

Dennis poem, 27/2/09

Moon, lighting this night
Zocalo's vast expanse, you
give our world new hope.

3/11/2007

Revised to:

Moon lighting this night
Zocalo's jubilant space
you speak of new hope.

3/12/2007

A common hate enriched our love and us:

Brutus poem, 20/3/09

Escape to parasitic ease disgusts;
discreet expensive hushes stifled us
the plangent wines became acidulous

Rich foods knotted to revolting clots
of guilt and anger in our queasy guts
remembering the hungry comfortless.

In drafty angles of the concrete stairs
or seared by salt winds under brittle stars
we found a poignant edge to tenderness,

and, sharper than our strain, the passion
against our land's disfigurement and tension;
hate gouged out deeper levels for our passion—

a common hate enriched our love and us.

1963

Brutus poem, 21/3/09

Dennis: "While at Northwestern University in 1973, I was invited to Madison to speak at an anti-apartheid rally at the University of Wisconsin. Unable to go, I sent this poem instead. I said, at the end, 'be glad' - to honour those who sacrificed, for their willingness to engage in civil disobedience, burning their passbooks. On March 21 1960, at Green Street in the Port Elizabeth city centre, we had a meeting of radical teachers (Teachers League of South Africa), and afterwards we listened to the radio and were shocked to hear live reports coming from Sharpeville, reports of the killing of unarmed people in a protest at the ghetto called Sharpeville - named after the supervisor, Mr Sharpe. It was at that moment, I believe, that I understood very clearly that the government would be willing to kill in order to stay in power. And we who opposed the government stood a fair chance of being killed. It was also at that moment that I decided that I was committed to the struggle and that I would if necessary die in the cause of liberation: 'Freedom or Death'. It was a very simple resolve."

Sharpeville

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

and certainly not
the heavy caliber slug
that tore through a mother's back
and ripped through the child in her arms
killing it

Remember Sharpeville
bullet-in-the-back day
Because it epitomized oppression
and the nature of society
more clearly than anything else;
it was the classic event

Nowhere is racial dominance
more clearly defined
nowhere the will to oppress
more clearly demonstrated

what the world whispers
apartheid declares with snarling guns
the blood the rich lust after
South Africa spills in the dust

Remember Sharpeville
Remember bullet-in-the-back day

And remember the unquenchable will for freedom
Remember the dead
and be glad

1973

Dennis: A poem for Ted Hughes, catalysed by an article in The Daily
News, 25 March, p.13*

Images

Black leather jacket, a hooded crow
claws at his shoulder: his stare
is unrepentant, expects no rebuke:

He was as I anticipated:
I am aware of his fame, his shrouded history;
we are craftsmen together, together
on London's Royal Mall by happenstance

Well we must be what we are, make
what genes and nurture have made of us
with quirky tweaking of our private will -

That was ages and oceans ago: now
his portrait, dared fated poet, stares:
I have no word of praise or reproof,
accept that talent makes strange demands
may make savage unforgiving demands

25 March 2009

* <http://www.dailynews.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=4905695>
and <http://www.dailynews.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=4903923>

A Summer Place

Sparkle of sunlight
on salt spray splashing
silken gleam of tanned limbs
in infinities of glowing space
all time turned to crystal
in stilled sempiternalties:
A splendid dream of our time
together: time never to be!

Feb. 12, 2004

Dennis Brutus

Ageing

The road, too, diminishes:
one would see less if one tried:
it is what ageing is about -
if one gave it thought:
generally though, one is content
eyes fixed on the road
content to see what can be seen
unanxious to speculate
about a possible road -
the diminishing road

Musgrave,
July 7 2008

Ambleside Lake District, England.

Brutus poem, 13/3/09

By lakeside shallows
where tawny reeds undulate
lacustrine pleasancess
where brisk freshets stirred
we could luxuriate

such comfort, such ease !
below the shallows trivets stirred

sighs might break the surface;
once there were homesteads
where trippers now frolic;
for pleasure, someone pays

Note; Farms and homes were lost to make areas of scenic pleasure for tourists to the Lake District; I visited there. db

Dennis: "Anger at Israeli evil."

Brutus poem, 12/2/09

Ancient of Days Vision

The caravanserai of time
has moved on to the point
where anger at Israeli excesses
has turned from surges of disgust
to battering wavecrests of action;
the world moves now against injustice
the mills grind slow but sure
furnaces rage turns arrogance to dust
chaff and straw scatter before roaring winds
the eye of justice glares: deceit
is pulverized: evil cannot endure

Anthology about AIDS

Brutus poem, 17/3/09

Dennis: "This would belong in an anthology about AIDS - it is obliquely referred to."

Sweetness will make it palatable:
with a spoon full of sugar
the medicine goes down,
in the most delightful way

So we descend to our destruction
So we descend to our decay
Such blinding sweetness
to obliterate sense
to obliterate sensibility.
Only only delight remains
to overcome all else -
it is pleasure we know

only pleasure we experience:
for this medicine there there is no medicine:
all we know is delight
all else decays to nothingness
will, indeed decay to nothingness

For CQ at 21/3/09

Blood Diamonds.

Brutus poem, 27/3/09

Dennis: "This poem was started two years ago after I saw a movie, Blood Diamonds. I finished it this week, thanks to my good friend the Argentine Marxist Claudia Martinezmullen. There were other relevant memories: I was in a recent march against Anglo American to protest the way they were taking over the land in Limpopo Province in search of platinum. A second memory is of a Thursday afternoon, September 17, 1963, when near 44 Main Street in Johannesburg, I was shot in the back trying to escape apartheid police, outside the magistrate's court. I collapsed and looked up at the front entrance to Anglo's headquarters."

For DeBeers:
A Diamond is Forever:
A Death is Forever

It is forever
a diamond is forever
it is so final
death is so final

it is forever
a diamond is forever
DeBeers says
"To us, there's nothing
more precious than the
health of a nation"

We do not talk, do we
of Blood Diamonds?
We do not talk do we
of displaced peoples?
of stolen land?
of sweated labour?
of bloodied labour?
bloodied diamonds?

for blood diamonds, too,

are forever

22 March 2009, Durban
For Claudia

Tribute poem for G.K Rangasamy

Broad finely muscled he strode
assured among his peers
his keenly assessing eye
awarding praise or rigorous dismissal
still tolerant of foibles amused by wit
shreddily courageous unswerving from truth;
now he is gone, man among men, he may not lost upon his like again

Dennis Brutus
Tribute poem for G.K Rangasamy "Chief"
October 28, 2008
Durban, South Africa

Brutus poem: happy birthday ANC, 8/1/09

January 8

Luthuli, Moroka, Kotane
Nokwe, Tambo, Hutchinson
Slovo, Wolpe, Bernstein, First
Mandela, Sisulu, Govan Mbeki
they were people, colleagues, friends
encounters on the long hard road

Over the decades we defined
our goals, nature of our struggle,
ideas, influences, helped articulate:
that some have strayed, lost direction,
some subverted goals, even while
others clung grimly to pledges,

promises, remembered tortures
others have endured, had visions
of youthful corpses in Soweto's dust

Over long years, arguments, debates
we phrased our aims, changed language
settled on ambiguities
heeded distant barked instructions
somehow a Front with many parts:
Morogoro, Lusaka, London, Dakar,
Sebokeng, Sharpeville, Kwazakele

Well, of course, we cannot despair
must renew, stubbornly, our hopes
and our resolve for social justice:
A New World Waits to be Born

Brutus poem: "Living under apartheid", 12/1/09

Dennis: "This was written in transit last August."

