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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Tania van Schalkwyk is one of South Africa's most talented younger poets and artists. I had the good fortune to be her professor and supervisor when she studied for the MA in Creative Writing at the University of Cape Town a few years ago. The collection of poems she produced as her creative dissertation was of a quality which fully warranted its subsequent publication in book form. The heterogeneous nature of her personal background—she has lived in any number of countries and speaks a number of languages, including French and German—all fed into a work which dealt with the complexities of identity experienced by someone coming from her diverse point of origin, linguistically as well as spatially. She was actually able to make poetry out of this. The volume itself marked, I dare say, a new kind of writing in South Africa, dealing in a new way with a wholly different kind of problematic to those which have long been seen as synonymous with South African literature. And this was recognized in the reviews her book received, all of which have been extremely favourable.

Tania is also at the centre of a new generation of South African writers and artists in her acquaintance with—and expertise in—a number of media. She is not simply a poet but a performance artist and an adept in making use of mixed media, both to promote her own work and that of others. (She has, for instance, used poems of hers as the basis for short films and has also produced a CD in which a number are accompanied by music.) In all this she has also proved herself to be singularly inventive—and, I've no doubt, will continue to be so.

I say this with confidence because, right from the outset of my acquaintance with her, I was struck by her drive and her commitment to her art. She learns quickly and works hard. She is widely read. And—and is evident from her more satirical poetry—is alive to pretension both in the arts and elsewhere. Perhaps above all, she has the kind of intelligence that is not prepared to go along with 'received wisdom', particularly of the more politically correct sort. All this makes her company as tonic as is her work. She is a person of real wit.

She was accepted, during the course of her Masters study at UCT, to participate in an academic exchange programme in the US. She subsequently spent a semester at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. This, along with her other travels, has only served to broaden her intelligence and the scope of the artistic work with which she is currently engaged.

More recently, in the summer of this year, her literary merit was further recognized by the award to her of a month-long writer's residency at Chateau Lavigny on Lake

Geneva. During her tenure there she drafted 20 pieces for a further book which will be organised around the theme of water and its metaphors.

In short, here is someone who has both the personal character as well as the talent to make her the kind of person who would flourish in the context of a writer's or artist's retreat—or any other kind of international forum for today's creative minds. I would recommend her without reservation. (It is an added bonus, of course, that she is fluent in both French and German as well as English.) In fact, I feel I can say with confidence—and on the basis of real evidence, too—that here is someone who has already and who will continue to make a real difference to cultural life in South Africa and elsewhere, the Indian Ocean area in particular.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to email me at Stephen.watson@uct.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,

Professor Stephen Watson (director, Centre for Creative Writing, University of Cape Town)