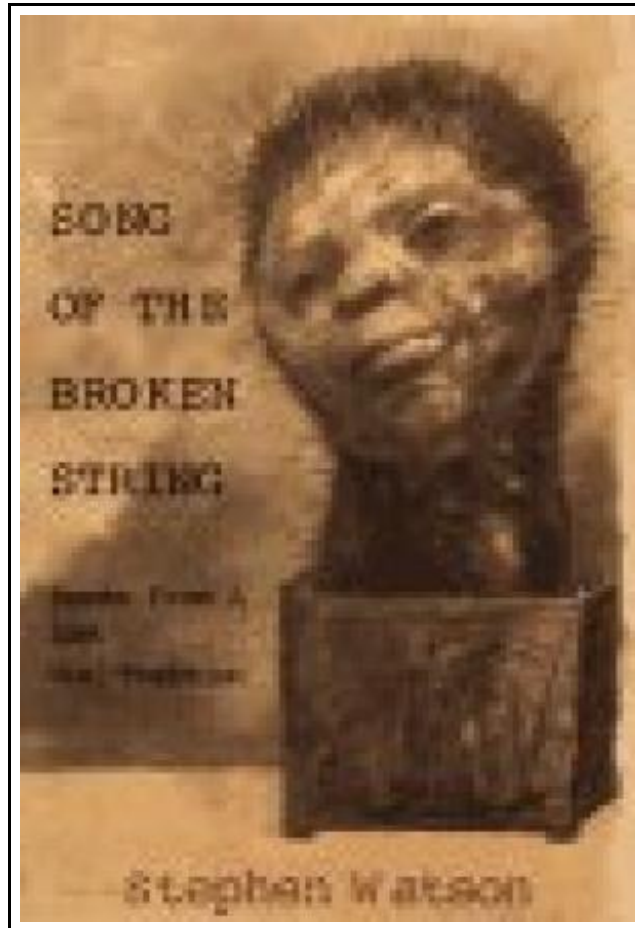


Song of the Broken String (Paperback)



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Reviews

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Sheep Meadow Press,U.S., United States, 1991. Paperback. Condition: New. Language: English . Brand New Book. The /Xam Bushmen, hunters, gatherers, some poets among them, were a stone age people who survived nearly 5,000 years in the region now known as the Cape Province of South Africa. By the turn of this century they had completely disappeared, destroyed finally by the murderous European settlement of the interior. Song of the Broken String has its provenance in the oral tradition of this ancient culture. In the 1860s, a German linguist named W. H. Bleek become aware of the genocide in progress. Taking into his service three /Xam Bushmen he found working as convict laborers in a chain gang, he set about preserving a small part of their heritage. After devising a phonetic notation of the /Xam s language, he transcribed the personal narratives, songs, and folktales of these three men and translated them into English. Housed in an archive at the University of Cape Town, the 12,000 pages of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection are all that remains of this people and their language.Stephen Watson, a contemporary South African poet, has explored this archive, re-translating Bleek s word-for-word English prose into poems in which something of the power of those original voices lives on, however filtered through the 19th century ethnographer and the 20th century writer. The results not only offer a path into a powerful oral tradition, but also raise questions about the ways in which we listen to and translate cultures that are distant or lost. Song of the Broken String does not bring back the /Xam, it is not a collection of artifacts. Something survives here that is almost monumental, certainly beautiful.

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