

How does mackay  
express his feelings  
for the two cultures  
he belongs to?

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Claude Mckay was brought up in Jamaica and moved in the to New York in the 1930s. This was during America's post-economicaldepression, which meant getting enoughmoneyor getting enough money was a very big struggle. It was even a bigger struggle for him to get a good job as an immigrant worker, so he had to settle for menial jobs. Although there was not formal and legal 'segregation' between black and white as there was in the South, there were areas for only blacks or only whites and prejudice was rife. Mckay became a political and social activist forhuman rights. In his poems, he evokes a strong sense of his homeland in order to assert the power of its beauty, to seek comfort in the emotional and spiritual warmth he remembers about the place.

#### I SHALL RETURN

The title 'I shall return' suggests a sense of homesickness and emphasises his determination to go back. The title is a definite statement which may suggest a sense of disappointment or frustration which is reminding him of how beautiful his homeland is. It can also be seen as a promise, as if he was promising himself a reward in order to carry on with life struggle with a purpose.

He repeats the same statement, almost as if he was trying to memorize it: " I shall return to loiter. I shall return to fiddle..." This helps to add a certain flow as the reader reads through the poem. It also makes the statement 'I shall return' become more alive and more promising to come to pass. It could be seen as him making himself a purpose for carrying on with life.

He uses colour to describe the images in his homeland: "... like brown blade...", "... the forestfires burn wafting their blue-black smoke to sapphire skies..." This allows the images to be physical and easier to picture. He probably used this technique to make the idea of his returning more realistic for him to be able to picture himself there.

He stresses on how much he misses his homeland, even its disadvantages by beautifying them: "... at golden noon the forest fires burn wafting..." He uses this to show that his homeland's bad views can be looked upon as exhibitions. This help to promote the idea of his returning even besides the negative aspects.

He uses metaphors to describe his feelings for the New York: "... to ease my mind off long, long years of pain..." This technique portrays his feelings for New York in a way the reader can relate to.

The structure of the text has a tremendous significance as it echoes the pattern of thoughts and feelings of the writer. It heads the reader to understand the message. The poem is written in a sonnet, which is important as a sonnet consists of two stanzas; an octave and a Sestet. The octave involves talking about the problems being faced, whilst the Sestet is about finding a solution to the problem: " I shall return again..." So in 'I shall return' he uses the idea of returning to his homeland as a solution to his problem.

#### THE TROPICS OF NEW YORK

The title 'The tropics of New York' suggests McKay evolving New York and turning it into his homeland. It could be said that he was missing home so

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much that he was starting to see visions of his homeland in New York. The title can also suggest McKay getting used to the Yankees style of life and him finding positive aspects of their culture.

He uses repetition and makes the rhythm comparable to that of an excited child at Christmas: " Bananas ripe and green and ginger-roots... and pears..." He uses this technique to illustrate the joy he had when he saw these fruits and vegetables. The excitement of the tone is only because the fruit reminds him of his homeland which just goes to show of how much he misses the place.

In *The Tropics of New York*, he uses religious vocabulary to describe the landscape of his homeland: "... mystical blue skies. In benediction over nun-like hill..." He gives the landscape a significance, which suggests that he adores it. It also adds a sense of silence and peace to the landscape.

He uses alliteration to describe his memories of his memories: "... of fruit trees laden by low ...", "... and dewy dawn..." This helps slow the pace down to help him emphasize the beauty of his homeland. It also adds a gentle sound and some resonance, which helps to produce a visual image of calm beauty. As these were memories, the qualities could not have been present in New York.

He evokes senses in order to separate the three stanzas. In the first stanza, he uses the sense of taste and tells of the food he saw. He uses sight in the second stanza to describe what he was seeing and the sense of feeling in the

third in order to show his emotions. This allows the reader to picture New York from different points of view.

It also helps to convey his emotions in a way that the reader could relate to.

He uses archaic syntax in the beginning of the third stanza to describe his emotions after seeing these fruits: "... I could no more gaze..." This helps to lead the calmness of the stanza. The calmness of the stanza can help evaluate how emotionally touched he was to see these fruits as he probably last saw them a long time ago.

He uses a metaphor to describe how he misses his old homeland: "... hungry for the old familiar ways..." The metaphor signals a change from physical longing to emotional and spiritual longing. It shows of how desperate he is to go back to his country.

Mckay uses a regular rhythm scheme (a/b/a/b). This helps to contain the emotion. The structure of the poem mirrors the process of seeing the fruit and wanting to eat it, whilst visualising the country it comes from to the spiritual way of life in that place.

In conclusion, I found out that Mckay uses both poems to illustrate his feelings towards both places uses techniques such as alliteration, narrative voice, metaphors, vocabulary, structure of the poems etc. His overall feeling is that he misses home and has a great desire to return. He feels living in New York is very painful and he does not seem to want to get use to the its lifestyle: "... hungry for the old familiar ways..."