

REVIEWS

The Fox and the Flies: The World of Joseph Silver, Racketeer and Psychopath by CHARLES VAN ONSELEN. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007). 672 pp. ISBN 10: 0-2240-7929-8

The Fox and the Flies follows the path of Joseph Silver, syphilitic rapist, pimp and thief across several continents, through brothels, law courts and prisons, into the depraved criminal networks that seem to form an immutable part of human society. There is a depressing uniformity to these networks despite their geographical context: women are demeaned, raped, exploited and driven insane; corrupt policemen form symbiotic relationships with criminal informers; and justice occasionally prevails but with no permanent effect.

It is also a little known shadow history of displaced Jews, surviving on the edges of society, on the wrong side of the law. This is not the story of close communities, endurance, industry and persecution with which most of us are familiar. It offers a glimpse of a denigrated world, using kinship ties to build criminal gangs to exploit vulnerable Jews and *goyim* alike across the world. It is an unedifying history, but salutary too, correcting a picture perhaps too often sanitized in response to centuries of anti-semitic prejudice. As with the complex web of links between criminals and police, the links between law-abiding Jewish emigrants and their low-life kin need to be described if the wider dynamics shaping ostracism and assimilation are to be understood.

The narrative is likely to appeal to a large audience beyond scholars of history. It reads as a gruesome thriller, replete with sex, violence and murder, somewhat reminiscent of Henry Fielding (but without Fielding's innocence). The descriptions of the symbiotic relationship between thieves and corrupt police, the sex industry, fast-growing cities, colonial expansion, patterns of emigration between continents, in a rapidly-changing world living sometimes beyond its legal structures are convincing, if sometimes overburdened with detail, and will undoubtedly spawn interesting new lines of research. Sustained analysis of the gender, class and race relationships that allowed Silver to flourish is one of the threads that future scholarship must tackle. The most interesting aspect of Silver's life seems to me to lie not in his pathology, but in the context that valued and rewarded perversity. The relationship of this to colonial exploitation, although presented as background detail, deserves a stronger and steadier focus. Although Silver made a living from the sex trade, analysis of gender relationships and the historical context in which such widespread predation was made possible is largely untouched. It is a story with men and perverse masculinity centre stage, and the absence of a balancing consideration of the histories of the women who gave Silver his livelihood, is a startling gap. Further than that, I must leave the merits of *The Fox and the Flies* as an historical analysis for historians to debate.

The issues I would like to take up are for me in more familiar psychological terrain. Joseph Silver is van Onselen's 'Prince of Darkness' (p.8), celebrated

throughout *The Fox and the Flies* as cunning, versatile, ingenious, dangerous, and frightening. Here is a passage chosen at random:

It was hell's playground, and he was totally at home in it. His success in capturing control of the city's law enforcement machinery as well as its most powerful underworld structures within six months spoke of a genius at the height of his powers. He had a boundless energy and an unlimited ability to manipulate people and situations to his advantage. His voyage of discovery offered a fascinating panorama of the city' (p. 150).

Van Onselen quotes Paul Begg, Ripperologist, as imagining Jack the Ripper as 'a sordid man, empty in soul and spirit, of no particular merit or distinction' (p.421). It is tempting to think the same of Silver. Perverse, often incompetent, impulsive, brutal and devoid of compassion, he provokes the question: why spend time on him? The answers to this are complex, but worth rehearsing here.

Case histories have a powerful place in the armoury of clinical psychological reasoning. They illustrate disease processes, identify patterns of behaviour, categorise typical symptoms, and seek out the anomalous and the unique for further inquiry. They have the capacity to put into narrative the relationship of an inner world of desire, conflict and need, with a social setting that shapes, forbids, amplifies and sometimes distorts. Beyond case histories are biographies. Extraordinary lives bear witness to human possibility, creativity, energy or leadership: they serve as ideals. Ordinary lives are no less important, sometimes because they contain courage and suffering often unnoticed and unknown, sometimes because they have the comforting capacity to speak to us about ourselves, our own lives. Lives of extraordinary brutality are also functional: they map moral spaces, separating good from evil, right from wrong; they also allow us sanctioned spaces within which to exercise the dark impulses haunting the periphery of our consciousness. Where does Joseph Silver fit in this taxonomy?

The answer to this vexing question lies in an exploration of authorial point of view. Case histories and biographies are not authored by their subjects. Patients, heroes and villains are spoken for – sometimes quoted at length, photographed, captured on film, but represented within a narrative structure that determines their readability as one thing or another. To write either version of a life is therefore a weighty responsibility. In my reading, van Onselen's positioning of Silver seems deeply ambivalent. The admiring tone captured in the passage quoted above certainly colours the presentation. Silver's capacity to reinvent himself time and time again does perhaps have heroic qualities. On the other hand his depravity and sadistic relationships with women place him as a villain, the bearer of our shadow, one who allows a voyeuristic glimpse into a world we delight in deploring. He is also a deeply ordinary man, impulsive, boastful, lecherous, and incapable of sustaining any enterprise for long. So he might belong in several sorts of narrative, indeed to all, at different times, and I suspect he will appeal to different groups of readers for entirely different reasons. This does suggest a multi-tonal authorial voice.

