



**HAL**  
open science

# The Myth of Don Juan in André Brink's Before I Forget

Aristide Trendrel

► **To cite this version:**

Aristide Trendrel. The Myth of Don Juan in André Brink's Before I Forget. *Alizés : Revue angliciste de La Réunion*, 2010, Old Days, New Days, 33, pp.165-182. hal-02341427

**HAL Id: hal-02341427**

**<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02341427>**

Submitted on 31 Oct 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## ***The Myth of Don Juan in André Brink's Before I Forget***

In his introduction to his collection of essays *Reinventing a Continent*, André Brink addresses the issue of a post-apartheid literature and the South African writer's fear of losing his imaginative focus after apartheid. Not only is he alien to such misgivings, but he cheerfully concludes as to the infinite possibilities offered by the new situation, among which the treatment of memory. *Before I Forget* is certainly an eloquent example of such a treatment, as it is a double enterprise, a dual foray into South Africa's historical past and Europe's literary past. Their juncture is one of the archetypes of Western love, Don Juan, and the result of Brink's attempt to understand, enlighten and finally appropriate the figure is a post-colonial version of the classic seducer.

To examine and denounce what is wrong with society is a recurrent concern in Brink's fiction and raises the issue of the artist's responsibility. In a "new South Africa," Brink's reconstructed Afrikaner, having found a place in the continent, expands his fighting horizons, while keeping memory alive. *Before I Forget* features a vigilant Janus-faced committed writer, who looks back assessing his amorous past, but also forward with an activist's determination. Sexuality and "the rights of desire" (conspicuous in one of his novel titles) is also a recurrent theme in Brink's work. It seems natural that his interest in this sweeping myth of sempiternal desire should appear among his post-apartheid concerns, since resistance literature could relax after the "remaking of South Africa". However, such a literature does not slacken in Brink's pen, all the more

so when it deals with a chameleon-like myth which takes the colour of the environment in which it lives. Indeed, the myth offering “elements that can be assimilated in any time and place,” as Georges Gendarme de Bévoitte notes (my own translation), is craftily worked upon and smoothly moulded into a native form. After a Spanish, Italian, French, German and English citizenship, last but not least, Don Juan is naturalised South African without losing his original attributes. I will argue that Brink’s Don Juan keeps up, to a certain extent, with the tradition of the major romantic twist that the myth took in the nineteenth century, while amplified and considerably expanded so as to gain both in depth and breadth, notably in the hero’s awareness of mortality and his inner experience of death as well as his eroticisation of revolt and politicisation of Eros. A system of checks and balances is set up in the narrative to guarantee the sovereignty of the myth.

Given the popularity and wide extension of the Don Juan title, the question of what qualifies the novel as a rewriting of the myth must now be given some attention. Jean Rousset’s requirement of “the permanent scenario”, that is the hero, the group of women and the fight with death, has found its intertextual way into Brink’s novel. In this respect it is rather contradictory that the South African writer should offer a very narrow view of his character. In an interview given to *Avoir-Allire* the author, denouncing his own creature as “a macho” and claiming that “he is not impressed by the seducer’s career of his character” advances a limited view of Don Juanism. His comments may account for the flimsiness and flatness of his female characters, but his male hero is a vivid representative and true avatar of Don Juan, which reminds us of the fundamental fact that the Don Juan myth, unlike Tristan’s, foregrounds the quest of love and the flight of desire rather than

the object(s). Brink's statement might have been motivated by a concern to dissociate himself from a character who, being a collector of women often compared to wines, could understandably draw the feminists' anathema. Likewise, his narrator's easy and loose declarations of the invaluable contribution of women to humanity seem to be symptomatic of the same concern for political correctness. However, Brink's European cultural heritage speaks for itself and when everything is said and done, it is certainly the text that has the last word.

