

## A Bachelardian Perspective on Fire in Selected Poems

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### Abstract

*The study problematised the applicability of Bachelard's elemental theory of imagination to different literary works. Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) can be described as a French philosopher who propounded his theory of understanding and analysing poetry or poetics. He ushered in a new idea of poetics of imagination in his book 'The Psychoanalysis of Fire'. Thus, this article aimed at analysing the poetic element of 'Fire' in poetic works that include 'The Tyger', 'Urizen', 'The Four Zoas', and 'Brush Fire'. The article adopted a qualitative approach and desktop methodology. The paper was underpinned by the theory of imagination. The study shows that Bachelard's theory of imagination deals with poetic elements such as 'Fire', 'Water', 'Air', 'Earth', and 'Space'. The above elements are not elements of nature but show the poetic inclination of the poets which finds manifestation in their works and are taken in the pre-Socratic sense. The study also shows that Bachelard's theory of imagination is not only applicable to previously mentioned literary works or texts but also brings to the fore the poetic element of the poet, that is, the poetic element of fire. The study concludes that these poems exhibit imagery of fire which is reflected through the lexicon used in the poems and brings out the poetic element of the poet.*

**Keywords:** Bachelard, cultural complexes, elemental imagination, fire, Psychoanalysis of Fire, poetry.

### 1. Introduction

This article is an attempt to analyse the elemental imagination of fire in the poems *The Tyger*, *Urizen*, *The Four Zoas*, and *Brush Fire*. This study is concerned with the poetic imagination which focuses on the poetic element of 'Fire'. Bachelard authored a book *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* in which he postulated that different literary works on careful reading show their poetic elements. It is worth noting that

Bachelard applies a different theory of imagination to analyse poetic works (Bachelard, 1964).

Smith (2016:16) observes in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, “The arts, on the other hand, begin with a constructing power, generally called imagination, and embody in forms with clarity of communication that makes them objects of perception to others. Despite his Freudian terminology, Bachelard is less concerned with reducing images to hidden, individual meaning than with exploring how shared imaginative responses cluster around a common phenomenon like fire”. Bachelard believes that shared imaginative responses toward fire are quite important. It can be argued that the poetic element of fire arouses different responses from different people. The emergence of an image is the most potent moment of the imaginative process for Bachelard.

The study investigates the poetic element of fire in these previously mentioned poems and the applicability of the Poetics of Fire. There seems to be insufficient literature in English on the application of Bachelardian Poetics to poetry. Therefore, this article applies the Poetics of Fire as propounded by Gaston Bachelard to four selected poems. Stated as a question was the knowledge gap that this study was analysing: What is the applicability of Bachelard’s Poetics of ‘Fire’ to poetry? The objectives of this study were: to investigate the poetic imagery of selected poems to find the poetic element of ‘fire’; to discover the poetic element of the poet, and to explore the applicability of Bachelard’s poetics of fire. The paper proceeds as follows: introduction, objectives, literature review, theoretical locale, methodology, results and discussions, and conclusion.

## **2. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study were:

- i) To investigate the poetic imagery of selected poems to find the poetic element of ‘fire’;
- ii) To discover the poetic element of the poet;
- iii) To explore the applicability of Bachelard’s poetics of ‘fire’.

## **3.Theoretical Locale and Literature Review**

This study is concerned with Bachelardian Poetics and is underpinned by the theory of imagination (Bachelard, 1964; Bachelard, 1969; Bachelard, 1994; Bachelard, 2002; Bachelard, 2006; Bachelard, 2011; Bachelard and Gaudin, 2014). The natural world is predominant in the work of Bachelard. As a proponent of the theory of imagination, Bachelard propounded the theory of material imagination. Others have

used linguistic-based models whereas Bachelard propagates a theory of imagination that is related to matter. He connects the poetic elements to a poet's temperament which includes: Fire, Water, Air, and Earth as poetic elements that influence the imagination of the poets. The analysis of the element of fire using the theory of imagination is befitting in the present paper.

Bachelard is one of the few authors of our time who has dealt with poetic imagination. He is a philosopher of science and a precursor of the theory of imagination who wrote five short essays between 1931 and 1934 which were presented by George Canguilhem under the title *Etudes*. Bachelard ushers in the idea of *reverie* in his first book on elements, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* which demonstrates a gradual development of Bachelard's Poetics (Bachelard, 1964). He brings in *cultural complexes* where he moves away from reductive psychology and advocates for careful reading as a means of responding to the literary image. *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* introduces various moods of reverie by Fire such as 'Fire and Respect': Prometheus Complex, 'Fire and Reverie': Empedocles Complex, 'Psychoanalysis and Novalis Complex', and 'Alcohol: The Hoffman Complex' (Bachelard, 1964). The "complexes" dealt with in this book are the points at which literary myth becomes focused on its cardinal points of creation, redemption, and apocalypse.

