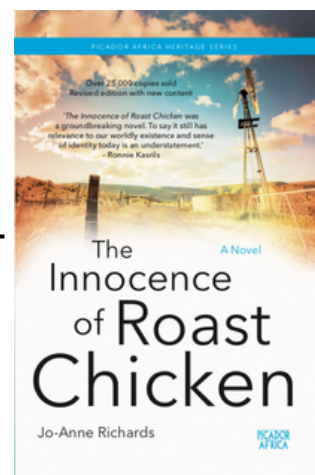


The Innocence of Roast Chicken Press Clippings



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HARDBACKS FICTION

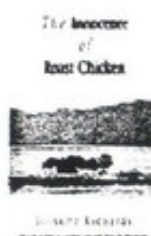


Bridget Jones's Diary
by Helen Fielding

Picador £12.99

★★

Bridget Jones is a spinster of 30-plus and her diary recounts a year of lightweight torment. Day after day, she battles with feelings of inadequacy, drink, cigarettes, fat and men. And it is the men problem that seems to cause all the others. She should be able to see the dud fellows coming, there are clues ('a white sock... a grey slip-on shoe, a swastika') but she doesn't. I was deeply moved by her battle with the video, but the word '****wit' pops up with depressing frequency, and Bridget, despite her supportive feminist chum, is at heart a committed fluffy waiting for Prince Charming. Michele Hanson



The Innocence of Roast Chicken
by Jo-Anne Richards

Headline Review £16.99

★★★

Kate is a white South African with attitude. While her human rights lawyer husband Joe is starry-eyed about the unfolding of the new South Africa, she relentlessly mocks it. In uncovering the mystery of why Kate is as she is, the story shifts between two worlds: the rural idyll of her grandparents' chicken farm in 1966, and Johannesburg in 1989. Despite characters who theorise about emotions rather than experience them, this book has pace and tension — shot through with the terrible beauty of the South African landscape and the efforts of a child to stave off a gathering evil. Gillian Slovo

Pick of the paperbacks

THRILLER

The Tailor of Panama - John le Carre (Coronet, £6.99) ★★★★★

IN John le Carre's latest espionage thriller, the Panama Canal is due to be handed back by the Americans at the turn of the century.

British Intelligence, in the shape of young spy Andrew Osmond, set up shop in Panama.

He recruits Harry Pendel, the tailor to the city's finest, including the President, and the ideal person to divulge all their secrets.

Le Carre is in top form, with a strong plot (owing much to *Our Man in Havana*) and meaningful characterisation.



GLORIOUS FOOD: Linda McCartney with hubby Paul.

COOKERY

Linda's Summer Kitchen - Linda McCartney (Little, Brown, £7.99) ★★★★★

THE longest day is just a month away; summer cookery books are gracing the shelves and yet we've only just seen the back of snow showers, biting winds and frost.

But less about the vagaries of the British climate and more about the culinary inventiveness of the British veggie.

Linda McCartney, the doyenne of the anti-meat brigade, dishes up a cornucopia of mouth-watering recipes

to tempt even the most ardent of flesh lovers.

And the beauty of Linda's concoctions is they all seem easy to prepare. There's everything from stuffed peppers, mushroom moussaka and aubergine curry to vegan fruit cake and vegetable strudel.

My only gripe is that these recipes have already been published as part of her book *Linda's Kitchen*. Still, perhaps she needs the money!

LITERARY

The Woman Who Walked Into Doors - Roddy Doyle (Minerva, £6.99) ★★★★★

RODDY Doyle's portrayal of raw, gritty Dublin life won a new army of fans when his novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* won the Booker Prize.

Previously he was best known for the brash *The Commitments*, which brought him fame largely through the brilliant film version.

The Woman Who Walked Into Doors is a remarkable achievement and his most accomplished work to date.

Doyle speaks from inside the kind of a wife, battered by a brutal husband and driven to drink, so convincingly and compassionately it is easy to forget it has been written by a man.

There is no way you can read Paula Spencer's story without getting emotionally involved. Doyle drags you with him into her thoughts and dreams, her agony and forlorn hopes.

He importantly understands how love can overcome the most savage act of hatred, how, despite the beatings, Paula still loves Charlo whom she fell for the moment she first saw him. And she realises that love has survived when a young policeman arrives to break the bad news - of his death.

The Innocence of Roast Chicken - Jo-Anne Richards (Headline Review, £6.99) ★★★★★

AN honest and powerful comment on the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Jo-Anne Richards' first novel knits fiction with historical events and

personal recollections.

She contrasts an idyllic, white and privileged childhood on an Afrikaans chicken farm in the Eastern Cape in 1966, with post-apartheid Johannesburg in 1989 when bitter memories cut through the euphoria.

HUMOUR

The Midden - Tom Sharpe (Pan £5.99) ★★★★★

NOT so much humour as lunacy! Sharpe's hero, Timothy Bright (but dim), is loaded. When the birthright funds run dry, Timothy turns unsuccessfully to gambling.

He finds himself drugged and in bed with the Chief Constable's wife. When the top cop arrives home after celebrating the dropping of bribery charges against him, he finds Timothy and almost kills him.

He sees the disposal of the "body" as an opportunity to frame old enemy Mrs Midden.

It's wacky, it's enjoyable, it's typical Tom Sharpe!

NON-FICTION

The Evil That Men Do - Brian Masters (Black Swan, £7.99) ★★★★★

FROM Saints to Serial Killers: Penetrating the Nature of Good and Evil, is the subtitle of the latest work from the author of the rightly acclaimed study of mass murderer Dennis Nilsen.

