

Sex and Love attempts to put sex back into the context of the relationships we make. It succeeds most clearly in putting sex firmly into the context of the motivations we have to form and maintain sexual relationships. It uses the concept of desire as the key to understanding our motivations and our pleasure. That desire for another affects our sexual relationships and our sexual relationships seems a truism, but as Wendy Holloway explains in her essay "Heterosexual Sex: Power and Desire for the other": "there is a whole area of women's experience of men in heterosexual sex which feminist theory and politics has not successfully addressed. It is almost as if the more widespread assumptions about love and sex are so taken for granted that we keep missing the basic and fundamental question: why do some of us feel so strongly about men that our feminist analysis (the oppressiveness of sexual relationships with men and all that) just does not succeed in determining our feelings and practices?"

Sex and Love is an innovative and provocative collection of essays that use psychological understandings of desire to get at the power of our sexuality. It is a relief to see psychoanalysis being claimed in this way by feminism (though Freudianism was never as wholly rejected by British feminists as it was by American), and I hope this book will help dispel the notion of Freud's work as the product of a dirty-minded misogynist. But a focus on desire is tricky, especially for a political approach to sexuality. It can lead to a fascinating exploration of the way each of us understands our gender and our sex role socialization. It can lead to a greater understanding of our sexual responses and of why and how power is acted out in our relationships. This approach, while potentially valuable for each of us individually, is tricky because of that - it addresses sexuality only at the level of the individual.

If we want to understand the politics of our sexuality, we can't afford to lose the understanding that sex, desire and love happen (or don't) between us, not only within us. If we lose sight of this then we run the risk of failing to grasp that sex is a political issue because it is a huge and determining part of our social relationships - at home, at work and out on the town. We put at risk the fragile understanding of our personal/sexual relationships as a fundamental part of a continuum of social relationships that stretches uninterrupted into the impersonal/asexual relationships that the male left has taken as its domain. The straight male left has, by and large, drawn a line across that continuum and has declared the personal politically invalid. It will be that much harder to assert the existence of the continuum if we explore what exists within us at the expense of what exists between us.

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Writing in a Stage of Siege by
André Brink
(New York, Summit Books, 1983)

André Brink is one of a small number of South African writers presently enjoying great international celebrity. Others are Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, Athol Fugard, and J.M. Coetzee. Brink's novels are best sellers, reviewed in the large circulation American and British newspapers as well as the fashionable liberal/left-wing journals like the **New York Review of Books** and the **New Statesman**. **Writing in a State of Siege** is, then, a collection of essays by a major contemporary South African novelist which addresses the problems confronting the South African writer and, by extension, any writer attempting to practise in a society in which political suppression is the norm.

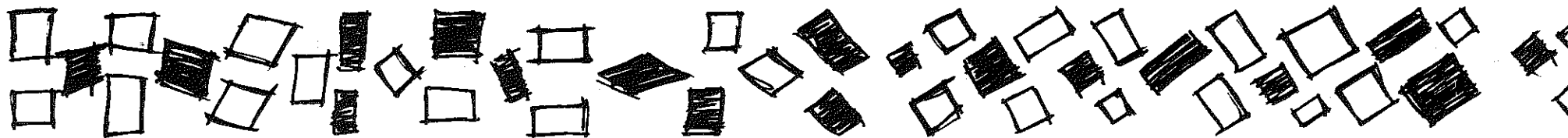
In common with the other writers mentioned above, Brink is white and writes in English - two factors which contribute to their popular success. That only white South African writers so far have managed to garner the world's attention is in some measure a consequence of the kinds of readers who have accorded them their fame. The typical reader - and therefore political sympathizer - of Brink and the others is a literate, curious, white, English-speaking, left-leaning liberal, who is a fundamental part of the vast readership of the English-speaking world at present. By and large, though there are obvious and honourable exceptions, these writers, drawing naturally upon their own experience, tend to write about the world of white people and its relation to that of the black. Their protagonists are, often, not unlike their readers, allowing a kind of "identification with" them which tends to bring the South Africa of the literature into a familiar perspective for the white Westerner. As significant to the success is the fact that, as Brink puts it in the essay "Censorship and Literature," the white writer, "for obvious reasons... can breathe more freely [than the black in South Africa.]" In other words, the South African government, in its desire to placate its Western business partners who publically express abhorrence for apartheid but publically continue trading with South Africa, is lenient towards white South African writers who publish their detestation of apartheid abroad while it jails, harrasses, and bans black writers who express similar views. South Africa is undeniably an industrialized country - unlike the other African nations - whose apartheid problem is perceptible as a logical, if blunt and brutal, extension of Western capitalism and whose setting is thus recognizable to us all. We in Canada may not be numerically overwhelmed by our poor native people, but we do have our poor and our poor native people and we are all participants in the way of life that conspires to keep them poor and harmless. This state is the deepest intention of the apartheid system - to keep the blacks poor and to render them harmless so that the white population can remain rich and powerful. The

