

Tonality and texture in Arnold van Wyk's *Vier weemoedige liedjies*: musical, poetic and personal considerations

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The four poems as set in Arnold van Wyk's (1916-1983) *Vier weemoedige liedjies* (*Four sad little songs* [1934, published 1949]) present a continuum of consciousness that explores various aspects of a sense of loss shared by the poets and echoed by the composer; whether on a cultural or personal level, the underlying motive that inspires their creative impulse is one of engagement reaching out to the unattainable. Van Wyk's unique portrayal of melancholy in these songs is the result of a remarkable interaction of tonal and textural elements that give sensitive expression to the content of the carefully selected poetic texts. Through this interaction, the nature of van Wyk's tonal language, albeit in an early stage of development in this instance, can already be determined, pointing to very specific ways of fusing together elements of structure and expression. Particularly notable are the ways in which tonality and texture are used in the immediate sense to capture the mood of the poems of these songs. On a more profound level, these elements bring forth deeper dimensions of meaning both with regard to the content of the poems and Van Wyk's personal life experiences.

Tonaliteit en tekstuur in Arnold van Wyk se *Vier weemoedige liedjies*: musikale, poëtiese en persoonlike oorwegings

Die vier gedigte soos getoonset in Arnold van Wyk (1916-1983) se *Vier weemoedige liedjies* (1934, gepubliseer in 1949) werp 'n blik op 'n kontinuum van bewussyn wat verskeie aspekte van 'n besef van verlies, soos deur die digters gedeel en deur die komponis ge-eggo, ontgin; hetsy op die kulturele of persoonlike vlak is die onderliggende motief wat hul kreatiewe impuls inspireer, verknoop met 'n strewe na die onbereikbare. Van Wyk se unieke uitbeelding van melankolie in hierdie liedjies is die resultaat van 'n merkwaardige interaksie van tonale en teksturele elemente wat sensitiewe uitdrukking gee aan die inhoud van die sorgvuldig gekose poëtiese tekste. Deur middel van hierdie interaksie kan die aard van Van Wyk se tonale taal, ofskoon hier nog in 'n vroeë stadium van ontwikkeling, reeds bepaal word in terme van baie spesifieke werkswyses om elemente van struktuur en uitdrukking te vermeng. Veral opmerklik is die wyses waarop tonaliteit en tekstuur in die onmiddellike sin gebruik word om die atmosfeer van die gedigte vas te vang. Op 'n meer diepgaande vlak bring hierdie elemente dieper dimensies van betekenis voort met betrekking tot die inhoud van die gedigte en Van Wyk se persoonlike lewenservarings.

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Arnold van Wyk's (1916-1983) unique portrayal of melancholy in his *Vier weemoedige liedjies* (*Four sad little songs* [1934, published 1949]) is the result of a remarkable interaction of tonal and textural elements that give sensitive expression to the content of the four carefully selected poetic texts.

A significant by-product of tonal and textural interaction in the four songs is the creation of poignant colouristic effects. These are produced through specific chord constructions and voicings, melodic contours, contrapuntal motions, linear chord progressions, extremes in register, and the juxtaposition of disparate melodic and harmonic elements. In the latter instance, the results are either tonally misaligned melodic figures within clearly identifiable tonal areas, or the combination of simple stepwise diatonic melodic constructs with freer tonal motions. In terms of tonal and colouristic contrast, the chromatic element of mixture or scale-degree inflection plays an important role. These inflections can be identified in chord constructions and progressions, and play a role in form divisions.

In view of their relatively uncomplicated tonal structures and the fact that they were early works, composed in 1934 at the age of 18, the *Vier weemoedige liedjies* represent an early stage in the evolution of Van Wyk's compositional style. The effects of tonal and textural interaction on tonal characterisation, development and ambiguity in the songs are not yet as strongly felt and as powerfully executed as in his later compositions such as *Night music* (1945-1958) for solo piano, the song cycle *Van liefde en verlatenheid* (*Of love and forsakenness* [1948-1953]), the *Duo concertant for viola and piano* (1962-1976), the *Missa in illo tempore* (1979), and his final piano composition, *Tristia*.¹ These compositions, as well as his major symphonic and chamber output, represent the full spectrum of his tonal language in the brevity of their tonal designs and expressive powers. In addition, the four songs still show greater adherence to conventional tonal practices than do

1 Thom Wium (2010: 25) explains that in 1972, "Arnold van Wyk compiled three of his earlier piano works into a new set intended for his own performance, which he planned to compliment with three new pieces". Characteristic of his compositional activity during the latter part of his life, the new pieces were never finished. The composer performed the original three movements, entitled "Rondo desolato", "Ostinato" and "Berceuse" as a set in 1972 and in 1983. These pieces were published posthumously by the Arnold van Wyk Trust in 1984.

the later and larger works. In fact, the first drafts of these songs show much more conventional tonal accompaniments, corresponding to their predominantly tonal diatonic melodic contours, than the later published version whose accompaniments were revised by Van Wyk and became tonally freer through less conventional progressions, more scale-degree inflections, added dissonances and misaligned elements. Nevertheless, many notable features of tonal colouration and expression, as developed by Van Wyk in his major works, are clearly evident in the *Vier weemoedige liedjies*, pointing to the already close relationship between tonality and texture in their tonal structures and designs. The principal reason for this lies in the sorrowful content of the four poems which, as will be explored later, reveal extraordinary levels of unified meaning that required a powerful musical response. This was indeed achieved in the realisation of the *Vier weemoedige liedjies*, where equally extraordinary levels of unified musical material were created to complement the contents of the four poems.

The elegiac and melancholic nature of Van Wyk's music is by now as much a part of the public reception of the composer's works as it is of the growing body of scholarship on his oeuvre. As Lüdemann (2008: 87) notes, a long overdue resurgence of interest in the composer coincided not only with what would have been his ninetieth birthday in 2006, but also with the greater accessibility of his private documents, autographs, sketches, letters and other unpublished material as held in the Arnold van Wyk collection in the Special Collections section of the J S Gericke Library at Stellenbosch University (See Muller 2008: 61). Existing explorations of the elegiac in Van Wyk's music draw on biographical, textual, contextual, intertextual, as well as subtextual dimensions of interpretation.² In this regard, the above-mentioned theme of the "darker hues of emotional expression" may, in terms of Van Wyk's personality, be understood as "a tragically inhibited individual, incapable in his personal interactions" – an aspect found to be extended to the composer's musical expression (Muller 2008: 65). By contrast, Grové (2008: 2) finds that Van Wyk, while deliberately evading any acknowledgement of autobiographical content in his work, could only in his music express those most existential aspects of his inner self and his lifestyle. Thom Wium (2008: 25) explores a

2 See Thom Wium 2010; Lüdemann 2008; Muller 2008; Grové 2008.

similar notion in suggesting that for Van Wyk, as a postcolonial artist, “home” was never to be situated in any geographical location, but could only be found within the European art tradition “as a locus of identity, safety and belonging”. On the other hand, Muller’s work on Van Wyk, which is to culminate in a first biography on the composer, suggests that Van Wyk’s homosexuality was a part of his being “a composer ill at ease with himself, crucially unable to reach within to an unequivocal and recognizable musical expression that constituted a personal identity” (Muller 2008: 69). In terms of the argumentation offered in this article, our allegiance will be with Grové’s notion of the music ‘itself’ in its relation with the poetic texts as expressive agent for Van Wyk’s personal life experiences.

In the present article, a systematic reading of the four poems in tandem with an observational analysis of the composer’s use of tonality and texture in the setting of these poems offer a platform for arguing that perhaps it was precisely this “miss-placement” that enabled Van Wyk to achieve extraordinary levels of colouration, atmosphere and expression in his music. It is our conviction that the nature of the relationship between tonality and texture lies at the heart of Van Wyk’s tonal language which was developed to give musical expression to his feelings of melancholy, artistic alienation, doubt and desolation as so aptly demonstrated in the titles, content, moods and atmospheres of his major compositions. At the deepest level of this musical expression lies the elegiac mood which is powerfully realised by Van Wyk through a uniquely developed individual process of tonal and textural interaction. Integral to the elegiac is melancholy, which is the prevailing mood of the *Vier weemoedige liedjies*. It is further our opinion that the delicate expressive features of these songs emanate from a careful balance between tonal and textural elements whose various manifestations reveal a spectrum of moods and atmospheres beautifully complementing and enhancing the poetic texts of the songs.

