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Anarchies of the Mind:

**A contrapuntal reading of the poetry and prose
of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Dambudzo Marechera**

Tinashe Mushakavanhu

Supervisors: Prof Donna Landry and Prof Caroline Rooney

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of Kent, Canterbury for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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Leaving Canterbury for Harare after being knocked down by a visa technicality was not originally scripted in this story. It took sheer will power, many nights of candlelight study, and stuttering Internet to arrive at this point. I wish to thank my supervisors, Donna Landry and Caroline Rooney for their support, encouragement, and whose expertise has guided me throughout my graduate studies. They provided a model of patience and commitment to academic work that will continue to inspire my own intellectual and professional development. I will forever be grateful. Apart from the process of researching and writing this thesis, I have learnt a great deal by crossing many physical and mental borders, and in the process negotiated complicated relationships regarding my own identity as a human being grappling with notions of home, and my place in the world. This work is also as much a credit to my parents, my first teachers – Noah and Roseline Mushakawanhu – whose unconditional love never diminishes.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the historical and contemporary engagements of philosophical anarchism in the selected writings of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Dambudzo Marechera in a bid to establish an anarchic poetics that emerges between them. Both use poetry and prose to express opposition to values and relations characterising authoritarian societies while also expressing alternative social, political and personal values. The unusual pairing of two writers who wrote and lived in very different times inevitably prompts an enquiry into the various trajectories of philosophical anarchism, Romanticism and postcoloniality in world literature. The aim is to blur the stereotypical nature of writers and writings from specific regions of the world and instead argue for an interliterary and intertextuality tradition as the new critical idiom. This thesis also analyses the social functioning of poetry and fiction in social reform and political revolution. Juxtaposing the perspectives of and writings from different spatio-temporal and cultural locations is necessary to emphasise the continuity of ideas, the evolution of theory and philosophy and the historical interconnectedness of humanity as explained by Edward Said's notion of 'contrapuntal juxtaposition.' The writings of Shelley and Marechera do raise important questions about society and the state and continue to address serious political issues. As will be demonstrated, the literature of Shelley and Marechera is not static, it grows and develops with each new reading, it is continually changing, and for this reason it is essentially moving. This study contributes to the fields of literary anarchist theory, postcolonialism as well as Romantic studies by extending a conceptual bridge between the political and literary histories of ideas in which Shelley and Marechera are both ambassadors.

KEY WORDS: anarchism, postcoloniality, reform, Shelley and Marechera.

ABBREVIATIONS

In parts I have used abbreviations to refer to works that I constantly reference and below is a list of the ones that recur throughout. Also, to ensure continuity and uniformity, it was important to quote from specific editions of primary texts by both Percy Shelley and Dambudzo Marechera. Where it is not the case, I specify the edition used.

Works by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Euganean Hills, Lines Written among the Euganean Hills

Prometheus – Prometheus Unbound

Queen Mab – Queen Mab

The Mask – The Mask of Anarchy

Letters I & II – The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Vol. I & II

Works by Dambudzo Marechera

Black Insider – The Black Insider

Cemetery, Cemetery of Mind

House of Hunger – The House of Hunger

Mindblast – Mindblast

Portrait – Portrait of the Black Artist in London

Works by Flora Veit-Wild

Source Book – Source Book of the Life and Times of Dambudzo Marechera

PREFACE

PERCY SHELLEY & DAMBUDZO MARECHERA: AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO MINDS¹



In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time.

The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge--it is as immortal as the heart of man.

-Wordsworth & Coleridge, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

This is an experimental preface in the form of an imagined conversation between Percy Bysshe Shelley and Dambudzo Marechera. My sources are entirely their own words: in poetry, prose, letters, essays, recorded conversations and interviews. I make no use of secondary material by critics or reviewers because I am mostly interested in how their views resonate with each other. As nothing substantive has ever been written about the connection

¹ A version of this conversation was published in a special issue of *Wasafiri* 27.4 (Dec 2012) pp. 82-88

between the two writers, I think this is the best way to test their compatibility and resonance with each other. The juxtaposition of their views highlights how radically different they are and yet how remarkably similar. In this imaginary conversation I take an unsentimental view on both – I am just the third force that brings them together for the first time. What did each really think about life? Did Marechera borrow anything from Shelley's verse and essays, or more speculatively, did Shelley anticipate many of the issues that were to preoccupy Marechera? The only documented connection between the two is Marechera's identification with Shelley and the parallels he draws in *The Black Insider* (p.30) of the romantic rebel, of the outsider rejected by society and rebelling against its norms. This exclusion from everyday society is intrinsically linked to their idea of the liberating force of literature, of a literature that unhinges the world and churns up people's minds. With all this in mind it will be relatively easier to appreciate the resonance between Shelley and Marechera, their utmost honesty and concern for truth in a world of falsity, pretence and deception. This is a conversation of ideas between two poetic minds.

People who do not know you that well seem to think that you are lacking in love and empathy for others. I think that love is at the core of your philosophies, the love for one another and the love for the self. More importantly, you are both driven by your love of your peoples and nations. Define love.

PERCY: It is that powerful attraction towards all we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our

brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own; that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness.

DAMBUDZO: To love is to discover terror, a very personal and intimate kind of terror: you are no longer yourself, you are no longer self-sufficient, you are the other person and the other person, of course, has got her own life. And it hurts to know love only as the Achilles Heel – that point of weakness through which the real world can fire into my soul arrows of desolation, frustration, depression, betrayal. This is love. The odd thing is that there is no real world – only what my five senses can excavate from the human location. And o the delight of sexual pleasure... when thought and calculation are banished out of sight. A melodrama of the voluptuous.

Every act of love is a recapitulation of the whole history of human emotion. That total innocence which is actually the seed of cynicism and ultimate despair. But when we have gone beyond despair, then we can dream. And it is in the dream that we discover our mythical self. The ghosts which hover over Great Zimbabwe are the same as those which tormented Troy, those which overwhelmed Carthage, those which watched over Aenias. And love is basically recognition, an eternal *déjà vu*, and this introduces a sense of terror, the desperate fear and longing of the loved one. To love is to die. And, as Sylvia Plath said, dying is an art. To realise that the loved one is doomed – it drives me insane to think of the loved one in any peril. But there it is.

There is something very poetic about the tragedy of your lives that plays out in the poetry of your imaginations too. It's almost as if you both write and live your own descriptions. However, what I am interested to know from you is what poetry means – its role and relevance to our being?

PERCY: Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be “the expression of the imagination”: and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre.

DAMBUDZO: Poetry is an attempt to put into words what is inside a person emotionally, intellectually, imaginatively. The poet's job is to find the equivalent, the verbal correlative of a particular feeling. This idea is from T.S. Eliot. The only difficulty is that there are no words for what you are feeling. When one has got into a lot of mindwork – and this is especially the case with poetry – you get into a state where poetry becomes pure thought, where there is no clear difference between philosophy and poetry. It is like a retreat from physical reality, an entry into a realm where the human being ceases to be and your soul takes over. Poetry becomes an attempt by the individual to become invisible, but with a kind of invisibility

which illuminates things from within as well as from without. That sort of poetry you can't really find in Africa and if you do it is always denounced as bourgeois.

We inhabit a crazy world that requires close scrutiny and vigorous Socratic questioning and it seems that you are both looking to challenge and be challenged in your own works. What role does language play in this endeavour?

PERCY: Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry; they may be called poetry by that figure of speech which considers the effect as a synonym of the cause. But poetry in a more restricted sense expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression. The former is as a mirror which reflects, the latter as a cloud which enfeebles, the light of which both are mediums of communication. Hence the fame of sculptors, painters, and musicians, although the intrinsic powers of the great masters of these arts may yield in no degree to that of those who have employed language as the hieroglyphic of their thoughts, has never equalled that of poets in the restricted sense of the term; as two performers of equal skill will produce unequal effects from a guitar and a harp. The fame of legislators and founders of religions, so long as their institutions last, alone seems to exceed

that of poets in the restricted sense; but it can scarcely be a question, whether, if we deduct the celebrity which their flattery of the gross opinions of the vulgar usually conciliates, together with that which belonged to them in their higher character of poets, any excess will remain.

DAMBUDZO: Language is like water. You can drink it. You can swim in it. You can drown in it. You can wear a snorkel in it. You can flow to the sea in it. You can evaporate and become invisible with it. You can remain standing in a bucket for hours. The Japanese invented a way of torturing people with drops of water. The Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique also used water to torture people. The dead friend Owen, who painted the mural on my wall, used to dream about putting LSD into South Africa's drinking water. It seems inconceivable to think of humans who have no language. They may have invented gelignite but they cannot do without water. Some take it neat from rivers and wells. Some have it clinically treated and reservoirized. Others drink nothing but beer and Bloody Marys and wine but this too is a way of taking your water. The way you take your water is supposed to say a lot about you. It is supposed to reflect your history, your culture, your breeding.... It is supposed to show the extent to which you and your nation have developed or degenerated. The word 'primitive' is applied to all those who take their alphabet neat from rivers, sewers and natural scenery – sometimes this may be described as the romantic imagination. The height of sophistication is actually to channel your water through a system of pipes right into your very own lavatory where you shake the hand of a machine and your shit and filthy manners disappear in a roaring of water. Being water you can spread diseases like bilharzias and thought. Thought is more fatal than bilharzia. And if you want to write a book you cannot think unless your thoughts are contagious. 'Do you still think and dream in your first language?' someone asked me in London. Words are worlds massively shrunk:

In yonder raindrop should its heart disclose,
Behold therein a hundred seas displayed.²

The languages of Europe (except Basque, Hungarian, Finnish, Turkish) are descended from one parent language which was spoken about 2500 to 2000 BC. This indo-European group of languages – in their modern form has been carried (by colonization, trade, conquest) to the far corners of the earth. Thus the Indo-European river has quite neatly overflowed its banks like the flood in the Bible has flooded Africa, Asia, America and all the islands. In this case there does not seem to have been any Noah about who built an ark to save even just two words of all the languages and speech, which were drowned. Literacy today is just the beginning of the story. Words are the waters which power the hydro-electricity of nations. Words are the chemicals that H₂O human intercourse. Words are the rain of votes which made the harvest possible. Words are the thunderstorm when a nation is divided. Words are the water in a shattering glass when friends break into argument. Words are the acronym of a nuclear test site. Every single minute the world is deluged by boulders of words crushing down upon us over the cliff of the TV, the telephone, the telex, the post, the satellite, the radio, the advertisement, the billposter, the traffic sign, graffiti, etc. Everywhere you go, some shit word will collide with you on the wrong side of the road. You can't even hide in yourself because your thoughts think of themselves in the words you have been taught to read and write. Even if you flee home and country, sanity and feeling, the priest and mourners, if any, will be muttering words over your coffin; the people you leave behind will be imagining you in their minds with words and signs. And there will be no silence in the cemetery because

² In *The Black Insider* footnotes source is unknown. In fact, this is from the Sufi poet, Mahmoud Shabistari.

always there are burials and more burials of people asphyxiated by words. No wonder it is said:

In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God.
And the Word was God,
All things were made by him;
And without him was not anything made
That was made.³

No wonder too it was said:
Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into dust descend;
Dust to dust, and under dust, to lie
Sans wine, sans song, sans singer, and-
sans end!⁴

Suddenly the other side of the world is only an alphabet away. Existence itself becomes a description, our lives a mere pattern in the massive universal web of words. Fictions become more documentary than actual documentaries. The only certain thing about these world descriptions is the damage they do, the devastation they bring to the minds of men and children. You do not become a man by studying the species but his language. The winds of change have cooled our porridge and now we can take up our spoons and eat it. Go, good countrymen, have yourselves a ball.

³ See, *Gospel of John*, 1: 1-3

⁴ Edward Fitzgerald, *ibid.*

I consider you both as poets in the sense in which Percy describes in *A Defence of Poetry*, of men of ideas as poets. Dambudzo you are acclaimed more for your prose fiction than your poetry which was continuously rejected and later published posthumously. Is there any difference between poetry and prose, And, if so, how are they different?

PERCY: A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur; the other is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and forever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains. Hence epitomes have been called the moths of just history; they eat out the poetry of it. A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful; poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted. The parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem. A single sentence may be considered as a whole, though it may be found in the midst of a series of unassimilated portions; a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought. And thus all the great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets; and although the plan of these writers, especially that of Livy, restrained them from

developing this faculty in its highest degree, they made copious and ample amends for their subjection, by filling all the interstices of their subjects with living images.

DAMBUDZO: I do not see a great difference between poetry and prose. The same concentration and intensity of expression attributed to poetry can be found, for instance, in those novelists who follow the stream of consciousness, like James Joyce. The stream of consciousness novel lies in the grey area between poetry and prose. The assumption of prose stating one thing after the other is not true. Franz Kafka wrote some rather good prose-poems. And on the other side there are some poems, for instance, the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which you can read as if you were reading a story, even though the impact is somehow different. Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* is a novel but it is written in the kind of South American novel style where prose achieves a magical quality, a sort of enchantment, an intensity which can even go beyond poetry into madness. I remember the first reactions and reports on the manuscript of *Black Sunlight* talking about how prose can actually reverberate beyond poetry into a form of psychotic insanity.

I sense that you both had the same ambition: to awaken people from the slumber of their historically limiting traditions and morals. What was your mission as a writer?

PERCY: The system of society as it exists (at present) must be overthrown from the foundations with its entire superstructure of maxims & of forms before we shall find anything but disappointment in our intercourse with any but a few select spirits. This remedy does not seem to be one of the easiest. But the generous few are not the less held to tend with all their efforts towards it. If faith is a virtue in any case it is so in politics rather than religion; as

having a power of producing that a belief in which is at once a prophesy & a cause -----.⁵

Most of my later work, especially the *popular songs* were wholly political, & destined to awaken & direct the imagination of the reformers. I see you smile ☺ – but that answers your question.

DAMBUDZO: I try to write in such a way that I short-circuit, like in electricity, people's traditions and morals. Because only then can they start having original thoughts of their own. I would like people to stop thinking in an institutionalised way. If they stop thinking like that and look in a mirror, they will see how beautiful they are and see those impossibilities within themselves, emotionally and intellectually – that's why most of what I have written is always seen as being disruptive or destructive. For me that slow brain death I was talking about can only be cured by this kind of literary shock treatment...in this way I see the writer as a kind of Cassandra figure with all this enormous talent to actually analyse, officialise intensely people's destinies, only to be cursed by censorship, by persecution, by whatever, for having that talent.... A vision like that transcends any political programme

Interestingly, Percy you were expelled for co-authoring the notorious pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) and Dambudzo you had one of your books, *Black Sunlight* (1980), banned in Zimbabwe for religious reasons. Do you believe in God? And what is the relationship between religion and the creative spirit?

PERCY: Religion is so intimately connected with politics, & augments in so vivid a degree the evils resulting from the system before us, that I will make a few remarks on it...the persecutions against Xtians, under the Greek empire their energetic retaliations, & burning each other, the excommunications bandied between the popes of Rome & the patriarchs of

⁵ Understanding hope as the characteristic Shelleyan mode of faith, we can see him here implying that hope produces not only the prophecy but a cause, but a power of agency.

Constantinople, their influence upon politics – War, Assassination, the Sicilian Vespers – the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, Ld. G. Gordon’s mob, & the state of Religious things at present can amply substantiate my assertions – And Liberty! Poor liberty, even the religionists who cry so much for thee, use thy name but as a mask, that they also may seize the torch, and show their gratitude by burning their deliverer.... It is this emperor of terror which is established by Religion, Monarchy is its proto-type, Aristocracy may be regarded as symbolising... its very essence. They are mixed – one can now scarce be distinguished from the other, & equality in politics like perfection in morality appears now far removed from even the visionary anticipations of what is called the wildest theorist.

DAMBUDZO: Yes, but which God? The Christian religion is mixed up with some of our traditions. If Christianity is going to have any meaning at all to anyone who is African, it must see that Christ himself is at first human and he is therefore African too. Religion has always encouraged a passive imagination in our writing. For example, most of the first African writers in Zimbabwe were priests or teachers taught in religious institutions and that has always given their works themes to do with life as predestined with a God up there and therefore that cramped and confined their imagination. Christianity has simply warped and twisted the African mind. They could only see the world in terms of right and wrong. They never tried to penetrate to the core of our actual national problems here. I would simply say to any young Zimbabwean writer now – just stop reading the Bible, just stop going to church, just write what you see around you and all those odd feelings and thoughts inside you. The church or religion (eg) teaches one to simply ignore or feel bad about one’s body. I am talking in terms of sexuality, in terms of those urges and desires which really shape one’s destiny in dreams and daydreams, in fantasies...

Now gentlemen, your expulsions from Oxford have become fodder for legends and mythmakers. This is the place where your paths cross in a remarkable fashion. Though Oxford remains one of the most distinguished educational institutions in the world, you were ejected from its system. Is Oxford a disagreeable place?

PERCY: Expelled. I got expelled. I was sent for suddenly... and I went to the common room, where I found the master, and two or three other fellows. The master produced a copy of the little syllabus (on *The Necessity of Atheism*), and asked me if I were the author of it. He spoke in a rude, abrupt, and insolent tone. I begged to be informed for what purpose he put the question. No answer was given: but the master loudly and angrily repeated, 'Are you the author of this book?' I replied: if you can produce evidence that I am, prove it. I had experienced tyranny and injustice before, but I had never met such unworthy treatment. I persisted in my refusal, and he said furiously, 'Then you are expelled; and I desire you will quit the college early tomorrow morning at the latest.' I left and never returned.

DAMBUDZO: Imagine, one morning I woke up to find myself being sent down in disgrace. I remember consoling myself by reflecting on how your (Shelley) free and happy life in University College was permanently interrupted by your expulsion in 1811. In my case, they gave me an ultimatum: Dambudzo, you must choose. Either you agree to certify yourself insane and we take you into a very good psychiatric home, or, if you refuse that, then we expel you. And they gave me only three hours to choose. After the three hours I went back and said, 'Well, I have chosen.' And they said, 'Oh shall we take you to the psychiatric home?' and I said 'No, I have decided I am not insane and you can therefore expel me. I have already packed my things.' They said, 'You are being a fool, it's a luxury psychiatric home, we'll pay for you there.' But I said, 'No, I am not insane.' Leaving meant that I was just about to start a journey in the real United Kingdom.

You were both exiled from your homelands for significant periods of time. Why did you leave and what did you hope to get that you were not getting in England and Zimbabwe, respectively?

PERCY: I must confess that the thought of leaving made me very melancholy. Our journey was somewhat painful. But no sooner had we arrived in Italy than the loveliness of the earth & the serenity of the sky made the greatest difference in my sensations – I depend on these things for life for in the smoke of cities & the tumult of humankind & the chilling fogs & rain of our own country I can hardly be said to live.... I often revisit Marlow⁶ in thought. The curse of this life is that whatever is once known can never be unknown. You inhabit a spot which before you inhabit it is as indifferent to you as any other spot upon the earth, & when, persuaded by some necessity you think to leave it, you leave it not, - it clings to you & with memories of things which in your experience of them gave no such promise, revenges your desertion. Time flows on, places are changed, friends who were with us are no longer with us, but what has been, seems yet to be, but barren & stript of life.... We do not know a single human being. Lord Byron we hear has taken a house for three years at Venice; whether we shall see him or not I do not know, as it depends partly on whether we get such a house as we can invite him to. The number of English who pass through the town is very great.⁷ They ought to be in their own country at the present crisis. Their conduct is wholly inexcusable. The people here, though in offensive enough, seem both in body & soul a miserable race. The

⁶ Before leaving for Italy, Shelley and his family owned a house in Marlow, an English town on the River Thames.

⁷ This is extracted from a letter Shelley was writing from Milan in 1818, which mentions a significant expatriate population.

men are hardly men, they look like a tribe of stupid & shrivelled slaves, & I do not think I have seen a gleam of intelligence in the countenance of man since I passed the Alps.

DAMBUDZO: Sick with Rhodesia, I left. My main experience of Oxford was loneliness and a certain questioning of why I found myself in a strange environment, whose traditions – well frankly – I found disturbing. I asked myself exactly what was happening to my generation and what underlies those events which erupt time and time again in any generation. Some of my friends had gone off to join the freedom fighters, some, like myself, found ourselves in countries where all we wanted to do was not so much gain educational certificates, but survive mentally, to hospitalise ourselves in a country where police dogs and other forms of brutalisation were not a day-to-day affairs. At the same time, there was this feeling that our generation had more or less been raped and that like any rape case we would never really recover from the psychological consequences... I just get bloody drunk. I don't want to think. Thinking is what gets me into a spot all the time. If you think, they think you are deep. If you don't think, they think you are always half asleep. I was never trained for anything but reading books I like. I haven't the nerve to present myself at a building site as that grossly underrated man, the unskilled labourer. Tried it once and got beaten up. The only thing I can do, I suppose, is to teach but I detest teaching. I'd hate to have the next generation's nightmares on my conscience. Not that I have a conscience. I can't afford one.... The loneliness of exile, far from home and in a hostile surrounding, brought those of us who suffered from this exile closer together. A black laager mentality developed which was cultivated and flourished in places like the Africa Centre or the Marlborough Arms, a Bloomsbury pub near the University of London where Zimbabwean exiles met. As we sat there in the safety of numbers and in the anonymity of educated talk which the beer was readily stimulating, I could see how wretched our position was, always having to form a

black laager against the horde of white natives. It was not enough for us to be black and proud and beautiful; little teeth of uneasiness always gnawed at our self-assurance for there is no answer to a whiteman's sneer.

This is a weird world of mechanical speeches with politicians lullabying us with mobile horizon promises. They are quick to mend legislation; so the world is what they make it for us who are passive, we who they shamelessly claim to have liberated, we, the followers. Sometimes (which is, sadly, most of the time), it feels like the ballot cannot effect the change we desire, it is always the recycling of same old same politicians. Is violence ever an alternative?

PERCY:

If then the tyrants dare
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, stab, and maim, and hew, --
What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.
Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak

In hot blushes on their cheek.

...

And that slaughter to the Nation

Shall steam up like inspiration,

Eloquent, oracular;

A volcano heard afar.

And these words shall then become

Like Oppression's thundered doom

Ringling through each heart and brain,

Heard again – again – again

Rise like Lions after slumber

In unvanquishable number –

Shake your chains to earth like dew

Which in sleep had fallen on you –

Ye are many – they are few.

DAMBUDZO:

I am against everything,

Against war and those against

war, against whatever diminishes

the individual's blind impulse.

Finally, Percy and Dambudzo, you were vocal against the status quo: have things changed? Will things ever change?

PERCY: Well, how can the English endure the mountains of cant which are cast upon them about this vulgar cook-maid they call a Queen? It is scarcely less disgusting than the tyranny of her husband, who, on his side, uses the battery of the same cant. It is really time for the English to wean themselves from this nonsense, for really their situation is too momentous to justify them in attending to Punch and his Wife. The [current economic crisis] is indeed a two-edged sword.

DAMBUDZO: I think some things have been improved. But basically our revolution has only changed life for the new black middle class, those who got university degrees overseas during the struggle. For them, independence is a reality; it has changed their income, their housing conditions and so on and so on. But for the working classes and the peasants, it's still the same hard work, low pay, rough conditions of living. In other words, I don't think independence so far has really made any significant change as far as the working class are concerned.

INTRODUCTION: ESTABLISHING ANARCHIC POETICS⁸

The beginnings: Encounters & Connections

I first encountered Dambudzo Marechera in an out of the way rural boarding school in Zimbabwe.⁹ Percy Bysshe Shelley did not exist for me at this time. I was thirteen. Our school library had a full collection of all published Marechera books. However, *The House of Hunger* (1978) was the first book I read by him, and it made me feel so much cooler than anyone else in high school: to be able to read a writer whom everyone considered to be difficult and incomprehensible. Marechera seemed to be coming at me with everything. There are lots of shifts in time and place in his work and you're never quite sure what is real and what isn't. His life seemed at stake in his words, and while I was reading him, so did mine. I vividly remember moments I would sit under library tables or hide behind colossal bookshelves and read a Marechera book. Reading Marechera was like an initiation into a secret society. There was something wonderfully subversive about his writing; he said things that were too dangerous to say, things I had to decode. Marechera didn't want to be too easily understood. As he explains, through his alter-ego Nick in *Black Sunlight* (1980), 'I am astonished at the audience's ignorance. I did not expect such a low cultural level among you. Those who do not understand my work are simply illiterate. One must learn... (*Black Sunlight*, 110).' In this way, Marechera prompted me to pursue him. We became comrades.

⁸ Parts of this chapter were published in Grant Hamilton's *Reading Marechera*, (Suffolk: James Currey, 2013) under the title, 'A Brotherhood of Misfits: The Literary Anarchism of Dambudzo Marechera and Percy Bysshe Shelley' pp. 11-25

⁹ Like Dambudzo Marechera himself who was a boarder at St Augustines, Penhalonga, I was sent by my parents to board at Msengezi High School between 1996 and 1999. As it was in the colonial times, to attend a boarding school still remains a rare privilege in contemporary Zimbabwe. There is usually immense emotional strain as the system is highly competitive and this is heightened by the great expectations of both, family and society. I survived it all by taking refuge in the small school library where I was to discover Marechera who had gone through the same experience. It was also at this time that I was to discover other black Zimbabwean writers too – Charles Mungoshi, Alexander Kanengoni, Chenjerai Hove, Kristina Rungano, Yvonne Vera, Charles Samupindi, Tsitsi Dangarembga, etc.

I loved this illicit relationship with Marechera – he was always like that forbidden friend in childhood who was way older than you and your parents and other adults told you to keep away from because they thought he was a bad influence and corrupting your sensibilities. And yet, you still sneaked out to see him because he had all the time in the world for you, you told him about your troubles and fantasies and he listened and gave you advice (so bad and daring sometimes) but you kept on coming back for more. He told you grown-up stuff that other adults would rather you did not hear but you listened to anyway and asked too many questions which never seemed to bother him, and he knew everyone else misunderstood him except you. While I have no claim to have met Marechera, his books were my older mates I looked up to, to be streetwise. Were they honest friends? Did they always tell the truth? I learnt to read between the lines and take out what I wanted. Truth is often what you want to believe.

In Zimbabwe, there are those who got to meet Marechera (or so they claim) and the rest of us who encountered him through reading his works and through embellished pub legends.¹⁰ In fact, those who were old enough when Marechera was alive tend to be possessive of the man and the legend, even his writings – there is an arrogance in them that says ‘because you never got to know him in his lifetime therefore you are not qualified to talk about him.’ I experience this a lot as ‘the (so-called) youngest Marechera apostle’¹¹ and felt it even more before and

¹⁰ I explore this issue in a detailed dialogic paper co-written with a Finnish scholar of Marechera, Dr Anna-Leena Toivanen, in Julie Cairnie and Dobrota Pucherova’s *Moving Spirit: Dambudzo Marechera in the 21st Century* (Berlin: Verlag, 2012) in a chapter titled ‘Cult figure and pub legend: Dialoguing on the legacy of St Dambudzo.’

¹¹ See, Memory Chirere’s essay ‘Marechera-mania grips writers’ in *The Southern Times*, February 5, 2006, p.C1. In this article Chirere describes six Zimbabwean writers – Robert Muponde, Nhamo Mhiripiri, Ruzvidzo Mupfudza, Philip Zhuwao, Ignatius Mabasa and Tinashe Mushakavanhu as Marechera apostles for being ‘associated with Marechera in either their content or form of their writings.’

after my participation at the historic Oxford symposium that celebrated the life and work of Marechera.¹² In those very moments, I become very suspicious of those who talk about Marechera. However, I do embrace my supposed ignorance as a buffer, a necessary critical distancing that allows me to engage with Marechera from a totally different angle. What I admire in Marechera is the sheer intensity of language, the use of intense imagery, the fearlessness and openness in his writings and the desire to be independent from the self and society.

In Zimbabwe, Marechera is an attitude – a way of relating with the world. He represents a certain post-colonial mindset, an uninhibited imagination offering alternative ways of living, of being, of seeing, of feeling, of emotion. In pursuit of all this, Marechera naturally experimented with form and stretched the elastic line between fact and fiction. Nothing is certain. Everything for him is dynamic, open to new interpretations. These qualities have endeared him to young Zimbabweans who have since established a monthly commemorative House of Hunger Poetry Slam, held at the Book Café¹³ in Harare since 2005, a gathering of young poets to celebrate Marechera.

¹² “Dambudzo Marechera: A Celebration” was a three-day symposium held at Trinity College, Oxford from 15-17 May 2009 and organised by Prof Elleke Boehmer and Dr Dobrota Pucherova. The event brought together renowned international scholars, writers, and artists who worked with or have been inspired by Marechera, and it emphasised transnational cultural interaction, creative freedom and free movement across national borders, all of which Marechera himself embodied, and at the same time it sought to analyse the meaning of 'African literature' in the 21st century. With the generosity of funds from the School of English at the University of Kent, I participated in the event as a panelist. Perhaps there is something ironical about Oxford celebrating, and, as it were, taking credit for the genius of an individual it once disowned.

¹³ The Book Café was shut down in June 2015, a year after its founder, Paul Brickhill, succumbed to cancer.



A poster of the poetry slam in Harare with a sketch of Dambudzo Marechera © Book Café

I have always liked writers who keep it real. Marechera certainly did. Reading *The House of Hunger* was a revelation. I saw in its pages the streets in which my mother and father grew up in the 1960s and 1970s Rhodesia, the same streets in which I was growing up in the 1980s and 1990s Zimbabwe – the hunger, the squalor, the poverty, the prostitution, the divide and conquer politics. I saw Mai *Nhingi*¹⁴, our neighbour, turn to prostitution to feed her nine kids after her husband suddenly died of a stress induced heart attack. We followed the older girls who had sex in the bushes at the edge of the ‘location.’ I remember *sisi* Immaculate from the big green house at the corner who had a child whose father was unknown. Literature became a motion picture of my existence as I saw myself walking through the words and images of Marechera’s ‘House of Hunger.’ I like writers who consistently ask me to stitch together those things that we normally keep apart, and while doing so, taking the most perversely original instance to instantiate the problem. Marechera was all those writers to me. Along the way I have had to read the works of James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Charles Bukowsky, Allen Ginsberg, Günter Grass, Dylan Thomas, Wole Soyinka and Percy Bysshe Shelley, etc as

¹⁴ Mai *Nhingi* is a generic for the mother whose child’s name has been forgotten, in this context, it could be any another woman in the township. In this instance, I use this expression to show that the mother figure in Marechera’s book *The House of Hunger* is a familiar everywoman type.

footnotes to his heavily annotated texts.¹⁵ I went to read the Russians, the Japanese, and the Germans in translation because Marechera cited them for their wisdom in dealing with the human condition.

But out of all that reading, Percy Shelley became more than just a footnote. He turned out to be a very special reference point and Marechera's kindred spirit. After reading Shelley I found myself in a world unlike any I had imagined before. I was excited and intrigued. Here, I thought was a way to live as a poet. I found the drama of his personality captivating. It became obvious to me why Marechera found him captivating too. They had both suffered the distinctive humiliation of being expelled from Oxford University, a parallel that meant so much to Marechera that he fictionalized it in his semi autobiographical novella, *The Black Insider* (1992). Marechera recalls, '...one morning I woke up to find myself being sent down in disgrace. I remember consoling myself by reflecting on how Shelley's free and happy life in University College was permanently interrupted by his expulsion...' (*The Black Insider*, 30). This is where my real journey with Shelley began.

Not long after I started my research at the University of Kent, I decided to visit Manchester to meet poet Steven Waling, who had been my mentor in a British Council literary initiative to

¹⁵ Zimbabwe is a traditionally conservative society and that is even reflected in the school curriculum, for instance, literature courses are usually catalogues of nationalist writings. My major fascination with Marechera was as a reference point to writers who could have easily remained alien to me. The authors in this list are not taught in Zimbabwe and this is not surprising as they are all unorthodox and too radical. This is one of the enduring criticisms of Marechera's work, that he is unreadable. In fact, John Wylie, a Heinemann reader rightly says: "*The Black Insider* reads a little like a clever dissertation for a PhD. What is remarkable is that the author, with so many brilliant minds supporting him and his ability to draw on them, can still find a wealth of original and perfectly phrased statements of his own to forward his arguments and to throw light on his own ideas." (*The Black Insider*, 17)

support young African writers, Crossing Borders Creative Writing Project.¹⁶ After many years of correspondence, Waling knew of my fascination with Shelley and volunteered to be my guide on a walking tour around key sites in Manchester. The city's radical history inspired Shelley and his contemporaries. Having a poet for a tour guide was an irresistible opportunity. My memories of the walk are fragments of an anecdotal and digressive tapestry of poetry that lived and continues to live in the facades of contemporary Manchester.

Standing in Peter Street, Manchester, the place that was at the heart of the Peterloo massacres, a historical moment that inspired some of Shelley's finest political poems, excited my imagination. Infrastructure and urbanisation had distorted this square, which was once a patch of open ground, known as St Peter's Field. Just being in this place where many thinkers, reformers and agitators used to gather to advocate change fortified my resolve and research mission. I was hungry to understand the radical stirrings that inspired Shelley's literary imagination and political thinking. The urgency of this quest had been further provoked by an early encounter with the novelist and scholar Abdulrazak Gurnah in his office at the Rutherford Annex, University of Kent. He asked me, 'What do you know about Shelley? What makes you think you can read Shelley and Marechera together? Do you think your curiosity is enough to produce quality research?' That walk in Manchester resolved many of these anxieties; it felt like a time travel exercise, between points in time, space, and history.

¹⁶ Crossing Borders' was a distance learning mentoring project that linked 25 mentors in the UK to over 200 African writers over a 5-year programme of development.



Walking tour of Manchester sites linked to the 1819 Peterloo massacre © Google Maps¹⁷

I therefore set out to seek whatever Marecheraic qualities he had. To imagine that someone like Shelley lived centuries before and in another world fascinated me. I found Shelley's restless and demanding presence enamoring. Then there was Shelley's conscious craftsmanship, his disciplined originality in handling and reworking traditional forms and the striking modernity that distinguished his work from his Romantic peers. I travelled with him in his solitary journeys from England to Ireland to Wales all the way into the Italian landscape and as I read more about his tragic existence and discovered the complex beauty of his poetry I enjoyed the sense of poetic adventure in his words and imagination, his sense of energy and intellectual power.¹⁸ Shelley's life story was just as colourful and exciting as

¹⁷ The indexical points of my 'Peterloo walking tour:' A – Peter Street; B – The Free Trade Hall (now the Radisson Hotel); C – Elliot House; D – Abraham Lincoln statue; E – Chatham's Library; F – Manchester Cathedral and G- Robert Owen, now the The Cooperative Bank PLC.

¹⁸ Ann Wroe's *Being Shelley: The Poet's Search for Himself* (Vintage Books, 2008) is a brilliant imaginary biography of Shelley that draws from his adventures and misadventures, especially towards the end of his life.

Marechera's. I was not simply fascinated by the scandalous detail of their lives but more interested in how they forge new categories of thinking and new modes of being and becoming.

To this end, both challenged established (and often imposed) thinking with a forceful refusal. Shelley rebelled against English politics and conservative values and was considered a pariah for his unconventional lifestyle. Everything Shelley proposed and pursued had its basis in his search for the meaning of life and the truth of his being. I found his range as a poet-philosopher and the modern applicability of his thoughts greater than is commonly supposed. Marechera rejected the white normative gaze of his life and experiences. Marechera, like Shakespeare's Caliban¹⁹, appreciated the gift of the English language colonialism benefited him. He didn't have to unlearn or relearn another lexicon to express his life on the streets of Vengere Township in eastern Zimbabwe where he was born and raised or to communicate his artistic soul. Marechera's voice took root somewhere deep inside me.

As a result, this thesis was born as an idea of rediscovering Marechera's story as it intertwined with Shelley's story and vice-versa; their explosive mixture of fantasy (the imagination), poetry and radical ideas are so close to the hopes and aspirations of our times. They were not just two idealistic writers who tragically died young but deep explorers of the human condition, and I have since discovered that their explorations have significant meanings for human well-being that are often obscured from immediate awareness. If the world has been more pessimistic and sinister because of the threat of terrorism and extreme

¹⁹ Caliban is a principal character in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* first performed in 1611.

fundamentalism²⁰, Shelley's and Marechera's peculiar energy and idealism may stand out even more forcefully as sharp flames against the shadows of our fears. What often made them appear absurd and misunderstood gathers a particular and poignant resonance today. Both strongly believed that the world could be revolutionized by the power of language and the imagination. They were desperate to develop a clear, yet creative, sense of what our ends might be. 'How shall we live?' is, according to Socrates²¹, the fundamental question of human existence, and Shelley and Marechera took on the challenge to answer that question (or, at least, spent their lives attempting this). Their attempts and/or responses make up the essence of this thesis.

Discrepant experiences, different worlds

Reading Shelley alongside Marechera with a comparative objective seems, at face value, presumptuous and contrived. But is it really? I would like to argue that this pairing provides an opportunity to re-read Shelley and Marechera in a larger – global – context. It is clearly obvious that the two write from out of different historical and social contexts and elaborate different textual strategies in response to their experiences and therefore I posit that their various works can be regarded as variations on a theme. I think both Shelley and Marechera present varieties of the Romantic experience – given the intensity of the two writers' concerns and their breadth and interest in matters touching politics: the dilemma posed for each writer by discrepancies between intellectual principles underlying their political assents and Romantic intuitions. I would argue that a comparative study of the two writers is an

²⁰ The September 11 attacks (also known as 9/11), a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, was the beginning of a dramatic and horrific global scale war on terror.

²¹ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on 'Socrates' <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/socrates/> <Accessed 3 May, 2015>

extension and elaboration of Edward Said's notion, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), of 'discrepant experiences.' For Said a contrapuntal reading of 'overlapping and interconnected experiences' such as those of Shelley and Marechera enables us

...to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others. (Said 1993: 36)

In juxtaposing these two together, it is therefore my interpretive political aim to make concurrent those views and experiences that have been ideologically and culturally closed to each other, and also attempt to shed new light upon other suppressed views and experiences. I hope to reflect on Shelley's conception of philosophical anarchism and his broader creative goal of revolutionary praxis. There is a sense in which Shelley internationalized his thoughts and ideas to encompass all humanity and thus regard himself as a citizen of the world.

Marechera embraces that very concept of being a citizen of the world when he lashes out that he 'would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or specific race, then fuck you' (Veit-Wild & Schade 1988:3). So while they remain at heart and in their experiences connected to their roots in England and Zimbabwe respectively, they embrace the wider world making their experiences richer and accessible to all. Discrepant experiences open up opportunities for genuine dialogue and constructive interaction beyond the limits of binary or Manichean opposition in which usually the western worldview is dominant.

The focus in this thesis will oscillate between later eighteenth century and twentieth century political and social historiography and this is inevitable considering the two writers under

study. In fact, a comparative approach is very necessary here if we are to appreciate the consequences of imperial history and how that continues to affect global human relations. And even though Shelley lived and died before the Berlin conference of 1884 which was to lead to the partition of Africa into colonies, one of which Marechera was to become a product of, the wheels of imperial domination had already been set in motion by the gradual growth and expansion of the Industrial Revolution.²² Now it is not difficult to follow the devastating consequences of the colonial conquest of Africa as generations of historians have already done this. Sadly, the tendency in history is to treat the whole world as a construction of the west; however, Shelley and Marechera argue for a common humanity.

As Shelley wrote of a utopian world – a world that may yet be still to come – his interpretation of history is doubly prophetic: it still offers the possibility of a brighter Hellas, and at the same time acknowledges that the menacing presence of tyranny will not easily disappear but continue. And Marechera sought in his fiction to ‘strip naked’ the masquerade of independence that attained after the de-colonization of Africa.²³ Independence is hijacked by a host of dictators and tyrants under the guise of nationalism and patriotism.²⁴ The questions that Marechera asked with brutal honesty were: how shall we use the immense opening we have gained, which enables us to liberate our minds, our souls, our bodies, and our instincts, from the historical memory embedded in our sub-conscious understanding,

²² I am implying here that the Industrial Revolution’s expansion to other territories was motivated by need of cheap labour and resources and it is not difficult to see how the colonial enterprise feeds off such a capitalist scheme. The partition of Africa I allude to was a means of sharing and dividing economic rights to foreign territories.

²³ Zimbabwe was one of the last countries to get independence from Britain in 1980 following a long armed struggle. In the 1970s and 1980s countries that had already attained independence were already riddled with corruption scandals and controlled by liberators-turned-despots eg Ghana, Nigeria, and Zaire. It seems there was no hope for a newly born country like Marechera’s Zimbabwe. Perhaps, to twist Ayi Kwei Armah’s iconic title of his 1968 novel about a blighted independent Ghana – to this day the beautiful ones are still to be born.

²⁴ Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1963) gives a more elaborate analysis on the ‘Pitfalls of National Consciousness.’

which instructs us to fear and respect the law and order and social regularities dictated by unchallengeable powers and what shall we, the emancipated people, define as our own distinct selves? In many instances, the answering of these questions produces a ghastly masquerade of which Shelley and Marechera wrote. They reveal the ugly face of society scarred by the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie.

Shelley reasoned that collective passive resistance would succeed because the spirit of the 'Old laws of England' would reduce 'the bold, true warriors' to shame for any violence against their countrymen. This legacy of non-violence has not been widely celebrated though it inspired Gandhi. Perhaps Shelley's ultimate contribution, as will be outlined in the thesis, was that hopeless idealism was a revolutionary force. To him, the appropriate way to promote libertarian idealism is not with swashbuckling militarism, but by consistent pacifism: eloquence, unimpeachable virtue, hope and boldness, what Gandhi would later call 'soul force.'²⁵ Whereas Marechera's creative gusto was fierier and he was keen like the militant African-American civil rights leader Malcom X to fight the system 'by any means necessary'²⁶ for his nation's true emancipation from all forms of colonialism.

Far from obliterating the historicity of either of the writers, the exposure and dramatisation of discrepancy between them can establish a sense of historical and political continuity across difference. In fact, the discrepancy between the politics that produced Shelley and that which produced Marechera is stark in contrast. However, my overriding concern throughout the thesis is the treatment of human experience and 'world history as viewable by a kind of

²⁵ Nirupama Rao 'Ghandi's light guided MLK' on *Politico* <http://politi.co/2g88wdZ> <Accessed 5 November 2013> The essay advances the argument that Martin Luther King carried forward Gandhi's commitments because both shared common values, common strategies and common struggles. We hint to the symbiotic connection elsewhere in this thesis.

²⁶ See, Malcom X *By Any Means Necessary* (Atlanta: Pathfinder Press, 1992).

Western super-subject, whose historicising and disciplinary rigour either takes away or, in the post-colonial period, restores history to people and cultures *without* history' (Said, 1993: 40). This restoration is of great concern to me and to Marechera who is very much aware of the ideological pacification institutionalised in formal education. This awareness ultimately leads to his expulsion from Oxford, an event, which I shall deal with later in the thesis.

And while at Trinity College, Oxford for the historic Marechera symposium, not one or two, but several 'decorated' post-colonial academics, most of whom, prior to this gathering I only knew as names on book covers, upon discovering my subject of research all interestingly remarked that it 'was an unworkable' comparison or an odd pairing of writers. My heart somersaulted. I wondered: Are there right and wrong ways to read literature? What do they see, that I can't see? Another professor approached me and after sharing my excited brief about Shelley and Marechera, screamed, 'O God, why these two, I don't even think Shelley is your man here? You must replace him. Perhaps, replace Shelley with another post-colonial writer like V.S. Naipaul.' And there was the professor and novelist to whom I had sent an email prior to the symposium to see if I could interview him. He never responded. However, after a brilliant talk he gave on Marechera and Ben Okri,²⁷ I walked over to him and congratulated him. He wanted to know what I do and where I knew Marechera from.²⁸ Once I

²⁷ He makes the claim that Ben Okri's Booker Prize winning novel, *The Famished Road*, was in part inspired by Marechera's death. In making the main narrator an *abiku* or spirit child, Okri was in communion with his departed friend, the speaker further explained.

²⁸ See Ella Goschalk; 'Oxford celebrates poet it once shunned' in *Cherwell* (Oxford student newspaper) 21 May 2009. This piece interrogates some of the controversies of the event, including why it was even held in the first place. There were only three Zimbabweans in attendance, myself, University of Zimbabwe lecturer, Memory Chirere and filmmaker Heeten Bhagat. Sadly, the black Zimbabweans who knew Marechera personally – I am thinking here of Stanley Nyamfukudza, Charles Mungoshi, Musaemura Zimunya, Olley Maruma, Chenjerai Hove were not invited. Marechera contemporaries who spoke about the author were only his 'white friends.' The affair was therefore a one-sided Western academy gathering to celebrate a literary project they have amazingly appropriated to be their own. Prof Elleke Boehmer's comment that 'the English Faculty and academia has moved on. We're now in a place where black writers' works are discussed and celebrated. It's a

mentioned my research interest, he was silent; ruffled the sparse grey hair left on his head and looked at me. He spoke softly and painfully slow. ‘Now I remember you. You are that crazy guy writing about Marechera and Shelley or something like that. Yes, I remember you, getting your email and just thinking the whole idea was crazy.’ Another event, a gathering that had a focus on English Romanticism, an elderly scholar, after a brief chat, said ‘You know, in 40 years, you’re the first black Romanticist I have met.’

It still puzzles me why this coupling of Shelley and Marechera is considered to be a bastardization of the critical literary practice? This collective dismissal surprised me as if other literatures and societies have either an inferior or transcendent value, as if to say, that modern European criticism has a monopoly over literary insight. The interrelationships between writers from different backgrounds have not been seriously explored as much as they should. To speak of comparative literature should suggest interaction of literatures with one another but the field is ‘epistemologically organised as a sort of hierarchy, with Europe...at its centre and top’ (Said 52). The remarks by these scholars almost imply that to compare the great English poet Shelley with a ‘post-colonial’ Marechera who is widely disparaged in Africa, anyway, is abominable and as such these criticisms fuelled the fire of curiosity in me. And whether there is an element of racism or racial exclusivity in the English academy is a matter of conjecture. But this may also be a matter of epistemic grids, the very institutionalised thinking that Shelley and Marechera both challenge. For Edward Said, this is a case of how knowledge is always invested in power. For me, this contrapuntal reading of

different Oxford from the one Marechera experienced’ is rather disingenuous. It is clear that black writers are only worthy of talking about if they are approved by committee or special exclusive gatherings, which is the case here.

Shelley and Marechera is a means of radically breaking with traditions in literary criticism, establishing new procedures of critical inquiry with fresh terms of reference.

In literary terms, this study therefore forces a return to historical and political readings of the Romantic period and black African writing inspired by the struggles to overturn the autocratic and colonial systems. Marechera acknowledges the aesthetic correlation between European literature and modern African writing, mainly in aesthetic terms. He goes on to say that ‘there is a healthy interchange of technique and themes. That Europe had, to say the least, a head start in written literature, is an advantage for the African writer; he does not have to solve many problems of structure – they have already been solved’ (Veit-Wild & Schade 1988:10). Here, Marechera is moving beyond the insularity of the often perceived cultural lines and in fact does not consider inter-literary exchanges pernicious. A reading of Marechera alongside Shelley should not therefore be a surprising enterprise as it certainly aids in the project of a common history that connects us as human beings, regardless of our backgrounds or skin colour.

Even though there is a small body of critical work devoted to the connection between Romanticism and colonialism,²⁹ there is still something problematic about these studies: the treatment of Africa as an extension of British imperial and cultural superiority. This raises the obvious vexed question of the relationship between culture and imperialism and the complicit

²⁹ See, for example, Timothy Fulford and Peter J. Kitson [eds], *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire 1780-1830* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). This volume examines Romantic literary discourse in relation to colonial politics and the peoples and places with which the British were increasingly coming into contact. It investigates topics from slavery to tropical disease, religion and commodity production, in a wide range of writers such as Edmund Burke, Hannah More, William Blake, Phyllis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, Mary Shelley, Thomas Clarkson and Lord Byron.

nature of English literature in the imperialist project. This supposed potency of English literature and English education within the colonial and post-colonial contexts is a favourite theme among Zimbabwean writers like Charles Mungoshi in *Waiting for the Rain* (1975); Dambudzo Marechera in *The House of Hunger* (1978); Stanley Nyamfukudza in *The Non-Believers Journey* (1980); and Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Bill Ashcroft et al in their theoretical manifesto³⁰ are very much aware that the study of English has always been a densely political and cultural phenomenon. Unfortunately, this remains the situation today. For instance, I used to express my frustration with Zimbabwean education in the University of Kent student newspaper:

The English literature curriculum in Zimbabwe remains largely colonial. The literature department, curiously called the English Department, at Midlands State University in Zimbabwe where I did my undergraduate degree teaches mostly English authors from Chaucer to Dickens. It bothers me that our educational system still connives with the past. Questions crawl in my mind. They still do. What is the reason in this day and age that we should be brought up on an impoverished reading diet in a so-called English Department? Why is this pattern so in our time? Why does it still persist? Has this all been an accident of content, time, place and history?³¹ (Mushakavanhu 2009: 7)

The choice of reading Shelley and Marechera together is also meant to challenge the reading of literature in prescribed terms or categories. It is a means of coming to terms with the historical marginalisation of one set of experiences for another. The question of resistance to

³⁰ See, Bill Ashcroft et al, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (Routledge, 1989)

³¹ This passage is from Tinashe Mushakavanhu, 'The Imperialist Yoke of English Literature' published in *inQuire*, issue 4.2, 2009. *inQuire* is a University of Kent student newspaper. I am here obviously not dealing with a peculiar subject as Ngugi deals with it in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) as do several other African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Chinweizu, Ezekiel Maphlele and Charles Mungoshi. My interest here is simply to observe that this is a subject no longer talked about and yet still part of the African experience and the African problem.

and complicity with imperialism has been thankfully deepened by the interrogations of scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Achille Mbembe and others. Chinua Achebe has in the past argued that the problem with the world knowledge system is that it is dominated by Europe and excludes the African testimony.³² Indeed, the knowledge system still teaches very little about Africa, or worse completely ignores it. African literature is treated as a series of ethnographic case studies; it is packaged only in a way in which it's acceptable to Western theories and aesthetics. I remember that:

As a young undergraduate at a Zimbabwean university, I had one big ambition, which was to engage critically with the dominant patterns of intellectual production. What irked me most was that I had seen foreign and well-funded scholars come to Zimbabwe and in six months or less, leave with a book manuscript of our culture, politics, economics, music etc. It was as if the locals were intellectually impotent or incurious, so they needed someone to tell them something about themselves. As young as I was, I often wondered why it required an intervention from a foreign academic for us as Zimbabweans to appreciate ourselves.

