

**OUT OF PLACE: A RE-EVALUATION OF THE POETRY OF  
DENNIS BRUTUS**

**TYRONE RUSSEL AUGUST**



A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
Philosophiae in the Department of English, University of the Western Cape.

WESTERN CAPE

Supervisor: Dr Roger Field

September 2014

**OUT OF PLACE: A RE-EVALUATION OF THE POETRY  
OF DENNIS BRUTUS**

Tyrone August

**KEYWORDS**

Brutus

Poetry

Influences

Lyric

Biography

Displacement

Prison

Exile

Homecoming

Cosmopolitanism

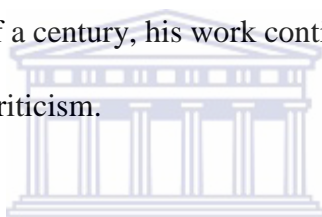


**ABSTRACT****OUT OF PLACE: A RE-EVALUATION OF THE POETRY OF DENNIS BRUTUS**

T. R. August

PhD Thesis, Department of English, University of the Western Cape.

The main aim of my dissertation is to re-evaluate the poetry of the South African writer Dennis Brutus (1924-2009). Even though he produced a substantial number of poems over more than half a century, his work continues to receive limited attention in South African literary criticism.



One of the main reasons is the perception that he was primarily a political activist who wrote poetry with the purpose of advancing his political objectives. However, even though he wrote extensively on political issues, his themes include a wide range of subjects.

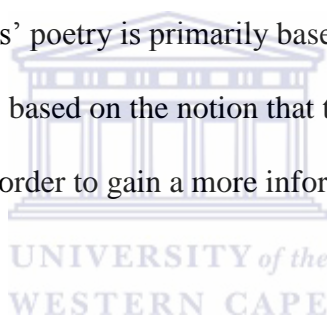
In addition, he paid close attention to the craft of poetry. Due to the tendency to foreground the political content of his writing, the complexity and diversity in the language and style of his poetry are seldom examined. Refocusing attention on the aesthetic features of his work is a key aspect of my dissertation.

I also contend that, despite the political content of much of his poetry, Brutus remains, first and foremost, a writer of lyric poetry. What makes his writing different from the

conventional lyric, though, is his quest to find ways of using a very personal mode of poetic expression to make statements on public matters. How he pursues this objective is a major focus of my dissertation.

I examine various literary influences on his writing as well. Brutus initially drew extensively on the traditional English literary canon he was taught at school and at university. Later, in order to communicate more directly and accessibly, he drew on traditional Chinese poetry. For the same reason, he subsequently wrote some poems with the specific objective of public performance.

My re-evaluation of Brutus' poetry is primarily based on a contextual reading of his work. Such an approach is based on the notion that the context within which a writer lives and writes is vital in order to gain a more informed understanding of his or her writing.



In addition, my dissertation draws on Homi K. Bhabha's elaboration of Freud's notion of the "unheimlich" ("unhomely") to examine Brutus' life and poetry. Bhabha pays particular attention to the sense of estrangement which is embedded in Freud's theory. His elaboration provides an important conceptual tool with which to analyse Brutus' writing, and makes it possible to identify links among his various poetic personae and to identify common features in the themes of his poetry. I argue that Brutus' unhomeliness lies at the centre of his poetic personae – the troubadour, the exile and the cosmopolitan – and of most of the themes of his poetry.

Another important focus of my dissertation is how Brutus responds to this state of unhomeliness. The central aspect of my argument is that he redefines his sense of self during different periods of his life: he evolves from initially being a patriot in South Africa into a rooted cosmopolitan in exile; he then, finally, becomes a rootless cosmopolitan. I explore the reasons behind this evolution, and contend that these shifts were essentially attempts to regain agency over his life.

September 2014



## DECLARATION

I declare that *Out of Place: A Re-Evaluation of the Poetry of Dennis Brutus* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Tyrone Russel August



September 2014

Signed: .....

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To avoid being effusive or overly sentimental, I have elected to list my acknowledgements in point form. In no way does this diminish my gratitude and appreciation for the assistance and support of the following individuals and institutions over the last few years of my life:

### **Department of English, UWC**

- My supervisor, Dr Roger Field, for turning a casual request to meet into a firm offer to supervise my dissertation, and for the meticulous care, insightfulness and empathy with which he subsequently did so;
- Ms Cheryl-Ann Michael, then Graduate Coordinator, who set the process in motion after my initial approach to Dr Field and later expertly and efficiently guided me through my research proposal;
- Dr Mark Espin, for his friendship, interest and lots of cups of coffee even while he was still working on his own doctorate; and
- Dr Fiona Moolla, the current Graduate Coordinator, for her attentive proofreading and various acts of kindness at the end.

### **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**

- The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, for supporting my dissertation through a grant in the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR), where I held a doctoral fellowship from 2011-2013.

### **Centre for Humanities Research, UWC**

- The CHR's director, Prof Premesh Lalu, for accommodating me at the CHR, a most stimulating – and challenging – intellectual space. Over and above this, my gratitude to him for arranging a writing fellowship at the Interdisciplinary Center for Global Change (ICGC), the CHR's partner institution at the University of Minnesota, which enabled me to work on the final draft of my dissertation from April-July 2014; and
- Ms Lameez Lalkhen; the centre's super-efficient and helpful administrator, who attended to practical matters related to my fellowship.

### **Interdisciplinary Center for Global Change, University of Minnesota**

- ICGC director Dr Karen Brown, for enabling me to put my life on pause for four months and concentrate on finalising my dissertation. The time and space offered by my visit was an invaluable gift; and
- The rest of the ICGC team, in particular Ms Shereen Sabet, Assistant to the Directors. The welcoming environment and routine expressions of kindness will always be remembered.

### **Library staff**

- **UWC Inter-Library Loans:** Ms Helena Primo and Ms Khonziwe Mpandle, for never getting tired of my endless requests to obtain material;
- **UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives:** Archivist Ms Geraldine Frieslaar, for material on the International Defence and Aid Fund and Christian Aid;
- **National English Literary Museum (NELM):** Bibliographer/literary researcher Mr Andrew Martin, for his prompt and ever-helpful response to my never-ending queries and requests;



- **Northwestern University Library:** Assistant University Archivist Ms Janet C. Olson, for so generously making available a copy of Brutus' privately circulated *Denver Poems*; and
- **Rondebosch Public Library:** Librarian Ms Nomaxabiso Nduna and her colleagues, for being so welcoming and allowing me to virtually use the library as a private work station.

### Photographs

- **Mr George Hallett:** For access to his precious collection of photographs of writers;
- **Mr Graham Goddard:** For sourcing and making available photographs from the UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives;
- **Mr Andrew Martin:** For making available photographs from NELM; and
- **Prof Patrick Bond, Ms Monica Rorvik and the Kohn family:** For photographs from their respective personal collections.

### Interviewees


- **Prof Dennis Brutus**, most of all: For his initial interest when I approached him as a total stranger about my intention to do a dissertation on his poetry, and for occasionally sending me material. While his schedule did not always make him a regular correspondent, his positive response helped to nudge me along in those early days.
- **Prof Patrick Bond, Mr Bennie Bunsee, Mr Antony Brutus, Prof Keorapetse Kgositsile, Prof Peter Klatzow, Ms Blanche la Guma, Mr Mandla Langa, Mr Don Mattera, Mr James Matthews, Prof Mbulelo Mzamane, Prof Njabulo Ndebele, Mr Mongane Wally Serote and Prof Wole Soyinka:** For enriching my dissertation by

making their time and knowledge available, and so willingly sharing their information and insights. Bond also graciously responded afterwards to various requests for information.

### **Family**

- My long-suffering wife Maud, for her love, support and patience, and the rest of our family, Marlon, Morné and Monique. They provided a safe and secure base to which I could return whenever the challenges appeared to become overwhelming.
- My mother, Rhona, who always supported my eagerness to read and fed my appetite with those early magazine subscriptions when I was at primary school. My father, John, is no longer around, but his bookshelf and love of reading remain lasting influences.
- My siblings, who always showed an interest in my various activities and unselfishly took vicarious pride in whatever I did: Eugene, Colin, Rossana, Vanessa and Fiona. Their spouses (past and present), Sharon, Carmen, Lindsley, Collin, Desiree and Virgil, and all their children – Chantell, Jonathan, Ricardo, Anthony, Tanielle, Danielle, Tiana, Tanisha, Deandra and Laiken – have also since joined them in their love and support. And then there are the grandchildren, Kayleigh and Paige. All of them are, naturally, beautiful and brilliant in their own right.

## CONTENTS

Title Page		i
Keywords		ii
Abstract		iii
Declaration		vi
Acknowledgements		vii
Notes on MLA Style Manual		xiii
List of figures		xvi
		
PREFACE		1
INTRODUCTION		7
<b>SECTION 1 The early years (November 1924-July 1966)</b>		<b>50</b>
CHAPTER 1 The South African troubadour		50
CHAPTER 2 An accidental Englishman		105
<b>SECTION 2 The middle years (August 1966-July 1991)</b>		<b>142</b>
CHAPTER 3 Adrift in exile		142
CHAPTER 4 Old roots, new routes		199
CHAPTER 5 An alien in America		244

<b>SECTION 3 The later years (August 1991-December 2009)</b>	293
CHAPTER 6 Resident alien	293
CHAPTER 7 No place like home	335
CONCLUSION	371
WORKS CITED	406
FIGURES	449



## 1. NOTES ON MLA STYLE MANUAL

### (a) In-text citation

As required, my dissertation follows the MLA style. However, in order to enhance the readability of the text, and to avoid the unnecessary repetition of certain details, my dissertation deviates slightly from the *MLA Style Manual* on in-text citation in the following instances:

- To differentiate between the titles of journal articles or chapters which use the same first word at the beginning, the first principal word of the title of the journal or publication in which it appears is included next to the first word of the title of the journal article or chapter;
- Line numbers are not provided for poems which are quoted in full or where not deemed relevant;
- Quotations from some poems have been included as part of a sentence even if they are longer than three lines, and not indented as prescribed by the MLA, if they are sufficiently short;
- Footnotes are placed at the end of a sentence, except when the reference is to a specific word in a sentence or when there is more than one footnote in the same sentence; and
- Foreign words are used in italics only if they are italicised in quotations or if not in general use in English (as recorded in the *Collins English Dictionary*).

Secondly, it should be noted that:

- The full name of an author or editor will only be provided in the first reference to avoid unnecessary repetition;

- The name of an author or editor will be repeated in full in the main body of the dissertation when first cited even if previously referred to in a footnote, as the main body is the primary source of information in the dissertation;
- The name of an author or editor is repeated in full in the text where more than one author or editor shares the same surname; and
- Where acronyms are used, the name of the organisation will only be written out in full the first time to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Thirdly, when the word “page” is written out in full in the dissertation, this refers to a page in my dissertation and not to a work cited.



### **(b) Works cited**

The references in the works cited also depart from the MLA style in the following instances:

- Brutus’ poetry and prose are separated into two categories in the interests of clarity and ease of reference; and
- Where an individual chapter is cited from a work by an editor with multiple publications, the first principal word of the title of the publication in which it appears is included next to the title of the chapter to differentiate between the titles of the publications.

## **2. SPELLING AND GRAMMAR**

To draw attention to incorrect spelling or grammar in quotations, square brackets or the Latin adverb “sic” are used occasionally. However, this has been done selectively in order to avoid unduly disrupting a fluent reading of the dissertation. Spelling inconsistencies or other

idiosyncracies in Brutus' poems or in his other writing have been retained as well without drawing attention to these with square brackets or "sic" whenever they occur. While this sometimes results in anomalies, such as when Brutus uses both American and conventional English spellings in his poems, the original spelling has been retained without any intervention. The primary consideration behind such omissions is not to unnecessarily impede readability when the meaning or correct spelling of the word is clear from the context within which it is used.

### **3. RACIAL TERMINOLOGY**

My dissertation uses the generic term "black" to refer to anyone who was disenfranchised under apartheid. This follows the practice introduced by the Black Consciousness Movement during the late 1960s when it defined as black all those who were "by law or tradition discriminated against as a group in the South African society" (Biko 48). This avoids using the racial terminology of the Population Registration Act of 1950 and the pejorative connotations associated with it. The more specific categories of "Coloured", "African" or "Indian" are used only as part of a quotation or when relevant in a context which applies specifically to people classified as such under this particular Act. (When "African" is used as an adjective to refer to someone or something related to the continent, this is generally clear from the context in which it is used.) Conversely, "white" is used in the dissertation to refer to all those who were enfranchised during apartheid.

## LIST OF FIGURES

TITLE	PAGE
1. Postcard from Dennis Brutus, 5 July 1995.	5
2. Letter from Dennis Brutus, c.1995.	6
3. Dennis Brutus in an undated photograph.	8
4. Dennis Brutus in an undated photograph.	50
5. Dennis Brutus with fellow anti-apartheid activists in an undated photograph.	61
6. Francisco Goya's painting, <i>The Third of May</i> .	120
7. The cover of Dennis Brutus' poetry collection <i>Strains</i> .	126
8. Vincent van Gogh's painting, <i>Prisoners Exercising (After Doré)</i> .	131
9. Dennis Brutus in London in 1973.	142
10. Dennis Brutus with fellow writers in Germany in 1979.	181
11. Dennis Brutus and Zakes Mda in the USA in 1983.	186
12. Dennis Brutus in the People's Republic of China in 1973.	212
13. A poem in Dennis Brutus' handwriting.	215
14. Dennis Brutus and Sonia Bunting at the United Nations in 1970.	248
15. Dennis Brutus in Washington in 1981.	252
16. Dennis and May Brutus in 1988.	291
17. Dennis Brutus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2009.	293
18. Dennis Brutus and James Matthews in Cape Town in 2002.	304
19. Dennis Brutus at the National English Literary Museum in 2000.	319
20. Dennis Brutus at Poetry Africa in Durban in 2007.	344
21. Dennis Brutus in Cape Town in 2009.	368
22. Dennis Brutus at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2009.	371
23. Dennis Brutus with his Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.	396



## PREFACE

For a project that has taken up several years of my life, the origins of my interest in the South African poet Dennis Vincent Brutus (1924-2009) are rather unclear. I cannot recall when I first came across his poetry, nor where. In fact, just a few months after I started primary school in 1966, he left South Africa for the United Kingdom (UK) on a one-way exit permit. Nor would his work have been stashed away somewhere among the eclectic collection of material at our home in Bosmont, a residential area in the west of Johannesburg.

My father John's bookshelf included classic works like Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and probably the obligatory William Shakespeare or two, but numbered – far more conspicuously – the detective and western potboilers churned out by American writers such as James Hadley Chase and Louis L'Amour. The preferred reading of my mother, Rhona, included magazines like the UK-based *Woman's Weekly* (mainly for its sewing and knitting patterns) and local newspapers such as *The Star* and *Post Transvaal* (for different yet no doubt also practical reasons). My choice of reading matter, being the eldest of five children at the time and therefore entitled to certain privileges, included the UK educational magazine *Look and Learn* but, far more importantly, English football titles like *Shoot!* and *Goal*.

Besides the generally escapist nature of our family's reading preferences, another reason Brutus' poetry was not to be found in our home was that my parents were rather moderate in their political views. During the late 1950s, they were still tentatively setting out to stake a claim in the lower middle class of Johannesburg among the people classified as Coloured. My father was a printer and my mother a garment worker. In addition, the recent trauma of being forcefully removed under the Group Areas Act from Albertville – their first home as a

married couple was at 49 Minnaar Street – must have further dissuaded them from any involvement in more confrontational political activities.<sup>1</sup>

So, when elections were held for the first time for the newly created Coloured Persons' Representative Council in 1969, support in our home leaned towards the accommodationist Federal Coloured People's Party of Tom Swartz rather than the more outspoken Labour Party led by M.D. Arendse, which rejected apartheid and campaigned for universal franchise in South Africa (Horrell 6). That was clear to me even then as a Standard 2 (Grade 4) pupil far more interested in football and pop music than in politics. It is therefore unlikely that Brutus or his poetry would have found much favour in our house.

Nor was it a subject of discussion during English lessons at our sedate primary school, then known as Bosmont First Primary, now G.R. Harris Primary (even though I do vaguely remember some kerfuffle one day among teachers over the then South African flag being raised at school to mark Republic Day). In any event, very few of Brutus' poems were published in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the newspapers which sometimes carried his early writing in his hometown of Port Elizabeth, namely *Evening Post* and *Eastern Province Herald*, were not easily accessible in Johannesburg. And left-wing political publications such as *New Age* and *Fighting Talk* would no doubt have been unwelcome in our home.

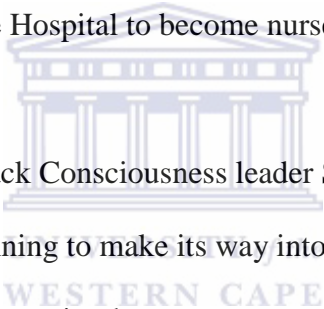
Copies of Brutus' poetry became even more difficult to obtain after he was banned in 1961. This made it illegal for him to publish anything; it also made it illegal for anyone to be in possession of his writing. Eventually his first volume was published outside the country two

---

<sup>1</sup>Alan Mabin describes Albertville as “a long[-]established, predominantly coloured-occupied, area of Johannesburg, within sight of Sophiatown but located on the Northcliff side of the (mainly white) Greymont valley” (33). According to a letter by Albertville Ratepayers' Association secretary I. Scott-Goodall on 12 June 1959, it was one of the first areas to be declared a white group area in 1956.

years later. Of course, in view of the continuing legal restrictions on Brutus, *Sirens Knuckles Boots* was not freely available in South Africa. In these circumstances, it is doubtful that my introduction to him would have taken place in Johannesburg during the 1960s.

And I certainly did not discover Brutus' poetry at high school in the 1970s. I received my secondary education at Maria Louw High School (now Maria Louw Senior Secondary School), a fairly small Afrikaans-medium school, in Queenstown. And, even though it was less than 350 kilometers from the more politically sophisticated Port Elizabeth, the two Eastern Cape towns were, in many ways, worlds apart. It was only after matric that the more fortunate in my school headed for the first time to Port Elizabeth – either to Dower College to become teachers or to Livingstone Hospital to become nurses.



And, even though the name of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko from nearby King William's Town was slowly beginning to make its way into our consciousness in that little enclave at the foot of Hangklip mountain, there was not even a whisper of the name of Dennis Brutus in Queenstown. No doubt this was testimony to the ruthless efficiency of state censorship and to the extreme fear of punitive action against those who dared to challenge the silences it sought to impose so brutally. Thus, even though a selection of Brutus' poems was published as *A Simple Lust* in 1973 – the year I started high school – I was unaware of it at the time.

After the countrywide student protests in 1976 (which eventually reached our school, too), and the death in detention of Biko and other activists of the Black Consciousness Movement in 1977, the state intensified its censorship and its methods of repression. So, by the time I entered the University of Natal (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal) in Durban as a

Bachelor of Social Science student in 1978, I think I was still unfamiliar with Brutus' poetry – even though, by the end of that year, he had published eight collections and privately distributed a ninth. On top of that, the traditional English literary canon which then prevailed at English-language universities in South Africa at the tail end of the 1970s, did not take kindly to interlopers.<sup>2</sup>

No doubt partly because of my lack of knowledge about his work due to his banning, and probably also because his reputation as a political campaigner in sport so greatly overshadowed his writing, I did not actively seek out his poetry when I spent a year in London doing my Masters degree in 1987-1988. While there, I learnt that Cheryl Roberts, a former fellow student at the University of Natal, was doing research on Brutus as part of an MA thesis at the University of York on non-racial sport in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> Yet, when she told me about her project, it met with little more than a cursory acknowledgement and, even then, did not provoke me into tracking down Brutus' poetry (as I did so greedily the work of many other South African writers banned at home).

Yet, at some point during my teenage years or early adulthood, I must have come across Brutus' poetry. I cannot recall anyone in particular drawing my attention to him, so I probably stumbled across his writing quite by accident. No doubt through a number of

---

<sup>2</sup> There were, I later discovered, important exceptions. Some academics were beginning to challenge the South African academy in the 1970s. Mike Kirkwood famously took on the South African English literary establishment in 1974 in a paper, "The Colonizer: A Critique of the English South African Culture Theory", at the "Poetry '74" conference at the University of Cape Town (102-133). As Chris Thurman notes, "Kirkwood's was not a solitary voice: it represented a growing frustration on the part of younger academics and writers with what they perceived as the reactionary, apolitical and even 'colonial' aspects of English South African culture ..." (40). In a paper in 1979, Isabel Hofmeyr similarly observes: "After decades of disparagement from conservative and thoroughly colonial literature departments, South African literary studies are slowly beginning to gain momentum. The academic barometer registers a few South African literature courses being introduced, albeit grudgingly, more journals appearing and seminars taking place" (39).

<sup>3</sup> Roberts completed her thesis, "SACOS 1973-1985: 15 Years of Sports Resistance. Charting the Journey of Non-Racial Sport in South Africa", in 1988.

similarly fortuitous encounters, he probably seeped into my consciousness. All I vaguely remember from my initial encounters with his poetry were his lyrical use of language and the immense richness and complexity of his imagery. But, apart from a passing familiarity with *Sirens Knuckles Boots* and *Letters to Martha*, there were huge gaps in my knowledge of his writing. A chance encounter with *A Simple Lust* at a Johannesburg bookshop in February 1995 reawakened my interest in his poetry. The collection confirmed my initial impressions of him: here was a truly gifted poet, whose writing appealed both to the senses and to the intellect.

The idea of writing a doctorate on Brutus' poetry then slowly began to develop. While working as a journalist in Johannesburg, I casually started reading up on him. I even contacted him at the University of Pittsburgh in June 1995, where he was then based in the Department of Africana Studies, and indicated my intention to embark on a study of his work. He kindly expressed an interest and we corresponded intermittently.

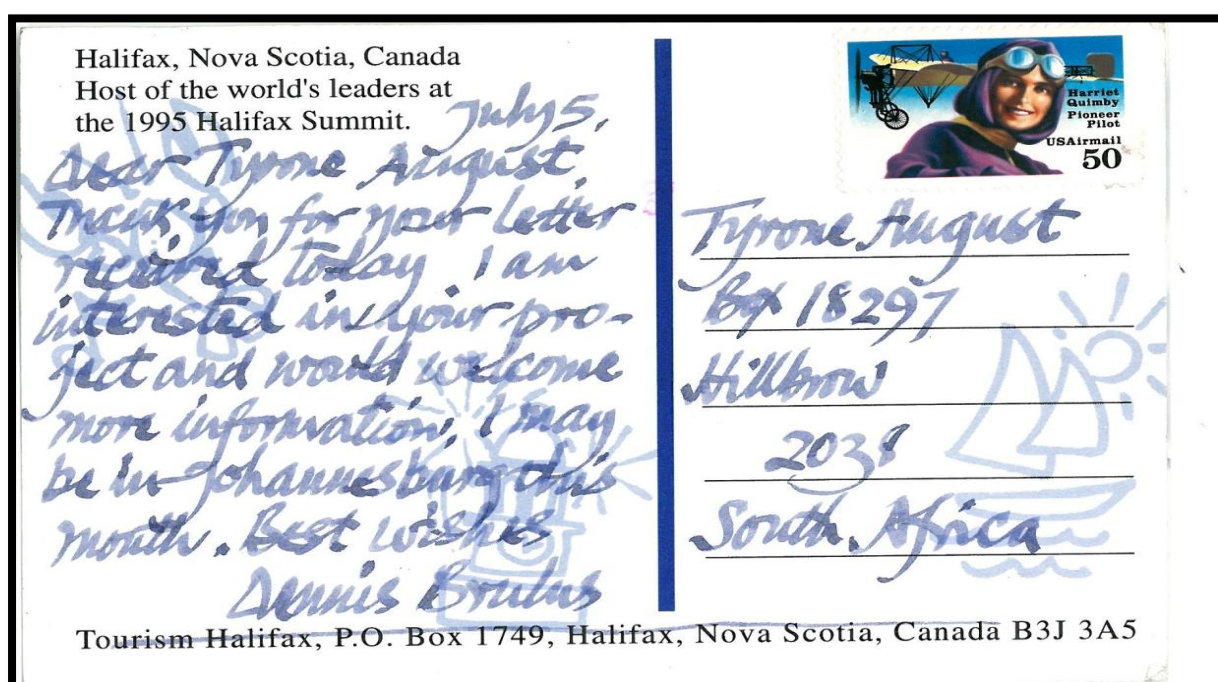


Fig. 1: Postcard from Dennis Brutus, 5 July 1995.

Unfortunately, work commitments prevented me from devoting much time to research on Brutus or his poetry. Even so, when he and his wife, May, came to Johannesburg in June 1998, I met them and subsequently interviewed Brutus as part of my research. In 1999, after a few years of sporadic work, I got as far as putting together a draft of a research proposal for the Department of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand. But then an unexpected secondment to Cape Town at the beginning of 2000, which soon became a permanent appointment, scuppered my research plans. A new position, in a new city, demanded my full attention. And so, for the next decade, Brutus fell off my to-do list.

Yet, once again, fate intervened. I became increasingly frustrated with my work as a journalist and eventually handed in my resignation at the end of 2008. Being reluctant to get off one corporate treadmill and immediately on to another, I frittered away the next year or two by dabbling in freelance journalism. It was during this period that I started thinking again about my earlier plans to study Brutus' poetry. Eventually, at the end of 2010, I decided to tackle this on-off project once again and registered with the University of the Western Cape as a student the following year. This time I did not allow any diversions to get in the way. My dissertation is the result of the research that followed over the next three years or so.

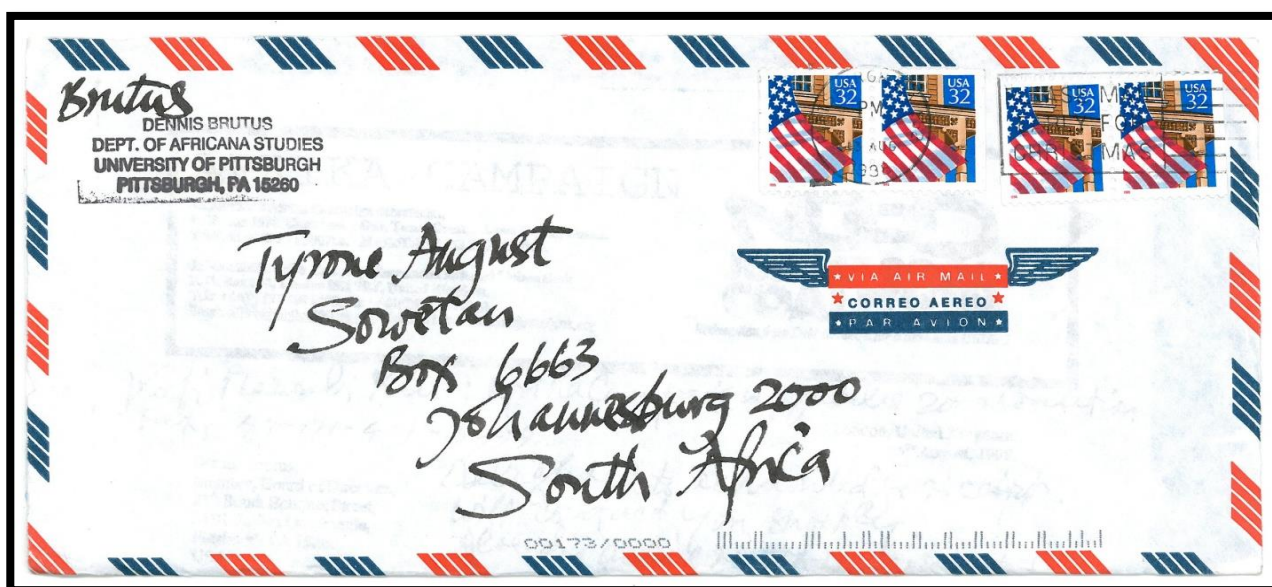


Fig. 2: Letter from Dennis Brutus, c.1995.

## INTRODUCTION

Whose house is this?

*Whose house is this?  
Whose night keeps out the light  
In here?  
Say, who owns this house?  
It's not mine.  
I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter  
With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats;  
Of fields wide as arms open for me.  
This house is strange.  
Its shadows lie.  
Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?*

– Toni Morrison



**Fig. 3: Dennis Brutus in an undated photograph.**

**Source: UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives.**



Between 1963 and 2005, Brutus published 13 volumes of poetry.<sup>4</sup> He also privately circulated a collection of poems at the University of Denver in the United States of America (USA) when he taught there for a term in 1970, entitled *Denver Poems*. In 2004, Worcester State College (now Worcester State University) in the USA marked his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday with the publication of *Poems by Dennis Brutus* (the title was later extended to *Poetry and Human Rights: Poems by Dennis Brutus*), a selection from work which he donated to its archives. In addition, Brutus published many poems in various publications since 1956. This body of work, which spans close to half a century, adds up to several hundred poems.<sup>5</sup>

Some of his poems were included in anthologies of South African poetry, for example in *Seven South African Poets: Poems of Exile*, edited by Cosmo Pieterse (1971), *South African Voices*, edited by Bernth Lindfors (1975), and *Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems*, edited by Barry Feinberg (1980). Brutus' work was also included in various anthologies of African poetry, including *Modern Poetry from Africa* in 1963 (edited by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier), *The Heritage of African Poetry: An Anthology of Oral and Written Poetry* in 1985 (edited by Isidore Okpewho), *When my Brothers Come Home: Poems from Central and Southern Africa* in the same year (edited by Frank M. Chipasula) and *Echoes of the Sunbird: An Anthology of Contemporary African Poetry* in 1993 (compiled by Don Burness). In addition, Brutus' poetry was included in 1993 in *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*, edited by Carolyn Forché, and in 2002 in *Gathering Seaweed: African Prison Writing*, edited by Jack Mapanje.

---

<sup>4</sup> The titles are *Sirens Knuckles Boots* (1963), *Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison* (1968), *Poems from Algiers* (1970), *Thoughts Abroad* (1970), *A Simple Lust* (1973), *China Poems* (1975), *Strains* (1975), *Stubborn Hope* (1978), *Salutes and Censures* (1982), *Airs and Tributes* (1989), *Still the Sirens* (1993), *Remembering* (2004) and *Leafdrift* (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Martin's checklist of Brutus' poetry accounts for 605 poems up to August 2004 (27).

\*\*\*

Brutus wrote his first poem at the age of either 14 or 15. The four-line effort, about a full moon rising over a lake one autumn night in his hometown of Port Elizabeth, was entirely spontaneous (Lindfors, “Somehow” 45). The teenager felt so enchanted by that image of the moon that he instinctively tried to capture it in language. His response was not as unusual as it may seem. Brutus grew up in a home immersed in a love of literature. Both his parents, Francis and Margaret (née Bloemetjie), were schoolteachers. His father continued to study while teaching, and Brutus often overheard him reciting the work of various English poets from the Romantic and Victorian periods. His mother also loved poetry and frequently recited poems to the children (Brutus, “Childhood” 97). She regularly assisted his elder brother, Wilfred, with his English homework at night as well. These were Brutus’ earliest encounters with the writing of poets from the traditional English literary canon. As a result, he recalls, he grew up “with an ear for sounds, for language, and words” (Sustar, “Artist” 153).

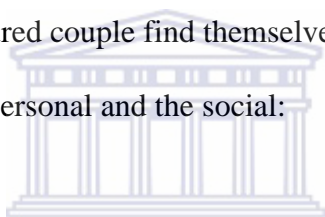
His next attempt at writing poetry was more calculated, and was the result of his competitive relationship with Wilfred. When the then 15-year-old Brutus discovered that his 19-year-old brother was beginning to excel in Afrikaans while a student at a teachers’ training college in Cape Town, and even published a few poems in that language, he wrote an Afrikaans poem in an act of sibling rivalry. He does not provide much detail about the content of this poem, but vaguely remembers that it was “an Afrikaans love lyric” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 46).<sup>6</sup> Later, in response to what he describes as “adolescent crushes” at high school, he wrote several more love poems, this time in English (Sustar, “Artist” 154). These were, in all

---

<sup>6</sup> *Denver Poems* contains a rare example of a poem by Brutus in Afrikaans. Written in February 1970, “Aan Zeke Mphahlele” (“To Zeke Mphahlele”) is addressed to the South African writer Es’kia Mphahlele in response to criticism that South African writers were not producing work in sufficiently large quantities (*Denver* 30).

likelihood, written in the style of the mainstream English poetic tradition to which he was introduced during his childhood at home and at school.

Brutus published his first poem while a student at the University of Fort Hare, then named the South African Native College (SANC). The 14-line “Rendezvous” appeared in 1945 during his second year at university in a student publication, *The SANC*, under the pseudonym “Le Dab”.<sup>7</sup> It is written in language which mimics the style which then prevailed in the English literary canon. Brutus himself describes the poems he wrote while at university as “very much in a hybrid Victorian or Elizabethan mode, because that’s what I was being exposed to” (154). It is a fairly conventional love poem yet, at the same time, refers to the threatening environment in which the enamoured couple find themselves – an early indication of Brutus’ enduring concerns with both the personal and the social:



Where grey trees wail not, nor the winter screams  
 Thro’ chilly walls that act as palisades  
 To hide the hostile gleam of jagged blades  
 Of sullen distrust and frustrating schemes  
 To rip apart for all time, all our dreams;  
 Where, in our hearts, the daylight never fades,  
 But keeps unchangingly its lambent shades,  
 There, only there, is happiness, it seems  
 There then I shall meet you with a glad  
 And fearless leap thro’ fires that beckoning say,  
 “Shrink not from Love, but from the mortal’s mad

<sup>7</sup> “Dab” is presumably a reference to “Dennis Anthony Brutus”. As a practising Roman Catholic at the time, Brutus preferred to use Anthony as his second name – instead of Vincent – in honour of St Anthony, a Christian saint (Martin 5).

Frustration and restraint of it – Delight

That holds you and shall hold you with a might

Supreme.” There then, we’ll meet, meantime, I pray. (*The SANC* 26)

In 1946 Brutus was forced to interrupt his studies due to financial difficulties. However, this turned out to be a blessing in disguise in at least one way. While he worked as a teacher at St Michael’s Catholic Mission, a school in Fort Beaufort, he wrote about a hundred poems. He kept these in a collection he called “The Grey Notebook” (he later renamed it “Green Harvest” because he regarded these early efforts as “all immature stuff”) (Lindfors, “Somehow” 47). He returned to the University of Fort Hare, near Alice, in 1947 to complete his degree (Lindfors, *Tapes* 16). While teaching at St Thomas Aquinas High School in Port Elizabeth, either during 1948 or 1949, he fell in love with a pupil. Although he did not pursue a relationship with her out of ethical considerations, he wrote many poems for her (he estimates the number at around a hundred). He collected these declarations of his affection in a small red notebook which he called “The Red Notebook”. Once again, like the poems he wrote at university, these were influenced by the writing of those regarded at the time as “exemplars of poetry” such as Shakespeare and the Romantic poet William Wordsworth (Lindfors, “Somehow” 49). Brutus acknowledges the Victorian poets Gerard Manley Hopkins and Robert Browning as important influences during this period as well.<sup>8</sup>

It was around the same time that he began to expand the range of subjects of his poetry. This was, in part, a response to his growing political consciousness while a student at the University of Fort Hare. “I first experienced discussions about the relationship of culture and politics as a student at Fort Hare University,” he remembers (Sustar, “Artist” 156). He

---

<sup>8</sup> Brutus later explains in which way these writers influenced him. “... I’m not of course imitating them,” he says, “I’m just letting those models help me to work out my own answer” (Van Wyk 181).

became increasingly aware of racial discrimination while at university, too. “When I was there, I discovered around me were first[-]class athletes,” he states. “They had the best times in the country, but they could not get on the Olympic team” (NELM, 1994/94.4.14.13). While a teacher at Paterson High School in Port Elizabeth, he became responsible by default for organising the school’s sports activities because there was no-one else to do so.<sup>9</sup> He also began to organise parents into “parent-teacher associations” to conduct protests against the Group Areas Act (Brutus, *Introduction* 367),<sup>10</sup> which was passed in 1950 to legally enforce the racial segregation of residential areas. Brutus’ poetry increasingly began to reflect his concern about the inequality and discrimination legally enforced under apartheid, often through violence and other coercive measures.

Whether out of a growing confidence in the quality of his writing, or because he regarded its wider distribution as a political imperative, he began to submit his poems for publication in media with a larger readership. Between 1956 and 1962, his poems appeared in the Port Elizabeth newspapers *Evening Post* and *Eastern Province Herald* as well as in national left-wing publications such as *New Age* and *Fighting Talk*.<sup>11</sup> The first poem he published with an explicitly political theme is “For a Dead African”, again under the acronym “DAB”, in *New Age* in April 1956.<sup>12</sup> It is about a man who was shot dead by police in Port Elizabeth during a religious procession on Good Friday. It is written in a style similar to those of his earlier

---

<sup>9</sup> According to Brutus, he played rugby, football and cricket as a child (Lindfors, *Tapes* 136). He participated in cross-country running (Bose 50) and played table tennis as well (Holly 369). However, by his own admission, he was more of a sports fan than an athlete: “I played most of them [sports] badly ...” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 136).

<sup>10</sup> This introduction was written for a new edition of *Salutes and Censures* scheduled for publication by Africa World Press either in 1987 (Bunn and Taylor 363) or 1989 (McLuckie and Colbert 210). However, in the end it was cancelled for undisclosed reasons.

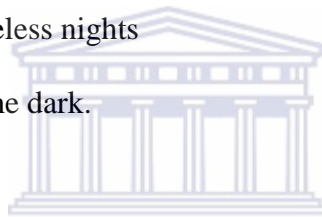
<sup>11</sup> According to Brutus, most of his “literary work” was published in *Fighting Talk* at that point (Van Wyk 179).

<sup>12</sup> This poem was later published in Brutus’ collection *A Simple Lust* in 1973 (34) and in the anthology *Poets to the People* in 1980 (Feinberg 1).

poems, and consists of three four-line stanzas. As Simon Lewis notes, it is “firmly English in language, style, and form” (“Appreciation” 123):

We have no heroes and no wars  
 only victims of a sickly state  
 succumbing to the variegated sores  
 that flower under lashing rains of hate.

We have no battles and no fights  
 for history to record with trite remark  
 only captives killed on eyeless nights  
 and accidental dyings in the dark.



Yet when the roll of those who died  
 to free our land is called, without surprise  
 these nameless unarmed ones will stand beside  
 the warriors who secured the final prize. (*Simple* 34)

The Johannesburg-based student publication *adelpi literary review* also published his work several times in 1962 and 1963, followed by two other South African journals, *Penpoint* and *Purple Renoster*, in 1963. The Uganda-based journal *Transition* and the Nigeria-based journal *Black Orpheus* published him in 1963 as well. It was out of his writing during this period that Brutus’ debut collection, *Sirens Knuckles Boots*, emerged.

\*\*\*

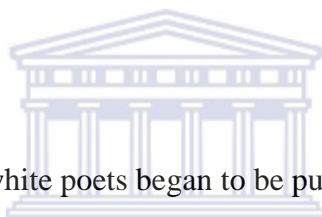
Brutus drew extensively on the traditional English literary canon of the time when he started writing poetry more regularly, and more seriously, in the 1940s while at university (1944-1945 and 1947). This included, most notably, the poetry of the Romantic and Victorian periods. In part, this is because of his exposure to the writing of these periods during his childhood. As noted earlier, these English poets were part of the university curriculum of his father when he studied part-time while a teacher, and his mother felt a deep attraction to their work as well (this will be discussed in chapter 1). Brutus was further exposed to the writing of these poets during his secondary and tertiary education. “We didn’t have a South African literary tradition,” he notes in an interview, “let alone an African literary tradition” (Sustar, “Artist” 154).

Little poetry was being published in English in South Africa during the 1940s. Only two collections by black poets were published during this decade: *A Blackman Speaks of Freedom!*, a slender volume by Peter Abrahams (b.1919), in 1940, and *Valley of a Thousand Hills*, an epic poem by H.I.E. Dhlomo (1903-1956), in 1941. The situation was not significantly different for white South African poets. While Roy Campbell (1901-1957) and William Plomer (1903-1973) brought out several volumes in this period, these were all published outside the country.<sup>13</sup> If the vacuum in published poetry in English in South Africa at the time meant that there was no local poetic tradition from which Brutus could draw, he also saw the positive side of this situation. “... [I]t’s great in the sense that really at that time that I started [writing] poetry, there was pretty much nobody else writing,” he remembers (Van Wyk 184).

---

<sup>13</sup> The UK publisher Faber and Faber issued Campbell’s *Sons of the Mistral* in 1941 and *Talking Bronco* in 1946, while The Bodley Head released *Collected Poems* in 1949 (Alexander 243). Plomer published the following in the UK: *Selected Poems* in 1940 (Hogarth Press), the privately circulated *In a Bombed House* in 1942 (Curwen Press) and *The Dorking Thigh* in 1945 (Jonathan Cape) (Plomer 5).

There were far more opportunities in South Africa for the publication of poetry during the next decade. Guy Butler (1918-2001) published his first collection, *Stranger to Europe: Poems 1939-1949*, in 1952, Anthony Delius (1916-1989) made his debut with *The Unknown Border* in 1954 and Francis Carey Slater (1876-1958) produced *Collected Poems* in 1957. Delius published a second collection, *The Last Division*, in 1959. Two literary journals, *Purple Renoster* and *Standpunte (Standpoints)*, were launched in South Africa during the 1950s as well. However, as Walter Ehmeir points out, both publications largely ignored the work of black writers (115). He notes that, apart from Sol Plaatje's novel *Mhudi* in 1957 – “and one or two books by a South African Indian author” (112) – not a single work of creative writing in English by a black author was published by a local publishing house during the 1950s or 1960s.



On the other hand, the poetry of white poets began to be published with increasing frequency in South Africa during the 1960s. Douglas Livingstone (1932-1996) made his debut in 1960 with *The Skull in the Mud* and followed it up in 1964 with *Sjambok, and Other Poems from Africa*. Delius published his third volume, *A Corner of the World*, in 1962 and a fourth, *Black Southeaster*, in 1966. Ruth Miller (1919-1969) made her debut in 1965 with *Floating Island*,<sup>14</sup> while Sydney Clouts (1926-1982) published a collection, *One Life*, in 1966. Both Miller and Butler brought out publications again in 1968: Miller published *Selected Poems*, while Butler produced *On First Seeing Florence* (his previous volume, *South of the Zambezi: Poems from South Africa*, was published in London in 1966).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The title poem, “The Floating Island” (Miller 70-71), borrows its central image from “Floating Island” (Wordsworth, *Poetical* 416), a poem by the English writer Dorothy Wordsworth (P. Kitson 363). Like Wordsworth’s sister, Miller reflects on the destructive power of nature, but also applies the image to South Africa’s political tribulations.

<sup>15</sup> Butler launched a literary journal, *New Coin*, in 1965. Based at Rhodes University, it also published his *On First Seeing Florence*, Delius’ *Black Southeaster* and Clouts’ *One Life* (the latter in conjunction with London publisher Purnell) (Butler 250).



Brutus was dismissive of much of the poetry produced by white South Africans during this period. In a radio interview with Pieterse in 1966, he describes it as “merely third rate or worse” (“Dennis” 59-60). He mentions the journals *Contrast* and *New Coin* by name, and comments that much of their content was “a trashy kind of lyrical poetry” (60). The reason for his harsh verdict is twofold: on the one hand, he contends that the poems in these journals are short and lack any epic or narrative qualities; secondly, he argues that they ignore the political realities of life in South Africa. “... [T]heir failure basically is there because of a failure to confront life,” he asserts. “It is because they don’t want to react to the broader situation, either in terms of South Africa or much wider, and this failure, this inhibition, this failure to respond, I think, is what eviscerates the poems and makes them gutless” (60).

These statements are, of course, sweeping generalisations. Miller’s two collections in the 1960s, for instance, deservedly earned her a reputation as one of South Africa’s most talented lyric poets. And while she did not write any overtly political poetry, some of her poems do allude – however subtly – to the casual cruelties inflicted on black people under apartheid. In “The Stranger”, for instance, she describes a cleaner walking down a road in Cape Town. The following two stanzas (lines 9 to 16) are a powerful and eloquent indictment of racial prejudice and the constant threat of violence which lurks behind it:

In the shadow of the lamp he glares  
 At invisible, invincible legions,  
 Their teeth bared, flashing curved metal,  
 Lust in their eyes, salty, bleeding

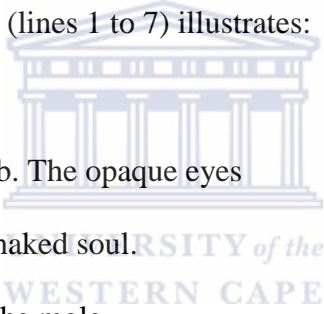
Ready to flash, move like a snake, sting –

Bring history into the quiet suburban streets

Where the grass grows and the red lilies

Burst like blood. (Miller 50)

Brutus' comments on the quality and content of South African poetry also do not apply to Livingstone. As Michael Chapman notes, despite the limitations of his debut collection, *The Skull in the Mud* contains evidence of "the emergence of a poet intoxicated with the potentialities of language and metrics in a way that his contemporaries of the 1950s were not" ("Douglas" 73). In addition, Livingstone's poetry also displays "a readiness to confront socially divisive South African landscapes" (120). An example is the poem "The Unknown Refugee", as the following extract (lines 1 to 7) illustrates:



The hands are curled and numb. The opaque eyes  
 are shutters drawn on sun, on naked soul.  
 Dim, secret, silent, brother to the mole,  
 he slumps beneath his corrugated skies.  
 His form is prone and frail. The slackened thighs  
 splay limply on old empty sacks of coal  
 while each sole flaunts its draughty abject hole ... (Livingstone 16)

The speaker's language may be restrained, yet the discomfort about poverty in South Africa is nonetheless clear. Thus, even though the voices of poets like Miller and Livingstone may be far too muted for Brutus' political sensibilities, not all the work of white poets at the time can be dismissed out of hand as "simply trashy" (Pieterse, "Dennis" 60). And the antipathy that Brutus expresses towards lyrical poetry in general – "there is no attempt at an epic or a

narrative treatment, and they are descriptive of persons or places, emotions or ideas” (60) – is difficult to comprehend. The lyric poem is, after all, his own preferred mode of writing throughout most of his writing career. In fact, in the same interview with Pieterse he refers to his poetry as lyrical (58). And, unlike some anti-apartheid poets who later turned from the lyric form to epic poetry – for example, Mongane Wally Serote – Brutus continues to employ this form in his later writing. His hostile comment to Pieterse is no doubt more specifically directed at a certain kind of lyric poetry – that which is silent on the political divisions and conflict in South Africa.

Nor can the absence of political issues from the South African lyric poetry of the time be attributed to the form being ill-suited or unable to deal with social concerns. Despite essentially being a form of self-expression, the lyric has always engaged with broader issues in society (this is discussed in chapter 4). As Mark Strand points out, the roots of the lyric have always assumed “a connection between privacy and universality” (xxii). Chapman, similarly, notes that “literature has always been a weapon of some struggle – political (Milton), religious (Donne), cultural (Eliot)” (*Exchanges* 9). He adds that “Shakespeare didn’t just struggle with apolitical universals called jealousy and love: he struggled against feudal residues, he recognised the energies of a new humanism, he yielded to the older orders while chafing against their very constrictions, and so on” (9).

Brutus is also quite justified in his criticism of South African publishers for their marginalisation of writing by black South African poets at the time. As he tells Pieterse of the poetry then published in South African journals, “as far as I know, one hundred per cent is the poetry of White South Africans, there is little in *Contrast*, or elsewhere, of non-white South Africans” (“Dennis” 60). Ehmeir’s research supports such a claim. *Contrast*, which

was launched in 1960, was “more or less limited to white intellectuals” (Ehmeir 123). He calculates that, of about 50 stories published between 1960 and 1968, only three were by black writers (Peter Clarke, Lewis Nkosi and Richard Rive) (119-120).

In response to generally being overlooked by South African publishers, black poets increasingly turned to journals outside the country to publish their work. *Black Orpheus*, founded in 1957 by Beier (Benson 1), was particularly supportive. The establishment of *Transition* by Rajat Neogy in 1961 offered local black writers another much-needed outlet for their work (Benson 1; Ehmeir 116).<sup>16</sup> Brutus’ poem “Sabotage, 1962”, for instance, appeared in *Transition* (Benson 125). And, in 1962, Brutus won a poetry prize in a literary contest run in Nigeria by the University of Ibadan in conjunction with the Mbari Writers’ and Artists’ Club (though he subsequently turned it down because the contest was open to black writers only).<sup>17</sup> It was against this background that Mbari published his debut collection in 1963 when he was 39 years old – the first volume of poetry by a black South African in English in more than two decades.<sup>18</sup>

\*\*\*

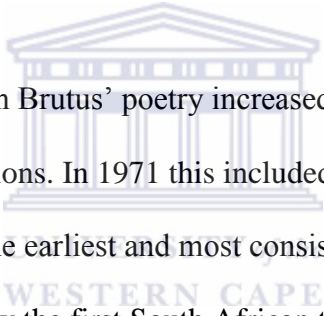
---

<sup>16</sup> The Paris-based journal *Présence Africaine*, which was launched in 1947, also published some work by black South African writers, including Kgositsile Keorapetse, James Matthews and Rive (Ehmeir 116). It published Brutus’ poem “Somehow we survive” as “Poem” in 1966 (Martin 11). *The Classic*, a journal launched by journalist Nat Nakasa in 1963, provided additional space for the early writing of Oswald Mtshali, Mafika Pascal Gwala, Serote and Matthews (Chapman, “Soweto” 183).

<sup>17</sup> Ironically, it was at the insistence of Mphahlele that the literary contest was restricted to “black Africans” (Mphahlele, *Afrika* 33). In his last collection of poetry, Brutus recalls his altercation with Mphahlele over the issue, which included an exchange in *Fighting Talk* (Steptoe, “Interview” 207).

<sup>18</sup> The South African poet Adam Small (b.1936) made his debut in Afrikaans with *Verse van die Liefde* (*Verses of Love*) in 1957. As the title suggests, these were essentially love poems. Small, then an academic at UWC, published his ground-breaking *Kitaar my Kruis* (literally, *Guitar my Cross*) in 1961 and *Sê Sjibbolet* (*Say Shibboleth*) in 1963. He became involved in the Sestiger (Sixties) movement of anti-apartheid Afrikaans writers in 1963 and served on its editorial board as well (Cope 188).

Brutus' poetry received immediate attention from literary critics elsewhere on the continent. Beier, a German extramural lecturer at the University of Ibadan, was the first literary critic to comment on Brutus' work in a paper written for an international conference on African literature in English – the first of its kind – in Uganda in June 1962. He was one of the founders of Mbari, which was then preparing to bring out Brutus' debut collection through its publishing initiative, Mbari Publications. Beier's paper was subsequently published the following year in *Black Orpheus* ("Three" 46-50). Paul Theroux, a writer from the USA who was teaching in Uganda at the time, included Brutus' work in a review of six African poets in 1963 in *Black Orpheus* (41-58). Daniel Abasiokong (45-48) and J.P. Clark ("Poetry" 20-26), both from Nigeria, followed with reviews of Brutus' poetry in 1965 in *Transition*.



The volume of literary criticism on Brutus' poetry increased markedly during the 1970s, when he published several collections. In 1971 this included reviews by Pol Ndu (41-54) and Lindfors ("John" 72-77), one of the earliest and most consistent critics of Brutus' poetry, as well as Es'kia Mphahlele, probably the first South African to pay serious attention to Brutus ("Debris" 67-71). Bahadur Tejani (130-144) followed in 1973, while Mphahlele published a second review in 1974 ("Poetic" 93-96). He also included commentary on Brutus' poetry in *Voices in the Whirlwind and other Essays* in 1972 and in *The African Image* in 1974. Lindfors produced a substantial analysis of the different styles he identified in Brutus' poetry ("Dialectical" 219-229) as well as another review ("Dennis" 7-16) in 1976.

Brutus' work continued to receive much critical attention during the following decade and featured increasingly prominently in book-length monographs. His work was examined in K.L. Goodwin's *Understanding African Poetry: A Study of Ten Poets* in 1982, in Ursula A. Barnett's *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English* in 1983,

and in Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre's *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa* and Tayo Olafioye's *Politics in African Poetry* in 1984. Brutus' work was also the subject of discussion in an essay in the collection *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*, edited by M.J. Daymond, J.U. Jacobs and Margaret Lenta, in 1984. Chidi Amuta commented extensively on his poetry, too, in *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism* in 1989. Several articles were published in journals as well during the 1980s, notably by Tanure O. Ojaide ("Troubadour" 55-69), Isaac Elimimian ("Form" 70-78), Tyohdzuah Akosu (37-52) and Colin Gardner (354-364).

In 1994, Monika Idehen edited *Salutes: Selected Writings*, a collection of essays published to commemorate Brutus' 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. Apart from two essays, the festschrift did not specifically focus on Brutus' poetry, but was an important indication of his growing international stature in literature. However, the single most important contribution on Brutus' poetry during this decade was *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus* in 1995, edited by Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert – the first book-length study devoted exclusively to his writing. It includes essays on various aspects of Brutus' first 10 volumes and also provides the most extensive bibliography of his poetry and of writing on his poetry published up to that point. Other notable contributions on Brutus' poetry during this period include an essay by Chipasula in 1993 ("Terrible" 38-55), Rosemary Folli's Masters thesis on prison poetry in 1994 and a journal article by Barine Sanah Ngaage in 1997 (385-392).

By far the most significant contribution on Brutus' work during the following decade was *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader* in 2006, which includes a collection of essays and documents edited by Lee Sustar and Aisha Karim. While most of these focus on his political activism, they provide a much better understanding of the historical and political

contexts in which he wrote which, in turn, enhance an understanding of the themes and writing styles of his poetry. *Poems of Dennis Brutus: A Checklist, 1945-2004*, a bibliography of Brutus' poetry compiled by Andrew Martin in 2005, provides a detailed guide to his writing – the first, and so far only, attempt to provide a comprehensive record of his poems. Other notable contributions on Brutus' poetry during this decade include journal articles by Ezenwa-Ohaeto in 2000 (23-31), Abdul Yesufu in 2002 (33-52) and Lewis in 2006 (45-62).

The next decade saw the release of two more book-length publications on Brutus: *The Dennis Brutus Tapes: Essays at Autobiography* in 2011, edited by Lindfors, and *Times with Dennis Brutus: Conversations, Quotations and Snapshots 2005-2009* by Cornelius Thomas in 2012. Even though most of the material in Lindfors' book was recorded in 1974 and 1975, it nevertheless provides important insights into Brutus' poetry and life which are still relevant. Thomas' book is of far more limited use, though it remains important for providing information on Brutus' political activism. A number of articles were published on Brutus' life and writing after his death in December 2009. However, most are little more than exercises in hagiography which focus primarily on his involvement in politics, and add little to a better understanding or appreciation of Brutus' poetry.

\*\*\*

The main aim of my dissertation, as suggested by the title, is to re-evaluate Brutus' poetry. Despite the range of themes he addresses, and the diverse forms and styles he employs over more than half a century, his poetry continues to receive little critical attention in South

Africa. There are various possible explanations for the reasons behind the marginal status of the writing of one of South Africa's most accomplished and innovative poets.<sup>19</sup>

Among the initial reasons for his virtual absence from South African literary criticism is the fact that he was declared a banned person in October 1961 under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. In terms of this restriction, he was not allowed to publish writing of any kind. Although the declared intention of this law was to prevent the spread of communism, its major purpose was to curb the activities of any individual or organisation that was opposed to the apartheid policies and laws implemented by the National Party (NP) after it was voted into government in 1948 (Foster 15).

In an attempt to circumvent these restrictions, Brutus published his early poetry either under acronyms or pseudonyms in South Africa during the early 1960s. As noted, his first volume of poems was published outside South Africa. Brutus was in police custody for breaking his banning order at the time of publication (his arrest, conviction and incarceration will be discussed in chapter 2), and escaped an additional charge only because it could not be confirmed when the poems were sent to Mbari Publications (even Brutus could not remember when they were submitted!) (Pieterse, "Dennis" 57-58).

After he went into exile in July 1966, it became even more difficult to gain access to his poetry in South Africa. Apart from the restrictions imposed on his writing by a second banning order in June 1965 (this time under the General Law Amendment Act of 1963, which

---

<sup>19</sup> The entry under his name in *The Companion to African Literatures* refers to Brutus as "one of South Africa's most important poets" (Killam and Rowe 52). In fact, Ojaide regards him as one of the founders of modern African poetry in the second half of the 1960s (*Poetic* 73). Olu Oguibe even describes him as "the author of some of the greatest poems ever written in any language or tradition" ("Meeting Dennis Brutus"). More specifically, Simon Lewis says he wrote "some of the most powerful political poetry of the twentieth century" ("Dennis" 174).



amended the Suppression of Communism Act), the distance between his overseas publishers and South Africa created an additional logistical obstacle to the distribution of his poetry. To compound matters, some of his collections were specifically banned for distribution and could only be obtained clandestinely, usually by those with links to underground distribution networks.<sup>20</sup> For many years, the only collection of Brutus' poetry available in South Africa was *Thoughts Abroad*, which was published under the pseudonym John Bruin to thwart the prohibition on his writing.<sup>21</sup>

Most of Brutus' poetry only became freely available in South Africa after February 1990, when then State President F.W. de Klerk lifted restrictions on individuals and organisations that were proscribed under apartheid. Nevertheless, despite the repeal of these restrictions, more than two decades later there still appears to be little interest in either critically examining or promoting access to Brutus' poetry in South Africa. None of his collections has been republished in this country. Nor have any of his poems been included as prescribed reading in the English curriculum of South African schools since the first post-apartheid elections in 1994.

In fact, even after a new political dispensation was introduced after the elections, Brutus' poetry still receives virtually no attention from literary scholars inside South Africa. Folli's thesis in 1994, which includes Brutus as part of a study on prison poetry, and her essay on the erotic nature of his poetry in 1996 ("Dennis" 17-25) are notable exceptions. During the

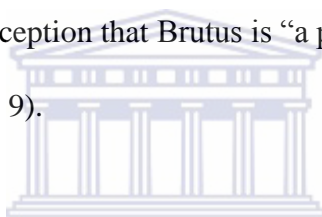
---

<sup>20</sup> Monica Hendricks recalls, for instance, that copies of Brutus' banned collections were covered in brown paper and circulated secretly in Cape Town in the cultural societies of the Unity Movement, an anti-apartheid organisation (308).

<sup>21</sup> Brutus explains that he chose this particular pseudonym "so that those [who] are interested will know it's a 'bruinmens' [brown person]" (Van Wyk 189). At other times, though, he distances himself from such a narrow, racially circumscribed identity. In an interview with Lewis, for instance, he says he is "impatient of categories, especially 'racial' ones, with which people in South Africa, and the United States, are often obsessed" (S. Lewis, "Speaking" 154).

1990s, as well as during the decade which followed, the most substantial work on Brutus' poetry continued to be published outside South Africa.

The continued absence of Brutus' poetry from South African literary criticism after 1990 suggests that the banning order originally imposed on Brutus does not adequately explain the continued lack of attention to his poetry. Another reason which may explain the ongoing marginalisation of his writing in South Africa is the perception that Brutus was, first and foremost, a political activist who wrote poetry with the sole purpose of advancing his political objectives. Lindfors, noting what he regards as a "kind of public erasure" of Brutus' poetry in South Africa, also speculates that one of the main reasons for the continued lack of interest in his poetry may be a perception that Brutus is "a poet of protest, and hence of propaganda" ("Dennis", Martin 8, 9).



Such a perception is a serious oversimplification. Early in his writing career, Brutus expressly comes out in opposition to using poetry to serve as propaganda (Lindfors et al 32). He argues that "it would be dishonest and discordant to introduce crude political statement, raw political dogmas, preachments against racism, in poetry" (32). While he does not always successfully avoid doing so himself, especially from the second half of the 1980s, he is not given sufficient credit for the aesthetic qualities of his writing.

Brutus certainly does address political issues in his poetry. "Is my poetry political?" he asks rhetorically in an autobiographical essay. "Yes. To depict my landscape in South Africa and not include the political features would simply be dishonest. The obligation to influence and change society rests on all of us ... we are all part of society and involved in all humanity ..."

(Brutus, “Dennis” 60).<sup>22</sup> He is unapologetic about his intention to honour this obligation. However, although he often directly addresses political issues in his poetry, he continues to pay careful attention to the craft of poetry throughout most of his writing career. This is clear from his creative use of language: his imagery and symbolism are often rich and complex, and he constantly strives to use various poetic devices with skill and imagination. As he says self-effacingly in an interview, “I was not unaware of the craft of poetry, and I was sensitive to the use of language and different ways of making a poem work” (S. Gray, *Indaba* 156). Thus, even though his work changes noticeably over the more than five decades during which he writes, he continues to pay close attention throughout to the craft of poetry. Refocusing attention on the aesthetic features of his work is therefore a central objective of my dissertation.



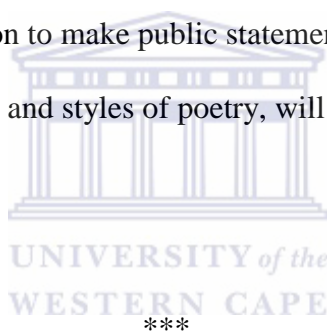
In line with this objective, I devote much attention to his various experiments with form and style. Many scholars tend to dismiss the increasingly simplified style of writing he adopted after his release from prison in 1965 as crude and unimaginative, even more so after his visit to the People’s Republic of China in 1973. However, an informed re-reading of Brutus’ poetry will reveal a greater complexity than he is generally given credit for. Even after he decides to write in a more direct and accessible manner, he does not do so exclusively in one style. He often moves back and forth between different styles (sometimes even within the same collection). He points out that this is the case from early on in his writing: “I always had several styles. There was a simple, direct statement, generally lyrical and rhyming and strictly metrical, often in stanza structure, but there would be also be the kind of complex Hopkinsian

---

<sup>22</sup> Brutus does not regard himself as a political poet per se (W. Thompson 73). However, he does believe that politics is a natural part of the subject matter of a poet. “I think that poets who decline to deal with the real world and who exclude politics and everything else that happens in life from their poetry do themselves a disservice,” he rightly argues. “Nothing that is human is alien to the poet” (73-74).

stuff, and there would be a kind of colloquial, conversational, unadorned poetry, which I picked up from [William Butler] Yeats” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 50).

The diversity in the language and style of Brutus’ poetry is often obscured by the fact that critics tend to foreground its political content and, in the process, pay insufficient attention to its literary features. I argue for a shift away from a narrow political reading of his poetry to a broader re-reading, in which there is due acknowledgement and consideration of the aesthetic features of his work. Despite the political content of many – if not most – of his poems, Brutus remains, first and foremost, a writer of lyric poetry. What makes his writing different from the conventional lyric, though, is that he constantly tries to find ways of using a very personal mode of poetic expression to make public statements. How he pursues this objective, through different forms and styles of poetry, will therefore be a central focus of my dissertation.



The primary sources of my research are Brutus’ 13 volumes of poetry, the privately circulated *Denver Poems* and the collection published by Worcester State College. In addition, some of his poems initially published in journals during the early part of his career are discussed where relevant. Individual poems in the following anthologies are discussed as well: *Seven South African Poets* (Pieterse 15-29), *South African Voices* (Lindfors 31-34) and *Poets to the People* (Feinberg 1-11). Some unpublished poems received from Patrick Bond, the director of the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Centre for Civil Society where Brutus was based in the latter years of his life, are examined, too. Other primary sources of information are various works of prose written by Brutus. These include articles in newspapers and

literary journals as well as contributions to book-length monographs, and deal with a wide range of topics – from reflections on his childhood and his poetry to commentary on South African and global politics.

The two main areas from which my secondary sources are drawn relate, firstly, to literary criticism of Brutus' poetry and, secondly, to biographical material on Brutus. As indicated, most of the early scholarship on Brutus' poetry is produced by academics and writers based in Nigeria because his work was available in that country in *Black Orpheus* and in his debut collection. For the same reason Mphahlele, who lived in Nigeria between 1957 and 1961, and subsequently visited the country during the early 1960s when he was asked to help establish Mbari (*Afrika* 33), was able to gain access to Brutus' early writing. After Brutus moved to the USA, his work increasingly became the subject of literary criticism in that country.

Archival material was obtained from several sources, most importantly from the National English Literary Museum (NELM) in Grahamstown, which received a vast amount of material from Brutus when he was still based at the University of Pittsburgh.<sup>23</sup> The UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives also provided valuable material, including photographic material. Northwestern University in the USA made a copy of *Denver Poems* available from its "Dennis Brutus Papers". Worcester State University, where Brutus spent time as a Visiting Professor and Poet-in-Residence, assisted as well with some information from its "Dennis Brutus Collection".

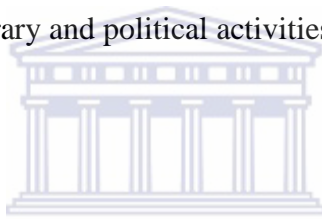
Several people were interviewed, either personally or telephonically. These interviews can be broadly grouped into three separate though sometimes overlapping categories: literary,

---

<sup>23</sup> According to a newspaper report by Ryan Cresswell, NELM received 87 boxes of files, more than 300 audio and video tapes as well as several books and photographs from Brutus.

political and personal. Those cited in the dissertation are the following (in alphabetical order): Antony Brutus, Dennis Brutus, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Peter Klatzow, Blanche la Guma, Mandla Langa, Don Mattera, James Matthews, Mbulelo Mzamane, Njabulo Ndebele, Mongane Wally Serote and Wole Soyinka. While the interviews with Patrick Bond and Bennie Bunsee are not directly quoted, these provided important background information as well.

The interview conducted with Brutus when he visited Johannesburg in June 1998 falls into all three categories: it provides literary, political and personal information. In addition to the interview, Brutus occasionally sent material from the University of Pittsburgh (where he was then based) related to various literary and political activities in which he was involved at the time.



The interviews with Langa (Johannesburg), Matthews (Cape Town), Mattera (Johannesburg), Ndebele (Cape Town) and Serote (Johannesburg) – all South African writers and/or literary critics – deal more specifically with literary issues. Telephonic interviews were conducted with Kgositsile (Johannesburg) and Mzamane (Bloemfontein), too. An interview was also conducted with Soyinka, who was secretary of the Union of Writers of the African Peoples (UWAP) when Brutus was its vice-president, during a visit to Cape Town. Klatzow (Cape Town), a musical composer, was interviewed as well on a song cycle which he composed based on several of Brutus' poems.

Interviewees familiar with some of Brutus' political activities include La Guma and Bunsee, both former exiles in the UK who are now based in Cape Town. A telephonic interview was also conducted with Bond, a Durban-based academic and political activist, on Brutus' post-

1990 political activism. Mattera and Serote, too, provided much information on Brutus' political activities, both in South Africa and abroad.

Interviewees who provided information of a more personal nature on Brutus include, most importantly, his son Antony with whom he lived in Cape Town during the last year of his life. Another son Marc, who is based in California in the USA, was not formally interviewed but also provided information on request via e-mail. The writer and medical doctor Deena Padayachee, who attended to Brutus during his last year in Durban, provided some information by e-mail as well.



My re-evaluation of Brutus' poetry is primarily informed by a contextual analysis of his writing. This approach is based on the premise that the context within which a writer lives and functions is vital to a more informed understanding of his or her work. In line with this view, Brutus' writing is located within the broader environment in which he writes. Most importantly, these include the following contexts: biographical, historical and political, and literary. These provide important insights into the content of his poetry. In fact, John Williams even goes as far as to claim that a contextual reading of a poem offers "the most helpful guide to a poem's meaning" (ix).

In addition, such an approach offers valuable insights into a technical understanding of a poem. This is especially relevant in relation to Brutus, who acknowledges being influenced at various times by writers from different periods, in particular those from the Romantic, Victorian and modernist periods. These periods, as will be discussed in some detail in the

dissertation, are marked by distinct differences in form. This is an additional reason why a contextual approach is applied in my dissertation. As Williams observes, “[i]t combines a sense of a poem’s context with the ability to analyse it technically ...” (ix).

\*\*\*

The biographical context in which Brutus writes is at the centre of my dissertation. There is much evidence which supports the merits of such a reading of poetry. An example is Jerome J. McGann’s study of the poetry of the Romantic poet Lord Byron (1788-1824). He cites the poem “On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year” (Byron 112) to illustrate how a degree of knowledge of the life of a writer allows a more informed understanding of his or her poetry. He contends that “little less than an awareness of Byron’s entire career in literature, in love, and in politics will suffice if the poem is to be understood” (McGann 347-348). This does not mean, of course, that this particular poem cannot be appreciated at all in the absence of such background knowledge. However, an appreciation of the poem will certainly be enhanced if the reader possesses some background knowledge of Byron’s life.

Even an appreciation of a poem like Byron’s “Go – Triumph Securely”, which is essentially about a lover who is betrayed, is enriched considerably by background information. The poem states in the first stanza: “Go – triumph securely – the treacherous vow/*Thou* hast broken *I* keep but too faithfully now,/But never again shall thou be to my heart/What thou wert – what I fear for a moment thou *art*” (Byron, *Vol III* 16; emphasis in the original). Knowing that the poem concerns Byron’s disintegrating relationship with Lady Caroline



Lamb, a married woman (Crane 34-35), adds another layer of understanding to the poem.<sup>24</sup> In fact, McGann even contends that, without such knowledge, “the force of the poetic statement would ... be drastically altered, diminished, even perhaps misrepresented” (353). He argues persuasively:

The case of this Byron poem is of course particular and special, but it represents a situation we encounter quite frequently in reading poetry. A great deal of verse will simply escape one’s comprehension at an elementary statement level unless certain contextual facts are clear to the reader. (McGann 354)

For much the same reason, Lindfors comes out in favour of the importance of considering a writer’s work within a biographical context. He rightly argues that “[a]lthough verbal constructs may be fascinating to contemplate solely for their own sake, they remain human products, and as such, cannot be comprehended fully until they have been traced back to a specific human source in a particular human environment” (*Blind* vii-viii). He even goes as far as to argue that the text “is so completely conditioned by its shaping context that it cannot be adequately grasped and appreciated without some knowledge of its creator and the circumstances that prompted its creation” (viii). While this is an overly deterministic view of the influence of the writer’s environment on his or her writing, it does correctly refocus attention on the importance of some knowledge of the writer’s background in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the work in question. Lindfors is thus justified in suggesting that such information may enable the reader to “enter the world of the author more completely and make better sense of what he finds there” (viii).

---

<sup>24</sup> McGann notes that the poem was originally published in 1844 with the title “To – “ (349). In his collection of Byron’s poetry, he helpfully uses the dedication “To Lady Caroline Lamb” as the title, which provides the reader with vital contextual information about the poem (Byron, *Vol III* vii; 16).

In Brutus' case, this argument is particularly compelling. The content of his poetry often corresponds closely to specific events in his life. Ojaide notices this and observes that "[t]here is a close correlation between the poetic personality and the man in Brutus's poetry" ("Troubadour" 56). In response to a question, Brutus even tells Lewis that autobiographies and memoirs "cover much the same ground" as he does in his poetry ("Speaking" 154). O.R. Dathorne arrives at a similar conclusion about Brutus' poetry, and even claims that "Brutus the man and Brutus the poet are one and the same ..." (214). While this is an oversimplification, some background knowledge of Brutus' life does indeed make possible a more nuanced understanding of Brutus' poetry. In fact, to ignore the relationship between Brutus and his writing may even lead to a distorted or incomplete understanding of a poem.

An example is his poem "Bury the Great Duke", a poignant description of an exchange between a father and his young son. It is based on Brutus' memories of how his father used to recite Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" at home (Lindfors, *Tapes* 40). In lines 9 to 12 of Brutus' poem, the son tries to win the attention – and, thereby, affection – of his father by correctly reciting the poem in full: "But I faltered while he waited/and until he turned away./And what other failures over ages/kept him turning half-away?" (*Simple* 108).

Having prior knowledge of the strained relationship between Brutus and his father enables the reader to gain a better understanding of the father's harsh response in the poem to the youngster's inability to recite Tennyson's ode fluently. There are numerous other examples where some knowledge of Brutus' life will increase access to his poetry and make possible a more complete understanding of the text. It is for this reason that a biographical context occupies such a central place in my analysis of his poetry.

\*\*\*

However, constructing an outline of Brutus' life in order to provide such a framework is fraught with difficulties. There are no book-length biographies of Brutus, nor does he publish any extended autobiographical material. In fact, in a letter to Mphahlele in November 1970 he refers to his ambivalence towards what he describes as "the mess of autobiographical material" (Manganyi and Attwell 200). He makes a similar point in October 1974. "I shrink from the notion of autobiography," he states. "One might do fragments if nothing else" (Lindfors, *Tapes* 123).

To complicate matters further, Brutus sometimes gives contradictory accounts or details of certain events in his life. For example, at one point he says his father died in Wellington, but later refers in the very same account to the location as Worcester (Lindfors, *Tapes* 37, 43). Brutus also sometimes misremembers dates. For instance, in September 1974 he mistakenly recalls the date of his banning order as around December 1962 (48) when elsewhere he refers to the date on more than one occasion as October 1961 (115; Sustar 41). Nevertheless, despite these factual discrepancies, various sources exist which provide enough material to construct a sufficiently detailed account of Brutus' life (or, at least, of a substantial part of it).

The earliest first-hand account of his life is a paper he delivered at the African Scandinavian Writers' Conference in Sweden in February 1967, entitled "Childhood Reminiscences" (92-98). Later the same year he provided details of his incarceration on Robben Island in an article in *Christian Action* ("Robben Island" 14-17), a quarterly publication of the London-based organisation of the same name which strove to involve the church in social issues (43). In 1973 Brutus provided important insights into his writing in a lecture at the University of

Wisconsin-Madison in the USA (“Poetry” 1-10). He filled in a few more gaps in 1987 in the introduction to a new edition of his collection *Salutes and Censures* (“Introduction” 363-367) and in an article in *Contemporary Authors: Autobiographical Series* in 1991 (“Dennis” 53-64).<sup>25</sup>

The first major interview with Brutus was conducted in October 1966 by Pieterse (“Dennis” 53-61). Lindfors also provides important material in two interviews, one conducted in February 1970 (Lindfors et al 25-36) and the other in August 1970 (“Stubborn” 44-55). Interviews published by E. Ethelbert Miller in 1975 (42-55), Renato Berger in 1980 (73-78) and William E. Thompson in 1983 (69-77) provide useful biographical details, too. There are references as well to various events in Brutus’ life in Barnett’s *A Vision of Order* (41-112) and in Alvarez-Pereyre’s *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa* (130-169).

Interviews with Brutus during the early 1990s by Kevin Goddard (66-78), Stephen Gray (*Indaba* 153-157) and Geoffrey V. Davis and Holger G. Ehling (101-110) shed further light on Brutus’ life and views. However, it is only in 1995 that the first detailed account of Brutus’ life appears. McLuckie’s chapter “A Biographical Introduction to Dennis Brutus’ Art and Activism”, in *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*, provides the most informative account up to that point of Brutus’ personal and literary life (1-40).

Lewis’ interview with Brutus between March and May 2000, which was published in 2006 (“Speaking” 153-159), and Van Wyk’s in December 2000, which was published the following year, provide much new information as well. Brutus later elaborates at some length on his life and poetry in several interviews conducted by Sustar between April 2004 and

---

<sup>25</sup> An extended version of this essay was published two years later as “Constellations of Exile” in the anthology *Echoes of the Sunbird* (Burness 24-34).

November 2005 (these were published in *Poetry and Protest* in 2006). Lindfors, once again, adds to the body of knowledge about Brutus with *The Dennis Brutus Tapes* in 2011 (even though, as noted previously, the last recording was made in 1975). These texts provide the core material which enabled me to construct a fairly detailed biographical context for Brutus' poetry.

\*\*\*

A background knowledge and understanding of the historical and political context in which a poet writes is vital to a more informed understanding of his or her poetry as well. Tom Paulin, the editor of *The Faber Book of Political Verse*, makes a convincing argument in support of such a view in his introduction to the anthology. Citing the poets John Milton and John Dryden as examples, he submits that their political beliefs are “fundamental to their poems and our reading is enriched by a knowledge of those beliefs and an understanding of the social experience which helped to form them” (Paulin 17). He takes issue with the view that poems exist “in a timeless vacuum or a soundproof museum, and that poets are gifted with an ability to hold themselves above history, rather like skylarks or weather satellites” – a misplaced belief, he suggests, only possible in Western democracies (17). However, he goes on to argue, this is certainly not possible in politically repressive societies: “... [I]n some societies – particularly totalitarian ones – history is a more or less inescapable condition” (17).

In Brutus' case, a consideration of the historical and political context in which he writes is equally pertinent. He started writing during a particularly turbulent period in South Africa's history. The NP became South Africa's ruling party just a year after he graduated from the

University of Fort Hare. Over the next few decades, it systematically passed a range of legislation which disenfranchised all black people and racially discriminated against them in all spheres of life – a system of government which became known as apartheid. While a schoolteacher in Port Elizabeth, Brutus gradually became involved in opposing the injustice and inequalities which were enforced under apartheid. In retaliation, the government banned and eventually imprisoned him. Brutus' political activities, and the repressive measures used to silence him, inevitably informed his poetry.

Locating his writing in the historical and political context in which it is written is therefore absolutely central to a more in-depth understanding of Brutus' poetry. As Folli notes, his writing “can be fully understood only within the larger framework of the social circumstances in which it found its being, and of the political reality, the Apartheid system, which fostered it. It is the product of a particular history, inevitably bearing the stamp of its historical era, voicing the frustrations and tensions of the oppressed majority” (71). Like Paulin, the South African poet Jeremy Cronin, too, rejects “a particular kind of academic practice where one confronts literature as something isolated, examinable in its own right and to be removed from its context” (S. Gardner 15).<sup>26</sup> Such an approach is ahistorical and prevents a more informed understanding and appreciation of a writer's work. In order to enhance an understanding of Brutus' poetry, therefore, my dissertation routinely situates his writing in its various historical and political contexts.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>26</sup> Paulin refers dismissively to an ahistorical school of literary criticism which once dominated literary studies, particularly in the USA (15, 17). His comment is obviously directed at New Criticism, which regards the text as the sole focus of critical attention and rejects all other factors as extraneous.

In addition to a contextual reading of Brutus' poetry, my dissertation also draws on psychoanalysis to interpret his work. The main reason for doing so is because Brutus' life is marked by a constant sense of displacement. This is evident from the poetry he wrote while he lived in South Africa, his writing in exile and in the verse he wrote after February 1990 when he initially chose not to return to South Africa permanently when it was legally possible to do so. His displacement is revealed by the particular poetic personae that he uses during these periods – the troubadour, the exile and the cosmopolitan – and by the themes which recur in his writing, especially those of loss and dislocation.

Sigmund Freud's notion of the "unheimlich" (which translates literally as "unhomely") offers a productive analytical tool with which to examine Brutus' life and poetry. In the sense that Freud uses the German term, it refers to something that is initially familiar but which subsequently becomes uncanny or frightening ("Uncanny" 219, 220). He attempts to understand how and why this occurs, and concludes that what is experienced as uncanny – the English translation which is preferred by his translator Alix Strachey – "can be traced back without exception to something familiar that has been repressed" (247).

However, it is not the way Freud uses the term "unheimlich" which applies to Brutus so much as the way it is later elaborated by Homi K. Bhabha. The primary interest of the post-colonial studies theorist in this concept is in the sense of estrangement which is embedded in it, hence his preference for the more literal translation of "unheimlich" as "unhomely" ("World" 141) – a choice with which I agree and, consequently, adopt in my dissertation. Bhabha also parts ways with Freud's use of the term in another significant respect: he shifts it from the domain of the psychoanalytical to the political.

This elaboration provides an important conceptual tool with which to analyse the poetry – and life – of Brutus. It makes it possible to identify links among the various poetic personae that he uses and to identify common features in the themes of his poetry. I argue that Brutus’ sense of unhomeliness is at the centre of most of his poetry: it provides a continuous link between his early poetry in South Africa, his poetry in exile and his post-1990 poetry. Throughout all these periods, there is an underlying sense of dislocation and alienation.

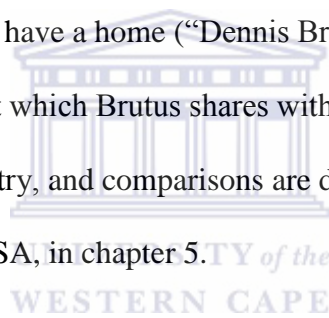
For this reason, the title of my dissertation includes the phrase “out of place”. This is, of course, a common English expression which, in one sense, refers to someone or something that is not in “suitable, appropriate, or customary surroundings” (*Collins* 1183). This applies to Brutus in many ways. Perhaps most importantly, he does not really feel at home anywhere – not in apartheid South Africa; not in exile; and also not in post-1990 South Africa. I attempt to illustrate this in chapters 2, 5 and 7, and offer reasons – primarily, though not exclusively, of a political nature – to explain Brutus’ profound sense of disconnectedness from the places in which he lives.

The literary scholar and post-colonial studies theorist Edward W. Said, who was born in 1935 in what was then Palestine but spent most of his life in the USA, also uses the phrase “out of place” as the title of his memoir. He writes at the beginning of *Out of Place* that “the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place” (3). This feeling initially grows out of his English first name, his uncertainty about whether his first language was Arabic or English, and the American links of his parents (his father was an American citizen and his mother attended an American missionary school) (3, 4, 8, 13).



His sense of dislocation becomes even more pronounced when he is forced to leave West Jerusalem in 1948 at the age of 12 after the state of Israel is established. A disconcerting experience at school in the USA further reinforces his sense of constantly being an outsider (248). When he reflects on his life in the USA many decades later, he refers with clear distress to his continued disorientation and sense of loss. “To this day,” he declares in his memoir, “I still feel that I am away from home, ludicrous as that may sound” (222).

Like Said, Brutus too experiences a sense of discomfort and of being out of place even though he spent many decades in the USA. When he is asked during a South African television interview in 2003 whether he regards the USA as home, he immediately says “Nope” and adds that he does not have a home (“Dennis Brutus: I Am a Rebel”). Because of this intense sense of displacement which Brutus shares with Said, the title of Said’s memoir is borrowed to describe Brutus’ poetry, and comparisons are drawn between their experiences in exile, and specifically in the USA, in chapter 5.



However, the phrase “out of place” does not apply to Brutus in a geographical sense only. He is also out of place in another significant way: he does not subscribe to any particular political ideology, even though he is active in various political formations, both in South Africa and abroad. As he declares in response to a newspaper article which refers to him as a Trotskyist, he does not follow any particular individuals, but subscribes to ideas instead (Letter). For the same reason, he does not uncritically support any political organisations. For instance, even though he is active in the underground activities of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa during the early 1960s, he does not unquestioningly support the organisation and often clashed with it politically (this is discussed in chapter 5).

Sustar and Karim believe that Brutus' commitment to what they term "internationalism" is at the centre of his differences with the ANC. They contend that there is "an irreconcilable difference between the internationalism that Brutus has always upheld and the African National Congress's [sic] ... view of national liberation in South Africa – the achievement of a non-racial government – as an end in itself" (17). While this may indeed be true, it does not entirely explain Brutus' acrimonious relationship with the ANC. At the root of these differences is arguably another reason: Brutus is unwilling to surrender his independence either as a political activist or as an intellectual. In other words, he does not want to be confined to a particular political place.

When the NP government refuses to recognise his full humanity, and tries to curb his political activities against apartheid, he resists and says: "I couldn't be kept in my place" (Lindfors, "Somehow" 55). Similarly, he resists attempts by the ANC to limit his independent-mindedness. Mzamane, a South African writer aligned to the ANC in exile, notes that while "the discipline of a central movement" emerges after the ANC's consultative conference in Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1969, "[p]eople like Dennis Brutus were not part of that, ... and I doubt, [at] that point in time, they would have allowed themselves to be ... directed centrally" (telephonic interview, 18 Feb. 2013). It is a stance that Brutus maintains for the rest of his life. In recognition of Brutus' life-long assertion of his political independence, Ashwin Desai colourfully though accurately describes him as a "non-ist, this jack out of the box" (1). Brutus' refusal to align himself to any one political party or ideology is probably a major reason for his being "out of place".

\*\*\*

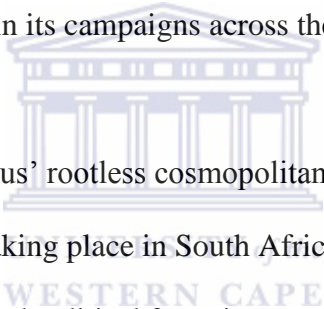
Another important aspect of my dissertation is how Brutus responds to his unhomeliness. A key part of my argument is that he redefines his sense of self during different periods of his life, and I identify at least three important changes: initially, while in South Africa, he possesses the essential attributes of a patriot; then, in exile, he evolves into a rooted cosmopolitan (in which place, or more specifically South Africa, continues to occupy a central role); and, finally, he becomes a rootless cosmopolitan (in which he attempts, with varying degrees of success, to minimise the role of place in his sense of identity).

While still in South Africa, his poetry expresses core sentiments associated with patriotism – a close identification with, and affection for, a particular country. This love for his homeland is reflected in many of his early poems. However, because he is denied full civil and human rights by the South African government, he begins to reassess his attachment to South Africa and starts to think of himself as a citizen of the world (Lindfors, “Somehow” 54). Other reasons for this expanded identity probably include his exposure at high school and as a member of the Teachers’ League of South Africa (TLSA) to various political theories of internationalism which were then gaining traction.

However, it is only in exile that he really develops a more expansive sense of self. The reasons behind this transition are varied and complex, but arguably include a desire to belong to a new community after being rejected by apartheid South Africa. He then begins to resemble what post-colonial studies theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah describes as a rooted cosmopolitan (“Cosmopolitan” 622). Now Brutus is no longer concerned exclusively with South Africa’s racial policies, but with political and economic injustice elsewhere in the world as well. Despite this, South Africa still remains at the centre of his poetry and political

activities in exile. As he tells Lindfors in an interview, he believes he can be most effective politically in a situation that he knows best (“Somehow” 55).

However, as a result of his growing disillusionment with the political and economic changes in South Africa after 1990, another significant change subsequently takes place in Brutus’ identity. He attempts to create further emotional and political distance between himself and South Africa, and turns from being a rooted cosmopolitan into a rootless cosmopolitan. In other words, largely in response to his disappointment in post-1990 South Africa, he tries to free himself from what Mphahlele refers to as “the tyranny of place” (“Exile” 37; *Afrika* 20). As part of this process, Brutus becomes involved in the World Social Forum (WSF) and increasingly begins to participate in its campaigns across the world for global justice.



