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Postmodernist Consciousness or Art for Art's Sake?: A Reading of Barbara Adair's *End*

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Abstract
White South African literature, especially of apartheid years, is particularly famed for its superior form over black writing. Although white writers have been adept at experimentation with form for long, the tendency for this continues, as its critical reception is often positive. However, critical engagements with such writings often gloss over their relegation of meaning. This essay examines Barbara Adair's experimentation with form in her second novel, *End*, using Postmodernist theoretical principles to probe the relationship between matter and manner in the work. The essay identifies intertextuality, meta-fictionality, minimalism in character profile, transgenderism, and authorial self-reference as formal strategies which compromise meaningfulness in the novel. Therefore, the essay concludes that a novel such as *End* may well be returning African literature to the controversy over whether art should be for art's sake or life's sake.

Key words: Postmodernism, South African literature, Barbara Adair, Art for art's sake, *End*

Introduction: Aesthetic Controversy on South African Literature

As a product of the dual heritage of Africa and the West, the African novel continues to pay homage to these roots thematically and stylistically. From its early days until lately, the African novel has drawn its thematic afflatus almost exclusively from the history, political and socio-cultural experiences of the people on the continent.

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Starting off with anti-colonial or cultural rehabilitation works of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye, Gabriel Okara, and Ferdinand Oyono, it moved on to critical self-examination writings of post-Independence epoch, represented by works such as AyiKweiArmah's. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Ngugiwa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*, Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Naguib Mahfouz's *Miramar.* Lately, roughly from around the turn of the last century, the African novel has begun to exhibit a gradual thematic shift from issues peculiar to the continent in terms of history, politics, and socio-cultural experiences to issues affecting people of and from the continent as individuals and groups. In other words, African novelists' thematic lenses are turning and focusing more sharply on the private and the global.

Stylistically, the African novel has always flaunted its mulatto essence. In this respect, it began with a fusion of African oral aesthetics and received aesthetics associated with the Western novel. This is depicted in most of the works by Achebe, Ngugi, Okara and so on, which are executed using the realist mode. It moved from traditional realism to modernism, as seen in works by Soyinka, Armah and so on. From modernism, the African novel has also embraced postmodernism. Jegede (2000) and Kehinde (2001) have drawn attention to this, using Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* and *The Black Sunlight*, which were published in 1978 and 1980 respectively. By these critics' conclusions one could infer that the cultivation of postmodernist temper in African fiction started about four decades ago.

However, the foregoing phenomenon does not apply to South African literature, a development traceable to the peculiar political history of the country. As correctly observed by Lewis Nkosi (1967), black writing of Apartheid era has little to offer in terms of aesthetic appeal, whereas white writing offers much. This is probably because white writing is not only less political, even its minimal political-consciousness used to receive critical censure. It is also probably due

to the cultural affinity between white South African writers and European writers. Since postmodernism originated in the West, a place with which white South African writers share some cultural affinities, it is not surprising that postmodernist consciousness in the country's fiction dates to a much earlier time than in other parts of the continent. Yet, postmodernism in South African fiction of apartheid years is not cultivated to the point that aestheticism becomes the narrative object of fiction writing. This essay draws attention to a possible emergence of this tendency in post-apartheid South African fiction, using Barbara Adair's *End* for its unusual, if not excessive, preoccupation with form.

In 1989, Sachs, a notable white member of the African National Congress (ANC) presented a paper before fellow members in Lusaka, Zambia during one of the Congress's in-house seminars. In a paper entitled 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom', he argues the need to reverse the trend whereby art is conceived as an instrument of struggle. Sachs declaims:

> If you look at most of our art and literature you would think we were living in the greyest and most sombre of all worlds, completely shut in by apartheid. It is as though our rulers stalk every page and haunt every picture; everything is obsessed by the oppressors and the trauma they have imposed, nothing is about us and the new consciousness we are developing (Spring is Rebellious, 1990:21).