(Mushakavanhu *ibid*)

While it may be necessary to engage the question of the subaltern as Spivak³³ suggests, that is, to work against the grain to collect and consider the voices, histories and traditions of those who are most unrecorded and excluded, sometimes it all smacks of patronising arrogance. Marechera problematizes all kinds of assumptions: whether they be fixed identities or the whole idea of frequently being homogenised. He tears through the constructed imaginary borderlines on the basis of imputed savagery and ignorance. His

³² See Chinua Achebe's *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (Anchor Press, 1986)

³³ See Donna Landry & Gerald Maclean [eds] *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty* (Routledge, 1996)

awareness that the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other is apparently strong and clear. He questions the way texts function at the level of representation and agency. For instance, in one of his most famous rebukes, he says:

I am the doppelganger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met. And in this sense I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or specific race, then fuck you. In other words, the direct international experience of every single living entity is, for me, the inspiration to write. But at the same time, I am aware of my vulnerability – that I am only me – and of my mortality; and that's why it seems to me always a waste of time to waste anybody's life in regulations, in ordering them...

(Veit-Wild & Schade 1988:3)

This provocative comment from Marechera has elicited a lot of responses, and rightly so. The naming process is a means of identifying and keeping control of 'the other' and as a result English critics promote and retain the dominance of British culture. Why is it still necessary to have Commonwealth Literatures outside English literature? The begging question is: are the Commonwealth Literary Prizes a means of controlling and defining literatures from the Commonwealth? This cultural hegemony is maintained through such canonical assumptions about literary activity, and through attitudes to postcolonial literatures which identify them as exotic off-shoots of English literature, and which therefore relegate them to marginal and peripheral positions. Marechera's public and intellectual persona was a means to rebuke these old fashioned assumptions and stereotypes. His numerous allusions to American and European writers were a means of celebrating his dignity and sophistication as a writer, just like any other. Indeed, a recurring European view of Africa is that it is a place, which has no

history, and that history does not become significant there until the European comes on the scene and records it.

The odd coupling of Shelley and Marechera therefore helps in deconstructing the binary oppositions and apparent strictures by which imperialist ideology becomes hegemonic, establishing itself as an apparently natural and inevitable authority. In some ways, this thesis is a deconstructive process, a juxtaposition of very different writers authoring their experiences in different forms informed by different theoretical and aesthetic discourses, a juxtaposition also paralleled by their reading of different geo-political spaces in individualistic terms. It is appropriate then that this thesis overrides rigid ways of reading literature by focusing on two writers who certainly have cosmopolitan outlooks.³⁴ There is also in Shelley as much as in Marechera, the dogged pursuit of the individual spiritual quest through the exploration of personal consciousness. This Freudian internalisation of experience has been studied in various ways. However, I would argue that this inward-looking process is the very basis of the philosophical anarchism of both writers. But the agency by which that process can happen is the imagination. The role of the imagination is crucial for both as it projects the possibilities of living and being, and in so doing stimulates our desire to realise those possibilities. This is the reason why Shelley thought the imagination was indispensable to moral and political life:

The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts

³⁴ See Caroline Rooney "Utopian Cosmopolitanism and the Conscious Pariah: Harare, Ramallah, Cairo in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, March 2011, Vol 46, No 1, pp 139 - 155

of ever new delight ... Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

(Lee-Clark, 1977: 488)

Without the ability to imagine we cannot improve our conditions. To imagine is to aspire. And as Jerome McGann has observed: ‘The idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free from the ruins of history and culture is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet’ (McGann 1983: 137). Indeed, it is this grand illusion that unites Shelley and Marechera whose commitment to poetry and truth is remarkable. Both were sharp thorns to the body politic of their countries and were looked upon as a danger to the continued existence of authoritarian usurpation. No wonder there was a systematic suppression of their writings in their life times and even after their deaths.

If it were not for the women in their lives – Mary Shelley and Flora Veit-Wild - who fought to preserve and resuscitate their legacies, our understanding of Shelley and Marechera would be radically different. They are such polarising figures that without dedicated and protective ‘keepers of [their] flames’³⁵ history may not have been as generous to them. There has been so much scrutiny on the Shelleyan archives that most of these discrepancies in his life and writings have been explained or accounted for (Hamilton 1992: 128 144). Unfortunately, that has not been the case with the Marechera estate. It has been constructed, shaped and policed by its creator, Flora Veit-Wild, since the late 1980s to the present. However, this may change, with the Marechera archive at the Humboldt University having been made open access

³⁵ Ian Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (Faber & Faber, 1992)

through the university library's electronic catalogue.³⁶ While it had been rumored for many years on the nature of the relationship that existed between Veit-Wild and Marechera, she finally ended the speculation when she revealed the affair in a coming out essay in 2013 in which she admitted that they were actually lovers.³⁷ Of course, there was a lot of backlash after the revelations, partly because, Marechera has become somewhat of a national icon who, especially young black male Zimbabweans, are possessive of.



A newspaper banner in Zimbabwe © Flora Veit-Wild

Shelley and Marechera are good case studies in literary posthumous legacies, a subject that is beyond the purview of this thesis but certainly warrants critical and scholarly attention of its own in the future.

³⁶ The Marechera archive at Humboldt University can be accessed here: <https://rs.cms.hu-berlin.de/marecheraarchive/pages/home.php?login=true>

³⁷ See Flora Veit-Wild 'Me and Dambudzo', *Wasafiri*, 2012, 27:1, 1-7

Defining philosophical anarchism

an·ar·chism /ˈanər,kɪzəm/



Use over time for: anarchism

Noun: 1. Belief in the abolition of all government and the organization of society on a voluntary, cooperative basis without recourse to force or compulsion
2. Anarchists as a political force or movement.

Synonyms: anarchy³⁸

In order to understand the anarchic poetics of Shelley and Marechera, it is important to plot the background and definitions of philosophical anarchism. The history and political thinking behind philosophical anarchism, the people involved, the affiliations and associations they make, all defy tight boundaries. It has no domineering figureheads like Marx or Stalin. But this looseness of identity or understanding of what anarchism really is, is not so surprising,

³⁸ A simple definition of anarchism that pops up from a basic Google search. <http://bit.ly/2g8f9Nt>
<Accessed 24 June 2010>

given the variety of political and ethical analysis and practice offered by the various early and later sponsors of anarchist thought – Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and Chomsky. In this sense, anarchism is fluid. It flows and follows various tributaries and changes with the needs and will of those who reproduce it.

Historically, philosophical anarchism arose not only as an explanation of the gulf between the rich and the poor, but the reason why the poor have had to fight for their share of the common inheritance. Philosophical anarchism also grew as a radical answer to what can go wrong in a society if human needs are not satisfied, as was the case with the French Revolution. As such, anarchism emerged as a philosophy to understand exploitation and tyranny, power and powerlessness. However, the irony of it all is that while anarchism was conceived as a philosophy for the underdog and repressed, elite intellectuals mainly propagated it. This disconnect (or conflict of loyalty) has persisted to this day.

From the start of their literary careers Shelley and Marechera display a radical distrust of the authority of conventional narrative voice. Their radicalism is firmly anarchic in nature. For the sake of clarity, it is obligatory to state from the outset that I am mainly interested in literary and philosophical anarchism, especially in how anarchism and literature converge to speak on the human condition. Shelley and Marechera are not typical everyday anarchists³⁹ advocating for lawless societies or bomb throwing activities. Unfortunately, the meaning and intent of anarchism from its philosophical conception in the late eighteenth century has been

³⁹ Anarchist may either refer to a person who causes disorder or upheaval (a definition commonly perpetuated by the mainstream media) or a person who advocates the abolition of government and an unjust social system (and this is the meaning I adopt throughout the thesis in my reference to Shelley and Marechera). Also see, Suzanne Moore 'Anarchy rules! But it's about a lot more than just lobbing things at police' *The Guardian* <http://bit.ly/2g6HVAq> <Accessed 18 December 2010>

grossly misrepresented and negatively defined. To blame for this mischaracterisation is the mainstream media and popular culture that have cultivated a certain idea of an anarchist that is contrary to the founding fathers such as Godwin and Proudhon.

It is not surprising that the definition and understanding of anarchism have been lost in translation, in the intervening centuries between Shelley's time and Marechera's time. But, do both writers mean the same thing with their references to anarchism or anarchy? No. Those with political power have always historically and politically manipulated the meaning and purpose of anarchism and anarchy to suggest lack of rule or utter chaos or violence. In this way the powerful instill fear in the masses to maintain the status quo. However, for Shelley and Marechera, anarchism is a liberatory force to free the human mind from the dominion of 'God, Law and King.' It is a living force, constantly changing; methods grow out of need and out of prevailing intellectual and temperamental requirements. The values that unite Shelley and Marechera lie in their concern with the realities of power and tyranny in everyday life. The first step is to refuse to conform. Both defied rules and limits, they always created holes through the fence of tradition to go and experience what was on the other side. They went beyond set boundaries so as to spread seeds of their ideas in order to undermine what Perez (1990:17) calls 'the repressive coding of institutions.' Their interest is in mapping out new means of seeing and interacting with the world and relies on their imagination to question constantly all values, advocating for a 'structureless, non-coded, non-inscribed morality.' Deleuze and Guattari affirm this in their defining thesis on the Anti-Oedipus:

All the stupidity and the arbitrariness of the laws, all the pain of the instructions, the whole perverse apparatus of repression and education, the red-hot irons, and the atrocious procedures have only this meaning: to breed man, to mark him in his flesh, to render him capable of alliance...

(1983: 190)

And this ‘stupidity and arbitrariness of the laws’ partly explains the problems in the societies that Shelley and Marechera come from, societies that kill and eat their own children in the name of power and ideology. Everything must always be nice, neat and orderly for a paranoiac system, and especially if that paranoiac system happens to be military as well as political and economic. That’s why the political will to order is usually a will to violence and oppression.

In order to appreciate the complexity and interconnectedness of anarchism as a worldwide phenomenon, I thought that a focus on an English writer and a Zimbabwean writer would help bridge the gap of my own realities and the realities I grew up reading. My other concern is that the historiography of anarchism has focused almost exclusively on the philosophy as it has only pertained to the West, neglecting elsewhere, especially Africa. Thus, the impression made so far has been that anarchism is a philosophy that arose in the context of ‘privileged countries’ (Adams 2003:3). Ironically, the truth of the matter is that anarchism has primarily been most relevant to the most exploited regions and peoples of the world. That most available literature on anarchism does not acknowledge this history speaks to the fact that centuries of engrained Eurocentricism have not been overcome in terms of knowledge production to this day. However, this has been slowly changing as attested by Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey’s *African Anarchism* (1997), a pioneering text in extending the discussion and framing of anarchism. More work still needs to be done on anarchist thought in Africa. I

believe what has slowed progress in the evolution of anarchism studies in Africa is that anarchism is very much considered to be a vulgar and alien concept. In an email correspondence with me, the literary-anarchist scholar, David Goodway, now emeritus professor of English at Leeds University, makes a pertinent observation:

I can never understand why so few Africans have any interest in anarchism. Anarchism has always thrived under despotisms and the continent has so many and your own country (Zimbabwe) a particularly nasty one. But many traditional African societies were anarchist or near-anarchist. I would have thought Africans would be tempted to conjoin the two realities and forge a new libertarian politics.⁴⁰

Indeed, very little has been published around the subject of African anarchism or anarchism and African literature. Mbah and Igariwey (1997:1) have noted that anarchist thought as an ideology did not in any substantial way reach much of the African continent until the mid-twentieth century. However, Mbah and Igariwey, while acknowledging the lack of an ideologically coherent form of anarchism throughout their study, nevertheless proceed to identify anarchist social elements amongst many African tribes, affirming the same sentiment the Goodway email points out. The only allowance I can make for the continued existence of such parochial notions about anarchism – that the two strands, so-called Western and African, must continue to be thought of as evolving completely apart and never connected - is that anarchism has been the speciality of mostly Western academics.⁴¹ And the time has come for that to change. Peter Marshall, one of the most celebrated anarchist historians, in an email

⁴⁰ Part of an email exchange about literature and anarchism between 21 and 28 May 2011 with David Goodway author of, *For Anarchism: History, Theory & Practice* (1989) and the more recent *Anarchist Seeds beneath the snow: left-libertarian thought and British writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Manchester University Press, 2006).

⁴¹ The Anarchist Studies Network is mostly a collective of white men in the Anglo-American academy with an obsession on everything anarchism. See their website, <http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/SGSA>

correspondence commends me for ‘embarking on the most important research today. Your intervention is very necessary,’⁴² he says.

This thesis, among other things, therefore demonstrates an alternative reading of philosophical anarchism in the hope that such an eclectic pairing of writers from England and Zimbabwe with very diverse backgrounds can be illustrative of the complexity of the philosophy of anarchism itself, which is to re-examine critically and think more holistically and effectively about the relevance of the past and its long-term effect on the present and future. It is important to interrogate our own actions, speak out against the current order for something better. That is what these writers did in their lives and in their works, and so this thesis too becomes part of that on-going conversation that has been mostly one-sided for so long. My argument is that anarchism is the pervading philosophy in the writings of Shelley and Marechera. In their writings, there is certainly considerable tension between order and chaos, between optimism and pessimism. This tension is not simply black and white but maps on to wider socio-political issues including culture, politics and personal identity. Anarchism becomes a signifier for the tensions and conflicts in all-human societies, which are worked through narrative prose and poetry. This concept of the text as a locus of tension suggests that literature has praxis value and that is one of the primary themes of the discussion.

What also connect Shelley and Marechera are their common history of victimisation and struggle against authority, capitalism and other forms of domination, and their common experiences of marginalisation. These comparable histories of victimisation or persecution

⁴² This is part of a very short email received from Peter Marshall on 12 May 2011. His book, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (1993) remains one of the most significant texts charting the history of anarchism. The major omission in the book is any mention of African Anarchism or literary anarchism in its 700 plus pages. However, he still refers to Shelley as one of the finest poet-anarchists to have lived.

complex and struggling through difficult social experiences provide a common ground to read Shelley and Marechera together. Both manage to show that even under the bitterest conditions a fundamental sense of individuality can still manage to flourish. For them the poet/writer's attempt to express his individuality is involved in a breaking free from constraining forms, which bore a parallel with the individual's quest to gain freedom from constraining forms and institutions in society. Herbert Read even goes a step further and claims that the poet's task is not merely to break down old poetic forms, but to break down social forms as well eloquently express this view. He argues that

....there is nothing I so instinctively avoid as a static system of ideas. I realise that form, pattern, and order are essential attributes of existence, but in themselves they are attributes of death. To make life, to insure progress, to create interest and vividness, it is necessary to break form, to distort pattern, to change the nature of our civilisation. In order to create it is necessary to destroy; and the agent of destruction in society is the poet. I believe that the poet is necessarily an anarchist, and that he must oppose all organised conceptions of the state, not only those which we inherit from the past, but equally those which are imposed on people in the name of the future.

(Read 1938: 8)

These Bakunian sentiments on the intricate relationship between creativity and anarchism are very much a part of Shelley and Marechera's creative programme. However, these ideas go as far back as William Godwin in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), in which he emphasised that artists in an anarchist society should embody principles of freedom and independence in the practice of their art. Freedom was not simply a political principle, but a principle, which permeated all facets of life. In arguing for creative freedom, Godwin anticipated the later writings of Bakunin who identified a natural 'revolutionary potential' in art. Bakunin believed that tyranny flourished where the individual was neglected in favour of

abstract ideas. Art, however, operating through a process of individualisation had the power to combat tyranny by recalling ‘to our mind the living, real individualities’ (Bakunin 1973:160). So it is essential to point out that Shelley and Marechera approach and deal with anarchism from the perspective of an artist rather than from that of a social theorist or politician. Anarchist writers such as Shelley and Marechera urge us to think deeply, to interrogate issues, to analyse every proposition and I am interested in how they manage to achieve the construction of an affective experience of these feelings and sentiments on the part of their readers through their writings.

The Paradoxes of philosophical anarchism

The goal of philosophical anarchism, as regarded by Krimerman and Perry (1966:1) in their introduction to *Patterns of Anarchy*, is that it is ‘a consistently individualised pragmatism.’ Unfortunately, anarchism is wrongly characterised as a negative philosophy because of its desire to upset the status quo. Dirlik explains, ‘the fear of anarchism is built into the word itself, whose meaning has been suppressed in everyday language by its identification with disorder’ (1991:1). People are always worried what happens after and yet philosophical anarchism is about projecting a perfect society, which however is ever vaguely sketched.

Another accusation levelled against anarchism is its ‘trace of vanguardism’ (Graeber 2004:7). Historically, the political philosophy of Godwin expressed the aspirations of a part of the petty bourgeoisie. With the consolidation of capitalism in Europe during the nineteenth century, with the slow extension of suffrage, increasingly larger portions of the middle class became staunch supporters of the existing political order, and anarchism became more and more a philosophy held only by a small marginal group of intellectuals. This development had the result that anarchist theory became more diffuse and at the same time more radical

than it had been. However, Shelley was even more radical than that. He sought to popularise anarchism to the masses. With Shelley there certainly appeared two tendencies in anarchist theory. The doctrine shifted from abstract speculation on the use and abuse of power to a theory of practical political action. At the same time anarchism ceased to be the political philosophy of the most radical wing of the petty bourgeoisie and became a political doctrine which looked for the mass of its adherents among the workers and even the proletariat, although it seems its spokesmen largely came from the intelligentsia.

This in itself should fortify the importance of Shelley and cement the crucial position which, I think, his works occupy in anarchist and libertarian literature in general. Unfortunately Shelley's contributions have received little attention up to the very recent past. For example, Michael Scrivener's *Radical Shelley* (1982) while interested in Shelley's philosophical anarchism does not elaborate much on its influence on various movements and activists in subsequent generations. The reason for this neglect could be threefold: the bad reputation anarchism has attracted due to the mainly violent and extreme elements within the movement; persistence of a one sided historical account of Shelley that focuses on the faults of his personality more than his accomplishments as a poet and philosopher; the third reason is Shelley himself or the characteristics of his writing. Most of his works are fragmentary, or are too personal and libellous to the point that publishers and printers deemed them unpublishable. Any reader of his works has to familiarise himself with a mass of historical detail in order to appreciate Shelley fully. This is now possible with so many biographies and critical works published. In fact, there is now a vibrant Shelley industry.⁴³

⁴³ The Keats-Shelley Association has done much to promote and support scholarship on English Romanticism through The Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation, which donated the Shelley and His Circle Collection to The New York Public Library in 1986. Today, the Collection continues actively to acquire books and manuscripts

Marechera remains the mustard on the table of African literature – its either you like him or loathe him. Most readers and critics loathe him. I think Marechera’s anarchism is too post-modernist and internationalist not to seem to be somehow Europeanised and therefore alien to Africa, and as such this has resulted in the alienation of Marechera. In fact, Marechera has been considered too European for his nihilistic individualism. He writes that:

A lot has been said about how I was alienated from my environment, from my Africanness. A lot has been said about – what the hell! I felt no group sense and no group context with all those around me with all those around me, London or Harare. There was just this terrifying sense of having missed the bus of human motion, having missed out on whatever all these and others had which made them look “at home” in the world. I had no world outlook. The whole thing could go out with a bang for all I cared. And I cared a lot. Here in Harare the things held against me would have been totally invisible to a Londoner. My unconventional dress and my dreadlocks would not have raised an eyebrow; my “iconoclastic” statements about “everything” would have drummed on deaf ears – no one would give a damn how I lived as long as it was bearably legal. Here in Harare, it was different. Expectations were crudely materialistic, less to do with the spirit but more with the price of the matter (*Mindblast*, 120).

In this diarised writing in *Mindblast*, Marechera tells of his sordid experiences in Zimbabwe – his lack of meaningful human contact, his unwillingness to conform and participate in the daily grind of human existence, his outsider status. These nihilistic tendencies alienate him from everything and everyone. Marechera was an extreme individualist-anarchist like Buddy, one of his characters in *Grimknife Jnr’s Story* who finds solace in reading (Buddy could be

relating to major and minor figures of the Romantic era, as well as works that illuminate the social, political, and cultural history of the age.

anyone but Buddy could also be Marechera as they share many similar personality traits and tendencies):

It was with savage tenderness that he read novels that would exhibit the human mind in its greatness, its pettiness, its twists and turns. There was so much to man than the pretty regulations of nation and society provided for. But if you expressed that they called you an anarchist.

(Mindblast, 63)

Anarchism therefore comes across in Marechera's writing as High Theory that is too intellectual for the social mainstream, and this is an ambiguity that both Shelley and Marechera struggle with. At the beginnings of their careers, their writings are too intellectual and philosophical to a point of abstraction but in the latter years of their careers, as will be demonstrated in this thesis, they mellow and the writings they produce are meant for mass consumption because their goal is to fight for the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual.

Advancing an anarchist literary theory

David Graeber (2004:2) asks: Why are there so few anarchists in the academy? This is a very pertinent question that partly explains the scarcity of literary anarchist material. If anything, anarchism is still viewed as a political ideal more than as an ethics of critical thinking or even literary theory. What has become evidently clear throughout my research is that literary anarchism or anarchist literary theory is still in its embryonic stage as there is very little written on the subject.⁴⁴ There are no literary anarchism reading lists and no consensus views

⁴⁴ See, Jesse Cohn's *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics, Politics* (Susquehanna University Press, 2006)

about even what anarchist literature is (though there is a tendency to focus only on Science Fiction as anarchist literature). Jeff Shantz (2011:16) points out that ‘Anarchist literary work remains diffuse and diverse, contradictory and distinct. Anarchist criticism is sporadic, disjointed, tentative, unsystematic.’ It is a shame. The absence of anarchist literary theories (key here is on multiple to circumvent the problem or desire to order or homogenise) is very curious given that anarchism or anarchic influences have inspired major figures in literature (James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Wole Soyinka). However, in recent years it seems there has been a gradual seismic shift as a new generation of literary-anarchist critics is emerging (Jesse Cohn, Jeff Shantz, Mark Antliff). There is need for new and inspiring critical means of analysing our contemporary struggles.

Literature provides ways of understanding and reaching out to otherwise inaccessible audiences as it presents exciting ways to discourse on issues beyond just the polemic and propagandistic rhetoric. However, for Shelley and Marechera it is not enough to simply accept literature in its traditional forms but what is clearly discernible between them is ‘an erosion of generic distinctions and dismantling of genre theory’ (Duff 2009:1). They value experimentation in form as a means by which they contest and challenge the prevailing values while developing new ways of relating, expressing and viewing the world. Anarchism as a philosophy encourages openness to new experiences and perspectives, experimentation with style and form. It is not fixed but constantly shifting in form.

Anarchists have often turned to the utopian genre as a means of expressing their visions of anarchist social relations and the formation of possible worlds in which anarchism prevails. The utopian vision that Shelley engenders helps him to criticise the political set up by

offering an imaginable alternative (and this will be my detailed focus on Shelley in Chapter 4). This reflects the anarchist impulse towards creativity and a preference for imagining alternatives rather than simply focusing on damaging aspects of the prevailing realities. Shelley does much in attacking and repudiating social problems openly and clearly and that is what makes him a potent Romantic voice. Notably, too, rather than presenting the anarchist future as postcard perfect and in which all contradictions and antagonisms have been resolved, anarchic writers such as Shelley honestly and unflinchingly raise the problems that will confront attempts at social transformation and the reconstruction of social life. This could as well explain the ambiguous and sometimes open endings of Shelley's writings.

Social change usually requires a certain kind of inspiration and insight. Colonial Rhodesian fiction inspired practical politics in many important ways and Dambudzo Marechera was one of the major lieutenants who through their writings provided insight into the black people's dreams, desires, concerns and created an interface that made possible a greater understanding of an alternative worldview from the one imposed. In such repressive conditions, the need for imaginative criticism is even more pressing. Even though the struggles against colonialism were utopian, Marechera was anti-utopian and against the grand Independence project. He advocated for an individualist anarchism, which emphasises individual liberty and personal transformation. Individualism is considered to be unAfrican and this resulted in his alienation.⁴⁵ However, in Chapter 4, I argue that Marechera becomes a nihilist anarchist as a consequence of his disillusionment and frustration at lack of publishing opportunities.

⁴⁵ The philosophy of Ubuntu which is universal across southern Africa emphasises a person's connectedness to others because I am what I am because of who we all are.

Marechera's anarchic sensibilities were a beneficiary of the prevailing revolutionary situation and sustained colonial tensions, conditions that provided him with a social imaginary that gave him direction and a language to voice the nascent urge for social liberation. Despite his death in 1987 to an Aids related illness, Marechera has served as the source, or the most influential exponent of anarchic ideas and practices in Zimbabwe. I will argue further that anarchic ideas have appeared repeatedly in Zimbabwe, not in an open advocacy form, but in the counterpoising to the existing political system. This generation experienced and adopted Marechera's anarchic thinking as part of its political coming of age, not merely as an intellectual abstraction but as a set of cultural practices and survival strategies. The vocabulary of Marechera's anarchism persists in Zimbabwe today.⁴⁶

Literary anarchist theory is necessary because anarchism always seeks to ignite the fire of curiosity in each of us, stressing the need to think, to analyse and to challenge issues.

Anarchists share with some Marxists the concern with the human qualities embodied in the working classes and their oppression as experienced in culture, social relations, and social struggles. Anarchists emphasize working class language and speech, views, perspectives, and experiences. They draw upon the cultures of the working classes and other oppressed groups. They defend against the imposition or naturalization of systems and promote the vernacular and popular expressions, working class idioms and styles. Anarchists have stressed how one might write, how one might develop new forms of representation (beyond concerns for proper content).

⁴⁶ When the Movement for Democratic Change was formed in 1999, it was two decades in the making. Its leadership was composed of a curious cast, a group that is part of what Flora Veit-Wild called 'the Marechera cult' in *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Times* (Africa World Press, 2004) pp. 379 – 393. The most prominent are Tendai Biti, Enoch Chikweche, Arthur Mutambara.

Anarchists situate themselves within struggle (or are situated there by social relations). Their criticism is partisan and engaged. They are clear about their opposition to the current authoritarian order and do not take a detached, academic position. Instead they distinguish between those works that accept the existing conditions and those that seek to challenge them in content and form, style and substance. They prefer works that help people. The present work is not intended to be authoritative or a fixed statement on anarchist literature or criticism. It is rather a beginning of a conversation, a starting point for future, further discussions. There is no other comparable work available that examines anarchism and literature, as I examine Shelley and Marechera here, within the context of anarchist social movements.

Romanticism and Zimbabwean literature

Spending a lot of time reading Shelley and Marechera side by side provoked another related curiosity. What is the influence of Romanticism, if any, on Zimbabwean literature? The answer is not hard to come by. Romanticism is not a popular subject as a literary subject in Zimbabwe. At present none of the Zimbabwean universities and colleges teaches Romanticism, though Blake, Keats and Wordsworth may feature in some courses. But even when there are references to Romantic poets, Shelley and to some extent Byron, are not likely to appear on the course outline in the way that Blake, Coleridge, Keats, and Wordsworth do. I will offer speculative reasons for these choices and omissions. Only male English Romantic poets are taught and this is not surprising in a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe which tends to celebrate masculinity and machismo. Femininity is a weakness. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the male protagonist, Okonkwo, commits suicide because of his perceived femininity and his conscious participation in his own emasculation by the

illegitimate colonial system. This is a shared feeling in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. It is no surprise too that the early historiography of Zimbabwean literature as recounted in the critical works of George Kahari (1980), Musaemura Zimunya (1982), Flora Veit-Wild (1992), Rino Zhuwara (2000), Maurice Vambe (2004) does not include female writers or if it does as is the case in Flora Veit-Wild's work they are mere footnotes. It is important to point out that there has been a boom in the study of the work of Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera, the two most prominent women writers to emerge from Zimbabwe. Perhaps, this thesis is perpetuating the same male culture by focusing on male figures. And while that could be an admissible charge, what this work strives to do is scale over certain geographical and ideological barriers imposed by global history and politics that can best be illuminated with a common gender focus. The focus of this thesis is more an implied brotherhood between the two selected writers, and how one feeds off from the other, if at all there is such influence and transference of ideas as Harold Bloom suggests.⁴⁷

Indeed, while studying English literature in Zimbabwe, I gained the impression that great poetry in England began with Chaucer, continued with Shakespeare, and then developed by means of Milton and Wordsworth. These were all the English poets one encountered over and over again whether as an O Level student or as an undergraduate English literature student. In 2011 many Zimbabwean people still ask me: who is Shelley? What did he write? Others ask if it is Shelley the author of *Frankenstein*?⁴⁸ However, Shelley's importance as a Romantic writer is largely undermined in the academy everywhere not just in Zimbabwe. Critics still

⁴⁷ See, Harold Bloom *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Bloomsbury, 1973)

⁴⁸ Some critics attribute authorship of *Frankenstein* to husband and wife, Percy and Mary Shelley. Others suggest Shelley himself. See, for example, the controversial book by John Lauritsen called *The Man Who Wrote Frankenstein* (2007). However, I am not seeking to problematise Mary Shelley's authorship here, but to show how Shelley is read in the popular imagination.

hesitate to place Shelley in the Romantic canon. G. Kim Blank's surveys⁴⁹ of universities in Britain and the United States that teach English Romanticism show Wordsworth as the most popular and most taught Romantic poet with an 80% plus ranking from all his respondents. Shelley ranks the lowest with around 12%. However, these statistics are surprising considering that Shelley is as globally expressive of the central concerns of Romanticism and certainly the most interesting craftsman among them all in terms of style and personality. In Zimbabwe there are possible reasons for this exclusion from the curriculum. Shelley is certainly too radical in taste for a conservative society like Zimbabwe in terms of his politics, ambiguous sexuality and philandering. School textbooks that are produced through the authorisation of the Ministry of Education's curriculum development unit tend to have an ideological function. In the early 1980s when Marechera was still alive and trying to live as a full-time writer in Zimbabwe educationists were promoting 'socialism' as the official literary aesthetic in the country.⁵⁰ One of the reasons for Marechera's castigation by a number of academics and critics in Zimbabwe was his outright rejection of this doctrine. He says,

I think writers are usually recruited into a revolutionary movement before that revolution gains whatever it's seeking. Once it has achieved that, writers are simply discarded either as a nuisance or totally irrelevant. I don't know that the writer can offer the emerging nation anything. But I think there must always be a healthy tension between a writer and his nation. Writing can always turn into cheap propaganda. As long as he is serious, the writer must be free to criticise or write about anything in society which he feels is going against the grain of the nation's aspirations. When Smith was ruling us

⁴⁹ See, G. Kim Blank's *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth Century Views* (1991). As this survey is two decades old it would be interesting to see how and whether these views have changed. In the two years I was Assistant Lecturer in Romanticism and Critical Theory at the University of Kent, I noticed that Shelley was not popular among my colleagues.

⁵⁰ See, Drew Shaw 'Transgressing Traditional Narrative Form' in *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*, pp. 3-22

here, we had to oppose him all the time as writers – so, even more, should we now that we have a majority government. We should be even more vigilant about our own mistakes.

(Veit-Wild & Schade 1988: 19)

The result, unfortunately, has been to marginalise the work of writers outside the framework, such as Marechera, who refuse to cooperate in the nationalisation of literature and of ideas.

The local academy pays lip service to Marechera's works and ideas. When I was an undergraduate student in Zimbabwe⁵¹, Marechera's *The House of Hunger* was on the reading list of our Zimbabwe Literature course. Interestingly, the Marechera we were taught was a streamlined Marechera who was not recognisable from the radical Marechera I had encountered on the township streets where I grew up or the Marechera I have had to discover in the years I have lived in the United Kingdom.⁵² Marechera is generally regarded as a disruptive personality to the nationalist project because he does not appreciate this essential identity and nationalistic view of culture and tradition that is still upheld in the country. Meanwhile, the people in Zimbabwe go on as before, unable to read and engage with the books, which Marechera writes for their education and enlightenment. Philosophy and praxis never unite for Marechera whose wisdom and insight is never appreciated. Antonio Gramsci once noted that:

The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand, the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel.... One cannot make politics-history without...this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation.

⁵¹ I was part of the first group of students to study at Midlands State University which officially opened in 2000, becoming the third national university in Zimbabwe and now the biggest in terms of student population.

⁵² See the essay I wrote about 'Retracing Dambudzo Marechera's footsteps' in *Panorama Magazine* <http://www.panorama.co.zw/index.php/archives/120-tribute/389-retracing-dambudzo-marecheras-footsteps> <4 October 2013>

(Gramsci, 1971: 418)

For Gramsci an element in the overcoming of this disconnection between ideas and reality was the emergence of ‘organic intellectuals’ who lived and worked among social groups rather than the ‘traditional intellectual’ isolated in their ivory tower of the university. In some measure, Shelley and Marechera successfully became public intellectuals. The measure of their influence is not certified by the academy but it is substantiated by their conviction to fight for their rights and beliefs to death. Unfortunately, they faced a lot of disconnecting experiences: the inability of reaching out to the masses due to lack of publication, failure to distribute their published works, censorship from the governing authorities and being victims of negative press coverage.

Marechera himself does not directly talk about direct influences from any of the Romantics. However, he mentions them, as he often does with many other writers, to stress a point or allude to a historical fact or timeline pertinent to whatever discussion he is going on about. Some of his allusions and references are a mere showing off. They are never elaborated. Sometimes, it is just a title or blurb extract he cuts and pastes. In his work, there is passing reference to Coleridge, Shelley, and Wordsworth without any elaboration. However, Shelley is a significant part of the narrative. The narrator of *The Black Insider* who calls himself Marechera and who could possibly be the same Marechera who is writing the story has been expelled from Oxford. This hints that Marechera had a conscious knowledge of Shelley as they both shared the similar fate of being ejected out of Oxford.

Marechera's interest in the 60s global literary and cultural scene, could also have coincided with his discovery of Shelley. Donald Reiman, a Romantic scholar, made the observation that:

In the late 60s Shelley's name and quotations, wrenched from their contexts in his works, have been used to further the lifestyles of hippies and druggies, the ideologies of Marxists and nihilists, and the fads of various pop subcultures, as well as the careers of academic trend-followers.

(Reiman 1990: xii)

In fact, Romantic period traits emerge in Marechera's radicalism, especially his desire for freedom and a sense of revolt against authority, which informs the works of Shelley and the other Romantics. A sense of individualism, revolt and scepticism is discernible in his attitude. This individualism is responsible for the predominance of subjective poems and the intense and lyrical expression of his individual experiences and emotions. Marechera was fully aware of the social function of literature in its shaping worldview. Hence, he was very cynical regarding the curriculum at the University of Rhodesia and later at Oxford. He was very aware that as students they were being exposed to Western thoughts and being forced to imbibe Western ideas and culture to the detriment of their own. The Rhodesia Literature Bureau controlled the writing and publication of literature. The expression of the black experience was restricted and sometimes forbidden.

Greenwell Matsika, a classmate of Marechera in the English Honours programme at the University of Rhodesia, remembers that 'he [Marechera] was rejecting many of the Romantic poets, Wordsworth and company. He didn't approve of the way they wrote and didn't like that part of the course... though he liked Shelley, William Blake and a little of Byron'

(*Source Book*, 117). The three Romantics that Marechera admired – Blake, Byron and Shelley - were the most radical of the lot. Marechera admired their commitment to poetry and their strong beliefs. While no explanation is given regarding his interest in Shelley, Marechera has been described as the ‘black Shelley’ or ‘African Shelley’⁵³ though no critical explorations of this characterisation have been undertaken so far. This is the first project to read both writers simultaneously. There are indeed many literary synergies between the two but they are certainly not the same person. They are different versions of the same.

For Marechera the rebel-poet, it is likely that he cherished Romanticism as a model for his radical expression. He was attracted to the ways in which the Romantics fight the demons controlling their country. Romanticism had in it the head-on encounter with very real, pressing historical forces and contradictions. It was an exploration of anxiety and was certainly imported from the shadows of Marechera’s European readings and made possible the sometimes safe and other times risky embrace of quite specific fears; the fears of freedom. What happens after? Most of independent Africa was burning down; the new leadership was more ruthless and corrupt than the previous systems.

Romanticism gave Marechera a wide historical canvas. For Marechera, Romanticism as historical epoch had everything he required as a resource: human nature as subject matter and the search for self-understanding and above all the ability to dream, to imagine. What was on his mind was the self-conscious but highly problematic construction of the new Zimbabwe. Even though there was a call for a literature that promoted patriotism and nation building in Zimbabwe in the early 80s, a few local writers led by Marechera himself, refused to be co-

⁵³ See, David Caute’s *Marechera and the Colonel* (Totterdown Books, 2009)

opted into this political programme led by Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF. Marechera insisted on being different and looked to Europe to establish a reference for that difference. He was able to celebrate and deplore an identity already existing and rapidly taking many contradictory forms. His need for alternatives, for difference provided a huge payout of themes and agency. It could also be that his time in England, in the London that Paul Gilroy has chronicled⁵⁴, Marechera had a deeper acquaintance with various literatures including the Romantics, a wider horizon than the ethnic absolutism of the place he came from. Marechera is in the modern sense a romantic as he exhibits all the Byronic ideals of a gifted, perhaps misunderstood loner, creatively following the dictates of his inspiration rather than the standard ways of his contemporary society.

Scholarship treats Romanticism as a peculiarly European phenomenon that took place within a specific historical period. In his discussion of Soyinka and Cabral's aesthetics, Geoffrey Hunt, essentially argues for an African romanticism. He arrives at that thesis by explaining that '...romanticism is a cultural response to a collective insecurity which to some degree, or in some form, exists in all societies....' He further explains that:

Romanticism is the dominant form under transition to bourgeois rule because class division is most pronounced under capitalism and the period of transition has the most profound and traumatic dislocating effects on culture, romanticism being precisely a form in consciousness of this dislocation.

(in Gugelberger 1985: 64)

⁵⁴ I am specifically referring to Paul Gilroy's *There ain't no black in the Union Jack; The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1995) – the book is set in the London of the 1970s, which a young Marechera was a part of as a witness and participant.

Marechera's emergence as a writer was precipitated by the transitory history of Zimbabwe, one of the last colonies of the British Empire. In many ways, his writings are a catalogue of a dislocated spirit. Romanticism is inspired by rapid transformations within a society.

Colonialism was responsible for the severe dislocation of the native cultures and required for new forms of consciousness. Zimbabwe, like so many other African countries, is a society which underwent traumatic political and social restructuring, a process necessitated by the overturning of the colonial status quo.

There are Marxist arguments⁵⁵ that insist on the fact that most of the Romantics were of privileged backgrounds, and rightly so. However, some like Shelley were filled with hatred and contempt for the very class to which they belonged and owed their intellectual and material existence. In the same vein, most of the writers in colonial Africa belonged to the privileged class – either they had been schooled in mission institutions or came from relatively comfortable backgrounds. Therefore, the ruling class in a neo-colony of Zimbabwe's type is what Fanon would call the comprador bourgeoisie. The essential characteristic of this class is that it does not own or control the means of production but acts as intermediaries. This class is dependent on external forces for its powers. Marechera saw through this – that black leadership in his native Zimbabwe did not possess the crucial power and means to direct the life and development of their society.⁵⁶ In fact, Marechera's work is one of the highest cultural expressions against this prevailing set up. And that is what makes his, a significant voice in Zimbabwe still.

⁵⁵ See, Geoffrey Hunt, 'Two African Aesthetics: Soyinka vs. Cabral' in *Marxism & African Literature* (1985), [ed] Georg M. Gugelberg London: James Currey

⁵⁶ See, Tinashe Mushakavanhu 'The political importance of Dambudzo Marechera' *The Zimbabwean* <http://www.thezimbabwean.co/opinions/36415/the-political-importance-of-dambudzo-marechera.html> <Accessed 19 December 2010>

So, while the influence on Zimbabwean literature may not be significant, there is evidence that Romanticism itself heavily borrowed from African literary cultures. In the late 18th Century, there was a highly visible community of African writers and anti-slavery campaigners whose works influenced not only abolitionists but the wider literature and culture of Romanticism. Prominent among these men and women were Ottobah Cuguano, Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley. Their contribution has not been fully acknowledged by critics who tend to overlook, and in so doing, efface the visibility of the African literary community during this period (Chaplin and Faflik 2011: 85).

Historical omissions of this nature are a consequence of the fact that studies in British Romanticism remain white. Paul Youngquist & Frances Botkin explain that ‘The whiteness of Romantic studies is a symptom of amnesia. It bespeaks a massive act of forgetting on the part of contemporary scholarship, an institutional disavowal of the economic conditions that help make cultural production during the Romantic Era possible: the maritime economy of the Atlantic.’⁵⁷ The act of reading Shelley and Marechera together is revolutionary exercise as it reconfigures our conception of the romantic spirit.

Conclusion: Thesis Chapter Outline

In this introductory chapter I have endeavoured to establish the various contexts in which I discuss the anarchic poetics in the selected writings of Shelley and Marechera. This is necessary considering that these writers are separated by long traditions and operate from different historical and political circumstances. And that is the primary uniqueness of this

⁵⁷ Paul Youngquist and Frances Botkin ‘Introduction: Black Romanticism: Romantic Circulations’ in *Romantic Circles* <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/circulations/HTML/praxis.2011.youngquist.html> <10 October 2016>

comparative reading: it brings together two disparate forms of history, geography, perceptions and ideas.

A study of Shelley and Marechera's anarchic poetics cannot properly begin without an examination of the underlying psychology that permeates their works. Chapter 1 will try to outline a psychological framework in order to enable an effective reading programme of Shelley and Marechera's works. To demonstrate the radicality of their works and psychological prognosis, I will present readings of *Prometheus Unbound* and *The House of Hunger*.

Chapter 2 extends the analysis by focusing on Oxford University and how it unites the two writers who suffer the same fate of being expelled from the institution for dissent and holding radical views. Oxford is a site in the reading OF Shelley and Marechera as it indirectly influenced the kind of writers they became. I am not necessarily interested in the relationship between pedagogy and anarchism but rather in alternative views. I intend to focus on Shelley's *Queen Mab* and Marechera's short story, 'Oxford, black Oxford' in *The Black Insider*.

The following chapter engages in their exilic experiences and how they affect or inspire their anarchic thinking and craft. I will do a close reading of Shelley's *Lines Written from the Euganean Hills* and Marechera's *Portrait of the Black Artist in London*. The chapter traces the various ambiguities in Shelley's and Marechera's attempts to remain loyal and connected to their countries of birth.

Chapter 4 reads the tangled relationship between anarchism and utopia with its literary counterpart, nihilism. In this chapter I will closely read *The Mask of Anarchy* and *Mindblast*. A significant shift happens in both Shelley and Marechera who, after facing so much frustration reaching out to wider readerships, strive in these texts to write for the masses with the desire to effect change of attitudes.

In the brief conclusion, I indicate anarchism's historical agency to expose the psychic and social traumas that unwork liberal models of history as progressive. My argument, however, resists the tendency embraced by most critics to pigeonhole authors with labels. Key moments in Shelley's philosophy and Marechera's literary strategies provide tools by which to disclose the gaps and antagonisms within anarchism's affirmative rhetoric. In turn, the careers of Shelley and Marechera can be shown as both recursive and experimental, moves which provoke more sophisticated philosophical reflections and reformulations of their intertwined fates.

CHAPTER ONE: AN OTHER STATE OF MIND

[...] because the universe in which we live is somehow a universe of dead conventions and artificiality, the only authentic real experience must be some extremely violent, shattering experience. And this we experience as a sense that now we are back in real life. - Slavoj Zizek⁵⁸

Anarchism and Psychology

This chapter attempts to investigate the underlying psychology behind the philosophical anarchism that is apparent in the writings of Percy Shelley and Dambudzo Marechera. The intention here is not simply to present a Freudian psychoanalysis. While on the one hand anarchism can be dismissed as a series of unrealizable wishes presented through imaginary scenarios or happenings, on the other hand, it is a mental process, the putting into scenes, the staging of alternative realities in the Artaudian sense.⁵⁹ What is the psychology of anarchism? is a question that largely remains unanswered. Dennis Fox points out that many anarchists are suspicious of ‘psychologising’ and make little reference to psychology.⁶⁰ There is very little or nothing substantially written on the theme of the psychology of anarchism.⁶¹ This is a rather surprising and serious neglect as psychology potentially has a great deal to offer to anarchism. While growing strong in the related disciplines of politics and philosophy,

⁵⁸ Sabine Reul and Thomas Deichmann, ‘The one measure of true love is: you can insult the other’ in *Spiked-Online*, 15 November 2001. *The piece is an interview with Slavoj Zizek in which he talks about, among other things, subjectivity, multiculturalism, sex and terrorism. <http://www.spiked-online.com/Printable/00000002D2C4.htm> <Accessed 10 January 2009>

⁵⁹ I am here thinking of the Theatre of Cruelty, a form of theatre developed by avant-garde playwright, actor, essayist, and theorist, Antonin Artaud, in seminal work, *The Theatre and its Double* (1938).

⁶⁰ See Dennis Fox ‘Anarchism and psychology’ in *Theory in Action*, Vol. 4, No.4, October 2011 pp. 31-48

⁶¹ Here is a link to the psychology reading list on the Anarchist Studies Network, which is prefaced with the following statement: ‘Psychology all too often serves to prop up an individualistic notion of social life. At the same time, psychology potentially has a great deal to offer anarchism (and vice versa!).’ Most of the books are on the following subjects: psychoanalysis, social psychology, echo-psychology, popular psychology and self-help. http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/ReadingLists_Psychology <Accessed 18 November 2016>

geography and anthropology, anarchist theory and practice have yet to become visibly influential within the fields of psychology and literature (Heckert 2013:513).

Anarchism is known for its disregard for borders. Fittingly then, this thesis proposes a cross-disciplinary approach to developing anarchist psychology, even to the point of embracing apparent contradictions as represented in the iconoclastic figures of Shelley and Marechera. Practically, an anarchist psychology might involve an examination of, and ongoing experimentation with, the practices, qualities of relationship and forms of social institutions which enable and nurture vitality: the simultaneous freedom and equality, individuality and community, which anarchists advocate. It is important to revise our basic understanding of anarchism as not only a public social practice but also an inner state of mind.

I will argue that focusing on the psychological motives of authorship in this instance is predicated on both Shelley's and Marechera's insistence on some kind of inward change in their readers. This approach to anarchist psychology draws on everyday anarchies that have the potential to blossom into large scale insurrections where people no longer obey the dominant order but instead create alternative orders. And having gone a change themselves, Shelley and Marechera, seek to communicate it. They write with the intention to effect change of attitude or change of perspective. Michael O'Neill (1989a:1) suggests, the poet is '...a combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both.'

Shelley's and Marechera's awareness of the complexity of poetic influence is itself striking. This awareness of their 'internal powers' to question and change the order of things is

relevant to philosophical anarchism with its emphasis on individual liberty and social transformation through a collective effort including the possibility of revolutionary action. In fact, the criticisms in their work imply a general disaffection with authority and they argue it is imperative to dismantle the institutions and systems that foster exploitation and abuse of the individual. The family, conventional sexuality and gender are at the top of their hit list. These institutions control the emotional, intimate lives of every one of us, and they have done incalculable damage to the individual. Perez (1990: 54-55) spells out this questioning of regulatory institutions by saying ‘The an(archist) is he or she whose active desire is not regimented, not hier(archized) by family, church, school, army, work, etc.’

The potential of individualism to accord personal independence and to facilitate the discovery of a personal and intrinsic identity is also realised by Kwame Appiah (2005:4) whose thesis asserts that, ‘individuality means, among other things, choosing for myself instead of merely being shaped by the constraint of political or social sanction.’ Perhaps, the crucial similarity between Shelley and Marechera is their tendency to privilege the disruptive subjectivity of individualism rather than the unifying objectivity of collectivism. This vision seems to emanate from their experiences of occupying marginal spaces where often the individual grapples to make meaning of the world. Their suspicion of the insidious role is clearly defined by Emma Goldman:

Individuality is not the impersonal and mechanistic thing that the State treats as an ‘individual’. The living man cannot be defined; he is the fountain-head of all life and all values; he is not a part of this or of that; he is a whole, an individual whole, a growing, changing, yet always constant whole.

(Goldman 1996:111–112)

Goldman's impressive body of theory⁶² of anarchism goes beyond the political and spiritual, but it is also deeply psychological. Herbert Read also highlighted simultaneous development of individual freedom and "social consciousness" because 'society can only function harmoniously if the individuals composing it are integrated persons, that is to say they are whole and healthy, and by that very reason competent to render mutual aid' (Read, 1943:18).

A major characteristic ubiquitous within Shelley and Marechera is a defiant overcoming of the limits set by historically imposed structures that would limit their range of expression, their engagement with politics, and the nature of social interaction. What is clear is their intellectual fluidity; their vast references to literary allusions and philosophies, perhaps suggesting that the human mind is a multiplicity of selves. To understand those selves, is to understand others, and society as a whole. In fact, this is the key to the philosophy that pervades their works and attitudes. From very young ages, Shelley and Marechera defied rules and limits. They always created holes through the fence of tradition to go and experience what was on the other side. They went beyond set boundaries in order to spread the seeds of their ideas and undermine what Rolando Perez (1990:17) calls 'the repressive coding of institutions.' Both rely on their imagination to question constantly naturalised values.

