

***POETRY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:  
POEMS BY DENNIS BRUTUS***



***FROM THE  
DENNIS BRUTUS COLLECTION  
WORCESTER STATE COLLEGE  
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS***

***INTRODUCTION BY KEN GIBBS  
COEDITED BY KEN GIBBS AND WAYNE KAMIN***

***TRIBUTES BY  
MERRILL GOLDWYN AND HENRY THERIAULT***

*Third Edition*

---

---

*The poems in this booklet are from the Dennis Brutus Collection at Worcester State College, Worcester, Massachusetts. None of the material in this booklet may be reproduced or reprinted without the express authorization of Worcester State College.*

---

---

Printed by  **WORCESTER**  
State College Publications and Printing Services  
Worcester State College Press  
Third Edition 2010

**ISBN# 098 198 3502**

## ***In Memory of Dennis Brutus (1924-2009)***

Dennis Brutus's work and legacy speak not only of the man and his times, but also of times preceding the pleasure and challenge of his company, and of time beyond, all of which, as he often paraphrased, will be longer than the binding rope of repression. He never hesitated to speak with and read poems to any gathering. The occasion might have been to one elderly Austin woman in her home. It included the smallest of school classes in Malawi, Brixton, Chicago's South Side, or Kyoto. And let's not forget all the international forums. Dennis organized ad-hocs, letter writings, petitions, and public protests for the greater good. Post-apartheid South Africa, the release of prisoners of conscience and those under the death penalty, sweatshops, environmental and economic justice, and so much more never failed to rouse and enlist him. Along the way, and at every turn was his eloquent, scholarly, reasoned and unassailable prose. Even more ubiquitous was his poetry with its characteristic detail, color, rhythm, passion, shout and restraint.

In every instance, the message was the same. As Dennis was so fondly compelled to say— "A luta continua;" the struggle continues. His goals remained the same: compassion, understanding, truth, and an equitable, fair shake for all in access to health, safety, food, shelter, and the opportunity and right for the enhancement of ours and the Earth's well-being without doing harm to others.

During his lifetime, Dennis Brutus was our teacher, mentor, colleague, comrade and friend. Until the end, he wrote verse and fostered peace. Dennis's work and his stubborn hope live on in all of us who knew him. Just think how fortunate we are to have him come our way.

— *Wayne Kamin*

## ***Preface to the Third Edition***

Many of the new poems in this gathering of the poetry by Dennis Brutus have been uncovered in Worcester State College's Dennis Brutus Collection by Wayne Kamin, who is currently archiving the extensive material in the collection. Appended to this edition is Wayne's overview of the Collection's holdings. The scholarly reader is directed to the College's website for his detailed description of the variety and the extent of manuscripts in the collection.

Although a number of poems in this edition were written during the past fifteen years, many of the poems are recent, and contain an elegiac tone, a darker note that arose naturally as Brutus's long and productive career approached its autumnal ripening, singing of "how unforgiving are the body's needs," and heralding the ineluctable "arrival of oblivion." The fire of his political activism never cooled, and in many of his most recent poems his voice stubbornly refused to give up hope for a better world. His long life afforded him the perspective to look back and assess his significant contribution to the long climb of humanity toward its highest potential, and he could be "content/ to have been of some service." Dennis Brutus always strove to assert with unyielding vitality his vision of brighter possibilities for the future, yet with an acknowledgement that all his words and images may be "small bright dead leaves in a playful dance." But his poems amply testify that Brutus's voice, like Shelley's West Wind, will stir those leaves and "quicken a new birth" and revitalize this "unawakened earth."

Many thanks are due those who made this publication possible. Without the skill and the ready assistance of the Publications and Printing Services of Worcester State College, this edition would not have been possible. And special thanks are due to Mary Ellen Thorpe, whose tireless patience and acute editing skills at the computer surmounted all the additions, emendations, and the annoying minutia associated with shepherding this edition through the printing process. Not to be overlooked is the continuous support of the administration of Worcester State College, with special thanks to Dr. Maureen Shamgochian, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Special thanks also go to Wayne Kamin, who has consented to be a contributing editor for this edition. Presently the archivist of the Dennis Brutus Collection at Worcester State College, Wayne began his human rights career by volunteering in a breakfast program and a voter registration project. He soon became interested in anti-apartheid activism as a result of his research position at the Warfield African and African American Studies Center at the University of Texas, Austin, and his stateside coordination of a regional Southern African Peace Education Program for the American Friends Service Committee. Subsequently Wayne worked with Dr. Dennis Brutus as editor of Troubadour Press and as a co-founding board member of the African Literature Association. For 37 years, Wayne has felt honored to have known Dennis as his teacher, mentor, colleague and friend, and to have enjoyed the pleasure and challenge of his company.

The passing of Dennis Brutus on December 26, 2009, brought his life to a close, but not the life in his words. To paraphrase Walt Whitman, the reader of the poems in this collection touches a man whose voice continues to speak powerfully of justice and the human condition with original energy.

# Introduction

The poems by Dennis Brutus in this collection have been gleaned from the trove of materials connected with his life and work housed in the Dennis Brutus Collection at Worcester State College, Worcester, Massachusetts. Year by year this collection grows, making it a significant archive of poems, letters, essays, newspaper articles, realia, memorabilia, photographs, and other items related to Dennis Brutus's life and work. Dennis Brutus first rose to prominence as an opponent to South Africa's apartheid policies, and for these activities, he was arrested and sentenced to the notoriously inhumane Robben Island, where he was incarcerated with his countryman and compatriot Nelson Mandela. Before his arrest, Brutus was already a mature poet, but his experiences in prison caused his commitment to the global struggle for human freedom to overshadow his dedication to the art of poetry. Having begun as the "singing voice of the South African Liberation Movement," he often in the later part of his life redirected his creative energies to the empowerment of his activist causes, resulting in a contraction of the time he devoted to writing poetry. However, as the number of poems scattered throughout the Dennis Brutus Collection attests, his poetic spirit always flamed brightly, burning embers of which appeared during the spare moments of a busy life: poems on credit card receipts, on the back of plane tickets, on the corners of lecture notes, in hastily entered journals, on calendars crowded with speaking commitments.

For those interested in the specifics of the contents of the Dennis Brutus Collection, an overview of the collection appears after the poems in this booklet. Access to this collection is readily available to scholars, students, and other interested persons. Besides printed materials, the collection also contains many photographs that document Brutus's travels and the multitude of places and people that have come within the range of his lifelong dedication to the world-wide struggle in behalf of human rights. Of particular note for this collection of poetry is the fact that most of the poems in the collection are handwritten in Brutus's inimitable calligraphy, an example of which precedes the poems in this booklet.

Brutus's first collect of poetry, *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots* (1963), was published in Nigeria while he was in prison in South Africa. His later works include *Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison* (1968), *A Simple Lust* (1973), which collects many of his poems up to that date, *China Poems* (1975), *Stubborn Hope* (1978), *Salutes and Censures* (1982), *Airs and Tributes* (1989), and *Still the Sirens* (1993). The latest publications of his poetry are *Leafdrift* (2005), *Poetry and Protest* (2006), and this collection printed by Worcester State College, 2010. Brutus has received numerous awards for his poetry, among them the Langston Hughes Award for Poetry and the Paul Robeson Award for Artistic Integrity.

The publication of *A Simple Lust* in 1973 in many respects constitutes a milestone in Brutus's development as a poet. Before this point, his influences were decidedly from the British and American literary tradition: John Donne was the strongest influence, then T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Kenneth Pachen, Kenneth Rexroth, Wallace Stevens, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Displaced from his native country, he saw himself as a troubadour poet, singing the songs of a lover separated from his first love: his native land. His verse techniques were solidly in the modernist camp, consisting of ambiguity, irony, complex images, and literary allusions and symbols. Imprisonment, however, and especially his experiences while in solitary confinement, transformed his poetic aesthetics:

In solitary, I began reevaluating my life, and I concluded that much of it had been wasted. I reevaluated the poetry I had written before going to prison, influenced by John Donne, T. S. Eliot, and Pound: highly ordered, reasoned, and ornamental. I decided it was contemptible. Rather than be reduced to despair, I altered my approach, devising very simple, unadorned poetry, concentrating on the immediacy of communication without trying to show how clever I am at manipulating words. (Quoted in Janet MacArthur, "Imaginary Homelands and *Thoughts Abroad*: Dennis Brutus' Hybrid Modernism," in *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*, eds. Craig McLuckie and Patrick Colbert, Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, 1995, p. 72.)

Dennis Brutus decided that henceforth his poetry would contain "no ornament, absolutely none" and that rather than writing for other poets or students of literature, he would write for the "ordinary person: for the man who drives a bus, or the man who carries the baggage at the airport, and the woman who cleans the ashtrays in the restaurant." (See material in Box 17, Dennis Brutus Collection, Worcester State College.)

Armed with a poetic voice that makes a "very conscious attempt at immediacy, at direct, unadorned communication," Dennis Brutus began writing poems such as the following:

Celebrate Geronimo's victory!  
Forward to further victories!  
Free Mumia!

This is the rhetoric of the plain-speaking public orator whose diction clarifies and expresses the passions of the community on an occasion that demands specific action, not self-reflexive contemplation of the eternal verities of the human condition. At appropriate times, this voice can be exhortative, at other times, stately, accurately summarizing the particulars of the common cause. Unlike other South African poets writing in English, Brutus's diction contains very few colloquialisms and place names from his native country. Instead, his diction is dependably cosmopolitan, its center the world, not a specific place of origin. This universality befits Brutus's commitment to the struggle for human rights, a struggle which is global and demands a language not limited to one nation or set of values.

Dennis Brutus did not, however, abandon his lyrical voice exclusively for the common, everyday voice of the collective "we." The romantic, modernist poet still smoldered as evidenced by the following poem:

Desire writhes in me:  
a red cloth rose  
a flame in a stormlamp,  
the tawny amber of cognac.

Here the "I" of the romantic lyricist persists, forging images that reflect the artist's personal emotions. In contrast, a poem such as "Zocalo," composed while he was poet-in-resident at Worcester State College, also relies technically on a sequence of images, but here the images are pictorial and used to visualize the general political and economic concerns of the collective "we." Most of his communal poetry, however, is fashioned from direct, abstract statements, eschewing imagery that could be seen as exclusively poetical or personal.

Brutus has created a remarkable poetry for the public occasion, imagistic when appropriate to intensify the message, philosophically descriptive when contemplating the root causes of injustice, but primarily constructed with an almost prose-like verse technique that defines the message as clearly as possible, emphasizing the general and the abstract not the specific and the particular. Brutus's poems for public occasions were freely reproduced and available to his audiences; his lyric poetry often remains unpublished until collections such as this booklet make this private voice available to the general reader.

When Brutus visited China in 1973, he became influenced by the haiku. At first employing this poetic structure in order to communicate succinctly his political themes, Brutus eventually transformed it to record those intimate moments of emotion, memory, and reflection that even a world traveler beset by a whirlwind of public engagements and responsibilities possesses. In three short lines, Brutus became a virtuoso in expressing his deepest feelings of anguish and despair, of joy and accomplishment, as well as his memories of loves lost, and his longings for absent loves. Witness the following poignant poem of love and mortality:

That gentle touch on  
your cheek many years from now:  
ashes from my urn.

This collection contains a number of similar personal moments compressed into gem-like images that scintillate with the inner soul of a man who dedicated his outer life to lifting the weight of oppression lying heavy on far too many human beings.

