

ESSAY REVIEW

WORDS AS BULLETS: THE WRITINGS OF DAMBUDZO MARECHERA*

[**Biographical note:** Dambudzo Marechera, perhaps Zimbabwe's best-known writer, died in Harare on 18 August 1987. He was born on 4 June 1952 in Vengere Township near Rusape. The son of a truck-driver, he attended various mission schools and entered the University of Rhodesia in 1972 to study English literature. In 1973, he was sent down with other student leaders who were involved in protest demonstrations. He was able to leave the country secretly and continued his studies at New College, Oxford, from 1974. Faced with the choice of undergoing voluntary psychiatric treatment or leaving the College, Marechera gave up his studies in 1976. He lived in Britain, mainly among London's 'alternative' community, as a free-lance writer, without a permanent home. He was writer-in-residence at the University of Sheffield in 1978, and gave readings at the Horizonte Festival in West Berlin in 1979. He returned to independent Zimbabwe in 1982, where he lived as a free-lance writer until his death. He won the Guardian Fiction Prize for his first book, *The House of Hunger*, in 1979].

Dambudzo Marechera is an outsider. He cannot be included in any of the categories into which modern African literature is currently divided: his writings have nothing in common with the various forms of anti-colonial or anti-neocolonial protest literature, nor can they be interpreted as being an expression of the identity-crisis suffered by an African exiled in Europe.

Marechera refuses to identify himself with any particular race, culture or nation; he is an extreme individualist, an anarchistic thinker. He rejects social and state regimentation — be it in colonial Rhodesia, in England, or in independent Zimbabwe; the freedom of the individual is of the utmost importance. In this he is uncompromising, and this is how he tries to live.

Thus he embodies for Europeans the almost nostalgic image of the writer-tramp, something less familiar to Africans, the Steppenwolf who survives on the fringe of society, always poor, homeless and alone, sleeping on park benches, spending on drink what little he occasionally earns with his publications. It is not necessary to have read Marechera to have heard of him, since his every public appearance is an opportunity for him to attack and ridicule the Establishment. At the ceremony in London at which he was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize in 1979, he hurled cups and plates at the chandeliers, finding the whole affair hypocritical and feeling that no one really understood him.

* The original German version of this review appeared in *Kritisches Lexikon zur Fremdsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Munich, Edition Text + Kritik, 1987), XIII, and this translation appears with permission. It has been translated by Orlaith Kelly and Roger Stringer, with the assistance of the author.

It would seem that Marechera finds himself always persecuted, endlessly pursued. With his unusually thin skin, he can only survive the constant, threatening blows of the outside world through the powerful and magical exorcism of the written word. This makes his language strikingly immediate and intense, with exceptionally vivid imaginative power. The 'power' of his words, always highlighted by critics, can be taken quite literally: with the power of the word and of the imagination, he seeks to counter the manifestation of power (i.e. violence) which he meets in all its forms in his own life, and which he abhors and fears more than anything else.

In *The House of Hunger* (1978), Marechera describes his first brushes with the violence which marked him for life — the daily violence of the township (in what was then Rhodesia) where he grew up. His mother worked unceasingly to send the nine children to school; his father, a truck-driver, an alcoholic, was killed in a road accident when Marechera was eleven years old. The 'House of Hunger' came to symbolize for him the environment of poverty, hunger and filth, the loneliness and brutality of all human relations. The sensitive and gifted boy fled from this squalor into the world of books, of fantasy, of dreams:

I acquired the ability to simply go on reading even while my father and mother were fighting, or while someone was being mugged just outside the house. I would simply just concentrate, knowing very well about the horrifying circumstances around me. A total escapism.¹

European literature and the English language became his means of escape. As the years passed, he acquired an extensive and thorough knowledge of world literatures, and his command of English became very sophisticated. His mother tongue, Shona, however, he associates with the misery and the material and spiritual poverty of his childhood, rejecting it and coming to hate it as much as he hates everything relating to tradition, family, and African origins.

The House of Hunger consists of nine stories, so linked in their themes that the book can certainly pass as a novel, as Doris Lessing writes in her critique.² The title story, by far the longest in the book and described by Marechera as a novella, is developed from its first words: 'I got my things and left.'³ The rest of the action is confined to this one day, during which the first-person narrator meets friends at the beer-hall and in a bar. Again and again, this ostensibly weak storyline is interrupted by the memories and reflections which accompany his departure from the House of Hunger, from childhood and youth; in this way, the boundaries of

¹ 'Escape from the House of Hunger' [interview with Marechera by G. Alagiah], *South* (Dec. 1984), 10.

² D. Lessing, 'A cultural tug-of-war', *Books and Bookmen* (1979), XXIV, ix, 62-3.