Although Sachs later admits that the arts played a vital role in the struggle for liberation, he insists that ANC members should be disallowed from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle. To him, tying literature to politics is tantamount to imposing 'our own internal states of emergency' (21). He therefore exhorts: 'let us write better poems and make better films and compose better music, and let us get the voluntary adherence of the people to our banner' (21). He also

condemns what he describes as solidarity criticism, that is, criticism that supports political commitment, which he considers inimical to good arts. He even prescribes a moratorium of about five years after which culture should have been totally divorced of politics.

While some other similar critical views pre-date Sachs' paper, the timing of Sachs' contribution appears to have conferred on it some greater historical significance. The paper, which was originally presented to ANC members in 1989, was later published in February 1990 by Johannesburg *Weekly Mail* on the same day that F.W. de Klerk, the last South African Prime Minister of apartheid era who also midwifed the birth of multiracial democracy, addressed the Parliament on his planned termination of apartheid. Referring to the impact of the coincidence, Susan Gallagher (1997) notes that the 'tumultuous response to this brief essay was unprecedented, revealing the volatile interconnection between culture and politics during the decolonization process' (381). This is also corroborated by Duncan Brown and Bruno van Dyke (1991) who are of the view that Sachs's paper generated a response that is unrivalled in recent South African cultural history. They also point out that the paper was 'energetically debated at cultural locals, COSAW meetings, academic seminars, and even by Members of Parliament' (vii), which underscore the epiphanic significance of Sachs's polemics.

Obviously, Sachs's arguments essentialise the need to improve the craft of writers as well as the imperative of exploring new themes. By moving away from the position of arts as a weapon of struggle and liberation for which it was known for many years, Sachs was actually re-echoing the drowned voices of critics like Lewis Nkosi and Njabulo Ndebele. Decades back, Nkosi (1967) had faulted the artistic quality of black fiction, claiming that it is characterised by 'journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature' (222). Coming from a critic who is extensively and thoroughly familiar with literature of other parts of Africa, especially West Africa and East Africa, this is not particularly surprising. During the period under review, writings from

other parts of the continent immensely benefited from the received tradition of metropolitan Europe as well as the rich oral traditions of Africa. A blend of both traditions and, especially, the skilful appropriation of the oral resources of their African societies made for a uniquely African as well as interesting imaginative works from writers in these regions. Of course, these traditions and resources were available to black South African creative writers, what is different is the socio-political circumstances of the writers. It has been widely argued that the urgency of the socio-political realities of South Africa made black writings of apartheid era what it is. Going into details here would be unnecessarily repetitive. In spite of his knowledge and implied approving critique of the aesthetic qualities of writings from other regions of Africa, Nkosi's critical punches at South African black writings of the time must be understood as a challenge to inspire robust creativity; rather than an attempt to disparage the efforts of black writers of the period.

Although white writings of the same epoch enjoy a more favourable critical assessment in terms of aesthetic quality, they are also known to be trapped in South African racial dissonance and infelicities. In what sounds like an apology for such a state of affairs, Nkosi (1981:76) reasons that this is 'because very often colour difference provides the ultimate symbols which stand for those larger antagonisms which Southern African writers have always considered it their proper business to explain.' But even now that apartheid is officially dead; it would be illusory to contemplate an absolute break with this past. However, it is refreshing to note that writers' execution of themes bordering on race, race-related and other issues in the post-apartheid era clearly departs from the old style. Generally, the new fiction by writers across racial divides exhibits unusual and sometimes startling manners of execution.

