PREFACE

The Thesis "THE POETRY OF CLAUDE MCKAY AND TCHICAYA U TAM'SI: A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF RACE CONSCIOUSNESS, SOCIAL PROTEST, STUBBORN HUMANITY AND THE CHRISTIAN THEME OF PASSION" establishes the validity, relevance and consequence of the key terms employed in it in the context of the life situations open to the Blacks in America and the new emergent African nations such as Zaire.

The method adopted is one of close critical analysis. The approaches are sociological, psychological and formalistic. There is a studied attempt to analyse, synthesize, interpret and evaluate the individual poems on their thematic relevance and consequence and on their form, structure and organization--the Gestalt.

Claude McKay and Tchicaya U Tam'si are brought together and investigated precisely because of their commonality of approach to the problems, plights and predicaments of the Blacks. Incidentally, the sturm und drang, angst and the sufferings of the African American is not that acute as that of the Black in the emerging African nations. It is precisely because the economic standard of the African American is better than that of the Blacks elsewhere. In fact, in the Dissertation the dissimilarities between
McKay and Tchicaya are analysed. Then there is a sharp focus on their comparative merits as Black creationists of proven worth. Yet again their limitations and strengths are examined.

The Dissertation identifies McKay and Tchicaya as outstanding Black artists who have contributed immensely to the growth, strength and relevance of Black literature. Because of their sound sense--phronesis--ethical stature--arete--and benevolence--eunoia--and by their poetry being marked by depth and clarity of vision that they occupy the first shelf in Black literature. Yet again, their works gain lasting value precisely because they are not constricted by racial predicaments. On the other hand, by introducing humanistic concerns and universals they ensure a lasting quality to their oeuvres.

McKay and Tchicaya are conscious of the fact that God created all men as equals. But it is Man who has been responsible for introducing into the world diversity and inequality based on caste, colour and creed. Social, political, racial and religious discriminations have resulted in chaos and disorder. Society is stratified. The supremacy of the master race over the slave, the rich over the poor, the Whites over the Blacks have been dominating factors.
The Blacks have been the most persecuted race next perhaps only to the Jews. Colour is the fundamental cause of their predicaments. The Blacks have been subjected to humiliation, trials and tribulations. The talented creationists among the Blacks give expression to this saddening tale in various forms of art. Claude McKay and Tchicaya U Tam'si, being gifted with the talent of creative writing, record the feelings of the Black soul in the form of verse.

Both Claude McKay and Tchicaya U Tam'si are keenly aware of the Black's predicament. Even as a boy McKay developed an appreciation for the purity and innocence of his race. His parents inculcated in him a sense of pride in his race. His brother Uriah Theophilus and an English man Walter Jekyll were instrumental in introducing McKay to the world of letters and the literary models. McKay's own experience in the various odd jobs that he did, helped him form a realistic idea about the condition of the fellow Blacks. In the case of Tchicaya U Tam'si, his father being a Congolese politician sent to the French National Assembly as an African representative, brought him up in France. He received a French education. Living as he did in France, his thoughts were back home in Africa and he kept track of the events there. He developed a passionate concern for his country men. Thus those two enlightened Blacks, Claude McKay and Tchicaya U Tam'si, reflect the Black milieu.
Claude McKay, the Jamaica-born American Black poet, and Tchicaya U Tam'si, the Congo-born French Black poet, are modern creationists of significance. Both these meaningful poets take pride in their race. They are acutely conscious of their race and the problems faced and confronted by the Blacks. The Blacks, whether in the Commonwealth countries or in America, are pressed to the wall and their sufferings persist in spite of the so-called do-gooders and social reformers and the series of legislative steps. Yet again, whether unfranchised or franchised, the state of the Blacks has been one of pain, misery and death. The Blacks have suffered displacement, disorientation and have had to undergo painful reorientation and accommodation. Thus their life is torn between reminiscences and movement. As Bellow projects the Jew as the type of the suffering man, these two Black writers project the Black as the representative suffering individual. The Black becomes a type in the hands of these two forceful writers.

