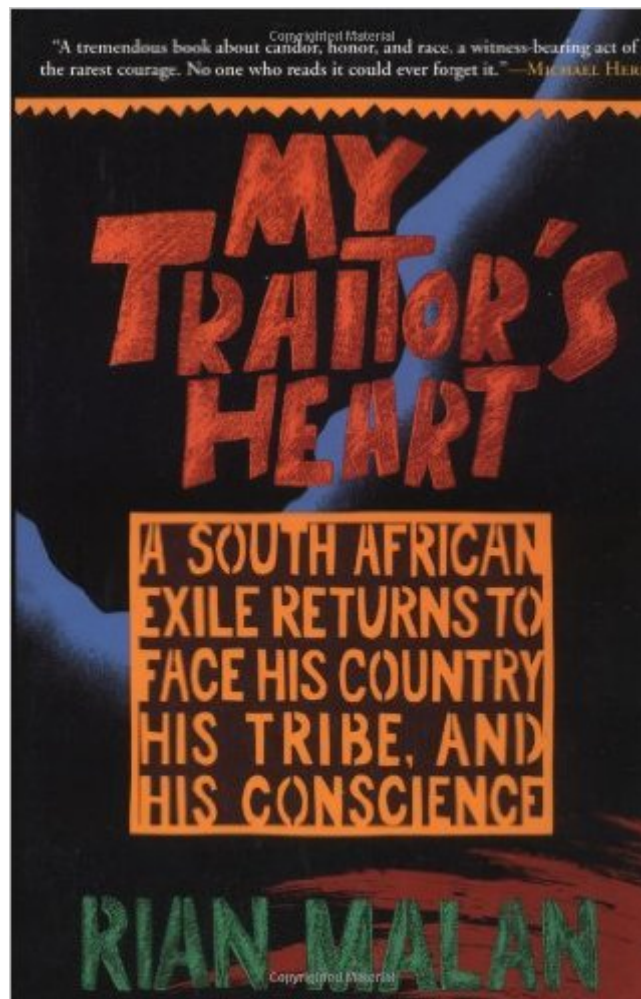


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My Traitor's Heart: A South African Exile Returns To Face His Country, His Tribe, And His Conscience



Synopsis

A classic of literary nonfiction, *My Traitor's Heart* has been acclaimed as a masterpiece by readers around the world. Rian Malan is an Afrikaner, scion of a centuries-old clan and relative of the architect of apartheid, who fled South Africa after coming face-to-face with the atrocities and terrors of an undeclared civil war between the races. This book is the searing account of his return after eight years of uneasy exile. Armed with new insight and clarity, Malan explores apartheid's legacy of hatred and suffering, bearing witness to the extensive physical and emotional damage it has caused to generations of South Africans on both sides of the color line. Plumbing the darkest recesses of the white and black South African psyches, Malan ultimately finds his way toward the light of redemption and healing. *My Traitor's Heart* is an astonishing book -- beautiful, horrifying, profound, and impossible to put down.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is an investigation into the attitudes of a liberal who was raised in South Africa. In the book, Malan tells us that his original charge was to write the history of his racist ancestors, who were among the first Boer settlers in the region. But when Malan began his project, he found he needed to first explore and develop his own perspective on race in South Africa before he could begin. And once he began doing this, he never really got around to the history project. The book is divided into 3 sections. In the first, Malan describes his own childhood and adolescence, leading up to his forced flight from South Africa, with a major focus on his youthful love for Blacks (especially in the abstract). The second part of the book details a number of violent murders that Malan

investigated upon his return to South Africa in 1986 to write this book. In this section, Malan describes the intense violence that was occurring in South Africa at the time, and how all Whites, even doctors providing humanitarian services in the townships, became targets for Black rage. He also explores violence between rival Black political groups. In the closing section, Malan visits a White woman named Creina Alcock, who lived on the border of Msanga, a tribal homeland, where she and her husband had struggled to build a sustainable rural development project with the local Blacks. The woman was widowed after her husband was killed while trying to negotiate peace talks during a tribal disturbance in Msanga. The book doesn't have a strong narrative thread- -instead it seems that Malan was trying to communicate some of his own confusion and ambivalence about racial questions by presenting so many stories and sides of the picture, and flipping rapidly from one to the next.

It seems that everyone has an opinion about Africa and all those opinions exist somewhere on a single sliding scale. At one end is the idea that all of that continent's problems are the result of some kind of post-colonial hangover and that if it hadn't been for the Europeans, Africa would be a wealthy, progressive Utopia. On the other extreme, is the opinion that the African culture has evolved in such a way as to virtually preclude 'successful' statehood. Critics of this book tend to dislike it based on their position on that scale relative to the author's (somewhere in the middle, by the way.) Also, they sometimes use dubious facts and theories to back up their positions (e.g. Malan does indeed discuss the Afrikaner disinformation campaign designed to turn tribes/political movements against each other, and trying to determine what ethnic groups have 'first settler' rights to a given piece of dirt is virtually impossible.) But all this is completely irrelevant. As is clearly stated in the extended title, this is the story of one man's journey through his own past and conscience. On this level, it is a triumph. It is the only book I have ever read that doesn't seem to include a single divisive word. Whether you agree with Malan's observations or not, I think it is clear that he agonized over and believed deeply in every one. Additionally, the book is beautifully written on almost every level: smooth, engaging prose, balanced structure, and unfailing pace. It is almost impossible for the reader not to be affected in one way or another. It has been asked whether this book is still relevant in light of the fall of Apartheid and the progression of S.A. in the years since its publication.

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