

https://dspace.org/

The South African landscape in painting and literature

Harmsen, Frieda

2015-05-20
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/17809

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

The South African Landscape in Painting and Literature

FRIEDA HARMSEN

THE SOUTH AFRICAN LANDSCAPE

IN PAINTING AND LITERATURE

Dissertation presented for the Degree of
Master of Arts in the
University of the Witwatersrand
by Frieda Harmsen.
July, 1958.

CONTENTS:

		Pg.
Introduction:		iii.
1:	Landscape in painting and literature:	1.
	South African heritage:	9.
2:	The sea:	21.
3:	The Cape:	47.
	Flowers in the landscape:	72.
4:	Natal:	84.
5:	Veld and farm:	94.
	The animals in the landscape;	123.
	The Karroo:	147.
6:	Symbol of Africa:	153.
Conclusion:		173.
Appendix 1:	The farm labourer and animal:	179.
Appendix 2:	Extracts from literature:	193.
Appendix 3:	Photographs: Between pages 211 - 212.	
Index:		216.
Bibliography:	1: Reference:	222.
	2: Literature:	227.
List of collections and exhibitions of paintings:		228.
Notes on the photographs:		

List of illustrations:

1. W.G. Wiles: Seascape.
2. Cecil Higgs: Saldanha (West).
3. Cecil Higgs: Rising Tide.
4. Cecil Higgs: Sea Birds.
5. Pieter Wenning: Cape Flats.
6. Pieter Wenning: Vineyards.
7. Gregoire Boonzaier: Kinderme[illegible].
8. Gregoire Boonzaier: Cottages at Wellington.
9. Jean Welz: Brandvlei.
10. Jean Welz: Landscape near Worcester.
11. Pieter Wenning: Gum Trees.
12. Hugo Naudé: Brandberge.
13. Hugo Naudé: Springtime in Namaqualand.
14. Gerda Fitlo: Night Cactus.
15. Zakkie Eloff: Dancing Fondas.
16. Gerda Fitlo: South Coast Road.
17. Clement Senaque: Valley of a Thousand Hills.
18. Francois Krige: Basuto Store.
19. Le Roux Smith Le Roux: Heat Haze.
20. J.H. Pierneef: Cornfields near Stellenbosch.
21. J.H. Pierneef: Composition.
22. Frans Oerder: View of the Rand in the Early Days
23. J.H. Pierneef: First Bend, Lichtenburg.
24. Walter Battiss: Eternal Palace.
25. Walter Battiss: Mural for the Pretoria Centenary.
26. Jan Volschenck: Karroo.
27. J.H. Pierneef: Karroo.
28. Maurice van Essche: Karroo.
29. Alexis Preller: Red Figure.
30. Alexis Preller: Hieratic Woman.
31. Alexis Preller: Primavera.
32. Alexis Preller: Three Figures.
33. Maggie Laubser: Harvesters.
34. Irma Stern. Xwazi Girls.
35. Norina Desmond: The Goat Girl.
36. Maggie Laubser: Ducks.

INTRODUCTION:

"For the right understanding of the South African people and their problem, the first requisite is a clear comprehension of their land" wrote Olive Schreiner in 1891 (1), but to a large extent this statement may still be accepted as valid today. The South African landscape has had and still has a profound influence on the people. This is well illustrated in Die Stem by C.J. Langenhoven. The poem is almost entirely a description of the landscape, and a dedication not primarily to the people, the history or the traditions or ideals of the land, but to the land itself. It is the landscape which has formed the people and their history, their traditions and customs, and to a considerable extent their language. The vocabulary, rhythm and idiom in both English and Afrikaans may in several instances be seen as a reflection of the environment.

The varied South African landscape in which "there is nothing measured, small nor petty" (2) seems to have an almost hypnotic influence over its inhabitants and will almost invariably bring them back if ever they should leave. They can hardly explain their return other than: "There is no room there (Europe), you know. It's so free here." (3). Olive Schreiner tries to form an analogy to give some explanation for this strange fascination the country has for its people: "South Africa is like a great fascinating woman; those who see her for the first time wonder at the power she exercises, and those who come close to her fall under it and never leave her for anything smaller, because she liberates them." (4).

It is no wonder then, that the South Africans should express themselves in terms of their landscape, and that for a long time landscape and rural life should be practically the only subject matter for the painter, the poet and the novelist. If an experience was expressed through landscape it was

likely /

---

1). Olive Schreiner: Thoughts on South Africa: pg 30.
2). Ibid. pg 50.
3). Ibid. pg 50.
4). Ibid. pg 50 - 51.

likely to be understood by all for it would then become a definition of a common experience.

It would appear, however, that no scholarly study has been made concerning the influence of the landscape on the emotional and artistic expression of the South Africans. Mention has been made of it frequently in essays and belles lettres such as the essay by Olive Schreiner from which has been quoted above, the essay by Willem van der Berg: Die asvuil ou Karoo and the "letter" describing the North west by Elisabeth Vermeulen. Laurence Green in his numerous informative books on Africa indicates in his anecdotes about the people he has met that he is aware of the grasp that the landscape has on these people, but he does not go further to investigate if this may have been reflected in their artistic expression.

Practically all parts of the land have been used as subject matter to convey a mood, to express an emotion, to meditate or to idealise. Some parts have inspired more work than others. The Karroo, for example, has a quite inexplicable power to make artists produce their most moving work, and so many have attempted to depict it that one might venture to say that all have tried. The coastal region of Natal on the other hand, has inspired almost no work of any significance. The following chapters each deal with a certain aspect of the subject matter, viz: the South African landscape, and an attempt is made to show how the various parts of the country have been employed by artists of the various periods in the artistic development in South Africa.

Within the chapters themselves an attempt is made, wherever possible, to present the second and more important division, viz: the three distinct stages of development in art in this country from the beginning of the century up to approximately 1940 - 50. (5). This division is more or less repetitive throughout the

essay /

---

5). Reference is made to the most recent work of well-known artists - i.e. work published or exhibited after 1955 - but these artists had already taken a leading position in either literature or painting before 1950. (In the case of the poets most had contributed valuable work in the thirties). Only in a few cases has the work of younger artists, whose work was introduced during the forties, been referred to in order to compare or to complete a section.

essay, but the pattern is revealed as one unit in the whole or final presentation. It will be seen that the realists and impressionists worked mainly in the Cape - and are therefore considered near the beginning of the essay; the semi-realists - or members of the group of the so-called "middle period" - concentrated largely on the farm and veld theme, and the "symbolists" give the all-embracing expression of Africa as a whole.

It was necessary to select severely throughout. The choice of artists and work was determined mainly by the divisions into chapters; in other words by the subject matter. Therefore in some cases the work discussed may be of inferior quality, and some lesser artists may be included while some better known names are omitted. This was very often necessary to illustrate a point, to form a parallel or to give a continuity and some form of completeness to the whole.

More time and space has been devoted to the Afrikaans contribution to South African literature than the English, mainly because it is the Afrikaner in particular who has that strong nostalgic longing for the open spaces which drives him to express himself in terms of the landscape and the elements within it. Besides, the Afrikaans community largely has a rural background as opposed to the generally more city-bred English South African, and therefore the Afrikaner in many cases has a more intimate knowledge of the countryside. Secondly there is more literature here in Afrikaans than in English. The English speaking members of the community did not experience such a strong incentive to write. They had no victory to win. Their language was firmly established with a history and a vast literature to support it (6). The Afrikaner had to create all this. The few significant English speaking writers have, however, contributed very valuable work and hold an important position in the development of literature in South Africa either as pioneers - e.g. Olive Schreiner, Francis Carey Slater and even Percy Fitzpatrick - or as considerable influences and examples - Roy Campbell, who had a marked influence upon the most

interesting /

---

6). See G.M. Miller and H. Sergeant: Critical Survey of South African Poetry in English - chapter 1 for an interesting interpretation of the "South African Problem" regarding English poetry in South Africa.

interesting and vital group of Afrikaans poets, viz: the poets of the thirties (7), and those who succeeded them.

It is an evident and an encouraging factor that in the relatively short period of fifty years the South African artists - painters, poets and writers of both English and Afrikaans - have made valuable contributions to form an interesting and indigenous South African art.

---

7). D.J. Opperman: Roy Campbell en die Suid-Afrikaanse poësie: Standpunte, vol 8. no 3. March, 1954.

Chapter 1

LANDSCAPE IN PAINTING AND LITERATURE

The painter, poet or writer can make use of landscape in his work in different ways, and the manner in which he uses it will be largely determined by the period in which he works. Therefore, during the Middle Ages when a scientific explanation for natural phenomena was almost entirely unknown and the open country was regarded as hostile and frightening, very little reference was made to landscape by artists. Another reason for the lack of representation of landscape was the general religious attitude of the time, viz: a negation of all earthly and sensual pleasures and a living only for the life hereafter. In the painting and literature of the period one certainly does find a certain amount of landscape-representation, but it was depicted symbolically. It was used to emphasise a point, not necessarily a religious one, for there are many pictures and stories (poems) which deal with the everyday life of the Mediaeval community. Sometimes it was used to emphasise a contrast as can be seen in the symbol of the pleasant, luxuriant, protected garden and without its walls the barren, cruel, almost desperate rocky hills in which no God-fearing Mediaeval man can live, even though many may have tried or were forced to try. Often landscape was used merely as a decorative setting to a story. In literature one will often find a suggestion of landscape which is there merely to give the characters something to move in. A forest, for example, was a popular suggestion. But sometimes Nature would actually play the part of human beings. The seasons would become characters with near human likes, dislikes and arguments and the entire world - which in such a case is almost entirely void of human beings and therefore only natural objects are suggested which are the essence of landscape - will rejoice and suffer as a result of their decisions.

During the Renaissance when man was the centre of all things and scientific mysteries were being solved and could therefore be controlled, governed and used by man, landscape was no longer used as a symbol, but as a subordinate background to man - to his activities, his portrait and his imaginative world as is depicted in his legends.

Later man needed an escape for his emotions. To

release/

release his emotions he would project them into the landscape and then place himself within it. In doing so he was still really the centre around which everything revolved, but not as in the Renaissance controlling the surroundings calmly and forcibly, but now voluntarily permitting the landscape to "control" him. He allowed the landscape to absorb him. The landscape finally became an overwhelming power and everything in it was intensely alive and had to be accepted in its own right. This emotional representation of landscape began almost immediately after the Renaissance, developing through the Baroque, forming in certain schools an idealised realism and in others an idealised classicism and culminating in romanticism. This emotional representation of landscape may be taken as the beginning of true landscape expression for the very reason that landscape is now equal to man. Nevertheless a human excuse still had to be found for depicting landscape; it still had to form a setting to a historical, biblical, mythological or personal story both in painting and in literature, and its function was to intensify the drama of the story.

Gradually, however, man began to tire of this artificial attitude. He no longer wished to dream, to live in such an intensely emotional world, but he now wanted to depict things as he imagined he really saw them. The illusion of reality was therefore uppermost, but beneath the surface the emotion which had inspired or commanded the artist to paint or write can be clearly appreciated. The significant difference is the difference of the actual emotion. It is now not a love of man which is uppermost, but a sincere love of nature for its own sake, particularly for the unspoilt nature of fields and hills and wild flora and for the simple folk who form an integral part of such a landscape.

This realism developed towards its final culmination in impressionism in painting and naturalism in painting and writing. This is the period during which the realistic representation of landscape for its own sake reached its peak both in literature and painting and could go no further. Its influence is still surprisingly strong today. Almost simultaneously, though, a reaction against realism in whatever form it might take - the idealised realism of the seventeenth century Holland, academism of the middle nineteenth century, impressionism, naturalism,- set in and this resulted in abstraction which possibly reached a peak during the second decade of the twentieth

century/

century. But abstraction did not satisfy everybody and many painters and writers turned back to the symbol. In art of this kind shapes of actual things are often distorted to create a significant pattern of colour or tone and shape, or sound which can exist individually and isolated in its own right and call forth an aesthetic emotion from the receiver (i.e. the spectator, reader or hearer) without any familiar literary meaning necessarily being attached to it.

Although all art is fundamentally the same in that it is a human expression which, whatever its medium, will reveal the characteristics of its period, these will be differently revealed by different art forms (painting, poetry and prose) because of the different vehicle used, but also because the artist's individual personality expresses itself by preference in one particular medium. If one may regard the primary aim of the artist as the symbolizing or representation of a universal human expression, then the attainment of this aim will be achieved in a manner appropriate to the material of expression. The secondary aim of the painter, poet and the writer will differ as a result of his choice of material. Each artist will concentrate on a certain focal point which best suits his particular medium. This shifting of emphasis of an aspect is the second great difference between the three forms of art under discussion.

If landscape is to be employed in painting or literature the difference will lie first in the material (medium) used to depict the scene, whether realistic or symbolic, and in the second place in the different approach to the subject once again determined by the medium, and finally in the function that the landscape has to fulfil in the completed work.

The main aim in painting is to fill a two-dimensional area with shapes and colour brought into being by means of paint which has a definite individual character. This composition must be built up in such a way that the

spectator's /

spectator's interest will be stimulated throughout by such things as the intricate interplay of lines, subtle changes in tone and colour and accentuation caused by contrasts.

In modern landscape painting the starting point is often the landscape itself, and it is usually not treated as merely a decoration or background to a human activity. The painter is not so much concerned with the human being who may find himself within this landscape, nor with the human philosophy or the solving of human problems which it might suggest. In other words, such association as would be the poet's or the author's reason for including this particular landscape in his work, does not interest the painter. He is merely concerned with the visual aspects of the landscape. The painter is conscious of the forms, the shapes, the colours and the general pattern which the ~~which the~~ landscape presents to him. He will make use of the "raw material" - the actual scene - which, as it stands in reality is far too vast and too chaotic to represent exactly. The painter must recreate it to form a concentrated composition which is capable, thanks to its controlled organization, of evoking from the spectator an aesthetic emotion possibly akin to the original emotion or inspiration experienced by the painter.

Thus the painter must distort or select. The degree to which he distorts will reveal the period in which he works, and within that his own personal vision will determine the final form that his work will take. Today there is a distinct range of treatment from impressionist-realism through simplified realism - i.e. the decorative - to a symbolic or abstract vision and expression.

The impressionist will attempt to give an illusion of reality, but, although the actual landscape from which the painting is taken may easily be recognised, he will not give a mere recording. Something of the painter's personality will strike through to the spectator to make him realise that he has not to do with a mere topographical document, but with a significant recreation of reality which now, apart from the real landscape, demands individual recognition.

In a decorative picture the shapes will be simplified and often rearranged, some exaggerated and others completely ignored to form a controlled unity. Such a simplification

can/

can often be recognised as one certain part of the country because the peculiar characteristics of the particular landscape have been explcited in order to emphasise its unique qualities. All irrelevant detail which is not really seen in the actual landscape by the observer in any case and, therefore, does not qualify the scene, is omitted. Yet, although the scene in the painting may be recognised as familiar, there is in this decorative work with its simplification and often drastic selection a definite move away from realism and a moving towards the symbolic.

The symbolic painter is the intellectual painter who, having in the past seen a landscape or several landscapes, will paint his picture from a memory image creating an entirely new landscape from a combination of many and built up of intellectually created forms. The final work will suggest landscape but it has no locality and no time: it is an individual yet universal expression created by means of visual symbols for which it is often difficult to find any word-symbols, and therefore those expressions may be found difficult to "understand."

In all painting the main emphasis should be on the composition made up of shapes and colours. In landscape painting these elements will present a visual representation complete in itself, not (necessarily) forming a background nor a channel for any subjective human activity. The function of landscape in a painting is therefore to present an interesting, even exciting, visual adventure. The eye is the main receiver: not the mind, which will demand human relationships. The form of the painting is primary, whereas the human emotion is secondary. This is probably the most significant, if not the most obvious, difference between painting and literature. In literature the human aspect - human thought, human activity - is of primary importance while the form - which in literature must also be perfect as it is only through the form that character development is possible - is secondary.

Poetry can be called the "bridge" between painting and prose for, in the various kinds of poetry which are prevalent today, a line can be drawn beginning from the poetry which by means of words can "paint" a reasonably accurate visual image (1) continuing /

---

1). It depends a great deal on the imaginative visual power of the reader whether the "realistic" poem will recall the original scene; it depends on the personal interpretation of the reader and therefore one can only speak of a "reasonably accurate" image.

continuing through to a verse with a realistic setting which forms a background to an individual philosophy and culminating in the abstract symbolism which is almost completely controlled by a personal philosophy as well as by sound.

In the "painterly" poem a vision of the real is represented or expressed for the sake of the thing (or landscape) seen. The result is really a word-picture which on the whole is easy to comprehend because familiar objects and situations are described in familiar words and word-combinations. The reason for its form (i.e. a poem) is that the original observer was so moved by the scene's beauty, its uniqueness or even its ugliness, its character or its individuality that he felt it must needs be expressed in a form less prosaic than mere straight-forward words. In other words, it needed more intensity in order to recreate the original emotion. The controlled form of poetry - and in particular the sonnet - is a means towards the desired intensity. However, this type of poem is primarily a recreation of a visual experience and will contain no thoughts suggested by the seen reality, no obscure philosophy and very little individual expression. But it must be remembered that even seeing is individual , and that therefore the thing seen will to some extent be modified by the personality of the poet. Just as in painting, the poet does not copy or record; he recreates. His representation can, however, not be photographic and not as "realistic" as that of the painter as a result of the symbols which he must use, namely words and sounds. The realistic painter can control the seeing of his receiver to such an extent that the spectator will eventually see the actual landscape as the painter represented it, but the realistic poet can only suggest an image which his receiver in turn has to convert from word symbols to a visual reality before he can "see".

A development from the realistic, unambiguous poem is the more philosophical, more individual and more emotional poem. Now, although the seen reality is, as before, the starting point, and the scene can be recognised as a particular landscape, there is definitely a more personal vision, and, in addition to that, the seen reality takes on a deeper meaning which either expresses the mood of the poet, or which may even express the mood of humanity. This subjecting to a mood or to a thought can be taken so far that the

landscape/

landscape finally reacts as the poet wishes: the fields will be barren when the poet is depressed and when he wishes to emphasise the degeneration of the human race: the fields will be sparkling with flowers when he is happy and full of hope for the future of his people. But, in this type of verse the landscape is still a familiar one, although it is modified by a literary implication.

This cannot be said of the symbolic landscape which, as in painting, is universal and eternal. It is a new and a permanent reality made up from individual forms, but which cannot be tied down to a locality or time: it is all-embracing. In poetry thus symbolic landscape is not used only to offer a setting for the characters (or poet) in which to move, but it will actually assist in the development of the characters and the plot by moving and changing either in advance of the actual development or in accordance with it.

Landscape in poetry can then have two functions: to paint a word-picture for the sake of the landscape itself with very little else to it: to illustrate a poet's thought or emotion which will be either direct (in the personal lyrical verses and sonnets) or indirect (in the epic poem). As a result of the medium used, the first function can very seldom succeed entirely for word symbols will always suggest a thought, and if they do not they are meant to play a part which they cannot play successfully, namely, to paint a picture, for the receiver feels frustrated in that he cannot really be sure of his picture when only words suggest it to him. The second function is therefore more significant and has far more value in that it helps to intensify a human experience.

In prose - i.e. in the sketch, short story, novel and in some cases the latter - we get or found parallels those in painting and poetry, namely, the realistic, the realistic to form a setting and finally the entirely subjective-symbolic.

Sometimes sketches are merely realistic word-pictures, describing in minute detail everything that the writer sees. There is nothing else to a sketch of this kind - except a remarkable language control. There is merely page after page of description. It tends to become tedious, for the reader wishes the landscape to have a function. All this description must serve some purpose. But nothing happens,

and/

and the reader finally loses interest through sheer fatigue, for, as has been noted previously, the reader must constantly convert the given words into a visual image which can seldom be entirely satisfactory or accurate. (2) Even though the writer may be very competent and write prose of an outstanding quality revealing an unusual power of observation, the final work leaves the reader dissatisfied and he wishes that the writer had rather painted his picture in paint.

Yet this type of prose can certainly be used very satisfactorily when it forms a background to a series of events. Many writers will describe the setting to their story so that it will be as true to the visual reality as possible, but they will revive the interest of the reader every now and again by introducing action which will take place within the setting. Therefore the reader feels that there is a reason for him to visualise the scene as it will then help him to understand the various movements of the characters.

It seldom happens, though, that the scenery in a story is entirely realistic or passive. Usually it consists in character and plot development. The mood of the character is the mood of nature, and as rapidly as the mood of the character changes, so the mood of nature changes too. This is, of course, a very human reaction: the surroundings are inclined to appear beautiful when one is content, and hard and relentless or even lifeless when one is unhappy. The writer exploits this human characteristic to the extreme and is therefore capable of creating a great intensity which is familiar to all, and yet new. Yet, sometimes, in order to emphasise the mood of a character, nature is in a contrasting mood. The surroundings may be calm and quiet, suggesting a continuous and prosperous growth while the character may, at that precise moment, experience disillusionment.

Today the writer will often create an abstract landscape as in the other art forms with neither place nor time. In prose this type of symbolic landscape often suggests a dream-landscape probably because it is so instrumental in intensifying the action. In this type the landscape often takes on overwhelming dimensions which completely control /

---

2) See Hammacher: Amsterdamsche Impressionisten; chap. 2. re the prose and painting of Jacobus van Looy.

control the human being who, although he may have a definite desire to act according to his own judgement and wish, is entirely helpless. The landscape is, therefore, the symbol of supernatural elements and fate over which man has no power.

The function of landscape in prose is then definitely to form a setting, a background to a series of events and it may or may not be instrumental in the development of character and situation. In prose landscape cannot stand alone as is almost essential in painting (almost essential for in some painting the landscape is also used to intensify the subject or action in the foreground) and possible in poetry. In prose the depiction of landscape is one part of many forming a unity, and not a unity in itself.

South African Heritage:

Although South Africa's geographical position is such that contact with its parent countries may appear to have been almost impossible - particularly before the twentieth century - all the spiritual and cultural expressions which are today to be found in the southern continent are closely related to the mode of expression in the European countries - although modified according to its own character and development. (3). In fact the beginning of South African art is the continuation of the European, and the long line of development which has formed contemporary European art has also been responsible for the particular form that art has taken in South Africa. It is therefore necessary to pause for a moment in order to examine the European cultural heritage which has formed an almost unbroken line of development to the art of today.

In Europe itself an interesting "influence circle" (4) can be traced and this influence is of great value to the South African, for the three countries which particularly influenced each other in painting and literature are the three from which the South African nation has sprung: Holland, England, France. Germany in this case is an

Outsider/

---

3) Matthys Bokhorst: Die kuns van 'nkwartceu: Standpunte.

4) The influence circle is suggested by Colmjon: Oorsprongen van de Renaissance der literatuur in Nederland.

outsider that does not to any great extent contribute to European art in general before the twentieth century, although during the past century German philosophy and expressionist painting have had a considerable influence on literature and painting in the countries of the Western culture. In addition, many South Africans have gone to Germany to study and have brought back to the country the contemporary,or immediately pre-contemporary, German mode of expression. (5).

"Influence" is a dangerous word and needs to be more clearly defined before the "influence circle" mentioned above can be discussed. It does not only mean that a certain person or style has more or less "forced" another involuntarily to act or to create in a similar manner. The person considered to be "influenced" must already have an outlook on life which is to some extent the same as that of his "forerunner," and he will therefore be capable of appreciating the forerunner's work completely before he can possibly be influenced. He will already see and notice certain subjects more clearly than others and these subjects will be similar to those seen by the forerunner. He will represent or express these subjects in a particular way which will again be reminiscent to that of the forerunner. Therefore, the work of the original artist - whether he is painter, poet or writer - will be incapable of influencing anybody unless another is already prepared through his own emotional make-up to receive this work. When the younger man comes in contact with the work of the older, the former will find many of his problems already solved and he is then able to develop further from that point. The fundamental argument is that the form which the expression of an individual is going to take is inherent in that individual, and the value of an influence is that it directs an emotion towards an appropriate concrete form.

Sometimes an artist is said to be influenced by another, but on closer study it is often proved that the "influenced" knew none of the works by the older man (6). In this case it is frequently the spirit of the period which brings forth work by different, even isolated individuals, which may be so alike that at a later date all these works may be

grouped /

---

5). E.g. D.J. Malherbe(Magrie Linhoorn Irma Sterne N.P. van Wyk Louw.

6). A South African example of such a case is quoted by C.M. van den Heever Skrywers van die woord. pg. 181.

grouped together as one whole. They all reveal the same characteristics, the same problems, the same solutions in many cases and even a similar, if not identical, subjective "feeling".

Very often work will be passed by unnoticed for many years because the particular period in which it was produced cannot appreciate it. And then a few restless individuals will begin to seek - work - in the very same direction as the forerunners and subsequently discover the work in which their own problems are treated. It is true that very often their own work then begins to resemble the older work more closely, but usually that is a transitory stage which will eventually bring them to express themselves more fully and sincerely, and which enables them to make their own particular contribution. Often it is they who introduce the older work to the general community who can then accept and admire it.

It is significant that a period should be ripe to receive a style for this does explain many "influences". It explains why suddenly a group or isolated individuals will all begin to work in the same way at more or less the same time, and why they all admire the work of a certain previous period which is not necessarily directly previous to their own. In fact, it very seldom is, for the development of art consists mainly of reaction against an immediately previous style which has reached its peak and usually degenerates into decadence. A new ideal has to be created and the seed for this ideal must be found in an already existing form.

To sum up: An influence is a logical development in an individual (that is, provided the individual is a creative artist and not merely a follower or copyist) or in time, rather than a following after. An influence can be seen as an impregnation into the subsequent form which art is to take.

Sometimes it is stated that true landscape painting found its origin in the seventeenth century landscapes painted in Holland. This statement may, of course, be queried, but it is likely that these Dutch landscapes which gave a more or less realistic representation of a familiar scene made others realise that a landscape may be beautiful in itself and need not be reminiscent of the setting of classical legends and architecture. For a long time only Holland could produce such landscape paintings , but they, too, were to some

extent /

extent influenced by the mythological, unrealistic conceptions of the Italians, and the humble, unspoilt country made way for the grandeur conjured up by the human mind. Trees and clouds, meadows and roads would all be distorted to emphasise the majority of nature whereas the intimate would usually be ignored.

Approximately one hundred years later the logical development in landscape painting took place in England. The seventeenth century Dutchmen had shown the world that landscape for its own sake could be a significant art form equal to historical and portrait painting. The Dutchman had shown the world that the scene painted need not be imaginary but actually based on a piece of countryside in the painter's immediate surroundings. In England these Dutch pictures were known and admired, and encouraged in particular two of England's most important painters to look at their immediate world. Turner was perhaps the most ardent admirer of the Dutch, (7) but Constable, after having learnt his lesson from them, turned to look at nature more closely and discovered the intimate aspects of the landscape, and the effects of sunlight. His sketches, which today are considered his important contribution to art, reveal his delight in sparkling light which also brings out a gay, lively colour which may be termed more "realistic" than the drab greys and browns of the Dutch, but which may only be more realistic in a more luminous England. The subjects Constable chooses reveal his love for intimacy: a snug English cottage hidden among the trees, a small flock of sheep wandering home through a tree-lined lane, and in his bigger pictures the little things: a dog trotting home, a boy drinking at a brook, a little boat being poled away from the bank. Therefore, although Constable's pictures still have to possess a certain Romantic grandeur to satisfy the demands of the period, he finds beauty in simplicity. His two main contributions are then the discovery of sparkling light and subsequently of fresh gay colour, and his love ...

intimate/

---

7) Turner is said to have stated that seeing a fine Van de Velde in a shop window had made him a sea painter. He is also known to have studied the old masters closely, among whom was Rembrandt. See C. Lewis Hind: Turner's Golden Visions, pg 48: Kenneth Clark: Landscape into Art, pg 98: R.H. Wilenski: English Painting, pg 190.

intimate simplicity.

The influence line continues with the exhibition of Constable's Hay wain in Paris where it was seen by painters who immediately recognized its value. Apparently the painters who founded the Barbizon School did not see the Hay wain, but through the example of their immediate forerunners - among others Delacroix - who had seen the English picture, they too, wished for a simpler and more sincerely natural representation of the world around them.

It appears that the painters of the Barbizon School worked more directly from nature, although their final pictures were most likely still completed in the studio. These painters began to represent the landscape in a more photographic manner. Their choice of subject was usually simple: lonely trees, a neglected skiff on a beach, a few small harbour buildings, the lowly peasants active in their humble task. The painters attempted to represent these scenes as naturally and as truthfully as possible. The pictures reveal a simple vision, unhampered by any romantic conception. Each picture is an attempt to represent the simple, visual image only.

The French Impressionists who followed on after the Barbizon group firmly initiated and completed the "revolution" of outdoor painting. They always painted directly from the subject, and completed their pictures with the model before them. They represented only the visual sensation of light. This method of painting directly from the subject and not from a memory image or the intellect or imagination was the first and until very recently the most important method of painting practised in South Africa. However, a romantic realism is to be seen in the early South African painting, particularly in the work of Frank Oerder.

Impressionism and naturalism - first brought to great heights by the French - was to appear almost simultaneously in practically all the Western countries. Undoubtedly the social and economic circumstances of the second half of the nineteenth century in the countries concerned made the period ripe to accept impressionism (8), but the two distinct

forms /

---

8). The middle classes became wealthier and education more general. Therefore these people would be the "patrons" of art, and would (eventually) appreciate the art which used their own familiar subject matter. Secondly, urbanisation drove the people towards a nostalgia for the countryside, and therefore the simple, natural landscape depiction of the impressionists could be accepted.

forms which it took in the Netherlands had a direct influence on South African painting, and with these two schools the "influence circle" closes.

The two distinct groups in Holland which were directly influenced by the Barbizon School and to a lesser degree by the impressionists were the Hague School - which may be termed the true impressionist school - and the Amsterdam School - which is more inclined towards naturalism.

The Hague painters (from 1850 onwards) usually expressed their poetic mood in pure landscape representations. They would introduce a building or a human figure now and again to enliven the landscape, and they treated cattle as if they were an integral part of the countryside. In contrast to the sparkling, light hearted French pictures, the Dutch pictures are sombre, grey and immobile. A little later (approximately from 1880) the Amsterdam School developed, using the same means and technique, but concentrating more on the human aspect and subordinating landscape - which in the Amsterdam pictures is usually a town or street scene - to the human activity.

The new impressionist methods and techniques were finally generally accepted as the new academic style, and young painters were trained to paint as impressionists. It is, therefore, not remarkable that the South African painters who received their training in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century or at the beginning of the twentieth century, or who saw the painting in Europe at that time should carry on in the same tradition and style in their new homeland. They indeed could not see South Africa through South African eyes, but retained the vision of their masters. Frans Oerder, for example, always was a Dutch romantic realist, although at the end of his life the pure Dutch character did recede to some extent. Hugo Naudé - although he trained in Germany and England - had a profound admiration for the late nineteenth century Frenchmen and he consequently painted French society in a South African setting. Pieter Wenning allowed his own strong painter's personality to team with the Dutch and the French to produce a typical Wenning painting, but not a typical South African one.

The /

The development in literature and painting runs parallel. But in literature a style parallel to the exhausted academism which immediately preceded impressionism, finds a significant echo and renewal in the early Afrikaans poetry, while the naturalistic-romantic poetry of 1880 in Holland only later found its South African exponents.

Briefly the line of development may be traced. In England during the early nineteenth century the poets, e.g. Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Tennyson turned to nature for their subject and inspiration. Not as their predecessors to inquire of nature why their lot was so difficult to bear, nor asking nature to sympathise with them and to carry them off to the unattainable Elysium, but lovingly and thankfully. Little things were noticed and admired. The grandeur of nature was seen with a new vision which made man stand still in admiring bewilderment. Man became conscious of nature as a beautiful thing in itself. Nature had never been seen like this before and the poets never tired of revealing this beauty to any one who was prepared to listen and to look. In France a similar development was taking place. The writers and poets were beginning to see nature and life as it really was without any romantic (which by this time had become sentimental) irrelevancies added to it. In French novels naturalism developed rapidly. As a reaction to the sentimental and insincere attitude of the upper classes of the early and middle nineteenth century, the naturalists sought their subjects and their settings in the gruesome and sordid corners of life. The reason for this was that the younger writers wished to teach the public to see reality and to throw dead tradition overboard.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century poets and writers in Holland tried to be romantic and failed pathetically. Simultaneously a popular literature was produced which was later known as "Predikanten poëzie". Ministers of religion usually wrote this type of work - hence its name - and it usually took the form of a simple, naïve little sermon in verse. Originally these poems were sincere, but gradually they degenerated to sentimental, unfelt pieces of rhyme which were easy for the man in the street to understand. They required no effort to read and they gave no exhilaration or any emotion whatsoever to the reader. They left the reader comfortably passive. There was no attempt

to/

to make any innovations in technique, no attempt to create a new image, no attempt to create new sound. In other words, these little poetic sermons were merely a following of an older style, but revealing no understanding of the real aims of art and as a result they have no intensity nor life. However, these poems came to South Africa and were read by the original protagonists of the Afrikaans language and subsequently accepted as the contemporary form of poetry which could be studied and taken as an example for their own poetic efforts. Much of the early Afrikaans work which has been written in this style is inferior, but one of South Africa's most beloved poets, Totius (9), made this style his own, and he created poetry, simple and sincere, which is a true reflection of the South African experience and emotion of that particular period.

In Holland in approximately 1880 a younger generation of writers and poets reacted violently against this unfelt, rhetorical, sentimental rhyming. They were driven to relentless criticism and condemnation of all literature produced in their country during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to them, only the seventeenth century poets such as Vondel and P.C. Hooft had ever written anything worth considering as world literature. Later, when these young men were a bit older and more tolerant, they did admit that there had been a few figures during the nineteenth century who had contributed valuable work, but by that time the renovation was almost completed and the public itself could distinguish to some extent between the good and the bad.

Besides criticism, the young men of 1880 themselves wrote work of outstanding merit, but although they claimed to be quite original in ideas and techniques, they were great admirers of the English poets, particularly Shelley and Keats, and the French naturalists, particularly Flaubert, De Goncourt and Zola, and their work distinctly shows an influence from England and France. However, the 1880 poets and writers resuscitated literature in Holland and contributed work which may be classed among the most significant and outstanding yet written in the Dutch language. They began to understand the meaning of art and literature

and /

---

9). Pseudonym for J.D. du Toit.

and they realised that they were not to tell a sentimental little story, nor to give a little sermon with a traditional moral attached to it, but they had to write in order to give: "de aller-individueelste ekspressie voor de aller-individueelste emotie" (10), and that this emotion had to be converted into sounds, words and images which would intensify that individual experience. They could see the world around them as their friends, the Amsterdam Impressionists, did and they put their visual sensations into concise, clear language, quite often neglecting the traditional rules of grammar altogether in order to make their image more distinct and expressing their individual emotion, which was such an integral part of their vision, more clearly. They prepared the way for a revival of Dutch literature; they themselves elevated it, and enabled the men who were to follow to develop their art to take on a very significant form.

As in painting, these impressionist-naturalist men of letters had a great many followers, among them South Africans who took from the Dutch work that which they could apply to their own individual vision. With the technique, freedom and boldness which was typical of the 1880-men, the South Africans painted many a significant word picture of the typical South African landscape.

In many studies on Afrikaans literature, the work has been divided into three main groups, preceded by an introductory group. The last quarter of the previous century can be regarded as a pioneering period when enthusiastic Afrikaners attempted to create a literature in their own new language. Yet they strove mainly to establish Afrikaans as an independent language rather than to produce work of artistic merit, and they attempted to break down the prejudice that Afrikaans was merely a (kitchen) dialect. After this pioneering work the beginning of the twentieth century saw the birth of genuine - though by no means great - art forms in Afrikaans literature. In this first period the work produced represented the visual reality in a rather simple and impressionistic

manner /

---

10). This was said originally by Willem Kloos.

manner. The country and its rural population, its flora and fauna were described as they appeared to be to the spectator. In the second period the poets and writers still based their work on the visual, but they introduced an additional element, sometimes referred to as a mild, slightly timid individualism. A philosophical implication is apparent in this work suggesting a more individual artist who stands slightly apart from the community. In the third period - the so-called "Tydperk van Dertig" - the artist is conscious - sometimes too conscious - of his individual calling and of his isolation, even elevation, from the general populace. Now he is also very frequently a city dweller and he is concerned with urban problems. His work becomes more symbolic to express the deeper emotional problems which arise as a result of the more intricate and complicated social conditions and obligations which confront the city man. Now, too, the artist is strongly aware of contemporary movements in Europe and he is consciously striving to create an art which can compare and compete with European work. Therefore he is far more critical of the aesthetic standards of his own work than his predecessors were of their's who so earnestly attempted to enlarge the South African oeuvre and so assist in establishing what was felt to be an urgent need - a national culture. At present a fourth group - already referred to by some critics as "Die Veertigers" - is moving towards the height of its power. (In one case it has been definitely attained in D.J. Opperman's Journaal van Jorik.) This group is following the healthy example set by the "Men of Thirty", is influenced by them, and they attempt - though apparently not always successfully - to maintain the high standard set by their direct forerunners. (11).

