

Here follows the review of  
***Where the Wind Wills***  
by Geoffrey Haresnape

written in Afrikaans by Joan Hambidge  
and published in ***New Contrast***

followed by an English translation  
by Bernie Lee

*NEW CONTRAST*



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## REVEIWS

*Where the wind wills* by Geoffrey Haresnape

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I

Ek skryf hierdie resensie as 'n Afrikaanse digter oor 'n mede-digter wat in Engels publiseer. Twee letterkundige sisteme, soos ons weet, wat selde bymekaar uitkom. Behalwe wanneer Afrikaanse digters vertaal word of as daar verwyte is van appropriasie soos in die onverkwiklike debat oor Krog se 'oorname' van Boesmanverse uit Watson. Steeds bly Engels en Afrikaans apart, en swart-digters het ook hul eie prosesse van kanonisering. Die nuwe Cambridge- kompendium probeer om die verskillende sisteme bymekaar uit te bring, maar lesers weet dat Engelse digters in hierdie land afgeskeep word met 'n paragraaf-resensie in Engelse dagblaaie, terwyl Afrikaanse digters op Versindaba se webruimte en in dagblaaie beter behandeling kry. Boonop is daar stewige verseboeke en 'n lang tradisie van kritiek wat digters inskat en essays oor ouer en jonger digters in *Perspektief & profiel*. En goeie Engels-Suid-Afrikaanse digters is daar soos Douglas Reid-Skinner en Isobel Dixon (o.a.) wat in Engeland bly, maar hier meer aandag geniet (deur Afrikaanse kritici!) en Ingrid de Kok, Stephen Watson, Patrick Cullinan (laasgenoemde twee saliger), Charl JF Cilliers, Rustum Kozain, Gabeba Baderoon, ensomeer. En natuurlik Geoffrey Haresnape.

## II

Hierdie jongste bundel van Haresnape word gepubliseer deur Echoing Green Press en die digter het in 1976 gedebuteer met *Drive of the Tide*. Op die agterblad word die bundel hoog aangeskryf deur Mark Swift vir die 'crystal clear intellect' en Rustum Kozain praat van die 'critical awareness'. By Haresnape was daar nog altyd 'n sterk vormbeheer en 'n komplekse gesprek met die Engelse digkuns.

Die bundel behels 'n lywige 96 bladsye en die slotvers 'Garden of Remembrance' (96) is 'n distigon waarin hy sy vader aanspreek. Die vader se beeld verklap die digter se oudwordingsproses en hierdie is 'n sentrale sleutel tot die bundel waarin die ouer digter besig is met 'n bestekopname. 'n Spieëlteks dus waarin die digter afskeid neem van sy vader se as en terselfdertyd met sy eie eindigheid gekonfronteer word. Gedagtig aan die sterk vormbeheer word die gedig goed in beheer gehou in hierdie 'backward glance'.

Die voorblad van Kim Longhurst dui immers reeds selfkonfrontasie en disseksie aan: die bloedvatsisteem, hart en binnewerkinge met 'n skip na regs (die vaart oor die Styx dalk?).

Twee personas (soos by Pessoa) praat hier saam: Erasmus Eyeball wat gesteld is op vormbeheer en Dr Severance Package wat meer hou van die vryer vers (Afdeling III).

Hierdie nota dui dan reeds daarop dat die werklike digter verskeie vorme van die digkuns ken en verken. En kenmerkend van die goeie digter is daar konkrete beelde ('Far

blue mountain ranges zizag like a weather graph', 3; 'False Bay is a great glazed plate', 6; 'the chop shop of the sea', 13; 'the lifeboats dropped away like seed pods from a tree', 31) en slim toespelings soos in 'Beached Whale' waar Moby Dick 'n draai gooi. Die lofdig ('praise song') vind ons in die gedig vir die digter se vrou ('At Seventy', 10) waar die geskiedenis van 'n verhouding opgeteken word en die digter blyke gee van hoe sy skryfwerk en 'n reël skryf vir elke jaar saam met haar! Die verse word gedra deur die nostalgie soos in die sterk 'The Clan Stuart' (13) waar die wrak 'n beeld word van die self. Die digter se oë is selfs nou swakker as die vader s'n wat daarop dui dat die digter ook deur sy verlede en familieverbintenis besig is met 'n bestekopname. In die lykdig 'Farewell' (14, 15) word daar afskeid geneem van 'n vriend:

God knows, I wish you well,  
and hate the scorch and liquefaction  
of your Viking funeral.

Die eerste afdeling is besonder sterk in die mymeringe, in die liefdesverklarings en nadink oor 'n vergange tyd. In die tweede afdeling word daar 'n interne gesprek gevoer in 'When and Where' (19) en in 'n gedig, 'HIV and Aids' (20), word die implikasies van hierdie epidemie satiries ondersoek met toespelings oor al die wanopvattinge wat in ons land bestaan. Eweneens satiries gedrewe is 'Flibbertigibbet' (23) met klappies na feministiese idees oor die patriargie en al die 'gender-driven fibs' knap verwoord in 'n distigon. Die vaste hand

van die digter red telkens 'n gedig van (oor)emosionaliteit of 'n wanstaltigheid wat gewoon laf sou wees. Gesprekke met bekende figure soos Lasarus ('Lazarus' in die 'act of dying', 26) en die briljante 'An Imagined Dialogue with St Thérèse of Lisieux' bedui op 'n belesenheid wat getransformeer word in aangrypande en onthoubare gedigte. (Die motto na Roy Campbell wys op die tradisie-bewustheid en Campbell-bloody-horse is immers een van ons groot digters; ook vereer deur Opperman in 'n magistrale lykdig.) En 'The Bass Violin Player's Last Hymn' gee 'n nuwe perspektief op die Titanic waar hierdie man steeds bly voortleef met die Noord-Atlantiese oseaan dreunend in sy ore. Herinneringe, indrukke, ervarings van die ouer digter bly eweneens voortleef in sy gedagtes en in gedigte. In die derde afdeling word Erasmus Eyeball aan die woord gestel en Dr Severance Package tree op vermaaklike gedigte waarin 'outage' digterlik ondersoek word. (Hierdie gedig moet onverwyld na Eskom versend word.) Die hele Suid-Afrikaanse werklikheid in al sy waansin word onder die loep geneem en ook 'n plesierige vers ondersoek die betekenis van 'Go Fuck Yourself' (48). Telkens imponeer die digter met ryme en halfryme, en humor.

Ook die Vuvuzela word besing (49). En die 'maverick poet', Roy Campbell word dan eweneens beskryf:

Dead set to streak and not to amble,  
He kept the proud seat of a Campbell.

In die vierde afdeling is daar weer groter erns soos 'n besoek

aan Poetry International met sy politisering van die digkuns. Asof die digter besef hoe tydelik politieke verse is, word dit voorsien van voetnote om die leser van die besonderhede in te lig. Terselfdertyd presteer hy dit om van die emosionele gegewe, te wete die spanninge in Jerusalem, 'n gedig te maak. Arthur Nortjé en Patrick Branwell Brontë se lewenslot word beskryf – en hier vind ons sterk ironie, iets waarin Haresnape ook goed geskool is. Dieselfde geld 'Nanook', 'n Noord-Atlantiese ballade en die leser besef dat die digter telkens gemoed is met die primordiale aspek van die digkuns: 'n walvis of enige ander dier word terselfdertyd simbole van die onbewuste.

En 'n besoek aan 'n begrafplaas aan Halifax (waar die Titanic-museum is) word 'n bestekopname van ons almal se lot: 'n graf.

In die gedigte oor Keats en 'n besoek aan 'n kerk, word hierdie gedagte verder uitgewerk.

