

Dennis Brutus' Poetics of Revolt

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0386-0

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0386-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Foreword	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	7
Imagining Place	
Chapter Two	23
“A Simple Lust for Freedom”: Investigating Apartheid Law	
Chapter Three	37
“Politics of Terror”: X-raying Apartheid Police	
Chapter Four	53
“I Come and Go”: Travel Discourses	
Chapter Five	69
Stubborn Hope: Resilience Discourses	
Chapter Six	87
Language as Agency of Revolt	
References	105
Index	113

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Professor John Nkemngong Nkengasong for accepting to write the forward to this book.

Chapters one and six of the book are thoroughly revised versions of articles that appeared in *Alizés: Revue Angliciste de la Réunion* No. 30 and *The Atlantic Critical Review* Vol. 9. No. 3, respectively.

I appreciate my family for their loving support and encouragement.

FOREWORD

Writing predominantly within the Apartheid period in South Africa that lasted until 1991, Dennis Brutus remains in the spotlight of current critical thinking as someone whose works were very influential in negotiating social change in South Africa. Whatever new directions post-Apartheid writers like K. Sello Duiker, J. M. Coetzee, Lesego Rampolokeng, and Niq Mhlongo have taken, expressing such concerns as violence, xenophobia, and homosexuality that reflect the new South African society, the past still impacts the present. The crude realities of the Apartheid system can never be so easily erased in the same way that it was not easy to stop the crude laws. Among the major voices that used literature to protest against the enterprise of racial injustice in South Africa were writers like Alan Paton, Athol Fugard, Nadine Gordimer, and Dennis Brutus who drew the world's attention to unjust Apartheid laws through their art. Specifically, Dennis Brutus's works still have a tremendous impact on the new South African society. His creative activism encouraged the struggle against racial injustice and political incarceration. It distinctly documented the injustices of the Apartheid system in poetry in a way that contributed to the irrevocable socio-political change in the country. Imprisoned alongside Nelson Mandela in Robben Island, he became famous as an opponent of Apartheid. He thus remains a symbol of verbal revolt against all forms of discrimination, repression, and subjugation in varying communities in contemporary experience.

Reading Eunice Ngongkum's *Dennis Brutus' Poetics of Revolt*, I find a freshening and innovative interpretation of Brutus's poetry that brings to life the poet's concern for suffering people in the Apartheid regime through such cruel acts as harassments, arrests, and imprisonment. A distinctive quality of the work is its interdisciplinarity, which combines postcolonial, Marxist, neo-historicist, and structuralist perspectives to bring to light the different motifs and strategies along with the artistry with which Brutus succeeds in initiating revolt through poetry. Through a cogent critical analysis of the poems, the book explains how Brutus engages the poetics of place, Apartheid laws, police oppression, travel aesthetics, resilience, and language, which Ngongkum considers as tropes or metaphors for reinforcing the despicable Apartheid image and influencing the popular revolt against such a system.

The six chapters contained in the book explore the relationship between the poet and his experiences. Born in Salisbury to “coloured” parentage, his political activism, the ban on his creative activism, and his arrest and incarceration in Robben Island are some of the factors that inspired poetry that encouraged radical optimism and called for social and political liberation. The analysis of the poems draws extensively from Brutus’s exciting collections, including *Letters to Martha*, *Sirens*, *Knuckles and Boots*, *Stubborn Hope*, *Salutes and Censures*, and *China Poems*, among others. Significantly, the first chapter “Imagining Place” views the landscape as a multifaceted metaphor or an artistic statement against the politics of segregation. Particularly, the reader will enjoy the second chapter that revokes the Apartheid laws, an innovative interdisciplinary paradigm that provides a deeper insight into the poems and the impact of Apartheid laws on persons and communities. Oppressive laws usually inspire literature, and for Brutus writing poetry became an act of resistance of the repressive laws of Apartheid, which promoted the separate development of the races. The chapter on hope and resilience discourses is effective in demonstrating Brutus’s power of words in moving the oppressed people towards the ultimate goal of freedom. Resilience in Brutus’s poetry, as seen by the author, seeks justice and fairness through a revolt poetics that integrates courage and defiance as appropriate techniques for the dissemination of ideas about the human condition in the Apartheid regime, and therefore excites activism.

Each chapter can be considered a separate enterprise, but the six chapters culminate in shaping the unique quality of Brutus’s poetry of revolt. The striking unity of the various chapters is achieved by the author’s brilliant comment on Brutus’s poetic language in the last chapter. She discusses language as an agency of revolt because of its ability to convey powerful emotions, probe the imagination, tickle sensibilities, make minds conscientious, and pressure its readers towards positive socio-political change. Of course, through words, Brutus explores the innermost sanctum of the cruel Apartheid policy to portray the impact of such policies on the black South African society.