In our analysis of the songs, we will accordingly focus on tonal and textural design and interaction as content- and character-creating devices. In addition, the interpretations will point to the influence of the poems’ deeper meanings on the nature of Van Wyk’s tonal language.

1. The four poems: an introduction

Before attempting to approach the four poems set to music by Van Wyk, it must be clearly stated that the composer obviously interpreted them as being melancholic – hence the title *Vier weemoedige liedjies*, either because of his lifelong propensity for such feelings or because he was in a melancholic frame of mind at the time of reading the individual poems. In addition, besides their content having possibly evoked a corresponding emotional response, he may have been struck by a common state of consciousness underlying seemingly disparate subject matter.

Accordingly, the approach employed in the interpretation of the four poems will be predicated on an assumed common state of consciousness, the contemporaneous period of creation (1930s) of both poems and music by young artists, and on what is known of the mind and personality of the two poets, the historical period and the political and social environment at the time.

According to Wellek & Warren (1984: 241),

[i]n a successful work of art, the materials are completely assimilated into the form: what was ‘world’ has become ‘language’. The ‘materials’ of a literary work of art, are on one level, words, on another level, human behaviour experience, and on another, human ideas and attitudes. All of these, including language, exist outside the work of art, in other modes; but in a successful poem or novel they are pulled into polyphonic relations by the dynamics of aesthetic purpose.

Accordingly, the analyses of the four poems under discussion will be based on the notion of a framework of “polyphonic relations” existing between the poems individually, as constituent parts of a whole, and the composer’s reaction to them. Together they form an aesthetic continuum of self-revelation comprising impressions, thoughts and impulses initiated either by conscious experience or by the subconscious. The four poems will now be discussed.

2. *Vaalvalk* (Falcon)³

2.1 The poem

Wit is die wêreld
van outydse wee,
en 'n treurige wals
is die vroemore see;
dou oor die duine, geen windjie wat waai,
net 'n vaalvalk wat sing soos hy draai, soos hy draai ... (Louw 1934: 44).

The title of the poem, by W E G Louw is a metaphor for monotony and transience. Throughout the poem, there are juxtapositions of images conveying a sense of melancholy, unrelenting desolation and loss. The falcon may also be viewed as symbolising both a form of existential captivity and a periodic transcendence.

This poem taken from Louw's earliest volume *Die ryke dwaas* (1934) was written during the build-up to the second world war and in the aftermath of the Great Depression. It is possible to interpret it, therefore, as an expression of the poet's emotional response to a world in upheaval where the present one is but a repetition of similar events in the past ("outydse wee").

The use of the adjective "wit" (white) in the given context may be an image expressing a sense of existential *déjà vu* - "die wêreld van outydse wee" (woe, grief, pain). The word is related to German *Weh*, and is still retained in Afrikaans as "weemoed(ig)" and "wel en wee". In this instance, a special emphasis is placed on its significance, given its position syntactically and metrically at the beginning of the first line. According to Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1996: 1106), in the West the colour white represents "the matt white of death, which absorbs the individual and inducts him or her into the cold, female lunar world. It is the herald of absence, nocturnal emptiness and the disappearance of consciousness and daytime colours". It might be interesting to

3 It should be noted that "Vaalvalk" is a poetic term, and does not depict a bird species. According to an inscription in Maclean (1996: 150-1), the bird described by W E G Louw is possibly the peregrine falcon (*falco peregrinus*; Afrikaans: *swerfvalk*), a bird that is found worldwide, including in southern Africa. All translations of texts in Afrikaans are the author's own.

speculate about the poet's inner world within the South African context at the time. How much did the country's past as an Afrikaner homeland weigh on him – its role as part of the British Empire, its share of economic stress in the aftermath of the Great Depression, and its future as political tensions once again increased in Europe? In an essay on Louw's oeuvre, Britz (1998: 637) notes that his poetry “was maar één van die uitingsvorme van ‘n aristokratiese lewenshouding waarmee hy probeer het om Afrikaans en die Afrikaanse geesteslewe na Europese model te verfyn en op te hef”.⁴

In summing up the content of W E G Louw's early work, Britz (1998: 640) notes the typical young poet's spontaneous clarity of vision and insight into matters of life and death, and a realisation that freedom is meaningless and limited, which is symbolised elsewhere in the same anthology in a poem entitled *Die dood van die dwaas* (*The death of the fool*) by the freewheeling falcon's need to return to its roost at day's end (“valk wat vér sy blou lug kan peil, / en oor die hoogste berg en kranse draai, / maar elke aand weer na die nes moet keer”).⁵ The bird's circumscribed daily routine may be said to symbolise the periodicity of human history. This symbolism reappears in *Vaalvalk* at the end of the poem with the freewheeling falcon's endless circling – “soos hy draai, soos hy draai ...” – and its return to its roost at dusk. The sense of futility is heightened by colours “wit” and “vaal” that project the emptiness, bleakness and monotony referred to previously.

If one interprets the image of the sea in lines 3 and 4 of the poem (“n treurige wals is die vroemore see”) to suggest an existential monotony, then the descriptive image of its early morning mournful waltz-like motion could certainly have a negative connotation. That the sea is associated with a dance form and is “treurig” (sad – sorrowful) is a projected personification of the poet's inner self onto nature. If, in Britz's sense, given the syntactical significance of the metrically stressed syllables “wit”, “wêr-” and “wee”, then “wit is die wêreld van outydse wee” (lines 1 and 2), implies a sense of fundamental pessimism regarding a looming disaster (“outydse wee”) once again threatening

4 “was but one of the forms of expression of an aristocratic bearing with which he attempted to refine and elevate Afrikaans and Afrikaans intellectual life based on a European model”.

5 “like a falcon which can limitlessly explore the blue sky, / and sweep over the highest mountain and crags, / but must return each evening to its nest”.

the larger European theatre with its implications for South Africa as an outpost of empire, then the lone, pale (grey) falcon's repeated call as it circles above the empty and silent dunes "oor die duine, geen windjie wat waai" (line 5) might be interpreted as an allegorical reference to the poet's own lament. The windless expanse increases the sense of foreboding.

White as a colour has always been and continues to be symbolically significant:

Since white was one of the colours allotted to the cardinal points, most peoples usually made white the colour of both east and west, that is to say, those two distant and mysterious points at which the sun is born and dies each day. In both instances white possesses the properties of a boundary, as do the endless lines of the horizon. It is the colour of passage ... The white of the west is the matt white of death, which absorbs the individual and inducts him or her into the cold female lunar world. It is the herald of absence, nocturnal emptiness and the disappearance of consciousness and of daytime colours (Chevalier & Gheerbrandt 1996: 1105-6).

The falcon likewise has traditionally been associated with powerful symbolism:

In ancient Egypt, where strength and beauty made it the prince of birds, the falcon symbolised the principle of light. It was the embodiment, among other deities, of Horus, god of ethereal space, whose two eyes were the sun and the moon and who took the shape of a falcon ... Indeed, the falcon, in the symbolic category of the solar, celestial, male and bright, is an ascensional symbol of every level, material, intellectual and moral. It signifies superiority and conquest, either acquired or in the process of attainment (Chevalier & Gheerbrandt 1996: 371).

Being well-versed in European literature with its wide frame of reference, Louw may have subconsciously identified the image of the wheeling falcon with the epochal nature of Western civilisation's value systems (cf Britz 1998: 637). Fundamentally, however, Louw likens the recurrent periodicity in humanity's existence to the falcon's daily routine.

The time of day is the early morning since there is dew on the sand dunes - "dou oor die duine" (line 5). Given the periodic recurrence of similar events in humanity's existence, this early morning image might also imply the stirring of a subconscious sense of the dawn of a new and different era when viewed in combination with the image

of a falcon's daily repeated flight above a lifeless and desolate ocean shore – recalling Louw's falcon in *Die dood van die dwaas*.

