

**FORMS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE:  
GUY BUTLER'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Guy Butler (1918-2001) was one of South Africa's most prolific English writers. His work extended across several genres. He has hitherto been seen by his critics in terms of neat binaries: Marxists versus liberals, Negritudinalists versus 'colonials'. In this study it is argued that a modification of these polarised positions is necessary. Butler's own position is simultaneously one of Oxford scholar and Karoo son, engaged with both the challenges and difficulties of 'local habitation'. By testing these oppositions against the concepts of 'past significance' and 'present praxis' I suggest that Butler is neither simply transcendental nor socially committed, neither simply international nor local. In taking advantage of a 'freer' perspective succeeding the 'struggle' decades in South Africa, I suggest a more inclusive re-evaluation of Butler as both artist and public figure serving an inclusive 'imagined community'.

Chapter One focuses on Butler's plays, both those published and – for the first time – those unpublished, and examines the texts in the context, locally, of a repressive apartheid regime and, internationally, against the background of the Cold War. What emerges is a writer whose views were neither exclusive nor sectarian, and who was an outspoken critic of injustice, wherever this occurred. Butler's hitherto undervalued contribution to the development of serious drama as an art form in South Africa is given prominence.

Chapter Two deals with Butler's poetry. For all his intervention in public debate, it is his poetic expression that reveals his most profound insights. His attempts to "take root" in a local habitation are scrutinised, and it is argued that the

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poetry has been misunderstood by many of his critics, especially those on the Left. Besides his “compulsion to belong”, the study explores the twin search of Butler for an African synthesis through his utilisation of the Apollo-Dionysus paradigm, and his ‘eschatological imperative’. While attempting to adapt European forms and sensibilities to African experience his poetry – it is argued – also seeks to heal the divisions of a fragmented South African society.

In Chapter Three Butler’s cultural projects are examined. It is argued that his cultural narrative is not one of separation but of integration premised (in his own words) on a “common humanity”. Several projects are scrutinised in the context of post-1960 Republican South Africa, where National Party policies attempted to impose crushing political and social hegemonies on the English community as well as on all communities of colour. While Butler’s immediate aims were to ensure the survival of the English language and English cultural identity, the scope of his cultural projects reveals that his ‘imagined community’ extended to all South Africans: his vision was not one of elite cultural separation, but of egalitarian integration. Butler’s achievements in his many and varied forms of service are considered as having contributed to the formation of a new, democratic society in South Africa.

**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any other university for a degree.

Signature of student:: ..... Date: 15-09-2003

Signature of supervisor:..... Date: 15-09-2003

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## **DEDICATION**

To the memory of my father and my mother.

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## INTRODUCTION

What is the defining quality of Guy Butler's literary work? When he writes in heroic terms of the 1820 Settlers' struggles on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Colony is he endorsing a systematic appropriation of land by white settlers, as critics such as Orkin<sup>1</sup> have charged, or is he genuinely attempting to create myth in the South African context to serve a greater cultural project – something akin to W. B. Yeats's Cuchulain, Aengus, and Fergus? Is Butler's stated intention of synthesising Dionysian vigour with Apollonian sensibility through 'transcendence' really possible, or is this simply an excuse to evade the responsibility of acknowledging and confronting the legacy of colonialism since it mythologises and thus depersonalises experience and historical event? Is a separation of 'politics' and 'culture' in fact possible, as Butler's literary approach would seem to suggest, or are these principles and practices inextricably intertwined? Furthermore, is it an oversimplification to think in terms of such neat binaries as most of Butler's critics have done hitherto – Marxists against Liberals, Negritudinalists against colonialists – or is a modification of these polarised positions necessary to an understanding of Butler's work? All of these questions are peculiarly apt to Guy Butler's contribution which I see as indissolubly 'art' or 'community service'. I shall take as a starting point a polarised view of Butler as an international Oxford scholar and purveyor of a transcendent Arnoldian tradition, or a Karoo son who is engaged with the problems of his local habitation and has 'taken root' in the African soil. By testing these oppositions against the concepts of 'past significance' and 'present praxis' or genesis and impact, I shall suggest that Butler is neither simply international nor simply local, neither simply transcendent nor simply socially committed. Or

perhaps he is both. My point is that no easy dichotomies are able to grasp Butler's complexity in the character of his achievement. This achievement is voluminous and diverse in its output, and spans the period from the Second World War to Butler's death in South Africa on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2001. The output coincides, locally, with the years of apartheid and, internationally, the years of the Cold War. It includes plays, poems, short stories, volumes of autobiography, critical essays, articles and commentaries, and a lifetime involvement in cultural and educational projects in the service of 'English in Africa'.

This study confines itself to examining Butler's two recognised art forms – his plays and his poetry – in the context of his commitment to habitation: a complicated concept and actuality that is summarised in the trope of the white English-speaking South African taking root in Africa in search of a 'common humanity'. Whereas Butler – like several other South African writers – experienced atomised attacks and defences of his work in the struggle decades of the 1970s and 1980s, I wish to take advantage of the somewhat 'freer' new decade of the 1990s to suggest a more inclusive re-evaluation of Butler as both artist and public figure. My focus on the plays and the poetry at the expense of short stories and autobiographies is not simply dictated by convenience or space. It is my view that Butler, for all his intervention in public debate, reveals his most profound insights in the poetic mode. His critical articles, radio and newspaper commentaries, for example, 'hit notice' not in academic theory but in popular reminders of cultural divide and the need for healing. His tales – collected as *Tales from the Old Karoo* (1989) – do not successfully manage the transfer of poetic intensity to the genre of the short story. Butler temperamentally is not a Herman Charles Bosman; his stories remain anecdotal without the surprise or suggestion possible to the short-



story form. Similarly his autobiographies reveal little conscious commitment to an art genre; rather, they are honest testimony. Like his critical articles, the autobiographies lend insight to his plays and poetry as well as to the difficulties – I return to my earlier point – of how an English-speaking South African finds ‘habitation’ in Africa. I utilise writings outside the plays and poems, accordingly, as contributing context to understanding Butler’s perceptions – his imaginative understandings – of commitment to his being a South African.

My argument has to take issue with the Marxist-Liberal divide of the ‘interregnum’. While I have the advantage of hindsight, my argument cannot be conclusive. It is a provocation to revisit Butler with revaluations of literary-critical schemas that were not so much derided as ignored in the tense politics of the 1980s. In the case of Butler it is, I think, impossible to understand or appreciate his contribution without at least granting credence to his own predilection not for material determinism, but for a Christian eschatology. Before we discuss this we must remember that, even during the struggle years, the Christian spirit remained strong in South Africa. A next step is to remind ourselves that this country has never been either ‘Africa’ or the ‘West’. In fact, such divisions – encouraged in the climate of apartheid and the Cold War – have been seen to be abstractions that do not fully account for ‘lived experience’. I wish to restore to Butler’s work something of its lived experience: writing plays and poetry, embarking on ‘English’ projects, under the ambitions of Afrikaner political hegemony.

. . .

Guy Butler was born on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1918 in Cradock in the Cape Province whilst the Great European War (1914-1918) was drawing to its close. Ironically, within two decades he himself would respond to a clarion call to fight in yet another

Armageddon. As we shall see later his involvement in the Second World War (1939-1945) would have a profound influence not only on his literary work but also on his philosophy of life. His boyhood and youth were spent in the Karoo where the unique topography, landscapes, and 'landshapes' would exert a far-reaching influence on his writing, whether consciously or subliminally.

He attended Rhodes University obtaining a Master of Arts with distinction which earned him the Queen Victoria Scholarship for post-graduate studies. But before he could take up his scholarship, Butler felt compelled to respond to the call to arms by General Smuts and the Commonwealth Allied Forces in 1940 when the totalitarian Axis powers were sweeping all before them in the European and North African theatres of war. He enlisted as Sapper in the 9<sup>th</sup> Field Company and was engaged in active service in Egypt, Syria, Italy, and the United Kingdom. As a result of these experiences, his first volume of poetry, *Stranger to Europe* (1952), contained numerous war poems of considerable impact. In the second volume of his autobiography, *Bursting World* (1983), he describes his traumatic impressions of the horrors of war including the maiming of his brother Jeffrey. Combined with an innately pacifist predisposition which he had inherited from the Quaker background of his father Ernest, these influences would direct his writings and his philosophy of life into a moderate liberal-humanist approach. It was an approach that would, at the same time, reflect an intense distrust of modernist and existential thinking which Butler regarded as iconoclastic and which, after the Second World War, had emerged in a fragmented and broken European society.

After Butler had demobilised as a Captain in the Army Education Services in 1945 he was able to accept a scholarship which allowed him to attend

Brasenose College in Oxford. It was at this time that the tensions between European and African frames of reference, between adherence to humanist principles and belief in a transcendental scale of values, between an egalitarian democratic society and hierarchical structures began to manifest themselves in the complicated nexus of oppositions that would constitute one of the impelling forces in Butler's work.

Upon his return to South Africa in 1948 Butler accepted a lectureship in the English Department of the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1951 he moved to Rhodes University where he secured a Senior Lectureship in the same year he completed his first play, *The Dam*, which was awarded First Prize by the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Foundation. His appointment as Professor and Head of the Department of English at Rhodes University in 1952 heralded the beginning of a lifelong association with that University in particular, and the communities of Grahamstown and the Eastern Cape in general.

When the Afrikaner National Party triumphed at the polls in 1948, English-speaking South Africans initially saw little cause for concern: the National Party had indeed gained power, but on a minority of votes. It was a widely-held view in United Party ranks in the 1950s that that party would regain power. Despite the fact that the United Party was defeated at the polls again in 1953, little seemed to shake the English establishment in South Africa during the fifties. But South African English-speakers were in for a shock in the 1960s. Despite its tenuous hold on political power in the 1948, 1953, and 1958 general elections, the National Party with persistence pursued an anti-Commonwealth, anti-colonial, anti-liberal and frankly racist policy. While black South Africans experienced the hard edge of

provocative discrimination, even terror, English speakers witnessed, step by step, the severing of links with the mother country and the Commonwealth. The increasing political hegemony of the National Party together with its use of severe political repression accounted for the demise of the Torch Commando and the Liberal Party – two political platforms of the English-speaking South African who was left with no political power base other than a lame official Opposition and a small and vigorous, but largely ineffective, group of Progressives. Rather, the rival nationalisms of Afrikaner and African came into bitter conflict after the Sharpeville shootings of 1960: a conflict from which the English-speaking South African was largely excluded. Bannings, acts of sabotage, detention without trial, emergency regulations, curtailment of civil liberties, curbs on press freedom, and stringent censorship of literature and art, all became common features of the two decades succeeding Sharpeville - the 'dead sixties' and the politically 'monolithic seventies' – and continued with unabated intensity in the Tricameral era of damage limitation politics introduced by P. W. Botha of the National Party. English-speaking South Africans of liberal persuasion were relegated to the status of political spectators. It was in this period of repression in South Africa that Guy Butler produced most of his literary and cultural texts.

Critical interpretations of Butler's texts have differed widely over the past forty years. In considering his work it appears that critics have ranged themselves at either end of a spectrum with apparently little common ground. At one end of the spectrum are those who see in Butler a transcendental, educated private voice in the liberal-humanist tradition, a poet of the imagination searching for synthesis in a lyrical voice that owes much to Wordsworth and the Romantic tradition. Generally, these critics have focused almost exclusively on Butler's poetry,

ignoring or overlooking his contribution in other genres and his cultural projects. At the other end of the critical spectrum are those critics who view Butler antagonistically against the 'teeth' of materialist dialectics, accusing him of failing to engage sufficiently the political and social problems of his milieu.

In the former view one of the earliest appraisals of Butler's poetry by Miller and Sergeant (1957) noted that his language has "... an edge and is pleasingly free from the poetic diction which has cramped the style of so many South African would-be poets".<sup>2</sup> The focus on the lyrical aspect of Butler's poetry continued in Hutchings's analysis of Butler's war poems<sup>3</sup> and van der Mescht's close scrutiny of all Butler's poetry,<sup>4</sup> in which he concluded that Butler was in search of essences and a sense of permanence. Bradbrook (1983), Malan (1986), and MacLennan (1992) have continued to evaluate Butler's work from this perspective. Bradbrook sees the chief characteristic of Butler's poetry as the twin virtues of attentiveness and serenity:

The first is an exact and sensitive adaptation to whatever he is looking at...an outward turning....  
The second, counterbalancing this, is serenity, a power to inhibit personal emotions which might distort the fidelity of his art....<sup>5</sup>

MacLennan sees Butler's best work as that which "...tells a profound story of human difficulty strengthened by elusive certainties".<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he sees it as poetry which is intellectually in excess of its romantic fervour; a poetry obsessed with the strength, yet absurdity, of European adaptation to Africa, the seeming incongruity of a European sensibility attempting to find accommodation in the intractability of the African landscape.

MacLennan's evaluation at least highlights the tensions in Butler's poetry as opposed to its "serenity" and "lyricism" which formed the focus of many earlier evaluations. These tensions were further explored by Van Wyk Smith<sup>7</sup> and Coetzee,<sup>8</sup> both of whom analyse Butler's attempts to synthesise the Nietzschean complement of Apollo and Dionysus, the former representing a dispassionate European rationality and the latter an intuitive African passionality in a renewed presentation of the Europe-Africa nexus.

At the other end of the critical spectrum, there are those critics who view Butler's work antagonistically against the 'teeth' of materialist dialectics. Whilst much of this criticism clustered around the period 1989 to 1992 and may have been precipitated by historical and political crisis, the materialist approach has its origins in a scathing attack on "Butlerism" by Kirkwood in 1974 and in a seminal work on commitment poetry by Alvarez-Pereyre<sup>9</sup> in 1979. When contrasting Alan Paton's work of social engagement with the work of Guy Butler, Alvarez-Pereyre made this damning comment:

Butler, on the other hand, seems to have written his study sitting on Sirius or, at least, in a padded room far from the noise and fury of the world. And nothing could contrast more than the conclusions reached by the two authors. There can be little doubt that, beyond the differences of personality and temperament, we have here two very different sets of political attitudes.<sup>10</sup>

It was an argument which would establish the ground for the anti-Butler polemic in the following twenty years, the argument of Butler's failure to engage, directly in his writings, the political and social problems of his milieu. It was an argument to which Marxist and anti-Butler critics would return again and again. Thus Kirkwood in his controversial paper given in 1974 accuses Butler of encouraging a school of thought and set of attitudes – which he

termed “Butlerism” – typifying a colonial and separatist mentality. He argues that Butler displays a marked inability to see the whole of South Africa’s history and culture as he is blinded by a romantic attachment to, and identification with, only part of it. For him, Butler epitomises the disjunction between the belated colonial perspective and changed historical conditions. Butler is castigated for his promotion of the English-speaking South Africans, (the ESSAs), and his attempt to place them metaphorically in the Zuurveld middle ground of a political encounter between Afrikaners and black South Africans is dismissed as inauthentic since, as part of an oppressive white ruling group, the English “...were never in the middle.”

Kirkwood’s argument would form the basis for further future attacks on “Butlerism” from subsequent materialist critics such as Orkin (1991), and, in his earlier work, Klopper (1991), both of whom take issue with the “false consciousness” and “moral ambiguity” of Butlerism. Focusing solely on Butler’s poetry in a comparative study with other Eastern Frontier poets such as Scully and Slater, Klopper arrives at the conclusion that the colonial perspective attains a self-consciousness in Butler’s poetry to the point where “...it signals its own collapse in its self-reflexive awareness of its own mode of existence.”<sup>11</sup>

In one of only two assessments to date of Butler’s dramatic works, Orkin <sup>12</sup> accuses his work of being coloured by a segregationist discourse which favours colonialism since, in Orkin’s view, Butler’s plays seek to naturalise the appropriation and possession of black land by ruling class whites. Although not writing specifically from a Marxist viewpoint, Williams <sup>13</sup> reaches a similar

conclusion in her study of Butler's culture theory, accusing it of being dominated by an ethical rationalisation of colonialism.

More recently, Watson (1994) has entered the debate. He finds Butler critics of the Kirkwood tradition guilty of a limited vision and an over-simplified paradigm in which "...ultimately, those like Alan Paton would seem to be little different from H F Verwoerd", <sup>14</sup> and further contends that they have missed the mark by some considerable distance. In his view the defining principle of Butler's work is not, as some would claim, a rationalisation of colonialism or even a promotion of one sub-culture over another, but a far more fundamental principle – Butler's ambivalence and, at times, opposition to modernity. Watson who, earlier, had attacked the rigid "essentialism" of liberal-humanists such as Paton seems in his own poetry and critical writings to have moved his position from a preference for "becoming" to embracing the immutability and permanence of "being". In defence of Butler he points out that Butler's story is essentially the story of

...a mind, an imagination, exiled in the land of modernity and in a particularly, viciously South African version of that land. <sup>15</sup>

Butler's work records the way in which one man

...acutely aware of the full, comfortless weight of modernity, has tried to mediate between his past inheritance and present disinheritance, and always with one end in view: a kind of homecoming. <sup>16</sup>

Watson has by no means spoken the last word in the debate. In a review of Watson's introductory essay on Butler, Morphet <sup>17</sup> agrees with Watson that a primary driving force in Butler's philosophy is an antipathy to modernism. However, in an attack on Butler he also makes the telling point that, in his opinion, what



Butler could never see was that the promise of modernity to blacks was utterly different to any of the forms in which Butler encountered it; for their grasp of the meaning of modernity was uncompromising. It was synonymous with freedom. At this point Morphet returns to the Kirkwood/Orkin argument that the entire Butler project is premised upon

...a cultural and physical landscape of conquest, dispossession, and domination, not only of blacks but of Afrikaners as well.<sup>18</sup>

Morphet goes further and accuses Watson of recruiting Butler to his own project of assimilation and assertion. The anti-modernist stance which Watson sees in Butler is, Morphet argues, also reflective of Watson's own position as indicated in his *Selected Essays*; a position which favours the essential as opposed to the historical, and being as opposed to becoming. Such debates form the background of my evaluation of Guy Butler.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PLAYS

#### Ravens or Doves?

A word is a wanderer, a raven or dove  
Sent from the ark of the heart to find if  
There be land...

Guy Butler. *The Dam* 1952

There he lies, not even another skeleton  
Nearby for company. No shadow near him, no sound,  
Except a meercat, a kiewiet crying,  
Or once in a year, perhaps, the shadow of a hawk.

Guy Butler. *The Dove Returns* 1955

SHAW: We have broken through the ring of rifles.  
ALETTA: The desert is blessed by a dove.

Guy Butler. *The Dove Returns* 1955

We reach the laager just as the silence  
Takes over from those great black birds;  
And in the silence I hear friend George  
Tell Margaret that the man out there  
Has set his mind on suicide.

Guy Butler. *Richard Gush of Salem* 1982

As is the case of other notable poets of the English language such as John Milton, W. B. Yeats, and, most particularly, T. S. Eliot with whom he has much in common, Guy Butler's playwriting takes second place to his poetry in the general perception of his public. Yet, a case could be made for a greater scrutiny of plays that have much to offer the serious literary critic. Currently we have the mainly disparaging comments of Martin Orkin<sup>1</sup> in his survey of dramatic writing in South Africa, and an early study of considerable detail done, unfortunately, on only half of Butler's plays by Dawid Malan<sup>2</sup> in 1986 when the materialist critics held sway on the South African literary scene. By re-reading Butler's plays already visited by other critics and reading, for the first time, all his unpublished plays through analyses of his authorial intention and, at times, deconstructively, against his apparent intent, I hope to open up some fresh possibilities in the interpretation of Butler's texts while confirming that his texts and his contexts are inextricably connected to the making of his meaning.

Why, it might be questioned, begin with Butler's plays and not his better-known poetry? The plays make an ideal starting point for this study because, in the first instance and contrary to prevailing critical opinion, their scrutiny casts an entirely different light on Butler's willingness to become socially engaged in his writing. This is especially true of the unpublished plays which exist in manuscript form only, as well as those already published which have, however, seldom been performed. In the second instance, their study reveals an artist who was concerned not only with the nebulous realm of the 'transcendental', as has been charged by his antagonists, but one who was also passionately committed to the temporal condition. The plays reveal a writer who was alert to the fluctuations of

political and historical movements and to the manner in which these impinged upon his imagined community.

In all, Guy Butler produced twelve plays, only eight of which have been published. Of these eight, it is significant that half were published at least four years after their first performance. This is, perhaps, indicative of the ambivalent position which they occupy in the minds of both drama critics and the theatre-going public at large. Butler's playwriting spans a period of two decades. His first play, *The Dam*, was written and performed in 1952 and the last of his twelve plays, *Richard Gush of Salem*, was performed in 1970 in commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the landing of the 1820 Settlers. He thus began his playwriting at a time that coincided with the beginning of National Party rule and produced his final play at a point that could be considered the height of apartheid politics in South Africa. At this time the National Party controlled more than a two thirds majority in Parliament and ruled with supreme power.

From an international perspective his creative playwriting period coincided with the emergence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a world superpower and a Cold War period extending from the Berlin blockade of Josef Stalin to the brutal crushing of the Czechoslovakian uprising by Leonid Brezhnev. As we shall see, it is against both local and international historical backgrounds that Butler's plays need to be viewed.

Initially, several problems attend the criticism of Butler's plays. In some

instances manuscript plays are undated and it is thus difficult to place them in sequence. Neither can one proceed with an analysis on the basis of the premiere performance dates of the plays: *Demea*, for example, although written in 1959 was performed for the first time thirty years later (1990) and many plays have never been performed. Publication dates are an even more unreliable guideline: *Richard Gush of Salem*, for example, was first performed in 1970 but published for the first time only in 1982. For the purposes of this study I have chosen to deal with the plays in the chronological order of their writing since this allows for an assessment of stylistic and thematic developments from play to play.

When Butler began writing his first play he was entering into largely uncharted literary waters in terms of a tradition of indigenous drama. In all, no more than a dozen plays, many of them satirical comedies, had appeared in the previous hundred years. Andrew Geddes Bain's *Kaatje Kekkelbek* (1838) was the first piece of known indigenous drama. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the satirical and other comedies of Stephen Black made their appearance. *Love & the Hyphen*, produced in 1908, was followed, in 1910, by *Helena's Hope. Ltd.* and *The Flapper* and *The Uitlanders* both in 1911. Nothing much else in English appeared after these until *The Way Money Goes* (1925) by Bertha Goudvis, and *Dr James Barry* (1932) by Olga Racster and Jessica Grove.

Other than exotic plays from abroad performed by visiting repertory companies from England and the occasional 'imported' play being staged in the 1930s and 1940s by the Bantu Dramatic Society in the Bantu Men's

Social Centre at the south end of Eloff Street, Johannesburg, little further that could be classified 'indigenous' appeared until Madeleine Masson's three plays during the War years, *Tropica* (1939), *Passport to Limbo* (1942), and *Home is the Hero* (1944), and the biblical play *Ruth* (1947) by Jessie Hertslet.

It can be seen that, by comparison with other genres such as the South African novel and South African English poetry, there had hardly been a significant output in works for the theatre from 1838 to 1950, when Butler commenced writing *The Dam*. There were certainly very few, if any, models in South African English theatre written in the "Great Tradition" which could have provided him with precedents upon which to base his aim of producing serious transcendental drama.

What did Butler imply by his use of the term "transcendental drama"? The key to an understanding of the term as he used it is to be found in three important lectures: "An Aspect of Tragedy"<sup>3</sup> delivered as his Inaugural Address, "Poetry, Drama, and Public Taste"<sup>4</sup> and "Soldier Heroes in Corrupt Societies: A Comparison of N. P. van Wyk Louw's *Germanicus* and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*"<sup>5</sup>. These provide the most succinct exposition of Butler's own theory of drama.

In "An Aspect of Tragedy" Butler devotes the first section to an examination of the Aristotelian concepts of 'pity' and 'terror'. These, when they are proper to tragedy, are

...communicated by witnessing a protracted spiritual crisis involving the disintegration (or tearing asunder) of a personality (or self) This is accompanied by a revelation of the reality of evil.<sup>6</sup>

However, the pity and terror proper to tragedy cannot be raised by external means alone. They have to spring

...from internal psychological disaster: not what is happening in the palace at Elsinore, which can be communicated in a thrilling dumb show, but what is happening in the soul of Hamlet which calls for words.<sup>7</sup>

Only in this way will the writer of great tragedy be able to portray convincingly, in the face of evil, the disintegration of his protagonist's personality. This, in turn, will elicit from the audience the emotions of pity and terror.

The second part of Butler's lecture deals with the problem of evil and illustrates how ancient rituals, the liturgical dramas, and the mature tragedies of the Elizabethan age are all concerned with the problem of evil which, in all its manifestations, strikes terror into the heart of man when he comes to the realisation that it constitutes a fundamental aspect of human nature. Butler points out that in Classical or Greek tragedy evil, as a concept per se, does not feature prominently and that this Aristotelian view of tragedy with its focus on plot pervades early English drama as well. Here, tragedy is resultant upon a change of fortune taking the protagonist from prosperity to disaster, rather than a direct confrontation of the protagonist with the forces of evil resulting in his demise.

It is worth noting, at this point, that this is very much in keeping with pre-Renaissance theology in which fourteenth-century man perceived the fall of the hero as a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosmic Fall of Man. The Copernican revolution and concomitant revolution in Renaissance theology would alter these perceptions radically. For the great Elizabethan

playwrights character would become more important than plot. The pity and terror proper to tragedy would be evoked essentially by the exploitation of their characters and not simply through their actions.

The Elizabethan focus on character makes the fall of the protagonist even more convincing. Where this can be ascribed, in Greek tragedy, to an error in judgement (“hamartia”) on the part of the protagonist, in Elizabethan tragedy the protagonists make their decisions in the conscious knowledge that they voluntarily defy the divine order. When the hero succumbs to evil and is cast down, his soul is torn to pieces and his agony becomes tragic. For Butler, evil is real :

I suggest that the reason why dramatists of all ages give us a revelation of evil, evil as against what is merely wrong or socially reprehensible, is because evil exists. Evil is real: the abyss is there.<sup>8</sup>

In his lecture evil is synonymous with a variety of concepts amongst which are strife, exile, madness, chaos, damnation, death and hell, and he sees evil as revealing itself metaphorically :

...we accept the metaphor for the thing, the generalization for the reality.<sup>9</sup>

Good and evil both exist in reality and this is most clearly evident, Butler believes, in the struggle between Good and Evil in the Classical theatre of the ancient world and the liturgical rites of the Mediaeval era. He draws the parallel between Dionysus and Christ: they have fates that are common to the cyclical pattern in nature; the vegetation god is murdered and his rebirth signifies the promise of a new crop; Christ is crucified and His rebirth assures the believer of life eternal after death. It is no accident that in the Christian Church’s liturgical calendar the feast of Christ’s Resurrection



coincides with spring in the northern hemisphere. Butler acknowledges that tragedy incorporates more than just the private and metaphysical spheres of existence, but his primary focus is on the protagonist's personal experience of evil.

In analysing the nature of the tragic hero's crisis, Butler perceives the struggle in terms of the Nietzschean Apollo-Dionysus dichotomy. In Nietzsche's view the two conflicting impulses of the measured restraint identified with Apollo and the wilder emotions of Dionysus fuse to create the essence of great tragedy. Butler carries this analogy further when he defines the tragic hero's struggle in Freudian terms. Every individual is split into

...an official organising self, and an unorganised welter of energies, the not-self.<sup>10</sup>

The "official self" (or Superego in Freudian terms) is the real subject of tragedy. The "official self" contains within it the "not-self", or what Freud might have termed the Id. At the periphery it is surrounded by the "exterior reality" of the outside world. The "official self" is thus placed in a predicament where it is confronted by two realities on separate frontiers and is continually called upon to mediate between these in order to remain fully integrated. It has to remain receptive and flexible to their influences thereby ensuring its own continued existence. But the "self" is frequently betrayed by the exterior reality as it is not possible fully to comprehend this reality. Relying on "instruments" of faith and abstraction it is able to conjure up a picture of the external reality. But this perception is both flawed and incomplete.

On the other frontier there is no less danger, as the “self’s” knowledge of the “not-self” is equally distorted, and so the “official self” is faced with a threat on two frontiers: it is neither secure from attacks from without nor from within. Represented in Nietzschean terms, the “official self” is Apollonian in disposition while the “not-self” is Dionysian. When

...something exterior but fundamental to the self or not-self is removed by design [and when] the organising principle in the personality loses command<sup>11</sup>

then the protagonist’s personality approaches the tragic in which the collapse of the self is symptomatic of a

...breakdown of the frontiers between the conscious and the unconscious.<sup>12</sup>

At this point the tragic hero develops feelings of alienation and dislocation in what he perceives to be a hostile world. “Exile” and “madness” are two symptoms of this personality disintegration and are related, the former being the “outward glance”, the latter the “inward glance of the tragic eye”.<sup>13</sup> The hero’s plight must, however, go beyond feelings of alienation and dislocation. His spiritual crisis must be protracted and tax him beyond his powers of endurance. This spiritual crisis must be accompanied by the revelation of evil. The ensuing result is a “tearing asunder” of his personality which does not, however, necessarily have to end in the hero’s death or destruction.

Butler contends that many of the modern European plays appearing in the aftermath of the Second World War ended in a nihilistic manner. He traces drama from its origins and shows how Classical drama developed from the choral dithyramb which narrates the birth and passion of the Greek god,

Dionysus. His life-cycle was re-enacted by his worshippers in sacred rites during which the choral was chanted. It entailed his *AGON* or conflict with his enemy; his *PATHOS* or suffering, passion and defeat; his *SPARAGMOS* or the seeming triumph of evil resulting in his death, dismemberment, and scattering of remains; and finally his *ANAGNORISIS* or resurrection, reintegration, and final triumph of Good. The entire rite is “Janus-headed” as it does service both for the internal and the external worlds. It is not only a re-enactment of the life-cycle of Dionysus but it also corresponds to the life-cycle of the seed in nature as well as the desire for regeneration within the human psyche: the internal process of dying to the old self and being reborn as a new creation.

In Butler's view the rite of the Mass is a re-enactment of a similar cycle since it re-enacts the life of Jesus Christ, in which there are notable parallels with the Dionysian life-cycle. Mediaeval drama evolved from the rite of the Mass and its liturgical roots were carried through to modern drama. Butler argues that modern dramatists have, however, abandoned any exposition of *ANAGNORISIS* in their plays which tend to end with the defeat of the hero. This not only goes against the liturgical roots of drama but also against the Great Tradition of playwriting, and Butler illustrates the point by referring to the great “Reconciliation plays” of Shakespeare's final cycle where the dramatist concentrates on reconciliation and regeneration.

Modern drama, on the other hand, argues Butler, has so far been non-committal in the face of the tragic question :

Unless the ending of the play in some way justifies the *AGON*, the *PATHOS*, and the death, the pattern is incomplete...<sup>14</sup>

The tendency in modern drama has been to present two endings, the

Nihilistic ending which

...leaves an impression of suffering to no purpose in an alien and apathetic universe

and the Stoical ending

...in which the impression is very much the same, but partly redeemed by the fortitude and dignity of humanity in the face of a capricious and inexplicable universe.<sup>15</sup>

...  
Not only must the inner chaos be mastered, but the outer world must appear capable of mastery. Man may still seem an exile on earth, but he must be assured of a home in the universe. There must be a possibility of heaven after hell and purgatory.<sup>16</sup>

In such terms he argues for the re-establishment of a tradition which goes

against the grain of modern European drama – a tradition which would see,

re-established, the Transcendental ending where

...an answer is found in something bigger than intellect or law, something which springs from sacrifice itself, the principle which lies at the heart of the germinal rite: a dying into life.<sup>17</sup>

The Elizabethans saw history as falling into three great epochs

characterised by three great dispensations: Nature, Law, and Grace (or Mercy).

The law of Nature

...comprised the governing principles of the universe as created by God. Divine and therefore good in origin, nature was subject to corruption and error as a result of the Fall.<sup>18</sup>

Because the natural law proved an inadequate guide to man after the Fall, he

was provided with written law (what Shakespeare calls “nurture” as opposed

to “nature” of man before the Fall) which governed the conduct of societies

and communities in the ancient world. The Incarnation brought in the third

dispensation, although

...throughout the epochs of Nature and written Law there are foreshadowings of the third dispensation: of Grace, of Mercy rather than Justice, of self-transcendence in sacrifice.<sup>19</sup>

Butler thus argues convincingly for transcendental theatre in which the dramatist concentrates on regeneration, reconciliation, and hope in the ultimate destiny of man. It was a pattern that was ideally suited to his project of the Apollo-Dionysus paradigm as the vehicle for synthesizing the cultures of Europe and Africa through the process of “transcendence” and a pattern that he would follow in the writing of his early plays.

Butler's first play, *The Dam*, was written at a watershed period in South African history. Dr D.F. Malan's National Party had triumphed in the 1948 elections, contrary to all expectations, against General Smuts's United Party government and the new government's first act was to abolish Indian voting rights in Natal. The new government's next objective was to impose stricter conditions for the franchise upon Cape 'Coloureds' which it duly achieved in the first session of Parliament in 1948. Its ultimate target would, of course, be to remove entirely 'Coloureds' from the common voters' roll. In 1949 the Cape Corps was disbanded and 'Coloured' men henceforth allowed to serve only as servants of white soldiers. The inexorable move towards the complete separation of 'races' continued with the abolition of the Native Representative Council in March of that same year. In 1950 the keystone Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act were passed and in 1951 the National Party government continued with its attempts to remove entirely from the franchise Cape 'Coloureds'. The Separate Representation of Voters Bill was introduced into parliament and passed with a simple majority which was, however, insufficient as the voting rights clause was an entrenched clause in the South Africa Act (1909) and required, for amendment, a

two thirds majority at a joint sitting of both houses of parliament. Despite this, the National Party government attempted to pass it as law. The matter was immediately challenged in the Supreme Court in June by the Franchise Action Council constituted mainly of 'Coloured' people and supported by liberals and the Torch Commando under the leadership of "Sailor" Malan and Louis Kane-Berman. It was a legal struggle which was destined to drag on for another five years. Meanwhile, the African National Congress (ANC), which had met in Bloemfontein on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1951, expressed its solidarity by calling on the government to repeal the six major discriminatory laws before 29<sup>th</sup> February 1952 otherwise it threatened to disrupt the Tercentenary Celebrations due to take place on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1952. Such was the racial discord and tension which existed at the time of Butler writing his first play.

Against the separatist political tendencies of the day, *The Dam* stresses Butler's own socio-political theory of the binding force of a common humanity. It is written in the free-flexible verse of dramatists like T. S. Eliot and, as we might expect from Butler's own pronounced theories on drama, it focuses on the Great Tradition's transcendental pattern of reconciliation and regeneration.

Significantly, *The Dam* is set in the Karoo

...that "landscape of the mind" ...  
 ...Karoo in the foreground, biblical in its symbolical depths; a landscape so simplified and intensified that the profound moral mathematics of their beings, and of ours, becomes ruthlessly, mercifully, clearer.<sup>20</sup>

Since the primary plot of *The Dam* is the psyche of Douglas Long and the spiritual journey of his tormented soul in its quest for peace, the desert-like

properties of the Karoo form the ideal setting. By damming a small stream Long seeks to bring revitalising water to an arid land, an action which, in turn, brings regeneration and revitalisation to his own spirit in symbols reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The primary plot represents, to some extent, the playwright's own searchings and questionings at this time :

Some of my own interior struggles found expression in a play *The Dam* in 1953, my first published book.<sup>21</sup>

Various sub-plots are woven around the white farm owners, black construction workers, and 'Coloured' servants who, removed and isolated from the modern metropolis by an uncompromising landscape, constitute a microcosm of South African society.

The play's action begins at the dam site where it is revealed that most of the characters do not share Douglas Long's enthusiasm for the project. Jan de Bruin, his neighbour, representative of the old order, believes that the Karoo was intended by God for sheep and not for cultivation; Long's wife, Jane, and his brother, Dr Robert Long, both believe that the project will undermine his health; Richard Waynflete, who has designs on Douglas Long's wife and is his real-life antagonist personifying evil, is prepared to advance him money for the scheme but only at exorbitant rates; and Kaspar and Katrina, servants to the Long family, believe that the proposed dam site is haunted by the curse of a defeated black chieftain, Batsi. Significantly, it is only the representatives of the younger generation, the Long family's English daughter, Susan, and the de Bruin family's Afrikaans son, Sybrand, who are supportive of the scheme and show a belief in the future. Sybrand convinces his father to sell a portion of his land on the bank of the riverbed in order to make Long's project a

reality. At a conscious level, Long's desire to build the dam is an altruistic one; but at the unconscious level his motives may well be different. In his review, a contemporary critic, C. J. D. Harvey, points to similarities between Auden and Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6* and Butler's play.<sup>22</sup> We certainly know that Butler was not overly impressed by Auden's play. Having seen a production in February 1947 at the Playhouse in London he wrote:

I found the mountain/mother equation even less convincing in production than in reading.<sup>23</sup>

At the unconscious level, the erection of the dam wall is, for Long, a form of psychological patricide in which he seeks to avenge the neglect of mother-love during childhood.

Dr Robert :	Because Our mother made less fuss of you, you gave Yourself to water and to dams. Can You say why you stopped playing there?
Douglas:	Father stopped me.

*The Dam* Act 1 Sc. 1 p.17

His brother, Dr Robert Long, points out that Douglas is

...dead-set  
On making dams among the hills, where father's  
Ghost may never interfere.

*The Dam* Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 17

Whereas Waynflete is his real-life antagonist, his father's ghost, á la Hamlet, represents his unseen enemy and is the greater threat to his sanity:

Dr Robert:	...Authority is Your father. You are, in metaphor, setting Out to kill and bury him.
Douglas:	Yes, Robert, I am. I have done so often in my dreams. I am many times a patricide.

*The Dam* Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 18



Seen in these terms, however, Long's desire to build the dam is not, as he believes, an altruistic and a creative act but a selfish and destructive one in which he seeks to expunge the ghost of his father from his unconscious. Despite the fact that Richard Waynflete is his real-life antagonist, it is Long's father who is his unreal enemy. In keeping with the classical form of tragedy, Long's nightmares constitute the *AGON* or conflict with his unreal enemy. At various parts in the dialogue, Long reveals his suffering by comparing himself with Achilles, Christ, St Sebastian, and Hamlet. Long nonetheless decides to continue with his project and Scene 2 of Act 1 describes the construction work in progress. The *Pathos* of the play is reached in Act 2 when a freak deluge destroys the dam wall which is but a few weeks from completion. Thus, ironically, the anticipated life-giving properties of water in an arid land give way to the destructive power which can be generated by this same substance. As with the great Flood, destruction must precede regeneration and re-creation. The destruction of the dam thus also becomes symbolic of a Dionysian destruction of Long's "old self" and the birth of the "new self".

Defeated and in despair, Long is "attacked" by "the voices" and, in terms of the tragic pattern, this phase represents the *Pathos* of the protagonist. His "old self" is torn asunder and he contemplates suicide in the process of *Sparagmos*. The "official self" of his personality has disintegrated having been subjected to attack on two frontiers: from the enemy within – the ghost of his father, and the enemy without – Waynflete. Evil has triumphed. On the brink of suicide he is saved by the intervention of his loyal servant, Kaspar, who persuades him to return home. In acknowledging the power of unselfish love, the process of *Anagnorisis* begins for Douglas Long. He is urged to

rebuild the dam. The project is successful and, in the denouement, he is redeemed to new life in a spirit of harmony with his own soul and fully re-integrated into harmony with the world of nature.

Besides the main theme of Douglas Long's spiritual death and regeneration, several other sub-plots or discourses can be detected in the play. The father-son discord between Long and the ghost of his father is echoed in the father-son conflict between Jan de Bruin and his son Sybrand. In an almost *Everyman* tradition, the good-evil conflict between Long and his adversary, Waynflete, is also presented. However, it is a defect of the play that these sub-plots are not carried through and for the most part are unconvincing. An early critic of the play, Anthony Delius, noted that the final confrontation between Long and Waynflete was too melodramatic, and criticised the jettisoning of Waynflete once his dramatic purpose had been served before the final act. The playgoer is left wondering

...what other characters among the *dramatis personae* he may expect to see quite fortuitously swallowed into the bowels of hell or shot like a rocket to the Church Triumphant.<sup>24</sup>

Two early critics noted in the play a weakness in that the plot presents only one dominant character: whatever dramatic conflict there is must needs take place within the psyche of Douglas Long. He is projected by the playwright as a superior moral character, but this can ultimately be expounded only by Long himself which, at times, gives him an air of sanctimoniousness. We are reminded of T. S. Eliot's objections to *Hamlet* which centre around the fact that, in great drama, there must be the 'objective correlative', or complete adequacy of the external circumstance to the character's emotion. This, he

maintains, is lacking in *Hamlet* where the protagonist is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible because it is in excess of its 'objective correlative'. In like manner, it is argued by these critics that Long's emotions are seen to be in excess of the facts as they appear.

Delius, in his characteristically witty manner, says that Long

...has so much interior that his external character as a human being seems entirely dwarfed by a tremendous spiritual hernia. [Much of] ...the failure of the play is due to the fact that the ball is so vastly greater than the dung-beetle.<sup>25</sup>

and Malan comments that Butler

...fails in depicting a protagonist whose suffering takes on tragic proportions. Empathy with Douglas is at all times difficult, partly because the strong allegorical overtones make him appear other-worldly...<sup>26</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, the play was received very favourably in its first performance at the Tercentenary Celebrations. Delius believes that the achievement of *The Dam* is to be found in its poetry:

The verse is always bursting out of its more prosaic clothing of plot and person.<sup>27</sup>

Far from the play lacking originality and ideas he sees that they are there in too great a profusion and that they "jostle one another" in "unassimilated masses" in Butler's verse. Whilst it is no doubt true that the poetry and symbolism in *The Dam* have a compelling power and beauty, there are also other notable achievements of Butler's first attempt at playwriting.

*The Dam* introduced a new form of serious morality play to South African theatre. The *Rand Daily Mail* reviewer noted this in his review of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1952 :

Mr Lefebvre alone seemed to realise that Prof. Butler has written the first important morality play in the catalogue of South African drama and not a hybrid of Eliot and Noel Coward.<sup>28</sup>

*The Dam* is significant because, in it, Butler introduced, also for the first time to South African theatre it seems, another convention of classical and modern European drama: the chorus. From his autobiography we know that he attended T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* at the New Theatre in London in 1947 where he noted that

...the chorus, which spoke the powerful verse in well-drilled unison sounded dead....<sup>29</sup>

But it was David Raeburn's production of the *Agamemnon* in that same year that made him aware of the dramatic possibilities of a well constructed chorus:

Before the gigantic main figures entered the chorus had communicated their dreadful unease...in a way the chorus of *Murder in the Cathedral* had failed to do...<sup>30</sup>  
[It]...moved through intricate and meaningful patterns so that one witnessed a kind of dance of the mind in their anguished and ominous debates.<sup>31</sup>

Having combined the best properties of the classical chorus and T. S. Eliot's choral design Butler struck the formula which he would use in *The Dam* and other subsequent plays :

A chorus needs to be broken into at least three groups of individuals: those for the protagonist, those against, and the waverers; the lines must be allocated accordingly; and then significant movements must be found to accompany them. These movements can help to show the audience how a united group disintegrates into a confused crowd, to see them taking sides and to witness them visually presenting a solid front. The movement clarifies the meaning, and the division of the speeches gets rid of the peculiar hoot of many voices speaking in unison...<sup>32</sup>

By utilising these techniques in his first play, Butler was able to create a chorus of masked "Watchers" who are able not only to set the scene for

the action to follow but also to comment on action at vital stages in the play :

Male Voice:     What significance have pride and fear  
                       In this our universe of rock and water –  
                       Do they invade the molecule and storm?  
                       The outer storm has ceased.  
                       Only an intermittent roll of thunder  
                       Shakes the air from afar  
                       Like a rumour from the Gods.

...

Fem. Voice:     For a moment, in a moving gap we glimpse  
                       The strong limbs of Orion  
                       Giddily leaning, about to fall

Male Voice:     Or the Scorpion's wide flung claws, -

Fem. Voice:     But simpler, clearer than all

Both:            The terrible Southern Cross.

Fem. Voice:     Over the broken pelvis of the dam  
                       They stare unmoved as stare they did  
                       Above green Eden and grey Golgotha.

Male Voice:     Under such stars our hero moves.

*The Dam* Act 2 p. 46

In the Tercentenary production of *The Dam* the Watchers wore owl-like masks that extended to their shoulders and dark full-length robes.<sup>33</sup> This enhanced the Brechtian-type distancing effect and the above passage indicates a certain contemplative aloofness. The Watchers observe that, in his “pride”, Douglas Long has attempted to transform his universe of “rock” into a “green Eden” but has failed. The “outer storm” has ceased but the Lear-type inner storm is about to break, in which the protagonist suffers a Dionysian dismemberment hinted at in the images of stellar fragmentation: the “strong limbs of Orion” become a “broken pelvis” when Orion falls on “Scorpion’s wide flung claws”, and this transforms into a crucifixion image when the Southern Cross becomes suspended over the “broken pelvis” in a “grey Golgotha”. Dionysus and Christ merge, as it were, in suffering but it is a suffering which has become sanctified; a suffering that, perhaps, all men who attempt to bring a “green Eden” into a desolate wasteland, whether it be literal or metaphysical, must endure.

But the Watchers do not only perform a contemplative and linking function in the play; they also perform an interrogatory function in the protagonist's self-discovery and spiritual recovery; they perform that kind of "dance of the mind in their anguished and ominous debates" to which Butler alluded:

Male Voice:	In his huge agony, beyond all human reach, He moves alone. <i>(Enter Douglas)</i>
Douglas:	How quiet it is! O God, how quiet!
Fem. Voice:	The quiet before the storm of questions. Neighbours and creditors will want to know What you intend to do.
Douglas:	I shall do what I did before I started the dam.
Fem. Voice:	You, you who defied the world? You cannot. In your pride you said: "I will build on your doubts." As the wall rose higher, you rose with it Until the world was prepared to be impressed. But now, without the wall for your pedestal, What will you be but the local crank?
Douglas:	I do not mind being the local crank. I will live Quietly here on the farm.
Fem. Voice:	Is there no fight left in you?
Douglas:	I feel as if my back were broken.

*The Dam Act 2 pp. 46-47*

The dam site is the locus for many deaths and many rebirths besides that of Douglas Long. It is the place where father and son in the de Bruin family reach a common ground in their relationship; the place where Jane Long's marital relationship with her husband is renewed to the point where "the two cliffs...almost meet"; the place where Susan Long makes her spiritual and social commitment to her fellow black South Africans; the place where Kaspar and Katrina realise that (in the light of attempts by white South Africans to remove them from the common voters' roll) they have no place in the new "green Eden"; the place where Batsi, the black chieftain, was killed coughing out blood among the rocks and, ominously Butler hints, awaits his own rebirth. C. J. D. Harvey contends that South African problems were included merely

...to supply local colour and make it an appropriate Tercentenary production.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps owing to the 'European' style of drama introduced by Butler, Harvey might have reached this conclusion but the issue of black-white relations is, in fact, raised on many occasions in *The Dam*. This pattern of spiritual rebirth takes on a far wider symbolic significance in the South African context. In keeping with the liberal-humanist pattern of individual regeneration as opposed to the materialist view of systemic regeneration, it is proposed by Butler as a solution not only to the travails of the individual but also to the social and political problems of the country. According to Butler only an individual change of heart on the part of every white South African and a willingness to share power and the country's resources with black South Africans could effect reconciliation, harmony and regeneration .

By contrast with Harvey, Orkin sees the play as a genuine engagement with Africa and the problems of race:

There are several moments when *The Dam* addresses the existence of numerous non-English peoples who also inhabit this space and who, in the words of its character Dr Robert prompt "demands upon our sympathy".<sup>35</sup>

He does, however, hotly contest Butler's modus operandi, maintaining that in Butler's plays there is present the strand of an

...energetic, proselytising and paternalist Christianity.<sup>36</sup>

Orkin is, of course, writing forty years later and from the perspective of the dialectical materialism that underpins his critical evaluations. It is the argument of the school of Marxist materialist critics against the liberal-humanist tradition of writers like Butler and Alan Paton. It is true that some of the language used by the play's main character Douglas Long, with whom Butler no doubt identifies, is at best ill-chosen and at worst patronising :

Kaspar: Old Baas de Bruin is also there. They are all in the  
Front room together.  
Douglas: Do I matter so much to them? And you  
You have come after me like a faithful dog.  
*The Dam Act 2 p.50*

Nonetheless, such ill-chosen similes are rare in the play and the general sentiment of the work, as Butler notes, conveys an attitude of respect and dignity towards people of colour:

...although their lines were few, they [Kaspar and Katrina] were amongst the most important in the play. Apart from what they said, one should consider what they did. There was simply no play without Kaspar and Katrina. The moral of the play depended on the white hero's suicide being stopped by a simple act of human compassion, not of a rich white for a black but of a poor black for a somewhat eccentric employer.<sup>37</sup>

Orkin also fails to place Butler's writing in context. When we recall that Sarah Gertrude Millin was still writing her racist novels of miscegenation - *King of the Bastards* in 1949 and *The Burning Man* in 1952 – Butler's thoughts on the issues of race are enlightened and radical by comparison with the general literary tenor of the time. Notwithstanding the fact that Long's sentiment may be patronising when, in conversation with Kaspar his "Coloured" servant, he refers to the dam as "our dam", there is an indication of his desire that the black workers and "Coloured" servants may share in the new hope of the future. Long also sees to it that the black workers are given higher wages and new living quarters, and a school is built for their children.

Orkin does concede that *The Dam's*

...recognition of Long's labourers was...itself significant. This contested the practice in much farm literature of marginalising black agricultural labour – in reality crucial to the farm system in producing the wealth of farming families.



It is not only the issue of black agricultural labour, however, that it addresses but, as Orkin recognises, also the issue of urban space:

*The Dam* expresses concern over the development of "differences too deep for us to shift" while "within our walls of privilege we whites live in a state of siege" and as the play draws to its close, it addresses urban space in a way that recognises that there may be looming problems in the land within which these farming families have found their sense of mutual understanding and religion.<sup>38</sup>

This awareness in the play is precipitated by the consciousness of Susan Long who has seen "...so much rootlessness" and feels that she has been "...given too much and they/Too little. ...so many people belong nowhere,/Homeless ghosts", dispossessed in a "seasonless land" in a story which cannot be told:

...it must be met with all  
 Five senses; the violence; and smells,  
 Degradation, the lurid colours, the dark  
 Of a primitive human storm. – How sweet  
 The air is here, how spacious, how secure.  
 In the cities at this hour, and every day,  
 Trains and trams pour out their thousands  
 Into space one tenth the size of this farm;  
 A horde of hovels hedged between a white  
 And well-lit suburb on two sides  
 And mine-dumps, depots, coal-yards on the other.  
 People  
 Press down unlit, treeless streets, to meet  
 In houses struggling vainly to be homes,  
 Where twenty sleep in a room the size of our kitchen,  
 And love is violent, and laughter hard, and hatred  
 Rises like steam. But also – at this moment –  
 The Angelus bell is ringing. All on the mission  
 Pause; hands, fresh from tending the sick and the hungry,  
 Rest on the heart of the Incarnation; and here  
 And there, halting in a purple mist of smoke,  
 A dark heart beats in unison with the bell.  
 In that most terrible place, the single bell  
 Of God's own heart still beats and pleads.

*The Dam* Act 3 pp. 65-66

It is difficult to reconcile Orkin's criticism of Susan Long's response to the townships as one which

...freezes the image of the urban African ignoring episodes of increasing resistance to suggest, by contrast, an icon of passivity...<sup>39</sup>

Far from suggesting an “icon of passivity” the imagery and structure of the poetry are full of Heraclitean movement: the teeming thousands moving in and out of railway stations, crushing into inadequate housing, pressing down unlit streets. The stench and degradation of urban squalor are contrasted with the sweet air of Long’s farm, and the “hovels” of the township surrounded, ironically, by lit suburbs of whites become an inversion of the farmhouses which lie behind the “white proclamation of homestead walls” (Act 1 Sc 1 p.8). Orkin also finds the image of “hatred [which] rises like steam” inappropriate as he sees it contributing to a “certain beatification of the suffering it presents.”<sup>40</sup> Presumably he has chosen to see a liturgical incense in the image, but this should not mitigate against seeing it for what it might really have been intended, given the political context, referred to earlier, of the play: a seething political discontent amongst South Africa’s black people. Butler is attacked for the language he gives Susan Long because it

...seeks no discourse of resistance, but chooses rather to *sanctify*, an ideal that, while it ministers to suffering, remains unconcerned with attempts significantly to diminish or eradicate it.<sup>41</sup>

It seems to escape Orkin’s notice that Susan Long’s spiritual journey ends not simply in pious mouthings but in a real commitment of selfless service to the community. She rejects the possibility of a romantic pastoral marriage with Sybrand, in order to devote her life to improving the lot of people living in black urban misery. Is Orkin suggesting that the great tradition of Christian service in the mendicant orders stretching from St Francis of Assisi to Mother Theresa of Calcutta is “unconcerned with attempts...to diminish or eradicate (suffering) significantly”?

Presumably, in Orkin's system of values a "discourse of resistance" is of far greater importance than the sanctified ideal of a commitment to lifelong service of the marginalised in society. At the hub of Orkin's viewpoint is the philosophy that a materialist structure of society will reduce suffering and poverty significantly where Christianity has failed to do so; and he translates this philosophy into Butler's texts. Recent events in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans would seem to give the lie to this theory.

Furthermore, there is very little in the text to validate Orkin's assertion that the play projects an assumption that

...the (untranslated) voices of the oppressed denote harmonious and joyful subjection....<sup>42</sup>

Butler, himself, answered this criticism when he wrote:

It has escaped the notice of some critics that the play does not end on a happy note of reconciliation between Afrikaner and English-speakers: the romance between the representatives of the next generation is frustrated by an awareness of black misery in the townships. As for the so-called coloureds, Kaspar and Katrina, they do not accept their lot as "serfs", as Martin Orkin calls them; and it is their anguish in the close of the play that makes Susan reject Sybrand's idyllic proposal, and opt for a life dedicated to the relief of urban misery.<sup>43</sup>

[*The Dam*]...is an attempt at reconciling the English and the Afrikaans people in the Karoo society that bred me, but it firmly rejects the notion that such a reconciliation between the two white groups alone will be enough....<sup>44</sup>

The dedication of *The Dam* to Father (later Bishop) Trevor Huddleston, then priest at the Church of Christ the King in Sophiatown, is symbolic of the church's mediation between black and white in Butler's pursuit of the binding force of a common humanity. Despite its flaws, *The Dam* was received enthusiastically by theatre-goers and white drama critics in 1952 and was regarded

as a promising debut in the genre of drama. Whilst some critics, such as Delius, perceived the play as a 'universal' play, others such as *The Star* drama critic perceived Butler as a socially responsive playwright who was prepared to engage local issues such as "...soil erosion, the Cape Coloured problem, the rural Native problem, the urban Native problem and the struggle between Boer and Briton" (19<sup>th</sup> February 1952). Black South Africans were precluded, by the National Party's apartheid laws, from attending performances.