The shadow of Brutus's past leaves its dark traces through the poems in this collection. The profoundly moving prose poem about visiting the place of his father's birth bespeaks the lingering sense of loss of a geographical home that he loved with a passion so elemental it can only be described as a simple lust. Dark memories of imprisonment, exile, and brutality shade the themes of the poetry. But despite the darkness, there is always the sense of a stubborn refusal to give up hope. Some of the poems may record instances of despair, disappointment with achieving the goals of a life's work, discouragement as the demands of mortality drain life's energy, but a dogged spirit endures. The permanent contribution that Dennis Brutus's poetry has made to uplifting the human condition is accurately described in his own verse:

An old black woman  
suffering,  
tells me I have given her  
"new images"  
—a father bereaved  
by radical heroism  
finds consolation  
in my verse.  
then I know  
these are those I write for  
and my verse works.

— *Ken Gibbs*  
*Worcester State College*

*From Barcelona  
you could see lights beckoning  
from Casablanca.*

*9/29/2004. d.b.*

*Selected Poems from the  
Second Edition of POEMS  
from the  
Dennis Brutus Collection*

## O'Hare

Moonlight on dark wings;  
below, the sleeping city:  
the coiled year crouches.

Dec. 30, 1997



Soft marshmallow moon  
glancing dimly on shadowed  
walks.

Oct. 1998



A heart-stopping moment:  
no, not the moment when I first saw you,  
but the instant when I realized  
you might let me love you.

Mar. 19, 1996



Celebrate Geronimo's victory!  
Forward to further victories!  
Free Mumia!

June 13, 1997



Lamplight on ruby-  
bright wine: gleam of holly leaf  
beside: companion.

Mar. 27, 2000



One of the great ironies  
of existence  
is how Christians  
can be so heedlessly  
cruel.

Apr. 29, no year



### **Bowling Green**

Desire writhes in me:  
a red cloth rose,  
a flame in a stormlamp,  
the tawny amber of cognac.

Feb. 16 and Mar. 7, no year



### **Baton Rouge**

River, big river,  
accept me, I have paid my  
dues to my fellows.

May 4, 1976



Cesaire, Damas, Senghor,  
I've met all three;  
the genial fathers of negritude:  
each gives the others credit.

Mar. 29, 1978



The treachery of my friends  
is intelligible:  
it is a sacrifice,  
another payment made  
in the economy of grace.

Nov. 14, 1976



Someone  
made me more alive,  
more human;  
I repay that gift  
by making more alive  
someone else.

Nov. 14, 1976



Stripped of leaves, bare twigs  
gleam in pale autumn sunlight  
—magenta-silver.

Nov. 11, 1998



Drink that bitter cup;  
grip your face not to grimace:  
those dark wells of contempt  
boredom bartered for  
by casual affluence.

n.d.



### **Philadelphia Airport**

Mothballed cruiser on  
Delaware River: oh when  
will they ever learn?

Feb. 2000



If you gaze long enough  
at your image of yourself  
you will disappear.

Dec. 11, 1998



Battered by autumn  
rains, crumpled petals sprawled in  
slush show bruised edges.

Aug. 6, 2000



## **Kyoto Fruit Garden**

Butterfly fragile  
airy as ladies' fans  
plum blossoms' pale grace.

Feb. 21, 1998



Jasmine scent at dusk  
bordering a concrete parking lot  
in grey Connecticut valley:  
all of your slim laughing grace  
comes back with this fragrance;  
I offer you belated thanks.

Jan. 4, 1997



## **Pittsburgh**

The stars shine brighter  
only because I begin  
to see more clearly.

Aug. 9, 1999



A major funeral  
long lines of black limousines:  
white flags in sunlight.

Sept. 2, 2000



## **After the fat lady sang: Haiku**

Dante's great canzon:  
"No herb could heal this blow—"  
Clinton's legacy.

Feb. 18, 1999



## **Charlotte to Pittsburgh**

Fragments of rainbows  
are hidden in cloud masses:  
Love comes in strange ways.

June 15, 2004



Perhaps in an urn  
my ashes might come to rest:  
let winds scatter them.

(alternate version)

Let some ash from my  
urn be scattered by gentle winds  
before your feet.

Sept. 2, 2001



Providence signals  
opportune occasions for  
those who are alert.

Mar. 31, 2001



Slim green ginkgos soar  
skyward by Osaka Bay:  
sweetness of birdsong.

Sept. 3, 2000



That gentle touch on  
your cheek many years from now:  
ashes from my urn.

Feb. 5, 2001



### **Airplanes**

Couriers of our time,  
gaudy tails erect  
in rain or sunshine.

n.d.



A little brown leaf  
drifting on a wayward stream;  
somewhere it will rot.

Nov. 6, 2005



## **Akhenaton's Song/ Prayer/ Psalm**

Light gleaming through trees  
light above sunset hills  
light glowing golden  
Rhodesian-Zimbabwean red  
light pink-grey on Africa's desert wastes  
light on lifted psalms in adoration  
psalms lifting in thanksgiving  
receiving light in gratitude.

light, source of being  
light glowing over, everywhere, forever  
light glowing over all, over all.

light at the center of all things  
light at the origin of all things  
light reaching across distances of the cosmos  
light without which all that is is nothing.

light the seed of our being  
light that inserts, asserts, establishes being  
light that defines us as divinity  
light that unifies us with divinity.

Sept. 24, 1998



## **Seattle**

We all have our causes  
dear to our hearts  
that we work and sacrifice for:  
the freedom of these,  
justice for those,  
the struggle against their oppressor:  
but let there be one cause  
that we all unite to serve  
that we all resolve to serve—  
the cause of the Native Americans.

Feb. 27, 1982



## **Boston Logan Airport**

Where are the people  
who feel guilty  
about the cruelties  
and injustices  
inflicted on the  
Native American people  
where, where are they?  
where are these people?  
I want to know them  
so that I can work with them  
for justice and decency  
for the Native American people.  
I beg them to reach out to me.

Sept. 3 or 5, 1979



## **Eichman Runs the Pentagon, or Modern Military Madmen**

“We cannot choose the arms race and the cold war  
and Peace.”

If 60 million Americans  
are killed in a day  
that is acceptable

but if 80 million Americans  
are killed in a day  
that may be less acceptable.

Beware the modern Eichmans  
in many of us.

Every moment in which we prepare  
for nuclear warfare  
we choose death  
and there comes a time  
when preparation demands action.

Soon we will reach  
the last time  
to make the choice  
between destruction and life.

There are people  
who really love death.

Unamuno cried out, during the Spanish Civil War,  
“Long live death.”  
I cannot tolerate  
this senseless  
and necrophilous shout.

Freedom  
is only a word.

Freeing one's self  
is a constant action  
our freedom changes  
with every action  
as choices change

when the chess game begins  
until one is forced to resign.

Thinking  
is a function  
of character.

Thinking requires  
courage  
adventurousness,  
a healthy suspicion,  
even cynicism

The art of living  
is a difficult thing;  
our general mood  
is not geared to reality.

To say Yes to Peace  
is to say No  
to the Arms Race.

Nov. 18, 1980



## **For Dr. Erich Fromm**

The conviction  
and experience  
that all humans  
carry all humanity  
in themselves.

“Nothing human  
is alien  
to me.”\*

I have no real understanding  
unless I can see  
in someone else  
what I see in my self.

“Humanism  
is a reaction  
to a threat to Man.”\*\*

Marxists,  
Catholics,  
all Humanists,  
seek a Renaissance.

Mar. 18, 1980

\*Terentius

\*\*Nicholas of Cusa



Golestan Palace,  
let the people rejoice,  
let your walls ring  
with the people's rejoicing  
all your sumptuousness  
that disgusted and repelled  
when it served as display  
for the Shah's foul voluptuousness  
shine forth bravely now  
to honor your creators  
the people, whose struggles  
are more glorious than all  
your splendor.

n.d.



### **Frankfort**

Joy is always possible;  
man's schizoid heart;  
they dance to gay rhythms,  
the women in embroidered  
gold and red,  
the men in dramatic  
ponchos  
the Chileans:  
they dance on the lush  
green field  
in another stadium the  
grass grows verdant  
bloated with gallant  
student blood.

June 3, 1974



## Poem for Vorster's Resignation

Crumpled monster Vorster  
toppled to a misshapen heap  
grotesque gladiator for incubus  
race hatred speared by truth  
now fallen in the fetid spill  
of your own guts and excrement  
that was no applause you heard:

that sound roaring  
over the mine dumps and debris,  
that was the voice of ghettos crying:  
Amandla! Amandla!  
that was the angry townships roaring  
Amandla! Amandla!

June 4, 1979



In the dark lanes of Soweto,  
amid the mud, the slush, the squalor,  
among the rusty tin shacks  
the lust for freedom survives stubbornly  
like a smoldering defiant flame  
and the spirit of Steve Biko moves easily.

Dec. 18, 1977



## **Munich Poem: At the Time of the Munich Olympics**

A disgust nauseous in me  
in a foul bulge of bile  
here in the vaulted hall  
among these lofty walls  
with the blue sky, and the spired temple,  
and the green woods beyond  
through the arched and fretted windows:  
nearby is Dachau.

And once long feathers trailed  
of greasy and rancid smoke  
from the chimneys industriously stoked:  
I remember the murders and massacres,  
the ovens, the torture, the screams,  
and I who have of it all  
with a detached observant horror  
am suddenly gut-swollen with foulness:  
murderers! beasts! I remember you.

Aug. 25, 1972



Walk by the ocean  
and feel the ocean spray  
walk by the ocean  
and hear the ocean waves break  
walk by the ocean  
and see the ocean-foam  
without the ocean  
no ocean-spray  
no ocean-waves  
no ocean-foam  
without the spray  
no ocean  
without the waves  
no ocean

without the foam  
no ocean

and the spray returns to the ocean  
and the waves return to the ocean  
and the foam returns to the ocean

see the world,  
see men,  
see women,  
see God

without God  
no world  
without God  
no man  
without God  
no woman

without the world  
no God  
without man  
no God  
without woman  
no God

we all return  
we are all One  
God is All  
We are all God.

Feb. 19, 1980



## **Two Zairian Soldiers**

They are young and open  
eager to speak their halting English  
curious about the larger world  
envious of its glamour:

they are trained for lethal acts  
and coiled with a deadly efficiency  
but their fresh-faced innocence  
makes them admirable servants of an unborn world  
of a new world yet to be born.

n.d.



## **Remembering Leeuwkop**

On a thin mat, on a stone floor,  
in night's dark, odors of unwashed bodies  
clamoring, a guard's rifled shadow  
profiled against a dim skylight  
it was like it was for slaves in slavery:  
so one could enter the experience  
sense the continuity  
how it was then, how it was now  
—clearly there was some community  
some consolation, knowing how they had suffered,  
how things had been for them;  
and how things are even now  
enslavement was still attempted  
endurance was still required  
and resistance still raged steadily.

Apr. 11, 1999 and Sept. 2, 1999



## **Thomas Merton**

Light illumined his spirit;  
in the end  
by connection  
supplied the disconnect:  
a foreign Gethsemane  
testing his mettle  
gave alien answers;  
his responses,  
galvanic,  
send sparks around the world.

Jan. 29, 1999



## Reading and London

—for Hugh Geach

For the young  
who are also brave,  
heedless of costs  
and reckless of life  
valuing lightly what is rich  
and seeing intensity  
as commonplace,  
for them a vehicle  
swooping out of the dark,  
headlights blazing menace,  
cannot possibly threaten  
until that last lurching instant  
and the fatal crash:  
then it is fatally clear  
goodness is real  
but no less real  
the challenged,  
confronted evil.

1969/1970



## **For Fellow Prisoners**

Let us speak together  
let us share our thoughts  
remember our common humanity  
and voice our resolution:  
we will keep strong  
we will keep our courage:  
a strong flame will burn  
deep inside each of us  
a flame of hope, a flame of will;  
we will endure.

Feb. 28, 1999



## **Seattle**

You are not free if your mind is in chains:  
if a web of lies is woven around you  
and you are trapped in a net of deception  
and you submit, a prisoner of falsehood,  
though your body be free, you are not free  
you are not free if your mind is in chains.

