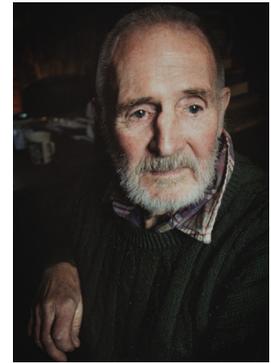


BITTER EDEN

Tatamkhulu Afrika



Published: 3 November 2016
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 ISBN: 978-1-910369-15-9
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A haunting story of illicit love in war.

In this frank and beautifully written novel, Tatamkhulu Afrika revisits his experiences as an allied prisoner of war after the fall of Tobruk in North Africa in 1942. The book reveals the complex rituals of camp life and the diversion of the POW theatre (in which, in real life, the author played Lady Macbeth). It lays bare the terrible cruelties, but also the strange loyalties and deep bonds the men know will never be replicated on civvie street. *Bitter Eden* is a tender, bitter, powerful book, of lives inexorably changed, of a war whose ending does not bring peace. More than simply 'war' literature, or 'gay' literature, this is a deeply moving, human work about the meaning of love, and what it is to be a man.

Tatamkhulu Afrika was born in Egypt in 1920 of an Arab father and a Turkish mother. He was brought to South Africa in 1923, orphaned, and raised by Christian foster parents. At seventeen, his first novel *Broken Earth* was published but almost the entire print run was destroyed in the Blitz. He did not write prose again for fifty years. He served in North Africa in the Second World War, and following the fall of Tobruk was taken prisoner of war where his experiences are recalled in *Bitter Eden*. It was first published when he was eighty-two. He died in December 2002, shortly after its publication.

Accolades for Tatamkhulu Afrika as a poet:

1994 and 2004 – Winner of the Sanlam Poetry Prize
 1993 – Winner of the Thomas Pringle Award
 1992 – Winner of the Olive Schreiner Prize
 1991 – Winner of the Thomas Pringle Award
 1991 – Winner of the CNA Debut Prize

“Tatamkhulu Afrika is a novelist the world almost missed.”
 – *Times Literary Supplement*

“A gripping study of the dehumanising effects of war and an empathetic portrait of illicit love.” – *The New York Times*

Key Selling Points of *Bitter Eden*:

- Critically acclaimed (see reverse)
- Has been described as a 'Modern Classic'
- Selected as Stonewall Honour Book 2015
- Chosen by NPR as a Best Book of 2014
- Shortlisted for Best Gay Novel for the Lambda Literary Awards 2015
- Previously published in the UK (Arcadia), US (Picador) Italy (Playground Libri) and France (Presses de la Cite) to high critical acclaim and excellent reviews.
- Excellent print and media coverage expected, building on the successes of existing reviews.
- A Blue Mark Books title.
- Advance reading copies available.

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‘Such a powerful, melodic, urgent and honest story of suffering, love and survival I have never quite encountered before. This is a jewel of a tale – a vital and raw piece of the true human experience – and it needs to never be forgotten. I am honored to have read it, and will pass it along to many others.’ – Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love*

‘*Bitter Eden* is one of those rare books that is both tender and tough, that is a punch to the stomach and a caress to the face... *Bitter Eden* is earthy and lyrical, caustic and moving. It is a thrilling read.’ – Christos Tsiolkas, author of *The Slap*

‘*Bitter Eden*’s love is neither kind nor tame nor ever adorned. The word love is never mentioned, because love – if this is really the name for it – is so spare and brutal and bare-knuckled that the characters themselves aren’t even aware of it. But this book will haunt you, and stay with you, and won’t ever let go.’ – André Aciman, author of *Call Me By Your Name*

‘A gripping study of the dehumanising effects of war and an empathetic portrait of illicit love.’ – *The New York Times*

‘A small masterpiece.’ – *The San Francisco Chronicle Review*

‘A nuanced psychological portrait of the bonds – platonic and sexual – men create for survival... What begins as an unforgettable account of prisoners of war ends as something surprising: a love story.’ – *Kirkus Reviews*

‘Harsh, exquisite and concise. An elegantly crafted work, an astonishing story of men in close quarters forging relationships that border on trust and betrayal – and how love, in war, is an ambivalent bond.’ – Kai Easton, *Independent*

‘*Bitter Eden* is an extraordinarily powerful novel. It reads like an epic prose poem – or a kind of deathbed confession.’ – Mark Simpson, *Independent on Sunday*

‘A fervent account of the repressed passions in Italian and German POW camps... Proves to be well worth the wait, above all for its chilling account of conditions in the camps.’ – *The Times*

‘Compassionate and disturbing.’ – *The Bookseller*

‘Of the forty or so books I have reviewed for the HNS, the majority have been well-written, informative and entertaining, but only one or two have had a profound effect upon me. *Bitter Eden* is such a novel. It lays bare the whole spectrum of human emotions. Beautifully written... a profound book about human emotion and eternal truths.’ – Janet Mary Tomson, *Historical Novel Society*

‘This autobiographical novel – first published in 2002, when Afrika was 82... does indeed merit the ‘modern classic’ badge.’ – Steven Cordova, *Lambda Literary Review*

‘An extraordinary story of searing intensity... Afrika’s narrative is also moving and curiously uplifting in that it highlights the nourishing quality of unconditional love.’ – Sebastian Beaumont, *Gay Times*

‘The story behind this book is as remarkable as the events which it describes... A raw and shockingly graphic account of life behind the wire.’ – *Mail on Sunday*

‘Here’s a take on World War II you won’t find in *The Great Escape*... while this poetic, elegiac memoir describes the brutal tyranny of the camps, it also reveals the startling physical bonds between the prisoners... A powerful story of men driven together by adversity.’ – *Daily Mail*

‘A beautifully crafted, absorbing read, a careful examination of human relationships, and a rare glimpse into the complexities of life in wartime.’ – *Booklist*

‘As beautiful as it is heartbreaking.’ – Saeed Jones, *NPR*

‘Another depiction of homosexuality that defies preconceptions can be found in the stunning short novel *Bitter Eden*, written by the late Tatamkhulu Afrika, based on his experiences as an allied POW during World War II. Afrika tells the tale of three men from different countries and cultures forging unexpected intimacies and enmities while imprisoned together in squalid Italian and German camps. This is a tough little grenade of a book, simultaneously bringing to mind *Bent*, *The Lord Of The Flies* and *All Quiet On The Western Front*.’ – Jim Gladstone, *Passport*

‘Tatamkhulu Afrika is a novelist the world almost missed.’ – *Times Literary Supplement*

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