

# **An Analysis of the Influences of Discourse in the Anthology: *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*Zimbabwean Poetry in English*, compiled and introduced by Kizito Muchemwa (1978: xii) as poetry that ‘...shows no definite direction of growth in its early stages...’ is a multi-voice anthology of pioneering work reflecting various levels of expertise and, ‘literary eclecticism’ (Adu- Gyumfi, 2003: 105), within the context of the Horton-Asquith Model. The model is a hybrid of recommendations made by two committees which were set up to plan for the establishment of University Education in Africa. Firstly, there was the Asquith committee of 1925 which favoured a modern University Education in Africa that incorporated African history, value systems and languages. The other committee chaired by James Africanus Beale Horton in 1968 recommended that there be established in Africa, a University Education system based on undiluted Western Education. In this model, there was no place of African languages, history and culture in University Education. As a product of these two models, the Horton – Asquith model is responsible for the relegation of African languages to the periphery in the Education system obtaining in African Universities. The model also sought to spread European languages in Africa and consequently European cultures and value systems. Ngugi (2000), rightly notes that the model still haunts African scholarship and politics to date. Therefore, in Africa, the Horton- Asquith Model created products of ‘the English Department whose initial aspirations were triggered by the admiration or disagreement with the models they read’ (wa Thiongo, 2000: 5).

The multi-voice anthology comprises voices mainly reflecting images of suffering, dejection, pessimism and surrender. As a product of the model, the anthology depicts a typical poetic character blended by a plethora of historical, oral and literary events whose influence is located within the history of Zimbabwe including her experiences as a colony. Sadly, though, the background influencing this pioneering corpus was either over-looked, glossed over, ignored or simply not given proper attention despite its centrality to the development of a Zimbabwean brand of literary poetry in general and a Zimbabwean version of poetry in English in particular. However, apart from Muchemwa’s (ibid) introductory remarks, the only other attempt to unmask the background influences of this poetry was done by Flora Wild (1988), who interviewed various poets, of course, not withstanding the typical shortcomings of foreign scholars of African literature. Wild (Ibid), does not clearly explain how information gathered through interviews was used to unveil the nature of the discourse, form, structure, spirit and status of the poetry corpus as a whole. The writer thus argues that this rare poetic discourse, a gigantic feat in its own right, is a clear product of both the negative and positive historical, cultural and econo-political realities of its time, of course, within the framework of the Horton-Asquith model. Thus, the historical condition of colonization, oppression and suppression of Shona–Ndebele religious values coupled with the then obtaining socio-economic system, it can be further argued, gave the poetry its propensity

and impetus which naturally is realised in its form and meaning. Furthermore, this poetry is better understood by appreciating the peasant background of its authors who mainly hail from communal lands. On the same token, knowing the influence of this poetry implies an awareness of its form, structure and thematic concerns.

In this chapter, one notes that the first anthology of Zimbabwean poetry in English was influenced by a three-fold tradition that can be reduced to two, namely, 'African oral traditions' and 'the damaging experience of European presence in Africa' (Adu-Gyamfi, 2003:104). Firstly, the poetry partly stems from the oppressive, repressive, segregatory and consequently dehumanising administrative style of the colonial regimes in Africa in general and Rhodesia in particular. The second source is the subsequent impact of the colonial education system that favoured English language, culture and sensibilities whilst clandestinely drawing from African languages, culture, customs and values all of which had been denigrated as backward. Arguably this culminated in an elusive additive diglossia. Perhaps, this is what Muchemwa (1978: xvi) alludes to when he posits, "...the new generation of interpreters is confidently exploring the possibilities offered by the English language and exhibit in their poetry an interesting, if not new sensibility." Thirdly, the poetry's background is rooted in the irresistible and omnipresent African orature that historically has been employed in various forms, to resist even the most despotic systems of governance. The writer, thus, looks into the said traditions in a bid to make a humble contribution to the debate surrounding the thematic and stylistic preferences of the poets in this pioneering, and, hence crucial poetry anthology in Zimbabwe's literary history.

