

Conflict, representation, interpretation - truth lied

Rensia Robinson

Introduction

To my knowledge, nowhere in South African literary canons does the Afrikaans poet T.T. Cloete figure as a 'struggle poet' nor is he reckoned as an outspoken socio-politically involved poet. In his poem entitled *Ballade van die digter* (**Idiolek** 1986:66 - *Ballad of the poet in Idiolect*) which can be read as an *ars poetica*, the poetic perspective ostensibly synchronizes with such an evaluation. The following verses from the poem referred to illustrate this observation:

"In tye van groot terreur...//sit (die digter) sy pen met sy lippe en liefkoos" (During times of great upheaval, the poet sits caressing his pen with his lips).

The following verses especially are relevant: "Die digter gaan onbarmhartig onverstoord / te midde van die algemene verderf / met sy taalskadeloosstelling voort" (the poet continues mercilessly, unperturbed amidst general corruption, with his disempowerment of speech / language).

Ostensibly, the concept disempowerment of speech / language (*taalskadeloosstelling*) is the opposite of controversy or rhetoric; it does not suggest a belligerent poetic style. Recognising it as a distinguishable poetic procédé, my aim is to scrutinize such procedure in this paper. I make use of the poem *Foto Boerevegters* (**Driepas** 1989:111 - *Photo Boer fighters*) to serve as a heuristic model in this enterprise. War, and in this case a specific war, signifies a turning point in history. Boundaries and traditional ways of thinking are questioned during such periods of conflict. Therefore, alternative discourses open up. Against this background, the ambiguous possibilities of the concept 'disempowerment of speech' will be exploited.

Author's Code

It has already been argued in different studies that Cloete's theoretical contributions are valuable keys to promote understanding of his poetry, especially when something as controversial as intentionality is involved. Lieb (1992:2) among others, in his argumentation of a 'New Structuralism', gives credence once more to reckoning with intentionality when "understanding speech or judging speech from a communicative point of view". Since intentionality, according to De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:116), deals with "the ways in which text producers utilize texts to pursue and fulfil their intentions", it does not involve any single simplistic strategy. It is structurally interconnected and especially in poetry it is interdependent on phenomena of implication. Snyman (1983:13) evaluates implication as "perhaps the most powerful strategy ... through which a concept is transformed into a talisman" (translated). Artists regularly, explicitly and implicitly, announce the reveal-conceal (deceive) potential of works of art. By tracing the process of meaning development and meaning allocation in a specific poem, interaction between author's intention and the reader's response is involved. The following remark by Lakoff ((1980:178) is valuable in dealing with such a process: "What we do in

indirect understanding is to use the resources of direct understanding". De Beaugrande (1980:13), for whom "a text ... is the manifestation of a human action in which a person intends to create a text and instructs the text receivers to build relationships of various kinds", also describes a text as "a progression between states". These premises are recognized as valuable points of departure.

With the influence of the author's intention in mind, certain traces in Cloete's oeuvre are followed in order to develop a strategy of understanding the functioning of 'speech disempowerment' in the model poem. In one of his articles reacting to Opperman's essay "Kuns is boos" (Art is evil), Cloete comes to the conclusion: "Tension in an ostensibly tensionless poem can be so subdued that it lies between verse line and sentence construction or between metre and rhythm; in other words these features can become counterplots of one another" (own translation). Cloete (1974:34) signifies such specimens of conflict as "corrective possibilities" and he (1974:33) argues that evil not only functions as corrective but also needs a corrective. For him a corrective is an essentially dramatic instance and in drama (and in poetry) it interacts with the disposition of conflict. Keeping these findings in mind, there is reason to question apparent meanings of the concept 'speech disempowerment' when it is applied to a seemingly uncomplicated poem of a rather genial mood. Only the two concluding lines of the poem foreground a disjunctive linkage with the preceding lines and can be a sign of potential tension and an argumentative code.

Significantly, the poem *Photo Boer fighters* appears in the volume of poems entitled **Driepas** (a trefoil. It can also be understood as "triple time", thus a waltz) in a sub-division named "Devilries", which implies a counterplot type such as mentioned by Cloete. De Beaugrande's (1980:263) finding is relevant to this context when he states: "we can ascertain many things via the self-contextualizing nature of texts". The volume of poems entitled **Driepas**, celebrates among others, cosmic rhythm, understood as triple time. In religious symbolic contexts this rhythm is an emblem of a creating Holy Trinity. In the poem *Beroerde tyd (Agitated rhythm)* in the section 'trefoil' (**Driepas**:168), the following lines show an experience of human participation in Divine rhythms:

<p>God hou tyd, en sy tye van beroering,... ...dit bly genesing vir nou, in die lirik</p>	<p>(God keeps rhythm, and his periods of turmoil...remain restoration for the present, lyric imitates his emotion. - free translation)</p>
<p>word na sy pype van ontroering gedans.</p>	

Poetry especially reflects such creatively agitated rhythms. Contrasting the divine triple time, a two-step rhythm symbolizes conflict (Cirlot 1982:232). It also signifies temporariness - a front line moving to the back. In each of the poems in the subsection "Devilries", the main theme is conflict. Time and again, however, such conflict is unmasked and relativised. In the poem *Inter nos* (**Driepas**:113) it is stated for instance: "to die for one's descendants is absurd" (free translation). Considering the place of the poem *Photo Boer fighters* in this section of **Driepas**, it can be inferred that the placing likewise signifies a code for 'an agitated rhythm' in the model poem.

The concept *Duvelrieë*, probably corresponding to 'devilries' in English, includes semantic nuances like evil, cruelty or tyranny and recklessness (**Reader's Digest English-Afrikaans Dictionary 1989**). The concept is used in mediaeval miracle plays. Such characters play the role of "stupid, deceived devils in ridiculous situations", according to the **Grote Winkler Prins** (1980:632). In *Mariken van Nieumeghen* (1917:27) the main character's aunt is such a figure about whom it is said: "dissension doom many a soul" (translated). This information provides significant background for understanding the context of the poem's argument.

