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André Brink: An aesthetics of response

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As a commentator on the enormities of the apartheid state, André Brink rose to international prominence during the struggle against apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s. In interviews, speeches and non-fictional writing, Brink's enduring meditation on the writer's responsibility to a society in a state of moral and political siege is exemplary in its revelation and passionate interrogation of the subtle discursive strategies of apartheid. Beginning with *Looking on Darkness*, Brink's fiction apparently shares similar concerns. However, recurrently engaging with colonial and racial myths, Brink's fiction invariably tends towards their revalidation; polemically opposed to the Afrikaner hegemony, his fiction nonetheless paradoxically often reads like a veiled reification of the apartheid power structure. Locating Brink's anti-apartheid reputation firmly in his non-fictional discourse, this essay also explores the dynamism of Brink's critical sensibilities in a movement that stretches from social realism (in the apartheid dispensation) to postmodernism in post-apartheid South Africa. It also attempts to account for Brink's novelistic and political dilemmas by highlighting the implications of his constant evocation of an apocalyptic vision typically deriving from his Afrikaner heritage and even more crucially of his abiding recourse to Eurocentric humanist universals. The essay finally engages with the paradox that the aesthetic approach which vitiated the urgency of Brink's liberation politics in apartheid South Africa may well be the main spring of his significance in post-apartheid South Africa and the international community. **Key words:** André Brink, aesthetics of response, anti-apartheid, writer's responsibility.

André Brink's international reputation as a major dissident Afrikaner artist whose fiction was crucial in the cultural struggle against apartheid and in the eventual democratisation process in South Africa is virtually unassailable. Shunning the strong temptations of the privileges accruing to nationalist Afrikaners during the apartheid dispensation, Brink chose persecution in choosing the course of dissidence. Deeply appreciative of the central role of myth-making in the discursive practice of apartheid, in novel after novel (beginning from *Kennis van die aand* later translated as *Looking on Darkness*), he strove to debunk myths created by the apartheid establishment aimed at legitimating and perpetuating white privilege and black marginalisation, revalidating in the process (for the apartheid establishment) a heretical notion of humankind incorporating all humans irrespective of colour or gen-

der. In 1973, Brink earned the reputation of the first Afrikaans writer whose work was banned in his native South Africa.

However, to observe that there are paradoxes in Brink's novelistic practice has now practically become a cliché in Brinkean scholarship. Privileging Brink's non-fictional work as the pre-eminent site of his anti-apartheid reputation, I intend in this essay to examine his sustained meditation on the nature and uses of art and of the self-forgetful and heroic roles of the responsible artist in an embattled and restricted society like apartheid South Africa to demonstrate that Brink's postulations and gesturing seem exemplarily post-colonial, aimed at interrogating colonial narratives and discourses and aiding the rupture of the entire colonial hegemony. In this backdrop, I account for Brink's political and novelistic dilemmas by highlighting his rootedness (as an *Afrikaner* dissident writer) in his *Afrikaner* heritage, especially in terms of the apocalyptic vision of its Calvinist incarnation as well as in the broader European intellectual tradition, particularly its fixation with humanist universals. Remarking on how the phenomenal political changes in South Africa foreground the dynamism of Brink's conception of literature as the aesthetic expression of social and historical realities, I conclude with a thought on the prospects of Brink's writing in post-apartheid South Africa.

André Brink's *Mapmakers* constructs a peculiarly urgent and inescapable conjunction between literature and politics in the apartheid dispensation. In the essay, "After Soweto," he writes: "There are countries in which the social or political climate makes it relatively easy for a writer to withdraw into an ivory tower and grapple with metaphysical problems. There are others, and [apartheid] South Africa is such a one, in which the socio-political realities are so overwhelming that no escape is possible" (Brink, 1983c: 150). Thus, if Brink's characterization of the literary text even at this stage of his career is postmodern, no interrogation of the correspondence theory of truth inspiring forms of social realism is intended but an illumination of the very form of the literary-historical engagement:

For the text is not a transparent glass through which a 'world beyond' can be observed. The qualities of the glass itself – its opacity, its smoothness or otherwise – demand the attention of the spectator (...) in the final analysis it is the density of the literary experience which determines our way of looking 'through' it at the world beyond (Brink, 1983c: 122).

Typically, then, in the essay, "Writers and Writing," Brink argues that writers and their work exist in the world, and that even the most private poem, written for the poet's enjoyment and hidden in his bottom drawer, presupposes a reader. Unless a work functions within a process of communication, Brink notes, it remains only partially realized. And in meditating on whether the implication of his premise is that the literary work is inevitably directed towards the fulfilment of a social function, Brink alludes fully to the playfulness of postmodernism, its disruption of the notion of meaning as single, fixed and accessible to all readers in the same form and in all contexts. Thus, he points to the distinction "between what the work *is* and what it *does* – or what can be done with or to it. Notre-Dame in Paris, has, among other things, been used as a stable, a church, a court of law and a sanctuary for criminals and beggars: but it remains, in the final analysis, a *building*. As with buildings, literature has been used and abused in many ways – by authors and readers alike" (Brink, 1983c: 41).

Among many examples, Brink cites the reputation of Brecht and Beckett in Polish theatre to question the idea of a single, final and true interpretation. Traditionally regarded as the model of the committed writer in the 20th century, Brecht nevertheless is performed in Polish theatre when pure fantasy is required. *Waiting for Godot*, on the other hand, the classical absurd drama, has been performed in Poland as the epitome of *théâtre engagé*. Given the historical waiting of the inmates of Auschwitz, the waiting of Estragon and Vladimir easily assumes a political dimension.

Brink also characterizes authorial intention as "erratic and unpredictable and most unreliable" but nonetheless acknowledges that "one cannot deny that much of the persuasive passion of *Don Quixote* or *Max Havelaar* derives precisely from the anger of a committed author, and that without that flame no mind would have been set alight by those works. Similarly, the agony and rage of James Baldwin or LeRoi Jones determine much of the compelling quality of their writing: "it is as if the violence of their commitment is enhanced within the dimensions of their work" (Brink, 1983c: 43). Brink's contention indeed is that political commitment in literature is not only possible and in fact inevitable but also conscious and passionate. He consistently refrains from valourising the postmodern notion of textuality characterized by an endless self-reflexivity and proliferating layers of meaning, and thus excluding the very idea of a definite political stance. His claim is that in a restricted society (like apartheid South Africa) so ur-

gently is the writer drawn into the difficult battles fought for political power that even his election for an apparently apolitical stance has overt, even conscious, political implications:

When Pasternak was first confronted with official condemnation, he retired into silence. When he emerged, it was to publish the purest lyrical poetry. And yet, these poems were interpreted as political provocation: because to write lyrical verse in a social context where political commitment or flattery of the system is not only expected but required amounts to a challenge in itself (Brink, 1983c: 43).

