“It seems appropriate, at this time of renewed xenophobic suspicion and violence, to consider the legacy of a writer whose life and work exemplified border-breaching inclusivity”… from Dambudzo Marechera: Africa’s literary doppelganger by Chame Lavery, 2015.

Dambudzo Marechera was born June 4th 1952, in former, colonial Rhodesia and died August 1987 in Zimbabwe. He was a Zimbabwean novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist and poet. He won scholarships to St Augustine’s Secondary School, the University of Zimbabwe and to New College, Oxford and was expelled from all three institutions for challenging conventional and authoritarian views.

Marechera’s first novel, House of Hunger (1978), won the 1979 Guardian fiction award. It was followed by four other novels, Black Sunlight (1980), The Black Insider (1990) and Mindblast (1884). His poetry, collected together in Cemetery of Mind, was published posthumously in 1992. After his departure from Oxford, he lived and wrote in London until his return to Zimbabwe in 1982 where he lived until his death in 1987. Following is a selection of his writings, including poems and excerpts from his books and interviews.
“I think writers are usually recruited into a revolutionary movement before that revolution gains what it is seeking. Once it has achieved that, writers are simply discarded either as a nuisance or as totally irrelevant. I don’t know that the writer can offer the emerging nation anything. But I think that 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 anything that he feels to be going against the grain of the nation’s aspirations. When Smith was ruling us 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 mistakes. A writer is part of society; a writer notices what is going on around him, sees the poverty every day. How can you whitewash poverty?” Dambudzo Marechera, interview South Magazine, 1984.

"War is no longer a mere fact of life but life itself. It is no longer a shadow under which we live; now it is us. Perhaps it has always been so, the only difference being that we no longer even care to waste our breath justifying our actions." Dambudzo Marechera, The Black Insider. 1990

**The Bar-Stool Edible Worm**

I am against everything
Against war and those against
War. Against whatever diminishes
Th’individuals blind impulse.
Shake the peaches down from
The summer poem, Rake in ripe
Luminosity; dust, taste. Lunchtime
News – pass the Castor Oil, Alice.

*Dambudzo Marechera, Cemetery of Mind, 1992*

"For a black writer the language is very racist; you have to have harrowing fights and hair-rising panga duals with the language before you can make it do all that you want it to do. It is so for feminists. English is very male. Hence feminist writers also adopt the same tactics. This may mean discarding grammar, throwing syntax out, subverting images from within, beating the drum and cymbals of rhythm, developing torture chambers of irony and sarcasm, gas ovens of limitless black resonance." *Marachera interviews himself, in: Dambudzo Marechera, 4 June 1952-18 August 1987*
Down dust dread dance
Since wrong wrung in chance
Will we? Dare we? Pronounce
The last human ounce?
Duet the solo done dually
Marching guns to fire January
Grapeshot into the new year's flank;
Dillydallying naked on the armoured tank.
Bullet-proof pirate taxi
Hired in desert the Mexi-
Can — Caramba! I was dreaming
And am not dreaming hopes the seeming.
Dambudzo Marechera, Siesta, Buddy's Selected Poems, Cemetery of Mind. 1992

"No, I don’t hate being black. I’m just tired of saying it’s beautiful. No, I don’t hate myself.
I’m just tired of people bruising their knuckles on my jaw. I’m tired of racking my brains in
the doorway. I don’t know. Nothing turns out as exactly intended. A cruel sarcasm rules our
lives. Sometimes freedom’s opportunity is a wide waistline. The bulldozers have been and
gone and where once our heroes danced there is nothing but a hideous stain." Dambudzo
Marechera, The House of Hunger. 1978

Identify the Identity Parade

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."
I am the rat every cat secretly admires;
The cat every dog secretly fears;
The pervert every honest citizen surprises
in his own mirror: POET.