And though it is a thought-provoking and well-reasoned book, it doesn't hold the attention like that masterful work, or even his study of cannibal killer Jeffrey Dahmer.

Perhaps that is because the subject matter is so deep - put simply, what makes some men good and other evil?

He ponders whether there is good and bad in all of us, and if it is our breeding which makes us as we are. But to his credit, he offers no answers to a question which has occupied generations.

Crime buffs who don't mind considering such a diversity of cases could find it a rewarding read, if a little heavy.

Gary Welford



BOOK OF THE WEEK

Marvellous eye for tiny, telling details

The Innocence of Roast Chicken

By Jo-Anne Richards

Reviewed by Michael Shafto

Not everyone, for a variety of reasons, liked the book *Mukitwa* – but few would give you an argument about the quality of Peter Godwin's writing. So when Godwin sings the praises of a fellow-writer you have to sit up and take note.

He calls Jo-Anne Richards, author of the debut novel, *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, "one of the freshest voices to emerge from South African literature in years".

To expand on that is the reviewer's job and it is a task not lightly undertaken for this is a book of some complexity and addresses matters which, as South Africans, should be of special concern to us all.

But first a brief look at the bones of the plot – a story told on two levels. The novel's time frame stretches from the middle 60s to 1989. The latter represents time present – a few months at the tail-end of that year – which is used as a vehicle to bring the story to its climax. But of equal if not greater importance is the year 1966 during the three weeks preceding Christmas, for it is in this period that eight-year-old Kate experiences a catharsis that will change her life forever and determine the person she is to become. Twenty-three years later, she is in the midst of a not very happy, tottering marriage that has lasted eight years.

Be warned. This is a discomfiting book. It looks at issues four-square and makes few, if any, concessions – be they in matters personal or political.

Kate's husband, Joe, a labour relations lawyer, may be somewhat weak-kneed and guilty of wearing the bleeding heart of his liberalism on his sleeve, but his wife's constant sniping and the cruelty of her bitchiness are sure to make you wince. Candidly, most of the time she's a right royal pain.

But what happened to Kate that fateful Christmas holiday of 1966 on her grandparents' Eastern Cape farm, inland from the family home in Port Elizabeth? What was it that so wounded and scarred her emotionally that she now finds it virtually impossible to live by ordinary standards? The answer lies somewhere in the days leading up to and including Christmas Day, and Richards cleverly plays with her readers' emotions as she drops one teasing hint after another before delivering the shattering coup de grâce.

The adult Kate's story as her husband battles to come to terms with the disappointments with which his

somewhat naive idealism inevitably confronts him, is a lot less interesting than her eight-year-old alter ego.

These are by far the best parts of the novel. Richards has a marvellous eye for tiny, telling details. The writing here is often lyrical, quite beautiful in its evocation of simple things keenly felt. There are passages reminiscent of the best of the early Lessing and they give Richards' prose an edgy, disturbing quality that reaches pitches of remarkable brilliance. It shines. She has the knack of finding exactly the right word.

Kate, in one of her many moments of irritation with Joe's perceived ineffectiveness, describes his hands as "drooling at his sides". She writes of Kate's two large, loose-skinned dogs – (they) "tumbled down the hill then, racing and rolling with each other".

There are many such vignettes of perfect, accurate recall. And there's Ouma – a decent, upright person at heart – with her tacit acceptance of the way of things: her position as unquestioned matriarch of the farm, her "boys" whom she treats firmly but well and from whom she expects total, unswerving loyalty.

The novel is skilfully structured with no loose ends. It's all there from the beginning; she never cheats or cuts corners.

Her ear for childhood dialogue is spot on. What a pity the adult dialogue is spoilt by a too-obvious setting up of arguments to illustrate the rights and wrongs of the country's political setup. That and an over-long, over-solemn leader page article in the local newspaper on the labour dispute Joe is working on, are two weaknesses the novel could have done without.

But these are quibbles of personal taste ... and overall Godwin is right – there's a truly exciting freshness here and what is more real portents of even better to come.

■ *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* is published by Hodder Headline at R69,95.

■ Turn to Tonight for three pages of StarBooks.

Through the eyes and mind of a child

Most South African writers are dealing with the past through child protagonists. **Lesley Cowling** looks at the most recent

TO confront the past, South Africa is using commissions and court cases, reporting the stories of what really happened. Societies rewrite their histories by these means, but literature confronts history in a different way: through the individual, through the life and experiences of characters.

And the past, for many emerging writers, is represented by childhood, because younger writers grew up in that most limpid of eras, the Sixties and Seventies, when apartheid expressed itself in the kind of simple terms we now find incredible.

And it was normal. The world of a child, from a child's point of view, is always normal. Children accept what is given to them. Like little Siddharthas, they go ahead and have happy childhoods, unaware of the misery and suffering beyond the palace walls. Only in adolescence does the reality begin to dawn and the happy childhood is lost forever.

Childhood becomes a compelling problem, then, for white South African writers; the loss-of-innocence theme is both powerful metaphor and cliché, and writers must skate warily around it.

It is the problem Jo-Anne Richards has taken on in her novel *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (Headline Review), following in the footsteps of writers like Mark Behr (*The Smell of Apples*) and Bryce Courtenay (*The Power of One*).

Richards's central character, Kate,

describes a summer holiday on her grandparents' farm in the Eastern Cape when she was a young girl, and intersperses that with descriptions of her adult life in the Johannesburg of the early Nineties.

The parallel narratives move towards, on one hand, a traumatic racial event, and on the other, a realisation of the effect of that experience on her adult self.

