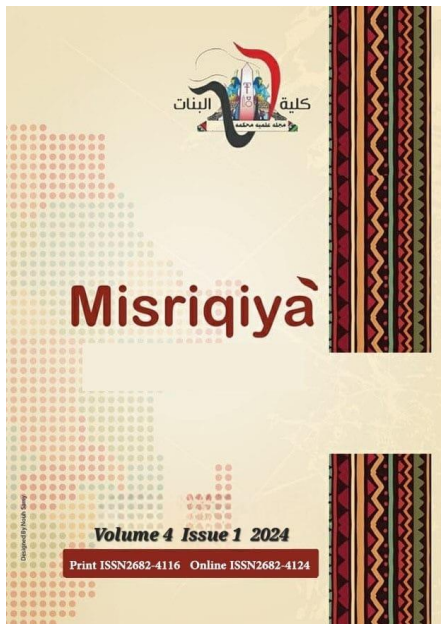




Anecdote of the Enfant Terrible: The Stigma of Madness in the Works of Dambudzo Marechera

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Abstract

Madness has always been a recurring theme in many literary works. Consequently, there was a growing critical interest in studying the representations of madness in literature. Later, the theme of madness gained a new level of interpretation since it has become a pretext for violations committed by authorities. It was used as a tool to restrict many non-conformist writers by censoring or banning their literary productions, in addition to different forms of torture to silence their voices. This paper addresses the question of madness in the legacy of the enfant terrible, the Zimbabwean poet, novelist, and sociopolitical critic Dambudzo Marechera (1952- 1987), in the light of Michel Foucault's interpretation of madness and power. Since some of Marechera's writings present the correlation between madness and power, the Foucauldian paradigm presents a valid theoretical explanation for his works. Marechera faced sociopolitical turbulence in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe at his time; he also experienced many problems during his scholarship in England which all eventually contributed to his suffering from psychological and mental crisis. Insights from Foucault can explain how the literary trajectory of Marechera was affected by the authority's definition of madness and its practice of power. Marechera has been stigmatized as mad, yet he tried to challenge such stigma as reflected in *The House of Hunger* (1978), *Mindblast* (1984), and *Cemetery of Mind* (1992).

Keywords: Dambudzo Marechera, Michel Foucault, power, madness, stigma, madness in Africa, *The House of Hunger*, *Mindblast*, *Cemetery of Mind*.

Anecdote of the Enfant Terrible:

The Stigma of Madness in the Works of Dambudzo Marechera

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
 Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
 Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
 Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
 Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart (Tennyson, *Ulysses*)

Introduction

Madness is always regarded as a remarkable phenomenon to study even before the progression of modern psychiatry which is now practiced in clinics and hospitals. *Key Concepts in Mental Health* (2017) defines madness as “unintelligible conduct and spoken thought. The person inhabits an idiosyncratic world, which does not make immediate sense to others” (p. 178). Historically, most mental disorders were attributed to madness due to its social, cultural, religious, superstitious, physical, or political associations, in addition, of course, to a lack of professional medical knowledge. According to the *Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry* (2013), “the public imagination has been fascinated ... by the mentally afflicted. ...[and] the social and political responses to mental illness and the mechanisms that have emerged to ... control the ‘mad’ among us” (p. 18). Thus, the lack of professional knowledge before the twentieth century and the spread of superstitious beliefs highly controlled the way people approached any mental disorder, especially with the absence of serious scientific attempts to understand their nature.

With the advancement of Western psychiatry in the 20th century, the Austrian neurologist, and the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) provided preliminary explanations of the unconscious that explained many mental disorders, including *madness*. Freud's theories paved the way for more research, leading to a revolutionary interpretation of madness within cultural, political, and historical contexts. This interpretation was the result of a study conducted by the French philosopher and critic Michel Foucault (1926-1984) in his book *Madness and Civilization* (1961) which was a critical

documentation of the history of madness and the evolution of psychiatry and how power manipulated this field to guarantee its supremacy. Foucault critically examined the historical and sociological conceptions of madness, altering the traditional portrayal of power, knowledge, and social and political notions. This subverted popular narratives about mental health and helped to dismantle the cruel attitude towards mentally disturbed patients across history.

Madness was not only limited to having physical aggression, hostility towards people, emotional and mental disturbance, or an illogical way of thinking but it was also related to openly expressing unwanted or questionable opinions or views. This was primarily due to insufficient medical studies and the wish for authority to manipulate this rising field to ensure its sovereignty. Articulating unorthodox ideas may be a daring challenge to the canonical or mainstream views imposed on societies. Expression of dissent is therefore defined as “madness”, which may lead to chaos, according to the guardians of the canon represented by authority.

Literature, serving as a platform for unrestricted expression, has been utilized by intellectuals to exercise autonomy and confront injustice. However, this has led to the labelling of their literary output as madness rather than a manifestation of anger or a form of resistance. Influenced by Foucault's insights, critical analyses have transformed the portrayal of power, madness, and other societal and political concepts. This connection between madness and power is evident in the works of Zimbabwean novelist, poet, and sociopolitical critic Dambudzo Marechera (1952-1987). Marechera's life and literary creations exemplify how the manipulation of psychiatry by authorities negatively impacted his journey and writings. The Foucauldian framework provides a plausible theoretical explanation for many of Marechera's works, illustrating the link between power and madness. Marechera's experiences during the sociopolitical upheaval in Zimbabwe, both during and after the colonial era, coupled with challenging circumstances in his academic pursuits in England and subsequent detention upon his return to Zimbabwe, significantly contributed to his psychological struggles. His literary expressions were profoundly influenced by both his life experiences and the policies enforced by colonial and national authorities. As such, the selection of this theoretical framework for interpreting Marechera's texts is motivated by the need to delve into the interplay of madness, authority, and literary resistance. Marechera's accusation of madness was

magnified and manipulated to undermine his credibility and raise doubts about the authenticity of his literary works, particularly following his diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Research Questions

The research aims to address several key questions centred around the definition of madness as a domain for exercising authority, particularly in the context of the insurgent intellectual Dambudzo Marechera, often labelled as the *enfant terrible of African literature*. The primary research questions include:

How does the definition of madness serve as an arena for practising authority, in the case of Dambudzo Marechera and impact the perception of his literary contributions? What is the connection between the deteriorating sociopolitical conditions and the psychological challenges experienced by Marechera, and how do these factors intersect in influencing his literary choices? To what extent was Marechera's psychological condition, characterized by schizophrenia and hallucinations, manipulated by authorities to undermine the value of his literary output, and compromise his integrity? In what ways did the authorities attempt to stigmatize Marechera's suffering by labelling him as mad, aiming to dehumanize him and diminish his credibility? Can the controversial literary production of *allegedly mad writers*, such as Marechera, be considered an act of resistance and an effort to challenge the stigma imposed by authorities on mentally challenged writers?