Brink explores the Don Juan myth at two levels, fictional and metafictional, or through incorporation and distantiation. While the narrative is a reinvention of the myth, within the narrative one of the major versions of Don Juan, which was the starting point of a new phase in the evolution of the myth, namely Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, is continuously discussed and probed. Like E.T.A. Hoffmann's, Brink's character(s) muse(s) on Don Giovanni. Through mirror effects the image of Brink's autodiegetic narrator is amplified, as a dialogic relation between him and the opera's character is put into narrative motion. In her doctoral thesis *Filiation and Writing in André Brink's Five Novels*, Mélanie Joseph-Vilain classifies Brink's novels into three categories: historical, contemporary and diachronic. *Before I Forget*, establishing a constant back and forth between past and present through the hero's inquiry into historical, personal and literary past and his scrutiny of the present, belongs to the diachronic kind. Moreover, Brink's Don Juan just like "Hoffmann's [...] must talk and explain himself, since the motives responsible for his actions are at times more important than the actions themselves", as Leo Weinstein maintains (Weinstein 1959: 76). Hence the need for a first person narrative becomes all the more imperative; Chris Minnaar, whose name means lover in Dutch, attempts to account

for his love life in a series of notes. The text reads as an elegy, a belated declaration of love to a dead woman made in a long letter which takes shape in diary entries that span the three-week American war in Iraq. As the South African “lover” pores over Mozart’s opera, Brink, through this intertext, reactivates the myth that has been evolving since Tirso de Molina’s founding text.

Right from the beginning Brink’s Don Juan strikes the reader as retrospective and introspective. No man cares less for his past than Don Giovanni, according to Roger Laporte, but Brink’s does. The title foregrounds the urgency of memory and becomes the pathetic leitmotif in the narrative, all the more so as his seventy-year-old hero is even older than Henry de Montherlant’s; the French playwright was the first who dared present a sixty-five-year-old Don Juan without satiric intent. In addition, while Molière endowed his character with wit and reasoning, Brink goes a step further advancing the figure of the artist as Don Juan and thus complexifying the myth, as we shall see, with the specifics of creation. Likewise, Brink enriches the pleasure on reflecting on lust, a major trait of the French playwright’s Dom Juan, with the pain and guilt unrestricted lust may entail. Yet unlike Miguel Manara, the historical person who identified with Don Juan, Minnaar does not repent or convert. Besides, in spite of his self-proclaimed identification with Da Ponte-Mozart’s hero, he highlights a difference: “I’m most unlike Don Giovanni. He played the arithmetic game, he was fucking by numbers [...] to me it is the glimpse of a woman’s uniqueness, her unrepeatability, which drives me on.” By introducing the categories of quality and quantity, Brink’s narrator levels a critique at Don Giovanni—albeit the only one—and prides himself in his superior apprehension of femininity. Unrepeatability in repetition, unique-

ness in serialisation seem to be this Don Juan's achievement as he composes his mosaic of femaleness.

Woman after woman emerges as if from a conjurer's hat, not according to a chronological order but through flashes of amorous recollections following the law of association and sudden inspiration. In its presentation of the group of women, the novel has a Russian doll-like structure, which gives a tedious repetitiveness to the narrative, but certainly serves the myth. The whole female community is indiscriminately represented in this long list of love held not by Frederik, the most discreet valet, but Minnaar himself. As memory is selective, only a certain number makes it onto the list which is based on the writer's notes kept in the previous years. No woman is wanting, but each one is an indispensable piece in the puzzle of femininity, "real" or fictional alike; in *Before I Forget*, Melanie or Nicoletta stand side by side with Nastasya Filippovna or Scheherazade. We shall see that as a writer Brink's hero will possess the fictional ladies more easily. Precisely, for the narrator, the ethic of quantity does not exclude quality, free in the novel from the concern for propriety implicit in the scenic mode. An elegiac tone does not exclude a dithyrambic one in this "kind of homage. In praise of women. What would I have been—how could I have been *me*—without each and every one of them" (Brink: 2004 10). In this object pronoun in italics Don Juan is identified in his contiguity and conjunction with the multiplicity and proliferation of femininity. All his women, those who were conquered and those "who got away" (John Updike), form a merry-go-round revolving about an ideal woman in the heart of the heart of the narrative. Rachel, albeit the female lead, fleshes out and thrives on the memory of those who made it onto the list.

