Published in The Writing of East and Central Africa Heinemann 1985

BLACK WRITING IN ZIMBABWE

No. 70

Until very recently it has been meaningless to speak of Zimbabwean literature in English. The history of the country from 1890 to 1980 was marked by a policy of teaching English at the expense of the vernacular languages, mainly Shona and Ndebele, for a socio-political context in which Zimbabwean blacks would have no cultural roots. Although oral literature maintained a reticent existence and the Rhodesia Literary Bureau encouraged writing in the vernacular so long as it was not critical of Government, there was no outlet in the country for a writer who wished to speak about the myriad complexities and plain injustices of Zimbabwe as he saw them. It was impossible for a local writer to confront Zimbabwe with an imaginative analysis of itself. The long absence of higher education for blacks and, since UDI, the presence of a politically sensitive censorship board, made serious creative writing in any language virtually impossible.[1]

Two writers are notable survivors in this oppressive picture, Arthur Shearly Cripps (1869-1952) and Doris Lessing (1919-).[2] Their work is exceptional among hundreds of novels and poems written by whites in the country who attempted in various ways to mythologise the colony as the new Arcadia or El Dorado. As a missionary Cripps committed himself without reserve to the blacks, and his poetry, novels and plays are testimony to his radical stance. His work reacted to the very forces that black writers were to tackle more personally many years later. As one critic has put it,

> Among over three hundred novels produced from Rhodesia since 1890, Cripps' work is unique. His contemporaries, Gertrude Page and Cynthia Stockley, commanded huge sales in Britain with novels that imaged Rhodesia as a place where Englishmen released from the distortingly genteel conventions of life at home could discover in themselves those qualities of their own nationalism which had made England great and with which they would create a British civilisation out of the wilderness. The Rhodesian frontier tested men and restored to them their lost manhood by providing them with a challenge and corresponding purpose. This myth (about Zimbabwe) still lingers on in the white Rhodesian psyche and Cripps (in his first novels at least) examines its validity in a way no other Rhodesian novelist has done. He establishes alternative images; Rhodesia is a bay tree country where the wicked flourish like the green bay tree of scripture; Rhodesia is a brooding earth waiting to avenge itself on those who have exploited her (sic).[3]

Similarly Doris Lessing destroys myths so copiously fostered by white writers with a social and psychological realism that alienates her principal characters. In their self-awareness they are victims of the truth that they have no place, no security, no identity with either the Europeans or the Africans. Her first novel, The Grass is Singing (1950) typifies tensions she was to explore in several novels and short stories about Rhodesia between the alienated white Mary Turner and the African, Moses, who is inscrutable to her but ubiquitous. The subtle but violent rapprochement between them is the imaginative prelude for an indigenous literature that will focus on the conflict as seen by blacks.

The birth of this literature has been painful and more protracted than in most African countries. Among the first novels by an African was Mutswairo's Feso written in Shona. It was published in 1956 by the Southern Rhodesia African Literature Bureau established in 1954. Mutswairo, referred to as 'a gifted young African novelist and poet' in the Chief Information Officer's Report for 1954, had his novel removed later from the list of recommended reading in African schools by the Ministry of Education.[4] When the novel came out in English in 1974, together with poems by Mutswairo, Chidavaenzi, Kousu and Herbert Chitepo under the title Zimbabwe, the book was banned. Once the Board of Censors was established in the 1960s the control on publication of writing by blacks was complete. Books to go were mainly political and historical. They included Shamuyarira's Crisis in Rhodesia (1965), Samkange's Origins of Rhodesia (1968), Sithole's Obed Mutezo: The Mudzimu Christian Nationalist (1970), Vambe's An Ill-Fated People (1972) and Mutasa's Rhodesian Black Behind Bars (1974).

Zimbabwe's most promising writer of fiction, Charles Mungoshi, had his first and best collection of short stories The Coming of the Dry Season (O.U.P. 1972) banned. When the right of appeal was taken up by the University English Department the Ministry of Justice ordered that the case be heard in camera. The appeal was turned down without reasons by the three white assessors. Thomson Tsodzo, a young Shona writer, was told by the Literature Bureau he would have to leave out of his Shona novel a chapter that had political implications if it was to be published.[5]

But no amount of offical vigilance could stop the desire among Africans to read African authors.[6] A survey of extra-curricular reading by African Sixth Form pupils in 1973 showed that among the most widely read books at that time was Achebe's Things Fall Apart.[7] Equally popular were James Hadley Chase and Ian Fleming, not surprisingly since so readily available in book shops. There was little awareness of the range of African writers but pupils at one of the largest African schools, Goromonzi, spoke of having African novels smuggled in to them from Zambia because they were so difficult to come by in Salisbury.

Such factors ensured a stunted life for indigenous literature and the progress of Zimbabwean writing was particularly slow under the Smith Government of the 1960s and 1970s. The first indication of black writing independent of official constraint was by a handful of black poets in African Parade during the 1950s, but there is no sign of an individual voice there. The poems have a strong religious base seen most explicitly in V.J. Kambalametore's line 'Move not a step without God'.[8] The nearest approach to a new note is Chaparadza's 'My skin may be black'.[9] The output of drama in English was even more slight. Although post-independent Zimbabwe has witnessed a vigorous interest in African drama, marked by several productions of plays from East and West Africa, there are less than half-a-dozen plays in English by local black writers.

