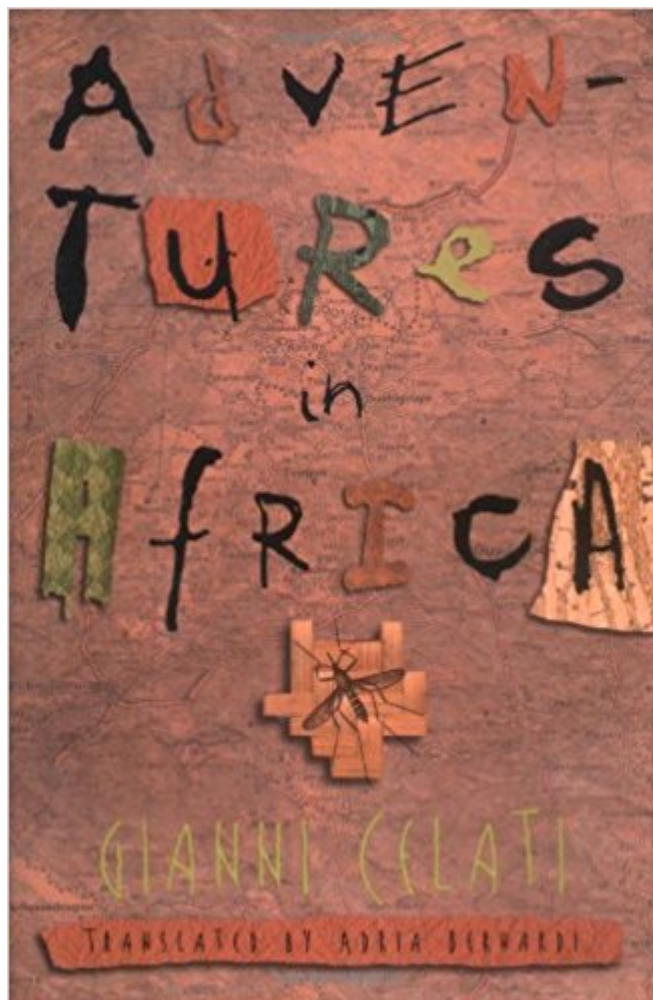


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# Adventures In Africa



## Synopsis

"In the life of a tourist who travels a bit far, I think that at a certain point, a question necessarily arises: 'But what have I come here for?' A question that sets in motion a great cinema of justification to oneself, so that one doesn't have to seriously say to oneself: 'I'm here doing nothing.'" In 1997 the celebrated Italian novelist and essayist Gianni Celati accompanied his friend, filmmaker Jean Talon, on a journey to West Africa which took them from Mali to Senegal and Mauritania. The two had been hoping to research a documentary about Dogon priests, but frustrated by red tape, their voyage became instead a touristic adventure. The vulnerable, prickly, insightful Celati kept notebooks of the journey, now translated by Adria Bernardi as *Adventures in Africa*. Celati is the privileged traveler, overwhelmed by customs he doesn't understand, always at the mercy of others who are trying to sell him something he doesn't want to buy, and aware of himself as the Tourist who is always a little disoriented and at the center of the continual misadventures that are at the heart of travel. Celati's book is both a travelogue in the European tradition and a trenchant meditation on what it means to be a tourist. Celati learns to surrender to the chaos of West Africa and in the process produces a work of touching and comic descriptions, in the lucid and ironic prose that is his hallmark. Hailed as one of the best travelogues on Africa ever written and awarded the first Zerilli-Marimón prize, *Adventures in Africa* is a modest yet profound account of the utter discombobulation of travel.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1997, famed Italian author and essayist Celati accompanied his friend, filmmaker Jean Talon, on

a journey to West Africa that took them from Mali to Senegal and Mauritania. The original purpose of their journey, to do research for a documentary on the methods of Dogon healers, soon became of ancillary importance. As Celati's diary-turned-book relates, the two white Europeans became lost and spent much of their trip wandering about unmoored. But more than a comedy of errors, Celati's book recounts the travails of a writer whose encounter with the unknown, the "other," clarifies his understanding of himself and allows him to regain a "state of self-forgetfulness" from which, Celati believes, the best writing emanates. Celati is no stranger to literary adventure. In Italy, he is best known as an experimental writer, unafraid to venture into uncharted territory. But while the author is certainly experimenting, this book is still a record of actual events, places and people; it provides an unusual portrait of West African countries. Instead of following a linear plot, the narrative bounces on the melodies of Celati's keen insights. (Most amusing are his reflections on tourists, whom he portrays as a bona fide ethnic group, thoroughly a part of Africa's cultural and economic landscape.) Out of his encounter with the "other" is born Celati's concept of "nothing" — the unconscious goal toward which his ostensibly reckless plot is moving. But only upon his return to orderly Paris does he fully elucidate its meaning. Celati's writing exposes the age-old power of travel to induce shedding the self and one's preconceptions. (Nov.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Acclaimed Italian novelist and essayist Celati transforms a series of journal entries recorded while traveling in West Africa into a tantalizing travelogue of cultural color and texture. As Celati and his friend, filmmaker Jean Talon, journey through Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania, their carefully laid plans are continually disrupted by the chaos and uncertainty that seem to characterize daily life in many Third World nations. The author, actively deciding to transcend the spirit of smug superiority that grips most European and American tourists visiting Africa, opts to embrace and enjoy the "diversity of sights, experiences, and people" he encounters. This delightful sojourn into the exotic and the unexpected will appeal to both seasoned and armchair travelers. Margaret Flanagan

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I ordered two copies for gifts and one for myself to share. For the traveler on the road or simply in life, that understands that often things are beyond our control but that does not have to be a bad thing. A mini vacation for an older traveler on a Montana winter night, making longing for the next adventure somehow more appealing and a pleasant way to drift off for the evening, quiet and safe.

