**Willie Burger**

**Brink, André (1935–)**

André Philippus Brink is probably one of the best known South African writers. Initially writing only in Afrikaans, he was one of the leading figures of the so-called *Sestigers* (Writers of the Sixties) who radically renewed Afrikaans literature, breaking away from the Realist tradition in Afrikaans fiction. Influenced by the French *nouveau roman* and the existentialism of Camus, Brink’s work of the 1960’s introduced Modernism to Afrikaans fiction. Breaking many taboos, writing openly about sex, and questioning the narrow Calvinist religious doctrine and political views prevailing at the time in the Afrikaner community led to clashes with the conservative Afrikaner establishment.

During the 1970’s, his work became overtly political and openly challenged apartheid. This led to the banning of *Kennis van die aand* in 1973. Brink rewrote the novel as *Looking onto darkness* and from then on simultaneously wrote his novels in both English and Afrikaans. His most important works from the 1970’s and 1980’s were *Rumours of Rain*, *A Dry White Season*, *Instant in the Wind*, and *Chain of Voices*. (*A Dry White Season* was adapted for film –the film was also banned in South Africa.)

In the 1990’s, his work took another turn, dubbed the “postcolonial/postmodernist phase” by Godfrey Meintjies. In *On the Contrary* (1993) Brink revisits South Africa’s colonial past, and in *Imaginings of sand* (1995) the postmodernist rewriting of history is continued from a feminist perspective. Re-imagining the past is a central theme in his work, culminating in the magic realistic novel *Devil’s Valley* (1998) and *Praying Mantis* (2005)*.* His latest work, *Philida* (2012), once again turns to the colonial history of slavery and is on the Booker long list.

If there is one thread running through André Brink’s oeuvre, it is his characters’ consistent rejection of the status quo. The character Estienne Barbier’s insistence to say “on the contrary” (in *On the Contrary*) and not to accept anyone else’s representation of the world, reflects a spirit found in all Brink’s characters: Joseph in *Looking onto Darkness*, Galant in *Chain of Voices* or Kristien in *Imaginings of Sand*, Hanna X in *The Other Side of Silence*, Kupido Kakkerlak in *Praying Mantis* all resist the idea that the world necessarily has to be the way it is presented to them–not the world of the church, the apartheid state, patriarchy, the colonial legacy nor the new dispensation in South Africa is to be simply accepted.

Like Cervantes’s Don Quixote, Brink’s characters stubbornly hold on to their belief in another possible way of existing. This spirit of saying “on the contrary” not only holds true of the characters in his novels. Brink’s novels themselves are repeatedly saying, “on the contrary.” This phrase is not a facetious resistance to bourgeoisie values and against clichéd ways of seeing the world. It stirs the readers consciousness that there is more to the apparent world, that another life is possible.

Brink makes his readers aware of the fact that the past could be narrated differently, that the official court documents or voices of empowered witnesses are only one possible way of understanding. And that a different look at the past empowers one to create a different future.

Brink also played an important role as critic–dominating Afrikaans literary criticism during the 1970’s**–**1980’s–and made a contribution to novel criticism and theory in *The Novel: From Cervantes to Calvino*.

Between 1961 and 1990, Brink was attached to the Afrikaans Department at Rhodes University. From 1991 until 2000, he was professor in the English Department at the University of Cape Town.

His novels have been translated into approximately thirty languages (including German, Dutch, French, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, Russian, Romanian, Turkish, Hungarian, and Japanese). Brink translated more than seventy works into Afrikaans from German, English, French and Spanish. He also translated Afrikaans works into English–the most recent being *Islands*,the acclaimed Afrikaans novel by Dan Sleigh.

**Awards**

Brink received numerous awards for his novels, translations, and journalism in several countries (France, Britain, Sweden, Italy, and South Africa) and has been awarded honorary doctorates by various universities.