

D.S.H.

9/7/83

Message to be read out on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor Dr D S Henderson at a party being held to honour Guy Butler at Rhodes University during the AUETSA conference (9 July).

To imagine Rhodes University without Guy Butler is rather like trying to imagine Britain without Winston Churchill or the United States of America without Abraham Lincoln.

Professor Guy Butler has been so intimately connected with, and responsible for, so much of the development of Rhodes University, that the two may well be said to have matured together. Professor Butler is our senior professor, having been appointed in 1950, two years before Rhodes was declared an autonomous institution. Ever since those early days, the names Guy Butler and Rhodes University have been closely linked, and, we hope, something of the spirit of the man has rubbed off onto the University.

Guy Butler is a man who has stood unfailingly for artistic integrity as a provoker and generator of literature; someone who believes in literature as a redeeming human force. He is also a man who regards himself simply as a poet. It is not for me to expound on Guy Butler's position as a major South African literary talent - you as English teachers are well able to assess that for yourselves. I could point to his role in the "respectabilization" of English literature, and its practitioners, in Africa today, for it was he who pre-eminently pointed out that the work of South Africans writing in English is a vital element in the national cultural heritage and that English, after all, has become and will continue to be an African language.

However, I should like to tell you about another side of Guy Butler - the man who has played a vital role at Rhodes University for over thirty years, as an educator, administrator, and a man of vision.

As the senior member of the University Senate, Professor Butler's opinion, although infrequently expressed, is always heard with respect.

Both I and the Vice-Principal, Professor Brommert, have the utmost confidence in Professor Butler's judgement on university concerns, be they matters of personality, administration, or educational policy, and indeed there have been many problem moments in the past when I have felt that there was only one solution, and that was to ask Guy.

Guy Butler came to Rhodes 33 years ago to teach English. As a teacher he is a man with a unique ability to illuminate a concept, a poem or a work of art. I have heard it said that attending a Shakespeare lecture by Butler was like being in a room with a series of chandeliers being turned on.

For such a teacher, it did not take long to establish the Rhodes English department as one with a fine record and a national reputation. The English professor then set about developing the natural off-shoots to the teaching of English - the Speech and Drama department was established in 1967, the Department of Linguistics and English Language in 19____, the Department of Journalism and Media Studies in 1970. One might almost borrow from the title of the latest Butler book, and describe those years as the years of the "Bursting English Department", such was the phenomenal energy he produced in order to bring about the evolution of his original English department into four large, flourishing and independent units.

Poet, educator, inspirer, administrator, Guy Butler is a man whose every action is part of a unified "whole man". I have no doubt, that, even if I were with you this evening in the flesh and not merely in spirit, Guy would not contradict me when I say that he is a man who subscribes to the view of the Japanese poet Baschó:

"What is important is to keep our minds high in the world of true understanding

No matter what we may be doing at a given moment, we must not forget that it has a bearing upon our everlasting self which is poetry".