

## VANESSA COOKE

"There's an innocence. She loves her dogs and her flowers. But she is very vulnerable. There's a complete trust there that makes her life all the more horrible."

Vanessa Cooke is talking about her character, Mol - one of South African literature's most evocative, disturbing and tragic figures, brought to life through the artistry of writer van Niekerk.

Cooke said she started out with the idea that the film would be in English and, upon discovering it was in Afrikaans, she wondered if she would be retained. Raeburn wanted no-one else for the role, which requires emotional remoteness and emotional depth in equal measure.

Cooke's performance is so perfectly contextualised within white poverty that it was inevitable that she was reminded of another role she loved doing: Sissie in Athol

Fugard's *People Are Living There*.

"The issue of poor whites is not dealt with often enough in the arts," she says, "so even that play was quite unusual in that respect."

"But I have thought about it a lot, and about how we dealt with some of the horrible issues at that time."

Undoubtedly, the most wearying aspect of Mol's life is dealing with Treppie, her brother, and Lambert, her son. The conflictual and incestuous relationships between the four main characters - this includes her "relative", Pop - certainly dishearten and help to destroy her, with the men's own intense lack of meaning in their lives making hers all the more difficult.

Fortunately, there are the dogs, and Cooke has grown close to "actor" Cindy, a *brak* who plays the adored Gerty in the film. She and Cindy are seldom apart and she admits that it is going to be tough for both of them when they have to part at the end of the shoot. The pair have had to "talk" to each other a lot, as the script dictates.

"You think I'm talking a lot of rubbish, hey Gerty?" says Mol in the book. And so it is. A lot of rubbish, a lot of love. Perhaps the only real love?

Cooke, who has been one of South Africa's most important theatre-makers through apartheid and reconciliation, has taken a break from her directorship at the Market Laboratory to film *Triomf*.



## PAM ANDREWS

"People were telling me to snap out of it. They just couldn't understand why I seemed to have lost faith in myself. But I felt like I had, or like something had gone out of it for me. So, I basically just took a break, but now I'm back - and this is best thing that's happened to me."

This is the more grown-up Pam Andrews, all the wiser. Hers was the classic modern TV fairy-tale. She was the ghetto teenager in the winning group from a music reality show, who became a major TV soap star. Soon she was a princess of the scandal pages, the idiosyncratic slash of her fashion sense attracting all the wrong attention.

But it was all overwhelming, suddenly, a few months ago, so "I fell off the kerb". This was destiny being kind to Andrews, if one considers that it was during her drop-out that she turned down a small part in the no-hoper, *Starship Troopers*. Had she done that movie, *Triomf* may have eluded her.

Director Michael Raeburn fell for her - apparently after seeing her on TV when he had already auditioned other, perhaps bigger, stars like Kim Engelbrecht for the role of the hooker, Mary.

"I can't explain it really," says Andrews with a grin, "because the director just seemed to believe I was right for the part. Almost from the get-

go, he was talking about shooting dates and what to do with my hair.

"It was like the gods were with me.

"My family was so excited when I got a part in this movie. They made a big dinner for me and we all celebrated. I mean, this is something. I'm 23-years-old, and I'm in a movie that is going to be big. One of the reasons why I'm sure about that is just the way they treat us. Are you hungry? Do you need a blanket? Anything we can get you?"

Andrews the celebrity has worn her hair in every possible way, and for this role, she has to have it overlong and platinum. It's almost as if she drafted in a Bratz doll to help her design the look.

But Andrews is big on change, stepping out of one part of her life and into another to mix it up. So she regards a recent dangerous fall through a glass door as somehow symbolic, in spite of the reality of long, fresh scars on the back of her right arm and others on her wrist. She considers it a sign.

"This movie is giving me a different perspective. I mean, this character is a high-class prostitute, she's quite expensive. She's seen a lot, and maybe her heart is a bit rough, but I love her so much. She's got depth. She's not just this uh-huh-huh kinda person. She's come out of tough circumstances. I admire that."

# TRIUMPHANTLY DISILLUSIONED

BY JANET SMITH

The Ford Granada's sunroof is Sellotaped shut. All around is the layered gloom of dirt. There's the infamous mass art shame on the wall, the lonely rose and the glass of water. The screen of the Trinitron TV set is smashed in, but it's still there, on its doily - as always, the focal point in the lounge.