Fiction has been the medium for most writers' vision of Zimbabwe. Most novels and short stories were written during the years of UDI, most by Shona writers, not Ndebeles, and most by exiles. Mungoshi is the notable exception who has remained inside the country and this shows in his more subtle treatment of institutional violence and the politico historical context. This may be a surface distinction, a difference of degree in capturing the complexities of life for the African in colonial Rhodesia. A comparison of the endings of his novel Waiting for the Rain (1975) and Mutswairo's English version of Feso (1974) will help identify differences and similarities. Mutswairo, who like Samkange has lived for many years in America, re-wrote Feso for the English version published in 1974. Howevever, it has a claim to be the first Zimbabwean novel in English because of its genesis in the original Shona text. Strictly, Ndabaningi Sithole's Busi, serialised in African Parade, comes first.[10] It centres on a young Ndebele girl, Busi, who helps to transform a rural school into a progressive religious centre for the community. Feso on the other hand, set in the 17th Century, takes the reader very much further back in time than any other Zimbabwean novel and thus seems to eschew concerns with colonialism. It deals with the conflict between two neighbouring tribes in Zimbabwe, the disdainful autocratic Vanyai ruled by Pfumojena (White Spear) and the Vahota who are a peaceful community concerned to find a worthy bride for their Chief, Nyan'ombe (Cattle Owner). One of the military commanders of the Vahota, Feso, takes on the task of wooing Pfumojena's daughter, Chipochedenga (gift of Heaven) for his chief. Although he succeeds, a war of retribution follows as if to fulfil the belief of the Vanyai that the Vahota are worthless. The Vahota rise again to overrun the Vanyai, disarm Pfumojena, and restore peace. After a praise song the novel ends:

> Thus sang Nyan'ombe and his warriors as they triumphantly returned to their own villages. They were met by women ululating, singing and dancing to meet their men - and some women warriors too - in the procession.
>
> The Vahota - now collectively called the Vatapa - built a new, even more prosperous and free society in peace, unimpeded by the threats and intrusions once imposed by the belligerent Vanyai. And many

marriages brought the "cousins" together.

And so, Nyan'ombe and Chipo, his wife, and all the people of the new Vatapa nation, lived happily together ever after, eating well, sleeping well, welcoming each new day with quiet joy and sure hope for the future.

Chokumarara and Manjira grew to mahood, having survived battle, and youth, to become great cattle breeders in the lush meadows of Mazoe.[11]

The language emphasises peace and the promise of unity between warring tribes. The present triumphs over the past because bitterness, arrogance and violence have been replaced by positive values of a free and peaceful society. On one level these features are handled like historical romance. Although the novel pertends to deal with the history of the Vatapa people, particulars of time and setting are less assertive in the text than the clash of feelings, values, and life style of the Vahota and Vanyai.[12] The arrogant Pfumojena represents that kind of political dictatorship that breeds fear and dissent among his people whereas Nyan'ombe wins universal respect by his dignity and counsel. Feso typifies the selflessness and daring of a loyal general and his exploits to find Chipochedenga raise the novel to heroic and national dimensions. The peaceful close confirms the romantic over the historical by intimating a resolution, a closedness undisturbed by historical forces for change. And it is this romantic feature that gives the novel such an open ended relation with its readers. It is a mythopoetic version of history. Hence, it can be read as a novel about Zimbabwe's recent past. Critics point to the allegorical possibilities of seeing Pfumojena (White Spear) and the Vanyai as symbolic of European rule, regarding the Vahota as a colonial leader might look upon the African, 'They regarded all others as decadent and treated them as their underdogs'.[13] The novel can be read as a confrontation between colonialism and Zimbabwe. The war is a war of liberation; out of violence is born an idyllically peaceful new nation.

The image of Shona society at the end of Feso contrasts in several important ways with the ending of Charles Mungoshi's Waiting for the Rain (1975). Here the setting is a Tribal Trustland village in Rhodesia in the early 1970s. Lucifer, working in the city, visits home for the last time before going overseas to continue his education thanks to help from missionaries. He is both the centre and reflection of cultural disintegration. At the close he leaves home to start his journey for Britain,

'Let's go, Father,' Lucifer says.

Like a false skin, the people peel back as the car moves forward. Looking at them in the rear-view mirror, Lucifer sees them in this order: his mother sitting down in the sand, his father's hand frozen in the air above him, Old Mandisa's hands cupped over her failing eyes, and Betty's turned back - going away with the tin of butter in her hands. All the village is behind and around them. But the Old Man and Old Japi are nowhere in sight.

The car surges forward as fast as the deep sand on the bush-track will allow. And Lucifer watches his home disappear behind a cloud of dust.

'You were born and grew up here?' the priest, Father Williams, asks.

'Yes.'

'Beautiful country,' he says.

Lucifer does not answer. They slow down to pass an ox-drawn cart. The people on the cart stare blankly at the passing car, and after it is well past them, they raise their hands as an afterthought. Father Williams waves back, saying: 'Beautiful people.'

Lucifer is staring ahead at a bird way up in the northern sky. He can't tell whether it's a vulture or a hawk.

'Such beautiful manners. I envy you, I really do.'

'They are all right,' Lucifer says, deciding that the bird must be a vulture.

The car picks up speed and Lucifer watches the leprous skin of his country slough off and fall back dead behind him. The speed of the car creates a pleasant breeze and Lucifer breathes deeply for a long while. In about two hours they will be in Salisbury.

Lucifer leans back and tries to look at his country through the eyes of an impartial tourist.[15]

The many facets of Lucifer's alienation, for example his disinterest in the missionary, his rejection of 'the leprous skin of his country', culminate in the irony that he has no relationship with his patron or 'his country'.

The points of intensity in the novel are not history or myth but the ironic conflict between individuals. For example between Lucifer and his parents, between Lucifer with his western scepticism and his brother Garabha with his drum and his cultural roots, and between each individual character and the community. The inner spiritual floundering of the family is confirmed by the harsh imagery of a countryside dry and hungry for the sustenance of life-giving rain. At the particular level Lucifer asks 'Must I live with what I no longer believe in?'[16] This lack of belief is symptomatic not of Sithole's assimilation of Mutswairo's positive heroism but of a distinct stream of writing in Zimbabwe where self-doubt and alienation are the stimulus of harrowing ironies.

The differences between the endings of Feso and Waiting for the Rain suggest two poles of writing, the one that manifests historical, social and political forces in external action, the other an exploration of internal awareness. The one is attentive to history, albeit through romance, to public conduct, to major figures whose actions speak for a whole people; the other explores personal attitudes, the deracination of individuals from their community and consequently the cultural disintegration of that community. The one is assertive in its hope, the other bleakly aware of spiritual drought. Yet common factors mark the two novels as emanating from a shared national consciousness. The once stable community, sustained by recognised cultural norms is challenged, in Feso blatantly, in Waiting for the Rain insidiously, by contempt. An alternative culture just two hours away in Salisbury or beyond the borders, not respecting the mores and values of Zimbabwe, yet too approximate not to engage with them, generates a crisis of survival in the local community. In Feso the people of Nyan'ombe are triumphant, in Waiting for the Rain they perish.

