qualities of the old ghosts, but his expansive published account of his journey, with its air of nightmarish fantasy,



proved astonishingly sound, though it was disbelieved and ridiculed by contemporary London society. It yielded information on an obscure country that shaped Napoleon's decision to invade Egypt at the close of Bruce's century, thereby ending the continent's long sleep.

Napoleon's lavish campaign to conquer Egypt from 1798 to 1801, with its remarkable contingent of archaeologists, scientists of every kind, engineers, artists and poets recruited to build up an encyclopaedia of knowledge on the country, makes enthralling reading. Moorehead's chapters open up an important episode in the history of science and culture and bring the author's own comprehension of fighting and strategy in the North African desert to France's struggle with the warrior Mamelukes. Moorehead does not see Bonaparte's enforced withdrawal from this great adventure and his return to chaos in Europe as eclipsing the fact that all the Napoleonic plans for the Westernisation of Egypt were eventually carried out. 'It was a Frenchman that built the Suez Canal fifty years later', he affirms, while the work of the savants, crawling into every interstice of the region, 'filled a gap in human knowledge that had persisted since Roman times'.<sup>100</sup>

Like its precursor, *The Blue Nile* assembles a striking company. There is the formidable Mohammad Ali, who enters the vacuum left by the French in Egypt and plays off both sides—the Mamelukes and Turks—'lurking on the sidelines with the cold, unblinking eye of the lizard'. There is, too, the murderous, frenetic Emperor Theodore of Ethiopia, defeated by the British in 1868. It is a measure of Moorehead's art of reliving (as one commentator phrased it), to understand and see the cultural and personal ambivalences in his Turkish and African persona with sympathy—a key to the strength and, for the reader, the pleasure of the book.<sup>101</sup>

At the story's close, joining past and present, Moorehead himself is there.

Lake Tana and the source of the Blue Nile can be visited without difficulty ... With mules and guides one can follow Bruce's route up to the source of the Little Abbai ... and with a little persistence ... one can reach the Tisisat Falls in a day's steady riding from Bahardar. It is a rewarding journey. Towards evening one sees in the distance the glimmering cloud of spray rising over the falls ... The spray that falls like gentle rain, wetting one to the skin, falls forever—two centuries and more ago on Lobo and Bruce, now on oneself, and still upon any traveller who chances to be at that beautiful place at this present moment. Sometimes a log, borne along by the current, teeters for a moment at the lip of the vast abyss, and then plunges downward on its long journey to Egypt and the sea.<sup>102</sup>

In the succinct words of one reviewer, 'Moorehead had done the Nile proud'.

## Cooper's Creek

TRAVELLER, HISTORICAL writer, and man of letters, Alan Moorehead was now the most acclaimed Australian author on the international scene. His Nile books sold in vast quantities and would be reprinted, published in abridgments for younger readers, translated into several languages, and produced in finely cased and newly illustrated editions for years. He was significantly better known than the former expatriate and future Nobel Laureate, Patrick White, who had fled Australia four years earlier than Moorehead in 1932 and returned in 1946, but whose major works, *The Tree of Man* and *Voss*, had struggled into print with very limited runs in the 1950s.

Moorehead enjoyed remarkable public approval but his Nile books also brought him pleasing academic recognition from the History Department at Makerere University and an invitation from John Sparrow, Warden of All Souls College, Oxford, to apply for a fellowship at the prestigious college if he planned to spend any length of time in England.<sup>103</sup>

After their stay at the Villa Diana, the Mooreheads—with short respites in Italy—maintained a home base near Regent's Park in London. There the family resided while Moorehead departed on his extensive travel and writing assignments to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel, Australia, America, Cuba, Africa—the countries followed in swift

succession. There Lucy kept in touch with her husband's literary agent, typed up his books, oversaw his proofs, managed the house, paid the bills and supported the family. She was its core. John, born in 1940, was enrolled at Eton; Caroline, a war baby of 1944, was sent later, unwillingly, to school in Switzerland; Richard, the youngest, born in 1952 and very like Moorehead in looks and temperament, was a London child who would in time follow John to Eton. As small children, they had happy memories of their father reading them Saki and Chekhov stories, and Kipling. For Caroline he was fun, with 'a great sunniness', though he could be 'cold and formidable' on occasion. John, with whom his father kept in touch while away, with letters interested in his doings, found him 'very direct, straight and rather formal, but generous and very fair', nevertheless, 'a figure from outside'. 'I was always slightly in awe of him', he said.<sup>104</sup>

By the mid-1950s Moorehead's successful output of books and magazine articles had secured him an income that allowed his family to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. 'After *Gallipoli*, which made money,' Caroline recounted with amusement, 'I didn't have John's shoes!' John went up to Oxford in 1959, and Caroline would go on after Switzerland to attend the Sorbonne and London University and lay the basis for her later, distinguished writing career.

By 1960, after much searching, the Mooreheads found a place for a permanent home in Italy. They built a house on a quiet hillside at Porto Ercole in Tuscany, within easy driving distance of both Rome and Florence. They took up residence there in the spring, Lucy overseeing most of the construction and the moving. Moorehead's little studio behind the house in the garden was designed for concentration, with his desk facing a wall covered with maps and photographs of his current writing project. He added an upright desk modelled on one used by Dr. Livingstone. ('Moorehead', one of his visitors observed, 'was good at that sort of thing'). It was a joyous place to write, to bring together *The*

*Blue Nile* for publication in 1962, to entertain friends, and to plant out the grounds with vines, lemon and olive trees, and Australian eucalypts among the cypresses.

By 1962, two elements co-mingled in Moorehead. At 52, urbane, sophisticated, with friends who included men and women in high literary, diplomatic, military and artistic circles, and many writers and travellers—Osbert Lancaster, Cyril Connolly, the J.B. Priestleys, Patrick Leigh-Fermor, Peter Fleming and his wife Celia Johnson, and Jamie Hamilton among them—who called to enjoy the hospitality of Villa Moorehead, he was, as one newspaper styled him, ‘a “Mediterranean man” who has refreshed his spirit with the arts and history of the high Renaissance’.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, with *Gallipoli* and his African adventures behind him, Moorehead was experiencing some sense of yearning for Australia.

Despite his two postwar visits, he had not greatly modified his original view of his own country as something of a cultural wilderness. Delivering the Sir Thomas White Annual Lecture at Australia House in the late 1950s, he made it known that, in his opinion, Australia still reflected ‘an appalling uniformity, where respectability had overtaken all but the best minds’. But, at the same time, he stressed that the moment had come for Australians to return to their own origins and see themselves in perspective, without false pride, and without apology.<sup>106</sup> There was a certain ambivalence in his attitude. Although Moorehead defined himself as an ‘an old expatriate’, and referred to his countrymen as ‘them’ and ‘they’, he had joined the Society of Australian Writers and was seen by some as one of the group of Australian writers, artists, poets and musicians who, by the 1960s, were gaining collective prominence in Britain and Europe.

Peter Porter, one of their kind, had a definition for them: ‘People born in the wrong country’. But, for Moorehead, the description was inexact. His very Australian get-up-and-go enterprise and zest to maximise his



talent abroad were the essence and the mainspring of his success, and while he was happy to be accepted by the English 'establishment' his remembered feeling for the ambience and singularity of the Australian bush clearly informed his lucid sense of environment in other lands.

It was that other distinguished expatriate, artist Sidney Nolan, who would now focus Moorehead's mind on his own country and provide an important story for his pen. Nolan presumably met Moorehead at some time after the artist took up residence in England in 1952, while he continued to address Australian themes. During the 1950s, Nolan had painted the stark landscape of Central Australia for his Burke and Wills series, in which he portrayed the deeply isolated figures of the two explorers on their overland journey across the continent almost a century before. He had returned to the series on and off over the years and, early in the 1960s, put into Moorehead's mind the idea that he should research and write a serious interpretation of the story that had now become an Australian legend.<sup>107</sup>

For Moorehead, the subject held all the themes that engaged him: exploration, travel, landscape, environment, singular men committed to discovery, and the fearful challenge of the unknown. Seized with the idea, he began his research on Burke and Wills at Porto Ercole early in 1962, reading the existing secondary sources on the expedition lent to him by the London Library and the copy of the expedition's commission of enquiry report sent to him by the State Library of Victoria. He arrived in Australia in the autumn and, after a few days ferreting about in the State Library, he set off on an organised Land Rover expedition in the footsteps of the explorers.

There is a pervasive stillness in the opening of his narrative of the book that would become *Cooper's Creek*:

Here perhaps, more than anywhere, humanity had had a chance to make a fresh start ... Nothing in this strange

country seemed to bear the slightest resemblance to the outside world: it was so primitive, so lacking in greenness, so silent, so old ... A kind of trance was in the air, a sense of awakening infinitely delayed. In the midsummer heat the land scarcely breathed, but the alien white man, walking through the grey and silent trees, would have the feeling that someone or something was waiting and listening.<sup>108</sup>

Into this waiting landscape, Moorehead introduces the great exploratory cavalcade which the Royal Society of Victoria, goaded by hopes of settlement and profit in Australia's unopened vastness, organised in 1860. It was an expedition to carve a route through the unknown centre (penetrated with much pain as far as the Simpson Desert in the 1840s by Charles Sturt) and to map a line linking the prosperous city of Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria. For this, the society's Exploration Committee had gathered £9000 to provide lavish equipment and manpower for the leader of the exploit, an Irish police superintendent from Castlemaine, Victoria, the headstrong and volatile Robert O'Hara Burke. His young lieutenant and ultimately second-in-command, William John Wills, scientifically-minded and adept in meteorology, would survey the route and the two would be joined by an assortment of men. Included were two German scientists, the naturalist Ludwig Becker and the older Herman Beckler, appointed as botanist and medical officer respectively, and ten others (selected from an astonishing 700 who applied from across the country), among them William Brahe, the camel expert George Landells, and the youthful John King, the last of whom would assume special significance.

On 20 August 1860, the huge expedition, with its camels and caravans, swayed out of Melbourne to assail the unexplored tracts of central and northern Australia, 'the ghastly blank'. There would be many uncertainties and readjustments along the way. When, in October, the

expedition reached Menindee on the Darling River, that furthest outpost of settlement that faced the central desert, Burke decided to break his party into two groups. Leaving behind a cohort that included Becker and Dr Beckler and a considerable section of his stores, he pressed on with an advance column of eight men and the best camels and horses, across 400 miles of country, to a permanent water source at Cooper's Creek, known from Sturt's earlier discovery.

For mile after mile the plain stretched away before them. At Mootwingee, a place of sudden jagged hills and gullies and deep pools, now known to be an Aboriginal sacred site, Moorehead bears contemporary witness:

Even today it is an extraordinary place, for there is much evidence here of the existence of an inland sea in prehistoric times ... The weight of oldness in these rocks ... is very great. Strange trees and plants dot the landscape and straggle up the ravines ... Except for the screeching of the white and pink cockatoos there is great silence and immobility in the landscape. The big red kangaroo and the emu vanish without a sound; it is a place of snakes and lizards ... and in the sand the ant-lion makes his hole and waits for the black ant to sliver down the slope into his jaws. In the pale blue sky, the wedge-tailed eagle spreads his six-foot wings and cruises in endless circles, watching the ground below.<sup>109</sup>

Ludwig Becker would have delighted in all this, but Burke and his party appear to have gone by Mootwingee almost with a shudder.

The heat was becoming intense—109 degrees fahrenheit in the shade—and reaching Cooper's Creek on 11 November, the party waited a month for the arrival of William Wright, appointed third-in-command at Menindee, with the expected stores. Impatient, Burke again decided to

make a dash for the Gulf of Carpentaria without waiting further for this contingent. His chosen party for the forward march of 1500 miles there and back was spare—himself, Wills as surveyor and recorder, Charley Gray in charge of the horses and John King of the camels. Taking two horses, six of the best camels and light stores, he left a permanent depot at Cooper's Creek under William Brahe. After cutting the sign 'Camp LXV' into a coolibah tree, the four men set off on 18 December 1860.

