

Recent Book Reviews

Recent Reviews of Life Writing Publications

Judith Lütge Coullie

This issue sees the first of what will become a regular feature of *Alternation*: synopses of reviews of new life writing by or about people from southern Africa. The reviews are drawn from a number of sources, popular as well as academic—from the South African media (newspapers and magazines) and academic journals, as well as some non-South African publications.

In the academy in the West, testimony and life writing began to gain marked academic clout in literary studies in the 1980s. The handful of theoretical and critical texts which appeared at about that time have since been joined by scores of others, with some theoreticians, critics and writers using the autobiographical medium itself to explore not only the meanings of their experiences but also the significance of the act of self-representation. Roland Barthes, Antony Burgess, Frank Lentricchia and Frank Kermode spring immediately to mind, as do Lyndall Gordon, Stephen Gray and Richard Rive, closer to home. In the last decade, international conferences devoted to life writing have been held in America, China, Canada and Britain (with another planned in Australia in 2002) and the first comprehensive encyclopaedia of life writing around the globe (edited by Margaretta Jolly) is about to roll off the press. But the burgeoning importance accorded to life writing and testimony of people who range from the poor and obscure to the rich and famous, is not confined to literary studies. It is manifest across a number of disciplines, including sociology and anthropology; history and theology; psychology and politics; education and medicine (as evidenced by the number of AIDS patient testimonies appearing lately); criminology and law.

Outside the academy, life writing and oral testimony carry greater weight now than in earlier generations. Rigoberta Menchú won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her testimony on behalf of the oppressed Quiché Indians of Guatemala. In the last few years, the testimonies of those appearing before State-constituted commissions in South Africa and Australia (the TRC for example) have found their way into numerous publications, whose market is by no means confined to those who may have professional interest in them. Moreover, the fact that the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban in September 2001 allowed space on the crowded agenda for the testimonies of a range of individuals shows yet again that the personal accounts of ordinary people are conceived of as crucial to an understanding of public

policy. And as the review entries below reveal, lately in South Africa the life stories of homeless people (Jonathan Morgan's collective story, *Finding Mr. Madini*), the unemployed (Adam Ashforth's *Madumo*), a murderer (Dimitrios Tsafendas in Henk van Woerden's *A Mouthful of Glass*) jostle for the attention of the book-buying public along with the stories of a rabbi (Cyril Harris' *For Heaven's Sake: The Chief Rabbi's Diary*), a prophetess (Nonhetha Nkwenkwe, in Robert Edgar and Hilary Sapire's *African Apocalypse*) and an ex-Vice Chancellor.

It seems to me that there are a number of possible reasons for this, and I shall not here attempt to be exhaustive. Going back in time, the focus on the self and on experience and memory can be construed both as the effect of post-Medieval trends within Christianity towards individual accountability, as well as the logical outcome of the weakening of religions in the West which gained momentum a few centuries ago. Many new disciplines, philosophies and theoretical movements emerged from this secularisation, among them anthropology, psychology, Marxism, feminism and—more recently—poststructuralism. Even a cursory knowledge of what these entail will allow one to see that the value accorded personal testimony—of powerful and prominent individuals as well as the disempowered and poor—is but one outcome of such developments in the knowledge-making industry. Another is the corresponding conviction, widely held, that the expertise and knowledge of specialists and intellectuals is provisional and partial, and does not obviate the need for those who were traditionally *objects* of study to speak as knowing *subjects* about their own lives. This revolution is implicated in the imperatives of democratisation movements which challenged monarchies, aristocracies, dictatorships, masculine supremacy and imperialism. Since democratic ideals insist that each vote is equally important—the President's vote carries the same status as that of a homeless person, that of a man being equivalent to that of a woman—the lives and life stories of the one may be of no less interest than those of the other. And although the publishing industry (and the reading public which it serves) might not be quite so idealistic or egalitarian, the range of testimonies which are published would seem to indicate that something of this ethos has indeed infiltrated into the life writing industry.

In South Africa, under the apartheid regime, autobiography and, to a lesser extent, biography, were important weapons in the liberation struggle. (One is reminded that the title of Don Mattera's autobiography—*Memory is the Weapon*—points explicitly to this.) Few doubted the political efficacy, during apartheid, of accounts—particularly by the most victimised, disempowered and impoverished—which testified to the horrors of 'separate development'. And in post-apartheid South Africa, testimony and life writing have not, as might have been supposed, waned in popularity (although, predictably, the concerns of the narrators and the nature of their struggles to achieve dignity have shifted somewhat).