Silver as a ‘case’

The story of Joseph Silver as a case history of a psychopath is limited by van Onselen’s narrative style: he frequently chooses not to quote at any length from primary sources, and there are slim pickings on his sources in the footnotes. This constrains jury members’ access to evidence. To offer a few examples, it is difficult to judge the grounds on which van Onselen describes Silver as having mood swings (p. 130), becoming listless or suffering bouts of depression (p.306-7). The word of the prosecutor often has to be taken on trust. The sensible jury-reader is left therefore to judge Silver’s mental affliction from an all-too-plain, verifiable pattern of criminal behaviour, and on those grounds, he does indeed seem to be a psychopath.¹ He meets all of the diagnostic criteria, including reckless disregard for safety, impulsivity, deceitfulness, unlawful behaviour, and inability to sustain productive work. His patterns of behaviour, abusiveness, conflict with the law, multiple changes of name, location and declared employment are all typical. Men with such histories frequently find themselves in prison, but also in mental institutions. It is interesting to note in passing that by 1906 Cape Colony had formally adopted the diagnosis ‘moral insanity’, sometimes also referred to as moral imbecility’ into its lunatic asylum tables. This category is the forerunner of anti-social personality disorder diagnosis and referred to ‘strong vicious or criminal propensities on which punishment has had little or no effect’.² Men - and a few women - with histories similar to Silver’s are to be found in Valkenberg’s case records.³ And to this day, Valkenberg’s forensic unit, and down the road, Pollsmoor prison, are home to a hundred Joseph Silvers.

Silver was not an unusual case in terms of his diagnosis. Of far more interest is the way in which his perverse and delinquent behaviour found a context in which it was able to flourish. *The Fox and the Flies* begins its account of each episode in Silver’s eventful life with a description of this context. However, the narrative weight seems to fall on the side of Silver’s exploits, rather than the imperial backdrop. The individual player takes the spotlight, leaving discussion of the complex rules of the game, the system, class, gender and race, colonialism, immigration too often ghostly forms and in shadow.

The psychopathy is clear; less so is the role played in Silver’s life by neurosyphilis. The primary psychopathy and early symptoms of neurosyphilitic degeneration often overlap, and include grandiosity, shallow affect, impulsivity, and

1 Van Onselen quotes R.Hare as distinguishing between psychopathy and anti-social personality (p.426). Hare and his collaborators argue convincingly for the distinction but it is not used in current international diagnostic systems such as the ICD-10 or DSM-IV.

2 This definition is given in the British Mental Deficiency Act of 1913; it would have shaped Cape Colony’s practice, and so would the medical debates that informed the legislation. For a full discussion, see S.Swartz and F. Ismail, ‘A motley crowd: The emergence of personality disorder as a diagnostic category in early twentieth century South African psychiatry’, *History of Psychiatry*, Vol. 12, 2001, 157-176. Valkenberg records surviving from the 1921-1929 period suggest that it was a diagnosis used at times to police sexuality of concern to the public, including women’s sex work, homosexual encounters, sex with minors, and cross-racial sexual liaisons.

3 The Valkenberg case series, patient records remaining from the time of its opening in 1891 to the 1940s are housed in the Manuscripts and Archives section of the University of Cape Town library. There are a significant number of patient records belonging to Jewish immigrants, many of whom share family names with Silver’s associates. The links between the under-world van Onselen describes, the plight of poor immigrants, and mental illness deserves exploration.

poor capacity to plan. For example, Charles Mercier writing in the early twentieth century, gives this description of the early stages of general paralysis following infection of the brain with syphilitic disease:

His character changes. Always a busy, energetic man, prone to take risks, to keep late hours, to live freely, all these characteristics become accentuated. His energy becomes overpowering; he undertakes more than he can get through, and his affairs become more and more involved and entangled; he speculates rashly; he goes about more; he takes long journeys upon slight inducement; he drinks more; he is less particular about his associates and companions; he goes among loose women; he talks too much, and chatters among strangers about his private affairs; he becomes effusive; he gives presents without sufficient justification; he brags.⁴

The early stages give way at variable intervals to poor concentration, loss of memory, confusion, and poor judgement. Van Onselen suggests that the early infection dated to the period 1887-8, and notes that by 1903 his handwriting had suffered, strongly suggestive of central nervous system involvement. If this is so, the disease seems not to have followed a typical course, which would have led to lethargy, quiet apathetic behaviour and eventual death 4 to 5 years after presentation⁵. He may have had periods of remission, which were not common, or his deteriorating handwriting might have had a cause other than neurosyphilis. Periods of lethargy might have been disguised by enforced times of incarceration. The point at issue is that however much early symptom pictures might overlap, neurosyphilis and psychopathy diverge in course and outcome, and it therefore seems insufficient simply to assert, as van Onselen does, that Silver suffered from both most of his life (p. 429). Many unanswered questions cluster around the dual diagnosis: did his behaviour become more disorganised later in his life? Did his letters show deteriorating memory or confusion? Were there delusional periods? If he had neurosyphilis, how did this affect his propensity to violence and his capacity to inflict violence on the women he terrorized? It seems quite likely that a substantial number of these questions might have been answered with a more detailed presentation of the evidence, either in the text, or in footnotes. Without this information the jury must suspend judgement.

