

## Book Reviews and Notices

**VOORSLAG 1 — 3: Originally edited by Roy Campbell, William Plomer and Laurens van der Post. A Magazine of South African Life and Art. Facsimile reprint of Nos. 1, 2 and 3 (1926).**

Edited by COLIN GARDNER and MICHAEL CHAPMAN

Pietermaritzburg, Killie Campbell Africana Library and University of Natal Press, 1985. 308 pp. R24 plus GST.

### *Voorslag* and the 'Maritzburg Connection'

Writing in *The Cape Argus* from England in 1927 Roy Campbell castigated what he had earlier referred to as the 'grocer's mentality' of Durban and, more generally, South African 'colonial culture':

Truly the rage of the sheep is terrible! If we had been at all timid of that moronism which has come to be associated with the name of South Africa, we should not have attacked it in the regions where it takes the most virulent forms. For, be it remembered, we edited *Voorslag* not only in South Africa, but in Durban, the Mecca of Moronism, the unbroken ignominy and dullness of whose history is only relieved by the inexplicable phenomenon of my birth there.<sup>1</sup>

Such arrogance and relish, hyperbole and pertinent comment, taken together, provides an apt summary of the direction and temper of the '*Voorslag* venture' which, during the winter months of 1926, exercised the creative and iconoclastic energies of three of South Africa's brightest young writing talents, those of Campbell, William Plomer and Laurens van der Post.

Produced at Umdoni Park, near Sezela, and enthusiastically pilloried in the daily press in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town, *Voorslag*, *A Magazine of South African Life and Art* set out to bring to the 'colony' the challenge of the European *avant garde*: in Plomer's words, 'to sting with satire the mental hindquarters of the bovine citizenry',<sup>2</sup> to remind it of its commercial smugness and racial bigotry, and to promote the ideal of the artist as the isolated genius amid the philistine herd. *Voorslag* finally ceased publication at number 11, but only the first three were under Campbell's editorship. It is these numbers, together with an Introduction, annotations and Appendices of contemporaneous reactions in the press and several of Campbell's letters pertaining to the journal, which have now been re-issued in a facsimile edition.<sup>3</sup>

Campbell dramatically announced his resignation in Number 3, an action precipitated by the issues at stake: 'art' versus 'commercial interests': 'youthful enlightenment' versus 'bourgeois conservatism'. Aged twenty-four, twenty-two and nineteen respectively, Campbell, Plomer and Van der Post

had cast themselves in opposition to their financial backer Lewis Reynolds (son of a sugar millionaire), who was a friend of Smuts and Creswell and who had political ambitions of his own in the constituency of South Coast, and to Maurice Webb, described as the 'business manager', who worked for A.C. Braby of Durban. (This firm printed *Voorslag* along with its regular order of business directories.) 'A coffee-coloured [magazine] which would have disgraced a tradesman's catalogue!'<sup>4</sup> exclaimed Campbell at the appearance of the first number; and, in response to Webb's preface, he wrote in a private letter: 'One can't introduce new ideas into a stale country by being meek and modest. We shall merely have the flies sitting on us. If you had not put in such an apologetic little preface . . . damn you!'<sup>5</sup>

Satirized by Campbell in his poem 'The Wayzgoose' (1928) as Polybius Jubb, Webb would in later years distinguish himself in the fields of race relations, education, social services and Christian unity. At the time of *Voorslag*, however, he was seen by the three young writers as the prude who, once editorial control of the journal had been relinquished by Campbell, would drape a fig-leaf over the 'exposed' ending of Plomer's serialized short story 'Portraits in the Nude'. In addition, Webb favoured the inclusion of stories by Sarah Gertrude Millin, whose novel *God's Stepchildren* (1924) — a dire warning against the consequences of miscegenation — had the 'official' approval of white middle-class South Africans, including that of General Smuts. 'An ill-bred little hussy,' said Campbell of Mrs Millin, and in a perceptive review he recognized the alternatives posed by Plomer's novel *Turbott Wolfe* (1925), a scathing denunciation of colonial prejudice and a book which had been slated in the local press.

Campbell contributed several other articles to *Voorslag*, including one of the first 'modern' responses to T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Waste Land', while Plomer wrote a far-sighted review of Dr Norman Leys's book *Kenya*, in which he reminded South Africans of the necessity of recognizing 'every man's human qualities as a contribution to the building of an indestructible future, to judge every man by the colour of his soul and not by the colour of his skin'. *Voorslag* refused to separate 'art' and 'politics', and several of its comments would probably produce today, in many white South Africans, the same angry and guilty explosion as they did when they were first written. We thus begin to understand more complex reasons for the generally hostile reception of the journal in the mid-1920s.