Like Nkosi, Ndebele (1991) argues that black writing is too much preoccupied with socio-political realities forced on the nation by the

Afrikaner hegemony. This, he thinks, merely re-draws attention to what is already known. He asserts that'Recognition does not necessarily lead to transformation: it simply confirms. Beyond that confirmation, it may even reinforce the frustration produced by the reader's now further consolidated perception of an overwhelmingly negative social reality' (27) In other words, Ndebele expects black writers to come up with works that, in formalist parlance, would *defamiliarise* the familiar, thereby impacting more effectively on readers' consciousness. He also calls for a shift in South African writing, especially black writing, from 'exteriority' to 'interiority'. In his explication, the literature of exteriority is a writing that focuses on the spectacular and tends to be documentary. 'It is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness' (1991:46). Conversely, he sees literature of interiority as one that 'displays the capacity to break down the barriers of the obvious in order to reveal new possibilities of understanding and action' (1991:50). Put differently, Ndebele advocates a more nuanced plotting, characterisation with greater psychological depth and a general proclivity for experimentation. This view aligns with that of Hawley who thinks that black writing of post-apartheid era 'may turn with more relish to the sort of fiction currently being written by white – more allegorical, less realistic, and postmodern in experimentation' (1996:61). To be sure, these are just some of several early critical speculations about post-apartheid literature. While elongating the list would be unnecessarily repetitive, the critical responses in book length works, dedicated journal editions, unpublished theses and dissertations, as well as academic articles and review essays to the literature produced in the new era, no doubt, provide a reliable map in appreciating and negotiating South Africa's post-apartheid literary landscape stylistically and thematically.

Critical receptions of works by post-apartheid black writers such as ZakesMda, K. Sello-Duiker, PhaswaneMpe and so on have confirmed Ndebele's and Hawley's speculations noted earlier. White writers have also continued to produce aesthetically conscious works. About this,

Graham Pechey cannot be more articulate. According to him, post-apartheid literature offers stories which seek 'to transform the victory over apartheid into a gain for postmodern knowledge, a new symbiosis of the sacred and the profane, the quotidian and the numinous (1998:58). Aesthetic experimentation is painstakingly cultivated in some of the new writings while the hitherto politically forbidden themes are explored without inhibition.

Some of the new and young voices in the South African fictional space are breaking new grounds and appropriating postmodernist tendencies. This is not to suggest that postmodernist temper is totally unknown to South African literature hitherto. To be certain, Coetzee's works like *In the Heart of the Country* and *Foe* would put the lie to such an assumption. The point is that some of the emergent works after the collapse of apartheid exhibit unusual artistic vigour, which could only have been a product of fertile and unfettered imagination. However, a trend in the emergent stylistic experimentation may well be returning us to the debate over whether art is for its' own sake or life's sake.

The Nigerian sociologist, social activist and occasional Marxist literary critic, Omafume Onoge (1985), in the seminal essay, 'The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature' identifies two different strands of art for art's sake apologists in African literature. The first are those who seek to absolutely sequester literature from society, exemplified by writer-critics like Lewis Nkosi, J. P. Clark and John Nagenda. This group insists that literature has no business with social commitments whatsoever. The other group, exemplified by Dan Izevbaye, argues for the need to gradually suppress social referents in African literature until the literature becomes less and less concerned with socio-political issues and more with personal and individual problems. In spite of the difference in the two strands, however, they clearly value literary narcissism. Interestingly, while this controversy over art for art's sake and art for life's sake started in the 1970s and probably peaked in the 1980s, it still subsists in muted forms as writers and critics create and respond to imaginative writings with ideological

preference in favour or against either tendency. In fact, some seem to have modified their views. For instance, the social referents of Nkosi's *Mating Birds* and *Rhythnm of Violence* are unmistakable. Though somehow allegorical, they clearly deal with the social problematics of apartheid. Similarly, Clark's 'The Casualty' is basically about the Nigerian Civil War. Today, writers and critics, who subscribe to the centrality of commitment in African literature, appear to be in the majority. Yet, the minority on the other side are getting more daring, more radical and more subversive in their experimentation.

