

# "Die Uurwerk Kantel":<sup>1</sup>

Different conceptions of literature as contested terrain

Everyday we find ourselves doing, saying, or  
thinking things that would have been impossible  
to our fathers.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

The annual Van Wyk Louw memorial lecture, presented by the University of Johannesburg (previously known as the Rand Afrikaans University - RAU), South Africa, is a prestigious cultural event since the early 1970 in commemoration of the Afrikaans poet and intellectual N.P. van Wyk Louw - a happening that usually raises great expectations. This certainly was also the case in 2004, when the poet Antjie Krog was to deliver the lecture, with an address entitled "Die Beautiful Woord van Van Wyk Louw".<sup>3</sup> Despite the excited anticipation, some critics felt that Krog's opinions did not offer much food for thought.<sup>4</sup> I would like to reconsider Krog's contribution, by placing her arguments in the recent, more general debate about Afrikaans in general and literature more specifically

## The position of Antjie Krog and N.P. van Wyk Louw in the Afrikaans literary field

N.P. van Wyk Louw (1906-1970) enjoys the status of being one of the most important Afrikaans poets and intellectuals. J.C. Kannemeyer, historian of the Afrikaans literature, and biographer of Afrikaans authors, describes Louw as "een van die heel grootste digtersfigure van die Afrikaanse letterkunde".<sup>5</sup> An important aspect of Louw's legacy was his

1-[The timepiece is tipping over] Louw, 1981:182. This is the opening line of N.P. van Wyk Louw's poem *Suiwer Wiskunde* [Pure mathematics].  
2- Virginia Woolf, 1975:299.  
3- [The Beautiful words of Van Wyk Louw] The title refers to a CD containing a collection of songs by Gert Vlok Nel (1998) *Beaufort Wes se Beautiful Woord*, which was

followed by a collection of poetry, *Om Beaufort Wes se Beautiful Woord te Verlaat* (1999, Queillerie).  
4-Pieter Duvenage, 2004. A prominent academic present at the lecture told me in a personal conversation, "Antjie het soveel kak gepraat gisteraand..." [Antjie talked so much bullshit last night].

contribution to the formation and support of a "national" literature for Afrikaans. Gerrit Olivier writes in this regard that: "Louw se siening van 'n nasionale letterkunde het in baie opsigte die intellektuele legitimering gebied vir die opbou van 'n Afrikaanse letterkunde."<sup>6</sup> Olivier describes the national literature ideal of Louw as:

iets wat op 'n natuurlike wyse uit 'n geestelike groeiproses voortspruit en aan 'n volk die reg gee om as afsonderlike groep voor die wêreld na vore te tree. Hierdie gedagte hang ten nouste saam met sy oortuiging dat die bestaansreg van die individu of die groep berus op die vraag of daardie individu of groep 'n 'geestelike lewe' kan voortbring, dit wil sê die konkrete historiese pyn van die bestaan kan omskep in iets meer blywends: skoonheid.<sup>7</sup>

Louw's conception of art-as-beauty, makes him an Afrikaans exponent of the New Criticism tradition that considered the autonomy of poetry and therefore of Art (high art) as self-evident and beyond dispute.

Whereas Louw is considered to be one of the most important poets of the group of Afrikaans writers called "Die Dertigers", Antjie Krog (1952), as poet, is part of a younger generation of writers who debuted during the late 1960s and early 1970s. She is well-known as poet in South Africa,

5-[One of the greatest poetic figures of the Afrikaans literature.] J.C. Kannemeyer, 1984:443. Ironically, not Kannemeyer, but Jaap Steyn wrote an extensive biography of the author, confirming the canonical position of Louw.  
6-[Louw's ideas about a national literature offered in many ways the intellectual legitimation for the development of an Afrikaans literature] Olivier, 1998:617.  
7-[Something which sprouts naturally from a spiritual growth process and

which gives the right to a nation to present itself as an autonomous group to the rest of the world. This idea is closely related to the conviction that the right to existence of the individual or group is based on the question whether that individual or group can produce a 'spiritual life', that is to say, to convert the concrete historical pain of existence into something more lasting: beauty.] Olivier, 1998:616. Emphasis in original.

