3.1 Introduction

Edward Kamau Brathwaite is an unusual combination: he is a historian and poet. He is perhaps one of the most celebrated and one of the most discussed poets from the Caribbean Islands. Brathwaite is a classic example of an artist embodying the 'homecoming' vision in his creative work. His 'journey home' has not been an easy one. Indeed it has been a long, tortuous journey at both physical and psychological levels, full of anguish which he underwent as much for himself as for his people. Brathwaite's development shows a familiar pattern: there is at first an awareness of carrying a stigmatized identity, followed by an attempt to erase it by running away from it. Then comes the awareness that the loss of self and a viable identity cannot be made up by running away from one's predicament and setting up a camp elsewhere to live in a sort of make-believe world. The dark night of the soul forces him to undertake a search to fathom his past. That is where the historian in Brathwaite takes over and transports him to Africa from where his people (not just ancestors as the term in such contexts usually implies but his fellow black men also) come. He fathoms the history of Africa before and after 'the middle passage'. He is almost driven to despair when he realizes that Africa of today cannot give him an access to the 'umbilical cord' of the black man tortured through slavery, but out of this very bleak realisation
Brathwaite creates 'a new world' for himself and roots himself there. In Brathwaite the unpromising past, the broken-down present and an uncertain future are simultaneously overcome in a new vision. In acquiring this vision and giving it a concrete sensuous shape, the historian in Brathwaite is assisted by the intuitive perception of the poet in him and the poet in turn, is strengthened by the contemplative, objective examination of the past by the historian. As a result, Brathwaite achieves a rare vision of home for himself and his fellow black men. This is the justification for according to Brathwaite's trilogy "Arrivants" the status of a modern epic and for regarding Brathwaite an epic poet.

3.2 A Biographical Sketch

Edward Kamau Brathwaite was born in Bridgetown, Barbados, an Eastern Caribbean Island on 11th May, 1930. He completed his education till the sixth form from Harrison College, studied History and English on his own, won the island scholarship and proceeded to Cambridge University in 1950, where he read History till 1953. When after finishing his studies it came to finding a job, the choice was 'anywhere in the whole world except for the West Indies'. In this respect, Brathwaite was not different from many other West Indian artists and scholars. His fears and his reasons for rejection of the West Indies were similar to Naipaul's. He wrote, accepting his rootlessness:
For me, too, child and scion of this time, there was no going back. Accepting any rootlessness, I applied for work in London, Cambridge, Ceylon, New Delhi, Cairo, Kano, Khartoum, Sierra Leone, Carcassone, a monastery in Jerusalem. I was a West Indian, roofless man of the world. I could go, belong, anywhere on the world wide globe. I ended up in a village in Ghana. It was my beginning.

He worked as an educational officer for the Ministry of Education in Ghana between 1955 and 1962. Ghana, a newly independent African nation, had then become a symbol of hope and solace which the Africans scattered all over the world greatly needed. There, Brathwaite had the opportunity to explore his roots. It was in Ghana that Brathwaite realized that a spiritual actualization of Africa was a very important and necessary phase in the movement towards wholeness and self-identification of the Afro-Caribbean and the Afro-American man.

Brathwaite returned to the West Indies in 1962 and joined the University of West Indies at St. Lucia as a tutor in extra-mural studies. He was appointed a lecturer in history in Mona Jamaica in 1963. Rights of Passage, an anthology of poems forming the first part of The Arrivants, took a definite shape between June and September 1964. In 1965 Brathwaite took a research scholarship to the University of Sussex. During this period, he got half of the Masks ready for publication. The first edition of Rights of Passage was brought out by Oxford University Press in January, 1967. Masks was published in April, 1968 and Islands in 1969 by the same publishers. His doctoral thesis at the University of Sussex titled 'The Development of
Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820 was published under the same title by Clarendon Press in 1971. Subsequently he has published five more anthologies of poems. Three of these volumes - Other Exiles 1975, Black and Blues 1976, and The Mother Poem 1977 form a second trilogy of his poetic vision. The Mother Poem is a tribute to Barbados, the island where he was born. He also wrote numerous reviews and essays and a couple of plays during his stay in Ghana but it must be stated that Brathwaite, the poet, and Brathwaite, the Historian-thinker, are not only inseparable but as has been already pointed out, are two aspects of the same personality drawing strength and inspiration from each other. In order to understand the growth of the poet it would be essential to know what he said about the other West Indian artists, about the role of poetry and literature in the lives of his people and about the relevance of such cultural forms as jazz, much before he became a poet in his own right.

