...We have here...not a racial poet but some one whose human pity finds ample scope in the social and economic inferiority of his people. When he takes up residence in the United States amid the welter of human suffering, he will quite rightly be concerned first of all with the victims of it, the Negroes; but this will not prevent him from seeing other implications, terrible and far-reaching, for those who are guilty of the evil, for mankind as a whole, not least for himself as a poet and as a human being. That the poet coming to face with human suffering and injustice must work out the implications which the experience holds for him as poet and human being is too common place to require further comment. He is of course no real poet if this exercise degenerates into maudlin self-pity, and will have no claims on the interest of his fellow-men. ... 693

... now the tree becomes not only an image of unknown growth and secret origin; of life, death and regeneration; but of cultural purity and impurity.... 694

A good poem communicates before it is understood. And the poet likewise is a man endowed with a finer spirit. He is not like the ordinary man in that he looks at things


694 Gerald Moore, "Surrealism and Negritude in the Poetry of Tchikaya U Tam'si", p.115.
around him in an altogether different manner from that of the common man. He sees more as is explicit from Coleridge's words in Biographia Literaria. Coleridge observes that the poet with a purpose sense creates poetry with the intention:

...to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which,...we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand....

The poet observes and hears more keenly, feels more deeply, remembers more vividly and reacts more intensely. He forms his ideas and gets emotionally excited in rather an unusual way which is not possible for ordinary people.

It is of interest to record the observation of Terence Hawkes at this point for it throws light on the nature and reachability of the poetry of Claude McKay and Tchicaya:

The 'new' perception involved the realization that despite appearances to the contrary the world does not consist of independently existing objects, whose concrete features can

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695 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, in English Critical Texts, p.191.
be perceived clearly and individually, and whose nature can be classified accordingly. 696

In fine, the poet's poetic genius is the distinction that sets him apart from the common man. His poetic genius, which according to Coleridge "sustains and modifies the images thoughts and emotions of the poet's own mind", 697 gives him greater liberty to associate words and ideas in myriad ways. Equipped with poetic genius, the poet courses on the "viewless wings of poesy" 698 to create his own poetic world. It is in this sense that the Greeks called him a poet. It comes from the word "poiein" which is "to make". In this context, Philip Sidney's estimate of a poet makes a pertinent reading. He says that the poet:

...lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, ... Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers [sic] poets have done..., her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden... 699

697 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, in English Critical Texts, p.196
By the alchemy of the poet's poetic ingenuity the poet amalgamates and associates kaleidoscopic patterns out of the raw emotions and words. That he has been endowed with such genius is but a gift of God. It is a gift of God too that the poet is able to feel, think and express in a different way. This is what is called divine afflatus. Longinus says:

I would certainly affirm that nothing makes so much for grandeur as true emotion in the right place, for it inspires the words, as it were, with a wild gust of mad enthusiasm and fills them with divine frenzy....

It is just a tiny spark which enkindles the flame of his poetic genius. It supplies the vision words or fire words which gather the momentum of a deluge or river of words. And words and emotions are equally balanced and matched. The resultant word composition attains the perfection of a sculptured piece.

Though inspiration forms the germ of all true and great poetry, the poetic genius needs a good deal of polishing, chiselling and grooming to suit the occasion. Inspiration does not come to the aid of the poet without persistent effort. It is ninety nine percent perspiration and just

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700 Longinus, On The Sublime, Quoted in Birjadish Prasad's An Introduction to English Criticism (Delhi: Macmillan, 1965), p.56.
one percent inspiration. Thus it is seen among the modern poets too that their success depends on their talents, both acquired and gifted. The poet sweats and labours to present his feelings in an appealing and enlightening way. Even creative thoughts have to be properly attired to reach the reader. And the great poet believes in accuracy, perfection and precision. Cummings' observation is worth quoting here:

At least my theory of technique, if I have one, is very far from original; nor is it complicated. I can express it in fifteen words, by quoting The Eternal Question And Immortal Answer of burlesk, viz. "Would you hit a woman with a child? -- No, I'd hit her with a brick." Like the burlesk comedian, I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement. If a poet is anybody, he is somebody to whom things made matter very little -- somebody who is obsessed by Making....

The creative writer does not simply observe and ignore; nor does he hear and forget. He thinks repeatedly and tries to explore the essence of things. He tries to achieve the truth behind the event. That results in newer thoughts and ideas. Gradually, the poet fills his repository which is his mind with a combination of fresh ideas and thoughts. He mulls over them and chews the cud, as it were. All these ideas and thoughts lie dormant and

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allow for the germination time until some fresh experience triggers their associative presentment. At the creative moment they crystallize and take shape. A new entity, a composite whole or a piece of creative work comes into being.

T.S.Eliot points out that the creative process is a complex exercise of assimilation and that the poet's mind is a medium or a cauldron wherein the fusion of divergent elements takes place. He says that:

The poet's mind is, in fact, a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together....

During the creative process "impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways." Images blend, thoughts intertwine, feelings overlap, sentiments fuse and even positive and negative emotions coalesce to form a cohesive whole.

Thus the creative writer's mind is the vast hinterland which provides him with the raw materials. He relies heavily on the fund of his experiences and emotions. His...

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702 T.S.Eliot, Tradition and The Individual Talent, in English Critical Texts, p.298.
703 Ibid., p.299.
received sensibilities and the registered perceptions come to have a bearing on the creative work. Received ideas are those notions obtained from outward agencies like books and pictures. They form the bulk of the second hand information that keep pouring in through the mass media and by oral medium. Registered sensibilities are those events and occurrences witnessed. Childhood memories and cultural heritage are the fountain-heads of registered sensibilities. The creative writer's mind is filled with the ideas of these two categories. Poetry is born out of the association of these ideas.

The two creationists under discussion, Claude McKay and Tchicaya U Tam'si, reveal a great potential for these sensibilities and a greater capacity for combining them to form new art emotions.

A critical study of McKay's poetry lays bare the fact that synthesis of various experiences forms the basis of his creative art. He has a store of such experiences, mostly bitter, and a few simple joys. His racial memory of bondage and the attendant horror and humiliation, his ancestral pride of how they conducted a death-strike, his childhood memory of death and depravity and adulthood reality of crushed hopes are ever green in his mind. His travels from "one city to another in different states enabled McKay to sharpen his perceptions of the
experiences and living conditions of his people." The pathetic faces which McKay encountered as a railroad waiter got embedded in his mind and now clamour for expression. The lynchings, which McKay witnessed in America, the Harlem dancers who were pushed to poverty and prostitution and his own personal humiliations in public places have all been neatly stacked up in his mind. As Max Eastman points out:

The subject of all poetry is the experience of the poet, and no man of any other race in the world can touch or imagine the experience of the children of African slaves in America....

Both the registered perceptions and received notions thus get fused together. A classic illustration for how McKay marries ideas with experiences to form rich associations is found in the poem, "Flame-Heart". It is worth quoting the poem in full here:

So much I have forgotten in ten years,
So much in ten brief years! I have forgot
What time the purple apples come to juice,
And what month brings the shy forget-me-not.
I have forgot the special, startling season
Of the pimento's flowering and fruiting;
What time of year the ground doves brown the fields
And fill the noonday with their curious fluting;
I have forgotten much, but still remember
The poinsettias red, blood-red, in warm December.

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704 Addison Gayle, The Black Poet at War, p.17.
705 Max Eastman, "Introduction," in Harlem Shadows, p.x.
I still recall the honey-fever grass,
But cannot recollect the high days when
We rooted them out of the ping-wing path
To stop the mad bees in the rabbit pen.
I often try to think in what sweet month
The languid painted ladies used to dapple
The yellow by-road mazing from the main,
Sweet with the golden threads of the rose-apple.
I have forgotten--strange--but quite remember
The poinsettia's red, blood-red, in warm December

What weeks, what months, what time of the mild year
We cheated school to have our fling at tops?
What days our wine-thrilled bodies pulsed with joy
Feasting upon blackberries in the copse?
Oh some I know! I have embalmed the days,
Even the sacred moments when we played,
All innocent of passion, uncorrupt,
At noon and evening in the flame-heart's shade.
We were so happy, happy, I remember,
Beneath the poinsettia's red in warm December.