According to Lakoff's (1980:79) opinion, the shift from positing different viewpoints, to an argument itself, appears when "The difference of opinion becomes a conflict of opinions". Ambiguity becomes polemical - one viewpoint against another. It is significant to trace interaction of the section "Devilries" with poems and themes in the rest of the volume. There is also interaction between the model poem and the other poems in the subsection 'Devilries', which can influence meaning allocation.

The poem *Ballade van die digter* (**Idiolek** 1986:66 *Ballad of the poet*), is considered an important example from Cloete's oeuvre on which to base decisions about traces of a point of view concerning the socio-historic function of a poet and his creation, poetry. Since the poem mentioned appears in die volume **Idiolect**, it is especially pertinent in reconstructing the author's code. What is significant here is the suggestion of an individual's unique 'voice' ('style').

Foregrounding of Discourse

One of the most obvious aspects of the model poem is the foregrounding of different viewpoints. Visual and verbal texts are juxtaposed; different socio-historical contexts and particular and general discourses can be discerned in the poem. There is obvious tension amongst these different perspectives. War and history are foregrounded as contemporary discourses against an absent past by incorporating the perspective of a historical photograph or 'archival evidence' (Hutcheon 1991:36). Since the device of foregrounding is seen as "a construction principle in the act of interpretation" as Van Peer (1986:21) qualifies it, "it is not the foreground or background as such which is of importance, but the relationship between them" which guides meaning allocation. Shifting social codes play a dominant role in the discourse. Tensions and conflict between different representations and interpretations become implicitly evident. Obviously, this includes the controversy of the all-embracing dichotomy, truth and falsehood. Such varied aspects develop through structuring strategies. The aim of my paper is to trace such development in the model poem as evidence of a procédé of 'speech disempowerment'. A useful description of discourse in this context is that of Hutcheon (1991:4), expressed as "a system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity".

Foregrounding of the discourse modus implies the important role of a shifting point of view. Uspensky (1983:1) stresses the fact that all art forms dealing with semantics, that is representing part of reality through a denotatum, foreground a point of view. To this he

(1983:8) adds: "When we speak of the system of ideas that shape the work, we are speaking about the deep compositional structure, as opposed to the surface compositional structure which may be traced on the psychological, spatio-temporal, or phraseological levels". In the discourse modus, the positions of speaker and addressee in language use play a major role (Van Gorp 1986:102).

Discourse analysis

The conspicuous two concluding lines of the model poem from the outset subvert a 'historical' photograph as a true to life document. A 'photo of fighters' (realistic or imaginary), which is signified by the title as the theme of the poem, is exposed as an ironic counterpoint of flesh and blood fighters. It is suggested that they are nothing more than 'paper-dolls', disguised as 'real fighters'. The irony of their appearance is that they are presented as braggarts. This implies a questioning of heroism as a possible aim or 'theme' of the photograph. Reconsider in the light of such comment, hidden discursive elements start with the title of the poem. It can be expected that it will be further developed through the poem's discourse.

Repetition, ellipsis, substitution, and hierarchical arrangement of linguistic segments establish relations contributing to discursive purposes. To my understanding, this implies that a "typographical rather than a dialogical form" (In 'A Derrida Reader' 1991: X111) is involved. One of Lakoff's (1980:93) important observations is: "In a good argument...each element of form is used to express content " and "the network of connections (in an argument) has an overall structure"(1980:98). While Easthope (1983:21), on the one hand, maintains poetry as "a distinct and concrete practice with its own independence, conforming to its own laws and effects", he does, on the other hand emphasize: "poetry is always *a* poetic discourse, part of a social formation defined historically". Formalistic analysis does not necessarily deny the socio-historic context of a poem, but can take it into consideration as a significant role-player in the development of poetic discourse.

Obvious phonic chains in the model poem, which once more begin in the title of the poem, create relations between concepts which foreground polemical issues. Through alliteration, 'foto' (photo), 'vegters' (fighters), 'veer' (feather as an embellishment of 'felt hat'), 'verkyker' (binocular), 'vryers' (lovers/suitors) and 'vilthoed' (felt hat) are connected. In this chain, semantic contrasts between 'foto' (focused) and 'verkyker' (to see from a distance) and 'vegter' (warmaker/warrior) and 'vryer' (lovemaker/lover) foreground discontinuities. The ostensibly random juxtaposition of neutral concepts thus reveals a meaningful discourse. Additionally, this phonetic chain echoes the omitted counterpoint of fighters, namely 'vyand' (enemy). When historical evidence is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the physical appearance of the Boer fighters which is highlighted, comprises those aspects which differentiate them from the supposed enemy, the British. It establishes their cultural identity. The British were equipped with military uniforms and heavy artillery like canons. Generally contrasted with the Boer fighters, the British were not bearded. The mobility of the rural Boers on horseback and their skill in hunting were some of their most effective strategies (Pretorius 1998).

Other important but omitted role players who are called to mind through the phonetic chain are the 'vroue' (women). They likewise played a heroic part in the Anglo-Boer War and additionally they are semantically connected to 'vryers' (lovers). The fact that these evident partakers in the war are omitted, puts a question mark behind the ideological premises of each of the subjects partaking in the discourse, that is, the photographer (or his 'objects') and the lyrical subject of the poem. On the other hand, these omissions may be markers of social codes of the specific context.

The [-f-]-phoneme is represented in each segment of the poem (twice in the title and in each of the four stanzas). The second phonic chain echoes the diphthong [-u-] from the key concept *Boere*. This chain follows an alternative pattern; the sound is concentrated in the first stanza, does not occur in the two middle stanzas but functions as end rhyme in the first and last stanzas. Semantically, it foregrounds the relation between 'hoede' (hats) and 'woede' (wrath) in the first stanza and '(vilt)hoed' (felt hat) and '(helde)moed' (heroism) in the last stanza. The phonetically related 'oë' (eyes) foreground the fact that emotive concepts in the two lists are concentrated in this phonetic chain. It is significant that 'Boere' matches this phonetic chain. Because the [-f-] as well as the [-u-]-phonemes occur in the concept 'vilthoed' (felt hat), this object connects the two lists phonetically, creating the same complementary relation which exists between the components of the concept *Boerevegters*. Phonetically linking 'vilthoed' (felt hat), 'vegters' (fighters) and 'verkyker' (binocular, suggesting 'armed vision'), suggests the semantic possibility that 'hoed' (hat) functions as a symbol of power - in this case military authority.

