

Die vindingryke ridder Don Quijote de la Mancha by Miguel de Cervantes, Gustave Doré and André Brink. Cape Town/Kaaps-tad, Human & Rousseau, 1966.

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There might be a future country in Southern Africa named Azania, nobody knows, but its current name in English is the Republic of South Africa, *Republiek van Suid-Afrika* in Afrikaans, this prodigious, beautiful, kitchen language in origin of former slaves and servants. In such a complicated but lovely country André Philippus Brink was born in 1935, in the Orange Free State –now Free State only in the exciting New South Africa– when things were quite different. André Brink is a recognized academic (I) –Rhodes University, University of Cape Town (*Kaapstad*)– a talented writer (II) and both an industrious translator and a self-translator (III).

I

As a academic, his students, his colleagues and his audiences in various continents know him well.

II

As a novelist, playwright and writer of essays, articles and speeches, his literary career consolidated in 1962 with *Lobola vir die lewe* (Bride-price for life), in 1963 with *Die Ambassadeur* (The Ambassador), in 1965 with *Orgie* (Orgy), and in 1967 with *Miskien nooit* (Perhaps never). He belonged to the so-called emergent *Sestigers* or Afrikaner literary generation that during the sixties brought to this tradition a profound interest in the complexities of human existence and a formal renewal with fresh modernist techniques never used before in Afrikaans, such as stream of consciousness, achronological presentation, typographical experimentation, or different narrators. He also experimented with the Theatre of the Absurd or the existential theatre in plays such as *Bagasie* (Baggage) (1965) and *Elders mooi weer en warm* (Elsewhere fair and mild) (1965).

Later on, in the seventies and eighties, he abandoned his experimentation and shifted to a much more traditional and simple style of narration. At this stage we have a new group of novels

entitled *Engaged*, with which he gained international recognition never enjoyed before by any Afrikaner writer. Some titles not to be missed are: *Kennis van die aand* (1973), *'n Oomblik in die wind* (1975), *Gerugte van reën* (1978), *'n Droë wit seisoen* (1979), *Houd-den-Bek* (1982), *Die muur van die pes* (1984), *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* (1988), or *States of Emergency* (originally in English) (1988). Here we find the André Brink challenging the Afrikaner political and social power; the first Afrikaner writer ever to be banned; the rebellious anti-apartheid champion; the liberal white intellectual; the dissident proscribed topic fanatic: police brutality, Calvinistic taboos and repressions, Cape Town slavery, racial injustice, interracial marriage and sex across the colour line; the man with the guts to surrender his pure literary purposes to a political cause, as the titles of some of his best essays denote: *Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege* (1983) or *Literatuur in die Strydperk* (Literature in the State of Struggle) (1985).

Actually, one of these novels, *States of Emergency* (1988), has frequently provided a common denomination to a group of 1980s novels, such as Nadine Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature*, Karel Schoeman's *Take Leave and Go* or J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*: 'state of emergency novel'. Those were the years of massive state repression and massive popular resistance.

III

As a translator we used the word *industrious* before and we repeat it. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* mentions that he can translate to and/or from four languages: English, Afrikaans, French and Spanish.

Brink himself has translated - or rewritten - some of his major novels from Afrikaans into English. He has unanimously been regarded as a perfect bilingual writer. *The Ambassador* (1964), *Looking on Darkness* (1974), *An Instant in the Wind* (1975), *Rumours of Rain* (1978), *A dry White Season* (1979) (Martin Luther King Memorial Prize / Hollywood film), *A Chain of Voices* (1982), *The Wall of the Plague* (1985), *The First Life of Adamastor* (1993), etc. have all previous versions in Afrikaans. Why did he do it? Brink undoubtedly turned to English to reach a much wider international diffusion of his ideas, and because of the banning of his work in Afrikaans, which meant being condemned to silence.

From English to Afrikaans Brink has translated such nineteenth-century classics as *Die avonture van Huckleberry Finn* (1963), or *Alice se avonture in Wonderland* (1965). From French into Afrikaans reputed writers such as Michel Rouze, L.N. Lavolle, Léonce Bourliaguet, Paul Jacques Bonson, etc. And from Spanish into Afrikaans *Die vindingryke ridder*, *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1965) and a staged but not yet published *Bodas de Sangre* by Federico García Lorca. *Die Arabiese Nagte* (1966) is another of his unavoidable highlights as far as translation is concerned. It is quite evident the beneficial impact that this work has had on the cultural wealth of Afrikaans.

