

THE ZAMBIAN SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH : A
CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF FORM, THEME AND
LINGUISTIC MEDIUM

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Leonard Chirwa

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To Muzyamba in gratitude

To Muzyamba in gratitude

DECLARATION

I, Leonard Chirwa, solemnly declare that this dissertation has not been previously submitted for a degree in this or another university.

Len Chirwa

Signed

APPROVAL

This dissertation of Leonard Chirwa is approved as fulfilling part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in African Literature.

EXAMINERS

1. Hrimangyan Date : 15-6-90
2. [Signature] Date : 23-7-90
3. [Signature] Date : 27/7/90
4. [Signature] Date : 26/7/90

ABSTRACT

Drawing on both recent short story theory and contemporary African literary criticism, this essay offers a brief history of short story writing in Zambia, mindful to highlight literary and extra-literary influences on the main thematic and technical trends, and subjects selected works to detailed scrutiny. The dominant themes of the literature - courtship and marriage, problems of urban life, and the female experience in a male-dominated society - are discussed in isolation as well as in relation to wider socio-cultural developments in Zambia since independence, and the structural and stylistic devices employed in some of the stories are evaluated in the context of particular stories' thematic concerns and/or desired effects. Coming at a time when critics are still largely indifferent to African short fiction, it is hoped that the issues raised here will stimulate further research and study in this sadly neglected area.

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 STATE OF SHORT STORY SCHOLARSHIP IN ZAMBIA

In his preface to Jazz and Palm Wine, Wilfried F Feuser (1981 : 1) notes:

Although it is bursting with life, the short story in Africa is a neglected genre. Critics have paid scant attention to the short story and treated it as a footnote to the novel. And yet short story writers were deeply involved in the genesis of African writing in European languages.

The state of short story scholarship in Zambia is a fine illustration of the truism of this observation. At worst, the short story in Zambia is completely discarded and at best treated as a marginal genre deserving little more than a passing glance along the critic's way to the 'serious' business of the novel (see, for instance, Reed, 1984). 'Literacy, Literature and Ideological Formation : The Zambian Case' (1983), Chileshe's seminal study of Zambian culture in a neo-colonial context, is the only major academic work so far to give serious critical consideration and attention to the genre. Given the broad scope of the study, however, the comments on Zambian short fiction are necessarily sketchy and do not make up for years of neglect.

Further, Chileshe's 'reading' of the stories in Liswaniso's Voices of Zambia (1971) and Mulikita's A Point of No Return (1968), the only collections upon which he bases his impression of Zambian short fiction, is largely thematic, paying little attention to the structural and stylistic devices used to express theme. Other critical comments on Zambian short fiction have been confined to brief articles by reviewers like Mabaso, Simoko and Simpson, and prefaces to short story anthologies. These, however, are too scattered and too shallow to offer the student of the genre sufficient insight into its nature, significance and social context.

Despite the critical neglect, African short fiction, of which the Zambian short story is a part, is gaining in popularity in some literature courses where it is taught as an autonomous genre, or used as an 'introduction into the art and the world of African fiction', given that the majority of students of African literature enter university with a poor background of reading and consequently tend to be intimidated by the sheer size of the novels they have to study (Achebe and Innes, 1985 : x).

Seen in the light of Zambia's literary production and consumption, the short story has several advantages over the novel.

As noted by most literary historians, Chileshe (1983), Phiri (1979) and Vyas (1971), for example, Zambian publishing facilities are not adequate to sustain full-scale book publication. The book publishing industry is also adversely affected by exorbitant printing costs which inevitably means that the books produced are too highly priced for the average Zambian. One would argue, then, that Zambia's publishing possibilities correspond more to short stories, which can be published - complete and self-contained - in magazines as well as anthologies and be broadcast on radio, than to novels, which almost always have to be published in book form.

Given the apparent dearth of published scholarship on the African short story in general and Zambian short fiction in particular, the genre's growing popularity in educational curricula, and apparent suitability to Zambian means of publication, serious criticism of this literature is not only desirable but necessary. The present study is, among other things, designed to meet this need, albeit in a small way.

0.2 ASSEMBLY OF DATABASE AND ANALYTIC PROCEDURE

The difficulties the researcher in Zambian short fiction has to come to terms with include the lack of any comprehensive Zambian short story index and the tendency towards periodical rather than book publication. Bliss and Rigg's Zambia (1984) is the most comprehensive record available of Zambian writing up to the time of publication. Like Jahn and Dressler's Bibliography of Creative African Writing (1971), the list includes only Baptie's The Drummer of the West (1970), Liswaniso's Voices of Zambia, and Mulikita's A Point of No Return. As most Zambian stories are still uncollected, Zambia is severely limited as resource material. Though Bliss and Rigg provide useful information on periodicals that have published and/or continue publishing Zambian short stories, the interested researcher still has to undertake a time-consuming search through numerous magazines 'hidden' in repositories at home and abroad.

The search, in this case, involved extensive use of the Special Collections section of the University of Zambia Library, National Archives, Lusaka, and Sheffield University's Inter-Library Loans department. Given the

apparent critical neglect of the genre, I was surprised to find such a wealth of uncollected material. Some two hundred stories by ninety writers were collected and classified according to theme and genre. The most significant of these were then selected for detailed scrutiny.

For obvious reasons - it was impossible, for instance, to include newspaper and radio stories due to limitations of time and space - no claim can be made that the final selection was comprehensive or even completely representative. An attempt was, however, made to select texts that display some of the major trends in Zambian short story writing since 1964.

Some 'expatriate' stories were included in the selection, although it has been traditional in literary circles to separate expatriate writing from Zambian literature (see, for instance, Reed, 1984). Though the exclusion of 'expatriate' from 'indigenous' writing makes neat categorization possible, it ignores the fact that Zambian writers of African, Asian and European origin share many themes and concerns, an oversight the present study tries to avoid.

The study opens with a brief history of Zambian short fiction, mindful to highlight literary and extra-literary

influences and conditions of production that inform on the range of themes and treatment. Chapter Two, 'Thematic Concerns', employs frontier theory to assess the scope and depth of the social issues raised and the 'manner of handling' within the restricted framework of short fiction, and proceeds to consider the socio-historical significance of the themes. Guided by the dictum that there must be harmony between the structural and stylistic devices employed in a short story and what that story is to portray, Chapter Three, 'Form and Style' looks at the structural and rhetorical features of some of the stories in the context of their thematic concerns and/or desired effects. Zambian short story practices, such as the employment of realism and linear narrative structure, and subgenres as diverse as 'trick-writing', 'confessions' and 'hybrid' stories are discussed and illustrated by specific examples drawn from diverse writers and stories. Linguistic peculiarities, such as 'palm-oil' tendencies, involving the infusion of appropriate translations of local idiom and imagery into village characters' dialogues, innovations relating to the languages-in-contact phenomenon in urban areas, and usages deriving directly from the aim of particular writers to impart knowledge or to provoke laughter, are also highlighted. Finally, in Chapter Four, important observations made through-

out the study, specifically those relating to the scope and limitations of Zambian short story production, are drawn together in a series of concluding remarks.

The study draws widely on both recent short story theory and contemporary African literary criticism. From the former comes the concern with 'unity of effect', techniques of plot compression and 'ideal' short story material while from the latter critical context comes the concern with the significance of the folkloric content of the literature both in terms of its quantity and in terms of its effect on the total impact of individual texts, the place of English in African literature, and the tendency towards writing for a European audience at the expense of the African readership. Although many of the issues raised are merely touched upon, it is hoped that they will nevertheless stimulate further discussion of aspects of form, theme and language use in Zambian short fiction which have hitherto received relatively little critical attention.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 THE BEGINNING

Zambian fiction in English has its roots in the cultural revival which accompanied the struggle for national independence. The advent of Independence in 1964 unleashed national consciousness on a mass scale which found expression in, among other things, the rapid expansion of basic education, the founding of the first university, Zambianization of the school curriculum and the civil service, and the development of a national press.

Due to the country's tribal-linguistic diversity (Zambia has about 70 local languages and dialects for a population of 7 million), English was adopted as the official language of education, bureaucracy, Parliament and the press. This had far-reaching implications for Zambian society and the literature that was to emerge. According to Lackson Kaemba (1968), English (spoken by only about a quarter of the Zambian population well into the 1970s) was elevated to such a level that merely being able to read and speak it became, for most, an 'achievement of [high] status', both educational and social; reading anything in the verna-

cular became a 'degrading' and 'embarrassing sign of illiteracy'. If the 'people who mattered' in the new nation were those who, among other things, had a good command of English, it follows that the vernacular writer, who, since the advent of writing, had taken over the village elder's revered position of 'historian' and 'wiseman' was now dismissed as a writer of simple and irrelevant tales.

It is important, in this regard, to remember the existence, some twenty years prior to Independence, of 'Northern Rhodesian vernacular fiction', the output of several mission presses and, later, the Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Joint Publications Bureau. The writers at the time included Josiah Phiri, Jacob Zulu, Andrea Masiye and the highly acclaimed Stephen Mpashi. As well as publishing original vernacular fiction, these writers translated popular titles into other local languages.

With further encouragement this literature would have blossomed into a 'formidable' body of indigenous writing. After independence, however, many vernacular writers switched to writing in English or stopped writing altogether. The existing body of literature in Nyanja, Lozi, Bemba, Tonga, Kaonde and other smaller languages in the North-Western

Province quickly sank into oblivion except perhaps in some schools and colleges where it was, and still is, virtually imposed upon reluctant students of Zambian languages. So grew Zambian apathy towards vernacular writing, a situation which persists to this day. Whereas Zambian educationists and ordinary readers generally welcomed Zambia's preference for literature in English to vernacular fiction, critics like Mubanga Kashoki (1970) related the marginalization of vernacular writing to the 'educated' Zambian's affinity to things European, 'va cizungu', and aversion to things African, 'va cimunthu', and warned of the psychological dangers of second languages giving rise to second-rate people, pathetic caricatures robbed of their cultural and individual identity and divorced from their surroundings and their fellows. Frightful though the consequences were, and granted that English was as firmly established as it was in Zambia, the way out of the problem of second language and foreign cultural domination was not in Zambian writers doing away with English, an undertaking which, according to Moody (1984 : 13) 'would be long and difficult and might well lead to far more cultural and psychological disruption than is caused by the second language situation itself', but, rather, in the writers 'conquering' the language by imposing their personalities upon it and 'forcing' it to

serve their desired purposes.

1.2 THE BIRTH OF LITERARY JOURNALS

The campaign for a national literature in English to express national feeling, revive and promote Zambia's cultural identity, was given official approval by the first President of the Republic, Kenneth Kaunda, who in a 1969 address to budding Zambian writers said that given the conditions prevailing at the time, there was 'perhaps no more appropriate mode of expression for the revival and promotion of Zambia's culture than the literary form' (Liswaniso, 1972 : 25). The country was then going through a period of rapid social change due to the independence process. The people were badly in need of ways of coping with change : valued traditional institutions needed protection and promotion, old suspicions and animosities between tribes and races needed diffusing and new alliances making and maintaining, social decadence needed to be anticipated and, if possible, prevented. A literature that would play an active role in this process of 'coping with change' would be welcome.

With profits from a lucrative copper industry, Zambia was able to finance various development projects including the publication of fiction. Numerous literary contests were

organized and the number of literary fora increased. New Writing from Zambia, Zambia's first literary quarterly was launched by the New Writers' Group in 1964. Four years later, a group of University of Zambia students launched their own quarterly, The Jewel of Africa. There were now new opportunities within Zambia for the publication of short stories, poetry and review articles.

Though both journals were aimed at encouraging Zambian writing in English, foreign works were sometimes published to discourage complacency among Zambian writers, what the editor of New Writing from Zambia (Vol 5, No 2, 1968) had in mind when he quipped : 'Umwana ashenda atasha nyina ukunaya, the child who stays at home praises only his mother's cooking'. The technical quality of the stories accepted varied widely because the magazines published both 'good' work by established writers to provide models, and 'less mature' work that contained 'the spark of something that could develop if given encouragement' (Editorial, New Writing from Zambia, Vol 8, No 1, 1972).

