

Marechera's world: naming people and places in Marechera's *Black Sunlight*

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A name is an important statement of identity of a person, persons, a phenomenon, or a place. It can be a peg around which identities are constructed or deconstructed, formed or de-formed, erased or resuscitated, planted or dismembered. The problem of identity is central to Marechera's concerns, with critics and scholars perpetually trying to place him in certain spaces, sometimes without much success. This article explores Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight* through an onomastic lens, with a view to finding out how the novelist named his characters and space(s) in his story. The names he uses create a landscape that reflects certain forms, processes and patterns. In its analysis of Marechera's names, the article weaves in current thinking in onomastics and of post-colonial traditions that have influenced literary criticism in the last twenty years.

Introduction

This article interrogates the literary onomastics embedded in Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight* (1980). It reveals that there are Greco-Roman names, place names, European literary names, religious names, general European names, names for politicians, historians, writers' names and names related to flora and fauna. In this study, we observed that the novel under discussion has a literary onomastics corpus of 97 names. Thus, the novel is both the primary source and the prism through which the novelist's choice of names is interrogated. A careful exposition of the author's background reveals that he is of the Zimbabwean and/or Shona cultural tradition. However, we argue that what emanates from his literary rendition is a corpus that seems to dislocate him from his cultural grounding and rootedness. The discussion investigates how Marechera's selection of names in *Black Sunlight* speaks to the ways in which his writing was influenced by European culture and traditions. This is an argument that critics of Zimbabwean literature such as Zhuwarara (2001) and Zimunya (1982) have advanced, and has been contested by most of the contributors in the volume edited by Chennells and Veit-Wild (1999). The contestations between these two schools of thought on Marechera's ideas on identity, belonging, culture, race, nation and nationalism make it critical that scholars continue to investigate aspects of Marechera's novels from a diversity of angles to enrich discussions on his contributions to Zimbabwean literature. This article utilises literary onomastics to investigate how Marechera's *Black Sunlight* can be read as an ideological tool which helps or peddles unstable identities which make the author neither African nor European in terms of worldview and cultural outlook. Part of the rationale behind this article is the dearth of scholarship that addresses Marechera's corpus from a literary onomastics perspective. In fact, most of the studies dealing with onomastics in Zimbabwean scholarship do not look at literary onomastics. Onomastics scholars such as Mashiri et al. (2017),

Chabata (2012), Ndlovu (2018), Pfukwa (2007) and Mamvura (2021) concern themselves primarily with names outside the literary domain. Marechera is a writer who is highly influential in Zimbabwe and warrants study from all possible angles. In his short life, he wrote books and poems that have won international acclaim and have been translated into many languages. This article examines how the names he uses in *Black Sunlight* can help deepen our understanding of his contribution to Zimbabwean literature.

Marechera's biography and some insights from literary critics

Dambudzo Marechera was born in Rusape in 1952 and grew up in Vengere Township under squalid conditions. His father met a violent death under unclear circumstances that haunted him for the rest of his life. He went to St Augustine's High School in Mutare and his psychiatric problems began when he was in Advanced level. He was expelled from the University of Rhodesia and moved on to Oxford, only to be expelled again. He lived in the streets as he wrote *House of Hunger* and *Black Sunlight*. *House of Hunger* won a Guardian prize for fiction in 1979. He returned to Zimbabwe at independence but never settled down. He was antisocial, paranoid, at best eccentric, and died in Harare in 1986. (Vambe 2001; Habila 2022).

Apart from the fact that I (principal author) met Marechera after his return from his European adventure, an elaborate description and characterisation of the novelist as seen by some fellow literary *aficionados* is critical. Therefore this section also dwells on the novelist, Marechera, as seen by some of his literary critics who interacted with him or his works while at home and in exile. Their insights are pertinent because we argue that African writers are seldom into art for art's sake. Their works are largely a product of their experiences. For them, art is life. Art, of which literature is part, is the transcript on which experiences are captured and archived. From the onset, the article acknowledges that Dambudzo Marechera is arguably one of the best writers to have emerged from Zimbabwe.