Although the critics of painting do not appear to have divided painting into similar phases or periods (12), but rather into styles (realism, impressionism, decorative painting, expressionism, surrealism (13) styles which nevertheless characterise the periods), the development in painting is directly parallel to that in literature/

---

11) Cf R. Antonissen: Afrikaanse letterkunde van aanvang tot hede. Pg 261.
12) See Matthijs Bokhorst: Die kuns van 'n kwarteeu.
13) A.C. Bouman: Painters of South Africa. Matthijs Bokhorst.

literature and the same divisions in time can be made. So the quaint historically interesting work done during the nineteenth century by Baines, Bowler and Angus may be seen as the equivalent to the work done by the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners. Early South African painting of the beginning of the twentieth century was concerned with the visual reality only. Work by Hugo Naudé and Pieter Wenning can be regarded as the pictorial parallels to work by the descriptive C. Louis Leipoldt and D.F. Malherbe respectively. C.M. van den Heever is referred to in the histories of literature either as a transitory figure between group one and group three - thus a representative of group two (14) - or as an immediate forerunner - even the first exponent of the third group (15). The parallel in painting is found in Pierneef's work particularly, as well as in the work by the Everard group. Irma Stern and Maggie Lautser may be included in this group, too, and their work can be placed alongside the poetry depicting the coloured by I.D. du Plessis who is definitely member of the second, transitory group.

The third group has been considered to be the most important yet from a purely artistic point of view. This can be applied to painting as well as to literature. Opperman (16) draws the student's attention to the fact that all the most significant Afrikaans poets were born within the same period - 1902 to 1914 (C.M. van den Heever - 1902: N.P. van Wyk Louw - 1906: W.E.G. Louw - 1913: Uys Krige - 1910: Elizabeth Eybers - 1914). Therefore time groups these poets as well as achievement. It is interesting to note that a number of South Africa's most important painters join the group by time too, e.g. Walter Battiss - b. 1906: Cecil Higgs - b. 1906 and Alexis Preller b. 1911. These painters reveal characterization in their work which are equivalent in standard, subject matter, form of expression and emotional impact to their contemporaries' poetry. As in poetry the standard in this painting is the highest yet attained in South Africa, but also strongly influenced by the contemporary European art forms. In painting, too, an attempt is made to compare and compete with the European contribution to art which is illustrated by the membership of the International Art

Club/

---

14) G. Dekker: Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis. A.J. Coetzee, S.C. Hattingh: Die Afrikaanse letterkunde.
15) D.J. Opperman: Digters van Dertig.
16) Digters van Dertig.

Club, and the International Association of Artists, Paris ([17]), and by the participation in the Venice Bienale Exhibitions, and by individual exhibitions overseas - e.g. Walter Battiss exhibition in London, 1957.

The development of painting and literature reveal a distinct similarity. Although one does frequently find work done in different periods which compares well with each other, the work done by direct contemporaries or during the same period reveals a deeper relationship. It is, then, not only a similarity of subject matter, but of vision, mode of expression and emotion. The period will insist on a certain form of expression which no emotionally alive artist can ignore and all will more or less express the same aspect of true human experience. The development of art in South Africa is a reflection of the development and maturing of a young nation's spiritual inheritance and its history.

---

[17] Matthijs Bokhorst: Kuns van 'n kwartjeu.

CHAPTER 2.

THE SEA.

On the whole the South African artists have neglected the sea as subject matter. P.J. Nienaber (1) suggests that possibly the "trekgees" so typical of the Afrikaner has drawn him away from the sea and into the hinterland. Nevertheless the sea has inspired some work, and some of this may be considered with the best yet produced in both painting (Cecil Higgs, Maggie Laubser) and literature (D.F. Malherbe, D.J. Opperman).

Usually the sea affects the human being emotionally. He will be conscious of an overwhelming power and an eternal movement. He may feel that this power and movement should have some reason or significance beside the geographical, but he cannot find it:

> Seg, het jij 'n doel
> waterwieg,
> skuim-gespoel?
> Of jou kome en gaan
> maar bedrog,
> skijnbestaan .....?
>
> D.F. Malherbe: [illegible]
> Die strand-brander
> Karroo Blommetjies.

The sea is a powerful background. One can constantly hear it, smell it, and feel it. It even appears to determine and control everything nearby. In reality, therefore, the sea already appears as a symbol - of power, of greatness, of movement. Everyone will react in his own personal way, and each individual will add a personal element in his vision or memory of the sea. In realistic representations the emotional element which is reminiscent of the sea may be present. But in such cases (e.g. the paintings by W.G. Wiles) the painting recedes into the background, and it is a memory of the sea that delights or moves the receiver.

A view of the sea on a sunny day by W.G. Wiles can definitely be termed realistic. Nevertheless it does not suggest a snapshot. It has a distinct, intellectually built up composition. The spectator's interest is focused on a moment when the water is churned into a white foam while a backward and forward movement compete

to/

---

1) Afrikaanse roman tematologie, pg. 186.

to determine the final direction of the water's course and it results in a circular whirlpool. This centre of interest is emphasised by a "frame". At the base of the picture rocks and silhouettes of birds are painted in a heavier tone and a warmer, darker colour. A diagonal line of breakers is in the middle distance, not demanding very much attention in themselves but terminating the important part of the composition and forcing the eye to concentrate on the chaotic, circular movement in the bay - formed by the rocks and breakers. This movement is suggested by an intellectual use of colour, varying from a yellow-white to a pale grey, the white predominating while the narrow curves of grey suggest movement - even to some extent suggesting a deeper turmoil. It is colour only that represents the movement. The brush stroke plays no part in the picture at all, nor is there any obviously visible paint texture. It almost seems as if the painter is ashamed of the materials he has to use and therefore tries to "hide" them. The colour is smoothed on to appear on the surface like a lustreless, yet clean enamel glaze. It is possible that this lack of "paint" and "brush", as well as the thorough knowledge the painter obviously has of the sea, immediately calls forth the term "realistic". For this picture does not impress the onlooker as a painting where the texture of the paint or the criss-cross of the brush stroke cause a visual excitement, but as an intensified moment of the sea. The onlooker is forcibly reminded of the sea, because a moment of which he is quite conscious but has never analysed is "frozen" in the picture and his memory completes or continues the vicious movement, adds the noise, the smell, the wetness and the breeze. It is very likely that the picture could be quite meaningless to a person who knows nothing of the sea. The sea has to be experienced before a Wiles picture can be appreciated. The picture certainly has power - a characteristic one finds in several of Wiles' pictures - thanks to a very intimate knowledge of the sea and achieved by a conscious, deliberate composition concentrating a large, eternally moving world on a relatively small canvas. But it is the power of the sea which is responsible for making Wiles "one of this country's finest and most popular painters of the sea" (2). It

is/

---

2) Everard Read: The Collectors' Guide to South African artists: pg. 24.

is not the power of a painting that impresses the onlooker. One is inclined to question whether Wiles is one of the country's finest painters, although undoubtedly he is one of the most popular.

In order to appreciate Wiles' pictures it is necessary to study his aim in painting. This he explains at length in the booklet:: Art - its spiritual meaning: an antidote to "Modernism" which he was "requested to write fifteen or sixteen years ago" (3). The title immediately suggests the argument expounded, viz: art has a religious duty to fulfil, a religious reason for its existence. This, of course, is not an artist's aim at all, but rather the aim of a moralist. The painting has to assist in an attempt at social reform or improvement. Therefore these pictures should not really be regarded as paintings at all if the onlooker wishes to gain any emotion from them, for there is little that arouses an aesthetic emotion. Nevertheless the pictures have a power that demands attention, but it is the power of the subject - in this particular case the sea - that demands attention.

On analysing his pictures it is evident, that although the medium and the application of paint may not exist in their own right, the compositions are built up in such a way to suggest large, sometimes violent, usually grandiose, movement. The compositions are intellectual. The Seascape in the Pretoria Municipal Collection well illustrates Wiles' ability to compose. The spectator is presented with a view on a dark, turbulent sea with a dark grey, heavily clouded sky above. A large wave has just broken on rock and sends up high, brilliantly white spray. The extension of the wave in at that exciting moment when it just begins to curl over, a few wisps of spray already flecking off the crest. In the background another wave has broken and its churning white is in full view.

The picture is built up mainly with diagonals and triangles. The curving wave forms a dingonal, the broken wave another, and a slight "swell" between the two is a third. All these lines lead to the focal point, viz: the triangular spray. From the apex of this triangle the eye will draw new imaginary diagonals. So a

backward/

/3) Letter by Wiles.

backward-forward movement is created. The actual diagonals lead the eye inwards from the front and side, while the imaginary lines lead the eye back to the less important rock in the immediate foreground, the highest tip of the curling wave in the foreground and to the sides. The triangular shape of the spray is repeated in the clouds and the birds. Yet the shapes are no longer so acute, but more lowing. The broken line made by the seagulls immediately above the spray is almost a perfect curve with a slight irregularity suggesting a sweeping upward movement. But the curve is sufficiently strong to bring the direction of the spray downwards again. The cloud-triangle - although curved - continues the line of the spray, causing the eye to move towards the left of the picture, and this continued line subtly intensifies the general movement. A second mass of cloud lower down repeats the curve.

Superimposed on the strong diagonals in the water are crossing curved lines representing the foam-pattern, making the eye move in an undulating movement from left to right. The composition has contrasts: the acute diagonals, abruptly broken by the triangle, the curves, all forming a pattern of conflicts that brusquely halts the eye before it can continue to follow the intricate lines. The light adds contrast, too. It is dramatic and theatrical. The spray is brilliantly white against a very dark grey sky. A "cave" of grey is within the triangle of spray itself. The curving wave is a deep dark in the hollow while the flecks of foam are highlit. The breaker in the distance is in full light, although the light is not so intense as on the main spray. On the left the area representing the calm flow-out of the water is in full, yet subdued and cold light.

On the whole the colour is realistic: a brown-green in the curve of the wave, a turquoise in the gentler water, a very dark purple-black strip representing the horizon, dark brown in the rocks lit by touches of a heavy orange. In the sky the colour shows a tendency of the painter towards the romantic. On the left, directly behind the startlingly white spray it is a very dark, deep grey, but on the right the two masses of cloud are identifiedby variation in colour. The upper mass reveals ever so slightly a tone of heavy pink, the lower mass a blue.

The/

The picture reveals no brush stroke, in fact no indication of how the medium was applied at all. There is no variation in texture. It is only after very close inspection that the onlooker can see - in the birds, the flicks of orange on the rocks and in some of the lines in the foam-pattern - that the picture is executed in pastel. As in the first Wiles picture described, the painter appears to expel the medium. It may not exist. He only wishes to recreate sea. As a work of art, therefore, it fails because the material with which it is made, is not allowed to make a definite contribution to the final expression.

W.H. Coetzer, on the other hand, does not suggest "sea" so strongly in his large painting of a storm, but he has attempted to represent the tumbling, agitated turmoil with a vigorous palette knife application, and a conglomeration of dark blues, reds, purples, greens. The result is not convincing, probably because there appears to be no control, nor organization, in the composition to emphasise and intensify the emotion. But the paint may exist and play an important part. Unfortunately, Coetzer attempted to intensify the drama with light. A large square shaped area in the upper part of the dark composition is an intense white, repeated as a radiating reflection in the centre. This crazy light together with the conglomeration of clashing colour and the large size, result in an over-dramatised picture. Coetzer is more successful when he too, subordinates his paint to the subject matter although the essential quality of a painting is then lost.

The sea with ships is a favourite subject with Nils Andersen, e.g. Saldanha Bay. The picture depicts two orange and white rowing boats beached on the sand in a rocky bay. The time is sunset. The sky is overcast. Planes of warm grey applied in short, fat brush strokes cover the larger area of the upper half of the canvas. In contrast, the left upper corner is a slight pink-yellow, also applied with short, regular strokes. This method of application certainly adds a sparkle. The pale yellow is repeated in the beach, but here it is stronger, bringing the plane forward. Harsh contrasting shadows of the boats intensify and cheapen the effect of sunset. A metallic emerald green forms the next band of colour representing lethargic, oily water. The

regular/

regular parallel vertical strokes of paint cancel out any suggestion of movement. This lack of movement where constant, powerful motion is expected, together with the exaggerated colour and the artificial, obvious light are, perhaps, the major faults of the picture. Further back where the acid green of the water merges into a heavy blue-grey, the representation of the sea is more convincing. The cliffs on the horizon continue in the same colour. The simple pattern formed by their shape and the smooth, rich application of paint is restful and pleasing. A band of thin, soft grey representing mist, adds a feasible and acceptable romantic note. But, unfortunately, the distant sea, horizon, mist and cliffs form a very small and insignificant part of the picture.

St. Helena Bay is a picture in the same style as the former with the same hard colour and exaggerated light creating a sickly drama. The view is from a very motionless emerald green bay with a most unusual water-line, making the water appear like a mass of stiff gelatine. On the beach an orange and white fishing boat lies awry on the sands, blatantly forced onto the spectator as the most important "figure" in the composition through a harsh contrast between light and shade. A skiff - orange and white - lies in the water in the shadows to the right of the picture, moored to a drift wood pole planted on the beach. This crooked pole casts a long, clearly defined shadow. Higher up on the beach, between the two boats, lies a third, but this is so badly drawn and so blurred that it is hardly noticed. Beyond the beach are the fishermen's cottages, orchards and hills, everything showing up by touches of light. The flicks of light paint in the background create an untidy, restless effect that detracts from the emotion of magnificent quiet the painter attempts to express in the fishing boat. The picture gives the impression that the painter was overawed by the glory of the sunset. He was moved by other emotions than the painterly and he could not translate these emotions into terms of paint, shape and line. There is an intensified realism in this picture which has an immediate, though brief, appeal to those aquainted with the beach at a similar time. But the appeal is the result of an association, a memory, and has very little to do with an emotion called forth by pure painting.

Andersen/

Andersen is frequently interested in dramatic light, and - as seen in the two paintings discussed - one sees how he attempts to express it in many of his pictures of the sea, e.g. Durban Bay at Night: Dawn, Durban Bay: A Ship at Sea. But in each case the light is theatrical, too forced and over dramatic. Consequently the picture looses its subtlety and therefore ~~to~~ loosesits aesthetic value.

The painter is far more successful when he does not use dramatic, romantic light as such an important element in his picture. The water-colour of a ship at sea is a pleasing picture. The artificial light is absent. The lines in the rolling ship, in the agitated water, in the smoke form a convincing pattern of contrasts, suggesting a struggle. The diagonal position of the ship towards the right of the composition adds to the irregularity and emphasises the unequal battle between a stormy sea and a ship. Here the movement is quite convincingly represented. The wet, loosely painted sky adds the final, largest contrast, and unifies and controls the whole. This picture reveals the painter's intimate knowledge of the sea. He spent his early years at sea with his father, who was a sea captain. Later, when he turned to painting professionally, he sailed in whalers, trawlers, liners, etc., in order to gain a deeper understanding of the sea which was his favourite subject matter. (4). But Andersen does not create a universal, nor a permanent, nor an aesthetic expression of the sea. Most of his pictures are anecdotal and rather superficial. His pictures - like those by Wil... - are interesting, however, as visual notes or incidental illustrations to the literary work by D.F. Malherbe. (5).

Pictures of the sea in a more impressionist style have been painted by Terence McCaw and Harry Stratford Caldecott.

Caldecott was perhaps most successful when he painted in the style of the French Impressionists, whom he intimately understood and appreciated (6). One of his seascapes - Clifton - is a charming, sensitive little painting. It is important to consider and examine for this

small/

---

4) Letter by Nils Andersen.
5) See below: pg. 39-40
6) See below: chapter 3,

small picture has a definite artistic, painterly appeal which is stronger than the appeal of the sea. It is worked out almost entirely in a varying grey-blue and given a misty unity by its dark support. Through the fine, thin, transparent handling of the paint in the upper part of the picture a haziness is suggested - so typical of a cold sea. The sea itself appears to be in movement, thanks to the irregular brush strokes sweeping over the middle area, while the rocks with the boldly applied paint, deeper tone and stronger colour add stability to the foreground.

Maggie Laubser's expressive paintings of sea birds, fishing boats and fisher folk are an important contribution to South African painting. "Her many fisher cottages contain a loving rendering of simple lives, and are often used for exciting decorative effects of colour and shape. The cottage dwellers are usually assembled round their door with a panorama of sea and fishing boats in the background." (7). Many of Maggie Laubser's paintings of the sea are excellent pictorial parallels to D.F. Malherbe's well-known novel, Hans-die-Skipper. But the painter herself feels that the farm with its labourers and animals is her subject: "Ek moet u vertel dat ek op 'n plaas woon en net die dinge skilder wat ek elke dag om my sien..... Ek het die plaas lief: die volk wat met hul werk besig is op en om die werf en op die lande, die diere, die ganse, die eende - dit alles het ek hier op ons plaas." (8) Therefore a more detailed discussion of her work will be found in a later chapter. (9). Her pictures of the sea and the fisher folk are merely mentioned to indicate their importance, and they will be referred to again later to point out the similarity between her work and that of D.F. Malherbe.

In her most recent work Cecil Higgs is successful in her paintings of the sea. Yet it appears that she felt attracted to its everlasting movement and mystery long ago, and that this movement, this "spirit of the sea" has been suggested in still lifes and interiors: ". . . while painting the interior of a house near the sea, as

in/

---

7) May Hillhouse: The art of Maggie Laubser. Trek. Vol. VIII. no. 23. May 5, 1944.
8) Maggie Laubser: Waarom en hoe ek skilder. Huisgenoot. Deel XXIII. no. 908. 18 aug. 1939.
9) See below: Appendix 1. pg.186.

in Onrust, ..., she will introduce the rhythm of the waves into the room, because this movement has become, by perpetual vision, the rhythm of her own being. The lamp on the table will incline like boats on the sea; the lines of an armchair and the sitting figure will suggest the curves of the breakers; and the colours will be imbued with some salty fragrance, like the sea-green fruit and the light sea-blue lampshade." (10). The still life, Storm (11) - a group in which the main object is a freakish piece of driftwood - creates a similar atmosphere. This picture appears to be rather surrealist in character as a result of the strange distorted, dream-like object and the atmospheric, mysterious area surrounding the central group.

Cecil Higgs' work is often recognizable by this slight surrealist element, but in some pictures it is more noticeable than in others. Superficial reality plays a small part in the painter's work: "Cecil Higgs is 'n gevoelskunstenaar . . . Die ongewone en fantastiese boei haar." (12).

The painter absorbs all the subject has to offer and she expresses it in terms of sensitive, varied paint surfaces, harmonious colour, and lines and shapes very frequently suggesting a lilting rhythm and a flowing movement.

Some pictures are vaguely reminiscent of the scene, e.g. Rocks and Spray: Hangklip, evening; Saldanha (West). The last picture is a relatively realistic representation of waves breaking violently over high piles of rock. The picture is powerful through its sweeping lines and a base of heavy colour. It even appears hard, suggesting to the spectator a fear of sentimentality. (Fig. 2.)

Rising Tide is a more abstract conception of the sea. Strange primeval shapes representing rocks form an interesting, all-embracing pattern, causing the eye to move in a repeated circle. Sharp contrasts in light and dark colour suggest glittering wet surfaces, and the smooth vertical streaks of paint representing streaming, dripping water, intensifies the surrealist emotion. The rich application of paint together with the cool colour and the smooth curves within the circle suggest a retarded movement that completes the surrealist sensation. (Fig 3)

Sea/

---

10) A.C. Bouman: Painters of South Africa. pg.109. illus. pg 110

11) Reproduced in Skone Kunste: pg. 206.

12) W.E. Serton. Skone Kunste: pg. 200.

Sea Movement is entirely abstract and suggests movement more than sea. The colours used - bright orange and green - are not the traditional, cool colours associated with the sea, and as this is a complete abstraction this unusual warm colour detracts from the emotion of sea that the movement in the linear composition does suggest. The movement is created by bright bands of colour that inter-weave and yet follow a distinct design so that the eye appears to penetrate deeper and deeper into a fathomless depth. The Vortex is a similar composition of paint revolving round a central focal point. The paint is applied as an impasto, streaked and scraped with a palette knife. So the varied textures in the paint surface assist in the suggestion of depth. The general colour is dark - blues and greens - with subtle, slight accents of complementary colours and light. The picture, with its spiraling, receding paint and colour creates a strange, mysterious effect which, in contrast to the Rising Tide, suggests a romantic element which is stronger than the surrealist.

Cecil Higgs' pictures suggest in turn influence of the nabis, the expressionists, of surrealism and romanticism. The painter appears to be thoroughly familiar with the various contemporary styles and trends and she is able to combine all elements to form a style that is typical of the painter, her country and her period. Sea Birds is an example of such a typical painting. (fig 4) It is a "memory" picture - perhaps even a composite picture - of her much loved spot, Hangklip, Cape. An irregular, hard flat area of black-brown paint, representing a rock forms the centre of interest. Around it a dry, white "spray" is applied in a scumble to the upper left of the rock, and sweeping brush strokes come down the right side, curve around below and terminate in a vigorously applied impasto in the left bottom of the picture. So an irregular oval is formed that is emphatically suggestive of violent movement. Within the curved stroke of the water in the upper right of the curve, a conglomeration of short diagonals of an intenser white alternated here and there by very dark but very short strokes represent the excited birds. The centre of interest, namely, rock, spray and birds, is similar to the Vortex in its spiraling movement, but more powerful and less romantic and mysterious. It forms a circularly moving entirety

against/

against a relatively calm blue-grey and subdued white background. The spiral ends with a lighter stroke within a dark area of rock, but is picked up again by a darker stroke to lead the eye back into the main sweep of the water. The paint application is vigorous and robust, the shapes formed by the water, rock and spray are jagged, the lines in the birds acute so that the whole creates a strong impression of tempestuous power. Although this is far removed from a realistic representation of the sea such as those painted by Wiles, it is a far more forcible, a far more personal and a far more painterly reminder of the sea. Indeed, its cold colour - predominantly grey-blue and white with a cold black-brown - the contrasts in paint texture, the irregular, sharp-lined shapes, all contribute to suggest to the spectator that he feels the icy atmosphere, and hears the rushing water with the shrieks of the birds shrilly intermingling. This is an expression of the sea that has more than a local meaning. It is an individual, deeply sincere expression of the sea, and a poem by one of the painter's contemporaries, C.M. van den Heever, gives a similar emotion:

> Die see se skuim spat kokend langs die rots
> wat bruin geskub van skulpe is: ek hoor
> die dondering waar golwe sneeuwit bots
> en hulle in saagte sopnigheid verloor.
> Die see dring swaarder om die skoongewasse
> en gladgerolde klip op skulp en gruis,
> waaragter roerloos glans die helder plasse
> wat straks sal wegstroom in die swaar gebruis.
> Ek vlug al verder voor die water uit,
> met elke golfslag spoel dit nader aan;
> die kolking wat hier sidderend waai en spruit
> laat my alleenig bo die waters staan,
> maar straks verguan die kans om nog te vlug
> en is daar nêrens meer 'n pad terug.
>
> Die Rots: (
> (Honderd Sonnette)

The poet makes use of similar subject matter. The sonnet suggests a similar strength, excitement and wildness as is suggested by the painting. The painter's visual representation suggests the sound which is actually recreated by the poet who, in turn, suggests a visual image which emphatically reminds the reader of the painting.

The emotion the sea arouses in a person is difficult to recreate in descriptive words, and frequently the poet who writes a straight forward, unambiguous poem will merely summarize his impressions. He may use words that stand for powerful sounds and huge size, but their use

will/

will not be convincing of the sea's grandeur. Rocks and caves may be compared to great architectural edifices, but the comparison will be unacceptable. The movement may be expressed in terms of senseless destruction. But nevertheless, such a poem (e.g. Op Knysna-Strand by H.A. Fagan) does not recreate the emotion that the sea calls forth from the onlooker. Sometimes such an unambiguous poem may attempt to express the sentimental longing for the sea. The weak, regular rhythm will lose the movement of the sea completely in the dreamy, slow tempo that irrevocably bans any emotion of the power of the sea. (e.g. My hart is siek van heimwee - by J.R.L. van Bruggen).

In painting, pure realism may still be accepted to some extent because the visual reminder can bring back the emotion of sea to the spectator, but a successful poem needs more than descriptive words. As has been discussed above, a word symbol must be converted before it can be visualised. The realistic painting immediately presents the spectator's visual memory and no further effort is required from the onlooker. Paradoxically, however, the good poet has an advantage over the realistic painter in some respects because besides presenting a visual image - although inevitably not as accurate as the painter's - he can also represent movement by means of rhythm, and to a considerable extent he can represent sound. This is well illustrated in C.M. van den Heever's Die Rots. The first eight lines can be regarded as realistic. The reader "sees" the spray and foam crashing against the shell-encrusted rock. He sees the violently breaking waves and the resulting foam-topped pools. He sees the smooth rocks, the shells, the gravel and the clear water. All this the realistic painter can present, too. But the poet gives more. He recreates the boiling of the sea with hard s-sounds and gutturals: Die sug se skuim spat kokend langs die rots / wat bruin geskub van skulpe is: in sagte soppigheid verloor; etc. He recreates the sea's magnificent but ruthless violence by means of rhythm. The irregularity of the rhythm emphasises the ruthless power of the sea. A Wiles-picture with its meticulously considered composition cannot recreate that violent power to such an extent, while Sea Birds by Cecil Higgs with its spontaneous composition, its varied paint texture and its intensifying contrasts can.

Hoe/

Hoe die golfrug haar baard,
o'er die rots
dreunend knars,
nes 'n blind-hollend ros
onbeteu'el
wild en los!

Maanhare swaai
in die wind
rondgesaai -
skitterende skuim
opgeskiet
in die ruim!

(D.F. Malherbe:
Die strand-brander)

Although those two verses are not as powerful, nor as expressive, as the first eight lines of the sonnet they too, assist the reader in forming his visual image by means of the sounds and the rhythm. "Met 'n maklike, swierige beweging van die vers word die ritme van die brander geteken" writes C.M. van den Heever. (13). The rhythm is irregular, but strong and it emphatically suggests the rise and fall of the water. The sounds are a convincing recreation of the sea's sound, and the images although somewhat hackneyed, nevertheless have a sparkle and freshness that enables the reader to form an accurate visual conception of the scene the poet describes.

D.F. Malherbe began writing poetry after his return from Germany where he had made an advanced study of language. His early work is based on memories of his youth, and he particularly recreated the scenes in nature that had made a deep impression on him. (14). His love for the sea is already apparent in the above-mentioned poem which appeared in his first volume, and which already indicates the more mature work of the much later Somerdae (15).

His work is predominantly lyrical, but often in epic form. When he can spontaneously give expression to his feelings he is at his best, and his verses then have a momentum that carries them on with an impressive vigour. (16) Yet sometimes he is inclined to moralise or to reason. Then all feeling, all intuitive movement disappears and the result is an empty, rhetoric summary of impressions or thoughts. (17)

The/

---

13) Uitgesoekte gedigte van Malherbe pg 10.
14) Ibid: pg. 9.
15) Ibid: pg. 16.
16) Ibid: pg. 14 and 23.
17) Ibid: cf pg. 17 - 18.

The rhythm which is typical of the poet's work and which is later to be characteristic of his prose, too, is slow, dignified and sweeping. He has a preference for many syllabled words, heavy and dragging sounds. Undoubtedly this rhythm and sound strongly assist in the suggestion of the mighty movement of the sea. It adds, too, to the suggestion of largeness. Even in his early work this characteristic technique is apparent:

> Die see is vol van eeuwigheid,
> van golwedeining op en neer
> tot wiegelwêreldе uitgespreid
> op maat van eindeloos kom en keer.
>
> (Klokgrassies.)

In the volume Somerlig many of his best poems are presented (18) and several have the sea as subject matter. Verban my na die skulpgekorrelde rotse reveals the poet's heart-felt longing for the sea. The images in this poem are concise and accurate, convincing the reader of the poet's intimate knowledge of the sea. Similar poems are the peaceful, lilting Oos-strike van die brander and the somewhat brisker Kleinmondstrand. The latter is a descriptive poem telling the reader of the poet's love for the natural surroundings of his much loved resort. In Verby the colour of the sea, the incoming fishing boat, the plundering sea birds, the suggestion of a north wind indicate that summer is past. Although no actual implication is made, no symbol is put forward, the images, the rhythm, the entire atmosphere of the poem suggests a greater ending than merely the ending of a yearly season: it suggests a completion and the passing of a period that can never return again. In Sinaptyd the real significance that the sea has for the poet is indicated: "My siel is oorvol van die see, van sy dreuning, ..." The sea, with its rhythm and all its mystery, has become part of the poet's being, he is imbued with the sea.

All these poems of the sea - word pictures, expressions of devotion to the sea, symbolism suggested by the sea - merge into one in Malherbe's best known novel: Hans-die-Skipper, and the quoted line from Sinaptyd can be accepted as a complete characterization of the book. For the reader is constantly aware of the sea, even though the actual descriptions of it are relatively scarce and very short and concise. The life of the main character -

Hans/

---

(18) C.M. van den Heever: Op cit. pg 47.
Coetzee en Hattingh: Afrikaanse letterkunde. pg. 45.

Hans - is determined by the sea: it may even be said that he is enslaved by it. Johan, who hates the sea, is nevertheless bound by it. Meester - in whom some critics wish to see Malherbe himself - allows his thoughts and philosophy to be expressed in terms of the sea. But, as in Malherbe's poetry, it is the powerful, breathing-like rhythm which runs its steady course throughout the book that makes the reader so very conscious of the sea, (19).

The long sentences with the many syllabled words, the heavy, hollow-sounding vowels, the present participles all add to the suggestion of a swelling and then a breaking movement. The regular recurrence of the long words which can only be spoken slowly creates the impression that the movement will never end. The same rhythm is found where the sea is not described directly, and because the writer has clearly stated the importance of the sea very near the beginning of the book (chapter two) the reader is strongly aware of the sea in the background. (20).

Because the tempo changes only slightly in the entire book, this steady, dignified rhythm is sometimes out of place and hampers the action and development, e.g. when the fight between Johan and Rooi-Koos is described. (21).

Certainly the rhythm gains some speed through the shorter words, but the long sentences as well as the long deliberation cancel out any sense of excitement or agitation. Swift reading - which is essential here - is impossible and the anger expressed can hardly convince the reader of the "onbeteuelde drif" of the two adolescent boys.

As in his poetry, Malherbe has an excellent control over his language. He is reputed to be the first Afrikaans writer to recognise the intrinsic, artistic and emotional value of language itself (22), and it is generally recognised that Malherbe's prose stands out as a milestone in Afrikaans literature (23). Like his poetry the character of his prose is predominantly lyrical - considered by some to be too lyrical (24) - and this personal lyrical quality is expressed by a vigour and a rhythmic momentum emphasising the inner personal thoughts

of/

---

19) Appendix 2: No. 1:
20) Appendix 2: No. 2:
21) Appendix 2: No. 3:
22) G. Dekker: Literatuurgeskiedenis: pg. 165.
23) P.J. Nienaber: Mylpale: pg. 148.
24) Dekker: Literatuurgeskiedenis: pg. 165.

of the writer. For the stylistic characteristics become an inherent expression of the writer's attitude to life and philosophy.

His realism is an idealised realism of a dreamer (25). His vision is broad. He neglects detail for that will hamper the aloof dignity of the whole. All the characters and accessories must help to build up a stately unit. All must emphasise and assist in putting across Malherbe's message to his people, viz: the nobility of labour.

The background to his story and the inanimate objects usually act as symbols, and are used in parables and as personifications to assist in emphasising the author's main point. In Hans-die-Skipper the sea and its contents is synonomous to Hans' life:

> Hy was nie meer Hans-die-Skipper nie, nie meer op die see nie, maar die deining self, 'n stuk van die see self! (pg. 156 - 157)

and:

> "Ek is net soos die skulpe, vrou, wat ver op die rotse te lande kom en daar vir n gelrek aan see-water doodgaan. Ek is soos die visse, vrou, wat vanself doodgaan, as jy hulle op droë grond bring.."
>
> (pg. 81)

The new fishing boat is the symbol of Hans' future hope:

> "Kom nou, vroutjie, laat staan daardie - in die nawinter sal jy 'n lewe sien hier by die vissery as die nuwe skuit - laat die ergste reëns net verbygaan ... net verbygaan. Jy kan nooit sink nie, dan haal ons dubbel die skade in van die wagtyd!"
>
> (pg. 143)

Meester frequently uses the sea as a religious symbol when he tries to comfort the simple, but sensitive folk who are puzzled by the apparant lack of consideration they have to encounter in life:

> "Sien jy, Hans," sê Meester, toe hulle uitmekaar sou gaan, "daar is 'n Stuurman wat die skuit in hande het - jou skuit en myne, elkeen syn en Hy voer ons waar hy wil, somtyds op gladde, pleiterige see, somtyds in die storm, somtyds op 'n visryke bank ....."
>
> (pg. 192)

The rhythm, the language, the idealised realism and symbolism all combine to form a sincere, sensitive whole with a considerable power.

/C.M. van den Heever

---

25) F.R.J. Malherbe. Aspekte van Afrikaanse literatuur: pg 34.

C.M. van den Heever has used the sea as a symbolical background too, e.g. in the short stories: Terug na die see and Broedertwis, both to be found in Simson. It is particularly interesting to compare Broedertwis with Hans-die-Skipper. The characters in both are fishermen, but while Hans feels that it is his holy calling and he wishes for no material reward, the brothers in Van den Heever's story destroy themselves through avarice and a desire for mastership. When the characters are analysed Malherbe's idealism is striking. The loveable, trusting Hans - quite convincing and acceptable in his own setting - is an impossible, non-existant figure when placed alongside the hard-bitten, disillusioned Adolf and Herman. Van den Heever almost seems to go to the opposite extreme to express the ugly in human nature when it is out for material gain.

In Broedertwis the storm at sea and the emotional storm of the two brothers merge into one. "Die storm nader" refers to both. The storm is described, while emphasis is shifted subtly from one aspect to the other - the brothers' quarrel, the natural storm, both together.

> Die storm nader. Dit is duidelik. Op so 'n nag kan baie dinge gebeur, en geen mens sal later raai hoe alles plaasgevind het nie. Vannag moet die afrekening kom. Een van hulle moet die baas word.
>
> (pg. 126)

This interchanging pattern recurs throughout, building up the tension. As the storm increases, so the growing hatred in the brothers races towards the climax. When the storm reaches its full, all-destructive fury the brothers are insane with the fear of death and brutally hold each other responsible for their predicament. The next moment the brothers see by the light of a flash of lightning that a breaker carries off two coloured assistants. Then darkness envelops everything. The brothers realise the futility of their material desires, but it is too late. A final mightily swelling wave engulfs the helpless little boat.

The tension is built up largely by association and images. Before the storm birds fly gracefully overhead, stars twinkle in the sky, the boat moves smoothly. Then the birds fly home swiftly and directly, the clouds cover

the/

the stars and cancel out all light, the swell becomes restless, the waves increase in height. A starting wind knocks the boat out of its course. The plume-topped waves grow darker and darker. The night becomes blacker. So gradually but relentlessly the sea increases in its destructive power and grandeur until it is like a night-mare sea swollen to overwhelming size. The little boat is described as a crazily bobbing cork and the climax is reached when a gigantic wave pulls it down into the depths. The next image - presented after a considerable and complete pause - is one of perfect peace in quiet: the mother of the two boys is waiting at home and thinking of their babyhood. This image adequately emphasises the climax, gives it more dramatic force, and it forms a good finish to the story.

A comparison with Malherbe's description of a storm is interesting. In Malherbe's story the faith and confidence of the fisherman is uppermost, and he even appears to have the storm under his control. Van den Heever's characters are helpless; the sea reigns supreme. Where Van den Heever's sea is dark, ominous, full of gigantic movement, Malherbe's sea is merely threatening: (26).

In Van den Heever's story the tension almost reaches breaking point. In Malherbe's story the rhythm is uniform, keeping the anxiety of the reader on the same level. Neither do the images in Malherbe's description contribute so convincingly to the drama as those used by Van den Heever:

> Die skuit het so nietig gelyk soos 'n dikkerdop in die skuimende en skuiwende, malende en rollende, gapende en sluitende waterwoestyn, en die honderd seearms het begeerlik gegryp na hulle om hulle in te trek in die diepte.
>
> (Hans-die-Skipper: pg. 162)

Here the present participles also detract from the chaotic violence that is characteristic of a storm, and suggest rather the calm, powerful, dignified movement of a peaceful sea. Compare Van den Heever's description:

> Die mas kraak of dit soos 'n potlood sal afbreek. Hulle klou aanmekaar soos toe hulle twee deuntjies was en 'n nare droom gehad het .... Dan swel 'n golf geweldig omhoog, dit is of 'n reus die bootjie op sy vingers laat tril, dit sak met 'n dowwe gekraak in/

---

26) Appendix 2: no. 4:

> in die diepte weg en as die golf met sy omkrullende skuimstreep weer opstyg, kom die bootjie nie weer terug nie .....(pg. 130 - 131)

The rhythm is short, abrupt. The sounds are hard, the image fantastic. And then the long sentence with its softer sounds - dowwe - and its present participle- omkrullende - successfully suggests the retarding, quietening movement rounding off the climax completely.

