

# 'Text' and 'voice' in recent South African poetry<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

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*This article explores in some depth two volumes of poetry which are indicative of a tension between the poem as 'text' and the poem as 'voice', or the self-conscious (metaphoric) 'reading' or 'rewriting' of the world versus the outward (prophetic) 'speaking' to the world. While neither book is hermetically sealed and, like all rich poetry, delights in transgressing categories, each is distinctive enough to lend itself to exploration in terms of 'text' and 'voice'. The article argues that John Mateer, the self-avowed iconoclast yet to find an individual voice, is postmodern in his reading and rewriting of the fragmented world, while Joan Metelerkamp is closer to the modernists in her speaking to the hallowed world as poet-prophet, eschewing textual pyrotechnics while situating herself within poetic tradition.*

In his recent review of Steven Watson's new volume, *Presence of the Earth*, Chris Mann (1996:38) welcomes its central quality, "presence", a "daring and refreshing discovery in an age of egocentric cyber-barbarians". Joan Metelerkamp's volume, *Stone No More* (1995), shares just this with Watson's, both demonstrating how human beings have 'presence' in the imagination and memory of those who know them, allowing their poetry to be rooted in a specifics of time and place, but also to possess a certain timelessness and universality. John Mateer's volume, *Burning Swans* (1994), on the other hand, is very much that of a young 'cyber-barbarian', brilliant, iconoclastic and self-insistent. His is the text of exile, of absence, of aporia, contrasting with Metelerkamp's voice of belonging and prophetic engagement. One might say that where Metelerkamp

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1 In this article the following two volumes of poetry are discussed:

John Mateer. 1994. *Burning Swans*. South Fremantle : Fremantle Arts Centre.  
Joan Metelerkamp. 1995. *Stone No More*. Durban : Gecko Books.

issues an invitation to build up, to integrate, according to the imperative of reconciliation (whether this is understood in 'political' terms or not), Mateer's style belongs to the age of struggle, the need for iconoclasm, for deconstruction. These two volumes, then, reflect a tension between the trendy postmodern emphasis on 'text', iconoclasm and fragmentation, and the less fashionable neo-romantic or modernist recourse to an integrated prophetic 'voice'.

## **1. John Mateer: *Burning Swans***

Somewhat out of synch with contemporary South Africa, *Burning Swans* is the debut volume of this 23-year-old who packed for Perth when he was seventeen. The title refers to Western Australia's emblem, the black swan, but it also suggests the 'burnt' swan of his Australian present ghosting the 'fire' of his South African past. Fire is employed throughout the volume as a metaphor for his erstwhile home, so the image of the burnt swan becomes an iconoclastic 'after-image'.

### **1.1 Exile, failure and loss**

The volume is unusually long for a debut, and offers many themes, outstanding among which is the pain of integrating the past with the present, which leads to a preoccupation with time, exile and identity. Most poems explore the healing and transfiguring power of relationships with women, where religion and faith have failed, though failure to communicate with the lover is also probed. Loss, in fact, becomes the keynote of the volume, particularly insidious when Mateer, like the South African poet Sydney Clouts, is conscious of the frequent failure of language, the silence at the heart of his craft. This is suggested at the outset in the epigraph by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche: "He who has not come to life after death is like a man suddenly struck dumb". We are privy to the poet's groping towards a new identity which resists definition, given his awareness of the flawed nature of words. In his search to get beyond ignorance, Mateer endeavours in Tibetan Buddhist fashion to attain the insight of emptiness (the absence of what is false) and luminosity (the presence of what is real). A key poem, "The Supreme Court Gardens", playfully sketches a literal manifestation of this with its depiction of neon translucence transfiguring a midnight scene, giving rise to the observation, "The sundial's at midnight".

Mateer writes with flair and confidence, even arrogance, which befits the iconoclastic nature of the volume. Scenes are deftly portrayed, framing most poems in a specifics of time, place and person (early 1990s, Perth, exile). South Africans who have experienced the last few crucial years from abroad will find many an echo of their frustration at not being part of the process. South Africa itself, however, is never mentioned unless in title or parenthesis (almost as if it

were problematic for Mateer to define his birthplace, given its elusive changeable identity). The frequent image for the country which has to be decoded is fire, sometimes drought, sometimes smoke. Images of the Angolan war, the cataclysm of Mandela's release, and the disturbed white psyche, particularly as manifested by friends in South Africa, are afforded incisive expression.

