



STILL UNDERMINING DAMBUDZO MARECHERA? POSTMODERN DIALECTICS IN *BLACK SUNLIGHT*

By

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Abstract

Dambudzo Marechera is arguably one of the most controversial figures in twentieth-century African literature. The Zimbabwean writer is often celebrated as a leading African postmodernist, a reputation shaped by critical engagements with his debut novel, *House of Hunger* (1978). In contrast, his second novel, *Black Sunlight*, has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This paper addressed this gap by critically examining *Black Sunlight* in order to foreground its enduring postmodern dialectical representations, situating the novel within a contextual framework that reinforces Marechera's identity as a postmodern writer. Jean-François Lyotard's critique of metanarratives in postmodern theory serves as the theoretical framework. Through close textual analysis, the study explored key postmodern literary techniques—such as paranoia, indeterminacy, parody, and vulgarism—and demonstrated how these strategies inform both the stylistic experimentation and thematic concerns of the novel. The postmodern dialectics in *Black Sunlight* illustrated violent and anarchy as predominant thematic preoccupations of the novel. Findings further showcase the postmodern reflection of structural and stylistic disorder as well as ideological fragmentation of thought-process. Marechera's style of writing is not accidental, but an ingenious invention of language that showcases postmodern stylistic import and in furtherance, asserts the postmodernist argument within the context of modern African literature.

Keywords: *Dambudzo Marechera, Postmodern literary techniques, Postmodern African writer, Identity, African Literature*

Introduction

The origin and success of the African novel can easily be traced to early African writers such as Peter Abrahams, Camara Laye, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ferdinand Oyono, Elechi Amadi and so on. These, including several others, are classified as Modern African

writers, whose works are reflections of the modern era. But one of the earliest novels that brought African novels to the international audience is Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, written in 1958. While Achebe focuses on the colonial predicament as it affects the African communities, David Ker (2003, p.1), in his essay, 'Introduction: Modernism and the African Novel', quickly pointed out that the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, 'appropriated its title from the spirit of the modernist age' as well as subsequent novels that were published after Achebe's debut. He argues further that this was a conscious attempt by Achebe to join in exposing the horror or terror of colonialism, 'the nightmare of history, that modernist writers in Europe and America were writing about' (Ker, 2003, p. 1).

Barely twenty years down the line, European writers such as Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut and the like began to reflect the denunciation of modernist expression and experimented on the postmodern temper, as it relates to fractionalised Western society. Apart from Vladimir Nabokov who wrote around the late 1950s, these Europeans are recognised as one of the earliest postmodernist authors in the late 1960s. Evidently, the world then had experienced the radical shift from the modernist ideology. Except Africa? Or so it seemed. As earlier discussed, critics have ascribed the late representation of Africa to a number of reasons. While some were influenced by sheer skepticism, others allude to the prevailing modernist direction which Achebe and other had initiated. But the fact remains that Africa, even if it attempted to, could not extricate itself from this global phenomenon, as Wole Soyinka (2001) had rightly implied in his essay entitled 'A Voice That Would Not Be Silenced'.

Ironically, it was also Achebe (1975) that foregrounded the veracity of postmodernism within African postcolonial milieu. In his essay entitled, 'The Novelist as Teacher', he strongly avers that 'today things have changed a lot, but it would be foolish to pretend that we have fully recovered from the traumatic effects of our first confrontation with Europe' (p.44). Although Achebe somewhat situates this expression with the context of Africa's insurgence against European colonist hegemony, there is a fundamental modification in the re-interpretation of the word 'change'. Even in the context of Achebe's sentence, the word 'change' is subjected to a complex network of definitions. Some would argue that Achebe might be referring to the postcolonial era, especially as it affects Africa's socio-political terrain. Others may simply prescribe modernism as the exact synonym for the word. Or perhaps modernity? This is an example of the post-structuralist scenario in which meaning is conditioned as ambivalent.

Nonetheless, our argument, in terms of deciphering the word 'change', gears towards Achebe's vision of the postmodern era. Akinsete (2023, p. 504) illustrates this as 'the continuous heartbeat of Western civilization' pumping 'irreversible and consequential

negative blood through the collapsing vein of traditional African societies'. In fact, according to Achebe, it didn't change a little, it changed *a lot*. His warning that European influence on Africa, like black spots on the leopard's skin, must not be undermined. Just as torrents of rains cannot wash off the leopard's spots, Africa's colonial status remains invariably tied to the advancement of European hegemony. Therefore, Achebe's words evidently foreground the continuity of postcolonial struggle in contemporary African society. However, his revelation clearly the effect of the postmodern era, which today as provoked a radical change in the manner of expression of Africa's multi-faceted themes. Perhaps, it is these reflections that prompted Achebe's essay entitled 'Message from Chinua Achebe', published in Dambudzo Marechera's second work, *Black Sunlight* in 1980. Achebe speaks:

. . .what I personally want to see – writers from all over Africa contributing to a definition of themselves, writing ourselves and our stories into history. One of the greatest things literature does is to allow us to imagine; to identify with situations and people who live in completely different circumstances, in countries all over the world.