Van den Heever uses startling extremes and contrasts, moving with dizzying rapidity from one end to the other, giving the reader the impression of being recklessly thrown about: (27).

Malherbe's description is more elegant. The movements are not so "acrobatic". The reader can follow Hans' little boat in his mind's eye far more easily, but through that a great deal of the anxiety is lost: (28).

The "slinger-skommel" in Van der Heever's description is far more chaotic in its suggestion than the elegant "dans" and the slow "klim" used by Malherbe.

A short story demands more concentration and more rapid movement than the full-length novel and this may account to some extent for the differences noted. But it is more likely that each writer wished the sea to form a background to his characters - a background that would reflect the nature and personality of his people. In Hans' eyes the sea could do no wrong; it was a friend that never let you down. The two brothers, on the other hand, had to give vent to their smouldering hatred, and the storm at sea is like a terrible, magnifying echo.

The powerful compositions in Wiles' pictures come to mind when one reads the description of a storm by Van den Heever. That is the mental picture Van den Heever creates. In the seascape illustrated (29) one sees the dark sea, the gigantic waves, the threatening overcast sky and the birds which the reader visualises when he reads Broedertwis. Similarly Malherbe's descriptions of the sea can be placed alongside the Wiles' pictures, particularly those representing the sea during the day. But from an artistic point of view the writers have made the more valuable contributions, mainly because they respect their medium and so have created a piece of work with a

more/

---

27) Appendix 2: no. 5:
28) Appendix 2: no. 6:
29) Fig. 1.

more lasting value than the pictures by Wiles which merely give a superficial recording of a scene. Nils Andersen's fishing boats in Saldanha Bay and St. Helena can "illustrate" Hans-die-Skipper, but once again the story will demand far more attention than the paintings. But Maggie Laubser's Fisherman's Cottage (30) accentuates and intensifies Malherbe's depiction of the coloured fisher folk. Malherbe's description takes on a deeper meaning when placed alongside the painting, for the simplicity and poverty stated by the writer but defeated by the dignified style, is fully expressed in the picture by simple, apparently primitive means.

In comparison with the descriptions of storms at sea by Malherbe and Van den Heever, the poem Reënstorm oor die see by D.J. Opperman (31) reveals a striking difference in attitude towards the same subject matter. Malherbe, Van den Heever and D.J. Opperman are representative of three different periods in Afrikaans literature and of the three fundamental styles and approaches discussed above (32) viz: realism, part-realism and symbolism. Malherbe's style is typical of the generally understood and appreciated realism with a certain amount of idealism interwoven with the whole. Van den Heever still uses realistic settings and images but an individual vision, and a symbolism is apparent in his work. Opperman works almost entirely with symbols, surrealist symbols that superficially have an uncanny realistic appearance, but throw a greater relationship to other symbols and objects take on a greater intensity and often a psychological meaning. Malherbe's description of a storm at sea is merely an occurrence, introducing action, assisting in character development and offering a final reason for Johan's subsequent behaviour and Hans' disillusionment. Van den Heever's storm at sea, although described in such a way that the reader forms a realistic mental picture, is a symbol of the brothers' hatred. Opperman creates a symbol - a strange, grotesque, gigantic and entirely fantastic bird - to express the storm that is now not "described" at all.

D.J. Opperman is - together with N.P. van Wyk Louw - one of the most important present day Afrikaans poets. With his very first volume - Heilige Beeste, 1945 -

he/

---

30) Johannes Meintjes: Maggie Laubser: illus. pg. 35.
31) Appendix 2: no. 7:
32) Chapter 1.

he had taken up a leading position. This work reveals a maturity, a new, personal vision, an enrichment and a renewal of subject matter, and an outstanding technical control (33). Opperman no longer writes of the "typical" South African things; of historic events and characters that everybody knows about; of animals, flowers, farms with their labourers and animals that everyone has seen in the same way before (34). He incorporates these typical South African elements into his symbolism revealing them in a new, more intense light, giving them an entirely new meaning that reflects the mental and emotional situation and problems of his time. Nevertheless, the South African elements he uses are so direct, so clear-cut and so stripped of any irrelevancies that his work forms a complete South African reality. In fact, his symbols are so pure and accurate that one critic felt compelled to say: "Sulke konkrete beelding van ons Afrikaanse werklikheid, en tog so vol deepte en so veelvlakkige idee, het niemand nog by ons bereik nie." (35).

This "concrete imagery" F.E.J. Malherbe ascribes to a reaction against the somewhat vague or abstract-philosophical work that immediately preceded Opperman's significant poetry, but, on studying Opperman's contribution closely and comparing it with that of the European surrealists, it would appear that this clarity reveals a strong <u>inclination</u> towards surrealism. Yet his work in its entirity is not purely surrealist, but through his acute focusing on particular objects and using certain recurrent symbols the surrealist bias is very strong.

Although one almost immediately associates painting with surrealism "its aims have found a purer and clearer expression in poetry." (36). It is interesting to note that surrealist elements have found their way into both South African poetry and painting.

Briefly, the characteristics of surrealism as they are revealed in both art forms may be enumerated.

The surrealist expression was an almost direct result of social unrest and in Europe its first phase, viz: Dada, "arose as a reaction to the futility of the First World War". (37) The dadaists ". . . . . derided simply everything/

---

33) Antonissen: Die Afrikaanse Letterkunde. pg. 267.
34) F.E.J. Malherbe: Ons Eie Boek. 1940.
35) Ibid.
36) Alfred Schmeller: Surrealism: pg. 5.
37) Schmeller: Surrealism: pg. 6.

thing, . . . We . . . were purely, completely Nihilist, and our symbol was the null and void, the vacuum, the hole." (38). One of the aims was to destroy all accepted standards of patriotism, honour, religion, ambition, human greatness. So the movement began by making a colossal caricature of human society, and surrealism proper developed from this leaving a world visible and familiar to members of the herd and penetrating the subconscious mind which is individual. Thus self-destruction was encouraged so that the individual, inner being could be found. To break reality and so to express the subconscious the surrealists made use of the dream "with its absurd encounters and transformations, its paradoxical combinations." (39). Therefore there is no time, no defined space, no boundary - except in the unrelated objects themselves which are clear-cut, stand out in stark relief and which are represented with utmost realism, having a "glassy rigidity" and a "cold gem-like strangeness". There appears to be no atmosphere, no shadow - for the shadows themselves are imbued with a mysterious, intense life. Objects are cracked, broken, destroyed to find the inner life. The final emotion that surrealism arouses in the receiver is one of stark intensity and often of horror and repulsion. But usually a surrealist work has a fascinating power that holds the receiver spellbound, and a number of great artists have made use of surrealism as a means of expression, e.g. the poets A. Roland Holst, Marthinus Nijhoff, T.S. Eliot, and the painters Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dali. That the two artists - D.J. Opperman and Alexis Preller - reputed to be among the leading poets and painters in South Africa today, should show a symbolic expression in their work that is reminiscent of the surrealists is an interesting phenomenon, but one that could be expected. Yet the South African critics do not often use the term surrealism, although they do describe the emotion it creates.

> "Ons kry by die lesing van hierdie poësie (van Opperman) tog die sonderlinge gevoel dat beurtelings die mees gewone en die vreemdste, die natuurlikste en die mees verrassende aan ons voorgestel word, of veeleer: ons ondergaan 'n wonderlike deurmekaarspeling van gevoelens van direkte vertroudheid en van absolute verlorewees t.o.v. dieselfde ding. Ons voel 'n vreemde/

38) George Grez, quoted by Schmeller, pg. 6.
39) Schmeller: pg. 9.

> vreemde vertroudheid met hierdie lewe, sodat
> ons verwonderd staan dat ons die vanselfs,rekende
> daarvan voorheen nooit só ervaar het nie: wat
> ons diep-in vermoed of geweet het, maar wat vir
> ons gewone denke nooit eintlik bestaan het nie,
> dit word hier 'n natuurlike waarheid, al bly
> ons steeds daarvan bewus dat hierdie waarheid
> min of meer tot 'n ander, dieper wêreld as ons
> s'n behoort, tot 'n wêreld onderkant die grense
> van óns fisiese en psigiese bestaan." (40).

A favourite realm of the surrealists appears to be water, the sea and its contents, the beach (or desert) and the wind. In Joernaal van Jorik - Opperman's important epic - the sea, fish, sea weed and ghost ships play a large part. A "wave rhythm" runs almost undisturbed throughout the entire work. Where it is halted by a startling statement or a nervous action, or eclipsed by a recurrent, regular narrative rhythm, the contrast is effective and heightens the tension. The "wave" always begins to flow slowly, gradually it swells, reaches the top but does not break, flows over and begins again. This torpid, yet powerful rhythm immediately creates a feeling of spacelessness, of timelessness typical of surrealism, and it intensifies to create a sense of unreality. (41).

Opperman combines reality with the supernatural, high-lighting the unearthly:

> Wanneer die maan opkom, uit elke wrak
> diep onder uit die bodem van die see
> styg wit spookskepe na die oppervlak
> en seil weer op verbeelde winde mee:
> (pg. 6)

He combines the real with the unreal by means of words in place of images:

> Spookskepe sny snags elke golf op kam
> terug langs die kwaai klip met sy wind en skuim,
> na Lissabon, Londen, en Amsterdam
> met skatte van die Ooste in die ruim:
> (pg. 9)

Notice how sober and tangible the names of the cities are in the rhythm; how they form an almost ludicrous contrast to "die kwaai klip."

The poet sees familiar objects in an entirely new way, although such as these are a personal vision of the poet rather than a surrealism vision. Cape Point

is/

---

40) Antonissen: Die Afrikaanse Letterkunde, pg. 267.
41) Appendix 2: no. 8.

is seen as:

> Die horingdier van berg wat staan en bak;
> wit bosluisvoëls bly daeliks deur die lug
> uit verre streke kom en klouterig sak
> met vierkgeklap op kruine van sy rug;
>
> sy kwaai klein ogies loer ... en elke skip
> wat hom in hierdie modderstiltes steur,
> skep hy op neushoring van skerp klip
> dat suidoosáwinde waters skuim en skeur
>
> en skip náskip wegsink tot soutwit bene . . .
>
> (pg. 9)

In this extract one notices how Opperman uses a single word to describe an entire action or situation. Klouterig sak is a complete picture of the action, manner and movement of a bird coming to rest.

Like the surrealist, Opperman focuses his attention on one certain object and depicts it in the most concrete, realistic manner. The particular isolated object becomes everything. It appears to glow with an inner light. It has a hypotising power:

> die goue vissie swem hog óm en óm,
> en dunsteel reik rapawers uit hul pot.
>
> (pg. 28: with slight variations: pg. 29: 34)

The reader is as hypnotised by the little goldfish swimming senselessly in its eternal circle as Aldous Huxley was when, under the influence of mescalin, he gazed at a chair (42). The reader is as fascinated and as puzzled by the little fish as he is when he sees a similar fish in Alexis Preller's Grotto. (Particularly the third image in the poem bears a resemblance to the painting). The receiver does not quite know why the fish is there in either case, and yet it is important and holds the interest and attention. Opperman manages to cast the spell over his reader through a very subtle change of position of the image within the rhythm. The verse in which one meets the little fish for the first time can be read casually; it is at the beginning of the "wave". The second time the "fish-line" occurs just after an emotionally laden pause - the top of the "wave." Besides, just before the second use of the goldfish-image a horrifying, underwater surrealist dream is presented and this influences the fish-image to a very large extent: (43)

The/

---

42) See Aldous Huxley: The Doors of Perception, pg. 15 - 16.
43) Appendix 2: no. 9.

The silence, suggested in these lines, the floating movement, the retarded, sluggish, dripping sensation, the equipoised objects strung together - quite unrelated to one another except that they are water objects - all this is surrealist.

There are other images in the poem that are reminiscent of surrealism, e.g. "vier vetplantjies in 'n bakkie sand" (pg. 42) 43) to name only one, but as they are not water or sea images, they are irrelevant here.

Finally the Joernaal van Jorik is reminiscent to surrealism in its entire setting and time. It came into being as a result of war; war is used as the reason for the action and development. The main character, Jorik, sees no idealism, no hope in the automatic machine age that encourages herding and expels the individual. Therefore, he wishes to destroy the machine and to liberate the individual. But he has not the power. He betrays his own ideals.

Yet in many ways Opperman's epic poem is far removed from pure surrealism for there is a strong sense of patriotism, honour and religion which the real surrealist cancelled out. Certainly Opperman has an unusual attitude towards these social traditions, and some readers may find this attitude disturbing. But it is powerful as a result of its "newness" and emphasises the main point of the work, viz: an inherent Clavinist sense of inherited guilt that will inevitably cause man to betray his ideals.

There are several interesting parallels in the work of the two South African "Surrealists". One - the goldfish and the grotto - has already been mentioned. Another is that of the larger fish. Opperman frequently mentions the "engelvis". It appears and disappears mysteriously, silently and seems to have no reason for existence in the poem. But as a result of its regular re-appearance this image intensifies the strangeness and the unearthly quality of the whole. The name-engelvis - immediately suggests, too, an unusual beautiful quality. Preller's panel: Captive Fish is entirely decorative. But the picture has a surrealist intensity because the fish fills the entire panel, enlarging and emphasising the creature. Like Opperman's goldfish it has a hypnotic effect but here it is through its size in relation

to/

to the size of the panel. The colours radiate from the fish and sufluse the background with the same cool glow. Fish appear in Preller's more complex compositions - Woman with fish, the Crucifix - as they appear in Opperman's poem: as a decorative element, yet adding a note of mystery, an unrelated, possibly symbolical, surrealist touch. The shell is a much-liked sea object painted by Preller. A shell in itself is a thing to delight a surrealist, for its irregular shape, strange opening and often broken appearance is a perfect symbol of the essential "self-destruction". Preller frequently places his over-sized shell singly on a deserted, never-ending beach so making use of another surrealist element, viz: the endless space in which there is no atmosphere; where the objects nearby are as clear and distinct as those far away. Preller's work has been mentioned here merely to point out a few similarities that occur in the work of the two artists. His work will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. (44).

It is difficult to find other parallels in painting to Opperman's work unless one wishes to see a resemblance in Cecil Higg's Rising Tide and the rising of the submarine mentioned in the poem. But it is merely a surrealist element in both which for a moment calls forth a similar emotion.

---

44) See below Chapter 6,

CHAPTER 3:

THE CAPE:

One of the most important painters of the Cape landscape is also one of the first sincere artists to work in South Africa. But, in spite of his South African subject matter, Pieter Wenning always remained essentially Dutch in his work. When he arrived in South Africa at the age of thirty-two his style was already formed by the Hague School. He knew the work of several of the leading painters of that school, and for a very short while was trained to paint in their style. He soon had to abandon the idea of being a full-time artist, but he continued to paint when he had time to spare. (1). Although Wenning's style was always essentially Dutch, he was also interested in French Impressionism and Post Impressionism. His work frequently reveals a Cézanne influence. This can be seen clearly if Wenning's Approaching Storm is compared with Cézanne's Cut in the Road (2). It can be seen in the surface pattern of almost all Wenning's pictures which is always heavy and bold; in the simple silhouettes of mountains and trees; in the rugged wall surfaces of white-washed cottages. The main lesson learnt from Cézanne was how to make a drastic selection and how to simplify as well as create an interesting surface pattern by means of colour and paint texture. Riverbank, Newlands (3) is a good example to illustrate this Cézanne influence.

Upon his arrival in South Africa Wenning went to work in a bookshop in Pretoria and later in Johannesburg. Consequently he found little time for painting. Yet, as in Holland, he would paint and draw whenever he had a spare moment. Nevertheless, his work always retained an amateurish quality, but with a strong indication of the creative artist shimmering through the somewhat clumsy handling. "His technique possesses the charm of the naïve and the inventive combined. Naïve it remains because of a certain lack of training; inventive it is because of his spontaneous discoveries." (4).

Eventually friends enabled Wenning to go to the Cape to paint for several months. It was in this part of the country he found his own particular subject matter.

The/

---

1) Boonzaier and Lipshitz: Wenning: pg. 1 - 2.
2) Illustrated in Phaidon edition: Cézanne: pl. 17.
3) Illustrated in Boonzaier and Lipshitz, pl. 37.
4) Bouman: Painters of South Africa. pg. 9.

The Cape landscape with its frequent grey winter skies and rain, its heavy colours, its Dutch style farm houses appeared familiar and paintable to the painter of the Hague School tradition. "Wenning's work is often imbued with the moist atmosphere of wet Cape winters, the feeling for which was most akin to his Dutch nature. It was a true sign of genius and self-knowledge that he put most of his subjects into this wintry setting, and that he chose them according to a true instinct of what he could best achieve." (5).

Wenning was essentially a landscapist. Sometimes he would introduce figures into his paintings, but usually these are insignificant and clumsily painted. The few figure studies he made are inferior in style and technique to his still-lifes and landscapes. Although he painted several still-lifes of a considerable standard, the landscapes far outnumber these. His subject matter in connection with the landscapes was limited. While he was in the Cape he would frequently paint old tumbledown, white-washed, thatched-roofed farm cottages which are very similar to the farm houses in Holland. The Malta Farm House is an example painted often by Wenning. Yet he would seldom paint popular subjects which would sell, and it is believed that the ever-popular gabled old-Dutch homesteads was the subject for only one of his paintings. (6). Neither would Wenning paint rosy untouched mountains, but if he did introduce a mountain into the composition it is a simple grey silhouette adding to the simple, decorative design. A favourite subject besides the old cottages is trees: "A close study of his subject matter reveals his extraordinary talent in depicting houses and trees, and these paintings are undoubtedly his most successful works." (7).

Wenning is noted for his sensitive use of colour which would often hide inferior draughtmanship. The pictures painted in the Transvaal have a warm, predominantly yellow-brown colour with enlivening touches of bright oranges and yellows. But in the Cape landscapes Wenning reverts to the typical Hague School colour range controlled by a unifying grey.

> "As a colourist, Wenning excels. His paintings from the earliest studies to his maturist works, are distinguished by his use of certain colours which are peculiar to him. He was a master of

greens/

---

6) Illustrated in Boonzaier and Lipshitz. Pl. 32.
7) Boonzaier and Lipshitz. pg. 5[illegible].
5) Bouman Op. cit. pg 9.

greens, and handled with complete control and sensitivity the vast range of greens which confront the landscape painter. He was able to express convincingly and effortlessly the tender green of a Cape spring, the golden tints of autumn, the bleached grasses of the Transvaal highveld, or the deep, rich olive greens of the mossy oaks in Newlands. It is not surprising, therefore, that the term 'Wenning greens' is often applied in South African art criticism to define certain greens.

Other colours peculiar to his palette are his rich browns, his effective use of black and white (derived from his studies of Japanese art) and his telling use of red. Perhaps Wenning's favourite and most expressive colour, which he employed with the greatest subtlety and taste in his work, is grey, in its endless nuances." (8).

Although the Cape Flats (fig. 5) does not have the typical cottage and trees, it is nevertheless representative of Wenning's style. This picture is Dutch in character and composition with its low horizon, high, heavily clouded grey-blue sky and lack of sunlight. In general the colours are cool. The picture is reminiscent of Cézanne, too, in the patterned treatment of the foreground. It is in this area that some warmer colour is introduced, but this rapidly merges into a cooler tone as the strokes recede towards the background. The composition is peaceful and calm as a result of its dominating horizontals and the quiet, controlled triangle. This is made up of the tree - which forms its apex - village dwellings and reclining cows - which indicate the points of the triangle. The triangular group is a small centre piece within a relatively much larger area of paint. The "centre piece" is painted in an impressionistic manner - small dashes of paint merely suggesting tree, houses and cows. The two cows (a very Dutch and Hague School element in the picture) are rather too big in comparison with the rest of the scene, but they are, however, only recognisable as cows after close inspection. From a distance they are two light-points firmly anchoring the triangle. The irregular patterned foreground lends an enlivening contrast to the otherwise static composition, and this is accentuated by the contrasting warm orange as opposed to the over-all heavy grey-blue. The entire composition is painted over a dark underpainting which was a typical procedure used by Wenning. Free, thick strokes are

applied/

---

8) Boonzaier and Lipshutz. Op. cit. pg 54 - 55.

applied in the patterned foreground. The paint strokes become smoother and quieter in the middle distance and sky. In the sky there is a suggestion of a delicate pink-orange in approximately the centre of the area before merging into a deep grey which brings the sky forward.

The Cape Flats is made up mainly of varying textures of paint and the only clearly determined shape is the simple silhouette of a distant mountain range. The Vineyard (fig. 6) illustrates a more drastic simplification in the shapes on the horizon, but the painter is still more interested in the painting of green fields with rich and varied paint textures than in the formal aspects of the landscape. The Landscape with a Vineyard, Constantia (9) reveals a greater interest in a simplified formal pattern. This somewhat geometric design is based upon the visual data of fields, bushes, trees, distant farm buildings and a massive mountain. The Decorative Landscape is a further development of this severely patterned work which is another typical aspect of Wenning's painting. The landscape is seen as a series of simple, abstract shapes. The dominating tone is grey, again achieved through a dark grey underpainting which also serves to outline the individual shapes, so contributing an additional heavy cumbersome quality to the picture.

This heaviness and lack of movement as well as the subject matter of Cape farms makes Wenning's work similar to that of D.F. Malherbe. Passages in Malherbe's Die Meulenaar can frequently be placed alongside Wenning's pictures and together they form a perfect unity. (10).

Wenning exerted a great influence in the Cape, and to this day he has many followers, although it is doubtful if any have surpassed him. It is interesting to note that in several cases (particularly in the case of Gregoire Boonzaier and Piet van Heerden) it is Wenning's surface pattern which is imitated and not his paint application. Jack Pieters in his early work did, however, use a technique similar to that of Wenning. His early pictures closely resemble the older man's work, and these paintings may be said to be the best Pieters ever made. They have a

sensitivity/

---

9) Illustrated in Boonzaier and Lipshitz: pl. 69.
10) See below: pg. (65 - 66).

sensitivity which his later work lacks entirely. They reveal the experienced and sensitive craftsman, and they have a colour scheme which was an original and new contribution to South African painting.

Gwelo Goodman for a while simplified his shapes and used mountain silhouettes in the background in the Wenning manner. Piet van Heerden introduces old houses and angular trees into his pictures in the manner of Wenning with colour which is also predominantly heavy and grey. But his pictures lack depth. They are anecdotal, superficial illustrations in oil which have an immediate, but temporary charm and which do not enlarge a visual experience.

Gregoire Boonzaier understands the Cézanne influence in Wenning's work and develops his own from that. In other words, it would appear that Boonzaier understands Cézanne through Wenning's analysis. Wenning's Backyards. Malay Quarter and Boonzaier's Windermere (fig. 7) show remarkable similarities. The analysis of the trees, the ramshackle houses, the foreground and the sky is a Cézanne simplification which is a bit more developed and abstracted than the Wenning example. Boonzaier, however is more interested in linear pattern than in paint texture. Compare Cottages at Wellington (fig. 8) with the Yellow House in particular as well as with the White Farmhouse and Backyard, Malay Farm of Wenning. (11). It is clear that Wenning made excessive use of rich, heavy paint, while Boonzaier's paint is thin, and controlled mainly by the drawn design. A varying character becomes apparent; Wenning's work is sombre, low in key, heavy, serious. Boonzaier's is more light-hearted, less cumbersome, quietly attractive. Boonzaier's work is more illustrative and anecdotal, and it has a more superficial quality than work by the more serious Wenning.

Nita Spilhaus learnt a great deal from Wenning, but nevertheless contributed a personal and original quality as well. In other words, she was not such a slavish follower of Wenning, but rather an admirer who could select certain qualities and assimilate these into her own expression. The dark sombre colour used by Nita Spilhaus is reminiscent of Wenning, although Nita Spilhaus is inclined to use a heavy blue rather than a grey, and she frequently contrasts this with a harsh bright yellow. Her

landscapes/

---

11) Illustrated in Boonzaier and Lipshitz: pl. 72, 77, 76.

landscapes of the Cape trees with a mountain silhouette background are usually small. The space is usually well filled, and often the painter makes an interesting and pleasing colour composition of varying blue-grey tones. Another interesting and pleasing characteristic is the painter's interest in receding planes which definitely adds a charm to some of the mountain scenes.

A charming contribution that Nita Spilhaus has made, is a series of fourteen etchings of Trees. All these prints reveal the romantic, fantasy-loving character of the artist. The myriads of lines are delicate and fine, suggesting a lively nervousness and a quivering movement. The patterns formed by the trees themselves accentuate this sensation. When analysed closely the patterns formed by the trunks, branches and leaves are grotesque, but as a result of the fine, delicate handling as well as the small scale on which they are executed, this irregular, grotesque pattern becomes lace-like.

The grouping of the trees further adds to the quivering, hesitant movement. Fantasy is given free reign. As a result of the grouping the trees appear as actors, each demanding individual attention, yet forming part of the whole. Therefore each tree - or group of trees - appears to be in a very conscious relationship to another tree or group. In fact this studied interrelationship of the individual members of the entire group is so intense that the analogy to the theatre may be taken further, and these tree groups can be compared to highly strung, yet graceful; tense, yet elegant; hesitant, yet rapidly moving ballet dancers.

The "décor" - when there is any - is in direct contrast to the airy, spider's web quality of the trees themselves. It is usually massive and heavy. Simplified hills which are reminiscent to the familiar Wenning silhouettes, often form a background. Otherwise a simple flat field, a simply patterned sky, or a lowly, solid little farm house forms the setting. The treatment in the background is different to that in the trees. Instead of the tangle of fine black lines, the areas are filled in with one flat tone which is usually a light grey. In most cases the mountains are defined by a sensitive but calm continuous black outline, once again suggesting Wenning.

This/

This charming series which involuntarily leads the spectator into a world of child-like fantasy has a Victorian quaintness. To see any of Nita Spilhaus' work is a peaceful experience, for neither her paintings nor her etchings are stimulating nor exciting. They are merely a delicate and charming recreation of the Cape scene.

In contrast to the Dutch Wenning Henry Stratford Caldecott was happiest when painting in the style of the French Impressionists. Caldecott "brought Monet in his heart" writes John Paris in the introduction to the catalogue of a memorial exhibition of Caldecott's work, and indeed several of his paintings are distinctly reminiscent of Monet's work. (12). This can be seen if Caldecott's Visit of the Prince of Wales is compared with Monet's Street of St. Denis on the National Holiday (13). An even more striking similarity can be seen if Tree, Montague is compared with Monet's Printemps (Johannesburg Art Gallery). Caldecott's Tree is a light breezy picture built up with colour and change of tone only. There is no three-dimensional form, no linear perspective, but merely a conglomoration of light, fresh colours - almost too many colours - brushed lightly and spontaneously onto a white canvas so that the entire picture suggests a crisp, untidy wind.

Landcape, Grabouw is Impressionist in style too, but perhaps not so strikingly similar to painting by Monet. The onlooker thinks of Sisley and Pissarro when he sees this picture. It is a quiet, horizontally composed work representing a sunny, but once again, windy day. The technique in this painting is interesting. The support is a sized but unprimed buff wooden panel. The sky is spontaneously brushed in with an intense pale blue in the left corner, becomes thinner and vaguer towards the centre until only a light stroke here and there appears in the right corner. The representation of the sky,

---

12) All the pictures by Caldecott discussed here were on view at the National Gallery, January, 1957. A few are illustrated in the Catalogue, and in Bouman: Painters of South Africa and Kuns in Suid-Afrika. It was not possible to obtain photographs of the paintings.

13) Illustrated in Basil Taylor: The Impressionists and their world: pl. 15.

sky in the right of the composition is therefore the support itself. The distant hills which form the next horizontal band are brushed in with a bolder stroke and a slightly stronger colour. A subsequent horizontal band of trees introduces the palette knife, and finally the broad horizontal field is worked out in considerably thick impasto. The warm, yet light colours in this area are so applied that the paint itself adds to the slight suggestion of light and shade. Therefore a paint-texture perspective is created. Although the composition with its almost severe horizontals is decidedly calm, the whole nevertheless suggests wind and this is undoubtedly achieved by the varying textures of paint. Caldecott appears to make an interesting attempt to express the harsh South African light. It is in this aspect that the picture differs from those by the French Impressionists. In order to represent the hot light - a problem peculiar to the South African landscape painter - Caldecott has predominantly made use of orange and yellow (in the field), an autumn brown, a warm blue and variations of these over the greater part of the composition. In addition the buff ground lends a warm unity to the entire picture. Nevertheless the picture cannot be described as "hot", probably as a result of the lack of strong, contrasting shadow, and because the colours - thanks to their broken application - do not glare, but rather scintillate.

It is interesting to note that although a South African artist may paint in a predominantly impressionistic style, the influence of Cézanne and the subsequent influence of the use of distinct pattern - which was such a powerful characteristic of much of early twentieth century painting - will frequently cause him to turn to a more formal style. Beside the contemporary influence, the South African scene with its vast, often hard landscape and strong light, the many angular objects such as grotesque trees and rocks and hardened animals which all cast such distinct, clearly defined shadows is responsible for this use of a more geometric and patterned style. To paint in the true French impressionist manner and simultaneously to represent the essential African character is virtually impossible. The general character of the land is too harsh and too severe to be expressed adequately through impressionism.

Caldecott/

Caldecott would frequently paint in a more formal manner. This is not a development from the "true" impressionist pictures discussed above, because several of the more formal pattern pictures were painted at an earlier date or in the same year as Grahouw and the Tree (1927).

Possibly these pictures have the most immediate appeal, particularly Street Scene, Malay Quarter and Washing Line, Malay Quarter (both painted 1924). These, together with Old House, Long Street (1924) as well as the little drawing Composition with Roofs are strongly reminiscent of Cézanne. But sunlit, white, ramshackle, cube-like houses will always remind one of Cézanne. The Street Scene and the Washing Line are generally attractive, sunny and peaceful. They are painted on a coarse, buff canvas which gives a pleasant texture and unity. But the longer one looks at these pictures the more illustrative they appear to be. This probably is the result of the rather obvious colouring - however pleasant it may be superficially - the evident, unsubtle interplay of light and the dark, black outline.

More subtle and more painterly pictures of the formal kind are : The Goat, Malay Quarter (1927) and Monument Station. These pictures, too, have a general appeal. Particularly the goat with its queer accompanying shadow and the hens, the figures, the two-wheeled cart each with its distinct, gay shadow create an atmosphere of simplicity and charm. The Monument Station is sunny, hot with a light palette colouring. The support is a course, white canvas. The paint has been applied dry and thin so that the texture of the canvas can strike through, and the over-all effect is like that of fine crumb which creates a pleasant surface quality. This peculiar dry texture also undoubtedly adds to the suggestion of arid South African heat - which, as has been noted, was missing in the Grahouw landscape - and this technique has been applied in several of the pictures, e.g. The Goat and the Old House.

Although Caldecott's work is charming and pleasant on the whole, there are some faults in several of his paintings. One weakness is the apparent inability to paint a large area sensitively. This is best illustrated in the Cricket Match. In this instance the painter has

chosen/

Caldecott would frequently paint in a more formal manner. This is not a development from the "true" impressionist pictures discussed above, because several of the more formal pattern pictures were painted at an earlier date or in the same year as Grahouw and the Tree (1927).

Possibly these pictures have the most immediate appeal, particularly Street Scene, Malay Quarter and Washing Line, Malay Quarter (both painted 1924). These, together with Old House, Long Street (1924) as well as the little drawing Composition with Roofs are strongly reminiscent of Cézanne. But sunlit, white, ramshackle, cube-like houses will always remind one of Cézanne. The Street Scene and the Washing Line are generally attractive, sunny and peaceful. They are painted on a coarse, buff canvas which gives a pleasant texture and unity. But the longer one looks at these pictures the more illustrative they appear to be. This probably is the result of the rather obvious colouring - however pleasant it may be superficially - the evident, unsubtle interplay of light and the dark, black outline.

More subtle and more painterly pictures of the formal kind are : The Goat, Malay Quarter (1927) and Monument Station. These pictures, too, have a general appeal. Particularly the goat with its queer accompanying shadow and the hens, the figures, the two-wheeled cart each with its distinct, gay shadow create an atmosphere of simplicity and charm. The Monument Station is sunny, hot with a light palette colouring. The support is a coarse, white canvas. The paint has been applied dry and thin so that the texture of the canvas can strike through, and the over-all effect is like that of fine crumb which creates a pleasant surface quality. This peculiar dry texture also undoubtedly adds to the suggestion of arid South African heat - which, as has been noted, was missing in the Grahouw landscape - and this technique has been applied in several of the pictures, e.g. The Goat and the Old House.

Although Caldecott's work is charming and pleasant on the whole, there are some faults in several of his paintings. One weakness is the apparent inability to paint a large area sensitively. This is best illustrated in the Cricket Match. In this instance the painter has

chosen/

chosen a high view point so that the picture consequently shows no horizon. The entire panel is a representation of ground with three tiny figures of Malay children intently and excitedly concentrating on their game. The panel is covered with crude, agitated, broad, criss-cross brush strokes. The colours - brown, white, a pale red, a slight blue - intermingle and result in an [illegible] dirty tone. The high vantage point has apparently over-powered the painter for there is no colour perspective and no paint perspective with the result that the entire setting becomes vertical, and in an impressionistic picture this is ineffective and senseless. If the painter's aim had been to create a surface pattern based upon visual data - such as has been accomplished successfully by Vuillard and Bonnard for example, and later developed further by Matisse - the picture may have been successful. But it is quite clear that the painter's aim was to catch and to represent a moment of action as accurately as possible in the impressionistic "snapshot" manner, and therefore this large, muddy area of paint has no function and is disturbing. Only in the area directly surrounding the little playing figures is there a comprehendible relationship in space.

Sometimes this weakness only occurs in one part of the painting, eg Red Roofs. Here only the foreground - but unfortunately the foreground forms at least one third of the entire composition - is confused, muddy, insensitive and seems superfluous to the painter's intention. The red roofs themselves are very attractive in colour and in the way the paint has been applied. The background with its misty grey-blue sky and mysteriously looming hill is subtle and sensitive - even poetic in feeling. In fact, because of the foreground which looks "forgotten" it appears that too much emphasis is placed on the bright red roofs, but when the foreground is obliterated it becomes clear that these sparkling roofs atop their crisp white walls form an essential contrast to the soft, ephemeral background.

Caldecott is essentially a painter of small, intimate scenes, and therefore when he tackles a vast scene such as Under Lion's Head he fails. The main fault in this picture is the inability to select and regroup. The result is a confused conglomeration of irregular

shapes/

shapes in contrasting tones. It does give an impression of the actual view, but it lacks the intensity and concentration which is so essential to a significant painting.

Possibly all painters in South Africa have at some stage grappled with the problem of the country's light. Caldecott appears to have tried to solve the problem in his own peculiar way, illustrated in Avenue, Worcester, and Early Morning Landscape, Worcester. These are painted on sized, plywood panels with a strong warm-orange tone. This unifying support, therefore, is the cause of a suggestion of all-over warmth. In addition a predominance of orange and blue paint is used. As a result the pictures are unpleasantly orange. They are dark and dull in spite of the use of complementary colours, and neither heat nor light are convincingly represented by the warm support and colours which should, in theory, scintillate. On closer study of the Avenue one begins to doubt the permanency of an unprimed panel, however pleasing the tone of such a panel might be. This panel reveals large, wide cracks which most certainly damage the painted parts and which spoil the effect of the unpainted areas.

Caldecott has made a pleasant contribution to South African painting. In contrast to Wenning he attempts to depict the sunny, windy Cape. If the work of the two painters is considered together, the onlooker will have found a very representative visual expression of the Cape landscape in several of its moods.

A third painter of the Cape who is of considerable importance is Jean Welz. Contrary to Wenning and his followers and Caldecott who all realistically depicted the Western Province in certain moods, and in whose work the spectator is left with no doubt as to the origin of the subject matter, Jean Welz uses the landscape as a theme rather than as a subject. Consequently his landscapes are difficult to recognise as a representation of a certain part of the country. His landscapes, like all his other work - still lifes, figure studies, portraits - are primarily formal painterly exercises. The landscape theme is used as a basis or a foundation upon which he can work out the problem of expression through the medium of the chosen material. The subject matter in itself is relatively of little importance.