Finally, from the use of the colours “wit” (white) in line 1 and “vaal” (grey) in line 6 of the poem, and the repetition of “soos hy draai”, it becomes clear that Louw wished to express a sense of emptiness, melancholy and loss, and to imbue his images with a sense of recurrent and unrelenting desolation. The mournful sound of the ocean and the windless dunes reinforce the effect. In addition to “vaal” having a structural function by tying the title to the last line, “Vaal-vaalk”, “vroemôre see”, “van”, “wit”, “wêreld”, “wee”, “wals”, “windjie”, “waai”, “dou”, “duine”, “draai” fill the poem with alliteration, imparting a lyricism that lends itself readily to a musical interpretation.

2.2 The music⁶

This through-composed miniature song consists of two short sections corresponding to the two stanzas of the poem, the second being a free variant of the first. An introduction preceded the first section and a brief piano interlude the second. It has essentially a three-part linear texture with the voice as upper part (if sung by a female). The higher of the two accompanying voice parts in the piano is mainly static, while the lower is designed to form a contrapuntal dialogue with the voice.

In the first section, the middle voice predominantly displays slow syncopated repetitions of G# with occasional deviations to G# an octave higher, and to B and D#, the third and fifth degrees of a supposed G#-minor tonality. The lowest voice presents a four-bar melodic pattern repeated twice and resembling a ground bass figure. It consists of descending and ascending seconds in the form of sighing figures, followed by a descending stepwise line. Prominent scale degree inflections within G# minor occurring in the ground bass are flat7, #6, #4 and flat2. The melodic contour of the voice spans a perfect

6 In light of the nature of the analytical observations, that is, a systematic walk-through analysis of each song, followed by further speculation on the deeper meaning of the music in relation to the texts and Van Wyk's personal messages in it, no specific examples of portions from the songs will be offered in this article. Instead, the reader is advised to consult the scores of the songs for a complete picture regarding the music. In terms of the central findings and conclusions of the analyses, the detailed verbal explanations should suffice.

fifth from G# to D# and represents a diatonic five-note set in G# minor. The inflected scale degrees in the lower contrapuntal voice act as expressive tonal colouring devices creating a feeling of desolation in conjunction with the subdued tonal simplicity of the vocal line. The first section of the song continues with further repetitions in the middle voice and an altered third repetition of the descending line in the ground bass.

The piano interlude presents an intensification of the contrapuntal texture through greater melodic activity in its two lines. While the repeated-note figure in the right hand migrates up to Bb, the left hand begins with the opening melodic figure of the voice, transposed down an augmented second, and linked with the descending stepwise line of the ground bass. This is imitated partially in the right hand by a minor sixth higher in preparation of the vocal entry in the next bar during which the repeated notes in the right hand move to G. The final line of text has the voice filling in the fifth, G# to D#, of the opening voice part, while the middle voice has repeated G#s, followed by a motion in parallel fifths with the last three notes of the voice. The left hand has now descended to G# which is repeated an octave lower with an additional voice (A#) a ninth above it. This A# resembles the second note of the filled-in fifth. The song ends with a repetition of the last three notes of the filled-in fifth in the voice alone, following from the A# in the accompaniment. This is preceded by a sighing figure, comprising the first two notes of the ground bass, in the left hand. With the repeated G#s falling away and the unresolved sixth second note of the ground, the G# tonality, although still felt, dissipates, and the only sense of its possible re-occurrence is given by the unresolved sixth scale degree which is allowed to die away in the pedal, achieving a 'surrogate' resolution two bars later in the final D# of the vocal line.

The curious nature of the three-part texture – two melodic lines in the outer voices and a mostly static inner voice – presents an unusual tonal situation in that the tonal motions of the song are not determined or controlled by the lowest voice, but rather by the repeated notes of the middle voice, creating tonal centres on G#, B-flat, G and G#. This is in spite of the vocal line being, on its own, clearly in G# minor throughout the song. The tonal design is, therefore, one of shifting tonal centres with contrapuntal lines circling around them. This fully complements the symbolic meaning of the circling falcon.

But there is more to come. Bearing aural perception of enharmonic alteration in mind, G# being in reality the enharmonic equivalent of Ab, the succession of tonal centres can be read as Ab, Bb, G and Ab. This reveals another circling figure, namely neighbouring tonal centres (Bb and G) around a central tonal axis (Ab/G#). Incidentally, there are also circling figures imbedded in the outer lines, often containing the shape of turns or changing-note figures. The circling falcon is, therefore, portrayed, both tonally and texturally, by the tonal axis and its circling neighbouring tonal centres, and by the circling contrapuntal lines around each element in the tonal circle. Extraordinary also is the fact that the so-called ground bass does not provide any tonal or harmonic stability, but rather becomes a captive figure within the circling tonal and contrapuntal motions of the song.

Finally, the mood of desolation at the close of the song is achieved by setting the last three words of the poem for the voice alone, ending on a high D#, the fifth degree of the G#/Ab-minor tonality. The importance of this will be shown at a later stage.

Reflecting on the essential tonal and textural ingredients and the compositional design of “Vaalvalk” in the light of Louw’s experience of a higher order of civilisation and a changing world evoking emotions of melancholy and desolation, both situations are addressed in the music. The higher order lifestyle and values are represented by the three-part contrapuntal texture which includes a ground bass, signifying both artistic elevation and preservation, that is, a learned style of composition built on a supposed tonal foundation – the ground bass. It is, however, the way in which both the contrapuntal texture and the ground bass operate that poses a threat to tonal order and stability resulting in musical expressions of uncertainty and instability.

First, the ground bass does not function as a tonal bass for the song; instead, as indicated earlier, it is the main factor eroding tonal stability; without it the song would be fairly straightforward in tonal terms. This, in turn, results in the eroding of a conceived G#-minor tonality through the combination of the G# tonal axis, its circling upper and lower neighbour-note motions and the circling contrapuntal lines around each of the notes of the circling tonal motion. However, since the G#-minor triad occurs as background to

the voice part only, and the ground bass becomes tonally undefined through both its role in the circling contrapuntal motions and its scale-degree inflections, emphasis is placed rather on the circling tonal motions than on a well-defined and all-embracing triadic tonality. The image of a threat to a civilised order is realised in the design of “Vaalvalk”, by placing contrapuntal writing, an *ostinato* bass pattern, diatonic tonal melodic motions in the voice part and a clearly defined tonal centre against scale-degree inflections, added dissonances, circling contrapuntal and tonal motions, and middle-voice rather than bass-line tonal definition. The feelings of emptiness, bleakness, monotony, transience and loss, as reflected in the poem, are portrayed in the music, first, by the combination of repeated G#s in the middle voice, the descending motions and scale-degree inflections of the ground bass and the simple diatonic melodic motions of the voice part and, secondly, by the freer tonal motions around G#, the parallel fifths between the voice part and the piano at the turning of the falcon and the repetition of the final words “soos hy draai” (as he wheels) in the voice part alone. Finally, the periodicity of human history is portrayed by the circling tonal motions moving around and returning to the main G# tonal axis.

3. *Eerste winterdag*

3.1 The poem

Na al die sonskyn is dit donker;
 vaal dryf die wolke in die lug;
 vaal die yl motreën wat heeldag stuiwe;
 laagdwarrelend die blare vlug -
 Stil sleep die ure en stuif die motreën buite;
 die druppels tril droewig teen die ruite;
 drup-drup eentonig op gewel en dak
 en hang swaar-blink aan die kale amandeltak. (Louw 1929: 1).

The title of this poem, also by W E G Louw, implies a transition (“eerste winterdag”) to a period very different from the preceding one (“na al die sonskyn”, line 1). The *angst* associated with periodic change

encountered in *Vaalvalk* is repeated as a theme in the seasonal change from summer brightness to winter's gloom. Once again external events are associated with symbols taken from nature as allegories of personal existential crisis.

