
African Doppelganger: Hybridity and Identity in the Work of Dambudzo Marechera

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The work of Dambudzo Marechera stands out as a unique expression of self and postcolonial identity in contemporary African literature. His fiction, though mostly autobiographical, consistently undermines any fixed notions of a unified and stable "self" or "history." Additionally, the poststructuralist and deconstructive elements within his work put pressure on the construction of meaning at the level of language and narrative. This approach critiques constructions of identity as well as nationalism, revealing them to be elaborate narrative fictions. The "fictionalizing" of Marechera's own life in his work, along with the performative character of his "public" life, raises questions about the "truthfulness" of the autobiographical form, as well as the authenticity of any construction of identity.

In this sense, Marechera, writing in the late 1970s, anticipated the theorizations of postcolonial identity as heralded by contemporary critics of postcoloniality. The scripting of the self in Marechera's work reveals the hybridity of postcolonial subjectivity, as experienced within the colonial setting as well as in exile. However, Marechera remains marginalized in current critical studies of African literature. This is in part due to his early death, as well as to his refusal to claim any specific "African" identity. Moreover, it is my contention that Marechera stands outside the conventional categorizations of African writing due largely to his class status. By not functioning within the international exchange of cultural production, Marechera remains doubly marginalized: invisible in the West and misunderstood at "home." Marechera's fascinating life and work present both a radical approach to the articulation of postcolonial identity and the authorial "self" as well as a unique expression of sociocultural hybridity as experienced in the margins of postcoloniality.

The history of the autobiographical form in African writing in many ways parallels the concurrent development of nationalism and narrative. Much of so-called "first generation" African literature modeled itself on nineteenth-century European realist modes of expression, thus providing the foundation for its "universalistic" claims to authority and authenticity. The nationalisms of the 1950s were constructed upon narrative lines, in order to create a "national (hi)story" around which to unify anti-colonial sentiment. Similarly, the classic autobiographical narratives of this period

were micromodels of this same construct. Fictional and nonfictional works by Peter Abrahams, Es'kia Mphahlele, Ngũgĩ, Nelson Mandela, and others presented the nationalist story on the individual level. African men, using European modes of expression, were able to construct a cohesive and centered subjectivity from which to articulate objection to colonial rule. This objection often came by way of appeals to notions of universal (i.e., Western) humanism, a fundamental basis of (early) nationalist ideology.

In the years after most African nations achieved independence from colonialism, the pitfalls of nationalist movements (as forecast by Fanon) began to present themselves. Critiques of nationalism tended to focus on the generally petty-bourgeois character of the leadership and the attendant "failure" of this leadership to usher in a postcolonial era that was not also neocolonial. In this sense, attention was diverted from the underlying construction of narratives of nationalism; more often, "new" (meta)narratives were simply constructed to replace the old. Thus, those writing autobiography and/or autobiographical fiction in this period—Soyinka, Ngũgĩ, Armah, Awoonor, and others—while clearly revealing rifts in the fabric of subjectivity and identity, still showed a general faith in narrative as the construct of history and emancipation, be it by way of Marxism, Negritude, or African socialism.

In the contemporary period, Western critiques of the grand metanarratives of history have begun to take hold within the postcolonial world as well as in the metropole. General frustration and cynicism on the sociopolitical level has been fueled by the continual crises of legitimation at the level of the African nation-state, as well as the seeming lack of effective alternatives for anti-imperialist struggle. As theorized within current notions of the postcolonial, the undermining of the concepts of nation and nationalism is due in part to the inefficacy of narrative as a conceptual foundation (see Bhabha, *Nation*). Similarly, critiques of neocolonialism and global imperialism are increasingly aimed at the (false) authority of nationalism and narrative to impose any uniform construction of "history" or "identity."

At the level of the postcolonial, writing back to the Empire, how might the self be reconfigured in this regard? Some fiction writers, such as Okri and Mudimbe, have begun to explore new notions of subjectivity and identity within the postcolonial context. But within the realm of autobiographical fiction, only Breytenbach, Head, and Marechera have seriously focused on the self and the construction of identity while also challenging conventional narrative form.¹ Furthermore, Marechera articulates—at the level of both form and content—a successful (and prescient) (de)construction of the postcolonial self that anticipates and challenges contemporary theorizations of hybridity, ambivalence, and postcolonial identity.