3.3 The Making of the Maker

The appearance of Brathwaite’s three anthologies in quick succession established him so firmly as a superb craftsman with an extraordinary vision that to trace the gradual development has become an irrelevant act to many. But the fact remains that this apparently sudden flowering of his imagination is not so sudden after all. His first poem 'Shadow Suite' was published in 1950 (Bim, III, No.2). Between 1950 when he first went to England and 1962 when he came back to the Caribbean he published many short lyrics
while he was a student in Cambridge University Journal and about fifteen long poems in 'BIM', 'Caribbean Quarterly' and 'Kyk-Over-Al', most of which were organised along the lines of musical suites each with four to eight movements. 'Shadow Suite' had eight movements. 'The Theme: A Calypso:' (Caribbean Quarterly IV, Nos. 3 & 4, March-June 1956 pp 246-249) was an extended suite of eight thematically related movements. 'Six Poems' (Kyk-Over-Al IX, No.27, Dec, 1960 pp 83-86) were six lyrics on jazz themes written with particular musicians and particular passages of music by them in mind. They appeared with a few changes as 'Jazz Portraits' in the new cyclostyled publication from Jamaica in 1973. These poems not only suggest his long apprenticeship but reveal the directions his poetry was to take in the mid-60's. The most important is the relationship between his poetry and jazz which is at the core of the poetic experience which The Arrivants offers.

The fascination jazz has for Brathwaite needs some exploration. Even as a schoolboy he loved jazz. He and a group of Upper Sixth students of Harrison College even tried to pioneer a radio programme in jazz in the late 40's. He sold the idea of featuring the 'real dread stuff' i.e. the iconoclastic sounds of the 'avant gardists' to Michael Laing of Barbados Rediffusion and the serialised programme was on. (It, however, could not go beyond the second and died a premature death.)

The elite raised their eyebrows at the idea of the
Harrison boys playing jazz. 'The elite instinct was to destroy through laughter’(2) as Brathwaite puts it. But his entry into literary adulthood not only survived this disapproval but bloomed.

Between 1950 and 1962 Brathwaite also emerged as one of the first West-Indian critics with significant and consistent contributions. During his years in Africa, he seemed to have developed a deep and growing critical interest in the new literature of the islands. As a reviewer and essayist he wrote on George Lamming, V.S.Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris and others. He also examined broad trends and currents in the West-Indian literature. His essays - 'Sir Galahad and the Islands’, 'The New West-Indian Novelists’ (in two parts), ‘Roots: Commentary on West-Indian Writers’ - all appearing in BIM Nos 25, 31, 32 and 37 respectively are based on the themes of rootlessness, exile, alienation, movement and journey on the one hand and those of roots, 'folk' values, community, communion and tradition on the other. These were the themes which became his major concern in later poetry. His views on poetry, artists and the relationship between the artist and the community had begun to take a definite shape as can be discerned from what he said about other writers and particularly Lamming, whom he greatly admired. Lamming’s essay ‘The Negro Writer and His World’ discusses the problem of the vast difference that existed between the African, the Afro-West-Indian and the Afro-American. Lamming had observed that politics was the only ground for a mutual
Negro sympathy. But instead of exploring this problem more carefully, Lamming had hastened to maintain that the Negro was undergoing just another version of the universal predicament of contemporary man. According to Lamming, the artist's first loyalty was to the 'self' revealed after descent into the private desolation of the soul, and after struggle to rescue experience from inner chaos and invest it with verbal shape. (3) But by 1960, Brathwaite had come to feel that Lamming had made too deep a descent into his private silence to preserve a healthy balance between responsibility to 'self' and 'society'. So he observed in the second part of The New West-Indian Novelists that after having read the later novels like The Immigrants and Of Age and Innocence even his first novel, In the Castle of My Skin had for its author a deeper and more personal significance. (4) It goes without saying that Brathwaite viewed Lamming's later novels as case histories of Lamming's personal malaise and therefore of much less significance than the malaise from which the black man as a whole suffered.