Female readers, however, may take umbrage at the portrayal of women in these poems. Since they are usually depicted as integral to Mateer's finding identity, they seldom speak and are frequently on the receiving end of violent thoughts, as in "The Same Thing" ('Can I say I'll leave / you bruised, breathing, thumped with hot / semen?'), to say nothing of the violent action present in "Meat": 'And I will / use her name, call her names with her name, / enjoy hooking into all those shaming positions'. This is no romantic idealist speaking: his hard explicit language thrusts into the (female) reader's consciousness, often violating it. "Questions and Gestures" is an elliptical poem, detailing a surrealist nightmare with an 'image of the red-hot blade hacking black eggs' which, if they mean anything, could connote the womb, thereby placing women yet again on the receiving end of violence. But in a harrowing poem, "Up North", which deals with the archetype of white men's rape of indigenous women, women have the last (silent) say: they decisively resist penetration, but only at a cost to their very identity. If there is any criticism of the scope of Mateer's first volume, it must be that his empathy for the marginalised is not readily apparent (perhaps not of concern to him), thus rendering the tone of this volume, for all its self-assurance, penile hard and inflexible.

## 1.2 Textual play and symbols

The first poems in the volume, probably earlier in creation, tend to be more prosaic, the lines longer, as they narrate other people's stories which impact on the poet-speaker's consciousness. The poems then modulate into a more subjective stance, trying to integrate past with present, self with lover, and begin to realise the failure at the heart of articulation. The last few poems convey this typographically: double-spaced lines, aporia between the utterances, fragmentary thoughts. Reprinted as an erratum is "Without Me", the very last poem, which masquerades as a printer's error, but is really a self-conscious playing with the multivalencies of words. The last lines read 'Know where candles / are but not matches'; the second version inverts the nouns, rendering the lines even more desperate, and thus the volume as a whole. There is little more agonising than possessing the secret of penetrating the dark, but having no means to do so. It is the visionary's nightmare.

William Blake is an obvious antecedent of this poet. He appears in the aptly-named "Experience" where his work tells his protégé to keep silent and to

breathe. As for Clouts's man in Klapmuts, secrets can only be breathed, not uttered. "Enough Pain" ventures the reason Mateer writes poetry, but in a clause that resists easy reading: 'One scars the known'. Does he mean 'writes', 'inscribes', 'hurts', 'deforms' those places or people known to him? All of these possibilities are incarnated in other poems in this volume. There are, however, moments in the poems where the secrets become shibboleths, accessible only to the initiated. Smoke is one such impenetrable symbol, yet of importance given the title of the volume. It is usually associated with his female lovers, particularly their mouths, and this is obviously a private Audenesque image. "Open Mouths", addressed to a lover, is quite inaccessible, depending on arcane imagery of burning, and cryptic questioning. In other poems, the smoke is 'the smell that's not life' ("Today Is Different"), or comes from 'her sour mouth' and is associated with South Africa ("Negatives Correspond"). Perhaps, given its unsavoury connotations, the symbol is just resistant to female readers?

Just as fire is the archetypal iconoclast, so is the poet an avowed pyromaniac ("Clarity"), though, paradoxically in this poem, pyromania becomes an 'image', therefore self-destructive, self-defeating. This conceit is a keynote of this endlessly speculative volume, visiting as it does, the tensions inherent in time, identity and language. If the iconoclast's image is time ("The Iconoclast's Image"), the genitive makes it ambiguous. Whether it is an image *of* the iconoclast, time as the breaker of sacred cows, or *possessed by* the iconoclast as a tool for his breaking of images, like pyromania, it is self-contradictory, self-annihilating. Yet the poet celebrates this prerogative in true Whitmanesque fashion.

### **1.3 Simplicity versus opacity of expression**

As is often the case with a first book, some poems are more successful than others, and the poem which won the Australian John E.V. Birch Award, "Habitat", deserves its accolade. It can be expected that a poet who interrogates time, identity and language, and who has not yet found a place he can call home, should be preoccupied with the idea of a 'habitat'. In this poem elemental images of birds and bats in the darkness suggest the primal emotions the lovers share before their enchantment is shattered by the quotidian:

When I'm this close to you we're  
far from my thinking: your neck, vulnerable  
ring-pierced lobe and the gap where  
your bra escapes your shirt –

Foam slaps the pavement from a hose  
pointed by the Greek man. Gulls wetly  
flap upwards into their orbit that's

either day or night. You, constricted  
by your thoughts, smile, go into  
a bare room and flick on the light.