The complexities in Marechera's constructions of what is autobiography and what is fiction make it seem as if any critical investigation of the broader implications of his work must eventually address the thin separation between the author's life and his writing. Throughout his career, Marechera mined his own experiences as sources for his work, constructing them in such a way as to obliterate the conventional line between fact and fiction. As Flora Veit-Wild has revealed, Marechera often embellished and

re-invented his own biography, both within his work and within the subsequent construction of the “Marechera myth.” However, as Stewart Crehan has pointed out,

[O]ne should perhaps bear in mind that a key principle of Marecherian aesthetics is to blur fact and fiction and to fuse emotion and reality through techniques of distortion and dislocation. ...The biographical facts do not really illuminate the writing because Marechera was such a self-conscious and, for all his self-invention such an honest writer, that setting the ‘facts’ against his heavily autobiographical fiction is rather like throwing a cup of water on a bonfire. (198)

In this sense it becomes instructive to approach Marechera’s life and work as a creative fusion of sorts, a “life-as-work,” or “life-in-work.” Marechera’s legacy represents a radical approach to the scripting of the self within post-colonial African literature, one that illuminates many of the contemporary debates within what has been loosely called “postcolonial studies.” His life-work was nothing if not the creative response of a hybrid jester to the experience of colonization, exile, and suffering.

That “his tragic destiny did not preclude a certain genius for publicity” (Crehan 199) only reinforces this point. If Marechera proved to be keenly aware of participating in his own myth-making, thus conceptualizing himself within a certain European tradition of the bohemian artist, he was also well attuned to the complexities such a construction presented within a society such as Zimbabwe. Likewise, it is clear that Marechera’s roots as an *enfant terrible* ran deep, back to his Rhodesian childhood (“Dambudzo” is Shona for “trouble”); his later exploits seem to have been as much an attempt to remain honest to himself as they were calculated gestures of self-invention.² One can trace through his writing and biography a performative quality, driven in many ways by a self-created persona of both artist and tramp. If in this sense one reads Marechera as a sort of African Genet, one can see how a conceptualization of “life-work” is essential in approaching what in many ways is a unique expression of critical engagement within contemporary African literature.³

Furthermore, it is clear that Marechera’s life-work is less pure invention or construction than a response to what Soyinka has called the “process of self-apprehension” (xi). Marechera’s experiences not only provided him with his subject matter, but also helped construct his stylistic voice and structural aesthetics. If, as Sartre claimed, the psychological state of the native is a “nervous condition,” Marechera’s expression of this experience seems an appropriately “nervous” articulation, reflecting many conflicting influences and identities. In other words, the conflation of life-work, fact-fiction, and man-myth should not be seen as hindrances to a critical pursuit of the “authentic” Marechera; rather, these apparent contradictions should be viewed as the loci of Marecherian aesthetics, exemplifying the schizophrenic experience of the contemporary postcolonial subject as well as the polymorphous expression of such an experience. Likewise, they challenge claims to authenticity made by conventional approaches to

identity, narrative, and thus autobiography (which is proposed in the customary sense as the narrative of identity).

If one considers most of Marechera's life-work as an attempt to articulate the self while simultaneously investigating the problematics of identity and deconstructing the very act of self-articulation, one can see how he represents a unique approach to autobiography. His most autobiographical works—*The House of Hunger* and the journal section of *Mindblast*—continually blur the line between truth and invention, author and narrator; one is challenged to put questions of authenticity aside in exchange for what are in a sense new constructions of "reality" and "identity." Likewise, in *The Black Insider* and *Black Sunlight*, the schizophrenic self and text seem to become one; though clearly constructed as "fictions," these books in many ways present a more telling portrait of the author than any conventional autobiography could. One indeed could read many of Marechera's fictions as elaborate conversations between his multiple selves and identities, set within *The Black Insider's* bombed-out Faculty of Arts building or the underground caverns of Devil's End in *Black Sunlight*, the metaphoric representations of Marechera's labyrinthine unconscious. Marechera's oeuvre presents this scripting of the self as a constant work-in-progress, using metafictional devices, automatic writing, surrealistic dream sequences, tales-within-tales, etc. to reveal the traces of the process of writing and self-invention. Likewise, Marechera constantly relocates himself (and his written self) within the shifting allegiances and constructions of identity, preferring to refract the self into many rather than invent a cohesive and stable subject position.