Moorehead's story of their march across the desert with its sharp stones, the clay hard as concrete, the never-ending flies, the swamps and ridges that blocked their way and the suffocating sandstorms, is quietly perceptive, controlled, and compelling. 'The mechanical monotony of this tremendous walk', he observes, 'is something not easily to be understood by the twentieth-century mind; hour after hour, mile after mile and always the same plain ahead ... always to get up in the morning with the prospect of doing the same thing all over again. The world narrows in these conditions ... And so the imagination that held these men on to their objective and the skill with which they overcame a thousand intrusions is something to be very much admired'.<sup>110</sup> By 10 February 1861, forcing themselves to exceptionable endeavour, they arrived within a few miles of the Gulf of Carpentaria and, bogged by mangroves, tasted the brackish water of the Channel. They had reached their goal.

His writing of the two leaders' moments in sight of the Gulf, eager even in triumph to return to their depot at Cooper's Creek, captures the sense of dreamy doubt and intense isolation of Nolan's painting of Burke and Wills, figures 'swimming mirage-like' in the landscape, which Moorehead would use for the book's jacket. Following them south in that wide, melancholy landscape, his narrative exhibits an empathetic understanding for the confident, reckless Burke, ill-suited through his lack of experience for the leadership task, and the diligent, observant Wills. There is an elegiac quietness in Moorehead's narrative of the

On the face of it this search was a hopeless affair, or rather it must have seemed so ~~at~~ now that they were confronted with the enormity of their task. Nine months had ~~now~~ elapsed since Burke had disappeared. Nothing whatever was known of his route after leaving the Cooper; he could be anywhere within a thousand miles and ~~everywhere to the north~~ <sup>the whole country</sup> was wholly unknown and unexplored. Howitt speaks of "the mysterious vastness of the desert interior which held, somewhere, the secret which it was our mission to discover". The silent unrevealing bush enfolded them, the ~~howling~~ <sup>howling</sup> dingoes ~~around the trees~~ <sup>in the bush</sup> ~~enforced their presence~~ <sup>enforced their presence</sup> ~~on the~~ <sup>on the</sup> kangaroo, stared ~~meaninglessly~~ <sup>as the strange procession went by</sup> and nothing was ~~communicated~~ <sup>communicated</sup>. Sometimes strange double mirages quivered on the plains around them and trees hung upside down in the empty sky. Where in all this dreaming floating space was Burke to be found?

There had been just one encouraging incident on September 6 ~~when~~ when they were approaching the flat-topped hills and the gibber plains of the Cooper country. A party of blacks - an old grey-haired man, a younger man and a group of lubras with their children - had come up to them on a dry watercourse. "They were in a very excited -

One can imagine them plodding on day after day with the black hordes marching in front ~~examining~~ <sup>examining</sup> the ground when there was ~~nothing~~ <sup>nothing</sup> interesting to be seen. Once they came on what appeared to be the tracks of a heavy cart - just <sup>such tracks</sup> as ~~Wills~~ <sup>Wills</sup> had ~~found~~ <sup>found</sup> on the first march to the lakes so long ago. Howitt followed the tracks & found that they had been caused by heavy logs being dragged along the ground ~~along a flood~~ <sup>along a flood</sup>. But for the rest the march up from Menindee ~~had~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~been~~ <sup>been</sup> ~~unsuccessful~~ <sup>unsuccessful</sup>.



travellers' supreme effort to reach Depot LXV: the torrential rain, the dying Gray eventually 'buried in his flannel trousers, his short-sleeved shirt and his wide-awake hat' in a shallow grave, which took them a day to dig because of their weakness, the struggle for food, and the arrival of the three broken and tattered men at Cooper's Creek. There, calling their 'cooees' and the names of their colleagues into the eerie stillness, they found only a deserted base camp and the message buried beneath the tree marked, 'DIG, 3ft. N.W. April 21 1861', which told of the departure of Brahe and his two companions that same morning. Moorehead catches at Brahe's predicament. He had instructions from Burke that 'he could be considered "perished" if not back in three months'. They had now been gone for over four. Should he set a date to leave? Should they wait? 'Each day', writes Moorehead, 'these questions posed themselves and there was never any answer'.

His account of the struggle of the three explorers to find a route south, not back to Menindee, but choosing instead Augustus Gregory's route via Mount Hopeless to Adelaide, exposes the intense and intimate power of his historical writing:

And so from now on we must picture them walking very slowly, exploring the dry channels of the Cooper one after another ... a very concentrated little group, walking in Indian file through the silent gum trees, pestered by the flies, not speaking very much, each one intent upon an inner world of his own discomfort ... and no sound about them except the creaking of the camel packs. They were constantly on the watch, watching the flight of birds, watching for the signs of blacks and watching one another. They do not appear to have quarrelled or to have lost patience with each other, and this was no moment for hysteria. They were aliens in this hard indifferent country, this gaol of interminable space,

and their only hope of escaping from it was by supporting one another to the limit.<sup>111</sup>

Burke and the faithful Wills would die at separate sites by the river. Only King, nourished and cared for by the Aboriginal Australians, would be found later by Alfred Howitt's rescue expedition and taken back, carrying the explorers' bones for triumphal burial in Melbourne.

Recrimination, criticism of the planning, and exaltation of the explorers would follow. But for Moorehead, the tragic failure of this epic journey carried a wider significance. It was not man pitted heroically against man as he had seen it on the field of battle, nor had it a parallel in the experience of those deeply motivated men, those giants of exploration in Africa. These were ordinary men lifted into extraordinary circumstances. In the end, he writes, 'This was just death, stark, despairing and meaningless, the monster in the dark'. The quarrel, as he saw it, was with that old indestructible, the Australian bush.

Moorehead brought something highly personal to this conclusion. He had returned to the desert landscape stirred by the paintings of the red outback—Nolan's early Ned Kellys and the doomed explorers—and he had found it a remote and dangerous place. Like Nolan, he was looking to interpret the country of his birth, its antiquity, curious beauty and history, and relate it to the life of the mind. In the end, Moorehead believed that it was the outback itself and the desert that was at the heart of the Burke and Wills tragedy, and the reason why it survived so strongly as a legend in Australia. It connected, he considered, at its deepest level, with the early settlers who believed that life was not so much a struggle against other men as against the wilderness—a wilderness that made all men equal.

*Cooper's Creek* was published by Hamish Hamilton in November 1963 and won that year's Royal Society of Literature Award. It was the first fully documented account of the Burke and Wills expedition told

through Moorehead's camera eye. Serialised in *The Sunday Times*, it turned new attention on Australia. Reviewers seized upon its mystic ambience and painterly qualities. *The Yorkshire Post* saw it as 'an Australian classic from start to finish ... the work of a writer whose detachment of heart does not preclude a fierce intellectual passion. His canvas is huge, yet his method is the etcher's'.<sup>112</sup> 'Mr Moorehead', *The Times Literary Supplement* added, 'belongs to a nation of artists' and 'now that he is writing about Australia it is curious how Australian he turns out to be'.<sup>113</sup>

Published in a first edition of 45 000 copies, the book became an instant bestseller in Britain, a circumstance unknown for an Australian theme. 'He gave Australia back its history', observed Michael Charlton, a fellow expatriate who had made his name with the BBC. In America the response was both popular and scholarly. *The Christian Science Monitor* and *The Atlantic Monthly* serialised the work, and it drew informed praise from the University of Columbia's Professor of History, Allan Nevins, who, with a comparative eye, declared that all students of the American West should read it 'for the marvellous parallels which it offers to our own record of trans-Mississippi exploration'.<sup>114</sup> In addition, a few months previously, Moorehead had received an invitation from Syracuse University, New York, inviting him to place his private papers in its manuscript collections as 'a boon to literary historians, writers and teachers, and to the university and scholarly world in general'. Now, in July 1964, the university renewed its overture.<sup>115</sup> Simultaneously, Harold Gotlieb, Director of Special Collections at Boston University, signalled his wish to acquire an Alan Moorehead collection as 'a distinguished nucleus' for the library which the university was building for the study and research of contemporary literature.<sup>116</sup>

Released for Christmas 1963 in Australia, *Cooper's Creek* was serialised in newspapers in Sydney, Perth and Adelaide and reviewed enthusiastically across the continent, with the exception of a growl at

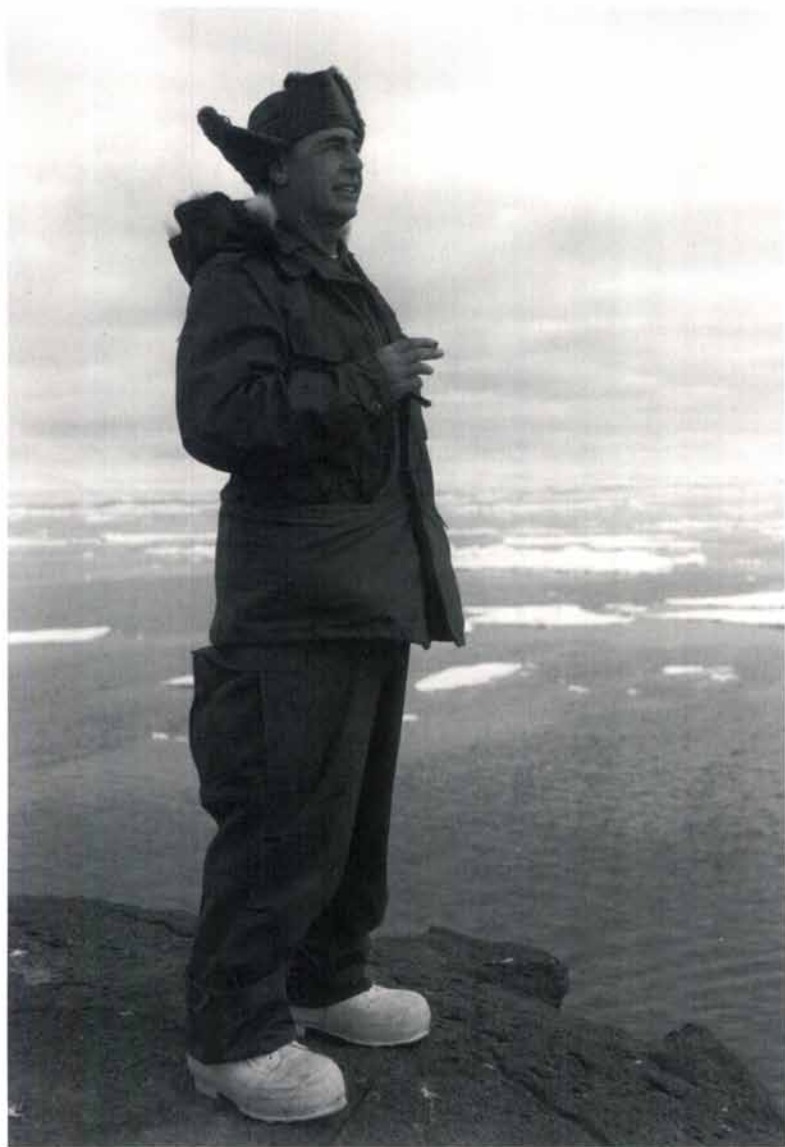
an inaccuracy in its historical context, from Hartley Grattan,<sup>117</sup> and another for its 'undue preoccupation' with the early settler's view of landscape, from Geoffrey Dutton.<sup>118</sup> Manning Clark, reviewing the dynamics of the story for an American audience in *The New York Times Book Review*, appeared to capture the book's prime significance. 'Now for the first time in this superb book,' he affirmed, 'readers have an opportunity to learn the full story and the meaning of this tragedy in the history of Australia'. While the setting was provincial, and at times even parochial, said Clark, the story 'is seen in its universal significance' and it was a measure of Moorehead's achievement that he moved the mind 'to ask the wider questions'.<sup>119</sup>