### **Influences from oral tradition**

In this section it is shown that poets heavily drew from the Shona – Ndebele strand of African oral traditions.

In her book entitled *Oral Literature in Africa*, Finnegan (1970) defines oral literature (orature) as, literature that is performed on specific occasions and transmitted by the word of mouth from one generation to another.

African orature has been positively noted to have been the source of African Literature by a number of Afro-centric scholars notably Chinweizu et al, p'Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Chiwome. In the words of Adu- Gyumfi (2003: 104), "This use of African oral tradition is abundantly evident in the works of major African writers." However, some Euro-centric scholars have blamed African orature for contributing to shallow plots and less developed characters in novels, a position dismissed by the fact that one cannot use European sensibilities, languages and culture, as a yardstick for African Literature. African literature is simply unique. So, the kind of characterisation, plot and thematic concerns of African literature clearly emanate from experiences of African people and their concept of history which is in the here and now. Similarly, orature, a composition of the material and non-material cultures of African people, is generally regarded as responsible for shaping Africans' understanding of the past, present and future in one breadth. According to Somjee (2000), in orature the visual and the verbal are intricately

related and complementary. Orature is also intricately tied to history, politics, wealth, poverty, happiness, misery, victory, defeat; in fact, everything concerning the African people. Orature gives meaning to life much as it is life itself. It manifests itself as both material and non-material cultures of African people. Its nonmaterial manifestations are various genres such as jokes, fables, riddles, spirit possession (as a concept), myths, taboos and even values, ways of marrying, worshipping, self defense, agriculture, story telling and governance. Materially, it can be realized as *hosho* (rattles), *magavhu* (rattles), *mbira* (a traditional musical instrument), *makano* (a traditional axe used for defense), *uta* (bow), *tswanda* (a type of calabash), the act of spirit possession, *misodzi* (tears), *madzihwa* (mucus) and so on. At a macro-level, orature transcends itself into mountains, valleys, galleys, human shelter, heads of cattle and goats as well as corresponding management systems. It is thus, a form of social consciousness, an omnipresent form of verbal and nonverbal communication that neither colonial education system in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) nor the general repressive and consequently dehumanizing administrative style of the colonial government could ever have removed or even suppressed among the educated African elites, not even from the most westernised among them. Viewed in this way, orature becomes existence and the meaning behind it. It is the form of consciousness that compelled early indigenous writers of *Zimbabwe Poetry in English*, to put words on paper. So, in part, Shona orature played a significant role in positively influencing and thus permeating the brand(s) in *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*.

On this issue, Charles Mungoshi makes a confirmatory statement when he confesses that his writings were influenced by "... oral poetry." He proceeds to say, "I do not consciously write like my grandfather talked but subconsciously my feeling and thinking is influenced by my ancestors and spirits" (Wild, 1988:79). Mungoshi's literary style, characterized by accessible language and expression with alliteration, repetition, praises, allegory and symbolism, depicts his heavy reliance on Shona oral poetry. Shona oral poetry derives its imagery and expression from people's everyday experiences and quest for survival. Its discourse is accessible and enjoyable to the target audience. In this way poetry becomes utilitarian. For example, in his poem, 'A Letter to a Son', Mungoshi writes:

Now the pumpkin is ripe.  
 We are only a few days from  
 the year's first mealie cob.  
 The cows are giving us lots of milk.  
 Taken in the round it isn't a bad year at all –  
 if it weren't for your father.  
 Your father's back is back again  
 and all the work has fallen on my shoulders  
 (p. 21).

This example symbolises Mungoshi's literary style in the anthology, marked by an artistic form that envisions a sociopolitical thrust and purpose. From the tone of the poem, the utilitarian value of the 'mealie cob' coupled with the repetition of 'your father' and 'back' puts the poem within the context of Shona orature. Thus serve for the English language used, Mungoshi is arguably one whose poetry is least influenced by western

conventions of writing. His poetry identifies very well with Shona people's way of life and aesthetic sensibilities couched in a utilitarian worldview.

