

The Significance of Lynton

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The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, to show that a culturally degenerative form of aesthetic literary assessment remains prevalent in teaching and critique of South African poetry. Second, that such assessment, even when applied to an acclaimed poem such as Campbell's 'Zulu Girl', is fundamentally invalid. Third, to show new and vital ways of teaching South African poetry by tracing strands of historical connectedness to and from the same poem by Campbell.

Section I

Roy Campbell's 'Zulu Girl' is a poem that maps the central conflict of colonial intrusion in this country and it ends fully prescient of gloomy reckoning. It is one of the most anthologized and regularly taught poems in South African English. It is often taught, however, not as a text of conflict but dealt with as an article of aesthetic excellence: proof that the colonial poet can equal, or at least aspire to, the perfections of the mother country. Outside a suppressed text of political intricacy, given that Campbell writes vicariously, on behalf of the other, there exists then a tradition of reading it that effectively stills the voice of protest within and its vibrant interconnectedness to other South African poetry. Poem and standard treatment are curiously at odds, and, I submit, bound in conflicts that are at the heart of our political being and our reading of South African works.

Although traditions of close-reading are claimed to be defunct, here is a report from a first-year student at a South African university quite recently.

The first semester had gone well. The first-year student had tackled the fiction section with relish, and then the drama section - not with as much relish, but with even more success. But what was to follow would result in unrelieved anguish and a loss of faith. The first-year student was about to collide head-on with an immovable object - the bad poetry lecturer. The bad poetry lecturer was of whimsical appearance. His skinny, alcohol-wasted frame was clad in tight, faded

jeans, a thread-bare long-sleeved shirt and a nondescript black jacket. His hair was wild, woolly and grey, his ratty beard Rasputin-esque. His wide, unfocused gaze was faintly marshalled by large, John Major-type spectacles. His dress and addiction originated in an earlier, more hedonistic age: the seventies. He burst into the lecture hall ... shouting unintelligibly to all and sundry. ... He reached his lectern, grasping it firmly to steady himself, and began garbling his first lecture; this caricature of the Amad professor from countless Hollywood B-movie college flicks. His method for understanding poetry slowly became apparent. He endorsed what the first-year student later came to know as 'Practical or New Criticism'. He was the spiritual spawn of the infamous I.A. Richards and E.M.W. Tillyard of Cambridge notoriety (how the wiser heads at Oxford must have quietly scorned the folly of these men, how they must have fretted over the consequences).

The bad lecturer would select a poem, any poem. Then, starting with the title, he would minutely examine every line for: alliteration, consonance, assonance, euphony, cacophony, inversion, syncope, chiasmus, zeugma, caesura, enjambment, and end-stopped lines. Syntax was for him an evergreen source of orgasmic delight: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, articles, tenses, mood, voice, and construction (simple and complex, coordinate and subordinate). By this intensely tedious and pedantic method, meaning (he would claim) would leap from the page into the mind of the student.

The first-year student was disconcerted. There was precious little emphasis on what ... the poet may have actually been trying to convey. All was grammar and technique. The student felt that the study of literature was being reduced to a science. His consciousness recoiled at this sacrilegious scheme. Clearly, the cold, black evil of the secret techno-econocrat mandarins of First-World civilization was infecting the vulnerable Faculty of Arts with its insidious poison.

All that was noble and honourable in the first-year student railed at this blasphemy. Angered, he approached the bad poetry lecturer in his office. He listened impatiently to the student, then bade him sit while he picked a photocopied article from a pile which he kept for such contingencies. Trembling a hand at the student, he began reading. The article was entitled *Discovery through Technique*, or some such, and it extolled the virtues of literary commentary the New Criticism way. Indeed, it pretentiously and smugly referred to detractors of this method as arrogant and ignorant (and here, the trembling hand was laid on the knee of the insulted student).

The dilated pupils looked approximately in the direction of the first-year student. An air of triumph and condescension mingled with the stale odour of academic atrophy. A copy of this article, which proves the irrelevance and inferiority of other methods of literary criticism was presented to the student. Another convert, thought the bad poetry lecturer, as he dismissed the student from his scholarly presence.

The first-year student was now enraged by this approach to the study of poetry. He listed his objections in a written statement to the Head of the English Department, a woman schooled at Oxford and thus a despicable traitor, as she heartily endorses New Criticism. Surely, wrote the student, 'English as a Science' is a most contemptible notion? Surely this method is more suited to train compilers of dishwasher manuals? Does it not amount to Industrial English, and as such is more suited to Technical Colleges?