*Cooper's Creek* was the first of Moorehead's writings to impinge directly on the Australian historical community beyond the eclectic Manning Clark. Geoffrey Serle, historian at Monash University, who had acted as publisher's reader for the book, wrote to Moorehead privately to compliment him on his 'powerful evocation of landscape' and 'narrative beautifully constructed and told',<sup>120</sup> while Kathleen Fitzpatrick, the respected professor of history at his old *alma mater*, the University of Melbourne, identified closely with the work. As an author on Australian explorers and their journals, she had immersed herself in the Burke and Wills saga at the request of the 1960 centenary committee of the expedition and had sent Moorehead her elegantly critical paper on the exploration committee's management of the venture. Having done this research, she confessed she had thought of writing a book on Burke and Wills but, hearing of his project, quickly abandoned the subject. The book to hand, a woman of excellence and generosity, she wrote him warmly, 'Not since I read *Kangaroo*, have I read any book which gave me so strong a sense of place about my own country ... The landscape, in the best sense, dwarfed the story'.<sup>121</sup>

For Moorehead, *Cooper's Creek* marked a particular milestone. In addressing his own country's history explicitly for the first time, he

had both confirmed and crystallised an Australian legend and shifted Australian history from its essentially local themes towards a place of relevance on an international map. It was a conceptual map, as writer David Malouf discerned. 'Turn the globe upside-down', he wrote, 'and Australia stops being tucked away in the lower left-hand corner'.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, the book flagged an awakening and a homecoming. 'For us of the older generation,' Moorehead recorded in his 1964 oral history interview for the National Library of Australia with Hazel de Berg, 'we've reached a curious forking, a dichotomy in our experience ... Returning to Australia, we have a tremendous tug back to the beginnings of our lives'. 'If I were younger,' he added, 'I would not hesitate for two minutes: I would return to this country and I would write here of Australian themes. You must in the end, if you are a writer, return at last to your roots'.<sup>123</sup>





*'I have seen the curve of the world'*

Alan Moorehead standing on a volcanic ledge  
overlooking the Ross Sea, Antarctica [1964]

Alan Moorehead Papers MS5654,

National Library of Australia nla.ms-ms5654-0-6x-o-v1

## The Australian

SIDNEY NOLAN had given the title *Cooper's Creek* to one of his early paintings in the Burke and Wills series and, significantly, Moorehead chose it for his book. Their respective searches for meaning in the outback bound these two Australians in friendship and, as the relationship grew, it proved influential to them both. Both were Melbourne-born. Nolan, seven years younger, came from working-class Irish parents and enjoyed a less privileged education than Moorehead. But, largely self-taught, he had developed a lifelong interest in literature and established an early experimental approach to art. He was already renowned for his interpretative, quintessentially Australian paintings when, at the height of his powers, he left the country in 1952, at the age of 35, to find a wider perspective and arena in Britain.

Moorehead's friendship with the artist stemmed directly from his own writings. Nolan had been given a copy of Moorehead's evocative *New Yorker* article, 'Return to a Legend', about his first trip to Gallipoli, when staying as a guest of George Johnston on the Greek island of Hydra. 'It was like unlocking a door', Johnston recalled.<sup>124</sup> Nolan at once visited the neighbouring Dardanelles and began to paint his mystic, imagined Anzac series, believing, as he put it, that if he could push Gallipoli far enough back into the history of Homer and *The Iliad*

and 'make the Australians into dream figures', he would be getting somewhere near the mark.<sup>125</sup>

In turn, responding to Nolan's influence and sense of landscape, Moorehead chose his friend's paintings of Burke and Wills at the Gulf of Carpentaria ('the primitive you suggested') for the jacket of *Cooper's Creek* and produced a book closely reflective of the artist's theme. For his part, the book cast its spell on the artist's mind. 'I'm sure there is something still to be got from the Centre', Nolan mused reading the pre-published manuscript 'and it would be wonderful to find it'. 'I feel it on the tip of my tongue almost', he wrote to Moorehead. '*Cooper's Creek* seems to pretty well get it, but if there is a last elusive layer to be found ... I would like nothing more than to look at it.'<sup>126</sup> He pursued the last layer and embarked on a supplementary Burke and Wills series in which the explorers, naked now on their two camels, became, as he told his friend, 'centaur-like for survival'.

'All this', Moorehead wrote to Nolan in August 1963, 'makes me want to have another bash at another Australian theme. I am keen to go out again and if we can make a trip into the centre together so much the better'.

His close exposure to Nolan's art led to a welcome interpretative project. During his writing of *Cooper's Creek*, the American *Holiday* magazine, to which Moorehead had been contributing travel articles since the 1950s, invited him to write an essay on 'The Artist in the Outback'. He responded with a perceptive analysis of Nolan's work. For him, Nolan's Ned Kelly, 'a haunting monolithic figure in the iron mask with the flames of hell upon it', the 'lyrical, floating dream-like ecstasy' of his lovers in *Leda and the Swan*, and his Anzac soldiers at Gallipoli were masterpieces which made him 'the Australian of Australians'.<sup>127</sup> For the author of *Gallipoli*, Nolan had evoked 'an almost religious depth of feeling and of poetry' in his Anzac series—the very emotions with which the soldiers fought. Here their works were closely intertwined. In

addition, Nolan's recurring sense of elegy, nostalgia and incompleteness were feelings with which Moorehead found strong connection.

Their friendship shaped other enterprises. Later that year, Moorehead approached Nolan with the idea of joining him on a trip to Antarctica, for which he planned to gather material for the *New Yorker*, always an important and sustained outlet for his writings. They would travel as the guests of the United States Navy on a specially equipped Hermes aircraft, with a group organised by a US admiral, to inspect the United States base at McMurdo Sound. They arrived in Sydney on a blazing hot day in mid-January 1964, travelled on together to Christchurch, and flew south to the ice on 24 January. It was an experience destined to reflect directly on each man's creative work.

Landing from the plane on this 'huge white plate of frozen earth clamped to the bottom of the world', Moorehead—for whom the whole planet was his ever-engrossing oyster—experienced, he confessed later, 'a moment of intense and natural happiness'. They stayed for eight days, both curiously alert to the similarities the empty polar landscape had with the different deserts of their minds. Nolan scribbled notes on the subtle colours of the landscape, while Moorehead, a 'Sunday painter', sketched.<sup>128</sup> For him, this journey to the ends of the earth, he said in an oral history interview, was 'more exciting than anything that has ever happened to me since the war'. 'I have seen the curve of the world.'<sup>129</sup>

The two were back together again in Adelaide in March that year when Nolan invited Moorehead to launch the exhibition of his recent African paintings (for which the African specialist had given him much valuable advice on routes and travel) at the South Australian Art Gallery. This event took place during the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, when Moorehead was also due to give the opening address at Writers' Week. Here the friends hatched another collaborative scheme and planned a new opera on an Australian theme. They chose Mrs Eliza Fraser, the sea captain's wife who, surviving a shipwreck on the Queensland coast







Alan Moorehead with Sidney Nolan  
in Shackleton's hut, Antarctica [1964]  
Alan Moorehead Papers MS5654,  
National Library of Australia  
nla.ms-ms5654-0-7x-o-v1  
Official US Navy photograph

in 1836, together with a convict, was held captive by the Aboriginal Australians. Mrs Fraser had already threaded her way into Nolan's mental landscape as a recurring theme in his drawings and paintings. Now he would design the opera's scenery, Moorehead would write the libretto, and Peter Sculthorpe would compose the music. But to Moorehead's singular chagrin, their plan, initially backed by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, proved abortive, and his libretto, which he looked forward to hearing sung, remains in manuscript form among his papers.<sup>130</sup>

Moorehead and Nolan had one more stimulating exploit together—a visit to Tahiti that March on their way back to their northern hemisphere residences. Carrying strong visual imagery from the Antarctic journey and fusing it with a sense of the rich history of Pacific exploration, Moorehead was already turning over in his mind the concept of a new book. It crystallised in Tahiti. There he shaped the centrepiece of his far-ranging work, *The Fatal Impact*, with its focus on the dire effects of European exploration and the human and faunal exploitation that flowed in its wake. 'Read Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*', was Nolan's sage advice.<sup>131</sup>

After Tahiti, Moorehead stopped at Gallipoli to take part in the TV documentary film Robert Raymond was making of the Gallipoli story. He wrote to Nolan: 'We had three days down there, perched ourselves on the hilltops, with Samothrace on one side and the Dardanelles on the other, the weather good and me spouting away at the camera'. The film had wide success, Moorehead emerging as a man with clear television skills and a high regard for Raymond. His promised article on Antarctica, 'Borrowed Light', would come out in the *New Yorker* in June 1964. 'I have a mountain of books to read on Cook, the islands, the whales, Antarctica, the Aborigines and John Edward Eyre and will see through the rest of this year whether I cannot cook up a book on the deadly white man in the Pacific.' 'Work well, my son', he concluded his letter from Tuscany, 'and have a break down here if you can'.<sup>132</sup>

As Moorehead made his way home, Nolan began work in his London studio on his Antarctic canvasses, the vivid white structures that were not all white but subtly brushed with deep blue and acid green; and the ominous, looming icebergs, with their linings of black and grey. 'I feel I missed the coda to our journey in not going to Gallipoli with you', he responded warmly. 'I enjoyed all our trip and often think of it now, when I am getting down to painting the Antarctic.' Nearing the end of some work on women's faces from his Adelaide visit, he added, 'Antarctic colours are creeping into their hats and dresses ... it is time to concentrate on the ice'.<sup>133</sup>

The intellectual closeness of this fellowship was clearly something Moorehead had not known since his richly shared war experience with Alex Clifford. Both Australians were nomadic in character and there was a unity in their very Australianness, their creative quest after ideas, and their individual attempts to understand and interpret the mystery and symbolic overtones of their country. Their friendship drew Moorehead back to Australia, where his subsequent visits stirred a deepening sense of connectedness and commitment to the country of his birth.

Australian newspapers always greeted this expatriate son as a celebrity on his intermittent reappearances. However, *Cooper's Creek* bestowed a new identity on Moorehead and brought him pleasure in a widening circle of Australian friends. He had met that other artist of the raw outback, Russell 'Tas' Drysdale and kept in contact with him in their different visits between Australia and Italy. Probably through Drysdale, who shared an interest in the mutton bird season in Bass Strait, he had also made contact with several Australian scientists—'Jock' Marshall, a colourful professor of zoology at Monash University, whose special interest was the breeding cycle of birds, and the West Australian ornithologist, Victor Serventy, who fed his interest in Australian wildlife and its conservation. One long-time friend

was Rod Andrew, whom Lucy and he had met in 1946 as a youthful gastroenterologist headed for England. Andrew was now the prestigious Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Monash University and engaged in a distinguished scientific career. From the outset of their friendship, he had admired Moorehead's 'animal vitality', his constant 'reaching for the stars', but he could also treat him with the casual Australian badinage that, living abroad, Moorehead missed.

He also met and developed a friendship with the youthful Robert Hughes, who, owing much to Moorehead's impetus, would soon be on the road to becoming a successful expatriate himself. Moorehead had been impressed by one of Hughes' critiques of art in the local press and telephoned to invite him for a drink. No doubt he saw in the aspiring Hughes something of his old *alter ego*, chafing at the bit in a country where he had to make do with reproductions for his critical work. He warned him: 'If you stay in Australia the way you are, Australia will remain very interesting but you are going to become a bore'.<sup>134</sup> Hughes took the hint and the promise of Moorehead's introductions to his publisher and agent in London, and was soon a welcome visitor at the Villa Moorehead.

For the ebullient Hughes, Moorehead was both a much-loved father figure and an inspiring mentor. 'From the moment we nearly fell into the fishpond together after our first lunch on my veranda in Sydney in 1964', he wrote jauntily in a review of Pocock's biography six years later, 'Alan Moorehead changed my life ... I have never known a writer from whom I learnt more'. It was less by precept than example. Staying at Porto Ercole for two months amid the lively dinners and the conversation, he observed Moorehead draft *The Fatal Impact* and acquired an invaluable lesson and an 'indispensable model of professional conduct'.<sup>135</sup> Each day Hughes watched his host disappear into his viewless garden studio for five hours and emerge at noon with 700 fairly clean words on paper.