Clearly the genesis of Zimbabwean fiction has been similar to that in other African countries caught up in colonialism, but there are differences. Whereas Things Fall Apart (1958) sparked off much African literature in English north of the Zambezi written after independence, in Zimbabwe, as in South Africa, writers have been long preoccupied with the literary problem of how to write about the experience of subjection.[17] In more than a dozen Zimbabwean novels published since UDI writers have tried to capture the socio-political experiences of blacks in a context where the individual has found himself more and more isolated from his traditions and excluded by the whites. The political situation has never been static. The novels reflect an ever increasing pressure to alienate the individual countered by his growing need for violent reaction. The process goes through at least three stages. There are novels that look back to the first meeting with white settlers. This historical perspective, often fashioned by romance and myth, is less individualised than the writing of younger novelists who focus on the effects of colonialism. In this second category particular characters become prototypes of the myriad ways in which an individual can be cut off from any meaningful sense of community. In the last phase novelists see violence as inevitable and necessary, though not always meaningful. The three phases constantly interrelate, but the emphases are different.

The historical category includes Samkange's On Trial for My Country (Heinemann, 1966) and The Year of the Uprising (Heinemann, 1978). In the former an old Ndebele, Gobinsimbi, tells the story of two trials held concurrently, one of Lobengula by his people for selling out to the British, the other of Rhodes by his father, a Christian Minister, for his unscrupulous acquisition of power from Lobengula and the Ndebele in 1893. The book points up the initial conflict in the history of the colonial presence, the wily determination of Rhodes and the less resourceful Lobengula, together with the sense that the African has lost something crucial in the engagement. The Year of the Uprising deals with the Ndebele rising and the 'Chimurenga' of 1896 in which several parts of the country are said to have rebelled against the whites. A messenger, Mlabangana, brings news of Lobengula's death and his last wish,

> Tell uMlungulu to lay this head-ring on the head of my rightful successor. The Amandebele must carry on all the customs of our forefathers.[18]

But history has moved ahead of him. The settlers have acquired land and weapons, and have entrenched themselves to a degree that makes it impossible for 'the customs of our forefathes' or the discontent of the people to have a lasting place in the new colony. Although the uprising is defeated it is the start of the struggle for Zimbabwe. Baden-Powell says to Lord Gray, 'I am afraid that the whites here have learnt nothing from this rebellion. There will be another round, I tell you. And when that takes place, I am not sure the white man will win.'[19] The novel begins with the alternatives mentioned above: will the people survive or perish.[20] The plea to spiritual powers for physical sustenance, particularly rain, prompts the contrapuntal theme of spiritual survival against colonialism. The novel has a veneer of historical accuracy, but the emphases is on historical processes rather than historicity. As with Mutswairo's novels Feso and Mapondera Soldier of Zimbabwe (Three Continents Press, 1978) the fiction strives to locate the action by realist details but this is a fictional technique that should not be mistaken for historical accuracy. A make-believe history is foregrounded, not to be analysed but to authenticate the effects of history on individuals and peoples. The determination of whites like Rhodes and Jarvis, set against the traditional religion and customs of the Ndebele and Shona is shown rightly as guileful, and increasingly ruthless. The greater their blindness to their own Christianity and to the human and national damage they do the more forceful is the novel's depiction of the spirit of resistance by heroes like Makoni. What the text says has been destroyed; the rebellion is, in effect, validated as praiseworthy. Its spirit deserves to triumph. The spirit of that past implies and explains Zimbabwe's struggle in the 1970s. If we examine outside sources, what is written is not what happened but, by the use of reports, eye-witness accounts and other historical techniques, Samkange gives the illusion of history.[21] Thus the narrative confirms, by its seeming historical authenticity, what is in fact its main concern. That is, a moral protest against history, particularly the violence that was brought to the country.

Most of the novels are not so expressly historical. The main body of writing has centred on the effects of colonialism. Some deal with oppression and domination, others with assimilation of the new culture into tradition. Ndabaningi Sithole, the Ndebele novelist, for example, while explicitly conscious of traditional customs and beliefs, shows the advantages of Christianity to the old order. Busi is a magazine serial about a young girl and her schoolmaster husband, Moyo, who survive customs that are treated by the novel as senseless, to become progressive Christian leaders of their community. The Polygamist (The Third Press, Joseph Okpaku, 1972) though similarly painstaking to explain tribal customs, is a more sustained attempt to deal with the changes brought about by the now familiar conflicts in many African novels - tradition and Christianity, the older generation with their village ways and youngsters attracted to the city and Western ideas. Old man Dube learns to adapt to new attitudes, particularly monogamy, brought back by his son Ndanda. He changes from protest - 'The new way has eaten him up'[22] - to accommodation while maintaining a strong and simple moral tone. The main characters in both novels and their community are better for allowing individuals to choose their marriage partners and for having a monogamous marriage, and the community, unlike that in Mungoshi's Waiting for the Rain, learns to accommodate. This is taken as resilience and wisdom.

A less didactic novel about assimilation, with stronger thematic ironies, is Geoffrey Ndhlala's Jikinya (Macmillan, 1979) which is about a village, presumably in Zimbabwe, in the 1890s, that has had no contact with the Europeans. After an attack on a remote white farmer's house during a rebellion only the baby girl is left alive and it is found by a passing hunter, Chedu, who takes it back to his village, Ngara. The child, Jikinya, is brought up in the village until many years later a European comes, and on seeing the young girl claims her as one of his own kind. The people of Ngara live in an idealised pastoral world, a reminder of the Vahota in Feso. In showing human sympathy and care for Jikinya the people demonstrate their openness to assimilate what is strange, but through John, the white traveller, the novel points up their unconsciousness of the changes bearing down on them from beyond the hills.