Another major reason behind Brutus’ rootless cosmopolitanism is that, at the same time as the post-1990 negotiations were taking place in South Africa, globalisation was becoming an increasingly powerful economic and political force in many parts of the world. As Brutus recognises, “just at the time when we had discarded apartheid unfortunately, we moved into a new era dominated by the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the World Bank” (Van Wyk 213). He explains this as follows in an interview:

... [N]ational boundaries are dissolving, ... we are now countries where people move freely, barriers have disappeared and the anticipation is that come the next millennium, we’re going to be in a very different world in which the barriers that existed up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that those barriers are going to disappear. Connected with that, is the notion that we are now in a global order – post-Cold War now that we’ve passed the old bi-polar struggles of two superpowers – we’re in a world in

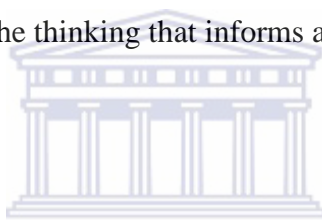
which there is a new global agenda: economic and political and ideological. (Nichols 16)

However, it is essential to note that the different phases in Brutus' identity cannot be rigidly demarcated into separate periods; traces of patriotism and cosmopolitanism can be detected in each of the three periods into which my dissertation separates his life. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive and, at times, co-exist within the same period. Tracking this transformation, and analysing how and why Brutus redefines his identity, is one of the main themes of my dissertation. My central argument is that this process is a response to his unhomeliness; it is an attempt, whether consciously or otherwise, to regain and retain agency over his life.



The structure of my dissertation combines both a chronological and a thematic approach. In terms of its chronology, the chapters are grouped into three sections. The two chapters in the first section (which cover the period 1924 to 1966) deal with the early years of Brutus' life and the poetry he writes during this period, and ends when he leaves South Africa on an exit permit in 1966. The three chapters in the second section (chapters 3 to 5) focus on his lengthy period in exile, initially in the UK and subsequently in the USA, between 1966 and 1990. The two chapters in the third section (chapters 6 and 7) deal with the period after Brutus is legally able to return to South Africa after the NP government repeals various legal restrictions on certain individuals and organisations (1990-2009).

The three periods into which the dissertation separates Brutus' life correspond broadly to shifts in his poetic personae and changes in both the content and the form of his poetry. The poetic personae he generally uses during these periods are the troubadour, the exile and the cosmopolitan. In his earliest poetry, he employs the persona of the troubadour. Chapter 1 outlines the reasons why he uses this medieval figure, and is the dominant theme of section 1 of the dissertation. Most importantly, Brutus identifies with the following characteristics that he associates with the troubadour: the fighter, the lover and the poet. Assuming the persona of a European figure from the Middle Ages associated with romance is fraught with tensions and contradictions. However, despite it being problematic in many ways, on both cultural and political grounds, an assessment of Brutus' early poetry cannot ignore the presence of the troubadour. It is a vital aspect of the thinking that informs and inspires his work during the early 1960s.

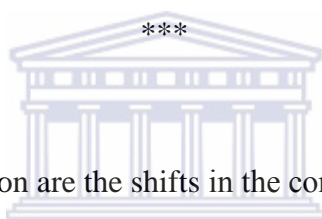


After he leaves South Africa, Brutus initially resists adopting the persona of the exile. In line with his later reservations about a patriotic attachment to a particular country, he regards the employment of such a persona as dishonest (Lindfors, "Somehow" 55). However, the voice of the exile is indisputably present in much of the poetry he writes in the UK and in the USA. Loss and longing often mark the poetry written during this period of his life, and are illustrated extensively in chapter 3.

A more cosmopolitan identity begins to emerge in exile. At first, this is in the form of a rooted cosmopolitanism, and is discussed in chapter 3. Although he becomes involved in various global justice campaigns during this period, he remains a committed anti-apartheid activist and his poetry continues to indicate that his attention stays focused on South Africa.

After 1990, for reasons referred to earlier, this becomes transformed into a rootless cosmopolitanism, which is a key focus of chapter 7.

However, there is not a strict convergence between chronology and the different poetic personae which Brutus uses during these three periods. For instance, he continues to use the persona of the troubadour occasionally while in exile. And, as noted, he begins to lay claim to a cosmopolitan identity in both his poetry and his public statements soon after he goes into exile (in fact, Brutus describes this development as a response to the South African state's rejection of him as a citizen under apartheid).



Other key themes of my dissertation are the shifts in the content and form of Brutus' poetry over the course of his writing career. While his poetry does address both personal and political concerns as early as the 1950s, the tone and style that he employs to do so change significantly in later years. His early poetry is, in general, gentle and restrained; later, however, his poetry becomes more declamatory and, at times, is even deliberately used as a tool of political mobilisation.

As part of my focus on the content and form of Brutus' poetry, my dissertation examines his use of the lyric form. Although he uses it throughout most of his writing career, he never explicitly spells out what attracts him to it. I argue that he is attracted to the lyric because it offers him a personal mode of expression: its highly individualistic and reflective voice appeals to him. In the later years of his exile, the tone of his lyric poetry shifts away from its contemplative nature and becomes more strident and exhortatory. Yet he never completely

abandons the lyric mode; in fact, even in some of his most overtly political poetry, his individual voice remains fairly distinctive. My dissertation tracks his use of the lyric poem in each of the three sections, and examines how it evolves during the three periods identified.

In chapters 4 and 6, comparisons are made with similar attempts by Cronin and fellow South African poet Ingrid de Kok to use the lyric form in a different way. While they, too, are aware of the constraints of the lyric form, they continue to use its personal voice to address public concerns. Both of them, like Brutus, refuse to recognise a rigid distinction between the private and the public. Chapters 4 and 6 discuss some of their attempts to combine the personal and the political in their lyric poetry.

The influence of other poets on Brutus' use of the lyric form is also discussed in several chapters. The role of poets from the traditional English literary canon, especially poets from the Romantic and Victorian periods, is discussed in chapters 1 and 2. In particular, chapter 2 traces aspects of the poetry of Wordsworth, Hopkins and John Donne visible in Brutus' verse. The impacts of Ezra Pound's work on the troubadour and Tennyson's poetry on knights are discussed in chapter 1 as well. W.H. Auden's ability to use the same image for both a private and a political purpose – addressing “the private statement to a particular individual, while the same statement is operating at a public level and making a larger, perhaps political statement” (Goddard 71-72) – is discussed in chapter 1, too.

Chapter 4 discusses the influence of traditional Chinese poetry and the writing of former Chinese leader Mao Zedong on Brutus. Following their example, his writing becomes even more direct and concise. Another major part of this chapter examines the similarities between Brutus' work and the anti-poetry which emerged after World War II. While Brutus never



specifically refers to the writing of the anti-poets, there are many common features between their writing and the content and form of his poetry from the late 1980s. The poetry of Nicanor Parra and Pablo Neruda are singled out for discussion in this regard. Although Czeslaw Milosz is not part of the anti-poetry movement, some of his writing nevertheless does share some of its features. For this reason, chapter 4 includes a discussion of his poetry along with the work of Parra and Neruda.

Chapter 5 examines the writing of several African-American poets. It includes the poetry of Langston Hughes, who was part of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s, and the poetry of Etheridge Knight, Don L. Lee and Nikki Giovanni, who emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as part of the Black Arts Movement. This chapter also provides an overview of the writing of the Black Consciousness poets in South Africa, notably Serote, Matthews and Mafika Pascal Gwala, who emerged at roughly the same time. In particular, chapter 5 focuses on the explicitly political nature of their writing and the directness of their language.

Chapter 6 discusses some of the poetry that Brutus later wrote with the specific intention that it be performed in public (rather than remain on the page, to be read in private by an individual). This context is generally ignored by most critics, with the result that many of his later poems are dismissed as political sloganeering. Chapter 6 argues that an assessment of some of Brutus' later poems must take into account the rhetorical devices employed in performance poetry, such as deliberate repetition, tone of voice, gestures and so forth. Literary critics have generally paid insufficient attention to these aspects of Brutus' writing. In order to contribute towards filling this gap in literary criticism on his poetry, my dissertation will explore these features in some detail.

**SECTION 1: THE EARLY YEARS (NOVEMBER 1924-JULY 1966)**

**CHAPTER 1: THE SOUTH AFRICAN TROUBADOUR**



**Fig. 4: Dennis Brutus in an undated photograph.**

**Photographer: Eli Weinberg/UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives.**

This chapter will focus on the presence of the troubadour in Brutus' poems, both as a motif and as a poetic persona, and examine why it features so prominently in his early writing. The troubadour, a composer of lyrical poetry during the Middle Ages in what is now Europe, is most visible in the poems he wrote before he left South Africa on a one-way exit permit in July 1966 and during the years immediately after his departure. In fact, after the publication of his first two collections, *Sirens Knuckles Boots* and *Letters to Martha and other Poems from a South African Prison*, he states quite categorically that “the troubadour image is important throughout my work” (Lindfors et al 28).

The first recorded comments by Brutus on why he is so attracted to the figure of the troubadour are contained in a radio interview in the UK in October 1966. He tells Pieterse, a fellow South African exiled poet: “It’s the combination of conflict and music in the troubadour which interests me – the man who can be both fighter and poet ...” (Pieterse, “Dennis” 55). A few months later, in February 1967, he elaborates on this remark at the African Scandinavian Writers’ Conference in Sweden:

In prison, going over the themes of my poetry with some bitterness in the empty hours there, I discovered something that linked my adult work with the beginnings of my literary knowledge: there recur in my poetry certain images from the language of chivalry – the troubadour, in particular. The notion of a stubborn, even foolish knight-errantry<sup>27</sup> on a quest, in the service of someone loved; this is an image which I use in my work, because it seems to me a true kind of shorthand for something which is part

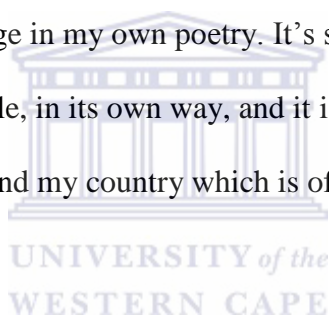
---

<sup>27</sup> The term “knight-errant” was first recorded in English in a fourteenth-century poem about chivalry in the King Arthur legend, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Burrow 30). According to Ian Watt, these were knights who roamed around in the twelfth century during the reign of Richard I of England and perhaps even as early as the tenth century (59).

of my life and my pursuit of justice in a menacing South Africa. (Brutus, “Childhood” 98)

Brutus explains the appeal of the image of the troubadour to him even more systematically a few years later during a poetry reading in the UK in August 1971: “He [the troubadour] was first of all a soldier, he was a knight, he went to battle; secondly, he made up music, poetry – he fought and he sang” (qtd. in Alvarez-Pereyre 137).<sup>28</sup> In addition, this time he expands on his notion of the medieval figure as a lover:

His third element was that he tended to have a reputation as a lover. And these are three elements which merge in my own poetry. It’s singing poetry; it’s poetry really which sings people to battle, in its own way, and it is about a permanent love affair, a relationship between me and my country which is often described in male-female terms. (137)



These three aspects broadly correspond to historical accounts of the troubadours, who first emerged around 1100 in what is today known as France (Zumthor 16).<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, the troubadours were indeed poets who performed their compositions. In fact, according to Ruth Harvey, the word “troubadour” is derived from the Latin word “trobare” (16), which

---

<sup>28</sup> More than three decades later, Brutus expresses a similar view. In an interview in his last collection of poems, *Leafdrift*, he tells Lamont B. Steptoe: “... [T]he troubadour is someone of course who composes poetry but he’s also a fighter. He goes to war and he travels. So for me it made sense to combine those in the image of the troubadour” (Steptoe, “Interview” 212).

<sup>29</sup> Contrary to the general assumption, however, the troubadours did not appear for the first time in the former southeastern province of France known as Provence. The earliest troubadours were from Poitou (a former province in western France) and Gascony, an area in the former southwestern province of Guyenne and Gascony (Gaunt and Kay 2). The troubadours only appeared in Provence after the middle of the twelfth century (3). Secondly, in another important departure from earlier convention, more recent scholars like Frede Jensen now refer to the language used by the first troubadours as Occitan (349). This was spoken in Occitania, an area which roughly corresponds to what is today the south of France.

means “to invent” (or, in this context, to compose).<sup>30</sup> More specifically, troubadours were composers mainly of lyric poetry (Tabor 350).<sup>31</sup> For this reason, Harvey emphasises that the word “troubadour” has “the fairly specialised sense of a man who composed lyric poetry” (16).<sup>32</sup>

Another characteristic closely associated with the troubadours is that they travelled widely to perform their compositions, both in the south of France and in neighbouring European countries such as Spain and Italy. Some troubadours even went as far as the Balkan Peninsula and right up to England. As H.J. Chaytor points out, “a wandering life and a desire for change of scene is characteristic of the class” (12). As a wandering minstrel, Brutus is therefore justified in identifying with the troubadour: he, too, was a composer of lyric poetry and travelled widely through South Africa while participating in anti-apartheid activities.

Brutus’ notion of the troubadour as a lover is also, in broad terms, historically accurate. As Chaytor notes, “the theme which is predominant and in which real originality was shown, is love. The troubadours were the first lyric poets in medieval Europe to deal exhaustively with this subject” (14). Geoffrey Brereton, too, identifies love as the dominant theme in the lyrics of the troubadours (30) as do, more recently, Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (6). On the other hand, Catherine Leglu points out that love was by no means the only subject of the

---

<sup>30</sup> While Mark Strand and Eavan Boland cite the same meaning of the word “troubadour”, they trace its origin to the Latin verb “trobar” (23). Earlier scholars give slightly different explanations. C.J. Tabor, for instance, traces the origins of the word “troubadour” to the Latin word “turbare” (350). Nevertheless, despite differences on the origins of the word, there is general agreement that the original troubadours were composers of lyrical poetry.

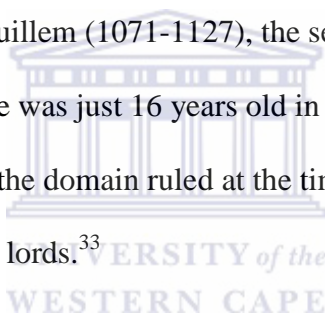
<sup>31</sup> There is no consensus on a definition of lyric poetry, but M.H. Abrams provides a useful description of it as “any fairly short, nonnarrative poem representing a speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling” (97). Similarly, David Lindley notes that “many lyrics are short, many speak of heightened feeling in a poetic present and are uttered by a voice in the first person” (4). Dirk Klopper, too, describes lyric poetry as “an introspective and self-reflexive form that seeks to give direct voice to individual consciousness” (“Lyric” 587).

<sup>32</sup> There were relatively few trobairitz (female troubadours). Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner estimates the total at just 21 (204). My dissertation will be confined to male troubadours in view of the fact that they formed the basis of Brutus’ notions of the troubadour.

troubadours; they also wrote political, didactic, satirical or moralising poetry (47).

Nevertheless, despite this important qualification, the available evidence provides sufficient grounds to support Brutus' notion that love is a central preoccupation of the writing of the troubadours.

However, his view of the troubadour does deviate in one vital respect from historical records – or, at the very least, is an oversimplified characterisation. Not all troubadours were knights, as he generally depicts them. According to Chaytor, the lyrics of the troubadours were initially a form of poetry that was “essentially aristocratic, intended for nobles and for courts, appealing but rarely to the middle classes and to the common people not at all” (10). In fact, the first known troubadour was Guillem (1071-1127), the seventh Count of Poitou and ninth Duke of Aquitaine (Bond 246). He was just 16 years old in 1087 when he inherited a third of France – an area even larger than the domain ruled at the time by the French king (Lindsay 3-4). Other troubadours were feudal lords.<sup>33</sup>

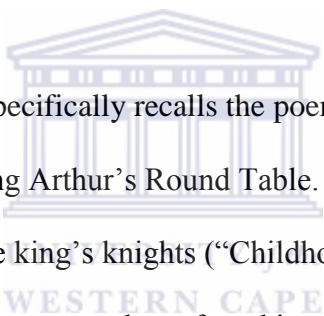


The knights, by contrast, were mostly vassals who served their lords as mounted soldiers, armed with a helmet, a shield, a sword and a lance (Painter 12). According to Jean Richard, these vassals were “simple knights dependent on a small fief”, whose main duty was to assist their lords to defend themselves and their honour (6, 7). In addition, when the lord responded to a summons from a count, duke or king, it was these vassals who made up his military contingent. In exchange for performing this role, the lord usually gave the knight a piece of land to support himself, his horse and his equipment. Richard further points out that the knights occupied a position just one stratum above the peasantry in feudal France (7).

---

<sup>33</sup> Despite the origins of the troubadours in the aristocracy, it is worth noting that some troubadours were members of the clergy (Alfonsi 34; Kay 111) or even clerks (Zumthor 14).

Perhaps Brutus' conflation of troubadours and knights was influenced by the poems and stories told or read to him and his siblings by his mother during his childhood. He recalls that she often did so in order to pass the time until her husband came home at night. He further speculates that, because his mother was a schoolteacher, another possible motive behind these story-telling and poetry-reciting sessions was the aspiration to improve her children's education ("Childhood" 97).<sup>34</sup> She even read poetry to the children on Sunday afternoons (Lindfors, *Tapes* 128). It was probably during one of these occasions that Brutus, the second youngest of four children, first came to hear about the world of the knights.<sup>35</sup> It was presumably during this period that he became enchanted by accounts of mounted warriors who carried out heroic exploits.



In an essay on his childhood, he specifically recalls the poems of the Victorian poet Tennyson (1809-1892) on the legends of King Arthur's Round Table. In particular, he remembers "Sir Galahad", a poem about one of the king's knights ("Childhood" 98). The first four lines give an indication of why the young Brutus may have found it so enthralling: "My good blade carves the casques of men/, My tough lance thrusteth sure,/My strength is as the strength of ten/Because my heart is pure ..." (Tennyson, *Poems* 102). Many years later, Brutus recounts a poignant memory of this poem from his childhood: "... [A]nother image came to me; my mother, in the afternoon sunlight, reading of Sir Galahad's search for light and beauty, with the sunlight falling on the page, and on the glowing colours of a picture of a knight entering a

---

<sup>34</sup> Brutus' mother was a teacher at the Henry Kaiser Memorial School (Lindfors, *Tapes* 42), the first school which he attended. She was active in various church and sports activities, too (Brutus, "Childhood" 94).

<sup>35</sup> Wilfred was the eldest, followed by Helen, Brutus and Catherine (Lindfors, *Tapes* 32).

dark forest” (“Childhood” 98).<sup>36</sup> That image of his mother – and its association with knights – clearly made a lasting impression on him.

Nevertheless, even though he may have wrongly equated troubadours exclusively with knights as a result of memories from his childhood, there were many instances when knights were indeed troubadours. In fact, according to Harvey, even poor knights sometimes became troubadours (16). And, when troubadours later emerged in Provence and in the north of France, knights from all ranks were “abundantly represented” (Bloch 307). Thus, even though not all troubadours were knights, Brutus’ conceptualisation of the troubadour was, in broad terms, in accordance with historical accounts, and became a powerful and defining influence on his early poetry.



The first poem in his debut collection *Sirens Knuckles Boots*, which was published in 1963, illustrates this well.<sup>37</sup> All three attributes which Brutus associates with the troubadour – the fighter, the singer and the lover – are present in this poem, “A troubadour, I traverse all my land”,<sup>38</sup> which appeared during the same year in the South African literary journal, *The Purple Renoster* (9):

A troubadour, I traverse all my land

---

<sup>36</sup> The books from which his mother read were either bought second-hand or given to her by white families for whom she washed laundry to supplement the family income when she was unable to teach (Lindfors, “Somehow” 44-45). She also read from books brought home once a week by Wilfred who, according to Brutus, attended “one of the few nonwhite schools at that time which had the vestiges of a library, often secondhand and cast-off books from white schools” (45).

<sup>37</sup> Brutus describes this poem as a sonnet and, more specifically, as a Petrarchan sonnet (Lindfors et al 27). However, even though the rhyme scheme of the two quatrains (abba/abba) is the same as in the Petrarchan sonnet, the rhyme scheme of the sestet (aba/aba) makes a significant departure from the original form, making it debatable whether Brutus’ poem can indeed be described as such.

<sup>38</sup> As indicated in my “Notes on MLA Style Manual”, the first line of an untitled poem will be treated as its title for ease of reference. Brutus often does not give specific titles to his poems “because I hope that the poem works sufficiently well that it doesn’t need a kind of signpost to it” (W. Thompson 69).



exploring all her wide-flung parts with zest  
 probing in motion sweeter far than rest  
 her secret thickets with an amorous hand:

and I have laughed, disdainingly those who banned  
 inquiry and movement, delighting in the test  
 of will when doomed by Saracened arrest,  
 choosing, like unarmed thumb, simply to stand.

Thus, quixoting till a cast-off of my land

I sing and fare, person to loved-one pressed  
 braced for this pressure, and the captor's hand  
 that snaps off service like a weathered strand:

no mistress-favour has adorned my breast  
 only the shadow of an arrow-brand. (*Sirens* 1)

Firstly, the speaker characterises himself as a fighter: he disregards personal danger in lines 5 and 6 (“disdainingly those who banned/inquiry and movement”) and fearlessly confronts the enemy in lines 6 and 7 (“delighting in the test/of will when doomed by Saracened arrest”). This is an indirect reference to Brutus’ defiance of the banning order imposed on him in October 1961, which restricted his ability to leave his house and to travel freely. Secondly, like the troubadour of Brutus’ imagination, the fighter sings during his confrontation with the enemy (line 10). And, thirdly, the speaker compares his love for his country to his love for a woman, and describes his travels as “exploring all her wide-flung parts” (line 2) and “probing .../her secret thickets with an amorous hand” (lines 3 and 4). However, his love is unrequited:

“no mistress-favour has adorned my breast” (line 13) – in Brutus’ case, because of the legally enforced system of apartheid which discriminates against him on racial grounds because he is classified as Coloured under the Population Registration Act of 1950.

The poem provides several other indications of how Brutus conceptualised the troubadour. At one level, “Saracened arrest” (line 7) refers to the armoured cars used by the South African police to quell anti-apartheid protests. For instance, they were used against those who gathered in Sharpeville outside Vereeniging in March 1960 to protest against pass laws which restricted the movements of people who were racially classified as African (Pogrand 133-134). However, on another level, the word “Saracened” can be read as a reference to the Sacarens, the inhabitants of the southwestern part of Asia known as Arabia, who forcibly occupied Jerusalem during the seventh century.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that Brutus employs the word “Saracen” in a pejorative sense in the poem: he uses it to refer to an intruder or invader. Years later, in a discussion of the poem, he explicitly mentions the Saracens and goes on to explain the dual meaning of the word that he was attempting to evoke: “... [T]here is a deliberate attempt there to play on both the Saracen in a medieval context and the modern Saracen as the armoured car of the South African police” (Pieterse, “Dennis” 58). In the same discussion, he even refers to “Saladin” (Salah-ed Din Yusuf), the sultan who fought against the crusaders when they tried to reclaim Jerusalem during the Third Crusade (1189-1192). Brutus was therefore drawing a direct comparison in the poem between the Saracens as foreign invaders and the NP government as colonial

---

<sup>39</sup> According to Anthony Pagden, the Saracens were believed to be descendants of the biblical figure Sarah, one of the wives of Abraham (172). Andrew Wheatcroft refers to this supposition as well, but adds two other possible explanations: one, that the word “Saracen” was based on a misreading of the word “Syringae” (Syrians) as “Saraceni”, or, two, that it was related to the Bani Sari, an Arab Bedouin group (54). The word subsequently came to be used to describe the inhabitants of Arabia and, by extension, all Muslims. In contrast, Syed Amir Ali refers to speculation that the word “Sacareni” is derived either from the Arabic words “Sahara” (desert) and “nashin” (dwellers) or from the Arabic word “Sharkiin” (eastern) (4).

occupiers of South Africa. This suggests a view of the troubadour as a fearless fighter engaged in a deadly battle in pursuit of a just cause. Such a reading is supported by the image of an “unarmed thumb”, which is a hand sign used by supporters of the ANC, then one of the main political formations of the anti-apartheid movement.

There is another important indication in the poem of how Brutus views the troubadour. He uses the word “quixoting” in the opening line of the sestet, a verb which is obviously based on the name of the central character in Miguel de Cervantes’ 1605 novel, *The Adventures of Don Quixote de La Mancha*. In broad terms, the novel is about a retired member of the Spanish nobility who decides to become a knight and roams around the country on horseback in pursuit of various causes, accompanied by his faithful servant Sancho Panza. As Anthony J. Cascardi notes, the novel has since “become reduced in the popular mind to the pencil-thin profile of its principal character, an errant knight of La Mancha seen tilting at windmills” (1). Brutus appears to share this characterisation of Quixote as a comic figure engaged in a seemingly absurd and futile quest. In his interview with Pieterse in 1966, he states:

... [T]here is an element of laughter in my work; it may be that I am engaged in a fight but at the same time I find a certain delight in it. I enjoy the fight; and this is where the laughter and the music, the gaiety and the humour come in. I can laugh at myself and see myself as a little like Don Quixote, tilting at windmills or, if you like, fighting a losing battle. (Pieterse, “Dennis” 55)

Decades later, in an interview with his editor Lamont B. Steptoe in 2004, Brutus still draws comparisons between himself and Quixote, “the guy who fights hopeless battles” (“Interview” 212). However, such comments must not be taken at face value. Brutus was a

committed political activist who participated in various campaigns in the struggle to achieve a more just and equitable society in South Africa. It is unlikely he would have been involved in these activities if he truly believed there was no prospect of victory. And, as he justifiably claims in the interview with Steptoe, many of his campaigns were indeed successful: “The odd thing is of all the people I know who have campaigned, I can probably count more successes than most of them ...” (212). These include, most notably, ensuring South Africa’s exclusion from the Olympic Games for the first time in 1964 (Hain 47) and its eventual expulsion from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1970 (Sustar 138).

Nor does the facetiousness of comparing himself with Quixote hold for his poetry either. As Pieterse points out: “I’d like to say that I think you do yourself an injustice – not a losing battle, certainly that is not the tenor, the resonance of your verse” (“Dennis” 55). In fact, Brutus may resemble Quixote in quite a different sense. Ian Watt points out that, during the Romantic period at the end of the eighteenth century, certain writers in England, France and Germany transformed Quixote from a buffoon-like figure into “a pure and genuine fighter for social equality and for an ideal” (224). For instance, Wordsworth refers with some admiration in Book Five (lines 59 and 60) of his autobiographical poem “The Prelude” to “The famous history of the errant knight/Recorded by Cervantes” (*Prelude* 170).

Contemporary writers have advocated a more nuanced reading of *Don Quixote* as well. The Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, for instance, observes in his foreword to an edition of the novel published in 1986 that “in spite of his recurrent disasters as a do-gooder, [Quixote] never fails in his faith in the ideal of justice” (xxvi). There is certainly sufficient evidence in the novel for such an interpretation. For example, Quixote proclaims that “the order of



**Fig. 5: Dennis Brutus in the back row (fourth from left) of an undated photograph with fellow anti-apartheid activists including Yusuf Cachalia (second from left) and Wolfie Kodesh (third from left). Seated in front are J.B. Marks (second from left) and Amy Thornton (fourth from left).**

**Photographer: Eli Weinberg/UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives.**

knight-errantry was first instituted to defend damsels, protect widows, and succour the needy and the fatherless” (Cervantes 80).

Nevertheless, the temptation must be resisted to read too much into a single reference to Quixote in “A troubadour, I traverse all my land”. What appeals to Brutus most about Quixote, by his own admission, is that he regards Cervantes’ character as “a variation on the troubadour idea” (Pieterse, “Dennis” 55). In his view, “[t]he man who goes ‘tilting with windmills’ is not very much different from the troubadour, minstrel or el trovatore – I think this is the same thing – the man who travelled across Europe, fighting and loving and singing” (55). It is these contradictory elements in Quixote which attract Brutus – more than the popular image of Quixote as a ridiculous figure engaged in a futile mission – and which he believes are present in the troubadour as well. Further evidence of the validity of such an interpretation is provided in a later poem, “Quixote”, written in December 1987 (*The Gar* 16). While Brutus still views Quixote as “vaguely absurd”, at the same time he recognises that he is “faintly heroic” (line 3). In fact, he declares that Cervantes’ character “will always stand as my ideogram/for self-awareness” (lines 4-5).

In his discussion with Pieterse about “A troubadour, I traverse all my land”, Brutus also refers to Tennyson’s ballad, “The Lady of Shalott”. A few years later, in a tape recording about his family background in 1974, he further recalls how his father used to recite this poem at home during his childhood (Lindfors, *Tapes* 35, 40).<sup>40</sup> Tennyson’s poem is about a mysterious woman who is imprisoned on an island somewhere near Camelot, the legendary court of King Arthur (*Poems* 26). It is this image of a woman in distress that Brutus is trying

---

<sup>40</sup> As noted earlier, Brutus also recalls how his father used to recite Tennyson’s “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 40). He refers to this poem as well in an interview with Lindfors (“Somehow” 44). He further recounts how he unsuccessfully tried to recite it to his father in his poem “Bury the Great Duke” (*Simple* 108).

to evoke in his own poem; he recasts her as “a mistress, a beloved, who sits sewing in a castle” (Lindfors et al 28). Drawing such a direct comparison between the mistress in his poem and a noblewoman in a poem about the legendary world of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table again highlights the association which Brutus draws between troubadours and knights.

Brutus’ poem “A troubadour, I traverse all my land”, even at just 14 lines, is therefore rich in evidence of how he conceives the troubadour. Perhaps most important of all, though, is the following phrase in line 3 of the first stanza: “in motion sweeter far than rest” (*Sirens* 1). This suggests that, in the circumstances, the speaker finds much greater solace in constantly being in motion rather than being in a state of repose. Furthermore, Brutus equates immobility with inactivity. Hence, even when his movements are restricted after he is banned, he still tries to find ways to get around this prohibition. When he works and studies in Johannesburg in 1962 and 1963 during his banning order, he and his wife, May (née Jagers), concoct various reasons to obtain permission for him to travel home legally to Port Elizabeth. “This happened fairly often,” he remembers. “I liked those trips because I was doing what they were telling me I couldn’t do” (Lindfors et al 27). It is as a result of this constant travelling – at least in part – that Brutus first thought of adopting the poetic persona of a troubadour:

So, travelling around and having this notion of myself travelling around, the ideas began to fall into place with this shape. Gradually they came together. I wanted to catch a certain medieval quality – I forget why – and that’s why you have a troubadour, a Don Quixote, quixoting in the poem. (27)

Brutus also employs the image of the troubadour in his next collection, *Letters to Martha*, which was published in 1968. In “The companionship of bluegum trees”, a poem written on 8 July 1966 – just weeks before he went into exile – the trees and winter sun remind him of when he was a student. The memory of this scene appears to be pleasant enough. Yet, at the same time, it makes the speaker uncomfortable; it “condemns me once again/labels me poet dreamer troubadour/unreal unworldly muddle-headed fool” (*Letters* 42). Even the trees seem to agree with this view; they “nod and swagger” (line 9). The discomfort Brutus feels about such a perception of himself (or, at least, of his poetry) suggests that he distances himself in this poem from the ironic associations he makes with the troubadour on other occasions.

There is no hint of irony either in his use of the image of the troubadour in another early poem, “I will be the world’s troubadour”. The poem is undated but he points out in a note in *Stubborn Hope*, the collection in which it was published in 1978, that it was written while he still lived in South Africa. The voice in the poem unequivocally declares an identification with the medieval figure:

I will be the world’s troubadour  
if not my country’s

Knight-erranting  
jousting up and down  
with justice for my theme

weapons as I find them  
and a world-wide scatter of foes



Being what I am  
 A compound of speech and thoughts and song  
 and girded by indignation  
 and accoutred with some undeniable scars  
 surely I may be  
 this cavalier? (*Stubborn* 22-23)

Brutus makes an equally forceful pronouncement in a poem written in 1970 while a visiting lecturer for a term in the Department of English at the University of Denver in Colorado. In “*I am the exile*”, the speaker emphatically embraces the figure of the troubadour:

*I am* the exile  
 am the wanderer  
 the troubadour  
 (whatever they say)



gentle I am, and calm  
 and with abstracted pace  
 absorbed in planning,  
 courteous to servility

but wailings fill the chambers of my heart  
 and in my head  
 behind my quiet eyes

I hear the cries and sirens (*Simple* 137)<sup>41</sup>

The differences between the troubadour and the exile will be explored in greater detail in a later chapter. At this point, it is sufficient to note that Brutus presumably groups them together in this poem because they share the common feature of movement from one point to another. Ojaide expresses a similar view: “Exile itself is a journey, a quest which corresponds to the wanderings of the troubadour” (63). Less clear, though, is the pointed reference in the poem to “whatever they say” in line 4. Only once does Brutus offer a direct response to criticism about the appropriateness of describing himself as a troubadour. His insistence on identifying with the troubadour in “I *am* the exile” appears to be partly in response to a comment by J.P. Clark at the Berlin International Poetry Festival in September 1964, in which the Nigerian poet and playwright questions the validity of Brutus’ claim to be a troubadour in his poetry (*Transition* 23; *Présence Africaine* 80). In the interview with Steptoe in *Leafdrift*, Brutus dismisses the critique by Clark, a former head of the Department of English at the University of Lagos and ex-editor of the journal *Black Orpheus*, as nonsensical: “... [I]n fact, I was already traveling a lot in South Africa, all over the place but I also of course later traveled all over the world” (“Interview” 212).<sup>42</sup>

Brutus uses the image of the troubadour in quite a deliberate manner as well in a second poem written in Denver, “In my calm acceptance”. The speaker describes himself in lines 8-12 as “ranging and revelling/along the sprawled length and contours/of land and loved-

---

<sup>41</sup> This poem first appeared in *Denver Poems* (8), a typescript which was privately distributed at the University of Denver in 1970, and later included in the collection *A Simple Lust*. The only difference between the typescript and the published version is that the word “am” in the first line is not italicised in the original.

<sup>42</sup> Mphahlele, who knew Clark when they participated in the Mbari Writers and Artists Club, was highly critical of him in his second autobiography, *Afrika My Music*. Mphahlele describes him as belligerent: “His spoken language breathes and charges like a bull. J.P. talks as if he were always straining at the leash, demanding immediate release. Loves to be unpopular, even among fellow-writers, as long as we give attention to what he says and writes. Or was it that he always felt constrained to do something brash and brave, to assert his presence ...?” (*Afrika* 33, 36).

ones/the evidence/of my troubadour-travelling” (*Denver* 24). In a later poem in *Stubborn Hope*, “Snarling, the great beast hurls through the dark”, Brutus appears to suggest that his constant roaming around the world will only come to an end when he is able to return to South Africa. Even though he acknowledges the physical beauty of the Dutch city of Amsterdam, in which he was presumably travelling at the time, he declares in the following two stanzas:

And we settle once more for the thundering flight –  
one more wide range on a troubadour’s earth.

And who can doubt that one day  
we will set out and turn  
and turn southward to that  
one last journey for which we burn  
and for which, as we journey  
now, the heart yearns. (*Stubborn* 54)



\*\*\*

Later poems of Brutus suggest that the American expatriate poet Pound (1885-1972) played a seminal role in informing and influencing Brutus’ notions of the troubadour. Pound is rightly credited with doing more than most writers during the twentieth century to reintroduce the poetry of the troubadours. According to Paul Zumthor, for instance, the writing of the troubadours “reentered living literature” largely as a result of his efforts (18).

Pound was introduced to the troubadours as an undergraduate student in Clinton, New York, in 1904. It was during this period that his early interest became “an abiding one” (McDougal 3). Just two months after he began his studies, he published a translation of a troubadour poem. In 1906 he visited Provence for the first time (Reck 7), presumably because it was then still generally regarded as the home of the first troubadours in France. When Pound lived in England, from 1908 to 1920, he became familiar with various studies on the troubadours in that country and in other parts of Europe. In 1910, he published *The Spirit of Romance*, in which the troubadours feature prominently. He subsequently spent many years translating and promoting their poetry.

Brutus acknowledges Pound as an influence on his writing as early as 1970 (Lindfors et al 34).<sup>43</sup> In an interview more than three decades later with Johan van Wyk, he again draws attention to the importance of Pound’s influence on his writing (181).<sup>44</sup> He even refers directly to Pound in two of his later poems. In the first, “Browning, Looking Down”, written in 2003, he remembers Pound during a visit to the library of the Victorian poet Browning (1812-1889) at his house in London (*Poetry* 52).<sup>45</sup> In lines 7-10, Brutus refers in admiration to “Sordello”, Browning’s poem about the thirteenth-century Italian troubadour Sordello, which reminds him of Pound: “(Pound, too, who envied Browning/for that unmatched Sordello,/would have smiled his crooked/cavalier/troubadour smile)” (52).

---

<sup>43</sup> It is probably not a coincidence that both pay homage to the French medieval poet François Villon (c.1431-1463). Pound once expresses agreement with the view that he possesses “a finer technique than any other Troubadour” (*Spirit* 17) and wrote an opera based on his poem “Le Testament” (“The Testament”) (Reck 46). Brutus mentions Villon in his poem “Montelimar, Marseilles and Nice” (*Strains* 19) and makes an obscure reference as well to him in a second poem, “Zocalo” (*Poetry* 27).

<sup>44</sup> Apart from his notions of the troubadour, Brutus was also influenced in other ways by Pound. This will be discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>45</sup> Brutus cites Browning more than once as an important influence on his writing (for example, in Lindfors et al 34 and in Lindfors, “Somehow” 174). The title of his collection *Thoughts Abroad* even appears to be an adaptation of the title of Browning’s poem “Home-Thoughts, from Abroad” (Browning 9-10).

The second poem in which Brutus mentions Pound is “E.P” (Pound’s initials), which is inspired by a visit to Rapallo in northern Italy. He refers in lines 13-16 to Pound’s incarceration at St Elizabeth’s Hospital, the psychiatric institution in Washington where he was held from 1946 to 1958 after he was found unfit to stand trial on a charge of treason for expressing support for Italy and Germany during World War II: “I remembered then sunlit lawns/of placid iron-barred St Elizabeth’s/where you raged, caged, ferociously,/but honored by some: ‘il Miglior Fabbro’” (*Leafdrift* 36).<sup>46</sup>

Both Brutus and Pound are attracted to the musicality of language, and the lyrics of the troubadours are, by definition, prime examples of musical language. Murray Schafer comments that Pound studied Provençal – one of the dialects of the Occitan language – for what it could teach him about cadence (132). He adds that “Provençal did not mean poetry alone, but rather poetry bound to music” (131). For Brutus, similarly, poetry is “an integrity of image – that is, a unity and consonance, [with] attention to the sound – the music – to ensure that it harmonizes with the sense” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 198). He unquestionably succeeds in achieving this effect in some of his poems.

In fact, Klatzow regards him as one of the country’s most musical poets. When he was commissioned in 1991 to compose a 20-minute song cycle for the annual Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 1992, Klatzow – then associate professor in composition at the University of Cape Town’s South African College of Music – decided to make a selection from Brutus’ poems. He wrote in a newspaper article before the festival that virtually every poem in *A Simple Lust* – which includes poems from *Sirens Knuckles Boots*,

---

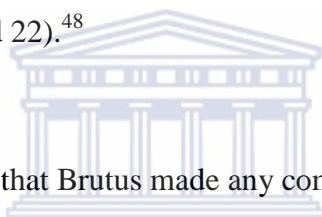
<sup>46</sup> When the American-born English poet T.S. Eliot dedicates his poem “The Waste Land” to Pound (49), he uses the Italian phrase “il miglior fabbro”, which means the better or finer craftsman. This phrase was first used by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri in his poem “The Divine Comedy” to describe the troubadour Arnaut Daniel. In the English translation of the poem as a Project Gutenberg E-book, the phrase is rendered as “without a rival stands” (line 112 of Canto 26 in “The Vision of Purgatory”).

*Letters to Martha, Poems from Algiers and Thoughts Abroad*, as well as from *Seven South African Poets* – would set well to music: “There is something about Brutus’ imagery that translates into sound; his use of language is mellifluous but above all there is my own conviction that this is real poetry rather than miscast prose” (“Ferretting out the Music in Dennis Brutus”). This is evident in the poem “I walk in the English quicksilver dusk”, which Klatzow selected for inclusion in his composition, entitled *Songs of an Exile*. Brutus employs many melodic sounds, in particular gentle alliterations, in his contemplation of the plight of those with whom he was once imprisoned on Robben Island:

I walk in the English quicksilver dusk  
 and spread my hands to the soft spring rain  
 and see the streetlights gild the flowering trees  
 and the late light breaking through patches of broken cloud  
 and I think of the Island’s desolate dusks  
 and the swish of the Island’s haunting rain  
 and the desperate frenzy straining our prisoned breasts:  
 and the men who are still there crouching now  
 in the grey cells, on the grey floors, stubborn and bowed. (*Simple* 102)

In addition to this poem, Klatzow selected six others to set to music: “In the dove-grey dove-soft dusk” (101), “At last the roses burn” (105), “I am the tree” (106), “Under the Fijian moon” (123), “Here, on another Island” (126) and “And I am driftwood” (141). Klatzow, who has often composed music based on poetry, describes *Songs of an Exile* as his best vocal work. “That is my masterpiece,” he declares unequivocally. “... [When] you look at Dennis’ poetry, straight away it turns into sound” (personal interview, 17 July 2012).

However, despite their shared views on the importance of musicality in the language of poetry, the troubadours appealed to Brutus and Pound for very different reasons. Pound was primarily attracted to them for literary reasons. Perhaps most importantly for him, he regarded their lyrics as marking the beginning of the modern period in literature. He singled out the troubadours as the first to produce a literature in the vernacular (McDougal 4).<sup>47</sup> John Tytell, one of Pound's biographers, agrees with this interpretation: "The troubadours were the first to shift from Latin to their own language and local dialect" (55). Pound undoubtedly made a close study of the life and work of the troubadours, and even tried to emulate their verse forms in his own poetry. An example is "Sestina: Altaforte" (*Selected* 53-55), in which he employs the sestina, a demanding verse form developed by the twelfth-century troubadour Arnaut Daniel (Strand and Boland 22).<sup>48</sup>



There is little evidence to suggest that Brutus made any comparable studies of the troubadours and their role in literature. He was arguably attracted to the troubadour for a far more basic reason. These medieval poets offered him a composite poetic persona for his own writing: the fighter-singer-lover. It was this romantic image of the troubadour that most enchanted him; not the historical reality nor the literary attributes of their writing.<sup>49</sup> He comes close to confirming this when he recalls his childhood memories of troubadours (and, in particular, his association of them with knights): "‘Romantic nonsense’, I snort, and resolve

---

<sup>47</sup> Zumthor points out that some critics share Pound's view and believe that the writing of the troubadours is so original that it marks "an absolute beginning" in literature (12). Others, though, claim – far more modestly – that it marks the beginning of modern European poetry (Boas 1).

<sup>48</sup> The sestina consists of six stanzas of six lines each, followed by a final three-line stanza. The last word of each line in the first stanza is repeated at the end of each line in the stanzas that follow (Strand and Boland 22).

<sup>49</sup> Even though Pound's interest in the troubadours was motivated mainly by literary considerations, their romantic image appealed to him, too. As Humphrey Carpenter points out, "they accorded with his view of the nature and character of a poet: it was attractive to think of oneself as a combative, aggressive wandering minstrel, an outcast who nevertheless commanded the attention of a cultured audience" (56).

to make new starts and to dismiss this kind of romanticism – even to suppress it. But it helps to explain some things” (“Childhood” 98).

\*\*\*

It is important to note, however, that although Brutus’ conceptualisation of the troubadour differs in important ways from the historical reality, he remains faithful to the medieval figure in key aspects. The unshakeable loyalty and devotion to a loved one that he employs in his poetry – in his case, to South Africa – is reminiscent of various aspects of courtly love.<sup>50</sup> According to M.H. Abrams’ glossary of literary terms, it is a philosophy of love developed by the troubadours with its own particular conventions for aristocratic lovers. “Love, with its erotic aspect spiritualized, is regarded as the noblest passion this side of heaven,” he states (*Glossary* 37). Sandra Resnick Alfonsi also emphasises the importance of love in the lives of the troubadours. In fact, she asserts that many troubadours “credit love with the force that keeps them alive, without which their life would be but paltry existence” (255). Brereton describes courtly love in even more extravagant terms: “To make himself worthy of her is his guiding principle in life” (30).

Because love occupies such a central place in his life, the suitor is extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. He is so desperate to secure the attention and favour of his beloved that he subjects himself to her every whim. As a result, according to Alfonsi, the primary emotion experienced by the suitor is one of intense suffering. She suggests that it is this

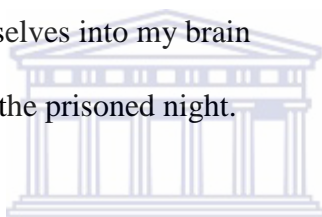
---

<sup>50</sup> Scholarly opinion is divided on whether courtly love was merely a poetic device or whether it was indeed practised. For instance, Roger Boas argues that it was a comprehensive cultural phenomenon, which included not only a literary movement but a certain lifestyle as well (129-130). Gaunt, on the other hand, is far more sceptical and asks: “Was it physical or not? Was it adulterous or not? Was it heretical? Was it ever practised? What were its origins?” (310). As Marc Bloch notes, because all knowledge of courtly love is based on literature, it is very difficult to establish to what extent it was merely “a fashionable fiction” (309). Nevertheless, whatever the historical truth of the matter, the notion of courtly love remains one that appealed to Brutus.



misery that is expressed “in poetic outbursts filled with pain and accusation” (317). Such a description certainly applies to some of Brutus’ troubadour poems. A moving example is the following poem, “When last I ranged and revelled all your length” (the dateline, “Jbg/Mbabane”, indicates that it was probably written in September 1963 when he left Johannesburg for Swaziland with the intention of attending a meeting of the IOC in what was then the Federal Republic of Germany, and remaining in exile afterwards):

When last I ranged and revelled all your length  
 I vowed to savour your most beauteous curves  
 with such devout and lingering delight  
 that they would etch themselves into my brain  
 to comfort me throughout the prisoned night.



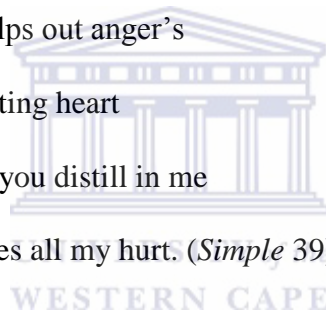
But waking early in the frosty dawn  
 and finding you deshevelled [sic] and unkempt  
 my heart arose as though you showed your best  
 – and then I wryly knew myself to be  
 the slave of an habituated love. (*Simple* 42)

The poem “Light, green-yellow luminescent, tender” expresses a similar sentiment (the dateline, “Zoo Lake: Johannesburg”, indicates that it was written while he still lived in South Africa). Despite the pain that the speaker’s beloved causes him, he is still unable to resist her charms, and her beauty appears to be sufficient to compensate for all the pain to which she subjects him:

Light, green-yellow luminescent, tender  
 seeps through these deep-foliaged weeping willows  
 to filter streams and runnels of soft glow  
 suffusing enclaves of green and sombre gloom,

and all my frantic and frustrated sorrow  
 dribbles from me in a pith-central tenderness  
 extracted by awareness of the charm  
 that graces this distraught and mourning land.

Oh lacerating land that pulps out anger's  
 rancid ooze from my resisting heart  
 now, with this loveliness, you distill in me  
 a balm that eases and erases all my hurt. (*Simple 39*)

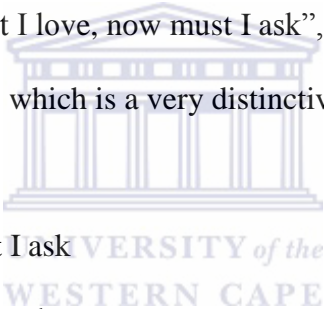


Brutus' use of the poetic persona of the troubadour is also in line with another attribute of the wandering minstrel: the subject of the troubadour's affections is usually unattainable, for one reason or another. Chaytor points out, for instance, that the women who are desired by the troubadours are usually married (14). Another factor that often stands in the way of the troubadour's love is the superior social status of the woman in relation to the troubadour. To quote Alfonsi:

In the male-female relationship propounded by the troubadours, the position of superiority is exercised by the woman. Although her physical and moral attributes make her worthy of adoration, they are not solely responsible for the subservient

attitude projected by her suitor. The subordination of the poet is often demanded by the elevated social position enjoyed by his lady. (154)

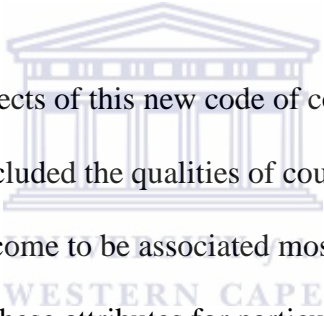
For Brutus' troubadour, too, the love he desires is unattainable. The whites-only South African government is wedded to policies of segregation based on a system of racial classification. As a result, Brutus occupies an inferior position in society – politically, socially and legally. The poem “I have not, out of love, cursed you yet” reflects his anger and frustration at the government's refusal to embrace him as a fully-fledged citizen. Written while he still lived in South Africa, the poem refers with a mixture of sadness and anger to “frustrated tenderness” (line 6) and “unattended love” (line 8) (*Stubborn* 5). In another poem written in South Africa, “Land that I love, now must I ask”, the speaker also expresses anguish about his unrequited love, which is a very distinctive feature of courtly love:



Land that I love, now must I ask  
 dare I discard the diurnal mask  
 of feeling, the protective husk  
 of manufactured feeling hiding hurt  
 Now that you show your secret hues  
 and hint in flickering tints your permanent heart  
 glimmering and tender in the luminous dark  
 your exposed loveliness dissolving away my dear  
 Now I must wonder if I dare,  
 Dare I discard my quotidian mask? (*Denver* 14)

\*\*\*

Brutus remains faithful to the historical troubadour in another important respect as well. His depiction of himself as a fighter in a quest for justice corresponds closely to the notion of chivalry, a key theme in the compositions of the troubadours. This was essentially a code of self-conduct for knights, in which loyalty and courage were generally considered to be at the core. After all, the knight was, first and foremost, a mounted soldier. However, there was a significant change in the traditional role of the knight, and hence in the nature of chivalry, during the eleventh century. Marc Bloch notes that religion introduced an important new element. For the first time, a moral aspect was added to the behaviour of knights: the clergy began to expect them to take an oath to defend the church, to protect the weak and marginalised, and to take action against those who perpetrate injustice (Bloch 316).



Leon Gautier outlined various aspects of this new code of conduct in his pioneering study *Chivalry* in 1891 (9-10). These included the qualities of courage, loyalty, compassion and justice, which have subsequently come to be associated most closely with chivalry. Raymond Rudorff, for instance, singles out these attributes for particular attention in his study of knights. While these qualities were always important to humanity, he submits, they became even more so during medieval times because it was a period in which there was extreme violence and lawlessness (232). For Brutus, apartheid South Africa represented a similar situation, especially after the violent response of the South African police to anti-pass law protesters in Sharpeville.<sup>51</sup> In these circumstances, the appeal of the chivalrous knight to him as a poetic device becomes obvious.

Ojaide makes a similar point: “His choosing the persona of the troubadour to express himself is particularly significant as the moving and fighting roles of the medieval errant, though

---

<sup>51</sup> The government declared a national state of emergency after the Sharpeville shootings, banned the ANC and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and arrested 11 503 people (L. Thompson 210).

romantic, tally with his struggle for justice in South Africa, a land he loves dearly as the knight his mistress” (68). Brutus expresses such a position explicitly in the poem, “I will be the world’s troubadour” (pages 64-65). In lines 3 to 5 of the second stanza, he reaffirms his commitment to “[k]night-erranting/jousting up and down/with justice for my theme” (*Stubborn* 22).

Brutus again declares his commitment to fighting for justice in the poem “To Those Who Persuade Us”. In the following stanza (lines 10-13), he calls on fellow South Africans who are the victims of apartheid to prepare for battle: “Let us cherish our humanity/which they seek to devour:/from our seed/the liberated world must grow” (Feinberg 9).<sup>52</sup> In the last stanza, he urges: “... [I]t is time to prove our resolve/our sincerity/in action.” The chivalrous intentions of the knight are clear as well in the poem “Prayer”, written just weeks before he left South Africa. Following the lead of his medieval predecessors, Brutus’ knight makes an appeal for divine assistance:

O let me soar on steadfast wing  
 that those who know me for a pitiable thing  
 may see me inerasably clear:  
 grant that their faith that I might hood  
 some potent thrust to freedom, humanhood  
 under drab fluff may still be justified.

Protect me from the slightest deviant swoop  
 to pretty bush or hedgerow lest I droop

---

<sup>52</sup> A shorter version of the poem, written in 1972, was originally published in the collection *Strains* (21).

ruffled or trifled, snared or power misspent.

Uphold – frustrate me if need be  
 so that I mould my energy  
 for that one swift inenarrable soar

hurling myself swordbeaked to lunge  
 for lodgement in my life's sun-targe –  
 a land and people just and free. (*Letters* 33)

In the poem “Montelimar, Marseilles and Nice”, Brutus notably pays homage to the chivalry of Roland, a legendary military leader during the eighth century under the reign of the Frankish king, Charlemagne. Roland's death in 778 during a battle at Roncevaux, a high mountain pass in the Pyrenees near the border of France and Spain, was immortalised in medieval literature. An example is “The Song of Roland”, a 4 000-line epic poem composed by an anonymous author in France between 1100 and 1120 (Hoyt and Chodorow 399). Brutus' knight is inspired by the courage displayed in battle by Roland: “... these images fire him too/and ignite his guttering manhood:/chivalrous Roland and Roncevalles, .../cannot one conjur with such incandescent names?” (*Strains* 19).<sup>53</sup>

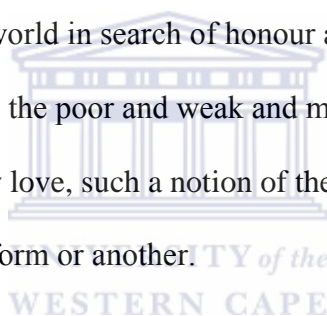
Besides generally associating chivalry with courageous engagement in battle, Brutus is attracted to a particular notion of chivalry in which the knight is associated with devoting his life to winning the love of a noblewoman – a notion advanced most widely by stories about King Arthur and his knights. The origins of the Arthurian legend are unclear, but the twelfth-

---

<sup>53</sup> Although Brutus refers to the pass as “Roncevalles”, the usual spelling is Roncevaux (G. Holmes 94).

century French writer Chrétien de Troyes is widely acknowledged as being at the centre of popularising it through his romances, for example in “Erec and Enide” (1-86). He often portrays King Arthur and his knights as “the most admirable and perfect model of knighthood, and his court a school for all who wished to perfect themselves” (Rudorff 157).

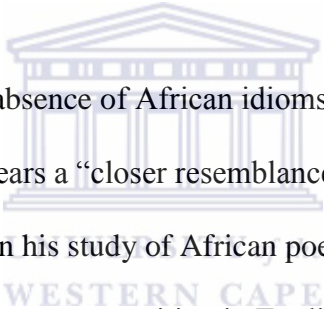
As noted earlier, Brutus acknowledges that his knowledge of chivalry is primarily based on the childhood stories about King Arthur and his knights told to him by his mother. He identifies Tennyson’s poetry as a key source of information for him on these legends as well. The poet’s “English Idylls and Other Poems” (*Tennyson* 63-116) and “Idylls of the King” (287-442) deal extensively with this subject. Rudorff describes these legendary figures as “interested in riding through the world in search of honour and glory by rescuing distressed damsels, righting wrongs, helping the poor and weak and making solemn pilgrimages” (98). As discussed in relation to courtly love, such a notion of the chivalrous knight is a recurrent theme in Brutus’ poetry in some form or another.



\*\*\*

However, even though Brutus utilised many of the features traditionally associated with the troubadour, he did not do so in an unmediated way. As indicated, he departed from historical accounts of the medieval European figure in important ways and adapted the characteristics associated with it to meet his own particular poetic objectives (even though, in part, this appeared to be the result of an erroneous understanding of the troubadour rather than a calculated decision). Yet, despite his reimagining of the troubadour, he came in for intense literary and cultural criticism from many literary critics for his choice of poetic persona.

Tejani, for instance, takes issue with this persona on cultural grounds and questions whether the troubadour is indeed an appropriate role for an African poet to assume. He dismisses Brutus' adoption of this persona as an "archaic description of himself, far more relevant in the sunny non-racial climate of the Mediterranean" (133). Chipasula makes a similar point. As far as he is concerned, the troubadour is an alien persona. "Couldn't Brutus find, in African or southern African traditions, an equivalent for this 'quixoting' troubadour?" he asks. "Did he really have to borrow an alien tongue to express his love for his native land?" ("Terrible" 41). He suggests that Brutus could have drawn instead on the traditions of oral poetry of his grandmother.<sup>54</sup> He proposes African songs performed at weddings or during hunting and even war as alternatives (40).



Ruth Obee draws attention to the absence of African idioms in Brutus' writing as well. She declares that much of his poetry bears a "closer resemblance to Western traditions of poetry writing than African oral" (242). In his study of African poetry, Goodwin even argues that, of those he regards as the major African poets writing in English, Brutus is "the one who is least 'Africanized' and most alienated from the indigenous traditions of his homeland" (1).

However, unlike Tejani and Goodwin, Chipasula acknowledges that the political and social context in which Brutus grew up in South Africa may have deprived him of the opportunity to learn much about the country's indigenous culture, let alone experience it. He concedes that South Africa's "fragmenting laws must be held responsible for Brutus' apparent lack of exposure to the region's rich oral traditions whose metaphors, symbols, images, and other poetic devices might have authenticated and anchored his work in genuine South African traditions" ("Terrible" 41; emphasis in the original).

---

<sup>54</sup>Brutus refers more than once to his mother being a descendant of slaves (Lindfors, *Tapes* 34). This is the subject of his poem "I must conjure from my past", which was published in *Denver Poems* (17) and in *A Simple Lust* (107). Another poem on the subject is "When my mother talked to me" in *Leafdrift* (3).



To properly understand the extent of this lack of exposure, it must be taken into account that between 1929 and 1934, when Brutus was aged between five and 10, he lived in Dowerville (“Childhood” 96), a subeconomic housing scheme set aside for “poorer Coloureds” by the town council of Port Elizabeth (Lindfors, *Tapes* 38). According to Brutus, Dowerville – located on the western outskirts of what was a small but growing town at the time – was the first segregated housing scheme for people classified as Coloured in what was then the Cape Province, and perhaps even in South Africa as a whole (“Introduction” 365). He recalls that African people lived even further out on the edge of Port Elizabeth, and only passed through or near Dowerville on their way to and from work (366). Growing up in a racially segregated residential area must therefore have seriously limited his exposure to the indigenous traditions referred to by Chipasula.



Another important factor that must be taken into account when questioning Brutus’ use of a European figure from the Middle Ages as his poetic persona is South Africa’s education system. As a result of the legacy of colonialism, the school curriculum of the former British Empire was a key factor in determining the content that was prescribed for teaching in South African schools, particularly during the period when Brutus received his formal education (the 1930s and 1940s). The Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 only, and South Africa remained a dominion of the British Empire until it became a republic in May 1961.

Olafioye recognises the role of South Africa’s colonial past on Brutus’ education: “The education Dennis received brought him closer to English writers than to indigenous African customs” (85). As a pupil in Dowerville at the Henry Kaiser Memorial School, probably from around 1930, and afterwards at St Theresa’s Catholic Mission School (45), Brutus did not escape the influence of the British education system. The same can be said of his time as a

pupil at St Mary's Catholic Mission in Grahamstown (Thomas 77).<sup>55</sup> The main poetic influences on Brutus during these formative years at primary school, he recalls, were invariably drawn from the mainstream English poetic tradition:

What I grew up with ... was very much the English, mainstream poetic tradition through my mother and through my schooling in missionary schools. It was the tradition of Wordsworth, but also of [Henry Wadsworth] Longfellow's "Excelsior", certainly of Tennyson's "Sir Galahad" poem. (Brutus "Introduction" 364)

He found much the same situation at the University of Fort Hare when he registered there in 1944 for a Bachelor of Arts degree. He describes the university as "a product of the British legacy and [it] worked very hard at imitating a British university" (Van Wyk 175). In fact, according to him, most of his lecturers were retired British professors who saw themselves as performing some kind of philanthropic duty by teaching in Africa. As a result, the poems he wrote while a student was very much within the tradition of mainstream English poetry.

"These were very much in a hybrid Victorian or Elizabethan mode, because that's what I was being exposed to, rather than South African ones," he recalls (Sustar 154).<sup>56</sup>

However, outside of his formal studies, the University of Fort Hare played an important role in his life. "I think if I had gone anywhere else I would have been less exposed to African culture and African intellectuals ...," he believes (172). His time at the university was presumably the beginning of a process which led to what he refers to as "my discovery, as an adult, of an African tradition as articulated by [literary] critics" (172). He describes this

---

<sup>55</sup> Brutus lived in Grahamstown with his mother in 1937 after his parents separated (Lindfors, *Tapes* 44).

<sup>56</sup> Although black South African poets like William Wellington Gqoba and William Isaac Wauchope wrote in English in the late nineteenth century (Masilela 334), Brutus is presumably making a general point about how little work was being published of black writers in English when he was at university during the 1940s.

tradition as one which is characterised by “the commitment of the artist as a social being, who derives his inspiration from the community and returns his creative product to the community” (172). This tradition fundamentally informs, and influences, his writing – even though he adopted the poetic persona of a character from medieval Europe.

Nor was the influence of the British education system on writers in former British colonies unique to South Africa.<sup>57</sup> Many of the English-language writers who emerged in Nigeria during the late 1950s were affected in similar ways as Brutus. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike famously lambasted J.P. Clark, Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo (at least for his writing during the early part of his career) for being “euromodernists”<sup>58</sup> – in other words, for modelling their poetry on the writing styles of modernists in Europe, in particular Pound and T.S. Eliot (149, 163), who experimented with new forms of expression in poetry during the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup>

Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike describe the work of Nigerian writers who were influenced by the modernists as “weak preciosity, ostentatious erudition, and dunghill piles of esoterica and obscure allusions, all totally cut off from the vital nourishment of our African traditions

---

<sup>57</sup> The Barbados-born writer George Lamming also draws attention to the central role of the British education system in the Caribbean in his collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*. “The West Indian’s education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada,” he comments. “Since ... England had acquired, somehow, the divine right to organise the native’s reading, it is to be expected that England’s export of literature would be English. Deliberately and exclusively English” (27). As a consequence, he notes, advancement in Trinidad’s civil service depended on the acquisition of knowledge of the work of English canonical writers such as Shakespeare and Wordsworth.

<sup>58</sup> All three were, coincidentally or otherwise, members of the Mbari Writers and Artists Club (Nwakanma 221).

<sup>59</sup> Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike mistakenly include Hopkins in their description of “euromodernists” (172). Even though there is an overlap in the periods in which the Victorians and the modernists wrote – Hopkins even met Yeats once (White 435) – his poetry does not experiment with form to the same extent as the more innovative work of the modernists.

and home soil ...” (3-4).<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, they laud those whom they regard as traditionalists for incorporating elements of traditional African poetry into their verse even though they choose to write in English (they cite the Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor and the Ugandan poet Okot p’Bitek as examples). In addition, Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike acknowledge the efforts of those they regard as occupying a middle ground between the “euromodernists” and the “traditionalists” (163), and include Brutus in this category (though Goodwin would probably disagree).

As the title of the trio’s book *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and their Critics* indicates, their critique was motivated by a desire to decolonise African literature. The objective was nothing less than “to end all foreign domination of African culture, to systematically destroy all encrustations of colonial and slave mentality, to clear the bushes and stake out new foundations for a liberated African modernity” (1). They saw their critique as a contribution towards achieving these aims within the field of African literature. In general terms, these are goals with which Brutus identified. When he was a Visiting Professor of English and Ethnic Studies at the University of Texas in Austin in 1974, he was a co-founder of the African Literature Association (ALA) and became its first chairperson (Idehen 3). This is an academic organisation specifically launched with the aim of promoting the “teaching, research, and dissemination of information on African oral and written literatures” (Lindfors, “Introduction” 3).<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Ironically, Soyinka also expresses dissatisfaction with what he regards as the excessive influence of Pound and Eliot on Okigbo’s poetry, and contends that “it shows too much ... in his work” (Nkosi 175).

<sup>61</sup> Brutus later describes the ALA as one of his proudest achievements: “I still think it was one of the most useful things I’ve ever done because it’s now become the leading organisation in its field, huge membership, big budget, tremendous influence, helps people to be published, people to get jobs, people to be promoted to full professors – a whole range of activities which would not have happened if the ALA had not been formed” (Van Wyk 211).

And, in 1975, Brutus was involved with Soyinka in forming UWAP which, according to a declaration published before its launch, aimed to “encourage and promote the literature of Africa in all languages in use on the continent”, “give especial encouragement to the literature of Africa in the indigenous languages” and “refurbish and render accessible the reality of an African civilization through works of literature” (“Declaration of African Writers” 8). At around the same time, Brutus helped to establish the Africa Network in the USA and served as its chairperson. Among its objectives were to acknowledge and encourage African writing. To help it achieve this goal, the network offered annual awards to those nominated by the organisation (Sustar 163).<sup>62</sup>

Brutus therefore clearly did not regard his adoption of the troubadour as a poetic persona as incompatible with his commitment to African literature. In this regard, it is important to note that his notion of the troubadour was not that of an individual on a personal quest, as the medieval figure was. As he states quite explicitly, “my loyalty has not been to any woman in the sense that the troubadours or knights of chivalry wore a particular woman’s favour” (Pieterse, “Dennis” 56). When he writes about love, he emphasises, “it’s not for a woman, but for a country” (58). In other words, Brutus deploys the troubadour in the service of the disenfranchised people of South Africa. His troubadour’s love is not for an individual woman, but for a whole country and all its marginalised people.

His transformation of the image of the individual troubadour into a representative figure allowed him to perform what he regarded as the traditional role of the African writer – to articulate the interests of his or her community. As he states in an interview with Joel

---

<sup>62</sup> The South African writer Don Mattera was awarded the Africa Network’s Kwanzaa Award in 1988 for his book *Sophiatown: Coming of Age in South Africa* (it was published in South Africa in 1987 as *Gone with the Twilight: A Story of Sophiatown*).

Goodfader and Alice Finn, “[t]he African tradition is of the artist always being an engaged person, a committed person” (28). He insists that he writes from within such a tradition: “Of course, I come out of the African tradition and I think one does not discover the tradition and then decide to adopt it and live within it. That’s not how the process works. One grows up surrounded by the tradition, a tadpole in a pond ...” (Brutus, “Introduction” 364).

As an example, he mentions the influence of traditional African oratory on his poetry as a result of attending public meetings in New Brighton, a residential area for African people in Port Elizabeth, at which community issues were discussed.<sup>63</sup> In particular, he borrowed the form of making a statement, developing it and then making what he describes as a “restatement” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 191). He points to several poems in *Sirens Knuckles Boots* as being influenced in this way. “Somehow we survive”, first published in the Johannesburg-based student publication *adelphi literary review* in November 1962 (3), is an example:

Somehow we survive  
and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither.

Investigating searchlights rake  
our naked unprotected contours;  
  
over our heads the monolithic decalogue  
of fascist prohibition glowers  
  
and teeters for a catastrophic fall;

---

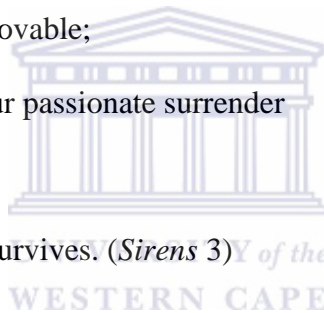
<sup>63</sup> His son, Antony Brutus, recalls: “I have very definite memories of my dad being someone who reached out ...” (personal interview, 10 Aug. 2012). He adds that his father also wanted the rest of his family “to be part of the broader South African community, and not just located in our own area”.

boots club on the peeling door.

But somehow we survive  
severance, deprivation, loss.

Patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark  
hissing their menace to our lives,

most cruel, all our land is scarred with terror,  
rendered unlovely and unlovable;  
sundered are we and all our passionate surrender



but somehow tenderness survives. (*Sirens 3*)

His poem “Lut[h]uli: December 10th 1961”, written in October 1961 to mark then ANC president Albert Luthuli’s departure for Norway to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, is another example of the influence of African poetry on his writing. He justifiably describes the animals in his poem as “great images from the oral tradition” (Van Wyk 208):

The African lion rouses from his shadowy lair  
and roars his challenge through the clamorous earth:  
– its billow blots all discords and all jars.

Hippos and elephant and buffalo without dispute

go lumbering to the drinking pools:

– but all the land he views he rules:

From here he pads on sun-picked bone and brittle thorn

stifling the tawny skies of a new day:

– power ripples over him like the light of dawn. (Pieterse, *Seven* 15)

More specifically, it falls within the oral tradition of a praise poem. According to Archie Mafeje, a key characteristic associated with the praise poet is that “he celebrates the victories of the nation, he sings songs of praise” (195). This description certainly applies to what Brutus was doing in the Luthuli poem. Further examples are the poems he wrote about the ANC leader after he mysteriously died in July 1967, “On the death of Chief Albert Luthuli” (*African Arts* 13) and the series “For Chief: A Tribute to Albert John Lut[h]uli”.<sup>64</sup> This series was initially published in 1968 in the journal *Africa Today* (46) and subsequently in an extended form in *A Simple Lust* (170-175). It is worth noting that the first line – “So the old leonine heart is stilled” (170) – echoes the opening line of his first Luthuli poem.

Akosu recognises that Brutus is performing the role of Luthuli’s praise poet in this series of poems: “In the context of Zulu literary tradition these poems belong properly to the genre of Izibongo, that is praise song” (5).<sup>65</sup> While he appears to make this observation with some

---

<sup>64</sup> There was much speculation after Luthuli’s death about whether foul play was involved. The ANC suspected he was killed by South African government agents, a view shared by many of Luthuli’s family members. However, Scott Couper makes a convincing case that there was “little, if any, motive for the government to murder an old, partially blind and partially deaf man who could not effectively lead a liberation movement (with whom, on the use of violence, he did not agree) under the strict terms of his banning order” (202).

<sup>65</sup> Of course, praise poetry is not restricted to Zulu culture. Jeff Opland has written extensively on the tradition in Xhosa oral poetry (for example, his 1983 publication *Xhosa Oral Poetry: Aspects of a Black South African Tradition*). Oral poetry is also performed by Ndebele, Tswana and Sotho speakers (Gunner and Gwala 1). In fact, the tradition extends to other parts of the continent as well. As Thomas A. Hale notes, “[p]raise-singing is



degree of disapproval – he regards the ANC leader as being what he considers to be a liberal influence on Brutus’ poetry and politics, resulting in what he perceives to be a preoccupation with love and non-violence – the point remains that, contrary to the claims of some critics, Brutus’ poetry was not devoid of the influences of African poetic traditions. In fact, his later collections, in particular *Salutes and Censures* and *Airs and Tributes*, can be regarded as examples of an extensive use of praise poetry.

Besides taking issue with Brutus’ deployment of the troubadour in his poetry, some critics even query his use of those features which he identifies most closely with the troubadour. Ndu, for instance, questions how effectively Brutus employs the image of the fighter that he associates with the troubadour. He is particularly scathing about what he regards as a lack of militancy in Brutus’ poetry: “He apparently wants to fight. But his fight must not be bitter. It is not a fight of life and death – for him. It is the mercenary soldier’s fight: gradual, curious but most cautious” (46). Ndu adds disparagingly: “Even when this meek child cries for vengeance, it is the cry of a toothless cur, there is no sharpness, there is no weapon; the cry is within him and muffled there” (48). Instead, he argues that Brutus’ poetry is characterised by an “emasculating and pervading influence of self[-]pity” (51). He further declares: “The South African black or coloured man who has the opportunity should shriek, even turn militant and use all available machinations to undermine the invidious regime. In a barbarian society, only the laws of the jungle hold” (52).

Ndu feels so strongly about what he perceives to be a lack of militancy in Brutus’ poetry that he returns to the subject at the inaugural conference of the ALA in 1975, which Brutus attends as one of the main organisers. He argues that while the South African poet can be a

---

one of the most widespread verbal phenomena in Africa” (47). In West Africa, for instance, it is one of the key functions performed by griots.

troubadour, it is necessary for him to be a town crier, too. “He must be the bell man, but he must sing or cry to his own troops,” he believes. “In classical African warfare, the battle-crier is the spirit of the battle” (Serote et al 30). He adds provocatively: “The crucial question is whether the troubadour sings standing on his feet or whether he sings laying prostrate on his back” (68). This is a scathing indictment of Brutus’ poetry (even if allowance is made for the physical impossibility of being prostrate while, at the same time, lying on one’s back).

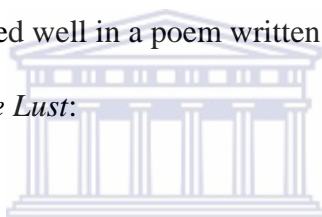
Almost as if in direct response, Alvarez-Pereyre defends the validity of Brutus’ use of the troubadour persona: “There is no doubt ... that Brutus, like many other ‘troubadour-knights’ of times gone by, fights and sings at the same time” (138). Even so, he concurs with Ndu’s contention that Brutus’ poetry lacks a certain kind of militancy: “It is, on the other hand, less certain that he writes a poetry which urges men to fight (‘which sings people to battle’), even with the proviso that Brutus immediately adds (‘in its own way’)” – as Brutus claims at the poetry reading in 1971 referred to earlier (137). Yet, unlike Ndu, Alvarez-Pereyre notes the absence of militancy in Brutus’ poetry with approval, and suggests that this is because Brutus expresses an aversion to incorporating propaganda into poetry.

This is certainly part of the reason behind the perceived lack of militancy in Brutus’ poetry (or, at least, in his early poetry). As he acknowledges in 1981, “[m]y poems are not the great stirring call to action some of my admirers and some of my critics wish they were” (Katz 41). He previously explained his rationale as follows: “I think it is immoral for an artist to import propaganda into his work. It shows a lack of integrity” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 53). He is quite emphatic about his desire to prevent his political views from intruding into his poetry. Instead, he prefers to describe an experience, and then leave it to his readers to formulate their own opinion about what he describes. He outlines this view at some length in an

interview in 1970. “By reporting a simple experience I ask people to make up their own minds,” he states. “But I don’t try to persuade them as to how they ought to make up their minds” (Lindfors et al 32). He stresses:

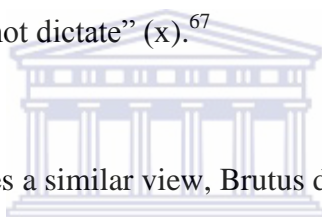
I may be a little old[-]fashioned in this, but I have tried not to preach about racism or to make political speeches about racism in my poetry because I really believe that there is a thing called artistic integrity. I really believe that one ought not to turn art into propaganda. I think this is not only dishonest, I think it’s a prostitution of the art.  
(32)

This aesthetic viewpoint is captured well in a poem written in Denver in 1970, and subsequently included in *A Simple Lust*:



Sometimes a mesh of ideas  
webs the entranced mind,  
the assenting delighted mental eye;  
and sometimes the thrust and clash  
of forged and metalled words  
makes musical clangour in the brain;  
and sometimes a nude and simple word  
standing unlit or unadorned  
may plead mutely in cold or dark  
for an answering warmth, an enlightening sympathy;  
state the bare fact and let it sing. (*Denver* 19; *Simple* 136)

He tries to remain faithful to this view in later life. In an interview in 1991, he makes the same point (Goddard 68): his primary objective in his poetry is to describe, he asserts, not to agitate. This is very similar to the stance adopted by the English-born American poet Auden (1907-1973), whom Brutus often cites as a significant influence on his writing.<sup>66</sup> In the introduction to the anthology *The Poet's Tongue*, Auden and his co-editor, John Garrett, write: "... Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice" (ix). They later add that "one must show those who come to poetry for a message, for calendar thoughts, that they have come to the wrong door, that poetry may illuminate but it will not dictate" (x).<sup>67</sup>



However, even though he espouses a similar view, Brutus does not always succeed in keeping explicit calls to political action out of his poetry. It seems he sometimes finds the violence that accompanies apartheid far too widespread and brutal to avoid doing so. An early poem, written during the mid-1950s, is an example of a rallying call for political action. The voice in the poem even encourages people to oppose apartheid by means of force (once again, contrary to Ndu's assertion that Brutus' poetry lacks militancy):

---

<sup>66</sup> Brutus mentions Auden's influence on his writing several times (Lindfors, "Somehow" 49; Goddard 70-72; Van Wyk 173; S. Gray, *Indaba* 156; Martin 5; Karim 15). More specifically, he credits Auden with being the main influence behind his decision to make a private statement in his poetry which, at the same time, is also a public comment. Probably inspired by Auden's poem "Lullaby", which Brutus cites as an example of a poem that makes both a private and a public statement (Goddard 72), he even writes a poem of his own called "Lullaby" in April 1994. This appears to be a meditation on South Africa's first democratic elections. As in Auden's poem (*Collected* 107), the speaker in Brutus' poem assures a loved one that he or she is safe in his protective arms: "Rock snugly to sleep/breath drowsily now/soft light, warm air/surround you now/strong arms protect you/and gently sway/and softly enfold you/in a warm embrace" (*Leafdrift* 133).

<sup>67</sup> Auden subsequently became even more sceptical about the role of poetry in society. Biographer Edward Mendelson later quotes him as saying that, while Auden still believes the aim of poetry is "to make us more aware of ourselves and the world around us", he does "not know if such increased awareness makes us more moral or more efficient" (296). Brutus heard Auden express a similar view when they were being interviewed on radio. He says he told Auden he was wrong, and proceeded to read some of his own poetry influenced by Auden's writing to show him how poetry can indeed change someone's life (Sustar 155).

Abolish laughter first, I say:  
 Or find its gusts reverberate  
 with shattering force through halls of glass  
 that artifice and lies have made.

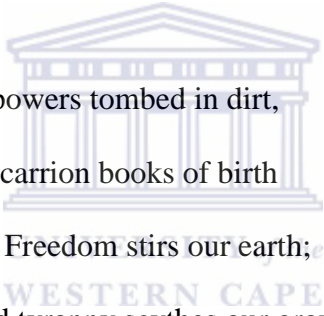
O, it is mute now – not by choice  
 and drowned by multi-choired thunder –  
 train wails, babies' sirens' wails:  
 jackboots batter the sagging gate  
 the wolfwind barks where the tinsplate gapes,  
 earth snarls apocalyptic anger.



Yet where they laugh thus, hoarse and deep  
 dulled by the wad of bronchial phlegm  
 and ragged pleuras hiss and rasp  
 the breath incites a smouldering flame;  
 here where they laugh (for once) erect –  
 no jim-crowing cackle for a watching lord,  
 no sycophant smile while heart contracts –  
 here laugh moulds heart as flame builds sword.

Put out this flame, this heart, this laugh?  
 Never! The self at its secret hearth  
 nurses its smoulder, saves its heat  
 while oppression's power is charred to dust. (*Letters 45*)

The message of defiance and resistance that reverberates throughout this poem is unmistakable: it refers graphically to raging anger and flaming swords, and declares that resistance to apartheid will continue relentlessly until it is defeated. Another example of a poem with an overtly political message of exhortation to action is “At a Funeral”, which was first published in the *Eastern Province Herald* in 1960 (Martin 11) and later included in *Modern Poetry from Africa*, an anthology edited by Gerald Moore and Beier (212). It is about the death of a young medical doctor, Valencia Majombozi, during an anti-pass law protest.<sup>68</sup> The reference to the “Black, green and gold” colours of the ANC in line 1 suggests that her funeral is doubling up as a political rallying point. In the following stanza (lines 7-12), the poem makes a strident appeal for people to rise up against apartheid:



Oh all you frustrate ones, powers tombed in dirt,  
 Aborted, not by Death but carrion books of birth  
 Arise! The brassy shout of Freedom stirs our earth;  
 Not Death but death's-head tyranny scythes our ground<sup>69</sup>  
 And plots our narrow cells of pain defeat and dearth:  
 Better that we should die, than that we should lie down. (*Sirens* 15)

A similar call to confront apartheid with active resistance is made in the poem “Steeling oneself to face the day”. The speaker prepares for the inevitable confrontation with a mixture of grim resignation and fierce determination:

---

<sup>68</sup> Majombozi's first name appears to be incorrectly spelt as “Velencia” in *A Simple Lust* (17). It is spelt “Valencia” in Moore and Beier's anthology (212) and in an interview with Brutus by William E. Thompson (69).

<sup>69</sup> Brutus says the phrase “death's-head tyranny” is based on the skull and crossbones used in the insignia of the German army's panzer division during World War II (W. Thompson 71).

Steeling oneself to face the day  
 girding one's self for the wrap of clothes  
 bracing oneself for the thrust of the world  
 one buckles to buttons and zips and belts:  
 With the gritted reluctance and indifference to pain  
 with which one enters an unsought fight  
 one accepts the challenge the bullying day thrusts down. (*Letters* 43)

Brutus goes even further in addressing violence in the poem "The Guerillas", subtitled "For the fighting men in Southern Africa" (Feinberg 7-8), which was originally published in the ANC journal *Sechaba* in 1968 (Martin 13). He refers directly to armed resistance, and even comes close to romanticising weapons of war. In lines 25-29 of the fourth stanza, he writes: "There is such a pleasure at last/in handling a cool efficient weapon/most modern, highly automatic/and moving off at the ready..." (8). However, he catches himself and acknowledges "the deeds of flame and terror/- terror from this weapon, terrible and cold" in lines 31-32. Nevertheless, in the fifth and last stanza (lines 33-39), he appears to have become reconciled to the inevitability of a violent confrontation with police and soldiers, the armed enforcers of apartheid:

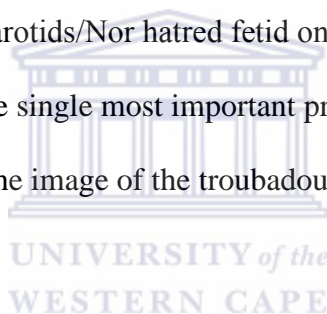
Chiefly it is a job to be done,  
 with drills to be followed and observed,  
 the enemy an analysable factor  
 or a brute so deadly that he must die first:  
 but sometimes there comes the thought of home  
 the angry longing of the exile

and a fierce will to smash an evil cruel thing. (Feinberg 8)

Such lines leave no doubt about Brutus' persona as a fighter in his poetry, and contradicts Ndu's contention that there is an absence of militancy in his work. Even so, it remains true that the language in Brutus' poetry is generally not violent. As Alvarez-Pereyre notes, "he speaks in tones of moderation, often sadly, where others feel the need to cry out" (145). Of course, Brutus does get angry, and often comes close to despair. Yet he does not allow such feelings to dominate his writing or to become transformed into hatred. As he states in the following extract from the poem, "No, I do not brim with sorrow", written in 1960: "...

Anger does not effervesce/In viscerally rancid belches/Or burst its bubbles on my optic nerves;/Gall is not secret in my parotids/Nor hatred fetid on my breath ..."*(Letters 47)*.<sup>70</sup>

What drives him, and becomes the single most important preoccupation in his early poetry, is love – hence his employment of the image of the troubadour in the first place.



However, Brutus' use of the troubadour persona as a lover has come in for criticism, too.

Mildred Hill-Lubin, for instance, takes issue with his collection *Stubborn Hope* – which contains many early poems written before he left South Africa – on these grounds. She argues that the traditional image of the troubadour places the female on a pedestal and "reduces her to an object because she becomes a symbol: she is voiceless and has little life of her own, except through the imagination of the male protagonist" (124).

---

<sup>70</sup> More recently, he also dismisses violence as a method to achieve a more just global society in favour of what he calls Gandhian principles: "We must be willing to challenge injustice, even if it means withstanding the brutality of the cops, getting beat[en] on the head, and gassed. We have to say, 'Go ahead, we're not going to quit'" (Sustar 293). In a "Statement of Political Beliefs", written in the form of a poem in November 2008, he reaffirms his belief in non-violence (*Poetry 72*). In another poem, he lashes out at the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno: "There are people/who really love death./Unamuno cried out, during the Spanish Civil War,/'Long live death.'/I cannot tolerate/this senseless/and necrophilous shout" (11).



Janet MacArthur takes a similar view in her commentary on *Thoughts Abroad*, which was published in 1970, one of Brutus' first collections after he went into exile. She takes account of readings of what she describes as the gendered symbolism of the troubadour. These suggest to her that the troubadour depends on designating women "as other, as non-discursive, passive, and absent, as the object of discourse rather than the subject" (16). According to such a reading, the symbol of the troubadour disempowers women (77).

Such criticism must be treated with circumspection. Alfonsi describes the male-female relationship in troubadour poetry as generally based on "the precepts of self-effacing masculine submission and feminine superiority" (3). Joachim Bumke also points out that courtly love "manifests itself in the submissiveness of the man, who considers himself the servant of his lady" (360). In Brutus' troubadour poems, too, it is the woman who is, in fact, in a position of power: she is the one who is in a position to decide whether or not to reject the advances of her suitor. And, as the speaker points out in line 13 of "A troubadour, I traverse all my land", his approaches are always met with blunt rejection: "no mistress-favour has adorned my breast" (*Sirens* 1). "Landscape of my young world!" conveys a similar message of rejection in lines 8-9: "There is no armour to exclude your poignancy, no blunting, and for me no ease" (*Denver* 11; *Simple* 132). In such instances, it certainly cannot be claimed that the female figure is helpless or mute.

On the other hand, there are indeed more grounds for discomfort in the way Brutus uses certain sexual imagery. Even though the act of physical intimacy is, more often than not, a vital and natural expression of the emotional relationship between two people, his poems often do portray the female figure as passive and submissive. An example is the first stanza of the following untitled poem: "Through your blue and lucent/unending expanses of air/I

pulse with phallic thrust/devouring your contoured loveliness” (*Simple* 27). Another example is the last stanza (lines 9-12) of the poem “Miles of my arid earth”: “and know the tenderness/of these my reaching hands/can conjure moisture, gentleness/and honey sweetness from your yearning hollows” (Pieterse, *Seven* 16). The male is portrayed as the active partner, who provides sexual pleasure and fulfilment; the woman is reduced to a position of subservience, a passive recipient of the male’s attention.

Hill-Lubin expresses even more serious reservations about Brutus’ use of sexual images. She argues that the language of some poems border on sexual violation (126). She cites “Sabotage, 1962”, originally published in the journal *Transition* (21), as an example. It compares an act of violence to sexual penetration in lines 5 and 6: “my country, an ignorantly timid bride/winces, tenses for the shattering releasing tide” (*Strains* 3). Hill-Lubin is even more disturbed by the poem “The beauty of my land peers warily”, which was also written in South Africa even though it was first published in 1978 in *Stubborn Hope*. She regards it as an example of a Brutus poem which depicts the female as afraid and nervous – even as the possible victim of a rape (126):

... I sense her presence pacing sinuously  
beyond the searching circle of the lights.  
Exploring pools of soothing tepidness  
I find the indrawn nerveless diffidence  
of beauty fearing ravishment’s delight ... (*Stubborn* 52)

Another early poem, “Let not this plunder be misconstrued”, goes even further and deliberately and explicitly describes the act of sexual intercourse in terms usually associated

with violence. And, although it does make a plea for understanding, the speaker nevertheless makes no apology for imposing himself on the object of his desire:

Let not this plunder be misconstrued:  
 This is the body's expression of need –  
 Poor wordless body in its fumbling way  
 Exposing heart's-hunger by raiding and hurt;

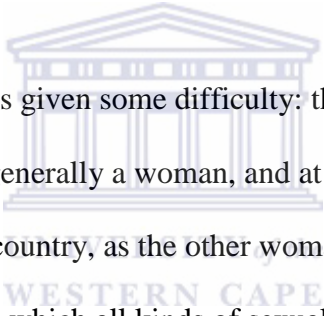
Secret recesses of lonely desire  
 Gnaw at the vitals of spirit and mind  
 When shards of existence display eager blades  
 To menace and savage the pilgriming self:

Bruised though your flesh and all-aching my arms  
 Believe me, my lovely, I too reel from our pain –  
 Plucking from you these agonised gifts  
 Bares only my tenderness-hungering need. (*Sirens* 27)

The speaker is concerned with satisfying his own needs only, even though he is aware of the pain that he is causing to the female. Her “[b]ruised ... flesh” (line 9) is not his primary concern; what matters most to him is his desire to satisfy his “tenderness-hungering need” (line 12). That such language is used in reference to a country, and is not directed at an individual woman, does not make this any less problematic. It is difficult to construe an act of violence as described in this poem as an act of love – whether for a person or for a country. To quote Hill-Lubin: “Certainly the language speaks of love, passion, tenderness but one

cannot ignore the violence and destructive elements ...” (129). To do so would be tantamount to accepting that the sexual exploitation of women can be rationalised on the grounds that it is motivated by some perverse sense of love.

