

In search of traces of textual meaning: a comparative reading

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1

An ideal comparative study would have been possible if the same poetic text was read from different theoretical points of departure, since this would have enabled the critic to indicate how one text, analyzed from different theoretical points of departure, can produce a multiplication of complementing and/or opposing “meanings”, and to demonstrate that the text is not stable in its dissemination of meaning. Analyzing meaning production in different texts deprives the final analysis of firstly, monitoring the extent to which certain readings lack the apparatus to stimulate the text in generating a maximum production potential, and secondly, of indicating how different approaches oppose and undermine while others either complement each other, or define the same interpretation differently, and consequently how all the differing approaches constitute a pluralistic intertext in constant discourse. Liebenberg, in his analysis of “Winternag”, accomplishes this objective well.

What could also prove to be a fruitful study, is assessing whether and to what extent specific texts are more compatible to specific analytical methods.

In my comparative analysis I shall compare different textual approaches to meaning production and shall indicate the syntagmatic discursive intertextual relations (the movement of supplemental differentiation) to eventually focus on the text’s inexhaustible production potential despite the coercive constraints of theoretical approaches, pursuing textual incarceration. This approach will mainly highlight the interaction between the compared theoretical frames, with the intention to demonstrate their discursive dynamics, and the proliferation of discourse within this pluralistic instable tissue of intertexts.

As a practical measure, only one or two selected aspect(s) from each reading will be responded to – not necessarily the most evident aspects, but rather those actively in discourse with other readings from this anthology.

2

“‘Bontekoe’: plek, tyd en persoon word een”: Henning Snyman

Snyman approaches the poetic text “Bontekoe” (by D.J. Opperman) by analyzing spatial, temporal and personal interaction within its structure. The essence of this approach is its tendency to regard these structural aspects as

being enclosed within an autonomous textual structure by locating it within a discursive relationship to another text, i.e. the description of a fire on a ship in the humorously moralizing *Journal van Willem Ysbrantsz* (1957: 29–49) by Bontekoe. The discursive dynamics of the structural aspects within the text are thus multiplied.

The *deiksis* highlighted by Snyman, and which Lyons (1977: 637) defines as “the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance”, evidently implies an intertextuality. I shall investigate the degree to which Snyman’s approach can be placed in discursive relation to, for example, Liebenberg’s approach concerning ideology and intertextuality, and refer to Hambidge’s and De Jong’s deconstructive approaches.

Intertextuality refers to the text as being produced within the space of the relations between texts, which is a site of productivity, where the text is not a stable product. Barthes (1988: 37) argues:

any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it at varying levels, [. . .] Any text is a new tissue of past citations. [. . .] Intertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; or unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation-marks [. . .] the whole of language, anterior or contemporary, comes to the text, not following the path of a discoverable filiation or a willed imitation, but that of a dissemination – an image which makes sure the text has the status not of a reproduction but of productivity.

Snyman’s analysis is, according to this quotation from Barthes, too superficial and one-dimensional. And it is at this point that theorists often misinterpret Barthes’s theory. Liebenberg, in this ideological and intertextual approach, succinctly emphasizes that intertextuality implies also those texts which are not evidently traceable within a text. Snyman, in his approach, concentrates only on the most obviously influential text corresponding to “Bontekoe”. It could also be demonstrated how language aspects operate intertextually, as Gräbe does, or how cultural or ideological or any other codes are related to the text, as Viljoen does, and so on.

Snyman’s strategy is thus to use a second evidently present textual reference (text 2) within the primary text (text 1) to stimulate text 1 to produce a clarification of its “meaning”. He does not, however, make any reference to any other potential textual relations. The Bontekoe text (text 2) seems thus to be used as a stabilizer of the Opperman text (text 1) by interlocking the two, without any other textual interference. The inferred “stability” of text 1, “proved” by text 2, is reproduced in Snyman’s text (text 3), instead of remarking on the evidence of text 2 being open, incomplete and unstable. I thus refer to Snyman’s approach as the *templet*-approach: using a single text (text 2) as a *templet* for another (text 1) to unlock and discover the hidden “meaning” of text 1.

Hambidge (1986: 75) advocates the reverse of this reading in her deconstructive approach, when arguing in favour of textual analysis which does not

attempt at closing in the text, but rather at focussing on the diversity, the divergent possibilities, the simbiotic relationships of a text with others and conclusively, its incompleteness. In her deconstructive reading of “Marilyn Monroe foto in blou” (by T.T. Cloete) she warns against the abuse of intertextuality and emphasizes that the concept should be applied within a semiotic reference field, and that the transposition should be indicated. She demonstrates the transposition within the poem she is reading, after placing the photograph to which it refers in its relational position. But, very importantly, she also refers to the transposition occurring within the photograph. This could be considered a deficiency of the Snyman-analysis. His demonstration of the Bontekoe text stabilizing the Opperman text, ignores the *changes* it activates in the Bontekoe text. Snyman’s search for textual meaning, unlike the deconstructive approaches in *Teks-Leser-Konteks*, highlights only one discourse, instead of a diversity of diffusing discourses undermining and influencing each other. Instead of indicating the play and overflowing of the signifiers, text 2 is implemented structurally to pinpoint the meaning of text 1.