Brink's conception of the peculiar situation of the Afrikaner writer stresses the indispensability of political commitment. Given the Afrikaner writer's implication through history, culture and complexion in the apartheid power establishment, his/her work necessarily elicits a response. Thus, Brink's reconstruction of milestones in the evolution of Afrikaner nationalism is a conscious inscription of dissidence as a defining attribute of Afrikanerdom, and indeed the mythical component that held the radiant possibility of the Afrikaner's redemption. For while the apartheid establishment strove to consolidate and perpetuate apartheid as the *raison d'être* of Afrikanerdom, Brink contended that in apartheid, the Afrikaner negated the best he was capable of but revealed instead "only that side of him which is characterized by fear, by suspicion, by uncertainty, hence by arrogance, meanness, narrow-mindedness, pigheadedness. What it denies is the Afrikaner's reverence for life, his romanticism, his sense of the mystical, his deep attachment to the earth, his generosity, his compassion" (Brink, 1983c: 19). Brink's account of Afrikaner history hence seethes with racial anguish, given his conviction that its culmination in apartheid was basically illogical. He notes the Free Burghers' early attachment to Africa and privileges the earliest recorded use of "Afrikaner" as a marker of identity in the context of a rebellion against tyranny. He equally engages in a passionate reflection on the Afrikaner's own experience of oppression at the hands of the British. Thus, in Brink's enunciation of the dissident writer's roles in South Africa, it is the liberation of the Afrikaner, not the black person, that is central:

[The dissident writer's] struggle is not just *against* what is evil in the Afrikaner, but for what he perceives to be his potential for good. In other words, it is not just a struggle aimed at the liberation of blacks from oppression by whites but also a struggle for the liberation of the Afrikaner from the ideology in which he has come to negate his

better self. The dissident struggles in the name of what the Afrikaner could and should have become in the light of his own history, had he not allowed adversity (both real and imaginary) to narrow down his horizon to the small hard facts of mere physical survival (Brink, 1983c: 20).

If in Brink's reconstruction of the Afrikaner's history in South Africa he reveals the good, responsible, and creative life to be at variance with the conventional reflexes of the laager, repeatedly he equally contends that the immemorial persecution and often even crucifixion of the heretic, the martyr, the rebel and the writer in all generations and in all cultures testify to the mortal terror with which society views the birth of new ideas. The censor, the mental asylum and the prison or even the gallows are only some of the institutions founded to check the rival discourse and extort conformity. For, as Brink remarks, power is "narcissist by nature, striving constantly to perpetuate itself through cloning, approaching more and more a state of homogeneity by casting out whatever seems foreign or deviant, until all parts become interchangeable and reflects perfectly the whole" (Brink 1983c: 173). Where Brink's emblematic figure of the heroism the writer incarnates in his model of the antagonism between the writer and the state is a political rebel, Antigone, Brink's abiding inclination is to interpret the will to persecution in religious terms. He treats dissidence as a form of asceticism, the will to privation, and since death itself is the final privation, martyrdom, as the embracing of the burden of sacrificial death in love and freedom is the perfection of the ascetic tradition.

Remarking, then, on Brink's conception of the antagonism between the writer and the state (with its denunciatory organ, the censor), J.M. Coetzee writes: "The ostensible powerlessness of the writer gives him a paradoxical potential for heroism in the face of persecution. And the writer triumphs in the end because his version of truth will outlast his antagonist's" (Coetzee, 1990: 60). For noting further on Brink's description of the process of the artist's access to truth, Coetzee identifies Brink's writer as the God of *Genesis* himself or at least as the bearer of the divine *logos* whose truth compels the telling (Coetzee, 1990: 64). The artist's conviction of his partaking in divine truth and of the state's presiding over and deep implication in the Lie is then his hope of eventual triumph and sustenance in his pitched battle against the state: "Deep inside him [the writer] approaches a welter and whorl of truth, a great confounding darkness which he shapes into a word; surrounding him

is the light of freedom into which his word is sent like a dove from the ark. In this way, through the act of writing, truth and liberty communicate" (Brink, 1983c: 163-64).

Internally lit by the radiance of divine truth, the artist is nonetheless under the burden of an ancient curse that he must forever vainly seek to expiate by the proclamation of that truth especially in the face and in defiance of persecution. Brink's own declaration of his devotion to express this truth is a vow: "When the conspiracy of lies surrounding me demands of me to silence the one word of truth given to me, *that word becomes the one word I wish to utter above all others*" (Brink, 1983c: 165). Truth is the affable and invaluable maiden, the *momlambo*, whom it is the lot of the writer to woo in spite of tribulations, even with the complete and rapturous devotion of the martyr in his approach to God:

The Security Police is ever alert to suppress or inhibit the truth (...)
[However] the writer has no choice but to expose and proclaim the truth wherever he can and whensoever he perceives it. If he is no longer allowed to shout, he must learn to speak in another tone of voice. If that is denied him, he must begin to whisper. And if he is no longer allowed even to whisper he must in Artaud's memorable phrase, continue to signal through the flames (Brink, 1983c: 153).

Through the artist's will to persecution expressed in his election to transcend the state's narrow frontiers, his words are unusually charged and empowered. For allowed by his closed society to pronounce the letters A to M, the writer, who risks his comfort and personal security to pronounce N or Z endows his words with peculiar weight and a new resonance. His words in fact cease to be merely words and enter the world as an act on their own right. The writer, in other words, transforms writing into a heroic act because in this context the dichotomy between "action" and "word" ceases. Far from evading responsibilities, the writer becomes involved with the human situation at the deepest level: "with every word he utters the writer places himself at stake, which is the only test for the assumption of responsibilities" (Brink, 1983c: 152).