Rachel's character is far more important than Donna Anna's in *Don Giovanni*. This young sculptress has multiple functions in the narrative. On a metafictional level she is an opponent to the Don Giovanni figure and adopts a humane yet critical view of the seducer's dissolute life. Consequently, she rejects Minnaar's erotic exploits, giving the Don Juan debate a moralising slant and thus leaving all options open to the reader. Although she adopts a condescending stance at the beginning of the narrative, claiming to pity "the lonely man" (Brink: 2004 42), in the middle of the narrative, her critique of Don Giovanni becomes extremely severe: "Don Giovanni's need to fuck [...] is the urge to run away. He cannot face his loneliness, so he needs to impose himself. There is an imbalance of power. In the urge to share there is a recognition of equality." (164). Rachel's egalitarian claim in love echoes a feminist trend in the narrative, which tries to balance the all-male account of experience. Yet, on the fictional level she is the *thou* complementary to the *I*, as Minnaar's addressee and counterpart in the epistolary situation. While towering female figures bring about Don Juan's image as an irresistible lover, Rachel puts forward the image of Don Juan as an ideal-seeker. What the narrator terms as "the single most perfect love affair of my life" (133) refers to an unknown woman behind the window of a train that was leaving the station. Rachel and this mysterious woman merge in the narrative: "I lean over and very gently, almost without touching, press my mouth against your forehead. Like years ago, my hand against a face behind a moving window" (229). Indeed, Hoffmann's interpretation of Donna Anna as the feminine object par excellence, inaccessible and ideal, tailored for the seducer but arriving too late, is quite relevant in the novel. On the one hand, the encounter is presented as salutary for Chris Min-

naar, as it is Rachel who puts an end to his writer's eight-year block, inspiring in him the text in process of being written, unifying and federating his fragmentary notes. Otto Rank underlines this animating role of the woman that finds its culminating point in romantic love. On the other hand, Rachel, married and too young for a Don Juan who is about to lose his sexual vigour, dies in a banal car accident just before the fulfilment of the erotic act. The romantic myth is thus saved and Don Juan's identity is preserved since the erotic quest clearly remains open at the end, although Rachel opens and closes the list of remembered women. Moreover, Brink developing the triangular formation in the myth partially fulfils Weinstein's prediction: "Those writing under Hoffmann's influence will concentrate their attention primarily on three characters: Don Juan, Donna Anna [...] and Ottavio, who will usually be depicted as an unworthy or insignificant man" (Weinstein: 1959 77). Brink revisits the love triangle under the auspices of *Don Giovanni*, making Rachel's husband one of the main characters in the text. The first encounter is dubbed "the *Don Giovanni* night," for the trio listens to the opera (Brink: 2004 75), which becomes the aural background of Minnaar's composition of the text and thus it perpetually commemorates the encounter. George naturally participates in the love debate inspired by *Don Giovanni* and sees in the opera hero "a compulsive seducer" in search of freedom (42). Sweeping love aside, he makes the narrator the sole perceiver of Don Juan's dual quest for love and freedom. Adding George to Rachel as a magnet of emotion and object of homosexual desire, although the latter appears only in a dream and remains sublimated, makes Rachel less than an Isolde. For Brink's Don Juan is a pursuer not of divine love, as the romantics would sustain, but of earthly love, albeit ideal and with a mystical



touch. The nature of the hero's paradise is no Biblical Eden. As the narrator confides to Rachel, speaking of his ideal woman, "She still drives me out to look for other moments and manifestations of paradise" (163). Brink pushes the reader forcefully onto the maternal track. As each woman is embedded in another woman, Rachel is embedded in the mother who has a special status in the narrative.