While he was in Oxford Butler came under the powerful influences of modern English and European theatre. "My dramatic education," he wrote in his autobiography, "owes a great deal to Oxford".<sup>45</sup> In England he had been influenced particularly by the religious drama of T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry. His unpublished play "Judith" was begun, it seems, in 1951. It was completed in its first draft as "Judith and Holofernes" in 1953 and subsequently revised, appearing finally as "Judith" in an undated manuscript, probably in 1954. The address on the latter manuscript is given as "c/o Nuffield Foundation" in London and we know that he went to England early in 1954 on a Nuffield Foundation Fellowship where he visited Oxford, Bristol and London, devoting his attention mainly to drama. In its final form "Judith" was produced as a radio play on SABC in 1957. It has, however, never been performed on stage. Although he completed *The Dam* before "Judith", Butler nonetheless regards "Judith" as his first full-length play:

The first full-length play I wrote, however, came as a complete surprise. As part of my reading programme for filling in important gaps in my basic Judaeo-Christian heritage, I decided to read the Apocrypha. I kept coming across stories of passages that were familiar, and thought in my humble way that the Protestant Bible was the poorer without them. Late one night I read the book of Judith and could not sleep again. What a story! What poetry!

I started writing at once. English poetic drama under the leadership of Eliot and Christopher Fry was very much the vogue and it was a poetic drama which I wrote: blank verse for most of the dialogue with ballad stanzas for the soldiers' choruses; the diction Jacobean, spiced with contemporary allusion and phrase. I enjoyed myself enormously. 'Judith' was the most extended piece of writing I had yet done. For a later radio production for the SABC I tinkered with it a little bit but have never published it, nor written a play in that mode since.<sup>46</sup>

Written at a time when the Cold War between the superpowers of the United States and its NATO allies on the one hand, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its Eastern bloc countries on the other was at its most intense, the play is Janus-headed in that, whilst it deals with themes of love, loyalty and fidelity in a community more than two thousand years ago, it also resonates with twentieth-century concerns. I believe it invites a reading not only from the perspective of metaphysical and transcendental drama but also from that of international politics. Its primary theme is metaphysical and universal rather than being rooted in South African particulars. Moreover, its structure supports its theme and places it in the mode of the "Great Tradition" of Elizabethan and Classical drama.

Although the play is an "historical" play on a religious theme, Butler has, like many playwrights before him, taken some liberties with his sources. Prince Holofernes, Nebuchadnezzar's Commander-in-Chief, is presented by Butler as an Achillean-type personality. It appears that he was far from this in reality, being described as a "...drunken braggart" in official commentaries on the Old Testament. However, the same source also informs us that

...the Book of Judith in particular shows a bland indifference to history and geography.<sup>47</sup>

Butler's intention is to present Holofernes in such appealing light as to make Judith's struggles and therefore her tragedy all the more poignant. It is significant

that, whereas in *The Dam* a single, principal character dominates the play, in “Judith” the action revolves around two main characters.

The scene is set in the time of Nebuchadnezzar who reigned over the Assyrians and whose armies, under Prince Holofernes, were advancing westward on a punitive expedition against Egypt. The cities of Ecbatana and Damascus had already been subjugated and their territories laid waste. Israel lay in the path of the Assyrians and Jerusalem, the Holy City, was threatened. Judith’s return to Bethulia from Jerusalem after the death of her husband, Manasses, coincides with the arrival of the advancing Assyrian army in the plains below Bethulia which itself is located in a strategic pass that leads to Jerusalem. The Jewish elders have exhorted their people to hold the position, no matter what the cost. The siege of Bethulia ensues and becomes the focal point of Butler’s play. The heroine, Judith, slays Holofernes; the siege is raised and the Assyrian army is put to rout. The plot of Butler’s play is an essentially simple one with great dramatic potential. By comparison with *The Dam* there are few sub-themes to detract from the main plot, the only one of note being the on-going antagonism between the tribes of Jacob and Esau. Micheli of Esau defects to Holofernes’s allies and betrays the Bethulians by revealing the location of the well that lies outside the city’s gates and is the sole source of the city’s water supply. Micheli is the personification of evil in the play and becomes Judith’s real-life antagonist. In “Judith” Butler dispensed with the formal chorus as he had constituted it in *The Dam*. Instead Jonah is presented as the sceptic Simon, the young but impressionable believer, and Anna the beggar, accompanied symbolically by a child, as the “blind, old woman” visionary who echoes the figure of Anna the prophetess in the Gospels. At various other points in the play, women from the city as well as soldiers from the guard of

Bethulia and from Holofernes's army are introduced to the chorus to provide variety and to comment on the significance of the action.

The first Act, set within the ramparts of Bethulia, introduces the very important symbols of water and drought. The first action presented is the drawing of water from the well and the appearance of Anna who tells us that

No journey of a day and a night  
But centuries have brought [Judith] here

...

Out of the past with a sword in her hand

"Judith" Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 5

and exhorts the child to chant with her the symbolic ballad of Dinah in which we are told that Simeon and Levi stole by night to the prince's tent and

Sudden their cold swords fell.

The prince

Lay in linen dyed black in blood.

Simeon and Levi cut his throat

He lay in linen dyed black with blood.

"Judith" Act 1 Sc. 1 pp 5-6

The linking of the ballad of Dinah with Judith's entry into Bethulia as the avenging woman of destiny with sword in hand predetermines her to a course of action that will contest with her natural feelings for Holofernes and provide a site of struggle within her psyche. The conflict in Judith's metaphysical or inner world is paralleled by the outer world of reality. On an external level, life-giving water represents the divine order of Yahweh, the only true God in the eyes of Israel, by contrast with the desiccation, drought and destruction of the temporal order of the man-god Nebuchadnezzar who

has had another of his crazy turns...[and]  
Eats nothing but grass, they say.

"Judith" Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 3

The parallel on an internal level is drawn by Judith herself when she says that submission to the false gods of Egypt and Babylon

...will dry the well of the heart  
And kill the singing bird on the tongue.  
There is no joy divorced from God

“Judith” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 13

which results in

...an empty acceptance  
Of exile as man's true condition.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 8

For Judith each besieged inner city must find, or lose, its own well which gives it spiritual nourishment and each human being acts deliberately, conscious of its acceptance or rejection of God.

The tragedy in Butler's play pivots on the fact that Judith has an intensely alert consciousness which brings her to the realisation that her own 'self-will' is the obstacle to her spiritual awakening and rebirth. Butler presents her character as in a constant struggle. Her 'official self' is placed in a predicament where it is assailed on two frontiers: she must choose between her 'self-will' and the vibrant experience of her womanhood renewed by her growing attraction to Holofernes, and the 'selflessness' of her response to the calling of her God. This dilemma produces the suffering and 'tearing asunder' of her being :

O God...  
If you could cease to be, and let me be!  
Is there not room in the world for both our wills?  
Then teach me to die this death, break me,  
Work your will. But why must he die, by me?

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 22

and



...I know it had to be done  
 But why, why, why should this pair of hands,  
 These hands, be forced to bear that weight?  
 This breast become a cobble stone  
 For a wrenching turn on the heel of Time?  
 ...  
 If only I did not feel his curls between my fingers!  
 When one becomes an instrument of God  
 Must one always be broken, torn like this?

“Judith” Act 3 p. 5

The passion and suffering of the Jewish festival of the Passover is hinted at by the traitor, Micheli, when he confronts Judith:

Simeon's blood, how strong and dark it is!  
 A heady wine which time will yet turn  
 To vinegar.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 23

The Paschal (and Crucifixion) symbols of “blood”, “wine” and “vinegar” are juxtaposed in dramatically ironic fashion.

Whilst Judith undergoes a Dionysian-like metaphysical dismemberment this is masterfully conflated with the physical dismemberment that Holofernes is destined to endure. In images which evoke the pattern of a ritual slaughter, this physical suffering is superimposed on Judith's mental anguish. When Holofernes refuses to delay his attack on Bethulia he is told

Those hands that itch for the reins,  
 Will tie you for the axe  
 Like a sacrificial bull.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 13

Judith's reference to ritual sacrifice takes on even greater significance when she and her attendant, Tamar, are granted permission by Holofernes to leave camp and go each night at midnight to the well outside the walls of Bethulia for the purposes of ritual purification.

However, upon leaving the besieged Bethulia her initial resolve to slay Holofernes wavers. His noble appearance is attested by various characters throughout the play : he is “a general above all praise”, “...beautiful, young,” with “...a granite mind hidden in ferns” who “...rides the wheel of the world”. Moreover her discovery of his humanity beneath the public image causes her to start loving him :

HOLOFERNES: I was fifteen, my brother twelve. Escaping our tutor  
 We slid through the palace gates and slipped like fish  
 Into the dense green fields. Our eyes were dazed  
 With green: heat broke in waves against the skin  
 Or shadows splashed our faces as we sprawled  
 Beneath great trees, digging eager teeth  
 Through the rind of stolen fruit. I feel the flesh  
 Of that peach in my palm as I speak. A day of birds,  
 Of dazzle and shadow, whose climax came at dusk,  
 Robbing that hive of bees.  
 We were stung of course, in several places,  
 But, looking at each other, we burst out laughing,  
 Laughing because each saw the other  
 With honey oozing from his lips  
 And the jewel of joy in his eyes.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 3 pp. 28-9

The sensuousness of the poetry and the intimacy of the diction are notable: the nostalgia of the lost paradise of childhood contrasting vividly with the arid battleground of military campaigns. Holofernes displays a sensibility and an empathy which indicate the potential for nobility of character:

JUDITH: If the thirst of hearts can touch you so  
 You can't be as pitiless as you pretend.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 8

HOLOFERNES: I stared at the dead, the ruins, the fires, the dust,  
 And saw them as myself, a wrecked city  
 In a ruinous world. My glorious triumph  
 Shrivelled to a silly farce.  
 Somewhere I knew was silence, a centre....

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 15

She begins to love him, and there are severe oscillations in her psyche between fulfilling her own will and happiness and doing the will of God:

JUDITH: Is he not beautiful, an eagle among men?  
And I have been long in the shade, feel suddenly  
The joy of the sun. My fettered feet  
Ache for the movement of the dance: my heart  
Is empty, swept and garnished, waiting.  
All that I am cries out: I love you  
More than Manasses, more than God.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 2 p. 22

But Holofernes's love is grounded in Judith's physical beauty and her intelligence, and not in the spiritual dimension of her being. His pride overcomes him when he feels his supremacy being challenged by the recalcitrant city under siege:

BAGOAS: Look at Bethulia's walls. Do they not  
Shimmer like silk in this light?  
HOLOFERNES: Tomorrow those high-breasted shapes  
Shall sprawl in abandoned rubble.  
My spear will loosen their silent pride.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 23

A succession of rapine images supported by the phallic undertones of “spear” suggest a physical violation not only of the city but of its identifying symbol, Judith. Realising that she has failed to turn Holofernes to the greater love of God, she slays him in a supremely ironic manner where the images of the above passage become inverted :

WOMAN 4: In finest silks and subtlest scent  
She veiled her breasts and thighs  
...  
[and] Crushed him with her beauty [before passing]  
...  
The falchion ...through his neck.

“Judith” Act 3 p. 7

Like Moses in Egypt, Judith has become a “channel” through which God has worked and a “furrow” through which his anger has flowed. Ozias draws this parallel when he says

We praise you Judith, you  
Whose raised right arm was strong  
To strike from the stones of thirst  
Great fountains of water and song.

“Judith” Act 3 p. 8

An alternative reading of “Judith” which views the play not only in terms of a Nietzschean Apollo-Dionysus dichotomy, but in terms rather of an East-West antithesis or, more specifically, of a Judaeo/Christian-atheist conflict releases some highly interesting insights from the texts. “Judith” was written at the height of the Cold War (1953) when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was under the autocratic rule of Josef Stalin and Chiang Kai-Shek’s Kuomintang nationalists in China had been overthrown by the communist forces of Mao Tse-Tung. Communist ideology thus held sway in the greater portion of Asia, across Eastern Europe, and into the Balkans. South East Asia had also come under increasing pressure and the Korean War between the communist north, supported by the USSR and China, and the nationalist south, supported by NATO, was still raging. A revolt against communism in East Germany had just been ruthlessly crushed by Stalin’s Red Army in 1953. Winston Churchill’s proverbial “iron curtain” had descended from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic and the grounds of contest between communist east and capitalist west found their location in Israel/Palestine.

It is not, therefore, surprising to find the following observation early in the text of the play:

HOLOFERNES: More than half the world accepts  
 The rule of Nebuchadnezzar. Is he now to bow  
 To a handful of superstitious peasants?

“Judith” Act 1 Sc.1 p. 11

Holofernes revels in the military might of the monolithic empire he represents and his supercilious comment about the “superstitious peasants” who believe in, and remain faithful to, their God echoes Karl Marx’s well-known dictum that religion is merely the opium of the people and not fit to be accommodated in a modern industrialised society. Holofernes’s soldiers confirm the nature of this invader from the east:

We are an empire's power,  
 We the hammer of time!  
 Our hearts are a scarlet flower.  
 ...  
 Our pulse is the pulse of History!  
 ...  
 Earth has never seen  
 So swift and sure a machine.  
 So efficient a force and fear  
 To bring the great peace near.

“Judith” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 9

There are clear undertones of the rhetoric of both communist revolutions in these images. The scarlet chest ribbons of Mao’s guerilla forces are recalled as well as the hammer - a symbol of the Russian Revolution. Moreover, the Comintern believed that, in accordance with “...the pulse of History”, a world-wide revolution of the proletariat would take place and this would bring about deliverance from bourgeois capitalism and result in “...the great peace.”

In justifying his state's wars of conquest, General Holofernes’s images are even more specific:

This power of Moses, this dream, where is it now?  
 Our power is here, and now.  
 A million **sickles** flickering through wheat, [my emphasis]  
 Clinking **hammers** in torrid forges, [my emphasis]  
 Clean white hands, adding, subtracting,  
 Accurate heads arranging the future:  
 Our engineers blast gaps through basalt ranges  
 Letting light through to lands long hidden  
 Behind the ignorant skylines of the earth  
 Fleets of a thousand sails, each hour,  
 On every wind, plow the obedient  
 Waters of the world...

“Judith” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 13

The language used here sounds more as though it has emerged from the Kremlin in the twentieth century than from Babylon over two thousand years ago. The unmistakable symbols of the Russian Revolution – hammer and sickle – are present; the “clean white hands” and “accurate heads” calculating and planning are strongly reminiscent of Solzhenitsyn’s description in *The First Circle* of Stalin’s state-enforced scientific programmes; and the engineers at work, blasting through basalt ranges, recall the forced labour programmes of Stalin’s Five Year Plans and dam building projects. This parallel is carried further when Holofernes claims:

Our armies are but ploughs and harrows  
 Breaking a worn-out earth to bear  
 Far heavier, happier yields. Bread, not hunger!  
 Houses, not hovels! New cities, shining,  
 Whose hearts are squares of statues and trees  
 Candid under the ordinary sun, -  
 Not dim-lit temples or secretive shrines.

“Judith” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 12

Besides the focus in the communist state on a secular, monolithic style of architecture, where the effigy or statue of the dictator dominates the “heart” of the city in a heartless society, and the uncompromising stance on religious freedom, what is echoed here is the Russian Revolution’s rallying cry of “Peace, land, and bread”. As agent of the state, Holofernes destroys existing cultures,

societies, and communities, all of which he considers culturally inferior, so that he can re-create the world in accordance with the fancies of his own King.

Judith's response to his appeal for her to support his new world-order challenges the cost to human freedom and the individual conscience that an acceptance of the new world-order entails:

We have heard of the splendour of nine-walled Nineveh:  
In her vast public squares the air blows sweet.  
But what of the heavily guarded palace?  
Where Nebuchadnezzar, the God-like man,  
The man-like God, makes iron laws to stamp  
His image on his subjects' hearts? Are men  
Mere coins for royal greed? Where he is lord  
His granite statue straddles all crossways,  
Shadows the paths of men. This we reject,  
In the name of Him in whose image we are made.

"Judith" Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 12

The Russian dictator Josef Stalin, having rid the USSR of its Trotskyian dissidents in the Great Purge (1934-37) in which thousands of opponents, even those suspected of dissent, were executed, developed a paranoia about assassination. He became a recluse in a "heavily guarded palace" and it is widely believed, not only in the west, that he was poisoned to death in an inner conspiracy. Conservative estimates by modern historians of unnatural deaths during his rule place the number at twenty-five million people who were executed or died in Siberian labour camps. He had "made iron laws to stamp/His image on his subjects' hearts" and had used men as "mere coins for royal greed". The inhumanity of his regime is encapsulated in the following lines:

He has walked so long on human faces  
His feet have forgotten the feel of the earth.  
He farms the world from a window: sees  
His herded, branded subjects as so many cattle  
Easy or hard to drive, to check, to quell

By laws or lashes, incentives, fodder or swords:  
 But the man in the God is lost: he drools  
 Down great stone corridors....

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 11

The cunning device of dictatorships the world over, admitted by Holofernes,  
 is to

...keep [man's] cruel eye turned outward, always  
 Outward, on the shining statue in the great green square!  
 Till he no longer needs to cry, “my soul's my own”....

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 16

Such a dehumanising policy results, ultimately, in the deepest alienation in  
 Man and contributes to what the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel termed “a  
 broken world”; a world in which, in Judith's words

...Faith is failing,  
 And in its place an empty acceptance  
 Of exile as man's true condition: exile from home  
 And altar, exile from God, belonging nowhere  
 In earth or Heaven.

“Judith” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 8

At a time when the Christian west felt itself most seriously under threat from  
 atheistic forces sweeping across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and making  
 inroads into Africa, there can be little doubt that Butler's own liberal-humanist  
 persuasions with their emphasis on individual freedom and rights of conscience, as  
 well as his strong belief in a personal God, find articulation in the character of his  
 heroine Judith. In terms of structure, I believe that the play stands amongst the  
 best that Butler has produced. The characterisation of both Judith and Holofernes  
 is convincing, heightened tension is sustained throughout the play without, at any  
 point, resorting to melodrama, and there are passages of the most poignant poetry  
 to back up the action. The lofty Jacobean verse diction possesses a certain  
 congruity in such religious drama which Butler found difficult to achieve in the more



secular context of *The Dam*. “Judith” is entirely successful as a work of literature; it might, however, resist production at a time when religious drama is not in vogue.

Written within a short interval of “Judith” but broadcast on SABC Radio a year before it, “Remembrance Day” is a one-act radio play commemorating Armistice Day on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1956. Set at the Cenotaph in Dundastown it immediately calls to mind the fallen combatants of the First World War, but it soon becomes obvious from the alphabetical Roll of Honour being called and from subsequent incidents which are narrated that Butler’s idea of the fallen embraces a far wider community.

Private Martinus Barkhuizen’s name is intoned in the Roll of Honour. A flashback scene takes us into a school classroom where we are introduced to the schoolboy pranks of Martinus Barkhuizen and then told that his “...bones lie in Benghazi”. The dead of Flanders commemorated by the Cenotaph are immediately linked by this device to the victims of Benghazi and other theatres of the Second World War.

A shift of location returns us to the present and a description of contemporary Dundastown passes severe indictment on the social system pervading a country now controlled by ardent segregationists:

TEACHER: Four hundred tin-roofed houses, four churches, four pubs,  
five garages, three cafés  
Split north and south by a dry river bed  
Whose mimosas are grey this time of year.  
Split east and west  
By an invisible curtain of steel on one side of which  
There are trees in the streets, electric lights,  
And houses are bigger and painted, and every garden a  
tap -  
Not one for a whole long street.

JOHN: Did they notice that even the dead lie separate?  
 The dead, so easy to handle in their small neat plots  
 So good in obedient beds.

“Remembrance Day” p. 186

The north/south division of prosperity/poverty is superseded by a new east/west split of segregation. It is the old west/east division of the Fish River and the Eastern Frontier revived by the National Party with its segregation policies, but it takes on a more sinister guise in the form of a Stalinist tyranny in the image “curtain of steel”. (In the original draft Butler had written “Split east and west as well/ In an invisible iron curtain...” and, no doubt, had the tragic events of the 1956 Hungarian uprising uppermost in his mind at the time.)

Where, in ceremony and myth, the Cenotaph and Remembrance Day are uniting men of a common humanity in death, in the reality of a small South African town artificial social engineering has ensured that they stay very much separate and that “...even the dead lie separate.” There is a disquieting ring in the phrase “the dead...so good in obedient beds” – an implication that the living who are suffering on the wrong side of the “...curtain of steel”, whether in Europe or Africa, will not remain subserviently obedient for long.

Breaking away from the present, Butler goes back in time to the 1820 Settlers drawing them and their adversaries in the War of the Axe, the Xhosa, as well as all the heroic dead of the frontier wars, into the Day of Remembrance. Just as a common humanity should link us in life, believes Butler, so a common humanity links us in death. Moreover, by creating a panoramic effect of time, Butler seems to be asking the question whether armed conflict will ever achieve its ends. An ominous warning is given in the following lines:

...a couple of crows insulting the silence with their squawking...  
 But if there's a thing I learnt in my time, it's this:  
 Put Man on any piece of the earth, no matter how pretty or ugly,  
 he'll bring it to blossom with blood and laughter.

...  
 I rode down to the wagon...and, at its head where they killed him, the  
 twelve year old touleier, Hansie, with the ants at his eyes already....

"Remembrance Day" p. 190

The theme of land and conflict tentatively hinted at here finds far greater exploration in Butler's next play, *The Dove Returns*. Butler had met William Plomer, who was then reader for Jonathan Cape publishers, in January 1955 in the Arts Theatre Club in London, to discuss with him the first draft of a play entitled "Post Mortem". It was subsequently revised and its title altered to "The Dove Returns". It was first performed by the South African National Theatre Organisation at Glencoe, Natal, on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1955. In structure and style it resembles both *The Dam* and "Judith". Despite the fact that T. S. Eliot had abandoned verse drama in 1953 when he chose the medium of prose drama for *The Confidential Clerk*, Butler continued to use verse:

I had great confidence in the unifying power of images when launched by rhythmical speech. I was deeply indebted to T. S. Eliot for my convictions as to the transforming and subliming qualities of poetry in the theatre...<sup>48</sup>

*The Dove Returns* thus not only follows the pattern of Butler's earlier plays in this respect, but also in that it retains the basic pattern of "transcendental drama" of his earlier works. Not unexpectedly, the model used by Butler is the final cycle of Shakespeare's reconciliation plays. These similarities notwithstanding, there is a slight shifting of focus. The universal themes pursued in the earlier works are not abandoned but they begin to acquire a greater specificity in a peculiarly South African context. Where *The Dam* had concentrated on a single protagonist, and "Judith" on two principal characters, *The Dove Returns* takes in the wider scope of

dramatic interaction not only between individuals, but also between groups or communities and, to a certain extent, plants the seed for the Settler plays that Butler would write in the future. Despite this greater complexity in plot, a far greater structural control is evident in *The Dove Returns* than, for example, *The Dam*.

The principal theme of the play evolves in an exploration of the polarities of destruction, death, and disintegration on the one hand and reintegration, reconciliation, and regeneration on the other. The South African War (1899-1902), as it is now called by revisionist historians, is used as a setting in which the plot unfolds. Boer Kommando leader Karel van Heerden ambushes an English column in the vicinity of his own farm. This action renders him a target of Lord Kitchener's "scorched earth" proclamation of 1900. Much against his own sentiments and judgement the young English subaltern who is commanding the column, Lt Gracy, is forced to destroy the farmhouses, dams, livestock, and orchards of the Van Heerden farm and all the Boer farms in the vicinity and to evacuate their families to the concentration camps. Partially in revenge and partially to assert his 'rite of passage' from adolescence to manhood, Paul ambushes a British contingent en route to a neighbouring farmhouse. In the process of killing Lt Gracy, Paul himself is killed. Lt Gracy's father, a third-generation soldier in England, and his mother, a pro-Boer pacifist, lose their only son whilst the Van Heerden family suffers the same fate in losing its only son, Paul.

Sarah van Heerden attends to the mortally wounded Lt Gracy and, unaware that her son has been killed in the same skirmish, promises the young English officer that she will bury him among her own people; but when, shortly

afterwards, she is informed of the death of her only son at the hands of this selfsame British column, she reneges on her promise and tell the soldiers to

...send him back to England,  
Let the soil that made him cover him.  
...  
Or if he must stay, dig his grave  
Anywhere you please: up the kloof,  
Where the jackal cries like a lost soul in the night,  
Among the thorns and thistles where the night-jar screams,  
Anywhere, but out of sight of our house, our trees,  
Out of sight of the road.

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 2 pp. 59-60

Scenes One and Two of the Third and final Act take place five years later on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, respectively. Butler develops the theme of the broken promise and shows how Sarah's inability to cope with the tragic death of her son not only prevents the healing of wounds incurred during the war, but also prolongs the suffering of her own family and, ironically, almost leads to the loss of her only remaining child, Aletta, whose marriage to the English Colonial Scout, Shaw, she refuses to sanction. Her re-awakening is precipitated by the visit of Lt Gracy's father to her own son's grave to pay his respects. In the final Scene, Butler traces the pattern of reconciliation and regeneration: Sarah comes to the realisation that her own suppressed feelings of guilt at Paul van Heerden's death and her bitterness prolong the suffering of her own family. She fulfils her promise to Lt Gracy and blesses the proposed marriage between her daughter and Jim Shaw. In accordance with Butler's objective of "transcendental drama" the play ends on a note of personal reconciliation for the two families whose lives were intersected by the trauma of war.

*The Dove Returns*, seen by its author to concentrate more on dramatic essentials and to be less lyrical than *The Dam*, shows a far greater control of what Aristotle termed the complex plot. It has, as its principal theme

...a conflict – outwardly between the English and the Afrikaners during and after the Boer War, and inwardly between hate and reconciliation.<sup>49</sup>

At the heart of the tragedy is the destruction of a home; not merely the physical despoliation which attends war but more tragically the destruction and disintegration of the spiritual bonds joining families:

It is ironical that, in order to protect his home, a soldier not only leaves it but, in his exile, destroys the homes of others.<sup>50</sup>

Whether the characters in the play are soldiers or civilians, Boers or British, servants or landowners, they suffer the same anguish of experiencing the threatened destruction to the geographic and spiritual locations which they hold most dear. For Butler, the concept of 'home' also denotes "family, country" and "beliefs – the emotional and spiritual home of the various characters".<sup>51</sup>

Existing tensions in the various homes are exacerbated by the divisive power of armed conflict. In the Van Heerden home Sarah's attempts to shield Paul from combat cause embarrassment to her husband who is renowned amongst the Boers for his military prowess, and the rift between them leads indirectly to Paul's death. As a result of his death, Sarah's continued enmity and bitterness after the conflict threatens to destroy the love and happiness of her daughter, Aletta, and causes greater estrangement between herself and her husband Karel.

On another continent and in another home, the tensions created by the war are just as pronounced. The sensitive, empathetic Lt Gracy appears to be totally unsuited to the theatre of war unlike his father, Col. Gracy, a professional soldier following in the career of his family. His lack of enthusiasm for war is matched by the pacifist tendencies of his mother who admires Emily Hobhouse and has pro-Boer tendencies which run very much against public opinion in England. It is a supreme irony in the play that the humane, articulate English lieutenant, an unwilling combatant, suffers the same fate as Paul, a civilian eager for the blood-rush of war signalling, perhaps, that both those who reject violence and those who espouse it are swallowed up indiscriminately in the same brutal consequences of total war.

For Butler, who experienced the horrors of war first-hand as a combatant in the Second World War, some imaginative and intelligent people are forced in such situations into a painful questioning of things they have taken for granted. Deprived of their normal environment they see its attractions and its limitations:

Their exile leads to a painful enlargement of vision. This happens to the English subaltern, Gracy, to the most completely homeless of all the characters, the Griqua Simon, and finally to the Boer mother, Sarah.<sup>52</sup>

Gracy arrives at an enlargement of vision which is able to separate political rhetoric from reality. Men are often driven to kill or destroy by an imagined fear that they will be deprived of the things they love. Both he and the Boer girl, Aletta, understand that the fear of deprivation, whether of land or property, is the catalyst which impels societies to conflict. Writing at a time when people of colour were being systematically deprived of their rights in South Africa, Butler draws strong parallels and spells out a powerful warning stressing the 'common humanity' that all men share with their 'enemies'.

*The Dove Returns* displays a highly skilful use of the Aristotelian concepts of “peripetia” and dramatic irony. When, at the beginning of the play, Aletta talks of a

...provident angel [which] guards this house [while]  
Outside the red wings of the dawn stretch out,  
Feathers of fire and blood, from edge to edge of the farm

*The Dove Returns* Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 15

little do we suspect that the sympathetic, humane Lt Gracy is fated to become the exact antithesis of a guardian angel where the “red wings” and “feathers of fire and blood” are not only vivid descriptions of the dawn, but take on a sinister new meaning when he comments ironically:

...But, God knows,  
It gives me no joy to play the avenging angel.

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 49

If, as E. L. Lucas maintains, the most poignant tragedy is the tragedy of human blindness in which, again and again, men contrive their own annihilation and destroy the thing they love, then the death of Paul is, indeed, bitterly ironic tragedy. In Sarah’s desire to protect her son, she imposes a tyrannical stranglehold on Paul, against the wishes of her husband and daughter, stunting his capacity to grow in character and causing him frustration which leads, ultimately, to his death.

Every growth in the individual or society involves a moment of exile, of going it alone, of frightening freedom.<sup>53</sup>

*The Dove Returns* is a more carefully crafted play than its predecessors with symbolism and biblical allusion frequently employed to sustain the cycles of destruction and regeneration. In the first Scene the symbol of the bird, employed



so frequently in Butler's other plays as well, is introduced when Karel van Heerden, returning from a commando raid, visits his farm:

KAREL:           Listen...in the distance  
                       Among the thorn trees at the drift, a dove has woken:  
                       She troubles the dark with her rumour of day.  
                       And far up the valley, a jackal is crying,  
                       Like a lost soul, crying.

*The Dove Returns* Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 10

Karel, who has returned to his farmhouse under the cover of darkness, refers to the dove which, like man, is a diurnal creature, as troubling the dark thereby unconsciously commenting on the unnaturalness of his own nocturnal behaviour in wartime whilst his daughter Aletta sees through "the flags and frontiers" of war rhetoric to the horrors and the "sea of blood":

ALETTA:                               ...Suddenly  
   My fingers relaxed, and I threw the bolt down into the dark.  
   For a moment I felt a pang of joy,  
   And a dove flew by me, just one Namaqua dove.  
   When its wings were gone I stood unable to move....

*The Dove Returns* Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 26

In her rejection of armed conflict, the pacifist Boer girl enjoys the vision of a Namaqua dove and a transitory, but serendipitous, experience. But she is fighting a tide of prejudice and blood, and in her discussion with the Colonial Scout Jim Shaw, the enlightened girl predicts the suffering that will follow:

  A moment ago in your arms  
   I was a bird in flight, a flame!  
   Now I am dry bone and cold grey ash.

*The Dove Returns* Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 24

The "bird in flight" suddenly becomes transmuted into the phoenix signifying, perhaps, the 'scorched earth' destruction of home and spirit. For the young Lt

Gracy it becomes an abhorrent image of war:

...At a place called Rietrand,  
I saw a schoolfriend, dead. The vultures  
Had got at him, and before the vultures  
Those who had killed him had taken his leggings.

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 33

As the war and the killings continue, the images of the bird as symbol become transmuted more and more into repugnant images of birds of prey. Aletta begins to feel like

...a dry leaf  
Spun in a whirlwind, a drowned bird in a whirlpool.

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 44

Her Namaqua dove has become a “drowned bird” in a tide of violence and, when in breach of her promise to the dying Lt Gracy, Sarah van Heerden instructs the soldiers to bury him

...Anywhere you please: up the kloof,  
Where the jackal cries like a lost soul in the night,  
Among the thorns and the thistles where the night-jar  
screams...

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 2 p. 50

in a grave with

...no shadow near him, no sound,  
Except a meercat, a kiewiet crying,  
Or once in a year, perhaps, the shadow of a hawk...

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 2 p. 64

the birds of prey seem to have triumphed. The hawk and the night-jar, omens of destruction and war, prevail, and echo Butler’s experience in his own send-off to the slaughter of war

...when, close by, two night-jars broke  
The starry strumming with their forlorn shriek.

Guy Butler “The Parting”

The characters in the play and, indirectly, all South Africans are presented with a challenge by Butler: the dove or the raven? Are people of various nationalities

prepared to co-exist acknowledging the common humanity which binds them together in an inclusive society under the unifying symbol of the dove of peace, or do they choose, rather, to be tied to attitudes of race and conflict in an exclusive society under the banner of the martial eagle? It was a question relevant not only to the bygone era but also to a South African society becoming rapidly polarised between an emerging black nationalism in the 1950s and the aspirations of Afrikaner Nationalists to create their own Republic on exclusionist lines, and is encapsulated in the curiously prophetic image of a “war in the future...throwing its shadow/backwards on me already.” (Act 3 Sc. 1 p. 72).

In the spirit of Butler’s “transcendental drama” there is, however, always hope: the phoenix which Aletta saw can rise from its own ashes and foreshadow regeneration and rebirth. At the moment of his death when his self-awareness is clearest and his ontological vision most precise, Gracy sees a bird fly out from beneath his horse and into the sun. The dying English lieutenant then exhorts Aletta:

...Don’t be afraid, Aletta.  
Let the bird fly through your heart....

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 2 p. 57

When Paul’s death is seen subsequently “in the light of another death” by his parents at Eastertide, a reintegration and regeneration of the spirit take place, the ravens of violence and death are banished, and the dove returns:

SHAW: We have broken through the ring of rifles.  
ALETTA: The desert is blessed by a dove.

*The Dove Returns* Act 3 Sc. 2 p. 82

Recalling the story of the Flood in Genesis, the play ends in a spirit of optimism and hope. The characters have all, in varying degrees, acquired that “flawed” or “double vision” of Gracy’s which has enabled them to transcend the limitations of their prejudices and to recognise the common humanity which they all share.

Where Malan sees *The Dove Returns* as a successful play which

...anticipates the themes of toil and sacrifice and the sense of rootedness that we encounter in the Settler plays,<sup>54</sup>

Orkin views it as a play which constructs the white subject primarily as a member of patriarchal landowning farming families where

...marriage ensures the continuation of the farm’s existence within the familial line, “sanctified” and blessed by a loyal and faithful serf figure, the ‘coloured’ servant Simon at the end of the play.<sup>55</sup>

He castigates Butler for his lack of concern for the oppressed classes which he terms ‘equivocal’ and adds that

...urban space disappears while the black presence on the rural landscape is explored only through the sporadic presence of a minor Griqua servant, conforming to the faithful serf figure commonplace in much farm literature, speaking language that fixes him in position finally as the defeated inhabitant of a reserve trying to avoid with difficulty prevailing racist discourse.<sup>56</sup>

Orkin’s classification of the white farm as ‘mediaeval fiefdom’ echoes J. M.

Coetzee’s observation about the characteristics of Afrikaans farm literature some of which are in evidence in Butler’s treatment of the landowning class. However, his complaint that “urban space disappears” would seem to suggest that he has not taken into consideration the demographic pattern prevalent at the time of the South African War. Almost without exception, Afrikaans communities were rural in nature and Afrikaners only moved to the towns after the First World War and especially

during the Great Depression when they became impoverished and could no longer work the land. When we turn our attention to black communities at the turn of the century, they were also predominantly rural in location; the gold mines on the Reef and the concomitant influx of black labour began in earnest only after the war of 1899-1902 when Milner's reconstruction programme came into operation. Given this scenario it is difficult to see how Butler could have incorporated treatment of urban space other than through a process of 'artificial insemination' in the plot.

Simon, the Griqua servant, is the most 'homeless' of all the characters and not without reason. The play was being written at a time when, after a five year struggle in the law courts, 'Coloureds' had been deprived of the franchise by the ruling National Party which packed the Senate with nominated Senators thus obtaining the necessary two thirds majority at a joint sitting of both houses of Parliament to force through an amendment to the Constitution. The reaction to this incident found expression in Butler's play:

The current political crisis over the removal of the 'coloured' voters from the common roll was echoed in the predicament of Simon, the retainer of the Boer Commandant. He refuses to be a party to the happy white ending.<sup>57</sup>

Simon's explanation of his inability to restrain Paul and prevent his taking the rifle assumes an ironic twist:

How dare I, a Griqua, not take his,  
A white man's word?

*The Dove Returns* Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 53

The implication, of course, is that white men keep their promises – something difficult to reconcile with the behaviour of J. G. Strijdom's white supremacist government which, if it did not contravene the letter of the South African

Constitution, contravened its spirit. We cannot help but feel that Simon speaks for all South Africans of colour in 1955 in the following passage:

SIMON: I just want you to know my feelings.  
 SARAH: Your feelings?  
 SIMON: Yes, Missus, my feelings. I know  
 A Griqua's feelings must count for very little,  
 For what is a Griqua after all?  
 But I want to speak like a man, not a Griqua,  
 Just once before I go.

*The Dove Returns* Act 3 Sc. 2 p. 74

Simon's consciousness of his colour finds expression in various parts of the play and he prays to be allowed to bear his colour with patience. He suffers verbal racial abuse at the hands of Paul van Heerden who, it seems, has for Simon the stock term of reference of "...bastard...dirty old Griqua". Simon is also presented by Butler as sufficiently alert to his own situation and thus, by implication, to the predicament of the group he represents when he observes that his friend Katot stopped drinking because "Brandy won't change the colour of your skin" – a suggestion by the playwright that the colour issue in South Africa will not simply go away because it is chosen to be ignored.

To suggest, as Orkin does, that Simon is a "...minor Griqua servant [who speaks in] language that fixes him in position finally as the defeated inhabitant of a reserve" is to miss vital elements and symbols in the play. We can glean from Butler's 1955 document, "Introduction to Broadcast of *The Dove Returns*", that he intended Simon to occupy a prominent role in the play. Talking of people who have had to suffer changed environments as a result of war, he comments that

...their exile leads to a painful enlargement of vision. This happens to the English subaltern, Gracy, to the most completely homeless of all the characters, the Griqua Simon, and finally to the Boer mother Sarah.<sup>58</sup>

We do not simply have to accept Butler's own interpretation of his play; nevertheless, it is Simon who proclaims, at various important points of the action, the 'leitmotif' that runs through *The Dove Returns*: the "...heavens are empty":

SIMON: My heavens are empty, Master. There is no hope for me.  
(Act 3 Sc. 1 p. 61)

SIMON: Now the heavens are empty because  
I have no more bubbles to blow, no rings of smoke,  
No wishes, no dreams (Act 3 Sc. 2 p. 77)

and in the denouement Col. Gracy tells Karel of his encounter with Simon at Charles Gracy's grave :

...as I was leaving, he stopped me,  
Pointing towards my son's grave, next to which  
Your wife was standing. He said: "The heavens declare  
The glory of God". (Act 3 Sc. 2 p. 81)

It has also escaped Orkin's attention that all does not end well in the play. Despite a recanting of their earlier decision to dismiss him from service, and an invitation from the Van Heerdens for him to continue staying on the farm, Simon goes into voluntary exile. He realises that, despite its tolerance of his presence, the white man's world has not accepted him fully. His short speech before he leaves the Van Heerden farm is a tragic parody of Simeon's song:

Grant me thy peace.  
(And a sword shall pierce thy heart,  
Thine also).  
I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,  
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.  
Let thy servant depart,  
Having seen thy salvation.

T. S. Eliot "A Song for Simeon"

Simeon has seen the salvation of his people and resigns himself to the inevitability of death in a spirit of hope. Simon, on the other hand, sees only

the “bitter end”, the bondage of his people and, wishing death, resigns himself to mere subsistence in a life without hope:

Now let me die, dear God. Rest in Peace,  
That's all I ask. No angels, no streets of gold –  
Let them roll this old body into a hole  
Leaving bones white as another man's.  
Why won't you let me die, dear God?  
Must I live to the bitter end?  
Well, let it be.

*The Dove Returns* Act 3 Sc. 1 p. 64

Simon is drawn with sufficiently strong strokes by Butler to suggest anything but a minor intrusion of no significance. His role is a significant, if limited, one. To have given him any greater “voice” in the play would have been incommensurate with the marginalised political voices of people of colour in 1955 and would have defeated Butler’s objective of drawing attention to their political plight.

Not only was South Africa’s political landscape engaging Butler’s attention more and more at this time, but also his desire to forge an ‘African synthesis’: how to syncretise the Apollonian order of Europe with the Dionysian energy of Africa; how to merge past myth with present predicament; and how to stress that the bonds of a ‘common humanity’ could hold together disparate mores and cultures? On his return from Europe to South Africa in 1954 it was the viewing of the ancient bronze heads at Ife, Nigeria, which suggested that this synthesis could be achieved. Butler recalls how he had

...remained fascinated by ancient Greek drama and the power of certain of those works to speak across great historical and cultural gaps...[and]...was particularly interested in stories which might be valid for both Europe and Africa, for blacks and for whites.<sup>59</sup>



In a lecture given in July 1956 he hints at the manner in which he would tackle his next two plays:

We are too immature for a mature drama....  
There are isolated South Africans who can see Nonqause as Aeschylus saw Cassandra, can look at the Mau Mau as Euripedes looked at the Maenads, who can look at Boer and Briton as Shakespeare looked at Yorkist and Lancastrian.<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding his views on South African threatreguers being too immature for a mature drama, he began to apply Greek myth to the African political landscape.

“Two Timers” is an undated manuscript play written on the larger theme of colonial administration in Africa, and on a sub-theme of the fidelity of the individual in relationships. There are various clues in the text which would suggest its composition in 1957-8 and, despite its stage instruction of the place being “...almost anywhere in British Africa”, its mythical allusions and its structure place it, I believe, more specifically in pre-independence Kenya in 1957-8 where Butler looked “...at the Mau Mau as Euripedes looked at the Maenads”.

The Mau Mau rebellion, a violent insurrection of the Kikuyu people, began with the murder of a few British farmers in Kenya in 1951. The Kikuyu had exceptional grievances – their growing numbers could not be accommodated on the smaller land areas reserved for them by comparison with the vast expanses of land occupied by settlers' farms, large portions of which remained uncultivated. During the rebellion farmers were murdered, cattle were mutilated, and other violent acts perpetrated. These tactics were intended to instill fear into the settler community, in the hope that most would leave the country. The Colonial government in Kenya arrested Jomo Kenyatta, the most prominent of the Kikuyu

leaders, together with others whom they deemed collaborators. They were all charged with being responsible for the insurrection and were condemned to lengthy terms of imprisonment, Kenyatta being released only in 1961. He vehemently denied any connection between himself and the revolt and, despite his incarceration, the insurrection continued.

From their bases high up in the almost impenetrable forests on the slopes of Mt Kenya and the Aberdare range, the Mau Mau ventured forth at the dead of night to attack the outlying settler farms and the British soldiers who had been sent to defend them. In order to get a greater control of the situation the Colonial authorities rounded up the Kikuyu peasantry from their scattered smallholdings and villages and made them live in village compounds which could be both defended and kept under control. The main thrust of the Mau Mau revolt was countered by 1955 although sporadic insurrections took place until at least 1959.

The insurrection had cost enormously in both lives and material expense. The Mau Mau took bloody reprisals against fellow Kikuyu who were suspected of collaborating with the British and, in the civil war scenario which ensued, it is estimated officially that some three thousand Kikuyu casualties occurred whilst unofficial estimates placed the figure at closer to ten thousand. Some hundred British lives were lost and the material cost to Britain of subjugating the rebellion was in excess of twenty million pounds. The Mau Mau rebellion also had the effect of polarising the indigenous population into two hostile factions: the Kikuyu and Luo people on the one hand, and the Kalenjin and coastal people on the other. This resulted in two rival political parties being formed: the Kenya African National Union (KANU) on the one hand, and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU)

on the other.

Against this background Butler used the mythical framework of Euripedes' *The Bacchae* where the central theme is the nature of the human soul and its relation to the natural environment and human society:

...the moral of *The Bacchae* is that we ignore at our peril the demand of the human spirit for Dionysiac experience. For those who do not close their minds against it such experience can be a deep source of spiritual power and *eudaimonia*. But those who repress the demand in themselves or refuse its satisfaction to others transform it by their act into a power of disintegration and destruction....<sup>61</sup>

*The Bacchae* presents the dichotomous nature of man not only in himself, but also in the social milieu. There is the rational and civilized side on which large communities, cities, colonies, and nation-states depend for stability. Pentheus, King of Thebes, is the representative of this Apollonian order which is concerned with the laws governing the community and the conventions of property, and which regulates the conventions of sexual behaviour. Opposing this is the spirit of Dionysus which attempts to liberate the spirit from the bonds of responsibility and law, and seeks to liberate life from tedium, pain, and fatigue. It opposes the rational in man, enjoys the life of the senses without the necessary precondition of censoring, and is conscious of a strong bond with the animal world. Each side of man's nature tends to fear and despise the other but both may be manifested at different times in the same person or the same social construct. In *The Bacchae* when the Maenads remain undisturbed and free they are gentle and pure; the same women who are able to tear animals apart with their bare hands are also able to suckle children gently at the breast. Pentheus, who represents an Apollonian order, is betrayed from within as a result of his growing disdain for the opposite side of his nature and, ironically, contrives to deal with the Maenads in every bit as bestial a manner as they eventually deal with him.

Set in a chimaerical British Colonial Territory called Tanga Uranga, "Two Timers" follows the pattern established by Butler in his previous plays. Written in free-flexible verse style and consisting of three Acts, it also employs a transcendental style ending. The plot is a fairly convoluted one. District Officer Stanton Wade, married to Patricia Wade who is in London at the beginning of the action, is the chief administrator of the territory. Father Jervis, an English missionary priest, is a friend and associate of the Wade family. Abdiel Sebenyani, who has accompanied Father Jervis to Sheba Rest Camp where the action takes place, has completed a Social Science degree abroad and converted to Christianity. Tanga Uranga is in a state of unrest as the country has lost its paramount chief. It is divided into two political camps – one loyal to the trade unionist traditional leader Bakwa, and the other giving its allegiance to Jacob Kenyama (a thinly disguised Jomo Kenyatta) who is about to return from England having obtained credible academic qualifications, to stake his right to undisputed leadership of the indigenous population. While in England, he makes the acquaintance of Wade's wife, Patricia, and is introduced to Nesta Crankshaw, an American political journalist, whose assignment is to cover the installation of the new paramount chief in Tanga Uranga.

In the absence of his wife, Stanton Wade has an affair with Denise Silvano, a journalist from Cape Town. Bamu, Jacob Kenyama's brother who has been studying medicine in South Africa but has returned to Tanga Uranga to see his brother after a five year absence, informs Jacob of developments in Tanga Uranga. Kenyama, Nesta, and Patricia Wade arrive unexpectedly at Sheba where Patricia learns that her husband has "two timed" her, and Jacob learns of the agitation of the local population.

As District Officer, Stanton Wade has organised an important conference to which he has invited all the chiefs, his objective being to maintain control in the territory. Before the proposed conference takes place, however, a revolt instigated by Bakwa's followers breaks out at the Eureka mine near the town of Logi in the absence of its South African-born mining magnate, Alexander Orville, who has come to Sheba Rest Camp. The revolt spreads throughout the territory and District Officer Wade, in the execution of his responsibilities, feels obliged to go to the town of Logi to quell the rebellion. Since his driver, Zachariah, has not yet returned by car from Logi where he was sent for supplies, Wade decides to go on horseback. The danger of his mission is accentuated when his only horse is taken by his wife in an act of revenge for his adultery and he is abandoned and forced to find his own way to Logi.

Paratroops are flown in to Tanga Uranga to quell the rebellion. In the course of dropping paratroopers over Eureka mine a plane piloted by a South African airman, Herman van Eyssen, has to make a forced landing. Van Eyssen is rescued by Patricia Wade who "two times" her husband by having an affair with Van Eyssen before bringing him to Sheba. Meanwhile, at Sheba Rest Camp the colonials have been "two timed" by Bamu who has cut the telephone wires, removed the batteries from the portable radio, removed the distributor cap from Orville's car and slashed the tyres thus isolating the camp from the outside world. Van Eyssen, resilient and battle-hardened, is able to repair the telephone link, rig up an alarm around the perimeter of the camp, and disarm Bamu thus restoring the batteries to the radio set. Bamu also confesses that a flask in the refrigerator contains human blood which would be used as "muti" by the witchdoctors for the installation of the new paramount chief.

Re-established contact with the outside world confirms that the rebellion has been quelled but there is still concern for Stanton Wade's safety as there has been no word from him. Fears are expressed that he may already be dead and that the human blood may be his. Patricia Wade feels great remorse, blaming herself for his predicament and assuring Father Jarvis that her love for Stanton has been restored. Father Jarvis acts as a voluntary hostage whilst the flask of blood is exchanged for Stanton Wade who, it is revealed, has been held by the Tanga Urangans. Stanton Wade and Father Jarvis both return and, in accordance with the now familiar transcendental pattern, the Wades experience a spiritual renewal in their marriage. The play, however, ends in a mood of slight foreboding in anticipation of another revolution in the future and questions the success of the European Christianising mission in Africa.

By locating the drama in a chimaerical part of Africa but having South Africans involved in significant roles in the play, Butler is able, through them, to comment critically not only on British Colonial policy in Africa, but more especially on the prevailing political dispensation in South Africa. On the international front his attention is caught by developments in the Cold War in 1956, particularly the Hungarian uprising and the USSR's role in assisting President Nasser of Egypt to nationalise the Suez Canal in defiance of Great Britain, which had constructed the Canal in 1867 and held the majority shareholding in the enterprise. In using the mythical framework of *The Bacchae*, Butler imports Graeco-European culture to Africa: Thebes becomes Tanga Uranga; Stanton Wade, the purveyor of Apollonian law and order, takes on the proportions of a Pentheus; Father Jarvis becomes the wise all-seeing prophet Teiresias commenting perceptively at various points of the action; and the Tanga Urangans are the Maenads.

Whilst the title “Two Timers” quite obviously refers on an outer level to duplicity and betrayal in the actions of Stanton Wade’s unfaithfulness to his wife and her resultant act of adultery with Van Eyssen, as well as Bamu’s political betrayal of his hosts, there is an internal level at which several of the characters are “two timed” in their own personal natures.

District officer Stanton Wade represents the ‘enlightened’ colonial order which he believes “...is better than chaos.” But, as Father Jarvis perceptively observes, it

...is order for its own sake,  
Not order for the sake of men

“Two Timers” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 9

and in this he echoes Teiresias’ warning to Pentheus:

...Pentheus, pay heed to my words. You rely  
On force; but it is not force that governs human affairs.  
*The Bacchae* p. 201

Stanton believes that to master the “green nightmare beneath the windless trees” the order of Apollo is a prerequisite. When he is confronted by problems in the course of building the road to Lugardville, he resorts to the power of Apollonian rationality upon which western civilization is firmly constructed:

And I said to them aloud:  
“In any right-angled triangle  
The square on the hypoteneuse  
Is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.”  
There was a moment’s baffled silence.  
In it the forest ceased to frighten,  
The swamps sank back, afraid,  
And the demoralising insistence  
Of arguing voices and ignorant drums  
Declined to a boring vibration. I laughed;  
I laughed the whole Congo basin and the Mountains of the Moon  
To scorn; the six thousand miles of the Great Rift Valley,  
The Sahara, the Kalahari, and the Victoria Falls,  
All the witch doctors and white creators in the continent  
Could not refute that proposition!  
I laughed, I saw them all in proportion.  
I ceased to be intimidated....

“Two Timers” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 10

Stanton Wade is guilty of the same indiscretions as Pentheus before him: in placing all his belief in the power of Apollo and deriding the “ignorant drums” of Dionysus he begins to court disaster. His dismemberment at the hands of Dionysus begins with the disintegration of his incorruptible reputation after his affaire with Denise is discovered:

ABDIEL:           It is easy to lose the veneer [of civilisation]  
                           When our civilised betters do;  
                           District Officer Stanton Wade,  
                           The ice-cold incorruptible,  
                           The great White example,  
                           Your friend,  
                           The good son of the Church!

“Two Timers” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 6

Stanton who, according to Patricia his wife, has “...always had a reason for every act” tries to rationalise his behaviour and refuses to accept the impulsive in his nature. It is Father Jervis, the wise Teiresias figure, who suggests to Stanton that Denise embodies the forbidden pull he feels to the maddening world about him and that she is the intoxication of the Africa which he laughs to scorn. But Stanton refuses steadfastly to acknowledge the Dionysian pull of nature within his psyche, despite his ironic attempt whilst living in England with his wife to “...get the earth and [their] blood /To meet in a deep unconscious dance” – a transformation in their relationship that Patricia always secretly desired. His artificial attempts – the desperate picnics among the bluebells, the purchase of an “ice-cold” cottage in the country, and the acquisition of horses in Tanga Uranga – all prove fruitless because he attempts to order what ought to be impulsive, vibrant experiences. Apollo must always define the space within which Dionysus is permitted and tolerated.

It is only Father Jervis who sees the regenerative possibilities of the



Dionysiac experience:

When the established order is too narrow  
It is sometimes necessary to break it.  
The resulting, temporary chaos  
May be a creative thing -  
If it allows for a larger synthesis, of course.  
The church calls such a chaos  
A blessed fault.

“Two Timers” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 8

Father Jervis sees the balance necessary in life and is not derisive of the Dionysiac experience, or the pull of Africa. He does not regard it, as so many Colonials would, as a betrayal of the values of the Enlightenment and a failure of the ‘civilising’ mission. Rather, he sees the acknowledgement of the Dionysian side of one’s nature as essential to a harmonious existence. But Stanton Wade is like Pentheus -

...limited man confronting an irresistible force. Since he will not bend, he has no chance.<sup>62</sup>

Wade’s wife becomes his Agaue. He has to suffer the anguish of seeing his marriage disintegrate, his wife have an indiscreet affaire, and has to suffer rejection by her in order for some metamorphosis to begin taking place within him. Significantly enough his reawakening takes place through the revisitation, with his wife, of a dream sequence:

STANTON:	You and I are in a luxury express Gliding through the most heavenly country At eighty miles an hour.
PATRICIA:	But we feel no wind, no movement Except the monotonous click of the wheels.
STANTON:	Beyond the glass, the world moves As on a cinema screen. You are uneasy; I’m quite happy reading <i>The Times</i> .
PATRICIA:	It’s terribly stuffy. Can’t you open the window?
STANTON:	No, dear, it’s air conditioned.
PATRICIA:	Why did we come by train? We should have come by car, Or, better still, have bought two horses.
STANTON:	I smile indulgently. You were expecting, after all.
PATRICIA:	I can’t bear the rails, the iron rails;

Click, click. I wish we could jump the rails.  
 STANTON: And, by heavens, we do! Over!  
 PATRICIA: Over a steep embankment, screaming and banging  
 With a sickening corkscrew motion.  
 STANTON: Our coach lands up like a hippo,  
 A happy innocent hippo wallowing in weeds.  
 I get out and swim in a little stream.  
 Great fun. I feel quite young.  
 I even do handstands in the water.  
 PATRICIA: Your feet look just like arum lilies.  
 STANTON: But after a minute I feel quite angry.  
 I get out, and write to the British Railways  
 Demanding an explanation: this is not  
 A scheduled stop.  
 PATRICIA: I stroll off. I find the Engine,  
 A big black friendly bull browsing among the green,  
 Up to his axles in bracken and flowers.  
 STANTON: At which point you awake –

“Two Timers” Act 2 Sc. 1 pp. 59-60

Stanton Wade's train of Apollonian order within his personality is derailed by the horned god Dionysus. His recognition of this is startlingly similar to that of Pentheus who recognises the god for the first time:

PENTHEUS: Why, now! I seem to see two suns; a double Thebes;  
 Our city's wall with seven gates appears double.  
 DIONYSUS *takes PENTHEUS by the hand and leads him forward.*  
 You are a bull I see leading me forward now;  
 A pair of horns seems to have grown upon your head.  
 Were you a beast before? You have become a bull.