Though the Bontekoe text is related to the later-written Opperman text, this relation was initially only a potentiality. Barthes (1988: 35) in this regard, refers to the productivity between texts “even if the author of the text had not foreseen them: the signifier belongs to every body; it is the text which, in fact, works tirelessly, not the artist or the consumer” and “the text is conceived as production (and no longer as product), ‘signification’ is no longer an adequate concept. As soon as the text is conceived as a polysemic space where the paths of several possible meanings intersect, it is necessary to cast off the monological, legal status of signification, and to pluralise it”.

Snyman’s analysis is thus not as he remarks “’n [u]itvoerige ontleding”, but only a demonstration of one analytical possibility, which he (1986: 9) implicitly admits: “dit bewys ’n deel van die omvang en diepte waartoe ’n woordkunswerk in staat is”.

Conclusively he (1986: 9, 10) comments that a literary analyst “hom nie mag bind aan ’n enkele ‘metode’ van werk nie en sy (en die teks se) individualiteit moet behou en erken”. That one analytical method limits textual production is just, as explained in this discussion. But that a text possesses its own identity, which should be respected and recognized, does not, in the light of intertextuality and deconstruction, seem to be unchallengeable, as will be explained in my reading of other readings.

3

“‘Droogte’: aspekte van poëtiese taalgebruik”: Ina Gräbe

When the aspect I selected to highlight in Snyman’s reading, (i.e., the “templet-approach”) is compared to Gräbe’s approach, the most evident difference would be that Snyman, in his analysis, indicates how two texts, when combined, become productive in their meaning constitution. He thus undermines the traditional idea of an autonomous text, while Gräbe, in her

analysis, illustrates how the language *within* one text (both local and global relations) becomes productive in generating meaning.

Gräbe, though, makes it very clear that, in order to expand the interpretive potential of the analysis of a poetic text, and in order to stimulate the productivity of a text's poetic language, extra-textual relations should be considered – the reader's extra-textual knowledge and codal competence should be activated. She comments: "By die dekodering van 'n gedig is dit nodig dat die leser sowel die ekstratekstuele as die intratekstuele relasies van die teks in ag sal neem". (1986: 12)

Even though she theoretically emphasizes both these analytical necessities, she only briefly mentions that knowledge of the extra-textual Bible frame's creation myth is essential to a comprehension of the "Droogte"-text (by Leon Strydom). Gräbe, though, refrains from analyzing the interaction between extra-text and text. Her analysis is devoted mainly to metaphorical constructions, syntactic-typographical organization, phonological structuring and metric-rhythmical emphasis in the text. She focusses on the defamiliarized language of the poetic text and its communicative consequences for the text, which is an essential aspect of textual analysis, since meaning production within the text multiplies the production potential of the text in its relation to other texts, too. This, however, should not be considered to be the end of the analytical process.

Gräbe (1986: 13) regards the implication of emphasis on intratextual relations as not only the focussing on language units as such, but also the discovery of relations between word segments, words, phrases, sentences, verse lines and stanzas in a poem. Intratextual relations of the defamiliarized language use within a poetic text thus implies semantic enrichment.

When referring to metaphor, Gräbe argues in favour of the identification and interpretation of both local (syntactic-microscopic), as well as global (structural-macroscopic) metaphoric constructions in poetic texts. Even though she is still incarcerated by the constructed and constricted boundaries imposed by her on the text, her approach can be credited for not being limited to microscopic textual phenomena, but for also including an analysis of the macroscopic textual structure.

What is especially important in this analytical method is its demonstration of how the meaning adopted by a textual phenomenon in a microscopic context can be changed, reversed, or undermined when placed within the text's macroscopic context. Gräbe (1986: 21) indicates the same process at work on syntactical, typographical and phonological levels. For example, when she refers to sound repetition she focusses on its dissemination in the poem: "Herhaling van klanke en klankkombinasies kan 'n reeds vasgelegde betekenis-assosiasie van 'n woord of woorde klankmatig versprei oor gedeeltes van die teks waar die betrokke woord nie weer herhaal word nie" (Gräbe, 1986: 31). If Gräbe acknowledges these meaning shifts within the text, why then, it could be asked, is the overflowing of this process into the extra-text not included in her analytical procedure, especially since her text-internal analytical conclusions can be regarded as a micro-example of the dynamics within a macro-intertextual context, where texts continuously, dynamically

infringe upon each other's territories and affect each other. Gräbe's own analysis divulges the unstable and unfixed meaning of signs, words, word clusters and sentences. This is reminiscent of Derrida's concept of "différance", to which De Jong (1986: 107) refers in her explicit deconstructive approach in *Teks-Leser-Konteks*: "As die gedig sonder 'n implisiete subjektiwiteit gelees word, dan lyk sy 'betekenis' na 'n selverdeling waarin die oorspronklike sel verdwyn het in reekse duplikasies en variasies." De Jong refers to Achterberg's oeuvre in which "elke kode opgehef word deur 'n volgende kode [. . .] Die oeuvre as geheel is 'n veld van tekens wat mekaar wedersyds opneem, aanvul en vervang in skynbaar onbeperkte moontlikheid van verwysingsvelde".

