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Table of Contents

Editorial	7
Articles	
Postcolonial Poetry and the Angst of Blackness: Trauma and Protest in Selected Poems of Claude McKay — Blossom N. Fondo	9
Emergence of the 'New Woman' of the East: A Cinematic Portrayal in Satyajit Ray's <i>Aranyer Din Ratri</i> (‘Days and Nights in the Forest’) — Mousumi Guha Banerjee	25
Contextualizing Transgression: Dynamics of Gender and Ethnicity in Ngugi's <i>A Grain of Wheat</i> — Amitayu Chakraborty	33
Power-politics in Mahesh Dattani's <i>Seven Steps Around the Fire</i> — Anju Bala Agrawal	44
Rereading Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka: A Critical Analysis of African Postcolonial Literature/religion — Ariful Islam	53
Cultural Diversity: Reading Monica Ali's <i>Brick Lane</i> — Arun Kumar Yadav	62
'Chronicles of a Young Woman in Wartime': Women and Liberation in Tahmima Anam's Works — Debarati Maity	71
Birth of Subject in Harold Pinter's <i>The Birthday Party</i> — Bahareh Bahmanpour	82
Cultural Re-location in Transnational Narratives: Analyzing Buchi Emecheta's <i>Kehinde</i> — Sujarani Mathew	93
Inequality in the Midst of Diversity is the Cry of the Voiceless — G. Immanuel	102

The Yoke and the Flight: A Study of Women's Role in Timothy Findley's <i>The Butterfly Plague</i>	108
— S. Muthu Kumaravel	
“Scribe, Move On!”—Repetition, Digression and Association in the Songs of <i>The Mwindo Epic</i>	113
— Sambuddha Ghosh	
Translation as Negotiation: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's Story “Rudali” in English Translation	123
— Arun Pramanik	
Anarchy and Post-independence India: A Reading of Chetan Bhagat's <i>What Young India Wants</i> and Arvind Kejriwal's <i>Swaraj</i>	132
— Arup Ratan Basak	
‘Pottermania’: The Creation of Brand Harry Potter and a New ‘Culture Industry’	144
— Somrita Misra	
A Monist Conflict in Dan Brown's <i>Angels and Demons</i>	153
— Sourav Chatterjee	
Inter-Linguistic Homonyms: A Semanto-Phonological Study of Select Indian Languages	163
— Sumathi Shivakumar	
In Search of Apt Methods in English Language Teaching	174
— Paragkumar D. Dave	
Integrating Authentic Materials into EAP Classroom	191
— Charul Jain	
Poems	
Days are like Clouds	199
— Hemendra Chandalia	
In a Crowd	201
— Basudhara Roy	
X'mas Spirit	203
— Stephen Gill	

Book Reviews

<i>Gujarati Dalit Short Stories</i> by Chandraben Shrimali Translated by Atul Kumar Parmar	205
— Indira Nityanandam	
<i>Of This Age and Obscurity and Other Poems</i>	207
— V.V.B. Rama Rao	
<i>Tapestry Poetry</i>	215
— V.V.B. Rama Rao	
<i>Eerie and Holy</i>	218
— V.V. B. Rama Rao	
Our Esteemed Contributors	230

Editorial

I am very happy to share the fact that the October 2015 issue of *GNOSIS* was appreciated by the world of Academia from all over the world for its richness and versatility; the credit for which goes to the entire team of *GNOSIS*.

We encourage writings from both experienced professors as well as young scholars. In this endeavour we hope to carry the torch of research as well as writing forward.

As a journal committed to quality research and writing, we are aware of the need to delink quality from publication cost. Hence, our decision to charge no publication fee from the scholars whose papers will be published in the issues of *GNOSIS*. At the same time since *GNOSIS* is a self-financed venture, co-operation and support in the form of subscriptions are solicited from the readers and admirers of English Literature and Language from all over the world.

There are nineteen research/critical articles, three poems of three poets, and four book reviews in this issue. Before concluding I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my reverend Associate Editor, Dr. Indira Nityanandam without whose critical insights this issue wouldn't have been a reality. Warm regards to our esteemed Board of Advisors and Review Editors for their tiresome efforts in reviewing the articles very sincerely and enriching each and every article with their valuable remarks resulting in the shaping up of this issue.