To elucidate, the following metaphor was used. University English students were compared to High School biology pupils. The poem was compared to the hapless corpse of a dead rat, splayed across the dissection table. Timidly the blunt scalpel ineptly butchers the limp form. Fur, skin, blood and organs everywhere. Thus does the reluctant English first-year attempt to dissect a poem using New Criticism: taking it apart to see how it works, like a transistor or a carburettor.

The head smiled and nodded, smiled and nodded, affably agreeing to look into the matter, etc., etc.

Not only this head but many, I believe, in this country smile affably and nod and nod blanketing and perpetuating a form of judgemental assessment that is particularly damaging in our situation. The upshot of much aestheticist critique is to ennoble a canon of revered texts that have stood the test, the sifting of prac. crit. Colonial literature suffers under this scrutiny and anxiety-ridden colonial lecturers, keen to align themselves with the best of Europe, feel they prove their citizenship to Europe and the holy island just left of it by demonstrating the inferiority of Pringle to Byron, or Schreiner or Gordimer to Woolf. As long as close reading is continued, there will be comparisons between the best of England and the best of South Africa. As long as close reading is seen as the unspoken, real determinant, while heads nod and smile affably, Campbell will not rate with Keats or Shelley. This is hard. Campbell is not as good as Housman. But is this the point? Is it helpful to teach students by means of intricate analysis that one poem is better than another or that one poem is particularly excellent? What is the point of rating poetry? What is the use of being able to scoff when Gordimer is mentioned in the same breath as Woolf?

Of course the avant-garde will say that South African poetry is no longer 'rated' or taught according to outdated European aestheticist criteria. But the student's letter already shows that this tradition does still pertain in the lecture room. It is equally simple, and sad,

to show that literary critics also persist in 'rating' South African poetry in established South African journals. They do so with all the sarcasm and unreflective mechanical attention that typifies the worst excesses of prac. crit., still revered and calcified in colonial obscurity, and arrogance. In EAR 13, 1996¹ Andrew Johnson, a graduate from Cambridge and lecturer at the University of Zululand, rates twelve recent books of South African Poetry. It is this sort of criticism that kills South African poetry. The second purpose of this paper is to expose this sort of criticism. The third purpose is to show new, and, I submit, more constructive, lively strategies for teaching South African poetry in the classroom and seminar room.

In the following excerpt, Johnson criticises Brian Warner's work from his anthology entitled *Dinosaurs' End*. This is not literary appreciation that invites others to participate and explore with the spark of a new insight: it is literary judgement - mortiferous, exclusionary and unhelpful.

Some of the puns are quite effective in their own right, but the syntactical twistings that have to occur in order to allow them to happen make one/me wonder whether the effort was really worth it. Here is the opening stanza, for example (7):

No sun was shining on the see
Of Oxford's Primate soul,
Of whom his ma, some years before,
When asked about his goal,
Had said that 'Samuel will perforce
Play in a famous role.'

The 'in' of the last line is redundant, and is included only to make up the requisite rhythm and syllable-count. There are plenty of examples of the verse form not being handled well enough (or utterly badly enough) for the stanzas to be really funny. ... Parts of 'The Iguanadon' are quite successful, if you like puns of high groan-worthiness:

This iguana don proclaimed (p.76)

¹ English Academy Review, Volume 13, 1996.

Here Johnson reviews Sue Clark's *The False Bay Cycle*:

In the case of *The False Bay Cycle*, the poems aren't deceptively simple, they are simply simple.

The first poem is 'Poem without End'. ... The syntax is snap-shot like, participles pave the impersonal way for the introduction of 'I' and 'you' oozing 'Everything beautiful'. One might attempt to read these lines as a succession of images of the utmost simplicity, directness and clarity, in which sexual love can occur and be recorded without the legalese (ensnaring syntax, vocabulary of reason) of daily living. Words like 'beautiful', 'desire', 'miraculous' would then shine in a burnished innocence, pure and true.

But they can just as well be read as puerile truisms. How hard-won are these supposed beauties? The ease of reading is deceptive. The struggle, the style implies, was over long ago. The result is this bare necessity, transparent and panting. If so, the paring is incomplete. ... Actually, this is coy yet gushy stuff, and I can't help wondering whether desire really stops her breath as readily as a rolled-up sock would (p.82).