*The Bacchae* p. 225

By the time Pentheus identifies the god, it is too late - Dionysus has already invaded his soul. A similar fate befalls Wade, but in his case there are distinct undertones of an invasion not only at the personal level of the soul, but at the socio-political level as well. It is, perhaps, a subconscious dread of his as chief administrator of a Colonial territory that the coloniser's Apollonian train of western civilisation will be derailed by the colonised's Dionysiac power. In the former case, the Dionysian invasion is a blessing for Wade, because it enables him to achieve a synthesis in his psyche which ultimately saves his marriage.

Several other characters in the play intersect on the same theme. Three white South Africans are presented to us by Butler, all in the most unfavourable light. Alexander Orville, a Cecil John Rhodes-type mining magnate, sees his role in the same grandiose terms of "...developing half a continent". Nothing and no-one must invade this "centre" of his being. He sees himself as "...a man who has left his mark in granite" and, egotistical in the extreme, suggests to the American journalist Nesta Crankshaw that she write his biography. Riding on the back of British military subjugation of the indigenous population, he sets about establishing a repressive Apollonian order where his mine becomes

...geometrical metal shapes  
In the vegetable muddle of the jungle [where]

..the surveyors put in their pegs,  
And the shaft sinkers started to sweat....

"Two Timers" Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 70

In worshipping the precision of rationalism he represents the technocrat supreme who suffers a feeling of emasculation when, during the insurrection, portable radio, wristwatch, newspapers, and especially Wall Street "ticker" are removed from him by Bamu. His protest at such action reveals not only the worst condescension imaginable, but also an unacknowledged deep-seated fear:

NESTA:	...Don't attack the white boss outright; Attack the gadgets which made him great: Damage his sense of mastery over Time, By removing all watches, upsetting all clocks: Make him doubt his control of events By letting him hear of none; deprive him of all sense Of human support by stopping all transport, All letters, all talk. Sabotage his inventions, Reduce him, in fact, to a savage – A creature without machines.
ORVILLE:	Only a western mind could have thought of it – Or a black mind corrupted by clever whites. It's devilish. No car, no radio, no watch,

No spectacles, no revolver, - and look at me,  
 Quivering, terrified .....  
 And these damn trees, like praying mantises  
 Hovering over these huts....

“Two Timers” Act 2 Sc. 1 pp. 75-76

The liberal-minded American journalist who arrived with all the answers to the African dilemma quoted verbatim from the Bill of Rights begins to perceive matters in the most reactionary light thus “two timing” her own stated philosophy; and Orville, in the most patronising manner, believes that the idea of psychological warfare is far too subtle to have emerged from the African mind. For the first time, though, unlike his fellow white South Africans, he begins to understand that the forces of history are against him: the praying mantis, symbol of Africa, begins to haunt him and suggest that a repressive Apollonian order might not be all that invincible.

But it is the Apollonian order within his own psyche that is the first to capitulate. Isolated from all, he and Nesta are forced to listen to the drums of Africa beat in the distance. Bromius invades his soul and, rising, he dances with Nesta, abandoning the ‘centre’ reserved for developing half a continent in favour of a romance:

ORVILLE:        Listen to those drums. .... they excite things  
                              In me that my mines never stir.

“Two Timers” Act 3 Sc. 1 p. 90(b)

The experience enriches him and, although not altogether redeemed, he emerges with fresh perspectives on his place in Africa as a “Fascist reactionary”.

The other two South Africans, Denise Silvano and Herman van Eyssen, are drawn by Butler as extremely shallow figures. Pilot Officer van Eyssen is a white supremacist who lacks any sort of empathy with other human beings whether they be white or black. For him, “souls” are divisible into two categories – “black or white”. His aggressive invasion of space is typified by his assertion that the “ruddy jungle” does not have “any damn history”. His antics are repugnant even to the colonial leech Orville:

Typical South African: siege mentality:  
 Always at their best  
 When they're barricading themselves behind wagons,  
 Burglar alarms, bars on the windows,  
 Colour bars and racial laws.  
 [If they're not]  
 At a loophole taking pot-shots at people of colour who  
 Trespass across the bright, white line,  
 [They're] ...off in the saddle, or in a cockpit,  
 Chasing horizons hell for leather after each other.

“Two Timers” Act 3 Sc. 1 pp. 88-89

No-one doubts Van Eyssen's resourcefulness: he disarms Bamu, repairs the telephone link, restores the radio, and sets up a “laager-type” alarm system around the camp. He believes in talking only when he is in as strong a position as he can get, which prompts Patricia Wade to comment that he simply loves violence. There is no development in the nature of his character and, unlike many of the other characters in the play, the experiences of love and war fail to enrich him. In a damning political comment he is made by Butler to appear as insensitive and intransigent as the Nationalists in the (then) Union of South Africa whom he represents.

Denise Silvano, the hedonist newspaper reporter from Cape Town, who has abandoned married life and her two children in pursuit of a life of unbridled sensuality, is presented in equally shallow terms. Presumably she represents the

apathetic ESSA-type whom Butler took to task in his articles and lectures for its lack of motivation and political responsibility. The chain of events in Tanga Uranga convinces her to return to her family, but it must be said that her conversion is unconvincing. She has been neither “torn asunder” by grief nor purged by suffering and it is difficult to see how she has arrived at the point of new resolve.

Where the white protagonists in the play are representative of an Apollonian order confronted by the power of Dionysian Africa, Abdiel Sebenyani represents an apostate Dionysian who has given his soul to the rationality of Apollo and attempts to deny the horned god any place at all in his psyche. Having returned from London where he has completed a Social Science degree, we first encounter him dressed in colonial khakis and referred to disparagingly by Zechariah as a “poor mission boy” who has embraced the Christianity of the colonisers. Others, such as Kenyama, see him as a “sellout” to the cause of the colonisers and as one who has

...the conscience of a coward, a white conscience,  
Swept clean and garnished for the Whites.  
No Black fingerprints upon it  
In the Black man's cause.

“Two Timers” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 27

Abdiel is in the unenviable position of being caught between two cultures and belonging fully to neither; being caught between two religions and, ultimately, belonging to neither. In short he represents the plight of the colonised and exemplifies what Cabral meant when he said:

Africa was made to leave her history, her true history.<sup>63</sup>

When he returns to the village of his ancestors, his psyche is assailed on two fronts: the personal and the public for, in Africa, as Soyinka<sup>64</sup> points out, the gods

are seen as an expression of the political unity (or disunity) of the people, and their history or measure testifies to their subjection to secular consciousness. The repeated drumming in of a new chief night after night puts him to the test and “disturbs” him. But he resists believing that

...the dance/Switches the mind off like a torch.

“Two Timers’ Act 1 Sc.1 p. 39

He fears that, by allowing the “dance” of Dionysus any space, he will lose the light of reason and seeks to justify its retention:

We've spun round and round in circles in the sun  
For thousands on thousands of years....  
And even when we have broken free  
The giddiness gets us easily.  
But we have looked at your straight lines  
Your triangles, your cross.  
They have broken the charm of the circle,  
And nothing, nothing can mend it!

“Two Timers” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 40

Despite his self-conscious resistance he eventually succumbs to the power of Bromius and dances in full tribal regalia whilst in a state of alcoholic intoxication. This results in his experiencing the most powerful feelings of betrayal as he looks back on the action and sees in it the images of the Fall of Man: he dances away from the New Testament into the Garden of Eden and finds acceptance in the warm belly of the tribal serpent. His remorse is tragic and underlines Father Jervis's perceptive comment to Stanton Wade about the moral ambiguity of the Christian mission in colonial Africa:

You have fixed your Roman yoke on this province;  
It is cut into triangles by your roads; its holiest peaks  
Are nailed by your survey beacons; its secret contours  
Lie open and nude on your aerial maps;  
You have brought it a certain peace, made travel easy.  
It's my job to sign  
Your Pax Britannica with a cross.

“Two Timers” Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 13

A Dalian-type Christ of St John of the Cross suspended over an Africa suffering crucifixion under the Pax Britannica is evoked. Every African peak becomes a Golgotha where, ironically, religion becomes an oppressive servant of the colonial order and not a liberating force. It is seen by the coloniser, on the one hand, as a

...candidate for stuffing up the cultural black hole of the continent...

and by the colonised, on the other hand, as

...yet another rubblemaker of cultural edifices.<sup>65</sup>

Abdiel's fall, however, does not only bring him suffering; it also brings him redemption. Having reconciled the two warring polarities of his psyche, he recognises his failings and becomes fully re-integrated.

It is significant that, of all the characters portrayed, Zachariah seems the most balanced and the happiest. He seeks to deny neither Apollo nor Dionysus and is able to strike a perfect balance in his personality. His ability to feel at ease in both traditions is typified by his switching of regalia:

when the sun comes up,  
I put on my cotton uniform:  
Till then, beads and skins....

"Two Timers" Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 3.

It is he who encourages Abdiel to rediscover his roots, and Zachariah is equally at home paying obeisance to both Kenyama and Stanton Wade.

It is worth noting, at this point, that the playwright's intention is to show that both Apollo and Dionysus must have their rightful place if a true synthesis is to be achieved in Africa. Butler does not, as some critics have suggested, privilege the Apollonian axiomatically over the Dionysian as is patently obvious in "Two Timers".



We are also given an insight into his thoughts on this matter in his lecture on a comparative study of the roles of Coriolanus and Germanicus in their respective societies:

Between 'nature' and 'nurture' a tension develops, particularly as the laws of nations, like the laws of nature, are subject to error. Too much of either 'nature' or 'nurture' is bad for man....  
 This opposition between the worlds of 'nature' (instinct and impulse) and of law and control is sometimes falsely simplified into the opposition between chaos and order: the world of the blood and the passions is stigmatised as chaotic; the world of intellect as orderly. Such a notion is foreign to Shakespeare, who firmly believed that 'blood' and 'judgement' need to be properly mingled in a man, and that a divorce between them was unhealthy....<sup>66</sup>

There is little doubt that Butler subscribes to the same point of view as Shakespeare, a playwright whom he greatly respects and upon whose style he modelled his own attempts of "transcendental drama." Just as the Maenads are docile and peaceful when not provoked, so too is likely to be the response of an indigenous African population when its traditions and space are respected. The Maenads become ferocious when threatened, and Butler seems to suggest that the response of colonised Africans would be no different when they are threatened with "the Roman yoke" of imperial control in over-regulated societies. No doubt the plethora of constraining racial laws being promulgated in South Africa at this time was uppermost in his mind.

As literature, "Two Timers" presents a most interesting insight into Butler's early search for an African synthesis and his unequivocal condemnation, ab initio, of the apartheid policies being implemented in South Africa. As a play however, "Two Timers" displays several flaws. It lacks the tightness of plot and the dramatic intensity of, for example, "Judith" and *The Dove Returns*. Too frequently, speeches by the various characters lose their dramatic cohesion and digress into convoluted

debates of a political and religious nature. Apart from Abdiel Sebenyani, we do not ever really get the feeling that any of the characters are being put to the ultimate test and “torn asunder” as, for example, Sarah van Heerden or Lt Gracy. For these reasons, as well as for the fact that it deals with a now dated political theme, “Two Timers” is likely to resist production. Its significance is that it seems to have led Butler to a more plausible treatment of a Graeco-European/African synthesis in his next play *Demea*.

Written within a year of “Two Timers” and completed by 1959, *Demea* was, however, neither performed nor published until thirty years later. As reason for this, Butler cites the apartheid laws (Separate Amenities Act, 1953) which forbade a mixed cast in play productions. There is no doubt that, in production, the play has suffered from a thirty year enforced silence. It will be seen that what, in retrospect, is a highly prophetic piece of political writing was deprived of its political impact by its literary moratorium. It was first presented in July 1990 at the National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown and received a mixed, although mostly favourable, reception from critics.

One critic saw Butler as able to portray successfully

...Demea's predicament and brutal act [which] takes on added connotations - the choices she makes are loaded with political and racial overtones.... One of the many striking images of this production, studded with blinding truth and painful recognition, is statuesque Xaba (Demea) in full traditional dress sitting like a goddess of revenge and retribution on a rock – a woman carved out of history and pain.<sup>67</sup>

For another the play is adjudged to be a failure since

...the message [of non-racialism] might have been pertinent in the Sixties, but I doubt there are many who need it today.... Besides, the lesson of non-racialism is driven home with such a mixture of patronising cliché and limp sentiment that only the most starry-eyed liberal

believers in the audience could possibly appreciate it, - and black spectators, I am sure, would reject it with contempt.  
 ...Set speeches, each on windy values, follow thick and fast....Not one moment of real drama, in the sense of a vital interaction of cast members, or even one arresting or original thought....<sup>68</sup>

The latter critical viewpoint is, of course, underpinned by its starting assumption that racism in South Africa ended with the unbanning of the African National Congress and the freeing of Nelson Mandela in 1990.

Contextualisation into the social and political milieu of 1959 gives the play an entirely different impact and prophetic status from its current value. The political philosophy espoused by Butler in the play would have carried him beyond the margins of political heresy in the eyes of the majority of white South Africans who, notwithstanding the sizeable proportion of English-speakers, had given an unequivocal endorsement to National Party segregationist policies in the 1958 General Election by increasing its parliamentary majority from 94 seats to 103 seats. This brought it to the brink of an incontestable two thirds majority in the House. With the death of Prime Minister J. G. Strijdom in that same year, Dr H. F. Verwoerd was elevated to the highest office in the land and brought with him his 'Grand Scheme' of apartheid labelled 'Separate Development' in which, it was advocated, each racial group would develop along its own lines. Undaunted by the Tomlinson Commission's rejection of the viability of Separate Development – its reservations being that the greatest share of the country's resources and land would remain in white hands after partition - Verwoerd proceeded to intensify the pace of racial legislation and separation, convincing many whites that self-governing Bantustans for each of the individual 'tribes' in South Africa was the most prudent political dispensation for the country.

Knowing that the South African government's racial policies would not be tolerated by India and many other newly independent African countries in the British Commonwealth, Verwoerd began preaching the merits of an independent Republic along the lines of the old "Boer Republics" and a withdrawal from the Commonwealth. In his scheme, not only would the different indigenous peoples "go it alone" locally, but South Africa would "go it alone" internationally. Such was the mood which informed the South African political scene at the time *Demea* was written.

In his autobiography, Butler himself explains the mythical origins of *Demea* written at the height of the Verwoerdian mania:

Ever since seeing the *Agamemnon*, I have remained fascinated by ancient Greek drama and the power of certain of those works to speak across great historical and cultural gaps. I was particularly interested in stories which might be valid for both Europe and Africa, for blacks and for whites. This interest, combined with my growing knowledge of South Africa in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, my reading of missionary and Settler diaries and of Xhosa and other tribal histories (most notably of the Amangwane under Chief Matiwane) led me in 1959 to transpose the *Medea* of Euripides from the Aegean to the fringes of the Cape Colony in the late 1820s.<sup>69</sup>

The universality of Euripides' play becomes re-routed: Corinth of 43 B.C. becomes a South Africa not only of the 1830s A.D., but also of 1959 as the playwright conflates two treks – a Separate Development plan political trek of modern South Africa on the wagon wheels of an 1830s frontier migration. Medea becomes transposed into Demea, a beguiling Tembu princess who, to her great cost, has deserted her own traditions and been seduced by the Apollonian intellect of the Jason-archetype Captain Jonas Barker, trader and veteran of the Napoleonic Wars and symbol of the English presence in South Africa. King Creon becomes the Verwoerdian Kroon, leader of a "herrenvolk" trek drawing its inspiration from the dogmas of fascist pure-Aryanism.

In form and structure, *Demea* is far closer to its Greek model than “Two Timers” is to *The Bacchae*. For the first time, Butler abandons the three Act format of the Great Tradition in favour of nine fairly cohesive Scenes within a single Act all linked by an interactive chorus. In this, perhaps, he was striving to achieve the same dramatic intensity as Euripides was able to do by employing a structure of continuous action. The play takes the form more of an allegorical epic than a dramatic tragedy. Notable, too, is the shift away from the free-flexible verse made so fashionable by T. S. Eliot in the 1950s and used extensively by Butler in the earlier plays, to a tightly-knit but nonetheless poetic dramatic prose style.

Of even greater significance, however, is Butler’s departure from the “transcendental drama” pattern of Shakespeare’s reconciliation plays and his own earlier attempts. Whereas all of Butler’s plays to this point had ended in a spirit of optimism and hope, *Demea* projects a sombre, lugubrious mood which approaches the nihilism Butler found so unacceptable in modern European drama.

As is the case with his archetype Jason, Jonas is initially a man of entirely respectable ambitions. He responds in an open-hearted manner to Demea’s request to be allowed to remain with him:

KANTONI: ...She said a thing no African woman would say; lifting her arms she said, “Captain keep me with you.” And to me the next morning, she said, “I am finished with these beads and skins. Put them away.” Dressed in her mission clothes, she sat on the wagon watching the huts of her childhood slip over the hills; and the wagon went back to the white man’s world.

*Demea* Sc. 1 p. 13

In acquiescing to her request, Jonas fails to realise the full import of the liaison to which he agrees. Demea, “dressed in her mission clothes” and personifying black

South Africa, has turned her back on the pagan rites of Dionysus pursuing, instead, the light of Apollo. She entrusts her soul and the guidance of her journey into the new world of Apollonian experience to the English. There is also a suggestion that the old way of life, the rural picture of the “huts of her childhood”, must “slip over the hills” and give way to a new industrialised order. Having repudiated her origins there is no turning back for the missionaries have “...made her a stranger to her tribe” (Sc. 1 p. 13).

Like Jason, Jonas has been presented with two fatal obstacles. Just as the non-Greek Medea would never be accepted by the Greeks as Jason's wife, Demea would never be accepted as Jonas's wife – the political, social, and economic marriage of black and white would always remain, from the white perspective, an unofficial ‘common law’ one, based only upon expediency and able, thus, to be reneged upon at any time. The second fatal obstacle is the fruits reaped from such an illicit union – the two sons, belonging to neither culture but rejected by both.

In the character of Jonas a concern for ‘civilised’ values is joined with a calculating Apollonian coldness and an unscrupulous want of feeling:

JONAS: ...One man can't fight the prejudices of a continent. They are the toughest things this land produces, tougher than aloes and desert shrubs, deep-rooted and covered in thorns. I am a practical man, who faces facts. Respect facts, don't attempt the impossible.

*Demea* Sc. 2 p. 25

His inability to synthesise the centrifugal thrusts of an Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy which threatens to dismember his psyche is the dilemma to which all colonisers are subjected:

DEMEA: I know the great freedom of our trek is a prison to you.  
 You hunger to live behind stone or brick walls, not canvas  
 and grass mats; to plant a garden of fruit trees, and eat of  
 their fruit; to put plough into earth and find it fruitfully yours;  
 to be among people who are settled and your own.

*Demea* Sc. 6 p. 54

He abandons any thought of embracing the natural, emotional Dionysian order which would restore equilibrium in his psyche, objecting to building his "...life on a darkness, an absence of everything" (Sc. 6 p. 55). He decides, rather, to break up the trek "...to the four winds", abandons Demea who had seen in him "...the bringer of a new heaven and a new earth" (Sc. 6 p. 54), and makes arrangements to consign his two sons to a Mission Station amongst the Griquas. His final insult to Demea is his joining of Kroon's trek and his proposed marriage to Kroon's daughter.

The supreme irony of Jonas's action is that, in seeking to uphold what he perceives to be civilised norms against an encroaching barbarism, he embraces a totalitarianism which, in its excesses, is even more violent and 'barbaric'. Writing about this phenomenon in the *Medea*, Vellacott puts it succinctly:

The play shows a truth which many Greeks must have recognised, though it was seldom acknowledged in so many words: that when a community or a nation has adopted, in its political and social institutions, the quality of self-control, *sophrosyne*, it soon learns that this quality belongs only in limited measure to its citizens; that the principle of barbarous excess is predominant in most individuals, so that the constant concern of government is to deal with barbarism inside the walls and in the council-chamber, as well as in foreign lands. Just as in the modern world democracy, desperate to resist totalitarianism, resorts to totalitarian methods, weakening its own life in the process, so the fiery Greek temperament made the menace of barbarism the excuse for its own excesses.<sup>70</sup>

The excesses in Kroon's trek are typified by his assertion that "...Civilised whites with guns and horses cannot be defeated by undisciplined savages" (Sc. 3 p. 28).

The Apollonian order of colonial subjugation, no matter how violent and repressive, receives the privileged status of being civilised whereas the nightmarish Dionysian other, even when it is left in peace and is gentle and peaceloving, is categorised as savage:

Kroon: I have watched them dance and drink until they were no longer people, but demons, flung this way and that by the drunken hands of the drummers, the shrieks of swaying, hand-clapping women.

*Demea* Sc. 3 pp. 29-30

Kroon displays an unconscious fear - the fear of the coloniser - of the triumph of atavistic Nietzschean energy over the social order of restraint, the subjugated over their victors, and the dispossession of the colonisers by the colonised. He justifies his aggressive invasion of space - "...Africa is big, and Africa is almost empty" (Sc. 1 p. 11) - by reinforcing the myth of an empty landscape, an unpeopled hinterland, which seeks to validate the untenable premises of colonial dispossession and its frequent excesses.

In pulling the plough "...of his great white dream" Kroon reflects the Nationalist propaganda of Afrikaner identity which used the Great Trek as its validating myth; a myth built on the erroneous historical premise that the nineteenth-century treks had been all-white events. Accordingly, he banishes Demea telling her that she and her "folk" of colour will have to be "...over the skyline an hour after dawn" the day following Jonas's marriage to his daughter. In what would become highly prophetic dialogue in political terms, Demea warns Kroon of the consequences:



KROON: Impis from different tribes will dance in their honour before the wedding. They are practising for the occasion now. You can hear their drums.

DEMEA: I hear them. What tribe is the high-pitched beat?

KROON: Baharutsi – to the west.

DEMEA: And the deep, slow throb?

KROON: Batlakari – to the north.

DEMEA: And the most distant drum?

KROON: I hear no other.

DEMEA: Fast, like the first spring rain falling on the dry veld. From the south-east.

KROON: There is no tribe there but a handful of Bushmen.

DEMEA: We hear different things, Kroon.

KROON: That is what I have always said. We live in different worlds.

DEMEA: Your white vision is our nightmare; but its pain may breed a vision in us that will be a nightmare to you.

*Demea* Sc. 3 pp. 36-37

Within a year of Butler's writing this passage, the "distant" drums "...from the south-east" would be rising to a crescendo. On 9<sup>th</sup> January 1960, riots broke out in the Cato Manor settlement bordering Durban. Nine policemen were killed and martial law was proclaimed in the area. This provided the catalyst for further insurrection. The newly-formed Pan Africanist Congress under Robert Subukwe organised mass demonstrations against pass law legislation and on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1960 the tragic events of Sharpeville took place where sixty-nine Africans were killed by government forces. Chief Albert Luthuli, in a move of solidarity, burned his Reference (Pass) Book publicly. Riots broke out on 27<sup>th</sup> March in Langa, a township outside Cape Town, and three days later, on 30<sup>th</sup> March, a crowd of 30 000 black people invaded the 'inviolable' Mother City. The various uprisings had now become a nationwide insurrection and there was a further revolt against the payment of taxes in Pondoland.

Perhaps most prophetic of all, Tembuland – mentioned frequently in the text by Butler as the land of the princess Demea – rose in revolt in 1961 under its Chief

Sabata Dalinyebo. The rebellion was quelled; he was deposed by the South African government and replaced by Kaiser Matanzima whose appointment coincided with the arrest of Nelson Mandela.

The play also hints at the future difficulties of concerted black action and the internecine strife that would hamper a united opposition to the racism of the supremacist Nationalists. When we recall that the greatest strife amongst the various black liberation movements took place between the Inkatha Freedom Party, claiming its inheritance from Shaka and symbolised by an elephant, and the African National Congress, which drew its power base from the Eastern Cape, or the land of Matiwane, the following passage has a distinctly prophetic ring:

INDUNA:           Matiwane's mind is set in another direction than a new land. He longs for the old. "Let us return", he said "to the land of my fathers and be crushed by the elephant Shaka." "You will never be crushed" some cried. So we turned back north. Two weeks ago we heard from a passing Bushman that you were here selling guns to Griquas and Boers. Then Matiwane said: "Go to this man Jonas. Buy all the guns he has and the heavy metal and the fire powder and let him teach you how to use them. With even twenty of such guns, with luck and the right ground, we will wash from the land of our fathers the shadow of Shaka."

*Demea* Sc. 5 p. 49

Kroon cannot hear the distant drums of retribution, preferring to continue cutting "the black skin of Africa", ignoring the "clay" which "cries out" in anguish and suffering. Jonas, the hero of battles overseas, has abrogated his responsibility of defending the defenceless here - perhaps an indirect allusion by Butler to the apathy and tiredness of an Empire upon which, at one time, the sun never set. Jonas forges an alliance with Kroon whose daughter he will wed. Faced with this scenario, Demea's retribution is swift and decisive. She sends her two sons to

Kroon with gifts of gunpowder barrels filled, surreptitiously, with sand and persuades the impi of Matiwane, in the guise of celebratory dancers at the wedding, to attack Kroon who, when he discovers the fake barrels of gunpowder, will kill the children in Jonas's presence. She resigns herself to her fate in the same stoical manner as Medea to whom the circumstances of her life bear strong resemblance:

MEDEA:            Now let things take their course. What use is life to me?  
                          I have no land, no home, no refuge from despair.  
                          My folly was committed long ago, when I  
                          Was ready to desert my father's house....

*Medea* p. 41

Demea's fatal plot runs according to plan and she gains her revenge when Jonas suffers the loss of all he has: he is subjected to the traumatic sight of his children being killed by Kroon before the new brides of both Kroon and Jonas are killed by Matiwane's warriors. He becomes "...a shadow that casts no shadow in the sun" having been deaf "...to the strange and the cruel, the high and the deep things". The cause of passion, disorder, and violent cruelty seems to have been vindicated against the cold, orderly, self-protective processes of civilised man and the play ends on a sombre note with no hint of any redemptive possibilities.

Despite the fact that it lacks the poignant power of Euripides' play, *Demea* is a finely crafted play in which, unlike some of Butler's earlier plays, the language has been pared of any lyrical excesses to suit the action of the characters. Furthermore, for the first time Butler was prepared to experiment with form in his attempt to strike a synthesis between the Aegean and the Cape. Contrary to the criticisms expressed by some of his detractors, what *Demea* does reveal is Butler's willingness, once again, to engage a controversial political theme.

Unlike any other play written either before it or after it by Butler, "The Silver Spoon" is written as light comedy which, nonetheless, masks a serious didactic intention. It is in manuscript form having been neither published nor produced, and its style and content would seem to suggest a completion date of around 1965. In it Butler retained the three-Act structure of the established Western tradition in playwriting but he chose to abandon the free-flexible verse style of T. S. Eliot to which he had previously adhered faithfully in his other three-Act plays. At one level "The Silver Spoon" deals, unsurprisingly, with Butler's favourite theme – the failure and personal rebirth and regeneration of the individual through a transcendental transformation. At another level it examines and comments on issues of race in South African society. Bitterappelsfontein, the fictitious town in which the action takes place, becomes a microcosm of the South African political milieu in the 1930s.

An enigmatic, central protagonist, Tim Jones, becomes the focus around which the plot revolves. Having been born into a wealthy white family he becomes painfully disillusioned when, as an eight year-old child, he discovers his father's infidelity to his dying mother. He suspects his mother's death has been hastened by his father and his mistress, and he runs away from home when his father remarries, taking with him a silver spoon with distinctive crest from the family silver. Wandering isolated in the wilderness of semi-desert and near the point of starvation, he chances upon an Irish handyman and his 'coloured' wife who adopt him and treat him lovingly as their own. It is an act of kindness he never forgets and he, in turn, does the same for an old outcast 'coloured' lady and her son Hasie Windvoel who becomes his faithful devotee.

Jones becomes a “gentleman of fortune” who has lived on either side of the colour divide. White by birth and in appearance, he has nonetheless lived most of his life among the unpretentiousness of people of colour who eat goats’ meat and have no airs of status. Engaging in acts of illicit diamond buying and poaching game for a living, he becomes legendary for his exploits and the law enforcement officer of Bitterappelsfontein, Sergeant ‘Domkrag’ Basson, sees in his arrest and conviction an opportunity for career promotion.

Other members of the town around whom the action revolves are revealed to us in the local hotel owned by an immigrant, Tefkie Kantorowitz, and his childless wife, Bekkie, who secretly longs for a child. Bombastic Dr Philpotts, the local dentist, who also happens to be the Mayor, runs a less than clean administration and has ‘bought’ the local public prosecutor. Philpotts is involved in several illegal activities with the hotel proprietor and with a nefarious character, ‘Steekgras’ van Tonder (Smith), who adopts several aliases and whose only redeeming feature is his beautiful and well-meaning daughter Anna with whom Tim Jones falls in love.

In order to boost his own image the Mayor has contracted Harry Colbrook, a civil engineer from Cape Town, to construct a dam outside the town. Unbeknown to all including Jones, Colbrook is Jones’s half-brother. Whilst the building of the dam is in progress the irrepressible Sergeant ‘Domkrag’ engineers his own coup – the corrupt public prosecutor is replaced by an incorruptible ‘Uitlander’ from Natal. The evidence available to the courts suggests almost certain conviction of Philpotts and his allies who contemplate the prospect of a long prison term. In order to gain the hand of Anna, Jones offers to “cook the evidence” and replace them in prison for the sum of three thousand pounds with which he hopes, upon his release, to buy land and marry Anna.

The dam is built by Colbrook and Jones serves his prison term. Upon his release he discovers that, in his absence, Anna has agreed to marry his half-brother Colbrook. However, rising floodwaters and the threatened flooding of the town delay the marriage. The rising floodwaters threaten to breach the dam wall and it is only through Jones' intervention that the calamity is prevented, thus enabling the marriage to take place. Jones returns the silver spoon to Harry Colbrook and Anna as a wedding gift thus legitimizing Harry's inheritance of the Colbrook estate and returns to the wilderness a self-imposed but wiser exile.

Biblical allusion and symbolism abound in the play. The most prominent are the Old Testament symbols of the desert and the Scapegoat, and the New Testament symbols of the sheep and the barren fig tree. Depending upon the disposition of one's mind, the desert can be either a place of profound mystical experience and renewal such as the Early Church Fathers discovered in Egypt, or it can be a Wasteland symbolising spiritual aridity in the absence of the Fisher King. It is seen as both of these in "The Silver Spoon".

For Dr Philpotts, the Mayor, who commissions engineer Harry Colbrook to construct a dam, the desert is a hindrance to urbanisation and growth:

Well, look what a miracle a couple of dykes and a few miles of canal did at Kakamas and Louisvale. Twenty years ago that stretch of river was inhabited by nothing but a brace of Griquas and an old Irish tramp. Now there are thriving communities, shops, schools, churches, lucerne, saltanas, oranges, green right up to the desert's rim. And it's going to be like that here too.

"The Silver Spoon" Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 8

Here the urban is axiomatically privileged over the rural and Philpotts, as the coloniser who accepts, displays his racial bigotry. For him, the worth of a

community depends upon how many shops, schools, churches, saltanas and oranges are to be found there. In his perception the "...brace of Griquas and an old Irish tramp" – seemingly the loving foster parents of Jones – could not possibly constitute a community and this opinion allows him subscription to the colonial myth of an empty landscape waiting to be opened by the Bible, the gun, and the pound.

Bekkie sees the aridity of her environment as keeping her barren. She believes that were she able to have sufficient water to maintain a garden and have a fig tree bear fruit, she too would "...be as a tree planted by the waters [and not] ...cease from bearing fruit." She welcomes the irrigation for very different reasons from Philpott.

For Tim Jones the desert "...is a sort of ocean" possessing all the characteristics, both regenerative and destructive, of that medium. A loveless home casts him into the wilderness where even nature is seen to be hostile:

TIM:                   ...He ate the last of his food as the sun went down. He made himself a bed of wintergrass in a windless place between three big smooth iron stones, and tried to sleep. But the jackals and the nightjars kept him awake. He knew they couldn't kill him, of course, but they made the whole world and the whole sky so damn lonely.

"The Silver Spoon" Act 1 Sc. 1 p. 18

He is soon led to distrust humanity and believe that "...Togetherness is all a lie". But the same wilderness experience, as I have said, leads him to chance upon an old Irish handyman and a Coloured wife who provide him a loving home. His willingness to become the scapegoat and go to prison sets him, once more, on a journey of self-discovery. The grasping materialism and the racial prejudice of the Bitterappelfontein community repulse him. When he is

confronted with the choice between getting his revenge on all by allowing the dam wall to break and the valley to flood, thus ruining the townsfolk, or keeping the floodwaters at bay by persuading black farm labourers to assist, it is Tante Liesbet who persuades him to do the good thing:

...In a long drought or in the path of a great flood we may feel as helpless as mice or insects. But we are not mice or insects. No. When we make up our mind to do a difficult thing, or, sometimes, when we coldly take stock of something we have done, we see just what we are, what life is; and to see that is enough.

“The Silver Spoon” Act 3 Sc. 2 p. 48

He chooses to do the right “difficult” thing but his eyes are opened to the point where he “...can live among, but not with, those who are blind” and he renounces any romantic designs he had on Anna. He decides to return to

...the non-human world; the wilderness that knows neither good nor evil. I have seen good and evil. I must take them into the desert and let the desert judge them. Only after that, maybe, I'll be free for other things.

“The Silver Spoon” Act 3 Sc. 4 p. 55

The play comments strongly if, at times, somewhat comically on the issue of racial prejudice. When Jones is arrested by Sergeant Domkrag Basson for being in possession of poached venison and asseverates that it is only goats' meat that he is carrying, the prejudiced response from the villagers is notable:

ANNA:	Why shouldn't it be goats' meat?
STEEKGRAS:	Only Coloureds and Kaffirs eat goats' meat. What should he be doing with a truck full of it?
TIM:	I was going to give it away.
MAYOR:	Your tongue has certainly lost its touch for a tale.
ANNA:	Who were you going to give it to?
TIM:	Coloureds and Kaffirs.
MAYOR:	What on earth for?
TIM:	Because I like giving meat to Coloureds and Kaffirs.
STEEKGRAS:	The man is mad.
MAYOR:	What a yarn to spill.

“The Silver Spoon” Act 1 Sc. 1 pp. 13-14



Believing that Jones is lying and that he has the finest venison in his truck the hotel proprietors, Tefkie and Bekkie, prepare the meat for their hotel guests, Mr Steekgras "Smith", the Mayor, and his wife Mrs Philpotts, who enjoy the highly seasoned meat immensely. When Tante Liesbet arrives and declares that it is goats' meat, she is not believed. Her solemn avowal that it is goats' meat and that she is an authority on goats' meat contains a humorous irony:

TANTE: ...And they [the children] send no money; in all this year not enough money to buy a single pig. We eat nothing but goats' meat; we farm only goats...

"The Silver Spoon" Act 1 Sc. 2 p. 15

Poverty and suffering, Butler suggests, removes the veneer of artificial class distinctions and reduces all to a common humanity. When crisis strikes the town it is only saved by Jones' intervention in getting all the inhabitants of the valley to work together. The heroic efforts of people of colour are, however, ignored by white racial bigots such as Steekgras:

STEEKGRAS: Look, just look at it. It's a nightmare. All colours working together. I never expected to live to see this day.

"The Silver Spoon" Act 3 Sc. 4 p. 52

It is the wise Tante Liesbet who sees far deeper implications in the attitude of people like Steekgras:

Make up the fires, my child...yes...the smell of coffee. Coal. Starlight. And men working, and fate working, in the dark together, or against each other.... And a silly cricket going on and on as if there were nothing happening. Just now the dawn wind will shake the flame; it will also shake each blade of grass over the length of Africa.

"The Silver Spoon" Act 3 Sc. 4 p. 54

This enigmatic but loosely prophetic passage seems to suggest that, whilst there are those people who are "working together" in South Africa, there are also those who are "working against" a common understanding. The latter seem to be aided

by an almost insuperable “fate working, in the dark” against harmony. The spectre of a fiery retribution awaits them in the suggestion of a warlike impi shaking blades “over the length of Africa.”

A political reading of Butler is certainly in keeping with the political preoccupations finding expression in all his plays, albeit as secondary themes in many of them. “The Silver Spoon” evidences an acute focus on material dispossession as a legacy of colonialism. Tim Jones, the play's hero, identifies with the coloured marginalised in South African society and is concerned with their material needs. It is he who is caught transporting meat to the location to give “to Coloureds and Kaffirs” and who insists that Hasie be paid a very generous wage of ten pounds per month:

TIM: It is what he is used to. He has dependants: his wife and kids and an old mother.  
 STEEKGRAS: Coloured?  
 TIM: Coloured. His father was white.  
 STEEKGRAS: Since when do you worry about Coloured people?  
 TIM: That is my affair. ...  
 ...  
 STEEKGRAS: ...To remain free, I agree to a little bribery. And now my bribe is to be used to spoil a Coloured man with a wickedly extravagant wage. In fact, one starts by making a modest, conservative stand, and in five minutes one is involved in a subversive, revolutionary act. Tim, I appeal to you. Why behave like a missionary, a kaffirboetie, an agitator?

“The Silver Spoon” Act 2 Sc. 1 p. 37

When Tim Jones is told by Tefkie that the Black shearers on his sheep farm will not agree to assist on the dyke, his first question is whether they were offered a just wage for their labour. When the well-meaning Harry asks Tim to intercede in the matter of the Black shearers because “...the future of the valley's at stake” Tim's retort is:

The future of the valley or the future of Philpotts, Van Tonder and Kantorowitz? What do you say, Hasie? What about your future? The shearers'? Mine? And they want us to help save it. No. No. No.

"The Silver Spoon" Act 3 Sc. 3 p. 51

As a White brought up in a community with no colour bar, Tim enjoys a trusted status amongst the 'Coloured' and Black communities where he is seen to be free of the patronising Colonial attitude of talking *at* people of colour rather than *with* them (Act 3 Sc. 3 p. 51). In the context of the play it is appropriate and significant that Hasie, a person of colour, is the catalyst which brings him to a new understanding and an action of forgiveness. This ends in his spiritual regeneration and rebirth, following the transcendental precedent set in all Butler's previous plays with the exception of *Demea*.

Between 1960 and 1965, Butler began researching the unpublished diaries and writings of the 1820 Settlers. He describes how the Oxford scholar began to be drawn further and further into the history of Africa, discovering himself gradually as a Karoo son:

Not only were there new sense data to be ingested; one had to learn how wrong it was to call the land loveless, shallow, artless and without ghosts: it had merely seemed to lack these dimensions because one had been encapsulated in a language, a literature and a religion insensitive to them. One had to put oneself humbly to school, to look at the landscape wide-eyed, and to listen to its stories with less wax in one's ears.<sup>71</sup>

The experiences of the 1820 Settlers caught his imagination and, within a period of five years from 1965 to 1970, he wrote four plays, all of which were on Settler themes.

*Take Root or Die*, the first of the four plays in what we might term 'the

Settler Cycle', was premiered in September 1966 on the occasion of the opening of the Rhodes University Theatre and deals with the trials and hardships experienced by the 1820 English pioneer Settlers within the first five years of establishing themselves (1820-1825). Owing to the diversity of their activities and the large number of settlers who had to be portrayed, Butler chose to use some seventy characters in twenty six Scenes spread over five Acts. He made use of extensive historical sources written by the Settlers themselves, in many instances using their own words.

The play does not, therefore, conform in any measure to the structure of Butler's earlier plays with their Aristotelian unity of plot but resembles more a series of historically-based vignettes dramatically linked into a lively pageant, rather than a formal play. Butler's attempt to present a wide cross-section of pioneer heroes naturally impedes any real dramatic cohesion and necessitates the use of settlers Godlonton and Montgomery as a type of unifying chorus. Montgomery becomes, in fact, the precursor of Charlie whom we later encounter in *Richard Gush of Salem*. The emphasis is placed on the tribulations of the community rather than on any particular protagonist, and the cohesion necessary in the play is to be found in a logical sequence of successive loosely-related episodes.

*Take Root or Die* examines the hardships endured by the first settlement in the Eastern Cape (and on South African soil) of some 5000 British pioneers who were brought to the Cape with the express purpose, it seems, of acting as a buffer in the district of Albany between the Fish and Bushman's Rivers. The play opens with the landing of these settlers in Algoa Bay and closes with the important Bathurst meeting of 1825.

In keeping with his vision of finding the “common humanity” which, he hoped, would bind all South Africans into a concerned, peaceful, sharing community, Butler presents in detail to his audience the diversity of origin, social class, and religious denomination of the Albany Settlers: the sincere missionaries Jeremiah Goldswain and John Ayliff; the philanthropists Dr John Philip and Thomas Philipps; the landed gentry represented by the Pigots as opposed to the poor farming community of whom the Stubbs family is a typical example; the hunters and traders of the Moody, Bowker, and Driver families; the romantic Irish runaway, John Montgomery, who moves with ease between the various cultural communities in the Cape and comments to the audience on happenings beyond the frontier; and, lest we get the impression that all those in the Settler community were an asset to their new land, the corrupt Settler leadership represented by William Wait. Most importantly, however, we are presented with the inefficient and corrupt colonial officials, Col. Somerset and Landdrost Harry Rivers, whose antagonists were the implacable champions of a free press, Robert Godlonton and Thomas Pringle. Perhaps Butler intended this to be seen as an exhortation to the ESSAs of the twentieth century to resist autocratic oppression wherever and whenever they encountered it. Significantly, there is no ‘vision of the future’ which binds the Albany Settlers together until their democratic rights and freedom are threatened by the corrupt and autocratic colonial officials. It is the Grahamstown Trial and the Bathurst Meeting which forge the Settlers into a unified and purposeful community seeking justice.

In presenting these various historical characters to his audience, Butler takes great care to provide a balanced and historically accurate picture. He gives preference to neither the Settler with the gun nor the Settler with Bible. Butler tries

to strike a balance between the two extreme historical perspectives of the British Colonial mission: the romantic nineteenth-century view which presents imperialism as the expression of a vigorous European nation's noble pioneering spirit; and the more radical view which presents British expansionism as a Sabine intrusion.

Action in the various scenes is initiated by characters of historical import who introduce themselves and proceed to set the scene for further developments. At times Butler also uses the devices of mime, musical interludes, and musical ballads, an art form he was keen to revive. At other times, he superimposes a scene of mythical or historical significance upon another and this is acted out by the principal characters most of whom play directly to the audience.

If there can be said to be any fundamental unifying theme it would be a presentation of how the disorganised individuals who land at Algoa Bay in the first scene are pulled together as the action continues into a cohesive community prepared to fight adversity and contest social injustice and misrule. The destitute farmers who were contracted to the corrupt Settler leader Mr William Wait refuse to continue working for him as they have not been paid any of the wages owed to them by contract. They are summoned to court in Grahamstown and whilst they await the arrival of their corrupt leader for Trial (Act II Sc. 7) the hunter, Miles Bowker, happens to meet them outside the courtroom and asks their assistance in directing him to a store. Meanwhile, his assistant, Thomas Lofts, who had taken French leave from Mr Wait's employ, attempts to hide behind several "stuffed birds and ostrich feathers" to avoid detection. He is, however, noticed and apprehended by the destitute farmers so that he can provide vital evidence in court in their successful defence against Mr Wait (Act II Sc. 8).

But the cause of justice is not yet done. In Act IV Lord Charles Somerset attempts to merge the benevolent fund of the colonial administration with the independent fund run by the Settlers themselves. In effect this would mean that the corrupt, embezzling Landdrost of Albany, Harry Rivers, would control the funds. The Settlers, led by Philipps, reject the proposal and Rivers begins planning a counter petition from bribed Settlers to Governor Lord Somerset attesting his suitability as fund administrator. Act V moves us into the Bathurst Meeting (1825). Contesting that the real motive for the amalgamation of the two funds is

...to silence us; to deprive us of our function, and you [Settlers] of what little leadership you have...

*Take Root or Die* Act V Sc. 4 p. 85

Thomas Philipps proposes a motion, seconded by Major Pigot, and ultimately supported by all save one at the meeting, that the funds remain separate and be run independently. The motion is carried and the Bathurst Meeting ends in a triumph not only for the Settlers but also, it is implied, for the voice of reason and democracy. The Epilogue, in which the various leading characters take turns at the footlights and deliver their closing speeches to the audience, celebrates this victory, and the play,

...a happy and successful production [with]...immediacy, pace, tension and humour...<sup>72</sup>

ends in a spirit of hope in the future.

Within two years, Butler would return to this same theme, but in more compressed version, for his radio play "A Scattering of Seed", which would be broadcast on SABC on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1968 to commemorate Settlers' Day in September. The radio play is itself based upon a document provisionally entitled

“Settler Epic” and reworked into “A Scattering of Seed” which consists of three major sections comprised of thirty four verbal tableaux.

The first section is a compressed version of the material used in *Take Root or Die* and deals with the first five years of the Albany Settlers' struggle. The second and longest section describes the first contacts of the white settlers with the indigenous people of southern Africa. Into scrutiny are brought the Sixth Frontier War (1834-35) and the establishment of Christian missionary outstations as well as early trading ventures. This section is brought to a close by the presentation to the Uys Trekker party of a Bible from the English Settlers. The third, and final, section traces, from a Settler's perspective, the course of South African history from the beginnings of the Great Trek until the discovery of diamonds in Griqualand in 1870, a date which coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the landing of the Albany Settlers who congregated in Grahamstown from far and wide for the occasion. The final chorus which concludes this section leads the listener forward in anticipation of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Settler landings, which would be commemorated in 1970.

In departing from the lines of formal drama, as was the case with *Take Root or Die*, Butler was, in his own view, once again seeking to

...bring to life a few people in their non-heroic incompleteness, frustration and hope; not great people, but ordinary folk whose collective efforts have helped to make our landscape and way of life what it is.<sup>73</sup>

He was, however, consciously or unconsciously also establishing the ground for a cultural myth which he no doubt hoped would act as a counterweight to Afrikaner Nationalism's validating myth of the Great Trek.



Retaining the theme of English “collective efforts” towards the development of the South African “landscape and way of life”, Butler wrote a play on the life of the famous South African geologist, engineer and road-builder, Andrew Geddes Bain. Described by Butler as a play with a “...strong Settler flavour” it was first performed in the Rhodes University Theatre, Grahamstown, on Settlers’ Day 4<sup>th</sup> September 1967. In the premiere, Bain was played by Frank Shelley whom Butler had first seen in London in 1947 and who that year had gained fame for his role as Hamlet in the London Playhouse production. Bain’s arrival at the Cape pre-dates the arrival of the Albany Settlers in 1820. Born in Scotland in 1797 he arrived at the Cape as a teenager in what is thought to be 1816. He had already established himself in Graaff-Reinet as a newspaper reporter by the time the Albany Settlers arrived. A man of eclectic talents he was a sometime saddler, journalist, trader, road engineer, geologist, and farmer. After the Sixth Frontier War in which he served as a lieutenant, he was rewarded with land, but Lord Glenelg’s revision of land policy on the Eastern Frontier shortly afterwards resulted in Bain being deprived of his land. This, together with other setbacks which he had to endure, notably the loss of all his possessions to Mzilikatzi’s impis when he was betrayed by his own Griqua servant, Barends, whilst on an expedition to the North in 1834 perhaps explains his cynical attitude towards his fellow men and the satirical nature of his ballads and poems.<sup>74</sup> In 1845 he was appointed Civil Inspector of Roads and by 1851 had elaborated his theory on the geological structure of South Africa, a theory which – with minor modifications – is still accepted today.

His little sketch *Kaatje Kekkelbek* is the earliest known piece of indigenous writing for the stage. It was first performed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1838 at the Grahamstown Amateur Theatre and according to Butler “exerted an influence quite

disproportionate to its actual worth".<sup>75</sup> Butler's *Cape Charade* is set in the Western Cape areas of Stellenbosch, Wellington and Worcester in 1853 whilst Bain, who was now at the height of his career, was building the Bain's Kloof Pass with convict labour. Already a well-known figure amongst scientists, Bain is requested to meet with several Russians from a Russian naval expedition to Japan which has put in at Simonstown. Several officers as well as the famous novelist Goncharov (presumably working on his novel *Oblomov*) arrange a visit to Wellington to see Bain. The proposed visit of the Russians causes Bain to write to his widowed daughter, Joanna Rex, requesting her to delay her return home for at least three days which will allow him to give his undivided attention to his Russian visitors. Whilst this request in itself would not normally be sufficient to cause friction in the household, coming, as it does, upon an already discordant marital relationship with his wife, Maria, it is a sufficient final catalyst to cause a fissure in the relationship: she perceives this as yet another self-centred and heartless act of a father who has not seen his daughter for ten years. He would rather, it seems, listen to

...the language of rocks, of mountains,  
of fossils, and of roads...

*Cape Charade* Sc. 7 p. 49

all inanimate things, but things upon which his formidable reputation rests, than listen to the voices of his family, the voices of the heart. To Maria it seems that her embittered husband would rather seek international fame and reputation no matter how fickle these might prove to be, than the solidly rooted love and social intercourse of his own family. This causes her to leave her husband and join her daughter in Stellenbosch in a move of solidarity. Meanwhile, en route to Bain, the Russians spend the night in the same inn as Joanna, and the romantic Zeleny is abhorred by Bain's treatment of his daughter. In a fearless confrontation with Bain

some two days later, the young Russian officer takes him to task for his insensitive behaviour. This precipitates the purgatorial charade which forms the dramatic climax of the play and results, in the now familiar “transcendental” manner, in Bain’s spiritual rebirth and revitalisation.

There are several sub-plots which run in tandem with the main theme. The Russian novelist Goncharov is working on his magnum opus *Oblomov* which deals satirically with his servant Zahar, a ‘serf’. This runs alongside other discourses of the master/servant relationship at the Cape during this time. When we recall that Ordinance No. 50, which regulated conditions for the Cape ‘Hottentot’ community, was promulgated in 1828 and that the abolition of slavery was high on the agenda of the British Colonial Office at the time, the Emancipation of Slavery Act being passed in the British Parliament in 1834, it can be seen that issues of race featured prominently at the time. By drawing in the Russian novelist and allowing him to comment on the distinctions of class in Russia, Butler allows himself the double focus of being able to comment on the plight of people of colour in the Cape alongside the debate on Russian class distinction.

Goncharov, as a man of letters, is presented as being interested in the state of South African literature. It is upon his suggestion that a dramatised version of *Kaatje Kekkelbek* is performed in the closing stages of the play and this allows Butler to comment on the development of an indigenous literature. Running alongside his positioning of a fairly prominent Thomas Pringle in *Take Root or Die*, it underscores Butler’s attempts in the late 1950s and 1960s to create a greater awareness of an indigenous South African literature. He uses his sources very loosely in an imaginative manner to link several local themes of an historical and a mythical nature and weave them into a plot in which the first indigenous play on a

South African theme is presented as being a collaboration between Bain, Frederick Rex of the enigmatic Rex family of Knysna and Frederick l'Ons, the Cape artist. At a time in the 1960s when all political and cultural life in South Africa was being placed, as Butler once expressed it, "...under Oom Paul (Kruger's) top hat in Pretoria", the device of placing the first indigenous English play in South Africa within a play being performed in the Rhodes University Theatre in Grahamstown enables Butler to create a subtle linkage between the origins of South African cultural life and the English Settlers' contribution, as well as setting up an alternative cultural locus, rooted in Settler tradition, to the Afrikaner Nationalist Mecca of Pretoria.

Moreover, by emphasizing Bain's feats of engineering and his historical significance and thus, by implication, the historical significance and contribution of the English Settler enterprise in South Africa, Butler sets out to establish a counter-balancing cultural force in opposition to Afrikaner Nationalist rhetoric. In the pioneering and engineering of so many road passes and the intellectual 'opening up' of the interior by Bain's *Geology of Southern Africa*, an alternative myth opposes Afrikanerdom's validating myth of the Great Trek. What is being suggested is that, whilst the Afrikaners projected themselves as being the first colonists to open up the interior physically by trekking there, the English colonists were the first to open it up intellectually by mapping it – a point which will find greater amplification and interrogation when Butler's cultural projects are scrutinised later in this study.

In *Cape Charade* Butler returns to the familiar "transcendental" theme of sacrifice and reconciliation. He points out that Bain, a highly talented but cynical man, has reached a critical point in his life where he must either adopt a less disparaging view of his fellow human beings or move further into bitterness and

isolation. Several 'flashbacks' in cinematographic style – a feature popular in the film industry in the 1960s but new to the theatre – are utilised by Butler to reveal the sources of Bain's disillusionment with humanity. In response to questions posed by his Russian visitors we see, firstly, a mimed passage of Bain and Klaas in their desperate bid for Motito in 1834 where the treachery of the Griqua leader Barends is revealed. Subsequent flashbacks show us Bain working, in 1843, on a newly-discovered fossil the scientific significance of which was not acknowledged by the Grahamstown Scientific Society, and his visit to Frederick l'Ons's studio in 1838 where we learn of his censorious motives in writing *Kaatje Kekkelbek*. The 'flashbacks' are intended to reveal the reasons for his bitterness and as "...steps whereby he moves to a better knowledge of himself".<sup>76</sup> It is an innovative device used by Butler to flesh out the character of the protagonist and to bring Bain to the point where the 'old' destructive self has to make way for the 'new' revitalised self.

Regrettably, Bain's 'conversion' is unconvincing in that it does not emerge as dramatically inevitable. There is no prolonged angst to be endured by the protagonist, no "tearing asunder", no purgative process in the classical sense of the term. Malan sums it up well when he says:

In *Cape Charade* we are presented with a more truthful portrayal of the problem of fatherhood than the intended portrayal of 'sacrifice' and reconciliation.<sup>77</sup>

His observation that the incongruity of key images is a fundamental weakness in the play is a valid one. The restitution to 'wholeness' is achieved by the image or charade of an 'amputation' or severing of the 'rotten limb'. The bitter experience of betrayal in the Motito episode had caused Bain to 'amputate' the 'compassionate' side of his nature – a fair enough analogy. But this same image, used for the

process of healing and regeneration in a diametrically opposed meaning, is confusing and unconvincing.