In the same vein, one notes that the moral vision in Zimunya's poetry is akin to Shona orature. Zimunya's strong rural background of having been born and spent much of his early life in his rural home, '...at the foot of Vumba Mountains in Zimunya communal lands' (Wild, 1988:56), clearly connects his vision of life and character to Shona oral culture and art. The material culture of "smoke", "mountains", "soot", "thatch" and "beer fires", in his poem, *My Hoome*, is perfectly oral. Also, the moralistic nature of the poem reflects how the poet's vision is informed by his environment, - his oral culture, that manifests itself as mountains, valleys, hot climatic conditions, beer fires, concerts and grass - thatched shelter. Thus, in the overall, the poet's mindset is a product of an oral educational environment in which young man and women were bequeathed with good moral values and knowledge of life issues through story telling and imitation of elders. Hence, in a typical didactic fashion of a fable Zimunya writes:

...gurgling and giggling  
like those rude young girls from the city  
gurgling and giggling  
swayed by mini-morals  
clothing the old chaste tradition  
with everlasting defilement  
(p. 10).

The verse echoes the tradition (rural) -versus - modernity (urban) motif prevalent in many early works by authors of African Literature wherein the city is depicted as the epicenter of vice, a colonial miscalculation cum- front against African culture and values. This motif, transmitted by word of mouth, symbolizes how African oral art was transformed into a formidable front against perceived negative effects of colonialism.

Another example of the tradition-versus modernity motif is Zvobgo's poem entitled *Grandmother Comes to Town*. In the poem, traditional values are depicted as symbolizing purity and perfection whilst modernity stands for canal behaviour and defilement. Thus, Zvobgo blasts contraceptives- taking- women of the city, who keep up shape by putting on bras to resemble virgins. He notes:

... Neil was a stranger and so is my old grandma  
In this new terrain of sky-scrapers and mini-skirts.  
...Whoever saw women with bleeding mouths gashing  
Blood of myriad colours as they walk unresponsive  
To the pain they must bear? Nhai, Chitando,  
You went too early you should have seen breasts  
Of mothers who no longer follow the moon's dictates.  
They still project forward like the horns of the kudu.  
(p. 49)

Focusing on the same issue Chiwome (1996), argues that this depiction of the city confirms the Bantustan myth that the true home of the African was the 'reserve'. In

addition, the moral aspect, repetition, tones and mood is perfectly aligned to Shona oral literature and culture.

Such influence from oral tradition also permeates most of Zimunya's early poems. An example is *No Songs*, wherein he bemoans the loss of material and non-material culture by blacks in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). Zimunya notes that people were reduced to meaninglessness with no ancestral shrines, no rains and meaningful harvests. The cumulative effect of all this is destruction of ecology and ecosystems. In addition, he is concerned about how modernity has destroyed Shona culture and religious beliefs. Hence, in romanticist fashion, Zimunya evokes images of one longing for an opportune moment to go back to the good olden days. He puts it thus:

We have no ancestors  
no shrine to pester with our prayers  
no sacred cave where to drum our drums  
and no svikiro to evoke the gods of rain  
so we live on  
without rain, without harvest.

...Where shall we find the way back?  
opaque darkness guards our exit  
we have groped and groped until  
our eyes were almost blind  
its hard to rediscover  
(p. 12).

It appears, the poet feels there has been too much of colonial dosage wherein Africans were oriented into western values through agents such as colonial education system and the media such that it became almost impossible for Africans to fight for self emancipation. This depicts an unfortunate feeling of hopelessness and surrender.