Shelley comes close to psychoanalysis by implying a splitting of the subject in *Prometheus Unbound*, especially through the notion of the scene and role-playing. But while Shelley recognises all this, his insistence on free will, on choice, with its consequent problem of

⁶² See also Emma Goldman *Anarchism and other Essays: The Psychology of Political Violence* (Dover, 1969)

knowledge and intention, prevents him from developing its full implications. Here Shelley was opening up space for reflection and debate. Marechera's *The House of Hunger* is a significant text that eloquently expresses the traumas of the post-colonial condition that emanated from despair. The story line is interrupted by memories and reflections, the boundaries of time and place shift constantly, flashbacks and stream of consciousness blur the lines between dream and reality. In its fragmented and open structure, the book anticipates much of the discursive nature of postcolonial literatures. Rino Zhuwarara argues that:

...the difference between Marechera and other African writers arises from the fact that he does not rush to affirm any African values and or identities. If one is looking for any affirmations from which to soothe the wounded African psyche and restore a sense of African humanity or dignity, he or she is bound to be disappointed. (Zhuwarara, 2001: 210)

For Marechera to be African is to embrace the contradictions created by colonialism. He explicitly disabuses those who cling on others for identity or political affirmation. In his rant, he says: If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you. In other words, the direct international experience of every single living entity is, for me, the inspiration to write. ... (Veit-Wild & Schade, 1988: 3). In other words, Marechera considered himself as a writer of international scope and experience.

As such Shelley and Marechera are highly sensitised individuals to underlying social and political forces at work in their respective cultures. This sensitivity to forces, which shape opinions and attitudes, places more and more emphasis on the imagination as a means of transforming consciousness. This chapter, therefore argues, that the psychology of anarchism rejects the binary notion of anarchy, the simplistic notion of the good sweeping clean the bad.

It is a psychology that emphasises a certain underlying logic of mental and emotional processes that are remarkably evident in Shelley and Marechera. It is the logic of an extreme will to make a difference, the marshalling of all the energies of one's conscious and subconscious forces towards the goal of a happy and just life. This is a characteristic ubiquitous within their works, a defiant overcoming of the limits set by historically imposed structures that would limit the range of expression, the type of political engagement and the nature of social interaction.

Their refusals to conform to external expectations had their corollary in both writers' attempts to map the psychological forms of freedom in their works. They take us to a deeper level of questioning and thinking about power, corruption, values and even identities. Conventional psychological knowledge can be narrow, prescriptive and conformist, without questioning the merits of rationalising history into a matter of cause and effect. Philosophical anarchism touches the very foundations of experience in terms of what it means to be human in a world full of constrictions. Murray Bookchin explains the insidiousness of the state in our lives:

the State is not merely a constellation of bureaucratic and coercive institutions. It is also a state of mind, an instilled mentality for ordering reality. Accordingly, the State has a long history – not only institutionally but also psychologically. Awe and apathy in the face of State power are products of social conditioning that renders this very power possible (Bookchin 2003:94–95).

Much of the target of Shelley's and Marechera's writings is towards the state. The primary objective in this chapter is therefore to understand the psychological motivation that drives anarchism as a creative enterprise, or as a source of revolutionary praxis. Shelley and

Marechera recognized that all forms of systematic violence are among other things assaults on the role of the imagination as a political principle, and the only way to begin to think about eliminating systematic violence is by recognizing this. Where most anarchist activities are public and dramatic, anarchist psychology focuses on the mind and mindsets.

As such Shelley and Marechera made it their business to investigate and interrogate the unjust indignation that accumulates in the human mind, the burning, surging passion that makes the storm of cruelty inevitable. They knew without doubt that a writer's very being must throb with the pain, the sorrow, the happiness, the despair in order to battle with human struggles, imaginatively. They saw literature in its various shapes and forms as a way of 'consciousness raising' as Ursula K Leguin an anarchist science-fiction author puts it (Killjoy and Robinson 2009:10). A liberated imagination is a powerful tool for understanding, and perhaps even resolving complex human issues. This recognition underlines how poetry and fiction are always the fulcrum of the moral imagination, a kind of creative reservoir, of potential revolutionary change. Ben Okri calls it the 'magnification of internal freedom.'⁶³

And, it is from invisible spaces – invisible, most of all, to power – in which arise the potential for revolution and extraordinary social creativity that freedom actually comes. If anarchism is, essentially, an ethics of practice, then meditating on literary strategies employed by writers might give an intimate understanding of the philosophy. A distinctive feature of anarchism, as a political philosophy, is that it roots itself not in a fixed epistemological schema or a set of propositions about the true structure of history, capitalism, or patriarchy but in an ethical

⁶³ See, Ben Okri in conversation with *Vanity Fair*'s Anderson Tepper at the Pen American Center, 4 May 2009. Video is posted on Youtube where he talks about his transcendental work – from its searing depictions of war orphans to wondrous evocations of archetypal searchers and dreamers. The link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TErh21yWKtc>

stance and this consists of a fundamental affirmation of freedom, and social equality. Shelley took this role seriously. He was a steadfast exponent of ideals dedicated to the regeneration of the human spirit and the search for abiding verities.

From an anarchist perspective a text must never be simply reduced to an instance of a context, seen solely as the expression of some larger, fixed structure. There must *always* be the possibility of surprise, of psychological transformation. In fact, for anarchist writers, language is not just the passive repetition of familiar signs and symbols; it is also an action against and for. Thus, writing and reading are not only the repeated confirmation of self-referential structures; they become means of transformation through which pre-conceptions can be changed. The anarchist assumption that a text can transform the mind or mindsets and is predicated on the perceived interactivity of the text with the reader. The text becomes a force, a part of an ongoing social and political dialogue. Anarchist interpretation seeks both the ground for possibility and the possibilities themselves. Jesse Cohn elaborates:

Since an anarchist ethical stance means both a refusal to dominate and a refusal to be dominated, an ethical approach to the text cannot simply mean a receptive or empathetic reading, in which we merely submit to its terms, nor can it mean a purely active reading, reading as the 'use' or violent 'appropriation' of the text; instead of positing ourselves as the slaves or the masters of texts, we ought to place ourselves into a dynamic relation with them, to see each encounter with them as a dialogue fraught with risk and promise. (Cohn, 2006: 113)

The positive force of anarchism entails a theory of textual meaning as relationship -- specifically, of textual meaning as that which emerges from two sets of relations: a.) the relations between the text and the forces which produced it within a given situation, and b.)

the relations between the text as a force and its possible effects or uses in particular situations. What is important in a text is not just what it means, but what it does and incites to do. It is not surprising that Shelley would remark that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world because he, and the other Romantics, strongly believed in the revolutionary potential of poetry. In Shelley's case this facility of varied expression is a consequence of aesthetic tact. According to Wordsworth, in terms of sheer craftsmanship, or poetic technique, Shelley was the most accomplished of the English Romantics.

Even though Marechera was chastised in his homeland of Zimbabwe and classified as a 'madman', he saw his function as that of an unheralded leader of a mind revolution who warned all against politics. For Marechera all politics, whether of the left or the right, was empty and meaningless. Political extremists were one and the same. Marechera's awareness of this is evident in his forceful assertion of his individuality as highlighted in the first stanza of the poem – 'The Bar Stool Edible Worm':

I am against everything
Against war and those against
War. Against whatever diminishes
Th' individual's blind impulse
(*Cemetery*, 140)

These statements cogently inscribe Marechera's individualism – he is an individual who refuses to identify himself with any form of ideology or movement that seeks a definitive compartmentalisation of individuals. For Marechera, and to some extent Shelley,

individualism is a matter of necessity that they forcefully foreground and defend in some of their writings.

David Graeber suggests that an anarchist approach to the study of texts must be modelled as a practice of 'teasing out the tacit logic or principles underlying certain forms of radical practice, and then, not only offering the analysis but using the analysis to formulate new visions, a 'utopian extrapolation' of the potential from the actual.' (Graeber 2001:27) It is no wonder that anarchist-writers use fiction and poetry to psychologically reform their readers from traditional social ideas and to add emotion to the rigid aesthetic ideals that are ever present in society. They, therefore, seek to negate societal conventions primarily through the production of unconventional literature.

Anarchism in literature is not necessarily the depiction of bomb throwing characters and cunning terrorists or devious characters such as Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* but perhaps it is also the narrative and poetic strategies of subversion, of challenging genre and history, something that Marechera rightly terms 'literary shock treatment,' a kind of mind altering experience one can feel and be part of through reading. So, what Shelley and Marechera advocate for is psychological conversion, a violence in the mind that pushes an individual to a point of deep reflection and regeneration. Annie Gagiano (2000:202) writes that Marechera came to see mindsets as the worst danger to that human individualism that he thought of as the very principle of freedom that he so cherished in himself, and others.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Also see Tiro Sebina, 'The Language of Anguish in Dambudzo Marechera's Fiction' in Kemmony Monaka et al, *Mapping Africa in English Speaking World* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp 37 – 43.

But for this regeneration to happen, the writer must step out of the prisms of not only the social and political establishments but the literary establishment too. Shelley and Marechera are not easy writers by any stretch of the imagination. Their writings are dialogues within dialogues and dialogues with other writings and dialogues with philosophers and thinkers. This is an important anarchic strategy, a critical model in which no set hierarchy exists. Their writings become amalgams of different genres, in which linear links are broken. The narratives cascade in no apparent or necessary order: there is dialogue by the characters; allusions to philosophy and myths, dialogue between characters within the narrative and larger contemporary issues persisting at the time of composition. Just as in everyday experience the implication here is that everyone must confront a variety of ways of learning and living.

There is, indeed, a kind of exuberant anarchy in this process that destabilises our psychological assumptions about power and hierarchy. The open endings in most of Shelley's and Marechera's works invite the reader to pursue further conversations as well as to go beyond the text into conversations that Shelley and Marechera do not even chart. So, the reader can and must piece together meaning. We might say that the major anarchic concern of their literature is to challenge what Wheeler (1993: ix) calls the 'tyranny of reason' and all that such tyranny implies. What is required is a demanding moral and intellectual rigour to keep alert to the evidence of a need for re-consideration and alteration of our point of view in the light of new experiences. Psychology helps to grapple with both the personal and the political.

Shelley and Marechera desired freedom from conventions, and from a monotonous, rigid lifestyle. It is a freedom from the established order of things, against precise laws and dogma and formulas. This philosophy of defiance of the conventional and the desire for change, sometimes achieved in a shockingly scandalous fashion, is a prominent characteristic shared between Shelley and Marechera, not only in their works but also in their lives. While they believed that their writings were capable of perpetuating change, what was most remarkable was their ability to induce change within society and individual mentalities, a kind of re-awakening from the slumber of the tediousness and monotony of daily life often regulated by others for profit and for power.

Shelley's motivation was invariably 'the impulse of a desire to define and enhance our humanity' (Duerksen 1988:ix). While freedom is individual in its source, it immediately becomes social in its application. Shelley's catalogue of poems was a series of renewed self-criticisms and analyses, a continuously dramatized process of self-understanding. And Marechera was convinced that individuals within society were prevented from conceiving things in new ways because of their reverence and unsuspecting respect for the established order. Holding onto tradition does not allow society to move forward. It is always the case that dominant social powers with their hegemonic influences prevent individuals from living as they are meant to, in a spontaneous fashion. What is apparently clear is that traditional thoughts are artificial ideas established by those holding the most influence. And if the rules don't fit the game, change the rules. And that is what Shelley and Marechera do; they make up their own rules as they go along.

If an anarchic psychology is to emerge, at its core is the individual experience. Change must start with the individual and work outwards to the broader society. The reaction of anarchists is provoked by the individual's very existence, which is always threatened by increasing concentrations of economic and political power in a very small collective. The challenge as pointed out by Emma Goldman is:

How is the ordinary man to know that the most violent element in society is ignorance; that its power of destruction is the very thing anarchism is combating? Anarchism whose roots are part of [human] nature's forces, destroys, not healthful tissue, but parasitic growths that feed on the life's essence of society. It is merely clearing the soil from weeds and sagebrush, that it may eventually bear healthy fruit. (Goldman, 1969:50)

What Goldman was suggesting here is that it requires less mental effort to condemn than to think. Rather than go to the bottom of anarchism, to examine its origin and meaning, most people condemn it outright because that is fashionable, or politically correct. Anarchism, from its inception, urges people to think, to investigate, to evaluate every proposition critically, and perhaps to understand the psychology behind the philosophy it is important to appreciate how the writers fight this struggle.

While the largely European scholarship that has grown around Marechera in recent years characterize him as a 'madman,' a writer with 'no message,'⁶⁵ I argue on the contrary that the evidence of his literary works shows that he had similar desires as Shelley to challenge and reform his society's attitudes. To communicate their ambitious literary visions, both writers

⁶⁵ See, Flora Veit-Wild's *Source Book* (Africa World Press, 1999)

saw the need for what Dacko and Kilbourn (2002) called ‘aesthetic reform⁶⁶.’ The level of experimentation and the dexterity of their writings suggest that Shelley and Marechera felt that the aesthetic ideals in place were far too rigid and lacked emotional intensity⁶⁷. People who feel more deeply and intensely than others are more aware of subtleties; their brain processes information and reflects on it more deeply. People with emotional intensity are sometimes described as sensitive, caring, and attentive. At their best, they can be exceptionally perceptive, intuitive, and keenly observant of the subtleties of the environment. Yet they are also overwhelmed by the constant waves of social nuances and others’ emotional and psychic energies. They tend to notice and remember a lot, and can be over-stimulated when things are too chaotic or novel for a long time. This ability to feel deeply and intensely often starts from a young age.

As children, there is evidence that Shelley and Marechera were ‘gifted, emotionally intense people ... troubled by existential depression, feelings of inadequacy, guilt loneliness, a heightened sense of injustice and a sense of responsibility for issues that [were] outside of their scope of control ... being held back by social and cultural ‘appropriateness’ (Aron 1997:26). It is this psychological conditioning that defines their aesthetic standards that value spontaneity and unconventional manipulation of genres, subjectivity and emotional representation. Reality, from an anarchist perspective, is a vast 'sum of transformations' which can neither be predetermined nor preconceived, a field which is open before the human mind.

⁶⁶ See J Dacko and R Kilbourn, ‘Romanticism and Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty: A Comparison of Two Counter-Cultural Movements’ <<https://www.scribd.com/document/39918021/Romanticism-and-Antonin-Artaud>> Accessed 15 May, 2013

⁶⁷ Emotional intensity is a very real yet under-discussed subject. Though a lot of scholarly activities are mounting, more is needed to take the understanding of Emotional Intensity beyond anecdotal evidence and pop psychology.

Shelley and Marechera exclusively focus on the psychology of power relations as they experienced them. They were too aware how power structures inhibit creativity. Herbert Read (1974: 17-18) supports this assertion by saying that ‘the exercise of power is the denial of spontaneity... The will to power is an eccentric and disruptive force: the unity it would impose is totalitarian.’ What emerges from Read’s argument is a parallelism that exists between the psychological and the artistic processes. Both depend on an innate creative energy, one in the mind of the artist, the other in the body politic. Both seek to give form to feeling – to symbolize feeling in an appropriate form. The symbols, which the artist invents, are as multiform as the feelings that motivate people, but the symbols that society invents are often limited and rigid. What this means psycho-politically is that revolutions must be preceded by revolutions of the mind. American philosopher, Robert Pirsing, in his seminal text, *Zen and the Art of the Motorcycle Maintenance*, explains:

But to tear down a factory or to revolt against a government or to avoid repair of a motorcycle because it is a system is to attack effects rather than causes; and as long as the attack is upon effects only, no change is possible. The true system, the real system, is our present construction of systematic thought itself, rationality itself, and if a factory is torn but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a systematic government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves in the succeeding government. There’s much talk about the system. And so little understanding (Pirsing, 1974:88).

For Shelley and Marechera the body politic needs to be addressed in terms of the whole system and not just the immediately observable parts of the sub system. The selected texts in this chapter – Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* and Marechera’s *The House of Hunger* – are

formative experiences for the writers and by default become socio-psychological templates, which may help explain the production and or interpretation of their other works. While understanding, an experience is at the core of interpreting a text, the two writers develop a powerful interpretive matrix for understanding their worlds. Perhaps Keith Oatley's psychology of fiction is helpful in explaining Shelley and Marechera's psychological motives in their writings:

A piece of fiction is a model of the world, but not of the whole world. It focuses on human intentions and plans. That is why it has a narrative structure of actions and of incidents that occur as a result of those actions. It tells the vicissitudes of our lives, of the emotions we experience, of ourselves and our relationships as we pursue our projects. We humans are intensely social and – because our own motives are often mixed and because others can be difficult to know – our attempts to understand ourselves and others are always incomplete. Fiction is a means by which we can increase our understanding.

(Oatley 2011: ix)

Oatley's theory is helpful in making sense of the fact that the restoring power in Shelley and Marechera reside in the persistent power of the mind and language. I hope to demonstrate how both writers provide their readers with a map of the mind and a profound faith that the map can be put to use.

In the past two decades, several groups of researchers have worked on finding out how fiction works in the mind.⁶⁸ At the same time research on brain imaging has started to show how the brain represents emotions, actions, and thinking about other people. My interest is not so

⁶⁸ For instance, I was a co-researcher of one such group, the Poetry Beyond Text: Vision, Text and Cognition project, which was funded by the AHRC and a collaboration between the University of Kent and Dundee University. This three-year project explored the cognitive, emotive and evaluative aspects of the process of reading poetry using methods indebted to Psychology and Creative Practice, combined with theoretical insights drawn from Literary Criticism. See, <http://www.poetrybeyondtext.org/>

much scientific as literary. The argument that fiction and poetry show what is possible for us as human beings, rather than merely about what has already happened, was first made by Aristotle in his *Poetics* written around 335 BC. Poetry and fiction can bring us closer to the truths of our human condition, particular kinds of truths of what we as people are like, and what we are up to in our interactions with each other. To achieve all this, Shelley and Marechera use poetic and fictional devices – metaphors, allegories, philosophy. Craftily they depict this search for truth in poetry or prose.

Literary shock treatment⁶⁹

To establish the nature of the psychological anarchism that manifests itself in the writing and thinking of Shelley and Marechera, it is important briefly to consider their personal and historical backgrounds. Quite accidentally, as I have discovered, tracing their growth and development as writer-philosophers, their biographical accounts resonate and reveal a similar pattern of events as well as temperamental affinities. Personal tastes and preferences differ due largely to class backgrounds and the historical gap that separates their existences. These two are as it were opposites and yet hold on to a similar vision – to free the shackled minds of people who encounter their work and ideas. I further argue that the shock value in their behaviour, public personas and literary writings is intentional as psycho-anarchic means and strategies. They shock to provoke and to challenge. Not many people recover well from this literary shock treatment but if you do, it means that you can see the light.

⁶⁹Shock therapy treatment is usually for chronic mental conditions by electroconvulsive therapy or by inducing physiological shock. In the context of this thesis, literary shock treatment is a psychological and mind altering experience that readers undergo.

Shelley was the first son of a wealthy, country landowner and born at Field Place near Horsham, Sussex, England in 1792. The year of his birth was significant in many ways. It was the year in which Thomas Paine published his *Rights of Man* and Mary Wollstonecraft published her manifesto *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; one year later William Godwin was to release the book that was to inspire Shelley the most, *Political Justice*. These events heralded the beginning of a decade of unprecedented upheaval, which affected most of Europe and had repercussions not only in politics but also in literature. The foundations of England were being shaken. Industrialisation was tearing apart the fabric of English society and the gap between the rich and the poor was widening. It was a decade of war, at first, only a distant war, fought largely at sea but later a war that came to every man's door step in the form of conscription, high prices, food shortages, and general social unrest. It came in the ceaseless, swelling, uncontrollable agitation of new ideas: a great wind of restless, contradictory ideas that blew open new doors and windows in men's minds and changed their lives forever. The social crust was no longer as solid as it seemed. Shelley's philosophic outlook and psycho-anarchic sensibilities were shaped by these upheavals and commotions.

Marechera was born exactly 160 years later in Rhodesia in 1952, the son of a truck driver and a nanny in the impoverished Vengere slum in the eastern town of Rusape, Zimbabwe.

Politics, nationalism, the forces of imperialism and rebellion, were the first and deepest parts of his inheritance.⁷⁰ Marechera's character was linked to the patriotic and nationalistic ardour of the times because

⁷⁰ See, eg. Doris Lessing praise of *The House of Hunger* (Heinemann, 1978) used on the back cover of the first edition: A black man who has suffered all the stupid brutalities of the white oppression in Rhodesia, his rage explodes, not in political rhetoric, but in a fusion of lyricism, wit, obscenity. Incredible that such a powerful indictment should also be so funny.'

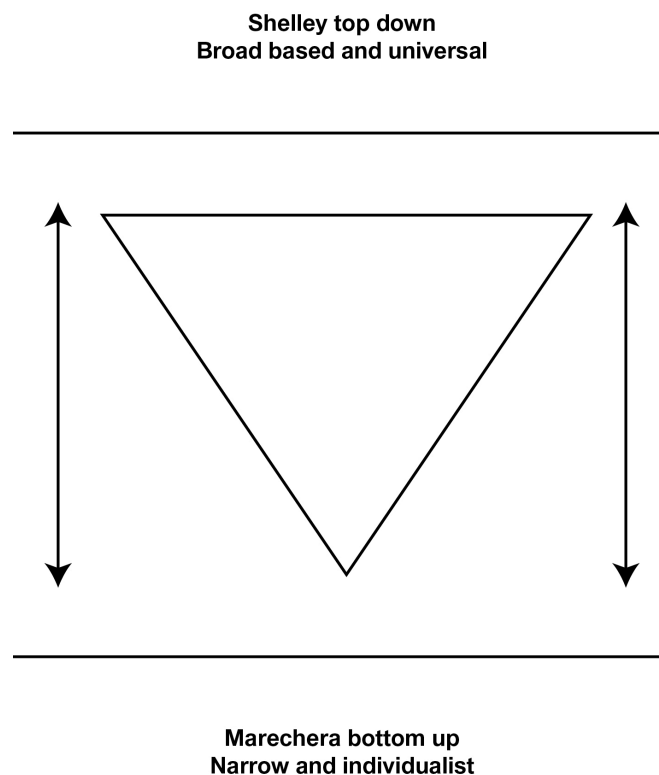
...how can you *observe* a stone that's about to strike you? That was my relationship with the then Rusape 'society.' I was the drunken brawls. I was my father one night coming home with a knife sticking out of his back. I was the family next door being callously evicted because the father had died – it was to happen to my family too. I was my father when some sixteen year old twit, white twit insulted him. I was all those who were being evicted from the surrounding white farms and being dumped and dumped anywhere. I was the fellow student dropping out because the school fees just could not be found. I was the horrible dark nights (the street lights never worked), I was the ghostly lamentations and wails when someone died you knew they would have to bury him in that rubbish dump they used to call the Native Cemetery.' (Veit-Wild & Schade 1988: 6-7)

These contrasting historical and personal backgrounds are necessary to establish in order to clarify the psychology underpinning the anarchic poetics of both writers. Shelley and Marechera clearly come from different ends of the social scale and their interaction with the world is determined by these personal experiences. However, despite where they came from, they were fighting a common enemy, and for a common cause. What *unites* them is a desire nourished by a heightened conception of self-development, and by a new understanding of the revolutionary process in society.

For Shelley and Marechera psychological and political balance is achieved by variation and complexity, not by homogeneity and simplification. They envisage an individual whose sensibilities, range of experiences and lifestyle is nourished by a wide range of stimuli, by a social scale that always remains within the comprehension of a single human being. Thus, the means and conditions of survival become the means and conditions of life: need becomes desire and desire becomes need. The point is reached where the greatest social decomposition provides the source of social integration. What we see is the pulverisation of all bourgeois

institutions. It becomes obvious that the anarchist tendencies of Shelley and Marechera are aiming for the same thing but inspired by totally different world views and perspectives.

Shelley is the rebellious son of a bourgeois father who is content with the prevailing status quo, while Marechera is a victim of the white bourgeoisie in colonial Rhodesia empowered by their imperial mission to extend territory, power and profit over resources. Perhaps, the most salient connector between Shelley and Marechera is that Shelley's bourgeois class is the same bourgeoisie that goes far and wide in search of more riches and more control. This is the enemy. This can best be diagrammatically illustrated in this manner:



The usual assumption with this kind of model would be that the base is the least important when it is in fact equally important as the top. In fact, it is the funny business of literary

criticism, which treats some writers with reverence and others with contempt. Shelley has the privileged status of the philosopher-poet and Marechera is treated as just another disillusioned post-colonial writer from the Africa of too many problems.

Marechera's work is written from an individualist perspective, the writer-narrator in *The House of Hunger*, seeking freedom and individuality. Once he comes to terms with himself he can be a useful and functional citizen. Shelley is interested in the community; hence one of his major poems *Prometheus Unbound* projects a prototype society. It is not by any means a perfect society, but a troubled society that is working to be a good society. Thus, the enduring criticism of Shelley is that he is too idealistic. Marechera's crime is exactly the opposite. The enduring criticism for Marechera is that he is too individualistic and cares less about collective values, when in actual fact he does care, as shown by his raw and emotional portrayal of a Zimbabwean society under colonial rule in *The House of Hunger*. He is demanding transparency and accountability, not just from the political class but from every individual.

The real import of *The House of Hunger* is Marechera's agony for the wretched human beings of the earth, the disinherited, and the spiritually bankrupt. Some of the characters in the story 'House of Hunger' have been degraded to a point that their struggle to free themselves from humiliation causes them to deny who they are:

He was always washing himself... at least three baths everyday. And he had all sorts of lotions and deodorants to appease the thing that had taken hold of him. He did not so much wash and scrub himself until he bled. He tried to purge his tongue too, by improving his English and getting rid of any accent

from the speaking of it. It was painful to listen to him, as it was painful to watch him trying to scrub blackness out of his skin (*The House of Hunger*, 93).

Marechera's characters operate according to how he perceives the nature of the world. To him, the world was defined by the attitudes of the white man. Humiliation is a common experience.

Their anarchic poetics focuses on communicating their radical desire for society to respect equality of all and social transformation through collective effort including the possibility of revolutionary action. While Shelley rebels against his class and background his is mostly a top-down anarchism that is parcelled to the masses by the bright and enlightened one, the intellectual poet, the 'unacknowledged legislator of the world.' Shelley, who refines his thinking from abroad, in Italy, is sympathetic to the protestors in England and is supportive of their causes. Perhaps his sympathy for the struggles illustrates the fact that he is one of them but cannot come to the frontline; he can only direct operations from behind the scenes. His exile adds to the mysticism of his political ideals and causes him to fashion himself as a Promethean agent of political and intellectual enlightenment. Marechera found supporting the struggle from a distance frustrating.⁷¹

The need to shock in both is not just a means to enhance their public bad-boy reputations but a way of forcing everyone to pay attention. Shelley had to rebel against his class to show them how horrible they look from the outside. What is interesting about the marginalisation

⁷¹ In a December 2010 interview with Stanley Nyamfukudza he told me that he also suffered a mental breakdown because exile became a burden. He had anxieties for not being in Zimbabwe to support and participate in the liberation struggle. The result of that period became his first novel, *The Non Believer's Journey* (1980). A psychiatrist had encouraged him to use writing as therapy.

of Shelley from his social class is that he is perceived to be disloyal to his privileged background, values and class aspirations. Shelley found the aristocracy repulsive in their deceit and corrupt means and ways of disenfranchising the poor any decency or dignity. He no longer believed in it. He no longer respected what it symbolised. He no longer accepted its goals, and most significantly he refused to live by its institutions and social codes. This refusal runs deep in Shelley. It extends from his hatred of political manipulation in all its forms and brings into question the very existence of hierarchical power as such. It transcends a critique of the society and evolves into a generalised opposition to the prevailing order on an ever-broadening scale.

Marechera had to alienate himself in order that he may show the poor and the rich how miserable they make each other in his native Zimbabwe. Shelley's unconventional and uncompromising lifestyle when combined with his strong disapproving voice made him an authoritative and much denigrated figure during his life and afterwards. He has remained a somewhat scandalous and marginalised figure in the history of English literary culture. The only way Shelley could get his message taken seriously was by shocking his readership. The dark sense of futility in the writings Marechera came from the violence and displacement of the colonial system. Marechera stands out among his peers (such as Katiyo, Mungoshi, Nyamfukudza) for his experimental, non-realist style, and his deconstruction of African and Western epistemologies of power. Even after independence Marechera refused to be co-opted into the nation-building project; he saw himself as the court jester, the subversive chronicler. Marechera continues to be criticised for his nihilism, his failure to offer opportunities for transcendence while destroying all markers of a stable identity.⁷²

⁷² See, Wilde and Schade, '*Dambudzo Marechera 1952 -1987*' (Baobab Books, 1988)

Shelley was not particularly a self-centred poet. Under 6% of the poems in his *Collected Works* begin with the first personal pronoun, compared with possibly over 70% of those in Marechera; and only 19% of his lines contain I, me, my, mine.⁷³ As usual, he writes best when his private feelings dissolve away into feeling for others. Marechera writes about himself but he also hopes that by magnifying his own personal and psychological journeys others may find salvation in that. He says ‘I always tried to reduce everything into a sort of autobiographical record. As though I needed to stamp myself with the evidence of my own existence; as if every single thing I did and said was pregnant with significance. Every transient emotion was the occasion for poetry. Every passing spectacle an epiphany’ (*The Black Inside*, 80). Most, if not all, of Marechera’s work is personal and autobiographical. In fact, Marechera’s earlier writing exhibits a marked attachment to the first-person pronoun and the confessional mode is especially predominantly used in almost all his works. The most obvious consequence of this device is to immerse the narrative ego in the text, fusing voice and discourse in a field of immanence, and putting identity unreservedly into play. In every case, more than one confessional voice is involved whether this is a result of authorial prefaces or stratified narrative structures. *The Black Insider*, for example, includes no less than three distinct first person narrative voices, and temporal ruptures in the order of its discourses complicate the situation still further. There is an unmanageable appeal, a plight of isolation, a voice resistant to all delimitation, so that Marechera’s work reads like a plea.

The psychological shock treatment to which Shelley and especially Marechera submit their readers to is tangible in all their writings. The writing is violent and thought provoking. The

⁷³ See, G.M. Matthew’s explanation of these maths in his monograph *Shelley*, (Longman, 1970) pp.7-8. The percentages of Marechera are my own estimates.

shock effect derives from the unusual images, which are as utterly unpredictable as both were in real life. The work they produce (in their exilic wanderings and search for truth) has a deliberate transgressive quality, an overstepping of boundaries. Another element that both employ is poetic language, some kind of textual madness in their play with sensations, odours, ideas, words and philosophies. Their poetic personas constantly scrutinise what we perceive as our reality, intervening in readers' psychic as well as social dispositions.

I would like to argue further that the intention of Shelley's and Marechera's anarchic poetics is to perform acts of literary shock treatment on their readers. They do not write for the sake of writing – they write to challenge, to provoke and to encourage deeper psychological reflection. Between them, they have addressed our past, our future, and our present condition. Their point of reference is tied to a mighty psychological mission: unsettling and motivating minds to be forces of good. For them it was not enough to just write and be read. Their lives became forms of expression too. Their lives became other means of communicating beyond the written down, reasoned out arguments in their works. Your response must become the quality of your day-to-day behaviour.

It is not surprising that Shelley and Marechera invested their intellect and imagination in fighting traditional hierarchies and fixed canons of knowledge. They felt obliged to protest and to challenge. In other words, Shelley and Marechera demanded another way of seeing and thinking – hence their experiments with technique, shifts in style and philosophy while in the process freeing the individual from the fetters of history and tyranny by activating the psychological dimension. Interested in forging new categories of thought, new modes of being and becoming, Marechera outlines the ambitions of his work as follows:

I try to write in such a way that I short-circuit, like in electricity, people's traditions and morals. Because only then can they start having original thoughts of their own. I would like people to stop thinking in an institutionalised way. If they stop thinking like that and look in a mirror, they will see how beautiful they are and see those impossibilities within themselves, emotionally and intellectually – that's why most of what I have written is always seen as being disruptive or destructive. For me that slow brain death I was talking about can only be cured by this kind of literary shock treatment... in this way I see the writer as a kind of Cassandra figure with all this enormous talent to actually analyse, officialise intensely people's destinies, only to be cursed by censorship, by persecution, by whatever, for having that talent.... A vision like that transcends any political programme (*Source Book*, 40 -42)

Later in his life Shelley also wanted to shock his readers into awareness, as this May 1820 letter to his friend and publisher Leigh Hunt shows:

The system of society as it exists at present must be overthrown from the foundations with all its superstructure of maxims & of forms before we shall find anything but disappointment in our intercourse with any but a few select spirits. This remedy does not seem to be one of the easiest. But the generous few are not the less held to tend with all their efforts towards it. If faith is a virtue in any case it is so in politics rather than religion. I wish to ask you if you know of any bookseller who would like to publish a little volume of *popular songs* wholly political, & destined to awaken & direct the imagination of the reformers. I see you smile – but answer my question (*Letters II*, 1964: 191)

Leigh Hunt never replied. While he may have wanted to help his friend reach out to his readership, Hunt understood the laws of publishing in Britain in 1820. He also knew how extreme his friend's political views were. These popular songs – *The Mask of Anarchy*, *Men of England*, etc – no doubt, would have led to the prosecution of both author and publisher,

under the vast array of laws which the Tory government of the time had passed to suppress any dissenting voices.

The psychology of anarchism is a political psychology. That is, it begins by trying to understand the nature of tyranny that oppresses human beings. Tyranny, it seems, has been established not just by external forces but rather by the people themselves. Oppression succeeds only because the psychological structure of those oppressed coincides with that of those who oppress them.

Unbinding Prometheus

There is some unanimity in Shelleyan scholarship in appraising *Prometheus Unbound* as a work of great scope and ambition. In the most part, the poem succeeds in its mission to be a catalyst for revolution or reform. However, my reading of the poem takes a radical departure from this preceding scholarship. I emphasise on the anarchic strategies Shelley employs and the psychological motives put in effect to inspire and to challenge the reader. Shelley's passion for reforming the world was given meaning and direction by his interest in revolutionary ideas and events. The history and fate of the French Revolution and his early readings of Godwin, Plato and others certainly helped him to define a theory of the mind and to elaborate a program of reform, both practical and ideal, which would answer the challenge of revolutionary failure and reaction. For him the French Revolution had been both a powerful symbol of what human energy could accomplish and a revelation of human corruptibility. That is why Shelley's use of the Promethean legend is remarkable and reflects his personal meditations on the necessity to find a philosophical and psychological plane on which an ideal revolution might be enacted and forestall further failures as had been seen.

Composed over three years (between 1818 and 1821), *Prometheus Unbound*, is often considered to be Shelley's most complex and ambitious poem, and rightly so. It was his own favourite, 'the most perfect of my productions,' written 'in the merest spirit of ideal poetry,' but although he knew its worth he also knew that it was a work 'very few would understand or like ...it is written for the elect.' (Jones II, 1964: 127). For Shelley, how his poetry got distributed was a part of the reading process. He had a fascination in the ways his poems circulated between users as another means by which political norms were not only decoded but also rethought.

His wife, Mary Shelley's note to the poem, echoes the warning: 'It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout.'⁷⁴ It is a poem with high seriousness, which Matthew Arnold tried to deny him and neuter his agency when he said 'The Shelley of actual life is a vision of beauty and radiance, indeed, but availing nothing, effecting nothing. And in poetry, no less than in life, he is a beautiful but ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain.'⁷⁵ In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley exhibits Miltonic ambitions in his willingness to try and understand humanity in its totality. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley says, 'the great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful.' This statement certainly expresses the dominant mood of *Prometheus Unbound*.

⁷⁴ WB Yeats 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' <http://www.yeatsvision.com/Shelley.html> <8 August 2015>

⁷⁵ Matthew Arnold, 'Shelley' in *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston, 1961) p.380

He tampered with a Greek tragedy and used it as a model of looking a little closer at humanity. The best description of the poem's hybrid genre comes from Shelley himself in his seminal essay, *A Defence of Poetry*:

The drama being that form under which a greater number of modes of expression of poetry are susceptible of being combined than any other, the connexion of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form. (*Shelley's Prose*, 285)

Based on this statement, I would argue that Shelley's adoption of the dramatic form in this case is subversive. It was a ploy to deal ambivalently with competing material and ideas. No wonder Sperry (1988:xi) would say it reflects 'a superior degree of self-consciousness and intellectualization.' The poem is not necessarily an (auto)biography but a project embodying long-studied conclusions not only about politics and reform but also a re-examination of human nature.

Shelley deliberately sought through his use of imagery to represent the operations of the human mind. With *Prometheus Unbound*, the ethos of Shelley's revolutionary politics evolves into a complex anatomy of the human psyche (Bloom 2004: 307). What is remarkable about this lyrical drama is that it is not mere traditional verse but rather a play of ideas in which he can marry the role of psychologist and political reformer. Even though Shelley is beset by a passion for reforming the world, this passion is applied to an interior psychology and a recognition that change must happen from the inside out.

The characters that populate the poem are there to represent the permanent and inalienable powers of the human psyche – the nature of man, life, and destiny. What is also fascinating

about this poem is that it in a way re-integrates the poetry with the life of the poet. From an early age, as documented in James Bieri's biography, the young poet was a keen student of ideas who read widely and was strongly influenced by the thoughts of others (Bieri 2008: 27). It is not surprising then that *Prometheus Unbound* has much to say about the mind of its creator even though it was not intended as a self-revelation but as a profound investigation of the mind and spirit of humanity, because as Shelley points out in his preface 'didactic poetry is my abhorrence'.

Shelley's Prometheus is neither a mythical Greek deity nor a fictional human being: he is a figure of future human potential projected to the utmost degree of idealization. Stuart Curran⁷⁶ has described *Prometheus Unbound* as adopting a 'transcendental form' or a 'composite' mode that moves beyond all generic limits. There was a tendency in Shelley to create hybridized dramas that mix immediate issues with traditional forms. Perhaps, Shelley sought cultural power in his dramas, the ability to make new cultural objects and through them renew the society that makes use of them – by restaging the past and by taking the stage in the present to shape the future.

In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley offers us a tragedy of the entrapped self that is also a tragedy of closed form. Thus, the liberation of Prometheus (humanity) from his enchaining by Jupiter (tyranny of rules and beliefs) is ennobling and beautiful. In order to achieve this freedom, Shelley drew on a wide range of theatrical improvisations in an attempt to imagine humanity's liberation from the tyranny of the self and from the tyranny that the selfish exert over the world. Prometheus is the representative hero of humanity. He is, as Northrop Frye

⁷⁶ Stuart Curran 'The Political Prometheus' *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 25, No. 3, Homage to Carl Woodring (Fall, 1986), pp. 429-455

commented, a favourite mythic hero for poets.⁷⁷ The nobility and selflessness of character makes Prometheus an attractive metaphor in nineteenth century European politics and literature. In Shelley's case, his use of Prometheus reflects his personal political meditations on the range of conditions associated with such political constructs as hegemony, tyranny and liberation. This thrust in Promethean politics is the subject of Shelley's January 24, 1819 letter to his friend Thomas Love Peacock as he was composing his *Prometheus Unbound*.

Shelley writes:

My first act of *Prometheus* is complete, & I think you wd. like it. – I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science, & if I were well, certainly I should aspire to the latter, for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, & harmonising the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled. Far from me is such an attempt & I shall be content by exercising my fancy to amuse myself & perhaps some others, & cast what weight I can into the right scale of that balance which the giant of (Arthegall) holds (*Letters* II, 1964: 70-71)

Clearly, Shelley is very aware and conscious of the nature of political antagonisms as noted in the 'contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled' and continues to be ruled. Prometheus, who is both villain and hero exemplifies the process of regeneration that Shelley anticipates to take place in everyone before any revolution can be successful. In fact, Shelley defined the idea of revolution in *Prometheus Unbound* as one that must occur within the mind of every man before true change can be expressed in nature and society. Revolution only occurs after an accumulation of insight:

⁷⁷ See, Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton University Press, 1957) p.155

Hark! the rushing snow!
The sun-awakened avalanche whose mass,
Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now.

(*Prometheus*, II.iii.36-42)

The simile in the middle of this stanza has the effect of making the ‘heaven-defying minds’ the centre of attention and the nub of rhetorical meaning, creating an expectation, which is fulfilled when we recognise that the larger presentation of landscape is indeed as a metaphor of the mind. By using transformative natural elements such as ‘sun’ and ‘snow’ the argument could as well be that our definitions of human nature – the ways, in which we think, speak and write – do change; that such change can also achieve massive alterations in the political system; and that these alterations can in turn create further shifts in what we take human nature to be.

The title of the poem itself is revealing: *Prometheus unbound*. It implies not so much the binding or unbinding of Prometheus or the method of his release. In fact, the phrase ‘Prometheus Unbound’ suggests more simply the state or process of being unbound. It is a testament of the importance of a constant necessity for the psychological refurbishment of minds. Here, Shelley intended to dramatise man’s powers of self-regeneration through inward reform. The opening act of the drama describes the hero’s change of heart, from hatred toward life. We first see Prometheus unrepentant, ‘eyeless in hate’ (I.9). The first emphatic indication of change comes in grief:

Not exultation, for I hate no more,
As then ere misery made me wise. The curse
Once breathed on thee I would recall.
 ...If then my words had power
Though I am changed so that aught evil wish
Is dead within; although no memory be
Of what is hate ...

(Prometheus, I. 57 -59; 69 – 73)

Shelley is insisting that we need to let go of external influences and embrace our inner selves before we seek any kind of political and social reform. He explores the point at which consciousness finally ceases to be determined by the past and begins to determine itself under conditions of freedom.

Individuals and societies are often governed by hate and fear even more effectively than by hope and love as history has always shown. And that Shelley should be charged with ineffectual and shallow revolutionary idealism is surprising considering the subtlety of his references to the forces of darkness against which his heroes must contend. He stages tyranny in all its oppressive power yet enacts possible stands against it. It is a poem about psychological regeneration – it is not a drama for the stage but for the imagination. Thus, it is an anarchist poem that depicts social anarchy, delineates an ideal objective process for anarchist transformation, and puts the reader through a process of discovery by which one can recognize an inner authoritarianism that can be overcome.

Michael Scrivener (1982: 156) argues that the poem is about the abolition of the “principles of tyranny” – not just particular tyrannies, but tyranny altogether. Judging from history, hating tyranny has never helped change the status quo. Hate is not enough. There is no ontological principle of domination. Only the individual can liberate himself from oppression, because oppression is a human construct, and not something existing eternally and outside human control. So, what must we do, to think, feel and imagine before we are free from hierarchy and domination in all their guises? Shelley’s main argument is for the moral and imaginative revolution which must precede a successful political revolution. He was aware that philosophy can open the apertures of the mind, but it is only an interest, not a regenerative faculty. As described by the Chorus of Spirits in the last act of *Prometheus Unbound*, such a creation is a continuous propensity of the liberated mind:

And our singing shall build
In the void’s loose field,
A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield;
We will take our plan
From the new world of man,
And our work shall be called the Promethean

(*Prometheus*, iv. 153 – 158)

The poem does advocate for utopian hope by showing that utopia is indeed possible; it imagines and effectively illustrates a revolutionary process and it provides an experience by which the reader can participate. I agree with Michael Scrivener’s labelling of the poem as an anarchist poem. Shelley was conscious of the transformational programme in *Prometheus Unbound*. He writes in his preface: The imagery which I have employed will be found in

many instances to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed (*Complete Poetry*, 229).

In writing this poem, Shelley attempted a re-writing or more precisely a re-ordering of history. His treatment of the old Promethean story is significant. He creates a new myth from the old. The implication could be that the narrative of our being can be altered by the power of our imagination. Perhaps Shelley chose a familiar story with familiar names in it so that his readers might identify with the characters but also see how they can be altered. He tries to show through the drama how the mind is fragmented into several parts that need to be put together to make a wholesome being. A major part of the poem's dramatic power was to reside in its shock value (an aspect of the sublime he was deliberately seeking) as an infinitely suggestive prototype of human perfection. William Hazlitt⁷⁸, a contemporary of Shelley, said 'He is clogged by ... no earth bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit ... It would seem that he wished not so much to convince or inform as to shock the public by the tenor of his productions.' The mistake we often make is to assume that the specific order of things now must always be. That is why *Prometheus Unbound* is a form of drama that lies beyond any genre, perhaps any theatre or time. A truly Shelleyan stage reveals that any political, social, cultural, or artistic form can be tyrannical, and only a constant process of re-forming – or making, breaking, and re-making again – can protect both society and art from those 'foul shapes ... Which, under many a name and many a form ... Were Jupiter' (*Prometheus*, III.4.180-3). Thus, *Prometheus Unbound*, challenges its readers to think about reality in radically unaccustomed ways.

⁷⁸ See William Hazlitt *Table-Talk: Essays on Men and Manners* (London: J.M. Dent & Co,1903) p. 149

William Keach (in Morton 2006:134-141) is of the view that reading *Prometheus Unbound* is a 'radical participation' in the revolutionary change Shelley is aspiring towards. He further suggests that the stylistic complexity of the poem bears the impress of an authorial agency that potentially elicits 'from us as readers our participation in a more inclusive and collective kind of human agency.' Shelley's anarchic mission is only successful if the reader is active and not passive because as Tilottama Rajan (1984:317) pointed out 'the reading-process' helps to 'reconstruct a unity not immediately given in the text.'

Jean Hall (1980:5) feels that 'Shelley lives in a world of appearance (metaphor, images) and its transformation; and the thrust of his poetry is not to reach the realm of a real Absolute, but to enact the transformation of forms.' The physical setting of the poem situates the attitudes and feelings, the 'eagle baffling' mountain to which Jupiter has nailed Prometheus. This unwelcoming natural setting with its suggestions of fear, isolation, cold and pain can translate into an image of mental reality, the unredeemed mind of humanity waiting to be liberated, just as Prometheus is waiting his liberator on the bleak precipice. I am not surprised with the choice of Prometheus as hero, given this mythological character's association with rebellion and isolation from his act of giving fire to man against the god's wishes and his reputation as a fore thinker or prophet for Shelley, he came to symbolize the mind or soul of man in its highest potential. The whole poem's central moment, Prometheus's recantation of his curse which is also Jupiter's downfall, in the poem's own terms 'a deep truth' which 'is imageless.' (*Prometheus*, II, iv, 116).

Shelley's lesson is simple. Liberation comes from within. Revolution must occur within the mind, perhaps within the mind of every man before true change can be expressed in nature and society. Demogorgon's words signal a tension that runs through the poem, a tension which preoccupies Shelley's dogged resolve:

...But a voice
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless
For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
On the revolving world?

(*Prometheus*, II, iv, 115 – 118)

Our 'wants' can only be expressed through language. Shelley is interested in the gap between words and meaning, which language seeks to complete. It is in the act of acknowledging incompleteness that the possibility of some utopian 'deep truth' can be kept alive, validated by the fact that any approach to it must be by means of the infinite power of the human mind's imaginings. Shelley wants to free us from the misuse of words, he does so to bring before us the possibility of human freedom. The rhetorical workings in *Prometheus Unbound* engage in questioning the aesthetic assumptions that frame our existence, a process Scrivener (1982:152) describes as 'breaking out of history and into utopia.' Shelley focuses on the psychological preconditions for a utopian transition, the point at which consciousness finally ceases to be determined by the past and begins to determine itself under conditions of freedom.

The scene of Prometheus' torture reveals the barren and indifferent state in which men live when they lack the power of vision or imagination. In reviewing his sufferings, Prometheus

regrets his curse on Jupiter. For Shelley, pity and remorse, may be regarded as an important step towards regeneration. At the heart of the poem is love, unconditional love. Throughout the poem Shelley propositioned that the agent of regeneration is love. The full import can be seen in Demogorgon's last words, which bring the poem to an end:

This is the Day, which down the void abysm
At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's despotism
And conquest is dragged captive through the deep;
Love, from its awful throw of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dread endurance, from the slippery, steep,
And narrow verse of crag-like agony, springs
And folds over the world its heading wings.

(Prometheus, IV, 554 – 561)

Shelley's notion of love transcends the human individual and is adamant that this freedom that love promises and brings is not easy. Shelley expected vigilance and 'patient power.' Somehow, we must hold on, even in the face of suffering; this mental strength is at the heart of Shelley's campaign. Very often, man has a penchant for subjecting himself to the sense of his weakness and settling for the security the status quo gives.

Shelley's acute observation is that evil has its own strength and growth. It can transform good into its own nature, as Prometheus was enslaved to Jupiter, his tyrant double created by the fear and hate in his own mind. Thus, Prometheus after repenting of his curse becomes for a

time passively subdued. He suffers from self-contempt, this powerful inward antagonism precipitated by the Furies who are endowed with the gorgon-like power of transforming their beholder into what he contemplates by “loathsome sympathy” (*Prometheus*, Act 1. 450). The Furies are agents of evil who delight in their own power. They or their subjects progressively take the form, odour, and colour of the poison they are and know:

The beauty of delight makes lovers glad,
Gazing on one another: so are we.
As from the rose which the pale priestess kneels
To gather for her festal crown of flowers
The aerial crimson falls, flushing her cheek,
So from our victim's destined agony
The shade which is our form invests us round,
Else we are shapeless as our mother Night.

(*Prometheus*, I, 465-472)

In these lines, there is a blending of subject and object, subject and environment, which gives form to what would otherwise be shapeless and chaotic. So in essence, to borrow a Platonism, men do become what they contemplate. The battle is won by recognizing that both evil and good have a vicarious effect on the climate of our minds. The description of the work of the Furies in *Prometheus Unbound* suggests that Shelley grasped fully the strength and lasting power of evil passions. There is always in man “unwilling dross that resists imaginative redemption” (Bloom 1959: 112). *Prometheus Unbound* was composed in the knowledge that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious traveller tramples into dust,

they can still bear the harvest of his happiness. King-Hele's (1964:169) conclusion that '(Shelley's) Prometheus represents the mind of Man, and his liberation is symbolic of Man's.' Indeed, Shelley borrows from the tale of Prometheus a sense of consequence resulting from his seeking enlightenment and power.