Orkin's<sup>78</sup> criticism of the play is far more trenchant. For him the "patriarch Bain" surrounded, once again, by "...a range of 'coloured' and in the style of colonialist discourse, stereotypically inferior 'serf' figures", resonates traditional supremacist and eugenicist views. The description of the Motito expedition, where Orkin takes exception to the language, is cited by him as an example:

KLAAS:	The cold wind was in our teeth. At last we Hotnots could go no further. We sat down in the water, in the drowning dark, with our horses' bridles in our hands. It got so cold that at last we found it less terrible to lie down, on our sides in the water. We all lay together, in Mr Bain's shadow. His back broke the wind.
BAIN:	My brains began to die. Then somewhere inside me a sort of earthquake started. An animal cry for warmth. Lisbeth. Joanna. Fire! I tried to get up. My limbs were so stiff I fell, twice. I shouted to the others to get up. They refused. It never occurred to me to leave them there, in the mud. I kicked them. They wouldn't budge. Then I took the sjambok to them.

*Cape Charade* Sc. 5 p. 40

It is doubtful whether Butler's agenda here is to reinforce a brutal supremacist colonial attitude. Two aspects need to be borne in mind. The first is that the description is of a cynical, insensitive Bain before his 'conversion'; and the second is that Butler is writing about the master/servant relationship a hundred and fifty years ago when slavery was still being practised in the American south and when it had only been abolished at the Cape some four years prior to this episode. For Orkin to expect Bain to have used far more sensitive language is akin to expecting a modern playwright to portray the autocratic Catherine of Russia utilising the diction of a Benjamin Franklin. The point is illustrated further by an excerpt from the unpublished diary of an 1820 Settler, Thomas Shone:

Wednesday 3rd October 1838. This day I began working by finishing a pr of boots for Mary. After that I finished the day by cutting 43 letters on the tombstone. The children were weeding of the lands. Mary **I was obliged to flog** on account of letting the calf on the oats continually, altho' I had repeatedly warn'd her to keep him out of the land. [My emphases.]<sup>79</sup>

Such is the language used by a father towards his daughter in 1838 where “flogging” and “sjambokking” were accepted everyday terms. Orkin does make the telling point that the play took place at a time when District Six was being subjected to state brutality by the apartheid regime. Given this political context the language and sentiments of Bain in the cited passage are importunate. As we have seen in isolated cases in his plays, *The Dam* being one such example, Butler lapses into the occasional paternalist phrase. However, to move from isolated cases of the particular to the general and claim that a paternalistic colonialism is the prevailing discourse in his work is to permit false logic.

The other charge made by Orkin about Butler's writing is its stereotypical portrayal of ‘coloured’ people. Butler himself responded to this indirectly when he wrote:

Only once have I managed to get a professional production in which my ‘coloured’ characters have not been burlesqued.<sup>80</sup>

He was, of course, referring to *Demea* which was first staged in 1990. It is interesting to note that Butler's complaint is corroborated by an early review of *The Dam* :

The actors...were allowed [by the Producer Ms Marda Vanne] ...to burlesque the two Coloured servants, for which the text gives no warrant.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, the view of ‘coloureds’ as a “...drunken, lecherous, insolent, irresponsible lot” (Sc. 4 p. 24) receives condemnation from Butler in the text. Orkin does, however, concede that Butler tries, both in *Cape Charade* as well as in

his earlier plays, to show in crucial ways how his protagonists are to an extent both humanised and redeemed by members of the oppressed classes who serve as functions of white regeneration. Despite this, the issue of colour prejudice is not as well dealt with in this play as in Butler's previous ones, and it must be said that *Cape Charade* contains too many flaws, both structurally and thematically, to be ranked amongst his more successful endeavours.

The best plays, Butler wrote, spring from "...perennial tensions and conflicts in individuals and societies."<sup>82</sup> There is no doubt that these tensions and conflicts were in abundance in South African society in 1968 when Butler describes how *Richard Gush of Salem* came to be written:

In 1968 CAPAB commissioned a play on a Settler theme to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the landing of the 1820 Settlers (1970). I wrote about a man dear to my heart, Richard Gush of Salem.<sup>83</sup>

The play is based upon a true incident which occurred during the Sixth Frontier War (1834-35). However, it is not meant to be locked into the timeframe of the past. It is meant to be as much a comment on the South African 'frontiers' of 1970 as it is on the Frontier conflicts of the 1830s. In the original stage production the movements backwards and forwards in time were supported and controlled by slides projected onto the stage backcloth, linking harpsichord music and the persona of Charlie, a character who moves with equal ease between the Settlers and the Xhosa, the past and the present. One contemporary critic saw the play as being

...not sliced out of the past. It is held in middle time. It has contemporary relevance.<sup>84</sup>

Not much has been written on the historical figure of Richard Gush apart from the fact that he had come with Hezekiah Sephton's settler party, departing



from Deptford on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1820. Since there were too many for the entire party to travel with Sephton in the *Aurora*, Richard Gush was elected to take charge of those in the *Brilliant*. It seems clear that Gush was already held in high esteem by his own compatriots before the remarkable incident of 1834, upon which the play is based, took place.

Butler's intentions are made clear in his introduction to the play. Despite the fashion in the 1960s of plays with small casts which employed minimal plots to explore intensely personal situations in great depth, such as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Butler chose to continue going to the historians for his story. Richard Gush is historically vital enough for good drama:

No one in his right mind could have invented the character of Gush, or his story, and got away with it.<sup>85</sup>

Despite Butler's substantially different approach from the trends made popular in theatre at this time by Beckett, Anouilh, Brecht, Osborne, Fugard, and Bolt, he shares a common technique in placing a single protagonist under severe scrutiny. His method of characterisation is by moral and ontological predicament rather than by class dynamics or psychological determinism. His objective is

...to create a play of substance...[whose action is intended to] ...raise questions about the meaning of life, about the ultimate destiny of individual men.<sup>86</sup>

During the Sixth Frontier War, Richard Gush rode out from the village of Salem unarmed, accompanied at a distance by two men one of whom was Barend Woest, to confront the Xhosa warriors who had surrounded the village and threatened to attack. Having debated at some length with the Xhosa chief he then rode back to Salem to fetch gifts of bread, meat and tobacco from his home,

returning to distribute these amongst the Xhosa warriors who then rode away.

Salem was left unharmed. Robert Godlonton, a local contemporary historian, wrote as follows:

An inhabitant, named Richard Gush – an excellent man, but of great eccentricity of manner, who held the notion of the unlawfulness of war even in defence of person and family...was so far consistent as to refuse to take up arms even at this perilous crisis.

...

...his arguments and persuasions [with the Xhosa] had considerable effect in rendering less frequent those harrassing attacks to which [the villagers of Salem] had been before exposed.<sup>87</sup>

Several moral questions which Butler posed in his earlier plays find expression in *Richard Gush of Salem*. We are presented with the ontological question of Man's fallen nature and his relationship with God the response to which, as was the case with "Judith", revolves around the concepts of selfishness and selflessness. The problem of fatherhood and the emotional structure of the family, explored in *The Dove Returns* and somewhat tentatively in *Cape Charade*, finds greater amplification here. And, most importantly, the theme of pacifism in the face of armed conflict in "...this lunatic fringe of the earth", where political polarisation had divided black nationalism and Afrikaner nationalism into two hostile camps drawing up the lines of battle, is interrogated.

Binary oppositions are, in fact, juxtaposed throughout the play to achieve Butler's desired effect. The universal 'oppositions' which run through life are manifested in the tensions between self-love and love for others; between isolation and the nurture of community; between desperation and hope; between reneging on a promise and keeping it; between fasting in penance and feasting in redemption; and between the destruction of war and the prosperity of peace.

These binaries are presented most clearly in the protagonist Gush and his diametrically opposed antagonist Dennison, where the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy is not so much explored as utilised to accentuate stark contrasts. The Apollonian restraint of the 'teetotal' Gush is contrasted with the Bacchic figure of a perpetually drunk Dennison. Where Gush is contemplative, spiritual and temperate, Dennison is impulsive, profane, and intemperate; where Gush is a faithful husband and a good father who acts selflessly in the interests of his family, Dennison is an unfaithful husband and an unreliable father who is narcissistic; where the former is a man of integrity who keeps promises and is a peacemaker, the latter is a dishonest moral renegade whose irresponsible actions of selling painted musket balls to the Xhosa are likely to precipitate responses of anger and war.

Butler avoids portraying Gush as another sanctimonious Douglas Long. Gush is shown to have weaknesses. Ignoring the advice of his wife and paying little heed to the voice of conscience within him urging him to return to Salem and preach the Gospel in the three languages of the area, Gush undertakes an ill-fated trading venture to Cape Town where his money is stolen. His response and the consequent estrangement from his wife reveals a certain fallibility which renders him more credible as a character notwithstanding Malan's perceptive observation that Gush's emphasis in his teaching is "...on contrition and judgement, not on love and redemption".<sup>88</sup> The same, however, cannot be said of the portrayal of Dennison's character which displays the liberal-humanist's penchant for seeing Good and Evil as two entirely separate conditions as opposed to the Modernist who sees them rather as two inextricably intertwined states of good-in-evil and evil-in-good. Dennison is presented as single-faceted which renders him less plausible as

a character. The play gains greater credibility when viewed more in the line of an *Everyman* morality play tradition where, rather than an in-depth plumbing of the psyche of modern man in the face of evil, it asseverates the merits of pacifism in "...this lunatic fringe of the world".

Written in the context of the 'dead sixties' in South African politics, the play comments on Butler's own unwillingness to succumb to the "swartgevaar" propaganda of the Nationalist Party and join the laager, a response to political isolation accentuated by the withdrawal of South Africa from the British Commonwealth in 1960 and the formation of the Republic in 1961. Given his thoughts about the role of the Englishman on the metaphorical frontier as a mediating voice of reason and pacifism in the struggle between the two great rival nationalisms of blacks and Afrikaners, the 'defection' of large numbers of ESSAs in the elections to an intractable Afrikaner cause set on armed confrontation was highly disturbing. Richard Gush's theory about the defence of the cattle kraal proves to be correct, prompting speculation that the cause of strife at both periods in history is attributable to material dispossession.

According to the playwright's instructions the Prologue and Epilogue of the play may be dispensed with in productions. Significantly, apart from the two Xhosa who appear at Gush's funeral in the Epilogue, no Xhosa warriors appear in the body of the play and yet there is always an awareness of their presence. In the light of racial laws which forbade the appearance of a mixed cast perhaps Butler was, of necessity, using this device. Or is Butler here suggesting the inexorable historical forces of the 'unseen' people of Africa at work and that black South Africans remain unaccommodated at the white man's peril?

In order to support the presentation of “perennial tensions” in the play, Butler resorts to frequent use of symbolism and Biblical allegory. The tree symbolism so prevalent in “The Silver Spoon” makes a re-appearance in the form of Gush’s pear-tree saplings. The Biblical symbolism of the good tree which bears good fruit and the withered fig tree which bears none and is chopped down and cast into the fire is applicable here. Dennison, the barren fig tree, breaks off a grafted limb from Gush’s pear tree in a fit of resentment, and it is Gush’s daughters who, at his funeral, sell the healthy young pear trees for grafting, the proceeds of which are sent to the Bible Society. The parable of the Mustard Seed, on the other hand, finds its antithesis in the green painted musket balls of Dennison’s dishonesty and duplicity with the Xhosa. In a deeper parallel, the tree takes on the symbol of fallen man in Dennison’s case. Do Dennison and Gush represent, symbolically, the two axes, one good, one bad, from which the ESSAs have descended? There is, perhaps, a tacit suggestion by Butler that the 1820 roots have produced a moral mixture - some good trees and some bad: in the words of Albert Memmi, some colonisers who “accept” and some who “reject” the tenets of a rapine colonialism. Gush’s comment upon the loss of his cattle could be equally pertinent to 1970 South Africa :

GUSH:	The whole system’s wrong!
WOEST:	The system can wait. The question is how to move your wagon.
GUSH:	The wagon can wait. The burning question is between me and the system. God is looking at us through the magnifying glass of the morning sun. He wants to know what I am going to do about the system. It can only lead to war. I beg you all to think of that.

*Richard Gush...* Sc. 1 p. 26

The most pervasive symbol in the play is, however, bread-sharing and communal feasting. The bread symbolism represents, at various stages, the daily bread of a

family meal; but it is also the sacramental bread of love-feasts, the universal meal. Moments of reunion are celebrated by love-feasts of various kinds. Amongst the Xhosa the ritual of the “incwala” is celebrated as the feast of the first fruits to make the Xhosa women fruitful and the men strong for battle. On the other side of the Fish River it is the sacramental bread which unites the Salem community in a love-feast led by Rev. Young on Christmas eve. During the eucharist on Christmas eve Philip Amm relates the same sacramental happening which he witnessed between Rev. Ayliff and the Chief Sikolo with the result that

...all strain and disgust and fear left [them], and the hot land, and the rocks were clean. It was very quiet. Only one bird and a grasshopper stirring.  
*Richard Gush...Sc. 2 pp. 45-46*

Amm here describes the “new creation” of St Paul where all is wiped clean and life stirs anew.

The eucharistic meal of the Salem community on Christmas eve foreshadows the bread-breaking ritual which would follow between Gush and the young Xhosa chief. Besides the obvious symbolic reference to the Lord's Supper other Biblical parallels are suggested such as the Miracle of the Loaves and the widow's encounter with the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings Chapter 17 where the hungry Elijah is fed the widow's last bowl of meal made into a scrap of bread. As is the case with the Miracle of the Loaves the meal is neither spent nor the oil in the jar emptied and the widow is miraculously provided with surfeit of both. The widow and her son, who are foreigners to Elijah's culture, are saved from starvation through their magnanimous response to a stranger. The Miracle of the Loaves, modern theologians tell us, is as much the miracle of greedy, avaricious man being prepared, against his nature, to share as it is of reproduction. It is the same preparedness by Gush to treat his adversaries with dignity and to share food from

his own home which earns him respect from the Xhosa chief and a pact to leave Salem unharmed. Faced with the choice of armed combat or peace, he has turned his back on the raven and embraced the symbol of the dove. When he returns to his family after his ordeal, Gush's simple gesture of breaking bread with them is a poignant moment where the daily bread becomes the 'bread of life' and the mundane becomes sanctified.

Together with "Judith" and *The Dove Returns*, *Richard Gush of Salem* represents Butler's best work for the theatre and has enjoyed more exposure and acclaim than his other plays. Besides various stage productions since 1970 when it was premiered, it was adapted for television by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and screened in 1984 at the height of the civil unrest which led to P. W. Botha's State of Emergency being proclaimed in 1985. It might be questioned how it was that Butler's work, which was highly critical of apartheid policies prevalent at the time, was screened by the SABC that generally toed the government line. As it happened, Butler was persuaded by his colleague and friend Roy Sargeant, who had vacated the Chair of Speech and Drama at Rhodes University to head the English Drama section of the SABC, to re-adapt the play for screening on television. Butler felt that the play had an important message to proclaim in the 1984-85 climate of violence, and television was seen to provide wide access for his message to whites in South Africa. Like Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* Butler's play adopted a timeless theme of relevance in a South Africa that, despite the strides made in political freedom since 1994, is still wracked by violence. Ironically, the very timelessness would have been too subtle to attract the condemnation of a crude and narrow SATV censorship apparatus.

Viewing Butler's plays in a post-New Critical spirit in terms of what Robert Weimann has categorised as the "past significance" (*Entstehungsgeschichte*) or "genesis" and the "present meaning" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) or "impact" of a work of art, what do we make of them? What was their past significance when they were written and do they still speak to us across the divide of time?

One of Butler's most severe critics, Martin Orkin, conceded that, in the very attempt to write plays about South Africa and to promote an indigenous South African theatre, Butler was contesting prevailing attitudes in the 1950s and 1960s. As has been noted, Butler's was the first attempt to introduce to indigenous theatre the concept of a morality play in the 'Great Tradition'. Whilst the success of his own plays remains open to debate there is little doubt about the influence they had in promoting serious attempts by other South African playwrights to follow suit. Athol Fugard, whose plays would gain national and international acclaim, acknowledges the important role that Butler played in the development of South African theatre:

...Your criticism, while always as gentle as possible, remained firm and precise. I eventually got the message : I wasn't a poet, so I decided to imitate you in another respect and try playwriting. That was the start of a new dialogue between us – which thank God continues to this day – and which eventually led to our first meeting. How is your recall on that one? It took place in the botanical gardens in Grahamstown on a still autumn afternoon, and both Sheila and I recall a long and leisurely conversation, with you giving us more time and attention than we deserved. The subject was theatre and more specifically a still very suspect form of it called South African Theatre. I left that conversation with one of the major provocations of my career. I can't remember your exact words but the gist of it was something like this: "South Africa has got more than enough of its own stories. It's time to start telling them and to stop imitating those that aren't ours". I started to try about a year later with *No-Good Friday*. Now, twenty four years after that, I look back gratefully on a relationship with you in which I have been on the receiving end of good advice, sincere encouragement, and generous friendship.<sup>89</sup>



Not only was Butler attempting to foster and develop an indigenous drama; he was also intent, as we have seen, on setting up an alternative discourse to an overpowering Afrikaner political and cultural hegemony in order to further the cause of the disenfranchised and politically marginalised at a time when the National Party held unfettered power.

In his 1984 article "South African Drama: Bedevilling Categories" Stephen Gray drew attention to the "phoney polarization between 'non-political' and 'political' plays":

...every act of theatre in every venue in South Africa at any one moment is always 100% political, and always has been. A performance which supposedly has nothing to do with the political situation has everything to do with it, because its audience is 100% part of that situation; the transaction that is the act of theatre always happens within the matrix that is the audience's present. And here is a corollary to that standard: there are no innocent theatregoers, just as there are no innocent playwrights, performers, managers, and (even) critics.<sup>90</sup>

Notwithstanding Gray's comments about a phoney polarization of drama, Butler was no Parnassian who fiddled on Sirius<sup>91</sup> while South Africa burned. Whilst the more private voice of his poetry does display an ideological preference for permanence and perceiving life as constituted of deep metaphysical constants which tends to mitigate against a more passionate involvement in temporality, the same cannot be said of the more public voice of his plays which, as has been demonstrated, show definite sociological preoccupations. The plight of urban blacks, the disenfranchisement of 'Coloureds', the animosity between English and Afrikaners, the white fear of Dionysian Africa, the absurdity of the 'Grand Scheme' of Separate Development, the 'laagering' mentality of whites in the face of inexorable historical forces: these all find expression and comment in his plays.

Whilst Orkin's assertion that Butler's plays are

...expressed in language indicating acceptance of much prevailing paternalist and segregationist discourse<sup>92</sup>

contains a half-truth in that Butler lapsed into the occasional paternalist phrase, it is an inaccuracy and a distortion to perceive Butler's work as supporting and underpinning "segregationist discourse" and politics. One can only assume that the point has been entirely missed in plays such as *Demea* and *Richard Gush of Salem* where in the Apologia, Charlie comments with obvious authorial approval :

CHARLIE:

Well, for what it's worth: the sooner we forget about their side and our side of the river the better. One country! No frontiers! Free trade! Mix!

*Richard Gush of Salem* Sc. 1 p. 21

The plays display a passion for social justice, dignity and equality, and this artistic pursuit was matched by a very practical concern in Butler's well-known friendship, at considerable risk to his own safety and reputation, with the anti-apartheid activist Matthew Goniwe. Each play sends out, "from the ark of the heart", the raven of conflict or the dove of reconciliation to challenge South Africans living in the apartheid era as to which of these will find 'land' in their midst.

In turning our attention to the 'present meaning' of Butler's plays and their relevance for contemporary readership, what are we to make of them? Are they, as was said of T. S. Eliot's plays, "notable works of poetic art" but "not great plays"? In a 1990 lecture on Guy Butler as dramatist, Don MacLennan makes the point that the human vision and passionate desire for justice behind the plays are unquestionable:

...the passionate ideas about justice, dignity, equality, the need for moral cleansing of African life, the celebration of the values of courage, persistence and humour, of ultimate seriousness – are all present **in** the plays but not achieved **by** the plays.<sup>93</sup>

As theatre the plays are, in his opinion, not a success because in them structure and meaning do not always work together, a situation partially explained by Butler's dislike for the unresolved in drama, "...yet he seems to accept the unresolvable in verse – the paradox that a poem closes but is yet never closed".<sup>94</sup>

Modernists may see in the plays an attempt by Butler to contrive, too deliberately, a demonstration of the triumph of 'good' over 'evil'. Malan sees Butler's plays as no longer speaking to the contemporary theatregoer because the worlds he created for the stage "...do not adequately manage to reflect the realities of a multi-racial [sic] South African society".<sup>95</sup>

Despite their deficiencies as constructs for the stage Butler's plays possess, in their thematic material, ideas and opinions that are still valid for a South African readership. His promotion of the idea of a 'common humanity' is, for example, not very far removed from the current political vision of harmonious diversity within the inclusivity of a 'rainbow nation'.

## CHAPTER TWO

### POETRY

#### The impossible union?

In all of us two continents contend  
Two skies of stars confuse us.

Guy Butler. "From Elegy II (1960)"

...we shall worship in the temple of both gods.

Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*

Here the impossible union  
Of spheres of existence is actual,  
Here the past and the future  
Are conquered and reconciled...

T. S. Eliot "The Dry Salvages" *Four Quartets*

O hidden God,  
sweet Giver of faith, still veiled, unknown to me,  
humbly I start again, set out to rediscover you...

Guy Butler. "After Ten Years"

So, wed with truth, I dwell above the veil.

W. E. B. du Bois.

The immediacy and ephemerality of stage production probably mean that Butler's plays will remain unstaged in the South Africa of the new century. So, for that matter, will be the case of the plays – also 'romantic' in their verse drama – of H. I. E. Dhlomo. Athol Fugard and Zakes Mda present more difficult cases – but different cases. Fugard's earlier 'township' plays have been revived with adaptations to the current scene – his less than 'scripted' texts are amenable to change. His later, more introverted and philosophical plays hardly captured critical attention. Mda has all but deserted the stage that his plays of 'poor theatre' (Beckett in Africa) occupied at the Market in the late 1970s to become instead a 'magical realist' novelist.

Although Butler's plays will probably not be revived as stage presentations, their ideas and insights, their signals of the difficulty of writing South African theatre before Fugard and amid the strictures of the then new apartheid regime, remain issues to provoke further debate: not only about the plays, but about the mindset of the regime. Despite its censorial inclinations, it usually missed the mark. The children's book *Black Beauty* was embargoed at customs whereas the new black poetry mostly appeared unhindered on the publishing scene. My point is that literature critical of the apartheid state could not automatically expect coherent response from the state. Butler's plays would have been unlikely to have been regarded, in any way, as 'subversive'. In retrospect, however, we see a firm, non-segregationist commitment by a person of Butler's 'historical' time.

What of his poetry? Is his poetry representative only of an Oxford scholar's belated colonial perspective, or is it powerfully and uniquely South African, rooted in the landscapes of South Africa as experienced by a Karoo son? When he utilises the myths of Apollo and Dionysus is he axiomatically privileging Western

and European empirical traditions as some of his critics believe, or is he genuinely attempting to forge an equitable synthesis between Apollo and Dionysus, Europe and Africa, in the “impossible union”? What elements underpin Butler’s vision of a synthesised South African society, and is his vision of such a union in a newly-fused culture really feasible? Is his syncretic vision limited to cultural and political contexts or do its parameters extend to include the numinous and the metaphysical, that ineffable area “above the veil” where the past, present and future must be “conquered and reconciled”? All of these questions concerning the poet’s habitation and ontogenesis are peculiarly apt to Guy Butler’s poetry, and in this chapter I intend to examine some of the disjunctures and syntheses which seem to define him at one moment as the Oxford scholar utilizing specifically European forms and myths in his poetry, and at another as the Karoo son seeking to “take root” in the South African landscape by adapting his imagery and his poetic structures to local demands. What I shall end up suggesting is that no simple dichotomies are able to grasp the complexity of Butler’s position in the practice of his poetry, and that his poetry evolved in responding to African immediacies. By re-reading specific poems – as I said at the outset – through analyses of his authorial intention and, at times, deconstructively against the grain of his apparent intent, I hope to open up some fresh possibilities in the interpretation of Butler’s texts while confirming that his texts and his contexts are inextricably connected to the making of his meaning.

Notwithstanding his considerable achievements as a dramatist, literary critic, academic, and cultural phenomenon it was, and still is, predominantly as a poet that Guy Butler achieved both local and international recognition. In

South Africa his importance to the tradition of English poetry is seen by André P. Brink in the following terms:

What lends Butler remarkable importance as an English poet in this country is that he is the first true poet fully to accept South Africa as his fatherland, in contrast with Campbell, who consistently regarded South Africa as Colonial.<sup>1</sup>

In an article on Butler in 1979<sup>2</sup> this sentiment was endorsed by David Wright who saw Butler as a significant figure in the development of South African English poetry.

Criticism of Guy Butler's poetry has extended over fifty years, from Roy Campbell's review of *Stranger to Europe* in 1953 to the present. It appears that there are two streams of thought in the literary critics' approach to Butler's poetry. The first, beginning with Campbell's review in 1953, is an almost exclusive focus on the craft employed by the poet, the aptness of his imagery and the lyrical beauty of his work, whilst the second, beginning in the 1970s with Kirkwood's and Alvarez-Pereyre's scathing evaluations, is highly critical of Butler's work which is seen to be too meditative, "transcendent" and lacking in what Kirkwood described as "the aesthetics of revolution".

The earliest critic in the first stream was Roy Campbell (1953) who saw much to praise in reviewing Butler's *Stranger to Europe* :

He is a metaphysical poet who crystallizes ideas into visual images by hard thinking when other poets would take many emotional lines explaining how they felt. The emotional effect is all the stronger for being so compactly simplified....

... He writes with difficulty, as Eliot does, not with fluid ease, as Dylan Thomas does (to compare two of the best living English poets). The *idea* is always the main motive of the poem....<sup>3</sup>

Campbell's reference to the marginalisation of emotion in poetry is, of course, remarkably similar to Mallarme's view of great poetry keeping the emotions in harness. Miller and Sergeant (1957) regard Butler's precise use of language as his most notable characteristic. Despite the fact that his language has an "edge" it is

...pleasingly free from the poetic diction which has cramped the style of so many South African would-be poets.<sup>4</sup>

They see in Butler's early post-war poems an attempt to seek a satisfactory basis for his interpretation of life. Brink (1958), however, sees even greater binary complexity in Butler's poetry. Besides displaying the disruption of life as a result of warfare and a hesitant searching for and eventual acceptance of a new way of life, Butler's poetry also displays

...contrasts between vigorous life and death, timelessness and time, vagueness and reality, and liquidity and solidity.<sup>5</sup>

In an early review of new South African writing in *PEN 1960* Brian Rose drew attention to

...Butler's reputation as an exquisitely sensual imagist, a sculptor of great delicacy of touch.<sup>6</sup>

William Plomer spoke in similar vein when writing an Introduction to Butler's second volume of poetry, *South of the Zambezi* (1966), describing Butler as being a partisan not only of imaginative truth but also of the best and most fitting use of the English language. This technical command in Butler's work is also alluded to by Ruth Harnett (1978) in her Foreword to Butler's *Songs and Ballads*. Furthermore, she notes in Butler's poetry "...a range of material, styles, and tones" wherein one can detect



...a dominant and unifying note of caring.  
 ...each utterance here, whether social or private, returns the reader to a centre: the thinking, feeling, suffering, joying person behind all the voices, and the values he holds steady through different occasions even when he questions his code.

[For Butler]...the individual matters, the community matters too, and the poet speaks for them and of them, as well as looking into his own heart.<sup>7</sup>

The 1980s saw, for the first time, detailed studies of Guy Butler's poetry. The first of these studies, an unpublished dissertation by Van der Mescht (1981), highlights certain *leitmotifs* in Butler's poetry. He sees Butler's poetry as being characterized by a compulsion to belong:

The question of belonging (in South Africa) amounts to an obsession in the poetry of Guy Butler.<sup>8</sup>

...another kind of belonging which five years of war-action would force the young poet to examine [is] man's belonging to the family of God and Nature.<sup>9</sup>

Butler's view of man as an isolated being is further apparent in the fact that he often writes about the outcast or outsider. Even when he writes 'historically' his attraction is to the solitary individual, the corollary of man living in community.

Clearly, one of Butler's greatest technical strengths according to Van der Mescht is his constant appeal to the reader's sensory equipment, as also is his readiness to experiment with form. The philosophico-intellectual style of poems such as "Elegy", "Ode. On First Seeing Florence" and "After Ten Years" give way to the narrative poems of the sixties, and the extensive use of the ballad form in the nineteen seventies. Van der Mescht's observation is that Butler's growing perception of the complexities of the African-European encounter resulted in a concomitant complexity of style. His search for an indigenous identity is seen as being inseparably linked with his search for an artistic idiom. Despite this

complexity, in his sympathetic study he sees Butler's idiom as having evolved into something

...plainly African: simple and largely unmetaphorical.<sup>10</sup>

Butler's constant calling upon the past to interpret the future, using traditional forms in new combinations is what Bradbrook (1983) sees as one of his best qualities as a poet. Echoing Campbell, she sees Butler's lyric being distinguished by two virtues:

The first is an exact and sensitive adaptation to whatever he is looking at, either great or small...the second, counter-balancing this, is serenity, a power to inhibit personal emotions which might distort the fidelity of his art.<sup>11</sup>

Viewing Butler's work from an entirely different perspective, that of Modernism, Chapman (1984) sees Butler as perhaps the prime representative of the liberal-humanist tradition in South African English poetry, a tradition that is at odds with Modernism since liberal-humanism has an inherent distrust of the apocalyptic, the bloody, and the sordid, and prefers private utterance in reasonable moderation to the public statement of a political position or ideology. In contrasting the techniques of the modernist poet and the liberal-humanist poet Chapman defines the liberal-humanist style of poetry as one which is characterized by a humane and reasonable voice that predominates over image-making. The liberal-humanist pictures himself as the purveyor of the Western European Enlightenment and has

...posited the value of fine conscience...respecting the inviolability of the individual as well as the patterns of the rural community...

...there is to be found an element of pastoral innocence, something of the 'common touch'.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the structural principles employed by the liberal-humanist in his poetry

...presuppose a voice which retains faith in the conscious mind's activity, whatever the vicissitudes of the moment.<sup>13</sup>

The pressures of a turbulent Africa in the post-1960 era did, however, force the liberal humanist poet into what he might consider iconoclastic stances where the adoption of a 'rough' African mask or a brash persona became the ploy of the poet seeking to free himself from the British empirical habit.

Despite an empathy with Butler's work, Chapman takes issue with the notion expounded by Butler in 1969 that "old-fashioned techniques that are no longer helpful in Europe" can still suffice in South Africa and points out that South African experiences have been too complex and varied to be wholly accommodated by modes that can be termed 'conventional'.

A second detailed study appeared on Butler in 1986, Malan's unpublished dissertation : "Guy Butler. Poet and Dramatist". Largely sympathetic to the work of Butler, his study focuses on what he perceives as the twin aspects underpinning Butler's poetry: on the one hand, the attempt to dramatize the European's sense of belonging and the role he has to play in Africa, and on the other hand, the depiction of spiritual crisis. For him, the motifs of "the will" and "the body" are shown to be in constant conflict in Butler's poetry. Tracing the influences of the Metaphysical poets, the Romantics, the Victorian poets, the poets of the First World War, and later especially T. S. Eliot's religious poetry, Malan shows how Butler follows the example of Wordsworth in investigating and recording his own experience and sense of self in the world. He notes, too, that Butler's earlier concern in his writing with the conflict

between Boer and Briton is replaced in his mature work by the more urgent racial conflict between black and white.

J. M. Coetzee (1988) sees in Butler the prototype of the English poet who, aware of his alienation in Africa, has two courses open to him: he can either apply, in a more and more frenzied manner, European metaphor to Africa in an attempt to make it yield its essence, or he can accept the abandonment of defeated European categories in favour of a putative naturally expressive African language. Most often, he sees Butler follow the latter route where “...the real Africa will always slip through the net woven by European categories.” For Coetzee, the poet in Butler

...is a various and complex figure: the bearer of the creative imagination; the bearer of a European culture in Africa; man afflicted with self-consciousness. The one familiar avatar we do not find in Butler is the poet as a being who projects moods on to the landscape or is flooded by the mood of the landscape. That is to say, Butler treats the relation of the poet to his landscape historically.<sup>14</sup>

Coetzee sees, in Butler's work, moments of alienation occurring again and again where Butler's poems relive “spots of time” that force on him an unsettling realization of his alienness in Africa, perhaps in the world. Most intriguing for Coetzee is the fact that this moment of alienation in which the world establishes its distance from the subject is also the moment at which the landscape announces its resistance to language. Specifically, in Butler's formulation, it is the moment at which the African landscape announces its resistance to European language. For Coetzee, this is a dominant theme in Butler's poetry. Throughout his work Butler seems to articulate two prime difficulties relating to language: the first is that the African landscape just is, without the ‘depth’ that landscape possesses when it carries the historical

resonances, myths, and symbols of voices from the past; the second is the route taken by white, European poets from Pringle to the present in describing Africa as not-Europe, dramatizing it in antithetical terms, making Africa into a mere negative reflection or shadow of Europe, devoid of its own character and substance. According to Coetzee, Butler most nearly resolves the language dilemma in poems such as “Hout Bay” and “Cradock Mountains” when he accepts that the enterprise of trying to read the sights and sounds of Africa is not entirely futile; that the various orders of nature, always likely to be separate from one another, can join in an holistic, universal hymn to the Creator in a moment of transcendence.

It is not so much the oppositions of language as the oppositions inherent in the Europe-Africa nexus that best define Butler’s poetry, according to Van Wyk Smith (1990). Citing Butler as one of the key South African poets in the group after the Second World War, Van Wyk Smith maintains that Butler was always intrigued by myth and archetype and that, in his poetry,

...the topographic poem, the poem of place, became – and has remained -  
...a powerful vehicle for exploring the appropriative and self-defining  
attachment to place.<sup>15</sup>

His poetry is a continuous record of the debate between conflicting mythic forces where the figure of Adamastor is seen as both challenger and nemesis, the Cape as both the place of storms and gateway to good hope, and the image of Table Mountain itself as both beckoner and barrier.

Another focus on the lyric qualities of Butler’s verse is given by Don Maclennan (1992). He sees Butler’s poetry as responsible to a deep religious

vision which tells a profound story of human difficulties strengthened by elusive certainties. Though he claims Butler is far from being a rigid essentialist, he sees him as a poet of “essence” or “being” whose later poems of solitary figures sharpen the problem of “belonging”. For Butler, the central problem is how to belong – how to **be** in Africa. MacLennan sees this as the main thrust of his work and demonstrates how Butler had become Wordsworthian not only in his need for lyric but also philosophic statement. Closely allied to this is Butler’s paradoxical concern with the strength, yet absurdity, of European adaptation to Africa and the incongruity of European sensibility finding accommodation for language in a place of extremes like the Karoo. The artistic solution to this, maintains MacLennan, was to juxtapose two different frames of reference such as Greek myth and Karoo reality. The problem consequent upon this discovery was, however, how to maintain it with significance. In South Africa of the 1990s “...Butler’s voice has become very quiet, very private.” His later poems “...veer towards stillness” and he “...does not relish entering the public debate”.

In answer to the materialist critics who condemn Butler for lacking an aesthetics of revolution, MacLennan points out that no less a figure than Roland Barthes states that there is no writing which can be lastingly revolutionary.<sup>16</sup> MacLennan continues:

Poetry is not reality: it is not freedom and it cannot banish death. It may transform consciousness and change attitudes, but it cannot change our collective destiny. All poetry is an act of imaginative transcendence....<sup>17</sup>

Despite such convincing arguments, it was the strident criticisms of Butler’s work by the materialist critics that held sway in the two decades of the seventies and the eighties. Kirkwood’s argument (1974) has already been

discussed in an earlier context. His summary dismissal of the sentiments expressed in Butler's "Bronze Heads" paved the way for Alvarez-Pereyre's damning judgement of Butler in 1979:

[Butler] ...seems to have written his study sitting on Sirius or, at least, in a padded room far from the noise and fury of the world.

There can be little doubt that, beyond the differences of personality and temperament (between Paton and Butler) we have here two very different sets of political attitudes.

[To conclude] ...that the attitude [of Butler] is rather Byzantine is perhaps going too far, but it does certainly lead to an Ivory Tower outlook....

Is Butler indulging in politics, then? If so, certainly unconsciously as he is not a racist but rather the victim of his own ignorance and his own marked exclusivism.<sup>18</sup>

In referring to Butler's "study" Alvarez-Pereyre is, of course, foregrounding the Preface of Butler's editorial project, *A Book of South African Verse*, published in 1959. It seems significant that Alvarez-Pereyre's judgement is based solely on a Preface written by Butler some twenty years before Alvarez-Pereyre's own study: a Preface written before the Sharpeville and Langa uprisings in 1960 and before the Soweto uprising in 1976 all of which preceded Alvarez-Pereyre's work. It is natural that changed historical circumstances in the intervening twenty years between Butler's Preface (1959) and Alvarez-Pereyre's study (1979) would alter both Alvarez-Pereyre's and Butler's perspectives on South Africa. Alvarez-Pereyre seems to be oblivious to the fact that Butler had not been afforded the same opportunity of historical retrospection that he himself had enjoyed. From a scholarly point of view, what is more disconcerting is that Alvarez-Pereyre reaches his judgement without any reference to Butler's other work such as his plays, essays and lectures and, indeed, Butler's own poetry. When one considers that, besides his strongly anti-apartheid stance in his plays and his lectures, Butler also

wrote strongly anti-apartheid poems such as “The Buffer Strip” “The Underdogs”, “Sundowners”, “In Memoriam, J A R, Drowned, East London”, “Profligate Parson”, “A Prayer for all my Countrymen” and “Ten Minutes’ Silence. 1970”, all some nine years before Alvarez-Pereyre’s judgement on him was delivered. The question might well be asked whether the principles of conscious elision are at work in Alvarez-Pereyre’s research or, failing that, why there is such a disturbing lack of knowledge on the part of the critic concerning the poetry Butler had already written prior to Alvarez-Pereyre’s study on poetry in 1979.

The Marxist-materialist critical basis which underpinned appraisals of Butler’s work by Kirkwood and Alvarez-Pereyre was also engaged in the 1980s and early 1990s by other critics such as Elaine Williams (1989) in her unpublished dissertation on Butler’s culture theory and by Klopper (1991; 1994) in his earlier work if not in his later views on Butler. (Williams’s analysis of Butler is scrutinised in detail elsewhere in this study in the context of Butler’s own culture theories.)

Klopper’s unpublished thesis on Butler’s poetry, which is viewed alongside the poetry of other Eastern Cape English poets such as Pringle, Slater, and Scully, interrogates Butler’s work from a specifically materialist perspective which attempts to demonstrate that Butler’s work is internally divided as a literary work and is thus “...doubly articulated”. Drawing extensively on the work of Pierre Macherey, Klopper seeks to apply this to Butler’s work in a genre such as poetry “...where history appears to be subordinate to the autonomous poetic imagination”. For him, Butler represents



...the epitome of the disjunctures between the belated colonial perspective and changed historical conditions....  
 ...the colonial perspective attains self-consciousness in the work of Butler [and] ...it signals its own collapse in its self-reflexive awareness of its own mode of existence.<sup>19</sup>

He believes that Butler takes the concern of what it means to be a European in Africa to an extreme of self-consciousness and that he pursues this theme more remorselessly than any of his contemporaries. Kloppe also sees, in Butler's work, a propensity to regard history as a transcendental reality that exists outside of the literary work. Consequently, for Butler, the possibility of finding communality in a shared humanity must lie outside the framework of history. According to Kloppe, the discovery of Butler's "common humanity" must therefore be achieved by the unrealistic expectation of transcending the divisions of history.

Butler's project of "taking root", successfully synthesising cultures, and adapting his poetic to African demands is seen by Kloppe to have failed:

The temptation to see the development of South African English poetry in linear terms as evincing, on the one hand, an increasing identification with Africa and, on the other hand, the evolution of a distinctive indigenous idiom, finds discouragement in a consideration of the work of Frederic Guy Butler.  
 ...his work displays an ambivalent relationship with the country of his birth, and employs a literary idiom derived not so much from South African poetry as from modern European poetry in general.<sup>20</sup>

In a later analysis (1994), Kloppe revisited Butler's project of attempting to forge a synthesis between Europe and Africa in his poetry.<sup>21</sup> Whilst conceding that Butler's attempts to fuse the two cultures in his writing were genuine ones in which he was not consciously privileging Apollo at Dionysus' expense although he notes that there are frequent unconscious lapses, he nonetheless stops short of suggesting that the enterprise was wholly

successful and leaves Butler largely unredeemed. Kloppe's perceived need to revisit his earlier assumptions does, however, seem to indicate a realization on his part of the complexity of Butler's work and reinforces the notion that revaluations of such contentious and complex work are necessary when critical frameworks and paradigms alter.

It is clear from the varied opinions expressed on Butler's poetry by his critics, both those that are favourably disposed to his work as well as those highly critical of it, that the poet in Butler is a highly complex figure where no simple analyses or dichotomies suffice and where the Roman writer Terence's dictum regarding critics, "Quot homines, tot sententiae", applies.<sup>22</sup> I intend to enter the discussion at this point. I believe that there are three major currents, all of which are interrelated, running through Butler's poetry. The first is an obvious compulsion in his poetry to assert a need to belong, manifesting itself more prominently in his earlier than his later poetry. The second is his constant striving for a syncretic resolution to what he perceived as divisive binary oppositions - cultural, psychological and metaphysical - the most dominant of which he cast as the Apollo-Dionysus antithesis. The third current, becoming ever more powerful as Butler's verse matured, is what I shall term the eschatological imperative in his poetry. Whilst the "compulsion to belong" in Butler's poetry has received detailed attention from several critics, most notable among them being Van der Mescht, Malan, and MacLennan, I shall argue that Butler's attempts at a synthesis primarily aimed at moulding a new shared culture between Europe and Africa have been largely misunderstood by most critics and that the eschatological imperative in his work, a factor I believe that accounts for his antipathy to modernism,

logical positivism and historical materialism, has gone virtually unnoticed. This will necessitate focusing on key passages, insights and motifs in different poems, in an attempt to weave together a clearer picture of Butler's often misunderstood message. To critics who regard the single poem as the self-validating text, such an apparently 'thematic' accumulation may appear to deny the value of the completed artifact but, as I shall argue, it is a valid means of releasing Butler's voice from several of its own 'repressions'. The interpretations which will emerge may, at times, appear to run somewhat counter to generally accepted views of the poems. Nonetheless, in the spirit of 'post New Criticism' which has empowered readers as makers of meaning, I shall offer other readers a challenge, and even a provocation, to return to Butler's texts if only to refute some of my interpretations.

Whilst it is not my intention to traverse ground which has already been thoroughly covered by critics such as Van der Mescht, Malan and MacLennan, some preliminary comments on "the compulsion to belong" in Butler's poetry are essential, since this motif is inextricably intertwined with the desire to "take root" and to forge a new cultural union between rationality and intuition, Apollo and Dionysus – one of Butler's major projects.

Despite the following asseverations by Butler in a *Cape Times* article:

I am a South African and, although I am of British stock, I have never felt myself a son of England. The calcium in my bones comes from the brak water of the Karoo and not the white cliffs of Dover<sup>23</sup>

his early poetry reveals no such unequivocal conviction. There is frequently a mood of displacement and an unfulfilled Romantic yearning to be tied to the

land whilst tacitly acknowledging the space that lies between. Many early poems such as “Servant Girl”, “Sweet Water”, “Farmer”, and “Myths” focus on solitary figures where the poet looks wistfully to Africans or rural whites of an older generation as sharers in a ‘natural’ relation with the land. These solitaires, much like Wordsworth’s, sharpen the problem of belonging. The cadences from the Xhosa girl’s tongue seem to put her in unison with the landscape as does the farmer’s ‘real’ presence on his land. Uncle Danby and the couple on Swaershoek Pass also symbolise an unalienated presence in Africa, a rapport with the landscape not experienced by Butler himself. Paradoxically, even the solitary who does **not** belong, who seems self-sufficient outside community, such as the Cape Coloured Batman in the poem of that name or the trekboer in “The Last Trekker”, holds a fascination for Butler. Is it because they articulate an ability to be independent of seemingly intransigent African demands which the poet himself battles to come to terms with? Whatever the answer, Van der Mescht’s observation that the desire to belong amounts to an obsession in the early poetry of Guy Butler is accurate. The reason for such an obsession is perhaps best given by Said, writing in an entirely different context about Kipling and Camus:

There is a striking coincidence between Kipling’s reassertion over the geography of India and Camus’s in some of his Algerian stories written almost half a century later. Their gestures are symptomatic not of confidence, but of a lurking, often unacknowledged malaise, I believe. For if you belong in a place, you do not have to keep saying and showing it: you just are, like the silent Arabs in *L’Etranger* or the fuzzy-haired blacks in *Heart of Darkness* or the various Indians in *Kim*. But colonial, i.e. geographical, appropriation requires such assertive inflections, and these emphases are the hallmark of the imperial culture reconfirming itself to and for itself.<sup>24</sup>

There seems little doubt that, even as the “coloniser who refuses” (to use Memmi’s term) Butler, like Kipling and Camus before him, felt the pressure of

his imperial heritage thus needing to indulge continuously in similar “assertive inflections”. Ironically, it would be his imperial war experiences where he witnessed societies and communities disintegrate which convinced Butler that belonging to the great human family in “a common humanity” should take on a much greater significance than local preoccupations. This, together with his post-war experience in a debilitated Europe where he declared himself a “stranger to Europe”, thus unequivocally embracing Africa, redirected the quest for belonging per se and sublimated it instead in a search for a cultural synthesis which would bring about a new society in South Africa. Significantly, the poems of solitaires largely disappear from Butler’s *oeuvre* at this point and are replaced by poems dealing more specifically with the Apollonian-Dionysian nexus and what I have termed the eschatological imperative.

Critical to an appreciation of Butler’s desire to achieve synthesis is an understanding of the workings of his imagination. His early poetry indicates a predilection to view reality in terms of binary oppositions. André P. Brink points to the contrapuntal themes of vigorous life and death, timelessness and time, vagueness and reality, liquidity and solidity in Butler’s early poetry and Malan believes that the motifs of “the will” and “the body” are shown to be in constant conflict. It seems that Butler himself was aware of these binary oppositions at work in his imagination. In his autobiography *Karoo Morning* he narrates an incident from his childhood which is indicative of the mould of his cognitive processes:

Tafelberg and Doomberg were glowing purple and pink at the far end of the valley, their parallel cliffs in horizontal bands lending them an architectural repose and strength. How different the rock on which I was sitting: not the product of wind and water, but of violence and fire; volcanic; igneous; not built up granule by granule, but injected as smoking liquid from the hot heart of the earth, vertical through the buckling sandstone towards the sun.

I gripped the wedge-like face of the boulder in front of me. This was pure, unspoilt, primitive, original. It has never compromised. The soils and the sandstones are second- and third-hand, resting on top of older rocks; but an ironstone koppie is a nail driven up from the centre of things, piercing layer upon layer of things.<sup>25</sup>

He continues explaining that much of his thinking

...tended to categorise experience as "sandstone" or "ironstone": sandstone stood for experience, for tradition, for raw materials that had been through great chastenings of wind and weather, growth and decay, and then been laid down in workable strata, vast laminated books of knowledge; ironstone stood for raw instinct and energy tapped from the molten heart of things, still defiant and resistant to wind and weather, primordial, difficult to work, innocent of secrets and knowledge. There was much sandstone in my parents, and much ironstone in myself. Sometimes it seemed I was a small, untidy dolerite outcrop surrounded by great, level, sandstone mountains of ineluctable authority and poise.<sup>26</sup>

Very clearly, we are dealing here with an imagination which tends to categorise experience in terms of opposites held in profitable tension. It is hardly surprising that one of Butler's earliest poems, "Darkness",<sup>27</sup> would reflect these opposing tensions:

I remember now how dark is blood,  
how often beauty is with deepest shadow mated;  
Homer saw the flood  
wine-dark, shadow-saturated.  
Sombre and dark the skies  
before the scent-releasing shower,  
and the centre of all eyes  
is a black flame, a power.

Here thinking ceases; intellect  
a surgeon's lancet to a granite wall –  
without Ur-darkness, I reflect,  
there'd be no light or sight at all.

(CP p. 2)

By contrasting light and darkness in a Caravaggio-like chiaroscuro effect, Butler highlights the symbiotic relationship that exists between opposites. The brightness of life is contrasted, and indeed linked, with the murkiness of blood which itself gives life to the body. In a deft extended metaphor, the body's lifeblood becomes the wine of Homer's life-sustaining sea, recalling the

famous refrain used as a 'leitmotif' in *The Odyssey*: "But who does not like to sail the wine-dark sea?" The symbol of life-giving water is continued in the image of a shower of rain which is preceded by dark and sombre skies. Even the brightest of eyes, it is suggested, have their life-giving source in the darkest recesses of the pupils. Darkness and light are inextricably linked and the diurnal patterns of life are suggested. Mechanically, the interdependence of opposites is emphasized throughout the stanza by frequent uses of hyphenation.

The concluding quatrain shifts to an internal as opposed to an external landscape. In darkness, thinking ceases and the intellect is as powerless as a surgeon attempting to make incisions on a granite wall with his scalpel. It is the emotions that hold sway in the realm of darkness and intellect is frequently powerless to control them. The final couplet draws on powerful Biblical symbolism in the form of Ur of the Chaldees, home of Abraham, "our Father in faith" in the Hebraic-Christian tradition, to restore an equilibrium to the poem. Ur, the pride of Sumeria located in the 'cradle of civilization' between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, became the bearer of the earliest civilization before which was a cultural darkness. Ur was also, according to Biblical tradition, the home of Abraham who was called out of darkness by Yahweh to establish the first monotheistic community and who would thus bring a new light to the world. The Messiah, "the light of the world", would spring from his seed and "the people that walked in darkness [would] see a great light".<sup>28</sup> The poem ends more on a note of quiet and confident resignation than of triumph indicative, perhaps, of a realization on the part of the poet that the best that can be expected in life is that darkness and pessimism can never be wholly expunged, only held in profitable tension.

Butler continued in his earlier poetry to see matters much in terms of the concepts of “ironstone” and “sandstone” contesting metaphoric terrain. He had not yet discovered, at the interface of the two, “lydianite”, described later by him as

...something comparatively rare, a product of two worlds, partaking of both, belonging to neither; something which lent itself to shaping, neither philosophical nor instinctual, sophisticated nor primitive, traditional nor original, but essentially between, exposed on both sides....<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the 1950s he would discover, in the work of the historian Arnold J. Toynbee, the “lydianite” needed to forge, into a suitable amalgam, the contesting binaries of “ironstone” and “sandstone”. Toynbee’s monumental ten volume research on the comparative study of twenty six civilizations, including arrested societies, had been completed in 1954. *A Study of History* was released in a two volume abridgement in 1957 and had an immediate impact not only on Butler, but also on most of the intellectual world. Differing vastly from such antecedents as Giambattista Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* (1725) in which the perpetual rise and fall of civilizations was catalogued, Toynbee’s work sought to explain the underlying currents impelling civilizations to phases of growth and decay. Utilizing elements of Hegelian thought, he concludes that societies and civilizations, and not nations or periods, are the significant units of historical study. His Challenge-Response theory of the rise and fall of civilizations contends that, under the leadership of creative minorities, their growth is due to successful responses to formidable challenges. These same civilizations, however, decline when leaders fail to respond creatively.

Butler was impressed by Toynbee’s work, quoting him on several occasions and beginning a most important section in his lecture in 1962, “The Republic



and the Arts" with a reference to Toynbee's theories. What is of even greater interest is that he used Toynbee's theory as his reference point in his first promotion of the possibilities of an Apollonian-Dionysian rapprochement in Africa.

Butler's use of the Nietzschean Apollo-Dionysus paradigm has, however, been greatly misunderstood. It caused much displeasure with the Left who were not ready to accommodate Nietzschean philosophy after its appropriation and propagandist use by Nazism, and also because the Hegelian approach to history upon which Toynbee's theories were based was directly antithetical to the dialectics of historical materialism. There were also many black intellectuals who considered Butler's theory highly problematic since they saw it as representing simplistic notions of a 'primal' Africa and a 'rational' Europe, underscoring an ancient and, ultimately, unfavourable contrast.

In order to understand how Butler intended to implement this cultural synthesis and where critics have largely misunderstood his intentions it is necessary, briefly, to revisit Hegelian thought, focusing especially on the dialectical process or *Triadic* process as it is sometimes referred to, developed by Hegel upon which Toynbee's, and thus Butler's, theories are premised.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy set out to transform Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy, which rejected the notion that man could ever fully grasp reality, into a metaphysical idealism. Hegel, together with other

German idealist philosophers such as Fichte and Schelling, rejected Kant's epistemology, stating that "whatever is, is knowable" since every object of knowledge, including "things", is the product of the mind. Hegel recognised that there is a subject and an object, a person and the world. But the essence of his idealism consisted in the notion that the object of our consciousness, the *thing* we experience and think about, is itself *thought*. This ultimately led him to the conclusion that all reality is to be found in what he termed the *Absolute Idea*. Hegel thus argued that appearance **is** reality, by comparison with Plato, for example, who made a sharp distinction between the two, or Kant who differentiated between the object-in-itself (*noumena*) and the object-as-it-appears (*phenomena*) thus separating appearance and reality. For Hegel there are no distinctions between appearance and reality other than a distinction within consciousness. For him "whatever is real, is rational, and whatever is rational, is real". His intricate phenomenological process of a balancing within consciousness between appearance and reality would later translate itself into the universally applied dialectical process. Nothing therefore, said Hegel, is unrelated. Thus whatever we experience as separate things will, upon careful scrutiny, lead us to other things to which they are related. If this process of dialectical thought is continued, it will lead us, in the end, to the Absolute. It is apparent, then, that just as the Absolute and also Nature are dynamic processes, so also human thought is a process, a dialectical process.

Hegel believed that this dialectical thought process exhibited a *triadic* movement. This *triadic* structure of the dialectic process reveals itself as a movement from **thesis** to **antithesis** and finally to **synthesis**, after which the

synthesis becomes a new thesis. This triadic or dialectic process continues, each time moving to a higher plane of synthesis and equilibrium until it ends in the Absolute Idea. Thought is always moving and contradiction, rather than bringing knowledge to a halt, acts as a catalysing agent in human reasoning and progress. In this process the mind moves from the more general and abstract to the specific and concrete. For Hegel, the Absolute Idea itself was also always in a dynamic process of self-development towards self-perfection. Thus, apparent contradictions in the dialectic process are seen to merge themselves, by a continuous unification of opposites, in a higher truth that harmonizes and comprehends them. The dialectical process is therefore at work everywhere: in the consciousness of the individual, in society, and even in concepts themselves.