So Johnson continues in judgemental high-handedness. He does not connect other South African poems, or show useful comparisons or enrich our reading with background knowledge. Each poem is treated in isolation and dissected on the operating-table of yesteryear's European make. What use is this sarcasm? How will it enable our schoolchildren to read South African poetry with joy or explore its themes with interest and cultural concern?

Section II

Let us take Campbell's 'Zulu Girl' and subject it to this arrogant system of assessment. Let us see of what use this method can be. Where will it lead us and do we need to go there? Then I want to 'read' Campbell's oem in other ways showing it can be compared and contextualized so that the university student can create connections and find comparisons

that allow a self-development and enrichment.

One of the few poems that 'makes it' according to Johnson-style assessment on the European ruler of literary excellence is Campbell's 'Zulu Girl'. But even this 'great' work will shrivel if the beam of assessment is turned on fully. We remain with the contentious statement that our literature will not compete with the best of English literature when prac. crit. is used. The only way is to test this and prac. crit. a poem that is unquestioned - a marker of our literary excellence, a fully anthologized piece. Let us sift Campbell's 'The Zulu Girl'. This should prove how hollow such critique really is.

We must start of course at the first line. I will hand out copies of the poem. In the first line of 'The Zulu Girl', there is a lame start with the words 'When in the sun'. The powerful and effective words appear only in the second half of the line. Unfortunately the first half of the line takes much of the emphasis, so that the strength of the later words is diminished. How much better would it be if the line read 'The hot red acres smoulder in the sun'. The words that truly tell of the searing African heat are foregrounded successfully with the 'h' of 'hot' fully aspirate by its initial position; well suggesting the desiccating blasts. 'Smoulder' in a central position then gains its proper attention. It describes not only the blazing red soil but the glowing, residual wrath of the Zulu nation. This connotation reaches forward pleasingly to the end of the poem. The second connotation of 'smouldering' is therefore deftly proleptic - it leaps forward to what is to come. This is the mark of a poet who sees his work clearly and sees it whole. As Campbell places the word, however, it is sustained over a false half foot: the iambic pentameter ends on the syllable 'smoul/'. This in itself is not a weakness, but attached to the potentially graphic and metaphoric associations of the word, the extended metre makes the sound trail into insignificance rather than command its rightful significance.

The second line is worse. 'Down' suggests a patronizing stance. The poet looks down over the labourers sweating in the fields. The condescending tone is redolent of some Southern states master watching smugly from afar and from higher ground, the torturing labour of the cotton pickers. If the poet is in sympathy with the Zulu woman (who should be called a woman and not a girl) he is adapting the attitude of haughty liberal patriarch

and not empathizing with a fellow human being. The phrase 'sweating gang' seems more to betray a repugnance for the stench of manual labour than to evoke pity for an oppressed nation. The participle 'sweating' is particularly clumsy when yoked to 'plies' through the ill-chosen noun 'gang'. 'Plies' has the connotations of a period piece: it belongs in register to Wordsworth's *Michael*: that housewife of THE EVENING STAR 'living a life of eager industry' (l.122). We know the word from Gray's *Elegy*:

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn
Or busy housewife ply her evening care (ll.21-2).

A 'sweating gang' does not ply its labour. If it did, this would suggest an over-strenuous group of agrarian needle-women. No. The poet should have known that the associations of 'ply' are quite incongruous matched with 'gang', let alone one that has the sweat trickling from the exertion of hoeing in the Natal cane-fields. We suspect that Campbell picks 'plies' for his rhyme with 'flies' of line four: not a felicitous conjunction anyway. Similarly, 'smoulder' is misplaced to rhyme with 'shoulder' and with even less justification in sense. The poet is forcing his lines to suit a traditional form that eludes his skill. In the process he mangles what good sense could have been conveyed.

But, suddenly, it gets better. We can overlook the tone of 'girl' and concentrate on the sparse simplicity of the phrase 'flings down her hoe'. Not only does this verb suggest exhaustion but also defiance. Here the rhythmical accentuation stresses exactly the right words. This impels the graphic and metaphorical associations as should have been the case with 'smoulder'. The caesura marked by the comma break causes us to stop and imagine more easily the bent figure of the labouring woman stopping to rise upright in full dignity. This halt suggests the quiet overthrow of the stooped attitude of the vanquished and the rightful assumption of true ownership of Zulu soil. It is her land and the poet sees her action as symbolic of a nation's patiently noble resilience.