By contrast the semantic relation with 'paprand- en opslaanhoede' (soft and turned up brims) foregrounds another possibility, namely an association with spiritlessness (in association with 'dowwe Boere-oë' - *dull Boer eyes*). Alternatively this relation can be associated with fanfaronade, if the 'veer-in-die-hoed' (feather in hat) isotopy is taken into consideration. These concepts also belong to the already mentioned emotive field. 'Vryers' (lovers) from the first list can also be related to this isotopy. Rhyme patterns parallel semantic relations among cultural, historical and social markers like '(naweek)vryers', and 'veer in die paprand- en opslaanhoede'.

This detailed foregrounding of key concepts and their semantic relations is a warning to the reader-interpreter that the poem is polyvalently structured. Patterning and its functions are described as follows by Thorne (in Van Peer 1988:281): "Patterns are the product of repeated occurrences of linguistic forms, each pattern realizing a theme". Discursive potentiality is built in on all levels of the speech act. Hasan (1985:84) uses the following metaphorical expression which elucidates the function of such strategies: "threads of continuity running throughout the text to describe the simultaneous operation of many cohesive chains, each of which supports and refines the domain of meaning for the others". She comes to the conclusion: "This is one reason why, in natural uses of language, we hardly ever notice ambiguities".

Juxtaposition of representations and interpretations.

One of the key discourses foregrounded by incorporating a photo as point of reference in a poem, is that of representation and interpretation. The photo as imaginary construct incorporated in the poem suggests a "structure of repetition of which the basis can be nothing else than representation" (cf. Derrida 1991:10). It is a prefiguration in the sense of a representative, taking the place of 'real' subjects. At the same time, it functions as a representation or re-production of an original representation or 'sitting' of figures. It neutralizes the concept 'original' (cf. Derrida 1991:10) as a type of 'stable' representation. What is the original 'behind' the photo, for instance, also, the intention behind it? De Beaugrande (1980:72) warns: "it (is) hard to determine...how much seemingly accurate recall is in fact a reproduction rather than a reconstruction". Obviously the process of interpretation is involved. By problematizing representations and interpretations in different ways in the poem, it becomes clear that what is involved are ongoing historical processes of representation and interpretation which activate discourse on every level.

Hutcheon (1991:43) argues that a photo, when considered postmodernly, displays a discourse modus. The linking of visual and verbal texts leads her (1991:125) to the conclusion: "the actual words, when read in relation to the picture, turn it against itself - as in (a) double-meaning play". She (1991:130) explains the process as follows:

If photography is, as a visual medium, inherently paradoxical, it is also semiotically hybrid. In Peirce's terms, it is both *indexical* (representation is based on some physical connection) and *iconic* (it is a representation of likeness) in its relation to the real. This complex hybrid nature is another reason why photography has become particularly important in a time of challenge to modes of representation...in Peirce's terminology, the addition of language is the addition of the symbolic to the indexical and the iconic.

By incorporating a photo as a discursive partner in a poetic discourse, processes of perception are activated in which 'transformations' of signs in the speech act become visible. Instead of the photo functioning as an icon of heroism, as is suggested by the second last line of the poem, it is degraded into a symbol of transience and of postmodern fragmentation (compare the line "dit ruik alles na lak en karton en papier" – everything smells of glue and cardboard and paper). Instead of an authentic 'historical text', this photo has all the characteristics of a postmodern text.

Since the poem functions as a comment on the photo, photo and poem are juxtaposed as ways of representation and interpretation. This juxtaposition activates a complex discourse. In his study of *Literature as discourse*, Hodge (1990:205) makes use of Foucault's guiding principle in investigating 'turning points' in history through 'material texts', namely by considering them as having 'a complex social function'. "The complex 'social function' reminds us that such phenomena are constructed by a number of agents for different and competing purposes, with different tendencies". It is a 'translation' of something visual, thus a secondary source. In Cloete's poem, the 'master copy' (the photo of the Boer fighters) is not available. The reader is directed by the comment of the

lyrical subject in the poem to visualise the photo. This suggests a process of imaginary reflections from which the reader's response must be reconstructed.

A photo represents a snapshot, a freezing in time, of what was otherwise a part of acts and complicated processes. It frames one miniscule aspect of war from a specific viewpoint. In the poem's discourse, the photo parallels a war which, historically observed, is like a 'spatio-temporal snapshot' in time-space. The framing of 'action', however, enables a viewer to become aware of relations on a small-scale in juxtaposition with a (historically) broad background. The photo is an empty 'form' which can be signified from different view points. Through the viewpoint of a viewer it is 'brought to life'. Discrepancies arising from historically different viewpoints are suggested. The viewpoint becomes part of many possible discourses on the topic of a specific historical photo as a representation of a large-scale war which also became part of ongoing social processes.

The poem can be described as a 'developing structure' ("wordende structuur", Stutterheim 1963:84) which can incorporate and reflect different perspectives. An interplay between reader response and viewer-lyrical subject in the poem becomes possible. A multiplying of perspectives results in what De Beaugrande (1980:65) describes as follows: "...in an extensive and richly connected world, the declarative and procedural aspects begin to converge". 'Statements' in the poem are in dialogue with other (even future) perspectives, the result of which is the creation of an open structure. Possibilities of association and meaning production are not terminated by any single reading because of the foregrounding of the instability of socio-historical perspectives.

Similar to the photographer's selective representation of war, the lyrical subject of the poem's selective viewing of the photo is foregrounded through two lists of names. Only certain objects are highlighted. Hutcheon (1991:135) draws attention to the fact that a photo implies foregrounding of the viewing subject. Why does the viewer focus on specific spots and what is the function of such foregrounding?