This/

This intense interest in the material may be a reflection of his early training as an architect (14). The architect's problem is to create an essentially abstract composition with solid, formal material. Paint is an entirely plastic material which will loose part of its fundamental character if it is to be used to represent three-dimensional, solid form. ". . . it is necessary to keep this architectural experience in mind, for it is this most essentially 'abstract' of the visual arts which has given Welz his extraordinary sure sense of balance and the firm geometric framework upon which even the most atmospheric and poetic of his later painting is based." (15).

In his earlier work, and in particular in the nudes, Welz does still to some extent represent sculptural form, and one notes "an emphasis on the 'drawn' rather than on the 'painted' line." (16). But in the majority of the landscapes any suggestion of sculptural form is absent. In the landscapes the spectator is very conscious of the romantic painter who, however, does not work intuitively, but who subjects his painting to a severe intellectual control. He is a meticulous worker, often painting out and over parts which were already previously considered complete by the painter himself. Sometimes it may be months, even years, before he will finally pronounce a painting complete.

> "He takes great pains to reach his goal, often wiping out parts of a painting which do not satisfy him. Works do not come from his studio in rapid succession. He likes to see them reach a stage of maturity and again and again he returns to them. This, of course, demands a strong discipline; he is too mature to let his impetus carry him away. This method might lead to fastness, the pictures might become stale and overdone, but with Welz this is not the case." (17)

As a result of this constant reworking and changing of one picture, it is difficult to note any considerable change in Welz's work. But there is a steady development and a gradual change. This is not so apparent in/

---

14) A short survey of Jean Welz's life is given in Standpunte, October/November, 1955, pg. 66.
15) Deane Anderson: Jean Welz: Lantern. June/August, 1953.
16) Ibid.
17) Bouman: Painters of South Africa: pg. 123.

in the various subject matter or themes which recur constantly, not so much in the paint application which has only shown a slight and a very gradual change and which is only distinctly observable if the early work is compared with the latest. But there are two distinct developments. One is to be seen in the change of colour. Welz's colour has practically always been sombre, heavy, tonal with a predominance of grey-tinted yellow ochres and varied coloured greys. Yet there is a definite development from a lighter palette through to a very dark, even ominous grey, towards a predominating grey-green and culminating at present in a combination of grey with a brighter blue, green and red. The second distinct development is more clearly illustrated in the still lifes than in the landscapes. The drawn object changes in appearance. The earlier work reveals angular, crude, even primitively drawn objects. In the later work the drawing shows a complete change. The lines are regular, smooth, flowing and they have a dangerous sophistication which nearly goes over to insincerity. A less obvious development is to be seen in the application of paint. In the earlier work the paint is applied with a brush in a traditional loose alla prima manner reminiscent of the technique of the Impressionists. Later Welz frequently uses the painting knife, applying the paint layer upon layer with one tone shimmering through the other. Sometimes he contrasts this method by painting a picture with the use of transparent glazes. But the thicker palette knife technique seems to be preferred by the painter for a long period. In his latest work the paint is applied more vigorously and spontaneously. The somewhat granular and varied surface made by the painting knife makes way for long, thick strokes which appear to have been merged into the other paint by the fingers. Consequently all distinct outline is lost in such pictures, and any objects which may be represented are suggested by colour alone. However, the palette knife technique is not entirely neglected by the painter. He constantly reverts to it.

In 1943 Welz painted a picture of trees which appears to be quite foreign to Welz's usual style. But it must be remembered that it is a very early picture in Welz's career as a professional painter. It seems to indicate

the/

the beginning of his painter's career, and it appears that the French painting with which he was so familiar was uppermost in his mind. The colour in particular is strange from a Welz palette. The forest of straight tree trunks is brushed in lightly, freely in broken colour, a manner reminiscent of the French Impressionists, in bright carmines and violet-blues. The rather harsh pattern of foliage is a crisp green; the background white. For a Welz picture Trees is remarkably incomplete, and it appears to be a delightful, light-hearted sketch expressing a happy abandon of a moment. This, too, is foreign to Welz's art, for as Deane Anderson writes Welz's art is "essentially a tragic art, an art which stirs the emotions, not through the ordinary channels of sentimental allusion, but as if from some distant and solemn, oracular period." (18).

Brandvlei (1944) (fig. 9) is an early landscape in the more familiar Welz style. It is a composition of delicate blue-grey and a very light orange and yellow. There is no suggestion here yet of the later sombre palette. There is a mere line suggestion of a meandering river flowing across a valley towards distant mountains. This picture at first glance indicates the romantic and lyrical painter, but is soon becomes evident that an intellectual discipline pervades the picture. The composition of colours and a few lines is carefully calculated; the paint applied meticulously and sensitively.

Landscape near Worcester (1947) (fig. 10) is a logical development of Brandvlei. It is even possible that this landscape was inspired by the same part of the country, for in it one sees a similar river meandering over a long flat distance. In contrast to the flat, grey-white foreground relieved of monotony by the curving lines of darker paint to indicate the river's course, is the chaotic conglomoration of heavy colour applied in irregular broad dashes of the painting knife. This violent contrast between fore-ground and distance has an immediate emotional impact. Although there is no distinct shape which can be recognised specifically and immediately as "mountain", the painted band strongly suggests a range of storm-cloud covered mountains. When reading Die Wolkemaker by W.A. de Klerk one is reminded in many instances of this picture. (19). De Klerk/

---

18). Deane Anderson: Op. cit.

19) Appendix 2: no. 10

De Klerk knows the Cape mountains intimately, but on seeing the painting which probably was inspired by the very mountains De Klerk knows so well, it would appear that Welz has understood their impact as thoroughly as the writer. Although De Klerk's images in the descriptions are more distinctly delineated, are sharper and stand out in more clear-cut relief and are more matter of fact than the vague, formless suggestion given by Welz, both create a sensation of the powerful and the mysterious, and of grandeur.

Welz very frequently uses Brandvlei as his theme, and progressively the suggestion of concrete form - which even in the earlier pictures was vague - merges into pure paint and tone. One can hardly speak of colour in these pictures. Storm in Sandhills, Hexriver is an example of a composition built up of layers of paint applied in a circular design. The main part of the picture is very dark, but a flash of light illuminates the composition in the upper right corner, while an undefined area of a heavy ochre anchors the movement which would otherwise be chaotic. The Landscape without horizon is practically described by its title. It is romantic and "Turneresque" in its vision (as was the previous picture described). Now (1950) Welz is making use of a palette knife paint application only. As in the Storm there is no representation of any objective, concrete form. There is a vague suggestion of trees and grass, rocks and pool, but these accents in the paint have been introduced primarily to vary and add contrast to the paint surfaces. Welz is using paint to its utmost in these last two pictures, and as with the over-sophisticated, over-competent drawing in the still lifes of this period, the method of painting is dangerous. Its facility may become sweetness; it seems to be on the point of disintegration.

A few years later (1953) Welz reverts to a more formal, even "architectural" landscape. This can be seen in the Bridge. By introducing an architectural structure - the heavy stone bridge - a drawn, sculpturesque quality is immediately apparent. Yet within the bridge itself the typical sensitive paint application has been employed and the bridge vibrates with varying tones. The bathers are distinct shapes, but have very little - if any - human characteristics which will evoke an emotional reaction from the onlooker.

The/

the onlooker sees them as part of the landscape and not as human figures. Indeed one figure is so much part of the rock on the right of the composition that it takes considerable time to find it.

At the time that the previous picture was painted, Welz was working on the Bathers. This is an entirely different kind of picture. Here once more Welz has obliterated distinct, sculpturesque form, and the three clothed female figures are merely suggested by whisks of distinct colour. The viewer is very conscious of the paint before he begins to recognise the change in colour as human figures. A relatively large area of rabbit in grey-white forms a background to the figures and represents a gigantic windblown wave. Above this is an area of intense cold blue, again applied freely and apparently spontaneously. A dark, distinct triangular shape on the left of the picture leads the eye diagonally into the distance where the third figure - considerably smaller than the two in the immediate foreground - can be seen. This picture gives a remarkable sensation of cold and wind- a sensation which is similar to that experienced when looking at Cecil Hiros' Sea Birds (20) This sensation is achieved in the Bathers by its predominantly cold colour - even the flesh of nus is gold - and the apparent chaotic, vigorous rubbing on of paint. It is difficult to believe that quite evidently Welz worked over this picture again and again to achieve the extent (21), for the ultimate impression it gets from the onlooker is the conviction that it was painted quickly and spontaneously.

Welz has presented a very personal vision of Africa, and has simultaneously introduced a lyrical quality often on the whole is devoid of sentimentality. Therefore he has made a valuable contribution to South African painting

> 'In a country whose painters as a whole reflect so much of the oppressive impact of the light and colour of Africa, Jean Welz stands slightly apart. But the refinement of his style, his capacity for evoking/

---

20) See above, chapter 2: pg 30 . And fig. 4.

21) It is likely that this picture was repainted: it is dated 1953 - '54.

> evoking a complex sequence of ideas by means of the greatest restraint, and the constant experiment and development which is the sign of a sincere creative artist, have gained him a high place in the country where for nearly twenty years he has made his home." (22)

It would appear from a casual observation that the Western Province has been used more frequently as subject matter for painting than for literature. But if Wenning and his school are considered as representative of one style the balance becomes more or less equal, and in fact, it is then apparent that the Cape has more poets than painters of merit although they do not not always use the Western Province as subject matter. Wenning and D.F. Malherbe form direct parallels in time, style and in one case in subject matter. (Die Meulenaar - the farm novel by D.F. Malherbe). It is more difficult to find a parallel in literature to the painting by Caldecott, although several of I.D. du Plessis' poems about the Malays may be compared - but in subject matter only - with Caldecott's paintings of the same subject. Welz's work reveals a similarity to descriptions by W.A. de Klerk when both use the Cape mountains as their theme, and in the fundamental character of the work their contribution is also alike because both are products of the same period. However, the poets and writers do not appear to have made so much direct or immediate use of the Western Province, although - as has been noted above - many were born and educated there. C. Louis Leipoldt mainly expressed the floral beauty of the Cape (23). I.D. du Plessis would sometimes use the Cape Coloured as his subject. The later poets - the so-called poets of "Dertig" and "Veertig" (24) - are more concerned with the problems posed by the city. Although it may not rank as their most important contribution to South African literature, these poets did turn to nature occasionally for their subject matter. For a brief moment W.E.G. Louw thought longingly of Spring in the Cape while he was in a northern land. (25). In his earlier work (Alleenspraak)

N.P. van Wyk

---

22) Deane Andersen: Jean Welz. Lantern.
23) See below, pg. 77-81.
24) Leading poets of these periods are: W.E.G. Louw; N.P. van Wyk Louw; D.J. Opperman: B.V. Petersen.
25) Appendix 2. no. 11.

N.P. van Wyk Louw still retains a certain realism or impressionism, yet suggesting a strong individual vision which will eventually develop to become symbolism. Dennebosse (26) is such an impressionist poem, and the first verse bears a resemblance to Nita Spilhaus' landscape of pine trees set against a delicate blue silhouette of the mountain. It is noticeable, however, that the second verse of the poem introduces a mystic quality, clearly indicating the poet's inclination towards the abstract and the symbolic. In his second volume (Halwe Kring) one finds Vier Gedigte by Jaargetye in die Boland. In these poems the natural surroundings are seen for a moment and subsequently act as symbols for the poet's mood:

> Die blydskap het oornag soos nuwe sneeu
> die laagste hellings van my vroeëmart
> tot skoonheid omgewkep waar elke skreeu
> soos 'n sweep in die blink lig van die klowe hard
> en helder klink . . . .
>
> (Eerste Sneeu)

The images are clear and pure (27), and they also convey a philosophic thought, and therefore give more than the visual only. (28). The metaphors have a striking intensity and originality. See how the snow-covered landscape is described:

> . . . . . Die ronde aarde staan
> wit oopgekelk en suiwer soos 'n blom -
>
> (Eerste Sneeu)

Yet Van Wyk Louw was soon to ignore local impressionism and he recreated a landscape that became symbolic of Africa. His work is, therefore, discussed in more detail in a later chapter. (29).

D.F. Malherbe's first significant novel, Die Meulenaar, has its setting in the Cape. In this book one finds that nature plays an important background rôle, and there are many direct landscape descriptions written in a sombre, yet direct style:

> "Groots is die visie op die Boulandse natuur
> en plaaslewe, en in die weidse, oratoriese-
>
> uitgesette/

---

26) Appendix 2: no. 12.
27) Appendix 2: no. 13.
28) Appendix 2: no. 14.
29) See Chapter 6: Symbol of Africa.

> uitgesette deining van die styl word die geluide van die natuur en die ritme van lewe en arbeid opgevang (heel dikwels ook verswelg). Die fragmente van realistiese waarneming gaan op in 'n ervaringswyse en vormgewing wat, soos by sy Duitse voorbeeld Kellermann, in wese nie-naturalisties is. Tragiek, natuur en arbeidsgeweld word ervaar as inkarnasies van 'n ewige wetmatigheid; uit Malherbe se visioenêr-simboliserende herskepping doen hulle op met afmetinge wat weinig of niks meer gemeen het met dié van enige realiteit. Sy roman word die liriese sang van lewensbeeld-in-hom; en onder die mooiste is sommige van dié passasies waarin die sang van arbeid en natuur en die liriese meegaandheid van die outeur saamklink tot 'n gedraenheid van musikale volsinne." (30)

The descriptions of nature may even be termed luxuriant. There may be a tendency to the over-ornate in the apparently conscious search for striking, original and magnificent images. The romantic tendency - characteristic of Malherbe's work - is obvious in the style of Die Meulenaar. In a description of a typical Cape landscape the romantic dignity of Malherbe is well illustrated in the slow-moving language, in the vision beginning from a small point - a little bird - and to see eventually a vast whole. The fertility and the idyllic quality of the Cape is well expressed. (31). The autumn and the winter are described in the same sombre, dignified style. (32).

Although Malherbe mentions colours - and even suggests that they have a blazing intensity - the reader is notaware of the glow, nor can one speak of gaiety or a light touch. A delicate metaphor may be found, however, in the following sentence:

> "Duisende pêrelogies blink voor hom uit van die pad soos die môrestou die grashalms en bedoude bosaies vat, en daar ver oor die kronkelloop van die rivier duskant groen graanheuwels langes hang die laagste strooisel van 'n verkwynende misbank." (pg. 188).

The diminutive for a brief moment relieves the cumbersome tempo and the image adds a sparkle to the reader's visualised scene. But almost immediately the lightness is again weighed down by the lengthy, even unwieldy/

---

30) Antonissen: Afrikaanse letterkunde. pg. 111.
31) Appendix 2: no. 15.
32) Appendix 2: no. 16.

unwieldy sentence. On the whole Malherbe's descriptions conjure up an overcast landscape, a picture which is low in key and heavy in form. This is the result mainly of the writer's style. The very long sentences, present participles, many-syllabled words, the emphasis on additional vowels all force the reader to read slowly. Malherbe selects, and although he will frequently add a small detail, that detail must contribute to the overall large simplicity and grandeur of the scene. Therefore, the general characteristics of the landscape descriptions in Die Meulenaar may be compared to the sober, heavy, low-key paintings by Wenning. Both artists express dignity and simplicity. Both attempt to express the vast, although they may make use of small detail or accents of colour to emphasize it. And in the work of both there is a distinct lack of convincingly suggested movement. The rhythm in Malherbe's sentences prevents this in the book, and the unifying low-tone under painting together with the simple, heavy forms prevent it in the painting. Finally, the period in which both artists worked, and the northern influence which both experienced will undoubtedly add to the similarity in their work.

A contrast may be seen when Wenning's rather unusual Gum Tree (fig. 11) is compared with Uys Krige's description of trees in The Dream. (33). Uys Krige - born in South Africa - is very conscious of the sunlight and he sees the iridescent atmospheric colour of the Cape; the silver, the green, the blue. He sees the tree as if it seemed to be made of pure light. It shimmers and it flashes sparks of pure colour. Wenning - brought up in the Hague School tradition - sees his subject in an overcast, dull light. His colours are sombre golds and browns, and he suggests a harmony rather than a melody. Krige, under the influence of the nimble-minded Mediterranean peoples, sees the "tall and slender and straight, . . . sharply outlined . . . all wet and glittering and swaying lightly as in a slow dance." Wenning's trees, seen through the eyes of a staid Hollander, are tall, sturdy, solid. Light would only emphasize form and not glitter nor shimmer.. Here the tree is made of a solid, towering mass. Light cannot penetrate it nor become part of it. The leaves in Wenning's trees/

33) Appendix 2: no. 17.

trees could not even sway lightly, let alone the trees themselves. And yet the suggestion of misty light on the right side of the picture which gives it depth, also adds a note of mystery, reminding the onlooker of the fantasy in Krige's passage. The romantic mystery of the forest appeared to have moved both painter and writer to express it.

W.A. de Klerk is primarily a dramatist, but his novels are nevertheless important, particularly as they were written during a period when very few considerable Afrikaans novels were produced. But even De Klerk does not reach the greatest heights in Afrikaans prose writing, although his work may be among the most important of the 1940 period:

> "Soms is hy geneig om meer te beskryf as van binne af uit te beeld, maar wanneer dit hom werklik erns is, skrik hy nie daarvoor om moeilike uitbeeldings aan te durf nie. Sy taal en vertelstyl is onegalig. Partykeer laat hy hom verlei tot oordrywing en die herhaaldelike gebruik van spesifieke woorde, waarvoor hy vermoedelik 'n voorliefde ontwikkel het; en in sy verhaalstyl, wat gewoonlik vlot is, verval hy soms in die gewoonte om die gang van die verhaal vooruit te loop op 'n wyse wat by 'n beter ordening van die stof onnodig sou gewees het.
>
> Wanneer hy hom in alle erns aan 'n belangrike skepping wy, lewer hy hoogstaande werk."
>
> (34)

Die Grenslose may be accepted as his first mature novel. The story is " 'n merkwaardige variant op die driehoeksstema (moeder - seun - dogter)(35.). Its setting is in the outer garden suburbs of Cape Town. (36). As is apparent from the opening passage, the style is simple and unambiguous. The landscape description is realistic and it is easy to visualise the scene. But the landscape, although it forms a pleasant background to the characters, is not very important to the development of the story. It usually does not assist in the development, nor does it intensify the drama. Only sometimes does it echo a character's emotion or state of mind. e.g. nature is compared to the mother's overwhelming pride in her son and her overpowering joy at his return/

---

34) M.P.O. Burgers: Perspektief en Profiel. pg. 761.
35) Antonissen: Afrikaanse letterkunde. pg. 258.
36) Appendix 2: no. 18.

return:

> Die natuur is oorweldigend. Anna kry 'n indruk van klare bergstrome, reuse bergpunte wat opreik na die son, die bedwelmende lied van singbosies.
>
> (pg. 27)

Occasionally the observation may indicate a future development:

> Die lig is skerp en verblindend. Maar agter teen die hoë berge skep dit 'n onaardse effek. Die lug is 'n vreemde ylblou, die rysige pieke van eteriese voorkoms. Maar daar is iets onheilspellends in die hele samestelling.
>
> (pg. 34)

This paragraph is definitely a prophecy of the eventual climax.

On the whole, however, there is not a complete unity between the characters and the development and the landscape background. The landscape descriptions could probably have been omitted without detriment to the story. The luxurious house and the garden are far more important for they have become part of the mother and they emphasize her haughty personality.

Die Uur van Verlange is entirely different in character from Die Grensloses. It is less impressionistic. A rather fantastic, idealised and more symbolic landscape is created, and this isolated mountain setting plays a more important part in the story. Over a number of years the district is developed to become a flourishing economic farming area which is very different from the earlier isolated, under-developed land where the farms were worked in a traditional, conservative and primitive manner. Necessarily the landscape must undergo a change. In the beginning of the story, a student tells the tale, and he sees his surroundings with the care-free, gay vision of a young man. He gives rather unrelated tabulations of the seen objects in nature, so giving them all a rather unearthly intensity. Together they combine to form an unapproachable, over-intensified landscape. There is also a suggestion of aloofness in this landscape which may be suggestive of the conservative stubbornness of the farmers. (37). The people are in close touch with nature, for a simple sound will remind them of the veld:

Die/

---

37) Appendix 2: no. 19.

> Die gemaal klink nou harder op. 'n Weldadige geur het deur die hele huis getrek. Ek snuiwe diep. Dis nou maar van ons lekker-ruik-kontrei - berghoegoe, en donderbuie, balseminietuin.
>
> (pg. 101)

In this extract the enumeration - typical of the first part of the book - is well illustrated. This suggests the casual attitude of the young storyteller. It is also equivocal, giving the mere data which the reader must use to build up a mental image of the magnificent, over-luxuriant setting.

Sometimes the writer makes use of an amusing - though maybe exaggerated - image, again suggesting the student storyteller, but also making his comparison in relation to nature:

> Tienuur, as ons aankom, sit die groot kersie-boom vol kinders. Hulle hang soos vinke van die takke, stop maar in van die heerlike, gloeiende vrugte.
>
> (pg. 115)

The isolation of the district is constantly emphasized by subtle means. For example, use is made of the inhabitants' curious speech - one may even venture to call it dialect ("Boomdruiwe" for example, are cherries) - and customs which may be foreign to the reader, but which hold a charming fascination (38).

In the first part of the book one now and again finds a passage which is less fragmentary, and which recreates the deep, soft colour of the Cape and its melodious sounds. (39).

The change of style is gradual and almost unobtrusive. As the storyteller becomes older, gains more experience; as a fellow-student works to bring about the change in the landscape, so the style becomes less flippant, less fragmentary. One image is not merely suggested as before, but presented in more detail (40). But occasionally the writer reverts to the tabulating method in order to grasp a vision which was apparently too vast to present in detail. Nevertheless the later tabulations are more co-ordinated than the earlier, unrelated lists. (41).

In/

---

38) Appendix 2: no. 20.
39) Appendix 2: no. 21.
40) Appendix 2: no. 22.
41) Appendix 2: no. 23.

In Die Uur van Verlange De Klerk attempted a very big and valuable subject, and the book certainly has a dignity and an unusual approach. But much of its power is lost by sensational writing, e.g. the hunting down of Ou Oom Giel, and by the inclusion of irrelevant and temporary anecdotes which are very detrimental to the unity of the book. It is doubtful whether this vast problem set out in the work has been solved adequately.

It is generally known that De Klerk is an avid mountaineer. This is well illustrated in the documentary Berge van die Boland which he wrote in conjunction with Marthinus Versfeld. In Die Wolkemaker De Klerk makes exclusive use of his intimate knowledge of the Cape mountains. Die Wolkemaker has been considered by some critics to be an important contribution to South African literature, and in the study by Coetzee and Hattingh one finds the following significant reason:

", . . Die Wolkemaker is betekenisvol . . . deels om die nuwe sin vir die Afrikaanse natuur wat daarin openbaar word: die gewaarwording van die aarde, nie soos die boer dit sien nie, nie as vrugbaarheid nie, maar in sy oerkrag as skoonheid." (42). In other words, the writer is not now experiencing the environment as an essential component of his everyday existence, but as a thing apart from him which may be enjoyed and experienced at will. It is, in fact, the citizen's view of the landscape, and not that of the rural man. This is a recent development in Afrikaans literature. One does, however, still find a typical characteristic of the Afrikaans attitude in Die Wolkemaker, viz: a conviction that farm life is the most sincere, the fullest and the most valuable. (pg. 343 - 344).

The setting - a high wasteland where no human being had ever set foot before - is not altogether convincing as a background to the problem. A group of people - all actively living, thinking individuals - are involved in an aeroplane crash and survive for a few days on this deserted mountain. A lone mountaineer manages to reach them. This is an incongruity which is almost unacceptable, and it illustrates De Klerk's inclination to

intrigue/

---

42) Coetzee en Hattingh: Afrikaanse Letterkunde. pg. 119.

intrigue and sensational writing. It is interesting to note, too, that while the writers of Berge van die Boland maintain that mountaineering need not be dangerous, that the experienced climber will rarely meet with an accident, Abraham Koch as the experienced mountaineer in Die Wolkemaker frequently just escapes death, he makes silly mistakes, and not one of the four final survivors can reach the security of civilization; two of these people meet their death as a result of a climbing accident. The critics maintain that if Abraham Koch's character is to reach its ultimate development, it is necessary that he should return from the mountains alone. But De Klerk does not manage to dispose of his characters very successfully. The reader is not convinced of the necessity of their death. Another - although lesser - incongruity is the philosophic thinking of the individual survivors. These histories, thoughts and arguments are strongly reminiscent of similar problems posed in Reisigers na Nêrens and Temas en Variasies by Willem van der Berg. That these discussions should take place in a drawing room is more acceptable than that they should take place in an eerie cave to the accompaniment of a violent winter storm, and while the speakers are awaiting death. Yet De Klerk may have wished to avoid a suggestion of insincerity and conceit which certainly does arise in the drawing room setting. The cruel, destructive, omnipotent mountains and the proximity of inevitable death will reveal the inner-most, the most true character. But will it be openly discussed? The reader is therefore constantly aware of the mountains and the elements, although in fact there is little direct description. The majesty of the mountains is often depicted (43) while the human being is entirely insignificant (page 319). Man is overawed by the magnificence of land untouched by human labour. He even accepts it as a symbol - of hope? of life? the writer mean of death?

> Daar lê dit soos 'n groot, wit stapelwolk.
> En dis nie ver nie. Dis hier - duisend voet
> bo hulle. Daar lê dit en lonk hulle toe,
> roep hulle vriendelik om te kom en daar in
> die lig te staan, vry en hoog op die nuwe aarde.
>
> (pg. 376) A/

---

43) Appendix 2: no. 24

A setting such as this and in this strange semi-surrealist spirit, has apparently not yet been expressed as such in South African painting. Welz - as has been noted above - has expressed it occasionally in a more romantic, lyrical way. It is interesting, however, that De Klerk should introduce a painter into his story. One would like to suppose that this surrealist painter whose description of his proposed final masterpiece (pg. 172 - 174) which reminds his hearers of a Dali (pg. 174), could recreate the De Klerk landscape.

FLOWERS IN THE LANDSCAPE.

It is not surprising that the brilliant colours and often fantastic, freakish shapes of the South African flora - for which the Cape Province in particular is well-known - should have been rewarding subject matter for the artist. The endless fields of colour have in particular inspired two of our best-known and most loved artists, viz: Hugo Naudé, the painter and C. Louis Leipoldt, the poet. Both artists had more or less the same thing to say, the same emotion to express, and an almost endless number of parallels may be found in the work of both. Once the work of both artists is known, the contributions of each will be thought of as one complete visual expression made up of various elements, the one adding to the other and together forming a remarkable South African unity. Each artist remains strictly within his own field. The painter is severely selective, controlling the composition by a thorough, yet unobtrusive draughtmanship, interesting the eye through various paint textures and using colour to intensify the pattern. The poet mentions, sometimes describes more fully, the colours, the flowers, insects, little animals, movements, breezes, to reveal his mood and often his philosophy. His verses frequently contain a message to fellow human beings - even though he maintained in his poetry that he sang only to please himself. Often a question may occur to the sensitive poet which, thanks to his medium, he may expound.

Hugo Naudé was the first South African painter to have the "courage" (44) to devote all his time to painting, to be a professional artist. Although his best known/

---

44) Mary Packer: Hugo Naudé; the artist who became enshrined in flowers.

known works are his pictures of the South African veld in "happy mood", an interesting development can be traced in his work (45). It then becomes apparent that the earliest landscapes reveal a more sombre character, while the latest are quiet, mature and tonal in style.

The earliest landscapes are in most cases mountain scenes revealing the artist's conscious effort to represent the view in a traditional academic manner, the initial sketches having been painted before the actual scene and later repainted on a larger scale in the studio. These studio pictures are usually referred to as "Naudé's largest pictures" (e.g. fig. 12), emphasizing the fact that his better known works are very small. These early works are dark and sombre while heavy mountain and rock overburden the painting to such an extent that all suggestion of grandeur is lost. Scintillating light and sparkling colour which is so typical of the more mature Naudé, is entirely lacking in these pictures. Apparently light was soon to be a problem with which Naudé grappled, for in subsequent pictures light begins to play an important part. Often the subject chosen is a mountain stream painted directly from the scene. The gurgling, splashing water catches the light and contributes a sparkle to the dark, heavy, overwhelmingly purple surroundings. Yet these pictures still reveal the painter who has not yet found his own individual idiom in painting, and the result appears to be somewhat foreign. Although there is an attempt to break away from the dark, germanic (northern European) colour, an attempt to represent the vastness of South Africa, the break away from the earliest style of painting learnt in the European schools is not complete. Unfortunately Naudé never dated his work and therefore it is difficult to determine when he finally broke away entirely from the dark, sombre pictures and began to paint with the light, French Impressionist palette. A particular landscape (46) may be a "bridge" between the early dark and the later so-called "typical" paintings. This picture

represents/

---

45) This development is presented in the D.F. Hugo Naudé collection, Cape Town.
46) This particular picture was not given a specific title. It is in the D.F. Hugo Naudé collection, Cape Town.

represents a landscape suffused with soft sunlight, a landscape revealing patches of delicate colour stretching away into the far distance. For although this painting is small, a characteristic which is later to be so typical of Naudé is apparent, viz: the ability of the painter to represent a vast, endless scene on a small scale. The application of paint is as yet not like that of the later work. Here the brush strokes are long and sweeping. The paint texture over the entire surface is the same throughout; long, rather dry strokes moving in varied directions, adding undoubtedly to the suggestion of never-ending distance. This picture is a direct forerunner of the paintings by which Naudé is so well-known and in which he shows such a striking similar outlook - on the flowering Karroo scene in particular - as his contemporary, Leipoldt. In the picture Mimetes Naudé's apparent favourite statement is possibly made for the first time. It is an expression of his joy and delight in the flowering fields of South Africa which he will repeat many times with constant variation and often gaining in intensity and completeness. This little composition was painted entirely out of doors, and it has the sparkle and freshness of a scene viewed for the first time with tender joy and delight. The painting suggests an early morning when the sea mists have not yet dispersed and together with the soft sunlight they envelop everything with delicate colour, obliterating all outline, erasing any harsh contour. In the foreground the silver-grey flowers form a soft, indefinite pattern, their tone adding to the delicacy of the whole. In the far distance the sea is barely suggested by a sparkle of light. The true, blinding South African colour is still missing in this picture as well as the over-powering grandeur and relentless, all controlling pattern. In many ways - in the delicacy of colour and tone, in the impressionistic application of paint - the picture suggests a European painting rather than a truely South African interpretation of the scene. In Mimetes Naudé makes use of paint perspective - i.e. varying textures of paint, grading from impasto to smooth brush-work to assist in the suggestion of depth. This is a characteristic which will be noted in almost all his ~~previous~~ painting. Now all darkness, all heaviness has

disappeared/

disappeared. The sombre northern European character has given way to a spontaneous brilliance which will become more intense as the painter continues his search to find the ideal means of representing the real South African scene. No longer are the landscapes remembered and forced into an intellectual composition in the close atmosphere of the studio, but the pictures are completed spontaneously and instinctively while the painter was wandering by caravan through his much-loved Namaqualand. One can speak of Naudé's "spontaneous surrender" (47) to the South African landscape which immediately suggests and even describes to some extent the brittle, swift, even sketchy application of paint, and the painter is described as "a true impressionist in that he follows Nature in her moods, he submits himself humbly to them." (48) Such a statement straight away calls forth the immediate impression that a Naudé picture makes on the spectator, viz: a gay, spontaneous, happy, quickly painted record of the clamorous springtime fields. But nevertheless such an apparently care-free picture long remains in the memory of the onlooker, and on closer study a Naudé painting reveals a sincere depth of feeling - although it may not be very profound - a true and ever new emotion of joyous wonder that the painter doubtlessly experienced when confronted by a new aspect of the already familiar landscape. A sound and confident draughtmanship also becomes apparent when the pictures are studied. Springtime in Namaqualand (fig. 13) is a typical picture of the mature Naudé. It is a small picture representing the far stretching fields overgrown with "wild larkspur" and Namaqualand daisies terminated by distant mountain ranges. It represents a vast, forsaken world where many hundreds of miles diminish into nothing, where the blazing sun flattens form and creates a diverse pattern, where colours scintillate and intensify, adding to one another and yet simultaneously cancelling out one another out. The scale suggested is so large that the human being - were he represented - would be absorbed entirely and become all significance. This suggestion of vastness and grandeur which is typical of Naudé's work is achieved by various technical means. Perspective is created by line, pattern, over-lapping planes, paint and colour. Yet none of this is directly obvious. In fact, the blue "larkspur" in the immediate foreground almost emphasize that colour does/

47) Mary Tacker: Op. cit.
48) Bouman: Painters of South Africa: pg. 41.

does not contribute to the suggestion of depth, but that line is the dominating factor. The size of these plants places them in the foreground, and the diminishing height of their neighbours diagonally behind them draws the inward line which is repeated by the orange, sparkling pattern formed by the daisies. This diagonal plane broadens in the middle distance apparently refuting the impression that line perspective is suggesting distance. Now it is colour perspective which lends depth to the composition. Subtly pale yellows and greens intermingle with the less intense or ore. The application of paint, too, is smoother in contrast to the heavy impasto in the foreground. The line of daisies doubles back on itself and continues its course into the far distance, assisted by two patterns of hills parallel to the daisies. The hills again accentuate the distance by line perspective. Here one finds an unfortunate obvious, enumerative piece of painting in the picture. The two hills are joined by a severe low ridge, which is a too direct and harsh continuation of the shadow line of the foremost hill. Beyond the hills the zig-zag of daisies has lost all the bright orange as well as the impasto. The light, smoothly brushed yellow line picks up here and there, leading the eye further and further into the less bright, less colourful background. The distant hills are represented by flat, over-lapping planes enhanced in the background by means of mixed mauves and greys, finally introducing the colour of the sky caught at first in a definite, heavy plane of flat table-land before opening out into the free, shapeless clouds. This is a misty, indefinite area emphatically contrasting the severely patterned field and mountain range. The use of complementary colours in this picture is noticeable and is undoubtedly responsible for that feeling of gaiety that the picture leaves with the onlooker. The brittle application of paint in the foreground which cancels out the sharp distinctions between light and shade suggests a breeze, movement and sensitively quivering life. The harsh hills and mountains with their heavy colour and obvious division between light and dark dominate and severely restrain that nervous, tentative life from developing to the full. There appears to be in this picture a dual outlook on life which is, incidentally, noted as characteristic of Leipoldt's attitude towards life (49), and which may possibly/

49) See Van Bruggen in the introduction to Die Moormanskgat: pg. 17.

possibly be an additional contributing factor to the similarities found in the work of both artists.

A more intimate flower picture by Naudé is a close-up view of a cluster of "wild larkspur". The entire picture is controlled by a soft, misty blue-grey. It appears as if the colour of the blooms suffuses the dull, pale ochre field around them. The picture suggests a cool, breezy, pleasant atmosphere, and Leipoldt unwittingly describes it:

Daar is 'n blommetjie wat groei
Teen elke krans, in elke kloof;
Sy blompies hemelsblou dié bloei
Tussen verlate grysgroen loof.

. . . . . .

Son-vrindjie, as die ou gevreet
Van wêreld-naarheid om my swig,
Dan kyk ek na jou blou en weet
Daar is nog son, daar is nog lig!

(Blampamperliedjie IV.
Uit Drie Wêrelddele.)

This little poem more or less describes the painting, and certainly evokes the same emotion. Other poems by Leipoldt do the same, e.g. the well-known Klossies (50) But when both verse and painting are analytically compared the difference is striking. Naudé certainly did not paint "k(a)lossies" (Ixia) - a little lily-like flower - in this case, nor do the blue spikes in the painting appear to be Heliophila - the little blue "friend of the sun" Leipoldt addresses in the poem quoted. However, a few concrete similarities can be pointed out. The fact that both artists worked in the same period must inevitably give rise to similarities. As contempories the work and attitude towards life of the one will naturally resemble that of the other. The subject matter is the same - the South African veld and flora, the South African colour and to a large extent the South African atmosphere. South Africa is emphasized for it appears that Naudé and Leipoldt were or the first (together with Jan F.E. Celliers and) -usl to see South Africa in a way which is slightly less influenced by the European vision, which was characteristic of the work by Wenning. Leipoldt is possibly more "South African" than Naudé as a result of the poet's medium, viz. the Afrikaans language. The approach of both artists towards the subject/

50) Appendix 2: no. 25.

subject matter is loving and tender. The poet uses diminutives, soft sounds, gives a suggestion of delicate colours, which all add to contribute to a tender emotion. In the painting the soft colours, the lack of distinct outline and the absence of darkness convince the spectator of the painter's love for the scene. In the poems the blooms quiver and tremble, there is a cool gentle breeze, there is sunlight, there is joy, and all that is to be found in the painting too. These are the words in the poems which remind one of the painting, which may be said to "describe" the painting.