Feb. 27, 1982



How does one catch  
with lyric vividness  
and plangent expressiveness  
the shifting intuitions  
and shadowy perceptions  
that lurk behind the blood  
the broken black faces  
the uniformed terror  
and speak of the true  
systematized powers  
that dominate our world.

June 24, 1974



So much is happening  
and yet, nothing is happening,  
nothing that makes major change  
so much is happening  
perhaps too much is happening  
so that nothing is happening  
that makes major change.  
What is the secret  
what must we do  
to make major change happen?  
Generally, it only comes with catastrophe  
—but even then,  
there must be preparedness  
happenings in anticipation of happenings.  
Change can come, major change  
but it must be prepared for:  
How? What must we make happen?  
Awareness is something.

Nov. 30, 1997



## **For John Harris**

Clang of metal doors  
shouted commands  
measured footfalls—  
boots, wooden sandals

clatter of metal mugs  
clatter on steel bars  
salute for a doomed man  
clatter, clatter, clatter  
stay strong stay strong stay strong

shout of metal on metal  
then, unbelieving silence  
pause, unbelieving silence  
then, faintly first  
whispered mangled words  
from broken mouth, broken jaw  
a doomed man to the gallows  
trying to sing, singing,  
“We shall overcome.”

Jan. 23, 1998



Joy explodes through the universe  
pulses through the cosmos  
is in the fever that burns through autumn  
in lambent crimson searing yellows  
joy expresses itself in the dance  
irrepressibly joy dances through creation.

Oct. 1, 1999



### **For Vaughan**

Every creation  
is a response to a problem:  
every individual  
is the mass written small  
but highlighted:  
all is uniform  
seen in the mass  
all is unique  
seen in the singular  
out of our humanity  
comes saint and sinner  
comes idiot and genius  
each worthy of respect  
each valuable:  
in a dewdrop  
all the sun's wonder is caught,  
against a grim backdrop  
a wall of prisoner's bodies  
fresh wounds stand out  
they flower against darkness.  
Overhead a lone seagull wheels  
lifting its stubborn defiant cry,  
a single feather resonates  
with soaring singing spaces

an unjudging eye's vision  
of teeming nourishing earth

sees a parade of shadows  
silhouettes in chains  
bending in unending labour:  
—the groans come from the chains  
suffisant: it is the chains that groan  
the sonorous continuing sough  
is the never-ending prison sigh  
that echoes from corners and crevices.

July 19, 2004



Beyond this problem  
many others rise  
peaks loom through mists  
beyond this range  
gathering our energies  
we know much more  
will be demanded  
in times to come.

July 21, 2004



Ultimately,  
it is peace we seek:  
beyond frantic greed  
beyond desire's unrest  
it is what we desire  
it is our heart's need:  
let us but learn  
to find peace in ourselves  
a peace for which we yearn  
and learn, above all,  
that this is a need we share

and sharing our need for peace  
we learn to share peace.  
It is in sharing our need for peace  
that we learn peace for others  
and for ourselves  
that we learn/earn/achieve  
understanding our deep need for peace  
and understanding that this is a need all others feel  
and sharing our deep need for peace  
with others  
is the way we help others to achieve peace  
and to achieve it ourselves.

Aug. 18, 2004



### **For Amy Goodman of Democracy Now**

There is a voice  
that comes through  
muddles of discords  
with such sweet clarity  
suddenly there is blue sky  
silver clouds sailing  
miles of distances—  
truth, clear songs of birds.

June 28, 2004



## **Zocalo**

It stretches for great distances  
that enormous expanse,  
harsh surface underfoot  
immense, a great square  
confronting a vast edifice;  
(nearby, steps, a cathedra—  
Maria Imperatriz, possibly  
mothers, babes at their breasts  
suckling, with begging cups):  
this ground is sacred  
soaked with heroic blood  
of those who died for freedom,  
sacred too, with footprints—  
Villon, Zapata trod this square  
now Zapatistas arrive  
a fanfare of triumphant trumpet notes  
flourish of banners, bandanas, masks  
with banners that declare  
“We are all Indians”  
for all the world, they declare.

Mar. 11, 2001



## **At Night, after Porto Alegre; South African Airways 747**

In this dim winged cathedral  
soaring above oceans of silvery cloud  
far beyond Atlantic's tumultuous heave  
we move, star-girt, distant  
from greed's debris, genocides, calcined bones  
curled in our private shrines  
or bent over light-pooled pages  
to a new world, new earth, where finally  
our dreams can be fulfilled.

Apr. 1, 2001



So neat they were, so attractive,  
shapely with a jewel-like gleam,  
but also so lethal, lying there quietly  
in a detective's hand.  
Having known a bullet in my back,  
I regarded these bullets with respect,  
knowing they might have plunged  
blasted into my skull; "Fight! Fight!" was urged:  
"A lucky escape," I thought,  
but commended my self on my prudence:  
inches deep in snow outside  
O'Hare Airport, my feet tingling,  
was still preferable to lying  
a corpse staining new-fallen snow.

2004



How the years fly by!  
Notes two years old lie around  
as if I wrote them yesterday.  
How the years fly by!  
Chances lost for things to do.  
My time on earth diminishes;  
my heart shrinks as the years shrink.

Mar. 18, 1996



She sits starrng  
    into emptiness  
with lusterless eyes  
her hands too feeble  
to trouble the flies  
clustering around the  
    mouth of her infant  
sucking vainly at her  
    milkless nipple.

2000



Dawn comes softly to La Guardia:  
pink light pursues the cloudwrack.

I head away from the East  
with customary stubborn resilience:  
chores, imperfectly performed.

n.d.



An old black woman,  
suffering,  
tells me I have given her  
“new images”

—a father bereaved  
by radical heroism  
finds consolation  
in my verse.

then I know  
these are those I write for  
and my verse works.

June 20, 1980



### **Gerard Sekoto's Studio**

We climb the narrow unlit stairs  
to a drafty garret and cold floor;  
the vinegary wine  
does not cheer my chilled spirits;

and the images of Africans dancing  
flashes against the sunset flames  
of the lowveld's low horizon,  
cannot cheer, can only intensify, melancholy.

Mar. 16, 1980



**New York Times, 3/29/1979**

At Meddi Spedi's grave  
his photograph looks out.

His mother  
stands before his picture  
(eyes stare under bushy eyebrows)

Don't look at me like that,  
my son.

A young man passes.

Please come and be my son.  
She embraces him.

He weeps;  
She comforts him.



Spring morning;  
the metal spire  
of the Chrysler Tower  
glitters  
over Bellevue hospital  
the clear sky  
is ice-blue.

n.d.



**Gainsville**

And here wonderfully, once  
lived the wondrous love of my love;  
now a deadly smoke skeins around the charnel  
house

that once was the city of Birmingham.

Apr. 11, 1980



## **In the Alcoves of my Heart**

There are alcoves in my heart  
I have not looked into  
and closets in my heart  
I have not dared to open.  
Somewhere are images of you  
your head in profile.

n.d.



## **Flying to Seattle**

White cumulus cloud forms.  
I saw two shapes embrace,  
a shaggy haired one lying over  
a supine female whose arms reached up  
to the body athwart her;  
and as I watched, the lovers merged,  
dissolved in cloud mist:  
and I thought of our so nearly perfect love.

May 21, 1976



## **For Danny Ransom**

flame  
flickering  
salt-seawind assailed  
candle  
guttering  
barbed wire prongs impaled  
blonde  
braving  
ghetto blackjacks traps  
love  
enfolding me  
holding the torturers at bay.

Mar. 17 or 18 no year



## **For Dr. Karenga**

Long hours after midnight  
in the deep dark of my open window  
I awake to awareness of presences peering,  
the golden faces, like large flowers  
of the stars of the Southern Cross.

O, let not my heart be petrified  
not calcined in layers of dust,  
hate, distrust, disgust, betrayal,  
let it once more, for once, be a flower  
open to give.

n.d.



## For Yvonne

How beauty comes to flower  
in the African sun!  
Warmth evoking warmth,  
Charm charming,  
And a glowing content  
Over all and everywhere.

July 4, 1974



A cool interior on a hot afternoon  
fusillades of bright light  
crackle down dark corridors  
light leaps of bright glass  
beyond, the soft grey drapes  
the cheerful light stabs  
the lightblades splinter  
the soft folds muffle  
and menace  
there is beauty  
and joy  
and terror  
and pain  
so I seize the ambience  
recall the memory  
of that instant  
in our relation  
the bright glow  
the cheerful pain  
the smothering tenderness  
the whole complex  
countervailing  
oxymoron  
of our love.

Mar. 13 no year



I hoard each day  
I count each day as precious  
as if it is the last.  
And when the last day comes  
I hope I will have the grace  
to accept it as the last  
and then turn back to fondle  
gravely, but with no repining,  
my treasured hoard.

Jan. 25 no year



I never said goodbye.  
All partings were temporary,  
never final;  
goodbyes were needless  
besides, it was drama  
when the ideal was reserve  
and melodrama was gauche  
above all, partings evoked feeling  
emotions would show or be stirred  
and that would not do  
so I said no goodbyes  
made no partings  
never said farewells  
when I tried to stroke the fine hairs  
of her wrist in mute greeting  
she cried out: please don't touch me.

Mar. 20, 1980



Alpha and Beta Centauri wheel  
past the fringe of the foliage where we drink,  
slip down to the past of time's abyss  
slot into the horizon's cache;

what lostness, unsated lust for home  
while slugs of yearning eat the cerebrum's edge  
makes us drink blindly, and endless drool?  
home-thirst, unslakable, devours our hours.

June 19, 1974



Small red-roofed houses  
somehow absurd  
clinging to steep hillsides  
sloping down to grey waves  
tossing white lace  
into chill southeaster winds

a sad small town  
a chill grey air  
a harsh cold light  
on dark shuttered wall  
and a lost inaccessible  
forever lost love.

Nov. 23, 1998



### **Ballad of Street Names**

Singing, song-like are the names  
that names should move one so!  
somewhere in the frame  
heartstrings vibrate  
as memories take shape  
somewhere behind the eyes  
teardrops start.

Sept. 22 and Dec. 6, 1999



It will be so pleasant  
when my time comes  
to have my ashes scattered  
on sun-dappled earth  
in some leafy close  
where late afternoon gold  
is poured on leathery gloss  
of brown and magenta leaves,  
where earth's soft breathing  
moves in gentle waves  
through tall blue spruces  
poised in their fragrant dream.

May 6, 1998



By the banks of the Tamar  
looking out on green fields  
sweep of hills and slopes  
in sunlit haze of late summer  
a verdant shadow descends  
cloud of peace, cloud of calm,  
cloud of knowing being.

Aug. 18, 1999



It was just like this  
at the Villa Algarve  
the sunlit houses  
the shining palms  
beyond, the blue waters  
of the curving bay  
and the bars  
gleam of grey metal  
with the chill  
spilt into the cell.

n.d.



Perhaps if I had loved you well  
your shadow would darken  
    all my days  
who knows and who can tell?

Perhaps if I had loved you well  
you would be all the women I have known  
you would not shadow all the  
    women I have known  
    who knows?

@2000



Hints of starlight haunt the night sky  
points of distant loveliness flicker  
amid continents of unpenetrable dark:  
grateful relief for hints of beauty  
amid eons of unmerciful gloom.

Nov. 1998



This tinsel heart  
gleaming up from the scuffed carpet  
seems to wink the affection  
of a dear lost friend.

It is as if, even now,  
with an understanding nod  
you noted my unacknowledged need  
for affection, for tenderness.

Aug. 2, 2000



**Seattle**  
**In the Tenderloin**

Some last flicker  
of defiant vitality  
gutters in the collapsing husk  
a despairing lunge  
of shrinking sexuality  
reaching with skeletal fingers,  
disarticulated, arthritic,  
for my frissoning skin  
from a cavernous skull  
shrunk to a calcined thinness  
eyes glare, plead, twinkle  
in appeal, denunciation:  
halloween's pumpkin mask  
of play, horror and grisly humour  
All-Saints and the unavailing reprise  
of All-Souls, doomed and damned.