Interestingly however — and this is the point of my title — Pietermaritzburg did not, to any noticeable extent, join in the denunciation of Campbell or *Voorslag*. While the daily press in the larger centres attacked with vigour (and at times with petulance) the 'radicalism' and the 'youthful pretension' of *Voorslag* (ironically, Mrs Millin offered one of the more balanced responses),<sup>6</sup> *The Natal Witness*, under Desmond Young's editorship, adopted a stance at sharp variance with that of Henry Wodson's *The Natal Advertiser* (in Durban). Soon after Campbell returned to Durban in 1924, having enjoyed both an unsuccessful spell at Oxford and a successful debut as the poet of 'The Flaming Terrapin' (1924), he had angered the good citizens of Durban in a lecture to the town. 'It is not enough to have made a grocer's paradise of half the earth [he concluded] . . . We must have a deeper and less ostentatious pride in ourselves than that which is born of

our richness and power.’ Slammed by *The Natal Advertiser* Campbell’s talk, ‘Modern Poetry and Contemporary History’, was printed in full by *The Natal Witness*, as a ‘brilliant analysis’ (19 & 26 March, and 2 & 16 April, 1925). And of his satirical poem ‘The Wayzgoose’ (which existed in manuscript by the end of 1929 when he left South Africa), Campbell was able to say in his autobiography *Broken Record* (1934): ‘I publicly offered in *The Cape Argus* to publish my ‘Wayzgoose’ at my own expense rather than take it to England . . . Only Desmond Young of *The Natal Witness* had the spunk to take it up, but was forbidden to do so by his firm’s lawyers.’

Whatever fascinating story lies concealed here — involving the rivalries of personalities, ideologies, newspapers and cities — it is perhaps fitting that the present facsimile edition of *Voorslag* should have been published and printed not in Durban, but in Pietermaritzburg, respectively by the University of Natal Press and, especially in view of Young’s attitude to the ‘*Voorslag* trio’, by *The Natal Witness*.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> ‘We hear from Roy Campbell: A “Long Range” Attack’, June 1927; reprinted as Appendix L in *Voorslag 1-3*, facsimile edition with Introduction and Notes by Colin Gardner and Michael Chapman (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1985), p. 73.
- <sup>2</sup> *Double lives: an autobiography* (London, 1943), p. 43.
- <sup>3</sup> See No. 1, above.
- <sup>4</sup> R.C.’s unpublished memorandum to William Plomer, August 1926 (Durham University Library).
- <sup>5</sup> R.C. to Maurice Webb, June/July 1926; reprinted as Appendix D in *Voorslag 1-3*, p. 48.
- <sup>6</sup> ‘A South African Magazine. Is *Voorslag* What It Should Be?’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 June 1926; reprinted as Appendix B in *Voorslag 1-3*, pp. 43-45.

MICHAEL CHAPMAN

#### INSIDE THE LAST OUTPOST

by DAVID ROBBINS. Photographs by WYNDHAM HARTLEY  
Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1985. 198 pp. illus. R25.

The image of Natal as claustrophobic and Kafka-esque, its colonial heritage depressing and suppressing, is not one commonly purveyed by *Natalia* journal. I imagine, however, that *Natalia*’s readers would confess that there might be more than a grain of self-protection in the way we grip on to our past, and that there is need for such a ‘medicine’ as Mr Robbins’s book offers us; a far-reaching antidote to the attempt to lean on the past in order to avoid a present that we don’t want to see. I found *Inside the Last Outpost* at times an inspired observation of cross-cultural symbols and moments, at times an unforgettable reportage of the cruel life-style our white self-protection implies for other Natalians, and at times an assault on white ‘guilt’ feelings that was moralistic to the point of being predictable and counter-productive. (In respect to the sincerity of the author, I offer this qualification whilst readily admitting my status as a third-generation white Natalian.)

Where is the book strong? In the quality of its first-hand observation. No academic tricks of getting the statistics first and then imposing them on the local landscape.

Blacks fill the pavements near the railway station. Tribal dress and suits; the shops of herbalists dingy with roots and bark and bottles of witchcraft; eating houses which offer, to the accompaniment of jive and laughter, hollowed half-loaves of bread filled with curried stew, and from which customers tumble in a finger-licking, foot-tapping profusion . . . In the late afternoons, Blacks fill the buses, the pirate taxis, going home; they don dark-glasses and drive big muddy automobiles with a careless sort of American style, radios thumping, elbows crooked through open windows, fingers tattooing the tops of steering-wheels . . .