Silver as hero or villain

While *The Fox and the Flies* speaks to the unfolding case history of a mental disorder and a disease, an authorial choice has been made around imaginative tracking of the historical figure of Silver (rather than equally psychopathic colleagues, or contemporaries, or his victims and his work associates). The almost obsessive fo-

4 C. Mercier, *A Textbook of Insanity and Other Mental Diseases* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1902, reprinted 1914, 1921), 245.

5 For a full description of the varieties and course of neurosyphilitic presentations, see W. Lishman, *Organic Psychiatry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), Chapter 8.

cus on Silver himself pushes the narrative away from case history and into biography, leaving the reader to judge whether he is being presented as hero or villain.

The villainous part of the narrative emerges most clearly in the chapter devoted to the Jack the Ripper murders in Whitechapel. The rehearsal of the murders themselves, grim bloody scene by scene, puts voyeurism in the picture. Such details are indeed important for profilers on the hunt, but their relevance once the killer is dead needs to be clear if it is not simply to be a feeding frenzy for ghouls. And there is a ghost of a moral purpose in writing about Silver's (and Jack the Ripper's) villainy, if it can be made to illuminate the ease with which women then and now are raped and killed by men. It is unfortunate therefore that the gender politics underpinning the contexts in which Silver operated are so underdeveloped in van Onselen's argument.

It is here that the presentation of Silver as hero comes into play. The Appendix to the book ('Clio and the Fox') maps out in loving detail the many paths crossed by van Onselen as he chased his fox. It is hard to escape the conclusion that he *wants* Silver to have the iconic Jack the Ripper status, Prince of Darkness indeed: he argues the case hard. Perhaps they were one and the same, although the case against needs answering. From a psychodynamic point of view Silver's life-long association with sex workers (many of them Jewish) suggests symbiosis and ambivalence but not murderous hatred issuing in ritualistic murder with an almost psychotic flavour. Silver sought Jewish women out, lived with them, exploited them and worked with them as associates, and his brutality leached into his relationships with them. There was therefore no hidden, compartmentalized fury, spasmodically releasing itself in ritualized attacks. Serial killers are often loners. Recent work suggests neurobiological links to autism spectrum disorders, and also to compartmentalizing mental functioning⁶. This makes sense: in the day the serial killer might be a quiet, maybe neat, fastidious man, little known by his fellow workers, who think of him as odd, but harmless; at night he perhaps seeks out the objects of his sexual desire and rage, living out a fantasy of lust or revenge. Such a scenario does not fit the Silver picture at all: he lived a sociable gangster life, and he lived off women who were Jewish and in the sex trade. No compartmentalizing there. Moreover, his stalking and reconnaissance abilities seem to have failed him where robberies were concerned; and his capacity to plan was marred by impulsivity. Ritualised murders of a very specific target group suggest planning, brooding, preoccupation with a vengeful fantasy that is then lived out detail by detail – did Silver fit this profile? This jury member thinks not. He was too disorganised, too addicted to immediate gratification, and was offered too many opportunities to express whatever rage he felt as he felt it, to make a convincing Ripper. He was an ordinary villain.

Ambivalence is the thread here. Silver's ambivalence towards women, van Onselen's ambivalence towards Silver.

6 J. Arturo Silva, G.Leong, and M. Ferrari, 'A neuropsychiatric developmental model of serial homicidal behaviour', *Behavioural Sciences and the Law*, Vol. 22, 2004, 787-799; M.Stone, 'Serial sexual homicide: Biological, psychological, and sociological aspects', *Journal of Personality Disorders*, Vol. 15, 2001, 1-18.

The book is introduced with the desperate story of Rachel Laskin, one of Silver's victims, who died insane and incarcerated, friendless, in a country far from her place of birth. By placing her dreadful history in the Introduction, the reader is seduced briefly into thinking that van Onselen will write a history that will recognise how she and others came to be so abused, will give readers a way to understand the context, will give voice to their suffering, and most importantly, make them into subjects, with lives to be respected. The focus on Silver offers no such comfort. The women in *The Fox and the Flies* remain as Silver made them: voiceless, abused creatures, with no history of their own.

To weigh the evidence then. Case against Joseph Silver as psychopath with syphilis: proven. Neurosyphilis? indeed: but the effects on his behaviour over and above the psychopathy remains unclear, because of evidence not led. Case for there having been a sex trade, corrupt police and an imperial underbelly - certainly. Case against van Onselen as the newest in a field of Ripperologists: proven. Case against Joseph Silver as The Ripper: I say not guilty.

SALLY SWARTZ

Psychology Department, University of Cape Town

One of the contributors to this collection, Philip Bonner, refers to a 'world of possibilities' as an entrée into the South Africa of the 1940s and the editors have happily picked up on this to arrive at the sub-title chosen for the whole volume. There is certainly much to be said for the revisionist intent which this entails. Conventionally the 1940s have been looked at *with hindsight* in terms of what succeeded this decade - the clash between African and Afrikaner, two potent nationalisms. Some of the essays here do fall into that category and comment on the evolution of those streams, but most focus on other possibilities which seemed to exist under the sheltering wing of the United Party (UP) government of General Smuts that ruled South Africa between 1939 and 1948 and, in so doing, restore half-forgotten issues and people to life.

