

**WOORDKUNS EN SKILDERKUNS**  
**BINNE DIE SIMBOLISME:**  
**NIJHOFF, VAN WYK LOUW EN GAUGUIN**

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Verhandeling voorgelê vir nakoming van die vereistes vir  
die graad Magister Artium in die Departement Afrikaans en Nederlands  
aan die Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys

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Potchefstroom

1993

*The artist - above all the painter - who looks inward is a god.  
But the painter who looks only outward is no better than an ape.*

**Saint-Pol-Roux**  
**(J. Pierre 1976:28)**

# VOORWOORD

Hiermee my opregte dank aan:

- Prof. J. van der Elst vir sy besondere gesprekke en leiding;
- Dr. Peet van Rensburg vir die tipografiese versorging en drukwerk;
- Attie de Lange vir die Engelse vertaling van die opsomming;
- Gustav en Marcia wat my harder laat werk het;
- My ma en pa vir al die ondersteuning en vir die wonderlike voorbeeld wat hulle vir my is. Dankie dat julle dié aanhaling van my kleintyd af vir my voorgehou het:

Watter kaart of watter ster sal ek jou wys  
om veilig deur die grysland heen te reis?  
Sal ek van 'n God praat wat verdoem,  
van Christus, en die Tien Gebooie noem?  
Voorlopig dan, maar onthou altyd  
aan jou dade grens 'n ewigheid;  
gee sin aan voorgeslagte deur die eeue heen,  
besef hy is 'n vegter weer van die begin, alleen;  
en mag die Suiderkruis en Negesterre witter  
as die stedeligte in jou siel bly skitter.  
D.J. Opperman, 1987:89

*Geldelike bystand van die RGN vir hierdie navorsing word erken.  
Menings in hierdie werk uitgespreek of gevolgtrekkings waartoe geraak is,  
is dié van die outeur en moet nie beskou word as dié van die RGN nie.*

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# ABSTRACT

This study indicates that it is possible to identify clear points of convergence between the genre of poetry and the art of painting within a particular mode.

- The title, which can be regarded as a structural element (cf. discussion 2.1), is a clear point of contact which not only fills certain gaps, but also creates means which give rise to new associations and metaphors. This phenomenon is relevant to the work of the three artists in question.
- The exploitation and development of images produced within the mode of Symbolism are found in the different genres of the three artists. Images of loneliness, images depicting woman and womanhood (cf. Ch. 2.2) as well as the use of colour images, especially blue, green and yellow, provide important relations between the genres.
- The order of presentation of the material also provides points of similarity. For example, repetition (cf. 2.3) and the concept of the two worlds are both exploited by the artists. All three artists use repetitions to intensify and drive home their point, and to facilitate the transition from concrete to abstract. The concept of the two worlds is also used in the same way by each artist, viz. that each artist moves out of his known world to another “reality” through the medium of art.
- The work of Louw, Nijhoff and Gauguin communicates the artist’s search for an extra-sensory, ideal existence (discussed in Ch. 3). The communication process in their work requires an informed interpreter as the work of all three artists is complex, so much so that it spearheaded new developments and offshoots within the Symbolist movement.
- Typical themes within the Symbolist movement appear frequently in the work of all three artists: the role of the poet as prophet, death and transience, decadence, woman and memories of lost childhood (discussed in Ch. 4).
- The aesthetic nature of their work results from a careful ordering of all the structural elements at their disposal. The quest towards Beauty — which the Symbolists saw as the ultimate aim of all art — manifests itself clearly in the work of Louw, Nijhoff and Gauguin (indicated in Ch. 5).

- The poetry of Louw and Nijhoff and the painting of Gauguin all share characteristics of the broader Symbolist movement. The clearest relations can be found in the quest for isolation and detachment and the creation of a transcendental reality far removed from a worldly existence. The use of unusual images and analogies (Ch. 2) sometimes creates the impression of obscurity and inaccessibility to the ordinary interpreter. The memories of a happy and lost childhood and the so-called “paradise-ideal” generates tension and conflict between the mundane, everyday reality and the Ideal existence. Louw, Nijhoff and Gauguin all embody within their work the idea of the artist as the chosen one (Ch. 5) who, through art, can give realization to Beauty and the “other world.”

This study has, because of the limitations of range and scope, only focused on poetry and painting within the context of Symbolism. It would also be possible to extend its parameters to include the disciplines of sculpture, dance, music, and architecture.

This study of the various similarities between the artistic disciplines has attempted to indicate that the practice of “comparative aesthetics”, as defined by Etienne Sourain (Seaman, 1981:5), is both viable and practicable:

Comparative aesthetics is the discipline whose basis is a confrontation between art works, and the procedures of the various arts (such as painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, poetry, dance, music etc.). The field of comparative aesthetics then, is like comparative literature the different arts being like the different languages, striving for parallel artistic effects.