"I wasn't trying to write a reportage of events," says Richards, "but to write a book on South Africa with no politics in it is ridiculous. You cannot show how people are here without touching on politics."

She says she wanted her character to come face-to-face with the realities, but the first half of the childhood narrative shows the "happy childhood", where these realities are invisible.

"There are several levels of violence. Not just political violence, but farm violence. I mean, you eat food because it's dead. Kate couldn't come to terms with the violence — it hit her all at once."

There is a strong air of nostalgia in the childhood narrative, which is richly descriptive, especially of landscape. The contours of the Eastern Cape are evoked time and again, the landscape detailed.

In this, Richards follows the lead of many white African writers who are far more inclined to romanticise the land than



Jo-Anne Richards: 'To write a book on South Africa with no politics in it is ridiculous'

are their black counterparts.

"When I lived in the Eastern Cape, I didn't notice the land and its distinctiveness," she says. But once she moved away, she realised she missed it, and that quality of nostalgia informs her description of the landscape.

She says: "I wonder if it isn't a way of demonstrating our connection to the country. White writers used it to show a link, a belonging, to root themselves here. Maybe black writers don't need to do that."

Of course, she didn't think about these kinds of issues when she began the novel. "I wrote about the Eastern Cape that way because I feel that way."

New body for local writers

Glynis O'Hara

SOUTH AFRICAN writers have, for the first time, a single body to represent all of them. Called the South African Writers' Federation (Sawfed), it unites a range of writers' organisations in one body. A national council and a transitional executive committee, consisting of Morakabe "Raka" Seakhoa (Congress of South African Writers), Walter Chakela (Windybrow Theatre director) and Menzi Ndaba (poet), were appointed to work on the constitution.

The main purpose of Sawfed is to represent writers (including journalists and scriptwriters) on the issue of copyright law and on relations with international writers and with satellite bodies.

"All over the world, writers have input on copyright laws, but it hasn't happened here. What about the Internet implications, for example?" asked Seakhoa.

Sawfed has nine organisations in its fold at present and writers involved include people like Nadine Gordimer, Don Mattera, Miriam Tlali, Keorapetse Kgositse and Ettienne van der Heever.

The organisation was, in part, formed in response to calls on writers to form a national writers' organisation so they could "act in concert and speak with one voice", says their declaration of intent.

Speakers at their recent launch included John-Willy Rudolph of Kopinor, the Norwegian reproduction rights and collecting organisation and Dr Hanan Awar, president of the Pen Centre of Palestinian Writers.

Interested parties may phone (011) 833-2530 or fax (011) 833-2532

BUSINESS DAY 9/12/86

Painful excursion among outdated, cruel perceptions

REVIEW/BOOKS

THE INNOCENCE OF ROAST CHICKEN by Jo-Anne Richards
(Headline Review, R88,95)

"I WILL go with you and be thy guide." This was the motto chosen for JM Dent's 1903 series of Everyman reprints.

The thought, in these days, was that a new mass readership would need to know how to plot their adventure in literacy and, with expert advice, make sense out of the multitude of signposts. It is as necessary now as a new wave of post-apartheid writers tell their stories.

Authors and poets have always been the antennae of the race. With massive seriousness or joking lightness, they create fields of wonder, expressing happiness or pain, giving wings to words just because they have discovered something they feel is worthy of expression. They

write to break through, to liberate and to upset.

In her first novel, Jo-Anne Richards is making available her own thoughts on a particular time and locality. It is important to place the age and attitudes. Kati, her central character, is describing. It is 1966, when the world of her Ouma's farm in the Eastern Cape is hedged with certainty. Holidays mean the love of a close-knit family with divergent political views, centred on a chicken-laden table; labourers William and Johannes outside looking after the livestock; and giggly Dora on duty at the Aga, even through the hottest summers.

The "innocence" of the title is a key word here. Kati was given the gift of a white childhood, protected from national issues of violence and dissent. She was allowed to be irresponsible and untroubled. That just does not happen now, for all young people are witnesses to bloody revolt and revolution on television from the moment they can be plucked down in front of the small screen.

Interspersed between the Christmas story of events which forever changed Kati's perception of the order of things are scenes from her married life 23 years later.

Here Richards spells out the hidden tenets of a generation only slowly learning how to adapt and refocus, to let go of taught and inherited moralities and behave without prejudice.

Thoughtful Joe is a lawyer who foresees a future in SA of infinite possibility and promise. He talks a mite self-consciously, and it is here that Richards can be seen as the beginner she is. The prose is stilted, skewed to the pedagogic and a trifle tedious, for Joe and his mining house friends are filled with the sort of liberal condescension that rapidly gets on Kati's nerves.

Richards manages to preserve, enshrine and give purpose to a past that was precious. The complex texture of human relationships, as seen by a sensitive and growing girl, only hints at the impending mismatch between ideologies. How could it be any different?

A Calvinist God was at the centre of Ouma's life. For her grandchildren, there were cool wild figs to be eaten fresh off the tree, a meerkat to entice from the bushes, dusty days and swimming in the reservoir. Yet Richards captures the growing belligerence of farm staff, the questioning of unreasonable dictates sensed but not understood by Kati.

This is a book that because of its subject matter must needs be provocative. Its youthful characters cannot be judged by their capacity for moral reasoning, but by their sincerity.

To appreciate what Richards is trying to do, one must accept old outlooks, plus an outdated, cruel perception of coloured folk in a frontier territory.

It is a painful excursion into the frankly scandalous as Richards tries to relate historical ineptitude to the way that we see things now.

Insight into privileged 'whitehood'

BETH COOPER finds a good plot and believable characters in an unmistakably South African story.

