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**MEDIATING URBAN IDENTITY: ORALITY,  
PERFORMANCE AND POETRY  
IN THE WORK OF KOOS DU PLESSIS**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
University of Natal, Durban

2002

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own original work and that where use has been made of the work of others, it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I acknowledge with extreme gratitude the assistance of my Supervisor, Professor Duncan Brown, for his calm, wisdom and superb insight, and his warmth and understanding during the writing of this thesis.

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

## ABSTRACT

In this article I examine as mediations of urban experience poems written by Koos du Plessis, a contemporary Afrikaans poet, together with their musical rendition by Johannes Kerkorrel, a singer and musician from the Afrikaans alternative music scene and former member of Die Gereformeerde Blues Band. The poetry was initially published with musical arrangements in the volume Kinders van die Wind: En Ander Lirieke (1981). In order to use this material in an article produced as part of an English study, I have translated the poetry into English. The translation (in linguistic and performative terms) of these poems has the dual effect of rendering them more appropriately for this study, and making them accessible to a wider audience. I am concerned with the way poems written by a poet from an earlier decade (the 1980s) interpret and mediate an urban identity and, further, with the fact that performance not only gives them a new lease of life, but also transforms them into works which have meaning and appeal for a more contemporary, broader audience. The fundamental issues addressed in this poetry, namely a response to and a negotiation of urban (South African) experience, continue to speak compellingly today.

## **Mediating Urban Identity : Orality, Performance and Poetry in the Work of Koos du Plessis.**

### **Introduction**

In this article I shall examine as mediations of urban experience poems written by Koos du Plessis, a contemporary Afrikaans poet, together with their musical rendition by Johannes Kerkorrel, a singer and musician from the Afrikaans alternative music scene and former member of Die Gereformeerde Blues Band. The poetry was initially published with musical arrangements in the volume Kinders van die Wind : En Ander Lirieke (1981). In order to use this material in an article produced as part of an English study, I have translated the poetry into English. Translation and its effects are aspects which will be discussed in detail later. However, the translation (in linguistic and performative terms) of these poems has the dual effect of rendering them more appropriately for this study, and making them accessible to a wider audience. I am concerned with the way poems written by a poet from an earlier decade (the 1980s) interpret and mediate an urban identity and, further, with the fact that performance not only gives them a new lease of life, but also transforms them into works which have meaning and appeal for a more contemporary, broader audience. The fundamental issues addressed in this poetry, namely a response to and a negotiation of urban (South African) experience, continue to speak compellingly today.

Little research has been conducted into the area of Afrikaans performative poetry/song. During the period of National Party rule, although a well-established Afrikaans literary scholarship existed, less attention was paid to more radical voices such as Breyten Breytenbach, André Brink, who were instead often taken up in translation in English departments, or to forms of alternative, performative expression. While many studies have been conducted into the influence of the urban environment on migrant workers and the music they produced, and a vast body of work has been produced on oral literature itself, most of these studies relate either to the work of cultures which are historically or socially distant, such as the Bushmen, or to African (black) cultures. Where 'white' performative genres are discussed, it is generally within the discipline of musicology (punk, heavy metal, etc).

My concern is to draw attention to what I perceive to be an important but neglected form, drawing on analogous work in other areas.

At the outset I shall discuss what is particular or unique about an urban identity, and make reference to the effect that urban living has on individuals, and how this experience has shaped literary and cultural expression. I shall consider literary studies and urban experience, the effect that an urban lifestyle and the escalation of urban development have on literary production, and how literature has developed methods and styles for coping with and addressing urban needs and effects.

Following a more generalised survey, I shall trace the specific roots of Afrikaans literary culture and its reaction to urban living. By examining urban circumstances, I shall suggest how literature, music and performance attempt to talk back to the urban environment: how styles are adapted and changed, in order not only to establish an identity, but to carve out a place for their creators which articulates their experience as individuals. As indicated previously, this article crosses the fields of oral, musical and literary studies. Working through oral studies, I shall examine what type of oral material has been the subject matter of the largest body of research, and discuss the similarities between this material and the primary texts I have chosen to study. I shall also analyse what kind of oral material has been produced by the cultural group (into which the writer of my primary texts falls) of white Afrikaners, and the circumstances which have led to the limiting of exposure to this material. In doing so, I shall also look at what material can be defined as 'oral'. Having sketched in details around Afrikaner identity and its urban mediation, I shall investigate the move towards an alternative style of Afrikaans urban music, seen as a counter-culture by some. I shall consider the similarities between forms of urban music such as rap and maskanda (which have received some coverage) and my primary material, and shall investigate affinities between song and established 'literary' genres such as lyric poetry. This will lead to a close analysis of the primary texts in their written form, which will take into consideration the effects of translation, as well as the contribution of translation towards reception of the texts. Finally, I consider specifically the performativity, and performance, of the songs.

### **Mediating Urban Identity**

The Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain in the eighteenth century and had spread to other European countries by the mid 1800s, saw a movement of people from small, tight-knit communities with a rural, pastoral lifestyle towards large, urban settlements and factory employment. While an agrarian and cottage-industry lifestyle provided a living, the living was poor, and economic and political coercion resulted in a move to the cities. Living conditions, leisure activities, health and safety conditions were altered. For those who remained rural dwellers, the situation also changed, as families were dislocated, neighbours moved and communities became depleted. In South Africa, historically, these changes really became evident with the discovery of gold and diamonds, as these early mining sites became sprawling, industrial areas, to which millions streamed with the desire of making their fortunes, or simply to find employment on the mines, and in related industries. Later, the legislation of apartheid enforced urbanisation by making the position of rural farmers untenable. At the same time it imposed on black people a contradictory sense of urban dislocation and belonging: forcing people to sell their labour in cities, while denying them legal rights of residence.

City dwelling is synonymous with vast numbers of people, vehicles and buildings, a fast pace of living, a dissociation from the natural world: as space is at a premium, nature, in the form of trees, parks and scenic public areas, is increasingly restricted to the suburbs and phased out of city planning. Of course, the individual's response to city life and to urban experience changes over time, and the urban experience itself changes. For instance, there no longer appears to be a modernist rush towards the production of all that appears new, abstract, or functional - instead, town-planners, residents and owners of businesses hasten (whether through historical sensitivity or acquisitive postmodernism) to save elderly buildings from falling into decay, or worse still, being demolished to make way for development. Still, commerce and the city encroach further into ordinary suburban life - where those who have escaped from the city dwell in mock-rural conditions.

Whatever an individual's reaction to the urban environment, it is certain that city

dwelling does elicit some kind of response. In the book, Urban Living : The Individual in the City, Walmsley says:

Cities evoke mixed feelings. Some people regard them as the epitome of all that is good in society. According to this view cities are seen as providing a wide variety of lifestyles, a great range of choices for both work and play, and a stimulating atmosphere. In this context it is worth noting that the very word 'city' comes from the same Latin root as the word 'civilization'. Other commentators take a less positive view. Instead of being regarded as a symbol and manifestation of civilization, cities are viewed in more jaundiced terms as the locale for many of the problems that bedevil present-day society. The evidence for this point of view is plentiful: drug abuse, crime, mental illness, vandalism, truancy, and family breakdown are usually more prevalent in urban than in rural areas. This is not to say that there is something in the nature of the urban environment that 'causes' such problems. It may well be that cities, in concentrating vast numbers of people in relatively small areas, also serve to concentrate social problems to the point where these problems are more noticeable than they would otherwise have been. (1988:1)

The city possesses the ability to engulf individuals, to employ one among thousands, so that an individual becomes just another job-seeker, just another motorist in a stream of traffic, just another pedestrian crossing a busy city street, merely an occupant in a lift among others who work in the same building, perhaps even for the same company, whose names and faces are unknown. Unlike life in a rural or communal environment, where people are known to one another by name, antecedents, occupation, or social standing, and where a stranger is immediately identifiable as such, a city takes away all other meanings attached to an individual, and makes him or her faceless and nameless. To a degree, this disturbs the individual's sense of worth and, most certainly, his/her sense of belonging. There is an experience of alienation and isolation within the extensive population and activity of the city. Perhaps, too, because of this alienation, there is less personal involvement in the lives of others. Individual values become sacrificed to an instinct for survival - people are less willing to help others, as the risk to personal safety is

far greater and because different value systems are set in place, as a response to factors like crime, abuse, poverty and physical danger.

The city is also a source of disappointment for many. Those who have failed in their quest still hope for some advancement of the human condition, and their presence manifests itself in the many homeless, beggars and street children. Beneath these shattered illusions the city has acquired a mystique as the tangle of urban legends grows. It is the den of iniquity (as epitomised in South Africa in the 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' narratives) where those who seek their fortunes are led astray, where morals and faith weaken and crumble. It is also, however, the place where the streets are paved with gold, a place of opportunity and entrepreneurship. It is among these contrasting images - as a member of a workforce, a nameless, faceless being, an innocent full of hope awaiting only the door which opens, and the victim of evil, urban subversion - that an identity is sought, a sense of belonging is yearned for.

While individuals respond to the stresses and the effects of urban living in various ways, my particular interest is how these stresses affect literary and creative work produced by such individuals, in particular, the possibilities of song and lyrical performance in mediating urban Afrikaans identity.

### **Literary Studies and Urban Experience**

The negotiation of urban experience is a dominant theme in modern literary work. Lehan discusses how various writers have developed theories relating to urban dwelling and modernity:

As historians tried to explain the city through conceptual systems, writers of literature relied on imaginative systems. *The Waste Land* has an affinity to Spengler's conception of the modern city, and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* has an affinity to Robert Park's model of the mechanical city. Eliot and Spengler concentrate on what happens to the city when it is cut off from a source of energy beyond itself, and Dreiser and Park concentrate on the physical laws that control this self-



enclosed system. Simmel and Duncheim concentrate on the psychic effect of those laws when the city is seen more blindly from the inside out. (1998:7)

Lehan discusses the way in which Dickens depicts the city, "as using up the land and creating a wasteland, a system of physical debris and human dereliction. An urban entropy is at work: chaos threatens order and urban forms of death intrude upon the commercial process" (1998:41). He describes the evidence of this "wasteland effect" in Our Mutual Friend and adds that T. S. Eliot was reading this novel when he produced The Waste Land. He continues by describing how Pynchon, in The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow, emphasises the superfluousness of the city's inhabitants and how their identity as individuals diminishes. He arrives at what seems a telling disclosure:

Two kinds of urban reality emerged from literary modernism: the city as constituted by the artist, whose inner feelings and impressions embody an urban vision, and the city as constituted by the crowd, which had a personality and urban meaning all of its own. (Lehan 1998:71)

In discussing Baudelaire, Lehan goes on to identify that particular ingredient closely associated with so much 'modern' writing - nostalgia. He describes a feeling that the world is in decline and a looking back to the past with sentimental longing. This nostalgia is evident too in the work of Koos du Plessis. There is a feeling about the city which implies fascination and obsession, while at the same time indicating regret, and a sense of loss, a sense of devaluation of what was old, but good. There is also an expression of lingering doubt and uncertainty about the future. This is evident in "As Jy My kon Volg..." (If You could Follow Me...):

Want ek is nog jonk en die wêreld is oud	Because I am still young and the world is old:
sy skadu val vêr deur die ruim.	its shadow reaches far through space.
Neem nou my hand, want die nag word koud -	Take my hand now, for the night grows cold -
en waarom sal ons versuim?	And why should we fail to find our place?

(1981:9)

and again in "Spore op die Maan" (Footprints on the Moon):

Elke hektaar is verkoop	Every hectare has been sold
Elke opstal lê gesloop	Every homestead lies demolished: cold

en die wêreld wag verwese in die waan.                      And the world waits bewildered, hoping soon.  
(1981:59)

The idea of a world overwhelmed, where everything has been done, and which is now experiencing a diminished activity, coincides with the theory of entropy which was used particularly well by Pynchon in The Crying of Lot 49. Taking this urban entropy a step further, Oswald Spengler believed that "... the city bankrupted the country and was diminished in return. Cut off from a source of nourishment beyond itself, the city became a closed system, caught in an entropic process that depleted its energy: it fed on itself producing degenerate ideas and human suffering" (Lehan 1998: 127)

T.S. Eliot's view of the city was one of emptiness, sordid scenes, squalid clutter, and a spiritual and literal wasteland where people acted out their meaningless lives in absolute mundanity and spiritual poverty. Lehan also points out though that Walt Whitman, whose work also centred on urban living, embraced the city in a more positive manner and found interest and enthusiasm in immersing himself in the city which "was to immerse oneself in the world, the very embodiment of humanity" (1998:228). William Carlos Williams, poet of the ordinary, believed that in focussing on the real, "the concrete", the poet must be able to lift this real world to the level of the visions which exist in his imagination. He echoed Dickens's sentiments that the city had "used up the land", and felt that to achieve the positive man had to execute a return to that which he had deserted (1998:242-3). Federico Garcia Lorca, who reacted to his label as 'poet of the gypsies' by travelling to New York, expressed his feelings about that city in terms of "revulsion, confusion and horror at man's inhumanity to man, and a painful awareness of the sweat, smells and stains of urban life" (Timms & Kelly, 1985:234).

Although writers sought in various ways to analyse and express the urban experience, its volatile, changeable state often thwarted them, forcing constant reinterpretation and reinvention of the urban theme. In Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art, Timms and Kelly say of the city:

But the society - and the city - of the present were in a state of flux which

eluded representation. A crucial factor was not merely the overwhelming size of the metropolis, but also the dynamic acceleration of urban and technological development. Within a single lifespan a rural community might be transformed into an industrial conurbation. The impact on human sensibility was all the greater because so many city-dwellers were not born in the metropolis, but were migrants from more traditional communities .... The acceleration of city life was accompanied by a redefinition of the relationship between perception and environment. (1985:3)

The modern has given way, in many cases, to the 'postmodern', which Jameson and Baudrillard have defined partly in terms of hyperreality - a surfeit of sensory perceptions which only served to numb the individual and to escalate nervous tension to fever pitch. In his Epilogue, Lehan concludes that "urban activity becomes more abstract and 'unreal' as power operates from hidden sources. Such a city is at once a physical reality and a state of mind: to read the city is to read an urbanized self, to know the city from within" (1998:287).