Currey (2008: 279) posits that while in Zimbabwe,

[Dambudzo Marechera] clashed with his teachers at St Augustine's Penhalonga. He was expelled from the University of Rhodesia, but his teacher managed to get New College, Oxford to give him a place. He was cared for, in spite of assaults on staff, by Lady Hayter, the wife of the warden. He maintained that he was expelled for trying to burn the college down.

Furthermore, "to be near him was to be on red alert. The curtain was always to go up on some new drama which totally absorbed one's time" (ibid.: 280). Currey (2008: 291) details the novelist's detention experience at a German airport as follows:

I talked to the Immigration Adviser Service. A sympathetic but practical adviser assessed the probabilities. She said, "He may have to spend a few days in detention, but we should be able to get him out fairly soon." She rang the direct line on my desk in the late afternoon so to say that he had landed at Heathrow at about midday. She sounded calmly confident that matters were in hand but then, minutes later, rang me to say that the situation was very serious. The immigration officers had just got hold of his Cardiff prison sentence and it was the conviction for possession of cannabis that had changed their whole attitude.

Going by this synopsis of the novelist's experiences both at home and abroad, it is clear that Dambudzo Marechera was a controversial character. This controversy is typified in his writing as he wanders and traverses both the African and European landscape via names of alien cultural traditions. Gikandi, conversing with Currey (2008: 292), stressed that "[t]o tell you the truth, James, I think the problem that confronts Marechera in this manuscript is one inherent in almost all exile literature – the

increasing loss of a context within which the writing is done". It is this loss of cultural grounding that culminates in a complex collection of names in *Black Sunlight* as this article argues. The next section explores theoretical underpinnings that help understand the literary onomastics found in Marechera.

Theoretical underpinnings and the praxis of onomastics

This section draws substantially from Pfukwa (2007). Onomastics is the scientific study of names (Nicolaisen 1978; Raper 1987). Various scholars have different categories, but most of them merge into the key streams of the place name, the personal name, the nickname and literary onomastics (Raper 1987) This article, as illustrated in the subsequent sections, concentrates on literary onomastics, which is the study of names in literary texts. This category of onomastics draws from a wide range of literary forms such as poetry, prose, drama and music.

Literary onomastics has made inroads in literary and cultural studies in southern Africa. This is more significant in the environment where boundaries of various disciplines are being broken and new directions in research and scholarship are being set. Literary onomastics established a firm footing in South African literature in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Koopman 1993; 2002; Jacobs 1994; Joffe 1995; Mathenjwa 1996; Squire 1996). Zimbabwean scholarship has followed the foundational work of George Kahari (1990) in his seminal work with names such as Pfuwa (2007), Viriri (2009), Mangena and Nyambi (2013), Mashiri et al. (2017) and Ndlovu (2018). These scholars have also contributed quite significantly to other areas of onomastics. Most of these cover the different fields, but very few explore literary onomastics in Zimbabwe, and this is the gap that this article seeks to fill.

Literary onomastics has extended the scope of literary criticism and demarginalised popular forms, placing them closer to the core of literary analysis. Neethling's (1995) critical review of Christopher Torr's cabaret "Hot Gates" traces the links between names in space and time in literary form. Neethling's argument reflects a shift in literary perspectives as renaming becomes a process of repossession of metaphysical space – a process of rewriting identities and reconfiguring historical and cultural spaces. Neethling looks for meanings in toponyms using connotations and associative meanings when he observes that a name is applied to some entity due to some motivation or association. There is a fusion of spatial and temporal planes in "Hot Gates" where toponyms build up a pattern which links them to specific historical nodes. The meanings and interpretations of these names is multiple. "Hiroshima...Buchenwald...Dunkirk...Normandy...Lockerbie...Saigon...there is a story buried behind each and every one of them" (Neethling 1995: 64). Many people died in each of these places and they become metaphors of human suffering in the song. As the names are recited, they generate longer texts and histories of their own. The names become a historical narrative of past experiences, some of which are traumatic.