The lack of a rigorous critical tradition encouraged new literates in schools and the professions to participate in the evolving literary culture without serious inhibitions. There was an outburst of writing from writers like

William Saidi, a journalist by profession, Kafungulwa Mubitana, anthropologist, Gerry Gallagher, accountant, Henry Mtonga, police officer, Bwale Chisaka, UNZA graduate, and Chiman Vyas, research officer in the Department of Cultural Services.

1.3 THE PIONEERS

Some of the stories from New Writing from Zambia and The Jewel of Africa were collected into an anthology, Voices of Zambia, published by NECZAM in 1971. The anthology, in the words of Mufalo Liswaniso, its editor, was intended 'to "throw some light" on creative writing in Zambia, to give a cross section of the nature and standard of fiction the writer in Zambia has produced, is producing and will . . . continue to produce' (1971 : v). The range of themes was necessarily wide, spanning traditional life remote from European influence, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and post-independence experience with the attendant adjustment problems.

The collection enjoyed a mixed critical reception upon publication. Critics variously praised convincing characterization, the use of African speech and imagery

and the successful infusion of interesting 'anthropological information', such as the Lozi 'spit-salute', in some of the stories, and deprecated the inclusion of tedious sociological data, and ungrammatical English masquerading as 'African idiom', in others.

Being thematically and technically uneven (Patu Simoko once remarked that he found some of the 'voices' 'hoarse', others 'deep and rich', and yet others 'broken and unsure'), Voices provoked the caustic comment that everything that was written in Zambia was published (Mabaso, 1972 : 32). A harsh thing to say, yet perfectly appropriate when one encountered, within the same book, stories by 'serious' writers like Saidi, Katema and Simpson, and inferior pieces like 'I Did Not Know' by Baleni Khumalo who, according to Simoko (1973 : 29), should not have allowed this story of a pregnant schoolgirl out of his exercise book! It became clear from this that editorial laxity, earlier hailed for encouraging the free participation of new writers, had had a bandwagon effect, allowing much 'schoolboy' writing - George Banda's 'Road to Ndola' (1969), Peter Chanda's 'Celebrant Filimoni' (1970), John Kanyanta's 'Catch, Thief' (1971), etc - into the mainstream of Zambian publication. In a situation where there was so little successful writing and so much futile writing, it was the overtly mediocre that attracted the attention of critics

who had little time to search for 'good' Zambian writing.

Fwanyanga Mulikita's A Point of No Return, published by NECZAM three years ahead of Voices of Zambia, was also a product of indiscriminate publication, given the untidy mixture of style and non-style, insight and nonsense the collection exhibits. Government-sponsored, NECZAM did not have profit as its primary purpose. The publication of A Point of No Return was therefore understandable, the simultaneous issuing of the book by Macmillan, in hardcover, less so.

Mulikita, Zambia's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations, now (1989 -) Speaker of the National Assembly, is the man regarded as the main formative figure of Zambian literature in English. An English and Psychology graduate of Fort Hare and holder of a certificate in freelance journalism, he has also published a rather obscure children's book, The Wise Fool and Other Stories (Oxford, 1978) and Shaka Zulu (Longmans, 1967), so far the only play by a Zambian to be adopted on the school syllabus. His source of inspiration for writing, according to Simoko (1972) and Chileshe (1983), was apparently the demand made upon him, as one of the few educated Zambians (Zambia had a hundred university graduates at independence), to contribute meaning-

fully to a new Zambian culture. What better proof of this than the revealing poem, 'This Man My Hero' (1965), he wrote, at Max Oloff's request, while still with the United Nations:

Let me try to revive my poetic art
 Henry's obligation to fulfill with
 the pen that has rested too long
 and only persistent requests stirs
 me along to hazard my name in full
 or part (Quoted in Simoko, 1972 : 22).

Mulikita wrote on a wide range of issues including colonial injustice ('The Tender Crop'), the problems of urban life ('Chibikubantu's Lover' and 'On the Brink of Chance'), the beauty of African culture before the arrival of the white man ('Mulonda wa Lilonga') and witchcraft ('Human Caterpillars Were Eating Away the Leaves of His Family', 'A Doctor of Philosophy Changes His Mind' and 'Chikoli's Ghost'). His narrative techniques were generally simple and included the juxtaposition of colonial capitalism with African communalism, the glorification of the African past through the idolization of the exploits of a legendary Lozi chief, and hyperbolic documentation of township squalor, and the potency of witchcraft. Though these techniques served to heighten Mulikita's concerns, his stories were frequently ruined by careless composition and poor style. Where he should have

been brief, Mulikita, apparently oblivious of the fact that 'beauty' in the short story comes from economy of style, was too elaborate, needlessly qualifying almost every speech:

'I never buy anything without consulting my bwana, you see,' he said. He doubted his own judgement (Mulikita, 1968 : 18).

Had he been more confident, Mulikita would have developed an effective style of his own. One thinks here of the unusual collocation in 'With it [a bucket] you fished your water from the well' (61) or where 'communalism' was expressed simply as 'yours is mine and mine is yours' (17). His control of language was, however, so shaky that his characters' speeches were constantly out of character. Mulikita was apparently unable to sufficiently distance himself from his literary creations. As a result, he had trouble deciding when or when not to use high-sounding allusions and technical jargon. In 'Chibikubantu's Lover', for instance, he had a semi-literate Lusaka thug tell his inquisitive bride (a barmaid) not to behave like a 'modern Socrates' (61) while elsewhere he, quite unnecessarily, 'stuffed' his Old Hankwamuna with so much stilted speech that he sounded more like a newspaper feature than a storyteller: ' . . . What a somnambulist utters during sleep however incriminating it may be, cannot be used as evidence upon which the courts may

base judgement In the circumstances the magistrate found himself unable to convict the accused' (99). It was the frequency of such stylistic flaws that led to Simoko (1972 : 22) concluding that Mulikita's main weakness was that in all his stories art played a role inferior to propaganda. This weakness Mulikita shared with many other Zambian writers before and after A Point of No Return.

Scottish-born Robert Baptie followed in Mulikita's footsteps, publishing two story collections in 1970 : The Drummer of the West and Sakatoni. Because of the facility of his tales, however, Baptie was easily dismissed as a writer of children's stories; he also authored 'Ackson', a popular children's adventure series in Orbit. His Drummer of the West contained too many 'silly' stories to be taken seriously. There was, for instance, 'Who Shuts the Door?', a tale of a quarrelsome old couple who leave their door open after agreeing that it should be closed by whoever speaks first. When, in the middle of the night, burglars threaten to humiliate the woman and scald the man with stew, the man protests, upon which the wife springs to her feet dancing and shouting: 'Husband, husband! You were the first to speak. You are the one that must shut the door' (Baptie, 1970b : 16). The

story was taken from 'Get Up and Bar the Door', an old Scottish ballad recorded in several ballad books including Buchan's A Scottish Ballad Book (1973 : 180-181). There was nothing wrong with what Baptie did but the enterprise added nothing to his craft or to the original ballad. One saw nothing in Baptie of the ingenuity associated with, for instance, Angela Carter, a writer who has successfully employed folkloric figures, motifs and techniques in her short fiction without sacrificing her artistry (The Bloody Chamber, Penguin, 1979). The distinction between the Baptie and the Carter approaches was that while Baptie aimed at 'reproduction', Carter saw folkloric figures and motifs as effective devices for expressing (in a heightened manner) her own world view, thus adding new dimensions to both her sources and the literature she produced.

That Baptie aimed most of his writing at 'readers of limited ability' should be clear from such thematically and textually thin tales as 'A Breath of Life', a story about the 'kiss of life' technique, apparently borrowed from a First Aid manual, and 'Fire', a piece concerned solely with the rescue of some children from a house fire. This was however only part of the Baptie story, for one also found, in The Drummer of the West,

more 'mature' tales like 'The Love of a Woman', a moving story about coping with a major family tragedy, and the allegorical 'Human Kingdom' trilogy: 'The Independent Man', 'The Store' and 'Independence Well'. Elsewhere, Baptie published other 'serious' stories such as 'Bus to Chipata' (New Writing from Zambia, 7, 4, 1971) and 'Not His Fault' (Z Magazine, 33, 1972). These 'mature' tales were nearly always well-researched, and often included the little oddities usually taken for granted by the ordinary Zambian yet significant when pondered on.

1.4 THE DECLINE

The seventies, on the strength of some exciting experiments with language and form by David Simpson, H E Haangala, Mary Chiwego, Bwale Chisaka, David Wallace and a few others, saw some improvement in the quality of short story writing. At the same time, however, cultural activities associated with nationalistic feelings of the sixties slipped into a lull that would last through the eighties.

The view of the present study is that this lull resulted mainly from Zambia's economic malaise linked to the collapse of copper and cobalt prices in the early seventies.

Austerity measures adopted to revive the economy led to a severe shortage of printing material. Mphala Creative Society and the New Writers' Group, publishers of The Jewel of Africa and New Writing from Zambia, respectively, ceased publication due to diminishing financial and technical resources. NECZAM survived but the company was so overburdened with textbook and government printing that it had little surplus machinery and stationery to sustain fiction publication.

It is not insignificant to note that since the collapse of these 'fora', Zambia has seen little of interest published except three narratives included in Breaking Free and Whispering Land, anthologies of stories by African women published by SIDA (1985) to mark the end of the United Nations' Women's Decade, and a trickle of tales published in Ngoma, Women's Exclusive, the now too erratic Z Magazine and the little-known Poetry. This being the case, it is easy to understand why the loss of fora and the lack of a viable promotion programme rank high among Zambian writers' complaints. Wallace, for instance, has noted that many Zambians would continue writing if they saw 'some probability of publication' while Chishimba claims that NECZAM does very little to promote writing 'apart from receiving manuscripts and sending most of them back to the authors' (Simpson,

1976 : 16). Could the lack of interest by NECZAM and other existing publishers also be attributed to the rarity of high quality submissions? The mediocrity of most of the texts collected for the present study indicates such a possibility.

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that the rise of the Zambian short story in English coincided with socio-cultural changes stimulated by the advent of Independence in 1964 : rapid urbanization, the adoption of English as a national language and the multiplication of journals. Responding to the need to express national feeling, revive and promote Zambia's cultural identity (in the face of rapid socio-cultural change), many educated Zambians, among them school and college students, schoolteachers and journalists, took it upon themselves to participate meaningfully in the cultural process through writing. Not only was there a ready audience for what was written in schools and colleges, where a nascent readership constantly demanded light, simple reading material, but, using profits from a lucrative copper industry, Zambia was able to sponsor writing competitions and support publication ventures.

The scope of themes treated through the years is fairly wide, spanning aspects of traditional life, juvenile delinquency, excessive beer drinking, crime, revenge, love and marriage, witchcraft, the colonial condition, the clash of cultures and the problems of urban life. The main preoccupation is however with the problems of a new society in which the introduction of new cultural elements has stimulated new desires, attitudes and values. This preoccupation, through which writers take an active role in the socialization of people caught in the crises of an altered socio-cultural environment, is variously dramatized through stories depicting the conflict between traditional and modern marriage ideals, the joys and frustrations of intercultural marriages and the problems of rural-urban migration. Another theme related to the changing cultural climate in Zambia is that of feminist protest in which one hears the anguished voice of the 'new' African woman questioning male sexuality and the unfairness that attends it.

Because of the strong influence of the oral tradition, particularly the African tale tradition which emphasizes mimesis and didacticism over artistic effect* , many of the stories

*One should however never forget the existence, in pre-literate societies, of good storytellers who drew enthusiastic audiences to their rendition of otherwise 'common' and 'loosely constructed' narratives through the power of rhetoric, intonation and gesture.

produced are mimetic and didactic in character without being carefully crafted. The composition of such tales (some of Mulikita's, Baptie's and Chongo's narratives, for instance) generally involves the lifting of familiar 'types' from oral tradition to illustrate well-known morals. Only in a few stories is there a serious attempt to marry profound themes with careful craftsmanship. Whether the chief concern is to 'educate' the reader or to display craftsmanship (which is rare), the main influence on the textual quality of most of the stories seems to be the drive towards finding or inventing a distinctly African/Zambian literary expression to portray authentic Zambian experience, except, of course, in some stories - some of Mulikita's, for instance - where the uncritical use of literary/philosophical allusions and technical jargon yields a stilted style. Except for Baptie, who attempts to evoke pastoral nostalgia through the employment of facile plots and a simple, biblical style, much like Paton's in Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), many writers attempt to authenticate the African content of their works through the infusion of translations of vernacular proverbs and idiom into village characters' dialogues or, where the setting is urban, the employment of code-switching and other linguistic innovations reflecting the meeting of cultures in Zambian towns.