THE INNOCENCE OF ROAST CHICKEN by Jo-Anne Richards (Headline Review):

IT'S been said there is nothing much left for serious South African authors to tackle after apartheid angst and political plots.

But then, debut author Jo-Anne Richards never saw her new book as post-apartheid, though it flits between the "pre-enlightened" past of the country and its present.

Instead, the former Port Elizabeth journalist has formulated a good plot — and believable characters — which is still unmistakably, painfully, South African.

"Everyone should have a farm like that in their childhood," says Kati of her upbringing in the Eastern Cape.

"The farm itself was untouched: by ugliness, unpleasantness, poverty, politics. Or so it seemed to me. Until that particular year, when it was spoiled. Everything was spoiled."

Like Rian Malan (*My Traitor's Heart*), Richards uses the tragic cause and effect of apartheid as a literary tool and not a vehicle.

While local readers recognise the tense dance of black and white citizens around each other during the turbulent Sixties, anyone ignorant of our legacy would recognise the universality of human suffering.

Kati is a perceptive, clever girl whose "charmed and untouched" childhood is changed forever by an horrific incident on Christmas Day at her grandparents' farm.

Lulled into a sense of privileged, satiated existence, she slowly begins to notice the cracks in her own family and the fragile society around her.



Author Jo-Anne Richards.

"When I was older, I realised that, after all, I had been just a child, powerless to deflect the horror, not strong enough to be chosen as the cosmic goalie."

"Then I felt sorry for myself, until I was older still, and the guilt — more collective this time — settled again. That was when I locked myself away from all the complexing ugliness of life..."

In an interview last year, Richards told me *Innocence* was not autobiographical, but drew on the rich experience of holidays on "oupa and ouma's" farm in Gaurieng, and her years in Port Elizabeth.

The author's strong point is an ability to get right inside a character, a scene or a situation — testimony to her powers of observation.

The political turmoil of the pre-election years are sketched by the adult Kati's conversations with her long-

suffering husband Joe and their "liberal Lefty" acquaintances.

The novel is divided between past and present narratives, each told from the viewpoint of Kati as child and adult.

To illustrate just how shattered Kati was by the rude awakening of a violent, divided society, Richards expertly shifts emphasis of tone to show how divided child and adult have become.

Before her innocence is figuratively sullied, Kati's life is a pastiche of sensual images.

"I was carried, coiled in sleep, from the car, too dark and dreamy to join in the half-heard greetings and embraces."

"My cheek against his jersey, I could smell my father's strength in the comforting, sweetish sweat of his body."

"But the chill of the night air feathering my hair carried, inevitably, the essence of the farm — that fetid mixture of soil, coal smoke, chicken and pigs."

The same heavenly farm becomes hell when the child begins to discover the unfairness of life in her country.

Years later, the adult Kati — now a learned librarian and confirmed cynic — has lost all sense of beauty and sweeps from one biting intellectualism to another.

Her character is a well-rounded study of a woman too terrified to confront the demons of her past or find optimism in her future.

And the novel is a sensitive and refreshing insight into the paradox of privileged whitehood in South Africa.

Paperbacks

**CANDIDA CLARK
and JASON THOMPSON**

Patient by Ben Watt (Penguin, £6.99) — Do not be put off by the gloomy subtitle, "the true story of a rare illness". By turns funny, moving and frightening, this book describes the progress and eventual cure of a usually fatal condition, Churg-Strauss Syndrome, from which Watt was diagnosed as suffering in 1992. He underwent months of surgery, and was given a 25 per cent chance of survival. Written with the intensity and lyricism one would expect from its author — the other half of *Everything But the Girl* — Watt's is a triumphant, gripping memoir.

The Innocence of Roast Chicken by Jo-Anne Richards (Review/Headline, £6.99) — Evocative and relentlessly frank, this is none the less an uncomfortable book, where fiction and what appears to be memoir rest uneasily against one another. The story moves between the white South African narrator's threatened idyllic childhood on her Afrikaans grandparents' chicken farm in the Eastern Cape in 1966, and Johannesburg in the tumultuous post-apartheid days of 1989. The question of individual responsibility becomes nothing less than a matter of life and death.

The History of Danish Dreams by Peter Hoeg (Panther/Harvill, £6.99) — The first novel by the acclaimed author of *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* is incredibly ambitious, weaving together the lives of real and fictional characters to create a story that is at once fairy-tale, parable, family saga, castigation of and plan for a new society. Focusing on four families from the 16th to the 20th

Savages by Joe Kane (Pan, £6.99) — An Ecuadorian Indian stands at the gate of the White House. "Moi" believes he can reach the President before being arrested. But the guards are too quick, warns his companion. "I will climb the trees and hide," replies Moi. "I will pretend I am hunting monkeys." The Huarani are a nation of 1,300 nomadic warriors, a tribe so remote that their language is unrelated to any on earth. Joe Kane followed the fight to defend their land from Western interests. For an environmentalist, he is refreshingly unromantic — even funny.

A Life of Matthew Arnold by Nicholas Murray (Sceptre, £8.99) — Arnold defined literature as "the best that has been thought and said". Today his work is no more fashionable than his Gladstonian whiskers. That is unfair, says Nicholas Murray. Many of the homely Victorian's prophecies have been realised: for example, that in a secular world the hole left by God would be filled by art. In an age when the study of fine writing has succumbed to "discourse", perhaps the Arnoldian virtues will make a comeback.

