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The Concept of Place in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus

Introduction

The worldview of any artist is determined in a large measure by that artist's perception and responses to a recognizable landscape. Bill Ashcroft et al. have observed that the concern with place is "a major feature of post-colonial literatures" because in once colonized territories, the "special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (1989: 8). The relationship between self and place is even more crucial in contexts such as apartheid South Africa where the majority black population was systematically denied access to land and identity by a formidable machinery of oppression rooted in apartheid ideology. The questions that readily come to mind are: How will a sensitive poet like Brutus respond to a South Africa operating on the ideology of apartheid? Will the poet celebrate landscape features in pure romantic overtones or will these same features constitute in themselves and in the poetry an artistic statement against the politics of segregation? This paper seeks to show that for Dennis Brutus the landscape of South Africa serves as a multifaceted metaphor for the liberation of the black population. In effect, natural spaces in the poetry hinge upon the desire to be liberated and the poet's revolutionary posture promotes a special relationship between him and South Africa. A post-colonial reading underscores the fact that this relationship is shaped by the particular dynamics between two colonized "others": the poet-*persona* and the land. But first things first, what is place?

Place is a concept that is so deeply entrenched in culture that a straightforward definition of it is almost impossible. However, we will consider some definitions as they relate to this paper. Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* asserts that place has a physical form: a landscape often understood as scenery perceived by seeing (9). *The*

Oxford Dictionary of Geography on its part, defines place as “a particular point on the earth’s surface; an identifiable location for a situation imbued with human values” (327). For Martin Heidegger, “to-be-in” is to belong to one’s environment, to identify with it, so to speak. It equally means to be interested in the beings of one’s surrounding (16). According to Yi-Fu Tuan, places presuppose rootedness in a locality and an emotional commitment to it (151). These definitions underscore the naturalistic (defining physical features) and existential (responses to place) qualities of place. Place then, is not just a location but also a particular one imbued with “human values.”

As noted before, we adopt a multidisciplinary approach in our analysis. This is simply because place is a concept that operates at the crossroads of current social, political, economic and environmental issues. Geography situates humans in place and offers us an opportunity to see their contextual responses. In postcolonial theory, place is set against the concept of space as territory. It transcends the boundaries of land to encompass issues of identity, love and mobility as Brutus’ poetry portrays. These two approaches delineate place as a unit where human experience and physical form are fused together in the vision of the poet of revolt to create a unitary concept.

Place as Nature and Existence in Brutus’s Poetry

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

Land is the basis of all national feelings. When a people’s land is taken away, the basis of their being is removed. That is why many countries are named by their lands [...] At other times people are named after the language they speak. But it is impossible for a common language to develop without a common territory... (*Writers* 108)

In the poetry of Dennis Brutus, the point of departure is the land of South Africa. The poet introduces us to the physical environment equally delineating the land as a means of livelihood for the bulk of the population. The poetry further speaks of the land as the place

where the flora and fauna flourish, where people have buried their ancestors. In this case, land can be seen as relationship. We find the poet displaying a deep attachment to his country, an attachment that has informed and continues to inform his work. It is an attachment that is almost spiritual, as Ngugi observes again in another context: "The land, the soil has got a lot of effect on the people [...] It is more than the material; it is not just because of its economic possibilities, it is almost akin to the spiritual" (quoted by Killam 123). This special relationship between the African people and the land might be the *raison-d'être* of the different liberation wars fought on the continent. It also enables us to understand why the issue of land or land use is given prominence in many of the charters of liberation movements.

According to Ashcroft et al., place is also a palimpsest, a kind of parchment, on which successive generations have inscribed and re-inscribed the process of history (1995 326). African history and its antecedents inform Brutus, with the specific historical experiences of South Africa becoming the poetry. This lays the basis of the revolutionary posture of the poet. The knowledge of the history and culture of the people thus enables the man of revolt to give "soul" to that specific geographical entity. As Emmanuel Obiechina notes: "no-one gives soul to something he does not understand, something he does not fully appreciate and does not know, because soul is the ultimate affirmation of the reality that cannot die" (8).