³ D. Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (London, Heinemann, 1978; Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1982), 1.

time shift constantly, present conversations passing unbroken through flashbacks and the narrator's thoughts, and the lines blur between dream and reality. In a mixture of autobiography and fiction, Marechera describes not only his childhood in the township but also the violent behaviour of his fellow pupils at one of the best mission-schools in the country; the brutality of White students, who beat up the narrator and his White girl-friend on the campus of the University of Rhodesia; his brutal interrogation by the Rhodesian police before fleeing to England; the African students who were police informers and who were solely intent upon improving their social position. He returns again and again to the mood that characterized his generation of students in Rhodesia at the beginning of the 1970s — the search for freedom by students who at the same time were paralysed by an all-embracing, corrosive moral disintegration and decay

There were no conscious farewells to adolescence for the emptiness was deep-seated in the gut. We knew that before us lay another vast emptiness whose appetite for things living was at best wolfish. Life stretched out like a series of hunger-scoured hovels stretching endlessly towards the horizon. One's mind became the grimy rooms, the dusty cobwebs in which the minute skeletons of one's childhood were forever in the spidery grip that stretched out to include not only the very stones upon which one walked but also the stars which glittered vaguely upon the stench of our lives. Gut-rot, that was what one steadily became.⁴

The other stories in the book take up motifs introduced in the main story, but also describe scenes and experiences from the time that Marechera spent as a student at New College, Oxford: the only Black student in his group, in 'Black Skin, What Mask', he tries to meet the intense pressures at a British university rich in tradition by denying his roots with the use of skin-lightening creams, by wearing wigs, in his clothing and accent, by going out with White girls — until he ends up slashing his wrists. Another story, 'The Writer's Grain', reflects a nightmarish surrealism: a boy who has lost his memory is subjected to brutally grotesque brain-washing by 'Mr Warthog', which is reminiscent of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). In the lyrical fairy-tale narrative of 'Protista', the man-fish, Marechera makes use of magic symbolism from the myths of his people to create a tender counterpart to the menacing image of Woman in 'The House of Hunger': Maria the huntress represents love, strength and fertility; without her, the country is threatened by drought, and the solitary and forsaken man (the narrator) is threatened by the death-bringing man-fish who lives in the depths of the river.

The writer's paranoia and his gradual mental breakdown pervade the whole book: at the mission-school he suffers from hallucinations and has a nervous breakdown; later, a monkey looks back at him out of the mirror to jeer at him; the

⁴ Ibid., 3–4.

professor of literature meets his *doppelgänger* at the same time that his wife is being unfaithful to him with one of his students called Marechera. All these are symbols of a split personality, a theme taken up and explored further in Marechera's second book, *Black Sunlight* (1980). Writing appears to be the only way in which he can combat his own disintegration: the poems become the symbolic 'stitches', constantly recurring in *The House of Hunger*, which keep the narrator (i.e. the author) in one piece:

Afterwards they came to take out the stitches from the wound of it. And I was whole again. The stitches were published. The reviewers made obscene noises.

It is now out of print. But those stitches, those poems . . .⁵

The House of Hunger brought early fame to Dambudzo Marechera. It made him the mouthpiece of that 'lost generation' of young Zimbabweans who found themselves oppressed by the colonial regime, and who were either alienated from their own culture or subjected to an alien culture in exile. In the words of the Zimbabwean Minister of Education at a public reading by Marechera in Harare in 1984:

His work gives illuminating insights into the struggle for sanity in a situation full of contradictions, where there was a severe dislocation of moral and social norms which, for the young academic, resulted in the fragmentation of family and community life and of ideals and vision, or, to quote T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, 'A heap of broken images'.⁶

Marechera's second book, *Black Sunlight*, published in 1980, attracted far less attention. Considered by many to be unreadable and overdrawn, it was initially banned in Zimbabwe, where, even though the country has been independent since 1980, the old censorship laws are still in force. The main reasons: obscenity and blasphemy. At the intervention of Zimbabwean writer colleagues, the ban was lifted shortly before Marechera's return from exile.⁷

The novel is about a photographer (the first-person narrator), a sympathizer with a group of young urban guerrillas. While on a photo-safari into the African bush, he is captured by a primitive and violent chief and hung upside down by his heels in a chicken-run. He is rescued by a White anthropologist who is carrying out research in the area. She tells him that the guerrilla organization 'Black Sunlight' has been smashed following a military coup. The rest of the book is made up of interweaving memories of his meetings with the group and with its individual members. Particular significance is given to his stay at 'Devil's End',

⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁶ Zimbabwe, Department of Information, Press Statement 94/84/SN, 'Minister praises Zimbabwean author' (Harare, Min. of Information, 1984). Speech by Minister of Education, Dr D. Mutumbuka, at a reading by Marechera at the Courtauld Hall, Harare, 23 Feb. 1984.

⁷ General Notice 260 of 1982, *Government Gazette* (12 Mar. 1982).

the group's camp in remote underground rock-catacombs, in which the photographer sees the most incomprehensible and fantastic things and figures, at times as if he were on a descent into hell; he meets his own *doppelgänger*, whom he interviews on questions of violence and art, and finally collapses to drown in a world of surrealist dreams and visions.