In spite of the state's mortal envy, the censor's inhuman gaze, the gaoler's malice, and even the real threat of the gallows or a cup of hemlock or the multiple sophistications of the executioner's vocation in apartheid South Africa, the ultimate triumph is the artist's. Brink seeks the explanation for this in the very delights of art and the writer's distinctive strategies of action which vary from the state's: "A book

cannot enter the field of battle against a sword. If the book does win in the end, as I am convinced, the reason for its final victory lies in the very fact that it declines to resort to the same sort of weapons as its adversaries" (Brink, 1983c: 109). Even when the writer's theme is a socio-political experience, he does not by his commitment "debase his art to the level of practical politics: instead, if he is really serious about his trade as a writer, he probes and examines and refines even politics in such a way that it becomes valid as aesthetic experience" (Brink, 1983c: 169-70). For Brink the writer's greatness is finally invariably proportionate to his devotion to the quality of his art:

whether he writes about the agony or about the ecstasy of experience, about love or disillusionment, about silence or violence, about history or the contemporary scene, about private fears or the socio-political dimension of man, the writer's primary concern is with the quality of his work. Nothing may be allowed to interfere with that: even anger should be distilled into something permanent. Then, and only then, his small word of truth becomes not so much an outcry *against something* as an affirmation and celebration of something: above all, of that humiliated, maligned, exploited, suppressed, fragile, frail, forked creature – man (Brink, 1983c: 170).

André Brink's writing on the roles of the writer in apartheid South Africa in several fundamental ways resonates with the particularly influential work of the renowned post-colonial theorist and critic, Edward Said. Brink's contention (in his 1969 essay, "Writers and Writing in the World,") that every act of writing presupposes a reader evokes Said's argument: "no one writes simply for oneself. There is always an other; and this other willy-nilly turns interpretation into a social activity, albeit with unforeseen consequences, audiences, constituencies and so on" (Said, 1989: 248). The very title of Brink's essay calls to mind Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, given too that Brink's argument in the essay is typically Saidian: that the locale of the writer and his work is the world. Following John Berger, Brink contemplates apartheid South Africa in terms that virtually become paradigmatic in Said's postulations on the Middle East and the former colonies to which the relevance of his work extends: "In Berger's view, shared by many others, most of the problems of the world today are related to the exploitation and degradation of people all over the world, and to their struggle to liberate themselves from the most humiliating of these forms of exploitation and degradation" (Brink, 1983c: 47). Brink relates this view to the

objectification of Africans, Coloureds, Indians and women in South Africa. Acknowledging Berger's view that the individual's assumption of responsibility against imperialism is an affirmation of human meaning, Brink points to the vital role of the writer in the decolonisation process as a redemption of mankind from extinction: "this it seems to me, indicates a function of writers in our terrifying and sordid world: to keep the voice of humanity alive; to ensure the survival of human values" (Brink, 1983c: 48). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1994: xii) too dwells on "a general worldwide pattern of imperial culture, and a historical experience of resistance against empire".

As he laments that literary criticism as it is practised in the American academy in modern times isolates textuality from the circumstances, events and physical senses that in the first place make it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work, Said articulates a varying conviction: "My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said, 1983: 4). Like Brink, placing the writer and his work in the world, Said goes on to locate the critic also in the same context and to identify criticism as a human endeavour in a worldly context: "Critics are not merely the alchemical translators of texts into circumstantial reality or worldliness; for they too are subject to and producers of circumstances, which are felt regardless of whatever objectivity the critic's methods possess" (Said, 1983: 35). The point is that by the very nature of the existence of texts, even in their most rarified form, they bear the imprint of their world, circumstance, time, place and society. For Said, therefore, the responsible function of criticism is to affirm

the connection between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events. The realities of power and authority – as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements, to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies – are the realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics. I propose that these realities are what should be taken account of by criticism and the critical consciousness (Said, 1983: 5).

Said's seminal essay "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," published three years previously, had even been more emphatic in affirming the implication of all knowledge in politics and

history: "there is no discipline, no structure of knowledge, no institution or epistemology that can or has ever stood free of the various socio-cultural, historical, and political formations that give epochs their peculiar individuality" (Said, 1980: 211). Brink's valorisation of Said's position could hardly have been more absolute as when Brink wonders if it is conceivable to regard the intellectual as

the lonely, aloof, disinterested creature who judges human events, in an ivory tower of dispassionate sanity, in terms of transcendental Good or Evil? We know that the much-vaunted "free-agent" of the Age of Reason is a fiction: we are all subject to the tussle and play of ideologies, even when we least suspect it; and at least we have learned this much from Marxism, that we accept our involvement – even our implication – in our social context and in history (Brink, 1983c: 38).¹

Said's particularly crucial and urgent demonstration in *Orientalism* is that orientalist and Africanist discourses are aspects of Europe's general effort to rule distant lands and peoples by a special mode of representing colonized peoples. Revealing the partisan ideology hidden beneath the scholarly and aesthetic idioms of these discourses, Said appraises them as a triumph of Europe's invention, having no relationship with its putative object, but representing instead a "Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" and other colonized peoples (Said, 1979: 3). Necessarily, therefore, such discourses make an ontological and epistemological distinction between Europe and its colonized Others. Commenting, then, on Said's signal contribution to the current post-colonial revaluation of the European canon, Dan Izevbaye indicates that the European consciousness of a racial self defined in terms of difference from his Others dates back to the Renaissance. Driven into other lands by economic necessity and intellectual curiosity, Europe had defined its relationship with this new world in evolutionary terms. Europe's apprehension of its noble savages, Oriental potentates and enslaved black princes as stereotypes – Othello, Caliban, Man Friday, over-sexed women – actually constituted a collective representation of another world offered as a form of knowledge to the reading public. Izevbaye concludes: "There was nothing innocuous about these literary images. Edward Said's influential thesis is that given the tradition from which they emerged, these images are at least an index to the kind of ideology which determined the relation between Europeans and other races since the enlightenment,

and they are still a very active political force in the contemporary world” (Izevbaye, 1996: 12).

Patrick Brantlinger’s (1986: 185) exemplary appropriation of a Foucauldian/Saidian “theory of discourse as strategies of power and subjection, inclusion and exclusion, the voiced and the silenced”, in tracing the genealogy of the myth of Africa as the Dark Continent to Victorian England in this regard yields astonishing revelations. Contending that the myth was invented in the smithy of political and economic pressures as well as a psychology of blaming the victim through which Europeans projected many of their own darkest impulses onto Africans, Brantlinger methodically demonstrates how Africa was darkened by the light of Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists because that light was refracted through an imperialist ideology and discourse of which the myth constituted just one example. Brantlinger inscribes Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* at the heart of representative European texts projecting an infernal image of Africa as the obverse of a heavenly Europe.

Brink himself keenly appreciated that apartheid would seek to supplement its materiality through discursive practices and aspire to conceal the political exigencies it was a product of by seeking validation in realms of human value and knowledge held in higher esteem than the overtly political:

For apartheid to be sanctioned as the definitive characteristic of the Afrikaner Establishment, it had to reach far beyond the domain of politics: it was not simply a political policy “adopted” as a response to the racial situation in the country but had to be accepted as an extension of an entire value system, embracing all the territories of social experience, economics, philosophy, morality and above all religion (Brink, 1983c: 18-19).