This assertion aptly justifies the presence of Marechera as a distinct writer, an isolated voice whose introspection with himself explodes into a myriad of confusions that define his society. Through his writing, Marechera exposes the contradictions of the repressive Zimbabwean society from his point of view as a character. His choice of using the first-person narrative technique in most of his works justifies this assertion. Helon Habila (2006, p.251) however, points out that “Marechera's enormous contribution to African literature is often underrated for so many reasons, one being the sheer impenetrability of his prose style. He is nothing like any African writer before him”. This statement presupposes the stylistic deviant that postmodern writers. And as such, this research towards inspecting Marechera as the first port of call in foregrounding his works within the purview of postmodern fiction. His erratic deviance seemed to answer Foucault's rhetorical question on the necessitated purpose of postmodernism, within the ambience of African literature. Or does this assertion not challenge the pessimistic notion of Wali on the redundancy that defined African literature in the last few decades? According to Foucault;

Is it not necessary to draw a line between those who believe that we can continue to situate our present discontinuities within the historical and transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century and those who are making a great effort to liberate themselves,

once and for all, from this conceptual framework? (Foucault, 1977, p.120)

One crucial signification to this notion is that Marechera dissociated from the 'social realist mode' that was adopted by early African writers such as Achebe, Ngugi 'wa Thiong'O, and so on. He rather departed from the usual tradition of presentable, anti-colonial and nationalist ideologies, deviating into obscurantist, self-reflective, technically ostentatious stream-of-consciousness mode (Habila, 2006, p.252). Therefore, through his stylistic choice, Marechera alienated himself, as his critics increasingly found it difficult to place his writing within the anti-colonial category. Flora Veit-Wild (1987) declares strongly in her essay entitled 'Words as Bullets: The Writings of Dambudzo Marechera':

Dambudzo Marechera is an outsider. He cannot be included in any of the categories into which modern African literature is currently divided: his writings have nothing in common with the various forms of anti-colonial or antineocolonial protest literature, nor can they be interpreted as being an expression of the identity-crisis suffered by an African exiled in Europe. (Veit-Wild, 1987, p.1)

These multiple possibilities of interpretations accentuate the pluralistic tendencies in Marechera's identity as a writer. Veit-Wild's assertion on the eccentric author confirms the postmodern trope of indeterminacy, which is reflective of all sorts of 'ambiguities, ruptures and displacements affecting knowledge and society' (Ihab Hassan, 1986, p. 503). Marechera himself is a postmodern metaphor in his rejection of the modern epistemology that ironically argues for objectivity and uniformity in a chaos-driven world. He is delineated as unmanageable, revolutionary and intricate. Again, Veit-Wild's (1987) resilient voice resonates further in her postmodern description of the Zimbabwean writer:

Marechera refuses to identify himself with any particular race, culture or nation; he is an extreme individualist, an anarchistic thinker. He rejects social and state regimentation — be it in colonial Rhodesia, in England, or in independent Zimbabwe; the freedom of the individual is of the utmost importance. In this he is uncompromising, and this is how he tries to live (Veit-Wild 1987, p.1)

Therefore, it was expectedly and perhaps still difficult to understand Marechera's works without necessary introspection into the life and experiences of the Zimbabwean writer. That is also why his collection of literary works oscillate between an autobiography (facts) and fiction; partly political, partly personally, a pastiche of mutilated feelings and disillusioned experiences that usually send the reader into a never-ending search for ideological resolution. Ironically, the initially reaction that greeted his maiden work, *House of Hunger* (1978) was skepticism. The book is a collection of a novella, short stories and poetry. Quoting Habila, it was an 'odd collection, the first of its kind in the Heinemann African Writers' Series, a well-known publishing house for newly independent African countries' (Habila, 2006, p. 252). However, the book won the esteemed Guardian First Book Award in 1979. It is said that Marechera was the first and only African to have won the prize, thus confirming James Currey's (the often-disillusioned Marechera's publisher) intuition that Marechera's exceptional narrative import could easily earn him the status of the most influential Zimbabwean writer during the early independence stage of the country.