Gräbe (1986: 42) eventually postulates a "meaning" for her text by means of a structural analysis, and concludes that her analysis demonstrates that "geen gedig verklaar kan word deur 'n blote kennis van sy oënskylike eksterne verwysingsraamwerk nie, omdat hierdie verwysingsraamwerk binne die poëtiese struktuur doelbewus verander en herinterpreteer word". The crucial aspect ignored by this statement, is its reverse: that a knowledge and application of "external" texts also changes and reinterprets the poem. I do, however, not regard the issue to be, as Gräbe argues, that of regarding external reference frames as the only way of understanding a poetic text, but rather that external texts should not be disregarded.

Gräbe's approach is typically structuralist, since it seeks an interpretation from *within* the structure of the text. Young (1981: 6) regards this criticism, by referring to Foucault, as demanding and pursuing a remainder of the essence of thought which "sleeps inside" the text, "waiting for the word of the critic to bring it alive". Since a text is not an enclosed unit, but in constant discourse with other texts, as one sentence within a poetic text is not an enclosed unit, but in constant discourse with other language units within the text, I would add to Gräbe's (1986: 42) remark (struktuuranalise [is] nietemin voorwaardelik vir die toereikende begrip van 'n gedig") that a stable "meaning" cannot be deduced from the structure of a poetic text, because intertextual relations and aspects within the text itself constantly undermine the stability of a semantic centre, as Gräbe herself (concerning the latter) has demonstrated in her analysis.

4

"'Winternag': van ideologie tot intertekstualiteit": Wilhelm Liebenberg

As an intertextual link to the conclusion of the previous section, Liebenberg's (1986: 44) response to the question 'what else can be said about "Winternag" (by E.N. Marais) after Lindenberg's analysis?', is: "So 'n vraag gaan van die veronderstelling uit dat 'Winternag' 'n gedig is met 'n spesifieke 'betekenis', iets wat 'raak'-gelees kan word, wat vasgepen kan word, wat uitgeput kan word [. . .]."

Liebenberg prefers to regard a poetic text as a *Text*. In this regard he refers to the Tel Quel-group's view of the text as a "translinguistic apparatus which

redistributes the order of the language by putting a communicative utterance, aiming to inform directly, in relation with different utterances, anterior to or synchronic with it", (Young, 1981: 36)

What is important, though, in Liebenberg's (1986: 45) reading is that he (unlike Snyman or Gräbe) emphasizes the two-dimensional status of the text, since the text is the location where different texts intersect to change, deconstruct and reconstruct the textual language. Its other status is that of intertext infringing upon the territories of others. He concludes that the text is thus both a function in and a function of its intertextuality.

Intertextuality, though, does not only refer to the evidently influential or commenting texts in the close vicinity of the text, but also to the "undiscovered" textual relations, of which the author/reader is not aware. An approach like Snyman's, which only regards the one and most obviously present intertext as a "key" to the primary text, could be criticized on these grounds. Liebenberg's (1986: 45) corrective argument against the narrowing of intertextuality concerns the permutation of texts around and in a text which produces an infinite series of results.

Liebenberg uses "Winternag" to demonstrate how many other texts and codes are embedded within the fibres of this text. Special emphasis is placed on its relation to the Afrikaner struggle, the language, as well as the national struggle, i.e. a cultural and an historical intertext, as well as a biographical intertext. But apart from these, he points to literary criticism as an intertext – literary criticism in the sense of search for textual meaning, which is closely interrelated to ideological values. Liebenberg quotes from different critiques to demonstrate how aspects of the poetic text misfitting the critic's ideological value system (another text) are easily transferred to the biographical text in order to be deactivated.

A valuable aspect of Liebenberg's contribution towards the inquiry into textual meaning production, is his analysis of how critiques manipulate intertextuality – how the surrounding intertexts are always placed in a specific relation to the poetic text, in order to stabilize the angle and position of intersection. This manipulation of intertextuality will prevent infinite permutation. He illustrates that intertextuality is denied by the "highpriests" of the "autonomous text", who deny the productive interferences of other texts and negatively refer to it as "hineininterpretieren". Liebenberg questions this "objectivity" which they advocate: does it really differ from "hineininterpretieren", since this is just another way of external control over (and restrictions to) semantic production and dissemination of the poetic text.

Liebenberg conclusively exposes what is presented as "natural" and "true" by critics (within a specific ideology) as being based upon arbitrary choices. By presenting arbitrary "meaning" or values as "true", certain interpretative possibilities are extinguished. This argument leads to the vital influence of ideology during interpretative procedures. Ideological manipulation of the discovery of the simplicity of a meaning centre is thus not the unlocking of a truth, but rather an attempt at directing the text towards an ideological preference, by means of textual repression and disseminational blocking. Ideology is, according to this critique, a key to the meaning of signs, and

according to the Tel Quel-approach, present in every sign, because whenever a sign is activated or used, its meaning is closed in: “’n Mens is (om die waarheid te sê) van die werking van ideologie, die vaspenning van betekenis, afhanklik om hoegenaamd te kan kommunikeer, te dink dat mens mekaar verstaan”. (Liebenberg, 1986: 64)

The most important insight from Liebenberg’s reading is, for the purpose of this discussion (in relation to the other discussed readings) his postulation that textual deconstruction exposes the “natural” aspects as being arbitrary – deconstruction as the untying of that which was tied by ideology. It is, as he refers to it, the undermining of common sense.