Rationale of the Study

The paper tries to read the legacy of the Zimbabwean poet and novelist Dambudzo Marechera as an example of *an allegedly mad writer* rather than as an angry writer in the light of Foucault's definitions of madness and power to present a coherent reading of his most highly critical literary production. It is an attempt to approach some examples of his literary legacy as an exceptionally challenging method of expression. The main reason for choosing the Foucauldian paradigm to discuss Marechera's works is the need to understand how many examples in his literary trajectory were affected by the authority's manipulation of the definition of madness. This manipulation as a tool was mainly an attempt by the authority to silence his harsh criticism of the authorities in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe, especially in the era of Robert Mugabe, the former Zimbabwean prime minister and president. Consequently, this paper will primarily focus on how the

theme of *madness* has always been a recurring allegation for silencing many dissident writers by accusing them of being mad to disgrace them and negatively affect the integrity of their harsh criticism of authority.

Madness as an Arena of Power

To understand how mental health was approached through time, there was a need to track the history of psychiatry. The *Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry* gives historical accounts of the early premises of psychiatric interventions in dealing with mental disorders after years of being “poorly funded, exiled to outside hospitals, a victim of rushed political experiments, castigated by anti-psychiatrists, its intellectual basis ridiculed” (p. 2). As such, psychiatry did not provide a sufficient scientific account in the beginning, but it was just a field full of negative connotations and misconceptions. It was not a reasonable attempt to understand “the whole person in health and illness” after centuries of undermining the professional expertise of its practitioners (p.2). Thus, psychiatry was primarily considered a non-academic way of approaching any mental sign of disturbance.

Additionally, sometimes such early attempts to track the history of mental disorders, including madness, explained the neglect of psychiatrists’ professional roles in favor of superstitions (p. 19). Such ancient reactionary views towards psychiatry contributed to the discrimination against psychologically distressed people creating what is called *stigma*. This concept is originally a Greek word that means “a mark”. It is also referred to as “a sign branded onto criminals or traitors to identify them publicly” (p. 22). Stigma was later used to refer to mentally unstable people due to the pejorative associations of psychiatry across history moving from a mark of criminals to a discriminatory tool against mental patients. It has evolved to discriminate against patients, with authorities manipulating stigma to disfigure intellectuals and criminalize their views. As such, it will be challenging to notice the blurry line between a criminal and a mentally unstable person.

Madness: A Myriad of Interpretations and Contexts

Due to the increasing interest in studying madness as a mental disorder in different contexts, literature then presented a convenient milieu to record and represent such a phenomenon. *Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry* traced the reflections of madness in different social and literary modes and contexts such as

“in the arts, the media, and the political discourse of our societies” (p. 18). The *Handbook* also registers the early attempts to define any form of mental instability as something that “came from the Gods” (p. 18), and it was explained by many critics and philosophers. Firstly, “Plato, who in his *Phaedrus* distinguished four kinds of mad people: prophets, mystics, lovers, and poets” (Gelder, p. 150). Also, Aristotle in *Poetics* states that “poetry implies either a happy gift of nature or a strain of madness (pp. 61-63). As such, it can be realized that the connection between literature and madness is related to divine inspiration and then to intricate associations in contemporary contexts.

Later, during the Age of Reason and Enlightenment, such a phenomenon was studied in the light of “scientific moralism” as the one who is mentally disturbed is considered a “degenerate” with an absence of reason. Later, in the Romantic era, there was an association “in the public mind the archetypal union of madness and genius” (p. 18), and this reflects why it was always valid to connect madness with creativity. Therefore, similar early assumptions about the correlation between art and madness may have justified the stigma of madness that labelled writers such as Marechera especially while bearing in mind that all these assumptions were the legacy of the Western gaze which already underestimates the literary production of the Africans not to mention those who are suffering mentally like him.

Considering the aforementioned Marechera is not the first literary example to depict the repercussions of mental problems. Other works include *King Lear*, *Don Quixote*, and *Jane Eyre*. Shakespeare's *King Lear* features the fool as a delusional character who tells truths, while Cervantes' *Don Quixote* portrays a mad, obsessed, and hallucinating protagonist who is being ridiculed instead of being medically approached (Scull, pp. 41-43). *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, uses madness as a major theme, with the protagonist detained at home before asylums became accepted for insanity (Scull, p. 70). Madness also has been a theme in African literature, as seen in the literary career of South African writer Bessie Head. Her 1973 *almost autobiographical* novel *A Question of Power*, written after her psychotic episode, is considered an autobiographical account of her time in a psychiatric hospital (Davis, pp. 492- 496). As such, madness was often seen as a source of wisdom, a personal dilemma, or a reflection of societal encounters.

The previous variety of representations of madness established the early premise of finding a connection between creativity and madness which was later explained by Sigmund Freud. Freud was originally known for his theories on the unconscious mind, dreams, and psychosexual consciousness. His thoughts on creativity are extensively presented in *Creative Writers and Day Dreaming*. He acknowledged the significance of daydreaming and imagination in the creative process. Daydreams, which involve spontaneous and unstructured thought, allow the mind to explore repressed desires, memories, and emotions and this can create a sort of correlation with the creative process. That's why he compared the creative process to "child's play" or "dreamer in broad daylight" (p. 425). However, the creative writer lives in his reality seriously, "he creates a world of phantasy¹ ... which he invests with large amounts of emotion—while separating it sharply from reality" (p. 421). Such an interpretation of the creative process and the unstructured or unrealistic way of thinking of the creative writer may have also contributed to the underestimation of the product of the creative process not to mention if such a writer was stigmatized as being unrealistic, unstable, or immature. Thus, this interpretation may have constituted the stigma that surrounded the creative process and the creative writer as it will be difficult to believe or acknowledge a daydreamer.