'Shoulder' too crosses an extra half-foot but here the metrical irregularity is perfectly justified. The sustained syllable helps us to visualize the obtruding shoulder just as the fine enjambment captures in verbal shape the movement of relief in untying the burdensome

child. The final 'er' of line three is almost lost by elision of the opening 'u=' of line four to further suggest, by vocalic melding, the smooth and easy shift of the Zulu woman. The dignity of motherhood further enhances the sense of an unbroken autonomy in the woman and the people she represents. 'Unslings' describes the actual removal of the binding cloth about her child but it also alludes to her child as latter-day avenger. A quiver of arrows is carried across the back of a hunter and is also referred to as a 'sling' of arrows. So her son, or her son's son, will prove to be a retributive weapon in the flesh of her conquerors. There is no doubt about the control and felicity of this line and a half. This is poetry of the first order in which each word is placed to maximum effect.

The same cannot be said of 'tormented by flies'. The verb is clumsy and out of key with the equation of quiet revenge which underpins the poem as a whole and imbues the figure of the Zulu woman with portentous stillness.

Line five, however, resumes this quality. The soft circle of thorn trees is a retreat from the exposed fields at noon but also symbolic of the Zulu woman's claim upon the natural territory of her birth. This beautiful, unspoilt circle of trees is the nature of her inherited landscape before the mercantilist appropriation and devastation brought about by settlers and planters. The selection of 'ring' to suggest a citadel, or protected area, confirms this sense of historic retreat just as the long sound of 'pooled' with its associations of cool water deepens the tone of placid safety and privacy.

Probably the worst part of the poem intrudes at this point: 'purpled with the blood of ticks' is very much in the mould of 'sweating' and 'tormented'. If the poet meant to portray an uneasy respite, the verbs he chooses are infelicitous and ineffective. Why are trees purpled with ticks? Have the ticks been crushed? By cattle rubbing themselves against the trees to crush the parasites? Cattle are more usually kept away from ploughed fields. Surely it would be a little far-fetched to suggest the tormenting flies and crushed ticks represent the colonial parasites that plague the true owners of the land and will eventually themselves be destroyed? Even if we were driven to such an interpretation does the imagery really cohere? I think not. Lines seven and eight are equally clumsy and contorted by unhappy rhymes of 'clicks', 'ticks' and the really strained verb 'ruled'.

But stanzas three and four redeem all. We have all probably seen such a drowsy baby sucking heavily. 'Plugged' fits well in conveying this sense of satisfying completion just as the nice balance of adjectival/nominal pairs in 'sleepy mouth' versus 'heavy nipple' well mirrors the interdependence of mother and child as well as the tradition of noble resilience that binds them. The rhyme here between 'nipple' and 'ripple' effectively links the mother's nutriment, both physical and spiritual, to the image of the stream replenishing the parched earth. The slight playfulness in selection of 'tugs' and 'grunting' grants a liveliness to the picture and undoubtedly authenticates it.

The finest section of the poem occurs at lines eleven and twelve. Here the poet finds quite naturally his own pleasing symmetrical form that again reflects the interdependence of mother and son. The delicacy and vulnerability in 'frail' is matched by the mother's 'deep' strength and security. Just so the boy's nerves are fed by the languors of the mother. The poet carefully reverses the order in his reflective metaphor by placing 'broad river' (mother) first and 'reeds' (child) second. Apart from the aptness of 'river' and 'reeds', possibly the most effective single word in the poem, 'sighing' calls us to read the line as a whole with a mournful sigh and positively compels us to do so with the languorous participle itself, 'sighing'.

The mood of drugged quiet in stanza three acquires a menacing strength in the fourth stanza. Any of the metaphorical foreshadowing already lingering in earlier lines now takes a definite form in the hammer blows of the double negatives of line 14, 'unquenched, unsmotherable'. Here Campbell is completely in control of the rhythm so that the stress falls exactly to suggest valiant resistance just as the caesura provides a perfect pause before 'unsmotherable'. The associations behind these words link the avenger child just as the suggestion of an eloquent and dignifying reserve that is so well conveyed by the quiet of the river. The vengeance image breaks through the surface of the poem in the chiasmus of 'curbed ferocity/sullen dignity': a trenchant verbal patterning that allows a criss-crossing of reverberating connotations.