Postmodernist Consciousness in *End*

The erotic and pornographic representations of sex in *End appears many enough to warrant a reception that sees it as a wilful inscription of postmodernism. Yet, this may not be sufficient to reach a conclusion such as this. However,* references to sex at unusual temporal and spatial contexts further steep the novel in postmodernist tradition. For instance, when Andre, one of the policemen trying to quell a riot by black protesters, is inside a tank preparatory to attacking the defenceless children, he is so much preoccupied with thoughts of sex that he 'felt his cock stir between his legs' (124). In another instance, a nameless *She* in the novel is masturbating while reading a telegram and smoking cigarette. Between another policeman and an unnamed woman, sex takes place in the public glare at Rick's Café. Similarly, a character by the name Juliet is presented copulating with several sailors and dockers as a public spectacle. These temporal and spatial settings of sex clearly objectify a rejection of the traditional view of sex as something that should be surrounded by some aura of secrecy and awe. It also illustrates what Jegede (2000), in her critique of Damdudzo Marechera's*The House of Hunger,* perceives as ways of breaking free of society's 'mental and physical confinements' (178). While sex is a main thematic thrust engaged from postmodernist optics in the novel, the execution of the narrative in general appears to be the end in itself.

If, indeed, Adair's representation of sex in her novel foregrounds

physical and psychical freedom from inhibiting morals and conventions of society, other aspects of the novel offer an even greater subversion of both realist and modernist traditions of fiction writing, which lends credence to the possibility of postmodernist consciousness on the part of the novelist. For instance, in her ingenuous but disorientating narrative structure, the novelist presents a story where characters and narrator engage in continual inter locution about their fates, what may or may not happen, what should or should not be done and sundry other matters. In a manner a typical of modern realist narratives, the narrator begins her story by asking the audience/reader whether she could tell them 'a story, a fiction; words that mean nothing or everything depending upon how you want to perceive them?' and whether it will have 'a wow finish' (1). This beginning sounds like the formulaic opening of traditional African folktale. But, more significantly, it deliberately hints at what Peter Brooker (1992: 175) describes as 'radical indeterminacy, and a tone of self-conscious…scepticism' characteristic of postmodernism. For the narrator and, by implication, Adair the novelist, the apprehension of the story is entirely tied to the perspective the reader brings to it. Indeed, it may even be meaningless, given the meaninglessness of life constituting the pretexts from which the writer draws her inspiration. Her concern with 'a wow finish' also underscores postmodernist propensity for shocking the reader into the consciousness of the realities of a contemporary world where the 'outrageous' and the 'impossible' hold sway. Although the opening of the story suggests that the narrator is a certain Freddie who wonders if she could tell us (her audience/reader) a story, there emerges another narrative voice which subsumes Freddie's, which also narrates Freddie as part of the story. This complexity invites a comment or two on the relevance and implication of Adair's narrative technique and her management of the narrative space in general. Traditionally, narration is equated with point of view, which usually comes in form of first-person perspective or third person (omniscient) perspective. However, new insights have impacted the concept of narration. In his exposition on the theory of narratology, Roger Webster (1996) aligns with the French theorist,

Gerard Genette (1996) in making some distinctions between the narrator and the focalizer. Both contend that the idea that the figure who narrates is synonymous with the figure from whose perspective events are seen is erroneous. The narrator is the one who tells while the focalizer is the one who sees. Viewed from a conservative and traditional approach, Adair's *End* would snugly fit into the omniscient narrative mode, which is believed to be more objective because the narrator, through whose eyes the events of the narrative are presented, is not a character and therefore not involved in the story. *End* fits into this mode because the primary narration is done by a voice other than the characters in the story. S/he simply tells the story using *he, she, it*, and *they*as may be relevant. As usual of the mode, the narrator distances self from the story. Besides this unknown narrator, there is also a Freddie who interacts with the characters in the story, claims to be the author and writer of the story in which these other characters feature. By this last role, Freddie assumes the status of a focalizer in the novel. By virtue of her direct interactions with the characters in the story and the information she provides to the reader about these characters, she is actually an internal focalizer. The internal focalizer participates in the events in the story and also reports the feelings and thoughts of other characters (Bal, 1996; Prince, 1987). However, Freddie's claim to being the author and writer of a story in which he features more or less like a theatre director in a narrative being told by another voice introduces a new angle to the narrative style, thereby foregrounding the idea of indeterminacy or what Mikhail Bakhtin (1989) refers to as *dialogic* or plural text. Certainly, Freddie's role in the story, sometimes as chorus or authorial intrusive voice, complicates the narrative structure. Rather than enhance realization of meaning, the employment of a focalizing agent in the novel undermines it. Indeed, sources of perspective become more problematic and disorienting, signifying the contradictory and unstable nature of human experience.

