

ESSAY REVIEW

**MARXIST AND PAN-AFRICANIST LITERARY
THEORIES AND A SOCIOLOGY OF
ZIMBABWEAN LITERATURE**

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DURING THE TWENTIETH century various theories of literature have been developed which in one important respect are without precedent in the history of Western aesthetics. Although Russian Formalism, American New Criticism, the British 'Scrutiny' school, Structuralism and some of the theories which go into the rag-bag of Post-Structuralism derive from widely different perceptions of the nature of art, all, in one way or another, suggest that a work of literature not only can but should be read independently of the individual who was responsible for its creation and the society of which he or she was a part. Closely related to this contention is the larger question of whether or not the value of a work of art lies in the closeness with which what it depicts — if indeed it depicts anything — corresponds to reality.

In our context only Pan-Africanist and Marxist literary theories contradict the claims of twentieth-century literary theories that both the author and his or her social milieu are irrelevant to a reading of a text. Pan-Africanism is by definition concerned with place and, since Marxism is a theory of social change which argues that social change is created through the interaction of the material realities of a society, the ideologies which these have produced, and the forms these ideologies have assumed, it considers critical practice to remain at the level of idealism if it attempts to contemplate literature outside the context of the historical and the social. Despite this, Marxist literary theory was until very recently pretty thin and unconvincing. One reason must be that neither Marx nor Engels systematically discussed how literature operates although both were extraordinarily widely read in literature and exchanged opinions on what they were reading in letter after letter. At a very early stage Marxism, against all its own assumptions, developed into a fundamentalism, which meant that the most casual and amateur allusions in the founders' letters became canonical. In the last years of his life Engels repeatedly complained of the superficialities which the followers of Marx were passing off as conclusions arrived at through the application of Marxist theory. Again and again in his later letters Engels attributed such over-simplifications to the fact that scholars were ignoring the considerations of the formal. In a

letter to Frans Mehring written shortly before Engels died, he expanded upon the reasons why some Marxists reduce Marxism into an exercise which believes itself completed when it attributes an economic cause and a social effect. He and Marx, he writes, had as their main emphasis 'the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But at the same time we have on account of the content neglected the formal side.'¹

Implicit in these late letters is Engels's awareness that he and Marx had paid insufficient attention to the process by which thought reflects economic facts (the metaphor is Engels's from the letter to Mehring) and how such thoughts are then given a formal expression as institutions within the social realm. If the movement among non-Marxist literary theorists was towards a consideration of the status of formal elements in a piece of literature, these remarks of Engels suggest that something of the same sort should have been preoccupying Marxist theorists. Engels had seen the failure to confront the significance of form as one reason why young Marxists (as he referred to them) were producing such thin analyses of social and political processes. Poetry, fiction and drama, which have a more obvious formal existence than real life does, should have invited a proper investigation of the function of the purely formal in literature in producing and reproducing real life. Instead Marxist theorists remained stuck with a simplistic base and superstructure paradigm, which at its most superficial was satisfied if it had located the tendencies of a work by identifying the class allegiance of its author and assumed that members of a particular class in a particular historic epoch must produce work inscribed with their own class preconceptions. Reading some of this stuff, one can understand Sartre's exasperated comment on Marxist aesthetics: 'Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry. The heuristic inadequacy of contemporary Marxism is contained in these two sentences.'²

Some of the blame for this refusal to confront the complex implications of dialectical processes must lie with the repression of serious theories of art in the Soviet Union for much of the Union's existence and this must in part be attributed to a refusal to confront an important implication of dialectical materialism: that the Soviet Union itself must be caught up in a dialectical and transforming process.

Essays in a collection published as late as 1980 show the sort of rigorously correct theory which was being produced by leading Soviet scholars.³ The artist's final purpose is laid down by O. A. Makarov who identifies the most important implication of art as the 'orientation of the reader, viewer or listener towards a certain perception of the world and certain type of civic behaviour, and the bringing up of socially active people'. Makarov warns against 'approximateness in one's judgements

¹ Letter dated 14 July 1893, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow, Progress, 1976), 65.

² J-P. Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York, Vintage Books, 1963), 56.

³ *Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics and the Arts* (Moscow, Progress, 1980).

about the determined nature of artistic activity' as if to be tentative is the greatest sin of all.⁴ It is hardly surprising in view of these remarks that the finest art is produced when artist and ideologue merge 'and the artist speaks as the ideologist of the working class, expressing its world-outlook and its understanding'.⁵ However, any illusion that the last remark might give of a proletarian art which comes from a proletariat producing itself as subject of its own discourse, is dissipated when another essay identifies the essential question to be asked of art: how do the motifs and meanings of art enrich 'its stock of means whereby it can exert its own ideological influence on the consciousness of the masses'?⁶ In that last formulation art is propaganda and as propaganda its purpose is control of the minds of the very proletariat which in theory the Soviet Union has liberated.

There is little to distinguish the theoretical positions of essays such as these from those in many collections put out by Progress Publishers when the Soviet Union still provided massively subsidized translations of politically correct scholarship. The seemingly endless repetition of a few theoretical positions is perhaps the most depressing aspect of such writing. The dreary predictability of its arguments also suggests the problems faced by subtle theorists like Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton in their attempts to formulate Marxist theories of art which could equal the subtlety and complexity of Marx's and Engels's original writings. It is significant that both Jameson and Eagleton emphasize the significance of artistic form in their attempts to locate ideology in the work itself. Both theorists show in every line that they write under the influence of twentieth-century Formalism and the other schools to which I have already referred.

Unlike the Soviet writers Eagleton confronts the problem of the text by recognizing the complex forms that ideology itself assumes. Something of this can be seen in Eagleton's criticism of Luckacs's claim that Balzac's greatness lies in the accuracy with which his depiction of the real allows him to transcend his own 'reactionary ideology and perceive the real historical issues at stake'.⁷ This is, of course, one of the many reformulations of Engels's remarks on Balzac in the rough copy of a letter to Margaret Harkness on whose shallow foundations elaborate theories of art have been established.⁸ Because Eagleton is his own man, however, and takes Marxism seriously as a tool of enquiry and not as some absolute system, he engages with this account of ideology as 'false consciousness' which blocks true historical perception, a screen interposed between men and their history'. This idea of ideology is 'simplistic' because it 'fails to grasp ideology as an inherently complex formation which, by inserting individuals into history in a variety of ways, allows of multiple kinds and degrees of access to that history'.⁹

⁴ O. A. Makarov, 'Art as an ideological phenomenon', in *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵ Y. A. Lukin, 'Ideology and art', in *Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics*, 109.