Brutus is aware of concerns about his use of the female figure in his early poetry. However, he mistakenly attributes this to a lack of understanding about the way he employs the individual woman as a metaphor for South Africa. In a tape recording on his poetry in 1974, for instance, he contends that “it is not always realized that the great bulk of my poetry is always addressed to two levels” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 189) – to an individual woman and to South Africa. He attempts to explain and defend this practice at some length:

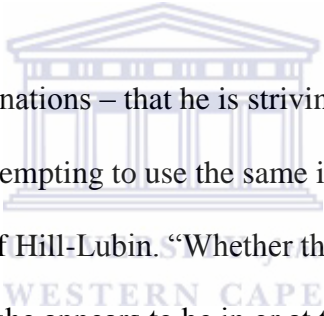


I think this [has] sometimes given some difficulty: the fact that the poem would be written for an individual, generally a woman, and at the same time would address itself to South Africa, the country, as the other woman with whom I have a curious love-hate relationship, into which all kinds of sexual elements enter. This is simply because my relationship, my emotional response to the country, had this kind of sexual ingredient. (189)

He further attempts to justify his use of sexual intercourse as a poetic device by stating that he believes that “the need for freedom is as fundamental to the human psyche as all the other animal appetites of the body: eating, sleeping, drinking, making love, excreting, breathing. It seems to me that the need to be free is as basic as these basic needs” (188). He repeats this view almost verbatim in a later interview with William E. Thompson, highlighting just how strongly he believes in it. He states that it must be “absolutely basic for a human being to be

free, it is part of our psyche, our nature. It's as elemental as the need to breathe or to eat or to sleep, or to excrete, or to make love" (W. Thompson 76).

Almost a decade later, he is still trying to defend his use of the female figure as a dual image. In an interview with Kevin Goddard in 1991, he says he is trying to make a simultaneous statement about a person and about South Africa. He repeatedly acknowledges Auden as an important influence in this regard. He points out that he admires that poet's ability to use the same image for both a private and a political purpose – addressing “the private statement to a particular individual, while the same statement is operating at a public level and making a larger, perhaps political statement” (Goddard 71-72).



However, neither of Brutus' explanations – that he is striving to depict freedom as a basic need such as sex, and that he is attempting to use the same image to express a dual meaning – adequately address the concerns of Hill-Lubin. “Whether the female is portrayed as a symbol or as an individual,” she argues, “she appears to be in or at the service of her mate” (133). She further suggests that this is at the heart of what she describes as “the thousand-year-old sexual politics of chivalry” (133). And while MacArthur is more sympathetic to Brutus' intentions, she, too, believes that Brutus' use of the female figure does not avoid the objectification of women.

These objections are not without foundation. Brutus' choice of a troubadour – and, in particular, one who is a knight – is indeed very ambiguous at times. The knight is, after all, the embodiment of a certain kind of masculinity – perhaps even hyper-masculinity, an extreme form of masculine behaviour (Pleck 31). Todd W. Reeser, for instance, characterises knighthood as “a series of masculine performances, composed of acts and styles (saving

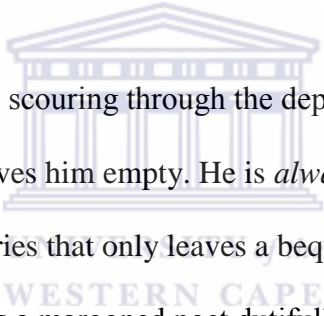
ladies in distress, wearing armor, fighting with a lance, and so on)” (84). Military prowess is, therefore, an important – if not the most important – skill in a knight. According to Sidney Painter, it was his ability as a fighter that “enabled the knight to fulfill his function in society – without it he was an object of scorn to his contemporaries” (29).

For Gerald A. Bond, on the other hand, there is nothing particularly heroic about the chivalry of the knight. He regards it merely as a pretext to display certain kinds of male prowess. To him, chivalry is “a martial culture that was founded on the warrior class and its acquisition of fame ... and that placed a premium on prowess and loyalty” (247). While some women certainly did wage war during medieval times and were also described as knights, according to Roger Boas, they were generally relegated to a secondary status in European society at the time (76). At best, there was an ambivalent attitude towards women during the Middle Ages. Boas observes that women were “simultaneously adored and denigrated” (76). In an analysis of a poem by Guilhèm, for instance, Gaunt recounts that women are portrayed as male possessions: “They are treated as a knight treats his horse, as a spirited animal, but one which is clearly inferior and which any man worth his salt can tame ...” (312).

Brutus’ notion of the troubadour is therefore inflected with many negative connotations. Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Brutus wrote most of the poems in his first collections during the late 1950s and 1960s – a time when very different norms prevailed in society. This is not to excuse nor to overlook any political indiscretions that appear in his early work, but is merely a reminder to evaluate Brutus’ troubadour poetry in its proper historical and social context. To remove his poetry from this context is to distort it and to burden it unnecessarily – and unfairly – with unintended meanings and consequences. At

the time, the image of a troubadour as a lover and fearless warrior in pursuit of a noble quest was a device that suited his poetic and political objectives.

Thus, despite the political tensions and historical inconsistencies in Brutus' use of the troubadour persona, it remains a significant presence in the work he wrote while he still lived in South Africa. This chapter provides ample evidence. In fact, Alvarez-Pereyre argues that the troubadour occupies a central position in Brutus' poetry and is "a lasting source of poetic inspiration" up to the early 1980s (136). Ojaide argues, likewise, that the image of the troubadour "unites all of Brutus's poems" up to then (55). Even as recently as 2010, Obiwu still suggests that the troubadour remains important in Brutus' poetry:



His hero is *forever* a lover, scouring through the depths of his beloved's contours in an insatiable quest that leaves him empty. He is *always* the soldier engrossed in the conquest of diverse territories that only leaves a bequest of blood and bodies, turning his glories into ashes. He is a marooned poet dutifully carving his beloved's sonorous eulogies on the hardened barks of history, only to behold a ricochet of sullen notes of unrequited love. (1; emphasis added)

However, such an interpretation of Brutus' poetry is an exaggeration, and is not sufficiently supported by the evidence. The image of the troubadour is not always present in his poetry. In some of his later collections, it becomes far less visible and sometimes even disappears completely. Nevertheless, despite the diminished presence of the troubadour in his later poetry, it remained an important symbol to him for the rest of his life. When he was asked at the age of 82 by Bond to describe the common feature that linked the various aspects of his life, he replied: "The role of the troubadour" (*Sunday Independent* 13). To disregard or to

underestimate the importance to him of this self-conferred identity would therefore be to exclude vital aspects of the thinking that informed and inspired his writing, and, in so doing, prevent a more nuanced and complete understanding of his poetry. However paradoxical or problematic, the troubadour indisputably remains at the centre of an assessment of Brutus' early poetry.





## CHAPTER 2: AN ACCIDENTAL ENGLISHMAN

As significant as the troubadours are in Brutus' early poetry, they are not the only literary influences on his writing in South Africa during this period. This chapter will examine some of his other major influences, in particular on the form of his early poetry. The most notable influences are all from England and include, most importantly, the Metaphysical poets, the Romantic poets and the Victorian poets. Brutus repeatedly acknowledges their defining role in his poetry. Barnett notes that, even though "modern African critics frown on analogy with Western literature, Brutus has no hesitation in drawing on his extensive and enthusiastic universal reading, and absorbing the writing of those he admires" (99-100).



As pointed out in the previous chapter, Brutus was first introduced to the work of the Romantic poets through the informal education he received at home from his parents. He often heard his father recite the work of the Romantic poet William Blake. His mother, too, loved poetry and often recited poems to the children. She regularly assisted Brutus' brother, Wilfred, with his homework at night as well (Sustar 153). In this way, the young Brutus discovered the poetry of Wordsworth (1770-1850), one of the key poets of the Romantic period. He recalls his mother reciting "Lucy Gray", "The Prelude" and "Daffodils" (Alvarez-Pereyre 131; Lindfors, "Somehow" 44), and adds that "the narrative poems of Wordsworth were among her favourites and I learnt to love them as well" ("Childhood" 97).

As a result of his exposure at an early age to the writing of the Romantic period – generally regarded as between the 1780s and the 1830s (P. Kitson 327) – he acquired a life-long

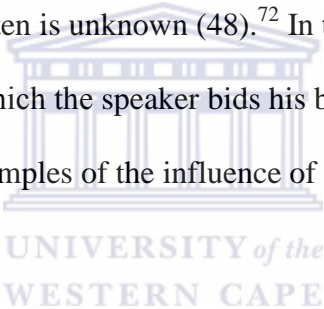
attachment to lyric poetry. There are several possible reasons why he developed an affinity for this mode of writing. According to Abrams, the Romantic period was characterised “by a cultivation of this form to a degree, and in a variety of excellence, which was without precedent in literary history” (*Mirror* 98). Wordsworth, in particular, played a seminal role in this process, both through his poetry and through his analytical writing. He placed the feelings of the poet at the centre of any critical appraisal of poetry. As Abrams points out, this marked a turning point in English literary theory (103).

In Wordsworth’s preface to the 1805 edition of the collection *The Lyrical Ballads*, for instance, he describes the poet as “chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel ... and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings” (27-28). Brutus holds remarkably similar views. In undated notes on his poetry, he states: “The simplest definition of the poet still seems to me to be a man more sensitive to the world around him and more sensitive to the use of words in which to convey his experiences” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 197).

Brutus holds similar views to Wordsworth on the process of writing poetry, too. In one interview, for example, he recalls the first poem that he wrote at the age of 14 or 15. He describes the process of writing the poem about a moon rising over a lake as “an entirely spontaneous impulse” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 45). It is no doubt more than a coincidence that, once again, this description is strikingly close to another observation Wordsworth makes in the preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* in which he famously declares that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (10). He repeats this point later and adds that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity” (33). In similar vein, Brutus

describes a poem as “the attempt to capture the moment, or the insight of the moment” (personal interview, 18 June 1998).

The poetry and critical writing of Wordsworth clearly make a deep impression on Brutus, and help him to develop an appreciation for sounds and language (Sustar 153). When he starts writing poetry more frequently while teaching at St Thomas Aquinas High School in Port Elizabeth around 1947-48 (Alvarez-Pereyre 133), he writes a hundred or so poems for a schoolgirl with whom he fell in love.<sup>71</sup> These are mostly sonnets in the mould of Wordsworth – and, he adds, Shakespeare – because he grew up thinking of their work as exemplifying the best writing in English poetry (Lindfors, “Somehow” 48-49). The whereabouts of the red notebook in which they were written is unknown (48).<sup>72</sup> In the absence of these lost sonnets, his poem “Nightsong: City”, in which the speaker bids his beloved a restful sleep, can be regarded as one of the earliest examples of the influence of the Romantics on the cadence of his poetry:


  
 Sleep well, my love, sleep well:  
 the harbour lights glaze over restless docks,  
 police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets;  
  
 from the shanties creaking iron-sheets  
 violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed  
  
 and fear is immanent as sound in the wind-swung bell;

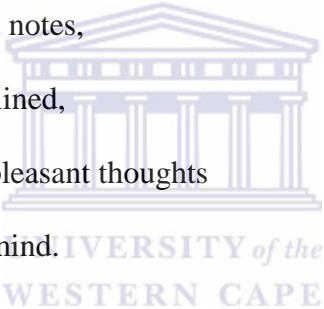
<sup>71</sup> Brutus is at pains to make it clear that he only started a romantic relationship with the pupil after she left school (Lindfors, “Somehow” 48). There is no evidence that he developed or acted on similar feelings for any other pupils when he was a schoolteacher.

<sup>72</sup> The only poem that survives from this period, according to Brutus, is “So, for the moment, sweet, is peace” (*Sirens* 32), which he says was influenced primarily by Hopkins (Lindfors, “Somehow” 49), and which will be discussed later in this chapter.

the long day's anger pants from sand and rocks;  
 but for this breathing night at least,  
 my land, my love, sleep well. (*Sirens* 16)

According to Goodwin, even the writing style of Brutus' early poetry – “a simple lyrical style of direct statement in strict metre and often in rhyme” – resembles that employed by Wordsworth (4). An example of this style in Wordsworth's work is “Lines written in early spring” (the precursor to the delicately crafted but powerfully eloquent “Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey”):

I heard a thousand blended notes,  
 While in a grove I sate reclined,  
 In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
 Bring sad thoughts to the mind.



The logo of the University of the Western Cape is a faint watermark in the background. It features a classical building with a pediment and columns, with the text 'UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE' below it.

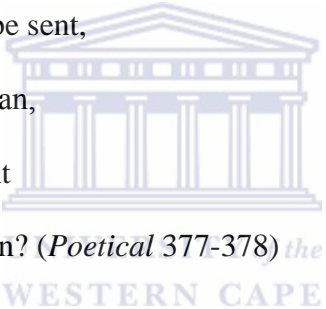
To her fair works did Nature link  
 The human soul that through me ran;  
 And much it grieved my heart to think  
 What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,  
 The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;  
 And 'tis my faith that every flower  
 Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,  
 Their thoughts I cannot measure: –  
 But the least motion which they made,  
 It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,  
 To catch the breezy air;  
 And I must think, do all I can,  
 That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,  
 If such be Nature's holy plan,  
 Have I not reason to lament  
 What man has made of man? (*Poetical 377-378*) *the*  
 WESTERN CAPE



The simple diction of Brutus' poem "I am the tree", first published in 1968 in the journal *African Arts* in a slightly different form (13), can be regarded as an attempt to emulate Wordsworth's style of making a direct statement in lyrical language:

I am the tree  
 creaking in the wind  
 outside in the night  
 twisted and stubborn:

I am the sheet

of the twisted tin shack  
 grating in the wind  
 in a shrill sad protest:

I am the voice  
 crying in the night  
 that cries endlessly  
 and will not be consoled. (*Simple* 106)

In recognition of the literary debt he owes to Wordsworth, Brutus even pays homage to him and fellow Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) in one poem: “At dawn/through patches of woolly cloud/I descend over the Lake District/– smoke-greys, slate-blues –/where Wordsworth, Coleridge and other poets walked:/words that I loved –/catching their lilt, their melodic intonation . . .” (*Strains* 36).<sup>73</sup> The last line clearly sums up the features which initially attracted Brutus to the poets of this era: it was the gentle and melodious tone of their language, a form which suited him at the time. In general, this remains a distinctive characteristic of his poetry, even when its political tone later becomes more urgent.

However, by December 1972 when “At dawn” is written, Brutus is already becoming frustrated with what he regards as the limitations of lyric poetry. In lines 8-12, for instance, he remembers the prisoners on Robben Island and writes despairingly that such poetry “will not work/nor free the men who crouch/over the piles of slate/and swing grey hammers/with their broken hands” (36). (His growing disenchantment with the lyric form will be discussed further in chapters 4 and 6.)

---

<sup>73</sup> The Lake District is a mountain region with lakes in northwest England in which Wordsworth, Coleridge and other poets associated with Romantic poetry lived at the turn of the nineteenth century (P. Kitson 339).

\*\*\*

Another major influence on the style and techniques that Brutus applied in his early poetry is that of the Metaphysical poets, who wrote lyric poetry at the beginning of the seventeenth century. He points out that, to him, it is “a very important period in English literature”, which he believes is often underestimated (personal interview, 18 June 1998). The most obvious reason he is attracted to the work of poets like Donne (1572-1631) and Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) is because of the intellectual complexity of their ideas. In particular, he is attracted by their ability to bring together seemingly disparate ideas. “These people,” he once states in admiration, “yoked unlikely ideas together” (Van Wyk 181).

Donne, for instance, often draws a link between the intellectual and the sensual in his poetry. One of Donne’s biographers, John Carey, describes this style as “the characteristically Donnean mixture of thought and feeling” (144). Brutus, who first encountered Donne’s poetry at the University of Fort Hare (Pieterse, “Dennis” 56),<sup>74</sup> was also attracted to it because of the way it combines the colloquial and the lyrical (Goddard 71). These dual features impressed him so much that he singled out Donne as the primary influence on his writing during the early period of his poetry (Pieterse, “Dennis” 56).

An example of the combination of thoughts and feelings in Donne’s poetry is the poem “A nocturnal upon St Lucy’s Day, being the shortest day”.<sup>75</sup> It is essentially a meditation on love and grief, but does so by drawing on references to the language of science and technology

---

<sup>74</sup> Brutus later says he discovered Donne three years after he became a schoolteacher (Lindfors, “Somehow” 48). Whatever the exact year, both accounts refer to roughly the same period: the late 1940s.

<sup>75</sup> St Lucy’s Day is a Christian feast day in some parts of Europe which celebrates the winter solstice and the increase in light that is expected to follow (Roy 412).

which were presumably in use during the seventeenth century. The first two stanzas of Donne's poem illustrate this creative technique well:

'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's,  
 Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmasks;

The sun is spent, and now his flasks  
 Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;

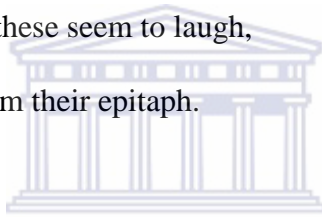
The world's whole sap is sunk;

The general balm th' hydroptic earth hath drunk,

Whither, as to the bed's-feet, life is shrunk,

Dead and interred; yet all these seem to laugh,

Compared with me, who am their epitaph.



Study me then, you who shall lovers be  
 At the next world, that is, at the next spring;

For I am every dead thing,

In whom love wrought new alchemy.

For his art did express

A quintessence even from nothingness,

From dull privations, and lean emptiness

He ruined me, and I am re-begot

Of absence, darkness, death: things which are not. (Donne 72)

Darkness and death are central themes: "The sun is spent" (line 3) and the speaker's "life is shrunk,/Dead and interred" (lines 7 and 8). However, the poem turns into a celebration of the



power of love. The speaker, it seems, was only dead figuratively because of an absence of love. When he does find love, it revives and transforms him: “love wrought new alchemy” (line 13). It succeeds in creating “[a] quintessence even from nothingness,/from dull deprivations, and lean emptiness” (lines 15 and 16) – much like the sun brings light again when spring returns at the end of winter. Donne employs the language of science as well to reflect on the mystery of love in his poem “Love’s Alchemy”. In lines 4-8, he likens it to the alchemist’s vain attempt to turn base metals into gold: “But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,/I should not find that hidden mystery;/Oh, ’tis imposture all: And as no chemic yet the elixir got,/But glorifies his pregnant pot” (65).

An example of a poem in which Brutus similarly combines the intellectual and the sensual is “No banyan, only”. It contemplates the nature of love and its physical expression. In the same way as Donne does, Brutus incorporates an image from contemporary science in his poem. He refers to the American geneticist Alfred Hershey, whose pioneering research during the 1950s provided evidence that DNA was the genetic material of human life (Stahl 1). In the fifth stanza, Brutus writes in lines 17-20: “Sublunary no more, yet more acutely mundane now/Man’s fingers claw the cosmos in gestures of despair,/Our souls, since Hers[h]ey, seek the helix of unknowing/Save mine, you-saved, now leafing like a bough” (*Sirens* 13). According to Goodwin, the poem suggests that the souls of the man and the woman are intertwined like the double helix in the DNA (7) – an imaginative combination, like Donne, of the intellectual and the sensual.

Besides following his lead in attempting to bring together disparate ideas in the same poem, Brutus’ poetry also resembles the Metaphysical poet’s writing in quite another distinctive way. As Andrew Hiscock points out, Donne’s poetry can often seem “rather cryptic at first

blush, presenting itself as a kind of conundrum and demanding energetic mental gymnastics on the part of the reader” (203). Much the same can be said of some of Brutus’ early poems. A case in point is “So, for the moment, sweet, is peace” (*Sirens* 32), which is discussed more fully later.<sup>76</sup> It contains the phrase “pelican-peck” in line 6, which appears to be intentionally and unnecessarily obscure. He explains it as follows:

... [T]here is another hymn by Thomas Aquinas<sup>77</sup> in which he compares Christ to the pelican. It’s an old medieval image of Christ. Apparently when baby pelicans are dying of thirst, the mother pelican will peck her own breast and they will drink her blood. Christ, you see, shed his blood to keep his baby pelicans alive. I’m using the image in another way by suggesting that the pelican sustains itself, keeps itself alive. Can you keep yourself alive by feeding on your own blood? (Lindfors et al 35)

Without the benefit of such an explanation, most readers would be unable to unlock the meaning of “pelican-peck”. Over and above this, Brutus sometimes even introduces unnecessary complications with his deliberate use of obscure allusions. In “No banyan, only”, he refers to St Francis of Assisi by his monicker Poverello (“the poor one”) in line 34 in the last stanza (*Sirens* 13). In itself, that is not an insurmountable difficulty. But what does result in confusion is that he refers in the last stanza to St Francis as “Paduan” (13), a resident of the city or province of Padua in northern Italy. As Goodwin correctly points out, Assisi is in fact located in the province of Perugia (7), which is in central Italy.

---

<sup>76</sup> The word “sweet” is spelt with a capital “S” in the version of the poem published in *A Simple Lust* (33). Brutus later explains that the poem was written for a woman named Dulcey, and that “Sweet” was a play on the Latin word “Dulce” or “Dulcis” in a hymn by the thirteenth-century Italian priest Thomas Aquinas (Lindfors et al 35).

<sup>77</sup> Besides being familiar with Aquinas as a priest, Brutus also studied his philosophical writing at the University of Fort Hare (Alvarez-Pereyre 131).

When Brutus was in prison, he reconsidered his use of such intentionally obscure or complex images and symbols in his poetry. He arrived at the conclusion that such writing was “a kind of self-display, a glorifying in the intellect for its own sake” (Lindfors et al 29). As a result, he decided to write in a more accessible style in future, and shifted away from fairly complex imagery and symbolism towards a more minimalist style of writing. “After prison,” he tells Goddard, “I was trying for a much more stripped-down, more sparse kind of language, so that Donne influence went” (71).<sup>78</sup>

\*\*\*

Hopkins (1844-1889) is another poet whose writing made a significant impact on Brutus’ early poetry. In an interview with William E. Thompson, for instance, he describes the Victorian as one of his two favourite poets (the other, of course, was Donne) (69). Brutus specifically pays tribute to him for his innovative use of words with different sounds. In an introduction to a collection of Hopkins’ poetry, W.H. Gardner refers to this feature as the “sound-texture” of his poetry (xxx). He goes on to suggest that Hopkins used alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme and half-rhyme more than any other poet in the English language. The sonnet “God’s Grandeur” contains many examples of these poetic devices, as the octave below illustrates:

---

<sup>78</sup> Even so, Brutus still refers with admiration to Donne decades later in an unpublished poem, “Rumour”, written in May 2009:

John Donne plunged into despair  
 imprisonment, disgrace  
 still punningly, wryly describing himself  
 “John Donne undone” – even  
 daringly speculating,  
 “Christ might have been a ‘willed suicide’ ”  
 emerges from his ruffled shroud  
 spectral-like to declare  
 triumphantly:  
 “Death thou shalt die”  
 and, unforgettably:  
 “Everyman’s death diminishes me.”

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. (Hopkins 27)

Besides the conventional abba/abba rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet, the poem also uses internal rhymes such as the words “seared”, “bleared” and “smeared” in line 6. There are many examples of alliteration in the octave as well, most notably the “s” sounds in line 7, the “g” and “o” sounds in line 3, and the “f” sounds in the last line. Not only were these an attempt to enrich his language, according to Gardner, but an attempt to bring out the more subtle relationships between his ideas and images (xxx). As an example of the use of such techniques in his own work, Brutus cites the poem “So, for the moment, sweet is peace”. He specifically refers to his use of assonance and points out that the poem employs a very deliberate use of certain vowel sounds (Lindfors et al 36):

So, for the moment, sweet, is peace<sup>79</sup>

I rest, wave-cradled, safe from emotion's spray

balmed by the shadeless trough, the sun-greened, sensed

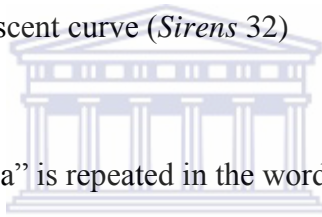
unfigured lean-feel of your ocean-self.

---

<sup>79</sup> Brutus' use of the word “sweet” may also indicate the influence of Hopkins. Norman White, a biographer of the Victorian poet, regards Hopkins' use of it as one of his “overdone words, seldom used in his poems with precision or power” (281).

Oh how I know unrest returns, the scourge –  
 what love can pelican-peck for long  
 its own swollen heart for sustenance?  
 can one shake pain as raindrops from a cape?  
 can the self, an unprotected molusc, crawl  
 free from the past's whorled labyrinths?

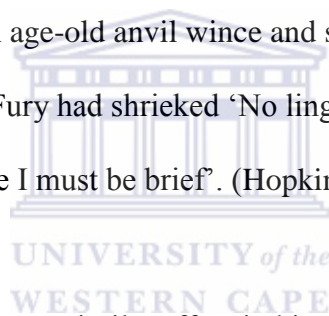
Even the thought of pain's return brings pain  
 a fissure mars the moment's quiet delf:  
 help me my heart to hold this instant still,  
 Keep me in quiet's acquiescent curve (*Sirens* 32)



In line 2, the sound of the vowel “a” is repeated in the words “wave”, “safe” and “spray”. The alliteration in this line, which is continued in the next two lines, emphasises the respite from his pain that his beloved offers him: “... safe from emotion's spray/balmed by the shadeless trough, the sun-greened, sensed/unfigured lean-feel of your ocean-self.” (He once refers apologetically to “pelican-peck” in the second stanza, and describes it as “an unhappy alliteration” because the p’s are too close to each other (Lindfors et al 35)!) Brutus draws attention to the numerous “f” and “l” sounds in the poem as well. To him, these “give the feeling of leaning against a wave” (36). Examples of half-rhymes in the poem are “scourge” (line 5) and “curve” (line 14), and “spray” (line 2) and “cape” (line 8). However, because these are so far apart, they are barely noticeable and, hence, not entirely successful. Even so, they are conscious attempts to write in a formal style in his early poems. His frequent use of such techniques clearly indicates that, as he acknowledges, he was “on a Hopkins kick” when he wrote the poem (34).

Brutus also admires Hopkins for “trying to do very complicated things with sound, playing consonants and vowels against each other, creating tensions in sound” (70).<sup>80</sup> The following stanza (lines 15-22) from an untitled poem by Hopkins is an example of this technique, and vividly evokes the anguish of the Victorian poet during a bout of depression:

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,  
 More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.  
 Comforter, where, where is your comforting?  
 Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?  
 My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief  
 Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing –  
 Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked ‘No ling-  
 ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief’. (Hopkins 61)



Brutus deliberately sets out to create a similar effect in his early poems. His well-known poem “The sounds begin again”, which contains the title of his debut collection, is a memorable example.

The sounds begin again;  
 the siren in the night  
 the thunder at the door  
 the shriek of nerves in pain.  
  
 Then the keening crescendo

---

<sup>80</sup> Brutus says the “clash of consonants” in Hopkins’ poetry appealed to him as well (S. Gray 155).

of faces split by pain  
 the wordless, endless wail  
 only the unfree know.

Importune as rain  
 the wraiths exhale their woe  
 over the sirens, knuckles, boots;  
 My sounds begin again. (*Sirens* 17)

Brutus points out that, in the second stanza, he tried to recreate a scene from a painting by Francisco Goya about an execution in Spain: “I am trying to catch both the defenselessness and the terror of the people whose faces are split by their wide-open mouths so that their eyes and foreheads disappear” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 189). While Brutus does not name the painting, his description fits Goya’s painting *The Third of May*, which is set in 1808 when France occupied Spain during the Peninsular War (Gudiol 86-87).

Ironically, Brutus comes in for criticism precisely for successfully creating a tension in the sounds he uses in some of his early verse. Mphahlele, for instance, describes *Sirens Knuckles Boots* as “displaying the usual features of a beginner’s work: brash, raw anger wielding the long thundering line and harsh sounds” (*Voices* 91). This is a misreading of Brutus’ early poetry. He uses certain shrill sounds quite deliberately to achieve a certain effect. Abasiokong recognises this when he points out that Brutus consciously employs words – and, by implication, sounds – to shock his readers (47). “The sounds begin again”, in particular, is a carefully crafted poem; it is not, as Mphahlele suggests, the result of unrestrained emotion on the part of a novice poet.



Francisco De Goya - The Complete Works

**Fig. 6:**  
**Francisco**  
**Goya's**  
**painting, *The***  
***Third of May.***

**Source:**  
**[www.francisco](http://www.francisco)**  
**[degoya.net](http://degoya.net)**



Another indication of Hopkins' influence on Brutus is the way in which the South African emulates his extensive use of compounds. Gardner describes Hopkins as a genius for his ability to compound words to create a new word. The Victorian poet does this in several ways, including by fusing words or by hyphenating words. "The purpose of this compounding is to weld together, in one concentrated image, all the essential characteristics of the object," observes Gardner (xxxiii). In "The Windhover", for instance, Hopkins refers to certain colours as "blue-bleak" and "gold-vermilion" (30). He uses this descriptive method in virtually every line of "Pied Beauty":

Glory be to God for dappled things –

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;

And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change;

Praise him. (Hopkins 30)

Brutus often imitates this device of compounding words in his early poems. Abasiokong believes this invention of "original double-barrel coinages" infuses his poetry with vitality (47). An example is the poem "Autumn comes here with ostentation" which, like "Pied

Beauty”, deals with the subject of the beauty of nature.<sup>81</sup> He writes in the following extract from lines 2-8: “Her polite-shrew’s voice is sharp in the wind/she trails her hair, wind-blown browns in the blonde,/across the oaks, streaking their nervous green:/her gusty breath,/passion-keen/is sweet in the morning air” (*Sirens* 11).

Brutus continues writing in this fashion many years later in exile. In “The sand wet and cool”, written in January 1970 as part of *Denver Poems* (6) and later published in *A Simple Lust* (149), he writes about two lovers who meet furtively on a beach, presumably to avoid prosecution under the Immorality Act of 1950, which prohibited sexual relationships between people from different racially defined groups. He refers to the “lioness-yellow” sand (line 4), “warmgold folds” (line 12) and “silkchill skeins” (line 12). Their day ends with the very Hopkinsian description in lines 49-51 that “we had our beach, our sea, our sun,/the stolen sensuous carnal delight/and the spray-bright, spume-chill, bladed air”.

Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike deplore the influence of Hopkins on African poets during the mid-twentieth century, and refer to it disparagingly as “The Hopkins Disease” (174). As pointed out in the previous chapter, they specifically exclude Brutus from their criticism, and regard him as occupying a place somewhere between what they term the “euromodernists” and the “traditionalists” (163). Some of Nigeria’s poets, by contrast, are harshly ridiculed for trying to write in the style of Hopkins. While Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike acknowledge the “energy and felicity” in some of Hopkins’ best poetry, they believe it is generally characterised by extremely poor punctuation and an over-use of alliteration and assonance.

Other features which the trio associate with his poetry are “word order deliberately scrambled

---

<sup>81</sup> Yesufu describes Brutus and Hopkins as essentially nature poets, “who delineate the graces and felicities of nature in all their manifestations” (51). Even though nature (or, more specifically, the land) is primarily a metaphor for South Africa in Brutus’ poetry, there is nonetheless considerable justification for this description. Wordsworth, another of Brutus’ early influences, is a pre-eminent poet of nature as well. In fact, to him poetry is “the image of man and nature” (*Lyrical Ballads* 23).

to produce ambiguities, syntactic jugglery with suppression of auxiliary verbs and articles, the specious and contorted cadences of sprung rhythm ... and the clichéd use of double- and triple-barrelled neologisms” (173-174).<sup>82</sup>

Later in his writing career, Brutus expresses a similar discomfort with some of these aspects of Hopkins’ writing. When he lends a copy of Gardner’s study of Hopkins’ poetry<sup>83</sup> to Arthur Nortje, he recalls that it made a considerable impact on the younger South African poet.<sup>84</sup> But, he adds approvingly, fortunately Nortje did not try to replicate Hopkins’ style uncritically. He notes that Nortje “liked what Hopkins was doing, he occasionally imitated it, but was never mired in Hopkins” (Goddard 70).<sup>85</sup> Brutus, arguably, followed the Victorian’s style of writing over a much longer period and with far less critical distance. However, in the same way he reassessed the influence of Donne on his writing while he was in prison, he later reconsidered his use of Hopkins’ style of writing, too. “Ever since I came out of Robben Island I’ve been trying to work towards a very much greater simplicity in my work ...,” he explains. “I felt my work was too clotted, too thick, there were too many strands knotted together, I was trying to make language do too many things at the same time” (Pieterse, “Dennis” 57).

\*\*\*

---

<sup>82</sup> Hopkins pioneered the use of sprung rhythm, which he describes as “the rhythm of common speech and of written prose” (184). To achieve this effect, sprung rhythm does not limit the number of syllables in a line. An example is the first two lines of “Pied Beauty”: “Glory be/to God for/dappled things –/For/skies of couple/- colour as a/brinded/cow; ...” (30).

<sup>83</sup> Brutus is presumably referring to Gardner’s two volumes, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, which were published respectively in 1944 and 1949.

<sup>84</sup> Nortje (1942-1970) was a pupil of Brutus at Paterson High School (Klopper, “Arthur” 6). When Nortje died in England, just days before he turned 28, Brutus described him as “perhaps the best South African poet of our time” (“Memoriam” 27). He later wrote the elegy, “Do not think”, in memory of Nortje (*Simple* 163-165).

<sup>85</sup> Tlhalo Raditlhalo also draws attention to Nortje’s “special interest” in Hopkins’ poetry (416).

Critical opinion remains sharply divided on the styles and techniques that Brutus employs in his early poetry. As MacArthur notes, “[c]ritics have either commended or condemned Brutus’ earliest verse with its clear echoes of poets of the English literary tradition, and for its highly mannered, highly derivative, neoclassical formality” (71). Christopher Heywood, for instance, describes Brutus’ early verse approvingly as immersed in the traditions of English Romantic and Metaphysical poetry (*History* 152). T. Coll MacGregor, on the other hand, echoes the concerns of critics such as Chipasula and Tejani about the perceived absence of African poetic traditions in Brutus’ verse (61).

Brutus himself later frequently expressed misgivings about the form his poetry took during the early part of his writing career. It is significant, though, that he never once distanced himself from the use of the troubadour in his poetry. As the interview with Steptoe cited earlier illustrates, he was still defending his use of the troubadour in 2004 – just a few years before his death (“Interview” 212). And, as he told Bond in 2006, he regards the troubadour as the one feature that links all the various aspects of his life.

The image of the troubadour was a recurrent presence in his poetry in other ways, too. For example, it was the name that he and Lindfors of the University of Texas gave to a publishing house which they formed with the specific intention of circumventing the banning order on Brutus by publishing his poetry under a pseudonym and distributing it in South Africa. Lindfors recalls that Troubadour Press consisted of little more than a small post box office in Del Valle, outside Austin, in Texas. “We had no interest in making Troubadour Press a going concern,” he explains. “The company had been created solely as a front for flouting one of the great idiocies of the South African legal code: the censorship of poetry” (“Dennis” 168-169).

The result of that venture was the collection *Thoughts Abroad*, which was published in 1970. Lindfors and Brutus also produced publicity material in the name of Troubadour Press to promote sales of the book and mischievously gave the impression that it was a thriving publishing house. Troubadour Press even survived long enough to bring out Brutus' next collection, *Strains*, in 1975 (albeit this time with a postal address in Blackson, Austin).<sup>86</sup> The cover featured a drawing of a musician, perhaps inviting comparisons with the troubadour, by the South African exiled artist Dumile Feni.<sup>87</sup> The title, of course, evokes the sound of music, too.

The continued presence of the troubadour in Brutus' poetry in some form or another, and over such an extended period, invites further analysis. It is particularly significant that Brutus first adopted the poetic persona of the troubadour while he still lived in South Africa. As noted earlier, his first troubadour poem, "A troubadour, I traverse all my land", was originally published in South Africa in 1963. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the troubadour was much more than just a poetic device to Brutus. There is reason to interpret Brutus' characterisation of himself as a troubadour as constituting an integral part of his definition of his personal identity.

The image of the troubadour suggests a constant state of movement (and, in Brutus' interpretation of the medieval figure, also of tension and conflict). Perhaps the underlying reason for such a displaced sense of self can be traced to his early life.<sup>88</sup> There are several

---

<sup>86</sup> Troubadour Press was later revived and co-published *Salutes: Selected Writings* in 1994 as a festschrift to Brutus on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<sup>87</sup> Feni, who went into exile in 1968 and died in New York in 1991, illustrated the covers of both Troubadour Press books (Nettleton 11). His name is erroneously transposed in the acknowledgements in *Strains*. Lindfors repeats the error ("Dennis" 168) and compounds it when he refers to "Feni Dumila" in a caption (*Tapes* 9).

<sup>88</sup> This account of Brutus' life is primarily based on two tape recordings he made in 1974 (Lindfors, *Tapes* 15-31; 32-46). McLuckie, too, provides an extensive overview of Brutus' life (1-40).

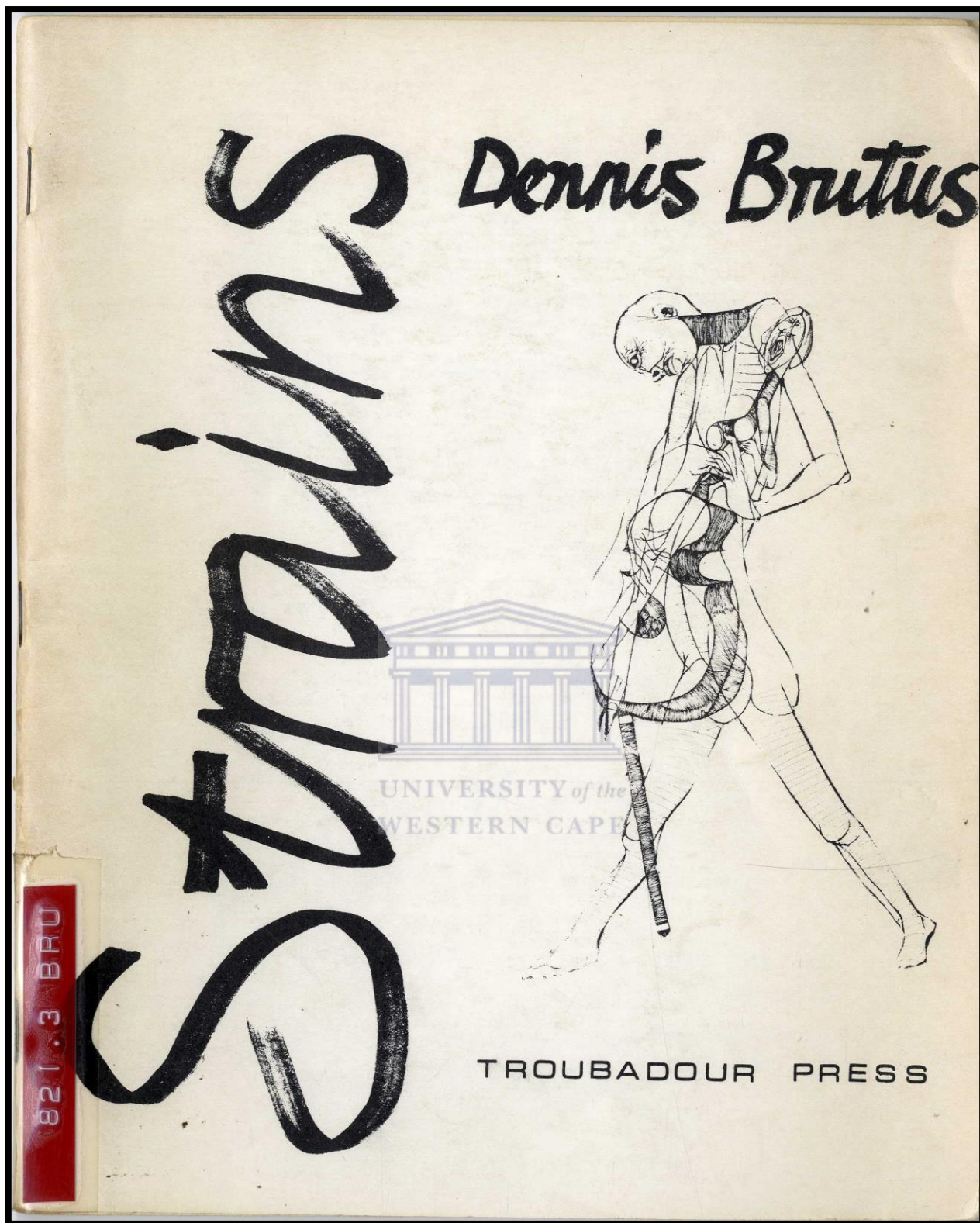


Fig. 7: The cover of Dennis Brutus' poetry collection *Strains*, published in 1975.

instances of dislocation right from the beginning. He was born in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to South African parents in 1924. Although his father continued to teach in Salisbury (now Harare), the rest of the family returned to South Africa when Brutus was two years old.<sup>89</sup> His father rejoined them in Port Elizabeth around 1929. However, this new period of stability and unity did not last long. Brutus recalls the “tension, hostility [and] unfriendliness” between his parents (Lindfors, *Tapes* 43). As a result of their acrimonious relationship, his father started to eat supper alone and his parents began to sleep in separate rooms.

In 1937 his parents separated permanently and he moved to Grahamstown to live with his mother and two sisters (Wilfred stayed behind, presumably with their father). They returned to Port Elizabeth around 1939. However, his father refused to reunite with his mother and instituted divorce proceedings instead.<sup>90</sup> Brutus remembers this as “a traumatic process” for his mother (45) and recalls helping her to write letters to secure maintenance from his father.<sup>91</sup> He refers to the separation of his parents in fairly fatalistic terms and attributes the break-up of their marriage mainly to differences in their personalities (and, in part, due to differences over the family’s financial affairs). He was not especially close to his father at that point and believes that, of the four children, he was the one for whom his father cared the least: “As I remember him at home, it is chiefly as a distant person, but also as a person who

---

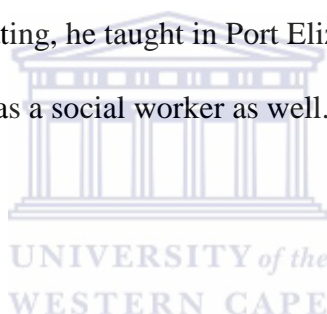
<sup>89</sup> According to an interview with Julie Frederikse, Brutus’ father was principal of a mission school in the former Rhodesia. The transcript on the South African History Archives website does not provide any details of the interview, but Frederikse notes in her book, *The Unbreakable Thread*, that she interviewed Brutus in Washington in 1987 (273).

<sup>90</sup> Because his parents separated when he was only 13 years old, Brutus describes himself as growing up in a single-parent family (personal interview, 18 June 1998).

<sup>91</sup> Although his parents remained separated, they only divorced officially in the late 1950s (Lindfors, *Tapes* 37).

could sometimes be enraged and could terrify us. I think I was truly terrified as a small boy. But mostly we never saw him” (9).<sup>92</sup>

Brutus’ childhood was disrupted in other ways, too. He attended a number of different primary schools (in addition, his schooling was further interrupted for long periods as a result of regular nose bleeds) (“Childhood” 95). In 1941 he left for Cape Town to attend a teacher training college in Parow, but returned to Port Elizabeth in 1943 to take up a scholarship to complete high school. The following year, he entered the University of Fort Hare to study for a degree. Due to financial constraints, he was forced to interrupt his studies in 1946 to teach at a primary school in Fort Beaufort. In 1947, he returned to the University of Fort Hare to complete his degree. After graduating, he taught in Port Elizabeth at his alma mater, Paterson High School, and worked briefly as a social worker as well. In 1950, he returned to teach at Paterson High School.



Even from such a brief outline of Brutus’ biography, it is clear that his childhood and early adulthood were extremely unsettled and unsettling. What further complicated his personal life was the political environment in which he grew up in Port Elizabeth. He was aware of the poverty around him in Dowerville. However, his direct involvement in politics came via quite a circuitous route. When he was a teacher at Paterson High School, he became responsible by default for organising the school’s sports activities because there was no one else to do so.<sup>93</sup> He eventually formed the South African Sports Association (SASA) in 1958 to campaign for racial equality in sport. The violent response of police to the anti-pass law protests in

---

<sup>92</sup> Brutus even wrote a poem about his father called “My father, that distant man”. It was first published in the journal *The Gar* in 1988 (16) and then as part of a sequence, “Endurance”, in his collection *Still the Sirens* (12). In his poem “Bury the Great Duke”, Brutus also painfully recalls how he failed to recite Tennyson’s poem “Ode on the death of the Duke of Wellington” to his father (see page 34).

<sup>93</sup> Brutus describes this process in some detail in a personal interview (18 June 1998).



Sharpeville further politicised him and, in 1961, he became involved in planning a National Convention for what he describes as “the colored section of the oppressed” (“African” 4).<sup>94</sup> This convention took place in Malmesbury in October 1961 and, according to Brutus, was “the most representative meeting of Coloured people in the history of South Africa” (Frederikse, “Transcript” 7) and “one of the most useful political activities I was ever involved in” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 115).

He was served with a banning order during the same month, which restricted his movements and prevented him from taking part in political meetings or any other public activities (Sustar 41). When he was dismissed from his teaching post that same year as a consequence, he left to seek employment in Johannesburg and, at the same time, to study law at the University of the Witwatersrand. Brutus variously found employment as a “tea boy” at the university (Lindfors, *Tapes* 58) and as a secretary at Central Indian High School (McLuckie 14), a private school founded in 1955 in protest against the forced removal of people classified as Indian from central Johannesburg under the Group Areas Act (Hutchinson 13).<sup>95</sup>

In May 1963 he was arrested for breaking his banning order by attending a meeting of South Africa’s Olympic Committee. In August he left the country for Swaziland, partly with the intention of attending a meeting of the IOC the following month, but also with the longer-term objective of going into exile to avoid being arrested if caught breaking his banning order. “I remember feeling a great anguish about leaving South Africa,” he recounts. “This was compounded of a sense of denial, almost of amputation, and indeed of betrayal of leaving the country when I ought to have remained there (and, of course fear of arrest)” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 52).

<sup>94</sup> According to Brutus, he secretly worked with the ANC to plan the convention (Lindfors, *Tapes* 115).

<sup>95</sup> In fact, Brutus was teaching illegally at the school in view of his banning order (Lindfors, *Tapes* 51).

However, when he crossed the Swaziland border into Mozambique, he was arrested by Mozambican police and handed over to their South African counterparts. When he tried to escape from police custody in Johannesburg in September 1963, he was shot in the back. He was subsequently convicted in January 1964 of breaking his banning order and imprisoned for 18 months. He appears to associate his incarceration on Robben Island with the haunting painting *The Prison Courtyard*,<sup>96</sup> which the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh completed while a patient at a sanitarium.<sup>97</sup> For Brutus, this was presumably a similarly traumatic period in some ways.

In addition, he was subjected to extreme physical pain in prison. Former Robben Island prisoner Indres Naidoo recalls how Brutus and other inmates were beaten by warders with batons and rubber pipes after they were ordered to pull seaweed from the sea. He says Brutus “was their main target, receiving more blows than anybody else, until he virtually lost consciousness” (Naidoo 88). Later, as Brutus lay in bed, he could barely speak properly: “[T]he words ... came out in a groaning whisper, broken up and harsh, hardly making sense” (88). Eddie Daniels, who was imprisoned on Robben Island from 1964 to 1979, believes Brutus was treated particularly harshly by warders and attributes this to a vendetta against educated prisoners. As a result, he states in his prison memoir, Brutus was “systematically and vilely persecuted, so badly that at one stage he became psychologically disorientated” (Daniels 150).

---

<sup>96</sup> He writes “one of my favorites” on a page featuring the painting (*The Prison Courtyard*, NELM, 94.4.14.13), also known as *Prisoners Exercising (After Doré)* as it is based on a work by the French painter Paul Gustave Doré (Lubin 193).

<sup>97</sup> Van Gogh, who was admitted to the sanitarium Saint-Paul-de-Mausole in southern France in May 1889 (Lubin 186), once compared himself to “a prisoner who is condemned to loneliness” (6).

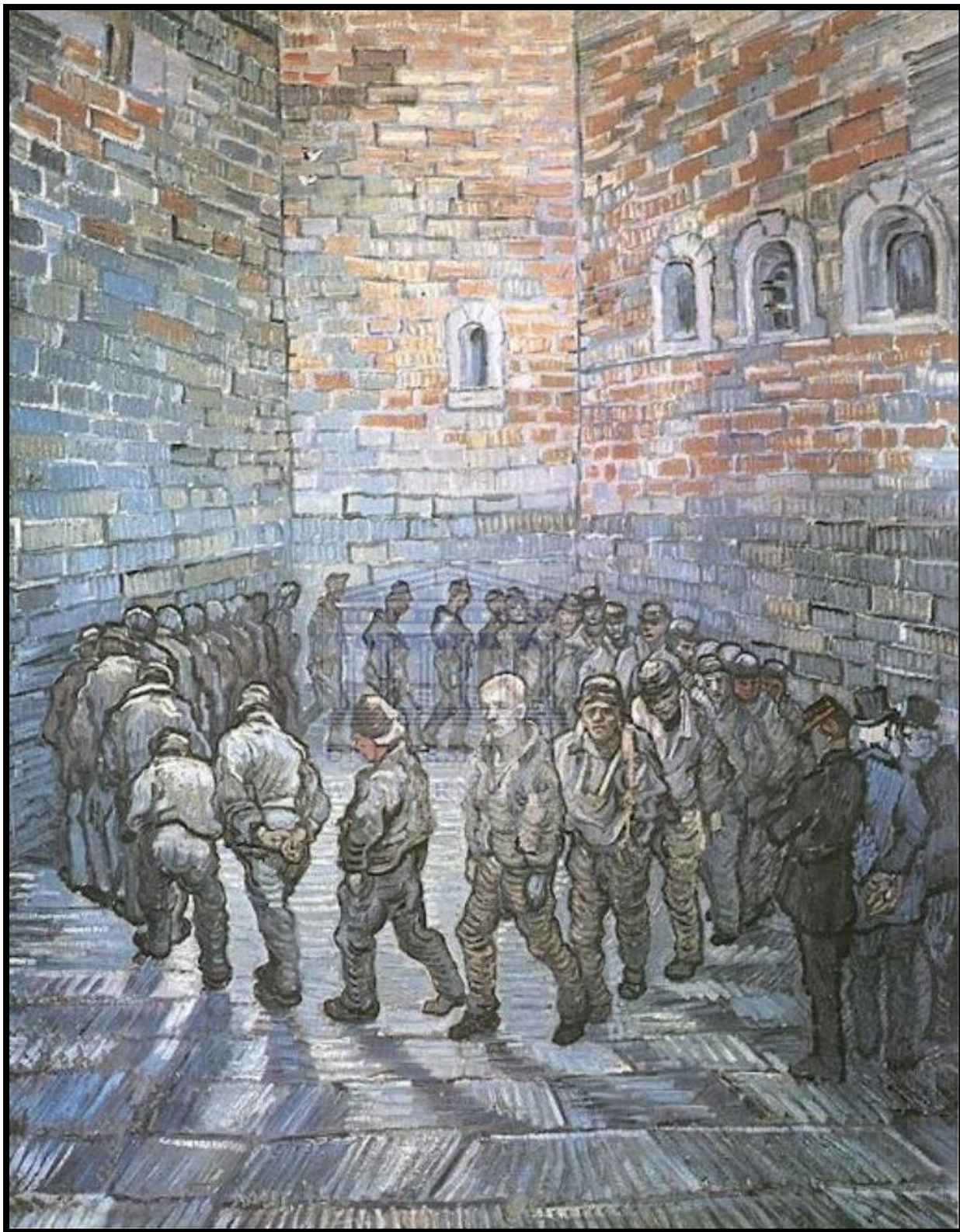
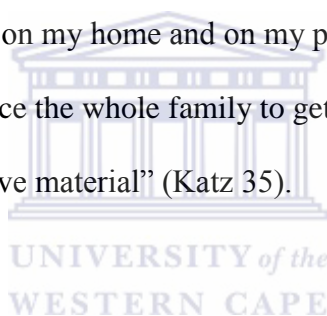


Fig. 8: Vincent van Gogh's painting, *Prisoners Exercising (After Doré)*.

Source: [www.vangoghgallery.com](http://www.vangoghgallery.com)

After his release from prison in June 1965, Brutus was served with another banning order.<sup>98</sup> Once again he was not allowed to attend any social gatherings, be quoted in any publication or publish any writing (Foster 6). These restrictions severely disrupted his life, and even affected the movements of the rest of his family. His wife, May, and their children could go to their friends, but were not allowed to have any visitors in order to prevent any social contact with Brutus (Lindfors, *Tapes* 111). During this period, May was intimidated and threatened with a banning order as well for engaging in unspecified political activities (113). In fact, Brutus claims he was harassed just for going to church services on Sundays (111). His home life was further destabilised by frequent visits from the security police. “I prefer to meet them at the front door and keep them there and not admit them into the house,” he recalls. “I resented their intrusion on my home and on my privacy” (110). Sometimes they would even arrive at 3am, and force the whole family to get up on the pretext of searching for what they referred to as “subversive material” (Katz 35).



He was also harassed by security police outside his home. After his release from prison, he eventually found employment in a junior capacity at an engineering company called Sharp Control (Brutus, “Dennis” 60).<sup>99</sup> However, the security police subsequently paid a visit to the owner of the company. A fellow worker, Ebrahim Bardien, recalls in an undated personal letter stamped 25 September 1998: “The following day, our boss, Mr Sharp, explained to Dennis that he was intimidated to fire [him] immediately. We all were very sad to see him leave under those conditions.” Bardien then helped Brutus to find employment at another engineering company, Bill Essex Engineering. “Just as he was about to settle in,” Bardien

<sup>98</sup> Soon after Brutus was released, his brother Wilfred was sent to Robben Island to serve a 15-month sentence for “furthering the aims of Communism” (Winter 197). *Letters to Martha* is largely made up of poems which Brutus sent to Wilfred’s wife, Martha, “in an attempt to convey what the experience was like, believing it was better for her to know than to have to imagine” (S. Gray 155).

<sup>99</sup> Part of this autobiographical essay was republished as “Constellations of Exile” in the anthology *Echoes of the Sunbird* (Burness 24-34).

writes, “the same [thing happened], the special branch [security police] again paid a visit.” As a result, Brutus again lost his job. Bardien helped him once more to find employment, this time at a company called Aberdare Cables. But the security police refused to end their campaign of victimisation; they called on this company as well, and pressurised it to terminate Brutus’ employment.

It is against this personal and political background that Brutus adopts the image of the troubadour in his poetry. It is a background which is marked by continual loss and displacement: he often moves from one location to another during his childhood and early adulthood. And, when he does create a home of his own after he marries in 1950, his life is further disrupted by apartheid as a result of his growing involvement in anti-apartheid campaigns. As a consequence, he experiences a further rupture in the relationship between what Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin refer to as self and place (*Empire* 8). Brutus himself points out in an interview that what he describes as “my lack of roots” begins when he refuses to accept being a South African on the terms prescribed by apartheid (S. Lewis, “Speaking” 155). In other words, he becomes estranged from his personal home and from his country long before he leaves South Africa in July 1966.

Previously Brutus explicitly defines himself as a South African patriot – someone with an intense love for his country.<sup>100</sup> For instance, he once refers to the powerful impression that Walter Scott’s epic poem, “The Lay of the Last Minstrel”, made on him at school (“Introduction” 364). No doubt Brutus’ feelings of a deep attachment to his homeland were reinforced by sentiments such as the following expressed in Canto Six, in which the minstrel passionately professes his love for his country in lines 5-7 of the second stanza: “Land of my

<sup>100</sup> The word “patriotism” is derived from the Latin word “patria”, which literally means “fatherland” or, more generally, “country”. Accordingly, Igor Primoratz describes patriotism as “love of one’s country, identification with it, and special concern for its well-being and that of compatriots” (18).

sires! what mortal hand/Can e'er untie the filial band,/That knits me to thy rugged strand!" (*Poetical* 39). Decades later, the impact of the poem is still fresh in his mind. "Implicit in those lines [of 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel'] is a statement of patriotism taken for granted," he says, "and a statement *for* patriotism which I assumed I was entitled to make; therefore, an assumption that South Africa was and always would be my native land" ("Introduction" 364; emphasis in the original).

An early indication of this sentiment in his poetry is "Patriot", published in July 1963 in *Penpoint*, a literary journal of the Department of English at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda, and later republished as "Patriot I" in *Stubborn Hope*. Even though the title is a declaration of his love for his country, the content of lines 7-12 clearly signals that he is beginning to feel increasingly ambivalent towards South Africa because of the NP government's policies of racial segregation and discrimination:

... if in time I can endure no longer  
 the torturing of unrequitedness  
 and claw your contours with deliberate clumsiness,  
 I beg you to remember  
 such violence may be  
 perversion of frustrated tenderness. (*Stubborn* 52)

Isaac Elimimian also finds ample evidence in Brutus' early poetry to justify describing him as "a patriot and nationalist to the core" (77). He cites "On the beach" as an example, with its

evocative description of a South African coast in the following stanza (lines 5-8): “spindrift from sand-dunes tresses down/to inlets where rock-fragments shoal,/seaspray and statice distil the mood/salt-sweet, foamwhite, seaweed-brown” (*Letters* 41). Elimimian singles out “On the road” as another example of Brutus’ patriotism. It is easy to see why; in lines 6-8 of the second stanza, the poem describes the South African landscape at night with undisguised emotion: “The wide night sighs its sensuous/openness, stirring my mind’s delight/to a transfiguring tenderness” (40). His love for South Africa can justifiably be regarded as a form of patriotism, with its connotations of a keen attachment to a particular country. However, despite his feelings for the country, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with South Africa and by the many restrictions which apartheid places on his life.

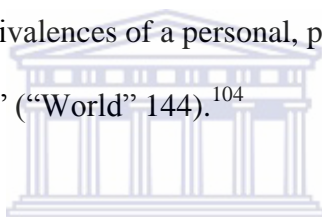


The concept of the “unheimlich” can be applied to describe such an existential crisis. The German word was first used in a similar context by Freud in an essay in 1919, “Das Unheimliche”.<sup>101</sup> “Unheimlich” literally means “unhomely”, though Strachey prefers the word “uncanny” in his translation of the essay into English (Freud, “Uncanny” 219). Freud traces at some length the etymology of the word “heimlich” (which is given as “homely”) before arriving at the conclusion that, among its many nuances, it also possesses the same meaning as “unheimlich” (224). As such, the word is ambiguous and contains two diametrically opposed meanings – “that of feeling at home, and that of not feeling at home” (Ghazoul 2). The main focus of Freud’s essay is an attempt to understand how something that is familiar becomes uncanny or even frightening (“Uncanny” 219-220). A key part of his attempt to explain this phenomenon is the proposition that what is experienced as uncanny can invariably be traced back to something familiar which has been repressed (247).

<sup>101</sup> The German philosopher Martin Heidegger subsequently uses the word “unheimlich” in *Being and Time* in 1927 to mean “not-being-at-home” (233). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, similarly, translate it as “unhousedness” or “not-at-home-ness” (*Post-Colonial* 73).

However, as pointed out in my Introduction, it is not Freud's original notion of "unheimlich" that applies to Brutus so much as the way in which it is subsequently elaborated by Bhabha. Although he recognises that the word "unhomed" is awkward, Bhabha prefers to use this literal meaning of the word "unheimlich" because it captures a certain sense of estrangement ("World" 141). In other words, to be "unhomed" refers to a particular state of mind.<sup>102</sup>

Bhabha also makes an important departure from the way in which Freud employs the word "unheimlich". While he retains the ambiguity embedded in Freud's use of the word, he transplants it from the psychoanalytical domain to one which can be described as the psychosocial or the psychopolitical (Ghazoul 3).<sup>103</sup> The first time Bhabha does so is in a university lecture in 1992. "The unhomed moment," according to his elaboration of Freud's theory, "relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" ("World" 144).<sup>104</sup>



WESTERN CAPE

This description certainly applies to Brutus, as illustrated by the skeletal overview of his personal and political biography. A poem written just weeks before his departure into exile provides a startling indication of the trauma he was experiencing at the time as a result of the severe personal and political pressures he was undergoing:

One wishes for death  
with a kind of instant defeatism

---

<sup>102</sup> This fits in with the definition of home as being more than just a physical space, but also a "state of being" (Rybczynski 62; Terkenli 332).

<sup>103</sup> Ferial J. Ghazoul points out that the psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon was an important influence on Bhabha in this regard in view of his emphasis on psychoanalysis as key to understanding resistance during the Algerian Revolution in the late 1950s and early 1960s (3).

<sup>104</sup> This essay was later reproduced in an extended form as the introduction to Bhabha's book, *The Location of Culture* (1-18).



wishing that the worst may befall  
 since the nearly-worst has so often befallen:

it is not a wish for oblivion  
 but a pugnacious assertion of discontent

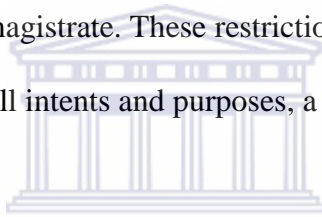
a disgust at the boundless opprobrium of life  
 a desperation; despair. (*Letters* 32)

In fact, in Bhabha's elaboration of the "unheimlich" there is no longer a clear division between the personal and the public. On the contrary, these blur into each other. He contends that "the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions", and attributes this to displacement ("World" 141). As a result of this displacement, he suggests, "the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (141). This description applies to Brutus in various ways. When he is released from prison, for instance, his family's own house seems strange and almost threatening. What aggravates this sense of discomfort is that his movements outside the house are restricted by a banning order. This virtually makes him a prisoner in his own home. He evokes this sense of unhomeliness poignantly in a tape-recorded account of this period:

The house still seems strange to me: the kitchen crowded and uncomfortable with nothing visually pleasing, much of it grimy. The furniture is too large and projecting awkward corners and edges that make me uncomfortable. Down the passage in the

front room the radio is playing. I sit gloomily at a table, my mind taut and prickly with a sense of confinement. A long weekend of house arrest, with only the short morning break I have taken, presses in on me with the knowledge that it is illegal for me to go out by the back door into the small concrete yard or onto the stoop by the front door. All this makes me irritable, the kind of brooding pent-up anger. (Lindfors, *Tapes* 110)

He also captures this sense of despair and existential dislocation eloquently in the poem, “When they deprive me of the evenings”. It is written after his first banning order in 1961, which made it a criminal offence for him to leave his home at night or during weekends without prior permission from a magistrate. These restrictions turn his home into a place of confinement and it becomes, for all intents and purposes, a prison:



When they deprive me of the evenings  
how shall I speak my inexpressible grief?

Think of the night-air, sweet with dew and stars  
the moon a molten ingot's spilling-splash  
plaqued on the night's glassed-ocean floor,  
the elegance of lamp-lit autumn oaks  
preening in accidental man-made grace  
and this rat-ceilinged hovel on my head.

When I am prisoned from my evenings  
how shall I word my inarticulable woe?

I shall curl to the tight knot of a shrivelled worm  
 or angularly bundled like a mangy cat  
 huddle against myself for warmth  
 or grub among leaf-litter of my autumn years  
 rustling foregone endearments in my throat  
 and seeking easement in remembered tenderness  
  
 but how shall I mouth my unencompassable woe  
 and how shall I be consoled? (*Stubborn* 8)<sup>105</sup>

A term coined by Ghazoul, “domestic unhomely”, can be applied quite productively in relation to Brutus. By domestic, she means at home “and what happens in the very confines of the household” (Ghazoul 16). Although she uses it in a very different context in her essay on Iraqi fiction, “the modes of violation, repression, and aggression” that she describes penetrate the fabric of Brutus’ family life in a very similar way (16). But, over and above this, Brutus’ sense of estrangement is not only limited to his home or to his domestic life. It includes South Africa as a whole. Ghazoul’s notion of a domestic unhomely can therefore be borrowed and extended to describe Brutus’ poetry as depicting a national unhomely. An indication of this is his poem, “In this country”, which he writes while still in South Africa. The last stanza (lines 19-25) captures a disturbing sense of unhomeliness:

Where sweet air flows,  
 And the slim trees grow,  
 In this country

---

<sup>105</sup> A slightly different version of this poem was originally published in the journal *Penpoint* (43-44).

Festers hate in fetid wounds  
 Infection floats on fluid air  
 Anger roars in the placid night  
 And the dark is drizzled with our tears. (*Stubborn 2*)

There are many other examples in Brutus' poetry which convey a state of unhomeliness in South Africa.<sup>106</sup> In lines 11-14 of "Somehow we survive", he writes: "Patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark/hissing their menace to our lives,/most cruel, all our land is scarred with terror,/rendered unlovely and unlovable" (*Sirens 3*). In "The impregnation of our air", he writes despairingly in lines 9 to 13 that South Africans have become "a bellicose people/living in a land at war/a country besieged/the children play with guns/and the schoolboys dream of killings" (*Letters 27*). In another, he describes apartheid in lines 1 to 4 as "[m]ore terrible than any beast/that can be tamed or bribed/the iron monster of the world/ingests me in its grinding maw" (*Sirens 6*). The speaker in this poem does his best to "stave off my fated splintering" (line 8 in the second stanza). But, in the end, the constant tension, fear and violence – never mind rejection and marginalisation – take their toll. Eventually, Brutus decides he can no longer live in South Africa with such an intense feeling of unhomeliness. He writes mournfully in a poem written in Johannesburg, presumably before he tried to flee from the country for the first time in 1963.<sup>107</sup>

I am out of love with you for now;  
 cold-sodden in my misery  
 your contours and allurements

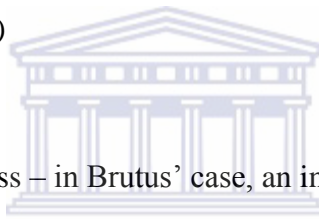
<sup>106</sup> Bhabha acknowledges the role of apartheid in shaping unhomeliness in his analysis of the South African writer Nadine Gordimer's 1990 novel, *My Son's Story*. He detects "an unhomely stirring" in each of the houses in her novel ("World" 147).

<sup>107</sup> This poem first appeared with minor differences in punctuation in *Penpoint* (43).

cannot move me:

I murmur old endearments to revive  
 our old familiar glow again  
 – like sapless autumn leaves  
 they rasp in vain.

You have asked too much of me:  
 fond-fool, bereft I cling  
 unloving, to remembered love  
 and the spring. (*Simple* 41)

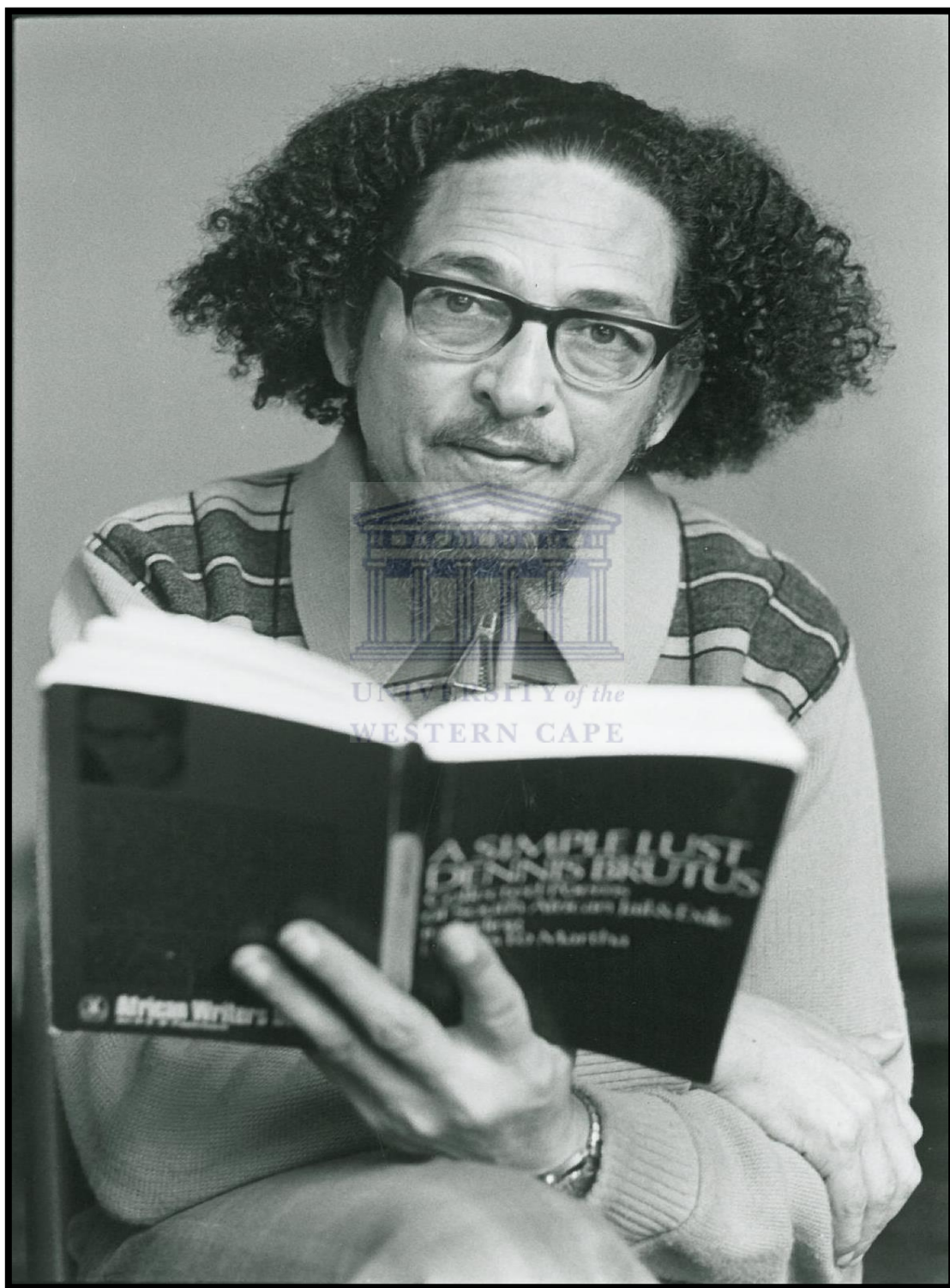


It is as a result of this unhomeliness – in Brutus’ case, an increasingly intense feeling of estrangement which gradually develops into an overwhelming sense of desolation – that he finally decides to leave South Africa. He comes to regard exile as a less painful alternative. So in July 1966,<sup>108</sup> after living for a year under a banning order after his release from prison, he eventually departs on a one-way exit permit.<sup>109</sup> It is to be the beginning of nearly three decades in exile.

---

<sup>108</sup> Alvarez-Pereyre mistakenly gives the year as 1965 (135).

<sup>109</sup> Bardien, who signed Brutus’ application for an exit permit, believes his dismissal from his third job after his release from prison was the final reason behind his decision to leave South Africa and attempt to start “a new life” abroad.

**SECTION 2: THE MIDDLE YEARS (AUGUST 1966-JULY 1991)****CHAPTER 3: ADRIFT IN EXILE**

**Fig. 9: Dennis Brutus in London in 1973.**

**Photographer: George Hallett.**

When Brutus left South Africa, he became one of an estimated 30 000 to 60 000 South Africans who were forced to live in exile<sup>110</sup> between the late 1950s and 1990 because of their opposition to apartheid (Bernstein, *Rift* xii).<sup>111</sup> He first went to the UK, where he stayed for about five years, before he moved to the USA.<sup>112</sup> During the 25 years he was in exile, he wrote the greater part of his poetry. Besides the privately distributed *Denver Poems*, he published eight volumes: *Poems from Algiers*, *Thoughts Abroad*, *A Simple Lust*, *China Poems*, *Strains*, *Stubborn Hope*, *Salutes and Censures* and *Airs and Tributes*. His poems were published in several anthologies as well (as listed on page 9). This chapter will focus on the content of his work in exile, and will identify and analyse the changes in his poetic personae and in his themes during this period.



There is an important evolution in Brutus' writing in exile in various ways. During his first few years outside South Africa, there are still clear traces of the troubadour persona in his poetry. In "I am the exile", for instance, the speaker explicitly reaffirms his status as a troubadour (see pages 65-66). In "Snarling, the great beast hurls through the air", in which Brutus reflects on a journey to the Netherlands, he writes that "we settle once more for the thundering flight—/one more wide range on a troubadour's earth" (*Stubborn* 54). Brutus' life

---

<sup>110</sup> Paul Tabori's general definition of an exile will be employed in this dissertation. He describes an exile as "a person who is compelled to leave his homeland – ... the forces that send him on his way may be political, economic, or purely psychological" (37).

<sup>111</sup> Writers were a particular target of repression in apartheid South Africa. According to David Bunn, "[i]n no other country save perhaps 1930s Germany did the state mount such a concerted effort to expel and destroy the most innovative representatives of nonofficial culture" (33). In fact, he regards exile in many ways as "the central problem in South African literary history" (33).

<sup>112</sup> Brutus qualified for a British passport as he was born in what was then Rhodesia. This was probably a key factor behind his initial decision to go to the UK. He later identified his knowledge of the English language as another important consideration (Berger 76). He moved to the USA in 1972 after his appointment as a professor in the Department of English at Northwestern University in Evanston near Chicago (Lindfors, *Tapes* 18).

in exile certainly resembles that of the troubadour in some ways: he is constantly on the move, either from one part of a country to another, or from one country to another.

There are nonetheless important differences between the troubadour and the exile. Most significantly, the troubadour goes from one place to another out of choice. By contrast, the exile is usually forced to leave home as a result of certain pressures, usually of a political or economic nature. In relation to Brutus, Ngaage notes that “[t]he separation of the Poet from his love (the land) is a forceful one. It is not a self-willed separation ...” (390). And, unlike the troubadour, the exile is not able to return home.

Perhaps in recognition of this, Brutus shifts away from the persona of the troubadour in his poetry and increasingly adopts the identity of the exile – and, more specifically, that of the political exile. “The exile replaces the troubadour and sings a different song,” notes G. Douglas Killam, who also draws attention to this shift in Brutus’ poetry during this period (95). This is indeed the case in much of Brutus’ poetry written after July 1966. South Africa and his enforced separation from the country become recurrent themes in his poetry. This yearning for his homeland is particularly pronounced in *Poems from Algiers*, the first collection written entirely outside South Africa. These works are composed after he attends the First Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algeria during July-August 1969. In the first poem, he uses the image of driftwood to describe the exile’s longing for South Africa, as the following extract illustrates:

And I am driftwood  
 on an Algerian beach  
 along a Mediterranean shore ...



Even the seabird questing  
 weaving away and across  
 the long blue rollers coasting  
 from green shelves of shore-land  
 and rock-tipped banks,  
 even the seabird has a place of rest –  
 though it may vary by season or by tide  
 and a mate brooding with swollen nares and puffed breast  
 signalling nest-routes with tender secret cries –  
 though it may vary by season or by tide.

But I am driftwood  
 By some white Algerian plage ...



For I am driftwood  
 in a life and place and time  
 thrown by some chance, perchance  
 to an occasional use  
 a rare half-pleasure on a seldom chance  
 and I grate on the sand of being  
 of existence, circumstance  
 digging and dragging for a meaning  
 dragging through the dirt and debris  
 the refuse of existence  
 dragging through the diurnal treadmill of my life.

And still I am driftwood ... (*Poems* 5-8)

By comparing himself to driftwood, Brutus draws attention to the exile's inability to exert much control over his life. He depicts himself as being helplessly flung about by the forces around him (this reference is presumably directed at the NP government which forced Brutus out of South Africa into an uncertain fate abroad). The poem repeats the statement "I am driftwood" several times throughout the 59-line poem, and ends with the following two despairing lines: "And still I am driftwood/on some sun-soaked plage" (9). The exile's longing for South Africa is unmistakable. The poem laments that "even the seabird has a place of rest –/though it may vary by season or by tide" (6).

Even when Brutus admires the beauty of the Algerian coastline, he is still reminded of South Africa. In one poem, for instance, he writes: "In the sunlight/in the roads along the sea/they sell the pale-green streaked and patterned watermelon/with its smooth and tepid skin;/blue Algerian sky and blue Mediterranean sea:/and by Clifton, Seapoint [sic] and the Cape" (12). This reflection of South Africa in Algeria occurs again in "A South African in Algiers: Homesickness", and is accentuated by its plaintive title. The flowers and plants that the speaker sees during a visit to a school in the Algiers suburb of Ben Aknoun strongly remind him of South Africa: "Cosmos, daisy and agapanthus/Kanna, scented geranium and katjeepering!" (13).<sup>113</sup> These two lines are, in fact, little more than a fragment of a poem, yet still contain a striking poignancy.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Kanna is a plant commonly found in South Africa, particularly in the Eastern and Western Cape ("Sceletium Tortuosum Herba"). Gardenia, a plant found in many countries in Africa and Asia, is also commonly known as katjeepering in South Africa ("Gardenia volkensii").

<sup>114</sup> Mphahlele, too, noticed the fragmentary nature of *Poems from Algiers*. In a letter to him in November 1970, Brutus acknowledges: "Generally, as you know, I am content to make my statements by fragments, hoping that they can add up to a kind [of] mosaic" (Manganyi and Attwell 200). However, despite this admission, he protests that not all the poems in the collection are simply fragments (200).

\*\*\*

This constant longing for South Africa is even more striking in Brutus' next collection, *Thoughts Abroad*, published just a few days after *Poems from Algiers* under the pseudonym John Bruin.<sup>115</sup> Lindfors, who was involved in selecting and publishing the collection, observes that “the mood throughout *Thoughts Abroad* was one of homesick reverie” (“Dennis” 169). While some of these poems were completed before Brutus leaves South Africa, most are written in various countries during his early years in exile. According to the datelines, these include England, Northern Ireland, Denmark, France, Italy, Sweden, Iran, Algeria, India, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Lindfors comments in a review of the collection that “[m]ost of these globe-girdling poems ... took the shape of memories or reflections on South Africa. These were truly the ‘thoughts abroad’ of an itinerant poet heartsick for his homeland” (“John” 73). A moving example is the following poem, written in the London suburb of Finchley:

November sunlight silvers my grimy panes,  
suffuses the gruel-grey sky  
and gleams on the cold woodwork;

such wan luminescence  
might as well not be,  
lacks all virtue, is devoid of warmth

while Southwards in a steady blaze

---

<sup>115</sup> The name “John Bruin” can perhaps also be regarded as a veiled reference to John Brown, who campaigned for the abolition of slavery in the USA during the early eighteenth century (Parry 279).

like a sheet of molten lead heat pours down  
and the world glows, while here I pine. (*Thoughts* 5)

As the speaker proclaims in “When last I ranged and revelled all your length”, a poem written in Johannesburg and in Swaziland’s capital city Mbabane, he is “the slave of an habituated love” (see page 73). Although Brutus is legally denied full citizenship rights in South Africa, and despite the fact that he is prohibited from returning after leaving on a one-way exit permit, he remains emotionally and politically tied to the country. As a consequence, the exiles in many of the poems in *Thoughts Abroad* – like those in *Poems from Algiers* – often record painful reminders of South Africa.

While in Nadi (not Nandi, as Brutus mistakenly refers to the town on Fiji’s main island), he writes: “Under the Fijian moon/in the sultry pre-dawn dark/a concord of memories murmurs/echoes old longings, misty passions/and new stirrings rustle the sibilant dark” (*Thoughts* 13). When he is in Iran’s capital, Teheran, he writes a poem in which the speaker admits in lines 3 and 4 to an “unassuageable desire/and loneliness” (12). Even the captivating sights of spring in England cannot ease the exile’s longing for South Africa. A poem written in London celebrates the fact that “[a]t last the roses burn/red flames and orange,/tea-rose pink and white/smouldering in the dark foliage/in the dark-green lustrous leaves:/the world is ripening and abundant/replete with its joyous growth” yet, in the same breath, laments that “my heart, unseasonal, grieves” (22).

And even though Brutus takes full advantage of his new-found ability in exile to move freely around the world, unencumbered by legal restrictions, he constantly feels guilty about those he left behind in prison in South Africa. During a trip to Denmark, for instance, the speaker in

the poem “Shakespeare winged this way using other powers” is reminded of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare’s play about the anguished Prince of Denmark. In lines 10-15, the speaker wishes that he possessed the playwright’s ability “to claw some image of my fellows’ woe/hacking the hardness of the ice-clad rock,/armed with such passion, dedication, voice/that every cobblestone would rear in wrath/and batter down a prison’s wall/and wrench them from the island where they rot” (8). The reference to the political prisoners incarcerated on Robben Island is unmistakable. Brutus is also reminded of Robben Island when he visits New Zealand. The city Nelson, on South Island, makes him think of ANC leader Nelson Mandela, then still imprisoned on Robben Island (Brutus, “Dennis” 58; “Constellations” 25).<sup>116</sup> Prompted by this geographical reminder, Brutus writes the following poem:

Here  
 on another island  
 within sound of the sea  
 I watch the moon turn yellow  
 or a blurred Orion heel

And remember  
 the men on the island  
 on strips of matting  
 on the cold floor  
 between cold walls  
 and the long endless night. (*Thoughts* 9)




---

<sup>116</sup> Mandela was first sent to Robben Island to serve a five-year sentence after he was convicted in November 1962 of incitement and leaving South Africa without valid travel documents (Mandela 160). After another trial from October 1963 to June 1964, in which he was convicted on charges of sabotage, he was sentenced to life imprisonment and returned to Robben Island (161, 181).

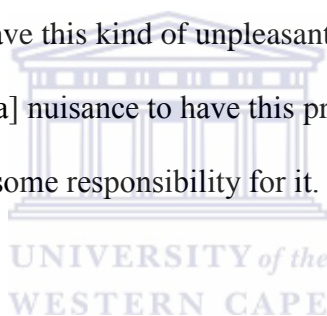
Exile burdens Brutus in other ways as well. After just a few years outside South Africa, he becomes frustrated with constantly trying to persuade people in different parts of the world to support political campaigns against apartheid. This is evident from several poems in *Thoughts Abroad*. An example is the last stanza (lines 10-15) of the following poem written in New York: “off to Philadelphia in the morning/to rehearse some moulded and half-singing words,/remouth some banal platitudes/and launch-lodge some arrows/from a transient unambitious hand,/a nerveless unassertive gripe” (14). The poem “I must lug my battered body”, written during a visit to the Australian city of Sydney, is another striking example of his occasional disillusionment with this part of his life in exile:

I must lug my battered body  
 garbage-littered  
 across the frontiers of the world,  
 recite my wear-shined clichés  
 for nameless firesides  
 and fidget, a supple suppliant, for papers  
 in a thousand wooden ante-rooms;  
 wince, in the tense air of recognition  
 as the clean-limbed, simple and innocent grow hostile;  
 – in my baggage I hear the ticking explosives  
 of reproach, and threat, and challenge. (*Thoughts* 15)

Brutus refers explicitly to his growing dissatisfaction with this aspect of his life in exile during a lecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the USA in 1973. “Most South Africans living in exile tend to concern themselves with the predicament of those who are

still in the country,” he remarks. “Many work pretty hard at getting knowledge across ... trying to make people more aware of conditions in South Africa and trying to move people to exert some pressure for change” (“Poetry” 3). Sometimes they encounter outright hostility; at other times they become discouraged by ignorance or apathy. Brutus specifically mentions the poem “I must lug my battered body” during the lecture, and refers to the experience as “a wearisome chore – going from place to place spelling out the same message, getting the same kind of negative or apathetic response” (3-4). He further states:

... [W]hen you go on a campus in Australia or elsewhere, one of the problems you have to contend with is not merely the ignorance and the innocence of the people you speak to, but when they have this kind of unpleasant knowledge thrust upon them, they dislike it. It’s really [a] nuisance to have this problem dumped on your doorstep and to be told you’ve got some responsibility for it. (4)



Nonetheless, even though he frequently encounters such disheartening experiences, Brutus diligently perseveres with his campaign to win international support for South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle. He describes this eloquently in a poem written while travelling from London to Rome, “Blue pools of peace”, and refers to “a dogged thrusting-on/to new places, new names and new marks” in lines 9-10 (*Thoughts* 10). In “At an edge”, written in Grenoble in the southeast of France, he writes defiantly in lines 5 and 9-11 that “new routes await choosing ... /new perils perhaps:/from the debris of defeat one crawls/emerges debouching on a vaster plain of challenge” (20).

\*\*\*

Yet, despite Brutus' intense love and longing for South Africa, he gradually undergoes a fundamentally important transformation in exile. While he remains emotionally and politically committed to South Africa, and continues to campaign tirelessly against apartheid, he gradually begins to redefine his personal and political identity. Simon Lewis traces Brutus' development of an identity "transcending home and exile" to 1986, when he joined the University of Pittsburgh in the USA as an adjunct professor in the Department of Black Community Education and Research ("Dennis", *Journal* 50, 55).

However, there is in fact compelling evidence that this process started much earlier in South Africa. As a high school pupil in Port Elizabeth, Brutus was already exposed to a fairly sophisticated political education. Many of the teachers he respected at Paterson High School embraced various brands of left-wing politics. "... [They] were ... Marxist or at the very least leftist and some of them were Trotskyist," he recalls (Van Wyk 181). This was probably the first time he became aware of the ideals of international solidarity being advocated by various political movements. These were largely informed by *The Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, in which they stressed "the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality" (77). This position was encapsulated in their rallying cry "Working men of all countries, unite!" (96), which subsequently became abbreviated as the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!". Leon Trotsky, who later developed his own theory of Marxism, also emphasised international proletarian solidarity. According to Peter Beilharz, Trotsky took on the role of "internationalist *par excellence*" (27). He firmly believed that, because of the nature of the world economy, capitalism could only be destroyed through an international revolution (27).



Brutus came into further contact with such ideas when he himself became a teacher after he graduated from the University of Fort Hare in 1946 and joined the TLSA.<sup>117</sup> Although this was primarily a professional body of teachers, it was also very active in community affairs (Adhikari 5). For this reason, the TLSA became part of an alliance of organisations formed in 1943 to oppose the establishment of a separate Coloured Affairs Department (CAD) by then Prime Minister Jan Smuts. The Anti-CAD alliance, in turn, endorsed the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), which subscribed to Trotsky's interpretation of Marxism, at its national conference in January 1944 (G. Lewis 222).