It is not possible to predict the future of Zambian short fiction, given that the 'boom' of Zambian short story writing lasted ten short years giving way to a long lull caused and aggravated by the combined effect of economic malaise, inadequate printing facilities and the marginalization of the arts in school curricula and broader national priorities. It is however safe to speculate that as long as the need to provide entertainment, information and education remains, the short story will survive. And, one hopes, as the aesthetic demands of the literate and the literary-minded increase, there will not only be another 'boom' but Zambian writers will also concern themselves with more profound themes, including post-independence failures in the social, economic and political spheres, and pay more attention to form and language use, given the genre's self-imposed concern with 'intensity' and polish of execution.

CHAPTER TWO

THEMATIC CONCERNS

The widely accepted view that there is, in fact, a unique kind of experience the short story deals with, and a unique way in which it imitates or creates that experience, is largely reinforced by the recurrence of such whimsical terms as 'the flash of fire-flies', 'salient details', 'tightness' and 'miniature representation' in short story theory. Suggested behind the dramatic imagery of the terms in question are notions of transience, rigorous selection, compression and suggestiveness, all of which are crucial to the understanding of the 'special demands' of the genre in-so-far as they affect the writer's choice of subject and 'manner of handling'.

Arguing that the short story is partly characterized by the material it treats, Valerie Shaw (1983) has highlighted its inherent inclination towards what she has called 'frontier' experiences, thus placing herself in line with recent anthropological studies, particularly Edmund Leach's notion of 'boundary' in his Culture and Communication : The Logic by which Symbols are Connected (1976). Spatial and temporal boundaries, according to the argument, are created to give

dimension to otherwise 'continuous' human experience. Given that, in reality, frontiers may be unmarked by any discernible changes in the natural landscape, the boundaries of human experience, in literal and metaphorical terms, are understood to include distinct lines as well as borderlands whose features are shadowy and indistinct. The crossing of social frontiers and thresholds - applicable to multiple contexts ranging from moving into a new socio-cultural environment (such as rural-urban migration) to the transition from childhood to adulthood ('growing up'), dearth to abundance or vice versa (particularly sudden change of fortunes), etc - is therefore often characterized by chaos and crises.

The short story is renowned for its uncompromising penchant for conflict and particularly for its disposition towards depicting, in diverse ways, 'frontier' experiences which evoke a sense of physical and psychological dislocation as characters are caught crossing the treacherous terrain of the threshold. Granted that social boundaries encompass what a given reference group (or individual) considers 'normal', any attempts to escape from or introduce alien elements into the 'natural order of things' are taken to be potentially dangerous, often threatening exclusion

or annihilation. It is no coincidence, therefore, that short story characters are typically strangers, rebels or other 'outsiders' on the fringes of society, such as harlots, thieves and cheats, situations depicted disastrous or potentially disastrous.

Designed to be read uninterrupted in one sitting, the short story is always on trial. The area of human experience chosen for exploration is a crucial test for both the concerned character's credibility and the writer's skill. The writer's artistic task is, in a sense, to convince the reader that the phase he selects from the character's complete life-span is a crucial one, either truly momentous for the character or typical of the lives of many people. Skilfully handled, the situation depicted, seen as a piece of life the artist catches and shapes as it flies past, should be significant in itself as well as in its relationship with the areas of experience outside the confines of the actual story. In the words of Richard Kostelanetz (1966, 1976 : 214),

. . . in contrast to the novel, whose length makes it capable of presenting a broad picture of reality, the short story devotes its attention to a small area of human existence. If, however,

this microcosm is sufficiently resonant, the short story will become a complex symbol for larger worlds. On its surface it may portray a single situation, but in its depth it can comment upon universal issues.

Ideally, then, the short story 'ought to raise some issue' (Bowen, 1937 : 15) and depend for merit on the skill with which condensation is effected.

It is remarkable how, in the light of the foregoing discussion, many Zambian stories concern themselves with the plight of individuals in a new society in which the introduction of new cultural elements has stimulated new desires, attitudes and values. The experiences depicted, covering the rites and customs of marriage, the relationship between parents and children, husband and wife, and the problems of urban life, in the context of sweeping cultural changes, are often inherently dramatic, yielding conflicts which can be effectively explored within the restricted framework of short fiction.

2.1 COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

The majority of Zambian stories dealing with courtship

dramatize the conflict between traditional and modern marriage. In Masautso Phiri's 'The Soil, not the Seed' (1969), for instance, Lote, a 'modern' young man, is forced to marry a woman he does not love even as he has made it clear he is in love with somebody else. Although Lote's parents are, by this act, exercising their traditional right to select their children's marriage partners, the consequences are disastrous. Unable to face the prospect of sleeping with his 'bride', Lote flees to the mines, amid rumours that he is impotent. When he returns home a few years later, with a new wife and son, it is to prove that his family were wrong to have imposed upon him a woman he did not love. Lote's parents are quickly persuaded to reconsider their former stance. After all, the fact that Lote has fathered a son removes the family's stigma of allegedly having an impotent son. Though Phiri undoubtedly feels strongly about the problem of marriage by proxy, one gets the uncomfortable feeling that his is a somewhat confused response to the issue. The story's resolution does not result directly from the central conflict, involving father and son, representing tradition and modernity, respectively, but from a secondary conflict concerning Lote's virility. This being the case, Phiri's intended criticism of arranged marriages is significantly undermined by his disproportional

tionate concern with male prowess.

Another story that deals with the question of arranged marriages is Julius Chongo's 'Namazizi' (1973). Unlike Phiri in 'The Soil, not the Seed', Chongo in 'Namazizi' speaks out in favour of the practice. Intended as a stern warning to children who take no heed of their parents' advice in marriage matters, the story is written as the confession of a 'wayward' child. Influenced, as many of his Nyanja radio narratives are, by oral tradition, 'Namazizi' is, in essence, Chongo's version of the story of a vain village maiden who elopes with a handsome stranger to the disappointment of her relatives who have arranged that she marry the ugliest yet most hardworking boy in the village. Inevitably, the marriage proves a big disappointment and ends childless when Alick, the handsome stranger, 'disappears' to the capital city. The moral here, as in many an African folktale designed to encourage children to marry within the tribe, is : 'Do not be deceived by a stranger's good looks'. If the narrative appears blurred, it is mainly due to Chongo's characterization which rarely rises above the elementary, reducing Namazizi's fate to a case of an unmotivated village girl drawn to

a motorcycle-riding stranger and disaster. There is, in fact, a sense in which Namazizi could be said to lack 'the sense of a life of her own'. Chongo has, however, employed well-known stereotypes from African oral tradition which most Zambian readers can easily identify and respond to appropriately. And, more importantly, the story makes its didactic point well, if simply. Girls who run off with strangers can never be, in the eyes of the tribe, complex or special despite their beauty, and the difficulty many worthwhile suitors have to get through to them. Given that most children would not like to be regarded as foolish, 'Namazizi' most likely achieves its desired effect.

A different variant of stories dealing with courtship keeps 'parental interference' out of relationships concentrating instead on the possibility of courtship going wrong due to 'human weakness'. In J M Zulu's 'The Child Bride' (1972), for instance, a young student abandons his studies to start a family but finds his fourteen-year-old fiancée pregnant - by somebody else! In a society where marriage is still deemed the only acceptable context for sexuality, the experience is as shattering to Jonathan, the young student, as it is

disturbing to the intended reader. Yet the story works mainly due to Zulu's explosion of the old cliché of the chastity of the rural child bride. Particularly effective is the subtlety with which the dubiety of Averina's chastity is suggested : her 'room smelt of sex' (Zulu, 1972 : 11) on one of Jonathan's visits to her hut. Innocently 'planted' where it is, this information passes unnoticed until the very end of the story when everything falls into place.

In other stories romance succeeds and marriage results, though matrimony is often not without its own problems. The intensity of the problems presented depends on the type of marriage depicted and the background and maturity of the people involved. The evidence of the stories examined points to inter-cultural and childless marriages being the most problematic.

Mixed marriages, involving Zambian men marrying foreign brides, are usually the culmination of romances begun in colleges in Europe or America. Success in such marriages, bringing together two radically different cultures and lifestyles, depends largely upon the concerned couples' ability to adjust to the circumstances and accommodate each other. More often than not these marriages remain

insecure because the people involved are usually intolerant and insensitive. Foreign brides are generally depicted as being lost, confused and lonely, the host culture unaccommodating.

'Will your people in Africa accept me as part of them? Will I be liked or just tolerated?' asks Elsie, a German national, in Simon Katema's 'The Baby' (1971 : 140), when she marries a Zambian man. Her fears are justified, considering the circumstances that Elsie and her husband find when they arrive in Zambia. It is a few years after independence and the country's towns have retained their colonial character. The couple find themselves in the midst of two communities, European and African, divided by mutual hatred and distrust. Husband and wife cannot attend the same social functions. And Elsie cannot find comfort in white womenfolk, who look at her 'ugly' nor in African women who feel 'suspiciously towards her' (140). Unable to take it, she returns to Germany, leaving her husband to look after their six-month-old baby, the couple's symbol of 'mutual understanding, respect and confidence among human beings of different races, colours and culture' (136). The story closes with the father's concern for Baby Chanda, an innocent party in the conflict, who, being coloured, will grow up in a social no man's land with its

own complexes.

In the case of Annie-Marie, the Afro-American woman in Abbey Maine's 'Hi! Zambia Man' (1976), the marriage to *Inambao* provides the opportunity for her to identify positively with the mother continent. The opportunity, however, passes by this 'soul sister' whose shallow-mindedness does not permit her understanding of African culture to extend beyond a basic appreciation of African music and dance :

When they got married, it was in a small ramshackle chapel that had a thatched roof. As they came out of the chapel, Annie-Marie commented : "The beating of that drum - it pierced my soul . . . I'm back home, home where we sing out with all our souls" (25).

In her mind, then, Annie-Marie feels she has finally escaped from the slavery of the diaspora and found freedom in the motherland. The life to which she is now expected to conform is, however, not quite what she had expected. She finds it hard, for instance, to accept the African woman's domestic roles of 'bearer of children' and 'kitchen keeper'. ' . . . I'm disillusioned,' she tells *Inambao*. 'I thought I had come home, home to freedom! Instead, I'm being forced into motherhood and stay in the kitchen' (25). There are

daily arguments about Women's Lib, which Inambao insists is a white middle-class movement, irrelevant to the African context. While Inambao insists on starting a family, Annie-Marie insists on contraception, even after three years of marriage. Husband and wife drift further and further apart. Annie-Marie succumbs to feelings of indifference, dejection and shame; Inambao falls in love with a mirage in the form of Emily Nkonde, a woman he has never met except through her monthly column in Chimwenwe.

At this crucial moment, Maine, sadly, becomes obsessed with turning out a perfect trick-ending, in the process losing control of the story. Arrangements are made for Inambao and Emily to meet secretly (the two have for a while been corresponding about Inambao's unhappy marriage and how he should try to salvage it). 'Emily Nkonde' turns out to be the nom de plume for Annie-Marie who pleasantly surprises Inambao with the announcement that she is with child! The story's vital concerns - Annie-Marie's Women's Lib commitment and incomprehension of African culture, the disapproval of an aunt who claims that women 'from across the seas' lack the native's charm, dignity and femininity, and other extra-familial constraints - are not followed through. The point is nevertheless made about the primacy of parenting in Zambian marriages as opposed

to Western marriages where conjugality is a married couple's primary role, parenting an extension.

Jealousy and infidelity occur frequently in stories about marital relationships. In most of these, suspicion provides the enigma, the rest of the story being devoted to stalking the suspected party in the hope of catching them in the act.

