Language Play and Humanism in Dambudzo Marechera's *The Black Insider*

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Introduction

Language is like water. You can drink it. You can swim in it. You can drown in it. You can wear a snorkel in it. You can flow to the sea in it. You can evaporate and become invisible with it .... Some take it neat from rivers and wells. Some have it chemically treated and reservoired. Others drink nothing but beer and Bloody Marys and wine but this too is a way of taking your water. The way you take your water is supposed to say a lot about you. It is supposed to reflect your history, your culture, your breeding, etc. It is supposed to show the extent to which you and your nation have developed or degenerated. The word 'primitive' is applied to all those who take their alphabet neat from rivers, sewers, and natural scenery—sometimes this may be described as the romantic imagination. The height of sophistication is actually to channel your water through a system of pipes right into your very own lavatory where you shake the hand of a machine and your shit and filthy manners disappear in a roaring of water. Being water you can spread diseases like bilharzia and thought. Thought is more fatal than bilharzia. And if you want to write a book you cannot think unless your thoughts are contagious (Marechera 1990:34)[1].

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[1] All subsequent page references will be to the 1990 Baobab publication of the novel.

The above passage from *The Black Insider* seems to me a poignant way to introduce a study of a novel in which the central argument is that language is central to any process of subject fashioning.

In *The Black Insider,* the narrator/protagonist (hereafter, 'Marechera', as this is the name/word by which he introduces himself later) presents us with a Faculty of Arts under siege from what appears to be a guerrilla war of independence in the Rhodesia of Ian Smith. He has taken refuge in one of the Faculty offices. All we know about the fighting is that it

> had been going on for a long time. In fact no one (I mean 'myself') could remember when the thing had begun, how it had begun, why it had begun at all, and finally who was supposed to be on whose side. All I know is that at one stage it was us blacks against whites. But somehow or other things had suddenly become complicated and it was no longer a black against white chess game. It was more like a kaleidoscope in which every little chink of colour in the shaken picture was fighting every other little chink. News agencies could no longer keep track of the alliances and counter-alliances, the neutrals and the non-aligned, the ferocious and the hyperferal, etc. (Marechera 1990:24).

We also begin to notice that the physical siege outside prompts another kind of siege in 'Marechera's' psyche, which forces him to reconsider the vexed question of the condition of humanity. What intensifies the interplay between the siege outside and the one in the psyche, is that both appear to have been abstracted from scripts, a mock American Western film script in the case of the former and, in the case of the latter, a literary-philosophical treatise, so that the boundary between what is taking place outside and what is taking place inside his mind becomes blurred. Indeed, as he observes, the 'faculty is the last desperate ditch of a state of mind bred in the tension of war' (Marechera 1990:31). This blurring, it would seem, is not fortuitous, but carefully staged by 'Marechera' in order for him to take full critical advantage of the distance allowed him by his 'entrapment', and the intellectual opportunity that such a distance promises. In any case, in his discussion with one of the interlocutors, an insider in the Faculty, the African Schweik, on the subject of reality and illusion, it turns out that the

term insider, with which Schweik had addressed him earlier, does not attract an opposite, that is, outsider. Rather, it relies on the system of differences that he invokes when he asks:

> What did you mean by 'insider'?
> His fingers drummed impatiently on the arm of the chair. He muttered:
> 'Does it matter? Inside-out is outside-in, but there's always bleeding. And hidden persuaders. Do you know how to make a man who walks away from his shadow? It is an illusion based on chemical preparation. A screen having the appearance of an ordinary white blind is shown. The performer stands behind this screen while the stage or room lights are turned off; a strong light behind him causes his shadow to appear on the screen; while he moves freely about, the shadow moves accordingly. No matter what position he takes, the shadow still appears on the screen; if he walks away from the screen, the shadow remains fixed ...' (Marechera 1990:75).

He proceeds to describe the technique, all the time keeping stage and off-stage indeterminable in terms of reality and illusion, even while it seems that the process fosters such a dichotomy.

The setting, in which 'Marechera' introduces us to the Faculty, is his room, on one of the walls of which is painted a mural depicting a jungle setting. Aside from the fact that this prepares us for the constant shifts in setting, it again foregrounds the impossibility of keeping the inside and the outside separate, and further reinforces the status of the novel as a philosophical treatise on issues ranging in nature and significance, from nation-making, through the human condition to the position of the intellectual in a context that does not seem to afford space for the intellectual. In the absence of that possibility, 'Marechera' proceeds to project an alternative via a series of dialogues with imaginary philosophical figures, Cicero and Otolith, and literary figures, from the classicists (Chaucer) through the romantics (Shelley) to the realists (Achebe) and the modernists (Conrad) in the form of a European and African inter-text. These are all representations of the shards constituting his fractured psyche. What he introduces to these philosophies and literatures, however, is a

carnivalistic code that borders on the fantastical, reminiscent of the notion of carnival that Mikhail Bakhtin identifies with the historical carnivals of the Middle Ages. The notion of carnival stems from the historical peasant carnivals that played a vital role in the lives of the ordinary people, who partook in the celebration of the carnival, in the process inhabiting two spheres in one carnival space, made up of, on the one hand, elevated religious dogmas of the Church, the trenchant hierarchical institutions, and the hardships of the consequent feudal labour, and, on the other, 'unrefined' peasant life.

In Bakhtin's terms, carnival is laughter, song, ritual celebration and via the latter, a way of legitimately parodying the institutions of authority, or, in his term, the Official. It is of a piece with Roland Barthes' (1991:44) *le sense obtuse* (the third meaning), which

> belongs to the family of puns, jokes, useless exertions; indifferent to moral or aesthetic categories (the trivial, the futile, the artificial, the parodic), it sides with the carnival aspect of things.

In this sense, carnival may appear to mimic and, indeed, to re-stage the peasants' conformity, when, in fact, what it re-stages is a parody of the conformism of daily life.

Let us consider the description of his setting, in particular the mural on one of the walls in the opening passage, and with that the confluence of the modern and the Stone ages where progression and regression, primitiveness and sophistication, are rendered implicit in each other:

> A fire-engine red chair had planted its four legs by the door. The pile of sex magazines resting on it ranged from *Playboy* to *Alpha*; a dairy-maid doll sat very primly on top of them. The naked light bulb still shone down upon the jungle mural which covered the far wall: A naked black woman was being pursued by a blood-red giant cat which was looking back over its shoulder at a brawny black archer who was aiming at it with an invisible bow and arrow. In the top center of the mural a myopic falcon held in its talons a Stone Age handaxe; its eye pierced towards the archer. Directly beneath it and slightly behind the cat a frozen zebra was simultaneously rubbing its

buttocks on a baobab and pawing the ground with its nose and hooves (Marechera 1990:23).