Brutus’s ingenuity in the art of crafting poetry that initiates the revolt against the dehumanizing laws and practices of Apartheid South Africa cannot be overlooked. Therefore, Ngongkum’s book steps aside from the usual focus on the “commonplace” Apartheid subject matter and the aesthetic-driven paradigms that dwell on Brutus’s eloquent expressions, complex images, irony, and allusions to explore the various poetic strategies that unveil the wholesomeness of his protest poetry. Her analysis

of the poems lucidly foregrounds Brutus's existential and soulful cry for social change, a move that indeed contributed to the breakdown of the Apartheid system. Clearly, the centrality of Ngongkum's work is hinged on Brutus's poetic strategy that moves his readers towards the condemnation and eradication of what is evil and the establishment of virtue for the common good, a strategy that helps the current reader of Brutus's poems to better understand the watershed politics of today's South Africa.

Ngongkum's analytical and interpretative strategies extol Brutus in the current critical discourses, foregrounding the corrosive force of his poetry against social injustice. More significantly, her interpretative strategies give the poems a universal and timeless appeal. Her effort recalls Sir Frank Kermode's view expressed in *Pleasure and Change: Aesthetics of the Canon* that poetic perception changes over time and each generation of readers has the competence to rediscover new meanings in poetry. The volume is quite insightful and brings to the surface the submerged ingredients of revolt with which Brutus laces his poetry and celebrates artistry that creates the excitement of reading Dennis Brutus at all times.

Professor Nkemngong Nkengasong

University of Yaounde 1

INTRODUCTION

The contestation of all forms of evil that hamper human growth and development in society is a recurrent feature of human history. In Africa, the challenges of slavery, colonialism, Apartheid, and neo-colonialism have presented a special problem to African writers who have often been at the forefront of the fight for social change.

This book examines the poetics of revolt in the poetry of the erstwhile South African poet and activist Dennis Brutus. The aim is to show the extent to which poetry as an art form has been and continues to be used in the cultural, political, and economic emancipation of the African continent and its people.

The immediate question that comes to mind is: how can one single consuming idea be the barometer in assessing an impressive body of work by one of Africa's outstanding poets? In my estimation, the concept of revolt is sufficiently varied and inclusive to merit the emphasis given to it in this book. As a principal current running through the bulk of modern African writing, its influence on the work of old and young poets alike is fascinating. Furthermore, revolt is one of those themes in the African literary experience that gives one sufficient freedom to transcend disciplinary and cultural boundaries to explore relationships between ideas and phenomena.

The phenomenon of revolt is universal in character. All over the world, oppressed peoples have risen to challenge external domination and internal oppression in order to assert their right to freely determine their own destiny. The independence movement and the current struggle against neo-colonial oligarchies in Africa are part of this historic trend. In such settings, the power of the pen has been acclaimed as being capable of transforming society; as being vital in the conscientization of the masses and heightening of awareness that often herald any important revolution.

On the African continent, examples abound of writers whose works have contributed to the emancipation of their peoples. The case of Agostinho Neto, whose poetry complemented the struggle against Portuguese imperialism in Angola, is one among many others. Dennis Brutus is cast in

this same mould and his poetry displays an accuracy of vision and a social awareness of quotidian reality that relate how things are and how they should be in his society. Brutus believes that, through poetry, his country in particular and the continent of Africa in general can be liberated from the throes of imperialism.

In African critical circles, the phenomenon of revolt has received considerable attention. Handled invariably as “protest” and as literature of revolt, the literati have shown that written African poetry in particular and literature in general have their origins in the protest tradition. This assessment draws from the peculiarities of African history; a history fraught with traumatic conflicts and tensions such as slavery, colonial and neo-colonial domination, and oppression. Louis James lends credence to this observation when he notes that:

In situations as explosive as that of Africa today there can be no creative literature that is not in some way political, in some way protest. Even the writer who opts out of the social struggles of his country and tries to create a private world of art, is saying something controversial about the responsibility of the artist to society (Pieterse and Munro, 1969, 109).

James’s views underline the crucial issues of the relationship between literature and setting, as well as the place of the writer in contemporary Africa—issues that are examined at length in this book. Literature is seen here as a product of society and should therefore be used in the service of that society. This is a perspective on which African writers and critics seem to agree. The Sierra Leonean poet and novelist Syl Cheney-Coker, for instance, says that, “if he is going to have any credibility today, the African writer must be committed: committed in the sense that he has to speak out against those outrages frequently perpetrated by those in power in his society” (Brown 2000, 3056). The critic Paul Tiyambe Zeleza notes that, “since independence, African writers, more than the professional academics, have exhibited a commitment to the political cause of the masses” (1994, 487). Throughout his life, Dennis Brutus was committed to comprehensively illuminating the realities of Apartheid and global injustice on the world stage. Through a poetics rooted in what he himself calls “the simple direct statement, generally lyrical, through a complex style ... to a colloquial, conversational unadorned” poetic idiom (Sustar and Karim 2006, 175), he critiques and comments on Apartheid oppression while demonstrating how such domination can be challenged and overcome. The implication here is that political commitment in Brutus’s poetry is determined by the latter’s aesthetic expression. This is all-the-more so when one accepts the premise that his poetry worked hand-

in-hand with his political commitment. In employing the varying styles hinted at above, the poet shows the reader how the literary expression of revolt is a question of formal and poetic strategies.