In Tales of the City: A Study of Narrative and Urban Life, a study of the stories ordinary people tell about their lives in the city (Milton-Keynes), Ruth Finnegan describes an urban future beyond the modern and postmodern. (Her work will be discussed in greater detail later, as it treats the nature of oral performance, how identities are negotiated through oral material, and how narrators adapt or modulate their performance for a perceived audience). Finnegan's perceptive view of a tale of the city is as follows:

In the now-vanishing 'modern' era, goes the tale, people were constrained by locality, congregating perforce in industrialised urban settlements to satisfy their need for physical contiguity. But in the knowledge-based era now dawning, new technology releases them from these local bonds. The age of 'information city' will replace the industrial city - if indeed, in that Utopian stage, urban settlements are needed at all. The story turns ultimately on the familiar cyclical plot of mankind retracing its steps back to that older, freer state destroyed by the cruel incoming forces of industrialisation and

urbanisation - the classic tale retold. The same narrated sequence unwinds from premodern to modern-industrial, and, finally, to the postmodern Information Age. (1998:18)

As Finnegan suggests, all the way through history, literary developments have shaped, and been shaped by social and political developments; so literature recounts how modernity and progress have encouraged the move of humanity from largely rural, pastoral communities which were tight-knit, traditional and closely bonded, to the scattered, diverse existence of individuals isolated although dwelling among many other individuals in cities, removed from their natural environment (the land) and bonds with friends and family. Yet the individual's response to this situation, though varying from person to person, is in some way to find affinity in diversity. It is by constructing and participating in artificial groups, related to leisure activities, or others, that individuals find commonality with others who are not related to them by means of family or community bonds; by this means sub-cultures (surrogate communities) develop, which allow the individual a means of bonding with other individuals. In examining the cultural group to which the poet Koos du Plessis belonged (urbanised white Afrikaners) in the next sub-section, I shall consider how the cultural history of this group, together with its socio-cultural background, helps shape the kind of literary response he offers to an urban environment.

### **Afrikaans Literature, Music and Identity**

Under Dutch rule, for the most part, the settlers at the Cape did not engage in any striking, flourishing artistic pursuits. However Dutch, and the initially more colloquial rudimentary Afrikaans, were spoken. When the Cape fell under British rule, there was no instant reaction to the inroads which the English language made on the inhabitants and, in fact, there seemed to be a realisation that it was necessary to adapt to speaking the English language for purposes of communication. The discovery of the diamond fields in 1871 brought many Afrikaners into close contact with people of other cultures, who spoke other languages, as they moved to the mine fields either to make their fortune by a 'discovery', or to seek employment. The subsequent second 'Great Trek' to the diamond and gold fields also led to a defensive move by Afrikaners towards preservation of their cultural identity, in the

context of such a melting-pot of culture and language. Originating from a largely rural, agrarian society, the Afrikaners were suddenly confronted by communication in many languages, with English predominating. It was the South African War (1899-1902), however, which provided the primary impetus for a drive towards the retention of an Afrikaner language, culture and identity. According to Michael Chapman, the attempts of Sir Alfred Milner, High Commissioner, to eradicate Afrikaans as a language provoked intense Boer reaction "and the survival of Afrikanerdom was ensured" (1996:17). In Die Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur (1978), J. C. Kannemeyer argues that the Boers were impoverished by the war, both morally and materially, and that later, precisely as a result of this war, a deep spiritual belief in unity and community was created in them which promoted a renewed nationalism utilising historical heritage as its foundation (1978: 76). Chapman notes that "what is important from the view of literary developments is that Afrikaner reaction was not spontaneous, but the result of a highly successful campaign to 'build the nation from words': language, literature and ethnic identity were mobilised in a populist, liberatory rhetoric directed against high Dutch and English" (1996: 117).

Early Afrikaans literature tended to be romantic and patriotic, and based its creative impulses on the sense of self, identity and values such as family, church and nation which stemmed from both a Calvinist heritage and an Afrikaner cultural tendency to define its perimeters as being unique and different from others, rather than seeking similarity. In Johan van Wyk's Introduction to S A in Poetry he discloses that during the 1930s, "Poems such as Jan Celliers' 'By die Vroue-betoging' and Eugene Marais' 'Die Smid' emphasise national ideals. Celliers' text especially propounds the idea of the bond between mother and woman as the elect of the nation" (1988). The Thirties' Writers or 'Die Dertigers' followed more aristocratic ideals. An author "eminent in the moulding of folk mythology" was C.J. Langenhoven. (Chapman 1996:121), whose style was sentimental and nostalgic. In the Forties the influence of city life had started to play a minor role: "The uprooted man in 'Ballade van die Grysland' divided between his material aspirations, and his faith, is echoed again in 'City of Johannesburg' by R. Cope who likewise upholds the rural as the ideal and denounces urban existence as degenerate" (Van Wyk 1988).

This is much like the expressions of city life portrayed by Koos du Plessis in "Somber Deuntjie" (Sombre Tune):

Donker dae, donker aande,	Dark days, darker nights,
die een net soos die res,	each one just like the rest,
vul die jaar se maande	fill the months of the year
en die son bly altyd wes.	and the sun stays always in the west.

(1981:41)

At this time, however, urbanisation was viewed in more simple terms as a choice between faith and family, and material urges. While Totius (Rev J. D. du Toit) produced work which was directly inspired by the South African War, though less towards the promotion of Afrikaner nationalism than towards a "symbolic vision of hope" (Chapman 1996:123), he also examined the effects of urbanisation on Afrikaners, but again in a simplistic manner which saw the move to the city as "the loss of a people's pre-industrial innocence" (1996:124).

There has been work by writers in English which describes in great detail the life of rural Afrikaners. In the early twentieth century, such writers included Pauline Smith, Olive Schreiner and Herman Charles Bosman. Smith wrote in English adapted to sound like the speech patterns of Afrikaners of the Klein Karoo and the Aangenaam Valley. Her stories display the focal points of religion, community life and cultural insularity which characterised many rural Afrikaners. Bosman's work has an almost oral quality developed skilfully by the fireside tale manner in which his narrator, the renowned Oom Schalk Lourens, relates in a chatty, seemingly artless (though in fact carefully crafted) manner, small, rural incidents. Chapman discusses the emergence of the 'plaasroman' or farm novel, which, although initiated by writers such as D. F. Malherbe, Johannes van Melle, Mikro and C. M. van den Heever, has continued to be popularised by conversion into television plays. The 'plaasroman' sets up the rural peasant farmer against the capitalist from the city who takes away his land. This invites comparison with the 'modern' characteristic of nostalgia, a sense that what is past was best, and that the best has been lost. Du Plessis's work also contains this element of nostalgia and a harking back to the ancient tales and

legends that serve as a reminder of the past.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1950s Afrikaans literature was dominated by writers such as N. P. van Wyk Louw who adopted a prophetic style of writing, and later, on admitting that the principles on which he had based his ideas had been faulty, an almost horror-ridden guilty outpouring. Chapman notes that "what he intended in literary terms was not only the simple patriotic verse of language movement poets, but the ideal that the health of the volk was connected to a flowering of the Afrikaans language" (1996:194). This contrasts with the work of D.J. Opperman whose Joernaal van Jorik (1949) was hailed by Afrikaners as a spiritual work and "is seen to connect the Afrikaner's physical and spiritual destiny both to his own history and to the history of the modern age" (1996:197). As can clearly be seen from the synopsis thus far, Afrikaans literature and literary tendencies were closely linked with ideas of nation and self, culture and identity. Musical trends tended not to be too different.

There is evidence that much early Afrikaans music relied heavily on borrowing from European, American or British sources, as the language was too new to have many traditions or expressions of its own. Both Ingrid Byerly and Ralph Trewhela agree that the majority of early Afrikaans and, indeed, South African songs were triggered by love or romance rather than battle. Trewhela says: "While many of the best known American ballads were sparked off by gunpowder, the dominant theme of our popular liedjies is more often love than war" (1980:11); and Byerly concurs: "Interestingly, many of the lyrics of American war songs were often translated into Afrikaans love songs like 'Wanneer kom ons Troudag Gertjie?' (When is our Wedding Day Gert?) which was built on the Civil War Song 'Just Before the Battle, Mother'" (1996:84).

Influences from Europe affected early Afrikaans music profoundly. In the song "O Boereplaas", for instance, the melody is borrowed from the German "O Tannebaum". Trewhela also raises the interesting idea that many other tunes and melodies were borrowed from English children's rhymes, and paints the picture of English and

<sup>1</sup> As in "Sprokie vir 'n Stadskind" (Fairytale for a City Child) (1981: 5).

Afrikaans children reciting rhymes whereupon the Afrikaans children later set their own words to the catchy tune. His example is "Hoe Ry die Boere", which he maintains borrows the tune of "London Bridge is Falling Down". This indicates clearly that much of the early music relied on borrowing of tunes or translation of words. The old stalwart "Sarie Marais" is also apparently borrowed from "Sweet Nellie Rhee", an American tune.

Byerly states that "when the Volksliedjie became highly popularised into the style that was to become known as the 'lekkerliedjie' (nice song), it was sung by numerous popular Afrikaans singers on orchestral recordings" (1996:85). My interest is in the classification given to the songs, that of 'nice songs'. This is apt, as Byerly stresses that the subject matter of the songs was:

a-political, often comical, and always good-natured. Typical lyrical contents were patriotism, nostalgic geographical sights, the seasons, beaches, lakes and oceans, mountains, flora and fauna, and humorous 'nonsense' lyrics on mundane subjects that avoided controversial issues and highlighted success and the good life. (1996:85)

This seems important in view of the close ties between the perceived flourishing of the Afrikaans language and, as Chapman proposed earlier, the "health of the volk" (1996:194). Music was a leisure pursuit and therefore it was expected that what was listened to was 'nice'; the sordid side of life was not a suitable subject for entertainment and cultural pursuits, nor was political debate.

Within the fraught decade of the 1970s censorship was tightly enforced and bland 'lekkerliedjies' were the order of the day. Byerly refers to Des and Dawn Lindberg as early protest musicians who were forced by censorship into humour and environmental concerns (1996:111). Bilingual songs such as Jeremy Taylor's tremendously successful "Ag Pleez Deddy!" began to make an appearance: "This song sold more copies than any previous local one, and broke the record of all the Elvis Presley releases of the time" (Byerly 1996:112). This says something about the South African market at the time. Perhaps exposed to an endless diet of 'lekkerliedjies' a song, even if bilingual, which spoke the language of the cities and



the suburbs was able to address a more urbanised Afrikaans public in a manner which they could understand, about things which were realities, rather than escapist fantasies.

1979 saw the birth of the Musiek en Liriek movement which began as a "modest little production at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg" (Trehela 1980:79-80), and which replaced 'lekkerliedjies' with songs which had meaningful lyrics called, in contrast, 'luisterliedjies'. These were described as a "vital and exciting new departure in Afrikaans light music" by Raehard Daniel of the Rand Daily Mail, and Ian Gray of the Star said that "the offerings in 'Musiek and Liriek' fall on the ears like spring rain" (Trehela 1980:80). This musical genre produced songs by artists such as Laurika Rauch and Anton Goosen. The second new Afrikaans movement is one which I will discuss in great detail later, but which began as what Byerly calls an East Rand Rock style.

The nostalgia which so epitomises 'lekkerliedjies' was partly a response to a vague sense of regret emanating from earlier years of deprivation, and had been fostered by Afrikaner nationalists who had promoted this style and assisted its support and popularity by providing a power base in which sentimental, patriotic cultural pride could flourish. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and even into the 1980s, the music industry was controlled and protected in South Africa by a number of entities such as the FAK - Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations) established as early as 1936, the ATKV - Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (Afrikaans Language and Culture Organisation) and the SABC - the South African Broadcasting Corporation. In his thesis, Afrikaans Alternative Popular Music, Smit describes this control:

...mainstream Afrikaans pop is completely acquiescent to both market forces and the all-powerful forces of the culture industry such as the SABC, the FAK and the ATKV Together with the monopoly of the mainstream record companies Decibel and MFP, these cultural and media organisations control the form and content of Afrikaans mainstream pop music. (1992:5-6)

It is against this background of literary and musical history that I will construct a picture of how an Afrikaner in a modern urban environment would find a method and a means for talking back to urban living and finding an identity in a social space whose parameters had changed. NS

Afrikaner Nationalism, which was initiated by Hertzog in 1924, but flourished under Malan from 1948 onwards, initially saw a period of economic growth in South Africa. During this time Afrikaans-speakers developed a feeling of mutual community which was strengthened by social interests and the unifying functions of language, culture and religion (Kannemeyer 1978:261). Yet, Kannemeyer asserts, there were among the Afrikaans community several contradictions and inner tensions at work, like those between country and city, farmer and factory-worker, wealthy citizen and share-cropper, and intellectual and ordinary burgher. Among the intellectuals a critical tendency was developing in respect of everything. Values were questioned, and a penetrating spirit of enquiry into the Afrikaner's past and the meaning of his existence in this country was initiated (1978: 263).

While the National (Afrikaner) Party ruled South Africa from 1948 to 1994, Afrikaans culture was at its zenith in terms of guaranteed usage, power and the prestige that accompanies the language of the dominant culture. As Chapman points out, until the 1970s Afrikaans writers generally avoided direct criticism of the government's policies (1996:118). In the 1970s Afrikaans and even white South African English writing entered a phase of 'modernisation' where an exploration of language itself tended to occupy writing with issues of form and style, during a belated period of 'modern' transition, rather than direct confrontation of the politics of black and white. NS

### **Talking Back to Urban Living : Finding an Identity**

Particularly for an Afrikaans-speaking individual who had been raised in a conservative, Calvinistic society, whose roots lay in a community-based pastoral lifestyle, exposure to the urban environment must have been something of a culture shock. City life exposed the individual to the pressures of other languages and

cultures, particularly to English, which was the language of commerce. Although Afrikaans was the primary language of the National Party which continued to rule until 1994, by the 1980s when Koos du Plessis was writing his poetry, things had begun to change in political circles. There was a certain awareness of the shifting of power, and of the growing challenge to that domination. As mentioned in my discussion of Afrikaans literary history, writers of this era did not produce much work which criticized the political system, as censorship was fierce and banning was swiftly executed. On the Afrikaans music scene, a slight transition was beginning to occur, from 'lekkerliedjies' whose bland, pleasant lyrics offered escape from the not always so pleasant realities of life, to 'luisterliedjies', where the emphasis was placed not on the cheerful melody, but on meaningful lyrics. The other change which was taking place was the Afrikaans musicians' discovery of a form of rock music, which used its rhythm and driving beat to express the feelings and experience of the artists, and to stimulate and provoke reaction among the audience.

In discussing Afrikaner cultural background, it was revealed that, in the main, Afrikaners held to their Calvinistic heritage in terms of the importance placed on religion, the family circle, and service to the nation. These are the foundations on which the Afrikaner identity rested: a sense almost of elitism, definitely of separatism or sectarianism; a devoutness in religion, the principles of which seemed to apply strictly and narrowly, as interpreted; a perception of women as the mothers of the nation whose sanctity must be preserved and respected, while a patriarchal society was promoted; a firm belief in the necessity of the advancement of Afrikaans language and culture while at the same time a desire to maintain and protect its purity.