Yet the book says little about the kind of people who fill its poignant cover picture. The rubric of the 'world of possibilities' best describes this most neglected element, large as it looms in the background of most contributors to this volume - the ordinary English speaking white South Africans plus the minority of Afrikaners who accepted the Hertzog-Smuts arrangements of the interwar years wholeheartedly. It was they who hoped that minor racial concessions or what Smuts called trusteeship could satisfy blacks and that the future lay with South Africa as an immigrant-friendly white-run Commonwealth nation playing its part in a world dominated by the triumphant North Atlantic alliance. This is certainly what leaps to mind as one looks at the striking photograph of happy well-dressed urban South Africans waiting for (their?) ship to come in. The large middle class element in this society enjoyed perhaps more creature comforts than any equivalent group outside the USA at the time; their dreams of Hollywood fantasy, motor cars, a range of sporting and other diversions and a business dominated economy seemed perfectly sustainable for the time being. This was their moment of self-confidence and optimism. These people are still awaiting social and cultural historians to discuss their world.

In this volume, the 'possibilities' are rather first and foremost those seen by fringe members of the political and social elite who started to dream of a deracialised South Africa able to integrate the mass of black workers and cultivators into a democratic society. Shula Marks notes that some very intelligent observers of the day, perhaps for the first time in South African history, had the hope that somehow Smuts or Hofmeyr could point South Africa in a new direction. Yet, as she starkly indicates in her afterword, there is little in the way of new possibilities to be found from a closer look at septuagenarian Smuts himself and only a bit more in his once much admired lieutenant, the 'liberal' Jan Hofmeyr. Smuts had been important in the series of debates and policy initiatives that constructed the cornerstone of segregationist South Africa, the Native Bills of the middle 1930s; his own conventional racist beliefs coupled with his sense of the white public gave him no interest in dismantling this apparatus. What one can say of Hofmeyr is that he had resigned from the Fusion government, not over anything to do with race, but with

the legislation aimed at curbing Jewish immigration from Europe. He certainly did want to liberalise the South African system but was too timid and too aware of his marginality in the UP to propose to do much about it.

If Marks rather argues against herself, this volume also reveals grounds for pessimism well on track by the middle of the 1940s. The more perceptive individuals had become far more pessimistic themselves after a few halcyon years. Jon Hyslop makes this clear in his biography of Guy Butler, the poet and literary critic, who developed quite a strong sense of an inclusive and liberalised society as a soldier during World War II, but became profoundly disillusioned by the views of the great majority of his white comrades even before the war's end. Rob Skinner provides something of a parallel in the shift of critical currents within the Anglican Church. The Campaign for Right and Justice, which nurtured Michael Scott, was uneasy with Afrikaner nationalism as well as the future Congress movement components and, as with Butler, tried for a radical liberal position that held some socialist currents, but it did not survive this particular period, dying after 1945. The contrast with later solidarity anti-apartheid church activity is striking. As is so well-known, a good decade later, when a significant liberal breakaway finally did occur in the UP, very few white voters went with it and only Helen Suzman retained her seat in Parliament for an unusually wealthy and atypical constituency - Johannesburg Houghton - while only a truly tiny number voted for the more unequivocal Liberal Party. I would submit that real change would have required not merely more decisive leadership, and Marks blames failed leadership here, but a willingness to establish a new dispensation through some kind of coup d'état that would obviate going to the white electorate at all. This is what had to happen even a half century later albeit with much sleight of hand on the part of the magician-cum-trickster F. W. de Klerk. Here finally in 1990 a white leader was found prepared to take the gap in more parlous times. From mid-century however, the only alternative for the small if individually impressive band of less compromised liberals, was to learn, as Athol Fugard put it, 'lessons from aloes' on survival in harsh conditions.

So what was different about the 1940s beyond a brief war-induced mirage of change? What was at play were the rapid urbanization and industrialization processes at work. These processes began to tear away the fabric of black society which increasingly urgently demanded redress and a new way forward. Nicoli Natrass' chapter usefully outlines the economic prowess of an industrializing country as a background to the rest. The real contradiction at the heart of administration lay in the furtherance of 'white South Africa' with its two 'races' united under Smuts, his core political project, combined uneasily with his willingness and relative farsightedness with regard to the needs of industrialization which he understood to affect the entire population. Little as Smuts was prepared to do for blacks politically, he understood the need to pave the ground socially, educationally, spatially, economically for a black population that could function in an urban and industrial setting.

A conservative view of this is recreated by Deborah Posel who refers to a 'racialised welfare state'. Posel may in fact have been pursuing this line given her reliance on a 1938 conference on 'urban native delinquency' still under the aus-

pices of the Hertzog Fusion ministry before the change in government allowed for more experimental space. Certainly the idea of a racialised welfare state was too contradiction-laden to succeed. One might contrast it with the beginnings of German welfareism under Bismarck, also intended to prop up a conservative regime in the late nineteenth century, but which still assumed that the workers would in some form vote and which aimed at uniting everyone under a German nationalist banner.

