

Jill Weintroub's book provides an intellectual biography of Dorothea Bleek, daughter of Wilhelm Bleek and niece of Lucy Lloyd, and also their immediate heir in terms of Bushman research. Bleek and Lloyd worked with /Xam and !Kung informants in their home in Cape Town in the 1870s to produce nearly 12,000 notebook pages of narrative, history and cultural information in the /Xam language with English translations. Dorothea learned /Xam from Lucy Lloyd and continued her father and aunt's work of translating material from the /Xam into English. She later published both folklore and cultural material from the notebooks and also completed the *Bushman Dictionary* that her distinguished forbears had begun. The dictionary was only published in 1956, thanks to the indefatigable efforts of her niece Marjorie Scott and Marjorie's husband Dick, evidence that Dorothea exerted as strong an influence on her immediate family as William and Lucy had done on her. Dorothea Bleek emerges in Weintroub's book as pivotal to the development of what today could be described as Bushman or San studies. Although she was only two when her father died, she was very close to Lucy Lloyd to the end of the older woman's life. Weintroub suggests that Bleek's dedication to Bushman studies can be attributed to her intimacy with Lucy and also to her idealisation of the father she never knew. As a child she also interacted on a daily basis with the /Xam and !Kung informants who lived in the household.

In some ways Weintroub's book complements Andrew Bank's *Bushmen in a Victorian World* (2006). In Bank's book, Dorothea does not receive anything like the attention accorded Wilhelm Bleek, Lucy Lloyd and the /Xam informants. She was only a child when the Bleek-Lloyd project was at its height, after all, and much of her life was not lived in the Victorian period. At first glance it is odd that Dorothea, a lesser figure in the central Bleek-Lloyd epic, should be the only one of the major actors to be accorded a full-length biography. But Wilhelm Bleek, as Bank's book makes clear, set out to preserve something of the /Xam language and culture of a people he felt would inevitably vanish before the forces of modernisation. Weintroub describes Dorothea Bleek's Bushman research as being motivated by a similar salvage imperative. Her own book could in turn be described as a project to salvage Dorothea's reputation and legacy as a scholar. As we read Weintroub's book, we realise that she salvages not only Bleek's life and contribution to scholarship, but a whole era of intellectual work. As the book shows, Dorothea Bleek served as the vital bridge between the Bleek-Lloyd era and the work of David Lewis-Williams, Roger Hewitt and the other pioneers of contemporary work on rock art and Bushman narrative in the 1970s. Through detailing Bleek's fieldwork, it also positions her as a forerunner of the ethnographic and linguistic work on Bushman groups that proliferated later in the twentieth century.

The book reveals Bleek to be a courageous and pioneering scholar, remarkably so in a scholarly environment that was dominated by men. One of the book's photographs shows a young Bleek seated amidst a group of scholars at a conference in

Berlin in the 1890s. She is the only woman. The importance she attached to fieldwork is especially impressive in this context. She travelled very widely in the region, as far as Angola and Tanganyika, often on her own or with another woman researcher. Bleek and Lloyd brought informants into their home; Dorothea went into the field to find them. Her research encompassed almost all the Bushman groups of the region and had a lot to do with the development of the not always unproblematic delineation of Bushmen as a distinct group across the region with a specific identity. While Dorothea is best known for her language work and her continuation of her father and aunt's /Xam project, the book shows that she also has to be considered as a major figure in the history of southern African rock art research, conducting field research and publishing books of copies at various periods throughout her working life.

One of the remarkable facts about Dorothea's work was her objectivity, or perhaps her capacity to live with uncertainty, a kind of intellectual humility. The book begins with a quote from one of her letters to Käthe Woldmann, written in 1936: 'It is my wish that when a translation of the collection of my father and aunt is published, it is simply offered to the world, without comments or interpretation in whatsoever form' (1). She eschewed the conjectures of contemporaries such as Leo Frobenius and recorded ethnographic and linguistic information without supplying much external commentary. This approach was perhaps most apparent in her rock art work. She insisted on accurate copying, including the background surface of the rock, without conjectural interpretation.

In some ways Weintroub supplies a similarly objective view of her subject. She does not downplay the darker sides of the racialised academic practices of the period with which Dorothea was complicit, helping to collect skeletal remains for measurement, for example, and sometimes revealing a patronising attitude towards Bushmen. A striking contrast with the Bleek-Lloyd work is the absence of a sense of individual Bushman informants as people in Dorothea's work. Partly this can be attributed to the relative brevity of her field trips and also to her project of recording language and other 'objective' social facts rather than the genealogies and personal histories that formed part of the broader /Xam project. She was convinced that 'language provided the key to understanding the "soul" of a people, in her case the bushmen' (2).

