

Phil van Schalkwyk

**FROM LAAGER TO LAGER:
REFLECTIONS ON AFRIKANER IDENTITY**

I

South Africa is currently celebrating 10 years of democracy, and although many problems still need to be solved, South Africans can be justifiably proud of what has been achieved during the past decade. However, the dark years that went before the dawning of freedom should not be forgotten. And indeed: when one says that one comes from South Africa, people often respond with keywords and names such as “Nelson Mandela”, “Johannesburg”, “gold”, “Sun City”, “Kruger National Park”, “the Big Five”, “Cape Town”, “Table Mountain”, “Rooibos tea”, “wine”, “the country with the little country inside its borders [Lesotho]”, but sadly often also still “apartheid”. “Apartheid”, meaning separateness, is an Afrikaans word, and for many Afrikaners it is regrettable that this specific Afrikaans word has become known throughout the world.

This article is aimed at providing an introduction to the Afrikaner, the group which was primarily responsible for apartheid (although the failure of many white English speaking South Africans to speak out against racist policies and practises furthered the cause of apartheid). Indeed, whether one likes it or not, a large part of 20th century life in South Africa has been shaped by the Afrikaners, descendants of the Dutch colonists who later on came to call themselves and their developing language after the African continent. One cannot understand recent South African history without understanding this obstinate group, who tend to think of themselves as the indigenous white tribe of South Africa. This article is an attempt at analysing Afrikaner identity on the move, their “Great Trek” through history from one “laager” to the next, and beyond.

II

The Afrikaner has gained an extremely negative reputation both within South Africa and abroad. They are notorious for their racism, and prejudice against this group can still be encountered, especially in countries that participated in the struggle against apartheid. But it should be stated right at the outset, even though it may seem obvious, that there is not something exceptionally diabolical about Afrikaners. They do not possess some innate evilness, nor have they been or are they the world's greatest racists. The rise of apartheid was the result of a historical process in South Africa: it followed in the wake of centuries of colonial rule, first Dutch and then British. The mindset of colonialism was fertile ground for apartheid to take root in. Also other historical factors should be taken into consideration: from about 1836 Afrikaners started their exodus (the Great Trek) from the Cape Colony to escape British rule; as pioneers they journeyed into the interior and established farms, often on large tracts of land dispossessed from the indigenous inhabitants. Two Boer republics were established, and soon diamonds were discovered in the Free State, and gold in the Transvaal. This triggered British encroachment and led to the Anglo-Boer War, which lasted from 1899 to 1902. The British eventually resorted to extreme measures in an attempt to bring an end to the war: the so-called "scorched earth" strategy, by which Afrikaner farms and homesteads were burned and the women and children put in large concentration camps, where thousands died of disease, lack of proper sanitation and malnutrition.

The Anglo-Boer War left the Afrikaner defeated, penniless and utterly humiliated, and this gave rise to a resurging Afrikaner nationalism coupled with strong anti-British sentiment. Many Afrikaners were unable to continue farming and had no choice but to go and work in the mines, where they ended up in poor white slums. This process of urbanisation was a next severe disruption of Afrikaner society, because traditionally they had been agriculturalists. However, after the Anglo-Boer War the British relinquished their hard-handed approach in South Africa and opted for a policy of consolidation, extending a hand of friendship and cooperation toward the Afrikaner, but not to the black majority, many of whom also suffered immensely during the war. The large measure of political freedom that the British allowed in the Boer republics provided Afrikaners with the opportunity to resurrect and reorganise themselves both politically and culturally. Former Boer War generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts established a party called *Het Volk* [The Nation], and won the Transvaal elections of 1907.