While contemporary theorizations of postcolonialism have begun to focus on the formation of identity within a broad matrix of economic, cultural, and political determinants, many constructions of these issues continue to rotate around the binarisms of "center-periphery," "self-other," and "colonizer-colonized." Marechera presents a challenge to this approach in that he seeks to position himself outside the very boundaries of these debates. Again and again he declines to locate himself within a fixed notion of identity or "role," whether via a Fanonesque critique of colonial racism or through a refusal to assert an "authentic African" voice against such racism. While Philip Darby and A. J. Paolini see the postcolonial strategy as one of a "native voice" asserting itself, "instrumental in overcoming an enduring position of otherness and subordination" (325), Marechera shows a disinclination to any expression as solely "native" (or "other," or "African"); rather he remains an independent and mobile voice located somewhere in the margins of these theorizations:

I think that I am the doppelganger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met. And in this sense I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you write for a specific nation or a specific race, then f--- you. (qtd. in Veit-Wild 221)

Perhaps a broader configuration of postcolonialism might move beyond a conceptualization based solely on the oppositions mentioned above. Homi Bhabha's notion of the "hybrid" seems to be crucial in approaching the fundamentally "in-between-ness" of contemporary postcolonial identity (see *Location of Culture*). In one sense, Marechera's experience as an exile in Great Britain during the 1970s and his return in 1982 to a Zimbabwean society within which he felt similarly alienated reflects a pattern of experience that typify this kind of postcolonial subjectivity. The clash of cultural identities and allegiances manifest themselves in a schizophrenic subjectivity that cannot find stable ground within the traditional notions of "nation," "race," or "culture":

[I]n the contemporary world-system, social identities . . . are not only always compound and overdetermined, they are also unstable at their origins, and incapable of being stabilized. On this reading, the problematic of exile, migration, and diaspora emerge as paradigmatic. (Lazarus 89)

This crucible of identity is clearly central to Marechera's work. His refusal to represent any specific "African" identity along with a consistent deconstruction of conventional modes of self-articulation within his works not only reinforce the dislocation of postcolonial subjectivity, but also works to reveal and investigate the contingencies and contradictions within such a project. Rather than attempting to smooth the surface fissures of any foundations of postcolonial identity, it is as if Marechera has chosen instead to hammer away at the floor just as it is slipping out from under him. This deconstructive approach to the scripting of the self remains unique within postcolonial African literature, which seems rather to be invested in shoring up the glass houses of nationalist and cultural identity. Marechera has described this approach as "literary shock treatment," an artistic violence that is necessary to counter the "slow brain death" of the postcolonial African subject (cited in Veit-Wild 41).

Marechera's aesthetic project is primarily accomplished by the articulation of the psychological experience of postcoloniality via the poetic image and its construction as anti-narrative. This involved for him a literary approach that took from any and all traditions while simultaneously attempting to cancel the distance between pure feeling and its expression in language. A violent and schizophrenic voice is layered with an erudite understanding of the European tradition, along with the additional self-consciousness well aware of broader cultural and political contexts and contradictions.

This awareness stems from his experiences at an early age, where colonial education in Rhodesia immediately immerses young Marechera in a conflict of identities:

As far as expressing the creative turmoil within my head was concerned, I took to the English language as a duck takes to water. I was therefore a keen accomplice and student in my own mental colonization. (qtd. in Veit-Wild 4)

In *The House of Hunger*, Marechera personifies the experience of cultural schizophrenia by putting multiple selves into the head of the narrator, who describes having been followed by invisible voices as a child⁴:

I was being severed from my own voice English is my second language, Shona my first. When I talked it was in the form of an interminable argument, one side of which was always expressed in English and the other side always in Shona. At the same time I would be aware of myself as something indistinct but separate from both cultures. (30)

Marechera's later education at Oxford furthered this alienation from his African background, though ironically re-presenting his "African-ness" back to him through the experience of exile. In Britain he came face to face with his own "otherness," as he was not only an outsider within the British culture which he was drawn to, but found himself also estranged from fellow exiled Africans. This is best expressed in a scene from *The Black Insider*, set inside London's Africa Centre:

I looked around, at the bar where a few blacks in national costume were standing, at the dining tables where the smart black faces were eating impeccably African food recommended by the *Guardian*, and at the side seats where little groups of black and white faces sat talking and drinking in an unmistakably non-racial way. Here then was the womb into which one could retreat to nibble at the warm fluids of an Africa that would never be anything other than artificial. A test-tube Africa in a brave new world of Bob Marley anguish, Motown soul, reggae disco cool, and the added incentive of reconceiving oneself in a friendly womb. (66)