Reincarnating The Ship of Fools: Foucault's Concept of Madness

In his *History of Madness* (2009), a later translated version of *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Michel Foucault critically examines the historical treatment and societal understanding of madness, challenging dominant discourses on mental health. Foucault's work has benefited various fields, including literature, by changing the narrative of power, knowledge, madness, and other social and political concepts. He started by exploring the way madness and different forms of mental disorders were approached starting from the Middle Ages. He states how the mental asylum started first as "leper houses" during the crusades then it was dedicated to the poor and the homeless or hospitals and later it "peopled with the insane" to formulate a sort of segregation around those mentally unstable people (pp. 4-5). Thus, the idea of quarantine also resumed even after leprosy ended but was used against people who were suffering from mental illnesses, especially as it was seen as a disease that was sent by God, and that confinement

¹ It is a less common spelling of fantasy, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary as translated and edited in *Collected papers* by Riviere, J., Strachey, A., & Strachey, J.

may be a source of salvation and punishment for their crimes and sins. Thus, “madness entered a space of social and moral exclusion” and mad people were seen as heretics who should be separated from the rest of society (p. 8). Such views, however, started mainly during the leprosy era in the Middle Ages, it continued throughout later encounters with mad people. Its main target was to consolidate the authority of the church by advocating that it was sent by God (p.7). In this way, there was a necessity to replace leprosy with another phenomenon, and that was madness.

Foucault also states that “The Ship of Fools” or *Stultifera Navis*² came into existence as a literary theme.³ However, the idea of Ship of Fools was presented at first as a literary theme, it correlated with the wish to “banish them from inside the city walls, leaving them to run wild in the distant countryside (p. 9). This shows an early wish to expel the *mad people* to disclaim their rights to proper life and treatment. The ship was a metaphor for the societal practice of isolating and marginalizing those who were considered mentally ill. It represents a vehicle that carries away socially undesirable individuals, much like how asylums served to isolate those labelled as mentally ill.

Although the concept of banishing the fool or the mad goes back to the Medieval era, it was revived to conquer specific people in our modern age. This method of banishment, subsequently adopted by various authorities, finds inspiration in expelling and ostracizing those with dissenting perspectives by branding them as mentally unbalanced. This prompts a crucial inquiry into the attribution of authority for labelling non-conformists as mad. Following Foucault's insights in *Subject and Power*, this process represents an endeavor to "objectivize the subject" by endowing the therapist with elevated authority and a distinctive perspective that distinguishes them from others. This is achieved through the decisive role of determining who falls within the realm of insanity and who does not (pp. 777-778). He states that those in positions of power, such as medical professionals, institutions, and the state, play a significant role in

² It is Sebastian Brant's extended poem, released in 1494. The English title of the book was *The Ship of Fools*, and the Latin is *Stultifera Navis*; originally in German as *Das Narrenschiff*. “The work is a harsh, scathing, and all-encompassing satire, particularly of the corruption inside the Roman Catholic Church, and it centres on the events on a ship transporting over a hundred people to Narragonia, the land of fools.”, according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

³ Foucault mentioned that *The Ship of Fools* was originally “[a] new object made its appearance in the imaginary landscape of the Renaissance, and it was not long before it occupied a privileged place there; this was the Ship of Fools, a strange drunken boat that wound its way down the wide, slow-moving rivers of the Rhineland and round the canals of Flanders (*History of Madness*, p. 8)”.

shaping and controlling the discourse around madness (*Birth*, p. 51). The pervasive influence of power extends even into the definition of mental disorders, a phenomenon that renders psychiatry, at times, a collaborator with the penal system because they were “the general functioning of the wheels of power” as Foucault thoroughly explained in *Power/Knowledge* (p. 115). As a result, it turns the “technician of medicine” who “would play an economic role in the distribution of help and a moral, quasi-judicial role in its attribution; he/she would become “the guardian of public morals and public health alike” (*Birth*, p. 42). Thus, for Foucault, the early encounters with mental disorders were strictly governed by sociopolitical restrictions, and the clinic turned into a space to practice power.

In the modern age, the same views are still in practice, and that was reflected and exercised in the cultural field. Henceforth, *The Ship of Fool* and the state of banishment were rather reincarnated in our modern society since they claim the upper hand in labelling and stigmatizing the non-conformist intellectuals and creative writers. It was an attempt to prevent them from propagating their views which could become a source of alternative discourse and knowledge that differed from the views propagated by the authority. In this way, *The Ship of Fool* was reincarnated as a metaphor for how intellectuals were banished under the pretext of being mad due to their different or revolutionary views, and in the case of Marechera it can be said that his mental suffering from schizophrenia. Based on this, referring to all forms of mental suffering as madness was very common and intensified the stigmas associated with mental health. However, mental health issues encompass a broad spectrum of conditions with varying symptoms and severity. As such, this generalization was exploited by the authorities to raise doubts towards Marechera’s views by calling him mad to affect the integrity and diligence of his opinions.

