

Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight*: Carnavalesque and the Subversion of Nationalist Discourse of Resistance in Zimbabwean Literature

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Summary

This paper examines *Black Sunlight* (1980), a novel by Dambudzo Marechera, in the light of critical reappraisal of narratives of national resistance in the 1990s in Zimbabwe. *Black Sunlight* was published in 1980, the year of Zimbabwe's independence when most black Zimbabweans viewed the coming of that independence as the vindication of Nehanda's prophecy that her "bones" shall rise and Africans will rule themselves. Novelists such as Edmund Chipamaunga in *A Fighter For Freedom* (1983) and Garikai Mutasa in *The Contact* (1985), were to use their fiction to fabricate, justify and present nationalist resistance as the "natural", and uncontested ideology of decolonisation in Zimbabwe. In contrast, in *Black Sunlight*, Marechera is radically singular in his use of the carnivalesque in order to resist ideologies of Zimbabwean cultural nationalism based on single notions of the "African image". This paper argues that the subversion of nationalist discourse of resistance in Zimbabwean literature that Marechera authorises in *Black Sunlight* stems from the author's desire to generate narratives of postcolonial resistance which encourage literary open-endedness, and incompleteness as a strategy to anticipate cultural change. This project enables the author to construct an idiom of resistance that is aware of the provisionality of the values it underlies.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek Dambudzo Marechera se *Black Sunlight* (1980) in die lig van 'n kritiese herbetrugting van narratiewe van nasionale weerstand in Zimbabwe gedurende die 1990's. *Black Sunlight* is gepubliseer in 1980, die jaar van die onafhanklikheid van Zimbabwe, toe die meeste swart Zimbabweërs die koms van hierdie onafhanklikheid bejeën het as die vindikasie van Nehanda se profesie dat haar beendere ("bones") sal verrys en dat Afrikane hulleself sal regeer. Romanskrywers soos Edmund Chipamaunga in *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) en Garikai Mutasa in *The Contact* (1985) sou hulle fiksie aanwend om nasionale weerstand te fabriseer, te regverdig en voor te stel as die natuurlike en onbetwisbare ideologie van dekolonisasie in Zimbabwe. In teenstelling is Marechera in *Black Sunlight* radikaal sonderling in sy gebruik van die carnivalesque om ideologieë van Zimbabweese kulturele nasionalisme gebaseer op afsonderlike nosies van die "African image" teen

te staan. Hierdie artikel voer aan dat die omverwerping van nasionalistiese diskoers van weerstand in Zimbabwiese literatuur wat Marechera in *Black Sunlight* outoriseer spruit uit die outeur se begeerte om narratiewe van postkoloniale weerstand te genereer wat literêre groei en onvoltooidheid aanmoedig as 'n strategie om kulturele verandering te antisipeer. Hierdie projek stel die outeur in staat om 'n idioom van weerstand te konstrueer wat bewus is van die voorwaardelikheid van die waardes wat daaraan onderliggend is.

Introduction: Rereading Marechera Beyond the Nineties

Dambudzo Marechera, Zimbabwe's internationally well-known novelist, poet, playwright and short-story writer was born in 1952 in Rusape, Zimbabwe. In 1973 Marechera was thrown out of the University College of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) for allegedly inciting some African students to fight white racialism at the university in Rhodesia. The publication of *The House of Hunger* in 1978 brought fame to Marechera as the novella won the Guardian Fiction Prize. But the reception of *The House of Hunger* in particular and Marechera's other works in general in the eighties in Zimbabwe and outside, has been mixed between cautious admiration and outright hostility. Some African-nationalist critics could not understand why Marechera's fiction had begun with the deconstruction of African nationalism within the struggle and after it when everybody was "supposed" to be happy that independence had come. For example, Musaemura Zimunya, Marechera's own compatriot describes Marechera's writing as "neurotic" (1982: 128) and dismisses the artist as one who "curries favours and succumbs to the European temptation in a most slatternly exhibition" (p. 126). One reviewer of *Black Sunlight* sees in the work an "exercise in self-destruction" (Wild 1992: 212). When *Black Sunlight* was published in 1980, the Zimbabwe Censorship Board placed a ban on the book in 1981 because the board members working for the Establishment argued that the novel was difficult to follow when reading, that it offended Christians, Muslims and Buddhists and that it also used the "foulest language"... [contained in] four-letter obscenities" (Wild 1992: 291-292). *Black Sunlight* was later unbanned in 1981. The hostility to Marechera's aesthetics is roundly summed up by Mbulelo Mzamane (1983) who accuses the author of not rooting his own aesthetics in the "African tradition":

[H]is [Marechera's] literary analogies owe very little to the African tradition, and rob his work of a Zimbabwean authenticity. Indeed there is a sense in which Marechera could try to write within the "African tradition" and that does not necessarily imply churning out conformist or imitational work.