Given this unabated growth in attention to personal history, it is rather sur-

prising that in South African libraries it is often still difficult to find in card catalogues and classificatory systems comprehensive lists of items which fall under the generic umbrella term of life writing in general and autobiography in particular. This is because texts are usually classified in terms of the principal occupation of the auto/biographical subject. So, for example, life stories of lawyers might be found under law, sporting personalities under sport, politicians under politics. It may thus be at best troublesome, at worst impossible, to ascertain exactly what texts comprise a particular library's auto/biographical holdings. So, if one looks up the subject 'autobiography' one frequently fails to find references to texts which may well be in the holdings and which are identified—by publishers, authors and readers alike—as autobiographical. There are obviously a number of reasons for this and perhaps the debate about this aspect of information systems could be undertaken at some other time. The point which I wish to make is that this collection of synopses of reviews of recently published life writing (autobiography and biography) may go some way to making the search for such texts considerably easier. For ease of reference, I have included information about the price of the book, as well as the number of pages, and have given full details about the source of the review and the name of the reviewer. In some instances, I found more than one review of a book. In such instances, one is not only able to compare the different responses, but also to gauge the amount of interest which a book has generated in the media.

It is hoped that readers will find much of interest in this diverse collection of reviews of life stories.

List of Publications Consulted

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| <i>The African Publishing Record</i> | <i>Mail and Guardian</i> |
| <i>Die Burger</i> | <i>The Mercury</i> |
| <i>Cape Argus</i> | <i>The New York Times Review of Books</i> |
| <i>Cape Times</i> | <i>Pace</i> |
| <i>The Citizen</i> | <i>Southern African Review of Books</i> |
| <i>Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa</i> | <i>The Saturday Star</i> |
| <i>Daily Despatch</i> | <i>Scrutiny2</i> |
| <i>East Cape Weekend (Leisure Supplement)</i> | <i>The Spectator (UK)</i> |
| <i>Eastern Province Herald</i> | <i>The Star</i> |
| <i>Evening Post</i> | <i>The Sunday Independent</i> |
| <i>Femina</i> | <i>Sunday Times</i> |
| <i>The Independent on Saturday</i> | <i>The Sunday Tribune</i> |
| | <i>True Love</i> |

Buried in the Sky.

by Rick Andrews.

Sandton, South Africa: Penguin, 2001, 207pp. R79,95.

These anecdotes, told by a 'mildly dissident' white South African about experiences of conscripts in the South African army in the 'seventies' are well told, ironic and often amusing, with a fine eye for detail, but no over-arching pattern of significance emerges'.

Shaun de Waal, *Mail & Guardian: Friday Books* June 8 - 14 2001:4.

Madumo: A Man Bewitched.

by Adam Ashforth and Madumo.

Cape Town: David Philip, 2000, 255 pp. R92,00.

This true story streamlines the experiences gained by Adam Ashforth, a Princeton professor, in the times (on and off since 1990) when he lived in Soweto—'an apartheid landscape that keeps evil alive'. Ashforth tells the story of Madumo, a man 'who has indulged in witchcraft' and for whom 'survival has only compounded his difficulty'. Madumo and Ashforth the story-teller are bound together by the development of the story and the development of their lives. The book shifts between two realities, between past and present tradition and modernity. Although it cannot answer the question of what is true, it 'reveals the course of beliefs in a mutable Africa'.

Neil Williams, *Mail and Guardian: Friday Books* September 1-7 2000:4.

Beloved African.

by Jill Baker.

Pretoria: Covos Day, 2000, 508pp. R165,00.

'In writing the history of her family, Baker has written a piece of the history of Zimbabwe, where she was born and brought up and was well-known as a broadcaster in the 1970s The most surprising thing about the book is that it's a good read ...'.

Roz Wrottesley, *Cape Argus*, July 7, 2000:10.

Rivonia's Children: Three Families and the Price of Freedom in South Africa.

by Glenn Frankel.

Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1999, 367 pp. R110,00.

This book tells the story of the white Jewish Communists—Hilda & Rusty Bernstein; Ruth First & Joe Slovo; AnnMarie & Harold Wolpe—who were engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1950s and 1960s. The author is a Pulitzer Prize winning American reporter; his 'racy style ... makes for a captivating read'. Nevertheless, it adds little to what 'we already know' and 'comes dangerously close to romanticising his leading characters'. It also contains misprints and errors of fact and South African usage.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, February 21 2000:12.

Judith Lütge Coullie

Frankel's meticulously researched narrative into the lives of 'a handful of white activists' is based on 'interviews, autobiographical writings, letters and even notes sewn into shirt collars and smuggled into prison'. He 'highlights the destruction wrought on family life'.

Phylcia Oppelt, *Sunday Times*, March 19, 2000:20.

Frankel, who shares a common Jewish background with his subjects, contrasts the Jewishness of activists Ruth First, AnnMarie and Harold Wolpe, and Hilda and Rusty Bernstein with that of Percy Yutar, the state prosecutor in the Rivonia Treason Trial of 1963, which led to the life imprisonment on Robben Island of 'the likes of former President Nelson Mandela'. *Rivonia's Children* is 'written like a novel', underpinned by 'meticulous research'.