In this regard, Brink recurrently drew attention to the crucial roles historiography played in the official project to justify and perpetuate apartheid. In *A Dry White Season*, the turning point for Brink’s Afrikaner protagonist, Ben du Toit, a teacher of the authorized version of history, is the traumatic realization that official history was not the disinterested, incontrovertible record of events that he had believed but instead an ideological specie of myth-making aimed at empowering the apartheid establishment.

In *A Chain of Voices* integrated with Brink’s abiding evocation of Africa as primal earth is his fascinating suggestion that the earth and its

rocks take their substance from the bones and flesh of the human dead, and that the longer presence of blacks in South Africa has meant that their mortality has left a deeper mark on the earth. Earth mother, Ma Rose, knowledgeable, reflective, mythical, old as the earth itself, and with a consciousness that seeks to trace phenomena to its ultimate mystical source, articulates this thinking: "The White people, the Honkhoikwa, the smooth-haired ones, are still strangers to these parts (...) They have not yet become stone and rock embedded in the earth and born from it again and again like the Khoikhoin. One doesn't belong before one's body is shaped from the dust of one's ancestors" (Brink, 1983a: 21). It is remarkable that it is only in the death of the son, Nicolaas, and in the imminent death of the husband, Piet, that Alida feels a new awareness of the resolution of her alienation:

Now, for the first time, I felt I had a reason to be here. "Belong" would put it too strongly, no one "belongs" here. But through the death of my son and the imminent death of my husband (...) I had acquired a responsibility towards the place, the landscape, ours, mine. My life is vested here (...) My extraneity has been strangely and solemnly resolved. In Nicolaas my flesh lies interred in this earth, and I am growing towards it (Brink, 1983a: 62).

Conscripted alongside his white peers by the South African government in *Rumours of Rain* to fight the "communists" in Angola, Louis has a vision of the stone-like enduring presence of blacks and of the rootlessness and essential foreignness of white people in Africa. This is a core source of his disillusionment with the apartheid establishment and of his perception of the utter futility of white men – Afrikaners, Cubans, Portuguese – killing one another as well as blacks in far away Africa. Louis envisions that all would suffer oblivion:

But those people belonging to the land itself. The thin Blacks, like sticks planted in their fields (...) I'm sure, if we pass that way again a hundred years from now, we'll still find them there just like that. Living with the seasons, like plants and stuff. If it rains, they get wet. If the sun shines, it scorches them. It makes no difference (...) The armies came and went, like bloody swarms of locusts. They were robbed and beaten and plundered and murdered and raped and bombed and fucked around. But they remained. One might as well try to get rid of stones. And that's why, every day, I asked all over again: What the bloody hell was I doing there? (Brink, 1984c: 361.)

Quite apart from Brink's typical denial of agency to blacks in the passage above, his political aim in the cited passages in *A Chain of Voices* and *Rumours of Rain* is to refute the official Afrikaner myth of the simultaneous migration of blacks and whites into the interior of South Africa. Brink was actually making a contentious political point: not just the primacy of blacks but that they were indeed autochthonous and would survive both the white man's violations and the white man himself.

Said has observed that "stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world. They also became the method colonized people used to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (Said, 1994: xii). In this regard, the African novelist, Chinua Achebe, whose chart-breaking work *Things Fall Apart* (1958) began a new epoch in Africa's post-colonial project of self-representation (commenting on Hammond and Jablow's *The Africa that Never Was*) draws attention to a body of fantasy and myth about Africa developing into a tradition with a vast storehouse of lurid images from which European writers consistently drew authorized images of the African (Achebe, 2000: 27). If, however, the enduring fascination which the moment of original encounter between the colonizer and the colonized (as a site potentially capable of revealing the truth of the nature of their relationship) has held for both writers from the metropolis and the empire is a metonymy for the lure of power, it expresses on the part of the former the desire to perpetuate mastership and on that of the latter the reclamation of sovereignty. That Brink should be drawn to this keen discursive battle of rival narratives is perhaps only too logical, just as it is that the project should set in particular relief his apparent paradoxical complicity within the imperialist structures he polemicizes against.

Brink's *The First Life of Adamastor*, Kossew has noted, clearly aims to provide a post-colonial revision not just of the epic, *Os Lusíadas* [*The Lusíadas*], (the first known European literary work to describe South Africa) by the Portuguese poet Luis Vaz de Camões but indeed *the* "eurocentric legend" of the first encounter (Kossew, 1996: 56, 59). Reconstructing that momentous event from the perspective of the colonized Other effectively silenced by colonial historiographers, Brink reclaims a human consciousness for history's Other, undermines the status of the authorized history as revealed truth both by the revelation of a polylogue of contesting voices and cultural misconceptions that impede perception and interpretation of facts. A new perspective relo-

cates the origin of incomprehension and violence in the relationship between the races not only in the neutral ground of cultural distinctions but in the coloniser's acquisitiveness and betrayal of trust; it equally effectively reverses the colonisers' projection of their anxious incomprehension of the languages of the colonized in terms of the latter's inadequacies: "The problem was that it was impossible to talk to the visitors. I had the distinct impression that they knew nothing resembling a language. They could utter sounds, but these were quite meaningless, like the chattering of birds" (Brink, 1993c: 22). Yet it has to be noted that the consciousness of the Afrikaner writer's African chief is hardly superior, on the whole, to that of a child, a buffoon, a savage.

Moreover, as Kossew (1996: 59) notes, in representing the unfulfilled sexual encounter between the black man and the white woman in natural terms, "Brink seems to be validating precisely that colonial stereotyping of the rampaging black man which his text seems to undermine". Similarly, Sandra Chait (2000: 20) notes that by representing the love between T'Kama and Khois as contradictory to nature, Brink provides "a convincing physiological reason for miscegenation taboos". Moreover, if Brink's *The First Life of Adamastor* suggests no physiological uniqueness for Khoi women, his earlier novel *An Instant in the Wind* clearly does for the Hottentot neighbour. In a fleeting but truly revealing moment of original encounter in which in utter nakedness the white female confronts the black female, the latter discerns kinship, while the former apprehends differences, validating the myth of the female Hottentot's unique womanhood: "the peculiarly elongated inner lips protruding from her almost hairless cleft and hanging down in long pink lobes, like the wattles of a turkey" (Brink, 1983c: 70). If, then, the physiological peculiarities are the incontestable texts of nature's revelation of incompatibility, in institutionalising the miscegenation taboo apartheid spoke nature's truth. In fact, in the Brink oeuvre as the first novel to engage colonial myths, especially the myth of the Dark Continent, *An Instant in the Wind* illustrates in a striking manner Brink's characteristic dilemmas.

