

# Anthony Egan NEW NON-FICTION

**HOW CAN MAN DIE BETTER: THE LIFE OF ROBERT SOBUKWE** by Benjamin Pogrund (Jonathan Ball, R97,95)

**H**AD he not died in February 1978, Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe would have been 73 this year. He would probably have played a prominent role in South Africa's democratic transition. Journalist Benjamin Pogrund first encountered Sobukwe when Sobukwe was lecturing in Zulu at Wits university. He was among those who broke away from the African National Congress in the late Fifties to form the Pan Africanist Congress. After the shootings at Sharpeville in 1960, Sobukwe was arrested, sentenced to three years for incitement, and imprisoned. The State then instituted the notorious "Sobukwe Clause", which allowed him to be kept on Robben Island in perpetuity. Six years later he was banished to Kimberley, where he remained until his death nine years later. This, then, is a story of a remarkable South African; it is also the story of his friendship with Pogrund, of their discussions and debates. Through them we see quite deeply into Sobukwe's personality and political thought. In time one hopes to see a more detailed, analytical political biography of Sobukwe; in the meantime this deeply-felt and well-written account — first published in 1990 and now reissued — is to be highly recommended.

**FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN PAST: NARRATIVES, DOCUMENTS AND DEBATES** edited by John A Williams (Houghton Mifflin, R140)

**S**OUTH AFRICA is a fashionable subject on which to publish at the moment, and the subgenre of collected "documentation" is particularly popular. Alison Drew's two-volume selection on the South African left (reviewed recently in these pages) is an example of this at its best. Not so in the case of this book, which has the feel of an undergraduate "reading-pack". It is made up almost entirely of excerpts from published, mostly secondary, sources, most of which are readily available to readers who care to visit libraries. Moreover, the selection of texts is at times eccentric — there are surely better, more scholarly works on the Eighties conflict between the United Democratic Front and the Azanian People's Organisation, for example, than a localised and descriptive piece by Rian Malan.



**Izwe lethu iAfrika: Robert Sobukwe in his Robben Island cell, from How Can Man Die Better. See our giveaway of this book on the opposite page**

**DRAGONSTRIKE: THE MILLENNIUM WAR** by Humphrey Hawksley & Simon Holberton (Sidgwick & Jackson, R79)

**N**OW that the Soviet Union is no more it had to happen that China would become the "baddie" of future historians — those who write about imaginary future scenarios as though they had already happened. In this book, China launches an attack on Vietnam as part of a regional land-grab in 2001, and the situation escalates into a Far Eastern — and potentially global — war. The result is Tom Clancy stuff without the compulsive page-turning narrative. One also wonders when we'll get a "future history" depicting a United States-initiated local war (an invasion of Mexico?) set up by a scheming president needing to divert public opinion away from socio-economic — or perhaps personal — problems at home.

**THE TAO OF MUHAMMAD ALI** by Davis Miller (Vintage, R62,95)

**W**OVEN into this book is an account of sports-writer Davis Miller's ongoing friendship with the great American boxer Muhammad Ali. Much of the book is autobi-

ographical, telling the story of Miller's own struggle to become a freelance writer amid economic hardship and the tragic loss of his father. Though Miller has an engaging style, the book is just too unfocused to hold one's attention. He has almost tried to write two books — a memoir of Ali and his own autobiography. Though US reviewers have raved about it, I found it rather disappointing.

**PRISONER OF POWER: THE GREG BLANK STORY** by Rex Gibson (Zebra, R79,95)

**G**REG BLANK, the stockbroker convicted of fraud who transformed the Krugersdorp prison while he was inside, is the subject of Rex Gibson's not-overlong biography. Its all stirring stuff, somewhat reminiscent of mainstream motivational literature. Unfortunately one would have liked much more of an analytical approach: Gibson does go into some of the intricacies of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the Office for Serious Economic Offences and the prison system, but not enough. So much could have been made of Blank's story and the economic-political forces operating around him. It is something South Africans should know more about; it is not sufficiently examined here.

Robert Sobukwe Papers

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