Their warm relationship had direct outcomes. 'When you come to write', Moorehead advised his young visitor, 'take a theme from Australian history'. The big unwritten story, he thought, was the convicts, though at 27 and trying to escape Australia, Hughes recoiled from it at the time. But a decade later, his highly successful history of Australia's convict experience, *The Fatal Shore*, took its point of departure from Moorehead's mastery of historical writing and was dedicated to his mentor and friend.

Moorehead, Hughes observed, was 'as proud as Lucifer about his craft'. Yet he was fond of the Greek word *philotimo*—knowing one's spot, one's place of balance in the world. He was totally without pretension and 'his writing was like his table talk, astute, wide-ranging, full of curiosity, without fantasy and anchored in the real world'.<sup>136</sup>

From his ringside seat, Hughes also perceived the quintessential nature of Moorehead's relationship with his wife. 'Moorehead', he discerned, 'had had the immense luck to find his natural protector early'. Lucy, two years his senior, a journalist of great skill had, 'with magnanimity, cunning and unbounded devotion, managed everything except his actual writing for 40 years'. And it was in large part because of the security she gave him that Moorehead, he surmised, was free of the professional jealousy and lonely rancour that so often went with being a writer. Hughes also knew, as did Lucy and most of their close friends, that though her husband loved her dearly and found every kind of support and sustenance in her, he was relentlessly unfaithful to her.

Lucy could turn away from his constant sexual infidelities, which were of the passing kind, but she was deeply hurt by his sustained affair, conducted in America and Paris over several years during the 1960s, with Alistair Cooke's attractive artist wife, Jane. Robustly masculine, Moorehead had double standards and expected great faithfulness from his poised and charming wife. But 'she adored him', her close



friend Martha Gellhorn declared, 'and he could never have managed without her'.

From late 1964, Moorehead was deeply committed to his human and ecological story. For this task he gathered in all the interests and insights derived from his African experiences that had made him such an outstanding historical writer: exploration, the environment, unknown primitive communities exposed for the first time to civilised Western eyes, and a sense of the immense but unanticipated changes inflicted by the white man's advent on indigenous people, cultures and wildlife. As one of the great travellers of his time, aware of the highly diverse societies of the globe, he added to this a mind which saw the rush of history stretching backwards to the fateful moment when 'a social capsule is broken open, when primitive creatures, beasts as well as men, are confronted for the first time with civilisation'.<sup>137</sup>

There is something visionary and passionate about *The Fatal Impact* and it is Moorehead's most controversial work. Subtitled *The Invasion of the South Pacific 1767–1840*, it is structured around the greatest hero-explorer and navigator of all time, Captain James Cook, who on his three voyages into the South Pacific and the Antarctic regions in the years 1768 to 1779, became, in Moorehead's judgment, the agent of unwitting and destructive change.

Moorehead focuses upon three historical experiences. First, the contact between the white man and the people at Tahiti, enacted when HMS *Endeavour* and her company arrived to observe the Transit of Venus in April 1769 and remained for several months to enjoy the society of these hitherto undisturbed Pacific islanders. Drawing on the journals of Cook and Banks, Moorehead introduces his readers to the islanders' culture and 'the singular happiness' of their lives. But Cook noted that, while his crew were given a clean bill of health by the ship's doctor on their arrival, the Tahitians went down with venereal disease after several weeks. This, Cook observed sharply, 'may spread over all

the islands in the South Seas to the eternal reproach of those who first brought it among them'.

When the *Endeavour* returned home at the end of her first voyage in 1771 carrying the idea of the noble savage to Europe, the Tahitians were poised on the brink of change, moving towards an invasion of the island by a succession of navigators, missionaries, beachcombers, whalers, traders, and those with political interests, who would reduce their happiness significantly and permanently.

For Moorehead, Gauguin's Tahitian canvasses, painted some 50 years later, capture most tellingly the fatal cultural effects that Cook's advent had set in train. By then the London Missionary Society, determined, as he describes it, 'to recreate the island in the image of lower-middle-class Protestant England', had hammered away with its amazing conversions. These had been followed by the sleaziness and inertia that, in 1842, Herman Melville discerned as characterising life in Papeete. Of the canvasses by Gauguin, Moorehead writes, 'no man or woman ever smiles; supine, defeated, despairing and beautiful, his people gaze in a reverie into a lost past'. On his famous painting of a Tahitian girl lying inert and naked on her couch, *tiare tahite* petals scattered about her, Gauguin had written one word in English, 'Nevermore'.<sup>138</sup>

In the second section of the book, Moorehead considers the *Endeavour's* landfall in Australia—'the land that waited'. There the company came upon something entirely new and infinitely strange. At Botany Bay and the Endeavour River, he writes, 'they were aware that they were confronted with an utter primitivism, wild creatures that had not developed beyond the marsupial stage, plants that did not appear to fit into the Linnean or indeed any other system of classification, and a nomadic people who lived more like animals than men. It was as though they were looking back into the beginnings of creation'.<sup>139</sup>

Moorehead tracks Australia's development through the phases of white occupation: possession and convict settlement, expansion

outwards through exploration, and acclimatisation. But his real story is of the Aboriginal Australians, their culture and their long, destructive exposure to the Western civilisers. This is a very different Moorehead from the author of *Rum Jungle* who had written a decade earlier of the 'blackfellows' and recalled that at school 'we knew "the Abos" were somewhere there in the bush and we treated them as a great joke'. Drawing on Basedow, the expertise of Ronald and Catherine Berndt on the Aboriginal Australians, and Daisy Bates' participant view in *The Passing of the Aborigines*, he writes with sympathy of their nomadic life and customs, their experience with the invading fleets and British settlement, and the broad indifference of colonists and governments to the erosion and destruction of their inheritance.

These, then, were the tough, vigorous, gentle, superstitious and conservative people whom Banks found but one degree removed from the brutes, and whom Dampier described as the miserablest on earth. Yet they were neither brutal nor miserable before the white man came. In a harsh and barren country they had established a perfectly valid way of life, they had kept the race alive through unknown centuries of time, they threatened no one, and coveted nothing except the barest minimum of food. They had the art of living for the day, they knew how to laugh and enjoy themselves, and if they had no ambition at least they possessed the Greek quality of the knowing of one's place in the world.<sup>140</sup>

For Daisy Bates, the Aboriginal people had become mere 'trespassers in their own country ... compelled to change their mode of life ... their age-old laws set aside for the laws they could not understand', and caught in their 'intolerable nostalgia for their half-forgotten past'. For Moorehead, it echoed the Tahitian refrain of fatal dislocation and change: 'Nevermore'.

In the final part of his book, Moorehead follows Cook on his two lesser-known journeys to Antarctica on HMS *Resolution*, where, descending southwards to cross the Antarctic Circle and circumnavigate the South Pole, he reached the furthest point south attempted by any man. Baulked by frozen land, he turned east toward Cape Horn, discovering the islands of Tierra del Fuego, South Georgia and the Sandwich Group, where—to the immense surprise of the ship's company—they stumbled upon a cornucopia of seals, whales, dolphins, turtles, and birds of every kind, 'probably the largest congregation of wildlife that existed in the world'.

Here, once more, it was the great navigator's fate to bring disaster in his wake. Armed with Cook's charts, the sealing and whaling fleets moved out from their European and American bases to plunder the sub-Antarctic islands, the seals their first quarry, as many as 9000 a week clubbed to death on the bloodstained ice for their pelts. By 1830, fur seals in the Southern Ocean were virtually extinct. For the whalers who followed, the first comers set up shore factories in the Bay of Islands in New Zealand, the Derwent Estuary in Tasmania, and all along the estuaries and coves of the deserted coast of southern, western and eastern Australia where each year the whales arrived from the south to breed. In time, the hunt moved to pelagic whaling in the open seas. 'It was', says Moorehead, 'a tremendous killing'.

Published in 1966, his eloquent book proved a lightning rod. Hitherto, James Cook had appeared as opening up the uninhabited lands of the Southern Hemisphere to the civilising influences of the West. Moorehead saw the outcome in a converse light. 'The results of Cook's intrusion in Tahiti and Australia', he argued, 'had been bad enough for the native peoples: for the Antarctic animals it was a holocaust'. In *The Fatal Impact*, he adopted an approach that had become his signature. He assembled a compelling historical story and turned it to expose a phenomenon that lay at the heart of expansive social, human, economic, and environmental change.

It was not of the same depth or scholarship as *Gallipoli*, *The White Nile*, *The Blue Nile*, or *Cooper's Creek*, yet the book had a unique stamp. It was the first piece of writing to address the issue of the negative effects of exploration as an overarching theme. It contextualised the Aboriginal Australians in a global scheme and, through it, Moorehead emerged again as a pre-eminent figure and a powerful advocate in the growing movement for worldwide conservation.

The book had immediate impact. It was published with a copious first print run and captured wide audiences when it was serialised, translated, reprinted and, later, issued as a paperback. Moorehead was made Patron of the World League for Conservation. Among a profusion of laudatory reviews, Isabel Quigly's *Catholic Herald* commentary caught its quality and its ambiguities. 'Whatever the moral or the ethical answer—and there seem to be many morals and many answers—the story itself, the characters and events, the scenery and adventures, the march of history on the one hand and the swift progress of disintegration on the other, is both magnificent and intriguing ... as a storyteller of this particular sort, Mr Moorehead is unsurpassed.'<sup>141</sup> Nolan, a participant at its genesis, viewed the finished work with an artist's eye. 'It is like seeing an Italian fresco in an Italian town', he wrote to Moorehead. 'The invented and the real become the same thing. Nothing gives more pleasure. The book is faultless.'<sup>142</sup>

For many it was the book's elegiac quality and tone of lyric regret that captured readers of *The Fatal Impact* which, together with *Cooper's Creek*, in the words of *The Times*' obituary writer 17 years later in 1983, 'elevated Moorehead's writings into a new style ... [and] contributed to his power'. But some reviewers considered that Moorehead had carried his overarching argument too far. Others wished for more documentary or more detailed sociological evidence. Bernard Smith, whose influential *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768–1850* Moorehead acknowledged as a major source, considered that the real



story was not the *fatal* impact that Moorehead chose to imply. Rather, he has written privately, Moorehead's 'love of dramatic narrative and title seduced him' and he had 'filtered out events to suit the title'. One of Australia's most distinguished scholars, Smith considered that Moorehead had used his academic book to provide a more popular account of the European penetration of the Pacific and 'dredged it for detail to suit his theme'. But he added generously, 'he is a born writer and his journalistic skills are everywhere in evidence in the book'.<sup>143</sup>

Writing in *History Today*, historian Peter Duval Smith, not always given to high praise, says 'At least he leaves the door of the laboratory open for others to enter'.<sup>144</sup> And, as always, there was 'the Moorehead phenomenon'. It fell to Australian litterateur and reviewer, Max Harris, to define it in decisive terms: 'His reading might at times be skimpy,' he summed up, 'his selection of material arbitrary,' but there was still 'the Moorehead integrity and the Moorehead flavour'. 'Moorehead tells other people's stories with real freshness: he really can see through the eyes of others ... As a result he is the living master of a modern literary genre which lies between history on the one hand and journalism on the other.'<sup>145</sup>



Alan Moorehead at the Great Barrier Reef [1965]

Tom Pocock Papers 1987-1990, MS8377

National Library of Australia nla.ms-ms8377-0-2x-v1

Reproduced with permission from the Moorehead family

## The Writer

THE FATAL IMPACT was to be Moorehead's last individually written book. With the work in press, he was back in Australia early in 1965 on a four-month tour, to pursue his concerns for the conservation of wildlife and to make a TV film on the subject with Robert Raymond. Marsupials, birds, snakes, crocodiles were all grist to his mill as he travelled from Queensland through eastern Australia to his childhood holiday haunts of Phillip Island and the islands of Bass Strait, sending off a sheaf of articles to Australian newspapers as he went.<sup>146</sup>

There were flutters in literary circles. Patrick White 'would very much like to see you', Geoffrey Dutton signalled, although in private the literary curmudgeon did not conceal his gall that while the best Australian bookshops did not bother to put *his* recent books on display, other writers 'should be paid huge advances to write books on the Nile and the Pacific'. 'I am even told', he complained, 'that Moorehead is not very good, but of course journalism is what the world wants to lap up'.<sup>147</sup>

In April, Moorehead caught up with Professor Manning Clark, all their attempts to meet at Porto Ercole or in London having failed. Now was their chance, men of like sympathies, to come together at the Clarks' house in Canberra. 'We soon found we had much in common', said Clark, remembering this long-awaited meeting. 'We both believed history was an art in which the writer imposed an order on chaos.