If we consider that outside his space there is what appears to be a war of independence, his description of his space is particularly odd, especially his drawing of the reader's attention to the pile of sex magazines on the *fire-engine red* chair with a dairy-maid doll sitting primly on top of them, and, later, his mentioning of the same sex magazines when he has to cover them with his coat so that Helen, one of the insiders of the Faculty who asks to move in with him, does not see them. Again, if we consider the violent pursuit and the disinterestedness of the zebra, 'simultaneously rubbing its buttocks on a baobab', we begin to see a connection between the war outside and the self-indulgence that the sex magazines and the zebra presuppose. Is it not possible, then, that he is asking the reader to view the war outside as another self-indulgent act? Considering that the war taking place outside is a nationalist war, and that he expresses his disillusionment with the ideals of nationalism:

It's a pity nation-making moves only through a single groove like a one-track brain that is obsessed with the one thing. It is not enough to be in power but to be power itself and there is no such thing except in the minds of people with religious notions. We are a devastated garden in a time of drought in which only those weeds grow which are lean and hungry, like Cassius. The multitudes are thick with grey hairs. Their empty bellies propel them to the immediate source (Marechera 1990:37),

it should not surprise us, it seems to me, that the war outside should be seen in the terms of the self-indulgence prefigured inside his space. Indeed, the mock Shakespearean drama that depicts post-independence leaders in trivial banter about their own sense of self-importance bolsters his case on the futility of independence as liberation:

Marota: What about the attack on Zambia? He said we all agreed on it. That cuts us off from whatever support Africa ever gave us.
Bishop: I do not need that kind of support.

Marota: But the masses -

Bishop: I am the masses ... Have I not engineered the first black and white government without a Congo or an Angola? What are you worrying about? I am black and you are black but do I know whether your soul is with the devil or with God? These who strike at the heart of God's country have renounced religion. They are communists. Devils. That is why I agreed to let our troops attack the Zambian bases. (Music)

Marota: You carry your God too high above the trees. The people cannot see him. All they see is the smoke and shrapnel of their own kind being killed at your orders.

Bishop: I am the people. And I have the best advisers; that professor who wrote *On Trial For My Country*. Right now I can see myself this day centuries to come being dragged into the dock on trial for God's own country.... (Marechera 1990:38f).

The Bishop, a reference to Bishop Muzorewa, who contested power with Canaan Banana, who went on to become the first Prime Minister of post-independence Zimbabwe, and the professor, Stanlake Samkange, the author of *On Trial For My Country*, are simultaneously a reference to the all too familiar story of post-independence African states, in which intellectuals were compromised by the promise of a benevolent and classless nationalism. Nonetheless, I want to recall the point I made above regarding the form in which the dialogue is presented, for it is here that 'Marechera' makes an ironic intervention, by posing another question that is implicit in the stage directions: the Bishop's violent intentions are spoken to the accompaniment of 'Music, Enter (Ian) Smith and his Train, Exeunt Smith and Bishop and the Train, Exit Citizen' (Marechera 1990:39f). It is not so much the deconstructive mock Shakespearean framework in which the political drama of post-independence is inserted that marks the force of this ironic intervention, as the de-naturalization, as it were, the ritualisation of official political ceremony. It is thus my contention that, given the prominence in the novel of the figures of pun, irony, buffoonery, mock ritualism, and such-like figures via which the ceremonial, the official and/or the authoritarian is read, a more pointed engagement with some of the ideas proffered by Bhakhtin on language and authority is salutary. Indeed, Bakhtin reminds us that, with the

advent of modernity, the ancient carnivals migrated into literature, most notably, the novel. Morris (1994:107) observes as much when he asserts that, carnival in literature

> prove[s] remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under Capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into 'rotten cords' and the previously concealed ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man and human thought was being nakedly exposed.

Puns, ironies, satires and all modalities of meaning that foreground contradiction, indeterminacy and language play are, in *The Black Insider*, part of the 'novel resting uneasily under every human skull', which, unfortunately, is often reduced, by those 'who think that objectivity is possible where such things as language rule' (Marechera 1990:91). However, as 'Marechera' (1990:91) tells us, even though

> Roland Barthes has tried to blow up that balloon, and quite successfully too... they have, of course, an in-built eject-mechanism and he will probably find himself falling into oblivion without a parachute.

However, it is not so much that 'Marechera' wants to play down Barthes' importance, as to highlight the possible objectification or reification of his linguistic terms. Barthes postulates the existence of three types of images or textual spaces. Firstly, we have the denotative, which is strictly dependent on linguistic codification and linguistic interpretation. Secondly, there is the connotative, which is dependent upon that which is culturally and sociologically construed and is reliant upon its associated symbolism. In between these two systems, is what he calls *le sense obtuse*. In *The Black Insider*, it seems to me, this third meaning is brought about by the play on the word 'black', both in the title of the novel and in its representation of 'Marechera', a word that simultaneously identifies the narrator/protagonist *as* the black insider among other insiders, *and* as a sort of blind (or dark) spot inside—or at the core of—the light that the other insiders hope to shed

on the subjects of their discussions. In this connection, the description of the Faculty as

> small when seen from the outside; but [from the inside] stupendously labyrinthine with its infinite ramifications of little nooks of rooms, some of which are bricked up to isolate forever the rotting corpses within (Marechera 1990:25),

becomes, perforce, the description of the encircling 'darkness' that becomes the novel's own narrative abyss. If the other insiders are to be regarded as hosts to a disobliging 'black insider', then, as he tells us, 'it is not to the advantage of a parasite to cause serious harm to its host, as thus it is likely to suffer itself' (Marechera 1990:33). Thus, the staging of the debate in *The Black Insider* tracks the contours of the Faculty itself, in the sense that, like the Faculty, nothing can be presumed from the pseudo-transcendentalism of Cicero, the visionary poeticism of the African Schweik, the grim realism of Liz, the corrosive cynicism of Otolith and the existentialism of Helen.

'Waiting on the end of the world'? Existentialism, Nihilism and *The Black Insider*

> There is a bomb on our roof. It dropped there on Sunday night. When I climbed on to the roof to look at it I could hear a faint humming sound purring inside it. The planes came over early in the evening .... I've never lived under the shadow of a bomb before (Marechera 1990:44).