In this poem, as Addison Gayle points out,

"Innocent and uncorrupt" are the key words.
...True to his [McKay's] experience as a Black man in a Western-oriented world, he attributes innocence to Blacks and corruption to Whites.

When McKay calls the Whites corrupt, he brings to the fore the life-long experience of bitterness he has had in his contacts with the Whites. The above poem is also McKay's tribute to his ideals of negritude. Moreover, he blends both his classical as well as romantic ideas. Addison Gayle commends thus:

707 Addison Gayle, The Black Poet at War, p.21.
The fusion of ancient, classical material with that manufactured from his own experiences is the most appealing characteristic of his earlier poetry; and nowhere is this art—so necessary a part of the equipment of the truly gifted poet—displayed so well as in 'The Flame-Heart'...

Addison Gayle adds:

"The Flame-Heart" is one of the most beautiful poems in Black literature, is a conglomerate, a blend of the classical, the romantic and the Negroid—these three characteristics which are the distinguishing features of McKay's poetry...

McKay's poems also bear testimony to the formative influences of both his brother Uriah Theophilus and a folklorist Walter Jekyll* and the inspiration he drew from the literary models. Uriah Theophilus and Walter Jekyll opened his eyes to the world of letters and McKay read with avidity "poets like John Mitton, Alexander Pope, John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, all of whose influences can be seen in his poetry." McKay was thus filled with the literary fervour of both the Romanticists

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708 Addison Gayle, The Black Poet at War, p.21.
709 Idem.

* This bears repetition.
and the Classicists that his poems are an admixture of both their flavour. On this point Addison Gayle observes thus:

McKay devoured the words, forms and images and tones of these poets of other 'times and climes', filing them away in his poetic mind until such time as maturity and sophistication would allow him to blend these elements with his own. . . .

McKay's style in "Flame-Heart" evidences the influence of the Neo-classical writers. In line with those poets before him, McKay also employs the iambic pentametre. An iambic foot is a metrical unit of two syllables, of which the first syllable is unaccented and the second accented as the following lines from McKay illustrate:

\[
\text{What time the purple apples come to juice,} \\
\text{And what month brings the shy forget-me--not.} \\
\]

Clearly McKay here resembles the Neo-classical writers like Dryden and Pope.

On the other hand, the subject matter of the "Flame-Heart" which is McKay's recollection of those happy

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711 Addison Gayle, The Black Poet at War, p.21.
moments spent in Jamaica ten years ago echoes the longing of the romantic poets like Wordsworth. As Geta Leseur comments, "... the emotion of the poem "Flame-Heart" is rich in West Indian Images." McKay could relive the past with this Wordsworthian kind of recollections. He remembers, how as a boy, he used to enjoy playing such games as cricket, moonshine baby, ring plays, hide and seek, soft-ball, swimming and running. He recalls the festive nights enjoyed in Jamaica and writes in "Boyhood in Jamaica" thus:

One of the happiest periods of those times were moonlit nights on which we made what was called a moonshine baby....

McKay expresses his longing to recapture those moments in "Flame-Heart" where he says:

...I have embalmed the days
Even the sacred moments when we played....

Likewise the tea-meetings in Jamaica still hold their charm on McKay. He visualizes those meetings in "Boyhood in Jamaica," thus:

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The tea meetings were dandy affairs which were always in a yard....A large booth was built chiefly of plaited palm leaves and at night the merry-making would start. We got all the "wine" we needed to drink and the elder men got their rum. Our favourite wine was orange and cola and we had a lot of ginger beer. The tea meetings started with dancing....

In "Flame-Heart" too, McKay recollects those happy days thus:

What days our wine-thrilled bodies pulsed with joy
Feasting upon blackberries in the copse?...

In such moments of recapitulations, McKay comes closer to the romantic poets. Geta Leseur remarks:

It is obvious that McKay was completely immersed in a romantic style of life very similar to that of some of his British models and contemporaries. A vocabulary interspersed with words carrying the romantic notion means that he consciously draws attention to where his allegiances to nature, life and self lie. All of these coalesced to create poetry....

It is true that McKay draws his inspiration from the British models. Whether in echoing the mechanics of the Neo-classicists or whether in treating the reverberant

themes of the Romanticists, McKay might as well pass for a British writer. But the locale in his poems are purely native. Geta Leseur is emphatic on this point:

Regardless of his [McKay's] thoroughly British orientation, emotionally and literally he never forgot his blackness....

Thus the secret behind McKay's poetic exuberance lies in the freedom with which he associates the registered and received sensibilities and yokes together seemingly disparate experiences to form a unified whole.

In order to bring about this unification of sensibility and association of ideas McKay employs a number of artistic devices and poetic innovations. Thus McKay has imparted to his verse a certain dynamic force. With a single stroke of his pen he is capable of setting off a series of emotional responses in the reader. He has honed his art to such fine tuning that Robert A. Smith admires McKay as "a man of deepest emotions, as well as one who was a skilled craftsman." 720

On the basis of both form and content, McKay's poetry as a whole can be brought under two broad categories. They

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are The Dialect Poems and The Poems in Standard English.

McKay's dialect poems have been written in the Jamaican dialect which is a variant of the Queen's English spoken in Jamaica. The poems deal with the challenging lives of the peasants, their inescapable poverty and social oppression and their in-born naivety. What brings these poems closer to the peasant life is the language employed. It is the actual speech form and spoken language used by the Black peasants. Elimimian affirms:

Claude McKay's dialect poetry, as demonstrated in the volumes Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads is valuable because it is rendered specifically in the dialect of the common people of Jamaica which the negro [sic] has no difficulty whatever in pronouncing....

Besides lending verisimilitude, the dialect language also adds immediacy, authenticity and charm to his poetry. It won the admiration of McKay's mentor, Walter Jekyll. McKay relates it saying:

And when I sent them [Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads] on to Mr. Jekyll, he wrote back to say that each one was more beautiful than the last. Beauty! A short while before I never thought that any beauty could be found in the Jamaican dialect....


722 McKay, Quoted in The Harlem Renaissance Remembered, Ed. Arna Bontemps, p.128.
The language sounds so very natural and native that the Jamaican peasants who heard it being read out remarked "Why they're just like that, they're so natural." Elimimian confirms it saying "...McKay...uses as Wordsworth would say, the language really used by men." Thus the colloquial language of the peasants imparts realism to McKay's poetry. Thematically as well as stylistically these dialect poems reveal McKay's fascination for Jamaica and its folk culture.

They [Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads] capture the exotic and earthly qualities of the black peasantry with a lyrical sensitivity reminiscent of Robert Burns....

Max Eastman goes to the extent of striking a parallel with Robert Burns and observes:

Claude McKay was quite the literary prince of the island for a time—a kind of Robert Burns among his own people...with his physical beauty, his quick sympathy, and the magnetic wayward humor of his ways....