Gillian Anstey, *Sunday Times*, May 7, 2000:8.

In this 'fascinating' book, Frankel 'doesn't preach or take sides' in his exploration of why the subjects of his narrative, these well-off white citizens, went to such lengths to fight the apartheid state.

Gillian McAinsh, *East Cape Weekend (Leisure Supplement)*, April 22, 2000:4.

A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

by Alex Boraine.

Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000, xviii + 466pp, R200,00.

This 'very first-person insider account of the TRC' is interesting but hardly a sparkling read.

Jaspreet Kindra, *Mail and Guardian, Friday Books*, Oct. 27 - Nov. 2 2000:5.

One of seventeen TRC Commissioners, Boraine's long and turgid account has provoked controversy because he displays his dislike for certain of his fellow commissioners and discloses the Commission's adverse conclusions on ex-President, F.W. de Klerk ('arguably in contravention of his oath of office'). Skip this book, unless you have an academic interest in the topic.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct. 30, 2000:12.

Cold Stone Jug.

by Herman Charles Bosman.

Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1999, 199pp. R54,95.

'There were two things that struck me on reading Herman Bosman's prison memoir, *Cold Stone Jug*, republished late last year to mark the 50th anniversary of its original

publication in 1949. The first was his approval of child sex. The second was that there was no explanation in the book of why he murdered his step-brother in 1926 ...'. Turrell argues that what is at issue is not the quality of Bosman's writing (this is 'extremely gifted'); what concerns him is not only Bosman's connivance at child abuse and failure to explain the murder, but the silence of contemporary critics on these subjects.

Rob Turrell, *Southern African Review of Books*, January 2000: <http://www.uni-ulm.de/~rturrell/sarobnewhtml/>; <http://www.uni-ulm.de/~rturrell/sarobnewhtml/>.

Dog Heart (A Travel Memoir).

by Breyten Breytenbach.

Cape Town, Pretoria, Johannesburg: Human and Rousseau, 1998, 199pp. R54,95.

A 'tough and tender reflection' on the place where Breytenbach grew up, *Dog Heart* is also 'a meditation on the place of writing, the power and trickiness of memory, the oddities of home and family, and the elusiveness, in a postmodern, postcolonial world, of personal and national identities If one wishes to understand something of the ways we (South Africans) live now, and why writing remains a crucial political necessity in this country, one could do worse than read Breytenbach's latest book. But it is not only timely and compelling. It's a greatly enjoyable read'.

Tim Trengrove Jones, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 11,2, October 1999:151-154.

The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War.

by Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva.

London: William Heinemann, 2000. xiv & 254 pp. R205,00.

Refusing to succumb to the modish trend to theorise and interpret visual images, this 'surprisingly good read' records, through the eyes of Marinovich, the experiences of four South African press photographers—Kevin Carter, Greg Marinovich, Ken Oosterbroek and Joao Silva—who worked largely in the trouble-torn black townships of the early 'nineties. It avoids 'most of the self-indulgent pitfalls of many autobiographical works' and none of its four subjects 'are fully spared the critical eye of hindsight'. The book serves as a frighteningly detailed record of 'one of South Africa's darkest times; a period marked by extreme violence, suspicion—and, ultimately, hope'. The book questions the morality of the war photographer: as Marinovich says, 'when do you press the shutter release and when do you cease being a photographer?'

Nechama Brodie, *Mail and Guardian, Friday Books*, September 21-28, 2000:8.

The two survivors, Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva, tell the story of a short-lived club of four award-winning photographers, 'white boys who drifted together at the

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start of the nineties and who, for half a decade dominated South African photography with their pictures of the township wars in those tightrope years before freedom'. It is 'an honest book, telling of the drugs and booze, the jealousies and animosities, the insecurities and fears, the hopes and ambitions of its members; of the trauma of photographing slaughter by bullet, blade, rock and flame; of the bloodlust and madness that seemed poised to destroy a nation on the brink of democracy'. Described in the preface by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as 'a splendid book, devastating in what it reveals', this is a book you will not forget.
Dave Hazelhurst, *The Daily News*, September 13, 2000:9.

Black Hamlet.

by Wulf Sachs.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, [1937]1996, 340pp. R90,00.

In *Black Hamlet*, Wulf Sachs (1893-1949), a Russian-born Jewish physician and the first practising psychoanalyst in South Africa, tells the story of the anonymous 'John Chavafambira', a Manyika nganga (healer-diviner) who moved from Eastern Zimbabwe to South Africa in the 1920s. Sachs wanted to discover whether psychoanalysis was universally applicable; Chavafambira wanted to gain an understanding of Western medicine. *Black Hamlet* is Wulf's novelistic reconstruction of Chavafambira's life. It's ambiguous textual status—not 'pure' psychology, anthropology or history—makes it the kind of document likely to fascinate students of contemporary cultural studies for years to come.