Madness in African Culture

Western psychiatry was prejudiced against the African account of madness. However, after years of acknowledging the Western gaze⁴ in explaining any mental health issues; particularly with Africans, there was a serious need to closely analyze the Africans’ psychological and mental issues during the colonial

⁴ For example, British colonizers had to develop their version of psychiatry to exclude the colonized fearing their threatening appearance, so they were repeatedly produced or abused (*Writing Madness*, p. 7). When the first mental asylum was opened in Rhodesia, it was a prison-like experience for the natives (p. 12). Africans were victims of different psychological or medical tests as they were seen by the colonial powers as racially inferior. Ironically, colonial power had difficulty in approaching differences between “normal and abnormal behaviour” done by the natives (*Writing Madness*, p. 13).

era. Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) Martinique- French intellectual played a crucial role in the mid-20th-century anti-colonial movements. In his *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, he delved into the psychological repercussions of colonialism and racism on both the colonized and the colonizer. Fanon critiqued the Western gaze of psychoanalysis. He scrutinized its portrayal of the mental life of black individuals. Fanon's writings also contributed to the formulation of a political philosophy for decolonization, highlighting the psychological problems caused by colonialism. He thought that the differences between the black and white worlds were evident as stated by Appiah in his foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks* (p. 1). For example, when black individuals contact the white world; not to mention when this contact is violent, they experience a sense of “collapse of the ego” especially when “the psychic structure is fragile. The Blacks start waiting for validation from the “Other”/ the white to enhance their “status” and “self-esteem”. As such, colonialism became the source of many psychological and mental problems in the African context such as schizophrenia, phobia, and anxiety, according to Fanon (pp. 109-110). Accordingly, Marechera’s suffering from schizophrenia since his early childhood can be attributed to living under a colonial regime which segregated the Zimbabweans in ghettos that were full of violence, poverty, and lack of resources.

Flora Veit-Wild⁵ also presented her account of the meaning of madness in African culture. She stated that madness was perceived within “the context of possession rituals or the treatment of mental illness” (*Writing Madness*, p. 2). However, she believes that the theme of madness was not sufficiently explored in African literature; also, she referred to the representations of madness according to Susan Sontag (1933-2004), the American intellectual. In Sontag’s *Under the Sign of Saturn*, she assumes that the mad person is someone with “intolerable behaviour” (p. 2). Madness was the defying tool used by the colonized to “subvert dominant structures of thinking and [violence] of ruling in the colony and the post-colony” (p. 54), within the African context. Sontag additionally stated that “[a] mad person is someone whose voice society doesn't want to listen to; whose behaviour is intolerable, who ought to be suppressed” (p. 64). As such, madness

⁵ Flora Veit-Wild is currently a professor of African Literature at Humboldt University in Germany, who wrote many critical works about his literary production and was Marechera’s girlfriend for some time.

was taken as a pretext to silence any form of opposition, especially with writers who have a history of mental health issues like Marechera.

In this way, it can be ensured that *mad writing*, from the point of view of authority, has always been correlated with violence. However, writers such as Marechera with his battle with schizophrenia did not stop writing due to his mental condition. It was rather an outlet for him to escape the ghetto house⁶ or what he called later the *House of Hunger*. He stated in an interview with himself entitled⁷ “Escape from House of Hunger” that he has been “influenced to a point of desperation by the dogged through brutalized humanity of those among whom I grew up.” (*Cemetery*, p. 3). For him, ghettos were not only a physical form of restriction, but it was a form of psychological limitation for an angry youth as well. To him, he used provocative writing to challenge colonialism and postcolonial authority, which contributed to his mental distress.

Anecdote of the *Enfant Terrible*

Marechera presents a glaring example in the controversial interpretation of madness in the African culture. He is the descendant of a culture which considers madness an emblem of spiritual possession rather than a medical case or even a heightened expression of anger. However, even in the Western arena, his mental condition was always a matter of discussion. For example, he has always been called by critics an *enfant terrible* due to his non-conformist attitude which started from his early childhood in Rhodesia. Merriam-Webster defines *enfant terrible* as a French word which means “a person known for shocking remarks or outrageous behavior” which best describes the attitude of Marechera as a bohemian artist. It is noteworthy that “the name Dambudzo ... in Shona⁸ [which is an ethnic language in Zimbabwe] means 'the one who brings trouble'⁹. His parents gave him

⁶ Violent conflicts escalated as tensions between the Rhodesian administration represented by white police officers and the nationalist movement grew starting in the late 1950s. Later, when acts of resistance began in the late 1960s, police or the army, led by the colonial authority, conducted routine arrests (*Source Book*, p. 49).

⁷ This interview was published as a foreword to his 1983 novella *The House of Hunger*. There are no mentioned reasons for why he was interviewing himself. However, it may have been the effect of being unconventional in his life or maybe he was skeptical towards other interviewers because of his mental health struggle, or it is maybe a result of a previous unpleasant experience. Also, he may have wanted to state certain facts about his views to deconstruct the stigma associated with him and his writings.

⁸ The Shona people, who arrived in Zimbabwe over 2,000 years ago, created political entities such as Mutapa, Great Zimbabwe, Mapungubwe, and the Torwa/Rozvi states. During colonial control, "Shona" was used to refer to individuals with similar linguistic, cultural, and political roots, which developed into Zimbabwean culture and political structures (*A History of Zimbabwe*, pp. 10-11). With various linguistic variations, the Shona became a dominant ethnolinguistic group in Zimbabwe. They came from the Shaba region, and they were mostly traders and farmers. (Owomoyela, pp. 9-10).

⁹ “The Marecheras called their son Tambudzai, or Tambu for short. Dambudzo is a different version of the same name”. Because of their extreme poverty, when he was later baptized in 1965 by the Anglican Church, he chose his Christian name to be Charles Williams as his mother said (*Source Book*, p. 49).

this name because at the time of his birth they had nothing” especially after his mother said that she was pregnant with him for eleven months in addition to having eight more children. This was quoted in *Writing Madness* after he died in an interview between his mother and Flora Veit-Wild (p. 62).

Additionally, in an online interview entitled *Special Issue on Marechera: Flora Veit-Wild* discussing her publication of the memoir *They Called You Dambudzo*, Veit-Wild explains why Marechera was called the *enfant terrible* of the African literature by saying that he was “received [as] enfant terrible of the African literary scene [who] was famous for acting in a manner that was deemed as particularly unconventional. His unconventional literary and personal choices correlated with the name that was given to him by critics. Additionally, she clarifies that:

His fame and name as the enfant terrible of African literature relates back to the time when he appeared on the international stage and was throwing “cups and saucers at chandeliers”, in the literal and the metaphorical sense. He did so in 1979 at a prize-giving ceremony, when he received, ..., the Guardian Fiction Prize. This action expressed his resentment of being patronised by Western literati, his rejection of being classified and categorized as an “African writer”.¹⁰ (*Hong Kong Review of Books*)

Considering this, he presented a modern incarnation of a "romantic artist" who is “misunderstood, suffering, alienated, and unconventional individual, giving his all to artistic creation and seeing further than “ordinary people” (2013, p. 16). His personality, writings, and biography reflect a “self-created persona of both artist and tramp”, according to Buuck (1997, p. 120). His suffering journey reflects his critical psychological condition and the deteriorating sociopolitical conditions in his country, making him a symbol of an iconoclastic, rebellious, and outspoken artist.