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

The first poem in the collection *A Simple Lust* (1973), entitled "A Troubadour, I Traverse my Land," is directly related to the poet's desire to know more about his country and to bring this knowledge to his countrymen in particular and others in general. In the poem, the troubadour image of the poet, "the stubborn and even foolish knight-errant

on a quest, in the service of a loved one" (cited by Wastberg 98), is developed. This image of the poet confirms Brutus as a poet of the "open road" – one who "traverse(s) all his land/exploring her wide flung parts with zest." The verb "traverse" immediately brings to mind the idea of travelling the whole width and breadth of the country, "her wide flung parts," and at the same time underscores the arduousness of the task, given that there are "those who have banned inquiry and movement" in his country. Yet the poet's delight to explore his land, especially "her secret thickets" is revealed in the word "zest." This opening poem thus confirms the view that the poet is interested in his land not only from a socio-political standpoint but also from an emotional one.

In "The Beauty of my Land Peers Warily," the natural landscape of South Africa is the focus. The speaker is on the road, observing the scenery as he drives round the country. Brutus, in this poem as in others of this nature, employs the *persona* of the privileged traveller to give us vivid pictures of the South African landscape. The title of the poem is evocative of a beauty that cannot be fully appreciated because of certain inhibitions: the restrictions under apartheid. Yet, "the palisading trees," "the hilly slopes," "the tree-fenced roads," "the rippling corn," capture the eye of the traveller as he comes in full view of them in the night-light. The exquisiteness of the terrain is further underlined through the use of sound devices of alliteration, assonance and rhyme. The /l/ sound recurs in words like "land," "warily," "hilly," "palisading," "slopes," while the /p/ sound occurs in words like "palisading," "presence," "pacing," "pools" and "ripping" among others. The /i/ and /u:/ sounds recur in words like "warily," "palisades," "hilly," "beauty" and "pools," "soothing," "aloofly," respectively. The poem also lends itself to a regular rhyme pattern of /abbacddceffe/. Such quatrain rhyming delineates the speaker's perception of his land as a place of perfect beauty. Moreover, the deep attachment to the place is brought out in the line "I sense her presence pacing sinuously." The verb "sense" connotes an intimate spiritual attachment to the land. It equally betrays a kind of male/female relationship developed at length in other poems.

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

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

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

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

captivating beauty drains away the speaker's "frantic and frustrated sorrow" especially with the awareness that there is a certain "charm / that graces this [otherwise] distraught and mourning land." The loveliness of the lake, and its surrounding greenery "pulps out anger's rancid ooze" from the speaker's heart and further acts as a balm that "eases and erases all-hurts." This poem, in the tradition of the baroque, expresses a desire for the hermetic retreat of the pastoral tradition, especially as the green world of the poem offers warmth and acts as healing unction to a soul conscious of the reality of South African strife and despair, as we find in the exclamatory line "Oh! Lacerating land." The land is being torn to pieces by the forces of occupation, yet there is intimation of a deep and consistent relationship existing between her and the speaker. This consistency is emphasized by the long vowel sounds giving a drawn out, almost breath-taking melody to the poem, in words like "green," "seeps," "deep," "weeping," "streams," "charms," "graces," "oozes," "erases," "eases." Even the poem's intricately designed structure of four lines per stanza suggests a certain perfection that is observable in the physical environment described in the poem.

"Landscape of my Young World" (SL 131), reminisces in Browningsque tradition about the beginnings of the poet-speaker's life as a child. The poem captures the first point of that entry into the world in its immediacy and total situation. The location is Port Elizabeth, in South Africa, with its poignant physical features of "heart-breaking hill-sides" and "green slopes." Its flora of "aloes" and "grey-greening dreaming firs" is quite inescapable. The adjective, "heart-breaking" is used positively to emphasize a fascination with this delightful background. The word "dreaming" equally conjures up the Elysian nature of these physical features. These carefully selected qualifiers create an inescapable atmosphere of alluring charm and tenderness. It is an atmosphere further reinforced by the rhythmic nature of the lines in the long vowelled /i:/ in "greening Eunice Ngongkum" "dreaming" and the alliterative /l/ and /h/ in words like "landscape," "world," "land," "hills," "huts," "heart-breaking," "hillsides" and "slopes." This constant image of a lovely and appealing countryside has built up in the poet-speaker, "a rebellious walling of reserve" against the forces that "lace-

rate" this otherwise splendid land. Many of the poems that describe the environment of South Africa demonstrate the naturalness and beauty of the surrounding in spite of the factors inimical to the welfare of the people and by extension, of the milieu. John Lent has observed that in Brutus' poetry that describes the landscape of South Africa, the idea is to use landscape imagery to transmute emotional reality (qtd. in McLuckie 107). Lent seems to be suggesting that landscape is relationship in the sense in which the elemental landscape images used in the poems serve to emphasize the connectedness of human beings and the landscape they are born to.