Mathenjwa's (1996) *maskandi* poetry is another good example of how names can play a central role in a literary text. According to Mathenjwa, the *maskandi* (the singer) often gives a lengthy introduction of himself, his origins and his physical features. The narrator mentions a string of personal names and relates these to place names. Like most oral poetry, Maskandi poetry is personal, spontaneous, constantly being reshaped and embellished by its narrator. Every narration has its own uniqueness. The power of oral poetry is not in the accuracy of the content, but in the art of the narration like the *imbongi* in Shona or Ndebele praise poetry where a long string of praise names are recited in honour of a person. Praise poetry is essentially oral and captures the soul of a people in a manner that the written form can never capture, as discussed in the work of Vambe (2004).

Koopman's (1993) onomastic studies of B. W. Vilakazi's epic poem *KwaDedangendlale* also contribute to literary onomastics. Koopman (2002: 42) observes that *KwaDedangendlale* ("The valley of a thousand hills")

explores the beauty of the place called *KwaDedangendlale*, but also the richness of its historical and cultural traditions. The spiritual quality of the area is emphasised in its being the resting place of the ancestors.

Vilakazi's poem explores the complex relationship between the land as physical space and the ancestors who traversed it in the past. Each of the names mentioned in the poem (such as Shaka and Cetshwayo) mark a node in history, and other traditions. Koopman (2002: 38) makes similar observations when he says that *KwaDedangendlale* is "...an archival repository of oral history which stretches back generations". In the poem, there are layers of history that lie embedded in the names like archaeological artifacts in stratified deposits.

In his onomastic critique of Michael Ondaatje's 1992 novel *The English Patient*, Jacobs (1994) shifts the locus of "imperial discourse" from the metropolitan centre to the "marginalized subjects" in the former colonies. He links colonial naming with colonial mapping, borrowing the notion of spatial mapping from Carter (1987). Jacobs (1994: 5) says that "[t]he shift from colonial to postcolonial fiction is marked, among other things, by a growing self-awareness concerning the role of mapping and naming the imperial project". Giving a place an indigenous name is a part of the wider effort to re-identify a place and loosen it from its imperial moorings and relocate it with its indigenous past. Names do not only interrogate the status quo, but a whole way of life, religious practices, social systems and cultural traditions that often marginalise sections of the population and relegate them to second-class citizens. Renaming becomes a process of rewriting cultural identities and the repossession of sociocultural space (Pfukwa 2007).

Negotiating meaning: an onomastic perspective

Linguists normally concentrate on three levels of meaning, i.e. lexical, denotative and connotative. The onomastician looks at all three, but also includes descriptive backing, which is connected to pragmatics (Meiring 1980; 1993; Nicolaisen 1987; Raper 1987). The original meaning is referred to as the lexical, or literal, meaning. It includes the name's or word's etymology and the language of origin. These are all significant factors, especially when considering that names, like any other words, travel from one language to another and from one culture to another. A name's lexical meaning is concerned with its initial meaning, and it is still considered a pure linguistic entity that can be subjected to linguistic examination (Koopman 1993). Most names have lexical meaning in their native language, but they become lexically opaque when they are translated into other languages (Neethling 1995), or, as Nicolaisen (1987: 6) says, "[a]s soon as a word becomes a name, it is cast loose from its lexical and semantic moorings".

Denotation is a step in the process of transforming a lexical item into a complete onomastic item. A name takes on referential functions and begins to accumulate connotations throughout the denotation phase.

Connotation has emotive aspects and involves association. Meaning has here shifted into abstract and psychological dimensions, losing its clear literal and referential features characteristic of lexical and denotative meaning. Connotation is now firmly entrenched in the onomastic domain, where names derive their meaning and value from associations with, and occasionally from, the emotions they elicit (Pfukwa 2007). Connotation is defined by some onomastics experts as "associative meaning", which

has social and cultural ramifications, while others refer to it as pragmatic meaning, which is another important linguistic term (Raper 1987).

Associative meaning, according to Raper (1987), might be cultural, affective, or social. For example, some onomasticians (Meiring 1980; 1993; Neethling 1995; Nicolaisen 1987; Raper 1987) link onomastics with associative meaning. Nicolaisen (1978: 143) says that “naming is the process by which words become names through association...using a name involves a knowledge of the appropriate associations”. The relationship between connotative meanings, associative meanings and emotive levels all contribute to the descriptive backing, which is another dimension in onomastic theory.