Sometimes the two artists are in an abundantly joyous mood. Naudé expresses this clamorous joy with brilliant colour and with vigorous paint application. Leipoldt can hardly arrange or organise the myriad of glorious impressions that he wishes to share with everybody. He does not know what excites him most and, therefore, he tries to embrace it all, and exultantly almost thrusts it at the reader, excitedly forcing him to see all the exuberant happiness of spring, e.g. in the well-known Oktobermaand. Not for one moment does Leipoldt allow his onlooker to stand still and really look. There is too much to see at once; the day, the evening; the sky, the Karroo; the flowers, water; the trees, flowers. Backwards, forwards; up, down; big and small; one rapid, clear impression after the other expressed in quick, brisk, easily pronounced syllables adding to the exhilaration and leaving the reader almost breathless. Leipoldt prevents utter breathlessness just in time by the last, more contemplative verse. There the tempo is slightly curbed by the longer, more dragging *a*- and *ei*-sounds, but it soon gathers speed again to emphasize the youthful, care-free joy.

The Naudé picture of Springtime in Namaqualand is in this poem: "Die koppies kort gelede nog as 'n kiip so kaal / Het nou vir welkomgroetnis hul mooiste voorgehaal", and the delightful: "So bloemtuinvol van kleure die sevaal ou Karo" present an almost complete mental image of Naudé's flowering fields. An important difference between the work of the two artists now becomes obvious. Naudé, the painter respecting his medium, must select one aspect of the chaotic multitude of impressions, and then the chosen aspect must be simplified, obliterating irrelevant detail in order to create a significant whole. Leipoldt, the poet, can gather the myriad of impressions together,

re-arrange/

re-arrange them and present them all at once, giving the reader material with which to form as complete and satisfying a picture as a Naudé painting. Yet a flowering field, by Naudé, although it is joyful and spontaneous, is more sedate, calm and mature than the poem. Oktobermaand is by a very young man who finds complete happiness when he is in the open. But even in his later work Leipoldt gathers a mass of varying detail in one poem, thereby creating possibly a pleasant mental picture, but not necessarily a good unity. If all the details mentioned in 'n Bluntjiesriet-omsoomde poel (51) were to be presented simultaneously in one painting, the picture would definitely be chaotic and unsatisfactory. The images called forth in the poem suggest an entire exhibition of impressionist paintings. The poem can therefore be termed impressionist too. A number of Naudé's paintings are thought of when reading this poem: "Swart-bruin stuande water" reminds one of the early, dark pictures, and even the late works of gloomy, mysterious true-lined lakes painted at a later date than the flowering fields (52). "Sandveld tjinkerintjees, wat weelderig / Hul wit blomvlerke uitsprei" may be illustrated by Chinkerinchees (53) where, incidentally, water is shown, too. Then there is the treasury of additional images, successfully building up Leipoldt's picture and atmosphere: the deserted nest, the water insects, the faded fern, the gold and yellow of the sunset and thorn tree blossoms, the heron. And yet, in spite of the myriad of images, the poem conveys a peacefulness. This is achieved by the long and soft sounds, the heavy rhyme, and dragging rhythms. Yet, if the big and the small were all to be depicted on one canvas it is feasible to presume that all peacefulness would be lost.

The poem is a word picture. Peacefulness has indeed been suggested by technical means, but nowhere has the poet stated an additional thought applying to life or to human beings which might have occurred to him while watching the sunset at the water's edge. In that respect it is nearer to painting than: As die dieping verlaat en die tulp nie meer bloei nie (54), which, as a result of its philosophical/

---

51) Appendix 2: no. 26.
52) The date when these pictures were painted was suggested by D.F. Hugo Naudé.
53) Illustrated in Bouman: Painters of South Africa. pg. 42.
54) Appendix 2: no. 27.

philosophical implication, is a less successful poem. The first verse is still unambiguous and painterly, although almost immediately there is a hint of a hidden thought going deeper than the surface: "Daar is sap in die stamme, en krag in die blare, / Nog diep in die hart van die hout opgevou:" The second verse is entirely subjective-philosophical, almost ignoring the previous realistic lines and turning inwards completely.

Often Leipoldt is described as the "lonely one", the "individualist". If he had lived today his statements and his attitude may not have been so startling. But to the early, relatively small Afrikaans community so bound to the strictest of Calvinist tradition and even inclined to chauvinism, to state blatantly: "Ek is natuurlik 'n Boeddhis" (55), and to announce fervently in his poetry that the past must be forgotten and forgiven (56) was more than a mild shock. As a result he lost intellectual contact with his fellowmen and consequently turned more and more to nature for comfort. He would address a cricket, a secretary bird or a flower, present a problem or maybe make only a little, insignificant remark just for the sake of making it:

Soos 'n borrelende vink wat sy hart verlos
Van die sang wat opbruis en uiting moet vind
As hy swaai oj die tak van die swarthoutbos,
Gestreel deur die sag-koel môrewind;

Soos die seemeeu sing as hy ooswaarts vlieg
Op sy sterke wieke die branders oor,
Omhoog, omhoog in die blou lug, vry,
Deur die skyn van die son en die see bekoor -

So sing ook die hart wat die skoonheid min.
Want skoonheid bekoor soos die son en die see;
En hy wat vir skoonheid sy siel ontgin
Skenk terug in sy lied wat die lewe hom gee.

(Skoonheidstrooi: XIX)

This poem fully explains Leipoldt's reason for writing. He had to express the emotion he felt when he looked at nature. The Slampamperliedjies are entirely personal, and sometimes rather difficult to understand for the thought may not be expressed in full. Yet, on the whole, these casual little songs are accepted by the Afrikaans reading people today as their own because they are primarily realistic reflections. The picture the words form in the reader's mind is a familiar one, although intensified by/

---

55) Interview with Plenaar. Recorded in: Leipoldt, Eensame Veelsydige. Ed. P.J. Nienaber. pg. 86.

56) E.g. Vandag in Uit Drie Wêreldele.

by either concentrating on one aspect of a whole, or alternatively grouping a number of elements together to form a unity.

In his early poems Leipoldt reveals an intense joy in nature. He joyously sings about all the beauty around him. He does not pause to consider that it may be destroyed. It apparently does not occur to him that others are possibly more interested in material things than in nature. For him nature is wealth. Later - somewhat disillusioned by his fellowmen - he turns to nature for comfort. In Die Dante some of the early vitality and robustness is missing which was characteristic of the early poems. The sounds drag, the tempo is slower, but a certain stubbornness is revealed by the persistent: "Somer en son en saffier vir my!" Eventually the reader feels that the poet stands entirely apart (57), and therefore he has a personal vision and philosophy. No longer is there utter realism, but thoughts inspired or suggested by flowers, leaves, birds, the moor which are, however, now almost symbolical. But the symbol still is a familiar object, and therefore these reflective poems still suggest a visual image which is easily formed in the reader's mind. Often the rhythm is irregular. There may even be a suggestion of confusion and disappointment. But one characteristic remains throughout in Leipoldt's nature verse: a tender love for and a sincere, ever-new joy in all that nature has to offer him. This he expressed in a simple - though sometimes careless - language which is easily understood. Consequently Leipoldt - even today - is one of the most popular nature poets in Afrikaans.

A mass of flowers is thankful subject matter for the realist poet, and many poems describing the spring blossoms and expressing the poet's joy at the re-awakening of nature may be found in Afrikaans anthologies. Jan F.E. Celliers found moving beauty in a field of autumn flowers. When he visited a concentration camp graveyard where children were buried, he found all the tombstones overgrown with cosmos (58). The soft sounds, the diminutives, the simple rhythm in this poem all contribute towards the tender, loving, even innocent, emotion evoked by the poet.

The/

---

57) Skoonheidstroos is a volume by the individualist Leipoldt.

58) Appendix 2: no. 28.

The picture painted in the reader's mind is delicate. The images emphasize the lightness and the aerial quality which is so typical of these flowers. How crude in contrast is the recent painting by Terence McCaw of the same subject. The little patch of harshly coloured cosmos in the foreground looks dead, hard and wooden. No breeze could flutter through that immobile mass. The green field surrounding the flowers is brazen, and the severely patterned hills in the background do anything but assist in bringing out the flowers. By their treatment the hills actually appear to be in the foreground.

C.M. van den Heever describes a flowering almond tree (59), which may be compared with Pierneef's Flowering Pear Tree (60). A more symbolist painting of a flowering tree is Ruth Everard Haden's Flowering Pear Tree. This large, decorative painting represents a tree triumphantly soaring upwards, the upward movement being strongly assisted by the distinct oval pattern forming the composition of the entire picture. In contrast to Pierneef's fine handling which suggests the delicacy of spring rather than the bursting forth of life, the treatment in Ruth Everard Haden's picture is bold and broad, making the spectator feel the strong vitality of the new season.

Toon van den Heever is a poet and writer of the so-called "middle period" in Afrikaans literature when nationalism and realism, that typifies the earlier work, makes way for work which, while it reflects the general outlook on life, manages at the same time to reveal a more personal vision. Toon van den Heever's work, therefore, often has a dual quality: local realism teamed with a more general conception - with ancient mythology, for example. Jan F.E. Celliers apparently warned him against this:

> "Siet u, Mnr. Van den Heever, dit help nie eintlik om gedigte te maak as mense hulle nie kan verkoop nie. U kies sulke uitheemse temas: Neem b.v. hierdie gedig oor die Minnegod - wat weet ons mense van hom af? Hulle loer hier 'n gedig van iemand wat kaal in die kroppies wegkruip en boonop nog met 'n pyl en boog gewapen is: hulle sal waarempel dink dis 'n Boesman! As u wil verkoop, bly by die ossewa, die keteltjie en die doringboom." (61)

Apparently/

---

59) Amandelboom - o lentebruid: Die Nuwe Boord.
60) The parallel C.M. van den Heever - Pierneef is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6: Veld and Farm.
61) Toon van den Heever: Gerwe uit die Zeitz van Skoppensboer. pg. 3.

Apparently the young poet did not follow the established poet's advice, for in the light-hearted, part realist, part imaginative poem Die Blomme little Cupid is fluttering round in a (South African) garden (62).

Toon van den Heever is possibly the only one who has made use of the flower as a basis for a sketch in prose. It is a little fairy tale told to a five-year old girl who demanded a story about the convolvulus. The story-teller proceeds to relate in mock seriousness how the morning glory came into being as a result of the jealousy of the cherub trumpeter. Because of his jealousy, the little trumpeter is flung out of the Eastern Kingdom - the land where it never grows dark. He landed deep in our Earth, and now he struggles every morning to go back to his homeland, but he cannot get any further than the hedge. (63). It may be a traditional little fantasy with nothing of the real philosophic-artistic value, but it has such delicate pieces of description and such fine, subtle humour that it certainly is a valuable contribution to the Afrikaans collection of sketches.

The flower or mass of flowers in their own right are very seldom used in Afrikaans prose. Whereas they make such an important contribution to poetry, it is rather strange that they should be so neglected in prose. Sometimes, though, flowers are described in passing (64), but the reader only barely pauses to consider them.

It is strange that whereas the South African flowers often have quite fantastic and decorative shapes, decorative panels based on these shapes are very rare in painting. Naudé - with the exception of a few still lifes and a background of large sunflowers to one of the portraits of a Bushman gardener - ignored the detailed shapes of the flowers and depicted them by means of colour only. Rosamund Everard Steenkamp used a decorative stipplia in the foreground of the landscape Gravelotte, but the flowers form a very subordinate part of the entire picture. Gerie Fitie devoted an entire Panel to a Night Cactus (fig. 14). This realistic picture distinctly suggests the quiet, temporary beauty of this unusual plant. Its exotic quality makes one stand still in wonder. To a poet it may appear as a symbol of a lonely soul, and as such it is expressed by the younger poet, S.J. Fratorius in Eensame Kaktus (65).

62) Appendix 2: no. ~~30~~.29
63) Toon van den Heever: Op cit. pp. 17 - 23.
64) E.g. Uys Krige: Die Berge in (Ver in die Wêreld)
C.M. van den Heever: Laat Vrugte.
D.F. Malherbe: Hans-die-Skipper.
65) Appendix 2: no. 30.

CHAPTER 4

NATAL:

It is interesting that Natal has inspired so little significant painting. Several possible reasons may be put forward, although these must all be considered cautiously. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible to find a definite reason for this lack that can be accepted as wholly valid. The part of Natal discussed here is the coastal region and the Valley of a Thousand Hills. Further inland the country loses the characteristics of a warm coastal area and is similar to the Bushveld and grasslands of the South African highlands. The countryside - i.e. the coastal region - is passive. Man has conquered it and appears to have it completely under his control. The country with its endless and for ever waving cane fields has submitted to man and so lost its own peculiar personality. It has very little variation and very little contrast. Its colours are soft and mild. The Karroo or the Bushveld may be opposed to Natal to illustrate this point of passiveness, of tameness. In the Karroo and Bushveld man and animal are involved in an everlasting struggle against overpowering elements. Natal is an area in which to live comfortably - even lazily - and to cultivate. Life in Natal appears to be more passive in contrast to the active, alert life in other parts. The bare veld offers a challenge to conquer, and once it has been brought to heel, still demands that its own character is respected. The predominant colour of Natal - a harsh, brilliant green - is not usually the painter's choice. The painters who have used green have either varied it, or subdued it to a grey overtone. The iridescent light is too illusive. It cannot be adequately represented in a severe or decorative pattern which is possible on the high veld, and yet it cannot be solved through impressionistic methods.

Several painters who work in Natal attempt to give reasons for the lack of good pictures based on the Natal scene. (1).

Patricia/

---

1) Natal has a very active Art Society which presents a large exhibition each year. But on the whole the paintings - many of them Natal landscapes - are weak.

Patricia Wiles said:

> "I do not feel that one can paint the 'essence' of Natal as one can, for instance, the Cape where an umbrella pine, a blue mountain and a cottage seems to describe the whole of the Peninsula.
>
> I feel that the picture buying public in this country buys a picture primarily for its subject matter which they like to understand. This tendency can be divided into two groups:
>
> a) Subject matter which is universally attractive eg. streams, the sea, mountains, forests, etc., etc.
>
> b) Subjects which include an easily recognizable landmark e.g. Table Mountain, Hout Bay or a subject that seems to typify a certain area. Natal does not lend itself to the group I have called (b) but naturally features which I have grouped under (a) can be found there. This does not mean that Natal is unpaintable in my opinion. We have our rivers, streams, mountains, sea and forests. But many pictures could be painted here and not recognized as being 'Natal'".(2).

The last statement may be true, but nevertheless several pictures that are catalogued as having been painted in Natal are often of an inferior artistic quality. Patricia Wiles' painting of Autumn in Kloof, although it is a pleasant, unassuming picture is not as successful as the more imposing Storm Clouds. This picture is painted in the province of Natal, but certainly not in the coastal region nor in the Valley. Storm Clouds therefore does illustrate the painter's point of a Natal painting not revealing the essence of Natal. Patricia Wiles enjoys painting in Natal, and is particularly intrigued by the "fleeting light playing over the city of Durban." She still "hopes to express this one day." (3).

Nils Andersen also enjoys painting in Natal particularly "the rolling hills and native Kraals. . . . also lovely unspoilt coastal lagoons" (4).

But, except perhaps for his painting of the Durban/

---

2) Letter from Patricia Wiles, dated 26. 7. 56.
3) Ibid.
4) Letter from Nils Andersen: dated 21. 7. 56.

Durban Docks (Durban Municipal Collection), Andersen's better paintings are not painted in Natal.

Jack Pieters simply states (5) that Natal is not paintable unless one is a "genre painter" and uses the colourful Indians and their customs as subject matter. Pieters is not happy painting in Natal, and usually the pictures he paints there reveal this lack of feeling. Only a few does he consider to be good, sincere pictures. They are of scenes which really roused him when he saw them for the first time and in the painting he could re-express this emotion. An example of this is: Native Reserve beyond Estcourt (6). It is an academic-impressionist picture, well balanced in composition and colour, and soundly painted. But it is not an impressive picture which the onlooker will remember.

However, Natal has many painters: e.g. L.A. Francois, Alfred Martin, Clement Senegue, Wallace Paton, Perla Siedle, John Fergueson. Alfred Martin has painted a charming picture of two young girls lazing on grass-covered dunes protected from the sun by large, colourful parasols. The sea is in the background. It is a delightful, sunny picture with pleasant, glowing sunshine with a European softness rather than the South African glare. The two large discs of the "Japanese" parasols - one red, the other yellow - form an amusing coquettish pattern in the little picture accentuating the pleasant warmth of the wind-still day. The picture is in the style of that directly before impressionism and with a strong English flavour: charming, innocent and rather sentimental. The painting is not a typical South African picture at all, for it lacks the brilliant light and it is almost too cultured and too civilized to be a convincing representation of the robust South African scene - even if that scene is found in the tame Natal.

A /

---

5). Interview with Jack Pieters, Durban. July, 1956.
6). The pictures by Patricia Wiles and Jack Pieters discussed here were exhibited at the Exhibition of the Natal Society of Artists, Durban, July 1956.

A painter who has solved the problem of the iridescent light so typical of the Natal coast is Zakkie Eloff, for example in Dancing Pondos (Fig. 15). A coloured grey sky and an intenser heat are brilliantly contrasted by the yellow beach. The Pondo girls depicted in strikingly brilliant colour and in violent action add to the suggestion of heat and complete the hot and wild atmosphere.

A few of the better-known painters appear to have worked in Natal: Pieter Wenning, Frans Oerder and his wife Gerda Pitlo, Gwelo Goodman, Irma Stern, W.H. Coetzer.

Although Pieters maintains that Wenning painted only one dock scene inNatal, (7), two drawings and one oil reputed to be by Wenning have been found. The drawings are of the typical gnarled, distorted coastal trees forming a very interesting, freakish pattern. The treatment of the drawings is both bold and decorative, and these sketches could have been forerunners of significant paintings.

The painting is a view of Durban, but it is certainly not one of the painter's best pictures although it may be interesting from an historical point of view. It is very Dutch in character, the composition and colour being reminiscent of the Hague School. Wenning excelled in painting greens, but they are practically always subjected to a predominant grey tone. This does not typify the harsh Natal greens which are bright and which seem to contain a yellow overtone.

A typical "Wenning green" meadow - suggesting a very rainy day - ends at a low horizon upon which are buildings. A clumsy domed tower of a large building forms a somewhat awkward, dead central focal point. The sky is high and grey, and the greyness of the sky dominates and suffuses the entire painting.

Gerda Pitlo's painting of the South Coast Road (Fig. 16) is possibly one of the more successful paintings of Natal. The conception is very realistic - even photographic - but the hazy distance and suggestion of a slight, warm/

---

7) Possibly the picture of Boats in the Pretoria Municipal Collection is the picture to which Pieters refers.

warm breeze achieved by misty, delicate colour and a relatively loose application of paint is convincing of that part of the country. Frans Oerder definitely painted in Natal too, but it is not known where the pictures are today. (8).

Irma Stern expressed Natal in her own vigorous manner strongly suggesting the exotic of the hot, colourful country, eg. Umzabalu, 1945. (9). She is what Pieters terms a "genre painter". Zulus and Indians often inspired her to represent them dancing, drinking beer, making music, or merely grouping together. Sometimes she depicted them in a quieter, more reflective mood, but nevertheless expressing the warmth, the colour, even the lethargy of these people and their surroundings. (10).

The most interesting painter of Natal is Clement Seneque. Due to the early death of this architect-painter his work has not received much attention In his drawing (11) and painting the architect's interest in form is very apparent, and in his paintings and lithograph (12) of the Shongweni Dam the entire conception is that of an architect. The picture in the National Gallery, Cape Town, represents the builders at work on the dam wall. The painting has a very controlled and subdued, tonal colour scheme with flashes of light catching two relatively narrow sides of the dam wall, and touching and revealing a tree on the extreme left of the composition. The light on the trees has far less intensity than that on the wall. The distribution of light is inconsequent from a realistic point of view as there is no light at all on the mountain side on the extreme left of the composition which should have been in full light if the painting had been entirely realistic. Emphasis is therefore subtly placed on the activity of building and/

---

8) According to Mrs. Oerder.
9) Illustrated in Max Osborn: Irma Stern.
10) Many of these pictures are reproduced in Max Osborn: In most cases the locality of the originals is unknown.
11) e.g. the charcoal drawing of the Durban Dock - owned by Jack Pieters.
12) Durban Municipal collection: National Gallery, Cape Town: and Oliver Walker, Johannesburg.

and the small workmen on the wall between the two rectangles of intense light. The workmen and building gear are also brilliantly lit by small strokes of contrasting light and shade. Seneque's application of paint is characteristic. The bold, medium stroke is sufficiently loose to prevent the picture from appearing dull and immobile, yet it is so regular and controlled that it adds to the suggestion of powerful form. The colours in all Seneque's pictures are subordinated to one general deep-dull tone, and in consequence the use of intense light is dramatic.

It is noticeable that Seneque has in the case of Shongweni Dam painted an architectural struct which has become a feature of Natal, but which does not reflect the essential Natal landscape. Seneque has, however, painted successfully a view over the Valley of a Thousand Hills, (fig. 17) which is in many instances reminiscent to passages in Roy Campbell's Light on a Dark Horse describing similar scenes. Not only is this picture successful as a result of Seneque's outstanding control over his painting - the composition, the paint and the colour all reveal the characteristic restraint - but the painter has chosen to depict an overcast day when the brilliant Natal green has a generally subdued tone and when the iridescent light is absent. Yet in contrast to Wenning Seneque introduces a dramatic flash of light in a strip of sky between the horizon and the heavy blanket of cloud so suggesting the sultry heat of the region. The entire picture - considerably smaller than the pictures of the Shongweni Dam - represents an endless, imposing view, and Seneque has accentuated its grandeur. In this small picture the spectator senses the vastness of the majestic scene which the painter has achieved by the undulating lines in the hills and by placing a small banana palm immediately in front of the wave-like pattern of distant hills. The illusiveness of the scene is suggested by the restrained tone and colour which appears to imply that the land contains far more than the eye can see. If the clouds were to disperse, and if the surroundings were to be explored it would appear that a landscape such as Alan Paton describes would be discovered:

> There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys

of Africa. About you there is grass and bracken and you may hear the forlorn crying of the titihoya, one of the birds of the veld.

(Cry, the Beloved Country, pg. 11)

and:

If there is mist here, you will see nothing of the great valley. The mist will swirl about and below you, and the train and the people make a small world of their own. Some people do not like it, and find it cold and gloomy. But others like it, and find in it mystery and fascination, and prelude to adventure, and an intimation of the unknown. The train passes through a world of fancy, and you can look through the misty panes at green shadowy banks of grass and bracken. Here in their season grow the blue agapanthus, the wild watsonia, and the red-hot poker, and now and then it happens that one may glimpse an arum in a dell. And always behind them the dim wall of the wattles, like ghosts in the mist.

(pg. 17 - 18)

It is a land of fertility, but also a wasteland. Animals and people live there and are dependant upon it. Yet man has destroyed it and has made it uninhabitable, but this cannot be seen when viewed from afar. The fertile valleys of the land are comfortable, safe, protected by the vast mountains by which they are surrounded. They even seem to be unapproachable until the appearance of the "toy train" proves that man from the outer world has penetrated.

The valleys are seen in greater detail in an extract from the lengthy poem: Valley of a Thousand Hills by the "Zulu dramatist and poet, H.I.L. Dhlomo." (13).

Silent, a bird floats past, and far away
A drunken whisk of smoke staggers about
This way and that, and wastes itself to nought!
The distant mountain peaks peep silent, veiled!
A dumb but busy ant has lost its way,
And up my leg it climbs, silent, silent
But quick I wipe it down . . . silent it runs!
A snail jogs quiet by, all peaceful, mute.
Curious, a root from some old tree, bobs up,
Peeps naughtily, all shy, and down the earth
It delves again leaving a part exposed -
So hurried was its stolen silent glance!
Drunk sprawl the sleepy vales, the herds graze dumb.
In peace and sloth a dappled snake parades
Its beauty fierce .... was it my ancestor?
A bolting hare abruptly stops, surprised,
And, hesitant, ears dancing up and down,
Listens, hears nought, and fearful, darts away!

(Poets in South Africa. pg. 40)

---

13)G.M. Miller: H. Sergeant: A Critical Survey of South African poetry in English: pg. 155.

Further inland the Natal mountains - the Drakensberg - have offered a challenge to both painter and writer. For example in a delightful, gay, carefree manner typical of the particular writer, Uys Krige records a trip on horseback into these mountains in : Setha en die reën and Die Berge in ... two sketches, both included in the volume Ver in die wêreld. In the company of his brother and sister, Francois and Mizzi, and Terence McCaw and Walter Battiss, Uys Krige enjoyed the carefree ride. He is the interested collector of story-material when he urges Setha to tell the tale of the jackal and the hyena (pg. 65 - 66). His poetic interest is whetted when Francois mentions a few names of villages and farms nearby. He enjoys the sounds of the words, and a picture is conjured up before him:

> Die lang klinkers waaroor Francois talm, gee aan die woord 'n soetvloeiendheid wat in my verbeelding die prent ophang van 'n groen statjie van netjiese Basoetohutte, perskebome en mielielappe iewers teen 'n helling aan, waardeur 'n bergstroom rustig vloei.
> (pg. 48)

But - maybe because in constant company of active painters - these sketches reveal the painter in Uys Krige. Accurately, but lightly, he describes the vast mountain scene (pg. 56 and 59), the nerinas (pg. 61), a bull - " 'n rooi stier op 'n groen voetstuk teen 'n blou agtergrond" (pg. 60), a herd of buck (pg. 67). He merely mentions the native stores in the hills: "Mnr. Rust se winkeltjie met sy groep Basoeto's voor die stoep" (pg. 47), but it seems to be precisely this scene which Francois has recorded. (14). In subdued earth colours and with a loose application of paint Francois depicts the casual, lazy atmosphere of the country store (fig. 18).

It seems unlikely that the other two painters have recorded this expedition in pictures: Battiss appears to have been hunting Bushman paintings at that time: "En toe hy van die Boesmanskilderye begin praat, is Battiss die ene belangstelling." (pg. 57) and McCaw seems to have been more interested in the city theme:

> ". . . die wolk is vir hom bysaak, die berg belangriker, want die berg skep die wolk, dis meer/

14) There is some discrepancy in the dates: Uys Krige's story was written in 1939: Francois' picture is dated 1946. But Battiss believes that the painting was made from sketches drawn on the trip.

meer soos 'n fabriek wat sy rook die lug
instuur . . .

Ek wou nog aan Terence vra: waarom het hy,
as hy die roos dan so minag, nie liewer in
Johannesburg gebly nie om aldaar fabrieke en hul
skoorstene te skilder, in plaas van hier hom
aan kranse en klowe te kom vergaap,"
(pg. 48)

and he finds the scene too vast to paint
(pg. 60 -61)

However, in literature, too, very little reference is made to the coastal regions of Natal, and no reason appears to be valid which can explain this lack of work. Uys Krige maintains (15) that Roy Campbell was "obsessed with Natal" and he quotes The Sisters to prove his point. But, although the colour, the images, even the rhythm of Roy Campbell's work may be attributed to his early experiences in Natal, his poetry very seldom directly expresses the Natal landscape. As has been noted above, in his autobiography, Light on a Dark Horse, several fine descriptions of the countryside are given, but it is doubtful if this can be considered to be of Campbell's best work. P. J. Schoeman sets his story about Fanie in Natal, ut this is that part of the province which is very similar to the Bushveld, and therefore does not form part of the present discussion.

Only one four-lined verse in a long epic poem - Joernaal van Jorik - by D.J. Opperman acutally places the reader definitely in Natal:

Umbilo, uit 'n msasrboiboom se kruin,
het s.a wit torir[illegible] v.n 'n moskee
en giftig pers 'n [illegible]ou wat in die tuin
rondstap - Koelies, vor suikerriet en see.

It is interesting to note that Natal is symbolised here by means of the Indians. This illustrates Jack Pieters' argument that Natal can be expressed only through the colourful Indians. Two other poems describe the religious ritual of the Indian, and therefore one is inclined to presume that the original inspiration or thought came from Natal:

Bokant die piesang- en die mangobome
spring rooi vlamme van die hout ineen,
en langs die Hindoetempel uit die lome
wierook/

---

15) Lecture on Roy Campbell: University of the Witwatersrand, April, 1958.

wierook begin die kalbasfluite eentonig teem
as die gereinigdes met klam kaalvoete
die paadjies kies uit die rivier - maar bang
duskant die oopgeharkte vierkant gloed
terugstuit, soos nat bruin vullens vasgevang.
Die bok en die pampoen lê oopgebreek,
die priester sprinkel met sy takkie blare
wywaters oor die vure en koel kweek
en voorste ry van beswete skare.
Dan in vervoering trap die kaal voetsole
lig-lig na Brahma oor tapyte kole.

(D.J. Opperman:
Vuurlopers: Engel uit
die klip)

Hibuskusvlamme in die blouswart hare,
En oor haar heupe span geblomde sy.
Die bloed van vorste vloei nog deur haar are:
Met hoë borste stap sy in die ry.

(I.D. du Plessis:
Tempel-optog.
included in Groot
Verseboek)

These two poems can very well be placed alongside Irma Stern paintings of the Indians, for they give a similar sensation of strong colour, of heat and of the exotic. In the paintings and the poems the heat, colour, and mystery of the East is strongly exphasized, and it is this atmosphere which one certainly does experience in Natal more than in the other parts of the country, but there is nothing to place the reader with certainty in Natal. The poems are rather symbolic expressions of the European regarding the unknown Easterner.

Chapter 5

VELD AND FARM

Until comparitively recently the greater part of South African art was centered around the farm: its life, its fruitfulness, its hardships. The wide expanse of veld was the farmer's kingdom. Rural life was at one time practically the only conceivable life, the only righteous life. A large number, if not all, of the established South African artists grew up as farmers' children, and in many cases their youthful background was similar. (1). Therefore it is not surprising that in much of the work produced by these one-time farmers there is a similarity, particularly in the case of subject matter. In the work of many of the poets and writers there is often another characteristic, viz: a deep longing for the wide, lonely freedom of the veld, introducing a melancholy and idealized tone in the whole, e.g. In die Hoëveld by Toon van den Heever, and Heimwee by J.R.L. van Brugger. Many of the writers have attempted to point out in their work that the farmers, their families and labourers are formed by the soil they cultivate, and that they gain a deep, intangible, inexplicable wisdom through close association with nature and through contemplation of the quiet, yet overwhelming creation that they know. Many of the writers have depicted the ideal patriarch of old who has become part of the land and a God-fearing ruler of his small kingdom.

In literature particularly there are innumerable widely read works of a considerable standard that have found their inspiration and subject on the veld or farm. J. van Melle attempts to explain why a writer is attracted to this subject, and it may speak also for the other artists:

"Toe ek eenmaal begin skryf het, was die Afrikaanse natuur en die lewe van die Transvaalse boer mede 'n inspirasie vir my. Hier het jy nog uitgestrekte strake met so te sê die ongeskonde natuur, en oral waar mens nog geen spore van mense-arbeid en mense se vernielsug sien nie, of dit nou kaal vlaktes of bosstreke of wat ookal is, daar is dit mooi. . . . . Daarby was die lewe van die Transvaalse boere so vry en awontuurlik en tegelyk so idillies dat dit enige skrywer moes aanlok om daaroor te skryf. Dit was, dit moet mens onthou, veertig jaar gelede en daar was veel dinge nog anders as vandag. Daar was geen motors en geen toerpaaie nie, geen fabrieke nie, geen draad nie. Oral, behalwe op die Rand, was dit stil en landelik." (2).

Not /

---

1). The radio talks: My Kontrei (1956), and the book: My Jeugland illustrate this.
2). Skrywers aan die woord. ed. P.J. Nienaber. pg. 200 - 201.

Not long ago it was probably safe to say that all Afrikaans and a few English poets and writers worthy of the title had based their work on the rural theme, and to a large extent this may be said of the painters too. Severe selection is therefore even more essential in this chapter than in the others. Only representative work can be discussed and it must serve as an example of the entire contribution of South African artists in this field. Possibly a few examples given will not be the best of their kind, nor the best produced by their authors, but such extracts and reproductions or descriptions of paintings are given to illustrate a typical or specific point of the bulk of work based on the farm theme, or to illustrate a similarity present in painting, poetry and prose writing. That the work of only a few artists is discussed does therefore not imply that work by others is considered inferior, but it is impossible to include reference to them all within the scope of this essay.

In 1905 the first poem of merit to be inspired by the loneliness and endless distance of the barren veld made its appearance. Winternag is possibly Eugène Marais' best-known poem, and at its original publication it caused a stir among the cultural leaders of the time because there had been very little, if any, Afrikaans poetry before which was so sincere and moving.

In the following year Jan F.E. Celliers' well-known poem Die Vlakte was printed in De Volkstem. Although its form and rhythm were not new, it nevertheless expressed in a good Afrikaans idiom the well-known and much-loved South African scene. The poem immediately brought Celliers forward as a significant poet. It also aided those who were striving to establish Afrikaans as a language in giving them a second example of sensitive use of Afrikaans. It is a word picture of the calm majesty of the seemingly endless country undisturbed in its centuries old peace. Everything is presented broadly and boldly. The conception is too big for small detail, unless that detail can contribute to the impression of vastness - e.g. the streams of water after the storm only form part of the all-enveloping night. The reader feels that man is not present in this deserted, yet noble world. Man would only be small and insignificant here in this symbol of God's majestic temple. But, although the poem was a welcome contribution to the embryonic literature, it is not a great piece of artistic expression, and very little of Celliers' work is of a really high standard: "Celliers is

nie /

nie 'n hewig liriese natuur nie, sy ritme beur nie fel in teen die medium van sy vers nie. Sy poësie laat ons nie huiwerend skou in die dramatiese worsteling van 'n wroegende siel nie. Hy is meer verwant aan die Nederlandse voor-Tagtigers, het geen affiniteit met die indiwidualistiese, opstandige Nederlanders nie, het ook geen invloed van hulle ondergaan nie. Die Vlakte is, by al sy prag van plastiek, nie veel meer as skildering nie, mis die universele, die simbolick van (Shelley's) The Cloud . . . (3).

Celliers' importance lies in the fact that he was able to express the emotions of an awakening nation in a young language that was still batteling for recognition.

In Eensaamheid a similar atmosphere to that in Die Vlakte is created but here the immediate environment is seen more intimately. The human being is part of the loneliness, and the veld is seen from his point of view. No longer is there that suggestion of greatness, but rather of a melancholy longing - an emotion typical of much early Afrikaans poetry. It is particularly through the rhythm and to some extent by the choice of words that the suggestion of melancholy is created. But although this poem has an appeal, it is far less impressive than the paintorly Vlakte. Yet neither Die Vlakte nor Eensaamheid reach such artistic heights as Dis Al. In this miniature verse Celliers surpasses himself, although Dekker maintains that Berusting - a poem similar in form to Dis Al - is of an equal standard. (4). In the very sensitive Dis Al Celliers makes no conscious effort to be a poet. The words are spontaneously brought forth and arranged in such a way that an atmosphere of dejection, of a stunned state of mind and of utter desertion is superbly expressed:

Dis die blond,
dis die blou:
dis die veld,
dis die lug;
en 'n voël draai bowe in eensame vlug -
dis al.

The various elements in the surrounding placed in such unrelated positions in the context, as if the poet does not really recognize them, contribute to that strong emotion of desolation, and then the sudden irregularity in the rhythm - like a whiplash - intensifies the feeling of despair, to fall back immediately to the hopeless, passive sigh - "dis al."

This poem may be placed alongside Eugène Marais' Winternag and the two together will form a unity and present the emotional quality which many people experience in the South African veld. This is an emotion which is difficult to express in words, but which is strongly sensed. The emotion that creates a feeling of the incomprehensible wonder of the universe /

---

3). Dekker. Jan Celliers ons volksdigter. ed. P.J.Nienaber; pg. 35.
4). Ibid: pg. 108.

universe, which makes the human being feel inferior and small, and which calls forth a restless longing for an indefinable experience, a nostalgic longing. Much of the popularity that these early poets enjoyed is probably because they were able to express this generally accepted emotion in words understood by all. That the early poets should have expressed this emotion and should have chosen as subject matter the ever-impressive veld illustrates that interesting and strange fascination the veld has always had for the South African poets and writers. Throughout the development of Afrikaans literature the same subject and the same emotion recurs again and again. The powerful force of the veld which compels the artists to write has probably produced a characteristic element and even a characteristic kind of work in South African art which at a later date may possibly be looked upon as one distinct type.

The veld becomes symbolical to the South African poet - of majesty, of vastness, of loneliness, of longing - but within that veld other objects at first attract attention and eventually become symbols too. It is notably the thorn tree, the ox and the ox waggon that are imbued with a symbolical quality. One already finds this in Die Vlakte where the thorn tree is depicted in a striking way:

> In sy skaduetjie rondom sy stam op die grond
> staan 'n eensame doringboom,
> soos die Stilte op haar troon, met dorings gekroon,
> wat roerloos die eeue verdroom.