Chesca Long-Innes, *Scrutiny* 2 5,2,2000:78-85.

Man of Two Worlds: An Autobiography.

by Wilfred Cibane.

Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998, 160pp. R54,95.

Cibane recounts his life's journey from his "'traditional" world ... represented by his Zulu roots, his marriage ... and his role as a father' to his "'modern" experience based in "the white man's world"'. This 'well-written autobiography' is 'highly recommended for all university and public libraries'.

Joseph McLaren, *The African Publishing Record* XXVI,1, 2000: 14-15.

Fireforce.

by Chris Cocks.

South Africa: Cosvos-Day, 2000, 368pp. R145,00.

Survival Course.

by Chris Cocks. South Africa: Cosvos-Day, 2000, 244pp. R95,00.

Fireforce is the story of a young man who joined the Rhodesian Light Infantry in 1976. The author vividly recounts details of battles with insurgents during the bush war, as well as revealing the heavy psychological toll such combat took on soldiers. *Survival Course* is the sequel. It carries on the author's personal story from when he left the RLI in 1979 through independence in 1980 and into the rumblings of his 'new life' in Zimbabwe. These books make absorbing reading for those with a special interest in Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe or in counter-insurgency warfare, but may have limited wider appeal.

Greg Dardagan, *The Mercury*, Aug. 25, 2000:12.

Noor's Story: My Life In District Six.

by Noor Ebrahim.

Cape Town: The District Six Museum, 1999, 89pp. R 40,00.

This autobiography is 'the latest of a trickle of works on life' in the 1950s and 1960s in District Six—a once vibrant 'Coloured' area in Cape Town, demolished by the apartheid government. It is 'a splendid tale, devoid of contrived drama or considered embellishments' and is suitable for both adult and younger readers.

Cornelius Thomas, *Daily Despatch*, April 26, 2000:8.

For Humanity: Reflections of a War Crimes Investigator.

by Richard J. Goldstone.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000, 152pp. R144.40.

Written in an autobiographical style, *For Humanity* gives the inside story of the three powerful positions held by the South African judge within a period of three years: the first was as Chairman of the Standing Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation which investigated various events which occurred during the turbulent years (1991-1994) of South Africa's transition to democracy. The second was as Justice of South Africa's Constitutional Court. The third was as chief prosecutor of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The account provides intriguing glimpses of the personal communications of then-president F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, and later of U.N. foot-dragging.

Jonathan Klaaren, *Sunday Times*, Oct. 1, 2000:23.

For Heaven's Sake: The Chief Rabbi's Diary.

by Cyril Harris.

Goodwood: Contra Publications, 2000, 330pp. R179.95.

Chief Rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues in South Africa, Glaswegian Cyril Harris reveals the motivations behind his sometimes controversial words and actions.

James Mitchell, *The Star. Tonight*, July 24, 2000:3.

Undaunted: An Autobiography.

by Ethné Holmes à Court with Liz van den Neuwenhof.

South Yarra: Macmillan, Australia, 1999. 272pp. AUS\$ 23,00.

Although Ethné Holmes à Court's life has been interesting as well as tragic, and her story offers 'fascinating insights' into colonial Rhodesia, it's marred by 'a perspective which is, at best, severely dated, and at worst, racist'.

Bev Rycroft, *Cape Times*, March 3, 2000.

The Many Houses of Exile.

by Richard Jürgens.

Weltevreden Park, South Africa: Covos Day, 2000. 500pp. R85,00.

'*The Many Houses of Exile* is an autobiography, fictionalised to some degree, that describes Richard Jürgens's getting of wisdom in the apartheid defence force, at Wits university, and as a struggle exile in Tanzania and Lusaka. I was struck by two strengths in the narrative. The first is that its fairly rich use of colloquialism is unembarrassing The second is that the narrator ... engages intensely with his world and its people while remaining ironically disengaged [It] can be excessively anecdotal, -and needs editing ... but it is well worth reading: an absorbing, sophisticated, and occasionally harrowing commentary'.

Ken Barris, *Mail & Guardian: Friday Books*, January 26 - 1 February 2001:5.

This autobiographical account by a fiercely individualistic writer will 'probably be remembered for the last part' which deals with the experiences of Jürgens and his wife in the exiled anti-apartheid movement, showing that the culture of the oppressed has surprising similarities with that of the oppressor.

Charl-Pierre Naude, *The Sunday Independent*, April 1, 2001:18.

Letters from Robben Island.

by Ahmed Kathrada.

Rivonia: Zebra, 1999. 263pp. R90,00.

The letters of prisoners on Robben Island, where the apartheid regime sent long-term political prisoners, had to be passed by the censor before they would be posted. Obviously, this inhibited the writers and we thus get little sense of the personality of the author in this collection of letters. The book is shoddily edited and difficult to read because of the employment of mock-cyrillic script.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

Country of my Skull.

by Antjie Krog.