To Brathwaite the issue of the artist's relationship to his world was extremely vital. Lamming gave supreme importance to the honesty of self-exploration. Social commitment was only a by-product of this fundamental concern with self-definition. Brathwaite, on the contrary, was beginning to posit a much more affirmative and direct commitment to public and social issues and to the concrete
solid world of facts, objects and events.

Many of the above mentioned observations may not be his complete appraisal of the other West Indian writers' works. They are, however, extremely useful for a better understanding of his own works. One can clearly see how the trilogy moves from the pre-occupation with politics and society in *Rights of Passage* towards a greater measure of introspection in *Masks* as well as in *Islands*. There is also the constant attempt to reconcile the individual with society; the solo with the chorus; and the alienated travelling consciousness with firm anchorage and harbour in acknowledged roots.

Another long essay of Brathwaite's appeared in 1963, a year after his return to the West Indies. It is titled 'Roots'. Here he went on to say, for the first time that an anthropological dimension lay beneath the phenomenon of rootlessness and restlessness among the Afro Caribbean people.

I tried to point out what to me was a subtle but telling dichotomy in the West Indian creative spirit; in which the writers at home wrote of their islands on the one hand, but wished for exile (in spirit of in fact) on the other, and where the writers in exile embraced and recoiled from their foreign status in the same said gesture as it were.(5)

Here Brathwaite defines the black diaspora in terms of the archetypal African experience of movement.

3.4 **A Preamble to the Arrivants**

This takes us to his highly acclaimed trilogy *Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* published in 1973 in the
first collected edition. Gordon Rohlehr wrote in his appraisal of the work, 'Together Rights of Passage, Masks and Islands are the monumental epic of a race, a kind of Aeneid or Iliad for Black people.' (6) The trilogy has superb architectural design. Each of these volumes is structured in such a way that it is thematically self-sufficient but offers a 'total experience' if read along with the remaining two volumes. Together, these poems form a powerful imaginative reconstruct of the migrations of the black people over the span of a thousand years, that is, from the collapse of the medieval African empires around the 11th Century till the present day. It is a re-enactment not only of the physical but also the psycho-spiritual journey necessitated by the problems of the black diaspora through which Brathwaite ultimately finds the solution to the problem of rootlessness and lack of identity, which he and his own people face. The main personae in the trilogy are identifiable as the collective consciousness of the archetypal Caribbean man who according to Velma Pollard:

moves through the various phases of identification and non-identification with the 'manscape' as he travels to the United States and to Europe, to Africa and back to the Caribbean Islands. (7)

Brathwaite's vision, however, seems to be even more comprehensive. The Collective Black Consciousness is omnipresent and is able to identify with the various personae, through whom the past moments of history (which have become a historical memory of sorts for the Black
people) are brought back to life. This consciousness incorporates within it the Afro-American and the Afro-Caribbean experience. In fact, Brathwaite's subtitle to the trilogy 'The New World Trilogy' is eloquent of his accommodating imagination. Again, coming to terms with this trilogy or at least to some seminal parts of it would be impossible without a deep understanding of the Afro-American music and literature right from the spirituals to be-bop and from Harriet Beecher's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the novels and autobiographies of Mais, Ellison and other writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Gordon Rohlehr has correctly observed in his *Pathfinder,*

Brathwaite in his trilogy seeks to do in poetry what Ralph Ellison has done in the novel to depict the movement of Black people from invisibility to visibility, from obscurity of Tom to the clarity of Ogun, whose mask is the recreated image of Black history and rebellion. (8)

*The Arrivants* like Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* is about the progress and process of the African 'soul' in the New World. This is seen as a world movement though Brathwaite is ultimately concerned with the Caribbean aspect of it, which is the one he knows best. The trilogy, again, is more concerned with the process than the protest; with trial and error and inner growth, a realization of dimension within the psyche of the colonized person, a widening of his sense of the possibility rather than with complaint against the colonizer. The whole trilogy is indeed a spiritual quest for identity and also a dramatic
enactment of the creation of the ethos with which to identify.