Later, the statistics. The location, the 'home' that the taxis return to, was laid out in 1846 for about 8 000 Blacks. Today 'it is slightly smaller, but contains well over 100 000 people'. In feeling something of the smart of these uncomfortable figures, I again and again respect the order of priorities of Mr Robbins's procedure. He always stands at a place first, takes in the sensations, and then writes.

Thus on Indian shops:

Snazzy Girl and Bombay Girl; Popattlall Kara and French Fashions Hair Boutique; sari shops and a confectioner's window filled with dusty cakes in the shape of ocean liners and aeroplanes . . . In a travel agency, booklets advertising pilgrimages to India and the Far East; in another window, ornate and garishly coloured pictures of a multi-armed woman reclining on a lion . . . You suddenly realise the Indians are no more Indian now than the Whites are European.

Given such vivid detail, the author's conclusion has point and force.

Now when this procedure is applied to some of the more stressful aspects of our national and provincial life, one finds one can accompany Mr Robbins on his honest and uncomfortable journeys — the sort that most of us try and avoid — without ever feeling that he will suddenly bully one with selected views or figures. The chapters on Msinga, 'the warren', and on the 'resettlement camps', like Compensation, are powerful through the sheer eloquence of observation:

There is a big resettlement camp at a place called Ntambanana about 30 kilometres west of Empangeni. It is a dry and rocky place, and in the winters there is little water. More than 6 000 outcasts already live there. Close by, there is a whole field filled with the iron of demolished and not yet erected fletcrafts (tin huts). If you stand near the police station, you can see the marks, extending over large bushy hillsides, of what the future holds. The bush has been cleared in systematic criss-crossing tracks which break the inhospitable land into squares. These tracks are plainly visible; even plainer are the four fletcraft lavatories which stand at the centre of each square. Almost certainly people will live here one day.

Robbins does not always stand at such a place alone. There are some striking altercations with his accompanying photographer. These are some of the most moving passages in the book. The two argue as to the appropriate 'white' response in such unlovely situations. At one stage his companion says: 'For me, when I think of everything we've seen on this so-called journey of ours, it's not so much guilt I feel as anger'.

Now I must say that I thought Robbins was at his best at those places where I felt anger, and not at his best at those places where he wanted me to feel guilt. Am I prodigiously complacent if I say — by way of suggesting where I was not touched — that I did not find ‘my’ people in this book?

Robbins admits the necessity of urbanisation, admits that you have to have, for a while, First World hospitals in the Third World environment, but I can find no room in his vision for those more ordinary colonial souls who built those things. Significantly, the only times ‘ordinary’ whites speak intelligently about Natal, is in the Msinga chapters, where farmers and agricultural officers show surprising perception of the sociological straits that make the area so distressed.

But elsewhere the whites are either the small band of super-dedicated missionary-doctors, or else they’re beach-boys, with ‘the sheer sloth of dark-glasses above mouths faintly pursed or parted as if to savour the anticipation of the evening’s discotheques, movies, dinners, clean sheeted love-making . . .’ When the life of luxury takes them from the sea to the mountains, they mouth platitudes about the scenery and leave behind them ‘tea-bags, cartons, broken glass, discarded food.’ Then at Game Reserves they corrupt, it seems, even the animals:

We saw giraffe and zebra and White tourists sunbathing with their transistor radios at the hutted camps.

Robbins ends the book with a juxtaposition of what for him are two representative images: two school-boys, one white and one black. One has ‘red eyes and a black swastika painted on his satchel’ and the other is found ‘bleeding in the churchyard’. No need to say which is which. For me such conscience-mining is unnecessary in a book that is undoubtedly a ‘moment’ in Natal’s literary self-awareness. Where it is strong, the book made me feel anger that ‘my’ people might, through greed and imperviousness, not inherit the best they have done. But I don’t respond to a strategy of disqualifying the doing.

The photographs have the wit of the text at its best, but, without captions, it is not always easy to locate the incidents they refer to.

W.H. BIZLEY

### **JOHN DUNN: *The White Chief of Zululand***

by CHARLES BALLARD

Craighall, Ad Jonker, 1985. 288 pp. illus. R34,95 plus GST.

Zulu history seems to hold a curious fascination for Americans. Donald Morris, author of the classic *Washing of the Spears* which appeared nearly twenty years ago and which remains, arguably, the best general history of the Anglo-Zulu War, is an American. So, too, is Norman Etherington who recently visited Natal. So likewise, is Charles Ballard, lecturer in history at the University of Natal in Durban and author of this new study of John Dunn.