From the times of the gold and diamond rushes, and subsequent to the deprivation caused by the South African War, more Afrikaners had moved from the rural, pastoral, community-based lifestyle to the urban environment seeking profitable employment. This environment wrought several important changes on the lives of the Afrikaners. It cut them off from their families and deprived them of their spirit of community. In the workplace they were exposed to people of different cultures,

religious beliefs and languages. Their national pride was shaken as they witnessed spectacles which disturbed them, and finally, their worship was impeded, as places of worship and congregations were not always available and religion often became an issue of personal integrity. Keeping the faith is difficult when all the support mechanisms for doing so are absent and the situations in which an individual is placed are so different from anything to which s/he has previously been exposed.

In a thesis entitled Culture Contact: The Afrikaner as a Minority in Durban, M.E. Close offers some perceptive analysis, although his study relates more specifically to Afrikaners in an English, urban environment. Having done fieldwork in the 1960s, followed by further studies throughout the 1970s, Close discovered that "some respondents regarded themselves as Afrikaners while others identified themselves as South Africans. A third category of people were described by others as anglicised Afrikaners" (1981:111). He also discovered that, in qualifying the description "Afrikaner", the following terms were used: "'ware' (true), 'suiwer' (pure), 'goeie' (good), 'regte' (real) and 'verengelsde' (anglicised)" (1981:6).

Close states that:

The researcher, himself an Afrikaans-speaker, going through the often agonising experience of adapting himself to a new, predominantly English, cultural environment realized that becoming either anglicised or becoming aware of your own identity as an Afrikaner accompanied by a wish to maintain your "purity" as an Afrikaner, could conceivably be seen as two possible reactions to culture contact. (1981:123)

In concluding his study, Close makes some observations which confirm to a degree the effect of close contact between individual Afrikaners and a blend of other cultures in a commercial, urban environment. Firstly, "In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Durban where Eastern, African and Western cultures meet one another the dominant 'other cultural' influence on Afrikaans-speakers is, however, that of the English culture" (1981:306). Close continues by dividing the problems encountered by Afrikaans-speakers into two definite categories: practical and social/psychological/ideological. Amongst practical problems he lists an inability to

communicate because respondents could not speak English well enough, a lack of Afrikaans medical practitioners and Afrikaans schools and churches. Nevertheless, he concludes that "social, psychological and ideological problems on the other hand, are much more likely to be the concern of pure Afrikaners" (1981:310). He identified three problem areas, the first of which concerned the maintenance of a pure Afrikaans identity, while the second related to the status of Afrikaans-speakers in the contact situation, and the third to the position of such people, regarding discrimination against them on the basis of their culture. It is mainly the first issue which is of relevance to my study. Close says: "Some feel that Afrikaans-speakers 'live in a hostile environment where they are constantly in danger of losing their identities as Afrikaners'. Young children in particular are 'easily influenced and vulnerable and must, therefore, be guided and protected where possible'" (1981:310). He arrives at the conclusion that these fears either encourage a 'pure' Afrikaner to isolate himself as far as possible from other cultural groups, in order to build his own 'world within a world', so creating an environment which allows him to achieve his goals; or else promote intermingling or anglicisation whereby these Afrikaners "adopt an integrationist stance". (1981:317)

However, despite their desire to remain 'pure', many Afrikaans-speakers could not avoid moving to the city in search of work, or better prospects. In this way, Afrikaners removed themselves from many of the systems that made them representative of their culture. They suffered a loss of identity, a sense of displacement. If those individuals happened to be writers, who were removed from the roots which might otherwise have formed the base for their expression, they sought a way to work through their experiences, by converting them to poetry. Simultaneously, by fixing on the city as the source of their displacement, they often became emotionally bonded to it. It loomed large on their creative horizons, and instructed the thoughts through which they expressed their nostalgia for what was lost or left, fears, renewal and hope.

In discussing existentialism as the definition of the relationship between *being* and *consciousness* Walmsley says that, "The central argument is that individuals define

the environment [for the purpose of this article, the city] as opposite to, and separate from, themselves. In other words, individuals *alienate* themselves from the environment and then set about overcoming this alienation by developing relationships with the environment that give meaning to human existence" (1980:53). Even if the relationship is a literary one, the effect is the same. As discussed in Close's study, the Afrikaans-speakers outlined the differences between themselves and the culture of the society in which they dwelt, but they subsequently developed strategies to overcome or circumvent this difference, either by forming their own societies or by relaxing their cultural principles and mingling with other cultures.

Much has been written about the impact which urban living has on the individual: "Some writers argue that the modern city has grown so large and is changing so fast that individuals lose their sense of identity or flee to the suburbs to retrieve it, others argue that the full potential of the individual can only be recognized in the rich diversity of modern city life" (Walmsley 1980:59). Few, however, deny that city life has some effect which provokes certain reactions from individuals, even though the reactions vary from individual to individual:

In fact the alienation and homelessness that are apparent in some sectors of the community may have partial roots in the growing rupture between people and place. The so-called 'conquest' of terrestrial space may have been accomplished technologically and economically but it has not yet been accomplished at a human level because it seems, at least experientially, that people become bound to their locality and have their quality of life reduced when this 'binding' is broken. (Walmsley 1980:63)

This sub-section has been titled "Talking Back to Urban Living", and Walmsley indicates that studies have recently paid attention to the "coping strategies that individuals adopt in order to combat *anomie*" (1980:3). It seems that cities, by virtue of their dimension, pace, and multitudes of people, provide more information in terms of external stimuli thrown at an individual constantly, than he or she can cope with. There are a number of ways in which individuals attempt to deal with urban living, such as by isolating themselves, by limiting certain activities which bring them

face-to-face with their immediate environment, and by completely separating their public from their private worlds. Walmsley says, "The upshot of these coping strategies is that individuals take little responsibility for people outside the immediate family and friends, preferring instead to leave it to institutionalized welfare agencies to cater for those swamped by the stresses of urban living" (1981:4). This mechanism would be very different from the Afrikaner culture which is community-based, and acts in accordance with relatively strict religious principles. It also accounts for the wrecks of humankind that one encounters scattered across the urban landscape, which serve as a dark commentary on urban life, and which populate the poems of Koos du Plessis.

Once again, Ruth Finnegan's study of urban life and narratives has proved helpful. She describes the purpose and effect which narratives of urban life serve:

It has also been the tradition in much social science to consider personal narratives within a different framework from other studies, if at all. But cities are made up of individuals. And each individual has his or her own stories. These differing personal narratives are equally part of the whole, intertwining and co-existing with the other stories to formulate the images and experiences of urban life. (1998:166)

Telling the story or recounting one's urban experience provides a means of 'talking back', also of uniting people through shared experience, in a community of shock, despair, hope, or horror because those who hear the story, read the poem, or hear the song may have felt the same emotions, lived the same experience, but have been unable to express this:

Narrative forms give individuals pathways for existing and for experiencing - for the 'implicit organization of experience into set, satisfying patterns' as Hymes has it of Native American narratives ... Story-tellings are used in the claiming or maintenance of identity, for self-legitimation and the validation of experience. They provide a way of coping with the struggle, anxiety or sorrow, if only by setting them within intelligible plots and figures, or of removing the teller from the mundane constraints of the present. They can both shape and contrast social realities, both uphold and challenge power. They can express

the underlying preoccupations and symbolisms of both individuals and groups. (1998:172)

So individuals are able to rediscover their sense of self through their expression of their experiences. It may be an altered sense of self, in that they may have to redefine themselves in terms of new parameters, yet by 'talking back' to the event/location which is affecting them, individuals are able to build a relationship or bond with that issue, thus setting up a communication or network and rooting themselves within a certain position or response.

In the next section, I shall move from the initiation of this response to a consideration of modes of response, what has been examined in the area of oral studies to date, and what constitutes oral material.

### **Oral Studies : The Extent and the Limitation**

Oral studies has, in recent times, become a field of extensive and rewarding research, yet today the very question of what constitutes 'oral' material remains highly contested. Contrary to some assumptions that 'oral' material is the exclusive preserve of non-literate societies, or originates from cultures and societies which existed at a social or historical remove, the 'oral' is very much part of modern (and postmodern) living. In Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts, Finnegan says that oral studies is now extending its field to include what can be termed the 'popular':

Some scholars who reject the proposition that only 'traditional' or 'folk' expression should delimit their field are now exploring combinations using the term 'popular'. This turns attention to the contemporary world: the many forms of popular, local or amateur verbal expression which can be studied now that, as Hannerz puts it, 'cultural interrelatedness increasingly reaches across the world' ... Historians too have been uncovering non-élite 'popular culture' forms that do not easily fall under 'folk' or 'traditional' headings...

(1992:15)

It is necessary at this point to distinguish the definitions of the word 'popular' which are reflected in the literary, anthropological and musicological discussions which I draw upon. The anthropological definition - largely following Barber (1987) - is that



of an area of social expression which falls between the categories defined as 'elite' and 'traditional'. In the musicological sense, 'popular' generally describes music which is accepted as mainstream or commercial, rather than 'alternative' music, which would have closer ties to the notion of 'popular' in anthropological references - a somewhat fugitive, rebellious, and irreverent form.

Whereas the term 'oral' used to be implicitly associated with 'traditional' it has, in fact, become clear that there is no precise definition of what 'oral' material is. Finnegan says: "Research on oral forms can no longer be presented as mere 'academic' exercises or theorising about the far away and long ago, but as bringing the researcher into complex involvements with the alter-equal inhabitants of the planet" (1992:51). She adds: "Similarly studies of modern urban life with its verbal and other traditions are everywhere becoming more common" (1992:55).

My study has made much use of Finnegan's works, as the subject of oral material has been her main field of interest and research. In another work, Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context, Finnegan affirms that:

Much of the interest in oral forms has in the past been directed to what was far off in space or time, or had achieved scholarly recognition in authoritative collections of 'traditional' forms... So the importance of local and contemporary forms has been continuously underplayed. It must therefore be stressed at the outset that there is much more 'oral poetry' than is often recognised, at least if one takes a reasonably wide definition of the term. And it is not just a survival of past ages and stages, it is a normal part of our modern life... (1977:6)

In considering, then, that 'oral' material may not only be that produced by historically ancient cultures, but may be contemporary, one encounters fascinating and rewarding material. In Tales of the City: A Study of Narrative and Urban Life, Finnegan explains:

Among the many instances of narrative in our culture are those to do with the concept and experience of urban life. There are many tales of the city... It is

hardly surprising that much storytelling should focus on this topic or take it as the setting - by the turn of the millennium, after all, more than half of the world's people will live in cities (Sanjele 1990 154). Tales of the city are thus scarcely marginal, but likely to play a significant role in our experience and understanding. (1998: 1)

In discussing the form which oral poetry can adopt, Finnegan suggests that the ballad, the panegyric ode, and the lyric form are most frequently used. Although some may be chanted, "sung delivery is the most common characteristic of oral poetry ... and the quickest way to suggest the scope of 'oral poetry' is to say that it largely coincides with that of the popular term 'folk song' "(1997 :13). As mentioned previously, to define exactly what constitutes 'oral' material is difficult. The lines of distinction between oral and written material, particularly in forms produced by contemporary artists in a literate society, are very thin. As Finnegan puts it, "... anyone interested in studying the facts about oral poetry rather than playing with verbal definitions or theoretical constructs has to recognise that consideration of 'oral poetry' cannot start from a precise and definitive definition of its subject matter from written literature" (1977:22).

As mentioned previously, the majority of research has been conducted in the field of ancient cultures and non-literate African cultures for a number of reasons, including the restoration of equality and balance in countries such as South Africa, as Duncan Brown indicates: "The retrieval of oral poetry 'and performance genres for critical debate is an important part of a large process of human, social and political reconstruction currently taking place in South Africa" (1998:2). Little, if any, work has been done on contemporary white South African exponents of lyric oral poetry. As Brown points out:

The resistance of literary studies to oral challenges is ironic in view of the debt of almost all poetic forms to oral rhythms and vocalizations, and the vital and continuing existence of oral genres worldwide. However, the importance of developing a new critical methodology for oral texts resides not only in the

possibilities for recuperating marginalized or suppressed forms. but in its implications for reconceptualizing the study of poetry as a whole. (1998:15)

In studying material such as that produced by Koos du Plessis, I hope to enter an area where very little work has been done: to contribute to widening the area of research on oral material; and to make the songs/poems - through new transcribed and translated versions - available to a wider audience. It seems that where previously, the study of oral poetry in all its forms (modern and ancient, from contemporary cultures and non-literate societies), or indeed the oral poetry itself, had been accessible to the interested few, it ought to be in the public domain. My hope is that my study, by making such material easily accessible, and perhaps comprehensible, in a more widely-used language, ensures exposure to the material for a wider group of people. In focusing on a subject on which there has been little work, I suggest its potential for further study and debate.

As Jeff Opland says in his introduction to his anthology of South African oral poetry, Words that Circle Words: "Oral poetry belongs to the domain of folklore. As such it is populist rather than elitist. It is the common heritage of many people rather than the realistic pursuit of the educated few" (1992:17). Opland refers to his selection process in compiling the anthology and mentions that the reader will discover fewer English than Afrikaans poems, and more poems from black languages. He attempts to justify this distribution by mentioning that "Afrikaans songs have received far more attention than their English counterparts. Perhaps because they were an aspect of folk culture, itself an aspect of nascent nationalism ..." (1992:21). He says of English oral material that, "Further representation of English material is rendered difficult, because the student drinking songs, or the songs associated with particular sports or pastimes, do not seem to have attracted the attention of scholars or collectors. On the other hand, there is a vigorous tradition of research into black South African folklore" (1992:23). (Although Opland refers to oral poetry as being 'populist', my study makes use of material which also has close ties with the alternative music scene. Alternativity in no way detracts, however, from the ability of material to become 'popular', as will be discussed in the next section.)

Opland also recounts the contents of a letter which he received from the Chief Curator of the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown, in response to his enquiry about English oral material. Prefacing the response, Opland sets out some ideas which serve to explain quite cogently why I too have selected Afrikaans oral material for my study: "... unlike its Afrikaans counterpart, English-speaking South African culture has been from the outset predominantly urban and middle-class, drawing its sense of identity and cultural focus from Europe rather than Africa, and therefore unlikely to have developed its own tradition of ballads, etc" (1992:22). The Chief Curator remarks upon the fact that songs in Afrikaans by artists such as David Kramer have been readily adopted and chanted in pubs and at social events by English-speakers. He says, "... the fact that the songs tend to be in Afrikaans rather than English is revealing - whoever sings Die Stem (the white [former] South African national anthem) in English anyway?" (1992:22).