There are too many yellow porcelain dogs to count, too many that are broken. And too many goblins and elves, dwarves and pixies in the scrapheap of a postage stamp-sized garden. Most are damaged, kicked in, leaning to the left with smashed faces.

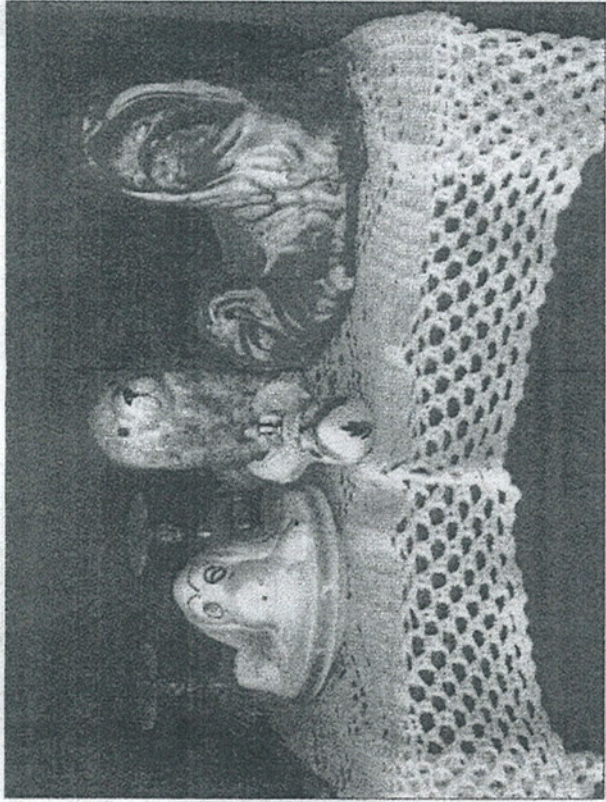
You'd be impressed by the art and props departments' tenacity in sourcing all these accoutrements of poor white living. But there'd be no need.

Very little was changed by Red Pill Productions in the house which was hired in the working-class neighbourhood of Jan Hofmeyr for the *Triomf* shoot. Although its residents were effectively banished to a caravan park in Klerksdorp for a holiday while filming took place, the house on Cosmos Circle apparently remains almost entirely unchanged.

Jan Hofmeyr has, of course, been famous before - and not for its "garden city" dream conjured up in the 1930s, when whites who were close to destitute, or, quite simply, very poor, were able to access a decent roof over their heads.

It's where the classic TV drama *Agter Elke Man*, which turned Steve Hofmeyr into a major star, was filmed. Like *Triomf*, the award-winning novel, it was rife with white desolation and the exposition of racism.

The movie, which is drawn from the multi-award-winning book by Marlene van Niekerk, is directed by Zimbabwe-based filmmaker Michael Raeburn, whose previous films include *Jit*, set



**PORCELAIN PUPS:** The interior of the house in Jan Hofmeyr remained virtually untouched for the *Triomf* shoot.

and made in 1990 in Harare, and 1981's *The Grass Is Singing*, from the Doris Lessing classic. South African stars John Kani and Patrick Mynhardt were in that movie with Karen Black and John Thaw.

Raeburn - who was born in Cairo - also has a writing credit on *Triomf*, which was first published in Afrikaans and translated into English by Leon de Kock. A co-production between Giraffe Creations in Harare, Epoteon Productions in Paris and Red Pill in South Africa, *Triomf* is in Afrikaans with subtitles.

There's great admiration for the cast, with Vanessa Cooke playing Mol, whose horror moments in her house of pain include being exiled into the garden after midnight to cut the lawn at the bidding of her monstrous, drunk son.

Lionel Newton is the distracted, vertiginous Treppie, while Eduan van Jaarsveldt, perhaps better known to South African TV audiences as *Idols* poseur Cliff Jennings, is Lambert, a man in a very deep well. Paul Luckhoff plays Pop, whose relationship with Mol somewhat mediates the disappointment in her life.

The film is expected to be completed next year, and if you know nothing about the book, take this blurb as your reason to be very interested in the film:

"March 1994, South Africa. On the day of the first free election Lambert Benade will turn 21, and Uncle Treppie promises him the girl of his dreams. But, in this hilariously horrendous trag-comedy, as a new world is born, two members of the wild, crazy and destitute family are destined to die ..."



**SOULMATES:** Actor Paul Luckhoff with boys who live in the Fietas area. The movie *Triomf* is being shot in their neighbourhood.

PICTURES: EUGENE ABB