Johannesburg: Random House, 1998, 286pp. R90,00.

'Although Krog supervised the SABC Radio team of TRC correspondents, as well as writing about the Commission's proceedings in the *Mail & Guardian ... Country of my skull* is by no means simply a sampling or distillation of her reportage. Rather, it offers an assemblage of excerpts from the testimonies of victims and amnesty seekers themselves, interspersed with and framed by reflections upon, dialogues about, epistolary responses to and overtly fictionalised and poetic explorations of the philosophical and practical processes of working through trauma towards an emergent sense of home, belonging and self-possession'. The text opens 'channels of empathy between self and other, past and present', and invites re-mappings of 'all those literal and metaphorical imaginary homelands that are sought out as histories of dispossession are addressed and begin to be redressed'.
Susan Spearey, *Scrutiny* 2 5,1:2000:64-77.

Never Been at Home.

by Zazah Kuzwayo.

Durban, South Africa: privately published, 2001, 76pp. R70,00.

The 24-year old woman's story of surviving childhood abuse, poverty, a battle for education and growing up in a time of political and social upheaval is 'simply told, badly edited' and 'painfully raw'.

Vasanthangamuthu, *Sunday Tribune, Perspectives*, May 20, 2001:1.

Felicia—Dare to Dream.

by Felicia Mabuza-Suttle with Thebe Ikalafeng.

Johannesburg: Zebra Press, 1999, 155pp. R89,95.

This is 'an interesting narrative of Felicia's strength, courage and commitment to an ideal' and 'has a real story to tell' but 'is slightly off-putting in its adoration for its subject'.

Unnamed reviewer, *Pace*, February 2000:18.

Dare to Dream 'is a classic which every South African should possess to achieve his or her dreams'.

Mandla Nxumalo, *Evening Post*, March 27, 2000:5.

Miriam's Song: A Memoir.

by Miriam Mathabane, as told to Mark Mathabane.

New York : Simon & Schuster, 2000, 315pp. R153,00.

Miriam's story (as told to her brother) is about poverty and the culture of the poor in apartheid South Africa. The daughter of a mother who does domestic work 'for starvation wages' and a selfish and abusive father, as a teenager Miriam is raped and falls pregnant. 'In spite of the familiarity of the theme, the detailing is continuously

Judith Lütge Coullie

intriguing and absorbing’.

Kole Omotoso, *Cape Times*, December 15, 2000:6.

Plain Tales from Robben Island.

by Jan K. Coetzee.

Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2000, 124pp. R102,00.

The biographies of these six political prisoners—Mati, Mgabela, Mkunqwana, Ngxiki, Sitho and Keke—told decades after their release from South Africa’s most notorious prison, are based on interviews. This ‘unpretentious little book’ is honest and sincere and is ‘strongly recommended’.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

Mac: The Face of Rugby.

by Ian McIntosh (with John Bishop).

Cape Town: Don Nelson, 2000, 256 pp. R69,95.

‘At long last a book on [South African] rugby that tells the whole story, that does not conveniently skirt contentious issues and is not delivered in the romanticised, camp-fire tale-style of so many rugby biographies/autobiographies.

Mac, in collaboration with the respected Pietermaritzburg writer John Bishop, frankly criticises those who deserve it, openly criticises himself when he deserved it, and honestly presents the facts so that the reader can make up his own mind on the big issues It is an outstanding portrayal of a true rugby legend’.

Mike Greenaway, *The Sunday Tribune*, May 28, 2000:30

Five Frontiers to Freedom.

by Jeff Morphew.

Sun Valley, Cape: Vineyard International Publishing, 2000. 226pp. R 75,00.

The author, a captain in the South African Airforce, ‘was the first to escape from an Italian prisoner of war camp during World War 2’. This account of his escape to Switzerland and his subsequent return to active service with the RAF is ‘storytelling at its best’.

Greg Hutson, *The Mercury*, February 28, 2000:7.

‘This must rank as one of the best—and best-told—escape stories of World War II. It must also rank as one of the best researched, vetted and edited books of its kind’.

Roger Williams, *Cape Times*, April 20, 2000:6.

Kortboy: A Sophiatown Legend.

by Derrick Thema.

Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1999.

This biography of Kortboy—George Mpalweni—a gangster boss, 'doubles as a socio-history of Sophiatown' [a black suburb demolished by the apartheid government]. It is 'a personal tale of crime, suffering and redemption'.
Cornelius Thomas, *Eastern Province Herald*, February 23, 2000:4.

Island in Chains.

by Indres Naidoo (and Albie Sachs).

South Africa: Penguin, 2000. 294pp. R80,00.