(Mzamane 1983: 213)

This desire to return to the past in order to revive a “conveniently” coherent image of “African tradition” and “Zimbabwean authenticity” implies a search for a pure and homogeneous African culture. This ideology of cultural nationalism implies that there is one way to mark, construct, theorise and write about the discourse of resistance in both a colonial and postcolonial situation in Zimbabwe.

Even as Marechera was writing in the 1980s he was fully aware of the internal limitations of the ideology of nationalism. He always feared that in Zimbabwe, the betrayal of the masses would repeat itself as had previously happened with countries such as Kenya and Nigeria. In the eighties, Marechera shared with Wole Soyinka of Nigeria and Ngugi wa Thiong’o of Kenya the conviction that after the failure by the nationalist governments in Africa to make independence meaningful to the ordinary people, nation, national consciousness, and narration would – to give a twist to Simon Gikandi’s (1992: 378) formulation – “no longer” walk hand in hand in African literature. Instead, Marechera consciously adopted the figural trope of the carnivalesque that he believed contained the capacity to oppose, subvert and undermine official culture from within. Marechera found the contradictory narratives of postcolonial resistance well represented in the carnivalesque novel whose “worlds” according to him are “complex, unstable, comic, satirical, fantastic, poetical and committed to the pursuit of truth” (1987: 101). In the 1990s there was a deliberate and unrelenting shift in the terms employed to understand Marechera. Postcolonial critics who have experienced the “failure” of the grand narratives of African-nationalist resistance to transform independence into economic freedom for the majority now recognise the significance of Marechera’s hostility to all that is represented as immortalised and completed in the ideologies of cultural nationalism. For instance, Flora Veit Wild observes that the carnivalesque in Marechera’s works enables his voice to carry the weight of a contestatory activity that subverts or disarticulates official ideological and narrative authority based on unitary definitions of postcolonial identities (1992: 94). Another critic, Mark Stein, writing of *Black Sunlight* in particular, specifically comments that the liberational potential of the novel is in its “demonstrating seizure of the meaning-making machine to specific ends” (1999: 66). Implied here is that national narratives of resistances are acts of social constructions and as such cannot claim to be relevant for all times. Narratives of resistance can be revised and this yields the possibility of authorising alternative forms of resistance based on different forms of African people’s experience under colonialism and after it. It is in this context that to “reread” Marechera’s *Black Sunlight* beyond the nineties through the figural prism of the carnivalesque is not only controversial but calls for the

recognition of the cultural heterogeneity that defines narratives of resistance as social formations.

Carnavalesque and the Instability of the “African Image” in *Black Sunlight*

In *Black Sunlight* the rejection of both a specific locality for setting and a linear formal narrative informed by a telos of a beginning, middle and end is signalled right from the first chapter of the novel. The narrator appears, first hanging from a tree, in a chicken yard, his head touching chicken shit: his crime is to have laughed at the old Chief’s erection. From this “vantage point upside down” (Marechera 1980: 7) the narrator is able to generate a vision from below, one that carnivalises or satirises the underside of the chief’s authority. The chief is portrayed as sadist, carnivorous and licentious. His throne is made up of “human skulls” (p. 2) and has a “necklace made of human fingerbones” (p. 6). The Chief’s huge physical appetites, ignorance and cruelty underlines the significance of the grotesque in the novel. The portrayal of the exaggerated greedy nature of the Chief is meant to mock, and undress the Chief’s authority that is not aware of a “world ... closing in on him in the shape of white people, the first one of whom was Blanche Goodfather” (p. 6).