We both believed that the historian should have the art of the story teller' and, above all, that the writer 'should have something to say'.<sup>148</sup> Significantly it was Clark, the first professor of Australian history and the leading academic in the field, who recognised both the seriousness of Moorehead's work and his contribution to Australian historiography. Clark had reviewed several of Moorehead's books and judged that he had both the gift to anticipate the groundswells in public opinion and to serve as a path-breaker in promoting a rising tide of interest in the history of Australia.

On the personal front, Manning Clark took another view of his visitor and saw in Moorehead 'a lonely and unhappy man' who, in spite of his great success, was something of a fugitive, always on the move. In this he put his finger on an aspect of Moorehead's uncertainties that most people, alert to his urbanity and accomplishments, failed to see. Happily, as the days passed, Clark noticed 'he grew more confident, as if he didn't have to put on an act any more, because he was among his own sort of people'.<sup>149</sup>

On this visit, Moorehead was clearly becoming increasingly at home and rooted in Australia as he planned a book on Australian fauna. He also tinkered with Australian property investments, and, as he told Rod Andrew, he was beginning to consider Australia as a place where he and his family might settle, or at least spend a part of every year. He was also pleased to receive an invitation from Professor Alan Shaw of Monash University's History Department inviting him to spend a period in the department as a visiting professor the following year—to hold seminars and be available to talk to students.<sup>150</sup>

Returning home via America, he signed up to write a film script on *Darwin and the Beagle*, another story of a world voyage that had an immense impact and influence on modern thought. Moorehead had fallen for the young naturalist when reading Darwin's journal for *The Fatal Impact*. He was fascinated by his adventure and the way in which his

discerning mind had responded to the journey's evolutionary evidence. The script was swiftly written, the staccato notes in Moorehead's informal notebook revealing the careful stocking and working of his mind.

Back in Italy, the script completed and the wind of success blowing sweetly, Moorehead succumbed to one of his recurring periods of frustration, boredom, *accidie*, and discontent. 'Nearly every thing I have touched in the last twelve months', he scribbled bleakly in his diary, 'has gone wrong'. His wildlife documentary did not appear; he was unable to write a book on Australian fauna—Serventy had captured that market;<sup>151</sup> and the unsuccessful Mrs Fraser libretto reared its head. 'As a result', he bemoaned, 'I find I have nothing to do'.<sup>152</sup> 'He worried constantly that he was not a success, couldn't write, couldn't pull it off', his daughter Caroline (at that time in her late teens) remembered. 'He never felt confident or safe'.<sup>153</sup>

Travel was the tested panacea. In August 1966, Moorehead was back in Australia again, this time with Lucy, Caroline and Richard. He now really saw his own country with all its signs of cultural progress—its opportunities for television plays, its lively critics, publishers and literary magazines, and its excellent wines and food—as an attractive place to live. On this occasion he exposed his family to a visit to a sheep station and chartered a boat to sail around the Barrier Reef with Geoffrey Dutton who, a year older, had coincided at school and university with Moorehead. To Dutton, he revealed something of the duality of his complex nature. 'I only know how to live', he confided honestly, 'like a hermit or a rake'.<sup>154</sup>

Back in Tuscany, towards the end of that year, Moorehead had good grounds for satisfaction. He had by then carved out his highly creative career outside Australia for 30 years, carrying it by persistent endeavour and a sense, shaped since boyhood, that he alone had to make things happen. It was an imperative that had propelled him to worldwide fame, immense travel, a Mediterranean villa, a small sloop, the *Lucandra*,



which he shared with his friend Sidney Bernstein, a flat in London, and an income (substantial at that time) from royalties, serialisations, reprints, and his magazine writings, of £24 000 a year. There was, in effect, little need for him to write continually for money. Yet, as he once confided to his sister Phyllis, he was oppressively aware that 'everything I do to earn our living must come out of my mind'.<sup>155</sup>

In December 1966, Moorehead, always so strong and energetic, started suffering headaches, occasional numbness in a limb and some garbling in his speech. When Lucy persuaded him to have a check-up and see a neurologist in London, an immediate test on a possible condition involving the blood supply to his brain was prescribed. 'Don't worry', he advised his family cheerfully. 'I'll write about the experience when it's over.' He was given an angiogram involving a slow injection of dye into the arteries to show up any vascular abnormality. Unfortunately, the dye caused a clot that precipitated a major stroke. Critically, his family considered the choice of an operation with three possible outcomes: a complete cure, his survival as a vegetable, or death. They chose the operation. Across the world, newspapers in Australia noted that their expatriate son was seriously ill in Westminster Hospital.

The long operation took much longer than expected, cutting off the blood supply, for a period, to the brain. Moorehead remained in a coma for a week. When he regained consciousness, he was completely paralysed and there had been cerebral damage that involved the speech centre and the communicating nerves. Alan Moorehead, one of the great communicators of his time, could neither speak, read, nor write. Parts of his brain were unaffected, he could think still, but he could not convey his thought. He was 56.<sup>156</sup>

Through great determination, he fought the paralysis until only his right hand remained inert, but he could never sign his own name or write again. His rich and splendid prose was reduced to a handful of words, 'marvellous', 'bloody awful', 'absolutely'.

Though silenced, his writing voice went on. In this tragedy, Lucy Moorehead, throughout his career his literary associate, editor, the abridger of many of his books, his administrative hand with publishers, and his organiser, would come again to his aid. 'Lucy', Martha Gellhorn had suggested to Moorehead after reading the *The White Nile*, 'is as near to Mrs Baker, struggling along behind you, as anyone of our generation is apt to get!'<sup>157</sup> Now, perforce, she was out in front. It was Lucy who edited and transformed *Darwin and the Beagle*, from the film script and his notes, and brought it out in 1969 with the help of the renowned book designer, George Rainbird, as a lavishly illustrated publication featuring reproductions of nineteenth-century oil paintings, engravings, monochromes, prints and drawings.

It was a book, to quote *The Sunday Times*, 'that brims with interest'.<sup>158</sup> It was, *The Atlantic Monthly* added, Moorehead's capacity to get inside the skin of his leading characters that gave readers such 'unfailing delight, in this case, the mind of a youthful scientist who was to change forever our understanding of the processes of life'.<sup>159</sup> 'One has the feeling', said Alwyn Lee, the long-time Australian book editor of *Time* and friend of Moorehead from university and Porto Ercole days, 'that Darwin—with his bones, fossils and bird skins—is only a thin bulkhead away in the next cabin'.

Significantly, Britain's eminent biologist and great Darwin specialist, Sir Gavin de Beer, wrote in *Bookworld* in October 1969 that Moorehead's portrait of what de Beer himself saw as Darwin's 'slow, naive, but uncannily sagacious mind' and his recreation of the scenery and events of the voyage, were 'as limpid as a burbling brook ... and crystal clear'.<sup>160</sup> 'The book made me wish', said Arthur Koestler simply in *The Observer*, 'that I had written it myself'.<sup>161</sup>

The first edition of *Darwin and the Beagle* sold 70 000 copies and appeared as a two-part series in the *New Yorker* in its year of publication. It was followed a few months later, in 1970, by *A Late Education*,

Moorehead's recollective chapters of autobiography brought together and edited by Lucy. So brilliant in his portrayal of other men's lives, Moorehead had always fiercely resisted writing a structured story of his own. Yet resisting, he had across the years written down snapshots of his own early life and experience which Lucy now gathered under the subtitle, *Episodes in a Life*. Several chapters were devoted to a portrait of his friendship with Alex Clifford, the tall, gentle war correspondent, musician and linguist who had so transformed Moorehead's life and intellectual development. Another focussed on Bernard Berenson at I Tatti. Others embodied wartime recollections and material about his boyhood. All bore the Moorehead imprimatur but without an integrated theme.

Introducing an Australian edition of *A Late Education* in 1998, Michael Heyward observed that in the ease of his writing Moorehead offers 'a long conversation that you wish would never end'. It was a point that animated international reviewers. 'One of the most remarkable authors of his time', *The New York Times* had pronounced in 1966. 'How does he do it?' Moorehead was always generous in publicly talking about his mode of writing, although he eschewed discussions of methodology. 'I personally get up at dawn and by midday my day's work is over', he told Hazel de Berg during an interview in 1964. 'One wants to go on with one's work but the brain is tired, the quality goes down and down and I find if you exceed your four-hour period everything has to be rewritten again on the following day. And heaven knows, it's bad enough without having to do that.'<sup>163</sup>

For himself he set down certain makeshift rules. 'Never write for the market, only yourself; never write anything unless you are agog to express yourself; rewrite everything until the words are absolutely clear and simple, with as few adjectives as possible; never be satisfied with anything.'

Certainly the typescript drafts of the books stored among his papers, with their revisions, sliced paragraphs, simplified phrases and sentences

and careful refining, attest to this strict self-discipline. Increasingly across his career, Moorehead would announce that he hated writing. He recalled the rooms where he had written books, 'these cells, these self-inflicted prisons where the writer sits incarcerated for so many hours each day—so many words a day, so many chapters in a month'. 'The real fun', he declared, 'is in the research. That is pleasure from first to last'.<sup>164</sup>

Moorehead's advice to aspiring young writers invariably echoed what he had learnt from Berenson. A young writer 'should start reading as much as he can, keep doggedly at it, and write incessantly'. His own writing was a product of wide and eclectic reading, travel and observation, and it bore the mark of Mark Twain's maxim, 'And what he thought he might require, he went and took'. Moorehead's integrity was never in doubt. He was an honest and conscientious researcher who openly acknowledged his debt. And while he admitted that as he got older 'the work gets harder', he declared that he would choose no other life than this. 'I am one of the lucky ones', he acknowledged. And despite slog and endurance, a driving commitment and the *accidie* he knew so well in writing, he relished 'that sense of fulfilment a creative man has when he knows that he is on the right track and working to the limit of his powers'. 'Style', said Virginia Woolf (whom Moorehead might well have detested), 'is all rhythm'. For Moorehead, his style was innate, a gift that never let him down.

One reviewer held him up beside those other prolific writers of nonfiction of his time, Peter Fleming and Patrick Leigh Fermor: 'travellers, scholars, adventurers all, blending the artistic and the practical ... reading deeply ... and living their lives with an intensity and range altogether alien to their successors'. They had no exact parallels in France or America, he contended. They were remarkable men, likely to be long remembered, and of them all, Moorehead, he judged, 'was the most thoroughly professional'. His publisher, Jamie Hamilton,

had written to Moorehead in 1965 after '25 unclouded years', 'You have always been the ideal author, loyal, appreciative, welcoming suggestions'.<sup>165</sup> With the many reprints and new editions of his books, his publishing house kept Moorehead's name before the public.