The author displays an acute interest in the maternal figure absent from the prestigious versions of the myth, yet brought under scrutiny by its interpreters. Pierre-Jean Jouve maintains that Mozart's *Don Giovanni* tends towards a form of the past, an inaccessible mother who alone would give him peace. Brink's version not only eagerly adopts this view, but makes it as explicit as possible. The mother figure, along with Rachel's character, dominates the narrative. Minnaar tells Rachel what he has already told the mother: "you came to me with all your loves" (17), the aged lady remarks. The old woman's death, prefigured in the funereal flowers offered by the son and originally intended for Rachel, follows upon the young woman's, thus operating a fusion between the mother and the beloved. Minnaar remains the Oedipal child who attempts to eliminate the father throughout his life. Twice he seduces his father's women, thus usurping the paternal place. From this perspective, Minnaar's central epiphany that the country is the only woman to whom he is able to utter unbreakable marriage vows (262) points to the mother through the age-old equation mother-land. However, Rachel overrides the mother as it is she who provokes the fight with death. More than a mere muse, she is a saviouress, as she ultimately engineers Minnaar's showdown with death on the arena of writing. I will argue that Don Juan's newly acquired consciousness of mortality liberates the hero, as Brink opts for what Gilles Deleuze

terms, citing Foucault, “a vitalism against a background of mortality” (Deleuze 1990: 125; my translation).

Like *Don Giovanni*'s overture, the novel's first pages announce death: a dead beloved, a dying mother, a dying city, Baghdad, and a man coming to grips with his own approaching death, turning his discourse into the swan song of his waning potency. A less static image than the narrator's “album in his mind” would be the chessboard of memory and a game of chess with the “Commendator”, as recollection after recollection returns, time is regained and the queen is almost saved; Rachel revives in the discourse. From a writer's block that called into question Minnaar's very identity, the narrator moves into what Maurice Blanchot terms “persecutive prehension,” the writer's irresistible need to grasp the pen (Blanchot: 1955 15). The resolution of the block seems indicative of the narrator's changing attitude to death. “One can write only if one remains master of oneself before death, only if one establishes sovereign relations over it,” states Blanchot (107; my translation). Through his immersion into death, Minnaar accomplishes his mortal condition. “For the first time I can imagine Don Giovanni old”, says the narrator in the final lines (Brink: 2004 311). While Georges Bataille in *L'Expérience intérieure* presented him as a reveller sadly lacking awareness of death, Brink makes the consciousness of a battling mortality the basic premise of his hero.

Don Juan casts himself into the role of Orpheus right from the start: “In and through every loop and line my hand traces on the page, to recall you, like Eurydice, from the dead” (Brink: 2004 7). No other Don Juan version illustrates so well this aspect of the myth which Pierre-Jean Jouve phrases as “the essential suffering region, which is our communication with the dead” (Jouve: 1968 141; my translation). Through this

love letter to a dead woman, Brink seems to point back to the origin of the myth. Indeed, Rousset traced the remnants of the ancient cult of the dead with food offerings in the meeting with the statue (Rousset: 1978 37). In *Before I Forget* food is replaced by an offering of words that challenge the silence of death even more poignantly, as the narrator identifies throughout the narrative with another literary figure, Scheherazade. The temerity of his stories keeps death at bay. Through this major narrative device that symbolically enables a form of communication with the dead, Brink posits the metaphysical and metapsychological duality of Eros and Thanatos. However, in spite of his close commerce with death, Don Juan remains on the side of life after having been through the temptation of loving death, which renders the consciousness of mortality more vibrant.

Commentators agree on Don Juan's nonchalant relations with death, on "a monomaniacal supernormality," on "a libido [...] impervious to any infiltrations of the death impulse," as Denis Hollier puts it (Hollier: 1985 77). However, there is a heretic version of Don Juan; in the tormented universe of Bataille's *Bleu du ciel* the hero is a necrophiliac. Here, we come to grips with what is Brink's major asset in the expansion of the myth. The South African author fills the gap between these two extreme visions and enriches the fight with death putting forward a Don Juan who consciously resists his death impulse. Brink introduces the polymorphism of desire while keeping it under control. Minnaar's taste for orgies described once in the narrative remains peripheral, but not his attitude to elderly women. "Impossible to translate into words" (Brink: 2004 210) is Nicolette who declares that "death is never far away when you make love" (218). The narrator's sense of danger and his fight against falling in love with her, because if