Dennis Vincent Frederick Brutus was born on November 24, 1924 in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe) to South African parents. The family moved to Port Elizabeth quite early in Brutus's life where he grew up and attended school. Due to poor health, Brutus attended school only irregularly, but his mother taught him at home, introducing him to Tennyson and Wordsworth early in life. Brutus later attended Fort Hare University where he obtained a BA in English in 1948. He taught English and Afrikaans in various high schools in South Africa for fourteen years but was dismissed on account of his participation in protests against racism and Apartheid in 1962. His subsequent arrest, imprisonment, and release on bail did not deter him from fighting injustice. He was accordingly banned by the South African government from taking part in any social or political agitation. He then moved to Swaziland in a bid to obtain a residence permit but was caught and handed over to the South African Police. Attempts to escape earned him a bullet in the back and eighteen months in the notorious Robben Island prison. Released from prison in 1965, Brutus was banned from writing and publishing. In 1966 he exiled himself, settling first in England before moving to the United States of America where he taught at different universities. He continued his campaign against racial injustice in South Africa and the rest of the world, returning to South Africa a few years after the end of Apartheid in 1994.

Brutus was very instrumental in bringing about South Africa's exclusion from the Olympic Games as a way of raising worldwide attention to racism in the country. He consistently championed the cause of human rights wherever he found himself because, for him, life was a contribution to challenging prejudice wherever it was found.

As a poet, he was able to match words with physical action. He once remarked in an interview that, "I think words should try to function like bullets. But it's a lot more than bullets that are going to change the world" (Lindfors 1974, 48). Brutus was therefore aware of the role he had to play in society as a poet and an individual. Niyi Osundare, the Nigerian poet and critic, called him, "a reassuring synthesis of thought and action, [who] has spent a considerable part of his life fighting apartheid not only with songs but also with concrete physical action" (1986, 30). It is this intersection between theme and technique that informs my reading of

Brutus's poetry in the six chapters of this work. Responding to a postmodern critical axis that argues for an interdisciplinary approach to literary criticism, I use a variety of reading practices, marrying postcolonial, new historicist, geocritical, spatial, and environmental theories to analyse the poetry from varying but interwoven perspectives that all hinge on the poetics of revolt. These topics range from questions of place, law, the police, resilience, and travel to language.

Chapter one, "Imagining Place," examines the relationship between self and place in contexts such as Apartheid South Africa where the majority black population was systematically denied access to land and identity by a formidable machinery of oppression rooted in Apartheid ideology. The chapter interrogates the extent to which a sensitive poet like Brutus responded to a South Africa operating on such an ideology. Did he celebrate landscape features in pure romantic overtones, or were these same features constituted in themselves and the poetry as an artistic statement against the politics of segregation? This chapter seeks to show that, for Dennis Brutus, the landscape of South Africa served as a multifaceted metaphor for the liberation of the oppressed population. In effect, natural spaces in the poetry hinge upon the desire to be liberated and the poet's revolutionary posture promotes a special relationship between him and his country. A postcolonial reading underscores the fact that this relationship is shaped by the particular dynamics between two colonized "others," namely the poet-persona and the land.

Chapter two is titled "'A Simple Lust for Freedom': Investigating Apartheid Law." The chapter draws from the theoretical law and literature paradigm to posit that poetry has the capacity to broaden and deepen an individual's understanding of ethics, politics, and human relations in general (Seaton 1999, 479). It transcends disciplinary boundaries to foreground legal discourses in African poetry, mainly confirming the possibilities that Dennis Brutus's poetry has in giving us insights into the nature and effects of Apartheid law. Through a textual analysis of the poetry, certain truths about Apartheid law, especially regarding its meaning in the lives of those who suffer its brunt, are laid bare. These truths are not easily found in non-narrative jurisprudence (West 1988–9, 126).

Chapter three is based on the assumption that art can provide unique possibilities for examining power and its intersection with race in hegemonic contexts. In this way, it examines the police as an instrument of power in poetry. Through a close reading of selected poems, the chapter, titled, "'Politics of Terror': Apartheid Police in Poetry," seeks to show that

through an aesthetic rooted in critical realism, Brutus delineates the construction and conduct of policing in the Apartheid context. As works of revolt, these poems document not only the excesses of the police in black and coloured spaces, but equally how their authoritarian and repressive actions are met with defiance by the downtrodden. While the whole Apartheid system and its aftermath can be said to be the focus of Brutus's work, how he represents key actors in the system, like the police, merits the kind of attention given to it in this chapter.

In chapter four the focus is on how the discourse of travel intersects and informs Brutus's revolutionary offensive by concretely examining discourses of travel in the poetry. I argue here that, contrary to the views of critics like Margaretta Jolly who opine that "there is no significant quantity of travel poetry composed by African writers travelling within Africa, at least in written form" (2001, 22), most of Brutus's poetry can be considered travel literature because it textualizes the poet's travels within and outside South Africa, positioning the oeuvre as testimony not only to the atrocities of Apartheid injustice but all forms of social inequality the world over.