In Britain, Marechera likewise felt estranged from the armed struggle taking place in Rhodesia. Though clearly sympathetic to the anti-colonial movement, he found himself increasingly cut off from any personal connection to the nationalist struggle: "Steve Biko died while I was blind drunk in London. Soweto burned while I was sunk in deep thought about an editor's rejection slip" (*Black Sunlight* 114). His cosmopolitan identity, intellectual pursuits, and general skepticism towards nationalism left him feeling ostracized by his fellow Africans in exile, while his fervent individualism and almost paranoid sensitivity to racism kept him at odds with the British society at large.

It is this "hybrid" status that informs most of Marechera's work, as well as the construction of "self" within his writing. His voice is one of a generation of Africans who have found themselves within that postcolonial space of unstable identities and schizophrenic allegiances:

There was this feeling that our generation had more or less been raped and that like any rape case we would never fully recover from the psychological consequences. (qtd. in Viet-Wild 152)

These consequences make up the bulk of Marechera's subject matter. If we can accept Emmanuel Ngara's description of Ngugi's style as "social

realism" and Armah's as "metaphoric realism" (115), we might see Marechera's stylistic mode of expression as "metaphoric surrealism." Beginning in *The House of Hunger*, Marechera uses a fictional technique that aims to represent the "inner exile" of the schizophrenic postcolonial subject. The brutal "psychological consequences" of the colonial experience in Rhodesia are presented in violent imagery and a tangled formal structure. The form presents not only the destructive results of colonial "order" on the colonized subject but also an attempt at preserving a mode of self-expression within the aesthetic response to such oppression:

Marechera does not indulge form at the expense of substance; he invests the relationship between them with a new politico-cultural significance recognizing that the basis of true self-determination lies in an appropriate means of self-representation. (Foster 59)

In the same way that Marechera articulates the "self" as a schizophrenic construction defying conventional "narration," the anecdotes of township life in colonial Rhodesia, with its many layers of physical and psychological violence, undermine any narratives of a singular and unified nationalist identity. In the schoolyard brawl described within the title novella, Stephen, the nationalist bully, beats the lonely and apolitical aesthete Edmund until the blood on his shirtfront resembles the shape of Rhodesia (65), ironically calling attention to the inherent violence of nationalism. This tale is framed within the narrator's musing on Edmund's later fate as a captured and tortured guerilla. Earlier, while conversing with the traitor/spy Harry, the narrator finds within the multiple layers of self a possible source of both violence and resistance:

I looked up. As I did so the old cloth of my former self seemed to stretch and tear once more What shall I see when the cloth rips completely, laying everything bare? It is as if a crack should appear in the shell of the sky And what of the house inside it? And the thing inside the house? And the thing inside the thing inside the thing inside the thing? I was drunk, I suppose, orbiting around myself shamelessly. I found a seed, a little seed, the smallest in the world. And its name was Hate. I buried it in my mind and watered it with tears. No seed had a better gardener. As it swelled and cracked into green life I felt my nation tremble, tremble in the throes of birth - and burst out bloom and branch (*House of Hunger* 17)

Marechera also sees how this hate can easily turn inward on the victim; speaking of his generation, dying "beneath the wheels of the twentieth century," the narrator concludes, "No, I don't hate being black. I'm just tired of saying it's beautiful. No, I don't hate myself. I'm just tired of people bruising their knuckles on my jaw" (45). Marechera's scripting of the colonized self throughout the text, as both victim and perpetrator of violence and meaning, chaos and order, civility and resistance, demonstrates the kind of ambivalence at the center of the colonial encounter, as theorized by Bhabha:

From such a colonial encounter between the white presence and its black semblance, there emerges the question of the ambivalence of mimicry as a problematic of colonial subjection Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire. It is the process of the *fixation* of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations. . . . (*Location of Culture* 90)

In Bhabha's reading, all forms of colonial mimicry (including realist literature) are infused with a fundamental ambivalence; however, in Marechera, one finds the mask of mimicry to be also that of the jester's. He finds locations of ambivalence to be potential sites of resistance and thus tries to exploit and explode them. By refusing any one fixed identity, he is able to critique all claims to "authentic" (i.e., nonambivalent) identity. Thus Marechera, writing during the Zimbabwean armed struggle for independence, still finds a location from which to critique the tropes of narrative and nation, the foundations for both imperial authority *and* African nationalism (which would prove to engender new regimes of mimicry):