and since a couple of years also internationally with her report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Country of my Skull* (1998), which was followed by a work on the influence of political transformation in South Africa, *A Change of Tongue* (2003) – also a prose work. Her commitment to make texts in different indigenous languages more widely accessible recently resulted in a project to translate and rewrite poetry in African languages into Afrikaans and English, published as *Met Woorde soos met Kerse* (2002) and *die sterre sê 'tsau'* (2004b) which was launched simultaneously with an English version, *the stars say 'tsau'* (2004c). Krog is also known for her voiced opposition to Apartheid during the 1980s, and for her participation in the Victoria Falls meeting when Afrikaans authors and members of the ANC's Culture Desk discussed the future of the cultural boycott and South African cultural production in general, in 1989. In the Netherlands, she is an often seen guest at poetry and cultural festivals such as *Poetry International*, *Winternachten*, and *Crossing Borders*.

#### Krog's Van Wyk Louw lecture

For the memorial lecture held on the 16th of September 2004, many people probably expected Krog to investigate the validity of Louw's conception of literature during a period of transformation and change, and to establish a link with her own current South African poetry projects, but Krog had something else in mind. As she stated, her aim with the paper was to tease apart some ideas about the role of the poet in Afrikaans society, and then to consider how the new, younger generation represents and deals with the new democratic order.<sup>8</sup>

After a short overview of what Van Wyk Louw's poetry meant to her personally, Krog identified a number of functions of the poet (with reference to Louw, but also beyond Louw): the poet should function as a politically engaged figure – through his poetry in the first place, but also beyond his poetry through the observations a poet makes about social life (as public intellectual). The poet is also someone who creates space: Krog supports the idea of

8-Krog, A. 2004a.

a transformative literature, which enables the opening up of space.<sup>9</sup> This creation of space, a process of accommodation, can be found in the notion of ubuntu, as described by A.C. Jordan (famous African intellectual during the 1950s): "gasvryheid, [...] hoe en wat jy skryf oor diegene wat nie jou eie is nie, die een deur wie jy tot jouself kan kom en kan word dit wat jy werklik is."<sup>10</sup> In the philosophy of ubuntu, Krog sees the very fundament of ethics: the ability to accommodate the other. Ubuntu, according to Jordan, is also the necessity to meet and rediscover every day anew the figure of the stranger, a task Krog ascribes to the intellectual: to support the stranger, and to insist that responsibility for this figure is a part of collective responsibilities.

Krog concludes that Louw is the poet of the reflecting individual who aspires to purity. She wonders, however, about the position of the new generation of young Afrikaners and how they give expression to their existence.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Krog argues, at least two poets debuted every year. But since the early 1990s, with one or two exceptions, no significant new poetic voices have emerged. However, some interesting new prose voices have emerged, such as Jackie Nagtegaal and Saartjie Botha. But, asks Krog, where are the innovative, young poets? She argues that:

jong wit mense op alle plekke  
gekontesteer en betwis voel. Op skool,  
op universiteit en kollege, in die  
openbare beroepslewe, op straat, op  
forums, moet wit kinders hulleself  
handhaaf teenoor en saam met mense  
van 'n ander kleur, mense wie se ouers  
veel minder bevoorreg was, maar meer  
streetwise. Die wit kinders sit met  
ouers wat remskoene is: as ons nie  
konserwatief sit en kla en wanhoop nie,

9-Krog here echoes Homi Bhabha's notion of 'beyond'.

10-[Hospitality, [...] how and what you write about those who do not

part of you, the one through which you can come to yourself and can become who you really are.]

sit ons die regering en hoon, of selfs al is ons bedoelinge goed, ons self weet nie eintlik eers mooi wat en hoe om in die nuwe Suid-Afrika ons pad te vind nie.<sup>11</sup>

She surmises that young Afrikaners deliberately avoid those topics that are contested terrains: politics, rugby but also poetry (in its conventional, traditional sense). The question remains, however: how does the young generation of Afrikaans-speakers confront the themes (such as urban-ness, instability, abandonment, drugs, AIDS, et cetera) that form the daily reality of today's modern Afrikaner youth?