Chapter five is titled "Stubborn Hope: Resilience Discourses in Poetry" and explores the subject of resilience in Brutus's poetry using a New Historicist paradigm. My argument is firstly that resilience was critical to the efficacy of the black struggle for freedom and the dismantling of Apartheid. Secondly, in the poet's vision of revolt the agency and internal dynamics of resilience at the individual, communal, and global levels inform both theme and technique. Through a realist paradigm, sustained by symbolism, metaphors, and rhythmic techniques, the poetry intimates that hope in change and individual effort animate resilience discourses in the face of racial oppression.

In chapter six, the issue of poetic language as an agency of revolt is the focus. It argues that in a context like Apartheid, where language itself takes on the pigmentation of colour, the poet cannot afford the delight in image making, constructing verbal artifices to please the reader or audience. Rather, the urgency of the moment will definitely constrain the sensitive poet to carefully select, in the words of Chinweizu, "the diction, imaging techniques, the logistics or the strategies of organisation and development, tone and style of utterance" (1980, 275), not only to create beauty but, above all, to get across their feelings and thoughts about the situation and move the people to action.

CHAPTER ONE

IMAGINING PLACE

Introduction

The worldview of any artist is determined, in the main, by their perception and responses to a recognizable landscape. Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin observe that the concern with place is “a major feature of post-colonial literatures,” because in once colonized territories the “special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being, [being] the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (1989, 18). The relationship between self and place is even more crucial in contexts such as Apartheid South Africa where the majority black population was systematically denied access to land and identity by a formidable machinery of oppression rooted in Apartheid ideology. The questions that readily come to mind are: how will a sensitive poet like Brutus respond to a South Africa operating on the ideology of Apartheid? Will the poet celebrate landscape features in pure romantic overtones or will these same features constitute, in themselves and the poetry, an artistic statement against the politics of segregation? This chapter seeks to show that, for Dennis Brutus, the landscape of South Africa serves as a multifaceted metaphor for the liberation of the black population. In effect, natural spaces in the poetry hinge upon the desire to be liberated, and the poet’s revolutionary posture promotes a special relationship between him and South Africa. A postcolonial reading underscores the fact that this relationship is shaped by the particular dynamics between two colonized “others”: the poet-persona and the land. But first things first: what is place?

Place is a concept that is so deeply entrenched in culture that a straightforward definition of it is almost impossible. However, some perspectives, as they relate to this chapter, will be considered. Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* asserts that place has a physical form: a landscape often understood as a scenery perceived by seeing (1956, 9). *The Oxford Dictionary of Geography* defines place as, “a particular point on the earth’s surface; an identifiable location for a situation imbued with

human values” (1996, 327). For Martin Heidegger, “to-be-in” is to belong to one’s environment and to identify with it, so to speak. It equally means being interested in the beings of one’s surroundings (1996). According to Yi-Fu Tuan, places presuppose rootedness in a locality and an emotional commitment to it (1975, 151). For Jennifer Beningsfield, it is “not only a sensory medium of grass, soil, stone and water, hills and valleys, not only physical topography. It is an experienced world which is drenched with meaning through inhabitation, conflict and violence” (2006, xi). These definitions underscore the naturalistic (defining physical features) and existential (responses to place) qualities of place. Place, then, is not just a location but also a particularity imbued with “human values.” It plays a significant role in defining one’s identity and in this way remains, in the words of Deborah L. Williams and Elizabeth A. Brandt, “a cornerstone of human life” (2013, 44).

As noted above, a multidisciplinary approach informs my analysis in this chapter. This is simply because place is a concept that operates at the crossroads of current social, political, economic, and environmental issues. David Orr says, in this regard, that: “A place has a human history and a geologic past; it is a part of an ecosystem with a variety of flora and fauna. Its inhabitants are part of a social, economic and political order ... They are linked by innumerable bonds to other places. A place cannot be understood only on its own [or] from the vantage point of a single discipline or specialisation” (1991, 129). Geography, for instance, situates humans in a place and offers an opportunity to perceive their contextual responses. In postcolonial theory, place is set against the concept of space as territory. It transcends the boundaries of land to encompass issues of identity, love, and mobility, as Brutus’ poetry portrays. These two approaches delineate place as a unit where human experience and physical form are fused together to create a unitary concept in the vision of the poet of revolt.

Place as Nature and Existence

Place, as seen above, is land, an identifiable geographical entity that people have come to recognize as the foundation of their being. Ngugi wa Thiong’o says:

Land is the basis of all national feelings. When a people’s land is taken away, the basis of their being is removed. That is why many countries are named by their lands ... At other times people are named after the

language they speak. But it is impossible for a common language to develop without a common territory ... (1997, 108)

In the poetry of Dennis Brutus, the point of departure is the land of South Africa. The poetry introduces us to the physical environment, delineating the land as a means of livelihood for the bulk of the population. The poetry further speaks of the land as the place where flora and fauna flourish, and where people have buried their ancestors. In this case, land can be seen as a relationship. We find the poet displaying a deep attachment to his country, an attachment that has informed and continues to inform his work. It is an attachment that is almost spiritual, as Ngugi observes again in another context, "The land, the soil has got a lot of effect on the people ... It is more than the material; it is not just because of its economic possibilities, it is almost akin to the spiritual" (Killam 1973, 123). This special relationship between the African people and the land might be the *raison d'être* of the different liberation wars fought on the continent. It also enables us to understand why the issue of land or land use is given prominence in many of the charters of liberation movements.