The Black Insider is a novel that is saturated with apocalyptic visions and caricatured observations of the general state of the human condition living under the threat of a 'bomb'. The 'bomb' on the roof of the Faculty is at once the vanishing point of a certain paradigm, the touchstone for the 'predestined horror' that Otolith believes the condition of humanity to be, and the unlikely source of a community caught in an existential situation; as 'Marechera' tells us, which 'had Helen decide to 'move in with me' (Marechera 1990:54).

The dialogues between the insiders bear testimony to the complex labour of self-reflection by their very inter-disciplinarity, and allow for the strategic interventions by 'Marechera', whose 'role' in the novel is to test the intellectual possibilities that such a collision promises. It is also in these voices that the opportunity presents itself for him to take advantage of another collision, so to speak, between the war as event and as cause for sustained reflection, or, in his words, between the 'war [that is] no longer a mere fact of life... but life itself', and the implications of this for 'the bleak theatre of the (Faculty) room where every little action—because performed in isolation and solitary confinement—gleamed with self-consciousness' (Marechera 1990:26). *The Black Insider* is, thus, an existential novel. Yet, unlike the existentialism of Helen who, 'Marechera' tells us, on seeing on his television set a picture of 'a black military personage supervising the extermination of his enemies ... yawned [and said] It was the same old story. If hawks have always had the same character, why should you suppose that men have changed theirs?' (Marechera 1990:27), *The Black Insider* is a novel that wills the human, albeit in the moment of its symbolic decay. If, for the novel, the 'people in the house are all refugees in one way or another, exiles from the war out there ... pilgrims at the shrine of the plague', and if the 'place stinks of psychological wounds', then the point he makes, that this gives the place 'a human fragrance' (Marechera 1990:25), must, at the very least, reinforce the optimism of the novel's will to track, rather than to dismiss, the symbolic putrefaction of which it speaks. It is in this sense that Antonio Gramsci's observation that nihilism and/or its analogies collapse too uncritically the optimism of the will and the pessimism of the intellect, is illustrated.

However, Helen, more than any of the other insiders, is 'Marechera's' Muse. She may lean dangerously towards nihilism but, of much significance, is how she looks into the abyss and suspends her descent into it, that prevents him, and, indeed, the novel, of which he is both agent and *provocateur*, from falling into it. What is apparent in Helen's existentialism is that it illustrates the proximity of human thought—the testament of human solitude—to the broad sense of violence, the supervision of death as a guarantee for one's life. Her smiling of 'what she thought was a Mona Lisa smile', soon after making her point about the inherent violence of human existence, recalls, for 'Marechera', 'the Dark-Ages-painting by that

Italian barbarian' (Marechera 1990:27). When placed in the broad context of *The Black Insider*, this reference to the Mona Lisa is significant, particularly when considering that the

> deeply introverted and obsessional nature of Leonardo's art is fully revealed in the Mona Lisa. He kept this picture by him until his death and soon became the object of a far greater personal concern, a kind of testament in paint (Jacobs 1980:75).

Similarly, in her eventual 'death' in the novel, Helen becomes his testament to another side of life, and her voice imparts to the novel as a whole, like the Mona Lisa, a 'sense of mystery from which the work emanates' (Jacobs 1980:75). Thus, the correlation drawn in the novel between 'Marechera' and Da Vinci, as creators of mystery, testifies to his idea of the novel as a 'big toe with little toes ranged down one of its sides' (Marechera 1990:24), as the Mona Lisa, 'an almost androgynous human being correspond[ing] to a purely personal ideal', was for Da Vinci (Jacobs 1980:76). The interplay between personal and public discourse is tangible throughout *The Black Insider*, which is, to be sure, the interplay between 'Marechera' the word/name by which the narrator/protagonist introduces himself to Liz, and Marechera the protagonist of another, but not different, autobiographical text. Thus, we find, interspersed with the forced sedentary existence of the insider, the worldly migrant from whom the former draws its textual sustenance.

The Black Insider, Dialogism and the Orders of Discourse

M.H. Abrams (1999:62) conceives of Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogue, and of the dialogic, in the following terms:

> To Bakhtin a literary work is not (as in various *poststructural* theories) a text whose meanings are produced by the play of impersonal linguistic or economic or cultural forces, but a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices, or modes of discourse, each of which is not merely a verbal but a social phenomenon, and as such is a product of manifold determinants that are specific to a class, social group, and speech community.

Barring the somewhat inflexible identification of the speech act with the grand categories of class, social group and speech community, which remains Bakhtin's cumbersome traditional Marxist inheritance, Bakhtin's view of the social is usefully tempered with the irreducible 'dialogic interaction of multiple voices' (Abrams 1999:62). It is with this last point in mind, that I now turn to the epistemological thresholds on which the insiders present their cases, and the subtle pointers that the narrative interjections introduce in-between speech acts to contend, cast doubt, and/or to relocate the discussion to other textual and social landscapes to which the dialogues must 'respond'.

We enter the active space of 'Marechera' through Helen's visit, and, with this, the novel shifts from the mere description of its setting to an analysis of the co-implication of solitude—being for oneself—and community, or being for oneself in the presence of others. This is evident in the realisation that 'having people around me made me feel at ease. There are possibilities, choices, alternatives only when one is with others' (Marechera 1990:26). Yet, Helen 'can't read or write' (Marechera 1990:26), which accentuates, for 'Marechera', the existential dilemma, which is that to be with others is, ostensibly, to be alone. As such, it is hardly surprising that in the presence of Helen, he conceives of his loneliness with increased intensity: 'But now, utterly alone in action and state of mind, every little thing has its season and every little purpose has its own downright good time' (Marechera 1990:26).

It is important not to lose sight of the paradox implied above with regard to such terms as self/other, solitude/company, individual/community, and such-like relations, for it is in the breaking down of the binary structure that they inform—Helen's presence-absence—that 'Marechera' proffers his thesis that,

> what we see, being our sight, has no objectivity and cannot be of itself but there it is, aghast at the end of sense where our perception seeks to fuse with the concrete that is always *just* out of grasp [e.a.] (Marechera 1990:32).