723 McKay, My Green Hills of Jamaica, p.62.
725 Michael B. Stoff, "Claude McKay and the Cult of Primitivism," in Harlem Renaissance Remembered, p.127.
726 Max Eastman, "Introduction" in Harlem Shadows, pp.XII-XIII.
In general, dialect poetry often creates problem of understanding to foreign readers. But this is not the case with McKay's dialect poetry. "Although dialect poetry often presents problems to its readers McKay achieves a high level of clarity in this volume."727

This unique aspect of clarity of thought and expression in McKay's dialect poetry wins the appreciation of the readers and critics alike. James Weldon Johnson remarks:

...these dialect poems of McKay are quite distinct in sentiment and treatment from the conventional Negro dialect poetry written by the poets in the United States, they are free from both the minstrel and plantation traditions, free from exaggerated sweetness and wholesomeness, they are veritable impressions of Negro life in Jamaica....728

The dialect poems bear witness to McKay's inheritance of the folk culture and his faithful adherence to the folklore tradition. He uses the speech rhythm, drawling sound patterns and the colloquial idioms to impart the typical Jamaican flavour of the peasantry to his poems. It is pertinent to quote Jean Wagner at this juncture:

Here everything is entirely and authentically Negro. It all comes directly from the people and is rooted in the soil, alike the phonology, often flavored with a delightful exoticism and the rather summary morphology; the typically fantastic placing of the tonic accent and the somewhat rudimentary syntax, seldom in accord with the Queen's English; and finally the often unexpectedly rough hewn words and images, which originate in the hard-working folk's immediate contact with a soil reluctant to part with its riches....

Having established himself as a great dialect poet, McKay switches over to writing poems in Standard English. This marks the second phase of his poetic career which coincides with his arrival in the United States in 1912. His poems in Standard English prove his loyalty in the literary sphere to his colonial legacy. England has wielded a great influence on young McKay. Even as a small boy while living in Jamaica, McKay had been inducted to English ways of living, customs and education. This fostered in him an unconscious attachment, or rather infatuation towards things that were English. This attachment was to remain in him and influence him throughout his life.

McKay has chosen the traditional sonnet form to clothe his militant anger, bitterness and protest. The sonnet

729 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.205.
being "the lightest form in European poetry" it may appear incongruous. The sonnet is too elegant and "classy" a vehicle to express so impetuous a sentiment like militancy or protest. But then McKay has deliberately picked on the sonnet form to repudiate the Western convention and to register his rebellion and protest. James Weldon Johnson underscores his achievement thus:

He [McKay] was pre-eminently the poet of rebellion. Most effectively than any other poet of that period, he voiced the feelings and reactions the Negro in America was then experiencing. Incongruous as it may seem, he chose as the form of these poems of protest, challenge and defiance the English sonnet, and no poetry in American Literature sounds a more portentous note than these sonnet-tragedies...

Though "the sonnet was his favourite mode of expression," as St. Clair Drake puts it, it was not a dogged reliance on the traditional format. He has used both the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnet forms after effecting suitable changes. He has twisted and pruned the sonnet to serve his purpose. McKay's originality and

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730 Thomas Sutton, Quoted in Bajaj's Search for Identity in Black Poetry, p.152.


ingenuity lie in flouting the "convention of the turn". John Hillyer Condit points out that "the turn traditionally occurs ... at the start of the closing sestet in a Petrarchan sonnet or at the beginning of the final couplet in a Shakespearean sonnet." McKay skilfully combines the Shakespearean rhyme scheme with the Petrarchan turn to create a novel sonnet form of his own.

McKay's sonnet "If We Must Die", for instance, employs the Shakespearean rhyme scheme, abab, cdcd, eefg, gg with a Petrarchan-influenced slight turn at the ninth line starting with "O kinsmen!" It is relevant to quote the poem "If We Must Die"* and indicate the rhyme scheme here:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honour us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!734

733 John Hillyer Condit, "Claude McKay and His Sonnets," p.360

734 McKay, "If We Must Die," in S P, p.36.

* This bears repetition.
Condit observes that within the sonnet's "inherent discipline and tradition, McKay's sonnets sometimes take even greater liberties to communicate his very personal and often revolutionary themes." It is interesting to note how McKay's sonnet "On the Road" employs a double turn as follows:

Roar of the rushing train fearfully rocking, a
Impatient people jammed in line for food, b
The rasping noise of cars together knocking, a
And worried waiters, some in ugly mood, b
Crowding into the choking pantry hole c
To call out dishes for each angry glutton d
Exasperated grown beyond control, c
From waiting for his soup or fish or mutton. d
At last the station's reached, the engine stops; e
For bags and wraps the red-caps circle round; f
From off the step the passenger lightly hops, e
And seeks his cab or tram-car homeward bound; f
The waiters pass out weary, listless, glum, g
To spend their tips on harlots, cards and  rum...  

The poem "On the Road" follows the Shakespearean rhyme scheme abab, ccdc, efef, gg. But the turn pattern strikes the discordant note. Explaining the novelty Condit comments:

Through the opening eight lines, the irritation and frustration felt by the waiters builds as the train trip lengthens. Then, at

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the beginning of line nine, with the phrase "At last," the sonnet turns as the train arrives in the station, bringing release. But only for the passengers! In the closing couplet, the sonnet unexpectedly turns again and sends the waiters to a leisure as depressing and deadening as their work. Long and heavy vowel and consonant sounds accent this second turn, the effect culminating in the "um" rhyme of the closing couplet....

Similarly McKay's sonnet "Outcast" introduces the turn as early as the sixth line beginning with "But the great Western world holds me in fee*." 738

Apart from the changes introduced in rhyming and turns, McKay has also modified the iambic foot to intensify the effect. For instance, in the sonnet "If We Must Die" the variation in the iambic pattern lies in the last line thus:

\[
\text{Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back...} \]

The two unaccented syllables preceding each of the words "wall" and "fighting" cause greater emphasis to fall on

739 McKay, "If We Must Die," in S P, p.36.
* This bears repetition.
them. The structural shift reflects the pressure building upon those who are fighting with their back pressed to the wall and also the gradual flexing of the muscle to fight back.

The dexterity and ease with which he handles the sonnet form shows "McKay's ability to bend traditional forms to his purpose." 740 Condit affirms it saying that McKay has "handled the traditional sonnet form in an innovative, effective manner." 741 McKay has thus stamped the indelible mark of his crafted art upon the sonnet form. Eugenia Collier is emphatic that "superimposed upon the Western forms is the unmistakable stamp of blackness." 742

McKay has also attempted some short lyrics and a few longer lyrics. But the bulk of his lyric verse is in the sonnet form. McKay reserves the sonnet form mostly for expressing his protest element. His love themes and other personal themes are often conveyed through non-sonnet lyrics. It is in place to quote "The Wild Goat" here:

O you would clothe me in silken frocks
And house me from the cold,


And bind with bright bands my glossy locks,
   And buy me chains of gold.

And give me, meekly to do my will,
   The hapless sons of men;
But the wild goat bounding on the barren hill
   Droops in the grassy pen....

The above poem is a simple, direct lyric in which McKay expresses his love for freedom. It is syllabic and exploits the iambic form with the alternate lines rhyming.

Thus the dialect form and the lyric verse in Standard English offer McKay a vast canvas to piece together his associations and to give expression to his accumulated wealth of experiences. In the process he employs a number of technical devices and artistic embellishments to colour his wordy pictures. Elimimian places McKay, at par with the major English poets in making use of the techniques. He comments:

...his [McKay's] techniques, although basically traditional, are as complex and varied as those of any major poet in English: the use of foreign languages, dialects, the sonnet sequence, the couplet measure, repetition, alliteration and mythology....


744 Elimimian, "Themes and Techniques in Claude McKay's Poetry," p.211.
Symbols play a major role in getting across McKay's intense passion and deep resentment. A closer study of his poems reveals a system of archetypal symbols which throws light on the working of his poetic genius and the concomittant associations drawn. Fire is one such symbol which lends different levels of meaning. The fire or the inner flame symbolizes the burning hatred in the poet's heart. It is the result of his disappointment, frustration and anger in the White world. He writes

... the years that burn,
White forge-like fires within my haunted brain...  