As Brutus explains, he is "part of the Trotskyist Fourth International movement via the Anti-CAD movement" (Sustar 30). Even so, he did not regard himself as a Trotskyist. "I was neither Trotskyist nor Stalinist – although I was with anti-CAD," he states. "I didn't feel I was locked into that position. I was open to all ideas" (33).<sup>118</sup> He points out that he read widely about various left-wing ideologies of one form or another: "... I was not only reading Marx, but also Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, Isaac Deutscher's biography of Trotsky,<sup>119</sup> and Mao as well" (29).

However, despite his increasingly sophisticated knowledge of internationalism, there is no evidence that this intellectual awareness found any practical expression at that point in his life either in his poetry or his politics. What eventually prompted his move in this direction was,

---

<sup>117</sup> Brutus' father was one of the prime movers behind the eventual formation of the TLSA in 1913 (Lindfors, *Tapes* 35). According to Mohamed Adhikari, Francis Brutus first tried to start an association of teachers classified as Coloured in 1905, but failed due to logistical and financial reasons (22).

<sup>118</sup> Brutus expressed the same view when he took issue with journalist Rodney Hartman's reference to him as a Trotskyist in a newspaper article, and said he rejects this term "as I follow ideas, not individuals" (Letter).

<sup>119</sup> Brutus is presumably referring to Deutscher's three-volume biography, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921* (1954), *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-1929* (1959) and *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929-1940* (1963). Beilharz claims that Deutscher, a writer and political activist, influenced more Trotskyists than anyone else in his time (151).

by his own account, the South African government's rejection of him as a citizen with equal civic and human rights. As he tells Simon Lewis, his lack of roots begins at the point when he refuses to accept being a South African on the terms prescribed by apartheid. "When apartheid South Africa affirmed that I was less than human, only humans could vote, I had to assert I was not part of that society," he states. "I became a citizen of the world" ("Speaking" 154-155).

However, the reasons behind Brutus' redefinition of a narrowly circumscribed sense of self are, in all likelihood, far more complex than simply a negative reaction to being excluded from full South African citizenship. In addition, there may be very basic and practical reasons for his decision to assume a broader identity, both as a poet and as a political activist: his personal exposure to injustice and suffering elsewhere during his travels in other parts of the world. His adoption of a more international identity is therefore not necessarily – or merely – a rejection of South Africa, but arguably also a growing awareness that political inequities exist elsewhere as well, and an acceptance of the struggles for justice and freedom in other countries as his own. In other words, he recognises that South Africa is not unique, but part of a broader global community which – in different and to varying degrees – also experiences injustice and oppression.

Quite early in exile, then, he sheds whatever notions of exceptionalism he may have been harbouring. He becomes aware that the political situation in South Africa is similar to that of other countries in certain ways. He increasingly comes to see the world as a global community, and himself as a member of that worldwide community. In August 1970 – just a few years after he went into exile – he unequivocally describes himself in an interview in London as a citizen of the world:

It strikes me sometimes that the world is so small today, and the areas of the world – in what is important – differ so little, that one needn't attach oneself to a particular area to the exclusion of all other areas. Also, I often suspect patriotism of being mere sentimentality, this kind of “my country right or wrong” nonsense, when in fact it's the world we're living in and not countries. (Lindfors, “Somehow” 54)<sup>120</sup>

This broadening of his allegiance is clearly reflected in the final poem in *Thoughts Abroad*, written on the way from Cairo in Egypt to Frankfurt in what was then the Federal Republic of Germany: “I yearn towards the heaving earth/to the mountain-mounds upthrust through cloud-veils/and the lace-fringed lily pad islands floating/in the calm lake of our blue Mediterranean” (*Thoughts* 28). It ends with the resounding affirmation that “all the world is mine and to love/and all of its humankind” (28). Lindfors recognises this shift in Brutus' thinking in his review of the collection: “In turning away from the ‘contours and allurements’<sup>121</sup> that once moved him, the poet symbolically progresses from narrow, parochial concerns to a more universal outlook. His unrewarding early love for his land is transmuted in the course of time and worldly experience to a profound sympathy and affection for all people everywhere” (“John” 74). Lindfors concludes that “[t]he homesick poet has finally found a new and larger home” (75).

Brutus' development of a broader sense of self in exile – away from patriotism, which he now associates uncomfortably closely with national chauvinism – invites comparisons with Said's dismissal of nativism, which is predicated on the notion of a single identity defined by

---

<sup>120</sup> Not all forms of patriotism necessarily endorse such blind loyalty to a homeland. As Primoratz notes: “The object of patriotic loyalty is one's country and polity; but this does not mean that a patriot will uncritically support any government that holds power in her country, or any form of government that might be in place there” (22). In fact, Simon Keller points out that for some “the highest form of patriotism is dissent” (63).

<sup>121</sup> This quote is from Brutus' poem, “I am out of love with you for now” (*Penpoint* 43; *Simple* 41).

nationality: “that all the Irish are only Irish, Indians Indians, Africans Africans, and so on *ad nauseum*” (*Culture* 277). Such a belief system, in Said’s view, is characterised by an anxiety “to confine oneself to one’s own sphere, with its ceremonies of belonging, its built-in chauvinism, and its limiting sense of security”. Accordingly, Said argues that there is a need to move beyond nativism (277). Brutus’ now-dismissive attitude towards patriotism indicates a similar discomfort with a narrowly defined sense of self (though, for Said, a rejection of nativism does not necessarily mean that an individual abandons his or her nationality).

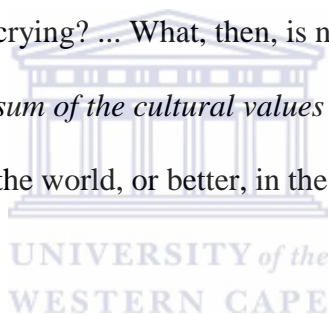
However, during Brutus’ early years in exile, his broader allegiances do not yet possess the features of a more clearly delineated cosmopolitanism (this will be discussed in a later chapter). Initially, they are still the tentative, inchoate beginnings of an identification and empathy with a wider world. One of the earliest indications of his desire to embrace a more expansive sense of self are his comments at the African Scandinavian Writers’ Conference in Stockholm in February 1967. During a discussion after Soyinka’s paper on “The Writer in a Modern African state”, he states that all individuals – not only writers, let alone African writers – need to make a certain commitment:

Not to *African* personality; I believe it is to human personality that he must commit himself. And so, whether we are Finns or Swedes or Norwegians or whether we come from any part of Africa, we are all committed, at least to one value, the assertion of human value, of human dignity, and that is why we have a special function when we see human dignity betrayed. (Soyinka, “Writer” 34; emphasis in the original)

This statement can be regarded as a direct repudiation of Negritude, a political and literary movement which advocated the expression and affirmation of a distinct African identity. For

Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Senegalese poet who was one of the founders of the movement in France, along with the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire and the Guianese poet Léon-Gontras Damas, “Negritude is nothing more or less than what some English-speaking Africans have called the *African personality*” (“Negritude” 179; emphasis in the original). Senghor elaborates on this notion as follows:

It is obvious that peoples differ in their ideas and their languages, in their philosophies and their religions, in their customs and their institutions, in their literature and their art. Who would deny that Africans, too, have a certain way of conceiving life and of living it? A certain way of speaking, singing and dancing; of painting and sculpturing, and even of laughing and crying? ... What, then, is negritude? It is – as you can guess from what precedes – *the sum of the cultural values of the black world*; that is, a certain active presence in the world, or better, in the universe. (180; emphasis in the original)



Although Negritude first emerged in the mid-1930s, it was still the subject of much discussion in South Africa during the early 1960s.<sup>122</sup> Mphahlele, for instance, discussed it at some length in his 1962 book, *The African Image*, and was fiercely outspoken in his critique. “Negritude as an artistic program is unworkable for modern Africa,” he asserts. “It pegs an emotion, a thought, a wish” (81). Mphahlele is even more vocal in his criticism at a conference on African literature at the University of Dakar in Senegal in 1963. “Who is so stupid as to deny the historical fact of *negritude* as both a protest and a positive assertion of African cultural values?” he asks. “All this is valid. What I do not accept is the way in which too much of the poetry inspired by it romanticizes Africa – as a symbol of innocence, purity

---

<sup>122</sup> In fact, Elimimian points out that the debate on the objectives of Negritude continued in Africa for decades afterwards (“Negritude” 23).

and artless primitiveness” (“Negritude” 23). He observes disparagingly: “So we are told only half – often even a falsified half – of the story of Africa. Sheer romanticism that fails to see the large landscape of the personality of the African makes bad poetry. The omission of these elements of a continent in turmoil reflects a defective poetic vision” (24).

Brutus shares some of Mphahlele’s reservations about Negritude. In an article in the South African anti-apartheid newspaper *Fighting Talk* in October 1962, he acknowledges that Mphahlele, along with fellow South African writers Nkosi and Bloke Modisane, “effectively punctured the mystical aura which surrounds the concept – and in his ‘African Image’ Zeke [Es’kia] drove a truck through it” (republished in Sustar and Karim 49).<sup>123</sup> However, Brutus argues that the movement deserves more attention in view of the widespread support it enjoyed at that stage in many parts of the continent. He goes on to describe it in positive terms as “the expression of a peculiar blackness or African-ness in literature which is related to matters like the development of an African personality and the cultivation of a recognizably African literature” (49).

In particular, Brutus supports Senghor’s contention that there are certain characteristics which constitute a uniquely African identity. “At the risk of sounding charlatan,” he contends, “I begin my answers with the assumption that the life of people on this continent is indeed different in certain respects from that of people on other continents, and that to express this

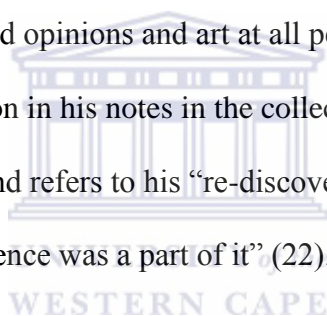
---

<sup>123</sup> Rive expresses a similar discomfort with Negritude, although on different grounds. In an interview, he says “I have been through Africa, and in the places where I have been to, the interesting thing was that I felt as foreign there, in spite of my colour, as I felt in Italy or Greece or anywhere else” (Nkosi, “Richard” 159). He therefore dismisses Negritude as “completely false” and a “rather ridiculous back to the womb ... kind of philosophy” (159). In his autobiography, *Writing Black*, he also declares that not all African people are subject to the same experiences: “I cannot be what the propounders of negritude or the African Personality cult would have me be ... I cannot recognise palm-fronds and nights filled with the throb of the primitive ... I am urban South Africa” (23). However, Desiree Lewis detects an ambivalence towards Negritude in Rive’s autobiography. She argues persuasively that he initially employs its ideas “in his optimistic celebration of a vibrant Africa versus a sterile West, while at the end he turns to the standard declamatory rhetoric and imagery of African nationalist indictment” (138).

life and the peculiar vitality of Africa is not only a feasible but laudable aim ...” (49-50).<sup>124</sup>

He also predicts that the particular brand of African nationalism that informs Negritude “is evolving into something more all-embracing in which we can find the expression and ultimate fusion of many diverse cultures” (50). He welcomes such a more inclusive identity, which is not confined to one particular culture.

By the time he is invited to the Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algeria in 1970, however, Brutus is far more uneasy about being defined primarily as an African. In comments published in *Poems from Algiers*, he admits that “I was naturally delighted to be invited, but en route became increasingly filled with misgivings about my right to be called an ‘African Voice’: how far were my ideas and opinions and art at all peculiarly African?” (21). He eventually arrives at the conclusion in his notes in the collection that being African is a complex, multilayered identity, and refers to his “re-discovery of the ‘variousness’ of Africa and the extent to which my difference was a part of it” (22).



Even so, he still shies away from embracing such a narrowly defined identity, for “whatever African experience and values it might assert which are peculiarly African, the one thing Africanness need not assert is exclusivity” (25). This affirmation ties in with his view of a fusion of diverse cultures to which he refers in his 1962 newspaper article on Negritude. Instead, he makes a claim to being “the non-totemistic ‘new’ African artist Ebrahim Salahi [sic] spoke about this month [July 1970], who will simply take his place in the whole of

---

<sup>124</sup> In an interview more than a decade later, Brutus is still sympathetic to some aspects of Negritude, and refers to it as “a vital impulse towards the recovery of black identity and the recovery of black culture” (Miller 51).

world culture while always bearing distinctive features as a result of his origins and experience” (6).<sup>125</sup>

Brutus’ reluctance to be defined exclusively as an African is also reflected in a letter in August 1970 to the publisher James Currey, who played a key role in defining the canon of modern African literature through his work on the Heinemann African Writers Series. “I hope it doesn’t sound ungrateful but I hope in time people will think of me, not as pigeonholed in the category of ‘African poet writing in English’ but simply as someone writing poetry in English,” he writes. “I think one ought to try and escape a racial or geographical classification” (Currey 210).

By 1974, Brutus declares that his membership of what he describes as a global village is more important to him than his allegiance to Africa in particular. In an interview in Austin, when he was based at the University of Texas as a Visiting Professor, he states emphatically: “One oughtn’t to have the kind of nationalistic, narrow obsession with a particular region. And I’m almost a little contemptuous of my own attachment to one corner of the globe when I really ought to have a loyalty to the whole globe” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 139). Yet, at the same time, he recognises that he knows more about the plight of people in Africa than in any other part of the world, and acknowledges that if he is going to play a constructive role in improving their circumstances, “it is better to be useful in the area where I have some expertise rather than becoming a generalized kind of do-gooder” (140).

---

<sup>125</sup> The Sudanese painter Ibrahim el Salahi (b.1930), who studied in Khartoum and London, is regarded as a pioneer of modern African art. After he was imprisoned in 1975, he left Sudan to live in exile, first in Qatar and now in the UK (Adams 27). Some of his earliest work was published in *Black Orpheus*, together with an article by Beier (48-50), who met him in 1961. According to Peter Benson’s study of the journal, which was founded in Ibadan in 1957 by Beier, many artists and writers who became prominent from the late 1950s to the late 1960s were strongly influenced by *Black Orpheus* (1, 20).



He adds that “[y]ou must stick to the area you know and try to make a contribution there” (140). This view is in line with the opinions he expressed earlier in an interview with Lindfors in August 1970 when Brutus still lived in London: “The people I must fight for are the people I know. It’s fine to fight for blacks in Britain, and I do what I can, but the blacks I know best and the situation I know best are the blacks of South Africa and the situation in South Africa” (“Somehow” 55). Hence, Brutus continues to express a strong attachment to South Africa in his poetry in exile, particularly during the early period. “I am the tree” can be regarded as an example of his continuing concern with his homeland (see pages 109-110).

The longing of the exile is described even more poignantly in “Flight/the exile/exit”, a poem which first appeared in the journal *Transition* in 1967 and which is dedicated to “James Cook, who arrived from South Africa June, 1967” (31). In the dedication to the same poem in *A Simple Lust*, now referred to by its first line “To be thrown outward in a steel projectile”, Brutus adds that Cook (spelt “Cooke” this time) also left South Africa on an exit permit (113). This poem gives an important insight into the thoughts and emotions which accompanied Brutus’ own flight into exile just the year before, as the first stanza illustrates:

To be thrown outward in a steel projectile  
 to hurtle outward in quivering uncertainty  
 to a cold fragment of a continental ledge  
 for huddling and perching and grubbing  
 and ultimately, unthinkable, to find settlement there (*Simple* 112)

The poem refers to the exile in lines 14 and 15 as "... the wounded 'banneling'/the D.P.-type/who is our age's mendicant and jew ..." (112).<sup>126</sup> The use of the Afrikaans word "banneling" for "exile", which is a language unique to South Africa, places further emphasis on the pain of the exile's forced separation from the country of his birth. The word "jew" is presumably a reference to Ahasuerus, who features in *Thoughts Abroad* as well in the poem "Through the midnight streets of Teheran" (12). According to medieval legend, he was a Jew and refused to allow Jesus to rest at his door on the way to the crucifixion. His punishment is to walk the earth until the Second Coming of Jesus. As a result, Ahasuerus became known as "The Wandering Jew". Paul Tabori describes him as "one of the most tragic and enduring symbols of exile" (57).

"To be thrown outward in a steel projectile" suggests that, despite being in exile for a year by the time he writes this poem, the anguish caused by Brutus' departure from South Africa is still very fresh in his mind. Through his poetic persona of the exile, he confesses in lines 16-20 that the anger he feels merely "holds off/the true deep wound that lies/like the dark bruised pulp at the heart of the fruit:/the agony the heart and mind hold in suspense/the whirling axe – or propeller-blade – whose/fierceness makes it invisible" (*Simple* 112). But, the voice in the poem proclaims in line 24, the "dull half-heard/ throb in the heart" (113) experienced by the exile never goes away.

\*\*\*

In 1975, after nearly a decade in exile, Brutus publishes his next collection, *China Poems*.

These are written in mid-1973 during a six-week visit to the People's Republic of China in

---

<sup>126</sup> "D.P" is an abbreviation for "Displaced Person". According to Tabori, this term is "preferred by bureaucracy, both national and international" (23). The USA, for instance, has a Displaced Persons Act.

his capacity as president of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) and as vice-president of the South African Table Tennis Board. The main purpose of his visit is to attend a Friendship Tournament in Peking (now Beijing), in which 86 countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America participate. After the tournament, he is invited to Shanghai, Hangchow (now Hangzhou) and Canton (now Guangzhou) (*China* 23). In his introductory comments to the collection, he explains that he wrote the poems in the hope that they would “indicate my admiration for the Chinese people and their great leader, Mao Tse-Tung [Zedong], and that they will help promote friendship between the people of China and all the peoples of the world” (5).<sup>127</sup>

This dedication is clearly in line with the belief Brutus now increasingly proclaims in a global community of nations. In 1974, a year after his visit to China, he still affectionately refers to the country: “Last year was a kind of cherry on top when I was invited to Peking, Shanghai, Canton. I wanted to go to Peking, but I never thought the opportunity would ever come, and I had given up on travel. But Peking was a very pleasant experience, and it means in fact that there’s no place left in the world that I want to go to” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 138). Brutus clearly held idealised views of China. Not once in *China Poems* does he reflect on the political turmoil and suffering there, even though his trip took place during the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (1966-1976).

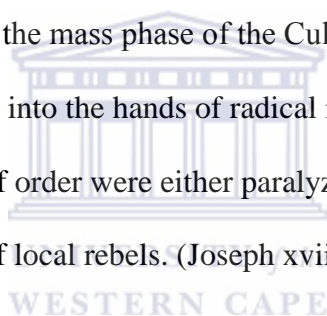
This was a turbulent and often violent period in China, during which Zedong – then chairman of the Communist Party of China – forcefully tried to re-establish his political control over the country. He believed China was straying from socialism and, in response, tried to politically neutralise those he regarded as revisionists (Chang and Halliday 570). As a result,

---

<sup>127</sup> *China Poems* includes a translation of Brutus’ poems into Chinese by Ko Ching-Po, who also assisted Willis Barnstone to translate Zedong’s poems into English (*The Poems of Mao Tse-Tung [Zedong]* 149).

millions of people were persecuted in factional political battles during the Cultural Revolution, and serious human rights abuses took place, including widespread torture, rape and imprisonment. Schools, universities, libraries, museums, art galleries and newspapers were closed during this period as well (Herdan 119). William A. Joseph notes in his foreword to the personal account of Gao Yuan, a member of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution:<sup>128</sup>

By the spring of 1966, the Cultural Revolution was a full-scale national movement in which counterrevolutionaries within the party, along with “representatives of the bourgeoisie” in academic and cultural circles, had been identified as targets of attack. This was the beginning of the mass phase of the Cultural Revolution ... in which power at the center passed into the hands of radical ideologues and anarchy prevailed below as the institutions of order were either paralyzed by the hunt for revisionists or stood by in tacit support of local rebels. (Joseph xvii)



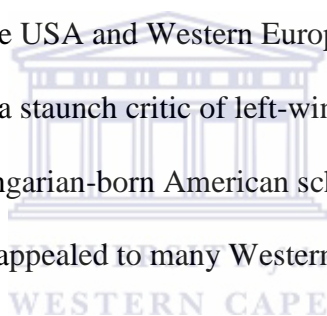
As a writer committed to justice and freedom, these events should have been cause for serious concern for Brutus. Yet there is only unqualified praise for China in the poems which mark his visit almost a decade into the Cultural Revolution. In his notes to *China Poems*, the narrator admiringly recalls “the friendliness and generosity, the poised confident children, the barefoot doctors and commune leaders; the old ivory carver working overtime so that there would be more money for liberation struggles” (*China* 5). Nowhere does he see any poverty or malnourished people (5). The narrator also remarks approvingly on the absence of traffic jams, pollution and even commercial advertising.

---

<sup>128</sup> The Red Guards were a mass movement of civilians – mostly students and other young people – who were mobilised by Zedong during the Cultural Revolution to advance his political objectives (Chang 375-376).

This romantic view of China during a particularly disruptive and traumatic period is reflected in many poems. In “The road from Peking airport”, Brutus writes: “Avenues of trees/for miles:/cicadas singing” (6). Another poem praises Zedong unreservedly: “No task/is impossible:/Mao freed China” (29). A poem which Brutus recites at the former headquarters of the Japanese Army of Occupation in Shanghai is similarly uncritical of recent events in China: “The barges clamorous on the river,/the men, in pairs, rhythmically leaning on their poles:/storied city of crime, plunder and intrigue – /now the people reconstruct” (30).

Such a one-sided view of political developments in China at the time was by no means unusual. Paul Hollander identified similar uncritical expressions of admiration and support among many intellectuals from the USA and Western Europe who visited China during the 1960s and early 1970s. Although a staunch critic of left-wing politics in general, and of communism in particular, the Hungarian-born American scholar nevertheless offers some valid observations on why China appealed to many Western intellectuals:

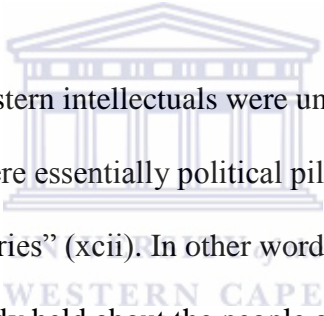


Not unlike the Soviet Union in the 1930s, China had something for everybody: for the puritan, a hard-working, simple, efficiently modernizing country; for the cultural connoisseur, thousands of years of Chinese culture; for the frustrated leftist, a Marxist-Leninist regime restoring the good name of Marxism; above all, and for most visitors, there was a land of mystery, beauty, purpose, and order, a former victim acquiring power and dignity ... (Hollander 287)

China probably appealed to Brutus for similar reasons. In one poem, for instance, he writes: “Peasants, workers,/they are the strength/of the land” (*China* 20). In another, the narrator observes: “Miles of corn:/it is simple:/life is simple” (21). The people of China are regarded

as selflessly creating a more just and equitable society. The speaker's admiration for Zedong and his followers is evident in the following poem, too:

Seeing the peaks  
 they had to conquer  
 lost in the mists  
 their spirits must have quailed:  
 but a sense of intimacy  
 between humankind and earth  
 kept them strong. (*China* 19)



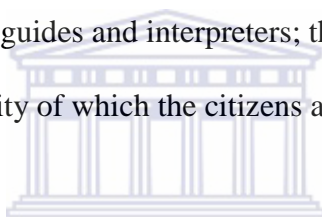
Hollander suggests that many Western intellectuals were uncritical of China and the Soviet Union at the time because they were essentially political pilgrims taking part in a “reverential tour of politically appealing countries” (xcii). In other words, their impressions were informed by the beliefs they already held about the people and politics of those countries when they visited them. The pilgrimage, then, merely serves “to confirm and authenticate the beliefs already well established” (38).

Hollander speculates that another reason why visitors left with their previously held views either confirmed or unchallenged is because they were prevented by their hosts from obtaining a more comprehensive picture of political developments in the country they were visiting. He describes this phenomenon as “hospitality”, and explains it as follows:

The techniques of hospitality refer to the entire range of measures designed to influence the perception and judgment of the guests; it is a form of attempted

persuasion by “evidence”, the evidence of the senses. As such, these techniques represent a concentrated effort to maximize control over the experiences of the visitors. Naturally the more centralized and powerful the host governments and the greater their control over the resources of their countries and over their citizens, the more successful they are in controlling the experiences of the visitor ...

Citizens of such societies will at least passively cooperate with the official treatment of foreign visitors; they will not, as a rule, challenge, in personal encounters with foreigners, the official versions of reality or do so very rarely and if so not forcefully. This is all the more the case since the guides and interpreters accompanying the visitors are more than just guides and interpreters; they are in effect government officials with some authority of which the citizens are well aware. (347, 348)



Jung Chang and Jon Halliday express a similar view in their account of Zedong’s leadership of China. “The population as a whole remained rigidly quarantined from the few foreigners allowed into China, who were subject to rigorous control,” they comment. “Any unauthorised conversation with them could bring catastrophe to the locals involved” (609). The result was that Zedong was able to have “watertight filters on what foreigners could see and hear” (480). Despite such constraints on the experiences and movements of visitors, Hollander rightly argues that these do not adequately explain the uncritical views of many of them. He points out that information was already beginning to emerge about the violence and disruption that accompanied China’s Cultural Revolution during the 1970s already (287).

The key factor behind the absence of any criticism appears to be what Hollander refers to as the predispositions of the visitors (351). Or, put another way, the visitors see only what they

want to see. This appears to be the case as well with Brutus during his visit to China: he looked up to China as a successful alternative to the poverty and oppression which he believed characterised countries in the West. This is indicated by his dedication of *China Poems* to the Chinese government – his hosts – as “a mark of my appreciation, affection and esteem” (5).

When questioned more recently about his views on political developments in China during his visit, Brutus claims that he was unaware of the violence which often accompanied the Cultural Revolution. “Looking back, of course, one realises that there were many serious crimes committed that I was not aware of at the time,” he concedes (personal interview, 18 June 1998). Yet, even though he acknowledges that “serious mistakes” were committed by the Chinese government during that period, he remains convinced that these were made in the process of trying to create a society in which the majority of Chinese people benefited. He points out, for instance, that far more people were able to go to college or university when Zedong was at the head of China’s government. The quality of life he saw in China also made a lasting impression on him. “I was impressed by the simplicity of Chinese living,” he recalls. “When I was there, I saw no rich people, but I also saw no poor people. I liked what they were trying to do, so I have no regrets about it, although looking back I realise there were many things happening in China that I was not aware of” (personal interview, 18 June 1998).

Nevertheless, despite its political lacunae, *China Poems* remains an important point in the evolution of Brutus’ poetry in exile. It is his first collection in which there is a sustained engagement with social and political struggles outside South Africa (though there are some early indications of similar concerns in *Thoughts Abroad*).<sup>129</sup>

---

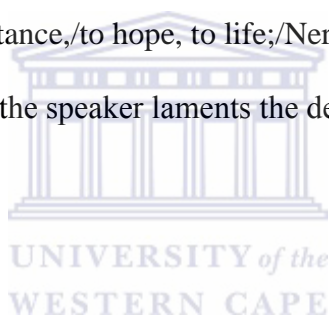
<sup>129</sup> An example is the poem “Frys [sic] still sell chocolate” (*Thoughts* 6), in which Brutus reflects on the plight of cocoa workers. J.S. Fry & Sons Ltd was the first chocolate company in the UK and later merged its financial



\*\*\*

Brutus' next collection *Strains* – published in the same year as *China Poems* – is similar in this regard. In a poem written in June 1972, for instance, he writes in lines 23-25 about the war then being waged by the USA in South Vietnam: “I see torn pieces of flesh/torn as by beasts, or hacked by butchers/I see pieces of flesh scattered among ricestalks:/Vietnam! Vietnam! My body cries” (*Strains* 29). He turns his attention as well to Chile in two poems written in 1973. In lines 20-25 of “No matter for history”, the voice in the poem pays tribute to Neruda, who died in suspicious circumstances shortly after the military coup d'état led by General Augusto Pinochet in September 1973 to overthrow President Salvador Allende: “his voice/sings on,/sings men to resistance,/to hope, to life;/Neruda is dead; no matter” (41).<sup>130</sup> In the second, “For Frank Teruggi”, the speaker laments the death of an American journalist who was killed after the coup:

A single rose  
 a single candle  
 a black coffin  
 a few mourners  
 weeping:  
 for the unsung brave  
 who sing in the dark  
 who defy the colonels




---

interests with Cadbury in 1919 (“The History of the Cadbury Family and its Chocolate Business”). Another example is the poem “Black hills surround Belfast city” (*Thoughts* 7), which refers to the violent conflict then being waged in Northern Ireland.

<sup>130</sup> Allegations resurfaced in the media last year that Neruda was murdered on the instructions of Pinochet. An example is Nick Clark’s article, “Was Pablo Neruda killed by Pinochet?”.

and who know  
 a new world stirs. (*Strains* 40)

Various countries in Africa feature in several poems in *Strains*, too. In a poem written in July 1974, Brutus pays tribute to Patrice Lumumba. The first prime minister of what is today the Democratic Republic of Congo was deposed in September 1960, after just a few months in office, and was subsequently killed by Congolese soldiers and Belgian military officers at an airport in Kinshasa in January 1961 (Meredith 111-112):

At N'djili airport  
 like a great vulture  
 with wings outspread  
 a single tree stands  
 and further apart  
 where Lumumba died  
 a group of trees gesture  
 like bereaved demented women (*Strains* 42)



Unlike in his notes in *Poems from Algiers*, in which he confesses an uncertainty about his identity as an African, and in a marked departure from the alienation he professes in *Thoughts Abroad* in the poem “I am alien in Africa and everywhere” (18), Brutus appears to be far more willing in this collection to embrace a continental identity as an African. Perhaps part of the reason is his increasing involvement in issues specifically related to the continent of his birth. In 1974, for instance, he attends the Sixth Pan African Congress in Dar es Salaam,

Tanzania. During the same year, he serves as chairperson of the steering committee formed in the USA to launch the ALA, and is elected as its founding president the following year.

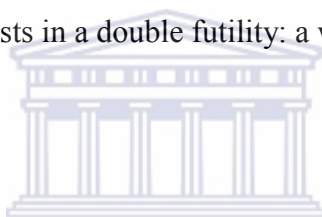
Another poem which suggests a new affinity with the continent is “Africa’s jacaranda dusk”. Partly written in the Nigerian cities of Ibadan, Lagos and Kano in January 1972, Brutus writes with hope and gratitude:

Africa’s jacaranda dusk  
 descends on Ibadan;  
 the trees poise  
 against the grey sky  
 while the red earth glows:  
 this is my sustenance;  
 the spirit is refreshed  
 the flesh renewed  
 while the sun smoulders  
 and the trees tower. (*Strains* 23)



A few weeks later, in February 1972, Brutus expresses similar sentiments during a visit to Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo. He writes with affection in lines 6-9 about “the fierce passion of its greenness/the exposure of its erotic pink miles/the ineluctable clamour of its rivers ” (26). The speaker in the poem celebrates his return to the continent in lines 15-20: “suddenly one was home:/the spirit stretched at ease/and the music of rain on leaves/of birdsong in the clear dawn/sang the soundless music/that was in the heart” (26).

South Africa, too, remains constantly in Brutus' thoughts in *Strains*. The poetic persona of the exile is clearly visible in some poems. For instance, in a poem written in November 1971, he mentions fellow exiled South African writers such as Mphahlele, Pieterse and Nortje (referred to as "KAN", the initials of his full name, Kenneth Arthur Nortje): "Our allies are exiles/dark flames beating/on the rim of a dark world/... Our allies are exiles/to their earth unreturnable/or corpses that rot in alien earth" (*Strains* 16-17). He even refers to himself in lines 16-18 as "scuffed with travail/lumped his crumpled sac/of tenderness turned to pain" (the poem is written under his pseudonym John Bruin).<sup>131</sup> Amuta describes this poem as a powerful lament on the plight of Brutus and the other South African exiles mentioned. "For each of them, exile is a negation of his being, a necessary sacrifice for freedom at home," he observes. "The pain of exile consists in a double futility: a wasted life and a wasted death" (Amuta 181).



Brutus strikes an equally despairing note in another poem: "we shall all die in exile,/we and our children/we shall die, miserably/while others bungle comfortably" (*Strains* 22). In similar vein, he dedicates "As a ghost in the starlight", written in November 1971, to Nortje and other exiled South African writers, including Nat Nakasa ("NN"), Can Themba (referred to by the initials of his full name, D'Orsay Canodoce Themba)<sup>132</sup> and Todd Matshikiza ("TM"). He notes despondently in the dedication: "All my friends, all dead in exile" (33). Nakasa, a journalist who founded and edited the literary magazine *The Classic* in 1963, committed suicide in New York in 1965. Themba, a journalist and short-story writer, died in Manzini,

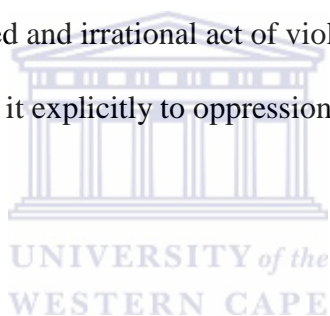
---

<sup>131</sup> Stephen Gray imputes egotistical motives to Brutus' inclusion of himself in the poem ("Caught" 34). However unusual such a decision, it may be no more than an attempt to remind South Africans of his presence in exile (the use of the pseudonym does suggest an intention to distribute the poem in South Africa).

<sup>132</sup> There are various spellings of Themba's first and second names. The version used above is from an introductory note to *Requiem for Sophiatown*, the most recent collection of his short stories, selected by Stephen Gray.

Swaziland, in 1967. Matshikiza, a journalist who composed the music and some of the lyrics of the musical *King Kong*, died in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1968.

However, even though Brutus still writes with great longing and affection about South Africa in *Strains*, there is further evidence in this collection that he is increasingly transforming his poetic persona from that of the exile into that of a more global identity. Besides the large number of poems about other countries in this collection, he also starts to draw connections between oppression in South Africa and elsewhere. In a poem about South Africa written in 1973, for instance, he recalls the tragic events at Sharpeville in March 1960, when an estimated 69 people were shot dead by police during an anti-pass protest.<sup>133</sup> He does not describe the shooting as an isolated and irrational act of violence motivated solely by racial prejudice. Instead, the poem links it explicitly to oppression and exploitation elsewhere in the world:



What is important  
 about Sharpeville  
 is not that seventy died:  
 nor even that they were shot in the back  
 retreating, unnamed, defenceless

and certainly not  
 the heavy calibre slug  
 that tore through a mother's back  
 and ripped into the child in her arms

---

<sup>133</sup> This figure, usually cited in official reports and media articles at the time, may in fact be higher. According to Philip Frankel, the bodies of another two dozen victims went missing after the shooting (148, 150).

killing it

Remember Sharpeville

bullet-in-the-back day

Because it epitomized oppression

and the nature of society

more clearly than anything else;

it was the classic event

Nowhere is racial dominance

more clearly defined

nowhere the will to oppress

more clearly demonstrated



what the world whispers

apartheid declares with snarling guns

the blood the rich lust after

South Africa spills in the dust

Remember Sharpeville

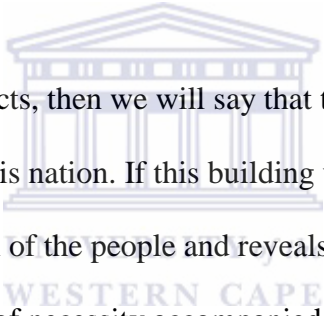
Remember bullet-in-the-back day

And remember the unquenchable will for freedom

Remember the dead

and be glad (*Strains* 38-39)

This dual consciousness – in which Brutus still focuses primarily on South Africa yet, at the same time, displays an awareness of political struggles elsewhere in the world – appears to be in accordance with the argument made by the political philosopher Frantz Fanon that a national consciousness and an allegiance to internationalism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In his paper “On National Culture”, delivered at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers in Italy in 1959, he was at pains to emphasise that a national consciousness need not be an exclusive, narrowly defined nationalism (Fanon 199).<sup>134</sup> In fact Fanon, who was born in the Caribbean island of Martinique yet chose to live and work in Algeria, argues that a national consciousness contains within it certain international dimensions as well:



If a man is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation. If this building up is true, that is to say if it interprets the manifest will of the people and reveals the eager African peoples, then the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values. Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. (Fanon 199)

At the time when Brutus was grappling with issues of personal identity, he was presumably aware of the distinction which Fanon drew between nationalism and national consciousness in this speech. There is some circumstantial evidence to support such a claim. In May 1974,

---

<sup>134</sup> Fanon was also aware of the potential for a national consciousness to be abused to advance sectional interests. In his essay “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness”, he draws particular attention to the danger of a self-serving national middle-class which merely replaces “the middle class of the mother country” for its own material benefit (149).

for instance, he presented a paper in Montreal, Canada, “Cultural Liberation and the African Revolution”, in which the philosopher features prominently. In this address, he describes Fanon as “one of the most important influences operating on the African mind” (Sustar and Karim 196). Possibly influenced by him, Brutus locates the struggles for national self-determination then under way in Southern Africa in a larger political context. He contends that these campaigns are about far more than “liberation merely in the sense of freedom to govern yourself” (199). On the contrary, he argues, these are part of what he refers to as a much broader international struggle: “It is not a local, nor even a national struggle. We see ourselves as an element in the global struggle against imperialism” (199). It is against this background that he writes his Sharpeville poem a year earlier.



It is far more difficult to track the evolution of Brutus’ poetry in his next collection, *Stubborn Hope*, published in 1978. While it does feature some new poems, it also includes a selection written in South Africa as well as material published in his two previous collections, *China Poems* and *Strains*. According to McLuckie, Brutus expresses reservations about the selection of poems in *Stubborn Hope* during a discussion with him in 1991, and even indicates a desire to redo the volume at some point. His main concern about the collection, not surprisingly, is “the lack of comprehensiveness and chronological order, which denies a sense of the progress and development of his art” (McLuckie 28-29).

There is also no single poetic persona in this collection. For example, in “I will be the world’s troubadour” (see pages 64-65), written in South Africa, Brutus still uses the troubadour persona. In “I come and go”, on the other hand, his poetic persona is once again that of the



exile. Brutus writes in lines 8-15 of the second stanza that “I shuffle through the waiting rooms/and the air terminals of the world/imposing and importuning/while the politely courteous/acquaintances/co-operate/help arrange my departures/without any pang of greeting” (25). The speaker is clearly weighed down by the physical and emotional demands of exile, as suggested by lines 16-21 of the last stanza: “I work my stubborn unrewarding will/obtusely addleheaded clumsy:/some few things happen/and I plod or shuffle or amble/wracked with anguished frustrate hunger/and go on” (25). He struggles to understand his longing for South Africa after being away for 12 years. In “Here, of the things I mark”, he writes in line 8 “that here I live as if still there” (25).

Brutus writes at length about exile as well in the poem “Sequence for South Africa”, which was first published in 1975 in *South African Voices*. It is one of the most evocative and insightful descriptions of exile in his poetry. In two of the sequences, for instance, he writes:

2.

Each day, each hour  
 is not painful,  
 exile is not amputation,  
 there is no bleeding wound  
 no torn flesh and severed nerves;  
 the secret is clamping down  
 holding the lid of awareness tight shut –  
 sealing in the acrid searing stench  
 that scalds the eyes,  
 swallows up the breath

and fixes the brain in a wail –  
 until some thoughtless questioner  
 pries the sealed lid loose;  
 I can exclude awareness of exile  
 Until someone calls me one ...

5.

I have been bedded  
 in London and Paris  
 Amsterdam and Rotterdam,  
 in Munich and Frankfurt  
 Warsaw and Rome –  
 and still my heart cries out for home! (*Stubborn* 93-94)



Brutus specifically refers to this poem in an interview with Lee Sustar: “After being forced to leave South Africa, I consciously shut out of my mind the awareness that I was in exile” (156). This is his way of attempting to cope with the debilitating effects of being forced to live outside the country. He declares that he wants to avoid being like those exiles whom he regards as wallowing in their predicament or others who take refuge in alcohol to ease their pain: “So clearly I had to keep the awareness of exile at bay, because I was aware of what it can do to you if you become too conscious of it” (156). However, despite his best efforts, at times he cannot completely avoid being reminded of South Africa by the sights he comes across in exile. “... [T]he awareness of exile would penetrate, but it would penetrate in an instant and in very specific ways,” he confides. “What appears in my poetry about specific

details of South Africa in that period are things that succeeded in getting through the screen that I set up to protect myself from the awareness of exile” (156).

In “Sirens contrail the night air”, for instance, memories of his former fellow political prisoners are triggered by the sight of prisons in other parts of the world: “Images of prisons around the world,/reports of torture, cries of pain/all strike me on a single sore/all focus on a total wound:/Isle of Shippey, Isle of Wight,/New Zealand and Australia/are places with a single name/– where I am they always are” (*Stubborn* 50). At other times, it is his own body that reminds him of the political prisoners that he left behind in South Africa. In “At odd moments”, in which he alludes to being shot while trying to escape from police custody in Johannesburg, he writes:<sup>135</sup>

At odd moments  
 my bullet scars will tinge:  
 when I am resting,  
 or when fatigue  
 is a continuous shriek in my brain:  
 and straightaway  
 I am stiffened with resolve  
 and am aware of my task  
 almost with reverence  
 and with humility (*Stubborn* 43)




---

<sup>135</sup> Brutus was shot twice in the back in September 1963 when he tried to escape from police custody in Johannesburg after he was arrested when he illegally left South Africa (Lindfors, *Tapes* 76).

However, despite the presence of the persona of the exile in many poems in this collection, a more international poetic persona is still occasionally visible. In the poem “In Teheran”, Brutus writes in the first eight lines: “In Teheran/where I was born/or where I’ve been/Or where I belong/– it’s all one/for it’s all one world/and everywhere/it’s all one place ...” (61-62). He also speaks out against the racial prejudice and discrimination which he observes in other parts of the world. In “Freedom!”, he records a disconcerting conversation with a fellow passenger on a train in the USA: “‘Freedom!/It’s wonderful’/said the Ukrainian/on the train to Philadelphia./‘In the Ukraine/the Russians take away my freedom/but here I am free/to make sure the black man starves’”(32). And in the poem “In England’s green and pleasant land”, the speaker comments in lines 2 and 3 that “‘wogs’ spit from the posters/and the swastika is a rallying sign” (39). In response, Brutus rededicates himself to actively opposing such racism. “We will build a green and pleasant land,” the poem declares defiantly in line 4 (39). It deliberately refers to the last stanza of a poem by Blake (1757-1827), “And did those feet in ancient time”, in which the Romantic poet angrily proclaims his commitment to resist what he regards as the destruction caused by the Industrial Revolution in England during the mid-eighteenth century:

I will not cease from mental fight,  
                                 Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
 Till we have built Jerusalem  
                                 In England’s green and pleasant land. (Blake 370)

Like Blake, Brutus’ poem expresses a fervent commitment to resist exploitation. As Ojaide observes in his overview of Brutus’ writing, “he fights as a spokesman and representative of the oppressed and the victims of injustice in South Africa and elsewhere” (68). This world-



**Fig. 10: Dennis Brutus with fellow writers Bessie Head, Lewis Nkosi, Lenrie Peters and Chinua Achebe. They were in West Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany, to attend the first World Festival of African Cultures in June 1979.**

**Photographer: George Hallett.**

view comes across even more explicitly and consistently in Brutus' next collection, *Salutes and Censures*, which is published in 1982.

\*\*\*

Ezenwa-Ohaeto points out that, in this collection, Brutus “not only asserts his own humanity and the humanity of those he represents through his poetry, but also the humanity of other oppressed peoples in the world ...” (27). Evidence in support of such a claim is that *Salutes and Censures* pays tribute, among others, to Senghor, Césaire and Damas (20-21), Angola's first post-independence president Agostinho Neto (26-28) and the American trade union activist Karen Silkwood (29). The poems also “salute” political movements whose causes Brutus supports, such as the Sandinista National Liberation Front which ended the Somoza family's dictatorship in Nicaragua in 1979 (6) and those which fought for the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 (34). “For the Kent State martyrs” honours four Kent State University students who were shot dead by members of the Ohio National Guard during protests against the American government's decision in 1970 to invade Cambodia:

We will remember them  
 as long as we live  
 we will remember them  
 at the rising of the sun  
 and at its going down  
 we will remember  
 the martyrs of Kent State  
 who died in May 1970

For justice they died  
 for justice here in this place  
 and for justice in a far-off place  
 thousands of miles away  
 they died by the guns of oppressors

And we will remember them  
 we swear we will remember them  
 and keep their memory alive. (*Salutes* 24)

“A Friendly Question to Native People of the American Continent” (22) and “Jay Silverwheels” (23) are further indications of Brutus’ growing awareness of and involvement in the plight of people elsewhere in the world.<sup>136</sup> According to McLuckie, he was very active in campaigns related to Native Americans in the USA, both as a writer and as a political activist.<sup>137</sup> Together with American human rights lawyer and community activist Arthur Serota, Brutus arranged a series of poetry readings in 1981 and 1982 to create awareness of their campaign to change Columbus Day (the second Monday in October, which is named in honour of the fifteenth-century European explorer Christopher Columbus) to Native American Day. McLuckie explains the rationale behind this campaign as follows: “The name change is the first step in a longer process designed to educate North Americans to the fact that Columbus did not discover America, and that such eurocentric renditions of history deny the validity of both the First North Americans and their cultures” (31).

---

<sup>136</sup> The correct surname of the Native American actor is, in fact, Silverheels. He played the role of Tonto, the partner of the masked cowboy the Lone Ranger, in the American television series *The Lone Ranger* from 1949 to 1957 (Allen 609, 615).

<sup>137</sup> Other poems Brutus wrote about Native Americans around this time include “Boston Logan Airport” in 1979 and “Seattle” in 1982 (*Poetry* 10).

However, even though Brutus' poetic persona is increasingly now that of a global citizen, he still remains committed to South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. This is reflected in several poems in *Salutes and Censures*. He "salutes" a range of South African anti-apartheid activists, including Biko (8 and 9) and ANC member Solomon Mahlangu, who was a combatant in its military wing Umkhonto weSizwe (13-17). In the following two stanzas of "Robben Island", Brutus once again remembers those who were in prison with him:

I see the men beside me

Peake and Alexander

Mandela and Sisulu<sup>138</sup>

and marvel

All the grim years.

And all the marvellous men  
who endure beyond the grim years.

The will to freedom steadily grows

The force, the power, the strength

steadily grows. (*Salutes* 38)



In addition, Brutus pays homage to many unknown individuals who participated in the South Africa struggle for freedom and justice. An example is "There was a girl", written for an eight-year-old child who was among an estimated 575 people killed during the student protests in Soweto which erupted in June 1976 in response to the decision of the NP

---

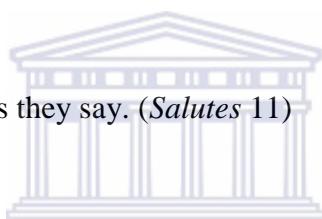
<sup>138</sup> They were all convicted on charges related to their opposition to apartheid. George Peake was incarcerated on Robben Island from 1962 to 1964 and Neville Alexander from 1964 to 1974 (Gerhart and Karis 126, 2). Walter Sisulu was imprisoned on the island from 1964 to 1982 and subsequently transferred to Pollsmoor Prison before he was released in 1989 (E. Sisulu 181, 284, 396).



government to introduce Afrikaans as the language of instruction at all schools in African townships (Lodge 330; L. Thompson 213):<sup>139</sup>

There was a girl  
 eight years old they say  
 her hair in spiky braids  
 her innocent fist raised in imitation

Afterwards, there was a mass of red,  
 some torn pieces of meat  
 and bright rags fluttering  
 a girl, once, in a print dress they say. (*Salutes* 11)



The targets of Brutus' "censure", too, are numerous. In the poem "In London it is dark", for instance, the speaker lashes out in lines 6-9 at "Westminster, that place of shame/spawner of slavery's systems,/hoarse-throated still with lust/for Africa's rape" (7). In this context, Westminster stands as a metonym for Western governments. As Ezenwa-Ohaeto bluntly notes: "The censure here encapsulates issues of international politics and the consequences of policies that do not take into consideration the aspirations of other peoples of the world toward freedom" (25). However, in this collection Brutus does not direct his anger at those in government only. He also blames business leaders for the suffering and poverty in some parts of the world. In the following three stanzas of "Autumn/Abboud/Aubade", for instance, the speaker singles out former First National Bank of Chicago chairman Robert Abboud for criticism:

<sup>139</sup> The poem was originally published in *The Gar* (16). According to Brutus, the child's death was described by Soweto student leader Tsietsi Mashinini in his testimony on the protest to the United Nations. Apparently she joined a student march without really knowing what the protest was about (W. Thompson 72).



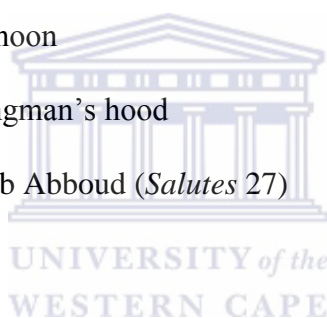
**Fig. 11: Dennis Brutus and the South African writer Zakes Mda at the University of Illinois, USA, in 1983. Brutus and Mda, who is based at the University of Ohio, campaigned together for American universities to disinvest from South Africa.**

**Photographer:  
George Hallett.**

When you wave your hands  
 in elegant gestures  
 I see the garrotte in the act  
 of strangling prisoners

when I see the glint of your manicured nails  
 I see the blades of machetes  
 slashing the throats of vulnerable women

and the shadows around your face  
 at five o'clock in the afternoon  
 are the shadows of the hangman's hood  
 that hangs around you, Bob Abboud (*Salutes* 27)



This volume is far more overtly political than any of Brutus' previous collections. In his draft introduction to a new edition of *Salutes and Censures*, which was intended for publication by Africa World Press during the late 1980s, Abdul R. JanMohamed describes them as partisan poems which demand that the reader takes a stand against injustice and oppression: "A great portion of *Salutes and Censures* consists of praise and blame poems, which, in Brutus' version, categorize the political and cultural world into a genealogy of political friends and foes" (NELM, 94.4.1.17).<sup>140</sup> He argues that this change in the tone of Brutus' poetry is a reflection of "the gravity of the current situation in South Africa" (94.4.1.17).<sup>141</sup> The poems

<sup>140</sup> As noted previously, this edition was never published, but a copy of JanMohamed's draft introduction is held by the National English Literary Museum (94.4.1.17).

<sup>141</sup> Amuta makes a similar point in relation to Brutus' previous collection, *Stubborn Hope*. He states that "the experience of exile and the compelling need for urgent militant action against apartheid forces him to abandon his earlier approach in favour of more direct, declamatory and structurally uncomplicated verse" (179).

in this collection refer to the student protests in 1976 (*Salutes* 10-11), the death in detention of Biko in September 1977 (8 and 9) and the hanging of Mahlangu in April 1979 (13-17).

Yet, as Lindfors quite correctly points out, Brutus' concerns are "truly international even when his focus remains fixed on his homeland" ("Dennis", Cox 123). He suggests that there is usually "a direct or implied comparison between conditions in South Africa and inhumane conditions elsewhere in the world" during this phase of Brutus' writing (123). For instance, Brutus dedicates the poem "Sequence" (*Salutes* 9), written for Biko, to the Chilean political activist Beatriz Allende, who committed suicide in exile in Cuba four years after the death of her father, then Chile's president, in 1977. In similar vein, Brutus links the impoverishment of children in South Africa to a wealthy global elite in lines 26-30 of "Poem for Vorster's resignation", which is directed at then Prime Minister B.J. Vorster: "those who should free them live in suave hotels/where chrome waiters glisten and glide/where magic is a signature on an authorised check/where rich food is discarded garbage/insulting the nostrils of famished children" (19).

\*\*\*

Brutus' next collection *Airs and Tributes*, which was published in 1989, takes up where *Salutes and Censures* leaves off. Several poems once again pay tribute to individuals who, in his view, deserve to be honoured for their roles in various political struggles – both in South Africa and elsewhere. In an interview with Rachel Zepp, he describes the collection as follows: "The poems are part of the larger corpus of my work in that they restate themes that occur frequently: resistance to oppression, concern for the victims of racism, commitment to struggle." For example, Brutus dedicates "Tribute" to Kwame Toure, the American civil

rights activist formerly known as Stokely Carmichael who later joined the militant Black Panther Party in the late 1960s (*Airs* 16-17). Another example is “In my kitchen” (8), in which Brutus recalls the Nicaraguan poet David Tejada, who was killed in 1968 during the dictatorship of the Somoza family.<sup>142</sup>

These tributes to Toure and Tejada are in line with the poetic persona of the global citizen which Brutus adopts in much of *Airs and Tributes*. He declares this openly from the outset in “The air of the universe”, the first poem in the collection: “The air/of the universe/enters me:/the great spirit/who encompasses/all existence/enters my being ...” (1). In “Scarab”, the speaker in this poem about a popular amulet in ancient Egypt also touches on being part of a broader international community and history:

This smooth stone  
 cool to the touch  
 is removed  
 thousands of years:  
 they blur by  
 in fast rewind;  
 millions of people  
 their pain and history  
 brush by me;  
 over these inches  
 I pierce centuries  
 and break through barriers



<sup>142</sup> Brutus does not name the poet in “In my kitchen”, but does so when he describes the same incident in “For Tejada” in *Leafdrift* (48).

my world and birth  
 imposed on me (*Airs* 15)

Nonetheless, the voice of the exile also remains present in this volume. In a poem about West Lake in eastern China, which is renowned for its natural beauty and historic relics, Brutus writes: “Even nightingales/by West Lake cannot silence/the wail of exile” (5). There are more direct hints of the exile’s yearning for South Africa, too. An example is the first two stanzas of “February Saturday”:

It is Saturday night over there  
 the summer smoulders down to a shadow  
 the Saturday summer games are over  
 time to replay them, in success or failure  
 time to talk, to speculate, to dream:  
 flickers of hope, speculative murmurs  
 firefly in the dusk, trill like birdcalls  
 in the sudden twilight hush (*Airs* 14)

In “For Ruth First”, Brutus pays tribute to one of South Africa’s leading anti-apartheid activists, who was killed in exile by a letter bomb in Mozambique in 1982 (Slovo 8).<sup>143</sup> He also mourns the death of 19 people shot dead by police in 1985 during a funeral procession in the Uitenhage township of Langa (*Airs* 2), on the exact anniversary of the date when anti-pass

---

<sup>143</sup> Brutus is on record as stating that the poem “The beauty of my land peers warily” (*Stubborn* 52) is about First as well (Wylie, “Ruth” 9). According to Brutus, it was written while the two of them were driving near her home in Johannesburg.

protesters were shot dead by police in Sharpeville.<sup>144</sup> And, in “For the Prisoners in South Africa”, written after a phone call from his daughter, Paula, informing him of a news item on the imprisonment of children in South Africa (NELM, 94.4.14.13), Brutus once again recalls all those still serving prison sentences for their opposition to apartheid:

What squats its vast bulk  
 at the end of my mind’s  
 shadowy recesses  
 dominating my thinking like a  
 legendary bastion, Bastille,  
 labyrinthinely convoluted  
 like a basilica upthrust on the  
 Horn where ages intersect  
 staring with basilisk-power to  
 turn my brain to stone  
 is knowledge of you, thousands,  
 imprisoned,  
 (The Fort, Rooi Hel, Pollsmoor, The Island)<sup>145</sup>  
 and the wound of knowledge,  
 knowledge of my powerlessness (*Airs* 3)



<sup>144</sup> Brutus incorrectly gives the date in the title of the poem as “March 21, 1987” when, in fact, the incident occurred in 1985 (Seekings 135).

<sup>145</sup> The Fort was then an awaiting-trial prison in Johannesburg. Pollsmoor Prison is in Cape Town and North End Prison in Port Elizabeth is informally known in Afrikaans as Rooi Hel (“Red Hell”). According to former political prisoner Harold Strachan, “every singlebrick [sic] inside the place [is] individually painted an identical earth red; a lurid burnt sienna like the planet Mars” (88).

Prison features prominently in “Our hands meet”, too. It is written for Melina Mercouri, whom Brutus remembers from his time on Robben Island when one of the guards constantly whistled the theme song of *Never on Sunday*, a popular film in which she performed in 1960 and which was nominated for five Academy Awards (Mercouri 160).<sup>146</sup> Mercouri later became the Greek Minister of Culture and Sciences between 1981 and 1985 and Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports afterwards until 1990 (Parry 1270). Brutus meets her when she chairs a symposium in Athens during this period and writes the following tender poem:<sup>147</sup>

Our hands meet  
in the blue Athenian dusk  
and the years roll away

I stand on a shore  
whose dark waters roll  
and the rocks and sand  
like years spent in prison  
crumble away

Our hands meet  
in the blue Athenian dusk  
and the years roll away



<sup>146</sup> The Greek theme song “Ta Paidia tou Pirea” (“Children of Piraeus”), composed by Manos Hadjidakis, won the Academy Award for Best Original Song (“Never on Sunday – Melina Mercouri”).

<sup>147</sup> Brutus also touchingly recalls this incident in Part V of the poem “Endurance”, as the following extract illustrates: “When we shook hands in the Athenian dusk/it closed a ring that had opened twenty-four years before/when a wisp of off-key melody had snaked into my grey cell/whistled by a bored guard in the sunlit afternoon outside ...” (*Still* 12).



I crouch in a cell  
 whose shadows never lift  
 and the cold and the damp  
 entering the flesh  
 eat at the marrow

Our hands meet  
 in the blue Athenian dusk  
 and the years roll away

I stand in the dusk  
 as the stars come out  
 and the years and the pain  
 fall away like manacles  
 and the chains dissolve

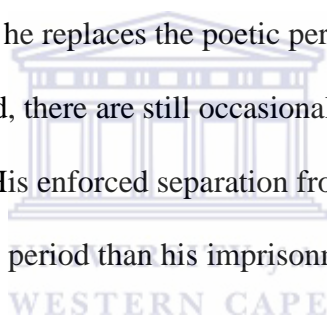


Our hands meet  
 in the blue Athenian dusk  
 and the years roll away (*Airs* 11)

As these poems illustrate, prison remains a central theme of Brutus' poetry long after he is released from Robben Island. Adrian Roscoe observes in 1977, more than a decade after his release, that Brutus' time as a prisoner is "a major landmark in his personal life and hence in his poetry too; it has become a focus for his thinking and reflection, a central point around which his career as poet and activist can be arranged" (163). Nearly three decades after

Brutus' release, this is still largely the case. In an interview with Stephen Gray in 1991, he acknowledges that prison remains a key theme of his poetry: "My preoccupation, the central concern in all my poetry, remains those people in prison, or what was virtually then a country imprisoned" (*Indaba* 155). Chapman agrees with this view, and suggests that Brutus' memories of his imprisonment constitute nothing less than "the basis of his creativity" after his release in 1965 ("Dennis" iii).

While prison is indisputably a major theme of Brutus' writing in exile, it is a gross overstatement to claim that it is the dominant preoccupation of his writing during this period. His love, and longing, for South Africa is a far more important focus of his writing abroad. This is underlined by the fact that he replaces the poetic persona of the troubadour with that of the exile (even though, as noted, there are still occasional traces of the troubadour in some poems after he left the country). His enforced separation from South Africa is clearly of much greater concern to him during this period than his imprisonment.



\*\*\*

Yet, despite his overwhelming preoccupation with South Africa in exile, Brutus – as noted previously – increasingly begins to address international issues in his poetry. His attempts to incorporate both local and global concerns in his writing and politics share important features with Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of cosmopolitanism.<sup>148</sup> Appiah, a Ghanaian-born academic who studied in the UK and is currently based in the USA, eagerly embraces a

---

<sup>148</sup> Brutus never uses the word "cosmopolitan" to refer to himself. As mentioned earlier, the closest he comes to doing so is to describe himself as "a citizen of the world" (Lindfors, "Somehow" 54; S. Lewis, "Speaking" 155). Yet, ironically, this phrase is precisely what the Greek words "kosmou polites" mean, on which the English word "cosmopolitan" is based (Nussbaum 7). Perhaps, like those identified by Robert J. Holton, Brutus views the word "cosmopolitan" as a term of abuse rather than as a form of self-identification (11). As Ross Posnock points out, those of a left-wing political persuasion – which certainly includes Brutus – regard cosmopolitanism as detached and, accordingly, as "elitist, apolitical, and hence irresponsible" (803).

cosmopolitan identity: "... [W]e have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship" (*Cosmopolitanism* xv). He stresses that "[o]ne truth we [cosmopolitans] hold to ... is that every human being has obligations to every other. Everybody matters: that is our central idea" (144). In addition to a concern for all humanity, the other core tenet of cosmopolitanism is an acceptance and respect of differences between people. He uses the phrase "universality plus difference" to sum up the essence of cosmopolitanism (151).

To Appiah, though, cosmopolitanism does not mean a belief in an abstract universalism; in his view, it is firmly rooted in a particular place. He even argues that cosmopolitans take their roots with them wherever they go ("Cosmopolitan" 622).<sup>149</sup> In fact, he regards everyone as a rooted cosmopolitan in some way or another – "attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people" (618).<sup>150</sup> For this reason, he also describes those with a rooted cosmopolitanism as cosmopolitan patriots.<sup>151</sup> But, he adds, this does not mean taking sides "with the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor with the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality" (*Cosmopolitanism* xvi-xvii). Appiah's notion of rooted cosmopolitanism can undoubtedly be applied to Brutus

---

<sup>149</sup> This statement is excluded from Appiah's essay, "Cosmopolitan Patriots", when it is published in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (J. Cohen 21-29).

<sup>150</sup> As far as can be established, Mitchell Cohen first used the term "rooted cosmopolitanism" (483), followed by Bruce Ackerman two years later (535).

<sup>151</sup> In some ways, Appiah's notion of a rooted cosmopolitanism is similar to what Bhabha describes as vernacular cosmopolitanism ("Unsatisfied" 195). In fact, Bhabha refers approvingly to Appiah's attempts to explore "the relation between the patriotic and the cosmopolitan, the home and the world" (195) He stresses: "It is precisely this border – narrower than the human horizon – that attracts me; this space that somehow stops short (not falls short) of the transcendent human universalism, and for that very reason provides an ethical entitlement to, and enactment of, the sense of community" (195). Bruce Robbins notes that, as a result of this view, some regard both rooted and vernacular cosmopolitans as versions of patriotism (31).

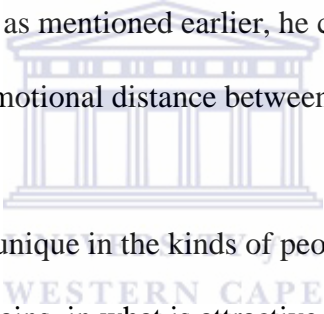
during this period in exile: as much as he claims a broader identity as a citizen of the world, he still remains inextricably attached to South Africa, both emotionally and politically.

Nevertheless, it is important to draw a distinction in some respects between Brutus' sense of a cosmopolitan self and Appiah's conceptualisation of cosmopolitanism. Appiah proceeds from the assumption that cosmopolitanism is generally a matter of choice. For instance, he cites a note from his father, the Ghanaian lawyer and politician Joseph Appiah, to him and his siblings in which he encourages them to assume a cosmopolitan identity. "Remember that you are citizens of the world," Appiah's father urges them ("Cosmopolitan" 618). His message goes on to inform them that they "could surely choose to live anywhere" (618). This injunction ignores the fact that many people do not necessarily live in another country out of choice. Political exiles, for instance, flee their homelands out of fear for their liberty or safety. Others, like economic migrants, leave their homelands in a desperate search to gain employment. Appiah, however, makes little more than a cursory reference to the suffering which accompanies the enforced movements of such refugees (618).

On the other hand, James Clifford's notion of discrepant cosmopolitanism goes much further in acknowledging the violence inherent in being displaced ("Mixed" 365). Although he writes mainly about large numbers of people forced out of their homelands to live in the diaspora, some of his observations apply to exiled individuals such as Brutus. Clifford makes the obvious point that, for the exile, there is "a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future" ("Diasporas" 304). He is also aware of the "[e]xperiences of loss [and] marginality" which characterise life for those living outside their homeland (312). The result, more often than not, is a tension within exiled individuals between a longing for their country of origin and the need to forge a new life in their adopted country –

a simultaneous looking back and a looking forward. The emergence of a cosmopolitan identity is therefore not always as benign as Appiah's notion of cosmopolitanism suggests. As Clifford rightly observes, "[d]iaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension" (312). It is the tension between these conflicting emotions which he characterises as discrepant cosmopolitanism.

Ross Posnock identifies another reason for these tensions in the cosmopolitan. He argues that there is an ongoing battle to balance what he describes as conflicting loyalties: "What is the highest value – the individual, the group, the nation, or the world – and what would it mean to be loyal to the world?" (802). Brutus constantly wrestles with a similar tension between the global and the particular. In 1974, as mentioned earlier, he castigates himself for being unable to put sufficient intellectual and emotional distance between himself and South Africa:

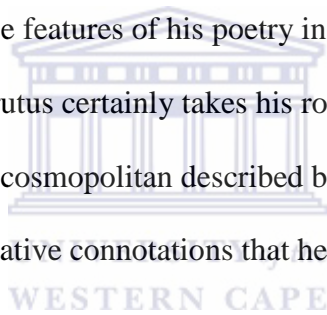


South Africa is in no way unique in the kinds of people that are there, in its climate, in its geography, in its mountains, in what is attractive. Having roamed, as I have, most of the world, I know how much South Africa is like so many other parts of the world. It's got unique political characteristics, but these really don't affect the quality of the human beings there; they're pretty much like people elsewhere. So how does one justify this sentimental attachment to an area no different from areas in Algiers or around Carmel on the West Coast of the United States? (Lindfors, "Somehow" 54)

And, even though he dismisses patriotism as an old-fashioned notion, he does not always succeed in transcending his love for South Africa. He attempts to justify this on the grounds of a sentimental attachment to the people of that country and not necessarily to any particular qualities of its landscape (even though many of his poems strongly suggest otherwise): "... I

suppose, in a sense, one sees people in a landscape, and then one knows that landscape, and it is dear to you not because of what it is intrinsically, but because of its associations. So it's a special landscape relating to special people ..." (55). Otherwise, he argues, there is very little justification for being emotionally attached to a particular part of the world: "So we ought to be patriots of the world rather than of a country ..." (55).

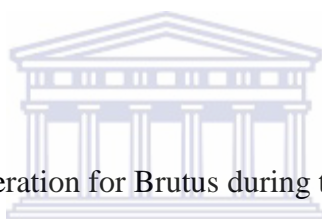
He also repeats his contention that his continued concern with South Africa is based on practical considerations. "... [T]o get a focus, I think you need a place and you need people," he argues. "So my greatest commitment – personal as well as poetic – is still to South Africa" (55). This dual allegiance of Brutus – to both South Africa and to the rest of the world – remains one of the most distinctive features of his poetry in exile. For whatever reason, whether political or emotional, Brutus certainly takes his roots with him wherever he goes in the world – very much the rooted cosmopolitan described by Appiah, despite his best efforts to resist patriotism and all the negative connotations that he associates with it.



Evidence of this tension between his continued attachment to South Africa and his professed acceptance of a global identity becomes increasingly visible in the content of his poetry during his later years in exile. In addition, there are significant changes in the form of his poetry during this period. While some of the formative influences remain from the traditional English poetic tradition which left such a distinctive mark on his early poetry in South Africa, there is a marked transformation in the themes, styles and techniques of his verse after he leaves the country. The next chapter will identify and examine some of these changes.

## CHAPTER 4: OLD ROOTS, NEW ROUTES

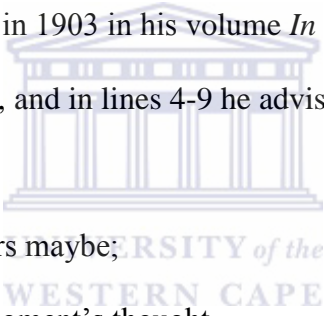
Despite his participation in various campaigns against apartheid while in exile, Brutus continues to express the view initially that poetry should not be written with the specific purpose of advancing any particular political cause. He still pays close attention to the craft of poetry after he leaves South Africa, and constantly experiments with different forms and techniques. He points out rather self-effacingly that “I was not unaware of the craft of poetry, and I was sensitive to the use of language and different ways of making a poem work” (S. Gray, *Indaba* 156). This chapter will focus on his attempts to write in different styles in exile, and examine how his views on the nature and purpose of poetry changed in later years and why.



An increasingly important consideration for Brutus during this period is to write accessible poetry in order to reach a wider audience. In his first collection, *Sirens Knuckles Boots*, the language is often dense with complex symbols and images – a result of his schooling in the traditional England literary canon (as discussed in chapter 1). It is after he reflects on his poetry while in prison that he decides to shift away from this tradition because he believes it restricts access to his poetry. He now wants to write “for the ordinary person: for the man who drives a bus, or the man who carries the baggage at the airport, and the woman who cleans the ashtrays in the restaurant” (Lindfors et al 29). He adds: “If you can write poetry which makes sense to those people, then there is some justification for writing poetry. Otherwise you have no business writing” (29).

\*\*\*

The result of this redefinition of his intended audience is a marked transformation in the way he uses language after his release from prison and in exile. As he explains to Pieterse in 1966, he turns to “a very much simpler, very prosaic use of the language” (“Dennis” 57). Such an approach invites comparisons with the poetry of Yeats (1865-1939). Although the Irish poet’s writing was initially strongly influenced by Greek mythology and mysticism, he later argues in favour of writing in a more accessible style. “I believe more strongly every day that the element of strength in poetic language is common idiom,” he states, “just as the element of strength in poetic construction is common passion” (qtd. in Ellmann 185). Richard Ellmann points out that this is a marked departure from the views Yeats previously expressed up to the mid-1890s (185). Yeats subsequently takes up this subject explicitly in the poem “Adam’s Curse”, which was first published in 1903 in his volume *In the Seven Woods*. It is written in the form of a discussion on poetry, and in lines 4-9 he advises fellow writers:



... “A line will take us hours maybe,  
 Yet if it does not seem a moment’s thought,  
 Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.  
 Better go down upon your marrow-bones  
 And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones  
 Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather ...” (Yeats 88-89)

Yeats returns time and again to the subject of language and accessibility in poetry. During a radio broadcast, for instance, he describes poetry as “an elaboration of the rhythms of common speech and their association with profound feeling” (qtd. in Jeffares 278-279). Similarly, he once refers to poetry as “the natural words in the natural order” (qtd. in Ellmann 154), and declares that the end-product must always appear to be the result of an effortless



process. When he succeeds in achieving this, the result is poetry of an extraordinary power and poignance. An example is “Easter, 1916”, written after a six-day protest in Northern Ireland against British rule in April 1916 which came to be known as the Easter Rising (T. Gray 39). The last stanza has become a much-recited lament on human suffering (particularly as a result of government policies perceived to be unjust):

Too long a sacrifice  
Can make a stone of the heart.

O when may it suffice?

That is Heaven’s part, our part

To murmur name upon name,

As a mother names her child

When sleep at last has come

On limbs that had run wild.

What is it but nightfall?

No, no, not night but death;

Was it needless death after all?

For England may keep faith

For all that is done and said.

We know their dream; enough

To know they dreamed and are dead;

And what if excess of love

Bewildered them till they died?

I write it out in a verse –

MacDonagh and MacBride



And Connolly and Pearse<sup>152</sup>  
 Now and in time to be,  
 Wherever green is worn,  
 Are changed, changed utterly:  
 A terrible beauty is born. (Yeats 204-205)

It is such writing that earns Yeats a reputation as “the most universally admired poet of the modern period” (North 21) and, at one point, a rating as “the dominant poet of our time” (Ellmann 1). As a result of this formidable reputation, he influenced the way many younger poets wrote at the time. By his own admission, Brutus joined their ranks in later years. Although Yeats’ poetry was not taught in any of the schools he attended, nor even at the University of Fort Hare, it immediately appeals to him when he does eventually discover it as a schoolteacher in Port Elizabeth. “Some of Yeats is wonderfully direct and simple,” he recounts in an interview (Lindfors, “Somehow” 50). He regularly reads his work and even remembers doing so once when the security police raided his home. He also recalls reading a copy of Yeats’ collected works as an awaiting-trial prisoner (Lindfors, *Tapes* 91, 115). Later he acknowledges that he incorporates aspects of Yeats’ writing style into his own poetry, and characterises the poems he wrote in this mode as “a kind of colloquial, conversational, unadorned poetry” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 50).

\*\*\*

This shift is evident in *Letters to Martha*, which contains some of the earliest poems Brutus published after he decided to write more simply, and which includes some of his first poems

---

<sup>152</sup> Thomas MacDonagh, John MacBride, James Connolly and Patrick Pearse were among the 15 Irish republicans executed for treason in May 1916 (T. Gray 56, 58, 62).

written in exile. He even refers to Yeats in line 6 of the poem “Now that we conquer and dominate time”, written in August 1966, as he flies over Ireland from London on his way to New York.<sup>153</sup> The poem itself, though, is mostly written in the vocabulary and style of his earlier poetry:

Now that we conquer and dominate time  
 hurtling imperious from the sun’s laggard slouch  
 transcendently watching the Irish jigsaw  
 slip astream dumbly under masking cloud,  
 green England dissolved in history-grey  
 and fanatic old Yeats made mellow by height,  
 now that all canons of space-time are dumb  
 and obey the assertions of resolute will  
 and an intricate wisdom is machined to leash  
 ten thousand horses in world-girdling flight,  
 how shall we question that further power  
 waits for a leap across gulfs of storm;  
 that pain will be quiet, the prisoned free,  
 and wisdom sculpt justice from the world’s jagged mass. (*Letters* 34)

During the same flight, he writes what can be regarded as another version of this poem.

“Above us, only sky” expresses the same sentiments: it suggests that humanity has made such astonishing advances in the field of technology that similar achievements, seemingly equally

---

<sup>153</sup> Brutus also refers to Yeats in a later collection in his poem “Even now, heart cries out”: “... so, with Yeats, I beat on a wall/stubbornly calling for magic:/embodiment of beauty –” (*Leafdrift* 124).

incredible, are bound to follow in other areas of human endeavour, resulting in peace and freedom. But, in this poem, Brutus resorts to far simpler and more accessible language to express the same hopeful view:

Above us, only sky  
 below, cloud  
 and below that  
 cloud;  
 below that  
 sea;  
 land is abolished,  
 only the sky and air and light  
 a beatific approximation  
 achieved.



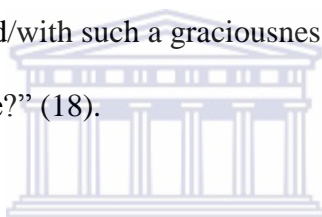
After this power  
 this conquest of brute reality  
 what can we not not do  
 not abolish?

Peace will come.  
 We have the power  
 the hope  
 the resolution.

Men will go home. (*Letters 35*)

\*\*\*

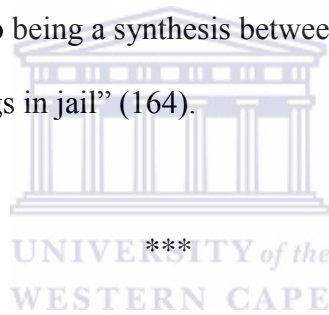
Brutus' next collection *Poems from Algiers*, written entirely in exile, provides further evidence of the progression in his efforts to write in simple and direct language. However, some of the nine poems appear to lack any artistic impulse. An example is the following poem: "Mystery, beauty, withdrawnness:/to speculate about possible thoughts/behind the impassive reposeful face,/the bland unrevealing eyes:/What possibilities! What fantasies!/What lost opportunities for outrageous delights!" (16). These lines are flat and lifeless, displaying little effort to convey emotion in an aesthetically imaginative way. Much the same can be said of the next poem: "What does one know?/What does one know to believe?/Yet my life is so suffused/with such a graciousness of sense:/how shall I not believe? And how shall I not hope?" (18).



Other poems in the collection, though, succeed in being both direct and aesthetically appealing, such as "And I am driftwood" (partly quoted on pages 144-146). And some poems in the collection, while appearing to be superficial, are in fact multilayered. An example is "A South African in Algiers: Homesickness" (13), referred to on page 146. On the surface, this poem seems to be merely a list of flowers in Algiers which remind Brutus of South Africa. However, as MacGregor points out, its appeal to the senses – "visual, auditory, and olfactory" – in fact resembles the poetry of the Imagists (64), the poetry movement founded in London in 1912 by Pound. This movement tried to popularise the use of concise and concrete images without offering any commentary (Childs 97-98) – precisely what Brutus is trying to do in his two-line poem. In addition, according to MacGregor, in some ways Brutus' poem also resembles the haiku (64), the traditional Japanese poem which is widely regarded as a key influence on the Imagists (Fraser 13; Sutton 118; Childs 97). MacGregor identifies traces of

Imagism and the haiku as well in Brutus' poem "In the sunlight" (*Poems* 12), and comments that, on the whole, images come naturally to Brutus (MacGregor 68).

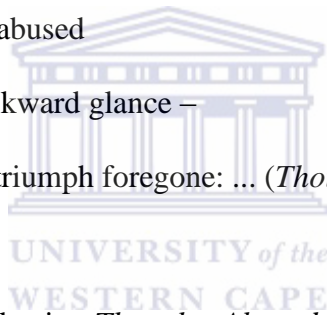
Thus, even while striving to write in a simplified way, Brutus does not always shift away completely from more complex images and symbols. Lindfors is therefore justified in claiming that, "though in form and style the individual poems in it [*Poems from Algiers*] more closely resembled the plain, laconic verse in *Letters to Martha* than the ornate, knotted, cerebral poems in *Sirens Knuckles Boots*, there was also greater complexity in certain of the Algiers poems than could be found in much of what he had written based on his prison experiences" ("Dennis" 164). He therefore rightly describes this collection as "a new turn in Brutus's poetry that came close to being a synthesis between his earliest intense poeticizing and his moody, colloquial musings in jail" (164).



To some extent, this comment also applies to Brutus' next collection, *Thoughts Abroad*. Although it is generally written in more accessible language, it is nevertheless more layered and complex than the poems in *Letters to Martha*. Lindfors notes that "more careful attention [is] paid to stanza structure, wordplay, and rounded framing devices than was the case in most of Dennis's prison poems" (169). Examples which support this contention are two poems written in the London suburb of Finchley, "November sunlight silvers my grimy panes" (see pages 147- 148), and the first two stanzas of "The copper beeches resume", in which the speaker marvels at the natural beauty of an English summer yet, at the same time, recognises and laments its fleeting nature:

The copper-beeches resume  
 their mulberry sumptuousness,  
 the roses, unabashed, flaunt  
 again their gross full-blown lushness,  
 summer returns, fleshy and foliaged  
 in the daedal cycle that spurns ascetic winter

Another summer! But never the same,  
 never the same experiencer,  
 I have passed my solstice, the time declines,  
 my highpoint aspired and abused  
 now what remains is a backward glance –  
 that was my summer, my triumph foregone: ... (*Thoughts* 23)



As in *Poems from Algiers*, the collection *Thoughts Abroad* contains some vivid imagery as well. An example is the poem “At last the roses burn” (see page 148), which graphically reflects a yearning for South Africa. “Fry[’]s still sell chocolate” is equally rich in description, as the first stanza illustrates: “Fry[’]s still sell chocolate/still glean the cocoabean/and the bean still coalesces a swollen gleam –/lambent like blooddrops fresh and red” (6). The influence of the Imagists on Brutus’ writing is therefore still abundantly clear in this collection.

However, at times *Thoughts Abroad* is much closer in form and style to Brutus’ debut collection than to *Poems from Algiers*. Many of the poems in *Thoughts Abroad* indicate a return to the rich and intricate language which is such a distinctive feature of the poetry of

*Sirens Knuckles Boots*. It is highly unlikely that the new reader whom Brutus envisaged in prison – “the ordinary person” (Lindfors et al 29) – will enjoy easy and unrestricted access to all the poems in this volume. An example is “Through the midnight streets of Teheran”, which contains an uncommon vocabulary and a reference to the biblical figure Ahasuerus, who features in medieval European legends:

Through the midnight streets of Teheran

with labours waiting for me

labour and unassuagable desire

and loneliness

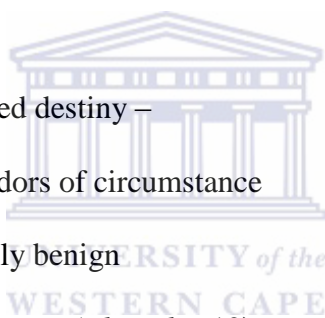
I spin out my fated web –

old Ahasuerus of unrevealed destiny –

reels doggedly in the corridors of circumstance

impelled by an impersonally benign

uncaring supernal omniscience. (*Thoughts* 12)



Thus, despite his stated intention of writing for a general readership, Brutus moves back and forth between different levels of complexity during his early years in exile. There is no linear development in his writing: he switches from simple, direct poems to those in which he utilises far more complex images and symbols. For this reason, Lindfors is justified in arguing that Brutus “retained the capacity to express himself in his earlier poetic modes even when consciously attempting to define a new style” (“Dennis”, Cox 119). *Thoughts Abroad* bears much evidence of this. Although Brutus committed himself in prison to writing more accessibly, he does not completely abandon his earlier, more dense style. He explains to Lindfors in August 1970 how he chooses which style to use:



... [A]s the idea comes to me first – if it comes in essentially simple conversational terms – I will then work it out on those terms. But if it comes to me as an idea which has been germinating, and when it takes shapes in verse, comes in a complex form, then I will go on developing it as a complex statement. (“Somehow” 50)

Even when Brutus’ language does appear to be straightforward, he still makes subtle use of various literary devices such as alliteration, onomatopoeia and parallelism. An example is “I walk in the English quicksilver dusk” (see page 70). The simplicity of the poem is deceptive. As Lindfors points out, it “is not a bald string of abstract nouns and verbs stretched out into a prosaic statement but rather a succession of graphic, sentient perceptions” (“Dialectical” 225). It is a gentle and restrained poem, yet powerfully evokes the misery and hardship of the lives of those incarcerated on Robben Island. For instance, the deliberate repetition of the word “and” at the beginning of seven of the lines draws attention to the fact that there is no end in sight to their plight (many of those on the island were serving life sentences). The alliteration also prompts associations with the sound of falling rain. Lindfors is therefore right when he observes that this is not “unornamented verse” (224).

\*\*\*

Many of the previously unpublished poems in Brutus’ next collection, *A Simple Lust*, also reflect a move back and forth between accessibility and complexity. In fact, Brutus explicitly grapples with this unresolved tension in “Sometimes a mesh of ideas”. He writes that “sometimes the thrust and clash/of forged and metallated words/makes musical clangour in the brain”; however, at other times, “a nude and simple word/standing unlit or unadorned/may plead mutely in cold or dark/for an answering warmth, an enlightening sympathy” (*Simple*

136). As he points out in this poem, he prefers to “state the bare fact and let it sing” (136).<sup>154</sup> Yet this is not always the case, as many poems in this collection illustrate, presumably because of the nature and content of the idea or emotion he is trying to express. Examples are the elaborate seven-part “Sequence” (153-157) and “The archer circles” (151-152), with its fairly obscure references to the star Aldeberan and the constellation Sagitta.<sup>155</sup>

\*\*\*

There is nevertheless a significant departure from Brutus’ previous styles in his next collection, *China Poems*. Most of these poems are written in a very economical – almost terse – style. This technique is in line with the objective he sets out to achieve in his post-prison writing. A further influence in the direction of such minimalist poetry is the American poet Willis Barnstone’s translation of Zedong’s poems, *The Poems of Mao Tse-Tung [Zedong]*, which was published in 1972. It contains 35 lyric and epic poems written between 1925 and 1963. Not long after he discovers Zedong’s poetry, Brutus visits China in 1973 (*China* 13). He recalls the influence of traditional Chinese poetry, in particular the *chueh chu*, on his subsequent writing:<sup>156</sup>

Even before my trip I had begun to work towards more economical verse. My exposure to *haikus* and their even tighter Chinese ancestors, the *chueh chu*, impelled me further. The trick is to say little (the nearer to nothing, the better) and to suggest

---

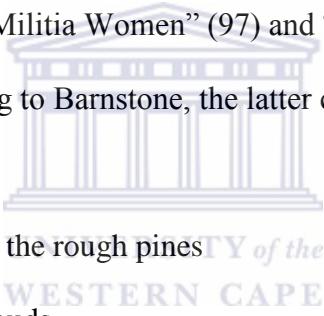
<sup>154</sup> Brutus expresses a similar sentiment in his interview with Lindfors in August 1970. He says that “very often I wish that my best poetry would be a simple, singing kind of poetry” (“Somehow” 50).

<sup>155</sup> Brutus taught himself about astronomy and even volunteered to teach a class on the subject at high school. “The theme of stars, and the image of Orion, are for me a real element of my thinking,” he points out. “They have always, or for most of the time, been images for me of light, of brightness, of beauty, and of hope” (“Dennis” 59).

<sup>156</sup> Barnstone translates this form of poetry as “jueju” which, according to him, literally means “truncated verse” (123).

much – as much as possible. The weight of meaning hovers around the words (which should be as flat as possible) or is brought by the reader/hearer. Non-emotive, near-neutral sounds should generate unlimited resonances in the mind; the delight is in the tight-rope balance between nothing and everything possible; between saying very little and implying a great deal. (35)

The chueh chu consists of four lines – made up of five, six (“in rare cases”) or seven characters each (B. Watson 10) – which usually rhyme at the end of the second and fourth lines (373). It is the most compressed Chinese verse form: if the lines have only five characters each, the entire poem will contain only 20 syllables. Zedong’s collection includes two examples of the chueh chu, “Militia Women” (97) and “Written on a photograph of the cave of the gods” (101). According to Barnstone, the latter contains seven characters (146):



At bluegreen twilight I see the rough pines  
serene under the rioting clouds.

The cave of the gods was born in heaven,  
a vast wind-ray beauty on the dangerous peak. (Zedong 101)

Brutus attempts to write such highly compressed verse in “On the roofs” (*China* 10), “Over the Bridge of Golden Water” (11) and “Poplar: A tall slender poplar” (14). However, these attempts are unsuccessful. They deviate significantly from the traditional form of the chueh chu. An example is the following quatrain: “The barges clamorous on the river/the men in pairs, rhythmically leaning on their poles:/storied city of crime, plunder and intrigue /now the people reconstruct” (30). It includes far more than the 20 syllables usually contained in the



**Fig. 12: Dennis Brutus in the People's Republic of China in 1973.**

**Source: *China Poems*, University of Texas.**

chueh chu.

In Brutus' defence, Lindfors suggests that he was not interested in working strictly within the formal constraints of the old Chinese form. Instead, he suggests – with some justification – that what Brutus was trying to achieve was a more economical use of words, images and ideas. “In other words,” he argues, “he was not seeking to render the *chueh chu* into English but only to emulate its verbal austerity” (“Dennis”, *World* 8). Even so, Lindfors concedes that the verse in *China Poems* is not truly Chinese in either their structure or their pattern: “They are too free-flowing, too irregular and sometimes too condensed or too expanded to be considered English equivalents of rigidly orthodox forms of classical Chinese verse” (9).

