

## CITATION

### 2016 Thomas Pringle Award for *ad hoc* Reviews

Professor Geoffrey Haresnape has been chosen as the recipient of this particular Thomas Pringle award for the outstanding quality of the reviews he has written on various texts, including poetry collections and dramatic performances. Being a poet and literary scholar with a distinguished academic career himself,<sup>1</sup> it is not surprising that Professor Haresnape is a well-informed critic and effective writer, but even when approaching his reviews with this expectation, one is still struck by the exquisite responsiveness he brings to the written and spoken word and the elegance of his expression. For the purposes of this validation of the award, four of his reviews are discussed.<sup>2</sup>

In his review entitled, *Black and White: Othello at Maynardville, 1970-2015*, the span of time Professor Haresnape has been actively involved in English Studies is demonstrated. Not only has he witnessed the turbulent shifts in South African politics and race relations, but he also reflects on how these changes find expression in works of art. In the case of this review, he reflects on the shifts in casting of key characters in dramatic productions of a single play. The review, covering four different productions of *Othello*, performed over a period of some forty-five years (1970-2015), illustrates his extensive knowledge and career-long passion for English studies. His analyses go beyond the different stagings of the play as he contextualises each production within the South Africa of its day, demonstrating a profound understanding not only of literature and performance theatre, but also politics and history. Race is a central issue in the love relationship at the heart of the play and in perceptions of the 'sooty-bosom'd' Moor, and Professor Haresnape explores the way the South African socio-political landscape with its radically changing racial policies interacts with each production's casting, performance and reception. The result is a comprehensive

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Haresnape is emeritus professor of English and Creative Writing (UCT), life member of Clare Hall (Cambridge University), hon. vice president of the English Academy of Southern Africa, hon. member da PEN SA, and editor of *Contrast* from 1980 to 1989. He is the author of five collections of poetry: *Drive of the Tide* (1976), *New-Born Images* (1991), *Mulberries in Autumn* (1996), *The Living and the Dead* (2005) and *Where the Wind Wills* (2011); a novel, *Testimony* (1992); and *African Tales from Shakespeare: Ten Narratives based upon his Poetry and Plays* (1999).

<sup>2</sup> 'Black and White: *Othello* at Maynardville 1970-2015' in *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, Vol. 27, 2015, 53-59. 'Whose God is Wisest? In the Land of the Gods'; *New Contrast* 169, Vol. 43, no. 1. 'The Primacy of the Imagination: Jennings, Pessoa and *Contrast* magazine' in *Pessoa Plural* no. 8, Fall 2015; 'From Chris Hani to Dr. Gottfried Benn: Peter Horn's poetry of the South African transition'.

review which encompasses a consideration of dramatic interpretation as well as the dynamic matrix surrounding it.

Professor Haresnape's sharp awareness of the social and political factors which form the backdrop to South African writing also informs his review entitled 'Whose God is Wisest?' on the poetry of Joel Krige, a younger relative of the more famous Uys. His eloquence is evident from the first sentence:

The 31 poems of Joel Krige's *In the Land of the Gods* plunge the reader into an ambivalent world in which hopes jostle with disillusionment, a desire to be rooted strains against the yearning to be mobile, and memories are countervailed by fragile expectations.

The sheer beauty of such expression reveals the poet within the critic. Later in the review he quotes Ben Okri's words that 'what defines a society is not how it overcomes its nightmare but what it does with the long-ever-after-days of sunlight', adding: '[t]he auguries for the "ever-after days" in South Africa do not seem good. Krige does not find any vestige of a rainbow over the land in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'.

In his article entitled 'The Primacy of the Imagination: Jennings, Pessoa and *Contrast* magazine' he discusses the work of Hubert Jennings whose critical articles on the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa were published by *Contrast* literary magazine.

Professor Haresnape writes of Pessoa:

If his footprint on the global stage was small, the ignorance which long clouded his reputation in the country of his childhood and education was profound.

The balanced structure of sentences such as this is deeply satisfying and rewards a second reading. This particular review is typically comprehensive as it appraises the poet Pessoa, the writer Jennings, and the role of *Contrast* magazine in providing a forum for such writers. Professor Haresnape who retired as editor in 1990 before *Contrast* was restyled as *New Contrast*, provides biographical information about both characters. Pessoa, we learn, was a 'many-faced' writer with numerous pseudonyms (or 'heteronyms') and is described as 'the most extreme case of multiple personality and self-division in modern poetry'. His great admirer, Jennings, on the other hand, was, on the surface, a 'straight-up-and-down' schoolmaster and disciplinarian. Jennings' attraction to the complexity of Pessoa's persona

and poetry is initially surprising, but Professor Haresnape suggests that there were hidden similarities between the two men, writing that 'Jennings had an inner life too, which moved beneath the carapace of the pedagogue'. The use of metaphor here is strikingly effective, concisely capturing the contradiction between the schoolmaster's poetic heart and the tough exterior or 'carapace' he presented to the world.

Professor Haresnape's review entitled 'From Chris Hani to Dr. Gottfried Benn' evaluates Peter Horn's poetry which is published in a collection with two titles, *The Rivers which Connect us to the Past* and *Survivors*, and raises wide-ranging philosophical and social issues such as defining the nature of man and analysing the perennial problems of conflict, upheaval and suffering in society. Applying these ancient human concerns to contemporary events like the assassination of Chris Hani which almost succeeded in sabotaging our nascent democracy, Horn explores the enduring realities of tyranny and revolution through his poetry. Professor Haresnape engages with these and other weighty existential questions while also analysing the technicalities of Horn's skill as a wordsmith:

Like most of his other writings, *The Rivers which Connect us to the Past* and *Survivors* have a distinctive verbal register, not altogether supple but informed with gravitas. Phrases and sentences are deliberately built up as if the verbal artefact were a kind of structure layered with masonry. Horn's language use seems particularly suited to the deployment of startling and/or weird images and the disjunctions of conventional syntax which characterize the poems under review.

Professor Haresnape's summations at the end of each review provide evaluative comment while also enticing readers to explore the writer reviewed for themselves. The end of the review on Joel Krige's work reads: 'Life experience and technical proficiency combine in these 63 pages of mainly free verse. They make the volume a substantial read'. Another example of his succinct yet open conclusions is seen in the closing sentences of 'The Primacy of the Imagination': 'Subtextually, the poem is paying homage to the primacy of the imagination. Jennings and Cope would have agreed with that priority. Would the protean Pessoa have concurred? Perhaps.'

It is a rare pleasure to read Geoffrey Haresnape's polished, often poetic, prose. He is a masterly critic and writer. Well-read across the spectrum of many disciplines, his wide-

ranging and specialist knowledge lends authority to his thoroughly informed, perceptive reviews. An acknowledgement of his sustained contribution to the English Academy over a period of around 50 years is long overdue. It is our hope that the Thomas Pringle Award will go some way towards redressing this deficit.

Dr Verna Brown

Dr Felicity Horne

Prof. Brenda Spencer