What is foregrounded in the two lists are details of appearance which are descriptive of the *Boerevegters*. The observation includes physical as well as psychological features. Diachronic interplay between concepts suggested in a double comparison which functions as commentary on the first list, foregrounds the deceptiveness of appearance (in this case 'war costumes'). The cultural-historically concepts which have already been contextualised in the two lists (just as the concept *Boer fighters* in the title of the poem) are intensified through the double comparison in the two middle stanzas. The idiomatic use of language foregrounds the sociolect. Both the concepts used in the comparisons, namely 'plaassondag' (Sunday on a farm) and 'naweekvryers' (weekend suitors) are anachronisms which typify a specific, bygone lifestyle. This prejudices the concept *Boer fighters* in the title of the poem as anachronistic and at the same time, categorises the related concept 'war apparel' as similarly a whim of fashion.

Foregrounding of cultural-historical distance (and consequent semantic 'degeneration') results in socio-political distance. This concealed discourse is foregrounded by the stylistic

figures (mild) irony and parody which are explicit in the poem. This kind of unavoidable turn in the poetic discourse, is described by Cloete in the 5th section of *oorloop (overspill Driepas* 1989:44) as follows:

die kosbaarste poësie	("The most valuable poetry - that is
- dit is 'n ander haglike	another kind of overspill - is open to
soort oorloop - is vir die parodie	parody and borders on the ridiculous".
vatbaar en grens aan die belaglike	Free translation)

Polysemantic poetic interpretation forces the photo as historic representation out of focus in the model poem. A telescoping of socio-historic perspectives becomes apparent. What comes to the surface can be named, borrowing from Hodge (1990:203), "anti-worlds and anti-meanings". The collage technique suggested in the poem remains representation, but at the same time it deconstructs, through fragmentation and discontinuity, a perception of reality (cf. Hutcheon 1991:88). Even the 'scientific neutrality' of photography, in this instance, is questioned and, according to Davis (1977:62), a result of such a procedure is: "the photograph (has) ceased to be a window on the world, through which we see things as they are. It is rather a highly selective filter, placed there by a specific hand and 'mind'".

While a photo represents a realistic happening (a war) from a specific socio-historic background, a viewer-commentator judges it from a different socio-historic context. Let us assume that this context is 1989, more or less the publication date of **Driepas** in which the model poem is represented. While it may be assumed that some codes of these two perspectives coincide (for instance a South African cultural context), differences in space-time stimulate the kind of discourse displayed in the two concluding lines of the poem. Ownership of the same historically conquered 'habitat' (by war under discussion) is again the source of contemporary conflict. Reader-response to the poem, besides sharing cultural codes, comes from a subsequent socio-historic context, namely the year 1999, centenary of the Anglo-Boer war. This implies a socio-political context which differs dramatically from the previously mentioned one. Listeners who may or may not share the same socio-political codes, represent the next link in the representation-interpretation chain. Since the first two perspectives started an argument, it may be accepted that each and every new viewpoint will add to the complexity of discourse. In a similar situation Hodge (1990:101) warns: "We need analysis that respects difference but isn't paralysed by it". When all discourses which are implied by the juxtapositions in the poem are taken into consideration, the poem activates new possibilities of reading from a broader and more objective viewpoint. One of the immediate results flowing from this, is a broadened perspective on thematic decisions made at the beginning. A objectifying process is stimulated towards the specifically referred to example of the poem.

The following questions become foregrounded: What weight can be attached to a photo as socio-historic document (cf. the line "dit ruik alles na lak en karton en papier"); what kind of evidence is foregrounded; for what purpose is it used; what light does it throw on the context from which it originated? Narrating events from the past in the present is

under scrutiny in historiographic theory as well as in postmodern fiction. Similarly, linking contemporary actions with an absent object from the past is under scrutiny (Hutcheon 1991:71).

Lexical information

Foregrounding of the social function of speech, begs lexical information of those concepts which play an important role in directing the discourse. According to Senekal (1986:115) in a similar inquiry, "each discursive structure must be seen as a realisation of the sociolect. The sociolect as a sectional language is easily recognised lexically, the most shallow dimension" (translated).

The concept *Boere* associates 'fighters' in a South African context with the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902. According to HAT, a 'Boer' is, among other possibilities, a member of the 'Afrikanervolk', a much debated categorization in present-day South African politics. 'Boere', however, can also refer to agricultural developers of land. This semantic nuance is reflected in the concept 'habitat' in the second last line of the model poem. 'Boer' is, however, also a pejorative term in the South African context (cf. 'boorish'). It is used pejoratively to distinguish a countryman from a (more sophisticated) townsman or world citizen. The term 'Boer' also functions as a pejorative political type in South African context. What becomes clear from these semantic possibilities is that the term is a pregnant socio-political concept.

Lexical information about the concept 'habitat' likewise serves an important purpose in the discourse on war and conflict. Etymologically, 'habitat' comes from Latin *habitâre, to inhabit or the act of occupancy*. It is significant that the concept is implemented in biology to denote an area or environment where an organism is most likely to be found (Ilson 1984). 'Habitat' is therefore an essential feature of a species. This fact complements the meaning of 'Boers' as land-dwellers. It is, however, also significant that 'habitat' can be associated with 'home' ('tuiste' De Stadler 1994). While 'Boere', semantically, links with 'habitat', 'vegters' (fighters) and 'heldemoed' (heroism) also belong to the same isotopy. Semantic possibilities like fearlessness, heroism, boldness, arrogance, recklessness and scorn of death (cf. De Stadler 1994) can also be considered in dealing with the concept. Both 'windmakerigheid' (showiness cf. 'veer in die paprand- en opslaanhoede' – feather in the soft and turned up brim hats) on the one hand and heroism on the other hand (cf. 'dowwe Boere-oë vol grys woede' – dull Boer eyes full of grey wrath) are implied by the concepts in the lists, qualifying 'Boerevegters'.

In the syntactic unit 'die oorlogsdrag / van die menere / is soos dié van 'n plaassondag // of van naweekvryers' (the battledress of these gentlemen resembles that of a rural Sunday or of weekend suitors), the concept 'menere' (gentlemen) is a generalisation contrasting 'Boere', a concept from the sociolect. 'Menere' also contrasts with 'plaassondag' and 'naweekvryers' which are also culturally characteristic, even more exclusively so than 'Boere'. These idiomatic expressions symbolise a characteristic lifestyle from a cultural past which was distinguished by a rhythm of life in which labour and recreation alternated. War is by implication foregrounded as a dissonance of this 'natural' rhythm. Within a

South African context, 'modern war apparel' of the Boer's offspring, once more 'freedom fighters', comes into focus. It concerns a much debated war on South African borders. Even more ironically, former 'nederige lojale agterryers' ('humble and loyal after-riders', i.e. mounted servants), became the most recent 'freedom fighters' and political rulers of the country.