¹⁰ Unlike many of the African writers, Marechera hated being labelled as an African writer as he believes that writing only for a specific nation or a race was very limited. “In other words, the direct international experience of every single living entity is, for me, the inspiration to write.”, as quoted from Veit-Wild in an interview about his novel *Black Sunlight* (*Source Book*, p. 221). He thought writing only for a nation was very limited as he believed he should be speaking against any form of injustice or generally addressing any subject matter. Additionally, he believed that being enclosed only within his African dilemma is a form of a ghetto that is similar to the ghetto that was created by the colonial powers to segregate the Zimbabwean from the White part of the country; in other words, it is a restraining label that may restrict his own which won't allow him to address any form of racism or injustice. He generally hated any form of classification.

An Enemy of the Authority

Accusing writers or artists of madness was one of the main reasons for censoring or banning their literary production along with their incarceration in prisons or mental asylums as an attempt to silence their oppositional voices. Their unconventional ideas challenged authority's sociopolitical canon. Dambudzo Marechera's works aimed to challenge colonialism and false narratives about the Black man's history and culture. His goal was to refute such claims and to establish a genuine connection with the African past, deliberately distorted by settlers, to empower the Black man to shape his future (Mlambo, p. 171).

Zimbabwe, once Southern Rhodesia, gained independence from Britain in 1980 after a prolonged war of liberation. Despite high expectations of economic prosperity and political freedom, the postcolonial economy was weak and inflated, leading to socio-economic problems such as violence and poverty (Mlambo, p. 194). The country's economic and political situation were intricately linked, causing hardships for the newly independent African countries (Out, pp. 121-122). The political predicament in the colonial and postcolonial eras provided a valid environment for socio-economic problems.

Dambudzo Marechera was born in 1952 in Rusape, Zimbabwe. His family was affected by the sociopolitical conditions that afflicted Zimbabwe during the colonial era.¹¹ Marechera couldn't separate himself from the conditions that faced his disrupted family and the deteriorating conditions in his society, as he said in his interview *Escape from House of Hunger* "How can you 'observe' a stone that's about to strike you?" (p. 4). Hence, he believed that the death of his father and the loss of their home marked the beginning of the speaker's physical and mental insecurity, as such, he says "I began to stammer horribly. It was terrible. Even speech, language, was deserting me. I stammered hideously for three years" (p.6). In this way, it can be stressed that his family was the main source of his trauma; however, one cannot be oblivious to the main cause behind their tragic life, which

¹¹ Marechera's alcoholic father who once worked as a truck driver was killed mysteriously according to Marechera's allegation in *A Source Book of His Life and Work* (pp. 49-51). He said in an interview with Alle Lansu in 1986 that he was in secondary school when he lost his father, and he said, "we still don't know which army officer did it." He also had to go alone with his mother to the mortuary to identify his father's body. It was a horrible experience to see his father killed in a horrible way "riddled with bullets". However, Veit-Wild and Marechera's brother Michael state in a footnote for this interview that there are many versions of the story of his father's death as they state that his father "was run over by a car when he walked home on the road at night". His brother also stated that he was there with them in the mortuary. These contradicting narratives may have been a direct result of his first encounter with death and the early traces of mental instability (*Source Book*, pp. 11-12). As for his mother, who was also an alcoholic, she worked as a housemaid, and later as a prostitute to be able "to feed her family and secure the schooling of her children". Dambudzo Marechera said "our family was evicted from the ghetto house. It may have been a ghetto house, but it had been our center" (p. 6).

is the crimes of the colonial era which mainly led to their misery and poverty. As such, Fanon's ideas can be recalled explaining the mental and psychological consequences of colonialism which were the main cause behind the miserable life of Marechera's family and their controversial relationships.

His mental problems, however, were not early observed by his family. Michael Marechera attributed his brother Dambudzo Marechera's troubled mental state to a family curse.¹² According to Michael, his mother sought the advice of a *nganga*; a spiritual healer.¹³ Marechera, however, believed that family complications, poverty, and lack of resources are owing to the incompetence of the postcolonial authority in Zimbabwe. Consequently, his unstable and miserable family life constructed the early signs of his mental instability. As such, his family did not allow him to understand his mental problems in a context away from the supernatural one. Veit-Wild states that "he suffered from hallucinations, hearing voices threatening and persecuting him", and his principal took him to medical treatment. The principal asserted that his personality was "the combination of his extreme brilliance of mind and uncontrollable behavior" due to the absence of a real caregiver and a role model (2006, pp. 56-57).

Marechera was also deprived of the appropriate chance of university education in both Zimbabwe and England. In Zimbabwe, he was expelled from the Rhodesian University due to participating in massive demonstrations against the racist colonial regime. Also, later in England after receiving a scholarship from the University of Oxford, he was expelled for his frequent conflicts with his professors in England, as stated in *Writing Madness* (p. 57). Accordingly, "he faced the choice of undergoing voluntary psychiatric treatment or leaving college"(Nyoni, 2011, p. 9). Thus, his early life witnessed an unstable lifestyle which was reflected in his works.

¹² Their mother believed that she was afflicted by the spirit of an angered ancestor in 1969. The *nganga* recommended passing on the curse to one of her children. Wanting to protect her two eldest sons, she chose Dambudzo, the third child. Consequently, Dambudzo began experiencing delusions in 1971, and Michael, a trained scientist, shared this supernatural perspective on his brother's mental state, connecting it to a curse transmitted by their mother (*Writing Madness*, p. 62).