'It is not a sin to do what every other housewife does and check a husband's clothes just to make sure they are "clean",' claims a Lusaka housewife in Mary Chipego's 'Out to Get Her' (1976 : 27). 'Cleaning Out' her husband's pockets, she finds a telegram announcing a girl's pending arrival 'with love' from Malawi. This prompts her to rush to the airport, at the same time determined to 'catch my very perfect man red-handed' (27) and desperately hoping the husband will tell her he was at the airport to pick up a workmate's girlfriend; the telegram had been addressed to him to protect the friend whose wife worked in the same establishment. The story takes a strange twist when the husband introduces the girl as his half sister from Malawi. The wife had, of course, never met her before but 'my husband had told me about her and he had intended her arrival to

be a complete surprise for both the children and me'
(27).

It is not always that jealousy gets 'light' treatment as the condition can have tragic consequences. In Mukelabai Songiso's 'All in My Mind' (1974), for instance, an irate husband beats his college-going wife unconscious despite her claims that she had delayed getting home for holidays because she had stopped over to see a sick nephew. When the wife's story is checked and confirmed (by the police), the husband is overcome by a deep sense of regret:

I sat on a chair which was near the [hospital] bed. I thought I was incapable of crying but as I looked at her, tears streamed down my cheeks. This was my most painful fault. All along she had been innocent, the poison had been in my mind (Songiso, 1974 : 28).

Despite the difference in treatment, the stories basically say the same thing. Jealousy is a condition usually based upon unfounded fears. The risk of embarrassment or tragedy can be minimized if spouses trust each other more.

Some spouses, however, are actually proved to be unfaith-

ful. The stories then become concerned with ways of dealing with the offending parties. The majority of these tales are written from a male point of view and are really about how to discipline unfaithful wives. The plots are at best stereotyped, nearly always involving a husband, a driver in most cases, embarking on a trip and, for some reason or other, returning home unannounced to find his wife in bed with another man. Punishment then ensues, taking any form from beating and instant divorce, such as in Raphael Kunkwa's 'Number Fourteen Kola' (1969) to 'systematic' indifference leading to the offending wife's suicide (William Saidi, 'A Man's Heart', 1964).

If anything in these stories could be criticized it is the emphasis on the male-biased penal code employed in infidelity cases. This may well be a fact of life in Zambia but it could also be argued that by naively recording these double standards, the writers are in fact helping to create them. Furthermore, the stories generally lack textual depth because no attempt is made to explore the reasons why wives 'misbehave'. This obviously depends upon the aims of particular tales but one hopes to see more substantial stories on the subject like Ann McAvoy's 'The Aeroplane' (1973) in which there

is a full exploration of cause and consequence.

Three pages long, 'The Aeroplane', told in the first person, from a wife's point of view, graphically demonstrates that a story could be 'sufficiently resonant' without being long. The metaphor of the frontier is useful here to appreciate the interrelatedness of the themes of flight and entrapment in the story. To escape from nuptial boredom, a couple decide to each take up a new hobby. The husband promptly resolves to build a model aeroplane and the wife secretly decides to take a lover, activities which take them both to the other side of the border, away from normal nuptial obligations.

Flight imagery, the model VC10 built by the husband on the one hand, and the picture of black cormorants stuck on the wall of the wife's lover's house on the other, dominates the story. When the wife's illicit relationship is consummated, it is amid conflicting feelings of panic and unbearable longing, leading to a sense of deep disappointment at the failure to surrender to complete abandon. The husband's test flight also ends in disaster, and the story reaches the epiphanic moment it has been swiftly moving towards when the woman

acquires a deeper understanding of her predicament and changes her attitude towards married life. The resolution - a return to 'normality' - is not without irony : 'What we needed was a hobby we could share, and one not so liable to end in disaster. So we bought a stamp album and now spend the evenings with tweezers and magnifying glass searching for mistakes in other people's handiwork' (McAvoy, 1973 : 6).

An interesting picture of Zambian attitudes to marriage and sexuality emerges from the stories discussed. The qualities generally emphasized are chastity outside marriage, fidelity within. Mostly written from a male point of view, it is not surprising that the preferred images of women are the virgin, the wife and the mother.

It is significant to note that most stories about troubled marriages are set in cities or at least involve characters with strong city connections. This may or may not be coincidental. What cannot be doubted is the recurrence of the subject of urban experiences in this and other African writing.

2.2 PROBLEMS OF URBAN LIFE

Cities, by their nature, attract people from different backgrounds bringing with them peculiar habits and customs, good and bad, to add to the depth and diversity of urban experience. The importance of this for the short story is not difficult to see. Amid this uncoordinated mixing of values and influences, conflicts are guaranteed; plots emerge almost ready-made.

The inevitability of change is generally accepted by writers working with urban-oriented material, most of whom concern themselves with the individual's attempts to come to terms with much altered circumstances. City life is depicted as competitive and uncaring, accentuating man's solitude in his intensely individual struggle to survive. The city is a topsy-turvy world where everything is regulated by money; money to buy good clothes, decent meals and, if one is from the higher rungs of society, a car, a mansion and other modern status symbols.

A decent way of making money is, of course, through obtaining a good education and a lucrative job. As not everyone is fortunate enough to get a good education and

a good job, most of the stories are about young men and women who come to the city to start a decent life but, unable to make it, turn to dishonest ways : cheating, prostitution and various forms of theft, ranging from pick-pocketing, as in Baptie's 'Not His Fault', to illegal mining, as in Chongo Kasonkomona's 'The Way of Precious Things' (1984)*. The trouble with this dishonesty is that it forms a vicious circle, with one problem leading to another, the point of Mbaso Kunda's 'Abandoned' (1971) in which a distraught prostitute abandons her child in a cinema because he is interfering with business. The story shocks not only for the prostitute's callousness in surrendering a helpless child to harsh city conditions but also for the dismal options open for the child, glanced at on the way to the cinema :

It was dusk. The sun had just sunk.
And with it the slum was changing
life Prostitutes, using various
methods of locomotion, depending on
station, were invading the city

* 'The Way of Precious Things' is interestingly set against the background of the ruling party - inspired 'economic takeoff'. Peter, in the story tells a fellow 'prospector' : '. . . Everybody - wives, mums, dads, all in-laws, business-managers, clergy and even philosophers - have answered the President's call regarding this particular economic take-off (Kasonkomona : 1984 : 82).

The alcoholic imbiber was putting on his best suit - which was fashionable five to ten years ago - in preparation for a visit to the shabeen (Kunda, 1971 : 8).

For those able to obtain education and secure employment competition remains stiff. Scholarships and study leave become opportunities for people to save and shop, as in Simon Katema's 'The Broadcaster' (1971). Illness becomes an excuse for some civil servants to persuade their employers to pay for their 'local sick leave' in pleasure resorts, as in Chiman Vyas's 'Local Sick Leave' (1971). The obsession here is not with acquiring enough provision for oneself but, rather, with competing with the neighbours. In 'The Broadcaster', for instance, it is a son's adoration of a neighbour's car that makes Paul aspire for one :

As for the car, he recalled what he had overheard a few days back his elder son saying to his mother :
'Mother, when Daddy comes back from England, he will surely buy us a big car . . . a car just like Chanda's father has' (Katema, 1971 : 84).

It is interesting to note that while most of these stories comment upon the city dweller's survival codes which often involve the violation of moral-ethical codes: honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, few actually condemn this

'new' way of life. Many, in fact, seem to endorse it, though, in some cases, this is as a result of naivete rather than conscious intention. Nowhere is this tendency clearer than in Stephen Kapenda's 'The Way it Goes' (1975), the story of a streetwise office boy who, in a desperate attempt to live up to the image of a successful company executive, loses money and mate. The story, set in a fantasy world where opulence, elegance and glamour matter above everything else, has a basic folkloric trickster-tricked motif. To 'keep up with the Joneses', Sakulu uses a series of tricks ranging from upward alteration of payslips to the invention of a story about going abroad on a company assignment. His luck begins to run out when his wife learns about his 'formidable stature' at work and demands a larger share of his pay package. Desperate to appease the woman, Sakulu borrows some money to buy her a bargain wardrobe from a Central Arcade dealer. The dealer vanishes, leaving Sakulu with a parcel of scraps of cloth and paper. The gulling of Sakulu by the Central Arcade 'businessman' is very convincingly handled. The pomposity with which the narrator introduces himself ('Yes I'm a man who knows what to wear, how to comb, how to walk into an office all in an up-to-date style. How to telephone while mimicking the face in an emotion like film characters' (25)) and his relish of the humorous anecdotes that characterize his

life, however, significantly diminish the story's melancholy quality. Although Sakulu accepts responsibility for his personal loss, there is little evidence to show that he regrets it, the overriding impression being one of celebration rather than condemnation of trickery :

Remain, citizens, remain calm. That month-end I paid the forty Kwacha I borrowed. I gave the change to the charcoal burners. My wife quit after selling the whole household. The men at work now really knew what I valued. I stayed with a friend the whole of that month. After five weeks Flora [Sakulu's wife] married Kalolo [his rival]. Other friends who went there told me it was a first-class wedding (Kapenda, 1975 : 28).

Other stories about urban experience in Zambia dramatize the dilemma of a community trying to create or assimilate new values and attitudes yet unable to destroy its traditional roots. It is a fragile community consumed from within by superstition and from outside by invading Western culture. To some extent, the characters one meets in the stories are a reflection of what Ezekiel Mphahlele has termed the 'African paradox' : detribalized, urbanized and westernized, but still African. They are people who have physically left their villages and settled in the cities, but still retained rudiments of their 'village mentality'. In William Saidi's 'Educated People' (1971),

for instance, a man who has sought a charm in order to secure promotion, which he has since secured, is challenged by his educated wife to withhold the witchdoctor's fee :

'If the witchdoctor was not paid and George lost his promotion, Jean was to pay him her month's salary; after six months if he still held his new job, he was to do the same with her' (Saidi, 1971 : 117). He is demoted. However childish the couple's 'civilized' debate on superstition, the event enhances George's belief in the potency of witchcraft.

The clash of cultures is also a fair recurrence in stories handling a mixed cast of European and African characters in an urban setting. Interestingly, the most compelling of these are written by expatriate writers, with remarkable variation in approach. The juxtaposition, in this regard, of Wallace's and Simpson's stories is interesting. Both writers concern themselves with Europe's mission to 'civilize' Africa with the significant distinction that while Simpson observes 'African mentality' with detached amusement, Wallace's works, charged with colonial guilt, bemoan the tragic consequences of the meeting of Europe and Africa.

The inappropriateness of African superstition in a technological age is a peculiar Simpson theme, an astute European observer his typical narrator. The emotional centre of his 'Magic Eye' (1970), for instance, is a European photographer attempting to capture on film a 'colourful' African character : a small girl reposed against a virgin wall. An incensed mother denies him the opportunity to record this 'moment of beauty' by snatching her small daughter away, muttering : 'That is a wicked thing' (Simpson, 1970 : 24). Disappointed, the photographer is left to muse about the reasons for the mother's violent reaction. He concludes :

A child's picture in my pocket would
give me power over the destiny of the child
itself. I cannot be allowed to gain
such power (24).

On its own, 'Magic Eye', on the surface a truly remarkable visual feast, does not lend itself to easy interpretation. Its 'hidden' meaning becomes more apparent when it is read with 'The Price We Pay' (1971), a later Simpson story whose opening paragraph might have belonged to 'Magic Eye' :

There is in Africa a strong residue of faith
in the unknown, and in the mysterious powers
some people are supposed to possess. Whether

there is anything in them or not, the stories can be turned to good account by those astute enough to see how. Often a colourful character, about to be photographed, will throw up his hands in horror and disappear behind the nearest wall, fuming about the 'leaching out of his personality' and its imprisonment on a small piece of card for his enemies to burn up or dispose of in less pleasant ways (Simpson, 1971 : 34).