The use of concepts from a sociolect favours readers from the same cultural and historical background. Subjectivity of point of view and the role of a particular 'cultural voice' can not be ruled out. For the role players involved, war was no 'naweekuitstappie' (weekend trip) as is ironically suggested by the viewer-commentator in the model poem. A photo's function is remembrance. The significance or the meaning of such remembrance is directed by a viewer's point of view which is influenced by background information, commitment or empathy. The scope of vision possible through the 'frame' of a photo not only depends on representation but also on the point of view from which interpretation develops.

Text Layout

Besides the already mentioned polemic build-up of different perspectives, it becomes clear that there are also other elements of tension in the model poem. Divisions of stanzas and syntax do not coincide. Stanzas run over into one another through enjambment. This procédé compels the reader to proceed discriminately.

Parallel to the division of the poem into four stanzas, there are four syntactic segments, which interact with the stanzas to create alternative patterning. The result is a foregrounding of semantic tensions or dissonance. The result also signifies a 'double structure'. Although not signified by capital letters, two main clauses are recognizable with verbs in the praesens. The verbs (which foreground the lyrical subject) are juxtaposed with 'historical action' (past time) which is framed by the photograph. The stylistic figures irony and parody reveal the discrepancy between what happened in the past and an act of evaluation in the present. The successive use of two related but nevertheless different tropes, requires further scrutiny.

The first grammatically conventional sentence of the poem links the two middle stanzas through enjambment: 'die oorlogsgedrag / van die menere / is soos dié van 'n plaassondag // of van outydse naweekvryers'. As centerpiece of the poem, the sentence functions as a bridge between two lists to which five (+) lines on either side are allocated, if the two concluding lines are reckoned as a new segment. The significance of the comparisons is an exposing of simulated ignorance (Gr. *eroneia* Van Gorp 1986:201). From this it can be inferred that the appearance of the 'Boer fighters' in the photo is misleadingly 'innocent' and nonchalant (cf. the lines 'dowwe Boere-oë vol gryswrede' – dull Boer eyes full of grey wrath). The ironic comment on the other hand unmasks them (and by implication similarly all fighters) as Don Quixote-like figures, likewise, even accompanied by loyal after-riders!

The second sentence ostensibly functions as an independent segment although, through the absence of a capital letter, it relates more closely to the preceding segments. It is supported by the conjunctive anaphora 'dit' (this) in the last line. It serves as a foregrounding of 'die saak' (the cause) in the previous line to which it refers back. 'The cause' can be interpreted as metonymy for the polysemantic concepts 'habitat' and 'heldemoed' (heroism). Within this semantic field it can be connected to a judicial isotopy, suggesting fair judgement. The ambiguities of this cause however, implicated by the tropes irony and parody, subvert such a conclusion.

Reference has already been made to the semantic relation between 'Boerevegters' and the phrase 'habitat en heldemoed'. Because of this linking, the two concluding lines can also be read as: "Die saak van die foto Boerevegters / dit ruik alles na lak en karton en papier" (the cause of the photo of Boerfighters, everything smell of glue and cardboard and paper). What has evolved in the rest of the poem presents new possibilities of application in the concluding lines. The specific case of the 'Boer fighters' has a general application. On the basis of the intricate structure of the poem and the other instances of generalisation referred to, the following statement is also implied: The cause of war / it smells of glue and cardboard and paper. Taking into consideration the expected idiomatic phrase in a context of war – it smells of gunpowder – the phrase becomes even more ironical and mocking. The implied cause for war is a 'heroic' quest for habitat / identity. Yet, such a 'cause' 'smells' of relativity because of the reality of shifting contexts. The following line from the poem *wat praat ek* ('what am I talking about' **Driepas**: 116) reveals a similar unmasking of the futility of human strife: "like all disintegrated people, scraps and remnants of previous property fossilised". Free translation).

The phrase 'glue and cardboard and paper' in the prominent closing statement of the poem, once more sounds phonic chains or relations. The rhymes 'bandelier' (bandoleer) and 'papier' (paper) do not only foreground irony. 'Lak en karton' phonetically relate to 'pure penkoppe, ou korrelkopooms' (zealous scouts and crusty old men) in the third stanza. These two categories also mark the beginning of the second list of foci. Two concepts which are foregrounded by the relational possibilities of the last phrase of the poem are 'koppe' (heads) and 'wapens' (weapons), considering the metonymic function of the nouns mentioned. This is a revealing parallel of a cartoon mocking 'men of war' which was published by the *Cartoonists and writers syndicate* (Keen 1986:9) with the slogan: "arms don't kill people, heads kill people". Through this perspective, implications like 'infantilism' in the case of 'scouts' and 'lack of reflection' in the case of 'crusty old men' become relevant.

Considering punctuation, the poem consists of one sentence, starting with a capital letter and developing through coordinate clauses and commas over four stanzas before ending with a full stop. This syntax implies one continuous semantic unit. The two subjacent grammatically 'conventional' sentences (excluding punctuation formalities) which are nonetheless discernible, are foregrounded by their polemic tropes. Both are preceded by a list containing parallels and contrasts. Sinclair (in Van Peer 1988:264) comments on such a list as follows: it is "a replacement of a syntagmatic choice by a paradigmatic one. The

syntagmatic structure is not developed, but instead there is a reselection of the same element of structure". The lists demand an alternative reading process to that of the underlying 'sentences'.

A comparison of the two lists reveals an obvious symmetry - ten items before each sentence. Fernández Armesto (1997:4) explains naming as the simplest method to foreground referential use for the purpose of linking 'reality' and language as closely as possible. Considering the semantic development in the poem, the two lists can be interpreted as 'proofs' of authenticity amidst several other ambiguities, especially those of the tropes.