According to Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, place is also a palimpsest, a kind of parchment on which successive generations have inscribed and re-inscribed the process of history (1989, 326). African history and its antecedents inform the poetry studied here, with the specific historical experiences of South Africa becoming the poetry. This creates the basis of the revolutionary posture of the poet, as knowledge of the history and culture of the people enables him to give "soul" to that specific geographical entity. Emmanuel Obiechina notes that, "no-one gives soul to something he does not understand, something he does not fully appreciate and does not know, because soul is the ultimate affirmation of the reality that cannot die" (1988, 8).

In Brutus's poetry, vivid pictures of the physical landscape are painted and act as settings for a good number of the poems. The physical beauty of the land is underlined for effect and equally delineates the contrast between what the land was and what it is now as a result of Apartheid. The emotion of love for the country is easily captured in the descriptions and can be said to fuel the zeal to see the land liberated. It is a love that sustains the faith in the fight and eagerly anticipates the moment of freedom.

The first poem in the collection *A Simple Lust*, entitled "A Troubadour, I Traverse My Land," is directly related to the poet's desire to know more about his country and to bring this knowledge to his countrymen in

particular, and others in general. In the poem, the troubadour image of the poet, “the stubborn and even foolish knight-errant on a quest, in the service of a loved one” (Wästberg 1968, 98), is developed. This image of the poet confirms Brutus as a poet of the “open road”—one who “traverse(s) all his land/exploring her wide flung parts with zest.” The verb “traverse” immediately brings to mind the idea of travelling the whole width and breadth of the country, “her wide flung parts,” and at the same time underscores the arduousness of the task, given that there are “those who have banned inquiry and movement” in his country. Yet the poet’s delight in exploring his land, especially “her secret thickets,” is revealed in the adjective “zest.” This opening poem thus confirms the view that the poet is interested in his land not only from the socio-political standpoint but also from the emotional.

In “The Beauty of My Land Peers Warily” (1978, 52), the natural landscape of South Africa is the focus. The speaker is on the road, observing the scenery as he drives around the country. Brutus in this poem, as in others of this nature, employs the persona of the privileged traveller to give us vivid pictures of the South African landscape.

The beauty of my land peers warily
 Through palisading trees on hilly slopes;
 At night along the tree-fenced roads
 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;
 I shiver at her self-defensive scorn
 in chillness of aloofly soaring rocks—
 But all of these my unwearying ardour mocks
 when sunfire ignites the miles of rippling corn.

The title of the poem is evocative of a beauty that cannot be fully appreciated because of certain inhibitions and restrictions under Apartheid. Yet, “the palisading trees,” “the hilly slopes,” “the tree-fenced roads,” and “the rippling corn” capture the eye of the traveller as he comes in full view of them in the night light. The exquisiteness of the terrain is further underlined through the use of sound devices of alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. The /l/ sound recurs in words like “land,” “warily,” “hilly,” “palisading,” and “slopes,” while the /p/ sound occurs in words like “palisading,” “presence,” “pacing,” “pools,” and “ripping,” among others. The /i/ and /u:/ sounds recur in words like “warily,” “palisades,” “hilly,”

and “beauty” and “pools,” “soothing,” and “aloofly,” respectively. The poem also lends itself to a regular rhyme pattern of /abbacddceffe/. Such quatrain rhyming delineates the speaker’s perception of his land as a place of perfect beauty. Moreover, the deep attachment to the place is brought out in the line “I sense her presence pacing sinuously.” The verb “sense” connotes an intimate spiritual attachment to the land. It equally betrays a kind of male/female relationship developed at length in other poems.

“On the Road” (1973, 50) employs the persona of the traveller to give us the sights and sounds of a typical South African night. The speaker observes the rising moon and its effects on the landscape features. First, the formlessness caused by the darkness gradually gives way to a perception of “trees detach[ing]/ themselves from formless landscapes/ to assume courtly grace.” The disappearing clouds are like light-edged blades that cut across the stars sparsely spread in the sky. The personification of the night in the line “The wide night sighs its sensuous openness” captures the appealing effect that the night has on the speaker, an effect that is evident in his response to the natural phenomena around him, “stirring my mind’s delight/ to a transfiguring tenderness.” In the last two lines of the poem, Brutus uses elements of nature to make a discreet political statement: “as stars harden to spear-point brilliance and focus fierce demands for peace” (50). Anthropomorphism occurs in these lines, as the stars seem to join forces with the speaker in the fight for peace. Brutus, in typical style, manoeuvres the sharp landscape and elemental imagery to suggest a political fact—the black South African’s quest for peace, which is necessary for one to be able to admire the landscape in all tranquillity. The form of the poem—two stanzas of equal length—suggests not only the harmony of the moonlit night but also the consistency of the speaker’s quest for peace in “a ravaged land.”