One is immediately struck by the similarity in style and content between these first two poems. "Eerste winterdag" is a continuation of the themes of *Vaalvalk*. Britz (1998: 639) describes the themes in Louw's early work as "... 'n sensitiewe aanvoeling vir die musikaliteit van woorde, vir klank en ritme, en 'n besondere aanvoeling ook vir atmosfeer".⁷ As in the previous poem, there are good examples of the sense of musicality in the use of alliteration, "Stil sleep ... stuif" (lines 5 and 6), and in "druppels ... droewig ... drup-drup" (lines 7 and 8). Obviously, such qualities would immediately appeal to a composer who shared a similar sensitivity to external phenomena.

One may begin by linking the poem's title *Eerste winterdag* to "wit" in line 1 of the previous poem. In addition, there is a thematic link between "donker" in line 1, "vaal" in lines 2 and 3 of the present poem and "vaal" in the last line of *Vaalvalk*. The sense of a bleak and desolate transience depicted in *Vaalvalk* is now expanded to a sombre world, the onset of another era in *Eerste winterdag*. What had existed in another earlier age, symbolised by "sonskyn", is now plunged in darkness, "donker" (line 1). What was previously a clear summer sky is now clouded over by scudding clouds "vaal dryf die wolke in die lug" (line 2). The image "vaal" in the previous poem that emphasised the sense of bleakness and greyness is deepened into reality by the image of a dimly gusting day-long drizzle, "vaal die yl motreën wat heeldag stuiwe" (line 3). One may sense a feeling of existential gloom in the poet's consciousness. This effect is then accentuated in the following line of the poem when Louw adds the image of the dead, eddying leaves as they drift near the ground ("laag dwarrelend die blare vlug", line 4). They embody the demise of an era previously suffused with "sonskyn" and growth. The rhymes "lug" and "vlug" at the end of lines 2 and 4 frame the images the poet associates with wind-swept barrenness, namely scudding clouds ("dryf die wolke") and the eddying leaves ("dwarrelend die blare").

7 "... a sensitive feel for the musicality of words, for sound and rhythm, and a special feel, too, for atmosphere".

The second half of the poem dwells on the type of consciousness that might prevail during the approaching winter: Line 5 contrasts the image of the unremitting drizzle in an outer world, “stuif die motreën buite” with an inner world (suggested by the “gewel en dak” image in line 7) dominated by a sensation of the retarded passage of time, “stil sleep die ure” (line 5). The poet is visualising the onset of a period of existential desolation (suggested by the winter image of the bare tree branch in line 8). This is underscored in the following two lines of the poem by the sound-image of the steady, sorrowful and unrelenting dripping of rain droplets against the windowpanes and onto the gable and roof, “die druppels tril droewig teen die ruite; / drup-drup eentonig op gewel en dak” (lines 6 and 7). The dripping sound concretises the experience of isolation. The windowpanes, gable and roof circumscribing the inner dimension are now contrasted with the bleak winter landscape of a lifeless outer space where the droplets hang suspended, rather than drip, from the bare branches of a single almond tree, “en hang swaar-blink aan die kale amandeltak” (line 8). The static state of the suspended droplets contrasts with the mobility of dripping raindrops. The single isolated observer (the implicit speaker) within is counterpoised against the isolated tree without.

The assonance between “stuiwe” (line 3) and “buite” (line 5) forms a bridge between the two halves by emphasising the consciousness of disconnection with the outer domain imposed by the wintery “motreën”. The rhyme of the poem’s final two lines, “dak” and “tak”, contrasts the inner and outer dimensions of the poet’s consciousness (the room versus the tree’s branch). A powerful sense of sorrow is conveyed by the unremitting drizzle, the patter of raindrops on the windowpanes, the monotonous dripping on the roof and, finally, the heavy suspended droplets on the bare branch. In the poet’s consciousness, they are images associated with weeping. It is interesting to note that in Greek and Roman mythology and in Hebrew religious tradition, the almond tree in blossom symbolises hope, constancy, and bountifulness (Charles 2011). The personal sorrow at separation between two worlds – the confinement within an inner space and the prospect of a lifeless outer domain – is symbolised by the barren almond tree with the suspended rain droplet.

The importance of these two examples of Louw’s work lies in his self-revelation of a sense of dichotomy existing between his

consciousness of the past and the present coupled with a sense of impermanence and change, something that obviously inspired Arnold van Wyk to capture its essence in music. Both examples employ scenes from nature, because it offers an excellent environmental allegory of human emotions.

These early poems presage a theme that was to occupy WEG Louw throughout his life, being, as previously indicated, deeply rooted in a European or Western civilisation that was also Christian (Britz 1998: 640). His posthumously published volume of poems *Opvolgte en opdragte* (1980) is prefaced by a motto from Adriaan Roland Holst's *Voor West-Europa* that asks "waar bleven de overwolkse maten / van Beethoven en Hölderlin?"⁸ Britz sees in the said volume a resurgence of the mindset that typified the literary cult of Afrikaans writers during the 1930s, and wonders whether it is "miskien eintlik die dreigende ondergang van die beskermende Afrikanderdom"⁹ that shocks Louw (Britz 1998: 647). Hence, Louw's earlier bitter attack in *Terugtog* in 1940 – after a period of study in Amsterdam – on the Afrikaner nation that had become "eersugtig, nydig, klein van hart en hand"¹⁰ and which was deserting the true God, "die ware God" (Britz 1998: 640). In addition, Britz speculates about Louw's possible projection of a sense of insecurity onto Western civilisation *per se*, in which everything of "godelike waarde" (divine value) is threatened on all sides by enemies ("deur vyande omring") (Britz 1998: 647). The cumulative effect of these poems' images might be interpreted as an allegory of Louw's pessimism about Western culture.

In reflecting on these early works, one is struck by their visionary power, a vision subsequently captured and projected in terms of "a system of norms of ideal concepts which are intersubjective [and] assumed to exist in collective ideology, changing with it, accessible only through individual mental experiences, based on the sound-structure of its sentences" in Arnold van Wyk's music (Welleck & Warren 1984: 156). The two poems and their settings as songs may be interpreted as being metaphors of the mindset that typified the literary cult of Afrikaans writers during the 1930s.

8 "What has become of the sublime grandeur / of Beethoven and Hölderlin?"

9 "... actually perhaps the immanent downfall of protective Afrikanerdom".

10 "... ambitious, jealous, small-minded and ungenerous".

3.2 The music

This song has two corresponding form parts, each in a different key, with a brief piano interlude in between the two. Strong colouristic effects are found in both the tonal design and the textural fabric.

The song opens with repeated half-diminished chords on C# in the piano. The way in which they are presented, that is, as repeated unstable sonorities with no immediate sense of resolution, creates an ambiguous tonal functional situation in that they could function either as II7 of B minor, or as VII7 of D major. This places emphasis on the colouristic rather than on the functional effect of the opening half-diminished chords at this point. Shortly after the entry of the voice, the C# half-diminished chords are followed by another set of repeated half-diminished chords with G in the bass. The two sets of half-diminished chords are separated by a tri-tone motion in the bass (C# to G), which is derived from the tri-tone within the C# half-diminished chord. This abrupt and disjunct bass motion, coupled with a change in position and voicing of the second half-diminished chord (a 6/5 sonority), causes a marked harmonic and colouristic contrast, portraying the juxtaposition of 'sunshine' and 'darkness' in the poem. A further element of colouration is that of mixture which is applied to the second half-diminished chord. Within D major, it is a chromatic rather than a diatonic seventh chord.

Upon examining the possible harmonic relationship between the two sets of half-diminished chords, it can be observed that, despite the tri-tone bass motion between them, their roots are only a third apart (C# to E). With this in mind, both sets of half-diminished chords could therefore be functionally related to D major as VII7 and II6/5/flat3, respectively. The problem, however, is that the progression VII7-II6/5/flat3 is a regressive rather than a progressive one in tonal functional terms, making the functional status of the C# half-diminished chord highly suspect. As it turns out, the apparent VII7-II6/5/flat3 progression, in conjunction with the tri-tone bass motion, seems to emphasise colouration and contrast rather than on a clear directed harmonic progression in D major. It is, of course, possible to read the VII7-II6/5/flat3 as II7-VII11 in B minor, if Bb would be enharmonically interpreted as A#, bearing in mind that the opening voice part displays a B-minor tonality on its own.