Further, Bachelard introduces two dimensions of imagination in *Water and Dreams*, namely, the *formal imagination* and the *material imagination* (Bachelard, 2006). This idea of material imagination and recognising poets and novelists by their material poetic element is new in recent times. Bachelard believes that matter is the 'unconscious of form', and is the unseen impulse that imbues a particular image with its poetic power. Hence, the study of culture complexes is meant to provide a method of understanding how the imagination produces certain kinds of images. Bachelard diverted his interests from the philosophy of science to the faculty of imagination. Gilson (1963) observes that he has suddenly turned his interest to a psychoanalysis of the most unorthodox sort since what then was being psychoanalysed was not even people but an element. This shows that Bachelard moved from the world of reason and science to that of imagination and poetry. Bachelard's works on poetic imagination opened up a different angle of approach.

Bachelard's works examine the images of various writers whose works provide the subject matter for Bachelard's theorisation on imagination. His working method is

one of empathy with the text and identification with the inner impulses of the writer. Bearing the remarkably different implications in mind, Bachelard (1964) in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* does not only relate the human psyche to the element of fire but also isolates the basis for the systematic development of a critical study of the literary works. Bachelard (1964:2) begins with the warning in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* that “the axes of poetry and science are opposed to one another from the outset.” Bachelard’s challenge to explore the axes of poetry and science is fundamental to all of his subsequent work. The poet gradually draws the most sympathetic treatment of the poetic power of the imagination of fire. Bachelard (1964:2) says philosophy can only hope “to make poetry and science complementary, to unite them as two well-defined opposites.” Bachelard gravitates towards the understanding of the poetic power of imagination which can be seen in his book *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*. He deals with the faculty of poetic imagination in all his works which are related to elements.

Bachelard does not only show the remarkably different implications in the book *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* in which he relates the human psyche to the element of fire, but he also isolates a basis for the systematic development of a critical study of literary works. Bachelard is hardly interested in developing an orthodox therapy. His psychoanalysis is exclusively concerned with norms for a rationally based objectivity. Bachelard (1964:14) argues that since we are limiting ourselves to psychoanalysing a psychic layer that is less deep, and more intellectualised, we must replace the study of dreams with the study of reverie, and more particularly, in this little book we must study the reverie before the fire. In the researchers' opinion, this reverie is entirely different from the dream by the very fact that it is always more or less centred upon one object.

Bachelard introduced the idea of reverie in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* which serves as the most important aspect of the act of imagination. ‘Reverie’ literally means day dreaming, but Bachelard emphasises that reverie is the creative process whereas dreams occur when one is asleep. *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* reflects Bachelard’s shift from scientific to aesthetic concerns. Bachelard argues that the poetry inspired by matter is dangerously seductive; like fire, poetry allures and destroys, fascinates, and distorts calms, and ravages. Like burnt brandy or like fire itself, imagination is something to be enjoyed, but also something to be controlled. Bachelard calls poetics of this kind of imagination ‘poetic-reverie’. This leads Bachelard to initiate a new style

of literary criticism which he calls 'an objective literary criticism'. For Bachelard (1964:110), the imagination is an "autochthonous, autogenous realm ...the true source of psychic production." He wanted to understand the imaginative process by objective process which he realised was not possible. Bachelard points out that one must apply a subjective approach to analyse poetry. On the contrary, one work of Bachelard also exhibits the scientific approach in the analysis of poetry.

In his introduction to *Water and Dreams*, Bachelard distinguishes between two forms of imagination, the formal imagination and the material imagination (Bachelard, 2006). In distinguishing between two forms of imagination, the formal and the material, Bachelard finds both at work in nature as well as in the mind. As Bachelard iterates in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, to understand the act of imagination, one has to leave past influences and try to attain the primitive thought process. In nature, the formal imagination creates all the unnecessary beauty it contains, such as the flowers which represent the material imagination. The material imagination is attracted by the elements of permanence present in things. Gilson (1963) observes that the images of the formal imagination, that is, of the free forms, have always received the attention they deserve from the philosophers, but Bachelard was conscious of doing pioneering work in turning to the "images of matter." The above images imply a formal element, but those direct images of matter, as Bachelard calls them, are precisely those forms given in matter and are inseparable from it.

Bachelard (2002) believes in the primacy of the image including the literary image and the reverie it generates. He argues that the dynamic material imagination of the earth determines the subjective inner being and designates the inner reality of things. Bachelard creates a special ontology by dealing with the particular reality of the literary image and its relationship to material reality. He deals with literary image, literary criticism, and the idea of dynamic material imagination in the book *Earth and Reveries of Will* and states his idea of use of the language (Bachelard, 2002).

