

Heart's Desire. A Woman's Longing for a Child

By Judith Uytterlinde. Pp. 144. R110. Double Storey Books. 2003.
ISBN 1-919930-30-2

This little book is a poignant, intense and unflinchingly frank autobiography of an adventurous, fun-loving woman who, in the prime of her life, wants 'everything — passionate love, close friendships, exciting work, exotic trips, and a child'. The book is about the author's desperate but seemingly fruitless quest for motherhood. After four years of unsuccessfully trying to conceive naturally, she turns to the medical profession for help. The problem is diagnosed as stemming from tubal occlusion, and in this book she recounts her roller-coaster emotions as she went through the seemingly interminable medical tests and treatments, including *in vitro* fertilisation, with little success.

She describes her ambivalence towards her doctors, her life partner, her friends and her family, as well as deep-seated jealousy aroused when in the company of women, including her own siblings, who were either pregnant or had children.

Judith had been pregnant once before, with a presumed twin pregnancy that ended in a miscarriage in the 10th week, an experience she describes in detail and with a mixture of passion and black humour. She is deflated by her doctor's dispassionate reference to her aborted 'babies' as 'foetal matter' and 'dead material'.

The book is also about life, love and fate for a Dutch woman in her thirties, and reads like a novel. Judith is a liberated woman, a free spirit with a freewheeling lifestyle. She lives, loves, hates, envies, and pursues her ambitions with absolute passion. She confesses to having 'had a number of boyfriends, and at that time I was never monogamous'. On one occasion, she 'went on a world trip and had one amorous adventure after another'. Her infertility stems from tubal occlusion and, although the notion is never broached in the book, one is left wondering whether the lifestyle she describes might have been considered as a possible aetiological reason for her problem.

All in all, this book – which has enjoyed wide circulation in a variety of languages – will make for thought-provoking (as well as entertaining) bedside reading for doctors and other health care providers, particularly for those whose vocation brings them in contact with patients seeking help for childlessness.