In 1910 the Union of South Africa was inaugurated, with Louis Botha as its first Prime Minister. Union entailed the merging of the former British (Cape and Natal) and Boer (Transvaal and Free State) colonies to form one united country. But this political settlement was a matter between the British and the Afrikaners

only – the black majority was not consulted. The Afrikaner benefited from Union, and the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism came to infuse a program of political, cultural and indeed also economic reconstruction. The latter was achieved by pooling little sums of Afrikaner capital in large conglomerates: the Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Lewensassuransie Maatskappy (SANLAM) and the Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Trust Maatskappy (SANTAM). The purpose of these was to operate as a counterbalance to what was seen as English capital (Ross 2000: 106). The Afrikaner made steady progress during the early 20th century, refining and standardising their young language, establishing a literary canon, etc. In 1938 they triumphantly celebrated the centenary of the Great Trek and unveiled the Voortrekker Monument outside Pretoria. They were on a winning spree and could not be stopped. Segregationist measures already introduced by the British, most notably in the establishment of the African reserves, were extended and culminated in the victory in 1948 of the Nationalist Party, which was to stay in power for the next 50 years.

As Ross (2000: 115) points out, the election was won under the slogan “apartheid” which was to become the watchword and a world-wide term of abuse among the opponents of the regime. The policy of apartheid was not overtly racist, although there was an undertone of intense racism. Ross (2000: 116) goes on to explain that, in strict theory, the National Party leaders have always emphasized the importance of ethnicity, seeing the various nations of South Africa as God-created entities, on the model of their own self-image as a distinct nation. These had to be preserved in all their purity. The state took it upon itself to do this, both by assigning everyone to one of the national categories within South Africa, through the Population Registration Act of 1950, and, in theory, freezing these categories for all time through the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Act of 1950. Thereby they tried to reverse the core process of South African history over especially the previous half-century, namely the social fusion of different groupings, including various African tribes, from all over the country in its growing cities. The consequences of these measures in individual suffering were immeasurable. The situation went from bad to worse, and as black resistance grew, the Nationalist Party’s policies and measures became increasingly severe.

The South African economy benefited from the sharp increase in the price of gold in the 1930s, and by the 1950s South Africa had entered an economic boom which lasted until the end of the 1960s. Apartheid policies favoured white South Africans and hence they were the ones who enjoyed the riches. The marriage of apartheid and capitalism was a decisive factor in 20th century South African history. Apartheid was not devised by a breed of humans more evil or perverse than the rest, but came about as a result of historical processes, most notably the humiliating defeat suffered during the Anglo-Boer War, the subsequent impoverishment of the Afrikaner, their gradual recovery and their fear of going back to poverty and subservience under British domination. As black numbers increased, a new fear was taking root: the possibility of being overwhelmed by a black majority.

Part and parcel of the nationalist project was the social and economic upliftment of the Afrikaner. Even those who resorted to working in the mines, benefited from Afrikaner rule by getting paid higher wages than their black counterparts. Consequently even working class Afrikaners soon became used to a privileged lifestyle. Even as early as 1922, the violent strikes of white mineworkers (the so-called Rand Revolt) were indeed centred round maintaining these material privileges. Afrikaners were increasingly drawn into a materialistic and consumerist lifestyle and mentality, a love of good living and leisure (almost in grand colonial style), which for example gave rise to large-scale employment of blacks as cheap domestic servants. Even middle-class whites could easily afford one or two servants. More generally speaking, apartheid thrived on a cheap and disciplined labour force. Apartheid was mainly about maintaining white dominance and protecting white wealth, and this entailed controlling the movement of blacks in South Africa, particularly as far as urban space was concerned. This crucial economic factor in the establishment and maintenance of apartheid is often underemphasized in analyses of this period in South African history.

In a newspaper article celebrating 10 years of democracy in South Africa, Afrikaner journalist Rian Malan (2004: 21) recounts his experience of the process of transition during the 1990s: he was terrified as the 1994 election loomed, and after its surprisingly peaceful passing, he adopted an attitude of scepticism; only after a decade he was ready to admit that he had been wrong in his predictions and could finally accept the gift of the new South Africa. It is, however, striking that he celebrates the democratic South Africa mainly in terms of material privileges. He comes to the happy conclusion that a blissful lifestyle is still possible after the Afrikaner had handed over power, as can be seen in the following paragraphs from his article:

The other day a British newspaper asked, what is it like now? I said, this is a question I've been dreading, but if you must know, it's amazing: peaceful, stable, one of the fastest-growing tourist destinations on the planet. In season, buses park on the road above our house, disgorging foreigners who gape at the view, dumbfounded, then turn their binoculars on us, clearly wondering what it's like to live in paradise.