Why did Brathwaite choose verse as the medium of expression for his vision, when Ralph Ellison and others have been effective in prose fiction? It may appear to some conventional theoreticians of 'the novel' that poetry may not have the concrete immediacy that the narrative fiction—particularly the kind of fiction that Ralph Ellison or James Baldwin wrote. But it is to be noted here that the choice of the poetic medium has not at all deprived Brathwaite of the possibilities of the novel. On the contrary it has helped him to intensify and dramatize the whole experience. Brathwaite is certainly an intensely lyrical poet and the lyrics come together to form a narrative on epic scale. The epic dimension of the trilogy offers tremendous strength and affirmation to Brathwaite's act of 'homecoming' at the end of his physical psycho-spiritual journey which he undergoes on behalf of his people who lived through centuries and died as 'rootless, traditionless, invisible men'.

Brathwaite has crowded the world of The Arrivants with people and events ranging from historical figures to fictitious ones over a span of hundreds of years. There are rich allusions rather than direct and clear cut references most of the times. This device of using the allusion rather than the concrete reference helps him to mythologize—and in the process to make universal—his vision. He knows the power of sounds and uses it most creatively to generate a sense of movement from place to place and from one point in
time to another. The whole trilogy resounds with different voices of different people through different periods - living simultaneously as it were, through its pages.

Creolisation - amalgamation of the white man's culture and the 'so-called' native culture - was an important aspect from the point of view of the birth of West Indians' own 'tradition' on the islands. (Ashis Nandy would call it internalization of the English culture) (9) The kind of English used for creative purposes by the Caribbeans was termed 'nation language' by Brathwaite. He used the term to replace the term 'West Indian dialect'. He had a number of objections to the term 'dialect'. In the first place the term had been bandied about for a very long time. In the absence of the awareness that modern sociolinguistics had brought about regarding the primacy and autonomy of the term 'dialect', it carried pejorative overtones. It was the language used when you wanted to make fun of someone - usually caricatures spoke in a dialect. It came from the plantation times when Black people's dignity was diminished through fixing an inferior status on their language.

It is far from surprising that the practice and the notions that went with it had their origin in an earlier phase of the black man's existence. Brathwaite quoted Dante, another epic poet, as the forerunner of this entire movement of 'nation language'. In his 'De Vulgari Eloquentia' Dante had insisted upon the recognition of Tuscan vernacular as the national language. Indeed Dante's
achievement signals the process whereby the vernaculars in Europe were to acquire dignity and power of expression and not be under the shadow of Latin. The same process is evinced in the medieval India where a saint Poet like Dnyaneshwar writing his magnum opus in Marathi — a vernacular held in low esteem by the Sanskrit Pandits — imparted to it and to the people who spoke it a new dimension in selfhood. Brathwaite thought that 'oral literature' ('orature' as he called it), was Africa's oldest form of 'auriture'. According to Brathwaite one seminal aspect of 'nation language' is its orality. It is based as much on sound as song. The noise that it makes is a part of what he termed as 'total expression' as opposed to reading, which is an isolated, individualistic expression. The oral tradition makes demands not only on the artist but also on the audience, to make the communication and the sense of community complete. Caribbean English as an alternative to English is in fact an alternative to the language that Prospero offers. (10)

Brathwaite's firm belief in the significance of sound of the word rather than its written form led him to trace the connections between native musical structures and the native language. The relationship between jazz and poetry can be prominently traced in The Arrivants. The fusion of poetry, dialect, music and dance in the poem suggests the rich complexity of Brathwaite's creative genius.
3.5 The Arrivants

The three volumes of the trilogy *The Arrivants* - an epic recording Brathwaite's own journey from exile to homecoming - are more or less of the same size. The sections or the 'movements' (to borrow the phrase from jazz music, which is so close to Brathwaite's heart) in each one of them are, however, different in number. *The Rights of Passage* has four, *The Masks* has six and *The Islands* has five. Both *The Rights of Passage* and *The Islands* are set in the Caribbeans whereas *The Masks* is set in Africa.