I am also grateful to my revered contributors who have made this issue an enriching reality.

Happy Mental feast!

Saikat Banerjee

Postcolonial Poetry and the Angst of Blackness: Trauma and Protest in Selected Poems of Claude McKay

Blossom N. Fondo

Abstract: The question of race continues to occupy an important place within postcolonial criticism. This is because race has served as a platform for the conceptualizations of power and powerlessness; a major trope within postcolonialism. Throughout human history, the non-white races of the world have experienced different forms of oppression. This has been particularly more grievous for black peoples whose blackness has served as a justification for some of the worst crimes against them. This situation has informed the creative imagination of many postcolonial writers. This paper seeks to uncover the angst of blackness as expressed in the poetry of Jamaican poet Claude McKay. Through a postcolonial reading of his poems, it is seen how throughout history the black man has stayed the underdog of the society, excluded from the centre of power and even denied his basic rights and humanity. The result is a poetry that expresses the profound pain of blackness as well as sounds a note of protest.

Keywords: Postcolonial criticism, Jamaican poetry, Race, Oppression, Trauma, Nostalgia.

Introduction

In times of great tragedy, pain and loss, humanity has often turned to poetry to express their angst. This is usually the case with natural disasters, national tragedies and collective trauma amongst others. This is because the spontaneity generally attributed to the poetic muse usually provides an outlet for deep overflowing sentiments. This has placed poetry as the literary genre best adapted to the expression of deep human pain and tragedy. Within the context of postcolonialism, the colonial encounter remains the major tragedy that has befallen the colonized. Similarly for the blacks of the West Indies, the slave trade and slavery have been the defining tragedies of their existence. Poetry has therefore been for them a powerful vent for the pain of their subjugation, humiliation and oppression under the sieges of slavery and colonialism. This falls in line with Antonio Jimenez Munoz's (2014)

stance that “poetry can thus serve as a weapon; it can be thrown at leaders, officials and people in an attempt to change their attitudes, to raise awareness, to denounce injustice” (34).

Celebrated Jamaican Poet Claude McKay is one poet who has singularly painted very effectively the pain of the black man faced with an unfeeling, exploitative and dominating white world. McKay’s poems are able to do this because he composes them from personal experience of racism. His encounter with racism has led him to state how “It was the first time I had ever come face to face with such manifest, implacable hate of my race and the feelings were indescribable” (Introduction Claude McKay: Selected Poems vii). Drawing from this, he is able to showcase through his poetry what the black man goes through at the hands of the white man whether in the era of slavery, colonialism or neo-colonialism. The plethora of problems faced by the black man is what prompted eminent African-American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) to opine that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line” (3). The result is a poetry that unveils the wounded soul of the black man as well as protest against this continued mistreatment. In this McKay fulfils the role of the authentic poet which Diana Greene describes as one who “works against all forms of injustice and destruction” (15).

This paper investigates McKay’s portrayal of the trauma of blackness through a reading of ten of his poems from the collection *Claude McKay: Selected Poems*. The main argument is that the black man has perpetually been the underdog of the society and his oppression from his first contact with the white man has produced trauma which McKay artfully illustrates through a poetics of pain, protest, loss and nostalgia. Read through the lenses of postcolonialism, this paper further intimates that blackness has served as a platform for the oppression and near annihilation of a people. Bill Ashcroft *et al.* (2005) have further noted that it is hard to think of a significant debate within the field of post-colonial cultural studies without feeling the impact of race (211). This study will especially be guided by Bart Moore-Gilbert’s (1997) proposal of what postcolonial criticism entails. He notes that:

Postcolonial criticism can be understood as primarily preoccupied with forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination—economic, cultural and political—between (and often within) nations, races or cultures which

characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally, characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of neo-colonialism. (12)

These are the aspects that will conceptualize the ensuing discussions of McKay's poetry.

A Poetics of Pain and Nostalgia

For people who have experienced colonialism in any of its forms, it constitutes a chapter of grave humiliation and trauma. The subjugation, exploitation brutality and diverse displacements have often produced a poetry permeated with profound pain and nostalgia for the life before such bondage.