⁶ Makarov, 'Art as an ideological phenomenon', 92.

⁷ T. Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London, Verso, 2nd edn., 1978), 69.

⁸ Letter from Engels to Harkness, April 1889, in Marx and Engels, *On Literature and Art*, 92.

⁹ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, 69.

Some ideologies are 'more false than others' but what to me seems more important is Eagleton's addition that 'in *deformatively* "producing" the real, [ideology] nevertheless carries elements of reality within itself'. In that word 'deformatively' (and the emphasis is Eagleton's) we are once again returned to the consideration of the formal. Nor is ideology a 'screen' or a 'filter' behind which reality lurks. Instead, Eagleton insists on the reality of the form which ideology assumes. 'Commodities, money, wage relations are certainly "phenomenal forms" of capitalist production, but they are nothing if not "real" for all that', he writes, and, extending this idea into literature, he notes that because Jane Austen does not concern herself with the reality which preoccupies historical materialism it does not mean that she is preoccupied with trivial illusion. On the contrary in the play of what constitutes morality and how it can be tested in the gentility or vulgarity of characters' manners she is exploring the very forms by which competing ideologies attempt to control, shape and direct this society. We all live formally and any fictional text has to address itself to those forms. As Eagleton says, 'the text takes as its object, not the real, but certain significations by which the real lives itself. . . . Within the text . . . ideology becomes a dominant structure, determining the character and disposition of certain "pseudo-real" constituents.'¹⁰ When Eagleton wrote these passages he would not have doubted that in the end there is one 'reality', historically produced and knowing only the instabilities of its own dialectical transformations. But between the existence of such a reality and the way in which we grasp it lies, if not an abyss, then ideological presences which are as powerful to move and direct history as is the reality itself. It is precisely because ideology is so protean in the forms which it assumes that a literary text itself is so formally complex. '[A] direct, spontaneous relation between text and history . . . belongs to a naïve empiricism which is to be discarded,' writes Eagleton.¹¹ And discarded it should be because it can only succeed in simplifying the numerous influences which are brought to bear on any social phenomena. The challenge of the literary text is precisely because it is, in Marxist jargon, 'overdetermined'.

In Eagleton's writing an important modern scholar returns us once again to the formal although at the same time remaining firmly within the categories of historical materialism. If we look at Frederic Jameson's significantly entitled *Marxism and Form* we will see the same concern that Marxism has not availed itself sufficiently of the insights into literature which the formalists have uncovered.¹² Jameson is, in fact, less eclectic than his British colleague and therefore more belligerent in arguing for the uniqueness of the Marxist vision. Because of the very claims it makes about the intellectual life, he argues, Marxism cannot be accommodated

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69–72.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹² *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1974).

as one among many other systems of ideas. Western relativism, Jameson observes, makes of Western culture an 'imaginary museum in which all life forms and all intellectual positions are equally welcome side by side'.¹³ This is possible because the culture places them there only to be contemplated and no one within the culture believes they are of practical significance. For Jameson, then, the peculiar value of Marxism — indeed its truth — is its insistence on the unity of the material and the spiritual, on its rejection of obfuscating dichotomies and dualisms. Only when we allow dialectics to let us know simultaneously the idea and the action, the spiritual and the material, the body and the mind, can we transcend 'that sterile and static opposition between formalism and a sociological or historical use of literature between which we have so often been asked to choose'.¹⁴

One possible response to this review so far is that while I am presumably intending to speak about Zimbabwean literature, since that is what the title proclaims, I have so far succeeded in ignoring Africa, let alone Zimbabwe. My examples have all been Western and are therefore as irrelevant to Africa as is any other ideological formation that is produced away from African society and African history. This is the position of the authors of *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* who quote from non-African or Eurocentric African critics only to demonstrate that African narrative in particular has been patronized, damned with faint praise, misunderstood or underrated.¹⁵ The examples they give range from the ignorant to the foolish, although in response they range from the racist to the indiscriminating defence of anything African — as long as there is no hint of debt to any non-African thinker. Understandably Chinweizu and his collaborators object to one critic's claim that an African work should be placed within the tradition of English letters as a whole because it is written in English.¹⁶ The claim is absurd because it implies that the mere use of a language somehow confers a transcendentalism on a text which enables it to float above the society from which it was produced and join the company of universal French-language or English-language texts. Of course French and English texts operate as influences in much African literature. But what is interesting in locating these exotic presences is not their existence within the text but their transformation. It is difference not similarity that is remarked upon. What Chinweizu and the others claim, however, is that to locate anything non-African in an African text is somehow to remove its integrity as an African work of art.

It is a problem that a book which sets out to decolonize African literature should spend so much of its time debunking what non-Africans have written and thought. One could claim with justification that it is Europe not Africa which is the real object of its discourse or, more precisely, an idea of Africa and an idea of Europe. The book seldom leaves

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁵ Chinweizu, O. Jemie and I. Madubuike, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature: European Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics* (London, KPI, 1985).

¹⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 9.

the level of the ideal. Opinions refute opinions, judgements battle with judgements, idea confronts idea. The process of decolonization which is being furthered occurs at the level of ideology, and ideology here seems to have no roots in a material reality except that of race. That Whites cannot speak with any understanding about Black literature is the book's central argument and some phrase based on that contention would provide a more accurate title because it comes closer to what the Chinweizu group is really concerned to demonstrate. Why this sort of cultural nationalist theory is ultimately so unsatisfactory is best demonstrated by turning from the Chinweizu group to an African Marxist, Chido Amuta, and his *The Theory of African Literature*.¹⁷

Amuta dismisses Chinweizu and his colleagues in more scathing terms than I think are appropriate although one can understand why they should have provoked any critic to such levels of exasperation: 'Their book is ultimately mythic and their brand of myth-making is good only for the Black Power-mongering, fist-clenching adolescent and for the lazy intellectual unwilling to apply himself rigorously to the real challenge of an intellectual calling'.¹⁸ I do, however, agree with Amuta that the principal objection to the Chinweizu book is that decolonization is 'posited as a cultural challenge in a purely superstructural sense'.¹⁹ That ideas exist in some dialectical relationship with the material realm is something which seems not to occur to Chinweizu and his fellow authors.