Dunn was a colourful transfrontierman curiously neglected in South African history. Moving to Zululand in 1857, he married one coloured and forty-eight African wives by whom he reputedly sired 117 off-spring (of whom the last one died only very recently).

This startling statistic seems to have been the basis for two historical novels by the late Oliver Walker, sometime music critic of the *Star*, which showed greater interest in Dunn's supposed sexual athleticism than in his economic and political role and significance. Those who seek more of the same from Charles Ballard will be disappointed. This volume is a reworking of Ballard's doctoral thesis on Dunn and bears the marks of all the historical research and judicious appraisal that one is entitled to expect in a book with such a pedigree.

Victorian Natalians were shocked at Dunn's 'polygamous bohemianism'. (Their modern descendants are more likely to be shocked by the fact that he and his hunters had killed off most of the game in southern Zululand by the mid 1880s.) He was a renegade and a villain, to be ostracised when he visited Natal, even if his baronial and lavish hospitality was enjoyed by many travellers north of the Tugela.

But none could deny Dunn's influence. Even if economic self-interest was his only motive, he not only sold large numbers of arms to the Zulus before 1879 but also, as 'Protector of Immigrants', he established an early migrant labour system for the Tsonga workers on whom the Natal colonists were much dependent. His economic importance was exceeded only by his political significance when he became one of Cetshwayo's most trusted confidants and advisers in the 1870s.

Inevitably, the Anglo-Zulu War was the supreme crisis of Dunn's life. He desperately desired to remain neutral. His sympathies lay with the Zulu, but he knew that Zulu valour could not withstand British resources and arms. Imperial arm-twisting eventually forced him to abandon his neutrality and join the British invasion (for which colonial opinion promptly derided him as a Judas). He regained the favour of the British authorities for services to the British army during the campaign, while after the war he was drafted into (and, seemingly, helped draft) Wolseley's disastrous scheme for the indirect rule of a fragmented Zululand, and managed to retain and, indeed, enhance his position as one of the thirteen chiefs (variously described by disgruntled colonists as corrupt, traitorous, infirm and imbecilic) in the post-war political economy.

The restoration of Cetshwayo in 1883 and the subsequent Zulu civil war brought Dunn's political involvement to an end. He spent his last years as a farmer and cattleman and died at Emoyeni in 1895 at the age of 65.

There is no doubt that this book is an important contribution to Natal historiography. Scholarly, readable and thoroughly researched, Ballard's study of Dunn shows that the latter was far from being the mere sensualist and moral leper which many of his contemporaries thought him.

Ballard portrays him as a versatile, complex, determined and extremely capable man, balancing with considerable success his political, ideological and economic priorities between the colony of Natal and the Zulu kingdom. It deserves a place on the bookshelf of anyone seriously interested in the history of Natal and Zululand, just as much as Dunn's numerous descendants deserve their place in the Natal-KwaZulu of a century later.

T.B. FROST

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## SHIPWRECK AND SURVIVAL ON THE SOUTH-EAST COAST OF AFRICA

by A.R. WILLCOX

Winterton, Drakensberg Publications, 1984. 44 p. illus. R8,50 plus GST.

Well-known for his three decades of work on African rock art, Mr Willcox has now produced a very readable monograph on shipwrecks before 1800 which resulted in parties of survivors making their way up or down our coast, and in some cases striking quite far inland. Their fortunes have been researched not so much to dwell on the terrible hardships they suffered as to assemble evidence about the exact sites of the wrecks, the routes taken by the survivors, and the disposition of the various native peoples in South East Africa at that time. Some of the re-tellings are less fluent and attractive than Mackeurtan's versions of the same events (*The Cradle Days of Natal*, 1930), but Mr Willcox has brought the record of investigation and scholarship up to date, drawing, for example, on recent work by the archaeological department of the Natal Museum, and accounts by divers investigating specific wreck sites. There are a few minor blemishes in the form of errors which have slipped through in the proof-reading — including the repeated use on pp. 30-31 of 'Stavernisse' (and once, even 'Stravernisse') instead of the usually accepted 'Stavenisse'. Although there is a list of References and Further Reading, references in the text are not detailed, and amount only to bracketed mention of the author consulted. This will not trouble the general reader, but may be inconvenient to the serious scholar. The book, however, is clearly intended for the former, and so the absence of full notes and critical apparatus is understandable. It is well illustrated with maps, tables and pictures, with some good colour work, including photographs of parts of the coastline mentioned in the text.

J.M. DEANE

## GREY'S HOSPITAL, PIETERMARITZBURG: A Commemorative Brochure 1855 to 1985

Edited by J. DUCKWORTH

Pietermaritzburg, the Hospital, 1985. 92 pp. illus. R7,50.