The men and women who reviewed Moorehead's books—essayists, literary figures, eminent journalists, international historians, authorities on Africa, politicians and generals—have attested to the importance and influence of his work. It is therefore the more surprising that, with the exception of Manning Clark and the multidisciplinary scholar Tim Bonyhady, in his publication on the Burke and Wills expedition,<sup>166</sup> Australian historians have remained so conspicuously silent on the historical value of Moorehead's work. Geoffrey Serle reputedly thought very highly of *Cooper's Creek*<sup>167</sup> and listed *Gallipoli* in the bibliography of his biography of Monash. Yet his entry in *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* on Alan Moorehead describes him with dismissive brevity: 'His writing was of the highest quality, his history works not scholarly but reputable'.<sup>168</sup>

Moorehead wore his own scholarship lightly and had a true respect for scholars and scholarship. He was generous in his praise of Serle's historical work, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria* which followed upon *Cooper's Creek* in 1965, characterising Serle prominently in a *Sunday Times* review as one of the new historians in Australia with whom 'the writing—or rewriting—of Australian history makes a considerable advance'.<sup>169</sup>

There is little sign that Australian historians, turning their lens on war, absorbed *Gallipoli* into their corpus of knowledge. Writing in 1965, nine years after Moorehead published *Gallipoli*, the distinguished historian, Ken Inglis, observed that Australia's academic historians had exercised 'a near silence on the subject of Gallipoli and Australia's role in war' and that C.E.W. Bean, Australia's war correspondent at Gallipoli and Anzac historian, 'was absent from the canon of Australian



historiography'.<sup>170</sup> Inglis was embarking at the time on his own enquiry into the Anzac tradition, a scrutiny that culminated in many essays and articles and in *Sacred Places*, his major history of Australian war museums and the culture that shaped them. Yet he omits any reference to Moorehead, as do the foundation academic writings on Australia's part in the Gallipoli campaign that followed. 'I always thought Alan Moorehead a masterly journalist and I took his book with me on my first visit to Gallipoli', Inglis observed privately. 'Australian historians read and admired his books. But perhaps we were narrow and parochial in thinking of him largely as a journalist and populariser.'<sup>171</sup>

If such admissions raise disturbing questions about the academic ownership of knowledge, Moorehead's influence lay well beyond this. As recently as February 2004, the Irish writer Carlo Gébler, literary son of the consummately literary Edna O'Brien, with a slew of successful novels behind him, turned his mind to writing a popular narrative history of the siege of Derry. A swift and engaging spinner of words, he found narrative history with its primary sources and its battery of facts and assumptions, incredibly slippery. 'It was', he admitted in *The Australian Financial Review* in February 2004, under the heading 'Chasing the Slippery Facts of History', 'like trying to pick bits of liquid mercury off the floor'. In this long and humbling experience, he thought of Moorehead. 'Before this', Gébler declared, 'I was a great admirer of historical narrative. I loved Alan Moorehead's *The White Nile* and *The Blue Nile* ... But now I have had the experience myself, two things have changed. My awe for Moorehead has increased, and my certainty that storytelling acumen can be deployed with ease across all the forms has been revealed as the facile sophistry it is'.<sup>172</sup>

Alan Moorehead was locked in silence for 17 years. As his favourite poet, John Donne, had written some centuries before: 'A great Prince in prison lies'. 'He was not just brave,' his daughter Caroline has recalled, 'he was heroic. He seldom complained but he felt trapped ... He made

huge efforts to do other things. He carried his Sunday painting forward with his left hand and became quite a good painter. He played bridge, he went to the movies, and always in the past an enormous reader—the English classics, Saki, Chekhov, the Russians generally, the poets, Donne, Browning and Wordsworth, modern American fiction, and every kind of history and travel, our houses were filled with books—he now listened to talking books'. He swam and walked. 'He longed to talk', she said, 'and we used to sit around the table for hours, laughing, as he struggled and laughed, and with my mother's help, made it into a game—guessing. It wasn't all grim. Some of it he made alright by the strength of his courage and determination'. Despite his clipped speech and Europeanised air before his illness, Caroline said, 'I thought of him as essentially and always Australian'.<sup>173</sup>

Tragically, Lucy, Moorehead's great companion and anchor, predeceased him. In July 1978, she was thrown from their car and killed, after a collision with a truck, as she drove him and his sister Phyllis out to lunch along the coast near Porto Ercole. Both women were ejected from the car while Moorehead, strapped in the front passenger seat, was physically unharmed, yet unable to relay what had happened.

Moorehead was awarded a CBE in 1968 and was made an Officer in the Order of Australia in 1978. He died in London after a second stroke, on 29 September 1983, at the age of 73. He is buried in Hampstead Cemetery, Fortune Green, under a simple white headstone that reads, 'Alan Moorehead. Writer.'

## Notes on Sources

The Alan Moorehead papers, NLA MS 5654, are the records of an outstandingly productive journalistic and literary life. Made up of 43 boxes arranged in 327 folders and 11 folio packets, they contain, in the first instance, press cuttings that stretch from Alan Moorehead's earliest reportage as a correspondent, or 'special correspondent' of the Melbourne *Herald* (press cuttings album, Box 40), through an extensive collection of scattered, unsorted general press cuttings covering his reportage from Gibraltar for *The Daily Express*, 1938, (Box 35, folder 70 to Box 40, folder 30 and Folio packet 1) through his appointments as *Express* correspondent in Paris and Rome, 1939–40 (Box 35, Folio packet 1) and on to a unique collection of his despatches as a war correspondent in North Africa from June 1940 to 1943. These, largely unsorted, are held in Box 35, folders 274–277; Box 36, folder 281; and Box 37, folders 286–287. Very few of Moorehead's despatches from the European theatre of war from June 1944 have survived among his papers, with the exception of a few press cuttings in Box 37, folder 290. With the dismantling of the *The Daily Express* archives, his wartime despatches are only available in microfilm at the British Library Newspaper Archives, Colindale, London.

Moorehead's documentary collection also includes notebooks, wartime and other diaries, personal and professional correspondence with agents and publishers, the manuscripts and proofs of his published and unpublished works, magazine and journal articles drawing on his extensive travels, newspaper cuttings of book serialisations, book reviews of his published works, exercise books of handwritten notes of background material for his books, and photographs.

There are no copies of Moorehead's outgoing correspondence and only a very small number of drafts. General press cutting boxes 34–40 mix duplicate newspaper book review cuttings with cuttings from

Australian, British, New Zealand, South African and European papers covering Moorehead's peripatetic career from 1945 to 1969.

### *Manuscript and original sources*

Papers of Alan Moorehead, National Library of Australia, MS 5654.

Papers of Lord Beaverbrook, House of Lords Library, London.

Papers of Tom Pocock 1987–90. Resource material (interview notebooks) of his biography of Alan Moorehead. National Library of Australia, MS 8377.

Oral History interview of Alan Moorehead by Hazel de Berg for National Library of Australia, March 1964.

### *Endnote citations*

The following editions of Alan Moorehead's books, of which there are numerous editions, have been used in the Endnote citations.

*African Trilogy*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1997

*The Blue Nile*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962

*Cooper's Creek*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963

*Eclipse*, London: Granta Books, 2000 and Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1995

*The Fatal Impact*, London; Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton; Mead & Beckett, 1987

*Gallipoli*, South Melbourne, Vic.: Macmillan, 1989

*A Late Education: Episodes in a Life*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998

*Montgomery*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1946

*No Room in the Ark*, London: Reprint Society, 1960

*Rum Jungle*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953

*The Villa Diana*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951

*The White Nile*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960

*Winston Churchill in Trial and Triumph*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955

### *Other major sources*

Tom Pocock's biography, *Alan Moorehead*, was published in London by Bodley Head in 1990. The edition used for citations was published in London by Pimlico in 1991.

Michael Heyward, 'Alan Moorehead', *Voices*, vol. 5 no. 1, Autumn 1995.



# Endnotes

## Preface

- <sup>1</sup> Alan Moorehead deposited his papers in the National Library on a personal visit in 1971.

## Chapter 1: The Making of a Journalist

- <sup>2</sup> 'An Australian Childhood. An Arcady of a Kind', *New Yorker*, 1 August 1953; see also Alan Moorehead, *A Late Education*, pp. 14–37.
- <sup>3</sup> Melbourne University Archives and Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'A Cloistered Life' in *The Half Open Door*, eds Patricia Grimshaw and Lynn Strahan, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982, p. 122.
- <sup>4</sup> *A Late Education*, pp. 23–25.
- <sup>5</sup> Alan Moorehead, *Rum Jungle*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993, p. 11–12.
- <sup>6</sup> Letter of recommendation from Frank Murphy, 20 May 1936, Moorehead Papers, Box 1, folder 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted in Introduction by Michael Heyward, *A Late Education*, p. xiv.
- <sup>8</sup> *Daily Express* cables, Moorehead Papers, Box 1, folders 3 and 5; press cuttings and Folio Item, Packet 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Sutton letter, Moorehead Papers, Box 1, folder 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life*, London: Heinemann, 1962, p. 246.
- <sup>11</sup> Lucy to Moorehead, Moorehead Papers, Box 1, folder 2.

## Chapter 2: The Prince of War Correspondents

- <sup>12</sup> Clement Semmler, 'War Correspondents in Australian Literature: An Outline', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 112 no. 2, 1985, and cf. Phillip Knightley, *First Casualty: The War Correspondent as*

*Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, London: André Deutsch, 2003.

- <sup>13</sup> W.P. Rilla, *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 December 1944, Moorehead Papers, Box 1, folder 6.
- <sup>14</sup> *Daily Express* article, Moorehead Papers, Box 37, folder 286.
- <sup>15</sup> *A Late Education*, pp. 159 and 166.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.
- <sup>17</sup> Alan Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1997.
- <sup>18</sup> *Daily Express*, 21 December 1940, Moorehead Papers, Box 37, folder 290.
- <sup>19</sup> *A Late Education*, pp. 153–154.
- <sup>20</sup> *Daily Express*, 12 December 1941, Moorehead Papers, Box 37, folder 287.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted by Michael Heyward, 'Alan Moorehead' in *Voices*, vol. 5 no. 1, Autumn 1995, p. 83.
- <sup>22</sup> *Daily Express* cables, Moorehead Papers, Box 36, folder 281; Christiansen to Moorehead, 3 March 1945, Box 1, folder 7.
- <sup>23</sup> *Daily Express*, 24 July 1942, Moorehead Papers, Box 37, folder 287.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Lessons of Tunisia', *Daily Express*, 25 May 1943, Moorehead Papers, Box 36, folder 281.
- <sup>25</sup> *Daily Express*, 3 October 1943, Moorehead Papers, Box 37, folder 287.
- <sup>26</sup> Letter, Christiansen to Richard Moorehead, 23 December 1943, Moorehead Papers, Box 3, folder 25.
- <sup>27</sup> Alan Moorehead diaries, Box 34.
- <sup>28</sup> *Daily Express*, 23 July 1944 and quoted by Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 200.
- <sup>30</sup> Francis de Guingand, *Generals at War*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964, p. 114.
- <sup>31</sup> *A Late Education*, p. 71.

- <sup>32</sup> Alan Moorehead, by Tom Pocock, p. 116.
- <sup>33</sup> Lord Beaverbrook to Alan Moorehead, 27 June 1946, Beaverbrook Papers, British House of Lords, London.

### *Chapter 3: Echoes of Battle*

- <sup>34</sup> Moorehead to Christiansen, quoted by Michael Heyward in 'Alan Moorehead', *Voices, op. cit.*, p. 81.
- <sup>35</sup> Alan Moorehead, *African Trilogy*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1997, Preface, p. ix.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pp. ix-x.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 191-192.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 157.
- <sup>39</sup> Phillip Knightley, personal interview with the author, 27 April 2004.
- <sup>40</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 December 1944. Moorehead's North African books ran into many editions to the end of the twentieth century.
- <sup>41</sup> Alan Moorehead, *Eclipse*, London: Granta Books, 2000, p. 133.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 146, 147.
- <sup>43</sup> For Moorehead's perceptive overview of the French in the war see *ibid*, Chapter 11, pp. 164-178.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 258 and 259.
- <sup>45</sup> Quoted by Pocock, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-208.
- <sup>46</sup> Alan Moorehead, *Montgomery*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1946, pp. 49-59.
- <sup>47</sup> Letter to Lucy, quoted by Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
- <sup>48</sup> Letter from Richard Moorehead, 6 December 1946, Moorehead Papers, Box 11, folder 86.
- <sup>49</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 21 December 1946, Moorehead Papers, Box 11, folder 90.