Nattrass shows that for a short phase during the war, private profits diminished, income differentials lowered and the state got more involved in the economy. Black wages rose proportionate to white, albeit from abominably low levels, while white skill colour bars started to show cracks. This was an era of commissions, which dealt with major social and political problems as the elite of the day saw them. One can argue perhaps that in this historic moment, there was some reality to a more inclusive concept of social citizenship, as Jeremy Seekings tells us, even if we dismiss Smut's trusteeship verbiage as almost all cant. This meant giving a green light at times, especially during the first half of the World War Two years, for serious social reformers to experiment, while at least keeping in contact with the state apparatus. A man such as Professor Edward Batson of the University of Cape Town, inventor of the poverty datum line and apparently influential in his day, cannot be dismissed simply as a proponent of a racialised welfare state. As radical a trade unionist as the communist Ray Alexander, eventually driven from South Africa, had considerable and constructive dealings with the government labour administration machinery in this phase, as she outlined in her recently published memoirs.

In this collection, the origins of welfare in South Africa are separately discussed by Posel and Seekings while Alan Jeeves introduces the reader to the primary health care model. A remarkable survival of this period has been the institution of the old-age pension for South Africans of all races, however unequally dispensed. The black pension was never entirely abolished by the National Party governments after 1948 even though benefits were at first steeply racialised. The health experiments of the day, which included the establishment of a medical school for future doctors of colour affiliated to the University of Natal, were quite radical. Most interesting was the Pholela model which sought to establish an overall holistic health intervention and evaluation system for an entire rural district. Correspondingly there was also the goal of training health workers who could diffuse important ideas more widely than the small battery of doctors and nurses. As Pholela developed, the progressive doctors confronted the broader problems of poverty and exploitation in rural South Africa and were forced to go beyond their original ideas of what was possible. Alan Jeeves provides us with a very useful introduction to names, dates, places, ideas and policies in this absorbing phase of South African medical history.

Jeeves' work is continued by Howard Phillips who scintillatingly investigates an urban clinic in a largely poor and Coloured neighbourhood on the Cape Town periphery and shows how the teeth were gradually removed from the initial experimental programme for which Grassy Park was known. Both Jeeves and Phillips make clear how incomprehensible the ideals of the experimenters were to the post-

1948 government where they had previously been tolerated. Indeed an integrated social policy is only now beginning to be formulated in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Finally, Shirley Brooks looks at the formal institution of leisure as part of the politics of an industrializing society with a view of the Natal game parks; here, however, there was no question of providing any black access. Promotion of leisure was a major theme in left social policy demands of the day in Europe, but there was no inclination towards deracialisation in South Africa's one predominantly English speaking province.

The last chapters of this volume harken back to more traditional discussions in South African history with their focus on black resistance and Afrikaner nationalism. Perhaps the most demanding, by Philip Bonner, takes as starting point the dramatic effect of industrialization on black urban life. Underneath overall planning initiatives, there was in fact chaos and contradiction allowing for considerable organization from below and resistance. As is so typical in his writing, Bonner stresses the militancy and creativity of mass forces and very localized leadership - 'uncaptured' by anyone. Using the example of political struggle in an overcrowded location designed for Indians in Benoni, he makes a case for the lost opportunities of the 1940s being found in another direction, amongst urban blacks coming into a new political life. He particularly highlights the role of the Communist Party of South Africa which was more dynamic and active amongst Africans than the African National Congress (ANC) at this juncture.

Shula Marks is also inclined to underline the growing radicalization within black organizations, referring to the teachers' organizations and the trade unions as well as the well-known urban struggles of the time, particularly on the Rand. Of course there is a literature, such as the work of Alf Stadler, that examines struggles and insurgencies elsewhere in urban South Africa in this period. Perhaps it is the very limited capacity of the leadership of the ANC and other radical organizations, rather than the unlikely hope of change from white leadership - increasingly repressive well before 1948 - that represented a certain betrayal of the masses, as Dennis Davis and Bob Fine pointed out for post-war black politics more generally years ago and is suggested by Bonner's analysis. Robert Edgar's less ambitious chapter biography of A.P. Mda tends towards the more limited goal of filling a gap in the scholarly literature by concentrating on this early ANC Youth League ideologue and providing thoughtful detail on ANC inner political workings of the later 1940s. Parvathi Raman's biography of Yusuf Dadoo is not unsuggestive, but mostly gives us a surface account of well-known political facts; Dadoo the communist who went on the Hajj, remains in the shadows and this chapter belongs to an older kind of historiography.

Perhaps too modest for what might potentially have been done, this volume still manages to lay out some very important themes. The debates on social policy, for instance health, are not only part of a newer historiography; they are very suggestive for the policy issues of the post-apartheid present. The 1940s certainly represent the point where thinking South Africans began to see the problematic construction of the nation as it had developed since 1910 and start to strike out in new directions, but the conservatism of the white public and the severe limits of

black leadership (albeit involving recovery from a very low base at the end of the 1930s) ensured that it was Afrikaner dynamism, and an attempt to stanch the flow of emerging social forms, which would win the day in the short run. Of course we have an excellent history of the National Party era by Dan O'Meara, a period dismissed by Saul Dubow as a 'dystopia', but it is largely confined to political rather than social or cultural change. Albert Grundlingh looks at the awakening of a radicalized (and more urbanized) Afrikaner nationalism from the time of the *Euufees* onwards, but his essay is largely impressionistic. The world of *Triomf* really requires a massive social history study to match O'Meara's political analysis that will explore this 'world of possibilities', so much of which did come to pass. For co-editor Dubow, the decade marks a 'mismatch between popular expectations and the capacity of the state to deliver on promises' (p.1), but of course the 'people' could not have been more divided as to who they were and what they wanted.