Living under apartheid

You wake up each grey morning
In a fog of sorrow
Hoping some shaft of brightness
Will flash to relieve your gloom
Some disaster, horror, catastrophe
Will signal the end of the system

True, there are those who love it
Who fight to preserve it
Love its privilege
Its assurance of protection
View its possible end with horror
(years later they will profess ignorance, will claim ignorance
and a supine government will accede
greed for power, can make all deals possible)

True, they were uncomprehending
That hunger for free air baffling
The raw sore on wounded selves unintelligible!
We worked each day with grimness
Monotonously each day at dawn
dragged ourselves up
tensed for the daily struggle

Sequence for Mumia Abu-Jamal

Dennis Brutus

Some voices must be silenced
they threaten the structures
of seemingly safe respectable lives
their clear vibrations
may shatter the crystalline shelters
that encase us from reality
shielding us from unbearable truths

but some may choose not to be deaf
they beat with broken palms
against the smooth impenetrable glass
of lies and comfort and power
and beg to hear the piteous cries
rising from the smoke and fire:

II:

The smooth impenetrable glass
of indifference and uncaring
is cool and pleasant to the touch
like the stone heart of power
that conceals the rottenness within.

III:

In the night
anger burns like fire
along the veins
in the brain
and at the core
of the anguished
unavailing heart.

IV:

Red and orange and saffron
the fiery ghosts
rise in the night
to sear the dreaming brain

and blast the wakeful eyeballs
staring into the dark:
images of terror.

V:

Red, bright red as blood
luminous with life
anger runs through the brain
anger against injustice
anger against pain
anger against impotence

And red, red as a rose
red as soft red velvet
red as a deep red rose
with shadows dark to black
red as poppies in sunlight
red as the blood of children
in the dust of Soweto
(come see the blood of children
in the streets of Soweto)
red as poppies in sunlight
with their fragile beauty
with their indestructible beauty
steadfast under battering rain
so strong, so red our courage:
we will not bow down
we will not submit to defeat
our courage will endure
our truth will survive.

VI: Postscript

When the blight of stillness advances
when songs and speech are silenced
when a light of life and laughter is gone,
the spirit still speaks and endures
like sparks that flash from silica
tough stardust, common dust of the world.

Butterfly,

Butterfly, butterfly
flitting by my window
where will you wander
where will you go
who will you delight
with your colourful charm
while I sit here and fumble
dumb ploughboy on a farm
what good is it to grumble?
i will only come to harm

Calabar River

Roll on, full waters, roll
full volume, silvery as fish scale
these are anguished records here
bright images flare from dark alcoves:
so much pain, grimly recorded
so much more pain awaiting record:
a President of the immortals would have sport aplenty
with our continents bogusry:
still full, silver Calabar flows

*Dennis Brutus
Calabar River
May 14, 2008*

*on the banks of the Calabar River is a slave history museum with vivid
images*

**Dennis: "Children suffer in many parts of the world; Gaza,
particularly."**

One world weeping
To those huddled figures
draped in cloths
young people, perhaps
even small children
moving through the shadows
and into the darkness of corridors
my heart follows you

impotent, in agony
my hands reach out to you
till my fingers are covered with blood
The world is filled
with soundless weeping.

1993

Ch'iu Chin is a Chinese poet

Dennis: "Ch'iu Chin is a Chinese poet, and the opening line is borrowed from her 1907 poem."

San Francisco: San Jose: Santa Clara

The perfume of freedom has burned my mind
with grief for my country
while I walk the ammoniac streets
reeking of urine and vomit
while shadows move in and out of shadows
gesturing with flapping empty trousers,
while gnarled and soiled both hands
thrust and receive with skeletal fingers,
dead eyes stare glassily, unconnected
to the hoarse whispered words of thanks
and I stare against the blank wall
of a despaired and despairing future:

the perfume of freedom has burned my mind
with grief for my country:
but I remember that seeming ultimate journey
to the bottom end of a continent
to an island graveyard of corpses and hopes
and an indestructible assertion
"We shall survive"

March 8–9, 1994

Cineaste

Dennis: "Written in Boulder at a lecture given by Ousmane Sembene; we had met on other occasions - including at a reception given by Senghor at the Presidential Palace in Dakar."

A riot of images and shadows

magician of the retina
shooting through to the brain
denim-clad, camera-accoutered
he enters without servility
the carpeted presence of presidents,
his glance collects, selects, images
and always he looks for the voice
the silent speech in light and shade
that illuminates the mind,
that resonates in the heart
that is accessible to millions.

For Ousmane Sembene, Sept. 26-27, 1993, Boulder

Cries of Ghosts Across Centuries

Dennis: "Today's Palestine solidarity march and rally, from the great Jumah Mosque to Durban City Hall, with around 1000 participants, reminded me of a poem that graces the inside cover of /leafdrift / (published in 2005 by Whirlwind Press of Camden, USA). The Israeli ambassador's visit to Durban next Tuesday gives us an opportunity to raise Boycott, Sanctions, Disinvestment demands, followed the next Monday - George Bush's last full day in office - by a shoe-throw at a Bush look-alike at Durban's US Consulate. Nonviolently, we must war with these barbarians, intent on genocide."

Cries of Ghosts Across Centuries

Babylon has fallen, has fallen
Yea, Babylon has fallen
Woe! Woe! Woe!

Towers that soared into clear blue
are at blocks of stone settled into earth
all gone, all shattered
ground into scattered dust

Babylon has fallen, has fallen
Yea, Babylon has fallen
Woe! Woe! Woe!

Now hordes of warring barbarians
literate, skilled in killing sciences
have come, have come, are here
are building an empire of corpses
humanity's spirit roams over desert sands
a wailing of lost bereaved ghosts
Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe!

