



# Red Dust

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## Red Dust Gillian Slovo

"Written with the pace of a thriller"—*Times Literary Supplement*. *Red Dust* is set in a rural South African town, where three people are about to meet their past. Sarah Barcant has left her law career in New York to assist an old friend as prosecutor on a Truth Commission hearing. Dirk Hendricks, a former police deputy, is being taken in handcuffs to the station where he once worked. There he will confront Alex Mpondo, the man he had tortured, who is now an MP.

## Red Dust Details

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Author : Gillian Slovo

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# From Reader Review Red Dust for online ebook

## Jeruen says

This book took me to South Africa. This is about an amnesty trial between a former interrogator and a former victim, where the former interrogator seems to know something about the death of another victim, that happened more than a decade ago. And there are multiple parties involved, trying to uncover what really happened in the summer of 1985.

Being that this book was written with an omniscient narrator, the reader had full access to what really happened, and the focus shifts from the happening but to how the characters perceived things as happening. Thus, this book was more than an account of a truth and fact-finding commission hearing between a black and a white man, but it was more a novel about truth itself. The book makes it clear that there are times in which people really cannot discern what is the truth. Instead, the truth boils down to what people think they believe in, and what people want to believe in. Multiple events in the book showcase this, such as the trial proceedings, and the final act by the wife of Pieter Muller.

I suppose I can say that I enjoyed reading this book. The narrative was very easy to comprehend, and the book was suspenseful enough to keep me preoccupied. And at the same time, it wasn't like an airport novel, the novel actually had a substantial topic that it was tackling. The only thing lacking I suppose is the personal interest: I find the topic interesting and profound, but it doesn't hit home like my other novels that I have read and that I have rated the best. So I suppose this novel only gets 4.5 stars out of 5.

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## Tessa says

This is a powerful novel dealing with the complexities of truth and reconciliation, set in South Africa. The author is the daughter of activist parents who fought against Apartheid in South Africa. I highly recommend this novel. Now, I am very interested in reading her memoir.

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## Ann Kopp says

I liked the theme of the book and I learned more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the society in South Africa nowadays. However, I really did not enjoy the writing style as well as the characters. Even though you get an insight in all of the character's thoughts I did not really get to know them and their 'true' personality. All in all, the book was OK to read since the topic is really fascinating and the history as well as the present of South Africa is very interesting but apart from that the book was not that good.

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## Baljit says

The search for the truth does not necessarily lead to justice, it evokes painful memories and does not offer redemption. I found the subject interesting, but the prose rather dull.

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## **Jeanette says**

Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust* is a gripping novel with the emotional pace and intensity of a thriller.

Sarah Barcant, now a top New York lawyer, is called back to her home town Smitsrivier by her old mentor Ben Hoffman as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) comes to town. The now frail Hoffman enlists her to help a grieving elderly couple to find out where their son Steve is buried.

Slovo skillfully brings to life the town and its people - Sarah, Ben and his wife Anna, Alex Mpondo (former torture victim, now MP), James Sizela (upright headmaster and grieving father), Dirk Hendricks and Pieter Muller former policemen and torturers and Pieters wife Marie as both unknowing and complicit.

Eschewing cardboard cut out answers, Slovo explores emotional fallout of past atrocities and injustice. She asks hard questions about the scope and effectiveness of TRC, the nature of justice, truth and reconciliation, that are all the more poignant for knowing Slovo's own personal experience with the TRC and her encounters with unrepentant man responsible for her mother's death. (Her mother Ruth First being killed by letter bomb sent by South African police.)

This is a powerful book that left me pondering.

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## **Jonathan Thijs says**

I think this is a very good drama novel, it's well-written and it shows you how deep racism actually goes. It isn't just discriminating people, which is already bad, but it was even torturing people, which is unbelievable in our point and time. It's awful to see how people's lives are infected by traumas and memories even in the present. And this book shows you how hard it actually is to accuse someone of something you are almost certain that's true, but where is just not enough evidence for, and the steps it takes to even interview that human who's not cooperating at all. I think this is a wonderful, powerful, important, ingenious, novel.

It was actually the first English book I read, we were on a holiday and I ran out of Dutch books, so I read this book after my dad finished reading it. And after that I bought some more!

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## **Crystal says**

Published in 2000, this novel set in post-Apartheid South Africa is amazingly relevant to today's discussions of torture. Questions about the morality of torture, the efficacy, the effects on the torturer and the tortured, the bond formed between them, can they move on? forgive and be forgiven? how does the country move on. Even a discussion of something that sounds a bit like water boarding and also the stripping of the prisoners to humiliate. The book is really about the attempts of the characters to come to grips with the past; the focus is not on chronicling the torture. In other words, the squeamish need not worry.

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## Herman De Vos says

Aanbevolen door Luc De Vos. Met plezier gelezen, maar niet van aard om meer te willen lezen van deze auteur.

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## Sushicat says

In 1985 to black "revolutionaries" are questioned by the police, one of them dies. In 2000 the case is subject of an amnesty hearing in the Court of Truth and Reconciliation. Alex Mpondo faces his torturer Dirk Hendriks and James Sizela hopes to learn the whereabouts of his son's body presumed dead at the hands of Pieter Muller, who still lives in the community. The tale shifts between the victims, the defendants and their lawyers. It explores the layers of guilt and responsibility, for acts and omissions real or perceived and how these things fit into the narrative we build for our lives and how we deal with inevitable contradictions.