As an example of how young Afrikaners give expression to their reality, she refers to Gert Vlok Nel (1965), who debuted with a collection of poetry in 1993, released a collection of songs on CD five years later, which was published as a collection of poetry a year later, and since then mainly presented himself at rock festivals. Krog poses the question whether the CD and the rock festivals can be interpreted as attempts to break away from the respectable context of Afrikaans poethood. She finds more examples of young people who rather opt to express themselves through angry and cynical rock music and comics, than poetry published by the mainstream publishers: she cites examples from a band called "Fokofpolisiekar" (a textual allusion to another rock band, "Brixton Moord en Roof Orkes" - who took their name from the (now defunct) police department in Johannesburg that dealt with serious crime such as murder and robbery). The young musicians of "Fokofpolisiekar" are not just screaming into their microphones, but commenting in a disillusioned manner on the futility of (a South African)

11-[young, white people feel contested and disputed everywhere. At school, university and college, in the public professional life, on the street, at forums, white children have to maintain themselves in the presence of people of a different colour, people whose parents were much less privileged, but more

streetwise. The white children are burdened with their parents: if we are not conservatively complaining and despairing, we are scoffing at the government, or, even if our intentions are good, we ourselves do not really know very well how to find our way in the new South Africa.]

existence.<sup>12</sup> A more constructive example, to Krog's mind, is 'rock chick' Karen Zoid. Krog interprets Zoid as someone who (not only in her songs, but also in her participation of the public debate on cultural identity) opens up space for all types of change: "sy maak plek vir allerlei soorte van Afrikaans, Suid-Afrikaanswees, sy vee haar gat af aan die wit manlike angste en sy kritiseer onregverdigheid ongeag van wie dit kom."<sup>13</sup> A final example that Krog uses are the disillusioned and sardonic drawings of the comic *Bittercomix*, which are for Krog an illustration of the transformation of Afrikaner:

Die eens magtige wit manlike digter met sy top klassieke opleiding, sy goeie keurige Afrikaans, sy toegang tot werk, die media en ander magtige politieke en literêre figure, sy pryse en akkolades word nou in die een en twintigste eeu 'n woordlose, taallose androgene seun wat met 'n stukkende en leë borskas bebloed die straat af strompel.<sup>14</sup>

Her conclusion is that the great-grandchildren of Louw created their own genre and are dealing in their own way with their own themes: "Hulle wroeg hulle apatie, agressie en gevoel van verwerping uit in hulle songs",<sup>15</sup> and those who

12-In an overview article on developments in the South African music scene, Theunis Engelbrecht (2004) states that the music of Fokofpolisiekar is "rof, grof en onbeskof en myle verwyder van al die ander kunstenaars wat probeer om meer volgelinge te werf met goue glimlagte en mooi, opbouende boodskappies oor die lewe." [rough, crude and rude, and miles apart from those other artists who try to attract more supporters with their golden smiles, and pretty, constructive little messages about life.]

In her analysis, Krog constructs a semiotic relation between Louw, Nel and Fokofpolisiekar through their different handling of the sign "country side" (taken from a famous

poem by Louw). Whereas Louw still treated it with rural idealism, the new generation uses the sign to express cynicism and disillusionment. 13-[she accommodates different variations of Afrikaans, South African-ness, she gives shit about white male anxieties, and she criticizes injustice regardless of anyone.] 14-[the once mighty white male poet with his top classical training, his impeccable Afrikaans, his access to work, the media and other mighty political and literary figures, his prizes and accolades, now becomes, in the twenty-first century, a wordless, languageless androgynous boy, who, with a broken and empty chest, stumbles bleeding down the street.]

do it well, according to Krog, are those who are willing and able to meet and search for the stranger in him/herself, or beyond, and who are willing to engage with the borders that delineate the inside and outside of the 'group'.

Krog raises a number of interesting points in her lecture, and a Bourdieuan perspective that offers a useful theoretical instrument to sidestep the stickiness of getting entangled in normative conceptions of literature. By regarding the support of particular conceptions of literature as position takings in the literary field, one can venture an analysis and interpretation of Krog's argument and the criticism raised against it.