Writing on Brink's appropriation of an Australian parent myth – the Mrs. Fraser story – in his bid in *An Instant in the Wind* to trace the origins of a racially divided apartheid South Africa and as a paradigmatic humanizing myth that can enrich a spiritually impoverished society, A.J. Hassall (1987: 10) observes that "Brink must go back to the eighteenth century to find the image of Eden that he can set against the jail of modern South Africa, and his story probes the choices and conditions

that have made it the prison it has become". Brink himself has remarked on how his transposition of an Australian story to the Cape colony in the eighteenth century had been done with so much verisimilitude that many readers had attempted to look up the documentation in the Cape archives (Brink, 1991: 387).

Yet Brink ultimately inscribes the setting of *An Instant in the Wind* infinitely before the eighteenth century. Adam and Elisabeth are primordial voyagers, like Conrad's European characters in *Heart of Darkness*, travelling back in time: they have the fascinating experience "not of traveling through mountains but of penetrating right into them. As they go on, the walls of the kloof grow more perpendicular; below it deepens into a ravine carved out by prehistoric floods" (Brink, 1986b: 174-75). Brink's setting precedes Christ: "World provisionally without end. Beyond the undulating veld of heather and heath, and the brushwood of erica and protea, begins the virgin forest: beechwood and blackwood, green-grey with hoary moss and ivy and strung with lianas; patriarchal yellow-wood and stinkwood trees, older than Christ" (Brink, 1983b: 109). In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad's European characters regress to the dark primordial jungle of the very beginnings:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of the black and incomprehensible frenzy (...) we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories (Conrad, 1984: 95-96).

But where Conrad represents Africa as the primordial jungle where civilized mankind runs "the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings" (Achebe, 1988: 3), Brink's appraisal of human civilization apparently exalts the "noble savage" and condemns "civilization" in moral terms as a state of nature. Constructing the evolution of humankind from the stage of the simple naked fruit gatherer, through the maker of humble tools, hunter and

herbalist to the corrupt sophisticated city dweller, Brink indicts the Europeanised segregationist city to which the wilderness becomes a romanticized Eden.

However, if in the wilderness, unlike in the city, Adam and Elisabeth painfully discover and acknowledge each other's humanity, if they experience love and the reciprocities of human communion and if they discover the necessary complementarity and interdependence which enable them to survive the inherent austerity of life's abiding wilderness, Brink's African Eden is nonetheless a prison which the human spirit can endure only fleetingly, is indeed under compulsion to flee: the lure of the Cape is irresistible: "This deep subterranean thing driving them on has not yet lost its force" (Brink, 1983b: 191); "One can only go on mechanically, in bitter resistance to hunger and thirst and to oneself, obedient to this indomitable will which forces one to go on" (Brink, 1983b: 193).

Quite apart from the Hottentots who nurture Elisabeth back to life after her miscarriage, Adam also recalls the Bushman who made a deep impression on him by his virtual mystical mastery of his African environment and his remarkable humanity. And if Adam himself is called "savage" several times in the narration, and in Larsson's clothes is hardly distinguishable from Conrad's African fireman, "a dog in a parody of breeches," (Conrad, 1984: 97), his precise designation may well be "noble savage" rather than the "ignoble" one. Brink's Africans are uncontestedly human! Yet on close appraisal, Brink's documentation of the temptations these African humans constitute to the stranded European woman among them is ultimately a validation of Conrad's insight. Recognising the Mrs. Fraser story as a classic captivity narrative in which typically a stranded (European) woman is subjected to the ultimate temptation of conversion to the native way of life, Hassall remarks on Brink's departure from his source and the usual form of the narrative, given that Brink's indigenous Africans support rather than imprison Elisabeth, and that the hardships of the journey instead of the humiliations of imprisonment test and teach her (Hassall, 1987: 14). Yet the terrible temptation which Elisabeth undergoes (of which the shedding of the trappings and paraphernalia of European civilization is only the external symbol) is ultimately an insidious invitation to regress to nudity, physically and figuratively, to a lower evolutionary stage:

Some of them [the Hottentots] force her to sit up, tugging at her clothes. She tries to help them unfasten and undress her, feels all clothing peeled from her; lies down again, trembling with cold fe-

ver. Someone lifts her and presses her mouth against the edge of a calabash. She is overwhelmed by the strong smell of herbs, but cannot move her head. Strange hands cover her naked perspiring body with animal skins (...) Where sleep ends and consciousness begins again, she cannot tell. In front of the hut, or among the trees nearby, someone is blowing a monotonous tune on the long still feather of a *ghoera*, and the low sad tone intrudes upon her dreams (...) sounds from another, remote existence (Brink, 1983b: 63).

The presiding consciousness in the narration in this section of the novel is, of course, Elisabeth's (much as she drifts through the wakefulness of present reality to the semi-consciousness of sleep, through dreams, reverie) and an anxious preoccupation of hers remains the sharp contrasts between Europe and Africa. Expectedly in these comparisons Europe is canonized. She recoils from the gift of clothes from her Hottentot hosts: "a few strings of beads round her neck and her waist, and rushes round her knees (...) a copper ring round one ankle" (Brink, 1983b: 90), insisting on her European dress as the badge of the redeemed: "With a haste she herself finds inexplicable she grabs it from their hands and puts it on, ties up the bodice and arranges the fichu" (Brink, 1983b: 71). Elisabeth is baffled by the mysterious efficacy of crude African herbal potions but extols the virtues of Western medicine and medicare: "At home, if mother felt dizzy, there was always someone at hand to sponge her temples with vinegar water or to offer her Sel de Corne de cerf. But here there hasn't been anything apart from the revolting stuff in the old hag's calabash. And yet I'm recovering" (Brink, 1983b: 71). In music, of course, the masters are all exclusively European:

They're [the Hottentots] dancing outside, it must be dark. Is there a moon? She can hear the clapping of their hands, their feet stamping on the ground; the *ghoera* and the wailing flutes; through her throbbing head reverberates the beat of *tkoi-tkoi* and of sticks. In Amsterdam there was chamber music; clavichord, and the great booming of the organ in the Zuiderkerk; and carrillons. The controlled ecstasy of the modern composers, Mr. Bach in Germany; the Italians Vivaldi and Scarlatti (Brink, 1983b: 68).

If Elisabeth partakes of black love and the temptations of Brink's African Eden but finally resolutely rejects these for the white Cape, her steadfastness makes her ordeal redeeming. Brink's inscriptions of his position through Elisabeth's consciousness are indicated in his valida-

tion of approximate colonial myths and insights in his non-fictional writing where his position is easier to locate.