The principal value of Amuta's book for me, however, is his insistence on the place of the materially real within the cultural, in other words his insistence on culture as part of some dialectical process. By emphasizing this, he has necessarily to acknowledge and confront the varieties of Africa's historical experiences and the consequent differences within African culture. One of the reasons why this is important is because it calls into question whether Pan-Africanist ways of thinking and ways of knowing have any validity. He quotes Fanon's prophetic warning that, although it was historically necessary for Africans 'to racialize their claims and to speak more of African culture than of national culture', this emphasis will 'lead them up a blind alley'.²⁰ Both Fanon and Amuta know that African culture, since it is not rooted in a single consistent and identifiable material experience, must assume many different forms appropriate to the widely different real-life experiences of different parts of Africa. If this is indeed so it makes Pan-Africanism an almost contentless concept. However, someone as intelligent as Ayi Kwei Armah has argued for many years that Marxism is yet another Western product which leads Africa away from its own identity. More recently Armah has pointed out that Africa has its own revolutionary methods and does not require inspiration for revolution from revolutionary theorists outside the continent.²¹ This

¹⁷ C. Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism* (London, Zed, 1989).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

²¹ A. K. Armah, 'Masks and Marx: The Marxist Ethos vis-à-vis African revolutionary theory and praxis', *Présence Africaine* (1984), CXXXI, 37.

is, of course, cultural nationalism gone mad and it is a very restrained Amuta who points out that to systematize a theory and practice of revolution from pre-colonial Africa's own experience would be akin to re-inventing the wheel to overcome Africa's technological backwardness.²² One is grateful to Amuta for his wit which, while being amusing, is also incisive and does not trivialize the importance of the issues being debated.

What I should like to highlight from Amuta's argument is his emphasis on the diversity of Africa, and the different material realities of the different nations and regions. It is these realities to which historical materialism is most sensitive and it is these differences which the idealist concepts such as 'African experience', 'African personality', 'African spirituality' and so on serve only to obscure. One could add to that list 'African literature' and discuss how far we fail to read the continent's texts in a complexly intelligent way — precisely because we look in them for some expression of a pan-continental experience. This has of necessity to be so generalized as to provide a thin reality for literature to explore and because it is so generalized to have no need of any complex formal expression. Even if one takes slavery and colonialism, which one could argue are central to the Black experience, there are problems. Much of Africa was only indirectly affected by the slave trade and the way in which colonialism manifested itself in Africa differed so widely from region to region and from colonial power to colonial power that a single African colonial experience did not exist. One has to note at this stage the ease with which Amuta uses a phrase such as 'capitalist imperialism' as if that somehow has a precision which he has correctly accused Pan-Africanism of lacking. No one could deny that capitalist imperialism has been at work, say, in both Nigeria and South Africa but the real-life manifestations of the phenomenon in the two countries have been so widely different that one wonders if indeed it is a single phenomenon and not an entire range of phenomena which intervene in and transform the real in many different ways.

One of the reasons why it is futile to try to arrive at some essential Africanness by looking into the past before imperialism to find the authentic Africa hidden there is because such a thing is no longer recoverable. Not only Africa but the entire world, the beneficiaries of imperialism as well as its victims, have been transformed by imperialism and it is from those much-transformed states that any new transformations must occur. What historical materialism must reveal are these material differences and the superstructural differences which were produced in different parts of Africa. In Amuta's words, the literary critic has 'to see African national societies and the literary works predicated on them in clearer structural terms'.²³ This involves a greater discrimination between region and region and country and country than the Chinweizu book even hints at. But if this is done we will be coming very close to real life, the production and reproduction of which, as Engels claimed, lies at the centre of any properly conducted investigation of culture.

²² Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature*, 60.

²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

If one of the reasons for the obvious differences between various national literatures is that each nation has a unique material experience, it becomes the task of literary criticism to locate the discrete features of that experience. Some will be purely historical and Zimbabwe's history has been addressed with a professionalism which has few equals in Africa and no literary critic can be excused for not being able to place our literary productions within their historical context. What we have not had until recently is an examination of our literature in terms of the economic and social backgrounds of its authors. George Kahari's very full studies of the Shona novel, and Musaemura Zimunya's study of Black pre-Independence writing refer from time to time to historical and social issues, but this is not the principal focus of their books.²⁴ They are more concerned with the essential task of seeing how the works they discuss function as texts. Even Kahari, who examines chronologically an enormous amount of material in his books, shows how the rapid historiographical shifts of the past forty years manifest themselves in corresponding shifts in the formal concerns of novels. Only Rudo Gaidzanwa has performed a specific sociological task in examining the way in which women are depicted in Zimbabwean literature but, since her concern is the material and ideological discrimination women suffer in Zimbabwe, only the sociological contexts directly relevant to these topics are referred to in her book.²⁵ The pioneering work of a sociology of Zimbabwean literature has now been performed with extraordinary thoroughness by Flora Veit-Wild in four books, three of which I shall consider in this review.²⁶

Pioneering is perhaps an unfortunate term since it is normally used to justify a lack of refinement and skill in some activity because it is breaking new ground. In fact Veit-Wild's work does break new ground and two of her books do it with a professionalism which is rigorous in its scholarly approach to its subjects without being dull. Her initial work consisted of a survey which was sent to all Black published writers in Zimbabwe who could be traced, 165 out of 212. Of the 165 who were written to 96 responded — which is an extraordinarily high response rate. Veit-Wild is more tolerant than I would have been of leaders in our society who pleaded that the burdens of office did not allow them time to complete the questionnaire. One of these is Archbishop Chakaipa, the Father of the Shona Novel, whose influence on subsequent Shona fiction is so considerable that his identity as a novelist is as important as the identity

²⁴ G. Kahari, *The Search for Zimbabwean Identity: An Introduction to the Black Zimbabwean Novel* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1980); *Aspects of the Shona Novel and Other Related Genres* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1986); *Plots and Characters in Shona Fiction 1956-1984: A Handbook* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1990); *The Rise of the Shona Novel: A Study in Development, 1890-1984* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1990). M. Zimunya, *Those Years of Drought and Hunger* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1982).

²⁵ R. B. Gaidzanwa, *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* (Harare, College Press, 1985).