The idea of synthesis as presupposed by Toynbee and subscribed to by Butler is based on the pure Hegelian model and not on the Marxist adaptation of Hegelian dialectical principles which has distorted them from their original meanings. Where, for Hegel, the antithesis was not seen in negative terms, it gradually appropriated such connotations in Marxist adaptations. By way of illustration, in one of his noted examples of "synthesis" through the triadic pattern, Hegel places the rational Idea as Thesis, the non-rational Nature as the Antithesis, resulting in a new Synthesis of "Geist" or Spirit. In no way was he suggesting a secondary status for Nature. Furthermore, the entire Hegelian process was seen as an harmonious one rather than a combative one, resulting in progress to a higher plane where, by gathering in the truth contained in earlier stages we reach, ultimately, a state of absolute knowledge. Furthermore, Marxist-materialists considered that ideas and

institutions are the reflection of material conditions – the reverse of the Hegelian approach. Michael O'Dowd sums up the distortions to the Hegelian synthetic process by subsequent Marxist-materialist philosophers as follows:

"What actually emerges...from the process of debate is generally something truly new, and better than what either side had in mind."

This was the original and valid doctrine of the dialectic as put forward by Hegel. The dialectic is not a war between good and evil, or between the forces of progress and the forces of reaction, as it is so often represented. It is a co-operative process where both the thesis and the antithesis, both the innovators and their conservative critics, cooperate to produce real knowledge....<sup>30</sup>

Bringing the same debate into a specifically African context, Omafume Onoge observes that

[the Marxist]...dialectical paradigm underscores conflict rather than harmony; stresses forces tending to disrupt and transform the status quo rather than equilibrating ones; and affirms qualitative discontinuity rather than gradualism. The upshot of this is that social systems are accorded only temporary legitimacy.<sup>31</sup>

What needs to be understood specifically in relation to the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm as applied by Butler are three principles which his critics have failed to note. The first is that the intention and purpose of using the mythic framework is not to underscore conflict between Europe and Africa or 'rationality' and 'intuition' but rather to bring about a harmony of cultures. The second principle, as we shall see with reference to both Butler's poetry and the position as stated in his essays and lectures, is that Apollo and rationality are not axiomatically privileged over Dionysus and intuitive passionality. The third principle is that Butler's own utilization of the Apollo-Dionysus nexus, much in keeping with the synthetic Hegelian process he was advocating, underwent several modifications and reformulations in a steady evolutionary process over some twenty five years adjusting itself to African

immediacies. To perceive the formulation as static, as many critics have done, or to dismiss the formulation glibly as articulating a distinction between "...culture and primitive nature, and brains and loins..."<sup>32</sup>, as Williams does, is to miss the essential components and evolutionary trajectory of Butler's thought. Moreover, it is questionable whether the critic has, in this instance, herself understood the complexities of the paradigm, listing Butler's perceptions of "Western civilization" as being "Dionysian" and "African barbarity" as "Appolonian" [sic].<sup>33</sup>

William Blake had made the point that what was needed to cleanse the Doors of Perception was to destroy the "negation" and thus redeem the contraries. It was with this in mind that Butler outlined his earliest ideas on synthesis in a 1950 lecture entitled "South African Literature":

The emergence of cultural cohesion in Western Europe out of the ruin of the Roman Empire may illustrate my point. Western Europe during the fifth century AD presents certain parallels with Africa in the twentieth: sophisticated, skilful, consciously superior Romans mixed with energetic barbarians speaking another tongue and utterly different in culture. Out of this uncompromising mixture came Dante and Notre Dame, Shakespeare and St John of the Cross. Without minimising economic and other factors, it seems to me that, as always, cohesion and order came from human consciousness – in other words, from above, not from below, from Grecian, Roman and Hebrew minds. But a synthesis is never an accident; it was achieved, consciously, by men such as St Augustine. In response to the disastrous fall of the great city of Rome, he wrote *The City of God*. Looking at the chaos – economic, cultural, religious, racial and administrative – that followed on the collapse, he did not throw up his hands in despair, or submit to the historical process, or the destiny of his race, but, pivoting himself on the Cross and its tremendous claims, declared for a common citizenship, for duties and privileges which were far more important than one's Roman or Germanic or Celtic culture, one's Mediterranean or Scandinavian temperament. All, Augustine notes, are citizens of the City of God and must humbly attempt to do His will. It was an audacious and difficult idea. But it looked forward, it had hope in it. It provided a sense of direction, a reference point. Out of this idea, gradually, came a new society, a new synthesis, carrying along with it much of the ruined civilizations which had given it birth.

I come then to the startling conclusion – it certainly startles me – that the South African writer has two courses open to himself. He can regard himself as a European and contribute to European literature, facing the European predicament by going to live there. This is a choice which Campbell, Plomer, Van der Post and others have made. Or else he can say, “I have European origins, but am committed to Africa, here, to this most original, unholy, unjust chaos. I am part of this, as well as being part of the European mess. I cannot clarify either or begin to control or synthesise them until at least part of me is above and outside both.”<sup>34</sup>

Whilst, from a vantage point of some fifty years further on, there might not appear to be anything “startling”, to use Butler’s own term, in the poetic project he outlined in 1950, when his lecture is contextualised it becomes apparent just how radical a programme he was advocating. In the two years prior to Butler’s lecture the National Party had embarked on a programme of stripping all South Africans of colour of their rights and citizenship. In 1948 Indian voting rights in Natal were abolished and the first restrictions were introduced on the Cape Coloured franchise. In 1949 the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act was passed, and the Natives Representative Council was abolished. This was followed by even more draconian social measures in 1950, the year of Butler’s lecture, when the Group Areas Act was passed to ensure strict residential separation of various ‘racial’ groups.

By using St Augustine as the precursor of his own ideas on synthesis, Butler declared, along with Augustine, for “...a common citizenship...for duties and privileges which were far more important than one’s [own] culture, one’s [own] temperament. All...are citizens of the City of God and must humbly attempt to do His will”. This was a most audacious idea for an oppressed South African society gripped in the tyranny of an opprobrious apartheid system, and must have appeared to fly in the face of the plethora of apartheid legislation taking

place. The idea of a common citizenship must no doubt have been anathema to the many supporters of white minority Nationalist rule.

Butler's use of St Augustine was neither fortuitous nor accidental. At various stages in his theoretical writings spanning a period of nearly forty years, Butler raises Augustine's name as the example, *par excellence*, of the visionary who, through a conscious application of his will, was able to effect a synthesised society capable of transforming itself. Born in North Africa of a Christian mother and pagan father in 354 AD, Augustine of Hippo became one of the most influential thinkers of the first millennium. Having received a thorough training in the Classics, particularly the work of the Roman poet Virgil, he would in time be able to merge the Classical with the prosaic in an entirely new style.

In terms of philosophical thought Augustine represents a culmination of the philosophic debates that preceded him whilst, at the same time, setting the course of western philosophy for the next thousand years. A profound thinker, his argument refuting the Academics' (Skeptics) theory that we could never know anything for certain, not even our existence, anticipates Rene Descartes' argument by some twelve hundred years. His dictum that "God is something than which nothing more excellent or sublime exists" influenced Anselm of Canterbury to formulate his Ontological Argument some six hundred years later. Even more remarkably, his doctrine of the "*rationes seminales*" foreshadowed the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas's potentiality and actuality, scientist Charles Darwin's evolution of species, and mystic paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's theory of complexity-

consciousness moving towards Omega point, all of them admittedly in vastly different ways.

The writing by Augustine of *De Civitas Dei* (*The City of God*) to which Butler alludes in his essay, was occasioned by the sack of Rome by Alaric the Visigoth in 410 AD. St Jerome, a contemporary of Augustine, wrote: "If Rome can perish, who can be safe." Undaunted, Augustine responded by distinguishing the two cities: an earthly city and a heavenly city. Thus the writing of *The City of God* was itself an act of synthesis. Large sections of it, particularly Books 15 to 18 where Augustine treats of the *procursus* or progress of the City of God on earth, demonstrate Augustine's recognition of the struggle in which the two worlds, the Classical and the Judaeo-Christian, were engaged not only in matters of fact but also in matters of language and style. Being equally at home in the world of Classical rhetoric and in that of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Augustine was the first to become aware specifically of the stylistic contrast between the two worlds and formulated the problem very perceptively in his treatise *De Doctrina Christiana*.

In the theories of antiquity and Classical writing the sublime and elevated style was termed *sermo gravis* ( or *sublimis*) whilst the low style was referred to as *sermo remissus* ( or *humilis*). It was accepted practice to keep the two styles strictly separated. But Christ's coming, his life among the lower classes, and the simultaneous sublimity and shamefulness of his passion and death, shattered the Classical conception of the tragic and the sublime. Thus, in the world of Christianity where Christ's incarnation and passion combine the elements of *sublimitas* and *humilitas* in overwhelming measure, the two styles of *sermo gravis* and *sermo remissus* coalesce and merge.



Noted German scholar, Erich Auerbach, comments thus on Augustine's achievements:

...no one ever more passionately pursued and investigated the phenomenon of conflicting and united inner forces, the alternation of antithesis and synthesis in their relations and effects. And he did so not only in practical contexts but also in connection with purely theoretical problems....

[Under Augustine]...the age of separate realms of style is over.<sup>35</sup>

...in terms of style, the antithetical fusion of the two was emphasized, ...as a characteristic of Holy Scripture – especially by Augustine.<sup>36</sup>

The use of St Augustine as a model of the synthetic process by Butler is, perhaps, more profound than is at first apparent. It is not only Augustine's visionary status as philosopher or his ability to synthesise the disparate realms of faith and reason which make him the perfect model, but also his ability to adapt, change and merge the Classical and Judaeo-Christian styles into something entirely fresh and new which makes him such a perfect model for Butler's purposes, as well as the fact that Augustine, a Dionysian North African, was able to re-juvenate a decaying and moribund Roman Apollo, giving birth to a new civilization. When Butler proposes a synthesis he is therefore not only suggesting a fusion of mores, customs, cultures and temperaments, and a synthesis of the realms of reason and intuition, but also a fusion into changed and adapted forms of artistic and stylistic expression reflecting these transformations.

Butler believed that two characteristics were necessary on the part of the poet or artist to effect these transformations into a new synthesis; these were "imagination" and "detachment". The creative artist is born with "imagination" but "detachment" is something he must achieve. On the one hand, the task of "imagination" is

...to initiate new attitudes and responses, to provide visions and incentives. In other words [the poet or artist] is in some sense the prophet and shaper of his society. But the effect of his work is sometimes not felt for generations.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, “detachment”, according to Butler, requires a removal from the present, a super-racial reference point

...a large landmark, a reference point, a beacon above the ranges of race, the sands of suspicion, the Red Seas of destruction. What hope is there for us if no such super-racial reference point is found, a fixed point from which to plan and map?<sup>38</sup>

Scrutiny of Butler’s theoretical writings, such as his numerous essays and lectures, reveals that, whilst the notion of bringing about a synthesis in South Africa was a lifelong preoccupation of his, beginning in 1950, the concept of its expression in the Nietzschean Apollo-Dionysus nexus had its earliest formulations only in July 1956 in an essay entitled “Poetry, Drama and Public Taste” after Butler’s earlier visit to Ife, Nigeria in 1954 where the parallel first occurred to him. Thereafter, for a period of some ten years, numerous references to the Nietzschean paradigm occur in various lectures and essays, the most sophisticated formulation of the paradigm appearing in an October 1962 lecture entitled “The Republic and the Arts”. It is significant that the paradigm finds no mention in a very late essay entitled “A Search for Synthesis” (1984) for, by then, Butler felt that he had explored it to its optimum and it thus made way for other imperatives in his work.

A close study of Butler’s poetry reveals the same pattern. Whilst it may be said that all his poems over a forty year period from 1947 until 1987 reveal the constant striving for synthesis, those which deal specifically with the Europe-Africa encounter in terms of the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm are limited to

a twelve year period from 1954 to 1966 which, interestingly enough, coincides with a similar timescale in his theoretical writings.

Poems such as “To an Artist Friend: Florence 1947”, “After Ten Years” (1952), and “Elegy” (1955) all treat the European encounter with Africa and the desire to attain a balance through synthesis, but outside of specific references to the Apollo-Dionysus paradigm. In “To an Artist Friend: Florence 1947” the poet uses the symbols of the aloe and the rose to represent Africa and Europe respectively:

This came at a time, I should suppose  
when I was aware of aloe and rose –  
of what had crossed the seas with us,  
and what belonged – indigenous.

...

We share, thanks be to ancestry,  
Bruegel, Giotto, the whole Uffizi:  
but, I contend, African light  
calls from a different kind of sight.  
We all respond to imaginative  
brilliant shocks from the primitive,  
simple, space-sure drawings that state  
how excellent and accurate  
were eyes trained by our air and sun  
before White Africa began.

African objects have to face  
terrific pressures of light and space.  
Aren't you tired of aloes which seem  
strayed out of a mystic Irish dream?  
Sick of studies of native faces  
empty of all human traces?  
Of placid paintings of the Reef  
without a hint of gold or grief?  
As if in a brand-new continent  
our art is already decadent,  
and courage, insight, fury, fuss  
were censored or superfluous!

Humbly, therefore, I propose  
To wed the aloe and the rose...

...

Give yourself to Africa!  
 Be proud and boast, be jealous of her:  
 for she will not unveil, reveal  
 an ear or eyelash unless you feel:  
 nor will she share her secret state  
 with smugness, indifference or hate.  
 Sit with paint-stained hands to your chin,  
 stare long at her, learn discipline,  
 yield and suffer until you find  
 her splendour dancing in your mind,  
 violent, lovely, frivolous.  
 Do this, or miss the creative bus.

...

So, open your senses, let things seep  
 Into the mind's absorbing deep.  
 There Africa and Europe will  
 coalesce and fuse until,  
 suddenly, out of your brain's abyss  
 will shoot the flowers of synthesis!

You see, dear Corduroy, unless  
 we modify our mental dress;  
 unless we clothe our minds and hearts  
 with home-grown images and arts;  
 and neither deny our heritage  
 (like adolescents come of age),  
 nor fail to grow new loves, and change  
 the downside for the mountain range –  
 every single (snowless) summer  
 will find us bigger, dimmer, dumber,  
 till, like those clumsy dinosaurs,  
 we'll die, a race of thugs and bores;  
 and our tremendous African sun  
 will glitter down when we have gone  
 on others, less incongruous. ...

(*CP* pp. 116-9)

The rose, besides being the heraldic symbol of England, possesses myriad symbolic associations in European literature and mythology: in Mediaeval liturgical drama it signifies the legendary miracle of the first roses appearing at Bethlehem in answer to a prayer by a "fayre Mayden" falsely accused and sentenced to death by burning; in Dante it is completion and perfection; in Blake, uncorrupted innocence; in T. S. Eliot it represents the "moment in the rose garden" recalling the mystic visions of Julian of Norwich; and in the widely accepted Christian context it is emblematic of a paragon and thus

peculiarly appropriated to the Virgin Mary, “the Mystical Rose”. The aloe, by contrast, has no such symbolic or mythic connotations for the white poet writing in Africa. It has not yet been able to denote any symbolical charge for the poet and still has to “...collect it by friction in countless contexts”<sup>39</sup> according to Butler. In wedding the aloe and the rose, Butler was attempting to create a new set of resonances for specifically African objects.

Giotto and Breughel, acknowledged masters of the Mediaeval and Renaissance periods in European art, are then compared with the unknown rock artists of Africa who have left a legacy of dim palimpsests of beasts and buck. The interpretation and appreciation of these rock artists' work requires a “different kind of sight”, a revised perception. Despite confirming the rich heritage left by the great European masters, it is the brilliant shocks from the “primitive, simple, space-sure drawings that state how excellent and accurate” these hunter-gatherer artists were. Nor did they assimilate these skills from White African colonisers – their sure skills of representing space and kinetic properties were innate and not dependent on any imported Apollonian structures.

An appeal is made by Butler to his fictional artist Corduroy to represent as evocatively as he can the sights and sounds of Africa, allowing “...courage, insight, fury, fuss” to inform his work, rather than to present it in European terms which are lifeless. Aloes, hardy plants of the desert, are presented by artists incongruously as though out of an Irish mist; portraits of indigenous Africans appear to be totally dehumanised; and the Reef goldfields, places of financial triumph but also of human and social tragedy, are presented in

nondescript terms. Butler's own expression that Europe was dying on its old feet seems to be appropriate here.

The exhortation for the European artist to give himself to Africa begins an extended metaphor where he is portrayed as a lover courting a mysterious feminine African other. The beauty and splendour of a capricious Africa are suggested but in the light of colonialism's excessively rapine nature I feel that this Europe-Africa metaphor sets up disconcerting resonances in the poem and does not achieve its desired effect.

Butler believed that in order for the "...flowers of synthesis" to shoot, it was necessary for the artist to "...open [his] senses, let things seep / into the mind's absorbing deep". In suggesting this almost Baconian approach to the perception of reality where, in a highly empirical fashion, nature is placed on the rack during the course of which, to use the Scholastic terms, its Substance (or "essence") is separated from its Accidents, Butler opens up the contentious debate amongst African intellectuals, both black and white, of whether there are 'peculiarly European' or 'peculiarly African' forms of knowledge and whether such epistemological barriers would preclude a shared and synthesised culture.

Oyeka Owomoyela maintains that African epistemes are unique and attacks African philosophers such as Paulin Hountondji, Marcien Towa, and Kwasi Wiredu whom he charges use Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge and culture to analyse 'peculiarly' African experiences. They, in their turn, have attacked ethnophilosophy for its authoritarianism, inflexibility and lack of scientific spirit which they see as characteristic of African epistemes.

Is there really a 'peculiarly' African experience or is all experience anchored in universals but approached through limited Kantian-type categories which are themselves conditioned and sustained by the variables of class, gender, ethnicity, space and history? In this poem, as in his other work, Butler seems to suggest that shared experience is not only possible but absolutely necessary if the desired objective of "a common humanity" is to be attained.

That Butler was still pursuing the concept of synthesis in general terms in 1952 is evident from his poem, "After Ten Years", published in that year:

I accept my pain, I am incomplete,  
cannot measure, build or synthesise;  
I lack a means of dimension, a corner stone,

An essential catalyst, O hidden God,  
sweet Giver of faith, still veiled, unknown to me,  
humbly I start again, set out to rediscover

you...

(*CP* p. 108)

Rather than a fusion between the rival and conflicting cultures of Europe and Africa, what is sought in this poem by Butler is a fusion between faith and reason, spirituality and rationality, something akin to Kierkegaard's "knight of faith" who as the "qualitative individual" confronts the "quantitative" and structured crowd, moving from antithesis to synthesis. Though he remains outwardly indistinguishable from others in such a social structure, as an autonomous source of creative and fidelic behaviour he becomes inwardly free of its despotic and hegemonic power.

"Elegy" was begun in 1944, although it was only in 1955 that it saw its first publication. It probably underwent several revisions for Butler tells us that he

would not publish poems unless they felt

...true and right in sense and sound. By listening intently to them through successive re-writings one finds the appropriate rhythm and finally the form.<sup>40</sup>

Despite its being a war poem which deals with the death and burial of a tank commander in Italy in 1944, it seems more appropriate to consider it in the context of its 1955 release when Butler was preoccupied with the European encounter in Africa. Moreover, Butler's own observation that

...so Protean is a poem's evolution that its final form may bear little relation to the notes of its first announcement<sup>41</sup>

endorses its treatment in the later context of its publication.

The elegy begins with Butler's reminiscence of fragments of conversation between him and his dead colleague: (only those extracts from the poem which are relevant to my argument are reprinted here)

Briefly released from autumn's battle line  
relaxed as antique shepherds on the sward,  
or lounging like young lords, we'd savour wine,

we'd say the pen is mightier than the sword;  
we'd nag at ironies of how we'd come –  
white Africans who artlessly abhorred

raw voices screaming from Berlin or Rome –  
only to learn the bitter paradox  
of trouble brewing, terribly, back home:

to help bring Freedom through the storms and shocks  
to harbour in calm waters, victory won –  
and then to run upon the selfsame rocks.

Talking universals large as the sun  
taking sweeping swaths of histories,  
of Israel, Rome, Mahommed, Prester John,

we kept returning to those Portuguese  
daring the flat world's edge, whose light craft came  
to pick the locks of all the southern seas.

Till then, to us, our land lay unknown, dumb:  
we heard earth's rondure ring in Camoens's voice  
and felt his proud foot pound the floors of time.



Who else could press such song from war and noise?  
 Into the epic vat what grapes he cast!  
 Sunburnt fidalgos, fair Grecian god-like boys

and princes gold as raisins from the East;  
 and so fermenting them till palates such as ours  
 still smack his pleasure in the troubled feast.

Great Europe, cradle of imperial powers,  
 far flung your boundaries of heart and mind,  
 we taste your sweetness but the vintage sours.

We, from the outposts, meeting you half-blind  
 and lost among your ruins, we must call  
 on ancient, common ancestry to find

a voice to match our young worlds, walking tall –  
 and not the bitter, witty, weary strain  
 of greatness haunted by decline and fall.

(CP pp. 76-7)

The irony of white Africans fighting against the fascist tyrannies of the Axis powers in Europe – the voices of Hitler and Mussolini “...screaming from Berlin and Rome” – and yet being unable to promote a just and fair society in their own country is not lost on Butler. There is also a sense of unease expressed in the white colonial presence in Africa for, despite their discussions on the varied histories of the Jews, the Romans, Islam, and Prester John’s kingdom of Monomotapa, Butler and his friend “...kept returning to those Portuguese” who were the first to discover the southern African coastline when they came “...to pick the locks of all the southern seas” in an act made to sound like piracy. But Camoens who commemorated the Portuguese voyages of discovery cast them in an heroic mould in his 1572 epic *The Lusiads*. Butler acknowledges Camoens’s artistic achievement by questioning “...who else could press such song from war and noise”. There is mild irony employed here as Butler’s own mellifluous song, his funeral elegy for a friend killed in battle, has been occasioned by the fury and destruction of war.

The skilful ambiguities of the tenth stanza allow it to set up various resonances within the poem. For Butler the vintage of Great Europe, which was cast into the epic vat much earlier by Camoens, has gone sour. Modern poetic voices of disenchantment in Europe have become bitter and weary thus betraying the glory of their origins. Consequently, the poet "...from the outposts" who is lost among the literary ruins of modern European voices must return to the "ancient, common ancestry" of the voice of John Milton and match it to "...our young world [of Africa] walking tall". Is this an early call from Butler for a synthesis between European form and African content? Or is Butler suggesting that it is not so much the literary conventions of "...Great Europe, cradle of imperial powers" which has "...far flung boundaries of heart and mind" (the auto-suggestion of intellectual hegemony imposed by the imperial centre on the peripheries is neatly encapsulated here) but rather its colonial enterprises which have gone "sour"? Whatever the interpretation, our allowing Butler a double focus establishes an entirely new set of resonances within the poem which enriches its text.

In utilising in his elegy the "regal measure" of John Milton's *Lycidas* and the tercet and 'terza rima' form made famous in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Butler was returning to the "ancient, common ancestry" of European voices to articulate his own thoughts. Whilst awaiting the arrival of the priest to perform the rites of burial and internment "...in a little field the Romans cleared" Butler's thoughts turn, however, once again from Europe to Africa:

Let all lament be inward, let it not break  
the stoic sky to sobbing, nor yet cause  
a cypress or an olive tree to shake

or darker waves to stumble on these shores:  
 these quiet-watered shores whose surface now –  
 now while the bearers on the pit's edge pause –

shines brilliant green and tosses bough on bough  
 of lavish blossoms and dark, glittering leaves  
 toward the earth and air – still whispering how

foam-white Love slipped naked from the waves,  
 and how dim siren songs could fill the ear  
 to lure young sailors into craggy graves

Oh, far and other the old godless roar  
 where Indian and Atlantic thrash the base  
 of sullen Africa: there red cliffs soar

to meet world-tides, world-winds and bleakly face  
 the southern pole! Never the halcyon rocks  
 on those huge waters born of storm and ice...

Oh dear friend, that friendless ocean knocks  
 my heart. Although our poetry was born  
 by this nymph-haunted sea whose music locks

my mind still closer every dusk and dawn,  
 your death brings other airs to fill my mouth,  
 now cold as the winds that blast the plunging Horn,

now hot as the swamps and deserts to the south,  
 that deep to severing deep may suddenly call  
 and distance dwindle to the point of death.

(CP pp. 80-1)

The first response of the poet's consciousness is to the immediate European images impinging on his senses and their wealth of mythic associations. Evidence of intervention by the gods in human affairs seems to be everywhere. The cypress, dedicated by the Romans to the god Pluto as a funeral tree because when once cut it never grows again, is linked with the olive tree whose branches were traditionally used in the lustral rites of the "asperges me" in early Christian burial. The halcyon waters of the Italian coastline recall the European fable of the kingfisher breeding during the winter solstice in a nest floating on the ocean and being able to charm the wind and waves so that the sea became especially calm. Out of these calm waters

Butler sees the mythical birth of Venus, “foam-white Love [slipping] naked from the waves”. Brought into the frame, too, are the notorious Sirens who lured Odysseus’ sailors to destruction on the rocks and the mediaeval Rhenish sirens of the Lorelei who likewise sent sailors to watery graves.

By contrast “sullen Africa” seems to be “godless”; no halcyon waters here, for the Indian and Atlantic Oceans “thrash” the soaring red cliffs of the southern African coastline. Despite this, and the fact that Europe has given birth to the imaginative and cultural masterpieces suggested by the poet, it is the “friendless ocean” which knocks at his heart and impels him to bring “other airs” to fill his mouth. These airs are both as “cold as the winds that blast the plunging Horn” and “as hot as the swamps and deserts”. Notwithstanding the elegy’s structure in the “regal measure” of iambic pentameter and terza rima, it is the great range of African feeling and the freshness of primal passion rather than the more halcyon European sentiments, Butler suggests, that are more adequate to an articulation of the deepest expressions of sorrow in his poem.

Is Butler also suggesting that appearance frequently belies reality, that Europe’s thin veneer of civilization is not to be taken at face value? It is bitterly ironic that his thoughts on mythical European archetypes and cultural masterpieces in a highly sophisticated, Apollonian-ordered society take place during an interlude in the greatest conflict and holocaust in human history.

His thoughts re-focus on Africa via Luis de Camoens, one of the great European epic poets :

Why should I now remember, now, and here  
words said about our Africa by one  
who took the world for his poetic share?

Camoens, imperial Renaissance man,  
whose heroes, fetched from Troy, still strut and prance  
from Lisbon and Malind: whose Grecian sun

takes Benin's blight and Goa in one glance:  
whose winds, though half-monsoon, half-Christian gale  
swirl spice and candle-smoke in mingling dance:

above whose big-with-the-future, bellying sail  
by turns Our Lady and lush Venus hover, -  
how few your words for Africa, how frail!

In so much unknown, nothing to uncover  
except one exiled god, whom rage deforms,  
old Adamastor, the sea's rejected lover,

shaking his foaming beard on Cape of Storms  
still blasting with the thunder of his curse  
whatever Man in Africa performs.

Far up the Eastern Coast, struck by the terse  
harsh sentences of death, your proud face winces:  
all grandeur, suddenly, quits your regal verse;

furled are the flags dumb are the drums of princes,  
whole continents are drowned in depths of song  
whose calm heroic irony convinces

bones lie best in lands where their hearts belong.  
The passage I now remember, Camoens, tells  
how many a scurvied corpse with rotting tongue,

you buried without requiem or bells  
in unblessed ground upon an unmapped shore;  
in mangrove shades, in grit of tropical shells,

abandoned those who staked and lost their share  
on Fortune's wheel since leaving Portugal:  
to save a hero's face from cruel air

use any passing wave or random hill,  
as we did for these ordinary men.  
There's nothing difficult in burial.

II

But do not stare, Camoens, at us ten  
who hide a body on this alien shore.  
Stare into Africa, beyond the line

of crags that echo Adamastor's roar:  
look on a gabled homestead, white in the sun,  
where a woman pauses in the open door.

She should be here. But nothing can be done.  
 We couldn't comfort her. You might have said  
 a simple prayer to Mary and her Son.

She moves across the yard, beyond the shed,  
 so small beneath the curving cliffs of sky,  
 to stand where trees across her other dead

throw shadows west and east diurnally.  
 Those lying there found Africa was good.  
 Where else should their extinguished bodies be

but in the soil that gave their daily bread?  
 Though Adamastor's curse seems strong enough  
 and our short history is dark with blood

this woman and these graves have power to prove  
 that exile ends where families hold still  
 and look on landscapes with familiar love.

There is, somewhat surprisingly in the context of an elegy, a mildly reproachful tone directed at Camoens by the poet. Seen from the perspective of "our Africa" by Butler, Camoens signifies the grasping imperial Renaissance man, freshly exposed to expanding global horizons, who is quite prepared to appropriate classical inheritances in the cause of colonial subjugation of new territories. The rapid secularisation of Renaissance culture and its concomitant polarisations are indicated by a number of incongruities where the prevailing winds are "...half-monsoon, half-Christian", where the economic interests of the spice trade jostle with the "...candle-smoke" of spirituality, and where Our Lady, icon of the Middle Ages, is superseded by Venus of antiquity. Camoens's heroes "...strut and prance / from Lisbon and Malind" in a display of arrogance, and in what appears to be the earliest use of the Apollo-Dionysus paradigm in his poetry, Butler then refers to Camoens's hero, Vasco da Gama, as the "Grecian sun", the European Apollo who would, in the course of rounding the Cape, confront the defeated Dionysus.

Camoens is castigated for not finding anything significant to say about Africa:

how few your words for Africa, how frail!

In so much unknown, nothing to uncover  
except one exiled god, whom rage deforms,  
old Adamastor, the sea's rejected lover.

The implication here is that it suited Europe to keep Africa undefined thus depriving it of any ontological status. Its existence would be dependent upon, and defined only in relation to, Europe. The best that Africa is given by Camoens is a single, deformed, exiled god making it not a newly-discovered Elysian field but an anti-Olympus. It was Camoens who had the opportunity of formulating the first positive European mental images of Africa but, charges Butler, he failed to do so. In Canto V of *The Lusiads* Vasco da Gama, representative of the European enlightenment, cheats Adamastor, who personifies the "African spirit", of the favours of the nymph Thetis thus setting in motion the cycle of legitimised dispossession which would become a characteristic of imperial conquest.

Despite the unfavourable status accorded Africa by Camoens, Butler affirms his own and his fallen comrade's loyalties stating that those who had lived and died in the continent had "...found Africa was good". The "curse" of Adamastor, though strong enough, could be conquered by a love of family and an allegiance to the land, no matter how difficult the latter might prove to be.

After the burial service, lying upon his back in camp and awaiting the next military skirmish, the poet's attention becomes focussed on the songs being sung by a dozen 'Coloured' batmen:

Now, rising to dance, they trample underneath  
all other sounds except their song's mad rhythm,  
then skate upon the ice their bacchic breath

has crystallised across the boiling chasm.  
But when they stop, watch, watch the surface crack,  
the dance dismembered drown in twitch and spasm!

Cannot the old organic age come back  
when through all dance and ritual song there burned  
pervasive warmth which our new systems lack,

a sun round which both death and life once turned  
with neither dark nor light the end of all?  
Pursuit of light alone is all I've learned;

blindness to death has made life trivial  
for what's the worth of cosmic words and maps  
if we can't gloss or place one burial?

(CP p. 93)

These images are strongly reminiscent of the dancing sequences in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* ("East Coker" I lines 24-47). Whereas Eliot seeks to examine the ineluctable patterns of life "...Feet rising and falling, / Eating and drinking. Dung and death...", Butler questions the Western approach of privileging a dispassionate rationality over an intuitive passionality. Already one can detect in these lines the seminal images of what would emerge in his subsequent poems as a more specifically defined Apollo-Dionysus nexus.

The dancing, the mad rhythm and the bacchic breath are all traditionally associated with Dionysus and "...the old organic age". By contrast, the new impersonal systems of empirical Europe are associated with the "light" and Butler bemoans the fact that "...pursuit of light alone", the principle of intellectuality, was all he had ever learned, thus denying the development of the full spectrum of his personality. Just as Eliot hopes that, by returning to the primitive cyclical patterns of our human nature, "...the darkness shall be



the light, and the stillness the dancing”, Butler hopes to see “...neither dark nor light the end of all” when a balanced synthesis between rationality and intuition is achieved.

It was an incident in his travels through Ghana in 1954 which first led Butler to see the Europe-Africa encounter in the more specific terms of the mythical Apollonian-Dionysian nexus:

We had been driving all morning along roads which were tunnels through rain forest, and our sedan car, moving through that green light, was not unlike a submarine, ingenious and efficient, but insensitive to the mode of life about it.

Our progress was halted by the strangest procession I had ever seen: sixty or so women of various ages, clad in vivid oranges and brick reds and siennas, danced slowly across our path towards a village on the right. They were dancing with what we would call wild abandon; a foot-shuffle and hand-clapping which involved everything between hand and foot in a continual rhythmical spasm. They were not singing, but screaming, and their faces were wet with tears, yet their expressions were not grief-stricken but ecstatically happy.

An arresting sight, just the thing for a tourist to see. What luck. Switch off. No spark in the cylinders, no petrol igniting, no vibration. Now, for the first time we became aware of the drums, some distance away at the village: the great drum orchestra of the Ashanti, seven in all, ranging from a sizeable hollow tree trunk, to a small tympanum about the size of a tambourine, employing a subtlety and variety of cross-rhythms that entered my ears in a torrent and in a few minutes washed away all the cultivated ground round my ego, and started gnawing at its always shaky foundations.

Here was Dionysus: the ecstatic women, wailing abandoned: the drummers, mask-like faces expressionless; the vast vegetable arena pierced by weak pencils of light which seemed to whirl and curl and scrawl on the ground - everything drawn into the overpowering maelstrom of the drums of skin and wood. There was no individual present; they were not dancing the dance, the dance was dancing them; they were not masters of the drums, the drums had mastered them.

For days I was haunted, disturbed, on edge. Sitting under a large cottonwood tree on the campus at Ibadan, I was approached by a tall, elegant Hausa trader, ironic, detached, intelligent, an individual if ever there was one. His bearers unrolled his bales on the cut grass. Among his wares was a white carpet with a simple over-all geometric design in red upon it. I could not take my eyes off it. If the drums had hypnotised me, this fascinated me. Here was clarity, intellect, authority. I was startled by its impact, and bought it at an exorbitant price. What had happened of course – to resort to current psychological parlance – was that Dionysus

had disturbed my "id" so violently that my "superego" clutched at that carpet as a piece of re-assuring magic. But it did not work. Spellbound as I was, I knew that the carpet was not a particularly good carpet, and that the drum-and-dance orgy was excessive and socially impossible. One needed something between rigid abstraction and submergence in primitive animism.

...

Dionysus, with his drums, his ecstatic message of self-forgetfulness in the group, of rapport with woods and the fields, surrounded by his singing, dancing chorus of satyrs, half-men, half-beasts – this dynamic dark god invaded Greece. There he met Apollo, the god of a very different music of the harp and the single voice; the god of measurement and rule, of light and line, of the eye, and of the "I", the individual consciousness.<sup>42</sup>

These early theoretical formulations would find expression in "Home Thoughts" (1956), Butler's first poem to explore, specifically, the Apollo-Dionysus myth in relation to Africa. Based on a story derived from the archetypal Greek legend of conflict between reason and passion, between Apollo and Dionysus for supremacy in ancient Greece, the poem begins in narrative form in Section I and shifts to philosophical reflection and application in Sections II and III.

Apollo, who sets aside "...plummet and rule", hastens to confront black Dionysus "...with dancing drums, / amid a snarl of leopards", for Dionysus has threatened to disturb the ordered equilibrium of ancient Greece. The two gods engage in a titanic battle which neither can win. The struggle for supremacy ends in a balance of power for

...neither could  
conquer the force in which the other stood.

Apollo recognises, however, that as a complementary element in human nature and society Dionysus' presence is necessary and so he

At last, at Delphi, half in love with him  
...gave the drunkard elbow room.

In such controlled co-existence, Dionysus' beating drums now become "soft drums" and his frenzied dances "slow pavans". Unable to endure this

inhibiting control any longer, Dionysus breaks the uneasy truce challenging Apollo either to join his tragic dance, or kill him. Apollo chooses the latter and thus reasserts full and measured control in his domain.

Is Butler suggesting here the fluctuating course followed by Western societies and communities since the Classical age of Greece and Rome, where the liberating forces of the Renaissance were superseded by the European Enlightenment, the age of scientific discovery and the accompanying dehumanisation of the Industrial Revolution? In the context of his later discernment in the poem of the "...predatory shade" of Dionysus re-emerging in Europe to stake his claim, it is quite likely. Butler had, himself, earlier dreamed optimistically of finding direction in Europe:

Long years drifting through African dark  
bred dreams that I might find, once here,  
a burning beacon, a gyro-setting mark....

But now, though in Florence, his thoughts return to Africa:

Why do I hanker homewards, falter?  
Because in Arno's flood the stars  
cavort with neon signs, headlights of cars?  
The Centaur, snapping its human halter,  
demolishes baroque facades;  
the Great Bear runs amok  
among our maps, tugging the Pole awry;  
oh, all things heave and buck  
since Dionysus slipped Apollo's guards  
and let his leopards range the earth and sky.

Stupid of me to brood and cry  
these barbarous confusions where  
triumphant marble effigies defy  
the moody turmoils of the air;  
but, as at home, I here discern  
the predatory shade;  
asleep all day in ivy or that fern  
which smothers the balustrade  
it sniffs the night and pads the cracked parterre  
between dry laurels and the shattered urn.

In a succession of Rimbaldian-type images the poet sees reflected at night in the waters of the Arno the northern constellations gone awry as a result of Dionysus having slipped Apollo's control. The baroque facades of surrounding buildings mirrored in the water representing the perfectly balanced architecture of the Enlightenment are demolished by the stellar formation Centaur which has snapped its "human halter". Even the Great Bear seems to have "run amok" dragging down with it the Pole Star, named Arcturus by the Greeks, brightest star in the northern hemisphere, the nymph Calisto having been set in the sky as the Great Bear and her son Arcas as the Pole Star by Zeus.

Europe, the paragon of order, restraint and civilization, has fallen prey to Dionysus. In a masterful extended metaphor the leopard, symbol of Dionysus, is depicted as being on the prowl. The "predatory shade" lurks unseen in seemingly innocuous ivy and fern by day, but at night it emerges and "pads" the cracked parterre, remnants of a formal garden now broken and unkempt, slipping between the "dry laurels", modern symbols of peace desiccated in a Europe destroyed by war, and "...the shattered urn" symbolising the cultural fragments of three millennia of civilization.

The poet had hoped that Galileo, as the symbol of Apollonian empiricism, could contain the unfettered, rampant Dionysian forces of destruction with the smooth linen cordage of his pendulum which would

...ruck and tangle where  
the rough stone of a leopard's bark  
ripples the scrub with fear

but comes to realise that his expectations are unfounded. This becomes the

epiphanic moment where he comes to the realisation that, notwithstanding its "...primitive storm of thunder", his allegiance is to Africa :

Never so clearly have I known  
 ...  
 these shapes and shades cannot be mine.  
 ...  
 I have not found myself on Europe's maps,  
 a world of things, deep things I know endure  
 but not the context for my one perhaps.

Despite his admiration for the vitality and freshness of Africa there remains, however, a nervousness and apprehension of the unchecked power of Dionysus, and the poet wonders if he dares to stare into the god's furious dance. Although "...a clearer love" of Africa is a promising starting point for him, he enlists the help of the god Apollo believing that a true union of the two gods is necessary:

In Greece, the invader was Dionysus, in Africa the invader is Apollo. In both cases they start as enemies, but discover that they cannot do without each other, that they are complementary.<sup>43</sup>

The exhortation is thus made to the god of the muse to join him in staring into Dionysus' furious dance

...Apollo, come!  
 O cross the tangled scrub, the uncouth ways,  
 visit our vital if untamed abysm  
 where your old rival in the lustrous gloom  
 fumbles his drums, feels for a thread of rhythm  
 to dance us from our megalithic maze.

Nervous he wanders staring-eyed among  
 barbarous forms unknown to the northern muse.  
 Leaves, granites touch him; in ear, on tongue  
 new sounds and tastes so many they suffuse  
 his sense with a blur of heat: delirium  
 that neither sleep nor sweat can clarify.  
 Oh, let the lightning of your quickening eye  
 and his abounding darkness meet and mate,  
 cleave, crack the clouds! From his brimming drum  
 spill crystal waves of words, articulate!

(CP p. 127)

Apollo is urged to “meet and mate” the “lightning” of his “quicken eye” with the “abounding Darkness” of Dionysus. Whilst there appears to be little doubt that Butler intended a genuine marriage between the two gods, seeing an equal fusion of the two cultures of Europe and Africa as the only option, the cast of his imagery in the poem militates against this. The presentation of Dionysus as the “barbarous” “black” god slinking “..instinctive into corpses”, occupying a nocturnal world and possessing “abounding darkness” by comparison with Apollo who is “...glittering in clean-cut bronze” with a “white dancing-floor” clarity of thought and “lightning in his quickening eye”, introduces a Manichean dualism into the relationship, in this instance axiomatically privileging Europe over Africa. Moreover, it is the god Apollo who is constantly reflected as taking the initiative and setting the terms for a rapprochement between the two. The final couplet is indicative of the unintentional yet exalted status accorded Apollo for it is only through the intervention of Apollo that the African muse receives a voice:

From His brimming drum  
spill crystal waves of words, articulate!

The “subjugated knowledges” of colonial Africa, to use Foucault's term, will always remain voiceless unless they have an Apollonian presence to “spill crystal waves of words” and articulate them.

Despite the fact that, as indicated, there are several shortcomings in Butler's first detailed poetic exploration of the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm, “Home Thoughts” marked an important early engagement with the Europe-Africa encounter. Later poems dealing with the same theme will be seen to move away from the one dimensional view of equating Europe with Apollo and Dionysus with Africa.

The poem “Surveyor”, printed in *Selected Poems* (1975) but omitted from *Collected Poems* (1999), is in fact an extract from Butler’s unpublished play “Two Timers” (Act I Scene I) which I estimate to have been written in 1957-8. The extract was first published independently as a poem in 1964. Like “Home Thoughts” before it, it also deals with the Apollo-Dionysus encounter, but in a vastly different way. Placed in its context in the play, the monologue is delivered by British District Officer Stanton Wade who represents the ‘enlightened’ colonial order in Tanga Urunga – a thinly disguised historical Kenya. By utilising the ‘mask’ of British District Officer Stanton Wade, Butler is able to break from the normally modest conventions of liberal-humanist poetry:

Cutting that jungle road from Lugardville  
 everything went wrong. The road gangs  
 always at the throats of the villagers  
 who always overcharged them  
 for booze, and yams, and girls.  
 Many on both sides died bewitched.  
 Each pay-day bred a bout of gambling  
 followed by stabbings, frequently fatal.  
 Not to mention the normal snags, like malaria  
 and the run of tropical bugs. The Doctor himself went down,  
 all his quinine dumped in a swamp by a careless coon.

Superiors, equals, inferiors all advised:  
 wait for new supplies, another dry season.  
 Pay the swabs off, man, don't be stubborn.  
 There's no disgrace. Listen to reason.

But I decided to try  
 democracy, diplomacy.

So I called a full indaba of headmen and of foremen  
 and sat like Solomon in my canvas chair between them,  
 in a clean bush-jacket and best topi,  
 with a drunken interpreter swaying behind my throne.

On my left,  
 nestling on mats in garments of skins,  
 bush pagans, dignified, suspicious,  
 and one old Christian convert  
 in starched khaki shorts and lime white shoes.  
 On my right,  
 the invaders, the roadmakers, the breakers of custom:  
 a tall mine boy with flashing aluminium helmet,  
 a chap in dungarees with ear plugs the size of saucers,

and a suave young slickie, lounge-suited for the occasion,  
who thought he spoke Oxford English.

And they talked, they wrangled for hours  
in a green nightmare beneath the windless trees.  
At no point could any formula of mine  
find purchase to lever them into sense.  
They heard failure in my voice.  
I'd lost my grip and they saw it  
in my fidgeting nicotined fingers.

(*SP* pp 60-1)

Wade's disparaging terms of reference for the indigenous population leaves us in no doubt about his feelings for the colonised. They are seen only as a cheap labour force. His exalted perceptions of himself and his role in the British 'civilizing mission' are conveyed by his own pretentious comparison with King Solomon as though he were also dispensing wisdom to philistines. On his left are positioned the local inhabitants who have resisted the construction of the jungle road, whilst on his right is a motley collection of black labourers from other areas whom he categorises, somewhat ironically, as "invaders" and "breakers of [the local] custom". It seems to have escaped his attention that the greatest intrusion into the life patterns and customs of the local inhabitants has been caused by the 'civilising mission' of British imperialism. He believes that to master the "...green nightmare beneath the windless trees" the order of Apollo is a prerequisite:

Defeated, I rose from my canvas throne  
lifting a hand for silence.  
I intended, at last, to dismiss them;  
but instead, to my own surprise,  
ignoring the interpreter, I said  
crisply, in coolest English:  
In any right-angled triangle  
the square on the hypoteneuse  
equals the sum of the square on the other two sides.

In the following baffled silence  
the forest ceased to frighten,  
the swamps shrank back, afraid;  
the demoralising Babel



of voices and drowsy drums  
dimmed to a boring vibration.

I allowed myself one brief smile,  
inside I was rocking with laughter:  
I laughed the Congo Basin to scorn,  
I leered sideways at the Mountains of the Moon,  
I regarded the six thousand miles  
of the Great Rift Valley with amusement,  
and I took up the whole Sahara  
as a very small thing.  
All Africa's black witch-doctors,  
all her white orators,  
all the dizzy word-spinners of the world  
could not refute that proposition.  
I laughed, got things in proportion,  
I ceased to be intimidated.  
They saw it, and accepted.  
The road went through on time.

The Commies are using it now.

(*SP* pp. 61-2)

Wade's invocation of the Apollonian principles of measurement and science are seen by him to have defeated the forests and swamps. Even the "drowsy drums" of Bromius are effectively disempowered – or so he believes. Massive topographical features of the African continent – the Congo Basin, the Great Rift Valley, the Mountains of the Moon, and even the vast Sahara Desert - are swallowed up in a Mathematical concept. This passage takes on an added significance when we realise the vital role that cartography played in imperial conquest. Benedict Anderson explains:

...European-style maps worked on the basis of a totalising classification, and led their bureaucratic producers and consumers towards policies with revolutionary consequences. Ever since John Harrison's 1761 invention of the chronometer, which made possible the precise calculation of longitudes, the entire planet's curved surface had been subjected to a geometrical grid which squared off empty seas and unexplored regions in measured boxes. The task of, as it were, "filling in" the boxes was to be accomplished by explorers, surveyors, and military forces...  
Triangulation by triangulation, war by war, treaty by treaty, the alignment of map and power proceeded.<sup>44</sup>

Wade's mental construct of "boxing" the African continent by applying the Apollonian principles of measurement, thereby placing Dionysus in bondage

and rendering Africa politically powerless, would prove to be seriously flawed. Wade grossly underestimates the power of Dionysus not only in African social structures but also in his own character. The denial of "...elbow room" to Dionysus in one's personal psyche can have disastrous consequences, as Paul Vellacott notes:

Any attempt to ignore or banish [Dionysus] will render his nature not merely amoral but bestial and hostile to the highest human values which the slow progress of man has won to distinguish him from beasts.<sup>45</sup>

Wade's cryptic comment which ends the poem is confirmation of the failure of the British 'civilising mission' in Africa and the defeat of Apollonian categories which have not been successfully integrated with Dionysian principles.

"Myths" (1960), signals a genuine attempt to strike a satisfying balance between Apollonian and Dionysian principles despite the fact that the integration of European and African modes in the poem is less assured in tone and more tentative than its antecedents. An intricate web of mythical associations is woven into the poem :

Alone one noon on a sheet of igneous rock  
I smashed a five-foot cobra's head to pulp;  
then, lifting its cool still-squirming gold  
in my sweating ten separate fingers, suddenly  
tall aloes were also standing there,  
lichens were mat-red patches on glinting boulders,  
clouds erupted white on the mountain's edge,  
all, all insisting on being seen.  
Familiar, and terribly strange, I felt the sun  
gauntlet my arms and cloak my growing shoulders.

Never quite the same again  
poplar, oak or pine, no, none  
of the multifarious shapes and scents that breed  
about the homestead, below the dam, along the canal,  
or any place where a European,  
making the most of a fistful of water, splits  
the brown and grey with wedges of daring green –  
known as invaders now, alien,

like the sounds on my tongue, the pink on my skin;  
 and, like my heroes, Jason, David, Robin Hood,  
 leaving tentative footprints on the sand between  
 the aloe and the rock, uncertain if this  
 were part of their proper destiny. Reading  
 Keats's *Lamia* and *Saint Agnes' Eve*  
 beneath a giant pear tree buzzing with bloom  
 I glanced at the galvanised windmill turning  
 its iron sunflower under the white-hot sky  
 and wondered if a Grecian or Medieval dream  
 could ever strike root away from our wedges of green,  
 could ever belong down there  
 where the level sheen on new lucerne stops short:  
 where aloes and thorns thrust roughly out  
 of the slate-blue shales and purple dolerite.

Yet sometimes the ghosts that books had put in my brain  
 would slip from their hiding behind my eyes  
 to take on flesh, the sometimes curious flesh  
 of an African incarnation.  
 One winter dusk when the livid snow  
 on Swaershoek Pass went dull, and the grey  
 ashbushes grew dim in smudges of smoke,  
 I stopped at the outspan place to watch,  
 intenser as the purple shades drew down,  
 a little fire leaping near a wagon,  
 sending its acrid smoke into the homeless night.  
 Patient as despair, eyes closed, ugly,  
 the woman stretched small hands towards the flames;  
 but the man, back to an indigo boulder,  
 face thrown up to the sky, was striking  
 rivers of sorrow into the arid darkness  
 from the throat of a battered, cheap guitar.  
 It seemed that in an empty hell  
 of darkness, cold, and hunger, I had stumbled on  
 Eurydice, ragged, deaf forever,  
 Orpheus playing to beasts that would or could not hear,  
 both eternally lost to news or rumours of spring.

(CP pp. 109-10)

The killing of a cobra, one of the autochthonic creatures of Africa, sets off a chain of emotional responses in the poet and a wide range of mythical associations, one overlaid upon the other. As an African reptile, besides its association with Dionysus the primal spirit of Africa, the cobra is also symbolic of Python, the enormous serpent that emerged from the slime of Deucalion's deluge, lurking in the caves on Mount Parnassus and terrorising the people until Apollo slew him at Delphi. The reincarnation of this myth in African

terms is suggested by the poet feeling "...the sun", Apollo, "gauntlet" his arms and "cloak" his growing shoulders. The slaying of the serpent brings about a struggle between Dionysus and Apollo for possession of his spirit as suggested in the opening stanza. Brought into intimate contact with the earth and the domains of Dionysus through the death of the snake, his consciousness is disturbed by the "tall aloes", the "lichens" with "mat-red patches", the "glinting boulders", the "erupting clouds" – all highly evocative kinetic images which seem to reflect a violation of the harmonious natural order. They seem to be drawing him into the landscape almost against his will whilst, at the same time, Apollo attempts to claim him by gauntletting his arms and cloaking his growing shoulders.

The experience is a watershed in the poet's relationship with the landscape, for the flora that are alien to Africa, the "...poplar, oak or pine" which surround the family homestead, would never be regarded in the same light again. They are now seen as "invaders" much in the manner of his violent intrusion into the landscape after killing the cobra, and they become alien to the indigenous African topography of "...brown and grey" which begins where the "...wedges of daring green" planted by the colonisers end. Significantly, the moment of alienation in which the landscape announces its distance from the poet also becomes the moment at which the African milieu announces its resistance to European language and myth. The footprints which he leaves beyond the coloniser's neatly squared patches of lucerne "...on the sand between the aloe and the rock" are "tentative" just as is his exploration of language and myth in relation to the landscape. This draws the poet into speculating whether "...a Grecian or Medieval dream could ever strike root away from [the coloniser's] wedges of daring green".

The question creates an ironic poise in the poem since the poet, in effect, answers it by skilfully weaving together other ancient myths related to the Apollo-Dionysus paradigm. It is no accident that he is depicted as reading Keats's *Lamia* beneath the pear tree. Keats's poem recounts the ancient myth of Lamia, a Libyan queen much beloved by Jupiter, who was robbed of her offspring by the jealous Juno. As a result, she became insane and vowed to take vengeance on all children. From her emerged the race of Lamiae in Africa who were said to have the head and breasts of a woman but the body of a serpent. They enticed unsuspecting strangers into their midst, especially adolescents and children, with the express purpose of devouring them. The serpent who appears to Hermes in Keats' *Lamia* is every bit as beautiful as the "...still-squirming gold" cobra held in the poet's hand:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,  
 Vermillion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;  
 Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,  
 Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;  
 And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,  
 Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed  
 Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries –  
 So rainbow-sided, touched with miseries,  
 She seemed, at once, some penanced lady elf,  
 Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.  
 Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire  
 Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:  
 Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!  
 She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:  
 And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there  
 But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?<sup>46</sup>

Lamia persuades Hermes to assist her to assume human form so that she can court the love of a beautiful young man, Menippus Lycius. Lycius is overwhelmed by her beauty and, in a device Butler would later use in his own poem, Keats introduces a parallel with Orpheus and Eurydice:

"...Ah, Lycius bright,  
 "And will you leave me on the hills alone?  
 "Lycius, look back! and be some pity shown."  
 He did: not with cold wonder fearingly,  
 But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice;  
 For so delicious were the words she sung,  
 It seemed he had loved them a whole summer long.<sup>47</sup>

Significantly, Eurydice, wife of Orpheus who was the son of Apollo, is also connected by legend to a serpent for it was while she was wandering in the glades with the nymphs that she trod upon a snake in the grass, was bitten in the foot, and died. Death comes also to Lycius via the serpent Lamia for, though her deception is noticed at the wedding banquet by the Pythagorean philosopher, Apollonius of Tyana, it is too late.

