**Contributor: Heilna du Plooy**

**Entry: Rabie, Jan (1920-2001)**

Jan Rabie was a key figure in the movement in Afrikaans literature known as the Sestigers, comprising writers who published in the 1960s. Living in Paris for a number of years (1948-1955), Rabie played an important role in the lives of several prominent Afrikaans writers who went to Europe and for whom he became a role model. He was married to Marjorie Wallace, a well-known South African painter of Scottish descent. From 1970 they lived in the small coastal village of Onrus in the Western Cape, and their home became a famous meeting place for artists and writers. Rabie’s volume of short stories, *Een-en-twintig* (*Twenty-one*, 1956), is generally regarded as a watershed publication, heralding a new approach in epistemology, content and style in Afrikaans prose writing, which was later affirmed by the work of other Sestigers.

Jan Rabie grew up in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. He spent the greater part of a pleasant and carefree youth on a farm alongside the Goukou River. He studied at the University of Stellenbosch and after that taught in various schools in the Cape Province. In 1945 he completed a Master’s degree in Afrikaans and Dutch literature.

In 1948 he left South Africa for Paris; the influence of French art, literature and philosophy is clearly visible in the existentialist and surrealistic characteristics of the stories in *Een-en-twintig*, written in the tradition of the French *poème en prose.*Though Rabie also wrote poetry in his student years, he was primarily a novelist. Some of his novels are still important on account of the relevance and actuality of their thematic content. In *Ons, die afgod* (*We, the Idol*, 1958) the main character is a coloured man and the novel explores racial tension from his perspective. In the *Bolandia* series, (*Eiland voor Afrika* (*Island before Africa*, 1964); *Die groot anders-maak* (*The Great Make-over*, 1964); and *Waar jy sterwe* (*Where You Die*, 1966), Rabie writes about the early years of the Dutch settlement in the Cape, to depict the complexity of race relations, later to become the central problem of colonial South Africa.

Rabie was a productive writer, though critics agree that the quality of some of his work is mediocre. He wrote books for young people, short stories, travel journals and autobiographical pieces and also did some translations. He was also an energetic writer of essays (*Die ewolusie van nasionalisme* (*The Evolution of Nationalism*, 1960); *Polemika* (*Polemics*, 1957-1965); *Buidel* (*Pouch*,1989). The diaries that he kept in Paris, were compiled and edited by André P. Brink and were published in 1998 as *Paryse dagboek* (*Parisian Diary*).

Jan Rabie was indefatigable in his resistance against the injustices of Apartheid and never gave up protesting in his talking and writing. He loved the country and its people dearly and believed that a better dispensation was possible. To this ideal he devoted his lifetime of writing.

**References and further reading**

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Van Coller, H.P. (ed.) (1999) *Perspektief en Profiel: ’n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis. Deel 2*, Pretoria: J.L. Van Schaik.

**List of works**

*Een-en-twintig* (1956)

*Ons, die afgod* (1958)

*Eiland voor Afrika* (1964)

*Die groot anders-maak* (1964)

*Waar jy sterwe* (1966)