Cape Town is not without its drawbacks – “nice place, dull people”, said the Greek poet George Seferis – but visitors don't seem to notice, perhaps because they're stupefied by the visuals. From our stoep [veranda] we can see nearly 100km, Cape Point this way, Groot Drakenstein the other, and before us, a giant horseshoe of blue water rimmed by mountains. There's this impossibly quaint fishing harbour below us, full of quaint wooden boats and grizzled old salts (Malan 2004: 21).

And further on:

After lunch, the Contessa [his American wife] and I often walk down to meet the fishermen as they land their catch at Kalk Bay, returning with a fat kabeljou or snoek [sea-pike]. Come sundown, we set the fish to braai [roast] on an open fire, uncork a bottle of wine and, yes, congratulate ourselves for living in the last corner of Africa that is immune to chaos and madness (Malan 2004: 21).

Clearly, Afrikaners may have proven curable of racism and prejudice, but not of materialism and their love of the good life.

This broad historical overview has, in the last few paragraphs, come close to probing the identity of the Afrikaner. In the next section this topic will be studied in greater detail.

III

In a recent doctoral study of contemporary mythologies in South Africa and the Low Countries, Afrikaner identity received considerable attention (Van Schalkwyk 2003). An extensive media survey had been carried out, supplemented by in-depth qualitative interviews, and these pointed to the following: that Afrikaners tend to be strange to the ways of the world and prone to deny reality, especially harsh realities or those that somehow challenge their own constructions. This is a result of their strict religiousness and the myth that portrays them as the chosen people of God. According to this myth Afrikaners are superior and have been called by God to bring his light to the southern tip of dark Africa (Wyngaard 1999). And characteristic of chosen people is their purity, their "holiness": they believe that they have been set apart in service of God. Therefore they tend to stand aloof, keeping themselves apart, and distance themselves from the Others (this aspect of Afrikaner identity is explored in André Brink's 1998 – novel about a secluded, microcosmic community, *Devil's Valley*). Because of their supposed holiness and purity, Afrikaners traditionally have a great fear of bad "influences", of things and people believed to be strange/foreign to the Afrikaans national character, of things that they perceive as evil or demonic. Often all these negative things and forces have been brought under the heading "communist". Indeed, during the Cold War almost all perceived harmful things and people used to be referred to as "communist", and equated with the anti-Christ. To some extent this still lives on, especially among older Afrikaners. Among many Afrikaners there is a marked tendency toward anti-intellectualism, a resistance to philosophy and the arts, almost a consciously pursued ignorance, as is evident from letters written by readers of Afrikaans magazines in response to articles published in prior editions of those magazines, and to stage production at arts festivals, recently published books, etc. These letters reveal that the authors of such letters not only refuse to learn anything new, but also that in fact they do possess very little knowledge and insight. This may be the reason why they can be so deeply offended by opinions and art as such, no matter what the exact content may be.

Many Afrikaners remind one of the stereotypical child from a "good" home, where he/she grew up in an overprotected environment and hence shielded from realities and the dark side of life. This can serve as one possible explanation of the infantilism of some Afrikaners, as is evidenced by popular Afrikaans compact discs like *Sies jou vark* [Phew you pig], *Blaas my bal* [Blow my ball], *Kielie my mielie* [Tickle my maize stalk], and the *Stoutgat*-series [Naughty ass series],

revealing anal fixations, among others. These facts contradict the Afrikaner's sense of superiority and expose it for what it is: a mere illusion. This is the case because people who are convinced of their own superiority become lazy like king's children: they are heirs to things that have already been won or attained, and thus there is no need to undertake anything new; their only responsibility is conserving, fortifying, building fences. The well-known conservatism of the Afrikaner can be explained, at least partly, against this background.