Brink's long article in *Re-inventing a Continent*, "Afrikaners," commenting on the dual heritage of Afrikaners, accounts for their failure in terms of their betrayal of the best traditions of two continents – Africa and Europe. His characterization of the two continents, however, is inscribed in terms of the familiar imperialist contrasted tropes of nature and nurture, darkness and light, the wilderness and civilization. For while Brink's Europe is distinctively eurocentric, secure in its self-esteem, distinguished by "its human values and culture shaped through centuries of trial and error," his Africa is equally a product of the Western ideological gaze, "a wild continent," with a (savage) "heart beat" that the European sojourner would need to "tune into guided by the indigenous peoples even to survive" (Brink, 2000: 125). For Brink, as for the Trekboers, adapting to Africa and learning to live off the earth, meant piercing the heart of the cosmic mystery: to the "Trekboers survival depended on one's ability to tune in to Africa: to adjust to the rhythms of the seasons, to drought and flood, to read the veld and skies, to find remedies and medicines in bushes and roots and shrubs" (Brink, 2000: 81).

Thus, Brink discerns the distinctive Africanness running deep in the Afrikaner blood which neither sophistication nor modernity can utterly destroy as an abiding passion for the *bush*: "[A] phenomenon which has never ceased to amaze me is the way in which even the smoothest city slicker among Afrikaners seems to cherish, somewhere deep down inside, a nostalgia for the bush, a desire to own a small piece of Africa" (Brink, 2000: 102). And where the longing itself can get transmuted – "the old dream of the wilderness" expressing "itself in a lasting concern with ecological and conservation programmes" (Brink, 2000: 104) – Africa itself is changeless, beyond domestication: "No matter how modernized the park becomes (...) a mere two hundred yards from the road you're back in Africa of centuries ago" (Brink, 2000: 103).² Ironically, an important theme of Brink's article is the implacable power of representations to perpetuate stereotypes, and his own sustained efforts are aimed at revealing diverse, unique Afrikaners, bursting at the seams of the traditional laager. Racial myths, of which colonial myths are a specie, are at their most insidious level of efficacy when they manage by a curious process of self-validation to shed the obvious trappings of mythology, assuming thereby the semblance of the incontrovertibility of revealed truths. The great irony is that the deep-

est demonstration of the power of discourse to perpetuate racial and colonial stereotypes is indeed the persistence of such myths about Africa even in the work of such an ideologically sensitive and committed writer as Brink himself.

One of Brink's most abiding dilemmas as a writer has been that his target audiences and constituencies often contrast sharply, making apparently disparate demands. Brink desired that his work should facilitate the democratisation process in South Africa but identified his more important preoccupation with the theme of human loneliness; arrogating higher human value to literature, he proclaimed that politics required refinement and elevation to be worthy of literature (Brink, 1991: 387). He expressed a certain commitment to his international audience:

It has become unfashionable to talk about "universals" or "eternals" in literature but if I have often been moved by the responses of black readers who wrote to me because in one way or another, they have drawn inspiration from this book or that to carry on with the struggle, or from white readers who confessed that through the reading of a novel they have discovered the common humanity they share with blacks, I have been moved at least as much by a reader in Belfast or another in Calcutta or another in Santiago, Chile, acknowledging that through their reading of a text they have discovered more, not about South Africa, but about themselves (Brink, 1990: 48).

For Brink if apartheid offered a boon to the artist, it was perhaps in the sense that the dramatic immediacy with which it foregrounded the fundamental conditions of human imprisonment, isolation and even death offered the artist ample opportunity for the interrogation of being, its conditions and its value. Thus Brink recurrently exploited apartheid as an image of the human condition. The point though is that Brink's allegiance to the universalist claims of European humanism vitiated his significance for the local, peculiar, urgent battle against apartheid.

In so far as Brink's theme was apartheid, he deplored modes of adjustment as evasion or complicity. In his fiction, all characters in whose consciousness the white man's projection of himself as God is valorised are satirised as characters who lack the innovative will power to seek to rise above their humiliated circumstances. In *A Chain of Voices*,

Adonis, like Januarie in *An Instant in the Wind*, who contemplates life as impossible except when led in his master's bondage, asks his fellow slaves: "How do you think we'll manage if the masters aren't here to look after us? They give us food and drink and clothes and everything" (Brink, 1983a: 190). Perhaps, though, the superstition about the master's divinity and the slave's infinite helplessness comes to its climax only in Ontong's alternative to the slaves' intended rebellion, an option that is apparently modelled on the human dream of ameliorating the harshness of the human condition through an appeal to God's benevolence in prayer.

Abel's response to Ontong is Brink's impassioned espousal of the necessity for the abolition of slavery/apartheid, of the common humanity of all peoples, of every slave's responsibility to struggle against oppression, not hope for concessions:

He'll always make your load lighter for you. He'll shorten the hours you got to work, or give you more food, or a better hut, or an extra *sopie* when you please him well. But we remain slaves, Ontong! That's what we want to change now. Not a life that's a bit better than before, but not to be slaves any more. To be free. I'm not an ox under a yoke. I'm a man. I got hands and feet just like the Baas. I walk like him. I eat like him, I take a woman like him. I get hurt like him. So tell me: Why should he be the master and I the slave? (Brink, 1983a: 458.)

Abel's perception of the desire to perpetuate the bondage of the slave as integral in the whole concept of "baasskap," and the slave's acquiescence as self-imprisonment, an even deeper form of bondage, is a vital revolutionary insight. That Brink invariably makes elderly people purveyors of the idea of hopeless acquiescence indicates his condemnation of the inertness of the older generation of black South Africans as complicity; but he is also exploring the impact of decades of systematic dehumanisation on the human spirit. The younger generation – growing up amidst violence – would increasingly espouse violence.

However, the dilemma of the black activist, Charlie Mofokeng in *Rumours of Rain* illustrates Brink's difficulty in a particularly revealing way. Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* fascinates Brink as a possible paradigm of the symbolic encounters between the master and the slave; between the superior and the inferior; between the oppressor's high-handedness and the resilience and inexhaustible resources of the human spirit to sustain itself; between the state's longing for an increase

in the efficiencies of power and the individual's uncompromising zest for life, freedom and happiness. Appreciating, however, that Camus's equation of the bondsman's defiant and loving acceptance of servitude as self-election with metaphysical redemption is clearly heretical in a struggle for the transformation of the political and economic structures of society, Brink has Charlie prise the myth out of its metaphysical context, re-interpreting it to imbue it with overt social relevance:

Your white Sisyphus operates in the dimension of metaphysics. My dimension is social. (...) It is the social which determines the nature of my task, the nature of my rock. On my way downhill to pick up the absurd rock again, I don't see anything metaphysical: what I see is my social condition, my oppressors. You may think in terms of suicide, if you wish to stick to Camus. Not I, because I exist socially. I've got to make the jump from suicide to murder (Brink, 1984c: 154).

