

Travelling home: Diasporic dis-locations of space and place in Tendai Huchu's *The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician*

Fatima Moolla

Abstract

The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician, a novel by Zimbabwean diasporic writer Tendai Huchu, adds to a growing body of global immigrant fiction. Huchu's novel concerning Zimbabwean émigrés in the United Kingdom displays a heightened spatial consciousness that self-reflexively complicates the spatial tropes and trends of much migrant literature. *The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician* generates an unrelenting dialectic in which the national home, both for migrants and citizens, is often unhomely, while host spaces yield to various forms of place-making and belonging. City space, in this case the city of Edinburgh, is shown through the unique mobilities of the three protagonists to produce different senses of identity. However, the forms of identity that emerge ultimately succumb to the spatial implosion represented by the death (in contained spaces) of two of the principal characters, whose city perambulations are thus brought to a halt. The reader discovers, furthermore, that the third character is not the cartographer of his re-orienting mental map of the host city, but that his itinerary has been directed all along by a sinister, somewhat ubuesque Zimbabwean expatriate, to whom the third character, fooled by this regime spy's clownish conduct, condescends and mistakenly patronizes.

[*The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician* is a story] about three men living in Edinburgh, trying to find a place for themselves in the city. It's a novel about ideas, music, memory, love, that kind of shit. (Huchu interview. Gyasi, 2015: n.p.)

There's a great Spike Milligan line: "Everybody has to be somewhere." (Huchu interview. Cousins and Dodgson-Katiyo, 2016: 201)

Tendai Huchu is one of a growing number of African diasporic writers with a significant international literary profile joining the circle of, most notably and in no particular order, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, Taiye Selasi, Helon Habila, Maaza Mengiste, Teju Cole, Binyavanga Wainana, Chris Abani, Yaa Gyasi, Chinelo Okparanta, Yvonne Owuor and Mũkoma we Ngũgĩ, among a few others. Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Huchu presently resides in Edinburgh, and may well be the writer who, through his immigrant Zimbabwean characters in *The Maestro, The Magistrate & The Mathematician* (2014), paradoxically, has written the city of Edinburgh into the twenty-first century global novel, doing for Edinburgh what the native Charles Dickens did for London and the Irish citizen James Joyce did for

- Musiyiwa M (2016) Shona as a land-based nature-culture: A study of the (re)construction of Shona land mythology in popular songs. In Moolla FF (ed.) *Natures of Africa: Ecocriticism and Animal Studies in Contemporary Cultural Forms*. Johannesburg: Wits UP, pp. 49-76.
- Mbue I (2016) *Behold the Dreamers: A Novel*. London: 4th Estate.
- Msiska M (2009) Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and the structure of Black metropolitan life. *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2(1): 5-27.
- Nasta S (2016) 1940s – 1970s. In Osborne D (ed) *British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 23-39.
- Patel S (2010) *Migritude*. New York: Kaya Press.
- Procter J (2016) Recalibrating the Past: The Rise of Black British Historical Fiction. In Osborne D (ed) *British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 129-143.
- Rodaway P (1994) *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*. London: Routledge.
- Selasi T (2013) *Ghana Must Go*. London: Penguin.
- Selvon S (1985) *The Lonely Londoners*. New York: Longman.
- Tally RT Jr (2013) *Spatiality*. London: Routledge.
- Tiah (2015) 'I Write Whatever the Fuck I Want, Whatever Matters to Me': An Interview with Tendai Huchu. <http://shortstorydayafrica.org/news/i-write-whatever-the-fuck-i-want-whatever-matters-to-me>
- Tshuma NR (2013). *Shadows*. Cape Town: Kwela.
- Tuan Y (1974). *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Prentice-Hall Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Tuan Y (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Vadde A (2015) Narratives of Migration, Immigration, and Interconnection. In James D (ed) *British Fiction Since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 61-78.
- Walks A (2015) *The Urban Political Economy and Ecology of Automobility: Driving Cities, Driving Inequality, Driving Politics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.