In *The Rights of Passage* Brathwaite evokes with acrobatic agility the movements of the Black people's dispossession of their homeland, as they try to find footing in the New World and beyond. This communal quest finds expression in the number of parts the Negro is forced into playing, a series of false 'masks' from knock-about adventurer, down-and-out vagrant, sleep-around sexual athlete to the ubiquitous stay-at-home, Uncle Tom, the character who is the end product of these miscellaneous poses and roles. Thoroughly disillusioned he finds himself at a point where his quest originally began.

In *Masks* Brathwaite goes beyond that point in history and goes to Africa, the place of his race's origin and reconstructs his individual -cum- communal history through a re-enactment of the entire scenario which led to his race's subjugation. In so doing Brathwaite retraces the steps of his ancestors in their nomadic movement to the sea where they encountered the slave traders.
The structure of *Masks* is a contrary but mutually dependent two-way movement. As the poet representing Black consciousness moves upwards from the coast in search of the village of his 'symbolic' origin, his own ancestors move downwards from the forest to meet him. Their paths cross at several points of intersection. This encounter convinces the poet that his destined path lies back to the Caribbeans where he must 'create' his new roots and also the soil of ethos in which his identity will take root.

In *Islands* he obeys this call by returning to the West Indies where he like 'Vishwakarma', the architect of the gods in Hindu mythology, recreates Barbados of his days of youth with tender, loving touches. His earlier sense of shame, failure, sterility is revoked only to be firmly and finally purged. He redeems the centuries old sufferings of the Black diaspora by a dramatic re-enactment of it and finally takes off with a newly awakened healthy sense of tradition and ethos which is 'The West Indian ethos'.

The epic trilogy involves two journeys to the West Indies on the part of the poet - the representative Black consciousness - or rather, the New World consciousness - the first at the beginning of 'the slave trade' when the Black people first became dispossessed of their roots, their ambience, their language, their religion and their dignity. The desperate attempts of these people to find identity are revoked in *Rights of Passage*. At the end of it when 'the nigger's home' is not found, a sad and fiery question is
hurled at the reader, where then is The Nigger’s home? In an answer to it the Black consciousness – or the ‘Omowale’ – undertakes a journey to Africa and the place of his origin in search of the umbilical cord which is not found. So the ‘Omowale’ (the stranger) as the spirit is named getting his final negative message from destiny returns to the West Indies with a determination that he will be ‘the creator’ of his own world. The Islands begins with this second journey when the search for ‘roots’ is over. The tremendous ‘positive’ effort of creation of ‘life’ and tradition is on. The creation is complete at the end of Islands when with ‘Veve’, the ritual chalk pattern (drawing) – an integral part of the voudoun worship which starts with ‘the possession’. The possessed griot/seer/diviner starts his ‘creation’. The direct evidence of this creativity is the very last poem ‘Jou’vert’ (a welcome day celebration). The newly created positive attitude to the West Indies is being celebrated and truly enough the poem starts with ‘so’ which is in stark contrast with the end of The Rights of Passage where the exhausted and constantly wandering spirit of the New World man says in anguish, where then is the nigger’s home?

3.6 Rights of Passage

A close analysis of the key poems from each volume is absolutely indispensable to bring out the nature of the phenomenal task that the poet has undertaken, and to make explicit the expanse and the texture of the poems and to
realize the extent of Brathwaite's achievement.