At this point one of the concepts used in the title of this paper can be held up for inspection, namely "laager". Branford and Branford (1993: 171) provide a clear explanation of this word: The Afrikaner pioneers, the so-called Voortrekkers, who left the Cape Colony and ventured into the interior of Southern Africa made use of ox-wagons. When they set up camp they lashed the wagons together to form a circle for the protection of the people and animals within, and as a barricade from which to fire on attackers. The initial meaning of laager was limited to this regular form of defence of the Voortrekkers, but later it took on also a figurative meaning and came to refer to an ideologically impenetrable enclosure, most often with reference to the Afrikaner who was said to possess a laager mentality.

Indeed, this guardedness, this tendency to seek refuge in laagers of denial and disregard has been seen as a central aspect of Afrikaner identity. Even the history of Afrikaans literature reflects this tendency to ignore, this obliviousness as far as broader South African realities, especially those related with black suffering and resistance, were concerned. Only since the 1960s some truly engaged works have been produced in Afrikaans.

Obedience toward Afrikaner authority figures has traditionally been expected and enforced in Afrikaans society. This, together with their lack of critical thinking, has made Afrikaners particularly vulnerable to deception by their leaders. In this regard the protagonist and title character in one of the first Afrikaans novels of note, *Bart Nel* (1942), says the following: "It is a fault of our people to respect our leaders too much and therefore we follow them to places where we should not have gone" (Van Melle 1996: 140). In 1999 Afrikaner journalist Chris Louw (2000) caused a big uproar in Afrikaans society with his open letter addressed to one of their patriarchs, Willem de Klerk (brother of former president F.W. de Klerk). This letter represented the start of a painful rebellion of the misused, obedient generation (Afrikaner men who are now between the ages of 35 and 55) who had to put into practise the grand apartheid schemes of their formerly revered "fathers" who never had to dirty their own hands. Louw's generation were compelled to perform military service (non-conscription led to imprisonment or exile), and it was most notably as soldiers that they were used to carry out apartheid's dirty work. Although recent research indicates that young Afrikaners, in comparison with their peers belonging to other groups, are still characterised by their respect for authority (Brynard 2000: 53), there is a noticeable shift toward greater broadmindedness, criticalness, trendiness, and an aversion to structures and institutions like the church (Kirsten 1999; Kombuis 1999).

Until fairly recently Afrikaners strongly identified with the biblical Israelites, the tribe of God: like the Israelites who had been slaves in Egypt, the mythical Afrikaans nation lost its sovereignty under British rule. Therefore narratives about the Great Trek, the Battle of Blood River, the Anglo-Boer War, the Rebellion of 1914 and the attainment of republican status in 1961 have become part of the nationalistic mythology of the Afrikaner: these narratives describe the Afrikaner's journey, under the guidance and protection of God, through the "desert" to the Promised Land of freedom and self-determination (in the form of the apartheid state).

But there is still another parallel: the so-called Diaspora, which entailed the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentiles mainly in the 8th-6th centuries BC. Recently the Afrikaner has also started to experience some kind of Diaspora. This could prove to be the new guiding myth of the Afrikaner, and was phrased as follows by one of the respondents in a survey of the opinions and expectations of Afrikaners: "Past: disgusting. Present: I'm concentrating on my work, I'm generating an income, I lock my house and switch on the alarm when I go out. That's all. Future: the Afrikaners are becoming the new gypsies of the world. We've got talents, we've got skills, we are adaptable, and we are not scared of hard work" (Van Zyl 1998: 65). This respondent's evaluation of the present is representative of the attitude of many Afrikaners, as is confirmed by my own media survey. The lack of enthusiasm that some Afrikaners have exhibited in the past few years can be attributed to various factors, for example: the high crime rate, affirmative action, and the burden of Total Guilt.