This is evident in McKay's poem "Quashie to Buccra" in which he captures the lamentations of a black man variously referred to as 'quashie', 'naygur' (in the Creole in which the poem is written) to a white man referred to as buccra. The poem focuses on the exploitation of the black man by the white man in a manner not dissimilar to slave, colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. The speaker in this poem laments their brutal exploitation. In the first stanza, the black man scornfully tells the white man that he has tasted potatoes and found it sweet, not knowing the hard labour of the black man to produce it. He continues that the white man wants a basketful of the potatoes for a negligible amount of money because he disregards the hard labour the black man invested to produce them. This portrays the idea of exploitation as the blacks labour under the most awful conditions but the whites reap the benefits. The quashie tells the buccra:

You tas'e petater an' you say it sweet,
 But you no know how hard we wuk fe it;
 You want a basketful fe quattiewut,
 'cause you no know how 'tiff de bush fe cut. (1)

This first stanza clearly shows the contention of the oppressed blacks. The oppressor gives a blind eye to his suffering captured in the line "but you no know how hard we wuk fe it" (1), and this is why he wants to buy so much of his produce for so little. The black man here is therefore lamenting his exploitation by the white. At the same time, this could be extended to neo-colonial politics whereby such colonialist institutions as the World Bank and the IMF impose rules on especially these formerly colonized countries which not only disregard their realities but worse of all, ensure their perpetual poverty and dependence.

This has continued to exacerbate the gap between the colonizing and colonized nations of the world. Thus this poem could also be read as the lamentations of the formerly colonized nations on their unchanging plight even after the formal end of colonization. In the days of slavery, the white slave masters exacted their labour for nothing and during the colonial era, this same labour was exploited for nothing or for a negligible amount. The present neo-colonial dispensation continues to witness the continuous exploitation of these nations. A good case in point is in the area of their agricultural produce whose prices are fixed not by them but by Western institutions running the world market. The poem can therefore be seen as exploring the continuous exploitation of the black race by the white.

In order to buttress this point, the speaker paints a picture of the pain involved in the production of these potatoes. He recalls the hard bush they have to cut to farm the land, also the burning sun and the impossibility of rest in these lines:

De sun hot like when fire ketch a town;
 Shade-tree look tempting' yet we caan' lie down,
 Although we woundn' eben if we could. (1)

The picture painted here has undertone of slavery whereby the slaves were forced to work under very unsavoury conditions, without the possibility of rest yet all for the benefit of the white man. The poem therefore in a sense depicts what little recognition the white man has for the black man. The black man is nothing but beast of burden whose suffering and pain is for the white man's gain and pleasure. The language of the poem is one of pain and trauma captured in such words and phrases as "hard we wuk fe it", "tiff the bush fe cut", "cutlass working in we han". All of this underline the hard life of the oppressed who is trapped in a terrible circle of labour and loss. The poem therefore indicates that the life of the black man continues to be bitter while paradoxically sweetening that of the oppressor.

McKay pursues the same subject matter with the next poem "Hard Times." In this aptly named poem, the poet presents in a pessimistic tone the unchanging conditions of the black man overwhelmed by a life of intense hardship. The opening line of the poem is illuminating "de mo' we wuk, de mo' time hard". This shows how tragically stagnant is the plight of the black man for hard work is expected to bring about better times but here it is quite the contrary. The next lines emphasize

this condition:

I don't know what fe do;
 I ben' me knee an' pray to Gahd'
 Yet t'ings same as befo'. (2)

The speaker then cites a number of things he is incapable of accomplishing because of this hard circumstances: he cannot pay his taxes, cannot get treatment for his sick wife nor feed his hungry children, yet he works very hard. The use of the simile "I am working like a mule" (2) shows just how hard his life is and the animal imagery points to what he as a black man has been reduced to. At this point, he compares his plight to that of the whites who do not have to work so hard for the good life:

While buccra, sittin' in de cool,
 hab' 'nuff nenyam fe waste. (2)

This introduces a sharp contrast between the two races. The blacks work so hard but are unable to provide the basics for themselves while the whites do very little yet have more than enough. This underlines the politics of subalternity at play here where the black man as subaltern subject is excluded from economic power. Thus it is a dystopian world for the black man where because of his marginal status; everything seems to go wrong for him as expressed in this line: "de peas won't pop, de corn can't grow" (2). It shows a world where nothing works for the black man, and because everything is fine with the white man, it can be inferred that the black man labours while the white man reaps the profit thus the speaker can sadly conclude that "for all the time is hard" (2). Just as in the preceding poem, "Hard Times" equally portrays the disparity between the blacks and the whites caused by the continued exploitation of the former by the latter. Thus the relationship is defined by exploitation resulting in a painful and traumatic existence for the black man.