Sept. 20, 1996



Why else would I cling  
to past records that have no value  
but that they enable me  
to recall past angers, hurts  
and hates, and so revive them  
when they might be forgotten.

Feb. 27, 1999



## **Post November 28, My 72<sup>nd</sup> Birthday**

Incredible!

That I should have lived so long!

And done so much

And so much travel!

Around the world twice—and more.

And plans for 1997?: Durban/Westville/Hawaii/San Francisco/  
Boulder/E. Lansing/Philadelphia/Binghamton/ Cape Town?

And retirement? And income? And travel?

But enough:

I will be content with

What I have done: Not SATISFIED nor compliant

Forward to whatever:

Amnesty?

Dec. 1, 1996



“La vida es un sueno,”  
she said with calm voice  
opening a pathway into her mind  
that I had not known of  
a sunlit garden  
that I had not known of  
that I could saunter into  
by vivid rosebushes  
and harlequin paving  
this was a new additional intimacy  
that I discovered and treasured.

Nov. 14, 1997



Mild silver autumn  
afternoon's satiation;  
all existence basks.

Browning salvias hint  
at autumn's stealthy approach;  
blood coagulates.

Tall grasses gleaming  
in late afternoon sunlight:  
European landscape.

Oct. 12, 1999



On this grey-silver day  
of cloudbanks light-suffused,  
my dear, I remember pain  
frantic grief, unspeakable  
and your presence—  
voice, shape, touch and feel—  
and how it redeemed  
an intractable mutilating world.

Sept. 30, 1998



## Prose Poem: Visiting My Father's Birthplace

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

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

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

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



## **Verona, PA**

Green cemetery slopes  
tell of sadness, of mounds where decay  
works its slow patient will  
through organs or ligaments  
while bones quietly moulder:  
black shadows from dark cypresses  
fall across grass with stubborn vitality:  
passion itself is enough to kill  
some, dying, blame it on  
fate or stars.  
Love lives, love dies, life lives;  
some turn uncomplainingly  
to their graves.

July 21, 2004



## **Sheltering under Gingkos**

Lightning slashes dusk's grey mists  
thunder growls a deep-throated menace  
sheltering from rain under slender gingkos  
death's threat electric thrusts from concrete  
from silvery shadows, rain-sweetened air:  
all is possible, all is transient:  
after all, existence's elegance remains  
sets joyous laughter rising unbidden  
as these imperious gingkos rise  
spread fronds of fanlike delicacy,  
sway gracefully to their decay.

Aug. 19, 2004



How unforgiving are the body's needs  
how ineluctable its demands  
it will cry out for attention  
for satisfaction, even satiation  
ultimately for surcease:  
so we arrive at oblivion  
so comes closure, arrival of oblivion.

2004



Sunlit Saturday afternoon  
laughter drifting over beers,  
music, cigarette smoke:  
outside, in a shabby vehicle  
parked curbside, someone's heart  
is constricted: did you too, my beauty  
eyes brighter with unshed tears,  
catch your bitter breath in unspoken  
sorrow, wordless parting?

Aug. 10, 2004



You're Dennis Brutus the poet  
I'll do it for you—  
it will be kinda fun.

Your poetry is terrific—  
in the Student Voice—  
Best I've seen.

Feb. 20, 2001



Silver wing gull, touched by sunset  
winging into dusk's darkening amethyst  
sees its habitat engorged  
with green pustulence  
is bombarded  
buffeted by potent invisible waves  
of myriads of cyber messages  
disoriented from sun's daedal constancy  
adrift  
veering  
plunges to extinction  
mysterious stellar  
centrifuges  
with choking  
cry.

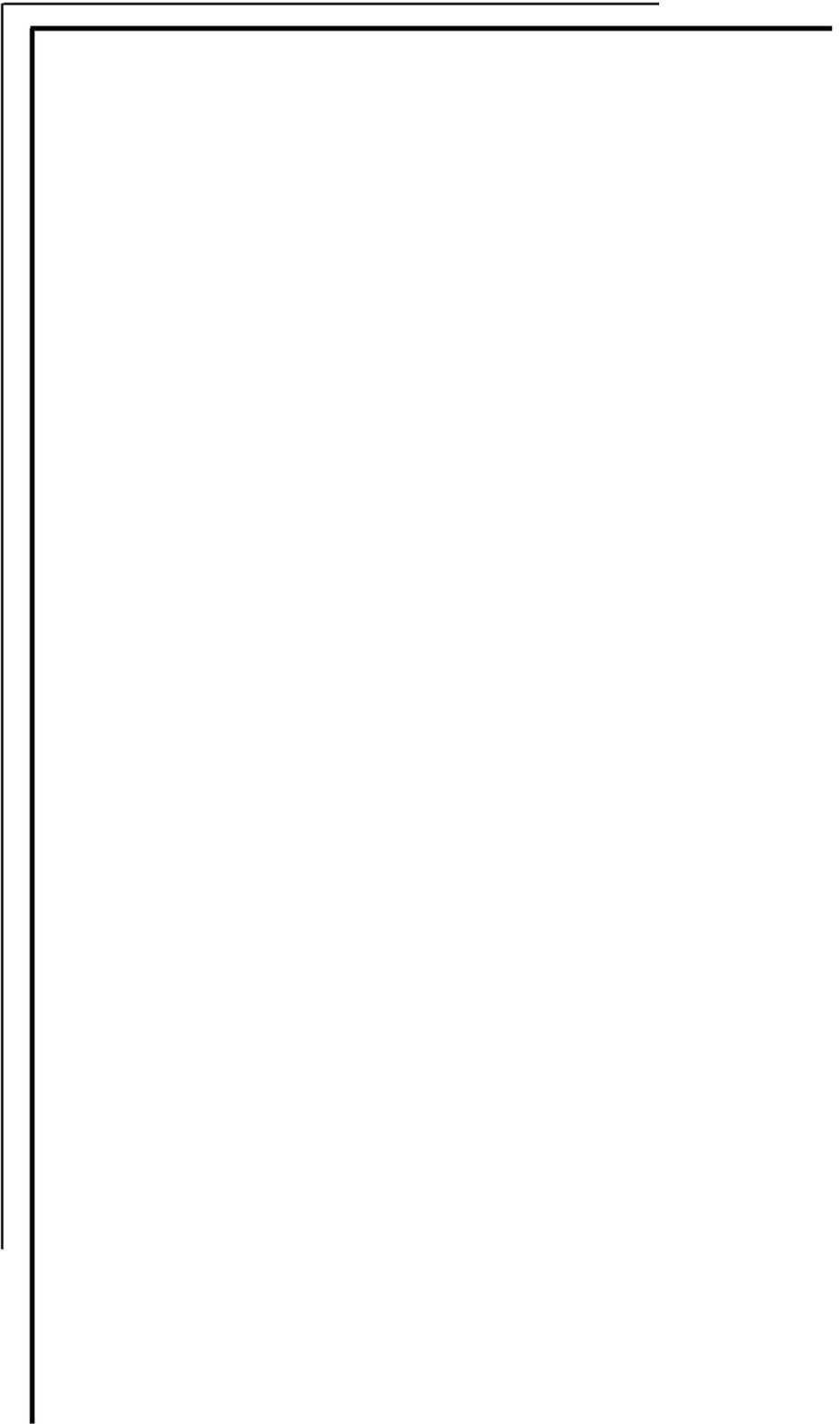
Apr. 4, 2001



Today I could sit down  
and write the saddest poem  
of my entire life,  
remembering this date  
which is the date I lost  
the one love of my life,  
who was torn from my arms  
by a brutal racist government  
and the intrigues of my friends  
who tried to protect what they thought  
was precious in my life,  
not understanding they were robbing me  
of my dearest, most precious possession  
(though I would not have claimed possession).  
What we had, what we understood  
was joint-ownership.

2004





*New Poems*  
*from the*  
*Dennis Brutus Collection*

A dark figure shambles in the  
    grey edges of the city  
unkempt and destitute  
shambles in grey dust at the  
ribbled edges of the city  
dust settles in a noxious  
    endless drizzle.



### **A Pittsburgh Christmas Carol**

By the waters of Alleghany  
we huddled in the dark and wept  
by ice-clad streets and rain-soaked buildings  
we huddled in the cold and wept.

we tried to sing  
but the words of the song  
strangled in our throats  
we tried to pray  
but the words of the prayer  
crumbled in our hearts  
we called to God  
when we could not sleep  
but God, unhearing, slept

by the waters of Alleghany  
we huddled in the dark and wept.

For Crafford Gryll



## **A Summer Place**

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

Feb. 12, 2004



Ah, slim silver beech  
trailing your graceful branches,  
why was she so strange?

July 29, 1995



Alert inquiring eyes  
searching faces  
testing textures and spaces  
miracle of infant mind.

Sept. 25



All merely stardust  
we act out those impulses  
that impel the world.

Oct. 23, 4:50 a.m.



An erratic experience  
concrete wilderness  
a scrivener's jungle  
they will exclaim dismayed  
somewhat in pity, somewhat in horror  
while I chuckle amused  
buried in my predicament.



And now  
better than ever before  
in the history of the world  
we understand  
how the instruments of love  
are the instruments of death  
and how love  
though it endures all things  
must be handled  
very delicately.

poem for Aids Anthology



As the dark slowly deepens  
figures take shape and harden:  
great bodies form from the past  
with sheen of muscle,  
dim glamour of battle dress  
dulled flicker of weapons:  
gallant challenge of the fallen  
whose will for freedom still pulses  
from the earth, from the dust  
and from shouts and eyes of angry youth  
whose pounding feet shake the land.

5:51 a.m.



## **At a Funeral: Ossie Davis**

When his coffin, covered with flowers  
was carried out,  
many waved in farewell;  
some waved to a great artistic talent  
now lost to the black community  
now lost to theatre's world  
some to a great caring human  
who spoke out for human rights  
everywhere, wherever he saw rights violated  
with a talent so superb, so assured  
you saw a master in action, seemingly without effort.  
Farewell we say, we all say, sadly,  
we mourn your loss, we salute your life.

Feb. 13, 2005, 1:14 a.m.



At dawn from eastern skies  
clouds like silver  
birds come flying.

Alternative:

At dawn from eastern skies  
flocks of clouds come flying  
like silvery birds.



## **Brazil: Revisited**

Dawnlight seeps slowly into Sao Paulo skies  
as if reluctant to rediscover old betrayals  
or disclose new ones in Lula's disappointed lands  
(IMF/World Bank scoundrels have tenacious  
as well as rapacious ravening claws)  
but trees silhouetted against pale skies  
against malodorous salvias assert  
irrepressible growth, undeterrable vitality:  
daylight advances, accepts sunset  
all elements of daedal Cycladic law.



Browning salvias hint  
at autumn's stealthy approach;  
blood coagulates.

Oct. 12, 1999



Browning, looking down  
on his house library in Wandsworth  
when I visited  
would have applauded  
my tribute to Shelley  
purchased in Port Elizabeth  
(Pound, too, who envied Browning  
for that unmatched Sordello,  
would have smiled his crooked  
cavalier/troubadour smile):  
I paying homage wished  
his work was better known,  
was more highly valued:  
that I might better serve his cause.  
Curators are cautious people.

Oct. 9, 2003; rev. Aug. 21, 2005



Chicago turns gold  
at sunset; somehow the dross  
still there, is concealed.

Sept. 9, 1999



### **Cineaste**

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

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



Fair jacaranda, we weep to see  
you haste away so soon.