McKay and Tchicaya are aware of the polarization of the Buccras—the Whites—and the Quashies, the Blacks. They realize the Whites to be the victimizers and the Blacks as belonging to the victimized segment of society. These two writers are conscious of the wealth hidden in the tribal culture and tradition. Therefore, as social scientists, their awareness of the plight of the Blacks,
their past tradition and present predicament is acute. They witness the Blacks experiencing denials, deprivation and dehumanization. These two poets as social scientists poignantly present their race consciousness. It is as Black that they speak in their verse. But their poetry would not have evolved into a higher level to wear the universal character if they just stopped talking of their race and the difficulties experienced by the Blacks. They do not react to the sufferings of the Blacks as Black creationists only but as human beings. Thus in fact, their poetry does not age.

The First Chapter presents these two writers as assertive Black poets who identify themselves with the suffering Blacks. They assert the dignity of the Blacks proving the fact that the Blacks are in no way inferior to the Whites. The Blacks need not play the servile and submissive role any longer. Their inner worth is proved; their purity and innocence are established and their power of endurance is exalted. McKay and Tchicaya hail the Black pride and assert the fact that the Blacks have every right to fight for equality. Equal educational opportunities, social recognition and human rights must become a reality to the Blacks. These two writers strive to bring about an awareness in the minds of the Blacks about their real worth and make them realize their finer qualities and fight for their rights.
The Second Chapter identifies these poets as social protesters and their poetry as bitter and violent. In fact, in the case of any Black writer to write poetry that lacks racial material would have been an anathema. As such the poetry of these two creationists analyses the social aspects of the race problem with bitterness and vehemence. Their awareness of the alienation and exploitation faced by the Blacks, urges them to protest. The socio-economic and cultural backwardness of the Blacks, their past tradition and present predicament draw a defiant cry of protest from these poets. The virility of their verse is due to the anger against the injustices and wrongs done to their race. Their anger, is of course, a justifiable one. Moreover, even when they protest, their anger is held under restraint. This quality of control over their anger lends dignity to their protest and elevates it to the level of a creative art.

The Third Chapter places the stress on the Black diaspora. History records that the Blacks have been forcefully uprooted from their African homeland and scattered as slaves all over the world. This displacement has seriously affected the life style of the Black. Wherever the Black is, he traces his roots to Africa and reminiscences over his past.
This chapter expresses the nostalgia of the Blacks towards their African homeland. Living in alien lands, these poets could relive the past by recollecting those happy moments spent in their homeland. The present disaster urges them to recast their eyes to the past glorious days enjoyed in the native soil. McKay pays a glorious tribute to Jamaica calling it a paradise. Those familiar hills, rivers and lakes still hold their fascination for McKay. When he recollects, the natural setting, his close relatives, friends and peasants crowd his mind. In his imagination at least, he could come back to Jamaica. In the case of Tchicaya, he is obsessed with the thought of Congo. He recaptures Congo with all its landmarks, the Congo river, its forests and savannahs, its fauna and flora. The carnage, the bloodshed and riots happening in Congo also unfold immersing the poet in sombre thoughts. This chapter describes these two poets' nostalgic sojourn in the land of their forefathers.

The Fourth chapter entitled "Grace Under Pressure" brings to light the moral strength of the Blacks on the face of disastrous circumstances. McKay analyses the economical, political, social and cultural pressures that the Blacks have to encounter in life. He is aggrieved that the Blacks are economically pushed backward, politically denied opportunities, socially stripped of equal rights and culturally torn between the two cultures, the African
and the American. Tchicaya too traces the alienation and the sense of loneliness in the Blacks. Their sense of rootlessness leads them to search for their identity. Tchicaya concentrates on the mental anguish of the Blacks, the turmoil and their angst over their inescapable tragic lot in the war-torn Congo.

McKay and Tchicaya focus their attention on the pressures mounting on the Blacks for whom struggle is life. But these sufferings in no way, suppress their spirit. The Blacks put up with these injustices silently. They achieve greatness through the manner in which they rise above these pressures gracefully. These two writers, on their part, exhibit extreme grace in withstanding duress in life. Their race problem never acts as a hindrance to their artistic creation. They learn to discipline themselves and to give their pain a dignity. As a sort of divine mission or noble duty, these two writers argue that the Blacks should not outsavage the savage White. They celebrate the imperturbable cheerfulness of the socially victimized Blacks who accept the buffets of life with a smile.