'You talk Utopia,' Byron is famed to have once told Shelley.⁷⁹ Shelley did more than that, he lived and dreamed utopia, not tomorrow's utopia but today's utopia. His longer poems including *Prometheus Unbound*, *Queen Mab* and *The Triumph of Life* end with a vision of a 'golden age.' But to arrive at this utopia he dreamed, for Shelley, hope was an essential to envisage the future. A visionary anarchist, Shelley decried the enslavement of the mind by church, state, law, custom, and tradition. He inveighed against priests, kings, soldiers, magistrates, and other wielders of institutional authority. In *Prometheus Unbound*, he envisages an autonomous race unshackled by external coercions and mind-forged manacles:

The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man;
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree

(*Prometheus*, 193-196)

Shelley exhibits his disregard for self-imposed travesties of the human mind. He declares that human agency should not be encumbered by the institutional excrescences of class, tribe and

⁷⁹ In 1818, Shelley visited his friend Byron in Venice. Their conversations – on human freedom and the prospects for social change – formed the basis for Shelley's poem *Julian and Maddalo*, in which the mild-mannered English rationalist Julian (Shelley) puts the case for hope, and the brooding Italian aristocrat Maddalo (Byron) argues for despair. 'We might be otherwise,' Julian insists, 'we might be all / we dream of: happy, high, majestic' were it not for our own 'enchained' wills. To which Maddalo replies bitterly: 'You talk utopia!' (*The Complete Poems*, 209 -210)

nation. The agency, he emphasises is now 'man' – not other men or institutions that purport to represent man. His invective against organized oppression comes from his disdain for institutionalised oppression.

Like Socrates, he thought knowledge begets virtue because nobody is wittingly iniquitous. Shelley's exhortations were ignored and this painfully frustrated him. A scorned prophet by his own people, he was fitfully despondent: 'I have,' he confided to his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg, 'sunk into a premature old age of exhaustion, which renders me dead to everything, but the unenviable capacity of indulging the vanity of hope' (*Letters I*, 1964: 383). But the question remains: can we ever be free from our environment and its various influences? Can individuals reach that point where they are carefree and just be? Perhaps the moral in Shelley's vision is that we must look forward not back, seeking for the New Jerusalem rather than the lost Eden. This could be the reason he rewrote Aeschylus' play and transformed it to show that history is not static, that our past selves should not be eternally bound to ravines of icy rocks and endure like Prometheus 'three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours' (*Prometheus*, I,i, 13). His ultimate message could be that suffering makes Prometheans, and so are revolutions born from difficult experiences.

He sees no oppression in the future and as the Spirit of the Hour proclaims, 'there was change,' total emancipation of mankind. He looked around

And behold! Thrones were kingless, and men walked
One with the other even as spirits do,
None fawned, none trampled...
None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines
Which smiled the lie his tongue disdained to speak

(*Prometheus*, III.iv 130-3, 142-3)

All the symbols of authority, ‘thrones, altars, judgement seats, and prisons’ (*Prometheus*, III,iv,168) stand vacant and unregarded now, while something akin to Godwinian anarchy reigns. It is easy to recognise throughout Shelley’s poetry the values and ideals of Godwin’s philosophical anarchism, particularly in the constant vision of a future age after the withering away of the state and the establishment of a free and loving society in which all men would be equal.

Shelley never lost hope that we could do away with oppressive institutions and systems. While this may seem very idealistic, psychologically it was motivational, to believe, to hope that ultimate change would prevail. Shelley’s intention was to psyche the reader. Rajan (1984:321) argues that the poem is dependent on ‘psychological interpretation’ to be understood or be effective. The implication, of course, is that the reader must find a common balance between the internal and the external to achieve the state of true freedom, an endeavour that is not easy because of the gaps in the ‘semiotics of the play’s characterisation.’ A case in point is that the play’s prophecy of a Promethean Age is problematical. Early critics accused the play of being ‘intangible’, ‘vague and hollow’, populated by characters who are ‘spectral, often formless, sometimes only voices.’⁸⁰

In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley succeeds in working his moral, political and philosophical ideals into a well-knit poetic theme. He also successfully fuses two sides of his nature, the rational and the emotional. The complexity and obscurity of *Prometheus Unbound* are a

⁸⁰ See L Zillman, *Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound: A Variorum Edition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959), pp. 41 - 44

result of Shelley's struggle to communicate ideas, which are 'beyond the resources of language' (King-Hele 1960: 208). Herbert Read (1943:271) called it 'the greatest expression ever given to humanity's desire for intellectual light and spiritual liberty'. Indeed, Shelley's evolutionary sequence occurs within two temporal realms, one historical and the other psychological.

Feeding the house of hunger

Dambudzo Marechera's writings are central to an understanding of Zimbabwe's turbulent history. And often he is systematically dismissed. Why this is so suggests something of the dimensions of Marechera's intellectual achievement and the character of the uncomfortable questions he raises. Marechera's analysis of Zimbabwe's postcolonial self-image is thorough and devastating. His iconoclastic, dense style expressed the psychological fragmentation prevalent in Africa during the 70s and 80s and challenged the fundamental beliefs of both the nationalist and post-independence eras. His first book, *The House of Hunger* (1978), is now considered as a Zimbabwean classic.⁸¹

The writer's childhood was shaped by conditions of squalor and violence as well as fear and oppression and offers a site that constitutes and defines resistance (Muponde 2015:3). For Marechera this sense of physical and spiritual starvation became his metaphorical "house of hunger," and its psychological impact was permanent. From early on, reading and writing provided his only means of escape. Marechera's reputation as an 'anarchist' writer is enduring. In his world, nothing can succeed and the only constant and exception is change itself. His vision is penetrating and his critiques show an open-endedness that negates closure

⁸¹ It is among 100 African Best Books of the 20th Century, a project coordinated by the Zimbabwe International Book Fair after the instigation of the late Prof Ali Mazrui in 2002.

and anticipates change. He refuses to idolize and gratify national discourses and ideologies and instead fractures them and shows the temporariness of the values that underline them. Thus, Marechera in his anarchic vision does not seek to teach but rather to provoke, shock and subvert.

The House of Hunger illustrates the devastating effects of growing up in colonial Rhodesia. The liberation struggle waged in the 1960s and 70s is the larger context in which the narrative is situated. Marechera demonstrates that the mindless brutality of colonialism was itself a form of madness that gave rise to double alienation: of a people and of the individual. To Marechera, it seems, having reached a point of psychological disequilibrium, the way forward is via an interrogation and understanding of the current situation. This is, at once, the strength of *The House of Hunger*. In its fragmentary nature, the writer is advocating a redirection, a channelling of energy not necessarily into the pursuit of freedom but the pursuit of self-understanding and self-knowledge, to build a “new” individual capable of surviving in a “new” society. The anticipation of a “new” society was real and urgent as the book was composed during the turbulent years just before the Lancaster House Conference that eventually paved way for Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980.⁸² As Muponde (2015: 22-23) explains, ‘the multifarious contradictions and dynamics of his work provide a counterpoint to the nationalist discourse and its inflexible brand of history and resistance.’

Marechera’s attitude emphasizes a certain underlying logic of mental and emotional processes that are remarkably consistent in his writings. It is the logic of the marshalling of

⁸² The negotiations which led to the Lancaster House Agreement brought recognised independence to Rhodesia (as the Republic of Zimbabwe) following Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. The Agreement covered the Independence Constitution, pre-independence arrangements, and a ceasefire.

all the energies of one's conscious and subconscious forces towards the goal not just of bare material survival, but rather towards the plenitude of life's inner resources. And this spiritual refurbishment cannot be performed lightly. What is at the core of Marechera's creative enterprise and anarchist tendencies is the idea of 'literary shock treatment.' For him, the objective of a writer is not to provide answers to questions or solutions to problems but rather to encourage a rigorous re-evaluation of the self by shaking up the status quo and disrupting the linear power structures that define his society. There is no time for complacency. In other words, one must be in a perpetual state of change, without holding on to any certainties. No wonder, then, that there should be a certain fragmentary quality to his work and thoughts. Definitions and/or definite works are tools of tyranny. It seems in *The House of Hunger* Marechera strived to bring about a revolution in stagnant styles of writing that were promoted by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau.⁸³

Marechera's life choices and writing style beginning from *The House of Hunger* challenge social and historically imposed political limits. Marechera understood that the label of self-indulgent, irrelevant, and 'un-African' attached to him was a power ploy to discredit his exposure of the emperor's nakedness (Gagiano, 2000:203). His strategy was to go on writing the attempted silencing and persecution itself as his testament and aid to other strugglers for freedom. Far from being self-obsessed, he was choosing to use a private voice even when dealing with public themes. In *Mindblast*, he writes 'the individual can only find his society by searching the utmost in himself' (1984:60). In order to understand one's place in the world, Marechera is suggesting that one has to come to terms with the vulnerability of one's own individuality.

⁸³ The Rhodesia Literature Bureau was a government unit established to publish works in the vernacular languages of Shona and Ndebele. The work was expected to be politically correct to be accepted for publishing.

He wanders into a deeper level of questioning and thinking about identities, about colonialism and even anti-colonialism. In a bid for negotiated independence, there were too many superficial answers that only concealed the truth and made apparent the fact that in the 'house of hunger' Ayi Kwei Armah's 'beautiful ones' were yet to be born.⁸⁴ It is like living with what Bessie Head in *A Question of Power* (1974:19) called a "permanent nervous tension," the not knowing why there wasn't any kind of social evolution beyond "this vehement vicious struggle between two sets of people with different looks" and perhaps different agendas and attitudes.

The House of Hunger is a literary manifesto, which lays bare the basis of consciousness that informs everyday life, and an understanding towards the very primary and infantile ways of trying to appreciate the world and to understand the psychologically undergirding structures of political power. The repressive political situation in colonial Zimbabwe was characterised by the 'never ending attritions of human dignity and the fear of the unknown' (Muchemwa 1978: xxiv). In an interview, Marechera invokes Allen Ginsberg's opening of *Howl* in which the Beat poet sees 'the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness.' He writes:

Ginsberg's words, 'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix', were echoing in my ears when I was writing *The House of Hunger*.

(*Source Book*, 368)

⁸⁴ See Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Heinemann, 1968)

Marechera dredges up ‘all the mess from which my generation more or less survived, and I ask myself, what has happened to my generation? ...this kind of diaspora that has happened to this generation. Exactly, what does it mean to the inner development of a people’ (*Source Book*:12).

Marechera knew, for instance, that to live on another’s terms was not the same as to live on his own terms. There is certain logic in these calculations. One sees it in the way he lived his life. He wrote not for those who already had their lives mapped out for them and nicely planned, but for fellow travellers on the road to nowhere. Thus, to some of the earlier critics, Marechera was a ‘lost traveler’ in the patriotic wilderness of nationalism that everybody else felt at home. Instead of change, he saw ignominious stasis. He writes, ‘We will drive through to the independent countries where ...original thoughts veer and crash into ancient lamp posts’ building ‘new towns crowded with thousands of homeless unemployed whose dreams are rotting in the gutters’ (*The House of Hunger*, 74, 79-80). Marechera’s insights into the conditions prevailing in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe need to be reclaimed in the face of the superficial readings of his works that have emphasised on his autobiography rather than his critique of his society and the wider world.

In writing Marechera never intended to betray his people, but to delineate their oppression. While Musaemura Zimunya’s *Those Years of Drought and Hunger* of 1982 found some redeeming features to admire in *The House of Hunger*, his final analysis was unfairly reductive. He wrote:

In Marechera Zimbabwe literature achieves confirmation at birth. Unfortunately, the vision is preponderantly private and indulgent. The social and moral undertaking is cynically dismissed at the

expense of the aesthetic motive. The artist curries favors and succumbs to the European temptation in a most slatternly exhibition. But, perhaps, the naiveté and narcissism will wither and the African become less European (Zimunya, 1982: 32).

Here, Zimunya made huge assumptions about the role of the Zimbabwean writer, and he is not alone. Juliet Okonkwo wrote that Marechera had ‘grafted a decadent avant-garde European attitude [nihilism] and style to experiences that emanate from Africa.’⁸⁵ It is such criticism that pigeonholes Marechera and thus mis-judges his creative legacy. In fact, Marechera’s treatment of ‘the house of hunger’ – the emergent nation state of Zimbabwe – not only offers a searing critique of the spiritual, moral and cultural poverty of the Zimbabwean mind, it also nourishes the very ideals of self-apprehension and regeneration which Zimunya accuses him of rejecting. Perhaps, Zimunya’s critique echoes the discourse of the time and the prevailing political sentiments.⁸⁶ This was shortly after independence and there was this desperately felt need for Afrocentric affirmation and national unity.⁸⁷ And Marechera was regarded as a spoiler. When brought to bear on Marechera’s fiction, the nationalist framework has not only the effect of suppressing what is possible to understand, but also forecloses the possibilities of the layered meanings of his writings in favour of a precast, monolithic reality.

The very fact that *The House of Hunger* was composed outside the historical circumstances it was dealing with, and informed by a hybrid intellectual climate of an exilic England, is a blessing in disguise. The international experience of the writer’s residence in a foreign

⁸⁵ Juliet Okonkwo ‘The House of Hunger’ (Review) *Okike* 18 (1981): 87 – 91.

⁸⁶ There was an insistence by the Zimbabwe government in the 80s for the public and intellectuals to adopt a monolithic nationalism.

⁸⁷ See Emmanuel Ngara and Fay Chung, *Socialism, Education and Development: A Challenge to Zimbabwe* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985)

country and his vast readings became a resource he deployed in his battle to open his compatriot's eyes to the way institutions and wielders of power attempt to homogenize them for the purpose of zombie type control, unquestioned. Thus, Marechera's work derives from many places, from many different influences and cultures. Marechera clearly did not see his mission as 'writing back'⁸⁸ to the imperial centre. He refused to vend a consumable cultural otherness. In fact, he places *The House of Hunger* in a global canon alienating himself from his African peers so much that according to Muponde (2015:126), he remained an outsider in the cultural politics attached to both the early stages of the history of the Zimbabwean literature in English and the political nationalism that the fiction by black writers like him were expected to contribute.

Marechera's break from the convention is not taken lightly by his contemporaries.⁸⁹ Early black fiction in Zimbabwe was predictably didactic, nationalistic in outlook in order to put 'us into historical perspective ... to restore national and human pride and dignity in the face of an aggressive colonial culture determined to ruin our national image of ourselves as worthy humans' (Zimunya 1982: 4-5). I will argue that Marechera found this psychological and social conditioning very limiting, he came to see 'mind-sets as the worst danger to ... human individualism' that he thought of as the very principle of freedom and that he so cherished in himself and others (Gagiano 2000:202). In *The House of Hunger* it is referred to as the regimentation of human pulses:

⁸⁸ James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series & the Launch of African Literature* (London: James Currey Publishers, 2008).

⁸⁹ Olly Maruma's film *After the Drought and Hunger* (Moonlight Productions, 1987) provides illuminating insights into the lives and ideologies into some of the pioneering black writers and publishers in Zimbabwe.

Life stretched out like a series of hunger-scoured hovels stretching endlessly towards the horizon. One's mind became the grimy rooms, the dusty cobwebs in which the minute skeletons of one's childhood were forever in the spidery grip that stretched out to include not only the very stones upon which one walked but also the stars which glittered vaguely upon the stench of our lives.

(*House of Hunger*, 2)

Marechera drew these warnings against the cunning strategies of power from his own experience, as outlined by Flora Veit-Wild:

In the long run, political persecution was less detrimental for Marechera than implicit suppression of his personality and work. His cosmopolitan outlook and anarchic views did not fit into the landscape of Zimbabwe just after independence...Hence his attitude and his writing were labelled as bourgeois and elitist (*Source Book*, 337).

He was the prophet whose message and vision the very people it was intended for denied. Political correctness – see no evil, hear no evil – is a farce. Marechera wrote against such constrictions wherever he perceived them, not only against the “white world.” This could be one reason why *The House of Hunger* with its revealing detail of corruption, sex and decay proved scandalous and shameful to the establishment. The book became an international hit and was even awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize in 1978. The irony here was that the British literary establishment was overwhelmingly embracing Marechera but he used the occasion to vociferate against the hypocrisy of it all. According to a West Africa reporter:

Dambudzo Marechera . . . was already well-launched on several drinks, and therefore loquacious. . . . I heard him complain that an African writer was expected to write only about Africa, and advocate the removal of such prefixes as ‘Irish’ and ‘black’ from the substantive ‘writer.’ He spoke of

himself collecting prizes in London while his people were being killed in Zimbabwe . . . the whole scene was not pretty, but it was certainly serious.

(*Source Book*, 189)

It is not that Marechera is ungrateful. His violent reaction comes from a genuine place that is offended by the double standards prize ceremonies bring especially to black writers. He is being celebrated for his subject matter – writing about an Africa of hunger and disease - than for his actual craftsmanship. It is easy to forget that his original title of *The House of Hunger* was *At the Head of the Stream* but his publishers convinced him that the change was necessary as one title was more marketable than the other (Currey 2008:280). As far as he was concerned to keep thinking in a functional, utilitarian way was to be untrue to his art. In ‘House of Hunger, the nameless narrator who could be Marechera, is having a verbal exchange with a Priest in a dramatic revelation of the uneasiness that gnaws at Marechera himself when he is at the Guardian Prize ceremony:

...the second time was during my nervous breakdown, when I shouted 'It's people like you who're driving us mad!' I wanted to say more, but I began to stammer and he took advantage of that to say 'It's the ape in you, young man, the heart of darkness.'

...

My inkwell missed his head by a breath and smashed into the wall behind him. But he shouted all the louder:

You have nothing but the ape-grin in your brains. And the white man came. Look around you. Surely the industry and progress . . .

A large lump of sadza hit him squarely in the face.

(*House of Hunger*, 48).

To ape is to imitate, but it can mean a few different things. One type of aping is to blatantly imitate something or someone in every way. For Marechera to be an ape is to be unoriginal — a rip-off. He is refusing to see himself the way colonialism has conditioned his people. In other words, Marechera, is astonished at the mis-reading of his work by a literary community he aspires to be an equal member of. He held on to his integrity to his grave. In his crazy, iconoclastic way he had re-defined the way we look at not only ourselves but even African literature; he had expanded the boundaries of what an African writer can write about.

It is important, he points out in *The House of Hunger*:

to insist upon your right to go off on a tangent. Your right to put the spanner in the works. Your right to refuse to be labelled and to insist on your right to behave like anything other than what anyone expects. Your right to simply say no for the pleasure of it. To insist on your right to confound all who insist on regimenting human impulses according to theories psychological, religious, historical, philosophical, political, etc. . . . Insist upon your right to insist upon your right to insist on the importance, the great importance of whim.

(House of Hunger, 17)

The psychological intensity of his efforts was intended to make people realize the dangers of betraying their own individuality to domination in its many guises (psychic, personal, social, economic and even political). It is in *The House of Hunger* that Marechera wages a ‘gruesome’ battle against the most insidious of all power forms, accepted reality. He observes:

Life stretched out like a series of hunger-scoured hovels stretching endlessly towards the horizon.

One's mind became the grimy rooms, the dusty cobwebs in which the minute skeletons of one's

childhood were forever in the spidery grip that stretched out to include not only the very stones upon which one walked but also the stars which glittered vaguely upon the stench of our lives. Gut-rot, that was what one steadily became. And whatever insects of thought buzzed about inside the tin can of one's head as one squatted astride the pit-latrine of it, the sun still climbed as swiftly as ever and darkness fell upon the land as quickly as in the years that had gone

(House of Hunger, 3-4)

This is an existential freedom that goes beyond the desire for the overthrow of colonial rule, although we see the constant presence of violent oppression. It is a freedom lying deep within the soul – a utopianism that goes hand in hand, perhaps necessarily, with his break from the realism of the African novel. Ernst Bloch⁹⁰ defines the utopian in terms of the ‘anticipatory consciousness’ common to all human life. Yet Marechera’s work is itself a form of anticipation – an anticipation of the utopian that was to flourish in African writing.

Marechera wrote at a time after the 1960s when ‘the failure of independence became the overriding theme of African literature.’ (Zeleza 1994: 482)

In fact, there is a note of lamentation commemorating the precious energies of human potential, almost invariably shown strangled by convention, conformity, or more overt impositions of power. It is struggle that he was not able to resolve in his life as he told Flora Veit-Wild ‘I was keen accomplice in my own mental colonization (Veit-Wilde 1992: 4) and his narrator in *The House of Hunger* echoes him:

I was being severed from my own voice. I would listen to it as a still, small voice coming from the huge distances of the mind. It was like this: English is my second language, Shona my first. When I

⁹⁰ Bloch's starting point is always the everyday life and existential situation of the individual, this is outlined in his magnum opus, *The Principle of Hope*, three volumes (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1986).

talked it was in the form of an interminable argument, one side of which was always expressed in English and the other side always in Shona. At the same time I would be aware of myself as something indistinct but separate from both cultures (*House of Hunger*, 30)

It is in his writing that Marechera attempts to enact as much as to promote transformative, vital ways of living, of looking back at the monstrous self that the colonial reality is creating with its impressionistic but illusionary incentives. The appropriation of English in the post-colonial text often leads to a transformation of the received language by the mother tongue. But it also becomes the meeting point of different traditions, different voices.

While many academics and reviewers of his works have characterized his writing as too self-indulgent and an unnecessary self-preoccupation enterprise, Gagiano (2000: 204) maintains that it is an effective strategy in 'his encounter with all powers, institutions, and roles.'

Marechera's anarchic mission was to speak truth to power and he adopted the Menippean genre⁹¹ to disrupt even the most basic requirements of narrative. His constant recountings of himself are not self-indulgent, but instead exemplify, emblematically, that central insight of individuality. Indeed, there is so much of his own biography in the texts, but the narrators are often nameless drifters, individuals with composite personalities, the everyman in each of us, in a constant quest for inner peace that never seemed to be anywhere. This is conveyed in the opening of *The House of Hunger* as follows:

I got my things and left. The sun was up. I couldn't think where to go. I wandered towards the beer hall but stopped at the bottle store where I bought a beer. There were people scattered along the store's wide veranda, drinking. I sat beneath the tall msasa tree whose branches scrape the corrugated iron

⁹¹ See Bill Ashcroft 'Menippean Marechera' in *Reading Marechera* (James Currey, 2013)

roofs. I was trying to think where I was going. I didn't feel bitter. I was glad things had happened the way they had; I couldn't have stayed on in that House of Hunger where every morsel of sanity was snatched from you the way some kinds of bird snatch food from the very mouths of babes.

(House of Hunger, 11)

This opening is in fact a prelude, a fair summary of the futility of the exercise of running away from your own shadow. Marechera, the man, was always getting his things and leaving. There was no stability in his life and neither is there any stability in his characters. With Marechera things always had a way of falling apart just at the moment when they seemed promising and 'the sun was coming up.' This contradiction is a malady of the philosophy of anarchism in that it sometimes becomes a philosophy whose values feel futile and cyclical.

The writer's position can change perceptions by stripping power of its guises and disguises. Marechera becomes the 'new African voice' that is 'articulating subalternity with an insider's experience and an outsider's intellectual and imaginative authority' (Gagiano, 2000:208). The cunning ironies of Marechera's writing are the evidence of his oppositional engagement with power structures and he confesses that in his youth he 'was extremely thirsty for self-knowledge and curiously enough believed' he could find that in 'political consciousness' ...there was not an oasis of thought which [he] did not lick dry; apart from those which had been banned, whose drinking led to arrests and suchlike flea-scratchings' (*The House of Hunger*, 2). To circumvent, arrests and detention or imprisonment he chose to attack the colonial super structure in more subtle ways that destabilised its monopoly in the minds of black Zimbabweans.

After independence Marechera would distrust and criticize the new black leaders as much as he had distrusted the white minority rulers. For him Zimbabwe, once Rhodesia is still the same house of hunger he grew up in. In other words, he is writing from within the house of hunger, he says ‘How can Africa write as if that Black Frenchman, Franz Fanon, never existed — I refer to the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Mask*.’ Zimbabwe was the last colony of the British⁹² and for Marechera to invoke this ominous reference to Fanon is suggestive of his fears that things will fall apart if the new leaders do not learn from the mistakes of independent Africa. He said, ‘The very thought that someone has got enough power to organise thousands of people’s lives, whether he makes a mistake or not, really horrifies me.’⁹³ His distrust of power would lead him to embrace the ideas of the American beat generation and to begin to study anarchist literature seriously; this subject would become the main preoccupation of his second book, *Black Sunlight*.

The House of Hunger of the title refers to Marechera’s own Vengere township in eastern Rhodesia and at the same time to the country. Marechera’s psychogram shocks and affects all. He hammers his message home with sharp blows. In an interview with Kirsten Holst-Peterson, Marechera explains that:

My book is about the brutalisation of the individual’s feelings, instincts, mental processes – the brutalisation of all this in such a way that you come to a point where, among ourselves in the black urban areas, that is ordinary reality. We then inflict it on ourselves, husbands on wives, wives beating their children, children beating up cats...the cat gets the mouse and... (Holst-Peterson, 1988:27)

⁹² See Alois Mlambo’s *A History of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) for a comprehensive narrative on the history of Zimbabwe.

⁹³ Helon Habila, ‘On Dambudzo Marechera: The Life and Times of an African Writer’ in *VQR*, Issue: Winter 2006 <http://www.vqronline.org/essay/dambudzo-marechera-life-and-times-african-writer>

The corollary effect is damaging. Everyone is engaged in destroying everyone else. Every soul is distorted; every child becomes a savage. Even sexuality becomes a cruel game. This house is starved of all feelings, all kindness, all humanity. There are many corresponding scenes in *The House of Hunger* in which the narrator describes the black on black violence as an everyday occurrence. The narrator's brother Peter 'walked about raging and spoiling for a fight which just was not there. And because he hungered for the fight everyone saw it in his eyes and liked him for it' (*House of Hunger*, 1). Violence is the means through which the colonial system entrenches itself:

There were arrests *en masse* at the university and when workers came out on strike there were more arrests. Arrests became so much a part of one's food that no one even turned a hair when two guerrillas were executed one morning and their bodies later displayed to a group of schoolchildren.

(*House of Hunger*, 2)

Throughout colonial history the coloniser had to pacify the colonised by forcing them to accept his laws and order, sometimes enforced by physical violence. Colonialism by its very nature involved the exploitation and subjection of people to serve the interests of the coloniser. Colonialism is not only political and economic exploitation of the colonised – it is also the psychological and cultural exploitation of the colonised. Fanon, in justifying his thesis that colonialism is 'violence in its natural state' points to the psychological violence exercised on the colonized peoples. Psychological violence is the injury or harm done to the human psyche of the colonised to decrease their sense of self-worth and integrity (Fanon 1967, p.44). Psychological violence takes on many forms such as brainwashing, indoctrination and threats.

Marechera was burning, burning to live and to express that will to live but throughout his short life there were psychological and political roadblocks:

There was however an excitement of the spirit which made us all wander about in search of that unattainable elixir which our restlessness presaged. But the search was doomed from the start because the elixir seemed to be right under our noses and yet not really there. The freedom we craved for—as one craves for dagga or beer or cigarettes or the after-life—this was so alive in our breath and in our fingers that one became intoxicated by it even before one had actually found it. It was like the way a man licks his lips in his dream of a feast; the way a woman dances in her dream of a carnival; the way the old man ran like a gazelle in his yearning for the funeral games of his youth. Yet the feast, the carnival and the games were not there at all. This was the paradox whose discovery left us uneasy, sly and at best with the ache of knowing that one would never feel that way again. There were no conscious farewells to adolescence for the emptiness was deep-seated in the gut.

(House of Hunger, 4)

Conclusion: A psychology of anarchism

Despite its self-appointed role as the ‘conscience of politics,’ anarchism is often in need of constant revisions, and of a move away from simplistic dualisms and monolithic perspectives of power. In a way, *Prometheus Unbound*, has that predictable feel, good always triumphs over evil, and *The House of Hunger* has that tragic note but ends hopeful. But this is too reductive, because Shelley and Marechera present more than that. They offer a refreshing flexibility of critique and narrative strategy through their questioning the adequacy of form, language and representation in their works.

Every attempt to ask questions is problematic with critics who often are the guardians of orthodoxy. Perhaps, it was necessary for Shelley and Marechera to die young, to separate themselves from their ideas so that they exist and have a force of their own. There was a persistent confusion and refusal to distance their personalities from their writings.

Literary anarchism is psychically motivated by rebellion and, driven by creativity and the imagination to find alternatives, and as such it provides utopian versions of the world. Shelley uses an allegory and Marechera an internal monologue. Both describe anarchist situations as utopian spaces, as systems we should struggle to achieve (Shelley) and as systems we should destroy and avoid (Marechera). These are thought experiments, designed to explore and dramatise ideas by way of imaginary scenarios. Problems can be discussed by way of dramatizations, and the appeal of an alternative society can be evoked for people to contemplate, to wish for, to work for.

The reason for the persistence of anarchism as an anti-political force is that anarchism's power is fundamentally psychological. It surfaces from a ferment of anger and resentment. And perhaps this leads to something, else. If people persist in challenging conventions and questioning the society in which they live, humanity will continue to renew itself. It is important to get rid of the arrogant assumptions that govern our daily existence in order to see and think about change.

Shelley's and Marechera's literary anarchism interrogate the psychological assumptions about power, hierarchy, and similar dynamics that frame our personal and interpersonal turmoil.

CHAPTER TWO: SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

Oxford is the most dangerous place to which a young man can be sent

- Anthony Trollope⁹⁴

The politics of education

The School of Hard Knocks is an idiomatic phrase meaning the education one gets from life's usually harsh experiences. The phrase has in recent times been famously re-popularized by the song *It's the Hard Knock Life* by the American rap icon, Jay Z.⁹⁵ I think the phrase is particularly important in Shelley and Marechera whose expulsions from the University of Oxford significantly shape their philosophic and world outlooks as they are forcibly enrolled into the School of Hard Knocks after being summarily dismissed from Oxford University. This chapter will investigate the importance of Oxford in the development of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Dambudzo Marechera as politically active writers. It will also examine how both writers fight the system of institutions. Shelley's and Marechera's disdain for subscribed systems and authority figures is legendary. Both were "sent down" under extraordinary circumstances and their creative legacies begin with these expulsions. If Oxford denied them degrees, it conferred on them the status of permanent outsiders. In their work, they often allude to themselves as outsiders. Subsequently too, the tensions between conformity and non-conformist traditions create further implications regarding their political and personal struggles. I hope to demonstrate the ways in which they have both undertaken a process of

⁹⁴ Anthony Trollope, *Castle Richmond* (Chapman & Hill, 1860)

⁹⁵ See Thomas Golianopoulos 'The Oral History of Jay Z's Annie Anthem, Hard Knock Life' <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/the-oral-history-of-jay-zs-annie-anthem-hard-knock-life/> <Accessed 28 December 2014>

‘self othering’ and ‘self-validation’, which is intrinsic to their sense of alienation from their societies.

In identifying the anarchist traits in Shelley and Marechera, Oxford plays a momentous role in affirming their resolve to fight tyranny of any kind, especially intellectual and political tyranny. If anything, expulsions from Oxford bestowed upon them the ability to recognize and embrace their literary voices. As a matter of fact, all their major works were written and published after leaving Oxford; therefore, it is imperative that in trying to trace their ‘anarchisms’, their Oxford experiences and their experiences soon after should be considered. I would like to propose that their writings and life philosophies are significantly informed by the education they receive from ‘the University of Life,’ outside and in direct contrast to the confines and rigid pedagogy of Oxford. This approach may facetiously seem to suggest that formal education is not of practical value compared to ‘street’ experience. The issue is not as simple as that.

It is important to point out that many significant figures in philosophical anarchism’s development have questioned the strong ties formal education held with the church and the state. For anarchists, the school is an instrument of domination in the hands of the ruling class (Avrich 2005: 8). Schools are merely institutions to socialize young people into becoming obedient and submissive members of society.⁹⁶ They are not places that encouraged free thinking and that allowed the space for students to develop their own interests and passions. However, the anarchist thinker goes through life developing his idea of himself and this

⁹⁶ This view persists to this day. Noam Chomsky ‘How the Young are Indoctrinated to Obey’ http://www.alternet.org/story/154849/chomsky%3A_how_the_young_are_indoctrinated_to_obey

search for identity manifests itself in many different forms. And the only way to discover his identity is to experience and distinguish his own individuality within the rest of society. It is the quest for ultimate liberation and knowledge of self that makes anarchism so diverse and individual.

In fact, one of the areas of anarchist philosophy, which is often overlooked, is education. This is obviously a key area of social change in that an institution such as a school or college can serve to demonstrate ways, in which we may be able to live, interact and relate to each other outside of the current 'normal' run of things as well as opening doors to new ideas and ways of empowering ourselves. My interest is not necessarily in the pedagogy of anarchism but rather the anarchic poetics that Shelley and Marechera adopt in their interactions with the world after Oxford. This chapter will show how Shelley's intellectual struggles have many parallels with those of Marechera, even though Marechera was to become a student at Oxford 165 years later.

Shelley and Marechera were certainly kindred spirits – their actual journeys may never have crossed but their paths were remarkably similar. What is particularly notable is that Shelley does have some aesthetic extension through Marechera who seems to have made careful rehearsal of the poet's methods – subtle use of imagery, symbolism, and motif. Marechera's concern was, however, less with Shelley's poetry but rather he was attracted to the ideas and personality of the poet, especially how Shelley navigated the social and moral conflicts that afflicted his post-Oxford life and literary production. Nonetheless, I further speculate that

Shelley also influenced Marechera's politics⁹⁷ in that Marechera took Shelley as the model of the isolated writer who is self-exiled from a disagreeable society. 'I have been an outsider in my own biography, in my country's history, in the world's terrifying possibilities,' says Marechera (Veit-Wild 1992:364) and he takes his place in the long tradition of Romantic outsiders such as Novalis, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley himself.⁹⁸ Marechera's identification with Shelley and the parallels he draws in *The Black Insider* (1999) between Shelley's life and his own are only too obvious because:

...one morning I woke up to find myself being sent down in disgrace. I remember consoling myself by reflecting on how Shelley's free and happy life in University College was permanently interrupted by his expulsion in the Spring of 1811 for alleged contumacy in connection with a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism* on which he collaborated with his good friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. For mine enemies speak against me (*Black Insider*, 30).

The implied emphasis here is how Shelley like Marechera is clearly misunderstood. In co-authoring *The Necessity of Atheism*, a provocative pamphlet, Shelley was rebelling against the arbitrary curriculum of studies, and seeking sources of knowledge, which were beyond the undergraduate level at Oxford, only to be condemned and kicked out. I postulate that Shelley was sent down for being a disruptive and independent thinker. He strategically distributed *The Necessity of Atheism* to all figureheads within the university to instigate a critical conversation. He was summoned before university authorities and refused to answer. He was thereafter served with a notice of expulsion. Had he accepted authorship of the essay,

⁹⁷ It is not clear when exactly Marechera encountered Shelley but he was certainly aware of Shelley's expulsion narrative. See, *The Black Insider* (1999: 29-30)

⁹⁸ See D. Marechera, 'The African Writer's Experience of European Literature,' speech presented in Harare on 15 October 1986, first published in *Zambezia* V.14, No.2 1987, pp. 99-105

there is a possibility he could have stayed after receiving a stiff penalty or punishment from University College. He chose to walk away. In solidarity with his friend's principles and convictions, Thomas Jefferson Hogg walked away too (Morton, 2006 21-22).

It is very clear that Marechera knew about Shelley's expulsion before his own expulsion. He could also have seen, or been to the Shelley Memorial at University College.



Shelley Memorial at Oxford © Oxford University⁹⁹

At Oxford Marechera saw himself as the black underdog fed from the hand of white academia.¹⁰⁰ He revolted against the college rules and detested what he saw as the arrogance and hypocrisy of Oxford academic life, the subject of his short story 'Oxford, Black Oxford' in *The Black Insider*. A disillusioned narrator exposes the secret of homosexuality in a cloistered tutorial room. For Marechera, this detail at Oxford University in the 1970s when

⁹⁹ According to the University of Oxford website, The Shelley Memorial is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable sculptures in Oxford. <http://www.univ.ox.ac.uk/content/shelley-memorial> <Accessed 10 June 2016>

¹⁰⁰ Marechera was a Junior Common Room scholarship recipient, a scheme that was sponsored by Oxford undergraduates who raised money to support Third World students. His resentment of Oxford was exacerbated by the knowledge that he was being funded by white students. He withheld obedience and it is said that his general disorderliness and lack of academic discipline led to the Junior Common Room scholarship scheme being cancelled altogether (*Source Book*, 154-155).

the institution was still ultra conservative was very scandalous. For Marechera to peel a layer off the veil of Oxford modicum completely changed his relationship with the institution.

Guardian journalist, Alexandra Topping, confirms this contradiction when she writes:

‘Oxford is a strange place with strange people pretending it’s all perfectly normal.’¹⁰¹

Like Shelley, he read voraciously beyond the scope of his degree requirements (Veit-Wild 1992:155). Through his disruptive behaviour and disagreeable nature, he forced the university to kick him out. Two myths surround his eventual expulsion. One is that he set fire to the college; the other myth which he personally maintains, was that given a choice between accepting psychiatric treatment or leaving the college, he chose to leave. In an interview, Marechera said:

I very much resented the implied accusation from Oxford of insanity. They demanded that I either sign myself voluntarily into their psychiatric hospital or I would be sent down. That choice really freaked me out. (Holst-Peterson, 1988:12-13)

Marechera chose to walk away and join his romantic predecessor, Shelley. Here the figure of the romantic rebel, the outsider, rejected by society and rebelling against its norms, isn’t just another fashionable ploy, it is linked intrinsically to Marechera’s idea of the liberating force of the imagination and of a literature that unhinges the world.

Oxford is certainly an important location to unearth the depth and scope of Shelley’s and Marechera’s anarchic thinking as it is a place that turned them inside out and forced them to

¹⁰¹ Alexandra Topping ‘I know all about Oxford’s class problem. It starts in schools’ *The Guardian*, 22 November 2016 <http://bit.ly/2g2L0yH> <Accessed 22 November 2016>

mature and discover themselves rather too quickly. What links them is their rejection of external authority, whether of the state, religion, or the hierarchies of administration – basically, everything that makes up Oxford, especially the suffocating entrenched comfort. While this thesis is not primarily biographical in its methodology, I find it essential to probe the minds and lives of these writers and investigate the influence of place, essentially to combine an attitude survey with a kind of sociological scrutiny aimed not only at the opinions and views of the two writers but also at querying their personal and social relations with their communities. Shelley and Marechera were interlopers at Oxford, individuals who became unwelcome when they refused to compromise. When the moment came, they left, but they had roused Oxford from its antiquated slumbers. The only language the institution would understand was to be outraged by their sheer excess of behaviour. And Oxford chose to expel for not to was risking them influencing others to become ungovernable.

Without doubt, Oxford education is excellent, considering that it is almost always in the top five of the best universities in the world.¹⁰² Ideally, Oxford education should form and stretch whatever minds are open to it. But perhaps the education it offers is also unreal. Shelley's Oxford offered a narrow curriculum based on philosophy and classics. The students were mostly sons of the aristocracy and gentry, for whom the university was a social finishing school more than an intellectual experience. These features, and the heavy expense required by an aristocratic lifestyle based on residential colleges, made the university largely irrelevant to the needs of a nonconformist like Shelley who ironically came from a conventional family background.

¹⁰² See rankings of top universities in the world <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2014-15/world-ranking> <Accessed 7 November 2016>

It is not surprising that the combustion of the philosophical anarchism in Shelley and Marechera was ignited at Oxford, primarily by the institution's rigidity and dull uniformity of its traditions and power structures. Both experienced Oxford environments that somehow discouraged people to think for themselves and experiment with ideas but many of their peers and contemporaries were often reacting to the expectations that weigh on them – expectations of power, class and influence. Oxford is itself the heart of the establishment¹⁰³, and has remained so, a manufacturing plant of convention, traditions and accepted behaviour. From its inception, it has always enjoyed the patronage of church, royalty and government.

Whereas Shelley's family could afford his education at Oxford, Marechera could only make it through the benevolent gesture of a Junior Common Room scholarship. What this means is that Oxford is a place for the privileged and chosen, a group of people who derive some social advantages from their association with the institution, and this attitude of patronage is what Shelley and Marechera also rebel against. They refuse to partake in it so much that when they cross the line of acceptability, they refuse to return.

Not everyone 'graduates' to be a witness in life – the true social cosmos consists of those whose eyes have been opened. Shelley and Marechera were real witnesses. What is consistent about their actions and re-actions is that they challenge convention, which for them is linked with the past, very artificial, and tainted with a lot of political and social hypocrisy. After all, anarchism is a mode of human existence, rooted in the experience of everyday life. Shelley and Marechera's philosophical anarchism shares a kinship with this idea of everyday living –

¹⁰³ Most of the political class in Britain studies at Oxford and Cambridge. The Oxford University official website cites 27 Prime Ministers who have been educated at the institution since the eighteenth century, including the current Prime Minister, Theresa May. <http://www.ox.ac.uk/about/oxford-people/british-prime-ministers> <Accessed 7 November 2016>

and is an expansion of techniques by which they can affect self-liberation. Shelley and Marechera stand out from most of their contemporaries by stressing the dynamic character of self and structures, the malleability of tradition and the transformative potential of the imagination. And what separates them from each other is that Shelley's stress on dynamism leads toward a projection of fundamental social transformation, whereas Marechera's dynamic perspective results in severe individualism. For Shelley the major foes are class exploitation and people's lack of control of their lives; for Marechera the principal enemies are personal stagnation and the absence of creative innovation in people's lives. Both herald self-realization. They go on to respond actively to the major issues and events of their day. Oxford certainly provides the social location of Shelley and Marechera's radicalization. For them, politics is not simply the clash of powers and pleasures but also another terrain on which the moral and psychological development of individuals should take place.

With *The Necessity of Atheism*, Shelley attacked the lethargy of the university and religion; a century later, enter Marechera, who arrives in England to find that what Shelley was fighting against is still an ongoing calamity at Oxford. In a sense, Shelley vents his spleen against the ways in which the academy works, he organises a publishing event so that important issues buried or distorted are surfaced and debated. The pamphlet was 'scattered prominently' and 'such acts of bravado in disseminating his work were not uncommon' (Morton 2006:2). He floated radical works down the Bristol Channel in bottles, an activity for which he attracted the interest of the secret service (Holmes 1987: 63 67). Shelley penned a sonnet 'To a Balloon, Laden with Knowledge' and floated with actual balloons, filled with actual knowledge in the form of radical pamphlets, across the Irish Sea. (Holmes *ibid*, 119 -20).

Shelley got more from his 'out of class' readings than from the classroom. Marechera does not become more tolerant of the institution but his self-loathing turns to anger against authority, whether personal or in general. Those things he loathed were not merely loathsome in themselves but loathsome because they were taken as marks of cultural superiority and a consequent right to assume authority over others. In fact, Marechera makes no secret of the fact that Oxford was not his world:

My experience of Oxford University was loneliness and a certain questioning of why I found myself in a strange environment, whose traditions – frankly – I found disturbing. I discovered they were trying to make me into an intellectual Uncle Tom. I was being mentally raped. (*Source Book*, 152)

While Marechera turned self-pitying into an art of survival, Shelley didn't. He valued the solitude and preoccupied himself – if he was not writing, he was eagerly performing chemistry experiments like Victor Frankenstein (White 1940:80). For Marechera the figures against whom he directs his loathing and dislike are many – professors, college servants, fellow students. What incites Marechera's rage and fury is for the university pretending 'pretending prejudice doesn't exist.'¹⁰⁴ Alexandra Topping writes about her own experience as if she is writing about Marechera's ghost: 'But it was the first time I'd really been aware of class distinctions, the first time I'd witnessed the unassailable confidence that a private education bestows. When a classmate tried to get me to say certain things because she just loved my accent, she wasn't being purposefully mean.' It is my considered view that Shelley and Marechera provide a rich source for the analysis of the relationship between the academy and society.'

¹⁰⁴ See Alexandra Topping, *ibid.*

Shelley's Oxford

Thomas Jefferson Hogg¹⁰⁵ provides the most comprehensive account of Shelley's time at University College, Oxford, albeit with a lot of exaggerations that have been contested by subsequent biographers of the poet. Apart from a few references Shelley mentions of his time at Oxford, specifically the expulsion incident, left nothing comprehensive about the place, and he never mentioned it in his later writings. However, what is pertinent from Hogg's accounts is Shelley's dislike of lectures because he found them 'dull and boring' and 'resolved never to go to another' (Hogg 1904:14). The reason was that Shelley was well read beyond his peers and was not learning anything new. It is the description of his room that perhaps gives a glimpse of the state of the mind of the poet:

Books, boots, papers, shoes, philosophical instruments, clothes, pistols, linen, crockery, ammunition and phials innumerable, with money, stockings, prints, crucibles, bags and boxes were scattered on the floor and in every place, as if the young chemist, in order to analyse the mystery of creation, had endeavored first to reconstruct the primeval chaos. (Hogg, 1904: 30-31)

From the outset, Shelley isolated himself in his little world of practical inquiry and a pursuit of the different components that made-up knowledge. With Hogg, Shelley found himself teamed up with another outsider; as birds of the same feather it was easy for them to flock together. Hogg's father blamed the failure of both Shelley and his son on their refusal to fit in with Oxford's social life. Newman Ivey White records a comment from a friend of Hogg senior:

¹⁰⁵ Shelley did not leave many reflective recordings of his time at Oxford. Hogg's book, *Shelley at Oxford* (1904) is the most authoritative guide to Shelley's six months at Oxford.

These two young men gave up associating with anybody else some months since, never dined at college, dressed differently from all others, and did everything in their power to show singularity... (White, 1947: 116)

In Shelley's day *singularity* (or individuality) was something for which Oxford had no tolerance. This singularity was intensified by Shelley's ambition. 'One account of the responsibility to which my residence at the university subjects me,' he writes shortly before his expulsion, 'I hope that my every endeavor, insufficient as this may be, will be directed to the advancement of liberty.' (Jones I, 1964:54). Shelley wanted answers, not necessarily expulsion; he dreamed of intellectual discussion not punishment. Naively, he sincerely believed that the university not only should have been, but already was, a place of liberty that promoted free debate on any topic.

In other words, Shelley dreamed of a university that made room for 'singular' characters such as himself. To him the university should have been a place where one could read what one wanted, live as one pleased and have the freedom to argue any topic whatsoever. It should have been a place where one could argue atheism in the presence of a bishop. Shelley recognised the sensitive spots of Oxford and set out to tread on them. But his idea of a university as a place to follow the argument wherever it led was not yet prevalent in England at the time. It was still largely a parochial society. Richard Holmes says that for Shelley:

Oxford required rousing from its antiquated slumbers; it had to be outraged by sheer excessive behaviour, and taken by a dazzling intellectual storm – it was a Bastille of the spirit, and he had arrived in person to open its gates. (Holmes, 2002:39)

Shelley was not much affected by the official life of the college, for he swiftly organised his own, making a point of keeping an outlandish timetable, frequently reading '16 hours a day, and often sleeping between 6 and 10 in the evening curled up like an animal on his hearthrug in front of the fire, then getting up to talk and conduct chemical experiments throughout the night' (Hogg 1904: 16). The young, curious and experimental Shelley was also a practical Shelley. Hogg describes him, thus 'I perceived at once that the young chemist took no note of time. He measured duration, not by minutes and hours, like watchmakers and their customers, but by the successive trains of ideas and sensations ...' (Hogg *ibid*, 1904:28). And it is these same qualities – scientific, attention to detail – that resonated in his writing and philosophical thinking.

Shelley's upbringing and social class, I want to argue, foment the rebellion that is exhibited in his life and work. The first micro-nation an individual is socialised into is the family, with a powerful government personified by parents. Rather than cling on to his privileged background with its comforts and securities, Shelley was led by his experience at Eton and Oxford to stand up against his own social class. He fought the despotic practice of 'fagging' at Syon House and Eton College. When he allows this wall of privilege to crumble, he exposes himself to a crude reality that he fights to reform for the rest of his life.

He recognized religion as a smokescreen that helped sustain the status quo. In *The Necessity of Atheism* he advances the argument that there is no proof of the existence of God, a view he persistently holds. In a later poem, *England in 1819*, he refers to 'Religion Christless, Godless.' It was not surprising when he clashed with those moral guardians, the Oxford dons, whose duty it was to preserve and cultivate 'English' values. During this time, the university was a place where young men learned to 'obey the Christian God and the God of Nature'

(Hofsetter 2001: xiii). That is why it is no surprise that when Shelley and his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg co-wrote a scandalous document advocating ‘atheism’, they were immediately summoned, given a chance to explain, refused and were eventually sent down.

It was their own sensitivity and attentiveness to the crucial connections between ideas and institutions, discourses, infrastructures, intellectual practices and modes of social structuration, which in part, led to their dismissals. To Shelley especially, knowledge was not a set of representations to be justified or privileged but rather to be contested. And the pamphlet, like most of Shelley’s publications at the time, was a project conceived mainly as a practical joke to gauge the responses it would elicit. Unfortunately, Shelley and his friend got more than they had bargained for. Considering Shelley’s young age when he wrote *The Necessity of Atheism*,¹⁰⁶ it was a very radical text in which Shelley was ‘less concerned with Christian theology as such but with the right to argue, even about God’ (White 1947: 112). What it simply does is to question the existence of God without denying his existence.