In the next poem, McKay once again draws attention to the plight of black people through a comparison with the little whites and the treatment accorded to both groups. In the poem titled "The Little Peoples", he notes that life is always worse for the black people who are considered the underdogs of the society. In the two-stanza poem, he presents the plight of these two groups. In stanza one, he talks of

The little peoples of this troubled earth,
 The little nation that are weak and white;
 For them the lifting of the veil of night.
 The big men of the world in a concert met,
 Have sent forth in their power a new decree.
 Upon the old harsh wrongs the sun must set,
 Henceforth the little people must be free. (27)

The poet shows how the global power brokers are interested in freeing those whites who are oppressed, so they fight against their oppression to help them attain freedom. However, in the next stanza, he presents a completely different story for the black. That the stanza opens with the word ‘but’ already points to a contrast in the way the blacks are treated. This is confirmed when he states “we the blacks less than the trampled dust” (27). This image is quite effective in portraying the plight of the blacks. They are given the worst treatment possible. So whereas a solution is sought to mitigate the suffering of the little whites, the blacks “must still be offered up as sacrifice” (27). So reading through the poem, it becomes clear that the ‘little peoples’ the title alludes to are blacks because they are the only ones whose plight remains unchanged. Thus, as the white man’s burden bearers, they must remain little or insignificant peoples. So while the circumstances of others are looked into, no one cares about the black man, because even his claims to humanity are disregarded. This contrastive treatment is what John McLeod (2007) has conceptualized as follows: “the divisive territorial consequences of colonialism express and underwrite other kinds of distinctions and discriminations which often mark out colonized people as lacking the same levels of humanity and human rights, as the European colonizers” (2).

The pain of slavery is one that has left its imprints forever burnt into the memory of the black man. It is the pain of this enslavement and all what it meant for the black man that constitutes the subject matter of McKay’s “Negro Spiritual.” Here he depicts the painful process of forceful removal and implantation in an alien land which characterized slavery. Therefore, he begins the poem by capturing the sense and fact of loss which defined the Slave Trade and slavery. He notes:

They’ve taken thee out of the simple soil,
 Where the sun made mellow thy tones,

And voices plaintive from eternal toil
 Thy music spoke in liquid lyric moans,
 They've stolen thee out of the brooding wood,
 Where scenting bloodhounds caught thy whispered notes. (29)

These lines portray what slavery did to the blacks. They were taken out of their lands and their relationship with these lands disrupted and they were forced into a new experience which completely rid them of their personhood. The title of the poem is significant as it clearly underlines that it is a black man's lamentation of what the white man has done to him. It is like a song of sorrow which underscores the cruelty of slavery through pointing out its myriad devastations on the black man, his body and mind. It shows how the whites have no regard for the blacks as Henry Louis Gates (2005) has noted that "Blacks were most commonly represented on the chain either as the lowest of the human races or as first cousin to the ape" (218). This explains both their enslavement and the treatment reserved for them in slavery.

McKay pursues this same subject matter in his poem "In Bondage." In a painfully nostalgic tone, he bemoans all what enslavement has deprived the black man of. The speaker relates what he would have been doing if did not find himself in bondage. He relates:

I would be wondering in distant fields
 Where man, and bird, and beast, live leisurely,
 And the old earth is kind, and ever yields
 Her goodly gifts to all her children fill.
 Where life is fairer, lighter, less demanding
 And boys and girls have made time and space for play
 Before they come to years of understanding... (36)

This first part of the poem presents the pain of loss, occasioned by slavery. So, after listing all of these joys of life which he would have been enjoying, the speaker moves to say he is deprived of all these because of his bondage.

But I am bound with you in your mean graves,
 O black men simple slaves of ruthless slaves. (36)

The poem is divided into two disproportionate stanzas: the first is made up of twelve lines and the second of just two lines. One can infer from this that what the speaker has lost is immense, requiring twelve

lines to recount, while he dedicates just two lines to state that he has lost all what he has because of his enslavement. The tone is nostalgic fully capturing the subject matter of loss and deprivation.