The Fifth Chapter projects McKay and Tchicaya as humanists. Love and compassion form the basis of humanism. Getting moved with pity at heart on seeing the sufferings of others, being ready to render service to
others, and also enduring pain or sufferings for the sake of others are also other humanistic virtues. These two poets have humanistic concern for the suffering Black race and by extension to the whole suffering human race.

McKay has inherited the humane feelings even in his early age from his mother. He is cut to the quick seeing the physical sufferings and moral degradation of the Blacks. Tchicaya, being conscious of the centuries of oppression and deprivation of the Blacks, pre-colonial tribal infightings, colonial violence, slave trade, Western racism, post-colonial failure, betrayal and massacre expresses his grief and feels sorry for them. While McKay is greatly moved by the colour problem of the Blacks, Tchicaya, on the other hand, concentrates on the bloodshed and massacre. McKay's attention is directed towards the moral degradation of the Blacks while Tchicaya is drawn towards the material deprivation. With misery triumphing over everything, with hopes getting shattered and with bafflement being common concern, the Blacks suffer more acutely than most other human beings.

Thus these two poets consider the sufferings of their race as their own. They go even a step further in identifying the suffering Black race with the suffering humanity. With commitment, they talk not only of the Blacks, but also of the White race. Quite rightly, they
transcend the race barriers and move a step higher and talk of the suffering human race. It is with human pity they present the lynched and the lynchers who also inflict sufferings on themselves. Though one clearly hears the note of defiance in their poetry, one fails not to detect the breath of vision and their right approach. They present Man as being constantly confronted with the threat to the human dignity and civilization. It is their sense of responsibility to mankind as poets that makes their poetry gain immortality. As critic after critic points out, their poetry does not age.

The Sixth Chapter presents McKay and Tchicaya as Christian poets. Thanks to the Christian Missionaries, the Blacks were uplifted from their down-trodden condition and educated. Christianity taught them endurance and promised them heavenly existence. But to the lettered Blacks Christianity still remains an imposition. What they admire in Christianity are the Christian virtues and the passion of Christ. These two writers are religiously conscious of the birth of the Holy Child, the importance of love, the experience of despair, death, crucifixion and Resurrection. Christ's concern for the whole human race and His selfless sacrifice induce these poets to be humanistically concerned for their own race. As Christ suffered for the salvation of the human race, these poets strive for
racial salvation. These writers identify their sufferings with that of Christ. The images they employ clearly point out the underlying theme of Passion. They trace the pervasive fatalism which mankind experiences but they fail not to highlight the concomitant reliance on God. In fact, freedom from sufferings and the pains of life lies with God. It is precisely for these reasons, they deal with love, despair and the Resurrection and their argument is that God alone is the true succour whether he is a Black or White.

McKay and Tchicaya acquire the ability to withstand pain and suffering through the Christian Passion. McKay believes in the divinity of Christ and that only through Christ one could attain salvation and heavenly peace. Tchicaya brings down Christ to personal human level and achieves divinity through Christ-like suffering. From a free thinker McKay has progressed and established his faith in Christ. Tchicaya too is optimistic but his optimism is based on the dynamics of human history. The passion of Christ appeals to both McKay and Tchicaya. It is only through the Passion that they realize the significance of life and hope for a better tomorrow.

The last chapter analyses the art of creative writing and how McKay and Tchicaya associate the various ideas to compose their verse. The Registered and Received
sensibilities blend together to form their verse. Their poetry is born out of the artistic association of thoughts, ideas and feelings. This chapter also examines the technical devices employed by them. One detects the influences of the racial element in their verse and the emphasis they place on the dialect and oral traditions. But they are effective modern poets capable of employing the modern techniques in their verse. Using these techniques, they voice forth their sturm und drang to the whole world.

Thus McKay and Tchicaya champion the cause of the oppressed Black race and in a wider sense, the whole of suffering humanity. They deal with eternal human values and hence they gain relevance even today.