Adair's story is suffused with meta-fictional elements and

unpretentious experimentations and borrowings. As early as the second page of the novel, Freddie, a character in the story, declares herself as 'the writer and the author' of the story. She explains the obvious implausibility away by noting that if another writer can do it, then she can too. In an address to a nameless character, she asserts:

> I'll have to deal with the clichés. After all, I am the writer, the author.
> I am writing this story. I'm the genuine creator. And if Martin Amis can
> do it in *London Fields*, well I can too. Wait for me. I'll walk down streets
> I've never been to. I'll meet characters I know I'll never know. I might
> even fly away… Do you think this is an unoriginal style?... Is there anything
> that is original? Some writers just do unoriginality better than others (2).

This is an open admission of stylistic borrowing from another novelist, as well as inscription of self-conscious experimentation. In numerous instances, the narrator mulls and comments on different elements of fiction writing. For instance, on a certain occasion, she ponders the theme of love and wonders 'if there is a novel in which this theme is not present?' (6). On another, she thinks about all novels having social element to them and decides to invest some internal drama in 'her' story and justifying it by telling the reader that she is doing 'something that makes readers think that they are not just indulging in an individual stage show' (8). Consequently, she decides to create contexts of genocide, racism and poverty for 'her' story.

The protagonist-narrator/'writer' also points out how she uses a story she had read elsewhere about an exhibition of body parts in one of the chapters in the unfolding narrative. She contemplates using a she, a he or a trans-gendered character as the protagonist in the novel.

Elsewhere, she reads over her narrative in order to decide what to retain or expunge from the story. She considers the appropriateness or otherwise of omniscient narrator and tries to capture images the readers would find attractive because, in her estimation, readers 'like a man with personal integrity, morality, intelligence' and because they 'want to be able to identify with the hero' (5). Similar comments and remarks abound in the novel, some of which are later explored to varying degrees of success. The result is that we are presented with a fiction about fiction, a fiction about principles and conventions of fiction writing. Certainly, these explorations of the processes of writing a novel is seriously distracting, impelling one to align with Peter Barry's (1995) view that postmodern writings tend to be narcissistic, while its style de-naturalises its content. Perhaps enthralled by this de-naturalisation, Fred de Vries (2009), in his review, describes *End* enthusiastically in the following words: 'Adair's work is experimental …does away with rules and expectations. It rips, plunders, and remoulds like the best of underground hiphop' (par. 2). These ripping, plundering and remoulding, no doubt, impact on the meaning(lessness) received.

As a self-conscious experimental novel, there is extensive use of intertextuality, which underscores the novelist's eclectic sources of inspiration and materials. The concept of intertextuality implies the 'interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it' (Cuddon, 1998:424). By this is meant the fact that literary works are not absolutely original creations of their authors. This aligns with Roland Barthes's (1988) view that the author is a mere synthesizer of the diverse ideas in a text, rather than the creator or originator of those ideas. Thus every text is a rehash of past works, parading signs, formulae and other aspects of social languages. In his popular essay, 'The Death of the Author', Barthes declares the author irrelevant, thereby undermining his place, as well as meaning traditionally ascribed to him in the interpretive process. This easily provides postmodern writers with the needed alibi to self-consciously appropriate aspects of form and content from a wide range of