¹³ Traditional healers, known as *n'anga*, draw their power from ancestral spirits which shows the active involvement of ancestors in healing practices. *N'anga* consult spirits using divining tools like dice, Shona wooden bones, animal bones, or *mungomo* (seeds). They possess knowledge of medicinal herbs, their applications, and their limitations. *N'anga* also performs exorcisms, sending evil spirits into animals or trapping them in bottles left in the bush. *N'anga* are similar to family priests, and they historically had gifts like finding food or hunting. *N'anga* play a crucial role in identifying and treating ailments, including those caused by witches or wizards (Owomoyela, pp. 35-36). That's why they played a crucial role in Marechera's life and battle with mental illness.

Dambudzo Marechera's harsh criticism of the authorities was reflected in many examples of his literary production. He was known for his outspokenness and often rebellious stance against oppressive systems. His literary works, such as *The House of Hunger* (1978), *Mindblast* (1984), *Cemetery of Mind* (1992), and many other works, explored the impact of colonialism and the struggles of post-colonial Zimbabwe with the national authorities. As such, his literary production reflected a level of commitment that addressed social issues advocating the ideals of justice and equality. Since then, he has been called an *enfant terrible* or mad as an evident accusation of his psychological suffering due to his strong and profound language and highly critical tone. Thus, *enfant terrible* turns to have twofold connotations. The first one is by the authority which is being a troublemaker and a source of harsh criticism, and the other one by people and critics who valued his rebellious and revolutionary views as an iconoclastic voice regardless of his psychological suffering.

Who Is Afraid of Marechera?

Regarding Marechera's literary choices¹⁴, he was not merely influenced by other writers, yet the sociopolitical challenges he experienced as a child strongly influenced his psyche. Hence, he claims that "...I have been influenced to a point of desperation by the dogged through brutalized humanity of those among whom I grew up" (Marechera, 2013, p. 1). Having such a traumatizing childhood was reflected in the opening pages of his very first prize-winning novella collection *House of Hunger* which was written in 1978. The setting is in Zimbabwe, and it explores the effects of colonialism and the struggle for independence. The narrative is fragmented, reflecting the disintegration of traditional values. The protagonist, who represents Marechera's persona, battles poverty, political oppression, and personal demons, providing a poignant commentary on the complexities of colonial Zimbabwean society. The novella explores themes of identity, alienation, and the harsh realities of a society in

¹⁴ In 1980, Dambudzo Marechera published his novel *Black Sunlight*, which, unlike his debut work, received less acclaim. The novel is a revolutionary and chaotic stream-of-consciousness narrative, recounting the experiences of a photojournalist involved with a revolutionary organization. Upon returning to Zimbabwe in 1981, Marechera's mental and physical health deteriorated, leading to his homelessness. He published the last collection during his lifetime, *Mindblast, or the Definitive Buddy* in 1984 which includes four plays, a prose narrative, poetry, and a section from his Harare journal. A novel titled *The Depths of Diamonds* faced rejection due to its obscenity. Marechera's health continued to decline, and he eventually died of AIDS due to his alcoholism, substance abuse, and random relationships. Posthumous publications compiled by Flora Veit-Wild include *The Black Insider* 1990, *Cemetery of Mind* 1992, a poetry collection, and *Scrapiron Blues* 1994, according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

transition. The title of the novella mainly depicts the overall hunger, poverty and corruption that Marechera's nation suffered from during the colonial era. He opens his novella by saying:

I got my things and left. I couldn't think where to go.... 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. And the eyes of that House of Hunger lingered upon you as though some indefinable beast was about to pounce upon you. (p. 11)

The previous lines denote the psychological distress and feeling of alienation which Marechera experienced due to the brutal political colonial scene in Zimbabwe. *House of Hunger* does not only represent the personal disappointment or experience of Marechera in colonial Zimbabwe, but it vividly tries to shock his readers by subverting the narrative of colonial power by creating an alternative discourse and knowledge that can abort power's attempts to "objectivize subjects" (Foucault, pp. 777-778). It shows the agony of the protagonist who represents Marechera's persona. It is a critical biography in which Marechera gives an account of his life as a child and a teenager under the grip of colonial powers surrounded by racism, poverty, and violence.

Throughout the quotation, the mention of the "House of Hunger" is metaphorical. It suggests a place that deprives one of sanity, and the comparison to a "bird snatching food", "indefinable beast", and "the eyes of the house" are triggering predatory feelings which adds a layer of symbolism. It reflects the extreme level of savagery and poverty which surrounds him in the ghettos. The major usage of fragmented narrative and uncanny symbols; especially symbols of savagery and death, were reflections of his mental instability and despair. It primarily reflects that such an oppressive environment can cause mental instability and feelings of alienation and despair in addition to setting the tone of later Marechera's writings. This is evident through the utilization of the aforementioned vivid and concrete imagery that strives to provide an authentic portrayal of colonial Zimbabwe. The narrative deliberately diverges from the deceptive storyline promoted by the authoritative figures who label him as mad. This act of stigmatization stems from their manipulation of language and authority, aiming to conceal the truth about Marechera, specifically considering his struggle with schizophrenia.

Marechera: A Poet in a Dilemma

Although Marechera reflected his literary genius in storytelling, he also valued poetry, so he presented his views concerning poetry in an interview about poetry that was published posthumously in his collection *Cemetery of Mind*. He said that poetry is an endeavour to articulate the inner emotions, intellect, and imagination of an individual (p. 209). The title *Cemetery of Mind* carries a metaphorical connotation suggesting a place where thoughts, memories, or intellectual pursuits are laid to rest or forgotten. The word "cemetery" typically refers to a burial ground for the dead, and when applied metaphorically to the mind, it implies a space where ideas or mental aspects have become obsolete, dormant, or lost.