He continues in this vein to propose that:

It is not so much what is unimaginable as what we cannot imagine that frames each individual human experience. Words evoke more than that which is there to be evoked. Imagination has the same edge over mere experience. And yet man is rooted only in what is there, beginning with birth and death and the state of his guts. The infinite is best expressed inexpressibly, suggestively, negatively. Human capacity is, in reverse, a definition of the impossible that incredibly surrounds us. We are what we are not, is the paradox of fiction. What is not observed, sharply observes that which is. What is not said, qualifies all that is said. Each circumstance comes into focus when we adjust the lens, making reality a series of parallel foci rather than a sharply outlined human epic whose every detail is simultaneously in focus (Marechera 1990:32).

I have quoted at length 'Marechera's' development of his thesis, for it sets the tone for both *The Black Insider* as a kind of narrative 'strip-tease'—in one of his interventions later in the novel, he observes how 'Homer does ... a strip-tease of the ancient Greeks' (Marechera 1990:82)—and the frame of his subsequent engagement with his interlocutors. It also characterises the modernism with which the novel is encoded, which, on the level of form, extends its particular intervention. Just as there is need to de-automatise the human through language, language itself, and the modes in which its rhetorical dimension has been given more prominence—the epic and the *Bildungsroman*, amongst others—requires critical vigilance; otherwise, as he tells us, it becomes merely 'an attitude' (Marechera 1990:36). Elaborating on the automatisation of the human in language, and language in rhetoric, he observes that:

My studies have made me my own jester. I cannot say anything without striking an attitude. I tried to love and found it an attitude deep within myself. I tried to hate and that too I found to be an attitude, nailed firmly down to my gut. Everything is an attitude, a sign. Pity, cruelty, good, evil, they are all attitudes, mere jack-in-the-box that suddenly spring out of me. I woke up one day and looked at the things I had always looked at, things like the sun, the clouds, a street, a dustman, a tree, a toilet roll, a bishop, an overcoat. Each

single thing was suddenly an attitude utterly complete in itself, abstracted in its own language (Marechera 1990:36).

The above bears traces of the material against which Bertolt Brecht developed his concept of alienation, by which he meant, in the case of his practice as a dramatist, a well considered critical distance that a dramatist must foster between the audience and actors and between actors and their roles, as the Formalists before him meant by defamiliarisation—though, of course, with a formal, rather than a social, context in mind.

While his brief meeting with Helen is significant, in the sense in which it provides the initial impetus for his subsequent engagement with the history of ideas, and their implications for his immediate present, it is the 'chance' meeting with the other insiders at Liz's 'tea party'—which is essentially a meeting of disciplines—that inaugurates a debate under a different kind of 'bomb'. If we consider, in light of this last point, his narrative diversion to his years as a student and exile in England, prior to this meeting, and that at some point after he had been 'sent down in disgrace' from Oxford, he found himself spending 'three nights on the roof of the English Faculty library' (Marechera 1990:31), which is the same place that the 'bomb' occupies on the roof of the Faculty of Arts in which they are trapped, then it would perhaps not be farfetched to consider this diversion as signalling a strategic displacement of a bomb that merely mimics the panic of an unexamined existence. In this connection, it should hardly surprise us that Cicero would point this out, during his conversation with 'Marechera':

> Is it not strange and uncommon that we can talk like this in the very midst of bombs and bullets and disease? It is not. The imagination reaches only that which is just beyond the grasp of human capability. No More. If our acts were really strange to ourselves and to our imagination then we would indeed understand what insanity is. For we are only a minute fraction of the spectrum of the impossible and the possible. Hence such of *what we know of as real life is limited within the thin thread of colour in which we have positioned ourselves in the spectra of the universe* (e.a.) (Marechera 1990:46f).

Now, the introduction of, and conversation with, Cicero, raises these

questions quite elaborately. Cicero's dress code is a visual template on which the novel grafts a post-Aristotle dramatic thesis, by way of deconstructing the model of 'real life' that Aristotle's actors must imitate:

> He actually wears a toga and a bowler hat. He walked into the room like a Royal Shakespearean Company public relations stunt. He, in fact, studied at RADA and did some minor roles in *The Satyricon* and in *The Golden Ass* for an obscure provincial company in the back yard of Scotland...There is in his right eye a dusky Latin glint which is perpetually piercing the marrow of whomever he is talking to (Marechera 1990:45).

Cicero starts his discussion by installing an Aristotelian thesis, that 'real life being the essence of drama ... means every instant of our lives is a complete play in itself' (Marechera 1990:45), which he then proceeds to deconstruct, by rescuing it from its inflexible classicism, and bringing it on par with the idea of infinity that 'Marechera's' strategic interventions propose. In this connection, in Cicero we are not so much in the presence of Aristotle as such, as in the presence of the de-totalisation of his (Aristotle's) grand dramatic scheme, in which drama reproduces the given surfaces of 'life'. Indeed, Cicero is forced through constant interrogation, which includes 'Marechera' shaking his 'head up and down, from side to side' (Marechera 1990:45), in a gesture of assent and dissent, to complicate the exteriorism of Aristotle's thesis, by forcing it to account for the processes that operate under and beyond the surface of 'real life', but which nonetheless constitute its texture. If, as he (Cicero) says, 'Our very bodies are composed of neat cellular dramas whose total tumult is a man in the act of saying "I am ill" or "Good Evening"' (Marechera 1990:47), and if we consider his substitution of the subjective position for Aristotle's authorial one, then the pathos enclosed in Aristotle's 'great tragedy', which is a consequence of an unproblematic passage from art to real life, is undercut. His view that even the 'stones upon which we stand and call planets and mine and grind into settings for our human dramas are themselves always in the act of their own dramas, spinning around the sun and eclipsing and disintegrating into meteorites' (Marechera 1990:48), highlights this will to a more complex relationship between art and life, and warns against the seduction of totality.

Cicero recounts the consequences of this, when he observes that,

> While we, immersed in the minutes of our last rehearsals (what we
> call tradition, civilization) think only of our own lines and footnotes,
> perhaps the grand drama of all the things we do not take into account
> is itself approaching a climax whose debris and shrapnel will
> devastate us (Marechera 1990:45).