As Bachelard moves towards his poetics of imagination, he notices that the subjective imagination precedes objective perception, and concludes that 'reverie' should be experienced subjectively before being narrated. He propounds that there are two moments in the creation of the literary image, first the correspondence to 'reverie' and then to description. Throughout the elements, Bachelard gravitates towards his discovery that the specific reality of the image can be known when it is given its combined subjective and objective being.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study applied a qualitative approach, particularly a descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was adopted because it was desktop research. The desktop research focuses on a limited and predetermined number of carefully selected works, such as poetry and novels. The descriptive research design stresses on describing the observable content and require interpretations like the present study. Bachelard's Poetics which is under research is interpretive and as such the meanings of the poems used in this study are non-numerical, but are based on experiences each poet might have passed through during the interactions with society (Brink and Wood, 1998).

The study used four poetic texts which were sampled purposively. Patton (1990) states that purposive sampling is the most common method of sampling in qualitative research where individuals, groups, and settings are considered for selection if they are 'informant rich'. In the present study, four poetic texts that dealt with the poetic element of 'Fire' in poetic works of 'The Tyger', 'Urizen', 'The Four Zoas', and 'Brush Fire' were purposively selected as they were considered as 'informant rich' in the sense that they all have a reverie of fire which points to Bachelardian Poetics. The homogenous purposive sampling was used. The above poetic works were used as secondary sources of data collection to justify the qualitative and descriptive objectives of the desktop research (Chaleunvong, 2009). All the literary works used in this research have been intensively studied by the researcher. The study used the principles of ecocritical and phenomenological approaches to collect and analyse the data. Data collection and analysis involved three steps. Firstly, the researcher identified texts that are related to Bachelardian Poetics. Secondly, data were collected by an extensive and exhaustive study of the main texts about other texts within the objectives, and context of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. The above steps show that data analysis went hand in hand with data collection (Mugenda and Mugenda 1999). Data were analyzed thematically using descriptive and analytical skills.

#### **5. Results and Discussions**

## 5.1 Analysis of *The Tyger* by William Blake

William Blake (1757-1827) was one of the Romantic poets from England. Blake's major works are the *Songs of the Innocence and Experience*, *Poetical Sketches*, and *The Book of Thel*, to name a few. Blake gained popularity posthumously. Blake believed in his theism which was entirely different from traditional Christianity. *The Tyger* is part of his *Songs of Innocence and Experience, Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1794). Without the simultaneous presence of both states, human existence would cease. In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Bachelard (1964:7) argues that among all phenomena, it is the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. He adds that it shines in Paradise and burns in Hell. A careful reading of the poem *The Tyger* reveals through its imagery its poetic element. Crehan states that:

Blake conveys violent, revolutionary energy by his use of a resonating poetic symbol (the wild beast in the forest) and the invention of a persona, whose thirteen unanswered questions, bound by six hammered stanzas, give the poem its peculiarly compressed verbal power (Crehan, 1984:125).

As stated above by Crehan, there is a staccato beat in this poem as if there is an urgency. The Tyger is a symbol of fire in Blake's poem as established in the analysis. The paper uses excerpts from the poem for the analysis.

*The Tyger*

*Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
(Lines 1-2)*

To begin with, the title of the poem *The Tyger, the Tyger* is an Asian predator; ferocious and feared. The title itself gives an insight into the poem and into the images of a predator which is unique in itself. Moreover, Blake shows reverence to the tyger. The form and the content of this poem is: "This work—powerfully oneiric—is also enlivened by such great poetic eloquence that it provides a rich example of life as expressed in words" (Bachelard, 2011).

The above quotation from a poem shows that *The Tyger* promises to be a strong lyrical tribute to the mighty Tyger. The prominent image of 'burning bright' in the first line of the poem shows the element of this poem. The images and figures of

speech in this poem show the element of the poem which can be deciphered as the poetic element of 'fire'. The imagery establishes the element of the poem. Although this study does not include the whole poem for analysis, whatever stanzas are taken into consideration are replete with the image of fire. Asiatic tigers have a pattern that resembles flames; Blake got this image of fire from that pattern. The pattern on the tiger's body is a combination of gold and black which represents both light and dark. 'Tyger tyger burning bright', this line portrays the tyger as the ball of fire, hence the images of fire are present and it brings forth the poetic element of the poem. The first line has the image of 'burning bright', therefore, the element of fire is present. Bachelard (1964) argues that *fire* governs moral qualities as well as physical qualities.

According to Bachelard (1964), *fire* is the ultra-living element. Bachelard approaches this poetic element subjectively. He concentrates on those very features which make images of fire attractive which bestow the reverie the power of reality. *The Tyger* has the images of fire which shows fire as the ultra-living element such as the lines quoted above. The tyger is a part of the non-human environment, moreover, it is a natural creature.

