

IN MEMORIAM
ANDRÉ LEFEVERE

André Alphons Lefevere, distinguished professor at The University of Texas at Austin and beloved colleague, friend and mentor to many there, died unexpectedly of acute leukemia at the age of fifty on March 27, 1996, in Austin, Texas. He came to the University in 1984 to take over the Netherlandic studies program, which flourished under his guidance. He was also very active in the Comparative Literature Program, where he directed numerous theses and dissertations and contributed a vision of how translations enlighten us about cultures in contact. He was the motivating force behind a new M.A. in Translation Studies. He brought great distinction to the University especially through his efforts in translation studies where he was an innovator and inspiration to many around the world.

André was a native of Belgium and received his Ph.D. from the University of Essex, England, with his dissertation *Prolegomena to a Grammar of Literary Translation*. Thereafter he taught in Hong Kong and Antwerp. During his years in Antwerp – 1973-84 – his numerous publications, visiting professorships in the USA, and his teaching brought him recognition as the leading theoretician of his time in the field of literary translation. His range extended beyond Europe to include Chinese, Greek and Arabic: he carried a global compass.

When he arrived in Austin he was asked by a colleague how he might feel about teaching beginners. He replied: “Well, Wittgenstein did it, you know.” And that was that. His Netherlandic literature and culture program attracted more and more students, including graduate students. André spent much of his time attending both to undergraduates who needed individual instruction and to graduates who wanted him to be their teacher in

Comparative Literature, as well as in Dutch and Afrikaans. His translation seminar in Comparative Literature was a regular and popular event. He treated his students as equals, trusting them to hold themselves to the same academic standards as he himself held. The apparent ease with which he constantly generated new ideas, together with the seemingly effortless way he managed to do enormous amounts of work, were always inspiring and made an academic career look light. His good moods, his friendliness, and his uncommon and generous sense of humor contributed greatly to the work environment in the Department of Germanic Languages and the Comparative Literature Program.

Not only did he work long hours in the classroom, he also wrote, with zest, acumen and fluency, the ten books which made him so widely celebrated, especially his MLA volume. Three or four more books are forthcoming. There are also six edited books, a textbook, thirty-four book chapters, thirty-nine articles, ten books of translation, ten translations in sections of books, twenty-six translations in journals and sixteen book reviews. There is a textbook in press. None of his work, writing or teaching was the least bit perfunctory. In every way, as writer, teacher, and translator, André was exemplary.

At the same time, he was very much his own man; there was nothing “standard” about him. This rare combination of independence and creative thinking brought him invitations from about forty universities which he visited as a guest professor for longer or shorter periods: Europe, Asia, Africa, America North and South – in all those continents he cut a significant figure. So, too, he was a luminary at just the right time, as translation became a large part of the web of relationships linking countries and continents. And to his writing about translation he could bring the fullness of his insight as an active translator: from French, Dutch, Latin, German, English, and into Dutch and English. Two things should be stressed. Firstly, his insights were rare, for they were those of a rare bird – the

polyglot *and* literary translator; he had style in all the languages he translated texts into. Secondly, André was sometimes dismayed by the way in which theorists had carried his theories, models and conjectures to extremes of abstraction, without having actually translated literary works. He deplored theory that had no basis in experience.

Among translators and those involved in the art and business of translation, particularly the scholars associated with the American Literary Translators Association, there has always existed a gap between those who actually do translations and those who theorize about it. As one of the most active members of ALTA and a scholar who was interested and very productive on both sides of the translation field, André initiated and was eventually one of the original founders of a movement to bring these two groups together. What he set out to do was to create a sort of bridge between the theory and practice of literary translation. His own work is, in fact, a model for this initiative as he engaged in the act of translating and theorizing about it, generally in this order.

It is not possible in this limited space to explain André's translation theory more fully. However, it is worthy of note that André used the metaphor of refraction to characterize the process of successful translation as a refocusing and redirecting of a source text into a target culture. This crystalline metaphor also seems to be an apt way to understand teaching, André's teaching in particular: as a bending of light that makes different parts of the spectrum visible, allowing viewers to see and enjoy its various colors. As hundreds of his former students have attested, André was a brilliant intellectual and linguist, so much more so for his ability to share that brilliance with others, in whatever terms (or colors) they were able to experience it.

André was also interested in and contributed to reception theory about translations. He was among the scholars who saw the production and reception of translations as a system, which, according to André, is “a portion of the world that is perceived as a unit and that is able to maintain its ‘identity’ in spite of changes going on with it.” What is also interesting in his various writings are his reflections and insight about the role and cultural politics of the translator in the transmission of literary texts between cultures.

In closing, a little portrait indicates his versatility and his finesse as a human being. At Christmas time he would dress up as Sinterklaas (the Netherlandic Santa Claus), in full regalia, a scarlet robe, lined with fur, a shepherd’s crook, a mitre, and a huge snowy beard. At the departmental Christmas party he would sit, enthroned, among the students and make remarks, never as “I” but always as “the Holy Man,” always to the point, always well-informed about the foibles of this or that student, about their struggles, their successes, their humors. He would give sweets as prizes, throwing them with a flick of his wrist. He spoke very softly, in this role of “Holy Man,” softly and with irony, as a sort of mischievous mandarin, a sly Santa. He loved every moment of that festive time, just as he would brighten, three weeks into any semester, and say “Only fourteen more weeks to go!” What he said as Sinterklaas, the way he carried himself in his robes, had nothing whatever to do with power or with importance. That is how he was: in his world of learning, no animals were more equal than others. Thinking of him now, we see him strolling, in his Santa Claus outfit, all along the open beach at Patara (on the Lykean shore of Turkey), where the “Holy Man,” so some say, might have come from. But wait: upon closer look, there they are, carefree, hand in hand with him, his daughter, Katelijne, and his wife, Ria Vanderauwera – she too a translator. So there they go.

André Lefevere touched the lives of everyone around him, and for many, the University of Texas will never be the same. Yet his colleagues and students, his family and friends, are greatly enriched for having known him.

Larry R. Faulkner, President
The University of Texas at Austin

John R. Durbin, Secretary
General Faculty Office

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors John Weinstock (Chair), Mohammad Ghanoonparvar, Christopher Middleton, and Dolora Wojciehowski.