One can from these examples draw the following conclusions: Brutus, in poems describing the physical environment of South Africa, consistently employs sound devices of alliteration, assonance, rhyming patterns, repetitions and fairly regular stanza patterns in conjunction with visual imagery. These devices do not only delineate a thorough knowledge of its topography but also show a particular attachment to this land, which takes "precedence over his other loves" (2). At the same time, the painting of such vivid landscapes evokes a corresponding psychological landscape; the frustration, anger and sorrow at seeing this beautiful country, in the hands of racist usurpers.

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

In the sunlight
in the roads along the sea
they sell the pale-green streaked and patterned watermelon
with its smooth and tepid skin;
blue Algerian sky and blue Mediterranean
and by Clifton, Sea Point and the Cape. (139)

Clifton, Sea Point and the Cape are place names in South Africa and we find them evoked here and integrated into the temporal and spatial experiences of the poet. This same pattern of associating the landscape with the poet's feelings occurs in Part 7 of "For Chief." Here, we are expressively told that the mere mention of place names like "Fietas or Woodstock or Gelvandale" brings anxiety to many South African activists reminding them of their responsibility and commitment.

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

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

Dancing as a way of celebration is supposed to be graceful and appealing, but we are told that these characters "drum the earth with their boots." The word "boots" connotes the ubiquitous police force terrorizing the blacks. The images "growl" and "sniff" demonstrate the bestiality of the apartheid system. In effect, the poem suggests that apartheid is inhuman because it thrives on the destruction of lives. A celebration of victory by the whites is reduced by the poet to a mere exhibition of the "primitiveness and ferocity" of an oppressive system. Another way in which Brutus distances himself from the system in the poem is by the use of pronouns: it is "they," "they" and "theirs" as against "us" and "ours." The "us" refers to the downtrodden, the group

with which the poet identifies. Such identification enables him to explore and explain the historical and social background of this suffering group. Their struggle is his and the images of that struggle become his poetry. Hence in "A Troubadour...", the "unarmed thumb" as symbol is "deliberately drawn from the salute of the African Congress, which at one stage was a thumbs-up signal" (cited in Pieterse 103). In the poem "At a Funeral," the colours "black, green and gold" at the beginning of the poem, are colours of the African National Congress flag, the main resistance movement against racism in South Africa. The anthem of the ANC becomes the music of the poem, "In my part of the world." The word "Africa" repeated in this poem identifies the dispossessed as a united people, fighting against an odious system. It equally depicts their love for their land and signals their determination to see it totally liberated. The technique used here as in many of the poems in the volume *Stubborn Hope* (1978), produces a deceptive sense of simplicity of the poetic statement. In the poem cited above, the reader is led to focus his attention on the connotations of the word, "Africa" and not unto the poem as artifice. The importance of what "Africa" is to the poet and his group is what is paramount.

Brutus authenticates ideas in his poetry through allusion to South African history. The footnotes accompanying some occasional poetry testify to this. For instance, "At a Funeral" is in memory of Velencia Majombozi who died shortly after qualifying as a doctor. "For a Dead African" is about John Nangoza Jebe shot by the police in a Good Friday procession in Port Elizabeth, 1956. "For Chief" is a tribute to Chief Albert John Luthuli, winner of the Nobel Prize for peace. In *Salutes and Censures* (1982), documentary techniques such as maps, photographs, newspaper cuttings and montage techniques are used to authenticate themes.

Important historical events also act as metaphors in the poetry. Janet MacArthur observes: "Brutus experiments with art as a means of transcending the nightmare of colonial history [...] [His] beautiful, self-contained poetic icons are never historyless; history oozes, seeps into them" (qtd. in McLuckie 82). The Sharpeville and Soweto massacres of the sixties and seventies in South Africa for instance, constitute poetic icons in some of the poems. In "The Sun on this Rubble

after Rain," Sharpeville – (the town where on March 21, 1967, sixty-seven black and coloured people, protesting against the pass laws, were shot dead by the South African police, and several others wounded) – becomes a verb, functioning at the initial position in the line, "Sharpevilled to spear points for revenging." Formed from the name of the town, the verb becomes an expression of the revolt of the oppressed. In the poem "Sharpeville," the latter symbolizes the reality of oppression in the South Africa: "it epitomized oppression / and the nature of a society / more clear than anything else." But for the Blacks, "Sharpeville" delineates the determination to fight for freedom: "And remember the unquenchable will for freedom / Remember the dead / and be glad" (SH 63).