### The battle about Afrikaans

To understand Krog's argument, it is necessary to look at a debate that has been going on about Afrikaans: about developments in the language, and its future. The history of Afrikaans, very briefly, has been the development of a creole language (originating from 17th century Dutch, including Malay, Khoi, Portuguese and Bantu influences) into its own independent form (a development that took place from the 17th until the early 20th century).

By the end of the 19th century, language movements argued that Afrikaans should be considered no longer a "kitchen version of Dutch", but an autonomous language on par with international languages, such as German, Dutch and English. During the first half of the 20th century, the socio-political context (in which Van Wyk Louw worked) was characterized as a period of growing nationalism and the formation of an Afrikaner cultural identity, following the Anglo-Boer war - a war in which the Boers were defeated by the English. This period culminated in the National Party winning the government elections of 1948. The language Afrikaans was employed as powerful nationalism tool, and the intellectual and aesthetic production of that time was regarded as proof that the language was the medium of a developed - and hence civilized - people, capable of expressing all the ideals of a group of people striving for political autonomy.<sup>16</sup> This is where the language nationalism

15-[They agonize about their apathy, aggression and feelings of abandon-

ment in their songs]  
16-Isabel Hofmeyr, 1987.

of Louw bears relevance, as well as the basic conception (upheld for most of the twentieth century) that there exists a 'correct' version of the language, as codified by the Afrikaanse Woordelys en Spelreëls, (read: the linguistic variant spoken by the white elite, or upper middle-class), and that the language (reduced to this one linguistic variant) belonged to a particular group of people, the Afrikaners.

Of course, as the political ideology and constructions of Afrikaner identity were not shared by everyone, these elitist notions regarding Afrikaans have often been subverted in the past (the literary movement of the "Sestigers" is a good example, but also by writers during the 1980s), and a number of years after the watershed mark of political transition (the 1994 elections resulting in an ANC government coming to power), the debate about Afrikaans has gained prominence again.

In his Van Wyk Louw lecture, delivered in 2003, novelist André Brink looked at a recent phenomenon of language innovation (which Brink regards as literary innovation), with specific reference to a novel by a young (17 year old) author, Jackie Nagtegaal, *Daar's vis in die Punch* (2002).<sup>17</sup> After the publication of this very small novel, Nagtegaal found herself in the middle of a public storm: the novel was lauded by some, and awarded with symbolic capital (such as the Nasboek prize for youth literature), while others wiped the floor with her particular version of Afrikaans - poet Lina Spies, for example, calls it a non-book in a non-language.<sup>18</sup> Brink, however, sees it as a highly successful, pertinent novella, "wat die onbevange leser deurgaans aangryp, en ook op nie-literêre - filosofiese - vlak vrae stel waarop daar in ons tyd en in ons konteks hier-en-nou-antwoorde gevind moet word."<sup>19</sup> The debate about Nagtegaal's form of Afrikaans, dubbed "Engfrikaans" because of the high incidence of English words, Anglicisms, etc., is particularly interesting, because prominent players in the literary field intervened in the debate, and expressed their opinion on

17-Brink, 2003.

18-Lina Spies, 2003.

19-[that continuously grips the uninhibited reader, and which also, on

a non-literary - philosophical-level, poses questions to which, for our times and context, relevant answers should be found.] Brink, 2003.

the matter. Stalwarts such as Brink, who is regarded as one of the current "high priests" of Afrikaans literature sided with Nagtegaal, but equally important players, such as authors Lina Spies and Hennie Aucamp, and literary historian J.C. Kannemeyer, launched a serious attack on this form of linguistic innovation.<sup>20</sup>

Lina Spies reformulated her anger poetically, and in her latest collection of poetry, *Duskant die Einders* (2004), one finds a lament about the situation of Afrikaans in the poem "Die Koms van die Monster o.a. genaamd Raka".<sup>21</sup>

Ek het 'n vaderland gehad –  
die Afrikaanse taal  
ek was daarin tuis  
soos die ruising  
van die bome in 'n bos

[...]