Life is not a plot, you know. It does not have a coherent theme but many different ones We raise the African image to fly in the face of the wind and cannot see the actually living blacks having their heads smashed open with hammers in Kampala. We have done such a good advertising and public relations stunt with our African image that all horrors committed under its lips merely reinforce our admiration for the new clothes we acquired with independence For people seeking freedom we are much practised in intolerance among ourselves. (*Black Insider* 84)

If *The House of Hunger* lays the groundwork for this structural approach, *The Black Insider* (written in 1978, though not published until 1990) and *Black Sunlight* (1980) further develop it while simultaneously threatening to obliterate it. While Marechera continues to remap the terrain of the post-colonial subject by laying bare the tormented psychic subconscious as not only subject matter but as organizing principle, it no longer remains clear if such an approach is an act of engaged self-determination or rather a tortured expression of self-consciousness trapped within "a labyrinthine personal world which would merely enmesh me within its crude mythology" (*House of Hunger* 7). In *Black Sunlight*, the revolutionaries and artists gather in a vast underground cave called Devil's End, where human ancestors once lived and slaves once were quarried. The "we" who frequent this labyrinth of doubles, illusions, and violence could be read as the multiple selves of the Marecherian voice, Devil's End its seedy unconscious.

'We are as it were the living memory of those centuries of nightmare. But then everybody must have roots. A sense of identity, continuity. Disease, war, persecution, rapine, these are our ancestors, you know. Fearful myths grew out of this place.' (71)

The fearful myth is of course that of identity, and in the course of the novel the deconstruction of a fixed identity (even one based on a notion of a shared "history" or ancestry) spreads throughout the language and the content. When the narrator Christian meets his double (who is furiously typing the manuscript which we presumably are now reading) within the heart of Devil's End, he asks him if he is an illusion. The author-double responds:

'If you prick me, I hurt. But then I am I suppose the sum of all the thoughts and delusions and feelings which I hold. In a sense I am the fiction I choose to be. At the same time I am the ghoul or the harmless young man others take me for. I am what the rock dropping on my head makes me. I am my lungs breathing. My memory remembering. My desires reaching. My audience responding with an impatient sneer. I am all those things. Are they illusions? I do not know. And I think that is the point. That we never do know for certain 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 it is a delusion that is very real indeed.' (68)

Marechera likewise ties the disordering of language and the violence of revolution to a challenge of conventional modes of "order," which he sees as masculinist discourses of power and control. The violent and anarchistic energies that not only provide *Black Sunlight* with its imagery and content but drive the book's entire (de)construction also demonstrate the process of self-expression that Marechera sees as his aesthetic principle:

There was no beauty apart from conflict. There were no masterpieces without aggression There were no such things as elegant and vulgar images. Intuition, which assimilates images, knew no privilege, or distinction. The principle of maximum disorder was the sole foundation of order in a poem. (*Black Sunlight* 111)

It is perhaps in this fragile negotiation of stylistic spontaneity and formal (dis)organization that many of Marechera's critics have found him wanting in terms of extended structural coherence.⁵ Nonetheless, despite the "incompleteness" of some of these experiments, it is clear that Marechera's project focused on the performative moment of self-construction, which simultaneously took into account the impossibility of any closed system of meaning or order. When Christian's double confronts his own image, created within his (unfinished) manuscript, he wonders if and when the author becomes the fiction, and to what degree one can find any coherent "truth" within the subtle negotiation of self-construction and identity:

'It depends I suppose on that fraction of an inch which separates you and I One did not want truths common to all but as it were private absolutes that chiselled one into something brighter and more significant than the design.' (*Black Sunlight* 62)

This distrust of any universalizing narratives of truth plays into an attempt to submit the narrative form to the more immediate emotional

moment, thus challenging colonial (and postcolonial) forms of order and control. Foster, using Barthes, sees an embodiment of this technique in the old man's section near the end of *The House of Hunger*:

Rejecting historical chronology and causative narrative structure, the old man's stories embody and encourage the free play of memory and association. In doing so they obviate the political determinism which cripples any personal or collective process of active cultural engagement among the blacks. Yet this is not to suggest they are escapist. On the contrary, they imply a rejection of the literate signifying system by which colonialism (de)values and controls, and the revitalization of an expressive and evaluative system centered on the performative verity and cultural validity of the voice. . . . (68)

In this respect, Marechera has classified his own writing within the category of the "menippean," which he believes to transcend categories of "African" or "European" ("The African Writer's Experience" 364). This approach can be seen especially in *Black Insider* and *Mindblast*, which use poetry, prose, plays, and "journal" entries. If *The Black Insider* stands as Marechera's singular evocation of the exile experience, *Mindblast* is his documentation of the "inner exile" that he encountered upon his return to Zimbabwe in 1982:

Here in Harare the things held against me would have been totally invisible to a Londoner. My unconventional dress and my dreadlocks would not have raised an eyebrow; my 'iconoclastic' statements about 'everything' would have been drummed on deaf ears—no one would give a damn how I lived as long as I was bearably legal. Here in Harare, it was different. Expectations were crudely materialistic, less to do with the spirit but more with the price of the matter. (*Mindblast* 120)

Within newly independent Zimbabwe, there was no traditional cultural space for the "bohemian" artist such as Marechera. If in the immediate afterglow of the nationalist revolution the state seemed in tune with the need to cultivate "cultural revolution" within the arts, this seemingly benevolent attitude ironically restricted the artist's role. That *Black Sunlight* was originally banned (for obscenity) in Zimbabwe under a censorship law held over from the colonial era proved to be a most telling example of the new state's rather strict conceptualization of the importance of "culture" and "free expression." Frustrated by the inability to find publishers for his work, consistently critiqued as inappropriate for "socialist" Africa, Marechera struggled to articulate an expression of his experience as an outsider within his own nation:

And there was the futility, the feeling of shame when it was said that the Third World did not want Art, it wanted food; it did not want poetry, it wanted drought relief; it did not want novels, it wanted education for all The only food they [such artists] had to offer was elevated air, the meat and drink of the leisured and the wealthy. (*Mindblast* 67)

Despite this sense of dislocation from the emergent cultural sphere in Zimbabwe, Marechera remained convinced of his connection and allegiance to other dislocated groups, specifically those for whom the newly independent nation did not fulfill its implicit promise of emancipation for all. Among the lumpenproletariat of Harare street life, Marechera found himself within the growing class of the disenfranchised, and from this vantage point he in turn proved to be a prescient critic of neocolonialism and corruption among the Zimbabwean elite. As an outspoken and early critic of the state and the *wabenzi* classes of the new black bourgeoisie, Marechera further distanced himself from dominant notions of the artist's role within the "developing nation." Yet in refusing to participate within the societal role expected of him, and thus limiting his opportunities to assert his voice in the national cultural discourse, he also became more affiliated via his outsider status with elements of postcolonial society that would most likely never become his literary audience:

They understood his poems. Even though they would never read them, Buddy knew they *understood*. That was the great thing about being misunderstood. You occasionally met those who knew your soul. (*Mindblast* 57)

This is perhaps the closest Marechera can come to reconciliation with the violent universe around him. The now well-documented descent into drunken bitterness, silence (within the publishing world), and his illness and eventual AIDS-related death is in part a legacy of a lone voice refusing to assimilate into a society that would not accept him on his own terms: "I knew it now. I was mad. But that was alright. Because the world was madder than I was" (*Black Sunlight* 59).

Critics of Marechera's work often return to his conception of the writer's role, which seems at odds with the dominant discourses concerning cultural production within contemporary Africa. Perhaps one of the harshest critics in this regard is Musaemura Zimunya, who asserts that Marechera's

masochistic artistic engagement overwhelms the social and moral intent. Pleading for admission into the neurotic twentieth century is the worst way to go about revitalizing a culture depleted by the self-same Europe. (128)

However, rather than seeing Marechera as wishing his way into the modern European tradition, it might ultimately be more fruitful to view Marechera's work as a response to a direct understanding of this "neurotic twentieth century." In other words, it does no service to postcolonial African modes of self-articulation to delegitimize certain expressions of alienation, estrangement, etc., simply because they happen to have been similarly understood by dislocated subjects within the West. That Marechera articulates this understanding from within a mode of literary production that seems to fit more neatly into certain European traditions (such as surrealism and postmodernism) does not preclude a reading of his work as an advanced expression of postcoloniality, in that the postcolonial

(in this reading) is by definition culturally hybrid. In this sense we can perhaps see Marechera's life-work as an evocation of a relatively "new" experience of cultural identity expressed in equally new ways. If the legacy of both his experience and his work seems in places fragile and contradictory, it is perhaps not only because of the experimental nature of his project, but also due to his desire to lay bare the act of self-invention on the page, as his subject matter.