However, there is a viable alternative functional harmonic interpretation for the first set of repeated half-diminished chords within the context of the opening melodic contour of the voice part which represents a stepwise descending unfolding of a B-minor triad. As suggested previously, the C# half-diminished chords could also be interpreted as II7 of B. Proof of this should normally be given by succeeding the II7 of B with its dominant and tonic harmonies, respectively, which, of course, does not occur in this instance. However, omitting these succeeding harmonies and following the II7 of B directly with II6/5 of D could be construed as an extreme case of harmonic contraction that, immediately after B minor is suggested by the C# half-diminished chords, it is bypassed dramatically by the direct motion to II65 of D major. This unusual contracted tonal progression is also a structural confirmation of the high degree of colouristic and tonal contrast between the two sets of half-diminished chords. In addition to the oscillating half-diminished chords and their tonal and colouristic effects, further colouration is achieved in the accompaniment through linear contrapuntal motions within the second half-diminished chord, resulting in added dissonances cluttering the smooth effect of the underlying sonority. The nature of the voice part is also a clear instance of how Van Wyk succeeds in combining simple tonal melodic motions with seemingly unconventional tonal ones.

After the repeated II6/5 half-diminished chords, the second half of the first part of the song establishes D major. However, modal mixture causes major/minor fluctuations, as well as melodic and chord colourations. A series of repeated chords coloured by augmented fifths and ninths, and added notes, are presented in the piano accompaniment. Linear activity, mostly minor second and third oscillations, also takes place within these chords. The result is a poignant tonal and textural portrayal of the monotonous nature images in the poem. In the process, the voice part is also affected to the extent that, through scale-degree inflections, it displays a D minor rather than a D major tonality in its contour. The brief piano interlude connecting the two parts of the song presents a continuation of D major with further tonal intensification through scale-degree inflections and added dissonances, the most prominent of these, an A-flat, forming a tri-tone against D.

The second part of the song is a varied repetition of the first, starting, as in the first part, with repeated half-diminished chords on A#, but embellished with oscillation seconds and thirds associated with previous recurring portions of the text. This time, there is a strong indication of G# minor in that the A# half-diminished chords form part of a II7-V7 cadence in it. However, instead of a resolution to tonic G# minor, the music moves down to C minor, followed by another half-diminished chord on C# with E in the bass. Again, the bass notes of the two half-diminished chords are placed a tri-tone apart (A#-E), but now as an indirect succession because of the intervening harmonies on D# and C. The overall tonal motion from the A# half-diminished chord to the one on C# with E in the bass heralding in the following B major tonality therefore resembles that of the beginning of the song. The function of the C minor chord is more difficult to pinpoint apart from merely being a contrasting transient sonority. In terms of B major, it may be viewed as a flat-II chord with mixture being applied to its third degree (E-flat), being followed by natural II6/5/flat-3. At this point, it is also interesting to note that this C# half-diminished chord is the same as the first of the song, now clearly functioning as II6/5 of B major. In addition, the C# half-diminished with E as its bass tone is embellished on the surface by a neighbouring half-diminished chord on D with F in its bass.

At the end of the second part of the song, the latter unexpectedly closes once again with a tonally enigmatic half-diminished chord on G without resolution, causing an unresolved tonal situation in the music. It is at this moment that the colouristic effect of the half-diminished chord, enhanced by an octave doubling of B-flat, its third, in the high register of the piano, is most powerfully expressed. However, even more significant is its structural symbolism. Comparing and linking it to the opening half-diminished chord of the song, we not only find it to be similar in position and voicing, but the two chords in question are once again linked by the same tri-tone bass motion (C# to G) that linked the first two half-diminished chords in the song. This time, however, the tri-tone link spans the entire song, giving us an overall structural voice-leading portrayal of the juxtaposition of happiness and melancholy.

All this implies that the tri-tone exerts its influence on both the colouristic and structural domains of the music, on the one hand, as

the central element of colourisation in the half-diminished sonorities, particularly the final one and, on the other, as the overarching voice-leading feature of the entire song.

Van Wyk's treatment of tonality and texture in "Eerste Wintersdag" reveals not only an increased sensitivity for word-painting and atmosphere in line with Louw's feeling for the musicality of words expressed by Britz above (most notably, via the use of the half-diminished sonorities and tri-tone motions), but also an intensification of the dichotomy between a brighter past and implied higher order values and imprisonment in repetitive monotony complemented by a desolation that becomes increasingly evident in the poem. The contrast between past and present and between freedom and confinement may be regarded as the underlying theme of W E G Louw's two poems set to music by Arnold van Wyk.

First, the dichotomy is reflected on the tonal structural level by the juxtaposition of contrasting tonally ambiguous and colouristic sonorities with clearly defined tonal areas. Secondly, the tri-tone as structural element in the juxtaposition of sunshine and darkness operates not only for the sake of contrast, but also becomes the overarching voice-leading feature of the song. The continuous and altered occurrences of these features are indicative of the reiteration and intensification of the contrast between sunshine and darkness, which are metaphors for the two worlds of consciousness re-emphasised in this poem.

Conversely, the inner and outer worlds of existential monotony and desolation are reflected in the texture through the elements of colouration and tonal blurring; these are effected through constant emphasis on repeated sonorities, either seventh chords (predominantly the half-diminished), or chords with added dissonances, presented respectively in tri-tone relationship and within clearly defined tonal areas. Constant linear motions occur within these repeated sonorities, involving dissonant melodic figurations which colour as well as blur the firmly established tonal areas. The combination of all these features gives us a tonal textural situation that is simultaneously reminiscent, transient and dismal in character.

4. *In die stilte van my tuin (In the quietness of my garden)*

4.1 The poem

In die stilte van my tuin
flikker son en skaduwee
beurtelings op die muur.

Blare van verbloeiende rose
het die wind hier dik gestrooi
voor die ope deur.

En die maanwit skoelappers
drywe op die geurende lug
lommerig verby.

Ook die hart wat jou bemin
voel die vreugde van die uur
as jou mond so lag, (as jou mond so lag). (Du Plessis 1938: 14).

In this poem, the first of two by I D du Plessis, the past and the present, and inner and outer domains continue to form the underlying structure noted in the previous two poems. In this instance, the underlying theme deals with reminiscences of a personal relationship symbolised by images taken from nature.

The insight into du Plessis's oeuvre by the eminent South African poet and academic Ernst van Heerden (1963: 44) provides the key to a deeper understanding of the following two poems:

Die digter se persoonlike probleem van die ongeoorloofde, 'antisosiale' liefde is die stukrag van hierdie, sy beste werk. [He is referring to *Vreemde liefde*]. Die hartstog is hier nie gewelddadig of beeldestormend nie en selde woest, en tog is ons van 'n intensiteit bewus wat gedemp is maar 'diep verborge feller gloei'. Agter die rook en walm blink die vuur. Hierdie brokagatige verse, dikwels onewewigtig van bou, word - onbegryplike metamorfose - die distillat van 'n hele leeftyd, 'n hele wêreldbeskouing, soos een rossige wingerdbljaar 'n hele Bolandse herfs in hom saamvat en weergee.¹¹

It is at once obvious that this poem by I D du Plessis shares with the two previous ones a similar contrast between inner and outer spaces.

11 The poet's personal problem of illicit, 'antisocial' behaviour is the impetus for this, his best work. Passion, in this instance, is not violent or profane and seldom

In verse 1, line 1, the poet refers to the stillness of his garden, “stilt van my tuin”, followed by a reference to the garden wall in line 2 “op die muur” – inner dimensions suggestive of a private space and, hence, intimacy. That is contrasted in the following two lines of the second verse with its image of an open door, “voor die ope deur”, indicating an access to this private sphere. It is important to note that, observed from within, the serenity has been disturbed by a wind that has strewn faded rose petals at the exit, “blare van verbloeiende rose het die wind hier dik gestrooi / voor die ope deur” (verse 2, lines 4 to 6). The rose in traditional emblematic or allusive use typifies surpassing beauty and perfection (Knowles 2006: 614) and, therefore, also symbolises perfect love bestowed. However, the wilted windblown flowers are now only a reminder of a blighted love.