In *Black Sunlight* Marechera fuses the diverse forms of self-expression and life-style of London's 'alternative' scene: when he wrote the book, in 1979, he was living in a huge commune of artists, drug addicts, meditators and individualists of all kinds. In a process of philosophical and poetic self-discovery, the book explores the relationship between Marechera's concept of the total freedom of the spirit as it can be manifested in art, and the political action which aims at gaining this freedom — anarchism. Marechera discusses in many different ways questions of reality, of man's capacity to perceive reality, of illusion and delusion, and of the task of the artist in relation to all these. His *doppelgänger* says to the photographer:

Day to day reality is therefore itself any illusion created by the mass of our needs, our ideas, our wants. Transform the needs, the ideas, the wants, and at once, as though with a magic wand, you transform the available reality. To write as though only one kind of reality subsists in the world is to act out a mentally retarded mime, for a mentally deficient audience. If I am an illusion, then that is a delusion that is very real indeed.⁸

At the same time, *Black Sunlight* is a poeticized confrontation with the theories of the futurists (particularly Marinetti) and the surrealists, whom it quotes and itself tries to emulate in their attempts at *écriture automatique*. Like them, Marechera seeks the liberation of language from the fetters of syntax, a free 'stream of consciousness' similar to that of James Joyce. In *Black Sunlight*, different planes of consciousness, recognizable stories and dreamlike visions, memories and reflections continually blend, flowing into images which are no longer recognizable to the intellect, but which the reader must feel and imagine.

This novel also presents Marechera's dichotomous view of women. On the one hand, the various female characters — from the anthropologist rescuer to the individual women terrorists — are depicted as being very positive, self-assured, independent, having a positive attitude to life, and are strong, stronger even than the men; and blind Marie, the photographer's wife, as the symbol of sensibility, is wild and unspoiled, rooted in her own 'black sunlight'. On the other hand, Woman herself, allegorically symbolized as the 'Great Cunt' or the 'Great Whore', emerging again and again in a wide variety of incarnations, is shown as the all-threatening, all-devouring, all-crushing chasm.

Marechera sees his experimental novel *Black Sunlight* as a subversive work.

⁸ D. Marechera, *Black Sunlight* (London, Heinemann, 1980), 68.

For him, the bombings carried out by the urban guerrillas, the breaking of linguistic and literary norms through the power of imagination, the smashing of social taboos through the explicit and aggressive presentation of sexuality, are all facets of one and the same thing: an attempt to weaken and destroy the pressures and demands of society. He aims to reduce reality to 'its essentials, to its atoms, to make it actually more forceful. Reduce everything to its ultimate, last components and it will blow people's minds.'⁹ *Black Sunlight* is a manifesto of intellectual anarchism.

For exactly this reason, he gave the title *Mindblast* to his third published book. He wanted it to 'blow the minds' of the people of Zimbabwe to whom he returned in 1982 — but he doubts whether it has had this effect. The reason for his return was the shooting of a film of *The House of Hunger*, which director Chris Austin had begun in London. A few days after his arrival, Marechera quarrelled with the director and the film was completed without the author. Marechera stayed in Harare, slept in doorways, and typed *Mindblast* on a park bench.

Mindblast is a miscellany of three plays, a prose narrative, a collection of poems, and a park-bench diary. In a more accessible style than his first two books, Marechera describes with wit, intelligence and vivid imagery his view of the newly-independent state of Zimbabwe: the materialism, the political intolerance, the stupidity and corruption, the socialist slogans, how a few become rich while the masses become poorer. At the same time, the author's own existence as an artist preys on his mind, full of hate, self-pitying or ironic; he is out of place, made to feel an outsider, misunderstood, despised, taken for a madman.

'Why does every revolution result in the alienation of its artists?', ponders the poet, Buddy, in the central story, 'Grimknife Jr's Story', on the death of poetry.¹⁰ It describes how various artists from the generation of those who were greatly influenced by the turbulent years of the revolt of the intellectuals in Europe, now, back in Africa, are neither understood nor accepted. However, Marechera does not limit himself to a one-sided indictment of post-colonial society, but, in the tragicomic death of the poet who collapses in the toilet of a bar in a pool of blood and alcohol, questions his own existence as an artist. The outward collapse is preceded by an inner breakdown: the sudden realization that his poems are insipid, shallow and futile.

Like a sudden downpour, hurling down fists of rain on his bare head, he had recognised his own failure. The plangency of his defeat reverberated throughout the room, returning to him in cartoon strip figures that were dancing on the bars of the Eroica which was now playing to the invisible but vigorous conducting of Tony who was watching him ironically from Grace's side. The harsh rain burst the drains of the house of his poems.¹¹

⁹ Interview with Marechera, Feb. 1986.

¹⁰ D. Marechera, *Mindblast, or the Definitive Buddy* (Harare, College Press, 1984), 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71-2.

For Zimbabwe, with its lack of public criticism, *Mindblast* represents an important contribution. However, overall, the book suffers from a viewpoint which is too abstruse for the ordinary reader to identify with: the egocentric existence of the poet acted out in the bar and saloon. The most powerful literary statement is to be found in the poems. Unfortunately, Marechera's poems — apart from those in *Mindblast* — have never been published in a single collection, only sporadically in anthologies and journals.¹² Strongly influenced by T. S. Eliot, they illustrate in a concentrated form the extraordinary creative power of Marechera's writing. With a highly unusual choice of words and their contextual associations, through the juxtaposition of opposites to the point of paradox, through the combination of the contradictory, he creates unexpected, inspired, shocking images of great intensity. 'A terrible beauty is born out of the urgency of his vision', writes the English critic Angela Carter in her review of *The House of Hunger*.¹³

