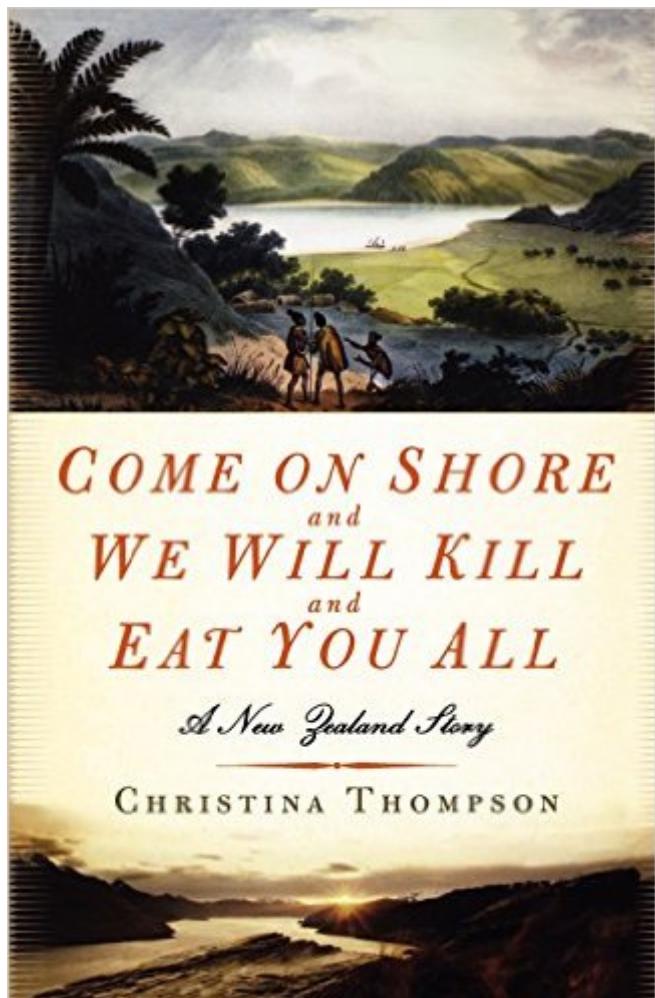


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Come On Shore And We Will Kill And Eat You All: A New Zealand Story



Synopsis

In this involving, compassionate memoir, Christina Thompson tells the story of her romance and eventual marriage to a Maori man, interspersing it with a narrative history of the cultural collision between Westerners and the Maoris of New Zealand. Despite their significant differences, Thompson and her husband, Seven, share a similar sense of adventure and a willingness to depart from the customs of their families and forge a life together on their own. Thompson explores cultural displacement through the ages and the fascinating history of Europeans in the South Pacific, beginning with Abel Tasman's discovery of New Zealand in 1642. Yet at its core, this is the story of two people who meet, fall in love, and are forever changed.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As an American transplant to New Zealand, I have to say that I found Christina Thompson's book an absolutely fascinating read. And as the author of two books on New Zealand myself (the second one a work-in-progress), I have to say that her volume has added immeasurably to my effort to understand, not only the historic Maori, but Maori today. I can also appreciate her cross cultural experience via marriage, being that my wife was born and raised in France. If Pakeha--Europeans--have historically viewed Maori with some ambiguity, I can testify to the fact that my French in-laws view me in a similar fashion. To put it politely they see me as a creature only a generation off the frontier that doesn't even know how to use a knife and fork properly--the French version of a savage, one might say. Ms. Thompson's Maori in-laws, on the other hand, impress me as being my idea of what in-laws should be. (I hope my mother-in-law doesn't read this.) I have only

one complaint about this book, and that is that I found the lack of signposts disorienting. That is to say that the reader has no way of knowing when Ms. Thompson's journey began. Was it in the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s? Except for that omission, I would have to give this book five stars.

I picked up this book at my local bookstore and could not put it down. Thompson's book mixes memoir with historic research to create a very accessible and interesting book. She smoothly combines her research on the literature of colonial-Maori contact with her own story of how she met and married her Maori husband. One of the best books on the contacts between very different cultures that I have read in a long time. And it will make you want to go to New Zealand too.

I've lived in four of the five main regions this book discusses (New Zealand, Australia, Boston, and St. Paul, Minnesota--I'm missing Hawai'i) so I feel especially qualified to review it. It's nonetheless a difficult book to review, in part because it's really two books in one. The first book showcases the pitch perfect notes of a participant-observer in the antipodes, and this is where the book shines. Thompson has some piercing insights into both Kiwi and Aussie cultures, and she has a wonderful ability to express them through carefully chosen anecdotes. I would recommend this book to anyone moving to that part of the world because Thompson's observations are so incisive and memorably articulated. The second book, the personal memoir, rang hollow for me. Thompson seems less interested in relating a personal story than she is in crafting a personal mythology. Consequently, the book lacks a certain humanity. The detached, ethnographic eye that works so well for describing the nuances of unfamiliar cultures falls short when it is turned inward on the author's own family. The most important character in the book--her husband--never materializes as a fully formed human being but remains a research subject, important mostly to the extent that he represents the every-Maori. Most oddly, though, and most frustratingly, Thompson comes off as blind to her own privilege. I know first hand what it's like to live as a graduate student and an under-employed academic so I empathize with those struggles. But I also recognize that the challenge is a whole lot easier when you have a well-heeled family in an affluent Boston suburb to fall back on. Thompson fancies herself solidly middle class, but could only live the life she lived because she could afford to fail, which is a luxury most solidly middle class folks don't have. At best, these faults make it difficult to relate to Thompson's story. At worst, it seems as though she views indigenous cultures as a means by which she might craft an "interesting personal narrative." In those moments Thompson appears only slightly more sensitive than the 18th/19th century European conquerors and verandah ethnographers she all-too-gently critiques. I don't think Thompson actually is that callous. I suspect

that she just over-intellectualizes her personal story and thereby keeps the reader at arm's length. Nonetheless, the result is to rob the book of the authority it might have gained by forging a genuine emotional connection with the reader. Thompson is too guarded, and her narrative too manicured. All in all, though, the book is a good read. I'd add a half star if I could. It's well written and conveys genuine insight, so it might be forgiven, at least partially, if it falls short as a memoir.

As a white north american once married to an African-Jamaican man, I appreciate Ms Thompsons' framing her book as one of contact between colonizer and colonized, sharing some of the history and showing as much awareness as she has of the snares of partnership across culture and class. I missed more details of the marriage itself, how they navigated these complex waters, even though I honor her statements about not wanting to cross privacy boundaries of her husband or his family. The book strikes me a valuable mix of her professional skills as an anthropologist and researcher and an honest personal story. A lively and valuable read for anyone interested in how we make contact and enter relationships across our many differences in this world. Can't disagree that Penguin History of NZ would be better history, but that is not purpose of this "story." Well written as well. Highly recommend.

A romantic love story between a New England girl and a Maori man starts out in New Zealand where they meet, takes you to Australia, Hawaii and ends in Massachusetts. Along the way you learn a lot about the Maori culture, the relationship of European settlers to natives both in America and New Zealand and how one couple creates and handles an effective intercultural relationship. A very good read! I loved it!

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