André Brink has always proved to be very fond of Latin European countries (*Latynse lande: Frankryk, Italië, Spanje, Portugal*). His travel books show this very clearly: *Sempre diritto. Italiaanse Reisjoernaal* (1963); *Olé. Reisboek oor Spanje* (1965); *Midi. Of Reis Deur Suid-Franryk* (1969); *Fado. 'n Reis deur Noord-Portugal* (1970). An anthology of all of these was published in 1990 under the heading *Latynse Reise* (Latin travels).

Concentrating on Spain and Spanish literature, Brink however, was not the first South African writer to travel around Spain, love the country and translate its literature into English or Afrikaans. We have the genial renderings of St John of the Cross and Lorca by Roy Campbell (1902-1957*), or Uys Krige's translated Spanish poetry (1910-). We are also especially indebted to Uys Krige for his delicious *Sol y Sombra (Spaanse Sketse)* (1948), recording his travel impressions from Barcelona to Almeria from November 1933 to December 1935 just before the Spanish Civil War broke out. Krige himself was a supporter of the Spanish Republic. Besides, the originality of his Latin interests contributed greatly to enrich a language and a culture, the Afrikaans, clearly biased towards Northern European traditions: British, German or Dutch.

Brink acknowledged his predecessor's merits in his own introduction to *Olé (Verantwoording: Die Drie Rose)*: «Vir my, soos seker vir talle ander, was hierdie eerste blik dié deur die ligryke oë van Uys Krige - veral in *Sol y Sombra* en sy meesterlike vertalings van Lorca en ander». *Olé*, which is dedicated to the First Lady of La Mancha (*Vir Dulcinea del Toboso*), was published in 1965, a year before his own translation of *Don Quijote* was published in Afrikaans in 1966, but the travel book already includes a quotation of the translation at the beginning of every one of its fifteen chapters. One example (Chapter 5: *Cuenca*):

«Wat vir 'n ding is 'n dolende ridder?» vra die meisie.

«Is jy so nat agter die ore dat jy dit nie weet nie?» antwoord Sancho. «Dan sal ek jou vertel. Om 'n lang storie kort te maak: 'n dolende ridder word die een dag pimpel en pers geslaan, en die volgende dag maak hulle hom keiser. Vandag is hy die ongelukkigste en armoedigste skepsel op aarde; en môre het hy twee, drie koninkryke wat hy aan sy agterryer kan uitdeel.»

(*Don quijote* I: XVI)

It is evident that the translation work was finished or almost finished before 1966, and that the spirit of *Don Quijote* lords over all the pages of this book that starts his romantic, picturesque and gastronomic Spanish wanderings from Catalonia, and follows through Castile, La Mancha of *Don Quijote* and Andalusia towards their end in the Balearic Islands, mainly Ibiza.

The deep impact of this Spanish world classic on André Brink can clearly be traced in many of his writings. For example, in his 1980 inaugural lecture delivered at Rhodes University and entitled *Why Literature?*, the eternal question in our prosaic modern world, Cervantes, *Don Quijote* and Sancho Panza are frequently quoted: «Ultimately, this again involves the relationship between man and death, since "there is a remedy for everything except death", as Sancho Panza well knew».

Unfortunately, this translation of *Don Quijote* into Afrikaans by André Brink is out of print. We can no longer buy the translated spirit of La Mancha in the unique language of the Karoo. But we do not want to forget to mention that there was another talented man of genius involved in the project: the nineteenth-century French engraver Gustave Doré, whose plates on *Don Quijote de la Mancha* are considered by many of his countless devotees as his master piece, and have become, in the course of time, inseparable from the literary work itself in the minds of many readers and of many publishers as well: arts and letters in perfect combination. The edition of 1966 of the translation by André Brink cleverly includes the reputed illustrations again.

You can frequently find individuals devoted to theoretical studies who claim that the translated work belongs to the translator as much as the author, or even more. They are probably right. Almost every citizen of the world can now enjoy in his or her own language the ideals and misadventures of this unique couple, Don Quijote and Sancho Panza: the native speakers of Afrikaans too, thanks to André Brink. This is probably the supreme reward that a translator can receive. Afrikaans is a language with a very humble origin but with a fascinating history. A spoken *patois* good for nothing elevating for many years. But it has always had a strong community behind it, well determined to give it all the rights they considered it deserved, and so it does today against the most powerful enemies: the right to hold the best books the world has produced, for example. *The Bible* was translated in 1932-33 and this original output of the human language instinct joined the Quixotic club in 1966.