Totius frequently sees South African things in a symbolic light, and he often uses the thorn tree image: e.g. in Viermaal gesien Totius addresses the tree, asking for an explanation of the funeral processions that constantly pass past it. In Vergewe en Vergeet the thorn tree is seen as a symbol of a nation. Although the little tree is damaged by an ox waggon that rolled right over it (the ox waggon is a symbol too) it will recover and grow again. And in Die Godsbesluit the sincerely and deeply pious Totius sees the "wag-'n-bietjiebos" as a symbol of God's will.

Even an impressionist-descriptive poem about a thorn tree - e.g. Leipoldt's Die Doringboom - has an element of mystery, a symbolical quality in it. In a prose passage the tree is frequently considered in closer detail and almost invariably calls forth a philosophical remark from either a character in the story or direct from the writer. (5)

In painting the thorn tree has been depicted realistically, e.g. by /

---

5). Appendix 2: no. 31.

e.g. by Adolph Jentsch in Dordabis - which, incidentally, is an outstanding visual parallel to the setting in Abraham Jonker's Trekboer discussed below -; it has been depicted in a decorative manner, e.g. by Rosamund Everard-Steenkamp in Gravelotte, and symbolically in the rather surrealist Fugue and Fetish in Thrall by Alexis Preller (6).

The ox waggon forms a picturesque element in the landscape and it reminds one of the pioneer's stubborn bid for freedom. Through the years it has become more than a mere ox waggon (7). The waggon is well-known in Afrikaans poetry through Celliers' Die Ossewa. This is a simple, descriptive poem, depending entirely for its effect on its rhythm and alliteration. If these elements of alliteration and conscious rhythm were to be removed there would be no visual image at all. But the rhythm is strongly reminiscent of the real, slow bumping movement of the oxen and waggon, and the sounds recreate the sensation of heat and dust. So it is the memory brought to mind by an auditory and sensory sensation that creates the visual image, and not the images in the poem itself. Yet the dragging tempo, the rocking rhythm, the hard, heavy sounds suggest the exhausting heat of a trek.

Totius also depicts the ox, but here there is no attempt at creating the image by means of over-consciously applied rhythm and alliteration. The image is more visual than auditory, but nevertheless an easy-moving rhythm suggests the casual gait of the ox just as well as in Celliers' poem:

> Hoe rustig stap hy aan,
> die edel jukgediert'!
> Hoe waggel hy die kop
> met horings swaar gesierd
> en stewig ingestrop.
>
> (Uit Donker Afrika.)

In painting the ox and waggon probably has a greater decorative value than a symbolic value. Yet W.H. Coetzer does wish to give a symbolic character to his very realistic reconstructions of incidents in the Voortrek. In his book: My Kwaa Vertel he writes detailed explanations to the pictures, e.g. to the picture entitled Simboliese voorstelling van die Groot Trek he writes: "Hier is die trekkers bo-op die hoogste punt van die Drakensberge. Voor hulle en diep daaronder lê die 'Beloofde Land'; so het hulle gedink. Die simboliek hier in die voorgrond is nog rooskleurig, want alles is nog in sonskyn, behalwe 'n skaduwee wat /

---

6). The two paintings by Alexis Preller are illustrated in Christi Truter: Alexis Preller; pl. 9 and 17.
7). Appendix 2: no 32.

Wat regs voor oor 'n gedeelte van die skape en die nooientjie begin kruip, en dien as 'n voorspel tot die ramp by Bleukrans- en Boesmansriviere. 'n Geweldige storm woed op die agtergrond, en op die regter-horison kan Retief en sy manskappe, wat na Dingaan gegaan het, gesien word, maar 'n bliksemstraal wis hulle uit. Dit is simbolies van die verraad en moord op hulle deur Dingaan se Kaffers. Heel regs simboliseer die eerste reënboog die verlossing van die Engelse juk in Kaapland. Die tweede reënboog simboliseer weer die uiteindelike oorwinning oor die swart barbaar met die slag van Bloedrivier." (8).

Also pictures which are not entirely "symbolical" as the one described above, are given a symbolic explanation, e.g. in the description to Natal-toe one reads: "Simboliese wolkskaduwees begin al 'n rol te speel . . ." (9) and Trek oor die Grootrivier "Die beeste swem oor en die pont word weer teruggetrek oor die rooibruin water om die ander waens te gaan haal wat nog deur die donker simboliese wolkskaduwees deurvleg." (10).

If the paintings were to be seen without the accompanying descriptions, the onlooker would not be aware of this wished-for symbolism. Coetzer's symbolism is therefore literary: it is not a plastic symbolism that can stand alone. Coetzer's pictures do not give the impact of a painterly symbolism, an impact that one does find in pictures by Cecil Higgs and Alexis Preller to name the work of only two painters. One has to know the history of the moment depicted, or one needs Coetzer's annotations before his Voortrekker pictures can possibly be appreciated.

Coetzer's pictures would form good illustrations to the historical novels by Francis Brett Young: They Seek a Country and its sequel The City of Gold. It can probably be claimed that the books make a greater aesthetic contribution to South Africa than the paintings. The books are remarkable for their scope covering an astonishing number of aspects of historical development; having a confusing wide range of time and place which may well degenerate into senseless and fantastic chaos; and introducing innumerable characters of importance. Yet on the whole the work in its entirity maintains a powerful unity, a steady development, and most of the characters are vividly portrayed. Some, however, are not so "alive". These are usually historical figures - e.g. Cecil Rhodes and Paul Kruger - and the reader suspects that this is a result of a lack of freedom on the part of the writer who can best create his own fictitious characters.

These books are truly South African in subject in that the writer presents almost the entire living drama of the country

in /

---

8). W.H. Coetzer: My Kwas Vertel: pg. 57.
9). Ibid: pg. 55.
10). Ibid: pg. 33.

in kaleidoscopic form from an unbiased point of view. The history of the trek, native wars, Boer family customs, farming, diamond discoveries, politics, gold mining, petty squabbles disrupting unity, transport riding, landscape of the Cape, Natal, the High Veld and Low Veld, the rapid development of a city all pass before the reader's imagination. A stage of development of a difficult, complex country and of an obstinate and self-willed people is recreated to live for the reader. The writer contributes a living, permanent impressiveness to this work which is missing in Coetzer's documents. No doubt the painter has as complete a knowledge of the period of history as the writer, but whereas a foreknowledge of history is an absolute necessity to appreciate the paintings, it is not an essential when reading the books. Knowledge of the country and its history may give an additional interest, but the fundamental, universal quality of the books does not require it. The main fault of the paintings is that they lack this fundamental universality.

A striking expressionist painting is Fritz Krampe's picture entitled Cows. Here one can speak of strong, impressive and painterly symbolism. The picture with its angular shapes, its dry, heavy paint texture and its very suggestive emotional colour, clearly expresses the misery of drought. The shape of the animals is exploited successfully to give the onlooker not only an interesting composition of lines, but also to add to the emotion the painter wished to express. A written note such as Coetzer gives would be superflous.

The ox has been exploited successfully in a decorative manner in painting by Bettie Celliers-Barnard in The Kraal, and by Lorna G. Kell in Oxen. In both these pictures the angular, decorative shapes of the animals and the curved sweep of the characteristic horns have been arranged in a convincing design. In Lorna Kell's picture the heads and horns are so pronounced that it can be placed alongside the last three lines of the quoted verse by Totius and it forms a striking parallel. The warm, strong rich colour adds to the general bold conception of both panels, and in the second picture in particular there is a distinct suggestion of the power of the animal in the fearless massing of form in the centre of the composition.

Drought is ever-threatening to the South African veld. Consequently its people are much influenced by it, and it is subsequently reflected in several of their customs and

precautions /

precautions, and it is used expressively in their language and idiom. The artists of the country, particularly those who have experienced drought directly, have depicted and expressed it frequently, usually in symbolic form, or otherwise expressing it directly as a great omnipotent influence subjecting everything to its incomprehensible and destructive will.

The work of Francis Carey Slater is relatively little known, yet his meditative work Drought has been described as "an almost flawless South African classic, as new today as when Slater first wrote his 'simple recitative, / Monotonous and austere'." (11). This may be too highly appreciative, for Slater - like so many of South Africa's English-speaking poets - is too derivative to be so great. However, in Drought one does find fine images of interesting originality and with a distinct South African flavour which (excepting for the work of Roy Campbell) raises his poetry above that produced by many of the other older English-speaking South African poets. Slater is of importance too, because - as Roy Campbell has indicated - he was a "forerunner and pioneer" (12) of all the English South African poets.

Drought is in four parts, with a prelude and an epilogue. In the prelude the poet indicates that Drought and Hate are one: Drought shrivels the country's agricultural productivity and strangles its natural life. Hate - a result of political strife - hampers the country's development and kills it spiritually. In Part One the poet presents a series of disconnected meditations upon the drought-stricken land. This disconnectedness suggests the helplessness, the partly delirious state of mind. The descriptions are constantly emphasizing the ruthlessness and harshness of drought. There is a constant repetition in the descriptions depicting the monotonous dry veld. The poet is always aware of the glaring sky which has such an influence over the entire landscape. With each description, however, the poet names another aspect and gives an additional thought. In this way he depicts the monotony of the veld as well as its varied vastness.

Part Two introduces a narrative. It reveals the result of drought on the life of the white human being. It inevitably leads to the state of Poor White. The result of drought on the lives of the Dark People is revealed: thirst, famine, bewilderment, despair and ultimately toil in the mines on the "Ridge-of-White-Waters." /

---

11). John Bond: The Collected Poems of Francis Carey Slater. The Star, 31 July, 1957.
12). Roy Campbell: Introduction to the Collected Poems of Francis Carey Slater.

White-Waters." The third section of part two is symbolic. The poet speaks of the dryness of the spirit of South Africa's people, particularly its leaders.

Part Three gives a revue of the political strife, and includes a song of Hate (pg. 46) referred to in the prelude.

In Part Four comes relief through rain:

> Softly and quietly across the waiting mountains,
> Softly and quietly and while we slept in sorrow,
> Sure of its way even in the heart of darkness,
> Came the redeeming rain:
> Came even as sleep to strained and weary eyeballs,
> Came even as rest to toil-racked limbs and tired,
> Came even as love to souls in desolation,
> So came the rain.
>
> (pg. 55.)

It is interesting to compare this lyric to Eugène Marais' Dans van die reën:

> O die dans van ons Suster!
> Eers oor die bergtop loer sy skelm,
> en haar oë is skaam;
> en sy lag saggies.
> En van ver af wink sy met die een hand;
> haar armbande blink en haar krale skitter;
> saggies roep sy.
> Sy vertel die winde van die dans
> en sy nooi hulle uit, want die werf is wyd en die bruilof groot.

Although in its entirity Marais' poem has a far greater element of fantasy, note how in several instances the same type of images - the image of delicate, timid arrival for instance - are used in both poems, and how the form and uncertain rhythm reveal resemblances.

There is a distinct change in the technique in Part Four of Drought. There is no longer such a severe, free verse, nor the slow, dragging rhythm which was characteristic of the first three parts. Now the poet makes use of rhyme, the lines are short, the tempo quick. This introduces a gaiety, a light, airy touch which is symbolic of relief and hope. The atmosphere of the poem in part four begins by being hesitant and timid, but it works up to a crescendo, and finally the lyrics are song-like, almost trivial, but remain charming (13).

The Epilogue is reflective. Is this new-found life and hope permanent? Is it sincere? The light-headed abandon makes way for pensiveness, expressed by the longer lines and the slower tempo. The poet ends by giving a sombre warning. (14).

Roy Campbell mnetions "The almost equally fine poetry of Arthur Shearly Cripps /

---

13). Appendix 2: no 33.
14). Appendix 2: no 34.

Arthur Shearly Cripps (15). Therefore it is valuable to compare his Spring with parts in Slater's Drought, particularly Part Four:

ii. After Rains.

Where the fire scathed, the green grass grows,
    Our black bowls bring of milk no dearth,
The hard hearts of a hundred hoes
    Beat at the melted heart of Earth!
Their nightly lauds for drunkards' fill,
Cricket and frog sing hoarse and shrill.

New births are ripening in the womb;
    Our furrowed gardens, big with seed,
Grow jocund at the thunder-gloom,
    And lap and suck for mothers' need.
To hoe! To hoe! Ere mounts the sun!
The wine is poured, the feast begun!
(16).

It is interesting to notice how different Cripps' technique is to that employed by Slater and Marais; how Cripps' poem appears to be far more "English" than South African. One wonders whether he had a direct experience of the first rains in South Africa or whether he is merely repeating another's experience. The images and the form are more in the nineteenth century tradition of English poetry than Slater's more original verse. Although Slater is also derivative in many ways, one does feel that he has experienced the sensations he describes more fully than Cripps in this particular instance.

A striking symbolic painting of heat and drought which intensifies Slater's description of "the veld, stark and lonely, - " is Le Roux Smith Le Roux's remarable and unusual picture Heat Haze. (fig. 19). Right in the foreground with its hooves actually "resting" on the frame is a little antelope with its head turned sideways and back to touch a lifted hindfoot with its snout. Behind the animal is a strange, clumsy, "primitive" cactus bush casting a strong diagonal shadow. Diagonally further back is a similar cactus and shadow, and in the far distance three more are faintly suggested through the heat haze. Excepting the cacti and antelope the entire painted surface is a graded, heavy earth red; intense in the foreground, yet broken and divided by light dashes of yellow ochre and green. The intense band is terminated rather abrubtly by a lighter tone which fades

and /

---

15). Roy Campbell. Op. cit.
16). Included in Thudding Drums.

and merges to become a green-tinted yellow ochre at the top of the picture which very convincingly suggests the haze caused by smouldering heat. The cacti are painted in a heavy earth green, light being sharply defined from dark. The little antelope is a grey yellow ochre. Although there is an almost drastic use of linear perspective in this picture, the colour suggests no depth or distance whatsoever which intensifies the sensation of a muggy, throttling heat. The application of the paint is loose and simple. There appears to be a strong yellow ochre underpainting over the entire canvas giving a hot unity to the whole. The painting is a most expressive depiction of a thirstland.

It is interesting to note that before Afrikaans was generally recognized as an independent language the wide open wasteland of the Karroo had already been used as background to a novel: The story of an African Farm by Olive Schreiner first published in 1883. Therefore this book has historical interest, although judged as a novel today it has many faults (17). It is written in the romantic manner: an absolute hero who has no faults - the German; an absolute villian who has no scruples - Bonaparte Blenkins; a sentimental, passive character who has to bear all Bonaparte's cruelty - Waldo; and a figure which Olive Schreiner, the socialist fighter for women's rights must have inevitably as a tool for her campaign - the haughty Lyndall. None of these characterd are convincingly portrayed as individuals. They are puppets, and the reader is very conscious of the manipulator.

But, although the book may fail as a novel, it has poetic qualities which will have a permanent appeal. Uys Krige explained (18) that Olive Schreiner was not detached enough to be a novelist; she was essentially a poet. Although the characters and events are unconvincing, the mood which surrounds the characters is deeply moving. The mood is that of the loneliness of an African Farm which is expressed in slow moving prose - "prose that comes out of the Karroo." (19). This mood is so permeating that the "farm gets hold of you". (19). It then gradually becomes clear that it is the forsaken Karroo farm which is the main character, and not the human beings who incidentally inhabit it. When the characters

and /

---

17). Dan Jacobson: The Story of an African Farm: an approach. Standpunte: vol 8. no 1. Sept. 1953.
18). Uys Krige: Lecture: The Poet in Olive Schreiner: University of the Witwatersrand, 17th April, 1958.
19). Uys Krige.

and events can be ignored The Story of an African Farm gives the reader passages of beautiful, sensitive and even humorous writing revealing a keen observer, but whose vision is nevertheless romantically coloured. It is interesting to note the depiction of the landscape. And it is interesting that the Karroo should have made that impact and had that fascination that it still has today (20).The book depicts several typical characteristics of the African scene, e.g. drought (21); the monotony of the wide expanse of semi-desert; the Karroo night; the barrenness of the Karroo. The writer's keen eye has noticed how any little human endeavour - for example a little building - will usually be absorbed by its setting, while another may just add a note of interest in the landscape, although not as definitely as a natural irregularity.

It is indeed "for the sake of the fragments" -(Uys Krige would probably say "the poetic fragments") - "that one reads The Story of an African Farm." (22) Through these fragments one may be given a more complete picture of the African landscape.

Jan van Melle's David Booysen and Abraham Jonker's Die Plaasverdeling and its sequel Die Trekboer are three of the many realistic Afrikaans novels based on farm life. Van Melle's book has been described as one of the most successful "farm" novels because it appears to have the most convincing expression of sincere human qualities. (23) But, although the surroundings sometimes react according to the character's state of mind, there is little actual description of the landscape, and the environment does not play an obviously important part in the whole. Attention is focussed rather on the pyschological development of the characters in the story, and in particular on the development of the main figure.

In Die Plaasverdeling and Die Trekboer on the other hand, the writer does not only concentrate on the development - or downfall /

---

20). See Olive Schreiner's essay on South Africa in Thoughts on South Africa pp. 37 - 43. It becomes clear how deeply this early writer was cast under the spell of the Karroo.
21). Appendix 2: no. 35.
22). Dan Jacobson. Op. cit.
23). Antonissen: Afrikaanse letterkunde: pg. 243.

or downfall - of his main characters, but he gives an accurate impression of the life and environment of a Karroo farmer. The story develops as a result of the environment. Although the writer attempts to emphasize a social problem - that of the impoverishment of the rural Afrikaner (24) - passages are given which are entirely descriptive, have no other function and consequently they have a very strong visual quality. The reader is frequently reminded of other impressionistic depictions - in poetry, prose or painting - while reading through these books. This may be a result of Jonker's extreme, photographic realism, presenting in his work the visual material that others have made use of, too, possibly in a more personal manner (e.g. Eugène Marais) or - like Jonker - in a hyper-realistic manner (e.g. Jan F.E. Celliers). The following passage, for example, presents a visual image which is similar to that created by Eugène Marais in Winternag and Jan F.E. Celliers in Eensaamheid:

> Net maar so nou en dan nadat die son al goed onder is, kom daar so 'n skielike vlagie yskoue wind wat klaend deur die blaarlose bome voer. En dan is dit weer doodstil en dit smaak of dit nog 'n slaggie kouer is as voorheen.
>
> Daar is geen maan nie, en die paar sterretjies wat nou en dan te sien is, verdwyn maar weer gou agter die deur skuiwende wolkevlies, sodat 'n mens in die stikdonker geen drie tree voor jou uit kan sien nie.
>
> 'n Ganse plaat van droë kameeldoringbome staan òf roerloos in die donker òf ritsel vinnig in die skielike windvlaag wat so onverwags op hulle neerdaal asof dit verdwaal het uit die wêreld daarbo waar die storme woed.
>
> 'n Endjie weg tussen die kameeldorings in brand 'n klein kampvuurtjie, en as die windvlagie verby is, kan 'n mens dof in die stilte van die veld mensestemme hoor. Stadig trek die rokie van die kampvuurtjie boontoe tussen die bome deur, en langs die vuur in die dowwe lig van die vlamme loom vaag die gestaltes van mense.
>
> (Plaasverdeling: pg. 331 - 332.)

The lengthy description of a lonely Karroo station (pg. 181 - 182) is certainly complete, so complete and accurate that any suggestive atmosphere which would possibly give the passage a more permanent artistic value is absent. In contrast D.J. Opperman's concise, concentrated quatrain in Joernaal van Jorik is far more striking and leaves a far deeper impression in its clear cut, original, personal imagery and extremely sparing use of words. (25).

The genial, kindly description of Antonie dreamily jogging over the dry expanse on his shabby old pony (pg. 6 - 8) is /

---

24). Antonissen. Op. cit: pg. 246.
25). Appendix 2: no. 36.

is in its entire conception, and expressed emotion - one of drowsiness - reminiscent of a number of paintings: e.g. Basutos leading a donkey by Alfred Krenz, Basutu Riders by Nerine Desmond and the pictures of native horsemen by Richard Cheales. Yet this passage is one of the more sensitive descriptions in the book. It is not merely descriptive, but performs another duty besides. It is expressive, and it is this entire subjective quality which relates it most closely to Krenz's picture. The passage is a very subtle introduction of the main character in the story. The reader immediately senses that Antonie is a naive, child-like, dull personality, as drab and as dry as the veld where he rides. He is somebody who will quite trustingly allow himself to be led astray - the pony even takes no notice of his master's directions - and yet quite convinced that all his actions are carefully considered and bound to lead him to success. When Antonie is eventually cheated out of all his possessions by a crafty, scheming brother, he cannot understand how this misfortune could have befallen him. A pathetic note is struck in this introductory passage which will develop later into a sincerely expressed trugedy.

In C.M. van den Heever's work one finds the setting as a symbolic background to the development of the characters. There is often a complete fusion of the character with the environment. The human being and his feelings, his thoughts, his reactions even become synonomous to the seasons, the land, the plants, the animals. The farm novels and stories usually, if not always, are set in the Southern Free State, Van den Heever's childhood home. Van den Heever explains his preference for the farm theme in the following passage:

". . . . 'n Mens se eerste indrukke bly diep vergroei met sy latere ontwikkeling, veral op letterkundige gebied. Baie skrywers beeld ook vroeër of later hulle jeugherinneringe uit; by ander word dit onregstreeks en subtiel verwerk.

Dit is dus te verstaan dat die agtergrond van die plaslewe vir my belangrik gebly het, al het latere ervaringe swaar daaroorheen geskuiwe. Dit het diep met al my assosiasies verbind geraak. Om hierdie rede is dit dat ek in my eerste boeke graag 'n beeld wou gee van daardie plaslewe wat met die jare vinnig aan die verander was. Ek het dit gedaan toe ek afskeid van daardie lewe geneem het en heimwee dus my sienings gekleur het. Hier was dus geen sprake van 'n stof of 'n tema kies wat in die mode is nie. . . .

By my was dit eenvoudig 'n poging om so goed moontlik uitdrukking te gee aan my verbondenheid met daardie soort lewe nadat ek stedeling geword het. Vir teen die agtergrond van die lewe sien mens die vlaktes, berge en riviere waarmee jy daagliks kennis gemaak het. Dit was 'n groot gebeurtenis

om /

om dag vir dag so met die natuur om te gaan. En dan, naas hierdie vryheid in die natuur, die somber, temperende krag van die godsdiens! Dit was asof 'n mens tussen vryheid en tug bly beweeg!

Die plaaslewe bring vanselfsprekend mee dat mens dag vir dag die omringende wêreld baie noukeurig betrag - laat dit dan maar met praktiese doel wees. Dit het ek gedaan, en dit spreek vanself dat hierdie liefde vir besonderhede mens, wanneer jy skrywe, maklik verlok na beskrywings wat deur uitvoerigheid gekenmerk word. Luister maar na die wyse waarop boere 'n ervaring beskrywe. Ook kon ek destyds nie help om byna soos 'n skilder kenmerkende tipes in so 'n plaasomgewing waar te neem nie . . . Ek noem dit omdat 'n skrywer veral sy oë, net soos 'n skilder, goed moet gebruik. Vir die prosaskrywer is dit uitstekende oefening as hy ook skilder, . . . So kom hy deur die werklikheid, en nie deur boeke nie, by die kuns." (26)

In his first novel, Op die plaas, Van den Heever already sets out a pattern that will develop and change in detail, but that will recur in almost all his farm novels. In his poetry, too, the same thought and philosophy is the main stimulus. In Op die plaas one already meets the lonely, isolated dreamer, Frerk, who will recur in other works either as a main character - e.g. Hansie (Langs die grootpad); Wynand (Somer); Daiel (Kringloop van die Winde) or as an additional character - e.g. Mnr. Hendriks (Droogte).

In Op die plaas the human being is seen in close relationship to the natural setting (27) , and in later work the human being is even synonomous with nature (28). In the sonnet Die Gras (Honderd Sonette) the close affinity of the human being with nature is again expressed.

Frequently nature "reacts" according to the character's mood, again emphasizing the close unity of the human being with his environment, and simultaneously illustrating the human characteristic of seeing and interpreting his immediate world according to his state of mind at a particular moment. When Johanna in Lant Vrugte experiences a short period of freedom from her strict parents' constant vigil over her, she feels entirely happy and she sees the farm in a new light:

> Was daar ooit 'n mooier Sondagmore? Die somerdag maak die wêreld lig en wyd tot daar waar die blou rante wegvloei in die lugoneindigheid. Johanna loop blootvoets oor die aarde; dit is 'n louter vreugde om die gang van jou voete te voel en die ritmiese deining van jou lyf. Sy gaan op in die dag, die wye, wegstromende dag met sy verre verskiete van blou en vervloeiende veldkleure. Die dag is vir haar 'n uitnodiging, 'n kostelike blom om te pluk.
>
> (pg. 155.)

The seasons develop together with the story (29). This correlation /

---

26). Skrywers aan die woord: pg. 173.
27). Appendix 2: no. 37.
28). Appendix 2: no. 38 and 39.
29). Appendix 2: no. 40.

correlation of the seasons with the development of the story is a very typical characteristic in Van den Heever's work, and he uses it to illustrate the spiritual philosophy in his writing of which the reader is strongly aware, viz: all life is a never-ending yet ever-new cycle:

> Nog altyd was die lewe soos 'n droom,
> 'n droom waarin die dinge dof verskyn,
> veel dieper lê die wese, klaar omlyn,
> veel dieper skuil die kringloop en die stroom.
> (Die wasige beeld
> Honderd Sonette.)

> Die aarde is oud en tog ook ewig jonk,
> in al wat sterwe, tril nog God se vonk.
> (Lente: Honderd Sonette.)

There are many small cycles within the big one. One cycle may vanish - in death, or in departure - but another will reappear and as likely as not follow a course similar to the first. One cycle influences the other, and all have points of similarity, apparently accentuating their uniform origin. The cycles are inter-related, one can only exist through contact with another. (30). All life is determined by the cycle whose course in its main movement is previously fixed. This is possibly best illustrated in the novelette - Daiel se Afskeid (Kringloop van die Winde) - in which a wandering sheep shearer finds temporary peace and prosperity as an independent farmer, but who must at last inevitably return to his former wandering life.

As has been illustrated previously Van den Heever very frequently meditates on the cycle theme in his poetry, and particularly in his later work, this concept of the cycle becomes very clear. In the volume Honderd Sonette there are many examples: Die droë velde; Ouma - Grootjie; Die jaar se einde to quote a few.

This philosophic, yet dreamer's preoccupation with the eternal cycle is one of the most typical elements in Van den Heever's work, and together with a romantic bias, it gives a quiet, deep, slow moving quality to the whole which one associates with Van den Heever's contribution to Afrikaans literature.

In the majority of Van den Heever's works one finds a romantic quality. In Op die plaas this is still revealed in delicate descriptions often creating an idyllic atmosphere (31).

Later /

---

30). Appendix 2: no. 41.
31). Apperdix 2: no. 42.

Later the idyllic makes way for a more severely outlined, harsher atmosphere, but through the style - the rhythm of the sentences, the choice of words - and through the deeper key note - the philosophy of the entire work - the romantic bias is still strongly felt. (32).

It is typical that one so very frequently finds a description of sunset, a moment which often calls forth a romantic thought or philosophy, and simultaneously describing an important and even decisive moment in farm life:

> En so gaan die lang somernamiddag om, en die son verdwyn weer in rossige wolkespelonke en 'n fyn ligstrook lewe nog ná as die eerste sterre reeds deur die aandonkering van die aand hul ligte laat ophelder.
>
> (Somer: pg. 96.)

This love of the sunset hour is found in Van den Heever's poetry too, e.g. In die skemeruur (Stemmingsure.)

Besides the dominant thought of the eternal cycle, and besides the romantic vision, Van den Heever very strongly and completely expresses the African rural scene. Possibly his symbolic realism adds a greater concentration, focusses a sharper light on the familiar landscape and gives it a greater intensity and even a greater reality. Van den Heever's concentration on various aspects of the scene makes the reader acutely aware of these aspects, and consequently he is likely to see them with the artist's vision. Van den Heever does indeed benefit from a painter's observation, for he can "paint" a scene very vividly, selecting - like a painter - certain characteristic elements and grouping them so that as a new whole they form a powerful unity. But contrary to the average landscape painter, and contrary to Pierneef whose work in so many ways is strikingly similar to that of Van den Heever, the latter as a writer also introduces a very important human element in his work which unites the human being with the surroundings - and even nature sometimes assumes human characteristics. The writer can - and must - concentrate on more than merely the visual in order to give his image a greater completeness. The following passage is typical of Van den Heever's writing:

> Die son klim hoër, en soos op ander somerdae groei die hitte vinnig aan. Die morekoelte is nou weg, en 'n broeiwarmte damp uit die aarde op, en 'n wolkie doinsorigheid begin op die koring lê. Dit begin netnou effens beweeg, 'n bedrieglike lugspieëling wat tower in die ruimte. Vinke ruis in /

---

32). Appendix 2: no. 43.

in glansende, ritmiese swerms van die donker-groen tuin af oor die land, en kort-kort skreeu 'n snyer "Oe-a!" om hulle op te ja, want selfs die fladderige voëlverskrikkers oral op die land boesem geen vrees meer in by die gulsige korrelverslinders nie. Hulle vlie met 'n ruisende gedreun op en sak op 'n ander plek neer waar luidrugtige kaffertjies hulle dan weer verwilder met kleilatte.

En so groei die somerdag in geweld. Ver in die Weste verskyn donderwolke. Eers is die donserige punte net sigbaar onderkant die trillende wasigheid, maar dan groei die wit rondinge uit, kolom na kolom, tot die wêreldeinde omtroon is deur die spierwit bakens wat rustig heers oor die ruimte van die veld. En die snyers swoeg voort: Die hande, wat nog ongewónd is aan die baie vat, word rou-rooi, maar daar is geen kans om lank met jou hande in die moeë rug te druk nie. Die oë meet net vlugtig die end koring vorentoe, die broek word ingedagte opgetrek en dan span die hemp weer glad oor die warm blasie, die sekel blits in die son en die sweet rol onder die hoed uit en drup oor die vuurwarm gesig. Oom Tom lyk of hy krom gebore is. Taai soos seining is die droë lyf, en die lang bobbejaan-arms skiet so afgemete-juis uit, werk so stelselmatig dat dit die ander snyers moedeloos maak; net die vat van die gebreide man, sy rustig-sekere gang, maak onervare snyers, wat onvermydelik bontval, onbewus boosaardig oor hul eie onhandigheid. Kort-kort veë hulle die sweet van hul gesigte en skiet dit weg oor die stoppels, dan volg 'n "Soe!" 'n Oomblik word die bewende landskap opgeneem, gekyk of daar nog geen koffie van die huis af kom nie en dan is dit weer wegval met 'n trier lyf as netnou, want al ongenadiger word die son. As die wolke maar gou hoër wil klim, sug meer as een, maar stadig is die gang van die natuurdinge, sonder 'n wil om die swoegende mense hier te dien.

(Somer: pp. 28 - 30.)

In this passage one can find the painterly qualities, particularly in the description of the gathering clouds which is a typical South African image and strongly reminiscent of paintings by Pierneef. There are sound suggestions and descriptions of human labour and movement which assist in completing the memory image. The field is seen from the human point of view - "die bewende landskap" - accurately - though indirectly - emphasizing the hot workers' condition. The natural phenomena reveal "human" characteristics - "al ongenadiger word die son". Finally there is a thought which can be expressed in literature, but certainly not in painting, and once again this is expressed in relation to the human being: " . . . maar stadig is die gang van die natuurdinge, sonder 'n wil om die swoegende mense hier te dien. . ." Even an expressionist painting like Maggie Laubser's Harvesters (fig. 33) which does to a certain extent suggest this thought, cannot really convey it adequately. This is a thought which must be expressed in words. The poet too, although he can frequently remain more "painterly" than the prose writer, will usually add an additional thoughtful element to his "picture" if the poem is to be complete. This is illustrated in Van den Heever's O deur die goudgeel koringland /

koringland which uses the same subject matter as in the prose extract, but the following subjective verses are added:

> O deur die goudgeel koringland
> van my verbeelding, met die hand
> die aare van die volle gees
> met tere liefde uitgelees!
>
> En watter mooier werk as maar
> die gerwe ryklik in te gaar,
> al toon die dorsvloer dat so skraal
> die korrels uit die kafwolk daal.
> (Die Nuwe Boord.)

Almost all aspects of farm life have been expressed by Van den Heever. Its luxuriant fruitfulness (Op die Plaas); its contrasts (Somer, pg. 36; 41); drought (particularly in Droogte, pg. 75); thunderstorms (Daiel se Afskeid; kringloop van die Winde, pg. 23 - 24); blazing white heat (Daiel se afskeid, pg 82); the animals and labourers who are so lovingly depicted (e.g. Laat Vrugte, pg 10 - 11).

All this presents the reader with an accurate, sensitive and loving expression of Africa, possibly the most vivid image - though paradoxically, idealized by a romantic vision - of the harsher parts of the country that has yet been given. But it is particularly in the depiction of the farmer people that all the landscape expression culminates. Although the landscape with all its aspects forms an integral part of the human beings in it, it nevertheless remains a background to the human being, his activities and his emotions. While the country stands as a symbol of the people, so the people symbolize the country that brought them forth. Many of them are hardened, unmoveable (Oom Gert - Langs die Grootpad; Sarrys - Droogte), relentless like the seasons with which they have to cope. Others are slow moving, incomprehensible even to themselves in their dreaming (Hansie - Langs die Grootpad; Daiel), their dreams are as distant, yet as clear as the veld's horizons. Yet others are impetuous and unreasonable (Oom Sybrand - Laat Vrugte) as the sudden contrasts; and several have a deep, but unobtrusive tenderness (Tant Maria - Langs die Grootpad; Stienie - Daiel se Afskeid ; Oom Sools - Droogte) like the deep, glowing colour one finds hidden in the full of Summer. Even the grotesque freaks of drought have a human parallel in the feeble-minded Ou-Datie (Droogte.) Their various temperaments combine or clash, develop or break down in the pre-determined, yet varied cycle, preceded or echoed by a similar development in nature. This is well illustrated /

illustrated in Droogte where the futile family strife is as unproductive, as throttling to progress as drought is to a farm (33).

Almost all the characters, however, have a unifying characteristic which, incidentally, was typical of the early Afrikaans rural population, viz: a severe, relentless Calvinism which gave the people faith and courage, but which frowned upon weakness of any kind. Even this hard staunchness may also be seen in the setting in which the small things are overwhelmed by the big, in which there is an unrelenting sternness.

Van den Heever's style largely contributes to the general impression of staunchness, of vastness - even of his particular part of Africa. The prose is slow moving. Long sentences add a meditative note. And a very typical farmers' idiom, descriptive and often refreshingly striking not only reveals the writer's accurate observation, but also adds a typical, rural atmosphere to the whole.

Already reference has been made to a similarity in the work by Van den Heever and Pierneef, but when the work of both is seen as a whole the resemblance is remarkable. Pierneef completes the visual setting by which Van den Heever's characters are formed and in which they move. The painting of the one is the complement to the prose in particular of the other, and for those who areacquainted with the work of both, these expressions become almost inseparable. Compare, for example, the following passage from Lant Vrugte with Pierneef's Farm near Pretoria (34):

> Dit is Sondag op die plaas en daarbuite lê die lig roerloos oor die koppies en die velde. Die woning rys vredig op in die uitbloeiende dag; die verten vertoon weidende vee, blou horisonne en yl wolkstrepe. In die harte van die boere is daar 'n rus so breed en kalm as van die oorgingsdae van die winter na die somer self. (pg. 90).

In the prose extract images, words, certain parts of speech such as the present participle: weidende and the rhythm of the sentences create an over-all magnificent peace which is achieved in the painting by the predominantly horizontal composition /

---

33). Appendix 2: no. 44.
34). Illustrated in Grosskopf: Pierneef, the man and his work: pl. 61.

composition, relieved by an occasional well-placed, quiet curve in the severely controlled drawing of the trees, and finally in the large, dignified and again severely controlled oval sweep in the sky. Pierneef's picture suggests Sunday, for there is no activity on the farm other than the conversation just outside the farmhouse door. The regular lines in the painted homestead are as peaceful as the writer's image, and the tall, closed, simplified pattern in the trees emphasizes, even increases the peaceful rising that describes the building. The lack of shadow in the painting is the pictorial equivalent of motionless light - "roerloos" so well expressing that typical glaring light of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal veld - which suffuses the fields and hills, and the equivalent, too, of that fine image "uitbloeiende dag" so expressive of the gradual maturing of a hot day. Although the photograph is not in colour, one can presume from looking at other works by Pierneef that the blue horizons are there, while the thin wisps of cloud are distinct in the picture. ". . . 'n rus so breed en kalm" is the main emotion that ensues from the picture and this is achieved - as has been determined previously - mainly by the intellectually arranged lines in the composition and by the wide canvas.

Pierneef's range in subject matter is as wide as that of Van den Heever. By selection and emphasis both artists frequently note and exploit the same elements. The heavy, strikingly lit thunder heads is a notable example. One is already quoted in the long extract from Somer (35), and there are further examples:

> Op pad huistoe sit hy en kyk na die wolke wat ver oor die vlakte saampak, wit opgestuwelde massas van weerlig deurspeel
> (Kringloop van die Winde. Pg. 92.