Opland reports the Curator's account of his experience of the behaviour of young Afrikaans and English national servicemen around campfires:

While the Afrikaners belted out a seemingly inexhaustible string of volksliedjies (folk songs), the English-speakers kept an embarrassed or mocking silence, and - eventually goaded into a response - found the only songs they all knew the words of were early Rolling Stones and Beatles numbers. (1992:23)

While this highlights the rarity of the oral material available in English, it also serves to explain why there has been a limited amount of research done. Oral material in African languages has, however, received a considerable amount of attention. Whether this is in relation to the issue of 'orality' as seen to belong inherently to non-literate cultures, or whether it is due to the vast quantities of material available for study, is not my immediate concern. Although I have used Afrikaans 'oral' poetry and subjected it to the dual processes of translation and interpretation, this differs little from much of the work done in respect of oral material in African languages. The fact that the material which I have selected is contemporary, rather than ancient, only serves to make it more accessible to a wider audience, as it should, theoretically, be more comprehensible to today's reader, in comparison to oral

material from the distant past. In sections to come I shall examine how performance changes the nature of this material and how, incorporated with music, in a manner possibly best described earlier by Finnegan as that of a 'folk song', it speaks to contemporary audiences.

### **Alternative Afrikaans Music, *Maskanda* and Rap: Some Comparative Insights**

These three musical styles have been selected as they represent different ways of reacting to the pressures of urban living, and express a social response to the conditions of the times. While they have distinct socio-cultural origins, the underlying concerns which the musical styles represent, by means of varying presentational and performance styles, are relatively similar.

In the section above dealing with Afrikaans literary and musical history, the 'escapist' character of much conventional Afrikaans music was discussed, in particular the 'lekker-liedjie', with its avoidance of all grim reality and its focus on nature, beauty and romance. This particular form of music was actively encouraged and supported by Nationalist state-controlled organisations during the 1960s and 70s, such as the FAK, ATKV and the SABC. As political challenges arose and protest against political control manifested itself in all facets of life, during the 1980s, controlled, commercialised music became unacceptable to a sector of the Afrikaans-speaking community who did not adhere to the political and social norms of the day. Such musicians created music which could reflect their changing attitudes, and provide a medium for participation by like-minded individuals. David Coplan says of such popular forms:

Musical composition in this sense involves the reinterpretation of new elements within existing cultural models, and the reshaping of those models to facilitate adaptation to changing situations. Popular music thus provides a multiplicity of meanings accommodating a range of manipulation, interpretation and choice, and supplies a measure of solidarity in an environment characterised by social insecurity, dislocation and differentiation. (1982:116)

For the Afrikaans-speaking white South African musicians, aware of the inadequacies and repressions of the political system under which they lived, and the evidence of protest and rebellion against existing systems, this was a time of tremendous uncertainty. In this regard Coplan adds:

In pursuing their own strategy of situational adjustment, South African popular musicians have given metaphoric expression to the dynamic of social interaction. In the cities, they have participated in the articulation of shifts in the bases of identification and association, combining diverse cultural patterns and principles into new sources of order, structure and solidarity. (1982:120)

The crisis in South African life in the mid-1980s affected the way some musicians, particularly those who were Afrikaans-speaking, began to express themselves musically. Byerly states that both the introduction of the 'luister-liedjie' (songs with meaningful lyrics) and 'East Rand Rock' were "a concerted effort on the part of musical subcultures to break out of the 'exhaustion of blandness' and challenge the ideologies and identities that had been handed down to them across generations" (1996:142).

The movement towards an alternative style of music saw Afrikaans-speaking artists adopting ironic pseudonyms to emphasise their non-conformity and the ridiculousness of the social conditions they reacted to: "Bernoldus Niemand" (Bernard Nobody), "Koos Kombuis" (Joe Kitchen), "Johannes Kerkorrel" (John Church-Organ), "Slim Gedagte" (Clever Thought), "Ben Zeen" (Benzine), "Geen Parkering" (No Parking) and "Los Ballas Trio" (Loose Ball Trio) (Byerly 1996:144).

These adopted titles were not, however, merely entertaining: they seized attention and imagination, and the artists and their music inspired a following which began to be regarded as a threat by the government of the day. Byerly (quoting Smit, 1992:2) explains that the movement captured the excitement and restlessness of the Afrikaner youth:

Afrikaner youth was ignited by the emergence of this music movement. The

Afrikaans alternative movement expressed a radical non-acceptance of mainstream Afrikaner nationalist ideology and offered a critical re-appraisal of hegemonic Afrikaans culture. The Afrikaner youth supported this message with such enthusiasm that Afrikaans alternative popular music came to be seen as a significant and dangerous youth-oriented social movement. The music came to be recognized as the manifestation of the emergence of an Afrikaans counterculture in Afrikaans youth, both by Afrikaans cultural authorities such as the FAK and the ATKV and the SABC, as well as the dissenting Afrikaner youth themselves. (1996:148)

The alternative movement was able to expand by such public displays as the Voëlvry Tour, in which alternative musicians travelled from campus to campus across South Africa to give performances. Described as "The New Great Trek" (Byerly 1996:149), it suffered public bannings which only served to heighten awareness of the movement and attract a larger following. Adding to the symbolism of the "Great Trek" was the fact that the Voëlvry Tour took place exactly 150 years after the real event.

Although this movement was initiated by Afrikaans-speaking artists, its audiences were not restricted to Afrikaans-speakers. Participation in events such as the Houtstok (beginning in 1989) and Splashy Fen (originating in 1990) festivals encouraged greater cultural mixing amongst audiences and performers, and the social concerns and issues raised musically by performers at such events addressed wider areas than those merely related to one particular cultural group.<sup>2</sup>

In Urban Rhythms, Iain Chambers explains that:

Music can be considered an important 'counter-space' (Henri Lefebvre) in our daily lives. Its power lies in a temporary suspension of the division between the 'private' and the 'public', between the imagination and the routines, roles and social relations in which we regularly find ourselves locked. As such,

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<sup>2</sup> On the Pietermaritzburg leg of the Voëlvry Tour, Johannes Kerckorrel encouraged the audience members to join political organisations

exploration of its organising categories. Imagination and 'reality' are brought together in a significant friction and exchanged. (1988:209)

In this sense, the Afrikaans alternative music movement certainly opted to veer away from the exclusively 'escapist' type of music promoted so extensively by Afrikaans and government organisations, and to offer a space in which social needs and 'real' issues were negotiated. In his thesis entitled Afrikaans Alternative Popular Music 1986-1994, Brendan Smit says: "Moreover much mainstream Afrikaans popular music does not simply deny the realities of the social realm, but attempts to create a particular field of social reality" (1992:6); and further: "The lyrics of Afrikaans mainstream popular music are almost always 'apolitical', non-satirical and mostly never critical or reflective of the current crises in Afrikaans and South African culture" (1992:10). In contrast, he describes the alternative Afrikaans music repertory as being "informed not by the exigencies of market forces, but by the expression of disjuncture of a marginalised Afrikaans counter-culture" (1992:12). Smit suggests that, "The aesthetic of Afrikaans alternative pop is the articulation of a social response to the hegemonic Afrikaner cultural codes, which in both form and content is an embodiment of a historical crisis in South Africa" (1992:12).

The musical style of alternative Afrikaans music is also best described by Smit:

The musical procedures employed in Afrikaans alternative pop music embody the counter-cultural impulses felt by the alternative musician and Afrikaner youth. The post-modern procedures of parody, pastiche and montage, the stylistic procedures followed by the alternative composers, question the cultural codes of the hegemonic culture. These procedures produce a fragmented response to the hegemonic culture which reveals the ways in which the counter-cultural subject, in experiencing social disjuncture and alienation, is decentred and without a defined cultural identity. In being divorced from the parent culture, the Afrikaans youth counter-culture has had to undergo a radical exploration of consciousness in its redefinition of self. (1992:16-17)

The 'popular' music, in relation to which Smit defines alternative Afrikaans pop, was



The 'popular' music, in relation to which Smit defines alternative Afrikaans pop, was that which was promoted commercially, and was brought to public consciousness by means of various media, particularly radio and sometimes television. Making a radio station's 'play-list' meant that a particular brand of music was endorsed, and as most media organisations were controlled to a degree, or at least influenced by, the government of the day, such music would thus have gained national acceptance. By being played, it had gained a stamp of approval which meant it was fit for public consumption. This endorsement was necessary as recording agents were reluctant to take on music which would not be commercially viable, and if it could not be played, it could not be sold. Initially, alternative music existed on the margins of this 'commercial' range of music simply because it had not been sanctioned and was in opposition to what was considered the norm. However, as interest grew and audiences manifested their support, recording agents turned to this type of music and 'adopted' it, demonstrating clearly that what was 'alternative' could move closer to what was 'mainstream' with sufficient commercial support.

The alternative music itself provided a reflection of the fragmented, uncertain lives of these Afrikaners. I shall pay particular attention to the style and personality of Johannes Kerkorrel, actually Ralph Rabie, a journalist turned composer and singer, as he is the artist who performs the work of Koos du Plessis. Kerkorrel considers himself "a fervent Afrikaner, rather than a deviant, or a dissenting troublemaker" (Byerly 1996:148). Byerly explains that Kerkorrel's aim as a musician was to portray a different perspective of Afrikaners and to reproduce a new identity for Afrikaans-speakers which they seemed to be increasingly prohibited from claiming for themselves. She reports that Kerkorrel himself expressed his intentions saying:

I never wanted to make meaningless music. I always wanted to say something. Music is an organic process where you're absolutely part of the social situation. It has to be relevant. People were waiting to have that nerve touched. It wasn't the people who weren't ready for it. It was the government that couldn't handle it. (1996:149)

Smit explains that Kerkorrel, who initially recorded and performed with Die

critique and a call for radical social change" (1992:62). Although to most people, rock 'n roll has a distinctly American identity, Dirk Uys, manager of Die Gereformeerde Blues Band, maintained that, "You can rock 'n roll in Afrikaans. It doesn't belong to any specific culture any more, but has become a universal medium of cultural reflection" (1992:63). This statement was qualified, however, by Uys: "... it is ultimately the message which is more important ... they [Die Gereformeerde Blues Band] see rock 'n roll as more of an attitude rather than a definitive musical genre" (1992:63).

Much of Kerkorrel's music contains elements of shock value, in the titles, subject matter and style of delivery. Byerly mentions the contradictory employment of symbols sacred in the "Afrikaner folk tale idiom" (1996:152), including the band's name which satirised the name of the most influential Afrikaans church, the Gereformeerde Kerk (the Reformed Church). The lyrics of many of Kerkorrel's songs contain references to the conditions he felt were evident all around him, such as in "Donker, Donker Land" (Dark, Dark Land), where his descriptions of a South African countryside differ greatly from earlier musical references to the idyllic, pastoral nature scenes so prominent in the 'lekkerliedjies', and instead portray the despair and darkness of an arid, barren country riddled with decay - an echo of certain modern literature related to post-industrial, post-urbanised city life, such as T.S. Eliot's The Wasteland and Dickens' Hard Times, yet containing the threat of imminent political disaster. The music itself, incorporating rock 'n roll rhythm, distorted electric guitar, blues riffs and a prominent 'backbeat', is very different from mainstream commercial Afrikaans pop music.

In The Hidden Musicians : Music-Making in an English Town, Ruth Finnegan describes the process of music-making:

Music is by no means the preserve of a favoured few or of peripheral minority groups but one mode of action - one set of pathways - potentially open to all, pervading many events in our society, and actively practised more, or less, fully by large numbers of people from every kind of background. If music is indeed one unique modality of human experience, it is hardly surprising that,

like language, it should be embodied in a number of different manifestations and social practices, and that musical enactment can be used, again like language, to action a whole series of events. (1989:340)

In this sense, as the alternative Afrikaans music movement embodied one cultural group's (or a section of that group's) move towards using music to convey its particular social experience, and to express its frustrations, needs and hopes, so, in South Africa, there were also other musical forms which offered responses to particular circumstances and lifestyles. The *maskanda* music style which developed originally amongst migrant workers in KwaZulu Natal is one of these, which offers enlightening comparative insights.

A link to the alternative Afrikaans style can be seen in the term *maskanda*, which originates from the Afrikaans word for musician - *musikant*. A further link to the style adopted by the Afrikaans alternative movement is that *maskanda* too makes use of a mingling of genres. While Kerkorrel and others mixed rock 'n roll, blues riffs, parody and Afrikaans lyrics in a form of pastiche, *maskanda* blends "instrumental music, sung lyrics, narrative or social commentary and self-praises" (Muller 1995:117). Initially, a *maskanda* was a kind of itinerant musician who, in rural areas, wandered from one community to another. Composition often occurred while this wandering or travelling between homes took place. Carol Muller describes *maskanda* style as follows:

The guitar sounds create what Karl and Feld (1994) call "music grooves", a unity of form and feeling; the song performance facilitates transcendence of self and space, while the narratives and self-praises negotiate the larger conflicts embedded in migrant experience - such as those between rural and urban, conservative and progressive; traditional and Christian, and between men and women - with the *maskanda* performer playing a similar role to that of the *imbongi* who negotiated key issues between ruler and ruled in Nguni society. The composite *maskanda* performance is constituted as a web of uneasy alliances between guitar sound, song and story. (1995:118)

In her article Muller discusses *maskanda* performance with particular reference to an

In her article Muller discusses *maskanda* performance with particular reference to an interview with Thami Vilakazi, an unemployed *maskanda* artist. In qualifying why *maskandas* were not considered good marriage material, she explains that:

... guitar players in rural areas were essentially those men who were migrant workers. They purchased guitars and concertinas in the urban areas and brought them back to rural Zululand. (1995:119)

She links *maskanda* performance to the special effects and experiences of migrancy, saying:

... song performance becomes a spatial-acoustic practice, a trajectory, a nodality of fabrication that - like the mass media and transportation that characterise urban experience - has the potential to connect people, places and experiences in the minds and imaginations of migrant workers. Walking, song composition and performance are not so much *about* urban-rural experience, as they *are* the very substance of a migrant worker's everyday practice. (1995:119)

There is a close link between this form of music and the particular experience of a migrant worker - a feeling of dislocation or rootlessness, and a sense of alienation or strangeness, which is, in part, related to the urban experience, especially the specific denial of black urban belonging by apartheid legislation. The physical movement of a migrant also seems to be captured in the fluid, mobile form of the *maskanda* expression. Muller explains that:

For a migrant such as Thami, the city is a space where nothing is special or marked, nothing is opened up by a memory or a story. Nothing is authored by anyone else; there is no store of myths ... De Certeau suggests that in such a context there is a need to fill the space with local legends, with familiar beliefs, to engage in practices that authorise and personalise spaces. (1995:121)

She continues to describe the function which the *maskanda* fills by his performance:

He authors a place in the urban environment both for himself and the people who inhabit the informal settlement. He creates urban legends in motion,

(1995:121)

Muller explains that in the song performance itself, the lyrical section is reasonably repetitive in text and sound, and that in Thami's performances, the rendition lies somewhere between sung and spoken poetry. This style is very similar to Johannes Kerkorrel's rendition of Koos du Plessis's poetry on the CD Johannes Kerkorrel Sing Koos du Plessis, which will be discussed in detail later. The motif of migrancy and wandering is markedly close to the text of one of Koos du Plessis's poems.