Gordon Rohlehr describes Rights of Passage in terms of jazz and calls it a long, varied and uneven suit behind each movement of which there is the poet's shifting consciousness, wandering like a Black Tiresias understanding and foresuffering all, and finally merging into his dry melancholy blues.(11)

Brathwaite states in his own notes of Argo recording of his performance of Rights of Passage:

The persona Tom also undergoes a series of transformations - from ancestor to a slave to a prophet to Uncle Tom and finally into our image of the past out of which the future springs.(12)

3.6.1 Work Song and Blues

Brathwaite begins the first phase of his 'movement' to use a term from jazz with 'Prelude' which recreates with 'aural' impressions the first westward journey of the collective spirit symbolically named 'Tom'. It represents the migrations of the Black people across the Sahara from Egypt to the West Coast of Africa which inevitably trapped them into the Atlantic slave trade. Brathwaite's main concern here is African in 'The New World' from the early days of slavery to the nineteen fifties.

Like a musical overture the poem states in very brave and skeletal forms the themes that will be developed throughout the trilogy. The very first line Drum Skin: Whiplash has overtones of the days of slavery though the image of the whiplash is used here to suggest the cutting
and scalding heat of the sun while travelling through the
desert. The remaining lines follow with a very slow
movement

I sing
I shout
I groan
I dream
about...... (4)

and create a proper mood for the remaining poem richly
suggestive of a slow, painful journey over a rocky
wilderness, each short line recreating the slow, painful
plodding. This desert symbolises both the Sahara which the
African migrants had to traverse as well as 'the spiritual
aridity' of the deracinated man of 'The New World'.

The camels wrecked in their own shit resurrect
butterflies which dance like captives forced into compulsive
act of 'existing'. The imagery throughout the poem is full
of death, decay, aridity, rocks, desert and fire. Dry river
beds are valleys of death. 'Dew falls in the evening' and
'blackbirds sing' but they sing

On the tree
stump ravished
with fire
ruined with its
own glory. (5)

New villages are to be built. Spittle (used in African
tradition as a blessing) will have to be mixed with dirt,
dung and sweat. Calling the members of the villages in Ga,
Kano Bamako (13) the poet expresses a flicker of hope, when
he says that 'walled cities will arise' only to realise that
population of flies will arise / from cattle towns:
- milk curdles in udder, in nipple, in mouth
Death will attack again in 'hot harmattan'.
But rains come again, bringing new hope

The trees are
cool, here
leaves are
green, there
burns the dream
of a fountain,
garden of odours,
soft alleyways.  (6-7)

A prayer follows, asking for benediction

Grant, God,
a clear release from thieves,
from robbers and from those that plot
and poison while they dip
into our dish.
Grant, too, warm fires, good
wives and grateful children  (7)

However, 'the consciousness' that has suffered too long
is full of doubt once more and says.
But the too warm fire flames  (7)

The poem ends with

'Flame burns the village down'  (8)
- on a distinct note of a possibility of negation.

The next poem 'The New World A 'Coming' presents the
arrival of the New World to the West Coast in Africa which
precedes the arrival of the Africans to the New World. The
highly allusive title is the same as Duke Ellington's 1943
composition (a suite again) based on Black history, cultural
experience etc.

The poem begins emphasizing the hapless, leaderless and
heroless wanderers meeting 'the white man' with fire arms.
'Our' firm fleshed, flame warm, fly bitten warriors fell.
Even before they could savour the joy of having reached the
end of their long, arduous journey they had to experience the shock of shameful captivity. With a quick reconstruct - suggesting the recapitulation of the fortuitous journey through hills, vales, deserts and forest the collective consciousness mourns the condition of the Black, and with a sweep in time conjoins the original shock of helplessness with the attempts of the West Indian slave rebel heroes as well as African chieftains - who also were frustrated. In the same breath, 'the spirit' thinks of bridling and hanging of 'Asantewa'.

There is no 'saviour' left. At this stage the fire imagery becomes dominant in the poem.

    And the fire, our fire, fashioning locks
    rocks darker than iron (10)

betrays them once more.