Brutus' poems differ in another important respect from the *chueh chu* as well: they lack any subtlety. And, as Kenneth A. Phillips points out, the absence of a direct statement is in fact the most outstanding quality of Chinese poetry, both in traditional and even in some modern forms (118). He further explains that these writers “tend to move in curved rather than straight lines” (119). Such an indirect approach is markedly absent in Brutus' efforts. Note, for instance, the following quatrain: “Over the Bridge of Golden Water/through the Gate of Heavenly Peace/in the Forbidden City/is the Peoples' Palace of Leisure” (*China* 11). There is nothing subtle or allusory about those lines; they are very direct and perfunctory. Phillips' correctly concludes that, despite Brutus' stated intention of writing economical verse, he “seldom achieves the economy and suggestiveness characteristic of traditional Chinese verse; he sacrifices these qualities to the glare of direct statement” (120).

Brutus' attempts to write in the style of the Japanese haiku – which, as he was aware, is based on the *chueh chu* (Barnstone 123) – are just as unsuccessful. There are many three-line poems

in *China Poems* (the conventional form of the haiku in English), yet none of them can be said to resemble the tight, disciplined structure of the traditional haiku. At 17 syllables, it is even shorter than the chueh chu. Examples of what are presumably intended to be haiku are the following: “A fern/can seize the artist/with its beauty” (*China* 22), “China:/landscape, but not with figures:/people” (26) and “Chinese vision:/branches/seen against the sky” (27). These are flat, almost banal statements, without any of the subtle nuances or suggestiveness which are characteristic features of the haiku.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations of the chueh chu and the haiku in *Chinese Poems*, they highlight an important aspect of Brutus’ writing: his constant attempts to experiment with new forms of poetry. Regarding the haiku, he comments in an essay that this form appealed to him because it is “a very demanding and satisfying form: it imposes such strict demands” (“Constellations” 33). He is quite candid about his failure to meet these demands (33). Yet, despite his limited success with these forms, Barnett is justified in applauding Brutus’ efforts to attempt new poetic techniques in *China Poems* (99). In similar vein, Lindfors argues that all the poems in this collection are experiments in communicating economically. “Sometimes they succeed, sometimes they fail,” he acknowledges, “but even the most dismal failures are interesting as attempts to make a few neutral words yield a great deal of meaning” (“Dennis”, *World* 16).

Brutus’ next collection, *Strains*, also reflects his interest in exploring different writing techniques. Written between September 1962 and February 1975, it features a variety of styles. There is, for instance, the direct narrative voice of the poet in exile: “we shall all die in exile/we and our children/we shall die, miserably/while others bungle comfortably” (*Strains* 22). This is little more than an overtly political statement – precisely the kind of propaganda

Sedako's cranes are flying  
 hovering  
 seeking a resting-place

Sedako's cranes are flying  
 hovering  
 seeking a resting-place  
 in our hearts

Sedako's cranes are crying  
 a thousand cranes are crying  
 pleading:  
 "Keep the dream of peace  
 in your hearts."

"This is our cry,  
 this is our prayer:  
 peace to the world."

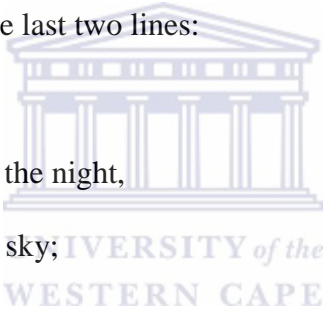
8.6.82. DB.  
 Peace Museum,  
 Chicago.

Fig. 13: An example of a poem in Dennis Brutus' own handwriting.

Source: National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.

that Brutus initially declared he opposes in poetry. Another example of a poem that is essentially political sloganeering is “It is time for action”, as lines 9-16 illustrate: “while my brothers rot:/we will be fobbed off/with promises/and gestures/no longer:/it is time to prove our resolve/our sincerity/in action” (37).

However, elsewhere his voice is more gentle and musical. He writes movingly about how he feels reinvigorated by the sight of Africa in “Africa’s jacaranda dusk” (see page 171). Even when he is dealing with an explicitly political issue, Brutus is often still able to retain a certain lyricism, as in the poem “For Frank Teruggi” (pages 169-170). Another example is the grim yet poignant “Sabotage, 1962” (partly quoted on page 98), written in couplets with half-rhymes and a full rhyme in the last two lines:



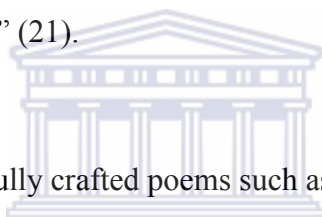
Here, thunderheads rear in the night,  
dominating the awed quiet sky;  
on the quiet-breathing plains  
fractured metals shriek abandoned wails  
my country, an ignorantly timid bride  
winces, tenses for the shattering releasing tide. (*Strains* 3)

\*\*\*

Brutus’ next collection *Stubborn Hope*, which mostly contains poetry written in the USA during the 1970s, is similar to *Strains* in key respects. It, too, reflects different kinds of



writing. As a consequence, Lindfors regards both collections as providing a comprehensive overview of Brutus' interests and styles, and refers to them as "interesting as diachronic synopses of Brutus's poetic interests and proclivities" ("Dennis" 172). He even describes each of them as offering "a whole smorgasbord of variegated treats" (172). On the one hand, *Stubborn Hope* includes overly simplistic poems like the following: "Hell is just stupidity/and blundering/and crassness;/a gross assault/on the sensitivities/of the least:/it is the brutal indifference/to the gentle and the good/that earns hell/and hell is just a place/of bruising assault on one's self/in a willed deliberate stupidity" (18). Another example is the next poem: "In this world/and confronting in my thought/the world I expect to confront/I am all that I am/and more than I am/and so much less than I am/as I remember/and discover – re-discover/sadly, sickly, impotently" (21).



On the other hand, there are carefully crafted poems such as "I have not, out of love, cursed you yet" (5) and "I will be the world's troubadour" (see pages 64-65). The symbols and texture of the language in "Orion's belt is out" (33) even invite comparisons with the skill and imagination displayed in Brutus' early writing in *Sirens Knuckles Boots*. In addition, it resorts to a degree of complexity that requires some knowledge of astronomy in order to understand some of its references:

Orion's belt is out  
 the Hunter marches in a distant sky<sup>157</sup>  
 recessed, as all stars are,  
 in this far dark clime:

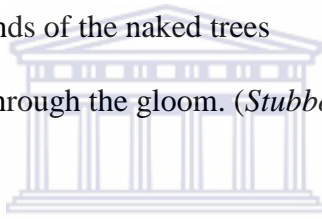
---

<sup>157</sup> Orion is a constellation named after a hunter in Greek mythology (Ridpath 2014). Orion also features in Brutus' poems "Here on another island" and "Orion hunts endlessly" (*Simple* 126, 128).

the Twins hold their staunch alliance,  
 a starved Dog cowers in the grey,  
 somewhere, overhead, looms an alien and unknown Plough:

only a planet's splash redeems the grimy murk,  
 that, and the faint blue silver luminous at a southern edge  
 where the City hurls its tinsel in the sky

– And the wonder of this open night  
 this almost unclouded winter sky  
 through the bare-wire strands of the naked trees  
 and lyric beauty running through the gloom. (*Stubborn* 33)



*Stubborn Hope* shares another important quality with *Strains*. Brutus again wrestles explicitly with the craft of writing and wonders: “When will my heart/ever sing again?/or speak of something/find some rare delight?/Where is the lyric impulse/Where the gift/and where the will/to fashion something beautiful?” (*Stubborn* 12). In another poem, “When will I return”, he writes plaintively:

When will I return  
 to the highly organised  
 complexly structured  
 image and expression  
 rich in flying tangential associations  
 that buttress, ore-vein or embroider

and sing with a complexity of feeling  
 and richness of expression  
 butterfly-fluttery in the belly  
 mosquito-swarmed around the head  
 and thrumming like the windharps of the forest  
 in the emotional branches of mind and nerves. (*Stubborn* 13)

This tension is unresolved in many – if not most – of the poems in this collection. Barnett points out that the imagery recedes in *Stubborn Hope*. “There are often only short stark statements and the whole lacks the cohesion of the earlier volumes,” she observes (99).

Goodwin, too, draws attention to a lack of images in Brutus’ poetry during his later years in exile: “The later poems about South Africa and the campaign on which he is engaged tend to be more prosaic, oratorical and bare of imagery” (22). He describes the poems which overtly deal with political issues relating to South Africa as resembling oratory and as being devoid of imagery – “the kind of propaganda poem that Brutus often expresses distaste for” (22).

Barnett makes the same point about Brutus’ writing during this period. “He does not always follow his injunction against propaganda,” she observes. “Some of his lines are purely political statements ...” (91). The first four lines from the next poem illustrate this: “There are no people left in my country/only resolves;/only faceless ciphers from whom I assert/my concern” (*Stubborn* 41). Although these lines are arranged in poetic form, they are little more than a direct political statement. In view of such lines, Chipasula dismisses *Stubborn Hope* as full of “flat statements, intriguing self-accusations, imagined questions or observations, without thematic linkages or apparent order, save for the sameness of voice” (“Terrible” 49).

\*\*\*

Brutus' next collection, *Salutes and Censures*, displays an even more noticeable return to a simple and direct form of verse. At times, the austerity is effective, as in "There was a girl" (see page 185), which captures the horror of a child's death during student protests in 1976 in stark, unadorned language. As Ezenwa-Ohaeto notes, "[t]he suppressed emotion in the description of the girl's death and the dismemberment of her body succinctly reveals more than a lengthy unbridled emotional essay could have conveyed" (26). This direct approach also works in some of the poems in which Brutus remembers the prisoners he left behind on Robben Island. An example is the following:

Sometimes they squat on the floor  
 sometimes they crouch in corners  
 sometimes, like emptied sacks  
 they spread limply on the ground  
 and sometimes, in damp dark patches  
 they sit like mouldy vegetables:  
 they are the political prisoners  
 who nurse in their broken frames  
 the frail flame of humanity  
 while monsters growl to snuff it out:  
 it burns in these men and women  
 splendid and inquenchable [sic]  
 as the red miles of sunset. (*Salutes* 36)

In other poems, however, this simplicity merely comes across as trite. An example is the following poem: "Sorrow for the children of Soweto/weep for the corpses of Soweto/and

swear an oath for Soweto – their deaths will not be forgotten/their lives will purchase our freedom” (10). It is a crudely propagandistic statement. Another example is the poem written on the death of Silverheels: “I lift my palm in salute/and wave in greeting/as you go thundering/down the endless eternal plains/‘Harold Smith’/they forced you to become/at the border/Remember, white man/the men you killed/Remember white man/the people you destroyed/and remember those who are dying” (23). This is little more than thinly disguised prose. As Ronald Ayling points out in his assessment of *Salutes and Censures*:

Obviously, Brutus has deliberately simplified his later poetic style – usually to emphasize unambiguous straightforward statements, uttered without ornamentation or any kind of poetic diction and with no discernible traces of literary artifice, influence or reverberations. By means of plain unvarnished invocation and reiteration, the poet clearly aims to speak to the oppressed peoples of the world. (137)

These political imperatives override aesthetic considerations in this collection. Brutus appears to concede as much in his introduction to the unpublished edition of *Salutes and Censures*. “Clearly, my concern is more ambitious than merely social representation,” he acknowledges. “I’m interested in social transformation” (“Introduction” 364). The demands of political activism now take precedence over poetic considerations. He once asks rhetorically: “Is my poetry political? Yes. The obligation to influence and change society rests on all of us; so far as we are all part of society and involved in all humanity, I firmly believe that it is not sufficient to describe the world, or even to understand the world; we must seek to transform the world” (“Dennis” 60). This world-view – which echoes Marx’s pointed comment in his *Theses on Feuerbach* that it is not sufficient to interpret the world, but that it is also necessary to change it (Marx 139) – informs and shapes much of Brutus’ exile poetry.

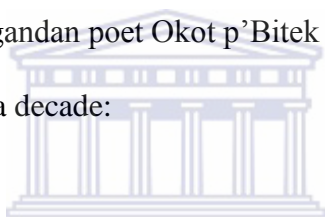
While his revised approach to poetry may serve to advance Brutus' political causes, it seriously weakens the aesthetics of his writing: many of the poems in the collection are political statements rather than poetic constructs. Ayling is therefore justifiably scathing in his assessment of *Salutes and Censures*. "Most of these writings were still[-]born, long before they appeared in print," he submits. "They neither illuminate his thought and art nor add anything of consequence to his stature as poet or even ... as social conscience for the Third World" (Ayling 135).

\*\*\*

Much the same can be said about some of the 17 poems in Brutus' next collection, *Airs and Tributes*. Political concerns once again often override aesthetic considerations. An example is "March 21, 1987": "As the seasons turn/and Summer droops to Autumn/the dyings continue/and resistance grows:/there are still those/willing to give their lives:/Sharpeville, Langa/you are sacred names:/in the center of our brains/the flame of desire for freedom/fiercely burns" (*Airs* 2). The poem dedicated to First (13) is not much more than a direct political statement either; there is no discernible attempt to transform his tribute to the anti-apartheid activist into an artistic construct. This is quite deliberate on the part of Brutus. After the collection is published, he expresses a preference for what he refers to as social action over creative action. The alternative, he tells Zepp, is "an evasion and mere diletantism".

Yet, despite prioritising politics over aesthetics during his later years in exile, many poems retain a certain lyrical quality: simple does not always mean banal in *Airs and Tributes*. This is evident even in an openly political poem like the following: "The day dies into dusk/the

quotidian round closes,/discloses the continuity of days/the constant questions/unanswered, unanswerable/fists are raised to the inhabited skies:/there may be movement, intelligence there/here are our fists, our questions, our pain” (*Airs* 17). Another example of the artistic rendition of a profoundly political subject, namely imprisonment, is the following: “Loud noises wake me:/heavy boots thumping,/doors flung open, snarls:/so finally they have come/must eliminate an irritant/I think, relieved and satisfied,/wait for the ripping thud of bullets” (4). Brutus deals creatively, too, with the loneliness of exile in the following poem: “Lonely far-off klaxon/hooting in the night/across the empty miles/desolate and desperate/once a woman’s voice/lovely and unheeded/called across the miles/desolate and desperate” (12). Brutus hauntingly captures a similar kind of sorrow and forlornness in “Bitek at Madison,” a poem about the Ugandan poet Okot p’Bitek who lived in exile in the USA and Nigeria from 1969 for more than a decade:



In a dark wood-panelled room  
 lit by intermittent gleams  
 as the logfire flared and was reflected  
 on bookshelves, wrought iron, glass,  
 he brooded half-visible, in semi-dark  
 the glass, liquor-filled, close at hand:  
 his voice, muted by sadness and weariness,  
 was low and plangent:  
 somewhere, far away, one still heard  
 the resonances of his anger and scorn. (*Airs* 6)

By Brutus' own admission in his interview with Zepp, the poems in this collection deal with the political themes which often feature in his poetry. Even so, he does occasionally attempt to do so in a manner that takes cognisance of aesthetic considerations. "Generally, the poems are free-form, except for the haiku," he tells Zepp. "But they do have an internal logic which dictates structure: thus some are a continuous statement ... and others have a stanza structure ...". While this observation also applies to the poems in *Salutes and Censures*, Brutus' attempts to find an appropriate aesthetic voice in which to express his political concerns are more successful in *Airs and Tributes*.

\*\*\*

Although there is also often an underlying tension between politics and aesthetics in the poetry Brutus wrote before he left South Africa, it unquestionably becomes far more pronounced in exile. This transformation now starts to go far beyond simply trying to follow Yeats' lead of writing in more accessible language. After nearly two decades in exile, Brutus appears to substantially redefine the purpose of his writing. He now declares that he writes with explicitly political objectives in mind. In an interview in 1983, he states that he believes that it is no longer necessary "for ornament, for complex organization, or indeed for any kind of persuasion" to be present (W. Thompson 73). Now he believes that direct language is sufficient to convey his meaning effectively to his intended audience. While he recognises the limitations of such an approach, he insists that at least some of his poems will succeed in having the desired effect on his audience – which is presumably to raise their awareness of injustice, and to urge them to actively participate in resisting it.



Such an approach is similar in some respects to the austere poetry that emerged after World War II (1939-1945). Many poets then began to feel that the writing styles and forms they had been using in their work up to that point were inadequate to enable them to respond fully to the death and destruction caused during the protracted and bloody six-year war. They became dissatisfied with the artifice of their writing and the self-expressive mode of lyric poetry. In line with this view, according to Michael Hamburger, some poets decided to communicate “as directly as prose, without resort to a special language mainly distinguished by its highly metaphorical character” (220). The result was a new poetry characterised by “a bareness of utterance” (251).

The Chilean poet Parra (b.1914) was one of the earliest proponents of such pared-down writing. He published *Poemas y Antipoemas (Poems and Antipoems)*, a collection of works written between 1938 and 1953, in 1954. Hamburger describes Parra’s poems as “distinguished by their cultivation and penetration of ordinariness, by addiction deliberately quotidian” (222). Edith Grossman makes a similar point and draws attention to the fact that Parra frequently uses colloquialisms in his poetry, and sometimes even clichés, partly out of a “continuing commitment to familiar, popular speech as his expressive and descriptive medium” (93). Examples of such direct, colloquial language are contained in the following extracts from his poem “Nineteen Thirty”:

... I offer nothing special. I formulate no hypothesis.

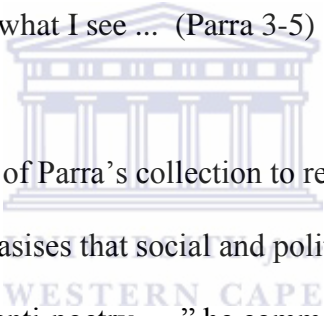
I am only a camera swinging over the desert

I am a flying carpet

A recorder of dates and scattered facts

A machine producing a certain number of buttons per minute ...

I am a rolling museum  
 An encyclopedia forcing a path through the waves.  
 I record each and every human act.  
 Only let something happen anywhere on the globe  
 And a part of me sets itself moving.  
 That's what my job is.  
 I give the same attention to a crime as to an act of mercy  
 I vibrate the same to an idyllic landscape  
 And the spastic flashes of an electrical storm.  
 I diminish and exalt nothing  
 I confine myself to telling what I see ... (Parra 3-5)



Hamburger borrows from the title of Parra's collection to refer to such a sparse style of writing as "anti-poetry". He emphasises that social and political concerns are at the root of this new austerity.<sup>158</sup> "In the new anti-poetry ...," he comments, "both feeling and metaphor were subordinated to an 'objective' function, to the presentations of socially relevant realities" (Hamburger 233). In pursuit of this objective, "music and feeling" become of secondary importance (235), with the result that the distinctive features of anti-poetry are "a deliberate prosiness" (235) and a "severe literalness" (251). In a later poem, "Young poets" (written between 1964 and 1966), Parra explains his rationale:

Write as you will  
 In whatever style you like  
 Too much blood has run under the bridge

---

<sup>158</sup> In fact, because of its "presentations of socially relevant realities", Hamburger points out that there is an obvious connection between anti-poetry and Marxism (233, 234).

To go on believing  
That only one road is right.

In poetry everything is permitted.

With only this condition, of course:

You have to improve on the blank page. (Parra 143)

\*\*\*

Neruda (1904-1973), a contemporary of Narra, also resorts to a more direct and simplified form of writing after World War II (and, just as importantly in his case, the Spanish Civil War which preceded it). His previous approach to poetry is reflected in the poem “Ars Poetica”, which was published in 1933 in the collection *Residencia en la Tierra, I* (*Residence on Earth, I*). It is a good example of Neruda’s earlier, more complex poetry. Even the title, which means “The art of poetry” in Latin and alludes to the Roman poet Horace’s treatise on poetry around 19BCE, may be unfamiliar to many readers. And, although the descriptive language used in Neruda’s poem is rich and inviting, it is often incomprehensible. As Maryalice Ryan-Kobler notes, “the text retains its secrets in its impenetrable syntax and imagery” (439). It is indeed a highly intricate and challenging poem:

Between shadow and space, young girls and garrisons,  
saddled with a strange heart, with funereal dreams,  
taken suddenly pale, my forehead withered  
by the rage of a widower’s grief for each day of lost life –

oh for each invisible drop I drink in a stupor  
 and for each sound I harbour, trembling,  
 I nurse the same far thirst, the same cold fever,  
 a noise in labour, a devious anguish –  
 as if thieves or emanations were coming –  
 in the enveloping shell, rooted, profound,  
 like a humiliated scullion, a bell cracked a little,  
 a mirror tarnished, the fug of a deserted house  
 whose guests come in at night sloshed to perdition,  
 with a stench of clothes scattered on the floor  
 and a yearning for flowers –  
 another way to put it perhaps, a touch less sadly:  
 but the hard truth is if you want it so,  
 the wind that whacks at my breast,  
 the unbounded expanse of night collapsing in my bedroom,  
 the morning's rumours afire with sacrifice  
 now beg of me this prophesy I have, with mournfulness  
 and a lurch of objects calling without answers,  
 with a truceless movement, a name I can't make out. (*Selected 47*)

Critics have attempted to interpret “Ars Poetica” by drawing on a number of different approaches and theories. These include stylistic, metaphysical, materialist and biographical analyses (Ryan-Kobler 439-440). The result is a number of widely divergent interpretations. Ryan-Kobler adds to the list by introducing another approach – what she describes as a metapoetic reading of the poem (440). Although she promises to solve what she refers to as a

literary conundrum, ultimately her reading of “Ars Poetica” does little more than provide yet another illustration of how the poem becomes “an open, multivalent text whose complexity demonstrates how critics arrive at such diverse readings of the work” (440).

After World War II, however, Neruda’s writing style changes significantly. He informs the Chilean Communist Party’s central committee in September 1952 of this development. “I’m writing more simply,” he states. “Little by little, I have shed complicated forms so that everyone understands my poetry” (qtd. in Feinstein 287). The following year, in his lecture on “Obscurity and Clarity in Poetry”, he elaborates on this shift and argues in favour of a “poetry like bread that can be shared by all, learned men and peasants alike” (qtd. in Hamburger 223).



Simplicity subsequently becomes one of the most distinctive features of Neruda’s writing.<sup>159</sup> He is dismissive of what he regards as “the mania for pedantry” (*Passions* 129). Instead, he advocates a move towards what he refers to as “impure poetry” (128). He describes this as a “poetry as impure as a suit or a body; a poetry stained by food and shame, a poetry with wrinkles, observations, dreams, waking, prophecies, declarations of love and hatred, beasts, blows, idylls, manifestos, denials, doubts, affirmations, taxes” (128). His collection *Tercera Residencia (The Third Residence)* in 1947 – which follows the 1935 *Residencia en la Tierra, II (Residence on Earth, II)* – contains examples of such poetry. The poem “I’m explaining a few things”, for instance, reflects on the ravages of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in a tone that is almost prosaic in its simplicity, as the following extracts illustrate:<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> Roland Bleiker also highlights the simplicity of Neruda’s poetry as one of its key trademarks: “For much of his life he tried to dispel the widespread perception that poetry is a mere entrance key to the society of high culture, a pleasant distraction for those who have the leisure to pursue verse-based fantasies, for those whose privileged education has rendered the obscure style of poems accessible” (1132).

You are going to ask: and where are the lilacs?  
 and the poppy-petalled metaphysics?  
 and the rain repeatedly spattering  
 its words and drilling them full  
 of apertures and birds?

I'll tell you all the news.

I lived in a suburb,  
 a suburb of Madrid, with bells,  
 and clocks, and trees ...

And one morning all that was burning,  
 one morning the bonfires  
 leapt out of the earth  
 devouring human beings –  
 and from then on fire,  
 gunpowder from then on,  
 and from then on blood ...

And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry  
 speak of dreams and leaves  
 and the great volcanoes of his native land?




---

<sup>160</sup> It is important to stress, however, that there was not a linear move from complex to simple poetry in Neruda's writing. Like "I'm explaining a few things", the poem "The Heights of Macchu Picchu" was written in 1945, yet some sections contain dense images and metaphors (Neruda, *Selected* 165-179). In other words, Neruda moved back and forth between the simple and the complex (in much the same way as Brutus did in his exile poetry).

Come and see the blood in the streets.

Come and see

the blood in the streets.

Come and see the blood

in the streets! (*Selected* 137-141)

\*\*\*

The Polish poet Milosz (1911-2004) was similarly disillusioned by the violence and suffering caused by war. He painfully recalls in his book *The Captive Mind*, which was originally published in 1953, that “[i]t was in my country that the Second World War began. At that time, I was living in Warsaw ... I lived through five years of Nazi occupation” (vii). He describes Poland during this period as “the most agonizing spot in the whole of terrorized Europe” (vii). The result is that, like Narra and Neruda, he becomes frustrated with the limitations of lyric poetry. As Donald Davie observes in his pointedly titled *Czeslaw Milosz and the Insufficiency of Lyric*, Milosz – who started writing lyric poetry in the 1930s – shifted away from the traditional qualities associated with the lyric form. He says Milosz became “distrustful of ... lyrical purity”, and refused to be restricted by it (42). This is indicated by the following extracts from his well-known poem “Dedication”, which he wrote in 1945 while still in Warsaw:

You whom I could not save

Listen to me.

Try to understand this simple speech as I would be ashamed of another.

I swear, there is in me no wizardry of words.

I speak to you with silence like a cloud or a tree ...

What is poetry which does not save

Nations or people?

A connivance with official lies,

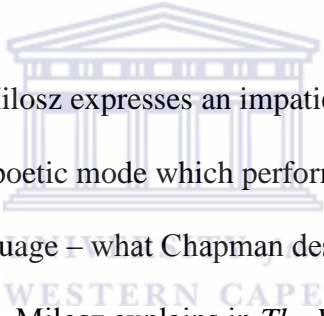
A song of drunkards whose throats will be cut in a moment.

Reading for sophomore girls.

That I wanted good poetry without knowing it,

That I discovered, late, its salutary aim,

In this and only this I find salvation ... (*Collected* 78)



As Brutus did in his later years, Milosz expresses an impatience with the limitations of lyric poetry, and commits himself to a poetic mode which performs a specific moral or ethical function. This requires a new language – what Chapman describes as “a deceptively plain, aesthetic language” (“South” 124). Milosz explains in *The Witness of Poetry* that he wanted to close the gap between an artistic elite and the broader public at a time of national crisis: “For when an entire community is struck by misfortune, for instance, the Nazi occupation of Poland, the ‘schism between the poet and the great human family’<sup>161</sup> disappears and poetry becomes as essential as bread” (31).<sup>162</sup>

An example of Milosz’s desire to reach a wider audience is his sequence of poems “Voices of poor people” (*Collected* 56-67), written in Warsaw in 1944 as “a search for a means of how to deal directly with the Nazi occupation” (Faggen 157). He warns about the horror of war

---

<sup>161</sup> Milosz attributes this quote to *A Few Words on Poetry*, written by the French-Lithuanian writer Oscar Milosz, a distant relative (*Witness* 31).

<sup>162</sup> This echoes Neruda’s call for “poetry like bread that can be shared by all” (qtd. in Hamburger 232).



and the banality of evil in simple, unadorned language in the poem “A song on the end of the world”, as the first three stanzas illustrate:

On the day the world ends  
 A bee circles a clover,  
 A fisherman mends a glimmering net.  
 Happy porpoises jump in the sea,  
 By the rainspout young sparrows are playing  
 And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.

On the day the world ends  
 Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,  
 A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,  
 Vegetable peddlers shout in the street  
 And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,  
 The voice of a violin lasts in the air  
 And leads into a starry night.  
 And those who expected lightning and thunder  
 Are disappointed.

And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps  
 Do not believe it is happening now.  
 As long as the sun and the moon are above,  
 As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,  
 As long as rosy infants are born

No one believes it is happening now. (*Collected* 56)

While this new language and style of poetry are not confined to eastern Europe, as Chapman mistakenly suggests, there is nevertheless merit in his contention that post-World War II anti-poetry can be attributed to a view that “the romantic-symbolism of the modernist imagination was considered to be inappropriate to the memory of the Holocaust” (“South” 124). Lyric poetry, in particular, was found wanting at this point in history. For Milosz, there was what Davie describes as a “privileged irresponsibility allowed to, or imposed on, the *lyric* poet” (28; emphasis in the original). As a result, Milosz begins to search for other poetic forms of expression (8).

This quest remained an enduring feature of his poetry. As he notes in the first stanza of his meditation on “Ars Poetica?”, “I have always aspired to a more spacious form/that would be free from the claims of poetry or prose/and would let us understand each other without exposing/the author or reader to sublime agonies” (*Collected* 211). Many years later, he again mentions this commitment in an interview. “My poetry,” he asserts, “is always a search for a more spacious form” (Faggen 166). Davie believes this search is motivated by an awareness of “the insufficiency of the lyric mode for registering, except glancingly, the complexity of twentieth-century experience” (166).<sup>163</sup> And, in the case of Milosz, what Chapman refers to as “the horrors of Polish history” (“South” 124).

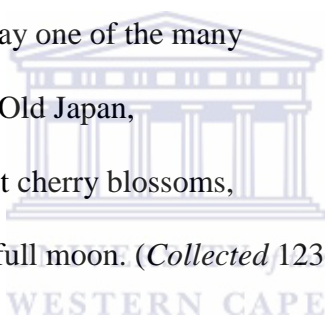
However, unlike some of the anti-poets who emerged after World War II, Milosz does not permanently abandon the lyric form. Leonard Nathan and Arthur Quinn identify his

---

<sup>163</sup> De Kok makes a similar point about lyric poetry in relation to apartheid during the 1980s: “For the moment, it seems to me, the written lyric must take account of the historical context, and be seen to be doing so. And that accounting in itself must make it political. For political it must be. Not in any simplistic or singular way. But it means that the traditional features associated with the lyric, things like reflection and irony and analysis, must be put to the service of the historical moment in all its urgency” (“Sort” 75).

collection *Treatise on Poetry*, which was published in 1957, as evidence of his return to lyricism. In the poem “Preface”, for example, Milosz celebrates the power of poetry in lines 20-22: “Novels and essays serve but will not last./One clear stanza can take more weight/Than a whole wagon of elaborate prose” (*Collected* 111). However, according to Nathan and Quinn, it is Milosz’s 1962 collection, *King Popiel and Other Poems*, that more fully announces “the playful exuberance of a poet who has experienced the full recovery of his creative powers” (57).<sup>164</sup> An indication is the first stanza of the poem “No More”:

I should relate sometime how I changed  
 My views on poetry, and how it came to be  
 That I consider myself today one of the many  
 Merchants and artisans of Old Japan,  
 Who arranged verses about cherry blossoms,  
 Chrysanthemums and the full moon. (*Collected* 123)



\*\*\*

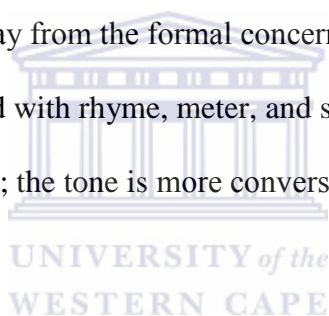
The post-prison and exile poetry of Brutus displays similar shifts in form and style as those displayed by Parra, Neruda and Milosz. In all these instances, the transition is prompted by a particular moment of crisis in history: in the case of the Chileans and Milosz, the major crisis is World War II; in the case of Brutus, the crisis is apartheid. Yet, even though Brutus’ use of the lyric increasingly comes under strain underneath the weight of what he regards as more urgent political imperatives, he never completely abandons it. In fact, the lyric – which

<sup>164</sup> According to Milosz, King Popiel was a legendary king in Poland (*Collected* 119).

William C. Spengemann describes as “perhaps the most ancient form of self-presentation” (171) – remains his preferred mode of writing throughout most of his writing career.<sup>165</sup>

However, Brutus increasingly struggles in exile to find a way of bridging the gap between what David Lindley refers to as “poetry of the single voice” and “poetry of community” (21). JanMohamed suggests that Brutus adopts the poetic persona of the traditional griot from the late 1980s as a way of combining the voice of the individual and the voice of the community. In his draft introduction to the unpublished edition of Brutus’ collection *Salutes and Censures*, he observes:

This anthology moves away from the formal concerns of Brutus’ earlier verse; these poems are not preoccupied with rhyme, meter, and structured verse, and the language is less “poetic” and arcane; the tone is more conversational, closer to “normal” speech and prose.



This shift towards a more “practical” form of expression is integral to the new persona of Brutus’ poetry, the modern political griot, a communal artist, who derives his energy and inspiration from his people and their concerns and returns these in turn to them through his poetry. (NELM, 94.4.1.17)

However, even though JanMohamed qualifies his comparison between Brutus and the griot by pointing out that the similarities are not formal, but in attitude and function only, it remains difficult to sustain. Although Brutus often speaks in a collective voice, and usually addresses the concerns of a broader community, his writing is generally far removed from the

---

<sup>165</sup> Cronin holds a similar view on the lyric as a form of self-expression. “In a sense,” he states, “I think that the lyrical mode, the lyrical genre, is a much more autobiographical mode than, say, the novel or the short story” (S. Gardner 14). He points out that he writes “very much from a subjective, personal position” (14).

oral tradition usually associated with the griot – even one narrowly defined as modern and political. Even so, a comparison with the griot remains valid in broad terms: Brutus never gives up trying to find a suitable voice to express both the private and the public, the individual and the collective. Sometimes the effort deprives his voice of much of its power and beauty. But, however limited or uneven his success in finding a way of merging the personal and the collective, it is a quest which Brutus never abandons.

And, in this quest, he continues to use the lyric poem – a highly individualistic form of expression. He never explains why he prefers the lyric mode. No doubt, though, he was attracted to what W.R. Johnson identifies as among the key characteristics of the European lyric: “compression, intensity of feeling, and complexity and subtlety of reflection” (48). However, JanMohamed correctly draws attention to an important difference in the way Brutus employs the traditional lyric mode. He suggests that “[t]he self in Brutus’ poetry is not conceived as a self-sufficient, monadic individual whose experience, efficacy and ‘integrity’ end at his epidermis” (NELM, 94.4.1.17). Instead, he submits, “the ‘individual’ is defined by his or her interactions with a community; the formative experience and efficacy of the self lie in the relations *between* the ‘individual’ and others” (94.4.1.17; emphasis in the original).

This is a productive way of explaining Brutus’ use of the lyric mode. He himself claims that he is part of an African tradition in which the artist is inspired by, and is committed to, his or her community (“Introduction” 364). JanMohamed describes the particular mode of writing that results from the interaction between the individual and the community in Brutus’ writing as the political lyric. “... [T]he salient characteristics of a poem in this mode is its representation of ‘political’ topics ... as deeply felt *personal* experiences,” he suggests. “Such a poem transcends the boundaries between private and public, between the lyric and the

political domains ...” (NELM, 94.4.1.17; emphasis in the original).<sup>166</sup> This is indeed a description that applies to much of Brutus’ poetry. However, it is unnecessary to place such poems into a narrowly defined category of “political lyric”. As Strand points out, the roots of the lyric have always assumed a connection between the private and the universal (xxii). Johnson, too, acknowledges this: “The private and the public, the merely personal and the truly universal, resist one another, yes; but from that struggle comes lyric poetry, both monodic and choral, at its best” (73). And, later on, he adds that “[h]uman beings have, after all, not only private emotions and selves but also public emotions and selves” (177).<sup>167</sup>

This is indeed what Brutus consistently tries to achieve with the lyric – to find a way to express both his private emotions and his public concerns. He is not always successful; sometimes his work verges on the clichéd and banal. At other times, though, he is able to find a voice that resonates with power and beauty. But it was a risk that Brutus was always prepared to take. As Monica Hendricks notes in a tribute to him, although his poetry becomes more strident and polemical in exile, he generally manages to retain his inherent lyricism (308).

\*\*\*

Of course, Brutus is not the only politically engaged South African poet during this period – the 1970s and 1980s – who grapples with the limitations of the lyric form yet continues to use

---

<sup>166</sup> Hendricks describes Brutus’ poetry as activist lyricism: “Not for him a disjuncture between the private and the public, the political and the personal” (311, 310).

<sup>167</sup> According to Barnstone, the division between the private and the public is a relatively recent phenomenon in poetry. “Before the middle of the nineteenth century,” he notes, “the poet did not necessarily have to choose between private and public worlds” (19). In support of his argument, he points out that the Greek lyric poet Archilochus (c.680-c.645BCE), Dante (1265-1321) and Blake were comfortable in both worlds (19). He suggests that this only began to change towards the end of the nineteenth century, though he does not offer any reasons for this shift.

it. Cronin (b.1949) is another notable example. Like Brutus, he served a prison sentence for his political activities (1976-1983) and lived in exile (1987-1990).<sup>168</sup> He, too, constantly wrestles with the highly personal and individualistic nature of lyric poetry. In an interview with Susan Gardner in 1984, for instance, he describes it as “a quite subjective style of writing”, and refers to his earlier reservations about using this mode:

... I was always somewhat unhappy with that, and became increasingly dissatisfied with that mode of writing, because I felt it was so self-indulgent in the South African situation. Here I was, privileged and white, sitting at University, writing love poems or whatever. The feeling became paralysing, so that I almost stopped writing. I was blocked by this disjunction between the realities in South Africa on the one hand, and my aesthetic predilections for the lyrical mode on the other. (S. Gardner 18)

Ironically, going to prison helped Cronin to resolve this dilemma. “Suddenly I felt I could write about being in love or about the emotions I was feeling. Those emotions, and the ways they were mediated, were the consequences of apartheid,” he states. “They were not exceptional, but exemplary of the oppression that other people feel, often in a much harsher fashion” (18). He further explains that “[s]uddenly the subjective and the public were held together in a dialectical relationship rather than being simply different one from the other” (18). Rita Barnard concurs with this observation, and suggests that Cronin’s imprisonment “enabled him to see in the loss of his mobility, in his enforced separation from his family, and in his intimate rediscovery of the incantatory and social dimension of language, the connection between the public and the private” (160).

---

<sup>168</sup> Cronin even briefly spent time in the same police cells at Pretoria Maximum Security prison in which Brutus was once held: “He had named the walls, the bars, the space, in lines that I had previously read. The place had been blessed with meaning. It was miserable, but somehow more endurable” (Van der Vlies 523).

In addition, as Cronin confirms, he was aware of the prison poetry of writers like Brutus before he was imprisoned himself. “I was aware of following in the footsteps of many writers, particularly, I suppose, of Dennis Brutus,” he points out. “From him I learnt that one could write an extended book of lyrical poetry out of a prison existence” (S. Gardner 23). Combining his own prison experience with the lyric tradition developed by poets such as Brutus helped to shape Cronin’s collection of poems, *Inside*, which was published in 1983. “I found a lyrical voice with which I was relatively happy. I found I was able to speak, from prison, of love, of the death of my first wife [Annemarie Cronin], of personal things like that, with some integrity, unabashedly,” he confides. “I felt that lyricism emerging from an apartheid prison cell had a social rootedness that I had not been able to achieve before” (Berold 127.) An example is the poem “Tonight is an envelope ...”:

Tonight is an envelope

Into which I climb, sliding between its folds

The letter I, flesh made paper

Turning in half, then again sleeplessly over.

Never more than 500 words

One letter per month quota, I take

Three weeks at least to arrive.

After their reckoning of words, after the censors,

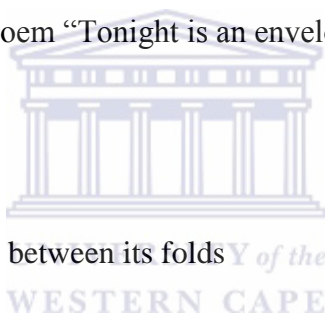
After the ink-check, code-check, comes

A rubber stamping.

Tonight is this envelope into which I slide

As the selfsame letter formed on my tongue

My tongue turned into paper – tonight perhaps





Taking off as no more than 500 words  
 In a bat of the lids, it's just  
 Possible to consider me as flying at last  
 As three week old words, behind the inside flap's  
     Gummed  
 Touch to reach you. (*Inside* 69)

Cronin was less satisfied with his second collection, *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad*, which was written mainly during the 1980s even though it was only published in 1997. He describes it in an interview with Robert Berold in 1998 as essentially notes and observations. "... [I]t never really became poetry to my satisfaction," he maintains. "Maybe it was just that I didn't have the time that I had so abundantly in Pretoria prison" (Berold 128). Nevertheless, he expresses some satisfaction with the poem cycle "Moorage", in which he explores "the intersection of the personal, the emotional and the broader political realities of our time" (128). He elaborates on this in the interview: "My relationship with my second wife [Gemma Cronin] becomes a point of moorage, a kind of lyrical anchorage for the events covered in the collection – roughly through the 1980s into the present" (128). The following stanza in section iv (lines 47-57) illustrates this well:

We call "nature" something  
 Frail as we know it, too, to be,  
 (A punctured ozone over ravished landscapes),  
 Something, nonetheless, more permanent,  
 Cyclical, more anchored, anchoring us,  
 The world in our minds, our minds in our bodies,

Our bodies in the world – something like this.

Nature: once touchstone of truth for the romantics.

For the modernisers: more, an untamed invitation.

For us: A weekend away in the midst of another

State of emergency ... (*Even 7*)

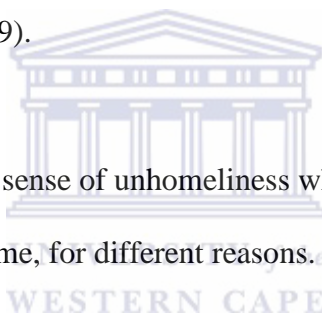
In an open letter to fellow South African poet Breyten Breytenbach in 1998, Cronin reaffirms his faith in lyrical poetry. “What I find compelling about lyrical poetry is its borderline existence,” he declares. “In the first place, it is the most marginalised and therefore the least commodified of art forms. But it is also borderline because it takes up a place in the unresolved tension (as you put it) between ‘sharedness and specificity’” (*Sunday Independent* 21).<sup>169</sup> However, despite his continued use of the lyric mode, Cronin – like Brutus – remains uncomfortable with its highly personal, individual voice. At one point in his open letter, Cronin even speaks more favourably about the overtly political writing of some black poets in South Africa during the 1970s: “It sought to forge, in poetry, even in English, a different kind of ‘I’, which was at once personal and collective, and therefore empowering (to use a now debased word).”<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> This quotation is from Breytenbach’s article, “Can a fouled-up Afrikaner join an unnatural marriage?”, in *Sunday Independent* (n.pag).

<sup>170</sup> However, David Attwell points out that these poets did not necessarily all reject the lyric tradition. Almost as if in direct response to Cronin, he notes: “The important point cannot be that the lyric tradition and its bag of tricks were eschewed by the Soweto poets, an argument that is unsustainable, but that the tradition was made tougher and became politicised through the process of its localisation” (150). He adds that the lyric gave South African poets “a vehicle for expressing selfhood and autonomy” (152).

This battle to forge what Cronin refers to in his open letter as “personal-collective places of some integrity” was, of course, a key preoccupation of Brutus’ writing. As he tells Simon Lewis in an interview in 2000, “I think the politically engaged poet probably functions best when his voice, and his experience, is that of the community, his ‘polis’, if you like” (“Speaking” 153-154). However, there is an unresolved tension in the way Brutus defines his community while in exile. At times, he describes it in quite specific terms as South Africa. At other times, he expresses impatience with such a narrowly circumscribed community, and instead professes a commitment to a broader, global community. He is aware of this tension – hence, as noted in the previous chapter, his remark that he feels “almost a little contemptuous of my own attachment to one corner of the globe when I really ought to have a loyalty to the whole globe” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 139).



The result is a continuation of the sense of unhomeliness which he first begins to experience in South Africa – although, this time, for different reasons. Despite the political and physical freedoms which living in exile offers him, he still experiences an overwhelming sense of unhomeliness. In fact, being in exile appears to exacerbate his feelings of alienation and rejection. He now occupies a world which is not clearly defined, to use Bhabha’s elaboration of unhomeliness, and which is half-way between one world and another (“World” 149). The next chapter will examine Brutus’ unhomeliness in exile and attempt to identify and analyse the reasons behind it.

## CHAPTER 5: AN ALIEN IN AMERICA

The unhomeliness that Brutus experiences in South Africa becomes far more pronounced in exile. Although he lives outside South Africa for more than two decades, there is little indication in his poetry that he ever feels completely at home anywhere during that period. This is true of the verse he writes during the first five years of his exile when he lives in the UK and, even more so, in the verse he subsequently writes after he moves to the USA. His poetry continues to reflect an acute sense of dislocation. There is little indication in his writing that he feels settled anywhere – either physically or emotionally – during this period. Perhaps part of the reason can be traced to his personal and political life in exile.

Brutus initially struggles to find a political home in the anti-apartheid community in the UK. During the 1960s, the ANC is slowly beginning to win recognition internationally under the leadership of Oliver Tambo, then the organisation's deputy president (Gerhart and Karis 151-152). And, even though Brutus does participate in ANC activities while in South Africa, his involvement is not based on unquestioning loyalty.<sup>171</sup> His relationship in South Africa with the ANC, and with its alliance partner the South African Communist Party (SACP), is often one of disagreement and even confrontation.<sup>172</sup> In an interview with Sustar, he points to several differences with the two organisations. These include disagreement over their decision in 1956 to field white candidates to represent black people in the whites-only parliament. "... [F]or a long time, I was on a kind of blacklist of both the ANC and the

---

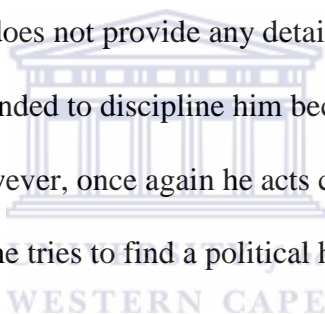
<sup>171</sup> Brutus became active in the ANC's underground structures in South Africa after it was banned in 1960, and formally joined the organisation in the UK after it opened its membership to all South Africans after its consultative conference in 1969 (Sustar 35-36).

<sup>172</sup> The SACP was launched as an underground organisation in 1953 after its predecessor, the Communist Party of South Africa, was banned in 1950 (Welsh 45, 131).

SACP, because I was known as someone who was undisciplined – insubordinate,” he recalls. “And I didn’t mind it. I kept doing my thing” (Sustar 36).<sup>173</sup>

He is involved in a similar dispute with the ANC in 1962 over his proposal to incorporate the word “Olympic” into the name of the South African Sports Association as a tactic to ensure that the IOC responds to its correspondence. The ANC advises him against it on the grounds that SASA, formed in 1958, is already well known and that a campaign would be required to introduce the renamed organisation to the public. Despite the ANC’s opposition, SASA becomes the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee in June 1963 (Bose 58).<sup>174</sup>

During another dispute with the ANC, the organisation threatens to discipline him if he does not abide by its decision (Brutus does not provide any details on the nature of this particular dispute, nor on how the ANC intended to discipline him because he was then not yet a member of the organisation). However, once again he acts contrary to the wishes of the ANC. It is against this background that he tries to find a political home in the UK.<sup>175</sup>



After his arrival in London, Brutus initially tries to help revive the South African Coloured People’s Congress (SACPC) in exile. Although he was only marginally involved in the SACPC in South Africa, he obviously saw its revival as offering an opportunity to establish a

---

<sup>173</sup> In an explanatory note to the poem “A Segmented Piece”, Brutus recalls that Naphtoli Bennun (whose first name he mistakenly refers to as Anatole), then a manager at a Port Elizabeth leather factory, formally invited him to join the SACP. He declined, he says in an e-mail forwarded to me by Bond, because he felt “uncomfortable with the discipline, the orders from the top”. Elsewhere he states that Bennun was authorised by the SACP’s central committee to offer him membership, and adds that he was also approached to join the party by Govan Mbeki, an ANC/SACP leader who lived in Port Elizabeth (Sustar 35).

<sup>174</sup> The decision to launch SANROC was made in 1962 (Bose 58). Peter Hain, who also campaigned for South Africa’s exclusion from international sport, mistakes this for the year SANROC was officially launched (46).

<sup>175</sup> Blanche la Guma, who lived in exile in London during the early 1960s and was a regular visitor to Brutus’ home in North Finchley, confirms that “he wasn’t that well accepted in the movement” and suggests that the reason was – at least in part – because he displayed “a rather know-it-all attitude” (personal interview, 27 Mar. 2013).

political base in the UK.<sup>176</sup> He works with fellow exiled writer Alex la Guma, a former leader of the organisation in South Africa, to revive the SACPC (Brutus, “African” 3). However, their efforts are unsuccessful, largely due to differences among former SACPC leaders in exile about the continued existence of a racially separate political formation. In March 1966, executive members Barney Desai and Cardiff Marney announced the dissolution of the SACPC in a statement released in London (Karis and Gerhart 370-372).

Brutus’ next port of call is the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in the UK. However, he claims that even though he volunteered to work for the organisation without any remuneration, this offer was rejected (Sustar 131). He provides two possible reasons for the rejection. Firstly, he suggests, the movement may have felt threatened by his personal reputation: “Perhaps it was a simple ego thing; that they thought that I might become too prominent” (131). Secondly, he speculates that his offer was spurned because of the close links between the AAM and the ANC which, he says, rejected him.<sup>177</sup>

Such a possibility is not without precedent. In her autobiography *Where Sixpence Lives*, the South African political activist Norma Kitson recounts being similarly ostracised by the SACP and the ANC after she arrived in exile in London in October 1966 (just three months after Brutus). Although she was an active member of the SACP in South Africa, she was not invited to any of the party’s meetings in exile. “I telephoned them on our arrival in London but it was obvious they wanted nothing to do with us,” she recalls (N. Kitson 190). Nor was she approached to join the ANC in London. What made her political marginalisation even

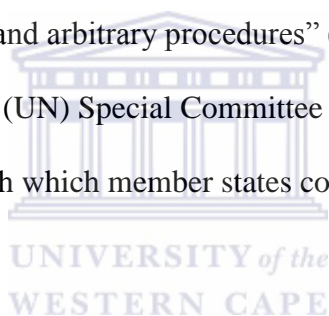
---

<sup>176</sup> When Brutus refers to the SACPC in 1974, he makes the point that he “was loosely and I think never officially associated” with it (Lindfors, *Tapes* 115). However, he subsequently informs Van Wyk that he was a SACPC official in Port Elizabeth (182).

<sup>177</sup> The ANC unquestionably exercised much influence in the AAM. It helped to found the AAM in 1960 and, according to Roger Fieldhouse, was “undoubtedly its main link with the liberation movement” of South Africa (27, 60).

more inexplicable to her was that her husband, David Kitson, was a SACP member who had been convicted of sabotage in December 1964 and sentenced to 20 years in prison. She blamed her ostracisation on certain SACP members in London. “If anyone starts any activity that is not under their control,” she claims, “they ‘bury’ them – immobilise them, or manoeuvre them out of the solidarity movement” (214).

Brutus eventually finds an organisational home in exile when International Defence and Aid Fund of Southern Africa (IDAF) president John Collins, who was then also a Canon of St Paul’s Cathedral in London, offers him a position as a campaign director.<sup>178</sup> IDAF, which provided legal aid for political prisoners in Southern Africa, regarded them as “the victims of unjust legislation and oppressive and arbitrary procedures” (“Constitution” v). It was recognised by the United Nations (UN) Special Committee on Apartheid as one of just three international organisations through which member states could send funds for the victims of apartheid (Fieldhouse 115).



Although he has already secured a position as a high school teacher when Collins approaches him, he eagerly accepts the offer. “Defense and Aid [IDAF] was in some ways political, but it was really a non-governmental organization, an NGO, that didn’t take sides in South African politics – a humanitarian thing,” he explains his decision. “It was an organization that did not require me to toe any political line” (Sustar 132). He adds pointedly: “In fact I was never hired or paid by any political organization. I was able to assist people from all the various South African political groups” (132).

---

<sup>178</sup> Brutus’ poem “Now that we conquer and dominate time”, written on 5 August 1966 – less than a week after he arrived in exile – is dedicated to Collins (*Letters* 34). He also mentions Collins in the “Dedication” in his last collection of poems, *Leafdrift* (n.pag.).



**Fig. 14: Dennis Brutus addresses the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid on 23 March 1970 as director of IDAF's Campaign for the Release of Political Prisoners in Southern Africa and president of SANROC. With him is Sonia Bunting in her capacity as an organiser of the World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners.**

**Source: UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives.**



However, joining IDAF does not mean his life in Britain is now stable and settled. As part of his work for the organisation, he often travels to campaign for the release of political prisoners in South Africa (McLuckie 21). This includes an address to the UN Special Committee on Apartheid in New York in March 1970. And while working for IDAF, he also resumes his activities with SANROC, which involves travelling widely to lobby for South Africa's exclusion from international sport. In 1966, for instance, he attends meetings of the World Athletics Association in Budapest, Hungary, and of the World Gymnastics Federation in Dortmund and the World Weightlifting Federation in East Berlin in the German Democratic Republic.

He travels extensively for other purposes as well when he lives in London. In 1967 he attends the African Scandinavian Writers' Conference in Sweden and visits the USA on a speaking tour. The following year, he attends the Havana Cultural Congress in Cuba and the World Conference on Human Rights in Iran (the latter as an IDAF representative). His extensive travelling and involvement in various anti-apartheid campaigns, inevitably, once again disrupt his family life.

His wife, May, who joined him in London with their seven children in September 1966 (Lindfors, *Tapes* 18), reflects candidly on this aspect of their life in exile.<sup>179</sup> In an unpublished interview with fellow South African exile Hilda Bernstein, she recalls that she was largely left on her own to look after their children. "I was kept very busy with all these children, with the different problems, largely alone ...," she says (Bernstein, "Transcript").<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> The children are Jacinta (1950), Marc (1952), Julian (1953), Antony (1955), Justina (1956), Cornelia (1958) and Gregory (1962). Another child, Paula, was born in the UK in 1968.

<sup>180</sup> Brutus is aware of the pain that his political commitments cause to his family. In the poem "For my sons and daughters", he admits: "Memory of me will be a process/of conscious and unconscious exorcism;/not to condemn me you will need/forgetfulness of all my derelictions ...". Even then he does not express any remorse:

She even goes as far as to suggest that perhaps it would have been better if Brutus never married. “I don’t think he could cope,” she believes.

There is nevertheless some degree of stability in their lives at the beginning: the family lives in the same house in London for about five years. However, in 1970, when Mphahlele secures a position at the University of Zambia, he approaches Brutus to fill his post at the University of Denver while it looks for a replacement. Brutus agrees and spends three months at the university as a visiting professor in the Department of English. He returns to the UK in March 1970 and resumes working for IDAF. However, this limited degree of stability comes to an end in 1971 when the owner of the London house in which they live puts it up for sale.



It is also the same year in which Brutus returns to the USA – this time permanently. In September 1971, he joins the Department of English at Northwestern University in Evanston as a visiting professor (where he later becomes a tenured professor). Once again the family is separated: Brutus leaves first for the USA with three of the children; his wife and the other children only join them a year later.<sup>181</sup> May Brutus’ departure for the USA in 1972 leaves her with a mixture of trepidation and resigned acceptance. She tells Bernstein: “It was very stressful. Here again, being uplifted, another trans-Atlantic jaunt. I’ve just settled down in England, still very agoraphobic but getting a bit better ...” (Bernstein, “Transcript”).

---

“I seek no mitigation –/would even welcome some few words of scorn ...”. He believes that the justness of his cause is sufficient vindication of his actions. The only point he submits in his defence is that “my continental sense of sorrow drove me to work/and at times I hoped to shape your better world” (*Stubborn* 4).

<sup>181</sup> Antony Brutus recalls that he and his father initially shared one bedroom after they arrived in the USA. His sisters, Jacinta and Justina, shared another bedroom (personal interview, 10 Aug. 2012).

However, her stay in the USA lasts for just two years. Unlike Brutus and their children, she does not have a British passport and her Certificate of Identity – a travel document issued to those deemed to be stateless – is only valid for two years at a time. As a result, the British embassy in Chicago instructs her to return to the UK and to reapply from there for readmission to the USA. She then returns to London with the three youngest children.

Although there are already long-standing problems by then between Brutus and his wife – she describes him as “the world’s worst womaniser” (Bernstein, “Transcript”) – their enforced separation in 1974 appears to mark a further turning point in their relationship. Apart from occasional visits, they continued to live in different countries, on different continents, for the rest of their lives.

A further destabilising factor in Brutus’ life in the USA occurs during the early 1980s when the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) tries to deport him.<sup>182</sup> In previous years, his one-year visas are routinely renewed. However, when Zimbabwe becomes independent in 1980, the UK revokes his passport and instructs him to apply for a Zimbabwean passport. For various reasons beyond Brutus’ control, his visa expires during this process (“Dennis”, *The Black Scholar* 72). The result is a three-year campaign between 1981 and 1983 to prevent his deportation. Dennis Brutus Defence Committees are established in several areas across the USA, including in Austin, Chicago, Seattle, Washington, Minneapolis and Amherst (Idehen 187). The anti-deportation campaign includes an unsuccessful application in 1982 for political asylum in the USA.

What further disturbs Brutus is that he believes the support from then Northwestern University president Robert Strotz for the campaign to stave off his deportation is half-

---

<sup>182</sup> A copy of the letter to Brutus from the INS is included in Sustar and Karim’s *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader* (222).



**Fig. 15:**  
**Dennis Brutus**  
**in**  
**Washington**  
**in 1981. With**  
**him are, from**  
**left to right,**  
**Stephen**  
**Kohn, Estelle**  
**Kohn and**  
**Michael**  
**Kohn, who**  
**took part in**  
**the campaign**  
**to ensure he**  
**won political**  
**asylum in the**  
**USA.**

**Photograph:**  
**Kohn family.**

hearted.<sup>183</sup> He tells journalist Gary Rivlin that the letter Strotz sends to the INS “made no effort to urge the immigration department to permit me to stay ... It was a routine letter that said what it had to say, and nothing more ...” (37). In the end, after five hearings at the Immigration Court in Chicago, Brutus wins his battle to stay in the USA: he receives political asylum on 6 September 1983 (Idehen 187, 188).<sup>184</sup>

However, despite this significant legal and political victory, and despite the fairly widespread support he receives during his campaign to avoid being deported, Brutus appears to remain unsettled in the USA. His sense of being unwelcome does not begin only in 1981 when Ronald Reagan takes office after winning the American presidential election. His sense of displacement corresponds in important respects to the feeling of unhomeliness that he experienced while still in South Africa. It is reasonable to speculate that his family ties, fraternal relationships and political bonds alleviated the degree of alienation he felt while in South Africa. In the USA, on the other hand, he is without most of his immediate family members (apart from a brief period between 1972 and 1974) and in a vast country where the South African exile community is far more widely dispersed than in the UK.

\*\*\*

Besides the new personal and political circumstances he encounters in the USA, it seems Brutus does not quite feel at home in that country as a poet either. No doubt this is, in large measure, due to the fact that the mainstream English poetic tradition is such a dominant

---

<sup>183</sup> Brutus feels ambivalent about Northwestern University for another reason, too. He speculates that he was not employed on the basis of academic merit, but because it needed “a black or a token black who was also a militant and therefore would be acceptable to the black students, but who also had tolerable academic credentials” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 133).

<sup>184</sup> Susan R. Gzesh gives a detailed overview of Brutus’ asylum case (McLuckie and Colbert 173-187), while Dennis Brutus Defence Committee secretary Y.B. Holly provides an extract from the tape recording of a hearing by the INS in Chicago (Bunn and Taylor 368-373).

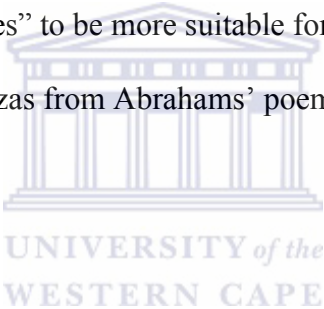
feature of his education. In a lecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he states that there was “very little exposure” to American poetry in South Africa when he received his school and tertiary education (Brutus, “Poetry” 1). This was probably even more so the case in the Eastern Cape, where he grew up and lived: it was home to large numbers of British settlers from 1820 (L. Thompson 55). The result of their presence in this area was, arguably, a longer and far more intensive promotion of English literature and culture than anywhere else in South Africa.<sup>185</sup>

By contrast, there were more opportunities in other parts of the country to gain access to American writing at a relatively early age, and many writers were influenced in quite significant ways by their exposure to literary developments in the USA, especially the writing of African-Americans. An example is the experience of Abrahams, who is from the same generation as Brutus (he was born in Johannesburg in 1919, just five years before Brutus). Like Brutus, he too received a mission school education dominated by mainstream English literary traditions. His teachers at St Peter’s in Rosettenville in Johannesburg and at Grace Dieu, outside Pietersburg (now Polokwane), were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge universities as well as products of English religious orders. Abrahams recognises that this “inevitably imbued me with the English vision of the way things are” (*Coyaba* 27). However, as a teenager he discovered the writers of the Harlem Renaissance at the library of the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in Johannesburg in 1937 (Abrahams, *Tell* 196-197). This American literary movement of the 1920s deserves its reputation as “the greatest intensity of creative activity ever to occur among black artists” until the new wave of writing which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Gibson 6).

---

<sup>185</sup> In fact, one of the key motives behind the establishment of the 1820 Settlers National Monument in Grahamstown was “to celebrate the English language and the traditions it transmits” (Butler 300).

As a result of Abrahams' discovery of the Harlem Renaissance, he counts the poets Hughes (1902-1967) and Countee Cullen (1903-1946) as among his formative influences (Heywood, *Perspectives* 172). According to Ntongela Masilela, it was Abrahams who introduced Hughes to South African literary history through his own creative writing (335). The significant impression that the writing of this period makes on Abrahams is visible, for instance, in his poetry in *A Blackman Speaks of Freedom!* and in many of his novels. Chapman draws attention to his use of "a tough, Americanized diction" ("Soweto" 202), and attempts to explain why Abrahams employs it. He suggests that Abrahams, in search of "a valid idiom of protest", regards "the British humanist literature which would have been encouraged by his church-school education" as inadequate; instead, he finds "the harsh, Afro-American poetry of, among others, Langston Hughes" to be more suitable for this purpose ("Voice" 122). An example is the following two stanzas from Abrahams' poem "Self":



I am a shadow,  
 Restless,  
 Roving everywhere.  
 Dawn greets me  
 Sneaking from a park bench  
 And a rendezvous with cold and sky,  
 I'm a bum, hungry and lonely;  
 Milk vanishes from doorsteps at dawn  
 As I pass ...

I'm a poet,  
 And through hunger

And lust for love and laughter  
 I have turned myself into a voice,  
 Shouting the pain of the People  
 And the sunshine that is to be. (*Blackman* 9)

Kgositsile (b.1938) also encounters the poetry of Hughes and other African-American writers before he goes into exile in 1961. He fondly recalls coming across their work at the United States Information Service (USIS) office in Johannesburg: “Those of us who were trying to find black literary models spent a lot of time in that library” (Rowell 28). He also obtains copies of their work from second-hand bookshops (Taylor-Guthrie 36). These writers help him to find his own voice; under their influence, he strives to keep his poetic imagery “in working clothes so that they can be accessible to my people” (36). An example is the following stanza from his poem “When brown is black”, which was originally published in his first collection, *Spirits Unchained*, in 1969:

For Malcolm<sup>186</sup>  
 for the brothers in Robben Island  
 for every drop of Black blood  
 from every white whip  
 from every white gun and bomb  
 for us and again for us  
 we shall burn  
 and beat the drum  
 resounding the bloodsong

---

<sup>186</sup> This is presumably a reference to the African-American political activist Malcolm X (1925-1965).



from Sharpeville to Watts  
 and all points white of the memory  
 when the white game is over  
 and we dance to our bloodsong  
 without fear nor bales  
 of tinted cotton over our eye (*If* 17)

When Kgositsile moves to the USA in 1962, he discovers that Hughes plays a major role in providing practical support to young writers during the 1960s in many parts of the world, including in Africa. This support takes the form of scholarships, tuition fees and even living expenses. “I doubt very much if there are artists, particularly writers, anywhere on this planet who matured in the sixties that can say Langston Hughes didn’t help them one way or another – anywhere, Africa, the Caribbean, and here [the USA] ...,” he states (Rowell 30). Kgositsile returns to this subject more recently without being prompted: “Without any pomp, without even any publicity about it – those who know about it are those who had direct contact with him or those who would have been told by the beneficiaries of his work” (telephonic interview, 23 Apr. 2013).

Rive (1931-1989) is an example of a South African writer who benefits directly from this generosity.<sup>187</sup> Hughes encourages his writing from an early point in his career. When Rive wins a prize in a short-story competition run by *Drum* magazine, in which Hughes is one of the judges, the poet contacts him to ask for more stories. In return, Hughes sends him autographed copies of his first collection of poems, *The Weary Blues*, which was published in 1926, and his collection of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks*, which was published in

---

<sup>187</sup> After Abrahams met Hughes in New York, he describes him as “one of the ... most generous human beings I have known” (*Coyaba* 144).

1934 (Rive, *Writing* 10).<sup>188</sup> This leads to a correspondence between the two during the 1950s. In 1963 Hughes includes Rive's poem, "Where the rainbow ends", in a collection which he edits, *Poems from Black Africa* (123) – the first time the now much-anthologised poem appears in the USA.<sup>189</sup> Shaun Viljoen attributes a large part of the South African's early success internationally to the efforts of Hughes. "As a consequence of Hughes' friendship and intervention," he observes, "Rive's quite dramatic rise as a writer on the international scene was precipitated and, by the early sixties, he was already well-established within intellectual circles locally and was known as a committed South African writer internationally" (Viljoen, "Richard" 110).

Rive himself points to the impact of Hughes and other Harlem Renaissance writers on South African writers during the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to Abrahams, he includes Mphahlele (1919-2008) and La Guma (1925-1985) as among those influenced by the Harlem writers (Rive, "Black" 47). As far as his own writing is concerned, he regards Hughes as a seminal influence since he first comes across his writing at the age of 12 at the Hyman Lieberman Institute Library in District Six, Cape Town. "A new world opened up," he recalls. "This was about me and depicted my frustrations and resentments in a world obsessed with colour" (Rive, "Being" 21). He discovers the writing of Cullen and fellow Harlem Renaissance poet Jean Toomer (1894-1967) at the District Six library as well during this period (presumably the early 1940s).

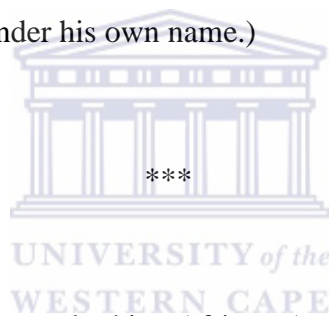
The experiences of Abrahams, Rive and Kgosisile – one in Cape Town, the other two in Johannesburg – suggest that there is a reasonable degree of exposure and access to American

---

<sup>188</sup> Mphahlele also received copies of these two books from Hughes. This led to the start of "a long friendship" between them as well (Daymond, Jacobs and Lenta 78).

<sup>189</sup> It is worth noting that Hughes dedicated the anthology to Abrahams (n.pag.).

literature in South Africa during the 1950s and 1960s, contrary to Brutus' claim in his University of Wisconsin-Madison lecture. Perhaps part of the reason he arrives at this erroneous conclusion is that, unlike some of his peers in South Africa, he did not actively seek out the work of American poets. The lecture provides some evidence in support of such speculation: Brutus makes adverse comments about African-American poetry, and describes it as generally being "the poetry of assertion" ("Poetry" 1). On the other hand, he regards English poetry – and, as a result of the colonial legacy of the British education system on the continent, English-language poetry in Africa in general – as "the poetry of persuasion – the poetry of argument" ("Poetry" 1). Brutus mentions the poetry he wrote under the pseudonym John Bruin, and places it squarely within the latter tradition. (The same can certainly be said of the early poetry he publishes under his own name.)



Possibly as a result of deliberately overlooking African-American poetry, Brutus only begins after the mid-1960s to grapple with the same kind of issues that Hughes already began to confront during the 1920s – how to develop a more accessible and direct style of poetry. An example of Hughes' efforts is his well-known poem "I, too", written in 1920 and later included in his debut collection, *The Weary Blues*:

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,  
 And eat well,  
 And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
 I'll be at the table  
 When company comes.  
 Nobody'll dare  
 Say to me,

“Eat in the kitchen,”

Then.

Besides,

They'll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed –



I, too, am America. (*Selected* 275)

This is easily comprehensible language, readily accessible to the people to whom, and about whom, Hughes is writing. His next collection of poems *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, which was published in 1927, is written in similar vein. Valerie Boyd describes it as “overflow[ing] with blues and sexuality and the unvarnished voices of the black masses” (186). Donald B. Gibson, too, notes with approval the growing clarity of Hughes’ language. “During the twenties when most American poets were turning inward, writing obscure and esoteric poetry to an ever decreasing audience of readers, Hughes was turning outward, using language and themes, attitudes and ideas familiar to anyone who had the ability simply to read,” he points

out (7). This is precisely what Brutus decides to strive for after he reflects on the content and form of his poetry while in prison on Robben Island.

Besides this common goal in their approach to writing, there is another similarity between the work of Brutus and Hughes: both consciously incorporate a certain musicality in their poetry (this is discussed in relation to Brutus in chapter 1). Hughes refers to this aspect of his writing during the Harlem Renaissance in his autobiography *The Big Sea*, when he notes that he began to write poetry “in the manner of the Negro blues and the spirituals” (205). Later he elaborates on why, and how, he tries to achieve this in his poetry:

I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street [in Washington D.C.] – gay songs, because you had to be gay or die; sad songs, because you couldn’t help being sad sometimes. But gay or sad, you kept on living and you kept on going. Their songs – those of Seventh Street – had the pulse beat of the people who keep on going.

Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun, night, day – night, day – night, day – forever, so is the undertow of black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor, and its rooted power. (209)

An example of this kind of writing is Hughes’ poem “The Weary Blues”. First published in 1925 in *Opportunity* magazine, the official publication of the African-American civil rights organisation National Urban League, it was later included as the title poem of his debut collection:

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
     I heard a Negro play.  
 Down on Lenox Avenue the other night<sup>190</sup>  
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
     He did a lazy sway ...  
     He did a lazy sway ...  
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.  
 With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
 He made that poor piano moan with melody.  
     O Blues!  
 Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
 He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.  
     Sweet Blues!  
 Coming from a black man's soul.  
     O Blues!  
 In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
 I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan –  
     “Ain't got nobody in all this world,  
     Ain't got nobody but ma self.  
     I's gwine to quit ma frownin'  
     And put ma troubles on the shelf.”  
 Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
 He played a few chords then he sang some more

---

<sup>190</sup> Lenox Avenue is a major street in the New York neighbourhood of Harlem. It is now known as Malcolm X Boulevard (Ramazani, Ellmann and O'Clair 688).

“I got the Weary Blues  
 And I can’t be satisfied.  
 Got the Weary Blues  
 And can’t be satisfied –  
 I ain’t happy no mo’  
 And I wish that I had died.”

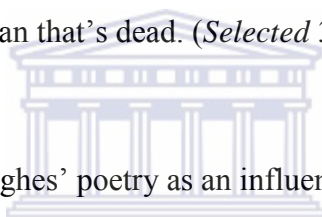
And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that’s dead. (*Selected* 33-34)



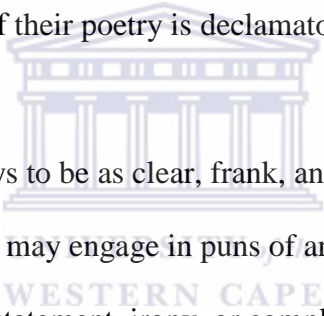
However, Brutus does not cite Hughes’ poetry as an influence on his writing in any way. This silence provokes questions, considering that he is very knowledgeable about the content and form of the American’s writing.<sup>191</sup> For instance, he notes approvingly in a discussion on American poetry that Hughes and other African-American writers “incorporated speech rhythms and the idioms of the blacks, not merely using black material, but black diction, black rhythms, so that you get a quite new, different kind of poetry” (Miller 48). Nevertheless, nowhere does he acknowledge that this pioneering development makes any impact on his own writing.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>191</sup> Brutus even wrote a poem about Hughes, “Looking for Langston?” (*Leafdrift* 38). This poem may be intended as a direct response to British film-maker Isaac Julien’s 1984 film, *Looking for Langston*.

It is easier to understand why he is hostile to the African-American poetry that emerges as part of the Black Arts Movement between the early 1960s and mid-1970s. Larry Neal, a theatre scholar who played a leading role in this movement, describes it as “the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept”, which advocates a separate nationhood for black people in the USA (272). Much of the African-American writing of this period is explicitly political and comes close to being employed as little more than political propaganda. Gibson virtually characterises it as such in an overview of African-American writing of that period. “Black poetry is ideological,” he notes. “It specifically supports black nationalism, black consciousness, black cultural and institutional ideals” (Gibson 10). He adds that African-American writing of the time is “consciously and explicitly didactic” (10), and goes on to confirm Brutus’ view that much of their poetry is declamatory:



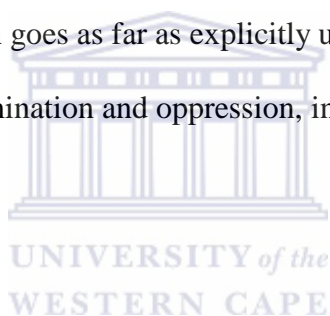
Black poetry intends always to be as clear, frank, and explicit as possible. It is a poetry of statement, which may engage in puns of an uncomplicated sort, but which intentionally avoids understatement, irony, or complex verbal expression of any subtlety. By being open and explicit, black poetry avoids highly symbolic or complex metaphoric expression, though simple symbols and metaphors may appear. (10)

Besides his reservations about the overtly political nature of such poetry, Brutus also takes issue with the form this writing takes. He argues that African poets – or, more accurately, African poets writing in English – are far more interested in the craft of poetry than African-American poets. For him, African-Americans resort to free verse too casually (in his words, they have “broken down to free verse consistently”) (Miller 49). He regards this as an important difference between the writing of African and African-American poets during this



period, and remarks disparagingly that “I think in America there is a very largely held assumption that if you get it down, if you ‘tell it like it is’, you’ve done it” (49).

The work of Nikki Giovanni (b.1943) provides many examples of such poetry. Her first two collections – *Black Feeling, Black Talk*, which was published in 1968, followed by *Black Judgement* – offer many examples (they were published in a combined volume in 1970). In “Poem for black boys”, for instance, she writes: “Ask your mothers for a Rap Brown gun/Santa just may comply if you wish hard enough/Ask for CULLURD instead of Monopoly./DO NOT SIT IN DO NOT FOLLOW KING/GO DIRECTLY TO STREETS/This is a game you can win ...” (Giovanni 50). Her poem “The true import of present dialogue, Black vs. Negro” is another example of such exhortatory poetry, as the extract below illustrates, and even goes as far as explicitly urging her readers to resort to violent resistance to racial discrimination and oppression, in quite direct and inflammatory language:



Nigger

Can you kill

Can you kill

Can a nigger kill

Can a nigger kill a honkie

Can a nigger kill the Man

Can you kill nigger

Huh? nigger can you

kill

Do you know how to draw blood

Can you poison ...

Can you kill huh? nigger

Can you kill ...

A nigger can die

We ain't got to prove we can die

We got to prove we can kill ...

Learn to kill nigger

Learn to be Black men. (Giovanni 11-12)

Another possible reason for Brutus' reluctance to emulate African-American poetry is because of the essentialism it espouses. Certain features associated exclusively with black people are generally portrayed in a positive manner; those associated exclusively with white people, on the other hand, are depicted in negative terms. In her commentary on the Black Arts Movement in the USA, the literary critic bell hooks acknowledges its crude binarism. "Characterized by an inversion of the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy," she observes, "it inverted conventional ways of thinking about otherness in ways that suggested that everything black was good and everything white bad"<sup>192</sup> (126). An example is the following extract from a poem by Don L. Lee (b.1942), "A message all blackpeople can dig (& a few negroes too)", from his 1969 collection *Don't Cry, Scream*. Lee (who later changed his name to Haki R. Madhubuti) addresses black people as "beautiful people; the sons/and daughters of beautiful people" (63). Lee assures them that they will "discover new stars:/street-light stars that will explode into evil-eyes,/light-bulb stars visible only to the realpeople,/clean stars, african & asian stars,/black aesthetic stars that will damage the whi-temind;/killer stars that will move against/the unpeople .../blackpeople/are moving, moving to return/this earth into the hands

---

<sup>192</sup> Another aspect of such binary thinking is the argument of the Black Arts and Black Power movements that the USA is divided into two distinct racial categories. According to Neal, "there are in fact and in spirit two Americas – one black, one white" (273).

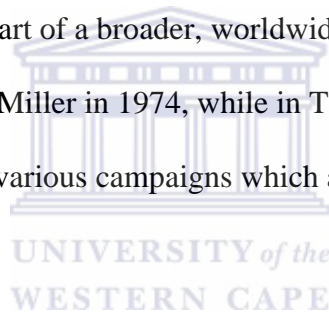
of/human beings” (63-64). Another example of such essentialism is Lee’s poem “The primitive,” which was first published in his collection *Black Pride* in 1968:

taken from the  
 shores of Mother Africa.  
 the savages they thought  
 we were –  
 they being the real savages.  
 to save us. (from what?)  
 our happiness, our love, each other?  
 their bible for  
 our land. (introduction to economics)  
 christianized us.  
 raped our minds with:  
 T.V. & straight hair,  
 Reader’s Digest & bleaching creams,  
 tarzan & jungle jim,  
 used cars & used homes,  
 reefers & napalm,  
 european history & promises.  
 Those alien concepts  
 of whi-iteness,  
 the being of what  
 is not.  
 against our nature,



this weapon called  
 civilization –  
 they brought us here –  
 to drive us mad.  
 (like them) (*Black* 24)

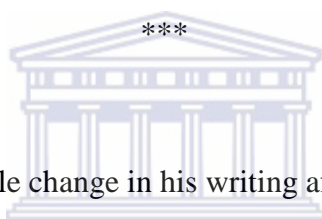
Such stereotypical imagery and crass generalisations are no doubt in conflict with the broader sense of self that Brutus is increasingly beginning to develop in exile – away from a narrow definition of his identity towards a more expansive sense of self. A crucial aspect of this revised self-definition is that his opposition to the racial discrimination of apartheid is no longer an end in itself; it is now part of a broader, worldwide struggle against oppression and injustice. As he tells Ethelbert E. Miller in 1974, while in Tanzania to attend the Sixth Pan African Congress, he is active in various campaigns which affect people in other parts of the world:



I've been working with the Indians [Native Americans] on Wounded Knee, with Chicano groups in Chicago on many issues, Puerto Ricans, others. I worked for political prisoners in Chile, on the campaigns in the Chilean issue. I've been active in opposition to the Greek colonels and their oppression, as well as the American involvement in it ... my life is an involvement in challenging injustice wherever it might be. (Miller 47)

Besides Pound and the American-born Eliot, the only American poets whom Brutus explicitly identifies as influences on his own work are Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982) and Kenneth Patchen (1911-1972) (Lindfors et al 34). In fact,

during the interview at the University of Texas in February 1970 in which he names them, he appears to express surprise that he can count as many as five American poets as influences on the development of his poetry. He refers to the quintet as “quite a lot of Americans, more than you would expect” (34). This is understandable at that point in his life, in view of his educational background and the fact that he is then still based in London. However, decades later, the only American poet he cites as an influence alongside several English writers is Stevens (Goddard 70). The English mainstream poetic tradition, it can be inferred, remains the most important impact on his writing even though he has been living in the USA for more than two decades.



There is, nevertheless, a discernible change in his writing after he moves to the USA. Goodwin is one of many critics who draw attention to this development. Although he recognises that Brutus is already beginning to write more simply and directly in London – in line with his decision to reach a broader audience – Goodwin rightly points out that he still pays much attention to the conceptualisation and execution of his poetry: “Both in South Africa and during the years in England he wrote a number of complex and lyrical poems” (20). But, he notes, much of Brutus’ writing after his move to the USA is “little more than prosaic counsel, aphoristic advice, or simple rhetorical statement and exhortation suitable for reading to audiences with only a low threshold tolerance for poetry” (20). The poem “I am a rebel and freedom is my cause”, published in 1975 in the collection *South African Voices*, bears this out. It is essentially political rhetoric, devoid of any poetic devices to convey its content:

I am a rebel and freedom is my cause:

Many of you have fought similar struggles

therefore you must join my cause:

My cause is a dream of freedom

and you must help me make my dream reality:

For why should I not dream and hope?

Is not revolution making reality of hopes?

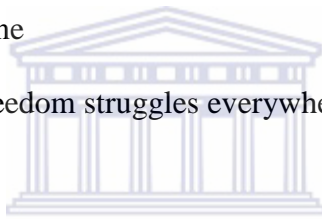
Let us work together that my dream may be fulfilled

that I may return with my people out of exile

to live in one democracy in peace.

Is not my dream a noble one

worthy to stand besides freedom struggles everywhere? (Lindfors, *Voices* 33)



WESTERN CAPE

There are several possible reasons for this shift in Brutus' writing. Apart from a desire to reach a wider audience, it is reasonable to speculate that the writing of American poets does eventually come to influence him – in particular, that of African-American poets – however much he differs initially with the strategy of exhortation he believes they employ in their poetry. Soyinka (b.1934), who also lived in the USA and taught at various universities there for extended periods, supports such an argument. He suggests that, as a teacher at various American universities, Brutus was exposed to various African-American influences – “the black theatre, poetry, literature movement, the ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement, the ideological writing” (personal interview, 5 Apr. 2013). In this regard, Soyinka specifically singles out the writing of Etheridge Knight (1933-1991), a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement after the publication of his collection *Poems from Prison* in 1968. As a result of Brutus' discovery of the writing of Knight and other poets associated with this movement, Soyinka contends,

his poetry took on new tones. “He became, I think, too rhetorical,” he suggests in the interview. “He allowed himself to become too sucked into the American waves of ideological passion, one way or the other.”<sup>193</sup>

There is considerable merit in Soyinka’s contention. During the interview with William E. Thompson in 1983 referred to previously, Brutus acknowledges a shift in his approach from the poetry of persuasion towards a more exhortatory kind of poetry. He states that the poetry he is writing at that point assumes that complexity and artifice are no longer necessary (73). Instead, he now believes that simple and direct language is sufficient to communicate effectively with his intended audience. There is much evidence in Knight’s poetry of his influence on Brutus’ new, almost prosaic approach. An example is his poem “Cell song”, written while an inmate at Indiana State Prison:

Night Music Slanted

Light strike the cave

of sleep. I alone

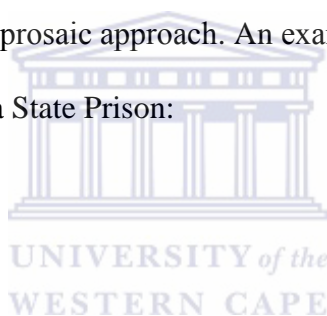
tread the red circle

and twist the space

with speech.

Come now, etheridge, don't

be a savior; take



<sup>193</sup> In an interview with Steptoe, Brutus says Knight “was a very fine poet, a very fine craftsman and ... wrote about the realities of the Black experience with great intensity and also great skill” (“Dennis”, McLuckie and Colbert 206). Brutus also pays tribute to Knight in the poem “Finally the hoarse voice” (*Leafdrift* 47) and acknowledges him in a footnote to “He sees through stone” (46), which pointedly borrows the title of a poem by Knight (*Poems* 10-11).

your words and scrape  
 the sky, shake rain  
 on the desert, sprinkle  
 salt on the tail  
 of a girl,

can there anything  
 good come out of  
 prison (*Poems* 11)

Knights' second collection, *Belly Song and Other Poems*, was published in July 1973, not long after Brutus moved to the USA to take up his position at Northwestern University. Much of it is in the form of direct statements. An example is "People Poem", a tribute to Lumumba: "they ripped him off/yes they did/all of his kingdoms/all of his castles/all of his empires/all of his dreams/they ripped him off/yes they did//they ripped him off/yes they did" (*Belly* 35). "Evolutionary Poem No. 1", too, is little more than a rhetorical statement: "I ain't got nobody that i can depend on/'cept myself" (57). Many of the poems Brutus published during the 1980s are similar in style and intent: they are brief social or political comments, written specifically to raise political awareness about injustice and to galvanise support against it.

\*\*\*

Besides his exposure to African-American poetry during the 1970s, political events in South Africa also probably played a role in the transformation of Brutus' poetry into more declamatory verse. These include, as mentioned previously, the 1976-1977 student-led



protests which, according to Jeremy Seekings, “brought to an end fifteen years of relative quiescence” (29). The government responded harshly to this new wave of resistance. Hundreds of anti-apartheid activists were detained; some, like Biko, died in detention in 1977 (30). Several anti-apartheid organisations and individuals were banned later that year as well. These brutal attempts to curb resistance to apartheid, arguably, impel Brutus to respond explicitly in his poetry (as discussed in the previous chapter).

Another significant development during the 1970s which presumably also contributes to this shift is the emergence of a number of new poetic voices in South Africa. These include Oswald Mtshali’s pioneering *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* (1971), followed by Serote’s *Yakhal’inkomo* (1972), Matthews’ and Gladys Thomas’ *Cry Rage!* (1972), Siphosiphoshe’s *Hurry Up to It!* (1975) and Gwala’s *Jol’inkomo* (1977). While Mtshali’s lyrical voice is generally more restrained, all of them are uncompromising in expressing their opposition to apartheid through their poetry. Serote (b.1944), in particular, is quite strident. He publishes, in quick succession, *Tsetlo* (1974), *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) and *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978). These collections employ unapologetically straightforward language. An example is the poem “What’s in this black ‘shit’” from his debut collection:

It is not the steaming little rot  
 In the toilet bucket,  
 It is the upheav[a]l of the bowels  
 Bleeding and coming out through the mouth  
 And swallowed back,  
 Rolling in the mouth,  
 Feeling its taste and wondering what’s next like it.

Now I'm talking about this;  
 "Shit" you hear an old woman say,  
 Right there, squeezed in her little match-box  
 With her fatness and gigantic life experience,  
 Which makes her a child,  
 'Cause the next day she's right there,  
 Right there serving tea to the woman  
 Who's lying in bed at 10am sick with wealth,  
 Which she's prepared to give her life for  
 "Rather than you marry my son or daughter."



This "Shit" can take the form of action;  
 My younger sister under the full weight of my father,  
 And her face colliding with his steel hand,  
 "Cause she spilled sugar that I work so hard for"  
 He says, not feeling satisfied with the damage his hands  
 Do to my yelling little sister.