The social code in the poem plays a major role in the semantic development. Garb is a prominent cultural identification and a periodicity sign. Cultural conventions are likewise significant identifications on different levels. By comparing the articles in the two lists, meaning production becomes apparent. Although there is not exact parallelism between the two lists, there are sufficient similarities to draw the conclusion that parallelism is indeed the chief function of the lists (cf. Sinclair in Van Peer: 1988:270).

There are three references to 'baard' (beard) in the first list. This is an important signifier of masculinity as becomes clear in the differentiation between 'melkdons' (incipient beard) and 'weglêmoestas' (handlebar moustache). In the first list, a hierarchical relation is foregrounded by this juxtaposition as is similarly signified by 'paprand- en opslaanhoede'. In the second list, this hierarchy is even stronger with the use of the concepts 'penkoppe' and 'korrelkopooms'. A third category also comes into focus namely, 'nederige lojale agterryers' (humble, loyal, after-riders). This example of stereotyping is once more politically explosive in contemporary South Africa. In the original context, the phrase can be interpreted as semantically 'innocent'. The importance of the 'agterryers' was that they did not belong to the 'enemy'. They were an integral part of a 'harmonious' lifestyle (cf. the accompanying concept 'loyal') where they belonged as much as the socially subservient 'penkoppe'.

Another significant parallel between the two lists is that in each of them there are passive elements and aggressive elements. The first five concepts of the first list can be interpreted as passive elements, while 'dowwe Boere-oë' (dull Boer eyes) serves as a hinge to switch to the second half of the list where objects belong to an isotopy of aggression or war. What have been 'dull eyes', are extended with the phrase 'full of grey wrath'. This phrase activates an association with the idiomatic phrase 'blitsende oë' (flashing eyes). The first object to follow in the list, 'gepoleerde kamaste' (polished gaiters) can semantically be associated with this idiomatic phrase. A military connotation can thus be made which is confirmed by the next object, a 'bullet-case hanging from the shoulders'. Head to foot aggressive readiness is signified. Two objects in the second half of the first list belong to weaponry. The remaining articles relate to previous concepts, namely 'verkyker' (binoculars, instead of eyes) and 'baard' (beard, unqualified full-grown male). These concepts signify greater refutability. Concepts in both lists have underlying emotive values, which are foregrounded by repetition or contrast. Parallelism, one of the ancient

style figures in oral poetry (Van Gorp: 299), fits stylistically as symptomatic of the kind of rural community signified in the model poem.

The first two objects of the second list, 'penkoppe' and 'korrelkopooms', belong to the same isotopy as 'hoede' (hats) which similarly take the first and second positions in the first list. The differentiated 'vilthoed' (felt hat) in the eighth position of the second list highlights this context. The first five objects of the first list can be associated with 'heldemoed' (heroism) while objects three to six from the second list, can be associated with 'habitat', thus corresponding the combination of the concepts 'habitat en heldemoed' in the second last verse. The last four concepts of the second list can be associated with aggression. With three out of four concepts referring to weaponry (as opposed to two such concepts in the first list), a slight development of readiness for battle is signified. However, this move is mocked by the rhyming of 'bandelier' (bandoleer) and 'papier' (paper). Significantly, 'papier' (paper) is the symbolic 'last word' in a poem with war as its main theme! The function of the rhyme, however, can also be turned around – this 'paper' can be related to 'weaponry' and utilised as such.

While the two lists (on the surface) leave the impression of 'prosaic naming', analysis reveals that each item is semantically motivated and structured. Foregrounding of the metonymic function of each of the nouns is proof of the complexity of discourses in space-time carried on simultaneously on different levels. Northrop Frye's (1982:130) observation that metonymy is 'a form of vision' which reverses conceptions of space-time, is relevant in this context. The discourse underlying the use of metonymy in the model poem subverts space-time perceptions about war and conflict as 'facts'. On the contrary socio-political images signifying war and conflict disturb human beings in their 'natural rhythm'! Simultaneously, the metonymy functions as a prominent instrument for cohesion, which signifies development (cf. Carstens 1997:129). A significant illustration of such bonding is the semantic interaction between 'Boerevegters' (Boer fighters) and 'habitat' (linking with 'Boere') en 'heldemoed' (linking with 'vegters'). The significance of the use of metonymy in this context can be inferred from the following understanding by Eichenbaum (in Preminger ed. 1993:784) of metonymy as "a displacement, or lateral semantic shift, that lends words new meanings, without leaving the literal plane". Concerning the model poem, this observation means that the model poem should be interpreted with a 'double vision' in mind - a literal level where 'die saak' (the cause) refers to particular fighters, while a metaphorical level must however also be kept in mind where the metonymy is to be interpreted as a process of substitution which generalises.

The following remark by Hartnett (in Couture 1986:143) underlines the controlling influence of intentionality on text production in this instance: "Cohesion does not create relationships...; rather they (i.e. ties) express cohesive relationships that already exist in the writer's thinking. Cohesion reflects mental processes which both writers and readers perform".

Socio-political perspectives

Socio-political issues interact with every 'historically motivated' discourse in the model poem. As the concept 'Boerevegters' in the first place signifies distinctiveness, socio-political issues in the poem also have a contextual application in the first place. What is perceived in a photo of Boer fighters is related to a South African patriarchal, rural community of a previous century. Existing socio-political hierarchies reflect a Christian Calvinist outlook on life.

Since the socio-political context of the model poem is of a previous century, that of the viewer-commentator will be different. The nineteen eighties was a period of political upheaval in South Africa which deeply influenced (already transformed) landowners. The claim of 'habitat' is once again central to the political discourse. The roles of 'freedom fighters' are inverted. In family life old hierarchies are subverted. A legal 'case' of previous 'heldemoed en habitat' is challenged since what has been warred about, is now reclaimed. On the other hand, similarities are evident between conflict and conflict. To Lakoff (1980:97) "arguments serve the purpose of understanding". His opinion is that "We construct arguments when we need to show the connections between things that are obvious - that we take for granted - and other things that are not obvious. We do this by putting ideas together". Similar strategies can be discerned in the Cloete poem.