Furthermore, in the poem, Zimunya reflects the typical affliction of an African under colonialism which segregatory and inhuman land policy had resulted in the degradation and denudation of land due to over population – an effect of the 1930 Land Apportionment Act. It resulted in massive displacement of black Zimbabweans from fertile soils of regions 1, 2 and 3 to the semi-arid regions 4 and 5. This was done under the pretext of paving way for factories, mines, towns and commercial farming. In the poem, the general motifs, thinking, tone and lamentation borne of an awkward feeling of being dispossessed, are primarily oral. As can be noted, prayers for ancestors, better known as *kupira midzimu*, and *ngoma* (drums) typify the language of oral art in Zimunya's poems. Similarly, Mutswairo's (1963) poem, '*The Grave of an Unknown Person*,' serves as another example of a poem in *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*, that is an offshoot of Shona oral poetry. So, as in his first pioneering Shona novel, *Feso* (1956), Mutswairo bemoans the deprivation of resources of the blacks by the colonizer in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). Thus in the *Grave of an unknown person* Mutswairo writes as if talking (as in orature). He asserts:

Here lie bones which were once a man who breathed as  
We do and sang songs of njari.

...The land in which you used to roam freely is now fenced everywhere and a stranger is now its lord.

No stones for the fire-place can now be taken from it,  
No firewood can be gathered to warm the hut at night  
(p. 148).

The struggle for repossession of land in Zimbabwe and all over Africa, has inherently been voiced and conceptualised through the use of various genres of oral art. This is so because African orature creates a form of consciousness in which life is viewed as a product of the land such that to talk about society is to talk about the land. So, anything that is done to the land affects life. It is on the land that people organize beer parties, practice farming, rear livestock, and engage in industrial activities. To the African, the land is the source of power, identity, culture and pride. The land question is interwoven with oral art for it both foregrounds and gives meaning and character to dreams, jokes, myths, legends, fables, songs and poetry all of which are part of oral heritage of African people. It is through various genres of orature that people ascribe all forms of meaning to their land – their source of pride and hope. Thus the role of the traditional *sarungano*-story teller, moralist and entertainer, was to give lessons and instructions to the young and old relating to how best people should live on this land, -this heritage which all people guarded jealously by performing rituals on and for it, purposefully tilling it and conserving it. So, methods of Agriculture like shifting cultivation were well calculated management strategies aimed at preventing soil erosion and hence preserving land fertility.

Just like Zimunya's *Ask Grandpa*, in '*Legacy I*' and '*Legacy II*' Kizito Muchemwa also leads the reader's mind to those good olden days of story telling when folklorists in the form of a grandmother and a grandfather were instrumental in charting a code of conduct for all people on the land. During the era in focus, laws, values and education were essentially an oral activity in which the traditional elders (grandpas) and grandmothers (grandmas) were think-tanks and custodians of wisdom churned to society by word of mouth. In '*Ask Grandpa*' Zimunya avers:

...who knows  
how the last lion  
hid in a woman's womb  
and came out ...  
(p. 14).

On this instance, Muchemwa takes the reader into a world of make-believe, in the fashion of the Shona fable, wherein animals could change into human characters and vice versa. The verse thus celebrates African knowledge systems and philosophy as capable of providing solutions to puzzles of life.

Thus oral tradition deals with happiness, sad experiences, birth, death, material and non-material cultures of a people realised in what they say, think and write about. Most of the poets in this collection were influenced by orature including Marechera who refutes this idea by claiming that his poetry was influenced by Amelia poetry: "... a combination of

the sonnet and the elegiac motif” (Wild: 19: 131). In this chapter one argues that Marechera’s poetry just like that of his contemporaries in *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*, was influenced by African orature and culture, western traditions and the repressive nature of the colonial administration in Rhodesia. **The following section analyses how the said poets were partly influenced by western literary traditions.**

### **Influence from western conventions of writing: The sonnet**

In this section one shows how some of the aspects of *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*, are partly influenced by western romanticism with specific reference to writers of the English sonnet. Notably among them are adherents of the Shakespearean sonnet like Pound, Keats and Wordsworth.