In the controversial essay, Shelley was questioning the ‘necessity’ of having established fixed rules, advocating for the need to define and redefine our conceptions, and of subjecting our ‘beliefs’ to the most severe scrutiny, instead of passively adopting beliefs and attitudes as normal and absolute. Shelley’s pamphlet isn’t as sensational or bombastic as the declaratory title suggests because as a visionary anarchist this pamphlet became an early manifesto of his career and life philosophy. He decried the enslavement of the mind by the church. The

¹⁰⁶ It is quite ironic that today we have Richard Dawkins famously preaching the necessity of atheism at Oxford; this would certainly make Shelley’s ghost smile! Dawkins, is an emeritus fellow at Marechera’s old fraternity New College, and was the University of Oxford Professor of Public Understanding of Science from 1995 to 2008. As an atheist, he is known for his book, *The God Delusion*, published in 2006, in which he argues that religious faith is a delusion.

opening exposition of the essay is presented in a defensive mode as Shelley already anticipates backlash and tries to preempt it:

A close examination of the validity of the proofs adduced to support any proposition, has ever been allowed to be the only sure way of attaining truth, upon the advantages of which it is necessary to descant; our knowledge of the existence of a Deity is a subject of such importance, that it cannot be too minutely investigated; in consequence of this conviction, we proceed briefly and impartially examine the proofs which have been adduced. It is necessary first to consider the nature of Belief. (*Shelley's Prose*, 205)

This opening has two functions as an exposition of the argument but also as a disclaimer that this piece is born out of deep reflection and curiosity. Shelley does not set off with an argument but rather sheds light on central points which seeks to 'impartially examine the proofs' regarding the existence of God. Except for the title and the signature advertisement, many Shelley scholars, argue there is no atheism in it. Rather Shelley follows the skeptical reasoning of David Hume and is merely presenting an agnostic argument (Reiman, 1990: 5-7).

He inveighed against priests, kings, soldiers, judges and other wielders of institutional authority. However, what is obviously clear is that freedom of expression was non-existent. Radical thinkers of the period faced the possibility of imprisonment as a matter of course. And their works were heavily gagged. And Shelley's expulsion was a mild show of this repression. Scrivener (1982:56) speculates that had Shelley been a working class-boy, he could have been prosecuted for blasphemous libel but his class and family status only warranted an amicable sent down.

In *The Necessity of Atheism*, Shelley used the word 'God' in a metaphorical sense. The word appears only once, at the very end, throughout the essay, Shelley instead, uses 'Deity.' God was the personification of ideas – the enduring human quest for truth and freedom. From his adolescent inquisitiveness, Shelley wasn't necessarily an atheist. He just called for the necessity of atheism as a call to skepticism, to critique, to truth. In fact, Shelley was anti-religion because what he was against was religion's claims to an absolute ideology that monopolizes our thought processes, our belief systems, and our social relations. But why was the essay so dangerous? What, in fact, was it arguing for? What was its importance in the career and reputation of Shelley, and why is it still relevant today? While this pamphlet was written nearly two hundred years ago before the development and advancement of scientific method and philosophical literature, Shelley was far ahead of his time. Despite, the advances that have been made since Shelley's time, the kind of nonsense he attacked in, *The Necessity of Atheism*, still persists in the minds of the educated class. Religion is still championed by many managers of political power across the world to facilitate the propagation of their self-interests.

Religion as a belief system conditions people to accept a certain way of life that is often coded and that is the target of Shelley's pamphlet. To pre-empt his readers from over-reacting after encountering some unsettling truths, he reasons that

...it is evident that having no proofs of sources of conviction: the mind cannot believe the existence of a God, it is also evident that as belief is a passion of the mind, no degree of criminality can be attached to disbelief, they only are reprehensible who willingly neglect to remove the false medium thro' which their mind views the subject. It is almost unnecessary to observe, that the general knowledge of the deficiency of such proof, cannot be prejudicial to society: Truth has always been found to promote the

best interests of mankind. Every reflecting mind must allow that there is no proof of the existence of a Deity. (*Shelley's Prose*, 206)

Shelley rebuked the established church because it was deeply implicated in the social and political oppression by which England was run and dominated. Shelley detested acceptance, obedience and passivity. He wanted challenges: challenges in argument and if necessary in the streets.

After the expulsion, he becomes a writer-activist who relies on the historical agency of the imagination as evidenced through some of his epic poetry, especially, *Prometheus Unbound* and *Queen Mab*, that present alternative utopias and ways of being. For Shelley, these poetic projects are in response to topical issues of the day. He engages in contemporary debates with writers, philosophers and politicians through his writings, both poetry and prose, and this participation was inextricably bound up with his genius in transforming abstract philosophy and everyday politics into art, feeding his growing understanding of the historical and political potency of the imagination.

Shelley realized that the social inequity prevalent in the English society was so much structured and institutionalized and firmly concretized by the dominant belief systems – hence he denounces religion and advocates the necessity of atheism. *The Necessity of Atheism* was a broad cry for the necessity of free-thinking which is not regulated by any expectations or moral guardians. Shelley emphasizes in the pamphlet that ‘it is necessary first to consider the nature of Belief’ (*Shelley's Prose*, 207).

The evasion of accepted morality is one of the ways in which Shelley set aside traditions. It is also how he exercises his own intellectual self-reliance. He refuses to be captive to the vocabulary of those who came before or those in power. He concludes the pamphlet, *The*

Necessity of Atheism, by pointing out that ‘as belief is a passion of the mind, no degree of criminality can (or should) be attached to disbelief...’ (*Shelley’s Prose*: 209). This refusal or defiance to be different (or think and perceive the world differently) defines his rhetorical strategies and the tools he deploys to create himself as a public intellectual and by extension create an imaginative constituency over which he exercises ideological and moral leadership.

There is an interplay of inner and outer forces and there is also an expanded comprehension – an ability to take on more of the world. Of course, his opinions are somewhat limited by youthful naïveté, shaped by circumstance, and charged with adolescent passion. They make up a set of ways of looking at the world and ways of seeing the impersonal forces of history. With this somewhat vague but steady imaginative comprehension, Shelley fashioned the personal dramas of his political poems as allegories of man’s life in history. And this drama is scripted in the realm of ideas, it starts as a dress rehearsal at Oxford, but finds full expression in Shelley’s post Oxford life.

Queen Mab: A Revolutionary Dream

Queen Mab, a dramatic poem published two years after Shelley’s expulsion from Oxford, in 1813, is his first major literary-philosophical statement. I will argue the poem is more than just about atheism. It is Shelley’s first substantive engagement with the politics of the times and mainly inspired by William Godwin’s philosophical anarchism. Shelley originally printed the poem for private circulation among ‘young aristocrats’ (Scrivener 1982: 67). The poem was to have a different fate in the public domain.

The scope of the poem was certainly ambitious. Shelley was convinced of the poem's revolutionary potential and initially only distributed 70 copies to individuals he believed would be sympathetic as he was worried the poem was too radical to be published.¹⁰⁷ And he was right. The poem was pirated and distributed in underground networks. Scrivener (1982:67) points out that in '1821, a London bookseller brought out a pirated edition of *Queen Mab*, which marked its official existence in the political world because the publisher ...was prosecuted.' Thereafter, the poem became a weapon in the battle ideas for Owenites, secularists, Chartists, and radicals of different persuasions.¹⁰⁸

What did revolutionaries see in *Queen Mab*? The poem is essentially subversive in intent, vigorously polemic in attack, and revolutionary in content and implication. In Shelley, philosophical anarchism as a theory of political speculation is gone, and has been reborn as theory of political action. Shelley is not satisfied to outline the evils of the existing system, and to describe the general framework of a libertarian society, he preaches revolution, he participates in revolutionary activity, and supports a social upheaval that can overhaul the prevailing setup because as he concludes in *The Mask of Anarchy* 'ye are many – they are few.' The revolt Shelley advocates is targeted at: established religion, political tyranny, war and commerce, and the perversion of human love. This is the real substance of *Queen Mab*, which is partly obscured and softened by its style and the cosmological settings.

The poem consists of nine cantos. After the two introductory cantos, canto III attacks the monarchy; canto IV attacks warfare and political tyranny; canto V attacks economic and

¹⁰⁷ James E. Barcus [ed.] *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2010)

¹⁰⁸ See Bouthaina Shaaban's PhD thesis on 'Shelley's influence on the Chartist poets, with particular emphasis on Ernest Charles Jones and Thomas Cooper' defended in 1981 at University of Warwick broke new ground on Shelley and the Chartists.

commercial exploitation; cantos VI and VII attack priestcraft and religion in general as well as Christianity. The remaining cantos enclose the whole poem in a vision of past and future. *Queen Mab* was purely philosophy simplified. The poem is argumentative and philosophical rather than just poetical, a dualism which Scrivener (1982:70) puts succinctly ‘Shelley’s poetry ... has a philosophical dualism that is a familiar Shelleyan constant.’ I would argue that the struggle for Shelley in *Queen Mab* and as with his other works, was that he was striving to reach out to all humanity because its grand ambition is to engage with the basis of the entire philosophy of life.

Shelley was only nineteen when he begun composition of *Queen Mab*, and the poem certainly exhibits a remarkably ambitious design and scope – the vision of ‘a preordained perfection that was alternately to inspire and to haunt the poet to the end of his career’ (Sperry 1988:1). *Queen Mab* is a poem primarily about ideas. Kenneth Neill Cameron goes on to even say that Shelley ‘like Lucretius or Goethe – was primarily a poet of ideas, ranging widely into social thought, philosophy, science and ethics. His greatest poetry combines all these ideas’ (in Reiman & Fraistat 2002:580). The poem, indeed, shows a lot of intellectual assimilation but what it really is doing is dialoguing with the current issues of the day. For me, it is important to not forget that *Queen Mab* launched Shelley’s reputation as a radical poet. Why is this significant? After his expulsion from Oxford, Shelley had a lot of soul searching to do and could have written this poem primarily to clarify his own mind, to resolve, if possible, the conflicting reality of the English society. In other words, Shelley was dialoguing with philosophy and expulsion from Oxford gave him street-level perspective of life and politics.

The poem is a journey. In fact, Shelley's imaginative tour covers the whole universe. It is an odd mixture of fantasy, fairytale, and political theory. *Queen Mab*, like *The Mask of Anarchy*, opens with sleep, a clear indication that Shelley is ready to transport his readers to another world, or rather, another phase of experience. Sleep becomes a dreamy state of reflective introspection, enacted by the metaphorical movement of the characters in the poem. *Queen Mab* opens with a play upon the first line of Southey's oriental epic *Thalaba*,¹⁰⁹ which is 'How Beautiful is night' but Shelley changes it to:

How wonderful is Death,
Death, and his brother Sleep!
One, pale as yonder waning moon
With lips of lurid blue;
The other, rosy as the morn
When throned on ocean's wave
It blushes o'er the world;
Yet both so passing wonderful!

(*Queen Mab*, Canto I, Lines 1-8)

The use of sleep is symbolical. The poem's utopian speaker is herself outside history, above and beyond it, immune to the exigencies of social life. Scrivener (1982: 73) identifies this as a Godwinian feature: 'The philosophical anarchist has to transcend mere self interest and determine the genuine interests of humanity.' Ianthe's abduction from earth is significant in that Shelley passively allows her to watch his chosen world-picture. She has visions of 'the Past, the Present and the Future.' The review of the past is cursory, showing man as

¹⁰⁹ *Thalaba the Destroyer* is an 1801 epic poem composed by Robert Southey.

transitory, but the review of the present is a critical attack on tyrannical kings. He shows us a king with fawning courtiers, sitting secure behind the palace sentinels and enjoying every luxury while the starving masses outside endure the king's misrule only because of the unconquered powers of precedent and custom:

Behold a gorgeous palace that amid
Yon populous city rears its thousand towers
And seems itself a city. Gloomy troops
Of sentinels in stern and silent ranks
Encompass it around; the dweller there
Cannot be free and happy; hearest thou not
The curses of the fatherless, the groans
Of those who have no friend? He passes on -
The King, the wearer of a gilded chain
That binds his soul to abjectness, the fool
Whom courtiers nickname monarch, whilst a slave
Even to the basest appetites -that man
Heeds not the shriek of penury; he smiles
At the deep curses which the destitute
Mutter in secret, and a sullen joy
Pervades his bloodless heart when thousands groan
But for those morsels which his wantonness
Wastes in unjoyous revelry, to save
All that they love from famine; when he hears
The tale of horror, to some ready-made face
Of hypocritical assent he turns,
Smothering the glow of shame, that, spite of him,
Flushes his bloated cheek.

(*Queen Mab*, Canto III, Lines 22-44)

Here, the critique of monarchy is not just a protest against absolutism, but an attack on Old Corruption and its foundations. Shelley subscribed to that commonsense belief that absolute power corrupts. He argues that ‘gilded flies’ and ‘drones’ live off the toil of workers, whose excessive and dehumanizing labour keeps and sustains the powerful class. Monarchy breeds a class of courtiers – placemen, pensioners, royal bureaucrats – who consume the wealth created by agricultural and industrial labourers. Shelley is not suddenly aware of these inequalities – he grew up with them but Oxford awakens his sense of justice. When he writes *The Necessity of Atheism* he is basically critiquing the ‘moral authority’ used to maintain the status quo. With his expulsion he decides to fight for the weak and oppressed because there was a part of him that felt he understood the source of injustice and the remedy.

The poem is revolutionary in so far as it rails against tyrants and monarchs; it depicts the myriad evils of Shelley’s society. The ruling classes were inimical to human welfare because ‘kings, priests, and statesmen, blast the human flower/Even in its tender bud’ (Canto IV 104-05). In fact the organic metaphor employed by Shelley is central here:

How withered all the buds of natural good!
No shade, no shelter from the sweeping storms
Of pitiless power!

(*Queen Mab*, Canto IV 125-7)

All systems are inimical to human growth – state power through its military constraints, religion through shackling the mind, and commerce for exploiting human beings who are

used as ‘living pulleys’ and ‘mere wheels of work and articles of trade’ (*Queen Mab*, Canto V 76-7). Shelley’s identification of an interlocking power structure remains even today, I would argue, a compelling feature of the social analysis of *Queen Mab*. The poem was popular for a reason; it was a mirror of the conditions of the times.

Shelley was a philosopher-poet and in *Queen Mab* he dramatizes his ideas, giving them a face and a voice that his readers could relate to. The poem’s embrace by socialist movements is instructive. The ability to move deep under the surface of human lives, to be a witness to the unspoken desires, fears, and dreams in his society is what makes this work endearing to its readers. Shelley put the best he had – the power of his creative imagination – to the service of his fierce and profound convictions and his political and human insight. *Queen Mab* displays the potential of his intellectual and creative range. It is, at its heart, a young poet’s quest for critical engagement, his obsessive desire of defining what role the poet could and should play in initiating the revolution of the mind. The poem opens the door to Shelley’s poetry by revealing the moral imperatives behind his philosophy and attitude to the world.

His aim is to destroy the imposing ideas of the old order, and through the characters he creates, he tries to advance arguments for the necessity of this destruction – in destroying he is preparing for the re-building of a new world. *Queen Mab* became the one work by Shelley that had considerable practical influence on the proletariat and other radical groupings. This poem is therefore a befitting introduction to Shelley’s poetic radicalism, for it presents his basic images, motives, and ideas. It is in this first major poem that he starts revealing the ‘mask of anarchy,’¹¹⁰ – kings, priests, judges and capitalists – the enemy that he fights

¹¹⁰ A detailed analysis of Shelley’s poem *The Mask of Anarchy* appears in Chapter Four of this thesis.

throughout his short life. Hogg recounts Shelley telling him about his face-to-face encounters with the faced repugnance of politics, the monstrous faces of power:

I went with my father several times to the House of Commons, and what creatures did I see there!
What faces! What an expression of countenance! What wretched beings! Good God! What men did we meet about the House, in the lobbies and passages; and my father was so civil to all of them, to animals that I regarded with unmitigated disgust!

(Hogg, 1904:125-126)

The language of this passage gives context to Shelley's long-standing interest in matters of equality and justice. He is observing as a child, that he is different; that he is separate but only after leaving Oxford is he forced to understand these inequalities. This firsthand experience of the corrupt nature of politics influences Shelley in his poetry so much that he dramatizes this 'disgust.' Shelley embellishes his writings with some character sketches as an important aesthetic concept. In Shelley, a poet's activism added a new context in which to read and interpret his work. Shelley understood the poet in libertarian terms as someone who wanted to free the mind of conventional morality and forge the human conscience anew. With Shelley, the revolutionary moment often occurs when the individual recognizes his own inhibitions as the basis of enslavement to external authority.

Shelley's expulsion from Oxford was certainly a blessing in disguise, for him and for the academy. Shelley was not just a thinker but a practical man too. After his expulsion, he eloped with a girl and soon after sailed for Dublin and threw himself whole-heartedly into the struggle for Catholic emancipation and repeal of the Union. As such with him there appeared two tendencies in anarchist theory. The doctrine shifted from abstract speculation on the use

and abuse of political power to political action enacted in the drama of his poetry. At the same time anarchism ceased to be a political philosophy of the radical petty bourgeoisie and became a political doctrine, which looked for the mass of its adherents among workers and peasants.

Marechera's Oxford

Dambudzo Marechera arrived at Oxford as a Junior Common Room scholarship recipient in 1974. He had been expelled from the University of Rhodesia with a dozen other students for organizing political demonstrations.¹¹¹ However, Oxford is a significant site within which to locate Marechera's radicalism and philosophy. From the very beginning Marechera was too well aware that the typical 'Oxford student' was highborn, and often lived a life of luxury in an environment rife with class distinctions. Oxford student society was a product of middle class culture and, in turn, fostered middle class attitudes with an upper class slant. Marechera, the working class boy, finds himself in a small minority at Oxford and finds it difficult to settle or conform. He was completely out of place. Perhaps, Marechera was confronted with his own inadequacies and that bothered him to the core. He became critical of everything and everybody, including himself.

Eldridge Cleaver, writing in *Soul and Ice* says that that there came a point in his life when he could no longer believe in the 'knowledge' of those whom he had considered above him. 'I had thought,' he says,

¹¹¹ Among the group of student leaders expelled alongside Marechera were some individuals who later became significant political and intellectual figures in post-independence Zimbabwe – Simba Makoni, Witness Mangwende, Ibbo Mandaza, Tafataona Mahoso, Stanley Nyamfukudza, and Rino Zhuwarara. Some of their testimonies are recorded in Flora Veit-Wild's *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book* (Africa World Press, 2004).

that, out there beyond the horizon of my own ignorance, unanimity existed, that even though I myself didn't know what was happening in the universe, other people certainly did. Yet there I was discovering that the whole U.S.A. was in chaos of disagreement over segregation/integration. In these circumstances I decided that the only safe thing for me to do was go for myself. It became clear that it was possible for me to take the initiative: instead of simply reacting I could act. I could unilaterally – whether anyone agreed with me or not – repudiate all allegiances, morals, values – even while continuing to exist within this society. (Clever 1969: 5)

Oxford was to present Marechera his own Cleaver moment where he had 'to go' for himself and 'repudiate all allegiances, morals, values' while at the same time negotiating his continued existence 'within this society.' This way of living and thinking is anarchic. Anarchy cannot be taught. It is not a single theory as such. It is a way of life, a way of being in the world, an attitude. If Marechera was not aware of it before, Oxford made him aware of the anarchic potential within him.

For Marechera Oxford was dreamlike. It was the first time he had ever lived in a museum. Its spires and cupolas and quadrangles, its towers and gables and ariels and hieroglyphs, its ancient walls with the shards of glass embedded on top, its chimes and bells resounding in the swirling mists, made home seem so distant and unreal. In New College, he lived in one of the frigid rooms overlooking the spacious Victorian quadrangle with the KEEP AWAY FROM THE GRASS sign. He dined in the gloomy medieval hall. The sacrosanct privacy of the place, the perpetual fogs and rains, elicited loneliness, an angst and melancholia such as he had never experienced before. The mementos of death (physical and spiritual) were everywhere. Beneath the shimmering surface of elegance and intellect, Marechera became aware of dark things affecting people he knew. Snobbish lot. Their snobbery had nothing to

do with money or birth but everything to do with intellect and style that was often pretentiousness. He began in disillusionment, continued in despondency, and ended in expulsion. No wonder a young Dambudzo Marechera felt lost and dislocated. Marechera reflected on this later:

My main experience of Oxford University was loneliness and a certain questioning of why I found myself in a strange environment, whose traditions – well, frankly – I found disturbing. I asked myself exactly what had happened to my generation and what underlies those events which can erupt time and time again in any generation. Some of my friends had gone off to join the freedom fighters, some, like myself, found ourselves in countries where all we wanted to do was not so much gain educational certificates, but survive mentally, to hospitalise ourselves in a country where police dogs and other forms of brutalisation were not a day-to-day affair.

(Source Book, 2004:152)

Here, Marechera alludes to how education is perhaps the most insidious and in some ways, the most cryptic of colonialist survivals, a system that was passed, sometimes imperceptibly, into neo-colonialist configurations. In Gramscian terms, it is true that education effects domination by consent. This domination by consent is achieved when Marechera and his generation of other black Zimbabweans ‘hospitalise’ themselves in Britain, a kind of mental asylum. It is no wonder he goes on to question, in Oxford, what was taught, how it was taught, and even challenges the subsequent emplacement of the educated African subject as a part of an unquestioned hegemony.

Marechera not only subverted the college rules and routine but became visibly troubled by the gap between theory, pedagogy and reality in university English teaching. He became bored and out of control. Marechera was known to sleep during the day when others went to

lectures and tutorials and drank and played the radio loud at night when the other students wanted to study (Veit-Wild 2004:159). He constantly clashed violently with college domestic staff and generally felt isolated. He also resented the social disparity between himself and most of the white students: 'I was shocked at their casual attitude to education and life. One of my fellow students was a lord at only 18 years. Money to him meant nothing at all. What he took for granted to me was expensive. I was confronted by people who saw knowledge as merely an appendage for social success' (*Source Book*, 2004:154). Marechera detested what he saw as the dryness, arrogance and hypocrisy of Oxford academic life. Like Shelley, he read voraciously on his own and acquired a lot of influences.¹¹²

Marechera was eventually expelled for bad behaviour, his lack of commitment to his studies, clashes with authority, assaulting other students. So while the myth that he tried to burn down New College may correspond with the popular image of the outrageous rebel-poet, Marechera could have only threatened to do such a thing. While the university advised psychiatric treatment, Marechera was adamant that it was the environment rather than himself that was insane. Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), set in an Oregon asylum, dramatizes the conflict between the institutional processes and the human mind and could as well explain Marechera's situation at Oxford. Kesey's novel constantly refers to different authorities that control individuals through subtle and coercive methods. It is a battle that Randle Patrick McMurphy (a role brilliantly played by Jack Nicholson in a Hollywood version of the novel) loses, just as Marechera ultimately loses. McMurphy constantly antagonizes Nurse Ratched and upsets the institutions routines, leading to constant

¹¹² Marechera's reading was eclectic. The two lectures (The African Writer's Experience of European Literature and Soyinka, Dostoevsky: The Writer on Trial for His Time), which Marechera delivered in Harare on 15 and 19 October 1986 provide bibliographic references to Marechera's reading habits.

power struggles between the inmate and the head nurse. The novel was a critique of the mental ward as an instrument of oppression. It is no surprise that Oxford resembled a mental institution for Marechera because of its manipulative policing and control of the mind. But life after Oxford was not easy for Marechera either.

The lack of coherence and continuity in Marechera's life after Oxford is reflected in the fragmentation and discontinuities evident in the structure of his work. His lifestyle increasingly informed both the form and content of his fiction. On leaving New College, Marechera entered a phase of his life in which he was permanently unemployed and had no settled home as he lived out the role of the 'writer-tramp.' There is no doubt that Marechera struggled to establish himself on leaving the cloistered calm of New College. This struggle to detach himself from the university setting implies that his time at Oxford had been somewhat removed from real life, he comments in *The Black Insider*: 'I was just about to start a journey of discovery in the real United Kingdom' (*Black Insider*, 43). It was a rude awakening as he was soon to discover. He started to lead a vagrant existence, moving from one place to another, and this fragmented experience is reproduced in narratives lacking direction, cohesion, and continuity.

What little influence remained from the academic conditioning of his university experiences soon disappeared in his quest for a clear sense of identity and purpose. *The Black Insider* demonstrates that he is aware of the hybrid nature of his identity and his search was not so much a search for who he was, but who he might have been, had he not been subjected to the pernicious influences of colonialism. The important feature of the search is the process itself. Such a search may well be the inevitable result of colonization. Fanon argued:

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: In reality who am I?' (Fanon, 1990:200)

Fanon's comments have relevance for black Zimbabweans who, consequent, to the activities of the boycotted Ian Smith government, found themselves isolated not only from the white minority but also from the rest of black Africa. Marechera says, 'we had become – indeed we are – the Jews of Africa, and nobody wanted us. It's bad enough to have white shits despising us, but it's a more maddening story when one kettle turns up its nose at another kettle' (*The House of Hunger*, 136). In effect, Marechera suffered a double isolation. He was banished from his home country and faced the debilitating effects of a hazardous lifestyle in a foreign country that seemed not to care for and want him at all.

Oxford, black Oxford

There are two important pieces of work by Marechera that show his fractious relationship with Oxford: his short story 'Oxford, black Oxford', set at Oxford, and *The Black Insider*. I will examine both to understand Marechera's philosophic and world outlook in relation to Oxford. Marechera fictionalizes his experience of his time in New College in the story 'Oxford, Black Oxford.'¹¹³ The title not only contains many nuances but somehow echoes William Ernest Henley's poem 'England, my England'. The first stanza of Henley's poem is evocative of the feelings and questions by which a young Marechera, who had just been asked to leave Oxford, was beset:

¹¹³ See *The Black Insider* (1999), pp.119 - 121

WHAT have I done for you,
England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
England, my own?¹¹⁴

These lines are a bitterly ironic comment on Marechera's exclusion from Oxford. Such a reading may also be suggesting Marechera regretted his leaving of Oxford. The securities that it provided for him were completely gone. Marechera often said that he was not aware of his blackness until he came to Oxford because although Oxford accepted black students it was largely a white institution. 'Oxford, black Oxford' could therefore be a mocking acknowledgement of his isolation. This is a bit like Fanon's account of arriving in Europe with an ambition to be part of it only to be excluded on racial lines.¹¹⁵

Marechera's anxieties in Oxford had several other causes, which accumulatively, led to outbursts of rage. He resented the implicit racism – real or imagined – that black students at Oxford encountered. Caryl Phillips echoes Marechera's experiences of Oxford in *The European Tribe* (2000). Interestingly, Phillips was at Oxford at the same time as was Marechera in the 1970s and felt out of place so much that every weekend he made secret trips to London to 'plug into' black life. This feeling of inadequacy led to Phillips' collapse with 'nervous exhaustion' and under advice from the college psychiatrist [had to] take 'a break' away from Oxford (Phillips 2000:5). Phillips left for America to discover himself. He remembers:

¹¹⁴ William Ernest Henley's poem 'England, my England' in DH Lawrence *England, My England and Other Stories* (Frazer Press edition, 2014)

¹¹⁵ Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan's *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* (Plenum Press, 1985) is a biography that tries to understand decisive moments in Fanon's life and how they impact on his thinking.

Oxford is a divided city. Although there are many black people, most of whom are employed by the British Leyland car factory, the prevalent ethos is of 'town and gown.' I found that student life had its own momentum, and spurned much of what happened in the rest of the city. City dwellers had a similarly dismissive attitude towards the university, and collaborations between the two were few. This left the question of black people inside the university. There were some of us but not many, and the situation was made all the more frustrating by the collegiate system whereby students tended to mix with those in their own colleges rather than across the university spectrum. (Phillips 2000:9)

So, Marechera's concerns were not mere personal exaggerations, they were real and damaging. No wonder he felt lost and dislocated. In an audio-recorded interview with Dutch culture journalist, Alle Lansu, Marechera expressed the same sentiments as Phillips:

Oxford is segregated, though I thought I had left segregation behind. On the one side there are the students, the aristocracy of Oxford. On the other side, there is a whole army of thousands and thousands of ordinary workers who live and work there. I mean, Jesus Christ, for the first time at Oxford I had a white servant. She had to come everyday to my house, sweep up everything, clean my empty beer bottles, clean up everything. Thousands are unemployed and live on social security. I would say the only two industries in Oxford are either to work for the students – sweeping rooms, cleaning up the university – or working for British Leyland, the car company, at Cowley. Their residential areas are totally cut off from the university, and so you have the same kind of segregation as at Rusape. And if you tried to cross the boundaries, if you as a student tried to drink in pubs where the workers drink, you would get beaten up. I got beaten up myself when I got tired of the student pubs and wanted to drink in pubs where there were some other black people. I think it was the way I talked.

(Source Book, 23-24)

This is in many ways a revealing account in that there is a sense in which Marechera feels he has betrayed the class and background he originally came from by going to the other side of

the divide. Marechera refused to belong or to participate in the Oxford community.¹¹⁶ He remained an outsider and the only salvation he was to get was his expulsion from the institution.

Another Zimbabwean writer, Stanley Nyamfukudza, who was at Oxford at the time, also considered quitting.¹¹⁷ He says, ‘during the first year everybody was in conflict with the college and other students. I wanted to come back after the first year’ (*Source Book*, 153). Black students were evidently a marginalised group, almost as if they were just mere token sprinklings of diversity.

The opening of the story ‘Oxford, black Oxford’ is a collage of images that begins with the ‘slow walk to a tutorial in All Souls’ reflecting Marechera’s actual journey from Africa to Oxford:

A few rusty spears of sunlight had pierced through the overhead drizzling clouds. Behind the gloom of rain and mist, I could see a wizened but fearfully blood-shot sun. And everywhere, the sweet clangour of bells pushed in clear tones what secret rites had evolved with this city. Narrow cobbled streets, ancient warren of diverse architecture all back up into itself, with here there and everywhere the massive masonry of college after college. Sudden and thrifty avenues winding past close-packed little shops. And the Bodleian which American Margaret portrayed as an upside-down artichoke. The

¹¹⁶ At the 2009 Marechera Symposium, as I was giving my presentation, two Zimbabweans sitting in the back started heckling me shouting, ‘Aren’t you ashamed sitting there talking about Marechera, a loser? Why are we all here talking about a guy who misused opportunities that so many are always clamoring for?’

¹¹⁷ In fact, Nyamfukudza remembered in an interview I did with him on 10 December 2010 in Hounslow Central, London, that he was depressed at Oxford and considered quitting until the college doctor (psychiatrist) asked him to write what he was feeling inside and the result was his first book, *The Non-Believer’s Journey* (1980). The novel is a work of disillusionment and existential angst about a university graduate teacher sceptical of the beliefs and aspirations of his people. Being a sceptic, the character remains aloof, a spectator, an outsider watching but not contributing to the struggle for freedom. It would not be surprising if the represented Nyamfukudza himself feeling guilty for deserting the liberation struggle. This is the same predicament that Marechera was in.

Cornmarket with its crowded pavements, its rebelliously glossy and supermarket look: did Zuleika Dobson ride past, her carriage-horses striking up sparks from the flint of the road? Myth, illusion, reality were all consumed by the dull gold inwardness, narrowness, the sheer and brilliant impossibility of all as the raindrops splashed and the castanets of stray sunlight beams clapped against the slate roofs, walls and doorways – I walked slowly towards All Souls. My mind an essay to itself. ('Oxford, black Oxford', *Black Insider*, 118)

I agree with David Patterson's observation that the 'wizened but fearfully blood-shot sun' can be seen as the vision of the future, of Africa under threat, and 'the spears of sunlight' represent Africans leaving Africa (Patterson 2000: 143). It can be further argued that 'spears of sunlight' is an implicit metaphor for the black Africans at Oxford and the 'drizzling clouds...the gloom of rain and mist' could be a metaphor for the hostile environment that greeted them. In fact, this opening paragraph has images of exclusion such as 'secret rites,' and 'ancient warren' which could suggest an exclusive society as well as medieval town planning, one that Marechera was completely out of touch with. The reference to Max Beerbohm's novel, *Zuleika Dobson* (1911), the most famous Oxford novel, is highly significant. Just as with his reference to Shelley, Marechera's allusion to Beerbohm is more than coincidental. The novel is a satire of undergraduate life in Edwardian Oxford and centres on the beauty and charms of Zuleika Dobson who is a true *femme fatale* and manages to gain entrance to the privileged, all-male domain of Oxford University. Marechera falls in love with her, as did all the male undergraduates in the book. While in the Oxford 'Cornmarket with its crowded pavements' the narrator ponders where 'did Zuleika Dobson ride past, her carriage horses striking up sparks from the flint of the road?' This allusion inserts the black narrator, inter-textually, into the history of Oxford. There is a striking passage in Beerbohm's novel in which an outsider's presence is mentioned:

As the landau rolled into “the Corn,” another youth – a pedestrian, and very different – saluted the Warden. He wore a black jacket, rusty and amorphous. His trousers were too short: almost a dwarf. His face was as plain as his gait was undistinguished. He squinted behind spectacles.

“And who is that?” asked Zuleika. A deep flush overspread the cheek of the Warden.

“That,” he said, “is also a member of Judas. His name I believe is Noaks.”

“Is he dining with us tonight?” asked Zuleika.

“Certainly not,” said the Warden. “Most decidedly not.”

Noaks, unlike the Duke, had stopped for an ardent retrospect. He gazed till the landau was out of his sight; then, sighing, resumed his solitary walk.

(Zuleika Dobson, 1952:9)

Here the resemblances between the character of Noaks and Marechera himself are striking – the unusual appearance, the squint, the thick spectacles, the difficult relationship he had with his Warden; the detail in this passage powerfully resonates with Marechera’s own biography. In this way Marechera indicates that his experience of prejudice and exclusion are not unique; they are, he appears to be suggesting, endemic in Oxford. What is interesting is that Marechera sees himself in the figures of history such as Shelley whom Oxford disagreed with. These apparent references to Oxford in his work show a writer who was making attempts to come to terms with the history of the place and why it was failing to accommodate people like him. Oxford is therefore shown by Marechera as an insular place, with a history of unwillingness to change.

The story is a brilliant expose of class issues, racial prejudice acted out in the three characters Dr Martins Botha (tutor), Stephen (fellow student) and the narrator (who could be Marechera himself). The name, Martins Botha, is a cross-cultural joke and a bitter reference to extremist

right wing fanatics. In the 1970s, Dr Martins is the name for the footwear that was most exclusively worn by Nationalist Party skinheads and Pieter Botha was an extremist Nationalist Party MP in the South African apartheid government. The figure of the tutor is therefore a suggested representation of the racial prejudice that is so much a part of the Oxford culture. Inevitably the story has an ideological function as the various exchanges between the three characters emphasise that Dr Martins Botha and Stephen share a value system from which the narrator is excluded. In the following extract the tutor has asked the narrator a question but before waiting for an answer turns to address Stephen:

‘Brr,’ he said. ‘Brr,’ he repeated. And SNEEZED.

As he blew his nose and wiped his spectacles he turned to Stephen.

‘I got your note. It’s all right. Hand it in sometime. Brr.’ He turned to me. ‘And how are you?’

I nodded as he had already turned back to Stephen.

‘Had a good shoot?’

Stephen actually blushed with pride as he said, ‘I bagged seven. Two are on the way to your house right now.’

‘Ah, a decent meal for once.’

(Oxford, Black Oxford, *Black Insider*, 120)

This conversation between Dr Martins Botha and Stephen is very intimate and even suggests a personal relationship outside the university system based on a shared culture of field sports – the shooting (and eating) of game is an accepted part of gentlemen’s way of life. The fact that Dr Martins Botha does not care what the narrator has to say could as well suggest that Marechera was stressing that black students were frowned upon as inferior students without anything important to say. Marechera even hints on a homosexual relationship between Dr Martins and Stephen:

I picked up my essay from the floor and began to read. I was half way through it when Dr Martins Botha laughed quite scornfully. I stopped. I did not look up. I waited until he had finished. I was about to resume when he suddenly - or was it Stephen's voice? – said, 'Nothing personal. You know.'

That is when I looked up. Dr Martins Botha's right hand was between Stephen's thighs. They were both looking at me. I will always remember their eyes.

'Shall I go on?' I asked.

The doctor nodded. Once more I began to read. I know my face was quite impassive. But behind it I knew my face had been touched by a thin slimy secret. It was as if an earwig was eating its way through my head. I finished reading. I felt very tired, very thirsty.

'That's it,' I said. And sank back into my chair.

'Well,' the doctor began. 'That's the best essay I've heard for years on the Gawain Poet. Have you any questions, Stephen?'

'It was brilliant. It quite settles everything,' Stephen said smiling. Christ. They were actually mocking me. ('Oxford, Black Oxford' *Black Insider*, 121)

These exchanges reveal the moral hypocrisy of the Oxford community and culture. Homosexuality in Britain was still a closet affair and in this instance it is almost a brotherhood that renders the black student impotent and of little significance. Even the black student's brilliance is undermined by the relationship between the tutor and the other student. What Marechera is revealing is his desire to be taken seriously, that he is not interested in being just a mere colonial token. If this short story was inspired by real experiences, Marechera's decision to stop attending lectures and tutorials altogether is not surprising. The tutorial reports for his first term show 'that some of his work was very good but much of it was incomplete' (*Source Book*, 156). Of interest in the short story is the power of language. Stephen is cast as firmly upper middle class or even perhaps aristocratic. Marechera's choice of language for Stephen shows him to be patronising, as the following demonstrates:

Always wanted to know where you learned your English, old boy. Excellent. Even better than most of the natives in my own hedge. You know. Wales.

‘It’s the national lingo in my country.’

‘Is it not bambazonka like Uganda?’

‘Actually yes, your distant cousins are butchering the whole lot of us.’

‘Mercenaries, eh. Sorry, old man. Money. Nothing personal.’

(‘Oxford, Black Oxford’, *Black Insider*, 119-120)

This is a rather patronising exchange. Stephen’s attitude towards his black classmate smacks of prudish arrogance. Stephen’s use of the word ‘bambazonka’ is an attempt at using an exotic African word to describe the strangeness of African languages when he is told that the national language of Rhodesia is English. By using a neologism in this case Stephen is showing his complete disregard of African languages and by extension African culture and African people. Marechera is shocked by the primitive colonial attitudes he encounters at a supposedly open minded and intellectual place like Oxford.

After leaving the tutorial, the narrator of ‘Oxford, Black Oxford’ says ‘I do not know how I got there but I suddenly found myself standing in front of a triple whiskey in the Monk’s Bar at the Mitre’ (*Black Insider*, 121). Could this be a stereotype that Marechera is subconsciously deploying, that once the black man has been pushed to the margins, he finds escape in alcohol, he self-destructs. This image appears elsewhere in Marechera’s work. *The House of Hunger* opens with the narrator wandering towards ‘the beer hall but stopped at the bottle store where I bought a beer’ (*House of Hunger*, 11). There are some Zimbabweans who have never forgiven Marechera for squandering his chance at Oxford, an institution to which every Zimbabwean aspires to go. If indeed Marechera had stayed at Oxford, chances are high

that he could or would have moved higher up in Zimbabwean society. But nonetheless, Oxford gave him more than material wealth – heightened powers of perception and imagination. And since his passing in 1987, lonely and despised, he has been embraced by a whole generation of young Zimbabweans who see him as a prophet who was ahead of his times.

Conclusion: The graduates

In the end, Shelley and Marechera emerge as graduates of a certain school of experience but ones who did not require Oxford certification. They learn as they go along. And they write as they learn from life's lessons – a displacement of the performativity of education as divorced from reality. In this chapter I have reflected on the striking parallels between Shelley and Marechera. Hogg's biography of Shelley has been discounted as notoriously untrustworthy in detail even while it provides the fullest sense we have of the earlier part of the Shelley's life at Oxford. His small book, *Shelley at Oxford*, published in 1904 is, despite the controversies, the earliest record of Shelley's time at University College. Apart from letters Shelley wrote to his family and friends from Oxford, there is nowhere that Shelley theorises or fictionalises about his experiences as Marechera did. The description of Shelley's shock immediately after being expelled has the ring of verisimilitude:

He was terribly agitated. I anxiously inquired what had happened.

"I am expelled," he said, as soon as he had recovered himself a little,

"I am expelled!" ...

He sat on the sofa, repeating, with convulsive vehemence, the words,

"Expelled, expelled!" his head shaking with emotion, and his whole frame quivering.

(Hogg 1906:168)

It was a clever joke that went wrong. *The Necessity of Atheism* was meant to provoke debate, to challenge received wisdom, and to encourage freedom of speech. The practice seemed to have fostered Shelley's intellectual curiosities and youthful naiveté. There is a very sad and human moment in Flora Veit-Wild's *Source Book*, when Marechera appears, a week after his expulsion, at the front door of the house of his friend, Stanley Nyamfukudza, another Zimbabwean writer. It seems, Marechera, like Shelley, felt the shock of being sent down. For all the patience, he trampled on, all the rules and regulations he flouted, he never expected the door to shut him out. Nyamfukudza remembers that 'he was in a bad mental shape and would spend most of his time sleeping' (oral interview 9 December 2010). The begged question, which is even more relevant today, is: do universities exist for the discussion and testing of ideas or for the suppression of radical ideas? It is not so much what both writers did, but how the institution reacted and contrived to get rid of them.

Marechera had the opportunity to review his life at Oxford in his subsequent works and interviews with journalists. The story was never the same. It changed with every new telling and always depended on to whom he was telling it. Flora Veit-Wild's *Source Book* is the most comprehensive 'Marechera Reader' covering the biographical span of his life. What has been particularly frustrating is that the version in this book has suddenly become the only version of the life and times of Dambudzo Marechera. The impression given of Marechera at Oxford is of an 'isolated figure,' 'always disruptive,' 'uncooperative.' In a two-hour interview¹¹⁸ I conducted with Stanley Nyamfukudza he said Marechera 'like any of us who had come from Zimbabwe coped through a social network we had created. When we came to

¹¹⁸ Interview with Nyamfukudza conducted on 9 December 2010, in Hounslow Central, London.

Oxford there were a few Zimbabweans already in Oxford, and a few others came at the same time with us. We all knew each other and supported each other, including Dambudzo.’ So, where did the bad boy character come from? Nyamfukudza thinks that ‘it must have been to do with administration issues about money and his welfare. He was always complaining about the way his college was treating him or the disagreements he had with some of his professors.’

Another striking similarity occurs after the dismissals – both are offered opportunities to apologise and atone for their ‘forgivable’ sins. They refuse to submit to the required modicum of outward deference to convention so that they could be allowed to continue to pursue their academic careers and possibly occupy positions of privilege in society. Paradoxically, Shelley was always in the stronger position, not simply because he had more bargaining power than Marechera, but because he had more to lose and was willing, if necessary, to lose it. It was easy for Shelley to see his father as the hypocritical conservative, hiding behind the cloak of social and religious respectability. And for Marechera, ‘all the centuries of my wayward fears’ (*Black Insider*, 125) of the bullying attitudes of the system were confirmed. He fought against the discriminating forces at the University of Rhodesia from which he was also expelled¹¹⁹ and Oxford was no different. Beyond their manifest differences and obvious misjudgements at times, Shelley and Marechera were united at a deeper level of understanding. The rigidity of Oxford only hardened their resistance.

Their post-Oxford writings are testaments of defiance against accepted wisdoms and also works of self-validation. Texts such as *Queen Mab* and *The Black Insider* emerge as

¹¹⁹ See, Flora Veit-Wild *Dambudzo Marechera: Source Book* (Africa World Press, 2004) pp.136 - 151

‘manifestos of ideas’ and take their driving power from the personal relationships that mattered most to the two writers. In conceiving his major poems, Shelley habitually sought to epitomize his imaginative perceptions by idealizing those relationships that served to connect him to the outer world. When those relationships altered, as they always did, they required new reconfigurations, visionary structures he was forced to modify repeatedly under the pressures reality brought to bear. There is thus a continuous and vital interplay between the creative work and the lives, between philosophy and the flux of lived experience that underlies and sustains their imaginations.

By leaving Oxford, both writers were refusing to be defined. The language of their respective expulsions is very interesting and pointedly political. Being ‘sent down’ means that they are ejected from a community they no longer belong or qualify to be part of. They are sent down simply because they never accepted imposed limitations. Shortly afterwards Shelley wrote to his father, ‘I hope it will alleviate your sorrow to know that for myself I am perfectly indifferent to the late tyrannical proceedings at Oxford’ (White 1947:119). What they recognize is that the beauty of life is to be outside so that the box doesn’t exist.

The legacies of Shelley and Marechera after being sent down from Oxford provide an interesting contrast. Shelley has enjoyed an afterlife in numerous popular forms. *Queen Mab* was pirated and circulated by the radical underground, including the Chartists. The poem that has resonated most with contemporary readers is, according to Timothy Morton in *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley* (2006:7), *The Mask of Anarchy*. He lists among many people, such luminaries as Mohandas K Gandhi, the students in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, scene of a massacre in 1989 who chanted *The Mask of Anarchy*, Arundhati Roy in an essay in

War Talk; the pop group Scritti Politti gave the poem a postmodern run for its money in their 80s song *Lions after Slumber* on *Songs to Remember* and Thabo Mbeki, the former president of South Africa, quoted it in an official Presidential Address. The Shelleyan spirit still resonates.

The cult of Marechera is a Zimbabwean phenomenon. The House of Hunger Poetry Slam is held monthly by groups of young Zimbabweans in Harare and Johannesburg, respectively.¹²⁰ Young slam poet, Sam Farai Monro, popularly known as Comrade Fatso produced a CD of poetry called *House of Hunger* (2008).¹²¹ A Rwandan actor, Ery Nzaramba, is currently making a biopic on the life and works of the writer simply titled, *Dambudzo*.¹²² Science fiction novelist and academic, China Mieville, cites Marechera's novel *The Black Sunlight* (1980) as a major influence on his novel, *The Scar* (2002).¹²³ The Dambudzo Marechera fan page on the social network site Facebook has almost 20,000 members from all parts of the world.¹²⁴

The irony is how Oxford has appropriated both writers as significant cultural figures. Although Shelley was expelled from University College, Oxford, he remains one of its most famous alumni and is now held in high honour there and has a statue erected in his memory. In 2005, the college acquired some of Shelley's letters to enhance further its connection with

¹²⁰ Linda Gabriel 'Poetry keeps hope alive in Zimbabwe' *Power of Culture* <http://www.krachtvancultuur.nl/en/current/2009/april/house-of-hunger-poetry-slam> <Accessed 1 June 2016>

¹²¹ See Comrade Fasto website for the album <http://www.comradefatso.com/> <Accessed 1 June 2016>

¹²² A trailer of Ery Nzaramba's film *Dambudzo* on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhBIFOfat-4> <Accessed 1 June 2016>

¹²³ Claire Armitstead 'The Books That Made Me: China Miéville' *The Guardian* (podcast) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2010/aug/04/books-that-made-me-china-mieville> <Accessed 1 June 2016>

¹²⁴ Dambudzo Marechera fan Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/dambudzo.marechera/?fref=ts>

the poet. Anne-Marie Canning, Access Officer at University College, said: 'We were really excited to host the first Annual Shelley Study Day. It is a great chance to celebrate one of our most famous old members and an opportunity for our academics to share their expertise with students from all over the country.'¹²⁵ In May 2009, the English Faculty at Oxford University hosted an 'international symposium' on the life and works of Dambudzo Marechera. The programme notes¹²⁶ described the event as 'a multi-media festival to recuperate the memory of the author in Oxford, where his writing first emerged after his expulsion in 1976. Marechera's experimental interpretation of the colonial and postcolonial experience has been recognized as a significant instance of African modernism and postmodernism that links him with such writers as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and J. M. Coetzee and demands new retellings of African literary history. His post-nationalist vision, an alternative to cultural nationalism long before its currency in postcolonial theory, is highly relevant to the concerns of postcolonial studies today, as the continued critical interest in the writer indicates.'

Perhaps Hogg's commentary on Shelley's gradual success after his death is true of Marechera as well:

When a great man has attained to a certain eminence, his patronage is courted by those who were wont carefully to shun him, whilst he was and is steadily pursuing the path that would inevitably lead to [his] advancement.

(Hogg, 1904: 129)

¹²⁵ See, 'School pupils study Shelley in his former college' report on Oxford University website, http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/news_stories/2009/090703_1.html <Accessed 15 August, 2009>

¹²⁶ See, <http://www.marecheracelebration.org/> <Accessed 20 October 2009>

CHAPTER THREE: GEOGRAPHIES OF THE MIND

How come when the English live in other countries they are ex-pats, but if people from poor countries do that they are immigrants?

– A Facebook status

Anarchism and Exile

In this chapter I examine the ways Shelley's and Marechera's multiple migrations between various physical and mental geographies impact on their writings and sensibilities. I purposefully multiply the meanings of exile as a way to examine the multifaceted writings of Shelley and Marechera but at the same time maintain the sociological specificity of the concept of exile. Exile is physically limiting in what it enables the writers to see and conceive but it is also an enriching experience that expands their creative and imaginative horizons. At the same time both writers seem to regret or suffer from the frustration that the distance of exile imposes on them from their countries in terms of publication and reaching out to their 'home-based' readerships. But the idea of the writer as visionary or seer is made more plausible by distance as they can see clearly the inside from the outside and this is a unique vantage point for Shelley and Marechera to engage not only with but articulate their visions.

Exile has always been a major thematic concern in literature. However, it is more so an issue when evaluating the writings and ideas of Shelley and Marechera. Both wrote their most polemical works while living in exile. And it is the expulsions from Oxford which offered the two writers the realization that they had to exist and form new identities outside the

established order.¹²⁷ At this point, they already had strained relations with their families. And so they embarked on bumpy journeys – journeys inside and journeys out and across. Their exiles, in the course of time, acquired auras of romantic myth and legend. This chapter will interrogate the connection between anarchism and exile in Shelley's and Marechera's writings and show how memory and nostalgia are significant in coming to terms with their exilic circumstances. Anarchism is transitional, not defined by precise location or history but an amalgamation of experiences and circumstances.