"Swerwers" (Wanderers):

Jy wat jou op jou wysheid roem.	You whose wisdom is your claim to fame
Wie sou jy die swerwer noem:	To whom would you give the wanderer's name:
die een wat sonder afskeid ry.	the one who leaves without farewell.
of sy wat eensaam agter bly?	or she who remains alone to dwell?
Of wie?	Or whom?

(1981:69)

In du Plessis's poem, he takes issue with the identity of a wanderer, discussing which qualities make an individual a wanderer. Ultimately, the poem hinges on whether a wanderer is best defined by his/her physical actions, or a feeling of spirit, an inner restlessness or yearning. Just as the *maskanda* style suits the issues being confronted by migrant workers in particular, so du Plessis also adopts a style (that of lyrical folk-song or tale) to translate similar feelings. The subject matter, that of wanderers, those who leave others behind and travel the road, ties in closely with the nature and circumstance of the migrant workers.

Muller reiterates that it is in the content that Thami expresses "... the moral disjuncture he senses between rural and urban spaces" (1995:125). Artists using *maskanda* style have achieved popularity and local acclaim, and receive increasing air-time. Busi Mhlongo (a singer from Inanda, KwaZulu Natal) used a "groove-oriented *maskanda* style on her second solo album Urban Zulu, taking this Zulu genre in a fresh direction by using non-traditional instruments, up-to-the-minute studio techniques and call-and-response chorus vocals to create a Zulu album of global relevance. Busi's reinterpretation of *maskanda* expresses the agony, the ecstasy, the pain and the joy, the trials and ironies of life in a modern urban South

ecstasy, the pain and the joy, the trials and ironies of life in a modern urban South Africa" ([www.melt2000.com/artists/mhlongo:2000:1](http://www.melt2000.com/artists/mhlongo:2000:1))

*Maskanda* is thus a form continuing to provide expression for urban dwellers, not all of whom are male, or migrant. While there are many other musical forms which attempt to do so, one of the most successful, notorious and popular is rap music. Both rap and *maskanda*, in very different ways, offer a means of mediating contemporary urban issues, through styles which will find acceptance with a wide audience and which encompass the cultural mix which urban living has ensured.

In his discussion of the South African rap band Prophets of da City, Duncan Brown says that rap was "from the start a form expressing urban identity and agency" (2001:5), and he continues: "Central to rap and hip-hop is its drawing together, in contexts of differential modernities and postmodernities, advanced technological and 'traditional' performance techniques into a form which claims, and accomplishes, an identity of belonging..." (2001:6). Brown asserts that hip-hop has "a central and continuing role in claiming a rooted, yet modern, urban identity and belonging ..." (2001:10).

While there are many differences of style and content in South African rap, it nevertheless seems evident that rap music is a genre which is used to convey a certain social and/or political commentary, which includes an expression of the vagaries of living in urban South Africa. The musical formulation of rap is best described by Brown as one:

... which involves rhythmic performance of words to a distinct - usually bass-heavy beat. Though it is now often digitally sampled, the beat was originally created by dextrous manipulation of a vinyl record by a DJ using one and later two turntables, moving the needle back and forth between set portions of a vinyl record (backspinning or scratching). The words of the rapper (MC) play off and work through and around the beats of the DJ and 'hook' with the samples of other records (choruses, instrument breaks, etc) which the DJ mixes in. (2001:4)

intertwined, and in alternative Afrikaans music which combines rock, blues and spoken and sung vocals, rap too blends or weaves different sonic combinations. It seems as if the need to find a medium which can adequately express the diversity, the alarming immensity and the almost jarring tones and discreet hum of city life results in the use of styles which employ and blend more than one element, to achieve in performance a kind of cacophony or fragmented sound which is able to penetrate urban indifference and reflect the somewhat fractured experience of city living. The musical style complements lyrics which relate to the many sensitive social issues which arise from urban dwelling and which form an integral part of day-to-day life, such as unemployment, drug abuse, loneliness, and so on. These lyrics are adapted into a musical style by the performers, which they feel will attract the attention of individuals in an urban arena where there is constant competition for attention by commercial resources.

### **The Poetry of Koos du Plessis: Translation and Analysis.**

Before entering into a detailed textual analysis, I shall comment on the translation of Koos du Plessis's poetry which I undertook for this study, as well as its nature and style. In the Introduction to Koos du Plessis's Kinders van die Wind en Ander Lirieke (1981), Stephan Bouwer says of his work:

It conveys eroticism, but also nostalgia, it tells of nights of love, but also of parting. Mostly of parting, and disenchantment. (Going mad, disillusion: this should surely be an awakening. The reality after the dream: the hangover after intoxication - the meeting point.) (1981: Intro)

The Introduction continues to describe du Plessis as a "romantic", "a troubadour by nature", and notes his use of natural symbols such as the sun and moon. It also refers to his greatest sources being those of folk art and folk language. Du Plessis is depicted as having a close bond with his language and cultural heritage. The Introduction also indicates that he feels that urbanisation has brought change which, in du Plessis's words, "threatens" (1981).

Most of the poems chosen for this study convey similar messages. They deal with

sorrow and loss, a darkness in life, a feeling of regret for lost innocence or an age gone by and, in their reference to mists, shadows, and twilight, evoke a lack of definition and emit a sense of dislocation and disassociation.

I shall discuss my method of translation and interpretation of these texts with reference to Susan Bassnet's findings in Translation Studies (1980), which stresses that translation is a complex issue as no text exists in isolation from its surroundings, and that, try as one might, the various layers of which a text is comprised resist precise pinpointing and identification. She states:

For there is no universal canon according to which texts may be assessed. There are whole sets of canons that shift and change and each text is involved in a continuing dialectical relationship with those sets. There can no more be the ultimate translation than there can be the ultimate poem or the ultimate novel, and any assessment of a translation can only be made by taking into account both the process of creating it and its function in a given context. (1980: 9-10)

In considering how the nuances of meaning which surround a text make it difficult to arrive at any single interpretation of the text, I have also had to take into account the 'orality' of the material I studied. Koos du Plessis's poetry is lyrical: its rhythm and rolling stream of sounds were meant to be spoken. Although the poetry exists completely and coherently as text written on the page, it does not strike the reader with its full impact, nor does it convey the emotion of its lines, until it is uttered. Reading the words aloud introduces an immediate and easy rhythm which is evident in the Afrikaans original, and which I have tried to echo in my English translations.

Edward Sapir held the opinion that:

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (Bassnett 1980:13)

Bearing this in mind, I have tried to locate Koos du Plessis within his particular



cultural-linguistic and historical contexts, and to consider the audience whom he was addressing by means of his poetry. In my translation I have endeavoured not to simply anglicize his material, and I have opted for an oblique, flexible method which, rather than word-for-word, line-for-line fidelity, attempts to interpret by choice of words and maintenance of rhythm the style and whimsical quality of the spoken poems. In order to achieve the rhythm and to spring the same tension in the lines and keep the balance, I have found it necessary to restructure word order, alter punctuation, and to select different words with similar meanings instead of the most direct translation choice. I have also added adjectives and adverbs where necessary to maintain the tension, or to complete the rhyme. Du Plessis's rhyming is extremely important to the melody of the poetry, and its lyrical nature would be quite lost without certain stresses brought about by line tension and rhyme.

I have also sought to retain the sense of regret and retrospective vision, which I feel is so integral to du Plessis's work, and indeed, to my study. There is a delicate balance to be achieved here, between a fragile sense of nostalgia and dire sentimentality. Du Plessis skilfully avoids the latter and I have tried to follow his lead in this regard.

As Bassnet advises:

It is an established fact in Translation Studies, that if a dozen translators tackle the same poem, they will produce a dozen different versions. And yet, somewhere in those dozen versions there will be what Popovič calls the 'invariant core' of the original poem. The invariant core, he claims, is represented by stable, basic and constant semantic elements in the text, whose existence can be proved by experimental semantic condensation. Transformations, or variants, are those changes which do not modify the core of meaning but influence the expressive form. In short, the invariant can be defined as that which exists in common between all existing translations of a single work. (1980:27)

It is this 'invariant' that I have sought to work around, using it as the base of meaning around which my translation is formed, while attempting to make the material itself

accessible not only to the original target audience of Afrikaans-speakers but, using English, to all those who can respond to reflections on urban experience, and to those who wish to study the effects of such an experience on literature.

While I cannot claim to have perfectly or entirely appropriately sensed and interpreted the poems' multiple layers in every word and nuance, I have tried to remain true to the overall feeling evoked by their subject matter, lyrical quality, mood, rhythm and style. My work in translation remains, of course, only my interpretation and naturally, interpretation is in itself subjective:

It has often been argued, in accordance with Longfellow, that *translation* and *interpretation* are two separate activities, and that it is the duty of the translator to translate what is there and not to 'interpret' it. The fallacy of such an argument is obvious - since every reading is an interpretation, the activities cannot be separated. (Bassnett 1980:100)

My interpretation itself will be subject to re-interpretation with every reading, as would the performance of the poetry on CD, each time the CD is played.

Considering du Plessis's collection of poems, and Johannes Kerkorrel's musical adaptation and performance of the poems on the CD Johannes Kerkorrel Sing Koos du Plessis (1998), where the poems are half-sung, half-spoken, almost whispered, leaving a hauntingly unspecific, yet unsettling sensation, it is evident that a great deal of personal emotion and experience have gone into their creation. Du Plessis's writing style is very much that of the troubadour or wandering minstrel. In another age he might readily have assumed this role. As such, any interpretation merits some delicacy. His style is simple: he does not use high, overblown Afrikaans; his is the ordinary language of the everyday, well-worn, and with several colloquialisms and anglicisms thrown in. He does not undertake emphatic arguments, adopts no black or white positions, but instead presents a persuasive, persistent whispered perception of the twilight of urban experience as it appears to him.

Du Plessis makes use of many elements of nature in his poetry, although these are not the traditional 'nice' poems in which nature is glorified. Certain recurrent motifs

are evident in almost all of his poems: shadows and mist loom large on the poetic landscape, whether they consist of city smog, mist-shrouded mountains, or smoke from one of the fires which occupy a central place in du Plessis's imagery. Although the language used is plain and ordinary, at times even rough, many of the images formed by this language are delicately beautiful. The overall impression is not of a crude or uncouth collocation of words, but rather a skilfully wielded sword of simplicity, which, with the lightest touch, cuts through the fog and darkness and prevents the poetry from becoming too simplistic or sentimental.

Although the poetry itself does not always refer directly to urban living, or to the city, it provides in its imagery of shadows much observation and expression of the effects of urban life. Its suggestion of lost values, and nostalgia for a heritage different from that of the speaker's current inheritance, assert an individuality, while coping with a feeling of rootlessness that seems to be a generalised reaction to the urban experience. Du Plessis's description of a world of shades, flickering light and impermanence seems to depict a newcomer's response to the urban environment, particularly that of a rural loner who does not appear to have the cushion of wealth against the harsher realities of city life.

In terms of the relationship between his poetry and the oral, there is a whole range of elements or characteristics present in the poems which enhance their 'oral' nature, including their rhythm, as already suggested.

In Oral Poetry : Its Nature, Significance and Social Context (1972), Finnegan lists three ways in which a poem can be termed 'oral'. These consist firstly of composition, secondly, its mode of transmission, and thirdly, its performance. She says:

Some oral poetry is oral in all these respects, some in only one or two. It is important to be clear how oral poetry can vary in these ways, as well as about the problems involved in assessing each of these aspects of 'oral-ness'. It

emerges that the 'oral' nature of oral poetry is not easy to pin down precisely.

(1972:17)

Most of du Plessis's poems contain elements which can be found in many oral texts, such as repetition, a cyclical progression, indeterminate endings, and a definite refrain or chorus. They display internal rhyming patterns, alliteration, wordplay and motifs or symbols, as well as the echoing of certain words and lines. Many of these qualities are included amongst those which Finnegan cites as representing the 'poetic' in oral poetry:

What we must look for is not an absolute criterion but a range of stylistic and formal attributes - features like heightened language, metaphorical expression, musical form or accompaniment, structural repetitiveness (like the recurrence of stanzas, lines or refrains), prosodic features like metre, alliteration even perhaps parallelism. So the concept of 'poetry' turns out to be a relative one, depending on a combination of stylistic elements no *one* of which need necessarily and invariably be present. (1972:25)

Besides the actual devices of language which are able to lend the poetry an 'oral' quality, there is also a link to the genre of 'folk tales' and 'legends' which is closely associated with orality. I have mentioned previously that du Plessis, the poet, has close ties with the role of troubadour or wandering minstrel, and often writes of such characters in his poems, thus assuming a dual mantle, that of troubadour himself, and that of a character in his tales. The poems themselves contain several references to folk tales. They tell of treasures, ships lost at sea, fairy-tales, gold at the end of the rainbow, and those who suffer from a wanderlust, roaming, unable to settle down.

In explaining the role played by oral forms Finnegan quotes Bottigheiner (1986):

Fairy tales - and other forms too - can function as a 'paradigm' for understanding the community and for determining and developing individual behaviour and personality in that community. (1992:127)

She provides further insight as to the deeper role of folktales from Lüthi (1982):

People who find themselves hurled into a threatening world whose meaning they do not know ... experience the transformation of this very same world in

the quiet, epic vision of the folktale .... The folktale envisions and depicts a world that unfolds before us as the antitype of the uncertain, confusing, unclear, and threatening world of reality .... At the same time as the folktale leads us into the midst of the rich nuances of the life of the folk and the individual. (1992:29)

In dealing with the content of the poems themselves, I have already referred to the repetition of certain natural elements as motifs throughout the poems. One of the most frequently used images is that of shadows and darkness. In the poem "Shadows", the poet presents humanity as vulnerable and defenceless, and positions his characters in a world of shadows, of departure, and of cold and darkness, removed from the sun which is the main source of warmth, light and life on this planet. "in a midnightland without confines/ of time/ and an eternity far from the sun" (1981:35). This darkness seems to signify a state into which du Plessis's characters have entered - a spiritual darkness. They appear to dwell in a place deprived of light and life, which accounts for the many references to endless night (which appear in other poems too), the sun remaining absent, and the need to light and guard fires. Departure implies the lack of stability and permanence: nothing endures, everyone leaves, or tries to. There is an endless searching for something else, something better. There are many images of suitcases, empty bags, packing and leaving. Departure takes both the form of the physical, and of death (the leaving of life), in these poems.