This question of slavery is pursued in the next poem aptly titled “Enslaved.” Herein the speaker passionately bemoans the suffering of the black race. The poem reads like a tearful lament of all what black peoples have had to go through at the hands of whites. He cries out how this produces hatred in him:

Oh when I think of my long-suffering race,
 For weary centuries, despised, oppressed,
 Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place
 In the great life-line of the Christian West;
 And in the black land disinherited
 Robbed in the ancient country of its birth
 My heart grows sick with hate becomes as lead. (37)

Once again, McKay paints a dystopian world of the black race. His diction portrays a picture of a people totally annihilated. Such words as “long-suffering race”, “despise”, “oppressed”, “enslaved”, “lynched”, “disinherited”, “robbed”, bring their tragic condition to light. The black man has not only been taken slaves to a strange land and subjected to the worst forms of treatment but even their homelands have been seized such that they are a homeless people shown in the line “for this my race that has no home on earth” (37). Faced with the sorry situation of his race, the speaker calls for vengeance upon the white race:

Then from the dark depth of my soul I cried
 To the avenging angel to consume
 The white man’s world of wonders utterly:
 Let it be swallowed up in the earth’s vast womb,
 Or upward role as sacrificial smoke
 To liberate my people from its yoke! (37)

This call for vengeance can also be read as a revolution call for the overturning of the white man’s world so as to liberate the black man from its clutches. “Enslaved” then succinctly portrays the plight of the black man reduced to a homeless slave in a world in which he is supposed to have full rights.

From a similar perspective, McKay presents the trauma of homelessness in the poem "Outcast." As the title rightly suggests, the poem presents the black man enslaved in the West, yet with memories rich of his homeland which he cannot return to. He therefore exists as an outcast, on the fringes of the society because he does not belong to this alien world. He is therefore nostalgic of the land where his ancestors were born free as he states:

For the dim regions whence my fathers came
 My spirit bandaged by the body, longs
 Worlds felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;
 My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.
 I would go back to darkness and to peace,
 But the great Western world holds me in fee
 And I may never hope for full release. (40)

As a result of his enslavement in the West, he explains that
 Something in me is lost, forever lost,
 Some vital thing has gone out of my heart. (40)

This is the same sense of loss and deprivation brought about by enslavement. This has rendered him more like a ghost where he states "And I must walk the way of life a ghost. Among the sons of earth a thing apart" (40). His usage of the metaphor 'a ghost' shows emptiness. He has lost his substance, his sense of self-definition and all that his left is a shadow. This he explains is because he was born "far from my native clime, under the white man's menace" (40). It is as a result of the white man's oppression that the black man has lost everything and exists as an outcast in a world into which he can never be accepted while at the same time cut off from the land of his belonging.

A Poetics of Defiance and Protest

Such pained experience the black man lives through usually prompts him to defy and protest against such a system that has denied him his humanity. This is what comes through in the poem "To the White Fiends", wherein McKay returns once again with a direct address to whites who have long oppressed his race. The title of the poem highlights his attitude and tone towards these white oppressors.

By calling them ‘fiends’, McKay underscores the evil embedded in their actions towards the blacks. Unlike in his poems of lamentation which are written in Creole to express his emotional pain, McKay writes this poem in standard English and uses firm language to make it known to the whites that what they have done to the black race can be done to them as well. The opening lines of the poem bring out the theme of defiance as seen below:

Think you I am not fiend and savage too?
 Think you I could not arm me with a gun
 And shoot down ten of you for every one
 Of my black brothers murdered, burn by you? (23)

These rhetorical questions bring out a number of important points: first of all, the poet turns the tables of representation by attaching to the white race the qualities they have long assigned to the black race such as ‘fiend’ and ‘savage’. The poet is here engaged in a counter-discursive practice by indicating that contrary to colonialist modes of representation, it is rather the whites who have shown themselves fiendish and savage. This is illustrated through a presentation of some of the actions of the whites which involve the murder through burning of blacks. Thus through this and other crimes he elucidated the whites have indeed proved to be savages. He pursues this line of thought by indicating in the same lines above that he too is capable of such acts and can even out-match the white race. However, he notes that he will not follow in the footsteps of the whites but will listen to the voice of the Almighty that calls upon him to be a light and shine the path for others on earth. The speaker therefore considers the black race as being on earth to show the way for the white race:

They dusky face I set among the white
 For thee to prove thyself of higher worth; (23)

So, although this poem highlights some of the abuses of the whites towards the blacks, it underlines the idea that the blacks must not seek for vengeance but should prove themselves of more worth by doing that which is right. The poem above all indicates that the savagery which blacks have been characteristically accused of is rather a defining trait of the whites whose actions have proved this.