Now republished, this account of Naidoo's imprisonment on Robben Island (the island on which Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid activists were incarcerated) was banned in South Africa when it first appeared in 1982. The text has retained features which now seem quaint, but reads amazingly well.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-Memories of June 1976.

by Ndlovu, Sifiso Mxolisi.

Randburg, South Africa: Ravan Press, 1998, 58pp. R39,95.

The author, one of the principal participants in the Soweto Uprisings of June 1976, recounts his recollections of the events leading up to the massacre of black students by the police. Part 1 gives eyewitness accounts by Ndlovu and others, as well as newspaper cuttings expressing various viewpoints. Part 2 addresses the issue of how that tragic event has been shaped in terms of 'hegemonic memories' that 'give place of prominence to the major anti-apartheid movements, such as the African National Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement' while suppressing the 'truly authentic counter-memories that represent the views of the masses symbolic of anti-establishment resistance'.

Femi Ojo-Ade, *The African Publishing Record*, XXVI,1, 2000:26.

Dreambirds: The Strange History of the Ostrich in Fashion, Food, and Fortune.

by Rob Nixon.

New York: Picador, 1999. 289pp. \$23,00.

Nixon grew up in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, near the vast wasteland known as the Great Karroo. 'Like so many sons, Nixon was determined to become his father's opposite: "He knew everything about roots, so I became obsessed with flight". But the Karroo's most significant bird was the flightless ostrich ...'. There are 'plenty of characters' who can 'hold their own' against the 'flamboyance' of the ostrich: an elegant plumassière, the Lycra-clad Arizona ostrich jockeys and 'Nixon's upright and unassumingly diligent father ... [who] winds up quietly dominating the book'.

Alida Baker, *The New York Times Review of Books*, May 7, 2000:14.

African Apocalypse: The Story of Nonhetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth Century South African Prophet.

by Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999, 201pp. R130,00.

Edgar and Sapire tell, in the measured prose of the historian, the sombre story of this illiterate woman who, in her forties, gathered followers and began to prophesy. The government of the day, nervous of the potential of African initiatives to destabilise colonial society detained Nonhetha in mental asylums from 1922 until her death in 1935. The intersection in the 1920s and '30s of psychiatry, struggling to establish scientific norms for itself, with the racial prejudices of South Africa of the time, is interestingly described. These tensions in turn overlaid a completely different African discourse concerning spiritual liberation.

Sean Morrow, *Saturday Dispatch*, July 22, 2000:4.

From Biko to Basson.

by Wendy Orr.

Saxonwold, South Africa: Contra, 2000, xx & 363pp. R125,00.

As one of the seventeen Commissioners on the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission, instituted to investigate gross violations of human rights during the apartheid period, Wendy Orr does not disguise her dislike, even contempt, for certain of her fellow commissioners. Her self-pitying book 'should have remained an unpublished personal memoir'.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct.30, 2000:12.

Catch Me a Killer.

by Micki Pistorius.

Johannesburg: Penguin, 2000, 253 pp. R79,95.

Micki Pistorius, South Africa's top criminal profiler, has written a book about her six years' experience in the South African Police Service during which time she 'has apparently helped catch more serial killers than anyone else, including the renowned United States expert Robert Ressler'. Accounts of cases are 'fascinating and informative'. This book, however, is 'also a kind of autobiography, a confession' which, 'like a violated body, is full of clues about its author'. Disturbing are her dislike for the Press and the fact that all photographs obscure her face ('Is this a tease, a power game or a cry for help?'). Also, 'Why does she make such dangerous statements as "I actually missed having a killer in my head"?' Whatever the case, one would expect a little less self-pity and bragging and a great deal more emotional and intellectual rigour from a doctor of psychology'.

Neil Sonnekus, *Mail & Guardian: Friday*, 16,34, August 25 - 31, 2000:5.

War of Words: Memoir of a South African Journalist.

by Benjamin Pogrund.

New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000. 381pp. \$26.95.

Pogrund details his experiences with the now defunct *Rand Daily Mail*—a newspaper 'regarded by many as the leader of the pack'—during the years when the apartheid government was intent upon controlling the press. As the RDM's African affairs reporter, he came into contact with the young Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe. 'In many ways it is a depressing read—an unpleasant reminder of what the country endured before the deal was struck for democracy'.

John McClennan, *The Sunday Independent*, September 3, 2000:18.

The Unfolding Man: The Life and Art of Dan Rakgoathe.

by Donvé Langan.

Claremont: David Philip, 2000, 171pp. R120,00.

'Superb South African graphic artist Dan Rakgoathe has constantly struggled with metaphysical issues unique to the black artist supplying a white market. This biography plots the most poignant events of his life (the death of his mother and three siblings, the onset of blindness) according to the subtext in his brilliant linocuts The book deals with the spiritual, the mysterious—and the tragic. A compelling tribute to a great artist'.

Denise Fouche, *True Love*, April 2001: 22.