But it is in the form of an alternative reading of Butler's poem that the introduction of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth attains its greatest impact. Butler's poem invites this alternative perspective. Is the slaying of the cobra by the coloniser an attempt to create an Eden in what he perceives to be essentially an anti-Eden? The colonial project heightens the Europe-Africa antithesis, the colonist splitting the virgin soil with "wedges of daring green" in an act of seeming violence to the land. The image itself is Janus-headed for whilst, on the one hand it represents the destruction of virgin indigenous vegetation, on the other hand it brings about new conditions for habitation by producing the "sheen of new lucerne". To what extent, though, is the impoverished and homeless condition of the African Orpheus and his Eurydice occasioned by not only these new modes of habitation introduced by the coloniser, but also the systematic implementation of land dispossession of later minority regimes? As if to link them to the repercussions of these projects, Butler depicts them in a curiously Promethean setting of a little fire beyond which is

an "...arid darkness", the antithesis of the verdant green patches of settled homesteads. In legend, Orpheus' shade passed to Tartarus where he and Eurydice roamed the Elysian fields happily together. Their African equivalents are presented very differently by Butler. They are "ragged" and live "...in an empty hell of darkness, cold, and hunger". The final couplet seals their fate: their world is real, not mythical; their chances of euphoric regeneration unattainable in the unjust dispensations of a 1960 South African political context.

Whilst very few detailed critical explorations of "Myths" exist, there are differing opinions expressed by critics as to its success. Kloppe sees the poem as reflecting

...a greater complexity and elusiveness of conceptual design.<sup>48</sup>

In an alternative psychological interpretation, he sees the act of killing the cobra as being imbued with erotic significance

...suggested by the heightened sensual awareness and the sudden tumescent growth.<sup>49</sup>

Van der Mescht sees Butler's project of introducing myth into Africa as having failed :

The speaker's question is answered. A "Grecian" or "Medieval" dream cannot belong in Africa. The poem is a rebuttal that Africa can be interpreted via Europe.<sup>50</sup>

By contrast, MacLennan sees the project as being successful. He sees in Butler's poetry a realisation that Europe and Africa are really one

...where unity of being is a possibility<sup>51</sup>

and in which context myths may take on an African incarnation.

If we exclude form and consider only content, I believe that the project of introducing European myth into an African context from a content point of view has been successfully achieved in "Myths". Using the Apollo-Dionysus axis as the underpinning feature in the poem, Butler has successfully superimposed other related and inter-connected myths such as those of the Lamiae and Orpheus and Eurydice. This device has allowed him to deal with both Apollo and Dionysus even-handedly thus avoiding an overtly dualistic and hierarchical approach which characterised earlier attempts. Moreover, as I have argued, his inversion of the original myths destabilises otherwise preconceived assumptions and lends these myths a new, fresh power in an African context.

Published first only in 1963 but having its origins as far back as 1954, "Bronze Heads" is a complex monologue recording Butler's impressions of stately fourteenth-century bronze effigies of kings in Ife, Nigeria, and seeks admission to the minds and cultures that these effigies represent. In many respects the poem's structure is very similar to "Home Thoughts" using the pattern of narrative followed by application and reflection. However, it appears upon close scrutiny that the poem is not entirely seamless, a factor probably attributable to the discrepancies set up by what Ezra Pound called the immediate "hard" version of its original conception in 1954 and the "soft" version of its revisions until 1963.<sup>52</sup> Butler's comment in his 1962 lecture "The Republic and the Arts" provides us with a clue to the manner in which "Bronze Heads", a highly problematic poem published the following year, might be interpreted:



Shortly after this West African visit, I read Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – to me, still the greatest piece of writing about Africa. The peculiar power that this work exerts over most readers springs from Conrad's having found the right symbols for one aspect of the European-African encounter, and having turned that encounter into a parable of a possible encounter within the souls of all men and women. The main symbols are the metal steamship and the primeval forest.<sup>53</sup>

Consider, now, the opening lines of Butler's prose description of his journey in West Africa which ultimately led him to the Bronze Heads:

We had been driving all morning along roads which were tunnels through rain forest, and our sedan car, moving through that green light, was not unlike a submarine, ingenious and efficient, but insensitive to the mode of life about it. Our progress was halted by the strangest procession I had ever seen....<sup>54</sup>

In place of Conrad's "metal steamship" we have here a sedan car resembling a "submarine" which, like Conrad's metal steamship, thrusts its way through the "green light" of "rain forests". Both in Conrad's and Butler's writings the external physical landscape and the internal psychological landscape merge. The physical journey to visit the Bronze Heads in the Museum at Ife is not only that: it is also a psychological descent into the self:

Mud-mat villages like childish sums  
all wrong on a slate; the bad road through the bush;  
loud babies, frantic hens; in heat and hush  
happy-go-lucky soft-mandibled drums  
like termites at the pit-props of the mind;  
then, foreign among smudged greens and dusty reds,  
clear glass and concrete in a shapeless square,  
this little museum. We find what we came to find.  
Perturbed by their authority, we stare  
in silence at the beauty of these heads.

(CP p. 130)

A series of images conveying disorder, "...villages...all wrong", "loud babies", "frantic hens", indicates the heightened state of confusion in the poet's mind which is disturbed by Dionysus' "...soft-mandibled drums / like termites at the pit-props of the mind". Temporary respite from this mental chaos is provided

by the sight of some semblance of Apollonian order – “clear glass and concrete in a shapeless square”. “We find what we came to find” is a deliberately ambiguous statement for, whilst it refers to their viewing of the Bronze Heads in the museum, it also refers to finding points of equilibrium deep within the poet’s psyche. Placed alongside Carl Jung’s noted journey into Africa, it takes on profound psychological significance:

In travelling to Africa to find a psychic observation post outside the sphere of the European, I unconsciously wanted to find that part of my personality which had become invisible under the influence and pressure of being European.<sup>55</sup> [my emphasis]

Whereas the poet describes his own feeling as being “perturbed” by the look of authority on the Bronze Heads they, in their turn, are “imperturbable”:

Imperturbable, the kingly bronzes stare.  
 Their sudden resurrection from black loam  
 to our undisciplined light can't startle them.  
 Achieved for once, and so for everywhere  
 their tragic vision. These noble faces – faces  
 that felt time's touch and faced our common doom –  
 how passionately passive they glance at all  
 this ribble and rabble on their old high places:  
 such eyes might watch ten more Zimbabwes fall  
 and still outstare our continental gloom.

(CP p. 130)

In the stately bronze heads Butler sees the perfect poise between the qualities of Dionysus and those of Apollo for the bronzes seem equally at home in both worlds. Having been raised from the “black loam” of Dionysus’ world, they are not startled by Apollo’s “light”. Their “passionately passive” demeanour is Butler’s psychological projection of what Jung described as the terrible ambiguity of an immediate experience. It is to the world of synthesis, poise, and perfect balance encapsulated by their gaze that Butler seeks admission.

The Bronze Heads as works of art now focus the poet's attention on the relationship between art, civilization and time:

How can Zimbabwe's walls and these bronzes sum  
our continent's long tale of joys and tears?  
What sage grew wise behind her hedge of spears?  
Wood carvings are made for white ants to consume:  
small skill in friezing life, no glazing breath  
to fix in art, as did the calm Chinese,  
those seconds of sight that make a fool of death.  
While Troy and Rome were towering, tumbling  
and dead Cordelia weighted the old king's knees,  
here only the sun-warmed granite was cracking, crumbling?

Sixteen centuries since the Cross, and none  
have paved a highway, keyed a bridge, or arch  
through which victorious regiments might march –  
no ringing of trowels down on neat, dressed stone.  
Through plains as large as Europe floes of game  
went drifting on the droughts, and lost tribes wandered  
changing their plumage like migrating birds.  
Young men were brave; no doubt the old men pondered –  
vague ghosts in footloose air, since no scribe came  
to pen their deeds in palisades of words.

My eyes are staring into their brazen stare  
but mind's absorbed in a long-lost Southern scene:  
an old surveyor's tombstone skew between  
rough stems of scrub invading the burial square:  
it seemed the ancient, unmapped world had won:  
all round mimosas foamed; a dancing wind  
with bees and birds upon its drunken breath  
with golden blooms and white thorns shook the sun  
whose saffron light and blurring shade made blind  
the lucid name and date-line cut beneath.

What trees more apt than these to symbolise  
undated cycles whose proud rituals of war,  
first fruits and making love once froze before  
the timely wisdom in this bronze king's eyes?  
But dreading what subtler dances might be born  
within his wisdom's shade, rebellious sons  
blinded and broke and black loam smothered him.  
And still the sap of tribal trees all runs  
to lavish dithyrambs of golden bloom  
or Spartan regiments of long white thorn.

(CP pp. 130-1)

What lends the Bronze Heads remarkable appeal is not only their poise, balance and seeming “detachment”, a concept much admired by Butler, but also their extraordinariness in an African context. Whereas in Africa the visual

arts normally utilised perishable materials such as wood and clay, and the verbal arts have traditionally been oral rather than written, these heads have defied the ravages of time, fixing in art "...those seconds of sight that make a fool of death".

The subsequent brief comparative discourse on the qualities of Apollonian Europe's civilizations with those of Dionysian Africa has invariably been misconstrued by critics as a veiled criticism by the poet emanating from a Eurocentric bias which regards the impermanence of African art forms as rendering them inferior to their European equivalents. I do not believe this to be the intention of the poet. The closing tercet of the third stanza is framed in the form of a question the answer to which is given in the succeeding three stanzas: for Butler, both civilizations are different and must be respected for what they are. "Towering" Troy and Rome, despite their Apollonian sophistication, also tumbled. The poet asks: "Was it only the "...sun-warmed granite" that was "...cracking, crumbling" in Africa, or were there, like Europe, patterns of existence undergoing the cyclical rise and fall of transformation?"

Whilst Europe had built highways, keyed bridges and built triumphal arches as marks of its cultural development, Africa had been more in tune with the natural rhythms of life. In place of bridges and arches are the mimosas which "...symbolise undated cycles" within which the "...proud rituals" of war, of the "...first fruits" and "making love" claim pre-eminence. Instead of the "lavish dithyrambs" of Greece (ironically, in praise of Dionysus), Africa has its own hymn to Dionysus – the wondrous "golden bloom" of the mimosas; in place of Europe's ephemeral triumphant regiments marching beneath commemorative

arches, Africa's mimosa displays perennial "...Spartan regiments of long white thorn". Africa, like Europe, also had its wisdom for "...no doubt the old men pondered". Sadly, though, notwithstanding the power of oral tradition in Africa, their wisdom, poetry and philosophy could not be entrenched for posterity within "palisades" impregnable to the attrition of time. There does not seem to be cause to suggest that the poet's intention here is to relegate and confine things non-European, whether art forms or civilizations, to a secondary cultural and ontological status.

Although ostensibly contemplating "...a long-lost Southern scene" the poet's consciousness is also focussed inwards. There is a bitter irony in the fact that the surveyor, as the practitioner of one of the most exact Mathematical sciences, has a skew tombstone and the neat square of the burial yard has been encroached upon by the uncouth scrub of Dionysus. The "dancing wind" and "drunken breath", strongly Bacchic images, reinforce the seeming rout of Apollo. Besides suggesting the defeat of Apollonian categories upon which colonialism is premised and the un-mapping of imperial territories, is there also a suggestion that in the ebb and flow of human consciousness order and restraint must needs give way to untrammelled emotional responses from time to time? Unlike the regal Bronze Heads, the surveyor has been unable to strike a balance within his own consciousness between the opposing psychological forces of Apollo and Dionysus and is thus foredoomed. In another context, Butler warns us that no continent has a monopoly of either god and that both gods contest the psychic terrain within all human beings :

If, for purposes of simplification, I equate Europe with Apollo and Africa with Dionysus, it must be clearly understood that I do not for one moment accept that each continent has a monopoly of a god. Far from it. Nazism had a large element of Dionysiac lust and cruelty in it; and it is precisely because we whites have such a large dark continent in ourselves that we are terrified....<sup>56</sup>

The "...long-lost Southern scene" now takes on specific details in Sections II and III of the poem with the poet recounting the hardships endured by the 1820 British Settlers in South Africa and their efforts to establish a cultural legacy in the African sub-continent. In a damning critique of these two sections of the poem, Kirkwood accuses Butler of falling into an insoluble contradiction,

... between the long view of history and a romantic, nostalgic identification with a partial aspect...a sentimental loyalty to 1820 ancestordom and the "English South African heritage"....<sup>57</sup>

There is no gainsaying the fact that an excessively romantic and, at times, maudlin sentimentality characterises these two sections and that they are, by Butler's own standards of detached writing, largely unsuccessful interpolations in the poem. However, whilst Butler might not have taken the "long view" of history, neither has Kirkwood taken a "long view" of the poem, treating the "settler passages" in isolation without any consideration of the overall design and message. Quoting the section

...though old drums, beast cries and racial ranting  
raise Cain in the thorn-scrub rising round our hearts,  
the naked eye, still steady, bright, resigned  
must check, cross check, each reference on its charts  
(CP p. 134)

Kirkwood comments:

We shall notice that towards Western culture Butler adopts a distinctive stance. Our access to Western culture in its traditional aspect allows us, as we shall see, to play Apollo to Africa's Dionysus.<sup>58</sup>

There are two serious flaws in this argument. The first is that Kirkwood fails to detect that the Cain who is raised by the "...beast cries and racial ranting" in the Dionysian "thorn-scrub around our hearts" is the product of an exclusively white (European) South African group and not black Africans; the second is that he conflates Europe solely with Apollo and Dionysus solely with Africa in a simplistic formula no longer operative in Butler's treatment of the paradigm.

The artistic challenge for the poet after his ruminations on the 1820 Settlers is to return the final section of the poem (Section IV) to the original concepts outlined in the opening section thereby resolving the many antagonisms in the poem :

Few tribes chant now and hearth-rug lions are dumb;  
 most rivers and ranges are mapped and properly named;  
 but Africa is anything but tamed  
 and God alone knows what is to come.  
 In spite of city parks and private planting  
 there's little shade for the contemplating mind:  
 yet though old drums, beast cries and racial ranting  
 raise Cain in the thorn-scrub rising round our hearts,  
 the naked eye, still steady, bright, resigned  
 must check, cross check, each reference on its charts.

If, having made a fair and heart-felt choice  
 to plant ancestral, shade-endowing trees,  
 the back must bend, yet on rebellious knees  
 the heart has cause, and cannot but rejoice.  
 For when the tribal energies, the flames,  
 the golden sap and blood revive, reform,  
 and dance down ways the staring eye discloses:  
 when shapes long stifled in our sensual storm  
 strike free and chant their clarifying names,  
 who will grieve at the strain such work imposes?

O brazen heads at Ife, you who stare  
 over the jungle, down the cataract,  
 as if such staring were the first slow act  
 by which man masters chaos anywhere,  
 stare at me, you bronzes, stare, persist  
 till, having caught your straight, incisive gaze,  
 I cut the scrub with calculated glances:  
 stare, as I replant, on dazzling days,  
 ancestral trees; stare on my sweating fist  
 in which, this moment, your bloodstream dances, dances.

Once again, there is an overlapping of internal and external landscapes. Despite the fact that "...rivers and ranges [have been] mapped and properly named" and Apollo seems to have asserted control, externally as well as within the human psyche, "...rising round our hearts" the thorn scrub of an uncontrolled and vengeful Dionysus still threatens in pusillanimous and bestial cries of "racial ranting". It is the naked Apollonian eye of control and reason that "...must check, cross check, each reference on its charts". There is nothing tyrannical implied in this, for it resembles Sartre's suggested dialectical balance of freedom and restraint or inertia upon which all really free societies must be founded. The controlling eye finds expression again in the invocation to the "brazen heads" to "stare over the jungle" in an act of controlled detachment, because it is only through an act of consciousness that true synthesis, not only in Africa, but also in the human spirit, can be attained. In proposing to re-plant ancestral trees, the pine and the poplar, Butler is not advocating a disregard for, or destruction of, things indigenous by things alien, as some critics have suggested – the "golden sap" and the "lavish dithyrambs of golden bloom" of the mimosa are, irrefragably, part of the essential landscape in his view. Rather, it is a recognition that we are all, in some way, conditioned by our environment and our past and cannot ignore or obliterate these factors if we wish to effect an authentic synthesis. Said observes:

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.<sup>59</sup>

Butler's plea is for authenticity if twin syntheses in the realms of personality and culture are to be attained. The white man living in Africa cannot, and



should not, deny his European roots any more than the black man, living in Europe, should deny his African roots in the interests of maintaining a balanced psyche. Only by worshipping in the temple of both gods, Apollo and Dionysus, will the “scrub” around men’s hearts be cut “...with calculated glances”. It is only through the pursuit of authenticity, Butler suggests, that the Dionysian “dance” can take place “...down ways the staring eye” of Apollo “discloses”.

In “Bronze Heads” Butler seems to have been successful in elevating the one-dimensional model of the dualistic Apollo-Dionysus paradigm of previous poems to a more intricate and complex level. The Europe-Africa encounter is presented not in ethnological terms, as Kirkwood supposed, but in terms of a psychological struggle which endows it with universal significance. Looking back on his poem some seventeen years after Kirkwood’s criticism, Butler responded as follows:

Kirkwood did a seemingly impressive hatchet job on Part II of “Bronze Heads”, but simply chose to ignore how the poem moves beyond “a sentimental loyalty to 1820 ancestordom”. It is an act of obeisance before the African dynasty or culture which produced the Ife bronzes, those portrait heads whose open, imperturbable gaze one aspired to emulate. It is true that I betrayed a colonialist wish to plant ancestral trees, and showed a paternalist willingness to share my cultural heritage; it is also true that I expressed a ‘Eurocentric’ belief in the need to stare, to contemplate, to count, to measure and to map; but it also shows an acceptance of Africa as itself. In the final stanzas the poet prays for the incisive gaze of the Ife kings, and he identifies his pulse with theirs.<sup>60</sup>

Van der Mescht believes that Butler successfully achieved synthesis for he had successfully contained “the Dionysian vitality” of Africa in the Apollonian “form” of European poetry. Whilst this is, no doubt, a perspective which might be taken on the matter it seems to me that such a union reflects more a subjugation of idea to form than a harmonious balance. Chapman’s trenchant

observation in relation to liberal-humanist poetry and its hegemony in  
prescribing inherited structures is also applicable here:

...whatever the complexities inherent in the clash of 'Europe' and 'Africa',  
the traditionalist has tended to adhere to a European timescale....<sup>61</sup>

It seems that Butler was alert to these imbalances in his pursuit of a genuine  
Augustinian synthesis which would encompass not only harmony of idea but  
also of style. Subsequent poems reveal a willingness on the part of the poet  
to experiment with form and evolve the Apollonian-Dionysian nexus even  
further.

"Isibongo of Matiwane", first published the year after "Bronze Heads", was  
reprinted in *Selected Poems* (1975) but inexplicably omitted from *Collected Poems*  
(1999). It is a poem of real significance for it marks the first attempt by  
Butler to circumscribe the Apollo-Dionysus encounter within African literary  
conventions. Using the form of African praise poetry, Butler writes of the feats  
of the royal chief Matiwane:

Matiwane, royal, wearing the blood-red feathers of the lourie,  
his eyes red, red his lips from drinking the blood of strong men,  
moves over the earth with the speed of a startled gnu:  
lowered bull's head, hoofs of thunder,  
to whom danger is soft as the air:  
black cloud from whom lightnings break, piercing the folded thighs  
of the curved Lebombo Mountains.  
He goes forth like the sun,  
we shield our eyes with our hands.

His eye is as strong as the sun:  
it looks at a man and the man gives the pick of his herd;  
if he has no cattle he surrenders his only son.  
I have seen a butterfly splashed with patches of colour  
quickly shut its wings when caught in the blaze of his glance.

The high bare ridges of the Mondlo Mountains  
are still stained brown and tired of the killing,  
but those who hold them are not Gwabini's men:  
for Matiwane, royal, put on his cowtails,

round his waist, his knees, his elbows, his heavy shoulders;  
 he took his time about dressing:  
 then rubbed himself with an ointment of mutton fat and red ochre  
 till he gleamed a golden brown;  
 yes, he took his time about dressing, putting on last  
 the blood-red feathers of the lourie;  
 but when he was ready  
 he smashed men down as an elephant  
 smashes small shrubs with his trunk: Oh watch  
 this bushbuck that stabs in its full career  
 this single man who is a stampede of cattle down a precipitous place,  
 this river in flood, grumbling with grinding stones.

He slew Sidlayi of the amaPanda,  
 and Magadla of the same proud tribe;  
 he slew Oka-Kheswa even among his queens;  
 he slew Nongazi among his very wives;  
 Mthimkhulu he slew, stabbing him suddenly in the liver  
 so that he floundered  
 stupidly in the dust  
 like a beheaded chicken.

He is a sheltering wood to those who are out in the open,  
 to families large and small:  
 but to his enemies, a trail that is mortal to follow,  
 as dangerous as a mamba's mark to his hole;  
 he is a pond in the courtyard of the kraal  
 where the weary may wash their feet.

Others move stealthily, creeping into the shadows of the hills,  
 but Matiwane moves like the sun in the open sky;  
 like the sun he goes forth:  
 we shield our eyes with our hands.

(*SP* pp. 58-9)

The measured tercet and terza rima structures employed so consistently by Butler in earlier poems, the most recent example being in the "Ode. On First Seeing Florence" (1963), have made way for the relaxed, narrative verse which would begin to characterise his poetry towards the end of the 1960s. The earlier belief in a "detached" form of writing affirming European frames of reference in which the poet rises above "his own anxiety, his own history, his own race" is set aside in favour of a less inhibited, more conversational and idiomatic type of verse where traditional Classical image, rhyme and metre, used in earlier poems make way for 'oral' free-verse narration.

The royal chief Matiwane is originally presented to the reader in strongly Dionysiac terms. He wears “blood-red feathers”, his eyes are red and his lips, recalling images of Bacchic orgies, are red “...from drinking the blood of strong men”. The allusion to the horned god cannot be mistaken either for Matiwane moves over the earth with “...lowered bull’s head, hoofs of thunder” to do battle and to rule. His feats of power and prowess in battle on the ridges of the Mondlo Mountains and amongst the amaPanda are inspired by a Dionysiac energy. However, his achievements in ruling justly and wisely over his tribe take on Apollonian characteristics: he harbours and protects families “large and small” and is compared with a “pond in the courtyard of the kraal” for the weary members of his tribe. Having left “...the shadows of the hills” inhabited during ferocious battles, in his time of peaceful tribal administration Matiwane, now a Phoebus Apollo, “moves like the sun” across the open skies, not of ancient Greece but of contemporary Africa.

By employing non-European literary forms in poems such as “Isibongo of Matiwane” (1964) and “The Drum of the Dead” (1965) Butler was not prepared only to “stare into Africa’s furious dance” from the sheltered ramparts of a detached European sensibility contained and re-affirmed within its own frames of reference – he was also prepared to join that dance. Where in the early poem “Servant Girl” (1946) language is seen largely as a resistant medium neither directly representative of the world Butler’s “...five simple slaves” were experiencing nor directly *en rapport* with Africa, “The Drum of the Dead” exhibits a use of African forms and imagery born of a confidence from experience within Africa’s dance. The opening lines of the poem

Our tribes played many musical instruments:  
 the Lemba plucked the *deze*'s well-tuned metal tongues;  
 the Tsonga rippled with pink palms or padded hammers  
 over elaborate xylophones with echoing calabashes;  
 many blew upon sable horns, kudu, or horns of impala,  
 or flutes of special bamboo from the sacred woods of *Tshaula*...

(CP p. 173)

are considered by William Plomer to have "...caught sounds purely African".<sup>62</sup>

The success of the poem lies in its power to synthesise European poetic devices with African images and rhythms where the alliterative labials emphasise the pinging sounds of the xylophone, in lines such as

The Tsonga rippled with pink palms or padded hammers  
 Over elaborate xylophones [my emphasis]

"Tourist Insight into Things" (1966) represents Butler's final presentation of the Europe-Africa encounter specifically in terms of the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm. The poem celebrates what is perceived as a mystical union between black Africans and the Dionysiac life force of "the old gods" of Africa. The poet uses the literary convention of a mask where the protagonist in the poem becomes a "tourist" who possesses an insight into the mystical and reverent relationship which exists between black Africans and their environment by comparison with the white settlers of British descent who "...take no moral notice" of the mystical patterns of life. Of necessity, Butler's choice of a European "tourist" mask forces a return from the successful indigenous praise-poetry form previously employed to established European practices:

...Once  
 you have shed your British sentiment  
 for dogs and other animals, once you've felt  
 your own dark life-blood pulsing like a drum  
 you'll find our big black brother has so much to teach you –  
 because, you see, he's still in touch  
 with all the old gods in a way

that makes one wonder  
 why D H Lawrence wasted all that time  
 in Mexico and Down Under.

Africans, like their continent, are not dark  
 for nothing. Their darkness is alive.

Compare, for instance, the various ways  
 we and they kill beasts. No priest in the West these days  
 leads the heifer (silken flanks with garlands dressed),  
 to the efficient abbatoir. The whole thing's done  
 by an hygienic machine. Not quite nice of course;  
 witness our treatment of butchers; but we take no moral notice,  
 the life of a calf not being sacred to us.

All over Africa all cattle are sacred  
 and the killing of a bull  
 is a ritual, a ceremony.

(*CP* p. 159)

The white settlers are disparaged by a white "tourist" for failing to understand Africa. They have ignored the Dionysiac principle within themselves and others and have not felt their own "...dark life-blood" pulsing like Bromius' drums. Consequently they have failed to recognise a mystical link between Africans whose "...darkness is alive" and the Dionysiac forces of nature. Moreover, it is suggested by the "tourist" in an oblique reference to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" that increased technological advancements have removed the numinous and the sacral from the Western experience of life:

To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
 Leads't thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?<sup>63</sup>

Ironically, in drawing the comparison with Keats's lines quoted above, the "tourist" implies that an extinct ancient Grecian society is far closer to contemporary African society than is present European culture. Soyinka observes:

In Asian and European antiquity...man did, like the African, exist within a cosmic totality, did possess a consciousness in which his own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self, was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon.<sup>64</sup>

Butler's own belief expressed in several of his theoretical writings and specifically in this poem through the mask of the tourist is that Athenian society, unlike modern European and colonial society, was able to strike the perfect balance between Dionysian and Apollonian principles thus enabling a worship in the temple of both gods.

In replicating the Dionysian fertility rites where the god must die to bring new life to his followers, the death of the bull brings life to the tribe:

While hills and echoes carry the bull's last bellow  
to the last of the ancestors, the laughing-singing-clapping wave  
tumbles, sparkles, spreads in bubbles and spume  
through the veins and the brains,  
the nerves and the bloods of all that is African  
on both sides of the grave.

The final rites practised on the bull

The thrusting fingers and thumb  
have found the titanic heart,  
he holds a bull's heart beating in his hand.  
Thrusting deeper, deeper he finds  
the root of life, root of the arteries, the aorta itself  
beating our its dithyramb.  
Blind in the dark bull body man's fingers seize and squeeze it shut...

are strongly reminiscent of the closing lines of "Bronze Heads":

O brazen heads at life, you who stare  
over the jungle, down the cataract,  
...stare on my sweating fist  
in which, this moment, your bloodstream dances, dances.

The bull's heart grasped firmly in the fist whilst beating out its dithyramb to Dionysius in the final rites of death becomes synonymous with the "sweating fist" in which the "bloodstream" of the brazen heads of life dances. From north to south, Africa is seen as a source of primal energy, contiguous within itself and suggesting, also, a universality of experience. Furthermore, from a white

urban perspective the desire to connect up with primeval life would fulfil a recurrent dream of metropolitan civilisations.

Conceptually, "Tourist Insight into Things" lacks the success of Butler's two previous poems. Although the poem lacks the sentimentality normally associated with the treatment of the 'noble savage' theme and, it may be argued, the use of the mask distances the poetic voice from this (for the "tourist" is not writing from within Africa but as an outsider), at times the poem comes perilously close to promoting this idea. Structurally, the reversion to essentially European timescales and modes of expression may also be seen as factors inhibiting the fullest treatment of Apollonian-Dionysian tensions. It seems that Butler was alert to these deficiencies and felt that he had exhausted all the possibilities, both artistically and conceptually, of the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm for he subsequently never returned to it specifically in its current formulation in his poetry. It would undergo a further Hegelian revision, elevating it to a new dimension.

The direction that Butler would subsequently take is hinted at in an earlier poem "Winter Solstice" not at any stage published in South Africa but appearing in *Oxford Poetry* (12-14) and reprinted in *The Oxford Viewpoint* (1.4) : 14. The poem is quoted here in full, owing to its general unavailability:

No towers under Orion, no given kiss  
 Wine by candlelight or midnight waltz  
 Will bridge this insulating night's abyss  
 Between me and delight; nor dull the pulse  
 Drumming it morse to death. Not these, nor the guns'  
 Staccato jerk at dusk will ever convulse  
 Me back to longing for love, watching for dawns.



Since the winter of my guilt congealed the world  
 There is no joy or pain. Though it stuns  
 The singer in my throat, fetters the unfurled  
 Orchards of my heart, it keeps Sensation still,  
 Staves off the cruel hour of being hurled  
 Back to the pit of appetite, the shrill  
 Accusing love left in a ditch to die.

Dead midnight of the year, seize and hold my will.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dawn leers. The ashen iris of her eye  
 Stares through ragged lids of cloud and hill  
 On trees and towers stiff against the sky.  
 Against my guilt each cold devoted bell  
 With clamour with harangueing tongue, round which  
 Rancid December air swirls with the smell  
 Of rotting leaves. Insensate to the rich  
 Never-shaking scent of Love's frost-bitten flower  
 Basalt loins will mock me from their niche.

Relentless, the shadows lessen: chilled, I cower  
 From the bold eye that strikes the winter-stripped  
 Stem-skeletons, enduring their derelict hour,  
 So sure of artesian sap. O I am gripped  
 In all-year guilt, black bark in every season,  
 Neutral between plucked fruit and flame-tipped  
 Bud on the late frost bursting! Mine the treason  
 Of corn that would not die, the metal will  
 That flowered into guns; and this the reason  
 Why quivering dreams of spring are hell,  
 Making me drum short messages to Death:  
 Garrotte green conscience in the dark! Quell  
 The sea-weed shudder, smother the insect breath!  
 And I'll stay dumb! This day's confessional  
 I'll cry no creed of Spring.

Old fingers seized  
 Smoothe cords in shining towers. Wild madrigals  
 Of iron burst on buildings and bare trees  
 Bronze descants to shaken bone and dust  
 And chastened voices chant from bended knees.  
 Tenderly now, across earth's dormant crust  
 Echo, bell and voice implore: Deny  
 Your dreamt escape from human love and lust:  
 Through these and through the round year's liturgy  
 Speaks God, now born as Man. Even within  
 The ice-fields of your heart He shall not die.

I give no answer. Firm I stand, my sin  
 Wrapped purple round me; I face the great "I AM",  
 Dumb, blind, quivering under the din  
 Of a dead myth's third degree.

The damning rhyme  
 Dissolves in silence, silence where I spin  
 A feather through great vortices of Time  
 Grinding to a stop. Earth's wheel steadies in  
 A socket cold and worn. The guns are dumb.  
 The trees are stone and mute the violin  
 Beside the heart's abandoned, flaccid drum.

And here is Peace. Over this lucid ice  
 Nor yearling heifer nor garland girl shall come,  
 Priest-led, to the pompous sacrifice  
 Or the hysterical dance. Isaiah's brow  
 Is marble-smooth. Hamlet, Oedipus  
 Forget the cursing womb, deaf to the slow  
 Dead march and faked transfiguring: at last  
 Pity and Love are useless. To printless snow  
 No mystic cries: be Merciful and Just:  
 No blush of blood; no limb lies slack  
 In the warmth of women or glow of suns: fast  
 In the glacier's grip is the dancer, the terrible, black Dionysus.

And here I discover my soul,  
 The hoar-frost of my heart, feel love's lack  
 Despatch grey blizzards to the human Pole  
 Where hangs a green Spring God, enduring still,  
 Ice-nailed, frost-crowned, unquenchable coal.<sup>65</sup>

The poet is clearly describing his own spiritual winter solstice in a broken and alienated post-war world. What needs to capture our attention is not so much the presentation of a distorted landscape which mirrors the feelings of ennui, spiritual dejection and alienation in the poet's soul as, for our purposes, Butler's treatment of Dionysus in the poem. The theme of death and re-generation in the person of the fertility god and its ultimate link with the redemptive capacities of Jesus Christ finds expression here for the first time in Butler's poetry. "Mine the treason / Of corn that would not die" is a cry of spiritual desolation that echoes St John's Gospel:

In all truth I tell you,  
 unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies,  
 it remains only a single grain;  
 but if it dies  
 it yields a rich harvest.

(John 12:24)

The waning of the poet's personal faith is seen by him as treasonable. Desolation and barrenness in the physical landscape around him mirror the poet's spiritually impotent predicament. He is unable to cry a "...creed of Spring" and thus effect his own spiritual rebirth. In ancient myth it is on the death of the corn gods – Osiris, Attis, Adonis, Demeter, Dionysus – that the germination or "rebirth" of seeds, and thus the success of the yearly crops, is seen to depend. As also is the case in the Medieval Grail legends, the protagonist becomes totally dependent on outside intervention – the death of a corn god – to restore him to a condition of faith. Like the Fisher King of legend Dionysus, despite being caught "...in the glacier's grip", has the power to restore the fertility of the external landscape through his own death thereby restoring spiritual life to the protagonist.

The use of appropriately charged symbols by the poet suggests that he sees the identities of the Spring God and Christ the Redeemer overlapping:

And here I discover my soul  
 The hoar-frost of my heart, feel love's lack  
 Despatch grey blizzards to the human Pole  
 Where hangs a green Spring God, enduring still,  
 Ice-nailed, frost-crowned, unquenchable coal.

The unmistakable images of a Christ-figure who "hangs" suspended above the human Pole "nailed" and "crowned" link with the symbols of Christ's passion in the sixth stanza:

I give no answer. Firm I stand, my sin  
 Wrapped purple round me...

and interface with numerous references to the Spring God throughout the poem.

Although Butler did not develop the Christ-Dionysus theme for some time subsequently, it is clear that this concept was a seed in his imagination awaiting later germination. The concept finds greater amplification in Butler's important 1976 lecture, "Soldier Heroes in Corrupt Societies: A Comparison of N. P. van Wyk Louw's *Germanicus* and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*":

Both heroes [Coriolanus and Germanicus] have, in the conflict of Nature and Law, Dionysus and Apollo, been driven to accept their unheroic common humanity.

[Germanicus has, however]...an intuition of different dimensions, beyond Dionysus, beyond Apollo, beyond Nature, beyond Law: the dimension of Christ, of Grace: of conquest not by power, but by love; not by self-assertion, but by sacrifice....<sup>66</sup>

It is evident that considerable evolutionary modifications in the conceptual framework of the Apollo-Dionysus paradigm have taken place. The synthesising processes of Christ's salvific death are seen to transcend the polarised struggles of Apollo and Dionysus. Paradoxically, the Christ figure is, simultaneously, both Apollo and Dionysus. In Biblical terms He is the Apollo of the Nations:

...the light of men;  
a light that shines in the darkness,  
and darkness could not overpower it. (John 1:4)

When Jesus spoke to the people again, he said:  
I am the light of the world... (John 8:12)

As long as I am in the world  
I am the light of the world. (John 9:5)

But he is also, simultaneously, the Dionysus of mankind for, in the supreme act of self-sacrifice, He will die in order that others may be reborn into new life:

The Father loves me,  
because I lay down my life  
in order to take it up again.  
No-one takes it from me;  
I lay it down of my own free will... (John 10:17-18)

By His death He brought life to the world.... (Canon of the Mass)

Christ forms the supreme synthesiser for, in Him, the contrary forces of darkness and light, birth and death, are balanced, harmonised and reconciled. In Butler's search for the ultimate form of the transcendent catalyst which could effect true synthesis, he saw the Christ figure. The poem "Natal 1497" (1978 collection) published shortly after his lecture on "Soldier Heroes in Corrupt Societies..." embodies in verse the principles of thought enunciated in his earlier lecture:

I.

Past shores no eye has seen,  
beneath uncharted stars,  
our three prows turn north-east;  
the breeze sings high and keen.  
On tilting decks from Portugal – *Sao Rafael*,  
we'll hold our feast to India – *Sao Gabriel*,  
on Christmas Day off Africa. – *Il Berrio*.

On the flagship all's astir,  
beneath our Captain's eye  
we'll play the ancient play:  
three wizards and a star.  
From Macedon comes Melchior – *Sao Rafael*,  
from India comes Casparo – *Sao Gabriel*,  
from Africa comes Balthazar – *Il Berrio*.

In silence, by each keel,  
the age-old knots are cut;  
the gifted kings of earth  
meet on our deck and kneel.  
From Macedon comes Melchior – with heavy gold,  
from India comes Casparo – with frankincense,  
from Africa comes Balthazar – with bitter myrrh.

(CP p. 208)

Narrated by a Portuguese sailor on board Vasco da Gama's 1497-8 voyage to India, the poem opens with a typically European perception of reality where the stars of the African sub-continent are "uncharted" and the shores unseen because they have not yet been registered in the European consciousness. On board the flagship *Sao Gabriel* sailing off the east coast of South Africa,

an area that would be named Natal by da Gama, a Christmas Day Nativity Play is about to be enacted. It is interesting that Butler deviates from the usual representation of the Magi as wise men from the Orient. Instead, they are here invested with a representative status of the various ethnic groups which inhabit the Natal region: Balthazar “from Africa” is symbolic of the indigenous black population; Casparo “from India” the Asian and Indian descendants of colonial indentured labour schemes in the 1860s in Natal; and Melchior “from Macedon” which would become ancient Greece and thus symbolise the origins of western civilization, the white inhabitants of the region. Melchior is the first whose words are presented to us:

## II

### *Melchior, King of Macedon*

The fateful star burns fixed above a ruined stable.  
Is this the cosmic concord our philosophers foresaw?  
How kneel upon these cobbles, bow to Hebrew peasants,  
How leave my gold among these animals and straw?  
Chair' O Pammagiste.

Yet why should I now recall how the woman of Mantinea,  
Diotima of mysteries, replied to Socrates:  
“Great love is always poor, rough-skinned and weatherbeaten,  
And couches out of doors with those of low degree.”  
Chair' O Pammagiste.

I kneel within the centre of my burning question:  
can this poor swaddled thing among the colts and calves  
be that half god, half man, nor mortal, nor immortal,  
who saves the universe from falling into halves?  
Chair' O Pammagiste.

The basis upon which Melchior approaches the Christ-child is a rational and intellectual one. It is not the earlier messages of religious prophets but rather those of “philosophers” such as Socrates and the oracular wisdom of Plato’s Diotima that come first to Melchior’s mind. For such a consciousness the Incarnation portends a “cosmic concord” which will save “...the universe from

falling into halves". Melchior, whose name means "King of Light", displays an air of conscious superiority born of the power of intellectualism: he is reluctant to kneel upon rough cobblestones and bow to Hebrew peasants. Like the Western inheritance he symbolises, he represents an intellectualism which, it is suggested, frequently impedes faith, for the "burning questions" of philosophy are given pre-eminent hierarchical status in his world.

By contrast, Casparo of India displays a very different mental predisposition:

### III

*Casparo, King of India*

"Whenever virtue fails  
and lawlessness arises  
there do I bring myself  
to powerful incarnation."

Recalling Krishna's words  
to the trembling charioteer,  
when all the signs were dark,  
incense I bring, and prayer.

O may your house, dear Prince, be peace,  
and not walled in on every side,  
and may the windows be large and open  
that changing airs from all the oceans  
may move through quiet rooms

*Chorus*

Shantih, shantih, shantih

May you be cooled and fed by them,  
and not dismayed, nor blown about.  
May none of your followers try to capture  
Your house for a restless inn or a prison;  
O may your house be peace.

Shantih, shantih, shantih

Casparo's approach to the Incarnation of Christ is a mystical one. Although he is from India, his name means "the White One" and his introduction of Krishna, "the black one", into the Nativity sequence produces a powerful set of

interactive symbols. Krishna is the eighth avatar of Vishnu, the supreme deity, and although he is known as “the black one” he is also the Apollo of India for he originally appears as the Sun God as well as the god of music, poetry and the arts. The historical sequences of his life parallel those of Jesus Christ. Fearing usurpation of his power and possessions, Kamsa attempts to kill Krishna by slaughtering all the children whom he suspected of being him. This finds its equivalent in Herod’s slaughter of the innocents. Whereas Christ describes himself as “the good shepherd”, Krishna becomes a lowly cowherd and eventually establishes himself at Dvaraka where he becomes revered as the “Great Saviour”. His personality is a highly syncretic one and his introduction as a parallel in the Nativity scene is a powerful allusion to the synthetic nature and potential of the Christ figure.

Balthazar, King of Africa, introduces yet a further dimension to the Nativity:

#### IV

##### *Balthazar, King of Africa*

O boy with the oxen  
 you ask a hard riddle  
 far darker than battle  
 that none here can answer.  
 Our prophets hear thunder –  
 a terrible river –  
 they say you will cross it;  
 they stay in the mountains.  
 We know when you’ve crossed it,  
 we know that your mother  
 will wash from your body  
 red mud of that river.  
 We pray that all peoples  
 will bind up your spear wounds,  
 and so we have brought you  
 this myrrh, my small master.

##### *Chorus*

Bayete, bayete,  
 bayete, bayete



By presenting the Christ-child with the gift of myrrh, Balthazar makes a prophetic allusion to the persecution until death that Christ would have to endure. He brings with it, too, the special characteristics of African culture – the empathy, concern and care for the well-being of kin and members of the community which is a feature of *ubuntu*. The deep feeling evident in the images of suffering contrasts markedly with the rational philosophic debates of Melchior and the ethereal mysticism of Casparo. A very successful poetic incarnation of the Word into an African context takes place. The passion Christ will have to undergo is described as “...a terrible river” to be crossed. The usual iconic image of the Pieta is re-presented as the Mater Dolorosa washing the “red mud” of suffering from her Son. The wounds of the Crucifixion are “spear wounds” which must be treated with myrrh and bound up “...by all peoples”. Even the structure of this stanza – each line a dimeter comprised of an iambic foot followed by an anapaest – lends it the lugubrious chant of a liturgical litany reinforcing the sorrow of the Passion.

The final act of synthesis in the Nativity scene is effected by Mary who intones a Magnificat and is subsequently joined in a harmonious chorus by the Magi:

...	
<i>Melchior:</i>	Chair’ O Pammagiste.
<i>Mary:</i>	Hosannah, hosannah, hosannah.
<i>Casparo:</i>	Shantih, shantih, shantih.
<i>Mary:</i>	Hosannah, hosannah, hosannah.
<i>Balthazar:</i>	Bayete, bayete, bayete.
<i>All:</i>	Hosannah, hosannah, hosannah.

The discrete properties of the mind, the spirit and the heart need to be in harmony in the perfectly integrated individual, suggests Butler, just as they also need to be integrated in a happy and balanced society. In the African

sub-continent that society must needs embrace the unity of the three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe, and their cultures as a realistic pursuit of a truly synthetic society. For Butler, the ultimate harmonising factor is Jesus Christ who is not only an Apollo but also a Dionysus, and not only a god for the spirit, but also for the heart and the intellect.

In a key passage appearing in a later article by Butler entitled “A Search for Synthesis” (1984), in which he reviews his theory on attaining synthesis, it is clear that he had been thinking very much along the patterns explored above:

I am capable of only limited, unheroic responses to party, church or state. Such beliefs as I hold have been granted to me. I do not retain them by reason or by act of will. The strength to hold them comes from what I take the source of those beliefs to be: the love of God for all men, and their limited ability to respond to it and, in responding, to find each other.

In 1950 it had seemed to me that the European synthesis had been achieved consciously by men like St Augustine. Thirty years later I still believe in the creative role of conscious thought. Perhaps, now, I would add that there might be some connection between that great African's power of synthesis and his sanctity; and sanctity is not entirely a matter of conscious choice.<sup>67</sup>

Butler's concept of an African synthesis, as I have argued, underwent several metamorphoses and transformations over a twenty five year period from the early 1950s until the mid-1970s. Beginning with the attempts to reconcile binary oppositions, it moved to the first, simple formulations of the Apollo-Dionysus paradigm where Europe was invariably equated with Apollo and Africa with Dionysus, the intention being to synthesise them through a detached form of writing and a consciously transcendent approach. The publication of “Bronze Heads” saw the paradigm evolve into more complex psychological terrain with subsequent concomitant variations in style in poems such as “Isibongo of Mawane” and “The Drum of the Dead”. The final

treatment of the theme in "Natal 1497" presents Christ as the ultimate synthesiser in a formulation where the creative role of conscious thought, though still necessary, is seen as insufficient without the unifying power of faith and sanctity. It seems that Butler, having brought the paradigm to such an intricate nexus, believed he could take it no further, setting it aside at this point in favour of other more immediate concerns.

Was the "impossible union" of a South African culture in which obeisance to both gods would be paid achieved, then, by Butler? Kloppe makes a telling point in this connection:

Although the attempt at discovering the basis on which a reconciliation between Europe and Africa may be achieved is fraught with conceptual difficulties, this does not mean that the project is ill-conceived. The only alternative to such a reconciliation is racial chauvinism.<sup>68</sup>

Notwithstanding the flaws of its implementation from time to time, I believe that Butler's concept of a synthesis between Apollo and Dionysus was visionary, for it afforded the opportunity to South Africans in a bitterly divided country of reintegrating the psyche and transcending the tyrannies of their divided histories, thereby allowing for the attainment of an integrated sense of self. The desire to mend these conflicts, even if only at times in the world of the poem, is commendable.

Baudelaire noted that modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent: it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable. It was with the "eternal" and the "immovable" that Butler became increasingly preoccupied, particularly in his later poetry although these concerns can be traced, to a lesser extent, in earlier poems as well. The epiphanous thought

of Christ as the ultimate complementary synthesiser of Apollo and Dionysus no doubt sharpened Butler's focus in this regard. The tendency to seek permanences is, of course, very much a characteristic of the liberal-humanist mind which wishes to anchor its perceptions of reality on the bases of permanences rather than transformations, elevating these permanences to the status of absolutes. This search for absolutes is, however, not limited solely to liberal-humanist perceptions and has been the holy grail sought in diverse ways by other major poets in the English tradition. In Keats, whose belief was not in a personal deity, the search was for a mystical union with an impersonal Absolute in the after-life. Thus Endymion:

"Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck  
 Our ready minds to fellowship divine  
 A fellowship with essence till we shine,  
 Full alchemiz'd and free of space...  
     ...till in the end  
 melting into its radiance, we blend,  
 mingle, and so become a part of it, -  
 Nor with aught else can our souls interknit  
 So wingedly; when we combine therewith,  
 Life's self is nourish'd by its proper pith..."

"The Fall of Hyperion"  
 Bk 11.777 & 11.805

By contrast, Wordsworth's notion of the Absolute is conditioned by his belief in a deity revealing itself through pantheistic manifestations in the created world. His vision of the mystical union is

...that serene and blessed mood,  
 In which the affections gently lead us on, -  
 Until the breath of this corporeal frame  
 And even the motion of our human blood  
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
 In body, and become a living soul:  
 While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
 We see into the life of things.

"Lines Composed a Few Miles  
 above Tintern Abbey"  
 l. 41f

Seeking similar permanences Butler's cosmology was, however, supported by a very different theological scaffold. Although several critics have drawn attention to the religious aspects of his poetry, their comparisons of Butler with Wordsworth are, I believe, misleading. Butler's theological framework is far closer to that of Herbert and of Hopkins than of Wordsworth, for his is the more orthodox Anglo-Catholic belief in a personal God and personal individual redemption. Like Dante, whom he greatly admired, Butler does not view history merely as a succession of contingent events but rather as an evolutionary pattern which is in contact with God's Divine Plan. In this view all events move inexorably forward towards a realization of that Divine Plan. The goal of the process of salvation, Dante's white rose in the Empyrean, is from all eternity prefigured in God. This eschatological world, the world beyond, is in active Fulfilment of the Promise. In keeping with the principles of Thomistic thought, all earthly phenomena are in a state of "potential" awaiting "actualisation". Man's existence on earth is provisional and must be complemented in the world hereafter. His guide from the potential of the temporal world to the actualisation of the eternal world is the divinely instituted Church, and its sacramental life and outward symbols a reflection of its inward power and efficacy in the salvific mission. Butler's poetry reveals, time and again, a reversion to the Liturgies and Sacramental symbols of the Church in compulsive gestures which confirm and reconfirm the tenets of an eschatological destiny. It will be seen that such symbolic references, whilst sporadic in Butler's earlier poetry, take on both increasing proportions and increasing significance in his mature work.

Critical to an understanding of the workings of this eschatological imperative is the notion of the temporal concept it presupposes. Walter Benjamin distinguishes two concepts of time, the first being “empty, homogenous time” which tends to operate horizontally and in which

...the concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time<sup>69</sup>

and the second, the “time of the now” [Jetztzeit] which he sees as not merely the present but more of the mystical “nunc stans” which is “...shot through with chips of Messianic time”.<sup>70</sup>

Benjamin was, of course, drawing on the earlier hypotheses of Lukacs and Auerbach. Lukacs had seen in the novel a form of “transcendental homelessness” for, according to him, it is the only literary art form which includes time amongst its constitutive principles:

Time can become constitutive only when the bond with the transcendental home has been severed....Only in the novel, whose very matter is seeking and failing to find the essence, is time posited together with the form....We might almost say that the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the power of time....<sup>71</sup>

According to Auerbach, the exact opposite occurs in the concept of what he called “simultaneous” or “Messianic” time where a vertical connection

...is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally – a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension (if I may be permitted to use this term for a temporal extension). It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding. The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event....<sup>72</sup>

...[This] figural interpretation of history implies that every occurrence, in all its everyday reality, is simultaneously a part in a world-historical context through which each part is related to every other, and thus is likewise to be regarded as being of all times or above all time.<sup>73</sup>

In terms of "Messianic time"

...an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. Their direct earthly connection is of secondary importance, and often their interpretation can altogether dispense with any knowledge of it.<sup>74</sup>

The novel operates in "empty, homogenous time" and this creates its vast difference from a genre such as poetry which operates in "simultaneous" or "Messianic" time. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Maurice Merleau-Ponty notes that our perceptual field's orientational structure consists of a horizontal as well as a vertical component, a foreground and a background, an up and a down. In the cognitive process it is, at times, natural to privilege one plane of perception at the expense of the other. Whereas poetry operates in the vertical plane, the novel operates in the horizontal sphere, which probably explains why seldom, if ever, great poets are great novelists, and vice versa. In the English tradition only Hardy and D. H. Lawrence might qualify and, even then, most critics would regard them more as significant novelists than poets. Butler's own case illustrates this point very well. Whilst he wrote prolifically in every other genre, he was unable to produce a great novel from his own imagination. *A Rackety Colt* which might at first sight appear to be a novel is, in fact, a polished prose rendition of the diary of an 1820 settler, Thomas Stubbs. Its original conception has, thus, not emanated from Butler's imagination.

One may pursue this line of thought, briefly, to observe that the short story genre, in the hands of a writer like D. H. Lawrence, is sometimes nearer to lyrical intensity than narrative causality. Butler's short stories, however, are lengthy anecdotes – sequential and contiguous. His autobiographical writing reveals the same tendency of operating more comfortably in vertical timeframes. In the successful first volume, *Karoo Morning*, the poetry of youth supersedes the discursive reflections of the mature Butler in the subsequent, and less compelling, volumes of autobiography. It is clear that his imagination worked most powerfully within the framework of “simultaneous” or “Messianic” time. A study of his poetry from this perspective reveals his constant attempts to come to terms with the numinous, to reach that area “...above the veil” in his search to interpret and understand his own eschatological destiny.

Eschatological symbols abound in Butler's poetry. The most prevalent and dominant of these, especially in his earlier poetry is the Crucifixion/Redemption symbol which, in his later verse, transmutes itself into the sacramental symbol of the Eucharist. It is perfectly understandable that he would have been drawn to the Crucifixion symbol, especially in view of his wartime experiences where some rationale was sought for the seemingly contingent human carnage which he witnessed. Some fifty years later, describing the effects of the Second World War on his psyche, he wrote:

I was groping, as I still am, not with an optimistic view of the human condition but with the cruel self-deception of my species. I had come out of the war (the death camps, the A-bomb) with my confidence in the human race in tatters....<sup>75</sup>

This mood is reflected in the symbols which emerge from that era in poems such as “Embarkation”:



The troop express will reach the port at six  
 in a white hail of gulls' wings  
 and sunset-purpled smoke from transports over which  
 grey-boned derricks nod.  
 Blacked-out buildings gaunt against  
 the well-lit city of the stars;  
 sailors roar rough shanties  
 in less respectable bars;  
 the sad cathedral bells proclaim  
 above the factory hooters and the lunatic tide  
 the distance of the everliving God  
 and the always Crucified.

(*CP* pp. 14-15)

The Eliotian images of "...an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering" God, whose soul is "...stretched tight across the skies" in a crucifixion image set against a backdrop of urban decay and human suffering in "Preludes", is presented to us by Butler in similar but less ambiguous terms. For him "...the always Crucified" is defined and named even if he does appear to be "distant" and something of a *deus absconditus*. The "...sad cathedral bells" barely manage to proclaim the Gospel message "above" the "lunatic tide" of warfare and the "factory hooters" of rampant materialism in an apparent struggle for ideological supremacy.

Although "Desert" (*CP* p. 27) explores, specifically, the themes of denial and asceticism, the image of "tree" as interchangeable symbol for "crucifix" or "cross" finds its first tentative formulation here:

Oh for a single tree, a singing bird  
 to reconcile this earth and sky!

Where is the angel of sap,  
 the seraph of blood?

Has Moses no rod  
 to strike this dust?

Here is the end of lust,  
 here the beginning of God.

The climatically hostile desert is, somewhat paradoxically, the place where God can be found. However, nothing is to be found in the desert unless it is through faith, whether it be the water that issued from the rock when struck by Moses or the nearness of God in the ascetic and contemplative life as sought by the Desert Fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries. Although the “single tree” is seen as a reconciling agent, primarily between the barren earth and the sky, it has yet to be loaded with the powerful mythic properties of redemption which we find in “Pieta”:

Tremendous, marching through smashed buildings, trees,  
a stream of bawdy bubbles from our lips.  
Dog-eyed he stares from the ruin's lower steps,  
then frightened fingers flutter out to seize  
his mother's dusty skirts. She lifts her eyes  
straightens, flashes back at bay, and almost trips;  
then turns, goes out to him, him only, grips  
his fear-blind head against her bending knees.

O silver cord, that, slipping so, unties  
compassion in her like a tidal sea,  
you tighten round my throat, you strangle me  
till I could swear noon-darkness stuns the skies  
above a woman pierced beneath a tree  
on whose black bough her one Son sweats and dies.

(CP pp. 37-38)

A profane, destructive advance by an army of occupation in war during the course of which the soldiers march “...through smashed buildings, trees” becomes transformed into a poignant spiritual experience. A villager, cradling her child's head against her bending knees, recalls in the poet's mind the crucifixion and pieta scenes of Christ's suffering. The poet's treatment of the theme in this poem, however, imbues it with both a contemporary and a universal significance for the parallels of the suffering Mary and Christ are drawn with the sufferings of ordinary men, women and children in the war.