The death of the sixty-seven in the Soweto massacres is not a waste but a part of the struggle for freedom as the poem, "The Dark Lanes of Soweto" portrays. Brutus elevates the dead here by the technique of extrapolation – the blacks are not only people dying but are people dying for a cause. In this sense then, the people are not covered into silence but we are told that "[t]he lust of freedom stubbornly survives / like a smouldering defiant flame – / And the spirit of Steve Biko moves easily" (SC 10). Steve Biko, a hero of black resistance was a victim of racist violence. Like the children of Soweto, his death will "not be forgotten / their lives will purchase our freedom."

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

“raddled” and “undiscerning” point to insensitive policies, characteristic of apartheid South Africa.

The effects of this wanton destruction of the land is beautifully captured in “Erosion: Transkei” (SL 16). The title of this poem lends itself to a double interpretation: erosion as a simple issue of geological destruction, and erosion as the topography of politics. The inimical development policies of apartheid have eroded the lives of the people. In effect, the Group Areas Act, enacted by the South African regime in which blacks were forced into Bantustans to encourage separate ethnic development, informs the poem. Transkei was one of those homelands reserved for the largely Xhosa speaking population. Its natural environment is near desert but erosion of the natural landscape has been reinforced by overpopulation: “Under green drapes the scars scream, / red wounds wail soundlessly / Beg for assuaging, satiation (SL 16). Evidence of the ravages suffered by the land comes across in the images of “scars scream.” The phrase “under green drapes” refers to the usual impression given by the racist government to the world that separate development is good but the poet notes that under this deceptive “greenness,” “scars scream” and “red wounds wail.” Brutus here succeeds in making a symbol out of landscape to buttress the destructive nature of apartheid. The personification used together, with the hard consonants /sk/ in “scars scream” highlight devastation and a disfigurement that is unnatural because caused by man.

The country is now complete desert, a sterile plain as we find in “For us, Only the Bareness of Existence” (SH 2). The poem is a terse comment on the predicament of the oppressed group, meant to eke out a living in an otherwise rich nation of possibilities and alternatives, “one hillock on the fertile plain.” The use of the pause in the first line is effective in drawing attention onto the group being talked about. The phrase “For us,” which occurs at the initial position of the first line of the poem, is set off from the rest of the line by a comma. The “us” refers to those with whom the speaker identifies and for whom, ironically, a country of wealth is nothing but “a Siberia of avarice.” Siberia, a stretch of desert land in Russia, symbolically captures the country from the perspective of the oppressed group (Blacks) for whom an

otherwise rich country breeds nothing but poverty, consequent upon apartheid. The juxtaposition in the poem effectively underlines the economic gap existing between the downtrodden and the Whites – “festivities” is balanced against “barrenest,” while “hillock” is contrasted with “sterile plain.” The briefness of the poem, written in unrhymed couplets, further suggests the inequalities existing between the haves and the have-nots.

Through vivid and concrete landscape images, Brutus succeeds in manipulating the reader into the psychological reality of a menacing and potentially dangerous environment. According to John Lent, Brutus forces “the horror in his home land out into the relief of our consciousness and this, more than simplicity or rhetoric, is the real political achievement” (qtd. in McLuckie 110). Our argument here is that place as a kind of metaphor, becomes a vehicle of communicating an idea of revolt for the poet. Furthermore, poetic devices of alliteration, allusions and balanced sentences reinforce the theme – the asperity and hardness of the poet’s world. In “A Tribute for Steve Biko” (SC 10), Brutus evokes the picture of a very desolate landscape characterized by “dust,” “silt,” “arid air,” “harsh in the throat / hurtful to the eyes.” The speaker notes that the landscape is studded with “crude Teutonic towns / with their ominous echoes” like “– Hamburg, Berlin, Hanover –.” The word “Teutonic” refers to the English, German and Dutch races that came to South Africa, bringing along with them their original ethnic names now imposed on the South African landscape. Therefore, just as the geographical landscape of this country is eroded and rendered arid, the history is also distorted by the imposition of Teutonic names. But Steve Biko, the man to whom this poem is dedicated, knew, and was deeply affected by all of these alien impositions because “their roads he traversed / they fired him with resolve / and smouldering anger”. Biko’s anger is at the deliberate apartheid policy of eroding not only the physical but also the historical landscape of South Africa. As we have observed before, Dennis Brutus, like Steve Biko, is at pains to accept the systematic destruction of his country by apartheid as these words portray it: “It is a suffering people, and a suffering land, assaulted, violated, raped, whatever you will, tremendously beautiful and I feel a great tenderness for it”

(Thompson 28). South Africa is viewed as a woman whom Brutus loves but who for the moment is "sexually violated" by the racist government in that country.