Blake's *Tyger* represents the human psyche. Symbolically, *Tyger* has the attributes of the human psyche since it represents the ego as well as the id of human beings. *The Tyger* embraces both good and evil which finds manifestation in this poem. The image 'Burning bright' represents the good side of the human psyche, whereas, 'Forests of the night' represents the darker side since both the forest and night are emblematic of the dark forces. The dialectics of good and evil ever torment the human beings. This poem shows the triumph of good over evil.

Crehan (1984) argues about the context of this poem in his book *Blake in Context*. He says:

The Tyger is a response to the terrible, new-born beauty of violent revolution. The poet now confronts his own antinomian energies as an external creation, whose 'fearful symmetry' obeys no known laws, and yet has a manifest, organised (ferocious) presence.

The critic argues that *Tyger* represents the vital world of the French Revolution and the world of experience. Burning *bright*; the duality of these words can be interpreted in contrasting ways. 'Burning' can be sensuous, purgatorial, or both. Words such as 'forests', and 'night', symbolise darker aspects of life, and at the same time the poet writes 'the forests of the night'. Again, the duality of the human psyche is apparent in



this line and shows that people who live in darkness can only see God as light. According to Jung, fire is closely associated with consciousness, thinking, enlightenment, wisdom, and spiritual vision. "Sun (fire and sky are closely related: creative energy; law in nature consciousness (thinking, enlightenment, wisdom, spiritual vision)" (Guerin and Labor). The *tyger* though a feared creature is a harbinger of light in these lines. Words such as 'forests' and 'night' symbolise the darker side of life while 'forest' symbolises the unknown. 'Night' is dark; and it symbolises chaos, mystery, the unknown, death, and evil. The iconic *tyger* is illuminating the dark forests which is a symbol of unknown and chaos. *The tyger* ushers in a realm of knowledge and wisdom. The next couple of lines from *The Tyger*, validate similar aspects:

*What immortal hand or eye*

*Could frame thy fearful symmetry?* (Lines 4-5, Stanza-1)

Blake brings his ideas home through staccato questions. The rhythm of this poem is analogous to the pounding of an ironsmith. Bloom says, "The speaker of *The Tyger* sees the Tyger as a fearful symmetry framed by darkness. The eye in its shrunken perception was born in the night of our fall from Imaginative vision and will perish in that same night" (Bloom, 1961:32).

As stated in the quote, the tyger is a creature of the night that will vanish the moment light comes. The tyger is a source of light or God in the poem, however, for a few nature is the vital force. Hence the tyger is emblematic of the power of nature. Both light and dark are present in the furnace of the mind. The tyger can be compared to the forces of nature as well.

These two lines depict the might of nature and show that the might of the tyger is unfathomable. Nature's force cannot be measured. The next lines say:

*On What wings dare he aspire?*

*What the hand dare seize the fire?*

(Lines 7-8)

The mystery of the fire has eluded humankind. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a sense of wonder in these two lines. Human aspirations are limitless and the sheer power of human endeavor is unfathomable. These lines, epitomise the reverie by fire, as well as, the *Prometheus Complex*. Bachelard says, about culture complexes, in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*: "They constitute the charged matter that nourishes our cultural styles --- adding dynamism to our expressions and acts" (Bachelard, 1964).

Bachelard handles the myth of Prometheus as interpreted in mythology; a harbinger of knowledge. The Prometheus complex has been mentioned by Crehan in *Blake in Context*. He has applied the same complex to *The Tyger*, a novel idea. He argues:

Prometheus, stealer of heaven's fire, who brought culture to mankind and suffered for his deed (Blake's poem shares the wisdom of the old myths: both are aware that important steps in human advancement can never be obedient and peaceful, but invariably bring danger violence and suffering) (Crehan, 1984:133).

'On what wings dare he aspire', this line has imagery of flight which underscores the persona's aspirations. It can be argued that it is a rhetorical question. The rhetorical question elaborates the conception that Blake is conjuring the conventional idea that nature, like a work of art, must in some way contain a reflection of its creator. These two lines are replete with images of fire; at the same time, the poet is depicting the ferociousness of the tyger. The tyger is especially associated with the term 'experience'. The tyger, the lamb, and the skies are part of nature. Nature to the Romantics was not a machine, but something alive: nature had a soul. Sarvan and Crehan note that: "*Here we are close to pantheism, that is, the identification of God with the universe; God is all things, including nature*" (Sarvan and Crehan, 1986).

