

## EUPHEMISING WILLIAM

Ruben Mowszowski

The problem with William was that he knew too much. He challenged our dominance and he paid the price. But there's no need to feel guilty. William didn't die, he went to the indeterminate world that terminally sick and unwanted pets – the ones that we used to 'put down' – go to. You see, William wasn't killed, he was euthanized. Unfortunately I can't tell you what the word means as it's not in any of the dictionaries I own. There's euthanasia of course, but that's killing to relieve suffering - and they don't mean the suffering of humans. The stranded whales at Kommetjie beach, maybe - at least people *thought* they were suffering - but William wasn't suffering. He was having a grand old time disassembling sliding doors. It's the people in the houses he raided who were suffering. No, don't get me wrong, I'm not going to suggest even for a moment that these people should be put down, as we used to say before this terrible neologism surfaced. The true victim of this semantic assault is the English language, and if we can't defend the language, what hope have we of saving the baboons? Instead of traumatising the children of Scarborough with a covert execution and the victim vanishing into thin air, William should have been acknowledged as a bandit-hero and given the Napoleon treatment; exile on one of our rocky islands where there are plenty of small birds and molluscs. (Baboons are remarkably adaptable.) But if the experts minds were set, and William, like Trotsky, just had to die, his death should have at least served some larger purpose. Baboons are astute observers with tremendous eyesight capable of distinguishing one face from another at distance of 10 kilometres.\* William killed in the open would have been as dead as he is now, but his death would at least have had some value. It would have exposed to the baboon world how dangerous we humans are. It would have been a deterrent. By euphemising William out of existence, we impoverish the language, close our options and commit future Williams to a similar fate.

\* For those who doubt this statement, I quote from Eugene Marais' *Soul of the Ape*: "...a young captive male could at a distance of six miles (9.66km), over a landscape flickering with mirage, recognize without fail among a group of people, a human friend to whom he was greatly attached."