

Dana Snyman times two

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My friend Dalena recently sent me an e-mail: 'Have you ever read Dana Snyman?' and attached a story by this popular writer. So, yes, I have and I have again and again, thank you. Then I visited my favourite bookshop in Cape Town, not planning to buy anything, as usual, but walking away with 'something' and feeling guilty as hell, as usual. That time it was Snyman's **Op die agterpaaie** (Tafelberg, 2008), a collection of stories previously published in the outdoor magazine *Weg!* Then I received another e-mail, from Alicia Hendricks of Tafelberg - Snyman's book has been translated into English: **On the back roads**, the cover picture being a close-up of the Afrikaans version. And now I have both - Dana Snyman times two.

Interesting, I thought - the Afrikaans version has 240 pages, while the English edition has only 228, including a glossary and occasional clarifications of direct quotations. I open the latter on



page 93 - my favourite story; 'The ship that refuses to die.' I read the first paragraph: 'The Liemba might arrive at ten o'clock, or at eleven. Or perhaps only this afternoon at four.' Interesting - the translator, Linde Dietrich, kept the word count almost the same (one word less), but there is a subtle difference in tone from the Afrikaans: 'Miskien kom die Liemba so tienuur se kant, miskien elfuur. Of vanmiddag vieruur eers. Of dekselswil glad nie.' Dietrich chose to omit the last sentence, not opting for 'Or bloody well not at all,' which I would have left in. I wonder why.

And why the designer, Anton Sassenberg uses the same photograph for the front page, but with a slight difference in view? Maybe this warrants investigation - another article perhaps... but it is the content we are really concerned with. First of all: Snyman has the gift of eloquence (what the literary theorist Kenneth Burke calls 'the end of art, and thus its essence'), being a raconteur par excellence. And that is why he has (rapidly) risen to almost the same level as legends such as Jan Spies and Tolla van der Merwe. The main difference is that Snyman is a travel writer; one with sharp observational skills, and a easy, free-flowing style which makes his work very readable, well-presented entertainment. Neil Sonnekus of *The Sunday Times* refers to his work as 'magical reportage'. Indeed - Snyman tells his stories with a well-balanced mixture of wonderment, compassion and humour; a dry, very South African humour; imbued with local flavour - colourful and descriptive.

Snyman understands his profession: he travels and writes with an open mind, with curiosity and humility (he does not become the focus of his stories). He makes friends wherever he goes - and people are happy to provide him with their, his, our stories. This collection covers life in general - the humorous, the tragic, the wonder, the magic, as only a born (travel) writer can offer: *The lessons of the open road, Miami Village, St Helena Bay, Nine hundred Harleys at Colesberg, On the trail of Dirk Ligter, and Postscript: I am an African* reveals much about our region and its people, and even more about Dana Snyman. Truly, I have not enjoyed travel stories so much since Peter Mayle. My verdict of any of the two 'Snymans': a companion to curl up with, minus the possible cold shoulder after you have switched off the lights - tomorrow just pick up where you left off.