Is daar uit sulke troebel water  
nog 'n distillaat te puur  
wat geskink kan word  
in glansende kristal?<sup>22</sup>

She also manages a swipe at the new generation Afrikaners in the poem, "Landsiek":<sup>23</sup>

Ons wil Afrikaans lekker loslit praat  
en sonder stem of skoling

20-Joubert, 2003.  
21-[The arrival of the Monster among others Raka] "Raka" is the name of the eponymous epic poem by N. P. van Wyk Louw about a tribe whose idyllic existence is disrupted with the arrival of the half-human creature Raka, and of the victory of Raka (and chaos) over order and civilization, embodied by Koki, the spir-

itual leader of the tribe. (Examples from Spies are cited from a review by Deborah Steinmair, 2004)  
22-I had a fatherland - / The Afrikaans language/ Like the rustling/ Of trees in the forest/ [...] Can one, from such murky water, / Purify a distillation/ To be poured/ In shining crystal?  
23-[Landsiek]

ons beautiful woorde sing  
maar de sjimpansee doet niet mee

With the reference to "beautiful woorde" Spies refers disapprovingly to Gert Vlok Nel, and to the "Zoid generation" in general,<sup>24</sup> and expresses a sadness about the loss of something she regards as worthy and better: a pure product fit to pour into something as valuable as crystal – the connotation being that pure Afrikaans can express pure, high, valuable ideas. On the other hand, the current murky water (the version of Afrikaans she opposes herself to) cannot ever be poured into crystal, in other words, express high and valuable ideas. Spies feels so strongly about her language that she equates the loss of the 'pure' variant of Afrikaans to losing her homeland.<sup>25</sup>

Within the context of the political changes, the debates about Afrikaans delineate a debate with political implications. Under the post-1994 regime, Afrikaans lost its privileged status as one of the two (Afrikaans and English) official languages, and it now has to compete with the nine other languages (in terms of economic and political power) against the hegemonic position of English. In the wake of the political transition which started at the beginning of the 1990s, a discussion has emerged about the position and future of the language. In 1990, for example, Hennie Aucamp (veteran Afrikaans author) argued that:

die Afrikaners 'fluks besig' is om  
sy kultuur, waarvan die Afrikaanse  
letterkunde 'n kernkomponent is, 'na  
die uitverkoop tafel aan te dra' [...] 'Wáárom? Om kommersiële redes? Uit onverskilligheid? Of in 'n roes van politieke boetedoening? In krisistye is kultuur geen luukse nie, maar die hoogste vorm van selfbehoud. Want

24-A term I will explain below.

25-Echoing the words of Camus that the French language is his homeland.



kultuur staan vir interne orde, en interne orde is die fondament van alle beskawing.<sup>26</sup>

The position, status and integrity of Afrikaans in a democratic South Africa have been debated vigorously during the past decade or so by a loose grouping of academics, writers, intellectuals and politicians. This debate displays a wide variety of positions, from one that seems to perceive an attack from all sides on the language,<sup>27</sup> to the position that supports getting rid of all 'volksnasionalistiese' associations with the language, i.e. cultural identity linked exclusively to language, even if it would mean the sacrifice of the language.<sup>28</sup>

An important position in this debate is one where emphasis has been placed on regarding the language and its group of speakers from a more inclusive perspective: this position has called attention to the different variations of the language that exist (arguing that they are all equally valid), and to the heterogeneity of the group of people speaking the language (represented by the different socio, and regional linguistic variants). This may seem an obvious

26-[the Afrikaner is swiftly busy carrying his culture, of which the Afrikaans literature is a central aspect, to the sales table. Why? For commercial purposes? Because of indifference? Or because of an intoxication resulting from political atonement? In times of crisis, culture is not a form of luxury, but the highest form of self-preservation. Culture represents internal order, and internal order is the fundament of all civilization.] H. P. van Coller and J.C. Steyn citing Aucamp, 1992:39.