In conclusion I quote another significant remark by Liebenberg (1986: 65): “Die punt is nie om met ’n ideologie-vrye alternatief te probeer kom nie, maar om ’n dialoog te voer. Kristeva kry die nosie van ‘intertekstualiteit’ juis by die sogenaamde Bakhtin-groep wat die klem op dialoog geplaas het, want dit is waarom dit uiteindelik gaan: die dialoog tussen tekste. ’n Teks *het* nie betekenis nie, maar beteken – vanweë die wyses waarop dit van ander tekste verskil”. This then, is also the intention of a comparative reading in search of the traces of textual meaning: to bring different texts, consciously or not, each advocating an “ideology”, into a productive process of discourse, eliminating the possibility of the autonomy of one reading.

5

“‘Marilyn Monroe foto in blou’: ’n dekonstruksie van die gedig as fototeks”:
Joan Hambidge

Hambidge’s analytical method is, like Liebenberg’s, deconstructive. She too demonstrates how intertextuality undermines textual autonomy, but she places less emphasis on the ideological “common sense” that should be debunked, and more emphasis on the necessity of “pure” intertextual analysis: “the transposition of one or more *systems* of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position. Any *signifying practice* is a field [. . .] in which various signifying systems undergo such transposition” (Kristeva 1980: 15). Hambidge, according to this definition, points to the importance of applying intertextuality within a semiotic frame of reference, as well as the importance of indicating the transposition that takes place.

Referring to the poetic text by Cloete and the famous M.M. photograph on which the poetic text reflects, Hambidge (1986: 69) remarks that conventional critics will regard the photograph as the key to the understanding of the poem (like Snyman does in his Bontekoe-analysis), but disregards the reversed. Hambidge not only emphasizes the fact that texts transform each other, but she also enhances the notion of the reader as text, charged with an infinity of codes/texts, i.e., cultural codes, etc., which affect the meaning of the text. Therefore, as Barthes states in *S/Z* (1975: 10) “[t]his ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, codes which are infinite [. . .]”. This implies the ideological charge which Liebenberg exposes.

In her deconstructive approach, Hambidge searches for the turning point(s) in the poetic text in order to indicate a text's contradictions of and within its own unity. During this procedure the deconstructivists' questioning of determinism is portrayed. These anti-deterministic ideals are also expressed in their attitude towards a critic's textual approach. Hambidge explains that the deconstructivist is involved in personal decision making, when choosing which relationship s/he wishes to depict. This implies that a *correct* reading is non-existent, since a reader's difference from another reader, can again be relativized by another. The latter is explicitly demonstrated by Liebenberg in his account of the history of critiques of one poem – there is not only one interpretative road, and each road leads to another meaning. Depending on the theoretical method applied, or the point of departure, *any* "meaning" could crystallize from an analysis. Thus: textually as well as theoretically, deconstruction is antideterministic.

Hambidge demonstrates that this poetic text "contains" more than one discourse and that even the most obvious discourse, that between poem and photograph, is not constant or stable in its overlapping: Cloete, in his poem, does not refer to all the information of the photograph, he accentuates specific information, and he also uses information which is not available from the photograph. The filtering process thus already starts at the "original" author, and is continued by the reader, the critic, and then again the readers of the critiques, or the critiques of the critiques and the readers of these, etc. Her analysis thus undermines the notion of an authoritative autonomous reading, and prefers to favour a poly-textuality where different signs intersect, which is multiplied by every new reading.

Hambidge's analysis can be credited for recognition of its unavoidable shortcomings. Instead of defending its reading as a precondition for the correct understanding of the specific poetic text, she explains her conclusion as being derived from a specific approach, a theoretical mould, directing and channelling the interpretative result of the textual analysis. She recognizes the impossibility of deconstructing (or involving) all the references or textual influences in a text. Her discussion is thus presented as a limited and insufficient analysis and as one possibility amongst many others.

6

"'Die klou dui al die dier aan': oor semiotiek en literatuur": Hein Viljoen
 Viljoen, in the introduction to his semiotic approach to literature, raises a vital question of literary theoretical inquiry: whether there exists a separation between the "meaning"-searching text-investigator and the literary text itself. Various solutions to this problematic question are posed by the different approaches in this collection. Viljoen in his discussion, reveals that he regards the literary investigator/reader as being part of the process of meaning production, by pointing to the codes or signs embedded in not only the text, but also the textual environment and the reader and his/her environment. Consequently his reading proposes a convergence of all these codes during the process of literary interpretation.