While he retains the idea that, even the occluded drama in Aristotle is a
grand one in its own right, his insistence on the things that are not taken into
account is salutary. In any case, he is inevitably only a voice that must be
tested against the scepticism of the novel. Indeed, the novel does this by
pitting Cicero against Liz, whose attitude to Cicero, to whose presentation
she has been listening, is that of disdain. She introduces herself via her
discipline, which is also the position from which she seeks to dismiss what
she considers Cicero's obscurantism:

> I did not learn linguistics and Old English from gazing at the smoky
> sky. The kind of reason I know is not learnt from gaping at scenery,
> neither does it grow on trees. And certainly the kind of feeling one
> 'absorbs' from the Victoria Falls is not to be encouraged in anybody,
> let alone a child. I was once nearly eaten alive by a lion in the
> Serengeti Park. Though I was petrified I remember quite well what I
> felt looking at those great jaws and I know I did not like it. All this
> about intense and vivid apprehension of life is pure twaddle. One
> may as well learn one's alphabet from sewers as from water-colour
> scenery. It's no use building the creative 'if' into one big system and
> labelling it the Romantic Image. There are too many loopholes in it.
> If you absorb too much of the sun you get sunburnt. If you absorb
> too much water you drown in it. If you absorb too much of the cold
> you freeze and get chillblains. If you absorb anything you better
> watch out it doesn't infect you with all sorts of diseases. It's all very
> well talking about reveries when a snake is crawling up your leg. But
> go on, Mr. Cicero, I find you very interesting (Marechera 1990:70).

> Yet, her introduction by 'Marechera' is significant, not least of

which the significance of the contrast that he draws between her transparency and Cicero's English-upon-Roman-upon-Greek-upon-modern minimalism palimpsest:

> For the first time I looked at her, seeing her as she was. A thin face and thin stringy hair both set precariously on an onion-shaped body that rested uneasily on a pair of thin scanty legs. The gold earrings squinted with myopia. But it was her ears which struck me the most about her. They were a shrunken version of the elephant kind, waving slightly with the rise and fall of her carefully modulated voice. And she was pale, paler than the whitest ghost in a girl's romance. Her long, slender fingers were almost transparent. Looking at her thin white face that was set like a skin of water you could've sworn that you could see the fragile skull underneath and even the grey impression of the brain imprinted eerily on the weak-seeming skull (Marechera 1990:48).

And again:

> As she sipped her tea I thought for one ghastly moment that I could actually see (as she swallowed it) the tea going down into her in one evergrowing brown stain so pale and pink was her beaux-arts frock (Marechera 1990:48).

Her brief introductory exchange with the narrator/ protagonist who, at this point, and for the first time, introduces himself as 'Marechera', is also interesting in this regard:

> 'And you, Mr-?
> 'Marechera', I said.
> ...
> 'What do you do?'
> 'Stories and fictions' I said vaguely.
> She looked vaguely at my face with her extended finger.
> 'Those who do, do; those who can't teach' she said and added wonderingly: 'I've never met any black writers. Are you angry and

polemic or are you grim and nocturnal or are you realistic and quavering or are you indifferent and European? Those are the categories, I think', she said (Marechera 1990:49).

Indeed, the point that the writer Marechera made in an interview with Flora Veit-Wild, returns with a parodic vengeance, that is:

> I think I am the *Doppelgänger*, whom, until he appeared, Africa had not yet met. In this sense, I would question anyone who calls me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you. For me, the direct international experience of every living entity is an inspiration to write. That is why it seems to me always a waste of time to waste anybody's life in regulations, in ordering them.

Thus, as 'Marechera' watches Liz and Cicero 'on the brink of a conversational wrestling match which I did not think he would win', it is a fitting tribute to Liz that he ['Marechera'] 'sat on a cushion in front of the girl [Helen, who had 'reached out from nowhere and touched his face'] and stirred a cup, wondering at the confusion inside me' (Marechera 1990:49).

I pointed out earlier that, in my view, Helen features in the novel as 'Marechera's' Muse, in the way that her virtually quiet presence, as the Mona Lisa of Leonardo Da Vinci, prompts and defeats the objects of art. She assures him that she 'won't disturb [his] writing at all. I know how not to. And it's important you must go on writing. I will be doing my drawing. I draw quite well but not yet as well as I want to so I have lots there to do', (Marechera 1990:50) which immediately recalls for 'Marechera' his own attempt to write her: 'I remembered what I had written about her in the slick and hypocritically honest way about 'invisible wound bleeding in her mind' to make her like that' (Marechera 1990:50). This idea of art reflecting on art, Helen's art seeking impossible perfection without naming its subject, and 'Marechera's' already foreclosed by its objectification of its subject, forces the latter to review his literary lexicon, particularly where Helen is concerned:

> I had never 'understood' women and I am never likely to do. I detest

understanding anyone that way. I cannot even say I know anything about my feelings for particular women. I usually close the subject to myself by saying that I do not want to know... Perhaps I was too early in contact with the bookish nature of it all. Even Jane Austen's notions about it among the landed gentry and middle class were as much a textbook of it as *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. At the same time there was the Dickensian lorgnette of it; the Lorna Doones and Becky Sharps; and the *Middlemarch* versions and they were all somehow mixed up with the more masculine preoccupations of heroism, manhood, trial by strength which in effect led to ideas about worthiness and unworthiness. And there was the Henry James effect which at once elevated it and curiously enough debased it. It all led back to dissections of art and artistic feeling especially the type in Thomas Mann where disease and corruption or consumption are at the very guts of beauty (Marechera 1990:51).

Yet, 'Marechera' brings no spoils with him from this literary history, which would allow him to redraw the virtual silence that Helen poses. What rescues him is what he borrows, by implication, from Helen herself, her earlier statement that 'I draw quite well but not yet as well as I want to so I have lots there to do' (Marechera 1990:50). The impact of the thrice-repeated 'I watched her go' (Marechera 1990:51), 'Yes, I watched her go with something like self-loathing' (Marechera 1990:52), and 'I watched her go without misgiving' (Marechera 1990:53), is reminiscent of Barthes' idea that art is at its profoundest when it is pensive, when it thinks. I want to extend this point, for it represents the last possibility for a discussion that is less concerned with the coherence of its logic, but, rather, with the possibilities that the very idea of discussion promises. 'Marechera' explores this in the person of a sedentary figure, the African Schweik, who, almost throughout the duration of the discussions, 'looked smilingly at everything that passed' (Marechera 1990:72). In his elaboration of his notion of art, which he bases on the photographs of Sergei Eisenstein, Barthes proposes two types of context in which responses can be made. One is what he calls the *studium*, by which he means the cultural and social expectations from documents that lay claim to the object world and its attendant social and cultural dimensions. The *studium*, according to Barthes, marshals all

available evidence on which it relies for its validation. A war photograph, for example, will draw its boundaries around notions of horror, aggression, suffering, victory, unity, blood, and similar images that can immediately be grafted onto a social landscape without the irony that profound art must generate. The second, he calls the *punctum*, by which he means the unlikely aspect of the image that, in his words, 'pierces' one outside of the field of visual expectation and socio-cultural validation. The *punctum* requires no evidence, for it is not the image in its totality but, rather, the glimpse of an unlikely aberration, or of something out of place and out of line with the evidential force of a given image—a missing tooth or feet sticking out of a covered dead body—that is at stake. In this sense, Barthes would look for the fictional in fiction, rather than the documentary force with which expository discourse has been imbued. If 'Marechera' brings no spoils from the Victorian literary canon, it is then remarkable that, as the point comes through quite forcefully in the above perusal of the shifts that are not quite shifts in the conception of the subject of art, the limits are already set, so that what promises to be Jane Austen's departure from the homogeneity of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, becomes a textbook—or by the book—form of departure. This form of departure mimics Cicero's attempt to break the monotony of Liz's disarming realism through impressionism, an attempt that is already trapped in its impatience to *get to the point*, which, paradoxically, is what Liz wants to achieve from another critical path.