In the poem "Shadows", people are described as shadows, symbolising a stateless, faceless form of life, with no identity or substance:

There are shadows, on balconies dark as night,  
where trunks lie open and empty, but for air.  
There are shadows, on platforms of twilight,  
for a train to the day they're waiting there. (1981:35)

As mentioned earlier in my article, this is often the kind of dislocated anonymity that city living creates. The platforms in the poem are formed of twilight, implying the sort of limbo from which the shadows wish to catch a train to the day; however, they are

of limbo from which the shadows wish to catch a train to the day; however, they are "an eternity far from the sun". They seem to yearn for light, which is missing from their "midnightland", and their "dreams" are packed into coffins, like packed suitcases ready for a journey, although the word "coffins" does not appear to indicate a journey within this particular frame of existence. Their last journey, it seems, will be the only journey which can bring them to their place of light.

"Shadows on the Wall" (1981:11) renews the shadow imagery, considering important aspects of life, including life itself, and observing how in the face of "darkness" everything becomes mere shadows on the wall. The image of fire is used in this poem, as in many others, to symbolise warmth, light, and life; humanity's original protection against the dark and all its terrors, real or imagined. The poem confirms that in the place inhabited by the speaker, nothing has any value anymore, not love, dreams, life, nor even the world itself. These are reduced in substance to something as ephemeral as a shadow on the wall. The obsession with shadows, and with the diminished importance of values, ties in with the way in which the pace, immensity and intensity of the city reduce the importance of matters which relate to the individual. As natural elements become less important in a city, where life is not dependent upon cycles of sun, rain and seasons, where the night sky is lit by artificial lighting, rather than moon and stars, so these elements too seem to dwindle in significance. The poet sees this as having a direct impact on the lives of those who once depended upon them, which become diminished by the absence of these natural elements. Love, too, is linked to a fire in this poem, yet against the invading darkness even love has no meaning, and ultimately the world itself is reduced to a shadow on the wall. This poem also contains images of death, physical or spiritual, with references to a funeral procession, and the coffin that waits: "... because the coffin in the attic waits/ and life is a shadow on the wall" (1981:11).

"Nightwatch" contains more images of darkness. A light is anticipated, but never comes. The poem links the biblical symbol of the cock crowing to a physical betrayal, as the cock's cry heralds the arrival of dawn, which in this poem will not come: "...but its stays night, absolute night" and "But the day stays away" (1981:55). There is a

although the effect of the fire which is guarded is shown to be slight, as it is unable to light up the watchers' faces. This may be because the characters are in the 'shadow' state in which most of du Plessis's citizens dwell. The poem uses the recurrent theme of natural phenomena diminishing, as in this instance the moon turns to lead, and the stars, and even the fires in their drums die out.

"If Everyone is Far Away" offers a more direct approach which describes a distance (physical or imaginary) between the speaker and those with whom s/he feels a close bond. Darkness takes over again, as curtains, windows and door shut out the light:

the curtains invent  
 a conspiracy against the light  
 the window sashes shrink bent  
 and doors shut tight. (1981:47)

Introspection becomes the preoccupation of the loner who searches his/her own emotions trying to find him-/herself, and discovers that his/her defences are worn down by loneliness. The implication is that when one is deprived of companionship or relations with others, one turns inward, shrugging off hope and borrowed bravery, as well as the fabrications and fronts assumed for presentation to others. All one is left with then is one's humanity, exposed, like the delicate, jelly-soft flesh of a snail without its protective shell.

"Sombre Tune" plays with images of darkness, with no distinction between day and night. There is a perversion of the natural order of things, as each month is the same, seasons usher in no change, and the sun stays unrisen in the west, heralding perpetual night. When monotony reigns, time passes like a small boy singing a sad ditty, with the sibilant 's' sound in the refrain heightening the sinister solemnity of the poem: "Sombre boy, sombre tune, sombre summer sun..." (1981:41). The verbal repetition of the 's' sound echoes the repetition brought about by an endless cycle of days and nights without distinction. Nevertheless, there is a spark of light in this seemingly hopeless situation, because the brain refuses to shut down totally in acceptance. Somewhere in its depths, it registers that it must question this state, and the individual - precisely because s/he is human - must quest after resolution. At first

the individual - precisely because s/he is human - must quest after resolution. At first the response is certain, but then the poet, capturing humanity's fallible essence, alters the certainty from "know", to "believe" and finally, to "hope".

Although the world is dark, even if every path is barred,  
I see a far light flicker and I know it is my star.

Although the world is dark, even if every path is barred,  
I see a far light flicker and I believe it is my star.

I see a far light flicker and I hope it is my star. (1981:41)

A guarantee of hope would be too facile a conclusion, and du Plessis diligently avoids neat and certain endings. His conclusions are not conclusions after all, merely possibilities.

The poems I have discussed so far all seem to belong together and I have labelled them the 'dark' poems. There are other poems, however, which look back on the past and seem to convey regret for a way of life that is lost. All of these poems share a sense of nostalgia which seems to be of the type so often perceived in 'modern' literature. The speaker in "If You could Follow me ..." (1981:9) beseeches someone to "Take my hand now for the night grows cold", which indicates that some kind of change is impending, but not yet actual. The speaker also mentions that others before them have failed, and that the moment of which s/he speaks is "perhaps the very last". S/he continues by saying that because they are young and the world is old, "Its shadow reaches far through space". The imagery of an immense shadow stretching to infinity conveys some kind of implacable certainty, that everything and everyone will be touched by that shadow. Despite its sinister note, the poem also seems to be a plea to a loved one, to love and live for the moment, and not to fear the parting of ways. The importance of light and the stars is expressed in graceful imagery in which the speaker states that he can be found "on the wings of the wind", by following his "track in the Milky Way" to see his "tent pitched among the stars". However, these beautiful lines contrast with the final lines of the poem which seem to imply that some danger threatens and that time is running out. This sense of impending peril, and an end to all that is familiar, echoes a fear expressed in



In several of du Plessis's poems, he takes issue with memories and the loss and regret which they evoke, as well as the pleasant times.

In "Voices in the Morning" (1981:31) the speaker hears the "whispering of strangers from a far, lost night", and he imagines that a dream is reborn in "twilight". Once again dark images abound, yet the dream heralded by them produces a "new light". The introduction of light is important against the backdrop of so much darkness and mist, and the poem expresses the belief that a haven exists somewhere, a place where everything is "old" and "unchanged". This points to 'change' as being the factor which has dispelled peace. The next verse reverts to a more cynical note. Every day promises some respite, yet the morning light shows this hope to be unfounded, as by evening, dreams have died. The poem ends on a hopeful if uncertain note, when the speaker appears to see visions of light.

"Molehills" (1981:51) calls back lost memories of time spent in the mining-town of Springs. Looking back to the past is depicted as a positive exercise, as it is linked to mining for gold. Again, images of "rain-mist" and "mist-shrouded" mountains are used. There is the disturbing notion that because of all the excavation, the land around the mines must be half-hollow, not solid, as it should be. Although the memories of the past are seen as being pleasant, an idea which prevents the poem sinking into sentimentality is that the speaker's own world is "half-hollow", and, finally, the realization that the entire world is also half-hollow. I take this as an indication by the poet that nothing is as fixed and stable as it seems, and that invisible internal excavation (eating away) may have taken its toll on the world without anyone realizing it.

Besides the group of poems which deals with memories, there is another set which deals with the wandering minstrel motif, and which takes issue with restlessness, rootlessness and dislocation. "Pretoria" is a fond glance down memory lane, at a city which holds good memories and evokes a wistful longing:

because for so many years you have  
shared my love and my pain

and listened in silence when I  
 played my old guitar's refrain. (1981:25)

The theme of music is introduced in the first stanza and carried through to both of the others. This is a lighter poem in which the city is personified, and accorded the role of listener and friend, a technique similar to that used in "City Johannesburg" by Mongane Wally Serote, although to very different effect. It conforms neatly to the poet's vision of poets in general, and himself in particular, as troubadours.

"Children of the Wind" (1981:3), which in its Afrikaans sung version is possibly the best known of du Plessis's poems, and which has been sung by many popular Afrikaans musicians including Laurike Rauch, recalls the past. Its opening line asserts, "I know an old, old melody", whereupon the poem itself follows the form and rhythm of a simple old tune. It refers to wanderers who have lost direction and those who search without success, whose actions are thus futile. All become nothing but children of the wind, blown at the whim of the wind ( an element of nature), in the same manner in which memories are wiped away. The poem suggests that one needs to hold on to one's memories because it is these which ground one, providing a sense of purpose without which one is simply blown away.

Closely tied to the belief in the value of one's origins is the poem "Fairytale for a City Child" (1981:5). Traditional elements of the folk-tale are present here with references to a fairy-tale both in the title, and in the second verse. There is a legend of gold at the end of the rainbow, although in this instance the rainbow is a neon one. The symbolism of the quest is evident in the refrain which tells the questor, "Follow it [the rainbow] each night across black rivers". Just as in a folk-tale, here there are cautions offered which the questor must heed in order to be successful: "you must never let yourself be bound"; and "not for a moment should you glance behind". There is also not only a treasure to be found, but a paradise to be reached at the end of a long, hard journey. Once again, though, the poet avoids over-sentimentality by equating utopia with something as understated as "a patch of sun". The sun is, however, symbolically important when viewed against the 'dark' poems where night and shadows reign. The rain in this poem is symptomatic of urban living, comprising

and shadows reign. The rain in this poem is symptomatic of urban living, comprising "soot and dust",<sup>2</sup> which heralds the emergence of the "neon rainbow" in the "starless" sky.

"Footprints on the Moon" (1981: 59) is probably the most definitive poem of the collection in so far as the sense of disillusionment with the effect of urban living is concerned. Nature is parodied in the speaker's revelation of the city experience:

Because nightly, the city's blossoms are born,  
scatter their seed, then at the dawn  
steel shoots are thrust through the earth's crust and soon  
rubble mountains grow in street and lane. (1981:59)

Steel shoots burst forth instead of blades of grass; the city's blossoms are not flowers. There are descriptions of pollution, over-expansion, over-population, and a sense of there being no stone left unturned, coupled with regret that humanity has left its mark on everything: "Space is crammed with rubble tumbled"; "Rubble mountains grow in street and lane / and there's sulphuric acid in the rain"; "Every word is rhetoric./ every dream is pure plastic". There is a feeling of claustrophobia in the words, "Each plan lies hopelessly crumbled", "there is no new haven to go to", and "Escape is futile /Even dreams are not worthwhile". Confusion and degradation reign: "Every homestead lies demolished; cold"; and "the world waits bewildered". Even the moon which dispels the darkness has not been held sacred. Mankind has had to make even this phenomenon, which once was worshipped, a commodity.

These sentiments are expressive of 'modern' fears and the symptoms which accompanied technological advancement and migration to urban centres. The poems as a collection seem to set the troubadour, a relic of past times and teller of folk-tales, in a modern urban environment. What emanates from the poems is a manner of working through this experience, a form of catharsis, both for the poet himself and for those who experience the same sensation through reading the poetry. The folksman roots himself in the past in order to resist being robbed of his

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Reminiscent of Wendy Oldfield's hit song "Acid Rain" which refers to the damage done to the environment by humanity's technological advances

of his experience because he calls on his past to characterise him as an individual, and he remains a teller of tales because, even in the city, there are tales to be told. The city in fact provides much more material to write about, because it unfolds experiences so far removed from his own personal knowledge. In order to cope personally, and to tell the stories, he develops a style which is part folk-song, part poem, and which blurs and blends the lines and laws of genres, creating something which is an appropriate vehicle to convey the sense of difference felt by an individual whose background leaves him/her particularly ill-prepared for the onslaught of urban living:

Somewhere there must be a peaceful nest  
 for the jaded soul to rest -  
 but see, there are already footprints on the moon;  
 thousands of dark tracks upon the moon.  
 Look, there are footprints on the moon. (1981:59)

### **The Poems as Songs: Oral Expression and Performance**

Having already discussed the symbolism, imagery and lyrical tone of Koos du Plessis's poetry, I wish now to turn to the performance of these poems by Johannes Kerkorrel which brings them to life and allows them valency in a completely different way. Just as Kerkorrel's husky, smoky voice breathes the words of the poems, so he breathes into them a new form which provides references identifiable by listeners today. In an urban environment which exerts pressures on those living and working there, such as stress, over-stimulation, a lack of open spaces and a loss of the sense of community peculiar to rural dwelling, listening to music provides relief, relaxation, reflection, and, often, escape or retreat from the intrusive demands of an urban lifestyle.

In recording these poems, Kerkorrel makes them available to a larger group than simply poetry-lovers. To participate in the unique experience which du Plessis's material provides, one no longer has to be a student or an academic - one can simply be a listener to music. Although, as discussed previously, Kerkorrel was a

simply be a listener to music. Although, as discussed previously, Kerkorrel was a founder and practitioner of the Afrikaans alternative music movement, it is not in his usual style (which has become synonymous with alternativity) that he performs these poems. The poems are presented in a mode which could perhaps best be described as that of the 'luister-liedjie' (listening song). In his own way, however, Kerkorrel has made this performance essentially alternative, simply by the act of recording poetry, and the mingling of Afrikaans folk music with digital technology, in order to create a multi-dimensional sensory experience. By listening to Kerkorrel's recording, the listener is able to participate in more than one way - the music and gentle tone of some of the tracks may serve to relax and soothe, while on the other hand, the actual content of the lyrics may strike a chord of empathy in terms of longing, of memory, and of identification, due to a shared experience. A further mode of appeal would be the impression made by the music and the beat on the listener, evoking the involuntary tapping of feet, inspiring movement to the melody, and possessing the enduring melodic quality which allows the tunes to remain fixed in the memory, to be hummed or echoed later. In this way, not only the ear, but the body and the mind become involved in the experience.

While the poems themselves already exhibit many features which confirm their oral nature, such as repetition, alliteration and recurring motifs, the performer extends these features further, adding his own unique interpretation to them, and contributing other factors which enhance these characteristics. The poems possess a 'natural', lyrical quality which lends itself to their oral utterance. This characteristic is enhanced by the addition of music, written by du Plessis, as the rhythm of the words becomes more obvious. The rhythm of the poems is not only crafted by means of the rhyme scheme and other such poetic tools, but also by the way words sound alongside each other when uttered. Repetition, for instance, becomes more significant formally, as in "Voices in the Morning" where there is a strong emphasis on the vision, the new light, through repeated formulations. Whereas the printed text simply ends with the words, "a vision, a vista bright:/ a bridge of stars!/ a land of light", the recorded version returns to this chorus a second time, omitting the line, "a vista bright", and then following the chorus immediately with "a new light" and "a land of light!" This

brings in a more positive note, contrasting with the negative images of dreams being buried. For listeners, it would seem to imply that hope is never vanquished. In "Wanderers", the performance does not end with the fourth verse as the printed text does, but continues to repeat a mix of the second and fourth verses, followed by a further repetition of the lines which begin the introductory and concluding verses, "You whose wisdom is the claim to fame/ to whom would you give the wanderer's name?". The repeated questioning conveys a more insistent and mocking tone than that of the written poem, and the performance takes on a more cynical note, easily absorbed by urban dwellers. "Shadows" offers additional repetition of the chorus which emphasizes the condition of humankind, viewed as travellers through the world, as illusions, or shadows, without substance or permanence. A final repetition of the plaintive refrain, "from the sun/ and an eternity far from the sun", seems to hammer home the futility of an existence which consists of constant commuting without identity or destination, and which makes humans faceless, nameless shadows amid a host of others, removed from the life-giving source of light.