Blake was a visionary poet; the *Tyger* is rich in deep symbolism. The tyger can be compared to the element of fire if analysed symbolically. These two lines symbolise revolution, a dynamic change. Mythologically, Prometheus stole the fire from the gods, fire is a symbol of knowledge too. It can be said that these two lines depict the human thirst for knowledge. Bachelard argues in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* that:

We propose, then, to place together under the name of the Prometheus Complex all those tendencies which impel us to know as much as our fathers, more than our fathers, as much as our teachers, more than our teachers. ....If pure intellectuality is exceptional, it is nonetheless very characteristic of specifically human evolution. The Prometheus complex is the Oedipus complex of the life of the intellect (Bachelard, 1964).

Like the Oedipus complex, the Prometheus complex represents a fundamentally ambivalent attitude. The poem, *The Tyger* underscores this ambivalence beautifully. 'Seize the fire' is suggestive of the human endeavor to become a Prometheus. The search for the new knowledge can be equated to the element of fire. Human beings

have been striving for new vistas of knowledge for ages. Hence, one can decipher the Prometheus complex in these lines. This poem also symbolises changing times. A violent, predatory nature is idolised in these two lines. Fire is an element that is quite volatile and hard to control. The following lines in the poem envision the same aspect of the element of fire that a blacksmith uses and controls:

*What the hammer? What the chain?*

*In what furnace was thy brain?*

*What the anvil? What dread grasp*

*Dare its deadly terrors clasp?*

(Lines 13-16)

The reverberation of the hammer (of a blacksmith) can be heard through the language of William Blake. According to Bachelard, 'reverie' or conscious imagining is complete and written down and one can perceive the material element or poetic element of the poet. Lines 13-16 from the poem 'The Tyger' represent the 'Novalis complex'. Bachelard says:

The Novalis complex is characterised by a consciousness of inner heat which always takes precedence over a purely visual knowledge of light. It is based upon satisfaction of the thermal sense and deep-seated consciousness of calorific happiness (Bachelard, 1964).

As stated above, heat is a property, a possession, and must be guarded judiciously and only given as a gift to a selected being who respects it. The blacksmith knows fire and he knows how it is going to penetrate. He knows how to go to the interior of things. Blake's fire has the depth to penetrate deep and does not play on the surface. It can be noted down that Blake's poem shows him as the poet of the ultra-living element of 'fire'. Bachelard postulates in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* that:

As soon as [the alchemist] has finished one distillation ....immediately starts the distillation anew, again mixing dead matter with the elixir, the pure with the impure, so that the elixir learns it was to liberate itself from its soil....In alchemy we are not faced with intellectual patience, but we are within the very action of moral patience, which searches for the impurities of a consciousness (Bachelard, 1964).

This figure of the alchemist as the educator of the matter along with the "reader as the alchemist" which traverses Bachelard's work, brings us to Bachelard's key notion of *reading as the education of "the imaginary mass that we are"* (Bachelard, 1964). When

we read the poem *The Tyger*, the imagery of this work takes us toward the element of 'Fire'. The word '*furnace*' is the image of a great fire. He argues:

Fire is a morally charged matter that is constantly becoming manifest through the images produced and reified by ourselves and our culture, as well as through our most intimate responses to others, to nature, or poetic imagery in solitary reverie (Bachelard, 1964).

When we read the poem *The Tyger*, we find the imagery of fire which comes out quite strongly. Blake manifests the element of 'Fire' quite masterfully in this poem. Hence, Bachelard's notion or theory of imagination that the author uses to show his poetic element in his work can be seen in Blake's work. Blake has shown his poetic element to be the element of 'Fire' since he uses images of fire throughout the poem such as 'fire', 'the anvil' of the ironsmith, and 'burning bright'. The central subject of the poem under discussion is the tyger which is the symbol of fire; also in his illustration, these stems, tendrils, and leaves often resemble fire.

### **5.2 Analysis of Selected Parts of *The Book of Urizen* a Poem by Blake,**

Fire in Blake has many profound associations; it can be said that it is the supreme element in his works. He sees opposites in everything as a dialectical thinker and writer, so fire with its Biblical aspects is both good and bad. *The Book of Urizen* (1794) is a prime example of the dialectics of good and evil which is manifested through the element of fire. The book takes its name from the character Urizen in Blake's mythology. The book describes Urizen as the primeval priest. Blake describes Urizen as the creator of men as shown in the poem below:

*I have sought for a joy without pain,  
For a solid without fluctuation  
Why will you die O Eternals?  
Why live in unquenchable burnings?*  
(Lines 10-14, Urizen)

Blake's *The Tyger* is replete with examples of fire in the Bachelardian sense. There is a dialectic of good and evil, but *Urizen* belongs to the dark side. Bloom (1961) says "*Urizen shows this inward torment that will finally result in the appearance of the phenomenal world of experience, the universe of Newton and natural religion*". "*I have sought for a joy without pain*" is emblematic of unshakeable monotony which is impossible. Bachelard (1964) argues that in the case of Urizen, "*Fire smolders in a*

*soul more surely than it does under ashes*" shows 'unquenchable burnings' which smolders in his soul. This entails that Urizen the dreamer is ready for the sacrifice.