Venus Flaring by Suzannah Dunn (Flamingo, £5.99) — Veronica is at the high summer of her life. With a painful sense of transience, we return to her schooldays. Her erstwhile best chum, Ornella Marini, is glamorous and restless. The pair grow up and apart, but Veronica has a great desire for reconciliation. "Losing a friend is worse than losing a lover," she reflects. "because everyone expects to lose lovers ... But why should

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THE LITERARY REVIEW

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adult life, Richards explores the plight of one woman, linking her development with that of the nation.

It is October 1999 and Kate is examining her role in the 'new South Africa'. Despite the fervour and optimism, her prognosis for the country remains bleak. She is especially wary of the white liberals, the 'self-communists, nervous ANC, T-shirt wearers', who have prospered on the celebratory bandwagon.

However, her condemnation of the chieftaincy system is a symptom of her despair, not the root of it. This can be traced to her belief in the inherent evil of human nature, which she is convinced will lead South Africa into a darkened spiral of bloody chaos.

Kate remembers how, as a child, her outlook was different. Her Afrikaans/English liberal upbringing in Port Elizabeth had shielded her from the horrors of apartheid, holding her into a sense of security, of faith in the world, its inhabitants and God. She especially enjoyed the holidays on her grandparents' farm, and she fondly recalls the childhood rituals of the magical world she inhabited.

When a new neighbour buys some of the family land, and rumours of exploitation and cruelty to the workers reach the household, signs of division appear in her world of unity. The family rift caused by political differences are exposed, and her illusion of happiness shattered. The holiday becomes an experience of tragedy and horror, culminating in an atrocity which strips Kate of her innocence, and marks her life for ever. She withdraws into herself, never to speak of it again and, as protection from the latent evil which she now believes to pervade humanity, she retreats into emotional solitude.

Anger and bitterness follow Kate into her adult life, affecting all those around her. Her marriage to Joe, an idealistic and hopeful lawyer, is a constant battle. However, during his involvement in a bloody strike he loses his idealistic illusions. As the reality of his crime is lost in the realising of pain and understanding deals with the management, he admits to Kate that her pessimism is well-founded, suggesting that neither their marriage, nor their country, holds any future for him. This serves as a catalyst for Kate's realisation that she needs his optimism as he needed her pessimism. She sees that they are both the products of damaged childhoods: his allowed too much hope; hers too little. She resolves to reveal her hidden past, and hopes that in so doing they will be able to understand their relationship, and face the future together.

The *Innocence of Roast Chicken* exposes the psyche of a damaged nation. Richards's conditional tone mirrors the current political climate in South Africa, where a nation is having to examine its past, in order that it may look forward to the future. More importantly though, Richards's first novel is a personal narrative, which steers the reader into her dreams, and the tragedies which unfold.

ANNA WORTHINGTON

A DAMAGED NATION

THE INNOCENCE OF ROAST CHICKEN

By Jo-Anne Richards
(Headline 224pp £14.99)

ANY NOVEL ATTEMPTING to address the complexities of contemporary South Africa is in danger of being overwhelmed by its subject. The problems which have plagued the country for generations have no clear end, and a lesser novelist could easily get lost in them. Jo-Anne Richards, however, has produced a political novel which at the same time is intensely personal. Through the juxtaposition of childhood memories and a story of

LONDON'S BEST SELLERS

Fiction

1. **LAST ORDERS** by Graham Swift (Picador, £15.99): Whitbread contender.
2. **HOGFATHER** by Terry Pratchett (Gollancz, £15.99): Discworld winter festival.
3. **THE TAILOR OF PANAMA** by John Le Carré (Hodder, £16.99): Spying abroad.
4. **EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF** by Beryl Bainbridge (Duckworth, £14.99): Leaving a sinking ship.
6. **DEATH IS NOW MY NEIGHBOUR** by Colin Dexter (Macmillan, £16.99): More Endeavour Morse.
- DARK HORSE — THE INNOCENCE OF ROAST CHICKEN** by Jo-Anne Richards (Headline, £16.99): Post-apartheid in South Africa.

Non-fiction

1. **MY STORY** by Sarah York (Simon and Schuster, £15.99): It sucks.
2. **EUROPE A HISTORY** by Norman Davies (OUP, £25): Monumental achievement.
3. **MY NAME ESCAPES ME** by Alec Guinness (Hamish Hamilton, £17): Out and about in London.
4. **TWO FAT LADIES** by Jennifer Peterson and Clarissa Dickson Wright (Ebury, £17.99): Yum yum.
5. **HOW FAR FROM AUSTERLITZ** by Alistair Horne (Macmillan, £20): Unbeatable Napoleon.
- DARK HORSE — POEMS ON THE UNDERGROUND** anniversary edition (Cassell, £12.99): While away the hours.

Information supplied by Books Etc, EC2; Bookshop on Islington Green, NI; Dillons, W1; Hatchards, W1; Heywood Hill, W1; Kilburn Bookshop, NW6; Stoke Newington Bookshop, N16; Waterstone's, W8.

LONDON EVENING STANDARD

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Calm down, it's educational...

This is Annie Sprinkle, an ex-prostitute and porn actress whose stage performances, using sex toys, are in earnest, and who, says Sarah Denning, in *The Mythology of Sex* (Batsford £17.99, pp220), is doing the world a favour. Sprinkle, Denning explains, is a 'carrier of Aphrodite', helping people enjoy their sexuality. Her audience can view her cervix through a speculum, giving her shows an educational flavour.

It's the sort of book everyone picks up and fervently flips through, and it makes a great conversation piece: the pictures, many of them of old paintings and engravings, are mostly inoffensive. Denning summarises attitudes to sex from 20,000 BC, when people had 'no idea of the relationship between sex and procreation', to the present, when people know about this relationship, but still, in many ways, have no idea.