In league with Bernard and Beatrice, he advocates political change and in fact considers the democratisation of South Africa not only inevitable but imminent. He is, in other words, politically conscious and committed. Yet in speaking of the striking miners at Westonaria, Charlie tells his employer, Martin Mynhardt: "they're kept behind barbed wire with nothing but dust and dry grass as far as you can see. They want liquor, they want women. They need *something*" (Brink, 1984c: 40). Given Ben Obumselu's (1990: 57) indication of the demonstrable influence of André Malraux's *La Condition Humaine (Man's Fate)* on *Rumours of Rain* the full text of Charlie's observation is clearly old Gisors's categories of Pascalian *divertissement*: "There is always a need for intoxication: this country has opium, Islam has hashish, the West has women (...) perhaps love is above all the means which the occidental uses to free himself from man's fate" (Malraux, 1990: 238). Like Brink himself, Charlie Mofokeng for all his ideological sensitivity and commitment still tends rather improperly to transpose to the political realm modes of adjustment to the human condition.

André Brink's obsession with human mortality has an obvious link with his politics: in his evocation of the common denominators of the human condition – in which death is central – inheres Brink's most passionate refutation of the inhuman discriminations deriving from apartheid's spurious myth of white superiority. Death is thus a recurrent character in Brink's fiction. Coffins and corpses are not only abiding presences but are common objects of farcical displays. His fiction

abounds also in characters suffering from heart diseases or stroke; and visits to graves dug for the living, just like big game hunting and bull-fights, are not infrequent delights.

"Isn't the smile just another way of baring one's teeth, a prefiguration of the skull?" (Brink, 1984a: 10); "We arm ourselves to the teeth against a thousand threats which never materialize, but against the one thing, death, which always happens, we have no defense" (Brink, 1984a: 9); "It is so beautiful to die" (Brink, 1983b: 249); "death (...) always prowls among us" (Brink, 1985a: 177); "All of us. One by one we were dying as we lived" (Brink, 1983a: 177); "Life is a sexually transmitted disease" (Brink, 1988: 7): these are only some of the insightful comments in Brink's fiction indicating his fixation with the mortal condition. The political dimension of the theme is foregrounded, for example, when the high-handed Afrikaner slave driver, Piet, on his death-bed meditates on life from the infinite depths of his frustrated will to divine power: "There's nothing my hands can hold on to any more. Powerless my talons lie on the bed beside me. Before, I had everything in my grasp: farm and people, earth, mountain, slaves, wheatlands, cattle. Now it's pulled away from me like a sheet, exposing my shame. Bare-arsed one comes into the world and bare-arsed one leaves it" (Brink, 1983a: 487). Brink's continuing theme is the implication of both white master and black slave in the human fold and the sober realities of the mortal condition. Oom Peet, the undertaker's, identification of death in *Rumours of Rain* as the only constant in human experience is typically Brinkean: "Everything in the world keeps changing all the time. Farms, horse-drawn carriages, churches, markets, the lot. There's nothing you can really depend on. Except for death. Death is a man's best investment, and keeps one close to God. That's why I chose it as my career" (Brink, 1984c: 258-59).

Thus, even in *An Instant in the Wind*, Brink's African Eden is in reality the eternal wilderness in the shadow of the valley of death. Where vultures and eagles are pervading presences all through Adam's and Elisabeth's wanderings as symbolic reminders of death, on their physical paths, the protagonists also stumble through tombstones and memorials, and themselves experience symbolic deaths and resurrections. In the wilderness, Elisabeth loses her husband and suffers a miscarriage; Van Zyl shoots himself; there are stories of the killing of twins, of old Hottentot women and children abandoned to die or thrown into pits, and of a ruin beneath which are found a skull and skeletons of children. All of the wilderness is indeed a vast grave throw-

ing up now and again the bones of dead animals, and the protagonists' memories are full of tombs and cluttered with ghosts of the dead.

Even the deaths of other creatures are presented and meditated upon as reminders of humans' own mortality. A dead snake smells like a human corpse; the baboon killed by a lion screams like a man, and, given Adam's and Elisabeth's nearness to the scene, they recognise the entire episode as a foreshadowing and an intimation of their own deaths; in the death of the couple of doves which she tries in vain to save, Elisabeth also discerns an anticipation of her and Adam's death. Presumably, what accounts for Brink's pervading apocalyptic vision in his fiction is his chastened conception of apartheid as embodying the threat of a holocaust. However, *An Instant in the Wind* also points in the direction of Brink's own Afrikaner background. Beyond the Karoo in Adam's and Elisabeth's anguished march towards the Cape, the farmer, de Klerk, at whose place they seek shelter and help, subjects them to the inevitable nightly Bible reading (which paradoxically neither threatened apartheid nor was threatened by it). Significantly taken from Ecclesiastes, the passage dwells on the futility of human labour; the transitoriness of the earth; the eternal unfailing repetitiveness of earthly patterns and experiences; and the condemnation of all things to oblivion. In Elisabeth's vision of a skeleton in the wilderness, sexless and rid of the burden of flesh, as the perfect human substance, Brink's dual visions apparently coincide: the finality of death, and the common human essence from which black, white, man, woman, take form: "A skeleton is what one should be allowed to be, clean and bare, bones. Discovering it in the veld you can't even tell whether it was man or woman. It's pure bone-being; human thing" (Brink, 1983b: 65-66). But the tension of conflating political activism with apocalyptic tragic humanism deriving from Brink's Afrikaner European heritage implicates his work in unending paradoxes, a virtual mortal blow to his professed political affiliations.

In Sisyphus's ordeal, in the ascetic's privations, in the travails of the tragic protagonist, in varying forms of the humiliated human condition, Brink saw the working out of (spiritual) salvation for "the forked animal," the human being. Indeed subscribing to the myth of Africa as the Dark Continent disinclined to civilization could not seem an ideological transgression to Brink:

Scorched red earth, here and there, in irrigation areas, patches of varying green. The bare veld again. At last the rocky ridges of the foothills. A landscape older than man, burnt bare by the sun, blown

empty by the wind, all secrets exposed to the sky. The more fertile narrow valleys among rows of hills made an anachronistic impression with their trees and fields and red-roofed houses. Man hasn't really taken root here yet, it is still unclaimed territory. His existence is temporary and, if the earth should decide, to shrug him off, which would happen quite effortlessly, he would leave no sign behind. The only permanence is that of rocks, the petrified bones of a vast skeleton. Ancient Africa (Brink, 1984a: 239).