## Chapter 4: The Mediterranean Man

- <sup>50</sup> Letter Moorehead to Lucy, 18 March 1943, quoted Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
- <sup>51</sup> Moorehead to Christiansen, 30 October 1947, Moorehead Papers, Box 1, folder 7.
- <sup>52</sup> Alan Moorehead, *The Villa Diana*, illustrated by Osbert Lancaster, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951, p. 5.
- <sup>53</sup> *A Late Education*, p. 188.
- <sup>54</sup> Quoted by Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
- <sup>55</sup> *A Late Education*, p. 193.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 178.
- <sup>57</sup> Letter from Bernard Berenson, Moorehead Papers, Box 3, folder 25.
- <sup>58</sup> Moorehead's undated draft letters to Menzies and Casey and their replies, 4 May 1955, Moorehead Papers, Box 4, folder 27.
- <sup>59</sup> Churchill, reported in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 30 August 1952, Moorehead Papers, Box 12, folder 99.
- <sup>60</sup> Geoffrey Dutton in *Australian Book Review*, March 1964.
- <sup>61</sup> Letters to Lucy, 22 and 27 June 1952, quoted Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 252.
- <sup>62</sup> Moorehead address, *The Sunday Times* Book Exhibition 1955, Moorehead Papers, Box 4, folder 27.
- <sup>63</sup> *Winston Churchill in Trial and Triumph*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955, pp. 2 and 10. See also Churchill material in Moorehead Papers, folders 291 and 295; also *The Sunday Times* from 7 November 1954 in Box 5, folder 48 and Box 18, folder 147.
- <sup>64</sup> *Evening Despatch* (Edinburgh), 1 November 1958.
- <sup>65</sup> Leonard Shapiro, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 October 1958.
- <sup>66</sup> Manning Clark, *Age*, 4 February 1959.
- <sup>67</sup> Information from historian Ken Inglis.
- <sup>68</sup> Letter to Lucy, April 1952, quoted Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

## Chapter 5: Gallipoli

- <sup>69</sup> 'Return to a Legend', *New Yorker*, 2 April 1955, pp. 98 ff.
- <sup>70</sup> *A Late Education*, p. 33.
- <sup>71</sup> Alan Moorehead, *Gallipoli*, Sydney: Mead & Beckett, 1989, p. 13.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 102–103.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 117–118.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 118.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 114.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 282.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 285 and 288.
- <sup>80</sup> *Literary Review*, June 1956.
- <sup>81</sup> Lord Freyberg, *Otago Daily Times*, 19 May 1956.
- <sup>82</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1956.
- <sup>83</sup> Hamilton to Moorehead, 25 November 1955, Moorehead Papers, Box 1, folder 4.
- <sup>84</sup> *Gallipoli*, p. 302.
- <sup>85</sup> Moorehead oral history interview with Hazel de Berg for the National Library of Australia, March 1964, Tape 54.

## Chapter 6: A Love Affair with Africa

- <sup>86</sup> Letter to Lucy, 2 June 1956, quoted by Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
- <sup>87</sup> Alan Moorehead, *No Room in the Ark*, London: Reprint Society, pp. 1–2.
- <sup>88</sup> Letter, Shawn to Moorehead, quoted by Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 266.
- <sup>89</sup> *No Room in the Ark*, p. 134.
- <sup>90</sup> Alan Moorehead, Prologue, *The White Nile*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960, pp. 1–2.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 88 and 89–90.



- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 122.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 348.
- <sup>96</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 December 1960.
- <sup>97</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *Listener*, 8 December 1960.
- <sup>98</sup> *John O'London Weekly*, 29 December 1960.
- <sup>99</sup> Martha Gellhorn letter to Moorehead, 16 January 1961, Moorehead Papers, Box 17, folder 141.
- <sup>100</sup> Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile*, New York: Harper and Row, 1962, p. 132.
- <sup>101</sup> Michael Heyward in 'Alan Moorehead', *Voices*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
- <sup>102</sup> *The Blue Nile*, *op. cit.*, pp. 288–289.

## Chapter 7: Cooper's Creek

- <sup>103</sup> Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
- <sup>104</sup> Private communications from Caroline and John Moorehead to the author.
- <sup>105</sup> 'Alan Moorehead: The Craft of Writing', *Sunday Times*, 24 October 1954, Moorehead Papers, Box 4, folder 27.
- <sup>106</sup> Sir Thomas White Annual Address, extracted as 'The Struggle for Tradition', *Meanjin*, vol. 16, pp. 430–432.
- <sup>107</sup> Alan Moorehead, Acknowledgments, *Cooper's Creek*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963, and T.G. Rosenthal, Sidney Nolan, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002, p. 115.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1–2.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.
- <sup>112</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 14 November 1963.
- <sup>113</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 November 1963.

- <sup>114</sup> Undated letter from Harper Row forwarding Nevin's undated commentary.
- <sup>115</sup> Letters from Syracuse University, 5 August and 10 September 1963, Box 8, folder 61 and 8 July 1964, Box 8, folder 63.
- <sup>116</sup> Letter from Howard Gotlieb, Boston University, 9 July 1964, Moorehead Papers, Box 8, folder 63.
- <sup>117</sup> *Book Week*, 8 March 1964.
- <sup>118</sup> *Australian Book Review*, March 1964.
- <sup>119</sup> *New York Times Book Review*, 16 February 1964.
- <sup>120</sup> Letter from Serle, 15 July 1963, Moorehead Papers, Box 21, folder 169.
- <sup>121</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick letters, 5 August 1963, Moorehead Papers, Box 21, folder 169 and 25 November 1963, Box 8, folder 61.
- <sup>122</sup> David Malouf, quoted by Peter Craven and Michael Heyward (eds), *Frontispiece, Scripsi*, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1989.
- <sup>123</sup> Oral history interview, *op. cit.* It was the receipt of the transcript of this interview that determined Moorehead to deposit his papers with the National Library of Australia.

## Chapter 8: The Australian

- <sup>124</sup> Garry Kinnane, *George Johnston*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966, p. 153.
- <sup>125</sup> Noel Barber, *Conversations with Painters*, London: Collins, 1964.
- <sup>126</sup> Nolan letter to Moorehead, 18 September 1963, Moorehead Papers, Box 8, folder 61.
- <sup>127</sup> Moorehead's essay appeared in modified form as the introduction to the American edition of Robert Melville, *The Legend of Ned Kelly*, New York: Viking, 1964. See Moorehead Papers, Box 8, folder 63.
- <sup>128</sup> For Moorehead's writings on Antarctica see *The Sunday Times*, 20 December 1964 and 'Borrowed Light', *New Yorker*, 27 June 1964.

- <sup>129</sup> Moorehead's oral history interview, *op. cit.*, Tape 54.
- <sup>130</sup> Moorehead Papers, Box 26, folders 217–218.
- <sup>131</sup> Nolan and Moorehead in Tahiti, Moorehead Papers, Box 8, folder 61 and information from Bernard Smith.
- <sup>132</sup> Moorehead letter to Nolan, 13 April 1964.
- <sup>133</sup> Nolan letters, 28 April and 25 June 1964, Moorehead Papers, Box 8, folder 59.
- <sup>134</sup> Ian Britain, *Once an Australian*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 198–200.
- <sup>135</sup> Robert Hughes, *Weekend Telegraph* (London), 3 March 1990; and see Robert Hughes letters to Moorehead, 25 November and 6 December 1965, Moorehead Papers, Box 8, folder 70, and November 1964, Box 8, folder 62.
- <sup>136</sup> *Weekend Telegraph*, *ibid.*
- <sup>137</sup> See Author's note, Alan Moorehead, *The Fatal Impact*, London; Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton; Mead and Beckett, 1987, p. 8.
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 112 and 115.
- <sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- <sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- <sup>141</sup> *Catholic Herald*, 21 January 1966.
- <sup>142</sup> Postcard from Nolan, 5 May 1966, Moorehead Papers, Box 9, folder 70.
- <sup>143</sup> Letter from Bernard Smith to the author, 10 February 2004.
- <sup>144</sup> Duval Smith article, Moorehead Papers, Box 22, folder 183.
- <sup>145</sup> Max Harris, *Australian*, 1 February 1966.

## Chapter 9: The Writer

- <sup>146</sup> Australian newspapers include *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane), *The Age* (Melbourne) and *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney). See Moorehead Papers, Box 38, folders 299–300 and 306.
- <sup>147</sup> White quoted by David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, Milson's Point, NSW: Vintage, 1992, pp. 525–526.

- 148 Manning Clark, Preface, *The Fatal Impact*, 1987.
- 149 Pocock interview with Clark, 11 November 1987, quoted in  
*Alan Moorehead*, p. 274.
- 150 Letter from Alan Shaw to Moorehead, 11 October 1965, Moorehead  
Papers, Box 8, folder 63.
- 151 Victor Serventy published his *A Continent in Danger*, London:  
André Deutsch, 1966.
- 152 Moorehead diary entry, 26 June 1966, quoted Pocock *op. cit.*, p. 275.
- 153 Personal communication from Caroline Moorehead to the author,  
May 2004.
- 154 Geoffrey Dutton, *Out in the Open: An Autobiography*, St. Lucia,  
Qld.: Queensland University Press, 1994, p. 300.
- 155 Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 279.
- 156 I am indebted to Tom Pocock for information about Moorehead's  
illness and later death.
- 157 Letter from Martha Gellhorn to Moorehead, Moorehead Papers,  
Box 17, folder 141.
- 158 *Sunday Times*, 19 October 1969.
- 159 *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1969.
- 160 *Bookworld*, 19 October 1969.
- 161 *Observer*, 21 December 1969.
- 162 The two-part series, 'Annals of Discovery', appeared in the *New  
Yorker* in August and September 1969. See Moorehead Papers, Box  
24, folder 199.
- 163 Oral history interview, *op. cit.*, Tape 54.
- 164 *A Late Education*, p. 190 and oral history interview *op. cit.*
- 165 Letter from Jamie Hamilton to Alan Moorehead, 22 March 1965,  
Moorehead Papers, Box 5, folder 43.
- 166 Tim Bonyhady, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth*,  
Balmain, NSW: David Ell Press, 1991.
- 167 Letter from Rod Andrew to Moorehead, 23 July 1963, Box 8, folder 61.

- <sup>168</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 438.
- <sup>169</sup> Moorehead's review *Sunday Times*, 1 December 1965.
- <sup>170</sup> Ken Inglis, 'The Anzac Tradition', *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 63 no. 3, March 1965.
- <sup>171</sup> Private communication from Professor Inglis to the author, 2004.
- <sup>172</sup> Article by Carlo Gébler, *Australian Financial Review*, 6 February 2004, p. 12.
- <sup>173</sup> Personal communication from Caroline Moorehead to the author, May 2004.