²⁶ F. Veit-Wild, *Survey of Zimbabwean Writers: Educational and Literary Careers* (Bayreuth, Bayreuth African Studies Series No. 27, 1992), 172 pp., ISBN 0-3-927510-15-7, DM5; *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work* (Harare, Univ. of Zimbabwe Publications, 1993), xvi, 419 pp., ISBN 0-908307-29-2, Z\$36.00; *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (Harare, Baobab, 1993), xii, 408 pp., ISBN 0-908311-43-5, Z\$35.20.

he derives from his high ecclesiastical office. Kahari's work shows how many younger writers have imitated his narrative formulas which condemn the break-down of pre-colonial social patterns and moral attitudes under the pressures of commerce and urbanization. His influence is still present in those writers who consciously disagree with him and go out of their way to break with his formulas and his didacticism. Archbishop Chakaipa should have found the time to locate himself among his fellow writers.²⁷ One notices with regret the absence of Kizito Muchemwa, a pioneer anthologist as well as a poet of considerable worth who has been silent for far too long. Musa Zimunya, an anthologist and our most important poet in English, should certainly have been represented, especially because, as a professional critic, he knows how badly we need the sort of study Veit-Wild was undertaking, and, as a poet and critic, he could have provided a useful self-consciousness about the relationship between his poetry, his profession and his social background. Although neither Bernard Chidzero nor Ndabaningi Sithole have an equivalent stature in our literature to these other names, they were among our first Black writers in Shona and English, respectively, and should have acknowledged the significance of art by filling in the questionnaire. It is a beneficially levelling experience for an artist to know himself anew among his fellow artists, any other high office he might occupy becoming irrelevant at that moment of comparison.

Veit-Wild divides her authors into three generations. Generation I covers writers born between 1917 and 1939, Generation II between 1940 and 1959 and Generation III 1960 and after. There are problems with these divisions because the samples from the three generations are unequally represented in the survey: there are 25 from the first generation, 62 from the second and only 9 from the third, which is too small a sample to be genuinely representative of all those who have started writing since independence in 1980. However, these divisions are valid for other reasons. It was only after 1950 that any real attempt was made to increase the number of schools for Black children. The mere fact that children of the first generation wrote at all must mean that their background was in some way exceptional. The writers in the second generation benefited from an increase in the number of schools although until 1970 secondary-school places were still pitifully hard to find even for talented youngsters. What is perhaps more important is that children of this generation would have passed through adolescence and entered adulthood against the background of a newly militant African nationalism which, despite its own divisions and fratricidal conflicts, pitted Blacks consciously against the settler regime and led inevitably to the liberation war. People born in this generation were likely to have had some education and possibly to have completed primary education but they also would have grown to public consciousness as most of Africa was being liberated from colonial control. They would have seen Zimbabwean Blacks slowly beginning to take command of their own political agendas and would have realized that majority rule was a possibility rather than some sentimental fantasy.

²⁷ Veit-Wild, *Survey*, 64-7, shows Chakaipa as the most important influence on the writers during their school years and still retaining an importance into adult life.

In fact my remarks about the differences between these two generations are borne out in Veit-Wild's statistics. For example, more fathers of the first generation of writers went to school for more years than fathers of the second generation did and, as Veit-Wild remarks, this means that 'the older writers belonged to a very small élite of Africans with an education high above the average... [T]here is a correlation, a distinct link between the father's education and the writing career.'²⁸ There are immediate issues that arise from this finding. Are the novels written by this generation in some way expressions of the interests of a class which had been created by colonialism and the schools it had provided? In other words, are the writers typical of Zimbabwean Blacks at this stage of our history or are they part of some new class of Blacks which was being formed in Rhodesia at this time? The issue becomes more intriguing when Veit-Wild points out that the percentage of fathers of second-generation writers who completed six years of education is not very different from that of the education levels attained by all African men at this time. In other words, there is no great class difference between the second generation of writers and the population as a whole. There is, however, one difference which is probably significant. The standard of education of the mothers of second generation writers was significantly higher than the national average.²⁹ Veit-Wild agrees with Betty-Jo Murphree's conclusions that the 'mother is more influential than the father in influencing pupil aspiration and achievement'.³⁰ There is a chance that another factor was responsible for increasing the importance of the mothers' influence on second-generation writers. The vast majority of writers of the first and second generation are from rural backgrounds but, as might be expected, a high proportion of the first generation of writers came from the families of clergymen or teachers on rural missions. In consequence these children grew up with both parents at home. The second-generation fathers show a significantly lower percentage working for the church and a higher percentage in the categories of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, most of whom would probably have had to work in town. The pattern of rural women left to fend for their families while their husbands worked in town increased after the Second World War and this in itself may be a reason why the mother's influence increased.

Christianity is conventionally the 'bogey-man' in much African theorizing about colonial processes and the historically inaccurate remark that missionaries engrossed Africans in their Bibles while other Europeans stole their land is often offered as a diagrammatic account of the missionary role in colonization.³¹ Veit-Wild refers on several occasions in her books to the role of the churches and missions in the lives of the writers — which is hardly surprising since 91 per cent of her respondents claimed

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Ibid., 16–17.

³⁰ Cited in ibid., 17.

³¹ See, for example, the slogans of the demonstration in D. Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (London, Heinemann, 1978), 36.

allegiance to a church. All first-generation respondents are professing Christians and only 5 per cent of the second generation and 11 per cent of the third entered 'No religion' on the questionnaire. There are identical percentages in all generations for those professing traditional religion.³² Are there problems in these figures? A participant at the conference which Velt-Wild organized to discuss the findings of the survey explained away these high percentages by claiming that unless one became a Christian one was unable to get an education. I think this over-simplifies a complex process of acculturation. The fact that 68 per cent of the respondents of the first generation and 53 per cent of the second attend church regularly implies a much deeper commitment to Christianity than would be achieved by an understandable strategy to get an education through outwitting the mission authorities. That the writers' relationship with their churches is more than a matter of convenience is confirmed by the fact that 72 per cent of the first generation are involved in some church activity whereas only 29 per cent of the second generation are.³³ I suspect that this dramatic drop in church involvement is directly related to the growth of nationalist activity in the 1950s. The only effective modern organizations in which the first generation could have been involved were related to the churches whereas by the 1950s other secular organizations had come into being which would absorb the activity of people who by virtue of their intelligence and education were natural leaders.