It is not unusual, nor unmanly  
nor unnatural to mourn the decay  
of beauty, its evanescence or fragility  
tension gathers behind the eyes  
pinches nostrils, contorts the mouth in  
a rictus of woe.

Dumbly the blossoms lie  
neatly gathered in the gutter—  
Keep your city tidy, civic virtue urges.

O, there are other, multiple sadnesses:  
Everything, brother, everything dies;  
I gather my own pouch of wizened bones:  
we have, flowers, a common fate:  
but it was beauty you brought in the world.

Nov. 7, 2008, 11:35 a.m.



Fetch it out of memory  
dust it off and polish it  
and let it shine like some bright jewel  
a jewel of glowing luster  
that flashes when it catches the light.  
Wear it like some bright jewel  
and let in shine let it shine let it shine  
brilliantly.

Fetch out that memory  
and let it show in your face  
let it shine in your eyes  
with the brightness of a glad confident morning  
with the glow of achievement  
of something done  
with the glow of contentment  
of service given  
and let it shine in your face  
to light up the world  
let it shine let it shine let it shine  
brilliantly  
splendidly  
inspiringly  
let it shine  
let it shine  
let it shine  
let it shine

Is there tucked away  
in some back corner of your mind  
some dim cupboard of your memory  
bits of an action  
remnants of a memory  
some action some time against injustice  
in support of justice?  
fetch it out  
brush it off  
and let it shine  
    let it shine  
    let it shine  
let it shine like some ornament  
brushed off and polished  
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine brilliantly

Take it out,  
brush it off  
and wear it like a badge of honor  
an emblem of some gallant action done  
wear it as your badge of honor  
and let it shine, let it shine, let it shine  
brilliantly.

Jan. 4, 2000



**For my daughter Tina (Mehitabel!),  
with love from Dad (Archy!)**

Sturdy sprig of pin-oak  
brightening my room's lumber  
even now, unfading after several  
months of inattention,  
still, with it, your caring presence  
lingers, confers a pleasant aura;  
for this, I offer you, my dear,  
my lasting, heartfelt thanks.



**For Stanley Turrentine**

Confident of his coming fame  
he offered LP's as a gift  
as we left our plane:  
music was round him  
warm-throated, lyrical  
as his radiant hope,  
generous as his friendly warmth:  
now he is gone, but his warm notes  
linger, fill night silence with a glow.

Aug. 2, 2004



For the young, the buoyant young  
young men and women of our land  
boys and girls, our upstanding youth  
greetings and welcome  
I feel that you belong,  
inherit the bounty that is yours  
and surge, surge to new hope  
bring your fresh energies  
to make our land ever better  
ever more bountiful  
more generous in gifts  
more open to growth, to fellowship.

Oct. 11, 2008



**For W.M.S.**

On a jagged way you go  
with a broken-backed cur's shamble  
a drunk's jaunty gait amid rubble:  
pain clings with the stench of stale sweat  
and anger flaps its tattered rags.

but also the fragrance of wilted blossoms,  
the grace of battered flowers erecting after rain,  
angers fumbling lyric defiance  
and magic: scent lingering from a woman's roused flesh.

Sept. 30/Oct. 30 (rev); version 7



## Funeral at Sea\*

Because I did not know him  
could not recall his face—  
(may have had him in my class)  
(a wreath of flowers flung on water  
sets up no ripples in a massive  
ocean swell, majestic, magisterial)  
nor could I penetrate his sorrow  
grief so deep, life seemed mere waste;  
sorrow disfigured faces near me  
I remained mute, unable to speak  
but I too, believe me, sorrowed,  
wished I could ease their grief.

*\*A young man committed suicide on Semester at Sea. We performed a simple ceremony at sea.*



How gallantly their flags have glittered  
in sun-silvered breezes  
how stubbornly their banners flapped  
in lowered cloud and drenching rain  
how urgently they urged the struggle  
in the teeth of adversity and batons:  
and still their courage steels us  
their wise words define the fight  
dissect the prospects for our victory.

for Paul LeBlanc's book June 26



I salute the jacarandas anyway  
whatever else the world may offer  
offer for our praise  
or our opprobrium  
I salute the jacarandas anyway.

It will be as if I never lived  
there will be no trace of me  
there will be no sign of me remembered  
it will be as if I never lived  
no trace of me will remain  
it will be as if nothing had been.

What will it matter if nothing remains?

you will have breathed the fresh morning air  
and walked the dewy morning grass  
and will have asserted for once your being

and I will salute the jacarandas once more.

Oct. 3, 2008

For Mahmoud Darwish

East London, Oct. 11, 2008



If you can make two blades of grass grow  
where one blade grew before  
the world will beat a ploughshare to your door  
and put you in a better mousetrap.



In the stupendously complex  
interactions of infinite intelligence  
I am an infinitesimal cell  
interacting with my fellows  
in a sempiternal dance of axons and dendrites  
I and this red oak exist and interact,  
cells of the central divine intelligence,  
some of us are diseased and suffering  
gradual processes of healing may take centuries.



In the suburbs of Durban  
in the month of October  
lavender mists of flowers  
hang about the trees.



Inside this skull, this cell,  
this casket, coffin, vault  
anticipating afterend  
all is ease, is comfort:  
a little niggling care perhaps  
for debts, bills, cares burdening  
friends, acquaintances, strangers  
but all else is ease  
content to be ending, content  
to have been of some service,  
content to end, contemplating ending.

Jan. 1, 2005

Webster Hall #511, Pittsburgh



## **JFK Airport**

Miles of landing lights  
planes landing like fireflies:  
overhead the moon.

Nov. 6 midnight, London time



Joy explodes through the universe  
pulses through the cosmos  
is in the fever that burns through autumn  
in lambent crimson searing yellows  
joy expresses itself in the dance  
irrepressibly joy dances through creation.

For Bob Johnson, Shona Shariff  
Oct. 10, 1999



## **Looking for Langston?**

Looking for Langston?  
You will find him where there is laughter  
where there are tears  
where there is sorrow  
and where there are fears,  
and where unbreakable courage survives  
in the resilience, the optimism  
lights the dark streets of the city—  
any city! Keep looking for him  
keep looking for Langston.

Pittsburgh, Feb. 25, 2003



Mild silver autumn  
afternoon's satiation:  
all existence basks.

Oct. 12, 1999



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

Mar. 11, 2007

Alternative:

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

Mar. 11, 2007 & Mar. 12, 2007



Near the la Rega de Sao Francisco  
in the square where they sell  
    cassettes, postcards and condoms  
for the tourists  
is the Pillourihno  
the pillory where slaves were  
    publicly whipped  
for disrespect or whatever:  
St. Francis, who knew something  
    about pain  
and bleeding wounds  
might have turned his mind to  
    another scourging.



## **New York: Cultural Capital of the Empire**

The rotting Apple:  
maggots swirl in dizzy haste,  
pursuing notice.

May 16, 1983



No, I was not to possess it  
not to retain its guttering flame  
although it guttered gamely, flickered  
as darkness shuttered down.  
I was to give it up  
surrender it, relinquish it.



No time was her faith more ardent  
than this patron saint's day,  
Day of St. Jude, Patron Saint of Hopeless Cases,  
she of course of the little flower Therese of Lisieux  
almost eponymous with bloemetjie little flower  
of May, of course, Madonna Soeur of Lourdes and  
that other penitent Mary Magdalene  
so, if prayers can function in that other  
perhaps excellent supernatural world—  
if there is any help, any greeting, any pledge  
of affection, of regret for multiple failings  
let her send it on this day, what may pass for prayers.

Oct. 28/29

For My Mother on St. Jude's Day



On this grey-silver day  
of cloudbanks light-suffused  
my dear, I remember pain  
frantic grief, unspeakable longing  
and your presence—  
voice, shape, touch and feel—  
and how it redeemed  
an intractable mutilating world.

Sept. 30, 1998  
(Sept. 30, 1960)



Once you have slept  
on an island  
you will never be quite  
the same.

Nov. 24, For Rachel Feld



Our train rolls into Lyons terminus  
shuddering aside the grimy buildings  
that merge with the settling dark  
whose texture is a fabric  
of shadows and spirits—  
the unforgiving tortured who  
cannot rest.



Peregrine  
Where will you rest  
Peregrine in flight  
What grace! What wonder!  
Do you contrive that elegance?  
Peregrine, restless peregrine  
by what shifting waves  
over what rolling sand dunes  
do you hover?  
Peregrine, wheeling peregrine  
what horrors, what despairs,  
evoke that raucous caw?  
Peregrine, drooping peregrine  
what sadness have you seen?  
What horrors worse than these  
that you slip past the ravine's edge?  
Peregrine? Peregrine?

Oct. 25



### **Pictures of Ajlon**

That mighty traveler Ibn Battuta  
spoke of the strong castle of Ajlon  
heroic Saladin caused to be built  
against marauding crusaders.

I too mounted those massive stoneblocks  
grey-shadowed by passing centuries  
and felt Time's shadow light as cobwebs  
with quiet insistence on my shoulders.

Now crouched in my closet of awareness  
breathing sadness, walled by horror  
of destruction pounding from the skies  
to shatter flesh and ancient treasures

I grope for consolation, fingering images,  
like unfocussed pictures I hug in my mind  
and hope these wounding memories  
can ease the pain lacerating my brain.

Jan. 26, 1991



### **Pine Shadows**

Walking through  
    pine shadows  
on slopes of Acropolis  
ages dissolve  
    ages flee.



Pleasant tree-shadowed streets  
discreetly set back houses  
their shuttered windows blank  
concealing possible secrets:  
there I had my own secrets  
my own hidden delights:  
the past will come back—  
tears vaporized may return  
as mist, raindrops or dew.



### **Prose Statement:**

I continue to write and to publish fairly sporadically. My concerns have expanded since South Africa has joined the world community and it is now part of global problems, but they continue to focus on freedom, on social justice and the right to creative expression. The “Salutes” published as a tribute for my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday were a pleasant marking of a milestone, but by no means the end of the road—I still care passionately about freedom, both in South Africa and everywhere else.

Jan. 1, 1995



Recognize: Comfort  
in the U.S. is purchased  
by anguish elsewhere.



### **Remembering Cairo**

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

Egypt is playing a tawdry role in  
the agony of the Palestinians;  
but it is not new, sadly.  
Jan. 1909



## **Remembering Kateb Yacine**

A delicate face, soft voice,  
an aura of associations  
of struggles, sorrows, so great  
they were unnameable,  
horrors not to be spoken,  
not to be thought of,  
not to be endured:  
barbed wire stuck  
in eyeballs,  
testes implanted mockingly  
on female crotches,  
all of struggle, of resistance,  
of not-to-be-broken will.



## **Repentance Day/ Reparations Day/ Fasting Day**

Let us be grateful  
Let us gather to give thanks  
and as we celebrate earth's bounty  
let us give thanks for all good things  
let us remember those who labored  
and those who sacrificed for us  
but let us remember especially  
those deprived and those we deprived  
and resolve to make amends:  
to those who were robbed and slaughtered  
let us make reparations  
let us be giving to those from whom much was taken away  
let us, in this, truly give thanks.

For Ward Churchill, Boulder



## Romeo and Juliet

Innocence is not ignorance  
awareness of body's  
potential  
is part of youth.  
The women will goad  
the men on , for this  
is how virility is established;  
so one selects the male  
who will have the fittest offspring  
fittest to survive—  
ultimately, the final crown  
is with the survival of the species  
Mercutio/Tybalt/Benvolio/ Romeo.



Salute the gallant ones  
who served gallantly  
while illness devoured their tissue  
devoured their lives, their time  
served smilingly, with a joke for the time  
patiently endured the foils of others  
salute these gallant enduring ones.

For Ali Hebshi



Seeing Picasso's works  
one has a sense  
that is how God creates.