Many critics have been concerned about Brutus' use of "tenderness" as poetic focus as quoted above. R. N. Egudu, commenting on the use of the word "tenderness" in the poem "Somehow We Survive," has this to say: "tenderness is used as a weapon to fight against apartheid [but this] does not mean that Brutus is not appreciative of the ugliness of the situation that prevails in South Africa. The kind of action Brutus is concerned with is more psychological than physical" (134).

John F. Povey has also observed that in the poetry of Brutus, "the reality of apartheid is made all the more evident through the contrast with the emotional assurance of the poet, rising above the threat of constant harassment" (44) in the lines:

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

To my mind, tenderness is used in this poem and in most of Brutus' poetry firstly, as an indication of the poet's attachment to his country for, as L. Castello notes, "everyone has a place to love" (62). Secondly, it functions as a strategy of psychological survival against the formidable machinery of apartheid, sustaining the poet's faith in the success of the revolution. Brutus needs the emotions of tenderness, of love, so that he can better appreciate the land he is fighting to liberate. This love for his country comes across as love for a woman, a mistress. In fact the poet has achieved a kind of symbiosis in talking of the human mistress and the country. This is what he says: "I achieved magically the simultaneous writing for South Africa and a particular woman [...] It was in the process of writing that I discovered one could do the simultaneous statement; which I have done ever since" (Lindfors 1974: 49).

In Brutus' poetry, South Africa is raised to the level of woman. She is depicted as a beautiful, cold-hearted individual, whom the male loves very much, but whose love is not requited. Brutus makes no secret of his love for his country. *A Simple Lust*, the title of one of the collections of his poetry, illuminates this love relationship. His love for his country is a simple lust; an image emphasizing the relationship between poetry and the poet's "cause," that of seeking freedom, as "basic a need as making love" (Thompson 76). The consistent personification of the land, the use of sexual imagery and the lyricism characteristic of love poetry can thus be understood as devolving from this attitude. The poem, "A Troubadour..." depicts the poet as the medieval troubadour, who explores and investigates the land, knight-errant on a quest in the service of a loved one. The beloved in this case is none other than the country. The troubadour image is therefore central to our understanding of the relationship between the *persona* in the poem and the land.

Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre says that in the troubadour image, Brutus expresses his devotion to a suffering land (286), while Arthur Ravenscroft notes that Brutus is able to convey "the general conditions of apartheid experience [...] through the conceit of the troubadour, celebrating his passionate love of his country as a woman whose body and spirit he tries to make himself one with, despite the violation they both suffer" (qtd. in McLuckie 40). In effect, the medieval troubadour was a knight who offered his life for the sake of and to the service of a love one – a lady-mistress, whose unattainable love was often praised in poetry. This image from its medieval setting has been appropriated to represent Brutus' position as a non-white poet in apartheid South Africa. As he explains: "This is an image I use in my work, because it seems to me a true kind of shorthand for something which is part of my life and my pursuit of justice in a menacing South Africa" (Wastberg: 98). The poet justifies the oft-noted ambivalence in the troubadour image in his poetry:

He [the troubadour] was first of all a soldier, he was a knight, he went to battle; secondly, he made up music, poetry – he fought and he sang. His third element was that he tended to have a reputation as a

lover. And these are three elements that merge in my own poetry [...]. It's poetry [...] about a permanent love affair, a relationship between me and my country described in male-female terms. (qtd. in Alvarez-Pereyre 289)

The relationship between country and poet is henceforth defined and analyzed in lover-beloved terms and the beloved is such a powerful ideal that the thought of her can make him sing and produce beautiful poetry. She inspires him to act and his love and devotion are so strong that he is willing to lay down his life for her.