government of South Africa has been successful in keeping the blacks poor and relatively successful in keeping them harmless. Though there have been immensely significant movements of black resistance to apartheid since the inception, in 1910, of the Union of South Africa and the African National Congress. In a superbly told chronicle of African Resistance to white domination, "After Soweto", Brink discusses the history of the relation of black and white in an attempt to explain the events of Soweto in an historical perspective. The great irony of South African history is the once-common goals of the Afrikaners and the black South Africans: vividly seen in white-oriented Socialism of the Afrikaners miners in the 20s, and the resistance of the Afrikaners to the British domination and British contempt. The great tragedy of the ultimate enmity of white and black South Africa, as Brink explains it, is the rigidly narrow rural Calvinism of the Afrikaners and the political maneuvering of the British. This essay brings us from those pristine beginnings of the struggle to forge a nation, of the wars between the British and Afrikaners, and those between the whites and the blacks, through the acquisition of power of the National party of Dr. Verwoerd and the inception of the doctrine of apartheid and its ideas of racial purity, to the present, where the powerful politico-military machine of the South African government smoothly operates one of the most efficient dictatorships in the world. It has, as Brink reminds us, had lots of time to practise and refine itself. For, as all the world knows by now, the National Party of South Africa has been in power, virtually unchallenged and apparently unshakable, since 1948. With decades of practice and accommodation to the miniscule objections of its trading partners in the West, the government of South Africa has firmly and definitively entrenched the doctrine of apartheid which, by definition, implies the subjugation of seven-eighths of the nation's population on the grounds of colour alone.

The success of the South African government has to do primarily with the fact that the West, inherently racist itself, has tended to regard the South African system as objectionable chiefly because of its legitimization of racism. We may, I believe, safely assume that if the South African government were to abolish the laws condemning blacks to servitude and such laws as legally discriminate against them, very little would change. A state would continue to exist in which a vast capitalist machine would continue to exploit a huge majority of working people and peasants who would overwhelmingly be black. And while, undoubtedly, at the top echelon a few blacks would enjoy some power, send their children to expensive private schools, eat in the same restaurants as whites, ride in the same buses, even, God forbid, use the same toilets as the whites, the machine would be fueled by poor black South Africans. The difference would be that under these circumstances the Western World would entirely approve of the South African government, trade even less inhibitedly with it than now, and South Africa would become even richer.

The Western governments now condemn apartheid because they enjoy large trading arrangements with other black nations and because some of them - most particularly the United States - have significant numbers of black voters. In addition, of course, they fear that South Africa - the most powerful, rich, and strategically necessary nation of the continent - will go over to the Russians in the event of a successful black revolution. It is, then, capitalism above all that makes South Africa as sympathetic to the West and it is the assumptions of that system through which non-South African readers communicate with South Africa and through the shared assumptions that the various worlds of white South African fiction become assimilable outside the country. Brink's writings in this book directly address these questions and forcefully attack the inadequacy of white liberalism which is the panacea which well-meaning Westerners - within and outside his country - would apply.

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to expensive
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schools, eat in
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whites, ride in
the same
buses even,
God forbid,
use the same
toilets as the
whites, the
machine
would be fuel-
ed by poor
black South
Africans**



A measure of the government's sophistication in dealing with intellectual opposition—perhaps the most successful of all its measures—is the very existence of this book and the sheer possibility that such points and arguments as it advances are publishable and speakable in South Africa

A little known fact about Brink is that he began his career as an Afrikaans writer and holds the chair of Afrikaans literature at Rhodes University in South Africa. The former fact looms large in the present book. His career has been a long, intense battle with the established authorities of the language and literature of Afrikaans. They have declared him, and other non-conforming Afrikaners like him, anathema to everything they believe their language and heritage stand for. Effectively they have deprived him of the audience whom he most profoundly wishes to reach. He cannot write in Afrikaans because Afrikaners have been warned against him. The culminating event in this part of his history was the banning, 1974, of his novel *Kennis van die Aand* (*Looking on Darkeness*). In the essay, "English and the Afrikaans Writer," Brink discusses the basis for his decision to abandon the language of his birth and bringing up as the medium of his craft. In a country where banning books is a way of life, Afrikaans writers had been curiously exempt from the ritual of banning that has always plagued English and African writers since the inception of censorship in South Africa. Brink attributes this tolerance towards Afrikaans writers to the respect (occasionally sentimental) that the language and its poets have enjoyed amongst its speakers and a consequent reluctance to prohibit its literary expression. Additionally, there is the fact that most

Afrikaans literature has been inoffensive - in the strong sense of the word as he uses it when he defines offense as one of necessary criteria of all good writing. That is, most Afrikaans literature has not challenged apartheid or its dogmas. *Kennis van die Aand* is the first Afrikaans book in history to have been banned in South Africa, a fact which gives Brink a certain pride of place in the literary history of his nation, but which led him to the decision to continue his career writing in English. As he describes it, in a passionate essay entitled "Culture and Apartheid," Brink was in the vanguard of a small but vitally important group of Afrikaans writers who were willing to accept the stigma of treachery to the ideology of apartheid and the Afrikaans nation and to produce, in Afrikaans, works which dared to question, as never before, the sacrosanct ideals of Afrikanerdom. This group was known as "die Sestigters" (or the sixties, i.e. writers of the 1960s). Its members were isolated and ostracised as they risked their vocations in their determination to write truthfully about South Africa in the language of the oppressors of their nation. The very language which the Afrikaans writer must employ ties him to a specific cultural group which Brink defines as: "a group which through apartheid, through geographical necessity, and through the rigidities of Calvinism, has made a virtue of isolationism: a group almost wholly out of touch with the 'world outside' . . . Especially because the majority of young writers feel a very strong emotional and spiritual bond with "our people" and prefer to adopt a defensive attitude towards the hostile world outside. This means that, contrary to trends almost everywhere else, young Afrikaans writers openly or tacitly support the establishment; and this leads to the extremes of explicit or implicitly endorsing, condoning, or supporting Afrikaner Nationalism - and apartheid."

