

# Writing the Lives of Dambudzo

## Marechera

Adebowale Oriku

### Abstract:

The late Zimbabwean writer, Dambudzo Marechera, used the phrase 'I am an outsider in my own biography' to qualify himself. This seemingly extravagant conceit has been the challenge I have encountered in researching and writing the life of this controversial figure in 'African literature.' Marechera occupies the Fanonian 'zone of occult instability,' a space of spiritual disquiet that is made even more turbulent by his creation of a mosaic of selves. With a degree of singularity, Marechera represents what I have used the phrase 'paradigm derangement' to describe. The aim of my research is to negotiate this derangement and bring some insight into the Marechera mythology, not to say 'madness,' in view of how his life and works are thronged with the psychopathologies of colonial and postcolonial life. After trying with some success to infix my biographical subject within a spatiotemporal centre, a merging of fiction and fact has become inevitable. In my presentation, I will discuss some the challenges I have encountered in trying to find a place for Marechera – or the multiple Marecheras – even in the semi-fictional rendering of his life story. I will also give an overview of how the Menippean form ('formless form') has become indispensable to the construction of the Marechera story. And in light of the literary cult following which underwrites his enduring consequence, an introduction of an epigone figure into the story has been pivotal in lending an antiphonal voice to Marechera's solipsistic universe. Marechera was born in Rhodesia, a country named after Cecil Rhodes whose name (and image) was the germ for the renaissance of the

'decolonising debates.' Having used counterfactual narration to collocate Marechera and Rhodes in my creative project, the thought of what Marechera, who celebrated placelessness and the deracialisation of knowledge, would make of the current debates is cogent.