I'm learning to pronounce this "Shit" well,  
 Since the other day,  
 At the pass office,  
 When I went to get employment,  
 The officer there endorsed me to Middelburg,

So I said, hard and with all my might, “Shit!”  
 I felt a little better;  
 But what’s good is, I said it in his face,  
 A thing my father wouldn't dare do.  
 That’s what’s in this black “Shit.” (*Yakhal'inkomo* 8)

Although Serote uses the first person in the poem, the “I” obviously represents a collective voice. “We had become sort of a voice of the majority of people in South Africa,” he confirms (personal interview, 25 Sep. 2012). Matthews (b.1929) adopts a similar approach in his poetry and was equally prolific. In addition to his poems in *Cry Rage!*, he edits the anthology *Black Voices Shout!* in 1974 (which includes some of his own work as well as poems by Serote and Gwala) and publishes the collection *Pass me a Meatball, Jones* in 1977. Like Serote, he too uses very direct language, and describes the poetry he and others wrote during apartheid as “a cultural weapon” in the struggle against apartheid (personal interview, 1 June 2012).<sup>194</sup> He is dismissive of the view held by some, including South African novelist and short story writer Nadine Gordimer, that they were not writing poetry that conformed to conventional poetic aesthetics.<sup>195</sup> “Who cares a shit?” he asks in the interview. “We [were] reaching people, and that was important.” He set out his poetic manifesto in “Cry Rage!”, the title poem of his and Thomas’ debut collection:

It is said

<sup>194</sup> According to Chapman, the emphasis on poetry as “a weapon of transformation” in the 1970s distinguishes it from the writing by black South African poets during the period which immediately preceded it (“Voice” 121). In fact, on the basis of Matthews’ efforts to communicate directly with a general readership, Chapman regards him as an anti-poet along the lines articulated by Parra (188).

<sup>195</sup> In an essay in 1982, for instance, Gordimer refers disapprovingly to those who emerge from prison “with a scrap of paper on which there is jotted an alliterative arrangement of protest slogans. For me, the necessity for the black writer to find imaginative modes equal to his existential reality goes without question” (“Living” 275).

that poets write of beauty  
of form, of flowers and of love  
but the words I write  
are of pain and of rage

I am no minstrel  
who sings songs of joy  
mine a lament

I wail of a land  
hideous with open graves  
waiting for the slaughtered ones



Balladeers strum their lutes and sing tunes of happy times  
I cannot join in their merriment  
my heart drowned in bitterness  
with agony of what white man's law has done (*Cry 1*)

These poets are clearly influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement which emerges in South Africa during the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>196</sup> It is initially a university-based movement, with Biko in the forefront as president of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). Black Consciousness defines as black everyone who is discriminated against in South Africa through the law or by tradition (Biko 8). In addition, there is an important qualification: such people are required to identify with the anti-apartheid struggle;

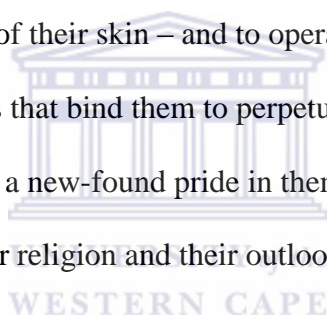
---

<sup>196</sup> In *Black Voices Shout!*, for instance, Matthews writes: "I am Black/my Blackness fills me to the brim/like a beaker of well-seasoned wine/that sends my senses reeling with pride /... they filled their history books with white lies/blinding me to the truth of the nobility of/my Black heritage ..." (64).

those who do not are dismissed as “non-white” (48). In a key paper at a SASO leadership training course in 1971, Biko characterises Black Consciousness as both a mental attitude and a political strategy:

Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient human being ...

Briefly defined therefore, Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude ... It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life. (48, 49).



In recognition of the formative role of Black Consciousness in the new wave of poetry that emerges during this period, Thengani H. Ngwenya categorises this writing as Black Consciousness poetry.<sup>197</sup> “Although connections between political ideologies and artistic products are, at best, tenuous,” he argues, “it cannot be gainsaid that Black Consciousness as a philosophy and a political ideology inspired – in direct and indirect ways – the work of the poets who came into prominence in the late 1960s [and] flourished in the 1970s ...” (502).

Ngwenya further contends that their writing has much in common with the African-American poetry of the Harlem Renaissance and, perhaps even more importantly, with the Black Power

---

<sup>197</sup> Ngwenya notes that other critics variously describe the writing of this period as “Protest Poetry”, “Soweto Poetry” or “Post-Sharpeville Poetry” (503). Examples are, respectively, Rive (“Black” 47, 51), Chapman (“Voice” 119) and Serote (“Post-Sharpeville” 1600).

movement of the USA. “Like African[-]American poetry associated with the Harlem Renaissance, Black Consciousness-inspired poetry is patently ideological, decidedly literalist and political in its themes, diction and imagery,” he argues (507). Its angry, defiant tone is a direct repudiation of the aesthetics of traditional Western poetry. This is declared boldly by Gwala (1946-2014) in his poem “In defence of poetry” – which ironically echoes the title of the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poetic manifesto in his 1821 essay, “A Defence of Poetry” – which was published in his collection *No More Lullabies*:

What’s poetic

about Defence Bonds and Armscor?

What’s poetic

about long-term sentences and

deaths in detention

for those who “threaten state security”?

Tell me,

What’s poetic

about shooting defenceless kids

in a Soweto street?

Can there be poetry

in fostering Plural Relations?

Can there be poetry

in the Immorality Act?

What’s poetic

about deciding other people’s lives?

Tell me brother,



What's poetic  
about defending herrenvolkish rights?

As long as  
this land, my country  
is unpoetic in its doings  
it'll be poetic to disagree. (Gwala 10)

Langa (b.1950), who also published poetry during the 1970s, provides further insight into the motivation of these poets in a personal interview (28 Aug. 2012): "I grew up in the BC [Black Consciousness] Movement. Poetry was popular, if only because of its immediacy. We had so many things to say, and had to say them in as immediate a way as possible."<sup>198</sup> Even though most of this poetry was published, he adds, "it was poetry that was oral, that was exhortative and that was calling for people either to do something or to change certain ways of their thinking". Ngwenya elaborates on this aspect of the poetry of the 1970s:

... [T]he language, form and structure of Black Consciousness poetry reflect the poets' attempts to merge the traditional oral forms with both contemporary township forms of cultural expression and modern western poetic forms. It is important to bear in mind that some of these poems were specifically composed for performance or recitation at political gatherings such as trade union rallies, student meetings and the meetings of community development organisations. It would be incongruous to have

---

<sup>198</sup> Serote expresses a similar view: "The urgency of this writing was that it had to keep pace with the unfolding, impatient struggle; it had to reach the people quickly to put a mirror before them" ("Post-Sharpeville" 1605). He adds that another reason for the particular way in which they used English was that it was not necessarily the home language of the intended audience. "... [W]e felt we had to use a simple, direct English that would be clearly understood, and that it was this that became at one and the same time a language of the poets and a language of liberation," he explains (1604-1605).

such poems written in complex diction and imagery as they were meant to have an immediate appeal to and response from an audience. For this reason most of the poetry associated with the Black Consciousness movement may not be carefully crafted artefacts in terms of the standard conventions of English poetry as defined in the narrowest, national or canonical sense, but rather clear and unambiguous and sometimes angry political statements. (518)

Alvarez-Pereyre makes a similar point about their writing. He describes it as “more utilitarian” and “much less concerned with stylistic perfection than with finding the means to express an urgent message” (242). Brutus was aware of these literary developments in South Africa.<sup>199</sup> He even wrote a poem in 1974 in honour of the new poets who emerged during the 1970s. In “For the Poets of ‘To Whom it may Concern’” (*Strains* 43), he addresses the poets represented in the 1973 anthology *To Whom it May Concern*, which includes Serote, Gwala, Sepamla, Mtshali and Langa.<sup>200</sup> He welcomes them as “[n]ew voices, brave voices” (line 1), and notes with approval that “out of the discord of grinding flesh/your voices speak with controlled passion/strident by turns, or murmuring” (lines 6-8). He notes the militant tone of their poetry, and predicts that “the murmur will grow to a rumble/the sound will yet be an earthquake” (lines 12 and 13).

Brutus increasingly adopts a similar tone in his poetry during the 1980s. His writing is now no longer, first and foremost, the reflections of an individual – at best cathartic, but without any express political purpose. Now he employs his poetry explicitly in the service of opposing political injustice and rallying support against it – precisely the kind of exhortatory

---

<sup>199</sup> Like the new poets who emerge during the 1970s, Brutus’ poetry also increasingly takes on an oral tone. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>200</sup> This anthology was edited by Robert Royston, a director of Renoster Books, which published Serote’s debut collection (Serote, *Yakhal’inkomo* ii).



poetry he once found so problematic in the writing of the African-Americans that he encountered when he first moved to the USA. The intensifying political crisis in South Africa, it seems, persuades him to revise his poetics.

In the mid-1980s, resistance to apartheid in South Africa leads to increasingly violent measures of repression by the government's security forces and results in the death of hundreds of anti-apartheid activists.<sup>201</sup> About 175 people died in political violence by the end of 1984 (Welsh 214), and another 600 by the end of September 1985 (Seekings 120). In 1985, 2 368 people were charged with various political offences in 114 trials, and 55 with high treason in seven trials (Welsh 299). The government declared a partial state of emergency in July 1985 and extended it to the rest of the country the following year. By the end of 1986, an estimated 16 000-20 000 people were in detention (Seekings 121, 196). Other repressive measures included bans on individuals and organisations, night-time curfews in many areas, controls on public meetings, restrictions on foreign funding and media curbs (198, 226).

The United Democratic Front (UDF) – an umbrella group of political organisations, civic associations, student groups and even sports clubs – and 16 other organisations were effectively banned in February 1988 under emergency regulations. In addition, restrictions were placed on various leaders of the UDF. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a federation of trade unions, was also prohibited from being involved in any activities other than those related to the workplace or employment (229). In view of this escalating political crisis, it can be deduced, Brutus concludes that his earlier style of writing

---

<sup>201</sup> Brutus' home province was particularly harshly affected by state repression. According to Seekings, "the worst atrocities [were] concentrated in the Eastern Cape" (300).

– a more self-reflective and lyrical poetry – is becoming inadequate to articulate an effective response. The result is that he, too, increasingly begins to turn to the poetry of statement.

\*\*\*

The intensification of the political crisis in South Africa also increases Brutus' sense of unhomeliness. Much as he professes to embrace a cosmopolitan identity in exile, his yearning for South Africa becomes even more pronounced during the 1980s. This is indicated by the frequent recurrence of the theme of exile in his poetry. As Paul Gready notes, exile “nurtures a heightened sense of home” (219). And, of course, home is far more than a geographical location. “At the heart of home lies the need to belong,” Gready points out. “Home is the most precious possession of those who do not belong and who feel permanently temporary, for whom all sanctuary and safety is provisional” (220). While he does not frame his analysis in Bhabha's terminology, Gready nonetheless describes the same kind of ambivalence associated with unhomeliness; he regards home for the exile as “a haven of the familiar, yet obscene and unlivable” (220). Such contradictory feelings about home are the very essence of unhomeliness.

In his analysis of Gordimer's 1990 novel *My Son's Story*, for instance, Bhabha refers to a character as “at once inside and outside”, and memorably describes such a state of mind as “the insiders-outsideness” (“World” 149). This description certainly applies to Brutus. There are many examples of such ambivalence in Brutus' collection *Stubborn Hope*, published more than a decade after he went into exile. The poem “In Teheran” (partly quoted on page 180), for instance, deals with his ambivalent feelings both towards South Africa and towards

his new home in exile. He is unable to reconcile his contradictory feelings towards either of these worlds:

In Teheran  
 where I was born  
 or where I've been  
 Or where I belong  
 it's all one  
 for it's all one world  
 and everywhere it's all one place ...

How then do I justify  
 the stubborn single-track anxiety  
 for this one place?  
 this sad, mad, silly, pitiable concern?

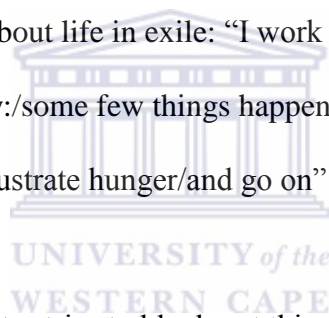


Kingston on Thames to Kingston, Jamaica  
 Tuskegee to Teheran,  
 Stockholm to Seattle  
 Dakar to Dar es Salaam:  
 Oslo to the Cape ...

Land it is not.  
 Not when Carmel and Los Palmas call.  
 Nor climate, town nor family.

Nor history or geography. (*Stubborn* 61-62)

Extracts from Brutus' poem "I come and go" in chapter 3 are worth repeating in this context as well. He writes despairingly in the second stanza (lines 8-15) that "I shuffle through the waiting rooms/and the air terminals of the world/imposing and importuning/while the politely courteous/acquaintances/co-operate/help arrange my departures/without any pang of greeting" (*Stubborn* 25). The exiled speaker is allowed unrestricted access into many countries. Yet, even so, he still feels unwelcome and there is an absence of any emotional connection with some of the people he encounters during his travels abroad. He may be an insider but, at the same time, is still very much an outsider. The last stanza (lines 16-21) painfully depicts his discomfort about life in exile: "I work my stubborn unrewarding will/obtusely addleheaded clumsy:/some few things happen/and I plod or shuffle or amble/wracked with anguished frustrate hunger/and go on" (25).



The exiled speaker in Brutus' poetry tries to block out this sense of displacement and alienation in various ways. In the first stanza (lines 1-4) of one poem, the exile attempts to do so by constantly keeping himself engaged in various activities: "I willed for myself an oblivious rush/that shielded me from a sense of loss/and blinkered myself with pre-empting chores/that cloaked me from a stranger's land" (26). Yet, invariably, the unhomeliness often still finds a way of intruding. An example is a poem in which an exile comments despondently during a trip somewhere in Europe one winter:

I wander through your cozy aubergs, dreary cottages  
and wonder at your cut-off unknowable streets  
that end at the snow-low horizon:

guess at the gusts that shake your wintry branches,  
 shiver at the melancholy whiteness of new-fallen snow,  
 trample the sludge of accumulated guilts  
 and settle in the snow and mire, the brick and friends  
 of this soiled, weary, ineluctable being. (*Stubborn* 46-47)

No matter where Brutus is in the world, he remains unsettled and estranged. He once describes exile as “the ultimate punishment” because it completely separates an individual from his country of birth or origin (Van Wyk 203).<sup>202</sup> Said, a Palestinian exile who also experiences such a sense of displacement, similarly describes exile as “the unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (*Reflections* 173). He depicts such a state of dislocation in his memoirs, revealingly titled *Out of Place*. Although he left his homeland in 1947 at the age of 12, and moved to the USA in 1951 where he subsequently lived for many decades, he still declares towards the end of his life that he feels “away from home ... The fact that I live in New York with a sense of provisionality despite thirty-seven years of residence here accentuates the disorientation that has accrued to me, rather than the advantages” (*Out* 222). He says he first realised he would always remain an outsider in the USA when he attended Northfield Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts, a mainly white school with an all-white teaching staff. After a clash with a fellow pupil, he says he was forced to see himself as “marginal, non-American, alienated, marked” (248).

---

<sup>202</sup> The South African writer Laurretta Ngcobo, who fled into exile in 1963 to evade arrest, submits that “[a] writer in exile suffers a kind of mutilation” (115). For the South African poet Breyten Breytenbach, who was not allowed to return to South Africa after he married the Vietnamese-born Yolande Ngo Thi Hoang Lien in France, “it goes without saying that one can replace, to all intents and purposes, the word ‘exile’ with refugee, misfit, outcast, outsider, expatriate, squatter, foreigner, clandestine, heretic, stranger, renegade, drifter, displaced person, marginal one, the new poor, the economically weak, the dropout” (“Exile” 181).

Nor was Said ever able to forget about the plight of the Palestinian people he left behind. Through a relative who did charity work on behalf of Palestinian refugees in Egypt, he became aware of what he describes as “the desolations of being without a country or a place to return to, of being unprotected by any national authority or institutions, of no longer being able to make sense of the past except as bitter, helpless regret nor of the present with its daily queuing, anxiety-filled searches for jobs, and poverty, hunger, and humiliations” (119). As a consequence, he became politically active towards the end of the 1960s and later participated in various initiatives to establish a Palestinian state. Primarily as a result of his continued attachment to Palestine – emotionally, intellectually and politically – he arrives at the conclusion in his memoirs that “the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place” (3).



For both Said and Brutus, it seems, their continued attachment to their homelands is the main reason for their unhomeliness. Both remain preoccupied with the suffering of the people in their respective homelands throughout their adult lives. And although both find a new home in the USA, both remain ambivalent towards it. “The sheer gravity of my coming to the United States in 1951 amazes me even today,” comments Said. “I do know that I was beginning again . . . , unlearning to some extent what I had learned before, relearning things from scratch, improvising, self-inventing, trying and failing, experimenting, canceling, and restarting in surprising and frequently painful ways” (222). Brutus, for his part, describes the USA as a “beautiful/cesspool” in lines 10-11 of the ironically titled poem “The home of the brave” (Simple 144). As he explains in a personal interview (18 June 1998):

When I was in the States, two things I discovered: that racism in the US is as bad as racism in this country [South Africa] ... And when I saw that, I knew I had a battle on

my hands there. But then I discovered something more important. American corporations were the biggest supporters of apartheid: Ford, GM [General Motors], Chrysler, Eveready, Motorola, Mobil Oil, Caltex. All American. And so I then knew that my function was to attack apartheid in the US, because you were attacking the source of the strength of the apartheid regime.

He does not express any particular attachment to the country nor to its people. As far as he is concerned, it seems, the USA is essentially a convenient political base from which to operate. In a similar way, Brutus explains his continued allegiance in exile to South Africa in pragmatic – even phlegmatic – terms. It is the country he knows best, both personally and politically, and this enables him to be most effective there as a political activist: “You must do what you can do where you are. Although it is fine to fight for humanity, one must always see ‘humanity’ in terms of real persons. One’s reaction to good or evil is a reaction derived from real experience, so that the evil I must fight is the evil I know” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 55).

However, despite these public pronouncements, Brutus’ poetry in exile tells a different story. He is unable to fully reconcile himself to a new home and life outside South Africa. In “What thrusts of loneliness”, for instance, he despondently refers in line 9 to “a brutal intractable world” (*Stubborn* 32). In another poem, “The golden afternoon drags”, he reflects in near-melancholic terms on his constant travels across the world in lines 22 to 26: “And I have done it again/and again/And now go to new terrain/new snowy heights/and what new miserable uncertainties” (40). Such estrangement and alienation are, as previously argued, distinctive features of unhomeliness. Despite the political commitment Brutus professes towards a broader community, he remains emotionally attached to South Africa. It is this

ambivalence that finds expression in a profound sense of unhomeliness in his poetry. This constant sense of displacement remains a source of tension and pain throughout his life in exile.

Besides a constant sense of unhomeliness, Brutus' frequent return to the theme of exile in his poetry also suggests a state of mind that corresponds closely in some respects to the general characteristics displayed by someone suffering from trauma. Freud's theory of this condition – “the unavoidable foundation for theories of trauma” (Luckhurst 8) – provides some insight into what Brutus may have been going through in exile. Freud outlined his theory mainly in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”. To help explain it, he compares the mind to a single cell with an outer membrane, which filters material from the outside world. When an external event does succeed in penetrating this membrane, an individual experiences trauma: “We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (“Beyond” 29). When this occurs, a large-scale disturbance takes place in the way the organism functions; in response, the organism then sets in motion various defence mechanisms:

At the same time ... [t]here is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises – the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can be disposed of. (29-30)

The organism then resorts to repetitive compulsion in an attempt to achieve this objective. Roger Luckhurst describes it as “a rearguard action to manage the traumatic impact” (9). This compulsion to repeat certain kinds of behaviour helps to explain the recurrence of certain



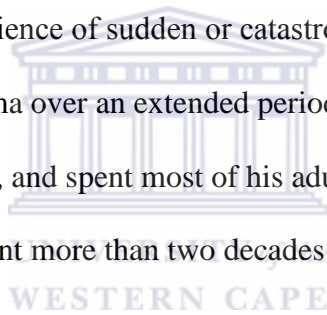
tropes in Brutus' poetry in exile. It is an attempt to manage the trauma inflicted on him by apartheid generally, and by prison and exile more specifically. As Lockhurst explains, the psyche constantly returns "to scenes of unpleasure because, by restaging the traumatic moment over and over again, it hoped belatedly to process the unassimilable material, to find ways of mastering the trauma retroactively" (9). Cathy Caruth notes that trauma is a wound of the mind and does not heal in the same way as a wound of the body (4). According to her, trauma is a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world", and "it returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4).

Many of Brutus' poems written in exile can be regarded as indications of such trauma. In the poem "At odd moments" (see page 179), for instance, the speaker refers in line 5 to "a continuous shriek in my brain" (*Stubborn* 43). In "I come and go" (25), the exile is "grubbily unkempt" (line 3) and "obtusely addleheaded clumsy" (line 17). As he slowly makes his way through the terminal of an airport, Brutus describes him in lines 18-21 in terms evoking utter desolation and inertia: "some few things happen/and I plod or shuffle or amble/wracked with anguished frustrate hunger/and go on" (25). The poem "World, I surrender you" is another vivid depiction of the intense suffering of the exile:

World, I surrender you:  
 ignore me: let me be:  
 let me disown and disclaim you,  
 you are too much for me  
 let me abdicate,  
 be absolved of you:

the hands of demands pluck at me  
 tear like piranhas my naked flesh,  
 stripping me down to the bone (*Strains* 34).

Such trauma, according to Caruth, is usually testimony to a “forgotten wound” (5). In Brutus’ case, however, his trauma is a constant part of his life in exile; every day he is wounded anew. And, contrary to the view generally expounded in trauma theory, the source of his wound is not something that is repressed; Brutus is constantly aware of his exile and how he came to be in exile. In other words, he lives with an open wound every day of his life in exile. Nor does Brutus’ experience fit neatly into the argument of trauma theory that trauma is the result of “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events” (Caruth 11). In his case, Brutus was exposed to trauma over an extended period. He grew up in a society premised on racial discrimination, and spent most of his adult life trying to resist it. As a result, he was imprisoned and spent more than two decades in exile.



This prolonged experience aggravates Brutus’ trauma. Dieter Riemenschneider hints at this in his assessment of *Stubborn Hope*. He suggests that there is a “mental tension” that runs throughout the poems that Brutus writes in exile; this tension, he argues, is never fully released. “It is here where we have to look for reasons why Brutus, in a strict poetic sense, at times fall short of aesthetic achievement,” he submits (Riemenschneider 127-128). Chipasula makes a similar point in his overview of Brutus’ writing. He refers to “the disappointments and pain” that Brutus repeatedly experiences in exile and speculates that, as a result, he is unable to develop to his full potential as a poet (“Terrible” 53).

Whatever the merits of such claims, it is certainly clear that Brutus feels an unhomeliness in



**Fig. 16: Dennis Brutus with his wife, May, during a visit to London in August 1988.**

**Photographer: Sandra Cumming/  
UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Museum Archives.**

exile that is similar to the unsettledness and alienation he experienced under apartheid in South Africa. This is graphically illustrated by the following poem:

Here, of the things I mark  
I note a recurring hunger for the sun

– but this is not homesickness,  
the exile's patriate thirst

At home, in prison, under house-arrest

The self-same smagting bit me<sup>203</sup>

Now is the same as then

And here I live as if still there. (*Stubborn* 25) *of the*

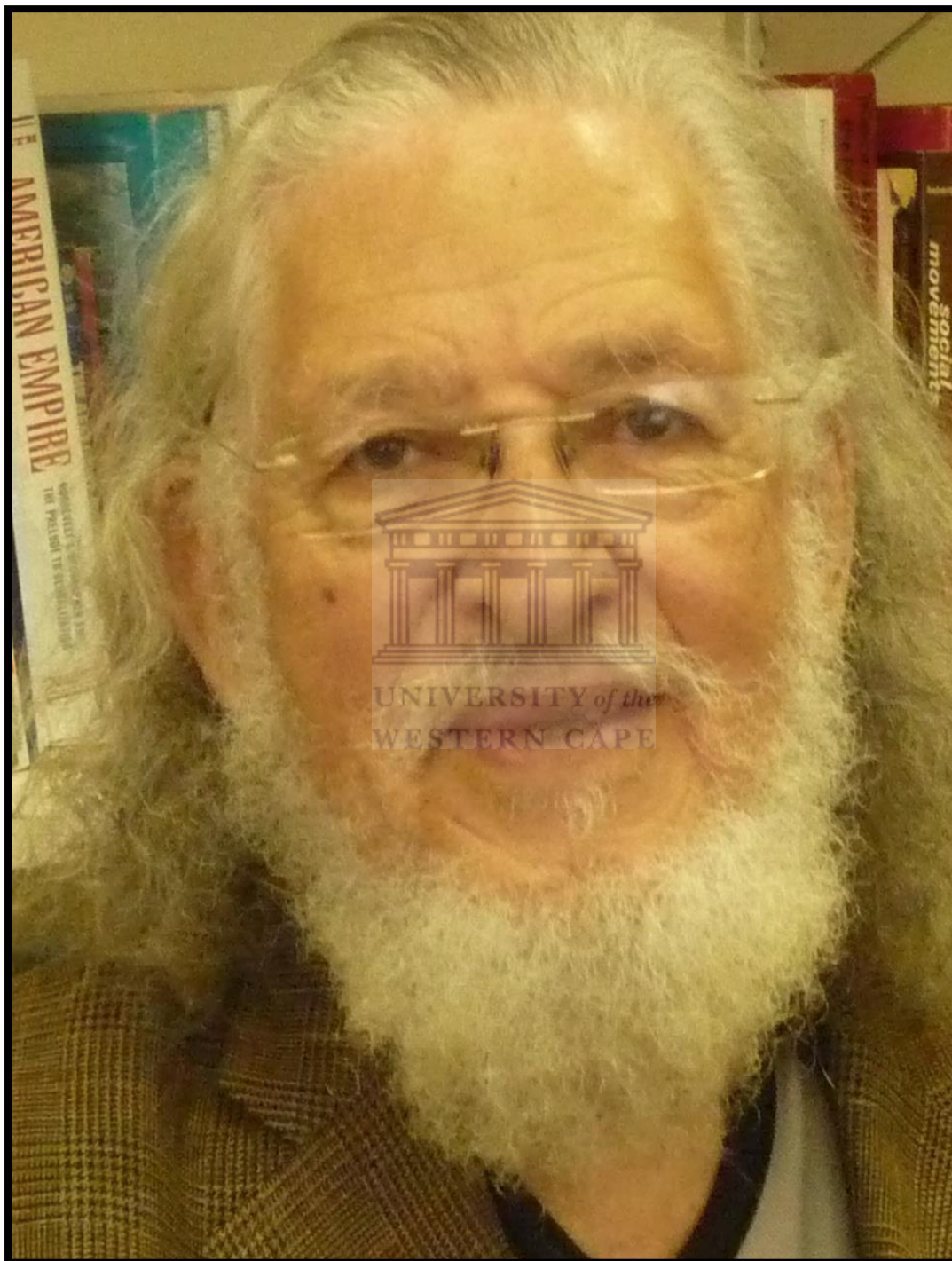
WESTERN CAPE



In fact, Brutus' unhomeliness continues even when he returns to South Africa after the NP government lifts its restrictions on banned organisations and individuals in February 1990. He makes his first visit to South Africa in July 1991, yet does not express any joy at his homecoming – either in his public statements or in his poetry. As was the case under apartheid, and subsequently in exile, a sense of unhomeliness remains a prominent feature in his life and poetry. The next chapter will examine the reasons behind his continued sense of alienation and rejection in post-1990 South Africa.

---

<sup>203</sup> The Afrikaans word is translated as “yearning” in a footnote to the poem.

**SECTION 3: THE LATER YEARS (AUGUST 1991-DECEMBER 2009)****CHAPTER 6: RESIDENT ALIEN**

**Fig. 17: Dennis Brutus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, in 2009.**

**Photographer: Patrick Bond.**

When De Klerk delivered his opening address to Parliament on 2 February 1990, the then state president announced the repeal of legal restrictions which prohibited the existence of various political organisations in South Africa, including the ANC, SACP and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). This historic announcement led to the Pretoria Minute on 6 August 1990, in which the NP government and the ANC reached a formal agreement to grant indemnity to returning exiles (Welsh 393). The agreement made it legally possible for Brutus, then chairperson and professor of African Literature at the University of Pittsburgh, to return to South Africa for the first time since he had left on a one-way exit permit in July 1966. This chapter will focus on his visits to South Africa and his eventual return, and examine the content and form of the poetry he subsequently writes. It will provide an overview as well of the post-1990 political changes in South Africa and explore the impact of these developments on his sense of self.



According to Christopher Merrett, when Brutus first tries to return to South Africa, his application for a visa is rejected in March 1991 (160). In April 1991, South Africa's consulate-general in New York, John Davies, grants him a single-entry visa (NELM, 4.4.3.5). Brutus duly makes his first trip in July 1991, travelling as a visitor on a Refugee Travel Document authorised by the UN (Davis and Ehling 101).<sup>204</sup> Perhaps appropriately, in view of his decades-long campaign during apartheid to isolate South Africa from participation in international sport, the main purpose of his visit is to receive an award from the anti-apartheid sports organisation SACOS in Durban (McLuckie 35).<sup>205</sup> He returns in December 1991, this time to attend a Writers' Conference in Johannesburg organised by the now-defunct anti-

---

<sup>204</sup> Brutus later explains that the refugee travel document was issued by the American government under a UN convention (Frederikse, "Transcript" 1).

<sup>205</sup> Brutus was appointed an official representative of SACOS by its president, Y. Ebrahim, on 24 September 1990 (NELM, 94.4.5).

apartheid weekly newspaper *New Nation* (Goddard 67).<sup>206</sup> In 1992, Brutus joins the Department of English at the University of Durban-Westville (now part of the University of KwaZulu-Natal) for a term as a visiting professor.

\*\*\*

It is against this background that his next collection, *Still the Sirens*, is published in 1993. South Africa is on the brink of a new political dispensation, and Brutus – like many others involved in the anti-apartheid movement – welcomes the political space which De Klerk’s ground-breaking announcement allows. The unbanning of various anti-apartheid organisations and the release of their imprisoned leaders in 1990 pave the way for non-racial elections in April 1994 and the adoption of a new constitution in May 1996. Brutus celebrates Mandela’s release from prison – just over a week after De Klerk’s speech – in the poem “February, 1990”:

Yes, Mandela –  
 some of us admit embarrassedly  
 we wept to see you step free  
 so erectly, so elegantly  
 shrug off the prisoned years  
 a blanket cobwebbed of pain and grime: ...

Now, vision blurred with tears  
 we see you step out to our salutes

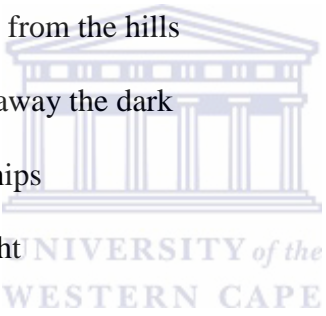
---

<sup>206</sup> When Gray interviews him during his visit, Brutus describes himself as a resident alien. “I’m still a stateless person,” he protests. “I’m not admitted into South Africa yet as a citizen, only as a visitor” (S. Gray, *Indaba* 157). His South African citizenship is eventually reinstated in August 1992 (Brutus, “Literature” 104).

bearing our burden of hopes and fears  
 and impress your radiance  
 on the grey morning air. (*Sirens* 24)

Various other poems in the collection reflect the renewed spirit of hope that prevails in South Africa in the wake of the unbannings, the return of exiles and the release of political prisoners following De Klerk's announcement. This period is regarded as ushering in a new phase in South Africa's history that will culminate in a fundamental transformation of the country's legislation and policies. In "Daylight", for instance, Brutus writes:

The sunlight comes slowly from the hills  
 slowly the sunlight drives away the dark  
 the grey around the townships  
 is softly touched by the light  
 slowly the daylight comes



The logo of the University of the Western Cape is a faint watermark in the background of the poem. It features a classical building with a pediment and columns, with the text "UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE" below it.

The day will come  
 The light will come  
 Peace and joy will come  
 Will come at last. (*Still* 17)

He also celebrates the lives of those who helped to bring about an end to apartheid. As Lindfors notes of his poetry during this period, it "takes on a commemorative air, congratulating those who have triumphed over adversity and honoring those who sacrificed their lives in pursuit of a noble ideal" ("Dennis", *African* 124). Among these are Tambo, who



became acting president of the ANC after Luthuli's death in 1967 and was confirmed as president at the organisation's consultative conference in 1969. When Tambo dies in 1993, Brutus writes the following elegy, "In Memoriam: Oliver Tambo":<sup>207</sup>

Warrior who has fought the good fight  
 these long years,  
 rest easy now.

You who endured  
 and encouraged others to endure  
 rest easy now.

You who could not rest  
 whose eyes were fixed  
 on the bright prize of freedom,  
 rest easy now.




Friend, comrade, counselor  
 Whose quiet guidance directed us,  
 rest easy now.

You who steered a steadfast path

<sup>207</sup> The reference to the title of Tennyson's elegy to his friend Arthur Henry Hallam, "In Memoriam A.H.H", is probably no coincidence as Brutus often acknowledges the influence of the Victorian poet on his writing. However, apart from the title, Brutus' poem bears no resemblance in either content or form to Tennyson's extended tribute to Hallam (*Tennyson* 96-199). He also uses Tennyson's title in "In Memoriam: I.A.H", in memory of Imam Abdullah Haron who died in police detention in September 1969 (*Stubborn* 68-69). Other poets similarly borrow the title of Tennyson's poem. Senghor, for instance, addresses his ancestors in "In Memoriam" (*Selected* 23), while the Irish poet Seamus Heaney writes "In Memoriam Sean O'Riada" for a traditional Irish music composer (29-30) and "In Memoriam Francis Ledwidge" for an Irish war poet (59-60).

through the long years of struggle,  
 now, now at last, rest, rest, rest easy now. (*Still* 32)

He pays tribute as well to his brother, Wilfred, who was imprisoned and detained several times in South Africa for his opposition to apartheid.<sup>208</sup> His brother eventually fled into exile in 1967 while out on bail pending an appeal against a three-year prison sentence for breaking his banning order (Winter 198).<sup>209</sup> The brothers were reunited in London in November 1967, just over a year after Brutus left South Africa. They subsequently worked closely together in SANROC (200). In the poem “For WCJB” – the initials stand for Wilfred Cecil Joseph Brutus – Brutus remembers his brother, who died in March 1986, with both sadness and admiration:



For him the battle never ended  
 he wore doggedly day after day  
 the armour of isolation and loneliness  
 the mask of indifference and impassivity  
 but a slow fury smoldered in his head  
 and a bitter green fire burnt in his gut like bile

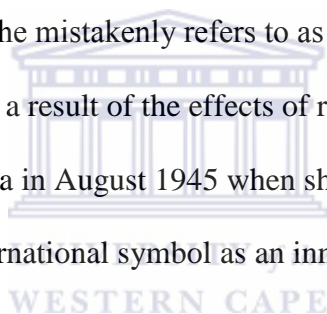
he heard, his anger flaring, each fresh distant outrage  
 and on the neighbor allies of oppression

<sup>208</sup> Wilfred was born in October 1920. Like Brutus, he, too, was born in what was then Rhodesia and became a teacher (Winter 190). Brutus first wrote about his brother’s death in the three-line poem, “For WCJB: Died in Exile: London March 26, ’86”, which was published in the journal *The Black Scholar*: “He will walk proudly/Knowing the heroes will know/He carried his share” (51).

<sup>209</sup> Gordon Winter devotes a whole chapter in his book on his activities as an agent of the Bureau of State Security to Wilfred Brutus. He describes how Brutus’ brother escapes into exile in 1967 before he is about to serve a second prison term on Robben Island. Winter observes that Wilfred “may be a tough political warrior but physically he has long been in bad shape. He suffers from a chronically weak chest and failing eyesight. He knew he could not survive three years on Robben Island, so he decided to flee from South Africa” (198).

his contempt ran in a steady stream like spittle:  
 even at the end, when his eyes clouded,  
 the last pinpoint gleam held steady,  
 and his ragged fragmented lungs rasped, “Freedom.” (*Still* 15)

A number of other individuals from various parts of the world feature in the collection. Lindfors describes this as “Brutus’ impulse to salute those who have inspired others by resolutely opposing injustice” (“Dennis”, *Africa* 123). Among those he singles out for acknowledgement are American tennis player and human rights activist Arthur Ashe (*Still* 26), American civil rights leader Martin Luther King (30) and Neruda (28). He even honours Sadako Sasaki (whose first name he mistakenly refers to as “Sedako”), the 12-year-old Japanese girl who died in 1955 as a result of the effects of radiation from the atomic bomb dropped by the USA on Hiroshima in August 1945 when she was two years old (16), and who subsequently became an international symbol as an innocent victim of war.<sup>210</sup>



Violence and suffering clearly remain key images in *Still the Sirens*. Brutus even recounts his experiences in prison in several poems, including in “Endurance” (11), “February 1964” (27) and “The Fort Prison” (16).<sup>211</sup> In “Names”, he recalls the brutal suppression of anti-apartheid protests in various parts of South Africa: “Names in the news/names in the air/Kwazak[h]ele, Zwide/Kwanobuhle/strange-sounding to some/familiar to me/names of far-away places/places dear to me:/and dear are the dead who die there/who die struggling to be free

<sup>210</sup> The Children’s Peace Monument, located in the centre of Hiroshima Peace Park, was built in remembrance of Sasaki with funding raised by children from various countries (“The Sadako Story”).

<sup>211</sup> Brutus first writes about the Fort, where he was held as an awaiting-trial prisoner after he was arrested when he tried to escape from police custody in September 1963, in “Remembering the Fort Prison, Johannesburg”. The three-line poem was published in *The Black Scholar*: “High White Mountains of/cumulus cloud, your fellows/kept me company” (51). He also refers to the prison in “For the Prisoners in South Africa” (3), which is quoted on page 191.

...” (17). Kwazakhele and Zwide are residential areas in his hometown Port Elizabeth, while Kwanobuhle is in nearby Uitenhage.

Although South Africa is on the brink of a new political dispensation when *Still the Sirens* is published, Brutus refuses to allow South Africans to forget their past. For this reason, he deliberately links its title to that of his debut collection, *Sirens Knuckles Boots*, which was published three decades earlier. “[The] barbs,” he writes in line 60 of the poem “Endurance”, “are buried in my brain” (13).

*Still the Sirens* can also be read as a warning to South Africans to remain vigilant during the political negotiations that follow De Klerk’s opening address to Parliament in 1990. Brutus is sceptical almost from the beginning about how far-reaching the political changes will eventually turn out to be. And even though he visits South Africa from time to time during the 1990s, he chooses to continue to live in the USA at that point. In his interview with Stephen Gray in December 1991, he declares that his “concern for the freedom of South Africa is unchanged. I’m not satisfied that it has been achieved yet. Indeed, I have serious doubts about whether we’re going to arrive where we thought we would arrive” (S. Gray, *Indaba* 157).

By 1992, while he is based at the University of Durban-Westville, he is even more critical of political developments in South Africa. He gives a newspaper interview to Vasantha Angamuthu in which he denies any sense of homecoming, and declares that he does not allow himself to feel what he describes as “a false emotion”. At the time, 19 political parties and organisations are engaged in negotiations under the auspices of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) to arrive at a new political dispensation. In the last

three stanzas of his poem “Voices of Challenge”, Brutus appears to sound a warning about the political concessions being made by the parties involved in the negotiations:

When there are compromises

they will challenge you

When there are betrayals

they will challenge you.

Do not rest easy, do not be deceived

those who have suffered and died

those who have sacrificed for freedom

their voices will challenge you



Endlessly, until we are free. (*Still* 18)

In his interview with Steptoe, Brutus also recounts his differences with the ANC over South Africa’s readmission to the Olympic Games in 1992. He opposes South Africa’s participation in the Barcelona Games on the grounds that he believes sport in South Africa is still “entirely under white control” (Steptoe, “Interview” 213). In addition, he feels that the disinvestment campaign against South Africa was prematurely brought to an end, and vociferously rejects the economic policies developed during CODESA. He argues that the country’s mineral and agricultural wealth still remains “in the same hands” (214).

In a speech in Denver in November 1993, he expresses concern as well about what he regards as premature celebrations about the release from prison of Mandela and other ANC leaders.

He argues that the release of political prisoners is “only one stage in the struggle”, and cautions that serious difficulties still lie ahead, in particular with regard to “negotiating some arrangement between the roughly three million minority and the thirty million majority” (Sustar and Karim 297-298). Nevertheless, despite his reservations about the compromises made during the CODESA negotiations, he welcomes the 1994 elections. He tells his audience in Denver that black South Africans “have been excluded from the electoral process for over three hundred years. That’s why April 1994 is so important. It will be the first time ever that black South Africans are able to participate in the electoral process” (296).<sup>212</sup>

However, by 2000 – just six years after the country’s first non-racial elections – he vehemently declares his opposition to the new government led by the ANC. In an interview in December that year, he outlines his disagreements with South Africa’s economic policies and his differences with the post-1990 leadership of the ANC in scathing terms:

... [T]he people who were with me in prison are now the people in power and the irony is that the things we fought for, struggled for and went to prison for, are the things which they are now denying. And not only denying but they are frustrating any efforts to achieve the kind of just society that they spoke about and if that’s not bad enough, worse is the fact that while they can see people living in poverty, near starvation, sickness without medical care, homelessness – they can live in disgusting affluence without a sense of guilt. (Van Wyk 213)

---

<sup>212</sup> Brutus’ comment disregards the qualified franchise of black people in what was then the Cape Province. Qualified Coloured males were eligible to register as voters on the common roll in the province from 1853 until it was abolished in 1956 (Welsh 26, 53). In addition, 15 780 African voters were on the common roll in the province by 1929 (38). In the former Transvaal and Natal, the Indian Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 made provision for the limited representation of qualified Indian males by whites, including three members of parliament, but the election was boycotted by the Indian community and the law repealed when the NP came to power two years later (27).

While his objections to the ANC-led government's policies during six previous visits to the country gets little support initially, by 2000 his views are being shared by a growing number of people. He regards this increasing disillusionment as sufficient grounds to consider returning to South Africa permanently. He believes the growing support for his views holds out the possibility of "not only being heard but finding people who are willing to be allies for a critical statement" (213). (Nevertheless, he still does not return permanently to the country at that stage. He eventually comes back in 2005 only, when he accepts a position as Honorary Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Civil Society.)

\*\*\*

In 2004, Brutus publishes *Remembering*, his twelfth collection.<sup>213</sup> His opposition to political developments in South Africa since 1990 is evident in a number of poems. In an untitled work written in the early hours of one morning in 2000, the voice in the poem states:

Forgive me, comrades  
 if I say something apolitical  
 and shamefully emotional  
 but in the dark of night  
 it is as if my heart is clutched  
 by a giant iron hand:

---

<sup>213</sup> All 16 poems are included in his next collection, *Leafdrift*, which was published the following year.



**Fig. 18:**  
**Dennis Brutus**  
**and South**  
**African poet**  
**and short-story**  
**writer James**  
**Matthews at**  
**the District Six**  
**Museum, Cape**  
**Town, in 2002.**

**Photographer:**  
**George Hallett.**



“Treachery, treachery” I cry out  
 thinking of you, Comrades  
 and how you have betrayed  
 the things we suffered for. (*Remembering* 15)

In the poem “Memory”, which was published in 2005 in his final collection, *Leafdrift*, he bitterly compares a protest march in 2004 in Alexandra, a residential area outside Johannesburg, to earlier protests against apartheid:

When we marched – slithered – through  
 slimy mud past riot-shielded cops  
 in Alex, while children peered wild-eyed  
 from dark windows, for some of us  
 these were re-runs of earlier apartheid-  
 burdened days: but then it was  
 defiant resolution that drove our hearts,  
 braced our feet: now sadness at betrayal  
 sat stone-heavy on our hearts, our shouted  
 slogans, weighted with irony, hung heavy  
 over us in grimy air, we winced  
 at familiar oft-repeated lies. (*Leafdrift* 93)

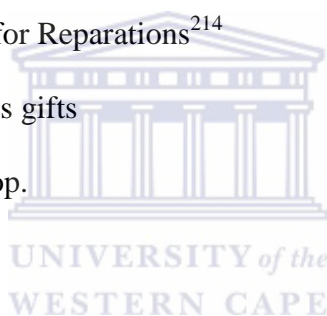
\*\*\*

After 1990, there is also a further change in the form and style of Brutus' poetry. Even though he made a conscious decision on Robben Island to write more simply and directly in order to become more accessible to a wider audience, he was determined at that stage to avoid writing in a crudely propagandistic manner. In an interview in August 1970, he describes it as immoral for artists to include propaganda in their work (Lindfors, "Somehow" 53). Despite this statement, much of his post-1990 poetry does indeed make direct political statements, with little – if any – attempt to transform the content aesthetically into a work of art. His writing becomes increasingly stripped of metaphors and imagery.

In *Still the Sirens*, for instance, Brutus reflects on a meeting of the UN General Assembly: "Spirits hover here/beseech with urgent voices:/'*Help us to be free*'" (*Still* 19; emphasis in the original). Another example of a direct political message, devoid of any attempt to transform its content imaginatively, is "Inheritors": "We are the little/people, who are ruled for now/by giants, briefly" (20). Even his elegy for Tambo, an ANC leader whom he obviously holds in high regard, is written in what is little more than terse prose (see pages 297-298). "We pay tribute to Rob Penny", written in March 2003, a month after the death of the American poet and playwright, who was a colleague of Brutus at the University of Pittsburgh's African Studies Department, follows the same approach:

We pay tribute to the spirit  
of Rob Penny  
and we mourn his passing:  
we pay tribute to his family  
especially his wife Betty  
and we express our sympathy

and we mourn his passing  
 we pay tribute to the spirit  
 of Rob Penny  
 and we thank him for his gifts  
 to his family and his friends  
 to his colleagues and students  
 for all he encouraged and inspired.  
 We pay tribute to the spirit  
 of Rob Penny  
 for his gifts to Kuntu Repertory Theatre  
 for his gifts to NCOBRA for Reparations<sup>214</sup>  
 and especially his generous gifts  
 to Kuntu Writers Workshop.  
 We mourn his passing  
 We salute his life  
 We honor his memory  
 We wish him well: Hamba Kahle<sup>215</sup>  
 Go well: Go Peacefully. (*Remembering 2*)



As discussed in chapter 4, such writing is little more than direct prose merely rearranged in lines that resemble what is conventionally considered to be poetic form, and is similar to the kind of anti-poetry pioneered by Parra. Such poetry, noted for its “glaringly prosaic

<sup>214</sup> N’COBRA is the acronym of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, an organisation established in 1987 to seek financial compensation for the descendants of former slaves in the USA. According to an N’COBRA pamphlet provided by Brutus, it is also “committed to the economic, cultural, intellectual, political, social, and spiritual empowerment of black people in the USA” (*N’COBRA*).

<sup>215</sup> “Hamba Kahle” (or, more correctly, “Hamba kakuhle”) literally means “Go well” in Xhosa or, more generally, “Have a safe and pleasant journey” (Tshabe 6).

discourse” (Grossman 93), is motivated by “a desire to communicate directly and to name things clearly without the highly stylized language and imagery of traditional poetry” (Melnykovich 65). Greg Melnykovich adds that those who write anti-poetry reject metaphors as “a useless luxury” and instead advocate “a return to ordinary, simple language of everyday speech as the best means to communication” (66-67). As suggested previously, the turn to a more direct form of self-expression grew out of a desire to find a way to respond more effectively to the vast scale of death and destruction during World War II, without the mediation of symbols or images usually employed in lyric poetry.

In a similar way to the shift of the anti-poets from traditional lyric poetry after that war, Brutus increasingly began to move away from this mode of writing under apartheid. During the 1990s, this became even more pronounced due to his disillusionment with the political dispensation which develops in South Africa as well as his growing despair at what he regards as the destructive consequences of economic globalisation. In fact, he even begins to raise doubts about the very purpose and efficacy of poetry in his collection *Leafdrift*. For instance, he expresses frustration in the poem “Poetry, Fleeing” about what he perceives to be the limitations of poetry (it was presumably written after the American army’s invasion of Iraq in March 2003, although the dateline is – probably unintentionally – given as February 2003):

Now a new greasy-black  
 smoke spirals evidence  
 of our new century’s horror:  
 among other obscenities  
 poetry’s image, winged horse

Pegasus<sup>216</sup> is pretext for atrocity  
 children's charred corpses smoulder  
 near puddled oilfields; compassion  
 has vanished, swirled away in fumes,  
 Earth's song, Poesy, has fled, is fleeing:  
 Surely some hearts have turned to stone,  
 must be, already dead. (*Leafdrift* 53)

“Heartfelt Appeal to Serious Poets”, in the same collection, goes even further and makes an appeal to poets to stop writing altogether:

Please, Please, Please, Please  
 it is time to stop writing  
 this stream, river of words  
 this deluge, avalanche of verse  
 stop it! stop it!  
 this drool, dribble of language  
 this diarrhea of poetry  
 too many words too much saying  
 we are deafened by this massing of sound  
 we are drowning in the welter of feelings –  
 Pulleeze!  
 false real half felt – who cares  
 the sacredness of poetry becomes banal



<sup>216</sup> This is presumably a dual reference to the logo previously used by the oil company Mobil, which still uses the name Pegasus in some of its products (“Gas engine oil”).

mystery  
 the shrines of poetry become junkyards  
 enough of this plethora of poetizing  
 Enough,  
 Enuff,  
 Enuff already! ... (*Leafdrift* 52)

However, despite Brutus' apparent despondency about the role of poetry in society, even mockingly resorting to unconventional English spelling, he is still able to recognise the creative power that resides in poetry. In the same poem (lines 21-35), the speaker goes on to acknowledge: "Of course there is the other side/I encourage all people to be creative .../Go on, go on, create/good bad or indifferent/only keep trying always to make it better/keep trying to always make it good/keep trying to always make it new:/in time we may have a world of beauty" (52).<sup>217</sup> This theme of hope recurs in another poem written in February 2003: "In pre-dawn dark suddenly/ghosts of poets, or memories of them/loiter: Auden, Levertov, Spender:/their words still live on/illumine a page for someone/in some dark winter corner:/it is how we help hope" (54).<sup>218</sup> This is probably one of the key reasons Brutus kept writing poetry right up to the end of his life.

And, even though the lyric – the form of poetry he preferred most – increasingly comes under strain beneath the weight of what he regards as more important political considerations, he never completely turns his back on it. Gibbs also draws attention to this aspect in his

<sup>217</sup> This sentiment is similar to Parra's injunction to young poets that "In poetry everything is permitted./With only this condition, of course:/You have to improve on the blank page" (143).

<sup>218</sup> Brutus acknowledges the influence of Auden and Stephen Spender (1909-1995) on his earlier poetry (for instance, in *Goddard* 70). While he does not refer anywhere else to the British-born American poet Denise Levertov (1923-1997), she too engages – like Auden and Spender – with political and social issues in her poetry. It is worth noting as well that Brutus and Levertov both participated in the Worcester County Poetry Association's Poetry Harvest Festival in November 1983 (*Poetry Harvest Festival 1983*).

introduction to the Worcester State College collection of Brutus' poetry published in 2004. He says Brutus did not abandon his lyrical voice altogether in favour of "the common, everyday voice of the collective 'we'" (*Poetry* iv). Instead, Gibbs submits with justification, "[t]he romantic, modernist poet still smoldered" in his poetry (iv). An example of the more personal, introspective voice offered to him by the lyric form is the poem "Feather, feather in the grass" in the collection *Remembering*:

Feather, feather in the grass  
 blue-black feather in the grass  
 for you I will let my angers pass.  
 I was out there, roiling my anger  
 reminding myself of multiple injuries  
 remembering insults, deceits, betrayals  
 all the agonies I have endured  
 when I spied you lying in the grass  
 with your quiet assertion of beauty,  
 of how much beauty surrounds us all

"Hey, the world is filled with beauty, withal"<sup>219</sup>

Feather, feather in the grass  
 blue-black feather in the grass  
 for you I will let my angers pass

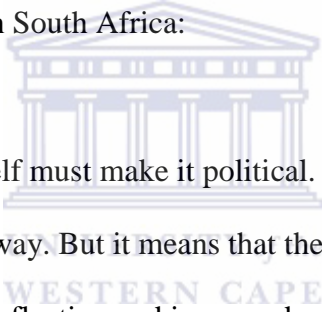
---

<sup>219</sup> The use of the word "withal" suggests the residual influence of English canonical poets such as Shakespeare and Wordsworth on Brutus. According to David and Ben Crystal's glossary of the words used by Shakespeare, the adverb features in several of his plays: it is usually used in a positive context to mean "in addition"; in a negative context, it means "nevertheless" (501). Wordsworth uses it with a positive connotation in his poem "So fair, so sweet, withal so sensitive" (*Poetical* 400).

for you I will forgive the world. (*Remembering* 10)

\*\*\*

Like Brutus, De Kok (b.1951) is aware of the limitations of the lyric, yet continues to use it. She acknowledges that it is a “particularly individualistic form of writing” (“Sort” 74). In addition, she is aware that the lyric is “part of our colonial inheritance” in South Africa (75). Despite this, as David Attwell rightly notes, De Kok is one of the few South African poets who recognises the political potential of the lyric tradition (150). At a symposium at Northwestern University in October 1987, for instance, she argues that the lyric must take account of the historical context in South Africa:



And that accounting in itself must make it political. For political it must be. Not in any simplistic or singular way. But it means that the traditional features associated with the lyric, things like reflection and irony and analysis, must be put to the service of the historical moment in all its urgency. (De Kok, “Sort” 75)

There are many examples of her attempts to do so in her debut collection, *Familiar Ground*, which was published in 1988 – just a year after she made those comments at the symposium. Many of these poems were written at a time when political repression in South Africa was particularly harsh (as noted in the previous chapter). De Kok’s poem, “Al wat kind is” (“All that is child”), refers directly to this period of violence and turmoil. It focuses on police action against young – presumably black – residents of Victoria West. It is a dark, angry poem, as lines 11-14 illustrate: “The bird of state has talons/and shit that drops like lead./Its metal wings corrode the streets,/it hatches pools of blood” (*Familiar* 59). Yet De Kok never



completely loses her lyrical voice in the poem, as the stanzas indicate which immediately follow this initial outburst:

A stone against a tank is a stone against a tank  
but a bullet in a child's chest rips into the heart of the house.

But when in time the single stones  
compact their weight and speed together,  
roll up the incline towards the lamvanger's lair,<sup>220</sup>  
crushing sand into rock, rock into boulder,  
boulder into mountain, mountain into sky,  
then the lungs of the bird will choke,  
the wings will blister and crack,  
at last the eyes will glaze, defeated.  
And this torn light,  
this long torn light  
will repair itself  
out of the filaments of children,  
and all that is child will return to the house,  
will open the doors of the house. (*Familiar* 59-60)<sup>221</sup>

<sup>220</sup> The English translation of the Afrikaans word "lamvanger" is, literally, "lamb catcher". The children are compared to lambs, and the state is presumably the bird of prey that hunts them.

<sup>221</sup> This poem is filled with hope and expectation. However, for Brutus it was unfulfilled. While he did eventually "return to the house", he was unable to "open the doors of the house". As argued, even after the formal end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa remained for him unhomey.

This poem illustrates what Kelwyn Sole refers to as an attempt by some South African poets after 1990 “to combine sociopolitical commitment with a concern for appropriate poetic style” (“Bird” 25). De Kok certainly falls into this category. She does not shy away from addressing an overtly political issue in “Al wat kind is”. Yet, at the same time, she remains committed to the craft of poetry: she pays careful attention to language, imagery and rhythm. As she points out in her address at the Northwestern University symposium, “the lyrical poet has a unique opportunity to unlearn some of her or his assumptions about the form and to refreshen and toughen – and potentially even South Africanize – the lyric” (“Sort” 75).

Her later collections of poetry bear eloquent testimony to her own attempts to do so. In particular, her poems about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – a body appointed by the newly elected South African government in 1995 to investigate human rights abuses during apartheid – offer several examples of such efforts. In “Bandaged”, for instance, which was published in her next collection *Transfer* in 1997, she movingly describes some of the evidence heard by the commission during its public hearings:

Cut down as flowers,  
 chopped up like wood  
 burned in a blaze of fire.

Bones unfleshed.

Throat choked.

Cheek charred  
 in the cave of the mouth.

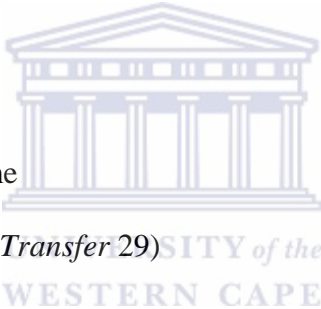
Ear burst. Eye torn.

Gravel. Grave in sand.

O listen, let us not turn away  
 from seeing and hearing  
 the witness speak with bowed neck.

Prayer, apostrophe, curse.

A bandaged story about  
 the broken world, stumps  
 on which to hang our shame  
 as useless hands, forever. (*Transfer 29*)



The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building with columns and a pediment, with the text 'UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE' below it.

This poem is restrained and devoid of any political rhetoric, yet powerfully comments on the cruelty and violence committed by police against anti-apartheid activists. The words are carefully chosen in what is a deceptively simple poem, with particular attention paid to rhythm to convey the horror of the events being described. De Kok explains her approach to writing poetry as follows:

... I don't see myself as a formalist. But my keenest interest is in poetry's key resource: rhythm. The sound a feeling makes is what interests me. If it doesn't make the right sound, the reader or the listener will know that it is not authentic, will question the poem's authority. Sound and rhythm are the driving forces of poems;

rhymes are just another set of strategies to find one's way into meaning. My own use is not consistent. But I think in rhythmic concentration and, from that point of view, the tension between patterning, order, and disruption, is exactly what makes meaning. (Steiner 195)

Another key tenet of De Kok's poetry is her refusal to recognise a distinction between the private and the public. For her, as for Brutus, the two are irrevocably linked. She declares that she has never accepted a dichotomy between what she describes as "political ('struggle') work and personal, apparently self-indulgent work" (189), and dismisses any attempt to separate the two as false and unsustainable. She adds pointedly: "Engaged poetry of any consequence is always more complex than that" (189). In her third collection *Terrestrial Things*, which was published in 2002, she moves back and forth between the personal and the political.<sup>222</sup> In many of the poems, for instance, she reminisces about her childhood in the mining town of Stilfontein. In the same collection, she reflects at length on the evidence heard by the TRC.

There are also instances in which the personal and the political collide within the same poem. An example is "In the cage", which recalls her annual visits into the bowels of a mine with her father, as lines 14-21 illustrate: "The men below smiled shyly –/my mother said they missed their children –/but I was glad not to be the child/of an underground man,/eyes bloodshot, eardrums blown,/rattling in a cage, crawling through a cave,/while up above, only a curtain and a bed/and hot thick paste with gravy for food" (*Terrestrial* 46). What starts out as a seemingly innocent memory of a childhood experience with her father turns out to be a

<sup>222</sup> The title is taken from the last stanza of the Victorian poet Thomas Hardy's poem, "The Darkling Thrush": "So little cause for carolings/Of such ecstatic sound/Was written on terrestrial things/Afar or nigh around,/That I could think there trembled through/His happy good-night air/Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew/And I was unaware" (14). De Kok explains elsewhere that she regards the poem as being "about the difficulty of extracting belief or hope in bereft or austere circumstances" (Steiner 194).

searing indictment of the exploitation of mineworkers, most of them migrant labourers.

Another example of the fusion of the personal and the political is her recollection of reluctantly dragging her feet on her way to school. This childhood memory, too, becomes caught up in the plight of Stilfontein's mineworkers, as the following extract (lines 7-16) illustrates:

... And I thought of miners and their tread,  
thud of reluctant boots to work.

I knew they were pacing too,  
deep beneath playground and street:  
there where the underworld's arms  
opened veins of honeycombed gold,  
where workers were digging  
in caves, hot, tight, blacker  
than anything up here  
even at its starless breathless darkest. (*Terrestrial* 47)

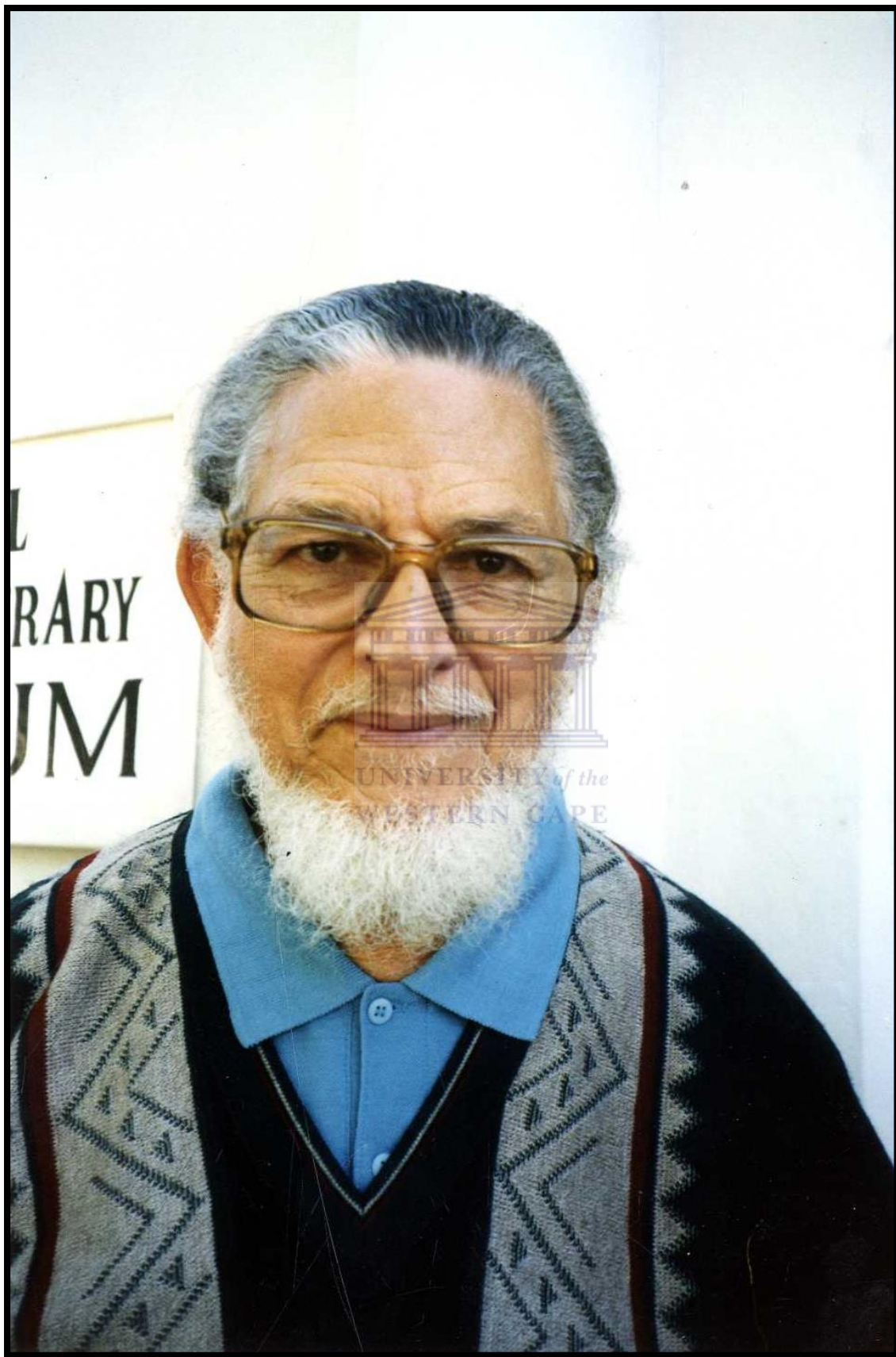
As these examples reveal, De Kok's poetry deliberately sets out to disturb and transcend the traditional boundaries of the private/public (also characterised by some literary critics as the personal/political). As Denise Gray notes, De Kok's poetry is generally "intensely personal" (5) – whether the subject matter is private or public. She goes on to point out that De Kok uses the lyric form in such a way that it "capture[s] ways in which historical events impinge on private lives" (36). De Kok recognises that the individual, even in his or her most private moments, is still part of a broader community or society. She appears to share the view which

Sole expresses in his overview of early post-1990 poetry that “the realities of contemporary South Africa are too complex to allow for a retreat into either a blinkered public, or private, poetry” (“Bird” 25).

\*\*\*

This comment also applies to Brutus’ post-1990 poetry. He, too, constantly shifts back and forth between the private and the public. In *Leafdrift*, for instance, he often reflects on his advanced age and on what he believes to be his imminent death (he turns 81 in 2005 when the collection is published). An example of his reflections on his mortality are contained in the poem “Someday the light will fail”, written in September 1999. It declares fatalistically in the first stanza: “Someday the light will fail/darkness and silence fall/stillness, blissful stillness settle:/work while the light lasts” (*Leafdrift* 193). The poem “All my delicate and lovely hair”, written in May 2002, is in similar vein:

All my delicate and  
 lovely hair  
 has drifted from me over  
 these long years  
 now deserts me as my body  
 ages  
 fibers and vessels grow  
 weary:  
 I am resigned to parting  
 to parting from all that

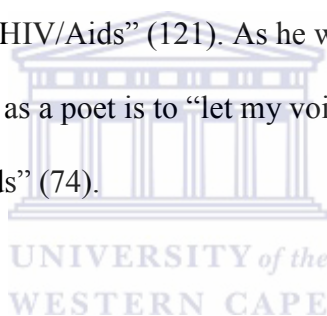


**Fig. 19: Dennis Brutus at the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, in 2000.**

**Source: National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.**

was me  
 and, finally, to part  
 with life. (*Leafdrift* 194)

Yet *Leafdrift* also features many examples of his more public concerns. “Environmental” (142) and “Gull gliding” (143), for instance, comment despairingly on the damage caused by environmental pollution. “Vieques: A moment of great joy”, written in May 2003, celebrates the announcement by the American navy that it will no longer use the Puerto Rican island as a bombing range after a number of protests over many years (139). The HIV/Aids epidemic is addressed in a number of poems, including “Picture of a young girl dying of aids [sic]” (119), “Let’s confront Aids” (120) and “HIV/Aids” (121). As he writes in lines 13-15 of “No rewards”, his main preoccupation as a poet is to “let my voice cry out/to reach unheeding ears/and eyes and hearts and minds” (74).



Yet, unlike De Kok, Brutus remains uncomfortable with the highly personal, individualistic voice of the lyric. For him, his political engagement is of primary importance. As a result, he increasingly prefers to speak in a collective voice. He tells Simon Lewis in an interview in 2000 that “the politically engaged poet probably functions best when his voice, and his experience, is that of the community, his ‘polis’, if you like” (“Speaking” 153-154). An example of such a collective voice in his later writing is the poem “For Fellow Prisoners” in *Leafdrift*, in which the speaker urges in the first four lines: “Let us speak together/Let us share our thoughts/remember our common humanity/and voice our resolution” (30).

This collective voice characterises many of Brutus’ poems in his last three collections. He is consciously striving to find a way of combining a personal and a public voice. Brutus’ poem



“Homage to Sun-Ra” addresses this issue, albeit indirectly. Written after the death of the African-American jazz musician Sun Ra (Le Sony’r Ra) in 1993, it addresses the challenges that both of them faced as creative artists in their respective attempts to find a communal voice:

Always we reach  
 towards new expressions  
 struggle to depict the visions  
 that haunt our dreams –  
 the voices, eyes, that remind  
 down the canyons of the aeons,  
 What we were,  
 What we are  
 What we might be:  
 Radiance streams from us  
 in melodic waves  
 to transform the universe (*Remembering 9*)



Brutus also never gives up trying to find a suitable voice to simultaneously express the private and the public, the individual and the collective.<sup>223</sup> Sometimes the effort deprives his voice of much of its poetic power and beauty. An example is the following stark verse from *Leafdrift*: “we never defined freedom/we all thought we knew/what each other meant/besides the problems are so huge/and it takes time/it takes a lot of time” (44). On occasion, he even abandons the personal voice of the lyric entirely in favour of a collective voice. An example

<sup>223</sup> Brutus once describes *Leafdrift* as a random collection of personal and political poems – hence the title: “The image that came to me was more of leaves blowing around in the wind and then accumulating in a corner; kind of drifting together” (“Dennis Brutus (1924-2009): South African Poet and Activist Dies in Cape Town”).

is “Liberation Chant”, which he writes in February 1991 and describes as a choral poem. This type of poem evolved in ancient Greece, and is designed to be read in a group setting. Like traditional oral poetry in South Africa, choral poetry makes extensive use of repetition and parallelism for clarity and emphasis. These characteristics feature prominently in “Liberation Chant”:

Our lives, our loves, we gave to this land

our pain, our tears, we gave to this land

we gave our strength

our energy

we gave our skill

our suffering

to build a mighty splendour where all should walk

free

and we pledge our energy

we pledge our skill

to go on building

until we walk free

To this we pledge our lives

and affirm our determination

we will not rest

we will not cease

we will not grow weary

we will not accept defeat



until all can walk free

until ALL

until ALL

until ALL can walk free

can walk FREE

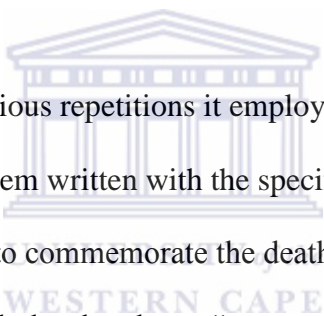
can WALK FREE

can WALK FREE

FREE

FREE

FREE (*Leafdrift* 23)



This poem, as signalled by the various repetitions it employs, is meant to be communicated verbally. Another example of a poem written with the specific intention of inviting audience participation is “Catena”, written to commemorate the deaths of students during the 1976 student protests (*Still* 31).<sup>224</sup> It includes the phrase “we remember them” several times throughout the poem. This is clearly not a silent prayer; the words are intended to be recited aloud by an assembled gathering, as the following extract illustrates:

Pray you, remember them

The alleys reeking with the acrid stench

Of gunfire, teargas and arrogant hate

Pray you, remember them

---

<sup>224</sup> An early example is Brutus’ poem “Stop” in *Stubborn Hope*. The last stanza, in particular, is a direct appeal to an audience: “Stop./Now./Think./Now./Then stand./And lift your fist/and shout your anger/and your resolution;/Shout “Africa”/Three times/Now./Africa./Africa./Africa” (*Stubborn* 54).

*We remember them*

The pungent odor of anger,  
of death and dying, decay

I pray you, do remember them

*We remember them*

Anger drifting through smoke-filled lanes  
in sudden erratic gusts

Pray and remember



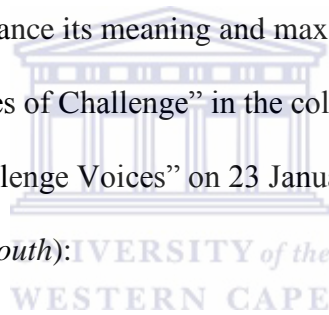
*We remember them ... (Still 31; emphasis in the original)*

As Tony Emmett points out, the oral rendition of poetry is particularly well-suited to the exigencies of political poetry (74). This is not the poetry of persuasion for which Brutus earlier expresses his admiration and support; this is the poetry of direct statement. In addition to the straightforward language it uses, the meaning of the oral poem is also made unambiguously clear by the way it is performed. Some of the rhetorical devices used to convey its meaning include “the stress on words or phrases, ... the tone of voice, and ... gestures” (74). These considerations apply to “Liberation Chant” and “Catena” as well. Disregarding them would render these poems flat and devoid of any power or beauty. As with

other forms of oral poetry, these two poems need to be considered in the context for which they are written – they are intended to be transmitted verbally, and to convey an explicitly political message in clear and direct terms.

\*\*\*

Similar considerations apply to several of Brutus' poems written after 1990. Even though there is no direct indication in other instances that they are intended for public performance, as signalled for example in "Liberation Chant", they share many of the characteristic features of traditional oral poetry. There are no dense images or symbols; the language is clear and direct in a deliberate effort to enhance its meaning and maximise its impact. An example is the following extract from "Voices of Challenge" in the collection *Still the Sirens* (this poem was originally published as "Challenge Voices" on 23 January 1993 in the now-defunct Cape Town-based weekly newspaper *South*):



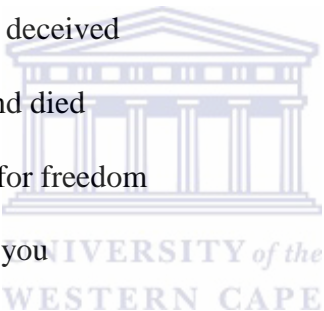
From the dust  
 from the mud  
 from the fields  
 the voices will rise  
 the voices of challenge.

Do not be mistaken,  
 make no mistake,  
 you will think they are asleep.  
 You will be wrong –

they will arise –  
 the voices will rise –  
 the voices of challenge  
 will challenge you ...

When there are compromises  
 they will challenge you  
 Where there are betrayals  
 they will challenge you.

Do not rest easy, do not be deceived  
 those who have suffered and died  
 those who have sacrificed for freedom  
 their voices will challenge you


 The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building with columns and a pediment, with the text 'UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE' below it.

Endlessly, until we are free. (*Still 18*)

On the page – in written form, removed from its performance context – many of Brutus' later poems appear to lack much (or, at times, even any) artistic merit. However, if they are viewed as intended for public performance, such an assessment needs to be revised: the language of the poems takes on a very different meaning and impact in this context. These poems can then be recognised and acknowledged for what they are: attempts to draw on elements of traditional oral poetry in order to facilitate direct communication, and perhaps even to exhort readers to some kind of active response to the events or issues being described (an important departure from the earlier views Brutus expressed on poetry). His son, Antony, notes that

Brutus recorded some of his poems with the specific intention of broadcasting them on the Internet (presumably on YouTube).<sup>225</sup> “There’s a drive in him to communicate,” he observes in a personal interview (10 Aug. 2012). “You remember his performance and you remember his passion somehow even more than the poem or the words themselves.”

There are many reasons why Brutus admires the oral tradition of poetry.<sup>226</sup> Jeff Opland, for instance, draws attention to the diction employed in oral poetry. In addition to the gestures used by the oral poet, and the social context in which the poem is delivered, he points out that the words of the poem remain “the principal source of emotion” (“Early” 2). It is this aspect of traditional oral poetry that Brutus is, arguably, trying to emulate in some of his post-1990 poetry – an objective which is not sufficiently recognised by some literary critics.

Of course, Brutus was not unique in attempting to draw on the oral traditions of poetry in South Africa. Many other black poets in South Africa attempted to incorporate certain features of oral poetry into their writing since at least the early 1970s. In fact, according to Ndebele, the declared intention of groups such as the Medupe poets from Soweto was to resuscitate the African oral tradition and to enlist its traditional functions in the cause of political mobilisation (“Writers” 414). Emmett explains how Medupe sought to achieve this. “Partly because of their shorter length, poems are easier to memorise and recite than works of prose,” he notes. “Unless obscure and over-complex, they are likely to have a greater and more immediate impact on audiences than almost any other form of oral communication,

---

<sup>225</sup> Examples of Brutus reading his poetry on YouTube are “Dennis Brutus Reads from his Work” and “Dennis Brutus: Climate Change & poem ‘Longing’”.

<sup>226</sup> Brutus once refers to the Xhosa poet Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi (1875-1945) as “perhaps still the greatest poet to come out of South Africa” (Kgositsile et al 35). Other oral poets whom he singles out for attention are James James Ranisi Jolobe (1902-1976), who composed poetry in Xhosa, and Benedict Wallet Vilakazi (1906-1947), who created work in Zulu (Miller 50). Jolobe and Vilakazi also wrote poetry for the page, while Mqhayi wrote novels as well.

possibly including even political speeches” (Emmett 73-74).<sup>227</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, this feature also influenced the style of writing of poets like Serote and Langa during the 1970s.

It would therefore be oversimplistic to dismiss all of Brutus’ later poetry as aesthetically weak or deficient. The context in which some of them are written, and the particular purpose for which they are written, must be examined and taken into account. A pertinent example is the poem “on the road”, with its seemingly meaningless repetitions and silly rhyme schemes.<sup>228</sup>

on the road to  
 on the road to  
 on the road to  
 Mandalay  
 that’s where the white folks play –  
 or so they say –  
 play with guns and other toys  
 play with guns and send their darlin’ boys  
 to kill or be killed  
 so they say



<sup>227</sup> The Medupe poets also recited their work to the beat of drums (Ndebele, “Writers” 413). The group was banned on 19 October 1977 along with several other anti-apartheid organisations. As a result of further state harassment, its members ended up scattered across South Africa and even further afield (its chairperson, Dumakude kaNdlovu, fled into exile) (Odendaal 71-72).

<sup>228</sup> This should not be confused with Brutus’ poem of the same name published in *Letters to Martha* (40), which is about the South African landscape at night.



ol' Glory's<sup>229</sup> goin down

in a glorious setting sun

the imperial days are over

tho it takes religion some

they went to war so cheerfully

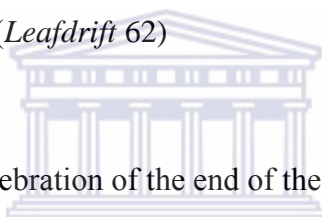
they treated it like a game

– they could even raise a cheer

when the Fuzzie-Wuzzies broke the square

but ol' Glory's goin' down

like the settin' of the sun. (*Leafdrift* 62)



Brutus' poem is, in fact, a wry celebration of the end of the British Empire in Burma (now Myanmar). It refers with deliberate irony to the British poet Rudyard Kipling's poem "Mandalay" (418-420), named after the former capital of Burma, in which a soldier looks back nostalgically to the countries in Asia which were once part of the British Empire. Brutus also mischievously borrows the line "on the road to Mandalay" from Kipling's poem, in which it is repeated several times. In addition, he mimics the playful rhyme schemes of Kipling's poem, and then subverts them to reflect on the violence which usually characterises imperialism. Brutus refers joyfully to "the settin' of the sun", clearly a reference to 1948, when Burma finally ceased being a British protectorate after more than half a century.

Brutus makes reference in his poem as well to the last stanza of Kipling's poem "Fuzzy-Wuzzy", which – like "Mandalay" – first appeared in the British poet's collection *Barrack-*

---

<sup>229</sup> Brutus mistakenly refers to the Union Jack as "ol' Glory". "Old Glory" is, in fact, a common nickname for the flag of the USA (*Collins* 1083).

*Room Ballads, and Other Verses* in 1892. In this poem, Kipling acknowledges the bravery of the Sudanese warriors who fought against the colonial British and Egyptian armies around the end of the nineteenth century, as lines 45-48 of the last stanza illustrate: “So ’ere’s *to* you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your ’ome in the Soudan;/You’re a pore benighted ’eathen but a first-class fightin’ man;/An’ ’ere’s *to* you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, with your ’ayrick ’ead of ’air –/You big black boundin’ beggar – for you broke a British square!” (Kipling 401; emphasis in the original). The British troops called the Sudanese fighters “Fuzzy-Wuzzies” because of their elaborate hairdressing. An example of the use of the disparaging description “Fuzzy Wuzzy” is contained in a letter published in an Edinburgh newspaper in 1898 (Spiers 145). Another soldier described the Sudanese fighters in a London newspaper in 1884 as “having heads huge with lumps of woolly hair on end upwards and sideways” (108-109).

Here, too, Brutus subverts Kipling’s use of the derogatory reference to the Sudanese, and appropriates it to applaud their victory when they broke a British infantry square in the Battle of Tamai in 1884, even though they did eventually lose the battle (100, 124). Brutus nevertheless regards this temporary victory as a precursor to the eventual end of British control of the country which was, for all intents and purposes, a British colony. His use of rhyme and repetition in “on the road” strongly suggests that he either intended it to be performed or wanted his readers to imagine it being performed; after all, it is meant to be a celebration of the end of British colonialism.

If this poem is considered without taking into account the context in which it is written, it comes across as naive, even childish. Such a misreading of poems written with the specific intention of being performed is not uncommon. Emmett, for instance, draws attention to this issue in relation to the mid-1970s poetry in South Africa which is influenced by the oral

tradition, and stresses the implications for an evaluation of such writing. “Greater attention needs to be paid to the emphasis, tone, use of pause and rhythm, facial expression, gestures and general attitude of the poet when he delivers his poem,” he urges (75). Cronin makes a similar point about some of the poetry written during the 1980s. He describes it as “a poetry that can only be understood and analyzed in its relationship to a range of traditional and contemporary oral and verbal practices” (“Even” 12). As a result, Stephen Watson acknowledges, poetry influenced by the oral tradition “suffers from the disadvantage of losing most of its force on the printed page” (17). But, he rightly stresses, “[t]his is a poetry which cannot often survive a separation from its context – that of actual performance itself – yet there is no question as to its validity and necessity” (17). These are vital considerations for a more informed assessment of many of Brutus’ post-1990 poems.



His later writing is marked by an ever more urgent desire to communicate clearly and effectively with his intended audience. And, as his participation increases in later years in various protest actions in support of global justice (the subject of the next chapter), the tone of his writing becomes increasingly strident and declamatory. Largely absent, now, are his earlier preoccupations with the demands of poetry as a craft; his primary concern in much of his later poetry is to communicate directly with his audience, with the specific objective of galvanising them into political action. This is a significant departure from his earlier approach to writing, in which he leaves it up to the readers (and now, increasingly, listeners) to make up their own minds about the content of his poetry. Now his poetry is often a direct, explicit call to active participation in various political campaigns. An example is the unpublished poem “Seattle Chant”, written in May 2009:

Remember Seattle

“we’re here

We’re wet

and we won’t quit”

Remember Seattle

We are here to do battle

“we’re here

we’re wet

and we won't quit”

Remember Seattle

We’re here to do battle

“No new Round

Turn around”

No Doha

Ha Ha Ha



Remember Seattle

We’re here to do battle

Cheerful in bright orange ponchos

“We’re here, we’re wet

And we won’t quit”

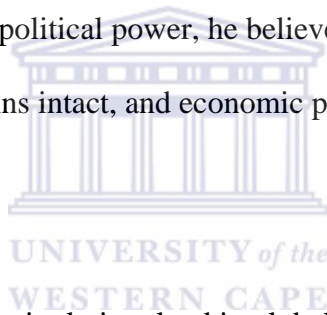
Remember Remember Remember.

There are no images or symbols in this poem; it is simple, unadorned language. It dispenses with conventional notions of aesthetics in Western poetry. For Brutus, his poetry is no longer a medium of literary expression only; it is now an instrument of political agitation and mobilisation as well. In other words, form is no longer an important consideration for him in his poetry. What matters now, above all, is its content. The consequences of this shift in his poetic priorities are inevitable: although it extends Brutus' audience to those attracted by the political subject matter of his poetry, it alienates those who can no longer identify any creative impulses in what they regard as little more than political sloganeering. Brutus is no doubt aware of the potential impact of his new approach on readers, but decides anyway to make his political causes a central feature of his poetry.

Several literary critics argue that this decision affected his writing negatively. Mphahlele, for instance, warned Brutus as far back as 1971 about the conflict of loyalties that arises when a poet is, at the same time, a political activist. "I know that Dennis Brutus does not feel he should be wasting his time writing poetry when more urgent and political work needs to be done," he observes. "For this reason, I think, he will never sit down and take pains over the mechanics of poeticizing thought and mood" ("Debris" 71). Chipasula, too, complains that Brutus' decision to reach a different and much wider audience results in "a great sacrifice in technical virtuosity" ("Terrible" 45). John F. Povey also contends that "the true potential of his poetic muse has been diluted by the fretful necessities of political activism" (41). Brutus appears to acknowledge the truth of these claims. In the preface to the checklist of his poems, he declares that "if, after all this, I have one regret, it is that I did not devote more time to the craft of poetry; to the use of language, of images, and of cadences" (Martin 5). As a result, some of his weakest writing is clichéd and, at times, even banal. But, he adds

unapologetically, “my excuse is that I was busy doing so much else that seemed to be worthwhile” (5).

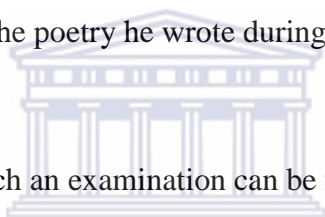
By his own admission, his political convictions eventually take precedence over the craft of poetry. This increasingly becomes the case, as argued previously, since at least the second half of the 1980s. The primacy of his politics over his poetry becomes even more pronounced during the early 1990s because he is convinced that the ANC, first as a liberation movement during the pre-1994 negotiations and afterwards as the ruling party, has betrayed its commitment to a genuinely free and egalitarian society. He regards the post-1990 political dispensation in South Africa as an abandonment of the ideals of the anti-apartheid struggle: while there has been a transfer of political power, he believes, the economic system which existed under apartheid still remains intact, and economic power remains, by and large, in the same hands.



In addition, Brutus becomes increasingly involved in global social movements during this period. This adds another imperative to his writing: his cause is now freedom and justice throughout the world. As a result, he now employs his poetry far more frequently – and far more crudely – to serve the cause of his various political struggles. His poetry increasingly becomes merely a means to an end; in and of itself, it is of secondary importance. And while he occasionally still continues to write lyric poetry of immense beauty and power, his main impulse is now that of political activism. This alters the content and mode of his writing in quite fundamental ways from that of his earliest poetry.

## CHAPTER 7: NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Even though Brutus was legally able to return to South Africa permanently by 1991 – a year after De Klerk announced the unbanning of previously proscribed political organisations and individuals – he only made occasional visits initially. This is remarkable given his intense emotional and political commitment to South Africa during the 25 years he was forced to live in exile.<sup>230</sup> This chapter will examine the reasons why he chose not to return immediately once it became legally permissible to do so, and instead spent another decade and a half living outside the country until 2005. Identifying and understanding the reasons behind such a crucial decision – or, at least, those reasons which are in the public domain – will allow a more informed understanding of the poetry he wrote during this period.



A productive starting point for such an examination can be found in the political domain. As noted in the previous chapter, Brutus fundamentally disagrees with the political settlement negotiated in South Africa which culminates in the country's first non-racial election in 1994. He repeatedly declares his opposition to the outcome of the negotiations, and even dismisses it as a betrayal of the key objectives of the anti-apartheid struggle. In an interview with Sustar, he states emphatically that CODESA produced a dispensation which would result in little more than superficial political changes:

... [T]he apartheid government was smart enough to enter into negotiations that allowed them to end up with a solution where political power is apparently transferred, but not economic power. De Beers' diamond mines, the gold mines, the banks, all the corporations, remain in the hands of the same people who benefited

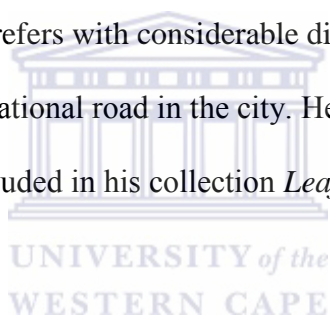
---

<sup>230</sup> In the poem "Snarling, the great beast hurls through the dark", written while in exile, he achingly describes "that/one last journey for which we burn" (*Stubborn* 54).

from apartheid, with a small privileged black elite being able to share that wealth.

You have a cosmetic change. (Sustar 285-286)

As a result of his uncompromising opposition to the new political dispensation, it can be argued, the sense of unhomeliness that Brutus experiences under apartheid in South Africa and during his prolonged exile becomes aggravated – and perhaps even more debilitating – after 1990. The South Africa that subsequently takes shape is not the kind of country that he fought for, either through his political campaigns or through his poetry. There is, in other words, no home for him to return to. In fact, he becomes even more estranged from the South Africa that begins to unfold after 1990. In July 1991, for instance, he describes his first visit to Port Elizabeth in 25 years and refers with considerable discomfort to the informal settlements he notices along the national road in the city. He declares bluntly that “I don’t feel at home yet” in an article included in his collection *Leafdrift* (97).