The book is a pretty good, compact read. The author tells us about ancient female-worshipping societies, and how these gave way to the less peaceable societies that worshipped the male. There's a lot about tribal rites, including male and female circumcision. And if you wanted to know about the venerable tradition of offering one's wife to another member of the tribe, this is your book. **WILLIAM LEITH**

Q. What does a drug-dealer do when he wakes up one morning sprouting angel's wings? A. Well, he starts by finding a good agent

CHRISTINA PATTERSON

reviews
NEW FICTION

Of this month's selection, there are three hugely confident and accomplished debuts from Americans: David Sosenowski, Max Phillips and Laura Kasischke and interesting, but less slick offerings from South African Jo-Anne Richards and British-based Pakistani Rukhsana Ahmad.

Sosenowski's *Rapture* (Sceptre £9.99, 298pp) explores an America in the throes of a new epidemic, Angelism. Hard-living, drug-running Zander Wiles wakes up one day with strange ridges on his back. He soon has a pair of fully fledged wings and a number of logistical problems. How do you eat, sleep, go to the toilet or order a pizza when you look and feel like a 'f-seagull... on the losing end of an oil spill'? Like a good American, he finds an agent, goes public and discovers that he is not a one-off. Hysteria sweeps the nation and so do its by-products: angel merchandising, under-wing deodorants, bumper stickers and specially adapted car seats as well as support groups and militant factions. Zander enters into therapy with Cassie O'Connor, author of *Angel Blues* and guest of Prah, and they embark on a problematic, if entertaining, love affair.

Sosenowski's extended metaphor allows for endless satirical possibilities. It is, of course, like Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, largely about Aids, but also takes in New Age philosophies, the obsession with 'therapies of all kinds and issues relating to disability, prejudice, addiction and political radicalism. The psycho-babble, AA meetings and dialogue are all hilarious. On the down side, you sometimes feel that the narrating voice is addicted to its own wit and that truth is sacrificed to wisecracks.

The same problem occurs in Max Phillips's *Snakebite Sonnet* (Abacus £9.99, 378pp), but it is more effectively resolved. Here, the rapture is one of sexual obsession and it strikes the narrator at the age of 10. Irritatingly precocious, Nicky grows up with a twin sister, Del, and intensely liberal parents, who show them how to use a condom when they're five. Nicky and Del teach each other how to snog, but Nicky's morose of repressed passion is for the older, glamorous Julia, whom he saves (he thinks) from a snakebite. Julia is left with a scar, Nicky with a lifetime of unrequited desire that haunts him through a catalogue of unsuccessful relationships.

This story is bursting with self-deprecating irony and witty, erotic sexual encounters. It's about the poison of sexual obsession as well as the pain and banality of being in love. The dialogue is often too polished, but Phillips makes a point about this too. "You know what I can't stand? Your sense of humour. See, even in my misery, I can still ring out the old one-liners." The novel moves from frivolity into something more profound and the reader, too, is smitten by its sweetness.

Sexual obsession is also the theme of Laura Kasischke's profoundly unsettling *Suspicious River* (Faber £9.99, 271pp), here unmitigated by sweetness or laughter. An award-winning poet, Kasischke writes with stark compression and unflinching precision about violence and desire. Leila, bored hotel receptionist, develops a lucrative sideline in oral sex, but things begin to spiral out of control when she meets new client, Gary Jensen. He hits her during sex, apologises and then ensnares her in a duplicitously tender relationship as lover and, it gradually emerges, pimp.

The complexity of this - Leila's growing dependence, pathetic gratitude and, yes, consuming desire - is portrayed with shocking clarity in taut prose, full of startling images. Scenes from the violent present are intercut with painful memories,

revealing a tortuous legacy of damage and despair. The narrative has a strong cinematic feel, combining visual detail with the brevity of a screenplay. The result is brutally beautiful and disturbingly erotic.

There is bitterness and blood, too, in Jo-Anne Richards's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (Headline Review £16.99, 248pp), a tale of lost innocence set in South Africa in the final years of apartheid. The story is told by Kati, a cynical white thirty-something married to Joe, a human rights lawyer. It switches between the prelapsarian childhood idyll of her Afrikaner grandparents' farmhouse, lusciously evoked, and Johannesburg in 1989, 'a time of great sparkling euphoria, delicately balancing on the very verge of change'.

Kati's own hope has been shattered by an incident that took place in 1966, the horrifying nature of which is not revealed until the very end of the book. A sense of foreboding pervades the entire narrative, both the delicate lyricism of the childhood world and the brittle acerbity of the adult voice, which casts an icy eye on the woolly liberalism of Joe's friends. Richards's descriptions are occasionally a little over-written, her psychologising a touch overstated, but this is a fresh and memorable addition to the literature of apartheid.

Rukhsana Ahmad's *The Hope Chest* (Virago £6.99, 307pp) is more interesting for its insight into Pakistani life and society than for the quality of its prose. The 'hope chest' is what Shahana and Saeed use to store clothes for their daughter Rani's longed-for wedding. Unfortunately, Rani delays these hopes by becoming anorectic and languishing in an expensive Chelsea hospital. This is juxtaposed with glimpses of rural poverty, arranged marriages and abortion in Pakistan.

Ahmad is a good storyteller, effectively interweaving the different strands and making angry comments about the role of women in a Muslim society - not to be taken for granted in these Taliban times.