In verse 3, the poet’s consciousness reverses the direction as happy memories reach outwards towards the object of his longing through the “door” of memory. In his consciousness, this recall projects innocence and integrity via an image of floating white butterflies, “maanwit skoelappers” (line 1). However, “white”, symbolising these attributes, is modified by its being linked in the compound construction “maanwit” (verse 3, line 1) with the changeability and inconstancy traditionally associated with the moon’s phases and appearances (Knowles 2006: 466). The effect is heightened by the erratic movement of the butterflies. The pleasure of the memories is captured symbolically in the image of the scented atmosphere, “die geurende lug” (verse 3, line 1), itself fleeting. The emotional experience that is still alive in the poet’s consciousness – “voel die vreugde van die uur” (verse 3, line 2) – is then directed towards the significant other in the image of the still loving heart – the heart being traditionally regarded as the centre of a person’s thoughts and emotions – “hart wat jou bemin” (verse 4, line 1). The special poignancy of the recall is present in the repeated image of past shared joy, “as jou mond so lag, as jou mond so lag” (line 3). When compared with the single phrase in the poem itself, this repetition in the music score may have been

unbridled; nevertheless, we are aware of ‘deeply suppressed, intense ardour’. A fire smoulders behind the smoke and fumes. These fragmentary stanzas, frequently disproportionately fashioned, become – miraculous metamorphosis – the distillate of an entire lifetime, a philosophy of life, just as a single crimson vine leaf captures and reflects an entire Boland autumn.

emphasised by the composer. One is reminded, in this instance, of the similar use of repetition for emphasis by Louw in the last line of *Vaalvalk*.

In the present poem, in symbolical terms, the walled garden – the inner space, the “*stilte van my tuin*” – is the poet’s private emotional domain, while the dappled interplay of sun and shadows, “*flikker son en skaduwee beurtelings*” (verse 1, lines 2 to 3), symbolises fleeting memories. One is thus reminded once again of *Eerste winterdag* with similar contrasts between sunshine and darkness and inner and outer spaces. In addition, the flickering of light and shadow in *In die stilte van my tuin* parallel the fitful eddying and swirling of dry leaves in *Eerste winterdag* (line 4). This type of imagery continues in the present poem with a special significance assigned to the colour white and the special effects conjured up by the atmospheric use of various nature images that featured in the previous poems by W E G Louw, namely the stillness or action of the wind, the circumscribed spaces, the atmospheric “lug”, the silences, and symbols of decay.

Given these parallels, the present poem again forms part of a continuum of collective intersubjective consciousness, recognised and interpreted as such by the composer. The two poems thus far – *Vaalvalk* and *Eerste winterdag* – share a tension between the present and the past and between inner and outer spaces.

The complex personalities of W E G Louw, I D du Plessis and Van Wyk, reflected as they are in these poems, require an attempt at interpretation that goes beyond the surface mechanics of versification. The present poem with its images of the walled garden, the open door, the dappled play of light and dark, the wind-strewn roses, the languidly drifting white butterflies, the moment of joyous recall is – like van Heerden’s image of a single crimson vine leaf capturing and reflecting a Boland autumn – an allegory of an evanescent “*vreemde liefde*”.

4.2 The music

This poignant little song, which has already achieved folksong status, is couched in ABCA form. Each section is in a new key/mode, sounding as the submediant of the preceding, and reached via brief piano links.

The outer sections are in Gb major, the second in D Phrygian/Aeolian and the third in Bb Lydian major.

The concluding sonority of each of the piano links is the highly ambiguous and colouristic sonority of the augmented triad formed by the three tonics, which acts in each case enharmonically as I#5 (or flat6) in the key of departure and as flat6 in the new key. Section A presents a simple diatonic melodic line in the voice part with slow-moving chords in the piano accompaniment. The melancholic and elegiac character of the music is beautifully expressed through linear and chromatic elements in the voice leading and within individual chords. In the process, the simple melodic line acquires subtle tonal colouration. Structurally, section A is based on an underlying I-IV-I tonal progression resulting in a plagal cadence.

Sections B and C are two consecutive episodes between the outer parts of the song. They are contrasted texturally in that B is largely chordal, whereas C has broken chord motions related to those found in the piano links and conforming to the tone-painting requirements of the poem. Again, the plagal cadence underlies section B, while the temporary tonic on D is embellished by two neighbouring harmonies on flat-VII. The appearance of Eb and Bb in the first and second neighbouring harmonies, respectively, together with C and Bb as part of the stepwise descent of the voice part from D to A within the second neighbour harmony, can be attributed to Phrygian and Aeolian influences. The subdominant in the plagal cadence is also coloured by its flat-7 degree (F), the result of mixture applied to F#, the third degree of D major.

Section C, on the other hand, is based on an underlying I-V-I tonal progression in Bb, a tonal mirror to the I-V-I progressions of sections A and B, with I embellished by a #4/2 sonority, followed by VI, embellished by a 4/2 sonority on Ab, before moving to the dominant F. The main colouristic feature of section C is the raised or Lydian fourth (E) appearing in both the voice part and in the #4/2 embellishing harmony to the tonic.

Section A1 is a freely varied recapitulation of section A. It starts with three appearances of IV which are seen to embellish the tonic Gb, together with colouristic elements of mixture and added dissonances affecting the IV chords. The conclusion of the song comprises a

motion to bIII/#-3, followed by V7/VI, VI/#3 and I. Against this, the voice part has repeated Bb/Db oscillations on the words “as jou mond so lag”, which clash with the underlying chromatic voice leading, producing striking tonal reinterpretations of both notes. Incidentally, these notes represent a simplified version of the voice part at the end of section A, at the setting of “beurtelings teen die muur”. In the final harmonic motion from VI to I, there is a simultaneous occurrence of E double-flat and Db, the former, a chromatic passing tone between Eb and Db in an inner voice, and the latter, the final Db of the Bb/Db oscillations in the voice part. An analogous simultaneous occurrence of Bb and B double-flat can also be observed in the last of the subdominant harmonies involving the same portion of text. All these features significantly contribute to the highly expressive and colouristic effects in the closing bars of the song.

The essential ingredients of this poem by I D du Plessis are beautifully captured in the tonal and textural design of Van Wyk’s setting. The privacy of the poet’s emotional inner space is portrayed tonally through the intimate character of the I-IV-I plagal cadence progressions underlying sections A and B, and in the three IV-I surface progressions of A1, while the revealing of happier memories in section C through the metaphoric “open door” (at the end of section B) results in the mirrored I-V-I closed cadential progression as the tonal background of section C. The progression from the inner domain through unsettled emotions towards tender memories reawakened by an external event and the subsequent return to the inner world of the poet in the quietness of his garden, as suggested by the piano part in the closing bars of the song, is presented through the key relationships thirds, reflecting contrast, deviation and return. The augmented triads connecting the various third key relationships are, by their very nature, transitory in both their ambiguity and instability. This is in line with the shifting and contrasting emotional states portrayed in the poem.

Texturally, the slow-moving chords in sections A, B and A1, together with the simple diatonic melodic contours of sections A and A1, produce the quiet and intimate backdrop for the entire song. The unsettled emotions, images of decay and happy memories are portrayed by the embellishing harmonies of section B, the arpeggiated textures of section C, as well as those of the brief piano links connecting the

various form sections to one another, and by the numerous instances of mixture or modal inflections and subtle dissonances colouring the harmonic and melodic content of the song as a whole. Especially notable are the embellishing bVII harmonies in section B at “Blare van verbloeiende rose het die wind hier dik gestrooi” (verse 1, lines 3 and 4.). The happy memories and “scented” atmosphere in the poem are painted in sound by both the raised or Lydian fourth and the #4/2 embellishing sonorities at “maanwit skoenlappers” and “die geurende lug” (verse 2, line 1) in section C. The joyful experience of the ‘loving heart’ in the final section of the song is made tangible by mixture being applied to the subdominant, converting it into a minor sonority. Incidentally, the only other instance of a minor subdominant is the one with the added minor seventh in section B coinciding with the setting of “voor die ope deur”, thereby already pre-empting the image of shared joy.