But Currey was not alone in his optimistic opinion of the outlandish writer. According to Habila (2006), John Wylie, one of Marechera's readers, had written in the report of the early draft of the second literary work, *Black Sunlight* that 'Marechera comes through in his book as a most likeable man, . . .and tremendously gifted' (p.254). And as such, Wylie strongly suggested that he (Marechera) 'should not be allowed to escape to another publisher for he could become. . . as important a writer as Soyinka or, perhaps, a sort of African Dylan Thomas only much more intelligent than Thomas ever was' (p.254). Going by this record, why then was Marechera's name not immediately etched in the annals of popular African writers? David Buuck (1997, p.118) affirms this notion, stating that 'Marechera remains marginalized in current critical studies of African literature'. So, what kept his work from not being recognised for so long? Why was he ostracised? Why was his distinction completely avoided, and not accredited? And did that contribute to the initial banning of his book in Zambabwe? And how justifiable is the reason given then in relation to the language and style of writing in an extremely political African society? These are thought-provoking questions about Marechera, with recourse to answers that would truncate his lack of recognition and further promote his contributions to African literary experience.

Among Marechera's critics, two of them serve the purpose of this study. First, Julie Okonkwo (1981:91) states that Marechera had 'grafted a decadent avant-garde European attitude and style to experiences that emanate from Africa'. She further posits that 'the continent cannot afford the luxury of such distorted and self-destructive sophistication from her writers'. (91) But the fact is that Africa now experiences (socio-

political and psychological) distortion. The reality of independence has long been eroded by the nebulosity of neocolonialism. Perhaps Marechera was too quick to foretell this postmodern future from a self-consumed African modern society. Furthermore, Annie Gagiano, the second Marechera critic, and still quoting Habila (2006), equally agrees with Okonkwo's criticism, arguing that,

the discomfiture of some critics with the African cosmopolitanism or African modernism embodied in Marechera's work might be linked with a representative passage in Ngugi 'wa Thiong'O's influential essay collection, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986): 'By acquiring the thought-processes and values of the foreign tongue, [the African] becomes alienated from the values of the foreign tongue or from the language of the masses. (Habila, 2026, p. 256)

Therefore, two principal factors can be deduced as decisive to the separation of Marechera from the conclave of postcolonial African writers. His unacquainted style of expression and his nonconformity to the postcolonial narrative of the African nations are Marechera's mortal sins, as far as his critics are concerned. Okonkwo immediately derides Marechera as a child of the Westernisation, lost in that exaggerated indulgence (or playfulness) of confounding stylish undertone. She notably defends the serious undertone of African literature, foregrounding its seeming unilateral direction as functional, and, according to Okonkwo, nothing else matters. Marechera's writings, in the face of adverse colonialism, seem to undermine this collective objective, this all-important agendum of the quest for socio-political freedom. After all, Achebe had predicted this in his essay 'The Novelist as Teacher', stating that 'the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact, he should march right in front' (Achebe, 1975, p.25). Gagiano's angst is somewhat similar, except that she theoretically exhumes Ngugi's radical ideology of postcolonial emancipation, which is embedded in counter-hegemonic insurrection against the European language. To Gagiano, if Marechera was not speaking the language of the people, whatever he says, which in the first place appears outlandish, does not matter.

Nevertheless, Marechera does not shudder by this criticism. Rather than defend his choice of difference, he unapologetically foregrounds it throughout his work, beginning with the *House of Hunger*. His decision as a deviant remains not just a stylistic import but, as Veit-Wild did put it, a lifestyle. Marechera perhaps chooses this way of life, ready to face its consequences. According to Habila (2006, p.253), 'it would seem that Marechera finds himself always persecuted, endlessly pursued. With his unusually thin

skin, he can only survive the constant, threatening blows of the outside world through the powerful and magical exorcism of the written word'. Like the postmodernist proponents have argued, Marechera's revolt takes not the usual form of attaining *order* and *truth* (Marxism, Structuralism, Modernism), which seemed to have failed in the delivery of reality. Marechera, in his works, simply sees into the future a recurrence of ironies; a system of oppression that cannot be unturned by race, colour or creed, not as it affects the country, continent, but first the individual self. Marechera simply edifies Foucault's rejection of the enlightenment's concept of freedom and liberty in his works, arguing against the seemingly passive modernist's hegemony that had begun to rise within the ranks of Africanism and nationalism.