Soon the peace of these people would be at its end, their garden of Eden would be transplanted by the pain to gain and accumulate, and their secluded existence would be brought before the eyes of the world and would be added to the universal destiny of man.[23]

The fulfilment of John's reflection is the arrival of European soldiers, a violent engagement, the death of Jikinya, and a temporary victory for Ngara's warriors. The idyllic image of the community with its admirable flexibility and wisdom, living simply to the cycle of nature is introduced and closed off by scenes of violence between blacks and whites. This structure is one of many accents that point up the pathos and blame for the death of a mature and integrated culture.

No matter how willing the people are to assimilate and to be critical of their traditions - particularly arranged marriages and the rejection of twins - their efforts go for nothing in the face of colonialism. That is the substance of Samkange's The Mourned One (Heinemann, 1975) and Mungoshi's novel Waiting for the Rain.[24] The effect of contact with the new culture is a double edged alienation. Mungoshi's Lucifer and Samkange's Muchemwa lose contact with their own culture - 'You are not a native,' says the Native Commissioner to the well educated Muchemwa[25] - and while seeming to be absorbed into the European nexus they are shown to be isolated from that too.

The Mourned One however differs from Mungoshi's novel in significant technical respects. The narrator, Muchemwa, seldom internalises his experiences. He presents his narrative as an autobiographical story of which he is the dramatic centre. The focus is on the relation of that centre to the world, first of Chipatu his home village, to the mission station Waddilove and to the wider world of Gatooma, Makwiro, Bulawayo, and St. Joseph's Mission. As in his historical novels Samkange keeps as close as his memory will serve to people, places, and events. When Muchemwa is finally condemned to death for the alleged rape of a white woman on the mission, Samkange lifts entire paragraphs from an actual judgement given in Salisbury on an African with the same name for the same offence.[26] This realist manner of writing achieves the effect that Muchemwa's experience in emerging from his home village to the mission and thence to adulthood in a colonial ethos, is not striking for its individuality but for its typicality. Muchemwa typifies what it means to be a victim of inhumanity both in theculture of his own people and in that of the settlers.

In Mungoshi's work the sense of deracination and alienation is more deliberately individualised. He works with particular ironies in Lucifer as well as with broader thematic ironies so strongly wrought in The Mourned One. But Mungoshi is less explicit in pointing up tensions than Samkange, for example between the good intentions of the missionary Ockenden in The Mourned One and the damage he does to local aspirations and culture. Because characters like the evangelist Moses Magedi are so oblivious of their failings the reader has

clear markers as to the satiric and moral perspectives of the novel. Mungoshi's fiction is more subtle and elusive. Opposition between black and white, traditional and urban life, Christianity and traditional religion are the context rather than the object of his writing. The prose is not self-conscious about its subject matter. It does not gesture to an international audience. Mungoshi writes for Zimbabweans with whom he shares the problems of being an individual in a society that demands many irreconcilable responses. Without the shrillness of Marechera's psychological realism he writes again and again in his short stories - The Coming of the Dry Season (O.U.P., 1973) and Some Kinds of Wounds (Mambo Press, 1980) - about the near impossibility for the individual, the narrator or hero of the story, to communicate, to understand or be understood in his community. Whether the stories are set in Harare or in the rural areas they keep probing at the individual's inability to comprehend the people and situations closes to him. The sordidness of township life is not offered as gratuitous and realist colour, it bears in on the consciousness of the hero as the outer manifestation of a moral awareness which the individual grasps at. When the young Tendai, in Mungoshi's story 'The Brother' is sent by his parents to his elder brother in town to collect his school uniform and fees he is staggered by the experiences of an all night party his brother throws for some friends. Revolted, Tendai goes outside

> There was the sharp smell of flowers from the trees lining the street. The leaves reflected the yellow light. The location was sunk in a drunken stupor, with the slightest hint of the stench of urine, stale vomit and human sweat. There was a low hum which told Tendai that even in sleep the township was very much alive, dangerously alive, but he didn't care.[27]

The imagery alludes to a lyrical beauty which by contrast accentuates the sordidness of life in the township. The last sentence repeats in other terms that here is humanity, life. Tendai in his country innocence realises that, but has not the resources to come to terms with it. His bravado is a lie. Like many of Mungoshi's heroes Tendai is an observer. He seems less important in the end than the world he observes. But that emphasis is balanced by his attempts inwardly to place and order what he sees. Hence many of Mungoshi's main characters, while seeming to be in contact with the world - drinking, hunting, working in the fields - are in fact isolated. And they retreat, inwards while life outside goes on with its deceptions and threats. When Moyo, in 'The Victim' takes the drunken Mangazva home he finds himself shown into the presence of Mangazva's family - 'I felt the constriction in the cramped living quarters of this house and infinite space at my back. I moved to some impossible safe place inside me'.[28] But there is no refuge. The narrative often achieves these two levels, the internal uncertain private world and the external which always ends up as the dominant, harsh, almost nihilistic partner, reinforced by an imagery of darkness or dry dusty countryside. His short story The Flood is

a fine example of all these factors.[29]

Similarly the title of Mungoshi's novel Waiting for the Rain suggests a unified expectation in the community, but it is evident there can be no communal response while individuals grope on a purely personal basis to come to terms with one or two other individuals, and while the community is divided on so many scores - religion, urban life, education, tradition. Waiting for the Rain is about a favourite son, Lucifer, whom his father, Tongoona, wants educated so that his own position will be more secure and celebrated. But when they meet the conversation is marked by awkwardness, silence. The educated and urbanised son and his rural father have nothing to say to one another. Lucifer, conscious he is independent, feels 'weighed down with a responsibility he cannot understand'. Tongoona is angry at not being able 'to converse normally and naturally with his own son'.[30] During Lucifer's visit home from Salisbury, before his departure for Europe, there unfolds an extended family each of whose responses to the deracinated Lucifer adds to the sense of social and cultural fragmentation. The complexity and success of the novel lie in the multiple possibilities of the imagery. Lucifer is the carrier of light, the bringer of knowledge (as the missionary would see him) yet Matandangoma says 'It is only to make the darkness that he goes'.[31] He sees his home as a physical and spiritual wilderness, 'the old stony country'. If this is Paradise he feels 'an unwelcome stranger'.[32] To him it is a place of death, 'the failure's junk heap'.[33] Yet to his sister, Betty, caught up in family rows and social scandal over her pregnancy, the village is where her roots are and her child's future:

> The village is there with its black laugh, blacker than death.
> Her parents are there with their heavy name, heavier than death.
> Let the two fight for right or wrong. She is beyond that.
> Something is going to live, or already lives in here - again
> feeling her belly - and there is no question of <u>that</u> being
> right or wrong. It just lives.[34]

Such disparate private worlds have no meaningful place together, yet the novel implies a common bond. 'Everyone in the novel lives in the expectation of some future event (symbolized by rain) that will free them from the thrall of the present'.[35]

Mungoshi is Zimbabwe's most substantial writer not least because he offers such a penetrating and complex image of the fragmentation of Shona society. He does not direct his fiction to any clear moral. Many of his characters are victims, not of explicit political forces, but of their own inability to accommodate to change. This is not through stubborness but the effect of spiritual drought. Waiting can be a hopeless business, and the 'silence' that occurs again and again in Mungoshi's fiction, is indicative of this, as it is of spiritual death.

