

**In memoriam**  
**ANDRÉ PHILIPPUS BRINK**  
**(1935-2015)**

André Brink, born in 1935 in Vrede (Orange Free State), belonged to the generation of *Sestigers*, along with Ingrid Jonker, Breyten Breytenbach, Jan Rabie, and Etienne Leroux, striving for a new experimental literature, writing freely about sexual themes, and using universal symbols and archetypes. Representative for the decade of the sixties are his experimental novels *Lobola vir die lewe* (Dowdry for Life, 1962), *Die ambassadeur* (The Ambassador, 1963), *Orgie* (Orgy, 1965), and *Miskien nooit* (Maybe Never, 1969), which are also a testimony of his strong interest in French existentialism. Brink summed up his French experience with the famous phrase: "I was born on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, in the early spring of 1960."

The next phase in Brink's creative development, which began after the Soweto unrests in 1969, brought a certain change into his writing, typical for other writers of his generation. Brink's novels starting from *Kennis van die aand* (Looking on Darkness, 1973), the first officially banned novel in Afrikaans, confronted and challenged the stern reality of a racially divided society. The publication ban encouraged Brink to write an English translation of his book, portraying an interracial relationship and denouncing the social injustice of apartheid policy.

From then on, Brink's prolific oeuvre was generated simultaneously in both languages, enabling the writer to reach a wider public, not only in South Africa, where his books were available through limited distribution, but also in Europe and worldwide. Consequently he published under two names: as André P. Brink in Afrikaans and André Brink in English.

Three of his books published in the seventies, *'n Oomblik in die wind* (An Instant in the Wind, 1975), *Gerugte van reën* (Rumours of rain, 1978), and *'n Droë wit seisoen* (A Dry White Season, 1979), were nominated for the Booker Prize. Brink was also considered a serious candidate to the Nobel Prize.

*Houd-den-Bek* (A Chain of Voices, 1982) opened a new chapter in Brink's writing, by skilfully combining a historical plot with a fierce criticism of the contemporary political situation in South Africa. Exploring local history and expanding the boundaries of the novel in the eighties and nineties, Brink did not stop to criticise the politics of apartheid.

After the first democratic elections on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1994, Brink remained a critical voice, this time focusing on corruption of the new government and on the rising wave of crime, affecting all strata of society. Nevertheless, after the final victory of the ANC, Brink declared that he felt freed from his moral obligation to oppose apartheid, and turned more intensively to history, attempting to create alternative views of the past and the present from feminine and native perspectives.

Notable for the nineties are *Sandkastele* (Imaginings on sand, 1995) and *Duiwelskloof* (Devil's Valley, 1998), the first being a feminine perspective on South African history; the second a dark, grotesque satire on apartheid's racial policy. The quest for an alternative insight into the genealogy of South African state and society, combined with an intense search for identity, defined as fluid and constantly changing entity, are the most typical features for the last fifteen years of his writing. Works such as *Donkermaan* (Rights of Desire, 2000), *Anderkant die stilte* (The Other Side of Silence, 2002), *Bidsprinkaan* (Praying Mantis, 2005) and *Philida* (2012) prove Brink's audacity in exploring discursive boundaries of the self and the generic boundaries of the novel.

André Brink was not only a novelist, but also an essayist, literary critic, academic teacher, literary translator, and an ANC sympathiser. His programmatic essays in the sixties helped to define and establish experimental tendencies within South African literature in Afrikaans. His book reviews led to a better understanding of literature, and are still a vital source of information about the world of letters in South Africa. They are still, along with his works of literary theory, studied and reflected upon by contemporary critics and historians of literature.

Apart from novels, Brink authored dramas, short stories and travel books, compiled poetry and prose anthologies, and produced numerous translations, including works by Ibsen, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Chekhov. He also lectured Afrikaans and English literature at the Rhodes University and University of Cape Town from 1961 until his retirement in 2005.

Distinguished for his literary achievements and humanist views with international prizes such as the Martin Luther Memorial Prize (1980) and Prix Médicis

Etranger (1980) as well as South African prizes (the Hertzog Prize in 2000 and 2001, the CNA Prize in 1965, 1978 and 1982), André Brink was made a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (1982) and Officier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1987). On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015 he received an honorary doctorate at the Catholic University of Louvain. On the 6<sup>th</sup> February he passed away on his way back to Cape Town.

Brink was a leading figure of the literary movement of *Sestigers*, a dissident writer, uncompromising intellectual, literary critic, academic teacher and prolific translator. With him South-African literary world has lost not only a prominent writer but also a critical voice commenting on political and cultural changes in his country. (Brink's essay, "Ground Zero: The South African Literary Landscape after Apartheid," published in *Werkwinkel* 6(1) provides an excellent example of his critical skills.)

In Poland, Brink was for many years the only Afrikaans writer whose novels have been translated (from English) into Polish and, along with J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer, a representative voice of his country. Married to a Polish-born academic, Karina Szczurek, late in his life, Brink visited our country and included reminiscences of his travel to Poland in his autobiography, *'n Vurk in die Pad* (A Fork in the Road, 2009). With Brink's death, Afrikaans literature lost an able ambassador, who succeeded in bringing the South African historical, political and literary debate closer to Europe.

**Natalia Stachura**