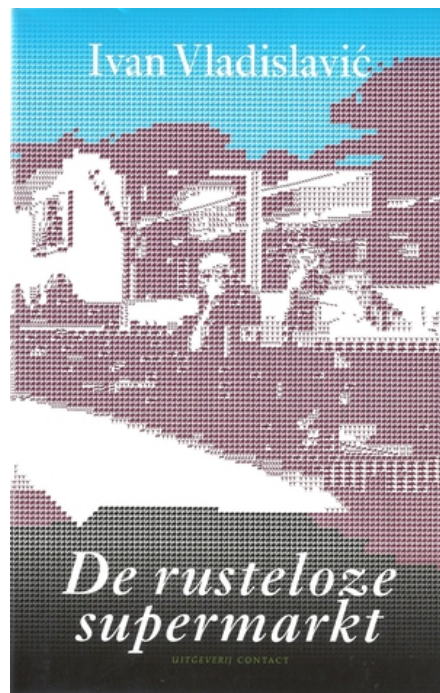




De rusteloze supermarkt

Ivan Vladislavić, Richard Kruis (translator)

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Ivan Vladislavi? , Richard Kruis (translator)

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This exhilarating novel by prize-winning author Ivan Vladislavi? is a linguistic tour de force, a spectacular carnival of post-modern commentary, urban satire, riotous imagery and outrageous wordplay. Set in Hillbrow during the tumultuous years of apartheid's demise, the rapid changes taking place both in the neighbourhood and the country are charted by staid, conservative Aubrey Tearle, a retired proofreader whose life has been devoted to reading telephone directories. Obsessed with what he terms 'corrigenda'—mistakes that crop up with increasing frequency as 'standards decline'—he embarks on a grandiose plan to enlighten his fellow-citizens, with disastrous, hilarious and poignant results.

Demonstrating a Cervantes-like knack for creating innocents who tilt at windmills, Vladislavi? continues to demonstrate the dazzling and unique talent seen in his previous writings as he explores the age-old theme of how individuals respond when 'things fall apart'—and what can occur when language itself is in a state of flux. This highly original novel reflects post-apartheid, post-modern writing at its best.

De rusteloze supermarkt Details

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Author : Ivan Vladislavi? , Richard Kruis (translator)

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From Reader Review De rusteloze supermarkt for online ebook

Anja Declercq says

Niets voor mij...

Sue says

Brilliant! What a writer!

The hero is tragi-comic Aubrey Tearle and the setting Hillbrow, Johannesburg in the 80s as the country changes politically and demographically. Ivan V is a master of metaphor and wry, even black humour. It is written with depth and is cerebrally quite challenging: Tearle's observations are rich with etymological word-play that is completely lost on his companions. I loved the book not only for the familiar landmarks (and Braamfontein streets) of my younger days, but also for the caricature-like characters. Yet they too are also believable in the grubbiness of Jo-burg's inner suburbs. Aubrey Tearle, the elderly grumpy nerd who proofreads phone books and is in a state of permanent outrage about the changes around him, will stay in my mind for a long time. (Some reviewer described him as a 'Prufrock' figure.)

Although there were many times when I laughed out loud, this is a portrait of a society undergoing an uncomfortable transition.

A very clever plot, although the dystopian middle section - Fluxman in Albilia - had me puzzled at first.

Oliver Wright says

Whilst I wouldn't normally venture to write a review, it seems a shame that a book this accomplished doesn't have one. So here are my thoughts. (Please bear in mind it's been a couple of months since I finished the book.)

The protagonist, Aubrey Tearle, is a retired (yet accomplished) proofreader, fighting a familiar battle against redundancy; not only of his profession - which is increasingly irrelevant to the society he sees himself as serving, but of the society in which he has found a comfortable niche. Bit by bit, he sees the things that he holds dear slowly crumbling around him, usurped by meaningless consumerism and coarse behaviour. Apartheid is seldom explicitly mentioned, but the context of the novel is dependent upon it's slow and continual unravelling.

We're given a compelling insight into Tearle's world. He's fusty, anal, and considers himself a defender of the moral good. There are frequent exercises in wordplay, as one might expect from a proofreader, and whole paragraphs devoted to the intricacies of grammar and vocabulary. In short, it's a pedant's treasure, and I was quite frequently lulled into thinking that I had a trait or two in common with Tearle, which certainly took me aback.

The story does not have a frenetic pace - the action taking place over a couple of weeks - but there aren't any significant dormant periods and I finished the book quickly. As part of Tearle's crusade, a chapter is devoted to his own short story, which is a good work of surreal fiction in it's own right, and a welcome reprieve from

the banality of Tearle's story.