discourse; from literary, historical, sociological, philosophical, and religious to other kinds of discourses. Sometimes, this comes in form of direct or indirect allusions, parody, pastiche or direct appropriation of other texts to corroborate an idea or display eclecticism. Given Freddie's comments quoted earlier, this is clearly the principle Adair appropriates in the novel. Most of the *intertexts* used either function purely as corroboration or mere exhibition of the novelist's eclecticism. Some of the examples include an excerpt from Coetzee's *Disgrace, which reads:*'The choice is between the operating table and the floor. He spreads out the blanket on the floor, the grey blanket underneath, the pink on top. He switches off the light, leaves the room, checks that the back door is locked, waits …' (144). In *Disgrace,* the text draws attention to what fifty-two years old David Lurie, a twice-divorced former Professor of Modern Languages at Cape Town Technical University and servant of eros, is reduced to. After years of sexual adventures with both the young and the old, prostitutes and students, he is reduced to caring for dogs and making do sexually with an unlovely and plain woman who is cheating on her husband. In the context of Adair's *End,* this can be seen as subtly drawing the reader's attention to the sex-starved plight of X, a major character in the story, following the re-appearance of his former extra-marital affair lover. The text is preceded by another from an Italian film based on the novel *Justine* and *Juliette* by Marguis de Sade. It presents a graphic detail of sex orgies, which makes Adair's other representations of sex in the novel less shocking. In fact, Adair seems to weave de Sade's textualisation of sex into her own narrative in order to demonstrate the view that she is doing nothing particularly new or out of the world. She has only engaged in 'discursive recycling" (Webster, 1996:101).

From Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hypereality,* Adair also imports this: 'Two clichés in a story can make you laugh, a hundred clichés, they will move you…extreme banality allows you to catch a glimpse of the sublime….' The same way she imports the question 'What is the point of war without love?' from Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie*

Marsh. In addition to the foregoing, the novelist formally acknowledges 'the direct and indirect use' of texts from Murray Burnett and Joan Alison's play, *Everybody Goes to Rick's,* as well as the mise-en-scene of a film entitled *Casablanca.* By this relation to other texts, both literary and non-literary, Adair further inscribes the allegiance of her novel to the postmodern episteme.

The self-conscious eclecticism and obsession with form by Adair can be further gleaned in several allusive narrations and poetic idiosyncrasies employed in the novel. There are literary allusions to Sophocle's play, *Oedipux Rex* and Virgil's *The Iliad;* historical allusion to the life of GustaveEiffer and his architectural works; as well as allusions to political figures like Patrice Lumumba, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and SamoraMachel. The novelist's use of texts from existing texts appears informed by the poetic diction and imagery with which they are enriched. Their occasional re-wordings by the novelist are no less poetic. Here are some examples:

> Tick, tock tick, tock… Time is fleeting, madness takes its toll. How does the rest of the song go? And soon this story will end… Tick, tock, tick, tock… Time goes by … After time comes time…' (6)

> Bright red, red, like the sky at night, red like the ruby the Indian nurse wore in her nose, red, red… Red for the unborn child, the child in utero, but had already been born (57)

> You must remember this, a kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh. It's still the same old story, the fight for love and glory… (33)

These texts are not just significant for the quality of their language; they assume a status of poetic refrain in the novel. They intersperse the narrative 'disorder' of the novel. In their slightly different

variations, the second and third examples occur in the narrative eight and six times respectively. The same thing applies to the *mise-en-scene* of the film Casablanca 'And so in Casablanca, we wait, and wait, and wait…'.