If this speculation is correct then Christianity becomes more than the spiritual wing of colonialism. We know that the London Missionary Society and the Jesuits were singularly unsuccessful after decades of work in the Khumalo kingdom but immediately after the invasion of Matabeleland in 1893 Inyathi, Hope Fountain and Empandeni were inundated with people wanting to become Christians. Velt-Wild, after quoting from Sithole and Lawrence Vambe, concludes that 'Christianity was thus clearly part of the process of moving away from the limiting borders of the African world into the modern world with its as yet unknown promises and horizons'.³⁴ In other words, it requires a massive dislocation and transformation of the material base of society before people regard as unsatisfying the spirituality which was an expression of the old order. Christianity could be perceived as an ideology of the modern and it was the only aspect of the modern to which people had easy access.

The most common anxiety to which the writers refer concerns education and the problems of getting educated. If one wants to be reminded of some of the injustices of Rhodesia, it is useful to look at the difficulties which the writers recall as being associated with their education. For the first and second generation writers these problems were overwhelmingly financial. Not a single respondent seems to have doubted for a moment his or her ability. We recall the free education which Whites regarded as their God-given right in Rhodesia while throughout the country Black children were overwhelmed by the greatest dread of all: an inability

³² Velt-Wild, *Survey*, 22.

³³ *Ibid.*, 162.

³⁴ Velt-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers*, 51.

to find school fees. The reasons for wanting to be educated are precisely located in the injustices of Rhodesian society. F. Bvindi wrote on his questionnaire that 'only through education could one liberate oneself economically'. S. Dzoro remarked, 'in Rhodesia, without education, one would be treated as an underdog'. 'Once I were better educated,' wrote P. F. Ndebele, 'I would beat racial discrimination and earn a better living'.³⁵ Nevertheless, despite these thoughts — and they were passionately held — throughout the 1960s and 1970s children demonstrated, marched and showed in every way they could that they rejected what the government was claiming to do in their name. As a result they heroically sacrificed what they most wanted and were expelled from school after school.

One of the more problematic issues in a sociology of literature is that of the influence of other writers on the writer or the body of literature one is considering. Literature is obviously produced out of specific material conditions, but to state that is to state everything and nothing. Not only is material reality multi-faceted, multi-causal, and therefore produces multiple effects in the superstructure but, as I have already argued, these effects reveal themselves in a wide variety of forms. Among these formal expressions of ideology are books, and yet to say that a book is simply a piece of superstructural ephemera is obviously to deny its material status as product, and the fact that its text is a body of ideas and situations which could influence material reality in all sorts of unexpected ways.

One of the more interesting set of replies to Veit-Wild's survey are those concerning the books which the respondents read and enjoyed. Of course these lists need to be treated with some caution because after UDI the censorship of the Rhodesian Front tried to cut us off from all external intellectual sources and so the books do not necessarily represent what would have been read if readers had been free to select their own material. In addition the syllabuses still contained a large number of books from the English classics which may not have figured so highly in the respondents' answers if they had had more exposure to modern texts from Europe and America. With those caveats in mind it is interesting to note that Shakespeare and Chakaipa occupy joint position as favourite authors read during school and that *Macbeth* narrowly beats *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* into first place as the favourite text. Shakespeare continues as a favourite author enjoyed in adulthood but he is now overtaken by Mungoshi and Ngugi. Chakaipa drops to ninth place along with Orwell. James Hadley Chase is almost level with Achebe and the odd group of Hardy, Marechera, Ribeiro and Wilbur Smith tie for eighth place.³⁶ At the conference organized to discuss the findings of the questionnaire, some participants criticized Veit-Wild for not including a question which would have allowed the writers to register the influence of oral literature on their own work. This certainly is an oversight but since published Shona literature does not score more highly in the responses than it does one wonders whether oracy would in fact have been seen as having the influence which Chinweizu and his colleagues insist that it must have. The Ngugi texts which the

³⁵ Veit-Wild, *Survey*, 47-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-7.

writers turned to in their adult life are not named and thus we cannot tell whether they were the more recent novels structured according to the techniques of traditional narratives or the earlier works whose predominant influence is the Western novel.

Some of the thinnest responses to Veit-Wild's questionnaire are in response to her questions about the 'personal and social experiences' the writers had wanted to express in their works. One response that is quoted and identified as 'typical' by Veit-Wild points out that no writer knows what he is going to write when he sits down. Writers who have identified a particular intention have done so only because the questionnaire implied that they should have had this sort of foreknowledge. This seems to me very sensible but at the same time the late Geoffrey Ndhala makes an important point when he is quoted as saying, 'a writer is not working in a vacuum. There are so many things happening around him. He might not be aware of reacting to those things but unconsciously he will be reacting to them.'³⁷ However, despite those disclaimers of a conscious and explicitly didactic purpose in their writing, the authors did in fact see at least a consequence in what they had written. Veit-Wild sums up the responses of the first generation as an attempt to preserve the cultural values of both the Shona and the Ndebele in the face of colonialism's attempt to pervert and annihilate them.³⁸ The second generation who had grown up and started writing against the background of nationalist militancy, government oppression and the liberation war are much more diffuse in their responses. Although some writers still claim a value in their writing because it helps to maintain the cultural and linguistic integrity of Zimbabweans, others seem more concerned to encourage their readers to overcome the current hardships through hard work and perseverance.³⁹ The small and probably unrepresentative third generation sample shows little interest in the concerns of their predecessors. According to Veit-Wild the writers of this generation are 'not burdened by traditional beliefs'. Instead 'they are modern young people who experience difficulties in growing up... criticize old ways of life' and refuse to take for granted the 'mental liberation' of Zimbabwe.⁴⁰

The writers of the third generation are the 'Non-Believers' of the title of Veit-Wild's third book, although one wonders if it would not fit Dambudzo Marechera more accurately — and Marechera belongs by birth to the second generation. He is the subject of what is without doubt the most successful of Veit-Wild's books, *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on His Life and Work*. The labour behind this work is enormous as Veit-Wild has collected in Zimbabwe and in various countries in Europe any documents relating to Marechera and she links these to information obtained from interviews with those who knew him. Like all good biographies it is so carefully crafted that it can be read as a work of art in its own right. Its form involves the continuous disintegration of dry official letters and academic reports, publishers' notes and letters to the courts which assume an appropriate bureaucratic gravity for their various audiences. They

³⁷ Ibid., 80-2.

³⁸ Ibid., 88.

³⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 90.

disintegrate because they cannot contain Marechera whose protean exuberance they are trying to account for. One of the most skilful achievements of the *Source Book* is to interleave this sort of documentation with unpublished work by Marechera which, although not very valuable in itself, assumes an interest in the context which the book provides. Someone who writes and thinks like this cannot be accommodated in the normal language and forms which society uses to order its affairs.

It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that Marechera existed in a world hostile to his genius. As the *Source Book* demonstrates in incident after incident, whether Marechera was at St Augustine's, the University of Rhodesia, Oxford, or down and out in London and Cardiff, there were always people who recognized, very often with great exasperation, that here was someone who had to be regarded as special and deserved special treatment. Sir Charles Hayter was Warden of New College, Oxford, when Marechera was there but before that he had been, among other distinguished offices, British ambassador to Moscow. He was a man accustomed to dealing with unusually brilliant people. Nevertheless both he and Lady Hayter seem to have spent an astonishingly disproportionate amount of time dealing with Marechera and, like everyone else who had anything to do with him, remember him with a strange mixture of admiration, affection and pure irritation. One of Veit-Wild's chapter titles is 'The "wretched youth" at the University of Rhodesia'. The designation is that of Alfred Knottenbelt who was friend and confidant of three generations of students at Goromonzi and Fletcher High Schools. At his funeral in 1991 some of the most powerful people in Zimbabwe mingled with every conceivable class of person to pay tribute to him. Even he, who was eccentric, tolerant and witty, while refusing to be shocked by Marechera, found it difficult to know the appropriate way to respond to him. One hero of the narrative is James Currey, who, although as a publisher must be accustomed to dealing with eccentricity, seems always to have been on hand to rescue Marechera from a series of scrapes.

The strength of the *Source Book* lies, at least in part, in the way the documentation and Veit-Wild's linking narrative recalls us from being charmed at these eccentric minds warily watching one another's oddities to the social and political context in which these relationships were being played out. There was poverty in Marechera's background, although many others were poorer than his family. The death of his father when he was eleven laid a terrible burden on his mother and although his memories of his childhood are frequently inaccurate in detail (he claimed his family was thrown out of its home at his father's death when in fact they lost the home some three years later) there is no doubt of great financial insecurity throughout most of his life. On the other hand, the family was far from being conventionally poor Rhodesian Blacks. Marechera's brother had a science degree, and a brother and a sister had both left the country and were fighting in the liberation war during Marechera's exile in England.

One way of accounting for Marechera and his background is to see him and his family as being produced by colonialism with all its contradictions which reproduced themselves in Marechera himself. On one level he hated Whites as colonialists and yet on another he was at

ease with White individuals and with the artefacts of British culture. He was capable of mocking his own multiple personalities: he once appeared dressed in a poncho which somehow managed to look like a Basutho blanket at London's Theatre Royal to receive his half of the Guardian Fiction Prize, and he appeared at a poetry reading in Harare wearing a pink hunting jacket, one of the uniforms of the British landed gentry. These costumes were mere sketches but even as sketches they were artistic events, formal expressions of the conflicting influences in his life which he was to explore with such genius in his work. They were in one way satires and like all good satire they were rooted in a deeply serious apprehension of life; when Marechera spoke out against colonialism he was not dabbling with the whim of the moment. But he also refused to attack colonialism by contrasting it with some idyllic version of Africa's past. The sort of cultural nationalism expressed by Chinweizu filled him with loathing, if only because he saw no reason why he and other young Africans should be deprived of the wisdom of many other countries and cultures.

The costumes Marechera assumed are signs of something else in his character which the *Source Book* conveys with great honesty and compassion. Marechera frequently invented and re-invented his own past and perhaps his own personality. In discreet footnotes Veit-Wild informs the reader when Marechera is moving into fiction; for example Marechera's father was not shot by the Rhodesian Light Infantry as he claimed,⁴¹ and no record exists of his having been beaten by the West German police. Sometimes she simply allows the fantasy to remain as obvious fantasy, for example, at the Berlin meeting when he called himself a Marxist and said that he was going to apply for asylum in the German Democratic Republic and claimed that his radicalism prevented other Black writers at the conference from expressing solidarity with him.⁴² As one reads the transcript of his speech, momentarily one feels impatient with an audience listening and presumably accepting Marechera's account of himself as a politically correct individual. Then Veit-Wild follows the transcript of his conference speech with a Deutsche Welle profile of Marechera. It speaks of his being dogged by his persecutors wearing different disguises. They follow him from continent to continent so that every brush with officialdom signals their presence. And then Al Imfeld, who wrote the transcript, adds: 'It may be nonsense, it may be madness, whatever it is, the effect is the same: persecution has become Marechera's reality.'⁴³ Some at the conference knew that his fantasy was ultimately rooted in the real. However much he may have exaggerated and invented what had happened to him in Rhodesia, the fictions which he created were expressions of the political reality of which he was a victim.

Marechera was invariably impatient at any concept of Black solidarity. Pan-Africanism and so on. I have heard him attack with equal venom White Zimbabwean and Shona culture within minutes of one another — completely disorientating his audience in the process. In the Berlin speech

⁴¹ Veit-Wild, *Dambudzo Marechera*, 11–12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 275–8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 279.

he dismissed the idea of the liberation war as a Black against White struggle as 'stupid and naïve', and although he was for that occasion presenting himself as a Marxist, a rejection that the struggle was simply racist was probably one of his more consistently held ideas.⁴⁴ But the *Source Book* does offer one other terrible detail about his life which comes, not from colonialism, but from a Shona belief. Marechera's mother had been willed to be the 'bride' of her grandmother, a powerful witch who had been killed in Nyamaropa in the middle of the nineteenth century. Mrs Marechera lost her reason at the end of 1969 and the traditional doctor whom she consulted recommended that she pass the unquiet spirit on to one of her children. She chose Dambudzo and two years later he began to suffer the delusions which he describes so vividly in *The House of Hunger*.⁴⁵ However one chooses to read this explanation of his nervous breakdown and subsequent instability, one can understand why he refused to see his mother when he returned to Zimbabwe. We can also recognize why he was unable to turn from the colonialism which oppressed him to the security of pre-colonial traditions. Marechera's brother Michael who told Veit-Wild of this curse remarked that this was why 'Dambudzo always said he had no family and why he saw himself as an outcast'.⁴⁶