The words are from an unnamed white journalist married to a Zambian woman. The man then sets forth to prove his 'thesis' by painting a convincing portrait of a firm believer in black magic, his wife Elizabeth, against the background of an encounter with a Kasai hoaxer. Convinced that the Kasai has travelled the country 'making money for himself by making it for other people' (36), Elizabeth persuades her husband, a sceptic, to surrender a few Kwacha for the man to double. The 'money maker' asks for some time for the magic to work; an anxious time of waiting ensues during which the journalist amuses himself observing 'moment by moment' changes in Elizabeth's behaviour. When it becomes clear, for instance, that the Kasai is a fraud (a neighbour calls to complain about how the old Kasai tricked his wife into parting with a few Kwacha), Elizabeth walks 'with that ominous quickness and erectness that I have come to recognise as indicating that her pride has been hurt and that something will have to be done about it' (39). Next morning, some fifteen minutes after Elizabeth rises, there is a rattle at the door followed

by a conversation. When the husband goes to assist, the caller is gone, leaving Elizabeth

. . . with that familiar sparkle in her eyes that she gets when excited. She held out two two-Kwacha notes.

'Look,' she said. 'We did increase our money after all. I told you we would'
(39).

The day's Telegraph carries the story of the Kasai's arrest, the previous evening, on a fraud charge; the oddity of events ought to be explained. The story therefore ends with some deep rationalization :

The light began to dawn slowly. She must have contrived the rattling of the door and the low conversation all on her own, to convince me we had had a visitor.

And the money? She must have had a small store of it that I knew nothing about - that she could draw on for just such occasions as this, when her wounded pride demanded that it be used. I grinned to myself. Elizabeth talked a lot of nonsense at times, but she was a girl of pretty strong character. She never knew when she was beaten, and hated to concede a thing. But it was, for her, I reflected, a very expensive way of proving she was right
(40).

Undoubtedly an intellectual, the biggest disappointment for

the journalist is that the event fails to turn his wife into a 'rational being' :

If this affair had discredited witchcraft in Elizabeth's eyes and taught her to think rationally, then I might have made an investment after all, though it seemed that I had paid for her good sense with my own (39).

'Masiye Meets Some Musungus' (1975) is perhaps Wallace's best realized work, a story that benefits significantly from being assessed against the notion of 'boundary', both in terms of the crossing of social frontiers and the introduction of destabilizing elements into the 'natural order of things'. It is also an excellent illustration of some of the catastrophic consequences of the meeting of Europe and Africa, however pure the characters' intentions. As the title suggests, the story chronicles Masiye's sad experiences with the first musungus he meets, 'good hearted' Morgan and Nuffield and his African wife who, having been born and bred in the city, is very Westernized.

The story's forte is undoubtedly its effective characterization. With linguistic competence, study and travel behind them, the musungus' success in the city is assured. Their mastery of 'modern civilization' is seen in, among other things, the way they decorate their homes and the confidence

with which they talk about their travels and exploits in Greece, Turkey, Persia and other countries. Against these experiences Masiye's clumsiness is plain to see. Not an 'ordinary' Zambian, he is very illiterate, Nyau dancing, bird trapping and fencing being his only 'natural' skills. Though sufficient in his 'little' world in the village, the skills are hardly appropriate to his new circumstances. The story abounds with expository detail to foreground his humble background, and innocence, as he is caught wobbling on slippery ground. He is said to be 'just up from the bush', 'a bit weak on the English' and 'practically untrainable' (Wallace, 1975 : 5). This is the man who comes to work in a white neighbourhood in 'the great city of Lusaka where Kaunda sits'; a 'house servant by tolerance of a Welshman in Africa' (9). Tolerant and sympathetic the musungus are! It is not surprising they decide to give their friend and servant a 'proper' Independence present. Says Morgan to the Nuffields:

'Bloke's got nothin', man. Well I thought we could give him a bit of a day, like. You know, say a March Past in the morning, lunch at my place, dinner at yours, see? We would hire a telly. Bloke's never seen a telly' (7).

Independence Day proceeds as planned but Masiye's reaction to modern technology is astounding. When he is given a

'ladio', a vital part of the Independence package, 'Masiye bangs his head in wonderment The servant gasps and bangs his head' (8). When the 'wondrous box of moving pictures' is switched on,

Masiye up! And clapped his head! Again!
 Again! He clapped his head! This thing!
 He clapped his head again, as if to say :
 'I don't believe it'. Yet it was there.
 The image moved and spoke (8).

With the coming of the Epilogue, the last note of the National Anthem and the fading of the image comes Masiye's 'demise', his 'innocence shattered into ignorance' (10). When he stands up to thank his masters for their generosity, there is no envy flickering in his eyes to say he desires what is theirs. In the end, feeling for the unfamiliar shapes of English, he can barely manage to say : 'I think . . . I . . . going . . . school' (9).

Masiye's dramatic change from surprise to shame unleashes in Nuffield the agony of guilt and despair as he realizes the mistake Morgan and he have made, effectively the story's epiphanic moment and raison d'être :

To make the low high for a day, to heal
 the blind for a glimpse of light, to give



too much and therefore not enough . . .
 No! That was not the way. That was not
 Independence (10).

To underline the gravity of their mistake, Wallace leaves
 the surviving characters the legacy of a hauntingly graphic
 image of Masiye in death, in his 'naked' house in Mulilo
 Compound Servants' Quarters, 'ladio' blaring, his

dancing heels against the tiny window of
 October light. The neck strung to a
 beam. The lips in a blissful grin. The
 arms locked in love and rigor mortis
 about his singing ladio (10).

2.3 THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE

Under the title : SISTERS, WHO WRITES THE BEST STORY?,
 the Swedish International Development Authority, SIDA,
 invited female writers from Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya,
 Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to participate in a short
 story competition. The aim of the competition was to
 gather material for an anthology to be published on the
 occasion of the UN End of Decade Conference on Women held
 in Nairobi in July 1985.

Of some eight hundred entries submitted, mostly from Kenya

Zambia and Zimbabwe, thirty-two finalists were selected. From these, five competition winners were chosen by a jury comprising Evelyn Nicodemus, author and artist; Heidi von Born, writer; Ruth Hallden, critic; and Karin Himmelstrand from the Office of Women in Development, SIDA.

Two anthologies have since resulted from the enterprise : Breaking Free : Excerpts from the Narratives of Young African Women and Whispering Land : An Anthology of Stories by African Women. Zambia is represented in the anthologies by Edna Banda Mulonda, Mbuyu Nalumango and Matildah B Silwimba. Though not among the five winning entries, their narratives rank among the most compelling writing about women in Zambia, highlighting, as they do, the problems young girls and women experience when confronted with male sexuality.

At the climactic moment of Nalumango's 'A Youthful Dream' (1985 : 16), fifteen-year-old Mwansa says : 'I'll show them! One day I will be somebody. I may be just a woman, that does not mean that all my life I have to be someone else's chattel or a copy typist - NEVER!' This awareness comes early in Mwansa's life. With it, the determination to break free from the shackles of tradition that would bind her to a life of servitude to father ,

brother and husband. Against the background of 'reactionary' textbooks, such as 'Mulenga' and 'Jelita',* and life in general, where men are groomed early in life for a life of work and play away from home while women are socialized into creating homes and raising their children, the 'dream' of female emancipation through education may well be a far cry but it is worth striving for.

The particular in the story is given general significance, Mwansa's household being perceived as a microcosm of wider female experience, her personal struggle to 'break free' being representative of the struggles of other women in similar circumstances :

My future mission would remain a secret - my struggle against social injustice in my own household. I guess the same injustice was occurring in other homes too. From a very tender age, women are the underdogs . . .
(17).

*Primary English Readers, the 'Mulenga' and 'Jelita' series in particular, have recently been the target of scathing feminist attacks for their sex stereotyping : Jelita, in these texts, is nearly always seen helping her mother with house chores while Mulenga, her brother, whiles his time away 'kicking the ball'!

'A Youthful Dream' works mainly because it recognizes the importance of the maternal role in the socialization of girls, a vital factor often ignored by feminist writers. The effect is, however, weakened because Mwansa's educated but 'very conservative' mother is at the same time the girl's model of a liberated woman.

In Mulonda's 'Love, Pain and Guilty Tears' (1985), home is still the battlefield but the conflict centres around childlessness. It is a man's world where some women could be barren but men are supposedly never sterile. A woman, Marrianna has to endure six agonizing years of gynaecologists, witchdoctors, tranquilizers and taunts while Musonda, her husband, gets away with refusing to take fertility tests.

Marrianna is dealt a severe blow when Musonda decides to bring home a child he claims to have fathered outside marriage. More convinced she could really be at fault, she strives even harder to conceive. She finally does but this is an added complication to an already complex plot as the pregnancy results from an extra-marital relationship she has been 'trying out' on a friend's advice. The story has an interesting 'sting in the tail' which makes it very readable : Musonda is, in fact, sterile, a fact he has known since he took a fertility test in his college years,

some time before he met Marrianna. He had 'fathered' little Bupe by some lewd arrangement with Mwansa, his bosom friend who was himself desperately trying to save his engagement. This vital information is relayed to Marrianna by an apologetic Mwansa; the story ends rather abruptly, leaving the reader to puzzle out what will happen when the disgraced woman confronts her deceiving husband.

In terms of content value, 'A Youthful Dream' and 'Love, Pain and Guilty Tears' have nothing much to offer besides depicting the various faces of anguished woman victims. Full of pathos and sentiment, they are essentially 'sob stories' which evoke in their intended audience little more than a more sympathetic hearing.

There is, as Abbey Maine's 'Skeleton in the Wardrobe' (1971)* hauntingly demonstrates, a more formidable side to the female victim, a facet that should shock even the staunchiest of male-chauvinists. It is a face that rarely shows itself and the story is itself a very rare tale.

* Although 'Skeleton in the Wardrobe' was written by a man it is considered under 'The Female Experience' because of its aggressive feminist character.

Combining clever characterization with appropriate setting, 'Skeleton in the Wardrobe' is a humorous story about a green-eyed preacher who hauls a suspicious closet to the pulpit and delivers a special sermon to denounce his wife's disloyalty. The deacon's chronic insecurity is perfectly consistent with his size and vocation. Diminutive and spiritual, he lives in perpetual fear of his mate seeking a more macho and worldly man.

Against the deacon's dismal features the woman reigns supreme; hers is an overpowering stature revealed only through the hardened diction of her interior monologue. Whereas 'the funny little man' does all the hard talking, 'his black face dripping with perspiration, waving his arms wildly in the air . . . sobbing, shouting and even groaning', the woman does all the hard thinking, her cool exterior concealing an explosive interior : 'As I sit there, I look frightened, but I am not frightened. No. I'm not. Just excited. I just want to prove my innocence. I want the flock to see I am a good woman' (4).

There is only one way to resolve this massive show of strength - the revelation of the 'live skeleton' in the closet on the altar:

Sh-sh-sh! Now listen, shame, he is pointing at the wardrobe : 'Angelina woman, maiden of our church, go and bow to God for repentance,' he orders, like a lord giving instructions to an obsequious servant.

I'm all confused. Bashimpundu hands me the key. I know what's in his crooked mind. There's a breathless silence as the key rattles softly. I clutch the wardrobe door and close my eyes.

Someone ejaculates : 'Ameni-ameni'. But I remain calm. I pull the door open. As I do so I look at the fussy little fellow - my husband, whose eyes are straight on mine. Then I look down at the floor and almost burst with laughter. There, sprawled on the floor, clad only in his underpants and kicking wildly like a frightened animal, is our son, Mpundu, who has just returned from boarding school. As usual Mpundu turned up unexpectedly (6).

Angelina's passive protest is a classic example of a woman turning her weakness into strength, silent submission, to male chauvinists a telling symptom of effective female domestication, being a subtle, yet lethal, weapon against male sexuality. When deacon faces congregation, it is to concede his devastating defeat. 'Children of Christ in Zion,' he cries, 'I'm like Adam before God. Just naked' (7).

The plot is so well-managed that it is only with hindsight

that one perceives the deacon's inexorable march to self-destruction.

The stories discussed in this chapter demonstrate the thematic trends of Zambian short fiction since 1964. The socio-economic basis of the literature is confirmed by the recurrence of stories depicting the problems of urban life and other situations related to sweeping socio-cultural changes triggered off by the advent of Zambia's independence.