Thus McKay is forced to nurture this fire of hatred for his survival. McKay employs "this image of an inner flame to convey the ardor of the lyric inspiration that urges all his being onward to liberation." Hence in "Mulatto"* McKay says:

There is a searing hate within my soul,
A hate that only kin can feel for kin
A hate that makes me vigorous and whole,
And spurs me on increasingly to win....

745 McKay, Quoted in Jean Wagner's, Black Poets of the United States, p.227.
746 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.227.
* This bears repetition
Clearly McKay has in mind the purifying effect of the flame. The benevolent aspects of its being constructive and making things whole are used with surgical implication. The word "searing" is indicative associatively of its therapeutic use. The same fire is invigorating and capable of tempering him. Its potency is echoed in "My house":

The blended fires that heat his veins within
Shaping his metals into finest steel.  

In "Polarity"* McKay invokes the malevolent aspect of the flame to warn off his detractors thus:

And I am fire, swift to flame and burn
Melting with elements high overhead ....

"The transforming power" of this fire is emphasized in his poem "Baptism".** The poet, on entering the furnace alone, is sure to become a finer and stronger soul thus:

I will come out, back to your world of tears,
A stronger soul within a fine frame....

* and ** These bear repetition.
Similarly poison is also symbolic of hatred. He warns himself against the poison of hatred of the Whites in the poem "The White House":

Oh, I must keep my heart inviolate
Against the potent poison of your hate...

Hatred being a poison needs an antidote as Jean Wagner points out:

His [McKay's] own hatred is thus an antidote that enables him to fight, on an equal footing, against the hatred that burns in the oppressor...

Likewise, the "City" has also gained symbolic importance in McKay's poetry. As Jean Wagner remarks that to McKay "the city symbolizes an evil that is multiple." McKay's experience as a constable in Kingston has produced this feeling of antipathy towards city life. The city is a place only for the crafty and corrupted people and not for the innocent and oppressed. McKay is keenly aware of the corrupting influence of the city. He cites examples in Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads about girls enticed and spoilt by the city life. In "A Country Girl,"

752 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.227.
753 Ibid., p.217.
McKay narrates the pathetic tale of a girl called Lelia ending up her life as a city prostitute. In another poem "Disillusioned" he brings in the picture of a young girl led to the city and seduced by the policeman.

The corrupting nature of the city has corrupted the police too. The police who are expected to maintain law and order, turn out to be drunkards and debtors. In the poem "A Recruit to the Corpy," the corporal drinks a lot at the expense of the other young recruits.

Moreover, the racial hatred also breeds only in the city. Hatred is seen everywhere in the city. McKay writes:

'Tis hatred without an' 'tis hatred within....

Hence McKay longs to leave the city. His yearning to go back to the country to escape from evil is expressed in the following lines:

Te-day I am back in me lan',
Forgotten by all de gay throng,
A poorer but far wiser man,
An' knowin' de right from de wrong....

As Jean Wagner observes:

Racial discord turns the city into an inferno, and McKay's only wish is to flee to the peace of the mountains, where blacks are sheltered from evil.... 756

McKay offers the same advice to the Blacks to flee the city in his poem "To W.G.G."

Do you not hear de battle's roar,  
De tumult ragin' on de shore?  
Do you not see de poisonous bait  
Man sets for man t'rough deadly hate?  

Come, flee de envy an' de strife,  
Before dey ruin our life:  
Come to de hills; dey may be drear,  
But we can shun de evil here. . . . 757

Jean Wagner affirms this saying: "To flee the city is, assuredly, to flee from evil." 758

On the other hand, the country and the things related to it, symbolize everything that is good. McKay gets his sustenance from the natural scenery of Jamaica. Jean Wagner points out thus:

His [McKay's] roots in the soil of his native island are amazingly deep and lasting. These

756 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.219.
758 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.219.
roots make him one with the soil. Through them he draws in his nourishment...\textsuperscript{759}

And the flowers mentioned in McKay's poems "Flame-Heart," "The Easter Flower," "The Tropics in New York" and "To one coming to North" act as a symbol of wholeness. Condit observes:

\textbf{...McKay was to use flowers, sunlight, moonlight, and streams as poetic symbols of that natural wholeness he had once known in the Jamaican hills and struggled to recapture through his adult peregrinations...}\textsuperscript{760}

In his "Flame-Heart," McKay enriches his mind with the recollection of the red flower poinsettia. Easter breaks the fetters of earthly confinement just as the flower breaks the tomb to gain wholeness. It is worth quoting the poem "The Easter Flower" in full here:

\begin{quote}
Far from this foreign Easter damp and chilly
My soul steals to a pear-shaped plot of ground
Where gleamed the lilac-tinted Easter Lily
Soft-scented in the air for yards around.

Alone, without a hint of guardian leaf!
Just like a fragile bell of silver rime,
It burst the tomb for freedom sweet and brief
In the young pregnant year at Easter time.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{759} Jean Wagner, \textit{Black Poets of the United States}, p.211.

\textsuperscript{760} John Hillyer Condit, "Claude McKay and His Sonnets", p.353.
And many thought it was a sacred sign,
And some called it a resurrection flower;
And I, in wonder, worshiped[ sic] at its shrine,
Yielding my heart unto its perfumed
power.... 761

Captivated by the wonders of Nature, McKay surrenders himself to nature and thus preserves his wholeness. This brings him closer to the English Romantic poets. Jean Wagner affirms this saying:

Like them [English Romantic Poets] McKay felt constantly drawn to nature and sensed the need to become totally merged in it.... For nature is an ever renewed source of strength, and instinctively he returned to commune with it.... 762

McKay uses the medium of images in his verse to give expression to his feelings and thoughts. He declares thus:

In putting ideas and feelings into poetry, I have tried in each case to use the medium most adaptable to the specific purpose. I own allegiance to no master.... 763

He also adds:

762 Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.213.
763 McKay, "Author's Word," in Harlem Shadows, p.XIX.
I have not used patterns, images and words that would stamp me a classicist nor a modernist....

True to his claim McKay strives at originality in using his images and metaphors. Even universal images like the Sun, the tree and flowers are set out in newer lights. Beasts of prey, for example, which usually stand for brutality and mercilessness are represented in McKay's poetry with a greater degree of gruesomeness as sucking the life-blood and equated with White America. In "America"* he wails that America

...sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life....

The same metaphor of a blood-thirsty tiger is repeated more effectively in his poem "Tiger"** thus:

The White man is a tiger at my throat,
Drinking my blood as my life ebbs away,
And muttering that his terrible striped coat
Is Freedom's and portends the Light of Day....

Commenting on this poem Elimimian says thus:

...the significance of this poem [Tiger] rests in the poet's constant reference to the white

764 McKay, "Author's Word," in Harlem Shadows, p.XX.

* and ** These bear repetition.
man through the use of bestiary imagery [tiger] and the manner in which he and by implication his race are exploited.\textsuperscript{767}

McKay visualizes the White man sucking up all the blood and throwing the lifeless body in the field. It is relevant to quote Jean Wagner here:

\begin{quote}
The metaphors often depict America as a kind of Vampire seeking to deprive the victim of his substance and to leave him a mere shell or skeleton.\textsuperscript{768}
\end{quote}

Moreover, the stripes on the tiger render the metaphor more effective since the American flag too has stripes.

Birds of prey remind McKay of the Whites ill-treating the Blacks. The vivid, clear image of the birds encircling the sky in search of their prey and then all on a sudden swooping down and snatching away the prey is portrayed realistically in the poem "Birds of Prey". It is worth quoting the poem here:

\begin{quote}
Their shadows dim the sunshine of our day,  
As they go lumbering across the sky,  
Squawking in joy of feeling safe on high,  
Beating their heavy wings of owlish gray.  
They scare the singing birds of earth away  
As, greed-impelled, they circle threateningly,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{767} Elimimian, "Themes and Techniques in Claude McKay's Poetry," pp.205-206.

