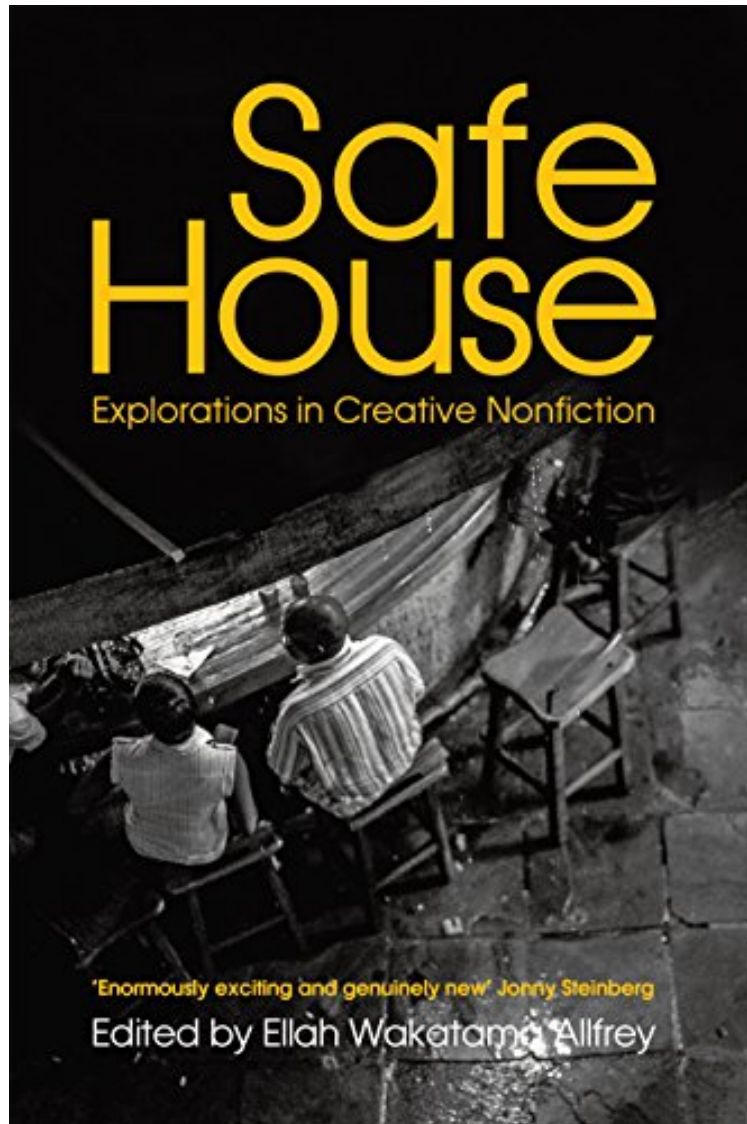


(Free) Safe House: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction (Commonwealth Writers)

Safe House: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction (Commonwealth Writers)

From Dundurn

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From Dundurn : Safe House: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction (Commonwealth Writers) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Safe House: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction (Commonwealth Writers):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Welcome collection of African creative non-fiction By Arja Salafranca While essay anthologies and collections from places such as North America and Britain are common and

plentiful, and part of the publishing landscape there, essays from Africa are rare indeed. Its sometimes hard enough, in a calendar year, to find essays published in South Africa, where I live, and rarer still to come across anthologies of the genre. This collection of creative non-fiction is to be welcomed, and lets hope there are many more to come. The reasons for the paucity of essays might be many, editor Ellah Wakatama Allfrey offers up one such reason: But African creative nonfiction, from the personal essay to the travelogue to the forensic investigation, seems, to me, to be in a germinal phase. This must have, in part, to do with resources. You have to leave your study to write compelling nonfiction. It takes time and money. While its true that a writer needs both money, and time, and sometimes travel, in order to produce essays, this collection proves that no matter the obstacles, African writers throughout the continent are finding the means to do so. With essays ranging from the Ebola crises to homophobia and murder, *Safe House* provides a lively portrait of the continent and some of the issues and concerns that intrigue and interest these writers here all living on the continent. Here are some of the highlights: *Fugee* by Hawa Jande Golakai. A lively, if at times meandering exploration into the Ebola crisis in Liberia, where her family comes from, in 2014. From being detained at OR Tambo Airport in Johannesburg, to making it back to Liberia, her essay reveals what life was like while the epidemic was raging. Her writing is assured and witty, *I beauty-queen my reply and the guy behind the Clicks counter* is so delicious hes practically a food group but this is a serious, considered portrait of a place and time in history. *Eating Bitter* by Kevin Eze is a fascinating piece that looks at the involvement of the Chinese in Africa, Senegal in this essay. His piece focuses on one particular Chinese family who have settled there, and explores some of the reasons the Chinese are in Africa. *Safe House* by Isaac Otidi Amuke a chilling account of having to flee ones homeland, enduring the loneliness and confusion as a refugee from Kenya in Uganda. *Walking Girly in Nairobi* by Mark Gevisser. The South African writer travels to Kenya to interview Peter, a gay Ugandan refugee in Nairobi. Talking to both him and his friends, Gevisser develops a startlingly horrifying, yet brilliant portrait of life as a gay man, even in a country providing sanctuary. *A Murder in Clovelly* by Bongani Kona a brilliant, compelling piece of journalism looking at the murder of a South African woman and her family circumstances. Similarly, Simone Haysoms *The Life and Death of Rowan du Preez* explores the life and murder of another South African equally brilliantly. *A Womans Smile* by Barbara Wanjala is another excellent piece which looks at the lives of lesbian women in Senegal. The travel story, *The Search for Magical Mbuji* by Neema Komba is both vibrant and compelling: In Rungwe there is a place called *The Bridge of God* on the Kiwira River. A big bed of rock swallows up all surface water in a powerful whirlpool on one side and then vomits it on the other side of the rock, taking anything and everything with it. To keep people away there are all sorts of taboos and cautionary tales around the place.