5. *Koud is die wind*

5.1 The poem

Koud is die wind waar Daphne droom
Sy wat so teer en warm was
en skoner as die lourierboom
wat oor haar rusplek waai
en skoner as die lourierboom
wat oor haar rusplek waai.

Nou fluit die bitter wind vir haar
en sneeu pak om haar deur.
Daar onder as die wind bedaar
hoor jy die branders dreun
hoor jy die branders dreun.

This second poem by I D du Plessis shares the same defining characteristics with the previous three poems, namely tension between opposites, in this instance, female versus male (Daphne and Apollo, the poem having the Greek myth as its source of inspiration); confinement in an inner space versus an external world dominated by

a tree in a winter landscape. Once again, symbolical images of wind, snow and sea impart a sense of tragedy.

As in the three preceding poems, *Koud is die wind* creates tension between a private and an external dimension – Daphne metamorphosed into and imprisoned in a laurel tree, on the one hand, and the frozen winter environment without, on the other. In the poem *Eerste winterdag*, a room is the place of confinement, while a barren tree concretises the winter outside. Daphne, daughter of the river-god Peneus, was pursued by Apollo who was captivated by her ideal beauty, he himself being represented by the ancient Romans as the perfect ideal of youthful manliness (Smith 1884: 43, De la Croix & Kirkpatrick 1991: 727). However, as he was on the point of capturing her, she prayed for help and was transformed into a laurel which subsequently became sacred to the god because it immortalised Daphne's beauty and her sacrificial victory over his lust for her. "An Apollonian tree, it also signified the spiritual conditions of wisdom and valour under which victory was won" (Chevalier & Gheerbrandt 1996: 593).

As mentioned earlier, this fourth poem continues the symbolic use of nature noted in the previous examples to express unfulfilment. One may surmise that Arnold van Wyk saw in these specific four poems with their shared theme an opportunity to immortalise in music a victory over the personal tragedies revealed in them. In a chapter by Hennie Aucamp on I D du Plessis, he draws our attention to DJ Opperman who mentioned (1953) that in June 1925, Du Plessis wrote an article "on the charm of words" for a quarterly magazine published by the University of Cape Town. In it, he enthuses about the power of words in the hands of artists: "For them words have colour, depth, resonance. Some glitter; some are dull; some glow [...] There are words that shimmer as the purest pearl; others opalescent, with delicate shades of meaning ceaselessly rising to the surface ..." (Aucamp 1998: 410).

In verses 1 and 2 of *Koud is die wind*, the desolation and isolation experienced by Daphne are conjured up by the images "koud is die wind" (line 1), "waar Daphne droom" (line 1), "wind wat oor haar rusplek waai" (verse 1, line 4), "fluit die bitter wind vir haar" (verse 2, line 1), "sneeu pak om haar deur" (verse 2, line 2). Du Plessis's

Daphne, who is delicate and passionate – “sy wat so teer en warm was” – is a tragic figure imprisoned in an internal dimension – “waar Daphne droom” – cut off permanently from any reciprocal human contact after her rejection of the lustful Apollo. Her beauty surpasses that of the tree below which she is imprisoned – but the sacrificial immortality gained by the transformation into the laurel is the cold aestheticism of art – her beauty now surpassing that of the laurel – “skoner as die lourierboom / wat oor haar rusplek waa” (verse 1, lines 3 and 4). Whereas in the myth Daphne does not die, but continues to exist in a vegetative state as a laurel, in du Plessis’s poem she is entombed in a state of suspended animation akin to being in a trance – “waar Daphne droom” (verse 1, line 1) “haar rusplek” (verse 1, line 4) above which the tree is rooted. Bearing in mind Du Plessis’s 1925 reference to “words’ delicate shades of meaning ceaselessly rising to the surface”, does the poet, in this instance, suggest that Daphne’s fate – “nou fluit die bitter wind vir haar / en sneeu pak om haar deur” (verse 2, lines 1 and 2) – will be the bitter price of irrevocable isolation for all those who strive to attain aesthetic idealism in art – the penalty exacted for seeking refuge from the rough and tumble of life? Indeed, contrasted with this trance-like state of being, the poem ends with an image suggesting the broad stream of life, symbolised by the roaring breakers at a distance – “daar onder” – in the repeated refrain at the conclusion of the poem – “hoor jy die branders dreun” (verse 2, lines 4 and 5).

In his profile on this writer, Hennie Aucamp draws one’s attention to a dualism with homoerotic undertones existing throughout his prose and poetry, of which he himself may not have been aware – “Was I.D. du Plessis hom bewus van die versluerde homoërotiese kodes in sy werk?” (Aucamp 1998). This dualism is possibly also the underlying psyche that manifests itself in the choice of the myth of Daphne and Apollo – female aestheticism versus male sensuality. It is interesting to note that, in both this and the previous poem, the poet emerges finally from introspection to address the imaginary listener – in the present example – “hoor jy die branders dreun, hoor jy die branders dreun” (where “jy” is an impersonal pronoun) and previously in *In die stilte van my tuin* – “as jou mond so lag, as jou mond so lag” (line 7). Are these lines an appeal for an empathetic response – or is the poem a subconscious revelation?

5.2 The music

The song is composed in a free strophic form, that is, the second stanza is varied and altered. The entire song, with the exception of its closing bars, may be regarded as a process of melodic and colouristic development and intensification on a prolonged dominant harmony within its mainly E Aeolian modality. Tone-painting is particularly prevalent in the melodic contours and in the combinations of melodic lines, notably those in the piano accompaniment. An additional factor in the pictorial quality of the texture is the use of extremes of register.

The melodic contour of the voice part exhibits sequential waves of filled-in thirds, as well as oscillating thirds and fifths. It also clearly reflects an Aeolian mode on E with the additional use of the raised or Lydian fourth (A#), which functions as a prominent colouristic melodic device. This is set against a suspended tonal backdrop produced by a consistently recurring dominant pedal point, above which a linear texture is woven comprising the voice part and an accompanying line or lines in the piano. These consist of sighing ascending second figures, strongly reminiscent of similar ones in Debussy's *Des pas sur la neige*, and ascending and descending filled-in thirds and fourths. Since the song's E Aeolian modality is suspended almost throughout by the static dominant pedal, the contrapuntal lines lose their ability to create tonal motion and function purely as elements of tonal tension, friction and colouration.

In the first part of the song, the middle voice sets out tentatively with the sighing figures, which are then expanded into the third and fourth figures, making the linear texture more active. In the four-bar piano interlude to the second part of the song, the two voices above the dominant pedal comprise ascending and descending sighing figures in contrary motion. A change in register an octave higher in the second part of the interlude creates further tension within the unresolved dominant of E.

In the second part of the song, the varied and altered melody of the first part is set against a dramatic two-part linear accompaniment still based on the dominant pedal, but placed in a high register. Particularly notable are the chilling high-register trills on oscillating Es and Ds, some prefixed by ascending fourth figures derived from those in the middle voice during the first part of the song. These

high-register trills depict the whistling of the “bitter wind” referred to in the text (verse 2, line 1). This is followed by another succession of trills moving down a fourth from E to B, each prefixed by ascending fourth figures. During this time, the lower of the two parts displays continuous ascending and descending oscillating thirds as a contrapuntal accompaniment to the high register trills. Following the trills, both parts continue with oscillating thirds in contrary motion, followed by a combination of sighing, descending second figures and oscillating third figures in the high and low voices, respectively, of the linear accompaniment. These melodic features do not only play a significant developmental and unifying role, but also form part of a process of colouristic intensification throughout the song. The high register trills in particular are the most intense portrayal of the effect of the “bitter wind”.

Finally, at the very end of the song, the ever-present dominant pedal point suddenly gives way to a low-register sonority on E which seems to fulfil partially the long-awaited need for tonal closure. However, it contains an added raised fourth (A#) which, together with the inconclusive ending of the voice part on B, the fifth degree of E, undermines this expectation. The gripping effect of this final chord is caused by its extraordinary register placement and voicing. Both the added raised fourth (A#) and the third (G) are presented simultaneously in the middle register and are set against a fifth (E/B) in the lowest register of the piano. The colouristic dimension of tonality and texture is prominent in the dying moments of this song.