. . . to insist upon your right to go off on a tangent. Your right to put the spanner in the works. Your right to refuse to be labeled and to insist on your right to behave like anything other than what anyone expects. Your right to simply say no for the pleasure of it. To insist on your right to confound all who insist on regimenting human impulses according to theories, psychological, religious, historical, philosophical, political, etc. . . . Insist upon your right to insist upon your right to insist on the importance, the great importance of whim. (Marechera, 1991, p. 75)

Marechera's skepticism against all forms of hegemony and insistence on his weird for-being-weird-sake attitude roadmaps him as a postmodern writer. This is evident in his much-quoted statement in his first novel, *House of Hunger*. However, a critical evaluation of the postmodern aesthetics in his select novel, *Black Sunlight*, becomes the next step in validating his status as Africa's unconventionality from the sardonicism of modernism.

Postmodernism: A Brief Overview of History and Theory

Postmodernism is a widespread movement that became prevalent around the late twentieth century. Its spread extended to several humanistic disciplines such as arts, architecture, philosophy, history, economics, literature and politics. It is a phenomenon that has widely been described as a new collective approach to interpretations of human experience. Its conception has been traced centuries back to philosophical figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, However, the term 'postmodernism', as quoted by Puja Mondal (2015), appeared to have first been used in 1917 by Rudolf Pannwitz, a German philosopher, in his description of the twentieth century's Western

ethos as 'nihilistic'. Akinsete (2020, p.176), in explaining the historical development of postmodern, states

...at the twilight of the twentieth century, there arose the term 'postmodern age' which emerged in Europe around 1940s and then later in America about a decade after. This period birthed the controversial concept namely postmodernism, often described as a new intellectual cum philosophical era that cuts across diverse disciplines of life such as architecture, philosophy, sciences, economy, politics and literature.

Postmodern theory, foregrounded by Lyotard's concept of 'incredulity toward metanarratives,' deconstructs the institutionalisation of modernism, by deploying skepticism toward absolute truths, universal explanations, and stable meanings, referred to as metanarratives. These are modern constructs that determine the patterns of history, reason, or identity. Postmodern theory rejects all these, while emphasising the condition of plurality, fragmentation, and difference. Therefore, one of the main tenets is the instability of meaning, signifying that language does not represent reality but only constructs it. Meaning is therefore open to multiple interpretations.

In his article, titled 'Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective', Hassan Ihab (1986, p.17-19), highlights the perception of pluralism as an important motif in postmodern theory. He alludes to a chain of postmodern characteristics that appear self-determining but also could also be linked to one another. Ihab uncovers a selected number of literary features connected to postmodern approach to literature. They are indeterminacy (ambiguity), fragmentation (disorder), unrepresentable (magical realism), decanonisation (deconstruction), parody and irony (playfulness) and so on.

Postmodern Tenets and Techniques in *Black Sunlight*

Postmodern literature, just like its theory, reacts against certain principles of the literary codex of modernist writings. But it also serves as an extension of modernism in other ways. Modern literature exists on the theoretical platform of rationalism and empiricism, which negates the thrust of postmodern theory. In fact, postmodernism proponents such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Richard Rorty, and Jacques Derrida initiated skepticism on the modernist belief that theory can adequately represent reality (Terry Barrett, 1997, p.18). This led to an outburst of experimentation of the *self* in various forms (individual or group), or the *inner-self*, as reflected in the stream of consciousness, a literary technique shared by both modern and postmodern writers.

Marechera's works are generally autobiographical, which explains the constant introspection that resonates throughout his works, *Black Sunlight* inclusive.

A number of African writings indulge in self-analysis in tandem with the socio-political pulse of the society. That is why the search for identity, or its reconstruction, dominates the thematic preoccupations of Modern African Literature, starting from the reflection of national autonomy to quest for personal distinctiveness (feminism, ethnicism, class, race and sex, among others). In other words, modernism in literature features increasing criticism of colonial hegemony, shift in power struggle, specifically concerning women, and so on. And part of the objectives of modernist writing is premised upon the institution of stability within an unrelenting chaotic world. This is exactly what, in all ramifications, Marechera deconstructs in the novel, *Black Sunlight*, validating Akinsete's (2020, p.175) precis on the presence and practice of postmodernism as a trope in contemporary African novel.

But first, the decisive point of divergence that separates modernism and postmodernism must be emphasised. In simple terms, postmodernism exposes the modernist pretense about its unprecedented achievements in terms of human advancement. Modernism cognises the catastrophe of a fragmented twentieth society, but postmodernism positively explores various opportunities towards producing new consequences. Therefore, while modernists express despair about the challenges of the new era, postmodernists were enthusiastic about the possibilities of any irrational development in such society (Matie Calinescu, 1987, p. 265). There is reminder of these failed attempts to provide stability and progress, given the wanton destruction and disillusionment caused by the scientific rebellion against humanism in the twentieth century, the peak of modernism. The consequences of this are the First and Second World Wars, societal disintegration (fragmentation) and the much-debated malicious side of capitalism. We return Barrett for further insight into this.