The expectations for the future expressed by the respondent mentioned above, draw one's attention to a possible new Afrikaner myth, with the keywords *Diaspora*, *gypsies*, *adaptable* and *hard work*. Although those who leave the country are still sometimes regarded as runaways, the dispersion of Afrikaners all over the globe is increasingly described in positive terms. Pakendorf (2000: 8) maintains that this phenomenon can broaden the Afrikaans language and culture immensely, and might enable Afrikaners to break out of their ghetto, which would be of much greater benefit to this group than separatist inbreeding and secession. So it can be asserted that the other side to the Afrikaner's withdrawal from reality is in fact: wrestling with reality, adaptability, opportunism. The great Afrikaans poet/artist/intellectual Breyten Breytenbach (1999: 41-42) points out that the Afrikaner is a hybrid nation and self-made African who has come into being precisely through interaction with Africa, the landscape and the soil of Africa. The Afrikaner is a restless nomad and explorer: "We project ourselves as conservative and yet we have continuously been busy with the art of change and adaptation. Survival was (and is again) conditioned by the necessity of becoming different, which is in fact a metamorphosis. In order to survive you have to be able to initiate change and unlock potential" (Breytenbach 1999: 41). It seems as if Afrikaners in South Africa and those abroad are indeed making use of new opportunities (Van Zyl 1998: 65). Breytenbach (1999: 43) maintains that, thanks to the adaptability of Afrikaners and

their ability to unlock change, they are great travellers and mediators, and therefore they could be agents for transformation elsewhere in Africa.

When one looks at the Afrikaner in this way, one can justifiably claim that their laager-mentality, their withdrawal from broader (South African) realities, was a mere repose, a mere campout, an interlude or passing error in the continuous process of becoming different. And this process has taken the Afrikaner beyond his old haunt. Afrikaners are indeed proving extremely adaptable and changeable, those abroad, but also those who have remained in South Africa. And in fact they have been accused by some of being opportunistic turncoats who embraced the new South Africa for the sake of self-preservation, pretending all of a sudden that they had nothing to do with what occurred during the years of apartheid. There are, however, Afrikaners who have truly been transformed, or grew up concurrent with the changes, and have become dynamic and committed citizens of the new South Africa. Some have shown a remarkable aptitude for becoming different, for example one of the foremost contemporary Afrikaans poets, Antjie Krog. As a reporter for South African radio she attended the public hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and wrote an engrossing book about how she dealt with that experience: *Country of my skull* (Krog 1998). She went on to explore ever further, for example reworking and “translating” Khoisan oral literature (produced in an extinct language, Xam) into Afrikaans poems, using 19th century manuscripts in which the words of a few respondents were meticulously recorded by the linguist Wilhelm Bleek (Krog 2003a).

Krog’s (2003b) most recent work, *A Change of Tongue*, is a book belonging to no specific genre. It is indeed meaningful and quite revealing that an Afrikaans poet of Krog’s stature decided to publish this book in English. In an interview Jane Rosenthal (2003) enquired about this choice: “Musing on why Afrikaans writers ‘now suddenly’ want to publish in English, Krog says that, in her case, ‘it’s that I want to interact with what I perceive is the creativity of the new South Africa, and English is its language’. Of Afrikaans she says it is no longer ‘a completely armoured language. It’s insecure, and it’s lost a lot of [she pauses here] ... volume, and it’s much nicer to work in, now that it’s vulnerable’. In the same interview Krog goes on to explain that the title, *A Change of Tongue*, does not refer in any simple way to a change of language – Afrikaans to English (while retaining the cadences of Afrikaans). The fish depicted on the cover is a sole (a “tongvis” in Afrikaans), which undergoes a skeletal rearrangement as it matures. Transformation is indeed a central motif in this book. And it is not the first time that Krog utilises the tongvis (tongue fish, if translated directly) as symbol of transformation and metamorphosis (for example with reference to whites in Africa). She has already done so in her highly acclaimed volume of Afrikaans poetry *Lady Anne* (1989).

