

For a black writer the language is very racist; you have to have harrowing fights and hair-raising panga duals [*sic*] with the language before you can make it do all that you want it to do. It is so for the feminists. English is very male. Hence feminist writers also adopt the same tactics. This may mean discarding grammar, throwing syntax out, subverting images from within, beating the drum and cymbals of rhythm, developing torture chambers of irony and sarcasm, gas ovens of limitless black resonance. For me this is the impossible, the exciting, the voluptuous blackening image that commits me totally to writing (pp. 7-8).

Marechera's choice of symbols and imagery reflects his own tortured existence.

Dambudzo Marechera, 1952-87 provides some fascinating insights into the style and nature of Zimbabwe's most problematic writer, both from within and without. It is, therefore, a welcome addition to the corpus of Zimbabwean literature. What is, however, regrettable is the number of elementary spelling and grammatical mistakes in it — for example 'my hands shoots up' (p. 7); 'T. S. Elliot' (p. 15); 'The heart is a desert place, and the earth of piercing heat' (p. 29); and 'Day-to-day reality is therefore itself any [i.e. an] illusion created by the mass of our needs . . .' (p. 36). Nevertheless, Flora Veit-Wild, Ernst Schade and Baobab Books are to be congratulated for the overall quality of the book.

It is also encouraging to note the establishment of a publishing house which, in addition to the University, can offer academics an outlet for the publication of their scholarly works.

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Patterns of Poetry in Zimbabwe By Flora [Veit-]Wild. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1988, viii, 152 pp., illus., ISBN 0-86922-432-8, Z\$10.00 (p/b).

Flora Wild's recently published book, *Patterns of Poetry in Zimbabwe*, is a useful addition to the study of Zimbabwean poetry written in English, blending, as it does, some criticism, interviews with some of the younger Black Zimbabwean poets, and a selection of their poetry, some of which has not been published before.

Mrs Wild's introductory essay is conveniently subdivided, with separate sections on each of the seven poets she interviewed, namely, Chenjerai Hove, Musaemura Zimunya, Charles Mungoshi, Hopewell Seyaseya, Kristina Runano, Albert Chimedza and Dambudzo Marechera. Her evaluation of the poets is neatly summarized in the following quotation:

Their weaknesses which I attempted to point out in detail earlier on, lie in their unsatisfactory craftsmanship, in the lack of poetical elaboration due to a certain lack of artistic competence and experience. They mostly fail to create a piece of writing which goes beyond the writer's personal feelings, intentions or sufferings (p. 28).

The author does point out — and, indeed, this is borne out by the interviews themselves — that part of the problem stems from the lack of a poetic tradition within which, or from which, the poet can define himself or herself. The historical reasons for this are well spelt out in the book.

The graver problem, however, that of artistic incompetence is, sadly, borne out in a large number of the poems given in the text. Charles Mungoshi, a noted

craftsman, points out some of the vigour that *must* go into, and form an integral part of, the creative process:

I have only got this one collection of poetry published (*The milkman doesn't only deliver milk*). When I was writing these poems I was trying to condense meaning in a few lines, it was an exercise for my prose writing. I kept on cutting to get utmost concentration. I wanted to find out in how many (or few) words I could put what I wanted to say. Of course there are differences. There are some poems, as you will have noticed, which are not that well shaped and condensed (p. 79).

The emphasis Mungoshi places on reworking one's material needs to be taken note of by many more Zimbabwean writers, who often leave the impression that they are content merely to spill their thoughts on to the page. Mungoshi's respect for the way in which words should be used is highly significant: 'Important for my writing was Hemingway, his way of writing a short story, of making it very, very short, the correct word at the correct place — and the rest silence . . .' (p. 81). That is why his poems and stories invite rereading, as each reading brings out 'different layers of meaning' (p. 81) — a crucial aspect in 'good' literature, but which is largely missing in Zimbabwean literature, as he himself points out.

Some of the other writers echo Mungoshi's sentiments, notably Zimunya and Marechera. Marechera's critique of the anthology *And Now the Poets Speak* is pertinent:

There you find the struggle with the feeling, if one has suffered, that the statement of one's suffering must necessarily be poetic. Now that is not so. The extent to which one has suffered through political oppression is not necessarily the substance of a poem (p. 135).

