

HONORARY GRADUATE

Frederick Guy Butler

Frederick Guy Butler was born at Cradock in the Cape Province on 21 January 1918. He was educated at the Cradock High School and Rhodes University, where he took his MA degree in 1939. During the Second World War his academic career was interrupted by military service in Egypt, Italy and the United Kingdom. After the war he returned to study at Brasenose College, Oxford. He is a Master of Arts of that university. The story of his early life is told in the first volume of his autobiography, *Karoo Morning*, and he has continued the narrative to the end of the Second World War in *Bursting World*.

Guy Butler was a lecturer in the Department of English at this University from 1948 to 1950, and he has been Professor of English at Rhodes University since 1952. In addition to producing a large number of scholarly articles, particularly on Shakespeare and South African literature, he has been the editor of several important works, in particular the two Oxford University Press anthologies, *A Book of South African Verse*, which appeared in 1959, and *A New Book of South African Verse in English*, which was published in 1979 with Chris Mann as co-editor. His editorial services to South African poetry go well beyond this, however, for he was English editor of *Standpunte* between 1955 and 1958, and in 1965 he founded the poetry magazine *New Coin*, which he continued to edit for a number of years.

He has brought out five volumes of his own poetry, establishing his characteristic lyric mode in his first volume, *Stranger to Europe*, which appeared in 1952 and which concentrated on his experience of the war. A life-long concern of his poetry has been the effort to crystallize what the contrasting experiences of Europe and Africa have meant to him. He has written five plays, the best-known being *The Dam* and *The Dove Returns*, both on South African themes. In both his poetry and his drama he has proved himself an honest and a deeply meditative scrutineer of South African life. Among the literary prizes he has won are first and second prizes in the SABC Poetry Competitions in 1949 and 1953 respectively, first prize of the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Foundation in 1953, and the Central News Agency award for *Selected Poems* in 1976.

Over and above his extremely distinguished career as a scholar and poet, however, Guy Butler will always be remembered for the energy with which he has striven to lead English-speaking South Africans towards an awareness of their own unique identity and heritage, and of their national rôle. Some of his deepest convictions were expressed in 1965 in an article entitled 'The Future of English-speaking South Africa', in which he wrote:

'We [English-speaking South Africans] don't know who we are The first step is to meet our forebears as people: in their own writings, in biographies, in historical studies, in works of fiction [for] we shall remain "Westerners by cultural correspondence course" unless we consciously locate ourselves and strike root.'

To the end of helping English-speaking South Africans to strike root - *Take Root or Die* is the title of one of his plays - he has always been extremely active in national bodies such as the English Academy, of which he was President between 1966 and 1969. He has made a major contribution on the cultural front through his active involvement with the 1820 Settlers Monument Foundation. He was the moving force behind the project from the time that it became clear that it would be firmly committed to a non-racial, forward-looking cultural and educational programme. He has been a member of the Council of the Foundation since 1967, and he organized for it both the major 1973 conference, 'English-speaking South Africa - An Assessment', and the National Shakespeare Festival 1976. He played a major rôle in the establishment and fostering of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University, serving as Chairman of the Institute from its inception in 1964 until 1972. He is currently a member of the Commission of Inquiry into the Creative Arts, and a member of the Drama Advisory Committee of CAPAB.

It is as an academic, a creative writer, and a campaigner for English and the English in South Africa that Guy Butler is being honoured by the University.