The sonnet<sup>1</sup> originated in Italy in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the English world its popularity declined during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In England Sir Thomas Watt (1503-1542), adopted and adapted the Italian Petrarchan sonnet named after Francesco Petrarch, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Later on, the English writer and poet, William Shakespeare, evolved the Italian sonnet into the then popular Shakespearean sonnet consisting of three rhyming quatrains and a couplet. The Shakespearean sonnet’s rhyming scheme is abab cdcd efef gg. Sonnets are generally written in such a way that the strict form and patterning becomes part of the language act. Meaning is derived from both words and form. In the Italian sonnet the octave contains the subject whilst the sestet ‘executes a turn thus releasing the tension built up in the octave’ (Glen Everett: geverett “utm.edu). In addition, the sonnet associated with William Shakespeare, the Shakespearean sonnet, presents its theme in a variety of ways. One pattern is to introduce an idea in the first “quatrain, complicates it in the second, complicates it still further in the third, and resolves the whole thing in the final epigrammatic couplet (Glen Everett: geverett “utm.edu). The sonnet demands both intellectual and technical skill both to compose it and to understand it.

The writer demonstrates that some early Zimbabwean poets in both Shona and English were highly influenced by the English sonnet, also known as the Elizabethan sonnet or the Shakespearean sonnet. Poets such as Dambudzo Marechera, Kizito Muchemwa, Henry Pote, Charles Mungoshi, Richard Mhonyera, William Hussey and Shimmer Chinodya attempted to write Zimbabwean (Rhodesian) version of the English sonnet.

In the anthology , the poetic forms, strictness, rigidity of strictures and the difficulties encountered by the reader in trying to decipher poetic meaning clearly demonstrate that some indigenous Zimbabwean poets were being partly influenced by foreign conventions of writing. Certainly, the simplicity in Shona orature is totally divorced from this

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1. Glen Evert ([geverett@utm.edu](mailto:geverett@utm.edu)) defines a sonnet as “... a fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter with a carefully patterned rhyme scheme.” Its fourteen lines are divided into two parts, the first line being the octave (or octet) – the first lines with a rhyming scheme of either abbaabbaa or abbacddc and or rarelyabababab. The remaining half, the sestet, has six lines with a rhyming scheme of xyzxyz or xyxyxy. As argued further by Glen Evert ( geverett “utm.edu), the sestet’s rhyming scheme may comprise of “... multiple variations possible using only two or three rhyme sounds.”

sophisticated literary style characterized, at times, by use of deautomatised cadence, word order and thematic concerns. Anyone familiar with the English poetry of the Romantic era such as that of William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), John Keats (1795-1820), Percy Shelly (1792-1822), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1892) and Lord Byron (1788-1824), can easily relate some of the early Zimbabwean poems in English to English poems of the Romantic era. These poetry corpuses are closely related in that they both present human emotions as an intellectual puzzle. Thematically, they mainly dwell on love and faith. Apparently, the sonnet is known to dwell on love and faith. Usually the beauty of nature is linked to human relationships and love. For example, the beauty of a flower is related to that of a loved woman. This sensibility is alien because among the Shona people love and beauty are understood from a utilitarian point of view. Thus, a beautiful woman is one who gives birth, loves her husband and family (including the extended family members). By the same token, a beautiful flower is one that bears fruits or provides medicine. This explains why it makes little sense to express one's love for an African woman by offering presents of flowers. One would rather have fruits, a dress, a computer or anything that one uses in life. In addition, language and form of this poetry is meant to be understood only by an initiated mind following an intellectual tussle. Usually human emotions and life are linked to nature: mountains, rivers, flowers, sun, moon and stars. There is also a tendency to romanticize the past as glorious, joyous and marvelous. In an interview with Wilkinson (1990: 208) Zimunya admits to have been persuaded by this literary tradition which he however regrets. He (Wilkinson, 1990: 208) asserts:

The poetry of Wordsworth and Browning made me wish to record the beauty of nature, of the mountains where I come from. I don't think I 'll ever be able to do that again.