In most of the narratives the forces of change are pitted against the forces of continuity. Although there are quite a few stories that advocate the preservation of tribal traditions threatened by encroaching Western culture, the main thrust seems to be the propagation of change. This is seen in, among other things, the rejection of African superstition, despite its strong social basis, and the appeal for a change of attitude towards other ethnic groups made through the sometimes very persuasive presentation of the joys and frustrations of intercultural marriages.

It is significant to note that, unlike its South African, West African and East African counterparts, which are noted for their unflinching confrontation of the major problems

affecting their regions, Apartheid in South Africa, political unrest and rampant corruption in West Africa, class struggle triggered off by the betrayal of peasants and workers by the politicians in power in East Africa (Kenya), Zambian short fiction is generally indifferent to matters relating to contemporary politics in Zambia. Food riots, student unrest, evictions, coup attempts and political detentions, which have recently become important parts of Zambia's social fabric, hardly find their way into the fiction. Furthermore, jealousy, extramarital sex and the other domestic issues that dominate the thematic concerns of the literature are rarely contextualized within the wider Zambian experience, which includes political oppression, corruption in high places, inequitable distribution of wealth and mismanagement of available resources, making Zambian short fiction seem to be pre-occupied with trivia in the face of the country's major problems.

Despite this parochialism, many Zambian writers demonstrate remarkable awareness of human hardship and misery in their depiction of the transition from childhood to adulthood, the problems of urban life and male-female relationships in a male-chauvinist context. Concerned mainly with the plight of the individual as he strives to find his bearings in a

changing socio-cultural environment, the stories tend to emphasize the pain and shocking effect of the experience.

CHAPTER THREE

FORM AND STYLE

Whatever the degree of sensitivity and maturity in dealing with the social issues raised, be they marital rites and customs, gender issues, the pressures of social and economic forces on townsfolk, or whatever, there is no substitute for finesse. For present purposes, 'finesse' includes the effective use of form and style, 'the choice and ordering of language within a contextual framework', as one critic has defined it (Winters, 1981 : 174). Generally speaking, a writer selects structural and linguistic devices most appropriate to what he has to say (Hazzard, 1976 : 99). This, in a sense, contributes to the expansiveness of the repertoire of genres, which in the context of Zambian short fiction includes 'trick-writing', confessional writings, various forms of didactic tales and what are in this study termed 'hybrid' stories.

3.1 STORY CONSTRUCTION

It can be stated that most Zambian writers who take short story writing seriously evidently strive for the 'well-wrought' story, the evergreen darling of storywriters'

handbooks associated in the latter part of the nineteenth century with Edgar Allan Poe's notions of a 'brief prose tale', depicting a single predominating incident and a single chief character, and containing a plot, the details of which are so compressed, and the whole treatment so organized, as to produce a single impression. At its best, the 'well-wrought' story exhibits remarkable consistency of style, rationality of structure, and a steadiness in viewpoint, these qualities undoubtedly being achieved through careful selection of detail and skilful composition. The number of writers working within this framework is remarkable, Ann McAvoy ('The Aeroplane'), William Saidi ('Educated People') and Robert Baptie ('The Love of a Woman') being the most impressive.

3.1.1 Linear Narrative Structure in the Realist Mode

Realism is the dominant mode of expression in most of these stories, the dominant emphasis often being on substance, that is the 'photographic' and the 'documentary', rather than artistic effect. The stories are generally characterized by closeness to topographic and sociological detail, as the following excerpt from Baptie's 'The Love of a Woman' should indicate :

As she approached Independence Avenue, she was thinking of her husband at his desk in the Ministry, and she turned left instead of right. She almost turned off the main road, but drove on, wondering if he had looked out of his window as she had passed. Before her loomed the cathedral, but she was not conscious of it. The car seemed to have a will of its own as it swung to the curve of the roundabout, straightened, then lurched on to the grass verge. She walked as a dreamer walks, ignored the side entrance and passed beneath the trees until she stood before the wide steps. The great doors were heavy, the building deserted. She knelt in a corner where she would trouble no one if they came, and silently prayed for courage and help . . . (Baptie, 1970b : 24 - 25).

The story's verisimilitude in action and setting is striking. Elizabeth Mulenga's 'blind' driving is perfectly consistent with the behaviour of someone who has received a 'death sentence' (23) from their doctor; she has just been told she has terminal cancer with only six months to live. As for topographical exactitude, the story is heavily dependent upon the knowledge assumed to be shared by the writer and his intended reader. A reader familiar with the topography of Lusaka's Independence Avenue, for instance, will have no difficulty recognizing the buildings referred to (unqualified) as 'the Ministry' and 'the cathedral' as the Ministry of General Education head-

quarters, and the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. Like other realistic stories, the tale's closeness to actuality, people and places being pleasantly familiar, in the main, offers the reader delight in recognition.

As well as being in the realist mode, most of the narratives employ linear narrative structure, the most usual, oldest and simplest form of storytelling. Essentially in this narrative structure, observed in most tales dealing with domestic issues such as childlessness, jealousy and infidelity, a character nurtures a wish, desire, need or objective. The fulfilment of this wish, desire or need, the attainment of this objective, meets an obstacle. The obstacle is overcome and the objective is gained or the wish is granted, or the efforts to overcome the impediment are frustrated and the fight is lost. The narratives in this category, whose interest derives from the writer's ability to interest the reader in the central character and heighten that character's sense of purpose, have a central sequence of events, arranged in a chronological order, that moves the story along to its logical resolution. This type of structure offers something for the reader to watch unfold and develop, by means of a series of complications, thus evoking suspense. Linear

narrative structure is therefore a particularly useful way of organizing experience in 'suspense' stories such as 'A Very Smartly Dressed Man' (1966), Saidi's terrific tale, reminiscent of Tutuola's story of the 'complete' gentleman in The Palm Wine Drinkard (1952), of a young widow who is seduced and brutally murdered by a flamboyant stranger. Here, the sense of mystery is evoked skilfully; there is something eerie about Ben's sudden entry into Maggie's life, the relative ease with which the two plan to marry and the callousness with which Ben's mother watches the slaying. Sadly for this promising story, the motive for the murder is left to the reader's conjecture. Could this be a case of reprisal for the widow's post-bereavement behaviour or simply feminine folly, as in Chongo's 'Namazizi'?

Essentially dramatic, linear narrative structure is also a popular way of organizing experience in the treatment of revenge, such as in 'A Hyena Remembers' (1971), Baptie's horrific story which closely parallels Maupas-sant's 'The Vendetta' (1883) in which a lonely old woman trains a fierce dog which ultimately kills her enemy. In much the same way, Mulongo, in Baptie's tale, trains two

lions to savage Fisi, a notorious terrorist and slave dealer. The loss of two village girls to Fisi being the motive for vengeance, the basic conflict is clearly delineated with much tension and uncertainty, given the enormity of the odds against Mulongo. Probably based upon the age-old belief in the existence of hidden strength in the feeble, 'A Hyena Remembers', like Maupassant's tale, employs a reversal of fortunes motif in which victim becomes victor. The story's aesthetic satisfaction derives from watching the underdog, with nothing but unrivalled ingenuity on his side, subdue a more formidable foe.

3.1.2 The Formula Story

Some of the linear narratives, though arranged chronologically, end with an ironic 'twist in the tail', a surprise reversal that necessitates a renegotiation of the story's significance. Reading this kind of narrative is like reading two stories, the real story remaining hidden until the end, the surprise-ending contributing a new understanding to the progression and resolution of the conflict.

America produced a master of this genre in O Henry ('The Gift of the Magi', 1905) while in France the form achieved perfection in Maupassant's hands ('The Necklace', 1881); Zambia can boast of Abbey Maine ('Hi! Zambia Man') and Mary Chipego ('My Secret', 1975). For purposes of demonstration only Chipego's story is discussed here as one of Zambia's most ambitious attempts at 'trick-writing'.

Told in the first person, from a wife's point of view, 'My Secret' is about the narrator spending two days of wild romance with a 'handsome young man' in an expensive hotel. The story bears all the ingredients of an extra-marital affair : lies to colleagues and family, 'shameless' concealment of wedding ring, much flirtation, champagne and flowers. Surprisingly, though, when the woman returns home to her suspicious husband there is only a mock confrontation about the affair. The mystery of the event soon clears when it becomes apparent that the two lovers in a hotel room were in actual fact husband and wife celebrating their wedding anniversary away from familial interference. This information is however kept secret until the very end, the impression created being one of the narrator teasing the reader for a considerable time before letting him into the secret

of enjoying a romantic wedding anniversary away from one's 'rivals', children, in this case. Chipego could not have chosen a better form for revealing her secret. Though the story's thematic content is slight (perhaps confirming the claim that, though mechanical, the formula story is a particularly effective way of dealing with otherwise 'trivial' matters), the reversing irony is neat, the artifice apparent.

Despite the artistry, Chipego's revelation of the 'truth' seems to 'kill' the story. This is, however, an anomaly common to all 'trick-writing', including O Henry's 'The Gift of the Magi', and Maupassant's 'The Necklace', for the formula story loses its capacity to thrill once the real story is known. In this particular instance, foreknowledge that the characters involved are husband and wife trying to recapture lost romance may keep the reader from enjoying 'My Secret' a second time. This notwithstanding, Chipego spoils this otherwise interesting story through careless composition. The very device she uses to keep the secret from the reader - the anonymity of the event being celebrated and the participants - calls into question the plausibility of the incident, from the

standpoint of its otherwise realistic mode of expression. What husband would earnestly tell his dear wife, 'Happy whatever-it-is!' and call her 'Mrs Whoever your husband is' (Chipego, 1975 : 26)?

It is with regard to this kind of carelessness that concern is raised about the technical incompetence of some of the otherwise promising Zambian writers. 'Careless slips' occur frequently in Zambian short fiction mainly because of some of the writers' confused attempts to thrill at the expense of making sense. As it has already been suggested, the resolution in Maine's 'Hi! Zambia Man' appears implausible because, in a frantic attempt to effect a perfect surprise-ending, the writer fails to adequately explore the story's major concerns; Annie-Marie's 'Women's Lib' interests, her incomprehension of Africanity, and an aunt's disapproval read like fragments of 'unwritten stories' (Gordon and Tate, 1960 : 456) because the narrative is deficient of foreshadowings, subtle or otherwise, of the only legitimate direction it will take. In the case of Phiri's 'The Soil, not the Seed', it is the writer's fascination with the relationship between euphemism and the referential context* that

*The discussion of Phiri's use of euphemism follows later in the section on Language Use.

robs the story of proportion, making it appear to be a 'confused response' to the question of marriage by proxy, the resolution 'developing' from the story's minor concern of Lote's virility instead of the basic conflict between Lote and his parents.

3.1.3 The Confession Story

It is significant to note the predominance of first-person narration in Zambian short fiction. First-person narration is important not only as a means of plot compression, in the sense that a writer can limit the scope of his story to only what the first-person narrator (a major/minor participant or an observer) sees, hears, thinks and feels, but also for the realization of another short story genre : the confession story. Chipego's 'Out to Get Her', Chongo's 'Namazizi', Haangala's 'All Flesh and No Bones' (1974), McAvoy's 'The Aeroplane', Songiso's 'All in my Mind', Vyas's 'I Smoked Dagga' (1971), and a host of other stories, fall into this mould.

These are very personal and subjective accounts of experiences, beliefs, feelings and states of mind,

told in the first person, which, to some extent, are self-revelatory. They revolve around one flaw in the narrator's character, lust in 'The Aeroplane', jealousy in 'Out to Get Her' and 'All in my Mind', irresponsible drinking triggered off by sudden affluence in 'All Flesh and No Bones', etc, the situation this flaw brings about, chronic remorse and self-pity in 'The Aeroplane', near-fatal beating of spouse in 'All in my Mind', the crippling of the wife in 'All Flesh and No Bones', etc, and its eventual resolution.

