**Contributor: Hein Viljoen**

**Entry: Krige, (Mattheus) Uys (1910 - 1987)**

Uys Krige – bohemian, romantic – stands out as a remarkable personality in Afrikaans literature. In the 1960s he was the best-known Afrikaans poet in Europe. He wrote seven collections of poetry and is also well-known for his short stories and plays. As a translator of French, Spanish and South American poetry and plays he broadened the horizons of Afrikaans literature. His Afrikaans translations of Lorca and of *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* are highly regarded. Through his vitality and zest for life he brought light, warmth, and humour into the otherwise very serious circle of Afrikaans writers of the time.

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Krige was born in the district of Swellendam. He studied law in Stellenbosch before working, briefly, as a journalist in Johannesburg. In 1931 he travelled to France and survived by writing, playing rugby (his father, Japie Krige, was a well-known Springbok rugby player), and giving swimming lessons. He became a close friend of Roy Campbell and his family, and in 1933 moved with them to Spain. In Valencia he studied Spanish literature and found a kindred spirit in Lorca, later translating a number of his poems and plays, including *Yerma* (1963). A highlight from his Spanish period is his bitter sarcastic indictment of Franco’s regime, ‘Die lied van die Fascistiese bomwerpers’ (‘The Song of the Fascist Bombers’).

Krige briefly worked as a journalist in Johannesburg before becoming a war correspondent with the South African forces in East and North Africa. He was captured at Sidi Rezegh and spent two years as prisoner of war in Italy before escaping in 1943. One of his camp stories, ‘Death of the Zulu’, was acclaimed internationally and translated into several languages. Krige’s escape across the mountains is related in *The Way Out* (1946), which was received enthusiastically in London but was only published in Afrikaans shortly before his death (as Môrester oor die Abruzzi, 1987). His war experiences are also reflected in his poetry and in two of his best one-act plays, *Alle paaie lei na Rome* and *Die sluipskutter* (*All Roads Lead to Rome* and *The Sharpshooter*).

Krige’s bohemian and cosmopolitan work brought new themes, an ironic elegance, and a romantic playfulness into Afrikaans literature. He seemed drunk on words and sounds, playing endlessly with sheer sonority, to the detriment of poetic form. Strong tensions between melancholy and vitality, between monotony and excessive colour, sound and light, and between dream and reality, lend vibrancy to his work. His language, inspired by simple ordinary speech, has a warm populist tone, as can be seen in *Vooraand* (*Twilight*)(1964), which is recognized as his best volume of poetry. His magnificent comedy, *Die goue kring* (*The Golden Ring*) (1956), also exemplifies the above traits.

His altruism, broad humanism and witty irony brought him into conflict with the apartheid regime of the 1950s and 1960s, but he was revered by the younger generation of writers. After a car accident in 1976 he spent his last years as, in his words, a ‘retired poet’. He died from stomach cancer at Onrust in 1987.

**Sources**

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