



Welcome to Our Hillbrow

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Hillbrow is a microcosm of the changing South African psyche. This novel links Hillbrow, rural Tiragalong and Oxford, and contains the shattered dreams of youth, sexuality and its unpredictable costs, AIDS, xenophobia, suicide, the omnipotent violence that cuts short the promise of young people, and the Africanist understanding of the life.

Welcome to Our Hillbrow Details

Date : Published November 1st 2001 by University of Kwazulu Natal Press (first published July 2001)

ISBN : 9780869809952

Author : Phaswane Mpe

Format : Paperback 124 pages

Genre : Fiction, Southern Africa, South Africa, Cultural, Africa, Literature, African Literature

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From Reader Review Welcome to Our Hillbrow for online ebook

Umar Paswal says

It's an interesting book if one wants to examine the lives of Black South Africans living in a big city after the apartheid. Most of the the people in these neighborhoods have moved from countryside and live in a separate world from White South Africans. The unique thing about this book is that it doesn't deal with White vs Black issues, but its main focus is the attitude and prejudices of Black South Africans toward other Black South Africans and immigrants from other African countries. Interestingly, the rural people feel like Blacks in a city like Johannesburg are dirty, with low morals, and no good can come from associating with them. Their views on Immigrant African are even worse. The epidemic of AIDS is understood in the light of these views--it is believed that it was brought by Black African immigrants from countries like Nigeria.

Wadlington Johnson says

This was a really interesting book that I enjoyed a lot. It is very brief only containing 124 pages but the amount of substance that is fit into such a short book is extraordinary. It deals with topics such as xenophobia, racism, rumor, discrimination, poverty, AIDS, and crime all within its covers. Another thing that sets the book apart is the second person narration that talks not back to the reader but to the protagonist of the story who has already passed when the book begins. It chronicles the events leading to his death revealing the entire picture in starts and stops that jump around a bit but add to the allure. This is a great book to spend an afternoon reading. It is quick but also carries a lot of weight. I highly recommend it.

Kirk Angeles says

Great book! So much substance was fluidly compressed into 124 pages.

The narrator of this novel is speaking to a man who had already died. He/she begins by summarizing the man's past, before his death, and then continues speaking about how his fatal end sent large ripples of guilt, sadness and anger to those around him.

Themes such as AIDs, betrayal, xenophobia, etc. gave a lasting impact even after the last page. Very glad that I read this.

Joseph Schreiber says

This remarkable novel employs a distinctive narrative voice drawn from the oral traditions of the author's home community (Limpopo Province) to explore complex questions of urban social problems, xenophobia and modern literary concerns in post-Apartheid South Africa. The communal narrator addressing the dead main character from both the physical and the metaphysical reality may seem to belay the sophistication of the plot structure, but in truth it heralds what was, at the time, an exciting new way of telling stories. My full review can be found here: <https://roughghosts.com/2017/02/13/yo...>

Unarine Ramaru says

Mpe was a literary painter of note. Saddening that he did not live long enough to write more novels. I enjoyed the style of his writing more than the story. The protagonist's omniscient voice puts the reader to a quizzical and introspective perspective.

Emily says

I read this directly after reading *Ways of Dying*, and while I like the messages that it conveys and the story in general, I couldn't get over that it was written in the second person. The second person does help to put the reader in the main character's shoes, but it just isn't a point of view that I want to read for a whole novel. Over all, I much preferred *Ways of Dying*.

Elizabeth says

An exceptionally sad narrative of young people living in Hillbrow, South Africa. Fraught with complexities and contrasts, this is an explicit tale for those interested in the realities of post-apartheid South Africa.

Steph Sawyer says

This is an amazing book. Mpe addresses the violence, xenophobia, crime, and the AIDS epidemic that plagues Hillbrow. It's a story of grief, despair, isolation, and suicide, but it's also about love and hope. The song repeatedly mentioned throughout the novel, Stimela's *See the World through the Eyes of a Child*, is definitely worth a listen as well.

Jake Goretzki says

And so, South African season kicks off. I've been meaning to read this since picking it up in Joburg a few years ago and getting suddenly 'back into' things South African on reading Mr Flanery's (okay, he's American) wonderful novel, *'Absolution'* (which itself reminded me of the unique conditions and rawness of SA literature - which is why I find it so darn interesting).

Here's a short, lyrical little number set among Hillbrow migrants, but focusing as much on where they've migrated from. It takes us too to Oxford (in fact, there was something perhaps unintentionally touching about how 'Oxford' in this case meant 'Oxford Brookes'. NB I went to UCL).