Of all the essays in the book, "Culture and Apartheid" most crucially addresses the intertwined cultural and political issues facing a South African writer of any background. It has the additional virtue of possessing two temporal perspectives. Written originally in 1975, the essay contains a postscript, added in 1982, which brings up to date the issues raised as questions in the earlier-written portion of the essay. Of particular significance is the acknowledgement, in 1970, of the fact that South Africa then was fast approaching the "point of no return" where a violent revolution seemed inevitable. At that time Brink was able to write - many would have found this highly optimistic in 1970 - that: "I am convinced that at this stage there is still a possibility of effecting change peacefully." In 1982 he writes: "in many ways . . . the overall situation appears no more gloomy than ever before." The matter of violence is, however, the central issue facing all South Africans at present and, as Brink's words suggest, nothing is being done to avert it: rather, all efforts are bent to the purpose of postponing it. It is a fact that violent acts against apartheid have greatly increased in recent years.

At the same time, however, it must be noted that the government is getting more and more skilled in its capacity to deal with resistance at all levels, including that of violent opposition. A measure of the government's sophistication in dealing with intellectual opposition - perhaps the most successful of all of its measures - is the very existence of this book and the sheer possibility that such points and arguments as it advances are publishable and speakable in South Africa. For the essays it contains were all written for South African audiences and readers and more remarkably, heard and read by them. The essays, like the one just quoted, are all subversive of apartheid. They have in common a deep intellectual, moral, and intestinal loathing of the system and resound with a tense passionate conviction borne of the author's despair of his native country. To some, to the optimistic liberal, they will speak well of the government's capacity to accept and allow criticism of itself. To others, like Brink himself, they denote by their existence, the level of cynical sophistication of the Pretoria regime which knows that the publication in South Africa of such views as Brink presents - which fall far short, it must be added, of advocating violence as a solution - is good public relations amongst South Africa's trading partners, and, more horribly but unfortunately correct, that the essays will be read only by a small minority of white and black South Africans who think these things already anyway. In short, the government is strong enough and confident enough to be able to permit the publication of such ideas. But, most important, it is able at any time to invoke laws to suppress the publication of anything it pleases as soon as it deems such writing even faintly dangerous. In the meantime it can permit the illusion of freedom of expression because it possesses its own legally constituted powers to revoke such freedoms at will - as many a newspaper has discovered when it exceeded the prescribed bounds of political propriety.

"On Culture and Apartheid" attempts amongst other things to come to grips with one of the more bitterly disputed intellectual issues raised by apartheid - that of the cultural boycott by which non-South African writers in the early sixties, with the support of all the black and many of the white opponents of apartheid, agreed to prevent their works being presented published or shown in South Africa. At that time the most notable South African opponent of the boycott was Athol Fugard who argued that little was to be gained by the prohibition of ideas and cultural artifacts in South Africa and that more was to be won by exposing South Africans to these things than not. The point is still arguable and much debated. Whether the boycott has any measurable political effect is highly unlikely. The real significance is that it stands as a reminder to South Africa and to the rest of the world that South Africa is a pariah and that its racial laws are unacceptable. Brink writes on this issue in a sincere and convincing way. He opposes the boycott, believing instead that it is preferable for South Africans to have access to current ideas and such modes of thought as undermine the pernicious doctrines with which they are forced. It is an argument which has un-doubted merit and one which

issues from a moral conscience quite as strongly opposed to apartheid as that of the supporters of the boycott. He writes: "If it has any faith in the persuasive value of ideas, the outside world should expose South Africans to them as much as possible rather than cut off the hands of those inside the country who need the might of revolutionary ideas to reinforce their own struggle for change."

"A Background to Dissidence" which forms the introduction to this book is in many ways the most revealing and interesting of the essays. It describes the spiritual journey of the writer from a solid, Nationalist childhood, a confirmed believer in the traditions and culture that were his birthright, to the position he now occupies of an avowed, outspoken, and implacable opponent of white South African nationalism. The context of this particular essay is the entire history of the Afrikaans nation; yet because of its personal perspective, the essay adds fascinating insights into the history of South Africa from the untypical perspective of Afrikaans iconoclasm. For it is the fact that he is an Afrikaner and the fact that the language he loves has become a language of oppression, wrenched out of shape by a political religion which threatens to extinguish its vital and creative possibilities that accounts for much of the pain and the fury of this superb, courageous book.

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