Descriptive backing

Descriptive backing is a concept that fully integrates the study of meaning into the world of onomastics (Leslie and Skipper 1990). Descriptive backing is essentially a loose collection of all associations centred on a name. Lourens (1994) citing Meiring (1993) suggests descriptive backing is an aggregate of all conventional attitudes and connotations linked to the name). Even the wildest assumptions can be included in these beliefs and implications, which may have little or no connection to the original meaning, especially when the name has been translated into another language.

The meaning of a name can be viewed as a collection of conjectures that contain and exclude specific characteristics related to the name at the same time (Pfukwa 2007). Through descriptive backing, names become an important part of a community’s history and culture. These viewpoints form the theoretical foundation for the discussion of Marechera’s *Black Sunlight*.

A summary of *Black Sunlight*

The story is a fable that operates independent of any spatial configuration, but is somehow set in the postcolonial era. Using the “stream of consciousness” style, the author narrates the struggle of a group of anarchists in revolt against military fascists in an imaginary African state. The protagonist is a photojournalist called Christian, whose camera becomes a medium through which the plot is developed.

The names in Black Sunlight

Ninety-seven names were counted in the story and they were divided into seven categories using guidelines from Jenjekwa (2018) and they are briefly outlined here drawing from Tent (2015). Jenjekwa (2018) suggests that the characteristics of names (in his case toponyms) is best explored through a critical analysis of the names in some defined categories, and goes on to say that the names can be classified according to categories which involve an analysis of the structure, the literal meaning and the connotative meaning. Jenjekwa (2018: 106) proposes the following categories:

- 1) names of farms/villages;
- 2) names of schools;
- 3) names of business centres;
- 4) names of bus and train stations;
- 5) names of political administrative divisions;
- 6) names of roads; and
- 7) names of natural features (mountains, rivers and forests).

While Jenjekwa is looking at place names, his argument can be extended to other types of names and this will include names found in literary texts. A full list of the names and categories is found in Table 1.

An overview of some names in *Black Sunlight*

Marechera's onomastic repertoire follows several significant patterns. The largest category is the Greco-Roman set that centres on the *Iliad* and upon this he builds his surreal fable. Evidently, Marechera was well versed in the classics. He takes it for granted that everyone knows Prometheus, Lucretius, Sisyphus and many names that loom large in Greco-Roman mythology. With the exception of five African names, the place names (toponyms) of his world are European. Other toponyms of his imagination are colourless, and where they are stirring, they are located in the stygian depths of evil. There is a profusion of names associated with evil and violence. Where he uses common names, they are the opaque English names that have lost their meanings as they migrated to other languages and have been reduced to mere referents, with no meanings intended. There is deep irony in the name Christian, the main character, because there is nothing Christian about this diabolical character that is more than a non-believer – he subscribes to evil. Out of all personal names in the fable, only one name, Mutasa, is Shona and this is a story written by a Shona-speaking person. This discussion selects a few examples in the different categories to explore the names he chose and what they might imply.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Marechera does not restrict himself to an African setting in his discourse. He does not cling to the safety of discourses that focus (positively or negatively) on different aspects of African cultural identities. Instead, he strikes off into the uncharted spaces of fables that traverse far beyond the continent into complex cultural and metaphysical spaces which take him to European traditions of the colonial era. Doubtlessly, his Christian upbringing and English education pervade his work.