English and German critics consider Marechera to be one of Black Africa's best prose writers, and *The House of Hunger* is acknowledged to rank with other great world literature. His work is viewed in relation to that of Kafka, Joyce, Camus, Sartre, Ionesco; he himself would add Chekhov, Alfred Jarry, Antonin Artaud, the Beatnik poets (Allen Ginsberg), and, in Africa, Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah:

I am in the tradition of those novelists and poets who, starting with political and social protest, developed to explore the division of sensibility from the environment. What Sartre called 'alienation', or Camus 'the absurd'; writers for whom social or national change is perfected within their own neurosis.¹⁴

African criticism is divided in its judgement of Dambudzo Marechera. It is true that his unique literary talent and his important contribution to the treatment of the Rhodesian past are acknowledged; however, several critics describe his writing as bourgeois, decadent, Europeanized, and see him as alienated from African tradition, considering his negative, nihilistic visions of the situation in a young African state embarking on independence to be inappropriate.¹⁵ Others,

¹² A selection of Marechera's previously unpublished poems is contained in F. [Veit-]Wild, *Patterns of Poetry in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1988).

¹³ A. Carter, 'A witness, a prophet', *The Guardian*, 21 June 1979.

¹⁴ Conversation with Marechera, Mar. 1986.

¹⁵ For example, M. V. Mzamane, 'New writing from Zimbabwe: Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*', *African Literature Today [Recent Trends in the Novel]* (1983), XIII, 201–25; J. Okonkwo, 'Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger*', *Okike* (1981), XVIII, 87–91; M. Zimunya, 'Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger*', in his *Those Years of Drought and Hunger: The Birth of African Fiction in English in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1982), 97–126.

assessing the social reality of post-colonial Africa more realistically and critically, recognize the important (and, indeed, political) function of a writer such as Marechera,¹⁶ who takes nothing for granted, but sees it as his task to disturb, to disrupt, and to destroy.

FLORA VEIT-WILD

¹⁶ For example, L. Nkosi in a contribution at the International Writers' Workshop in Harare, July–August 1985; and B. Okri in 'Arts and Africa', 8 Aug. 1986, BBC African Service, transcript 659 G.

DAMBUDZO MARECHERA: A PRELIMINARY ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY*

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

ORIGINALS

The House of Hunger (London, Heinemann, 1978; Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1982).

Black Sunlight (London, Heinemann, 1980).

Mindblast; or, The Definitive Buddy (Harare, College Press, 1984).

These have been reviewed in the preceding essay. Apart from his three major publications Marechera wrote several smaller pieces, a number of which will have appeared in various newspapers and magazines in various countries and still have to be retrieved (for example, he worked for some time as a free-lance reviewer for *West Africa* in London). One of them is the following short story in which he depicts some aspects of his lonely life in London.

'The Sound of Snapping Wires', *West Africa*, 7 Mar. 1983, 603. Reprinted in F. Veit-Wild and E. Schade (eds.), *Dambudzo Marechera: 4 June 1952 – 18 August 1987: Pictures, Poems, Prose, Tributes* (Harare, Baobab Books, 1988), 27.

The following three pieces were written in 1982–3, after Marechera's return to Zimbabwe.

The Stimulus of Scholarship: A Drama by Buddy. Serialized in *Focus* [a students' magazine at the University of Zimbabwe] (1983), Nos. 1–3 and (1984) No. 1.

'The Alternative Graduate' [prose-poem] hectographed and distributed at the University of Zimbabwe by the author in 1982.

'The Lonely and Lovely Tumult' [short story], *The Sunday Mail Colour Magazine*, 29 May 1983, 6.

I have only managed to dig out *The Stimulus of Scholarship* recently, after Marechera's death. This little play, which he wrote and published when he liaised with some of the members of the editorial team of *Focus* (e.g. novelist and playwright H. G. Musengezi), is interesting because it is set at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in the late 1950s–early 1960s. Most obviously, Marechera had read Michael Gelfand's *A Non-racial Island of Learning: A History of the University College of Rhodesia from Its Inception to 1966* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1978) because the play recalls in detail events described in that book: such as Terence Ranger (alias Hudson), warden of Manfred Hodson Hall, being thrown into the water by outraged White Rhodesian citizens at one of his anti-colour bar actions at a public swimming pool; or Sarah (Sarah Kachingwe, née Chavunduka), the first and at that time only Black girl at the College, being shuffled around from one hall of residence to the other because they were racially segregated and no provision had been made to accommodate Black women.

* I am most indebted to Roger Stringer, University of Zimbabwe Publications Officer, and to the Department of English, University of Zimbabwe, for their assistance in the compilation of this bibliography.

As Marechera told me, he wrote and published (himself) 'The Alternative Graduate' around the same time, though I have, so far, not been able to get hold of a copy of it. He read from it at a poetry reading at the University's Beit Hall (as Andrew Whaley reports in *The Herald*, 4 Apr. 1982), together with Solomon Mutsaers, Samuel Chimsoro and Joseph Kumbira.

The short story 'The Lonely and Lovely Tumult' captures, in the sensations of a few minutes, the manifold impressions of colour, movement, mood and atmosphere of Harare's First Street mall.