\textsuperscript{768} Jean Wagner, Black Poets of the United States, p.231.
Watching the toilers with malignant eye
From their exclusive haven...
They swoop down for the spoil in certain might,

They beat us to surrender weak with fright,
And tugging and tearing without let or pause,
They flap their hideous wings in grim delight,
And stuff our gory hearts into their maws

[My Emphasis]....

These birds pierce the flesh of the prey with their claws. Similarly the Blacks bleed being held under the fierce clutches of the oppressors. Commenting on these two poems "Tiger" and "Birds of Prey" Jean Wagner writes;

Blood and heart quite assuredly have a symbolic value in these poems, which denounce the depersonalization of the black man and his exploitation by society's rulers....

Irony comes as a handy tool in the hands of McKay to convey his ideas. The ironic presentation of the situation of the Harlem dancers shows McKay's technical craftsmanship. He explains the critical situation of these young girls who are forced to the degenerated state of prostitution. Their mental detachment to this degrading job is that which appeals to McKay who justifies them

saying "I knew her self was not in that strange place."  

A further explanation to the poem "Harlem Dancer" is given by Schavi Mali Ali thus:

The poem [Harlem Dancer] has been read as an allegory of the prostitution of black art that was common in the 1920's. Blacks were paid exotic, to provide the temporary relief that Whites came looking for, and many were unscrupulous enough to be accommodating or they believed that white patronage was essential to their existence....

Again, irony is the tone when the poet sarcastically speaks through the mouth of a peasant in "King Banana" saying:

Wha' lef' fe bucca teach again
Dis time about plantation?
Dere's not'in' dat can beat de plain
Good ole-time cultibation?....

The simile is also an effective artistic device which McKay employs with great success. In "King Banana," the

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* This bears repetition.
beauty of the smoke rising up to heaven is compared to the crickets going up the sky with a noise thus:

Out yonder see smoke a rise,  
     An' see de fire wicket;  
Deh go'p to heaben wid de nize  
     Of hundred t'ousan' cricket.... 774

In "Me BannaBees", the bees drawn towards the flowers are compared to a man attracted by the soup.

De blossom draw de bees  
     Same how de soup draw man.... 775

In "Mother Dear", the withered leaves are compared to the fallen state of the maidens. It is said:

Akee trees are laden,  
But de yellow leaves are fadin'  
Like a young an' bloomin' maiden  
Fallen low.... 776

To enhance the rhythmic beauty of the poems, McKay takes recourse to alliteration. These alliterative phrases "Sweet-voiced stream," "black-faced boy," "swift swallows

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775 McKay, "Me BannaBees" in Ibid., p.15.  
776 McKay, "Mother Dear, in Ibid., p.77.
sailing," "rain-birds racing," "shining stair," "tender
toughts" and "silver stream" not only add to the music
of his verse but also make it picturesque.

The device of repetition also provides the musical
quality to his verse as is seen from the lines from "To
Clarendon Hills"*

LOVED Clarendon hills,
Dear Clarendon hills,
Oh! I feel de chills,
Yes, I feel de chills
Cousin' t'rough me frame
When I call your name,
Dear Clarendon hills,
Loved Clarendon hills... 777

McKay is a conscientious craftsman who pays great
attention to diction. He cannot tolerate his own words
being substituted. He reacted sharply when the title of
the poem "The White House" was changed. His response runs
thus:

If you understand how an artist feels about
the word that he chooses above other words to
use--if you know that artistic creation is the
most delicate of all creative things--if you
want to pit against how a craftsman, a
goldsmith, an engraver, might feel about
some one changing his design--then you'll

777 McKay, "To Clarendon Hills," in D P., vol.I,
p.106.

* This bears repetition.
McKay takes great pains to choose his words. He reveals the fact:

I have not hesitated to use words which are old, and in some circles considered poetically overworked and dead, when I thought I could make them glow alive by new manipulation.

In this connection McKay favours comparison with Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Edward Estlin Cummings, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath, to quote a few, who believed in employing apt words in the apt context and to them writing is an art and is never accidental.

McKay has in fact used such archaic words like "Thou", "Thee," "Thy," "Thine," "hapless," "Olden" and "reckling." These old English words gain life and importance through his poetic genius. Thus Claude McKay employs the charms of poetry, his poetic ingenuity and acquired art to produce excellent crafted art.

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778 McKay, Quoted in John Hillyer Condits' "Claude McKay and His Sonnets," p.363.
779 McKay, "Author's Word," in Harlem Shadows, p.XXI
Similarly, the African artist Tchicaya U Tam'si also creates his poetry out of the fund of his rich and varied sensibilities. He has spent, as a boy, the best part of his impressionable adolescent period in Congo. The rich tapestry of the African landscape with its savannahs, hills, herds and the river has filled his mind. Looking back from afar in France, the happenings in Congo begin to unfurl against this familiar back-drop and stain his imagination. Insurgency and blood-shed there fill him with dismal forebodings. Aghast over the magnitude of violence and anxious about the outcome of events, the poet is caught in a whirlpool of tormenting emotions. And Tchicaya attempts to externalize his turbulent mind and to give expression to his tormented soul in the form of his verse. In doing so, he makes use of unfamiliar and unusual associations of things and ideas, objects and their objectives and words and their referents.

Tchicaya's poems are full of images and symbols. As Gerald Moore points out, Tchicaya uses fundamental symbols around which human imagination has perpetually revolved: the tree, the bird, the river, stars, sun and moon, the sea, the breaking of bread; and a vocabulary often recalling insignia of Passion, Death and Resurrection....

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But the way in which Tchicaya associates one with the other is strikingly unconventional. Clive Wake affirms that Tchicaya's

...poetry is constructed around a vivid, startling use of imagery and symbolism of a chiefly visual kind....

And every word or epithet that Tchicaya makes use of in his poems brings in a great deal of meaning by its association and cross references. Thus his poem explodes into rich meaning and, as Betty O'Grady puts it, "a chain of ever widening reference is created."

A look at the following poem "Presence" from his collection called Brush Fire is suffice to understand the freedom with which he associates ideas and objects. He is eclectic in bringing together seemingly dissimilar and unrelated ideas.

Having found no men on my horizon I played with my body the ardent poems of death I followed my river to the cold and surging billows I opened myself to the world of sea-weeds Where solitudes crawl

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782 Betty O'Grady, "Tchicaya U Tam'si: Some Thoughts on the Poet's Symbolic Mode of Expression," p.32.
open the thickets to solitudes
to the sun
open my flesh
to the ripe blood of riots
the breath of sperm mingles me
with the yeast of leaves and storms

and my hair roughened by all the winds
stands on edge
my hands moist to all seeds
carry my feet deep into space
and I resemble slow death with its rich suns

faked presence I shall be unfaithful
for christ the god of armies
has betrayed me
when he allowed his skin to be pierced
offering us the mere proof of his death

here is my flesh of bronze
and my blood closed
by the numberless--I copper and zinc

by the two stones of my brain
eternal by my slow death
coelocanth of the deep....

Different themes unfold in this poem. Apart from the themes, one appreciates the wide range of associations made by the poet to heighten the different emotional responses experienced during a variety of contexts. Thus while attempting to establish his identification with the Congo, he makes a sweeping reference to the landscape and the horizon. His physical existence corresponds to and intermingles with the the elements of the world. Commenting on this poem Gerald Moore says:

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In the opening lines we find one of the most striking of all his expressions of physical identification with the river, forest and ocean of his native Congo. The very strength of this impulse towards physical unity may be seen as a product of his exiled situation....

Though Tchicaya is physically absent he retains his contact through these physical marks. His feeling of loneliness in an alien culture is also a part of the general surging emotion of bitterness among the masses back home. Thus Tchicaya paints a wordy picture of manifold physical as well as mental existence through association.