But what needs to be emphasised here is Krog’s claim that English is the language of the creativity of the new South Africa. English is but one of the 11 official languages of South Africa, but has indeed acquired an unrivalled status and

instrumental value in the country. To mention one more example, this time from South African music: the band Boo! is achieving unprecedented national and international success with their funky and highly innovative “monkipunk”. Like many bands with Afrikaans speaking members they write their lyrics in English (in Boo!’s case sometimes also in gibberish or the “languages” of the jungle). The “leader” and creative force behind Boo! is Chris Chameleon, an apt name for a young, adaptable role model like himself, who has refined the art of continuous *andersword* (becoming different).

However, one should be careful of an overoptimistic conclusion: as much as one would like the Afrikaners’ trek to have led them to something grand and positive, this is unfortunately not the case. Their journey has taken them to greater self-understanding indeed, and although they have made remarkable progress, their trek did not carry them on to some higher plane. They may have forsaken their tendency to seek refuge in the laagers offered by grand ideologies, like apartheid, but the 1990s and the millennium have brought on new realities and perceived threats, and some Afrikaners seem to have withdrawn even deeper into the cocoon of consumerism which they started to weave around themselves since the middle of the 20th century. Hence the title of this article: “From laager to lager”. “Lager” is a kind of beer, popular in South Africa, and synonymous with the stereotypical white South African way of living: sunshine, sea and Chevrolet. No braaivleis (barbecue) is complete without a can of lager in the hand. It is strongly associated with men, notably rugby-loving Afrikaner men of whom many sport a massive beer belly.

There may seem to be a contradiction between the Afrikaner’s work ethic and their love of leisure, but this is not the case: Afrikaners do indeed have a strong work ethic, but unlike the citizens of some other countries in the world, they are not prepared to work without considerable rewards for their labour, both financially and recreationally. Afrikaners invest time, effort and money in leisure and jealously guard their free time. The enormous emphasis that used to be placed on extramural activities in Afrikaans schools and universities was aimed, in my view, at preparing children and students also for the recreational part of their lives as privileged citizens of South Africa.

IV

This outline of Afrikaner identity is concluded with reference to a poem by Ina Rousseau (1926-). It is the third poem in the cycle “Stappewolf” in the volume *’n Onbekende jaartal* (An unknown/undisclosed date), published in 1995. This is one of the finest poetic cycles in Afrikaans and is devoted to the Afrikaans poet Peter Blum (1925-1990). Blum was born in Austria and arrived in South Africa as a boy of 12. With his debut in 1955 he was the harbinger of renewal in Afrikaans literature, and he was deeply admired by great Afrikaans poets like Van Wyk Louw and Oppen-

man for his exceptional erudition and technical skill. But even after his second great volume had appeared he was still denied citizenship, and so he turned his back on Afrikaans bourgeois culture and mediocrity, which he had criticised and satirized before in a remarkably telling way, and left the country in 1960, never to publish in Afrikaans again. His central position in the Afrikaans literary canon rests on merely two volumes of poetry. Like Blum, Ina Rousseau made her debut in the 1950s. The cycle "Steppewolf" is a late attempt at making sense of Blum as enigmatic contemporary of hers, and she does so by hinting at some similarities with Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), the German poet and novelist who often focussed on the individual's search outside society's restrictive conventions. Rousseau names her cycle of poems after Hesse's 1927-novel *Steppenwolf*. In this novel the protagonist is a lonely writer who despises bourgeois society and considers himself a wolf of the steppes. In the poem quoted below, Rousseau looks at Afrikaans society through the eyes of Peter Blum, and based on his oeuvre imagines how he might have seen them (during the early years of apartheid and the economic boom).

This poem can serve as a conclusion, as a summary of what this article was aimed at conveying. It can, in fact, also be offered in its own right as a crash-course in Afrikaner identity. The poem has no title; it is merely numbered as "3" (Rousseau 1995: 36). My own annotated translation of this poem from Afrikaans to English reads as follows:

He is sitting in a Coffeehouse, surrounded
 by the commoners of Keerom¹ Street
 – a herd of ex-Maties² –
 who tuck into stews and sosaties³
 while speaking soft-emphatically
 in neat phrases,
 and then again reason louder
 about recent developments: *Klasie Havenga*⁴...
*Eric Louw*⁵... a runaway
 majority⁶... I'm telling you there will be the devil to pay
 tomorrow in Parliament ... the best
 left winger⁷ Western Province⁸, had in years...