Shimon Peres is honored by Balliol College, Oxford  
Nelson Mandela honors Cecil John Rhodes in Foundation  
(on the occasion of Mandela's birthday)  
For he's a jolly good fellow (3 times)  
and so say all of us (3 times)  
INCLUDING CECIL RHODES (3 times; addition by D.B.)

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

Bailed out by Old Balliol  
Haled before old Halliol  
Sold out via old Sailliol  
Traded by old Traillol  
Dismally failed by old Failliol  
Deserves jailing by old Jailliol  
Tyburn is the place where he should burn  
Terrorist of all the terrorists  
Shimon Peres is the tera of the terrorists  
Together we mourn these events;  
together we mark these betrayals  
together in shame and sorrow we mark these events.

Dennis Brutus  
Worcester, MA , 2008



Shining on the darkened earth  
on what horrors do you shine  
what terrors might you see  
bring peace to this sorrowing earth.



So much pleasure from Nature—  
observed in passing  
or starting point for thoughts  
moods, emotions, reflections  
sometimes, too, memories

Aug. 30, 2005



Spring comes to England  
and my mouth is numb;  
the blight of Southern racist putrescence  
extends along my being like sheeted rust.

My eyes, bleared with rime  
from an acrid sterile air  
are rheum-filled to impercipience,  
my lips flake spittle scabs  
in creaky articulation

and the sap and blood run high in England  
fluttering green-moth leaves chrysalis  
from the black wooden branches  
gnarled and knotted and noded.

For Miriam Patchen, Dec. 19, 1986



## **(Statement of Political Beliefs)**

It seems to me  
it might be possible  
to put together a coherent statement  
of my political beliefs  
(or of how I see the world)  
by looking at my poetry—  
at least finding implicit statements—  
though these things—e.g. my belief in non-violent struggle  
which may not come out clearly  
since I have not articulated them—  
See the John Jebe poem—  
some central ideas  
    freedom is basic  
    creative action is an assertion of humanity / freedom  
    is necessary  
    is heroic  
    (but does not need  
    heroic posturing / dogmatism—of any sort—is to be avoided  
    (though one may occasionally be guilty of it)

slogans, sloganizing, sloganizing (and clichés) must be  
avoided like the plague (hmm!)

to assert one's full humanity is also to achieve one's full  
potential—  
    it is what true freedom is about (as defined among others,  
    by Karl Marx), but  
    I arrive at definitions  
    independently.

Nov. 22, 2008



## **Sterling Brings It**

From the blue and silver  
fading to grey and darkness  
over Chicago's band shell  
Sterling brings it  
Sterling brings the blues

Muddy Waters' blues  
barreling into the groin  
as tenderness, naked lust  
gritty, guttural, gutbucket blues

Oh that potent half-inch swagger  
of well-fleshed haunch

Sterling brings the blues.

For Sterling Plump



Sterling brings the blues  
out of the grey dusk  
when the blue fades to silver  
and into blackness  
over Chicago's band shell  
Sterling brings the blues

All that sorrow  
all that stubborn laughter  
music beauty uncoiling  
out of the dark the pain the stars

Smoky old Southside by the railroad tracks  
where you hear the old men growling  
in the lanes there are mongrels howling  
where the EL rattles by

Muddy's raucous lust  
(Ol' hoochie-coochie man!)  
howling wolf's plaintive wail  
all the suggestive lurch  
of a ten-inch swaggered haunch  
all that music's subtly uncoiling  
Sterling brings them all!  
Sterling swings the blues  
Sterling hawks the news  
Sterling blasts the blues  
Sterling has a ball.



Still they sing  
sirens of insensate longing  
driving us to shatter  
on shoals of frustrate hope

Still they weave  
patterns of disjunct design  
stab pierce and slash  
with random logicless shears

Still, blind fates,  
they urge, awaken desire  
for utopian dreams;  
still we shipwreck on love.

Sept. 30, 1998



Suddenly, on the  
left, framed by birch  
          boughs, placid  
Lake Zurich appears.

Oct. 5/Oct. 6 en route Boston-Zurich

Alternative:

Framed by birch boughs on  
the left, suddenly placid  
Lake Zurich appears.



Sun-silvered towers  
of cloud soar on either hand:  
almost touchable.

Nov. 8, Flying into Durban

Alternative:

Sun-silvered towers  
of cloud: breaks on either hand:  
almost touchable.



Surrounded by silence  
over a near-empty glass  
he broods again in semi-dark:  
once it made sense  
his pain demanded respect  
that staring at distant vistas  
spoke of an exile's grief:  
But now? Now with people free?  
(Free at least to vote)  
Well yes,--but also free to starve.

(There are more beggars now  
children with—incredibly—  
smiling eyes, hoping to charm  
some small change from your pocket  
to silence their growling stomachs)  
So, yes, let him sit in acrid dark  
brooding on his distant griefs.

Kingston, Toronto, Pittsburgh



Swirling, soaring, curvetting  
great brown oak leaves, swallowtail-shaped  
dive or lift on thermals  
as autumn winds gust

swirling in circles yellow, brown, or scarlet  
curiously playful or joyful  
little dead leaves celebrate their dying  
it's what, it seems to me, life is more truly about  
joyful beginnings, joyful endings  
a stubborn will to survive, to be  
more truly describes our world:  
after, nothing: being has once more been.

If I could pray, if I believed in prayer,  
if I could offer joy, relief or consolation,  
I would on this day, remembering "All Souls"  
offer you some evidence of affection;  
instead I offer these truthful images:  
small bright dead leaves in playful dance.

For my Mother and Father  
Nov. 1/ All Saints All Souls/2005

“Take thou this rose,  
this rose I give to thee”  
she sang, melodiously:  
what romantic images  
was she conjuring I wonder  
in the drear unloving world she bore?

November 18, 1989



Tall grasses gleaming  
in late afternoon sunlight:  
European landscape.

Oct. 12, 1999



The cocktail circuit  
where—in diplomatic language—  
they tell cock tales  
of what they sucked  
there is always the possibility  
that a man can persuade himself  
that his acts of betrayal  
can be refashioned in his mind  
to acts of virtue, or at least  
of necessary compromise  
in service of the common good.  
How common! And to what good  
to get where they are.

For Ahmed Kathrada  
12:40 a.m. Oct. 1, 1999



The Cubans are a proud people:  
admired by some, pitied by others  
they have endured terrible inflictions  
consequent on Yankee “manifest destiny.”  
they are also showered  
with gifts from those who share  
their courageous opposition to  
imperialist designs:  
grateful for generous offers  
they still decline to become beggars:  
their courage is also a product of the pride  
that inspires them to resist.



### **The March**

The march will be remembered  
the march  
from Alex to Sandton  
the long march  
the long march will be remembered  
with all the other marches  
the march in Sharpeville  
the march in Sebokeng  
the march in Boipatong  
the march in Ginsburg  
the march in Bisho  
they will all be remembered  
together they make the Great March  
the Great March to Freedom  
from Alex to Sandton  
the Great March to Freedom.

Oct. 31/2002; rev. Aug. 31, 2002



The truth, I think, was different  
it may have been in that shelter  
where I prepared to spend the night with you  
when some drunk kissed my hands  
and thanked me for my services  
to the wounded suffering poor  
that I knew I could never leave  
it meant we would always be parted  
and I would always be  
dogged and stubborn, my  
country's servitor.



There will be enough time  
between the taking of a piss  
and the catching of a cab  
to begin to reconstruct  
the story of our slow ascent  
to erectile humanity  
now that a cradle will be restored:  
Iraq's museum will be re-opened.

What the Yank barbarians pillaged  
what their bombers pulverized  
we may start anew restoring  
tessellating motes of dust  
vainly attempting to recover  
irrecoverable past evidence;  
Rejoice, rejoice, it is time to rejoice,  
verily it is time to rejoice  
Inderdaad, dit is tyd te baljarr!

March 5-10, 2009

*Note: The media has reported that Iraq's museum is to be reopened*

Last line in Afrikaans: Truly, it is time to celebrate.



Those women, desperate  
huddled over their knees  
in soundless weeping  
those scraps of torn washing  
stretched anyhow, anywhere

O, the night seems to come  
in slabs of cold blackness  
here where people huddle  
under sacking, tarpaulin, rags  
huddle vainly against the cold  
(bare ruined choirs  
where late the sweet birds sang)

O, that staring frightened child's eyes  
the bundled pathetic belongings  
lost, forgotten, abandoned  
such a wail of misery  
rising in the night  
appealing,  
vainly appealing.

12:15 a.m. Nov. 11, 2007  
For Shauna



Through high-piled masses  
of gleaming thunderheads  
we weave our way  
past blue-crystal inlets  
and bays of sky:  
at the end is dusk  
and solitude.

June 25, 1989 en route Budapest,  
Frankford, New York, Pittsburgh  
(rev. June 27: Pittsburgh)



Through the grey dusk of a cityscape  
shambles hesitantly an unkempt  
figure, homeless, desperate, destitute  
the grey figure that shambles  
through the dust at the edge of the city  
is the image of the homeless,  
destitute and desperate  
that haunt our present  
modern contemporary world  
and the pain fills the air  
like a wail, like the  
dust that settles on the  
rubble of this disintegrating world  
like a noxious drizzle  
settling on the world  
the figure that lurches, lurches  
unendingly through the  
deepening gloom, dusk, dark.



To those huddled figures  
moving through shadows  
into dark corridors,  
draped in cloths, veils,  
small young people perhaps  
smaller, even children  
disappearing into darkness:  
my heart follows your shapes  
in impotent agony  
hands stretch after you  
till blood covers my fingers,  
the world fills with soundless weeping  
like a great rain seeping down  
till I drown the landscape in grief.

Mar. 1, 1984



**Two notes on poetry:**

“No poem is ever finished—it is merely abandoned.”

“Perhaps all poems are merely drafts.”



We are all  
though we may not all know it  
laborers in the vinery and  
in the Lord’s vineyard.



We give thanks O World  
for being bundled in  
the body of being.



Well, he is gone now  
dear Billy Nair  
who cheered us on the long road  
to Robben Island  
who held calm under insults  
who held steadfast  
when there were betrayals around:  
so he is gone  
we salute his passing  
we pay tribute to his courage  
we mourn our loss with sadness:  
well, we must gather our courage  
we must muster our strength  
we must commit to our struggle  
we must continue to strive.

Oct. 28, 2008



When that cracked old bell is finally busted  
and its phony false old hoarse voice  
    is finally obliterated  
then a sweet sound will sing across this country  
across this world  
then sweetly will freedom ring.



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

June, 1995 For Mumia Abu-Jamal



When they just told me I was  
“deportable,”  
the first images that came to mind  
were portable things:  
portable radios, TV’s, typewriters—  
then I saw myself dangling  
as if by a handle  
from some official’s  
official arm

then came incredulity:  
“What was this foolishness?”  
and “What about inalienable rights?”  
and finally: “I don’t believe this folly.”  
but they were in deadly earnest.

Feb. 2, 1987



White moths fluttering by  
my window in winter sun-  
light: swarming snowflakes.

Oct. 3, 1999



### **X Parish, New Orleans**

Corpses floating in that murk  
of water, mud, debris, arms dangling  
or stiff in death's rigor, breasts  
bloated with congealed blood;  
burly boatmen, bursting with vigor  
in orange protectors, pole  
their skiffs expertly, their tenterhooks  
grapple with cadavers, impale thighs  
exposed in death's indifferent obscenity;  
in call centers data clerks enter ciphers  
that record someone's loss:  
there is no place for grief.

Oct., 2005



You poor malign narcissist  
I fear you and pity you  
I am determined to escape you  
I cannot allow you to destroy  
    my sanity, my career, my  
    capacity of service, my decency  
I am in control  
I control myself  
I am in control of the situation  
I will avoid you tomorrow—  
    somehow, or resist you  
    or slip away from you  
you are dangerous, destructive  
vindictive, mean, cruel,  
cunning and wholly solipsistic  
inhabiting a false private  
narcissistic world, destructive  
of this real world of me.