This assertion is an apt summary of the effects of influences of Euro-centric conventions of writing evident in some of the poems in *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*.

There are several other poems reflecting dependence on Euro-centric perceptions and sensibilities especially those associated with admiration of nature. For instance, in 'Nyamakondo – Haunt of Kingfishers', Judith Moyo eulogises Nyamakondo river for fish, fresh drinking and bathing water as well as the wonderful site presented as the river meanders between the small kopjes. She 'sings':

The people worship your water, Oh Nyamakondo,  
Is there any other river so beautiful? (page, 41).

In this poem, it is, however, noted that the poet admires both the river's appearance and its utilitarian value. This reflects a hybrid of western and Shona sensibilities. Arguing in the same line Jones (1993: 5) asserts, "African writers derive their original inspiration from their culture bases but they have also at their disposal the whole Western literary tradition."

'Wild Mushroom,' by Shimmer Chinodya is another example where the poet praises the beauty of nature. In this poem he praises the beauty patch of African grass. However, the happiness is short-lived as the poet is saddened by the fact that forest fires will in no time destroy the beautiful scenery featured by 'The tall khaki African grass.' This sensibility is alien because the Shona people do not admire nature for its own sake. For example,



grass should have been admired for its use as thatch, fodder for animals, manure and so on.

The last example is, '*I Like Them*', wherein Bonus Zimunya admires the northern mountain of his home in a typical romanticist style. He writes thus:

I like the chevrolet western mountains.  
Lying still below the vivid blue of the sky-  
with wheels of boulders  
and axels of earth  
and windows of stone  
Tearing its way towards the south  
(page,30).

The paradox of romanticism in Africa is that whereas their Western counterparts were reacting to a historical condition that necessitated a phase of revitalizing art, African romanticists had no corresponding historical situation that called for romantic poetry. This renders their works unintelligible and uninteresting particularly to the African reader.

In the anthology, a number of poems have been identified as sonnets. These poems with similar form and a fixed number of lines, fourteen in all are:

<b>Title</b>	<b>Poet</b>
<i>To My Elders</i>	Henry Pote
<i>Legacy 11</i>	Kizito Muchemwa
<i>African Mhondiwa (1969)</i>	Shepistone Sekeso
<i>Sitting On The Balcony (1975)</i>	
<i>The White Child (1966)</i>	Henry Pote
<i>Rhodes (1976)</i>	Richard Mhonyera
<i>Of New People (1976)</i>	William Hassey

These poems are clearly aligned to Shyklovsky's Zaum poetry which "... by a deliberate play on word and their accepted meanings, aimed to produce a trans- rational language in which words functioned in a purely formal, artistic way" (Bennet, 1979:20). On a similar note, but without elaboration, Muchemwa (1978: xiv) retorts: "- there is a lot of puerile excitement and poeticizing here". These early poets seemed to have been hoodwinked into being preoccupied with the formal properties of literary texts where language of poetry and sensibilities raised were mainly defamiliarised and decontextualised. This became an obvious communication barrier to the African readership and readers in Europe. Thus, the use of tortuous expressions, violated syntax and imagery were meant to make poetry an intellectual exercise. The following poem by Kizito Muchemwa serves as an example:

October Flower  
It is a luckless flower that furls  
Blossoms in the Sahara of years  
Death takes it in lying palms  
Fronds that scald swaddled love.

We eat the unlighted table of silence  
Weather-wise in armoured cocoons that shield  
The visored knights playing the game of honour  
With the reckless and feckless cowherds

It's the wisdom of tortoise and snail:  
Scout with antennae before surrendering  
The given is not an inert blank  
For carving out territories of mind and heart  
( page,136).