Postmodernists criticize modernity by citing the suffering and misery of peasants under monarchies, and later the oppression of workers under capitalist industrialization, the exclusion of women from the public sphere, the colonization of other lands by imperialists and, ultimately, the destruction of indigenous peoples. Postmodernists claim that modernity leads to social practices and institutions that legitimate domination and control by a powerful few over the many, even though modernists promise equality and liberation of all people (Barrett, 1997, p.18).

The reality is that the principles of modernism, in terms of an egalitarian world, further negate the spiral socio-cultural and political hegemony experienced in all shades of human experience. In fact, the very attempt to initiate a change presupposes a worse condition. This is the bane of postcolonial discourse today, an unending myriad of Western imperialism. Postmodernism authenticates this *reality* and prides itself in its representation of this anarchical world in its literatures. This is achieved with the affective aesthetic influence of postmodern tenets. David Harvey (1990, p. 311) admits that 'the chaos of signs, of competing signification and messages, suggests a condition of fragmentation and uncertainty... that emphasizes many of those facets of postmodern aesthetics'. The study draws from the categorisation of the likes of Ihab Hassan, Harvey who extensively validate the pluralistic characteristics of postmodern writings whose reflections are profoundly demonstrated in the linguistics choices of the writers.

In lieu of this, references cannot but be made to certain postmodern aesthetics that are pivotal to the postmodern interpretation of *Black Sunlight*. This study identifies and interrogates the manifestation of paranoia, indeterminacy and excessive vulgarism, as contained in *Black Sunlight*. This combination is effortlessly enshrouded in the language deployed in the novel. Furthermore, the application of these postmodern tenets/techniques contributes to Marechera's canonisation as a uniquely different writer, with a reformed postmodern taste, style and purpose of expression.

These postmodern techniques may not appear mutually elusive. In fact, in terms of definition, it is sometimes difficult to delineate certain postmodern tenets from others. This foregrounds the very nature of postmodernism as a complex theory which in fact critiques its own self. Therefore, it is important to uphold the interlocking nature of these tenets as well the similarities that exist among quite a number of them. Therefore, while emphasis would be on the exploration of the three principal postmodern techniques namely, paranoia, indeterminacy and vulgarism as evidently portrayed in *Black Sunlight*, references would also be made to others that are closely connected to these postmodern choices.

Paranoia, Indeterminacy and Vulgarism as Literary Representations of Anarchism in Dambuzdo Marechera's *Black Sunlight*

The open lines of *Black Sunlight* are indeed a déjà vu of its antecedent, *House of Hunger*, both expressively depicting his unconditional nerve in terms of language use. Marechera deconstructs the presumed sense of coherence and order that typify the structural ordinances African modernist fiction, exemplified in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ferdinand Oyono's *House Boy*, Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom*, and so on. He immediately challenges the intelligence of the reader to read between and *within* his

pulsating lines. It is quite easy, in fact, alluring to interpret Marechera's motive as deliberate attempt to becloud his readers. On the contrary, through his language choice, he instantaneously resonates the message of anarchy and misperception that are brought to light by the technique of paranoia. This ultimately showcases his fears, angst, displeasure of situations around him. The text states:

Through the open window. The fucking window, a slashing wind blows. Through the open window. Within this pale womb with its beard, a brutal story writhes. Night imprisoned in the room stayed with me all day long. Laughter's broken glass, through the fucking window. Is the view (Marechera, 1980, p.1)

Some of these open expressions, particularly the last, cannot be described as a complete thought, a definition that suitably adhered to the question of what a sentence implies. There is no question about the seditious fragmentation of the thought process, which results in the elongation of the reader's set objective – the attainment of meaning. This elusiveness, this feeling of intangibility explicitly defines the setting of this novel and mood of the writer. It is this state of paranoia that defines the totality of the author's message in his description of himself and his repressive society. Invariably, this state of paranoia determines the temper of the author as a postmodern writer, whereby the voidness of existence is revealed by the writer. Therefore, Marechera's style of writing is not an accident, but an ingenious invention of the English language that evoked a widespread response and further asserts the postmodernist argument.