It is my argument, carried forward from the previous chapter that with the expulsions from Oxford came the realization that Shelley and Marechera were writers. Shelley, like Marechera, knew that he was two men – a man and a poet/writer. This is dangerous knowledge, which certainly grows horns in their exilic havens. They are two young people trying to make right the past and the present so that the future can be a better place. One of Shelley's characteristics is his double personality; a man trying out the crude material of his poetry crudely in his own life; the other, the poet who purifies, moulds, transforms this material in his work. The man Shelley had the shrill, excitable voice which jarred on the ears: the poet has a voice which wins readers by the thrilling purity of its music (Hogg 1904:12). The personality of Marechera is repugnant at times, but the sheer depth of his writings is revealing in its mastery of language, breadth and scope of his ideas, the concise analysis of social and political matters not only in his homeland of Zimbabwe but the rest of the world he inhabits or interacts with. Others, remember the drunk Marechera, who provoked all, pushed boundaries and trampled on the etiquette of human relationships and yet in that state, spoke

¹²⁷ In fact, for Marechera this was a second expulsion after being dismissed from the University of Rhodesia in 1973 for leading political demonstrations against the Rhodesian authorities. He subsequently received a scholarship to Oxford, which is the focus of the previous chapter.

the truth that everyone else knew but never dared to speak. What exile did in both cases was to give them the distance and the time to reflect and to consider their own positioning in terms of ideology, identity and intellect – the key ingredients in the sort of philosophical anarchism they grapple with in their writings and interactions with the world.

The two writers are more at home in the conjured spaces of their works enabled by exile than their actual homelands. Shelley and Marechera feel real and at times imagined constraints upon them that makes an artistic virtue of exilic necessity. The examination of Shelley's Italian experience helps to restore this needful human dimension that accrues in the study of his poetry, and recovers, in consequence, aspects of its value that are timeless and significant. The effort in *The House of Hunger* is, it seems, for Marechera to re-create a place from which time has barred the artist who would forget the urgencies of the present as many would forget the memories of the past. Marechera desires to return to the image he creates while living in a reality that merely exiles him further from what he desires. Marechera sought, just as Shelley did, the recurring image, or the image restored which satisfied their curiosities and indeed assuaged their homesickness. Shelley in Italy was racked with homesickness, homesick for a world crumbling. Here the imagination is sovereign to both. What is created in the Shelleyan and Marecheran exilic writing is not only a new space to exercise their being but a medium through which to re-imagine their journeys towards freedom. They imagine in new surroundings the conditions that existed before the traumas that necessitated their displacement.

The state of mind of the exile at times results in a decidedly ambiguous relation with both the place of remove and the place of resettlement. Shelley and Marechera face the dilemma of

two places and home becomes where they are, but home is also where they have been and this dialectic is demonstrably the concern of their exilic writings. It is a concern that empowers them to breakdown rigid identifications of place and specific groups of people. They belong everywhere. This is the nature of their philosophical anarchism that is concerned with human nature in its entirety. By whatever principle of locution, that place from which the exile is blocked becomes a revised model for the place in which they resettle their imaginations. Their articulation of this condition reinforces the pattern that courses through their narratives. Exile becomes an invitation to conversion, not simply a turning or movement from place to place (though there is a bit of that) but a transformation – imaginative and psychological – of one place or state of mind into another. This is, of course, also at the heart of the creative records that make up their exilic stories. It is precisely the exilic doubleness of Shelley's situation or placement that accounts for the generative and allegorical texture of most of the poetry he writes while living in Italy. Shelley's displacement overlaps a time in English history near, if not dear, to his heart, a time when imminent political changes were taking shape and there was potential civil war looming. For Marechera, exile enables him to confront the ghosts of colonialism head on. The colonial malaise is specific to him but also globally widespread and that international aspect is what interests him the most. The imaginative experience necessitated by the distance of exile becomes a boundary crossing of sorts, a projection from familiar space into narrative space where consciousness is displayed as verbal territory. And this is what Emma Goldman (1969:17) anticipated when she singled out, 'anarchism (as) the only philosophy which brings man the consciousness of himself.'

The exile writings can also be read as mental biographies mapping out feelings and intimations of people and places. Their consciousness is without boundaries and fixed

position; bereft of or in a continual struggle with language. It is fractured – indeed, plagued – by discontinuities. As will be shown in this chapter, the writings and memories of Shelley and Marechera are characterized by an absence of any fixed spatial positioning; by fluidity of motion and soul; by mutilation of and transcendence of language; by the carnality of the spectacle; by obsessively violent tones. Shelley and Marechera were, of course, not simply reproducing their inner agony. Rather they were giving a systemized, positive version of it. The poetry of the imagination was for them a means of treating that mangled, passionate inner life.

To borrow from a relatively new concept proposed by Ben Grant and Kaori Nagai in *Kipling and Beyond* (2010), there is a shared ‘ex-patriotism¹²⁸’ in Shelley and Marechera. While exile seems to have permanently marginalized them as outsiders from their own national biographies, exile could also have made them even more patriotic of where they came from. Shelley and Marechera become obsessed with home – there is a deliberate engagement with *home* in both, home in the sense of origins, where they came from. Shelley created a vast poetic empire that bore imprints of his motherland. He writes about the state of affairs in England as an interested citizen intellectual. And Marechera subjected Zimbabwe to endless scrutiny in all his works. Both created not only spatial but temporal labyrinths – Shelley attempted to capture the slow pace of change in England and its apparent stagnation; Marechera pondered on the true nature of freedom and independence in a free Zimbabwe.

¹²⁸ See, *Kipling and Beyond* (2010) edited by Caroline Rooney and Kaori Nagai. In their chapter, Grant and Nagai explain that ‘ex-patriotism is a slip, whether of the pen, the tongue, or even memory, between the different meanings of the word ‘expatriate’, and between one home, country, or language to another, while exposing and accentuating the relationship to our patria’ (pp.185-204).

Exile is an immense force for liberation as the extra distance automatically develops contrasting structures in one's head, not just syntactic and lexical but social and psychological, political and cultural; it is, in other words, undoubtedly a leaping forth into other spaces and frames of experience and new ways of engaging with the world. But there is a price to pay. The distance can become too great resulting in the loss of identity and of language. One has to fight all that as an extra effort, although that effort can also result in escaping the familiar phrase, the expected word, simply because it no longer automatically comes into one's head. A new language for survival and for relating is adopted. It is a gain as much as it is a loss. Edward Said (2000:55) defines exile in terms of pain: 'Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.' He further explains however, that plurality of vision compensates, at least in part, for the psychological dislocation:

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal (Said, *ibid*).

With the adaptation to a new environment, the exile finds new customs, new activities, new expressions that occur in competition and against the memory of the old. The new does not necessarily replace the old, but results into some kind of contrapuntal juxtaposition. Although the exile lives in a world that is admittedly decentred and nomadic, he finds enrichment through a greater sense of potential – a new way of seeing, of hearing and of experiencing the world. Marechera certainly achieves the “contrapuntal” awareness that doesn't necessarily compensate for the sense of loss but adds to his confusion and desperation for identity. Is it possible to find balance? Marechera finds no solution or answer to his dilemma but further

disillusionment. Whereas for Shelley exile is simply a reflective time that gives him a panoramic gaze at humanity. In fact, Shelley is a true expatriate in the various senses of the word¹²⁹.

Marechera uses the very concept of exile to question postcolonial identities (often and always imposed), and he challenges his readers to re-think the linguistic and ideological categories by producing texts that do not fit into neat cultural programmes but instead engages in the process of breaking the boundaries between them. It is interesting that James Currey (2008: 285), who was then editor at Heinemann and dealt with Marechera, suggests that the more he asked him to produce a ‘developed and structured novel’ the more Marechera fractured and convoluted the narratives until they were unrecognizable or entirely different from the original¹³⁰. He was simply refusing to be packaged, to be seen in certain and predetermined ways or to be read in specific ways but according to his own terms. As he wrote to Currey in December 1978, he neither could nor would change his style of writing:

I can see the Kenyan branch of your firm still insisting that the work be simplified and be more broadly socially based, etc., as well as pruned of all allusions to literatures and persons which a peasant or worker does not understand. I no longer in my private life indulge in anything remotely political: it nauseates me now because I know it is blood and brains spattered over grit. To have hypocrites like that lording it over the revised *Black Insider* will certainly reinforce my own isolation. However, I

¹²⁹ In a sociological sense expatriate can simply mean a resident in another country or banishment from one’s own country. Shelley is both. His exile in Italy was voluntary and at the same time it was a banishment of sorts as he was reviled in his home country for his outrageous behaviour and beliefs.

¹³⁰ While the publication of *The House of Hunger* was being prepared by Heinemann in 1978, Marechera was urged by James Currey to write a novel as being more suitable for the African Writers Series (AWS) than short stories. He famously came up with four manuscripts in the first ten months of 1978: *The Black Insider* and *A Bowl of Shadows* (submitted in June/July 1978), followed by *The Black Heretic* (in October) and *Black Insider* (subsequently published in 1980). The other two manuscripts are still not known their whereabouts and have not been found since Marechera’s death in 1987.

merely wish to point out that three manuscripts certainly need a thorough going-over; yet at the same time their very nature and themes will after revision still leave me vulnerable to the same non-textual charges of elitism etc., and, having already wasted ten months on them, it would be doubly frustrating to be so always obviously outflanked. I am aware therefore of how your firm can quite easily drop me now that *House of Hunger* is out of the way (*Black Insider*, 1999:8).

The Marechera narrative is characterized by dislocation, historical amnesia, the revolt against social constraints and he certainly does not limit his focus to the world of Zimbabwean immigrants, but even depicts a wide range of marginal types in the English society, the down and outs of London. For instance, the community in *The Black Insider* consists of a disparate group of runaways, including idealistic revolutionaries, failed poets, underage children and drug addicts, all exiled from mainstream society to which they can no longer belong or fail to function in the accepted ways and means.

Moreover, his extensive reading results in the discovery of literary figures such as Rimbaud, Shelley, Joyce, DH Lawrence, Nabokov, Soyinka, etc who in their rebellion against bourgeois society, chose exile and nomadism, leaving a textual legacy that Dambudzo Marechera uses to advance a dialogue of the crisis of the present. Hence, he explores texts, oral history, and popular culture to find clues that will help him understand his position as a postcolonial nomad. He is committed to giving African exiles a legitimate space and identity hence the affirmative title, *The Black Insider*. He reveals how difficult it is for the minority voice to be heard as long as the dominant hegemonic discourse continues to resist and define. The insistence for Marechera to write a particular narrative in a particular genre for easy acceptance, easy categorization and easy packaging frustrates him. He refuses all this. James Currey reveals that Marechera was the only writer he dealt with who questioned and

challenged the editorial operations and interests of Heinemann regarding how the African narrative is and must be constructed.¹³¹

Shelley's life of self-imposed exile in Italy has an aura of Romantic myth and legend. However, alluring the myth, inevitably, a tangled web of truths, hypotheses and distortions arises from the historical record, which, in the popular mind at least, is taken as completely factual. The myth influences interpretations both of Shelley's experience in Italy, and the nature of that experience in his poetry. Part of this problem stems from the fact that little detailed information about Shelley's exile is available, beyond Shelley's own letters from exile, which give a more intimate account of his wanderings in Italy than other periods of his life and allude to the alienation he feels, being far away from the site of struggle. Shelley's exile, his defection from his class and the disreputability of his beliefs and behaviour, had a tremendous effect on the carefully partisan handling of his biography by the survivors of his own circle and generation, and even more so, his family.

In fact, the isolation Shelley experienced in exile was both welcome and trying. He gained freedom and peace of mind, but, on many occasions, felt deep nostalgia for England and he certainly longed for his work to be understood by others, especially the English readers to whom he addressed most, if not all, his works. The 1819 poems, which he dubbed the 'popular songs,' were designed to appeal to a mass readership and speak to their desire for reform and in the process, alter their perceptions.¹³² Shelley sent the work to his friend and

¹³¹ See James Currey's discussion in *Africa Writes Back* (James Currey, 2008), pp. 278-296.

¹³² See Kim Wheatley, *Shelley and His Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999). Wheatley's book provides critical analysis of the dialogue between Shelley's poetry and its

publisher, Leigh Hunt, with the hope of publication. Unfortunately, they were never published and it must have been agony for him to want to contribute to the ongoing political debates at home and have no outlet to share his views. Hunt avoided the risk of prosecution and only published them a decade after Shelley's death and when the situation in England was less volatile. But even in that isolation, Shelley had a circle of friends and family – his wife Mary, Claire Clairmont, Byron, the Gisbornes – a core of people who were acquainted with his ideas and whose presence acted as a stimulus to his political and creative aspirations. Then there are those at home with whom he was in regular correspondence, his link to current affairs in England – Leigh Hunt, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Thomas Love Peacock, and Charles Ollier – his news feeders.

Shelley had to bear the brunt of scathingly destructive criticism during his Italian exile.¹³³ This came largely from establishment critics who took exception to his radicalism. The meanness, which motivated the negative reception of his works, gave Shelley evidence to support the myth of Keats's death at the hands of the critics and led him to identify himself, in some measure, with Keats's sufferings. In *Adonais*¹³⁴, the hostility of the critics towards the creative spirit is linked to the futile tyranny of 'ages, empires and religions' manifested in

contemporary reviewers, and further argues that Shelley's idealism can be recovered through the study of his poetry's reception.

¹³³ Sussane Schmid and Michael Rossington, *The Reception of P. B. Shelley in Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹³⁴ *Adonais: An Elegy on the death of John Keats* is a pastoral elegy written for John Keats in 1821 after his death, and is one of Shelley's best and most well-known works. In Shelley's version, the "beast" responsible for Keats's death is the literary critic, specifically one from *London's Quarterly* who gave a scathing review of Keats' poem "Endymion" and led him, as Shelley thought at the time of composition, to his early death. (Shelley was unaware of the true cause of Keats's death). In fact, John Keats suffered an agonising death after his doctor wrongly diagnosed tuberculosis as stress.

the ruins of Rome. The comfort for Shelley was that he was away from this hostile environment, which produced those reviews and sentiments scornful of his ideas and personality. And, so too was Marechera no stranger from unfriendly criticism – from other writers, academics, and even ordinary people whose idea of him they were fed by what was written about him. Marechera constantly writes about, or talks about this negative reception in most of his writings and interviews with the media. In the journal section of *Mindblast*, he writes that ‘A lot had been said about how I was alienated from my environment, from my Africanness. A lot had been said about it – what the hell!’ (*Mindblast*, 1984:120). The source of the viciousness against Marechera was certainly his unwillingness to participate in the nation-building project, which emphasised on the very notions he was negating, all centred around ‘Africanness’ or in other contexts *ubuntu*. In the African context *ubuntu* is a humanist philosophy focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other and this is often the basis of most African societies. As such Marechera was worried that in his isolation he was missing the bus of human motion, having missed out whatever all these and others had which made them look “at home” in the world. He simply had no world outlook.

Shelley from over the sea

Shelley was grossly maligned for his scandalous relationships, his politics, and his attacks on the establishment and his defence of the working-class underdog. In the end, and for his frail health, he left England in 1818 to stay abroad in Italy. He died at sea four years later when he drowned when his sailing boat capsized. At the time, there were many alleged conspiracies regarding his sudden death. There were those who believed his death was not accidental.

There were sinister forces behind it. Some allege that Shelley was depressed in the last days and committed suicide by drowning; others say that he did not know how to navigate from the trail of debts he had been accruing to support his lifestyle in Italy; others believed that some pirates mistook the boat for Byron's and attacked him, and others believed his death was a political murder.¹³⁵ Whatever may be the case; Shelley never returned to England and to this day remains a permanent exile.¹³⁶

The last four years of his life spent in Italy were the most productive of his whole career as he produced his most accomplished poems. Alan Weinberg's book, *Shelley's Italian Experience (1991)*, remains the most comprehensive study of Shelley's exile years. In the book, Weinberg, poses many important questions: Shelley's response to Italy is interesting but how is it expressed in his poetry? How 'Italian' are Shelley's poems, to what extent are they influenced by Italy, how important is knowledge of Shelley's Italian experience in gauging the significance of his poetry and views? These questions constitute the frame of Weinberg's book¹³⁷, but I intend to extend the discussion further and focus on the significant omissions in the book that if not accounted for, the wide-ranging effect of Shelley's exile cannot be fully comprehended.

¹³⁵ See, Literary Curiosities blog on speculations about 'The Murder of Percy Shelley' <http://litcur.com/the-murder-of-shelley/> <Accessed 3 August 2016>

¹³⁶ P.B. Shelley is buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, where John Keats is also buried.

¹³⁷ Focusing on Shelley's 'Italian experience', Weinberg's book both addresses itself to the living context which nurtured Shelley's creativity, and explores a neglected but essential component of his work. The poet's four years of self-exile in Italy (1818-1822) were, in fact, the most decisive of his career. As he responded to Italy (his immediate environment), his poetry acquired a new subtlety and complexity of vision (his projected future of England). Endowed with remarkably keen powers of absorption, Shelley imaginatively reshaped the rich cultural heritage of Italy and the vital qualities of its landscape and climate.

Shelley's poetic technique shows that the poet characteristically founds his work upon an established idea or genre and then, in the process of writing, subverts the tradition upon which he relies, purifying it of its outmoded elements. This anarchic poetics is at the heart of the revolutionary project that Shelley advanced throughout his life. While in Italy, Shelley becomes more philosophic in his outlook and engagement with the world. As an expat – a voluntary exile – he had the time and the means to indulge in his musings. For Shelley, Italy was a 'paradise of exiles' – in fact, this is a phrase he first uses in *Julian and Maddalo*, as the poet's surrogate, Julian, scans the evening landscape at Venice:

Oh,
How beautiful is sunset, when the glow
Of Heaven descends upon a land like thee,
Thou paradise of exiles, Italy!

(*Julian and Maddalo*, lines 54 – 7)

The phrase 'paradise of exiles' had a deep and personal significance for Shelley and certainly problematizes the meaning of his exile experiences and concisely sums up the nature and complexity of it. In fact, the multiplicity of 'exiles' in Shelley's expression is important in that it pinpoints the multifaceted nature of his life as an English exile in Italy. However, Shelley's paradise is not an unconditional state of bliss. The ideal and the real co-exist in his poetry, and a paradise is always in the making and has to be dismantled and remade when necessary. In fact, Shelley's hatred of tyranny, and that of arbitrary laws, customs and conventions of society manifested in his opposition to the Church as institution. Italy was no better than his England.

Shelley's writing project in Italy was to formulate the framework of the Promethean reform in response to and against an increasingly turbulent political situation in his home country of England, extolling the need for a long-term, moral revolution. For most of the Romantic poets, the mythic figure of Prometheus was frequently appropriated as a symbol of indomitable libertarian aspirations. As outlined in Chapter one of this thesis, Prometheus embodies the human condition with all its potential for brilliant innovation and for cruel suffering. And for Shelley, distance allows new possibilities of vision and comprehending human nature at a much larger scale. This is clearly demonstrated in the range of Promethean themes and concepts Shelley dwells on – the conscious intellect, political power, artistic inspiration, hope and despair. It is in exile that Shelley acquaints himself with the Promethean myth to help him understand what it truly means to be human at a time when there was dire oppression in England and a desperate need for limitless optimism.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will mainly focus on the first long poem Shelley wrote when he arrived in Italy in 1818 as it encapsulates the ambiguity of his new positioning in a new location and the effect this relocation had on his revolutionary thinking. While the poem is not necessarily one of the best-known Shelley poems and may seem obscure but I will contend that it is necessary to refresh our reading of Shelley by engaging with his least popular but powerful work to show the depth of his creativity. Stephen Spender describes *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* as the 'most purely visual poem' and Shelley's 'lyric masterpiece' (Spender, 1952: 39). It is a reflective lyrical poem and the title is indicative of how Shelley takes a literary survey of his new landscape from which he now resides, and from where he dreams, and from which he interacts with the world. It is a statement of reflection from a new terrain of experience and a distancing from the old

experiences. Weinberg (1991:23) points out that the ‘hills offer a refuge for a poet-figure in exile.’ Indeed, the hills provide a perfect setting for Shelley’s ode – they present a broad view of Italy (Padua, the plain of Lombardy, the olive-sandalled Apennines in the south and the snow-topped Alps to the north, and to the east, Venice). Shelley, it is clear, has a good overview of the Italian scene and safe enough distance for reflection, for gaining perspective on his new circumstances. The poem begins with a tragic lament of loss, of ‘misery’, of drifting away:

Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep wide sea of Misery,
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on –
Day and night, and night and day,
Drifting on his dreary way

(Euganean Hills, 1-6)

The poem is a journey in so far as it alludes to the metaphor of life as a ‘voyage’ over a dangerous sea in this ‘dreary way.’ The implications of these grim descriptions are to show the predicament of humanity and the poet’s release and remove from these tragic happenings. Because the poet is situated at a high point on the Euganean Hills, exile is being projected as a transcendental experience that puts Shelley on a spot where he can see clearly and perceptively the journey towards humanity’s destiny. From his vantage point in the hills, he describes a personal experience in the course of a single day, from dawn to sunset. In this manner, Shelley is able to record the full scope of his initial reaction to Italy. I agree with Weinberg (1991:24) when he observes that ‘when reading the poem, one has the impression that Shelley was deeply conscious of exile in the early months of his residence in Italy, and

that, to his mind, his experience reflected the human condition in general.’ Donald Reiman gives further credence to this view when he suggests that the third stanza of the poem alludes to the death of Shelley’s past life in England:

On the beach of a northern sea
Which tempests shake eternally,
As once the wretch there lay to sleep,
Lies a solitary heap,
One white skull and seven dry bones,
On the margins of the stone,

(Euganean Hills, 45-50)

According to Reiman the ‘seven bones symbolize the seven years between his expulsion from Oxford (March 1811) and his final departure from England (March 1818)¹³⁸.’ What this reading of the poem does is situate the poem at the very beginnings of Shelley’s exilic experience and his psychological attempt to break with the past so that he can focus his energy on creating the infrastructure to reach the future. In fact, running through the poem in the manner of a leitmotif is the theme of exile. The poem represents man as the lonely voyager, who by his detachment can and is able to look at the world from a distance.

Euganean Hills establishes misery as a basic condition of the world and thereby portrays how this misery may be transcended. This fundamental ambiguity between misery and reform is characteristic of most Shelleyan poetry, especially in its provision of an interpretive framework for reflecting about what it means to be human.

¹³⁸ This point is footnoted to the same poem in the Norton Critical Edition that Donald Reiman co-edits with Neil Fraistat, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* (2002 edition), p.111

Michael Scrivener (1982:147) describes *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* as a 'death-in-life' poem. I agree with this diagnosis in that Shelley's banishment from his family and country is some kind of death. The poet therefore proposes the annihilation of a social order which does not nourish liberty and individual freedom with society returned to a state of nature. The absence of love and respect was too much for Shelley:

Whether such there be or no:
Senseless is the breast, and cold,
Which relenting love would fold;
Bloodless are the veins and chill
Which the pulse of pain did fill;
Every little living nerve
That from bitter words did swerve
Round the tortured lips and brow,
Are like sapless leaflets now
Frozen upon December's bough.

(*Euganean Hills*, 36 -44)

The imagery is chilling indeed; this is the portrait of a man stripping bare the tortured misery of his existence, the reviews in 'bitter words' and swerving the population against him. This is the life Shelley was leaving behind. Exile, however, offers an opportunity of rebirth, a new season for renewal; In that sense there is not so much 'death-in-life' as opportunity in exile. There is sadness in the Shelley who stands in the Euganean Hills as if he is a ghost looking back at himself. What worries him is that in his absence he will easily be dead to his own people and completely forgotten. He says:

There is no lament for him
Like a sunless vapour dim
Who once clothed with life and thought
What now moves nor murmurs not.

(Euganean Hills, 63-65)

But that is not the end of him. He dies in one place to rise in another. This new birth is beautifully projected from the speaker's vantage point on the Hills where he sees the sun radiating over the horizon of the sea as if he has been resurrected in a state of glory. This scene has biblical allusions to the transfiguration of Jesus when Jesus begins to shine with bright rays of light. Shelley is casting himself as a Promethean figure who is just being handed over the powers to reform the world.

Lo! The sun upsprings behind,
Broad, red, radiant, half-reclined
On the level quivering line
Of the waters chrystalline;
And before that chasm of light,
As within a furnace bright,
Column, tower, and dome, and spire
Shine like obelisks of fire

(Euganean Hills, 100-107)

Fire, of course, is at the heart of the Promethean mythology. Fire provides mankind with the means, both material and spiritual, for regeneration. It is poignant it is as if Shelley is reclaiming his powers from the nature surrounding him in the Euganean Hills. There are other instances where fire is mentioned in the poem. In a stunning series of lines, Shelley

develops a simile that suggests a fiery social revolution, sparked by philosophy (Scrivener 1982:150). The imagery entails a destructive power with a restorative effect:

As the Norway woodman quells,
In the depth of piny dells,
One light flame among the brakes,
While the boundless forest shakes,
And its mighty trunks are torn
By the fire thus lowly born:
The spark beneath his feet is dead,
He starts to see the flames it fed
Howling through the darkened sky
 And sinks down in fear: so thou,
O tyranny, beholdest now
Light around thee, and thou hearest
The loud flames ascend, and fearest:
In the dust thy purple pride!

(Euganean Hills, 269- 284)

The confrontation with tyranny is mediated by the fire imagery and results in a complete victory for liberty. Fire is used as an image of revolution. The work of fire here is purely destructive, clearing the old so that the new can grow. Once destruction has done its work, the forces of nature (or the mind, or both) can operate at full capacity to restore the paradise that we all ought to inhabit. The poem oscillates between the mythical and the real, perhaps, which is because of the compound effect of exile as a means of deep reflection and perception.

The poem, like many other Shelley poems, is based on personal experience. Critics who have followed this line of thought – especially Donald Reiman and Kenneth Neill Cameron – have found embedded in the poem a lot of biographical data. Unlike Weinberg, they are not just interested in the Italian issues, but in how the poem communicates and locates Shelley in this new environment far away from home. But unlike Marechera in *The Black Insider*, here Shelley is not primarily concerned to give an account of himself like Marechera obsessively does, nor is the speaker merely the poet's surrogate. He is a generalized poetic persona. Exile is represented symbolically and is given broad existential connotations. The poet, released in part from the meaningless clamour and false colours of his once limited mind, is ready to experience, in the silence and clarity of a moment of imaginative insight, a universe in which his private and social moral endeavours find their unified significance.

Through the broken mist they sail,
And the vapours cloven and gleaming
Follow down the dark steep streaming,
Till all is bright, and clear, and still,
Round the solitary hill.

(*Euganean Hills*, 85-89)

The point Shelley is making is that when one can banish bitter memories of the past, there can come upon the spirit moments of brightness, of clarity, and of calm silence. And it is within these best and happiest moments, that the poet's more-than-human powers of imagination make him the prophet and legislator of the world¹³⁹. Already, Shelley is mapping

¹³⁹ Shelley's closing line in his famous essay; 'A Defence of Poetry' written in 1821 is a summary of the poet's role in society, as an unofficial spokesperson, 'the unacknowledged legislator of the world.' This essay was written three years into Shelley's exile in Italy.

out his grand ambitions for humanity. His diagnoses of the problems of human society or the solutions he offers were always large scale. While the Euganean Hills offer him a temporary refuge and vantage point from which to view with detachment the course of Italy's 'rise and fall,' he sees that history within the context of elemental and atemporal forces:

To some calm and blooming cove,
Where for me, and those I love,
May a windless bower be built,
Far from passion, pain, and guilt.

(*Euganean Hills*, 342 – 345)

The island-paradise described in these lines is, no doubt, a figurative and symbolic one, the same island-paradise the 'voice from over the Sea' amplifies in *The Mask of Anarchy*.

Shelley seems to be suggesting here that the island of calm lies within the minds of those who live 'far from passion, pain and guilt.' Exile is not necessarily a place but rather a condition of the mind and soul. If such a state of soul can be achieved, the Spirits of the Air, those atmospheric limitations of mortality that interpose themselves between the human and the divine, will undoubtedly bring about encounters between this ideal human society and the outside world where the penalties of Necessity continue to be exacted. Perhaps, suggests the poet, the calm and kindness with which we encounter the multitude will affect them more than their passion will affect us; perhaps we can, through the exercise of love and reason, bring about a regeneration of other individuals; perhaps, under the mild influence of

...the love which heals all strife
Circling, like the breath of life,
All things in that sweet abode
With its own mild brotherhood:

They, not it, would change; and soon
Every sprite beneath the moon
Would repent its envy vain,
And the earth grow young again.

(*Euganean Hills*, 366-373)

The ending of this poem is almost formulaic and anticipates a utopian retirement. In the last stanza there is a utopian image of retreat and exemplary action, 'a windless bower' (Line 344) the poet hopes to build for himself and those he loves 'far from passion, pain and guilt (Line 345).' Shelley presents exile as a 'healing paradise' (Line 355), a utopian outpost, and a platform for transformation and creativity. However, the poem is symptomatic of a problem, a problem that Scrivener (1982: 152) attributes to the 'aristocratic structure' of the poem. There was always an air of importance about Shelley. Social renewal is tied to the poet's fate. Shelley's exile is by no means forced, it may be necessary for medical reasons but he also saw it as an opportunity to retreat and relocate to a safer (and neutral) territory where nature and spirit can constitute an oppositional force. The closing lines of this poem embody in a great measure a perfect anarchist society that Shelley envisages as a 'mild brotherhood' of equality. These are lines fused with a lot of optimism for the regeneration of humanity.

Epistolary Anarchy and Shelley's letters

*Il buon tempo verra*¹⁴⁰

Percy Shelley

¹⁴⁰ In a letter from Pisa dated 10 March 1820, Shelley writes that 'I have a motto on a ring in Italian – 'Il buon tempo verra.' – There is a tide both in public & in private affairs, which awaits both men & society' (Jones II 1964: 177). Here, Shelley alludes to Brutus in *Julius Caesar* Act IV. Scene iii. Line 216.

Among Shelley's Italian writings is a large volume of letters that have since been published.¹⁴¹ The most detailed of the letters were addressed to Thomas Love Peacock and Leigh Hunt. In those letters, Shelley gives the most beautiful descriptions of his wanderings in Italy, of the people and the place. But what is particularly significant about this stash of letters is that they provide a psychological and physical map of Shelley's exilic experience. He refuses to be fixed to a place and this constant movement from place to place becomes an eternal search for freedom.

The representation of travel writing as a sub-literary genre, in the form of epistolary accounts, is significant if Shelley's exile is to be fully comprehended. The letters contain the most personal and intimate writing by Shelley. His sincerity and good naturedness clearly come through. I would also argue that for Shelley, who suffered from the 'fear of missing out' or FOMO in contemporary parlance, his letters were a means to stay relevant. Shelley understood historical and cultural periods as products of a shared 'spirit of the age' and he was particularly concerned with the poet's capacity to establish an 'assimilative ratio that was simultaneously individual and collective' (Mazzeo 2007:122).

Shelley is consciously aware that in writing these letters he was developing a personal archive of his exile experiences for posterity. The letters are rich with domestic detail but also with a deeper appreciation of the Italian environment. He writes to Thomas Love Peacock:

¹⁴¹ I cite from Frederick L. Jones's 1964 authoritative 2 volumes of *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford University Press, 1964)

...but no sooner had we arrived at Italy than the loveliness of the earth & the serenity of the sky made the greatest difference in my sensations – I depend on these things for life for in the smoke of cities & the tumult of humankind & the chilling fogs & rain of own country I can be hardly be said to live.

(Thomas Love Peacock, Milan, 6 April, 1818 in *Letters II* 1964:3)

This is one of the early letters Shelley writes from Italy, where he relocated to mostly for medical reasons and to escape his spiralling debts and scandals. During Shelley's time, there were good reasons for Englishmen to go and live abroad, especially in a place like Italy.

There was the cheapness of living, the sunshine, and the classical Italian culture. Avoidance of creditors was also one of the chief reasons. Shelley's spending habits, marked by great generosity to friends, was to get him into serious financial trouble. It certainly seems that he had a substantial and regular income, which made it possible for him to move abroad, far from the English madding crowds. For Shelley, exile is a choice of luxury. Not only had he the means to live abroad but exile also became a convenient distancing from his numerous public controversies.

The way he describes Italy in his letters to Thomas Love Peacock (one of the examples is quoted above) is more like a holiday of pleasure and bliss. He is delighted that Italy permits him 'health, competence & tranquility' all of which 'England takes away' (*Letters II* 1964:94). Other than health, exile also gives Shelley the necessary critical distancing from the day-to-day struggles in England, this distance gives him a broad scope for insight into the troubles within his home country. For anarchism to thrive it depends on the power of insight and exile perfectly gifts Shelley with the necessary distance and time for deep reflection.

However, it is surprising that Shelleyan critics have ignored this favourite genre that Shelley self-consciously practiced almost as a literary form. If there is anything that sustained Shelley in exile and kept him linked to England it was the letter. The lack of interest in the Romantic letter could be due to the fact that the letter has been for a long time a submerged genre, and even more so in these times. The personal computer, the mobile phone and the Internet have almost become the primary means of communication almost to the point of obliterating the letter. And yet it is through his mail correspondence to his friends and publishers that Shelley elaborates his ideas and beliefs. Most of the letters are detailed plans of the poetry Shelley was writing or the books he was reading, or the people he met and sometimes we are made aware of the inspiration or provocation behind the writing of the poetry.

In a letter to Love-Peacock from Livorno in August 1819, Shelley describes a typical day in his life. The letter certainly demonstrates the poet's writing process and how it is seamlessly a part of his everyday routine. This was a poet committed to his craft and even the reading partnership with Mary, his wife, is hinted on:

I awaken usually at 7. read half an hour, then get up, breakfast. After breakfast ascend my tower, and read or write until two. Then we dine – after dinner I read Dante with Mary, gossip a little, eat grapes and figs, sometimes walk, though seldom; and ½ past 5. pay a visit to Mrs Gisborne who reads Spanish with me until near 7. We then come for Mary & stroll about till supper time (*Letters II* 1964: 114).

Judging from this letter, Shelley was a full-time poet as there is no indication that he did another job apart from writing (and travelling). The travel was not just physical but a travelling of the mind too. Anarchism is not a static philosophy but a philosophy in motion.

Shelley's meandering through the Italian landscape becomes an anarchic experience, a refusal to be fixed or boxed in a place.

His desire to constantly change or move is a desire to grow in mind and spirit. In these local travels, Shelley comes into contact with people whom he describes as having 'less character'¹⁴² because of their inability to change and grow from the forces of habit that oppress them. Shelley could be suggesting their incurious nature, the very nature that his anarchism attempts to annihilate. Shelley also feeds himself good reads. In the letter extract quoted above he describes how he spends a great deal of his time reading and this enabled him to experience many cultures and places. This possibly explains the intensely philosophical nature of his writings as he had more time for reflection and critical engagement with issues surrounding him. Shelley could see his letters as personal archives conveying information about his travels and writings. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg from Milan in April 1818, Shelley tells him that

...my letters to Hunt and Peacock are, as it were, common property, of which, if you feel any curiosity about me which I neglect to satisfy myself, you are at liberty to avail yourself of.

(Letters II, 1964:14).

The reliance on his letters to Hunt and Peacock to capture the experience of exile was partly because he could not reproduce the same copious details for everyone as it was hard labour in those days to write long letters by hand. Hunt and Love-Peacock became the point-men between Shelley and England and Shelley and Italy. Shelley's need to connect with the place

¹⁴² See letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg from Shelley in Milan dated 30 April 1818 in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (*Letters II* 1964: 14-15).

he leaves behind and his desire to keep in tune with the goings on in England is made apparent to Love-Peacock in a letter from Milan dated April 20, 1818:

The curse of this life is that whatever is once known can never be unknown. You inhabit a spot which before you inhabit it is as indifferent to you as any other spot upon the earth & when persuaded by some necessity you think to leave it, you leave it nor, - it clings to you & with memories of things which in your experience of them gave no such promise, revenges your desertion. Time flows on, places are changed, friends who were with us, but what has been, seems yet to be, but barren & stript of life (*Letters II* 1964: 6)

No doubt the impulse behind Shelley's voluminous correspondence was his isolation in Italy and being far away from the political realities and literary culture in England. Perhaps, it is important to point out that anarchism takes into cognisance the past and the present and the letter became a conduit for Shelley's past and present to interact in a way that informed his vision for the future. His correspondents were mostly friends – publishers, editors, intellectuals, poets, etc – a circle of like-minded individuals. The literariness of his letters also has something to do with their origin – many of them – in talk about work in progress; they make up a running gloss on his work as it was evolving or commentary on other poets writings. Shelley's letters can be classified as a miscellany of personal and business writing depending on the addressees. Sometimes it was both. There is hardly any letter to family in the Jones 1964 volumes.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ See also Shirley Carter Hughson's more recent *The Best Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (2009). It also contains no letters to and or from family.

The letters are a significant addition to his work as a whole and reveal the nature and impact of the loneliness that Shelley and his family had to endure while in Italy. His longing for a literary community is reflected by the people he chose to correspond with, people who understood him. The letters are an invaluable record of the Romantic writer at work.

Sometimes, Shelley's letters were responses to personal attacks on his personality or negative criticism of his work, or both. Other times, it may not only have been his isolation but his desire to be part of (a) the prevailing English national discourse or (b) establish a new English national vocabulary.

There is a sense in which Shelley's epistolary writing foregrounds the formation of new communities in place of the old. These letters act as a nostalgic negotiation between the literary reputation formed at home and abroad. For Shelley, as with the other Romantics like Byron and Keats, intertextuality becomes a key facet of exile. Jane Stabler believes through the epistolary narrative, Shelley engages in the exilic 'imaginary conversion' (O'Neill and Howe 2013: 60). In other words, Shelley staked his interests on the literary casino table, even though he was losing all the time. It was a way of guaranteeing his place in the literary culture of his country, given the frequency and frustrating and exasperated relations he continued to have with publishers and editors of periodicals. In England, Shelley's desire was simply to remain in the intellectual network of the time, and thanks to a faithful sponsor such as Leigh Hunt who worked hard to keep Shelley's name and works in the public domain, he largely succeeded.

In a world before literary agents were official, Shelley used Hunt and Love-Peacock as agents. These were people to whom he discussed work-in-progress, printing and distribution,

reviews of his books. Shelley was a man actively involved in the entire publishing process of his works. While he could not fully participate in the traditional publishing process, Shelley found ways and means of broadcasting his ideas outside the official lines. Being cast outside the system gave him the freedom to write exactly how he chose without the need for commercial consideration or fear of censorship. There is something anarchic about a social fugitive hounded out of his country writing back to revolutionise and conscientise his people.

The letters are examples of fine travel writing as they are detailed travelogues of Shelley in Italy. The descriptions of the landscape are vivid and clearly show a poet in some kind of spiritual communion with his new environment. What is particularly striking about the Shelley letters is that they are written and posted from different Italian cities, a mapping of sorts, and in each Shelley takes stock of the surroundings and the people. His description of Venice in a letter to Love-Peacock is a fine example:

Venice is a wonderfully fine city. The approach to it over the laguna with its domes & turrets glittering in a long line over the blue waves is one of the finest architectural delusions in the world. It seems to have – and literally it has – its foundations in the sea. The silent streets are paved with water, & you hear nothing but the dashing of the oars & the occasional curses of the gondoliers. (*Letters II* 1964:42)

This is the gaze of Shelley the tourist; whose only past time is travel. His letters from Italy are an atlas of experiences of his adopted country and reflections of his old life. The letters reveal the workings of his mind, the frustrations and agony, the inspiration and creativity. The letters reveal the political, economic and social factors that inspire Shelley's often abstract verse, by refocusing the Romantic preoccupation with the everyday, posterity, and alienation through the lens of exile.

Marechera's portrait as a black artist in London

Dambudzo Marechera lived in Britain as a student and then as an 'illegal' immigrant in the late 1970s.¹⁴⁴ He sought and found in the London Paul Gilroy has chronicled in *There Aint No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987), the political, musical, literary expressive culture of the black Atlantic diaspora, a wider horizon than the collectivity of nationalism or ethnic absolutism that was prevailing in Zimbabwe. Marechera was down and out in London and had no fixed abode – he put up with friends and lived as a squatter in the margins of the English society. London had a different set of problems. In *Portrait of a Black Artist in London*,¹⁴⁵ Marechera writes about his experiences of surviving in a racially hostile London. This work was obviously influenced by James Joyce's semi-autobiographical novel, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)¹⁴⁶, which traces the intellectual and philosophical awakening of young Stephen Dedalus as he begins to question and rebel against the Catholic and Irish conventions with which he has been raised. He finally leaves for abroad to pursue his ambitions as an artist. Marechera is the young black artist in London.

¹⁴⁴ See, Flora Veit-Wild's *Source Book* (2004)

¹⁴⁵ This work remains unpublished in its entirety. The full version is supposedly deposited at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. However, in this instance, I am relying on the version of this choreodrama included in the *Source Book*, pp. 250 - 268

¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, at the James Joyce Conference held from 13-14 June 2011 at the Institute of English Studies, Senate House, London there was a special panel dedicated to Marechera who is often seen as Africa's response to James Joyce. Marechera himself in his essay 'The African Writer's Experience of European Literature' says that when he started writing, James Joyce 'was the skeleton in my cupboard' (in Veit-Wild & Schade 1988: 10).

Marechera's life in England was more than unstable. He had made a decision to be a full-time writer and expected to be sustained by this profession. But he also created his own myth of the writer-tramp, the outcast and rebel, the *enfant terrible*. Marechera's mistrust of the establishment and high valuation of individual freedom made him resist absorption into London's literary society. In fact, Marechera's thematization of the marginalised black artist is an almost obsessive concern of his. This fixation with the functionality of the writer in an alien society and culture was significant in that the very conditions of alienation and social marginalisation were in themselves conducive to creativity and self-reflection. Even the protagonists of his stories are outsiders and marginalised figures who have this introspective power to engage with the complex reality that surrounds them. *Portrait* is a choreodrama of the black artist on the fringes of the London community but he is a specific black artist, an African black artist who suffers double marginalisation.

The London setting shifts with every movement the character makes; it is a monologue of some kind, poetry in motion of a self-aware artist in a paradoxical world. This is how a revelatory poetic vision of reality presented itself to Marechera, living as he in fact did, as an illegal immigrant on the streets of London, experiencing British State-orchestrated racism in the late 1970s. No solution for his desperation was in sight when he wrote *Portrait of the Black Artist in London*:

Everywhere the argument reels from mouth to mouth
Everywhere the headache bounces from head to head
My body is the map on the wall seas rivers mountains islands
My body is the B52's bombing strategy the dead reckoning

From the deep of the sea the highest of granite peaks
And the air in between are the split infinitives of my speech.

(Source Book, 268)

Here, we find the limits of socially orchestrated knowledge and reason in the negatively (non-positivistic) rendered space, a space which the psyche occupies between formal, linguistic markers which denote accepted reason. It is through this “eye” that black immigrants locked within the confines of a foreign and historically imperialist nation see their destiny as destruction.

During his time as a tramp in London, Marechera went through stages of serious depression. He sometimes told the story of how he contemplated to drown himself in the Thames after his expulsion from Oxford (maybe out of humiliation and frustration) but each time was held back by the dirty water. He alludes to this episode in *Portrait* when he talks about ‘ripple softly, dirty Thames, reflects softly the suicide’s rain.../Ripple, O ripple softly, dirty Thames...’ (*Source Book, 268*). Though Shelley’s death was not suicide, had Marechera drowned, they could have both died of drowning. However, the psychological pressure must have been unbearable, especially, for one who was surviving through the cracks of the justice system, who could have been busted at any time and deported back to troubled Rhodesia where family disappointment would have weighed him down.

Portrait is a lyrical piece which is almost song-like in composition with recurrent themes and phrases which are as Flora Veit-Wild (2004:239) puts it, ‘reminiscent of the agitated rhythms of Harlem jazz poetry.’ Perhaps there is allusion to the influence of the Beat writers in the choreodrama’s rhapsodic stylistics too. In its angry tone and provocative language Marechera

unleashed his rage about the rising racism in England at the time. He uses the image of rape, of violent sexual intrusion, as an overall metaphor for racist aggression. He blends personal reminiscences about a girl in Wales with his attacks upon British politics, especially the ‘sus’ laws which gave the police the power to arrest anyone suspected of committing an offence, a power which was often misused against black unemployed youths; the right wing National Front election campaign which used the image of the black mugger to incite the masses and the general hostility towards illegal immigrants.

Did Marechera read *The Mask of Anarchy*, a poem I will analyse more fully in the next chapter? There are no references to the poem in any of his writings but the style of his London choreodrama is very much like that of Shelley’s political poem, also written from exile in Italy.

Marechera’s <i>Portrait of A Black Artist in London</i>	Shelley’s <i>The Mask of Anarchy</i>
<p>Who’s that at the end of the bar Look’s like Martin Webster breathing tar Hey mister don’t you like the way I look We’re all not born in the white white book It burst at the seams, somehow I got through There’s tar on your nose I’ll smash it for you</p> <p>...</p> <p>Somewhat, Mister Barman, I got through Yeah, its we niggers isn’t it We got to get through somehow in spite of Whitelaw In spite of Webster. In spite of Maggie.</p>	<p>I met Murder on the way – He had a mask like Castlereagh Very smooth he looked, yet grim Seven bloodhounds followed him: Next came Fraud, and he had on, Like Eldon, an ermined gown; His big tears, for he wept well, Turned to mill-stones as they fell.</p> <p>And the little children, who Round his feet played to and fro,</p>

<p>I said in spite of William Whitelaw</p> <p>...</p> <p>Immigrants in the soup are said to taste of curry Are whipped by the cook McNee in a hurry The scars on my bottom I got sitting down hard at Liberal Party meetings</p> <p>....</p> <p>Howe has his budget Whitelaw has his repatriations Thatcher has her freedom of enterprise Missles from New York are sited on my front door My backyard is full of nuclear waste Japanese made WHAT AM I The black bull's eye for all their white targets What am I The black arsehole for all their John Bull plans</p>	<p>Thinking every tear a gem, Had their brains knocked out by them.</p> <p>Clothed with the Bible, as with light, And the shadows of the night, Like Sidmouth, next Hypocrisy On a crocodile rode by.</p> <p>And many more Destructions played In this ghastly masquerade, All disguised, even to the eyes, Like Bishops, lawyers, peers or spies.</p> <p>Last came Anarchy: he rode On a white horse, splashed with blood; On his brow this mark I saw - 'I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!'</p>
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There is something chilling about these two accounts, with a history of over 150 years between them. Both writings were set in English cities, the first in Manchester, the second in London. Shelley's words resonate today. As I stood outside the the Radisson Hotel, formerly the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, a modern luxurious palazzo-style building with a plaque dedicated to Peterloo I was too eager to find echoes of that radical history in Marechera.



Plaques of the Peterloo site in Manchester © Tinashe Mushakavanhu

Indeed, it seems Shelley's masquerade did not end with his exposure of Castlereagh, Eldon, Sidmouth but the political actors have changed masks into Thatcher, Whitelaw, Webster, Howe as Marechera reveals and the nature of the problems have changed too. The similarities in the poems are strikingly remarkable – both are dealing with topical and very shattering issues (the Peterloo massacres and the Brixton race riots); in fact, the problems that Shelley was dealing with are no longer just local but, as Marechera highlights, global. Perhaps, the irony of it all is a home secretary with the most apt name – David Whitelaw, who was responsible for the heavy-handed policing of ethnic minorities and immigrants (notably the application of the sus laws). Marechera poses a question:

Is his name White

And Law?

(Source Book, 251)

Whitelaw's tenure coincided with the most serious riots in London of the twentieth century that took place mainly in Brixton in 1981. The riots resulted in several deaths and damage to property and buildings. In fact, Marechera recalls an incident when he was stopped under the sus laws by a policeman in St James Park who demanded to search his rucksack:

I first told him what was in it. then he searched throwing my things on the ground and the increasing flow of tourists and sightseers gave us a wide berth... Next he searched me, feeling up from my ankles up to my crotch and then around my hips up to the armpits. He was not satisfied. There was the question of identification. He looked at my dirty grey hair on my dirty black head.'

(*Black Insider*, 58-59)

What stopped Marechera from being further harassed by the policeman was when he mentioned that he was a writer and showed letters from Heinemann and a contract for his new book (*House of Hunger*). The policeman smiled and said to him, 'keep out of trouble,' a remark that doesn't appear to be genuine but sarcastic. In fact, it is a crude and patronising statement uttered through a rehearsed smile and an intense look that says 'we're watching you, you are lucky this time around. In the *Portrait*, Marechera summarises his feelings, 'I was in-built with pain and/shame and no definitions' (*Source Book*, 259). In the background of all this racism was the 1968 speech¹⁴⁷ by Enoch Powell whose chilling echoes still

¹⁴⁷ *The Rivers of Blood* speech was a speech criticizing rising immigration, as well as proposed anti-discrimination legislation in the United Kingdom made on 20 April 1968 by Enoch Powell, a Tory MP. According to most media and historical accounts, the popularity of Powell's perspective on race may have played a decisive contributory factor in the Conservatives' surprise victory in the 1970 general election. Here is a film documentary on Youtube about Enoch Powell that puts into perspective his controversial views - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc26aTCwyYM> <Accessed 10 January 2016>

reverberated in Britain and Marechera could see ‘rivers of blood begin at Heathrow’s detention centres’ (*Source Book*, 262).