## ***Activist and Inspiration***

It would be impossible to overstate the impact of Dennis Brutus on Worcester State College and its Center for the Study of Human Rights. He first connected with our campus in 1982, in the midst of his struggle for political asylum in the United States, after fleeing apartheid in South Africa. In that year, we honored him with an honorary doctorate. He has maintained a strong bond with our institution ever since.

The year 2000 saw his return to Worcester State in dramatic form, accompanying Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Njongonkulu Ndungane for two days of programs on the human rights issues of South Africa. The series of March events punctuated the revitalization of the Human Rights Center after a decade of dormancy. It was a transition point for the Center, toward a truly global focus, not just in terms of the topics of our programs, but in the more important fact of bringing internationally respected figures from beyond the United States to our campus. What is more, for Dr. Brutus and Archbishop Ndungane Worcester State College became the base outside of South Africa from which they raised in the international arena certain crucial issues that had been pushed to the margin by the celebratory attitude with which the world community greeted the end of apartheid and the partial success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. From our own halls they posed the challenge of reparations for apartheid.

A year later, Dennis Brutus returned to Worcester State for a semester as Poet-in-Residence, hosted by the Department of Languages and Literature and the College's Honors Program. In this role, he had sustained direct contact with the students in his Literature and Human Rights course. And, he became the backbone of the Human Rights Center, participating in a series of events. To have someone of his stature, commitment, and activism as a direct influence on our campus took us beyond even the 2000 high water mark and permanently transformed our campus. With Dennis Brutus's residency, the Human Rights Center went from a series of programs to a continuous presence on campus, a fixed feature of the experience of our students, faculty, and staff.

In February of 2003, Dr. Brutus returned once more to Worcester State, this time to donate officially a large set of materials, including personal letters, photographs, and unpublished manuscripts, which became the Dennis Brutus Collection. In this way, his life and legacy became an enduring part of the College, not merely a monument to his literary and political achievements, but a living resource for future generations of scholars, writers, and activists.

Throughout his involvement with Worcester State, Dennis Brutus has been a tremendous inspiration for so many of us, carrying us along with him to do ever more to promote human rights around the world and at home. He has made connection after connection with a whole range of members of our community. Just as importantly, he has attracted and brought with him to campus a group of activists (scholars, poets, and others) who have raised the level of our awareness and action immeasurably. He has drawn so many of us to join him in the struggle for universal human rights.

*Worcester, Massachusetts, USA, October 19, 2004*

*Henry Theriault*

*Associate Professor of Philosophy and*

*Coordinator of the Center for the Study of Human Rights*

*Worcester State College*

# ***Dennis Brutus: The Worcester State College Connection***

by

*Merrill Goldwyn, Professor Emeritus, Department of Languages and Literature  
Co-Founder and Former Coordinator for  
The Center for the Study of Human Rights  
Worcester State College*

The first important connection of Dennis Brutus, renowned South African poet and human rights activist, with Worcester State College was his appearance on May 28, 1982, in a program intended both to inaugurate the newly created Center for the Study of Human Rights and to honor the recipients of honorary degrees to be awarded the next morning. Greatly impressed by Dr. Brutus's rare combination of courageous determination, intense commitment to human rights, eloquence and dignified grace, which I had the opportunity to observe at a previous public lecture against apartheid, I resolved in my capacity as coordinator of the Human Rights Center to invite him to participate in this program as well as to arrange for him to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. At this event, which was entitled "In Support of Human Rights," he was a featured speaker and also offered a reading of his poetry.

In his letter offering Dr. Brutus the honorary degree, the then president Joseph Orze declared that the College "would do honor to itself in honoring you." The degree citation lauded Dr. Brutus not only for his reputation as a literary critic and scholar but also for his "reputation as a champion of racial equality [that] has been only matched by [his] acclaim as a poet." The degree citation further praised Dr. Brutus for his "passionate sympathy for [his] oppressed people [for which he was] willing to risk and finally suffer both strict imprisonment and exile" as well as for his "noble and inspiring example of the unquenchable will for freedom."

It is important to note that Dr. Brutus was at this time locked in a desperate struggle for political asylum in the United States. Thus he was immensely grateful for these gestures of support by Worcester State College as well as by others. As a result, he sent me the following poem dedicated to all those whom he considered his "friends and helpers":

## **For all My Friends and Helpers**

The loyal support  
of courageous friends gives the  
embattled heart strength.

May 14, 1982, Amherst

In addition he sent me several lovely haiku poems, of which the following was composed on the morning of the award of the honorary degree, May 29, 1982, and addressed to both Reverend Paul Ferrin and myself as co-founders of the Human Rights Center:

Raindrops patter down  
on a reflected streetlight:  
yellow dawnflower.

The growing connection of Dr. Brutus with Worcester State College took on a momentous new direction during this same period when he, motivated by the same grateful impulse as well as a generous desire to support and aid the fledgling Human Rights Center, donated an extensive collection of his personal papers to the center. This collection consisted of numerous unpublished poems, letters and other documents which related to his many human rights activities, including his struggle for political asylum, as well as to his personal friendships, family relations and his academic life. The collection included treasures such as letters from Nadine Gordimer, South African winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Pete Seeger, legendary American folk singer, in addition to letters from several prominent congresspersons.

In the following year, I was overjoyed and profoundly moved to receive the following telegram from the Dennis Brutus Defense Committee, which was created to promote his campaign for political asylum, announcing the success of this campaign:

DELIGHTED TO REPORT THAT ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1983 JUDGE IRVING SCHWARTZ ORDERED THAT DENNIS BRUTUS BE GIVEN POLITICAL ASYLUM. THIS IS A GREAT VICTORY IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM, APARTHEID AND OPPRESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA. ON BEHALF OF DENNIS BRUTUS AND THE DBDC OUR WARM THANKS TO YOU AND ALL WHO BY THEIR HELP CONTRIBUTED TO THE VICTORY.

It was profoundly gratifying and moving to feel that Worcester State College had contributed to his victory after his long, hard-fought struggle and to be able to share in his joy and triumph. The Worcester State connection with Dr. Brutus had now taken on a new impetus and strength. Since these dramatic and important beginnings, the Center for the Study of Human Rights along with the support of other campus organizations has been a primary sponsor of Dr. Brutus's numerous appearances at Worcester State College.

During the same year, Dr. Brutus appeared twice more at Worcester State College. The first time he was joined by Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American congresswoman, who spoke about her recent journey to South Africa, while he offered a reading of his poetry. The second time he gave another poetry reading. Since then, this connection has continued to flourish, from personal visits such as the occasion in 1999 when he invited several Worcester State people to a small, intimate dinner at a local restaurant to celebrate his 75th birthday with him to extraordinary public appearances at the College, such as his two-day visit with Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Primate of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, and Successor to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in March 21-22, 2000. During this event, there were programs ranging from "Political Imprisonment under Apartheid in South Africa" and "An Evening of Poetry and Personal Witness" to "Poetry and Human Rights." At this time, the connection with the College broke new ground with Dr. Brutus's appointment as Poet-in-Residence for those two days and with the formal opening on March 21, 2000, of the Dennis Brutus Collection, including an attractive exhibition area in the College's Learning Resources Center, where the collection is housed.

The March, 2000, visit proved to be so successful that Dr. Brutus was promptly invited to return for the spring semester of the next year as Poet-in-Residence, with significant responsibilities such as collaboration with the College's Honors Program as well as with the Center for the Study of Human Rights. These responsibilities included co-teaching with myself an honors course entitled "Literature and Human Rights," and poetry readings with acclaimed poets Marjorie Agosin and Martin Espada, on such topics as "Poetry and Human Rights: Chile and South Africa, the Next Phase," "Poetry and Human Rights II: Politics and Poetry: Censorship and the Poet," and "Reflections on Racism: An Interactive Dialogue." It was during this residency that Dr. Brutus composed his poem *Zocalo*, published in this volume and read at the College's commencement exercises, May 19, 2001, in which he expressed his compassionate identification with the struggles for social change and social justice of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, exclaiming in the final line with passion rising in his voice, "We are all Indians."

Two years later Dr. Brutus returned once again to participate in a conference entitled, "War, Inequality, and Global Justice: A Symposium in Honor of Dr. Dennis Brutus," on February 27, 2003. At this time there was a formal ceremony honoring the extensive donation by Dr. Brutus to the Dennis Brutus Collection. This donation included valuable books from his personal library.

As both the connection of Dr. Brutus with the College grew and his contributions to the collection expanded over the past twenty-two years, I found that my highly positive original impression of Dr. Brutus, which prompted me to first invite and honor him at Worcester State College, has been confirmed again and again by the enthusiastic responses to his appearances by the entire College community and beyond. One need only look at the headlines of the College media reporting on his lectures and readings to offer evidence of his impact. Examples include headlines such as "Poetry Brings Message to WSC," "Students Eyes Are Opened," "Social Activist/Poet Makes Deep Impact on WSC," and "Dennis Brutus Becomes Interactive," with one student reporter observing that his "wonderfully articulate sentiments on the importance of knowledge and participation have struck a responsive chord in many a student." (*The Student Voice*, p. 1, March 27, 2001) When he speaks and reads at the College, the entire campus reverberates with his inspiring message of hopeful determination and commitment to social change and social justice, epitomized in his characteristic refrain, "Another world is possible."

At this time, the Dennis Brutus Collection has become through his continuous generous donations an invaluable resource for the study of his biography, his literary career, and the history of his involvement with the human rights movement. As such, the Collection now constitutes one of the most important sources for research on the life and works of Dr. Brutus.

It is therefore in recognition and appreciation of the long, rich, and productive connection between Dr. Brutus and Worcester State College and in celebration of his 80th birthday, that the College is happy and proud to publish this volume of his previously unpublished poems from the Dennis Brutus Collection and to dedicate it to Dr. Brutus with sincere gratitude. On behalf of both Worcester State College and myself, I am honored to participate in the presentation of this volume to him and, on the occasion of his 80th birthday, to extend to him our very best wishes.

# ***The Dennis Brutus Collection at Worcester State College***

by

*Wayne Kamin, Archivist*

The majority of the Dennis Brutus Collection (DBC) resides in climate-controlled boxes housed in an officially dedicated alcove on the first floor of the Learning Resources Center (LRC) at Worcester State College (WSC). An adjacent series of display cabinets features poems, manuscripts, letters, posters, and photographs which highlight South African Dennis Brutus's rich, varied life (1924--2009) as a deeply committed, tireless, distinguished artist and cosmopolitan human rights activist. For his achievements, he has received numerous doctorates of human letters, literary prizes and social justice awards. Organizations he has founded or co-founded include the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, the International Campaign Against Racism in Sport, the African Literature Association, Troubadour Press and Jubilee 2000. He has served as a board member and representative at large of Amnesty International, a consultant to the United Nation's Special Committees on Apartheid and the Middle East, and a longtime program participant for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

At its inception, the DBC numbered some 1000 documents. Its placement at WSC in 1982 resulted specifically as thanks to Professor Merrill Goldwyn for his early 1980's advocacy during Brutus's struggle against deportation from America by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. The donation also represented Brutus's gratitude for the college's award of an honorary Doctorate of Human Letters and the campus-wide welcome into its family and the Worcester community. The 1982 donation was formally accepted in February, 2003. Shortly thereafter began the organization of the Dennis Brutus Collection. The first publication of its contents appeared in *Poems by Dennis Brutus*, Worcester State College Press, 2004, edited by Ken Gibbs, as a detailed summary of the holdings organized by library director Donald Hochstetler, who also compiled that first archive.