The overwhelming mood of paranoia is so strong that it seeps into the unconsciousness of the reader. Fuelled by the state of insecurity that envelops his consciousness, the nameless protagonist blames his immediate society for his psychosomatic incarceration. He continually experiences a psychological disorder, as described by the way he views his world when he was chained up-side-down by the tyrannical leader, who is referred to as chief. The protagonist sees himself as the end victim of an extremely repressive society. The text reveals:

As now I grind my teething people in a cocoon. Swinging. Europe was in my head, crammed together with Africa, Asia and America. Squashed and jammed together in my dustbin head. There is no rubbish dump big enough to relieve me of my load. Swinging upside down, threatening to burst the thin roof of my brains. Those years of travels. Years of innocence and experience. Motherfucking months of twiddling my thumbs with insecurity (Marechera, 1980, p.4)

At a metaphorical level of interpretation, the protagonist becomes paranoid simply because he can no longer recognise the concept of humanity any longer. What is perhaps more critical is the protagonist's defamiliarisation with reality, which, as he strongly avers, is nothing short of an illusion. He also becomes disillusioned and eventually obsessed with his discovery that the world, his world reeks with deception, instead of truth and integrity, as well as chaos, rather than the much-proclaimed emphasis on harmony. In his desperation, the protagonist seeks to find his own people. Throughout the novel, he wanders around in a desperate bid and endless search for the recognition of himself in his people. The protagonist submits:

. . . In search of my true people. Yes, in search of my true people. But wherever I went I did not find people but caricatures of people who insisted on being taken seriously as people. Perhaps I was on the wrong planet. In the wrong skin. Sometimes. And sometimes all the time. In the wrong skin (Marechera, 1980, p. 4-5)

Paranoia, as postmodern literary technique, is highly representative and becomes relevant to the thematic preoccupation of a necessitating search for identity. Marechera himself admits, in an interview with Alle Lansu in 1986, the intensive bearing of paranoia in his novel, stating that 'the idea that to be paranoid is the only way to face reality' (Veit-Wild, 2014, p. 30). It further accentuates the need for a consistent probing from insanity to sanity, a willful escape from an extremely hostile society. This soul-reaching feeling of fear and anxiety is so strong that the protagonist and his prostitute friend, Blanche Goodfather, sleep with guns in their hands, even after making love. Like a virus, this state of paranoia soaks the entire pages of the text. It is, however, pertinent to stress that the mere presence of these postmodern techniques should not be the only justification of postmodern canonisation. What affirms the postmodern should extend to the overall significance that these techniques project in the exploration of the thematic concerns of such texts.

Apart from paranoia, there are some other postmodern aesthetics that strongly characterize the postmodern novel, vis-à-vis *Black Sunlight*. Harvey (1990, p.9) buttresses this assertion, affirming that 'fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or totalizing discourses are the hallmarks of postmodern thought'. Having already delved into the last part of Harvey's list which encapsulates paranoia, indeterminacy and fragmentation comes next. However, the duo is quite closely related as one eventually leads to another.

Indeterminacy is another postmodern trope in *Black Sunlight* which also significantly addresses the theme of anarchy. Ihab Hassan (1986, p.503-505) qualifies this technique as part of the pluralistic nature of postmodern literature, which he identifies indeterminacy as ambiguities and displacements that rupture morphological and syntactic consistency in the acquisition of information or generally speaking, knowledge. Pluralism is often regarded at best as an aimless eclecticism (W.J.T. Mitchell, 1982, p. 612). Hence, the eclectic nature of Marechera's experimentation and stylistic innovations transcend the customary restriction to generic patterns of literary expression. A reader is compelled to experience that pastiche (a concoction of literary phenomenon) of uncertainty, fear, helplessness and incompleteness. Stimulated by the profound use of imagery and repetition, the reader is drawn away from the narrative world to a poetically imaginative experience. The lack of plot structure further intensifies the stream of consciousness which distorts reality and challenges authenticity of the text. These are also evidential signs of paranoia, a quite symbolic representation of African postcolonial societies. Therefore, the use of paranoia measures up to the dominant theme of anarchy that this book not only buttresses but represents in all ramifications – language, style, and theme.

In terms of language use, the title of the selected text, *Black Sunlight*, equally symbolises that uncertainty that comes with indeterminacy. The oxymoronic heading detonates within itself the reality with which to substantiate blackness with any nature of light, particularly the sunlight. The word 'black', despite being descriptive, is systematically foregrounded in this title. No doubt, the sun is the source of all energy. But this energy comes in form of *light*. Marechera plays down this import with his introduction of the adjective 'black'. The phrase 'black sunlight', therefore, can be interpreted as 'dark energy', a metaphor for overwhelming density of chaos and anarchy. Also, the mordant demonstration of tyrannical black power in postcolonial African countries can also be proposed as viable interpretation to the title. This rationalises the preoccupation of neocolonialism in the novel. The point is that postmodernism thrives on such paradoxical expressions, which fuel the indeterminacy of a conclusive interpretation. In terms of the displacement of light, the text speaks further. 'The endless glittering view of gigantic humid trees shutting out the sun. A thin mould of history covers the walls. Covers the blood, flesh and bones. A black skin, thin and minute. Covers the darkness in the room' (Marechera, 1980, p. 1).