Another poem, “Zoo Lake: Johannesburg,” begins with a Marvell-esque meditation on a green restorative world, also distinctly South Africa:

Light, green-yellow luminiscent, tender,
seeps through these deep foliaged weeping willows to
filter streams and runnels of soft glow
suffusing enclaves of green and sombre gloom. (39)

The sunlight, “seeping” through the green foliage surrounding the lake, reflects different shades of colour in the landscape: “light,” “green,” “yellow,” “luminescent.” These visual images, in conjunction with the precedent colour terms, conjure up the magnificence of the natural environment made more beautiful by the falling light. Such captivating

beauty drains away the speaker's "frantic and frustrated sorrow," especially with the awareness that there is a certain "charm/that graces this [otherwise] distraught and mourning land." The loveliness of the lake and its surrounding greenery "pulps out anger's rancid ooze" from the speaker's heart and further acts as a balm that "eases and erases all-hurts." This poem, in the tradition of the baroque, expresses a desire for the hermetic retreat of the pastoral tradition, especially as the green world of the poem offers warmth and acts as healing unction to a soul conscious of the reality of South African strife and despair, as we find in the exclamatory line "Oh! Lacerating land." Brutus's emotional response resonates with Roy Osama Kamada's view that "for postcolonial writers, the landscapes that they write about are necessarily politicized. Their own subjectivities are intimately implicated in both natural beauty as well as the traumatic history of the place" (2010, 2). The land is being torn to pieces by the forces of occupation, yet there is intimation of a deep and consistent relationship existing between it and the speaker. This consistency is emphasized by the long vowel sounds giving a drawn out, almost breath-taking melody to the poem in words like "green," "seeps," "deep," "weeping," "streams," "charms," "graces," "oozes," "erases," and "eases." Even the poem's intricately designed structure of four lines per stanza suggests a certain perfection that is observable in the physical environment described in the poem.

"Landscape of My Young World" (132) reminisces in a Browning-esque way about the beginnings of the poet-speaker's life as a child. The poem captures the first point of that entry into the world in its immediacy and total situation.

Landscape of my young world!
 Land of soft hills and huts
 of aloes and grey-greening dream firs;
 these are the images to lacerate,
 against which I glass myself in distance
 or a rebellious walling of reserve.
 Heartbreaking hillsides and green slopes!
 There is no armour to exclude your poignancy,
 no blunting, and for me no ease.

The location is Port Elizabeth in South Africa, with its poignant physical features of "heart-breaking hill-sides" and "green slopes." Its flora of "aloes" and "grey-greening dreaming firs" is quite inescapable. The adjective "heart-breaking" is used positively to emphasize a fascination with this delightful background. The word "dreaming" equally conjures up

the Elysian nature of these physical features. These carefully selected qualifiers create an inescapable atmosphere of alluring charm and tenderness. It is an atmosphere further reinforced by the rhythmic nature of the lines in the long vowel /i:/ in “greening” and “dreaming,” and the alliterative /l/ and /h/ in words like “landscape,” “world,” “land,” “hills,” “huts,” “heart-breaking,” “hillsides,” and “slopes.” This constant image of a lovely and appealing countryside has built up in the poet-speaker, “a rebellious walling of reserve” against the forces that “lacerate” this otherwise splendid land. Many of the poems that describe the environment of South Africa demonstrate the naturalness and beauty of the surroundings in spite of the factors inimical to the welfare of the people and, by extension, the milieu. John Lent has observed that Brutus’s poetry describes the landscape of South Africa, and the idea is to use landscape imagery to transmute emotional reality (McLuckie 1995, 107). Lent seems to be suggesting that landscape is a relationship in the sense in which the elemental landscape images used in the poems serve to emphasize the connectedness of human beings and the landscape they are born to.

These examples provide the following conclusions about Brutus’s poetry of place. In poems describing the physical environment of South Africa, sound devices of alliteration, assonance, rhyming patterns, repetitions, and fairly regular stanza patterns, in conjunction with visual imagery, are consistently employed. These devices not only delineate a thorough knowledge of its topography but also show a particular attachment to this land, which takes “precedence over his other loves” (Brutus, 1973, 2). At the same time, the painting of such vivid landscapes evokes a corresponding psychological landscape—the frustration, anger, and sorrow at seeing this beautiful country in the hands of racist usurpers. These tensions, from a postcolonial perspective, highlight place as “a concept of contention and struggle, a continual reminder of colonial ambivalence” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 177).

Obiechina notes that the committed writer “should know the history and geography of [his country] so well that he could without too great effort, celebrate it in his songs, poeticize, describe, and integrate within the human experience of the people” (1988, 9). The history and geography of South Africa are discernible in Brutus’s poetry. In “In the Sunlight” (1973, 139), the evocation of South African place names is both for incantatory effects and an indication of profound knowledge of place:

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
 and by Clifton, Sea Point and the Cape. (139)

Clifton, Sea Point, and the Cape are place names in South Africa, and we find them evoked here and integrated into the temporal and spatial experiences of the poet. This same pattern of associating the landscape with the poet's feelings occurs in part seven of "For Chief." Here, we are expressively told that the mere mention of the place names like "Fietas or Woodstock or Gelvandale" brings anxiety to many South African activists, reminding them of their responsibility and commitment.