he did, he “would be lost” (*Ibid.*), reveals his resistance to the experience of death-in-love which Bataille describes in his poem “Tombeau”: “I fall into immensity / which falls onto itself” (Bataille: 1971 75; my translation). Likewise, he declines the sexual invitation of the wreck of a woman with whom he has the experience of the obscene and the abject but keeps her with him “all the time”, “whenever I am with a new woman [...] or by myself” (Brink: 2004 239). Thus such a lurking fascination with death, although it never reaches the depths fathomed by Bataille, does create a dramatic tension, inexistent in most versions of the myth.

Nevertheless, transgression could by no means be absent from a rewriting of the myth. Although Brink rejected his Calvinist background, the symmetry of the two car accidents in the novel points to his former affiliation. The first, which causes the death of the narrator’s wife and child, is provoked by a marital row over an illicit love affair and the second, which causes Rachel’s death on the day of her birthday, is contiguous to the promise of pleasure. Like in *Don Giovanni*, death strikes in the middle of celebration but in the novel it comes uninvited. However, it is at the ending that transgression harks back to the seventeenth-century original Don Juan, where the crime is not the amorous disorder, but the offence to the dead, as Rousset maintains (Rousset: 1978 26). Minnaar is about to kill Rachel who is lying in a coma, when he realises that she is already dead and he proclaims his guilt: “I am as guilty as if I have done it. It is not my fault that I have come too late. Like Rogozhin, I killed the thing I loved.” (Brink: 2004 311). The identification with Dostoyevsky’s character in *The Idiot* entails the appropriation of Nastasya Filippovna, one of Don Juan’s fictional elected ladies, and the hubristic act actualises Hoffmann’s demoniac revolt against Creation, en-

dowing the hero with existential depth. The maxims he lives by are revolt, liberty and passion and here is Camus's absurd man. The French philosopher gave the Don Juan figure its letters of nobility acknowledging its authenticity. The rock has rolled down, but Minnaar rolls it up again before he forgets. This is the absurd man's heroism. Libertinism, liberty, liberation is the notional chain in motion, in *Before I Forget*. After having sung "Viva la Liberta" with Don Giovanni (306), the narrator enunciates: "We do not write to hold on, but to let go. I am learning [...] to loosen my grip, to set memory free, to let myself be: myself and all the women who have allowed me to be what I am now" (*Ibid.*). This declaration of liberation is his final insight, the outcome of his artistic inquiry into love, death and revolt. Blanchot, citing André Gide, points out the writer's transformation after completion of the work: "I wanted to show [...] the influence of the book on the one who writes it [...]. For coming out of us, it changes us, it modifies the course of our lives" (Blanchot: 1975 104; my translation). Minnaar, enriched by the intimation of eternity his text provides him with, returns to temporality and finitude: "He [Don Giovanni] is still woman-struck [...] The only difference is that he no longer needs a camera" (Brink: 2004 311). This anecdotal final line, referring to the statement of a famous photographer who would continue to take pictures after retirement, free from the need of a camera, restores Don Juan where he belongs to temporality, not incompatible though, as Micheline Sauvage claims, with the Oedipal fixation, since Brink's Don Juan, contrary to Bataille's, evades the pitfall of regression and death through the eroticisation of revolt.

The rebellion against the father in *Before I Forget* fashions the identity of Don Juan as a man in revolt. The challenge against authority, which the myth exemplifies, finds its expres-

sion in the narrator's defiance of paternal interdicts on both sexuality and writing. The most memorable episode in the novel features the father's punishment of the boy for using the word "cunt" and the paternal invention of a euphemism for vagina, filimandorous. The subsequent and consequent expansiveness of sensuality is extended to political struggle, as the father epitomises the colonialist's figure which Minnaar abhors and condemns. His political engagement against any form of colonialism and injustice starting from apartheid becomes life-long in the course of the narrative. Likewise, the rights of desire, of humanity and of free expression become inseparable. Brink in *Mapmakers* clearly expresses a view in favour of committed literature.