What a pity the poem did not end here. The lame last stanza recalls the poorly-worked

opening. The image of this proud and indomitable mother is lessened by the word 'looms'. The introduction of a village is adventitious. The sole phrase worth keeping is 'terrible and still'. Here is the central equation referred to earlier reduced to a quintessential simplicity. All this is spoilt by the tortured mixed metaphor of harvest time in the breast of the cloud. We have too lately and too clearly seen before us, described in pleasing language the sanctity of a mother suckling her child, to have now the conflation of reaping.

At best then one could conclude that 'The Zulu Girl' is an uneven performance. Well, we may say, and so what? And I think we would be right to object. If, after a pompous show of technical analysis, all the weaponry of the bad poetry lecturer, a poem is shown to be worth only 6 out of 10, what does it help us as readers? Many people are interested in South African poetry and want to know how to appreciate it better. Chapman is right in his exhortation on page 32 of his *Anthology*: 'Certainly our poets, from Pringle to the present day, have engaged seriously, humorously, mockingly, heroically, angrily, and inseparably with 'life' and 'art' and deserve to be read with both critical alertness and generosity.

Section III

If scrutiny of the text alone does not afford any rich appreciation of SA poetry, what should we use instead? Clearly a methodology of aestheticism alone, rating the text as a literary artefact, as a work of art alone, does not achieve much. It teaches us to sneer at SA poetry even at its unassailable 'best' in classics such as 'The Zulu Girl'. To separate aesthetically insulated poetry and or poetics from politically committed verse and/or critical approaches is shown by the above analysis of Campbell's major contribution to be spurious. SA poetry has to be contextualized. Simply parcelling off overtly political poems as inevitably time-bound and weak will not do: nor will it serve us as readers to scour the *Anthology* for 'good' poetry, doggedly refusing to adjust the spectacles of prac. crit. What I will now suggest is an alternative way of reading SA poetry: a series of contexts.

In the course of our mechanical analysis it seemed that the word 'down' suggested a sense of imperial patronage; of someone looking down from higher ground upon the natives. If we go back to find out where the poem was actually written, this suspicion becomes a much more useful reality. We can study the poem with a sense of its historical identity. This I will consider to be the first contextual frame.

Here is a photograph of the colonial estate from which Campbell wrote 'The Zulu Girl' - it is Lynton Hall. Actually there is a small house on the estate particularly reserved for artists and writers.

The trust [of the estate] also maintained a bungalow near the beach which, much as Woolsack at Groot Schuur, was intended to be occupied by artists and writers. Edward Roworth, the painter, and Roy Campbell, the poet, both stayed there, nourished by hampers sent down from the Hall. Some of Campbell's best-known poems - 'The Serf', 'The Zulu Girl', 'To a Pet Cobra', 'The Zebras' and others were written at Umdoni Park.²

Umdoni Park is the splendid beach house governing the bungalow and the Hall itself is a perfect example of the grand colonial mansion. It was the jewel of the Lewis sugar barons. Campbell is speaking for the oppressed sugar worker. He takes on the sort of righteous defence that qualifies as political ventriloquism. Speaking for the other, from the comfort and excess of the landowner's table, he mollifies the guilt he feels by transference into artistic statement. He deals with the predicament of intellectual bourgeois, predicting, even encouraging the justice of a final reckoning, of an uprising. The turret of Lynton Hall was designed as a vantage point from which to shoot at enemy rebel Zulus should they storm the great homestead. It was deliberately castellated and had access to a store-room of firearms as well as the great cast-iron water-storage tank suspended in the tower. The awareness of the proximity of rebellion and the means of oppression are thus encoded in the architecture of what is otherwise all grace and beauty. The lodge for artists is a part of this gilding and is meant to bespeak an elegance of mind above the sheer brutality of the colonial plantation, of lines of dark-skinned workers hoeing the red soil in the blistering

² G. Viney, *Colonial Houses of South Africa*, Struik, Cape Town, 1987:190.

heat. Tolerance of the artistic licence even of the artist's own pale insurrection in words, is distinction of a superior hold over power. Campbell as colonial dependent, as intellectual rebel under the patronage of the landed baron, casts an important context over the poem and the reason for writing it. Suddenly, what was only suspected in the word 'down' in prac. crit. becomes a certain framework of rich association. A Chinese haiku describes a similar situation.