In die slotafdeling word die belangrikste temas saamgesnoer, te wete tydelikheid en 'n soeke na metafisiese sin. In 'Good Hope' (88) word die dood van die vader so beskryf:

My dad has chosen fire  
rather than the worm.

En dit is asof die vader terugpraat vanuit die graf ná die priesterlike seremonie en die digter plaas sy (ons) verganklikheid teenoor die groter einde van die aarde. Ook die TRC – wat resoneer met Indrid de Kok se gedig oor

Biskop Tutu – plaas die gegewe terug in die hier-en-nou, in menslike lyding wat so ver teruggaan as die lot van 'n Taung-kind.

III

Dit is 'n waardige bundel geskryf deur 'n gevoelige digter wat jou dwing om na die lewe deur sy oë te kyk – immer die toets vir 'n geslaagde bundel. Vele van die verse het reeds in tydskrifte verskyn, maar as geheel in hierdie bundel is dit suiwer deurgekomponeer. Dit is ryk aan temas, aan vorms, aan 'n gesprek met die digkuns.

*Joan Hambidge*

This is an English translation by Bernie Lee of the *New Contrast* review written by Joan Hambidge

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## Review

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### I

I write this review as an Afrikaans poet about a fellow poet who publishes in English. Two literary systems which as we know, seldom come together; except when Afrikaans poets are translated or there are accusations of language appropriation as in the unquenchable debate about Krog's "takeover" of Bushman verses from Watson. Still English and Afrikaans stay divided, and black poets also have their own processes of canonization. The new Cambridge compendium attempts to bring different systems together, but readers know that English poets in this country are neglected with a paragraph-review in English newspapers, while Afrikaans poets get better treatment on *Versindaba's* website and in newspapers. On top of this, there are solid books of verse and a long tradition of criticism which evaluates poets, and essays about older and younger poets in *Perspektief & Profiel*. And there are good English-South African poets, like Douglas Reid-Skinner and Isobel Dixon (amongst others), who live in England, but enjoy more attention here (by Afrikaans critics!) and Ingrid de Kok, Stephen Watson, Patrick Cullinan (the latter two passed on), Charl J. F. Cilliers, Rustum Kozain, Gabea Baderoon, etc. And of course, Geoffrey Haresnape.

### II

This latest collection of poems is published by Echoing Green Press, and Haresnape made his debut in 1976 with *Drive of the Tide*. On the back cover, *Drive* is highly praised by Mark Swift for the poet's "crystal clear intellect" and Rustum Kozain talks about his "critical awareness." Haresnape has always had strong form control and a complex conversation with English poetry.

The poetry book entails a bulky 96 pages and the last verse "Garden of Remembrance" (p. 96) is a set of distichs in which he addresses his father. The father's image reveals the son's aging process and this is a central key to the poetry collection in which an older poet is busy taking stock. It is a mirror text in which the poet says goodbye to his father and is simultaneously confronted with his own mortality. In keeping with Haresnape's strong form control, the poem is well controlled in this "backward glance." The front cover by Kim Longhurst indeed indicates self-confrontation and dissection: the blood vessel system—heart and inner workings—with a ship to the right (the cruise on the Styx perhaps?).

Two personae (as in Pessoa) are talking in section III : Erasmus Eyeball who is set on form control and Dr. Severance Package who likes the freer verse more. This element of diversity already indicates that Haresnape knows and explores several forms of poetry. And, characteristic of the good poet, there are concrete images—"Far blue mountain ranges zigzag like a weather graph" (p. 3); "False Bay

is a great glazed plate” (p. 6); “the chop shop of the sea” (p. 13); “the lifeboats dropped away like seed pods from a tree” (p. 31), and the clever allusions as found in “Beached Whale” where Moby Dick throws a turn. The “praise song” we find in a poem for the poet’s wife (“At Seventy” p. 10) where the history of a relationship is recorded and where the poet gives glimpses of how he writes and where he writes a line for every year with her! The verses are carried by nostalgia like in the strong “The Clan Stuart” (p. 13) where a wreck becomes the image of the self. The poet’s eyes are now even weaker than the father’s which indicates that the poet is also busy taking stock through his past and his family relationships. In the elegy, “Farewell (pp. 14-15) a friend is bid good-bye:

God knows, I wish you well,  
and hate the scorch and liquefaction  
of your Viking funeral.