Apart from the collection of poems contained in *Mindblast*, poems by Marechera have been published in the following anthologies:

McLoughlin, T. O. (comp.), *New Writing in Rhodesia* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1976), 20-1.

Muchemwa K. Z. (comp.), *Zimbabwean Poetry in English: An Anthology* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1978), 20, 107-9.

Style, C. and O-lan (eds.), *Mambo Book of Zimbabwean Verse in English* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1986), 293-5.

[Veit-]Wild, F., *Patterns of Poetry in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1988) 136-45.

McLoughlin's and Muchemwa's anthologies contain some of Marechera's early poetry (when he was still writing as Charles Marechera) which he wrote while he was a student at the University of Rhodesia in 1972-3, some of which were originally published in the literary magazine *Two Tone* (June 1973). It is very unfortunate that the editors of the extensive *Mambo Book of Zimbabwean Verse* merely reprinted, thirteen years later, three of these same poems instead of asking Marechera for some previously unpublished poems. *Patterns of Poetry* contains fifteen of his recent poems (mostly love poems), and reprints four from *Mindblast*.

Veit-Wild, F. and Schade, E. (eds.), *Dambudzo Marechera: 4 June 1952 - 18 August 1987: Pictures, Poems, Prose, Tributes* (Harare, Baobab Books, 1988).

This collection is a tribute to Marechera's life and work, and contains a number of his poems, prose texts and essays, as well as obituaries, critiques and photographs.

TRANSLATIONS

1. German

Haus des Hungers (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1981).

Schwarzes Sonnenlicht [extracts from *Black Sunlight*], in O. Filip, and E. Larsen (eds.), *Die zerbrochene Feder: Schriftsteller im Exil* (Stuttgart, Thienemann, 1984), 271-8.

A contract for the translation of *Mindblast* is being negotiated between College Press, Harare, and a German publisher.

2. Dutch

Translation of *The House of Hunger* with Unieboek bv, forthcoming.

3. French

Extract from *Black Sunlight* in D. Coussy, J. Bardolph, J-P. Durix et J. Sévry (eds.), *Anthologie critique de la littérature africaine anglophone* (Paris, Union générale d'Éditions, 1983), 468–72.

The German translation of *The House of Hunger* by Claus Peter Dressler and Curt Kaemmerer deserves high praise. While staying very close and truthful to the original, the translators manage to re-create Marechera's breath-taking drive and vigour in the German idiom, at the same time producing an excellent literary work impressive in its own right.

The inclusion of extracts of *Black Sunlight* in the collection of writings by exiled authors, *Die zerbrochene Feder* [The Broken Nib], appears to be very inappropriate and regrettable. The book contains pieces by exiled writers from authoritarian or fascist regimes in Eastern Europe (the majority), Asia, Latin America and Africa, mainly South Africa (!). The introduction to Marechera accordingly gives a wrong impression, assuming that he was exiled from independent Zimbabwe to study in Oxford.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

I. On his life, work and views generally

The following titles all contain profiles of the personality, life and work of Marechera, often based on interviews with him.

'Arts and Africa', no. 288P, BBC African Service transcript (London), 8 July 1979.

Simpson, H., 'Profile: Dambudzo Marechera', *Art Links: The Commonwealth Arts Review*, 2, Apr.–June 1980, 31–8, 'Out of Battle: The Arts of Zimbabwe', 32–3.

Imfeld, A., 'Portraits of African writers', no. 9, Deutsche Welle transcript [Cologne], 1979; subsequently published in *African Writers on the Air* (Cologne, Deutsche Welle, 1984), 92–101; reprinted in *Moto*, XVIII, vi, 7 Feb. 1981, 9.

Imfeld, A., 'Dambudzo Marechera—Kafka in den Ruinen Zimbabwes' [Kafka in the ruins of Zimbabwe], in his *Vision und Waffe, Afrikanische Autoren, Themen, Traditionen* (Zürich, Unionsverlag, 1981), 337–48.

'Exiled writer looks back in anger', *The Sunday Mail*, 14 Feb. 1982.

Gambanga, J., 'Writing with a cockroach-eye-view of life', Gemini News Service [London], GB 3303. 1983.

'Dambudzo Marechera', in H. M. Zell, C. Bundy, V. Coulon (eds.), *A New Reader's Guide to African Literature* (London, Heinemann, 1983), 414–15.

Imfeld, A., 'The facts are ugly: Zur Literatur von Tansi und Marechera. Im Haus des Hungers—Warten auf die Polizei', *Die Wochenzeitung* [Zürich], 14 Dec. 1984.

'Escape from the House of Hunger' [interview with Marechera by George Alagiah], *South*, Dec. 1984, 10–11.

Hove, C., 'The Artist/Writer's Lonely Vision: A Comparative Study of the Portrayal of the Artist's Social Role in Armah's *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Fragments and *Why Are We So Blest?* and Marechera's *House of Hunger* and *Mindblast*' (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, Dept. of English, unpubl. BA(Hons) dissertation, 1985). Marechera discussed on pp. 53–83.