> Die wolke wat netnou nog soos spierwit domme die lugeinder verheerlik het, het opgesprei en saamgesluit tot 'n onegalige sluier wat hoër en hoër skuiwe. En vér oor die lande drywe die wolkskaduwees, met hier en daar 'n sonkol tussenin, 'n bewegende skoonheid oor die land, met die are wat nou en dan opglans as 'n strook sonlig dit vang.
> (Somer: pg. 35.)

Pierneef's painting of Johannesburg in 1886 is only one of the many examples which reveal the snow-white domes and the piled /

---

35). See above, pg. 110 - 111.

piled up masses with their dramatic light that the writer describes.

The strong contrasts between light and shade - e.g. Pierneef's Louis Trichardt - and between violence and peace -

En so stap die twee broers terug in die helder son wat nou weer vol oor die blinkende aarde skyn asof die donderbui nooit sy heerskappy versteur het nie
(Somer: pg. 41) -

is another characteristic of the countryside that both artists often exploit.

"En die son, in 'n blouwit trilling daarbo, gloei roerloos op hulle neer" (Daiel se Afskeid; pg. 82) is such an accurate description of Pierneef's almost colourless pictures of approximately 1946 - 1948 that one is tempted to believe that Van den Heever saw the paintings before presenting this terse sentence. It is interesting to note that Kringloop van die winde was published in 1945, and in it the descriptions are altogether far less colourful - although some have a suggestion of deep colour - than the earlier descriptions in Op die plaas, Droogte and Laat vrugte. Maybe Van den Heever's suggestion enabled Pierneef to see the peculiar white light which he then used to an extreme in his painting. Would there have been any mutual influence at that time, or is the practically simultaneous similarity co-incidental? (36).

A little /

---

36). According to Professor A.J. Coetzee C.M. van den Heever was not intimately friendly with the painter, but was merely acquainted. Apparently the writer possessed only one Pierneef painting. Pierneef designed the the cover of the first volume of Tydskrif vir Letterkunde of which Van den Heever was the editor. Van den Heever himself has said that the painter gave him the original design.

Van den Heever did for a while consider becoming a painter and attended painting classes in Holland. He was a great admirer of the Dutch painting of the seventeenth century and - according to Coetzee - endeavoured to paint in their style. This does not imply, however, that had he continued to paint he would have always painted in that style. His contemporary style of writing would make one believe that he would have developed a more modern style if he had painted. In this admiration of the seventeenth century painters, Van den Heever again resembles Pierneef: "After his second visit to Europe he (Pierneef) came back in 1926 with mature and heightened reverence for the so-called 'Old Masters', more particularly the great seventeenth century painters of the Netherlands." (Grosskopf: Op. cit. pg. 14.)

A little further in the story a more detailed description of the mercilessly hot day is given which again is the exact parallel to almost all Pierneef's pictures of that period:

Bo-oor die aarde, vaal geskroei en vol afgevrete, dor polle, tril dit liggies op, en na die koppies toe is dit of wasemrige golwe wegdein teen 'n horison waar die lig witblou opslaan en vaal-blink die oog gevoelig laat terugskrik. Oor alles is die son, gloeiend en geweldig in die hemeldiepte. Dit voel of die hele lug so ver as wat dit uitstrek, van die moordende son dorrvlam is en nou neerskroeiend op die aarde neersyg in 'n roerlose, onontkombare verskroeiing wat alles uiteindelik sal oorweldig.

(Kringloop van die winde: pg. 82.)

With his strange white-pinks and white-blues Pierneef manages to suggest the vibrating heat Van den Heever mentions and also the haziness of the horizon. "witblou" is exactly the colour Pierneef uses. Those particular pictures are indeed "fel-blink", and the glare which is represented is too strong for the sensitive eye. The emotion that the onlooker experiences when looking at one of these paintings is accurately rendered in the last sentence of the given extract.

Verweg kan hulle die reëntoue nou al sien, hier en daar yl uitgestrek, maar op ander plekke word dit donkerder, 'n vaal-blou geriffelde kolom wat die uitsig op die verte heeltemal vernewel. 'n Bliksemlig skn verblindend oor die lande en soos 'n verdoemenis val 'n donderslag, gevolg deur 'n skeurende gekraak, en dan is dit stil, net die gerus van die koring, soos 'n groot skare wat bid voordat die geweld van 'n veldslag losbars.

(Somer: pg. 36.)

This passage is an accurate word-parallel to Summer in the Bushveld (37). The"reëntoue" are there, and on the left of the composition the sky is so dark that the horizon merges with it. In the painting the clouds and trees are dramatically lit giving a pictorial equivalent to the writer's mention of the flash of lightning that blindingly cuts across the veld. Pierneef creates the drama with a violent contrast between light and dark, and the short, vertical strokes add to the suggestion of apprehensive agitation. Van den Heever creates his drama, not by pictorial means, but by an association with human religious belief - "soos 'n verdoemenis val 'n donderslag" - while the corn is seen as a (human) multitude bowed in prayer. A literary, but not a painterly contrast between onslaught and humility.

There /

37). Illustrated in Grosskopf: Op. cit. pl. 52.

There are other passages by Van den Heever which do not so closely resemble Pierneef's paintings in content and detail as these already discussed, but in these passages the general sensation and the deeper truth expressed is that which is experienced when looking at a Pierneef painting. The following passage, for example, forms a parallel to Pierneef's Cornfields near Stellenbosch (38).

As Daniel dorptoe ry, dan sien hy hulle, allenige mense, op die groen, uitgestrekte velde besig om te ploeë. Dit is swart en bruin en vaal lappe bewerkte aarde wat van die plaaspad af wegstrek, en die gesaaide het nog skaars ylgroen oor die gelykte verskyn, of die reën het al weer gekom, swaar buie wat maklik val en byna daagliks in die verte uitsak, waar hulle blouig neerdamp om vinnig nader te kom, 'n wye ruising oor die aarde, tot die grond diep deurweek is en lang kuile oral te sien lê, omsoom van hoë gras, bruin in die saad.

(Kringloop van die Winde: pg. 70).

The wide view, the pale patchwork of fields, the pale green of the young crops are the actual similarities one can find in the two paintings and the prose passage, but besides that there is no more that one can actually point out as the same except the broad conception of both paintings and writing.

The glowing picture of the undulating landscape Piesanghoek with its deep, rich colour, and softly painted grey, heavy clouds strongly suggesting a late Summer's afternoon after a refreshing storm is in its romantic entirity an outstanding pictorial expression of the atmosphere Van den Heever creates in Driel se Afskeid when the wanderer is caught in a storm on his way to a country town (pl. 23 - 25). Yet here there is almost nothing concrete which one can take from the painting and from the story to place alongside one another in order to point out where the resemblance lies. But both painter and writer have managed to convey convincingly an intense, typical experience of Africa.

Finally one more comparison may be made. Van den Heever's delight in describing the South African sunset has already been mentioned. In the quotation from Somer (39) one notices the suggested grandeur in "rosige wolkespelonke" and in the heavy, slow moving quality of the words themselves. Other passages from Op die plaas and Droogte also illustrate that Van den Heever expresses a peaceful, yet magnificent experience in a wide, apparently deserted, setting. Van

den Heever's /

---

38). Two paintings with this title are considered here: One is in the National Gallery, Cape Town; the other in a private collection, Johannesburg. Fig. 20.

39). See above pg. 110.

den Heever's descriptions and images are nevertheless predominantly realistic. Yet Pierneef's "cubist", mathematical and geometric Composition (fig.21) - far removed from realism - is an excellent parallel to the writer's poetic descriptions. The painting is built up entirely of regular squares, forming a very regular paving over the entire panel. Within this paving a landscape is built up with diagonals crossing the squares, and the colour or tone within the squares changing so that the representation can be discovered. In the centre of the picture is a very bright sunlit mountain and sky. More attention is drawn to this light area through a large, super imposed diamond shape. This diamond gives two additional focal points (the first being the intense area of light) above and below. The lower point corresponds to the light focal point. It is from the two diamond points that the main diagonals radiate. Therefore a great deal of movement is introduced into the picture by means of lines. The movement is up and down and cornerwards. Then there is movement which appears to be from the picture plane inwards. This is achieved by colour. The tree in the foreground is painted in a single, intense dark tone. The dark orange rocks in the foreground have also been brought forward by pure colour and possibly with the addition of black. The central mountains and sun lit sky are in the background in spite of being very light in contrast to the perimeter of the painting. This consistent dark surrounding is probably the main reason for the recession of the mountains, and in addition the mountains and sky appear to have been painted with a mixed colour over an underpainting. The painting's dark "frame" and grotto-like central pattern does indeed remind the onlooker of Van den Heever's "rosige wolkespelonke". But it is mainly the "breathing" quality - created by lines and receding colour -, the severe selection, drastic patterning and the stylization allowing only the essential to remain which creates the atmosphere of vastness and desolation that one feels when reading the word picture by Van den Heever.

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef is a true South African painter in contrast to Frans Oerder, the Hollander of the romantic realist tradition, and Erich Mayer, the German realist whose work in so many instances resembles that by Pierneef in subject matter and colour (e.g. the Baobab Tree; Rustenburg Kloof; etc) although Mayer's work is always delicate and mild in contrast to Pierneef's stark, powerful expressions.

Oerder's /

Oerder's work always remained essentially Dutch in character, even though he frequently made use of the South African landscape as subject matter. Near Pretoria illustrates Oerder's strong resemblance in style to work by Mauve, Weissenbruch, Joseph Israëls. The composition is horizontal, suggesting a restful calm. To prevent monotony the painter has introduced a row of tall trees which, although they too are placed in a horizontal band, nevertheless contrast the severity of the horizontal. Cows and a herdboy introduce an additional interest, and, incidentally, a typical Dutch element. The paint has been applied in a controlled academic manner. The colour is subdued and predominantly grey - another foremost characteristic of Dutch nineteenth century painting. In fact the picture is so Dutch in its general character that the rich yellow ochre field is almost startling, for the rapidly summarizing onlooker expects it to be a luxuriant green.

For a short while Pierneef studied in Rotterdam at the same school where Oerder received his training. Upon his return to Pretoria Pierneef worked with Oerder for a short period. Therefore it is hardly surprizing to find a strong Dutch-Oerder influence in Pierneef's early work. It is in fact remarkable that Pierneef was able to develop so quickly and independently to become an essentially South African painter. No other painter before him had managed to do so.

Yet even Pierneef's early work is more architectural, more formal, more controlled and more impressive than Oerder's romantic-realistic impressions.

Oerder's influence can be seen if his painting View of the Rand in the early days (fig. 22) is compared with Pierneef's First Rains, Lichtenburg (fig. 23). Oerder's picture is an unambiguous representation of the visual data: a stone cattle kraal in the left foreground; in the middle distance an irregular horizontal band of trees, walls and farm dwellings; finally a horizon of undulating hills with a faint suggestion of the smoking mine chimneys. The composition is again severely controlled by a horizontal design. The technique is traditionally academic. The paint is fat, rich, heavy and glossy with oil and probably a final coat of varnish. The brush work is smooth, subjected to realism. The colours gradually merge from one into another without a distinct division unless they are to

represent /

represent a solid object. The colour in general is subdued, heavy, predominantly dark and grey. There is no suggestion of sunlight although the strip of sky which is visible appears to be cloudless.

Pierneef's painting representing a primitive hut set against trees in a lonely veld under a storm threatening sky, is also based upon a severe horizontal design. Yet immediately Pierneef's more formal, more selected and more intellectual composition is obvious. The horizontal is very severe with no suggestion of undulation. The line is accentuated by the rigid line of the hut's roof, the continued straight line of the tree tops which is merely a fraction above the completely straight horizon of the veld. The cloudy sky covers approximately two-thirds of the picture area. This is characteristic of the Dutch school, but incidentally, it is not reminiscent of the particular Oerder painting described above. It probably illustrates not so much a Dutch influence as Pierneef's intense interest in large, cloud-filled, dramatic skies. In this instance the sky is impressive as a result of large, bold, curved lines which accentuate the placid flat land below and which contrast its lack of movement. The application of paint is rich, thick and reminds the onlooker of Oerder's technique. The colour is heavy and predominantly grey, again reminiscent of Oerder. The treatment in the foreground also reveals resemblances to the older man's work. The horizontal strokes alternating areas of red-yellow-brown with a heavy green is alike in colour to that in View of the Rand. Yet Pierneef does not subject his paint to realism as Oerder does. He allows it to be expressive primarily as paint. His colours do not merge, but the powerful brush stroke is quite clearly revealed. The painterly technique is particularly well seen in the treatment of the sky. It is essentially an area of powerful, expressive paint. In Oerder's picture the sky is merely an area of an indistinct glazed tint.

Oerder's picture may be more realistic, and it may reveal a clever craftsmanship, but Pierneef's painting - even though influenced by the Dutch tradition and Oerder, and possibly not quite so concerned with the accurate representation of surface texture - is more impressive as well as expressive and has a far greater permanent and universal quality.

Pierneef, in his attempt to express the essential South Africa, was soon to leave the more sombre palette, and he painted a number of "French Impressionist" pictures. The

colour /

colour is light, shadowless, sundrenched and the paint is applied in small, broken strokes. But apparently he soon found impressionism inadequate to express his land, and consequently his style became more severe in pattern, less naturalistic in colour, and the paint texture became thinner and flatter.

Pierneef realized that the essential character of his country is hard, angular and even geometrical. This led him to semi-abstract painting in the early 1920's - apparently even before he became acquainted with the work of the Dutch cubist painter, Konijnenburg (40). Pierneef did not continue to paint in this manner for long. He is reputed to have said: "Art has to walk with the nation, and to grow with it" (41) probably implying that the South African people were not ready to accept or able to understand expressions which were so far removed from the familiar visual reality. Grosskopf continues to say: "Pierneef himself, had he so chosen, could have bravely ridden far ahead. He did not wish to. And probably that is the main reason why he deliberately checked his personal leaning towards abstract expression. " (42).

This abstract interlude, however, strongly influenced all his subsequent work up to the very last. All compositions are stylized, severely controlled by an intellectual, architectural basis. Everything fits into a severe framework, very often dominated by an oval. The shapes of trees, clouds and rocks are drastically simplified so introducing a magnificent monumental calm which is characteristic of all his work.

Pierneef's drastic selection and simplification is most obvious in the drawing. Colour, at first glance, appears to be secondary in importance. Yet in his avid search for the most characteristic depiction of South Africa Pierneef's work shows a distinct development in the use of colour. After the delicate impressionistic rainbows the colour is simplified and intensified. In Barberton Hills, for example, he makes use of a strong deep, cool orange, a purple-tinted blue and white. In the abstractions e.g. Study in Blue, the few colours are used sparingly and /

---

40). S.P.E. Boshoff writes the following in Skone Kunste: . . . En dit voor sy besoek aan Europa in 1924 en voordat hy met die werk van Konijnenburg kennis gemaak het. Ek sê dit met opset, omdat daar, . . . van verskillende kante te kenne gegee is dat Pierneef tot hierdie kunsvorm gekom het deur kennismaking met daardie moderne prestasies. pg. 170.

41). Quoted by Grosskopf. Op.cit. pg. 23.

42). Ibid: pg. 23.

and sensitively revealing an equivocal glow. Later the colour becomes deep and rich and glowing - e.g. Piesanghoek - yet controlled by the peculiar red-tinted blue. Eventually distinct divisions between light and shade form an important part of the colour composition - e.g. Louis Trichardt revealing Pierneef's apparent attempt to express the harsh light of the country. In this he was ultimately most successful when he omitted the darks and painted canvases of glowing white light. The colour is now subjected to this white, chalk-like glare and it looses all its deep intensity. These pictures most successfully suggest heat, aridity and relentless, cruel sunlight which so many painters have attempted to express before and since Pierneef's contribution, but usually unsuccessfully.

In his mature work, when Pierneef no longer completed a picture entirely from nature, but when he had by devoted study absorbed the essential quality of Africa, he gives the most true, the most permanent representation of his land. In this he resembles C.M. van den Heever. It is the general conception of both artists, together with an ability to grasp the essential and the characteristic atmosphere of South Africa that causes their work to be so closely related and so very similar. It is probably safe to say that these two artists have been able to give the most accurate visual South African expression, untainted by a Dutch or French conception. It is true that both studied in Europe and that both respected and admired the work by their European leaders and predecessors. But they managed almost immediately on returning to their homeland (particularly Van den Heever whose development was altogether more rapid than that of Pierneef) to assimilate the influence and the technique learnt in Europe into their work, and translate it into a pure South African idiom and expression. They were able to strengthen the South African elements to such an extent that any foreign element which may still have been apparent in their early work, is completely overcast to become almost unrecognizable. If one is to choose "typical" South African art, an art which is representative of the country and its people, one must turn to the work of C.M. van den Heever and Pierneef.

The Animals /

The animals in the landscape:

An interesting and picturesque element in the South African landscape is its wild life. Until comparatively recently game was so plentiful that it formed part of the daily experience of the majority of South Africans. The early settlers were enthusiastic in recording their adventures with the animals in incredible hunters' tales (e.g. by J.F. Cillié) and in paintings (e.g. pictures by Baines and Bowler). The way of life of the various groups of natives was to a large extent determined by the animals and they figured in the creative activity of these peoples (e.g. in rock art, in Bushman, Hottentot and Bantu folktales). At the beginning of this century many of the indigenous folktales were retold in English and Afrikaans (by Bleek and Lloyd, Gustav Preller and Eugène Marais), rock paintings were studied and copied (by Bleek and Lloyd). It may be presumed that through this interest that the White Man began to show in the art of the native, a certain influence crept into the European's own expression. Yet the pioneer, transport rider and farmer also came into direct contact with the wild animals. They played a very large part indeed in the everyday life of the Voortrekker, and up to this day a large proportion of South Africans have a deep rooted, traditional love for an adventurous hunting expedition. Simultaneously a large number of South Africans - particularly the Afrikaans speaking people - admire and love the animals and have a considerable knowledge about them. Therefore it is not surprizing to find a true European's art expression devoid of native influence in which the animal plays a large part.

Although it is particularly in Afrikaans prose that this expression finds form, the first significant South African animal story is in English, viz. Jock of the Bushveld by Percy Fitzpatrick. It was published in 1907, long after the adventures of the transport rider and his dog had actually taken place. The entire book is a vivid, to some extent idealized, account of the adventurous life in the untamed Bushveld of the previous century. "Jock is die resultaat van 'n terugblik wat 'n aventurier op sy lewe

werk/.

werp en toon dat Fitzpatrick hom by voorkeur in sy gedagtes besiggehou het met die paar jaar wat hy in die wilde wêreld rondom Barberton deurgebring het." (43).

Roy Campbell refers to Fitzpatrick as a "Kiplingised Englishman" (44), and although a sneer is sensed in the Campbell sentence, the reader of Jock is certainly reminded of Kipling's work. The types of adventure, the description, the character development and to some extent even the style may be compared to that of Kipling. The story's great attraction is probably its great hero - a dog -, its easy reading and the many exciting adventures it recounts. Another attraction is undoubtedly the accurate visual descriptions of the Bushveld and its ever-interesting inhabitants - the animals. Almost all aspects of the wild Bushveld are described: the veld itself with its deceptive distances, its weird bush, its innumerable kinds of animals; drought, storm, the blazing heat, sunset; the dangerous routes from the low-veld up to the plateau, the hardships endured by the transport riders and their oxen and finally the rewarding, overwhelming view over a vast expanse of country. All the descriptions are visual and colourful, and many parallels can be found in the work of later South African artists, e.g. Pierneef, C.M. van den Heever, Totius, Battiss, Everard-Steenkamp, etc. This may be because Fitzpatrick's work is descriptive only, certainly vividly descriptive and carried forward by a certain momemtum , but lacking a personal element other than the idealized memory. Therefore it is the reality of the scene which is more powerful than the actual writing, and it is this visual reality that has been expressed by other artists in addition to their personal contribution. Fitzpatrick manages to hold the reader's interest because he himself shows interest. For example, when a much older friend and experienced hunter "showed me things; reading the open book of nature that I could not understand" (pg. 39), he in turn reveals to the reader many small points which those who are unfamiliar with veldcraft would not have noticed. he writes of the animals'

camouflage /

---

43). Coetzee.Percy Fitzpatrick. Lantern, August, 1949.
44). Roy Campbell: Light on a Dark horse. pg. 151.

camouflage, and the reader is reminded of similar passages in animal stories by Bangiro and Schoeman. (45).

It is interesting to compare Fitzpatrick's description of impala with that by Roy Campbell:

> There is no more beautiful and fascinating sight than that of a troop of impala or springbuck really on the move and jumping in earnest. The height and distance that they clear is simply incredible. The impala's greater size and its delicate spiral horns give it a special distinction, the springbuck's brilliant white and red, and the divided crest which fans out along the spine when it is excited, are unique. But who can say which of the many beautiful antelopes is the most beautiful? The oldest hunter will tell you of first one, then another, and then another, as they come to mind, just as he saw them in some supreme unforgettable moment, and each at that moment has seemed quite the most beautiful animal in the world.
>
> (Percy Fitzpatrick: Jock of the Bushveld pg. 111.)

> The hardest to draw of all these beautiful animals, and the hardest to shoot, both on account of its ineffable grace and its agility, is the impala. It is known as the "springbok of the low-veld", not so much because of any physical resemblance, but on account of its prodigious powers of jumping; these excel even those of the springbok. One of the loveliest sights imaginable is the reddish-golden arc formed by the bodies of a herd of impala as they leap clean over a stream or (so as not to leave any tell-tale spoor) over a wide waggon road. They seem not so much to leap as to fly: and their aerial acrobatics compare with those of other smaller antelopes as the flight of swallows, swifts or bee-eaters compare with the flight of other birds.
>
> (Roy Campbell: Light on a dark horse.: pg. 87.)

Fitzpatrick's description is exact, almost scientific, stating only the bare visual facts. He is reminded of nothing when he sees the antelopes except the springbuck and the hunter, and these are directly concerned with the animals described. Fitzpatrick does not allow his imagination to wander for one instant. He describes the action as beautiful and fascinating which does not really do full justice to the spectacular leap; he speaks of the height of the jump as incredible - and says nothing more about it. Campbell on the other hand immediately adds a poetic, an artistic quality to a passage that was to be merely descriptive and which makes no pretensions to be artistic writing. Campbell speaks of the buck's ineffable grace and agility immediately giving an idea of the movement. He sees a reddish-golden arc formed by the animal's body as it leaps. He sees the buck fly rather than leap and that immediately reminds him of birds in graceful flight.

Fitzpatrick's /

---

45). Appendix 2. no.45.

Fitzpatrick's account is accurate, but the reader must know the animal before he can visualize, or rather complete, the given image. The reader must know the animal too if he is to appreciate Campbell's description to the full, but nevertheless, Campbell does give a more complete and a more satisfying image through the choice of words and of comparison that certainly suggests the movement of the impala. Campbell's actual writing contributes a greater unity to the picture, the words themselves add to it, whereas Fitzpatrick's words carry little descriptive force in themselves.

Fitzpatrick's "classic" is popular. It gives an accurate idea of the wilds and the game of South Africa. It relates adventure that has a certain appeal and which encourages further reading. But Jock of the Bushveld is not of a high artistic standard, mainly through its documentary character in both story and language.

Hans Anton Aschenborn was another forerunner in the field of animal expression in writing and also in painting. He was a German who settled as a farmer in South West Africa in 1910. He is remembered now as a painter, writer and book illustrator. In 1921 his little Gemsbuck book - The Life of a Gemsbuck - appeared both in Afrikaans and English. The booklet is immediately attractive through its many charming, delicate drawings surrounding the text on every page. The full page illustrations vary in standard. The pen drawing of the flight from the veld fire is possibly one of the most successful in the book. But nevertheless, the picture is no more than an illustration. Although the elements of a good "dramatic" composition are there, they have not been fully exploited. Selection and distortion are not sufficiently severe, and there are too many irrelevant details and insignificant pen strokes to form a picture with an individual character. Some of the illustrations from paintings are unsatisfactory because they too are overcrowded with meaningless brushwork. Darks and lights form agitated and senseless patterns, so losing any unity and a sense of grandeur that the painter may have wished to achieve. One of the herd notices something is simpler and therefore more satisfying. This picture reveals a sound knowledge of the animals depicted and one can readily believe that the painter spent many

hours /

hours in ambush studying the animals from close quarters. But the picture has little artistic value. It is a recording by an animal lover of a species of buck. Bouman - who thinks highly of Aschenborn's work - typifies the painter's contribution when he writes. "Dit is . . . 'n uitvoerige reisjoernaal in beeld. Die dagboek van 'n veredelde natuurmens. Jagter, boer en kunstenaar." (46). Other paintings reveal an inclination towards romantic-realism. On moonlight nights they could always be found is, as are the other pictures, a recording, but through the use of green-blues and cold yellows and the relation to one another, the little flicks of white here and there and the very dark shadows, the recording is wrapped up in an unpleasant sentimentality. The covey of guinea fowl has a similar romantic quality, but is on a higher artistic plane. The tree and birds form an interesting silhouette pattern against a mid-tone background. The heavy, flat shapes of the birds are a good contrast to the spidary lines in the tree. The simple silhouette of bush is a stable base to the somewhat eerie design above. If the light disc of the moon had been omitted, the picture may probably have been better for the half-tone background would have been more pleasing, it would have suggested a greater calm if it had been continuous.

Aschenborn's writing is like his painting. informative, descriptive, somewhat sentimental and revealing little real artistic power. His writing is good when he can describe objectively what he sees, but there is no development of character or action and the reader is constantly on the same plane. Scenes which might develop into a significant whole are left incomplete. Even at the end of his story Aschenborn appears to be uncertain and apparently helpless, and presents a weak "fairy tale" ending. His story is not really a story at all, but "snapshots" neatly arranged one next to the other. The booklet is indeed like an illustrated hunter-farmer's "dagboek". But as a pioneer in this field - in both painting and prose - Aschenborn is important, and his contribution is therefore valuable.

In /

---

46). A.C. Bouman: Kuns in Suid-Afrika. pg. 27.

In the same year as Aschenborn's Gemsbuck book Sangiro's (47)well-known Uit Oerwoud en Vlakte was published. Die lotgevalle van 'n leeufamilie - the main story in the book - was written by a homesick Stellenbosch student, and this will undoubtedly contribute to the idealized character of the story. Nevertheless, the writer maintains in the foreword that the imagination plays no part, but that he has attempted to describe accurately the life and habits of the animals that he heas learnt to know intimately during his youthful years in Central Africa. P.J.Nienaber qualifies this statement: " . . . wat hy bedoel, is dat hy by sy noukeurige waarneming niks bygefantaseer het nie. In die werklikheid lê die bekoring van sy dierverhale juis daarin dat sy groot verbeeldingskrag hom in staat gestel het om die diere na die innerlike uit te beeld. Die werklikheid het in sy siel 'n nuwe kleur aangeneem en toe hy dit in sy boek weergegee het, was dit soos 'n skildery en nie 'n foto nie." (48).

In Simba Sangiro tells the reader directly: " . . . 'n mens (kon) jou selfs so 'n bietjie in die rol van roofdier indink terwyl jy die gedagtes teuelloos oor die wye land laat sweef." (pg. 23.) so explaining to some extent the sensitive and sympathetic animal description. In Uit oerwoud en vlakte Sangiro idealizes the animals and the country where they live. The reader is convinced of the magnificent, awe-inspiring beauty of the country in the very first paragraphs of the book, and later he is convinced, too, of the nobility, honour and intelligence of the animals.

Sangiro's style is similar to that of D.F. Malherbe. He reveals the romantic vision of the idealist, and although he often "paints" a traditionally "beautiful" picture, he far more frequently creates the mysterious, emotionally laden atmosphere by suggesting sounds. In this too, his work is similar to that of Malherbe: ". . . 'n vlakvoëltjie begin oorkant teen die berg sy welkomsliedjie, helder en trillend soos die doudruppels waartussen hy sit, aan die eerste lig te sing." (Uit oerwoud en vlakte. pg. 67.) Notice how an intense feeling is added to the picture by the word trillend and by the comparison of the helder en trillend with doudruppels. This immdiately adds a lyrical quality to the description of an everyday occurence. Examples such as these are plentiful in Sangiro's work.

Like /

---

47). Pseudonym for A.A. Pienaar.
48). P.J. Nienaber: Die dier in ons letterkunde. Tydskrif vir wetenskap en kuns. Nuwe reeks, deel 6. no. 2.

Like Malherbe, Sangiro too makes use of long, rhythmic sentences and present participles, but unlike Malherbe he does break the monotonous regularity by sudden speeding up or by an abrupt stop.

The sketch - In die oerwoud - is entirely descriptive, and it is "een van die skoonste stukkies prosa in Afrikaans, waarin Sangiro se styl op sy beste tot uiting kom, . . . veral die inleidende gedeelte is in sy geheel ene sangerigheid, waardeur dit verhef word tot een van ons suiwerste voorbeelde van kunsprosa wat ontdaan is van alle opsetlike mooiskrywery." (49).

Die eerste lig word deur byna elke dier met sy eienaardige geluid begroet. Met tussenposes word die verskillende klanke van die nag herhaal, dog slegs 'n paar keer in halfslaap. Dan begin die dagdiere te roer. Nouliks het fisante oral in die bos mekaar begin toeroep, of 'n swerm horingbekke verlaat met sware vleuelslae hul sitplekke hier digby in die bome en kondig luid die begin van 'n nuwe dag aan. Hul ergerlike geskreeu vervul die lug rondom en sou genoeg wees om 'n vreemdeling in die bosse skrik aan te jaag; nooit her die natuur 'n dier van 'n meer wanklinkende stem voorsien om sy vreugde en lewenslus mee uit te druk nie. Nou eens weergalm daar skelnote, soos dié van Kaffertjies wat slae kry, dan rek dit uit tot lang en aaklige krete, soos 'n sterwende in sy wanhoop mag laat hoor, om dan skielik weer met 'n crescendo-beweging tot 'n volle koor van alle moontlike en onmoontlike geluide op te styg - en almal deurmekaar, soos 'n trop waansinnige hekse gaan hulle te kere. Ander swerms verder af word aangevuur deur die vir hulle ongetwyfeld opwekkend-klinkende môregroet en vlieg skreeuend die lug in. Ook renostervoëltjies laat êrens in die bos hul klaende getjier hoor, en hoër op in die berg klink die skril trompetnote van olifante. (Uit oerwoud en vlakte. pg. 150 - 151.)

Note how accurately the sounds of the early morning have been observed and expressed. Note how dignity and even a classic beauty is given to the whole by the heavy, slow moving prose, the many syllabled and combined words.

Sangiro also gives visual descriptions of the animals he sees near the drinking place, e.g. an accurate and full description is given of a very decorative kind of monkey, but when the writer can describe the sounds these creatures make, he again achieves great heights. (50).

Die lotgevalle van 'n leeufamilie and Renosterlewe are not merely lyrical, descriptive sketches, but contain a definite developing theme and convey a message: that of the drama and tragedy of the animals' life. Therefore, in these two stories the writer is primarily sympathetic towards the animal while the hunter is practically despised. In the tale about the lion family the nobility of the animal is emphasized, but /

---

49). Coetzee en Hattingh: Afrikaanse Letterkunde. pg 101.
50). Appendix 2: no 46.

but the tragedy develops because Man - who is physically the weaker - can exterminate the lion through his sly cunning. It is this point of view, this admiration of the animals that mainly creates the idealized character of the work. Also the to some extent human qualities in the animals add to the idealisation. The writer often reveals his love for the animals in humorous or tender passages proving, once again, a very accurate observation. (51).

Both Aschenborn's Gemsbuck book and Sangiro's Uit oerwoud en vlakte have the same aim, viz: to reveal the beauty, the charm, the harshness of the animal world of Africa to others. The two writers even make use of the same theme: the adventures of young animals that have lost the protection of their elders. But while Aschenborn's book is merely briefly informative, giving barely an outline in a simple, documentary manner, Sangiro is the artist who can recreate his experiences in such a way that his work forms a valuable, individual whole which gives a far fuller and far more accurate image of the African wild life, because "Sangiro het heel besonder hoedanighede as mens, waardeur sy verhale uitstyg bokant die gewone jagverhaal, waardeur hy die gebied van die volkskuns verlaat en ryp kultuurkuns lewer." (52).

In striking contrast to Sangiro's idealist vision and lyrical style is the harsh, objective recording and abrupt, quick moving prose of C.G. and E.B. Hobson. Sangiro is the animal lover and hunter who in particular focusses attention on the big and the noble; on the lion, the rhinoceros; who sets his tale in the grotesque, luxuriant beauty of the equatorial jungle. The Hobsons are like observing scientists watching the smaller species of animals - the jackal, wild dog, baboon - in the arid land of the Kalahari. The theme of the Hobsons' books is the never-ending, cruel, vicious war in the animal world. One has to kill the other to live, and he in turn must be sly, cunning and cruel if he is to survive another day. There is never any consideration or sympathy for another in this world. The only kindness may be that of the mother for her young. She will risk her life to save /

---

51). Appendix 2: no. 47.
52). Coetzee en Hattingh. Op.cit. pg. 100.

save it, but even that is temporary as Adoonsie, the little baboon, found out when the older baboon drove him away from a nourishing desert plant (Kees). While in Sangiro's story war is waged mainly against man, in the Hobsons' work man seldom makes an appearance at all. Sangiro himself is part of the story, the Hobsons are behind the scenes. But in the Hobsons' as well as in Sangiro's work the reader is always conscious of the writers' sound knowledge of the animals habits.

The Hobsons often describe an animal ritual in detail in a language that enables quick reading, that describes accurately and precisely with the mimimum of conscious effort. In addition a touch of humour is often added causing the reader to take a more personal interest in the characters (53). At other times the cunning of the animals, desperate to protect their young, is described (54). In such instances the amused observation is no longer apparent, and this more serious atmosphere is achieved by a subtle change in sentence construction. There is less caricature and more swift action. In the humorous passages one may find, for example: "So 'n more dan spog en pronk en steun kommandant Kees gewoonlik day dit 'n aardigheid is. " (Kees. pg. 19). Here the amusing seriousness is expressed particularly in the choice of verbs and their relative position in the sentence. A laugh at the serious old baboon kommandant is definitely there.

The Hobsons' books are full of adventure, of interesting facts bout animal life, written in an entertaining style. Through this they are a valuable contribution to the Afrikaans animal literature. But artistically the Hobsons' work does not surpass that by Sangiro. The language, though typical, picturesque Afrikaans, does not have the same intensity as that of Sangiro. There are mannerisms that eventually become disturbing. The general vision and conception is inclined towards the scientific, and is rather impersonal as opposed to Sangiro's deeply sensitive and personal approach.

Op Safari by Sangiro is considered the first Afri huntingtale that can claim to be literature (55.) It is written in the same lyrical style as Uit oerwoud en vlakte. Several fine, romantic "paintings" of the vast, powerful

Central /

---

53). Appendix 2: no. 48.
54). Appendix 2: no. 49.
55). G.S. en P.J. Nienaber: Die Afrikaanse dierverhaal. pg. 26

Central African scene are presented which are reminiscent to similar passages in Uit Oerwoud en Vlakte. The great difference in the two works lies in the change of aspect. In Op Safari Sangiro is on the side of the hunters, and he now considers the action from the human beings' point of view.

Apart from Sangiro F.J. Schoeman is "ons simpatiekste en beste jagverhaalskrywer." (56). In his books there are only flashes of animal description as the animals are quickly noted by the hunter. There is one exception - Strepies, die sebratjie - where the "life story" of a young zebra is told with delightful humour and detail which is typical of Schoeman's style. But usually Schoeman sees the animals in passing while they are hidden in the bushes (57).

An interesting aspect of Schoeman's work is his use of the animal in the Zulu's language and superstition. Zulu folklore and customs were Schoeman's special field of study, and whenever he went out on a hunting expedition he would note down whatever new expression, story or custom he heard. In his books he makes use of this knowledge. He speaks to the native servants in their idiom:

"Jy slaan die slang op sy kop, Lewies. Sulkes soos ek en jy en ons soort brul net wanneer ons die vyand se hart op 'n skerp stok steek. Ons moes nie ons asem voer die jong bulletjies nie ..." (Fanie se veldskooldae. pg 21)

He allows his own form of expression to be influenced by this native idiom, even when there is no conversation with the Zulu:

Dié keer was dit Jekkie wat moes bontstaan, maar sy was 'n bokkie wat nie deur een hond vasgekeer word nie. (Fanie se veldskooldae. pg 50).

Here human beings are synonymous to animals: the young girl compared to a quickly reacting little buck, and her friend - Fanie - and his father, who are at that moment teasing her, compared to hunting dogs.