27-Espoused by the ideas of Dan Roodt of the Pro-Afrikaanse Aksie Groep (PRAAG), for example, that takes a strong position in favour of a coupling between language and cultural identity. See <http://www.praag.co.za>.

28-Jakes Gerwel (2004), for example, polemically asked: "is een gevolg, of implikasie, of onuitgesproke wens van demokratiese postapartheid-Suid-Afrika dan nie dat

ons alle vorme van taalgebonde of taalverwante identiteitskepping verbysteek en agterlaat nie? En dus, dat selfs pogings of bedoelings om progressiewe inhoud te gee aan taalgedefinieerde gemeenskappe eintlik en uiteindelik neerkom op 'n teruggryping, 'n reaksionêre moment in 'n moderniserende samelewing? En dat dit Afrikaanssprekendheid in dubbele mate geld, gegee die politieke geskiedenis van die taal?" [Is one consequence, or implication, or unexpressed desire of a democratic post-apartheid South Africa not that we have surpassed and left behind all forms of language-specific and language-related creations of identity? And therefore, that even attempts or intentions to give progressive content to our language defined communities boil down to a harking back, a reactionary moment in a modernised society? And does this not hold true even more so for speakers of Afrikaans, given the political history of the language?]

argument to defend but, under the ideology of Apartheid, this heterogeneity of the language group (and indeed, of the language itself) had been ignored and rejected for a long time in service of a conception of cultural unity that justified political domination and Afrikaner nationalism, embodied by one specific version of the language. This notion of cultural unity implied a close link between cultural identity, political power, a particular version of Afrikaans, and specific forms of expressions.

However, the younger generation of speakers of Afrikaans have other issues to deal with than this form of nationalism. For many, their issue is being South Africans, not Afrikaners, in the first place, and subsequently, language as an issue of cultural identity is something they reject too. Tim du Plessis, editor of the Sunday paper *Rapport* has coined this group of young (Afrikaans) South Africans as the "Zoid generation": people such as rock sensation Karin Zoid who do not care much for the issue of cultural identity politics played out over the back of language.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, Zoid furiously rejected the figure head position implied by the label, which, ironically, links her to a particular position related to a language, by stating that "My taal is nie my issue nie, my land is my issue."<sup>30</sup> Du Plessis says, "Dis duidelik Afrikaanse jong mense voel instinktief aan hulle moet hul stemme en hul identiteit in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks vind."<sup>31</sup>

Given this context of the debate about Afrikaans, what is one to make of Krog's position taken during her Van Wyk Louw lecture? As someone who is continuously involved in poetry projects of all sorts and at different levels of institutionalization within the literary field, Krog certainly knows better than to suggest (as she did provocatively in her lecture) that no more poetry is being written by young South Africans in Afrikaans. Being one of the editors of the third volume of poetry by previously unpublished authors, *Nuwe Stemme 3* (2005), published by

29-Tim du Plessis, 2002b.

30-[My language is not my issue, my country is my issue] Tim du Plessis, 2002a.

31-[It is clear that young Afrikaans speakers feel instinctively that they have to find their voices and identity in a South African context.] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

one of the big, established publishers, Tafelberg, is proof enough of her feigned ignorance. However, Krog's argument can be read as a position taking pleading for a number of reconsiderations: of aesthetic norms, of aesthetic forms, and of conceptions of literariness.

Her argument, I believe, can be read as an exploration into those areas not often scrutinized by the gatekeepers of literary value and aesthetic norms (often wilfully ignored - in ostrich fashion). What she found was a productive area where exciting developments are taking place (and have been for some time already) with regards to the representation of experience of a young generation of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans: during the late 1980s there was the Voëlvrybeweging, as the alternative Afrikaans music movement of that time was known, led by musicians such as Johannes Kerkorrel and Koos Kombuis. Similarly interesting are comics and cartoons, such as *Bittercomix* and the *Laugh it Off Annual of South African Youth Culture* that attest to the existence of aesthetic genres (albeit expanded in some senses) commenting textually (through language) on the South African reality. These efforts of word-art (supported visually or musically as the case may be) attempt a destabilisation of a stable narrative that maintains a simple and homogenizing representation of reality.