In 1997, Gianni Celati, well-known Italian literary figure since the nineteen sixties and author of

fiction, essays and translations, embarked on a journey into West Africa, accompanied by his friend, the film maker Jean Talon, with the intention to research the work of the traditional Dogon healers, based in the Malian "Centre for Traditional Medicine" in Bandiagara. Traveling unaccompanied into a world they did not know much about, not able to communicate except in the lingua franca of the educated, French, they negotiated their way through the country with local people for transport, guides and accommodation. It is as Celati confesses "a comedy of errors, delays, misinformation, and wandering about, as contacts are unfindable, means of transportation are unreliable, and complications arise at every turn". Celati's observations and musings have been published as "Adventures in Africa", based on a series of notebooks (nine altogether) that he kept like a travelogue during the trip that took them beyond Mali also to Senegal and across the border to Mauretania. It took me quite a while to get into the spirit of Celati's writing: jottings also in terms of unfinished sentences and thoughts... much is left to our own knowledge or imagination. His description of daily details of their first days of wandering through Bamako, Mali's capital, and traveling to other cities en route to Bandiagara, the centre of the Dogon region, can be anything from tedious to repetitive to slightly funny and ironical. Only when they finally reach their intended destination do the short information snippets unfurl into a more comprehensive account of their experiences and encounters. Even then, Celati is more concerned with his "stinginess" and his frustrations with the people around him than much else. Still, amidst all these ramblings we can detect gems of observational clarity, astute depiction of individuals and their demeanour in their Dogon context. While the original objective of the trip, to prepare for a documentary on the Dogon healer, does appear to become questionable, the visit itself is extended beyond Mali's borders. Eventually Celati relaxes into the local rhythms and attitudes that make him feel closer to the locals than to the other tourists they encounter... and he has wonderful comments about those as well as the would-be experts expats and anthropologists. Celati gives a detailed caricature of the "tourist", somebody innocently bumbling along in a foreign environment where he perceives everybody as a kind of trader, "starting with less than ten years old". He also gives himself the aura of the "writer on vacation", writing in more or less hospitable surroundings, losing himself in the colours and atmosphere of the locale, losing his sense of time... While I found "Adventures in Africa" overall, despite its weaknesses spelled out above, a worthwhile read, I cannot really recommend it highly to readers who are not already familiar with this region of Africa, unless they are willing to undertake much background research themselves first. Other than the interesting introduction by Rebecca West into Celati's writing history and some context for the book, the reader is left very much to his own devices to follow the itinerary, place the towns and villages, visualize the people and

landscapes. There are no maps, no explanation of local terms, no background information to historical and socio-political context, no images of what the book is describing. [Friederike Knabe]

Maybe there are two ways of writing about travel. First, you write about startling things or things that other people normally might not notice. Second, you present a somewhat ordinary world but you do so in high-flown prose that---because of the quality of the writing---carries the reader along no matter what. This journalistic travel book seems one that a publisher might have picked up ONLY because the writer is well known. It is neither well written nor particularly acute in what it sees and reports. Too often there is a grim habit of stereotype, and always there is a languid sense of a prose style that suggests little more than some jottings in a loose-leaf along the way. A Graham Greene brings heart, keen perception, and inspiration to his "Journey without Maps" into Africa, and may other writers encounter people who remain in your mind. Celati just putters along.

Very engaging book about all that is ordinary yet extraordinary in what to many readers may initially seem exotic places.

After reading Adventures in Africa, we think that this book was not the best book ever. We thought that it was rather dull throughout almost the whole book. One reason that we might have thought that it was dull is because, the book is written like a journal. We haven't ever read a book written like a journal before, and I don't like that style of writing. That could have had an impact on us not liking the book, or just simply because we didn't like the way it was written. Also, the story line was not too interesting. Each journal that he would write each day would just tell about what he did that day. It is like reading a book about a person that sits at home all day. The main character was a tourist in Africa, and would meet new people and travel to different places. Most of the day's he would do the same thing. We found this book to be very repetitive, and we find that pretty boring about books. He would always tell about how he would go to this river and watch all the people bathe. He would do that everyday for a long period of time, and it just got old. After that he would go to a cliff and climb it everyday. Most days though, he would take a tour bus somewhere. While he was in Africa he made many friends, sometimes it was hard to keep them straight. His friend Jean, was his best friend, they went almost everywhere together. This book isn't the best book, and we wouldn't recommend it unless you like to read other peoples' journals. We just didn't find it interesting at all. It didn't grab my attention or make me actually want to read the book. The only reason why we read it was because we had to for a grade.

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