Days of Constant Rain

Sunday, September 14, 2008

.14/9/08

Days of near constant rain, until the grass stands in water, no place for it to go. Walking today, in a plastic rain poncho, the weather a dull bass roar in the trees that are beginning to change colors, matte in the noon rain light. Six wild turkeys dripping as they cross the path. A drowned mole floating in the puddle between the roots of a big oak, its fur clean and sleek black, shiny as broken anthracite. The gleam of the broken. I'm thinking of the poet Dennis Brutus as I walk in the rain because he may be important for an essay I've been contemplating, his Letters to Martha from prison and then the poems of exile, intelligent and sane and full of solid language. What I have told students to call "earned." Don't kid yourself, torture is never for information or for coercion, always for the pleasure of the torturer, or to assert the power of the state, which is the same thing. Then a meadow rustling under the sheets of rain, thick yellow ragweed tangled with purple thistle, the flowers seeming sewn, threaded into the green background of wet leaves, tapestry. As if that word would lift it all above the quotidian, as if it needed to be lifted. There must be something that connects Brutus's poems with this field, something more than the mere fact that I'm here. Something. The inclusiveness of the world. Expulsion.

http://klagewelt.blogspot.com/2008/09/blog-post_14.html

Posted by anhaga at 1:37 PM

Desmond Tutu tells me

i am wonderful

i have been a reconciler

i have been a forgiver

i have been wonderful

It feels good

it helps cheer me up

but you know I must tell you

sometimes in the night

sometimes in the dark

i find my heart weeping

it is as if I am bleeding tears

They say they made a braaivleis

they opened a six pack

they sat around drinking

while he burnt to death
my son burnt to death
when he was a baby
he would stop crying
and smile at me
when I offered him my breast

Dennis Brutus
October 14, 2008
04h40am
Caracas

Endurance

Brutus poem, 26/1/09

"...is the ultimate virtue—more,
the essential thread
on which existence is strung
when one is stripped to nothing else
and not to endure is to end in despair."

I

Cold floors
bleak walls
another anteroom:
another milestone behind
fresh challenges ahead:
in this hiatus
with numb resolution
I coil my energies
and wait.

II

Stripped to the waist
in ragged pantaloons
long ago I sweated over bales,
my stringy frame—strained—
grew weary but sprang back
stubbornly
from exhaustion:
the lashes now,
and the labors are different
but still demand,
wound and stretch to breaking point:
and I still snap back, stubbornly.

III

All day a stoic
at dawn I wake, eyelids wet
with tears shed in dreams.

IV

My father, that distant man,
gray hair streaked with silver,
spoke of St. Francis of Assisi
with a special timbre in his voice:
loved him not, I think, for the birds
circling his head, nor the grace
of that threadbare fusty gown
but for his stigmata: the blood
that gleamed in the fresh wounds
on his palms and insteps:
in my isolation cell in prison,
the bullet wound in my side still raw,
those images afflicted me.

V

When we shook hands in the Athenian dusk
it closed a ring that had opened twenty-four years before
when a wisp of off-key melody had snaked into my grey cell
whistled by a bored guard in the sunlit afternoon outside:
it circled the grey walls like a jeweled adder
bright and full of menace and grew
to a giant python that encircled me, filling the cell
then shrank and entered me where it lay
coiled like my gut, hissing sibilantly
of possession;
twice I breathed death's hot fetid breath
twice I leaned over the chasm, surrendering
till some tiny fibre at the base of my brain
protested in the name of sanity and dragged me
from the precipice of suicide that allured
with its own urgent logic
Our hands meeting, uncordially, your gaze
quizzical, perhaps affronted
sealed a circle in the gathering dusk,
like the ring of dark waves advancing
on the island's jagged shore
and the dark enclosure of wire
whose barbs are buried in my brain.

VI

Wormwood gray shadows take shape
as night drains from the moon:
objects assume outlines

and some backdrop is suggested
and still the noose of time's expiring closes in
shapes, like bats-upended
hover and circle
holy men chanting their mantras
as darkness dissolves
in a purgatorial stasis.

VII

In the air pungent with asepsis
the raucous guards swagger
their uniforms and holsters bulk
in a perennial twilight
the sweat of newly dead corpses
makes rigid the smoke-laden fug
the collapsed lung labors stertorously
strained iterations of emergencies
thread the air like steel bobbins
stitching towards finality, mortality
corpse-like, in the gloom
bodies clutter the floor in rows
a gloom threaded with sighs
yearnings, griefs and lusts
overhead, the silhouette of guard and gun
prowl against the discolored glass
men's hungers, tears, groans
tall expanses, concrete brick, glass
encircle the harsh cement
dull gray against fresh blood
and a circle of gaping mouths
the faces swallowed away
life bleeding away, the blood pooled
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Brutus all 12-5-05 with index 12/5/05 10:10 PM Page 104
only redeeming this crepuscular acesis
one bright voice, bright eyes, welcoming flesh
one bright ribbon in the encircling gloom
long torn, long lost and tattered
but still cherished at the center of the brain
No, it redeems nothing
cannot stave off the end
nor offer any relief from this
encompassing gloom

1993

(excerpt from Poetry and Protest, 2006, UKZN Press and Haymarket Press)

The academic and cultural boycott of Israel
May 13, 2005

Since the Sixties until 1994 I have dedicated most of my time— apart from a spell on Robben Island Prison—to promote and enforce the boycott of apartheid South Africa. I have no doubt that international solidarity, particularly in the form of the boycott campaign, contributed to change in South Africa.

Despite the political changes in South Africa, apartheid lives on. It lives on in the oppression of the Palestinian people and their daily subjection to the racism of the Israeli state. The actions of the Israeli state are reminiscent of, and often even worse than those of the South African apartheid regime.

Apartheid South Africa also acted with impunity. It was supported by the West and, let us not forget, by pariah states such as Israel and Pinochet's Chile. It was only when people of conscience and organizations around the world pressured their own governments and multilateral institutions, did we see movement toward democracy in South Africa. Facile arguments against the boycott of Israeli institutions are familiar to me. They were the same or similar to the arguments used against anti-apartheid activists. Israel, like apartheid South Africa, ignores international law and is supported in this by the major powers. The latest outrage is the near silence on the grotesque and obscene Apartheid Wall which the International Court of Justice condemned some time back. This complicity, understandably, contributes to the desperation felt by many in Palestine. The call from Palestinian academics for a peaceful boycott campaign should therefore be embraced particularly by those who pontificate against violence.

In the spirit of moral consistency and resistance to all forms of injustice I have no hesitation in supporting the call for the academic and cultural boycott of Israeli institutions. While I believe in the comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions, I applaud the recent decision of the UK-based Association of University Teachers as a step in this direction.¹

I call on academics and scholars throughout the world to join us in this action.

¹ The AUT's endorsement was later rescinded under pressure from pro-Israel groups.

Farewell the Nightingales

Dennis: "This is one local aspect of a problem which is actually global."

Walking the streets of the Shah's Tehran
I was conscious of lurking Savak -
cries of tortured victims hung in the dusk
even as I lingered over buttered long-grain rice
in a dim bistro's magic cave:

That was then: horror enough, you might decide
but now a new noxious blight
covers over Persepolis' ancient lances,
a ghoulish silence cloaks environs

Farewell the Nightingales! Song is fled
We have willed desolation on our world.

(Footnote: The Mail & Guardian January 16-22 2009 reports, "Crows flee
Tehran's pollution... high levels of carbon monoxide... drove off...
nightingales")

20 January 2009

For July 24

Once I might have given you joy
but I was a stupid selfish boy:
i wonder, if I could make you happy today
but you, alas, have flown away

*Dennis Brutus –
July 24, 2008*

haiku verse

(It is not widely known, but Dennis is one of the leading non-Japanese
writers of haiku verse, and has been featured in the Japanese literature.)

Dennis: "This is supposed to be a haiku - almost successful; 5/7/5 beats
or accents - not feet - and should have a caesura after the second line;
the last line is not sufficiently explicit. It was written during the

Social Movements Indaba meeting late last year."

A single emerald
flares from a dewdrop flinging
a green prised flame

John
Paul II Centre

Bethlehem, Free State

December, 2008; d b.

Hopes for a better world

Dennis: "There are lively political struggles in our time, particularly in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia."

Hopes for a better world

Walking those ragged, pitted sidewalks
where walkers, shoppers surged
one had a sense of buoyant hope
surges of confidence, unleashed desire:
the broad-grinned ice cream vendor
frank gazed waitress swabbing spills:
all had a friendliness and trust:
it was good to walk those cordial streets
companied by one striving to serve

Caracas to Durban, 2008-09, for p.b.

Horror is all around us

Brutus Poem, 10/1/09

Dennis: "written after midnight, feb 8"

Guernica Sharpeville Shatilla Gaza

Horror is all around us
Death destruction mashed corpses
it is all around us: commonplace
Astonishingly humanity erupts
such virulent excesses against humanity

there is no limit to our ingenuity
in the service of torture carnage
Astonishingly too we have wells
of pity mercy goodness;
we can find ways to heal wounds
devices to repair injury:
Miraculously, somewhere, we have compassion

How a Poem begins

You see a tree,
a mountain
or a flower;
something in it moves you;
it sparks a thought
or an emotion;
it is how a poem begins:
not in a decision
or conscious choice:
some might call it inspiration
others, however, would not

Dennis Brutus
How a poem begins
August 12, 2008

I am a rebel

Dennis: "A 'found' poem; based on a speech by Yassir Arafat at the UN 34 years ago. Arafat, at that time, was one of the great Palestinian liberation fighters."

I am a rebel and freedom is my cause:
Many of you have fought similar struggles
therefore you must join my cause:
My cause is a dream of freedom
and you must help me make my dream reality:
For why should I not dream and hope?
Is not revolution making reality of hopes?
Let us work together that my dream may be fulfilled
that I may return with my people out of exile
to live in one democracy in peace.
Is not my dream a noble one
worthy to stand beside freedom struggles everywhere

I lie in the dark
and beg forgiveness
from whatever Gods there maybe,
or fates, or unseen hearers
for my follies
god, what a lousy lover I was
such a lousy selfish, ignorant
naïve lover I was
above all, selfish
relishing only my own narrow selfish pleasure
ignorant of the pleasure I might give
and in giving
give my self delight

Dennis Brutus
August 30, 2008
Durban, South Africa

I salute the Jacarandas anyway –
in memory of Mahmoud Darwish

I salute the Jacarandas anyway
Whatever else the world may offer
Offer for our praise
Or our opprobrium
I salute the Jacarandas anyway

“It will be as if I never lived
There will be no trace of me
There will be no sign of me remembered
It will be as if I never lived
No trace of me will remain
All will be as if nothing had been”

What will it matter if nothing remains?

You will have breathed the fresh morning air
And walked the dewy morning grass

And will have asserted for once your being

And I will salute the Jacarandas once more

Dennis Brutus

October 3, 2008

For Mahmood Darwish

12th Poetry Africa

UKZN Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre

In the stupendously complex

interactions of infinite intelligence

I am an infinitesimal cell

interacting with my fellows

in a sempiternal dance of axons and dendrites

I and this red oak exist and interact,

cells of the central divine intelligence,

some of us are diseased and suffering

gradual processes of healing may take centuries.

underlined lines are in margin, without indication of placement within poem.

Dennis: "Influenced by Dante's banishment

Brutus poem, 18/2/09

Exile, exile

you are a bitter word

I eat you with my bread

I drink you with my tea

you are the bitter word

that makes the world bitter to me

The stars look down

they see the world

they see a place

where I cannot be

Exile, exile

you are a bitter word
I eat you with my bread
I drink you with my tea
Exile, exile
you make the stars bitter to me

2005

Karen Silkwood,

Brutus Poem, 9/1/09

A terrible knowledge
To the memory of Karen Silkwood, who died
on the road from Cimarron, November 13, 1974

On the road from Cimarron
terrible knowledge squatted
like an unnatural monster
at the back of her brain

On the road from Cimarron
terrible knowledge pursued her
headlights lasering
the back of her head

On the road from Cimarron
terrible knowledge
of a mutilating death
rested with lethal casualness
on her sleeve

On the road from Cimarron
terrible knowledge impacted
on her brain
with the shattering crash
that smashed her car from the road:
they wished her to die
with the terrible knowledge
locked in her skull

terrible knowledge
of a nuclear holocaust

terrible knowledge
of a nuclear holocaust
clumsily unloosed

through carelessness
or greed

terrible knowledge
that even now
a few are dying

slowly
horribly
lied to
lied about
and she had the terrible knowledge

Behind her
out of the dark
hurtled a red glare:
baleful Moloch,
awesome fireball
glimmering:
terror
lunging to destroy

Out of the dark
behind her
a monstrous hound
lunging from Erebus
sharp fangs snapping
to extirpate her:
terrible knowledge
of impending death

Terrible knowledge
of the guilty ones
—cops, executives, agents—
who conspired to destroy her
and her terrible knowledge
and now conspire
to plead their innocence
their ignorance

Terrible knowledge
of our capacity to destroy
of our potential for destruction,
of our destructive greed:
terrible knowledge
Karen's knowledge,
our knowledge,
terrible knowledge

Kneeling before you in a gesture...

Kneeling before you in a gesture
unposed and quite unpractised
- I emphasize, though we need not be assured
for neither could take time to posture
standing always stripped to the very bone
and central wick of our real selves
that burnt simple and vulnerable as flame -

Kneeling before you for a moment,
slipped quite unthinkingly into this stance
- for heart, head and spirit in a single movement
responded thus to some stray facet
of your prismatic luminous self
as one responds with total rhythm in the dance -
I knelt

and answering, you pressed my face against your
womb
and drew me to a safe and still oblivion,
shut out the knives and teeth; boots, bayonets
and knuckles:
so, for the instant posed, we froze to an eternal
image
became unpersoned and unageing symbols
of humbled vulnerable wonder
enfolded by a bayed and resolute maternalness.

Dennis Brutus

Living Under Apartheid

You wake up each grey morning
in a fog of sorrow
hoping some shaft of brightness
will flash to relieve your gloom
some disaster, horror, catastrophe
will signal the end of the system

True, there are those who love it
who fight to preserve it-
love its privilege
its assurance of protection
new its possible end with horror

(years later they will pro less ignorance will claim innocence – and a supine government will accede greed for power, can make all deals possible)

True, they were uncomprehending
that hunger for free air battling
the raw sore on wounded selves
un.....(*word check*)
we worked each day with (*words check*)
.....(*words check*) we cried each day at dawn
dragged ourselves up
tensed for the coming combat

Dennis Brutus
Living Under Apartheid
August 28, 2008

Memories of the Big March

Dennis Brutus: The march from Johannesburg's Alexandra Township to the Sandton financial district - where the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development was held - on 31 August 2002, with an estimated 30 000 participants, was an important moment in the regrouping of liberation forces after 1994. I was glad to be part of it, but had to be aware of the irony of marching against the forces we had helped put in power.

Memory

When we marched – slithered – through
slimy mud past riot-shielded cops
in Alex, while children peered wild-eyed
from dark windows, for some of us
these were re-runs of earlier apartheid-
burdened days: but then it was
defiant resolution that drove our hearts,
braced out feet: now sadness at betrayal
sat stone-heavy on our hearts, our shouted
slogans, weighted with irony, hung heavy
over us in grimy air, we winced
at familiar oft-repeated lies.

August 13-14, 2004

Miles of my arid earth

Brutus poem, 23/3/09

Miles of my arid earth
rasping dry as smoker's cough and craving
heat, hunger ache in your dusty haze
sighing, heaving, tremulous;

all my seared eyes caress your miles—
boulders that blister, scald and rust—
ranging parched reaches of rutted sands;
coax pastels from your dun and dust

and know the tenderness
of these my reaching hands
can conjure moisture, gentleness
and honey sweetness from your yearning hollows.

1971

No Banyan, Only

Brutus poem, 2/6/09

Dennis: "A seminal work, done in Port Elizabeth in 1960".

The quiet wisdom of the body's peace:
Carnality, in this our carnal world, is all
Bamboo and iron having sealed
Our mundane eyes to views of time and peace.
Now I am strong as stones or trees are strong,
Insensible, or ignorant with vibrant life;
Streams or the air may wash or pass me by
My mind breathes quiet, lying yours along.
(Upon what meat is this man fed
That he is grown so great?
Diet of eloquent delectable accolades
Warm, soft, kindly, sweet and red.)

Under no banyan tree I strip no onion skin
To find a néant kernel at the still center:
"A little winter love in a dark corner?"
No, Love (for Chrissake, no) no love, no sin.

Sublunary no more, yet more acutely mundane now
Man's fingers claw the cosmos in gestures of despair,
Our souls, since Hersey, seek the helix of unknowing
Save mine, you-saved, now leafing like a bough.

Breaking through theory-thickets I thrust
To this one corpus, one more self
That gives Content and content to an earth
Littered and sterile with ideas and rust.

Let alphabetic electrons bloat on Freudian excrement,
Our golden bodies, dross-indifferent, count no gain,
Finding Gaugin's eternal island afternoon
And you hibiscus and my continent.

Most kindly you and what indeed can be
More most-required than kindness
In this our shared world? And thus
My thanks for heartsease balm you render me.

Animals, perhaps, without merit of their own
—Forgive me Poverello, Paduan, my conceit—
Attain at last such steady ecstasy
As this you give, a gift to make us both your own.

Old Dodderer

Brutus poem, "Old Dodderer", 19/3/09

Dennis: "The 'another' is W.H. Auden - see his 'Thank you, Fog' and others of his poems."

He plods on stockinged feet
between kettle pots and tap
murmurs complaints against
the burden of being
Commiserates with aching bones
sympathising with their plight
turns, finally, to the calendar
applauds, without enthusiasm,
"one more day" with uncertainty,
remains gratified for what is past,
regrets again what remains undone
like another quips, it will be good
sometime soon to welcome death.

PEGASUS

Dennis: "PEGASUS, once an image for poetry, became a logo for an oil corporation."

Winged Pegasus stands transfixed
on an oil-tank in Texas
and the plains extend around:

in the noise-fug of motors
where is the singing note
that will turn the stones to trees?

there is a harmony of will
that tremoring the fetid slag
patterns the impotent atoms.

New Orleans: October 30, 1971

Dennis: "An early poem, circa 1960, written in Port Elizabeth, for a South African, "A" (subsequently deported). Also applies to Joburg, CT, and Durban today."

NIGHTSONG: CITY

—Dennis Brutus

Sleep well, my love, sleep well:
the harbour lights glaze over restless docks,
police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets

from the shanties creaking iron-sheets
violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed
and fear is immanent as sound in the wind-swung bell;

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

<http://medusaskitchen.blogspot.com/2009/02/night-children.html>

Examining shaky foundations*

When conditions are so unseemly
even the blind are made aghast
and police are firing rubber bullets**

in defense of the indefensible
it is time Messers Makgoba
and Mandela and others of your ilk
to reassess your gains and efforts -
more importantly, reassess your
measuring rods, question your values

Respectfully I offer, you cannot construct
an edifice on dishonest roots
cannot hope it will stand:
structures built on shards
or crumbled fragments of tortured bone
must, of necessity, crumble

Structures built on deceit and lies,
such structures cannot survive:
in the harsh light of everyday
under scrutiny they will
not survive

Bring out from padded rags
those covered lies, deceptions
deceits, distortions, misrepresentations
all contrived to preserve the myths
heroic mythology of our unsullied cause

Dig out the shabby skeletons:
jaunty Sol Kerzner with his handy 'copters
and that ready wad to shut inquiring eyes
the Koornhofs who could bend apartheid laws
licentiously, lubriciously:
Brett Kebble's multiple ambidexterities

There is no way to build a truthful narrative
if you begin your tale with a tissue of lies:
fabrications, deceptions, contrivances
striving to preserve old inequities
striving only to secure your share
of those same inequities under a gloss
of iconic virtues and integrities
carefully nurtured to complaisant media
complaisant handmaidens of their
corporate lords

We may aspire in our dreams
for the Nile, the Mountains of the Moon,
storied wisdom from the Valley of the Kings***
but Southward headed we may slosh
through Antarctic iceflows - worse
gurgling in Kakpype of Kwazekele beach: ****

To Begin: let's name the criminals:

DeKlerk and Koornhof, Kebble, Oppenheimer,
Let us begin a new, a clean beginning
one true, respecting the people's hope
for a different better world:
or let us else make an end
and no more talk of human rights

Let us, at least, be truthful to ourselves

3/4/09

* Poem prepared for the conference on 'Reconciliation and the Work of Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Dialogue', Nelson Mandela Foundation, Johannesburg, 2-3 April 2009

** an attack by Durban police on UKZN students protesting socio-economic injustices, in which a blind student – amongst a dozen others - was injured by rubber bullets, 23 March 2009

*** currently in educational circles, the wisdom of Egypt, and of the Valley of the Kings, is being touted

**** Kakypipe = shitpipes: Port Elizabeth sewage pipes emptied into the area where black people were allowed to swim in my youth

Take out the poetry and fire, 9/4/09

Take out the poetry and fire
or watch it ember out of sight,
sanity reassembles its ash
the moon relinquishes the night.

But here and here remain the scalds
a sudden turn or breath may ache,
and I walk soft on cindered pasts
for thought or hope (what else?) can break.

Sharpeville

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

and certainly not
the heavy caliber slug
that tore through a mother's back
and ripped through the child in her arms
killing it

Remember Sharpeville
bullet-in-the-back day

Because it epitomized oppression
and the nature of society
more clearly than anything else;
it was the classic event

Nowhere is racial dominance
more clearly defined
nowhere the will to oppress
more clearly demonstrated

what the world whispers
apartheid declares with snarling guns
the blood the rich lust after
South Africa spills in the dust

Remember Sharpeville
Remember bullet-in-the-back day

And remember the unquenchable will for freedom
Remember the dead
and be glad

Dennis Brutus: This is a poem from 1970, in which after looking at the politics of Africa, I look at my own place in Africa.

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

and I am driftwood.

Others may loll in their carnal pool
washed by tides of sensual content
in variable flow, by regulated plan

but I am driftwood.

And the tides devour,
lusts erode the shelving consciousness
fierce hungers shark at the submerged mind
while the quotidian battering spray . . .

Even the seabird questing
weaving away and across
the long blue rollers coasting
from green shelves of shore-land

and rock-tipped banks,
even the seabird has a place of rest—
though it may vary by season or by tide
and a mate brooding with swollen nares and puffed breast
signalling nest-routes with tender secret cries
though it vary by season or by tide.

But I am driftwood
by some white Algerian plage.

And the riptides rip and tear
erode, devour
and unrest, questing, yeasts in my querying brain
and I beat on the fierce savaging knowledge
rampaging through my existence
accepting the knowledge, seeking design

For I am driftwood
in a life and place and time
thrown by some chance, perchance
to an occasional use
a rare half-pleasure on a seldom chance

and I grate on the sand of being
of existence, circumstance
digging and dragging for a meaning
dragging through the dirt and debris
the refuse of existence
dragging through the diurnal treadmill of my life.

And still I am driftwood.
Still the restlessness, the journeyings, the quest,
the queryings, the hungers and the lusts.

(Though we know how clouds gather and have weighed the moon,
though we have erected and heaved ourselves
in some vast orgasmic thrust
to be unmundane and to trample the moon—
still the blind tides lunge and eddy,
still we writhe on some undiscovered spit,
coil in some whirlpool of undefinable tide)

Yet in the unmarked waters I discern
traceries of patterns like wisps of spume
where I have gone
and snailtrails in seasands on a hundred shores
where I have dragged my sad unresting loins
—tracks on a lunar landscape that suggest some sense—

And still I am driftwood
on some sun-soaked plage.

Club des Pins/Algiers/en route to Paris. 1970

3/1/09

Dennis Brutus: In July 2006, I visited Lebanon during Israel's bombardment. My stay at the Shatila camp for Palestinian refugees - the site of the 1982 massacre arranged by Israeli Defence Minister Ariel Sharon - was most poignant. I can only imagine the damage done to the people of the Gaza Strip, this week, next week. But there is resistance, forever.

Only in the Casbah
in its steep, stepped and narrow ways
warrenning in shops, homes and passages
past the refuse and the children
and the shrivelled tenacious dames;
only in the Casbah
where the bombed structures gape
in mute reminder of the terror of the French
is the tenacious, labyrinthine and unshatterable heart
of resistance
truly known.

Algiers 1970

2/1/09

Dennis Brutus: "This poem written in tribute to Steve Biko reflects a long interest, including my founding of the Steve Biko Memorial Committee during exile in Chicago. Descriptions of the towns (including King Williamstown) were recalled from an earlier hitchhiking trip, from Port Elizabeth to East London. Twenty years later, Biko's own fatal interrogation, in September 1977, occurred in the same building in Port Elizabeth in which I had been interrogated years earlier."

Poem composed for Steve Biko Day, San Antonio, June 16, 1978

The dusty roads
from Peddie to King
the yellow river
choking with silt
draining to i'Monti

the dust-filmed bluegums
poised and dreaming
in the arid air
the parching dust
harsh in the throat
and hurtful on the eyes
the crude teutonic towns
Hamburg, Berlin, Hanover
with their ominous echoes
— all these he knew
their roads he traversed:
they fired him with resolve
and smoldering anger
their racial hate seethed round him
like the surge of shimmering heatwaves
and laid a thousand lashes
on his taut flesh:
here he planned, dreamed,
waged his struggle
and hardened his will
to confront the butchers
to challenge their terror
—even if they robbed him of his life.

Dennis Brutus 16/6/78

1/1/09

INTRO: The Sirens of oppression I referred to in my first collection (1963) were still present in South Africa in 1989, as they seem to be as well in Gaza in 2009 thanks to Israel's bombing spree.

Dennis Brutus, Durban 1/1/09

Still the sirens

Still the sirens
stitch the night air with terror—
pierce hearing's membranes
with shrieks of pain and fear:
still they weave the mesh
that traps the heart in anguish,
flash bright bars of power
that cage memory in mourning and loss.
Still sirens haunt the night air.
Someday there will be peace
someday the sirens will be still

someday we will be free.
1989

Visiting my father's birthplace

Prose poem: Visiting my father's birthplace

The landscape is familiar: gently sloping hillsides covered with greenery—brown shrubs. I am going in search of my father in the country of his boyhood and though I'm in a car with family members, it is all intensely private—so private that I don't even allow myself the murmured converse I usually conduct with myself.

This green-shadowed landscape troubles me. The hills have been slashed open, of course, so that there are red-raw stretches all along the wide asphalt roads—and I cannot suppress the knowledge that these wide swift roads were planned to ensure the rapid transit of military vehicles to any area where there might be "trouble"—the euphemism for unrest provoked by police brutality or the ruthless enforcement of inhumane laws. There is another reminder of the iron land of repression—the miles of gleaming wire and cable that conveyed instantaneous alerts about these same "troubles"; that sent helicopters or armored patrols—scorpions, hippos, buffaloes (these vehicles had animal names, sometimes because they evoked a resemblance)—with screaming sirens and flashing headlamps into the "townships," as the segregated and menaced areas were called. They are a constant presence. And though they no longer carry the same menacing quality, they are a brooding reminder, a symbol not to be shaken off.

So it is with the load pressing on my mind that we enter the small fishing village where my father grew up, after stopping at an information cottage near the entrance and picking up some material from a helpful but somewhat perplexed attendant.

The sea stretches out, pale blue to silver at the horizon and the bay curves gently, with fishing boats in the foreground, and a bulky factory on the headland of the entrance. The town will, of course, have changed greatly, but the sea is the same sea, and this is pretty much the scene he would have looked out on. I try to see with his boyish eyes: try to feel what he felt, to enter somehow into the thoughts and feelings of the father who would never let me enter his mind. Nothing comes of it. Only the thought of that lingering military presence. And of the greed for profit that will bring more factories to destroy this landscape that can still tug at my heart.

2004

Remembering Egypt

(A poem fresh from Dennis' pen, today.)

Dennis: "Egypt is playing a tawdry role in the current agony of the Palestinians; but it is not new, sadly."

Remembering Egypt

Solitary I walked the sands
beside the Pyramids
hot soil beneath my feet:
ageless the cloudless skies
aeons above invisible stars:
men laboured in dusty rags
parched reeds wilted in shallows
children with dark hungry eyes
gazed, curious, at alien intruders
while power games unwound
dynastic narratives unscrolled;
sorrowing, we braced for tawdry tales

Seeing a film on Robben Island

Dennis: "A documentary film on visiting Robben Island prison was shown at the Centre for Civil Society at UKZN; this was one reaction."

Seeing a Film on Robben Island

There are the familiar waves,
green, creaming in the shallows
on grey, sharp-edged rocks;
impassive buildings with no hint of horrors
even barbed wire seems unthreatening
grey-shadowed cells are merely suggested
soundless images emit no screams:
still, sorrow accumulated there
sorrow, with rock-hard resolve;
how has it all somehow dissolved?
Grinning DeKlerks strut our malls
in cammies prime their tools for heists
our record activists rewrite the rules

to hide their own - and others' - guilts

db. durban

NOTE: 'record activists' are those who have credibility because they have a record - of some sort - of being activists in the liberation struggle

Seen in a mirror."

Dennis: "Seen in a mirror."

Image

We accept what we are:
not that there is much
that we could do about it:
rejection, for instance,
would be meaningless:
So also, objection:
we accept what we are
consent to accept this state
acquiesce in current being,
commit to being as is.

Durban, 12/3/09

Shadow-patterns of leaves

Shadow-patterns of leaves
on a window-shade
moving gently in a breeze

Suddenly I am seized with sadness
perhaps for the first time
this is the world I must leave ere long

This is the loveliness I must lose

Oh, craven, will you not act?
save, I beg you, our world,
find courage to challenge terror

*Dennis Brutus –
24 June 2008*

Shakespeare winged

Brutus poem, 25/3/09

Shakespeare winged this way using other powers
to wrest from grim rock and a troubled student-lad
an immortality outlasting all our time
and hacking out an image of the human plight
that out-endures all facets of half-truth:

here now we hurtle north-east from the westering sun
that follows, plucks out from afar
the wingstruts crouched and sunlit for a plunge:

O might I be so crouched, so poised, so hewed
to claw some image of my fellows' woe
hacking the hardness of the ice-clad rock,
armed with such passion, dedication, voice
that every cobblestone would rear in wrath
and batter down a prison's wall
and wrench them from the island where they rot.

Shimon Peres is honoured

Shimon Peres is honoured by Balliol College, Oxford
Nelson Mandela honours Cecil John Rhodes in Foundation

(on the occasion of Mandela's birthday)
For he's a jolly good fellow (3 times)
and so say all of us (3 times)
INCLUDING CECIL RHODES (3 times; addition by d.b.)

Yes, he skulked along all roads
yes, he whipped folks with all goads
he kissed princes, made them toads
he burdened blacks with all loads
disguised himself with various woads
his gut swarmed with trematodes
we condemn him, whatever bodes
he's the worst of S O D's - or Sodes
he's the robber-baron, free-booter, mercenary,
soldier-of-fortune, coloniser, pirate
bully, servant, architect of imperialism CECIL RHODES

Bailed out by Old Balliol
Haled before old Halliol
Sold out via old Sailliol
Traded by old Traillol
Dismally failed by old Failliol
Deserves jailing by old Jailliol
Tyburn is the place where he should burn
Terrorist of all the terrorists
Shimon Peres is the terrorist of all the terrorists

Together we mourn these events;
together we we mark these betrayals
together in shame and sorrow we mark these events

dennis brutus nov. 2008;
worchester state college,
worchester, mass

Balliol college is giving shimon peres an honorary degree. d.b.

Spring

Well

it seems to me
this early spring day
that
when it is time to go (fairly soon, now we understand)
it is that spray
of jacaranda blossoms
on the topmost bough
that I will miss most
at least
it is the sort of thing
i will part with –
or be parted from-
reluctantly most

*Dennis Brutus –
September 2008*

Tribute to Steve Biko

Dennis Brutus: "This poem written in tribute to Steve Biko reflects a long interest, including my founding of the Steve Biko Memorial Committee during exile in Chicago. Descriptions of the towns (including King Williamstown) were recalled from an earlier hitchhiking trip, from Port Elizabeth to East London. Twenty years later, Biko's own fatal interrogation, in September 1977, occurred in the same building in Port Elizabeth in which I had been interrogated years earlier."

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and laid a thousand lashes
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waged his struggle
and hardened his will
to confront the butchers
to challenge their terror
—even if they robbed him of his life.

Dennis Brutus 16/6/78

Still the sirens

Still the sirens
stitch the night air with terror—
pierce hearing's membranes
with shrieks of pain and fear:
still they weave the mesh

that traps the heart in anguish,
flash bright bars of power
that cage memory in mourning and loss.
Still sirens haunt the night air.
Someday there will be peace
someday the sirens will be still
someday we will be free.

1989

Dennis Brutus, Durban 1/1/09

Stubborn hope

Endurance is a passive quality,
transforms nothing, contests nothing
can change no state to something better
and is worthy of no high esteem;
and so it seems to me my own persistence
deserves, if not contempt, impatience.

Yet somewhere lingers the stubborn hope
thus to endure can be a kind of fight,
preserve some value, assert some faith
and even have a kind of worth.

1977

The Diminshing Road

The road, to, diminishes:
one would see less if one tried;
it is what ageing is about –
if one gave it thought:
generally though, one is content
eyes fixed on the road,
content to see what can be seen
unanxious to speculate
about a possible road –
the diminishing road.

Dennis Brutus

THE MOB

August 13-14, 2004

6/1/09

(Durban's inner-city has witnessed a mob of xenophobes roaming. This poem is about a white crowd who attacked those who protested on the Johannesburg City Hall steps against the Sabotage Bill in May 1962.)

The mob

These are the faceless horrors
that people my nightmares
from whom I turn to wakefulness
for comforting
yet here I find confronting me
the fear-blanked facelessness
and saurian-lidded stares
of my irrational terrors
from whom in dreams I run.

O my people

O my people
what have you done
and where shall I find comforting
to smooth awake your mask of fear
restore your face, your faith, feeling, tears.

1963

The New Monastics

Brutus poem, 23/2/09

Dennis: "Medieval scholars plotted - or tried to plot - their universe;
now Summers, Geithner, Zoellick, Strauss-Kahn, et al have a similar
enterprise."

The New Monastics

by Dennis Brutus

Tall black-shadowed cypresses
slender beside arcaded cloisters:
thus were monastic enterprises: now with our new doctrines
secular-consumerist we bend
with similar devoutness in service
to our modern pantheon -
Bretton Woods, its cohort deities
- World Bank, IMF, WTO -
diligently we recite
"We have loved, o lord, the beauty of your house
and the place where your glory dwells"
"Amen" we chorus in unison
as ordered by our Heads of State
obediently we traipse to our slaughterhouse
directed by our Judas-goats
Mbeki's herds tricked out in shabby rags
discarded by imperialist gauleiters
who devised our Nepad subjugation

– ActionAid Economic Justice course, Kenyan School of Monetary Studies
in Nairobi, November 26, 2007

A tribute to Vanessa Redgrave

(Dennis: "I just read a tribute to Vanessa Redgrave, in the January 2009
issue of 'Your family.' She continues to campaign on behalf of the
Palestinians.")

Still her voice is a silver trumpet
among war's bluster, barrage of lies
storms of wailings, sirens' shrieks

When I was served - for a second time
with another 5-year house-arrest
having come from Robben Island
she sent me recordings she had made
of ballads and resistance songs
(perhaps to comfort/console)
during the time of Vietnam's war
via my editor-friend Ruth First,
Solidarity in Struggle!

Still her voice is a silver trumpet
Crying: Justice for Palestine.

5 January 2009

Trimly honed, he moved with ease
among colleagues, respectful of work
attentive to skill, ability
he gave full measure
to all demanded of him
gave effort, energy, work
more than was measured
was praised far below his work

Dennis Brutus
Tribute poem to A.E Lutchman "Little Chief"
October 28, 2008
Durban, South Africa

Two poems by Dennis Brutus in Caracas

Below are two poems presented by veteran anti-apartheid and global social justice activist **Dennis Brutus**, in Venezuela for the eighth meeting of the Network of Intellectuals and Artists in Defence of Humanity and the World Forum for Alternatives, October 18, 2008.



Dennis Brutus

Poem immediately following the conference, in the Hotel Alba overlooking Caracas mountains, 5:50am on October 18, 2008.

Saffron dawn glimmers
beyond the mountain's blue bulk
my shoulder's reflection infringes
on the window's dim report
So let some impact from you my words echo resonance
lend impulse to the bright looming dawn

* * *

Poem delivered at the closing session.

*There will come a time
There will come a time we believe
When the shape of the planet
and the divisions of the land
Will be less important;
We will be caught in a glow of friendship
a red star of hope
will illuminate our lives
A star of hope
A star of joy
A star of freedom*

In thanks to President Hugo Chavez and the people of Venezuela,
Dennis Brutus
October 18, Caracas.

Dennis: "For Valentines Day, for S, with a nod to MPG (LOL)"

Here are roses; here dance:
dance for me, exquisitely
but temperately,
my now no-longer nimble heart
does not take lightly
to transports of delight
being transported extravagantly
may end conclusively
in ways not planned by you or me;
dance, lovely, give delight
exquisitely, heartwarmingly -
perhaps, even, concluvily.

d.b. 2/14-15/09

(The quotation is from Marx's classic essay on the Fourteenth
Brumaire. db)

Brutus poem, 12/3/09

Dennis: "Title quote is from Hamlet's Ophelia - after she has gone
crazy; I note how conformist our contemporary poets are; how few - like
Bila or Horwitz - will raise a critical voice."

But you must wear your rue with a difference

Others there were too who spoke out
but they were few and were speedily crushed:
true, yours was cautious and subdued
you were anxious not to seem disloyal
nor to antagonise possible friends:
Still integrity demanded frankness
so you could not exclude possible diversions
conceded rumours recognised doubts
so, if now there are failures you can: speak,
recall your earlier reservations
if there is sadness, you can add
"but always I conceded things could go wrong":
men are frail, power corrupts and always
the corporates will say: "We can make you rich."

12/3/09

Well he is gone now
dear Billy Nair
who cheered us on the long road
to Robben Island
who held stead fast
when there were betrayals around
so he is gone,
we salute his passing
we pay tribute to his courage
we mark our loss with sadness
well we must gather our courage
we must commit to our struggle
we must continue to strive

*Dennis Brutus
October 2008
Durban, South Africa*

Dennis: "Wry commentary."

I come and go
a pilgrim
grubbily unkempt
stubbornly cheerful
defiantly whistling hope
and grubbing for crumbs of success

out of all near-defeats

I shuffle through the waiting rooms
and the air-terminals of the world
imposing and importuning
while the politely courteous
acquaintances
co-operate
help arrange my departures
without any pang of greeting

I work my stubborn difficult unrewarding will
obtusely addleheaded clumsy:
some few things happen
and I plod or shuffle or amble
wracked with anguished frustrate hunger
and go on.

1978

Brutus poem, 19/2/09

Dennis: "Written in Finchley: 18 Hilton Ave."

Home-walking blues
late night gleaming on window panes
cold rain slashing my cheeks
mutters among blue-shadowed trees
a voice remembered in my head
murmuring bad news:
walking to a place called home
a cold bitter place called home.

Home-walking blues
heading east where the light has died
stray leaves drifting across my face
sighs from dead leaves crunched underfoot
a voice remembered in my head
murmuring bad news:
walking to a place called home
a cold bitter place called home.

October 1996