This beautifully laid out book, with its black and white and colour plates, provides a fascinating weave of events in Rakgoathe's life, but I never got the sense of the man.

Lucinda Jolly, *Cape Argus*, January 15, 2001:10.

'The story of artist and philosopher Dan Rakgoathe's life and work is inescapably South African, and the impact of our history on this individual is exhaustively charted'.

'JC'. *The Citizen*, December 18, 2000:14.

A Labour of Love.

by Kogi Singh.

Durban: Aryan Benevolent Home Council, 2000, 237pp. R57,00.

Kogi Singh's 'beautifully written biography' of a 20th Century Indian migrant labourer's child—Shishupal Rambharos—in South Africa is 'a moving account' of how the boy 'learned to conquer his fear of living as an orphan and a refugee'.

Xolisa Vapi, *The Independent on Saturday*, May 27, 2000:11.

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Judith Lütge Coullie

The Last of the Queen's Men: A Lesotho Experience.

by Peter Sanders.

Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000, 175pp. R100,00.

'Peter Sanders, one of the last administrative officers to be posted to Britain's African Empire, relives his years in Africa with the sharp eye of an observer and the authority of a historian. *The Last of the Queen's Men* is a little gem'.

Mail & Guardian: 101 Books for Christmas, November 10 -16 2000:2.

This book is 'gossipy about the life of the author as administrator' and is 'too superficial to interest politicians and says very little of social structure and history of the Basotho'.

Graham Young, *Cape Argus*, January 29, 2001:10.

Vice-Chancellor on a Tightrope: A Personal Account of Climactic Years in South Africa.

by Stuart Saunders.

Cape Town: David Philip, 2000. 273pp. R140.

Saunders—former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town—writes of the embattled state of that university in the latter years of apartheid. It is a story of 'a terminally afflicted society' written 'with a practiced research worker's sharpness'.

Alan Lipman, *The Sunday Independent*, April 16, 2000:17.

Saunders has produced 'a valuable addition' to our understanding of the times when tertiary education was most under threat from the Nationalist government. 'Highly readable, and recommended'.

James Mitchell, *The Star*, March 13, 2000:12.

Time Stretching Fear: The Detention and Solitary Confinement of 14 Anti-apartheid Trialists, 1987-1991.

by Else Schreiner.

Cape Town: Robben Island Museum, 2000, 256pp. R95,00.

On September 17, 1987 fourteen South African activists, amongst whom was Jenny Schreiner, were detained in terms of Section 29 of the Internal Security Act. All were granted full and unconditional indemnity in March 1991. This is the story told by Jenny's mother 'about the people, the trialists, lawyers, supporters, police etc.'

Jill Gowans, *The Sunday Tribune*, Feb. 18, 2001:13.

The Prophetic Nun.

by Guy Butler.

Johannesburg: Random House, 2000, 127pp. R183,00

This 'meticulously researched text' tells the stories of three nuns—Sister Margaret, Sister Pauline and Sister Dorothy Raphael—whose 'lives and work in South Africa encapsulate much of what might be termed the contemporary "transformative" agenda', revealing how cross-fertilization between Eurocentric and indigenous traditions cut a thoroughly prophetic edge in the mid-twentieth century. This 'triumphantly successful' book belongs to that tradition of biography in which the biographer's own spiritual development can be traced.

Chris Chivers, *Cape Argus*, Aug. 7, 2000:14.

Butler's lavishly illustrated book tells a 'magical tale' of how these three women chose to bestow their remarkable individual gifts on mankind.

Bob Eveleigh, *East Cape Weekend, Leisure*, Oct. 21, 2000:4.

The Morning Light: A South African Childhood Revalued.

by Prue Smith.

Cape Town: David Philip, 2000. R94,95. 336pp.

'Smith's memoir is a well-written, moving account of a life that begins in Johannesburg in the "late, late British Empire". It includes a long diasporic existence in England and ends with her return to South Africa to embrace what she calls "the freedom of Mandela"'. It is not a comprehensive autobiography. Rather it focuses on 'several momentous periods and experiences, including her idyllic colonial childhood and its "dissolution" following the death of her father Her memoir is, in a sense about the claims made upon her by the compulsion to escape and the longing to come home'.

David Medalie, *Sunday Independent*, November 19, 2000:18.

One Step Behind Mandela.

by Rory Steyn and Debora Patta.

Rivonia: Zebra Press, 2000, 208 pp. R89.95..

As leader of then-President Nelson Mandela's security team for five years, erstwhile racist and policeman Rory Steyn learnt much from Mandela, including the need to respect all people and be more humble and more patriotic. The book does not indulge in gossip about Mandela's private life; indeed, it reminds one of early magazine journalism about Hollywood stars as there is not a single 'bad word' about Mandela. Being bodyguard to such a world figure was an arduous job which, at times, caused Steyn to sweat blood, particularly when Mandela insisted on visiting areas controlled by parties which opposed the ANC.