Mungoshi's fiction is less overtly protesting than his poetry. Although it deals with the effects of urbanisation, and the clash between Christian and traditional beliefs it is less directly concerned with history and politics than the work of other writers. It looks inward on Shona society without stressing a moral point of reference to historical developments of the country under colonial rule as does Samkange's The Mourned One.

Novels and short stories since 1975 have regarded the inner life of the individual as drawn inevitably to violent protest against the colonial system. In Katiyo's novel, A Son of the Soil (Rex Collings, 1976) and Marechera's The House of Hunger (Heinemann, 1978), violence seems a necessary response to life because, as at the end of Ndhlala's Jikinya, the Europeans seem capable of thinking only in those terms. Alexio, the subject of A Son of the Soil, finds that the more conscious he becomes of his socio-political ethos the more ruthless is the surveillance of the police. The difficulties of his upbringing at Makosa's village and Mtoko, his separation from his mother, an early life of beatings and abuse by those who looked after him, seem a dark unintelligible world compared to the clear response demanded by his experiences in Salisbury. The white man's treatment of Africans is presented as simplistic and violent. The last section of the novel is a tale of institutional and physical violence by the authorities to which Alexio responds by escaping from custody and joining the guerillas. The writinglacks the subtlety of Mungoshi and the energy of Marechera, It has flat patches of exposition whose only justification could be anxiety about an international audience. But unlike Jikinya it points up the divisions between white officials whose only resource is violence and an intelligent young Shona who for all his failings of his own society quickly realises that what the Europeans offer is a great deal worse. The only way to meet their violence is with violence. In the end Chief Makosa, carrying a ceremonial axe shows Alexio the path to the guerillas.

Violence is both a necessity and inevitable in new fiction. Although writers continue to draw on those images and themes that epitomise a communal consciousness of colonialism - imagery of drought and hunter, the damage done to tradition by Christianity, the journey motif indicative of spiritual alienation, references to the 'chimurenga', the sekuru figure (old man) asserting history and the spiritual world, violence has become a much more explicit factor in recent writing. It is so much more accented than that other concern in many of the novels, criticism of customs and beliefs in Shona society. Ndhlala is theonly novelist to present Shona society as without blemish. Marechera, by contrast, is so preoccupied with violence that the social dimension of his stories fragments into a kaleidescope of personal protestations. There is virtually no social framework into which his narrative settles. His attempt at psychological realism

is a break from both socio-political realism and the more conventional stance of the narrator in other Zimbabwean fiction. The House of Hunger is not about the processes of alienation or the dynamics of opposing cultures and traditions. The stories allude to an image of a house. The village house, home and centre of cultural consciousness, is metamorphosed into the African mind in Zimbabwe. It is beset by spiritual drought. 'Capitalists', 'imperialists' and 'the bloody whites' are for Peter what 'hold the House of Hunger in a stinking grip'.[36] Rather than validate this as Samkange's The Mourned One did, Marechera writes a fiction in which the assertion of feelings becomes the substance of the narrative. Hence the varied modes of his fiction are more obtrusive and telling than those found in other Zimbabwean writers. The political dimensions of experience in Zimbabwe are taken for granted in a way that the narrator's violent response to his place in that society is less interesting for its causes than its startling manner of protest. In the title story the narrator emerging from an abrasive domestic background, goes for a drink with an acquaintance, Harry. They meet his friend Julia in the bar. On the surface that is the story. But beneath this thin series of events are several layers of consciousness which constitute the inner imaginative life of the narrator. By various techniques - stories within stories, patterns of imagery (stitches, stains, blood, breaking)- the fiction establishes the territory of the narrator's mind. Weariness and disillusion with life, protest at missionaries, black informers, whites, education, repeated physical violence, sexual perversion, are markers on a drought-stricken landscape. The stories 'The Writer's Grain' and 'Are There People Living There?' work a macabre satire in which humour is generated by fusing extreme opposites. In 'The Writer's Grain', London and a rural village in Zimbabwe, fantasy and sexual violence, belief and rejection of local myth, are presented as active oppositions that inform the narrator's depression and near madness. As the narrator in the title story says of himself, the laughter of others

> reduced my whole world to a turd. It's stench got into my food, my painting, my reading and my dreams. Everything I touched turned into a stinking horror.[37]

The satiric point of 'Are There People Living There' is that the absurd image which whites encourage blacks to aspire to catches the narrator's fancy only because the alternatives he knew were equally impoverished.