¹ This Afrikaans street name literary means blind alley/cul-de-sac/impasse.

² A colloquial name for students of the Stellenbosch University (Western Cape), a cradle of Afrikaner (i.e. white Afrikaans) culture in South Africa.

³ Pieces of meat, vegetables and fruit packed onto a skewer and roasted/grilled.

⁴ Afrikaner politician (Minister of Finance) during the early days of the apartheid era, when separate development of the various races became official state policy.

⁵ Afrikaner politician during the early days of the apartheid era; Minister of Finance; later Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁶ Referring to exclusive white South African politics, an inflated little world that basically consisted of only two opposing parties: the National Party and the South African Party. The majority of South Africans, blacks (all nonwhites), did not have the vote.

⁷ A position in rugby. Rugby is a rough team game of British origin and became the national sport of South Africa. It inspired almost religious devotion among Afrikaner men and was used as a measure of manhood, in school and at tertiary level: it was the most sacred of all the extramural activities.

⁸ A provincial South African rugby team, with a long and proud tradition; it produced many famous national players (called Springboks). The language referred to here is Afrikaans. It is a relatively new language that

All that in the ridiculous little language⁹,
 almost without literature¹⁰,
 which they pretend to cherish
 and press against their chests like a teddy bear¹¹ –
 At this very moment he would gladly
 fling a few good Gothic words of thorn
 right in among them,
 preferably with both erotic and indelicate
 implications – or no, rather nip them all
 with a whip¹², *that* he'd enjoy very much,
 the components of this hegemony,
 so exceedingly decent and Dutch¹³.

started developing from 17th century Dutch in the Cape Colony, and spread northward due to the Great Trek (1836) and permanent settlement in the interior, and has been influenced by various European and indigenous languages. The result is a simplified version of Dutch with enough indigenous and unique features to make it qualify as a (South African) language in its own right. Initially it was regarded as inferior (the British called it "kitchen Dutch"), but when the Afrikaner gained political control of South Africa in the early 20th century, it rapidly developed into a language of science and literature with the support of the state. Afrikaans is currently the mother tongue of about 7 million South Africans and Namibians. More than half of them are of mixed race (the so called Coloureds), the rest are mostly white.

⁹ A provincial South African rugby team, with a long and proud tradition; it produced many famous national players (called Springboks). The language referred to here is Afrikaans. It is a relatively new language that started developing from 17th century Dutch in the Cape Colony, and spread northward due to the Great Trek (1836) and permanent settlement in the interior, and has been influenced by various European and indigenous languages. The result is a simplified version of Dutch with enough indigenous and unique features to make it qualify as a (South African) language in its own right. Initially it was regarded as inferior (the British called it "kitchen Dutch"), but when the Afrikaner gained political control of South Africa in the early 20th century, it rapidly developed into a language of science and literature with the support of the state. Afrikaans is currently the mother tongue of about 7 million South Africans and Namibians. More than half of them are of mixed race (the so called Coloureds), the rest are mostly white.

¹⁰ By 1800 Afrikaans had developed into a distinct language, with more or less the same features that it has today. From the 1870's onward, Afrikaners started to become more conscious of their own identity. This was in reaction to British encroachment, following the discovery of diamonds and gold in the two Boer (Afrikaner) Republics. The Society for True Afrikaners (*Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners* – *GRA*) was established in 1875 and actively promoted the Afrikaans language and Afrikaans literature. At first the literature had mainly the purpose of 1) proving that Afrikaans could be used for writing and even for literary purposes and 2) teaching Afrikaners, who were mainly uneducated farmers, to read. Gradually, as the Afrikaner regained its dignity after the defeat suffered during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), and gradually secured more and more political power, a tradition of excellent literature was consciously developed and this project gained momentum when Afrikaans was given official status, next to English, in 1925. Despite this, not much literature had been produced in Afrikaans by the 1950's, compared to the old languages of the world, when the poet Peter Blum made his entry.