The cataclysmic metaphor of the black sunlight is further revealed in the patchy story of Susan, the prostitute, who, by the virtue of her ill-gotten income, still renders economic serve to the main character of the novel. First, he observes the melancholic appearance of Susan's customers after the sexual act and defines them as 'unreal people'. More

importantly is the description of the flies that attempt to snatch a grain of food from the narrator's leftover meal. The imagery of desperation and indecision is borne from the challenging manner of survival. The text reads:

the flies shot into the air and angrily contemplated suicidal dives to retrieve their lost lunch. They were fat and blackgreen with dark, silver wings that vibrated faster than eye could ever see. Their huge compound eyes glistened with the paranoia of black sunlight. (Marechera, 1980, p.7).

The metaphor of the black sunlight instigates disillusionment and disenfranchisement. Humans are portrayed as inhumane, while flies are personalised with human attributes. Marechera deconstructs the human condition, affirming the philosophy of cultural posthumanism, a theory that interrogates concept of humanity and the human nature. This foregrounds the anarchical dimension of reality in the world of the narrator, and in fact beyond.

Marechera remains merciless in his choice of expression throughout the novel. With each turn of the page, he exhibits the cruel world in an almost inhuman fashion. For this postmodern writer, everything begins and ends with imagination. With disconcerting use of imagery and oxymoron, he paints and sculpts the reader's imagination, as vividly as reality itself. He demystifies our conventional sense of imagination in the most representative fashion, in which the reader cannot escape from. He is indeed *different* writer, throwing caution into the wind, unwinding the scarlet robe to reveal the unspeakable. According to the novel;

A nightmare in low key. That was how the days unfolded, slowly but surely, with a steady bright light behind their skin. I drank it in one gulp... Marie looked scared and brave; she was here, right here in the present, and yet far away. As it were a distant present. The dead thing that had been born out of her, her baby, had long since been incinerated. Like time (Marechera, p. 26)

While modernist writers try to make readers think, postmodernists such as Marechera channel their energy to make readers *feel* – the pain, thirst, scourge, blood, everything within the text challenges the senses. The profound imagery and undulant language use serve as the literary catalyst in provoking a psychological re-awakening on the part of the reader towards an unrepentant repressive world. Fernando Morador (2007), in the introduction of his book, *Postmodernism and the Digital Age*, affirms that

postmodernism 'opened for a new way of thinking and especially, for a new way of *feeling*'.

As brief as his literary career, Marechera's messages are concisely contained in the first few expressions of his works. Viet-Wild, Habila and others have already established a flawless summarization in *House of Hunger*, in the expression, 'I got my things and left'. . . Also, Marechera, at the end of *Black Sunlight*, abruptly leaves his readers again bewildered, and contaminated by the very sense of misperception and consternation that haunted the writer himself. In the end, the reader is only certain of entrenched ambiguities in the book, in life and in the (African) society. This pastiche of indeterminacy, beginning with the absence of chronology and ending in elusive objectivity merges to foreground the trope of distortedly unrepentant modern society, one which the postmodernists play upon. This playfulness, therefore, leads to the concept of parody, as another postmodern technique that equally preoccupies this text.

The connection between parody and postmodernism is visible in terms of their inherent incongruence. According to Linda Hutcheon (1991, p. 32), parody is derived from the Greek word *parodia*, in which the prefix 'para' interprets as 'against', while the second part of the word, 'ode' illustrates a song, usually of praise. Attention is immediately drawn to the imprecision and ambiguity in this word. Hutcheon (1988, p.3) also sees postmodernism as 'a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges.' The nature of parody also deploys that same subversion that postmodernism deploys, only that there is a sarcastic bite that revolves round references to a more significant event. This aesthetic form of intertextuality that often comes with parody foregrounds the postmodern. The text states:

As I swung gently by my heels in the thick fat fucking breeze of sheer humidity, I had a clear view of the court and could see and hear all that went on there. So this is humankind. Swinging. Backwards and forwards. Swinging through history. These are my people. I am their people too. Crucified upside down by my heels. My Golgotha a chickenyard. Father! Father! Why the fucking shit did you conceive me? (Marechera, 1980, p. 4)