In "Shadows on the Wall", the last line of every verse except the first is repeated. As the last line of each verse emphasizes that dreams, love, life and the world are nothing but shadows on the wall, this adds a conclusive note of finality to the futility of all human actions. The repetition of the last lines of most of the verses in "Footprints on the Moon" adds a definition and balance to the track. The rhythm is improved and the pauses before the repetition contribute musically to the retention of the melody. Finnegan points out that repetitive patterning is integral to performative genres:

Patterns of repetition can provide structure and coherence to an oral poem - a necessary aspect in a medium as ephemeral as the spoken or sung word - but need not lead to monotony. Repetition in itself can lead to variation both in the intervening non-repeated units, and very effectively - in strategic variation within the repeated element itself. This variation and development through the use of repetition is a widely used device in oral poetry. (1977:103)

Some of the poems which I have discussed in their print version do not appear on

the CD. The poems "Pretoria", "Children of the Wind", "If Everyone is Far Away" and "Sombre Tune" have not been performed. Poems which I have not dealt with such as "Najaarsdroom" (Autumn Dream), "Hier's Ons Almal Tesaam" (Here We all are, Together). "Vermiste Mens", (Missing Person) and "Skielik is jy Vry" (Suddenly you're Free) replace them.

Some poems are given two treatments, such as "Wanderers" (Swervers) which appears in a 'radio trance mix' and an 'instrumental ambient space mix'. "Shadows" (Skimme) is presented as an 'ambient radio mix' and a 'dub shuffle'. Once again, this is evidence of the play of technology and equipment which allows the same material to be presented in two different variations on one CD. It is also evidence of the oral nature of the material which lends itself to different performance techniques.

Before considering the performed material in greater detail, it is worthwhile considering how performance effects the material generally. Finnegan feels that:

Even when the importance of performance is stressed in general terms, more needs to be said to convey the particular style and flavour of any given genre. A full appreciation must depend on an analysis not only of the verbal interplay and overtones in the piece, its stylistic structure and content, but also of the various detailed devices which the performer has at his disposal to convey his product to the audience, and the varying ways these are used by different individuals. (1992:13-14)

What is generally noticeable throughout the performance of Kerkorrel is that he has delved into the mood and tone of each poem, and reflects the overall sensibility in the chosen form of accompaniment, which varies from percussion and keyboard, to piano, and to guitar. In "Molehills", for instance, the accompaniment is that of guitar. As this track has a strong 'folk' element of nostalgia and longing, the warm notes of the guitar chords contribute greatly to the appeal of the track. It is the song of a wanderer looking fondly back down the years at a good place and time, and the mode of accompaniment is that of an itinerant musician. However, in "Nightwatch", the drama of the alternating strong and softly tinkling piano keys is needed, to suit the nature of the subject matter and the melody.

It is not only in the choice of instrument that one gauges the mood and tone of the poem/song, but also in the vocal range. Kerkorrel uses his voice as an instrument, to convey emotion, tension, drama and regret. His voice shifts from track to track, from loud and strong, to whispered and faint. It shouts, and trembles with emotion, or tones in lightly and tunefully with gentle guitar chords. In "Nightwatch", for instance, Kerkorrel's voice throbs plaintively, then descends to a whispered sigh, when he sings, "and one-by-one the stars go dead." The voice dies, in keeping with the dying of the light, and the inevitable sinking into darkness and night.

Modern technology is at work in making the poetry live, musically. Synthesised sounds, echoes and effects are added to the music composed by du Plessis. Kerkorrel, well-acquainted with both alternative and traditional Afrikaans music, strives to achieve a medium somewhere between the two. He adapts the music and words, which would be close in nature to those of folk music, and adds to these a more modern alternative slant, in terms of instruments and sound effects, as well as vocal acrobatics combined with interesting and original introductions and conclusions to the tracks.

In this way du Plessis's material, which appeared in printed form in the early 1980s, is transformed into a genre which is easily accepted and understood in the late 1990s, a decade later, and remains compelling today. As James Lull says:

When a personally relevant or amusing lyric is transmitted in music it often becomes a focal point for listeners, sometimes overriding the physical and emotional attractiveness of the beat. The beat can be seen as a medium for delivering the lyric in a rhythmic way, sending it deep into the mind of the listener. (1987:146)

This is particularly significant in an urban society where there are so many media and such an overload of information competing for an individual's attention. The poems themselves provide concepts which can be identified with, and thus become personally relevant to listeners. However, Kerkorrel's performance serves not only to make the material accessible, but is compatible with the ways of urban living, and, moreover, speaks to the listener in a manner which demands attention.



In today's urban and technological society, CD recording reaches a much wider audience than could be reached by live performance alone. The fact that the CD has transformed the poetry into something else, a genre which is not quite that of poetry, nor simply 'pop music', also increases its accessibility to a broad audience. Poetry in text form has to be purchased or borrowed from libraries, while a CD which is purchased can reach large groups of listeners at the same time, depending on where it is played. Even live poetry performances are generally attended by a certain sector of society, commonly assumed to be those belonging to an 'artistic' or 'literary' circle. However, music can reach a listenership simply by being given air-time on radio, or in a store. Thus, the addition of the music to the poetry changes its impact from that of 'oral' to that of 'performance', or even somewhat 'mass-popular', which achieves effects over and above those of narrowly-defined 'oral' material. Lull describes the purposes served by music:

Listeners create imaginative personal and social uses of music in all cultural contexts. In part, this is because music is available in so many varieties and can be experienced so easily in a large number of situations. Audiences participate in popular music in ways that are *physical* (singing along, tapping, clapping, dancing, sexual arousal, and so on); *emotional* ("feeling" the music, reminiscing, romanticizing, achieving a spiritual "high", and the like); and *cognitive* (processing information, learning, stimulating thought, contributing to memory, framing perceptions and so forth). (1987:141)

A critical aspect of a recorded performance is that it can be played at will, in differing contexts and for different audiences, so that the performance itself may mean very different things.

To discuss the specifics of performance which are evident, I shall return to the CD itself, which begins with "Voices in the Morning" (Stemme in die Mòre). The track is introduced with a heavy rhythmic beat, and a direct lead-in to the deep, throaty, immediately-identifiable voice of Kerkorrel, which alternates between strength and power, and wistfulness and nostalgia. The verse structure and repetition differ significantly from those of the written text, and repetition is increased by these changes. On this track, a section of the refrain, "Somewhere there is still a peaceful

place:/ along a wild coast somewhere/ a haven of rest lies here", is repeated, emphasising the desirability of a place of peace. The lines beginning, "Each dream is buried every evening", seem to stress the sheer mindlessness and hopelessness of current existence, and how bright aims and dreams seem to fade without an opportunity of realisation. Kerkorrel's performance ends, however, on a positive note, with a play on the word "light" indicating that hope is persistent. The track ends in an overtly modern way as the vocals stop, the music fades, leaving only the drumbeats, which become louder and stronger until the sound ends abruptly on a sharp, short beat which sounds like a shot. This brings the material to an urban listener's attention in a way which is unconventional, yet allows the lyrics to dominate the performance, conveying their message in a manner which leaves the concept open to interpretation and identification by the listener.

In discussing the track "Wanderers" (Swervers), I shall use the 'radio trance mix' version as the other version is purely instrumental. The poem itself is central to the image du Plessis creates of himself as a wandering minstrel, and the performance of the poem enhances this concept. It opens with vocals which are powerful in tone. Keyboards provide a 'funky' beat, and the questions in the text are echoed in the questioning note in Kerkorrel's voice. The music rises in waves, swelling and building behind the deliberate voice which quests and probes. In the last verse, the vocals become louder and more insistent. The track differs from the printed text, in that following the final verse, Kerkorrel then repeats the first two lines of the second verse, followed by the last two lines of the fourth verse:

Who would the true wanderer be indeed:  
 The one who travels; the one who reads,  
 The one with ticket and suitcase -  
 or each one who still has dreams in place -  
 Or who?  
 (1981:69)

At this point the music reaches a climax, and the first two lines of the last verse are repeated, "You whose wisdom is the claim to fame/To whom would you give the wanderer's name?" This is followed by an echo of the question, "Who would the true

wanderer be indeed?”, then a sighing sound effect which whips the music into a frenzy before it ceases, allowing only the percussion to continue. The remaining image created is almost one of footsteps walking - a close link to the theme. This typifies the city as a place in which dwellers are not rooted, are migrant, where changes of address and employment are frequent, where movement is inevitable and stability is not guaranteed.

“Shadows” (Skimme), the ‘ambient radio mix’, conveys a marked difference in tone from “Wanderers”. It has a warm, intimate, almost ‘bluesy’ feel to it, reminiscent of evenings at street cafés. There is a rich fullness to the tone, undercut by a slow, jazzy backbeat. The vocals are languid and the repetition is enhanced by Kerkorrel’s own additions. Following the final chorus, Kerkorrel repeats the chorus again, with stronger, louder vocals, and in conclusion, repeats again, “from the sun - and an eternity far from the sun”. The music and drums run through to the conclusion which ends on a blues note. This is apt because of the nature of the lyrics. “Shadows” laments the plight of humankind, much as blues music was originally sung to lament the condition of slaves. As an expression of human misery, the content fits the style.

“Shadows on the Wall” (Skadu’s *teen die Muur*) differs from the tracks before it, by using piano as the accompanying instrument. The introduction consists of light, tinkling piano notes. The vocals have a warm, gentle and romantic tone. The overall effect is light, whimsical and slightly sentimental, yet this is contrasted with the somewhat ‘dark’ content of the lyrics. By the second verse, however, the tone has become more cynical, in keeping with the theme. In contrast with the printed text, every last line is repeated by Kerkorrel as if to emphasize the futility of everything. The first four lines of the final verse are a repetition of the first verse, and in these, the tone reverts to that of the soft, whimsical, half-whispered beginning. The vocals become still softer, and the pace slower, until the final line. The track ends with the sound of tinkling piano notes fading, like a fading hope. In “Footprints on the Moon” (*Spore op die Maan*) the accompaniment is that of guitar, and the style is deceptively simple. The vocals are deep and intimate and, in contrast to the cynical content, the tone is light and pleasant. There are a number of textual rearrangements made in

performance. In the second verse, or what I call the refrain, Kerkorrel repeats, "Yes, look, there are already footprints on the moon". He continues throughout the performance to add repetitions of the last lines. The track finishes with a gentle guitar chord and is quite intimate, certainly inviting the listener to pick up the tune, and sing, or hum along. This serves to spread the content of the performance because it is remembered in this manner. It is also simple for a city dweller to identify with the implicit cynicism embodied in this track because the urban environment creates a place where people readily become jaded and disillusioned, where appetites are so easily aroused by the ever-increasing diversity and variety, that nothing satisfies the individual eventually.

The beautiful imagery of "If you could Follow me" (As Jy my Kon Volg) is treated in an apt manner. The track consists of a deep and gentle piano introduction followed by a silence before the whispered vocals begin. The pace is measured and stately, its rhythm almost that of a waltz. The lyrics are slow and attenuated in keeping with the pace of the track. The overall effect is one of gentle romance, despite the somewhat sinister undertones of the words. Kerkorrel has kept the delivery simple, resisting the urge to overdramatise the impact of the undertone. In contrast with the printed version, the same third line is used in the final chorus, as in the first, "... for the night **grows** cold", rather than "is", which makes it seem less immediate, and removes some of the sombre sting from the lyrics. This track oozes appeal to urban dwellers who might long for the intimacy and gentleness evident in the tone, and yearn for the same beauty in life as is embodied in the imagery, while living in a modern, industrialised environment where tenderness is an alien emotion.

The melody for "Tale for a City Child" (Sprokie vir 'n Stadskind) sounds like that of an old, well-remembered air, and carries with it a wave of nostalgia. The track begins with slow, measured piano accompaniment and sounds a little like a hymn at first. Here, the vocals are almost spoken, rather than sung, and the insertion of lengthy pauses and the stretching of syllables affect the pace and tone. The title of the track has obvious implications for the listener, and its formal, old-fashioned style could summon memories for most listeners who would find affinity with the quest-like

references adapted to assume urban characteristics. "Nightwatch" (Nagwag) is given a heavy piano introduction and the vocals are loud, almost shouted, and very powerful. The choruses have the effect of being chanted in a hypnotic fashion. When the song reaches the refrain, "But the day stays away", the pace quickens, and the vocals tremble with emotion, in tune with the crashing piano chords. This track would strike a chord in any city dweller who has ever worked a shift, and been obliged, as many who perform essential services in the city are, to remain awake during the small hours. The hypnotic, almost trance-like state of the track echoes the feeling of fatigue, when the hours ahead appear to stretch out endlessly, each one taking longer than its allotted 60 minutes to pass by. The second refrain is followed by a repetition of the lines, "Yes the day stays away,/ the moon becomes lead,/ and one-by-one the stars go dead". The track closes with a sprinkling of piano notes, which resemble closely the sound-evoked image of stars winking out, or dying, one by one.

"Molehills" (Molberge) provides an example of a real 'luister-liedjie'. The tone of nostalgia and memory, longing and regret, is enhanced by the soft, guitar accompaniment. It is easy to imagine this as being the ballad of a wandering minstrel. It has a warm, intimate tone and light, wistful vocals. There is certainly - far more than in the printed text alone - the hint of a lost way of life, a regret for something past.

These descriptions, though they do not do justice to the musical and sonic complexities of the songs, suggest that, in performance, the effect and rendition of the material are somewhat changed and, at the same time, enhanced. Although the alteration to the words, or the amended repetitions, do not change the content markedly, the addition of the music, selection of different musical instruments to provide accompaniment, the range and tone of vocals, the insertion of pauses, the use of silence or, alternatively, music within these pauses, and the manner of introduction and conclusion of the tracks contribute to the transformation of the texts. The magical element of performance is that were another artist to use the same texts, together with their musical arrangement as composed by du Plessis, s/he could, by the choice of different instruments, pace, tone, vocals, harmonies, sound

effects, and so on, create a performance which would again be unique. Not only does the response vary from listener to listener, but it may also change from hearing to hearing, performance to performance.