ZINDERENDE ROMAN VAN JO-ANNE RICHARDS

Onschuld bestaat niet in Zuid-Afrika

0747277265

JO-ANNE RICHARDS:
THE INNOCENCE OF BOAST CHICKEN
Headline Review, 134,50

Oft zag ik op een wernoodige
vredesmiddag in Andalus
hopen het ondergaan van de
zee, de kleine Spaanse club Ingo
naar gelijkspeelers tegen Sevilla.
Landsdien walg ik de witslagen van
legers op de voet. Ze spelen bij
na altijd gelijk.

In mei van dit jaar was ik tien da-
gen in Zuid-Afrika, een land dat me
tot dan toe koud had gelaten.

"Ik had er niks mee," zoals sommig-
e mensen het formuleren. Dat je
ergens geweest moet zijn om er
waarsame voor te kunnen opbrengen,
lijkt uit mijn dagelijkse speur-
tocht naar boekjes informatie uit
Zuid-Afrika, ook toegewezen door
correspondenten en perlbouters.

Die wetenswaardigheden zijn nog
steeds doordrenkt van politiek,
niet verwonderlijk voor een land
dat zijn bekendheid in de wereld
dankt aan de legendarische tot voor
kort van een politiek die elders
slechts diep in de nacht, verborgen
in het dichtste bos, fluisterend ver-
woordt wordt door gemaskerde
mannen met pomptanten op.

Dat ook de witte land afkomstige
literatuur politieke tendensen
heeft, zal niemand verbazen, al is
het streven naar apartheid innid-
dels verbanen naar het rijk van de
pomptanten en een slinkend aan-

tal Boeren, al sinds 1835 op de
vlucht voor democratie.

Toch is politiek niet de hoofdzaak
in de zinderende roman van Jo-
Anne Richards: *The Innocence of*
Boast Chicken.

Ofschoon de Boerenoorlog nog al-
tijd woedt gestreden wanneer het
zevenjarige Engelse meisje, de
hoofdpersoon van het boek, tot
haar tiendeertjes tijds een kreutz-
kantie de kennismaking heren-
wen met de Afrikaanderstak van
hun familie. Zelfs de voertaal tij-
dens het diner is al een probleem.
Het oudste broertje schroomt niet
om het cricketverlag op het Afri-
kaanse station enigzins neerbui-
gend te waarderen.

"Ik vind het leuk hoe ze er een heel
andere sport van maken. Het is niet
het cricket zoals wij het spelen,
maar ze maken het opwindender,
als een gladstroomgevecht eigen-
lijk." "Hy kom, en hy kom, en hy-
kommen hy kom en hy BOU!" laat
de schrijver de vertelster zeg-
gen. Dan wordt er toch maar naar
het beschafteerde geluid van de in-
geestige zender overgeschakeld.
Het is een romantisch beeld van
een landelijk Zuid-Afrika dat de
schrijver schildert in het grootste
deel van de roman.

In het laatste is de zevenjarige
hoofdpersoon een volwassen
vrouw geworden, getrouwd met
een idealistische advocaat. Het ru-
zende echtpaar woont in Johan-



Jo-Anne Richards

nesburg ten tijde van de onwente-
ling.

Het is opvallend hoe de stijl veran-
dert in de hoofdstukken dat de au-
teur terugschakelt naar het verle-
den. Cynische dialogen en korte
commentaarzinnetjes worden dan
lyrische, langlopende alinea's in
het moesige Engels dat we kennen
van Evelyn Waugh in zijn nostalgi-
sche hagiografie van Engelse land-
huizen *Brideshead Revisited*.

Jo-Anne Richards probeert ook iets
op te roepen: de onbezorgde jeugd
van een kind op de boerderij van
haar grootouders in het ongerepte
'veld', een idylle van eenvoud in
een maatschappij die al begint te
woelen.

"I wandered past the fig tree and
through the orchard, filled with
peach, apricot, plums and loquat
trees, following the route I knew
Gama would have taken in the
boys' quarters. It was cool under
the trees and I stopped at the edge
of the shade to eat mulberries.
Crushing the ripe fruit into my
mouth, my hands and bare feet
stained a dark red and I could see a
spreading droplet that was going
to mean trouble later: crawling
down my T-shirt on to the vest
which habitually hung out over my
shorts." En zoals die druppel heren-
stap het schone T-shirt bevlekt,
zal de onschuld van het leven in
een arcaïsch Zuid-Afrika onber-
oepelijk aangetast worden door
het dreigende gerommel van de
maatschappij.

Voor de Nederlandse lezer is het
even slikken bij de vernietigende
typering van onze geëinigende
voorzitters, de Boeren, een men-
schensoort die nog het meest doet
denken aan horden woelhabuppor-
ters op het oorlogspad.

Ondanks de gestroomde structuur
van flashback en forward, is de
schrijver, voorheen een van Zuid-
Afrika's bekendste journalisten,
erin geslaagd subtiel verbanden
zichtbaar te maken tussen die al-
ways gecorrumpereerde rakende
idylle aan de Kaap en de naïveten
waarmee de echtgenoot van de
hoofdpersoon zijn ideaal van Mas-

del's Rainbow Nation mastreeft.
Onschuld bestaat niet, luidt de con-
clusie.

Een hilarisch hoofdstuk beschrijft
een massa-bijeenkomst in het sta-
dion van Soweto waar het volk bij-
eengekomen is om zijn vrijgelaten
leiders toe te juichen.
De manier waarop Jo-Anne koste-
nieten maakt met de blijheid en
de illusies om haar heen, doet sterk
denken aan de gehaktmolen waar-
in P.J. O'Rourke keer op keer zijn
oude idolen van de staties propst.
Ze citeert het gelicht van de optre-
dende 'liberation poet'.