On turning around, he almost collides into Otolith:

> He was dressed in black Elizabethan dress, like a single-handed performance of Hamlet on a cramped stage. He was of middle age, coal black, disillusioned, transfigured, damned, and as it seemed prey to his nerves. I was to learn that he was a barrister who had somehow seen an inexplicable light on his way to the courts and had from that time totally changed his life ... He did not so much believe in anything as in the uselessness of human beings in so far as their condition was a kind of predestined horror. For instance, the bomb on our roof did not surprise nor affect him in any sense (Marechera 1990:53).

This 'collision', like those with Cicero and Liz, poses another

disciplinary problem, one that recalls post-colonial literary disillusionment, except that Otolith is set on a nihilistic course in which horror must be actively sought and rewarded. Described as 'dog-eared', he brings with him the image of an old book which is over-read, over-analysed and over-used, the mental make-up of a cynic. His experience as a barrister, which he recalls to 'Marechera' with the authority of one who, unlike Helen, has not only looked into the abyss, but has found it an appropriate setting for a post-colonial drama of which he sits in judgement, says as much:

> '... I once had the honour of meeting one of Zambia's executioners. A white chap. He had retired and returned to pastures green in Rhodesia on a fat pension. He gave a most entertaining grisly picture of the gallows. He had with the patronage of the government there executed some three hundred black condemned men. There were all kinds—murderers, armed robbers, rebels, rapists. Now he is himself tormented by gout and ulcers and worries more about his wine and food than all the ghosts of the men he hanged. What kind of a man becomes an executioner, do you think?'
> I frowned trying to think.
> 'Unimaginative' I replied: 'Without funds. Practical. Totally unsentimental. One who is not his father or his mother unless they too had been in the trade'.
> But he shook his head.
> It takes an awful lot of humanity to execute another human being. This particular white hangman in the employ of a black government was extremely imaginative, of independent means (at the beginning), crassly romantic, and doted on his mother. In spite of all this he was good at his job and never pretended to hate it. After all, it was well paid (Marechera 1990:56).

Yet, on reflection, it is with this meeting that another, more sustained meeting between the implied 'Marechera' and the historical Marechera begins, and if the Faculty of Arts is a metaphor for a more constrained form of exile, then the collision with Otolith is the extension of this metaphor, without the terminal lexicon with which 'Marechera' identifies the exhausting, because circular, dialogues taking place inside the Faculty,

particularly between Cicero and Liz, with both of them defending the internal coherence of their disciplines, impressionism and realism respectively. Consider, for example, the following:

> 'Nothing exists but as it is perceived', he (Cicero) insisted.
> 'That's Shelley', Liz said smiling.
> 'For instance, children do not distinguish what they see and feel from themselves. Their nature is dissolved into the surrounding universe and the universe is absorbed into their being. And they have an unusual intense and vivid apprehension of life. Each is at once the point and the circumference; the point to which all things are referred, and the line in which all things are contained. Love-'
> 'But familiarity shields us from such tedious gazing, don't you think?' Liz asked unperturbed. 'All this unfathomable astonishment would put quite a strain on our eyes I should think. If life was really like that and all feeling and reason was simply the combined result of a multitude of impressions planted by reiteration, then we may as well pack up and close down our schools and universities', she said.
> 'They are closed', he said grimly.
> 'That's just this funny war' (Marechera 1990:70).

Later in this exchange, 'Marechera' notes that 'Cicero did not know when he was losing' (Marechera 1990:71). I have ventured the argument that the impetus for a more sustained engagement with the broader question of post-colonialism begins with 'Marechera's' meeting with Otolith. However, I want to add that, it is not so much that Otolith provides such an impetus as, to borrow Joseph Conrad's apt phrase, the 'sinister backcloth' against which the 'tragic farce' is acted which has led to his absolute disillusionment. When, in concluding his case about the executioner, he says:

> And the law is, of course, the opinion of the citizen. And the citizen in Africa will not, of course, be denied his right to witness public executions, public scourgings, public amputations, public castrations, as long as some court or other has sentenced the victim to that. I was a barrister. I still am but I no longer practise. I found out too late that I was of a timid and squeamish nature. I could not

face the fact that the law is merely a screen behind which many a villain lurks. More crimes are committed within the law than against it. It is big business in Kenya. It is big business in Nigeria. In fact there is not one place in our continent where it is not so (Marechera 1990:56).

Yet, it is the hysteria, the 'exclamation marks of weariness which gleamed deep in the wrinkles of his face', which, in 'Marechera's' words, were complimented by 'that Elizabethan costume [in which] he could have been the horror which Kurtz saw at the *Heart of Darkness* Brussel's (*sic*) suburbia', that render the backcloth that Otolith provides particularly banal. Indeed, rather than have his case validated by the grim statistics he marshals with a breathless triumphalism to give it substance, that is, 'It is big business in Kenya. It is big business in Nigeria. In fact there is not one place in our continent where it is not so', he becomes the generalised horror that he projects onto the entire continent. Such is the banality of disillusionment, that the novel makes one last entry, in the form of the African Schweik, to proffer a less anxious critical departure:

I passed my eye over the room. In the far corner sat one who *looked smilingly at everything that passed*. He was dressed in an old tattered dressing gown that had certainly survived the rigours of the better part of the War. It looked like the kind of hardy trench-coat which would see a timid man through the missiles and bombs of dreams. At the same time it was like the one which Dostoevsky invented as the uniform of characters constipated by ennui and wretchedly cursed with manservants of insolent wit. The face was a long as it was broad; its outstanding feature was its unremarkabilty: two wide-apart beady eyes, a miserably crestfallen negro nose, and a mouth perpetually stretched into smiling by a vacant and unnatural void that glowed luminously beneath the dark skin. He caught my eye and nodded self-consciously.
He said in greeting:
'Dreadful world, isn't it? (e.a.) (Marechera 1990:72).

