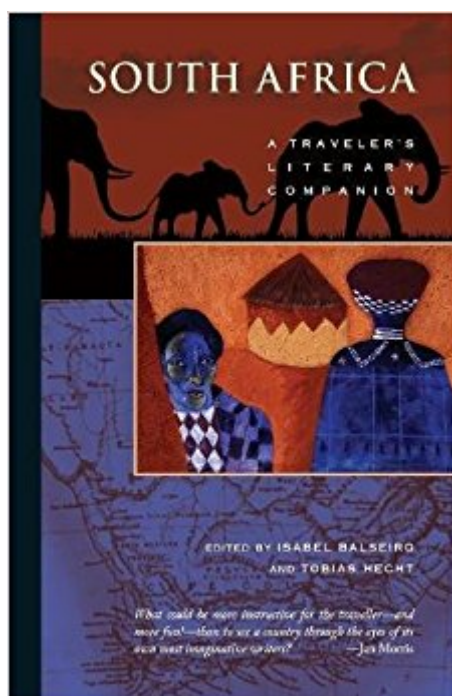


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South Africa: A Traveler's Literary Companion (Traveler's Literary Companions)



Synopsis

Including short stories from some of South Africa's best and most renowned writers (Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and Alan Paton, to name only a few), this collection accompanies readers to a recent, but altogether different South Africa, reflecting perspectives of both the oppressed and the oppressors. Some of the stories are previously unpublished, but all of them constitute examples of the most imaginative and provocative South African writing, from many disparate perspectives.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Isabel Balseiro is the Alexander and Adelaide Hixon Professor of Humanities at Harvey Mudd College, in Claremont, California. Her publications on South Africa include *To Change Seels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa* and the anthology *Running Towards Us: New Writing from South Africa*. Tobias Hecht is the author of *At Home in the Street: Street Children of Northeast Brazil*, which won the Margaret Mead Award, and *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel*. One of his short stories, written in Spanish, won second prize in Spain's Hucha de Oro, which carries the world's largest prize for a single piece of short fiction. An independent scholar, writer, and translator, he received his Ph.D. from Cambridge.

This collection was published in 2009 and contained 17 works by as many South African writers. There were 10 short stories, and excerpts from 5 novels, an extended essay, and a memoir. The

book is part of the Whereabouts Press's traveler's literary companion series, a beautiful attempt to introduce a wide range of foreign writers and locations to English-language readers. All the works in the South African anthology were written originally in English, except for one translation from Afrikaans, by Jan Rabie, and one that might have been translated from Xhosa, by A. C. Jordan. There was nothing translated from Zulu, Pedi, Tswana, Sotho or the other indigenous languages. Writers of European heritage included Olive Schreiner, Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, Ivan Vladislavic, Jan Rabie, J. M. Coetzee and H. C. Bosman. Those of black African heritage included A. C. Jordan, Es'kia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Gcina Mhlope, Modikwe Dikobe and Zachariah Rapola. A writer of multiracial heritage was Richard Rive. Those of Indian background included Ahmed Essop, Ronnie Govinder and Rustum Kozain. The collection was divided into writing set in three geographical regions--Gauteng (including Johannesburg and Pretoria), KwaZulu-Natal (including Durban) and the Western Cape (including Cape Town)--plus one catch-all chapter for rural areas/the farm/the game park. One work, by Schreiner, dated to the first decade of the 20th century. The rest ranged from the 1940s (Mphahlele, Bosman, Paton) to the 2000s (Vladislavic, Rapola, Kozain). The few published after the end of apartheid didn't refer to the events leading up to 1994 and after, and focused on the downbeat. Two pieces, "1899" by Schreiner and "Mrs. Plum" by Mphahlele, both classics, comprised more than one-third of the anthology. For this reader, the most interesting stories by far were "The Hajji" by Essop, which showed the dilemma faced by a Muslim Indian who sacrificed too much to try to keep his sense of dignity. And "The Rooinek" by Bosman, in which an Afrikaner narrator told of a horrific trek across a desert and mused on the conflict of English and Boer, with a memorable blend of humor and sadness. "The Turban" by Jordan, presented in the style of an oral tale said to be based on Xhosa narrative, also impressed. Schreiner's "1899," about the sacrifices of the Boers through several generations, was grim reading but ultimately moving, and showed well people's connection to the land. Other stories focused on the early Dutch exploring the land (Rabie), the landscape and people's relation to it (Paton), strife and cooperation between the Zulus and Indians (Govender), a riot in a township (Coetzee), a young black woman forced to marry against her will (Mhlope), and the Afrikaners' oppression of blacks in the countryside (Dikobe). The excerpt from Vladislavic's essay described how security systems in today's South Africa isolated people. Some of the stories were too short (Nkosi, on a man in prison), unfocused (Rapola, on a man and a prostitute) or had points that escaped me (Kozain, Gordimer). Examples of positive social change and cooperation in this collection were rare. Of necessity, the focus of many stories set in the past was on people separated by race/ethnic group and by historical conflict. Some authors and works that might've filled out the anthology, in my

opinion, are "Bloodsong" by Ernst Havemann, about a white boy's tale of bonding with Zulu people in connection with an ancestral dance they performed. "I Take Back My Country" by Bartho Smit, about the uneasy relationship between a gifted black artist and a wealthy white man. And "Recognition" by David Medalie, in which the widow of an Afrikaner leader attended a reconciliation banquet held by a post-apartheid leader. Or works by the many multiracial writers left out, such as Peter Abrahams, Alex La Guma, James Matthews and Zoe Wicomb. Writers translated from Afrikaans were also missing, except for Rabie. More humor might've been added by something like Lewis Nkosi's "The Prisoner," in which a black maid kidnapped and manhandled her white boss. Recent other anthologies include Encounters: An Anthology of South African Short Stories (1998), Running toward Us: New Writing from South Africa (2000), the 900-page Omnibus of a Century of South African Stories (2007), and the 600-page Captured in Time: Five Centuries of South African Writing (2010). Earlier collections include Modern South African Stories (1980), The Penguin Book of Southern African Stories (1985), A Land Apart: A Contemporary South African Reader (1986), The Vita Anthology of New South African Short Fiction (1988), The Penguin Book of Contemporary South African Short Stories (1993) and The Heinemann Book of South African Short Stories from 1945 to the Present (1994).

Fast shipping. Book arrived in good condition. The book is a good overview of SA literature. There was plenty of range in the types and timbre of stories.

South Africa is truly an enigma to many Americans. "South Africa: A Traveler's Literary Companion" is a look at the strong literary culture that inhabits South Africa, granting western readers a vivid picture of a culture unlike anywhere else in the world. Its people have their own unique spirit, a sort of blend of the European and traditional African philosophies. "South Africa" is a must for any collection focusing on world literature.

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