Tchicaya brings about the irony of his own situation in relation to that of the Congolese. He raves and pines for a truly liberated and united Congo while the people are indifferent to the fate of their country. He finds none who could share his feelings or ideas. With no other choice, he inflicts pain on himself and indulges in self-mortification. Obviously the poet has in mind the tribal custom of inflicting injury on one-self to appease the gods. The individual works himself into a hysterical dance accompanied by a crescendo of drum-beating. In a frenzied state he cuts open his flesh, lets it bleed and

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784 Gerald Moore, "The Uprooted Tree," p.152.
offers his blood offering to the deity. The poet would, by extension, give himself up to be self-tortured if only the riots would stop.

Keeping in line with the image of the ritual one finds the poet slowly lapsing into an ecstatic mood. His hair stands on end. He slips into a trance, as in the case of the "vats" or the "poet-seer". He transcends time and space and experiences a spiritual existence with his "slow death." This death-in-life [Nirvakaalpasamadhi] enables the poet to come clear of all the physical restrictions imposed upon him by the West and enjoy spiritual oneness with his people. Gerald Moore explains that these

...lines give us already a powerful impression of the poet's inner exploration of a body, a physical 'presence', which is his only link with the landscape and people of his own country. And since death is above all the process by which we mingle our elements with those from which we came, it is this process which dominates the opening stanza of the poem...⁷⁸⁵

To Tchicaya death is not an end in itself but the beginning of a new life of assimilation and regeneration. Gerald Moore points out that

the impression is far from deathly, for the imagery of 'breadth of sperm,' of 'yeast' and of 'rich suns' stresses that the path is more one of renewal than of disappearance....

Tchicaya claims that his flesh is made of bronze. Thus it is fortified to endure the rebuffs and scorns of a hostile world. The reference to coelocanth reinforces the idea that the poet, endowed with the regenerative power of cultural and social assimilation with the West, will bear it out with a new lease on life. Coelocanth is a prehistoric fish which was once thought to be long extinct. But recently it has been discovered to be living in the deep trenches around Africa.

Similarly, as the yeast leavens unnoticed, or the sperm inspires new life, the poet undergoes his seed time. The moist seed lies in a subsumed state till it emerges into a new being.

Christ suffered and died only to rise up into glory. The poet is Christ-like.* He parodies Christ's life-in-death with his death-in-life. He does not get transformed into spirit. Unlike the eucharist in which Christ's flesh gets transubstantiated into bread, the poet's gets transmuted into a burnished alloy. Thus he seeks permanence through his verse born out of the burnished alloy.

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* This bears repetition.
Thus it is seen that this poem of Tchicaya is a condensed expression of his vast experience in a variety of fields ranging from simple domestic life to esoteric learning. With great liberty he freely associates his ideas from different walks of life. He has culled his ideas from physiology, physiognomy, philosophy, necrology, marine biology, fisheries, anthropology, urology, cooking, horticulture, theology, metallurgy and so on. He fuses them together to explain his point. Entirely unrelated as the fields are, the ideas fit in their place and form a homogenic and unified whole. They serve to illustrate with greater fidelity the multi-dimensional picture that the poet wants to evoke. With their connotative and denotative meanings, these inter-disciplinary associations effectively reveal the complexity of the poet's thinking process with its attendant emotions. They lend strength of purpose, validity and viability to his arguments apart from rendering variety to the images. Every poem in its finished stage is an association of ideas. This association in a modern poem is brought about by the use of a variety of modern techniques like repetition, parallelism, juxtaposition, contrast, fragmentation and other metrical and rhetorical devices.

Tchicaya has employed a number of such devices and techniques to express his ideas strikingly. He is better known for the unconventional use of his images or rather
chain of images. As Gerald Moore points out:

...this young poet is distinguished not only by elan and energy and the startling power of his invention, but above all by the intensity with which he explores, eviscerates, rearranges his vocabulary of images...\textsuperscript{787}

Tchicaya's images follow each other in quick succession that the poems appear as a wilderness of images. Thus he speaks through the medium of images. They lend suggestiveness and multiplicity of interpretation. Senghor describes his poems as a "'Kaleidoscope' of images, which erupt with a force of 'geyser'."\textsuperscript{788} That images form the central axis of Tchicaya's poems is borne out by Gerald Moore's remark that:

...his [Tchicaya's] poems exhibit a complex system of interdependent imagery, so that the particular images of each poem often feed the significance of those in surrounding poems. This characteristic makes each of his books very much a whole to be read and evaluated as such...\textsuperscript{789}

Thus Tchicaya's images cut across poem limits, reappear and get embellished and become more distinct in the

\textsuperscript{787} Gerald Moore, "Surrealism and Negritude in the Poetry of Tchikaya U Tam'si," p.105.

\textsuperscript{788} Senghor, Quoted in Betty O'Grady's "Some Thoughts on the Poet's Symbolic Mode of Expression," p.33.

\textsuperscript{789} Gerald Moore, "Surrealism and Negritude in the Poetry of TchiKaya U Tam'si," p.100.
successive poems. For instance, the image of the tree acquires greater significance and offers a clarified picture as the reader moves from one poem to the other. In 'Low Watermark' the poet is referred to as a dead tree spilling all its sap. In the following poem "A Game of Cheat-Heart" he is the "sterile tree" and then the reader is given to know that his 'death' is the result of his sterility. Yet his sterility is unqualified. Only in the next poem "Strange Agony" does the reader come to know that it is the family tree or the tree of his origin of which he is a leaf. As the poet does not know about his origin, he considers himself sterile and dead. Tchicaya's images span over many poems and incrementally reveal their thematic concerns.

Betty O'Grady dubs Tchicaya's imagery as "dense and at times esoteric." Some of the images are really odd. A dish stands for matrix and eye. The rainbow is an image for the ideal. Africa is portrayed as a mother who has lost her child and during her centuries of mourning ploughs and sows her body in readiness for the birth of a new child.* Tchicaya is fond of making use of his own body as an image. In "Low Watermark" he says:

790 Betty O'Grady, "Some Thoughts on the Poet's Symbolic Mode of Expression," p.29.

* This bears repetition.
Make at my brows
    ramparts of dark stone
    carry to the line of my mouth
    my hand of dark joy* . . . 791

In "Madness," Tchicaya equates his grief to the Christian Passion thus:

    I alone hold the secret of my blood
    and my eyes are wombs
    let the virgins come
    among the thorns of our blood
    we will dance
    erect in the summer solstice
    our hands opened to the fissures of the earth... 792

The same idea is again recapitulated in one of his later poems "Rapt" as follows:

    One flesh made my flesh sorrow
    One fire made my soul liquid
    One wind wished my hands porous.... 793

It is thus in line with Senghor's estimate of Tchicaya when Senghor compares him to Cesaire and says that his

    ...images explode from the heart, whose passion is a lava that flows straight upon its

* This bears repetition.
way, carrying all burning all with its fervour and transforming it into pure ore...

Images abound. There is a unity of imagery and theme. To vindicate his themes of desolation, isolation, loss and frustration Tchicaya uses such images as absence, death, decay, the body, solitude, blood, salt and space.

Tchicaya's Christian imagery also plays a vital role in shaping his poetry and bringing about thematic synthesis. He says in "The Scorner":

For the Eucharist I begged wine leaven and salt
I was the wandering jew to betray you who have betrayed me...

The imagery in the above lines is characteristic of Tchicaya's love-hate attitude towards Christ. Clive Wake points out that Tchicaya attempts to

...deliberately parallel 'the analysis of his suffering' with Christ's using the imagery and terminology of Christology...He plays on the ambiguities of Christ's betrayal of Africa and his own...