Not only does the African Schweik introduce into the novel a

worldly perspective but, also, a poetic mode of critical address that threatens to implode even Cicero's argument which, by an unfortunate paradox, rests on the very terms 'clarity and stability' (Marechera 1990:47) that he is happy to have 'Marechera' reject in their earlier discussion. Indeed, against the better judgement of the latter, that is, 'Cicero did not know when he was losing' (Marechera 1990:71), he is adamant that his case for impressionism must *rest*, which, needless to say, defeats it entirely or, more to the point, locks him in the finitude that is antithetical to impressionism. In short, the African Schweik closes ranks around Cicero and Liz, by rendering them as two aspects of the same expressionism, the former representing the particular and, the latter, the whole. When Schweik points out to 'Marechera' that he 'travelled widely in Europe before [he] came back home [and that the] expense was not worth it but [he] would not have missed the experience for anything', he returns us to the first description of the Faculty with its 'bricked up rooms to isolate forever the rotting corpses within', but, also, with its 'infinite ramifications of little nooks of rooms' (Marechera 1990:25), so that the structure that the dialogues have taken up to the point when he is introduced, mirror such closure and only the possibility of openness. Because Cicero's impressionism is ultimately caught up in the rhetoric of Liz's ridicule and condescension, that is, 'It's all very well talking about reveries when a snake is crawling up your leg', and 'But go on, Mr. Cicero, I find you very interesting' (Marechera 1990:70), he is ostensibly an insider whose 'outside' is an impressionism that cannot redeem itself from mere special pleading. He may not quite be a 'rotting corpse' yet, but he is not quite not one either.

Finally, what Schweik introduces us to, is the question of cultural and political migrancy, and, with it, the question of home, exile and return in post-colonial discourse, which is then taken up in the rest of the novel. I now want to turn to this question, and to the various theories that have been proffered to elaborate it.

Home and World in *The Black Insider*

The African Schweik enters the novel in the following terms:

> *Anonymous lanes* where misery treads unknown through the fog with cries as silent as pennies in the nether belly of a jukebox. Here none

scrutinizes the crescent moon but through a mist of desolation whose only sound drills into the skull phantasma of black multitudes sorrowing. The newly-born are condemned to seek *unborn routes* and wander through the pulsing cloudbreak toward the secret horror of the storm where old and cynical gods still dream where last they dreamed and fell in the darkened byways of tradition-tried hell. In the schoolroom marking their books I glean from my pupil's essays the disease soon to overtake their minds and plunge them hysterically straight-jacketed into the abattoir world of guns and meat-cleavers ....

An *empty house* on an *empty earth* creaked beneath the *prodigal's feet*. Only the land that's framed by the *empty blue sky* is enclosed like a brain in my skull. The dust that will reclaim me fashioned me; it falls like snowflakes upon everything in my life. When I stand still and look through the *pitch dark of myself*, I reach out for the *electricity switch which is not there* (e.a.) (Marechera 1990:73).

The recurrence of the word 'empty' in the above, signals the clearing of the redundant space of point and counter-point that has hitherto tied the novel to a narratological dead-end. The arid formalism of Cicero's thesis-counter-thesis-synthesis is superseded by the poeticism that grafts itself onto a liminal space that sets up boundaries, such as, 'home', 'earth', and 'world' at the very moment that it denies them the final word. This comment on migrancy is significant, particularly its implicit recognition that, an indissoluble dialectic subsists between the migrant and the borders that s/he has to negotiate, which pose very specific structural demands. 'Marechera' raises this point in his interjection on the question, when he points out that:

We are a continent of refugees; one day here, another day there; so much fodder for the boundary makers. There is no sense of home anymore, no feeling of being at one with any specific portion of the earth. As you said we have to seek unborn routes and these, like the evidence of ourselves, are yet to come. We live as though we are rehearsing our roles in a misty womb where we cannot see the text clearly but as it were remember vaguely the general theme of it (Marechera 1990:79).

I want to track this argument by considering two divergent positions in the scholarship of post-colonialism. Homi Bhabha (1994:1) taps into this argument when he announces that:

> It is the trope of our time to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond. At the century's edge, we are less exercised by annihilation—the death of the author—or epiphany—the birth of the 'subject'. Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism*....

In 'The potentials of boundaries in South Africa: steps towards a theory of the social edge', Robert Thornton (1996:136-156) argues that, to hasten to surpass neo-colonialism, to claim that imperialism's legacy has passed, and that it has retained no impact on the culture that conventional imperialism has 'left behind', is to deny its residual material impact, the evidence of which is the acquisitive culture and client state system that has continued to generate similar forms of class relations as in the period of active colonisation. In this sense, it is my view that, whereas *The Black Insider* does acknowledge the weakening of borders in the way in which Bhabha (1994:1), citing Martin Heidegger, sees them as places 'from which something begins its presencing', there is also a sense in which, for 'Marechera', the migrant will always be 'fodder for the boundary makers', (Marechera 1990:79) and these boundaries, to be sure, are economic. As such, he is cautious about Bhabha's culturalist generalisation that:

> The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organisational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions ... that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world (Marechera 1990:79).

The marked difference between the two migrants in the following encounter in London between 'Marechera' (who is quite close to the historical Marechera) and the black policeman who accosts him, is indicative

of the care that 'Marechera' takes not to elide the material implications of crossing boundaries. He tells us that:

> I came up from London where a meagre advance from my publisher saved me from the terror of Trafalgar Square when I was sleeping out in St James's Park and evading homosexual advances from the kind of guys who feed on homeless hippie types! I had gone there to sign the contract about the book and get the advance but time didn't seem to move and I didn't want to go to any of the other blacks I knew were in London. It's one thing to be comrades against whites and it's totally another thing to be penniless; the comrades would be suddenly struck by amnesia as far as knowing you went. So I hung around Trafalgar Square and St James's Park and there were hundreds like me without a penny or a roof anywhere in the world. I don't know how many times I stared at the pictures in the National Art Gallery. Or at the pigeons shitting on Nelson's head. And at the lions against which so many tourists were always being photographed.
>
> Then a black policeman stopped me one morning in St James's Park. He demanded to search the rucksack... He looked at the dirty grey hair on my dirty black head. His own was smart— legally groomed. He looked at my jeans and T-shirt; they were filthy beyond belief from sleeping on the ground in the rain with only the branches of trees to keep out the wetness. He demanded to see my letters from Heinemann. I gave them to him. He smiled a sort of Kojak wry smile and said sternly 'Keep out of trouble' (Marechera 1990:58f).