Finally, one might ask what Marechera brings to current debates within postcolonial studies. While it seems that Marechera is a prototype of the (almost celebratory) theorization of Bhabha's hybrid, his work remains to a large part almost invisible within contemporary studies of African literature. To some degree, this is a result of Marechera's early death and the relative scarcity (outside Zimbabwe) of his published work. The work of the Dambudzo Marechera Trust to publish and promote posthumously Marechera and studies of his work has helped change this trend, as recently revealed at the first Marechera symposium, held in Harare in August 1995. Nonetheless, one wonders if Marechera in some ways remains marginalized even in relation to theorizations of the hybrid and the postcolonial, due to his class status and refusal to participate in the transnational cosmopolitan exchange of intellectual capital. In many ways the theorists of postcolonialism represent certain elements of cross-cultural affiliation; yet at the same time, the political economy of cultural and intellectual exchange between "North" and "South" results in a certain class character:

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungraciously call a comprador intelligentsia of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate and trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa. (Appiah 149)

While one does not wish to delegitimize the expressions of political and cultural hybridity and ambivalence undoubtedly experienced by such figures, it remains crucial to chart the marginal and subaltern who remain to a large degree absent from this exchange. Marechera, ostracized by academic institutions both at home and abroad, remained an extremely rare voice of Africa's lumpen proletariat; in this sense his work is doubly marginalized, unable to traffic in the new cosmopolitanism of postcolonialism as practiced by the likes of Rushdie, Mudimbe, Ngũgĩ, and others. One must keep in mind Aijaz Ahmad, who argues:

. . . [t]he ideological ambiguity in these rhetorics of migrancy resides in the key fact that the migrant in question comes from a *nation* which is subordinated in the imperialist system of intra-state relationships but, simultaneously, from the *class*, more often than not, which is the dominant class within that nation—this, in turn, makes it possible for that migrant to arrive in the metropolitan

country to join not the working classes but the professional middle strata, hence to forge a kind of rhetoric which submerges the class question and speaks of migrancy as an ontological condition . . . (12-13)

Perhaps herein lies one reason why Marechera's work—seemingly so ripe in “hybridity” and critiques of nationalism—remains conspicuously absent in the celebrational formation of the contemporary postcolonial canon.

Marechera's lasting legacy, for those who take the time to rediscover his work, may thus reside not only in his unique articulations of self and the autobiographical, but also in his marginalized class position. As both an exiled Rhodesian and a homeless Zimbabwean, Marechera's schizophrenic articulation of postcolonial identity represents an important and unique expression of one of Fanon's “wretched of the Earth.” His intelligence, wit, bravery, and refusal to compromise remain the enduring achievements of an individual who continually struggled to write himself into a world which did not seem to want him. We would do great service to Dambudzo Marechera to give him our fresh appreciation and rapt attention.

Part of this essay comes from a paper originally presented at the first Dumbudzo Marechera Symposium, held in Harare in August 1995.

NOTES

1. In addition to the Marechera texts discussed here, see Breyten Breytenbach's *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* and *Mouiroir: Mirrornotes of a Novel* and Head's *A Question of Power*.
2. See Veit-Wild for exhaustive research into Marechera's troubled youth and schooling, subsequent exile and diagnosis of schizophrenia, along with numerous stories of his public outbursts and arrests.
3. Marechera in fact asserted his connection to Genet, calling him “my doppelganger, in fact the ghost which . . . African literature had refused to greet: the life of blind poverty, blind impulse” (“The African Writer's Experience” 365). Like Genet, Marechera's tramp persona was not a mere facade; often he relied on the patronage of his friends and publishers to get him out of various jails in both the UK and Zimbabwe (see Veit-Wild).
4. Marechera did suffer from a similar type of schizophrenia as a child, which included rampant stuttering and his “marking” (through a Shona ceremony in his township) as the inheritor of the Marechera family “madness” (see Veit-Wild).
5. See Veit-Wild for various critical responses to Marechera.

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