The tree on which Christ died is a “black bough” linking it to the “smashed...trees” of the first line and the conflagrations of war. Mary’s lot of suffering foretold by Simeon, the “sword piercing her heart”, has also become the lot of women worldwide who have to witness their children’s sufferings and their sons’ bodies “pierced” and mutilated by the carnage of war. The pieta thus becomes a worldwide symbol of contemporary female suffering whose only hope of alleviation resides not in the present, but in the promise of ultimate redemption.

The assurance of “certain certainties” of faith found in “Pieta” seems to have abandoned the poet in “Letter to Monte Stanco” (*CP* p. 46) where, notwithstanding a further recurrent symbol of the Crucifixion, the poet’s seeming intention in the manner in which he deals with the phenomenon of time is to break with the transcendental home. In a soldier’s letter sent home from the theatre of war, reminiscent of the poems of Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, a description is given in the first two stanzas of the battle front and the debilitating effects of war. Despite the succession of dreary images such as “drizzling rain”, “black track” and “smothering heights” reinforcing the impression of a terrain denuded of its romantic attachments by war and the ahistorical weightlessness which these images suggest, the notion of time presented by the poet is sequential. The final stanza, however, seeks to overturn this contiguity:

Mother, I feel our single file  
is doubled now in the dark;  
this track is old, the mist’s on the world,  
and the hill is a question mark;  
shadows are men to the end of time  
who can’t care much if the end of the climb  
is Golgotha’s hill or the hill of the Ark;

a shadow with shadows I stalk alone  
 with timeless kit through the eternal rain,  
 with the same one weapon, the human will,  
 mounting the heights of death and pain.

(*CP* pp. 46-7)

An attempt is clearly being made to sever all connections with conventional time-frames: the soldiers are "...men to the end of time" who wear "...timeless kit", trudge through "...eternal rain" to a destination which is either "...Golgotha's hill" or the "hill of the Ark", the two symbols – the former suggesting certain suffering and death, the latter a release from a death sentence back into life – being separated by several thousand years. The crisis of faith occasioned by the horrors and apparent senselessness of war has precipitated this attempted break with the transcendental home conveyed by tentative irruptions to the pattern of simultaneous time. The "question mark" which surrounds the hill seems no longer to be a strategic or military one, but takes on the additional significance of an interrogation into the absence of faith and the possibilities of its rebirth in combating feelings of despair and ennui for, as Walter Benjamin points out, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption.<sup>76</sup> Butler's attempt to sever the cord of Messianic or simultaneous time has, however, not been entirely successful. In using Golgotha and the Ark as points of reference, he has introduced chips of Messianic time which have had the effect of restoring the vertical relationship. One suspects that, despite the crisis in faith he describes, the belief in an eschatological destiny was so strong in him that, try as he might, he could not undermine its temporal manifestation. Furthermore, the extent to which his liberal-humanist style would admit of such disjunctures is also a moot point.

The theme of Crucifixion as a means of expressing the atrocities and suffering of a world at war has again riveted Butler's attention in "Christmas 1944. Castiglione Dei Pepoli" but this time it is accompanied by other religious symbols woven into the second and third stanzas:

Raw is the rock uncut by chisels; clean  
trackless snow speaks no evangel.  
The only movement in the earth and sky  
is a silver fighter, splendid, single,  
whose shadow, leaping the hillsides, hints  
a sudden advent of death's angel.

A deep sea-silence presses on my ears;  
sunlight, like a wind that beats the skin,  
and clearer than my shadow on the snow,  
harder than these ragged teeth of stone  
in me lies faith a scattered skeleton,  
Christ's cross burning, Bethlehem in ruin.

(*CP* p. 47)

The poet reaches the conclusion that his own faith is in disarray "...like a scattered skeleton". Intriguingly, though, the manner in which he has arrived at this conclusion of faith lost is through a series of strong, if subtle, eschatological images which almost presuppose a belief in the retention of their mythical power and efficacy. Christmas time, the moment of Jesus' incarnation, is also a fulfilment of the promise made by the angel, Gabriel, at the time of the Annunciation to Mary. The Church liturgical season of Advent which leads up to the feast of Christmas takes on a sinister significance in its treatment in the poem, for the seraph here described is no harbinger of good news but a "...splendid ...silver fighter" aeroplane and itself an "advent", but of death. The conflation of the images of human suffering in the war and those of the great redemptive myth lead the poet, ultimately, to a personal response of despair, rather than the optimism or hope associated with Christmas for "...Bethlehem [is] in ruin" and the Cross, symbol of redemption, is "burning".

Although Butler avers, in “After an Atrocity” (*CP* p. 52), that he has “...nothing to beg dead Gods” he nonetheless displays, in the final lines of the poem, a need to averruncate deep-rooted Christian sentiments and conscience by desiring to

...blast bones bare of the divine,  
to be pure brute, utterly free  
from such pretence, such insane pride,  
to live in a sinless, wordless key  
and have no need for the Crucified.

Even in the intellectual, if not the emotional, act of apostasy the Crucifixion image looms large in Butler’s thinking as do other more abstruse biblical references in the poem. The “bones” that the poet wishes to be blasted “...bare of the divine” recall the prophet Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones, and desire the exact converse of the original context:

He said to me: ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ I said: ‘You know, Lord Yahweh.’ He said: ‘Prophesy over these bones. Say, “Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh. The Lord Yahweh says this to these bones: I am now going to make breath enter you, and you will live. I shall put sinews on you, I shall make flesh grow on you, I shall cover you with skin and give you breath, and you will live; and you will know that I am Yahweh.” ’  
*Ezekiel 37: 4-7*

Not only does the poet wish to be freed from this call to faith, he also expresses the wish to live in a world without the sanctions of conscience and without divine revelation, a world that is both “sinless” and “wordless” where he has “...no need for the Crucified”. It seems that, in the poet’s case, both these ideals are unattainable for he is unable to break with the practice of utilising Christian symbols as iconic ‘touchstones’ and fracture the vertical chain of Messianic time, instead being drawn inexorably, perhaps even unknowingly, along the path of “infinite migration” described by Ali Shariati:

...man, this dialectical phenomenon, is compelled to be always in motion....Man then can never attain a final resting place....Man is a 'choice', a struggle, a constant becoming. He is an infinite migration, a migration within himself, from clay to God....<sup>77</sup>

St Augustine maintained that man's predicament is not that he is ignorant, a view held by Plato accounting for man's errancy, but that he stands in the presence of alternatives. He must choose either to turn to God or away from God. "After Ten Years" (*CP* p. 105) marks a positive response by Butler to the doubts raised in earlier poems such as "Christmas 1944..." and "After an Atrocity". Although he begins the poem with "...now, no vision", there follows a relentless search by the poet for a vision and for religious symbols which re-affirm his eschatological destiny. In desperation he seeks anywhere

...an altar, in the city,  
beyond, or in the storm: if only to cry:  
"I have hope: we shall master our dream!"

The constant striving upwards into the metaphysical realm where he might see beyond the veil is suggested by the "...steep ascending gothic nave" which parallels the spiritual struggle up "...the once miraculous hill" of Calvary after "...the voiceless vigil / through rigid groves, up frost-paved paths" in his own faithless journey up a *via dolorosa*. His inability to regard the miraculous hill, Calvary, in the light of faith is accompanied by feelings of extreme angst and guilt at his perceived apostasy. The persecution reserved for such a condition not only for apostates but, ironically, also for martyrs is hinted at in the

...blue, hard, ...icicles advanc[ing]  
till they meet in my spine and pierce my tongue...

Such an intolerable spiritual predicament can only be reversed by the intervention of the dying "corn god" persona of Jesus Christ who becomes the "...essential catalyst" :

I accept my pain. I am incomplete,  
cannot measure, build or synthesise;  
I lack a means of dimension, a corner stone,

an essential catalyst. O hidden God,  
sweet Giver of faith, still veiled, unknown to me,  
humbly I start again, set out to rediscover

you with uncensored senses: shedding all dreams,  
departing all cities of words, I shall wander  
curious as a child, vulnerable as a lover:

let dawn your Son in joy, or pain, or wonder  
in anger or kisses on these open pulses.

There is a recognition by the poet that, for him, full spiritual and psychological integration can only take place within the synthetic possibilities of personal redemption in Jesus Christ. In an allusion to the Biblical symbol of Christ as the “cornerstone rejected by the builders”, the poet accepts in faith the cornerstone of his God, although still a “hidden God” who is “veiled” and “unknown”. The shift from night to day in the poem is paralleled by the advent of God the Son, Jesus Christ, who is implored to “dawn” on the “open pulses” of the poet in a gesture of his complete submission to the Divine Will

Renewed faith, even if neither yet fully understood nor fully defined, is the predominant mood of “Elegy” (*CP* p. 76). The Crucifixion theme appears yet again, though not only this time as a powerfully evocative religious symbol ideally suited to the theme of death and spiritual rebirth in the context of a burial, but also as the metaphoric template upon which the latter part of the elegy is constructed. The now familiar *pieta* scene following Christ’s crucifixion is introduced into the poet’s stream of meditation on the death of his friend:

I dread the triumph of endemic wrong  
against which tenderness has no appeal.  
These two stricken women must belong



among the universal host who kneel  
 about a mother in whose aching arms  
 lies One our sins have pierced for burial.

The universal application to womankind of the suffering Madonna, which finds expression here, has been highlighted earlier. There is a powerful ambiguity in the image of "...One our sins have pierced for burial" for, whilst it clearly refers to the stigmata Christ who died to conquer sin, it also suggests obliquely that the dead tank commander, who had

...knelt on dew-wet grass in the chilly air,  
 and opened unpierced palms for bread and wine...

now "lies.....pierced" awaiting burial as a result of mankind's sins in perpetrating acts of violence and war.

In the rites of burial intoned by the priest Butler links together, for the first time, the symbols of Crucifixion and the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass:

"Death where is thy sting?" No defiant boast  
 supports this rhetoric. Gently, he,  
 in the names of Father, Son and Holy Ghost,

with raised hand signs a cross on the sky and sea;  
 and, at that sign so simply made, the sight  
 of you, my friend, is given back to me:

a mass in a quiet field in early light  
 and I, half envious, watching the ritual there;  
 seeing, surprised, how simple and contrite

you knelt on dew-wet grass in chilly air,  
 and opened unpierced palms for bread and wine,  
 and took, and ate, your sacramental share.

The sign of the cross made by the priest seems to the poet to be appropriating the entire created world, symbolised by the "sky" and "sea", to the redemptive process; its link with the mass "...in a quiet field in early light" reinforces the tripartite links implied between creation, Crucifixion, Eucharist,

and the act of redemption. The created world is baptised into this sacral union by the poet in his conceits of nature's ecclesial union:

I would you slept where grey mimosas churn  
cream-yellow pollen on the tombs, and tall  
Red aloes, winter's candelabras, burn

On all the hills where, once the spring rains fall,  
The silken freesia from its silver stalk  
Might swing a censer for your burial.

The red aloes burn on an imaginary altar at a burial site in Africa and the silken freesia takes on the image of a thurible used at requiem masses to cense the deceased, the iambic pentameter and alliteration used highlighting the metronomic swing and swish of the thurible.

The time sequences of the burial service are superimposed on those of the church's Easter Liturgy. Following the completion of the rites of burial, *Part Four* opens with the simple words "It is finished", recalling the final words uttered by Christ at the Crucifixion, "It is consummated". Christ's suffering and death were followed by His triumphant resurrection, which is what the poet seeks for his friend:

Why can't I make a song of suffering,  
Give you a resurrection? Oh, to place  
You among our stars – not these first, glimmering

Rush lights in a darkness damp with loss –  
But in the brilliant scatter of our sky,  
The sharpest shiner in the Southern Cross....

Perhaps the quest for "a resurrection" for his departed friend takes two forms, the first being that of an assured transcendental existence after death, the second being immortality in a completed poetic artefact. Whatever the intention, even assuming a double focus, the poet bluntly asserts at the

beginning of part VI, “No resurrection”, believing that on both counts he has failed, is lost, and

...must blindly grope  
through slums and deserts of [his] heart, and fall  
into the shame of impossible hope;

drowning in [himself], must cry and call  
across the seas and continents and skies  
for One who walks the waves of burial.

Resurrection, in the spiritual sense, cannot be effected through the human will or the artifices of the intellect. It requires what Kierkegaard called a “leap of faith” in the promise of redemption, a condition acknowledged by the poet who calls for “...One who walks the waves of burial”.

Whilst Butler’s subsequent poems such as “To a Statue of the Virgin” and “Ode. On First Seeing Florence” continued to treat the Crucifixion and Pieta themes in the manner of his earlier poems, “Dream of a Buffer Strip” (*CP* p. 182) reveals an entirely different perspective on the theme. Cast in the form of a surrealist-type dream of apartheid South Africa in 1972, the poem widens the scope of human suffering in relation to the Mass and the Crucifixion:

eyes an innocent blue  
under his pilot's cap  
david livingstone  
opens his pocket bible

in chapter one st john's  
apocalypse we read  
and every eye shall see him  
also they which pierced him

i see through binoculars  
our new jerusalem  
galvanised-iron mirrors  
reflecting golden sun  
and all encircled by  
a ten-foot fence steel poles  
and glittering diamond mesh.

The hallucinatory nature of the dream enables Butler to interchange the identity of “david livingstone” with a doctor and a priest-figure. The crucifixion image is presented to us this time indirectly through images of impalement from the Book of the Apocalypse being read aloud by “david livingstone” whilst the protagonist in the dream, who seems to be largely unsympathetic to the cause of the oppressed, sees the “new jerusalem” of Nationalist South Africa – apartheid’s promised land – encircled by security fencing. In his dream they encounter five black children at play. Startled and afraid they forget their play and all but the fifth child, who stands firm, sidle away:

...a catapult in hand  
and pebbles at his feet  
it's all happened before  
it's going to happen again  
he'll slip a blue smooth pebble  
into the primitive sling....

An apocalyptic image of fear in the mind of the protagonist turns the child into a modern day David preparing to do battle with his oppressor Goliaths. His attack is, however, only imaginary. He is asthmatic and in need of medical attention. In a further hallucinatory sequence, the protagonist follows “the obstinate doctor” down

...a colossal breathing nave  
huge black men and women  
dark as thunderstorms

and follows their line of sight, seeing what holds them there:

...like stone age worshippers  
at human sacrifice  
that damned asthmatic child  
how did it get entangled  
so brutally in the wire

it hangs there like a wild bird  
blown to its twisted doom...  
...

the mad old doctor's gentle  
 sunburned hands reach out  
 unpin the fluttering child  
 he does not take its pulse  
 nor tap its heaving chest  
 he lifts it up sky high  
 then lowers and kisses it  
 between its squinting eyes  
 in the name of the father once  
 in the name of the son that's twice  
 in the name of the holy ghost  
 three times he kisses it gently  
 there at the foot of our altar  
 our holy diamond fence

the sun dies in a cloud  
 there's a terrible tremor of earth.

The protagonist's derogatory observation of a mass of black people "...like stone age worshippers at human sacrifice" becomes bitterly ironic in the context of a modern day crucifixion scene where the child "hangs", "brutally...entangled" in the barricades of apartheid. For it is not the mass of black people who possess a stone-age mentality but their white persecutors whose opprobrious political systems have brought about the human sacrifices of Sharpeville, Cato Manor and Soweto.

The "mad old doctor's gentle sunburned hands" enact the eucharistic Consecration scene of the Mass. Elevating the child towards the heavens in a gesture of oblation which simulates the elevation of host and chalice by the priest at the consecration of the eucharist, he invokes the Holy Trinity, the three kisses delivered on the child suggesting a symbolic allusion to the three rings of the Sacring Bell. The "diamond fence" of apartheid has become not only the cross of suffering but also "...the foot of our altar" in a poetic device which has conflated the Mass and the Eucharist with the Crucifixion. The couplet describing massive cosmic disturbances is reminiscent of the evangelists' accounts of Christ's crucifixion:

It was now about the sixth hour and the sun's light failed, so that darkness came over the whole land until about the ninth hour.

(Luke 23:44)

And suddenly, the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked and the rocks were split....

(Matthew 27:51)

The "altar" at the foot of the barricade is not only an extension of Christ's crucifixion, for the image possesses Janus-headed capabilities in that it also has the potential to suggest that barricades of separation became the false altars of Baal in apartheid South Africa. The barricades of physical separation translated themselves into even more sinister ramparts of emotional and spiritual isolation:

the child jumps into my arms  
 ...  
 he kisses me wet on the cheek  
 with all the force i have  
 i heave i hurl him from me  
 as if he were a snake  
 ...  
 i force my eyelids open  
 beautiful and clean  
 pretty as a doll  
 in a christmas shop at night  
 with golden hair ensnared  
 in our ten-foot diamond fence  
 hangs dead my son my son.

Acts of colour prejudice and racism effect their own persecutions in countless ways, the perpetrators being no more exempt from suffering than the victims themselves. We are brought full circle to the start of the dream for "...every eye shall see...they that pierced him". The innocent David-child with catapult is seen to take fearsome retribution: like Absalom who met his death trapped in a tree where he was slain by Joab, there ensnared in the apartheid barricade, dead, is the protagonist's golden-haired child eliciting a cry of sorrow from a father that has reverberated through the ages:

O my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son!

*II Samuel 18:33*

For Butler the triple concepts of the Eucharist as the commemoration of Calvary, as the “universal bread” of commensality, and as denoting life within the Mystical Body of Christ become increasingly intertwined :

Although the rim of agony is all earth  
and each death breaks a universal bread  
the break is bitterest where the corn had birth.

“Elegy” (*CP* p. 83)

This holistic union is also seen to incorporate not only mankind but the entire spectrum of creation and finds expression in later poems such as “Sweet Water” (*CP* p. 167). Most commentators have seen in “Sweet Water” a nostalgic desire to return to the simple rural patterns and values of an 1820 Settler environment. A few, such as Van der Mescht, see it possessing a different gravity of thought:

The vast and relentless workings of nature form a natural backdrop against which man's actions of ‘the fractional present’ are performed.<sup>78</sup>

Whilst these observations are, no doubt, valid they overlook the sacral import of a poem whose apparent simplicity belies its profundity. A clue to the manner in which the poem might be approached is to be found in Butler's critical observations on Sydney Clouts's poem “As It Was” :

It ends with a sharp, delightful, casual sacrament – a mug from the living, reflecting stream:

faces over the water  
watching the berries that ripple above the clouds –  
many faces, many hearts,  
that will be far far apart;  
and a mugful of water  
scooped with a clang against stone  
tasting so sweet and deep and cold  
of unhuman numerous things.<sup>79</sup>

In "Sweet Water" a veneration before nature is suggested in the images describing Danby's preparations before imbibing the water:

On the sand near the water's edge  
he spread his handkerchief and knelt.  
I could hear his old joints creak.  
Embarrassed, I knelt nearby.

...  
"Now," he said, "now,  
oh, taste how sweet it is."

Delicately, three times,  
the huge and trembling hand  
cupped the sweet waters of the Angry River  
to his lips....

...  
He's dead now, and I am left,  
bereft, wondering  
to what stream I could take whom  
and kneel like that, and say:  
Taste how sweet it is.

A situation commensurate with the reception of the Eucharist is indicated in the kneeling posture. The words, "Taste how sweet it is", recall the liturgical oration: "The Lord has given us bread from heaven / Containing in itself all sweetness". The symbolic action of scooping "three times" parallels the "Domine non sum dignus..." recited three times in the ancient liturgy before the reception of the Eucharist whilst the water as sacrament hints at Jesus at the well in Samaria declaring that He is the water of "eternal life". In suggesting the sacral act of imbibing water from the river, Butler is appropriating not only Africa to his notion of the Mystical Body but also the entire created world. That Butler might have had little reservation in executing such a seemingly intrusive religious act is revealed in his observations on T. S. Eliot:

...if Christianity is valid for all men, truly catholic, then a Christian poet can legitimately lay all cultures under tribute.<sup>80</sup>



The poem concludes with an expressed desire for commensality which will bring about Butler's vision of a shared, common humanity. Together with the conceit of the Mystical Body embracing all creation, this idea of a commensality partaking of a "universal bread" finds greater amplification in the Butler's last major poetic work before his death, *Pilgrimage to Dias Cross* (1987). (*CP* p. 225)

Besides Voss's comment that

..."Pilgrimage to Dias Cross" completes, with the *Ode* and the *Elegy* a kind of canonical generic triad bracing the *oeuvre*...<sup>81</sup>

the poem is highly significant in that it represents the pinnacle of Butler's artistic achievement in poetry in a manner that blends, in perfect harmony, the twin artistic concerns of content and style as well as bringing to resolution the metaphysical and ontological debates that had preoccupied him for forty years.

The desire for an Augustinian synthesis of style, as I have already argued, had been one of Butler's earliest poetic pursuits. Between the war poems and "Pilgrimage to Dias Cross" a considerable evolution in his style and technique had taken place. Smoothness and euphony coupled with highly intellectualised imagery are peculiar features of his war poetry and the poetry of the early 1950s. The acute self-consciousness and highly personal responses of the war poems make way for a more detached style of writing in the 1960s in an attempt to develop the transcendental point from which Butler believed he could effect his ideal of synthesising a reality which he perceived in terms of binary oppositions and conflicting forces. The scholarly Oxford style begins to make way for a Karoo reality, and the 1970s is a period in which Butler's preoccupations with the ballad

form necessitate a return to a more personalised style of writing in which the prolific mythical and historical European references are shorn from his poetry.

In "Pilgrimage to Dias Cross", begun in 1971 but completed only in 1987, the Parnassian style employed by Butler in his other major poems such as "Elegy" and "Ode. On First Seeing Florence" makes way for a simple, direct style which gives the impression that every image, every symbol, every word has been considered with great care. Butler had always favoured the tercet and terza rima because it was

...superbly flexible...its continuous self-generating rhyme scheme gave it an onward thrust suitable for narrative; one could create paragraphs of whatever length the material demanded.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the terza rima's favoured status by Butler, for the narrative of "Pilgrimage to Dias Cross" he broke with it in favour of a style more reflective of African dialogue. The lengthy philosophic reflections of earlier poems make way here for a more direct, economical style in which the powerful symbolism in the verse is left to speak for itself.

In "Pilgrimage to Dias Cross" Butler has moved beyond the point of identification with the specific cultural concerns of individual communities such as the English-speaking group in South Africa to a fully inclusive view of community which hopes to heal the divisive histories of the past. In moving along the vertical axis of simultaneous time from the present to the past and back again to the present, "Pilgrimage to Dias Cross" is able to suggest the framework for a shared common humanity whilst, at the same time, expiating the past for, as Butler observed :

No nation can be intelligent about its future unless it has digested its past, not suppressed it.<sup>83</sup>

A basic characteristic of any pilgrimage is its spatial separation from the familiar and the habitual. In the Hebraic tradition every male Israelite was required to visit the Temple three times a year. In Islam, the central Muslim pilgrimage, the Hadj, is a journey obligatory on every man or woman who has reached the age of puberty and is of sound mind, and must be performed at least once in life. Hindus make pilgrimages to Mount Kailas and Lake Manas in north western Tibet. Christian pilgrimages initially tended to stress the voluntary aspect and to consider sacred travel to Rome or Jerusalem as acts of supererogatory devotion but, with the passage of time, a strong element of obligation came in with the organisation of the penitential systems of the Church.

Anthropologist Victor Turner believes that all pilgrimages foster the emergence of “existential *communitas*” for they bond together, however transiently and despite political boundaries, large numbers of men and women who would otherwise never have come into contact. The “*communitas*” spirit presses always to ever greater unity and universality and presents itself as a timeless condition, an eternal now, or what T. S. Eliot might have called “a moment in and out of time” where the structural view of time is not applicable.

The ‘shrine’ chosen by Butler as destination for his pilgrimage is the site of the *padrao* erected by Bartolomeu Dias. I use the term ‘shrine’ advisedly as Butler has indicated that the destination in the poem “...is not a holy shrine in the accepted sense of the word”.<sup>84</sup> The poet determines to go on a

personal pilgrimage because of “racial idolatries” which have turned South Africa into a chthonic nightmare:

How many must die each day, choked like Laocoon,  
Lassoed by this devious dream whose coils roll on, and on?

His destination, which is described as a “...bonewhite cranium crowned with scrub”, is already being loaded with powerful mythic resonances to be amplified later in the poem. In erecting the cross, Dias did not foresee

what destinies of consciousness,  
fleets, empires, tribes, tongues, gods  
hung in his rotten rigging, spun  
in the salt white sand that filled the space  
between the cross's square-cut base  
and the ill-fitting socket built  
of the bonewhite, soft  
indigenous stone.

It marked a limit  
to failure and success....

The cross marked “... a limit to failure and success” for Dias who was successful in being the first European to round the Cape of Storms thereby establishing for European maps the southernmost limits of the African continent, but who nonetheless failed to complete the envisaged passage to the East Indies. Does the “limit to failure and success” also refer, perhaps, to the European ‘civilising mission’ in Africa ? The “ill fitting” square cut base of the cross, erected by Dias in a manner which replicates the appropriative gestures of the Spanish conquistadors in the Americas, symbolises the planting of redemptive love in African soil whilst at the same time signalling the first moment of European cultural intrusion into the sub-continent. The cross thus becomes, somewhat paradoxically, both a unifying and a divisive force.

In the course of fingering the artefacts of the various cultural groups which have inhabited the region in the past three centuries – the unstrung beads and flints of the indigenous population, blue and white Delft china chips from the Dutch East Indies era, and the spent musket balls from the British occupations – the poet's mind becomes focussed on various representatives from these groups who are introduced to his pilgrimage walk. The historical sites connected with the lives of Cobus Boesak, the great elephant hunter and leader of the Khoikhoi, the English settlers Jeremiah Goldswain and James Butler, the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse, and Karel Landman, leader of one of the groups of Dutch farmers in the Great Trek, are identified and the ghosts of these personalities are called up to vindicate their respective roles in history.

Boesak laments the fact that, in assisting the whites during the Frontier Wars, he enabled a system of racial domination to become entrenched in South African society. Goldswain's sorrow is expressed at the polarised attitudes of his descendants:

After ninety days' detention  
a girl in faded denims shouts again,  
"Bread and justice for the Blacks!"

Her cousin in Anglo American  
She calls a fascist pig.  
Scorn and anger twist her mouth.

...  
...another  
self-exiled, cold in London,  
burns his call-up papers.

"I shall never go into the Townships  
to shoot down Blacks for the Nats."  
His brother's in the Parabats.

What is happening to my seed?  
All choked by tares, all  
Fallen on stony ground?

He kicks a pebble from his path.

Political polarisation has taken place within the English community in South Africa. The traditions of democracy and justice are seen not to have survived in a community where many of Goldswain's offspring support an oppressive regime. The kicking of a stone is an ancient pilgrimage practice of expiation in South America.

Karel Landman reproaches his descendants for their dispossession of others' rights to the land and their mistaken dream of a divinely sanctioned love of only their own people. Nongqawuse berates modern day politicians on either side of the colour line who consider only their own interests:

*The prophet is left out of their dreams.  
He ends his life in prison, on an island in the sea,  
Or withers in aged exile, as I did, here.*

...  
*Young men are filled with visions,  
They raise their fists, forward they dance...*  
...

We turn our backs on the burial grove,  
On the fading western light, and walk  
Away from the troubled earth and history....

In keeping with her reputation Nongqawuse's words are highly prophetic. There are unmistakable inferences to the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, and her statement of the young men filled with visions recalls a similar prophetic passage in the biblical book of Daniel. Her prophecy is seen even to extend to a declining Western influence in Africa portended by the "...fading western light".

The poet, accompanied by the other pilgrims, continues his journey:

Nothing. The sounds of breakers rising and falling.  
I trip, I fall, I rise. I shoulder a branch  
of a flotsam tree.

..  
 Through dwarf wind-matted scrub the footpath  
 twists steeply up to the level top.  
 Cold and dark.

...  
 Often a journey ends on a height  
 and no one there.

It is clear that the "...bonewhite cranium crowned with scrub" on which the *padrao* stands recalls Golgotha – the place of the skull – and that Christ's crowning with thorns has been drawn into the metaphor, for the poet here begins his own *via dolorosa*, shouldering his crucifix, stumbling, and rising again, ending his suffering on a lonely height. The steep ascent represents the pilgrim's ascent to a metaconsciousness seeking admission to the One. The moments of extreme emotion, it is suggested, whether they be ecstatic or sorrowful, are always experienced in an existential isolation.

The pilgrims create a fire into which is thrown the "flotsam of history" in an act, as it were, of immolating the injustices of the past. Around the fire, at the site of the *padrao*, they are united by their common humanity which is confirmed by a theophanous manifestation:

Midnight.  
 The blanket of silent air and stars  
 cannot console or still the restless surfaces.  
 On the eastern horizon  
 a paling of some stars, and then,  
 bit by bit, the moon: a white half-wafer,  
 mysterious in its incompleteness  
 mysteriously suspended over  
 the simmering chalice of the sea.

Blaise Pascal's self-professed terror at the eternal silence of immense spaces is not to be found here. Rather it is the mystical feeling of oneness with the entire world of Being. For the mystic the moon symbolises the death/rebirth

cycle and the coalescing of mortal and immortal. Here it takes on added significance for it is the host of the Eucharist “mysteriously suspended” over the simmering chalice of the sea in an image reminiscent of the Jesuit mystic-scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s “Mass on the World”:

...I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it I will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.  
Over there, on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky....I will place on my paten, O God, the harvest to be won by the renewal of labour. Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the earth’s fruits.<sup>85</sup>

The Cross, image of suffering and redemption, has been transmuted by Butler into the Eucharist, image of the universal bread of a common humanity united in the Mystical Body of Christ. It is at this moment that the pilgrims are joined by the ghost of Dias at their fire:

*May I share your circle of light  
island of warmth in the cosmic cold?  
Perhaps you will share my wine?  
It has come a long way.  
The vineyard is very old.*

Dias issues an invitation to commensality – an extremely powerful unifying influence in any community or any pilgrimage. In his autobiography Malcolm X describes its effect in his pilgrimage:

Love, humility, and true brotherhood was almost a physical feeling wherever I turned...All ate as One, and slept as One. Everything about the pilgrimage atmosphere accentuated the Oneness of Man under One God.<sup>86</sup>

The emphasis here is very much on dining together, the anthropologists’ ‘commensality’ which, when transmuted into the paradigmatic medium of ritual, becomes ‘communion’ or a Eucharistic sharing. The host which is described as “mysteriously suspended” above the “chalice” of the sea finds a



further Eucharistic link in the wine offered by Dias, recalling the symbols of the Lord's Supper, as well as providing a link with the allegory of the Vine and the Branches used to denote the Mystical Body of Christ. Endowed with these properties, the Eucharist becomes an agent of universal and cosmic integration:

When Christ, extending the process of his incarnation, descends into the bread in order to replace it, his action is not limited to the material morsel which his presence will, for a brief moment, volatilize: this transubstantiation is aureoled with a real though attenuated divinising of the entire universe....  
When Christ comes to one of his faithful it is not simply in order to commune with him as an individual...these words [of consecration] extend beyond the morsel of bread over which they are said: they give birth to the whole mystical body of Christ.<sup>87</sup>

In a spirit of ecumenical unity the poet moves the process of reintegration forward. A Psalm, an integral part of the Calvinist trekkers' worship, is prayed together with the English settlers' favourite hymn, "Guide me, O thou great Redeemer" and tribute is also given to God through the Khoikhoi immortal, Heiseb, as well as the Creator of the Heavens and giver of life in black African theosophy. The concluding lines are a summation not only of the poem, but also of a lifetime of artistic endeavour:

I raise my voice and sing with them  
rejoicing, for once at one with all  
in the fragile constitution of a verse.

It is a start at least.  
Better a pilgrim's song when old,  
one all-embracing dream,

than burn with rage  
in a damned land  
in an insolent age.

*Sele! Sele!*  
*Ahom, ahom, ahom.*

For once, Butler finds himself “...at one with all” even if, at the time of writing in 1987, political and social unity had not been achieved, for this unity is to be found in the poetic artefact and “...the fragile constitution of a verse”. The closing lines, quoted from “The Bell Song of Ntsikana”, have no meaning and they imply, according to Voss,<sup>88</sup> the birth of a community of balance, culture without politics, outside history, for which the poet has longed. Prophetically enough, South Africa would “...double [its] Cape of Storms” and sail into calmer political waters in the following decade and establish what Fanon called a non-adversarial community of awareness and anti-imperialism in itself embracing the ideas of Butler’s “common humanity”.

The relinquishing of the Apollonian-Dionysian paradigm as the most suitable philosophic scaffold upon which to construct a common social and political destiny for Butler’s imagined South African community coincided, as I have argued, with an increased eschatological thrust in his poetry. What Butler wrote of T. S. Eliot could be equally applied to his own mature poetry:

...important as quotations from, and allusions to [various] sources are in helping to create the universe of his work, they can be seen as fragments reflecting light from the central flame of the poet’s religious experiences, insights and beliefs. They are not startling meteors or errant stars, they are points in constellations comprising a cosmos. As his religion becomes progressively and more consciously Christian, the Bible and the Liturgy, the rites and Sacraments of the Church provide the keys to his poetry.<sup>89</sup>

Butler’s own pursuit in his mature poetry of a serendipitous experience, “...one split second, outside, beyond the Fall” enabling him to “dwell above the veil”, is relentless. The eschatological imperative which underpins his mature poetry and informs his existential vision is, in a sense, anti-Cartesian and (without falling into the Senghorian trap of dismissing all rational, philosophical, or

logical thinking) resists the reification and dehumanisation of man which are seen to be part of the empirical tradition. But what do we make of Butler's ambivalence to modernism?

Stephen Watson is, I believe, only partially correct when he explains Butler's antagonism to modernism in terms of Butler's embracing a Romantic, anti-rationalist, anti-deracinating tradition.<sup>90</sup> Although he credits Butler with being an innovator as well as a conservationist, a radical as well as a traditionalist, he attributes this ambivalence to a peculiarly South African response to uprootedness. I believe that Butler's antagonism to modernism has deeper, more metaphysical origins.

The progressive dismantling of what Jean Francois Lyotard called the great legitimising narratives of emancipation and enlightenment has resulted in our language of morality being stripped to the point where we possess only the residue of a conceptual metaphysical and moral framework, which now lacks those moral and spiritual contexts from which its significance originally derived. The consequent lacunae have been filled by rival religions to Christianity. In the modern world a melange of ecological thought, liberation theology, Eastern mysticism, and Western academic relativism manifests itself in value-free social and political systems which have affected modern philosophical and theological thinking.

Modernism flies in the face of an absolutist conception of theology. Espousing a Kantian position that it is impossible for the mind to reach any kind of reality or to have any knowledge of the Absolute, modernism

undermines the very foundations of theological investigation and assumed Christian epistemes. Jesus, in this system of religious relativism originating in the 1950s, cannot be considered as the only avenue to God. He becomes a 'myth' and one among many other prophets and spiritual leaders. The logical conclusion, then, since the Absolute cannot, in this view, impinge in world history in any manner, is that there can be no Church and no Sacraments; the personal redeemer, Christ, is placed alongside other salvation myths. German theologian Josef Ratzinger points out that, in a relativist system of thought,

the Absolute cannot come into history, but only models and ideal forms that remind us about what can never be grasped as such in history<sup>91</sup>

...[therefore] the historical Jesus... is no more the absolute Logos than any other saving figure of history.<sup>92</sup>

Whilst Christians would, naturally, view this philosophy with great hostility, Ratzinger points out that the protagonists of modernist/relativist thought in their turn view the Church's position with scepticism. From the perspective of relativist morality, orthodox Christian belief is taken to signify a revelation of God in history through Jesus Christ and that this personal Redeemer can indeed be known. This orthodox theological position is, however, perceived to be an attack on modernity and its essential philosophical roots of unlimited tolerance and freedom.

As has been noted from the eschatological imperative which underpins Butler's poetry, his cosmology would not admit of the open-endedness of modernist thought and, in particular, its disavowal of the concept of personal redemption and the ultimate eschatological destiny of man. For this reason Butler was also openly hostile to leftist materialist thinking which shifted the

relation of personal sin and redemption to a relation between social structures and happiness. In Marxist thinking, conversion of heart through repentance and Sacrament made way for a re-designing of the social order in some specific way to eliminate evil from the world. Ratzinger observes:

Redemption thus became a political process, for which the Marxist philosophy provided the essential guidelines.<sup>93</sup>

Butler's rejection of modernism and History (or the materialist perception of world progress) was not simply a rejection for its own sake or because, as has been suggested by his adversaries, he felt these philosophical positions threatened his own position of privilege in a unique social order. His antagonism to modernism and History has much deeper metaphysical roots. Both struck at the core of his passionately held beliefs in a personal redemption and the sacramental life of the Church to effect the mystical union. His rejection of both modernism and History is thus a rejection in favour of his own ontogenetic position consisting of a homogeneous, immutable and eternal metaphysics. In "The Development of a National Character" he writes:

The process of civilization, it seems to me, is precisely that: the unending struggle of the finite to reach the condition of infinity, the hunger of the universal for a particular form. *Incarnatus est.*<sup>94</sup>

Notwithstanding Butler's preoccupations with the numinous in his poems from the mid-1960s until his final major work in 1987, his gaze became ever more clearly focussed on the African milieu impinging itself on his consciousness during this period. The 'dreaming spires' of Oxford made way for the Cradock mountains and the South African landscape. His cultural projects display this same evolutionary trajectory. Whereas in 1959 he had edited an

influential poetry anthology, *A Book of South African Verse*, in which he declared poetry to be "...an educated man's affair", subsequent editorial projects would reveal to what extent he had shifted his position. Although his 1979 anthology (co-edited with Chris Mann), *A New Book of South African Verse*, reflected a wider range of editorial selection than the earlier anthology, it nonetheless still continued to promote the approved inheritance of a traditional liberal-humanist sensibility. Not only did the anthology lay itself open to a charge by critics of an editorial bias against certain styles and themes, but it also appeared to lack a demographic balance. His immersion in the research of local English culture and history for his 1969 and 1974 publications, *When Boys Were Men* and *The 1820 Settlers: An Illustrated Commentary*, ironically sharpened his focus on the realities of a far wider imagined community of all South Africans. The two 1988 publications, *Out of the African Ark* and *The Magic Tree*, showed to what extent his thought had evolved over a thirty year period. *Out of the African Ark* is a celebration not only of the sounds, shapes and colours of Africa which ceased, now, to be "artless" to him; it is also a celebration of the cultural richness and diversity of South African society. Drawing on an eclectic combination of black, English and Afrikaans writers amongst whom are Chimsoro, Pringle, Mandishona, Mtshali, wa Kabika, Opperman, Awooner, Zimunya, Kariara and Daniel Kunene, traditional Khoikhoi, San, English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Zulu and Shona stories are given great prominence in the attempted construction of a widely-represented collective South African cultural legacy.

Published in collaboration with Jeff Opland in the same year as *Out of the African Ark*, *The Magic Tree* (1988) is a widely representative collection of narrative poems, despite Butler's observation in the Introduction that the anthology

sought not to be representative or all-inclusive. The diverse voices here speak with the “simple openness” alluded to by Butler in his 1959 anthology. However, there is no longer a ‘bourgeois’ suggestion of the poetry being “an educated man’s affair”. Beginning with a prelude on southern Africa before the European voyages of discovery, the first section of the anthology attempts to give graphic descriptions by various writers such as Chidyausiku, Fairbridge, Samson and Mazani of the lifestyles of the San, Khoikhoi and various indigenous black peoples who inhabited the sub-continent. Oral tradition is given great prominence in the second section as well as those stories which are about basic human emotions written by poets such as Scully, Slater, Van den Heever, Bereng, Huna, Mtshali and H. I. E. Dhlomo. The third and fourth sections present stories drawn from history by poets as diverse as Kipling, Opperman, Mqhayi, Jolobi, Livingstone, Plomer and Matshikiza, whilst the two concluding sections deal with “...insights into the everyday lives of ordinary people” and the burning questions of politics where the ‘radical’ voices of poets such as Gwala, Serote, Sepamla and wa Nthodi are given circulation in a South Africa still under an apartheid regime.

Butler’s and Opland’s comment in the Introduction to the volume sets its tone:

The history and way of life of the people of this country contain elements proud and glorious, and elements tragic and shameful. We have not sought to avoid the latter, but have included poems expressing pride as well as anger, despair as well as hope. We conclude the anthology with a selection of poems in which the poets address the racial diversity of the country, the clashes and tensions between representatives of various cultures as well as the opportunities for peaceful exchange and assimilation.<sup>95</sup>

Significantly, the liberal-humanist hope of dialogue as opposed to praxis is still proposed as a means of South Africa successfully negotiating its divisive and violent history. In the light of subsequent political and historical developments in

the 1990s, the political view entertained was not unrealistic but, in fact, highly prophetic of a new democratic society which would emerge through the Codesa negotiations and the 1994 Constitution. No longer was equality to be found only “...in the fragile constitution of a verse”. In drawing an analogy between eastern European voices articulating their concerns in a period of political suppression and those of South Africa in a similarly turbulent political dispensation, Chapman highlights the identification by several poets,

...including Guy Butler, Lionel Abrahams and Stephen Watson of poetry as civic and moral communication: the aesthetic being consonant with the weight of the matter.  
In his subsequent poetry as well as in his editorial projects and translations, Butler himself put into circulation many voices that speak simply, boldly, and publicly.<sup>96</sup>

In responding to African immediacies the simple, bold, and public positions taken by Butler in his own later poetry as well as in his editorial projects will be seen also to characterise his approach to the various cultural projects in which he was engaged over a forty year period. A description and assessment of these projects is the subject of the final chapter of this study. The overview should help us further to place in critical perspective the plays, poetry, and the various critical and autobiographical comments to which I have referred.



## CHAPTER THREE

### CULTURAL PROJECTS

#### Inside and Outside the Whale

...the fact is that being inside a whale is very comfortable, cosy, homelike thought. The historical Jonah, if he can be so called was glad enough to escape, but in imagination, in day-dream, countless people have envied him. It is, of course, quite obvious why. The whale's belly is simply a womb big enough for an adult. There you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter *what* happens. A storm that would sink all the battleships in the world would hardly reach you as an echo.... [The writer] ... feels no impulse to alter or control the process that he is undergoing. He has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, *accepting*.

It will be seen what this amounts to. It is a species of quietism, implying complete unbelief or else a degree of belief amounting to mysticism...  
...seemingly there is nothing left but quietism – robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it. Get inside the whale – or rather, admit that you are inside the whale (for you *are*, of course). Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it.

George Orwell. *Inside the Whale* 1940

Outside the whale the writer is obliged to accept that he (or she) is part of the crowd, part of the ocean, part of the storm, so that objectivity becomes a great dream, like perfection, an unattainable goal for which one must struggle in spite of the impossibility of success. Outside the whale is the world of Samuel Beckett's famous formula: I can't go on, I'll go on.

Salman Rushdie. "Outside the Whale" 1991

...no experience that is interpreted or reflected on can be characterized as immediate, just as no critic or interpreter can be entirely believed if he or she claims to have achieved an Archimedean perspective that is subject neither to history nor to a social setting.

Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism* 1994

A description and assessment of Butler's cultural projects is the subject of the last chapter of this study. My entry point is the observation of the concluding sections of the previous chapter: Butler's shift from Europe to Africa; to a European/African re-incarnation; to a simple, honest recognition of new insights, forms, imagery and style that is both oral (African) and written (Western); or to the collapse of such binaries: to be inside or outside the whale. The final chapter suggests that - despite the 'Marxist' versus 'liberal' criticism to which Butler was subjected in the previous two decades - Guy Butler was always both inside and outside the whale. His commitment to his public projects (his ability to make things work) in an undeniably divided South Africa deserved Nelson Mandela's understated but quite profound accolade: "He has done a good job. He has done his duty. His ancestors will be proud of him".

Butler's cultural projects and various critics' interpretations of his earlier theories about an English-speaking South African culture seem to define him at one moment as the purveyor of a reactionary and outmoded Arnoldian colonial mentality - a mentality seeking sanctuary in the safe regions of a visceral prison within the whale - and at another moment as a figure outside the whale: one committed passionately and totally to the temporality of the South African socio-political milieu.

Notwithstanding Rushdie's assertion that modern reality is actually

...whaleless, this world without quiet corners [where] there can be no easy escapes from history, from hullabaloo, from terrible, unquiet fuss...' <sup>1</sup>

the complexity of Butler's thought on culture theory is best understood by using the now-famous Orwellian image of the writer who, at times, chooses detachment, passivity, and isolation inside the whale and, at other times, chooses to engage actively the social currents swilling around outside the whale.

Perplexingly, Butler sits somewhere outside the neat categories posited by either Orwell or Rushdie. Despite the fact that his drama, poetry and prose writings tend to display the "...degree of belief amounting to mysticism" and that he himself was very conscious of his privileged position as a white South African placed inside the whale by the structures of colonialism and, later, apartheid, he could not be fairly categorized as one who willingly and consciously performed the "essential Jonah act" of allowing himself to be ingested by a system he deplored, "...remaining passive, *accepting*."

There are repeated attempts by Butler to move outside the whale and escape the tyranny of his history:

...[The South African writer]...can say: "I have European origins, but am committed to Africa, here, to this most original, unholy, unjust chaos. I am part of this, as well as being part of the European mess. I cannot clarify either or begin to control or synthesise them until at least part of me is above and outside both. Before I write I must get above or outside, or I shall make confusion worse confounded. How shall I get above or out?"<sup>2</sup>

Whilst they are undeniably conscious and genuine attempts, it is also true to say that they are not always consistent. Edward Said's comments about the inability of any poet or writer to claim an "Archimedean perspective" is most applicable in Butler's case. We have to see Butler as one whose experiences were not "immediate" and who was subject not only to 'history' but also to the most complicated of social settings.

Mindful of his position as a white South African writer with a colonial inheritance Butler's writings on cultural theory and his social projects display a constant and consistent attempt to escape from this visceral prison and become

...part of the crowd, part of the ocean, part of the storm.

Whilst Butler could never be categorized as an 'activist' writer, his articles, essays, and lectures in the realm of culture theory and his concrete projects in the practical realm all point to a willingness to engage in the strongest censure of a political system which he despised and openly denounced in his writings.

Mike Kirkwood and Elaine Williams, Butler's two most stringent critics in the field of culture theory, see his writings as being dominated by an ethical rationalization of colonialism. For Kirkwood, in particular, nothing short of a complete overturning of the class system would suffice and he saw Butler's criticism of National Party policies as feeble and ineffectual attempts by a liberal in colonial clothing to change the system from within. Both Kirkwood and Williams were, of course, writing from the perspectives of Marxist/materialist discourse in the 1970s and 1980s when such discourse was seldom challenged and reigned supreme. The demise of the USSR and her satellite states in the 1990s would reveal to what extent Marxist social theory had feet of clay and would open to closer scrutiny previously unchallenged arguments from the materialist perspective.

Butler's cultural narrative, as I shall argue, is not one of separation but of integration. For Butler South African identity was too varied to be a unitary and homogeneous thing. Rather than seeing South African culture as a unitary identity, he tended to see the whole as a complex but not reductively unified one. Where critics such as Williams and Kirkwood chose to see South Africa in terms of a linear and subsuming historiography, Butler was seeing it as an intricate nexus of intersecting cultural strands requiring complex and contrapuntal solutions amongst which was his constant attempt to forge synthesis between Apollo and Dionysus, Europe and Africa, coloniser and colonised.

A second serious limitation of Butler's critics is their inability to place his cultural writings and projects in context. Butler's work has to be seen as a response to the politics of post-1960 Republican South Africa where National Party policies were threatening the English liberal project of economic and cultural expansion, a process seen by many to foreshadow the emergence of a vibrant, unified South African society. Commenting on the succession of Dr H. F. Verwoerd as Prime Minister on the death of J. G. Strijdom in 1958, Butler observes that 1959 saw

...many fresh assaults on possible growing points of liberalism and the attack on the open universities by the Separate Universities Bill which was to break the affiliation between Rhodes and Fort Hare.<sup>3</sup>

His primary concern in the two decades between 1960 and 1980 would be to resist what he perceived to be growing attempts by the Afrikaner Nationalist Party at political and cultural hegemony. Black political aspirations had been broken – or so it then seemed – by the brutal police repressions of Cato Manor, Langa, and Sharpeville and the passing of immobilising legislation such as the Riotous Assemblies Act, the Ninety Days Detention Act and Suppression of Communism Act. And it now seemed to Butler that white opposition politics was the National Party's next target. Given Gramsci's trenchant observation that cultural hegemony can best be established and maintained through the consent of the dominated, it is logical that Butler would use all the amassed resources of the 'cultural bank' at his disposal to thwart what he perceived to be the hegemonic aims of the National Party. It is apparent from his essays and newspaper articles that his immediate objectives were to ensure the survival of the English language and the English South African cultural identity, which he saw as being placed under the most extreme threat. Butler's vision was, however, not sectarian. As will be

seen, there was a full perception on his part that the power of English as a world language and the antiquity and durability of English democratic principles placed an inalienable obligation on the English-speaking South African to fight for the rights of the disenfranchised. Consequently there appear in his essays and lectures on cultural theory frequent exhortations to the English-speaking South African to get involved in the political debate and fight for the rights of the marginalised sections of the South African community.

Butler's earliest and, possibly, one of his most important contributions to the synthesizing process of South African culture was his promotion of African and South African literature. Writings from the Centre or metropolis were axiomatically privileged over writings from the margins no matter how meritorious or creative these latter from the 'colonies' might be. Against the prevalent academic practices of his time Butler promoted the values of indigenous South African literature and, as early as 1949, he was lecturing to Transvaal schoolteachers on the difficulties of teaching a non-indigenous literature. When he was given the Chair of English at Rhodes University in 1954, one of Butler's first acts was to introduce South African works in English into the syllabus. As early as 1954 Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and Pauline Smith's *The Little Karoo* first made their appearance on the English syllabus at Rhodes University.

Butler played a leading part in helping to set up a conference of writers, editors, publishers, and university teachers of English, held from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1956 at the University of the Witwatersrand, to discuss the question of South African literature in education. He considered it a "milestone in the development of South African literature in English" for it broached a subject which had received

scant attention from South African universities in general. Butler, however, found it difficult to make any headway on the South African literature front with many of his professional colleagues, most of whom seemed wed to an almost sacred canon of the Great Tradition as expounded by F. R. Leavis. The only Head of an English Department at the Witwatersrand Conference who supported the cause of some South African literature in academia was Guy Haworth of the University of Cape Town who, ironically, was not South African but Australian. From records of the proceedings it seems, though, that he went too far in proposing a syllabus on South African literature which immediately gave ammunition to the Leavisites and the adherents of the Practical Criticism school to attack proposals that favoured indigenous literature. Butler records his bitter disappointment at the outcome of the Conference:

My concern that a child's geographical and historical environment should be present in some of the poems and the stories studied at school was dismissed....<sup>4</sup>

Despite the difficulties experienced with other Heads of Department and also with his own faculty members who tended not to take South African literature too seriously, Butler persevered with the promotion of South African literature entirely on his own, it seems, at this stage. He included seminal South African works in the Rhodes University English Department syllabus. Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and Pauline Smith's *The Little Karoo*, both set some years earlier, became fairly entrenched. Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, first published in 1948, was set in 1960 and 1961; Laurens van der Post's *Venture into the Interior* (1952) was set in 1953; Herman Charles Bosman's *Mafeking Road* (1947) was set in 1955; and works about Africa – Joyce Cary's *Aissa Saved* (1932) in 1954, 1955, 1956 and 1961; and *Mister Johnson* (1939) in 1957, 1958,

and 1959 – were all added to the Rhodes syllabus not, it appears from staff notes, without the odd raised eyebrow:

...it was uphill work. Even when one could advocate the inclusion of a South African work on its sheer merit, one had to persuade colleagues to provide the space and time for it by sacrificing some masterpiece from a long-established, almost sacred canon.<sup>5</sup>

Butler wryly observes that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) – also added to the list (1954; 1955; 1959; 1962) – encountered less resistance since Conrad was very much a part of the revered canon.

Apart from the odd foray into South African literature by Cape Town University it was Rhodes University alone, under the direction of Butler, which promoted the serious study of indigenous South African and African English writing, at least until 1969 when the Institute for the Study of English in Africa under the direction of Sydney Clouts, but originally conceived and established by Butler himself, organised a highly successful conference in Grahamstown for the English Academy of Southern Africa. It was entitled "South African Writing in English and its Place in School and University" and took place from 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> July that year.

This time, great prominence was given to indigenous English poetry. *Unisa English Studies* produced a special edition in September 1970 which was devoted to poems by Guy Butler, Douglas Livingstone, Anne Welsh, Michael Macnamara, Perseus Adams, Sydney Clouts, and Ruth Miller. At the Conference the poems were read by the poets themselves, apart from Anne Welsh who was in England and Ruth Miller who had recently died of cancer. Further printed exposure to the proceedings of this important conference on South African literature was recorded



in Rhodes University's *English Studies in Africa* (later *English in Africa*) series, another Butler initiative, in March 1970. The circulation of these two influential journals in the world of academe did much to enhance the reputation, and thus foster the acceptance, of indigenous English studies in South African universities and schools. However, ground gained by the 'progressives', represented by Butler, did not come easily. The 'conservatives', led by the articulate Philip Segal, Professor of English at the University of the Witwatersrand, advanced persuasive arguments for keeping South African English literature out of the canon. To emphasize South African literature, in his opinion, would be to

...assert a provincial and pointless pseudo-nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

Despite Segal's eloquence in favour of retaining an exclusive focus on metropolitan riches, the protagonists for the acceptance of South African literature were more successful at the 1969 Grahamstown conference than they had been at the Witwatersrand in 1956. Butler again led the way in 1972, some five years before the general university acceptance at the Cape Town conference in 1977, with Rhodes University offering South African literature as a Paper in the English III course and also as an elected offering at Honours level. His philosophy was not exclusivity but inclusivity. The study of South African English literature should stand alongside works of the accepted metropolitan canon – not replace them. On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1972 he was able to write with some sense of triumph to William Plomer:

We have at last had the courage of our convictions, and started teaching South African Literature in our B.A. English course – an optional paper in the third year, which some sixty students out of ninety chose to do.

I am handling early diaries and South African poetry up to Campbell. Yesterday I took a seminar at which a bright 18 year-old lass gave a critical appreciation of your "Transvaal Morning". She did it extremely well. I am sure it would have warmed your heart to hear her gay yet deferential response to the words and to the idea itself. She got the point all right.