As can be observed, this is a very difficult poem to interpret. Consequently, one emerges with two possible interpretations, a lateral one, whereby one envisions the fate faced by a blooming lovely flower during the hot month of October and a hidden one associating the theme of the poem with the liberation war events. If one adopts the latter interpretation, then, the poem becomes pessimistic and thus retrogressive. Certainly, such poetry becomes almost inaccessible to the reader. The dangers associated with this type of writing are aptly summed by Muchemwa (1978: xxii) who writes thus:

When a poet imitates the metropolitan models one finds the metropolis implicitly giving orders and the poet writes for an imaginary (English/British) audience”.

In conclusion, the sonnet's presentation of life violates Africans' way of understanding poetry and reality. In Africa, rhythm is generated by context and occasion. Poetic form and rhythm are determined by what is being done to sustain life. This means understanding of poetic discourse and language depends on the activity at hand and the nature of the participants. The same can not be said about the poem given as an example above. Its interpretation remains open ended, a clear violation of African utilitarian-oriented sensibilities and conventions of performing/writing poetry.

## **Censorship**

Poets and novelists of the pre-independence Zimbabwe were also adversely influenced by the political environment of their time. As can be noted, the colonial regime in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) could not pass the ‘...town square test’. (*Financial Gazette*, January 20-26 2005:1) expressed as ‘...if a person cannot walk into the middle of the town square and express his/her views without fear of arrest, imprisonment or physical harm, then that person is living in a fear society, not a free society’.

The colonial administration in Rhodesia created a fear society through a regime of legal instruments and enforcing institutions such as the British South Africa Police (BSAP), and the Rhodesia Literature Bureau, a censorship body which became functional in 1956, with a mandate to ensure that literature was published only if it was free of subversive messages of a political, social and religious nature.

Some of the laws contributing both to self and external censorship were the Defense Act (DA), the Official Secrets Act (OSA), Powers Privileges and Immunities of Parliament Act (PIIP), The Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA) of 1960. For the purpose of this chapter, it suffices to explain the most repressive ones notably the OSA, which barred authors to write on and publish or receive information that the state deemed

classified and, the LOMA, which made it illegal to engage in activities that were deemed as undermining law and order by authorities. The latter could attract the highest penalty of up to 20 years in prison. It was the most dreaded one. The cumulative effect of these laws was so dislodging that even newspapers resorted to leaving out blank spaces to make readers aware that information had been censored. In literature, creative writers of political discourse ended up resorting to irony and allegory, whilst others abandoned political issues to focus on love, death and nature. The daring ones like Ndabaningi Sithole and Solomon Mutswairo, had their novels, namely, *Amandebele KaMzilikazi* and *Feso*, respectively, banned in 1966 immediately after Solomon Mutswairo's *Feso* had been removed from the School syllabus. A number of authors were subjects of a variety of threats, for example, the literature Bureau wrote a threatening letter to Zimunya in 1970 (Wild, 1988).

The harassment, both covert and overt of writers, poets and pro-revolution politicians alike, created an inherent state of fear among all black Zimbabweans who viewed themselves as engaged in a perpetual 'situation of struggle' (Zimunya in Wild, 1988:55), for self emancipation and heritage. To writers and poets such a state of instilled fear generated self censorship which partly resulted in them writing either using very heavy metaphor or on issues free of controversy such as poetry that admired flowers, trees, grass, mountains, animals and buildings.

Herbert Chitepo's epic poem *Soko Risina Musoro* (A Message that is at Variance with Reality), serves as an example of poetry that was published due to use of irony to satirize against the socio-political landscape of the time. Thompson Tsodzo's works were also published due to his dependency on humor and irony. As for the genres under review, a combination of factors ranging from literary style to moderate thematic concerns, made them acceptable for publication by the colonial administration. For example, Zimunya's early poems notably '*Mountain Mist*,' celebrate the beauty of Zimbabwe's landscape and nature. Such poetry is usually adorned with colorful language and rich in expression and the reader ends up enjoying the rhyming of words without benefiting from the content which obviously will be of very little relevance. Through this genre, the poet seems to be wailing to be heard as he endeavors to be seen to be on par with his white counterpart. Such a notion engulfed a number of Zimbabwean writers of both Shona and English literature. Arguing in the same line, Muchemwa (1979: xiv) asserts:

One cannot make large claims for the poetry of these pioneers but what one finds interesting is the tentative experimentation with a foreign medium of expression –a crisis of language and identity manifesting itself in their poetry.