Similarly, in “The Dominant White”, McKay ironically calls to question the acclaimed superiority of the white race over the black. He states that God gave the white race the power to lead but they have

been unable to do this rather using their power to abuse. This is the method McKay uses to interrogate this superiority. Thus he opens the poem with these words:

God gave you power to build and help and lift;
 But you proved prone to persecute and slay
 And from the high and noble course to drift
 Into the darkness from the light of day.
 He gave you law and order, strength of will
 The lesser peoples of the world to lead;
 You chose to break and crush them through life's mill,
 But for your earthly gains to make them bleed
 Because you've proved unworthy of your trust,
 God – He shall humble you down to the dust. (24)

This stanza shows the white race to be rather unruly as they have been unable to use their self-ascribed higher intelligence to do mankind good. Quite on the contrary, they have been engaged in the exploitation and destruction of other races for their benefits. The entire poem therefore is a presentation of the litany of crimes of the whites towards the non-white races of the world. Thus the first stanza above points to the whites' inability to lead although they have arrogated the right to lead others unto themselves. In the second stanza, it is stated that "You have betrayed the black, maligned the yellow...you called upon the name of your false God to lash our wounded flesh with knotted cords and trample us into the blood-stained sod" (24). This is a lamentation of the physical brutality that characterized the tragic encounter between the black and the white races. In the name of your 'false god' mentioned shows the role of Christian religion in subjugating the black race while such phrases as 'wounded flesh', 'knotted cords', 'blood-stained sod' may refer to the excesses of the slave trade and slavery where the black slaves were subjected to such extremely abusive treatment that rid them of their humanity. The violence of slavery has rendered it the sore in human history and is the major highlight of what little consideration the white slave masters had for the blacks.

In the third stanza, the poet laments in these words:
 The pain you gave us nothing can assuage,
 Who hybridized a proud and virile race,

Bequeathed to it a bastard heritage
 And made the black ashamed to see his face
 You ruined him, put doubt in his heart,
 You set a sword between him and his kin,
 And preached to him, with simple lying art
 About the higher worth of your white skin! (24)

Here he moves from physical brutality to the cultural domain where the aspect of cultural imperialism and mental colonization is brought to light. The idea of hybridizing a proud and virile race underscores the ways in which the colonial encounter led to the impoverishment of black cultures. Through what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has termed "cultural engineering", the black race was led to develop an inferiority complex faced with the whites and they therefore considered their blackness as the curse to be freed of. It is such a situation that eminent anti-colonial critic Frantz Fanon (1967) captured in his landmark book *Black Skin, White Mask* wherein he writes that "the black man among his own in the 20th century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other" (13).

The fourth and last stanza could be read as detailing the crimes of neo-colonialism. This is the era after the so-called independence where the colonizers still rule from the shadows determining the future of the colonized, or rather ensuring that they had no future altogether. This is expressed in the line which reads "you stultify the dreams of visioned youth" (24). This youth here could refer to the young or newly independent nations whose visions of true independence and freedom were quickly transformed to ashes by the continuing interference of the former colonial masters. These former colonizers who ensured at their departure that their stooges will take over control of these states were still able to exert their influence over them and therefore have a bearing on their governance. This is what the poet means by the following lines:

You place your seers with madmen, fools and rogues
 Their words distort and twist, despise their creed:
 You choose instead the little demagogues
 That will uphold you in your shameless greed! (24)

Given this state of affairs the black man even after the much fought for independence is still not free as he is still subordinated to the white

man. So, in four stanzas, McKay bemoans the plight of the black man faced with the white man who is neither ready to accept him on an equal basis nor see him a free being. He therefore predicts at the end of each stanza that God will humble the white man to dust. The regular 'ab' rhyme scheme which McKay adopts for this poem could be a way of indicating the continuity of the white man's crimes. This regular rhyme scheme shows how nothing has changed but rather from one epoch to another, the white man oppresses the black. Therefore, from slavery, through colonialism to neo-colonialism, it is the same force at work and the same crimes against the blacks.