The rewards of paying greater attention to how language 'works' are evident in some of the poems found in *Patterns of Poetry*. Kristina Rungano, whose poems are often prosaic, does rise to the occasion in 'This Morning', which pulsates with passion, energy and desire, and brings to mind Senghor's love poems. Her use of imagery, here, is both rich and illuminating.

The finest poems in the book are those of Mungoshi and Zimunya. The latter's poetry is at its most vibrant when he is evoking the world of nature and rural life. 'My Home' reveals the poet's delight in the beauty of the Eastern Highlands, and his conscious identification with rural people. The rhythm of the poem conveys, aptly, his warm sentiments. Zimunya's robust sense of humour, which is evident in 'My Home', comes to the fore in 'Kisimiso (A Version of Christmas)'. The earthy nature of the poet's 'Kisimiso' phase seems to degenerate into gratuitous vulgarity in the *Country Dawns and City Lights* phase,* and I tend to agree with Flora Wild's comment that these poems 'appear to be too intentional, too moralistic' (p. 64).

Dambudzo Marechera's keen intelligence is evident in his interesting interview, but the selection of his poetry that the reader is offered is rather disappointing. His most successful poems, like the sonnet 'Primal Vision', for example, seem to be the ones in which he, as it were, mocks himself, from without. Although the critic clearly thinks highly of Marechera's poetry, she does

* M. B. Zimunya, *Country Dawns and City Lights* (Harare, Longman, 1985).

concede that 'at the end, his self-indulgence and exorbitant subjectivism prevent him from creating the kind of pure and immortal art he is aiming at' (p. 22).

The question of the writer's relationship with society as a whole is boldly enunciated by Hopewell Seyaseya, Albert Chimedza and Charles Mungoshi. Seyaseya also provides an apt retort to Ngugi's clamour for vernacular literature:

Another point: Ngugi wa Thiongo can say, you must write in your own language. For him it is alright. For no matter what he is going to write now, it will be translated into English. Whereas for people like me, if I want my voice to be heard, it is best to write in English (p. 94).

Writers must be free to choose how they write and what they write about. Some of the poets cited write both in English and Shona and use the medium which best conveys their thoughts and feelings at that particular point in time.

Mrs Wild, by and large, manages to convey her sentiments clearly, although the odd expression here and there reveals that English is not her mother tongue. Careful editing could, however, have ironed out clauses like: These statements are mainly based on J. Haasbroek's *English commentary of Shona love poetry* in collection mentioned in footnote 1 on page 18, in which he ends with the following perspective . . . (p. 19). More trying are inconsistencies and typographical errors made when referring to anthologies or individual poems, as in: 'A storm is brewing' (p. 15) and 'A Storm is Brewing' (p. 16); 'Up-in-arms' (p. 29) and 'Up in arms' (p. 35); '*Arrow of God and Things fall apart*' (p. 31), for example. Names have occasionally been misspelt — as in 'Ezekiel Mphahlele' (p. 26), 'T. O. McLoughlin' and 'S. Mutsvairo' (p. 31).

Nevertheless, as Professor Lewis Nkosi's Preface makes clear, 'for anyone wishing to achieve a certain measure of intimacy with the men and women who produce [the new Zimbabwean poetry], this book will undoubtedly prove to be a compulsive reading' (p. viii).

Mrs Wild is to be congratulated for editing these interviews with some of Zimbabwe's younger poets, and for providing a selection of their poems, which should serve as a good introduction to those who are unfamiliar with their work and to those who wish to discover what compelled these poets to write. Her publisher, Mambo Press, deserves credit for producing a well-bound volume with good quality paper.

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Better English: A Handbook on Common Errors By M. Lewis and W. Masters. Harare, Longman Zimbabwe, 1987, 114 pp., illus., Z\$7.25.

The teacher of English in a second language situation is always faced with the temptation to collect errors. Many teachers have dauntingly large, some might even say impressive, collections of errors painstakingly amassed almost as a by-product of the language classroom process. Once the collection begins to run to thousands of examples rather than mere hundreds, the collector makes an assumption common to all collectors: that these errors must have some value.

The search for the value of the collection proceeds along predictable lines. As