Readers familiar with other South African writers such as Andre Brink and J.M. Coetzee will notice the similarity of style, clear, concise prose and neatly constructed fiction. In many ways, this is its biggest pitfall; the academic style doesn't really distinguish it from those others. I can't help but feel that the plot is also not particularly original, notwithstanding the 'futile resistance' theme playing out effectively and compellingly through a different, yet recognisable set of characters.

Of course, there is some liberation towards the end of the novel, and for all those pitfalls (which wouldn't necessarily bother those who hadn't read Brink or Coetzee) it was a rewarding read, made better - surprisingly so, in retrospect - by allusions to other works by Vladislavic, notably *The Loss Library*.

Is this worth reading? Whenever I recommend a book to someone, I always ask myself the question: Is it worth reading again? Yes it is.

John says

I forget how I heard about this book, but it represents another paving stone in my path to better understanding South Africa.

Essentially it's the story of Aubrey Tearle, a curmudgeonly, fussbudgety, persnickety, nitpicky, negative Nelly of a man, a retired proofreader confronting life at the crossroads of late Apartheid-era South Africa. The story is told from his perspective and while clever is also very dense.

It helps to have some sense of South African history and pop culture, although there were a number of references that flew past me. It is very funny in places, especially when Aubrey thinks he knows more than he does and yet is completely clueless about popular culture and current events.

It is also touching in places. "We forgive you." That's all I'll say.

And yet it was a challenge of a book to read, not always in a good way. I am curious enough to want to check out some other works by the author, but not right away, especially when there are so many other books to read.

Caroline says

I'm not entirely sure what I think about this book. Possibly I need to wait a week or two and let it settle in my head.

Definitely the sort of book a grammar nazi would love, lots of proofreader references and clever ways with English. And very evocative of Hillbrow of the 1990s. But somehow it lacked pace. I kept expecting something momentous to happen, seeing all this as background to the story. While there is a little bit of "action" in the final pages, it feels inadequate somehow, by then.

I'm giving it 4 stars because it was very, very well written - and holding back one star for plot :)

Rex Deverell says

It's a work of verbal pyrotechnics - sometimes to a fault - slowing down the momentum but always amazing. I picked it up on a visit to South Africa, and it introduced me to a new sub genre of writing - novels about the bridging period between apartheid and a freer society. We view an earthshaking transformation via the mentality of a fussy retired proof reader, confident in his absolute certainties.

David says

Amazing

Mark says

Superb characterisation of the central character who tries to create order in an increasingly chaotic country. I'm not a fan of postmodernism but here it fits the subject matter perfectly.

Paul says

Interesting book, set in Johannesburg in 1993, the changes happening in South African society are seen through the eyes of the rather unlikeable central character. The retired proofreader Aubrey Tearle spends his days at the Europa Cafe, bemoaning all the standards that are slipping away into the past in his view. Funny in places and riddled with clever wordplay it wouldn't exactly have you rushing out to book tickets to go visit Johannesburg.

J.L. says

I think it was a little too experimental for my taste. I figured since it was set in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, South Africa, during the time that the neighborhood was waning, that it would reveal more about the PLACE. But it was kind of a weird book.

Ben says

A dense and demanding book, The Restless Supermarket is a comedy and national allegory that painfully criticizes its narrator with the best possible intentions. Through Tearle, Vladislavic at once captures the voice of the complicit apartheid racist and undermines it through humor, wit and a comedy of errors.

Though often a struggle to read, the novel argues with the notion of a prescriptivist world and questions the authenticity of history in the face of change. The Proofreader's Cup, Tearle's self-proclaimed life's work, sits boldly in the middle as a fanatic's fantasy that runs against the grain of reality. In many ways, The Restless Supermarket is a wonderful reflection of what it means to be in between, a liminal work that reflects

the postmodern relationship between the present and the nostalgic past that never was.

John Jennings says

A really interesting angle on 'transition' Joburg. The protagonist Tearle manages to be simultaneously deeply unpleasant and bigoted, and also rather sweet; charmingly anachronistic. The relationship between the characters in Cafe Europa is complex, though. There aren't 'good guys' and 'bad guys', but rather a mismatched melting pot of individuals making sense of the new society they are finding themselves in. Vladislavic is rather skilled in building our sympathy, and despite his shortcomings, I found myself becoming rather defensive of Tearle when his old friends start to turn against him.

I found the first half of the book quite hard going in parts. The pace is sometimes a little slow, and though an important part of Tearle's character, the grammar and language jokes become a little self-indulgent and tiresome in parts. My reading pace picked up considerably for the 'Proofreaders Derby' itself and it gave me the momentum to get to the end rather quickly. I'm very pleased that I did.

