

says Caute, all three share a kind of heroism in the refusal to let their separate voices be quelled by the State and its apparatus.

Of course, it is not as simple as that in the telling — certainly not when dealing with Marechera — and Caute acknowledges as much in his Preface to the essay. He will, he disarmingly tells us, make some changes to 'the truth': certain conversations may be slightly altered; certain gaps may have to be filled. But through this fictive approach — paradoxically — events and people (often unnamed) are eerily recognizable, certainly to Zimbabwean readers. And it seems an ideal way of writing about Marechera, whose own relationship to objective reality was often problematic but whose work — given its rootedness in the shifting states of the unconscious — offers far more historical perception than most other Zimbabwean writers. Indeed, Caute's leaning towards the fictive in this essay frees him so that he can offer a much more complex picture than is common in journalistic writing of his hero/anti-hero: the man whose writing 'blisters every totem pole'.

But what happens when Caute turns to the novel form itself? Is he freed even further? Perhaps in his earlier work like *Comrade Jacob* (London, Quartet, 1974) and *The Decline of the West* (London, Panther, 1968) this was the case. But in *The K-Factor* — his metafictional account of the death of White Rhodesia — something goes very wrong. The story seems promising enough: it is 1979 and Mr and Mrs Laslet of Hastings Farm are surrounded by the effects of war. Enter Hector Nyangagwa, supposedly researching land issues for his Ph.D. But is he all he seems? Or is he really working for the comrades? And is not there something decidedly strange about the Laslets? Does their six-month-old baby really exist or is it a figment of everyone's imagination?

This final question is never really answered and yet the baby is central to any understanding of the novel. It is the focal point of Sonia Laslet's racial neurosis, but when the child is 'kidnapped' by a group of guerrillas their ransom note is painfully ironic: 'Your baby has gone. What have you lost?', it reads. So is the baby meant to stand for White obsessions and fantasies? Or are the references to Sonia's 'virgin birth' to be seen in conjunction with the predominant motif of the book: sexuality at its most animal and brutal?

Perhaps Caute feels that metafiction of this kind is the best way of exploring the absurdities and senselessness of White Rhodesia. But what are we left with? A brittle, superficial novel shocking only for its gratuitous violence. And, anyway, the Rhodesia of 1979 was far more surreal than any writer — except Dambudzo Marechera — has yet been able to grasp.

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FIONA LLOYD

To Breathe and Wait By Nancy Partridge. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1986, 242 pp., Z\$7.88, ISBN 0-86922-379-8.

This story of Deidre, a widow in the Bulawayo of 1978, whose knowledge that she is dying brings her an ever-increasing awareness of perception about those she loves and the country she lives in, will perhaps excite uncomfortable memories for

many Whites who lived through the pre-Independence war years. A new dimension is added to her relationship with her friend Katharine when she at last leaves to understand the latter's conviction that the war being waged to preserve 'White supremacy is intrinsically immoral. The right of every human being to freedom, both personal and political, becomes obvious to her with the realization that Julia, her maid, and increasingly her friend, is exactly like herself in every respect and that their mutual interdependence must be based on an equality of fact as well as of personal recognition. At the same time, she acknowledges that her children have the right to stand alone, and that emotional independence is as unimportant as physical liberty. Threaded through the story is Deidre's own late blooming of heart and mind, paradoxically as her physical strength declines.

The tale is told in a stream-of-consciousness style which does not always succeed; some judicious pruning might well have sharpened the impact of the ever-flowing, sometimes rambling, thoughts, recognizably feminine in their preoccupation with home and family. Though the atmosphere of those years, the mood of those involved, is well captured, the book would certainly be improved by careful editing and a sharpening of the focus on the central problems. Finally, Mambo Press must be taken to task for the unacceptably large number of misprints and the erratic punctuation, notably as regards the use of the question mark, which are bound to irritate the reader.

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VÉRONIQUE WAKERLEY

Women and Law in Southern Africa Edited by A. Armstrong. Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1987, xiv, 281 pp., Z\$5.00, ISBN 0-949225-48-7.

Independence is not only for One Sex By K. Bond-Stewart. Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1987, 128 pp., Z\$6.50, ISBN 0-949225-50-9.

Young Women in the Liberation Struggle, Stories and Poems from Zimbabwe By K. Bond-Stewart. Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1984, 67 pp., Z\$3.00, ISBN 0-949932-85-X.

Zimbabwean Women in Industry By P. Made and B. Lagerström. Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985, 60 pp., Z\$3.50, ISBN 0-949932-98-1.

All of the above books are published in Zimbabwe Publishing House's 'Women of Africa' series, but they are very different in concept and style. *Zimbabwean Women in Industry* irritated me in its bald and somewhat didactic style, and particularly in the number of uncaptioned photographs which — to me at least — were not self-explanatory. Presumably this book is aimed at the 'working class' women's market, to sensitize women workers to their specific disabilities in the labour market and to organize them rather more effectively than has been the case to date; in which case, it would be better produced in Shona, Ndebele and Tonga than in English.

Young Women in the Liberation Struggle is based on the writings of female ex-combatants in the course of their English studies at Ranche House College. There is a tendency in some of the pieces to mythologize, in the style of traditional