BILL FREUND

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban

Scholar, gentleman, pioneering surgeon and reforming medical administrator, the remarkable life and achievements of Dr James Barry have long been overshadowed by the scandal that broke at the moment of the doctor's death. This concerned, as many readers of this review will already know, the second of the descriptors I have chosen. The servant who laid out Barry's body in the sweltering London July of 1865 claimed that the corpse was that of a woman (and of a mother at that). The controversy over Barry's sex remains. As the latest in a line of Barry biographers, Rachel Holmes admits that it is inevitable that an account of his life - to give the doctor his pronoun of choice - must begin at its ending. Holmes, nevertheless, does a good job of making sure that Barry is not reduced to a sum of his (disputed) parts. She offers an inventive and largely convincing explanation for the questions surrounding Barry's sex, but she also deals at satisfying length with the broader historical developments in which Barry should be located. His career criss-crossed British imperial interests in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: amongst the doctor's postings were the Cape, Mauritius, the West Indies, the Mediterranean and Canada.

There is a growing interest in biography as a methodology employed by those following the 'transnational turn' of the new imperial history. For historians seeking to demonstrate interconnections between core and periphery and across distinct colonial outposts, individual lives tend to slip across the boundaries imposed by nationally-focused stories in useful ways. They highlight the networks (interpersonal and ideological) that bound distinct imperial sites together. Once usually confined to the shelves of hagiography and imperialist apology, more recently the lives of colonial officials have been revisited as offering important entrance points into these broader debates. Publications by Zoë Laidlaw and by David Lambert and Alan Lester are part of this trend, and more collected volumes of transnational and imperial biography are in preparation.¹ Barry's career was part of a rich mix of imperial rivalries played out in the context of global warfare, of debates about governance and corruption, and about the nature of liberty (for both white and black). His time at the Cape was possibly the most fascinating period of his entire life, and it takes up a significant proportion of Holmes's book. Barry was up to his very elegant neck in what Lord Charles Somerset's biographer once called the 'succession of extraordinary events that fell one upon another at the Cape during 1824 [which] resemble nothing so much as a fantastic play - neither a comedy, a tragedy, a farce nor a drama, but a farrago of all four'.²

1 Zoe Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815 – 45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); David Lambert and Alan Lester, (eds) *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, (eds) *Mobility, Intimacy and Gender in a Global Age of Empire* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming 2007).

2 Anthony Kendal Millar, *Plantagenet in South Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 168.

Scanty Particulars is a book written for a popular audience and generally focused more on narrative than on making analytical arguments about the possibilities of transnational biography. It is nonetheless (bar one important exception, of which more below) generally good history with much to offer beyond the fascination of Barry's life. Holmes is absorbing on Barry's part in the 'fantastic play' convulsing the Cape, without losing sight of the way in which these scandals speak to broader issues of social change. The style of the book is engaging, amusing and poignant by turns, and mostly shows a satisfying depth of understanding of both context and period. It would be churlish to reveal Holmes's conclusions about Barry's sex (saved for the very end of the book), but suffice to say that the doctor's own medical and scientific researches and preoccupations offer important clues that have been generally ignored in previous accounts. Holmes locates her discussion of these issues in relevant theoretical literature on the history of sexuality, while wearing this scholarship lightly. Less evident is any direct engagement with the historiography relating to colonial South Africa, although Holmes is clearly familiar with this.

I do have one serious reservation about this book that is worth spending some space discussing, given current debates about audience, market and genre within the profession. Though it might be tempting to dismiss this as 'academic' quibbling, I would argue that it represents a problem with important implications for both the book under review and for the discipline of history. Even the most popular readership cannot excuse a complete lack of references in a work of history. Despite extensive quotation from both published and archival sources, there are no footnotes in this book. There are no clear indications of the location of any archival sources, though these have been used extensively. A 'select bibliography' of some published sources (two and a half pages) is hardly sufficient. This is a problem on a variety of levels. Perhaps most importantly, we have to take Holmes on trust. Holmes is generally careful to put qualifiers into her text where necessary, but (especially given the style in which the book is written) we have no way of judging any, possibly entirely justifiable, uses of poetic licence. To put it more bluntly, without references we have no way of knowing whether she has simply made things up. Given that much of this book centres on an attempt to uncover long-debated mysteries about Barry, this poses even more difficulties for Holmes than would be usual for a work of this sort.

Publishers are often known to exert pressure on authors to abandon academic scaffolding. (Simon Schama evidently has sufficient clout to insist on footnotes, even in his 'sold in airports' histories published by BBC books). But as historians we should be wary of capitulating. As for further work on Barry, or on associated themes and narratives, anyone wanting to follow up on Holmes's archival material for research purposes of their own is reduced to educated guess-work as to what she might have used and where it might be located. Holmes has gone on to another popular history, so it may be that she is not interested in scholarly engagement with her work. If so, this is a shame. This may be a book for a popular readership, but it is also a book with which scholars of both the Cape and of issues of empire and sexuality could profitably engage. It touches on important questions about colonial governance, status, gender, performativity, and sexuality, to name but a few.