Veit-Wild, F., 'Write or go mad' [A Portrait of Marechera], *Africa Events*, Mar. 1986,

- 58-9. Shortened versions of the same article published in *New African*, Apr. 1986, 52, and *The Guardian* [Lagos], 9 Feb. 1986; and in German in *Tageszeitung*, 4 Dec. 1987, 16.
- Lloyd, F., Interview with Marechera, 1986 [wide-ranging taped interview], English Dept., University of Zimbabwe, transcript forthcoming.
- Lansu, A., 'Ik wil kortsluiting veroorzaken in de geest van de lezer' [I want to cause a short-circuit in the mind of the reader], *Vrij Nederland*, 21 Feb. 1987.
- Bossemma, W., 'Twee Schrijvers in Zimbabwe: Een keurige huisvader en een dronken getto-jongen' [Two writers in Zimbabwe: A decent family man and a drunken ghetto kid], *Onze Wereld Magazine*, Nov. 1987. On Marechera and Mungoshi.
- Veit-Wild, F., 'Dambudzo Marechera', in *Kritisches Lexikon zur fremdsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Munich, Edition Text + Kritik, 1987) XIII. Original version of preceding essay.
- Petersen, K. H. *An Articulate Anger: Dambudzo Marechera: 1952-87* (Mundelstrup [Denmark], Dangaroo Press, 1988). Interview with Marechera recorded in May 1987.
- Interesting in Imfeld's 'Kafka in den Ruinen Zimbabwe's' is how he depicts Marechera's appearance at the Horizonte-Festival in West Berlin in 1979 where the explosive language of this young and at that time little-known writer left the audience completely stunned. Generally, however, Imfeld tends to overdraw his features in quite a bombastic and sensationalist style, and his comparison between Kafka and Marechera is rather questionable. In African literature Imfeld compares Marechera with the Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi stating that the two belong to a new generation in African writing.
- Highly recommended is George Alagiah's interview in *South* for the detailed insights it gives into Marechera's background and his views on the present state of Zimbabwean literature.
- Chenjerai Hove's dissertation, though dealing with specific works of Marechera, is listed here because it focuses very strongly on the general views and attitude of the writer, his 'lonely vision' seen *vis à vis* social commitment; it does not provide a very detailed analysis of *The House of Hunger* and *Mindblast*.
- The following three titles should be seen in relation to the last phase of Marechera's life, after his return to Zimbabwe in 1982.
- 'Minister praises Zimbabwean author', Press Statement 94/84/SN (Harare, Dept. of Information), 23 Feb. 1984. Speech by the Minister of Education, Dr D. Mutumbuka, at a reading by Marechera in the Courtauld Hall, Harare.
- Caute, D. 'Marechera and the colonel—A Zimbabwean writer and the claims of the state', in his *The Espionage of the Saints: Two Essays on Silence and the State* (London, H. Hamilton, 1986), 1-96.
- Kreimeier, K. *Geborstene Trommeln. Afrikas zweite Zerstörung. Literarisch-politische Expeditionen* (Frankfurt, Verlag Neue Kritik, 1985); 204-8 on Marechera.

It is surprising to hear a senior government representative such as the Minister of Education giving so much recognition and praise to Marechera as 'one of Zimbabwe's foremost writers' (see also preceding essay, p. 116), considering how little acknowledgement and support he had received from public and literary authorities before his death. His clashes with those have been closely observed by Caute in his essay on 'Marechera and the colonel', which has so far been the

longest publication on Marechera. Giving humorous insights into Marechera's daily life in Harare after 1982, it focuses on the 'persecution' of the not always popular writer by the government (such as his detention during the 1984 Zimbabwe International Book Fair), adopting too uncritically, however, Marechera's own persecution complex.

German literary journalist Klaus Kreimeier, who visited several African countries and talked to some of the leading writers including Marechera, points out how his writings are seen by literary authorities such as Ranga Zinyemba as too decadent and nihilistic, not appropriate to the process of nation-building.

The following pieces (all based on interviews) deal with Marechera's views on some special issues (poetry, language, censorship).

[Veit-]Wild, F., *Patterns of Poetry in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1988), 20-3, 131-5.

A critical assessment of Marechera's poetry and an extensive interview with him about his views on poetry.

Veit-Wild, F., ' "Ich höre zu, wie Wörter meinem Bewußtsein entspringen": Anmerkungen aus Zimbabwe zu Sprache und Literatur im nachkolonialen Afrika' ['I am listening to the way in which words emerge from my mind': Annotations from Zimbabwe about language and literature in post-colonial Africa], *Osnabrücker Beiträge zur Sprachtheorie* (1984), Apr., XXV, 104-12; 106-109 on Marechera.

Whaley, A., 'House of pain, light', *The Sunday Mail*, 8 Mar. 1982.

In the last two titles Marechera talks about subjugating the (ex-colonial) English language in order to make it serve his own means. Whaley also draws a subtle portrait of the writer of *The House of Hunger* after his return home.

'Censorship—Does it clean the mind?', *Moto*, XXIII, May 1984, 5-6.

'Dambudzo Marechera: From the Journal', *Index on Censorship*, XIII, vi, Dec. 1984, 27-9.

The last two titles, respectively, display Marechera's strong rejection of any kind of censorship and tell of his detention during the 1984 Zimbabwe International Book Fair in Harare.