In my mid-day nap
I hear the song of the rice-planters
And feel somewhat ashamed of myself.

The wealthy surveyor of the rice-workers feels the pain of their back-breaking labour, but the consciousness lasts only long enough to interrupt his post-prandial rest. The unease he senses at being in splendid and possibly dangerous isolation is tellingly turned to a poem. Writing, the very mark distinguishing the moneyed from the illiterate masses, is used as a way of writing out his slight guilt. Campbell too uses the language of the oppressor to inscribe a scene of the oppressed and his own unease as artistic annalist. He is not middle-class revolutionary enough to forego the largesse of Lynton and openly shout revolt to the natives. Yet this hesitance need not be read as cowardice or hypocrisy. Speaking for the other, however questionable, arrogant and rightly dubious in some contexts, in this case belongs to a fascinating and not entirely ignoble larger context in South African poetry.

In Chapman's *The Paperbook of South African English Poetry*³, the first poem reproduced, is Pringle's 'Afar in the Desert'. The second line tellingly describes the unspeaking bushman as a bush-boy beside the white grandee:

With the silent Bush-boy alone by my side.

The colonial master is of course speaking loudly in the poem itself while his servant-

³ M. Chapman, *The Paperbook of South African English Poetry*, Craighall, Donker, 1986.

companion is obligingly and suitably, mute. The term 'boy' is used almost unconsciously instead of 'man'. It is possible that the poet's companion is young but more likely that he is as old or older than the poet but more likely that he is spoken of as a 'boy' because of his social and historical relegation to secondary position. Two elements then link this poem to 'The Zulu Girl': silence and relegation. It is useful to compare Brooks's poem on page 40 of Chapman's *Anthology*. Isaak van Batavia pleads for his manhood:

Question:

Where do you live my Slave Boy, say?
I want to hire you by the day.

Answer:

Massa me no slave Boy be;
Me be free Man, me be free.

The poetry in Chapman's *Anthology* traces a development clearly paralleled in the confluence of indigenous and settler art of this country. The Europeanized perspective of many of Bowler's paintings gradually gives way over the centuries to the hybrid productions of today such as this woodcut of J. Muarangeso which in pre-liberation South Africa asks the sad question: 'Who will speak for us?': the native is still silenced.

At first immigrant artists from Europe looked for patches of verdant coastline that most resembled home. Relatively late in the nineteenth century did artists of the immigrant tradition start to face and appreciate the harsh red centre of the Karoo or the bushveld. This gradual identification with the landscape maps of course a psychological and cultural commitment.

The topic of articulation, of being able to speak, allows us to see a slow empowerment of indigenous poets. More and more, poets speak from Africa and about the peculiarly cruel conditions of this southern tip; with its scenes of oppression, corruption and strife' (Pringle, p.33). The transfer of the conqueror's language is the true mark of incipient liberation. Although Pringle is enlightened in his views and stands high in the annals of our struggle against autocracy, he still appears to be speaking instead of the 'Bushboy' in 'Afar in the Desert' and for the Bushman in 'Song of the Wild Bushman'. This vicarious articulation is evident in Slater's 'The Return' and even 'The Zulu Girl'. The possessor of

the victor=s language is automatically enfranchised to speak for others. Pringle deserves applause for needling the consciences of his settler and overseas readers. The satire in his 'The Honey-bird and the Woodpecker' is stinging. The rapacity of the colonial intruders takes these self-proclaimed Christians below the level of their feathered robber counterparts. The thieving immigrants are hypocrites to boot. Guy Butler sustains this strain in his poem 'The Underdogs' (pp.97-8). Butler's attack is louder and more inimical than Pringle's which is tinged with melancholy. Butler is impatient of the continued injustices and the smug, stock reactions of non-think racialism. Butler is particularly angered by the shabby facade of superior ethics resorted to by money-grabbing hypocrites. Here too Butler is an Irish descendant using the language of political potency on behalf of the underdogs; the oppressed and dehumanized victims of segregation have no voice.

This concludes our brief look at the locus of speech as context. We turn now to land, the red stolen acres, and again 'The Zulu Girl' is enmeshed in a wide stream of other poems.