Marechera breaks away from most trends in Zimbabwean fiction by accenting the intensity of he inner world of his narrators. The socio-historical and political context that so concerns other Zimbabwean writers is there as a world with which the narrator has difficulty making contact. His starting point is the opposite to that of other writers. 'The silent but desperate voices inside me'[38] have a problem not with understanding that external world but in

putting words on it. At one level The House of Hunger illustrates the devastating effects of growing up in colonial Rhodesia but the vision of that devastation is not presented in social realist terms. Here the black narrator is left almost speechless while in theinternal world of his consciousness there is an hyperactive verbal iconoclasm that leaves nothing standing but its fictions about itself. Marechera's verbal exterity outstrips that of most African writers, but as his recent book Black Sunlight indicates, his serious concerns with the metaphysics of creativity and with language itself as a violent instrument take his fiction beyond the accepted bounds of 'African' literature. The writing is sometimes obscure and his identity crisis as a black Zimbabwean living in exile has thrown him into the seering problems that surround a writer's relation to reality. As the narrator's double says to him in the macabre and fanciful Devil's End,

> 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 that is a delusion that is very real indeed.[39]

With the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 and the conclusion of the war, fiction is less likely to take Marechera as an example than Mungoshi whose work offers a more feasible mode of analysing the one area of experience that has so closely touched millions of lives in Zimbabwe for so long, the war. In an address to Zimbabwean writers in 1980 Nadine Gordimer remarked that wars of liberation were such important events in African history that it was surprising how few novelists had written about them.[40] The first such novel by a black in Zimbabwe is S. Nyamfukudza's The Non-Believer's Journey (Heinemann, 1980)[41] Its starting point is reminiscent of Bessie Head's account about a young Zimbabwean she met in Botswana. She writes,

> He wanted an alternative to war and power. He had no faith in the future black leadership of Zimbabwe. There was no one articulating the hopes of the people and he did not want to die for a worthless cause. I latched eagerly on to his dialogue and my first novel (When Rain Clouds Gather) provides an alternative for young men.[42]

Nyamfukudza's novel offers little that is positive. Sam, a teacher in Salisbury, is sceptical of township politicians who do not go out and fight, and cynical about the guerillas. He is presented as 'a drinking man' (p.23), a university graduate with little self-respect, who, like everyone else, has been drawn into the war, 'tired of myself, of boozing every other bloody day, of this goddamned country and its people with their endless troubles!' (p.52). Thematic oppositions in earlier Zimbabwean novels - urban and rural mores, modern and traditional values, white versus black - and the consequent deracination of the individual, move to a different level at which such oppositions give way to new dichotomies. By use of a conventional Western narrative manner the novel centres

on Sam's perception of his war-torn country. The usual spiritual journey from country to town is reversed as in Mungoshi's Waiting for the Rain but not to point up Sam's alienation as a result of his education. The physical violence of township life sickens him and his journey home for Mabachi's funeral is equally painful. While people in town choose the beer bottle in preference to the gun, his young brother at home opts to fight rather than go to school. Rural life is constantly under critical scrutiny in Zimbabwean fiction but Nyamfukudza suggests that the war brings out a strength in the rural people's acceptance of suffering which Sam cannot understand. He regards the hope for freedom from the white man's rule as an 'intoxicating dream' which is in fact 'the longings of drunken itinerants' (p.24). But his father and the guerilla, Chikwepa, who kills him, ask for a kind of commitment that requires a belief beyond rationalisation. There is no place in this violent country for the individual who does not give himself to the communal belief that liberation is possible. Unlike Marechera, Nyamfukudza makes his controlling consciousness answerable to the socio-political context of the narrative. In the end Sam is shot, an image which the narrative has projected as the alternative to the bottle. They are bleak options.

Zimbabwean fiction has thus progressed through several kinds of historical realism - Samkange's recreation of Lobengula's engagement with Rhodes and the consequent uprising, and novels about oppression and deracination under missionary and colonial administration - to writing that sees violence as inevitable. On the way there is a movement inwards to the individual psyche by Mungoshi and Marechera. Most recently, if Nyamfukudza is a fair example, violence is seen not as the redemptive force which public rhetoric claims but as arbitrary and destructive of the individual. It is as though the process of liberation is more meaningless for the individual, particularly if he is sceptical, than the experience of oppression. Alternatively the sense of community takes on a new significance rooted in the rural people's faith that they unite in suffering.

This last point is taken up in the latest book of poetry published in Zimbabwe, And Now the Poets Speak.[43] Poetry of suffering and protest, the cri de coeur of multiple voices is underpinned by a faith rooted in the soil that the national birthright cannot be expunged, that through sufferings that birthright will be triumphantly enjoyed. Much of the writing takes its strength from an upretentious directness, flexible rhythms, and familiar rural images which repeatedly push the poetry into a communal symbolism. Some poems have a public accusatory manner, such as in this stanza from Dzvairo's 'Birthright',

> How years and tears and fears
> Have proved even to your scornful hearts
> That your laws and your greed
> Your hate and your guns
> Your hate
> Were not able to dent
> That precious gift of my being
> My birthright in Zimbabwe.[44]

As the poetry maps out and attempts to control harrowing feelings about war, many a bleak poem like Gambanga's 'The Dream' (p.88), Chimsoro's 'First June, 1975' (p.96) and Hove's 'Loaded Guns : happy journeys' (p.100) is redeemed from private indulgence by the shaping presence of the poetic voice. Some forty-two poets present a record of their experience of the liberation war. They write from prison, from exile, from rural villages, from guerilla camps. Although the achievement is uneven, their poetry is a testimony of individual engagement written largely so that the book becomes a public account of a people's feelings about the progress of the war, multiple private moments, all culminating in the relief, pride and exhortation of the poems in the closing section 'And the People Celebrate'.

The editors of And Now the Poets Speak start from the premise,

> that the colonial and racial malaise into which we had become sunk had created so much confusion and deprivation that culturally we now had only one source from which to seek ultimate salvation - the success of the revolution.[45]

Poems by Dzvairo, Samupindi and Hopewell Seyamoya have a strong underlying faith that the suffering will be vindicated. Despite and often because of the war - variously imaged as a bush fire, a wife, a journey - the cry of anguish is complemented by acceptance as in Violet Moyo's line 'Shatter and lay Zimbabwe bare, bare for new order'.[46] The mood of the poetry ranges through disgust and despair, fear and loss, to a yearning for release while later poems like Kadhani's 'Chimoio' and Mungoshi's 'Mwari komborerai Zimbabwe' (God Bless Zimbabwe) link the sense of pain with indebtedness to those who have died,

> For the dead live in the living
> And the living are the seed of the dead.[47]

The poems are so arranged as to reflect the progress of a national sensibility through the war. In the early sections Zvogbo's poems have a sureness of tone and a sharpness of language that stand out against the sentimentality and forced metaphors of suffering in less mature poets. The striking poems are often those of direct statement where the feelings of protest, indignation or loss have been worked into a powerful simplicity as in Dzvairo's 'Follow my Mind' and Mwanaka's 'The Return'. In the last section of celebration poems Kadhani and President Banana make an interesting contrast because both are sensitive to rhetoric, both are attempting a more accessible and popular poetry. Banana's 'The People's Creed', a variation on the Apostle's Creed applied to a multiracial society - 'I believe in a colour blind God' - takes its strength from the ironies it establishes against beliefs, language and rhythms he presumes are well known by his readers, whereas Kadhani experiments with form and rhythm in order to jolt his reader into an awareness of the new order.