2. On *The House of Hunger*

'A talent worth watching out for', *Publishing News* (1979), I, 19. On Marechera at the Guardian Fiction Prize ceremony.

Carter, A., 'A witness, a prophet', *The Guardian*, 21 June 1979.

Fleming, R., 'A Zimbabwean's fictional Olympics', *Encore American and World-wide News*, 3 Dec. 1979, 34.

Herbert, H., 'Double visions of the imaginative landscape', *The Guardian*, 30 Nov. 1979, 11.

Lessing, D., 'A cultural tug-of-war', *Books and Bookmen* (1979), XXIV, ix, 62-3.

Style, O-lan, 'Introduction' to 'Annual Bibliography of African Literature for 1978', section on 'Southern Africa', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (1979), XXIV, ii, 15.

The preceding titles are mainly reviews of *The House of Hunger* and reactions in the British press to the awarding of the Guardian Fiction Prize to Marechera in 1979. The critics express

their surprise about this 'miracle' of a new talent who so passionately and urgently impresses his pain and anger on to the reader. At the same time, they point to his sometimes harsh, always unpredictable character: 'a talent worth watching out for' has also to be taken literally considering Marechera's hurling crockery past the chandeliers at the prize-giving ceremony and other 'performances'.

'Im Haus des Hungers', *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 3 Mar. 1982.

'Haus des Hungers', *Zitty* [Berlin], Apr. 1982, 16-29.

Schneider, U., 'Dambudzo Marechera, *Haus des Hungers*', Hessischer Rundfunk transcript [Frankfurt], 9 Sept. 1982.

Becker, J., 'Aus dem Munde eines Schriftstellers: Erzählungen des Afrikaners Dambudzo Marechera' [Out of the mouth of a writer: Stories of the African Dambudzo Marechera], *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 Dec. 1982.

Holzer, K., 'Nicht nur fürs Regal' [Not only for the bookshelf], ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk) transcript [Vienna], 9 Feb. 1983.

The German reviewers of the *House of Hunger* also highly acclaim the book including the brilliant German translation. They see Marechera as one of the best Black African writers, emphasizing the general modern, cosmopolitan quality of his literature as opposed to typical African writing.

Okonkwo, J., 'Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger*', *Okike* (1981), XVIII, 87-91.

Zimunya, M., 'Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger*', in his *Those Years of Drought and Hunger: The Birth of African Fiction in English in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1982), 97-126.

Mzamane, M. V., 'New writing from Zimbabwe: Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*', *African Literature Today* (1983), XIII: Recent Trends in the Novel, 201-25.

Zinyemba, R., 'Zimbabwe's "lost" novelists in search of direction', *Moto* (1983), XV, 7, 9-10.

These African critics, while recognizing Marechera's unique talent and his important contribution to African literature, unanimously disapprove of his nihilist and chaotic views which they see to be closely related to European decadence and neurosis, 'alien to Africa—a continent of hope and realizable dreams' (Okonkwo).

Cohen, D., 'Zimbabwean literature', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (1981), V, xv, 2, 337-9.

McLoughlin, T. O., 'The past and present in African literature: Examples from contemporary Zimbabwean fiction', *Présence Africaine* (1984), CXXXII, 93-107.

McLoughlin, T. O., 'Black writing in Zimbabwe', in G. D. Killam (ed.), *The Writing of East and Central Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1984), 100-19. *House of Hunger* and *Black Sunlight* discussed on pp. 110-12.

McLoughlin, T. O., 'Cultural authenticity in Black Zimbabwean literature in English: A case for metonymy', in D. Rochay and P. Dakeyo (eds.), *Nouvelles du sud: Littérature et anthropologie* (Paris, Silex, 1986), 79-91. *House of Hunger* discussed on pp. 84-6.

These last essays place Marechera's work, particularly *The House of Hunger*, into the context of recent Zimbabwean writing. They put emphasis on Marechera's very new and powerful narrative style, the 'immediacy of his image' which makes the 'misery and madness, pain and want . . . present in every line simultaneously' (Cohen). Thus they see him break away 'from most trends in Zimbabwean fiction by accenting the intensity of the inner world of his narrators . . . hence the centrality of the interior monologue and the inclination to write a narrative fragmented by diffuse memories of the past' (McLoughlin).

3. On *Black Sunlight*

Ladsun, J., 'Sunlight and Chaos', *New Statesman*, 12 Dec. 1980, 45-6.

Bryce, J., 'Through a lens darkly', *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 Jan. 1981, 19.

'Literary milestone goes the distance', *The Herald*, 2 Feb. 1981.

Maveneka, L., 'A glimpse of Hell', *Moto* (1982), I, v, 41.

Walling, W., 'Black Sunlight', *World Literature Today* (1982), LVI, 169.

In the assessment of *Black Sunlight*, the reviewers are much less definite than in the case of *The House of Hunger*. While the reviewer in the *Zimbabwe Herald* praises it as a 'literary milestone', Jane Bryce calls it a 'daring attempt', Walling finds that Marechera's first novel 'has not proved entirely successful', Maveneka perceives it as the 'hallucinations of a schizophrenic', and James Ladsun ends up calling it 'an heroic failure'.

'Judgment on banned novel plea reserved', *The Herald*, Feb. 8. 1982.