Table 1: Names in *Black Sunlight*

Greco-Roman tradition	Toponyms (place names)	European literature/culture	Religious figures	Personal names	Flora and fauna
Achilles	3rd Ave	Arnold	Allah	Blanche	Ginger the cat
Aesop	Black Hall	Aston Smith	Buddha	Goodfather	Mimosa
Cato	Blunt Rock Falls	Beethoven	Christ	Christian	Oxalis
Cicero	Brixton	Darwin	Devil	Christopher	Venus fly trap
Circe	Bude	Faustus	Eden	Franz	
Claudian	Cairo	Fontaine	Golgotha	Kathrine	
Cretans	Cape Town	Ides of March	Jezebel	Marie	
Eumenides	Dumfries	Hamlet	Job	Nick	
Horace	Devil's End	Klemperer	Jonah	Nicola	
Juvenal	Devil's Peak	Locke	Moloch	Sordid Joe	
Lucretius	Forster Ave	Macbeth	Sir Thomas More	Susan	
Menander	Hugh Street	Milton	St Mary's		
Odysseus	Jade Chambers	Montaigne			
Orion	Lagos	Rousseau			
Penelope	London	William Blake			
Polyphemus	New York				
Prometheus	Oxford				
Sisyphus	Pacific				
Socrates	Sahara				
Tibullus	Singapore				
Tiresias	Soweto				
Virgil					
Wings of Icarus					
Zeus					

The Greco-Roman tradition

Marechera's onomastic trope is anglophone and deeply influenced by Greco-Roman traditions. Achilles was a famous Greek warrior in the legends of the Trojan wars. It is said only his heel was vulnerable and he was finally killed by Paris. Marechera draws from Greek mythology other great names such as Circe, Sisyphus, Menander, Prometheus, Zeus and Odysseus. Legends have been woven around each of these names over the ages and they have become key points of reference in English literature. Similarly, Marechera has names such as Lucretius, Cicero and Virgil who are prominent Roman writers. Any serious scholar of English literature was supposed to know these names.

The place names (toponyms)

Some of the place names of Marechera's imagination are neutral and some are a logical extension of the names associated with the devil. Most of the events in the story occur at Devil's Peak and Devils' End which is the headquarters of Black Sunlight Organisation. The narrative weaves its labyrinthine maze of evil as the reader is led through Devil's End with its throne of human skulls and inverted crucifixions. This is a brief glimpse of hell as Raftery (1991) would have captured it. Images of perpetual suffering and pain are evoked constantly as we see Christian moving through the different places in Devil's End such as the Jade chamber and the Blunt Rock Falls.

In the Caves of the Devil's End is the Black Hall which reminds readers of the Black Hole of Calcutta where an Indian Emperor, Surajah Dowla, confined over 140 prisoners in a small cell and many of them died (Cavendish 2006) This number has been disputed through the ages and has been revised downwards, but it still remains a fact that a large number of British prisoners were cramped into a small Indian prison in the middle of nineteenth century. Marechera mentions cities across the continents without any significant pattern in them, such as Soweto, Lagos, Cairo, New York. As toponyms, they contribute nothing to the plot or themes in the novel. You would expect Soweto to be linked with the Soweto uprising of 1976, but Marechera has nothing to do with the struggle against apartheid or any struggle against injustice. He repeatedly mentions the Sahara desert and it becomes a *leitmotif* of barrenness, aridity and suffering; all of which build up to the themes of the story.

European literature

Marechera draws some of his names from some of the finest works in English and European literature and they become a mirror of the chaos and anarchy of Devil's Peak. He is well read in English and European literature and despite all his denial and disdain of it, it is deeply ingrained in his subconscious. In the fable, he refers to Macbeth, Caesar, Dr Faustus, Arnold, Milton, Joyce, Blake and many others with such ease that reflects that they are part of his subconscious mind.

For instance, he refers to "Macbeth's bell" that signals Macbeth to commit the heinous act of regicide. *Macbeth* is a play full of evil and this has been accepted by critics throughout the ages. The only thing that seems to redeem Macbeth is that he dies in remorse. It is not clear whether Marechera died in remorse. Similarly, the "Ides of March" mark the day when Caesar was assassinated and this is drawn from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Just like Duncan in *Macbeth*, Caesar was assassinated, only that it was in broad daylight.

The name Moloch also appears in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* and in many other European literatures of the medieval and Elizabethan era. Moloch was a Canaanite god linked with child sacrifice. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan the prince of the devils, gathers all fallen angels and they proceed to build pandemonium, the great parliament of the demons. In the great debate on how to

fight God, Moloch is a strong advocate for an all-out war against God, even if the devils will never win. He is the most aggressive devil in Pandemonium. The theme of evil and hell looms large in Marechera, not so much because of his moral stature, but he is in his own "perpetual torture house" which becomes a canvas upon which he paints his grotesque tale.