In the fourth year (Honours) we offer a paper called African Writing in English – a continental survey of mainly black writers, although we have included Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Cary's *Mister Johnson* "if only for the record".<sup>7</sup>

The following year (1973) Butler went a step further by introducing "African Literature in English" as a special Honours course and listing it in the University Calendar. He describes the reactions that followed this move:

These moves caused a flutter in the literary and academic dovecotes. Writers welcomed them....  
...it is ironic that Natal, once the bastion of Leavisites, is now the most hospitable to the Africanists. Perhaps the salvation-through-literature spirit has survived there: English Literature as moral pabulum – not for mother-tongue speakers only, but for all.<sup>8</sup>

In 1977 for the first time a national conference of university English teachers, held at the University of Cape Town, accepted the fact of South African literature into their curricula. The list of 'approved' South African writers now included Olive Schreiner, William Plomer, Pauline Smith, Herman Charles Bosman, Thomas Pringle, Roy Campbell, and Ruth Miller as their work was seen to be "...of sufficient complexity and agreed artistic achievement". The move was likened, by Jack Cope, to the situation in the United States

...where the locals have managed to throw off British colonialism and have a culture of their own.<sup>9</sup>

In subsequent years this euphoria would, unfortunately, lead to an over-emphasis on the local at the expense of the international and precipitate a distortion at the opposite end of the literary spectrum. Laurence Wright observes that in subsequent years Butler became

...somewhat dismayed to see wholesale trashing of the classical curriculum in the name of Africanising reform or low-grade access to world literature in English.... He saw no reason to relinquish the Western heritage in favour of African exclusivism...the synthesis he worked for [was] neither racialist nor nationalist, but human.<sup>10</sup>

What emerges clearly from Butler's position in these early debates on the promotion of an indigenous South African literature are three salient points. The first is that Butler reveals himself to be the first important academic and the first notable writer and poet of English origin to embrace unquestioningly the South African sub-continent as his home and destiny and to take South African literature seriously. He was not content, as was the case with other English liberal-humanist writers of his time, to see South African interests as satellite and thus inferior to those of the London metropole. For him, the experiences of the Karoo son were every bit as valid as – if not more so than – those imbibed beneath the 'dreaming spires' of Oxford. There is no subservience of place for him, no repudiation of the margins at the expense of the centre. He had a great love of South African literature in English, Afrikaans, and whatever African language writing was accessible in translation. His passion for South African literature was denigrated by many other South African academics who had not managed to keep one foot out of Europe, and was described somewhat disparagingly as a "passion for local colour". Equal to the task, he responded with barbed remarks concerning a "culture by correspondence course". The fact that an indigenous South African literature is taken as seriously as it is today, not only by South Africans themselves but also by academics worldwide who have not hesitated to confer the highest awards such as Nobel Prizes for literature on South Africans, is in very great measure accountable to Butler's early vision and persistence in demanding the respect for indigenous literature which he felt was its due.

The second matter of significance was the inclusiveness of Butler's vision. English literature was there to be enjoyed by all. Whilst, from present perspectives, there may appear to be little that is startling about this standpoint, placed in the

context of National Party rule in the 'dead sixties' and 'monolithic seventies' it was a revolutionary thought. The Bantu Education Act (1953), brainchild of Dr H. F. Verwoerd, with its destruction of the Mission School system in South Africa and its deliberate strategy of keeping black South Africans subservient by allowing them only the most inferior education, was in place. To suggest that black South Africans be allowed access to the 'riches' of a sophisticated and, possibly, liberating body of literature at this time was viewed as nothing short of scandalous by the Afrikaans press who castigated Butler for his opinions.<sup>11</sup> Butler's response to their criticisms was to condemn, in the most unequivocal terms, an opprobrious political system.<sup>12</sup>

A third salient feature of the entire debate on the merits of indigenous literature is the extent to which Butler was acutely self-conscious of the fact that, in purely cognitive terms, a colonisation process had taken place within his own consciousness and it was a mental subjugation he was intent on decolonising. He was no conscious protagonist of Western supremacist thinking. During his first sojourn in Europe shortly after the Second World War he had struggled to find himself "...on Europe's maps". In his poem "Home Thoughts" written at this time he expresses a restless desire to return to Africa, but it is seen as an Africa of

...loveless, shallow...artless shapes  
Where no ghosts glamorize the recent graves.

Butler's immediate post-war consciousness was still conditioned by the myths and symbols of Europe, besides which Africa appeared "artless" and without any glamorous mythical attraction for the serious writer. However, he came to realise that there are

...at least two Africas: the geographical land mass, and the symbolical Africa inside us<sup>13</sup>

and observed that his early writings as illustrated in "Home Thoughts" are a clear indication of the degree to which his mind

...had been "colonised" by English literature and the Western tradition.<sup>14</sup>

It is a feature of Butler's thinking that he always maintains the most scrupulous integrity. The discovery of any subconscious distortions perceived by him to be undesirable in his thinking or writing are always accompanied by the necessary means of expiation. The solution, as Butler saw it, was to take a conscious leap outside the whale and allow himself to be engaged by the swilling tides of an Africa to which he was fully committed.

If the indigenous literature debate was a contentious matter between 1950 and 1977, the issue of language, and specifically the use of English, was – and indeed continues to be – a site of the most intense emotive struggle. Perhaps nowhere more so than in South Africa do we find language loaded with political connotations. Advocate George Bizos narrates how, at the Steve Biko inquest, Sydney Kentridge S. C. made significant use of his choice of language by insisting on asking his questions in English. When asked by the magistrate what his authority was, Kentridge explained:

Let me say at once that I am quite capable of cross-examining [this witness] in Afrikaans. I do not choose to do so.<sup>15</sup>

The chorus of approval from the packed court made it quite clear that at least the majority of the audience understood Kentridge's decision as an expression of solidarity with the nation-wide protest against the compulsory use of Afrikaans in black schools. Writing in 1983 Mphahlele observed that black writers were using

English not only as a political statement (against Afrikaans), but also as an act of faith that there was an audience out there which was constantly tuning in to their literary creations.

Butler's view of English as language was foremost a utilitarian one. He did not see the language as linked to the strata of race and class. His writing on the subject displays a great awareness of the masses of South Africans for whom it would be a second language, performing the function of a 'lingua franca':

The teaching of English as second language was on my conscience from the start. The primary aim for most South African children should be English for practical use, to help earn one's daily bread, to fulfil the functions of a *lingua franca*.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst he most often perceives language, and more particularly English, as an instrument solely for communication he is, nonetheless, very alert to the emotional import that comes with language when he recalls the cry of the nineteenth-century nationalist movements in Europe in the title of his 1974 public lecture at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg – "The Language of the Conqueror on the Lips of the Conquered is the Language of Slaves". He is also conscious of the fact that a language struggle is likely to have important political aspects not the least of which is territorial. Speaking from 'outside the whale' he writes disapprovingly:

The policy of apartheid is a characteristically European attempt to establish that satisfactory equation between language spoken and land occupied.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the issue of language will frequently be tied to the issues of political and economic justice:

The African community in the Republic can present an impressive solidarity;...[there] is a profound substratum of common African values and traditions, the bond of a common military defeat and, subsequently, economic exploitation by the white man; and the bond of common aspirations for freedom, dignity, and a juster share of this world's goods.<sup>18</sup>

Spoken and written in 1974, these words have a prophetic ring about them in the light of the Soweto uprisings which in 1976 would shake the South African political establishment.

Despite these very accurate perceptions of the links forged between language, land and culture through local political circumstances Butler, more frequently than not, seems to suggest that there is not *necessarily* a pre-conditional link between culture and language:

While I insisted, and still insist, that languages and cultures do differ, I also insisted that, within a given country, they influence each other, and produce common loyalties and sentiments....Language is only a fraction of a culture. We can and do talk quite sensibly of European or Western culture, although Europe contains many powerful sub-cultures and dozens of different languages. African culture already is and will be something like that.<sup>19</sup>

It must be observed, however, that there are occasional inconsistent lapses from Butler's predominantly utilitarian perception of language. In "The Language of the Land" he notes that

...it is not so much a question of transmitting a language, but **an ethos, a system of values.**"<sup>20</sup> [my emphasis]

and again

...I felt that my subject, English, was not merely an important practical instrument to be made available to my fellow countrymen, but that it had a creative, artistic, African future....<sup>21</sup>

The suggestion here is that Butler does not see language as being exclusively utilitarian and that it can, indeed, have certain ideological moorings, though to what degree is not made explicit. His earlier statement that language forms only a fractional part of culture is, perhaps, indicative that he did not see language as being fully coterminous with culture.

Lest we think that Butler may have strayed into thinking along racial or ethnic lines, and that all black African writers would see the situation vastly differently from him, it is worth recalling the fierce debate which has raged amongst African theorists on this issue. Butler's position is not very different from the views of Chidi Amuta, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka who insist that African literature written in European languages is legitimate and who propose a functionalist approach to the language question in Africa. Ranged against them are Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Obi Wali and Oyekan Owomoyela who explore the connection between language and cultural identity. Owomoyela<sup>22</sup> posits that cultures have links to specific languages. He argues a case for discourses in African languages and critiques the functionalist approach to the language question in Africa. Where the functionalists' view is that language is merely a tool, Owomoyela, Obi Wali, and Ngugi suggest that language is necessarily ideologically loaded. Amuta observes that the proponents of linguistic indigenization have attempted to find "ideological mooring" in the fact that the European languages were an integral part of the arsenal of colonialism while African languages are deemed to have retained the reservoir of pre-colonial values and institutions seen to stand in antithetical opposition to imperialism.

Against Amuta's argument, and Butler's for that matter, that the use of European languages ensures communication between hitherto linguistically disparate and thus exclusive groups thereby fostering unity, Owomoyela states, not very convincingly, that in Africa European languages are vertically divisive. In his review of Owomoyela's work *Ojwan'g*<sup>23</sup>, however, points out that there is another motive for his repudiation of European languages. His argument in favour of discourses in African languages is predicated on the idea that the success of



imperialism is dependent upon

...surveillance [as] an instrument of subjection and control

and hence the need for Africans to "...maintain a sphere of privacy."<sup>24</sup> As has been the case with most people advocating English as a 'lingua franca' or 'world contact language', it seems that Butler, along with these others, grossly over-estimated the number of English speakers worldwide. Richard Bailey points out that, even if we take the most generous estimates of the number of English-users worldwide as being a billion, four fifths of the world's population remains totally unaffected by the language. Thus not even one in every five people worldwide uses English. He describes English as

...the language of the powerful few at the expense of the powerless many....[However] ...we can be comforted that many of these powerless people believe that English provides a way out of poverty, but it is not inevitable that they will continue to think so until everyone enters the circles of English.<sup>25</sup>

Writing on the topic mainly in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s before any serious scholarship had been accomplished in this field, and preceding the Chomskian linguistic revolution by some two decades, Butler could be forgiven for mistaken assumptions in a field little explored in his time.

It seems that the more moderate approach to the functionalism of language has predominated in Africa in general and in South Africa in particular. Whilst the 1994 Constitution has enshrined eleven official languages with the full rights as applicable under the Constitution, English has emerged as the official language of communication in the public administration, Parliament, and the judiciary where the Minister of Justice, Penuell Meduna, announced in October 2000 that English would be the only language of record in the law courts. What Butler foresaw

would eventually happen has materialised. Because of its functionalism in global, social, economic and political intercourse, and also because of its potential to unite disparate linguistic groups in a part of the African sub-continent where no single language predominates, English has become the lingua franca in South Africa.

But it was not solely for its linguistic expediency that Butler promoted the use of the English language; he genuinely believed that it could unite South Africans:

It seems to me that the cultural role of English – caught between two increasingly violent and exclusive nationalisms – is to keep on stating, with patience and courage, that our common humanity can unite us.<sup>26</sup>

Equally as important is the notion that it could also bring about a more just and equitable dispensation:

The basis of this role is humble; to accept our responsibilities as bearers of a contact language seriously: to make the knowledge of the world available to all our countrymen of whatever race, and to provide dedicated teachers and ample funds for this task.<sup>27</sup>

Largely as a result of Butler's insistence that there should be no interference with the spread of standard English since, badly taught, it would reduce the language to a "barbaric dialect", Elaine Williams maintains that language is never seen, by Butler

...as the product of the anonymous and collective labour of successive generations, but a possession of a particular class fraction which holds it out as a gift.<sup>28</sup>

Quoting Bourdieu she maintains that, for Butler, the approved relation to language is one that

...presupposes at every point the whole context of legitimate culture and no other context.<sup>29</sup>

That such a sweeping statement about the perceived legitimacy of language use can be predicated upon Butler's support for the use of standard English is astounding, to say the least. 'Standardisation' is every bit as vexing and contentious an issue now as it was some thirty years ago when Butler broached the topic. Williams fails to see the complexity of the issue; she attacks Butler for promoting the use of standard English and insisting upon a certain established standard of morphology and syntax. Just how problematic the debate is can be gauged from the fact that academics such as Makoni (1992), Moyo (1994), and Wright (1996) argue against standardisation whereas Van der Walt (1998) and Parakrama (1995) argue forcibly in favour of it. Language is still now, as it was then, 'a site of struggle'.

Butler certainly believed that there would be a metamorphosis of the English language when used in Africa. He observes a hybridization of cultures and the concomitant 'Africanisation' of language:

English are being Afrikanerised, Afrikaners Anglicised, Africans Westernised, and everyone Africanised.<sup>30</sup>

It appears that he was prepared to allow for a strategic widening of the acceptable range of variation within the standard, fully realising that it might lead to postcolonial hybridity-as-conflict in the margins upon the metropolitan centre. The degree to which this could be done was the perplexing question:

[I] ...was committed to experiencing Africa's sense data and converting its multifarious living and cultural forms into art; and as our medium was the English language, that meant establishing verbal presences in an alien language sometimes inadequate to the task. This was one of Clouts's main concerns, and at one time he felt it could only be done by creating a new, specifically African, language.<sup>31</sup>

Butler, it seems, was prepared to see the indigenisation of the 'ethos' and 'traditions' associated with English as imported from the centre. Despite his preparedness to see the margins alter the language received from the centre, he was anxious to preserve a particular form of the language as well as the cultural milieu which the language is seen to embody - an attitude somewhat critically alluded to by Njabulo S. Ndebele as "...prescriptive open-mindedness."<sup>32</sup> Where are the limits to be drawn with language? Even if we do, in this instance, agree with Ndebele it should not preclude us from seeing that what we might deem today as occasional aberrations in Butler's thinking on language and cultural theory occur more through his desire to share the privileges of education, material resources, and a world contact language with his fellow South Africans than through any ulterior desire proposing a cultural and linguistic sectarianism as its goal.

It was precisely these vexing problems linked to language which preoccupied Butler in the 1960s. In 1961 at a South African Conference of English Educators held in Cape Town, he drew attention to the need for a special institute for the study of English in Africa, specifically with regard to second-language speakers. He had anticipated that the University of Cape Town, which already possessed a flourishing linguistics department that was focused on Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic language studies, would eagerly adopt this project. The opportunity was passed over by the University of Cape Town and this induced Butler to set up a special linguistics and English language section within the Rhodes English Department – one of the first such provisions for special language study in the use of English in South Africa. Coinciding with the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of Rhodes University, the establishment of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA) was announced in July 1964. The first Director was

Dr W. R. G. Branford with Butler as Chairman of its board of management. By 1972 Butler felt that the linguistics section of the English Department at Rhodes University deserved the status of a separate Department of Linguistics. Dr W. R. G. Branford was appointed to its first Chair.

Under Professor Branford's direction, the initial thrust of the Institute in 1964 was lexicography. This naturally led to a Dictionary Unit which produced *A Dictionary of South African English*, edited by Dr Jean Branford. In a rapidly changing environment where, inter alia, the impact of Dutch, Afrikaans, Malay, Khoikhoi, San, Nguni and Sotho cultures on the English language has impelled the evolution of a peculiarly South African vocabulary, the Dictionary has been so successful and been so much in demand that it has now run to four editions. A second very important focus for the Institute, as far as Butler was concerned, was the research and work which could be undertaken in the 'lingua franca' field of English as a language to non-mother tongue speakers. Butler noted that research in this most important field had been curtailed by two constraints: expertise and finance. The appointment of Professor Lanham, an expert in the field of non mother-tongue studies, eliminated the first constraint, and the financial support of the Molteno Trust in 1973 removed the second. This highly successful combination resulted in the formulation of the Molteno Project – a project specifically designed to research and implement, if possible, the most effective transmission of English to non mother-tongue speakers.

Through extensive research in the Molteno Project the Institute for the Study of English in Africa was able to establish that the teaching of English to non mother-tongue learners was educationally more effective if learners were educated

for the first three years of schooling initially in their mother tongue. Such research has been of inestimable value to educators in planning language development programmes for children at the Pre-Primary and Foundation Phase (Grades 1, 2 and 3) levels of education. The Molteno Project's primary school English Language courses, *Breakthrough to Literacy* and *Bridge to English*, have revolutionised the teaching of literacy to black schoolchildren in South Africa, most of whom are non mother-tongue learners of the English language. It is interesting that the design of these language courses employed a different approach from the teacher-dominated education process of former years. Its approach is very much learner-centred, foreshadowing the revolutionary Outcomes Based Education approach which was to find wider currency in the South African Education system from 1997 onwards. The Molteno Project is the most extensive research and implementation initiative in the field of language learning in black primary schools in South Africa. Such was its success that, in 1984, it was mandated by the Department of Education and Training to implement its *Breakthrough to Literacy* programme in four territories comprising some 1400 schools. In 1986 the BP Teacher Education Unit was established in the Molteno Project offices in Braamfontein. By the end of 2001 more than 20 000 teachers had been trained by Molteno Project personnel and a total of 10 000 classes established using Molteno Project learning strategies. The Project's widespread success in South Africa led to its favourable reception in other parts of Africa where both the Namibian Government (1994) and the Zambian Government (1996) contracted the services of the Molteno Project. Butler's vision of a language for all, united in a common humanity, seems indeed to have taken root.

It was not only in the transmission of second language to Primary school children that the Molteno Project and ISEA were successful. ISEA also formed one

of the first Adult Literacy Units in South Africa. The Rhodes Workers' School, which began on a limited scale by offering service personnel at Rhodes University the Campus English Programme and Xhosa Literacy at Level 1, has developed into the Ukhukhula Project with classes in adult literacy each Monday and Wednesday evening expanding up to Level 3 which leads to Independent Examinations Board (IEB) qualifications. In addition to this programme, an amplified programme is run by ISEA in the Grahamstown Community Learning Centre and consists of a 'Formal Strand' leading to IEB qualifications as well as a 'Non-Formal Strand' with weekly classes in Vocational Education and Life Skills. This encompasses topics in primary health care, small business development, conducting personal finances, hobbies, market-gardening, and first-aid.

The Adult Literacy Programme of ISEA and the Molteno Project have also given rise to the development of a series of *Adult Basic Readers* in the official South African languages for the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Levels 1 to 4. A modular ABET *Foundation Programme* to achieve grass roots access to formal career-path training in the manufacturing sector is also being developed. The fact that literacy was, and is, being fostered in languages other than English is indicative of a non-sectarian, inclusive philosophy being implemented by the Institute. In 1987 Butler was able to comment with much validity:

...I believe that the Molteno Project alone justifies the establishment of the Institute.<sup>33</sup>

Other research and development programmes currently being undertaken by ISEA include an investigation into the intelligibility and comprehensibility of spoken English in South Africa and the production of Shakespeare texts [the *MacMillan Communicative Shakespeare Series*] for a unitary South African education system.

Accessibility of the English language to the wider community has also been kept in mind with ISEA's development of an integrated English Literature course for the lower secondary phase (now the Senior Phase of the new General Education and Training [GET] band) of schooling. An educational radio programme for Community Radio – the most accessible form of media for the masses – has also been developed.

At a more advanced level of language studies, the Institute first produced the journal *English in Africa* in 1974. Providing a forum for the study of African literature in English it is published twice yearly in May and October. In-depth research papers and reviews on all aspects of English writing in Africa, as well as the other literatures of Africa, including oral traditions, are encouraged by its editorial policy. Besides publication of the journal twice yearly, an extensive list of other publications has been produced under its auspices. Of interest has been the attempt to give currency to the unknown writings of several black South African writers such as Sol T. Plaatje ( *Selected Shorter Writings*), R. R. R. Dhlomo ( *20 Short Stories*), and Seithlamo Motsapi's first collection of poetry ( *Earthstepper the ocean is very shallow*).

It was also only a matter of time before Butler established a poetry journal in 1965 under the auspices of ISEA. The winning of a R400 second prize in the National Poetry Competition provided him with the stimulus and the funding to

...pull down to earth a dream [he] had cherished from the late fifties onwards: to start a poetry journal.<sup>34</sup>

His entire prize money (a fairly substantial sum in 1965) was donated to ISEA for this purpose. Together with Ruth Harnett, Butler co-edited the first issue of



*New Coin*, a poetry journal which would subsequently be issued twice yearly in June and December. The editorial policy was to print poems of achievement and promise. Whether contributors were established poets or unpublished authors was deemed to be immaterial. In addition to this twice yearly journal, *New Coin* also published longer poems in pamphlet form such as Anthony Delius's *Black South Easter* (1966), Butler's own *Ode. On First Seeing Florence* (1968), and, with Purnell Publishers three volumes of poetry: *One Life* (1966) by Sydney Clouts, *Set in Brightness* (1968) by Anne Welsh, and *In Praise of Night* (1969) by Elias Pater. Additional publications appeared in 1973 and again in 1984: Arthur Nortje's *Lonely against the Light* (1973) and Bruce Hewett's *The Dawn of Song* (1984).

The fact that *One Life* won the Ingrid Jonker Memorial Prize in 1967, and the Olive Schreiner Award in 1968, and that *In Praise of Night* won the Olive Schreiner Award in 1971 is indicative of the high quality of poetry which was being attracted by the journal. Furthermore, it was giving a platform to many South African poets such as Nortje and Mtshali whose voices would otherwise have been silenced by a culturally monolithic political regime. Mtshali, later to become a highly acclaimed poet, was unknown when he submitted his first writings to *New Coin*. Butler recalls his impression when first encountering Mtshali's work:

...I remember our excitement at receiving a poem "New Born Calf" from the then-unknown Oswald Mtshali – one of the first poems submitted by an African. We believed that poems didn't happen, but had to be achieved; that they had qualities which distinguished them from most spontaneous cries of self-pity, anguish and rage, although they could be piteous, anguished, and very angry.<sup>35</sup>

A 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative edition of *New Coin* appeared in 1989 entitled *25/25. Southern African Poetry – Twenty Five Themes over Twenty Five Years: Selected from New Coin Poetry 1965-1989*. Despite the fact that the format of

*New Coin* has been changed several times during its existence over the past thirty five years, it has maintained its original editorial policy and continues to provide a valuable platform for previously unheard South African voices.

The year 1959 saw an intensification of the apartheid system. Ignoring pleas from the British Government to heed the wind of change sweeping across Africa, Verwoerd promulgated a series of restrictive and repressive laws aimed at maintaining the disenfranchisement of South Africans of colour. He segregated the universities, the Extension of University Education Act setting up three University Colleges for blacks, one for 'coloured' peoples, and one for Asians. Industrial legislation was amended to make it impossible for blacks and whites to belong to the same trade union. A new Prisons Act made unauthorised reporting of conditions in prisons illegal, and the state was empowered to hold any suspects incommunicado. This intensification of suppression led to a series of insurrections: riots broke out in Lady Selbourne (outside Pretoria), followed by the first series of riots in Cato Manor on the outskirts of Durban which spread to Pietermaritzburg. These riots would, of course, intensify the following year when the Sharpeville killings would take place and the resulting State of Emergency be declared. Upon pressure from the Commonwealth leaders to modify his policies, the intransigent Dr Verwoerd threatened to leave the Commonwealth. Amidst this political chaos the numbers of emigrants from South Africa swelled enormously. Butler was asked by John Sutherland, editor of the *Evening Post*, to write an article entitled "Why I am not leaving South Africa". This forced him to crystallise his thinking on his place in the African subcontinent and he records:

...it marked a definite stage in my finding a local habitation in South Africa, and more particularly in the Eastern Cape. From then on, periods of overseas study leave, such as that to Holland and Britain in 1961, enriching

as they always were, deepened my sense of commitment to this particular place.<sup>36</sup>

This deepened sense of commitment manifested itself in three ways. The first was to resist, with every means at his disposal, National Party hegemonic ambitions; the second was to develop a sense of belonging and commitment amongst the group of English-speaking South Africans which, it was hoped, would lead on to an awareness and acceptance of their social responsibilities to all South Africans irrespective of their 'race'; the third was to stimulate growth, both cultural and economic, in the relatively impoverished Eastern Cape region.

The 1820 Foundation, the establishment of the National English Literary Museum (NELM), and the institution of the Grahamstown Festival all need to be seen in the context of increasing attempts by the National Party to stamp out 'rival nationalisms' and establish unchallenged political and cultural control. Butler observed somewhat indignantly:

Both our tradition and our language are under open attack....The Englishman, we are informed, will be welcome if he (a) is conservative; (b) identifies himself with the Afrikaner's history, struggle and mission. It seems that the tradition and language established in 1820 are not so securely rooted as we think.<sup>37</sup>

The concentration of his efforts in Grahamstown was very much a reaction, both geographically and symbolically, against the prevailing locus of power. Prior to the Second South African War (1899-1902) Pretoria had been the epicentre of Afrikaner power in the days of Paul Kruger and the two Boer Republics, but the loss of the war and the terms of the Treaty of Vereeniging (1902) altered this dramatically. Victory in the 1948 elections by Malan's National Party meant that, for the first time since 1902, a predominantly Afrikaner party was in power.

Pretoria once again became the hub of the ruling party's administration with the civil service, the diplomatic corps, and the executive authorities all being placed there in large numbers. It lay in the shadow of the Voortrekker Monument, the Air Force Gymnasium, and the Army Base all situated high up on Voortrekkerhoogte – renamed from the original Roberts' Heights in a conscious act of historical erasure. The Voortrekker Monument was an embodiment of the founding myth of the Great Trek. It scarcely mattered that black South Africans had been trekking across South Africa for at least two centuries prior to 1834, or that many English settlers (most notable amongst whom were Lt Farewell and Francis Fynn) had earlier made the passage from the Cape to the coastline of Natal and Portuguese East Africa. In an act of supreme cartographic erasure, the Afrikaner Nationalists appropriated the trek eastwards as their founding myth. The attempt by the National Party politicians to draw English tradition and culture into this vortex, and their insistence on incorporating English documents of origin into their cultural archives for propaganda purposes, dismayed Butler:

Protests from Cape Town and Grahamstown were ignored – Pretoria was to be the place. As one of my supporters said, "Why should everything be placed under Oom Paul's top hat?"<sup>38</sup>

Grahamstown seemed to Butler ideally situated, both ideologically and geographically, to act as counter to the prevailing locus of power. It had been at the centre of political decision-making from the early days of the Albany Settlement, through the Frontier Wars, and until the 1880s. It had experienced its own power struggles in those years with Cape Town, centre of the Cape Colonial Administration. The twentieth-century Pretoria-Grahamstown struggle was the nineteenth-century Cape Town-Grahamstown antithesis reformulated. Moreover, as the geographical centre of English settler activity in the nineteenth century, Grahamstown would tie in well with Butler's attempt to establish a founding myth

linked to the 1820 Settlers which could act as a counter-balance to the National Party's Trekker Myth.

Attempts by the government sponsored Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to acquire original literary documents of value for the "National Documentation Centre to cater for all major language groups", which had been set up in Pretoria under the auspices of the Human Sciences Research Council, as well as increasingly frequent attempts by overseas collectors, most notably Americans, prompted Butler to suggest to André de Villiers, who was then Director of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA), that they start a collection in Grahamstown that would be truly representative of South African Literature in English. The original books and manuscripts which Butler had already gathered formed a solid nucleus for the Thomas Pringle Collection under the care of the Rhodes University Librarian. Butler wrote to many of his colleagues in the literary field and secured the enthusiastic support of Stephen Gray and Jack Cope, amongst many others. One of the first donations to arrive from a Mrs Meg Bull of Somerset East was a manuscript of Thomas Pringle's early poems written in his own hand. With keen and on-going support from local authors the collection continued to grow. Realising that the location of these important original English language documents was a *fait accompli*, the Human Sciences Research Council redefined its policy and subsequently funded the National Documentation Centre for English in Grahamstown (1974). In 1980 this Centre was declared a cultural institute and officially declared the National English Literary Museum (NELM). Butler's prompt and vigorous action in precipitating the establishment of this important cultural archive ensured that the riches of a growing indigenous literature did not, indeed, "end up under Oom Paul [Kruger's] top hat". Moreover, its location

in Grahamstown also gave him the opportunity to research, and to weave anew, the 1820 Settler myth which could now be rooted in a specific locale. Thus, whilst there were undeniably strong mythic resonances, there were also practical considerations in locating the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown.

How feasible was Butler's project of establishing a set of mythological strands within the web of the 1820 Albany settlement? W. B. Yeats had, of course, done something very similar at the beginning of the twentieth century to stir Irish nationalism with his nurturing of the legends of Aengus and Cuchulain. Was such a project necessary in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, and was it feasible? 'Community' is usually associated with black writing and, according to Benedict Anderson, communities are always imagined. What was Butler's imagined community and what were its limits? Whilst these questions cannot be answered in any empirical way, a close scrutiny and contextualisation of Butler's social projects related to the 1820 project and the ESSAs as well as his polemics will perhaps bring us closer to an understanding of his perspectives.

By contrast with the Foucauldian sense of abrupt discontinuities of relationships and consciousness, Butler believed in the underlying permanence of social structures and relationships. His idea of the nation, or group, mirrors Benedict Anderson's which is of

... a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time...[and] conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.<sup>39</sup>

Butler believed implicitly in the importance of such groups and social institutions. In his obituary on Sir Laurens van der Post he writes that the belief that

... individuals can grow and live without particular institutions or establishments is , in my view, Sir Laurens's Achilles heel.<sup>40</sup>

Thus Butler constantly attempts, in the historian Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, "...to establish continuity with a suitable historic past". But, for that group seen as colonisers, the difficulties of such a pursuit are compounded by the social fragmentation of a heterogeneous colonial order as opposed to the homogeneous condition of its first-world origins. Elleke Boehmer observes that

...with the onset of European migration and colonisation, people experienced an intense need to create new worlds out of old stories.<sup>41</sup>

Boehme identifies the tendency to re-create the past; that there was also a need for the English-speaking South African to do so, few denied. Stephen Watson observes that the South African writer in English struggles to establish this continuity with a suitable historical past, even when that past is re-created. For Watson, South African writers in English have an "identity crisis", a

...cultural schizophrenia...one reflection of an absence of a past and a shared communal history.<sup>42</sup>

Butler's attempts to weave a tradition of Settler mythology through his later plays, prose, and the editing of several Settler diaries need to be seen against the background of the South African writer in English struggling to establish some sort of continuity with a suitable historical past. However there were some critics such as Philip Segal who, although seeing the need for such continuity, doubted the efficacy of such a project:

By all means let a writer whose imagination is stirred by such matters write passionately about them, but why pretend that one can create a genuine collective tradition by playing with a period which, impressive though it is, cannot today carry the fascination of true historic myth.<sup>43</sup>

Was this tradition too weak, as Segal implies? Talking generically about weak senses of tradition, Raymond Williams<sup>44</sup> observes that they are often points of retreat for groups in a society which have been left stranded by some particular hegemonic development and all that is left to them is "...the retrospective affirmation of 'traditional values' ". Butler, however, did not see the group of English-speaking South Africans (or ESSAs) as a stranded group whose force was spent. Rather he saw a potentially strong English-speaking community under threat. It was his vision that, far from retreating into an enclave of spent traditional values, they take an active and dynamic lead in fighting to uphold democratic principles and the rule of law not only for themselves, but also for all other South Africans. He was concerned that

...few English-speaking South Africans were aware of the historical roles they ought to be playing...<sup>45</sup>

His concern was for the survival of this small, but potentially influential, group

...whose home language is English, and their role and responsibility in this multi-lingual society.<sup>46</sup>

Writing at the turn of the twentieth century the French philosopher, Henri Bergson,<sup>47</sup> points out that in man the tendency to form communities is most fully developed. He proceeds to identify two communities. On one hand, the closed community is restricted to a definite group and its members are joined by mutual bonds, always ready to attack or to defend and tied to an attitude of combat. The open community, on the other hand, embraces in principle the whole of mankind. Butler's writings and his public utterances state, unequivocally, this ideal of an open community. The following extracts from a speech given by Butler in Bloemfontein to the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs, a body overwhelmingly supportive of the Apartheid programme of Dr Verwoerd in 1961, are not only illustrative of this



point but are also remarkably courageous in an era known for bannings and detention without trial for opponents of apartheid:

[The different groups]...have rejected each other and continue to reject each other. We tell three million urbanised blacks that they and their children must look forward to nothing but perpetual exile without rights. Our Indian population are told that they don't belong, and ought to get back to India. The English are told that nothing short of a complete identification with the aims and sentiments of Afrikanerdom can make them acceptable South Africans. They, in their turn, put on airs of superiority and exclusiveness that make, or used to make, the Afrikaner feel that life in Johannesburg was a new exile in Babylon. In our more violent moods we tell blacks that they have title to only one-fourteenth of our country, and they reply that we have title to none of it.

...

The only hope is a new idea of the South African nation, which, while allowing for and indeed encouraging certain group attitudes, accords to all the fullest possible participation in the privileges, responsibilities, and rewards of the society.

...

Members of different nationalities can therefore only meet on the tacit or open understanding that they are men before they are Germans, or Frenchmen, or whites or blacks. To reverse the order, and to say that my nationalism is more important than my humanity, is to be irrational, to claim a superior racial status, or to deny the universal nature of man.

...

The answers I get to these questions [about South African nationhood] lead me to say, quite simply, that for me a South African is anyone who lives in my country.

...

Whatever national character we develop, may it be one which calls forth an *isibongo* from all South African lips.<sup>48</sup>

In the light of these very inclusive utterances by Butler, it is difficult to see validity in Elaine Williams's criticism that

Butler's own group categories and boundaries are as arbitrary as the ones he places around other groups, whether ethnic, national or linguistic, and are historically produced rather than essential.<sup>49</sup>

Are not all boundaries, all definitions, arbitrary by virtue of the fact that they are defined or enunciated from a particular non-Archimedean perspective? In a rather simplistic analysis of the problem she talks of "essential" categories, or "essential" definitions of such categories which seem to presuppose a Kantian *a priori* status.

Since all writers and critics are products of their historical inheritance, to accept her statement would imply that no writer or critic could ever define or articulate thoughts: a condition leading to intellectual paralysis. Butler's imagined community is, in fact, more intricate than is at first apparent and needs closer scrutiny.

Butler perceived his imagined community in two forms: his immediate community of English-speaking South Africans, and his wider community of "...anyone who lives in my country", the former linked together through the ties of language and culture, the latter through "...a common humanity", the two sub-groupings concentric but not coterminous. The nucleus, consisting of South African English speakers must, in Butler's words, "...extend the common ground to all". Benedict Anderson's observation that, since the nation is conceived in language and not in blood, one could be "invited into" the imagined community is applicable here. By contrast, group definitions which are predicated on blood are inherently racist and they are, ironically enough, the products of ideologies of *class* rather than those of nation:

The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations....<sup>50</sup>

That there might be a failure to attain the ideal open community is always a reality according to Anderson who takes the analysis further to suggest that even the most avowedly open communities are always, necessarily and unconsciously, closed in some measure:

Seen as both a *historical* fatality and as a community imagined through language, the nation presents itself as simultaneously open and closed.<sup>51</sup>

This would seem to indicate that it is no easy task for any writer imagining any fully open community to remain entirely and continuously 'outside the whale'. Whilst the most strenuous attempts would be made consciously to embrace this position, the occasional unconscious retreat to within the visceral security of the whale would seem to be unavoidable, such psychological excursions in Butler's case being more the product of social conditioning and historical inheritances than any preconceived ideological standpoint.

There is little doubt that of the two communities he imagined, Butler naturally found it much easier to identify with that small group known as English-speaking South Africans. Between 1960 and 1965 he began researching the unpublished diaries and writings of the 1820 Settlers. A casual interest in the local settler history of the Eastern Cape, which began with the writing of the plays *Take Root or Die* in 1966 and *Cape Charade* in 1968, turned into an intense fascination with the history of the 1820 Settler group and the artistic possibilities which this could open up. Butler edited these early Settler writings and diaries into a collection entitled *When Boys Were Men* which was published in 1969 when Settler interest was reaching its zenith in anticipation of the forthcoming 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of the 1820 Settlers in South Africa. As a sequel to the Anniversary celebrations, he published a collage of old photographs, excerpts from diaries, and his own annotations in *The 1820 Settlers: An Illustrated Commentary* in 1974. The play *Richard Gush of Salem*, published in 1982, completed what could be termed 'the Settler Cycle' plays and in 1989 the publication of a short novel *A Rackety Colt* based on the real life experiences of an early Settler, Thomas Stubbs, rounded off his work on the Settler theme in the medium of prose. There were, of course, other projects undertaken at the same time, such as the compilation and editing of

*Plays from Near and Far* (1972), *Tales from the Old Karoo* (1989), and *The Magic Tree: South African Stories in Verse* (1989), but these had as their subject matter a general interest in other diverse South African traditions rather than a specific focus on Settler life and myth.

The short novel *A Rackety Colt*, based largely on the experiences as outlined in the diaries of the early Settler, Thomas Stubbs, makes for interesting analysis. As has been previously argued, Butler's imagination operated within the framework of "simultaneous" or "Messianic" time rather than "empty, homogenous time" more suited to the genre of the novel. The conceit of *A Rackety Colt* has not emanated from Butler's own imagination but is an adaptation of Stubbs's diary. It seems, though, that Butler's imagination was captured by the courageous individual exploits of this early settler. Anderson has pointed out that the national imagination of a group is often to be seen at work in the form of the *picaresque tour d'horison* of an individual moving through the landscape:

Here again we see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of the solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside.<sup>52</sup>

Although not strictly a picaresque novel, since the landscape of Thomas Stubbs is neither sociological nor psychological but physical and geographic, *A Rackety Colt* nonetheless might be said to utilise similar strategies which have, as their end result, the unity and cohesion of the group.

Despite the fact that Butler was using Settler myth and the history of the Eastern Cape as a bulwark against what he perceived to be a growing Afrikaner National Party hegemony, such was the literary and artistic merit of his work that he

was, ironically, acclaimed for his efforts by the very sector he was denouncing publicly – the National Party government – and awarded a government-sponsored literary prize which he declined. One can only speculate on the reason for such an award being made by a government to one of its most outspoken critics. Since Butler seemed to be the spokesman for English-speaking South Africans, it is possible that, in offering him the literary prize, an attempt was being made by a government under severe political pressure in the ‘troubled seventies’ at a rapprochement between itself and its white opponents in order to present a united front against rising black nationalism.

Although Butler’s work in the field of Settler myth and history centred on the English-speaking community, it was viewed by many South Africans more as an attempt to recover a lost past than to promote an exclusive sectarianism. At the re-dedication of the 1820 Settlers’ Monument in 1995, following its devastation by fire, Laurence Wright recalls how Nelson Mandela, when shaking the hand of an ageing Guy Butler, commented with obvious approval:

He has done a good job. He has done his duty. His ancestors will be proud of him...<sup>53</sup>

a statement which, despite its apparent simplicity, links past with present, and the English Settler tradition with the spiritual ethos of African culture.

Not only had Butler written and produced three of his own plays prior to 1970, but he had also produced a play from the established canon every year from 1954 until 1970. Since there was no university theatre, he was forced to use a variety of locations including the City Hall, the Rhodes University Great Hall, and the open air. The practical need for a university theatre, together with the

ideological need for a useful language memorial to the 1820 Settlers caused him to become one of the chief protagonists and the driving force behind the planning and establishment of the 1820 Monument. With the Monument, of course, came the 1820 Foundation, and the Grahamstown Festival.

Elaine Williams is entirely correct when she observes:

The 1820 Settlers' Monument of which Butler had been executive director...serves to wed myth and place together in the same way that the myth of 'volk en land' tried to do for the Afrikaner Nationalists.<sup>54</sup>

However, she does not go on to draw the distinction between the widely divergent objectives of the Afrikaner Nationalists and those of Butler: where the former were seeking to use their 'Volksgeist' to assert racial, social, cultural, and political dominance over other groups in South Africa, the latter was using the same spirit of 'Volksgeist' to resist these crushing hegemonies. The Monument would incorporate the idea of a continuity of essence, meeting the needs of myth by the historical collection and preservation of historical documents, books, furniture, pictures, and other memorabilia from the past. Monuments can, and do, play an important part in any struggle against oppression. Writing about resistance to imperialism, Anderson observes that monuments, temples, mosques, schools and courts

...were topographically anomalous...they were understood as zones of freedom and, in time, fortresses from which religious, later nationalist, anti-colonials could go forth to do battle.<sup>55</sup>

It was largely through Butler's efforts that the 1820 Settlers' Monument became a rallying point for the principles of democracy and freedom from racialism – the four large boundary stones erected like pillars signifying the 'four freedoms'. However, in the planning stages there were some sections

of the Settlers' descendants who wished for a conventional monument of a brave Settler lad with his Brown Bess musket. No doubt Butler's own pacific Quaker background, his horrendous experiences in the Second World War, and his own understanding that such a monument would re-open the wounds of ethnic struggle rather than heal them induced him to resist vigorously such a provocative concept. In a talk on national radio (SABC) he proposed that the 1820 monument should be used for creative purposes rather than the "static" and "useless" French Huguenot Memorial, and the Afrikaans Language Memorial and that the memorial

...should avoid sectionalism and exclusiveness.<sup>56</sup>

Writing some thirty years after the erection of the 1820 Settlers' Monument, Michael O'Dowd sums up Butler's successful vision:

Indeed, Professor Guy Butler...saw the central purpose of the 1820 Settlers' Monument in Grahamstown to be the organisation of conferences to promote the culture of debate. I think he was absolutely right....<sup>57</sup>

It was Butler's belief that the intellectual and artistic success of the 1969 Conference in Grahamstown organised by the Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA) was, in great measure, due to the live drama performances and poetry readings which were staged. This confirmed his belief that festivals could play a creative cultural role in the development of South African society. A diary entry in 1959 describes the genesis of the Grahamstown Festival :

At present I feel stifled by Rhodes and Grahamstown. Something is needed to stimulate this part of the world. A Grahamstown Festival? Mentioned this to Rennie at tea on Sunday morning, who said that Hewson had written a letter proposing such a thing, to be linked with Settlers' Day celebrations. Deserves a lot of thought.

...

The compulsion to escape South Africa and its regime was paradoxically combined with the desire to do something to stimulate this part of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Since drama has its origins in human struggles with nature and with others, it is natural that Butler should have seen the Grahamstown Festival as an opportunity not only to reintroduce the tradition of folk festivals so prevalent in the Eastern Cape in the early nineteenth century, but also as an opportunity to use theatre at such a festival as a medium of resistance to the Afrikaner Nationalist project.

It is worth noting that, at approximately the same time, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was engaged in a similar strategy in Kenya. Ngugi's Kamiruthu project (1976), whilst consciously originating in an attempt at reconnection with the broken roots of African civilization and its national traditions of the theatre of empty space, of language, of content, and of form, was tangentially a powerful form of resistance literature to the abuses of the post-independence neo-colonial ruling party in Kenya. In many respects, Butler's Festival project parallels Ngugi's not only in its motivational origins but also in its evolving realities: the celebration and commemoration of ancestral roots and myths is accompanied by a forum for political resistance.

In more recent years the Grahamstown Festival has expanded into the National Festival of the Arts – the largest and most significant cultural gathering on the African continent. It has developed into an event which now covers the total spectrum of the arts in South Africa. Its central meeting place is the 1820 Settlers' Monument and it consists of the Main Festival Programme and the Fringe Programme. The Festival Committee is responsible for devising the Main Festival Programme and, each year, it nominates artists in the fields of dance, fine art, film, music, theatre, or opera



to receive the Young Artist of the Year Award which carries great prestige. The Fringe Festival Programme, however, is open to anyone and no pre-selection criteria are applied. Besides having a vital role to play as a forum for new developments in the arts in South Africa and for promoting the arts particularly amongst black South African artists who previously had no platform, the Festival today contributes substantially to the economy of one of South Africa's poorest regions and, in so doing, performs not only a valuable literary service but also a valuable social and economic service to the entire community of the Eastern Cape region.

The last of what Elaine Williams calls the "objective structures of Butler's cultural influence" which needs investigation is his role in the founding and promotion of the English Academy. He was one of the founder members of the English Academy which came into existence in 1961. Butler served as President of the Academy from 1966 to 1969 and was a life Vice-President. He was also the first recipient of the English Academy Medal in 1989. One of the functions of the English Academy was to organise debate; another was to implement strategies that would protect and foster the growth of the language. To this end the Autumn School as well as an English Language Teaching Information Centre (ELTIC) were set up and a series of significant literary awards was established. These awards celebrate and reward excellence in diverse fields of writing.

To nurture excellence in prose, poetry, and drama the Olive Schreiner Prize was established. It is devoted to one of these categories each year and focuses primarily upon work of an academic nature as opposed to the

Thomas Pringle Awards which are conferred for excellence in the less formal modes of television reviews, literary articles of a newsworthy nature, and the short story or one-act play category. The encouragement of creative youth writing has been stimulated by the provision of a biennial Percy FitzPatrick Award for Youth Literature. In line with the Academy's policy of encouraging manifold perspectives, the recipients of these awards represent a wide spectrum of cultural diversity. To be found on the awards recipients' lists are names such as Dan Wylie, Zakes Mda, Kelwyn Sole, and Lerothodi la Pula, to mention but a few. The English Academy medal is also awarded. It is for services rendered specifically to the cause of English teaching and learning in South Africa.

Despite this vigorous promotion of the English language - or, perhaps, because of it - the Academy came in for some stern criticism in the 1980s. Elaine Williams sees the role of the English Academy in South Africa as one in which it acted as

...a kind of cultural bank, amassing what Bordieu calls "cultural capital" only to hand it over as a 'gift' to the poor...entering into an asymmetrical relation in which the debtors must pay with a promise of assimilation. The recognised, if euphemised, relationship is an unequal balance of power.<sup>59</sup>

Williams was not alone in her criticism of the English Academy in the 1980s.

At the 1985 English Academy Conference the Leftist theorists were voluble in their criticism of the Academy and, in his English Academy address delivered at the Jubilee Conference the following year, Njabulo S. Ndebele argued that the strategy that Butler and the English Academy were following was one of

...benevolent containment and encapsulation in order to maintain, expand, and exert influence.<sup>60</sup>

One needs, of course, to contextualise this criticism of the Academy in the 1980s into its historical framework. The ineffective Tricameral Parliamentary system was introduced into South African politics by President P. W. Botha in 1983. By providing a parliamentary platform for Whites, Indians, and 'Coloureds' but excluding Blacks from this new political dispensation, the Tricameral Parliamentary system not only failed dismally in attempting to stem the rising tide of political instability in the country, but also exacerbated the problem by angering black nationalists who felt insulted by this political exclusion. The political situation became even more volatile with the proclamation of a national State of Emergency in 1985 and the drastic curtailment of whatever civil liberties remained. It was against this background of civil unrest and political turmoil that the work of the Academy was viewed critically, particularly by the Marxist leftists who felt the Academy's standpoint and language too moderate for such extreme times. The Academy was seen in much the same light as Shelley's beautiful angel flapping its ineffectual wings in a void.

Others, however, subsequently saw the work of the Academy differently.

Commenting in a much later Academy lecture, O'Dowd writes:

At its foundation the (English) Academy decided that its function was to organise debate, not to legislate orthodoxy. Many of its conferences have genuinely debated controversial issues rather than taking a line on them.... Indeed, Professor Guy Butler, as one of the founders of the Academy saw this as one of its chief purposes...I think he was absolutely right, and this is the primary and central task of the Academy for the foreseeable future.<sup>61</sup>

What is reflected in the argument is more a contest of clashing ideologies than anything else: the debate of Marxist versus liberal-humanist revisited.

Butler's brand of gradual liberal reform has been the subject of much criticism over the years and the Orkin-Kirkwood arguments positing radical change return to mind. When set against the current views of the majority of black South Africans, Butler's liberal ideas are not that much – if at all – at variance with these. Themba Sono, writing in *Ironic Victory: Liberalism in Post-Liberation South Africa*, provides a hypothetical checklist of liberal values and deduces that the majority of black South Africans would find themselves broadly in agreement with such values. He makes the point that

...liberalism is *not* what one professes to subscribe to, but rather what one adheres to and upholds in one's day-to-day life

and that most black South Africans are fundamentally liberal:

African culture is neither illiberal nor organically incompatible with liberalism.<sup>62</sup>

In terms of their political philosophy Leo Marquard, Alan Paton, and Guy Butler were all way ahead of their time. In a sense, Butler's position was prophetic. The socialist political theorist, Richard Bellamy, expresses the current shift worldwide to a universal liberalism succinctly:

Twentieth century liberalism has suffered the curious fate of steadily declining in most countries as an electoral force exclusive to a particular party, whilst prevailing and even growing as a background theory or set of presuppositions and sentiments of a supposedly neutral and universal kind which dominates political thinking across the ideological spectrum. Today all major groupings employ the liberal language of rights, freedom and equality to express and legitimise their views and demonstrate a corresponding acceptance of liberal conceptions of democracy and the market.<sup>63</sup>

The greatest width of political spectrum is allowed by such a liberal philosophy and it was very much in keeping with Butler's pursuit of the ideal of a "common humanity" uniting all South Africans.

In reviewing Butler's cultural projects what conclusions can we reach? Is there any validity in Elaine Williams's criticism of Butler's cultural projects as

...instruments in the hands of social actors with particular interests, interests that were not innocent of political or ideological motives.<sup>64</sup>?

In one sense Williams is, ironically, correct: Butler's political or ideological motives fundamentally were to resist an encroaching and debilitating Afrikaner Nationalist hegemony preaching the doctrine of racial segregation and inequality. However, in the context of her argument her suggestion is, rather, that Butler was utilising these cultural instruments and projects to maintain the system of suppression and inequality. She states this unequivocally later in her argument:

[Butler] ...is the appropriate person for producing the necessary effects to promote cultural theories which disguise the attempts on the part of one group to maintain economic power over another.<sup>65</sup>

As has been demonstrated, nothing can be further from the truth. It seems that she misses, entirely, the object of Butler's struggle from the 1950s to the late 1980s. For more than forty years, Butler was one of apartheid's most vehement critics and his projects were not culturally selective but egalitarian. His promotion of the respect and study of indigenous literature; of access of the English language and its literatures to all, irrespective of ethnicity; of unheard black voices in the journals which he established; of the Molteno Project with its widespread success amongst the marginalised in the field of literacy; all these, inter alia, confirm the fact that his vision was not sectarian but global and universal.

Williams's statements that

...Butler's...hope for a future South Africa based on principles of western parliamentary democracy have not taken a firm hold on popular consciousness, even among English-speaking South Africans...<sup>66</sup>

and that it

...does not matter then, that the ideal is not fulfilled, that it has not, and will never turn South Africa into a community of common political and cultural purpose<sup>67</sup>

seem, in post-1994 South Africa, strangely anachronistic Marxist arguments preaching violent class struggle, as do the arguments of both Kirkwood and Orkin. Using a phrase from Hegel, Laurence Wright<sup>68</sup> makes the point that the "earthly ballet of bloody categories" encoded by Kirkwood never materialised and that, instead, South Africa "doubled its Cape of Storms" using the very "Athenianism" upon which Kirkwood had heaped such scorn. Whilst Butler stayed in South Africa until his death, contributing to his imagined communities, both Kirkwood and Orkin left the country with, it seems, little stomach for the new South Africa. Being products of the ironies and dislocations of modernity, they were seemingly unable to relate to the complexities of Butler's intellectual style. Consequently they reduced to simplicisticism an intricate nexus of political, racial, and ethnic identities the complexities of which were apparent to Butler.

This is not to say that the narrative of Butler's cultural origins and projects is consistently flawless. There are, in truth, serious lapses from time to time. In his earlier writings he is occasionally guilty of cartographic and cultural erasure:

Africa has no history, it ticks to a different clock, under constellations many of which are mythless.<sup>69</sup>

He also refers to South African writers who have to

...fill, or abolish, or redeem what they feel are the culturally empty centuries behind us.<sup>70</sup>

There are also occasional passages which lapse into a tone of Western moral superiority:

The few things that South Africans have in common are taken from outside, from Europe and America, which is tantamount to saying that the forces making for cohesion – and some cohesion is necessary for culture – are neither characteristic nor indigenous.<sup>71</sup>

Remaining consistently outside the whale is, it seems, no easy task for a writer who is a product of two frequently conflicting sets of experience. A constant tension exists between the Dionysian energy of a South Africa to which Butler was fully committed and the Apollonian origins of his colonial education, between the brooding atavistic attraction of the Cradock mountains and the 'dreaming spires' of a cultured Oxford, and between the mental references of the coloniser as opposed to those of the colonised. O'Dowd expresses cogently these subliminal tensions within the writer:

...writers, whether they want to or not, whether they intend to or not, put into their writing everything that they know and everything that they are. ...they express, again whether they mean to or not, and often best when they do not mean to, their backgrounds and origins, their social milieu, their superficial beliefs and their deep beliefs (which may be different). They tell us about the society in which they live, not only when they mean to but also when they do not mean to. They reflect the constraints under which they write, whether applied by government, by those whom they respect, by their peers, their critics and, above all, their market.<sup>72</sup>

Butler was aware that he occupied no Archimedean perspective and that his viewpoint was limited. As has been demonstrated, he also acknowledged that his earlier writings had reflected a colonisation of his mind by a Western tradition and its inherent empirical bias. His infrequent retreats into the visceral security of the whale should not blind us to the magnitude of his

achievements as a public figure whose cultural projects and polemics were not only of immense past significance in the struggle against an unjust apartheid system, but also retain great present meaning in the evolving realities of projects that continue to be of great service to his imagined communities.

. . .

The South African society fostering the values of a 'common humanity' for which Butler had striven throughout his life came to fruition. Butler's role in the transformation of that society to a condition that Frantz Fanon called a social consciousness beyond national consciousness should not be underestimated. Many of the literary and social concepts which Butler had espoused have become a part of the 'new' South Africa – in his speech at Walter Sisulu's ninetieth birthday celebrations on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2002, President Thabo Mbeki referred to the great role that Sisulu had played in bringing about a society embracing "...the common humanity uniting us all". Butler's service, in his artistic and cultural projects, to this 'imagined community' united by a "common humanity" was considerable. As is the case with all thinkers and all poets, Butler was a product of his times and his contexts, and thus subject to the various tyrannies imposed by the twin co-ordinates of space and time. Edward Said makes the telling point:

...no one has the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting the world free from the encumbering interests and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves.<sup>73</sup>

Guy Butler's vision might have, at times, been flawed, but it was always honest and courageous. What he wrote about Richard Gush of Salem might be



equally applicable to his own life, for Butler had the same “uncompromising streak, the heroic, uncomfortable devotion to principle, the awkward challenge of a life lived under the judgement of a relentless conscience”.

This study has attempted to redress a historically understandable but limited appraisal of Butler’s contribution to South African literary and community life. The post-apartheid potential, ironically, has created conditions for the re-evaluation of a figure thought to be a ‘Settler’, but a figure who remained committed to an inclusive South Africa. Guy Butler’s literary contributions and community service are indivisible: this is the mark of his achievement.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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