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N.P. van Wyk Louw, D.J. Opperman and the Afrikaans Literary Tradition

In this paper a brief sketch is given of the development of the Afrikaans language and the literary tradition before the arrival of the two major poets of the mid twentieth century: N.P. van Wyk Louw and D.J. Opperman. These two poets created a type of poetry in which every word and image were functional and illustrated their craftsmanship and professionalism. As examples of their poetry two poems are discussed, one by each of the two poets: the centre piece of Louw's choric drama *Die dieper reg* and Opperman's "Nagwaak by die ou man." Whereas Louw's poem uses words which are marked by their intensity and poetic grandeur, that of Opperman illustrates his sober and economic style and the way in which he employs the short-circuiting metaphor and different layers of meaning. Both poets were able to "think" in terms of African images and to make the geography and history of their continent subservient to a greater purpose.