I'm absolutely fascinated by what happened to Hillbrow (having gone through it in a taxi and been strongly advised to be terrified), so am very easy to please on this front. It's all there: crime, AIDS, xenophobia, drugs, suicide - but of course this is also a tale of love, betrayal and rural superstition.

A distinctive, street-inflected voice - often surprisingly funny (especially when we get sexual and head to the 'Southern regions' and things carnal). Linguistically and metaphorically pretty interesting too, to a UK reader (the idea, for example of 'the other bone of my heart').

So, touching and lyrical. Next up (or next-up-but-one): *The Restless Supermarket* (which I suspect might Do Good Hillbrow too).

Adam says

Two stars: it was 'ok' at best.

This tale of life in and around Johannesburg failed to engage me.

The topics covered in this novel (including AIDS, race relations, human relations, and the 'new' South Africa) are treated far better in *Dog Eat Dog* by Nicholas Mhlongo.

One good thing about *Welcome to Hillbrow* is its brevity.

Bill says

This is a very short novel, a novella really, only 124 pages. It is written as a narrative from a second person, to the main protagonist, who is already dead as the book is written.

Hillbrow is a very violent suburb of Johannesburg in South Africa, and the title of the book is very ironic, as there is definitely nothing welcoming there at all. Almost every character in the book dies at some point, by all kinds of different means. Suicide, murder, AIDS, witchcraft...you name it.

But it is still an interesting read and as it is very short, you can read it in an hour or two, so, as such, it is definitely worth your while.

AC says

Wow, wow...! This book is just brilliant... Mpe, who died suddenly, leaving just this one novel and some poems, may have been a genius.

Yandisa says

"She understood now that there were many ways of dying, that the choice between suicide and life was not merely a choice between stupidity and intelligence, that sometimes when people threw their own life away, it was because they were intelligent and courageous enough to see and admit that they did not own this life"

I really enjoyed reading this book , suicide , Xenophobia, AIDS beautifully explored in 124 pages. I found it

crazy how one can draw parallels between Refentse (the protagonist) and the author, this novel felt like a premonition . It was nice to see Refilwe' s mind open despite the painful demise. What a read , also I'm glad I read Ways of Dying just before reading this book m the narrator makes reference to Ways of dying in a beautiful way.

Phaswane Mpe had a beautiful mind ♥??

Roberto says

Benvenuti a Hillbrow è un romanzo basato sulla descrizione delle difficili condizioni di Hillbrow, un'area ghettizzata di Johannesburg, un tempo zona di soli bianchi, oggi luogo ibrido, meta degli immigrati dal resto dell'Africa, sovrappopolato, degradato, brulicante di vita ma anche segnato dalla morte e dalla violenza.

Usando diversi stili letterari come il realismo magico e il flusso di coscienza, l'autore descrive la vita della città dopo la fine dell'apartheid, affrontando temi come la xenofobia tra africani, l'AIDS, la droga e la prostituzione.

Fin dall'inizio del libro sappiamo che il giovane protagonista Refentše è morto, ma continua a essere l'interlocutore cui il narratore si rivolge. Buona parte del romanzo ricostruisce gli eventi della sua vita fino al suicidio, come fosse una cronaca di una morte annunciata, intrecciandoli con le storie di altri personaggi, anch'essi quasi tutti indirizzati al suicidio, alla tossicodipendenza, alla follia o alla malattia, ma destinati a ricongiungersi a lui in Paradiso.

Violenza, povertà, omofobia, droga, xenofobia, misoginia, superstizione, dilagare irrefrenabile di Aids, contrasto tra la tradizione dei villaggi e i nuovi stili di vita della metropoli costituiscono il quotidiano che provoca il costante disorientamento delle giovani generazioni rappresentate in questo romanzo.

Mpe si ribella alla realtà decadente della Hillbrow in cui vive soltanto sette anni prima di gettarsi all'età di 34 anni dal ventesimo piano del palazzo in cui abita, malato di AIDS.

È un romanzo duro, appassionato, visionario, difficile da leggere nonostante la sua brevità, in cui Mpe porta avanti la propria campagna contro gli stereotipi e i pregiudizi, di qualsiasi tipo essi siano.

Forse è proprio la presenza continua di violenze, stupri, suicidi, malattie a diminuire un po' l'efficacia del messaggio contenuto nel romanzo, poiché queste violenze divengono parte di un mondo alienante che ad un certo punto immaginiamo lontano ed irreale.

Irene says

Suicidal ideation on a large scale? Did the author actually kill himself at 34 or was there a different cause of death?

I just couldn't really get fully into it. I didn't love the writing style. I don't know. I thought it'd be better.