I have quoted at length from this encounter, particularly because it proposes a very specific way in which to talk about cultural and political migrancy. The individualism that is implied in Bhabha's subjectivism, does not account for the collective poverty that 'Marechera' alludes to in 'there were hundreds like me without a penny or a roof anywhere in the world' (Marechera 1990:58f). Indeed, Bhabha's (1994:1f)

> 'in-between' spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood ... that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself,

appear to be self-constitutive, and the financial access codes that lubricate them are downplayed. There is also a deliberate attempt on the part of 'Marechera' to highlight the multiple profiles that constitute the socio-cultural and the political-economic texture of border-crossing—tourists, sexual migrants, the unemployed—which it would be folly to theorise under the common and disarming rubric of 'the beyond' or the 'in-between'. 'Marechera' makes this apt observation regarding the nature of one particular 'in-between' space, the 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 unmistakeably (*sic*) non-racial way (Marechera 1990:66).

This observation simultaneously reiterates Bhabha's argument that 'border lives' must be lived 'beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities',—a point which the 'black faces ... eating impeccably African food' seem to have conveniently forgotten, though, of course, the fact that the food has been recommended by the *Guardian*, is an ironic reminder of the opportunism with which this impeccable African identity is occupied—and rejects his (Bhabha's) elision of a rigorous engagement with the real content of the 'in-between' space which, in the case of the above, is an insular and, as such, vacuous, non-racialism that is only sustainable against the backdrop of a paranoid social system. If we recall the incident of the encounter with the 'legally groomed' black policeman in St James's Park, it becomes particularly urgent that discussions of migrancy are taken beyond the notion of 'the beyond' that Bhabha proffers but never seriously engages.

It is with the last point in mind that I now turn to consider the terms whereby 'Marechera' confronts Bhabha's elision, by exploring the coincidence of the material and the cultural in the formation of the migrant subject, both intra- and inter-nationally. He does this by evoking the notion of the emperor's new clothes, thus linking migration to imperialism. The significance of this part of *The Black Insider* is that it acts as a closing argument, not so much in the sense of foreclosing on the dialogues that have hitherto only proposed conceptual possibilities as to give them substance by testing them against a range of texts that have imagined their communities along the lines of similar concerns as those of the insiders. Further to this, this part of the novel also sharpens its focus on the predicament of exile, which, paradoxically, also generates active debate without the baggage of social routine. The Faculty of Arts, with its 'bricked up walls', is a constant reminder throughout this final section of the hazards and limits of critical engagement with one's time and place. Earlier in the novel, during one of the narrative diversions, 'Marechera' observes as much regarding the paradox of exile as a simultaneously morally paralysing and intellectually ennobling place, the former being the response of those, like Liz, who still hope that after 'this funny war', the old disciplines will be re-installed:

> I found it congenial to my nature to live an insecure wandering life and this was fortunate because I had no money and this lack of funds meant that I would have no friends worth domineering, no wife worth lording it over, no house worth imprisoning myself in, and lastly no false sense of self-respect to think myself other than what I was: a penniless young writer who ought to know better (Marechera 1990:29).

Because at the centre of *The Black Insider* is a debate about the conditions of possibility for a different critical consciousness and, with it, a different approach to the relationships between the self and nation, the self and the world, and the self and its own assumptions about itself, it is my view that the following comment on the image of Africa that has been circulated and deconstructed all at once, must constitute 'Marechera's' last attempt at an analysis, and, if, as he says earlier, the 'faculty is the last desperate ditch of a state of mind bred in the tension of war', then the

following is a reminder that exile and return are saturated with the terms of empire:

> History is not something outside man, but man in his own merciless nakedness, in spite of the emperor's new clothes. Aye (*sic*) Kwezi Armah in his *The Beautiful* (*sic*) *Ones Are Not Yet Born* not only stripped the African image of its clothes but also forced it to undergo a baptism of shit. Okgibo's inexorable resculpting of our nakedness in the Pygmalion sense filled his homecoming with shadows of the conflict that would kill him. And Gabriel Okara, with his ear to its heartbeat, listened to the inner voice that was being stifled by the new style and the unheeded crumbling of the old historical walls. The voice penetrates to the innermost promptings of human accessibility which can find no meaning except brutal response in the man-made artefacts surrounding it. Here a chasm is exposed within the African image; our roots have become so many banners in the wind, with no meaningful connection with the deep-seated voice within us. But they have at the same time strengthened their grip on us: a new kind of fascism based on the 'traditional' African image has arisen. Ngugi is in jail, eating his grain of wheat. And here we are drinking tea in the rabble of the war (Marechera 1990:82).

Conclusion

Recent critical literature on Marechera's works, *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera* (1999) being the most comprehensive, has, in the main, placed almost exclusive emphasis on the combative nature of Marechera's relation to terms such as humanism, nationalism, Africanism, and other such terms that, with the advent of deconstruction and the 'post' theories, seem to lose their referential value. To some extent, it does seem that Marechera, particularly in his well-documented commentaries, has encouraged this sort of approach to his writing. Indeed, his famous statement on the position of his writing in relation to 'African' writing, that is,

> I think I am the *Doppelgänger* whom, until I appeared, Africa had not yet met. In this sense, I would question anyone who calls me an

African writer. Either you're a writer or you're not. If you're writing for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you (Veit-Wild 1999:34),

does seem to prompt an evaluation of his literary *oeuvre* as a blue-print for 'post' discourse: post-nationalism, post-humanism, post-Africanism, in the sense of 'post' as past or after.

This study has represented my attempt to rethink Marechera in the light of his representation of language in the opening quotation, where terms such as 'humanity' have been appropriated for ends that make 'the notion of the human more appealing than humanity'. As the opening quotation implies, for Marechera, the battles over these terms and the values that they define are, perforce, battles over language. In this sense, it does not seem helpful to me to search for a category in which to place Marechera's writing. *The Black Insider* is itself a complex and eloquent testimony to the redundancy of boundaries, even as it concedes that they will always be drawn nonetheless, and that, when they are, it will be presumptuous to pre-empt their characteristic presence-absence on the basis of an unexamined transcendentalism.

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