Brutus is equally critical on his first visit to South Africa in an article he writes for the Chicago-based monthly magazine, *In These Times*, in November 1991 after he returns to the USA. His disappointment is unmistakable: “The society that we are moving toward – that might in time be achieved – looks to be different than what we had previously been striving for” (*In These Times* 9). He claims that the ideals of political and economic justice are being abandoned and replaced with a version of democracy which will still be marked by gross inequality:

... [I]t seems to me, we are seeing a transition from state capitalism and apartheid to multinational corporate capitalism and the “free market”, where human beings become commodities like everything else. In some ways, the New World Order is



even uglier than what we had before. Because it presents a sense of being immutable, and at best, people are opting for accommodation rather than fundamental change.

(10)


When Brutus visits South Africa the following year to spend a term at the University of Durban-Westville, he expresses similar reservations (Stiebel 53). In the newspaper interview with Angamuthu referred to previously, he states that he does not feel any nostalgia or sense of homecoming. “When this country is free, perhaps then one can allow oneself a certain degree of sentiment,” he declares. “Now, however, one is more concerned with what is happening in the country.” It is against this background that he writes the despairing poem “Song of the Homeless” (see page 353), dated 8 and 28 April 1994: it is significant that it was started just weeks before South Africa’s first non-racial elections and completed the day afterwards.



Nor does he feel any greater sense of belonging or homeliness in the USA, even though he continues to live there after 1990. As noted in chapter 5, he was struck by two factors in the USA after he moved there from the UK: firstly, the widespread racism in the USA, and, secondly, the support of many American companies for apartheid. His gloomy poem “Amerika”, written in 1987 during Reagan’s presidency, indicates his opposition to certain American government policies: “Wraiths are racing down Fifth Avenue/over ice-crystals ignited by streetlights:/spectres fleeing vainly their grisly deaths/and premonitions of the undead/doomed to be struck down tomorrow:/Amerika, Amerika, where will you find compassion?” (*Leafdrift* 10). Nor does his opinion of the USA change much after 1990. In

fact, he unfavourably associates the kind of democracy being forged in post-1990 South Africa with the administration of George H.W. Bush, who was the USA's president between 1989 and 1993 (*In These Times* 9).

Brutus' sense of unhomeliness is clearly visible in the poem "San Francisco: San Jose: Santa Clara". Written in March 1994, the speaker laments that "[t]he perfume of freedom has burned my mind/with grief for my country/while I walk the ammoniac streets/reeking of urine and vomit" (*Leafdrift* 14). Brutus' unhomeliness is even more explicit in "Home-Walking Blues", written in London and initially published in 1999 in the American literary magazine *Illuminations*. The poem reveals a profound sense of displacement and loss; it suggests he feels there is no welcoming place he can call home – this after several visits to South Africa, and in the same year as South Africa's second non-racial elections take place:



Home-walking blues  
 last light gleaming on window panes  
 cold rain slashing my cheeks  
 mutters among the blue-shadowed trees  
 a voice remembered in my head  
 murmuring bad news:  
 walking to a place called home  
 a cold bitter place called home

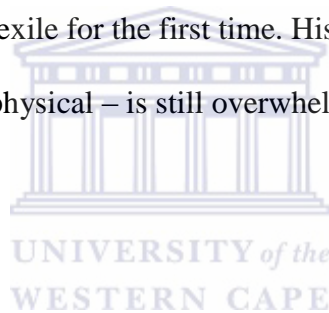
Home-walking blues  
 heading east where the light has died  
 stray leaves drifting across my face

sighs from dead leaves crunched underfoot  
 a voice remembered in my head  
 murmuring bad news:  
 walking to a place called home  
 a cold bitter place called home (*Leafdrift* 89)

In some ways, it seems, Brutus feels he is essentially still forced to live in exile. In the poem “In a green dusk”, intriguingly dated 30 July 1966 (the date on which he originally went into exile) and 31 July 2003, Brutus writes in line 5 that “I gather my scattered selves for exile” (*Leafdrift* 82). It is significant that he completed writing this poem more than a decade after he returned to South Africa from exile for the first time. His sense of exile – emotional and psychological, even if no longer physical – is still overwhelming. This is expressed quite explicitly in the poem “Exile:

Exile, exile  
 you are a bitter word  
 I eat you with my bread  
 I drink you with my tea  
 you are the bitter word  
 that makes the world bitter to me

The stars look down  
 they see the world  
 they see a place  
 where I cannot be



Exile, exile  
 you are a bitter word  
 I eat you with my bread  
 I drink you with my tea  
 you are the bitter word  
 exile, exile  
 you make the stars bitter to me (*Leafdrift* 190)<sup>231</sup>

At this point in his life, Brutus appears to occupy a space that is somewhere in between exile and home. He is no longer forced to live in exile yet, at the same time, he feels unable or unwilling to return to South Africa. Leila Baradaran Jamili and Sara Faryam Rad detect a similar sense of displacement in a character in American writer Toni Morrison's 2008 novel, *A Mercy*, and describe her as feeling "no-belonging" and living "in a space of in-betweenness" (309). They note that such a sense of ambivalence is what Bhabha characterises as a state of unhomeliness, and regard it as both a rejection of home and a longing for home at the same time (310). Such ambivalence in Brutus' poetry is evocatively captured in lines 3-4 of "Lush slow scent", in which he refers to the "scent of my land haunting me/in a far-off place" (*Leafdrift* 9).

\*\*\*

In addition to Brutus' opposition to political developments in post-1990 South Africa, there appear to be quite pragmatic reasons behind his decision not to resettle in the country initially. After he retires from full-time employment at the University of Pittsburgh in June

---

<sup>231</sup> While there is no indication of exactly when this poem was written, it is dated as 2005 in Lee and Sustar's *Poetry and Protest* (369).

1999, he stays on as Professor Emeritus in the Department of Africana Studies and continues to teach on a part-time basis occasionally (Huchber, personal e-mail, 22 Aug. 2014). As Brutus is already 65 when restrictions are lifted on proscribed organisations and individuals in South Africa, his continued association with the University of Pittsburgh presumably allows him some degree of financial security. In contrast, there is little prospect of securing a similar academic and financial arrangement in South Africa at that late stage of his teaching career. (The last teaching post he held at a state school in South Africa was at Paterson High School, from which he was dismissed in 1961 because of his political activities.)

Eventually, however, Brutus does return to South Africa permanently in 2005 – presumably for equally pragmatic reasons (his decision was certainly not informed by ideological considerations in light of his opposition to political developments in South Africa). His advanced age – by then, he is 80 years old – and the increasing frailty that comes along with it, appear to be among the main reasons behind his decision to live out his remaining years in South Africa. Many of the poems he writes before his return suggest an increasing preoccupation with matters relating to mortality. As noted previously, he writes in a poem dated May 2002 that he awaits his death with resignation (see pages 318-320). In another, dated May 2004, the speaker ponders a “spectral face/gaunt with shadows/that foreshadow/skeletal highlights:/so one glimpses/insights into death ...” (*Leafdrift* 189). In fact, in “Anticipating a Funeral”, dated April 2003, he even appears to be contemplating his own funeral ceremony (185).<sup>232</sup> In the end, thus, circumstances entirely beyond his control appear to be the decisive factors behind his return. The physical burdens imposed on his body

---

<sup>232</sup> The poem reads in full: “Anytime/Anywhere/Anyhow:/What no music?/(No knowing what he would have wished)/What no prayers?/(Not clear what exactly he believed)/What no speeches?/This, it seems, is what he wished” (*Leafdrift* 185). In another poem, he even goes a step further and suggests what should be done with his remains: “Perhaps in an urn/my ashes might come to rest:/let winds scatter them” (*Poetry* 7).

by the passage of time come to supersede any personal or political reservations he may still harbour about returning to South Africa.

As he realises by now from his previous visits, South Africa is no longer home to him – it is no longer a central part of his “state of being” (Rybczynski 62; Terkenli 332). In many ways, it is now just a physical space to him. It is in response to such an enhanced sense of unhomeliness that Brutus turns to and embraces – to a far greater extent than before – a transnational or cosmopolitan identity. As post-1990 South Africa does not offer him a home now – as the country refused to under apartheid as well – he deliberately sets out to redefine and extend his identity even further. This shift enables him to identify with a broader, international community and, in this way, attempt to achieve some sense of belonging.

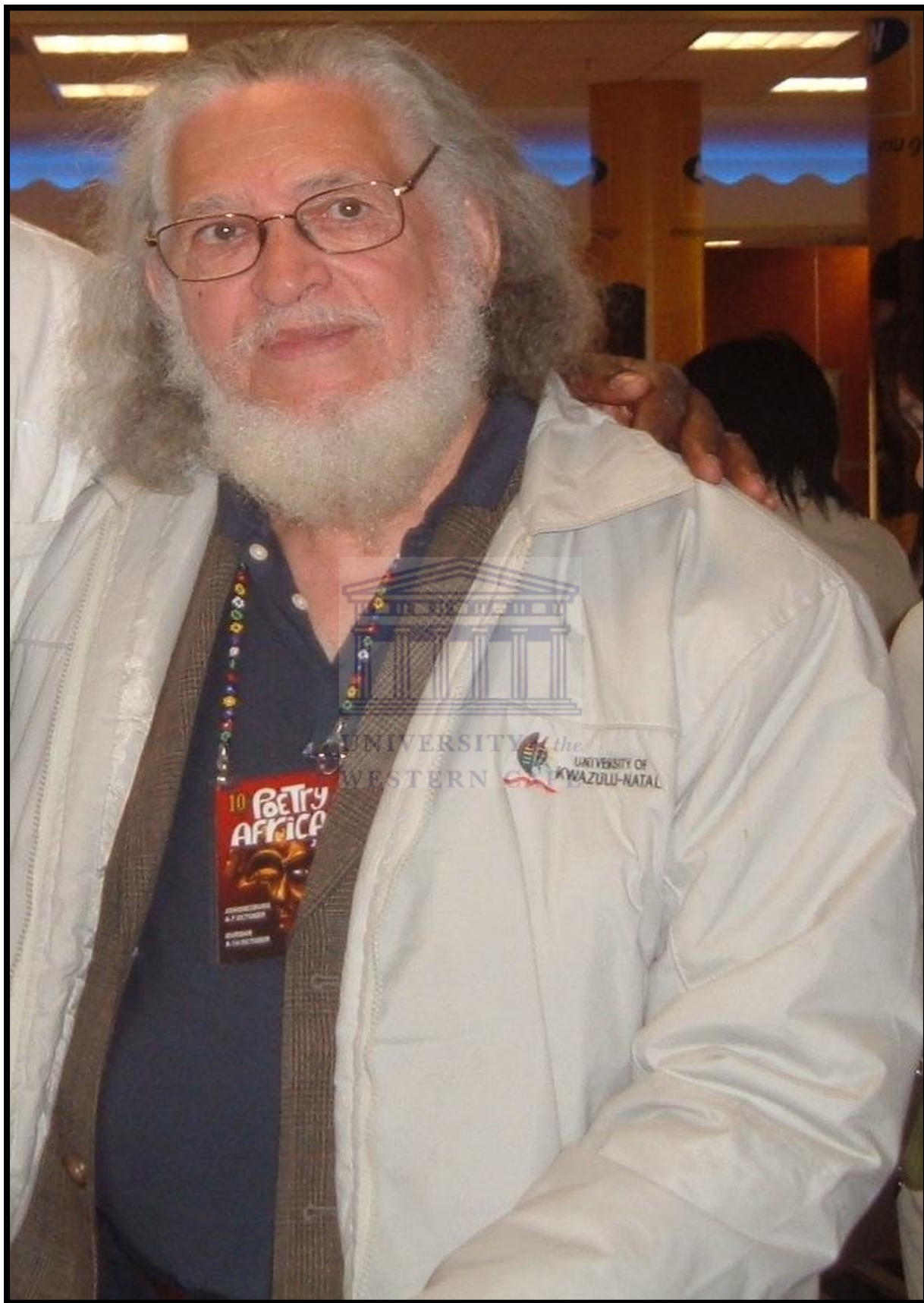
As pointed out earlier, Brutus’ nationally circumscribed identity becomes subsumed within a much wider identity. In other words, he makes a conscious decision to transcend what Pheng Cheah refers to as the “ties of kinship and country” (487). Brutus is now part of a “universal circle of belonging [that] embraces the whole of humanity” (487). Cheah insists that assuming such a cosmopolitan identity does not mean the absence of any roots. In Brutus’ case, however, these become buried very deeply underneath a transnational identity. While Brutus can indeed be described previously as essentially a rooted cosmopolitan, after 1990 he increasingly appears to distance himself from his narrowly defined identity as a South African. More than at any other point in his life, his cosmopolitan identity becomes his primary identity: he is now, first and foremost, a citizen of the world. His political concerns increasingly reach beyond the borders of South Africa to an even greater extent than before.

In the poem “Flying, after Seattle”, for instance, written after he participates in protests in Seattle during the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meeting in November 1999, he celebrates in line 16 that “[w]e begin to construct a better world” (*Leafdrift* 72). In “SAA 747”, written after a WSF meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the voice in the poem yearns in lines 8 and 9 for “a new world, new earth where finally/our dreams can be fulfilled” (49). And in a poem written in March 2002, after another WSF meeting, the speaker rejoices in lines 8 and 9 that “a new resolve is stirring/a better world is possible” (77). These poems clearly indicate that Brutus’ struggle for justice now increasingly embraces the whole world; no longer is his primary focus on South Africa.



This is particularly evident in *Leafdrift*. Many poems speak out against poverty, inequality and injustice in other parts of the world. For instance, they address poverty and hunger in Zimbabwe (4), homelessness (95), the HIV/Aids epidemic (119, 120, 121), the death penalty in some American states (18, 26-27, 28), the 1991 Gulf War (88), the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 (5, 140), environmental pollution (142, 143) and a range of other social and political issues. As in *Still the Sirens*, he pays tribute as well to individuals who participated in various social and political campaigns, including the American anti-slavery campaigner Harriet Tubman (25) and the Nigerian writer and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was hanged in 1995 by General Sani Abacha’s military government after he was convicted on charges regarded in some quarters as politically contrived (241).

The range of Brutus’ social and political concerns indicates a highly developed sense of international solidarity. While this is not a new development, as pointed out in previous



**Fig. 20: Dennis Brutus in 2007 at Poetry Africa, an annual festival hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Creative Arts in Durban.**

**Photographer: Monica Rorvik.**



chapters, there is nevertheless some merit in Simon Lewis' contention in his introduction to *Leafdrift* that Brutus should be read in the new collection "not so much as a poet defined by nationality and his resistance to South African apartheid but as a transnational poet defined by his opposition to racism and economic injustice worldwide" (iii). In a subsequent article, Lewis argues that Brutus' sense of self became even broader in 1991 as a result of his disenchantment with the political transition then still under way in South Africa:

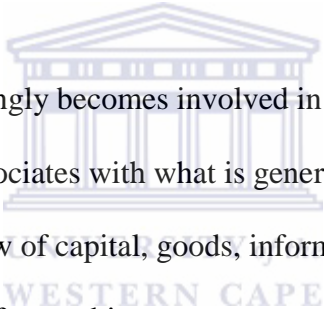
... I would argue that in the same way that he wrote of the psychological need to embrace the status of prisoner on Robben Island, so since 1991 Brutus has resolved to embrace the status of exile; not that he hadn't embraced it before, but I believe he has embraced it in a different way now, moving beyond the expectation of one day going home and instead thinking in transcendent terms and on a global scale. ("Dennis", *Journal* 57)



He further speculates that "[t]his new embrace of exile is not just a question of recognizing his incorrigible outsider-ness; it's a question of transcending inside and outside. Thus, ever the contrarian, Brutus greets the advent of ANC rule and its shift of gear into neo-liberal economic policies not with a new strain of exilic melancholy but with a new resolve of globalized commitment" (58).<sup>233</sup> And even though Brutus' opposition to injustice elsewhere in the world is certainly not a post-1990 development, it undoubtedly intensifies during the political transition which followed De Klerk's announcement in Parliament in February 1990. In the following extract (lines 3-14) from the mournful poem "In this time in this air", for instance, he writes:

<sup>233</sup> Lewis' acknowledges that his use of the word "gear" is a pun on Gear, the acronym by which the government's macroeconomic strategy Growth, Employment and Redistribution – announced in June 1996 by then Finance Minister Trevor Manuel – came to be known ("Dennis", *Journal* 58).

... awareness of pain is  
 pervasive as the air  
 each labored breath draws  
 from a miasma of sorrow  
 the ribcage creaks pain  
 expelling, not expunging sadness:  
 still falls the rain of horror<sup>234</sup>  
 the landscape is drenched with destruction:  
 “business as usual” goes the cry  
 business of profits, of death and dying ... (*Leafdrift* 20)



During the 1990s, Brutus increasingly becomes involved in international campaigns against the injustice and inequality he associates with what is generally described as globalisation, which essentially involves the flow of capital, goods, information and people between countries (Tarrow 5).<sup>235</sup> Brutus refers to this process, more specifically, as “Western corporate globalization” (Sustar 291), and characterises such economic globalisation as a “heedless, destructive rush of the corporations for profits and the fierce destructive competition of the capitalist system” (Sustar and Karim 342). This often results in unemployment, less job security, an increase in unprotected working conditions and even cuts

<sup>234</sup> While this line echoes the title of Edith Sitwell’s poem “Still Falls the Rain” (Sitwell 272-273), there is nothing in Brutus’ poem to suggest this is an intentional reference to her depiction of the German bombing of London during World War II. Brutus uses a similar line, “for still it will not rain”, in line 43 in “Pray” (*Salutes* 19). Here, too, there does not appear to be any particular reference to Sitwell’s poem.

<sup>235</sup> These campaigns are often erroneously described by many, including Brutus, as part of an anti-globalisation movement. However, there are some positive aspects to globalisation as well. Greg Buckman, for instance, acknowledges “its spirit of internationalism, and its common human bonding” (211). In fact, an international social movement such as the WSF can be regarded as an example of globalisation “from below”, hence the title of a study on the subject by Donatella Della Porta et al (3). What opponents of globalisation object to, more accurately, are its negative political and socioeconomic consequences. Among these, in Brutus’ opinion, are “the flow of capital and resources away from the underdeveloped countries ... and delivering it to the developed countries” (Thomas 5). On the other hand, he does not raise any particular objections to the cultural aspects of globalisation, perhaps because he recognises it as offering certain advantages, such as an international medium of communication in the form of English.

in social spending (Della Porta et al 11). In response, Brutus campaigns for international solidarity to oppose economic globalisation. As far back as January 1994, he makes the following call in a speech to the National Conference of Christians and Jews in Pittsburgh: “We need to come together. We need an alliance of those who are caring ... If we are to face a globalization of oppression, a globalization of capitalism in the post-Cold War world, then let us be willing to prepare also for a globalization of resistance, a globalization of the struggle for justice” (Sustar and Karim 315).

In particular, Brutus singles out the advanced industrial countries and international financial institutions for criticism. As Sustar and Aisha Karim point out, he regards the Group of Eight industrialised countries, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as “institutions forming the core of the world system and its problems” (16).<sup>236</sup> In line with this view, he even participates in protests in Seattle during the WTO ministerial meeting in November 1999. An estimated 50 000 people took to the streets to oppose the talks. According to Greg Buckman, some WTO delegates were unable to attend as a result of the protests, while other delegates were even divided about whether to continue the talks after Seattle. “The juggernaut of economic globalization faltered, badly, for the first time,” he submits. “A bold new era in the anti-globalization debate had begun” (Buckman 115). After taking part in the protest, and feeling emboldened by its wide-ranging impact, Brutus writes the hopeful poem “Flying, after Seattle”:

Eastward, with wings sun-silvered

---

<sup>236</sup> Brutus also accuses these institutions of forcing the ANC to adopt certain economic policies after the 1994 election. “... [J]ust at the time when we had discarded apartheid,” he says, “unfortunately, we moved into a new era dominated by the IMF and the World Bank” (Van Wyk 213). He argues that the result of the structural adjustment programmes they proposed for South Africa “can be a country that is even more bankrupt, more unable to repay its loans, and more impoverished, as its currency is devalued, its services are gutted, and its agricultural sector is turned upside down to produce cash crops for export rather than food for the people’s subsistence” (“Africa” 381).


at sunset, flying after Seattle  
 we dip into encroaching gloom  
 a surge of joy irradiating darkness  
 as a new youthful song proclaims hope:  
 at a crux in time we made our choice  
 beat back predatory ghouls  
 who would devour our inheritance ...  
 Arise, you billions to assert our will:  
 We begin to construct a better world. (*Leafdrift* 72)

Brutus subsequently becomes a founder of the WSF, an international movement which campaigns for global justice. It positions itself as an alternative to the World Economic Forum (WEF), an international organisation primarily made up of business and political leaders. The WSF, on the other hand, is supported by individual activists as well as a wide range of civil society organisations and pressure groups, and held its first meeting in Porto Alegre in January 2001. This was attended by more than 700 social movements from 122 countries, which were represented by 4 700 delegates and more than 15 000 participants (Houtart and Polet viii).<sup>237</sup> According to Fuyuki Kurasawa, the forum brought together “a bewildering range of subaltern groups whose identities and livelihoods are threatened by the current world order” (240-241). They describe themselves in a WSF document as “women and men, farmers, workers, unemployed, professionals, students, blacks and indigenous peoples, coming from the South and the North” (qtd. in Della Porta et al 68).

---

<sup>237</sup> Buckman estimates the number of participants even higher at 20 000 (117).

The following year Brutus attends a meeting of the WSF in Porto Alegre, which is now the forum's headquarters (Le Blanc 3). The 52 000 participants pledge "to continue our struggles against neoliberalism and war, to confirm the agreements of the last Forum and to reaffirm that another world is possible" (Della Porta et al 9, 70). Like those who attended the first WSF meeting, it was an equally diverse group. This time the participants describe themselves as "adults and youth, indigenous peoples, rural and urban, workers and unemployed, homeless, the elderly, students, migrants, professionals, peoples of every creed, color and sexual orientation" (68). After the meeting, Brutus writes another optimistic poem, "SAA 747", in which he confidently predicts that the establishment of the forum will bring about far-reaching political and economic changes internationally:



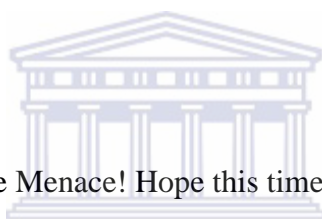
In this dim winged cathedral  
 soaring above oceans of silvered cloud  
 far beyond Atlantic's tumultuous heave  
 we move, star-girt, distant  
 from greed's debris, genocides, calcined bones  
 curled in our private shrines  
 or bent over light-pooled pages  
 to a new world, new earth where finally  
 our dreams can be fulfilled (*Remembering* 16)

In a subsequent interview with Sustar, he describes the new forum in glowing terms, too. "I am optimistic that we are on the right track," he says. "I think the World Social Forum and what it stands for is one of the most hopeful things of our time. That is why I spend a lot of time with it" (291). Brutus participates in what he refers to as "three major global protest

actions” by December 2000 (Van Wyk 214): in Seattle (November 1999), Washington (April 2000) and Prague (September 2000).

\*\*\*

Nevertheless, even though Brutus becomes increasingly involved in international campaigns against what he regards as injustice and inequality in other parts of the world, this does not mean he necessarily becomes any less committed to South Africa – as Essop Pahad, at the time a senior ANC member who was a Minister in the Presidency during President Thabo Mbeki’s term of office (1999-2008), insinuates in a letter to the Johannesburg-based national daily newspaper *Sowetan*:



Welcome home Dennis the Menace! Hope this time you will stay, the better to appreciate that we cannot allow our modest achievements to be wrecked through anarchy. Opponents of democracy seek such destruction. But if you intend once more to leave for demonstrations elsewhere, we can only retort: *et tu Brute!*<sup>238</sup> Good luck.

(Letter)

However, Sustar and Karim make the important observation that Brutus sees his activism in South Africa and the campaigns for global justice in which he participates as part of the same cause. As Brutus explains as early as 1970 in the interview with Lindfors quoted in chapter 5, “one must always see ‘humanity’ in terms of real persons ... so that the evil I must fight is the evil I know” (“Somehow” 55) – referring, of course, at the time to South Africa under apartheid. He reaffirms this view in 1974 when he makes the point that “I know more about

<sup>238</sup> Pahad uses this Latin phrase from Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar* (Act III, Scene 1, Line 77) to accuse Brutus of disloyalty towards South Africa (*Shakespeare* 831). It translates into English as “and you, Brutus”, and is uttered by Roman ruler Julius Caesar when he recognises his friend Marcus Brutus among his assassins.

the suffering of people there [in South Africa] than anywhere else in the world, and if I'm going to be useful, it is better to be useful in the area where I have some expertise" (Lindfors, *Tapes* 140). Even so, he emphasises later that, in addition to his anti-apartheid activities in exile, he was also regularly involved in campaigns against injustice in other parts of the world. "I think I've also always been able to deal with the political situation outside of South Africa as well – not just with the South African situation," he informs Stephen Gray (*Indaba* 157).

This dual concern – with South Africa and with the rest of the world – is often reflected in his poetry during this period. In "Baghdad", for instance, he inserts the image of impoverished children living in informal settlements in South Africa into a poem about the bombing of refugee camps in Lebanon in April 1996:

The devastation  
 that is going on  
 while I sit here  
 reading my mail  
 – photographs of children  
 in squatter camps –  
 while bombs and shells  
 fall shrieking  
 splintering homes  
 scattering flesh:  
 how is one to endure  
 how is one to hope



when greed and power  
 devour, destroy, all? (*Remembering* 8)

\*\*\*

Yet, while South Africa remains a focal point of his post-1990 poetry, there appears to be an important shift in the way Brutus defines himself during this period. Even though he displayed some features of cosmopolitanism early on in his life, such a world-view – as argued earlier – does appear to become far more pronounced as a result of his growing disillusionment with post-1990 political and economic developments in South Africa. While this shift may not be quite as dramatic and as sudden as Steptoe suggests, there is nonetheless some degree of truth in his assertion that “as the new history of South Africa unfolded and it became apparent that it was not going in the direction that was initially promised, I saw Dennis’ attitude change from disappointment to anger and finally to the commitment to enlarge his vision and his struggle to include the entire world” (“Celebration” 33).

Paul le Blanc, a political activist based in Pittsburgh, makes a similar observation. “He did not hide his misgivings over compromises with [the] system of the global capital that so many of his ANC comrades, once partisans of socialism, were now making as the apartheid regime was collapsing and they themselves were assuming the reins of power,” he remarks (3). While Brutus lives in Pittsburgh, he continues to speak at various “socialist forums” in the city (3). After he attends the second WSF meeting in Porto Alegre in 2002, he initiates the establishment of a Pittsburgh Social Forum in the city and becomes increasingly active in various campaigns of the WSF.<sup>239</sup>

---

<sup>239</sup> The third WSF attracted even more participants. Della Porta et al estimate the number at around 100 000 (9).



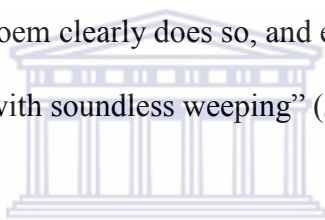
His increased participation in international organisations can be viewed – at least, in part – as a response to his growing opposition to post-1990 developments in South Africa. Once again, as under apartheid, he feels out of place in the country of his birth. This is explicitly suggested in “Song of the Homeless”, a poem written in April 1994, not coincidentally the same month as South Africa’s first non-racial election: “Cold wind, wet wind/flinging your tears in my face/where will you find rest?/how will I find a home?/When will we stop crying?” (*Leafdrift* 95). In an attempt to find a new sense of belonging, he becomes far more involved in campaigns for global justice. Such an interpretation is supported by Cheah’s contention that cosmopolitanism offers “a universal circle of belonging” (487). Now, to a much greater extent than before, Brutus embraces the broader world as his new home.

Whereas Brutus is still first and foremost a South African in exile, this aspect of his identity now increasingly appears to become subsumed within a much broader identity after 1990. He is now primarily a citizen of the world, and only secondarily – by an accident of his parents’ birth – a South African. Whether intentionally or not, Brutus shifts away during this stage of his life from a rooted cosmopolitanism towards a more universal form of cosmopolitanism as originally conceptualised by the Stoics in ancient Greece.<sup>240</sup> In the view of this school of philosophy, the cosmopolitan embraces an allegiance to the world at large – what Martha C. Nussbaum approvingly describes as “the worldwide community of human beings” (4).<sup>241</sup> In other words, the cosmopolitan does not demonstrate any particular allegiance to the people and land of his or her birth. Rather, according to this world-view, the cosmopolitan regards everybody as “equally human, of equal moral worth” (135).

<sup>240</sup> Holton points out that cosmopolitanism first emerged, in one form or another, 2000 years ago in ancient Greece and Rome (3). However, cosmopolitanism is not an exclusively Western phenomenon. The circulation of Sanskrit poetry in Asia during the first millennium, for instance, is evidence of “a translocal culture” (Pollock et al 586). Sami Zubaida also points out that the Abbasid Court in Persia mixed Islam and Persian culture during the eighth and ninth centuries, “aspects of which can be described as cosmopolitan” (32).

<sup>241</sup> This article was first published in the American bimonthly magazine *Boston Review* on 1 October 1994.

Such a world-view can certainly be identified in Brutus' post-1990 poetry. In lines 1-4 of "One World Weeping", for instance, he describes "huddled figures/draped in cloths/young people, perhaps/even small children" (*Still* 21). The poem makes no reference whatsoever to any particular place or country. All the reader is told in lines 5 and 6 are that these figures are "moving through the shadows/and into the corridors" (21). Yet, still, the speaker is moved in lines 9 and 10 to try to intervene and provide some assistance or comfort: "my hands reach out to you/till my fingers are covered with blood" (21). Whether the children are from South Africa or not, it appears, does not matter. It is the plight of these children – their obvious poverty, their abandonment – that is most important to the speaker in Brutus' poem. This is in line with Nussbaum's assertion that cosmopolitanism demands a recognition of "humanity wherever it occurs" (7). Brutus' poem clearly does so, and ends with the statement in lines 11 and 12 that "[t]he world is filled/with soundless weeping" (*Still* 21).



The later Brutus is now equally concerned with the wellbeing of people throughout the world. In lines 2-5 of the poem "and for it to be truly beautiful", the speaker outlines a vision for a better world: "it will have to be true/and if it is true to the best in us/it will be a world that will be/true, and just and beautiful and free" (*Leafdrift* 15). This poem suggests that Brutus is no longer concerned exclusively, or even primarily, with political, economic and social issues relating to South Africa. He is now concerned with injustice and oppression everywhere. In other words, he transcends what Cheah describes as "the particularistic and blindly given ties of kinship and country" (487).

While Cheah goes on to argue that cosmopolitanism is not rootlessness, some of Brutus' later poems do indeed suggest that, to a greater degree than ever before, he detaches himself from South Africa as the principal focus of his attention and as the main factor which informs his

identity – a distinct shift from the rooted cosmopolitanism as conceptualised by Appiah, with which he earlier shared many features. In some ways, the later Brutus can be regarded as a transnational: both through his poetry and his political activism, he attempts to transcend nationally defined borders. Although Ulf Hannerz correctly draws attention to the delicious irony of the term “transnational” – it draws attention to precisely what it attempts to negate: “the continued significance of the national” (6) – it remains useful. It clearly signals the crossing of national boundaries: the Latin prefix “trans”, of course, indicates that it goes beyond or across borders. This is an apt description of much of Brutus’ post-1990 poetry.

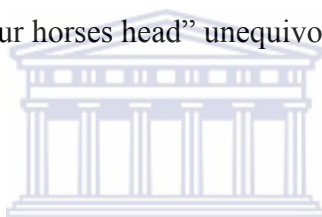
\*\*\*

In addition, some of the poems in *Leafdrift*, in particular, suggest a further shift to the left of the political spectrum by Brutus. Emmanuel Ngara rightly observes that Brutus is “a poet of the oppressed, the incarcerated and the brutalized” (13). However, on the basis of his pre-1990 poetry, he argues that Brutus does not display “a discernible class position” and “does not come out clearly as a spokesperson for workers and peasants” (13). This contention is debatable, as earlier poems such as “Fry[’]s still sell chocolate” (*Thoughts* 6) and “Autumn/Abboud/Aubade” (*Salutes* 26-28) provide evidence to the contrary. And, even supposing there is insufficient proof in Brutus’ earlier poetry to entirely refute Ngara’s claim, it is certainly no longer the case since at least the early 1990s. In November 1993, for instance, Brutus tells a conference in Denver:

... [I]n our time the notion of democracy as we’ve used the term up to now has been thoroughly discredited. Democracy serves the interests of the small, monied few, the privileged ones. Therefore we must look very seriously at alternatives that share the

wealth of the country instead of concentrating it in the hands of the few. This, of course, is to look at socialism as an alternative to bourgeois Western democracy. (Sustar and Karim 307)

After the launch of the WSF, Brutus repeats his call for a socialist economic system even more forcefully and frequently. He declares that “I believe that we can achieve a new kind of world – that another world is possible, as the World Social Forum theme puts it” (Sustar 293). In this context, he suggests, it is necessary to consider socialism as an alternative economic system in South Africa. He further argues that socialism is still often proposed in South Africa by “the people in the ghetto” (292). In line with this view, the speaker in Brutus’ poem “North and South our horses head” unequivocally comes out in support of socialism:



North and South our horses head  
 going nowhere

South and North our powers pull  
 inducing paralysis

contradictions must be resolved  
 that is clear

no glib formulations  
 must obscure

phantsi privatization phantsi<sup>242</sup>

forward to socialism

our road is clear! ( *Leafdrift* 7)

<sup>242</sup> Phantsi” is a Xhosa adverb meaning “down” (Tshabe 990), and is commonly used in political slogans or songs. Like the WSF, Brutus regards privatisation as “a mechanism for transferring public wealth and natural resources to the private sector” (Houtart and Polet 123).

Brutus envisages the WSF as playing a vital role in bringing about socialism, which he defines broadly as a more equitable society. He regards capitalism, on the other hand, as “corrupt and destructive” (Sustar 293). In a speech in New York in May 2005, he tells the audience that “all over the world, people are getting their act together, and we are mobilizing to change the world. The slogan of the World Social Forum, ‘Another World is Possible,’ is something we believe, and something we can do” (Sustar and Karim 362). He identifies the ultimate goal of the WSF as nothing less than the creation of “an alternative vision for the world, in which peoples’ basic rights are paramount” (340). In fact, while others generally refer to the WSF as a global justice movement, Brutus even goes as far as characterising it as a world liberation movement:

... [W]e’re really taking on the global struggle against the global corporate agenda which is crushing people everywhere all over the world: the workers, the peasants, women, children, the exploited, the oppressed. We fight on behalf of all of them. And ... we have to start all over again and build a whole new movement and a whole new struggle. (360)

This declaration of intent once again highlights the shift in Brutus’ personal and political identity. It increasingly becomes subsumed within a broader identity that transcends national borders. While issues relating to South Africa remain important to him, his commitment to a new global order now seems to be his primary, overriding concern. The local organisations and campaigns in which he is involved in South Africa now appear to be merely a means to a much larger end. As he says in an interview with Sustar in 2003, “we fight the oppressor where we find him ...” (354). But the longer-term goal is, ultimately, now to change the whole world – not just South Africa. Brutus’ political vision is no longer circumscribed by

national boundaries, as the following poem – written in Pittsburgh in March 2002 – indicates, providing further evidence of his newly elaborated status as a transnational:

Voices reaching across miles  
 ambient air filling with sound  
 a new melody of hope  
 from the downtrodden rising  
 pulling bare feet from sucking mud  
 from Brazil's favelas [sic]<sup>243</sup>  
 to Roche Bois in Port Louis<sup>244</sup>  
 a new resolve is stirring  
 a better world is possible. (*Leafdrift* 77)



As *Leafdrift* illustrates, Brutus' later poetry engages increasingly urgently and frequently with issues and incidents in many other countries. His concerns now include the geography of the whole world – from violent conflict in the Middle East to poverty in Brazil. He declares in a “Prose Statement” in January 1995: “My concerns have expanded since South Africa has joined the world community and it is now part of global problems, but they continue to focus on freedom, on social justice and the right to creative expression” (*Poetry* 67).

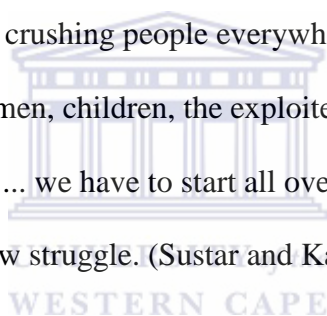
This world-view is markedly different from the nascent internationalism that he gestures towards when he still lived in South Africa and during his early years in exile. Brutus now

<sup>243</sup> A favela is a generic term in Brazil used to refer to a shanty town (*Collins* 560).

<sup>244</sup> Roche Bois is in Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius.

claims a far more coherently defined identity as a global citizen. He tells Sustar that it is possible to achieve “a new kind of world”, and places the WSF at the centre of the struggle to reach this goal (Sustar 293). In a speech in New York in May 2005, he claims that people are beginning to come together in organised formations throughout many parts of the world in pursuit of this objective:

We are willing to confront this new oppression. In the old days this confrontation was pretty localized. This time it’s going to be globalized. We are willing to take them on, all over the world, and to challenge them all over the world. When we do, its [sic] worth remembering that we’re really taking on the global struggle against the global corporate agenda which is crushing people everywhere all over the world: the workers, the peasants, women, children, the exploited, the oppressed. We fight on behalf of all of them. And ... we have to start all over again and build a whole new movement and a whole new struggle. (Sustar and Karim 360)



It seems this is the only way Brutus can finally end his enduring feeling of unhomeliness – by embracing the whole world as his home, and by becoming part of a new international movement to fight for global justice. Yet, however hard he tries to regain agency over his life, and forge a new sense of belonging by claiming the whole world as his home, he remains unsettled. This is starkly illustrated by an unpublished poem, “A Segmented World”, written in May 2009 – just a few months before he died in December 2009:

I live in it  
 half in the past  
 fractionally in make-believe

fantasies, anticipations

chimeras, Disney scenarios

and always I hug

clandestinely

the unhealed hurt

Nowhere does Brutus ever feel truly at home again. He remains out of place no matter where he is. Even though he claims to be a citizen of the world – in other words, even though he adopts the whole world as his home – this expanded sense of identity fails to provide him with an adequate sense of belonging.



Even Brutus' involvement in African and South African formations linked to the WSF fails to provide an adequate grounding for his sense of himself as a citizen of the world. His participation in the activities of South Africa's Social Movements Indaba, the Southern African Social Forum and the African Social Forum (which first met in Mali in January 2002) are primarily exercises in political pragmatism. In an interview with Sustar originally published in October-November 2003, he explains his involvement in these formations by repeating his mantra that "we fight the oppressor where we find him" (Sustar and Karim 354). It should also be noted that, at that stage, he still lives in the USA. His participation in these formations therefore does not necessarily suggest any particular attachment to either South Africa or the continent. As he declares unhesitatingly in a television interview that same year, "I don't have a home" ("Dennis Brutus: I Am a Rebel"). He is clearly no longer a



rooted cosmopolitan as he once, arguably, was; now he is not grounded in any particular country or continent.

In spite of this, some proponents of Afropolitanism would nevertheless include Brutus as part of their Africanised version of cosmopolitanism. J.K.S. Makoka, for instance, regards everyone who is born in Africa as automatically being an Afropolitan. “The definition is clear and so are the bearers of the label,” he claims. “African immigrants and citizens of African nations living in the West are automatic Afropolitans” (16). Achille Mbembe, who is credited with first proposing the ideas behind Afropolitanism, along with Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu (now Selasi), would probably be more circumspect in advancing such a notion.<sup>245</sup> Even though Mbembe privileges African identity in his version of cosmopolitanism, he describes it as no more than “a way of being in the world” (28). It is, in his conceptualisation, essentially a “way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness, the ability to recognise one’s face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites” (28). Simon Gikandi, too, notes, that Afropolitanism is simply “a new phenomenology of Africanness – a way of being African in the world ... prompted by the desire to think of African identities as both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them” (9).

Chielozona Eze also advances a different interpretation from Makoka. He notes that “[p]lace and origin are no longer exclusive markers of identity, even if they still play vital roles in many people’s self-reading” (238), and instead refers to Afropolitanism more cautiously as “a

---

<sup>245</sup> Selasi, a novelist who was born in the UK to a Ghanaian father and a Nigerian mother, first used the term “Afropolitanism” in an article in 2005 in the now-defunct student magazine *The LIP* (“Bye-Bye Barbar”). According to her, Afropolitans are “Africans of the world”, whose identity is defined by national, racial and cultural attributes. The central characters in Selasi’s 2013 novel, *Ghana Must Go*, all personify Afropolitanism.

mere effort to grasp the diverse nature of being African or of African descent in the world today” (239). In other words, being an Afropolitan involves choice; it is not automatically inherited or inscribed at birth. To confer a social identity on an individual on the basis of a biological accident of birth, as Makoka suggests, is unsustainable. As Stuart Hall points out in a conversation with Pnina Werbner, identity “is not inscribed, forever, in or transmitted by, the genes. It is socially, historically, culturally constructed” (Werbner 347).

In any event, no matter how well-intentioned the premises are of Afropolitanism, it is unlikely that Brutus would have defined himself in such terms in view of his previously expressed discomfort with being narrowly or primarily defined as an African. Even though he was born in Africa, he does not profess any particular allegiance to or grounding in the continent. Over and above this, he would dissociate himself from an identity which is associated with elitism and exclusivity, as even a sympathetic proponent of Afropolitanism such as Eze concedes it is (240). This accusation, of course, is directed at cosmopolitanism in general despite the efforts of those such as Clifford to redefine cosmopolitans more broadly to include those previously omitted due to either their racial or class background (“Traveling” 106).

\*\*\*

What, then, to make of Brutus’ lived cosmopolitanism, bearing in mind his professed commitment to being a citizen of the world? As suggested in chapter 3, he first appears to exhibit the main features associated with rootless cosmopolitans in the late 1980s, and even more so from the early 1990s – those with a declared affinity for other people elsewhere in the world, yet without any particular attachment to any single country. At this point it is

necessary to interrogate the phrase “rootless cosmopolitan” more closely in order to determine whether it is indeed an appropriate analytical description of Brutus. It was originally used as a term of disparagement under Joseph Stalin’s rule of the Soviet Union during the 1930s to denigrate Jewish intellectuals in particular, and government critics in general, and was equated with anti-patriotism (Pinkus 183). In relation to certain theatre critics, for example, the newspaper *Pravda* states that they “have lost their sense of responsibility to the people. They represent a rootless cosmopolitanism which is deeply repulsive and inimical to the Soviet man. They obstruct the development of Soviet literature; the feeling of national Soviet pride is alien to them” (183-184). The intention behind the use of “rootless cosmopolitanism” in this context is obvious – to stigmatise and to marginalise those defined as holding views which differ in any way from those of Stalin’s government.<sup>246</sup>

It was used in a similar context in Germany during the same period to tarnish the image of left-wing intellectuals (Grass 458n1). The writer Günter Grass (b.1927), for instance, recalls being angrily referred to once as “a traitor to the fatherland” because of his opposition to a unified Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 (458).<sup>247</sup> “The expression, paired with the term ‘rootless cosmopolitan’, belongs to [a] special vocabulary of German history,” he notes (458). Yet, he admits, he is indeed a traitor if that means being opposed to a certain kind of fatherland. “Any fatherland of mine must be more diverse, more colourful, more neighborly,” he declares, “a fatherland that has grown, through its suffering, wiser and more open to Europe” (459). He believes this can be achieved more effectively by

---

<sup>246</sup> Henry L. Feingold points out that the phrase was used during the 1950s to describe Jewish people in the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev’s rule, too: “Undoubtedly, he meant that Soviet Jews were prone to resist the shaping influence of Communist ideology and were not fully committed to the regime” (162).

<sup>247</sup> Stephen Brockmann describes Grass as “the most prominent German critic” of the unification of the two German states in October 1990 (125).

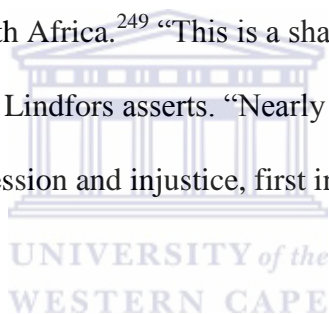
reuniting the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany as a confederation instead of as a single state.

In view of Brutus' persistent criticism of the ANC as both party and government, no doubt some within its ranks will apply the term "rootless cosmopolitanism" in this pejorative sense to Brutus as well. An indication of such a sentiment is revealed by Pahad's letter to the newspaper *Sowetan*, in which he mockingly welcomes Brutus "home" and expresses the hope that he will stay permanently this time. However, he hints that he does not think this will be the case, and comes close to questioning Brutus' attachment and commitment to South Africa (Letter). He all but dismisses him as a rootless cosmopolitan, whose loyalties lie elsewhere.

Such a reading of Pahad's letter is not necessarily an overreaction nor a misreading of the underlying sentiments embedded in it. The continued marginalisation of Brutus' literary work in post-1990 South Africa can be regarded as an indication of the political hostility that lingers towards him. For instance, his poetry has never been prescribed reading in the English curriculum of South Africa's schools since the ANC came to power in 1994. In response to an enquiry, Bulara Monyaki, the Chief Education Specialist (Languages) in the Department of Basic Education, confirms that "[n]one of the sources ... consulted places Dennis Brutus' poetry on the curriculum" (personal e-mail, 9 Dec. 2013). This omission cannot simply be ascribed to what has colloquially been characterised as "struggle fatigue" – an exhaustion with apartheid and its preoccupations after almost half a century of racial discrimination and resistance to its legalised enforcement. Last year, for example, Rive's 1986 novel "*Buckingham Palace*", *District Six* – about the Cape Town neighbourhood from which

thousands of residents were forcibly removed after it was declared a white area in 1966 under the Group Areas Act – was prescribed for Grade 11 learners.<sup>248</sup>

Lindfors also points to the continued neglect of Brutus' poetry in South Africa more generally. Even though much of his poetry was written in exile, Lindfors comments, “[w]hat is more difficult to understand is why this kind of public erasure has persisted since 1994, when a new political order was established in Pretoria, and apartheid itself was banned” (Martin 8). He expresses the hope that Brutus' poetry “will soon be repatriated to the country that inspired almost all of it, and that he will gain the recognition and respect that he deserves in the history of South African literature” (9). He adds that, up till then, not a single book by Brutus has been published in South Africa.<sup>249</sup> “This is a shame, for in some ways Brutus is the most South African of poets,” Lindfors asserts. “Nearly everything he has written was shaped by his experience of oppression and injustice, first in South Africa and later in the wider world” (8).



Gibbs also promotes the literary merits of Brutus' poetry on other grounds in his introduction to the Worcester State College collection *Poetry and Human Rights*. He asserts that “his diction is dependably cosmopolitan, its center the world, not a specific place of origin. This universality befits Brutus's commitment to the struggle for human rights, a struggle which is global and demands a language not limited to one nation or set of values” (Gibbs iv).

However, it is probably this very cosmopolitanism – and the critical distance his rootlessness allows him – which is responsible for his ongoing marginalisation in South Africa.

<sup>248</sup> According to Viljoen, “*Buckingham Palace*”, *District Six* has been on the list of possible prescribed texts at various grade levels in Western Cape high schools since 1997, and has been used as a text in schools elsewhere in South Africa as well (7).

<sup>249</sup> Brutus makes the pointed comment in the “Dedication” to *Leafdrift* that “[i]t would be nice to thank some South African publisher for printing a collection of my work, but so far this has not happened” (n.pag.). *Poetry and Protest*, edited by Sustar and Karim (both based in the USA), was published simultaneously in the USA by Haymarket Books and in South Africa by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Press in 2006.

Contrary to the view held by some, though, rootless cosmopolitanism does not have to be a term signifying opprobrium. After all, to be a cosmopolitan – in the original sense of the word – is to display compassion for the rest of humanity. It is a recognition that roots, in and of themselves, do not automatically determine an individual's worth or primary sense of self (a point made earlier in relation to Afropolitanism as well). The negative connotations attached to rootless cosmopolitanism are therefore assigned to it erroneously or according to a prior political agenda. Grass attempts to reclaim the phrase as an attribute endowed with merit in his article in the journal *Dissent*. He associates rootless cosmopolitanism with greater diversity and tolerance. As a result, he declares: “If sides must be drawn, let me be numbered among the rootless cosmopolitans” (460).

Tony Judt also makes an effort to rescue the term from those who infuse it with negative qualities when he approvingly describes Said as a rootless cosmopolitan. He bases such a characterisation of Said on a statement he made just a few months before his death that “I still have not been able to understand what it means to love a country” (qtd. in Judt x).<sup>250</sup> Judt states in his foreword to Said's book, *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map*:

That, of course, is the characteristic condition of the rootless cosmopolitan. It is not very comfortable or safe to be without a country to love; it can bring down upon your head the anxious hostility of those for whom such rootlessness suggests a corrosive independence of spirit. But it is liberating; the world you look out upon may not be as reassuring as the vista enjoyed by patriots and nationalists, but you see further. (x)

---

<sup>250</sup> In support of his argument, Judt also cites Said's comment in *Culture and Imperialism* that he has “no patience with the position that ‘we’ should only or mainly be concerned with what is ‘ours’” (xxv).

Brutus no doubt holds similar views. He does not hesitate to openly express his political differences with the ANC and the SACP, even as far back as the 1960s, and continues to do so after 1990. As Brutus points out in a rebuttal of a description of himself as a Trotskyist, he follows ideas – not particular individuals nor, for that matter, ideologies. In recognition of this, Desai refers to Brutus in a tribute as a “non–ist, this jack out of the box” (1). It is this non-affiliation to any particular ideology which marks him out as a rootless cosmopolitan, and which enables him to remain autonomous and to freely express his critique of the ANC. This fits in with Feingold’s conceptualisation of rooted cosmopolitans as “unideological, questers for the rational, understanders rather than believers” (166).

Feingold’s defence of cosmopolitan Jewish people in the face of hostility from Khrushchev’s government is also relevant in relation to Brutus. “He [Khrushchev] need not have taken umbrage,” Feingold responds. “... [C]osmopolitans display ... autonomy and unwillingness to plug into society fully, no matter in which nation they are ensconced” (162). However, this does not necessarily mean that the rootless cosmopolitan always becomes “individuated, uncommitted and detribalized”, as Feingold suggests (163). What it does mean is that the rootless cosmopolitan’s notion of tribe or community is expanded from being narrowly circumscribed to becoming much more inclusive and expansive. Brutus, for instance, continues to remain committed to a broad, global community, and continues to act and write in ways which he believes protects and advances the interests of that community.

Feingold goes on to make another important intervention: he contends that being a rootless cosmopolitan is not a matter of choice. “It takes years of deracination,” he asserts (163). Besides, he adds, the consequences of being rootless – “alienation, loneliness, anomie” (163) – do not make rootless cosmopolitanism an attractive choice. This description certainly



**Fig. 21:**  
**Dennis Brutus**  
**in Cape Town**  
**around**  
**November/**  
**December**  
**2009.** His  
**grandson**  
**Jerome (13),**  
**the son of**  
**Antony**  
**Brutus, is**  
**reading poetry**  
**to him.** On his  
**left is the poet**  
**Ari Sitas.**

**Photographer:**  
**George**  
**Hallett.**



appears to apply to Brutus in the latter years of his life. The South African poet Mattera claims that Brutus was “pushed aside” on his return to South Africa by the ANC government because of his vocal opposition to its policies.<sup>251</sup> “They would see him as a gnat in their eye,” he says, “they would see him as a fly in the ointment” (personal interview, 25 Aug. 2012). Mattera, who is critical of many policies of the ANC government as well, adds: “We fought [against apartheid] and yet we are not loved in our own country, by our own people, because we don’t support their policies; we don’t support the way they are; we don’t support what they are.”

Deena Padayachee, a Durban-based medical doctor and writer who served as a co-executor of Brutus’ estate until January 2014, expresses a similar view.<sup>252</sup> He believes that “[w]hile Dennis was greatly respected, admired and honoured all over the world, he sometimes continued to endure opprobrium and rejection in our country” (personal e-mail, 24 Aug. 2011). In another e-mail on the same day, he goes on to state more specifically that Brutus was “marginalised, ignored and overlooked by the ANC”, and even suggests that “[m]any among the previously legislatively advantaged hated him till the end”.

It is the rejection which follows, along with a feeling of alienation, which makes Brutus the epitome of unhomeliness in the later years of his life. As Feingold notes, rootless cosmopolitans do not “live at ease” in the world (168). They do not experience a sense of belonging anywhere – even though their home is supposed to be everywhere. In fact, in Brutus’ case, he becomes a citizen of the world precisely because of his rejection by South

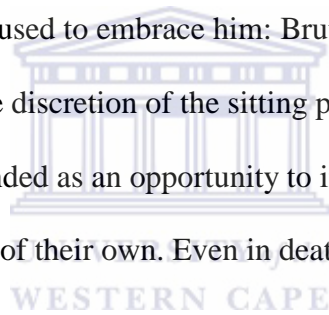
---

<sup>251</sup> Brutus wrote a letter of support for Mattera when he was nominated for the Kurt Tucholsky Award of the Swedish PEN Association in 1986, which he was subsequently awarded. As noted in chapter 1, the American-based Africa Network, which Brutus helped to establish, also gave Mattera its Kwanzaa Award in 1988.

<sup>252</sup> Padayachee provided medical treatment for Brutus, who suffered from prostate cancer, during the final year of his life (personal e-mail, 22 July 2014).

Africa – under apartheid and during the post-1990 political dispensation. His cosmopolitanism is informed, at least in part, by a desire to construct a new home and sense of belonging for himself. The new South Africa which took form after De Klerk's historic announcement in parliament failed to provide him with the kind of home that he desired and fought for during most of his adult life.

Even in death, he was rejected. Despite his participation in the anti-apartheid struggle (most notably securing South Africa's expulsion from the Olympic Games), and despite the quality and volume of his literary output, Brutus did not receive any official recognition of his contributions to South Africa after his death from prostate cancer in December 2009. Its representatives in government refused to embrace him: Brutus did not receive a state funeral, an honour usually granted – at the discretion of the sitting president – for those regarded to be of national significance, and intended as an opportunity to involve the general public in a national day of mourning for one of their own. Even in death, he remains out of place.



## CONCLUSION

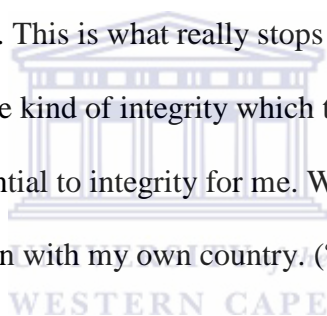


**Fig. 22: Dennis Brutus receives an honorary doctorate from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, in April 2009.**

**Photographer: Patrick Bond.**

The two main preoccupations of Brutus' life are, without doubt, poetry and politics. How these two concerns intersect, and impact on each other, is a theme which runs throughout this dissertation. In his public statements, Brutus tends to foreground the role of politics in his life. In an interview with Lindfors in 1971, for instance, he declares emphatically that he is unable to give priority to poetry over politics:

In order for me to make a total commitment to poetry, I would have to remake myself. This is not impossible, in the sense that I could wholly shut out, say, my political activity, my organizing work, my sports, the kind of chores which I do from day to day with this and that committee, and so on. I think it would not be impossible, but I think it would be immoral. This is what really stops me: that a total commitment to the craft of poetry, with the kind of integrity which that implies, would do damage to what I now regard as essential to integrity for me. Which means social concern. Specifically, social concern with my own country. ("Somehow" 51)



Mphahlele makes a similar point in his review of *Poems from Algiers*. "I know that Dennis Brutus does not feel he should be wasting his time writing poetry when more urgent and political work needs to be done," he states. And because such work demands extensive travelling, he adds, Brutus "seems content to write down verse as the impulse takes him and leave it as said and done" ("Debris" 71). Povey recalls discussing this issue with Brutus. "When I have accused him of neglecting his great gift for verse," he recounts, "he only smiles and says, 'First things first'" (41).

In fact, at one point after he becomes active in politics, Brutus even stops writing poetry for a while. "I think that for a long while I saw the two as so separate that I couldn't merge them,"

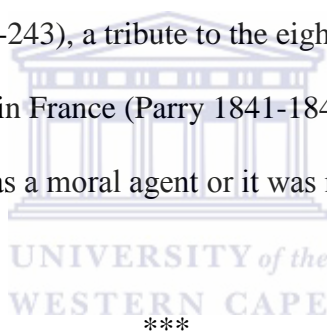
he remembers. “So I gave up writing poetry for perhaps as long as ten years; I can’t remember now. But there was a time that it seemed to me that to go on writing in such a conflicted situation was untenable, kind of irrelevant” (S. Gray, *Indaba* 155). In a later interview, Brutus places this period at around 1950, and says it lasts for about a decade (Van Wyk 173). However, his discovery of Auden’s writing (as discussed in chapter 1) was a turning point in his approach to how he writes poetry.

“It was through teaching ... Auden’s work that I became aware of the possibilities of combining the private and the public, the personal and the political, in a way that freed me,” he declares (Brutus, “Preface” 5). From then on – presumably the early 1960s – he continually strives to use the personal voice of the lyric form to make public statements. His poem “Nightsong: City” (*Sirens* 16), which was first published in 1962 (Martin 11), is one of his earliest attempts to fuse the personal and the political. No longer does he regard poetry and politics as mutually exclusive. For him, separating them into two distinct categories of human endeavour is to construct a false binary. In his concluding remarks at the ALA’s inaugural conference in 1975, for instance, he declares that “literature and life are inextricably bound together”, and that “there is no way you can function in the literary field without also functioning as a social being with responsibility to your society” (“Concluding” 58).

However, as noted earlier, he does not regard himself as a political poet per se. To him, politics is like any other area of human activity, and is therefore a valid and natural subject for the poet. He believes that those who exclude politics from their writing restrict, and impoverish, their poetry. In South Africa, he feels, it is even more short-sighted to exclude politics from a writer’s subject matter. “South Africa is a landscape in which you cannot

escape the politics,” he argues. “Wordsworth couldn’t escape writing about Grasmere Rydal Mount;<sup>253</sup> Eliot couldn’t escape writing about the urban images of the cities; it seems to me you have to deal with your landscape, and that’s *my* kind of landscape” (W. Thompson 74; emphasis in the original).<sup>254</sup>

In fact, some of the early work of Wordsworth, who was initially an ardent supporter of the 1789 French Revolution, can be regarded as activist poetry. Some of his most explicitly political writing is included in “Poems dedicated to national independence and liberty” (*Poetical* 241-264). Among the most well-known examples are “Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour”, in which he lambasts England as “a fen/Of stagnant waters” (244), and “To Toussaint L’Ouverture” (242-243), a tribute to the eighteenth-century Haitian leader who fought slavery and died in prison in France (Parry 1841-1842). “For him,” biographer Stephen Gill observes, “poetry was a moral agent or it was nothing” (189).



Brutus views his poetry as part of this tradition. In addition, he embraces two central tenets in his approach to poetry and politics: firstly, as noted in chapter 1, he places himself fully within an African tradition of art, in which the artist is a representative of the community. “I come out of the African tradition,” he affirms in the unpublished edition of *Salutes and Censures*, and refers to this as a tradition “of the commitment of the artist as a social being” (“Introduction” 364). He also describes this tradition to Goodfader and Finn as one in which

---

<sup>253</sup> Wordsworth moved from the Lake District to Grasmere in north England in 1799 (P. Kitson 339). Rydal Mount is the name of the house in which he lived in Grasmere from 1813 until he died in 1850 (Wordsworth, *Poetical* xxvi, xxix).

<sup>254</sup> Brutus makes the same point more than two decades later. “I never saw poetry as a deliberate, strictly political instrument,” he tells Sustar (153). “It was political because my landscape was political. It was inescapably political. There was racism around me.”

the artist is “always being an engaged person, a committed person ... We begin with an art which is used in the service of the people ...” (28).

Secondly, as discussed in chapter 4, another formative influence on his approach to poetry and politics is Marx’s injunction that it is not sufficient to understand the world, and that those who do so also need to participate in changing it (“Theses” 37-39). “The one thing I accept from the Western approach to art,” Brutus declares, “is the maxim that the artist ought not to be content to describe the world, but that he ought to be trying to transform the world” (Goodfader and Finn 28). These two premises are at the centre of his approach to poetry and politics.

From the early 1960s, he becomes increasingly engaged in various anti-apartheid activities while, at the same time, continuing to write poetry. He refuses to accept Nortje’s injunction in the last two lines of his poem “Native’s Letter” that “some of us must storm the castles/some define the happening” (361). Mphahlele issues an early warning to Brutus in his review of *Poems from Algiers* about the risks inherent in simultaneously being a political activist and a writer. “... [W]hen one and the same person, like Brutus or Mazisi Kunene (also an exile in London)<sup>255</sup> is both poet and political activist,” he cautions, “there is bound to be a conflict of loyalties” (“Debris” 71). Goodwin, too, points to the risks that he associates with combining poetry and politics. “The need to make a political statement has often directed a poet’s attention away from poetic quality,” he argues (xiii).

However, even though Brutus believes that politics and poetry cannot, and should not, be separated, he does not believe poetry ought to be used in a crude fashion as an instrument of

---

<sup>255</sup> Kunene (b.1930) left South Africa to study in the UK in 1959 and subsequently became involved in the ANC. His first collection *Zulu Poems*, a translation of his Zulu poetry, was published in 1970 (Killam and Rowe 130).

political propaganda. He articulates these views at some length in an interview (Lindfors et al 32) and in a tape recording (Lindfors "Somehow" 53) in 1970. To employ poetry as propaganda, he believes, is immoral and displays a lack of artistic integrity (see chapter 1). For this reason, he resists being labelled a protest poet (Goddard 68).

More specifically, he rejects it as an accurate description of his poetry because "I don't go around in my poetry saying 'What a terrible thing racism is', or 'What a terrible thing apartheid is' ... except by indirection, by implication. By reporting a simple experience I ask people to make up their own minds" (Lindfors et al 32). He adds: "I don't think I myself would call this protest. I would say it functions as protest; it has the effect of protest. But I think it's poetry and not protest; it's not propaganda. The politics is not imported into it" (32). Decades later he expresses a similar view in an interview in 1991. "... [O]ne of the things I did was to describe a situation, without protesting against it," he says, "and allow the reader to make up his mind whether it was a reprehensible situation which he or she would feel impelled to protest against" (Goddard 68-69).

For a significant part of his writing career, he remains averse to the use of poetry as a political tool. However, as noted in the dissertation, he does not always succeed in keeping propaganda out of his poetry. Sometimes he even employs his poetry quite explicitly and deliberately as an instrument of political mobilisation. I argue that he begins to do so in response to the increasing brutal measures employed by the NP government to quell growing resistance to apartheid. This is one of the major reasons why the content and tone of his poetry becomes declamatory after the 1976-1977 student protests and, even more so, after the government responds to the anti-apartheid campaigns of the 1980s with increasingly harsh security measures (as discussed in chapters 4 and 5).



\*\*\*

Yet, in one essential respect, Brutus' poetry remains consistent: he never abandons the lyric form. While some South African poets engaged in politics turn to the epic form (for example, Kunene and Serote), Brutus continues to use it throughout his life. On the basis of the evidence in this dissertation, it is fair to speculate that he is attracted to the lyric by his temperament and by the intrinsic features of the form.<sup>256</sup> He refuses to accept the dictates of those who seek to exclude public concerns from the lyric because of its highly personal and reflective nature. As Strand observes, there has always been a connection between what he describes as privacy and universality (xxii). In his study of the lyric mode, Johnson makes the obvious but important point that human beings have “private emotions and selves” as well as “public emotions and selves” (W. Johnson 177). Brutus clearly holds a similar view and constantly uses the lyric to explore life in all its diversity and complexity. He addresses a wide range of subjects in his poetry – from intensely personal feelings for a loved one to explicitly political concerns such as calling for an end to apartheid and, in later years, for the transformation of global institutions of finance and trade.

The range of forms and styles he uses in his poetry is equally diverse: these include Petrarchan sonnets, classical Chinese poetry, Japanese haiku and poems influenced by African oral poetry, written with the specific purpose of public performance. He explores different styles of writing, too. As chapter 1 illustrates, his earliest poetry in the 1960s, under the influence of the English literary canon of the time, utilises complex images and symbols. In later years he resorts to a more accessible and direct form of writing out of a desire – informed by political objectives – to communicate more directly with his intended audience.

---

<sup>256</sup> Although in a different context, Brutus openly acknowledges his individualism in a tape recording (Lindfors, *Tapes* 173).

Even so, he does not confine his poetry to any one particular style; he constantly attempts different forms of writing. He often moves back and forth between different styles, at times even within the same volume. These constant shifts remain a distinctive feature of Brutus' poetry throughout his writing career. He always experiments with different ways of writing poetry. While these are not always successful, he is not given sufficient credit for his efforts to extend the range of the lyric form.

At his best, Brutus writes some of the most evocative and skilfully crafted lyrical poetry in South African literature. A review of *Letters to Martha* in the London-based newspaper *The Guardian* – famously emblazoned on the cover of *A Simple Lust* – states that some poems in the collection possess “a grace and penetration unmatched even by [the then exiled Russian writer] Alexander Solzhenitsyn”. More recently, the entry under Brutus' name in *The Companion to African Literatures* refers to his “thoughtful, delicately crafted, sometimes hauntingly lyrical poems” (Killam and Rowe 52). Numerous poems are cited in this dissertation which support such an assessment.

\*\*\*

A key concern of his writing is to make the lyric form more accessible and politically relevant. In line with this objective, his poetry increasingly begins to share the core attributes associated with the anti-poetry which emerges after World War II. As shown in chapter 4, in response to the nature and scale of the human suffering caused by such a bloody and prolonged war, anti-poetry dispenses with complex images and symbols in the interests of communicating as directly and effectively as possible. While Brutus never explicitly claims any affinity or association with the writers of anti-poetry, his writing increasingly shares the

main features of anti-poetry: it is often devoid of metaphor and usually employs direct, and sometimes even colloquial, language. As he comments in an interview with Pieterse about the change in his style of writing after his release from Robben Island:

... I had hoped that they [my poems] would ultimately reach a wider audience and this may be one reason why I tried and still try to pare my thought down to a very simple [,] basic sort of structure. I'm not sure that's the only reason – I think in prison I also did a lot of rethinking about technique and expression and that is one of the things that persuaded me to seek a simpler idiom. (58)

However, it is important to note that, even though Brutus' writing becomes more direct and accessible, he continues to retain the essence of the lyric form. His poetry remains the single, contemplative voice of an individual (even though, at times, that individual may be speaking in a representative capacity on behalf of a broader community). In some of his later writing, however, he begins to shift further away from the conventional form of the lyric. He starts to write some poems with the intention of public performance, which is signalled by the repetition of certain words or phrases (this is discussed in chapter 6).

Some poems – such as “Stop” (*Stubborn* 54) and “Catena” (*Still* 31) – even invite the audience to participate in the rendition of the poem by repeating some words and phrases. His intention is now no longer only to reflect on or to describe a particular emotion or event; now he is attempting to exhort the listener to act on the content of his poetry. In other words, he now employs his poetry – or, at least, some of his poems – in the service of political conscientisation and mobilisation. This is a marked departure from his initial commitment to keep propaganda out of poetry and his disparagement of African-American poetry of the

1960s and 1970s as declamatory. As argued, this change is in response to political events in South Africa: he now wants his poetry to be more immediately relevant and practically useful.

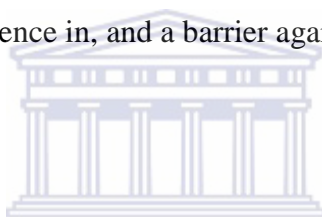
However, even though he moves from lyrical poetry towards a form of anti-poetry and later to poetry intended for public performance, he never completely abandons the lyric form. His last collection, *Leafdrift*, provides many examples of the more personal, reflective voice of the lyric. In his interview with Lindfors in 1970, he points out that his writing always incorporates several styles. He describes his poetry as ranging from “complex Hopkinsian stuff” to “a kind of colloquial, conversational, unadorned poetry” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 50). The choice he makes on how to proceed, he explains, depends entirely on how the idea germinates. “... [V]ery often I wish that my best poetry would be a simple, singing kind of poetry,” he says. “But if it presents itself as a complex notion or image initially, I tend to accept that” (50). Several decades later, those comments still remain valid in many respects. This approach remains the underlying logic of his poetry throughout his writing career.

\*\*\*

Over and above writing poetry, Brutus’ also displays a keen love of language as a medium of communication. Through his work with the ALA and UWAP, he participates in various initiatives to promote the use of indigenous languages in Africa. In relation to South Africa specifically, he asserts that all the languages of the country should be treated equally under the Constitution. However, he makes an important practical qualification. “All languages of South Africa are entitled to equal treatment,” he tells Van Wyk (193), “but they may not all

demand equal treatment or require equal treatment in the sense that some are spoken by very small groups.”

Presumably he chooses to write in English for a similar reason, even though he is fluent in Afrikaans as well: it enables him to reach a wider audience both in South Africa and globally.<sup>257</sup> However, he is mindful of the fact that English is not the home language of most people on the continent. This is an additional reason why he makes a conscious attempt to simplify his poetry after he comes out of prison, he says: “... [O]f course, if one is writing as I would be principally for the people of my own continent, and particularly those who are just becoming familiar with the English language – ... I think then one must avoid embroidery or anything that would be an interference in, and a barrier against communication between writer and listener” (Pieterse 58).



Nevertheless, in the same way that he does not always act in accordance with his own declared antipathy towards the incorporation of propaganda in poetry, he does not always adhere to an easily accessible vocabulary either. The attraction to certain words – because of the particular nuance embedded in it – is often irresistible. Perhaps this is sometimes the result of a certain cultivated pomposity; he himself describes some of his writing as “self-display” (W. Thompson 73). An example of such a contrived effort is the following early poem written while still in South Africa:

Profligate seminal milliards

my ego's co-existences

---

<sup>257</sup> Brutus refuses to choose between the opposing views of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the use of indigenous languages by African writers. “... [W]hen I am asked to take sides between Achebe and Ngugi, I say I am on the side of both,” he says (Sustar 165). “I am sympathetic to those who are opposed to the colonial language, but I don't condemn those who use the colonial language, particularly under the circumstances that gave it to them.”

yearn with theftuous motility  
 for acquisition of your other selves:  
 in your girded scenic basin  
 facsimile of primal shores  
 they orgy (*luxe, calme et volupte*)<sup>258</sup>  
 while I, lacustrine mallard,  
 brood, preen and nest. (*Stubborn 55*)

At other times, though, his employment of a more complex vocabulary is informed by a desire to communicate as precisely and as fully as possible. As a result, his poetry sometimes includes arcane or esoteric language. He clearly takes much delight in the different shades of meaning in individual words, and even displays a playfulness in his choice of language at times. The extract from the following poem is an example: “In the stupendously complex/interactions of infinite intelligence/I am an infinitesimal cell/interacting with my fellows/in a sempiternal dance of axons and dendrites ...” (*Poetry 60*).

In addition, Brutus often draws on the specialised vocabulary of mythology: Laocoon, Circe, Thor, Oedipus, Icarus, Pegasus and Medea are just some of the figures who feature in his poetry. He also includes references to religious figures (among them, St Francis of Assisi and St Jude), artists (including Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso and Raphael) and classical music composers (for instance, Beethoven, Schubert and Baldassare Galuppi). Astronomy, which demands a specialised knowledge, is another favourite point of reference (Orion features most often, followed by the Southern Cross, but the constellation Sagitta and the star Aldeberan make appearances too).

---

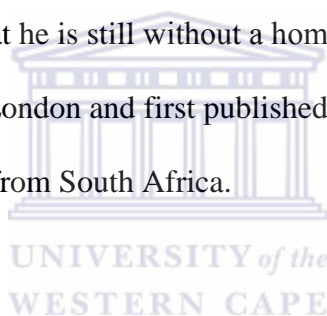
<sup>258</sup> *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* (“Luxury, Calm and Pleasure”) is the title of an oil painting by the French artist Henri Matisse (Chilvers, Osborne and Farr 321).

He employs these diverse frames of reference, along with an extensive vocabulary, quite deliberately to help him convey a particular emotion, idea or event. They enrich his poetry by enabling him to express himself more precisely and comprehensively than would otherwise have been possible. While he does sometimes lapse into ostentatious displays of knowledge, more often than not he applies his exceptional command of the English language and his familiarity with a wide range of fields to add important new layers of meaning to his poetry.

\*\*\*

As noted, the content of his poetry deals with a wide range of issues. However, the one single element that unites various themes of Brutus' poetry during different parts of his life is a sense of displacement – whether in apartheid South Africa, exile or post-1990 South Africa. He first begins to feel disconnected and alienated from South Africa during the 1950s and 1960s because it denies him full civil and human rights. He tells Simon Lewis that when apartheid rejects him as fully human, it became necessary for him to “assert I was not part of that society” (“Speaking” 154). His displacement in exile is obvious: he is forced to uproot himself and his family, and to start a new life in an unfamiliar environment outside the country. In an interview with Van Wyk, he memorably describes exile as “the ultimate punishment” because it completely separates an individual from his or her homeland (203). After 1990, when he is legally able to return to South Africa, he does not do so immediately even though he has invested so much time and effort in the anti-apartheid struggle. In some ways, he now feels even more estranged from South Africa: this time he feels betrayed by the outcome of the political agreements reached during the CODESA negotiations. For this reason, he does not feel any sense of homecoming when he returns to South Africa.

His displacement is evident in many poems. Chapter 2 contains several examples of his despair while in South Africa. In one poem, for instance, he declares: “I am out of love with you for now;/cold-sodden in my misery/... You have asked too much of me” (*Simple* 41). In exile, he often expresses a longing for South Africa. Chapter 3 provides numerous examples of his sense of loss, most notably in the volumes *Thoughts Abroad* (in particular the mournful “I am driftwood”) (5-9) and *Poems from Algiers* (“I am alien in Africa and everywhere” is a pertinent example) (18). After 1990, his disappointment in political developments in South Africa becomes a recurrent theme in many poems. He even accuses some of his former political comrades of treachery, for instance in the poems “Forgive me, comrades” (*Remembering* 15) and “Memory” (*Leafdrift* 93). The result of such disillusionment is that he feels that he is still without a home. His poem “Home-Walking Blues” (*Leafdrift* 89), written in London and first published in 1999, is an indication of his despair and continued alienation from South Africa.



Another striking indication of Brutus’ disconnection from any particular place – whether in South Africa or outside – is the poetic personae that he employs. Even though he is attracted to the troubadour because it offers him a composite poetic identity as a fighter, lover and singer, it is not coincidental that the medieval figure roams from one place or country to another. In one interview, he specifically refers to the constant movement of the troubadour (Lindfors et al 27). And while he initially resists assuming the persona of the exile, as noted before, its presence in much of his poetry written outside the country is obvious. He even declares once that “I *am* the exile/am the wanderer” (*Simple* 137; emphasis in the original). While in exile, he begins to expand his poetic identity and intermittently assumes a broader, more cosmopolitan identity. In the last poem in *Thoughts Abroad*, for instance, he proclaims that “all the world is mine and to love/and all of its humankind” (28). In “Flying, after



Seattle” (*Leafdrift* 72), he celebrates his membership of a new worldwide community, and expresses his confidence in its collective efforts to bring about a better world.

However, as pointed out previously, Brutus’ poetic personae do not exist separately from each other in different periods of his life. At times, the troubadour poetic persona continues to be present in exile; his cosmopolitan voice already begins to emerge in exile; and, even when the cosmopolitan becomes his most dominant poetic persona after 1990, the exile can still often be detected. The employment of different personae in his poetry is an indication of how he struggles to come to terms with his displacement: he resorts to different poetic personae because they meet different needs at different times.



Bhabha’s elaboration of Freud’s notion of the unhomely is employed as the main analytical tool with which to understand and interpret Brutus’ poetry. It provides a mechanism with which to identify common elements in the content of his poems and his poetic personae in a body of work which spans more than half a century. My dissertation argues that a state of unhomeliness – a sense of estrangement based on his displacement and alienation – is at the centre of Brutus’ poetry. Nowhere does he sufficiently feel a sense of belonging; he remains disconnected and out of place wherever he is.

My dissertation argues that Brutus attempts to respond to his unhomeliness in different ways. At first, he lays claim to a patriotic love for South Africa. He initially identifies closely with Scott’s poem “Lay of the Last Minstrel” because of its implicit statement of patriotism – “a statement *for* patriotism which I assumed I was entitled to make ... an assumption that South

Africa was and always would be my native land” (“Introduction” 364; emphasis in the original). In exile, he later expresses some discomfort with such a narrow identity. “I felt I was not localized, I couldn’t be kept in my place,” he states. “And this meant that one transcended a local patriotism” (Lindfors, “Somehow” 55). He insists that “we ought to be patriots of the world rather than of a country” (55).

However, he is still intimately attached to South Africa, both emotionally and politically, in exile. His homeland remains the main focus of his life and poetry. He attempts to rationalise this – not entirely convincingly – by arguing that he can be most effective politically within a context which he knows best. “I restrict myself to fight for liberty in regard to the country of my origin, wherever it is possible, and I cannot do more,” he tells Berger in 1980 (78). The same applies to his poetry. “... [W]hat I’m trying to do ... is choose a specific incident, a specific locale and then make a very specific reaction to it,” he tells Van Wyk of his poetry in South Africa during the early 1960s (193). This undoubtedly continues to be his approach in later years in exile. For this reason, my dissertation argues that Brutus is very much a rooted cosmopolitan in exile; he continues to display an intense attachment to South Africa, despite public comments in which he defines himself as a citizen of the world.

After 1990 – both in response to his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the CODESA negotiations and to the growing power and reach of economic and political globalisation – he increasingly participates in the international campaigns of the WSF. Some of his later poems reflect this by resorting to a collective voice rather than utilising the individual “I” so characteristic of lyric poetry. Notable examples are “SAA 747” (*Remembering* 16) and “Flying, after Seattle” (72). Several other poems also suggest a shift from a rooted cosmopolitanism to a rootless cosmopolitanism. Bruce Robbins dismisses the notion of a

rootless cosmopolitanism as outdated and limited because it prioritises “primary allegiance to the community of humankind at the expense of all smaller allegiances” (15).

However, using the word “rootless” in relation to cosmopolitanism does not necessarily have to be a negative attribute; after all, the notion of rootlessness is implicit in the original meaning of the word “cosmopolitan”. As Robbins himself points out, the word originally refers to “the overriding of local loyalties by a cosmic, transnational, or species-wide perspective” (2). Its primary motivation, he notes, is “its impulse toward global justice” (3). These descriptions certainly apply, in general terms, to Brutus’ poetry and politics in later years: he was, clearly, reverting to cosmopolitanism as originally conceptualised. In any event, as noted previously, Brutus himself once declares that he does not have any roots. “I think my lack of roots began when I refused to accept being a South African on the terms dictated,” he tells Lewis (“Speaking” 155). “The roots they [the apartheid government] were trying to sever were ones I had refused to develop.” By his own account, therefore, Brutus becomes a rootless citizen of the world.

\*\*\*

In addition to a substantial body of poetry, Brutus leaves behind an important legacy in literature in other ways as well. He received wide recognition as an educationist. Besides his respective full-time positions at Northwestern University and the University of Pittsburgh, he was invited to teach at many universities in the USA. In 1975 he spent a year as Visiting Professor of English and Ethnic Studies at the University of Texas (Lindfors, “Introduction” 3). In 1981-1982, he was Visiting Professor in African Literature and Poetry at Amherst

College (“Dennis” 61).<sup>259</sup> In 1983 he was Visiting Professor at Dartmouth College’s Programme of African and African-American Studies for a quarter (61), while in 1984 he was Adjunct Professor at Northeastern University and Cornell Professor at Swarthmore College in 1985-1986 (61).<sup>260</sup> In 2001, during a semester as Poet-in-Residence at Worcester State College, his responsibilities included co-teaching an Honours course, “Literature and Human Rights” (Goldwyn 90).

Thus, despite limited information on Brutus’ performance as a university teacher, it nevertheless appears that his contribution in this area has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Brutus himself plays down his achievements in this regard. After standing in for Mphahlele at the University of Denver, he says during an interview: “I thought I did a very bad job. I left there very unhappy with myself” (Lindfors, *Tapes* 133). And, while at Northwestern University, he makes the comment that “I am convinced that I am not by temperament either a teacher or an academic” (131). However, others appear to feel differently. In the same interview, Brutus acknowledges that the reports from Denver on his performance are “quite good” (133). And, despite his suspicion that his appointment at Northwestern University was initially motivated by political expediency, he recognises that he must have performed sufficiently well in order to be granted tenure.

While at Northwestern University, he teaches African literature, which he describes as “my main specialty” (Miller 55). In addition, he also teaches various courses in American and British literature, including his old favourites Browning and Tennyson (55). In 1986 he moves to the University of Pittsburgh as an adjunct professor in the Department of Black

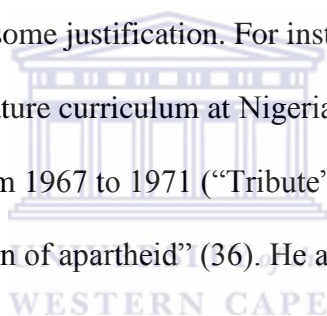
---

<sup>259</sup> Elsewhere the date of Brutus’ visit to Amherst College is given as 1982-1983 (Idehen 187).

<sup>260</sup> McLuckie gives the year of Brutus’ visits to Dartmouth College, Northeastern University and Swarthmore College as 1985 (31).

Community Education and Research (Lewis, “Dennis”, *Journal* 55), and later becomes chairperson of the department and professor of African Literature (Brutus, “Dennis” 62). In 1992, he spends a term as visiting professor in the English Department at the University of Durban-Westville (Stiebel 53).<sup>261</sup>

There is also some anecdotal evidence to suggest that, through his writing, he reaches many students in other parts of the world besides those where he taught. Simon Lewis, a professor of English at the College of Charleston in the USA, suggests that Brutus made “profound impressions on students all over the world”, including in the USA, UK, China, Nigeria and South Africa (“Dennis”, *Tydskrif* 122). While he does not provide any supporting evidence, such a claim may not be without some justification. For instance, Ojaide remembers Brutus’ poetry as part of the African literature curriculum at Nigeria’s University of Ibadan when he was an undergraduate student from 1967 to 1971 (“Tribute” 36). Brutus’ first two collections, says Ojaide, “made us feel the pain of apartheid” (36). He adds:



I believe Brutus’s poetry stirred many of us in the English Department to volunteer to be bused over a hundred miles to Lagos to demonstrate against apartheid and its supporters. Brutus sharpened our consciousness in such a way as not to be satisfied with personal comfort but to fight for others who are held down by ungodly laws of tyranny. (36)

That is a quite remarkable tribute to Brutus as a writer: it illustrates that, at its most eloquent and skilfull, his poetry is able to rouse its readers into action and, in some way, attempt to

---

<sup>261</sup> Non-literary stints at other universities include an appointment as Visiting Distinguished Humanist at the University of Colorado in 1992-1993 (Brutus, “Literature” 104) and Honorary Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Centre for Civil Society from early 2005 until August 2009 (Bond, personal e-mail, 31 Oct. 2012).

make the world a better place for others. That is precisely what Brutus saw as one of his most important roles as a poet. Like the French poet Saint-John Perse, whom he quotes with approval in his poem “No rewards”, he believes the poet must be “the guilty conscience of his time” (*Leafdrift* 74).

Like Ojaide, Ndebele also recalls the impact Brutus’ poetry made on him when he first encountered it as an undergraduate English student at the University of Botswana-Lesotho-Swaziland (UBLS) between 1969 and 1973. He recalls in a personal interview that he wrote an extended essay on Brutus based on *Letters to Martha*, in which he found “quite compelling evocations of prison life and moments of intense lyricism in that harshness” (4 Feb. 2013). Mzamane, another South African graduate of the UBLS, later taught Brutus’ poetry to students at the same university as well as in Nigeria. “He resonated with my audiences, but I would say he resonated primarily because of the South African situation,” he recounts in a telephonic interview (13 Feb. 2013). “He was one of the first to turn this subject into poetic tropes for our contemplation.” This, in itself, is a major achievement.

\*\*\*

Brutus also plays a key role from the early 1970s in helping to establish a number of organisations with the specific intention of supporting and promoting the work of writers (in particular, African writers). The most successful of these efforts is the ALA, which he helped to launch in the USA. In 1974, he is chairperson of the steering committee set up to establish the association and is elected founding president at the ALA’s first conference in Austin the following year. At the end of the conference, Lindfors acknowledges the “enormous contribution” of Brutus (“Concluding” 58). According to Lindfors, “[h]e is the one who

contacted writers and got them here; he is the one who organized the Austin Working Committee, and everyone who served on this Committee is aware of the crucial role he played in planning the events of this weekend” (58). No doubt the experience that Brutus gained in SASA and SANROC equipped him with the necessary administrative and organisational skills to perform such a vital coordinating role.

Brutus regards the ALA as one of his most important contributions to literature and justifiably describes it as “the leading organisation in its field” (Van Wyk 211). It is open to all writers, teachers and scholars, and strives to promote scholarship on African literature and the teaching of African literature (“ALA Constitution and Bylaws”). “Until the formation of the ALA, African literature did not exist as a category – it was not in the syllabus,” according to Brutus. “The ALA legitimized this field of study, so that people could get promotions, recommendations, publish work, and do a whole range of things as a consequence of having an association that has intellectual and academic credibility” (Sustar 162-163). He adds: “A lot of the pursuits over the years in African literature come out of the sheer fact of the establishment of the association” (163). This year the ALA held its 40<sup>th</sup> annual conference at the University of Witwatersrand, and included a paper on Brutus’ poetry – a fitting tribute to one of its founding members.

His attempt in 1975 to launch UWAP, with Soyinka as one of the prime movers, was less successful. Unlike the ALA, this was intended to be an organisation specifically of writers. Among its main objectives were to promote African literature “in all languages in use on the continent” and “[t]o concern ourselves with the interests of writers in all aspects that concern their profession and well-being” (“Declaration” 8). With Senghor as president, Brutus was one of the vice-presidents of UWAP, along with the Ugandan writer Taban Lo Liyong.

Soyinka was secretary, while other co-founders included wa Thiong'o and the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah (Sustar 163).

“Brutus was UWAP,” recalls Mzamane. “But unlike SASA, which gave birth to SANROC, UWAP remained a romantic idea only” (“Dennis Vincent Brutus, 1924-2009: A Tribute”). After consulting Soyinka in 1989, Brutus again tried to revive the organisation (Uzoatu 30). According to Mzamane, Brutus set up a steering committee which included Soyinka, Achebe, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Edward Brathwaite. However, these efforts, too, appear to have met with limited success, once again presumably because of the various commitments of the organisation’s leadership.<sup>262</sup>

Nevertheless, what the attempt to launch UWAP does indicate, is a continuing interest and desire by Brutus to provide support for African literature and languages. Around the same time, more modestly, he helps to form the Africa Network in the USA and became its chairperson. As the name indicates, its main purpose was to provide an information network. “It anticipated the potential of the Internet by creating a national organization,” recalls Brutus (Sustar 163). In addition, the Africa Network gave annual awards to those it regarded as deserving writers. It enjoyed more longevity than UWAP. In 1988, as noted, Mattera was given an award for his memoir. At the age of 64, then, Brutus was still actively engaged in supporting and promoting African writing. His efforts may not always have succeeded, but he carried on trying.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>262</sup> Brutus once refers to the increasing demands on Soyinka’s time after he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986 (Sustar 163).