The simplicity of this poem is part of the charmed scene it seeks to sketch, and this clarity of expression is a skill on which Mateer would do well to concentrate. Yet the poem also indicates his engaging with the intrusion of the quotidian into his private world. In other poems it is the television screen which injects Inkatha, Rushdie, Nuremberg and the Dalai Lama into his enchanted world, forcing him to be pragmatic, as in "Fire Imagined":

It's like when last year my mother saw an  
angel in the clouds.  
Being realistic, I told her in this heat it'd  
melt before hitting the ground.

Mateer feels the need to take cognisance of the everyday in his private world, which renders this volume that much more accessible.

"Glimmerings" is another poem which works. Again, it talks about a place of belonging which eludes the poet-speaker. He only finds it in nostalgia for what has been lost, a place called 'elsewhere' inhabited by the known whom, in other poems, he wants to 'scar' (inscribe?). The pain is palpable; the expression evocative. In this poem and elsewhere the poet's preoccupation with the raw material of his craft, language, and his awareness of its flaws, is obvious: "Talking, I spoon dirt into my mouth". Throughout this volume letters are written, books are given, speech is attempted. But all are fallible. The book yields to the hug, speech to the smile, words give way to the cello, letters to a chessboard. Ironically for the poet, touch is the only real communication: 'I'm a poet not / talking: I'll always have to touch her' ("An Unanswered Question").

The poems which ought to appeal to South Africans, those in which he plays around with Afrikaans as a language redolent of his country of birth, are strangely not successful, too consciously crafted. Entitled "Other Language", the poem cycle interleaves English and Afrikaans lines, the former a direct if flawed translation (articulation?) of the latter:

Ek praat en skryf  
I speak and write  
so – Die kamer is al donker. Horison  
thus – The room is already dark. The horizon  
oranje. Hoekom dink ek so: – dat ek  
orange. Why do I think thus: – that I

opduik uit die water van my bad uit om  
surface from the water of my bath to  
gesigte, stom gesigte, te sien oorstrom.  
see faces, mute faces, overflow.

All the cycle does is point up graphically in four sections the failure of one language to express the same idea as another (the failure of language itself to express an idea?). The self-consciousness is irritating and mars an otherwise intriguing set of meditations on being and poetry. The effect is of a ghosting television screen; the message is garbled. Here the text indeed lacks a voice, even if it speaks typographically of Babel.

The poem cycle, "A New South Africa", is more accessible, offering blackness as liberation: 'Being blackened, I understood / what could be for just a moment'. The underlying idea is that the swans of South Africa must be burnt through the fire of the struggle, in order to be free, like the black swan of Western Australia. However, in "Last Weekend" the poet-speaker wistfully says of an experience at midnight, 'Swans could have been white if there was day'. Here white-hot swans are the ideal, symbolising an integrated identity, but only achieved paradoxically via 'burning' in the refining fire of South Africa. In the poem already alluded to, "The Supreme Court Gardens", Mateer imagines 'burning swans alive / with flame feathered across live / water: stars'. These swans are his *idée fixe*, incarnated variously as 'Celan's eternal eye', 'matches', an 'elongated flame'.

The *idée fixe* has other avatars, too. Insects, stones, stars, pearls, eyes, specks, electrons all pepper his poetry, reminiscent of Blake's 'world in a grain of sand' or Clouts's 'particles'. These are the most powerful images in his poetry, because they dispute the right of the word to possess or limit them. They have an independent existence, resisting closure: 'I could have quoted, but / those stones, subtle and better left unsaid, / are flowers of their own' ("Iceberg Roses"). In the effortless poem, "Reminders of the Season", the poet-speaker draws comfort from things left unsaid, open-ended, still to look forward to:

The afternoon, wind-cleared and solemn.  
Like a blue fist forcing the blank sky  
to believe. Under a winter tree budding  
with snails I find an old tin.  
It was rusted, red, and barely opened.

Inside the house, I go to the phone. Phone her.  
No one is there and I am glad. I need  
to think that our words, their mysteries  
and misunderstandings will be there  
waiting, like a warm sky after rain.

The beauty of poems like these is their simplicity.