Invited to 'listen' to the intimate feelings of one so much wiser after a personal disaster, the reader gets the impression of being a confidant, which could be very appealing. As in real confessions, the impact of confession stories derives from the necessity to tell the truth and the narrator's readiness to take penance. Generally speaking, the stories are not recounted for the sake of recounting; they often unfold 'regrettable' circumstances, crises that lead to decisive changes of attitude or character 'growth'. As most of the stories deal with 'serious' social issues, they are also characterized by seriousness in tone. The sense of sincerity is conveyed not only through the use of the

first person narrator, evoking a sense of a first-hand account, but also the mercilessness of the self-assessment. The analytical exposition of identified personal weaknesses is pursued to its logical conclusion, however unpleasant the final outcome. In 'Namazizi' the resolution involves the transformation, through much pain and grief, of Namazizi from a conceited village girl into a mature child-minder in an orphanage. 'I am still there,' she tells her confidant, 'taking care of those who need sympathy, understanding and protection - giving myself to humanity and serving it; after all, I've had some experience of it in its various forms' (Chongo, 1973 : 27). In much the same way, 'All Flesh and No Bones' ends with the transformation of the narrator from an irresponsible drunk into a repentant husband looking after his invalid wife and praying for his 'sin'. '. . . I have resigned myself to my fate,' he confides in his reader. 'I sinned, and I am praying for my sin. Sometimes I console myself by saying that the punishment fits the crime, but it's not much of a consolation, I can assure you' (Haangala, 1974 : 29). As a contrast to these, the resolutions in 'The Aeroplane' and 'All in my Mind' are more pleasant and evoke a remarkable improvement in the quality of life of the characters involved; husband and wife embark on a common hobby, in the former, while in the latter a remorseful husband

allows his wife to return to college, serenity, based upon mutual trust, having returned to their troubled relationship.

As a common characteristic, the 'confessions' cited here evoke some sort of therapeutic effect; after the crisis, which in each case presents the narrator in a bad light, comes a sense of release from tension. The stories are on the whole well written.

3.1.4 Hybrid Forms

A few other stories display textual qualities which do not fall into any particular mould and constitute what are best seen as 'hybrids'.

The most significant of these hybrid forms is based upon the fusion of the formal characteristics of the essay and fiction. Just as a proposition is stated at the beginning of an essay, developed by arguments and finally proved, so is a 'thesis' advanced at the start of these stories, developed by a series of scenes from a revealing event in the recent/distant past and eventually proved. The

following opening sentences typify the beginning of such stories :

There is in Africa a strong residue of faith in the unknown, and in the mysterious powers some people are supposed to possess (Simpson, 'The Price We Pay', 1971 : 34).

The one unselfish act of a selfish man reduces to insignificance the many small acts of patient benevolence and selflessness performed over a long period of time by people commonly regarded as kindly, someone once said to me (Chisaka, 'Cycles', 1973 : 16).

Despite the conspicuous absence of dramatic urgency in the cited 'hooks', the stories possess their own brand of 'magnetism'. A reader rarely relinquishes stories that so quickly stir his intellectual curiosity. The stories do not linger, but move quickly on to what they are after : the rejection of the rationality of African superstition, in Simpson's sarcastic story, a solemn reflection on the life of a selfish man who performs one unselfish act and dies for it, in Chisaka's tale.

Textually, these stories bear relatively little conversation to break up the rather long tracts of narration. Evidently employed by writers who consciously feel they

have something worthwhile to say, these hybrids are spiced with an unmistakable intellectual flavour to foreground the profundity of their socio-political content. This tendency is not difficult to see in Chisaka's reflection on human nature in the following excerpt, for instance :

The ways and acts of men, as of God, are many and strange, seemingly indifferent to laws and codes When all the books on psychology, sociology and physiology are written, man remains man, his actions and thoughts mysteries to be divined through insight and understanding, tools hardly yielding of absolute and objective results (16).

Because of the weight placed upon content, it is possible to extract from these 'part essay, part fiction' stories more or less explicit statements about the human condition and assume that the forms exist for the sake of social comment. The test for unity (of form and content) in such structures is simple for each scene, incident, and detail must bear a direct relation to the proposition and its validation.

An interesting example of multiple-fusion of contrasting contemporary documentary genres is Gallagher's 'Of

Lemmings and of Men' (1972) in which a group of company departmental heads embark upon a collective effort to defeat their smoking habit with disastrous results. The story, which, among other things, explores the protagonists' psychological and physiological reactions to the abstinence, including the 'occasional pin-prick of desire', loss of concentration, depression and downright madness, is remarkable not only for its metaphysical insights but also for its textual quality which derives from an interesting intermingling of texts : minutes, tape extracts, colloquial conversation (gossip) and straight narration. Because of its multiple-fusion of texts 'Of Lemmings and of Men' eludes satisfactory formal description. The seemingly incompatible genres, here used to record the proceedings of the first impromptu meeting and the concerned characters' reactions to abstinence, which provide the basis for the analyses and discussions in subsequent meetings arranged for the purpose, are however evidently appropriate to the story given its setting (an office complex) which also lends it the modes of documentation to emphasize (perhaps feign) the authenticity of its content.

3.2 LANGUAGE USE

The styles in the short fiction considered here, though as diverse as the writers and their concerns, to a large extent reflect the challenge of creating an aesthetic language in a second-language situation. This problem, which is common to many African writers and an important area of concern in studies of African literature where whether or not European languages can effectively express African experience is a frequent question, has been addressed by Chinua Achebe (1965 : 29) in the following words :

My answer to the question, can an African learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing? is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask : can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker? I should say I hope not. It is neither necessary, nor desirable for him to be able to do so He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience I have been given this language English and I intend to use it I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.

encounters such tracts as the following he is left with no doubt he is reading African writing:

He said offerings of maize would be made to the Rain Spirit that very evening and the ceremony would take place in front of his house at a time 'when the eye could see no farther than the Tree of the Crowing Mamba in the west' (Mubitana, 'Song of the Rainmaker', 1971 : 4).

'You have . . .' he ran out of voice again. After a risky belch he said, 'You have urinated at the source of the river whose water you drink, son of a bitch here. Your head, I cannot tell, is something between clay and a mass of porridge. What you have done you did as if you were not the very making of my own water. Now people curse me all over here.' In his last remark he indicated various parts of his body which were affected by the curses (Chishimba, 'Boomeranged', 1973 : 11).

It goes without saying that the 'African idiom' of village characters, such as those quoted above, has functional significance over and above merely 'flavouring' the texts, certainly for the characters and the cultural group they claim to be. It is a vital part of their daily interaction with one another and the environment. As 'The Rainmaker' is set in an environment remote from urban (or Western) influence, it is not surprising that the people use the

position of the sun (and the degree of visibility) to tell the time. Such digital precision as '18:30 hours' would be out of place in such a world. The vulgarities in the 'Boomeranged' excerpt above are used to foreground a father's anguish : his school-going son has impregnated a village girl, thus 'urinating at the source of the river whose water he drinks' (shaming his father).

Figurative language is not confined to vulgarities. In Phiri's 'The Soil, not the Seed', for example, metalepsis is used in situations where actual detail would be vulgar; copulation and childbirth being potentially embarrassing subjects, the parentage of Lote's child is discussed in euphemisms :

'Whose child is that?' he [Lote's father] asked.

'My child,' Lote answered.

'Did someone make him for you?'
[. . .]

'No father, I made him.'
[. . .]

'This is really his child,' . . .
[an old woman] said. 'I congratulate you. You know, all along I could not believe you had no fire in you. How

could you not when all your ancestors before had it? I told them again and again that they were lying but they persisted and said Tiku was their example of your failure. Now they muste [sic] be made to chew their own words. Tiku's family should be made to apologise before all the families in this village. They cannot get away from this.'

[. . .]

'True, we should not blame the seeds as being rotten when it is the soil that is not fertile,' another woman said (Phiri, 1969 : 32, 38, 39).

The language is suggestive without being offensive.

3.2.2 Linguistic Innovations in Urban-Oriented Narratives

The most remarkable factor from which urban-oriented fiction draws is the 'languages-in-contact phenomenon' (Stern, 1981 : 141 ff), the inevitable result of the meeting of two or more cultural-linguistic groups in urban areas.

The inclusion of Nyanja and/or Bemba lexicon in some of the fiction attests to one aspect of this phenomenon at work : 'code-switching', a common tendency among both 'literate' and 'illiterate' Zambian urbanites (Chileshe, 1983 : 260). The contexts in which a Zambian speaker of English may switch from English to one vernacular or another (the switch ranging

from one word to several minutes of speech) in 'natural' conversation are as varied as when one wishes to show reverence, in which case one may use Ngoni 'baba' where 'father' or 'sir' would not be respectful enough, when one wishes to humiliate another, such as through the use of reverential 'ba bwana' (sir) to taunt a ludicrous person, or in cases where one is unable to find appropriate English words/phrases for some vernacular expressions. This important bilingual strategy, which greatly extends the range of expression in English, is, however, used only sparingly in Zambian short fiction and when it is it does little (style-wise) than lend 'local colour' to the texts, as the following excerpts should indicate :

The result of this rise from a Mission school teacher to one of the apamwamba, the bosses, saw a rise of fortunes for me, so much so that my family became a two-car family, with an Executive type residence, and I became one of the big shots around town (Haangala, 'All Flesh and No Bones', 1974 : 26).

A man in a lumber -jacket at the back of the bus shouted to one of the women standing in the middle : 'E! we njabi, Eh, sweetheart, come and stand here near me so that we can make a family!' (Kalumba, 'The Darkness of the Matter', 1971 : 43).

A more significant stylistic feature of Zambian short fiction, within the framework of the languages -in - contact phenomenon, is the 'Zambianization' of English, a source of worry for members of the English Teachers' Association of Zambia, ETAZ, with their insistence on 'good grammatical English' (see, for instance, Van Melsen, 1977 : 24 - 27).

David Wallace, quite interestingly, is the most consistent and most representative exponent of this stylistic trend. His 'The Education of Beatrice Banda' (1973), for instance, is written in idiom anyone who has studied English at secondary and/or tertiary levels will recognize as violently departing from 'textbook English' taught in schools and colleges. Take for instance, this excerpt :

Normal boyfriend too for Beatrice Banda was that one Roy Musonda in the same school with Beatrice Banda quite dark in his skin, but too handsome when he was putting on the bellbottoms with buttons at the bottom and ever the pink shirt from Copenhagen Denmark by courtesy his brother from trade visit there with INDECO. Form three by now and also by now Beatrice Banda was promoted to form two. But she was clever in English that one, although unfortunately difficult in mathematics because the teacher hated me. Also

perhaps for me in my brain it was a bit hard - but is that a reason for him to hate me? Mr. Sharma of mathematics told Beatrice Banda to stand on the chair with the hands on the head and all the boys saw her pant, but it was not dirty. And so now redoubled the gangs waiting for netball and tomorrow the pesterings to Beatrice Banda increased . . . (Wallace, 1973: 6 - 7).

It has, on the face of it, a whole catalogue of stylistic flaws : run on sentences, misuse of 'too', inappropriate placement of 'putting on', inconsistency of point of view, etc. Not only can a charge of unintelligibility (how much of this writing can a reader, impatient to get the point of the story, tolerate?) be brought against Wallace; he could also (in some quarters) be construed as mocking some Zambians' inability to learn English. It is, however, important to remember that such 'mistakes' as the ones contained in the excerpt, and throughout the story, are hardly noticed as serious grammatical errors in Zambian English conversation where emphasis is more on communicative competence than grammatical correctitude. Besides, the language used is perfectly consistent with the narrator's level of education : Beatrice is a Form Two drop-out, hence her shaky command of English.

It is significant to note that Wallace's rule-breaking is very studied. This is especially true of his style in 'Masiye Meets Some Musungus', in which he uses several varieties of English which collide interestingly, thus showing each other off. The style, in this story, not only epitomizes the effective exploration of the languages -in-contact phenomenon for aesthetic purposes; it is also consistent with the story's socio-political concern, which, as it has already been indicated, is the meeting of Europe and Africa. As the two cultures meet so do their languages, resulting in interesting linguistic innovations involving pidginization, free borrowings, adaptation of lexicon and syntax, etc (Stern, 1981 : 145), some of which would in TEFL/TESL be dismissed as instances of 'mother-tongue interference'. The wide range of linguistic usages in the story reflects the writer's use of speech as an index of origin and social status. It is interesting, in this regard, to note that while Morgan for the most part speaks Welsh English, 'unEnglish' utterances, attributable to attempts to learn a dominant second language while faced with an already entrenched first language, are confined to Masiye's speech and interior monologue :

Masiye in the house of Morgan

Morgan, wide with smiles, rounds the rooms and Morgan talking incomprehensibly in the English tongue. Essentials first, Masiye learns in this house of many rooms, with even cooking and eating done to the inside. Turn here, comes the fire for cooking, turn there, comes beautiful music continuing for ever without a rest. This is ladio. And Masiye, quick to learn, finds his town life haunted by thought of having a ladio (Wallace, 1975 : 5 - 6).