In "The Urbanisation of African Music". David Coplan says of the achievements of musicians:

In pursuing their own strategies of situational adjustment, South African popular musicians have given metaphoric expression to the dynamics of social interaction. In the cities, they have participated in the articulation of shifts in the bases of identification and association, combining diverse cultural patterns and principles into new sources of order, structure and solidarity.... People in situations of urban change use musical metaphors as instruments for social movement, order and self-development. By means of empathies, emotional communication, performances both symbolise and actualise changes in status and help bring order out of the chaos of diverse and conflicting cultural images. (1982:125)

As the performance engages with the issues which Koos du Plessis reflects on in his poetry, and transfers them within a modern, flexible genre, easily accepted by audiences and listeners today, so the perceptions evoked by the words of du Plessis may strike a chord for urban listeners. A response to urban living is no new concept, but urban dwelling possesses certain characteristics which are stamped on those who live and work in the city, leaving few untouched. Those who listen to du Plessis's words, transformed by Kerkorrel, may draw something from the performance - whether it is an affinity with a particular lyric, a sense of identification with the musical style of performance, or simple relaxation achieved by listening: some response will be aroused which serves to alleviate or express a reaction to the effects of an urban lifestyle. This may be achieved by evoking nostalgia for times in the past, pride in culture and identity, empathy with sentiments expressed in the lyrics, or simple pleasure in the music. While the poet may have achieved a form of catharsis in his writing, the listener receives (through the medium of performance) a further catharsis.

In the words of Koos du Plessis:

The words are forgotten  
and still, the tune remains  
like vaguely recalled snatches of  
a very old refrain.

But I am still the troubadour  
who wants to tell everyone  
about you, old jacaranda town,  
with song and music strummed. (1981:25)

So du Plessis reworked the genre of poetry, transforming it into a reflection of the experience of the wandering minstrel, echoing in form and style the nature of the troubadour's lyric. He used a form of poetry with oral characteristics, playing with rhythm and pauses, with sound and pace, which lends itself beyond doubt to spoken delivery. He composed music to accompany his words, and this dual medium - having been adapted by Johannes Kerkorrel - is transformed through the medium of performance into a genre which could reach out and touch the lives of city dwellers. The words tell of depression, a fear of losing one's identity, the development of a cynical disposition in the face of a world and a lifestyle which seem to place little value on humanity, and in which little is left unsullied.

The material also speaks out though of hope, and its persistence, of memory and regret carried by the voice and melody of a wandering minstrel, who moves through the spaces of both rural community and urban environment, to show that beauty and hope exist side-by-side with uniformity and progress. The image is individual and it encourages the belief that the ability to be unique exists in each listener. In this way, du Plessis deals with, confronts and conquers his own urban fears, creating an identity for himself. And through the channel created by Kerkorrel's performance of his material, a method of mediation of the urban experience is offered, with the capacity to reach many individuals resulting in a variety of responses.

Written texts, particularly poems, often remain restricted in their social effects since they are unlikely to be explored outside of academic or intellectual circles. Du Plessis's work, in its mediation by Kerkorrel, speaks of individual and common experiences in ways that are more broadly accessible. The effect of the material, in performance, provides all who live in an urban society with the reassurance that they are not alone in their daily experience of urban life.



## **APPENDIX**

The method which I used in translation was initially to translate the poems word-for-word, from Afrikaans into English. I then returned to the Afrikaans texts examining the spoken rhythm, the rhyme scheme and, obviously, the meaning. In working through all of the poems, I gained an overall impression of the style and characteristics of du Plessis's writing, and when continuing with the English texts, reworked and reshaped the texts to assume a similar model, form and rhythm to that of the originals. This often necessitated deviating from direct translations and, as mentioned previously, amending the text to allow for the same flow and melody. Perfect rhyme schemes could not always be achieved, nor was it always possible to use the English word with exactly the same meaning as its Afrikaans equivalent. I feel though, that this has not been to the detriment of the poetry, but has rather reproduced a similar mood and ambience to that of the originals.

**Translations of Primary Texts****Poetry of Koos du Plessis****Children of the Wind**

I know an old, old melody  
of life's weals and woes  
of long-lost sailing ships within  
deep sea-vaults of long ago.

The words are long forgotten  
and still, the tune remains  
like vaguely recalled snatches of  
a very old refrain.

Of wanderers without direction;  
of seekers who fail to find...  
And finally, all were nothing but  
children of the wind.

Faces, dreams, names  
blown by the wind away;  
and where all the words have gone,  
only a child could say.

Wanderers without direction;  
seekers who fail to find...  
And finally, all were nothing but  
children of the wind.

## Pretoria

Pretoria, jacaranda town  
it's October once again...  
Perhaps that's the reason why  
tonight my longing is so plain,  
because for so many years you have  
shared my love and my pain -  
and listened in silence when I  
played my old guitar's refrain.

Pretoria, jacaranda town  
where I so gladly, only  
strolled up and down the streets  
in the spring rain, lonely:  
where long after midnight  
peeping out of windows, girls I saw,  
still listening dreamily to  
the song of every troubadour.

Pretoria, jacaranda town  
the time passes so very fast,  
and those years lie like  
pale-blue mountains in my past.  
But I am still the troubadour  
who wants to tell everyone  
about you, old jacaranda town,  
with song and music strummed.

## Nightwatch

An icy wind blows and blows ...  
A cock denies himself and crows  
awaits the light ...  
but it stays night -  
absolute night.

Endless hours come,  
slumber-guarding fire-drums;  
and the fire's glow cannot embrace  
not one body or face,  
not even one body or face.

Endless hours come,  
of stars and fire-drums,  
of keeping watch and waiting ...  
utter waiting.

But the day stays away;  
The moon becomes lead,  
and one-by-one, the stars go dead.

Endless hours come,  
of stars and fire-drums,  
of keeping watch and waiting ...  
utter waiting.

But the day stays away;  
The moon becomes lead,  
and one-by-one, the fire-drums go dead.

### Molehills (Memories of Springs)

Your name sings of lost fountains of long ago  
and conjures up images of oases along the path,  
the mine towers reach so far, yet even so,  
your beauty lies much deeper - in the heart,  
And I remember.

In a way the same peace was around,  
the inclination merely to live just where one will -  
and should I descend the shafts to the past, underground,  
the rumbling brakes gradually grow still.

And the roaring in your belly shakes the walls at night,  
and in a shaft brings flashes of blue light  
where in the deep-dream-hours men like moles fight,  
to break gold from the locked safe of the night...  
and I remember.

I remember still sometimes the August rain-mist  
from the mist-shrouded mountains of the mole;  
the resignation of people at peace, but with awareness:  
that hereabouts the world is half-hollow, not quite whole.

Of the strangest adventures there were legends,  
deep, deep in the manmade mountain at night,  
and in caves around the gang-fires, friends,  
against grey walls, all is dwarfed by the play of light...  
and I remember.

There was a house with a kitchen and wood-grained table,  
and six people who shared in love and woe ...

And with time's passing all would unravel,  
but the woe I have forgotten years ago.

But I remember and still delve gold from bygone years  
from the mist-covered mountains of the mole,  
and dream and build though my peace is consumed by fears,  
even though my own world is half-hollow, not quite whole.

... and dream and build although my peace is consumed by fears,  
because the world is half-hollow everywhere.

And I remember.

### If Everyone is Far Away

If you find everyone is far,  
the heart suddenly becomes old,  
if the world is a star,  
aloof and cold,  
the curtains invent  
a conspiracy against the light,  
the window sashes shrink, bent,  
and doors shut tight.

If everyone is far away, you find yourself  
where you search through drawers in silent rooms of the heart.

If everyone is far away, you find your soul -  
like a woman in front of a mirror, vulnerable and apart.

If there is not a soul around,  
you lay everything on the line,  
that which is borrowed, you have found,  
will be fetched again in time.

The truth comes then  
exorcising each lie you own,  
giving you clarity once again -  
and leaving you all alone.

If everyone is far away, you find yourself  
where you search through drawers in silent rooms of the heart.

If everyone is far away, you find your soul -  
like a woman in front of a mirror, vulnerable and apart.

### Voices in the Morning

I sometimes still hear voices in the morn -  
a whispering of strangers from a far, lost night -  
and slowly a primitive dream again is born,  
in twilights of shadows against day's dusky light;  
a new light: a vista bright:

Somewhere there is still a peaceful place;  
along a wild coast somewhere,  
a haven of rest lies here -  
somewhere in a land of time past, and space,  
everything is old and unchanged there.

Every day promises a new haven:  
there is seldom solid ground in sight  
in morning light.

Each dream is buried every evening,  
but then, one morning, the voices reappear;  
I see, with eyes that search the heights,  
a vision, a vista bright:  
a bridge of stars!  
a land of light!



### Shadows on the Wall

Outside the darkness reigns,  
comes filtering through the panes.  
I need a few coals to build the fire tall,  
And the chest of drawers and table  
and everything that once was stable -  
melt into mere shadows on the wall.

Yesterday's dreams  
sinister and sombre seem,  
because, look, there is an appointed hour for all:  
by high-rise building plans we are excited  
but the demolishers are invited  
and our dreams are but shadows on the wall.

Organ-accompanied rendition  
heralds the parting's premonition,  
but everything's all right - love is a fire, after all,  
of the fiery wooing that took place,  
we hear later in the court case  
because love is a shadow on the wall.

In black or white arrayed,  
in procession or parade,  
how long will everything still last wonder one and all;  
and live life at helter-skelter rate  
because the coffin in the attic waits  
and life is a shadow on the wall.

Outside darkness reigns  
and filters through the panes.

I need a few coals to build the fire tall,  
and my feet and my hands  
become old familiar lands  
in shadow-maps set against the room's wall.  
The world becomes a shadow on the wall;  
a flickering shadow on the wall.

### **Wanderers**

You whose wisdom is your claim to fame,  
to whom would you give the wanderer's name:  
the one who leaves without farewell  
or she who remains alone to dwell?  
Or who?

Who would the true wanderer be indeed:  
the one who travels; the one who reads,  
the loner with his sauntering gait,  
or each one who yearns and has to wait -  
Or who?

Who would fit the true wanderer's role  
the one on foot, the one in soul,  
the one who strides through far-off lands,  
or he who through the smog's screen scans  
Or who?

You whose wisdom is your claim to fame  
To whom would you give the wanderer's name:  
the one with travelling-ticket and case,  
or each one who still has dreams in place -  
Or who?

## Shadows

There are shadows, on balconies dark as night,  
where trunks lie open and empty, but for air.  
There are shadows, on platforms of twilight,  
for a train to the day they're waiting there.

### Chorus

Vulnerable, vulnerable humankind,  
on a trip from one platform to another one,  
in a midnightland without confines  
of time  
and an eternity far from the sun,  
from the sun -  
and an eternity far from the sun.

There are shadows, enveloped and overcoated,  
protected against the icy wind's grip.  
There are shadows with coffins like cases bloated,  
full of dreams packed for the trip.

### Chorus

### Sombre Tune

Dark days, darker nights  
 each one just like the rest,  
 fill the months of the year  
 and the sun stays always in the west.  
 The time like a sad lad passes soon  
 before the door I see,  
 and he sings a sombre tune -  
 and he sings it just for me.

#### Chorus

Sombre boy, sombre tune, sombre summer sun.  
 I would have changed it, if I could, I'd change each one.  
 If I could ... each one.

So little to remember and, yet, so much to forget,  
 for between now and then lies something the brain remembers yet.  
 The house of purple chambers for years without window panes has stood,  
 with every door locked up and windows barred with board.

#### Chorus

There's nothing to expect here  
 and yet, why does hope jeer:  
 "It is not eternally night" and  
 "One must just keep on going"?  
 Although the world is dark, even if every path is barred,  
 I see a far light flicker and I know it is my star.

Although the world is dark, even if every path is barred,  
I see a far light flicker and I believe it is my star.

I see a far light flicker - and I hope it is my star.

### Footprints on the Moon

Each plan lies hopelessly crumpled  
 because something says, you stupid bumbler,  
 space is crammed with rubble tumbled,  
 And realization dawns too soon:  
 There is no new haven to go to,  
 because, look, there are already footprints on the moon.

Because nightly, the city's blossoms are born,  
 Scatter their seed, then at the dawn,  
 steel shoots are thrust through the earth's crust, and soon,  
 rubble mountains grow in street and lane  
 and there's sulphuric acid in the rain,  
 and look, there are already footprints on the moon.

Where should I go?  
 Escape is futile,  
 even dreams are not worthwhile  
 because the world is in denial,  
 and realization dawns too soon.  
 There are no new trails to blaze  
 because look, there are already footprints on the moon.

Every hectare has been sold  
 Homesteads lie demolished; cold,  
 and the world waits bewildered, hoping soon,  
 that a miracle there will be,  
 to stop its caterpillar-like army,  
 but look, there are already footprints on the moon.

Flight to mountain or wood...  
Do you think that there is none:  
that you are finally alone?  
Oh, on Venus secret agents' spy work is done  
And realization dawns too soon.  
There is no new haven to go to.  
because look, there are already footprints on the moon.

Every word is rhetoric,  
Every dream is pure plastic  
and atom's the idiom of those in tune.  
Somewhere there must be a peaceful nest  
for the jaded soul to rest -  
but look, there are already footprints on the moon,  
a thousand dark tracks upon the moon,  
See, there are already footprints on the moon.



### Fairytale For a City Child

When the rain of soot and dust has passed by  
and the smoke has vanished from the air,  
in the starless sky  
a neon rainbow will appear.

And mark it well, for if by you it should be found  
my child, there's a fairy-tale you should know,  
of a treasure which with ancient chains is bound  
that lies at the end of the neon rainbow.

Follow it each night across black rivers  
over mountains of concrete not of stone;  
if you walk for ten thousand hours  
you will arrive there then, alone.

But here you must never let yourself be bound  
because, so the words of the age-old tale go,  
for happiness and joy to be found,  
you must search for the end of the neon rainbow.

Follow it each night across black rivers,  
not for a moment should you glance behind,  
perhaps you'll reach the land of blue sapphires  
where maybe, a patch of sun you'll find.

### **If you Could Follow me...**

If you could follow me on the wings of the wind,  
to worlds beyond the moon afar,  
my tracks in the milky way you'd find,  
and see my tent pitched among the stars.

Because I am still young and the world is old;  
its shadow reaches far through space.  
Take my hand now, for the night grows cold -  
And why should we fail to find a place?

If you could love me till everything came to an end  
and never fear the parting of our ways,  
life, we would learn to comprehend  
and be happy for moments, and for days.

But we are still young and the world is old  
and they have failed, those before us in our past.  
Take my hand now for the night is cold -  
this time is perhaps the very last.

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