Weintroub refuses to gloss over the more disturbing parts of Dorothea's research. Nor does she ritualistically invoke the habitual excuse that scholarship has to be located in its time and period rather than judged anachronistically in terms of contemporary understanding. Rather she shows that Bleek's failings are only part of a complex research endeavour, which should be appraised in its entirety. Weintroub turns to photographs, for example, to show that a relatively easy and familiar relationship probably existed between Dorothea and her field assistants. She notes that Dorothea's insistence on the 'indigenous authorship' of the rock art countered a lot of less progressive thinking on the subject in the 1920s and 1930s (6). Nor did Dorothea believe that the Bushmen were a relic from the Stone Age who were incapable of change and adaptation (161). She accepts Darwin's idea of descent from apes on the grounds that she respects baboons and finds primitive man more advanced than modern man in many regards. She notes in a letter to Käthe Woldmann that the Bushman

understanding of baboons would mean that the idea of descent from apes would ‘not be unfamiliar or repulsive’ to them (162). For Bushmen, she says, there ‘is no great divide between man and animal in their thinking’ (149). Weintroub’s book as a whole demonstrates that Dorothea’s dedication to Bushman rock art, narrative research and language can scarcely be considered dismissive of the Bushman achievement and outweighs some of the limitations inherent in her attitudes.

Weintroub’s book is an intellectual biography, a genre in which one expects to learn something of both the person and their ideas. Despite Weintroub’s access to Dorothea’s field notes and her long correspondence with Käthe Woldmann, Dorothea seems to resist biography. She reveals very little of herself in these sources, although this reticence is itself revealing. At times she shows her impatience with other scholars, chiefly males, and also with speculative thought with no foundation in fact. Käthe is in thrall to Rudolph Steiner but Dorothea acerbically remarks: ‘Children’s fairy tales, folktales I enjoy, but so-called “scientific tales” I do not like.’ (163) Here we glimpse a sharp and satirical sense of humour, but such glimpses are few and far between. Bleek’s field notes reveal that she also had an acute eye for the landscape and a love of natural beauty. She enjoyed lifelong friendships and her intimate family clearly held her in high regard. Dick Scott describes her as a ‘great-hearted lady’ whose ‘cheery companionship, hard work and quiet confidence’ were an inspiration (153). But her sexuality and emotional life remain a mystery. She was single throughout her life and clearly preferred the company of women to men, not least as co-researchers.

More we cannot learn from the book, and Weintroub refuses to speculate. In fact she turns the intractability of her biographical subject to advantage; instead of focusing on Bleek’s personality she offers an intriguing insight into the ideas that influenced Dorothea and the changing intellectual milieu in which she moved, both in Germany and at the Cape. The external facts about Dorothea’s life are rich enough to compensate for the lack of access to her subjectivity: she grew up in a household that was at the centre of Cape intellectual life and also was home for Bushman adults and children. She lived as an adolescent and young adult in Germany and experienced its rich intellectual life. She explored the rock shelters of the Cape, recording rock art with her fellow teacher and friend, Helen Tongue. She travelled extensively in remote regions of southern Africa at a time when it was arduous to do so.

The book gives more space to Bleek’s field work and her research on rock art and language studies than to her contribution to folklore studies. Her collection of /Xam stories *The Mantis and His Friends* (1923) deserves more attention, in my opinion. Despite Dorothea’s claim to present evidence objectively rather than interpret it, she combines different texts in order to create new versions of stories in this book. The principles underlying her selections from the /Xam notebooks for the Bantu Studies series could also have benefited from more examination. Bleek’s extraordinary dedication to the linguistic work of her father emerges in the detailed account of her struggles to complete *A Bushman Dictionary*. The significant contribution to the dictionary of Dorothea’s own linguistic endeavours among the Bushman languages of the region also becomes evident in Weintroub’s book. The chapters on rock art show convincingly that Dorothea’s contribution in this field was immense and hasn’t been

fully evaluated. The book might have delineated later trends in rock art studies more carefully that could have benefited from Dorothea's mistrust of interpretation and preference for 'sampling and collection' (29) but to do so would probably have courted the sort of academic controversy that Dorothea herself seems consciously to have avoided. Instead the author points out how Dorothea's approach anticipates some recent trends in both rock art research and studies of Bushman narrative.

The book convincingly makes the case for the need for a full length study of this important scholar and goes on to provide it. It adds to the growing body of scholarship on scholars in South Africa and the role of women scholars more particularly, covering a period that is foundational to several disciplines. It avoids academic jargon, reads well and will be of interest to a general educated readership while also stimulating new lines of scholarly enquiry.

Michael Wessels

Department of English, University of the Western Cape