Some of the poems by Muchemwa, Zimunya and Christopher Magadza (e.g. *Prospecto* - 1968), in *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*, clearly reflect a trend where poets are carried away with expression and style to the point of, at times, forgetting the message. Muchemwa (1979) also expresses reservations about some of the early poets' infatuation with language for its sake. The aping of western conventions of poeticising is also seen in the poetry of Chivaura, who is so fond of admiring nature, flowers, mountains and rivers. Notwithstanding the fact that Shona unlike English is a tonal language, Chivaura even experiments with a forced rhyming scheme in some of his poems notably *Hwenda*

*nemweni*, *Rudo Parwizi* and *Rudo Ipfunda*. He even attempts a Shona version of an English sonnet.

Other features of this style of writing poetry are use of coinages, violated semantics, syntax, and phonology. The use of tongue twisters by Muchemwa, in some of his early poetry, is akin to this literary style. In '*Gardens and Graveyards*' he writes:

Idylls colour – riot their ordered innocence,  
The deep green of years flags hopes that crudescence –  
Beneath the frisking flower beds of gaiety  
An old lizard conducts dangerous chemical experiments.

This literary style, couched in the formalist literary tradition, is also associated with western poets like Wordsworth, William Keats and Pound. It is a literary style well known for use of tortuous expressions and deautomatised, phonology, lexis and syntax. This tradition is clearly discernible in a number of the poems written by early Zimbabwean poets. It unnecessarily overstretches the mind of the reader.

Formalism, a modernist theory of writing, mushroomed in Europe soon after the first world war. It was championed by linguists at the Prague Linguistic Circle who mooted the idea of coming up with a universal way of writing poetry as its main thrust. Scholars such as Victor Shklovsky and Jakobson felt that in its state then, literature had become a source of boredom due to its simplicity and familiarity. To them literature was supposed to be unfamiliar and tortuous hence it would appeal to one's sense perception. Emphasis was thus put on form which was believed to generate content. As already noted, western formalism cascaded to a number of early writers in Zimbabwe. Hence, in an interview, Zimunya admits that they wrote some of these early poems to simply enjoy the beauty of language. In the same vein Muchemwa posits, "I think what we call African Literature will be the poorer if we ignore influences from other countries (Wild, 1979:133). This sounds prudent but the only danger lies when one sacrifices African conventions for western ways of perceiving reality as was the case in some of the poems in the reviewed anthology.

## **Conclusion**

In the foregoing, it has been maintained that, just like their counterparts in Shona, the poets of early *Zimbabwean Poetry in English*, were conditioned by the Horton-Asquith model to adopt a literary style that reflects influences from a three-fold tradition, namely, Shona orature, Western writing conventions (e.g. Formalism and Romanticism) and adversities of colonialism such as censorship. These traditions resulted in not so coherent discourse patterns in poetry as noted both by the current writer and Kizito Muchemwa, (1978). Thematically, the anthology ranges from social, religious and political issues whilst stylistically a mixture of simple communicative strategies, typical of Shona orature, and, an alien literary style based on the meter, are evident. It has been noted that, western influences, particularly the formalist tradition of writing, has resulted in genres such as the sonnet and the adoption of a more rigid and mathematical style of writing. Ultimately, the three-fold tradition is manifest in language characterised by use of simple to difficult lexical items and expression in a continuum.

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**NB This was written as a book chapter. It was peer reviewed and is awaiting publication. It is one of the two articles that I have included as a peer review(ed) article.**