When the native takes up the language of the oppressor and excels at it a crucial point has been reached: the native talks back so that the settler can understand. Few settlers write in Zulu or publish in Xhosa. In Mrs Dube's 'Africa: My Native Land' we have the first signs of a fluent appropriation of the foreign intruders' own parlance. It is important too that Mrs Dube was a relative of John Dube, first president of the ANC. Chapman also notes (p.305) that her poem was written in the year of the Natives Land Act which turned thousands of Africans (sic) off the land. The frequent comment on Mrs Dube's work is at the critical centre of this paper; she is commonly derogated as adopting the idiom of a stiff, too formal English and thus fails to gain an authentic poetic voice. This is of course the unmistakable guillotine edge of judgmental prac.crit. The poetry does not 'make it' according to criteria informed by European aestheticism calcified into colonial laws. Why should we be rating Mrs Dube's poetry? Compare it rather to Slater, who means well in adopting the persona of a Xhosa dockworker (p.73), but it is quite clear that his efforts lack the ring of first-person directness in Dube's strident verses. It is almost embarrassing to hear Slater (who is undoubtedly a better poet in the aestheticist sense) but a much worse one when he tries to imagine how the Xhosa man may think of his situation:

The white man loves the sea, and he is like it,
His skin is like the foam upon its surges,
His life is swift and restless as its bellows,
Rimmed with rude noise he knows not land-locked quiet.

We dark folk, love the land, and we are like it:
Our skins resemble burnt brown earth, or shadows ...

Dube, in stanza three of her poem, takes up Pringle's cry against the inglorious, wholesale theft of land from the true owners. The phrase 'outcasts in their own country' has a particular resonance through much later poetry as it suggests not merely gross dispossession but also the emotional alienation felt as a result. There is an agonizing ambivalence as poets try to articulate feelings that have been truncated by circumstance. The phrase outcasts in their country serves as a banner for much South African poetry and 'The Zulu Girl' falls directly under it. The Zulu woman forced to hoe her own fields for her conquerors.

The sense of loss, both physical in the removal of thousands of acres of beautiful land, and spiritual, in the dismissal of that heart-felt identity with the landscape so generative in a poet's vision, causes a certain elegiac quality to shroud a great many poems including Campbell's 'The Zulu Girl'. At the next stage there is another kind of context - connections with literatures of antiquity. I will look at two - not seven - types of pastoral as context. The first connective text is Virgil's eclogue sequence written at the time of Caesar Augustus's redistribution of farmlands to reward soldiers of his cause in the Roman civil wars. Virgil has his shepherds speak plaintively of their cruel removal from farmlands which they inherited, worked faithfully and loved dearly.

Chapman chooses as the cover for his *Anthology*, a picture of rural versus city man. This division is actuated not only by choice of life, however, but in many cases by the fierce wrongs of legislation and the poverty that follows hard on its heels. So the pastoral takes in particularly the plight of migrant labourer, forced to the city for money yet yearning for the sweet paternal acres of his birthplace. Slater's 'The Return' is significant in this respect. It links a tradition that stretches forward in its plangent echoes to a wide variety of poems: David Wright's 'Easter at Machadodorp', Serote's 'City Johannesburg' and Sacks's

Machadodorp' to mention but a few.

The sense of alienation and loss closely borders on the bitterness of exile: both are physically and emotionally constrained. Lionel Abrahams writes of the murder of the mind in 'Doctor History delivers Another Political Martyr' (p.259). Chris Mann speaks of the unspeakable in his poem 'In Memory of Jeanette Schoon Killed by a Parcel Bomb in Exile in Angola' (p.205). Here language itself is mutilated as its conventions of 'ordinary' communicative efficacy are torn apart by the slaughter that goes beyond words:

But language, its close-knit fabric of words
which speaks with ease of precious, humdrum things -
the kitchen's bright kettle, those hands cradling
the last blue mug of tea - language is ripped,
the threads dangling, by such a smashing
blast, can only gesture, patchily, at a
room in shambles, the hair tufts, flesh
-bits, the splatterings ...

The aestheticists I've heard smugly crowing over the demise of much political poetry now that the revolution is over - now they cry, its real literary worth will be exposed. This is not an uncommon sound in the corridors of English departments here. In the face of Mann's poem, however, this smugness shrivels. Now, if ever, the record of the past, our connectedness to it, our answerability to teach our children from its record, is eminent. More now than ever, South African poetry should be taught. Reading Mann's poem and its contexts, such poetry has to be taught. The holocaust cannot be forgotten nor should our foulness. Sacks testifies to his bewilderment and outrage at the assassination of Richard Turner (p.286).