The link of Eros and politics is signified through another major narrative device, the interweaving of erotic and political developments. Contrary to Bataille's novel where "the sexual and the political are too allergic to each other to communicate" (Hollier: 1985 87), in *Before I Forget* their concurrence is harmonious. Minnaar's involvement with women intermingles with his involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle through the medium of writing. Just like Brink, Minnaar as a South African writer struggles against apartheid and the Afrikaner hegemony and undermines the system, discrediting it abroad; and as a South African lover he loves all women indiscriminately. The celebration of the first Dutch settlement at the Cape tercentenary in 1952, for instance, which sends Bonnie, the coloured secretary, and Chris Minnaar "into a frenzy of lovemaking," viewed as a political act, breaks down for Minnaar the divide between white and coloured: "Suddenly [...] I knew from the inside of her what it meant to be [...] a coloured woman. And that brought me a new shocking understanding of who I was. [...] This I could only be because it was lived through her."

(Brink: 2004 104). Not only does the son liberate the coloured girl from the predatory oppressor, but through love he develops an insider's commitment to the anti-apartheid cause. In retrospect Don Juan's personal history reveals their bond which involves the history of South Africa.

Indeed, dark or bright pages of South African history are systematically sealed by the narrator's private erotic history. Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd's assassination acts as a catalyst upon Chris and Helena's relationship, as it breaks her resistance to love-making and his resistance to marriage. No Don Juan is fit for matrimony and the faithfulness it conventionally requires, yet Brink's hero comes up with a quaint declaration of love and its concomitant pledge of fidelity: "South Africa had become the only woman in my life I could not ever, finally, leave, because she would not leave *me*." (262). Although the subordinate clause sends the reader back to psychological explanations, what is important in this statement seems to be the narrator's fully eroticised relationship to the country which is also multiple and diverse. Don Juan's ideal is a fair, unified South Africa. Just like Brink, Minnaar rises to international prominence and is persecuted during the struggle against apartheid. Isodora Diala's view that "Brink's allegiance to the universalist claims of European humanism vitiated his significance for the local peculiar, urgent battle against apartheid" (Diala: 2005 22) does not seem to be valid in *Before I Forget*, where the South African writer fully exploits the political implications of the European myth in the context of apartheid, colonialism and post-colonialism. South African history seems to be a powerful stimulus to Brink's imagination as his political consciousness and his indefatigable commitment process the Don Juan myth.

Love and politics go hand in hand in the novel, as the struggle against oppression, revisited through memory and filtered through love, is amplified by contemporary developments and an aged Don Juan undertakes a new battle against neo-colonialism. The TV screen that day after day reports the bombardment of Baghdad constitutes a setting within a setting. Here we have a seducer's diary whose entries are dated by the progression of the war in Iraq, which becomes "the context and condition of" the narrator's "memories of love" (Brink: 2004 305). If a woman's death and the looming death of memory prompted Minnaar's notes, it is the death of civilisation, according to the character, made tangible in the American invasion of Iraq, that keeps them going; the Iraq war is constantly reported by the narrator, who along with the CNN journalists provides his own commentary: "The West has truly come to the edge of the abyss" (6).

This violent intrusion of contemporary politics into the fabrics of the novel testifies to Brink's will to continue resistance to any form of colonialism. Don Juan's quest continues on two fronts, the erotic and the political: "The real war lies ahead" is the narrator's conclusive statement on the fall of Baghdad (305). Commenting *States of Emergency*, his 1989 novel, Brink advanced that "it is easier for fiction writers, who have slightly more freedom than journalists, to assume some of the journalistic functions" (Getz: 1989 25). Thus the working-through of love mediated by Don Juan is not in the least meant to be a distantiating from Brink's interventionist literature. Don Juan is no longer representative but performative, as he becomes instrumental in the project of asserting difference from the colonial centre through his life-long struggle against oppression. Therefore, *Before I Forget* is a post-colonial novel according to the definition given by Bill Ashcroft,



Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin which covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” (Ashcroft: 1989 2). The narrative precisely spans the whole of this period and points to an on-going battle while it skilfully interweaves historical events with the European myth. Brink’s novel denounces the hegemonic oppression of imperial power, whatever form it may take.