As such, Marechera's poetry involves spontaneously arranging sounds and words, rather than a "conscious effort". To put it differently, one disconnects the mind from language, allowing words to rearrange themselves haphazardly and in an ever-changing structure as believed by Veit-Wild (2006, p. 53). For example, in his poem *The Bar-Stool Edible Worm*, he says:

I am against everything
Against war and those against
War. Against whatever diminishes
Th' individual's blind impulse.
Shake the peaches down from
The summer poem, Rake in ripe
Luminosity; dust; taste. Lunchtime
News – pass the Castor Oil, Alice. (*Cemetery*, p. 59)

This poem expresses a strong stance of opposition, rejecting various elements such as war, those who support war, and anything that represses individual instincts. The language is straightforward, reflecting a defiant tone. The imagery involves the metaphor of "shaking peaches from a summer poem", suggesting a desire to harvest the vibrant and ripe aspects of life. The reference to "lunchtime news" and "passing castor oil" may signify his rejection of unpleasant or bitter realities by comparing listening to the news to swallowing castor oil. Overall, the poem conveys a sense of defiance and a call to embrace the positive and radiant aspects of existence. The refrain of "against" is his way of asserting the idea of being a non-conformist. Also, the poem is signified by fragmented language and imagery in addition to the subtle rhythm which correlates with his belief in the

spontaneity of sounds and words, and it adds music to what is harsh and aggressive. For example, there is an alliteration in the repetition of "r" sounds in "Rake" and "ripe", in addition to the repetition of "p" sound in "peach" and "poem"; also, "the sound "l" is repeated in "luminosity" and "lunchtime", and this adds a level of musicality to the harsh reality that he is suffering from. The usage of fragmented and unconventional imagery may correspond with his lack of an organized way of thinking, yet tracking the subtle meaning and imagery in the poem reflects a deeper meaning that communicates a spirit of rebellion and urges an embrace of the positive and radiant dimensions of existence. Additionally, the imperative verbs are used to show his rage and demand for control in what could seem like an unmanageable situation. The enjambment in these lines helps convey a sense of urgency and directness aligning with the speaker's assertive tone as they express their opposition to various elements. The use of enjambment such as in "Against whatever diminishes/ Th' individual's blind impulse" also contributes to a conversational quality, as if the speaker is passionately expressing their views without pause.

Additionally, the poem is marked by what Dirk Kloppe calls "textual madness"¹⁵ which runs throughout his literary production and can be noticed in his aesthetic choices (p. 124). There is a lack of a structured way of thinking with such a fragmented style of writing. Furthermore, by playing around with language and style, he creates a flow and connects the ideas. As such, he violates the rules of canonical poetry by breaking the pattern of the rhythm, and at the same time, he breaks the stereotype of being an African by writing in English and rejecting to write in Shona because for him it was the language of the ghetto that he tried to escape from (*House*, pp. 6-7). He reflects on how he rejects all the norms and all the lies propagated by the authorities to blind the citizens. In this way, it can be assured that although he suffers from hallucinations and schizophrenia, this has not prevented him from speaking the truth.

In *Identify the Identity Parade* he reflects on his personal dilemma as an intellectual with different views by depicting the role of the poet in a society that makes him feel rejected:

¹⁵ Kloppe uses "textual madness" to refer to Marechera's style in his poem *Throne of Bayonets*. However, it distinguishes his writing style generally as he breaks the canonical literary boundaries and tends to "do experimental, seemingly arbitrary, and heterogeneous discursive strategies" (*Emerging Perspectives*, p. 124).

I am the luggage no one will claim;
 The out-of-place turd all deny
 Responsibility;
 The incredulous sneer all tuck away
 beneath bland smiles;
 The loud fart all silently agree never
 happened;
 The sheer bad breath you politely confront
 with mouthwashed platitudes: "After all, it's
 POETRY."

....

The pervert every honest citizen surprises
 in his own mirror: POET. (*Cemetery*, p. 199)

Throughout the poem, Marechera sought to establish his identity as a poet amidst a constantly imposed sense of alienation by society and authority. This enduring sense of estrangement became a pervasive force in Marechera's life, compelling him to assert his poetical self against the relentless currents of isolation. He externalizes his feelings of alienation and lost identity which can be reflected in society's gaze which calls for his banishment due to his revolutionary literary choices which are seen as a sign of madness, so he deserves such feelings of estrangement or "out-of-place", as believed by authority. This could reflect Foucault's *Ship of Fools* which shows that dealing with insurgents or different literary geniuses is a reincarnation of the banishment of the mad, in this case, the non-conformist writer Marechera. The usage of words like "luggage," "turds," "sneer," "fart," and "bad breath" contributes to the antagonistic and unfiltered poetic diction. The usage of such words evokes strong images distinguishing the defiant style of the poet and his rejection of the refined language. The metaphors might symbolize aspects of the poet's lost identity making him unnoticed or unappreciated by society. They also reflect deep pain and agony and how feelings of inferiority are deeply rooted inside his psyche which intensifies his mental disorder. The fresh images of "mirror and poetry being "bad breath" and "loud fart" are both daring and extremely fresh and assertive of his role as a non-conformist who challenges the conformists in his society. The use of "luggage" is a metaphor that implies being a burden, while the term "turd" suggests that he is *something* unpleasant or rejected by his society. Also, the mention of antitheses

as “loud fart” and “bad breath”, treated with denial and politeness, adds a touch of humour and irony. The overall tone appears to be a mix of irony and agony, yet at the same time, it reveals that he is self-aware of his value as a poet. There is also a commentary on societal perceptions of unconventional or challenging expressions in the context of poetry.

The poem may symbolize the discomfort or disregard often associated with unconventional audacity in facing the authority with the truth that is reflected in the antithesis by being “a pervert surprising an honest citizen in the mirror”, using provocative language that annoys the comfort of *brainwashed* citizens. Although the lines do not follow regular meter, there is a subtle sense of rhythm in the flow of words and phrases. For example, the repetition of the words “POETRY” and “POET” creates a rhythmic pattern because of alliteration that also appears in the repetition of the “p” sound in many examples such as “politely” and “platitudes”. This could be a metaphor for how poetry often challenges social norms. Also, the use of the words “POETRY” and “POET”, capitalized, suggests a self-acknowledgement of his identity as a poet, which is rejected by his society, and results in a circulating stigma of madness that devalues his literary production, but it didn’t stop him from facing any form of injustice.

Marechera: Mad or Criminal?