For his next volume, therefore, Mateer would be wise to take a leaf out his own poem "For a While", where he makes a plea for avoiding in his speech 'the fatigued tone of despair, the / brightness we can't strain, that / scratched membrane of dream'. I feel that a little more gentleness, less stridency, should endow his next publication with the maturity already ghosting this volume, and affirm the presence of an integrated voice behind the brilliant textual posturing.

## 2. Joan Metelerkamp: *Stone No More*

In complete contrast is the second volume by the 39-year-old Sanlam Award-winning Durban poet, Joan Metelerkamp, *Stone No More*. It confirms her stature as a poetic voice seriously to be reckoned with as this country moves into a new era which favours individuality, creativity and the building up of relationships and the fabric of the nation. This is a collection with *soul*, about living *soulfully*, celebrating people and places, through memory and art in the way popularised recently by the philosopher-theologian Thomas Moore. As South Africans, indeed, as human beings on the threshold of a new century, we should take seriously the injunction to build, on both the private and political front, now that iconoclasm is no longer constructive, or desirable.

### 2.1 Hallowing the quotidian and ordinary

Anticipating Mann's valorisation of 'presence', Metelerkamp admitted in an interview in *New Coin* (1992:26) that she is tired of the emphasis put by academia on "absence and loss and substitution rather than on presence and possibility and reality". This postmodern fetish is ill-suited as a poetic to a nation trying to build itself up, no longer so preoccupied with deconstructing itself. The beauty of this second volume lies precisely in its hallowing of the quotidian, and the ordinary, rooted as it is in a specifics of place and time (suburban Durban, early 1990s). Yet it refuses to ignore the suffering at the heart of this milieu, Cato Manor, and the names of victims of the violence in KwaZulu-Natal echo hollowly through the poetry. Metelerkamp, however, does not play a sham role of trendy identification with the victims when her identity and life circumstances preclude this, and such integrity is the hallmark of this volume.

This is the kind of poetry which resists a prosaic analysis, so stirring the reader with its exquisite use of words and ruthless honesty, that the only honourable response is on the level of *soul*: art. This is poetry to inspire, in turn, a painting (an activity which pervades this collection), a bas relief (like that of the birth of Aphrodite on the cover) or that quintessential female art form, the quilt, ennobled by Adrienne Rich, and used, together with its relatives, the shroud and robe, to

symbolise female activity within this collection. The domain of the sewing room, however, can provoke an ambivalent response, as Metelerkamp demonstrates in one of the poems of her first volume, *Towing the Line* (1992:114), when she asks plaintively, 'what understanding can come from seaming / blankets or poems at all?' ("On Ingrid de Kok's Familiar Ground").

Classical mythology provides the bedrock from which these poems take their nature. A dialectic is set up between Athena, symbolising a woman out of kilter with her female self, finding false identification with the male, the intellectual, the prescriptive, and Aphrodite, the apotheosis of female strength, serendipitous, self-sufficient, creative. The interplay between these types offers Metelerkamp a way of exploring her own life: academic and mother, intellectual and poet, the desire for recognition and acceptance of namelessness. At this stage in her life it seems as if Aphrodite, or soul living has the upper hand; the everyday pursuits of being a wife and mother are invested with a sacredness which makes up for the renunciation of a name in academe (what Moore would term the heroic or Promethean, an assertion of the ego at the expense of soul).

## **2.2 Poetic allusions and antecedents**

Taking its cue from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, this volume is characterised by process and change. Even the title is open to a multiplicity of meanings. "Stone no more" is a quotation from *The Winter's Tale*, where Hermione's statue is metamorphosed into flesh, reborn into life and marriage with Leontes. This has particular relevance to the main poems in this volume which are elegies to Metelerkamp's grandmother (her namesake, Joan) and friends she has known. The sense of loss – and it is crucifying – is mitigated by the sustaining power of memory, and longevity of the printed word. This gives a fluidity to this collection which rejects the idea of marmoreal epitaphs. "Stone no more" can also be read as a comment on the poet-speaker's feelings: after the catharsis of grief, with its expression in verse, comes a softness, a heart of flesh in place of one of stone. Or it can take on the overtones of a command, a recognition of the essential fallibility and humanity of us all, where none can cast the first stone. Perhaps most importantly, the reader is confronted with the constantly-moving stone of Sisyphus (disconcertingly misspelt, and it is not the printer), symbol of the courageous existentialist as immortalised by Albert Camus. Sisyphus becomes a type for formidable women like her grandmother and the South African poet Ruth Miller, on whose works Metelerkamp has done pioneering research.