Whatever other conclusions we can draw about Marechera, we have to acknowledge his uniqueness. His life and his writings therefore raise peculiar problems for a sociologist of literature. Can one reasonably talk of a Marechera generation? Any sociology of literature must be concerned with both the difference and the similarities between a writer's social background and that of the population as a whole. Veit-Wild does compare her sample with the general population but it is at this point that the limitations of a sociology of literature appear. Only from the texts themselves will one be able to conclude whether or not the atypicality of the author's background produced an atypical ideology which is in turn reproduced in the author's work. We know that the first generation writers were an élite as far as education was concerned. How did their élitism manifest itself? They were teachers of their readers. What form did this teaching take in their novels? The answer to that question can lie only in a formal analysis. One would also have to note that much of traditional oracy was didactic in its intention and see how far a new formalism was created to teach the new knowledge. The educational background of the second generation resembled far more closely that of the population as a whole. Did they then speak with a popular voice? One can only answer such questions by looking at the texts and seeing how far they correspond to some attitudinal norm, although I have no idea how one would arrive at such a thing. Veit-Wild observes that '[i]t is a phenomenon of Zimbabwean literature that literary works published concurrently present extremely different outlooks'. And she mentions works by Sithole, Mungoshi, Samkange and Marechera to evidence these differences.⁴⁷ Veit-Wild has

⁴⁴ Ibid., 275.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 53-4; Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, 28-34.

⁴⁶ Veit-Wild, *Dambudzo Marechera*, 54.

given years of scholarship to building literary memorials to Marechera and surely she would agree that now we know in part the reasons for the uniqueness of his vision and the uniqueness of the form of his writings within the Zimbabwean context. The more important issue is the implications of the observation that Zimbabwean literature published at the same time presents different outlooks. If indeed that is so what is the purpose of producing a sociology of this literature? Surely whatever else sociology aspires to do it must believe in its ability to locate common causes in the social which will have common effects in the social. In fact, Veit-Wild does explain what the second generation authors have in common: they were, she writes, people

whose frustrations and lost hopes in the bleak years of UDI evolved into a general scepticism, a pessimistic approach towards society in general and disillusionment about African politics. Hence the 'anomaly' about Zimbabwean literature which on the very eve of Independence gave birth to highly unpatriotic writings.⁴⁸

This, then, is an explanation which is rooted in the social experiences of the second-generation writers she has named: Marechera, Mungoshi and Nyamfukudza. I must confess, however, that to take as evidence of a common effect the rather dubious category of 'highly unpatriotic writings' is not satisfactory. I assume it means that all three were sceptical that Zimbabwean independence would usher in a new era. In fact all would have believed that the liberation war had to be fought but each man was sufficiently politically sophisticated to know that there are many stages in a revolution of which the armed struggle is perhaps the easiest.⁴⁹ Perhaps to be tentative about simple causes and effects in revolutions is to be genuinely patriotic.

Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers is a more ambitious book than the *Survey* and concentrates on a few selected authors so that 'individual voices appear in their singularity as well as mouth-pieces for the common feeling'.⁵⁰ This requires an analysis of the works themselves and the need to relate background to text. As I have already suggested, this has its own problems and it seems that Veit-Wild is aware that she has not done it. In fact she remarks that 'applying specific elements of structuralist or formalist methods' to the texts would usefully complement her own study.⁵¹ So grateful should all Zimbabweans be to Veit-Wild's labour and achievements that it seems churlish to criticize even some of her work. However, I do find this book uneven in quality.

She restores Lawrence Vambe to his rightful place as an important voice preserving the memories of vaShawasha, indicting the settler government of Zimbabwe and the pusillanimous British government which

⁴⁷ Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers*, 6-7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁹ In 1980 Professor Kahari and I spoke at some length on these matters with Nyamfukudza and Mungoshi in one of a series of twenty-six interviews with Zimbabwean writers arranged by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. The tapes were subsequently destroyed by the ZBC.

⁵⁰ Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers*, 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

demonstrated its cowardice not only at UDI but throughout the years it was responsible for Rhodesia's Blacks. But what seems to me most important about *An Ill-Fated People* is, as Veit-Wild notes, that it fuses biography with oral traditions and standard histories of the Shona.⁵² As the barriers between fiction and history begin to be dismantled in contemporary scholarship the value of this sort of book grows. It recognizes how fantasy, subjectivity, the creating of the typical from the unique all play their part in our recollection of the past. The creativity of the historian and the novelist is not so dissimilar and we require both histories and novels in our literature. In fact, whenever Veit-Wild deals with the way in which the factual has been inserted into recollection she is impeccable and this is one of the reasons why her interviews are so good. Those with Mungoshi and Chris Magadza in this book are models of their kind. Similarly, she is the first person to deal at length with the production of texts from the Literature Bureau and its role as an institution of ideological control. She blames the Literature Bureau for preventing Shona and Ndebele literature from engaging with serious issues and forcing them to deal instead with trivial folklore.⁵³ This is, in fact, not the whole story about the work of the Literature Bureau as in the *Survey* writers were almost as willing to defend it as to attack it.⁵⁴ Similarly, school teachers who helped their students are given some memorial in this book when they could so easily have been forgotten and their status undervalued. It is when Veit-Wild discusses a fictional text that one feels she is making subjective judgements which she regards as having some absolute and objective status. The idea of 'unpatriotic literature' is an example.

The chapter on Samkange demonstrates typical flaws. There is unfortunately not enough space here to do as she has asked and analyse *Year of the Uprising* in a 'formalist' way and to defend a text which is singled out for particular obloquy. She attacks the book for failing to fulfil her expectations of what a realist historical novel should be. For example, she takes issue with the episode in the novel where chiefs from all over the country meet at Great Zimbabwe to plot the 1896 Rising. Anyone with the slightest knowledge of the country's past knows that such a meeting could not have taken place: therefore, the reader encountering this episode in the novel knows that it must be serving other purposes than the purely historical. This purpose Veit-Wild, citing myself and David Beach in a footnote, identifies as the need for some past symbol of national unity which was necessary at the time of the Geneva Conference. But then suddenly we are told that the weaknesses of the narrative can be attributed to the fact that while Samkange's 'intention is to support Zimbabwean resistance against colonial oppression, he sympathizes with the white liberal position'.⁵⁵ I can see no evidence whatsoever for this statement except that Samkange quotes extensively from published documents written by Whites who are in fact, in their callous optimism, justified by

⁵² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁴ Veit-Wild, *Survey*, 96-8.