In his introduction, though, he confuses this interpretative codal convergence with the traditional notion of a text as being in possession of a very specific meaning, which could be discovered. He asks the questions: "Wanneer verstaan ons 'n werk? Wanneer het ons dit verklaar?" More relevant questions could be asked, especially in the light of the other attempts at tracing meaning in this collection – questions like: Can a text be understood? Can we explain a text? In other words: is there an understandable, explicable specificity in a text? Is the reader just one link in the chain of meaning production – one segment in the overlapping codal or sign structure?

Macherey's critique on structuralism is applicable here too, namely, that this kind of approach merely presents itself as a deciphering of an enigma, or (as he formulates it) "to dig up a buried meaning ... Criticism merely produces a pre-established truth". (1978: 141)

Viljoen's questions provoke the unfortunate interpretation that he regards the reading of a text as an attempt towards the discovery of the innate coherence of the text. This is not only a contradiction in itself as Macherey points out, since it implies that the interpretation of the text is simultaneously a copy of the real meaning (thus a repetition), but also a new addition to the original, proved by the notion that interpretation is only required because it is not readily available. Thus copy, but also supplement.

Apart from this contradiction, Viljoen's own semiotic approach contradicts these introductory questions, since, as I have already mentioned, he explicitly demonstrates how, in the process of sign-overlapping, the meaning dissemination is launched, which involves a process of production (which never reaches a stage of final establishment) rather than reproduction, performance rather than representation. At this point Viljoen's approach is reminiscent of Hambidge's remark concerning meaning production (1986: 79): "Uiteindelik ontmoet die verskillende tekens mekaar in 'n poli-tekstuele toestand. Die rus is van korte duur: die leser vermenigvuldig die kodes".

Other relevant aspects of Viljoen's approach to meaning, is his emphasis on the arbitrariness of the sign, and the notion that the code is a social convention, and that codes are the rules according to which signs are generated. He points out that the sign is a learnt code which can be decoded by the reader. This decoding, though, should not be regarded as the "unlocking" of a truth, since the link is arbitrary, learnt, and not natural. This is again reminiscent of Liebenberg's remark (1986: 64): "Die poging om te wys dat dit wat as vanselfsprekend en natuurlik aanvaar word, eintlik op heel arbitrêre keuses berus". But whereas Viljoen only points to the implication of this notion, Liebenberg attempts to search a critic's style of interpretation for the ways in which s/he presents arbitrary choices as truths.

Apart from the learnt quality of the link between sign and meaning, it also flows over the edges of the established codal configuration when it overlaps with other codes. These codes are thus essential for the creation of meaning, but it is a process which cannot be controlled to remain within its signifying cell. This provides the reason for the impossibility, regardless of codes and signs, to identify in a simplified manner a meaning, or to uncover the right, real, true interpretation. In the process of challenging this possibility, the

process inevitably takes over control and instead of the reader or writer remaining in command of the process, they become part of the process – signs and codes constituted by a myriad other signs and codes. Viljoen (1986: 83) remarks: “Die interpretant kan op sy beurt weer teken wees vir ’n ander interpretant, sodat daar sprake is van ’n oneindige semiose: iets wat in die praktyk gebeur”.

Contrary to the above mentioned implication, Viljoen (1986: 85) comments: “Die globale betekenis van ’n werk word opgebou uit verskillende tekens op verskillende vlakke wat almal daartoe bydra dat die sentrale betekenis uiteindelik tot stand kom”. This returns the argument to the conventional notion of a central meaning of the text, which contradicts the structural analysis of the sign, its implications and its position in meaning formation, as explained above. A remark like this could be tolerated if, instead of the specific “die”, Viljoen rather used an unspecific “’n”, as one possible manifestation of a myriad meaning possibilities. This statement, though, is saved by the phrase “tot stand kom”, which implies production, rather than discovery.

This semiotic reading theory is thus not directed towards the development of methods to untie the “real meaning” of the text, but rather the processes of meaning formation. (See Senekal, 89)

This approach is comparable to that of Gräbe and Snyman, who utilize structural components in order to discover textual meaning, while the semiotic approach regards structure to be conceptual and thus investigates the procedures by means of which a structure is attributed to a text. Viljoen (1986: 89) remarks: “is dit nie meer grondliggend om die prosedures te bestudeer waardeur struktuur aan ’n teks toegeken word as om die struktuur te bestudeer – ’n struktuur wat reeds die produk van die interpretasieprosedures is nie?” This is an extremely relevant question, which is at the heart of literary theory, and it suggests that instead of attempting to discover meaning, the reader should rather attempt to discover the ways in which meaning is constituted – in other words, the interaction of all the codes at the textual crossroads. This approach is a step deeper into the foundation of meaning formation than that of for example Gräbe, who adheres to structural analysis. At this point Gräbe’s remark should be weighed again: “Dit is eweneens duidelik dat geen eksterne benadering kan lei tot ’n werklike begrip van ’n gedig nie”. By this remark she confesses her reading to be an attempt to find meaning, rather than to investigate how a reader “finds” meaning.

Liebenberg goes a step further. Viljoen accentuates the importance of analyzing *how* meaning is constituted, while Liebenberg analyses how the procedures of meaning constitution and text interpretation, become naturalized and how this naturalization of meaning formation and interpretation conveys aspects of the nourishing working of ideology.