Jake Goretzki says

I have a bit of a fascination for 'transition' SA at the moment and have had a voyeuristic interest in Hillbrow for ages (it can often sound to the outsider like a 'real life' SF dystopia). It took me bloody ages to get a copy of this book, which is generally cited as one of the definitive novels of South African transition. Happily, it's now back in print.

It's entertaining and more thoughtful than comedy might suggest.

Firstly, Aubrey Tearle. He's a memorable portrait of a linguistically-fixated, pedantic old Boomer who's sorely lacking perspective. Yes, a highly recognisable archetype (just witness a cluster of the recently retired talking crosswords / ubiquity of labels on teeshirts / loud music / baseball caps in any boozer in the English-speaking world). Yet he's brittle and human too, and often rather unintentionally moving: his loneliness, his brutal honesty about his own appearance and his disappointment at the successive withering of promising friendships.

He's also dryly funny (and very realistically, his best gags fall on the deaf ears of peers), putting out a stream of strong wisecracks (this being first person) – e.g. describing Bogey's leather jacket as 'from the sweepings of an abattoir' and numerous damning dismissals of the world around. That first line is characteristically snappy and brutal too 'A salesman bugging a pink elephant.'

He's joined by a coterie of rounded supporting characters. Spilkin: new best friend, then Judas. M.T. Wessels: the kind of man you get stuck with when you are forced to socialise at conferences. ?

Though comic, the novel does also reflect more deeply on transition. Aubrey sees the detail, but is wilfully blind to the wider picture. He hasn't really thought about what change will mean (he's too busy reading phonebooks and tut-tutting at decor), and doesn't 'get' why it's due. I think the character is stronger for the relatively subtle way in which Vladislavic handles Aubrey's racism (it's pretty passive and not especially loud or caricatured). I started wondering if we were to be served a Rainbow epiphany at dawn with the young lady, Shirlaine – but that's not him. All told: you're not really thinking it through, are you, Aubs. Shirlaine's line towards the end is a subtle little cut and summary of his crisis "It's not the end of civilisation,

you know. There are new places for whites opening up in Rosebank.”

And for all of the presence of Aubrey's voice, we aren't spared style and experiment. The ‘story within the story’ chapter breaks for some flashes of rather delicate writing [‘...lovers were leaning on the parapets to watch the moon dissolve like a paper doily in the Indian ink of the water’]. The acting out Aubrey’s fantasy about Alibia (a sort of ‘If Proofreaders Were Superheroes’) is also engagingly disruptive (there’s a touch of SF there, actually). And of course, the very idea of a fantasy about a place, in a mural, in a bar is totally to character (the lonely man playing God like a child poking an ant’s nest in a sandbox). He’s very good at rendering accent too (from the slovenly peer to the Portuguese Mozambiquan shop assistants).

Recommended – and right that’s it back in print.

Tiah says

- Alcohol spoke in the archaic, extravagant language it uses during our arguments. It said: This is your lucky day, spindleshanks. Nature has done you a favour by dimming your sight. -
 - Personally, I prefer reading silently, to myself. Reading belongs in the head, behind the eyes, not just under the breath, but inside the folds of the brain. I can tolerate reading out loud on occasion, if the words are enunciated clearly and the circumstances are fit. But this soundless movement of the lips is uncouth, like a cat twitching through a rutting dream. -
 - Nine out of ten people died peacefully. Did no one die kicking and screaming any more, cursing God and the sawbones? They all seemed to struggle with such good grace against cruel misfortune. One miserable death acknowledged, on long season of pointless suffering faced with bitterness and resentment, would have been a breath of fresh air. -
 - Dotting on i might be regarded as a mere punctilio, and failing to do so dismissed as a trifle. But all the dots left off all the i's accumulate, they build up, they pack together like a cloud over a field of stubby iotas. Soon there is a haze of them in every hollow, and the finer distinctions begin to evade us. In the end, the veil of uncertainty grows so thick that everything is obscured'.
-

Arthur says

Great slightly altered reality, subtle shades of South Africa.

Tracey says

A really awesome story of a retired proofreader who critiques the changing apartheid society in Johannesburg, South Africa in the 1970s using his editing vocabulary, extensive knowledge of etymology, and other proofreading skills. It is challenging, a dictionary is often needed, but also a very different kind of apartheid book because events are only learned as they are perceived by the narrator who doesn't pay attention to actual events as much as he does to the errors they are presented with.

!Tæmbu?u says

KOBOBOOKS

Reviewed by The Complete Review, The Independent (16 Apr 2014)

James says

Fascinating to read a book with such a clear voice from another country. A cerebral read, concentration needed, but more than rewards the effort, giving an interesting insight into South Africa in transition, and a strongly drawn central character. Involving.