Marechera was not only affected by the stigma of madness but his rivalry with the authority extended till he “had been detained for short periods before as a result of his heavy drinking and quick temper, outspoken views and bohemian life-style” (*Index on Censorship*, p. 28). After returning from England to Zimbabwe in 1981, he was arrested during the Zimbabwe Book Fair¹⁶ in 1984 while he was waiting for the publishing of his collection *Mindblast*. Marechera is the true embodiment of the enfant terrible who is living his life to the lees with a hungry heart fearless of the consequences, as Tennyson said in *Ulysses*.

Due to having an unstable life, Marechera’s relationships with the surrounding atmosphere in newly independent Zimbabwe were full of doubts as he distanced himself from real affection with his loved ones in addition to his

¹⁶ His book *Mindblast* was scheduled to be released at the Second Zimbabwe Book Fair in 1984. However, copies were not available for the Fair's opening due to claims of last-minute publishing house issues (*Index*, p. 28). During the fair, Marechera spent four days in the Harare Central Police Station till the fair ended. His arrest happened after being interviewed by two Dutch radio journalists, and subsequently, he was taken into custody. During the interview, he fearlessly answered the questions of the journalists, and he severely attacked the policies of Prime Minister Mugabe. Marechera stayed at the police station while the officials released the journalists (*Index*, p. 27).

wavering interaction with educational or literary institutions. Although he sought their acknowledgement, he wanted to go beyond their control, according to Klopper (*Emerging Perspectives*, p. 123). These unstable relationships raised the question of “madness” since he treated the surrounding atmosphere with a sense of alienation and uncertainty; especially after his homecoming to Zimbabwe in 1981. That glaring sense of alienation was reflected in his controversial collection *Mindblast* in which he published his most iconic and researched poem *Throne of Bayonets* in which “he criticizes the Mugabe regime and its superficial socialism” (Armstrong, p. 184). The title of the collection is a reference to the creative process which has a sudden and intense impact on the mind or a powerful mental experience. As for the title of the poem, *Throne of Bayonets*, it shows a direct attack against the postcolonial Zimbabwean regime that secured its sovereignty, “throne”, by using violence and “bayonets”. Through the poem, he reflects on his personal turmoil and despair, and that is clear in the opening lines of the poem:

Where to sit still
And slam the door
Against fear of tomorrow?
Brute black rain
Pummels my brainpaths
Unleashes areas of despair
In my once sunlit memory.
Nothing but blows and kicks
Greet the friendly eye of thought
Which bloodied muddied shakes the dust
To all humanity
And discovers terror the totem of truth. (*Mindblast*, p. 89)

Marechera’s persona in the poem reflects on negative emotions that overwhelmed him in the post-independence era. After years of suffering from colonialism, he was deeply stricken with despair after promises of prosperity made by the government. The diction shows a sense of despair is reflected in the usage of metaphors such as “brute black rain” that “pummels” their mind which reflects a sense of chaos, violence, and internal struggle with the negative feelings due to

the deterioration that he is witnessing. He also reflects on the usage of oxymorons the representation of the schizophrenic environment that he was living in as he is torn between memories that were once "sunlit" but have now been overwhelmed with despair. The lines exhibit a more vivid rhythmic flow, marked by a combination of enjambment. There is an alliterative repetition of the "b" sound in "brute", "black," "bloodied", and "blows", which adds a rhythmic quality to the poem. Additionally, there is a noticeable repetition of the "t" sound in the same line in "terror" "totem", and "truth" which creates an increasing sense of the music of the line to carve the importance of truth in the mind of the reader.

The imagery in the poem, as such, suggests a profound change in the speaker's perception of the past regardless of the colonial legacy that triggered his mental suffering. Thus, he poses many questions regarding his sense of alienation; whether to continue this choice and ignore the fear of tomorrow, especially with the problematic situation that intensified his predicament. He shows how the intellectual pursuit in his country as represented in the "friendly eye of thought" is being "greeted" by nothing but "blows and kicks" which is personification that reflects the hyperbolic usage of sheer violence to silence and blind any form of opposition. However, he tried to rise above all the problems by "shaking the dust", but his attempts were met by "blood" and "mud" which again raises the idea of contradiction between what he is doing and the harsh reality of his country. Nevertheless, he believes that someday all humanity regardless of the suffering will be able to disclose "the totem of truth" or the most preserved truth despite the surrounding "terrors". The opening lines of the poem touch upon the fact that writing can be a form of either escape or resistance and raise the idea of the contradiction that surrounds a non-conformist writer such as Marechera. It raises the question of madness— is he really mad or schizophrenic, or he is just surrounded in his reality by signs of schizophrenia and madness? However, the answer can be that despite his struggle with his personal demons he was fully aware of the surrounding deterioration.

The analysis of his literary selections highlights the recurring pattern of branding his full name Marechera, a non-conformist writer who is suffering from schizophrenia, as mad to suppress his voice. This justifies the use of Foucault's paradigm to examine the impact of power on the definition of madness and its role in shaping his literary narratives. Marechera's mental struggle is a result of fighting omnipotent oppressors whose perception of ideals as justice and freedom

contradicts with what he believes in. Thus, fighting against unrealistic or schizophrenic ideals propagated by the authority may have led him to such deteriorating mental conditions since he was traumatized by the lack of integrity and injustice on many levels.

Conclusion

Madness has been a social concept throughout history, with various interpretations due to a lack of knowledge and education. It has evolved beyond physical and mental disturbances to include challenging opinions. The paper explored the correlation between madness and power, focusing on the writings of the Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera. Many of Marechera's writings protested colonialism and dismantled its false narratives, demonstrating the complex relationship between mental instability and literary genius. Despite suffering from mental health issues, Marechera remained an antagonistic voice who spoke against injustice, seeking ideals and love despite the stigma of mental illness. The assertion of Marechera's madness was manipulated to discredit his reliability and cast uncertainty on the genuineness of his literary creations, especially in the aftermath of his schizophrenia diagnosis. He was a restless soul tormented with a hungry heart which made him a traveler searching for ideals and love everywhere regardless of his battle with the stigma of his psychological challenges.

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