



An Act of Terror

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Weighing in at 834 pages, AN ACT OF TERROR, Andre Brink's ninth novel, is a long but not overlong story which focuses on the days leading up to a car-bomb attack on the South African president and the following six or so weeks, which twenty-eight-year-old Thomas Landman, Afrikaner photographer turned activist and now terrorist, spends on the run from police, trying to stay alive and free while also struggling with his own feelings of responsibility and guilt (the president escapes unharmed, but six innocent people, including one infant, die. Brink plays the high drama of the chase (led by the maniacal Kat Bester) against a number of other narratives which do not so much slow as deepen the novel: flashbacks to Thomas' discovery of apartheid, the suppression of his photographic essays by the white government, and his meeting with black activist Siphon Mdana in London, and flash-forwards in which those Thomas meets while on the run—family members as well as chance acquaintances—consider him in light of what they only later learn about his ambiguous act of terror.

Similar ambiguities abound in the two-hundred-page, thirteen-generation-long history of the Landmans in South Africa, written by Thomas and offered by Brink less as an appendix than as a Derridean supplement which the reader is free to read either consecutively or concurrently. Uncertain in its origin and divided in terms of race and politics, the family and its history deepen and extend the already problematic nature of Thomas' personal revolt from Afrikaner rule of the very land from which it takes its name but remains alienated. Writing so doubly long a novel, Brink was eventually overtaken by the pace of change in South Africa, resistance to which served, narratively and morally, as the novel's driving force. Perhaps, however, one should say "nearly over-taken," for the issues this novel raises will not be settled by referendum, least of all, as Brink so astutely notes, if racial distinctions are only to be replaced by less visible but no less effective and repugnant economic ones. Although the novel's language is occasionally creaky and its ideas often cliched, AN ACT OF TERROR is a novel of undeniable power which, while ostensibly about apartheid and afrikanerism, is ultimately a post-Dostoyevskian inquiry into the various family, racial, and national myths upon which the good life depends and the possibility of commitment and community as costly alternatives.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/an-act-terror-salem>