In the next poem "A Capitalist at Dinner", McKay paints a picture of capitalism as "ugly, fat, overfed" (25), highlighting the fact that it is unattractive, undesirable and greedy. This can be explained by the many crimes against humanity in the name of capitalism. Colonialism, for example, which brought a vast number of people in the world under the subjugation of a few was fuelled by capitalistic greed prompting Karl Marx to opine in no uncertain terms that "colonialism is the highest form of capitalism". It was equally this capitalism which led to the greatest human trafficking of all time in the world in the name of the Slave Trade. Thus in this poem McKay says the capitalist is "wrapped in his sordid visions of vast wealth". In the next stanza of the poem, the poet's disgust is underscored as follows:

Great God! If creatures like this money-fool,
 Who hold the service of mankind so cheap,
 Over people must forever rule,
 Driving them at their will like helpless sheep –
 Then let proud mothers cease from giving birth;
 Let human beings perish from the earth.

The fact that the capitalist is presented at dinner indicates the consumerist zeal that defines capitalism as a whole. McKay thus paints an ugly picture of the force that has ruled the world and made victims out of many and concludes that should the reign of capitalism continue, it were better for the existence of humankind to cease. This is more so because its crimes that have caused so much pain such that life under such conditions is no life at all. The poem is a subtle protest against capitalism.

Perhaps, Claude McKay is best known for his poem "If We Must Die", a fourteen line, one stanza poem wherein he defies the oppressive

forces that have consistently put the black man down by inviting the black man to confront death with dignity, courage and fearlessness. The opening line reads: “If we must die, let it not be like hogs” (43).

The simile here indicates that the oppressed must not accept death without a struggle faced with the blood-thirsty oppressors whom he metaphorically refers to as “the mad and hungry dogs” (43). He appeals on his fellow oppressed to die nobly

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. (43)

The speaker emphasizes on the need to face death courageously such that the adversary will recognize their bravery even in death. This poem seems the appropriate conclusion to the selected poems for this study because it acknowledges the oppression of the black man and calls on him not to accept this oppression passively. It insists on the need to fight fearlessly even faced with the prospect of death. He calls on the oppressed to accept this possibility of death in their struggle for freedom and to therefore face it courageously by fighting back passionately and determinedly. The rhetorical question “what though before us lie the open grave?” (43), shows that they must accept this possibility but should not be deterred by it. In other words, the speaker holds that it is better to die courageously than to die in perpetual oppression hence the closing lines:

Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the world dying but fighting back! (43)

This poem therefore holds that if death is the price for their freedom, let them readily pay it but while at it, it must not be a dumb acceptance of death but one that comes if it must, on the heels of a brave struggle. The poet adopts a defiant tone as he expresses the readiness to die for his freedom and to do so nobly.

Conclusion

Claude McKay has in the selected poems, used his poetry to decry the angst of blackness. These poems have shown what it means to be black in a world where whiteness is the rule or in a white-dominated world. These poems have thus decried the exploitation of the black race by the white, uncovered the pain that oppression elicits and in

this he infuses his sometimes mild and sometimes virulent protest. McKay has equally artfully captured the profundity of loss which characterized especially slavery and the ensuing nostalgia. All of these have together projected a dystopian world for the black man who is caught in a painful web and forced to occupy the lowest position in the social fabric. In a tone that moves from lamentation to protest, McKay has successfully brought to light what it means to be the underdog of the society. He has shown himself a committed poet who is engaged through his art in assuaging the condition of his people. It is in this that McKay became a major voice in black poetry as he used his art to harshly condemn the damage done to black people by a white world. His poetry therefore falls into the postcolonial matrix which involves amongst others, uncovering and resisting colonial domination. This resistance has been enacted not only in thematic terms but equally at the level of language and culture seen in the way he boldly employs the creole as a postcolonial alternative and in his references to the cultural richness of the black race prior to colonialism. This fully captures the essence of postcolonial poetry which Rajeev S. Patke (2006) underlines as follows "On the one hand, this poetry bears witness to the residual force of colonial histories, on the other, it shows how that force may be turned to new forms of linguistic and cultural empowerment" (vii). McKay's poems selected for this study have fully undertaken this task.

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