Illuminating African narratives for readers both inside and outside the continent. A Nigerian immigrant to Senegal explores the increasing influence of China across the region, a Kenyan student activist writes of exile in Kampala, a Liberian scientist shares her diary of the Ebola crisis, a Nigerian journalist travels to the north to meet a community at risk, a Kenyan author travels to Senegal to interview a gay rights activist, and a South African writer recounts a tale of family discord and murder in a remote seaside town. In a collection that ranges from travel writing and memoir to reportage and meditative essays, editor Ellah Wakatama Allfrey has brought together some of the most talented writers of creative nonfiction from across Africa.

Not so much timely as long overdue, this collection of essays and short memoirs directs the focus inward, leaping from blade-sharp observations of contemporary life around the African continent to a striking consideration of the continents cultural and political future. *Safe House* transports the reader beyond the tired narrative of news reports through individual stories and into worlds of hidden complexities. Stimulating reading. (Aminatta Forna) This collection of creative nonfiction is to be welcomed, and lets hope there are many more volumes to come. (The Sunday Independent) Its that perspective and degree of specificity, as well as the quality of the writing, that make this a wonderful and refreshing collection. (Globe and Mail) The stories in this anthology provide a form of connective tissue to contemporary life on the African continent in Cape Town, Nairobi, Dakar, and Kano. As a whole, it is both microscopic and panoramic, and strongly argues for an annual take of the same. As an editor who regularly commissions nonfiction I am full of envy. (Billy Kahora, Editor of Kwani?) A promising tradition of creative nonfiction is nascent in Africa. Fresh ways of writing African experiences are afoot. This publication signals the gestation of something enormously exciting and genuinely new. (Jonny Steinberg, author of *A Man of Good Hope*) About the Author Ellah Wakatama Allfrey, OBE, editor, critic, and broadcaster, is former deputy editor of *Granta* magazine, series editor for the Kwani? Manuscript Prize, and the deputy chair of the Caine Prize for African Writing. She served as a judge on the 2015 Man Booker Prize panel. She lives in London, England. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. FUGEE Hawa Jande Golakai There's a saying that goes, You cant go home again. It offers no direction as to where youre supposed to go. Its meant to be poignant: some manner of existential examination of how things once lost cant be retrieved, relived, at least not from the same perspective. I think. Ive always been a little too literal for the deepness of sayings. MARCH 1622, 2014 DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA Ja, but where are you from originally? the journalist presses me. Ah. This again. Im one of the featured authors at Durban's seventeenth Time