In "A Troubadour, I Traverse my Land," love/sex imagery abounds. The speaker as lover delights in "exploring," and "probing" the "secret thickets" of the country-mistress "with an amorous hand." The gerunds "exploring" and "probing" occurring at an initial position in their respective lines signal the speaker's ultimate loving desire to "know" and "plunder" the mistress' body as in an act of sexual assault. The intimacy the speaker will like to see existing between them is vividly captured in the line "I sing and fare, person to loved-one pressed." The speaker seems to be consoled just by being "pressed" to his loved one, even with the realization that his love yet to earn him a "mistress-favour." As in many other poems of this nature, the use of the possessive "my" emphasizes not only the intimate relationship but actually anticipates the problems the speaker would encounter once he understands that the land is no longer his.

In "Erosion: Transkei," the land-mistress is willing and ready to succumb to the sexual possession of the lover – "Dear my land, open for my possessing." This response from the mistress increases the lover's "sensual delight" which mounts in anticipation of the moment of "possessing." In the phrase "Dear my land," the affective "dear" occurring at the initial position emphasizes the intimacy between the lover and his loved one. Yet, the juxtaposition one finds in the poem such as "sensual delight/fury," "love/pain" calls attention to the fact that the mistress is not yet totally his because another ravages her. These tensions in the verse qualify the tensions existing in the apartheid context. The speaker is unable to enjoy his love because of the presence of intimidating forces. Poetic form adds meaning with the fairly

regular rhyme scheme and the alliterative /m/ in the line "mounts, and mixed with fury is amassing," bringing to mind the desired harmony between poet and country.

The phenomenon of displacement is crucial in our understanding of a sense of place in Brutus' poetry. Displacement is a condition that befalls the writer of revolt. Dennis Brutus, in the years before the dismantling of apartheid, was exiled from his country. The question that comes to mind is the following: how does the artist whose work shows a marked attachment to his place of origin respond to the issue of displacement? Will his absence from his country not influence his commitment to the "cause"? Janet MacArthur says this about Brutus: "Exile from South Africa is often presented as a prison-house of the spirit [...] Relief comes only in the attempt to reconstitute and express devotion to South Africa in poetry, his poetry thereby becoming a response to a new uncertain life and identity induced by exile" (qtd. in McLuckie 71).

Some of the "After Exile" poems in *A Simple Lust* and in the other volumes of poetry written after exile reveal the poet's nostalgia for his homeland and a systematic refusal to be "lured" by the "charms" of his countries of exile. In "Country and Continent" (SL 167), the possessive hold South Africa has on the speaker is described through a mythological allusion – the succubus. In effect, the succubus was believed to be a devil assuming a female body so as to possess men in their sleep.

This mythological reference, the use of images of violent sexual possession, along with structural repetitions and repetition of ideas in the poem, heighten the effect of the all-embracing hold that his country has on him. It is a "consuming fire," driving the speaker to quest for freedom, it also reminds him that in the midst of "charms" and other "allurements," the final destination is South Africa: "Love whose uninterrupted urge / drags on the now / sucks on my energies / and steers me homeward to the familiar nest" (168). Because the landscape of South Africa has remained familiar to him, the speaker in "I am an alien...3 (SL 121), cannot consider himself at home in any context other than South Africa. Bernth Lindfors observes that "[t]he exile poet

was now at liberty to wander the world, but no matter where he went, his thoughts kept returning to his native land" (1974: 169).

The general observation, one can make regarding Brutus' poetry of exile is that, the principal mood is one of nostalgia as the poet looks back to a time past when he had a direct touch with his homeland. The evocation of a closeness with his country is evident and as he roams from country to country, the separation is a wound in his soul, "the wound of knowledge / knowledge of my powerlessness" (AT 3), and becomes more depressing when he considers his inability to effect quick and positive changes from the distance of exile, "as the dyings continue."

Poetry of revolt then becomes the medium of presenting, through elemental landscape images, different facets of the landscape as well as the poet's response to these. The sense of a dislocation from a physical "homeland" has not only generated feelings of nostalgia but has also brought about a creative tension in the poetry evident in the contrastive portrayal of the country of exile and the poet's home country. In poems dealing with the theme of exile, place becomes the concomitant of difference, the continual reminder of the separation, as well as signalling the urgency of the task of the exile.

In this paper, we looked at place in Dennis Brutus' poetry. A sense of place is evident in knowledge of and response to the particular locality of South Africa, which identifies the poetry. The poet, whether in his country or abroad, continues to display an intimacy with the land as we have seen. In this way he seems to agree with Ben Okri that a definite "relation exists between environment and what it does to you inside" (qtd. in Wilkinson 81). Indeed, it is this special attachment that fuels the determination to see the land liberated from the throes of apartheid.

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