While the primary focus of this dissertation is on Brutus' poetry, it is not beyond its scope to make reference to his role as an international humanitarian.<sup>263</sup> After all, his belief in a common humanity is at the centre of his approach to both poetry and politics. He expresses this view with remarkable clarity and foresight in his interview with Lindfors in 1970. Then, already, he articulates a position which challenges the notion that people owe their primary – never mind exclusive – loyalty to a particular country or homeland, and instead locates people within a broader community which transcends national boundaries. "... [T]here's very little justification for being sentimentally and narrowly attached to a particular strip of the earth," he says, "because our concerns more and more are global" (Lindfors, "Somehow" 55).

At around this time, Brutus' poetry increasingly reflects his international concerns. One of the earliest examples is "Fry[']s still sell chocolate" (*Thoughts Abroad* 15), published in 1970, which comments on the plight of cocoa workers. Other poems during the early 1970s which deal with events elsewhere in the world include "Your breasts under my lips" (*Strains* 29), about the Vietnam war, "No matter for history" (41), about the coup d'état in Chile and Neruda's murder, and "At N'djili airport", about the assassination of Lumumba (42). His most sustained engagement on any subject other than South Africa is, of course, the series of poems in *China Poems* written in mid-1973 after his visit to China that year.

In politics, forging international solidarity against apartheid is one of Brutus' earliest campaigns. In 1955, he forms the Co-ordinating Committee for International Relations in Sport (Bose 50). When SASA is launched in 1958, Brutus becomes its founding secretary and initiates an international campaign to exclude South Africa from the Olympic Games if the

---

<sup>263</sup> Simon Lewis speculates that Brutus was driven by "an intuitive blend of humanism, Marxism, and liberation theology" ("Dennis", *Safundi* 306). This may not be far off the mark. As noted earlier, Brutus writes – with apparent approval – that "Marxists,/Catholics,/all Humanists,/seek a Renaissance" (*Poetry* 13). And his world-view certainly corresponds to Julian Go's view of cosmopolitanism as "a form of humanism that looks beyond provincial identities (including national ones) and emphasizes the shared humanity of individuals" (210).

national Olympic committee refuses to allow all South Africans to represent the country (Brutus, “Dennis” 55). He becomes even more active in international affairs between 1966 and 1969 as director of IDAF’s World Campaign for the Release of Political Prisoners while in exile in the UK. After he moves to the USA, he participates in political campaigns which involve a number of countries – from Puerto Rico to Chile to Greece. By 1974, he can state without any exaggeration that “the notion that my struggle is an international struggle is not something I have to theorize about; it’s a living thing, my life is an involvement in challenging injustice wherever it might be” (Miller 47). This international consciousness is one of the defining characteristics of his poetry and politics.



In recognition of his contribution to poetry and politics, Brutus receives many awards. In the USA, his first honorary doctorate is from Worcester State College in 1982, followed by a second from the University of Massachusetts in 1985 and a third from Northeastern University in Boston in 1990 (McLuckie 29, 31 and 33). He also receives several honorary doctorates in South Africa. In May 1997, the University of Durban-Westville awards him an honorary doctorate (Bond, personal e-mail, 12 Sep. 2014). In April 2009 he receives honorary doctorates from Rhodes University and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Thomas xi). These doctorates are in a number of different fields, ranging from “humane letters” (McLuckie 29) to law to literature.

Other awards in the USA include the Annual Langston Hughes Award in 1986 from the City College of New York (32, 258), an affiliate of the City University of New York, and the First Annual Paul Robeson Award in 1989 for promoting art through education from the non-profit

American organisation Moonstone (32). The Chicago Chapter of TransAfrica, an African-American policy organisation which was centrally involved in the disinvestment campaign from South Africa, gives him its Steve Biko Memorial Award in 1984 (258), while the Washington School of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), one of the oldest progressive think-tanks in the USA, grants him an Outstanding Teaching Award in 1987 (32, 258). In 2005, he receives the Fonlon-Nichols Award, a lifetime achievement award conferred since 1993 by the ALA and the University of Ottawa (McCorkle, personal e-mail, 30 Aug. 2014).<sup>264</sup>

In South Africa, Brutus receives a merit award from SACOS in 1991 for campaigning against racism in sport (McLuckie 35). In December 2007, he is named among 34 people to be inducted into the South African Sports Hall of Fame (*IOL* 6 Dec. 2007). However, he famously rejects it, among other reasons, for its “shocking celebration of cricket’s racist rebel tours” – a reference to the inclusion of cricket administrator Ali Bacher in the same year (Letter). He receives a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Department of Arts and Culture in 2008 – the first, and so far only, recognition of his contribution to literature by any post-apartheid South African government.

\*\*\*

Finally, there are many other rich sites of study in Brutus’ poetry. This is to be expected in a body of work which includes hundreds of poems written over more than half a century and in several different continents. In particular, the presence of the following elements in his poetry

---

<sup>264</sup> This award is in honour of Bernard Fonlon, former head of the African Literature Department at Cameroon’s University of Yaoundé, and Lee Nichols, a journalist who reported on African literature for the American-based radio station Voice of America (“Fonlon-Nichols Award”). Two of his interviews with Brutus are quoted in my dissertation.



**Fig. 23: Dennis Brutus with his Lifetime Achievement Award from the South African government's Department of Arts and Culture in 2008.**

**Photographer: Patrick Bond.**

are worthwhile subjects of further attention: religion, nature, music and the erotic. In addition to these themes in the content of his poetry, another important site of study is his organisational role within the ALA.

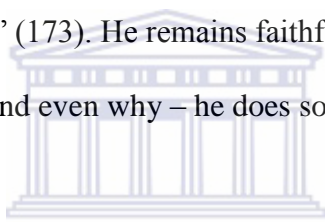
By Brutus' own admission, religion is a recurrent – though sporadic – theme in his poetry. He observes that the appearance of religious thought in his writing corresponds to “particular phases of my life, arising out of certain circumstances” (“Constellation” 28). Prison is unquestionably one such phase: he writes part 4 of “Letters to Martha” (*Letters to Martha* 5) and “Prayer” (33) during this period. “Oh God” (*Stubborn Hope* 43) and “Dear God” (67) are other examples of poems in which Brutus directly addresses God, while “Our aims our dreams our destinations” (*Letters to Martha* 53-57) is an extended meditation on human suffering and the nature of God.<sup>265</sup> “By the waters of Babylon” in *Seven South African Poets* (18), a reflection on exile which references Psalm 137 in the Bible, is a more subtle example of his turn to religion in his poetry.

As Brutus affirms in the last line of “Christmas 1965” in the same anthology, at the heart of his writing on religion is a deeply held belief in “man’s inherent divinity” (28). This statement is echoed nearly two decades later in the opening poem of *Airs and Tributes*, which refers in line 10 to “the divinity within me” (1). In the last poem of his last volume, “Out there, in the ever-present future”, he once again contemplates the existence of a divine being. “I am assuming, of course, God exists,” he writes in line 3 of the first stanza, and adds in the second-last line of the last stanza: “presuming, of course, that God does exist” (*Leafdrift* 198).

---

<sup>265</sup> While on Robben Island, Brutus read work by Thomas à Kempis’ (notably *The Imitation of Christ*, “a book I read often at one stage in prison when I was trying to achieve some kind of spiritual depth”), and St Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori (Lindfors, *Tapes* 125).

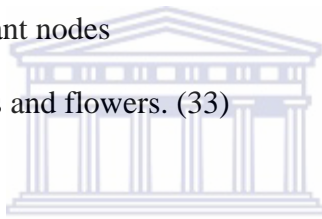
As mentioned earlier, Brutus also refers to various Christian figures in his writing. However, his views on religion are not without complications or contradictions. In a tape recording in September 1974, he acknowledges that he finds religion “difficult to deal with” in his poetry (Lindfors, *Tapes* 173) and, in another recording the following month, he describes his ambivalent feelings towards it as “a kind of stumbling and groping between two worlds, a material, wholly natural world, and a supernatural and spiritual world” (125). He adds: “For now, I teeter or totter between the two, stagger around without being able to define my world and therefore being unable to define myself in relation to a world” (125). However, he firmly indicates his intention to continue incorporating religious thought into his poetry “when it is a matter of absolute honesty and because there is no way of excluding it from the statement of my thought at that particular time” (173). He remains faithful to this precept throughout his writing career. How and when – and even why – he does so is a worthwhile area of research.



Not entirely unrelated is the presence of nature in his poetry. While there is some research on the prominence of landscape in his writing (including in this dissertation), not much specific attention is given to plants, flowers and trees. Sometimes these occur in Brutus’ poetry as objects of beauty in their own right; at other times, they are used as symbolic elements. He clearly has a vast knowledge on the subject. His trees include the banyan, oaks, pines, willows, jacarandas, bluegums, cypresses and poplars. Countless other trees are not named; once he even writes an ode about a tree, “The beauty of this single tree” (*Stubborn Hope* 8). Leaves, too, feature frequently; note, for instance, the first two stanzas of “Autumn/Abboud/Aubade” (*Salutes and Censures* 26). Roses in bloom – “red flames and orange,/tea-rose pink and white” (*Thoughts Abroad* 22) – are a particular favourite. Occasionally there are petunias, peonies, strelitzias, tulips, hydrangeas, hibiscus and wisteria.

And though *Salutes and Censures* is one of Brutus' most consistently and explicitly political volumes, it still includes the following celebration of nature:

Pink cherryblossom and gold forsythia  
 and crocus purple and white and gold  
 all leap into bloom  
 at the first hints of heat  
 as winter flickers into spring  
 but, best of all, the lilac tree  
 aquiver like flocks of twittering birds  
 puts forth myriads of vibrant nodes  
 soon to be buds and leaves and flowers. (33)



In this poem, the trees and plants are both objects of natural beauty and symbols of hope. Brutus consistently and imaginatively uses them in this dual way in his poetry. An examination of these aspects will add much to an appreciation of his poetry; in particular, it will help to shift the largely one-dimensional focus from the political content of his writing.

Besides adopting the troubadour as a poetic persona, music also features prominently in Brutus' poetry in other ways. In the same way as religion, it is especially important to him in prison. In "Our hands meet" (*Airs* 11), he writes about meeting Mercuri, whose theme song from the film *Never on Sunday* was a favourite of a prison guard on Robben Island. He recalls the guard whistling this song in Part V of the "Endurance" (*Still* 12-13). However, Brutus seldom devotes an entire poem to music. "Words for Music", dedicated to the American folk singer Mary Travers (*Strains* 13), is a rare example. More often than not,

music is incorporated in a poem to evoke a certain emotion or to highlight a certain event – hence certain references to the classical music composers identified earlier or to contemporary musicians such as jazz composer and saxophonist Stanley Turrentine (*Poetry* 56) and blues songwriter and singer Muddy Waters (73). Singing is also a noticeable presence in some poems, for instance in “Swatches of brassy music” (*Stubborn Hope* 44) and “Song” (*Still* 22). Exploring the presence and function of music in Brutus’ poetry will add an important new dimension to studies of his work.

An examination of the erotic in his poetry will fulfil a similar function. Some work has been done in this regard, most notably Folli’s journal article and occasional references by Lindfors, Simon Lewis and Hal Wylie. However, the frequency with which the erotic occurs in Brutus’ work deserves further inquiry. Brutus himself claims that the erotic appears more frequently in his work than in that of any other African poet who writes in English. “It seems to me that to suppress the sexual erotic element in poetry is dishonest if in fact it is a component of your experience and [if] you either exclude it or repress it, you deny its existence,” he states. “If it is a part of your experience then the honest thing is to include it, and poetry is always about honesty” (Van Wyk 201-202).

Once again, it is the political content of Brutus’ poetry which obscures other aspects of his work. Brutus himself recognises this problem. “... [T]here’s a good deal of my poetry which in fact is erotic at one level even while it is being erotic at another level,” he says (Van Wyk 201). “... [T]his may be why some people have not identified the erotic element because they’re focusing on say the political or the landscape.”



In addition, another reason why it is worth reappraising the presence of the erotic in his poetry is that it is the one other subject – besides politics – which attracts much criticism in his work. Concerns include his portrayal of women as submissive sexual partners (there is some discussion of this aspect in relation to the troubadour in chapter 1). Other objections relate to the presence of violence which sometimes accompanies his depiction of the sexual act. On the basis of such criticism, there is sufficient justification to revisit the portrayal of the erotic in Brutus' poetry.

Besides these additional avenues of research, Brutus' role in the ALA is another area which lends itself to further inquiry. As noted, he played a key role in launching the association and continued to participate in its activities for many years, including hosting its conferences. Today the ALA is still the most vibrant and active formation involved in promoting African literature. Some material has been published on the establishment of the ALA, and Brutus discusses his involvement in interviews with Sustar (160-163) and Van Wyk (210-211). However, the records and documents of the ALA will no doubt yield much additional information. Such a study of Brutus' activities in the launch of the ALA, and of his continued participation in its work, will provide greater acknowledgement of his role within the ALA and help to address an important gap in African literary studies.

\*\*\*

There is still much work to be done on Brutus' poetry. While this dissertation was able to gain access to some archival material, there is still a vast amount of information to examine. Much of it is housed in the USA in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern

University, the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Worcester State University and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library. In South Africa, NELM is the custodian of most of his documents, while the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Civil Society maintains an online archive on his political work.

However, it is Brutus' volumes of poetry which remain his most important literary legacy. He himself notes that his poetry is the one feature that is constant in his life and which offers him the most profound sense of fulfilment. In an interview with Berger, he observes: "My poems were to me like a harbour of security in this complete abandonment by the world; at least this was a sure accomplishment, these poems had an existence, and all the rest was not in my power" (77). Although this observation is made in the specific context of imprisonment, the trajectory of his life suggests that this comment continues to apply after his release from Robben Island as well.

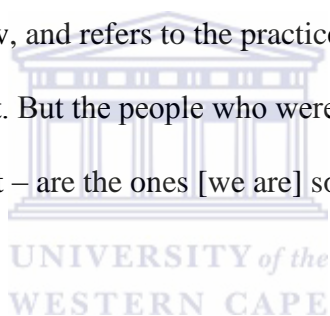


In South Africa, there is very little official recognition of his substantial contribution to literature specifically and to society more generally. Yet renaming sites after him or erecting memorials in his honour will not necessarily be the most appropriate way to pay tribute to him. His poetry is his most significant legacy; the most fitting way to honour him would be to help make his poetry become a living legacy. Perhaps one of the most effective ways of doing so is for it to become prescribed reading at school.

There is support for such a form of remembrance even from within the ranks of the ruling party. Serote, once a senior official of the ANC and government, describes Brutus as follows in a personal interview: "He was [an] astute academic; he was a genuine and committed activist; and he believed in being creative through poetry. All of those things combined

[were] a major contribution . . . , not only to South Africa, but to the human experience” (25 Sep. 2012). He adds: “One wishes that people like that, at the present moment here in South Africa, were taught or prescribed at high schools and universities . . . That’s our history.”

Langa, also once a senior ANC activist in exile, similarly holds Brutus in high regard, especially for his pioneering role in South African poetry. “Dennis is someone that we regarded as an institution, as a national treasure,” he says in a personal interview (28 Aug. 2012). “He opened a lot of doors for people and he really put South Africa, as it were, on the poetic map.” Like Serote, he believes there is insufficient acknowledgement of Brutus. “We are very poor as a society at recognising and nurturing what is very, very, very important in our lives,” he says in the interview, and refers to the practice of renaming roads after certain people: “I’m sure that’s important. But the people who were our conscience – whether we agreed with that conscience or not – are the ones [we are] so hell-bent, in a hurry, to forget . . . it’s terrible.”



Ndebele, too, draws attention to the significance of Brutus’ early poetry. “He just stood out on his own in a particular style and . . . theme,” he says. “He was an expressive artist at a particular point in time, giving us access to what was not easily available – the inner life of an oppressed people to overcome their circumstances through the power of art” (personal interview, 4 Feb. 2013). But it was not only for the content of his poetry that Ndebele holds him in high esteem; in fact, he singles out Brutus’ contribution to the lyric form as his main contribution to poetry:

I actually think his poetry defeated his politics – at least, the best of it. I think of those moments of triumphant humanism . . . In a sense, some of his poetry is as artistically

tight as J.M. Coetzee's sparse writing: each word counts, each rhythm counts; each image counts. His best work stood on its own as art more than politics. (personal interview, 4 Feb. 2013)

My dissertation shares this view, and is an attempt to provide evidence in support of such a claim. Despite Brutus' public statements about the importance of politics over poetry in his life, he never stops writing poetry. As Lindfors recalls, "[h]e had a habit of writing poems whenever the mood struck him, putting them down on whatever paper was within easy reach" ("Dennis", McLuckie 166). When Lindfors goes through some of Brutus' papers that he brought to the University of Texas from the UK, he finds poems "penned or penciled on the backs of envelopes, on the pages of newspapers, on magazine covers, on restaurant menus, on departmental memos, on pieces of junk mail, on laundry slips, on scorecards, even on airline vomit bags" (166).



This is surely not the output of someone with a cursory interest in poetry. On occasion, Brutus even deliberately chooses what form of poetry to write on the basis of his time constraints. "... [Y]ou can think about a *haiku* when you are in the plane or in the bus or wherever," he explains. "And you can start shaping it, you don't really need a lot of paper and a lot of space. So that's what I write" (Davis and Ehling 110). He makes this remark during an interview in 1992 – more than two decades after Lindfors' perusal of his UK papers. Brutus is clearly an habitual writer of poetry; it remains an essential part of his life. However irregular and inconsistent his efforts may be, and notwithstanding the uneven quality of some of his writing, he never stops. That is not the practice of someone for whom poetry is an inconsequential preoccupation. As the entry under his name notes in *The Companion to African Literatures* in 2000:

There can be little doubt . . . of his stature as one of South Africa's most important poets. His most memorable poems are those about or closely related to his concrete experiences as an opponent and a victim of apartheid. But as a citizen of the world and a person deeply concerned with human and cultural rights and freedoms he has continued to write thoughtful, delicately crafted, sometimes hauntingly lyrical poems. (Killam and Rowe 52)

Despite his many contradictory public statements, Brutus consistently and imaginatively tries to reconcile poetry and politics – the two enduring passions of his life. He infuses his poetry with politics, and he enriches politics with his poetry. These two realms of human activity – as his own poetry often shows so eloquently – need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, he writes in the preface to Martin's checklist of his poetry that, if he has one regret, "it is that I did not devote more time to the craft of poetry; to the use of language, of images, and of cadences; my excuse is that I was busy doing so much else that seemed to be worthwhile ("Preface" 5). Even so, at his best, Brutus writes poetry of the most exquisite lyrical beauty and intense power.

## WORKS CITED

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### (a) POETRY

- Brutus, Dennis. *Airs and Tributes*. 1989. Ed. Gil Ott. Camden: Whirlwind Press, 1990. Print.
- . "At a Funeral." *Modern Poetry from Africa*. 1963. Ed. Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier. Baltimore: Penguin, 1966. 212. Print.
- . "Challenge Voices." *South* 23 Jan. 1993: 7. Print.
- . "For Chief: A Tribute to Albert John Lut[h]uli." *Africa Today* 15.1 (1968): 46. Print.
- . *China Poems*. Austin: University of Texas, 1975. Print.
- . "On the Death of Chief Albert John Luthuli." *African Arts* 1.4 (1968): 13. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 May 2014.
- . "Denver Poems." 1970. TS Series 35/17, Box 14, Folder 4, Dennis Brutus Papers. Northwestern University, Austin.
- . "Flight/the Exile/Exit." *Transition* 32 (1967): 31. Print.
- . "The Guerillas." *Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems*. Ed. Barry Feinberg. London: Heinemann, 1980. 7. Print.
- . "I am out of love with you for now." *Penpoint* 15 (1963): 43. Print.
- . "I am a rebel and freedom is my cause." *South African Voices*. Ed. Bernth Lindfors. Austin: University of Texas, 1975. 13. Print.
- . "I am the tree." *African Arts* 1.4 (1968): 13. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 May 2014.
- . *Leafdrift*. Ed. Lamont B. Steptoe. Camden: Whirlwind, 2005. Print.
- . *Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison*. 1968. London: Heinemann, 1978. Print.
- . "Lut[h]uli: December 10th 1961." *Seven South African Poets: Poems of Exile*. 1971. Ed.

- Cosmo Pieterse. London: Heinemann, 1979. 15. Print.
- . "Miles of my arid earth." *Seven South African Poets: Poems of Exile*. 1971. Ed. Cosmo Pieterse. London: Heinemann, 1979. 16. Print.
- . "My father, that distant man." *The Gar* 35 (1988): 16. Print.
- . "Patriot." *Penpoint* 15 (1963): 43. Print.
- . *Poems from Algiers*. Austin: University of Texas, 1970. Print.
- . *Poetry and Human Rights: Poems by Dennis Brutus*. 2004. Ed. Ken Gibbs and Wayne Kamin. Worcester: Worcester State College, 2010. Web. 28 Sep. 2012.
- . "For the Prisoners in South Africa." 1994. TS 94.4.14.13, Folder 2, Dennis Brutus Collection. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.
- . "Quixote." *The Gar* 35 (1988): 16. Print.
- . *Remembering*. Camden: Whirlwind Press, 2004. Print.
- . "Remembering the Fort Prison, Johannesburg." *The Black Scholar* 17.4 (1986): 51. JSTOR. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.
- . "Rendezvous." *The SANC* (1945): 26. Print.
- . "Rumour." Patrick Bond. "Fw: Brutus Poem, 'Rumour' (new), 11/05/09." Personal message. 27 Apr. 2013. E-mail.
- . "Sabotage, 1962." *Transition* 10 (1963): 21. Print.
- . *Salutes and Censures*. 1982. Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1984. Print.
- . "Seattle Chant." Patrick Bond. "Fwd: [Debate] Brutus poem, 'Seattle chant' (new), 31/5/09." Personal message. 27 Apr. 2013. E-mail.
- . "A Segmented Piece." Patrick Bond. "Fw: Brutus poems, 'A Segmented Piece' and 'A Segmented World' (new), 4/5/09." Personal message. 27 Apr. 2013. E-mail.
- . *A Simple Lust: Collected Poems of South African Jail and Exile*. London: Heinemann, 1973. Print.

- . *Sirens Knuckles Boots*. Ibadan: Mbari Publications, 1963. Print.
- . "So, for the moment, sweet, is peace." *The Purple Renoster* (1963): 9. Print.
- . "Somehow we survive." *adelphi literary review* (1962): 3. Print.
- . *Still the Sirens*. San Francisco: Pennywhistle Press, 1993. Print.
- . *Strains*. Ed. Wayne Kamin and Chip Dameron. Del Valle: Troubadour Press, 1975. Print.
- . *Stubborn Hope: New Poems and Selected Poems from China Poems and Strains*. London: Heinemann, 1978. Print.
- . "There was a girl." *The Gar* 30 (1977): 16. Print.
- . "To Those Who Persuade Us." *Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems*. Ed. Barry Feinberg. London: Heinemann, 1980. 9. Print.
- . [John Bruin, pseud.] *Thoughts Abroad*. Del Valle: Troubadour Press, 1970. Print.
- . "A troubadour, I traverse all my land." *The Purple Renoster* (1963): 9. Print.
- . "For WCJB: Died in Exile: London March 26, '86." *The Black Scholar* 17.4 (1986): 51. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.
- . "When they deprived me of the evenings." *Penpoint* 15 (1963): 15. Print.

(b) **PROSE**

- Brutus, Dennis. "Africa 2000 in the New Global Context: A Commentary." *Africa Today* 44.4 (1997): 379-384. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Dec. 2012.
- . "African Thought: A Tribute to Alex la Guma." *Memories of Home: The Writings of Alex la Guma*. Ed. Cecil Abrahams. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1991. 3-5. Print.
- . "Childhood Reminiscences." *The Writer in Modern Africa: African Scandinavian Writers' Conference, Stockholm 1967*. Ed. Per Westberg. New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969. 92-98. Print.
- . "Concluding Remarks." *Issue* 6.1 (1976): 58. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.



- . "Constellations of Exile." *Echoes of the Sunbird: An Anthology of Contemporary African Poetry*. Comp. Don Burness. Athens: Ohio UP, 1993. 24-34. Print.
- . "Dennis Brutus 1924 - ." *Contemporary Authors: Autobiography Series*. Vol. 14. Ed. Joyce Nakamura. Detroit: Gale Research, 1991. 53-64. Print.
- . "From the Introduction to *Salutes and Censures*." *From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art (TriQuarterly 69, Spring/Summer 1987)*. Ed. David Bunn and Jane Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. 363-367. Print.
- . Letter. *Sunday Independent* 13 Jan. 2008: 7. Print.
- . "Literature and Change in South Africa." *Research in African Literatures* 24.3 (1993): 101-104. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Dec. 2012.
- . "In Memoriam, Arthur Nortje, 1942-1970." *Research in African Literatures* 2.1 (1971): 26-27. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Apr. 2011.
- . "The Poetry of Suffering: The Black Experience." *Ba Shiru* 4.2 (1973): 1-10. Print.
- . Preface. *Poems of Dennis Brutus: A Checklist, 1945-2004*. Comp. Andrew Martin. Madison: Parallel Press, 2005. 5. Print.
- . "The Prison Courtyard." 94.4.14.13, Folder 2, Dennis Brutus Collection. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.
- . "Reflections on a Return to the Land of Sirens, Knuckles, Boots." *In These Times* 6 -12 Nov. 1991: 8-10. Print.
- . "Robben Island." *Christian Action* (1967): 14-17. Print.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

- Abasiokong, Daniel. "Poetry Pure and Applied: Rabearivelo and Brutus." *Transition* 23 (1965): 45-48. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Apr. 2011.
- Abrahams, Peter. *A Blackman Speaks of Freedom!* Durban: Universal Printing Works, 1940.

Print.

---. *The Coyaba Chronicles: Reflections on the Black Experience in the Twentieth Century*.

Cape Town: David Philip, 2000. Print.

---. *Tell Freedom*. 1954. London: Faber and Faber, 1988. Print.

Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 1957. Orlando: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988. Print.

---. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. New York: Norton, 1953. Print.

Ackerman, Bruce. "Rooted Cosmopolitanism." *Ethics* 104.3 (1994): 516-535. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 July 2014.

Adams, Sarah. "In My Garment There Is Nothing but God: Recent Work by Ibrahim El Salahi." *African Arts* 39.2 (2006): 6-35, 86. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 June 2014.

Adhikari, Mohamed. "*Let us Live for our Children*": *The Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1940*. Cape Town: Buchu Books; University of Cape Town Press, 1993. Print.

Akehurst, F.R.P., and Judith M. Davis, eds. *A Handbook of the Troubadours*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Print.

Akosu, Tyohdzuah. "Poetry in the Repressive State: The Example of Dennis Brutus." *Review of English and Literary Studies* 3.1 (1986): 37-52. Print.

"ALA Constitution and Bylaws." African Literature Association. Web. 26 Aug. 2014.

Alexander, Peter. *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982. Print.

Alfonsi, Sandra Resnick. *Masculine Submission in Troubadour Lyric*. New York: Peter Lang, 1986. Print.

Ali, Syed Amir. "Arabia – Its Geographical and Physical Condition – The Ancient Arabs." *A Short History of the Saracens*. By Ali. 1926. New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1981: 1-4. Print.

- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Project Gutenberg E-book. Web. 25 May 2013.
- Allen, Chadwick. "Hero with Two Faces: The Lone Ranger as Treaty Discourse." *American Literature* 68.3 (1996): 609-638. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 June 2014.
- Alvarez-Pereyre, Jacques. *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa*. London: Heinemann, 1984. Print.
- Amuta, Chidi. *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*. London: Zed Books; Atlantic Highlands: Institute for African Alternatives, 1989. Print.
- Angamuthu, Vasantha. "I do not feel even a sense of homecoming: poet Brutus." *Daily News* 22 May 1992: n.pag. Print.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Cosmopolitan Patriots." *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*. Ed. Joshua Cohen. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. 21-29. Print.
- . "Cosmopolitan Patriots." *Critical Inquiry* 23.3 (1997): 617-639. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Sep. 2012.
- . *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. London: Allen Lane, 2006. Print.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- . *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2000. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Attwell, David. *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005. Print.
- Attwell, David, and Derek Attridge, eds. *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print.
- Auden, W.H. *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957*. 1966. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. Print.
- Auden, W.H., and John Garrett. Introduction. *The Poet's Tongue*. 1935. Ed. Auden and

- Garrett. London: G. Bell, 1962. v-x. Print.
- Ayling, Ronald. "Statements and Poetry: *Salutes and Censures* Re-examined." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 135-141. Print.
- Bardien, Ebrahim. Personal letter. c.25 Sep. 1998. MS.
- Barnard, Rita. "Speaking Places: Prison, Poetry, and the South African Nation." *Research in African Literatures* 32.3 (2001): 155-176. JSTOR. Web. 13 Apr. 2011.
- Barnett, Ursula, A. *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980)*. London: Sinclair Browne, 1983. Print.
- Barnstone, Willis. "Chinese Versification." *The Poems of Mao Zedong*. 1972. By Mao Zedong. Trans. Barnstone. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 122-124. Print.
- . "Notes on the Poems." *The Poems of Mao Zedong*. 1972. By Mao Zedong. Trans. Barnstone. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 131-147. Print.
- Beck, Ulrich. *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Cambridge: Polity, 2006. Print.
- Beier, Ulli, "Ibrahim Salahi." *Black Orpheus* 10 (n.d. [1961-1962]): 48-50. Print.
- . "Three Mbari poets." *Black Orpheus* 12 (1963): 46-50. Print.
- Beilharz, Peter. *Trotsky, Trotskyism and the Transition to Socialism*. Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1987. Print.
- Benson, Peter. *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Print.
- Berger, Renato. "Interview with Dennis Brutus." *Genève Afrique* 18 (1980): 73-78. Print.
- Bernstein, Hilda. Introduction. *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans*. By Bernstein. London: Jonathan Cape, 1994. xii-xxv. Print.
- . "Transcript of interview with Dennis Brutus." n.d. TS MCA 7, Hilda Bernstein

- Collection. UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives, Cape Town.
- Berold, Robert. "Jeremy Cronin." *South African Poets on Poetry: Interviews from New Coin 1992-2001*. Ed. Berold. Scottsville: Gecko Poetry, 2003. 127-134. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Introduction: Locations of Culture." *The Location of Culture*. By Bhabha. 1994. London: Routledge, 2004. 1-18. Print.
- . "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism." *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*. Ed. Laura García-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer. Columbia: Camden House, 1996. 191-207. Print.
- . "The World and the Home." *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 141-153. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.
- Biko, Steve. *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*. Ed. Aelred Stubbs. 1978: London: Bowerdean, 1997. Print.
- Blake, William. *The Poetical Works of William Blake*. London: Oxford UP, 1958. Print.
- Bleiker, Roland. "Pablo Neruda and the Struggle for Political Memory." *Third World Quarterly* 20.6 (1999): 1129-1142. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 June 2014.
- Bloch, Marc. *Feudal Society*. London: Routledge, 1961. Print.
- Boas, Roger. *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977. Print.
- Bond, Gerald A. "Origins." *A Handbook of the Troubadours*. Ed. F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 237-254. Print.
- Bond, Patrick. "Re: Dennis Brutus/CCS." Personal message. 31 Oct. 2012. E-mail.
- . "South Africa Tackles Global Apartheid: Is the Reform Strategy Working?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.4 (2004): 817-839. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct. 2012.
- . *Talk Left, Walk Right: South Africa's Frustrated Global Reforms*. 2004. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2006. Print.

- . "Troubadour politics." *Sunday Independent* 3 Jan. 2010: 13. Print.
- . "Re: UDW degree." Personal message. 12 Sep. 2014. E-mail.
- Bose, Mihir. *Sporting Colours: Sport and Politics in South Africa*. London: Robson, 1994. Print.
- Boyd, Valerie. *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*. 2003. London: Virago Press, 2004. Print.
- Brereton, Geoffrey. *A Short History of French Literature*. 1954. Middlesex: Penguin, 1961. Print.
- Breytenbach, Breyten. "Can a fouled-up Afrikaner join an unnatural marriage?" *Sunday Independent* 23 Aug. 1998: n.pag. Print.
- . "The Exile as African." *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*. Ed. Marc Robinson. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994. 179-182. Print.
- Brockmann, Stephen. "Günter Grass and German Unification." *The Cambridge Companion to Günter Grass*. Ed. Stuart Taberner. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 125-138. Print.
- Browning, Robert. *Selected Poems of Robert Browning*. 1955. Ed. James Reeves. London: Heinemann, 1967. Print.
- Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn. "The Trobairitz." *A Handbook of the Troubadours*. Ed. F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 201-233. Print.
- Brutus, Antony. Personal interview. 10 Aug. 2012.
- Brutus, Dennis. Personal interview. 18 June 1998.
- Brutus, Marc. "Re: Dates." Personal message. 25 July 2014. E-mail.
- Buckman, Greg. *Globalization: Tame it or Scrap it?: Mapping the Alternatives of the Anti-Globalization Movement*. London: Zed Books, 2004. Print.

- Bumke, Joachim. *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. Print.
- Bunn, David. "'Some Alien Native Land': Arthur Nortje, Literary History, and the Body in Exile." *World Literature Today* 70.1 (1996): 33-44. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Sep. 2012.
- Bunn, David, and Jane Taylor, eds. *From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art (TriQuarterly 69, Spring/Summer 1987)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Print.
- Burness, Don, comp. *Echoes of the Sunbird: An Anthology of Contemporary African Poetry*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1993. Print.
- Butler, Guy. *A Local Habitation: An Autobiography (1945-1990)*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1991. Print.
- Byron, Lord. "To Lady Caroline Lamb." *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*. Vol. III. Ed. Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981. 16-17. Print.
- . "On This Day I Complete my Thirty-Sixth Year." *Byron: Poetical Works*. Ed. Frederick Page. 1904. London: Oxford UP, 1970. 112. Print.
- Carey, John. *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*. 1981. London: Faber and Faber, 1990. Print.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *A Serious Character: Ezra Pound*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.
- Cascardi, Anthony J. Introduction. *The Cambridge Companion to Cervantes*. Ed. Cascardi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 1-10. Print.
- Cervantes, Miguel. *The Adventures of Don Quixote de La Mancha*. Trans. Tobias Smollett. London: André Deutsch, 1986. Print.
- Chang, Jung. *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*. 1991. London: Flamingo, 1993. Print.

Chang, Jung, and Jon Halliday. *Mao: The Unknown Story*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2005.

Print.

Chapman, Michael. "Dennis Brutus: 1924-2009." *Current Writing* 22.1 (2010): ii-iv. Print.

---. "Douglas Livingstone." *South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective*. By

Chapman. Johannesburg: AD. Donker, 1984. 73-124. Print.

---. "South African Poetry: A Perspective from the Other Europe." *Art Talk, Politics Talk: A Consideration of Categories*. By Chapman. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 108-131. Print.

---. "Soweto Poetry." *South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective*. By Chapman. Johannesburg: AD. Donker, 1984. 181-242. Print.

---. "Voices of Apocalypse: Soweto Poetry, its Origins and Directions." *Contemporary African Literature*. Ed. Hal Wylie, Eileen Julien and Russell J. Linnemann.

Washington: Three Continents Press, 1983. 119-127. Print.

Chaytor, H.J. *The Troubadours*. Plymouth: The College, 1912. Print.

Cheah, Pheng. "Cosmopolitanism." *Theory, Culture and Society* 23.2-3 (2006): 486-496.

Web. 12 Feb. 2013.

Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. 2000. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Chilvers, Ian, Harold Osborne, and Dennis Farr, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*. 1988.

Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.

Chinweizu, Jemie Onwuchekwa, and Ihechukwu Madubuike. *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and their Critics*. London: KPI, 1980.

Print.

Chipasula, Frank, M[kalawile]. "A Terrible Trajectory: The Impact of Apartheid, Prison and Exile on Dennis Brutus's Poetry." *Essays on African Writing: A Re-Evaluation*. Ed.

Abdulrazak Gurnah. Oxford: Heinemann, 1993. 38-55. Print.



- , ed. *When my Brothers Come Home: Poems from Central and Southern Africa*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1985. Print.
- Clark, J[ohn] P[epper]. "Poetry in Africa Today." *Transition* 18 (1965): 20-26. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Apr. 2011.
- . "Themes of African Poetry of English Expression." *Présence Africaine* 26.54 (1965): 70-89. Print.
- Clark, Nick. "Was Pablo Neruda killed by Pinochet?" *Independent* 2 June 2013. Web. 20 Aug. 2013.
- Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302-338. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 July 2011.
- . "Mixed Feelings." *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. Ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. 362-370. Print.
- . "Traveling Cultures." *Cultural Studies*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1992. 96-116. Print.
- Cohen, Mitchell. "Auto-Emancipation and Antisemitism (Homage to Bernard-Lazare)." *Jewish Social Studies* 10.1 (2003): 69-77. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 July 2014.
- . "Rooted Cosmopolitanism." *Dissent* 39.4 (1992): 473-483. Print.
- Collins English Dictionary: Millennium Edition*. 1979. London: HarperCollins, 1999. Print.
- Cope, Jack. *The Adversary Within: Dissident Writers in Afrikaans*. Cape Town: David Philip; New Jersey: Humanities Press; London: Rex Collings, 1982. Print.
- Couper, Scott. *Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010. Print.
- Crane, David. *The Kindness of Sisters: Annabella Milbanke and the Destruction of the Byrons*. London: Flamingo, 2003. Print.

Cresswell, Ryan. "SA poet's works come home at last." *Sunday Times* 1 Jan. 1995: n.pag.

Print.

Cronin, Jeremy. *Inside*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983. Print.

---. *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables and a Jeremiad*. Cape Town: David Philip; Mayibuye Books, 1997. Print.

---. "'Even under the Rine of Terror ...': Insurgent South African Poetry." *Research in African Literatures* 19.1 (1988): 12-23. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Sep. 2012.

---. "Only hand-wringing Afrikaners will see I to eye with you, Breyten." *Sunday Independent* 6 Sep. 1998: 21. Print.

Crystal, David and Ben Crystal. *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*. London: Penguin, 2002. Print.

Currey, James. *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature*. Oxford: James Currey, 2008. Print.

Daniels, Eddie. *There and Back: Robben Island, 1964-1979*. Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, 1998. Print.

Davie, Donald. *Czeslaw Milosz and The Insufficiency of Lyric*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. Print.

Davies, John. Letter to Dennis Brutus. 17 Apr. 1991. TS 4.4.3.5, Dennis Brutus Collection. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.

Davis, Geoffrey V., and Holger G. Ehling. "On a Knife Edge: Interview with Dennis Brutus." *Southern African Writing: Voyages and Explorations*. Ed. Davis. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. 101-110. Print.

"Declaration of African Writers." *Issue* 4.4 (1974): 8. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.

De Kok, I[ngrid] J. "A Sort of Difference." *Pretexs* 1.1 (1989): 73-78. Print.

---. *Familiar Ground*. 1988. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991. Print.

- . *Terrestrial Things*. Cape Town: Kwela; Snailpress, 2002. Print.
- . *Transfer*. 1997. Cape Town: Snailpress, 1998. Print.
- Della Porta, Donatella, et al. *Globalization from Below: Transnational Activists and Protest Networks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Print.
- “Dennis Brutus: Climate Change & poem ‘Longing’.” Web. 16 July 2014.
- “Dennis Brutus Fights Deportation.” *The Black Scholar* 14.2 (1983): 72. Print.
- “Dennis Brutus: I Am a Rebel.” Television. SABC, Johannesburg, 2003. Web. 30 Nov. 2013.
- “Dennis Brutus Reads from his Work.” WGBH Open Vault, 1982. Web. 3 Dec. 2013.
- “Dennis Brutus (1924-2009): South African Poet and Activist Dies in Cape Town.” Television. *Democracy Now!*, New York, 2009. Web. 6 July 2014.
- Desai, Ashwin. “South Africa: The Second Transition?” Dennis Brutus Memorial Lecture, Port Elizabeth. 13 Mar. 2012. Web. 24 Apr. 2012. Lecture.
- De Troyes, Chrétien. “Erec and Enide.” *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*. By De Troyes. Trans. David Staines. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 1-86. Print.
- Dhlomo. H.I.E. *Valley of a Thousand Hills: A Poem*. 1941. Durban: Knox, 1962. Print.
- Donne, John. *The Complete English Poems*. 1971. Ed. A.J. Smith. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977. Print.
- Duerden, Dennis, and Cosmo Pieterse, eds. *African Writers Talking*. London: Heinemann, 1972. Print.
- Ebrahim, Y. Letter to Dennis Brutus. 24 Sep. 1990. TS 94.4.5, Folder 1, Dennis Brutus Collection. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.
- Ehmeir, Walter. “Publishing South African Literature in English in the 1960s.” *Research in African Literatures* 26.1 (1995): 111-131. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.
- Elimimian, Isaac. “Form and Meaning in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus.” *The Literary Half-Yearly* 28.1 (1986): 70-78. Print.

- . "Negritude and African Poetry." *African Literature Today* 19 (1994): 22-43. Print.
- Eliot, T.S. *Selected Poems*. 1954. London: Faber and Faber, 1966. Print.
- Ellmann, Richard. *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*. 1949. London: Faber and Faber, 1973. Print.
- Emmett, Tony. "Oral, Political and Communal Aspects of Township Poetry in the Mid-Seventies." *English in Africa* 6.1 (1979): 72-81. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Dec. 2012.
- Eze, Chielozona. "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 26:2 (2014): 234-247. Web. 10 July 2014.
- Ezenwa-Ohaeto. "Shriek of Nerves: The Rational Voice of Dennis Brutus and the Poetry of Exile in *Salutes and Censures*." *African Literature Today* 22 (2000): 23-31. Print.
- Faggen, Robert. "Czeslaw Milosz: The Art of Poetry LXX." *Czeslaw Milosz: Conversations*. Ed. Cynthia L. Haven. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2006. 149-170. Print.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961. London: Penguin, 2001. Print.
- Feingold, Henry L. "The Charge of Rootless Cosmopolitanism." *Lest Memory Cease: Finding Meaning in the American Jewish Past*. By Feingold. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1996. 162-172. Print.
- Feinstein, Adam. *Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print.
- Fieldhouse, Roger. *Anti-Apartheid: A History of the Movement in Britain*. London: Merlin Press, 2005. Print.
- Folli, Rosemary Anne. "A Tent of Blue and Souls in Pain: Creative Responses to Prison Experience with Emphasis upon Existential and Autobiographical Elements within Selected South African Prison Writings." MA thesis. Rand Afrikaans University, 1994.
- . "Dennis Brutus: Erotic Revolutionary." *English Studies in Africa* 39.2 (1996): 17-25. Print.

“Fonlin Nichols Award.” Fonlin-Nichols Award. Web. 30 Aug. 2014.

Forché, Carolyn. *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1993. Print.

Foster, Don. *Detention and Torture in South Africa: Psychological, Legal and Historical Studies*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987. Print.

Frankel, Philip. *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001. Print.

Frederikse, Julie. *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-Racialism in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990. Print.

---. “Transcript of Interview with Dennis Brutus.” *SAHA Collection AL2460*. South African History Archive. Aug. 2009. 1-11. Web. 3 Dec. 2013.

Freud, Sigmund. “The Uncanny.” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 17. 1955. Ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1981. 217-252. Print.

---. “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 18. Ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1955. 7-65. Print.

Fuentes, Carlos. Foreword. *The Adventures of Don Quixote de La Mancha*. By Miguel Cervantes. Trans. Tobias Smollett. London: André Deutsch, 1986. xi-xiii. Print.

“Gardenia volkensii.” Web. 5 June 2014.

Gardner, Colin. “Brutus and Shakespeare.” *Research in African Literatures* 15.3 (1984): 354-364. Print.

Gardner, Susan. “Jeremy Cronin.” *Four South African Poets: Robert Berold, Jeremy Cronin, Douglas Reid Skinner and Stephen Watson interviewed by Susan Gardner*. Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1986. 13-27. Print.

- Gardner, W.H. Introduction. *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. 1953. Ed. Gardner. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958. xiii-xxxvi. Print.
- “Gas Engine Oil – Mobil Pegasus™ 1005 | Mobil™ Industrial Lubricants.” Mobil. Web. 2 Sep. 2014.
- Gaunt, Simon. “Poetry of Exclusion: A Feminist Reading of some Troubadour Lyrics.” *The Modern Language Review* 85.2 (1990): 310-329. JSTOR. Web. 23 Apr. 2013.
- Gaunt, Simon, and Sarah Kay. Introduction. *The Troubadours: An Introduction*. Ed. Gaunt and Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 1-7. Print.
- Gautier, Leon. *Chivalry*. Ed. Jacques Levron. Trans. D.C. Dunning. London: Phoenix House, 1965. Print.
- Gerhart, Gail M., and Thomas Karis. *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*. Vol. 4. Eds. Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977. Print.
- Ghazoul, Ferial J. “Iraqi Short Fiction: The Unhomely at Home and Abroad.” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3.1 (2004): 1-24. JSTOR. Web. 25 Apr. 2013.
- Gibbs, Ken. Introduction. *Poetry and Human Rights: Poems by Dennis Brutus*. 2004. Ed. Gibbs and Wayne Kamin. Worcester: Worcester State College, 2010. iii-v. Web. 28 Sep. 2012.
- Gibson, Donald B. Introduction. *Modern Black Poets: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Gibson. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973. 1-17. Print.
- Gikandi, Simon. “Foreword: On Afropolitanism.” *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*. Ed. Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makokha, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. 9-11. Print.
- Gill, Stephen. *William Wordsworth: A Life*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Print.
- Giovanni, Nikki. *Black Feeling, Black Talk/Black Judgement*. 1970. New York: Morrow

- Quill, 1979. Print.
- Go, Julian. "Fanon's Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism." *European Journal of Social Theory* 16.2 (2013): 208-225. Web. 30 July 2012.
- Goddard, Kevin. "Dennis Brutus." *Out of Exile: South African Writers Speak*. Ed. Goddard and Charles Wessels. Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1992. 66-78. Print.
- Goldwyn, Merrill. "Dennis Brutus: The Worcester State College Connection." *Poetry and Human Rights: Poems by Dennis Brutus*. 2004. Ed. Ken Gibbs and Wayne Kamin. Worcester: Worcester State College, 2010. 88-90. Web. 28 Sep. 2012.
- Goodfader, Joel, and Alice Finn. "A poet's conscience." *International Review* Apr. 1983: 28-29. Print.
- Goodwin, K.[enneth] L. *Understanding African Poetry: A Study of Ten Poets*. London: Heinemann, 1982. Print.
- Gordimer, Nadine. "Living in the Interregnum." *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Place*. 1988. Ed. Stephen Clingman. London: Penguin, 1989. 261-284. Print.
- . *My Son's Story*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1990. Print.
- Grass, Günter. "Short Speech by a Rootless Cosmopolitan." *Dissent* 37.4 (1990): 458-460. Print.
- Gray, Denise. "The Challenge of the Lyrical Voice in 'Unlyrical' Times: A Study of Ingrid de Kok's Poetry." MA thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010.
- Gray, Stephen. "Caught on Tape: Dennis Brutus's Questionable Hold on Poet Arthur Nortje." *Current Writing* 25.1 (2013): 30-38. Web. 13 Aug. 2013.
- . *Indaba: Interviews with African Writers*. Pretoria: Protea, 2005. Print.
- Gray, Tony. *Ireland This Century*. London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994. Print.
- Gready, Paul. *Writing as Resistance: Life Stories of Imprisonment, Exile, and Homecoming*

- from Apartheid South Africa*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003. Print.
- Grossman, Edith. *The Antipoetry of Nicanor Parra*. New York: New York UP, 1975. Print.
- Gudiol, José. *Goya*. Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2008. Print.
- Gunner, Liz, and Mafika Gwala. "Introduction: Izibongo, Power and the Popular Voice." *Musho! Zulu Popular Praises*. Ed. Gunner and Gwala. Johannesburg: Wits UP, 1991. 1-52. Print.
- Gwala, Mafika. *No More Lullabies*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982. Print.
- Gzesh, Susan R. "The Defense of Dennis Brutus: Apartheid on Trial." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 173-187. Print.
- Hain, Peter. *Sing the Beloved Country: The Struggle for the New South Africa*. London: Pluto, 1996. Print.
- Hale, Thomas, A. *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*. 1998. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2007. Print.
- Hamburger, Michael. *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modern Poetry from Baudelaire to the 1960s*. 1969. Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982. Print.
- Hardy, Thomas. *Poems of Thomas Hardy: A New Selection*. Ed. T.R.M. Creighton. London: Macmillan, 1974. Print.
- Hartman, Rodney. "34 named for SA's Sports Hall of Fame." *IOL*. Independent News and Media SA, 6 Dec. 2007. Web. 25 Aug. 2014.
- Harvey, Ruth. "Courtly Love in Medieval Occitania." *The Troubadours: An Introduction*. Ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 8-27. Print.
- Heaney, Seamus. *Field Work*. London: Faber and Faber, 1979. Print.
- Heidegger, Martin. "Care as the Being of Dasein." *Being and Time*. 1962. By Heidegger. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985. 225-



273. Print.

Hendricks, Monica. "The Luminous Tongue in the Black World." *Safundi* 11.3 (2010):

308-311. Print.

Herdan, Innes. *The Pen and The Sword: Literature and Revolution in Modern China*.

London: Zed Books, 1992. Print.

Heywood, Christopher. *A History of South African Literature*. 2004. Cambridge: Cambridge

UP, 2010. Print.

---. "The Novels of Peter Abrahams." *Perspectives on African Literature: Selections from the Proceedings of the Conference on African Literature held at the University of Ife*

1968. 1971. Ed. Heywood. London: Heinemann, 1979. 157-172. Print.

Hill-Lubin, Mildred. "Every Troubadour has a Mistress: The Image of the Female in Dennis

Brutus's *Stubborn Hope*." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W.

McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 123-134.

Print.

Hiscock, Andrew. "The Renaissance, 1485-1660." *English Literature in Context*. Ed. Paul

Poplawski. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 110-210. Print.

"The History of the Cadbury Family and its Chocolate Business." Web. 5 June 2014.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. "The State of South African Literary Criticism." *English in Africa* 6. 2

(1979): 39-50. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Dec. 2012.

Hollander, Paul. *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society*.

1981. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007. Print.

Holly, Y.B. "Ping-Pong: Excerpt from Hearing of the Case of Dennis Brutus in Immigration

Court." *From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs and Art (TriQuarterly 69,*

*Spring/Summer 1987)*. Ed. David Bunn and Jane Taylor. Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1987. 368-373. Print.

- Holmes, George, ed. *The Oxford History of Medieval Europe*. 1988. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.
- Holton, Robert J. *Cosmopolitanisms: New Thinking and New Directions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- hooks, bell. *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. 1953. Ed. W.H. Gardner. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958. Print.
- Horrell, Muriel, comp. *A Survey of Race Relations*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1970. Print.
- Houtart, Francois, and Francois Polet. *The Other Davos: The Globalisation of Resistance to the World Economic System*. London: Zed Books, 2001. Print.
- Hoyt, Robert S., and Stanley Chodorow. *Europe in the Middle Ages*. 1957. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976. Print.
- Huchber, Linda. "Professor Dennis Brutus." Personal message. 22 Aug. 2014. E-mail.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*. 1940. London: Pluto Press, 1986. Print.
- . *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. 1959. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981. Print.
- Hunter, Eva, and Craig MacKenzie, eds. *Between the Lines II: Interviews with Nadine Gordimer, Menan du Plessis, Zoë Wicomb, Lauretta Ngcobo*. Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1993. Print.
- Hutchinson, Alfred. *Road to Ghana*. 1960. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Idehen, Monika, ed. *Salutes: Selected Writings*. Evanston: Troubadour Press; Camden: Whirlwind Press, 1994. Print.
- International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa. "Constitution." TS. London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1964. UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives.

- Jamili, Leila Baradaran, and Sara Faryam Rad. "Unhomeliness: Deconstructing Western Master Narratives in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*." *IPEDR* (26), 2011: 309-313. Web. 5 July 2013.
- JanMohamed, Abdul R. "Draft Introduction to *Salutes and Censures*." 1994. TS 94.4.1.17, Dennis Brutus Collection. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.
- Jeffares, A. Norman. *W.B. Yeats: A New Biography*. 1988. London: Arena, 1990. Print.
- Jensen, Frede. "Language." *A Handbook of the Troubadours*. Ed. F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 349-399. Print.
- Johnson, W.R. *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. Print.
- Joseph, William A. Foreword. *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution*. By Gao Yuan. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987. ix-xxx. Print.
- Judt, Tony. Foreword. *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map*. By Edward W. Said. New York: Vintage Books, 2005. vii-xxi. Print.
- Karim, Aisha, and Lee Sustar. Introduction. *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader*. Ed. Sustar and Karim. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 11-18. Print.
- Karis, Thomas G., and Gail M. Gerhart. *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*. Vol. 5. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997. Print.
- Katz, Jane. "For the Unsung Brave: Dennis Brutus, Poet from South Africa (1973)." *Artists in Exile*. By Katz. New York: Stein and Day, 1983. 31-42. Print.
- Kay, Sarah. *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Print.
- Keller, Simone. "How Patriots Think, and Why it Matters." *Patriotism: Philosophical and Political Perspectives*. Ed. Igor Primoratz and Aleksander Pavković. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 63-73. Print.
- Kempis, Thomas à. *The Imitation of Christ*. Trans. Leo Sherley-Price. 1952. Middlesex:

Penguin, 1986. Print.

Kgositsile, Keorapetse. *If I Could Sing: Selected Poems*. Cape Town: Kwela; Snailpress, 2002. Print.

---. Telephonic interview. 23 Apr. 2013.

Kgositsile, Keorapetse, Dennis Brutus, Chinua Achebe, and Ali A. Mazrui. "Panel on Literature and Commitment in South Africa." *Issue* 6.1 (1976): 34-46. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Dec. 2012.

Killam, G. Douglas. "A *Simple Lust*: Selection, Structure and Style." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 86-98. Print.

Killam, Douglas, and Ruth Rowe, eds. *The Companion to African Literatures*. Oxford: James Currey; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000. Print.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition*. 1940. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966. Print.

Kirkwood, Mike. "The Colonizer: A Critique of the English South African Culture Theory." *Poetry South Africa*. Johannesburg: AD. Donker, 1976. 102-133. Print.

Kitson, Peter J. "The Romantic Period, 1780-1832." *English Literature in Context*. Ed. Paul Poplawski. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 306-402. Print.

Klatzow, Peter. "Ferretting out the Music in Dennis Brutus." *Review/Arts* 19-25 June 1992: 11. Suppl. to: *Weekly Mail*. Print.

---. Personal interview. 17 July 2012.

---. *Songs of an Exile*. 1992. MS. Private collection of Klatzow, Cape Town.

Klopper, Dirk. "Arthur Nortje: A Life Story." *Arthur Nortje: Poet and South African, New Critical and Contextual Essays*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Ross Tyner. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004. 1-28. Print.

- . "The Lyric Poem during and after Apartheid." *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 587-606. Print.
- Knight, Etheridge. *Poems from Prison*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1968. Print.
- . *Belly Song and Other Poems*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1973. Print.
- Kurasawa, Fuyuki. "A Cosmopolitanism from Below: Alternative Globalization and the Creation of a Solidarity without Bounds." *European Journal of Sociology* 45.2 (2004): 233-255. Web. 8 Nov. 2012.
- La Guma, Blanche. Personal interview. 27 Mar. 2013.
- Lamming, George. *The Pleasures of Exile*. 1960. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1992. Print.
- Langa, Mandla. Personal interview. 28 Aug. 2012.
- Le Blanc, Paul. "Artistry Serving Activism." *Against the Current*. July/Aug. 2007: 5. Print.
- Lee, Don L. [Madhubuti, Haki R.] *Black Pride*. 1968. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972. Print.
- . *Don't Cry, Scream*. 1969. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1973. Print.
- Leglu, Catherine. "Moral and Satirical Poetry." *The Troubadours: An Introduction*. Ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 47-65. Print.
- Lewis, Desiree. "Writing Hybrid Selves: Richard Rive and Zoë Wicomb." *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Ed. Zimitri Erasmus. Cape Town: Kwela Books; South African History Online, 2001. 131-158. Print.
- Lewis, Gavin. *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African "Coloured" Politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987. Print.
- Lewis, Simon. "Dennis Brutus: 1924 - ." *African Writers*. Vol. 1. Ed. C. Brian Cox. New York: Scribner's, 1997. 115-126. Print.

- . "Dennis Brutus (1924-2009): An Appreciation." *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 47.1 (2010): 122-125. Web. 5 Feb. 2013.
- . "Dennis Brutus and the Stations of Exile." *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 3.1 (2006): 45-62. Print.
- . "Introduction." *Leafdrift*. Ed. Lamont B. Steptoe. Camden: Whirlwind, 2005. i-iii. Print.
- . "Speaking their Wordless Woe." *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. Ed. Judith Lutge Coullie et al. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. 153-159. Print.
- Lindfors, Bernth. "Concluding Remarks." *Issue* 6.1 (1976): 58. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.
- . "Dennis Brutus' Mousey Tongue." *World Literature Written in English* 15.1 (1976): 7-16. Print.
- . "Dennis Brutus, Texas Poet." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 162-172. Print.
- . "Dennis Brutus, Texas Poet." *Loaded Vehicles: Studies in African Literary Media*. By Lindfors. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1996. 91-103. Print.
- . "Dennis Brutus: A Tribute." *Poems of Dennis Brutus: A Checklist, 1945-2004*. Comp. Andrew Martin. Madison: Parallel Press, 2005. 8-9. Print.
- . "Dialectical Development in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus." Ed. Alistair Niven. *The Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation*. Liege: Revue des Langues Vivantes, 1976. 219-229. Print.
- . Introduction. *The Blind Men and the Elephant and Other Essays in Biographical Criticism*. Ed. Lindfors. vii-ix. Print.
- . "Introduction." *Issue* 6.1 (1976): 3-4. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.
- . "John Bruin: South Africa Enigma in Del Valle Texas." Rev. of *Thoughts Abroad*, Dennis

- Brutus. *Africa Today* 18.4 (1971):72-77. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 Apr. 2011.
- . "‘Somehow Tenderness Survives’: Dennis Brutus Talks about his Life and Poetry." *The Benin Review*, 1 (1974): 44-55. Print.
- , ed. *Contemporary Black South African Literature: A Symposium*. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1985. Print.
- , ed. *The Dennis Brutus Tapes: Essays at Autobiography*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2011. Print.
- Lindfors, Bernth, et al., eds. *Palaver: Interviews with Five African Writers in Texas*. Austin: University of Texas, 1972. Print.
- Lindley, David. *Lyric*. London: Methuen, 1985. Print.
- Lindsay, Jack. *The Troubadours and their World of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. London: Frederick Muller, 1976. Print.
- Livingstone, Douglas. *Selected Poems*. Johannesburg: AD. Donker, 1984. Print.
- Lodge, Tom. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983. Print.
- Lubin, Albert J. *Stranger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh*. 1972. New York: Da Cap, 1996. Print.
- Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Mabin, Alan. "‘Doom at One Stroke of the Pen’: Planning and Group Areas, c.1935-1955." HWS-253. Historical Papers Research Archive. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1990. Web. 8 Jan. 2014.
- MacArthur, Janet. "Imaginary Homelands and *Thoughts Abroad*: Dennis Brutus’ Hybrid Modernism." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 70-85. Print.
- MacGregor, T. Coll. "‘Africanness’ and *Poems from Algiers*." *Critical Perspectives on*

- Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 60-69. Print.
- Mafeje, Archie. "The Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community." *Issue* 6.3 (1967): 193-223. Print.
- Makokha, J.K.S. "Introduction: In the Spirit of Afropolitanism." *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*. Ed. Jennifer Wawrzinek and Makokha. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. 13-22. Print.
- Mandela, Nelson. *Nelson Mandela: The Struggle is My Life*. 1978. London: IDAF Publications, 1990. Print.
- Manganyi, N. Chabani, and David Attwell, eds. *Bury Me at the Marketplace: Es'kia Mphahlele and Company, Letters 1943-2006*. Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2010. Print.
- Mapanje, Jack, ed. *Gathering Seaweed: African Prison Writing*. Oxford: Heinemann, 2002. Print.
- Martin, Andrew, comp. *Poems of Dennis Brutus: A Checklist, 1945-2004*. Madison: Parallel Press, 2005. Print.
- Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. "The Communist Manifesto." *The Communist Manifesto with related documents*. Ed. John E. Toews. Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 1999. 63-96. Print.
- Marx, Karl. "Theses on Feuerbach." *The Communist Manifesto with related documents*. Ed. John E. Toews. Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 1999. 137-139. Print.
- Masilela, Ntongela. "New African Modernity and the New African Movement." *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 325-338. Print.
- Mattera, Don. Personal interview. 20 Aug. 2012.
- Matthews, James. "Cry Rage!" *Cry Rage!* By Matthews and Gladys Thomas. Johannesburg:



- Spro-cas Publications, 1972. 1. Print.
- . "I am Black." *Black Voices Shout!* Ed. Matthews. Cape Town: BLAC, 1974. 64. Print.
- . Personal interview. 1 June 2012.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Afropolitanism." *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Simon Njami. Trans. Laurent Chauvet. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2007. 26-29. Print.
- McCorkle, James. "Re: ALA/Dennis Brutus." Personal message. 30 Aug. 2014. E-mail.
- McDougal, Stuart Y. *Ezra Pound and the Troubadour Tradition*. 1972. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974. Print.
- McGann, Jerome J. "The Significance of Biographical Context: Two Poems by Lord Byron." *The Author and His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*. Ed. Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978. 347-364. Print.
- McLuckie, Craig W. "A Biographical Introduction to Dennis Brutus' Art and Activism." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 1-40. Print.
- Melnykovich, George. "Nicanor Parra: Antipoetry, Retraction and Silence." *Latin American Literary Review* 3.6 (1975): 65-70. *JSTOR*. Web. 31 Oct. 2013.
- Mendelson, Edward. *Early Auden*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981. Print.
- Mercouri, Melina. *I was Born Greek*. New York: Doubleday, 1971. Print.
- Meredith, Martin. *The State of Africa: A History of the Continent since Independence*. 2005. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2011. Print.
- Merrett, Christopher. *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip; Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994. Print.
- Miller, E. Ethelbert. "An Interview with Dennis Brutus." *Obsidian* 1.2 (1975): 42-55. Print.
- Miller, Ruth. *Poems, Prose, Plays*. Ed. Lionel Abrahams. Cape Town: Carrefour Press,

1990. Print.

Milosz, Czeslaw. *The Captive Mind*. 1953. Trans. Jane Zielonko. Middlesex: Penguin, 1980.

Print.

---. *The Collected Poems (1931-1987)*. London: Penguin, 1988. Print.

---. *The Witness of Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983. Print.

Miner, Earl. "Pound, *Haiku*, and the Image." *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*.

Ed. Walter Sutton. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963. 115-128. Print.

*MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. 3rd ed. 1985. New York: Modern

Language Association of America, 2008. Print.

Monyaki, Bulara. Personal message. 9 Dec. 2013.

Morrison, Toni. *A Mercy*. London: Chatto and Windus, 2008. Print.

---. "Whose house is this." *Home*. London: Chatto and Windus, 2012. n.pag. Print.

Mphahlele, Es'kia. "Africa in Exile." *Daedalus* 111.2 (1982): 29-48. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Apr.

2013.

---. *The African Image*. 1962. London: Faber and Faber, 1974. Print.

---. *Afrika My Music: An Autobiography 1957-1983*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984. Print.

---. "Debris, Driftwood and Purpose." Rev. of *Poems from Algiers*, Dennis Brutus. *Africa*

*Today* 18.2 (1971): 67-71. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Apr. 2011.

---. "Exile, the Tyranny of Place and the Literary Compromise." *Unisa English Studies* 17.1

(1979): 37-44. Print.

---. "My Experience as a Writer." *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*. Ed. M.J.

Daymond, J.U. Jacobs and Margaret Lenta. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal

Press, 1984. 5-82. Print.

---. "Negritude – A Reply." *African Literature and the Universities*. Ed. Gerald Moore.

Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1965. 22-26. Print.

---. "Voices in the Whirlwind: Poetry and Conflict." *Voices in the Whirlwind and other Essays*. By Mphahlele. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. 1-120. Print.

Mphahlele, Ezekiel [Es'kia], and Tim Couzens, eds. *The Voice of the Black Writer in Africa*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1980. Print.

Mzamane, Mbulelo. "Dennis Vincent Brutus, 1924-2009: A Tribute." Iziko Museum, Cape Town. 6 Jan. 2010. Address.

---. Telephonic interview. 18 Feb. 2013.

Naidoo, Indres. *Island in Chains: Ten Years on Robben Island*. 1982. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2000. Print.

Nathan, Leonard, and Arthur Quinn. *The Poet's Work: An Introduction to Czeslaw Milosz*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991. Print.

"National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America." Web. 1 July 2014.

N'COBRA. Washington: N'COBRA, c.1998. Print.

Ndebele, Njabulo. Personal interview. 4 Feb. 2013.

---. "The Writers' Movement in South Africa." *Research in African Literatures* 20.3 (1989): 412-421. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.

Ndu, Pol. "Passion and Poetry in the Works of Dennis Brutus." *Black Academy Review* 2.1-2 (1971): 41-54. Print.

Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *The Black Aesthetic*. Ed. Addison Gayle. New York: Doubleday, 1971. 272-290. Print.

Neruda, Pablo. *Memoirs*. Trans. Hardie St Martin. London: Penguin, 1978. Print.

---. *Passions and Impressions*. Ed. Matilde Neruda and Miguel Otero Silva. Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983. Print.

---. *Selected Poems*, 1970. Ed. Nathaniel Tarn. Trans. Anthony Kerrigan et al. London: Vintage, 2012. Print.

Nettleton, Anitra. "Writing Artists into History: Dumile Feni and the South African Canon."

*African Arts* (Spring 2011): 8-25. *MIT Press*. Web. 1 May 2014.

"Never on Sunday – Melina Mercouri." Web. 5 June 2014.

Ngaage, Barine Sanah. "The Woman as Symbol and Vehicle of Expression in Brutus' 'A Simple Lust' and Senghor's 'Chants d'ombre' and 'Ethiopiennes'." *Neohelicon* 24.1 (1997): 385-392. Print.

Ngara, Emmanuel. *Ideology and Form in African Poetry: Implications for Communication*. London: James Currey, 1990. Print.

Ngwenya, Thengani H. "Black Consciousness Poetry: Writing against Apartheid." *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 500-522. Print.

Nichols, Lee. "Interview with Dennis Brutus at ALA meeting, March 29, 1996." *ALA Bulletin* 22.2 (1996): 15-17. Print.

---. "Interview with Dennis Brutus, East Lansing, April 19, 1997." *ALA Bulletin* 23.3 (1997): 31-32. Print.

Nkosi, Lewis. "Richard Rive." *African Writers Talking*. Ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse. London: Heinemann, 1972. 157-159. Print.

---. *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature*. Harlow: Longman, 1981. Print.

---. "Wole Soyinka." *African Writers Talking*. Ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse. London: Heinemann, 1972. 171-177. Print.

North, Michael. *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Print.

Nortje, Arthur. *Anatomy of the Dark: Collected Poems*. Ed. Dirk Klopper. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2000. Print.

- Nussbaum, Martha C. "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." *Boston Review* 1 Oct. 1994. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.
- . "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*. Ed. Joshua Cohen, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. 2-17. Print.
- . "Reply." *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*. Ed. Joshua Cohen, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. 131-144. Print.
- Nwakanma, Obi. *Christopher Okigbo 1930-67: Thirsting for Sunlight*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2010. Print.
- Obee, Ruth. "From Tom-Tom Beats to Shrieks in the Night: The African Quest Hero's Search for a New Black Aesthetic." *Relocating Literature: Africa and India: Conference Proceedings*. Ed. Shaun Viljoen and Justin Brown. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 2000. 225-247. Print.
- Obiwu. "Dennis Brutus and the Orphean Troubadour." *African Writing Online* 9 (2010): 1-4. Print.
- Odendaal, Welma. "Donga: One Angry Voice." *English in Africa* 7.2 (1980): 67-74. *JSTOR*. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.
- Oguibe, Olu. "Meeting Dennis Brutus." *Sentinel Literary Quarterly* 3.2 (2010). Web. 27 Jan. 2014.
- Ogundele, Wole. "Politics and the Pastoral Ideal in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 14.2 (1992): 49-60. Print.
- Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo. "The Song of the Caged Bird: Contemporary African Prison Poetry." *Ariel* 13.4 (1982): 65-84. Print.
- Ogwude, Sophie. "History, Progress and Prospects in the Development of African Literature: A Tribute to Dennis Brutus." *African Literature Today* 30 (2012): 98-107. Print.
- Ojaide, Tanure O. *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa: Essays on African Poetry*. Durham:

- Carolina Academic Press, 1996. Print.
- . "Tribute to Dennis Brutus: Invoking the Warrior Spirit." *Illuminations* 20 (2004): 36-38. Print.
- . "The Troubadour: The Poet's Persona in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus." *Ariel* 17.1 (1986): 55-69. Print.
- Okpewho, Isidore, ed. *The Heritage of African Poetry: An Anthology of Oral and Written Poetry*. 1985. Essex: Longman, 1993. Print.
- Olafioye, Tayo. *Politics in African Poetry*. Martinez: Pacific Coast Africanist Association, 1984. Print.
- Opland, Jeff. "The Early Career of D. L. P. Yali-Manisi, Thembu Imbongi." *Research in African Literatures* 33.1 (2002): 1-26. JSTOR. Web. 17 Jan. 2013.
- . *Xhosa Oral Poetry: Aspects of a Black South African Tradition*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983. Print.
- Padayachee, Deena. "Re: Dept of English UKZN." Personal message. 24 Aug. 2011. E-mail.
- . "Re: I was his GP." Personal message. 22 July 2014. E-mail.
- Pagden, Anthony. *Worlds at War: The 2 500-year Struggle between East and West*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Pahad, Essop. Letter. *Sowetan*, 29 Aug. 2002: 22. Print.
- Painter, Sydney. *French Chivalry: Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Mediaeval France*. 1940. Ithaca: Great Seal, 1962. Print.
- Parra, Nicanor. *Poems and Antipoems*. 1958. Ed. Miller Williams. Trans. Fernando Alegria et al. New York: New Directions, 1967. Print.
- Parry, Melanie, ed. *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*. Centenary Edition. Edinburgh: Chambers, 1997. Print.
- Paulin, Tom, ed. *The Faber Book of Political Verse*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986. Print.

- Phillips, Kenneth A. "An Innocent in China – *China Poems*." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 113-122. Print.
- Pieterse, Cosmo. "Dennis Brutus." *African Writers Talking*. Ed. Dennis Duerden and Pieterse. London: Heinemann, 1972. 53-61. Print.
- Pinkus, Benjamin. "The Campaigns against 'Jewish Nationalism' and Cosmopolitanism." *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948-1967: A Documented Study*. By Pinkus. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. 147-192. Print.
- Pleck, Joseph H. "The Theory of Male Sex-Role Identity: Its Rise and Fall, 1936 to the Present." *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*. Ed. Harry Brod. Winchester: Allen and Unwin, 1987. 21-38. Print.
- Plomer, William. "Note." *Collected Poems*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1960. 5. Print.
- Poetry Harvest Festival 1983*. 1994. 94.4.4.5, Folder 2, Dennis Brutus Collection. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.
- Pogrand, Benjamin. *Sobukwe and Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1990. Print.
- Pollock, Sheldon I., Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Cosmopolitanisms." *Public Culture* 12.3 (2000): 577-589. *Project Muse*. Web. 25 Sep. 2012.
- Posnock, Ross. "The Dream of Deracination: The Uses of Cosmopolitanism." *American Literary History* 12.4 (2000): 802-818. *Project Muse*. Web. 15 Oct. 2012.
- Pound, Ezra. *Selected Poems*. 1928. Ed. T.S. Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1973. Print.
- . *The Spirit of Romance*. London: J.M. Dent, 1910. Print.
- Povey, John F. "Beneath the Knife of Love. The First Collection of the Poetry of Dennis Brutus – *Sirens Knuckles Boots*." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig

- W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 41-48. Print.
- Primoratz, Igor. "Patriotism and Morality: Mapping the Terrain." *Patriotism: Philosophical and Political Perspectives*. Ed. Primoratz and Aleksander Pavković. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 17-35. Print.
- Raditlhalo, Tlhalo. "Writing in Exile." *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 410-428. Print.
- Ramazani, Jahan, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair, eds. *The Northern Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. Vol. 1. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003. Print.
- Reck, Michael. *Ezra Pound: A Close-Up*. 1967. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968. Print.
- Rich, Susan. "Ingrid de Kok." *South African Poets on Poetry: Interviews from New Coin 1992-2001*. Ed. Robert Berold. Scottsville: Gecko Poetry, 2003. 111-117. Print.
- Richard, Jean. *The Crusades c1071-c1291*. 1996. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Ridpath, Ian. *A Dictionary of Astronomy*. 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014. Web. 25 June 2014.
- Riemenschneider, Dieter. "Yet Somewhere Lingers the Stubborn Hope: Dennis Brutus' Poems in Exile." *Salutes: Selected Writings*. Ed. Monica Idehen. Evanston: Troubadour Press; Camden: Whirlwind Press, 1994. 121-128. Print.
- Rive, Richard. "On Being a Black Writer in South Africa: A Personal Essay." *The Voice of the Black Writer in Africa*. Ed. Ezekiel Mphahlele and Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1980. 21-24. Print.
- . "Black Poets of the Seventies." *English in Africa* 4.1 (1977): 47-54. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.



- . *"Buckingham Palace", District Six*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1986. Print.
- . "Where the Rainbow Ends." *Poems from Black Africa*. Ed. Langston Hughes. 1963. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968. 123. Print.
- . *Writing Black*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1981. Print.
- Rivlin, Gary. "An enemy of the state." *Reader* 15 July 1983: 1, 26-28, 30-37. Print.
- Robbins, Bruce. *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence*. Durham: Duke UP, 2012. Print.
- Roscoe, Adrian. *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977. Print.
- Rowell, Charles H. "'With Bloodstains to Testify': An Interview with Keorapetse Kgotsitsile." *Callaloo* 2 (1978): 23-42. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.
- Roy, Christian. *Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2005. Print.
- Royston, Robert, ed. *To Whom it may Concern: An Anthology of Black South African Poetry*. Johannesburg, AD. Donker, 1973. Print.
- Rudorff, Raymond. *The Knights and their World*. London: Cassell, 1974. Print.
- Rutherford, Jonathan. "Interview with Homi Bhabha: The Third Space." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. 207-221. Print.
- Ryan-Kobler, Maryalice. "Pablo Neruda's 'Arte Poética': At the Prophetic Crossroads." *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 53.2 (2000): 439-448. *JSTOR*. Web. 12 June 2014.
- Rybczynski, W. *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. New York: Penguin, 1986. Print.
- "The Sadako Story." Hiroshima International School. Web. 2 July 2014.
- Said, Edward W. "Collaboration, Independence, and Liberation." *Culture and Imperialism*. By Said. London: Chatto and Windus, 1993. 262-281. Print.

- . "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals." *The Edward Said Reader*. Ed. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin. London: Granta Books, 2000: 368-381. Print.
- . Introduction. *Culture and Imperialism*. By Said. London: Chatto and Windus, 1993. xi-xxviii. Print.
- . *Out of Place: A Memoir*. 1999. London: Granta Books, 2000. Print.
- . *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000. Print.
- "Sceletium Tortuosum." Web. 5 June 2014.
- Schafer, Murray. "Ezra Pound and Music." *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Walter Sutton. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963. 129-141. Print.
- Scott, Walter. *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*. 1904. Ed. J. Logie Robertson. London: Oxford UP, 1960. Print.
- Scott-Goodall, I. Letter to Helen Joseph. 12 June 1959. AD1137-Cd3. Historical Papers Research Archive. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. Web. 8 Jan. 2014.
- Seekings, Jeremy. *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991*. Cape Town: David Philip; Oxford: James Currey; Athens: Ohio UP, 2000. Print.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century." *The African Reader: Independent Africa*. Ed. Wilfred Cartey and Martin Kilson. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. 179-192. Print.
- . *Selected Poems/Poesies Choisies*. Trans. Craig Williamson. London: Rex Collings, 1976. Print.
- Serote, Mongane Wally. Personal interview. 25 Sep. 2012.
- . "Post-Sharpeville Poetry: A Poet's View." *Third World Quarterly* 10.4 (1988): 1600-1606. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.
- . *Yakhal'inkomo*. Johannesburg: Renoster Books, 1972. Print.

Shakespeare, William. "Julius Caesar." *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Ed. W.J. Craig. 1905. London: Oxford UP. 1962. 820-845. Print.

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. 1972. Ed. J.A. Burrow. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982. Print.

Sisulu, Elinor. *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In our Lifetime*. Cape Town: David Philip, 2002. Print.

Sitwell, Edith. *Collected Poems*. London: Macmillan, 1958. Print.

Slovo, Gillian. *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997. Print.

Small, Adam. *Verse van die Liefde*. Cape Town: Culemborg, 1957. Print.

Sole, Kelwyn. "Bird Hearts Taking Wing: Trends in Contemporary South African Poetry Written in English." *World Literature Today* 70.1 (1996): 25-31. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Sep. 2012.

*The Song of Roland*. Trans. Charles Scott Moncrieff. Project Gutenberg E-book. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.

Soyinka, Wole. Personal interview. 5 Apr. 2013.

---. "The Writer in a Modern African State." *The Writer in Modern Africa: African Scandinavian Writers' Conference, Stockholm 1967*. Ed. Per Wastberg. New York: Africana Publishing Corporation; Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1969. 14-36. Print.

Spengemann, William C. *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980. Print.

Spiers, Edward, M. "Engaging the Mahdists." *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*. By Spiers. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004. 99-111. Print.

---. "Reconquering the Sudan." *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*. By Spiers. Manchester:

- Manchester UP, 2004. 137-157. Print.
- Stahl, Franklin W. "Hershey." *Genetics* 149. 1 (1998): 1-6. Web. 4 June 2014.
- Steiner, Dorothea. "Severities and Gusto: An Interview with Ingrid de Kok." *Imagination in a Troubled Space: A South African Poetry Reader*. Ed. Michela Borzaga and Steiner. Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 2004. Print.
- Step toe, Lamont B. "In Celebration: Dennis Brutus, 28 November 1924-26 December 2009." *Sable: Special Issue* 14 (2010): 28-33, 115-117. Print.
- . "Interview: The Poetic Aesthetic of Dennis Brutus." *Leafdrift*. Ed. Step toe. Camden: Whirlwind, 2005. 201-216. Print.
- . "Interview with South African Poet-in-Exile Dennis Brutus." *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Ed. Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1995. 198-208. Print.
- Stiebel, Lindy. "No Sense of Homecoming." *Illuminations* 20 (2004): 53-54. Print.
- "The Story of Dennis Brutus." *Voice of Africa* 4.1 (1964): 29-30. Print.
- Strachan, Harold. *Make a Skyf, Man!* Johannesburg: Jacana, 2004. Print.
- Strand, Mark. "On Becoming a Poet." *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. Ed. Strand and Eavan Boland. New York: W.R. Norton, 2000. xvii--xxiv. Print.
- Sustar, Lee. "Apartheid, Neoliberalism, Resistance: Another World is Possible." *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader*. Ed. Sustar and Aisha Karim. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 285-293. Print.
- . "The Artist as Political Activist." *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader*. Ed. Sustar and Aisha Karim. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 153-166. Print.
- . "Isolating Apartheid – South Africa and International Sports." *Poetry and Protest: A*

- Dennis Brutus Reader*. Ed. Sustar and Aisha Karim. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 129-144. Print.
- . "From Protest to Prison." *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader*. Ed. Sustar and Aisha Karim. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. 23-44. Print.
- Tabor, C.J. "The Troubadours." *Folklore* 40.4 (1929): 345-368. Print.
- Tabori, Paul. *The Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study*. London: Harrap, 1972. Print.
- Taylor-Guthrie, Danille. "Conversation with South African Poet Keorapetse Kgositsile." *Issue* 24.2 (1996): 36-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.
- Tejani, Bahadur. "Can the Prisoner make a Poet? A Critical Discussion of *Letters to Martha* by Dennis Brutus." *African Literature Today* 6 (1973): 130-144. Print.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *Selected Poems*. Ed. Christopher Ricks. London: Penguin, 2007. Print.
- . *Tennyson: Poems and Plays*. 1912. London: Oxford UP, 1968. Print.
- Terkenli, Theano S. "Home as a Region." *Geographical Review* 85.3 (1995): 324-334. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.
- Themba, Can. *Requiem for Sophiatown*. Selected by Stephen Gray. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- Theroux, Paul. "Voices Out of the Skull: A Study of Six African Poets." *Black Orpheus* 20 (1963): 41-58. Print.
- Thomas, Cornelius. *Times with Dennis Brutus: Conversations, Quotations and Snapshots 2005-2009*. East London: Wendy's Book Lounge, 2012. Print.
- Thompson, Leonard. *A History of South Africa*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. Print.
- Thompson, William E. "Dennis Brutus: An Interview". *Ufahamu* 12.2 (1983): 69-77. Print.
- Thurman, Chris. *Guy Butler: Reassessing a South African Literary Life*. Scottsville:

- University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010. Print.
- Tshabe, S. L., ed. *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa*. Vol. 2. Alice: University of Fort Hare, 2003. Print.
- Tuakli, Wosornu [Selasi], Taiye. "Bye-Bye Barbar." *The Lip*. 3 Mar. 2005. Web. 10 July 2014.
- . *Ghana Must Go*. New York: Penguin, 2013. Print.
- Tytell, John. *Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano*. London: Bloomsbury, 1987. Print.
- Van der Vlies, Andrew Edward. "An Interview with Jeremy Cronin." *Contemporary Literature* 49.4 (2008): 514-540. *Project Muse*. Web. 29 Oct. 2012.
- Van Wyk, Johan. "Interview with Dennis Brutus." *Alternation* 8.2 (2001): 168-215. Print.
- Viljoen, Shaun. "Richard Rive: A Skewed Biography." PhD dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand, 2006.
- Viroli, Maurizio. Introduction. *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism*. By Viroli. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. 1-17. Print.
- Vivan, Itala, and Eva Hunter. "Lauretta Ngcobo." *Between the Lines II: Interviews with Nadine Gordimer, Menan du Plessis, Zoë Wicomb, Lauretta Ngcobo*. Ed. Hunter and Craig MacKenzie. Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1993. 97-116. Print.
- Watson, Burton, ed. *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century*. New York: Columbia UP, 1984. Print.
- Watson, Stephen. "Poetry in South Africa Today." *World Literature Today* 64.1 (1990): 14-19. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.
- Watt, Ian. *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*. 1996. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.
- Welsh, David. *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*. 2009. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2010.

Print.

Werbner, Pnina. "Cosmopolitanism, Globalisation and Diaspora: Stuart Hall in Conversation with Pnina Werbner." *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives*. Ed. Werbner. Oxford: Berg, 2008. 345-360. Print.

Wheatcroft, Andrew. *Infidels: A History of the Conflict between Christendom and Islam*. 2003. London: Penguin, 2004. Print.

White, Norman. *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. Print.

Williams, John. *Reading Poetry: A Contextual Introduction*. London: Edward Arnold, 1985. Print.

Winter, Gordon. *Inside Boss: South Africa's Secret Police*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1981. Print.

Wordsworth, William. *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*. 1904. Ed. Thomas Hutchinson. London: Oxford UP, 1960. Print.

---. *The Prelude: A Parallel Text*. Ed. J.C. Maxwell. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971. Print.

Wordsworth, William, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *The Lyrical Ballads: 1798-1805*. 1940. London: Methuen, 1959. Print.

Wylie, Hal. "Ruth First's Resistance Activities and Non-Fiction." Madison, University of Wisconsin-Madison. 1990. 1-19. Print.

Yeats, W.B. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. 1933. London: Macmillan, 1965. Print.

Yesufu, Abdul. "Smear Magnificence: Nature and Denaturalisation in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Dennis Brutus." *Acta Academica* 34.3 (2002): 33-52. Print.

Zedong, Mao. *The Poems of Mao Zedong*. 1972. Trans. Willis Barnstone. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Print.

Zepp, Rachel. "Interview: Dennis Brutus." *Pennsylvania's Literary Network Newsletter* Aug./Sep. 1989: 4. Print.

Zubaida, Sami. "Middle Eastern Experiences of Cosmopolitanism." *Conceiving*

*Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. 32-41. Print.

Zumthor, Paul. "An Overview: Why the Troubadours?" *A Handbook of the Troubadours*. Ed. F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 11-18. Print.





## FIGURES

“The cover of Dennis Brutus’ poetry collection *Strains*.” *Strains*, Troubadour Press, Austin.

“Dennis Brutus in an undated photograph.” LA599-7-2. UWC-Robben Island Museum  
Mayibuye Archives, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus in an undated photograph.” EW168-1-1. Eli Weinberg/UWC-Robben Island  
Museum Mayibuye Archives, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus in Cape Town in 2009.” Personal collection. George Hallett, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus with fellow anti-apartheid activists in an undated photograph.” AO15-7-4. Eli  
Weinberg/UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus with fellow writers in Germany in 1979.” Personal collection. George Hallett,  
Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus and James Matthews in Cape Town in 2002.” Personal collection. George  
Hallett, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus with his Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.” Personal collection. Patrick  
Bond, Durban.

“Dennis Brutus in London in 1973.” Personal collection. George Hallett, Cape Town.

“Dennis and May Brutus in 1988.” LA824-5-1. Sandra Cumming/UWC-Robben Island  
Mayibuye Museum Archives, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus at the National English Literary Museum in 2000.” Dennis Brutus Collection.  
National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.

“Dennis Brutus at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2009.” Personal collection.  
Patrick Bond, Durban.

“Dennis Brutus in the People’s Republic of China in 1973.” *China Poems*, University of  
Texas, Austin.

“Dennis Brutus at Poetry Africa in Durban in 2007.” Personal collection. Monica Rorvik, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus and Sonia Bunting at the United Nations in 1970.” AT103-18. UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives, Cape Town.

“Dennis Brutus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2009.” Personal collection. Patrick Bond, Durban.

“Dennis Brutus in Washington in 1981.” Personal collection. Kohn family, Washington.

“Dennis Brutus and Zakes Mda in the USA in 1983.” Personal collection. George Hallett, Cape Town.

“Francisco Goya’s painting, *The Third of May*.” 1814. Oil on canvas. Prado Museum, Madrid. Web. 24 Oct. 2013.

“Letter from Dennis Brutus, c.1995.” Personal collection. Tyrone August, Cape Town.

“A poem in Dennis Brutus’ handwriting.” Dennis Brutus Collection. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.

“Postcard from Dennis Brutus, 5 July 1995.” Personal collection. Tyrone August, Cape Town.

“Vincent van Gogh’s painting, *Prisoners Exercising (After Doré)*.” 1890. Oil on canvas. Pushkin Museum, Moscow. Web. 7 Dec. 2013.