of the Writer arts festival, and at these events, being grilled about otherness is a train that's never late. You can't be unoriginally from somewhere. I don't think that's a thing. She waves her hand. But you know what I mean. You're quite accomplished, considering. She catches herself and flinches at the considering. I let it slide. You've lived in South Africa for years, right? You've gotten most of your education here? I smile. She's doing that cherry-pick thing people feel obliged to do with foreigners, timeline the best of your attributes so their country can take credit for it. Postgrad education, I correct. But I'm tired and cranky, not exactly shipshape for interviews. It's not going to matter anyway. No one reads articles about writers, and we don't much care just buy the book. So. West Africa. There's that virus scare starting up at the moment. I sit up. It's across the border. In Guinea. Is she putting this in the piece? Why do I keep clarifying where the reported cases are from whenever I'm asked? It's not like viruses need visas to travel. You mentioned you moved home two years ago. Why'd you decide to go back? I want to say it was less a deliberate decision and more a quest for closure, a need to tie up a loose end that had dangled, frayed and fraught, for too long. But I've stopped saying this. I morph into a mumbling cretin when I do, as if afraid the real-real reasons (frustration much? drifter) will seem ridiculous. People then feel the need to tilt their heads and nod, like it's noble and they get it, or they don't but won't be rude enough to admit it. Instead I beauty-queen my reply: it was time to move on, to help my recovering country. To revert fully to my native state, which, aside from the odd visit, I haven't done in over two decades. To see how much it's changed, the land that small me took for granted she'd grow up in, get a job, marry, have piccaninnies, likely grow old and die. Life has taken me down brighter, more meandering lanes, for which I'm very grateful. The journalist nods to my words, scribbling away. When the article comes out, it says I went home because it's where I'd always wanted to get married and have children, as if finally I can stop being a loser and make it happen. My best friend calls me to laugh; she's just learned something new about me. I sigh. No one reads articles about writers anyway. MARCH 23/APRIL 12 JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA My friend Fran laughs like a bawdy barmaid in a Chaucer tale, a comforting sound. I've decided to round out my stay to a month, so I'm staying at her flat, plotting insidious ways of never leaving. Our mouths run all day, about shoes and sex, politics and career changes, original versus fusion curry recipes, TV content. The meaningful mindlessness that any red-blooded woman who lives in a male-dominated household doesn't know she misses until the tap is turned back on. Her spare bedroom is a cloud of amenities. SuperSpar is five minutes away, full of strawberries, peaches, and other edible exotica that I never see or can't afford in Monrovia. The guy behind the counter at the Clicks pharmacy is so delicious he's practically a food group. I trawl the malls, stoked to be back in Jozi, home of posh cars and cinched-waist lovelies with awesome hair. Feeling uncouth, I get a Zimbabwean hairdresser to braid me; her price is a blip on my radar. I'm balling in dollars. On rare occasions, Fran gets serious. Ebolas making the news online. You know it's getting serious when it makes the news. She glances at me. I stay quiet. Are you considering going back to your job? I'm at my job, I answer tersely. National Health Coordinator at Ministry of Health is a title I've buried, along with career dissatisfaction. After all those years studying to be, then working as, a medical immunologist, I'm now an author, a career switcher, trying to fade out the former as I find my feet in the latter. The irony is I left a tough profession that involved essays and articles that few understood to do what anyone who knows the alphabet could manage, my critics say. Writing isn't respectable, not in Africa anyway. I'm considered a sufferer of Me Disease, an unrepentant member of the selfish generation, we who shirk duty to follow pipe dreams. There's little consideration for how hard it's been to let go which I still haven't done fully for how much I question myself. Do you think they'll be able to contain it? Fran asks. No. Snip. Snarl. I cringe at my tone. She means well. We drop it, switch back to safe terrain. A guy back home has thrown his hat into the ring for my affection. I don't know. Men are dicks but then again, men have dicks, so. I'm vacillating between uncertainty and blushes. We've spent more time talking and texting now that I'm on the other side of the continent than we did when I was home; social media makes Bravehearts out of us all. Fran does her laugh: please give Contender a whirl. Hhmmm. At night, though, on my laptop, I'm stealth-surfing the web. Numbers are climbing in Guinea, and now Sierra Leone, but I know the true figures are understated. Through the grapevine at my old job, I hear they're not really doing anything or mobilizing forces to stop it leaking through the borders. Immobile. Do we even have forces? The Neglected Tropical Diseases Unit they contend with elephantiasis and yellow fever, last of the unicorn afflictions. Is ebola not contemporary enough, and if so, will it get an upgrade fast enough to make us take it seriously? Because hemorrhagic viruses are the last word in seriousness. And we don't have testing centres. We won't know what measures to take. We don't have anywhere near enough doctors. On a normal day our one major hospital, John F. Kennedy Medical, is heaving with humanity, all waiting for hours on end for treatment. But it's across the border mostly, says my ex-colleague. And we weren't really infectious-infectious. You were one of the few real disease scientists we had. And you left. Pause. Anyway, you know our government. These old guys move slow. Let's see. Guilt bites a chunk out of me. I kick it in the teeth. It goes away. Well, retreats. Into a dark corner, where it squats, eyeing me, gnawing on something I didn't give it permission to eat. I don't lock it up or put it on a leash. I want it to come back and harass me. We have a weird relationship. APRIL 13 10:00 P.M. OLIVER TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA The airport is cold. Winter should be winding down, but Joburg tends to be clingy when it comes to its seasons. I'm double-layered, jacket in carry-on just in case. I don't mind airports; they're like hospitals you do your time and get out. Mostly. I do hate this particular red-eye, though. Departure: one-frickin-thirty

in the morning. The airline assured me the flight would leave an hour earlier than usual, but it seems they didnt take into account that the plane needed things like cleaning and refuelling before they made their wayward promises, so it looks like were taking off the same time. I cant wait to leave. Airports get seriously wrong, creepy, after all the shops close. Like abandoned warehouses. Unlucky stragglers huddle by the gates, bleary-eyed, giving each other grim stares. And there are always a few gratingly cheerful chipmunks who want to story-of-my-life you until the boarding call sounds. I walk around to avoid them, Viber-flirting with Contender as I pace.