Names from different religions

Marechera's grotesque tale has two biblical figures that are diametrically opposite, Job and Jezebel. The book of Job is a poem about suffering and a test of faith in the face of trial and tribulation. When the blind Marie cites Job all night, she seems to be seeking inspiration in a biblical figure that the author has no belief in. For Marechera, Job is nothing but a metaphor of perennial suffering.

Jezebel is arguably the most evil figure in the scriptures. She connived with the priests of Baal to hunt down and kill the anointed prophets of Israel to the extent that Elijah at some point had to go into hiding. She met her own end in a most cruel and inhuman manner devoured by dogs with only a hand remained. Only Marechera could link such a satanic figure in the Bible to crucifixion: that all-important symbol of sacrifice for the Christian faith. Marechera, true to his nature, subverts and inverts all Christian ideals by talking about "crucifixion" of this most evil figure in the Old Testament.

To Marechera, Christ is nothing more than a swear word. This to the Christian faith is more than an act of sacrilege. It is an inversion and subversion of Christian values that can only come from the devil himself. He does not spare the Moslem and Buddhists either; like Christ, they are simply swear words. Marechera's spiritual world is a subversion of the "normal". The spiritual names of his choice are drawn from the depths of hell itself, and where they are linked to the great faiths of the world, they are subverted, trivialised and reduced to nothing but swear words.

Marechera writes about the "Jonah complex" (p. 73) and this is difficult to unravel. Out of many possibilities, three are proposed here. Firstly, Jonah disobeyed God when he was sent on a mission to Nineveh and he was punished by being swallowed by the whale. Maybe Marechera is suggesting that refusal to go on a mission can be described as the Jonah complex. Given his anarchist nature, it is difficult to see Marechera interpreting the scriptures positively. The second possibility is the simple swallowing of Jonah where he lived in its bowels for three days. We meet an elaborate description of swallowing elsewhere in the novel. The third possibility of the Jonah complex might be Jonah's anger over the salvation of Nineveh. But then these are all speculations about the phrase and this fits very well into the onomastic frame of descriptive backing which includes all speculations around a name (Meiring 1993; Pfukwa 2007).

Execution in Christ's time was sometimes by crucifixion and was sometimes carried out at Golgotha, which in Hebrew meant the "place of the skull". Marechera's onomastic landscape itself is a vast Golgotha where there is so much suffering, violence and cruel death. We see a chief who sits on a throne of skulls and wears a necklace of human vertebrae. There are perpetual "crucifixions" and to call these deaths crucifixions is to venerate these characters who by their own choice decide to be evil. We also meet a man who is crucified upside down, which is also a symbol of Saint Peter and an inversion of the sacred Christian belief of crucifixion.

Personal names

Marechera's personal names or anthroponyms are drawn from English and European society. There are only two African names, Mutasa and Steve Biko, out of a total of thirteen personal names which are largely English or European. Besides Susan, Christopher and Christian, the European names he chooses are drawn from the European continent. Franz sounds German, Blanche and Marie look French, and

Nicola is possibly Italian. Sordid Joe suggests some negative connotations and can signify the gloom and doom in places such as Devil's Peak and Devil's End, while Nick is a shortened form of Nicholas.

Discussion

Loss of identity

Marechera's loss of identity is best expressed by his rootlessness. He jettisons his name Charles at some point and adopts Dambudzo, which means endless suffering. Indeed, he suffered endlessly in his short life. How much of it was of his own making is subject to much debate. He refused to conform or to find space in any community in his home country as well as in the home of colonial masters whose language and culture he mastered so well.