*Dambudzo Marechera, Cemetery of Mind. 1992*

"It is not sanity or insanity that I fear but the power that consciously shapes these in others. Advertisements, educational programmes, television, the radio, universities, general elections, wars and the very notion of progress have performed mass brain operations in the heads of peoples in Africa, America, Asia and the Pacific. The human being consciously created himself by cramming inside his own head the things that have convinced him of his separateness from his animal lineage. In the same way, others today are convincing themselves in Africa and elsewhere of their own elite separateness from those 'unfortunate' enough not to have had brain operations quickly enough, if ever. In this maze I only know that the presumption of superior intelligence is more likely to hurt than to heal, more likely to dehumanize than to make us more human." *Dambudzo Marechera, The Black Insider. 1990*

"It is not so much what is unimaginable as what we cannot imagine that frames each individual human experience." *Dambudzo Marechera, The Black Insider. 1990*

In jail the only telephone is the washbasin hole: blow and we will hear

Write the poem not from classroom lectures
But from the barricade’s shrieking defiance.
From the mortuary’s brightly frozen monocle
From day’s gunburst to night’s screaming human torch
From bleeding teeth that informed to underground
Perception of black fire

Write the poem not from the rhyme and reason of England
Nor the Israeli chant that stutters bullets against Palestinians
Nor (for fuck’s sake) from the negritude that negroed us
Write the poem, the song, the anthem, from what within you
Fused goals with guns and created citizens instead of slaves

Do not scream quietly
We want to hear, to know
And forge the breastplate a poet needs against THEM!
*Dambudzo Marechera, Cemetery of Mind. 1992*
"While I was writing Black Sunlight I was reading books on intellectual anarchism to reinforce my own sense of protest against everything; I was reading Bakunin and Kropotkin. Intellectual anarchism is full of contradictions in the sense that it can never achieve its goals. If it achieves any goal at all, then it is no longer anarchism. And so one has to be in a perpetual state of change, without holding on to any certainties. And that element I put across very seriously as well as in a very frivolous vein.

At the same time a very heavy element in Black Sunlight is this idea about sexuality. Everything political becomes personal, everything personal becomes political, but the four are in a state of continuous tension, and therefore almost everything one says or does reeks actually of sex. A bullet can be a heavy sexual image. A bomb can be like the eruption of sperm in the womb. Most of the people I was living with were people who rejected traditional sexual roles and accepted sexuality as a liberating force in itself. As you know, I provide no answers, except only a rigorous re-evaluation, especially of western intellectual thought. ” Interview with Alle Lansu, February 1986, Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work.

I am the rape
Marked on the map
The unpredictable savage
Set down on the page
The obsequious labourer
Who will never be emperor
My hips have rhythm
My lips an anthem
My arms a reckoning
My feet flight
My eyes black sunlight
My hair dreadlocks
Sit on this truth out at sea
Hit the shit when you go out to tea
Don’t want to hear what ears hear
Don’t want to see what eyes see
Your white body writhing underneath
All the centuries of my wayward fear
Goodness is not ground out of stone
Evil neither. Men gnaw their chicken bones.
Know the electric shocks that seized my testicles.
Which now you eat with the lips of a sunrise
Your white body writhing underneath
All the centuries of my wayward fear.

Dambudzo Marechera, I Am The Rape, The Black Insider.1990
“Language is indissolubly connected with what it is that constitutes humanity in human beings and also, of course with inhumanity. Everything about language, the obscene, the sublime, the gibberish, the pontificatory, the purely narrative, the verbally threatening, the adjectivally nauseating - they are all part of the chiselling art at the heart of my art, the still sad music...”  
_ Dambudzo Marechera, An Interview with Himself._

_In the History Class_
Dress the question in jeans
And sweater
And black-bull-skin sandals
The hair Gorgonlocks of the dead
Man’s father: Gunter Grass jellied
Pig’s head Salome of Babylon
Serves on a brass platter;
Night’s drumsticks in overpowering
Crescendo pulse within; massed oxhideshields
And knobkerries like blackrain sea in pounding
Tumult toward the Gatling Gun. Truth
Dealt his assegai, drove to the bone-hilt
The uttermost point of the tumult. Where then
The sire and hero of our time, the all-amassing
massive msasa?
_Dambudzo Marechera, Cemetery of Mind. 1992_