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## GG says

Il faut que je parte. Je ne peux plus rester ici. Je suffoque. Je souffre. Mon entourage m'opprime. Je visite toujours les mêmes endroits. Je respire les mêmes odeurs. Oui, il faut que je parte... Mais le faut-il vraiment ?

Peut-on fuir le passé ? Est-il possible de tout laisser derrière soi, de tourner le dos à son enfance ? Sarah Barcant pense pouvoir le faire. Elle décide de quitter la petite ville de Smitsrivier en Afrique du Sud pour poursuivre des études de droit aux États-Unis. Devenue procureur de renom à New York, elle y mène une vie confortable, partagée entre son travail et les nombreuses distractions qu'offre la Big Apple. Mais son passé refuse de déclarer forfait. Un coup de téléphone va bouleverser la vie de Sarah l'obligeant à faire face à tous les souvenirs qu'elle avait pourtant pris grand soin de ranger au fond d'un tiroir. Ben Hoffman, son ami et mentor, demande son aide pour une affaire importante. Dirk Hendricks, un ex-policier blanc qui purge depuis plusieurs années une peine d'emprisonnement pour avoir torturé le « terroriste » noir Alex Mpondo, vient de déposer une demande d'amnistie devant la Commission Vérité et Réconciliation. James Sizela, directeur d'école, y voit une occasion unique pour tenter, lors de l'audition, de récolter des indices sur la disparition de près de quinze ans de son fils Steve, ancien compagnon de lutte de Mpondo. Il fait alors appel à Hoffman. Mais le vieil avocat, malade et affaibli par les années de lutte judiciaire pour le salut du peuple sud-africain, demande à Sarah Barcant de prendre la relève. Elle accède à sa requête et revient dans sa ville natale.

Au-delà de l'intrigue judiciaire plutôt classique, ce roman puise son originalité dans les retrouvailles d'une jeune femme avec une terre dont la moindre poussière rouge porte en elle le sang et les larmes des victimes de l'apartheid. Tout en évitant de tomber dans le discours moralisateur que l'on retrouve souvent dans les livres traitant du sujet, Gillian Slovo, la fille de Joe Slovo, ancien président du parti communiste sud-africain, trace le destin tragique de deux peuples qui ont en commun l'amour de l'Afrique. À travers la confrontation entre Hendricks et Mpondo, l'auteur attire notre attention sur la fragilité de la frontière entre l'opprimeur et l'opprimé, condamnant sans équivoque l'obéissance aveugle aux lois. La phrase de la philosophe française Simone Weil (1909-1943) – « L'obéissance à un homme dont l'autorité n'est pas illuminée de légitimité,

c'est un cauchemar » – surgit ainsi à chacune des pages de ce récit passionnant de la nouvelle société sud-africaine.

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### **Katty says**

Important topic, poorly written novel. The ideas are compelling, but the writing and style of the book fell flat. Gillian Slovo may have a personal connection to the subject matter, but her sloppy execution of *Red Dust* makes the topic of post-Apartheid South Africa unappealing. I'd be interested in reading literature about the Apartheid from a skilled author.

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### **Esther says**

A stirring novel, possibly but not explicitly based on true events.

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa has come into being in 1996.

In this case, they are trying to disclose the events after the arrest of two black “revolutionaries” in 1985, one sure crime having been torture, which for one man is believed to have resulted in his death.

Eventually, it seems less a question of what really happened to whom, and more a question of who has an interest in telling the truth, and which interest, and who would be capable of accepting the truth, and who would, taking their own personal guilt and doubt into consideration, really want to know the truth being exposed to everybody – and whether any of this could change the years of suffering and help with the mourning.

Furthermore, the truth in this book seems to be very little “black and white” and more subject to personal circumstances, society and government, which as the story is set in South Africa, quickly does turn back into a question of “black and white”.

It is an intense account of victim-torturer psychology, as well as showing in a very authentic and believable way the many different perspectives not only of black and white people, but also of insiders and outsiders, of future and past oriented characters.

What I believe to have understood from this novel and its approach to the problem is that the past cannot be changed, and that, rather than trying for individual revenge, a “society-wide reconciliation” is believed to be the best solution for South Africa to come to terms with its history.

I should like to find out, as this book dates from the year 2000, which progress has been made in this direction.

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### **Fiona says**

*Red Dust* is a fantastic, page turning court room drama set in South Africa.

The murder of Alex Sizela in 1985 has been left unsolved and the body unfound. Sarah Barcant flies from New York back to her childhood hometown to help her friend and mentor find some sort of peace for Alex's grieving parents.

Dirk Hendriks, an ex-policeman now prisoner, has filed for amnesty as part of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission. Alex Mpondo, Dirk's old torture victim, and friend of Alex Sizela reluctantly returns to face Dirk and his old demons.

Red Dust is a story of truth, in its many forms and meanings.

I chose it partly because I have already read a book of Slovo's - Ice Road and because I wanted to read something set in South Africa for once. I want to broaden my horizons.

I have learnt two things:

1. I want to read even more Slovo because I love her natural style of writing.
2. I want to read more books set in SA, about the apartheid especially.

Short chapters, interesting characters and an interesting backdrop make this as one of my favourite books.

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### **Karl says**

I am rating this book 3 stars and that is generous. The reason is that I did learn more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post Apartheid South Africa. This being an important topic, I thought the novel itself was not too inspiring and I didn't like some of the characters, as I really " did not get to know" them for me to be involved in the story. The writing style also, leaves something to be desired.

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### **Patrick says**

An interesting portrait of post-Apartheid South Africa, if somewhat bleak.

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