    It falls walls, fashions
    these fire-locks darker than iron (11)

Thus carrying the 'branded shame' and chained, the captives walk in a new 'clinked silence of iron'.

The moment of departure is full of pain and anguish. The spirit describes it with hindsight / foresight. The green, soft, wet, peaceful farms of Aburi, Akwamu (a town in Akwapan overlooking ga plains near the West Coast of Ghana) dance before the eyes of the departing souls, which then meet with the hard, cold men carrying them while the slaves' hearts are heavy with turmoil and a deep sense of shame.

The blood of the black would soon be mixed with the white men's passion in sport and though full of
indifference and anger, (following the course of nature) it will create new soils, new souls and new ancestors; - but it will have lost its 'freedom'. The pride of the ancestors, and the race will now be mixed with wind and water, flesh and flies and most essentially with whips and fixed fear of pain in the 'chained and welcoming port'. The situation is wrought with intense irony.

'Tom', the poem that follows takes the reader to the New World and to the lives the Blacks try to shape there. The earlier poem has stated, that 'new ancestors' would be created. 'Tom' is the new ancestor and he is the 'persona' incorporating the black experience in Rights of Passage. The choice of Tom is quite deliberate. Tom was a historical personality. And again he is suitable for representing the state of mind Brathwaite wants to project in Rights of Passage - namely Black negativity, self doubt, lack of faith in future and the habit of moving and wandering in search of justice. A child of a White father and a Black mother he is a prototype obviously patterned on Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1850's). Though interpreted as a coward today, he is a man of true moral strength. He does not believe in striking a blow even for his own freedom. On the contrary, he advocates active refusal to commit a sin. Once he embraces Christianity he behaves like a true Christian.

Gordon Rohlehr suggests in Pathfinder that Brathwaite may have patterned his poetic persona on the prototype but actually he sees him 'not so much as a person as the
beginning of a process'. In him one finds many 'types' fused. The words 'father/ founder/ flounderer' are reminiscent of Ralph Ellison's description of Booker T. Washington in his Invisible Man (15) 'the college Founder, the cold Father Symbol'.

Tom represents certain states of mind which have been described at length by WEB Du Bois in Black Reconstruction in America and which can be summarised as 'black negativity' etc. Of course, Tom's is not the only voice one hears in the book as that would be delimiting the presentation of the Black psyche to only one aspect. Brathwaite also allows Tom a fair degree of self-knowledge and dignity. Tom is an important figure because Brathwaite seeks through amalgamation of historiography and mythology to depict the movement of the Black people from the invisibility of Tom (the white world's failure to recognize who he is) to the clarity of Ogun, whom one meets in Islands.

With 'Tom' comes the first reference to 'blues', the only solace that the slaves found in their misery. It became a symbol of 'pride' during Harlem renaissance. It is used by Brathwaite throughout the trilogy as a positive aspect of 'The New World culture' and a rich heritage that establishes creative genius of the Black man.

The cotton fields still remind Tom of the cassava roots and along with them of the entire agricultural experience in his homeland which has become a distant dream - which the yellow waves connecting the two continents bring to the shore. He requests the same shore to keep that dream
untarnished by drowning the screams of agonized slaves. The poem is full of words like 'screams', 'lashed' etc., which are constant reminders of 'the suffering'. Tom feels that the Afro-Americans have forgotten the ritual dances and many other things. Yet they carry the racial memory and dare to remember the glory of Africa celebrated vividly in the long lined stanza which creates a pleasantly soothing effect in contrast with the rest of the poem which is composed in short lines. Tom begs for amnesia because he does not want anything that would remind him of his children - the future generations of Afro-Americans who are 'lost' to him as they neither accept Tom as their ancestor nor continue the tradition of 'ancestor worship', an important link between the past and the present. Tom expresses his wish that his children should rise in the path of the morning, run through the fields in the morning sun and see 'God's curved/mourning/calling'. But he knows that this life in harmony with nature is denied to them. He knows that they are taught 'foolishness and uselessness and sorrow'. With a distinct awareness of who he is he calls himself a 'timid father, founder flounderer'. As a father he is weak, as a founder of a race and the first ancestor he lacks 'strength, confidence and achievements'. So he flounders. What has he created as the first man of The New World? Only 'worthless weed and needless seed' (16). He holds his hat in his hand to hide his heart. Yet his heart is full of hope that his children will learn the comprehensive knowledge of Africa,
America and the West Indies. In the very next poem 'All God's chillun' we meet him complaining against his own mockery by his children. What has taken place is quite opposite to the expectations in 'New World A Coming'. They hate 'the hat in hand' Tom and the one roomed God he praises. With rich overtones of the overwhelming pathos of 'the fool' in King Lear he says,