The Zulu soldiers honour their ruler thus:

"Leeu; kalf van die olifant; vöël wat al die ander voëls opvreet; . . . buffelbul op wie se vel 'n hele impi se assegaie g'n merkie laat nie;" (Groot Spore. pg. 29, 30.)

and when Schoeman is brought before the king he greets him by adressing him as:

"Swartmaanhaarleeu wat brul dat 'n hele impi se skilde bewe." (Groot Spore. pg 30).

He/

56). Niemeier: Afrikaanse dierverhaal. pg. 27.
57). Appendix 2, no. 50.

He joins the Zulus in a great hunting expedition to kill animals for the witch doctor's medicine and an induna ennumerates the animals required:

Hy het begin deur vir my op sy vingers af te tel watter dier- en reptielsoorte daar ingesamel moes word vir die koning om sy groot medisyne te maak. Naas die reeds genoemde drie slangsoorte, die renosterbul en die buffels, het hy nog die volgende genoem: 'n swartmaanhaar-leeu, 'n luiperd, 'n olifantbul en 'n seekoei, 'n uitgegroeide bobbejaanmannetjie en 'n hiena en 'n <u>inyangelezane</u> (Groot Spore. pg. 57.)

In cases like these, Schoeman is often more scientific than artistic, presenting the reader with interesting facts about indigenous beliefs, but adding little to the development of the story. Sometimes the scientific attitude gains the upper hand and definitely hampers the pace and breaks the unity, but at other times his scientific observation forms part of the whole. For example, in another hunting trip he records the natives' belief in the animal's intelligence (58).

Eventually Schoeman himself appears to be imbued with the mysterious beliefs of the African tribes. In <u>Op ver plaie</u> he is a believer in a legendary horse which very frequently figures in Bushmen stories. This horse is a mighty leader of a large herd of zebras, and Schoeman is determined to find him. For him this horse stands as the symbol of freedom, and he expresses in prose that which so many Afrikaners have expressed before - particularly in poetry: the longing for the wide open spaces, away from the cities and industry, free to move at will.

Legend is a strong force in this story, and in the book a strange, symbolic mystery is constantly alongside observed fact. This adds an intensity and a deeper meaning to the book that is lacking in Schoeman's other work. The "aaii ... ai ... a" of the eagle is heard again and again like "'n stukkie van groot Afrika se siel" (1g 2) intensifying the strangeness, reminding the reader of the quest of symbolic freedom. Opposed to the symbolism, are realistic and humorous little scenes again revealing Schoeman's power of observation, but usually a word or a suggestion leaves the reader to complete the picture.

When at last the horse is found, he is only sensed and heard; not seen nor touched, so again emphasizing the symbolism of the entire quest. <u>Op ver plaie</u> is probably the only "animal-hunting" book which is not entirely realistic, but which - influenced by Bushman folklore - introduces an imaginative /

---

58). Appendix 2. no. 51.

imaginative quality which is very refreshing. It might be developed in other works so that the South African animal stories will not be descriptive and informative only, but will have a new, individual character and an additional interest.

The animal does not feature so often in poetry as it does in prose. C.M. van den Heever has written a few impressions of animals, each ending with the inevitable death of the animal (Die springbok, Die meerkat) or the threat of death - Die diere. The last poem has painterly qualities, and it forms a good complement to Sangiro's prose sketch, In die oerwoud. (59).

Opperman writes a concentrated, yet descriptive verse in which an idea similar to that expressed by Van den Heever is present, viz: death is always near the animal, but with an implication that it is near to human beings too:

> Ons sien 'n eland stadig nader kom
> maar wei as trop rustig met hom;
> dan tref 'n pyl en weet ons weer
> die dood wei tussen ons vermom.
>
> (Engel uit die klip.
> Dicreriem.)

In the poetry of Roy Campbell the wild animal takes an important place. C.J.D. Harvey notes that with animals as symbols and images Campbell is "always at ease." (60).

Campbell is probably one of South Africa's most powerful poets, and possibly the most significant English poet from South Africa. But "he is . . . one of those writers (. . .) whom it seems impossible to discuss on literary grounds without including a great deal about his personality, his 'philosophy', his politics and other seemingly irrelevant matters, until the poems themselves are almost lost sight of." (61).

Indeed, his unusual vision, his individual, bitter point of view and his sarcastic statements are startling when one first reads the poems. Yet a poem like A Veld Eclogue: The Pioncers does "shock" a general image into an entirely new light, into an extreme light that is far removed from popular tradition. Campbell's poems cause the reader to readjust

the /

---

59) Appendix 2. no. 52.
60). C.J.D. Harvey: The poetry of Roy Campbell. Standpunte, vol. 5, no. 1. October, 1950.
61). Ibid.

the popular conception of South African people, animals and landscape. Campbell often presents the less heroic aspect of his subject, and so enables the reader who is conversant with the more stately, noble expressions of that same subject to readjust a possibly one-sided idea into one which is more complete. But Campbell is frequently on dangerous ground. His ambition to make a different, an unconventional, a startling statement sometimes gives the impression of childishness, of a remark made by "the spoilt boy." (62). In To A Pet Cobra one finds the following lines which suggest the "spoilt boy" attitude:

> Sired by starvation, suckled by neglect,
> Hate was the surly tutor of our youth:
> I too can hiss the hair of men erect
> Because my lips are venomous with truth.

If the reader is able to ignore the "unpoetic" qualities in Campbell's work, and if he concentrates on the form of expression, the powerful technique and the artistic originality of vision - untouched by the satirical "originality" - the importance of the poems is clearly felt:

"The outstanding quality of his poetry is its force and vigour, the brilliance of its images and the sureness of its rhythms. His verse forms and metrical patterns are invariably traditional and one imagines his contempt for verse libre or the more experimental forms of modern poetry is as profound as for other forms of 'intellectual progress'." (63).

Campbell himself admits that he has been influenced considerably by other poets: "To those interested in the chronological development of these poems I would say that the surest index would be the lessening influence of Rimbaud which was everywhere present in The Flaming Terrapin: the impressionism of that poem gradually gives place to a hardness and clearness of [illegible] derived chiefly from Baudelaire in the Zulu Girl [illegible]t Cobra, ... Several of the best of these poems [illegible]t paraphrases, notably the Hermes on the Carmargue which was 'lifted' from the great Provencal poet Mistral who has had a powerful influence on my later work published after Adamastor." (64).

Critics remark on these strong influences too. Where then, is one to find Campbell's original contribution? Probably it can be found in his strong, accurate, typical expression of Africa: " . . . It is obvious that the rich luxuriant sub-tropical /

---

62). E. Davis: The Spoilt Boy in Roy Campbell. Trek, March, 1951.
63). C.J.D. Harvey. Op cit.
64). Preface to Adamastor: June, 1930.

sub-tropical coastal belt of Natal and Zululand, the higher, rugged and more austere hinterland of South Africa, in short all the shapes, forms, colours, sights, sounds and even scents of our magnificent southern land made a tremendous and lasting impact on the sensitive mind and imagination of Campbell as a child. . . . . Without them he would not have written some of his finest poems. . . . .

Here I do not merely wish to emphasise the thematic origin of such poems. There is something - fundamental power, elemental energy, fierce almost primative surge and strength, call it what you will - in the inmost fibre and very essence of these poems, that it can only be of this land." (65).

The following lines from the Pet Cobra illustrate this characterisation:

> Where the hard rock is barren, scorched the spring,
> Shrivelled the grass, and hot the wind of death
> Hornets the crag with whirred metallic wing -
> We drew the fatal secret of our breath:
> By whirlwinds bulged forth, whose funnelled suction
> Scrolls the spun sand into a golden spire,
> Our spirits leaped, hosannas of destruction,
> Like desert lilies forked with tongues of fire.

Campbell frequently concentrates on the hard, clear cut and sharp images and sounds, so, incidentally, adding another typical aspect of Africa. He speaks of the wind's metallic wing, of the cobra's coils which are vaulted with electric power (To A Pet Cobra), and the striking poem The Zulu Girl is so clear cut and devoid of any soft "mother-ly" qualities that the harshness of the arid, relentless Africa is superbly expressed.

In contrast to his usual crude, stark and startling poems, The Zebras has a romantic beauty and a soft lyrical quality not altogether unlike the visual images created by the romantic Sangiro. (66). But although the poem creates a clear visual image, and although it has an idyllic beauty, it is not so striking, so powerful nor so symbolic of Africa as the Zulu Girl with its harsh relentlessness. The Zulu Girl makes a lasting impact on the reader; The Zebras fades away quickly, like the moment the poet describes.

Campbell's Zebras - particularly the last lines - are reminiscent of G.A. Watermeyer's powerful poem Die Hings which Antonissen describes as: "'n prag-ode aan die geheime vuur van die wordse lewe." (67). The natural freedom and wildness /

---

65). Uys Krige: Roy Campbell; Profiles. Trek. October 1951.
66). Appendix 2. no. 53.
67). Antonissen: Die Afrikaanse letterkunde. pg 277.

wildness of the animals are so strongly expressed here that any suggestion of the conquered domestic animal is eliminated. The horses of this poem are governed by nature and not by man.

In Ballade van die Bloeddorstige Jagter and in Dood van die Wildegans Watermeyer reveals the cruelty of the human hunter. With the exception of Sangiro's Lotgevalle van 'n Leeufamilie Watermeyer is possibly one of the few South Africans who has written artistically valuable work in which the human hunter is regarded with contempt. In fact the feeling of contempt is stronger in Watermeyer's work than in Sangiro's. This is particularly apparent in Ballade van die Bloeddorstige Jagter, while in Dood van die Wilde-gans one finds the more descriptive poem with a suggestion of the heartlessness of the hunter.

In the ballade realism is left immediately in the first lines:

> Die geelkapel se kronkels lê
> drie sirkels om die maan.

and so a suggestion of the supernatural at once creates a dream - or nightmare - world in which wounded animals accuse the hunter of wilful slaughter. In this poem there is no sign of the accustomed realistic animal description, but attention is focussed sharply on one certain characteristic of the animal, so intensifying the unreal atmosphere and adding a surrealist element: "Ek kelk die sonlig in my keel / en rym die rondebessie ryp" describes the wild canary; "Die speerpunt van die wind was ek,/ goud ster wat in die daglig skiet" the hawk. The eland bul is described: "My skoner en my skof rond bó / die trots van elke horingdier" and the leopard is: " . . . . die drinker van die bloed, / die ding wat donker loop". While the reader is made aware of the perfection of the animals, attention is also sharply focussed on the wounded, mutilated and kill victims of the hunter who kills only for pleasure and not out of necessity. So a contrast is presented between the perfect and the broken; between the necessary and the unnecessary. But although there are many striking images, a really powerful whole is not achieved. The tension - strongly suggested at the beginning of the poem - does not increase and does not build up to the desired and essential climax. There is no develop ment. There is hardly a change of rhythm which could assist in a development of tension (as is well illustrated in

Opperman's /

Oppermann's Journal van Jurik), and which could assist in the intensifying of the meaning of the poem. The reader is not assured of the ultimate conviction of the hunter. The poem appears to be incomplete.

"Daar ontbreek iets in die uitbeelding van die spanning tussen die diere en die jagter. Hy reageer nie voldoende op die diere se beteug waar hulle as klaer en hy as aangeklaagde teenoor mekaar staan nie. Die algemeen-menslike waarheid dat hy wat geweld gebruik deur geweld sal ondergaan, word nie oortuigend gesuggereer nie." (68).

Watermeyer's way of depicting the animals is a personal one. His clear cut symbols that represent the animals are vivid and powerful, and certainly add a new visual element to Afrikaans poetry which could possibly be expressed in painting too.

Although the animal has been used so successfully and frequently in literature, the painters apparently have not fully realised the possibilities of this majestic, decorative and expressive subject matter. Jack Pieters has attempted to paint a picture of a group of rhinoceros in an impressionistic manner. The painting is technically competent; the colour pleasingly controlled and the painter has managed to represent the protective unity of the surroundings and the animals. But impressionism cannot suggest the grandeur and ferociousness of this bad-tempered animal. The picture consequently lacks power and interest.

Simon Hodge has depicted the antelopes of the National Parks in a charming, decorative manner. Yet the animals depicted are too tame, too gentle, too well-fed, too protected to convince the onlooker of any excitement, or of any thrill that wild beauty can give and which is so often mentioned by the writers who have described similar animals. Hodge's pictures can be appreciated for their delicate charm, and for the skilled use use of water colour. The application of paint, the colour, the decorative realism all indicate an admirer of Russell Flint. This fine, aerial English quality is superficially attractive but it is foreign to an arid, cruel, hard African landscape, and it is not expressive of the country's animals which echo that toughness and relentlessness.

The /

---

68). Coetzee en Hattingh: Afrikaanse Letterkunde. pg 81.

The painter who has come the closest to representing the animal population of South Africa, and whose work frequently reminds one of the poetic beauty of a description by Sangiro, Schoeman or Roy Campbell, is Walter Battiss.

"The importance of Battiss does not lie only in the fact that h is one of the foremost pioneers of modern art in this country, that as an artist his research in the field of prehistoric art is of countless value, but also that by his own work, his paintings and woodcuts, he penetrates the soul of Africa with gripping intensity." (69).

Battiss was brought up in the tradition of the English Royal Academy. The old English culture in general and in particular paintings in the Royal Academy style were appreciated and admired in his home. Consequently he grew up to believe that to represent the superficial visual world in an academic or impressionistic manner was the only necessity in painting. He believed then that nothing more was required of art, that a recording of the visual was the only essential. When he accidentally discovered a prehistoric implement in the Karroo - the beauty of which delighted him - he came to realize that there is an art other than the impressionistic and realistic. After this accidental discovery of an ancient tool, he began his research into primitive African art. In contrast to the archaeologists who had studied cave art previously and who had set a scientific standard of realism to evaluate the paintings, Battiss studied the work from an aesthetic point of view. He realized that realism is unimportant in this work, but that an essential spiritual quality, which penetrates a people's being is that peculiar living power expressed in the rock shelters. He realized then too, that it was the deeperspiritual symbolism which was absent in the realistic work of South Africa. To be a South African artist - according to Walter Battiss (70) - one must advance beyond the visual, and attempt to express a "Spirit of Africa." This is difficult for a South African with a European background and tradition. Battiss explained further that a South African painter cannot be a Bushman or a member of any other indigenous tribe. The painter must recognize this, and therefore he should not attempt to produce primitive art. But he should learn from the indigenous primitive; he should try to understand the essential symbolism of the African primitive and build his own from that. This development is still /

---

69). Herman Hahndiek: Preface to Fragments of Africa.
70). Interview with Walter Battiss. Pretoria, 8 February, 1958.

still in its early stages because South Africans have been slow to realize that mere descriptive realism was inadequate to express the character of their country. But now, Battiss believes, a characteristic element is beginning to appear in South African painting which distinguishes it from contemporary work elsewhere.

Battiss has explained his own "self-dicovery" in the following manner:

"When I came down from the mountain of initiation I was articulate and free. For I had conversed with the white rocks and lilac trees, the coucal and the rhebuck. I had conversed too with the ancient men of Africa who spoke to me through their picture writings on the walls of their crumbling rock-shelters.

The twisted rivers and the endless veld spoke of animate and inanimate space.

At night the waters and flats reflected the macrocosmic spheres above my head. So the planets and their moons and star suns, twin comets and nebulae shone hesitatingly upon the river fish and upon the long tambookie grass.

The hollow of the mountain held a white man's farm. When I looked on the clear contours of the new white boy in Africa who had been born there in the Mopani trees, who loved his father's cattle, who knew where to find under the ground the rare sweet honey of the small wild bee, who knew what red wood made the lasting fire, who knew all the African boy knew, then I understood the white boy belonged to the ancient men and was thus, with me, a modern man.

Finding these things and selfishly possessing them had changed me.

All this was my peculiar discovery but I had no desire to paint an anecdote about them but rather to make pictures of them in such a way that I exposed the happy change they had worked within me.

Yes, I made and want to make pictures which are a colour language of the haphazard experiences of my African existence.

These pictures I call fragments of Africa but they are also fragments of myself." (71).

Battiss was "articulate and free." Released from a meaningless tradition which had caused him to paint mild, charming, delicately coloured impressions of the landscape. He was now free to paint with vivid colours, intensifying an emotional reality. He need no longer be bound to the rules of visual perspective and accurate realistic drawing. Perspective and drawing would in future be submitted to and employed for decorative and intricate pattern, which in his most recent work has no suggestion of depth or distance whatsoever. Three dimensional space eventually plays no part.

Yet /

---

71). Walter Battiss: Introduction to Fragments of Africa.

Yet in earlier pictures - e.g. the Red Grotto - he creates a mysterious depth which appears to be unending. Possibly this type of picture was inspired by the caves themselves: "My own research in the field of ancient African arts has revealed itself in paintings of ancient walls, cavernous rocks and elongated figures and animals." (72).

In the preface to Fragments of Africa Hahndiek goes on to characterize Battiss' work in a poetic manner:

"He who dwells only on its (Africa's) peaceful charm, its poetic beauty, its delectable patches of Eden; he who idealises the South African scene in romantic pictures that satisfy the casual and sentimental eye, is like the man who notes the song of the bird but ignores the roar of the lion.

Walter Battiss is aware of the bird, but he seeks the lion first. His work is inspired by and charged with the force, the majesty, the bizarre beauty, the ruthless primitive laws which are the peculiar qualities of that vast and impressive theatre which is South Africa.

And yet, though consequently his colouring is often vivid, his conception bold and powerful, the characteristics of a fierce primitivism of Africa, there is always the suggestion of the song of the bird, the delicate rustling of the grass, there is always the evidence in his work of a subtle loveliness, of a strange enchanting poetry."

Although the break with delicate impressionism was definite, the most obvious change which typifies the earlier work, is an intensification of colour. (73). The landscapes of this period may be described as expressionist. They are bold, determined, vividly coloured, essentially summaries of the visual African landscape. The riot of strong complementary colours is expressive of the African heat; the bold brushwork of primitive harshness. These pictures still retain a visual perspective, the colours still have a fundamental base of realism - i.e. skies are still to be recognized as such and are still blue, grass is green or yellow ochre, but the basic colours are strongly intensified. The shapes too, can be recognized to represent fields, mountains, clouds, trees and human figures. Yet a strong sense of a decorative intricate pattern begins to control the entire composition and realism recedes.

In /

---

72). Walter Battiss: New Art and Old Art in South Africa. Studio. September, 1952.

73). It is interesting to note that previously Battiss appeared to be wary of too much colour. In the prose sketch - Die Berge In - by Uys Krige, the writer records Battiss' warning to Terence McCaw to beware of too much colour.

In the Eternal Palace (fig. 24) "Bushman" symbols of the human figure and African animals are superimposed upon an indefinite landscape. In this picture one can distinctly recognize rocks, a pool and a distant horizon. Linear and aerial perspective still play a part in this composition. But these remainders of realism are unimportant in the picture. The mystery of the unusual indigenous figures attract the attention, and the spectator senses that inexplicable "Aaii ... ai ... a" of which Schoeman was aware as he travelled through a land imbued with legend and superstition. Both Battiss and Schoeman were able to assimilate that "Spirit" and very frequently re-create it in their work. In the painting the clearly delineated little figures appear to be scattered arbitrarily and with no preconceived design over the area representing rock and pool. It is interesting to note, however, that in most cases the little symbols are slightly transparent, carrying within their outlines the colour of the surface upon which they are superimposed, although they are accentuated by flashes of brighter colour. It would seem as if the lines and patterns in the real rock had suggested those little figures to the painter. This intangible quality of the figures does suggest a country which is densely populated with an incomprehensible people, who are everywhere and make their presence felt constantly, while they cannot, however, be seen. In many instances Schoeman records similar sensations. He is conscious of people, of animals, of mythological spirits, but he cannot see them, and - as in the case of the majestic Bushman horse - he cannot catch them.

The pattern of rock plays a large part in the Eternal Palace. The suggestion of a rock surface is stronger in Red Hartebeest, and a number of other paintings using African animals as subject matter. The "rock surface" is the boundary of the landscape. In other words, there is no suggestion of distance, of a horizon, of veld, of sky. The animals are arranged as a two dimensional pattern upon this flat area. The paint surface is rough and slightly granular, emphasising the suggestion of a rock surface. The colour is consciously arranged in a distinct pattern. Red and yellow framing bands and diagonals are definite leads in the picture. The shapes of the animals are superimposed upon these areas of colour with a certain regularity. In Yellow Afternoon there is no suggestion of a

rock /

rock surface as in the previous picture, but angular patterns suggest a complete rocky landscape and primitive buck. It would appear that in order to create this symbol of a landscape, his "rock surface" pictures were a necessary preliminary. The colour in Yellow Afternoon is brilliant and warm, yet there is a strong overall unity. Although most of the animals in this picture are painted in a contrasting bright yellow, both the unity in the colour and the similarity of the shapes cause the animals to appear camouflaged. One would like to imagine that if the painter had not noted them the casual observer would have passed them by. In a similar manner Sangiro makes the reader aware of the well protected rock rabbits which form such a complete unity with the rock.

In these earlier pictures the colour, although bright, is nevertheless matt and shallow. In the later work the colour intensifies in its brilliance and a deep glow suffuses the entire picture. It even appears to be luminous. A predecessor to these glowing pictures, and possibly a bridge between the earlier and the later work, is Pictures on the Rocks. (74). Maybe the focal point in this composition is the"African" wall design in startling, contrasting white on a dark, luminous ground. But the spectator is far more interested in a "herd" of glowing red cattle - represented by indetermined areas of colour within which rich black outlines delineate toy-like animals - and two maids herding them. The "herd" forms a distinct angular African line pattern which forces the eye to move constantly over the entire canvas. This leading line composition is typical of Battiss' work of this period. He does not allow the eye to come to rest on one central point. Usually it is a colour line or a band or a series of circular shapes that leads the eye. Line, indicating figures or plants, is practically always superficial and often appear to be capricious.

Together with the introduction of the glowing colour - usually intensified to an unusual degree of luminosity by a very dark perimeter - Battiss temporarily neglects the

lead /

---

74). Because Battiss never dates his work, the pictures cannot be placed in a chronological order with any certainty.

lead line composition and works with a central motif. But not very much later the painter extends the central motif to form a glowing all over pattern upon a dark, night-like ground. It would now appear that at this stage Battiss has entirely absorbed the lesson rock art had to teach him, and that henceforth he is able to create his own African symbolism with his own personal colour which is of primary importance in his work, and with the new "primitive" shapes and patterns inspired and suggested by the African people, plants, animals, birds, pebbles and rocks.

Although it is frequently possible to analyse a Battiss composition by picking out diagonal, angular, square and straight bands or areas of colour, or by seeing a circular-diagonal movement in the robust application of paint, the Battiss pictures usually leave the impression that the painter has intuitively felt his way. A number of his most recent pictures (75) of animals, figures, birds, African wall designs leave the impression that once the first figure or shape was placed the others would grow out of it. Wherever there is a space on the canvas another shape is arbitrarily fitted in. Battiss himself explains that his pictures do develop in this unpreconceived manner. The woodcut technique he applies more or less illustrates this free growth of a picture too. The woodcuts have a few essential units - representing a figure, a buck, an abstract shape, etc. - each which is repeated several times. But each time the various blocks are placed in varying positions. Frequently the same blocks are used in different compositions and the variety of the final products appears to be almost inexhaustable.

A summary of Battiss' work can be seen in the mural painted for Pretoria on occasion of its centenary celebrations (fig. 25). This large painting is symbolic of the capital's neighbouring villages and districts many of which bear the names of animals, e.g. Olifantsfontein, Elandsfontein, Baviaanspoort, Daniespoort, Hartebeespoort are some of the names. Each is illustrated by a group of animals suggested by its name. Although the colour in this composition is matt, chalky and controlled by a neutral /

---

75). Exhibited in 1956 and 1957.

neutral tone which reminds one of the earlier work, there are brilliant accents: e.g. the yellow fruit held by the grey monkey in the top left corner, the brilliant red of flowering aloes down towards the lower left of the picture. The surface pattern is once more suggestive of rock and within each area an animal group is placed. The eye is led across the picture by a subtle and intricate interplay of diagonals of changing tone and points are emphasized by small areas of brilliant, luminous primary colour. The majority of animals are large and slightly reminiscent of the large animals depicted in rock shelters. Most of them suggest an aloof dignity contrasted, though, by a little group of buck - "Bushman buck" - which appear to represent no district or village, but which assist the composition and add a delightful touch of humour.

In many ways Battiss' work is similar in subject matter and feeling to that by several writers. It is interesting to know that C.M. van den Heever admitted to Battiss that the latter's researches into South African rock art were directly responsible for a chapter in Jeug (76). Here an old Bantu herdboy tells his very young European companion an ancient Bushman legend after the two had looked at the paintings on the cave wall.

Battiss' interest in the primitive culture of Africa is patent in his work in which primitive symbolism frequently plays a part. In this his work resembles that by P.J. Schoeman who, as has been noted, almost inevitably includes a primitive element in his writing. But - with the exception of Op Ver Paaie - Schoeman's interest in the primitive appears to be primarily scientific and the reader is aware of the notebook in which Schoeman consciously and meticulously records idioms, stories, customs, etc. In Battiss' original paintings - i.e. those apart from the scientific copies of rock art - the note book is put aside. The spectator is indeed conscious of a strong "Bushman" influence in the work of approximately 1952, but even here it is fully absorbed and incorporated into a spontaneous expression.

A characteristic which Battiss has in common with Sangiro, Schoeman, the Hobsons and Roy Campbell is the accurate observation and the intimate knowledge of the animals and their movements, their attitudes, their oneness with /

---

76). Jeug Chapter 1, part 6.

with the surroundings. Compare the painting Animal Medley with any description by Sangiro, Schoeman and even Fitzpatrick of animals in camouflage. Compare Yellow Afternoon with Sangiro's description of rock rabbits in their natural environment, and a more direct parallel in subject, but not in feeling is found if Sangiro's passage is compared with part of the Pretoria mural. Compare Baboons with Hobsons' Kaes to see that Battiss knows the serious antics of the baboon as well as the Hobsons.

Whereas it is known that Sangiro, Schoeman and Campbell gained their knowledge from direct contact with the animals during hunting trips, and the Hobsons through daily contact that life on a remote farm offers, it seems probable that Battiss gained his knowledge indirectly from the cave paintings. This does not imply, however, that Battiss has never directly observed his models, but he seems to have discovered them later.

The animals the writers so frequently describe - the kudu, the impala, rock rabbits, birds, elephants, baboons - can all be found in the painter's work. It is interesting, however, that whereas the felines are sometimes found in rock art, and the lion in particular plays such an important part in the work of the writers, Battiss appears to have ignored these animals. Yet, considering the various aims of literature and painting, this peculiarity can be understood. In a story a conflict with a lion or leopard can introduce an element of tension and of a literary contrast: strength opposed to weakness; cunning opposed to stupidity; experience opposed to ignorance. In painting tension and contrast is built up with shapes, lines, colours, tones, and the felines with their regular flowing lines do not offer such good material for the decorative and vigorous painter as the more angular buck. Yet the danger of a nearby lion can be used to build up tension in a story, while the antelopes seldom can be used to create an atmosphere of expectancy.

Although the aspect upon which the writers and the painter concentrate may differ in some respects, the work when seen as a whole forms an adequate and interesting revelation of the African animal.

The Karroo:

This large, untamed area of land holds a strange fascination. It definitely influences people; one may even venture to say that it has a hypnotic influence. Those who live there will usually not wish to depart; visitors are cast under its spell while they are there; and a great number of artists have attempted to express the emotion they have experienced in this semi-desert. When Maurice van Essche was asked if he could explain why so many artists were almost inevitably drawn, challenged to attempt to depict the Karroo, he answered somewhat hesitantly that it was the "spirit of the Karroo" - to be found nowhere else - that compelled one to paint it. This may not appear to be a fully explanatory statement, and yet it does explain. Man does not really understand the Karroo, and above all he cannot control it. In contrast to the passive and submissive coastal region of Natal the appearande of which is almost entirely determined by man's labour, any human endeavour in the Karroo is completely insignificant. The vastness of the Karroo overwhelms the human being's effort to make an impression. The great silence of the Karroo is another aspect that impresses the human being; it is rather frightening, uncanny, again overwhelming and it makes man aware of his insignificance and of his powerlessness. Elisabeth Vermeulen describes this in her fine "letter" about the North West:

Ek staan hier en luister na - niks. In hierdie late uur lê 'n stilte oor alles, gelyk aan die swaar, wagtende stilte wat daar heers in die groot, swart ruimtes tussen die buitenste sterre. Die angskreet van 'n sterwende diertjie, die geblêr van 'n verdwaalde lammetjie raak dadelik gedemp en verlore in so 'n groot ledigheid.
(Van Mens tot Mens.)

Here nature will never be a partner to man. In one year there will be drought with dust storms, death and poverty; the next there will be violent thunder storms, accompanied by hail, floods and shortly after sweet-scented mosaic-fields of flowers and a wealth of exotic bird life; and then again year after year of dust, barren trees and death. (77) . Yet:

77). The following essays describe the enchanting and inexplicable qualities of the Karroo:
Olive Schreiner: South Africa. (Thoughts on South Africa)
Willem van der Berg: Die Asem al Ou Karoo.
Elisabeth Vermeulen: Brief (Van Mens tot Mens.)

Jy voel asof jy betower is en jy is heimelik bevings . . .
Nog nooit in jou lewe het jy so klein gevoel as hier op die eindelose Karoo-vlakte nie. (Willem van der Berg.
Die Asvuil Ou Karoo.)

This sensation of being small and overpowered, of being unable to bring about any significant change is a sensation against which man will rebel. He wishes to conquer and to control. As long as he has not made his conquest he will remain interested in his adversary. Primitive man would endeavour to explain the sensation and would probably incorporate it into a religious belief and would perform a rite to express it. Civilised man, and particularly the highly keyed, sensitive artist, will endeavour to express the sensation by depicting the scene which has made him feel enchanted, secretly afraid, small. If he can express the Karroo, he will have conquered it, he will feel that he has it under his control, he will no longer be "afraid" of the inexplicable and the unknown. Everybody reacts to the Karroo in a personal manner. It is a very subjective reaction which cannot be recreated adequately in a realistic manner, for there is far more in the Karroo than the visual only. It is therefore easy to understand that most artists who have been challenged by the Karroo, will depict it subjectively and emotionally. The better artists will realize that the Karroo with its great mysterious personality can only be expressed symbolically; and the expression can only truely reflect one as, part of the whole personality. All expressions differ widely, particularly in the more personal-subjective arts - painting and poetry. Yet it is interesting to note that a number of the novels discussed above have their setting in the Karroo, and the setting had a very important impact in each case. (78). Elisabeth Vermeulen's Temmers van die Noordweste and its sequels Stormlaagte and Elsa must also be mentioned as novels which are "formed" by the Karroo. In the first and second books in particular, the setting plays an important part. But nevertheless Elisabeth Vermeulen's letter from which has been quoted is a more direct and more sympathetic description /

78). Olive Schreiner: The Story of an African Farm.
Abraham Jonker: Die Plaasverdeling and Die Trekboer.
Mikro: Toilings.

description of the Karroo.

An exceptionally fine essay is Die Asvaal Ou Karoo by Willem van der Berg in which the writer attempts to analyse his reaction to the Karroo. In order to do that he quietly contemplates the land, the climate, the people - white and coloured - the animals, the plants, the night. He gives an accurate, sympathetic description, but he also manages to recreate the atmosphere he experienced. The slow contemplative style does a great deal to create this atmosphere, but also the writer's calm, accurate, appreciative observation and philosophy contribute to a very sensitive remembrance:

Jy staan so mymerend en kyk na die grassies wat tussen die leiklippe waarmee die graf beskerm is, ingedring het, dan na die struik-oorgroeide voetpaadjies en die half verwaarloosde omheining. En dan, verder en nou grootser in die skemering, die eindeloosheid van die vlaktes wat oor al die jare, deur al die oue sedert die laaste besoek van die gletsers, in geen opsig verander het nie. Jy sien die laaste bedrywigheid van die dag op en om die werf, en rondom die klein vestingkie van die menslike besoekers die groot stil velde, en op die westerkim die smeulende vuur van die son. En jy glo vas dat niemand ooit hier kan leef sonder om self, iewers in sy wese, groot en sterk en vry te word soos hierdie wêreld nie. Want wat myself betref: Ek het baie ondervindings in my lewe gehad wat onvergeetlik sal bly. Maar die mooiste hiervan was my kennismaking met die asvaal ou Karoo.

It is almost impossible to find parallels in painting, poetry and prose writing which can be compared with one another. Yet there are a few, e.g. the parallel mentioned above of the setting in Jonker's Trekboer with Dorsdabis by Jentsch. Passages in the two essays by Van der Berg and Elisabeth Vermeulen may remind the reader sometimes of a painting, but the parallel is never complete; there is merely a similarity. On the whole all the works inspired by the Karroo are highly individual, and although pleasing in themselves, seldom expressive of one's own reaction to the Karroo.

Jan Volschenck has depicted the Karroo realistically and the pictures have no emotional value at all. The vast Karroo cannot be depicted satisfactorily in a photographic manner on a small canvas. Nor do the separately

painted /

painted twigs of Karroo bushes assist in recreating that all-enveloping spiritual quality of the Karroo; and the soft grey-pink-mauve colour does not suggest the Karroo's arid power. Volschenck's pictures are too small in vision and conception to express this vast land. (fig. 26).

Pierneef has expressed the flat decorativeness of the Karroo in his usual stylized manner which has a certain impact and grandeur. He represents the mysterious glowing colour of the sunset, suggesting in his pictures the desolateness and the heat. (fig. 27).

The South West African painter Adolph Jentsch - although his pictures have a topographic quality - depicts the aridity with flat, pale, almost toneless colour suggestive of the sun-scorched Karroo, and one may say that he depicts that sensation of helplessness the onlooker experiences by his strange composition. The scraggy Karroo bushes are arbitrarily scattered over almost the entire canvas. The brush strokes appear to be timid, tentative as if put down by a nervous hand. There is no aerial perspective in his work, there is hardly any change in tone value. It is all in a light key. This suggests the endless distance and an almost hopeless and even senseless struggle for life.

Maurice van Essche expresses the decorative and the emotional aspect of the semi-desert by bold, crude patterning with heavy black lines and dark, sombre, hot colours - a green ochre, orange, yellow ochre - brushed in with bold strokes and thick paint. (fig. 28).

Jean Welz expresses the Karroo in a romantic manner. In the picture Karoopad no form is clearly defined. There are merely changes in colour, tone and paint texture. This very successfully suggests a heat haze, even though the colours - a (naples) yellow, orange-red, blue, a mauve-grey - are cool. Dark irregular areas of paint just hint that there are bushes and ditches. The streaks of the painting knife in the thick yellow paint indicate the direction of the road. Thin, transparent paint in the upper part of the picture represents a glaring, hot sky.

Otto Schröder, another South West African painter, has depicted the Namib in a gentle impressionistic-romantic manner, suggesting endless distance dissolving into mist and haze by means of delicate colour and treatment. One colour merges into the other, forming a circling composition which leads the eye into the far background. An

indefinite /

indefinite wisp of darker paint representing smoke emphasizes the composition, and also adds a romantic human touch. The spectator is interested in that smoke: does it come from a travelling train? If so, where is the train going? Is the smoke from a human settlement? a farm? a village?

Walter Battiss has painted a few decorative panels of the Karroo in blazing colour, but he has also painted the symbols of the desert. In these pictures he makes use of primitive African patterns and shapes probably suggested by pebbles and succulents. The colour, contrary to the painter's familiar glowing colour, is controlled and subdued with a unifying tone of grey - suggesting aridity?

Gwelo Goodman, Norine Desmond, Richard Cheales are the names of merely a few of the many more who have attempted to paint the invincible Karroo.

In poetry one possibly finds as many and as varied attempts to express the desert as in painting.

Leipoldt attempts to give a visual image of the many-sided Karroo in Karoo-winter (Die Moormansgat), but he fails for he merely lists his impressions which have no intensity and lack any emotional quality.

I.D. du Plessis depicts the Karroo in a gentler mood which is not so characteristic of the inhospitable district, but rather an occasional gift. Lente in die Karoo (Land van ons Vadere) reminds one strongly of Leipoldt's better work in its joyous description of fields of colour and in its expression of happy abandon. But it is hardly expressive of the essential Karroo.

Uys Krige, South Africa's wandering poet, whose poetry may not be complete from a technical point of view, nevertheless has a personal vision and a deep sincerity - even though that may be light-hearted. He does not attempt to express the Karroo in its entirety, but he suggests its vastness, its many-sidedness, but he does not endeavour to explain it. With the "flashes" of images and comparisons he suggests that he ponders for a moment and then shrugs the problem away. The rhythm of the train in Die Karoo (Die Boerevrou) does not really give him time to ponder, but there is sufficient time for the Karroo to make its lasting impression. This casualness is typical of many of Krige's poems.

In strong contrast is Ernst van Heerden's sombre, philosophic /

Author Harmsen F
Name of thesis The South African landscape in Painting and Literature 1958

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Library website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the Library website.