The collection is not all protest poetry. Relatively few poems rage with bitterness. More evident is the struggle both human and artistic for

integrity. If the novels articulate alienation through violence, these poems are complementary in that violence is here a purgatory on the way to establishing in words a national sensibility.

However, And Now the Poets Speak hardly reflects the range of poetic performance in Zimbabwe. Leading poets are represented - Zvogbo, Muchemwa, Chimsoro, Zimunya, Hove, Mungoshi - but the brief for the volume was poetry of the revolution. To glimpse the wider horizons of Zimbabwean poetry, it is necessary to go back to K. Muchemwa's collection Zimbabwean Poetry in English (Mambo Press, 1978). Given that black poets came to English and the poetry of England as strangers from a culture that had been relegated to rural villages, it is not surprising that the black poets' first task has been to find a voice that adequately expresses the tensions in his own sensibility. Often that has not been nourished either by his own traditions nor informed by the large body of poetry in English from the rest of Africa. Many of the better poets were but teenagers when U.D.I. was declared. The consequent international isolation, together with the internal policies of Smith's government, compounded the poet's problem of looking at experience with a critical eye. There is poetry of protest from Zimunya who writes a passionate indictment of the violence and hypocrisy of the system. Muchemwa gives a more meditative ironic denunciation. In 'Tourists' he bitterly mocks the Europeans in a language that turns their own clichés into images of alienation. He sees only fear in their talismans and fetishes. Together with Zvogbo these poets find Zimbabwe 'a vast prison of the wild', a 'mad-house', 'a barbed-wire reality'. Most of the work done in the 1960s and 1970s came at the hurts of experience more obliquely, sometimes with nostalgia for a lost past. The search for roots and how to place rural traditions and values in a poetic consciousness, living in a technological and urban world, are some of the main preoccupations. The joyful lyricism of Chinodya and much of Chimsoro contrasts with the muted scepticism of Muchemwa and the deceptive low-key ironies in some of Mungoshi's poems.[48] As Muchemwa points out in his introduction, Zimunya is one of the very few to take strength from Shona traditional poetry. In this distinct way he draws on a range of natural similes andShona domestic imagery. His earlier poetry is rooted in places and people from the Eastern Highlands. More recent work strives to capture a mythical sense about Zimbabwe as a place of traditions and struggle. But until independence the best of the young poets - Mungoshi, Zimunya, Muchemwa - wrote in a spiritual wilderness in which images and symbols of the land provided the habitat for a lost generation in search of its roots.[49] As Zimunya writes in 'No Songs'

> We have no ancestors
> no shrine to pester with our prayers
> no sacred cave where to drum our drums
> and no svikiro (spirit-medium) to evoke the gods of rain
> so we live on
> without rain, without harvest.[50]

The more positive side of the quest for a poetic sensibility is illustrated in the humorous and satirical poems. Old men, grandmothers, n'angas are caricatured by sharp jesting perceptions of physical details, bloated self-esteem, idiosyncrasies of habit or dress. This acuteness of observation is part of a strong social consciousness evident in Mungoshi's fiction and Shona plays. Novelists repeatedly illustrate how it is pulverised in the engagement between black and white.

The war was fought inter alia to free people for just such a vitality of social awareness and, in the poets' terms, to fertilise the wilderness. Now the predicament of the black writer is whether to salvage tradition which in Muchemwa's poem 'Legacy' seems beyond his reach or to turn inwards, a more individualistic exercise, and scrutinise the gap between public rhetoric and private expectations generated by independence and the actualities of life in the new Zimbabwe. In either case the writer has resources in traditional oral literature and a social consciousness which for the first time he can explore without constraint. Having so long and successfully resisted the identity imposed by others, writers now have open access to a spiritual and aesthetic home. Mungoshi's poem 'In the Wilderness' is like an epitaph to times past:

> The torrid silence of the October sun
> Miles upon miles and miles of burnt-out plains.
>
> Suddenly you realise
> You are talking loudly to your
> shadow.[51]

This poem epitomises a major theme in Zimbabwean writing, the isolation of the individual from his community. It has been a literature about survival. Particularly in the fiction there has been a move from concern for the survival of the community, in Mutswairo and Samkange's historical novels, to self-preservation of the individual, seen in different ways in Marechera and Nyamfukudza. Between these poles the community struggles for its identity through the experiences of an individual like Samkange's Muchemwa and Mungoshi's Lucifer. The effects of colonialism and the necessity for violence so disorientate the individual that Nyamfukudza's Sam tries to preserve his individuality, however sordid, in spite of the community.

But in Zimbabwean poetry the search for a value context has been a much more private quest until the several isolated andprotesting voices were brought together after independence in And Now the Poets Speak. Read together these poems take on a communal voice marked by its concern for an identity rooted in the shared experience of the liberation war.

What Zimbabwean writers in English have demonstrated is a breadth of talents which have drawn their inspiration from a deep concern for a sense of community. That range of talents betters any corpus of pre-independent literature north of the Limpopo for its versatility to depict the multiple effects of colonialism on the community and its individuals. The writing has been principally

a quest for roots but it has been complicated by thehonest awareness and the harrowing consequences of realising that many of the roots have died, some have been pulled up, some replaced. The tension between searching for individual identity andyearning for a meaningful community, until Marechera and Nyamfukudza, has been played out on the assumption that the rural community with some modifications to its cultural mores was a significant spiritual resource against the malaise due to colonialism. That is now a less certain option. With independence and the figure of the schoolteacher no longer the prototype of advancement or modern mores, Zimbabwe is moving into a socio-economic order in which the former oppositions, if not the imagery that shaped them, have little pertinence. What remains is the same struggle for spiritual survival and self-definition.