Contrary to Brecht who considered Don Juan a social parasite (Rousset: 1978 176), Brinks makes the hero significant in an anti-apartheid, antinationalistic, anti-imperialistic context. Thus the politicisation of Don Juan whitens his dirty linens, if any. Thanks to political commitment not only are individual rights asserted, as they have been traditionally through the figure of Don Juan, but also collective. Therefore, if on the one hand, Don Juan / Minnaar, celebrating unrestricted love and personal instinct as part and parcel of human nature, releases an element of social disorder, on the other hand, through commitment he restores social order which had been disrupted not only since the imposition of the apartheid laws but since the arrival of the colonisers. In this respect *Before I Forget* is an optimistic novel advancing the brand of optimism inherent in political engagement. Brink not only declines to share J.M. Coetzee’s fears of “colonisation of the novel by the discourse of history” (Coetzee: 1988 3), but seems to dismiss Bataille’s idea of a guilty literature. The French writer in *La littérature et le mal* took pleasure in considering literature in a communist society because it would be a society in which literature would never have a status. Brink delights in its officially dissident status as protest becomes one of its *raison d’être*. Under Brink’s pen literature pleads not guilty.

By giving the Don Juan myth a political coating, the dissident's veneer, the anti-imperialist's aura, Brink undertakes the mythography of the postcolonial struggle. Brink's political commitment remains passionate and it is enriched by the politics of love ingrained in the European myth. In his embrace of the myth we are reminded of Walter Benjamin's image of the folded socks. As a child, the German philosopher was fascinated by the sight of his socks forming a unity, sheltering a secret inside, and was baffled by the disappearance of mystery when unwrapped. Likewise, Brink's Don Juan seems meaningful when he envelops his predecessors. The whole secret of literature may lie in its phantom-like intertextuality, after all.

Aristie Tendrel<sup>1</sup>

### Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill. Griffiths, Gareth. Tiffin, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Bataille, Georges. *Oeuvres complètes* III. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Sens unique* trad. J. Lacoste. Paris: Maurice Nadeau, 1988.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *L'espace littéraire*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1955.
- Brink, André. *Before I Forget*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2004.
- Coetzee, J.M. "The Novel Today", *Upstream* 6.1, Summer 1988, 2-5.
- De Bévot Gendarme, Georges. *La légende de Don Juan, son évolution dans la littérature, des origines au romantisme*. 1906. Geneva: Slatkine, 1993.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Pourparlers*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1990.

---

<sup>1</sup> Université du Maine, France.

- Diala, Isidora. "André Brink: An Aesthetics of Response", *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* Vol. 42 (1), 2005, 5-30.
- Getz, Alene. "A Writer in a State of Emergency", *Sydney Morning Herald*; 1 September 1989, 25.
- Hollier, Denis. Miller, Richard. "Bataille's Tomb; A Halloween Story" October, Vol. 33, Summer 1985, 73-102.
- Joseph-Vilain, Mélanie. *Filiation et écriture dans cinq romans d'André Brink*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, Université Aix-Marseille I- Université de Provence, 29 November 2003.
- Jouve, Pierre-Jean. *Le Don Juan de Mozart*. Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1968.
- Laporte, Roger. "Un Homme sans Nom", *Oblique*, Vol. 1, N°38, 95-103.
- Pujas, Sophie. "Rencontre avec André Brink", *Avoir-Alire*, 23 May 2006.
- Rank, Otto. *Don Juan et le double*. Paris: Payot, 1973.
- Rousset, Jean. *Le mythe de Don Juan*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1978.
- Sauvage, Micheline. *Le cas Don Juan*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1953.
- Weinstein, Leo. *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959.
-