As in Metelerkamp's first volume, other poetic voices are frequently heard. W.H. Auden is a mentor, so is Derek Walcott, and in a poem like "After the interview" the well-schooled reader hears echoes of lines from famous poems by Henry Reed and W.B. Yeats. Such intertextual references woven throughout add



intricacy to an already striking fabric. This is muted in other poems, however, with a quieter, more devotional tone, private, ordinary, looking less to academe for its nod of approval than to ordinary people, women in particular, who would find an echo of their own life experience in the poems. It is female poets like Elizabeth Daryush and Marianne Moore on whom Metelerkamp draws for her style, syllabic metre, although this volume, while very controlled metrically, stands on the threshold of free verse. The illusion of *vers libre* is created by thorough mastery of the syllabic line, giving the impression of a tautness beneath the fluidity. Whereas the earlier volume displayed a penchant for the three-stepped line of William Carlos Williams, this is rejected for a smoother, more elegiac line, sometimes in stanza form, in keeping with the themes of this volume, laments for the dead but also celebrations of the soulful life.

Unlike Mateer, whose echoes of other poets are more instinctual, Metelerkamp is very conscious of writing in a tradition, of experiencing the presence of the past, as T.S. Eliot put it in 1919 in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1980:38), and which he considered indispensable for anyone who would continue to be a poet after the age of twenty-five. Metelerkamp's historical sense (both poetic and genealogical) is reflected in this volume, revealing an awareness of the timeless as well as of her own place in time. So the poet-speaker of this collection is also conscious of carrying on the hierarchical (feminist) struggle of namesake, Joan in a hostile world: 'but it is I, I who / must go on / speaking now' ("At the centre you sit"), even as her grandmother said to her mother, 'your turn now – carry / the can, not I not any longer' ("Joan"):

Love in the first fling  
lets dancing in the blood  
let this be love as strong  
as love for my children  
love of life struggling  
sustaining despite  
daily discomfort,  
letting love here shoot  
green tendrils through the  
familiar ground the  
imperfect terrain  
that is.

Words of Ingrid de Kok, and Metelerkamp's grandmother, are appropriated here in celebration of her task as poet and mother.

### 2.3 Soul, art and eros

The poems are significantly longer than those in her first volume; Metelerkamp seems to be moving away from the lyric voice to assume a more narrative (prophetic?) stance. There are only fifteen poems, but some of these are cycles, or contain sequences, taking their cue from Miller's harrowing "Cycle", written in tremendous grief at the death of her son. "Joan" is the most significant of these, occupying central place in the book, a testament to a redoubtable woman who died by her own hand five years before her granddaughter was born. Like Hermione's statue, this poem takes on the contours of flesh when it is read, and recreates Joan Rose-Innes Findlay in a magnificent and loving tribute. Through this poem, which gives contemporary resonance to John Keats's view of the world as a 'vale of soul-making' forging a soul from the intelligence, the 'stone / weight' crushing the poet-speaker becomes 'soft grief' through its expression, and the legacy of her grandmother an injunction 'To keep the spirit dancing / in the blood'.

Metelerkamp shares with Mateer a respect for the independent power of the natural world, and such images form the stuff of these poems. Stones are obviously used to symbolise oppression and pain, while the pod is a favourite image for nurturing and affirmation. In "Poem for my mother", which came third in the 1992 Sydney Clouts Memorial Award, a mother scoops up her daughter 'like a fallen pod', and in the central poem already mentioned, "Joan", the poet-speaker carries her child as 'a seed in a healing pod'. Both images occur in a trenchant elegy for a friend from student days who died in London, "For Davydd". The youthful poet-speaker's face is viewed by Davydd as 'a pod form opening', in opposition to the older 'stone face', racked with repressed pain. Trees and flowers germane to KwaZulu-Natal are symbols throughout for 'life-blood' or 'life-line' ("Joan"). They inject soul, or what Metelerkamp prefers to term 'eros', the 'god of love' announced by a 'wreath of leaves of yellow-wood and celtis' ("Portrait"), into the otherwise mundane 'interstices of routine' ("When you ask me").