In the ending of *Portrait of a Black Artist in London*, Marechera rereads the sublime meanderings of Edmund Spenser’s *Prothalamion* (1596) in a more sinister but more accurate political light. Spenser’s decorous language acclaims the purity of the Thames, a life force of British imperialism in relation to two swans:

So purely white they were
That even the gentle stream, the which them bare,
Seem’d foul to them, and bade his billows spare
To wet their silken feathers, lest they might
Soil their fair plumes with water not so fair,
And mar their beauties bright
That shone as Heaven’s light
Against their bridal day, which was not long:
Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song¹⁴⁸

However, the genteel image of yore is contorted by Marechera to produce a terrifying depiction of the status of the black migrant subject, dwelling in the Britain of the late 70s. Marechera’s reading of British society is of one that, at a state level, arrogantly refuses to nurture those to whom it coldly denies citizenship. Spenser is thus demonically rewritten in Marechera’s long poem in the following way as a curse:

¹⁴⁸ See, Alphonso Gerald Newcomer, Alice Ebba Andrews *Twelve centuries of English poetry and prose* (1910)

One hundred years of solitude¹⁴⁹ are contained in this single drop
I drink it explode view the falling star's glittering minute
Bread milled from stone's reason's yet cannot conjure Windscale
I know what I want which is not my desire but the hidden persuader's
Rippling softly, dirty Thames, reflecting softly my suicide's rain
In Malet Street I drink the bitter juice Socrates' hemlock
Crimson drop after crimson drop colours with coriander London's demise
Do not ask "Where do you come from" but "Where are you going"

(*Source Book*, 268)

This is because the political entity of the British state reveals itself on the level of the intuitive insight as being genocidal. The colonial subject meets the true nature of his bloodsucking host – the “spirit” whom he seeks to turn the tables on. He knows the identity of this host due to the debilitated condition of his body, through being on the run as a black artist: ‘I look in the mirror squarely at the aging horror.’ (*Source Book*, 265)

London's denial of responsibility for the outcomes of exclusionist policies is finally hammered home in the last stanza of *Portrait of the Black Artist in London*:

Ripple softly, dirty Thames, reflect softly our suicide's rain
Clouds of fire loose my millions of blood onto the ebbing tide
I can use the fable when Pilate and Falstaff mingle their brains
In the sink
Ripple, O ripple softly, dirty Thames (*Source Book*, 268)

¹⁴⁹ An allusion to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967)

Falstaff here is Marechera, who points out the hidden pathology underlying the genteel British self-image. In fact, for Marechera, exile was never a welcoming experience as it was for Shelley – the weather was terrible and the attitudes of the people were stinking racist. It was a site of struggles, not of contemplation and reflection.

The Black Insider

Marechera's first book, *The House of Hunger* (1978), opens with self-exile: 'I got my things and left.' He did. He left to make something unlike any other African literature. His perverse oeuvre has militated against systematic engagement. As the years of exile multiplied, political necessity was transformed into an aesthetic choice. The non-return to Zimbabwe is Marechera's main literary device in *The Black Insider*. For Marechera nostalgia manifests itself only through a cryptic disguise that lies at the core of the enigma of authorship and determines his narrative strategies.

Marechera refutes the idea of dual citizenship of this world or another – but decides to be a wanderer in time and spirit. He knows all too well that the object in the mirror is closer than it appears and if he gets closer he will merge with his reflection. Marechera transforms the irreparable loss of exile into his life work. Marechera was forced out of Zimbabwe after expulsion from the University of Rhodesia for political reasons. Legend has it that he staged a one-man demonstration protesting against the unjust white controlled system (*Source Book*, 111). As such, he did not choose exile, but exile pulled him away, only to victimise him. Marechera is "okay" with his nomadic existence because in order to survive he has to keep on moving and attaches little or no weight to responsibilities. He disregards all social structures and the "normal" way of living. He simply lives a day at a time:

I found it congenial to my nature to live an insecure wandering life and this was fortunate because I had no money and this lack of funds meant that I would have no friends worth domineering, no wife worth lording it over, no house worth imprisoning myself in, and lastly no false sense of self-respect to think myself other than what I was ... (*Black Insider*, 29).

Whenever Marechera feels homesick, he also remembers how sick of home he is. It is as if when he looks back, he doesn't see home but hunger and diseases. Home becomes an empty space, a moving target he must move around and catch-up with. His scripted return to Zimbabwe in 1982 is like a second exile for him.¹⁵⁰ When he fled the country it was Rhodesia, and when he returns Rhodesia is gone, and in its place, is a new country, Zimbabwe. *Mindblast* (1984) is a literary diary of being home and yet not being home. He certainly does not belong. In the 'Journal' section of the book, Marechera describes how he is treated as an outcast by his own people – family, friends, and colleagues – even the people he grew up and went to school with. He was the familiar stranger:

Now and then I would meet someone who would give me a floor and I would sleep easy in a snug sleeping bag. Come morning, with her six o'clock alarm rasping my dream apart, I would find the hazards of the streets terrifying waiting for me with open arms. But first: food. That must always come first. I trudged into a Greek owned grocery store, bought myself a pack of sour milk and three buns and headed for Cecil Square to sit, eat and type this story. (*Mindblast*, 120)

¹⁵⁰Marechera only returned to Zimbabwe as part of a film documentary about 'House of Hunger' that was being produced by Channel Four. But once he arrived in Harare, he had a major fall-out with the director, Chris Austen, whom he accused of being a security operative being employed to set a honey-trap to ensnare him into the clutches of the Zimbabwe government. In the end a hired actor had to play the role of Marechera.

In fact, the only home Marechera had was his typewriter. He carried this 'portable home' like a snail carries its shell; it is this home that he guards like a patriotic vigilante. The only thing, which Marechera seemed to have owned, which he incessantly declares ownership of, is his typewriter. It is in there that he lived, that he could become whoever he wanted at any given point in time. He says, 'I describe and live my descriptions... I am what I am not because I am an African or whatever but because it is the basic nature of a maker of descriptions, a writer' (*Mindblast*, 123). And so, the typewriter was a protean metaphor for Marechera's yearning to communicate. When he is thrown out of his lodgings in a Cardiff flat for violence against the flat owner, he doesn't mind his luggage being 'thrown into the nearest dustbin', because all he wanted he could carry, and that was his 'typewriter and books.' (*Black Insider*, 57).

But, the object of Marechera's nostalgia is difficult to fix. Like his fiction, it is not site-specific. At first, one might think it is the 'house of hunger,' the Rhodesia of his past and yet his later fiction is almost devoid of Zimbabwean references and appeal to a shared aesthetic imagination with Western literatures he was devouring at the time. I would argue that his writings are fragmentary so that he can cheat on history as it is conceived by the west. He rewrites his story, his people's story. He cheats on literature as well while yet believing in its magical powers to provoke and to challenge. He is clearly nostalgic for all those idealistic, absurd, amateurish, imaginative projects of alternative modernity and the virtual realities of ordinary imagination. His work is about the selectivity of memory. His fragmentary writings become a cautious reminder of gaps, compromises and black holes in the creation of any utopian and nostalgic edifice, the independent nation state. His lack of faith was a real fear of

failure, a way of proving our eschatological stories are never total and complete. Ambiguous nostalgic longing is linked to the individual experience of history.

Marechera's popularity in the European academy is due to his creation of a purely Zimbabwean exotica for foreigners, and his response to that was the hurling of cups and plates at the Guardian Fiction Prize ceremony attendees. For in celebrating his work, he saw them instead celebrating the killing and dehumanisation of his people in Zimbabwe (*Source Book*, 188). For Marechera the story had precisely the opposite effect from the one he intended – his invitation to the reader was to go beyond the descriptions, to quarry deep the real issues that were affecting the black people in Rhodesia. Marechera was openly addressing the Empire but the Empire chose to deflect the tough questions Marechera was posing by celebrating his madness. The Marechera of the popular imagination is almost a Frankenstein monster created and empowered by Heinemann. Reader reports and accounts from James Currey,¹⁵¹ his main editor at the time, show a deliberate attempt to rein him in, to force him to write the 'authentic Zimbabwean novel.' They were a lot more generous with monetary incentives to motivate Marechera to write the book they were after but as cunning as he was, he saw through it all, and decided instead to abuse the system. When it was clear that Marechera was not going to compromise, they stopped the advances and banned him from the Heinemann offices. Marechera explains:

¹⁵¹ See, James Currey, *Africa Writes Back* (James Currey, 2008) pp. 279 - 295

Since reading is an industry in its own right, somebody somewhere is getting the profits. Publishers, critics, lecturers, second-hand booksellers and shoplifters. It's a complete study of how parasites and their hosts exist. At the same time there are all the rest of them breathing down the writer's neck telling him he must write in a certain way and not in another way; and there are those who think that because they have read what has been written have got a perfect right to say just about anything to the writer and he is supposed to take it calmly. Every man is a walking collection of aphorisms. The thing about a story lurking around every corner, and a novel resting uneasily inside every human skull. Nonsense. (*Black Insider*, 91).

In refusing to be labelled or tokenised, Marechera is reacting to the culture in which he was living and writing from, a culture that always insists on labelling anything and everything, and that is the very attitude that he is making a statement against. He is not simply 'the insider' in Britain but 'the black insider' in Britain because he chooses to be. He is against the way the West always projects its own ideologies and philosophies on others, 'like colonialism, that great principle which put anyone who was not white in the wrong. Create education and immediately you put others into a false position of inferiority' (*The Black Insider*, 79). In postcolonial African literature, however, which can be seen both as a product of and a reflection upon the Western model of education, the encounter with the educational system is frequently viewed as a most ambiguous experience and this ambivalence is usually associated with the antagonism between coloniser and colonized. It is viewed in black and white terms of tradition versus modernity or alienation vs assimilation. Exile here has a double face, that of physical ex-patriation from the homeland in the first instance, and secondly the deracination produced by returning to a homeland undergoing decolonization.

Marechera articulated through his later writings, what I would call the exile-within, a kind of exile imposed upon him by the Zimbabwean authorities who in turn institutionalised his

condemnation to live in a no-man's land because of his vocal opposition to the status quo. This situation appears more tragic because it is clear Marechera desperately needed to belong to a congenial group but none could accept him for fear of security scrutiny. In his mind, exile and insanity resulted entirely from institutional pressures of the government and its various security apparatuses. Most of his works, often are autobiographical, and bear the stamp of a tortured mind attempting in vain to uncover the causes of exile and insanity. He says, 'I always tried to reduce everything into a sort of autobiographical record. As though I needed to stamp myself with the evidence of my own existence: as if every single thing I did and said was pregnant with significance' (*Black Inside*, 80).

By using narrators who are themselves entangled participants in the larger global politics which dimly perceive through their memories, Marechera anticipates the postcolonial situation of profound cultural and historical disjuncture. Marechera's vision of the struggles of his protagonists and alter-egos to find themselves in relation to both past and present involves a level of alienation, violence and despair. Marechera is aware that identity is a construct – he insists through titling his book, *The Black Insider* that he belongs but only according to his own terms. Before leaving Zimbabwe for the first time he was widely known as Charles William Tambudzai Marechera, but after his expulsion from Oxford he adopts Dambudzo – meaning trouble – which seems to be a warning of his disagreeable nature. And this is revealing of Marechera's honesty too. He raises problems: problems of agency and politics highlighted by his account of the process of his own temporary subjectification to the politics of exclusion.

In the case of *The Black Insider*, it is precisely nostalgia as a means for creating, at least provisionally, a sense of identity that the postcolonial critique of the present retains some purchase. It is a common experience for the reader of Marechera to have this sense of a writer whose insights, whose questionable identifications, go beyond his opinions, themselves expressions of an everyday cynicism in order to challenge and resist any questioning of his background. His despair is brutally painful especially when so many feelings were being subtracted out of his world and this was all due to 'the tearing cloth of exile, and of the sense of being in a world in which one yearned to leap out of one's mind' (*Black Insider*, 61).

The different characters in *The Black Insider* become ideas, constituents of Marechera's psyche that he yearns to make whole, but cannot. The characters could also be indicating a form of psychic exile, a fracturing of identities and personalities that displacement creates. It is an impossible task. As a writer, he is subconsciously aware of his nostalgia for wholeness. In fact, *The Black Insider* signals a commitment to an identity, which, paradoxically, will be represented not as the stable and autonomous subject of conventional autobiography and memoir, but as shifting and dependent upon the subject itself in the present. He tries to give meaning to the remembered self (or selves) of the past which he already represents in *The House of Hunger*. However, *The House of Hunger*, is very personal as it remains largely nostalgic, but in a complex and self-aware sense. He wrote the book out of the feeling that he had lost everything but Marechera also realizes both the negative and idealizing dangers of nostalgic reminiscences on the one hand and on the other hand the limitations of all such harking back.

Marechera uses memory to reconnect with aspects of Zimbabwean history such as his childhood and youth in Rhodesia and explores the mental degradation of the human being in township life under colonialism, a country from which its natural citizens have felt cut off, disconnected, or alienated by their colonial past. There is in Marechera, an inner exile of lived experience (*The House of Hunger*), as well as the more obvious exile of the migrant (*The Black Insider*). Nostalgia is a source for a vision that both acknowledges and attempts to transcend the pain and sufferings of the past. Marechera struggles to find a way of adequately representing personal and historic pasts in *The House of Hunger*, resulting in a complex nostalgia for the future. The emotional impulse behind that book is a nostalgia, a hunger, a reaching out for something lost and hard to define but instantly recognizable.

Reconfiguring Africa

Nostalgia means reaching out to the past, re-tracing the past. Dennis Walder (2011:73) says ‘to remember Africa is not to remember it; it is to remember ‘Africa’, that is, a construct of the remembering self.’ Marechera talks about this in *The Black Insider*, where the African image falls prey to his iconoclastic campaign;

When I was sixteen, seventeen I started writing bits and pieces of the prose-poem kind about such imaginary things as Mother Africa, Black Woman, and the kind of intensely romanticised Africa which could only exist in a pride-starved adolescent. The black is beautiful kind of thing. Like Langston Hughes, Leroi Jones, Senghor, and the negritude school (*Black Inside*, 80).

Marechera quickly outgrows this antiquated approach as it turned out that the African image, which he was constructing in his writings, was false and limiting as it was divorced from the

hard physical facts of day-to-day life. Marechera points out that ‘Ayi Kwei Armah in his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* not only stripped the African image of its clothes but also forced it to undergo a baptism of shit’ (*Black Insider*, 82). This was a pertinent observation in that Ayi Kwei Armah’s book published in 1968 is one of the first post-colonial texts to be written that was critical of the independence projects that were taking shape across Africa. The novel expresses the frustration many citizens of the newly independent states in Africa felt after attaining political independence. Many African states like Ghana, where this novel was primarily set, followed similar paths in which corruption and the greed of African elites became rampant. Corruption in turn filtered down to the rest of society. Marechera’s *The House of Hunger*, which was published exactly a decade later in 1978, was a mere continuation and elaboration of Ayi Kwei Armah’s themes. While, Marechera and Armah, could be classified as wake up writers in the sense of their desire to shock their readers.

Chinweizu et al treats these issues in their book, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* (1983). In fact, the debate over the decolonization of African literature revolves around two issues: the language to be used in the writing of such literature and the critical criteria to be applied while appraising it. Chinweizu et al believe that genuine decolonization can only be made possible through the use of Afrocentric rather than Eurocentric approach in the study of African literary work. Obviously, this is a simplistic but necessary intervention. Demanding for theoretical paradigms that are most directly relevant to the real conditions of African life is a legitimate right.

Marechera’s reaction at the awards ceremony of the Guardian Fiction Prize is significant as it enacts his opposition to the commodification of the African story and the African writer.

While fellow writers such as Angela Carter and Doris Lessing were praising Marechera as the new star of African writing, the prize-winner used the occasion to vociferate against the hypocrisy of the literary establishment amidst the Victorian splendour of the Theatre Royal he hurled expensive china at the crystal chandeliers and the heads of his liberal benefactors. At this specific occasion Marechera complained that an African writer was expected to write only about Africa and advocated instead for the removal of such prefixes as ‘African’ or ‘Irish’ from the substantive ‘writer.’ He spoke of himself as collecting awards in London while his people were being killed in Zimbabwe¹⁵². The irony of this comment is also the truth of it.

The House of Hunger was certainly the kind of book the London crowd in attendance expected from an African writer— it’s a gut-wrenching story, dripping with blood and poverty and violence – a book that confirms all the negative characteristics of the Africa of their imagination. Marechera could see how he was being patronised and used as a poster-boy of African literature. No wonder he had a tumultuous relationship with Heinemann publishers as recounted in James Currey’s important book, *Africa Writes Back* (2009). Currey (2009:280) says, ‘to be near (Dambudzo Marechera) was to be on red alert. The curtain was always about to go up on some new drama which totally absorbed one’s time.’ Marechera’s abuse of his relationship with the publisher was simply retaliation. He knew he was being branded as merely a product for the ‘African Writers Series (AWS) public’, which John Wyllie, an external reader for Heinemann, rightly believed Marechera was ‘far above’ (*The Black Insider*, 7). Marechera’s relationship with his publisher therefore questions and challenges

¹⁵² These comments are recorded in a report of the event, ‘Red Faces and Red Wines’ in *West Africa*, 10 December 1979, 273-274.

our perceptions and definitions of African literature and its authors and producers.

Heinemann meant well by starting the African Writers Series as they were certainly trying to encourage non-African readers to rich stories of Africa. The problem lies in the fact that African literature was being produced more as a commodity than as means for critical and intellectual engagement. The primary market for the AWS was not Africa itself, but the West desperately looking for authentic, contemporary representations of life in Joseph Conrad's heart of darkness. And it was this literature which became the staple reading diet for the African school market as James Currey outlines in his book, *Africa Writes Back*.

The tensions between these two positions, of authorship and a pre-determined readership, anchors on such issues as the very definition of African literature, the conditions and modalities of its production. However, the young generation of 'expatriate' writers from Africa have not been too eager to engage with these questions but are instead queuing to appear at international literary festivals as faces of African literature as defined by the audiences they talk to, indeed, they are merely used as ethnographic tokens. Perhaps, this is a harsh assessment but I still contend that it is largely true.

African writer. African literature. These are commercial labels to hide on obscure shelves in High Street Bookshops. As much as 'others define them' African writers also define themselves as such by the politics of their message. Africa has always been a continent of message writers. Perhaps it is a colonial legacy – they have always been the ones who write back: to a system and the ones who write to educate. This has obvious limitations – the label only serves to highlight our grandstanding of the African image and the African story.

Marechera anticipated this when he said, 'We have done such a good advertising and public relations stunt with our African image' (*Black Insider*, 84).

But, the label – African writer – also largely reflects on the consumers of 'African' or 'post-colonial' literatures. The producers and the market have already placed a value judgment on the work even before they have read the stories. Such questionable assumptions and categorizations are to be expected in a world where the production (editorial, publishing) and consumption (marketing) of 'canonized' African literature is largely in the hands of 'outside' experts. What is known globally as African literature lies outside the hands of its creators and subjects but is in the tight grip of institutions that obviously possess fixed ideas about what African literature should and should not be, and what authentic African characters can or cannot do. Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina in a short essay that has since gone viral on the blogosphere, *How to write about Africa* (2005), skewers clichéd tales about Africa, by offering sarcastic advice, if it is advice at all but which it isn't but a laugh at the ridiculousness of some of the stereotypes perpetuated:

In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ This essay was first published in *Granta Magazine*: Issue 92, 6 January 2006

He also takes exception to the all-too-common portrayal of Africans themselves as uncomplicated stock characters, while animals are often depicted as complex and multi-dimensional:

Broad brushstrokes throughout are good. Avoid having the African characters laugh, or struggle to educate their kids, or just make do in mundane circumstances. Have them illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa. African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause...

Animals, on the other hand, must be treated as well rounded, complex characters. They speak (or grunt while tossing their manes proudly) and have names, ambitions and desires. They also have family values: *see how lions teach their children?* Elephants are caring, and are good feminists or dignified patriarchs. So are gorillas. Never, ever say anything negative about an elephant or a gorilla. Elephants may attack people's property, destroy their crops, and even kill them. Always take the side of the elephant.

Wainaina's witty criticisms of writing Africa certainly ring true. In this instance, he describes how African animals are seen as iconic species representing the wildness of Africa for liberal white writers. Africa becomes a special kind of zoo, of a backward people mixed with animals and what this does is augment a 'single idea of Africa'¹⁵⁴ in the imagination of the outside world, one accompanied by paradoxical associations of savagery and nobility, natural wealth and human poverty, rhythmicity and ultraviolence, beauty and catastrophe and capture the echoes of Marechera's lament as he pleads with the rest of the world to feel something other than pity for Africa. Marechera and Wainaina both strongly believe that the continent is

¹⁵⁴ Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi, the influential Nigerian author, talks about the dangers of a single story in her much publicised TED Talk in 2009 at Oxford University. Her primary argument defines the power of story to subjugate, interrogate stereotypes held by everyone – even well-meaning, kind people – and how they limit all of us. It is at times profound, wise, humorous, and hopeful.

not just a hopeless monolith, but a place filled with real people and real possibilities. That, it seems, is a message too often ignored. It is a message that resonates strongly in Marechera and yet has never been fully acknowledged only because he questioned the status quo in all its guises whether as power politics or the “intellectual rape” of the black peoples. Marechera is aware that the stuffing has been knocked out of us.

Marechera therefore identifies the source of his fictions in terms of memories of loss, always deepening and darkening, intermittently intercepted by the urge to connect it all within some overarching vision. It is a state of mind with which anyone living at a distance can almost identify. In fact, it is possible to see Marechera connecting the past with the present in a way that creates an ironic gap between the myths of Africa as outlined by Wainaina above, and the actual realities. Walder qualifies this disparity by suggesting that:

With irony, there comes an implicit ethical demand to go beyond a reductionist, sentimental nostalgia stuck in stereotyped versions of the past, of ‘Africa’ as a reservoir for self indulgence. (Walder 2011:83)

The House of Hunger, for instance, reveals a history of universal decomposition, the sinister spiral of decay and deterioration. As T. S. Eliot’s narrator remarked in the *The Waste Land* (1922): ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins.’ For Marechera, writing is a way of stitching together the fragments that are the writer’s life. Yet, like Eliot’s, Marechera’s journeying or that of his nameless narrator who could be himself is towards establishing an inner spiritual dimension. Perhaps the irony of Marechera sitting to write *The House of*

Hunger in a two-week binge camped by the River Isis should not be ignored.¹⁵⁵ After being forced out by Oxford's rigid bureaucracy he traces its smug arrogance to his childhood and his past. The book made him the mouthpiece of 'the lost generation' of those young Zimbabwean intellectuals who had been expelled from their country by the insensitive Rhodesian government and were scattered all over the world. He sums it all up by saying:

With *House of Hunger*, my initial impulse was simply one of utter despair. Well, I felt that I had lost everything. There I was in exile, seemingly no future, no nothing. I started asking myself what had happened to my generation. A kind of lost generation feeling (*Source Book*, 176-177)

Nostalgia for the Future

What is the relationship between exile and nostalgia? How does nostalgia relate to anarchism? These are legitimate questions in that these three concepts – anarchism, exile and nostalgia – are somehow deeply implicated in the sense of who we are, what we are about, and (though possibly with much less inner clarity) whither we go. However, I would like to argue that for Shelley and Marechera nostalgia is not necessarily a longing for a lost past but a romance with their fantasies of the future. This rather unorthodox reading of nostalgia is expounded in Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) which basically argues that nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective and prospective. Particularly relevant here is Boym's idea of a nostalgia that predicates and longs for a different future, which it may fashion by investigating the past. She explains that:

¹⁵⁵ The truth of this claim is however contested in Flora Veit-Wild's *Source Book* (2004:177). Marechera himself gave two, possibly complementary, versions of where or how he wrote *The House of Hunger*. In one version, he claims to have written the book bingeing while camped by the River Isis. At other times, he said he wrote most of the book in the kitchen of friends he simply names as Peter and Sheilagh. Whatever the truth is, Marechera led a bohemian lifestyle.

Creative nostalgia reveals the fantasies of the age, and it is in those fantasies and potentialities that the future is born. One is nostalgic not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been. It is this past that one strives to realise in the future (Boym, 2001:351).

Shelley's oeuvre demonstrates this ambition of realizing the future in the past that he envisages in his poetry. He re-writes a lot of Greek myths in his attempt to organize the chaos of the present and to highlight the regenerative potential of human beings. While Shelley is implicit in achieving this ambitious mapping of the future, Marechera is not. The nostalgia that creates the mood in *The House of Hunger* is about nostalgia for home, of family, of friends, of community all of which he misses as an exile in Britain. For Marechera, the past is not a straightforward affair – it is a disintegrating canvass of experiences, 'the dull and brutish ghetto life' (Veit-Wild & Schade 1988:7).

The subtext of the narrative is a silent yearning for a wholesome community without the troubles that he highlights – the violent exploitation and disenfranchisement of black people. Perhaps, Pierre Macherey's epithet – the text says what it does not say – could explain how to read Marechera's *House of Hunger*:

...the silence of the book is not a lack to be remedied, an inadequacy to be made up for. It is not a temporary silence that could be finally abolished. We must distinguish the necessity of this silence. For example, it can be shown that it is the juxtaposition and conflict of several meanings which produces the radical otherness which shapes the work: this conflict is not resolved or absorbed, but simply *displayed*. Thus the work cannot speak of the more or less complex opposition which structures it; though it is its expression and embodiment. In its every particle, the work manifests, uncovers, what it cannot say. This silence gives it life. (in Walder 2004: 253)

It is clear therefore that Marechera's text is not sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, with gaps without which it would not exist. So, *The House of Hunger* tacitly implies a spiritual and emotional feeding regime of the black peoples in Zimbabwe who were suffering under the iron leadership of Ian Smith. Smith made his famously infamous statement¹⁵⁶: 'I don't believe in black majority rule ever in Rhodesia, not in a thousand years.' Marechera writes about the same country that Smith lays claim to, a country of his childhood but where he has no rights whatsoever except to be a perpetual subject whose mind became 'grimy rooms' with 'dusty cobwebs' in which 'the minute skeletons of one's childhood were forever in the spidery grip that stretched out to include not only the very stones upon which one walked but also the stars which glittered vaguely upon the stench of our lives' (*House of Hunger*, 14). Throughout the text Marechera alludes to a spiritual hunger for freedom, for the right to be and this yearning is the subtext of his book that also gives it an optimistic relevance.

The distance of exile makes nostalgia fragmentary; for him, memories are never wholesome. Some of the things lost will never be recovered, perhaps they can be reinvented. The quest for continuity apparent in Shelley's work, between the past and the present, although often prompted by a sense of crisis, leads to a greater sense of rupture and alienation. Hence, Shelley is a time-traveller of sorts who moves backwards in time and forwards into the future while in the present.

Marechera remembers his life in Rhodesia, in flashes, that are sometimes harrowingly disturbing:

¹⁵⁶ See Nigel Rees, *Sayings of the Century* (London: Unwin, 1984), p. 247.

In the House of Hunger diseases were the strange irruptions of a disturbed universe. Measles or mumps were the symptoms of a malign order. Even a common cold could become a casus belli between neighbours. And add to the stench of our decaying family life with its perpetual headaches of gut-rot and soul-sickness and rats gnawing the cheese and me worrying it the next morning like a child gently scratching a pleasurable sore on its index figure. How could I just get over it, for heaven's sake?

(House of Hunger, 18)

In Marechera's work there is no idealising the past because it is a series of 'strange irruptions' and 'symptoms of a malign order' (ibid). But in highlighting the atrocious past, Marechera is in fact appealing for a better future. It is only through repulsion that a sense of renewal can be attained. Dennis Brutus explains that '[in Marechera] there was a genuine desire and search for ways to communicate, to invent ways of saying and imagining that would shock others into awareness. It was his own deep caring that drove him to try to move others to the point of pain' (in preface to Veit-Wild and Chennells 1999: xi). Marechera's microscopic analyses of the Rhodesian society helps to show how the indigenous black peoples were 'eaten to the core by the syphilis of the white man's coming' (*House of Hunger*, 92).

What is apparent in these analyses of both Shelley and Marechera as exilic writers is that nostalgia is a progressive concept that does not simply idolize the past or simply lament the present but rather it is an anticipation for a different future without the faults they highlight – the corruption of the powerful, the exploitation of the poor, lack of freedom of expression. They are nostalgic for that space where humanity is in perfection or free from the bondage of tyranny, which may all seem too idealistic but at least can be imagined. Whether or not they succeed is another matter – their contribution is in making their readers curious enough to

think about themselves and the world that surrounds them. Shelley and Marechera challenge and examine their memories more closely, and even consciously seek to intellectualize their occurrence and outcome. In so doing, the two writers challenge the past as not an absolute, but as experience from which we can learn to be better people in the future. The future is not tomorrow, but now.

Shelley and Marechera are not necessarily looking for lost beauties of the past but are rather yearning for the beauty that seems to elude humanity. What is actually interesting is that their nostalgic elements are melancholic and there's nothing lovely to their past that will be fondly missed but everything that should not happen tomorrow and eternity. From an anarchist point of view, nostalgia is a yearning for a future without the tragedies and travesties of the present. Shelley, the utopian anarchist, is obvious in what he wants, a utopian world free of tyranny. Marechera does not necessarily say what he wants, but in evoking the past, he is not celebrating it, but condemning it in the hope that it will not repeat. Marechera is the nihilist anarchist is 'against everything/Against war and those against/War. Against whatever diminishes/Th' individuals blind impulse' (Veit-Wild & Schade 1988:1).

Svetlana Boym suggests ways in which nostalgia should and can be perceived. I do agree with Boym that nostalgia is a yearning for 'another time, a better life' (2001: xiv). Nostalgia is a rebellion against the idea of time, the time of history. One of the characteristics of Shelley's poetry is his use of allegory and myth. By asserting the universality of the mythic content, he is saying people, always and everywhere, are basically alike. This, indeed, is part of the rationale for employing a body of myth drawn from one epoch and culture to interpret

another. Perhaps, it is a means for Shelley to appeal to a common humanity, and not a specific grouping.

Marechera in his eccentric ways also sees himself as a universal writer who is not limited by time or history – he is free to splinter time, to border-jump the limits of history and imagination. In an essay, Marechera says:

I think I am the doppelganger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met. And in this sense I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you. In other words, the direct international experience of every single entity is, for me, the inspiration to write. But at the same time, I am aware of my vulnerability – that I am only me – and of my mortality; and that's why it seems to me always a waste of time to waste anybody's life in regulations, in ordering them...(Veit-Wild & Schade 1988:3)

So perhaps, exile, that physical and spiritual distancing, that detachment, that gap is necessary in order for the individual to step out of his environment, and I would suggest some of exile and nostalgic reflections are necessary to comprehend the philosophy of anarchism. Boym (2001: xiii) says nostalgia 'is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship.' What this means is that while nostalgia is retrospective, it is also prospective.

Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future. Nostalgia becomes a memory bank for philosophical anarchism in that it is about the relationship between 'individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory' (Boym 2001: xvi). This view perfectly suits the

ambition of anarchism as a universal model of human philosophy and morality in its utilization of nostalgic memory in formulating the future.

A return and no return

One of the most intriguing aspects of Dambudzo Marechera's exile is the repeated postponement of his return to the country that haunts his memory. Memories of his country constitute a source of emotional succour for the writer during his exile years. When he returns, the country Marechera left has disappeared and is replaced by another. Marechera would not have returned to Zimbabwe had it not been for Channel Four who talked him into producing a documentary based on his first book, *The House of Hunger*. On his return he is received by no-one but a fellow writer and friend, Wilson Katiyo.¹⁵⁷ He is disillusioned from the very beginning, questioning the government's legitimacy and its authoritarian stance on literature, especially when he discovers that his second book, *Black Sunlight* (1980), is banned. He says, 'I just arrived for God's sake and the first news I receive is that my book *Black Sunlight* is banned for being obscene.'¹⁵⁸ He is livid and decides he needs to return back to England but is disallowed for failing to have the adequate documentation.

After his exile, Marechera had avoided the trap of excessive sentimentality and euphoria towards his homeland. He remained highly skeptical of the whole independence project.¹⁵⁹ He sees it as a neo-colonial construct which is intentionally misused for political ends and

¹⁵⁷ Marechera's return to Zimbabwe is captured in Channel Four film, Chris Austen's *The House of Hunger* (1986) before he falls out with the film crew, a day after arrival.

¹⁵⁸ See Chris Austin's film *The House of Hunger* [1982]. He says this statement to Musaemura Zimunya and Wilson Katiyo.

¹⁵⁹ Zimbabwe attained independence from Britain on 18 April 1980.

fronted by blacks conniving with the white establishment. On the drive from the airport, captured on film in the docudrama, *The House of Hunger*, he tells Katiyo that the ‘Zimbabwe I have seen so far is not the Zimbabwe I wanted to get back to.’ The panoramic drive from the Harare International Airport to the city centre is enough for Marechera to notice that things have not completely changed even though the political set up has supposedly changed. The film shots show people hawking wares on the roadside for their dignity and survival, and the old buildings in a new Zimbabwe shock Marechera and he gives this monologue while looking out of the moving car:

It’s all strange to me. I am sorry; I am looking at all this as a bloody tourist. I can feel it inside myself I am looking at it as a bloody tourist not as part of my people. No, I can’t stay here. I can see it myself. I don’t belong here anymore. (Chris Austin’s film, *The House of Hunger*)

In a sense, writers like Marechera carry their own exile with them – in fact, their isolation and oppositionality define them. There is seldom a comfortable niche for writers who are prepared to express their views in an uncompromising manner and who are ready to court opprobrium in defence of causes they strongly feel to be right. The personal price can be a death sentence leading to a social death – and exile is part of this process. Adversity can release bursts of creativity in such individuals. Exile for such writers is a condition of life. Marechera’s concept of exile evolves from its emergence in the sense of estrangement and alienation that mark the characters in *The House of Hunger* (1978), through its development as a psychological state in *Black Sunlight* (1980) and *The Black Insider* (1992), to his ostracisation as a ‘mad-writer’ in *Mindblast* (1984). And ‘humankind,’ as T. S. Eliot wrote in *The Four Quartets*, ‘cannot bear much reality.’

Shelley never returned. He died disillusioned in exile. He drowned and was cremated, his ashes spread in Rome, Italy. He remains in the forever of perpetual exile. Perhaps, those who berate utopian anarchism as a wishful bliss were right.

Conclusion: Countries of the mind

I know two countries: my own, and the country of writing.

- Margaret Atwood¹⁶⁰

Both Shelley and Marechera spent their lives obsessively building and re-building their 'homes' in their writings. For Shelley, in particular, his main concern was creating order and stability through the poetic reconstruction of factual materials and philosophy. This is a concern that characterizes the writer in exile; his chief subject is his own mind and the environment that brought it into being. *Lines Written from the Euganean Hills* is a poem by a poet surveying the distance between his past and present. And exile also makes for self-awareness as *Portrait of the Black Artist in London* reveals. What also comes out clearly in these discussions is that the isolation of exile led to Shelley's and Marechera's intense political awareness – thus the acute awareness of the social and political ambience in their societies fully dominates their poetry and fiction. Their personal circumstances equipped

¹⁶⁰ A remark made by Margaret Atwood when she was in conversation with Christopher Bigsby in *Third Ear*, BBC Radio 4, 24 January, 1989.

them perfectly for their chosen themes and literary vision. As exiles, the subject of the future engaged them deeply in a personal way. In this sense, they were visionary authors, thinking ahead in anticipation liberty and individual freedom.

In spite of all that has been said against the biographical approach, in the case of Shelley and Marechera their life stories still remain key to a deeper understanding of their work. It is clear that most of what Shelley and Marechera wrote came from a desire to understand their own positions in the world. But their writings are not entirely self-absorbed. They are also polemical. The polemical dynamic of the poems is, in the first instance, implicated in Shelley's personalized stance since the bleak picture of his situation in exile itself calls into question his condition. While Marechera's work deals with the Twentieth-Century themes of fragmentation, the meaninglessness and the general absurdity of life, he remains relevant because wants to points out the cracks in the society.

Exiles do not lapse into silence. If silence is the expected outcome of exile, both Shelley and Marechera are evidence of the writer's resilience; of his refusal to embrace silence. If exile debilitates the poet's expertise, it also encourages increased resourcefulness. Shelley befriended publishers, asked friends to pass on news to him in the form of books, newspapers and letters. Marechera considered his publishers as a surrogate family, and Shelley too relies on his publishing network of friends for spiritual sustenance and news feeds about the prevailing political situation at home.

CHAPTER FOUR: WHEN NOW IS THE FUTURE

History is the present.

- Anon

Anarchism and Praxis

Is it possible to see Shelley and Marechera as one constellation with regard to projected futures and elsewhere? This is the question at the heart of this chapter. In fact, the artistic areas in which they worked and the genres they used, are very diverse. There is, nevertheless, something that ties them together: their pessimistic conception of history and their sceptical views of reality. For these writers, the relationship between history and philosophy has a direct impact on the meaning of responsibility and freedom. So, what is at stake is not only the question of the representability of the real but more crucially of the emancipation from what Shelley and Marechera perceive as oppressive systems of representation that inform our reality. As ‘outsiders’ and marginalised intellectuals they were excluded from the dominant ideological coordinates in their societies, and were therefore able to locate and criticise the prevailing social and political trends. However, there is a clear divergence in the way they create and promote counter-discourses to challenge dominant ones and both achieve different historical dimensions. At the centre of their writings is a dynamic oscillation between rage against the injustice in the world and the desperate hope for redemption. This is explicitly clear in Shelley, whereas in Marechera hope is implied and not stated. However, both were philosophical writers in that they were sharing with ‘everyday people’ analytical tools necessary to understand their world – helping them think lucidly about confusing and multifaceted issues and sorting good from bad.

My classifications in this chapter are not as straightforward as they seem, they criss-cross. Shelley has generally been described as a utopian poet, mostly because of the youthful energy and idealism in his writings. On the other hand, Marechera has been notoriously labelled as the ‘anti-African’ writer for the pessimism that clouds his life and writings. He was a self-destructive person with nihilistic tendencies. The focus of this chapter will be on Shelley’s *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819) and Marechera’s *Mindblast* (1984).

Shelley, Utopian Anarchist

Utopian writing in its many manifestations is complex and contradictory. It is rooted in the unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups and individuals in their unique historical contexts. Produced through the fantasising powers of the imagination, utopia opposes the affirmative culture maintained by dominant ideologies. Utopia negates the contradictions in a social and political system by forging visions of what is not yet realised either in theory or practice. The specific western tradition of the literary utopia is generally agreed to have originated with Thomas More’s seminal book *Utopia* published in 1516. More wrote during a transitional period of despair and hope, of conflict and contrast, of increasing wealth and increasing poverty, of idealism and corruption. This is corroborated by Tom Moylan who concludes that ‘utopia developed as a narrative form in times of deep change, and it has continued to thrive in tumultuous moments since the sixteenth century’ (Moylan 1986:3). Of course, this view could as well legitimately explain why utopia is a rhetorical strategy employed by Shelley in his poetry. Shelley was writing at a time when England was undergoing an unpredictable social and political crisis. The utopian impulse in his writings is motivated by disillusionment and disappointment with the prevailing socio-political system. It is important to note that Shelley was also an admirer of Plato’s *The*

Republic, which according to James Bieri, he translated from the original Greek (2005:67 - 70). Plato's *Republic* remains one of the best-known early fictive utopias, which was a thought experiment, an investigation into the nature of the individual, and not a blueprint for the ideal polity. The big lesson for Shelley from Plato was that utopia is a polemic and an exploration of alternatives and *The Mask of Anarchy* demonstrates this effectively, as will be shown in this chapter.

Lucy Sargisson succinctly explains the relationship between politics and utopia. She says that, 'the relationship between politics and utopia is curious because politics often rejects utopianism and yet politics is built on utopias' (in Moylan & Baccolini 2007:25). This is a very significant observation in that revolutions are often built from discontentment with 'the now' and a desire for a better tomorrow. And not only is the future meant to be a better place but in that better future people also have to imagine different ways of being. What is of essence to Shelley is the necessity of utopia in everyday life, the need for constant imagining beyond the accepted and perceived realities. Shelley adopts utopia to challenge and galvanise for change. Utopia is by its very nature radical and revolutionary, especially as a mental process that subverts and changes our world outlooks.

Shelley's utopian anarchism is both estranged and seriously subversive in its consciousness raising and critique of prevailing problems. He effectively does this by offering radical political commentary in an accessible imaginary space. This is the underlying premise of all his 1819 popular songs. Shelley is by nature a malcontent, a social other, who is critical of all norms, values and structures. His estranged viewpoint as stressed in the first stanza of *The Mask of Anarchy* allows Shelley to subvert these norms and conventions:

As I lay asleep in Italy
There came a voice from over the Sea,
And with great power it forth led me
To walk in the visions of Poesy.
(*The Mask*, 1-5)

In these opening lines Shelley establishes his physical positioning. He is far removed from everyday England but the distance gives him special powers to envisage what his society needs in order to progress. The omnipotent role assigned by Shelley to ‘a voice from over the Sea’ is significant because it gives a mystical and almost unquestionable authority to his ‘visions.’ Vincent Geoghegan’s explanation of utopia is important here. He suggests that utopia:

... anticipates and criticises. Its alternative fundamentally interrogates the present, piercing through existing societies’ defensive mechanisms.... Its unabashed and flagrant otherness gives it a power which is lacking in other analytic devices. By playing fast and loose with time and space, logic and morality, and by thinking the unthinkable, a utopia asks the most awkward, most embarrassing questions. (Geoghegan 1987:1-2)

In *The Mask of Anarchy*, Shelley distances his persona from his own world and the world of the readers by use of an estranged character, a dreamer from another land, in another time. This ploy accentuates the contrast between the new (anticipated) and the current (ill-ridden) world. The use of a dreamer is a powerful mode for criticism and is part of the estranged-yet-embedded nature of utopia. In other words, the poem is presented as an almost sacred text with an unquestionable message. Ordinary people and ordinary events are given supernatural

qualities. The omnipotent effect makes the narrative in the poem surreal and yet so powerful and evocative. This is the sort of poem that is psychologically affecting, or at least, that appears to have been the intention of the poet from the way the text is constructed. We will never know its immediate impact because the poem was only published a decade after it was written, outside the historical context that inspired it.

For a utopian society to be represented it must be imaginatively located somewhere. Shelley turned to mythological elements as a practical attempt to show that it is possible to re-imagine what is already there. In fact, this gave Shelley the imaginary space in which to create both philosophical and literary experiments in anticipation of a free and just future. The poem is a rendition of a dreaming sleeper poet. Moylan (1986:5) explains that ‘... the very dream-making activity of the utopian imagination continually resists the limitation of human desire to the economic and bureaucratic demands of the given system.’

This dreamy but subversive element of Shelley’s ‘utopia’ is characteristic of his major works such as the allegorical *Queen Mab* (1813), which became so popular and was even adopted by Chartists and the working-class movement of the Victorian era who immediately recognised and grasped its value and the alternatives it was propagating. Another poem with a dreamy quality to it is *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), which is folkloric in style in its dramatising of the turmoil in the human mind. In fact, Shelley’s life-long pursuit was to show his people their unrealised potential. However, what is evidently clear is that the utopian elements in Shelley’s writings opposed what existed by exposing the anomalies of the political and royal franchises.

The Mask of Anarchy is presented as a poem that is not an imaginary epic of the past but an epic of discontent with the present. The utopian impulse is embedded in what Shelley is criticising. This permits him to perform the political function of critique by alluding to well known political characters and events. What utopia therefore shares with anarchism is its subversive and subtle rejection of the dominant system. In most if not all Shelleyan poetry, there is rejection of hierarchy and domination and the celebration of emancipatory ways of being as well as the very possibilities of a free society. However, Shelley is not clear how to reach this utopian threshold. He advises the people to fold their 'arms and steady eyes.../Look upon them as they slay' but closes with a clarion call for an uprising 'rise like lions.../Ye are many – they are few.' (*The Mask*, Stanza XXXVIII) This is a contradiction in terms and in deeds. The utopian manoeuvre is one of breaking radically with the present toward a transformed future, but in this instance, Shelley opts instead for speculating on the next steps of a viable collective opposition. The ambiguity of the ending of the poem could be a result of Shelley's detachment from everyday England rendering him cautious as which remedy to prescribe.

And for all his radicalism and robust campaign for change, Shelley's writing is full of contradictions and ambiguities. Sometimes his personality impedes his poetic sensibilities. In Shelley's utopian world there are almost always, it seems, authoritarian figures and this certainly results from the authoritarian conception against which his ideas were built. These heroic figures could be versions of himself or versions of how he would reconstitute the world if he could. The observation by Marie Louise Berneri is rightly significant here:

The contradictions inherent in most utopias are due to this authoritarian approach. The builders of utopias claimed to give freedom to the people, but freedom which is given ceases to be freedom.

(Berneri 1971:3)

Even though Shelley was exiled from his elite family and his political class, it seems he never lost sense of his background. He sees himself as *the* person with solutions to problems. The tyrannical figures he fights, he subconsciously becomes. In fact, there is in Shelley the ‘rich boy mentality.’ He wants to create and oversee a perfect world that only he takes charge of. Other people lack the intelligence. This attitude was early formed by his experience in Ireland, where he tried to lead a revolution from the frontline but dismally failed. Shelley had accurately identified Ireland as the nerve centre of the British oppression he had already come to detest. Though Shelley’s active interest is striking enough for someone of his age¹⁶¹ and class background, the most remarkable and problematic aspect of this whole episode is that he never analysed the Irish question in exclusively national terms. Ireland was merely a local example of an ‘international’ phenomenon and Irish politics was for him just a stepping stone on the path of globalised reform that he was embarking on. In the pamphlet, *An Address to the Irish People*, which he finished writing before going to Ireland, he outlines his desire to ‘awaken in the minds of the Irish poor, a knowledge of their real state, summarily pointing out the evils of that state and suggesting rational means of remedy.’ The fact that Shelley wrote it before setting foot in Ireland is very telling of his political naivety and idealism. The assumption here is that the Irish people need guidance and are lacking in intellect. Perhaps, his famous line ‘poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world’ gains much political currency when read in this context. For Shelley, the poet is more than just a representational

¹⁶¹ Shelley was nineteen and had just been expelled from Oxford. He had also just eloped with his first wife Harriet Westbrook, whom he was to abandon later to marry the younger Mary Godwin.

voice, but the heart and soul of revolution. He speaks for, he directs the operations and thinks for the revolution.

The description of Clifford Chatterley, who calls himself a 'conservative-anarchist' in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, befits Shelley as he was

... more upper-class....He was at his ease in the narrow 'great world', that is, landed aristocracy society, but he was shy and nervous of all that other big world which consists of the vast hordes of the middle and lower classes, and foreigners. If the truth must be told, he was just a little bit frightened of middle-and-lower-class humanity, and of foreigners not of his own class. He was, in some paralysing way, conscious of his own defencelessness, though he had all the defences of privilege. ... Nevertheless he too was a rebel: rebelling even against his class. Or perhaps rebel is too strong a word; far too strong. He was only caught in the general, popular recoil of the young against convention and against any sort of real authority. Fathers were ridiculous: his own obstinate one supremely so. And governments were ridiculous: our own wait-and-see sort especially so. And armies were ridiculous, and old buffers of generals altogether, the red-faced Kitchener supremely. Even the war was ridiculous, though it did kill rather a lot of people. In fact everything was a little ridiculous, or very ridiculous: certainly everything connected with authority, whether it were in the army or the government or the universities, was ridiculous to a degree. And as far as the governing class made any pretensions to govern, they were ridiculous too.

(Lawrence 1928: 10)

Lawrence couldn't resist letting his character's condition – paralysed from the waist down and impotent – become symbolical for all his class. Clifford Chatterley is portrayed as a representative of the decadent upper class, and nothing else. He can only be remotely involved in what is going on around him. And so too is Shelley disabled by his exile from his homeland and the gagging of his works. There is little he can do from afar – his poetry is not

published or widely circulated in England and that frustrates him as his attempt to use poetry as a medium of political and social transformation is thwarted. While most of his poetry was highly intellectual, highly philosophical and written for a selected group of readers (constituting mostly his wife, his peers and fellow writer friends), Shelley's decision to write the 'popular songs' as an attempt to reach out to a wider audience is highly significant. Whatever changes have to happen, Shelley recognises the importance of engaging the masses. Contesting ideology is not enough but contesting deeply set ways is more important. What emerges from reading Shelley is that utopia is not static or normative, but rather it is a critical and deeply political phenomenon, one that invites humanity to be open minded in the daily interactions with the world.

Most of Shelley's poetry certainly testifies to the possibility of transcending localised, domestic histories through a universal myth in which the boundaries of history can be stretched to accommodate the revolutionary dimensions of beautiful idealisms of moral excellence. *The Mask of Anarchy* was largely informed by specific geo-political issues, but the characters within the narrative, and the human issues dissected, transcend period and place so much that the poem still makes sense even when read today.¹⁶²

The Mask of Anarchy is obviously a political allegory. Because it was based on real events and people, Shelley attempted to make the poem's meaning not obvious through references to popular mythology and iconography. The long speech comprising most of the poem, are spoken by a maternal spirit, who is introduced thus:

¹⁶² Even when substituting for the names of English politicians mentioned by Shelley the names of present day Zimbabwean politicians, the poem makes perfect sense.

These words of joy and fear arose
As if their Own indignant Earth
Which gave the signs of England birth
Had felt their blood upon her brow,
And shuddering with a mother's throe
Had turned every drop of blood
...to an accent unwithstood ...

(*The Mask*, 138 – 45)

This maternal voice is contrasted with an aggressive and self-indulgent father. Shelley deploys another female figure, the maniac maid, whose name is Hope, who is the one who instigates the revolution implied in *The Mask of Anarchy*. This male-female duality implies a structural defect in governance predicated on inequality, class separation and gender.