¹¹ Afrikaans was appropriated by Afrikaner nationalists, with the result that Afrikaans was subsequently stigmatised as "language of the oppressor". This marriage of ideology and language entailed that those who loved their Afrikaner identity were supposed to also cherish "their" language, but although most Afrikaners supported the nationalist ideal it often had to take a backseat to their capitalist, consumerist mentality and ease-loving life-style. As long as apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism favoured them and ensured a life of privilege they paid lip service to the official ideology, and to its institutions, without necessarily being truly and passionately concerned about the details.

¹² Afrikaners used to believe, and some still do, that one should physically discipline one's children, in the way the Bible instructs us. Proverbs 13: 24 reads, in the King James Version: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." This part of the poem is about giving Afrikaners some of their own medicine, but also hints at the medieval-like backwardness of their approach to life.

¹³ The Afrikaner's worldview and characteristics can be traced back to the Calvinism and conservatism of their Dutch ancestors, a heritage safeguarded especially by the Dutch Reformed church, of which many traditional Afrikaners have been (active) members. The leaders of this denomination either supported apartheid, or neglected to criticise the ideology and its often inhumane policies and practices. The bearing of the Afrikaner hinted at here is one of guardedness, decency, propriety, respectability, moderation, which often made for stilted and limited/diminished lives.

Bibliography

- Branford J. & Branford W., 1993, *A dictionary of South African English*, Cape Town.
- Breytenbach B., 1999, *Andersheid en andersmaak, oftewel die Afrikaner as Afrikaan. Berig gerig aan Frederik van Zyl Slabbert*, "Fragments" 1999, No 4, p. 26-44.
- Brink A. P., 1998, *Devil's Valley*, London.
- Brynard K., 2000, *Afrikaners op die couch*, "Insig" 52-58, July.
- Hesse H., 1963, *Steppenwolf*, San Francisco.
- Kirsten J., 1999, *G'n tyd vir die kerk*, "Insig" 137, p. 34-35, June.
- Kombuis K., 1999, *Het jy al vandag jou "inner child" 'n oorveeg gegee? 'n Satire op die post-alternatiewe Afrikaner*, "Insig" 143, p. 46-47, December.
- Krog A., 1989, *Lady Anne*, Bramley.
- Krog A., 1998, *Country of my skull*, Johannesburg.
- Krog A., 2003a, *Liederen van de blauwkraanvogel: /Xam-gedichten*, Amsterdam.
- Krog A., 2003b, *A change of tongue*, Johannesburg.
- Louw C., 2000, *Ope brief aan Willem de Klerk*, Dainfern.
- Malan R., 2004, *A gift so huge I choked on it*, "Sunday Times" No. 21, February.
- Pakendorf G., 2000, *Eer die nuwe trekkers*, "Insig" No. 8, August.
- Rosenthal J., 2003, *A gift of tongues (Interview)*, Available on Internet: www.chico.mweb.co.za/art/2003/2003oct/031003-antjie.html [date of use: December 28]
- Ross R., 2000, *A concise history of South Africa*, Cambridge.
- Rousseau I., 1995, *'n Onbekende jaartal*, Kaapstad.
- Van Melle J., 1996, *Bart Nel*, Pretoria.
- Van Schalkwyk P. L., 2003, *Horisonne: mites oor die moontlike in kontemporêre verhalende tekste van Suid-Afrika en die Nederlandse taalgebied*, Potchefstroom (unpublished).
- Van Zyl J., 1998, *O, vaderland! Wit Afrikaners vandag*, "De Kat" No. 13 (12), p. 62-66, June.
- Wyngaard H., 1999, *Net uit genade*, "Insig" No. 139, p. 29, August.