

## Annette L. Combrink

**Review: *Current writing: Text and reception in Southern Africa*. (Published by the University of Natal under the joint editorship of Margaret Lenta, Michael Chapman, Margaret Daymond and Johan U. Jacobs. Volume 1, 1989 – editor: Margaret Lenta)**

*Current writing* aims to supply what its editors perceive as a lack in the journal field: a periodical devoted specifically to Southern African writing of the last twenty years is how the editors start off their Preface, and in this sense the journal is a most welcome addition to the available outlets for (specifically) publishing material about Southern African literature. It is further important to have this outlet, they argue, in view of the fact that “the Southern African reading public in our day has grown enough to make a viable market, . . . but even more important is the fact that readers elsewhere cannot be as eternally concerned with the problems of the subcontinent as are we”.

The publishers of the journal propose to work according to wide thematic concerns, and promise in future issues to deal with feminist criticism and women’s writing in Southern Africa (1990, under the editorship of Margaret Daymond), Southern African autobiographical writing (1991, under the editorship of Johan Jacobs) and Southern African poetry (1992, under the editorship of Michael Chapman).

The present issue focuses very strongly on two recent literary events: “the publication in 1988 of *Ten years of Staffrider* and the . . . publication, later in 1989, of *The Drum Decade*”. The issues contained in these publications form the subject of a heated debate, in the form of articles by David Maugham-Brown (“The anthology of reliquary?”) and Njabulo S. Ndebele (“The ethics of intellectual combat”). The two critics in question raise fundamental issues and differ sharply, to the extent that Ndebele says of Maugham’s “brief” that it “fell victim to the rather limited objectives of contrived combat” (p.34) – he feels that the idea should not be to “denounce, but to shed some light and some much needed understanding”, and he goes on to say that “this is a very demanding task, the kind that one is better advised to approach with a great sense of care, for it is not necessarily antithetical to humility” (p.35). This argument is taken further by Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamene in an article called “An unhistorical will into past times”. He provides a specific perspective by saying about Maugham’s response that “true as many of his observations are about the ideological deficiencies of the *Drum* writers in relation to the *Staffrider* generation, I feel that some of his remarks are made outside of the historical context which informs the stories” (p.36), and he also redeems the anthologies so harshly treated by Maugham-Brown by maintaining that “the exercise which both anthologies represent is susceptible to more sympathetic treatment than Maugham-Brown and Visser accord it” (p.36).

Boitumelo Mofokeng, in writing about ten years of *Staffrider*, asks the

question “Where are the women?”, and makes an eloquent appeal to the women to write, to make their voices heard, and quotes *COSAW* in support of his appeal.

The issue opens fittingly with a brief and eloquent obituary for Richard Rive, written by Stephen Gray, and Rive is further represented in the issue by an interview conducted by Braam de Vries on his involvement with *Drum* and *Staffrider*, which has the usual ebullience and verve one associates with Rive. This section is complemented by a very useful bibliography on Rive’s work.

This first issue also contains a thought-provoking article by Thengani H. Ngwenya on Bloke Modisane’s *Blame me on history*. The article centres on the concept of the ontological status of self in Autobiography, and comes to the conclusion that the work to him is “both ‘historical’ and ‘individual’, both document and autobiography” (p.76).

Jacques Berthoud of York writes a discerning analysis of J.M. Coetzee’s *White writing* and Nadine Gordimer’s *The essential gesture*, and concludes that “. . . (these books) demonstrate that writing under apartheid, far from being in need of special pleading, reveals to us what blander and more protected performances conceal, that literature is not a trivial pursuit” (p.87).

The final article in this issue is Dorian Haarhof’s survey article called “Fighting and Writing: The origins of indigenous Namibian Literature”, a particularly apt publication in the year of Namibian independence.

The review section is at present still fairly small, but contains a few very useful reviews on both African critical thinking and Southern African art.

If the first issue is a true portent of what is to come, this journal will indeed fill a very special niche in the Southern African publishing world, and will be welcomed by both writers and researchers and the more general reading public.

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