# Index

- Aboriginal Australians 47, 90, 100,  
105–106, 108
- African Trilogy* vii, x, xi, 29, 31,  
41, 122
- A Late Education* ii, vii, x, xi, 4,  
115, 116, 122
- Alexander, General  
Sir Harold 12, 28, 39
- Andrew, Dr Roderick 102, 112, 132
- Antarctica 94, 97, 100–101, 107, 130
- Asquith, H.H. 60
- Atlantic Monthly* 91, 115
- Auchinleck, General Sir Claude 12,  
15, 16, 28
- Australian War Correspondents 11,  
14, 31, 48, 63, 118
- A Year of Battle* vii, 27, 28
- Baker, Florence 72–73
- Baker, Sir Samuel 72–73
- Bates, Daisy 106
- Bean, C.E.W. 11, 63, 118
- Beaverbrook, Lord xiii, 5, 8, 24, 25,  
40, 64, 122
- Becker, Ludwig 85–86
- Beckler, Herman 85–86
- Beer, Gavin de 115
- Belsen Concentration Camp 34
- Berenson, Bernard 43–44, 116–117
- Bernstein, Sidney 114
- Birdwood, General William 61
- The Blue Nile* vii, 66, 68, 77, 78, 83,  
108, 119
- Blue Nile (river) 66, 70, 77, 79
- Bonaparte, Napoleon 77–78
- Bonyhady, Tim 118, 132
- Boston University 91, 130
- Brahe, William 85, 87, 89
- Bruce, James 77–79
- Buckley, Christopher 23, 48
- Burke, Robert O'Hara 84–87, 89–  
90, 92, 95–96, 118
- Burton, Richard 70, 72
- Cairo 9, 11, 14, 18, 23, 27, 40, 44, 68
- Carden, Admiral 56
- Casey, R.G. 45, 127
- Catholic Herald* 108
- Christian Science Monitor, The* 46,  
91, 127
- Christiansen, Arthur 5–8, 12, 17,  
20, 27, 36, 40, 124–127
- Churchill, Sir Winston vii, xi, 18,  
38, 46, 48–50, 56, 60, 64, 127
- Clark, Manning viii, xii, 50, 92,  
111–112, 118, 127, 132
- Clifford, Alexander 10, 14–17, 23,  
31, 39, 47, 101, 116
- Connolly, Cyril 83
- Cook, James 100, 104–105, 107
- Cooke, Alistair 103
- Cooke, Jane 103

- Cooper's Creek vii, 80, 84, 88, 90–92, 95–96, 101, 108, 118, 129
- Cooper's Creek (place) 86–87, 89
- Cox, Geoffrey 7, 39
- Crete 16, 28, 30
- Crossman, R.H.S. 37
- D-Day Landing 20
- Daily Express, The* xiii, 5–9, 12, 17, 18, 20, 22, 31, 33, 35, 40–42, 49, 121, 124, 125
- Darwin, Charles vii, 112, 115
- Darwin and the Beagle* vii, 115
- Driberg, Tom 24
- Drysdale, Russell ('Tas') 101
- Dutton, Geoffrey 47, 92, 111, 113, 127, 132
- Eclipse* vii, x, xi, 27, 32, 35, 42
- Edward VIII 49
- Eisenhower, Gen. Dwight 28, 36
- The End in Africa* vii, 27–28
- The Fatal Impact* vii, xiii, 100, 102, 104, 107, 108, 111–112, 131, 132
- Fielden, Lionel 54
- Fisher, Andrew 60
- Fisher, Lord (Jacky) 56
- Fitzpatrick, Kathleen 3, 92, 124, 130
- Fleming, Peter 83, 117
- Foley, Charles 17
- Freyberg, Sir Bernard (Lord) 19, 63, 128
- Fuchs, Karl vii, 45–46
- Gallipoli* vii, xii, xiii, 38, 51, 52, 55, 63–64, 67, 74, 76, 82–83, 96, 108, 118
- Gallipoli (place) 53–55, 57, 60–65, 75, 95–96, 100–101, 118–119
- Gauguin, Paul 105
- Gébler, Carlo 119, 133
- Gellhorn, Martha 29, 76–77, 104, 115, 129, 132
- Gordon, General Charles 74
- Grant, James 72
- Grattan, Hartley 92
- Gray, Charley 87, 89
- Great Barrier Reef 47, 110, 113
- Guépratte, Admiral 57
- Guinand, Francis de 23, 68, 125
- Hamilton, Hamish (Jamie) 63, 76, 83, 117–118, 128, 132
- Hamilton, General Sir Ian 57–59, 61
- Harris, Max 109, 131
- Hemingway, Ernest 42–43
- Herald, The* (Melbourne) 1–4, 7, 9, 46–47, 121
- Hetherington, John 4
- Heyward, Michael xii, 29, 116, 123, 124, 125, 130
- Holiday* 96
- Howitt, Alfred 90
- Hughes, Robert 4, 102–103, 131
- Huxley, Elspeth 76, 129

- Inglis, K.S. x, 118–119, 133
- Johnston, George 95, 130
- Jordan, Phillip 48
- Kemal, Mustafa (Atatürk) 57, 59–61
- King, John 85, 87, 90
- Keyes, Roger 57
- Kitchener, Lord 56, 61, 74
- Knightley, Phillip x, 31, 35, 124, 126
- Koestler, Arthur 115
- Lancaster, Osbert 83, 127
- Landells, George 85
- Lee, Alwyn 115
- Leigh-Fermor, Patrick 83
- Livingstone, Dr. David 70, 73, 74, 82
- Lüneburg Heath 21, 24
- Malouf, David 93, 130
- Marshall, Alan ('Jock') 101
- Mediterranean Front, the North*  
*African Campaign 1940–43* vii, 27
- Melbourne University xi, 2, 54, 92, 124
- Melville, Herman 105
- Menzies, Robert 45, 127
- Mohammad Ali of Egypt 77–78
- Monash, John 65, 118
- Monks, Noel 4–5, 7, 9, 42
- Montague, Evelyn 28, 48
- Montgomery* vii, 37, 42, 122
- Montgomery, General  
 Sir Bernard xi, 12, 21–24, 26, 28,  
 31, 35–36, 39
- Montgomery, Henry 36
- Moorehead, Alan ii, xiv
- African travels 66, 68–71, 75,  
 77–79
- Antarctica 94, 97, 98–99, 100,  
 111, 130
- Australian visits 37, 48 (1946);  
 47–48, 53 (1952); 90 (1962),  
 65, 97, 102 (1964); xii, 111–112  
 (1965); 113 (1966)
- Awards and honours 24, 38, 64,  
 90, 120
- Childhood 1–2, 13, 53, 106, 116, 124
- Conservation 68–69, 101, 104–109,  
 111, 112–113
- Death 120
- Family background 1–2, 37
- Illness 114, 119–120
- Marriage 8–9, 39, 41, 44–45, 47,  
 67, 82, 103–104, 115, 120
- Reporting in Gibraltar 6–7, 121
- Reporting in Melbourne 3–4
- Schooling 2, 106
- University 2–3, 54
- War reporting  
 Belsen concentration camp 34  
 D-Day Landing 20  
 Europe 6–7, 20–22  
 India 18, 41  
 Mediterranean 7, 9, 24  
 Tunisia 12, 18–19, 125  
 USA 18, 28

- Western Desert 10, 12–19,  
23–24, 30
- Writing as a craft 16, 23, 27, 29,  
40, 43–44, 50, 65, 87, 89–93,  
102–103, 108, 109, 111–119,  
121, 129
- Moorehead, Bernard (brother) 1, 37
- Moorehead, Caroline (daughter) x, 41,  
47, 82, 113, 119, 129, 132
- Moorehead, Frank (uncle) 55
- Moorehead, John (son) x, 41, 47,  
82, 129
- Moorehead, Lucy (née Milner) 8, 9, 15,  
37, 39–42, 44–45, 47, 50, 67, 68,  
82, 102, 113
- As Moorehead's literary editor  
and organiser, 44–45, 82, 103,  
115–116
- Cairo, 14–15
- Death, 120
- Moorehead, Louise (mother) 1, 37
- Moorehead, Phyllis (sister, Mrs  
Whitehead) 1, 37, 114, 120
- Moorehead, Richard (father) 1, 20, 37,  
125, 126
- Moorehead, Richard (son) 41, 82,  
113
- Morrison, Ian 48
- 'Mrs Fraser' (libretto) 97, 100, 113
- Murdoch, (Sir) Keith 47, 53
- Murphy, Frank 4, 124
- Mutesa, King of Buganda 75
- Nevins, Allan 91
- New Statesman and Nation, The* 11,  
29, 32, 125, 126
- New Yorker* xi, 41, 44, 47, 55, 67, 69,  
95, 97, 100, 115, 124, 128, 130, 132
- New York Times, The* 92, 116, 130
- Nicholson, Harold 74
- No Room in the Ark* vii, 68–69, 123
- Nolan, Sidney ix, 52, 80, 84, 90,  
95–97, 99, 100–101
- Nunn May, Alan 99–101, 108, 130, 131
- Observer, The* 29, 40, 115, 132
- Paris, liberation of 21, 34
- Pocock, Tom xii, 8, 9, 24, 109, 122
- Poliziano, Angelo 41
- Porter, Peter 83
- Priestley, J.B. 76
- Pritchett, V.S. 29
- Pontecorvo, Bruno vii, 45–46
- Quigly, Isabel 108
- The Rage of the Vulture* vii, 41–42
- Raymond, Robert 100, 111
- Ridgway, General Matthew 63
- Rilla, W.P. 11, 32, 125
- Robeck, Admiral de 57
- Rommel, Marshal Erwin 12, 18, 31
- Rum Jungle* vii, 47, 106, 123, 124
- The Russian Revolution* vii, 49–50
- Scotch College, Melbourne xi, 2
- Scott, Ernest 3

- Sculthorpe, Peter xii  
 Sekules, Peter 92  
 Serle, Geoffrey 92, 118, 130  
 Serventy, Victor 101, 113, 132  
 Shaw, A.G.L. x, 112, 132  
 Shawn, William 67, 69, 128  
 Shute, Nevil 47  
 Smith, Bernard x, 108, 109, 131  
 Smith, Peter Duval 109, 131  
 Sparrow, John 81  
 Speke, John 70, 72  
 Stanley, Henry 70, 73–74  
 Stark, Freya 70–71  
 Sturt, Charles 85  
*Sunday Express, The* 5, 22, 35, 49  
*Sunday Times, The* 48, 50, 64,  
     91, 115, 118, 127, 129, 130,  
     132, 133  
 Sutton, Charles 7, 9  
 Syracuse University 91, 130  
 Tahiti 100, 104, 107, 131  
 Theodore, Emperor 78  
*Times, The* 17, 48, 108  
*Times Literary Supplement, The*  
     37, 76, 91  
 Tobruk 12, 16, 18, 19, 30, 31  
*The Traitors* vii, 45–47  
*The Villa Diana* (book) vii, 123, 127  
 Villa Diana (residence) 41, 81  
 Waller, Richard (Dick) 69, 71  
 Wavell, General Sir Archibald 12, 15,  
     16, 27  
 Welsh, Mary 42  
 White, Patrick 81, 111, 131  
 White, Sir Thomas 45, 83  
*The White Nile* vii, x, 70, 72, 76, 77,  
     108, 115, 119, 123, 128  
 White Nile (river) 70, 77  
 Wills, William 84–85, 87, 90, 92, 95,  
     96, 118, 132  
 Wilmot, Chester, 11, 14, 31  
*Winston Churchill in Trial and*  
     *Triumph* vii, 48, 123, 127  
 Young Turks 55, 56



# ALAN a rediscovery MOOREHEAD

AN AUSTRALIAN LIFE

In this volume of the National Library's biography series **An Australian Life**, Ann Moyal brilliantly illuminates the passion and creative energy which drove Alan Moorehead's life and work. Moorehead was one of Australia's most adventurous and celebrated writers and his work remains a vitally important part of our literature.

Moorehead first made his name as an intrepid and extraordinarily eloquent World War 2 correspondent, then as the author of *Gallipoli*, *The White Nile*, *The Blue Nile* and *Cooper's Creek*. His works of history and travel drew critical acclaim and inspired a generation of writers as he helped to reshape the way Australians understood themselves and their place in the world. This is 'An Australian Life' to savour.

Dr Ann Moyal AM is a biographer, autobiographer, and leading historian of Australian science. A graduate of the University of Sydney and Doctor of Letters of the ANU, she is well known for her memoir *Breakfast With Beaverbrook*. She met Alan Moorehead in 1965. Ann founded the Independent Scholars Association of Australia in 1995 and lives in Canberra.

Front cover:  
Alan McCrae Moorehead  
by Ida Kar, early 1950s  
vintage bromide print;  
National Portrait Gallery, London

Back cover:  
Samuel Calvert (1828–1913)  
*Cooper's Creek*, c.1873  
Pictures Collection,  
nla.pic-an10328053

New cover design 2007



ISBN 0-642-27616-1



[www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)

The White Nile   Coopers Creek   Gallipoli   African trilogy   The Fatal Im