Maruziva, D., 'Novelist lining up forces to fight book ban', *The Herald*, 12 Feb. 1982.

These are about the banning of *Black Sunlight* by the Zimbabwe Censorship Board, Marechera's reaction to it and M. Zimunya's appeal against the ban which he perceives as 'a symbolic emasculation of Zimbabwean literature'.

Veit-Wild, F., Interview with Marechera on *Black Sunlight*, Feb. 1986 (unpublished).

In this interview Marechera talks about the literary and philosophical concepts behind the book.

Tsomondo, T., 'Marechera's *Black Sunlight*'. Paper presented at the colloquium on Zimbabwean literature, University of Zimbabwe, 23 Apr. 1987.

The paper analyses particularly the stylistic devices used in *Black Sunlight*.

4. On *Mindblast*

Zinyemba, R., 'An eloquent but a tortured blast', *Herald*, 17 Sept. 1984.

'Dambudzo Marechera: From the Journal', *Index on Censorship*, XIII, vi, Dec. 1984, 27-9. [Already listed above under section II. 1].

Zinyemba, R., *Zimbabwean Drama: A Study of Shona and English Plays* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1984), 95-109 on the plays of *Mindblast*.

'Arts and Africa', no. 659G, BBC African Service transcript [London], 8 Aug. 1986, 3-5.

Review of *Mindblast*, in the *Times of Swaziland*, c. Oct. 1986 (exact date could not be confirmed).

Unfortunately *Mindblast* has not had much publicity and, as it has been only locally published, especially not outside Zimbabwe. Interviewed for the BBC, Marechera talks about his experiences after his home-coming to Zimbabwe in 1982 which form the background of the book.

The *Index on Censorship* describes how Marechera was detained just when the book came out, pointing out the 'lack of concern shown by his publishers and the Book Fair organizers'; it then reproduces a lengthy passage from the 'Journal' in *Mindblast*.

Zimbabwean critic Ranga Zinyemba acknowledges Marechera's utmost honesty in exposing his personal struggle in a 'world that in many ways is too narrow to contain manifestations of his individualism', while at the same time criticizing the too egocentric vision of this book. However, the reviewer in the *Times of Swaziland* sees Marechera (with *Mindblast*) 'at the forefront of a new literary revolution in Africa . . . by new young writers that are marginally better than Ngugi and Achebe ever were'.

5. Film

'Drama in the House of Hunger', *Moto*, I, iii, July 1982, 37, 39.

Nkosi, L., 'House of Hunger lifts the veil on shocking truths', *The Herald*, 9 Sept. 1983.

Reviews of Chris Austin's film *House of Hunger* which is based on Marechera's book and includes documentaries about his life in London and arrival home in Zimbabwe.

6. Obituaries

The Times, 20 Aug. 1987.

Zimunya, M., 'Dambudzo Marechera: Portrait of an extraordinary artist', *Sunday Mail*, 23 Aug. 1987, C1, C10.

Fraser, R., 'Dambudzo Marechera', *The Independent*, 25 Aug. 1987.

Ripken, P., Tribute to Dambudzo Marechera, Deutsche Welle [Cologne], 23 Aug. 1987.

Lloyd, F., Tribute to Dambudzo Marechera, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, Radio 1 [Harare], 26 Aug. 1987.

'Arts and Africa', no. 714G, BBC African Service transcript [London], 28 Aug. 1987, 4-6.

Omotoso, K., '(A writer's diary) When the young die: The example of Dambudzo Marechera', *West Africa*, 14 Sept. 1987.

Abu, S., 'Dambudzo Marechera (1955-1987): An obituary of Zimbabwe's well-known writer', *Africa Events*, Sept. 1987, 76-7.

'Marechera — flash of lightning', *Moto* (1987), LVIII, 22.

'How will the future see Dambudzo Marechera?', *Prize Africa*, Oct. 1987, 6-7.

Mawerera, R., 'In memory of Dambudzo Marechera: Zimbabwe loses a fearless genius', *Parade*, Oct. 1987, 6-7.

Tower, A., 'Dambudzo Marechera', *Listen* [Hamburg] (1987), III, ix, 47.

Compared to the often reluctant reception and little support Marechera received, especially in his last years, the enthusiastic recognition he has obtained after his death is remarkable. However, many of the obituaries deal rather with his controversial personality and erratic life-style than with his work. This indicates a certain insecurity as to how ultimately to understand and assess Marechera's writings. Comprehensive studies of his work are still a task of the future and will have to include his posthumous manuscripts.

Harare

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Note

When Marechera died, he left behind four (mostly short) novels, one miscellany of prose, poetry and drama, three dramas, one choreodrama, two prose fragments, two short stories, a collection of five essays, about 125 poems and one poetic sequence. It is not known how many more manuscripts he left at the various places he stayed at, or with publishers, and these still have to be retrieved.

In order to enable a complete posthumous publication of Marechera's unpublished works, and to foster future research on his life and writings, the executors of Marechera's estate would be most indebted if any reader could pass on to them:

- unpublished manuscripts, poems and other writings by Marechera;
- references to published work by or about Marechera not included in this bibliography;
- any documents, correspondence, etc., relating to his life or work;
- any reviews, studies or critiques not included in the bibliography.

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