Black writing in Zimbabwe has demonstrated a sharp individual consciousness through the torrid years of colonialism. The predicament for the writer is now to relate that inner critical sensibility to the quickly shifting socio-political context of the newly independent Zimbabwe, 'reaching out', as Marechera put it

> to that phantasm and creation of my own imagination. The insider, sihouetted against the black blinding sunlight. The vast inner emptiness seeking to leech upon the obscure vitals that exist out there.[52]

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1. Africans first sat 'O' levels in 1949 and the University was opened in 1957.

2. Born in Kent, Cripps came to Mashonaland in 1901 and spent the rest of his life here. Lessing was born in Persia, came to Southern Rhodesia in 1924 and left in 1949. Of the early white poets, Cullen, Gouldsburg and Kingsley Fairbridge deserve attention, and more recently Noel Brettell.

3. A.J. Chennells, 'Introduction to Cripps' novels', Arthur Shearly Cripps: A Selection of his Prose and Verse, compiled and introduced by G.R. Brown, A.J. Chennells and L.B. Rix (Mambo Press, 1976), pp.13–14.

4. The first three novels published by theLiterature Bureau were Feso, N. Sithole's Amandebele kaMzilikazi and Bernard Chidzero's Nzvengamutsvairo.

5. Tsodzo read parts of the excised section at the first University Festival of Zimbabwean Arts, October 4, 1980.

6. Government was aware of this many years earlier. See for example the Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, 1953, 'Time is against us, for already a high proportion of the African population is literate, in the vernacular if not in English, and if sound and healthy literature is not put in their way soon it is almost inevitable that pernicious or undesirable literature will creep in to fill the vacuum' (p.50). In the same year two manuscripts of Shona novels were submitted to the Ministry for consideration (Ibid. p.51).

7. Unpublished report by T.O. McLoughlin and J. Uys, English Department, University of Rhodesia, 1973, p.8.

8. 'People will talk of you', African Parade, Mar. 1954, p.15.
For a complete listing of writing in Rhodesia see Rhodesian Literature in English : A Bibliography (1890 - 1974/5), Mambo Press, 1977, compiled by J. Pichanick, A.J. Chennells and L.B. Rix.

9. L.W. Chaparadza in African Parade, Feb. 1957, p.25. He is better known as a Shona novelist. Earlier anthologies are New Writing in Rhodesia (Mambo Press, 1976) ed. T.O. McLoughlin, Poetry in Rhodesia, 75 years (College Press, 1968) ed. D.E. Finn, andRhodesia Verse 1888–1938 (Oxford, 1938) chosen by J. Snelling.

10. African Parade, Oct. 1959 - July, 1960, Sept. 1960 - Jan. 1961.

11. Feso in Zimbabwe Prose and Poetry (Three Continents Press, 1974), p.119.

12. For an historical analysis of the place and period of the novel see D.N. Beach, The Shona and Zimbabwe: 900–1850 (Mambo Press, 1980), pp.66–70 et passim.

13. Feso, p.38.

14. See G. Kahari for details of this reading in The Search for Zimbabwean Identity (Mambo Press, 1980), pp.39–50.

15. Waiting for the Rain (Heinemann, 1975), pp.179–180.

16. Ibid., p.162.

17. All but three works of fiction by black Zimbabweans were published before Independence in 1980. The exceptions are S. Nyamfukudza The Non-Believer's Journey (Heinemann, 1980), D. Marechera Black Sunlight (Heinemann, 1980), and C. Mungoshi Some Kinds of Wounds, (Mambo Press, 1980).

18. The Year of the Uprising (Heinemann, 1978), p.29.

19. Ibid., p.150.

20. Ibid., pp.1-4.

21. I am indebted here to ideas in F. Kermode's The Genesis of Secrecy: On the interpretation of narrative (Harvard Univ. Press, 1979).

22. The Polygamist, p.73.

23. Jikinya, p.89.

24. Mungoshi has also written several works in Shona.

25. The Mourned One, p.111.

26. Cp. The Mourned One, p.141 and Rhodesia Herald,

27. 'The Brother', Some Kinds of Wounds, p.59.

28. Ibid., p.125.

29. Ibid., pp155-179.

30. Waiting for the Rain, p.44.

31. Ibid., p.140.

32. Ibid., p.42.

33. Ibid., p.162.

34. Ibid., p.38.

35. A.J. Chennells, 'Charles Mungoshi', unpublished English Department Paper, p.2.

36. The House of Hunger, p.9.

37. Ibid., p.30.

38. Ibid., p.136.

39. Black Sunlight (Heinemann, 1980), p.68. This book has recently been banned by the Zimbabwe Board of Censors on grounds of immorality.

40. Nadine Gordimer, address at Ranche House College, Salisbury, Aug. 29, 1980.

41. Several novels about the war by whites are discussed in an essay review by A.J. Chennells, 'The Treatment of the Rhodesian War in Recent Rhodesian Novels' Zambezia, Vol. 5, ii, 1977 pp.177-202.

42. Bessie Head, 'Social and Political Pressures that Shape Literature in Southern Africa,' World Literature Written in English, 18, no. 1, April 1979, p.23.

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44. Ibid., p.15.

45. Ibid., p.xiii

46. Ibid., p.147.

48. See particularly S. Chimsoro's Smoke and Flames. Mambo Press, 1978.

49. A similar point is made by R. Graham in 'Poetry in Rhodesia', Zambezia (University of Rhodesia), vol. 6, no.ii, 1978, pp.187-215. Graham gives a lively overview of pre-independence poetry. The most recent work on Zimbabwean poetry is by R. Zhuwarara in a research seminar paper to the English Department, University of Zimbabwe, 30 Nov. 1981.

50. 'No Songs', Zimbabwean Poetry in English, p.12.

51. 'In the Wilderness', The Milkman Doesn't Only Deliver Milk, poems by Charles Mungoshi selected by Nick Alexander (Poetry Society of Zimbabwe, 1981), Mopani Poets series vol. 5, p.13. Among other poets published in this series is Noel Brettell Season and Pretexts, 1977.

52. Black Sunlight, p.112.

To M'Longeteru
Nov 1981