

Resensies/Reviews

Reading Lady Anne's tales of gossip and debauchery

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The Cape Diaries of Lady Anne Barnard 1799-1800, vols 1 and 2

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This latest collection of Lady Anne Barnard's writing consists of the previously unpublished and unrevised diaries she kept in the Cape between 1799 and 1800. Each of the Van Riebeeck Society publications covers a year of her reflections on life at the Cape. In this sense the diaries are a sequel to her published journals, *The Cape Journals of Lady Anne Barnard 1797-1798*, edited by A. M. Lewin Robinson with Margaret Lenta and Dorothy Driver, also published by the Van Riebeeck Society (Cape Town, 1994) and are also a companion to the letters she wrote to Henry Dundas, *The Letters of Lady Anne Barnard to Henry Dundas*, edited by A. M. Lewin Robinson and published by Balkema (Cape Town, 1973). The diaries, however, differ from her other writing in that they were never intended for further scrutiny and so contain a wealth of detail not available elsewhere (though some thought may perhaps be given to Lady Anne's express wish that this writing of hers never be made public (Vol I: 301).

Lady Anne has been written about extensively elsewhere (one CD Rom search turned up 90 publications mentioning or dealing with her).¹ It is therefore not my intention to attempt a literary analysis of her work – or the effect of her gender on her work (as has so eloquently been discussed by *inter alia* Margaret Lenta and Dorothy Driver).² Rather I will concentrate on her reflections about other people since Lady Anne was both social voyeur and raconteur *par excellence*.

One of Lady Anne's abiding themes lay in the character of, and her relationship with, her young relative Anne Barnard. Young Anne acts as a foil to Lady Anne throughout the diaries, her insipid, unwomanly and rather pathetic behaviour constituting an unspoken contrast to Lady Anne's more intrepid, proactive, but still quintessentially feminine character. It is difficult to know whether she was as insipid in fact, or whether Lady Anne just chose to portray her in that way.

1. Search of South African Studies CD-Rom database, January 1999 edition, in August 1999.

Lenta, M. 'Degrees of Freedom: Lady Anne Barnard's Cape diaries', *English in Africa*, 19 (1992) 55-68; Driver, D. 'Lady Anne Barnard's "Cape journals" and the concept of self-othering', *Pretexis*, 5 (1995) 46-65.

When she contemplated marriage, Lady Anne was rather scathing about Anne's pool of suitors:

(I)t would be a match of more inclination & cheerfulness less with Col. C. than with Col. M: the first I believe is petulant & not good temperd but he is young - Handsome - has I hope rather a good heart & may be led right by sense & sweetness - the other is yellow, sickly peevish & ill temperd too, he might be led I dare say, but some dogs are more worth the leading than others - I should not like to marry the Col. Atall myself, and often wonderd how Anne could envisage it with so much satisfaction (vol I: 17).

Shortly after, when Anne the younger contemplated Colonel Crauford's proposal, Lady Anne felt compelled to remind the younger woman of his reduced means. Anne's reply was typically shortsighted declaring, according to Lady Anne, a wish to economise by giving up the wearing of silk gowns.

(I)nshort I found the amount of Annes sacrifices were to give up all the things what were not agreeable to her and to wear muslin gowns instead (Vol I: 25).

After the Crauford's married, young Anne wrote to Lady Anne about feeling bilious, apparently discounting the possibility that she might be pregnant. Lady Anne reported her as asking if she

may take a vomit ... I shall tell her by all means if she wishes to be Hangd ... as it is exactly what all women do who wish to destroy a little one they don't choose shoud appear (Vol I: 97-98).

Neither painful childbirth (a measure of redemption?) nor maternal instinct were granted her (Vol I: 347). For Lady Anne, who never found it possible to have children and clearly felt some regret in this regard (Vol I: 100) it might have been frustration at Anne's youth and prospects which prompted her to write in such a way about someone of whom she was at the same time, clearly quite fond.

This is only one example of the personal and professional relationships which occupied the bulk of Lady Anne's writing. For this reason she dwelt at length on Andrew's feud with neighbours over their participation in a civilian militia. Relations with Major Dundas, the acting governor of the Cape, and subsequently the new governor, Sir George Young, also occupied much space in her diaries. The former resented Andrew's position as Secretary very much - both the fact that it was a civilian position and also because Andrew clearly had favoured status with his uncle, Sir Henry Dundas. An ongoing saga in the diaries is the allocation of official housing to be made after the arrival of the new governor, which co-incided with the nuptials of the former bachelor, Major Dundas.

Lady Anne's personal concerns, however, did not prevent her from writing about matters which touched less directly on the Barnards. Her friendship with many of the leading Dutch families at the Cape (done to declare a political independence from the military establishment at the Cape as much as anything else) gave her interesting views on the progress of the second Frontier War, between the Dutch and the Xhosa on the eastern frontier. Many of her comments about events at the Cape were gathered from her Dutch friends, since it seems to have been her husband's policy not to involve her too heavily in discussions about his work.

Reviews

In writing this review, I spent some time trying to think of what I could write about Lady Anne that would be new. Her writing has been extensively discussed, not least by herself. Much has also been written about the currents within her writing. This, however, does not detract from the value of Lady Anne's writing. The only other historical account of the Cape in the eighteenth century that I have enjoyed as much recently has been Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon* (London: Vintage, 1998) - a labyrinthine and vernacular representation of the lives of the two surveyors who eventually demarcated the northern states of America from an aboriginal wilderness, but whose surveying journey began in the Cape. Their tale is equally full of gossip and debauchery, though less tastefully and discreetly phrased.

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