Aspects of South African history are discernible in the poetry of Dennis Brutus. The politics of Apartheid and its constraints on the oppressed black people with whom the poet identifies come under his critical lens as a poet of revolt. An awareness of the history and development of this racial policy gives the poet the grounds to distance himself from it. In the poem titled "Blood River Day," techniques of deflation—which consists of reducing the subject by employing negative diction and imagery to achieve the desired effect—are employed to condemn the bestiality of the Apartheid regime. The white people in the poem are celebrating a victory construed in negative terms:

Each year on this day
 they drum the earth with their boots
 and growl incantations
 to evoke the smell of blood
 for which they hungrily sniff the air. (1973, 77)

Dancing as a way of celebration is supposed to be graceful and appealing, but we are told that these characters "drum the earth with their boots." The word "boots" connotes the ubiquitous police force terrorizing the black people, while the images "growl" and "sniff" demonstrate the bestiality of the Apartheid system. In effect, the poem suggests that Apartheid is inhuman because it thrives on the destruction of lives. A celebration of victory by the white people is reduced by the poet to a mere exhibition of the "primitiveness and ferocity" of an oppressive system. Another way in which Brutus distances himself from the system is by the use of pronouns; "they" and "theirs" as against "us" and "ours." The "us" refers to the downtrodden, the group with which the poetic persona identifies. Such identification enables him to explore and explain the historical and social background of this suffering group. Their struggle is his and the images of that struggle become his poetry. Hence, in "A Troubadour . . .," the

“unarmed thumb” as a symbol is “deliberately drawn from the salute of the African Congress, which at one stage was a thumbs-up signal” (Pieterse 1974, 103). In the poem “At a Funeral,” the colours “black, green and gold” at the beginning of the poem are those of the African National Congress flag, the main resistance movement against racism in South Africa. The anthem of the African National Congress (ANC) becomes the music of the poem, “In my part of the world.” The word “Africa” repeated in this poem identifies the dispossessed as a united people, fighting against an odious system. It equally depicts their love for their land and signals their determination to see it totally liberated. The technique used here, as in many of the poems in the volume *Stubborn Hope*, produces a deceptive sense of simplicity of the poetic statement. In the poem cited above, the reader is led to focus their attention on the connotations of the word “Africa” and not unto the poem as artifice. The importance of what “Africa” is to the poet and his group is what is paramount.

Brutus also authenticates ideas in his poetry through allusion to South African history. The footnotes accompanying some occasional poetry testify to this. For instance, “At a Funeral” is in memory of Velencia Majombozi, who died shortly after qualifying as a doctor. “For a Dead African” is about John Nangoza Jebe, who was shot by the police during a Good Friday procession in Port Elizabeth, 1956. “For Chief” is a tribute to Chief Albert John Luthuli, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. In *Salutes and Censures*, documentary techniques such as maps, photographs, newspaper cuttings, and montage are used to authenticate themes.

Important historical events also act as metaphors in the poetry. Janet MacArthur observes how, “Brutus experiments with art as a means of transcending the nightmare of colonial history ... [His] beautiful, self-contained poetic icons are never historyless; history oozes, seeps into them” (McLuckie 1995, 82). The Sharpeville and Soweto massacres of the 1960s and 1970s in South Africa, for instance, constitute poetic icons in some of the poems. In “The Sun on this Rubble after Rain”, Sharpeville (the town where, on March 21, 1967, sixty-seven black and coloured people, protesting against the Pass Laws, were shot dead by the South African Police, and several others were wounded) becomes a verb, functioning at the initial position in the line, “Sharpevilled to spear points for revenging.” Formed from the name of the town, the verb becomes an expression of the revolt of the oppressed. In “Sharpeville,” the latter symbolizes the reality of oppression in South Africa: “it epitomized oppression/ and the nature of a society/ more clear than anything else.” But, for the black people, “Sharpeville” delineates the determination to

fight for freedom, “And remember the unquenchable will for freedom/ Remember the dead/ and be glad” (1978, 63). The death of the sixty-seven people in the Soweto massacres is not a waste but a part of the struggle for freedom, as the poem “The Dark Lanes of Soweto” portrays. Brutus elevates the dead here by the technique of extrapolation—the black people are not only people dying but are people dying for a cause. In this sense, then, the people are not cowed into silence, and we are told that, “The lust of freedom stubbornly survives/ like a smouldering defiant flame—/ And the spirit of Steve Biko moves easily” (1982, 10). Steve Biko, a hero of black resistance, was a victim of racist violence. Like the children of Soweto, his death will “not be forgotten/ their lives will purchase our freedom.”

Such a thorough acquaintance with the land, its people, and its history enables the poet to easily delineate what the country has become as a result of the presence of the forces of occupation. In his first collection *A Simple Lust*, Brutus is in many poems quick to point out that the once beautiful country has become “a sickly state” where loveliness has been tainted by “disease” and her “best image ravaged” (1973, 34). There is a consistent use of images of disease and violent destruction to highlight the extent to which Apartheid has destroyed the land and rendered it “unlovely and unlovable.” The brutal destruction is captured in the phrases “trafficked,” “raddled,” and “undiscerning occupying feet.” The word “trafficked” connotes economic exploitation of an illegal and disreputable kind. Again, the technique of deflation works well here. The white people, who illegally exploit the resources of the land according to the poet, have no moral basis to do so. The words “raddled” and “undiscerning” point to the insensitive policies characteristic of Apartheid South Africa.