Marechera’s laughter is meant to undermine the very cultural authority generated by and invested in the African image. Implied in that mockery of the chief is that he is only weakening his rule by brutalising his own kind because colonialism will sweep him under as well. As in Yambo Ouologuem’s *Bound to Violence* (1971), where blacks commit acts of aggression on other blacks, Marechera’s Chief makes it laughable for cultural nationalists who search for the authentic identity of black people in the past when one aspect of that past is defined by violence of blacks on blacks. Christian, the narrator of *Black Sunlight* is being satirical when he searches for his “true people” while swinging upside down as the Chief’s prisoner. What Christian finds are “caricatures” of people who insisted on being taken seriously (Marechera 1980: 4). That the narrator finds “caricatures” instead of his “true” people, implies that colonialism has severely dislocated the African image. In other words, the search for an authentic African identity is shown to be misguided because it robs precolonial African people of historical agency. It also ignores the fact that African societies had their complexities that could not be represented by a single narrative privileging coherence against the realities of ruptures and discontinuities. Because the discourses of cultural nationalism refuse to recognise these complexities of

the African identity they are implicated in reproducing colonialist modes of thinking, and writing about Africans. A “new fascism” sanctioned by the “African image” not only obscures the emerging contradictory alignments based on gender, class and even ethnicity in the African societies, but also that the same “African image” is used by postcolonial African leaders to silence dissent.

In *Black Sunlight* the effect of reviving the “African image” is to sanction political repression of alternative narratives of resistance. At the Devil’s End are a community of people who are the products of this “memory of those centuries of nightmare” (p. 71). As Christian puts it, the enslavement of some Africans was made possible by the help given to slavers by some African chiefs:

Devil’s End was also used as a collection point by the slave drivers Floggings, impalings, body inspections, tortures of all kinds All kinds of men found refuge here: robbers, heretics, pirates, criminals, hermits, lepers, swindlers, pariahs of all types. We are as it were the living memory of those centuries of nightmare. But then everybody must have roots. A sense of identity, continuity. Disease, war, persecution, rapine, these are our ancestors, you know.

(Marechera 1980: 71)

In the moral economy of the imagery of cultural nationalism, “roots” and “ancestors” suggest a genealogy traceable to a distinct, coherent African past. And yet, the irony here is that Christian suggests that what he has known is not the history and experience of security, warmth and care provided by roots and ancestors, but disease, war and persecution. Christian draws parallel links between the sadistic Chief and postcolonial African leaders when he asks: “Was there a difference between the chief on his skull-carpentered throne and the general who even now had grappled all power to himself in our new and twentieth-century image?” (p. 13). With this remark the novel rejects the idea of perceiving the struggle of the African communities against colonialism as constituting the only historical experience that Africans know. For, the ideological construction of some Africans as “robbers, heretics, pirates, criminals, hermits, lepers, swindlers and indeed pariahs” reveals cultural nationalism’s appropriative power or capacity to define some Africans as its inferior others. It is both a symbolic and cultural mode of representation that is ironically informed by the ideology of European Enlightenment whose desire was also to mark as primitive, and therefore deserving to be discriminated against, not only non-Europeans but also anyone who refuses to accept its telos of progress. And yet these essentialist definitions of Africans invoked by the “African image” mask the arbitrariness and

provisionality of their political meanings and choices.

What Marechera successfully subverts here is the cultural economy of nationalism's Manichean image of the African past as good with Europe as its evil other. In that refusal to characterise the African past as coherent, positive and unified, the author undermines both the African cultural nationalism's discourse of resistance of the 1960s that emphasised stable narratives of identity, and also European anthropology whose imperial mode of functioning to name and control Africans depended on a stereotype that fixed African identity for all time in an unchanging past. Blanche Goodfather seeks after the "ideal human society ... [and she ferrets out] ... few bits and pieces of authentic people reducing them to meticulous combinations of the English alphabet" (p. 4). The paradox of that discourse of cultural nationalist resistance that purports to be built on unitary and stable definitions of the African reality is that it is itself inherently unstable. It simultaneously implies a "rejection" of colonial ideology's processes of othering and yet the same cultural nationalism attempts to assign racial essence to blackness and Africanness. Marechera's ideological success here is to demonstrate that the colonial discourse of power that operates to name, and mark Africans for purposes of controlling and exploiting them is not entirely possessed and controlled by the coloniser. Africans are themselves also implicated in reviving and sustaining colonialist modes of defining African reality as long as they single-handedly continue to promote the "very political ideals which are to do with the authentication of the African image" (Marechera: 1992: 221). The major effect of such an uncritical cultural enterprise is to narrow the "political" meanings of resistance that Africans can generate and authorise.

The Instability of Postcolonial Urban-based Guerrilla Resistance in *Black Sunlight*.

