

donkerder velkleur – in die Kompanjiesmans se samelewing uiteensit. Die lê van verbande tussen die sewentiende-eeuse oorspronge en die hedendaagse stand van sake op heelparty van die ou plase, was wel vir my besonder sinvol. Dit gee 'n onmiddellike toepassingswaarde aan die teks en laat my dink dat die boek moontlik ook 'n nismark in Kaapse museumwinkels mag vind.

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Indaba: Interviews with African Writers.

Stephen Gray. Pretoria: Protea Book House. 2005. 227 pp. ISBN 1-86919-089-0.

Stephen Gray contributes a valuable resource for specialist and amateur alike in the form of this handy volume of interviews. It is compiled from numerous encounters with writers over the last forty years and the range of authors interviewed and the kinds of questions posed and answered is impressive and informative.

Gray provides a brief introductory overview of the literary interview as practice and genre and the needs it has served over the years. He goes on to detail periodicals and books that have pioneered the collection and archiving of interviews with African writers, most of which do not date back much earlier than the 1960s. He also lists some basic guidelines for the intrepid interviewer: "The rules of the game are well established. I should allow them their space, never upstage them; let them get away with the necessary promotion we have tacitly agreed upon, in the shape of a plug for the next book, or whatever it is they wish to punt, but push back in turn for a wider, deeper confession that should be of interest beyond the local occasion to our read-

ers or listeners." (10)

Indeed, these interviews have allowed the reader entrée into the thoughts of twenty-three writers. The conversations, in edited versions, have mostly been published or broadcast earlier, and Gray notes that the book form has allowed him to present the original versions in their entirety. He also provides insightful introductions to each chapter, including biographical and critical information.

The writers interviewed will not always be familiar to readers outside South Africa. While some are widely-read and, like Gordimer, celebrated internationally, others, like Douglas Livingstone, who made his living mostly as a marine bacteriologist, were not well-known even in South Africa, where he settled and published his three "slim volumes of poetry." In fact, one of the strengths of Gray's collection is that he brings the thoughts and oeuvres of a good number of writers to a wider audience. I found the interview with South African expatriate Alan Scholefield to be particularly informative: "Alan Scholefield is the kind of writer who, as often as not, is overlooked when the real highbrow discussion of literature in Southern Africa gets underway (...) Yet Scholefield is a remarkable writer by any standards, and some dozen of his novels deal with the Southern Africa experience (...) without Scholefield's extraordinary *The Eagles of Malice* (1968), would anyone really have remembered the Herero Massacre during those forgetful days?" (102)

However, when Gray lists Scholefield with "Haggard, Buchan, Van der Post, Stuart Cloete and Wilbur Smith as writers of historical romances," I'd have liked to see a little more situating of his work within what here is a wide spectrum of treatments of South Africa and "the African."

Some of the longest sessions are with the wider known writers. Speaking as one South African to another, one writer to another,

Nadine Gordimer discusses her shift from a liberal to a more radical political view in the 1970s, with Gray leading the conversation into explorations of how this evolution is reflected in some of her novels. Similarly, after over twenty years living away from South Africa, Dan Jacobsen returns to promote his autobiography, *Time and Time Again*, and Gray steers him into discussing the concerns that eventually led him to write outside his homeland. [One small karp I have about this interview is that a citation of Afrikaans writer Van Wyk Louw, "*eindelik teen 'n doringdraad met knipsels wol vaswaai*," (66) goes untranslated. This is fine if the target audience is South African, but a book of this quality and value should be inclusive of any English language reader.] A long introductory section and a lengthy interview also presents some welcome information about Somali author Nuruddin Farah.

From a rather different angle, interviews with Siphso Sepamla and Fatima Dike bring out insights from the other side of South African arts. Sepamla answers a question about working with white editors by saying: "Our experiences are different. I think most White writers and critics and editors don't have the sort of feelings that oppress me as I sit in a township room, writing, fearing this or that (...) But then, on another level, one has to accept that there's a lot that we can learn from one another." (88) Dike says of her play *The Glass House*, "And I would like this play to portray that it is no harm for a white man to

help a black man that far, but one thing that they must remember is that they must let us walk the road, they must let us read the book, and they must let us see the film, on our own, and make our own judgment thereafter – without being told what to do." (100)

Gray provides some excellent interviews with francophone African authors Edouard Maunick, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Ahmadou Kourouma and Veronique Tadjo, as well as lusophone writer Luis Bernardo Honwana. His interview with filmmaker/director Ross Devinish brings some new insights into the work of, and collaboration with, Athol Fugard.

An inspirational subtext that runs throughout this collection is that it is produced in the postapartheid era, even though many of the interviews were conducted during the days of white minority rule. Introductory remarks for each interview often contain historical context of how Gray and/or others worked to get an author's work read outside or even inside South Africa, thereby circumventing repressive governmental control of literary production. There is an overall enthusiasm and optimism for literature and the arts, for their ability to reach and empower diverse audiences, unfettered by censorship, banning or exile, which provides a dynamic frame to the topics and events being discussed.

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