3.2.3 Stylistic Innovations Due to Other Functional Considerations

Other linguistic usages relate directly to particular writers' intention to instruct, entertain or ridicule.

An interesting tendency in consciously didactic works is to explicitly state morals in their titles, such as in Baptie's 'Bethankful' (1970) and Chongo's 'To Forgive is Good' (1969). Other than this, didactic tales display nothing stylistically interesting, except perhaps the occasional quotation of proverbs or wise sayings, such as in Baptie's 'What Parents Are' (1970b : 34) :

'My friends,' said Nason, 'we have a

saying, "What parents are, their children will be." Perhaps we should say "What the child is, so are the parents."

When this happens, the quoted proverb performs the double function of reinforcing a point, which in this case is the importance of respecting tradition, and showing the successful user of the quotation to be a man 'who knows things' (Obiechina, 1972 : 22).

Humour, an important aspect of Zambian life in happiness and in sorrow, appears frequently in Zambian short fiction, the strategies of its evocation being as varied as the contexts in which it appears. In Chimam Vyas's 'A Bite' (1970), for instance, a great deal of humour results from the use of an elevated style, foregrounded by the constant use of royal 'we' by the office orderly-narrator, to recount an absurd event involving a girl who goes to a police station to report a bite but gets so sick of the orderly's pomposity that she bites him :

Anyway, as the situation was commanding us to ruminate on the State Philosophy of Humanism, we saw a smart girl heading forcefully toward our desk, pushing back the anxiously waiting queue. It goes without saying, we couldn't control our-

self but to attend to her first regardless of the regulation of attending the queue in order of standing. After all, beauty is beauty, you see . . . (Vyas, 1970 : 9).

The linguistic strategies employed in Daka's 'Mateyo, my Son' (1971) are completely different from Vyas's though they also provoke much laughter at pretence. The use of corrupted English in Mateyo's letter not only reflects villagers' 'unsuccessful' attempts to write English but also produces comic effect in the depiction of Mateyo as a pathetic parody who anglicizes his African name (Mateyo Dinkwi becomes Matthew Deanqui, Esq) to enhance his status as a Western educated assimilatee :

Misitara Mateyo Dinkwi,
Minisitiri ofu Pubriki Elyitimenti,
Box U 19040,
Lusaka (Daka, 1971 : 143).

The deliberate misspelling here (which in reality would reflect mother-tongue interference) is undoubtedly meant to ridicule Mateyo's adopted attitudes. No wonder he cannot readily accept the letter as his when asked by his office orderly :

He looked at the letter, then glanced at the office orderly's face and said :
 'Leave it with me.' He was too proud to admit that smudgy letter was indeed his or that Mateyo Dinkwi was his name (Daka, 1971 : 43).

3.2.4 Some Flaws

Whereas one lauds some of the linguistic innovations cited above, insofar as they enrich the repertoire of styles, one cannot forget to mention the fact that there is much in the language of some of the stories that is ungrammatical without being creative, and therefore a clear sign of sheer ineptitude. One thinks here, for instance, of such ridiculous structures as 'The news of Lote's arrival was soon well-known in the whole village' and 'She cried for the whole night that it irritated him and he hit her again', in Phiri's 'The Soil, not the Seed' (1969 : 33, 36), and the following in Kapenda's 'The Way it Goes' (1975 : 25, 26, 27) : 'Abroad? for some advanced prospects! Representer there - the embassy of the engineering firm - the pioneer of this big firm to be me, fantastic', 'Any attempt would reveal the same irritation as before so I slipped through the connecting shrubs and jumped the road', 'A woman was plaiting Mrs.

Nyirongo on the veranda' and 'The next morning at the office was hectic, I found that before nine hours in the morning I had already talked to four managers in their offices. So that they could owe me money to get me out of a pit'.

Another 'flaw' to be noted is that of 'tedious prefacing', evidenced in the over-abundance of explanatory tags to elucidate what in the Zambian context are well-known cultural concepts : 'And here is my husband, Bashimpundu, that is, the father of our twins', in Maine's 'Skeleton in the Wardrobe', 'Some said he was mfiti, a wizard, for his eyes were red like the eyes of those who ate the dead . . .', in Baptie's 'A Hyena Remembers', 'Oh, mukowa, my relation, still what you have always been?' in Liswaniso's 'Return of the Worker' (1971), etc. It is such 'prefacing' that provokes the criticism that Zambian writers write primarily for a foreign audience at the expense of the local readership. And how absurd as many of the writers are published and read at home! There is however no simple solution to the problem, given the complexity of Zambia's multiculturalism in which one does not assume that the cultural codes of one ethnic group will be understood and/or responded to by others.

It is impossible in a work of this size to cover all aspects of form and style in Zambian short fiction. The structural and stylistic features highlighted in this chapter should however give a fair indication of the remarkable range of genres and linguistic usages in this literature.

As earlier indicated, an important aspect of the Zambian short story in English is its mimetic, didactic function, particularly the socialization (or guidance) of people caught in the crises of a changing socio-cultural environment. This manifests itself in the tendency towards presenting an easily recognized fictional world through which readers can see their fears and aspirations reflected and commented upon. Though many of the stories examined are mimetic and didactic in character without being carefully crafted, there is some evidence, attempts at 'trick-writing' in which emphasis is not so much on substance as on artifice, for instance, to show some writers' interest in exploiting the form's technical aspects rather than the social reality it can be made to reflect (or refract).

The most significant linguistic usages observed in the literature to a large extent reflect what could be said to be overt attempts at inventing a distinctly African/Zambian literary language to portray authentic Zambian experience, manifested in the infusion of appropriate translations of vernacular idiom (what in some studies of Achebe, Shelton (1969), for instance, have been called the 'palm-oil' of language) into village characters' dialogues or, where the setting is urban, the employment of code-switching and other linguistic strategies related to the meeting of diverse cultures in Zambian towns. It is interesting to note that the 'African idiom' cited is not just 'sprinkled' here and there to give 'local flavour'; apart from characterizing people, it is in some contexts used euphemistically to discuss potentially embarrassing subjects while in other contexts elder characters use it (in a vulgar manner) to rebuke younger ones. Other idiosyncratic uses of language relate to the use of corrupted English as a characterizing device (which reaches its extreme in Wallace's works) and the evocation of humour, such as through the use of an elevated style to recount a ridiculous event, in Vyas's 'A Bite', for instance, where much humour derives from the incongruity between the pretentious language used, the narrator's low social

status and the absurdity of the event described.

Finally, the consistency, accuracy and relevancy of structural and stylistic devices employed, in the context of the socio-political content and desired effects of particular stories, is a point that hardly needs emphasizing. It is however sad to note that despite the enormous potential that exists in Zambian short story writing, many Zambian stories are frequently spoilt through mismanagement of plots and ungrammatical English, a situation perhaps indicative of the fact that many writers do not pay adequate attention to form and language use in their writing.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This study set out to survey short story writing in Zambia since 1964 and to demonstrate the range of themes and treatment. At least two approaches were available for the task : the sociological approach, to investigate the growth and social significance of this literature, particularly its socio-political content, and the formalist-structuralist approach, to evaluate such concerns as style and technique. It was decided to blend these considerations and assess the 'intrinsic' qualities of particular texts as well as to locate the stories within the socio-political context in which the fiction is produced and consumed.

The past quarter of a century has seen Zambia produce an impressive number of short stories, the bulk of which were published during the first ten years of the country's Independence. From the early 1970s, with the decline of the country's economy and the demise of The Jewel of Africa and New Writing from Zambia, short story production began to diminish significantly. The reasons for this, apart from the obvious one of serious

economic malaise, include the lack of a viable promotion programme and the marginalization of the arts in school curricula and wider national priorities.

Despite the large overall corpus, few Zambian stories display sustained excellence. The weaknesses noted include the lack of discipline and design, seen in the mismanagement of promising plots, tedious inclusion of incidental detail, the needless qualification of characters' speeches (such as in some of Mulikita's works), the unnecessary elucidation of well-known traditional concepts, ungrammatical English, and an over-reliance on stereotyped plots, such as those dealing with jealousy and infidelity. Most of the flaws could be easily eradicated if adequate attention were paid to structure and language use.

Concern has been raised about the abundance of 'schoolboy' writing in mainstream Zambian publications, an inevitable result of indiscriminate publication. This unfortunate publication trend began with the little magazines, New Writing from Zambia, The Jewel of Africa and Z Magazine, which published virtually everything that was submitted to encourage the participation of new writers in the

evolving literary culture. NECZAM, Zambia's leading publisher, did little to improve the situation. There also seems to be a lack of artistic direction, on the part of both writers and publishers, given the unevenness of material in periodicals and collections. Distinctions between children's literature and adult literature, 'literary' short stories and transcriptions (in translation) of folklore, particularly folktales and narrative ballads, are neither made nor adhered to.

In spite of these technical problems, one finds stories that are authentic and individual, humorous and insightful, richly informative and persuasive. Some of the writers undoubtedly possess satisfactory skills of story construction, evident in the sometimes refreshing treatment of conflict in 'frontier' experiences, involving clearly defined boundaries of human experience with clear rules of inclusion and exclusion, and concern with form and linguistic creativity. With the expansive repertoire of cultural and linguistic codes provided by Zambia's multicultural/multilingual situation, there can be no limit to literary creativity. It is interesting, in

this regard, to note the use, in some of the works, of not only traditional elements, such as proverbs and metalepses, but also 'Zambianisms' and other linguistic strategies drawn from the use of English in Zambia.

The domestic subjects - jealousy, infidelity, childlessness, etc - that dominate this literature certainly have their place in Zambia's cultural development, such as the rise in the status of women, but these have been at the expense of other Third World realities such as poverty, inequitable distribution of wealth, mismanagement of available resources, corruption, the meaninglessness of 'flag' independence and problems of international capitalism. It is self-defeating to assume that because of its small size, the short story is meant to deal with 'small talk' only, leaving the 'big talk' to the novel. While one does not wish to be prescriptive, one cannot forgive the complete indifference of a genre that is inherently suited to dealing with problems and problem solving (Baker, 1986) to events of 'national significance', such as the now frequent food riots, attempted coups and political detentions. Because of its lack of interest in the country's major problems, Zambian short fiction could be said to be afflicted by the same anomaly diagnosed in the Zambian novel : the fudging of important socio-political

issues, meaning that, with a few exceptions, the literature does not raise significant questions about Zambian experience (see, for instance, Crehan, 1987). Such a literature can hardly inspire people to aspire for bolder and higher resolves in their struggles against oppressive man and nature. These are undoubtedly the worst times to write in, given the prevailing civil strife and suppression of dissent, but they are also the best times to write about!

The scope of the study was deliberately kept wide to allow the researcher to present a clear general picture of short story writing in Zambia as well as to give some of the major stories adequate scrutiny. Despite this modest contribution, the Zambian short story in English remains a fertile area for literary scholarship. Apart from single-author and single-text studies, research possibilities for future scholarship include aspects of expatriate writing in Zambia, the traditional content of Zambian short fiction, and womanhood in the Zambian short story. Such studies however need to be accompanied by the compilation of bibliographies and anthologies of uncollected stories (some of which will need revising) to facilitate easy access. If the present study will provoke further research and study in the Zambian short story, it will have served a useful purpose.

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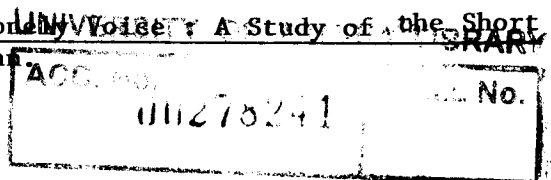
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