7

“Die liefdesgedig as sy eie onmoontlikheid: dekonstruksie van ’n fenomenologiese betekeniskonvensie”: Marianne de Jong

De Jong introduces her argument by explaining how theory of literature traditionally reduced a poetic text to the simple formulae of the poet who knows what he says and says what he means. According to this approach the interpreter of a poetic text had to analyse the text in order to understand what the poet says and what the text means. Modern literary theory reduces a poetic text to the formulae of the speaker: the text is founded on the voice, the text is a way of saying. Approaches which regard texts as networks of codes and semiotic processes, like Viljoen's, imply a reader to identify the codes and to combine them with other codes. She explains how the text cannot "mean" in itself, but that the traces of meaning are embedded in the text – the potential of its becoming alive; its presence is embedded in its absence. De Jong uses Achterberg's poetic oeuvre and demonstrates how a female image is constantly recalled, and that this is possible because of her absence: "Om te skryf is om die afwesige in die taal aanwesig te maak. Die sleutel tot haar bestaan is daarom ook die sleutel tot haar volkome afwesigheid – haar lewe in die doderyk". (De Jong, 1986: 100)

De Jong makes use of the codes within a specific poetic oeuvre to demonstrate her theoretical point of departure. The code or textfiguration is the beloved. De Jong points out how this beloved, the code, is constantly annulled by a next code, and the beloved appears again and again from text to text. Even though every text postulates her presence, she seems to be infinitely repeatable and replaceable. This brings us to the presence/difference dialogue within post-structuralism which starts right at the heart of the sign: language is constituted by difference, the sign can only *be* because of the absence of that which it excludes and from which it can be differentiated. At the same time the sign cannot produce the signified as being present, because the very fact that it is a sign for something implies the absence of that "something". "Representation never re-presents, but always defers the presence of the signified". (Young, 1981: 15)

When we divorce ourselves from our inscribed Western philosophical tradition of logocentrism's search for presence, we discover only difference – and the text becomes an endless flow of signifiers, one referring to the other with meaning endlessly deferred, presence endlessly postponed.

An approach attempting to constrain the text will capture presence where there is only absence, and will, as Liebenberg explains, establish natural common sense where there are only traces of ideology. Difference, too, can never be affirmed as an ultimate value, because it is that which subverts the very foundations of any affirmation of value.

To use De Jong's approach of indicating how the beloved is constantly moving from one text to another and to indicate how it fits into the post-structuralist theory of meaning, would be to refer to meaning generation as a process which occurs within a horizontal system of relationships – thus: signifiers no longer refer to entities beyond themselves, but only to other signifiers, and meaning is never free or separable from the signifier which "invokes" it. According to Derrida, what occurs is "play" – presence is perpetually denied, the centre ceases to exist, and its lack entails the co-presence of absence. (See Ryan, 1982: 92)

De Jong's analysis is in accordance with this Derridean theory, as can be seen in the following remark by her: "Die gedigte tematiseer die afwesigheid van waarheid of werklikheid van taalttekens. Hulle enigste werklikheid is die taal self: die gedig verwys steeds na vorige gedigte en na lateres". (De Jong, 1986: 100)

Word and text thus cannot originate meaning, they only consist of *traces* of meaning which is itself never encountered. De Jong (1986: 103) argues that meaning consists of parasitically bound signs and that it is an illusion of Western logocentric philosophy that meaning can be captured through the sign. Meaning itself is a sign: "Betekenisgewing is be-tekening". (De Jong, 1986: 104)

According to this theory, De Jong (1986: 101) explains the formulae of Achterberg's love poetry: the conventional love poem is a substitute for that which is absent. And absence, she explains, is the formula which Achterberg implements. The pivoting paradox of the oeuvre is that the "u" (you), which is embodied in the poem, and which is the "meaning" of the poem, becomes text over and over again. The intention of the "u" cannot be formulated outside the text. De Jong (1986: 101) comments: "Die poësie hef daarom die metafisika van betekenis as ideële en bestaande gegewe op. Waar die gedig moet oorgaan in betekenis [. . .] word dit weer teks. [. . .] Vervulde betekenis is 'n 'prevelen, niet te verstaan . . .' wat slegs deur die gedig nagestreef kan word. Die gedig is 'n *poging* om betekenis te maak. Die ironie wat Achterberg ontgin, is dat alle vervullings 'buite' die taal slegs in taal uitgedruk kan word. Betekenis is altyd teken".

De Jong's approach thus focusses on the language of absence, which questions those textual theories which intend capturing the meaning of one text, and representing it in another.

8

"'Waita Ou-Derra van ons': 'n gedig as diskoers": Jan Senekal

Senekal proposes in his reading the notion of referring to the intertext as a "discourse". By means of Belcher's "Waita Ou-Derra van ons", he demonstrates how discourse analysis can be implemented in the reading of a poetic text. By referring to Fowler (1981: 7) he locates his reading within the frame of literary theory and argues that discourse analysis reaches further "than just describing the formal structures which give texts their shape and texture. It is a mistake to regard literary texts as autonomous patterns of linguistic form cut off from social forces" (Fowler, 1981: 7), because literature does not come to existence within a vacuum, but within a communication space, which changes continuously.

