



Mafeking Road: and Other Stories

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These slyly simple stories of the unforgiving South African Transvaal reveal a little-described (and rarely romanticized) world of Afrikaner life in the late 19th Century. Like our own Mark Twain, Herman Charles Bosman wields a laughing intolerance of foolishness and prejudice, a dazzling use of wit and clear-sighted judgment. Spun by the plainclothes local visionary and storyteller Oom Shalk Lourens, these moving and satirical glimpses of lethargic herdsman, ambitious concertina players, legendary leopards and mambas, and love-struck dreamers lay bare immense emotions, contradictions, and mysteries within the smallest movements and unadorned talk of the Groot Marico District. Leading oral tradition by the hand into a territory all his own, Bosman maps a world at once lucid and layered, distant yet powerfully familiar.

Mafeking Road: and Other Stories Details

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Author : Herman Charles Bosman

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Tim says

My favourite South African writer. He makes you laugh and cry. The Rooineck is particularly heart-breaking. And the ending of Unto Dust, from the other Schalk Lourens book, is just beautiful.

Mervyn Koots says

This is a great little collection of stories - most of them less than a dozen pages - from a wonderful writer. Anyone wanting to crawl into the heart (I nearly said brain) of a Boer-War-era rural Afrikaner white farmer in South Africa, could do no better than read these and other wonderful short stories by Bosman. Don't be put off by the biographical fact that he was sentenced to death at age 22 for shooting his step-brother, his death sentence being commuted on appeal, followed by ten years hard labour in a South African prison in the 1920s and 1930s, during which he wrote his wonderful prison memoir Cold Stone Jug. Bosman was a complicated man, but as shown in that memoir, in other writings, and especially in the wonderful stories in this particular collection, he was an extremely perceptive man and highly articulate, even behind the apparently simple facade of his glorious creation, the curmudgeonly Oom Schalk Lourens.

Oom Schalk spends much of his time on his stoep, looking out over the dry veld as he spoons far too much sugar into his mugs of coffee. Bosman subverts the impact of his profound insights into human nature by constructing stories and characters as sweet as any cup of coffee Oom Schalk consumes, and as idiosyncratic as any character that one can find in the writings of Mark Twain.

As a young man Bosman started writing - at first, short stories for his local newspapers. He then qualified as a teacher and took up a teaching post in the Groot Marico district in South Africa. This barren, dry land with its quirky characters became the source for much of the writing in this volume.

Through the perceptive and mischievous eyes of Oom Schalk, Bosman comments on taboo issues in South Africa, from race relations to the never-ending tension between English and Afrikaners, to the contested terrain of politics and history. Each of the stories is hilarious, disturbing, or deeply moving, depending how open the reader is to letting the superb language drift into his or her consciousness. In many cases the very last line of the story wrenches a tear from the eyes or turns a dagger in the stomach.

Anyone embarking on a voyage of discovery in the rich tradition of South African literature needs to forage early on in that voyage in these and other stories by arguably the country's leading exponent of the short story.

Dwayne Bailey says

So where to start. I first read this book at school. Growing up in Apartheid era white schools I guess this was as subversive as our English teacher could get.

The stories are tragic and hilarious. **Oom Schalk** is our narrator, a poor Afrikaans farmer living in the Groot Meriko, a place where Herman Charles Bosman spent time as a teacher.

Through Oom Schalk, Bosman was able to make social commentary on South African race issues, on Afrikaners and on South Africa's curious history. The stories are funny or heart wrenching. Some just give you a complete chill in the last line.

You eventually love every single one of these short stories. I'd say if you are visiting the country for the first time this would be one book you should read.

Silvergift says

Free firstreads giveaway book. A simple set of stories, written from a storyteller's perspective (or, rather, told from that angle). The mild ridicule that comes off the pages is hilarious if you get it, but if you read the stories without thinking, you'd never guess the actions (or discussions) are supposed to be laughed at. I keep going back to read the stories again.

Barbara says

I really enjoyed reading the stories taking place in the early days of the 20th Century. Bosman died in 1951 but he has really captured the dialog and life of Afrikaner pioneer farmers that are still entertaining today.