⁵⁵ Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers*, 127.

the outcome of the Rising. But Veit-Wild confidently arrives at both an account of symptoms and diagnosis: 'as a novel it is inconsistent and fails to engross the reader. This is due to the author's relative detachment from the nationalist struggle in the decade before he wrote the novel.' He tries to 'propagate the national myth of resistance' while 'his real interest was reconciliation with the colonial power.'⁵⁶ The strength of Veit-Wild's writing in all her books has been a rigorous objectivity about her material. No statement is made without supporting documentation and as a result the reader has a sense of entering into the solid experience of our writer's lives. These remarks, however, assume that perceived formal failures in the novel derive from perceived political incorrectness. She is, of course, being 'politically correct' in suggesting there was only one possible way of looking at the events of the late 1970s; that is her prerogative. But as a critic I have to protest at simplistic political judgements being offered as cause for ill-analysed defects at the formal level within the novel. The book is simply more formally complex than she allows and she would have to offer a more complex account of politics in the late 1970s to account for what is in the book. All she succeeds in doing is accusing a great man of a mean opportunism.

Later in her book she criticizes Emmanuel Ngara for hailing Hove's *Bones* as a 'milestone' in the development of our 'national literature'. She argues that the 'term and concept of a national literature' should have become obsolete, faced as we are with the 'multi-faceted nature of post-colonial experience and writing'.⁵⁷ I can only understand this remark by assuming that she does not understand what Ngara certainly means by 'national literature'. Like Amuta, Ngara is looking for a literature which is rooted in our unique but multiple historical experiences as a nation and this he finds in *Bones*. Veit-Wild, on the other hand, seems to think it means the cultural nationalism of which we have already seen examples in Chinweizu's book. She sees Hove's book as another example of 'the stupid villager coming to the maze of the city' which was fashionable thirty years ago. By making his characters 'backward, innocent and ignorant' he ignores the 'complexity of life and consciousness 30 years later'. More to the point, Hove is 'diminishing the wisdom, experience and world view of peasant people, the very collective strength that the work aims to achieve'.⁵⁸ The work is a work of 'national literature' because it celebrates an image of African women 'which recalls long-ago phases of *négritude* and the rediscovery of the African identity . . . *Bones* will probably fulfil more of the romantic longing of the Western woman literature researcher than of the Zimbabwean woman reader'.⁵⁹ According to Veit-Wild, Chenjerai Hove creates a romantic and naïve African image which is mere regression 'oblivious . . . of the broken African image which Marechera and others have given the world'.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 317.⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 318.

A passage like this usefully illustrates some of the problems faced by African critics. First of all there is the reading of *Bones*. Veit-Wild condemns the novel because it offers an image of the peasantry which is not politically correct: it does not show that women have undergone a crisis of identity in the last 30 years. It is over-simplifying to refer to soiled clothes and sun-cracked skin because for some reason (which I don't follow) this is an 'outdated and over-simplified image of the poor'.⁶¹ Is Veit-Wild's argument that such women do not exist in Zimbabwe? Clearly that is nonsense. The women are there for all to see, and not only on the commercial farms where *Bones* is set. In any case whatever else occurs in the novel one occurrence is a crisis of identity among very poor and ignorant women who suddenly find themselves thrust into a public role as wives and lovers of guerrillas. Are Veit-Wild's reservations about the book because of the use of the ancestors who give a larger spiritual dimension to the immediate public experiences which everyone is undergoing? Chinweizu and his colleagues argue that there is no reason why African novels should not include interventions from the spirit world as part of their reality — if only because many people in Africa perceive such active spirit presences as part of our reality. No, the objection is that Hove's 'collective memory and collective history presents a monolithic view of African society' which reflects the 'anti-pluralistic tendencies of official political thinking in Zimbabwe'.⁶²

Veit-Wild's contribution to Zimbabwean literature is that in her *Survey* she allows us to see our writers in all their variety of different social and educational backgrounds, temperaments and aspirations. She also demonstrates that there is enough in common among the members of each generation for there to exist the shaping forces of a shared material reality although, as the *Survey* registers, this might produce different responses at the level of individual writers' consciousness. In short, she has identified the plurality of the Zimbabwean experience. She attacks Hove, however, in the name of pluralism and modernity, for writing out of an understanding of Zimbabwe which is rooted in an archaic and monolithic (the word is hers) cultural nationalism. In her accounts of both Samkange and Hove there is the implication that the failures of art and understanding in their novels derive from their relationship with the governments of the time. Marechera is invoked as the pluralistic voice to demonstrate that Hove is pursuing an ideology firmly rooted in the past. I cannot imagine the Marechera I knew (and know him a great deal better after reading Veit-Wild's *Dambudzo Marechera*) allowing himself to serve this sort of dogmatism.

Behind all this is a denial of her own work. She has helped us to create a national literature which acknowledges our complex past and present reality and which is not rendered shallow by racist simplifications of what Amuta calls 'Pan-Negro consciousness'.⁶³ Having done that she does not

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 319.

⁶³ Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature*, 67.

know how to deal with the material her writers produce. The presence in *Bones* of the spirits immediately makes it 'négritude' when what Hove should be writing about is the 'world view of peasant people'. Where has one heard that before? In the Soviet theory of course. One problem in this book is that there is only one politically correct attitude for each generation. But a more fundamental problem is that Veit-Wild has problems in reading texts — in translating form into ideas. At the beginning of the book she criticizes Kahari for not recognizing that literatures of protest and alienation are contradictory. There is, of course, absolutely no reason why the alienated individual — Marechera comes to mind — should not protest his or her marginalization. The linking of the terms only become unacceptable when the critic is dealing with some deadly literary typology which I thought had sunk from view 30 years ago.

I do not want to end on a negative note. Eagleton, Jameson and Amuta all show what can be done when the dogmatism of Africa's cultural nationalists and the old Soviet theorists are laid aside. Chinweizu and his colleagues and the Soviet theorists can see only their own single discursive space. The discourse each group produces addresses itself to only one object: a single Africa, the primacy of the Soviet Union. The serious Marxists show multiple formal expressions of multiple material realities. We can be grateful to Veit-Wild for showing us at least the latter. It will be only the fault of the critic if henceforth his or her accounts of Zimbabwean texts are not rooted in the minutely described social reality which Flora Veit-Wild has made available to us.