Instead of focussing on a text's influence on other texts (used in its traditional meaning), and vice versa, Senekal highlights the text as a social force with a vital cultural function. Thus: not just text as intertext, but text as social text. Intertextuality obviously also regards society as a text, but Senekal proposes the pivot of his discourse analysis to be the relation between literary

text and social text. This reading concentrates mainly on the textual structure which firstly influences, and secondly reflects the relations within society. Rather than approaching literature as a language structure, it is approached as a complex system of social communication acts and poetic attitudes (see Senekal, 1986: 112). It is an attempt to reconstruct the relations between, on the one hand, poetic text and, on the other hand, the discourse within its communicative space. Thus: as traditional literary theory attempts at finding a truth in a text which would be a reflection of a reality outside the text, this discourse analysis attempts to deduce from a text that which is *regarded* as “reality” and the interpretation of the world in the society that stimulated the generation of the specific poetic text. The text thus reflects on society and society is reflected in the text. This reminds one of Viljoen’s statement (1986: 87): “Literêre werke [. . .] word geplaas in ’n netwerk van relasies met hul produsente, resipiënte, kulturele kontekste en met ander werke”. This indicates how different theoretical approaches, in some instances, share common ground.

The producers of texts are themselves products of culture, which implies that texts are cultural products through which speak the voices of society in personal or public codes, consciously or not. If the producer of the poetic text is inscribed into a society, so is the reader. S/he is not free to read as s/he likes, but is informed by a social formation defined historically.

Senekal accentuates the ideological basis of a poetic text, which is reminiscent of Liebenberg’s reading. The difference between the two approaches is that Liebenberg implements ideology to undo the possibility of a true presence within a text, while Senekal exposes the ideological basis by focussing on the text as a product of society and indicates that the text, and the society that generated it, are in constant discourse with each other. Evidently both recognize the ideological “presence”, but both make their own inferences from the text.

The challenge to the reader reading a text as a social discourse, is to realize that s/he is partially “produced” by the discourse, who again participates in the production of the discourse. And eventually the reader, who is the product of historical structures and superstructures, has to evaluate his/her position and unravel the ideological effect of the discourse in, for example, a poetic text. The reader would inquire, according to Senekal, whether his set notions and value systems are confirmed, reformulated or discontinued by the text. By using the example of “Waita Ou-Derra van ons” Senekal demonstrates that this poem does not fit into the traditional frame of Afrikaans poetry and that Belcher deconstructs the traditional hierarchical position of Afrikaans-European versus Afrikaans-African. He explains how in this text two sociolects with different ideologies confront each other and that the discourse implies a crisis of value systems. In this way, this specific poetic text displays a model of “our reality”. Between the two sociolects cuts the semantic borderline which involves all the levels of the divided cultural, political and social South African life. As Senekal refers to it, a social conformation or malconformation on a material level is inscribed in the text by means of the binary opposition “jou Pieraks” and “ons township”, and that

these semantic oppositions are on the discursive level, parallel to capitalism versus socialism. In this poem it is, according to Senekal, related to a specific power hierarchy: capitalism as a form of government, which materially privileges one group to such an extent that the other group has to pray for daily bread.

What is neglected by most readings in this anthology, is that literature has a communicative function within the frame of social discourse. This might appear to be in discord with the post-structuralist notion of language as being self-referential. It can, though, be accommodated within a post-structuralist frame, if it is kept in mind that only signifiers occur in language, and that the reader is responsible for carrying the meaning to the text, which s/he is able to do by means of general rules within excepted codal systems, which is based upon arbitrary (not natural) relations. Consequently a text acquires a communicative function. What I regard as especially relevant is that a poetic text, like this one, not only questions the values of everyday life and the presuppositions of cultural paradigms, but also focusses attention on its own, by firstly unveiling the shortcomings of the cultural paradigms, and secondly deconstructing them. (See Senekal, 1986: 124–5)

The poetic text consequently acquires the function of powerful manipulation, as a discourse influencing our actions. Most of the other readings in *Teks-Konteks-Leser* focus on interrelations between language and texts, whereas this approach defines the reader, its society and culture as an essential text, participating in textual discourse, and more importantly, a text which can be manipulated by the poetic text, amongst other manipulative powers.

9

“‘Bitter lig’: ’n struktureel-semantiese analise”: Elmarie Engelbrecht

Engelbrecht's text analysis of Cussons' "Bitter lig" is, according to her, based upon Greimas' structural semantics, which is aimed at explaining either the non-coherence or coherence of a text. The primary goal of her analysis is thus to abstract a thematic essence from the text.

This approach seems quite similar to the other structural analyses from this collection, though it differs slightly in the sense that the analyst admits the reductionary effect of this procedure: "om die globale betekenisinhoud van die teks 'Bitter lig' deur middel van sistematiese analisestappe te struktureer en tot 'n tematiese tekskern te reduceer". Structural analysis is, as other restricting analytical methods, a way of controlling or manipulating the text to, according to its own codes, fit or not fit the structure which is created during the reading process. The reader thus forces the text not to overflow the structural boundaries and in the process not to disseminate meaning into an uncontrollable productivity. Here the analyst is the manipulator and the text is *reduced* to an oversimplification of its "meaning".