*First I fought with the fire, consum'd  
Inwards, into a deep world within:  
A void immense, wild dark & deep,  
Where nothing was: Nature's wide womb*  
(Lines 11-15)

Urizen is all consumed by the internal fire. "Here I am' Envelop me in rivers of burning lava, clasp me in your arms of fire as a lover clasps his bride"( Bachelard, 1964). The inner combustion is taking the protagonist towards his doom, 'A void immense, wild dark & deep'. Bachelard (1964) shows that the reverie by fire drives Urizen to negative mental space, "Say farewell to the life of men and follow me into the life of phantoms." One aspect of fire in Blake is that it burns away the corrupt, narrow, and oppressive world and opens an infinite world of visionary plenitude. These lines portray the dark side of the human mind in the fallen world. The images in the lines above point towards the poetic element of fire. Urizen is portraying the fallen world as shown in the poem below:

*Rage, fury, intense indignation  
In cataracts of fire blood & gall  
In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:  
And enormous form of energy;  
All the seven deadly sins of the soul*  
(The Book of Urizen, Chap: III Lines 44-48)

The poem 'Urizen' rejects a physically ordered narrative, and the poem is constructed to dramatise the fragmentation of the fall which the poem describes. "*The limits of a fallen understanding are exposed by the poem's form as it seeks to, through a variety of perspectives and approaches, to re-constitute vision*" (Mollyanne Marks, 1975). These lines are full of chaos, the positive energy of fire is absent; the scene is bleak and full of purgatory fire. Blake's *The Tyger* heralds a new world through the revolutionary element of fire, on the contrary *Urizen* is a tale of the dark side of the human psyche; hence it has images such as 'cataracts of fire blood & gall'. Urizen's earth is full of didactic pictures of the fallen world. Bachelard says,

In the heart of the fire, death is no longer death. Thus, a reverie by the fireside, when the flame twists the frail birch branches, is sufficient to

evoke the volcano and the funeral pyre. The bit of straw which flies away with the smoke is sufficient to urge us forward to meet our destiny. What better proof is there that the contemplation of fire brings us back to the very origins of philosophic thought? If fire, which after all, is quite an exceptional and rare phenomenon, was taken to be a constituent element of the Universe, is it not because it is an element of human thought, the prime element of reverie? (Bachelard, 1964).

Lines 44 to 48 are a perfect example of the reverie by fire or imagination activated by the element of fire. Urizen embraces fire with open arms. Blakean imagery proves that reverie by fire is most attractive; it can entice someone towards self-immolation. 'In a whirlwind of sulphurous energy' shows the dominance of the element of fire and its deadly attraction. Perhaps, fire is an extremely attractive poetic element hence it can drive someone toward mental death. Which is obvious in these lines. Urizen has the 'Empedocles Complex', which drives him towards his doom. Bachelard, 1964) says, "At times it is before an immense fire of live coals that the soul feels itself affected by the Empedocles complex." The images in the poem 'Urizen' prove that the character Urizen suffers from Empedocles Complex. This very special and yet very general kind of reverie leads to a true complex in which are united the love and the respect for fire, the instinct for living, and the instinct for dying. To save time one could call it the 'Empedocles Complex' (Bachelard, 1964).

### **5.3 Analysis of the selected part of *The Four Zoas* by William Blake**

The poem 'The Four Zoas' the torments of Love and Jealousy in the death and judgement of Albion the Ancient Man was written in 1797. This study analyses selected lines from this poem that show the element of fire. It is a prophetic work, which consists of nine books, referred to as 'nights'. The four Zoas are Urthona, Urizen, Lovah, and Thamas; the work *The Four Zoas* outline the interactions of the Zoas, their fallen forms, and their emanations. Los plays an important role in Blake's mythology. Los is the embodiment of human creativity and inspiration and is described as a smith beating with his hammer.