An interesting stylistic novelty, which sharply draws attention to itself in the novel, is what the focalizing agent flippantly refers to as 'a trans-gendered character' or 'changeable-at-a-whim character? In the first chapter of the novel and, as early as the second paragraph, the narration revolves around a certain *he* who, apparently, is a friend to the protagonist called X. The focalizer, Freddie, who also serves as a narratee of the omniscient narrator, joins this duo to make up the character list in this chapter. For this *he*, there is neither nominal antecedent nor cataphoric referent throughout the chapter. At the beginning of Chapter II, Freddie, for a moment, wonders whether she should change the nameless *he* to a *she* and, pronto, she does. The unnamed protagonist begins to be referred to with *She*. In the third chapter, we also have a *He* and a *She* for whom there are no nominal referents. This would be replicated for the better part of the rest of the story. Thus, attaining intelligibility becomes laboured as the narrative assumes steady and confounding complexity. With this disorderly syntactic and, by implication, semantic incoherence, the reader becomes trapped in what Jegede (2000:176) describes as 'a profound sense of ontological uncertainty', not just about the signifiers in the text but also about the realities of the contemporary world. In the novel, Adair seems to employ this technique to generate ambiguity and dismantle the idea of binary opposition with which we are familiar.

Close in relation to the above is the namelessness of most of the characters in the novel. Instead of giving these characters names, the novelist simply uses descriptive epithets to refer to them. Thus, we have characters like the photojournalist, a Khaki shirt, the piano player, a waiter, the barman, the door man, the receptionist with braided hair, a gilded whore, X's colleague, a white hand, a black hand,

the stereo voice, the golden hearing, the man with the money, a short black shirt and a white T-shirt and so on. While these characters are indeed minor characters in the story, the same cannot be said of X and Y. They are major as well as rounded characters. Letters X and Y are used in Mathematics to denote unknown values. Using such letters as personal names of people inexorably ascribes anonymity or insignificance to them. With this technique, the novelist consciously dissolves the identities of her two major characters, implying in the process that they could be any man and any woman. Similarly, the nameless characters that are essentially flat in their conception must be seen also as illustrative of the novelist's design to dissolve or deny such characters their individual identities. To borrow the words of Kehinde (2001:27), this is 'a reflection of the deep doubt that humanity has about itself'.

In terms of plot structure, Adair's novel is not totally atypical of white South African literary work. The narration in the novel does not follow the traditional or conventional logical presentation, as diverse and unrelated events are forced into contiguous trajectory. Different events are juxtaposed while the narratee – narrator weaves in her rather too frequent meta-fictional discourse. The result is a disjointed and fragmentary narration, which compels the reader to decode meaning through inductive and deductive contemplations of diverse ideas and events in the story. Perhaps, this is meant to objectify the fragmented nature of today's contemporary world. Indeed, Kehinde (2001), amplifying Edward Muir's view, has pointed out that a fragmented structure like this is not only typical of postmodernist fiction but also symbolic of a transitional era, which may well be suggestive of South Africans' on-going grapple with psychical transition from apartheid to multiracial democracy almost two decades after the political transition.

Conclusion

As a movement or theory that is extremely sceptical of tradition and all the truths it purports to uphold, postmodernism continues to attract the contemporary global-conscious and culturally hybridised generation of African writers, both in the Diaspora and the natal continent, and across racial and other boundaries. With its preference for blurring borders between the high and the low cultures, the attraction becomes even greater. As members of the emergent global, ICT-enabled community, African writers of different backgrounds are inscribing their link to this community where any rupture of extant tradition or value is celebrated and valorised. While some may have misgivings about espousing this trend, it appears irreversible for the moment. There can be no denying the fact that postmodernism has been beneficial in a number of ways. In literary scholarship, many assumptions have been challenged and new knowledge spawned. This essay has highlighted a number formal properties in Adair's *End* which are ingenuous and invite the reader as an active collaborator in the presumed journey to the destination of meaning. These features, suchas intertextuality, meta-fictionality, trnsgenderism, minimalism in character profile and authorial self-reference, clearly place the novel in the postmodernist tradition. Ironically, the same features also constitute obstacles in the journey of meaning apprehension, making. the author appears intent on confounding even the admirers of postmodernism by giving them 'words that mean nothing or everything' (1). This *writerly* frustration therefore raises the question of whether Adair's art is for art's sake or life's sake; or is about to provoke another heated debate in African literature.

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