Engelbrecht, as Gräbe in her structural analysis, restricts her analysis to the internal relations within the text in order to describe or explain its "essence"

("tot sy wesentlike struktuur, ook: 'Gestalt', te herlei" – 1986: 135). She restricts herself further, in order to constitute a coherent structure, by mainly addressing the occurrence of repetition of semantic elements. This allows for the text to be understood (or misunderstood) as a coherent meaning unit. In this regard, Engelbrecht refers to Claes (1979: 46) who regards the choice of the homogeneous layer of meaning in a text as arbitrary and manipulated by the reader. According to Engelbrecht, she follows the same procedure. It is thus evident that the consequent abstracted "meaning" will be the result of a long process of continuous reductions and restrictions. The eventual result is an oversimplified, over-controlled, over-reduced meaning or meaning possibility. Since the selection of the procedure by means of which these manipulative reductions are achieved, are also controlled by the reader, it can be concluded that the eventual product is coincidental within the context of infinite meaning production, and should not be regarded as "die wesentlike struktuur" of the text.

Engelbrecht explains that, according to their repetition in a text, dominant repetitive semes constitute one or more homogeneous meaning level(s), which are referred to as isotopes. These disordered units are valuably implemented in abstracting and describing thematic textual centres. The isotopes are thus used as analytical instruments, which are supplemented by lexeme comments from the lexicon as well as the reader's own intertextual knowledge. The reader can, by means of this intertextual frame and knowledge, draw relevant conclusions, by means of identification, selection, and reduction to the most essential frames and macrotopics. This procedure is arbitrary and hypothetical, in order to reach the aim of the analysis.

Engelbrecht (1986: 154) comments, illuminatingly: "Die onderskeie groepe verwante sleutelsemene, die seleksiekriteria op grond waarvan dit gekies is en saamgegroepeer word, asook relevante afleidings word telkens as 'n eenheid getabuleer [. . .] Alle afleidings is arbitrêr van aard en moet beskou word as 'n preliminêre fase of oriëntering tot die isotopiebeskrywing. Die abstrahering en benoeming van konteksseme [. . .] sal van leser tot leser verskil: die resultaat moet dus as 'n verteenwoordigende en nie 'n allesomvattende weergawe van die konteksseme [. . .] beskou word nie". Though this reflects a highly structured analytical procedure, it is evidently only representative of one interpretative strategy and one meaning abstraction.

Engelbrecht suggests that since the abstraction and description of a thematic text centre is a reducing and synthesizing-method, it should be supplemented by isotopy description, in order to identify text detail, which is essential for further description of these hypothetical meaning structures.

As a conclusion Engelbrecht again emphasizes the essential role of the reader, though she regards the analytical steps as being highly controllable.

10

In conclusion it is necessary to remark on the status of theory as has implicitly been done throughout the discussion: the object of criticism is, as it was presented, a discourse – discourse between texts and texts, and texts and their

“worlds”, and eventually also critical texts and critical texts. The latter was very clearly demonstrated insofar as my discussion commented on critiques of texts, and especially by applying a comparative approach, which placed all these texts at the intersection of textual crossroads.

I have commented on the critiques by reactivating and implementing the comments from other critiques within the anthology. Consequently I propose a preference for a poly-textuality, where all texts have equal access to a democratic forum, and where no text or language is regarded as a metatext or a metalanguage. Within this interactive process of discourse, criticism cannot become fixed or established, as a result of the productive nature of difference, which is a constant process of deconstruction, reconstruction, etc.

Critics, authors and readers will never arrive at theoretical consensus, and should never, if the complexity of textual meaning production has to be safeguarded. This does not imply that one analytical method should not criticize or reverse another – this is part of analysis. Not only literary texts should be decoded, but critical texts certainly, too. We should thus not regard correcting, modifying, criticizing, revising and supplementing critique as retardation of the process of meaning abstraction, but rather as stimulation of its potential.

The more analytical tools, the richer and more varied the product. This anthology provides the reader with a wide range of tools in order to demonstrate the diversity within this search for the traces of textual meaning, but unfortunately some contemporary analytical procedures have not been included, either since their discourses have not yet fully reached the South African critical scene, or because the ideological circumference of an anthology of this nature prefers not to accommodate them. One such a vital critical instrument, is that of feminism. The anthology should, though, be credited for its equal male and female representation when it comes to critics. But it retracts into the old tradition of androcentrism, when it is noticed that only Engelbrecht bases her analysis on the work of a female poet. In order to focus on the unpardonable omission of a feminist perspective, I have decided to adopt, as a conclusion, a quotation from Anette Kolodny (see Showalter, 1986: 246) to argue in favour of a “playful pluralism” of divergent interpretations, where all have “[the] right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from [...] texts; [the] right to choose which features of a text she takes as relevant because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it. In the process, she claims neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for her different readings and reading systems, but only their [...] applicability in [...] decoding [text]-as-sign”.

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