The compiler and her assistants are to be congratulated on producing this very comprehensive record of a much respected institution. A tremendous amount of effort and research has gone into its compilation, and the large number of interesting photographs adds to its charm and attraction.

There is one unfortunate omission which should be rectified if ever there is a second edition. Mention is made of all the Regional Matrons and part-time visiting medical staff, but there is no reference to the Assistant or Deputy Medical Superintendents who unstintingly gave of their services to the nursing staff by attending to their medical needs at daily sick parades, and undertook other important administrative duties.

The brochure is well worth reading, particularly by all those who have had many years of association with Grey's. It will remain an important historical record of this great hospital.

V.A. VAN DER HOVEN

**VALLEY OF THE ELAND**

by VENN FÉY

Cape Town, Timmins, 1984. 183 pp. illus., maps. R19,95.

This is the story of 'the transience of humans, individually and collectively, and the impermanence of their works', with the valley of Garden Castle in the Drakensberg as its setting. It is a combination of the history and natural history of the area, together with a *soupeçon* of autobiography, pleasingly illustrated with drawings by the author's son, Keith.

**I REMEMBER**

by ESME STUART

Pietermaritzburg, the Author, 1985. 183 pp. illus. R15,00.

This little volume forms the reminiscences of a much-travelled octogenarian, the niece of James Stuart of *Stuart Archive* fame, and grand-daughter of both David Dale Buchanan and Marthinus Stuart, first magistrate of Stuartstown (Ixopo). The last few pages contain snippets of family history.

**WILLIAM JOYNER (1818-1887) AND HIS DESCENDANTS**

by PATSY JOYNER

*Groen Vlei*, Swartberg, Typescript, 1985. 41 pp. illus.

Although not a published book in the accepted sense, this excellent chronicle of the Joyner family in Natal and East Griqualand requires publicizing. It was written to commemorate the centenary of Joyner ownership of the farm *Groen Vlei* in East Griqualand.

**WILLIAM ANDERSON (1790-1873) AND HIS DESCENDANTS**

by ROBERT WATT ANDERSON

Pietermaritzburg, Typescript, 1984. 141 pp.

Here is another work which falls into the above category. Besides biographical information on the Natal settler William Anderson and his thirteen children, this book aims to provide details of all Anderson's descendants to the present day. Typed and printed on computer, the copies produced are being continually updated as new information comes in.

**THE BEHRMANN FAMILY FROM OCEAN LODGE, 1883 to 1983**

by ADOLF and IAN BEHRMANN

Pietermaritzburg, the Authors, 1984. 49 pp. R7,50.

Adolf and Dorette Behrmann and eight children emigrated to Natal from Hanover in 1883. For generations the family had owned the farm *Meinerdingen* near Walsrode, but because of ill health Adolf had to leave his homeland. In Natal he purchased *Ocean Lodge*, a 600 acre farm near Stanger. Written on the occasion of the family's centenary gathering at *Ocean Lodge Estates* (now in the ownership of the Balcomb family), this little book traces the history of Adolf and Dorette and their 108 descendants.

**ALIVE, ALIVE-O!**

by RUTH E. GORDON

Pietermaritzburg, Ruth E. Gordon, 1984. 234 pp. illus. R15,00.

This is the autobiography of well-known Pietermaritzburg local historian, Dr Ruth Gordon.

Dr Gordon has been an indefatigable traveller and much of the book is the record of her adventures, both in this country and abroad.

**FIGHT US IN THE OPEN**

by JOHN LABAND

Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter and KwaZulu Monuments' Council, 1985. 49 pp. illus., maps. R4,46.

In this slim volume, second in the KwaZulu Monuments' Council series on Zulu history, the author consciously attempts to redress the imbalance of previous purely white perceptions of the Anglo-Zulu war by looking at the conflict through Zulu eyes.

**BRITISH SETTLERS IN NATAL 1824-1857: a Biographical Register  
Volume 3, Bond to Byrne**

by SHELAGH O'BYRNE SPENCER

Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1985. 108 pp. illus. R24 plus GST.

The third volume of Shelagh Spencer's *British Settlers in Natal, 1824-57* appeared in May. This volume completes the names beginning with B and includes the well known Pietermaritzburg brothers, David Dale and Ebenezer Buchanan. Some early Ladysmith residents found here are Thomas Burchmore, James Brown, William Brown and Alfred Bowes, the ferryman on the Tugela river. Famous Durban and coastal characters are Walter Brunton, James Brickhill, Samuel Butcher and Alexander Brander.