"The scarred hand of exile was dry and deathlike and the lines of its palm were the waterless riverbeds, the craters and fissures and dry channels scoured out of the earth by the relentless drought. My own hands, with their scars and callouses and broken fingernails, sometimes seemed to belong not to me but to this exacting punishment of exile."  
_ Dambudzo Marechera, The House of Hunger. 1978_

_The Trees of this City_
Trees too tired to carry the burden
Of Leaf and bud, of bird and bough
Too harassed by the rigours of unemployment
The drought-glare of high rents
And spiralling cost of water and mealie meal
Trees shrivelled into abortion by the forest fires
Of dumped political policies
Trees whose Kachasu-veined twig-fingers
Can no longer clench into the people’s fist
But wearily wipe dripping noses, wearily wave away
The fly-ridden promises issuing out of the public
Lavatory
Trees under which, hungry and homeless,
I emerge from seed to drill a single root into the
Salt stone soil
The effort of a scream of despair.
*Dambudzo Marechera, Cemetery of Mind.* 1992

"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 dream that we discover our mythical self." *Dambudzo Marechera, Cemetery of Mind.* 1992

"Thoughts that think in straight lines cannot see round corners..." *Dambudzo Marechera, The Black insider.* 1990

Tomatoes
I get tired of the blood
And the coughing
and more blood
I get out of that flat real fast
to some cool quarrelling bar
and talk big to bigger comrades
washing down the blood with Castle an’ Label
shaking hands about Tsitsi bombed to heaven
trying to forget I don’t like cooking in dead people’s
pots and pans
I don’t like wearing and looking smart-arse in dead
people’s shirts an’ pants
(They said yoh mama an’ bra been for you
said these are your inheritance)
I’m so tight as a drum can’t drink no more
It’s back at the flat on my back
swallowing it all red back hard down
I woke up too tired to break out so bright red a bubble.
*Dambudzo Marechera, Cemetery of Mind, Which of you Bastards is Death?* 1992

"From early in my life I have viewed literature as a unique universe that has no internal divisions. I do not pigeon-hole it by race or language or nation. It is an ideal cosmos co-existing with this crude one. I had a rather grim upbringing in the ghetto and have ever since tried to deny the painful reality of concrete history. If, as it is said, we all have something to
hide, then my whole life has been an attempt to make myself the skeleton in my own cupboard. If brightness can fall from the air, then, as with Heinrich Heine, poetry is the art of making invisibility visible. Translating the literary imagination into fact may perhaps make writers acknowledged legislators. It becomes a question of perspective, almost of optics. If I am looking at something, and I am conscious of myself looking, does that affect what I see? Can I learn to experience the world from that quality in us which is the source of dreams?” Dambudzo Marechera, lecture, October 1986.

“Nothing lasts long enough to make any sense...There are fragments and snatches of fragments. The momentary fingerings of a guitar. Things as they are—but not really in the Wallace Stevens manner. The way things have always been. A torn bit of newspaper whose words have neither beginning nor end but the words upon it. A splinter of melody piercing the ear with a brittle note. Nothing lasts long enough to have been. These fragments of everything descend upon us haphazardly. Only rarely do we see the imminence of wholes. And that is the beginning of art.” Dambudzo Marechera, The House of Hunger. 1978

The Dambudzo Marechera Archive of the Humboldt University in Berlin
https://rs.cms.hu-berlin.de/marecheraarchive/pages/home.php?login=true

http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p024mfks
http://s55615.gridserver.com/The_Scofield_Issue_1.3_Dambudzo_Marechera.pdf
https://mg.co.za/article/2015-04-09-dambudzo-marechera-africas-literary-doppelganger

Selected works:
The House of Hunger, 1978
Black Sunlight, 1980
Mindblast; or, The Definitive Buddy, 1984
The Black Insider, 1990 (compiled and edited by Flora Veit-Wild)
Scrapiron Blues, 1994 (compiled and edited by Flora Veit-Wild)