Another pervasive image already noted, in the realm of culture rather than nature (subverting the usual male / female dyad), is that of sewing, both a healer's task and a domestic pursuit. An earlier unpublished version of "Self / Critic: Birth of Venus" did not include a wonderfully rich stanza which is a hymn to female art forms (and a homespun gauntlet to the panoply of Athena):

I shall  
venture in unsolicited, insouciant, shameless in my home  
made shawl, home spun words, appliquéed with paisleys, diamonds, satin  
stitched with floribunda roses, such warp and weft of words, such drapes  
of greens, vermillions, falling round my naked form like hair like flax

like gold, protecting me like women's arms, waiting, on the shore, receiving me, wrapping me in finest textures of their craft, patterns of women's work, from sea to sea, from here to then, from knot to knot ...

Elsewhere needlecraft becomes a metaphor for the elegiac form, which hallows the dead like a shroud. In the keynote poem, "Joan", the poet-speaker is conscious of using 'the fabric of words to weave / a wonderful shroud for our loss', felt severally by all women:

I longed for you to take it,  
to rub it through your fingers  
feeling its fine stuff, passing  
it from one to the other,  
holding it up to the light,  
laying it in the centre

there letting it be  
a symbol of peace  
carried within us  
its message healing.

Then, almost pre-empting the act of weaving a shroud, women are enjoined, like surgeons, to 'Stitch, stitch gently over the gaping flesh / cover the wound keeping the life blood in'.

But this volume is also shot through with coquetry, eroticism and coy playfulness, both in the use of *double entendres* and in the subject matter. "Kissing the rod" is a risqué play on the act of writing and sexual foreplay, and the 'dark man' sequences of the longest poem, "Portrait", are tantalisingly immediate:

And as she works,  
as the night gathers into deepest  
dark, then begins to slip with the call  
of early brown hooded kingfishers  
into grey, his figure comes, clearly:  
the long freckled back, the finely turned  
legs, high instep, thin ankles, the pale  
form, no phantom lover, familiar  
maculate man, waking daily, here.

The figure in this poem (and also in "Letter") is reminiscent of the 'stranger' in Miller's open-ended poem "Blue-mantled Mary", and draws much of his demiurgic power from association with this figure. Metelkamp insisted in the *New Coin* interview (1992:27) that "gods have different shapes and forms ... they are going to help us – if they are integrated in ourselves – to bring eros into the everyday". This infusing of myth and symbol into the quotidian, as opposed to

the intrusion of the everyday into Mateer's enchanted spaces, renders her poetic voice timeless as well as contemporary.

This volume is indubitably an advance on the first, in terms of mastery of language use, immediacy of experience described, and the glimmerings of an individual voice with definite preoccupations. Metelerkamp has an absolute horror of humbug and pretence: whether these are the false pressures brought to bear in academia ("After the interview"), or 'failed saviours' which are unable to empower or authenticate the individual ("Undercurrents"), or women who are hoodwinked into reductively taking on patriarchal attributes ("Self / Critic: Birth of Venus"). This idiosyncratic voice is refreshing in contemporary intellectual circles, unfashionably moving away from the metaphor of text, of 'reading' everything instead of speaking it. Where Mateer exemplifies the self-conscious postmodern strain in our poetry, Metelerkamp goes back unashamedly to the modernists.

If there is any weakness, it is perhaps a looseness or fragmentation in the long poems, like parts of "Portrait" (the dialogue sequences sit uneasily within the poetry) and "Space of the Imagination", which presents incidents and characters too cryptically for real identification. Metelerkamp's background is in theatre, and this may have encouraged a dramatic approach, but more work needs to be done to make such poems as seamless, say, as Guy Butler's celebrated dramatic poems. This was a shortcoming identified by Karen Press (1992:13) in her review of Metelerkamp's first volume, where she pointed out that small images often worked better than the big poem, and that sometimes the expression of a truth is unclear. But this is a small cavil, and I look forward immensely to the third collection, given the overwhelming sense of integrity and depth behind these poems.

### **3. Conclusion: Fragmented psyche versus integrated soul**

A "coherent philosophic seriousness" underlies Stephen Watson's volume, which Mann (1996:38) attributes to the "rich cluster of presences that shape our lives and contribute to our sense of identity". It is precisely this recapturing of soul, and the prophetic role of the poet, that make Metelerkamp's volume immeasurably richer than Mateer's, even if the young man's volume is intellectually stimulating and trenchant. *Burning Swans* is a text belonging to a time at odds with nation-building, reading the psyche and the world as fragmented, and for that reason is valuable, preventing us from becoming complacent and cliché-bound. But it is the maturer voice of *Stone No More* which speaks into our situation, as South Africans forge a new poetic and national identity, urging us like Eliot to be conscious not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

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