Shelley's utopia is reflective – he projects the faults of the past and present in order to project what the future must avoid. The utopia projected in Shelley's writings is intrinsically both oppositional and transformative. He is opposed to the hypocrisy of those in power and the institutions that prop them up. This is the underlying message of *The Mask of Anarchy*. He is not just an opposer but a transformer. And that is the essence of his utopian impulse – the desire for a different, better way of being. Utopia for Shelley has a regenerative capacity to recondition the mind. However, can utopia facilitate a program of social reform? This is a question that Shelley's poetry answers only but in ambivalent terms. Shelley's refusal to give a definite vision at the end of the poem is calculated. He has parted the river like Moses in the *Bible* and thereafter it is for the people to mobilise their desires and needs for a better life in their paradise. So Shelley does not present the image of a 'utopia' as a place that already is; he forces his readers to participate in the imagining of the new utopia.

And while it is easy to dismiss Shelley's revolutionary programme as too idealistic and unrealisable, it is important to emphasise the fact that his utopian conceptions are drawn within actual historical time. To suggest that utopia is purely an abstract concept is wrong. It is a common truism that all ideas grow in some social context. Shelley does not merely comment but subjects reality to serious scrutiny. What Shelley presents in his works, is a sense of unlimited possibility, the sense that life is a surprise gift and that around every corner could be something amazing. It could be terrifying, it could be confusing, it could be disturbing, or it could be simply wonderful. This, no doubt, makes his poetry especially powerful. That is why *The Mask of Anarchy* itself is a play of sorts, a 'masquerade' and the participants are 'the spirits of oppression and destruction' –murder, fraud, hypocrisy and anarchy – known in the human form as Castlereagh, Eldon, Sidmouth and others:

And many more Destructions played
In this ghastly masquerade,
All disguised, even to the eyes,
Like Bishops, lawyers, peers or spies.

(*The Mask*, 26-28)

The source of the destruction and the ruins is identified primarily as anarchy. Shelley inverts the meaning of anarchy from its contemporary usage today. In today's terms anarchy is an idiom for balaclava clad youth destroying and desecrating everything, or it refers to extremist terrorists murdering innocent people. However, Shelley used it to describe the destructive power of the powerful. Anarchy was the enemy of the common people of England, and

...he rode

On a white horse, splashed with blood;

He was pale even to the lips,

Like death in the Apocalypse.

And he wore a kingly crown;

And in his grasp a sceptre shone;

On his brow this mask I saw –

‘I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!’

(*The Mask*, 30-37)

For Shelley it was important for the people to comprehend the current state of affairs before embarking on the utopian journey. The masses are being empowered with a knowledge and truth they need to galvanise for the necessary change. Shelley shows the poor remuneration that the working classes receive for slaving for the ruling classes, a theme that he also explores in *Song to Men of England*. The workers are virtually slaves, cheap tools of production:

“ ‘Tis to work and have such pay

As just keeps life from day to day

In your limbs, as in a cell

For the tyrants’ use to dwell

So that ye for them are made

Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade,

With or without your own will to bent

To their defence and nourishment.”

(*The Mask*, 160-167)

Shelley wants his readers to be indignant with themselves and their conditions. He rouses their passion to act, to wake up from the slumber of their everyday reality. The speech of the 'maniac maid,' who in this case is an agent of utopia, further, identifies the real scandal at the heart of the English society, the perpetual exploitation of the poor. That exploitation will continue unless the masses do something about it. The impatience of the maniac maid's father 'Time' who is 'weak and gray/With waiting for a better day' is an indication that the utopian future has been slow coming. In fact, this utopian future, this 'better day,' must be here and now. The maniac maid is there to ensure that utopia is a radical break with the present rather than simply deferred in the future. How does utopia become the present?

Paul Foot (1990: 16) suggests that it is through 'agitation.' But, he also poses a question, 'What should be agitated for?' The journey to utopia is a process that is started by agitation against the status quo and agitation for action. In the same vein, Timothy Webb (1977:79) explains that the 'controlled indignation' of *The Mask of Anarchy* makes possible 'the crucial transition from anger to hope.' Shelley qualified his radical ardour with an insistence on restraint. He recognised the importance of inner revolution – it was no use regenerating social and political institutions until individuals were regenerated. Utopia is a state of mind.

By appealing to the emotions of his readers, Shelley's mission is to get his readers enraged, and prompt them to react. Whether Shelley is advocating passive resistance or a violent insurrection, either way, he significantly and repeatedly emphasises on their large number – 'Ye are many, they are few.' The clear message here is that whatever changes that must take place, they ought to be collective and driven by collective needs. In his younger years Shelley

wanted to be at the frontline of revolution as a fulltime political activist but the times he spent in Ireland and Wales discouraged him. Shelley deserted political activism for the poetic world in which the revolution could first be enacted in the mind. While he could not directly participate in the protests or organisation of them, even in exile Shelley remained politically active. He sought for the paradise within but also yearned for a new society which would be acceptable. The fact of the matter is that for Shelley poetry was not an end to itself. Poetry had a much wider significance and had to affect social and political changes in his society.

During his lifetime and the early years after his death, Shelley's achievements were undervalued by some establishment figures, including his father, and in government and cultural institutions (be it in publishing, newspapers, or the academy). This resulted in his work being intentionally ignored. His 1819 poems were meant to help change the climate of opinion. Shelley's refusal to give in to his personal despair is intimately related to the high ideals which he conceived for poetry and to the way in which he pursued them in dark and tempestuous times. Krishan Kumar is in agreement that utopia is a subversive genre and dismisses the simplistic notion of utopia as simply 'escapism' or 'light-hearted-daydreaming' (Kumar, 1991:87). This could explain the subtle Shelley who had to hide his thoughts behind elaborate literary contrivances, though undoubtedly he ended up being too fanciful and got carried away to the point of obscurity. Kumar further explains:

Establishments of both Right and Left have been equally hostile to utopia. Utopia has been a subversive form: that is perhaps the first point to make in 'mapping' utopia. The very uncertainty over the intention of the author - is this satire? Is it wish - fulfilment? Is it a call to action? - has provoked authorities to blanket suppression. Better silence it, just in case. (Kumar, 1991:66).

It is no surprise therefore that Shelley was not published during his lifetime because of (a) the radical nature of his work (b) the potential for his work to incite action/violence. As a result Shelley's work was virtually embargoed from circulating in his home country. It was often circulated among friends or pirated for mass circulation by political elements. What is apparent in Shelley's case is that utopia challenges by supplying alternatives and discarding unworkable patterns and structures. It shows the vast difference between what is and what could be. However, it must be pointed out that what could be is merely suggested by Shelley's disgust with the prevailing status quo. In doing so, Shelley did not intend to give a blue print for the future but rather insist on a call for action now. Thus the utopian function in Shelley's poetry and the real source of its subversiveness is a critical commentary on the disfigurement and re-arrangement of society.

Utopia demands transitions, a journey of sorts, departing from one point and arriving at another. Krishan Kumar suggests that utopia, in its long history, retains the basic form of a journey. He explains, 'The traveller in space or time is an explorer who happens upon utopia (Kumar 1991:89).' Shelley's poetry often takes the form of a journey in mind, space, time and history. *The Mask of Anarchy* has a very panoramic approach, a trail of the plunder and destruction inflicted on the land and the people by the people who ought to be leading and protecting them. Perhaps it is purely coincidental that Shelley's utopian sensibilities are heightened by his comfortable exile in Italy from which he gazes back on his home country. He uses his poetry as a vessel to go back and forth, to shuttle between the distances of the past and the present and the present and the future. The poem is indeed a journey, from the state of anarchy to the state of liberty and freedom. The actual physical distance of exile is also significant as the poet is removed from real time events in his home yard. He is

splintered between the two places. Shelley is correspondingly a double vision. He looks down from utopian heights with a sometimes exasperated or pitying mien but more often with comic relish for the follies and vanities manifesting in his own country. He looks up from his own distant world with a tragic sense of the unattainability of the ideal. The utopia he constructs in his imagination is an equitable world, shot through with reminders of the stubbornly flawed world he inhabits outside his imagination, in his own society.

Shelley tentatively shows what needs to be done to make these ideals a reality for the great masses. He does this not by constructing an alternative society in which those ideals have been fully realised, but he suggests or rather implies that these problems can be eradicated in one of two ways – violent or non-violent. But their realisation takes the form of a utopian projection in the form of the maid called ‘Hope.’ It is no wonder Mahatma Gandhi was enthralled by the revolutionary potential of this poem. However, the non-violence philosophy has been heavily criticised for being naïve and unrealistic. Its detractors feel that violence must be fought with violence. It is by showing negative things from his own world that Shelley negates their persistence into the future – the corruption of the political class, the poor working conditions, the heavy-handedness of the armed forces. Things need not continue as they are. Out of this defiance, set in a context that proposes an alternative, comes the desire for change and the hope that it may be possible. The irony of it all is that Shelley’s final unfinished poem is titled *The Triumph of Life* (1822), a motto that is utopic and yet the subject of the poem is very ambivalent.

By 1822 Shelley’s disappointment with the real world and his ability therein to influence change had weighed him down. This grandiose but naïve ambition gave credence to the

dismissive criticism that branded him as an ideal dreamer in a foreign country. However, without the utopian imagination it would be impossible to imagine a different world from the one prevailing. Many critics of anarchism have dismissed the philosophy as utopian in the negative sense of being 'nowhere' and incapable of being realised. Yet, for Shelley utopian poetics have a psychological value in that they dramatise and enact the direct action which people ought to partake in. The suggestion here is that anarchist principles when enlivened by the utopian imagination provide alternative mental spaces in a free society in harmony with the natural world. Shelley's utopian vision is dynamic, organic and open ended. There is no revolutionary closure: he offers a process, not an end; a journey rather than just an arrival. Rather than imposing a repressive morality, Shelley provides ample room for personal creativity. Had *The Mask of Anarchy* been published at the heat of the moment soon after its composition, there is reasonable speculation that it would certainly have had an impact. These are poems that rouse anger in readers. In order to act they need to be provoked.

So the anarchist utopia is not the closed space of a perfect society but engages in constant struggle against protean forms of domination, hierarchy and exploitation. It is the active creation of a free society. It operates in the present tense. The poem is a medley of narrations with unrivalled open-endedness. The pictured society is riddled with corruption and exploitation. The detail may be local but the human issues timeless. But what Shelley does show is that utopia is not mythical or imaginary but can be discovered and created here and now. And it is this immediacy that marries anarchism and utopianism – the desire to offer immediate alternatives to the urgent misery of the day. However, the immediacy of utopianism is in that it stimulates critical thinking and makes visible the limitations of present conditions and encourages the pursuit of alternatives to existing political and social realities.

On the other hand, anarchism is utopian in character for holding up the vision of a free society, but it is also realistic in drawing on existing libertarian trends. Shelley was encouraged to create ways to reach another world far better than the upside down one he inhabited or had left behind.

As Shelley was writing of England from exile, it is important to point out that his work also embodies a utopia of escape. The lure of escapist utopianism is great in Shelley as this allows him to advance his idealism of moral perfection from a detached position. He was able to create a postcard perfection world in his poetry like a visual artist, but instead of a brush and paint, his canvas is made up of words. Shelley is like a painter, recreating a world he remembers from memory but altering any blemishes. It is evident from scholarly biographies that after composition of each poem he was eager to share it with his friends who had remained in England and those he communed with in Italy. This could be his way of coping with the ambiguities and uncertainties of the world, and he therefore clings to a more manageable and immediately gratifying ideal world. John P. Clark explains that,

accordingly, utopia can serve as a means of escape from the imperfections of the world and their inevitable reflection within our own being.... It can offer an imaginary compensation for being denied real power or having real efficacy. In this sense, utopia is neurosis, a defense mechanism, a convulsive reaction against self and world. It offers an imaginary revenge against a recalcitrant reality' (JP Clark, 2009:15-16).

In other words, there is an understanding of utopia as here and now, and as affirming a radical break with the present – rather than the more deterministic idea of revolution as emerging from social and economic contradictions and always deferred into the future. Thus,

Shelley's utopian vision has an ideological function: it operates as a way of propagandising alternative political and social visions.

Utopian interventions

The obvious scandal of Shelley's great political poem, *The Mask of Anarchy*, is that its appeal to the power of mass resistance is written from aristocratic exile. Certainly, this position does not disqualify its interventionist rhetoric. Shelley appeals to universal Promethean virtues. Some critics including Matthew Arnold have challenged the status of Shelley's poem as one of the great examples of English radical poetry. Is Shelley's political poetry no more than aesthetic processing of politics? The issue here is that Shelley is accused for remaining a voice in his dream without waking up to follow its instructions of action. However, this dreamy shimmer is a tension that both sustains the poem's idealism and exposes the ideological bind of proffering poetry as the thing to be 'done' in political crisis. What is apparent is that the dream vision of Shelley plays a subversive role because it can envisage the oppressed collectively seeing what the visionary sees. Anarchy is unmasked as tyranny and a corrupt monarchy. Shelley takes charge of the ineluctable voice of the historical moment. Shelley's poem is a part of a larger culture of resistance. The remarkable gesture of the poem is the power of definition and of language.

Marechera, nihilist anarchist

In a 1986 interview with Alle Lansu, a Dutch culture journalist, Dambudzo Marechera mentions Bakunin as the major influence of the anarchism he espouses. The Russian philosopher-thinker remains an influential figure in the histories of both nihilism and anarchism. Bakunin's most famously quoted statement is almost a creed for the nihilist anarchists such as Marechera: 'Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all.'¹⁶³ Marechera certainly trusted in an 'eternal spirit' so much that he drew creative inspiration from his self-destructive tendencies, in the way he lived and wrote.

The tendency to identify anarchism with nihilism and to regard it as a negative philosophy or a philosophy of destruction has historically endured.¹⁶⁴ The tradition continues. There is certainly something dark and twisted in Marechera's interactions with the world as demonstrated in *Mindblast* (1984). Indeed, Marechera sought to destroy the status quo but only as part of the process of regeneration, and only because he believed in the potential power of free men to build again and build better in the rubble of the destroyed past. Zimbabwe was emerging from a bruising struggle for liberation and Marechera was not ready to just sit and watch a few individuals hijack the freedom train that everyone was entitled to be a passenger on. Certainly, no man capable of such moral compunction can be dismissed as a nihilist. The nihilist, using the term in a general sense, believes in no moral principle and no natural law whereas the anarchist believes in a moral urge powerful enough to survive the destruction of authority. While these distinctions are clear, I still want to contend that

¹⁶³ See J. W Burrow (2002) *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848–1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press) pp1-.3 The book provides an exploration of the history of ideas in Europe from the revolutions of 1848 to the beginning of World War I, with a focus on Bakunin, Nietzsche, Proust, Flaubert, Wagner and Wilde.

¹⁶⁴ See George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, pp. 13-15

Marechera is a nihilist-anarchist in that he is negatively vicious towards the status quo as he wants to see it destroyed in the hope that a new system that benefits all may prevail. In a sense, Marechera had to be negative to be positive.

Marechera was one of the few individuals who did not have any faith in the independence project. He was on the outside looking inside, and exile in Britain distanced him from the claustrophobic prisms of independence. This easily made him a target of 'hate' and vicious criticism. He rejected early on the black leadership in Zimbabwe, the same leadership responsible for the recent economic and political crisis today¹⁶⁵. In 1978, at the height of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, Marechera is reported to have heckled when Robert Mugabe addressed his nationalist compatriots at the Africa Centre in London (*Source Book*, 240). He had no faith in the man who was to lead Zimbabwe into independence two years later.

However, it is also important to point out from the outset that he was not the only Zimbabwean writer to be sceptical towards the false promises of happiness and freedom that characterised the country's independence. Other writers such as George Mujajati, Cont Mhlanga, Habakuk Musengezi, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Stanley Nyamfukudza, Chenjerai Hove, and Shimmer Chinodya all question the false illusions of independence, sending out a cry of alarm against the hypocrisy of the leadership. In fact, there is nothing celebratory in the writings coming out of Zimbabwe in the early years after the attainment of independence from Britain. It is difficult to read the literature of Zimbabwe without being struck by how

¹⁶⁵ In 2000 Zimbabwe's ruling party first experienced a serious challenge to its political hegemony and in response they instigated a violent take-over of much of the country's privately owned farmland. Several books have been written about this subject which are all part of the 'crisis discourse' about Zimbabwe that emerges post-2000. including Munyaradzi Gwisai (*Revolutionaries Resistance and Crisis in Zimbabwe*, 2002); Stephen Chan and Ranka Primorac (*Zimbabwe in Crisis*, 2006); Ian Scoones et al (*Zimbabwe's Land Reform: Myths and Realities*, 2010) and Phillip Barclay (*Zimbabwe: Years of Hope and Despair*, 2011).

antithetical it was to the idea of independence and how pronounced in it was the absence of hope and promise, how dour, how troubled, how frightened, how sceptical, how dark the early founding literature is. The list of titles published in the first decade of Zimbabwe's independence reads like a nihilist catalogue:

Author and Book Title	Year Published
Dambdzo Marechera, <i>The House of Hunger</i>	1980
Charles Mungoshi, <i>Some Kinds of Wounds</i>	1980
Stanley Nyamfukudza, <i>The Non-Believer's Journey</i>	1980
Cont Mhlanga, <i>Workshop Negative</i>	1986
Tsiitsi Dangarembga, <i>Nervous Conditions</i>	1988
Shimmer Chinodya, <i>Harvest of Thorns</i>	1989
Chenjerai Hove, <i>Bones</i>	1989
George Mujajati, <i>The Wretched Ones</i>	1989

Why would a country so repelled by Rhodesia's moral and social order devote its talents to reproducing in its own literature seeds of disillusionment? An answer to that seems obvious: one way to benefit from the lessons of earlier mistakes and past misrule is to record them so as to prevent their repetition through exposure and inoculation. This rather melancholic aspect of Zimbabwean literature could be symptomatic of the bigger issues facing the 'new' country then, and sadly continue to persist to this day. With the recent political crisis in Zimbabwe, Marechera specifically helps us to remember that all that glittered in 1980 was not gold. Warning lights flashed through his exuberant fiction; his challenging questions constantly provoked the authorities. As Nadine Gordimer once remarked, Marechera stuck his neck out while others were reluctant to open their mouths (*Source Book*, 328). Is this true? It is partly true in that while others wrote about it, Marechera did not just write but also

publicly spoke about it. He said things others were scared or not comfortable to say in public. This made him the voice of the voiceless.

The cracks in Zimbabwe have been blatant for decades. After the Lancaster House Agreement in 1978 and the landslide victory of Robert Mugabe's Party (ZANU-PF) in the 1980 elections, the sense of euphoria, which followed, was short lived. Incidentally, the late Bob Marley who was invited to play at the independence gala composed a song titled *Zimbabwe*. Throughout the song Marley repeatedly warns the leadership that:

So soon we'll find out who is the real revolutionaries;
And I don't want my people to be tricked by mercenaries.¹⁶⁶

Strikes spread rapidly throughout Zimbabwe over the following years led mainly by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU). Although socialist rhetoric was infused into government statements and policy at this time, the trade union movement, while initially supporting the government, became increasingly impatient with its failure to implement "socialist" policies and, by the mid-1980s, when it became clear that ZANU-PF had no intention of ever introducing even a minimum type of state-socialism, the trade union movement moved into opposition. An immediate and opportunistic way of curbing this disillusionment and paranoia was by Robert Mugabe's party launching a tribal pogrom, popularly known as Gukurahundi¹⁶⁷, and thus

¹⁶⁶ Part of lyrics from Bob Marley's song, *Zimbabwe*, full lyrics of song on <http://www.sing365.com/music> <Accessed 3 August 2011>

¹⁶⁷ Gukurahundi is a Shona word that means the early rain that washes away the chaff before the spring rains but referred to the North Korean trained Fifth Brigade that executed an estimated 20,000 civilians. The most comprehensive dossier with details of these killings was compiled by the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP) entitled *Breaking the Silence, Building*

whipping up a fever against the largest minority, the Ndebele with the awful massacres, which followed in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the 1980s. Discontent mounted. Yet, the inherited system of white domination was maintained. Even though Marechera lived to witness a country in transition, he recognised and condemned early on the contradictions of this artificial process. The euphoria for the newly reconstructed country was merely a façade behind which untold misery dominated. This resulted in Marechera being censured, insulted and sometimes imprisoned (*Source Book*, 326 – 335).¹⁶⁸

It is easy to dismiss Marechera as a pessimistic writer who had nothing good to say about Africa. But it is also possible to appreciate the potentially restorative effects of the nihilistic attitude he represents. Marechera viewed his writings as a respite, a temporary lull in the search for truth; he was able to argue that it could serve to purge people of a false and debilitating world view, potentially leaving them healthier than they were before. Despite his cynical denunciations and his frequently negative sentiments, he maintained his hope and belief in a transfigured world and the possibility of true independence. While he could not personally admit it, perhaps his secret desire was that his fiction could rejuvenate and replenish. Cauter disagrees in this rather cynical comment:

We should, of course, be wary of investing our heavy drinking egoist with the role of seer and prophet.

We cannot quite honour him as the black Shelley, though both suffered expulsion from Oxford. He was

True Peace: A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980–1989. Yvonne Vera treated this theme in her last published novel, *The Stone Virgins* (2002), as did John Eppel in some of his poems in *State of the Nation: Contemporary Zimbabwean Poetry* (2009). Christopher Mlalazi in *Running with Mother* (2012) also bravely addresses the subject. However, this remains officially a restricted subject and no discussion of any kind is permitted. In 2010, visual artist Owen Maseko was detained for his exhibition, called *Sibathontisele* (Let's Drip On Them), consisting of three installations and twelve paintings. Maseko was charged, under the *Public Order and Security Act*, with undermining the authority of President Robert Mugabe. The charges were later dropped.

¹⁶⁸ See also, David Cauter (2009) *Marechera and the Colonel* (London: Totterdown Books).

never going to be Professor of Strict Logic in any university. Socialist doctrine bored him and he despised the people, the *povo*, while speaking up for them, just as he scorned to use the Shona language. (Caute, 2009:2)

While this assessment is largely true, it is also wrong in suggesting that there is no logic in the Marechera logic. The logic is simply that there is logic in no logic and perhaps that's what he meant when he said, 'intellectual anarchism is full of contradictions in the sense that it can never achieve its goals. If it achieves any goals then it is no longer anarchism' (*Source Book*, 31). I would argue instead that Marechera's anarchism, which is very nihilistic, is actually used as a weapon to reveal how hollow the independence project is. He uses it to uncover the problematic relationship between the new political set up and the expectations of the masses. The difference between their lives is strikingly presented in his writings, especially in *Mindblast*, which was written two years after his return to independent Zimbabwe. In one of his 'Plays by buddy' Marechera elaborates on this disparity:

...there are many shades of black but the only true one is that of the have-nots. Don't mean to sound bitter – yes, I do mean to sound bitter, but it seems to me for all the ideals our independence is supposed to represent, it's still the same old ox-wagon of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. There's even an attempt to make poverty a holy and unacceptable condition. You say you're hungry, and the shef peers over his three chins down at you and says Comrade, you're the backbone of the revolution as if your life's ambition is to be thin and lean as a mosquito's backbone. And you try to say "Shef, I don't want to be the backbone, I want to be the big belly of the struggle against neo-colonialism like one you got there underneath that Castro beard." And before you even finish what you are saying he's got the CIO and the police and you are being marched at gunpoint to the interrogation barracks. (*Mindblast*, 1984: 38)

This soliloquy in the play *Blitzkrieg* illustrates that Marechera's writing in post-independence was neither bourgeois nor elitist in its outlook. On the contrary, it was very often a voice for the marginalised, dispossessed and downtrodden in society. Marechera attempts to destroy the high security wall in which the bourgeoisie live. They had replaced the colonial white master in his house and even copied the way he conducted business. In any case, Frantz Fanon's pitfalls of national consciousness were manifesting in this very theft every hour that the new middle class lived, and on the immoral ground on which they stood. The most worrying trend for Marechera was that this new black middle class soon became the judges, the business-people, and the government. Their power soon became criminal power as what they wanted was to be feared but not respected. No wonder Marechera condemned them in uncouth terms and to make matters worse some of these people were his friends at school and in exile.

The Marecheran nihilism has the power to transform individuals because it throws into question the world in which they are unreflectively immersed. It makes them see what they are, and more importantly, brings into the open all that they are not. It reveals to them who and what they are truly are. Karen Carr (1992: 126) explains that, 'Nihilism brings with it a higher truth, a truth that makes the experience of nihilism potentially transformative.' In that vein, Marechera's nihilistic tendencies can be said to be intrinsically liberating. Marechera is able to clarify his overall message in his interview with the journalist Alle Lansu:

I try to write in such a way that I short-circuit, like in electricity, people's traditions and morals. Because only then can they start having original thoughts of their own. I would like people to stop thinking in an institutionalised way. If they stop thinking like that and look in a mirror, they will see how beautiful they are and see those impossibilities within themselves emotionally and intellectually –

that's why most of what I have written is always seen as being disruptive and destructive. (*Source Book*, 40-41).

It can be argued that Marechera's nihilism is a psychological state necessitated by the social, political, cultural and historical conditions. His works after *The House of Hunger* (1978) are filled with philosophical experiments; what one finds in them are attempts to lay out his thoughts, to discover the perfect turn of phrase, the most provocative argument, the most effective approach. This makes the task of reading Marechera harder for by what criteria do we pick and choose among the fragments to separate the real Marechera from the unreal? Marechera wrote in an environment that discouraged people to think for themselves and experiment with ideas, and Stanley Nyamfukudza laments the poverty of ideas and healthy criticism in the country¹⁶⁹. Skinning the skunk is actually a literal translation of a Zimbabwean Shona idiom, *kuvhiya chidembo*. It simply sanctions that some issues are not meant to be discussed in public because they could be. It has to do with perceptions and consensus, which all totals into self-censorship because you can only speak or discuss socially accepted subjects. Marechera desperately advocated for freedom of expression and an environment that could encourage intellectuals and writers to play a critical part in the development of a new Zimbabwe without fomenting the kind of dogmatism that so often takes root. The dialogue between Grimknife Jr and Rix the Giant Cat in one of the untitled stories in *Mindblast* reflects this antagonism in post-independence Zimbabwe:

“Look, Officer Rix, earlier you called me a mental delinquent. What's that?”

“You do not think the way everyone else thinks.”

¹⁶⁹See Stanley Nyamfukudza's essay 'Skinning the Skunk: Some observations on Zimbabwe's intellectual development' (The Nordic Africa Institute, 2004), pp. 16 -26

The youth, amazed, looked hard at Rix.

“But all my life I have never thought!” he shouted.

....

Rix bristled: “Don’t give me that! It’s you who doesn’t know what’s what otherwise you wouldn’t be here. Anyway honest citizens only think what they are told. They don’t think for themselves.”

(*Mindblast*, 1984:46-47)

Marechera’s response to such criticism, which was often personally levelled against him, was in his polemical writings. In *Mindblast*, another ‘everyman’ character, Buddy, who is certainly the author’s alter ego, is accused of ‘nihilistic individualism’ which was ascribed to his European influences (*Mindblast*, 62). Because his writing was not part of the nationalist discourse or lacked socialist ideology, like Marechera himself, Buddy was often attacked:

They said every poem is political; everything written is political. So which side are you on comrade? Is yours poetry with the people; or poetry against the people? And Buddy, who had always had a problem with slogans, would shake his head in frustrated sadness and walk away. They would beat him up, tear up his notebooks and stuff them into his bloody mouth. (*Mindblast*, 62)

It is not surprising that Marechera always found a way of sneaking in his personal views in his own fiction in response to some of the criticism he received. Marechera’s writing spelt out no collective values and often elicited violent responses. On many occasions he was physically assaulted or manhandled in order to intimidate him not to speak his mind or change his views. He had nothing good to say about Zimbabwe – the place and its people. Even his descriptions of the country are negative, everywhere around the infrastructure is crumbling or inadequately substandard. The concept of nihilism is often linked to sickness,

decay, and disintegration. It is no surprise that Marechera questions and interrogates the concept of one absolute and distinct reality. The new Zimbabwe was a veneer cover over something sinister. This was not a peculiar phenomenon. Some of the countries to gain independence early such as Ghana and Nigeria had undergone the same problems as shown in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). Both novels deal with the realities of nameless post-independence countries. The novels provide descriptions of the existential angst of the heroes who struggle to remain clean and sane when everyone else around them had succumbed to rot.

Marechera is clearly unhappy with the sickly sight of the newly born Zimbabwean state. In his first book, *The House of Hunger*, Marechera allayed the anxieties of his childhood and youth. He says, 'In the House of Hunger diseases were the strange irruptions of a disturbed universe' (*House of Hunger*, 7). Here Marechea uses disease as a metaphor for social malaise. The 'House of Hunger' not only becomes a symbol of physical starvation but metaphor for the overall spiritual deprivation of the country. In all his work, disease, degeneration, and decadence are ambiguous conditions that culminate into some kind of dissolution and death. But death is a necessary consequence of life, of growth, of regeneration. Marechera certainly refers to a psychological death, a 'mindblasting' process for any of his readers.

Mindblast is a cocktail of genres – plays, poems, short stories and memoir. The book itself is a demonstration and representation of a multitude of voices and disguises, exposing the hypocrisy and artificial relations created out of convenience and the need for patronage in the new Zimbabwe. And the only way for Marechera to reach the truth was by dismantling or

“stripping naked” any kind of disguise, pose or attitudinising. This is where Marechera’s political importance lies. Faced with the atrocities committed against humanity in colonial Zimbabwe, he attacks falsity and pretence in post-colonial Zimbabwe. What Marechera saw was what he had always seen: nothing had changed in the house of hunger. Its spiritual emptiness was even more apparent. The nemesis was no longer white. Marechera as a nihilist-anarchist believed in a vigorous spirit that imposes its will through the destruction and annihilation of its surroundings. Marechera recognised, of course, that existential ennui did not happen in a vacuum, but he offered a sustained and penetrating account of the historical conditions.

In *Mindblast* most of the characters that populate the stories are drifters – perennial job seekers, drunks, prostitutes, down-and-outs who find no meaning in the ‘prescribed’ life in socialist Zimbabwe. Marechera himself never bothered to get married and decided to have a permanent break with his immediate family. The narrator of the ‘Journal Section’ in *Mindblast* spends most of his time on park benches and alleyways leading a reclusive life:

A lot has been said about how I was alienated from my environment, from my Africanness. A lot had been said about it – what the hell! I felt no group sense and no group context with all those around me, London or Harare. There was just this terrifying sense of having missed the bus of human motion, having missed out on whatever all these and others had which made them look “at home” in the world. I had no world outlook. The whole thing could go out with a bang for all I cared. (*Mindblast*, 120).

In fact, exclusion gave Marechera the freedom to say and do whatever he wanted without restrictions, some kind of poetic licence. So it could also be that the nihilism in Marechera is

a sense of disillusionment with his own circumstances and the circumstances that surround him.

The Marechera Literary Bureau

Influence is simply a transference of personality, a mode of giving away what is most precious to one's self, and its exercise produces a sense, and, it may be, a reality of loss. Every disciple takes away something from his master. – Oscar Wilde, The Portrait of Mr W. H.

Dambudzo Marechera is the closest approximation there is to what could be described as ‘the Zimbabwean writer’s writer’, the writer in whose corpus writing stands out clearly in its own right, as a percept, a value which exercises tremendous, if not heterodox fascination for other younger writers. Marechera often wrote about the indirect influence that writers exercise on other writers across generations, cultures and literary traditions. Marechera has indeed exercised influence on a whole generation of young Zimbabwean writers. Memory Chirere’s recent survey of what he popularly dubs as ‘Marechera-mania’ among young Zimbabwean writers and readers is indicative of Marechera’s influence on the younger generation of Zimbabwean writers. Chirere, who has been an English lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe for the last decade, describes how students are spellbound by Marechera:

After their first experience with *The House of Hunger*, at least a third of the male students immediately begin to be overly outspoken. They begin to grow their own dreadlocks, smoke and drink, scribble their own poetry and prose, and you are waylaid by young men and women who plead with you to look at what they are writing. You sense that they want you to confirm that they are now part of the club. Their poetry is angry and melodramatic, without being very clear about the causes and targets of the anger. You realise that the anger is targeted toward their parents, their siblings, the University of Zimbabwe, elders, and even against themselves. (Cairnie and Pucherova 2013:112)

It seems there is an innate anger in Marechera that the young people in Zimbabwe find so powerfully attractive and the older generation find repulsively poisonous. It is this anger against everything, and his attitude against organised systems and authority, that endears him to the young people. Considering the social and economic challenges that Zimbabwe has been undergoing, young Zimbabweans have surprisingly adopted 'mad Marechera' as the voice of reason. He speaks for the frustrated, the persecuted, the marginalised, and the voiceless. His stance to speak truth to power to his contemporaries, most of whom constitute the ruling class, make him a prophet who foresaw the problems and excesses that have over time corrupted Zimbabwe's body politic.

Marechera decided, on his return to Zimbabwe, to start a Writing Surgery in Harare to teach and encourage young writers. Unfortunately, this significant venture was shut down after only three days of operation. While this initiative has been largely ignored in the prevailing Marechera scholarship, I think it reveals more about Marechera and especially the importance of the craft of writing. Marechera remained a lone figure, the tramp writer. His voice was widely a threat to the lives of those in power and whose mere existence depended on the deception of the masses. At this time, Marechera's existential and political nihilism was not popular with the masses. He nonetheless was officially declared public enemy number one, so jailing and silencing him went a long way towards achieving especially the political goals of the Zimbabwean leaders, some of whom grew up and went to school with Marechera. The establishment in Harare therefore attempted to wipe Marechera from its slate as it regarded him as subversive in the sensitive post-independence climate where loyalty to the new government (and leadership) was seen as the all-important ingredient in ensuring progress. A

free and critical role for writers was threatening to the status quo. Often he did not even attain recognition as a threat but was rather relegated to the lowly marginality of being considered a mere ‘insolent parasite’ (Veit-Wild 1988: 29).

If there was any consolation for Marechera, the writing organisation he was so eager to establish was to emerge after his death. Thanks in part to Flora Veit-Wild, Marechera’s biographer and lover; the Budding Writers Association of Zimbabwe (BWAZ) and Zimbabwe Women Writers (ZWW) were concurrently set up in 1990 in memory of Dambudzo Marechera. However, I would like to believe that had he been alive, he would be very disappointed with the sheer state of these organisations. These are membership organisations, limiting their extent and reach. They also dismally fail in terms of quality – badly written verse, broken English, reams of pretentious prose. There is nothing of their hero in what they write or how they write. I saw this first hand,¹⁷⁰ from letters I received from across the country, through workshops I attended and my own personal interactions with many of these young writers.

Marechera was a gifted craftsman who routinely abandoned the traditional structure of narrative, with little apparent concern for the reader’s cognisance. His stories do not begin at the beginning but in the middle or end of something, and usually do not end. For instance, *Mindblast*, is a mixture of genres – drama, short stories, poetry and memoir. There is no doubt that Marechera was a self-involved writer. It was almost as if Marechera was saying ‘look at me I have written the anti-story.’ This posturing, reeking as it does of authorial self-

¹⁷⁰ Between 2004 and 2006, I was elected as National Secretary in the Budding Writers of Association of Zimbabwe executive committee. Prior to that, I had started the writing club at the Midlands State University and had spent a year as a publishing intern at Weaver Press in Harare. These roles enabled me to meet young Zimbabwean writers.

absorption, bears only contempt for the reader. This fracturing of narrative is employed as a means to convey the spiritually crippling nature of life and the bewildering absence of narrative is intended to mimic his alienated life.

In fact, Marechera was frustrated with the lack of a vibrant literary culture in the Zimbabwe he returned to, after exile in Britain of the 1970s. He wanted to be taken seriously as a writer, like those he had encountered in his literary sojourn. The fact that Marechera wanted to mentor younger writers shows how much he valued the craft and process of writing. It's a very gratifying humanity.

Conclusion: The Present tense

You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of Madness.

It comes through non-conformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. - Thomas Sankara

There is no doubt that there is a method in the madness of Shelley and Marechera. For a start, the kind of anarchism that Shelley and Marechera embrace is enigmatic, a celebration and condemnation of a corrupt world, in both literal and metaphorical terms. The result is a compound of nihilistic, existentialist, Romantic and utopian impulses. To label them simply as anarchic writers is not enough. It should be clear that anarchism is a stray philosophy, an infectious idea, a broken ideal. The dialectical and contradictory nature of anarchism and its chameleon character are evident in the different visions that Shelley and Marechera espouse in their writings. Shelley is more hopeful and trusting of the good of human nature, whereas Marechera is suspicious of humanity and finds human relations frustrating.

However, what is evidently clear is that the characteristic preoccupations of the anarchism that Shelley and Marechera represent are of a very subversive kind that focuses on free expression, politics, religion, disrupting the status quo whilst at the same time advocating alternative kinds of society. And because both chose the present as the compass of their lives, the writings they engendered possess an immediate value that is still applicable even today. It is the present, and not history or the future, which is a roomful of fact you cannot get out of, as Linton Kwesi Johnson rightly suggested. That is why, to some extent, Shelley and Marechera have remained the front soldiers of a vast moral and aesthetic revolution, one that continues to transform the way we perceive our reality. They protested against a corrupt past and ridiculed organised authority.

The specific long-term effects of their creative visions are certain, especially judging from their influence among generations that come after them. The way they lived and behaved, and the stuff they wrote managed to increase scepticism of, and disdain for, centralised authority and bureaucratic systems. Shelley's and Marechera's anarchist praxis cuts across many of the differences that figures of authority have used to divide and conquer. This is because the ordinary person (regardless of race, religion, or creed) does not wish for wars, or prisons, or opulence in the face of poverty. But those in power require these elements to be in place so that they can maintain control. Consequently, false ideas of racial, religious, and national inequality are installed and maintained by the governing institutions. No wonder that the most influential writings of Shelley and Marechera are dossiers of damning attacks against the credibility and legitimacy of governments, tyrants, systems. Their personal actions – the choices they make, the way they choose to live, what they write – these are all overtly anarchist acts.

On his return from exile, people rejected him. He extended this to the country: Zimbabwe was rejecting him. And so, he decided to retreat into himself, relating to his own experiences in a very narcissistic way. His powers of observation were deepened by this rejection. He was detached from and excluded from his own society and viewed it from within. However, Marechera developed what Greenwell Matsika called the “persecution complex” (in Flora Veit-Wild: 320). He mistrusted the security apparatus and working within the establishment. The episode around which David Caute’s book revolves is one of many. A suspected police spy assaults Marechera in a public toilet for discrediting the new Zimbabwe government to foreign journalists. Not surprisingly, the government monitored Marechera’s movements and interactions.

Marechera was thus paranoid. He suspected everyone was out to get him; everyone was a Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) following him everywhere he went. He once told a journalist:

It’s very easy to get paranoid, especially when you have been in exile for ten years. You are back home and you find your own situation and identity in more of a confusion than when you were in a foreign territory. (*Source Book*, 233)

One element of Marechera’s new identity was his opposition to the state and his sense of political persecution. The heretic of the pre-independence exile movement had developed into the opponent and provocateur of the majority-rule black government. Marechera confronted the burning political issues of the early 1980s. From 1983 onwards, as the Mugabe government was turning nasty and more autocratic, Marechera took the state to task for the

suppression of any kind; for the killings of dissidents in Matebeleland; for the increasing nepotism in government; for the uneven distribution of drought relief; for the suppression of the freedom of speech. Consequently, Marechera considered himself a dissident in the context of the new state – as portrayed by the Giant Cat in *Mindblast* who was persecuted and suppressed by the government. It is no surprise that he felt like ‘an outsider in my own biography, in my country’s history, in the world’s terrifying possibilities’ (Flora Veit-Wild 2004:364). In fact, Marechera’s difficult relationships with individuals and with social institutions are well documented in Flora Veit-Wild’s *Source Book* (2004). Marechera deliberately alienated himself from the understanding and affection of those closest to him, treating friends and colleagues with a mixture of candour and suspicion. This emotional ambivalence extended to his relationships with authority and or any institutions.

While Marechera largely remained an outsider in his personal, professional and political capacities, this is also true of the subject positions, which he articulates, in his literary works. Similarly ambivalent relationships characterize Marechera’s narratives and poems, with the narrator or speaker functioning as a social double. It is an articulation of marginality that signifies a disruptive disorder from which a new order must emerge. In both the life and the work, the biographical subject and the artistic subject are closely implicated. As far as his life is concerned, Marechera renounced all familial ties and adopted the role of the autonomous, freethinking visionary writer.

Russian authors no doubt influence him. In a lecture on “Soyinka, Doestoevsky: The writer on trial for his time” Marechera singles out the Russian novelists as ‘voices of vision’ in times of ‘political and spiritual evolution.’ (2004:369). Marechera opened lines of thought.

He anticipated the disenchanted tone of post-colonial writing that has since become in vogue. Marechera's frustration with the bureaucratic vision of nation building is justified. The people overseeing the process are familiar to him. Instead of associating himself with party rhetoric and fraternising with his former peers, who now hold office in government, Marechera chose to align himself with the social outcasts, putting his faith in social renewal with marginal groups.

CHAPTER FIVE: (IN)CONCLUSION

Anarchism, really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. - Emma Goldman (1869 – 1940)

Todd May opens the volume *New Perspectives on Anarchism* (2010:1) by claiming that ‘Anarchism is back on the scene.’ He further explains that ‘theoretically, as well as practically, anti-authoritarian thought is in a resurgence....’ There are many reasons for this resurgence of anarchist practice and thought. Anarchism must occupy a unique place in the history of ideas and yet it remains under-acknowledged. I contend that anarchism has something to contribute to a vision of social and political transformation. I hope that I have in the process dissolved some popular and academic misinterpretations of anarchism. While the everyday rhetorical use of the term refers merely to some vague embrace of chaos, anti-intellectualism, or disorganised violence, the word in the sense in which I have used it in this thesis implies investments in freedom and equality. This is what unites Shelley and Marechera despite their different historical periods, their fight for the liberation of the human mind and to overturn any forms of tyranny and dominion. Within this consensus, there is still considerable diversity.

In this thesis, I have attempted to show how Shelley and Marechera adopt the philosophy of anarchism as a literary strategy for the liberation of the human mind from the tyranny of our everyday experiences. However, as I have highlighted from the beginning, there is a lot of inconsistency in the history of anarchism. Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen (2004: 239) also conclude that ‘there is considerable work still to be done, eg, in putting African anarchism on

the map.’ This is the opportunity that prompted me to think and reflect on the anarchic poetics of two writers as different as Shelley and Marechera. My intention was to blur the boundaries that define and categorise these writers. These two writers offer new insights and new ways of thinking in a way that few writers do. Those who would seek to understand current politics and offer insights for resistance have found anarchism’s resources to be at once relevant and supple. Anarchist thought speaks to the world in which we live, but it remains open enough to allow us to speak through it. Shelley and Marechera exemplify the possibilities the anarchist theoretical tradition has to offer contemporary thought and practice. They have influenced significant historical moments through their work. There is, according to Shelley and Marechera, a sense that the potential for anarchist action lies barely beneath the surface of everyday life. This is an important methodological point that allows us to re-think and re-value philosophical anarchism. Perhaps, anarchism acts as a cultural resource and as a form of political conscience, irrespective of whether they succeed as such.

Anarchism certainly has greater influence than is often acknowledged. It is not an event but a process; a kind of constructive anarchist praxis. A critic such as Matthew Arnold tried to reduce Shelley into an ‘ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain’ (1895: 244). I see this as a way to neutralise Shelley’s radical ideas by simply focusing instead on the person of the poet. Such critics dwell on the faults of personality rather than on the substance of the writings. And his personal life – his youthful rebelliousness against his father, his atheism which led to his expulsion from Oxford, his elopement with his first wife Harriet Westbrook, his tangled relationships with various people – make his character controversial. Rumours of his irregular life prejudiced nearly every critic against him: ‘Shelley – an unmentionable subject’ was how his name appeared in the index of one review’

(Spender 1952: 17). Marechera endures the same kind of criticism that targets his lifestyle more than the substance of his work. He was widely known as 'the mad man' and this was the view that was perpetuated by state media and academics as a means of rendering what he says of little significance. It is therefore not surprising that in both cases each writer is not only misunderstood but also misrepresented by critics and other gatekeepers of the literary world.

Shelley and Marechera, driven into exile by different forces, encounter so many frustrations such as lack of publication opportunities, censorship, and even imprisonment (for Marechera). As a result they end up fluttering helplessly 'in the void' in Matthew Arnold's terms and never seem to descend to help with the actualities of social change. I believe that Shelley's sophisticated account of politics is wide-ranging and foregrounds his own experiences as a private citizen and also explores his obligations as a public poet. While a great deal of Shelley's work does simply reflect the defects of his own nature. In a good deal of his writing he gets beyond his nature, and shows a sensitive and profound awareness of his life and everything that surrounds it. What makes Marechera popular today is his ability to see through the pretension and hypocrisy of the postcolonial set-up. Marechera, could have easily joined the privileged class but chose to be free from it as he didn't want to participate in the oppression of others. The real dilemma of the moral critic when confronted by a poet like Shelley and a writer like Marechera is that the qualities in the life which make him reprehensible are exactly those which gave him the experience that grounds the radical potential of his writing.

Where do we go from here? is the question both attempt to answer. Shelley is clear in mapping out a society he envisages, whereas Marechera is not. This is because apart from Shelley dramatizing the revolution and/or reform he anticipates in his society, he writes philosophical essays to enunciate his vision and ideas. Shelley was a man and writer with an open mind and full of eagerness to envisage new means for human experience and expression. Shelley's political and religious views in the fight against social injustice got him into controversies with his society. His family was angry. His father thought that Shelley had lowered his family's reputation. He worried more about his reputation and his seat in Parliament than about his son's accomplishments as a writer. Shelley inspired other people but not his father. He stimulated his college friends' creativity by issuing *The Necessity of Atheism* though that led to his dismissal from Oxford. For a young man in his late teens, Shelley had foresight. He saw that people were treated with cruelty by tyrant kings. He was deeply moved to seek equal rights for all humans. He inspired people to demand better living and working conditions. Shelley knew that monarchism was the wrong form of management. He wanted the governors to treat the public equally, and give them more rights, which we call today democracy. His ultimate purpose was freedom. He wasn't so successful during his lifetime, but I can say that he foresaw many modern forms of protest by inspiring Gandhi's *satyagraha* resistance movement and subsequently the civil rights movements.

For Marechera, the future is implied rather than realised. He stubbornly refuses to spell out what the future must be but he insists on the need for individual regeneration as the first step towards a better future. Marechera was certainly not interested in a speculative future. The liberation struggle that resulted in Zimbabwe's independence had both a practical objective and a speculative agenda. While the practical objective of overturning the colonial enterprise

was achieved, the speculative agenda, which is more ideological in nature, was and remains a spectacular failure. The Zimbabwe government preached socialism by day and practiced capitalism by night. Marechera's work illuminates the gap that exists between Zimbabwe's professed ideals as a nation and the reality we witness now. In one form or another, that gap has existed since Zimbabwe's birth. What is troubling is the gap between the magnitude of our challenges and the smallness of our politics – the ease with which our politicians are distracted by the petty and trivial, their chronic avoidance of tough decisions, their seeming inability to build a working consensus to tackle everyday problems. Our politics is all about self-fulfilment and self-aggrandisement. There is no care about the constituents that they represent. Marechera was a thorn in the flesh of the newly born Zimbabwe. Whereas everyone else was singing praises of the new ruling politicians, Marechera was already sounding warning bells. Things were not as they seem. Marechera was gagged and imprisoned. He was isolated to frustrate him, to lock him in a web of paranoia, to make him think he was the faulty one and not the system around him. It is important to consider Marechera's disempowered and isolated position in independent Zimbabwe as the condition making him especially aware of, and therefore the more determined to express, the voices of the socially marginalised. The vitality, and the very power to disturb, of his writings remain alive today. In a country where the vast majority of the population has remained the wretched of the earth, the pitfalls of national consciousness became all too apparent to Marechera early on.

Shelley's and Marechera's need to express their political ideas through poetry and fiction results in an important reflexive shift that necessitates a corresponding reflexivity in anarchist philosophy, a connection not yet sufficiently recognized by scholars. If Shelley appears as a

privileged point of entry in my discussion it is simply because of his historical relationship to anarchism (he was son in law to William Godwin who is considered to be the father of English anarchism) and so had the potential to re-evaluate both the concept of anarchy and the genealogy of the movement itself at its conceptual beginnings. The terrors of the French Revolution were still fresh, and the world had not yet recovered from its first paroxysm of horror at the terrible school of free thought that was born of that period. Shelley and his Romantic peers became embodiments of free speech and freethinking. While they were highly intellectual and philosophical they never stopped trying to reach out to the masses because if the society was to change it was the masses that had to initiate that change. Marechera was born in a colonial territory and grew up under enormous deprivation and segregation. He was supposed to have no rights simply because he was born black. It is this background that made him militant in his approach and attitude to life. And if he appears angry in most of his work, it is only because he always had to fight from a position of disadvantage whether it is in Harare, London or Salisbury.

And because both writers were born into periods of anarchy and blood, it is not surprising that these two children of revolutions should become high priests of iconoclasm. In their desire to subvert the old order of things their boundless enthusiasm and energy spared nothing. Whatever merits an institution may have in itself, the fact that it was part of an ancient economy of social or political life was sufficient for them to condemn it, denounce it as a pernicious obstacle to the advancement of (hu)mankind.

Beneath the pressing concerns of the day, the attempts to define, explain and defend their modes of perception and their styles of expression, Shelley and Marechera were in fact

confronting such central questions as the social function of art and the requisite freedom of the artist. In both instances, the ideas they put forward were not only of striking originality, they have also proven of lasting significance for subsequent thinking and writing. I contend that while the beauties of Romantic poetry have long been appreciated, the import of Romantic literary theory and philosophy as embodied by Shelley has still not been fully recognised. In part, at least, this neglect may stem from the relative inaccessibility of most of his work. Many of the major programmatic statements are either embedded in lengthy works or scattered in prefaces, fragments and letters.

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