Section I of the collection is particularly strong in musings, love declarations and reflections on a bygone time.

In section II, an internal conversation is held in “When and Where” (p. 19) and in a poem, “HIV and Aids” (p. 20) the implications of this epidemic are subjected to a satirical investigation with allusions to all the misconceptions that exist in our country. Also satirically driven is “Flibbertigibbit” (p. 23), with its little slaps at feminist ideas about the patriarchy and all the “gender driven fibs”—smartly articulated in distichs. Each time the steady hand of the poet rescues the poem from being too sentimental or from malformations which would just seem silly. Conversations with known figures like Lazarus (“Lazarus” in the “act of dying” p. 26) and the brilliant “An Imagined Dialogue with St Thérèse of Lisieux” signify expertise that is transformed into poignant and memorable poems. (The “Dialogue’s” epigraph from Roy Campbell highlights an awareness of tradition—Campbell-bloody-horse is indeed one of our great poets; also honored by Opperman in a magisterial elegy.) And “The Bass Violin Player’s Last Hymn” gives a new perspective on the Titanic where the musician still continues to “live on” with the North Atlantic ocean thundering in his ears. Memories, impressions and experiences of older poets also continue to live on in Harenape’s thoughts and in the poems.

In section III, Erasmus Eyeball is verbalized and Dr Severance Package produces his entertaining poems, such as the one in which an electrical “outage” is poetically investigated. (This poem must forthwith be sent to Eskom.) The whole South African truth in all its madness is put under scrutiny, and a humorous verse investigates the meaning of “Go Fuck Yourself” (p. 48). Each time the poet impresses with rhymes and half-rhymes and humor. The Vuvuzela is praised (p. 49). And the “maverick poet,” Roy Campbell is then also described by Erasmus Eyeball:

Dead set to streak and not to amble,  
He kept the proud seat of a Campbell.

In section IV, there is a greater seriousness again, as in a visit to an International Poetry Festival in East Jerusalem with its politicization of poetry. As if the poet is aware of how temporary political poetry is, the poem is provided with footnotes in



order to inform the reader about the details. Simultaneously, he manages to make a poem out of an emotional “given,” namely, the tensions in Jerusalem. Arthur Nortjé and Patrick Branwell Brontë have their fates described—and here we find strong irony, something in which Haresnape is also well schooled. The same applies to “Nanook—a North Atlantic Ballad.” The reader realizes that the poet is each time concerned with the primordial aspect of poetry: a whale or any other animal he describes simultaneously becomes a symbol of the unconscious. And a visit to a graveyard in Halifax (where the Titanic-museum is) becomes stock taking of everyone’s fate: a grave. In the poems about Keats and a visit to a church, these thoughts are further worked out.

In section V, the last, all the important themes are joined together, namely temporality and the search for metaphysical sense. In “Good Hope” (p. 88) the death of the father is described as such:

My dad has chosen fire  
rather than the worm.

And it is as if the father talks back from the grave after the priestly ceremony and after the poet has placed his (our) evanescence against the bigger end of the world. Also “‘Trojan Horse’ hearing of the TRC”—that resonates with Ingrid de Kok’s poem about Bishop Tutu—places the given back in the here-and-now, in human suffering that goes as far back as the fate of a Taung-child.

### III

This is a worthy collection of poems written by a sensitive poet who forces you to look at life through his eyes—ever the test for a successful collection. Many of the poems have already appeared in magazines, but they have been soundly integrated into this book. It is rich in themes, in forms, in a conversation with poetry.