For he saw (South) Africa as an appropriate setting of epic action, given the bitter wars fought for freedom there, and the accentuated precariousness of human life. Brink appropriated the myth as a resonant metonymy of humans' doomed efforts to claim the earth, a powerful metaphor of the impermanence of the human tenancy, of the representative inconsequence of human action. Thus, Brink inscribes ideology as metaphysics, the form in which ideology assumes its greatest and subtlest power. In *An Instant in the Wind*, the hostility of nature, the haunting mortality of the protagonists, their traumatic pilgrimage itself, lead the narrator to the sombre reaffirmation of the ancient myth of the human as the eternal pilgrim and voyager, only walking by: "This great range is a threatening antagonist. In the narrow sliver of deep blue sky high above them they see, from time to time, the specks of eagles or vultures hovering: this is no country for human beings" (Brink, 1976: 175). But the "country" meant cannot possibly be Brink's South Africa nor could the message have enhanced the struggle for post-apartheid South Africa. Brink's humanism took precedence over his liberation politics.

In 1990, Brink had envisaged that the release of Nelson Mandela from prison would mean for South African writers "the liberation of the imagination" (Brink, 1990: 472). Remarking on how apartheid had narrowed and proscribed the scope of the imagination of writers, Brink hoped that with the changing political situation in South Africa "the imagination in South Africa can now be set free to explore, boldly, adventurously, even outrageously, the new territory we have entered and whose map is still undrawn" (Brink, 1990: 481). Speaking to Elnadi and Rifaat in 1993, a year before Mandela's presidency, Brink envisioned with a new exhilarating sense of freedom the possibility of concentrating on what had remained pre-eminent to him: "the experiences of individuals as opposed to the political and ideological side of things"; he spoke about "trying to get more and more of an imaginative

grasp on reality, to invent history"; and equally interpreted the freedom in terms of filling in gaps in South African history. Brink considered *On the Contrary* such an attempt to "correct the historical record and fill in a gap" (Brink, 1993b: 8). His recent fiction, *The Other Side of Silence* (2003), is another such effort, implicitly contesting the pariah status of Afrikanerdom by laying bare the phenomenal cruelties and severities of German colonialism in South-West Africa. As in most of his other post-1994 fiction also, with black political freedom in South Africa achieved, Brink focuses not only on the exclusions of race but even more keenly on those of gender, Hanna's mutilation, a resonant metaphor of colonial/racial oppression, speaking also of the silence/silencing of gender.

Characterising as archaeological the use of memory to excavate the silent or silenced racial/gender landscapes of the past, Brink posits that given inherent correspondences in the processes of historiography with those of fiction, "history," in an ontological sense, inaccessible except as an act of language, is transformed by the process and nature of textualisation into a narration. Thus Brink identifies textuality as a fundamental characteristic of the postmodern post-apartheid South African fiction, and considers it capable of engaging with and transforming the mind-set that informed the master narratives of apartheid. For "Simply to replace a patriarchic discourse with a matriarchic approach still repeats the patterns and the model that informed the original narrative" (Brink, 1998b: 33). His contention is the indispensability of "new aesthetic responses to the changing circumstances" of South African life (Brink, 1998b: 29); it is the basic need for a fundamental shift in the very possibility of writing.

"Postmodernism," "magical realism," "mythology" are constructs Brink has invoked at various times to characterize his most recent fiction in which the very ontology of history is now interrogated. He contests the imputation that postmodernism is congenitally unable to enter into alliances with historicity and morality: "Once the world is perceived as story, with an endless capacity for renewal, metamorphosis, and reinvention, literature becomes more, not less potent" (Brink, 1986b: 19). The imaginative worlds of *The First Life of Adamastor* (1993), *Imaginations of Sand* (1996), *Devil's Valley* (1998), *Rights of Desire* (2000) in which humans, spirits, animals, interact in a complex convocation are illuminated by Brink's references to the folk tradition of magical realism in the works of Tutuola, Achebe, Ngugi, Soyinka (and he could have added Mofolo nearer home). The urgent re-invention of the con-

continent, Brink passionately contends, has to be through a nuanced imaginative grasp of reality: "Myth may have preceded history, but in the long run it may be the only guarantee for the survival of history" (Brink, 1998b: 42).

For more than three decades, André Brink has demonstrated a remarkable fertility and courage in articulating his position on the responsibilities of the writer in South Africa's complex and changing socio-political landscape, not only in his enormous fiction but also a massive corpus of non-fictional writing as well as interviews. Brink's abiding conviction is that prevalent socio-political situations inspire, stimulate and modify a writer's necessarily *aesthetic* response to his circumstances. Appraising Brink's non-fictional work, Rosemary Jolly (1996: 27) terms his motives exemplary, remarking further that "his sense of the relationship between private and public duty is informed by a consistent and admirable set of ethical prerogatives". Brink's non-fictional discourse on the writer and his/her society alone is enough to stake an immortal reputation on. However, in his novelistic practice, given his privileging of European humanist universals, Brink's engagement with the local but urgent struggle against apartheid often seemed compromised. Brink was often meditating on the good life in a state of affairs that approximate to post-apartheid South Africa. Paradoxically, then, given Brink's peculiar aesthetic response to the political in his "apartheid fiction," and his more recent keener focus on the exclusions of gender, if in post-apartheid South Africa, as in the international community, the significance of Brink's work remains in the ascendant, that perhaps is only to be expected.

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Notes

1. The pattern of the growth of Brink's artist-protagonists in *Looking on Darkness* and *States of Emergency* is towards the realization of the worldliness of responsible texts. In the former the coloured-actor protagonist, Joseph Malan, initially drawn to the theatre as a form of evasion, is to turn the theatre into political commentary, becoming in some ways the archetypal artist, given his anguished discovery of truth, his obsession with it, his passion to create a rebirth of feeling in his society and his suffering prosecution and death for scandalizing the state. Similarly, in *States*, the narrator-protagonist abandons "The Lives of Adamastor", a complex love story devoid of a political dimension, for "States of Emergency" which engages with "the current of history sweeping past me: this torn and plundered country, this goddamned time" (Brink, 1988: 5).
2. Brink actually cites an Afrikaner park-keeper here but he does so approvingly and moreover appropriates the opinion to illustrate his thesis: Africa as the eternal jungle.

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