Through the agony of such chronicles there is perceptible the dream of another pastoral prototype in SA poetry: what I would term the second type of pastoral. In his fourth eclogue, Virgil describes the birth of an infant, who, he prophesies, will be the mighty leader of a glorious, free and triumphant Rome. Early Christian readers took this to be a pagan glimpse of our Saviour's birth and eternal reign. In all the text characterizes a desire among humans for messianic transformation of a landscape of iniquity into one of harmony and justice. Because the carnage of injustice has been so extensive and repellent

in this country, many poets look away from the smell of pillage and death much as the bird-speakers do in Pringle's poem:

Faugh! I hate the smell of blood
Let us down to the wood – (p.39).

Poets dream of a day of retribution, as in 'The Zulu Girl' for instance or Qabula's 'praise Poem to FOSATU'. Compare the following lines (p.297):

Lead us Fosatu to where we are eager to go.
Even in parliament you shall be our representative.
Go and represent us because you are our Moses -
through your leadership we shall reach our Canaan.

The millennial miracle of political restitution is treated too in Stephen Watson's 'History' but from another point of view. Watson questions, much like Benjamin in *Animal Farm*, the dawning of any such promised day of freedom. Mann too deals with the golden age pastoral hope in the same tone of disillusionment:

And shall there ever be jubilation,
and shall a golden Afrika arise?
History with its portents,
the nearpast with its prophets,
like the derelict phone on the station wall,
crackles unanswered in the dark.

These are but a few of the contexts which I think might usefully be used in teaching poetry in a way that would better answer the complaint of the student I quoted at the start. Exploring such concerns is exciting and pertinent, particularly at first-year level when English enjoys a wide attraction to many students majoring in other subjects. There is no point pretending that prac. crit., close reading or aestheticist imperatives are safely packed away. Their proponents, often more dogmatic than their illustrious mentors back in that pretty island to the left of France, wield the axe of censorship in many academic colonies still. Most of this paper was written three years ago as a tutorial letter for third-year students. The then Head of Department, regarded as an authority on South African poetry, editor of the *Companion to South African Literature*, would not allow such heresy

to be published. He openly preferred students to have no tutorial matter for that quarter of their course on South African poetry than be exposed to such traitorous material. Is it not time to examine our teaching practice which filters down to generations of teachers and students and develop a new and more appropriate way of teaching our own poetry? Or should we smile and nod, nod and smile? Or even worse should we discover some yet more tortured way of teaching our beloved colonial practice of prac. crit. under a different guise? Language teaching is the flag and surely that is what prac. crit. has said all along - look at the language - how it works - that is the magic key to literature. So we can teach literature by means of quasi-linguistic analysis and all are wonderfully happy - the old, the trendy and the new - except for the poor puzzled student. Anything but change our mode or take off those beloved John Major spectacles of the bad poetry lecturer.

Even in quite recent work on South African poetry, such as Stewart Conn's contribution to *Scrutiny 2* of 1998, there is no positive suggestion about how to *teach* South African poetry in ways that will encourage young South Africans (or overseas readers) to explore with fascination the links and intertextual subtleties that undergird and render valuable our heritage of poetry. Conn's answer is to cut away the vestiges of the past and look for a brave new wave of poets untrammelled by colonial guilt or debt:

Of crucial import will be the impetus of new generations of South African-born poets, free from obligatory ventriloquism and political correctness, and severed from any sense of colonial inheritance. I suspect those who 'come through' will do so through loving what can be loved of this still riven and tormented land, and transmitting this in a language capable of acting as a carrier of insight, intelligence and compassion.⁴

I differ entirely from this view. The significance of Lynton is that we enrich our reading by connecting with the past; unearthing the often unlovely archeological truths of the past and re-describing our present. I do not think it helpful to obliterate memorials of the ugly and immoral years of apartheid or of British concentration camps. It does not help to break down statues that remind us of evil things past. To demolish the sites of concentration camps in Germany would not remove or exorcise the inhumanities that took

⁴ *Scrutiny2*, p.62.

place there. Rather, the literary evidence of the past should be re-examined and connected to the present. In this sense Lynton is highly significant as a strategy for teaching and re-reading South African poetry. Compassion, insight and intelligence come from appraising the past, re-living and re-experiencing it; reflecting on it and learning from it. **This** is the challenge to new poets, critics and teachers of poetry in South Africa.

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