Welcome the leaders
The leaders of the people
Welcome the leaders
They will free the people
Welcome the leaders
Of our land
Africa
Our land
The people shall govern
This land.

Met zulke dichters heb je geen kni-
cken nodig.
Jo-Anne Richards verwierf haar be-
kendheid in het midden van de ja-
ren tachtig door haar publicaties
over folteringen in gevangenis-
sen. Ze trotseerde de dreiging van ge-
vangenisstraf met haar weigeren
bronnen te noemen. Uiteindelijk
werd ze van een veroordeling ge-
wijwaard doordat de arts van we-

Parool
13/12/96

ze de details had getuigd, zich be-
kendmaakte.

The Innocence of Boast Chicken, al ver-
biedend boeizaam de bestsellerlijst
in Zuid-Afrika en vertien dagen
geleden vertrokken in Engeland, is
niet alleen een belangwekkende no-
man omdat hij zo goed geschreven
is.

Het boek gaat ergens over en dat is,
in de context van Nix, een lichte op-
luchting.

HENK SPAN



THE SUNDAY TIMES 7 section

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Maureen Freely brings Daphne du Maurier's anti-heroine up-to-date in *The Other Rebecca* (Bloomsbury £14.99) by turning her into Sylvia Plath. The re-vamped Rebecca is an American writer whose bitterly confessional novel *The Marriage Hearse* is hailed as a feminist classic after her death. Her craggily handsome, well-born English husband is a womanising poet, labelled "Mad Max" Midwinter by reporters who blame him for her death; while sinister Mrs Danvers becomes a batty acolyte editing —

and re-writing — her idol's letters. Freely uses the naive new wife, who finds herself living in her predecessor's fiction, to comment shrewdly on English snobbery and the problems of second marriages. But though she rings the changes with comic verve, ingenuity, and insight into the continuing power of her prototypes, her characters never quite cut loose into independent life.

Peggy, the narrator of Elizabeth McCracken's remarkable first novel *The Giant's House* (Jonathan Cape £9.99) is a librarian in a small Cape Cod town, "less a woman than a piece of civic furniture". Only 25, but safely settled into old maid's routines, the cool, pedantic Peggy mocks her own dreams of "kisses that wouldn't be delivered". But one day in 1950, 11-year-old James — impossibly tall for his age, already nick-named the town giant — comes

into her library, and the pair tentatively become friends. Peggy's liking for the boy turns to obsession, and she patiently insinuates herself into his family and his life. Realising that James cannot live long, she makes up her mind with ruthless simplicity: she will love him, and "never care what others thought of me, or even what he was thinking of me." The relationship that she wills into being becomes increasingly complex. Peggy's compassion for James, whose enormous, fragile body is "killing him just with its growth", turns into fierce, physical passion. James, handling his role as circus freak with quiet dignity, needs Peggy but hankers after easy flirtations with other teenagers. The lucid, compelling prose convinces us that this mismatched pair do become a real couple: improbably, disturbingly, and very movingly, theirs is a true love story.

Jo-Ann Richards displays a wonderful feeling for place and period in *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (Headline Review £16.99). Kate is miserably out-of-step in 1989 Johannesburg, newly — and, she feels, naively — euphoric about political change. Drinking heavily, quarrelling with her human-rights lawyer husband, she sits isolated but observant, through an enormous, ebullient black-white rally. Kate blames her cynicism on a traumatic incident in 1966, the last of her idyllic summers on her Afrikaans grandparents' chicken farm. Richards handles the juxtaposition between past and present, and the countdown to horror, a shade schematically; but her prose is sharply evocative, and she conjures up the child's powerful feelings with a vividness intensified by nostalgia.

Margaret Walters

Down on the farm

The Innocence of Roast Chicken

by Jo-Anne Richards
224pp, Headline, £16.99

Kate Herbert

THE title of Jo-Anne Richards's first novel is a natural kooky-name contest contender. But *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* makes sense on a farm where children do not connect cherished farmyard pets, albeit chickens, with what is served up on the table. To discover the connection is to realise one of the unpalatable truths about growing up. And these roast chickens provide an analogy for harsher truths in a story of innocence suddenly and brutally lost.

Kate is a bright, young South African woman rendered incapable of sharing her country's hope and optimism by her experiences one Christmas on her grandparents' farm. A cynical and despairing adult, she cannot stomach the naivety of her liberal husband and friends as apartheid looks set to end. Cleverly constructed, Kate's story switches between an account of her own loss of innocence that Christmas holiday

and the current breakdown in her relationship with her husband and country.

Richards is best when describing, through the eyes of the seven-year-old Kate, the original Eden that is life on the East Cape farm. The farm comes alive through evocative and personal descriptions with such a close attention to detail it is easy to presume the novel is at least partly autobiographical (which it is not). The sections focusing on the older Kate's destructive relationship with her easy-going husband are interesting and necessary, but you itch to get back to the farm and the build-up to the specific incident that shattered the young child's dreams.

Unlike many South African books of the last two decades, this novel does not appear to be of political intent. It provides a slice in the life of ordinary middle-class whites living in South Africa in the turbulent last days of apartheid. Such politics as it has are drawn along the fine line between hope and despair so central to children in general and South African adults in particular.

The treatment of English liberals is fresh in its frankness; neither martyrs or heroes, Richards's ordinary folk are loyal and optimistic — and naive and self-important. Not many writers would have been in a position to criticise the great liberal cause before 1989-90.

With luck, *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* will help pave the way for a new genre of simple and honest South African story-telling.

The Guardian 20/2/97