Considering contemporary discourses of power like those on racism, feminism and religion, the model poem can become a fruitful field of conflicting trends. The concepts 'plaassondag' (a rural Sunday), 'naweekvryers' (weekend suitors), 'penkoppe' (scouts), 'korrelkopooms' (crusty old men) and 'agterryers' (after-riders) are out of step with a prevailing socio-political context. A patriarchal system, especially as accompaniment to religious convictions, is seriously questioned or disposed with. One of the most polemical issues of the model poem is the 'voice' of the absent - women and children, voiceless and faceless 'after-riders' as well as the faceless 'enemy'. Statistical information can provide proof for an argument that the absent, according to contemporary norms, are 'discriminately' excluded from the picturing of the heroic.

Merely by taking contemporary sociolectic principles into account, the model poem is full of conflict. A culture of group remembrance of a past war within a plural community and in a broader democratic system forms part of a polemical minefield. New wars are decided by new role-players, often in inverted positions. It is up to the reader to decide whether these discourses determine the focus of the poem or whether they are functional to the underlying discourse about a questioning and re-evaluation of human conflict. Sinclair (in Van Peer 1988: 267) puts forward the following acceptable standpoint: "In poetry, it is not necessary to decide upon a particular option; more than one can be held as relevant, even if they are incompatible with each other. In some cases one's overall interpretation will assign priorities without excluding less likely possibilities".

A vision of warfare – local, general, apocalyptic

The suggested telescoping of historical perspectives in Cloete's poem inevitably guides a reader towards his most recent volume of poems, **Uit die hoek van my oog** (1998 –

From the corner of my eye). Not only the title of this volume confirms the foregrounding of perspective in the mind of the poet. In *Paser I* (70) the poet's perspective is described as a "helder trapsuutjiesoog" [wat] "uitreik / tot aan die afrandsel van my kyk" (a clear chameleon eye which reaches out towards the extreme end of my vision – free translation). Concurring with a poetic procedure of 'speech disempowerment', the poet in this volume (**Uit die hoek van my oog**: 68 – *penkop hoor meer as een stem – scout hears more than one voice*) is described as "no good soldier ("geen goeie soldaat), "without harness" ("sonder harnas") and "unarmed" ("ongewapen"). Although he is described as "a quester" ("Soek antwoorde / uit die ongehoorde"), "he has no answers" ("al my nadink bring net vrae"). The sole resistance given to him, is a poem ("Wees paraat... // Hoe? Dit is eenvoudig: / in die blote gedig"). The themes and discourses of several poems in this volume furthermore relate to those in *Foto Boerevegters*. The most revealing poem regarding perspectives of war and conflict, however, is the poem *geelperdridder* (**Uit die hoek van my oog** 26). which can be read as an expanding view on the subject of local warriors. The poem not only reveals general tendencies of warfare through the ages, its vision is apocalyptic in the sense of "a violent and doom-laden prediction" (Ilson ed. 1984).

A juxtaposition of the latter poem and *Foto Boerevegters* shows an ostensible continuation of the [f]-phoneme chain, now introducing the (significant) absent concepts from the previous poem, namely "vroue en vroue-kore" [wat] "bid vir liefde en vrede" (women and women choirs praying for love and peace). This however sharply contrasts the main theme of the poem, a fighter described as a "vlammende man ferm" [met] "fallus en vuus" (a fiery bold man with phallus and fist). Considering the latter poem, the symbolic significance of apparently 'neutral' concepts from the previous poem becomes clear. Instead of the comparable "penkoppe" (scouts), "melkbaardkadette" (incipient-bearded cadets) are described as marching with "grimaces, bald skulls and skeletons, cultivating stubble-beard" (loop met "grimasse / kaal skedels en skelette / en kweek stoppelbaarde"). There is explicit mention: "from antiquity beards had, even for popes, military significance...even with sceptres they prepare battle-axes and carcasses" (van oudsher had baarde / selfs vir die pouse militêre waarde. / selfs met septers berei hulle hellebaarde en karkasse"). The "yellow fiery man/fighter" in the latter poem has a "large beard" and rides, in contrast to the Boerfighter-precursors, "on a bridleless yellow horse". Both trooper and horse are "harnessed, with helmet" and he rides skilfully without holding on, the horse's mane is saw-toothed" ("albei...geharnas: met helm op die kop" en "ry behendig...loshande. / die perd se maanhaar is saagtande"). Chillingly this horseman is not only an "ever more skilful soldier" but also "tramples down all his precursor's white wooden crosses" ("al knapper soldaat" wat "trap (op) al sy voorgangers se wit houtkruis"). The poem *geelperdridder* (yellow horse knight) implies an unsettling vision of an apocalyptic, inhuman warfare prepared by previously known corps of fighters. It lacks any humourous or mocking perspective (as in *Foto Boerevegters*) since this "yellow horse knight", as an ultimate example of warriors, is "lessening (as) primate"...but increasing as an "ever more able soldier" ("al minder primate"...al knapper soldaat"). The "yellow horse knight" recalls Genghis Khan's 'golden horde' which swept over eastern Europe in the 13th century. This army consisted of "deadly mounted bowmen who

revolutionised the medieval battlefield” (Severin 1991:94). A Judeo-Christian vision of a final Armageddon, on the other hand, is also familiar with horses and their riders who “wore breastplates, fiery red, blue, and sulphur-yellow”. These horses had a frightful appearance with “heads like lion’s heads”. “By the fire, the smoke, and the sulphur that came from their mouths, a third of mankind was killed” (Rev. 9:17).

The poet’s “chameleon’s eye” covers a canvas of fighters ranging from antiquity to an apocalypse, commencing from the framing of a local remembrance of national heroes. For the reader the poem results in the postponement of a localized verdict.