Without proper referencing, however, scholars are inevitably going to treat it with a certain degree of scepticism.

KIRSTEN MCKENZIE

History Department, University of Sydney

In 1956, author and leading figure in the Liberal Party Alan Paton set off with six others in a five ton truck to search for a lost city in the Kalahari. Paton never wrote about the expedition, and it was not mentioned in his autobiography. But a fifty-three page handwritten manuscript, along with some other notes and papers, were found in the Paton archive donated to the University of KwaZulu-Natal after his death. This manuscript has been edited and provided with an introduction by Hermann Wittenberg.

Paton was a lesser member of the Kalahari expedition, which was driven by the fanatical energy of 'Sailor' Ibbetson, a 'nice-looking young fellow with clear blue eyes, ruddy face, and a powerful body' whom, Paton noted, had 'calm fanatical eyes'. The quest was inspired by Farini's 1886 book, *Through the Kalahari Desert* which had described lost ruins. In his introduction, Wittenberg does a good job of situating Farini's account in the extensive genre of 'lost city' writing which offered explanations for Great Zimbabwe and the origins of civilization in the continent - fantasies that had inspired the seventeenth century Dutch settlers to set off in search of Prester John, and which persist today in periodic claims for the ruins of lost Indian civilizations. Ibbetson's ill-planned and under-equipped expedition found nothing, but this did not dent the enthusiasm of its leaders whom, Wittenberg reveals, went to their deaths believing that the lost city must have been over the next range of mountains.

Paton, however, had little time for the lost city story and dismisses its possibilities fairly early on in his memoir. Throughout his account, he seems gently amused by his companions' fanaticism, while envious of their ability to sleep in almost impossible conditions. Indeed, Paton's manuscript is neither a diary nor an apologia for some hidden history. It is rather a fragment of writing about the land - a central theme that runs through all of Paton's work. This is best captured in a closing passage, in which Paton wonders whether he would go back to the Kalahari:

There are strange things to see there, and strange people to meet; but it would be hard to say which is more entrancing, these strange events, or the long passive periods of time that separate them. Certainly the slow passage of time, the absence of ordinary duty, the hot sun burning, the antelopes running, the attractive monotony of the acacia trees and the yellow grass and the everlasting plain, steal over one like a drug. One can never have too much of it, because it is like breathing, something so near to nature that it cannot sate one; one does nothing, one is content to be. And this is true of the nights as of the days, whether one is sleeping under the stars, or lying in agony in a truck, with great waves of sound washing over the canopy.

This - then - is the conclusion of a quest, the objective of which is to penetrate deep into the empty lands of the desert in pursuit not of a lost city, but rather of distant, mythical mountains: 'I had in my mind a picture of the Aha Mountains as

clear as if I had seen it with my eyes. There they rose, out of a land of rock and sand and stone, unbelievably austere, waterless, plantless, lifeless; and I saw their colour as that of yellow ochre darkened by umber, because that was the colour of them on the austere and empty map that Sailor spread out on the floor'. As the expedition progressed, Paton navigated between the comedy of their progress - as the truck broke down repeatedly, stuck in the sand because of their inexperience in driving - and the sensual qualities of the land. He felt revulsion for the first Bushmen he met, 'not so much from them as from their nasty and brutish life', and wonder when three African horsemen rode out of the tall grass like 'soldiers of Genghis Khan'. And the journey ended with the return to the familiar, when they reached Nokaneng, 'a Batawana village, the most pleasant and cleanest place that we saw in the Kalahari, and having in the person of Mr and Mrs Andrew Wright, a host and hostess full of kindness and Kalahari lore'.

What are we to make of this? Alan Paton never published his manuscript, and seems to have moved on without the Kalahari intermission having much subsequent influence on his work. Wittenberg offers a rather complex explanation, deducing a need to escape the pressures of political life and the oppression of the apartheid state. I did not find this convincing, and there seems no reason not to take Paton's own account at face value; he gave Ibbetson a lift from Pietermaritzburg to Kloof, was taken with the idea of joining the expedition and carried along by his fellow-travelers' enthusiasm. Once on the road, he occupied himself with some experimental writing, playing with ideas about the landscape and immersion in a world free from the normal constraints of time and place. Once back home, he got on with other work, and chose not to publish the piece. Paton was immensely careful in his writing. It is not at all apparent that he would have welcomed the posthumous publication of a manuscript that he had chosen to put to one side.

MARTIN HALL

Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town

Disciplines other than cinema studies have, over the years, adopted, adapted, and incorporated cinema into their curricula. On the one hand this was due to the desire to valorize film (and later video) as a research tool, as with visual anthropology. On the other hand, the value of introducing film to the curriculum is an effective way of retaining viable student numbers in traditionally non-media disciplines which saw a dramatic decline in enrolment in the 1990s. The Arnoldian-derived assumption that film has nothing to do with knowledge, reasoning or analysis has long since passed (or should have), as scholars from all disciplines now include film (and video) in the classroom. One of the first books to appear on the topic was K.R.M. Short's *Feature Films as History* (1981) in which he argues the value of films as source material and how they provide an understanding of the societies and intellectual trends they both reflected and affected. However, apart from a short introduction, the idea of history on screen and what this means in terms of a paradigmatic development, is not greatly elaborated by Short or his authors. Apart from *The Historical Journal of Radio, Film and TV* and *Film and History*, which have proven to offer key resources in the field, we can fast forward to Robert A. Rosenstone's *History on Film/Film on History* (2006), seemingly published after the completion of the Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn manuscript. Rosenstone offers a detailed overview of what is meant by history on the screen and the editors of the present volume rely quite heavily on his work to underpin the volume as a whole.