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794 Senghor, Quoted in Gerald Moore's "Surrealism and Negritude in the Poetry of Tchikaya U Tam'si," p.100.


796 Clive Wake, "Tchicaya U Tam'si," p.133.
Thus a good deal of Tchicaya's imagery has a sound anchorage in Christian referents.

Certain images are repeated with different attributes that they become key symbols. An understanding of their symbolic significance is essential for the realization of the full meaning of the poems. The tree is at once the poet's genealogical tree, the tree of crucifixion, suffering and regeneration. And the belly is symbolic of death, martyrdom, warmth and life, greed, voracious appetites of the exploiters, fertility and regeneration. Betty O'Grady terms his symbolism as "dialectical." 797 According to Dathorne:

797 Betty O'Grady, "Some Thoughts on the Poet's Symbolic Mode of Expression," p.31.

Tchicaya's symbols are so complex that different aspects of the symbol, as in the case of a puzzle, have to be pieced together to form a complete picture. Gerald Moore makes a pertinent observation thus:

Every important symbol evokes a polarity of moods, and to measure the pulse of this polarity it is necessary to read Tchicaya in long stretches at a time...

Tchicaya's symbols and images are never static but dynamic. They keep on changing and developing with ever expanding patterns of references and cross references. There is, as Gerald Moore puts it, "rich interactions of imagery from one point of the poem to another." It is interesting to note how a symbol and an image in one of his poems get enriched and elaborated upon in the following poem. In the poem "The Dead" Tchicaya speaks of his tree of life and that his "disgrace had three colours." Seventeen pages later in the original text, in another poem "Viaticum", he again refers to the "colour of three histories". Obviously, Tchicaya refers to the disgrace brought about during the three periods of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of Congo. Again the genealogy tree of the former poem turns out to be the tree of laughter that has sprung upon the two hills of his "cheeks".

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800 Idem.
Thus it draws on the symbolic significance of the tree of Calvary. Hence K.E. Senanu and T. Vincent suggest that Tchicaya can only be truly appreciated when read in long stretches. For his images surge, recede, reappear and gather cumulative meaning...

The complexity of the images is also due to the fact that Tchicaya employs a number of personal images. Betty O'Grady illustrates this point saying that:

...images follow each other in quick succession, often specifically Congolese or regional in origin. Even universal images such as the sun or rain or trees must be read in the context of the Congolese heat and tropical rain....For the non-Congolese or even non-Vili reader, the meaning of some of the aphorisms and esoteric utterances will remain hidden. For example, only some one familiar with African and more particularly Congolese or Vili custom would realize the full dialectical force of the phrase "They have spat on me".* since spitting orunction by saliva is a form of benediction....

Besides these complex imagery, Tchicaya also makes use of surrealistic elements to bring home his associations effectively. Surrealism is defined as:

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* The original French version runs as follows: "Ils ont craché sur moi...."
Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral control....

The inspiration of Aime Cesaire and the technique and example of the surrealists have made him set words free to dance at the will of the reader. He has done so partly by the

...choice and arrangement of words, and partly by the apparently superficial device of avoiding all punctuation and capital letters, so that the reader has to find his own way round the poem without the signposts on which he has come to rely....

The following lines from Tchicaya's "Across Time and River" is worth quoting:

but a river remains
with the key to all dreams in its thighs
but as for knowing why the leaves sing
  oh grief grief
  hurrah for thunder

to march with clenched fists
to march first
and count the stars
to jump over virgin forests
without having to be hyena or phyton

then applaud a river
and hinds and zebras and gazelles
then leap over the waves with it
the ant says
I will carve up the buffalo
hey leave the river
and come frog woman
the dragon flies danced
veiled in azure and pollen
but the river remains
and the rainbow
an old man on the bank
old man wash your sore
but tell my mother tell my father
I am here alligator woman
I am here crocodile lover
o mother crocodile lover
o father alligator woman
old man wash your wound...

The above passage reveals how the words without any punctuation enjoy complete freedom of association. One associates ideas in a circular fashion also. Gerald Moore comments that

The mind in reading moves them (words) to and fro upon the page, so that in effect they do more work than they could do in a more rigid context...

As a result, Tchicaya's language is elliptical. A cursory reading does not yield the rich meaning that is hidden behind the lines. Lewis Nkoshi is of the view that

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U'Tamsi's surrealist technique, the mutilated imagery, the extreme condensation and displacement, contribute to our lack of secure anchorage in much that he writes....

But Tchicaya's defence is that

It is quite easy to read my poetry if one takes time; if one is careful to pause in the right places; there is no trick about it....

Clive Wake admits that Tchicaya's "poetry is complex, highly charged but very immediate poetry." Indeed the opening lines declare what the poem is about. Tchicaya has also indicated that the key to his poems can be found in the titles. Betty O'Grady affirms that

Many of U Tam'si's poems open with a gnomic utterance....it plays an important semiological role, just as the titles of the poems or the lines set in proem serve as an epitome for the poem....

Again as Gerald Moore points out, "Each of Tchicaya's volumes of poetry seems to grow outwards from a single...

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809 Lewis Nkoshi, Tasks and Masks, p.147.
810 Tchicaya, Quoted in Clive Wake's "Tchicaya U Tam'si," p.125.
idea." A Triche-Coeur (A game of Cheat-heart) deals with the search for the key. Epitome analyses his position as a Black man amidst the happenings in Congo. La Ventre (The Belly) grows outward from the imagery of belly as a point joining life and death. Arc Musical speaks about his art which is externalised as the bow harp.

In order to secure and weave together the ideas associated with his themes and to achieve a synthesis of the same, Tchicaya employs a number of minor artistic and poetic devices as well. Tchicaya affects an ironic poise which Gerald Moore terms as a "kind of protective detachment" while discussing serious matters. In "The Hearse," he says:

I know nothing of what the storm tells of the history of the congo does it begin when it thunders or does it finish when geography and geo-history mingle or join themselves face to face sex and source face to face river and earth I know nothing of it nothing and I have used the excuse of my rotten teeth to keep my mouth shut decently....

813 Gerald Moore, "Introduction" to S P, p.XI.
814 Gerald Moore, "The Uprooted Tree," p.163.
With humour Tchicaya feigns ignorance and thus throws into relief the seriousness of the crime committed by the colonists. Lewis Nkoshi asserts that "The frequent slyness and archness of manner is a kind of armour against which our fiercest accusations bounce off without inflicting too much injury." 816

Through a play of contrast between "cold belly" and "warm air" in "Low Watermark," Tchicaya brings into sharp focus the underlying pathos. The poet is spiritually dead yearning for the warmth of peace in the land. Betty O'Grady observes that "contradictions and contrasts form a harmonious whole" 817 in Tchicaya's poetry.

Counterpoint and contrapuntal effects create tension in "The Dead." Tchicaya writes:

Amid this pus of things well-made
They are smothering the fire whose mystery scarcely revealed
...two souls have never made a couple... 818

This tension heightens the poignancy and sharpens the anguish in Tchicaya over the incident at Leopoldville. He juxtaposes dead forms with his gutted being, in "Still

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816 Lewis Nkoshi, "Tasks and Masks," p.146.
818 Tchicaya, "The Dead", in S P, pp.40-42.
life" and identifies his suffering with the land's. Reiteration of the images of rot and decay creates a sense of death and destruction in "Long Live the Bride". By distorting the natural and by using dislocated and grotesque images Tchicaya paints a landscape of desolation. In "Flight of Vampires" he writes:

and here a mother is delivered of a child with two heads
...another mother to put into the world a child with three heads and perhaps no legs... 819

Further, in his "Long Live the Bride," Tchicaya says:

...I am dead murdered in the altar of Christ. 820

Tchicaya is thus able to recapitulate the entire history of Congolese betrayal, ruination and Christian connivance. He does so with the help of just a few words used rather unconventionally.