Repression in *Black Sunlight* is ironically the condition that makes possible the authorisation of the discourse of resistance. Marechera inserts the notion of political resistance carried out through urban guerrilla warfare as one of the many aspects of the historical dimensions of postcolonial agency. The enemy that is fought by the urban guerrillas at Devil's End are visible through their agents: the army, the police, the churches (p. 94) and the educational institutions. These are the vicious ideological state apparatuses that in the words of David Maughan-Brown "guarantee, for the dominant class, the reproduction of the relations of production" (1987: 5). The ruthlessness of the state agents however, encourages the possibility of open revolt or rebellion.

And yet, for Christian, the status of being in opposition to state terrorism is itself an unfinished form of identity that does not exhaust the subjective resources implied by the term resistance. The very fact that the urban guerrillas at Devil's End are trained and committed (Marechera 1980: 72) means that their political choices are already subjected to and curtailed by adhering to particular political programmes or formats. The guerrilla leader at Devil's End also threatens to engulf the movement through imposing new forms of authoritarian rules and order. Like the very state that the political movement is fighting, the urban guerrilla movement at Devil's End develops structures that encourages conformity to a particular and narrow social ideology. As Christian is to learn from Chris, at Devil's End "[N]obody smokes tobacco here. You have to smoke what we smoke If you smoke different that's undemocratic and upsetting. It smirks of individualistic opportunism" (p. 54). Chris's desire to crush differences and suppress individuality within the narrator is symbolic of the totalitarian tendencies growing within the movement, its impatience if not outright intolerance with what is different to it. The lack of tolerance to alternative views within the political movement at Devil's End recalls to the reader, cultural nationalism's desire to suppress alternative narratives of national resistance that are authorised by different social groups within the nation. In *Black Sunlight*, Marechera reveals that a discourse of national resistance that began at Devil's End as a counterhistory subsequently aspires to become the dominant narrative with the potential to suppress alternative voices.

Fortunately, in *Black Sunlight*, the urban guerrilla movement is denied both military and political success against the repressive state. For Christian, the political movement's commitment to an overt political programme is precisely its major fault:

No Black Sunlight Organisation existed – publicly and even privately to the Special Branch and the security forces Even the very name, BSO was a joke. Bakunin Shits Okay. Bleeding Sodds (cf Orifices). Black Souls Organize. To atrophy ourselves with a BSO label was shit.

(Marechera 1980: 104)

For Christian, the tyranny imposed on the individual by sedimented values embodied in political dogma is that it threatens to "snuff ... out with types of religion, education, legislation, codes and in the last resort, jails and lunatic asylums ... this tiny spark that will detonate all creation" (p. 66). Further, the narrator and his double concur that political manifestos spread "more snow and ice than before in the space within the human heart" (p. 66). For Chennells and Wild commenting on the "failure" of the rebellion at Devil's End, "revolution's probable failure is ... anarchism's conviction that

authority and privilege are necessarily despotic” (1999: 47). That the rebellion by the urban-based guerrilla movement in *Black Sunlight* should fail to achieve a certain political coherence is also in keeping with the author’s desire to reduce the notion of opposition ad absurdum (Stein: 1999: 67). It is also the author’s criticism of the BSO’s “intellectual conservatism in spite of [its] revolutionary” (p.111) desire to transform society.

Marechera states that while he was writing *Black Sunlight* he was reading books on intellectual anarchism to reinforce his own sense of protest against everything. Marechera favoured for the kind of postcolonial resistance he promotes, a sort of intellectual anarchy which is “full of contradictions in the sense that it can never achieve its goals” (Marechera quoted by Wild 1992: 31). The author privileges a political programme that perpetually anticipates change. Consequently, *Black Sunlight* refuses to emplot the BSO narrative of resistance as comedy, with a finished political agenda. Marechera constructs a narrative that endlessly desires to subvert its own authority. Meanings are not fixed any more and authority, whether as implied by the state machinery or the BSO political infrastructure, is constantly made to reflect on the conditions of its possibility. Marechera is aware that to destabilise the dominant literary narrative necessitates a preliminary critique of one’s own counternarrative. The relevance to Zimbabwean literature of Marechera’s anarchism is that the author refuses to hold on to any certainties and instead subverts the values of the discourse of resistance in nationalist literature that threatens to seal with closure the multiple national narratives of resistance. Marechera’s mode of contributing to nation-building in *Black Sunlight* is not to flatter it, so that it becomes complacent and oblivious to the many internal contradictions that define its processes of longing for national form (Brennan 1990: 45). The author’s sense of patriotism implies a paradoxical relation not only to the discourses of resistance that compete in constructing the ideas of nationness but to the nation itself: the idea that one has simultaneously to work *for* one’s nation by working *against* it. Marechera was an “outsider” to his “own biography, and to his country’s history ...” (Marechera 1987: 101) because he criticises hallowed concepts of African cultural nationalism associated with the African image, revealing how inadequate they have become in describing a viable discourse of resistance to Africa’s internal and external oppressors. That very subversion of nationalist politics makes the author a real insider and a patriot. Thus the enormous importance of Marechera in African literature is to interrogate the ideological assumptions underpinning the cultural discourses of nationalist resistance. Marechera enables the reader to comprehend the ambivalence at the heart of the discourses of cultural absolutism: an ambiguity that is underwritten by a