Placelessness in Marechera's fable

Names such as Black Hall, Blunt Rock Falls, Devils Peak and Devils End can be anywhere in the world. These place names suggest mayhem, suffering and evil. Where the place names are familiar geographic names, they seem to carry little significance; for example, there is little connection between Singapore and Soweto. Sahara suggests a vast dry expanse with very little life. Similarly, the street names such as Hugh Street and Forester Ave can be anywhere in the world. This sense of placelessness and rootlessness in Marechera's onomastic repertoire in its physical identity is as equally strong in his psychosocial identity. The place names in the fable build up to the theme of anarchy that runs through the novel.

Space and time in the fable

The chronology of events in *Black Sunlight* operates outside the writing conventions of his time. Nothing is constant, the order in which events happen is irrelevant, and what is significant is the writer's stream of consciousness as he narrates his fable in the form that suits him (Vambe 2001). He unchains himself from the restrictions of form and structure that enfeeble many African writers, especially at a time when most of them were struggling to align with liberation movements on the African continent. Besides a single mention of Steve Biko and an oblique reference to the Soweto massacre of 1976, there is nothing that directly links him with contemporary events in southern Africa as he writes his story. With the exception of places like Devil's Peak, which is a significant natural feature in Cape Town, and Soweto, most of his place names cannot be pegged to any specific space on the continent. The location of his tale is of little significance. What is important is the content with which he builds the tale. This makes his canvas universal as he breaks out of the restrictions and constriction of the African writer who is part of the anti-colonial struggle.

All education in Rhodesia was underlined by European traditions. Colonial education by its very nature taught more about Europe and less about oneself. What manifests in Marechera's writing can be termed, to borrow from Mungoshi's (1972) *Coming of the Dry Season*, the "Lucifer syndrome" in the sense that there are parallels in relation to how he chooses to be forgetful about the home factor in his literary renditions. We can suggest that Marechera's literary creativity in this novel is synonymous with Asante's (2007: 1) baby eagle who is seemingly comfortable in debilitating foreign cultural practices:

As the baby eagle grew in the chicken yard, it began to see itself as a chicken. Surrounded as it was by the chickens, the little eagle received a chicken education, wore chicken clothes, ate chicken food, and attempted to imitate the walk and mannerisms of the chickens...all traces of its earlier eagle training had been forgotten. In everything, the little eagle acted like a chicken until one day it started to think of itself as a chicken...In fact, all eagle consciousness was lost...It never saw itself in the light of its eagle history.

This article further argues that such literary creativity can be seen as an expression of self-hatred, which Asante (2007: 5) describes as “a particular orientation of African people, or any within their own culture that they have lost all sense of direction”. Marechera presents the readership with unstable and alien identities; identities that do not speak to the immediate environment he is connected to. Birt (1997: 204) is of the view that this is a result of a people who have undergone colonial oppression:

Oppression robs people of their identity as surely as exploitation of their fruits of the labour. Oppression imposes rigid, stultifying identities on its victims. Often it imposes a deformed consciousness on the oppressed which helps to reinforce the very system of oppression which deforms them.

Marechera’s onomastic choices reflect the standard product of English colonial education that knows the European classics inside out, yet knows very little of the African story. Unwittingly, he is an anglophone with European cultural traditions deeply etched in his sub-consciousness. A few questions are in order here. Would any European reader accept a novel about Europe where only 10 out of a 100 names were European? Today’s scholar on the African continent can ask why an African scholar should struggle to master knowledge on Circe, Sisyphus, Icarus and Prometheus and know nothing about Sundiata, Samori Touré, Mirambo and Cetshwayo. Why should the non-European child be burdened with classic mythologies that are far removed from African narratives? Whatever names Marechera chooses, whether consciously or subconsciously, reflect his sociocultural context, his historical background and his metaphysical cosmos.

Conclusion

This article has discussed one of Zimbabwe’s best writers through an onomastic lens. The names he gives his space and people are not utopian, but are culturally, historically and spiritually bound. Marechera’s onomastic repertoire takes him way beyond the African space, suggesting some universal thread in his writing. The question that remains is: was he an African writer or a writer in Africa? The article has also established that the colonial education Marechera was exposed to had a role to play in as far as his naming of places and characterisation is concerned. This article holds that the novel is a prism through which the instability and identity crisis that the novelist was known for is mirrored.

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