Similar to the end of “Vaalvalk”, the voice part, as mentioned earlier, concludes on the fifth degree of E, which also happens to be the first note of the song in the voice part. Different from “Vaalvalk”, however, the underlying tonic is present in this instance, but its effect is undermined by the raised fourth in the low register sonority and undercut by its decay in the piano part, leaving the voice alone with just a glimmer of the distorted E Aeolian modality with its unresolved raised fourth.

Daphne’s imprisonment in an internal space, together with the external isolation depicted by the frozen winter environment, evokes a two-way response from Arnold van Wyk in his musical setting of “Koud is die Wind”. First, Daphne’s state of suspended animation

is symbolised by the static tonal situation caused by the dominant pedal, creating a state of tonal suspension. Although a resolution to the tonic is eventually accomplished through the final sonority built on E in the piano part, it is blurred by the low register placement and voicing of the sonority with its unresolved dissonant raised fourth. However, this final blurred tonic sonority is reconcilable with the E Aeolian modality in the voice part which was, up to this point, kept in tonal captivity, so to speak, by the dominant pedal. The low register tonic is a musical depiction of the image of the roaring breakers at a distance, symbolising the broad stream of life. Therefore, it breaks into the dominant pedal, freeing the E Aeolian melody from its tonal captivity and retrospectively restoring it back to tonal life. The archaic beauty of the Aeolian melody and its tonal kinship with the final tonic sonority may thus be said to symbolise, in music, Daphne's immortalised beauty and sacrificial victory.

As for the frozen winter environment and the laurel tree's branches moving in the winter wind, this is accomplished both tonally and texturally by the dominant pedal, the floating contrapuntal lines with their waving and sighing melodic contours and pitch oscillations, and the high register trills, all accompanying the ever-present Aeolian voice part with its nostalgic beauty.

6. Concluding remarks

The four poems of *Vier weemoedige liedjies* present a continuum of consciousness that explores various aspects of a sense of loss shared by the poets and echoed by the composer, whether on a cultural or personal level, the underlying motive that inspires their creative impulse being one of engagement reaching out to the unattainable. Themes that amplify this effect are silence (“geen windjie wat waai”, “stil sleep die ure”, “stilte van my tuin”, “as die wind bedaar”), isolation (“net 'n vaal valk”, “die motreën buite”, “die hart wat jou bemin”, “waar Daphne droom”, “haar rusplek”, “sneeu pak om haar deur”), and heartache (“treurige wals”, “druppels tril droewig teen die ruite”, “verbloeide rose ... voor die ope deur”, “fluit die bitter wind vir haar”). “The work of art, then, appears as an object of knowledge *sui generis* which has a special ontological status. It is neither real (physical, like a

statue) nor mental (psychological, like the experience of light or pain) nor ideal (like a triangle)" (Welleck & Warren 1984: 156).

The four poems also share images that are a unifying factor: gradations of light and dark ("wit", "vaal" [x 3], "sonskyn", "donker", "swaarblink", "son en skaduwee", "maanwit", "sneeu"), wind images ("geen windjie wat waai", "dryf die wolke", "dwarrelend die blare vlug", "rose het die wind hier dik gestrooi", "wind ... wat oor haar rusplek waai", "nou fluit die bitter wind vir haar", "as die wind bedaar"), and sound images ("treurige wals", "vaalvalk wat sing", "druppels tril droewig", "drup-drup eentonig", "as jou mond so lag", "fluit die bitter wind", "hoor jy die branders dreun"). Van Wyk's musical interpretation of the four poems parallels all these components.

A final word needs to be said concerning the relationship between Arnold van Wyk's music and his personal life experiences. As was intimated at the beginning of this article, the development of Van Wyk's tonal language and powers of expression was in accordance with his lifelong feelings of melancholy, artistic alienation, doubt and desolation – aspects that are by now well documented in Van Wyk scholarship. Not only could he identify himself fully with the content and themes of the four poems he selected for his "Vier weemoedige liedjies", but they served as the ideal vehicles through which he could realise his own distinctive and personal tonal voice already at such an early stage in his compositional development. It should by now be clear that we cannot endorse the notion of a lack of personality in Van Wyk's music, as propounded by Muller quoted earlier in the article. It is, however, the overriding theme of the four poems, a sense of 'loss', that is seminal to the nature of his tonal language.

Apart from the poignant ways in which Van Wyk's tonal and textural structures enhance the rich content, meanings, moods and atmospheres of the four poems, we find in the nature of these musical expressions the key to the way in which he communicated his personal sense of loss in music. From the above observations and analytical interpretations, it is evident that Van Wyk was, in his very essence, a Romantic composer, having given extraordinary attention to emotional expressions through musical rhetoric, tone-painting and colouration. Muller (2008: 62) describes this aspect of his compositional disposition as "inevitable and something of a

tragedy that, laying claim to an anachronistic aesthetic, would result not in happiness but in the kind of emotional struggle metaphorically reminiscent of his place of birth". Muller (2008: 69) continues that "Even as a mature composer, in some of his best work, he continued to search for musical stimuli or techniques to spark his own writing, resulting in works densely layered with intertextual reference, but also curiously devoid of a strong personality or focus". Grové (2008: 5) explains the melancholic and conservative nature of Van Wyk's music through the idea of a kind of "auto-biographical poetics". Suggesting that the elegiac in the composer's music perhaps reflects his truest voice ("... ek kan eintlik net hartseer musiek skryf") (Grové 2008: 5). Grové (2008: 5) also cites the composer's statement that he saw himself as a late Romantic, for whom there was no place within contemporaneous compositional culture ("... en vir ons is daar vandag nie plek nie ...").

Historically, the tonal environment for the cultivation of expressive tonal language has been that of major/minor tonality with its rich tapestry of motions, shapes, colours and expressive gestures. Although the highest levels of human experiences and expression in music can by no means be confined to the major/minor tonal system alone, its essential nature, ingredients and supposed universality does conjure up, at least for some, the notion of a 'higher' order of musical organisation. For the influential twentieth-century Austrian music theorist, Heinrich Schenker, for instance, the threat to the artistic and expressive supremacy of major/minor tonality was neo- and a-tonal experimentations and systems in musical composition. Yet, it is this very threat that had to be accommodated by conservatively minded contemporary composers for the sake of their compositional integrity in a new tonal age.

For Van Wyk and some composers of his generation, who still aspired to maintain a higher order of musical organisation and expression, the acquisition of new tonal idioms, composition styles and systems in their music was inevitable, but not necessarily a natural, comfortable, or even intuitive process. It is our opinion that Van Wyk wanted to preserve the organisational and expressive qualities of the "old tonal order"; however, at the same time, he was forced to find his compositional voice within a "new tonal order" whose elements were necessary for his artistic expression, but which nevertheless created in him a sense of tonal loss. The mere fact that he spent most of his time

in music, studying tonal compositions for the sake of creative insights, inspiration and reinterpreting their meanings in his own music, attests to the fact that tonality remained the essential driving force in his musical thinking, but that it ended up being repressed by elements of conflict and friction in his own music. This dilemma is clearly evident in his tonal and textural excursions as demonstrated earlier, resulting in definable, yet blurred tonal and voice-leading structures, as well as frequent tonal ambiguities. In terms of colouration, it is particularly interesting to observe how it manifests itself much more on the textural domain of the four songs than through functionally rich and complex tonal voice-leading motions. The music thus presents itself as a rich kaleidoscope of textural colours set against a dichotomous tonal background, that is, a combination both of distinctly diatonic tonal material and deviating as well as misaligned voice-leading elements. It is precisely this combination that enabled him to achieve extraordinary levels of colouration, atmosphere and expression in his music which, under “conventional” circumstances, would have required far greater emphasis on tonal richness. Therefore, in the interaction of tonality and texture in Van Wyk’s music, the latter becomes the principal agent for colouration and atmosphere, while the former becomes the principal agent for expression and meaning. In our view, it is the effect of this particular interaction resulting from a creative conflict that makes Van Wyk’s personal melancholy and sense of loss so present and heartfelt in his music.

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