Sal says

I'm loving this. A little bit Twain, a little bit Uncle Remus-- I know there must be better comparisons out there for this book too-- it's a series of half-funny, half-sad tales about a small town, told by one presiding, a little bit boastful character.

karen says

what do i have to do to sell this book? i put it on table, and nothing. i make a lovely endcap just for archipelego books, and nothing. why wont you believe me? isnt it pretty, with its van gogh cover and rich purple textured cover? and read the back: blurbs!! from people i have never heard of, but they are blurbs!! well, there is publishers weekly, but they compare these stories to robert frost or bob dylan, so i dont know if they can be trusted. but i know i can be. these are more like o henry or thomas hardy on a gentle day. they are mostly very short - under 10 pages, but they all have those snappy endings that cause laughter or empathy or both. they are cleverly written and also have shades of mark twain in them (does it help if i name-drop?) c'mon, is it the afrikaner thing? theres a little racial inequality here, but if i can gloss over it, so can you! is it cuz he killed his stepbrother? because - glass houses, guys. weve all had those days. just read the book. i want someone else to have read it. i said please.

Jennifer Goodson says

A friend from Africa gave me this as a present last month and I really, really loved it. What beautiful short stories. The punch comes in the final line and it is usually very moving. What lovely - and very humorous - writing. Such a brilliant evocation of the rural simplicity of Africa, and such lovely characters. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

Keith Sparrow says

What a lovely collection of short stories. These are so funny, sad, serious, whimsical, and part of the South African soil. The author has a way of luring one in with humour and beautiful characters, and then turning the knife in the very last sentence of the story. I absolutely relished these stories, and they are laden with atmosphere and populated by delicious characters.

H.L. Balcomb says

A fantastic read, capturing the spirit of South Africa during the post Anglo-Boer War era. The short stories are captivating, less the offensive vernacular of the time and the fact that it is written from a singular cultural perspective. Additionally, the only negative of Bosman's literary style is that non-South African readers may get lost in the stories depth. His writing makes the assumption that the reader is familiar with South African idioms and symbols of his time. Yet, his work remains a prodigious collection of short stories in my eyes. As stated in the introduction, a great example of the spirit of early twentieth century man/woman.

William says

A set of simple yet hilarious short stories about Boer farmers in the bushveld of South Africa.

On the effects of peach brandy:

'It seemed a long way, now, from the kitchen to the voorhuis, and I had to lean against the wall several times to think. I passed a number of other men who were also leaning against the wall like that, thinking. One man even found that he could think best by sitting on the floor with his head in his arms.'

On looking for cattle before coming across a leopard unexpectedly:

It happened about mid-day, when I was out on the far end of my farm, behind a koppie, looking for some strayed cattle. I thought the cattle might be there because it is shady under those withaak trees, and there is soft grass that is very pleasant to sit on. After I had looked for the cattle for about an hour in this manner, sitting up against a tree-trunk, it occurred to me that I could look for them just as well, or perhaps even better, if I lay down flat. For even a child knows that cattle aren't so small that you have got to get on stilts and things to see them properly...I could go on lying there under the withaak and looking for the cattle like that all day, if necessary.

On getting over 'ploughing sickness':

Hans Coetzee, who was a Boer War prisoner at St. Helena, told me how he got sick at sea from watching the ship going up and down, up and down, all the time. And it's the same with ploughing. The only real cure for this ploughing sickness is to sit quietly on a riempies bench on the stoep, with one's legs raised slightly, drinking coffee until the ploughing season is over. Most of the farmers in the Marico Bushveld have adopted this remedy, as you have no doubt observed by this time.'

Pete says

A wonderful collection of humorous yet often poignant short stories. If you are interested in the history of South Africa and the character of the Afrikaner you will love this book.

Mike Talbot says

This is surely the best set of short stories ever. What a fantastically enjoyable collection. The characters are so deliciously caricatured yet in a loving way. The narrator, Oom Schalk is himself a liar and an exaggerator. You have to love him.

These are witty tales and have magnificent punch lines - usually in the very last sentence - that nail you in the gut. They make you laugh and almost cry. They are just too brilliant.

John Caulfield says

Probably the best set of short stories to come out of Africa. Sentenced to death for shooting his rooinek (English) brother-in-law, Mr Bosman was a hard man with an eye for detail. Every one of his books is a classic in its own right. After the death sentence was commuted on appeal, he spent some years in prison, where he wrote Cold Stone Jug, a chronicle of his prison experiences. Please note that there are no politically correct views expressed in his literature.

Sipho Marakabi says

Hey. Had to come to a different country to encounter one of my country's greatest writers. Brilliant stories. I loved the style and the insights and the topography - a dusty land with dusty people.