desire to contest the hegemonic colonial forces on one hand and paradoxically to work with those forces on the other hand.

The Subversion of Realism in *Black Sunlight*

The complexity of *Black Sunlight* is further confirmed in the ways in which the author engages with and actually interrogates the medium of narrativity itself. For Marechera, there are no natural or organic meanings fixed in the texts for all times. What is “real” and what is not cannot be taken as self-evident because “reality” itself is constructed within social contexts that are mediated through particular social discourses. Christian tells his double in a discussion on violence, that human beings are distinct from feral animals because man is defined by his conscious acts of either oppressing or resisting domination: “Man defines man. Man defines nature. Man defines violence. And he himself is defined by his own definitions” (1980: 67). Implied here is that in any act of narration the provisionality of the meanings and the values that underpin those narratives provide the continual energies to revamp the contradictory motions of history. Christian suggests that narratives – including Marechera’s – that are seemingly “full” are constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but are left out.

Christian rejects the protocols of realist representation that purport to *think* and *know* itself as that which constitutes the “real”. The narrator is in fact satirising the homogenising tendencies in classical realism when he states:

To write as though only one kind of reality subsists in the world is to act out a mentally retarded mime, for a mentally deficient audience. If I am an illusion, then that is a delusion that is very real indeed.

(Marechera 1980: 68)

Marechera, the author of *Black Sunlight*, approvingly quotes Sinyavsky who rejected classical realism in favour of fantastic realism:

I don't think of modernism as some kind of device. It is no more so than realism which is itself a convention, an artificial form. Realism pretends to be able to say the truth about life. I'm not against truth, but it can be sought by different routes. In the nineteenth century realism was very productive as a form, but in this century – it's impossible.

(Sinyavsky quoted by Marechera: 1987: 104)

For Christian, to name reality is to seek to impose one's will on that reality. It is to attempt to control it. And yet, as Chennells and Wild argue, "[t]he authority to which realism lays claim derives not from the real but from the realist's definition of the real" (1999: 46). In other words, there is no single reality or definition of what is real. And so, to the extent that narratives of resistance in some pre- and postindependence Zimbabwean novels (such as *A Son of the Soil* (1976) by W. Katiyo and *Victory* (1992) by G. Mujajati) privilege realism, at the expense of African myths, fantasy and the folktale, those texts are seeking to naturalise the hegemonic discourse of African nationalism as an uncontested or uncontestable political order. To say this is not to imply that all forms of realism are negative and incapacitated from within. It is not also to suggest that the carnivalesque, myth, fantasy and the folktale as modes of cultural representation possess inherently positive attributes. Rather, as suggested by Hayden White, it is to recognise that realism is "simply one discursive 'code' among others, which might or might not be appropriate for the representation of reality" (White 1987: 31).

Black Sunlight's literary project is to demystify realism's claim to the status of being an uncontested transhistorical narrative of order, truth and progress. Deferral of meaning, and operating with conflicting levels of experience remain permanent features in Marechera's desire to construct a metanarrative of resistance that will capture the complexity of postcolonial resistance. There are, for example, in *Black Sunlight*, cracks, jumps, fissures, and disappearances in the plot itself, an erratic compilation of stories which defy the sequentiality of a realist narrative that Bill Ashcroft (1996), in another literary context, identifies as being typical of postcolonial writings. The fissures and jumps in the plot within *Black Sunlight* are deliberately "inserted" by the author. Marechera has to confront the use of English that is not his mother tongue. In order to make it say and do what he wants to mean, he has to have "harrowing fights and hair-raising panga duals with it". That means in particular

discarding grammar, throwing syntax out, subverting images from within, beating the drum and cymbals of rhythm, developing torture chambers of irony and sarcasm, gas ovens of limitless black resonance.