*In terrors Los shrunk from the task. His great hammer  
Fell from his hand his fires hid their strong limbs in smoke  
For the noises ruinous hurtlings & clashings & groans  
The immortal endur'd tho bound in a deadly sleep*

( Lines from *The Four Zoas*, Blake)

Los is an ever-changing character in *The Four Zoas*; Los furthermore can sound like a loss. It represents a lost world. Quite significant images of fire are at the centre of the lines above, there is chaos everywhere. The world of Los is bleak as portrayed in these lines; Blake uses images as a vehicle for conveying broad thematic statements within the poem. William Blake dealt with contraries in his works. Since this paper applies the Bachelardian poetics of fire to these works, it will emphasise that. There is a juxtaposition of 'fire' and 'smoke' is a depiction of life and death, the moment fire goes out the life force ebbs out. Bachelard argues,

Thus, to lose flesh, marrow, juice, and fluid is of little importance. To lose the fire, the seminal fire, that is the great sacrifice. This sacrifice alone can engender life. One can see, moreover, how easily the unquestioned value of fire can be established (Bachelard, 1964).

As can be seen through the images of these lines the persona has lost all his powers because his fire is gone. Though an immortal, he has lost all his powers. Blake's images are dominated by the element of fire.

#### **5.4 Analysis of *Brush-Fire* by Tchicaya U Tam'si**

Tchicaya U Tam'si (1931-1988), a Francophone, African poet from People's Republic of Congo, was a prolific writer. He studied in Orleans and Paris (France). His poetry exhibits some influence from Césaire but seems to have distinctive Congolese passion and intensity. Tchicaya's major poetic works such as *Bad Blood* (1955), *Epitome* (1962), *Selected Poems* (1970), and *The Inner Failure* (1977) established him as a major francophone poet. His verse focused on African culture and nature. Britannica states:

His poetry relates, through rich and varied imagery, the broken heritage of the African present and the roles of the Roman Catholic church, French colonialism, and education. Through fierce and startling symbols repetitively used like devices in oral African literature, Tchicaya expanded his verse to make large statements about life (Britannica).

The imagery of this poem is quite vivid. He offers a series of intense images related to each other by association rather than by any immediately perceptible string of meaning. Tchicaya extensively used African symbols and rhythm to demonstrate an

oral quality in his poems. Below is a poem on *Brush-Fire* which depicts the element of 'fire':

*The fire the river that's to say  
The sea to drink following the sand  
The feet the hands  
Within the heart to love  
This river that lives in me repeoples me  
Only to you I said around the fire  
My race  
It flows here and there a river  
The flames are the looks  
Of those who brood upon it  
I said to you  
My race  
Remembers  
The taste of bronze drunk hot.*  
(Utam'si Tchicaya Lines 1-14)

According to Bachelard, the poetic elements of 'Fire', 'Water', 'Earth', and 'Air' may find representation in the same piece of literary work. Consequently, *Brush-Fire* by U Tam'si shows the same qualities. On the other hand, the river is the symbol of the river of 'fire'. The imagery of this poem and the meaning of this poem establishes U Tam'si as a poet of the element of fire, hence the inclusion in this chapter. When we talk of the Bachelardian approach, Bachelard's phenomenology too comes to the fore during the analysis of poems.

The first impression the poet gives is that he is in a rush to portray his feelings, hence he uses run-on lines or enjambment as a poetic device. Just like the element of fire which spreads so fast or molten lava which flows so quickly. '*The fire the river that's to say*', the poem opens with the image of fire, a river of fire. The title itself '*Brush-Fire*' depicts an image of a bush fire. It can be compared to the great bush fire of Australia and North America which occurred because of global warming. There is a recurring motif of race and negritude in the poem *Brush-Fire*. This poem showcases the devastation of a race and oppression of the colonials, yet, to some extent, Bachelardian poetics can be applied as evidenced in the poem below:

*The fire the river that's to say*



*The sea to drink following the sand*  
*The feet the hands*  
*Within the heart to love*  
*This river that lives in me repeoples me*  
*Only to you I said around the fire.*  
(Utam'si Tchicaya)

The first stanza opens around 'fire' and ends with 'fire'. U Tam'si's images are from nature such as *the sea*, *the sand*, *the river*, and above all *the fire*. Man is the central symbol from which all other natural phenomena like the *sea*, the *river*, and the *sand* revolve and radiate. Irele (2001) argues that the African continent, from which all of this collective is discussed, is a metaphor highlighting the protagonist's perennial quest to connect with his natural habitat which is his roots. Although Utam'si spent his time in France, his work is a portrayal of his roots. African symbols, natural habitat, and angst of his people find expression in the poem *Brush-Fire*. Lines 1 to 5 focus on the meandering river which provides warmth to the persona. In the passage quoted above, the imagery suggested by the 'hands,' the 'feet', and the 'heart', are symbolic of the biblical trinity of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Christ. In the natural state of affairs, the symbolism suggests the captivity to which the oppressed people – particularly the Black race have been subjected to hostile treatment. The 'fire' is revolutionary in the context of this poem and displays the protest of the oppressed race. The imagery suggests heat and fire, the river too seems to be made of swirling fire. Natural elements find an expression in these lines. The poetic elements of 'fire', 'water', and 'earth' find expression in this poem. Significantly, three of the traditional elements suggest the conscious desire of the poet to connect with the elemental forces of the natural world order.

