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# Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter by J. Nozipo Maraire

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**WORLD LITERATURE IN REVIEW: ZIMBABWE**

J. Nozipo Maraire. Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter. New York. Crown. 1996. 194 pages. \$20. ISBN 0-517-70242-8.

"A luta continua," the slogan for the revolution in much of southern Africa, is a befitting theme for Nozipo Maraire's mother-to-daughter clarion call to "remember" in order to know and be, for it is in knowing what makes one that one then knows how to be, how to absorb "multiple frames of reality." Thus the essence of a mother's legacy to her daughter as she enters a new world, leaving her native Zimbabwe to study at Harvard, in the USA.

A long, reflective letter, Zenzele is a mother's retrospection and her reminiscences of her restless, inquisitive daughter's growing-up years. Born of premonition and thoughts about the transitoriness of life, the volume bears home truths for the realities of living in the real, unnatural world of racism, of color consciousness; importantly, it contains lessons in what it means to be an African, an African woman abroad. It is the natural exchange between generations, each enriched and enriching--the older feeling inadequate and obsolete as it struggles with the effects of change and modernity, the younger idealistic and charging full force into the future. Zenzele is necessarily a "curious distillation of traditional African teaching, social commentary, and maternal concern," a cultural, maternal legacy, told and passed on with love and exultation by a mentor-guide mother. Through reminiscences of her own growing-up experiences--from puberty to the giddiness of adolescent love to facing loss from sudden death of a first love to mature love, marriage, and family--she recounts one recollection after another, deftly interweaving history with memories.

Made all the more immediate, intimate, and forceful by the discovery of a strange yet undiagnosed strength-sapping "growth" the doctors have discovered, this lyrical "lessons of life" legacy is replete with home truths ranging from the "post-colonial syndrome" of cultural bleaching that produces tragic "been-to's" like Mukoma Byron who sell their souls to Western icons, to political activism, from the topic of love--that "beautiful and mysterious event"--to the revolutionary war, from wife abuse to ruminations on metaphysics and "staying at peace within."

The language is poignant, simple, and laced with humor and pathos, especially evident in the account by the maid-turned-spy cousin Tinawo of her exploits of a female freedom fighter and in Mukoma Byron's tragic transformation from sadza-eating Byron Makoni to pipe-sucking, tea-at-ten-and-four Englishman Byron Makon. The tone is conversational, one of ease, providing a sense of immediacy and connectedness despite the ever-present sense of geographic distance.

For women writers from Zimbabwe, the incubation period is over, so to speak. Renaissance women indeed, these writers are emerging from the woodwork, their artistic and creative talents fully shored up with formal academic and professional preparation. With fellow countrywomen and writers Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera, Nozipo Maraire joins the rising ranks of Zimbabwean women writers with successful first novels. A neurosurgeon trained at Harvard, Columbia, and Yale--certainly America's very best--Maraire has successfully combined professional studies with literary and creative talent, actively practicing medicine and nurturing her artistic and creative bent through art collecting and writing.

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By Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith, University of Nebraska, Omaha

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