The effects of this wanton destruction of the land are beautifully captured in “Erosion: Transkei” (1973, 16). The title of this poem lends itself to a double interpretation—erosion as a simple issue of geological destruction and erosion as the topography of politics. The inimical development policies of Apartheid have eroded the lives of the people. In effect, the Group Areas Act enacted by the South African regime, in which black people were forced into Bantustans to encourage separate ethnic development, informs the poem. Transkei was one of those homelands reserved for the largely Xhosa-speaking population. Its natural environment is near desert, but the erosion of the natural landscape has been reinforced by overpopulation: “Under green drapes the scars scream,/ red wounds wail soundlessly/ Beg for assuaging, satiation” (16). Evidence of the ravages suffered by the land comes across in the images of “scars

scream.” The phrase “under green drapes” refers to the usual impression given by the racist government to the world that separate development is good, but the poet notes that, under this deceptive “greenness,” “scars scream” and “red wounds wail.” Brutus here succeeds in making a symbol out of the landscape to buttress the destructive nature of Apartheid. The personification, used together with the hard consonants /sk/ in “scars scream,” highlights a devastation and disfigurement that is unnatural because it is caused by the human.

The country is now entirely desert, a sterile plain as we find in “For us, only the barrenness of existence” (1978, 10).

For us, only the barrenness of existence
in a Siberia of avarice:

vainly one’s mind traverses the festivities,
seeks for one hillock on the sterile plain

so one returns to the recognition:
nothing for us is offered, nothing gained.

The poem is a terse comment on the predicament of the oppressed group, meant to eke out a living in an otherwise rich nation of possibilities and alternatives, “one hillock on the fertile plain.” The use of the pause in the first line is effective in drawing attention to the group being talked about. The phrase “For us,” which occurs at the initial position of the first line of the poem, is set off from the rest of the line by a comma. The “us” refers to those with whom the speaker identifies and for whom, ironically, a country of wealth is nothing but “a Siberia of avarice.” Siberia, a large tundra in Russia, symbolically captures the country from the perspective of the oppressed group (black people) for whom an otherwise rich place breeds nothing but poverty as a result of Apartheid. The juxtaposition in the poem effectively underlines the economic gap between the downtrodden and the white people: “festivities” is balanced against “barrenness,” while “hillock” is contrasted with “sterile plain.” The briefness of the poem, written in unrhymed couplets, further suggests the inequalities existing between the “haves” and the “have-nots.”

Through vivid and concrete landscape images, Brutus succeeds in manipulating the reader into the psychological reality of a menacing and potentially dangerous environment. According to John Lent, Brutus forces “the horror in his home land out into the relief of our consciousness and this, more than simplicity or rhetoric, is the real political achievement” (McLuckie 1995, 110). My argument here is that place as a kind of

metaphor becomes a vehicle of communicating an idea for the poet of revolt. Furthermore, poetic devices of alliteration, allusion, and balanced sentences reinforce the theme of the asperity and hardness of the poet's world. In "A Tribute for Steve Biko" (1983, 10), Brutus evokes the picture of a very desolate landscape characterized by "dust," "silt," and "arid air," "harsh in the throat/ hurtful to the eyes." The speaker notes that the landscape is studded with "crude Teutonic towns/ with their ominous echoes" like "—Hamburg, Berlin, Hanover—." The word "Teutonic" refers to the English, German, and Dutch races that came to South Africa, bringing with them their original ethnic names now imposed on the landscape. Therefore, just as the geographical landscape of this country is eroded and rendered arid, the history is also distorted by the imposition of Teutonic names. But Steve Biko, the man to whom this poem is dedicated, knew and was deeply affected by all of these alien impositions because, "their roads he traversed/ they fired him with resolve/ and smouldering anger." Biko's anger is at the deliberate Apartheid policy of eroding not only the physical but also the historical landscape of South Africa. Dennis Brutus, like Steve Biko, is at pains to accept the systematic destruction of his country by Apartheid as his response to an interview question indicates: "It is a suffering people, and a suffering land, assaulted, violated, raped, what-ever you will, tremendously beautiful and I feel a great tenderness for it" (Thompson 1983, 28). South Africa is viewed as a woman whom Brutus loves but who for the moment is "sexually violated" by the racist government in that country.

Given the poetry's rootedness in the love paradigm, many critics have been concerned about Brutus' use of "tenderness" as a poetic focus. R. N. Egudu, commenting on the use of the word "tenderness" in the poem "Somehow we Survive," has this to say: "tenderness is used as a weapon to fight against apartheid [but this] does not mean that Brutus is not appreciative of the ugliness of the situation that prevails in South Africa. The kind of action Brutus is concerned with is more psychological than physical" (1979, 134). John F. Povey has also observed that, in the poetry of Brutus, "the reality of apartheid is made all-the-more evident through the contrast with the emotional assurance of the poet, rising above the threat of constant harassment" (1973, 44) in the lines:

Patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark
hissing their menace to our lives ...
somehow we survive
and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither. (1973, 4)