The lines '*this river that lives in me repeoples me, only to you I said around the fire*' show the impact of the reverie by the fire. The river flows through the persona's being and resuscitates him. It highlights the persona's perennial quest to connect with his roots. Irele says:

UTam'si's verse focuses on a wide variety of subject matter, including nature, the indigenous African cultural tradition, and Western colonialism. U Tam'si effectively celebrates not only the place of man in the universal scheme of things but also nature's interrelationships with each other (Irele, 2001).

In keeping with this tradition, U Tam'si portrays similar sentiments in the poem. The word 'love' that 'repeoples' reinstates his love for his country and Africa as a whole. 'The Fire' is the blood running through the persona which signifies the love of the land and the people. Moreover, the freedom struggle of the people is enunciated through the image of 'fire'. He presents the stanza below:

*My race  
It flows here and there a river  
The flames are the looks  
Of those who brood upon it  
I said to you  
My race  
Remembers  
The taste of bronze drunk hot.*

(UTam'si Tchicaya)

The suffering of the race is a paramount issue in this poem where UTam'si portrays the angst of his people. At first, the image of a flowing river is presented, which symbolises the race of the persona. It is grieving and they are running away from the atrocities of the colonials. The word 'brood' too is indicative of the sad mood of the persecuted race. The lines above highlight a reverie by fire and all imagery points towards that. Images such as '*flames*' and '*bronze drunk hot*' express both fascination and terror as they move from the '*flames*' to '*bronze drunk hot*' which is a symbol of bullets. The bullets are a representation of death and the end of a clan. Bachelard's *Empedocles Complex* comes to the fore in these lines, especially in '*bronze drunk hot*'. He says,

Fire is for the man who is contemplating it an example of a sudden change or development and an example of circumstantial development. Less monotonous and less abstract than flowing water, even more, quick to grow and to change than the young bird we watch every day in its nest in the bushes, fire suggests the desire to change, to speed up the passage of time, to bring all of life to its conclusion, to its hereafter. In these circumstances the reverie becomes truly fascinating and dramatic; it magnifies human destiny; it links the small to the great, the hearth of the volcano, the life of a log to the life of a world. The fascinated individual hears the call of the funeral pyre. For him destruction is more

than a change, it is a renewal. This very special and yet very general kind of reverie leads to a true complex in which are united the love and the respect for fire, the instinct for living, and the instinct for dying. To save time one could call it the Empedocles Complex (Bachelard, 1964).

The line '*bronze drunk hot*' depicts *Empedocles Complex* since the persona embraces death willfully. The valour and nationalism of the persona are personified in this line. The instinct to die is evident. The reverie by fire results in *Empedocles Complex*. It can be argued that Bachelardian Poetics finds expression in this poem. The imagery of this poem shows the element of the poem as well as element of the poet.

The conjoined violence of colonials and racism on nature and people is the focus of this poem. In the case of the application of Bachelardian Poetics, there is ample evidence to suggest the reverie by the fire, which gravitates towards a culture complex. The reverie veers from life to death and flames to bullets. This finding is in tandem with what Bachelard (1964:16) says in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, "Expressing both fascination and terror as it moves from the hearth to the volcano, such a reverie joins the instinct for living and the instinct for dying". Bachelard denotes this tendency as the 'Empedocles complex,' after the fifth-century BC Greek philosopher. According to the myth, Empedocles died by throwing himself into the crater of Mount Etna. The imagery of this poem supports this attitude, such as '*the taste of bronze drunk hot*'. The freedom fighters preferred to be killed by bullets for their country, hence, it is a depiction of the 'Empedocles complex'. The freedom fighters were ready to embrace death. The material imagination is evident in this poem where UTam'si shows his element as 'fire'. This poem shows the ambivalent nature of fire according to Bachelard. In the first stanza, it is benevolent, whereas the same element of fire symbolises the funeral pyre. The Bachelardian approach is applicable.

## **6. Conclusion**

The paper has presented the applicability of Bachelard's elemental theory of imagination to different literary works. The article has analysed the poetic element of 'Fire' in four poetic works that include 'The Tyger', 'Urizen', 'The Four Zoas', and 'Brush Fire'. This article establishes that the Bachelardian perspective of fire is present in the four poems that have been analysed. The paper has demonstrated how different poets show their poetic elements which find expression in their language and imagery. Cultural complexes can also be deciphered in the analysed poems. It can also be

concluded that the poetics of fire is symbolic and exists in all four analysed texts. Finally, both formal and material imagination are present in the analysed poetics of fire which establishes the applicability of Bachelardian approach.

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