One of the ways in which the writer describes his world is portrayed with him being hanged upside down. At a metaphorical level of interpretation, the protagonist describes his frustration at his estranged society. He further expresses his sense of disillusionment with the oscillatory movement which depicts lack of definite direction. The usage of

himself as the engine of distortion is also symbolic. He does not deny his involvement in his chaotic world; instead, he recognises himself as part of that disillusioned society. Perhaps, more significant is the perceptive reference to the biblical narrative of Christ's crucifixion. The preponderant philosophy about this meta-narrative remains the ironical twist of a ruthless world that condemns the innocent, and the helpless. The protagonist in fact compares himself with the innocence of Christ, being crucified with guilt, without blame. He aligns with Christ's suffering. Nevertheless, he playfully deconstructs the sacredness attached to this Christian narrative. The text states thus;

I closed the huge doors behind me and walked softly towards the altar. I was in the opium of the people. The huge cross dangled from the chains fixed to the roof. I stood at the crucified Christ. He looked like He needed a stiff drink. He looked as if he had just had a woman from behind. He looked like He had not been to the toilet for two thousand years. He looked like I felt. That was the connection (Marechera, 1980, p. 32).

Through the use of vulgar expression, the postmodern character in the writer deconstructs the same meta-narrative of God's benevolence and well as the significance of Christ's crucifixion. Instead, he denigrates the actions of God for his business of creating a chaotic world in which humanity, include the protagonist, now suffers. Marechera introduces another dimension to Nietzsche's stance on the death of God. In *Black Sunlight*, he attempts to foreground the dearth of God's invincibility and supremacy.

Apart from the linguistic distortion, lack of sequential plot and other stylistic import that postmodernism utilises, the use of expletives and/or unabashed vulgarism is also a common postmodern aesthetic choice in terms of language use. Postmodernist writers find no reason to exercise restraint in the description of sex and sexuality, which remains a crucial part of human experience, as foretold by Sigmund Freud. The reader is immediately exposed to the open vulgarity and brazen description of sex scenes in *Black Sunlight*. But sex scenes in postmodern literature have fundamental implications. While exploring the sex scenes in the novel, Ayo Kehinde (2001, p.34) states that the sexual trope in Marechera's work is aimed at depicting 'the sordid state of the society, as well as shock his readers into consciousness'. In furtherance of this, the metaphor of sex in postmodern works deconstructs the fallaciousness of modern writings in the expression of reality. The postmodern writers depict sex as a natural phenomenon that possesses a therapeutic influence in a chaos-driven world.

In *Black Sunlight*, the explicit description of sex scenes is quite fundamental. They serve as a means of survival, an escape from the disreputable condition of their lives. A significant occasion is the student demonstration which became sore. The soldiers are said to be in a “nasty mood” and ready 'to teach almost everyone a lesson' (Marechera, 1980, p.35). They eventually do, and in the beating and stampede, Professor Webb, who tries to fight back the tyrannous actions of the soldiers, lost his life, amidst several others. The protagonist, who passively tries to record the whole event, finds himself rescuing his blind wife, Marie. In the end, they managed to safety, and eventually make love in the most extraordinary fashion. The text states:

Fast. Sharply. I was dancing to her song, a very old and incantatory song. My feet thumped and drummed the floor. Turning this way, that way. Rapidly. It dinned in my ears. It stunned my innermost reserves. She was down there at my feet, between my knees, eating my penis, making the dark furnace roar. I reached down. She was not there (Marechera, p. 42).

Although sex is openly expressed, there is still that feeling of paranoia and elusiveness of reality which saturates the chaotic world of the characters. Sex is simply a temporary relief from this grueling environment. And the use of sexual expletives such as 'fucking Christ', 'conniving cunt', 'vagina', 'motherfucker', symbolically represents the burdensome feeling of frustration and misdirection that serves as physical and psychological reaction to a hostile society.

Conclusion

Marechera's *Black Sunlight* reflects an autobiographical stance, centering on the writer's personal experiences, thoughts, and struggles. He offers no apology for this self-focus, projecting the notion that an author's work is consequential primarily to their personal ideas and intellectual explorations, rather than being immediately directed at society. In *Black Sunlight*, the postmodern sensibility manifests through intense dialectics that explore themes of violence and anarchy, reflecting the novel's preoccupations with disorder and fragmentation. Language, which arguably is the iconic foundation of human civilisation, is skillfully manipulated by Marechera, while style serves as the literary grease that conveys meaning with precision and force. The deliberate vagueness and experimental techniques in his writing underscore the power he wields over his readers, positioning him as one of Africa's pioneering postmodern writers.

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Bio statement

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