In Australasia there is the annual and very well attended Film and History conference, where the topic is well entrenched, especially through the refereed on-line journal, *Screening the Past* (www.screeningthepast.com). This site publishes studies, reprints reports (such as the Grierson Report commissioned by a South African organization) and a very challenging review by Samuel Lelièvre of Frank Ukadike's book, *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Film Makers* (2002). The Film and History Association is made up primarily of people who are film scholars first, using history as a backdrop for their studies. The Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn anthology emerged from a selection of papers presented at what was billed as the 'First International African Film and History Conference', held in Cape Town in 2002. This conference, unlike the Film and History group, are primarily historians, who wanted a vehicle to merge two conceptual streams; the study of African history and film and history.

Seventeen chapters, penned mostly by men, are printed in this volume. Apart from an overly-short and quite fascinating Introduction by the editors, most chapters are case studies of specific films, covering both the old classics and the newly emergent classics. While each chapter problematises the idea of history there is no single, comprehensive, chapter on history and film, requiring the interested reader to go elsewhere to find this information. But, as the editors point out, the sub-discipline has not really matured that much, which makes such a study all the

more urgent. What is also quite significant is that all of the authors whose work was selected for publication are historians, not a single one is a specialist cinema scholar, as may be found in the discipline, though some are cited in the volume. This division was apparently visible in the conference itself and continued in the selection process. By comparison, in visual anthropology many of the scholars are also film/video makers, a meshing which was driven by the need to overcome the restricting codes and alienating practices of professional documentary makers and to develop the medium as a means of epistemological disciplinary significance. Analysis of the received text was not the only objective; the making of the text was also considered a means of discovering new forms of anthropological language not possible in abstract writing. In contrast, *Black and White in Colour* offers analysis of texts. There is no hint of how film might be used in ways analogous to those of visual anthropologists - grounded as they are in linguistics, semiotics, hermeneutics, documentary film theory and anthropological theory itself.

Conversely, cinema scholars are often forgetful of contexts, on which historians are obviously very strong, as is evidenced in every chapter in the book. There is a historical rigour here that is both refreshing and informative, never descriptively boring. What I am pointing out, then, is that a very useful companion to the present study would be Rosenstone's new book, in addition to his earlier publication cited by the editors, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (1995).

The editors aimed at providing geographical, chronological and thematic coverage of the African past and thus they included films which range from reconstructions of pre-colonial West African societies located in an indistinct period, to representations of genocide in Rwanda and South Africans struggling with issues of truth and reconciliation. Also provided are examples of different kinds of history films, both Hollywood and oppositional (p.4). Each chapter offers more or less a case study of one or more thematically related films. Amongst the films discussed are those on the wars against the Zulu (*Zulu Dawn*, *Zulu*), films directed by West Africans, films arising out of the west (*Out of Africa*, *White Mischief*, *Cry Freedom*), and recent titles like *Hotel Rwanda*, *Lumumba* and *Flame. The Battle of Algiers* makes a welcome reappearance, amongst others.

For me, the continued discussion by Mendolsohn of *Breaker Morant* is instructive. This film, more than any other, portended debates about film and history in South Africa, with the literary and historical protagonists (Susan Gardner, Richard Haines) being put to the test by antagonist, M.M. Carlin, from the University of Cape Town English Department (see for example *Critical Arts* 3(3), 1985 on "Popular Memory"). The debates raged for a number of issues, before being closed by the editor. And there the issue of cinema and history largely rested as far as South African scholars were concerned, until the conference on which *Black and White in Colour* is based. This book fractures the issues which generated the earlier discussion around *Breaker Morant* and explores the question of the relationship between film and history in much more depth while also examining how the African past has been represented in a wide range of titles.

Most chapters in *Black and White in Colour*, a play on the film of the same title, draw on both histories and ethnographies in analyzing the film texts. In this

sense the historian's approach to history on screen approximates the early anthropological approach of checking early film texts against written ethnographies with regard to accuracy and interpretation of data. In some cases we learn that the film texts may be in advance of the received histories, in others not.

Overall, this book is a first for a number of reasons: it deals with the relationship between history and film, not just history on film; it is written solely by historians, thereby recovering film as a means of interpreting the past and making the medium relevant to that discipline; it focuses on a single continent, and includes most regions, it is geographically inclusive rather than exclusive; and it examines films made about Africa from lenses external to the continent. How I wished that I had had this book when I first taught African cinema in 1990. At that point very little had been written on African cinema, and what had been written was not easy to access or to read. *Black and White in Colour* is well worth the read and makes the teaching of African cinema, whether its history or just the texts, or the relationship between the two that much easier.

KEYAN G TOMASELLI

Culture, Communication and Media Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal