LOVE AS A RESPONSE TO APARTHEID:
A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF DENNIS BRUTUS

by

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DEDICATION

For
Akosu, Nyinyayo, Ashi, Wandoo,
And all those
Who value and defend
The truth.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of references.

Tyohdzuah Paulinus Akosu

JUNE 1983

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, apartheid regulates political. cultural, social and economic aspects of people's lives. The whiteman is the affluent but frightened master and the Blackmail is the hungry and exploited servant. Dennis Brutus's poetry protests against this situation. He responds to the many conflicts generated by apartheid, by appealing for love and respect for the individual in place of the hatred and the stifling atmosphere engendered by apartheid. The various levels and implications of his response, the precise meaning of his appeal for love, constitute the major concern of this thesis .

Chapter one makes a survey of existing critical studies and shows the need for a further examination of the love theme in the poetry of Dennis Brutus, It defines love and relates it to Brutus's definition that is informed by his Christian upbringing and his political orientation, his liberal humanism, The chapter deals with Brutus's biography and looks for those traits which are discernible in his poetry. Chapter two is a detailed study of love as a liberal ideological response to apartheid in Brutus's poetry. Chapter

Three discusses love as a means of sustaining man's dignity and identity, human attributes which apartheid seeks to destroy in the Blackman. Chapter Four examines love in Brutus's poems as a struggle against alienation and insecurity brought about by apartheid. Chapter Five discusses Patriotism and the fight for a birthright. The Conclusion summarizes the major arguments of the study, reassesses Brutus's literary achievement and evaluates his contribution to Literature and the liberation struggle in South Africa.

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ABBREVIATIONS

SKB	Sirens Knuckles Boots.*
LTM	Letters to Martha and other poems from a South African Prison.
PFA	Poems from Algiers.
ASL	A Simple Lust: Collected Poems of South African Jail and Exile, including Letters to Martha.
SH	Stubborn Hope, Selected Poems of South Africa and a Wider World, including China Poems.
SSAP	Seven South African Poets.

* Sirens Knuckles Boots published in 1963 by Mbari, has no page numbers.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The earliest critical comment on Brutus's poetry is from Ulli Beier, who introduced him in a paper prepared for the Conference of African Writers of English Expression held at Makerere University College Kampala in 1962. Beier defends Brutus against critics, especially West Africans, who accuse South Africans of producing literature that bores the reader because of its monotonous protest:

> There is a general feeling among West African writers that South Africans indulge in continuous protest writing. They have often and severely criticized this. It has been said that they are full of self-pity and that their continuous spineless protesting is becoming a bore and fails to arouse sympathy.
>
> The reproach is a little cheap, coming from people who have grown up without knowing any real oppression, and any real frustration. It is difficult to see how South African writers can escape the recurring themes of race prejudice, apartheid and oppression.

Beier's statement is meant to pre-empt adverse criticism such as J.P. Clark's or Bahadur Tejani's. Beier's defence is quite fitting for an introduction

of a new poet which aims at arousing the interest of a wider readership. Beier's introduction of Brutus's poetry implies that Brutus's themes, like those of other South African writers, revolve only around 'race prejudice, apartheid and oppression', and that he is only marginally more skilled, writes with more restraint than other Black South African writers. 'In Dennis Brutus's verse there is none of the outcry, the scream, the anger of protest poetry. Sometimes it reads like understatement; yet who could fail to be moved by a subdued poem like "Erosion: Transkei",' Beier writes.[1] Beier's critical comments do not deal with Brutus's conception of love, a major pre-occupation of his.

Daniel Abasiekong, who has also written on Brutus's poetry, compares it to the poetry of John Rabearivelo. Abasiekong's is one of the earliest critical studies that find love as a pre-occupation of Brutus's poetry. However, his study is preoccupied with the style Brutus uses. The main thrust of Abasiekong's argument, which is the reason for its comparative approach, is that both pure and applied forms of poetry, such

as Rabearivelo's and Brutus's are valid as poetry. It depends 'more on the poet's own inspiration and his artististic capabilities and not on the intrinsic nature of his raw material'. Abasiekong proceeds to explain how effectively these two artists use imagery and diction. What impresses Abasiekong in Brutus's poetry is the 'brilliant intensity of his imagery /and/ confident modulation of rhythm and gross structure'. Abasiekong concludes that Brutus's 'work has re-affirmed that it is possible and valid to create good, perhaps great poetry out of politics and history... to write living and intensely personal poetry whose meaning takes hold of public affairs'. This is a realistic critical appreciation, as is Abasiekong's answer to critics who find Brutus's poetry too restrained to accommodate the revolutionary spirit demanded by the situation in South Africa. Abasiekong writes, 'In South Africa, however, where 'the future has already been fixed by the present, it requires something other than verbal pleading to influence the future'.[2] Abasiekong's study is perceptive. However, its limitation is that it covers the stylistic aspects of Brutus's poetry well but

does not do as well in its discussion of themes.

In his study of Brutus's poetry, Paul Theroux conveys his concern about the 'bloody bungled world' of South Africa, in which the writer operates with difficulty. According to him, 'the South African writer is in a very special position. With Britain, the United States, Germany, Japan and countless other countries pouring money and industrial schemes into the country, it takes a strong voice and a skilful hand to unravel the gorgeous South African brochure, shout in the faces of the Great Powers and touch the brutalized nerves beneath it all.' He concludes that as a result of these investments, the South African writer 'is not only a slave to the regime but also a slave to the regimes of the most powerful countries of the world'. Theroux makes valid claims about Brutus's poetry which he fails to elaborate on. For example, on the subject of love, his study only observes that 'amorousness is something that is dear to Brutus, but something that is out of reach. So Brutus, concentrates on the emotion that will lead to

amorousness - the way is through tenderness to love.' It is not enough to say love is important to Brutus. The question is, why is it so and what is Brutus's own conception of love? These questions need to be answered because many people do not understand why Brutus should be concerned with love in the face of racial hatred propagated by the apartheid regime in South Africa. Theroux's study fails to answer these crucial questions. He further observes in his assessment of Sirens Knuckles Boots that, 'Sex in these poems is frightening; images of love making are contrasted with images of death and dying.' This is true, as poems such as "Mirror Sermon" from Sirens Knuckles Boots confirm. However, the use of such images of love making as Theroux speaks about indicates one way only in which Brutus conceives of love. On style, Theroux says that Brutus 'has escaped the decayed language of revolt, the clichés of the man oppressed'.[3] Such an assertion misses the point. Brutus does not use the language of revolt much, not because it is a decayed language or the cliché of oppressed peoples but because Brutus's liberal humanist ideology dictates the use of a modest language. Liberal humanists do

not advocate violence but love which calls for peaceful human co-existence. The language that matches this aim and which Brutus uses is one that appeals to reason; a language of persuasion, lament and exposition. This language has its own way of penetrating our consciousness, just as that of revolt has. Theroux gives Brutus his due credit on this issue but for the wrong reason, swayed as the critic is by his sympathy for the anti-apartheid writer in South Africa.

In his treatment of Brutus's poetry, J.P. Clark feels that Brutus 'succeeds to a considerable extent in transforming life into art'. This leads him to declare that Brutus's 'poetry is servant to politics'. This suggests that Brutus is more concerned with the politics of his country than with literary creativity. Such an assertion is not correct. The imagery and diction of most of the poems in Sirens Knuckles Boots, the volume which Clark uses, demonstrate Brutus's craftsmanship as a poet. But in Clark's opinion, 'Reading the work of Dennis Brutus, much of it re-modelled rhetoric, one comes back to the old excuse by Mphahlele that certain situations like those in

South Africa really are too paralysing for words. Perhaps - for what does one do to a dog holding a mauled paw?' The validity or otherwise of this criticism can only be known if a thorough scrutiny of Brutus's poetry is made. Clark's study is no such scrutiny. The image of the South African writer, a conspicuous target for apartheid, as a whining injured dog in need of sympathy is of no critical value. It merely plays down the great influence the politics of South Africa has on the writer and his work. Clark plays down the dilemma of the South African writer in such a way that even what Brutus has achieved with great control is given a bad name and hanged. For example, quoting from "The Sounds Begin Again", the poem that opens Sirens Knuckles Boots, Clark dismisses Brutus's effective poetic structure as 'the banner headline approach /which/ intrudes right from the title piece of an otherwise valuable volume'. Clark says that Brutus has 'quite a brutal Elizabethan hold on words'.[4] Clark focuses on diction, but even this is not exhaustively treated.

J.P. Clark's study, which appeared in 1970,

does not cover Letters to Martha, which was published in 1968. The study is, therefore, narrow in scope and does not examine the theme of love. Ola has observed that Clark's study has caused apologetic appraisals of Brutus's work. She says: 'Ever since J.P. Clark decided in 1965 that "a little less shouting for more silence and mime might not only make for dignity but also command attempts to rescue and action" in the case of Dennis Brutus, critical approach to this powerful poet has tended to be subdued and mostly apologetic'. Ola's other observation, that 'Brutus's poetry aims at something that refuses to die in the suffering man' and that 'ultimately, the poems end up as an affirmation of love to sustain the suffering heart', constitutes a profound assessment of Brutus's poetry.[5] Unfortunately, this appreciation comes in the form of a short conference paper and, as such, does not cover areas and details relating to the issues it raises.

Bahadur Tejani accuses Brutus and his publishers of withholding important political information after leading the reader to hope for

this in their introduction. But, since poetry works by implication, it is in the unravelling of such implications that the reader's interest and the life of the poems are sustained. To supply the political information Tejani wants would negate this aim and encourage the reader to emphasize the political aspect of Brutus's poetry to the detriment of other themes and art itself. Dennis Brutus rightly feels that he 'Shouldn't be explaining everything. If it's a good poem, it will explain itself.'[6] Backing his claim with a reference to Brutus's use of the troubadour image, Tejani argues that Brutus has 'a lightness of tone and approach toward the function of poetry which is self-condemning'. However, Brutus's lightness of tone indicates the poet's wish to return peace for the hatred bred by the apartheid regime, an attitude that accords with his message of love. To point out the 'weaknesses' in Brutus's poetry, Tejani compares Brutus's verse with Koestler's The Scum of the Earth and Kaunda's Zambia Shall be Free. The critic makes this comparison between the poetic and prosaic forms for the sole purpose of enabling him to ask: 'Is poetry a suitable medium to convey prison experience at all?', and

sees no poetry constitute an important and effective metaphor. The free movement of birds is compared to the manoeuvring of jet planes. The yearning for freedom is clear and further stressed in the third line by the image of acrobats. Brutus is marvelling and wondering how natural things like birds and artificial ones like jet planes can have so much freedom while human beings are denied such freedom through imprisonment. The metaphor, therefore, effectively helps the reader to grasp the mental torture of the prisoners and their yearning for freedom. Tejani's study is based on his pre-conceived ideas rather than on Brutus's poems as literary creations. According to the critic:

> To the mind of the East African, the white South African is a bizzare phenomenon... quite understandably, not until the deeper shades of suspicion have been removed by long personal contact can we believe in anything that is said by a white South African, or view anyone who toes the line of non-resistance without natural hostility. South Africa's international position and our impressions of that part of the world will and do interact with a reading of these poems.7

These are the opening statements of Tejani's examination of Brutus's Letters to Martha. They

show with what bias he sets out to tackle Brutus's prison poems. He has made up his mind from the start that there must be something suspicious about Brutus's poetry if Brutus advocates non-violence, a philosophy which Tejani equates with non-resistance. Tejani's unstated conclusion is that because Brutus toes the line of 'non-resistance', his poetry can hardly have any value. Furthermore, Tejani is determined that his 'impressions' of South Africa must be called to service in the interpretation of Brutus's prison poetry. These impressions are not facts. They are notions which Tejani has cultivated about the politics of South Africa. This is wrong for it makes Tejani's study non-literary. An objective, analytic and informed critique of Brutus's poetry has to be guided principally by the poems themselves.

M.J. Salt's perceptive analysis of Brutus's poetry comes in the form of a reply to Tejani's study, which Salt thinks is adverse and ill-informed. As a reply, it answers the issues raised by Tejani. Consequently, it does not discuss the theme of love. Salt points out

Tejani's inadequacies by showing how Tejani asks the wrong questions, 'questions which are formulated on the basis of strong preconceptions and opinions about Brutus'.[8]

Egudu's study of the poetry of Dennis Brutus is largely concerned with the poet's reaction to apartheid and his craftsmanship in unveiling this reaction. He says, Brutus's 'poetry being his response, is of course the product of the interplay of the socio-political situation and his personality. The present study is concerned with the nature of this response and how it has been effected in terms of artistic rendition'. Egudu points out that the response is 'of one who is in mental agony whether at home or abroad... the kind of action Brutus is concerned with is more psychological than physical'. The love aspect of Brutus's response, which is a psychological issue, is not given the treatment it deserves in Egudu's study. A work that is aware of the psychological nature of Brutus's response is expected to deal with the pronounced existence of the sexual and homosexual love forms in his poetry. Egudu's study is limited in this respect. The

critic is carried away by his sympathy for Brutus's unenviable and brutal socio-political environment. He accepts the view that the poems in Letters to Martha are prosaic but defends them in the following terms: 'It can be argued in his /Brutus's/ favour that the weight of sorrow was so heavy on his heart that he became unsettled mentally and could not pay the necessary attention to his art'.[9] The poetry of Letters to Martha is not prosaic. It is simple but good poetry. Twenty-nine of the fifty two poems in Letters to Martha take the form of letters and, as such, employ the language of everyday speech. As poetic letters meant to console Martha, Brutus's sister-in-law, over her husband's imprisonment and acquaint her with prison conditions, these poems cannot be couched in metaphysical and clotted images. They cannot be made to sound too dialectical either. That is not the manner in which condolences, sympathies and consolatory messages are expressed. Dennis Brutus himself accounts for the 'inferior' quality of Letters to Martha by saying that the suffering people whose fight he spearheads must be informed more simply and clearly of the brutality of apartheid. In his words:

> You ought to write for the ordinary person: for the man who drives the bus, or the man who carries the baggage at the airport, and the woman who clears the ashtrays in the restaurant. If you can write poetry which makes sense to those people, then there is some justification for writing poetry. Otherwise you have no business writing.
>
> And therefore, there should be no ornament because ornament gets in the way.10

Egudu ascribes the prosaic nature of Letters to Martha to the sorrow generated by the brutality of prison rather than to the poet's intention to reach a proletarian audience. His study leaves the issue of love which it discerns in Brutus's poetry unexamined.

Adrian Roscoe says that Brutus's style is guided by 'modesty and reason' and, therefore, 'blends dignity with patience, and calmness with reason determined always that emotionalism must never triumph'. These are valid observations that need buttressing with textual evidence. For other claims which Roscoe makes justification is difficult to find. For example, he feels that Brutus 'often confines his wordplay to closing lines as if rationing for himself the poet's joy

of luxuriating in the beauty of his own words; as if indeed the figurative represents escapism. Emotion is rarely overstrained and metaphor is subtly unobstrusive'. Brutus's poetry does not attest to this claim. Most of his metaphors have several layers of meaning and only a careful analysis arrives at the appropriate meaning. It is not true to say that such metaphors are 'subtly unobstructive'. After quoting the whole of "Somehow we Survive" /SKB/, Roscoe comments that in the poem, 'The solid violence loaded into "boots club the peeling door", with its visions of police bullying the weak, is answered by the calm repetition about the survival of tenderness'.[11] This is a valid point on which an exhaustive discussion should ensue because it raises vital questions about Brutus's poetry. For example, why is tenderness such an important issue in Brutus's poetry and how does one reply to violence with tenderness? The poem Roscoe quotes raises the issue of religion which advocates the love, patience and non-violence one sees in Brutus's poetry.

Hal Wylie comments more directly on the love

aspect in Brutus and compares the poetry to the poetry of René Depestre's. Wylie's study is limited in two ways. First, the scope of reference covers only Brutus's exile poetry, as suggested by the phrase 'Creative exile' in the title. Any study of Brutus's poetry that emphasizes love must, of necessity, look into Sirens Knuckles Boots as a volume in which the issue of love is most prominent. Secondly, as a comparison, Wylie's study tends to touch on all aspects of Brutus's poetry, concentrating on none in particular. From the premise that René Depestre and Dennis Brutus have positively gained from their experiences of exile, 'continuing their political and literary work with good results', Wylie states that his 'study attempts to find the elements which explain their continued creativity'. He describes both poets as 'world citizens', troubadours, to use Brutus's equivalent. Wylie finds the visions and inspirations of the two poets similar. These are the elements that form the basis for Wylie's comparative study. Speaking more precisely on love, the critic says that, 'Eros plays an important role in the literary

work of both poets.' According to him: 'Both poets seem to be working the platonic idea of eros as the attractional force which holds families, clans and societies together and therefore the cement that builds the polis through political action'.[12] Although Wylie does not pursue the discussion further, the appropriateness of his claim with regard to Brutus's poetry can be demonstrated.

The latest major study of Brutus's poetry is the critique by Ken Goodwin (1982). The study does not focus on any one aspect of Brutus's poetry in particular. It is a general appraisal whose success lies in the critic's careful study and use of information about the poet's life extracted from the many interviews Brutus has granted. Goodwin's study asserts that Brutus's 'style and tone... always draw on the European rather than African models. His subjects, on the other hand, are largely drawn from experiences in South Africa, though they are seen as exemplifications of problems common to all humanity'. This assertion is only half true. Whereas the theme of love, which Goodwin discerns in Brutus's poetry, is a theme common to all humanity, apartheid, the other subject of Brutus's

poetry, is not an experience common to all humanity. Again Brutus does not always draw on the European models for his style and tone. The poems entitled "Sequence for Luthuli" /ASL, pp.170-175/, show that Brutus also draws on the izibongo genre, an indigenous form of Zulu praise poetry. Goodwin argues that Brutus's 'tendency to see political problems in moral terms /and/ his charitableness to his opponents' are wrong. This dissatisfaction leads the critic to leave unexplored the intriguing combination of themes in Brutus, of which he is aware, as when he says: 'The mingling of vehemence and tenderness, is indeed one of the characteristics of his work'. This is Brutus's love-hate relationship with South Africa, a situation which puzzles many readers of Brutus's poetry. In his analysis of individual poems, Goodwin continues to show his awareness of this thematic combination. Analysing "A troubadour", he says: 'It is a poem that, like "Nightsong: City", combines the political and the sexual'. He stops at this, even though he is aware that the matter is of considerable literary importance as many of Brutus's poems combine these themes. Goodwin admires Brutus's style and asserts that with 'definitive and often

highly pictorial' first lines, Brutus easily achieves clarity for which, according to the critic, Brutus is indebted to the metaphysical poets. He appreciates Brutus's style, saying that his 'syntax remains clear and simple /which/ makes even the most difficult of his poems easier to explicate'. Goodwin largely agrees with Tejani, who accuses Brutus of churning out inferior work. However, Goodwin also observes that the poems in Letters to Martha 'are neither artless nor relaxed'. Citing Brutus's diction in the poems to back up his claim, he says: 'Despite the frequently demanding verse forms, there is an absence of grammatical inversion, convolution, complexity, or unidiomatic usage'.[13] In general, Goodwin's study is among the most comprehensive studies on Brutus's poetry. It analyze the poems in their correct context by fixing the periods, previously unknown, when most of the poems were written. The study covers Sirens Knuckles Boots, Letters to Martha, A Simple Lust, and Stubborn Hope. However, the study merely acknowledges the theme of love in Brutus's poetry without discussing it exhaustively.

Other critics feel that they must mention

Brutus's work even if they do not wish to look at it in detail. For example, the 1978 edition of Claude Wauthier's The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa conspicuously displays Brutus's picture on the front cover but makes only passing references to him in the book. This is to acknowledge Brutus's importance in the literature and thought of modern Africa but fail to deal with the poet's work.

The very brief attention given to Brutus in Toward the Decolonization of African Literature, is in keeping with the aim of the authors. They are mainly concerned with categorizing Brutus in African literature as 'middle ground', occupied by those 'who unlike Euro-modernists or the traditionalists, share no strongly distinguishing characteristics'. Their difficulty in dealing with Brutus's poetry is to be expected. The issue of apartheid in Brutus's poetry is already an issue of decolonization. The authors, therefore, cannot 'decolonize' Brutus's poetry.[14] They do not discuss the theme of love either.

Some critics are politically inclined in their approach to Brutus's poetry because of the

currency of politics in South Africa. Others tend to underestimate the influence of the poet's political environment on his writing. Both approaches are not conducive to objective criticism as they push to the background Brutus's poetry, which they purport to assess, and instead emphasize the politics of apartheid. Other studies have attempted to focus more on Brutus's style. Here, too, there is a shortcoming, as Lindfors in his evaluation of critical studies on Brutus points out: 'There has been a tendency for critics to allow their attitudes towards the matter and man to condition their attitudes towards the manner in which the man has articulated the matter.'[15] A review of existing literature on Brutus's poetry shows that one important aspect of his poetry needs further study. This is the theme of love.

The psycho-analytical writings of Sigmund Freud, Erich Fromm, and others can be usefully applied to the study of love in the poems of Dennis Brutus. Freud's views are relevant because Brutus himself shows an awareness of his theories as in the following lines from "Breaking through

theory thickets": 'Let alphabetic electronics bloat on Freudian excrement/our golden bodies, dross-indifferent, count no gain' [SKB]. Unlike Freud, Erich Fromm is not acknowledged in Brutus's verse but his views complement Freud's views on love.

As a psycho-analyst, Freud is interested in what various feelings constitute love, what the origins of such feelings are, and the effect they have on the human mind. Love to Freud is, therefore, 'conspicuous for a most remarkable combination of characteristic features'. Freud suggests that one of these features of love, which he associates with sexual or genital love, is its drive for happiness. He notes that, 'One of the forms in which love manifests itself - sexual love - has given us our most intense experience of an overwhelming sensation of pleasure and has thus furnished us with a pattern for our search for happiness.' He suggests, along Platonic lines, that cases exist 'in which happiness in life is predominantly sought in the enjoyment of beauty, where beauty presents itself to our senses and our judgement - the beauty of...

natural objects and landscapes'. Brutus's love of the South African landscape and his cry that it is being 'rendered unlovely and unlovable' is a feeling that accords with this Freudian concept /SKB/. Freud's theory further suggests that the roots of our human suffering can be traced to a situation where all our love outlets are frustrated. He says: 'We are never so defenceless against suffering as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love. But this does not dispose of the technique of living based on the value of love as a means to happiness.'[16] Freud's assertion has some relevance upon our understanding of Brutus's troubadour poems. We are better able to appreciate the extent to which Brutus's love for South Africa and his wife is frustrated by apartheid, and how this is the main cause of his anguish and the springboard for all his actions.

An even more illustrative example that shows the applicability of Freud's views to Brutus's poetry is the insanity Brutus records in his prison poems. This insanity sprouts from the frustrated love outlets of the prisoners by the

prison environment, which restricts man's sexual desires. Freud observes that, 'A restriction of sexual activity in a community is generally accompanied by an increase of anxiety about life and fear of death which interferes with the individual's capacity for enjoyment and does away with his readiness to face death for any purpose.'[17] This is a theory that applies to the South African reality. In Fugard's Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act, Can Themba's short story, 'Crespuscule' in The Will to Die, the love-liquor abode of Lena in Abrahams's Mine Boy, we see a restriction of sexual activity sponsored by the laws of apartheid, which are responsible for the tense and chaotic lives led by the characters depicted in these literary pieces.

The main difference between Freud and Brutus is that Freud feels that the commandment, love thy neighbour as thyself, 'is impossible to fulfil; such an enormous inflation of love can only lower its value not get rid of the difficulty'.[18] Besides, Freud's view is that 'not all men are worthy of love'.[19] These are views which Brutus does not accept, as borne out by the Christian

ethic which informs his work and by his attraction towards and his adoption of the Satyagraha ideology propounded by Mahatma Gandhi. On the whole, however, much of what Freud views as love and its effects on the human mind can be discerned in Brutus's poetry, too.

The Art of Loving by Erich Fromm is a major contribution to our understanding of the concept of love as manifested in Brutus's work. Within the context of Fromm's analysis, the insanity and homosexuality one discerns in Brutus's poetry is not so much a question of frustrated love as it is an issue of man trying to overcome his aloneness. Man, Fromm says, is 'life being aware of itself'. However, Fromm explains further, this awareness of himself and his world is a frightening one. Man realizes that his birth and death are outside his will, that he has a short life span, that he is alone and separate, and that he is helpless before the forces of nature and society. According to Fromm, this awareness of himself and his world is a prison which man must free himself from if he is not to become insane.[20] Love is a means of escape from a separate existence in order

to unite oneself with other human beings. This is a view of love that applies to Brutus's poetry.

Apartheid, in the end, restricts human contact and prevents man from leaving the prison that is himself. Bantustans, the tribal states which apartheid creates, restrict human contact, for these states keep certain people in certain places all the time and make it difficult for human contact to be made. In South Africa, the restriction of human contact is encouraged by a capitalist ideology that supports the accumulation of wealth by individuals and firms. In this situation, the individual is further pushed into isolation as capital and labour are emphasized over and above human worth. This context from which Brutus's poetry springs accentuates man's desire to conquer his aloneness and to make human contact. But, as Fromm argues, the failure to achieve this aim leads to insanity, which is evident in Brutus's prison poems.

Fromm distinguishes between five major forms of love: brotherly love, motherly love, fatherly love, erotic love and religious love. These he defines on the basis of his hypothesis that man

wishes to leave the prison that is his separate, disunited existence. All these forms of love described by Fromm correspond to the various forms of love that are discernible in Brutus's poetry. 'Certain basic elements are common to all forms of love,' Fromm further states. 'These are care, responsibility, respect and knowledge.'[21] All these elements are manifested in Brutus's appeal for respect for the individual.

Brutus's conception of love is also informed by his Christian upbringing. He was born into a Christian family and his pious mother remained a major influence in Brutus's childhood. Brutus tells us that, 'For many years my father was neither seen nor heard from.'[22] However, this religious influence must not be overstressed. Brutus shows some disenchantment with Christianity. Accounting for the circumstances surrounding his sponsorship by a Catholic priest, Brutus says: 'It was because my mother was a devout Catholic and so was I, and I was the top altar boy, server, and things like that, and I am quite sure I had been marked down as a potential priest, who would go to the seminary at some stage. So they would

encourage my education.'[23] There is in this the awareness that the Christian faith is selfish and, at times, robs the individual of his freedom to run his life. In spite of this awareness, Brutus finds it difficult to disentangle himself completely from this faith.

In Brutus's ambiguous stand on religion, one detects a similarity to Simone Weil. For one thing, they impose on themselves a similar obligation toward society. In his introduction to Simone Weil, T.S. Eliot explains that, 'She was a passionate champion of the common people and especially of the oppressed by the selfishness of men and those oppressed by the anonymous forces of modern society.'[24] Again, both Brutus and Weil feel the same about the duty we all owe to human beings. In Weil's words: 'The object of any obligation in the realm of human affairs, is always the human beings as such. There exists an obligation toward every human being, without any other conditions requiring to be fulfilled, and even without any recognition of such obligation on the part of the individual concerned.'[25] Brutus's respect for human worth accords with the views expressed by Weil. There are, however,

certain issues about christianity on which Brutus's stand is more categorical. For example, he clearly thinks well of Christian love even if certain people have distorted its interpretation and application.

Mutuality, human understanding, and goodwill in Christianity are underscored in St. Paul's definition of love which, among other things, stresses that, 'love does not insist on its own.' This element of mutuality is at the foundation of the love in Brutus's poetry. Brutus is fighting for a future South Africa in which the whites and other races will live in mutuality, guided solely by human brotherhood.

Love in Brutus's poetry includes the following elements: An erotic or sexual desire which, when not satisfied, becomes the root of man's problems, as Sigmund Freud explains. Love is also the interaction between human beings that emphasizes the principle of equal regard and mutuality. In love there is active concern for the neighbour, a concern founded on the fact that the neighbour is a human being and has to be

treated as such. Benefits are not the motives in this concern. At other times, love manifests itself in man's struggle against his alienation, a struggle to leave the prison that is himself and reach out to his fellow beings. Love is the activity that maintains our human dignity. Patriotism and nostalgia imply a love that shows our emotional attachment to a home that one values above any other place. When one is deprived of this home in any way this love becomes even more accentuated. At such times it becomes a struggle, a demand for this home, this birthplace. As Soyinka explains in the introduction to his anthology, Poems of Black Africa: 'What gives for instance, the love poems of Dennis Brutus their raw passionate desperation is the fact that they are just as much poems of love as they are poems of indictment... against the brutish environment from which such emotions are painfully wrenched.'[26]

Dennis Brutus's poetry exhibits certain autobiographical elements which are important to our understanding of his work. He was born of South African parents on 28 November 1924 in

Salisbury, the capital of what used to be Rhodesia. He spent his childhood years in Dowerville, 'a group of roughly a hundred families... on the western outskirts of the small but growing town of Port Elizabeth' in South Africa. Dowerville was an isolated, lonely place. Brutus says: 'Dowerville was cut off from the community as a whole; and in this isolated community I was an isolated individual, even as a small boy roaming the streets alone during school hours.'[27] This solitude encouraged a taste for fantasy and heightened the need for human companionship. These aspects are noticeable in Brutus's poetry.

At their Dowerville home, Brutus was exposed to poetry readings conducted in the family. He tells us: 'I think the earliest literary influence on me was my mother, who not only recited nursey rhymes to me as a child, but had herself a love for poetry.'[28] These early literary influences included readings from the work of poets such as Wordsworth and Browning. The influence of the Romantics is noticeable in Brutus, especially in Sirens Knuckles Boots. His poetry exhibits elements of the erotic with which Romanticism is usually

associated.

The foundations of Brutus's political thought and responses to apartheid which are evident in his poetry were laid during his years at Fort Hare College, where he was a student at the same time as some leading members of the A.N.C. Youth League founded in 1944. The A.N.C. Youth League propagated radical political thought that was quite pronounced at Fort Hare, where its Programme of Action was drawn in 1949. This is why Brutus's contact with his fellow students at Fort Hare is an important aspect of his political, social and creative life. These people included nationalists such as Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Anton Lembede, A.P. Mda, Geofrey Pitje, W.F. Nkomo, M.T. Moerane, Oliver Tambo, Godfrey Mzamane and many others. Lembede, who emerged as the leading ideologue for the nationalist cause before his death in 1946, and several other leading figures of the A.N.C. Youth League had been taught at Adams College by Chief Albert Luthuli, whom Brutus admires. The Programme of Action of the Youth League was a programme of militant political action which advocated a

'"total and complete boycott of all elections under the Native Representation Act of 1936, the bungas, local and district councils, advisory boards and similar institutions." They wanted a council of action appointed to "act vigorously."'[29] Gerhart also tells us: 'Faith in the efficacy of boycott was... a common element in the "rebel" outlook of most Youth Leaguers in the 1940s.'[30] Side by side with the politics of petitions advocated by the old guard of the A.N.C, the Youth League advocated radical action. Its policy was one that would influence Brutus's political thinking because, like him, it wanted change but through non-violent means, through civil disobedience, as later manifested in the Defiance Campaign that resulted from the Youth League's Programme of Action.

After his education at Fort Hare, Brutus taught for fourteen years in South African High Schools. His active protest against racism and apartheid during these years resulted in his being banned from all social and political activities in October 1961, and his dismissal in 1962. 'At the end of July 1962, the government issued a list of 102 people, including Brutus,

whose words past, present or future must not be reproduced in any way. Later Brutus, with others, was placed under house arrest.'[31] This experience is directly responsible for the publication of Brutus's first volume. As he tells the reader in an accompanying note to Sirens Knuckles Boots: 'Banned and gagged by the Minister of Justice, so that no words of mine can be quoted or printed. This is maybe why I have now thought of getting my work published (October, 1962).'[32] Brutus's poetry thus becomes a way of exposing apartheid in order to mobilize external support against apartheid. His poems are important for the insights they give to an international audience about the Black people's burden in South Africa.

Brutus defied his banning orders in 1963 and attended a meeting to protest against racism in sports. He was arrested. He tried to escape but was extradited by the Portuguese police in Mozambique. When he tried to escape a second time he was shot and, on recovery, sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment on Robben Island, South Africa's maximum security prison. He was released on 8 July 1965. Letters to Martha,

which 'were written within maybe six months to eight months of coming out'[33] of prison, are a representation of the experience of this political period in his life, an experience which accounts for the style of Letters to Martha. His other collections are Denver Poems (1969), an occasional publication by the University of Dever; Poems from Algiers (1970); Thoughts Abroad (1970), published by the Troubadour Press in Texas; A Simple Lust (1973), which is his most comprehensive and representative selection from his early poems; China Poems (1975), written in August - September when he was in China for the Friendship Invitation Tennis Tournament. Strains (1975) edited by Wayne, Kevin and Chip Dameron was also published by the Troubadour Press. The China poems together with others from Strains and South African Voices (1975) appear in Stubborn Hope (1978), which is Brutus's latest volume of poetry.

Brutus left South Africa in August 1966 but has maintained his vigorous campaign against the government of South Africa in sports. As President of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC), he was part of those who organized

demonstrations and other forms of mass enlightenment to exclude South Africa from the Olympics at Tokyo in 1964, while Brutus was still in Prison, and in 1968. Some of Brutus's poems deal with such campaigns against apartheid. 'Let me say it' is one example /LTM, pp.50-52/. He has served as director of the World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners. This major concern of Brutus's is reflected in his work. His exile poems are forever agonizing about the plight of those prisoners still languishing on Robben Island.

Brutus discovered, soon after his release from prison, that it was stifling to stay on in South Africa as a writer. The bans on him were meant to strangle his literary and political activities. Consequently, he left South Africa on an Exit Permit, a document which in Lewis Nkosi's words, is 'a one-way ticket'. It is given to the bearer who signs that he is leaving South Africa permanently and has no business assets in the country. The bearer of this document who returns to South Africa is 'liable for prosecution and a jail term of imprisonment'.[31] But because

of his continued opposition to apartheid in exile, Brutus's life is always hanging in the balance. For example, a Nigerian newspaper, the Punch of 5 February 1982 reported that:

> According to a letter written to President Shagari [of Nigeria] by the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), professor Brutus as of now 'faces immediate deportation if he loses his current case [expiration of residential permit] with the United States of America's Immigration and Naturalization Service.' The letter continued that, 'As a wanted political figure, the outcome of such an action is easy to predict - instant imprisonment or liquidation.'

Since Brutus left South Africa, he has been living like the troubadour he considers himself to be.

Brutus's biography shows a person determined to indict the South African government for its politics of race, which poses a great threat to human love and understanding throughout the world. Brutus's concern with love touches on the crux of the apartheid reality, for apartheid encourages white people to love and respect white people only, as people who consider themselves superior to other races. Brutus feels differently. In his poetry love becomes an attitude that argues against

the betrayal of human dignity. Love assumes a contemporary political purpose: it suggests a solution to the problem of racism and apartheid.

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CHAPTER TWO

LOVE AS AN IDEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO APARTHEID

Brutus conceives of love as an important aspect of the liberal humanist philosophy. The sense in which liberalism and liberal humanism are used here is the sense in which liberals are thought of in South Africa. According to the South African Students' Organization, 'The true liberal was the white who directed all his efforts to educating other whites and preparing them to accept a future situation of majority rule.'[1] There is much truth in this but the definition is more theoretical than real. For example, from its foundation in 1912 until it was outlawed in 1960, the African National Congress was guided by liberal principles and yet its members were largely underprivileged black South Africans demanding majority rule. One cannot, therefore, speak of the true liberal to refer only to Whites. Gail Gerhart says:

> Liberals, while standing for sweeping changes in race relations and for the elimination of the worst forms of racial exploitation, have in general not directed their attacks against the basic structure of the South African system... Liberals

> often proceed from a paternalistic view of race relations, but they have also been moved by religious or humanitarian biases... Besides recognizing the principles of human equality, it /liberalism/ has sought to protect the other pillars of democracy: civil liberties, the rule of law, a free press and an independent judiciary. South African liberalism has tended to look to parliamentary democracy as the best and only vehicle for the achievement of political change... Perhaps the most distinctive trait of South African liberalism until recent years has been its optimism in the face of all evidence that white racism was becoming invulnerable to change through ordinary political means.[2]

This definition is a more accurate description of liberalism in South Africa. Liberalism is a political system guided by the principle of love; it is love that imbues one with a humanitarian bias. The religious bias which Gerhart associates with liberalism has brotherly love at its core. Love and racial exploitation cannot exist side by side. Love is the major factor behind the principle of human equality which Gerhart says South African liberals emphasize. Furthermore, the non-violence that liberals advocate in the face of White intransigence derives from love. Brutus's preoccupation with love in his poetry indicates his ideological leaning towards liberal humanism in response to apartheid.

Those characteristics by which one recognizes liberalism, especially in South Africa, are also characteristics manifested in Brutus's treatment of love. Among these features is the humanitarianism demonstrated by liberals in situations where suffering abounds. The Christian injunction that one must love one's enemies prompts Brutus's humanitarian attitude. In the following poem, Brutus addresses his oppressor thus:

> I have not, out of love, cursed you yet,
> though anger and impatience often rock me;
> nor have my clawed hands dug in you
> with imprecations of obscene abuse,
> but know that frenzies may yet come:
> remember then that my frustrated tenderness
> bursts out in violence of suppressed love,
> my fury out of unattended love. /SH, p.57

From the violent images of the rock and of claws tearing human flesh, one realizes that Brutus can also resort to violence as a response to his oppressor's violence. Such violence is forestalled by love and human sympathy. Brutus's attitude is an example of the ideal meant for his oppressor to emulate. The Catholic faith to which Brutus belongs does not approve of the law of Moses whereby the injured is justified to injure his enemy, too. Brutus's decision to show his

enemies a world of love demonstrates a typical Christ posture: You must not only love your enemies but you must also forgive them. This is why in a poem written while under house arrest, Brutus eschews violence and adopts a compassionate attitude even toward those who betray the struggle:

> Presumably
> One should pity the frightened ones
> the old fighters
> who now shrink from contact:
> and it is true I feel a measure of sadness
> - and no contempt -
> and have no wish to condemn
> or even grow impatient /ASL, p.75/

The poem is remarkable for its lack of bitterness. Despite the gruesome experience of house arrest and an eighteen months' jail term which Brutus has just completed, he readily sympathizes with those who fear to go on opposing apartheid. The oppressor must not be given the opportunity to rejoice by making him realize that his brutality hurts:

> it is best to shutter the mind and heart
> eyes, mouth and spirit;
> say nothing, feel nothing and do not let
> them know
> that they have cause for shame
> /ASL, p.75/

Those acquainted with liberation struggles in Southern Africa may wonder why any one should recommend passive resistance as a response to apartheid. Brutus advocates passive resistance because it is a liberal humanitarian force whose love basis argues against human destruction, not even the destruction of one's enemies who continually threaten one's existence. Brutus argues more openly in this manner in his eleventh letter to Martha, his sister-in-law, in which, as he often does, he resists impatience that will lead to violence. In the poem Brutus is worried about:

> a special freedom -
> that of those the prisons hold
> and who depend on change
> to give them liberty. /LTM, p.12/

In thinking about his imprisonment he expresses the opinion that:

> One comes to a callousness,
> a savage ruthlessness -
> voices shouting in the heart
> "Destroy! Destroy!"
> Or
> "Let them die in thousands!" -
>
> really it is impatience. /LTM, p.12/

The change which Brutus speaks of in the poem can be brought about through the violent struggle between conflicting social classes. It can also result from a change of heart which Brutus hopes for from the oppressor. We are thus faced again with liberal considerations that argue against human destruction no matter the circumstances: It is the mark of impatience to destroy instead of waiting for things to change. To destroy human life is to resort to beastly instincts. These are the liberal views contained in Brutus's cogitations.

Instead of a violent response, Brutus demonstrates that human love and care must be our guiding principles at all times, even in situations where we are oppressed and in which those who are dear to us are sent off to prison. For Brutus to believe that it is impatience to be urged to violent human destruction is to wish for change in South Africa half-heartedly. For, as Frantz Fanon says: 'You do not turn any society, however primitive it may be, upside down... if you are decided... to remove all the obstacles that you will come across in so doing... It is clear that

this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence.'[3] Brutus's guiding principle is humanitarian but impractical. His reasoning as expressed in "Their Behaviour" is that the guilt of the oppressors is a transgression which everyone of us is guilty of; the evil varies only in degree. Thus:

> Their guilt
> is not so very different from ours
> - who has not joyed in the arbitrary exercise
> of power
> or grasped for himself what might have been
> another's
> and who has not used superior force in the
> moment when he could,
> (and who of us has not been tempted to these
> things?) - /ASL,p.797

This manner of reasoning is influenced to some degree by the Christian doctrine that all men are born with the original sin and that only God can punish or absolve guilt. The humble tone in the poem heightens Brutus's candid appeal for reason. However, the bestial image of the oppressor in the same poem does not leave room for humanitarian considerations. The oppressor is a monster whose 'bared ferocity of teeth' speaks more aptly of mad, hungry and angry dogs than of human beings. The 'chest-thumbing', a boastful gesture, signifies the joy of having scored a great victory. Brutus

depicts apartheid as a religion to the white oppressor, a god 'made in the image of their prejudice/which drowns the voice of conscience' /ASL, p.797. Brutus asserts that 'our predicament' is 'mirrored' in the behaviour of the white oppressor /ASL, p.797. Everywhere man is inclined to abuse his power to oppress those under him but nowhere is this abuse of power on such 'a social, massive, organized scale' more apparent than in South Africa /ASL, p.797.

"Their Behaviour" was written on 16 December 1965, the annual celebration day of Blood River, which marks the victory of the Boer trekkers led by Andries Pretorius over Dingane and his Zulu warriors in 1838. At the end of the day, the Ncome River, which was part of the battlefield, flowed with Zulu blood. In "Blood River Day", Brutus gives us a picture of every occasion on 16 December when whites celebrate this frightful historic event:

> Each year on this day
> they drum the earth with their boots
> and growl incantations
> to evoke the smell of blood
> for which they hungrily sniff the air:
> /ASL, p.777

The image of the white racists as beasts persists in the poem: one is confronted with the smell of blood which they evoke; they growl like hounds and are appropriately associated with the lair to which their guilt drives them. The picture which Brutus paints of Blood River Day is a horrific one, depicting a festival of cannibals. This situation, in reality, leaves no space for displaying the universal love of humanity which Brutus feels should be shown to everybody. As Sigmund Freud observes, 'a love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value by doing injustice to its object; and secondly, not all men are worthy of love.'[4]

Frantz Fanon's views are an extension of Freud's. He recommends counteracting violence with violence if total change is to be effected. Instead, Brutus advocates endurance, reasoning that,

> Endurance 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.
> /SH, p.107

Endurance is a commendable human trait and Brutus's

concern is that one should retain his humanity. In the poem, however, Brutus goes on from this point to ask those who suffer oppression to cultivate the quality of endurance so as to preserve their humanity. Lewis Nkosi refutes such an approach by stating that, 'Liberals have been telling us these long bad years to work for a world where people are equal and our efforts in this direction have not bettered our lives materially, nor is it probable that they will make the conditions... in South Africa disappear.'[5]

A re-assertion of their humanity is not the crux of the problem of an oppressed people. Their problem is how to live well in this material world where poverty is known mainly to the victims of oppression who, ironically, provide the labour which generates such material wealth. But, for Brutus, our human worth is more important than anything else and can only be preserved through love which according to him:

> ... is a way of establishing one is real;
> personal, intimate and civilized:
> to shout, be violent and importune
> will not do in this context,
> but a confrontation, male-female,
> is possible, even if not legitimate or moral:
> so one hopes, strives, speculates:
> it is the wish to be accepted as a person
> - something real and living. /ASL, p.80/

This poem protests against planned dehumanization and a denial of human identity. The terminology which apartheid uses in classifying the two broad categories of race in South Africa denies the human element of the downtrodden. The term 'non-white' views the oppressed negatively and denies them their human identity. In rejecting this term and promoting the term 'black', the South African Students' Organization explained in its Newsletter of September 1970 that, 'We are merely refusing to be regarded as non-persons and claim the right to be called positively. It helps to recognize the fact that we have a common enemy.'[6] Looking at such planned dehumanization, it is unrealistic for Brutus to advocate non-violence as he does in his poetry. It is not realistic either in such a situation to recommend love between the oppressed and the oppressor as a solution to the problem of race relations in South Africa. This is not the most effective or only way of preserving the dignity and identity of the oppressed. Violence serves the same purpose for as Fanon says: 'At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.'[7] The victim whose

human worth has been abused cannot be expected to respond to his oppression with love, especially in South Africa where the oppressor wilfully and continually suppresses him with brutal force. The Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 is a pertinent example of such brutality. The Sharpeville crisis was sparked off by demonstrations organized by the Pan African Congress against pass laws, another device used by the oppressor to depersonalize Africans. Brutus has written about the significance of Sharpeville in the following terms:

> 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 /SH, p.897

As the poem confirms, apartheid is planned racial and economic dominance as demanded by capitalism; it is planned violence and dehumani-

zation. Apartheid is the destruction of what can never be bought with money, the blood it spills on occasions such as Sharpeville. These wilful acts are executed with unflinching determination, a suggestion that is conveyed in the image of a world which fears to act decisively against apartheid but only condemns it in whispers while apartheid continues to consolidate itself at gun point. Such a situation calls for violent retaliation. A love response which the poet recommends in this situation is a liberal solution that is illusory.

Another major influence that has led Brutus to such a recommendation is Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine of 'Satyagraha'. Brutus admits that he 'was directly influenced by the concept of "Satyagraha" developed by the Gandhis in South Africa'.[8] Satyagraha is a term which was coined by Gandhi in 1906 in the initial period of his South African campaign to secure elementary human rights of Indian immigrants. Most of these Indians were brought to South Africa as indentured labour. Gandhi explains that 'Satya' means truth and 'agraha' implies firmness, so that 'satyagraha'

is synonymous with force. Continuing his description of this doctrine, Gandhi says: 'I thus began to call the Indian movement "Satyagraha" that is to say, the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence.' He stresses further that this 'excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute Truth and is, therefore not competent to punish'.[9]

Satyagraha has a special attraction for Brutus because it encompasses an appeal for truth, love and non-violence. Furthermore, the doctrine appeals to Brutus because its view of man, as expressed above, accords with Brutus's Catholic background. Contrary to Gandhi's teachings that man is not infallible and, therefore, not competent to sit in judgement over others, the oppressed in South Africa know the truth about their living conditions and are therefore competent to punish. Viewed from this practical angle, Satyagraha is an escapist liberal doctrine and is ineffective to counteract the violence engendered by apartheid. However, Dennis Brutus subscribes to the non-violence recommended by Satyagraha as an ideal to guide him in his response because having experienced violence, he believes as a humanitarian that vio-

lence should not be used on any human being.

The African National Congress and its leader, Chief Albert Luthuli (1898-1967), have been another major liberalising influence in Brutus. This fact is corroborated by the seven poems, "For Chief", in A Simple Lust which Brutus wrote as a tribute to Chief Luthuli, who was killed in an accident at a railroad crossing in July 1967. In the context of Zulu tradition, these poems must be seen as Izibongo, that is, praise poems. Brutus, who writes them is then Luthuli's imbongi, the praiser or praise-poet, a person whom every Zulu Chief had in his service. Luthuli was the Zulu Chief of the Abase-Makolweni in the Groutville Mission Reserve. Brutus's praises of Luthuli thus form a practical demonstration of the type of love which Brutus proposes as a reaction to the brutality of apartheid. Chief Luthuli, who accorded all people human love, was deprived of it in various ways, including his humiliating dismissal by the apartheid regime from the chieftainship on 12 November 1952. Brutus supplies this love posthumously to the chief in these izibongo.

As Trevor Cope observes: 'The function of

praise-poems arises from the function of praises in general, which is to bring about conformity to the approved modes of behaviour... The purpose of the praise poem is to present the chief as an object of admiration.'[10] Luthuli, as seen by his imbongi, was an admirable character whose behaviour was exemplary. The liberal streak in Luthuli, manifested in his capacity for endurance without retaliating violently, elicits Brutus's admiration as in the following lines:

> So the machine breaks you
> and you fall
> still fighting grimly
>
> the years epitomize
> in this harsh act
> of many:
>
> Should one despair
> knowing how great the power
> how unavailing opposition?
>
> Yet your great soul
> asserts a worth -
> transcendant humanity.
>
> There is a valour
> greater than victory:
> Greatness endures. /Poem 2, ASL,p.17/

The image of the machine makes Luthuli's endurance more glorious. The machine represents apartheid which Luthuli fought, armed only with endurance and love. The apartheid machine tried to break

Luthuli's spirit through intimidation, banning and imprisonment. However, he persevered in opposition and never despaired. He carried on fighting till his death. His endurance was worthy of emulation which is why Brutus, on behalf of many, evokes Luthuli's spirit in another of these izibongo: 'O great patient enduring spirit/return to us' /ASL, p.172/.

The other liberal quality of interest to Brutus is the Chief's passive resistance to apartheid, a response built on Christian foundations. In a statement he made after his dismissal as chief, Luthuli said: 'I have embraced the non-violent passive resistance technique in fighting for freedom. The wisdom or foolishness of this decision I place in the hands of the Almighty... The Road to Freedom is via The CROSS.'[11] This is the 'Chief's reflected splendour' which Brutus in the following poem advises all in the anti-apartheid crusade to copy:

> O let Chief's reflected splendour
> and the aura resistance sometimes brings -
> except to the jaded, jaundiced, cynic -
> o let us catch a little of this fire
> and let us burn and steadily assert
> our faith, our will to freedom and our love
> for freedom and our dear unhappy land:

> of inextinguishable and hungry fire
> of love and hunger and imperishable resolve.
> /ASL, p.174/

'Imperishable' and 'inextinguishable' imply that love is of a more lasting and more rewarding nature than the hatred of those who espouse apartheid. This is the reason why Chief Luthuli's demonstrated love and non-violence appeal to Brutus, so that he sees the late Chief as a person

> who sustained a faith in grace
> believing men crippled could still walk tall
> in the thorn-thickets of corrupting power
> /ASL, p.170/

Brutus's admiration for Luthuli is also inspired by the latter's message of Christian brotherliness in which Brutus himself believes. William Frye, who knew Luthuli personally, describes him as 'a devout, soft-spoken Congregationalist who talked in terms of compassion and patience and brotherly love'.[12] Throughout his speech on the occasion of the presentation of his Nobel Prize for Peace (1960), Chief Luthuli emphasized the Christian concept of brotherhood by saying: 'How great is the paradox and how much greater the honour that an award in support of peace and the brotherhood of man should come to one who is a citizen of a country where the brotherhood

of man is an illegal doctrine, outlawed, banned, censured, proscribed and prohibited.'[13] For Brutus, Chief Luthuli embodies the brotherly love that is essential for the preservation of human dignity and human values. This is a liberalist posture.

Brutus's regard for Chief Luthuli reflects his espousal of the ideology of the African National Congress (ANC). Under Luthuli and his predecessors, the A.N.C. was guided by a religious sense of brotherly love. This is reflected in its anthem composed by the Xhosa composer, Enoch Sontonga, and adopted as the official anthem of the A.N.C. in 1923. The anthem, 'Nkosi Sikelel'i Africa', as translated by Donald Woods, reads:

> God bless Africa
> Raise up her spirit
> Hear our prayers
> And bless us
>
> Bless the leaders
> Bless also the young
> That they may carry the land with patience
> And that you may bless them
>
> Bless our efforts
> To unite and lift ourselves up
> Through learning and understanding
>
> Descend, Spirit! Descend Spirit!
> Descend, Holy Spirit.[14]

Those who subscribe to the views expressed in this anthem seek redress from God. In a poem written on South African Freedom Day, 26 June, the day on which the A.N.C. - inspired Defiance Campaign against unjust laws was launched in 1952, Brutus in exile remembers this anthem with solemnity. This indicates to what deep level the ideology contained in the anthem affects him. In the fourth letter to Martha, he writes:

> the resort of the weak
> is to invoke divine revenge
> against rampaging injustice /LTM, p.57

But, in the religious spirit of 'Nkosi Sikelel'i Africa', Brutus does not turn his back upon the Christian teaching of forgiveness. He goes on in the same poem to assert his faith in God, in the following terms:

> in the grey silence of the empty afternoons
> it is not uncommon
> to find oneself talking to God. /LTM, p.57

Grey, a recurring image in Brutus, is a deathly colour. Brutus's idea then is that where one is persecuted and unhappy, it is difficult not to place one's hope in God's protection for one's spiritual salvation, which is the appeal made in

the A.N.C. anthem.

The A.N.C. emphasized the brotherhood of man and fought for the freedom of all people. The quest for such Christian brotherhood precludes violence, which the liberal abhors. Adhering to this philosophy, the A.N.C was regarded in South Africa by other anti-apartheid organizations as a non-violent political organization inspite of its action arm, Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), formed in 1961 and now the A.N.C. People's Army. Umkhonto directed its violence at government institutions instead of killing the enemies of the people for whose freedom the A.N.C. was fighting. One of the organizations that was frustrated by the A.N.C. policy of passive resistance was the Pan Africanist Congress, formed in 1959 by the younger members of the A.N.C. because of this policy, a policy illustrated abundantly by the Defiance Campaign (1952-55) organized jointly by the A.N.C. and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC). The Defiance Campaign, as described by Roux in Time Longer than Rope, was a liberal campaign against unjust laws. Highlights of the campaign included the positive participation of some highly placed

whites such as Patrick Duncan.' Duncan was the son of Sir Patrick Duncan, one of Milner's "young men" who had been a minister in Smut's Government in 1921-24 and 1937-39, and subsequently Governor-General of the Union of South Africa,'[15] Roux informs us. On the evening of 8 December 1952, at Germiston Location where he and six others had broken the Group Areas Act, Patrick Duncan spoke of love to the resistors:

> Today South African people of all kinds come among you. They have come with love for you and with peace. I ask you to do what you have to do without making trouble but in a spirit of love. Mayibuy'i Africa![16]

In addition to this love aspect, the campaign denounced violence and emphasized passive resistance. A placard issued by the National Action Committee, established to co-ordinate the activities of the demonstrators, warned the volunteers:

> BEWARE!
> DO NOT be provoked - Do not listen to those who preach violence - Avoid rioting - follow congress lead - BE PEACEFUL, DISCIPLINED, NON-VIOLENT.[17]

The liberalism of the A.N.C., as examplified in the Defiance Campaign, has been a major liberalizing influence in Brutus. This is because it corresponds to Brutus's ideal response to apartheid, a response characterized by a display of love and non-violence.

This liberal response is also characterized by an unwavering optimism. The optimism in Brutus's poetry, that apartheid shall eventually give way to full democracy in South Africa, is nearly always inspired by a belief in the miraculous powers of God to end all human suffering:

> anger and resolution
> yeast in me
> waiting for the time of achievement
> which will come if God wills
> when I flog fresh lashes across these thieves.
> /LTM, p.52/

The success Brutus has achieved in organizing sports and other boycotts against apartheid is credited to a spiritual trust in God, as manifested by the above lines from "Let me say it" /LTM, pp.50-52/.

When Brutus was flying over the Atlantic Ocean on 5 August 1966, after leaving South Africa, he thought about the brutality of apartheid. To be physically out of the claws of

the apartheid police was for him a 'conquest of brute reality'. This personal excitment and relief led him to expresses the hope of millions of others that,

> Peace will come.
> We have the power
> the hope
> the resolution.
> Men will go home. /ASL, p.96/

Without any practical, more positive action, this is more like the Christian hope which encourages suffering here on earth for the possession of a blissful Heaven in the next world.

"Somehow we Survive" from Sirens Knuckles Boots shows more optimism than any other poem in Brutus's work.[18] In the poem, Brutus expounds on the idea that in the destructive atmosphere of South Africa, love provides the only hope for survival, for love ('tenderness') is immortal /SKB 7. It is, however, inconceivable how the victim of apartheid can survive by countering violence with tenderness. The 'investigating searchlights' which 'rake/our naked unprotected contours' show that people are treated like prisoners, since searchlights are mostly used in

prisons to guard against prisoners escaping at night [SKB]. The image of boots that 'club' the peeling door occurs constantly in Brutus's poetry and represents the brutal South African police force [SKB]. Brutus suggests a show of brotherly love as an antidote to their brutality, an idea that we get from the following lines in the poem:

> over our heads the monolithic decalogue
> of fascist prohibition glowers
> and teeters for a catastrophic fall. [SKB]

Monolithic decalogue recalls the Ten Commandments carved out for Moses on a stone. Apartheid laws are, in this sense, the monolithic decalogue Brutus speaks of and whites are self-appointed gods. Those who wish to perpetuate apartheid use the Bible to justify the system. Ironically, advocates of apartheid choose to remain blind to the Ten Commandments in the Bible, the second of which urges them to love their neighbours as themselves. Brutus's indirect liberal appeal here is for brotherly love, which he hopes will end apartheid.

Apart from Christian considerations, the

other reason why love as a liberal ideological answer to oppression appeals to Brutus is rooted in his status as a 'Coloured', the category that Millin calls 'God's stepchildren' in a novel by that title. Dickie-Clarke writes:

> Coloureds have the culture of the whites, so it is impossible to give the term Coloured, any distinctive cultural content. On the other hand, they share much of the social exclusion of the non whites. When compared with the white, Indian and African strata, the Coloureds have a more confusing and subtle political situation to cope with.19

Goodwin also informs us that as 'a member of the minority group of "Coloureds" [Brutus's] situation has, indeed, been even more alienated than that of other South Africans of mixed ethnic origin, for having been born in the former Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) he has never held even minimal rights in South Africa'.[20] Brutus's ancestry comes from both the oppressed and the oppressors. He finds it difficult to prescribe a response to apartheid that recommends violence against either group. This dilemma is one which the poet himself brings out in a poem that reads:

I must conjure from my past
the dim and unavowed spectre of a slave,
of a bound woman, whose bound figure pleads
silently,
and whose blood I must acknowledge in my own:

fanciful wraith? imagining?
Yet how else can I reconcile
my rebel blood and protest
but by acknowledgement
of that spectre's mute rebellious blood.

Brutus reaches out to the source of his rebellious, protesting spirit. He traces it to a woman slave in the distant past: The Dutch East Indian Company, which established the first European settlement in South Africa in 1652, imported slaves from West Africa, the East Indies, East Africa and Madagascar. The marriages that resulted between the whites and the slaves produced the Cape 'Coloured' people. Brutus's forebear evokes the spectre of a slave protesting and rebelling against her under-privileged status, like Mrs Elmira Lindsells in God's Stepchildren. In tracing his rebel blood to the slave line of his ancestry, Brutus is by implication, saying that were he wholly white, he would have no reason to protest or rebel. Like Hans Kleinhans in God's Stepchildren, Dennis Brutus has been rejected by his white brothers and has resigned himself to his black

fate, calling for a change of system that will be accommodating to blacks but one that will not destroy the whites.

The viciousness of apartheid calls for decisive action against the system. Brutus's liberal response underplays the urgency of the matter for it preaches philantrophy, patience and endurance. Brutus advocates an ill-fitting response to apartheid. It is a hedging response because in political situations the proletariat cannot love, endure or be patient with plutocratic racists. As Simone Weil says: 'Those who keep masses of men in subjugation by exercising force and cruelty deprive them at once of two vital foods, liberty and obedience, for it is no longer within the power of such masses to accord their inner consent to authority.'[21] One other weakness with Brutus's answer to apartheid is that liberalism de-emphasizes the sustaining force of apartheid, the white-controlled economy, and instead projects apartheid as a moral, cultural and political issue. Love as a reply to apartheid brutality is the doctrine of the other cheek. Nonetheless, Brutus protests and defends the rights and worth of men

in such turbulent political atmospheres as South Africa. This is what validates his poetic efforts inspite of his liberalism, which is ineffective as a rejoinder to apartheid.

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CHAPTER THREE

LOVE AS A MEANS OF SUSTAINING MAN'S DIGNITY AND IDENTITY

Brutus thinks of love as an activity that upholds human dignity and identity. Respect for one's fellow human beings is given its fullest expression only when one shows compassion for other human beings. Similarly, one needs to show that one cares for others and that one feels responsible for satisfying their spiritual and physical needs. Since essentially love entails giving rather than receiving, the man who is cared for and respected feels assured that his humanity is acknowledged. Brutus's concept of love as a means of sustaining man's dignity and identity has its roots in his Christian upbringing. The Christian command, love thy neighbour as thyself, is an injunction that is aimed at fostering man's dignity and identity. To love your neighbour as yourself entails showing him brotherly love in an altruistic spirit, demonstrating your solidarity with him in his plight. This implies that in loving there is reassertion of man's humanity, a

reassertion we find in Brutus.

"You have your private griefs" from A Simple Lust summarizes Brutus's idea of brotherly love. The poem conveys Brutus's personal concerns which involve peace and our responsibility in ensuring the survival of peace [ASL, p.159]. Although peace is not synonymous with 'indifference/nor inaction', Brutus says, the positive action we can take to ensure its survival does not have to be war [ASL, p.159]. The alliteration in the line 'Let us wall ourselves away from war' helps to emphasize the protest against such violent action [ASL, p.159]. War destroys both the peace we seek and human life. Brutus is convinced that since

> Peace comes from inner certitude,
> assurance about one's worth
> one's status, talents, labours: [ASL, p.159]

the best way to ensure its survival is to 'care' and 'share a shared sorrow' [ASL, p.159]. In the poem, the peace which man longs for, especially in societies like the poet's politically repressive home, requires that the individual should be absolutely convinced that his humanity is recognized by others. Apartheid works rigorously against the

recognition of man's individual worth. Brutus points out that in South Africa the recognition of one's humanity needs to go beyond the mere acknowledgement of one's human identity. It must involve the conviction that one's social position, his gifts and his efforts are accorded their due recognition. But apartheid survives through the exploitation of black labour; apartheid survives through waging a psychological war against the oppressed black majority, by evolving and spreading the doctrine of black inferiority and white superiority. Brutus's argument in the poem is that to help the blackman regain his self-respect we must take due regard of his status as a human being, respect his abilities and treasure his work. In his view, the only way we can achieve this objective is to be charitable in our dealings with others, to extend to them the love that requires us to put their interests as fellow human beings before ours:

> no virtue can transcend charity:
> Peace without love is death,
> the hollow ribcage of the cadaver.
> [ASL, p.159]

To be fully one's self and truly human, one needs

to be loved and to care for others. From Brutus's poetry, as exemplified in the above lines, there emerges the notion that love which identifies with the sorrows and joys of others is an attribute in which our identity and glory as human beings reside

The notion that the gift of love is man's most glorious, his most abiding attribute, is again conveyed in the poem, "That People Care". The argument in the poem is that riches and weapons are not the only needs of an oppressed people. But:

> That people care
> is more than money
> their thoughts, their love, their prayers
> that is what gives us strength [SH, p.53]

This is so precisely because oppression in South Africa is more than just an economic and political issue, as pronounced and severe as these aspects of it might be. Oppression is equally severe in its psychological manifestations. On the psychological level, it can easily break a human being, make him lose his identity and sense of honour. In this sense, moral support is worth more than money or weapons. 'Care', in this context, means the spiritual support which

millions of people the world over give to the oppressed peoples of South Africa. Brutus's contention here does not mean that weapons and money are insignificant in the liberation struggles of an oppressed people. He only wishes to emphasize that we must first take due cognizance of such people's dignity as human beings before we set about helping them to liberate themselves. This social aspect of liberation is what money and weapons cannot achieve because they cannot love neither can they restore to the oppressed a sense of what he is worth as a human being.

Brutus, like Fromm, thinks of brotherly love in terms of care and the human solidarity this embraces. He is of the same opinion as Fromm that brotherly love can only exist between equals. This notion is expressed in the poem, "Stop", which arrests our attention by its imperative tone:

> Stop.
> I ask you to think for a moment
> to think of pain
> of hunger,
> to think of people who are not free,
> to think of death. [SH, p.53]

The word 'think', whose recurrence in the three

stanzas of the poem underscores its importance, denotes not only a reflective act but, more importantly, it summons us to pay our absolute attention to people who are fettered; to show our concern for people whose human dignity has been violated: If one does not have the right to live where one wishes to live, as the Group Areas Act decrees, his human standing is being abused. If people are mainly recognized by pass books and their existence determined by such documents, as is the case with the blacks in South Africa, their human status is desecrated. If, as stipulated by the prohibition of Mixed Marriages and the Immorality Acts in South Africa, people cannot live, love and marry freely, their human attributes are defiled. Not to be free in South Africa does not necessarily mean to be locked away in a prison cell on Robben Island; it means to have one's status as a human being undermined in all spheres of life. Brutus asserts the need to confront such situations with a sense of responsibility and brotherly love, an entirely voluntary act where one shows concern for the needs of his fellow human beings:

Stop.
Now.
Stop thinking of other things.
Think only of this -
of people dying
dying by the gun,
the boot,
the fist.
Think of them,
the people who are not free,
who will give their lives to be free.
[SH, p.537

If we do what Brutus asks of us, we are in fact respecting and projecting human importance through love. Love then becomes the measure of man's grandeur and identity, in places where these noble aspects of humanity are abused and suppressed by deliberate policies whose aim is to set up certain racial categories as superior to others.

In "It is the men", Brutus maintains that:

It is the men
who assert man's common worth
most plangently
who are the proudest boast
of most men's lands:

but we have no such heroes
no such boasts:
those who attempt it are our private shames
- or else efficiently suppressed. [SH, p.617

The words, 'heroes' and 'boasts', which are used interchangeably, signify the public acclamation of man's noble deeds. These noble deeds consist in

openly asserting the equality of men and professing our love for humanity. By such acclamation we acknowledge and promote those ideals in man which lead heroes to fight for human equality. Brutus says love is lacking in South Africa and man's dignity is not accorded its due recognition by the white racist regime. To extend such recognition to the oppressed people of South Africa amounts to a negation of apartheid.

Many writers of the Third World who protest against the dehumanization and exploitation of the proletariat are the heroes of their various nations and the Third World in general. Brutus says such men of repute are silenced in South Africa. The apartheid regime does not wish to be confronted with its guilt: Nelson Mandela, who was sent to Robben Island in 1962 and spent twenty years there, is still in prison at Pollsmoor, near Cape Town. Steve Bantu Biko was murdered in detention on 12 September 1977. Brutus and a host of other South Africans, among them some of these writers who assert man's common worth, are now in exile. For some of these writers, the denial of their human worth has been too much to bear. Consequently they have either drunk themselves to death, like Can

Themba, or committed suicide, like Arthur Nortje and Nat Nakasa. These heroes have been treated thus by apartheid because they professed the belief that all men are equal and because their doctrine restores humanity to all men.

There are two ways in which Brutus shows brotherly love as a force that sustains man's essence and honour. First, there is the altruism that accords dignity to the dehumanized and exploited victims of apartheid. Secondly, there is the sense of solidarity, of human at-onement, which pervades Brutus's poetry. Such comradeship is intended to protect the humanity of the oppressed.

In "In the dove-grey dove-soft dusk", Brutus demonstrates his altruism. His selflessness is manifested in his concern for the welfare of his suffering colleagues which he puts before his own. In the poem, Brutus is in exile and making use of his newly - acquired freedom, taking a 'stroll in the quiet dusk'. [ASL, p.101] Ironically, this walk turns out to be a bitter experience. He is assailed by memories of his previous imprisonment. He has to contend with the memory that those he has

left behind are still languishing in prison. His freedom is rendered unenjoyable by thoughts about the prisoners and the people of South Africa in general who are not free or safe to satisfy 'the poignant urgent simple desire/simply to stroll in the quiet dusk', as he does [ASL, p.101]. Such restrictions constitute a crippling psychological attack on the victim's sense of worth. Brutus's depressing memories of the imprisoned in South Africa demonstrate selflessness: To think of another's suffering when one is no longer in the same plight is a noble act whose aim is to further the neighbour's life and thus his humanity. Eric Fromm says, and this accords with the view expressed in Brutus, that 'love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not towards one "object" of love.'[1]

The romantic tone and imagery Brutus uses in the poem are expressive of love and respect for all things. A prominent feature of Romanticism is love of nature, which implies a love of man since man is the masterpiece of creation. In the poem,

dusk is seen in the image of a dove, a beautiful bird; the air is 'luminous', the sky 'bright' and the sea 'a soft circling presence' [ASL, p.101]. Brutus thus describes his former prison environment in a lively romantic manner:

> the wall softened to frozen smoke
> and their rigidity melted
> receding to miles,
> ... the air was alive and tender
> with a mist of spray from the sea, [ASL,p.101]

The romanticising of his prison surroundings, the beauty of nature that enclosed the prison island, shows the accentuated yearning of Brutus and the other prisoners for freedom. The irony and the agony in this situation consist in the fact that, whereas the prisoners are not free, nature (the sea, the air and the birds) is. Brutus's awareness that in exile he can satisfy his poignant, urgent desire to stroll in the dusk, while others still in prison cannot, makes his freedom meaningless.

The hope for man's freedom and the resolution to work rigorously towards its attainment are pronounced aspects of the altruism we find in the poetry of Dennis Brutus. In "Shakespeare winged this way using other powers", Brutus expresses the

view that nothing is more important than involving one's self actively in a fellow human being's woes. According to him, Shakespeare created for himself:

> an immortality outlasting all our time
> /by/ hacking out an image of the human plight
> that out-endures all facets of half-truth:
> /ASL, p.127/

Brutus regards the example of Shakespeare as a manifestation of his concern for the plight of others, a defence of man's dignity that is conscious of the indestructible nature of the human spirit in the face of all adversity. This is what Brutus aspires to:

> O might I be so crouched, so poised, so hewed
> to claw some image of my fellows' woe
> hacking the hardness of ice-clad rock,
> armed with such passion, dedication, voice
> that every cobblestone would rear in wrath
> and batter down a prisoner's wall
> and wrench them from the island where they
> rot. /ASL, p.127/

The poem is full of action that is suggestive of the great effort that must be expended in liberating oppressed people. This action can be seen in Brutus's diction: concerning yourself with your fellows' woes is like 'hacking' rock enveloped in ice, which is what prisoners on Robben Island are subjected to. One needs to be 'armed' with

'passion' to be able to 'batter down' all oppressive structures in order to 'wrench' the enslaved from the claws of their slave masters. Brutus is committed to an alleviation of the suffering of others, a suffering caused by man's inhumanity to man, and to a restoration of their humanity that has been trampled upon by the apartheid regime.

His idea that the woes of his fellows are his own is even more overtly expressed in the title poem of A Simple Lust:

> ... I speak the others' woe:
> those congealed in concrete
> or rotting in rusted ghetto-shacks;
> only I speak their wordless woe,
> their unarticulated simple lust. [ASL, p.176]

There is, in the poem, a juxtaposition of speech and voicelessness which contrasts Brutus as a free person with the prisoners, the gagged people. The choice of his subject matter, the woes of the prisoners, shows that Brutus is not feathering his own nest. He is fighting against the poor quality of life forced upon the people by apartheid. This poor quality of life is effectively conveyed in his choice of words and in the images he uses. 'Congealed', for example, evokes the picture of blood thickening. The image continues in 'rotting',

which denotes that the health of those shut up in prison eventually deteriorates. Brutus's protest against the poor quality of life under apartheid is carried on in the description of the people's dwellings as 'ghetto-shacks'. So, in prison and at home, the apartheid victim is a disintergrating individual whose rights as a human being are abused. These are the woes of the victims of apartheid to which Brutus subordinates his personal interests. His vehement protest against the infringed human rights and dignity of his fellow South Africans derives from his altruism and his liberal humanism.

Brutus shares the afflictions of his compatriots, both at home and abroad. On the island of Nelson in New Zealand, Brutus can only think of the men who are in prison on Robben Island:

> Here
> on another island
> within sound of the sea
> I watch the moon turn yellow
> or a blurred Orion heel
>
> And remember
> the men on the island
> on strips of matting
> on the cold floor
> between cold walls
> and the long endless night. [ASL, p.126]

Here, as in the previous poem, his anguish is caused by the hardship which he knows his compatriots are going through. As depicted in the poem, they are made to live like beasts. They have no beds to sleep on but instead sleep on torn mats which are as uncomfortable as the bare floor. They are exposed to severe cold so that in their discomfort the nights appear longer than they actually are. In this poem, as in all the others that demonstrate his altruism, the image of prison looms large. Prison, as used in Brutus's poetry, must not be defined solely in terms of restrictive concrete walls and iron bars meant for the corrective punishment of criminals. To be adversely affected by apartheid, means to be in prison in South Africa. In this sense, South Africa as a whole is a prison for Africans. Prison is consistently symbolic of human degradation, which Brutus opposes. Each time he evokes the image of prison, he is creating anew a situation in which he can kick against humiliation and a situation in which the reader is always reminded of what is to be done, namely, revolt against dehumanizing systems.

The other way in which Brutus shows that love

sustains humanity is by demonstrating solidarity among the oppressed. This surfaces in the poem, "At a Funeral", written on the occasion of the funeral of 'Valencia Majombozi, who died shortly after qualifying as a doctor' [SKB]. In the poem, the oppressed firmly resolve that, 'Better that we should die, than that we should lie down' [SKB]. Valencia's promising career has been cut short by death: This 'hollow panoply' is 'for one whose gifts the mud devours, with our hopes' [SKB]. Her death reminds Brutus of the living millions whose talents apartheid neither respects nor wishes to acknowledge. The image of the grave, in 'Oh all you frustrate ones. powers tombed in dirt', shows that those who are still alive but whose worth is not recognized are like the dead [SKB]. The painful irony, however, is that, unlike Valencia's, their unnatural death is caused by a destructive political scheme, represented in the poem by the image of 'carrion books of birth' [SKB]. There are separate birth registers for blacks and whites. Thus Brutus speaks of the books of birth to refer to racial segregation, a disgusting phenomenon that appals him, as conveyed in his use of 'carrion' in the preceding quotation.

Brutus's argument, which projects the communal outlook of the oppressed, is that, for millions of those apartheid suppresses, it is not natural death that stands tyrant over their talents, but apartheid, 'death's-head tyranny" which, like a pair of thongs, 'scythes our ground/And plots our narrow cells of pain and defeat' [SKB]. Apartheid as a common enemy of the oppressed engenders a fraternal feeling among them. This solidarity helps them to survive oppression. In other words, this brotherly feeling among people who are tyrannized is an expression of their solidarity which enables them to preserve their humanity.

In the poetry of Dennis Brutus, his appeal for solidarity among the oppressed is discernible in the persistent communal tone which he employs. A typical example is the poem, "A common hate enriched our love and us". The common hatred of apartheid, which makes beasts of them, breeds tension and makes their land a frightful place. In this situation, the victims have a oneness of feeling: "hate gouged out deeper levels for our passion" [SKB]. 'Gouged', which suggests a

chisel, shows that this passion has evolved from pain. The passion must not be allowed to waste away:

> Escape to parasitic ease disgusts;
> discreet expensive hushes stifled us
> the plangent wines became acidulous [SKB 7]

In these lines, Brutus attacks the uncommitted, the collaborators who, after the gruesome experiences of Sharpeville, found it easier, safer and more profitable to embrace the policy of the Bantustans. According to Brutus, to yield to the terror of guns in this manner is to dodge the reality of oppression and live like parasites, relying on the goodwill of whites; a good will that one cannot always bank on. Such comfort as one may get by collaboration with the system is disgusting, especially as it entails a betrayal of 'the hungry comfortless'; a betrayal of the common love between sufferers which must be placed above everything else if a long-lasting remedy is to be found for the evils of apartheid.

The structure and tone of "A common hate" help to sustain the contention that a common hatred of apartheid creates solidarity among the victims. Typically in Brutus, the poem starts with a

hypothetical statement: 'A common hate enriched our love and us:' The use of the colon shows that the next four stanzas are meant to elaborate on the statement in the opening line. After the cogent argument advanced in the poem's four stanzas, the concluding statement that is identical with the opening statement ceases to be a hypothesis but rather a proven fact: 'A common hate enriched our love and us'. The communal tone evinced in the use of words such as 'our', 'us', and 'we' is a pointer to the solidarity engendered by their common experience of fascism.

The fascism inherent in apartheid is brought out graphically in "The Sounds Begin Again" from Sirens Knuckles Boots. The poem reads:

> The sounds begin again;
> the siren in the night
> the thunder at the door
> the shriek of nerves in pain.
>
> Then the keening crescendo
> of faces split by pain
> the wordless, endless wail
> only the unfree know.
>
> Importunate as rain
> the wraiths exhale their woe
> over the sirens, knuckles, boots;
> my sounds begin again. / SKB /

The images of sirens, knuckles and boots combine to symbolize an authoritarian regime, a police

state, which is what South Africa is. Brutus speaks of the incessant police harassment of blacks by the South African police force. This force threatens the existence of black South Africans everywhere in South Africa. The iambic trimeter employed in the poem serves to indicate the ceaseless and regular nature of police brutality. This brutality is excessive, as denoted by the use of words such as 'crescendo' and 'pain', and phrases like 'shriek of nerves'. The relentless nature of the violence unleashed upon blacks turns them into a bundle of nerves, as conveyed by the frightening images of thunder and of faces split by pain. The situation in which mere sounds instil fear in the hearts of the oppressed and conjure frightful pictures of oppression creates paranoids. The common response of the victims to this situation is lamentation that elicits our sympathy: 'the wordless, endless wail/only the unfree know'. Proof abounds of this ugly South African reality which Brutus speaks of. Helen Joseph, the first house-arrested person in South Africa complains about the thunder at the door saying: 'It wasn't pleasant to wait night after night for the knock on the door and

the unwelcome intrusion into the privacy of my home - and to think that this would go on for five years.'[2] Police surveillance in South Africa is not limited to people under house-arrest. It is extended to any black, as is evidenced by the case of Mzal' uJola, raw from the Transkei, who is interrogated by Johannesburg police in My Cousin Comes to Jo'burg. The police try to find out if he is an 'illegal' dweller in Johannesburg. They quickly find out by asking him to produce his pass, which he does not have. They are ready to 'pull him in for failing to produce'.[3] The insecurity caused by the ceaseless police torment is a form of mental torture and causes one's nerves to shriek in pain. From the common experience of this torture results a sense of togetherness.

Love which recognizes the human worth of all people, for which Brutus has always fought unreservedly, is characterized by its lack of exclusiveness. During a writers conference in Scandinavia, he told his colleagues that, 'Whether we are Finns or Swedes or Norwegians, or whether we come from any part of Africa, we are all committed, at least to one value, the assertion of

human value, of human dignity, and that is why we have a special function when we see humanity betrayed.'[4] Humanity is betrayed in South Africa. However, Brutus is interested in defending human dignity wherever he sees it betrayed.

In South Africa, more than anywhere else, the black majority is not only refused recognition but abused. Nana Sita's case provides a typical example. He is an Indian who on 10 December 1962 was charged with contravening the Group Areas Act by refusing to vacate his premises in which he had lived for thirty nine years. Defending himself at the Pretoria magistrate's court, he told the judge that:

> In all the years of my adult life, I have passionately believed in the universal ideals of human brotherhood and social justice and am deeply sensitive to any inroads into these ideals. Apartheid refuses to recognize human dignity and brands its victims as subhuman. It denounces all known canons of ethics as propounded by the world's great religions and philosophies. On an individual level, it degrades and maims a man's life and a life of self-respect.5

By viewing love as a strong force that sustains human dignity, Brutus is protesting against and counteracting the dehumanization that is caused

by apartheid, by re-asserting the 'known canons of ethics as propounded by the world's great religions and philosophies'.

Brutus wishes to extend love to every human being as a means of asserting man's common worth, because he believes that to assert man's common humanity is a heroic deed to which all men must aspire. However, such an assertion is lacking in South Africa because those who attempt it are suppressed by apartheid. Brutus, who teaches that we must exhibit love as a celebration of man's common worth, defies apartheid by this act.

In the highly industrialized and developed countries of the world, and this includes South Africa, humanity is continually undermined. People are evaluated in terms of what benefits the capitalist can derive from them. The individual is seen less as a human being, with rights that must be respected, and more as a labour unit. The evil is more pronounced in South Africa, where it is not only the greed for wealth that governs such dehumanization but also the political system that props racial segregation. The whiteman regards himself as superior and attempts to

obliterate all traces of humanity and respectability from the blackman. Dennis Brutus preaches love as an assertion and defence of man's worth. His doctrine serves as protest against apartheid.

Footnotes

1. Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, London, Unwin Books, 1957, p.38.

2. Nana Sita, 'House Arrest: The Minister is Satisfied; the Judge is Not' in I Will Still Be Heard edited by Marion Friedmann, London, Arthur Baker Limited, 1963, p.30.

3. Mbulelo Mzamane, My Cousin Comes to Jo'burg, London, Longman, 1980, p.11.

4. Per Wastberg (ed.), The Writer in Modern Africa, Uppsala, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968, p.34.

5. Friedmann, p.19.

CHAPTER FOUR

LOVE AS A STRUGGLE AGAINST ALIENATION AND INSECURITY

Apartheid is an alienating force which imprisons the blackman in South Africa because it refuses to accept him into its materially privileged white culture. Brutus agrees with Erich Fromm that a victim of such circumstances 'would become insane. could he not liberate himself from this prison and reach out, unite himself in some form or other with men, with the world outside'.[1] In Brutus's words:

> There are times
> when our repudiation of ourselves
> is so complete
> the acceptance of our corruption
> so absolute [SH, p.17]

Many victims of apartheid are forced to look upon themselves as worthless as a result of this scheme which does not look at them as human beings but as sources of cheap labour. A sense of hopelessness prevails in the lives of such victims who feel so ashamed of their existence that 'the embrace of despair/is almost final' [SH, p.17]. Brutus believes that, in such situations:

> Our only consolation
> relief
> must be found outside ourselves [SH, p.177

In other words, if we are not to become alienated we must seek human company. In the poem, the search for companionship to combat alienation is underscored by 'the thrust of our concupiscent propensities', our extraordinarily strong sexual tendencies that are 'so unarguable' [SH, p.177. According to Brutus, the consolation we derive from such human companionship resides 'in the nature of God/and his desires' [SH, p.177. This is a view which Brutus imports from his Christian education:

> And one remembers Augustine:
> God made us for himself
> and we desire him
> because it is his desire
> (It is by clinging to the nature of God
> that we escape despair
> in our own nature). [SH, p.187

To be an apostle of this view which Brutus advocates is to abide by God's second greatest commandment, to love our neighbour as ourselves. To do this means to unite with men, with the world outside ourselves. So Brutus conceptualizes love as a struggle against man's alienation in oppressive circumstances like those prevalent in

South Africa.

In Alienation and the Body in Racist Society, Manganyi notes that, 'Alienation from the reality of the body can be understood as a collective alienation of man in industrial and technological societies.'[2] This concept can be usefully applied to the South African situation. South Africa is an industrial and technological society; it is a racist society whose legislation brings about alienation. Seen from Manganyi's viewpoint, what Brutus says of alienation in his poetry applies to the majority of South Africans who must scour for human contact in order to avoid becoming splintered. The reaching out, the consolation that must be found outside ourselves, is therefore not a matter of choice for the victims of apartheid.

In Brutus's poetry, the struggle against alienation takes various forms and has two main aims: to combat the aloneness of the oppressed and to battle against the insecurity which causes that aloneness and is part of it. The forms this fight takes include engaging in sexual intercourse, marital relationships and homosexuality. In the context of a struggle against insecurity and

alienation, the important aspects of these love forms that is prized above their erotic sensuality is the companionship involved, the human contact, a sharing of joys and sorrows.

The notion that love actively fights one's feeling of aloneness is quite prominent in Brutus's work, especially in his prison poems. In poems that demonstrate this idea, one is often confronted with the image of a woman in the background. This image is often that of Bernice, Brutus's wife. This means that the love being discussed is marital in which companionship abounds. In South Africa it is not always certain that husband and wife can stay together, as was once confirmed by the situation in the poet's family. In an interview with Bernth Lindfors and others, Brutus tells us: 'I had an order from the secret police restricting me to Johannesburg. So for the hell of it, I used to think up excuses for having to travel. I would persuade my wife to find a pretext (She was about 700 miles away from me).'[3] In such a situation the groping towards each other between husband and wife, mentally or physically, becomes a battle against man's estrangement and the danger that surrounds him. "More terrible than any

beast" from Sirens Knuckles Boots illustrates this battle. In the poem, Brutus employs images that speak graphically of insecurity. Apartheid is seen as an insurmountable beast 'that cannot be tamed or bribed'; it is an 'iron monster', that is, a monster that threatens the poet-persona with extinction as it 'ingests' him 'in its grinding maw'. The poet tries to dodge this insecurity which can break him:

> agile as ballet-dancer
> fragile as butterfly
> I eggdance with nimble wariness
> - stave off my fated splintering. [SKB]

The poet's comparison of himself to a butterfly emphasizes the need for company in the face of adversity. The butterfly seeks the company of bright flowers among which it hides itself away from its enemies, just as the poet takes shelter in the mental companionship 'of someone bright and dear/and far away', most probably his wife, when he is confronted with 'the granite day' [SKB]. Eggdance' points to the poet's gradual disintergration if his oppression continues, for the egg cannot dance forever on its end without falling on its side. For the time

being, however, the poet-persona achieves comradeship in thinking about his wife who represents steadfastness in love.

A further illustration of how marital love is a duel against aloneness is discernible in the poem, "The price, the name, are of no account" in which Brutus, separated from his wife, is lonely. As he confesses:

> Where there are female things I ferret
> blindly hoping for some trace of you
> who were all the women in the world. [SH, p.67]

In order to fill this vacuum in his life, the poet mentally falls back on the company of his wife. He finds solace 'in a single gulping sniff' of a perfume which smells like the perfume his wife used to use [SH, p.67]. The smell evokes fond memories, 'sweet remembrance' [SH, p.67]. His earnest and persistent search for company, as conveyed by the choice of words such as 'blindly' and 'ferret', suggests a desperate fight against alienation.

In Dennis Brutus, the image of his wife as a life-sustaining force in an alienating environment is a constant one. Her significance in his life

is summed up in the following lines from "For Bernice":

> You were the still oasis
> in a whirling vortex. [ASL, p.76]

Brutus's relationship with his wife is like the relationship between a desert wanderer and an oasis. Bernice gives Brutus a new lease on life and a sense of security in an environment where insecurity abounds. This idea is conveyed in the image of a 'whirling vortex, a tornado. The image aptly captures the turbulent political atmosphere of South Africa. Bernice as an oasis is a symbol of life and hope. In another context, Bernice could be symbolic of South Africa, in which Brutus trusts and to which he remains attached. His happiness in this companionship is evident in the following lines in which Brutus reminds his wife:

> You could make such chords of sensibility
> sing in me
> and permit them resonance
> in the chamber ofyour listening self
> that thinking of you
> I was simply glad. [ASL, p.76]

The ecstatic tone of the poem effectively conveys the idea that Brutus feels safe in the company of

his wife. Apart from openly stating his joy at being with his wife, Brutus evokes the image of music to describe his happy state. The sense of security is most complete, as in the poem, when the companionship involves mutual understanding.

In "It is your flesh that I remember best", written 'for my wife in separation', Brutus fights against being uprooted. Living away from his wife, he takes recourse to memories of his blissful marriage. He recollects:

> It is your flesh that I remember best;
> its impulse to surrender and possess
> obscurely, in the nexus of my flesh
> inchoate stirrings, patterns of response
> re-act the postures of our tenderness.
> [SKB]

Brutus would disregard himself scornfully ('contemn myself in guilt') if it was only the sexuality that he valued in his marital relationship because then it would be a mere exploitative, erotic act [SKB]. But the human company he gets in this relationship gives meaning to his marital life. The erotic aspect of it is just part of a cherished togetherness:

> for know, as dearly memorable are speech
> the shy expressive gestures of your eyes
> your patient, penetrative, patient mind.
> [SKB]

In separation Dennis Brutus appreciates his wife's understanding love, which gives him strength to fight his severance from her and his compatriots, as a result of his house-arrest in South Africa.

Brutus also employs filial love as a weapon against his alienation. He craves the company and love of his sons. He has become painfully aware of his separation from them as he gets more involved in the fight against apartheid and racism in the world. In "For my Sons and Daughters", he writes:

> my loneliness; my failures; my amalgam wish
> to serve:
> my continental sense of sorrow drove me to
> work
> and at times I hoped to shape your better
> world. [SH, p.4]

The failures Brutus talks about here should be seen in terms of his inability to offer uninterrupted fatherly love, which his children need in order not to feel insecure and alienated. Without their company, he, too, is lonely. To combat his loneliness, he asks for their love and forgiveness. He is aware that his request is difficult to

fulfil. His hope, though, is that their adult experiences will make it easier for them to forgive him. He is painfully aware that only a reunion with his children can cure him of his alienation. He strives to combat his guilt as a father who feels that he has neglected his children. In so doing, he is fighting a battle against himself, to prepare himself for the final erasure of his alienation when the union is at last achieved.

Homosexuality is another manifestation of a craving for love in which the affected individuals wage a war against estrangement. This perverted form of love is caused by sexual frustration. In South Africa, such outlets for satisfying sexual desire are sealed off when people are sent to prison, where normal sexual activity is not possible. Again, the laws of apartheid restrict full sexual activity by prohibiting mixed marriages and all forms of sexual relationship between whites and people of other races. Those adversely affected no longer feel that they are part of a human world. Their lives become tense, insecure and lonely. This is true of prisoners in the prison poems of Dennis Brutus. They resort to homosexuality because, even though perverted, it

is the love form easily accessible to them, through which they obtain closer human contact and thus allay their fears and insecurity. In the eighth letter to Martha, the behaviour of the prisoner nick-named 'Blue Champagne' is a demonstration of this situation. With a name which is indicative of intoxication and excitement, Blue Champagn, with his 'youthful curves' that were 'most highly prized', was 'the most popular "girl" in the place' [LTM, p.9]. Blue Champagne's homosexuality is wilful: 'he would sleep with several/each night' [LTM, p.9]. This shows his desperate need for human company and his need to release the tension bred by his insecurity. He finds human company by embracing homosexuality, which enables him to survive the alienating prison circumstances.

In his seventh prison letter Brutus ruminates about prisoners like Blue Champagne who beg for 'sexual assault'. He asks:

> To what desperate limits are they driven and what fierce agonies they have endured that this, which they have resisted, should seem to them preferable, even desirable. [LTM, p.8]

Even though in the second stanza of the same poem he agrees with those who consider homosexuality 'as the depths/of absolute and ludicrous submission', in the final stanza he admits:

> But it has seemed to me
> one of the most terrible
> most rendingly pathetic
> of all a prisoner's predicaments. [LTM, p.87

Brutus's prison poems attest to the philosophy that, 'The deepest need of man is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity.'[4] One notices, for example, that Blue Champagne remains sane. By contrast the 'bespectacled highschoolboy' in "Postscripts 6', who dodges homosexuality ends up insane because, having rejected homosexuality, he fails to devise other means to overcome his separateness. He has a 'withdrawn protected air' about which Brutus writes:

> and I marvelled, envied him
> so untouched he seemed to be
> in that hammering brutal atmosphere.

> But his safety had a different base
> and his safely private world was fantasy;
> from the battering importunities
> of fists and genitals of sodomites
> he fled: in a maniac world he was safe.
> [LTM, p.22]

The prisoners are driven to desperate limits to accept homosexuality. They have to counteract looming insanity, tension and loneliness in order to survive. The prisoners who are struggling to survive find homosexuality preferable to insanity, the end result of alienation. Moreover, Brutus is aware of the crippling power of fear, which he conveys in "A letter to Basil", written while the poet was under house arrest:

> How deadly an enemy is fear!
> How it seeks out the areas of our vulnerability
> and savages us
> until we are so rent and battered
> and desperate
> that we resort to what revolts us
> and wallow in the foulest treachery.
> [LTM, p. 23]

The prisoners' indulgence in homosexuality shows their frantic fight against being battered or savaged by the fear bred by apartheid. They prefer to neglect ethical consideration and resort to the filthiest betrayal of their human dignity, if that will ensure survival.

Homosexuality in Brutus is of a less complex

existence. In this regard, love is a psychological defensive mechanism because the mental torture caused by insecurity is even more destructive than physical torture. Insecurity creates tension through the fear it breeds. For those it conquers, insanity results. The sexual love in human fellowship is used as a counteracting force against all this. In "Let not this plunder be misconstrued", Brutus argues that in certain circumstances, sexual activity takes place 'when shards of existence display eager blades/to menace and savage the pilgriming self' [SKB]. The image of the black South African as a visitor or pilgrim in his own home speaks of insecurity. The insecurity is heightened by the image of 'eager blades', blades eagerly drawn to maim the being of the poet-persona. In the context of this insecurity, sexual love must be seen as:

> ... the body's expression of need -
> Poor wordless body in its fumbling way
> Exposing heart's hunger by raiding and
> hurt;
> Secret recesses of lonely desire/that/
> Gnaw at the vitals of spirit and mind.
> [SKB]

A pathetic picture of the insecure person is painted in these lines. The poem conveys a yearning for security, as conveyed by words such as 'need', 'heart's-hunger' and 'lonely desire'. The poet-persona in his sexual relationship with his wife ('my lovely') achieves psychological protection against loneliness and the perilous threats posed by the apartheid regime.

One sees the same situation in "Kneeling before you in a gesture", in which the poet-persona kneels, 'stripped to the very bone', before his love, as a 'gesture' of his total surrender to the redeeming power of love:

> 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 - [SKB]

The image of the poet-persona, kneeling naked before his love, portrays an anguished, helpless person seeking protection and comfort. The gesture of kneeling naked is also associated with sexual activity, as reinforced by the image of 'the dance'. The view of sex as a dance finds amplification in the poem, "Mirror Sermon I and II",

where Brutus variously calls it the 'graceless dance' or the 'macabre dance of death' [SKB 7. The woman's response to the poet-persona's request for protection is, therefore, a lover's response:

> 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: [SKB 7

The insecurity bred by apartheid in South Africa is represented by the usual images of knives, teeth, boots, knuckles and bayonets. These are weapons used by the brutish South African police force. The image of the mother's womb in these lines conveys a desire for security such as the womb affords the foetus. The image of the womb illustrates the kind of shelter the poet is offered by his lover against a dangerous environment.

A further example of the concept of love as a struggle against the endangering of human life in fascist societies can be found in "It is the constant image of your face" from Sirens Knuckles Boots, which emphasizes the compelling force of

the inner sense of security with which love and comradeship attracts the insecure. Even though Brutus's patriotism comes before any other feeling ('My land takes precedence of all my loves'), he betrays this love for his land ('I confess without remorse or shame/my still fresh treason to my country') because of his life of insecurity in 'a world of knives' [SKB 7. In such a world, only few people will refuse the 'dear protectiveness' proferred by those they love [SKB 7. Love and human togetherness in this sense constitute a fight against the insecurity and alienation that fascism breeds.

In Brutus, we also find fellowship, devoid of any sexual considerations, which is engendered by the common nature of the suffering of those people apartheid attempts, with some measure of success, to victimize. Through this human fellowship or love, which Brutus calls 'closer contact/and understanding', the victims succeed in acquiring an inner sense of security [LDM, p.117. He tells us that:

> It is not all terror
> and deprivation,
> you know;

> one comes to welcome the closer contact
> and understanding one achieves
> with one's fellow-men,
> fellows, coapeers; [LTM, p.11]

Terror is part of the insecurity which prisoners experience. However, the prisoners combat such insecurity with the companionship that has arisen among them. This is the only grace that punctuates their dreary lives in prison and its insecurity. When this happens,

> ... the mind is bright and restful
> though alive
> rather like the full calm morning sea.
> [LTM, p.11]

Although the mind is delighted and peaceful, it is not oblivious of terror in prison. It is still fully awake to this terror but, supported by love, the mind is not always in turmoil. It resembles the sea that is peaceful in the morning only to erupt later in the day when the winds start blowing.

The view that love in any oppressive society must be valued as a means of fighting tension and insecurity is summarized in a short poem that laments a lost lover:

> I do not fear your loss now
> but when I face the absolute tests
> how shall I fare without your central love?
> This is what, without reproach, I fear.
> [SH, p.64]

In the South African milieu, the very trying situations for under-privileged citizens like Brutus consist of tension and insecurity generated by the brutality of apartheid. Brutus rightly conceives of love as a form of struggle against alienation and insecurity.

All the poems in which the notion of love as a psychological defensive mechanism is advanced were written while the poet was still in South Africa and experiencing the cruelties of apartheid directly. In this context, a view of love as a struggle against such cruelties constitutes an indictment of apartheid, for the whole scheme of apartheid is such that it enhances alienation and insecurity: South Africans are deliberately prevented by a network of prohibitive laws from making as much human contact and understanding as they would wish. Lewis Nkosi notes in a paper, "Sex and Politics in South African Literature":

> Ordinary human beings separated by the colourline, grope toward one another,... they seek to establish contact without much success; ironically enough, the one area where it is possible for men and women, of whatever class, race or background, to establish contact, however hasty and unloving, is in the sexual area - but in South Africa, at least, such sexual commerce is not only morally condemned if it takes place between black and white people, it is also punishable by law.8

For this reason the prisoners are forced to prize the close contact and understanding that arises among them highly.

Brutus's concept of love as a struggle against alienation and insecurity helps to depict even more clearly the evils of apartheid. In attempting to dehumanize its victims, sometimes with some success, apartheid destroys the sense of worth for the majority of its citizens. This accelerates the victim's self-alienation. With the notion of love as a struggle against alienation and insecurity, Dennis Brutus protests against all those evils perpetrated by apartheid. Brutus's conception of love thus amounts to protest against apartheid, which is what has been the aim of black South African poetry and literature in general.

CHAPTER FIVE

PATRIOTISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A BIRTHRIGHT

In Brutus, patriotism reveals itself in three ways: through his admiration and celebration, in romantic fashion, of the beauty of the South African landscape; through the nostalgia that dominates his poems of exile; and through protest against the physical destruction that goes on in South Africa. Brutus's 'greatest commitment - personal as well as poetic - is to South Africa'.[1] In "Dismay wrenches the heart", Brutus says of the world of exile:

> this is not my rightful world
> here I am simple, naive, an oaf,
> now I must sadden, turn to retreat
> unless I recover some stubborn will.
> [ASL, p.115]

Brutus's self-portrait as a pathetic lout indicates the disintergration that sets in when a person is cut off from his birthplace. To alleviate the pain of exile, Brutus tells us, he turns to the 'vague consoling teat of words, articulation, verse' [ASL, p.115]. The expression of his emotions through verse soothes the poet-exile, like the mother's teats soothe a

wailing baby. However, this is a temporary solution. A more lasting and redeeming solution is to remember that the exile has a place he loves, a place he can call his home. Brutus and other victims of apartheid in South Africa remain attached to their fatherland where their birthright has been usurped. Thus, the patriotism of the oppressed people of South Africa denotes their accentuated yearning for a restoration of their birthright in a full democracy.

South Africa, as depicted in Dhlomo's epic, Valley of a Thousand Hills, is a land of tremendous beauty. Dennis Brutus's adoration of its beauty reflects a love of the land that signals a struggle to re-establish his lost roots, a struggle to regain his lost birthright. In "Sequence for South Africa 6", he says that the appreciation 'of beauty/in a foreign landscape' is a painful process; the exile has to 'reproach' this 'vaguely familiar' beauty 'because it echoes/remembered beauty' of his home [SH, p.94]. The beauty of a foreign landscape is, therefore, a perpetual reminder of exile, and exile a perpetual reminder of a denied birthright. Brutus tries to reduce the

pain of exile and the pain that derives from his denied birthright by thinking of and singing praises to the beauty of the landscape of his home:

> Landscape of my young world!
> Land of soft hills and huts
> of aloes and grey-green dreaming firs;
> [ASL, p.132]

The romantic sensuality in which this description is couched illustrates the poet's love for a home which he has left behind, a home to which he longs to return as a free citizen. Remembered in exile, such beautiful images of home as contained in the above lines 'lacerate'; they strip the exile of his emotional and mental stability. Brutus strives against this laceration by mentally transporting himself to South Africa. The emotional link with his fatherland cannot be severed by the use of force or weapons:

> Heartbreaking hillsides and green slopes!
> There is no armour to exclude your poignancy,
> no blunting, and for me no ease. [ASL, p.132]

This is an indictment of the apartheid regime in which the whites use force to deny other South Africans their right to live as free people in the land of their birth. Brutus reminds the

regime that patriotism cannot be stifled. The only alternative is to allow all citizens, irrespective of their skin colour, to exercise their birthright. Brutus vows never to rest till he regains his rights as a son of the South African soil.

The issue of patriotism as a feeling that cannot be suppressed through force is more exhaustively treated in "A troubadour, I traverse all my land", from Sirens Knuckles Boots, in which the adoration of the land is evident in the images Brutus uses. The image of the troubadour is reminiscent of the travelling poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who were the composers and singers that flourished in the courts of Spain, Italy and Southern France. The special theme of their ballads was courtly love. By portraying himself in the image of the troubadour, Brutus sums up his preoccupation with love in his poems. As wandering poets, the troubadours were visitors in the foreign lands in which they performed. This image also applies to the blackman in South Africa who has been made a temporary sojourner in his own home. For instance,

through the Bantu Laws Amendment Act of 1964: 'On January 1, 1965, it became impossible for Africans to win unchallengeable residence rights anywhere in white South Africa.'[2] They must live in these white prescribed areas like troubadours in foreign lands, doing the bidding of their masters. Such deliberate attempts to frustrate the aspirations of the blackman in South Africa are not enough to arrest the love of his fatherland and the passion to fight for the restoration of his appropriated birthright.

Brutus's love for the land is further compared to the sexual relationship between man and woman:

> A troubadour, I traverse all my land
> exploring all her wide-flung parts with zest
> probing in motion sweeter far than rest
> her secret thickets with an amorous hand:
> [SKB]

This extended metaphor demonstrates how highly Brutus loves the land of his birth. The erotic image of a wanton woman, with her limbs flung wide, is both a reference to the chaotic state of South African society and a description of the topography of South Africa. Brutus explores these parts in order to understand South Africa better. The fact that he undertakes the survey with

enthusiasm reveals his desire to possess the land. In love there is this possessive element. In the same erotic image, Brutus expresses the idea that in sexual activity motion is more gratifying than immobility. Translated into the reality of South Africa, this means that unwavering patriotism and protest against the evils of apartheid are more rewarding than an acceptance of defeat by the system. This accounts for the poet's determination to face the might of the agents of apartheid. He does this in a scornful and light-hearted mood:

> ... I have laughed, disdaining those who
> banned
> inquiry and movement, delighting in the test
> of will when doomed by Caracened arrest,
> choosing, like unarmed thumb, simply to stand.
> [SKB]

Brutus's humourous response to the serious violence unleashed by apartheid depicts the agents of apartheid as disdainful monsters. The image of the unarmed thumb suggests the thumbs-up sign of the A.N.C and conveys Brutus's determination to fight for his birthright, for the liberation of the oppressed peoples of South Africa. Brutus defies those who advocate apartheid as a doctrine not to be questioned by those whose rights it has usurped. Brutus ignores their ban on 'inquiry and movement'

[SKB]. The risk of imprisonment, which his defiance entails, is conveyed by the image of saracens, British-made troop carriers. These saracens form the answer of the apartheid police to protest. At the first signs of revolt by Africans government mobilizes 'its armed forces, and [sends] saracenes, armed vehicles and soldiers into the townships in a massive show of force designed to intimidate the people'.[3] In the battle for their birthright, the African people are ready for 'the captor's band/that snaps off service' to the land [SKB]. Brutus remains attached to his fatherland, even though threatened by violence and imprisonment. Imprisonment is conveyed by the image of 'the shadow of an arrow-brand' [SKB]. This used to be the identifying mark of a British prisoner. In the line, 'Thus quixoting till a cast-off of my land', Brutus evokes the image of Don Quixote, Cervante's hero in Don Quixote [SKB]. This mediaeval image is not wholly fitting in the South African context. The honour which the black man in South Africa pursues is not exactly like the imaginary flights of Don Quixote. The fight for a birthright is a serious issue that

means everything to the black South African.

The romantic description of the Zoo Lake in Johannesburg points to Brutus's love for the beauty of the landscape of his home which comforts his being:

> Light, green-yellow luminescent, tender
> seeps through these deep-foliaged weeping
> willows
> to filter streams and runnels of soft glow
> suffusing enclaves of green and sombre gloom
> [ASL, p.39]

His mind is equally awake to the sorrow that dwells in this beauty. Mixed with his admiration for such beauty Brutus also condemns the sorrow engendered by apartheid. Such sorrow is more openly disturbed in the second stanza of the poem. In this stanza there emerges a picture of the land as a 'distraught and mourning' place [ASL, p.39]. The beauty described in the first stanza offers the only relief to an otherwise grim situation. It is the same beauty, Brutus says, that makes 'all my frantic and frustrated sorrow/ dribble from me in a pith-central tenderness' [ASL, p.39]. His patriotism gives his life some substance:

> Oh lacerating land that pulps out anger's
> rancid ooze from my resisting heart
> now, with this loveliness, you distill in me
> a balm that eases and erases all my hurt.
> [ASL, p.39]

As in his love for his land, evident in his romantic admiration for its landscape, we discern in Brutus's nostalgia an index of a love for home which has been frustrated by apartheid laws that have forbidden him from going back home. In "Sequence for South Africa, 5", Brutus tells us that he has lived in some of the world's most beautiful and exciting places: London, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, Munich and Frankfurt, Warsaw and Rome. In all these cities, it must be assumed, Brutus was accorded the respect due to him as a human being, with dignity, and rights. Whereas he could live in peace in these foreign lands, Brutus tells us, 'still my heart cries out for home! [SH, p.94]. His nostalgia carries with it the protest against the absence of those rights he is accorded in exile, in foreign lands.

The beauty and hospitality of foreign homes remain forever unsatisfactory. This is what we are made to understand in "It is hers, England's seducing charms" in which Brutus expresses the

idea that England's beauty attempts to lure him away from his country's bright future which he optimistically foresees. The poem weighs the advantages and disadvantages of exile. His love for South Africa persists, even though the 'loveliness' of his home does not compare with England's at the moment [ASL, p.104]. The juxtaposed images of England and South Africa, two women whose beauty the poet assesses, express this idea aptly. Unlike England, South Africa has 'her loveliness tainted by disease/and her best image ravaged and austere' [ASL, p.104]. The disease of hate has destroyed an otherwise beautiful place. Brutus is thus tempted by the 'seducing charms' of England, which is like a woman who holds out motherly love for the exile, 'curled in her so-comfortable embrace' [ASL, p.104]. However, Brutus still opts for South Africa, 'an arid eroded dust-bowl of a love' because in this love lies the hope for his total emancipation as a South African citizen [ASL, p.104]. Moreover, the pleasures, comforts and freedom of the land of exile are deceptive. England's luring beauties are mere 'tricks of charm/dear quirks of loveliness to enchant' [ASL, p.104]. Brutus thus prefers the

more lasting and honest affection of his birth-place. 'I must be faithful to a land/whose rich years unlike England's, lie ahead', he decides /ASL, p.104_7. Brutus's patriotism imbues him with the optimism that looks forward to the day of liberation. His hope implies an appeal for the eradication of apartheid and the restoration of the rights of the oppressed.

Brutus's continued attachment to his father-land derives from a jealous love for his country. The truth of this is conveyed in "Having Fled, I display a fugitive's jealousy":

> Having fled I display a fugitive's jealousy,
> regard my heart suspiciously
> caution it against seduction by another's
> charms
> chafe against those who criticise
> or praise too lavishly
> and those who, being with you
> are indifferent, blind,
> or take too much delight in you /~ SH, p.65_7

His jealousy of those who enjoy full rights makes Brutus regard their attitudes to his exiled status with scepticism and suspicion. This is the dilemma of the exile who really loves his home and yearns to go back to it. The status of a refugee makes his life a miserable one at

times. He feels wretched when surrounded by over-sympathetic friends. Sychophants do not improve the quality of his life with their flattering tongues. The exile no longer knows what he should do and starts to live a strained life in which his feelings are no longer clearly defined. "By the waters of Babylon" provides a good example of this dilemma. Based on Psalm 137, Brutus's poem shows his mixed feelings towards exile, his feelings of love and hate:

> By the waters of Babylon
> the brackish wastes of alienness
> lie like dust on heart and throat,
> contour and curve of hill and field
> unspeaking and meaningless
> as a barbarous foreign tongue. [SSAP, p.187

Babylon is both a symbol of exile and of captivity which suitably depicts the plight of the oppressed South African. The hatred of exile is described by the ugly images of 'brackish wastes', 'dust' and barbarity. But in the midst of this ugly picture of exile, Brutus is struck by some 'gracious scenes' whose beauty creates nostalgia because they are scenes that resemble 'other familiar friendly haunts':

these trees; these hills; this sky, this sun
evokes a dearness that lacerates;
the heart heels from this wounding loveliness
[SSAP, p.18]

The love-hate relationship is an important aspect of Brutus's poetry which depicts the South African reality. It surfaces in the paradox in which loveliness is not only a thing of joy but also a thing that wounds the heart. The poem portrays the mixed feelings of the poet who is uprooted from his home. The scenes described in the poem are scenes of 'dearness' and 'loveliness' because they recapture for Brutus something of the home atmosphere, the beauty of its landscape. However, the very fact that they remind him of South Africa makes them 'wounding' scenes that tear his being apart. He is painfully reminded of the fact that he and millions of others back home are denied their rights. This is why these exile scenes present 'such beauty' and, at the same time, 'such pain' from which the exile turns away 'wordlessly' and weeps [SSAP, p.18].

Brutus feels strange in Bamako, Mali, where "By the waters of Babylon" was written. His love for his land, a love which looks forward to the democratic years ahead when he shall be back in

South Africa, makes him feel an intimate part of only one place, South Africa. In Algeria, too, the poet feels he is just driftwood:

> And I am driftwood
> on an Algerian beach
> along a Mediterranean shore
>
> and I am driftwood. [PFA, p.5]

The image of driftwood, like that of the troubadour, describes the status of being without a fixed abode, of being denied a home. As Brutus painfully knows, 'even the seabird has a place of rest-/ though it may vary by season or tide' [PFA, p.6]. Like the seabird, a symbol of freedom, Brutus yearns to return to his home which, unlike the seabird's, can never vary. But Brutus's exit permit does not permit him what the seabird enjoys, the peace of one's home. The image of the driftwood implicitly protests against apartheid, which in several ways cuts off many South Africans from their fatherland. Exile is one such way but as Brutus tells us, 'exile is not amputation'; it is not complete severance as when a hand is cut off from the body [SH, p.93]. Therefore, his patriotism survives.

In exile, Brutus's memories of home are some-

times aroused by painful images which remind him of South Africa. The image of sirens in a London night in "Sirens contrail the night air", reminds Brutus of his home, where sirens, knuckles and boots are constant reminders of police brutality. The second stanza of this poem consists of a list of islands which remind Brutus of Robben Island. Consequently, all islands 'are places with a single name/- where I am they always are' [SH, p.507. The islands recall further images of home:

> Images of prisons around the world,
> reports of torture, cries of pain
> all strike me on a single sore
> all focus on a total wound: [SH, p.50]

These are images that speak of the violence and the denial of freedom in his home.

In his protest against violence and the denial of freedom one also perceives his call for the unreserved freedom of all South Africans, irrespective of the colour of their skin. "Nightsong: City" exemplifies this love:

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

In his customary manner, Brutus metaphorically compares his love for his land to that between a man and a woman, a love that demands total commitment and yields complete satisfaction. The image of cockroaches, which destroy food, clothing and books at night, describes the police who are agents of destruction. The mournful tone of the poem conveys his disapproval of the infrigement of people's liberty and security in a land that is theirs. Police violence, as seen in the second stanza of the poem, is dreaded like 'a bug-infested rag' [SKB]. Violence occurs constantly in 'the shanties' with 'creaking iron-sheets' [SKB]. This violence mainly affects the underprivileged, for they are the people who live in African townships that are little more than shanties.

Even in exile, Dennis Brutus continues to mourn the human destruction in South Africa, as manifested in "I walk in the English quicksilver dusk". In the poem, Brutus turns from the lively, pleasant dusk of 'streetlights' and 'flowering trees' to think of the 'desolate dusks' on Robben Island. In the English environment, Brutus is moved by the rain for, as he says, 'I spread my

The land is once again seen in the image of a beautiful woman whose beauty has been violated. The people 'wail' for their rights as citizens of South Africa, rights which have been eroded by apartheid [SKB]. Their birthright has been eroded through the establishment of Bantustans. African self-rule in these tribal states is illusory and fragments African resistance. Self-government in the Bantustans is a drawback that can never achieve the ultimate aim of the South African people, namely, the eradication of apartheid, a task which needs all their concerted efforts. The nightmarish life led by the oppressed South Africans is depicted, in the poem, by the illusory beauty and calm of Transkei:

> Dear my land, open for my possessing,
> ravaged and dumbly submissive to our will,
> in curves and uplands my sensual delight
> mounts, and mixed with fury is amassing
>
> torrents tumescent with love and pain.
> Deep-dark and rich, with deceptive calmness
> time and landscape flow to new horizons -
> in anguished impatience await the quickening
> rains. [SKB]

Although Brutus's patriotism mounts to sensual heights in these lines, we notice that the land is 'ravaged' and the peace which exists in its natural beauty is lacking in its human composi-

tion. The calm in Transkei is superficial. It is not matched by the beauty of its landscape. This is the cause of Brutus's anguish. In such a beautiful land where there should be harmony among its people, the people are denied their freedom and claim to the land. Love and pain exist side by side in Brutus to depict this South African reality. Brutus looks forward to a time when the land shall be redeemed.

In a true democracy, our citizenship is taken for granted. However, in South Africa the matter is different for South Africans live in a fascist plutocratic world. The patriotism that is demonstrated by such South Africans as Dennis Brutus means more than the sentimental feeling for, attachment to, and zealous defence of the fatherland, which is what patriotism means to the rest of the world. Besides encompassing all these aspects, patriotism among South Africans denotes a desperate clinging to their country, to their birthright which the oppressed in South Africa are denied by force of arms. South Africans who are patriotic and determined to retrieve their birthright and protect the image of a fatherland

they deeply feel for protest against their oppression. In their protest, they project the evils of apartheid for the world to see and condemn. In the South African context, patriotism encourages the black struggle for the retrieval of a usurped birthright. The patriotic poems of Dennis Brutus express the dreams of the disadvantaged and the oppressed for a better life; the liberation movements fight to make these dreams a reality. His poems thus bear a close relationship to the liberation struggle.

Footnotes

1. The Benin Review No.1, (1974), p.55.

2. William Frye, In Whitest of Africa: The Dynamics of apartheid, Englewood, Prentice Hall, 1968, p.16.

3. Nelson Mandela, The Struggle is my Life: His speeches and writings brought together to mark his 60th birthday. Also included are historical documents and a recent account of conditions on Robben Island, London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1978, p.159.

4. Frye, p.36.

CONCLUSION

Dennis Brutus's preoccupation with love as a liberal ideological response to apartheid constitutes a non-violent form of protest and demonstrates his struggle for better race relations in South Africa and for the eradication of apartheid. He was exiled from South Africa because of his political activities against apartheid. His poetry forms an inextricable part of his political activities, for it exposes the evils of apartheid and indicts the South African government that props it. At the same time, his poetry projects what he considers to be an ideal solution to South Africa's race problem. This ideal is love.

The love theme in Dennis Brutus shows his respect for human worth. Love provides him with the energy he requires for the battle he wages to remain human in a dehumanizing atmosphere. From an economic perspective, apartheid exploits and cripples black people, refusing to accord them any recognition beyond exploiting their labour. On the social plane, apartheid denies blacks their human identity by relegating them to a sub-human status, prompted by the superiority complex of

its white propagators. When the human dignity and identity of the individual are deliberately crushed in this way, his life loses meaning. Thus Brutus's message of love as a preserver of an individual's worth and his identity must be regarded as protest against apartheid which seeks to destroy them by design.

In the context of the struggle for better race relations and an end to apartheid, Brutus views love as the means by which man can fight against his alienation and the insecurity bred in fascist societies. Circumstances have compelled South Africa's black majority to accept Western culture. The black person who struggles in the net of this imported culture is ultimately an alienated, insecure being. The superiority cult of the West denies him a human identity and questions his worth; the Christian religion is used as a weapon to restrain his protest; and capitalism tells him he has to feather his own nest and yet wrests from him the means by which he can do so. Worse still, capitalism encourages interest in the self against the blackman's traditional communal background. Love, human companionship, thus provides the

blackman in South Africa with the inspiration he needs to fight his alienation and the insecurity engendered by apartheid.

Patriotism and nostalgia in Brutus demonstrate a love that represents a heart-rending struggle for a birthright, a birthright that is denied those who oppose apartheid in South Africa. By defying suffering, violence and even death, and remaining faithfully in love with South Africa, Brutus registers his emphatic protest against those who have usurped his birthright.

Brutus envisages love as a means of waging a peaceful struggle to achieve better relations so that apartheid can be wiped off the face of the earth. As an ideal, this is plausible. As a practical solution in the context of South Africa, Brutus proposes a solution to apartheid that will never produce the desired results largely because it is reformist. He protests against apartheid and calls for true democracy. However, he does not advocate revolutionary change. He calls for change through non-violence, an appeal which is evident in the modest language that characterizes his poetry. He advocates change that will bring about

certain amendments to the political and parliamentary system in South Africa. The mode of change advocated is influenced by his universal stand against human destruction, a stand evident in the characteristic appealing tone of his poetry. He leaves unanswered the question of how to reform South Africa without first destroying apartheid completely. Furthermore, the type of change Brutus calls for in South Africa is informed by the Christian doctrine of the other cheek. In the case of South Africa, this doctrine has not worked since the years of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent retaliation against apartheid brutality. In this sense, Brutus's solution of non-violent retaliation against apartheid brutality does not come to grips with the reality of South African politics. This raises questions about the validity of his poetry as a call for change in South Africa. However, the main task of Brutus's poetry is to expose the evils of apartheid to the world, to show that he does not support such evil and that something has to be done about the situation. The politician and the revolutionary need to take off from there and effect the desired changes.

Evaluated more directly as literary creations, Brutus's poems succeed very well. His use of images, for example, speak of a skilled poet. These images effectively depict the situations Brutus writes about. The troubadour image is one of Brutus's finest images for, in one note, it expresses the idea of the black South African as a temporary sojourner in certain areas of his country of birth and spells out Brutus's appeal for love as a solution to such evil machinations. The combined images of sirens, knuckles and boots which depict police brutality are universal images that communicate easily to many people. The image of South Africa as a woman with whom Brutus has a sexual relationship shows his commitment to South Africa. The image of driftwood summarizes his exile poetry. His images never lose sight of his main concern, the exposure of the violence that is inherent in apartheid and the love that should take its place. In this sense, Brutus's images succeed in effectively depicting the reality of apartheid, the love-hate situation that exists in South Africa.

Brutus's diction is as effective as his images. Although the diction is sometimes archaic, it

succeeds in communicating his message at various levels. His typical poetic structure, whereby a hypothetical statement is made, debated upon and substantiated in subsequent stanzas, and the truth of the earlier hypothetical statement asserted in the last stanza, matches his appeal for patience in place of violence in seeking a solution to the problem of apartheid.

Critics have quarreled with Brutus's mild use of language and the prosaic nature particularly of Letters to Martha. However, it would be contradictory for Brutus to preach the message of love as a solution to racial hatred and turn round to engage the services of the language of violence. It would defeat Brutus's purpose. Though inclined towards the prosaic, Letters to Martha and his other volumes of poems succeed as poetry with a brilliancy of imagery that is very striking, as exemplified in many of the poems discussed. Furthermore, Brutus advances convincing reasons for the prosaic nature of Letters to Martha, poems designed to reach an essentially proletarian audience.

Brutus's achievement as a poet is praiseworthy. Politically, too, his poetry succeeds for it achieves its major aim of galvanizing opposition to apartheid. However, his solution for the eradication of apartheid is a liberal, reformist and unworkable solution. In the light of White intrasigence in apartheid South Africa, one fact remains clear, the fact that the oppressed in South must not hesitate to bury the hatchet in the heads of their enemies who will not listen to reason.

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