Naturally Tchicaya's style is terse, his diction unusual and his syntax displaced. As Clive Wake points out, "Tchicaya's sense of frustration, anger and loss produce

820 Tchicaya, Quoted in Ibid., p.265.
a more aggressive diction...."\(^{821}\) Tchicaya achieves rich associations of his ideas through uncommon blending of words and images. He establishes harsh and startling realities using, as Wilfred Cartey puts it, "unnatural disfiguration and deformities drawn through dissecting surrealistic images.\(^{822}\)

Apart from these artistic devices of versification Tchicaya also makes use of a number of embellishments like rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and music.

Music becomes an integral part of Tchicaya's poetry. This musical quality links his poetry to the traditional African poetry. While words are used as repetitive devices in the traditional poetry, symbols in Tchicaya's poetry play a similar role.

Tchicaya has dispensed with the conventional metric form and as Betty O'Grady affirms, "it is rhythm that determines the shape and progression of the poem."\(^{823}\) "Brush Fire" exhibits a syncopated rhythm of the drum. Words and phrases mark time and advance the poem. At

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\(^{822}\) Wilfred Cartey, Whispers From a Continent, p.267.

\(^{823}\) Betty O'Grady, "Some Thoughts on the Poet's Symbolic Mode of Expression," p.31.
times the repetition gathers greater momentum and "the effect is incantatory, creating a profound emotion that in turn releases the poem's significance." Betty O'Grady makes a pointed reference saying that

...assonance, alliteration, and echoing reverberations reinforce the repeated images, refrains and ideas....

Senghor admires Tchicaya's musical ingenuity and calls him an "auditory" poet. Tchicaya himself has admitted in one of his interviews that, "Everything that I have written is oral." Dathorne points out how the traditional element of repetition common in oral poetry is, in Tchicaya's poetry, both ornamental and functional thus:

Linked to oral poetry, U'Tamsi's verse attempts to create a special type of 'spoken poetry' which gives his symbols free rein....His symbols are used like repetitive devices in traditional African poetry, but instead of mere repetition U'Tamsi expands his images into a number of parallel meanings....

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825 Idem.
826 Senghor, Quoted in Idem.
827 Tchicaya, Quoted in Idem.
A critical reader thus finds Tchicaya's spiralling movement of imagery well matched against the lyricism of McKay. While the former appeals to the intellect and enthrals the reader, the latter delights the senses and endears the heart. But then he moves to the head through the heart. Both the artists under discussion are talented craftsmen who have perfected their crafted art over the years. There is a marked development and maturation in their works. Both McKay and Tchicaya have had a sound knowledge and firm anchorage in the foreign models. McKay had been considerably influenced by the Romantics. Shakespeare and Milton have awakened the poet in him.

Similarly, the surrealist poets have influenced Tchicaya. Cesaire and Rimbaud have fascinated the young poet. Notwithstanding these early influences, both McKay and Tchicaya have steered clear of these formative influences of these foreign models. In fact, they made use of these foreign models as spring-boards to launch into higher regions of perfection in art. At the same time they have roots in native African poetic tradition.

McKay exploits the richness of the rustic scenic beauty, the wealth of the colloquial idiom and the musical quality of the speech rhythm in his dialect poems. In his poems written in Standard English too, McKay stands out as unique by being a torch-bearer of negritude.
In the case of Tchicaya U Tam'si, though he inherited in life the dual cultural tradition of both Africa and France, his poems echo the aspirations and longings of a Congolese. Betty O'Grady is emphatic that his poems are "marked by non-Western experience, thought modes, speech patterns and thematic concerns."\textsuperscript{829} It is interesting to note that while the form and structure of the poetry of both McKay and Tchicaya are Western, the soul and spirit remain native. In other words, the form and manner are Western, but the content and matter remain African. With a great artistic skill the two creationists match the one with the other and in the process they create rich and variegated associations of thoughts and emotions with their sensory and intellectual perceptions.

It is true that both McKay and Tchicaya left their native land and went to the Western world seeking higher education. But the urge for self expression was irresistible that they took to writing instead. Their receptive minds, being keenly responsive to impressions, began weaving thought with emotion and recollected experience with imaginative expression. Thus they formed rich mosaics of associations of the past with the present and by projecting the same into the future.

\textsuperscript{829} Betty O'Grady, "Some Thoughts on the Poet's Symbolic Mode of Expression," p.30.
There was the yearning in both the artists to return to the native land. McKay could never make it in his lifetime. Tchicaya did manage to go to Congo only to flee from there in a few months. Thus they both died in foreign lands with their hearts longing for the "native clime."

Incidentally the foreign soil allowed them greater artistic freedom than their native country. It was this pining that enabled them to make frequent flights into the world of imagination and draw picturesque associations of the real with the irreal, the near with the far-fetched and the concrete with the abstract.

Both these creative writers transcend the temporal and the topical aspects to record in their verses the eternal human virtues and the universal human values. Besides the racial elements, McKay's poems are also full of experiences, both personal and collective. Geta J. Leseur observes thus:

His [McKay's] poetry is one which says yes to life--rich, free, passionate and concerned....He wrote poems of exuberance, sorrow, faithful affection, patriotism and sturdy independence....

Thus McKay's poetry represents the whole gamut of human experiences.

Moreover, while dealing with racial issues McKay comes closer to identifying himself with his own community. As Arthur D. Drayton affirms, "...it[McKay's humanity] imparted to his verse a certain universal significance."\(^{831}\) McKay's protest too creates a brotherhood among all those who have been opposed and "it is sometimes a protest on behalf of humanity."\(^{832}\) His protest transcends all barriers of creed, race and nation to be really international and inter-racial. As Addison Gayle puts it:

...his [McKay's] poetry serves as a living inspiration for those who refuse to bow down at the feet of alien gods....\(^{833}\)

Tchicaya, on the other hand, stands out as a unique poet. He is unique because of the unique kind of verse he writes. Betty O'Grady makes a pertinent comment saying that

His [Tchicaya's] intensely personal world view and poetic expression create his own

\(^{831}\) Arthur D. Drayton, "McKay's Human Pity," p.77.
\(^{832}\) Ibid., p.87.
\(^{833}\) Addison Gayle, "Introduction" in The Black Poet at War, p.18
individual mythology, which sets him apart from all neat literary categories.... 834

Tchicaya is both unique and at the same time universal. It is borne out by the fact that Tchicaya is concerned over the lot of the human beings everywhere. Senanu and T. Vincent remark thus:

...his [Tchicaya's] keen awareness of what it is to be African and black is equally matched by his sense of the human condition.... 835

Tchicaya makes common cause with all human beings irrespective of race and colour. He stresses the oneness in "Epitaph" saying:

We are this union of water salt and earth of sunshine and flesh.... 836

The ego-centric poet of the Epitome has now come to terms with the external reality of human oneness in his later collection Bow Harp. Clive Wake remarks that

834 Betty O'Grady, "Some Thoughts on the Poet's Symbolic Mode of Expression," p.29.
Tchicaya is able to transcend the specifically racial concerns of his earlier poetry to write poetry which is unambiguously universal....

Tchicaya is apprehensive about the apartheid everywhere. Betty O'Grady describes it as his "existential anguish not for the individual alone but for the individual as part of a corporate body, past, present and future." Both McKay and Tchicaya have risen far above their respective ages to foresee a social reality in which racial and cultural assimilation would be inescapable. It is to their credit too that whatever they have seen and said of their particular contexts are true in our Indian context. The Adivasis and Dalits in the Indian society today offer a parallel study. They are the Indian equivalents to the Africans in the Western world. Approaching their problem in the light of the previous case-study offered by both McKay and Tchicaya would eschew much of the heart-burn and grittiness which such an excercise would otherwise entail.