In 2005, Dr. Brutus, anticipating his impending retirement from the University of Pittsburgh, began sending WSC increasing numbers of moving boxes full of additional materials. The resulting collection now contains some 12,500 primary and secondary documents, thus expanding the volume of virtually all the original boxed categories and necessitating the creation of new ones. The LRC's archive room now contains first editions of all Brutus's published books. The library's general stacks now contain copies of those volumes by Brutus, along with many from other African writers.

Moreover, roughly 10% of all documents are in the campus's Human Rights Center (HRC), Sullivan Academic Center, Room 323. The HRC contains the DBC's working files available to investigators, but also available for use by students and their teachers, including those active in Worcester State's young Amnesty International chapter. The contents focus on a range of national and international issues and the activist human rights organizations which address them. Non-violent, direct action peace and justice advocacy informs and ties

together the work of all those groups. Brutus also has contributed several hundred books of poetry, prose history, philosophy and other aspects of the human experience. They have been merged on the HRC's library shelves with volumes donated by the late, similarly social justice oriented WSC scholar and teacher, Sarah Scharbach, to be checked out on the honor system, as per Brutus's wish. In addition, the HRC now has dozens of tapes, CD's and DVD's of Brutus alone, in formal interviews, or conversing with colleagues. That audio/video portion of the DBC soon will be enhanced by a series of 1977 tape-recorded interviews with African liberation movement leaders, as well as with leaders from supportive African Union nations during the struggle against colonialism in Angola and Mozambique, and apartheid in South Africa. Such news indicates that the DBC will continue to be a work in progress for some time to come. Contributions still arrive from friends and colleagues who hold Dennis Brutus and his work close.

Most of Brutus's letters are found in the LRC's boxes 27 and 27 A-C ("Letters from Dennis Brutus, 1976-98"). Some appear in the LRC's "Anti-Apartheid Sport" boxes 1 and 1A, in "Racism and the Death Penalty: The Mumia Abu-Jamal Case, 1991-2007" (box 28), and elsewhere. Individual working files in the HRC contain a small number of his letters. Most letters to Brutus from national and international activists in the anti-apartheid sport movement rest in boxes 30 and 30A-G ("Letters to Dennis Brutus, 1969-94"). Still others by those activists are in the anti-apartheid sport boxes and in box 21 ("The Anti-Apartheid Divestment Movement, 1972-86"), and box 10 ("Dennis Brutus's U.S. Deportation Case, 1978-2005") has a few of their letters of support. All this is to point out how one set of items among several specific types of documents, in this case the letters, provides a sort of plot adhesive to help tie together the stories the Dennis Brutus Collection has to tell. Public appearance flyers, to cite another type of document, most stored in boxes 29 and 29A-C, offer a narrative glue of their own. Brutus's archive thus somewhat retains what Ken Gibbs described in *Poems* as its "eclectic nature." If such organization makes a patient examiner's task somewhat more arduous, the hope is it that it will additionally yield a more fruitful result.

Dennis Brutus's work and legacy speak not only of the man and his times, but also of times preceding the pleasure and challenge of his company, and of time beyond, all of which as he often paraphrased will be longer than the binding rope of repression. He never hesitated to speak with and read poems to any gathering. The occasion might have been to one elderly Austin woman in her home. It included the smallest of school classes in Malawi, Brixton, Chicago's South Side, or Kyoto. And let's not forget all the international forums. Dennis organized ad-hocs, letter writings, petitions, and public protests for the greater good. Post-apartheid South Africa, the release of prisoners of conscience and those under the death penalty, sweatshops, environmental and economic justice, and so much more never failed to rouse and enlist him. Along the way, and at every turn were his eloquently scholarly, reasoned and unassailable prose. Alike and even more ubiquitous was his poetry with its characteristic detail, color, rhythm, passion, shout and restraint.

In every instance, the message was the same. As Dennis was so fondly and unable otherwise compelled to say--"A luta continua, the struggle continues." His goals remain the same: compassion, understanding, truth, and an equitable, fair shake for all in access to health, safety, food, shelter, and the opportunity and right for the enhancement of our's and the Earth's well-being which does no harm to others.

For some fifty years, Dennis Brutus was our teacher, mentor, colleague, comrade and friend. Until the end he wrote verse and boosted peace. Dennis's work and his stubborn hope live on in all of us who knew him. He passed. He never quit. Just think how fortunate we are to have him come our way and bestow his burden upon us.

Several work/study students contributed time and effort to the archive's current issue. Among them, Patrick Sargent deserves special thanks for his yeoman duty while enrolled as an underclassman and after graduation. Many campus's administrators, faculty and staff pitched in whenever and however possible on the production of the archive. When Brutus, in no uncertain terms, first requested that I travel from to Worcester State, it was impossible to imagine the awaiting collective support on the campus for an inspiring and endearing poet, scholar, and activist who is held in such high respect by the college's faculty and staff.

Below is a general guide to the collection's contents. A more detailed, itemized and annotated index will appear on the College's website in Winter, 2012. Protocols for appointment-only access to the Collection, and actual access, will be made available then, as well.

Please contact the following personnel for details:

**Dr. Aldo Guevara**  
Coordinator  
Human Rights Center  
Sullivan Building, Room 323  
Worcester State College  
486 Chandler Street  
Worcester, MA 01602  
1.508.929.8685  
aguevara@worchester.edu

**Wayne Kamin**  
Archivist  
The Dennis Brutus Collection  
3105 French Place  
Austin, Texas 78722  
1.512.322.9640  
waynekamin@peoplepc.com

## ***General Guide to the Dennis Brutus Collection Holdings in WSC's Learning Resources Center***

*Note: Each box marked with an asterisk is arranged by date and accompanied by an index which chronologically lists and briefly describes every document. Other boxes are inventoried by the means described in parentheses. Any box without a note or an asterisk means that it will be catalogued during summer, 2010.*

### **BOXES 1, 1A**

Anti-Apartheid Sport\*

General anti-apartheid sport references, 1959-2002

SAN-ROC (South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee) references, 1966-92

SAN-ROC-London references, 1974-94

ACCESS (American Coordinating Committee for Equality In Sport and Society) references, 1977-82

ARENA (Institute for Sport and Social Analysis) references, 1976-84

ICARIS (International Campaign Against Racism in Sport) references, 1975-80

ITS (Institute for International Sport) references, 1992-2003

SACOS (South African Council on Sport) references, 1977-2005

ANC (African National Congress) references, 1983-85

New Zealand anti-apartheid sport general references, 1975-86

CARE (Citizens Association for Racial Equality), New Zealand, references, 1975-81

HART (Halt All Racist Tours), New Zealand, references, 1972-77

National and International organizations references, 1973-2005: SCSA (Supreme Council for Sport in Africa); All China Sports Federation African Lawn Tennis Confederation; African Table Tennis Federation; the government of India; the Austrian Embassy in London; the United Nations; the U.S. government; and the American Friends Service Committee

Anti-Apartheid Sport and the Olympic Games references, 1975-80: tennis references, 1974-92; cricket references, 1976-89; rugby references, 1976-89; and soccer references, 1972-2000

### **BOX 2**

Poetry by Dennis Brutus Published in Periodicals, 1977-2001\*

### **BOX 3, 3A-B**

Photographs of Dennis Brutus alone, with family, friends, colleagues, classes, at casual events, readings, protests, conferences and other events

## **BOXES 4, 4A-C**

Poetry Manuscripts by Dennis Brutus; plus individual handwritten poems, many of the final drafts of which appeared for the first time in WSC's 2004 Poems by Dennis Brutus, and which are joined by more recently discovered ones to be published in the upcoming WSC book Poetry and Human Rights: The Dennis Brutus Collection at Worcester State College.

## **BOXES 5, 5A-C**

Prose Manuscripts Sent to Dennis Brutus, 1976-2001  
Alphabetical by author.

## **BOXES 6, 6A**

Individual and Manuscript Poetry sent to Dennis Brutus, 1973-2003  
Alphabetical by author.

## **BOXES 7, 7A**

Postcards sent to Dennis Brutus

## **BOXES 8, 8A-D, AND BOX 9**

Dennis Brutus's Calendars, Appointment Books, Travel Records, and Plane Tickets, 1968-2005 Chronologically arranged.

## **BOX 10**

Dennis Brutus's U.S. Deportation Case references, 1978-2005\*  
*Note: Includes the Dennis Brutus Defense Committee*

## **Box 11**

Manuscripts About the Poetry of Dennis Brutus, 1978-2005  
Alphabetical by author.

## **BOX 12**

Dennis Brutus's Honors and Awards, early 1970s-2005\*  
*Note: In 2009, Brutus received honorary doctorates from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and Cecil Rhodes University, and was one of three recipients of the War Resister's League International Peace Award.*

## **BOX 13**

Courses (descriptions and syllabi) taught by Dennis Brutus, 1980s-2005

**BOXES 14, 15, 16, 16A**

Miscellaneous Dennis Brutus Materials: undated original hand drafts of letters and of papers for publication

**BOXES 17, 17A**

Published Prose by Dennis Brutus: interviews; public testimonies, speeches, articles, late 1960s-2005\*

**BOX 18**

Dennis Brutus and Amnesty International references, 1978-99\*

**BOX 19**

Dennis Brutus at the University of Pittsburgh references (campus activities)

**BOX 20**

The Gar Magazine, an Austin, Texas-based source of anti-apartheid resources, African Literature Association news, and some newly published poetry by Dennis Brutus. Arranged by issue.

**BOX 21**

The Anti-Apartheid Divestment Movement references, 1972-86, plus the American Committee on Africa's divestment packet of non-violent direct action publications from that period.\*

**BOX 22**

African Literature Association references, 1974-2005\*

**BOX 23**

Manuscripts About the Poetry of Dennis Brutus, 1978-2005  
Arranged by author.

**BOX 24**

Apartheid Reparations, Global Apartheid Reparations, and Jubilee 2000 references

**BOX 25**

Democracy in Haiti references, early 1980's-2004\*

**BOX 26**

Troubadour Press references, early 1970s-early 2000s  
Arranged by categories (i.e., sales receipts, expenses, activities, publications, internal correspondences). Also, references to Dennis Brutus Defense Committee, which Troubadour co-founded.

## **BOXES 27, 27 A-C**

Letters from Dennis Brutus, 1976-98\*

## **BOX 28**

Racism and the Death Penalty: The Mumia Abu-Jamal Case, 1991-2007\*

## **BOXES 29, 29A-C**

Dennis Brutus's Public Appearances, 1967-2005\*

## **BOXES 30, 30A-G**

Letters to Dennis Brutus, 1969-94\*

## **BOX 31**

Business cards of Dennis Brutus's and of people he has known

## **BOX 32**

Biographical pieces on Dennis Brutus

*Note: See also box 12 (Honors and Awards)*

## **BOX 33**

Tapes, CD's and DVD's Featuring Dennis Brutus Alone or with Other Poets, Activists or Panelists

*Note: The original tapes have been re-recorded as CD's and DVD's. Originals are in Box 33 in the LRC. New recordings are housed in the HRC, individually itemized by content, i.e., poetry, protest, panel discussions, etc.*

# ***General Guide to the Dennis Brutus Collection Holdings in WSC's Human Rights Center***

*Note: The files below affirm the Center's dedication to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to equality, justice and dignity for every human being regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability or age.*

Each file has been inventoried in chronological order of its contents.

**The Human Rights Center's History**

**General Human Rights Documents**

**Human Rights for Women**

**Racism**

**The Death Penalty**

**Genocide**

**Globalization**

**Global Apartheid/Global Justice**

**Reparations and Ecological Debt**

**South Africa and Apartheid**

**Africa**

**Latin America**

**Asia**

**Ghandi Peace Institute In South Africa**

**Amnesty International**

**Activism**

**National and International Organizing Manuals and Contacts**

**The Dennis Brutus/ Sarah Scharbach Social Justice  
Book Collection**





————— 486 Chandler Street • Worcester, Massachusetts 01602 —————  
[www.worcester.edu](http://www.worcester.edu)