Truth and falsehood as shifting points of view

In his prose as well as in his poetry, Cloete displays the poetic word-game as trickery between truth and falsehood. The title of his prose debut *Die waarheid gelieg* (Truth lied), is one of the important keys in understanding aspects of his poetry. The main theme of his second volume of prose, *Identikit*, is something similar - the search for the 'profile' of the guilty through a reconstructed likeness or 'picture'. The roles of pursuer (signifying 'truth') and offender (signifying 'falsehood') unexpectedly change in a moment of revelation. In *Rotsode* (**Jukstaposisie** 1982:16) the poet is portrayed as ‘a Janus,... a thief, who steals / from every body and every face / and soul something, from those who do not know how to keep themselves whole / and together, he robs something from them for a poem’ (free translation). The following poem plays out the key role of different perspectives of perceptions of truth and falsehood (**Idiolek** 46):

dit alles bymekaar
gesien tot my spyt
is eensydig pynlik waar
soos alle waarheid

kommentaar
vir die duidelikheid
dis die oog wat vergaar
wees tot sy waarheid bereid

daar is nog moois wat oorbly
maar buite die oog
wat tot sy hoek toelaat en uitskei
soos dit hom behaag

die oog
wat uitsoek
hy maak onvermydelik droog
in sy ewige hoek

(All things considered, to my regret, are one-sidedly painfully true as all truth // commentary for clarity – it is the eye that assembles – be prepared for its truth // there is

still beauty left but out of sight. The eye includes or excludes from its view as it pleases // the selecting eye inevitably misleads from its eternal (subjective) point of reference - free translation).

In the model poem it is a similar 'game' of truth and falsehood that influences production of meaning. On account of this conclusion, the concept 'taalskadeloosstelling' (disempowerment of speech / language) may deal with this important issue - the process through which poetic speech alternately cancels out truth and falsehood. The poet's word-games are not senseless, according to *Ballade van die digter* (**Idiolek**1986:66). Though the poet's innocent trifling with words is signified as "'n roekelose ydel gesprek / met ewighede" (a daring idle communication with eternities), he "hou woorde aan die lewe / terwyl soldate in Viëtnam en Thermopylae sterf" (keeps words alive while soldiers die in Viëtnam and Thermopylae. Free translation). The climax of the poem is the 'revealing' of the apocalyptic Word:

Ek, Ek het besluit
die aarde soos dit is bestaan voort
ter wille van dié gut dié ydeltuit

stel Ek die oordeelsdag uit.

(I, I decided / Earth, as it exists, continues / for this mischievous, frivolous creature / I postpone judgement day).

My understanding of these lines is that the poet is revealed as one with "the impossibility of finishing" (cf. Derrida 1991:244). On behalf of his word-games, a 'final pronunciation' and a 'final judgement' are suspended in spite of vast surrounding destruction and by implication guilt. A time-game (reaching towards 'eternities') can be continued owing to the poem's creative structure.

The poetic style of the poem *Foto Boerevegters* matches such findings. Recognition of the poem's procedure influences the process of meaning allocation. Not a single conflict of language, originating from the interaction of truth and falsehood, was settled by the poetic discourse. Different paradoxes were foregrounded but also maintained in the poem. Incongruities revealed by linguistic strategies, for instance the ironic similes and the parody of the two closing lines, captures the reader's attention. Parody's important function is its foregrounding of anomaly (cf. a trope/turn). Through a closer look, however, a subjacent truth comes to the surface counterbalancing opposites (Van Gorp 1986:297). It is significant that both irony and parody can be perceived as "truth lied".

The model poem is framed, in the last instance, by the context of the volume **Driepas** in which the section *Duvelrieë* functions. From this fact it can be inferred that war, despite being manifestation of evil and dissonance, is allocated a significant place in space-time and has a fragmented validation, as implied in the closing verse lines. In spite of the fact that war has a 'two-step' uprooting rhythm, it creates tensions exhibiting counterpoints.

Foto Boerevegters is simultaneously a signification of falsehood and of truth. The surface 'perspective' of the poem is: wars are lies. Underlying this falsehood, however, are perspectives of truth about human frailty against the destruction of time.

Conclusion

The procédé of 'speech disempowerment' ('taalskadeloosstelling') does not make use of stylistic figures of declaration or rhetoric. Instead its tools are understatement and wordplay. Through a sobering of language, speech becomes transparent. Language parallels a window, allowing dimension and room for 'breathing'. Through structural strategies, signs obtain different possibilities of function, for instance, when not only indexicality is relevant. Iconicity and symbolism of a single sign come into focus, creating new perspectives. A further important result is that language mirrors point and counterpoint. Obviously it creates an explosion of potential meaning. Northrop Frye (1991:83) quotes evidence from T.S. Eliot and Mallarmé who "tell us that purifying the speech of the 'tribe' or society around us is what gives a social function to the poet".

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Lists

Foto Boerevegters T.T. Cloete **Driepas** 1989:111

- | | | |
|---|---|------------|
| 1 | Veer in die paprand- en opslaanhoede,
melkdons en weglêmoestas,
dowwe Boere-oë vol grys woede,
gepoleerde kamas en koeëltas | list 1 |
| 2 | om die skouers baard, gewere,
verkyker, die oorlogsdrag
van die menere
is soos dié van ‘n plaassondag | sentence 1 |
| 3 | of van outydse naweekvryers;
pure penkoppe, ou korrelkopooms,
nederige lojale agterryers,
perde en saals en tooms | list 2 |
| 4 | kruithorings, vilthoed
geweerloop, bandelier,
die saak van die habitat en heldemoed
dit ruik alles na lak en karton en papier. | sentence 2 |

(bold print for differentiation)

Lists (inventories)

List 1

- 1 koppe (paprandhoede)
- 2 koppe (opslaanhoede)
- 3 *baard* (melkdons)
- 4 *baard* (weglêmoestas)
- 5 oë
- 6 **berede toerusting** (kamas)
- 7 **wapentuig** (koeëltas)
- 8 *baard*
- 9 **wapentuig** (gewere)
- 10 oë (verkyker)

List 2

- 1 (pen)koppe
- 2 (korrel)kop(pe)(ooms)
- 3 agterryers
- 4 **berede toerusting** (perde)
- 5 **berede toerusting** (saals)
- 6 **berede toerusting** (tooms)
- 7 **wapentuig** (kruithorings)
- 8 koppe ((vilt)hoed)
- 9 **wapentuig** (geweerloop)
- 10 **wapentuig** (bandelier)