(Marechera quoted by Wild: 1992: 4)

Marechera not only uses language without inhibitions. In *Black Sunlight*, new levels of feeling and thinking about the relationship between literature, creativity and postcolonial resistance are reached. His own subversion of nationalist models of resistance is an attempt to generate a new idiom of that same resistance. For him, a resistance discourse such as the one that hinges upon an immutable "African image" which fails to re-evaluate its own

conditions of possibility and continuity is bound to subvert itself from within. Alternatively, a resistance that recognises the provisionality of its values remains open to new experiences.

The Paradox of Marechera's Postcolonial Mode of Resistance in *Black Sunlight*

Dambudzo Marechera's ways of constructing a subversive language of postcolonial resistance in Zimbabwe in *Black Sunlight* are not without their own problems, paradoxes and contradictions. For example, in its original form, the carnivalesque that Marechera uses to destabilise dominant meanings was authorised by the collective or the popular classes. Its contradictory narratives more or less coincided with the "collective" ideas and values of the popular. In *Black Sunlight*, there are times when parody that used to be a collective activity is self-consciously used to advance the author's individualistic ideas on art, and resistance. Transferring the carnival into the literary/written text, to some extent, curtails the full potential of what the same carnival laughter would have achieved in live, performative contexts. Michel Foucault recognises the problem of interfacing or massaging orality onto the uneven "body" of the written mode when he argues that, "[t]he coming into being of the notion of the 'author' constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences" (1988: 197). Implied by Foucault, and to some extent by Marechera, is that the price carnival has to pay when it enters the novel is that to some extent it is hypostasised. The paradoxes of Marechera's modes of resistance in *Black Sunlight* have to do with his awareness that even his own narrative of resistance is ideologically suspect. This admission that one's revision of dominant narratives is also partially overdetermined is in actual fact an ideological strength and not a weakness. That in *Black Sunlight* Marechera implicitly acknowledges the limitations of his own narrative intervention within the struggle to construct an enduring idiom of postcolonial resistance is in keeping with the ambiguous spirit of the carnivalesque which, as Mikhail Bakhtin observes, was "directed at all and everyone, including the carnival participants ..." (Bakhtin quoted by Foucault 1988: 11-12).

Also, Marechera's outright rejection of any forms of nationalism and the literary creative method of realism that underlie those narratives sometimes implies a refusal if not a failure to differentiate between different forms of nationalisms and realisms. Sembéne Ousmane's reliance on socialist realism in *God's Bits of Wood* (1984) suggests that some forms of realism are still

useful in representing revolutionary social reality. Similarly, one feels that as one among many of the historical dimensions of the anticolonial struggles in Africa, some forms of political nationalism have been instrumental in forging ideas of nationhood among Africans, even when these nations are internally fractured along class, gender, race, sex and generational lines. Marechera's *Black Sunlight* at other times speaks in multiple ways that can only be identified as belonging to that European literary movement that has come to be called post-modernism. The paradox of postmodernism as a mode of resistance to the sociopolitical, economic and cultural excesses authorised by modernism is that postmodernism's sensibility exists both outside and inside "modernity" that the author subverts, and to which he is also linked in an ironical relation of dependency and antagonism.

Conclusion

Where some Zimbabwean writers such as Mutswairo, Ndhala, Samkange, and Katiyo celebrate independence, invoking the "myth" of a stable African image in their fiction, Dambudzo Marechera wrote in a way that undermined that image. He was aware that there is no single "African image" in Zimbabwe. In this regard, *Black Sunlight* is a novel that delegitimises not the idea of the nation but the simplistic discourses of resistance authorised by nationalist critics to describe the idea of the Zimbabwean nation. In constructing his own metanarrative of resistance, Marechera draws our attention to the arbitrariness of that symbolic process of assigning meanings. In *Black Sunlight* the narrator – as observed by Mark Stein – "constructs meaning: his story authorizes what is true and what is not. That is his ultimate act of subversion within the diegesis of his narrative" (1999: 66). The novel thus becomes a critique of the processes of narrating resistance and the authority that this process confers to the events being depicted. In other words, the instability inherent within carnivalesque enables Marechera to reveal and subvert the "stable" narratives of resistance authorised by Zimbabwe's nationalist writers.

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