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HUGELY ENTERTAINING READ

My Life with the Duval By Tim Keegan (Umuzi)

This is a witty, comic 'varsity novel' of the type crafted by Kingsley Amis, David Lodge or Malcolm Bradbury albeit transplanted to a South African setting. It lampoons the petty rivalries of self-aggrandizing literary academics and the storm-in-a-teacup departmental politics of campus life.

The key protagonist is Rex Duval, a tenured English literature professor who lands on the shores of Cape Town in the early 1960s. Though this self-absorbed character is the ego around which the story orbits, it is narrated – across thirty years – by his foil and benefactor Edward.

Edward is as diffident and retiring as Rex is self-promoting and self-indulgent; and when they marry vivacious twin sisters they are locked into a domestic set-up propelled and sustained by a barely contained chaos.

Rex, a typically rambunctious literary bohemian, is obsessed with writing the definitive biography of the dead Twenties writer Finch Magnus Finch. He corrals his friend Edward into subsidizing his field research into finch's oeuvre and life across Europe and America. The fact that Edward is an unworldly Pooterish bourgeois makes him the perfect foil to Rex's licentious egomaniacal excesses. It is this juxtaposition which furnishes the humour for this comic novel.

Rex is a narcissist and an alcoholic to boot. He sleeps with his female students and can't be bothered with finessing departmental politics. This results in his inevitable downfall.

My Life with the Duval is hugely entertaining read with many witty set-pieces and a dark but convincing ending. – *Stephen Randall*