Reinet Louw, *Die Burger (Boekewereld)*, September 9, 2000:7.

Judith Lütge Coullie

A Mouthful of Glass.

by Henk van Woerden, translated from the Dutch by Dan Jacobson.

Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2000, 168pp. R99.95.

Demitrios Tsafendas, a parliamentary messenger, stabbed Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd to death, in parliament, in 1966. Van Woerden's almost novelistic tale of a sad man who spent the rest of his life in prison and then—in the last years—in a mental institution, is highly readable.

Glynis O'Hara, *True Love*, March 2001:21.

Van Woerden's account 'is not a history—although in many ways it comes close—because there are too many loose ends'.

Mike Oettle, *East Cape Weekend Leisure*, December 23, 2000:5.

Dutch writer Henk van Woerden 'finely sketches' the life of Demitrios Tsafendas, the eccentric who, as a "Christian, communist, Coloured, Black and White" ... suffered rejection at every turn until finally, "creatures" living inside his body ordered him to commit one of the most dramatic assassinations in our time. Van Woerden asks the interesting question: "Was he mad, or was the madness outside him?". Skilfully translated by Dan Jacobson'.

'SSM', *Femina*, December 2000:165.

Hendrik Verwoerd, 'the great ideologue behind the quasi-theocratic system of racial segregation known as apartheid' was stabbed several times by Demitrios Tsafendas, a loner, a drifter, a madman. This book about Tsafendas's life is difficult to classify but is worth reading because it is 'extremely well written, and beautifully translated. Books don't need precise classification; and lives don't need to have a fixed course to be tragically and unutterably sad'.

Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *The Spectator*, October 28, 2000.

No Future Without Forgiveness.

by Desmond Tutu.

Parktown, South Africa: Rider, 1999, 244pp. R145.00.

Like Alex Boraine's account of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this book is interesting, but hardly a sparkling read. Concerning the controversial episode when Tutu, as Chairman of the TRC, begged Winnie Mandela to apologise for her part in the gross violation of human rights, Tutu says that he feels that he succeeded in getting her admit to some responsibility. He also recounts the criticism which he received from members of the governing party, the African National Congress, for placing those who had fought against apartheid on the same moral plane as those who had implemented it.

Jaspreet Kindra, *Mail and Guardian, Friday Books*, Oct. 27 - Nov. 2 2000:5.

TRC Chairperson Archbishop Tutu has written 'a succinct and gripping story' which 'reads in part as a sermon, in part as a confession'. The book is 'accessible, informative, free of any personal animus and must stand as the definitive story of the TRC'.

Betty Welz, *The Citizen*, Oct. 30, 2000:12.

The Victor Within.

by Victor Vermeulen and Jonathan Ancer.

Norwood: Tenacity Publications, 2000. 112pp. R76,00.

This simply told tale is 'a South African story of courage and love' that will 'clutch at the heart'. At the age of nineteen, a dive into a too-shallow pool left Victor Vermeulen with paralysis due to a broken spine. He looks back at events in his childhood and sees how they were preparing him for adulthood.

Kim Robinson, *The Independent on Saturday*, Jan. 6, 2001:7.

Rainbow Nation Revisited: South Africa's Decade of Democracy.

by Donald Woods.

London: Andre Deutsch, 2000. xiv & 255 pp. R219,95.

The bulk of the book is a narrative of the return journey Donald Woods (the subject of the film, *Cry Freedom*) made to South Africa after a long exile. This journey is 'evocatively described and used as an excellent springboard for some salient contrasts between the apartheid era as Woods experienced it before his famous escape on New Year's Eve 1977, and the changes and developments he saw on his return in 1990'. The narrative has 'an enticingly autobiographical flavour' but the extended reflections, probably with the non-South African reader in mind, 'tend to destroy the narrative thread'. The desire to combine 'the highly personal' with 'social analysis' is problematic, as is the title: on what grounds is democracy seen as beginning in 1990? In the end the book is a muddled conflation of memoir, travelogue and social commentary.

Chris Chivers, *Cape Argus*, October 23, 2000:14.

My Plunge to Fame: Gaynor Young's Story.

by Gaynor Young (with Shirley Johnston).

Claremont: The Spearhead Press, 2000. xii and 227pp. R90,00.

At 28, actress Gaynor Young plunged down the equivalent of five storeys during a performance of *Camelot* at the State Theatre in Pretoria. This left her with 2% hearing, brain damage, tunnel vision, and a spastic right hand. This book recounts Young's 'literally crawling back to life'. This book, which could have been 'maudlin or self-pitying is anything but. It's charmingly colloquial, warm unputdownable and,

Judith Lütge Coullie

yes, it's inspirational'. Read this book.

Arja Salafranca, *The Saturday Star; The Goodweekend*, September 9, 2000:3.