In his comment on Krog's lecture, the poet Charles-Pierre Naudé interpreted Krog's lecture as a defense of "poetry as expression of emotions", rather than as an expression of thought; Krog's conception of art, he maintains, privileges "proletarian" art forms above all other forms of art.<sup>32</sup> He despairs the loss of the "verfynde poëtiese stem" - an artistic voice, capable of creating beauty, as Van Wyk Louw envisioned? Naudé accuses Krog of exclusivism, but his insistence on the refined poetic voice (or, to put it more bluntly: Art, with a capital A) is at least as exclusive as Krog's position would have been, had she pleaded for exclusive proletarian art (which I seriously do not think she is doing).

Pieter Duvenage, who elsewhere has expressed his concern about, what he regards to be, the minority position

32-Charl-Pierre Naudé, 2004.

and increasing marginalization of Afrikaans and of Afrikaners since 1994,<sup>33</sup> accuses Krog of being a "digterlike nasiebouer en morele hekwagter"<sup>34</sup> who has a clear normative ideal of the direction in which the youth should be steered: "'n staatssentralistiese Suid-Afrika waar daar baie min begrip vir die ander is. 'n Mens wil onwillekeurig vra: waar pas die begrip demokrasie hierby in?"<sup>35</sup> In the context of Duvenage's argument, his reference to *the other* here refers to those who are marginalised today: in Duvenage's perspective 'the other' is the Afrikaner - as marginalised group within the new political system. Duvenage does not oppose the use of art as a political instrument, but interprets Krog as a defender of ANC cultural policy, whom Duvenage sees as the central, powerful agent in the cultural field. His own implied position is one that would support the use of art to promote stability and a stronger position for the language and for the group of people who associate themselves with the language. Duvenage's position is a reaction to the perceived contestedness of Afrikaans (indicated by the different positions in the language debate), but one can pose the question: does to be contested necessarily also mean to be threatened? Or are those contested aspects of Afrikaans (its exclusivity, its elitism) not exactly that which pose a stumbling block to democracy, and is a defense of Afrikaans (specifically its contested aspects) not perhaps more dangerous to the survival of the language?

### Conclusion

Krog has shown the socially transformative potential of word-art if the conceptions of literature are expanded to include those forms of expressions that exceed our pre-given linguistic, political or cultural norms, in other words, make them "singular", to use Derek Attridge's description:<sup>36</sup>

33-Pieter Duvenage and Danie Goosen, 2002.

34-[poetic nation builder and moral gatekeeper]

35-[a state centralistic South Africa where little comprehension

remains of the other. One involuntarily would like to ask: where does the notion of democracy fit in here?]

36-Derek Attridge, 2004.

The *singularity* of the artwork is not simply a matter of difference from other works (what I [Attridge] term 'uniqueness'), but a transformative difference, a difference, that is to say, that involves the irruption of *otherness* or *alterity* into the cultural field.<sup>37</sup>

By asking us to take serious such expressions that might deviate from the established norms of aesthetic or linguistic forms, Krog acknowledges an engagement with otherness, not despite its disruptive potential, but because of its disruptive potential.

Krog's socially transformative conception of art, Naude's conception of art as high art (in support of the autonomy of art), and Duvenage's notion that places art in service of politics (art as instrument to promote cultural identity, and [restoration of] political power) are all different position-takings in the literary field through the use of different conceptions of literature. What a careful mapping of the different positions shows, is that the terrain of cultural production is one where literary notions (and by implication, notions of language and cultural identity) are contested and fought over. This is not peculiar for the South African context, but given the social, political and cultural changes that have taken place in the country during the past decade, where positions of power have shifted, new ideologies have replaced older ones and many certainties of the past have been done away with, it is certainly worth to investigate carefully how the cultural field operates, and how the contestations within the field are indicative of larger processes of change; a situation that echoes the words of Virginia Woolf: "a shift in the scale - the sudden slip of masses held in position for ages - [which] has shaken the fabric from top to bottom."<sup>38</sup>

37-Attridge, 2004:136. Emphasis in original.

38-Virginia Woolf, 1975:299.



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