Hey, nuncle!
Wanna see
What God in heaven
brought for me? (17)

Describing the rat infested single room he lives in and the scrawny plot of land he works on - he brings out the irony of fact that

there was a time
we kept
our state on golden stools - remember? (18)

This ransacking the memory is an act pervading Rights of Passage as well as Masks. But what is the point of these memories of the golden past, when even Tom's own children do not respect him? As a father he could have told stories to his children had he been in Africa but even that has become irrelevant in the American fields where the 'roots of love' are destroyed with pain. Here

Boss man makes rule
I am his patient mule (19)

But Tom is also aware that Boss man is 'without pride' and 'full of fear'. He hides his fear 'of fear and darkness' in the whip. He prays to God to hide his heart
from the lips
that spit
from hate
that grips
the sweating flesh
the whips that rip
so wet, sored
so fresh. (19)

The imagery becomes loathsome when Tom describes his barrel bellied children making him a laughing stock. The pain has a double edge. It is the white man who laughs at him and it is the white man that his children imitate as they laugh at their own roots. Tom’s heart has to hold hard not only from the overseer’s rod but from his own children’s sneer.

With tremendously rich overtones from Shakespeare (King Lear and Othello) once more he says

But to hell with this, nuncle!
You fussy black Uncle
Tom...
the crinoline off the white woman,
man; be the black buttin’ ram
that she makes you (20-21)

Finally he asks with resignation

What deep sin
What harsh logic
What shattered glory
guides their story
When release
from further journey? (21)

The journey, however, continues and Tom, 'the New World consciousness', comes to New York, London. The title of the poem 'Didn't He Ramble' is invested with sharp irony. It is the tune played by New Orleans funeral band. The 'I' in the poem speaks for a group and like the 'blues' singer he is speaking about the common anxieties of the era encompassing
the lives of Afro-Americans migrating to New York and the Afro-West Indians to London. He is playing a different role here - that of the actor/musician who is cut off from the agrarian roots. With exquisite skill the years of Harlem renaissance and the depression of 1929 are squeezed into the experience of a single year.

That summer was fine:
newspaper notices
variety acts
what the heart lacked
we supplied with our hips (22)

'That summer' wryly alludes to the years of Harlem renaissance.

But with the winter I knew
I was old. Poor
Tom was cold. (22)

'The winter' refers to 1929 depression. At the end of the first section the ghost voice of Tom says

I died alone, without the benefit of fire. (22)

Tom is still an unaccommodated man. White Paul Whiteman appropriates his jazz music, gets the recognition as the 'King of Jazz'; poor Tom, who created the music and the dance, dies alone. The 'spirit' of Tom indulges in a dream of the south. The south was a real part of the jazz experience. The voice of the persona merges here with that of America's first great jazz poet Langston Hughes.

A soothing, caressing wish-fulfilment dream of the gentle and warm flow of life in the south to the accompaniment of the minstrel's slow guitar is shattered when the agonizing irony of the situation drives home. His children - the generation of the 1930s - are seen in zoot
suits and Black Texan hats. Flashing their false teeth they form fake friendships which turn them into people's choice. They become people's politicians and join the rat race of 'grab all you can and give it to yourselves'.

I who was once your slave
now slay my captive friend (24)

Tom's spirit enjoys the warm comfort of the soil which he could not, while he was alive. Though disappointed in his sons the thought of grandchildren engenders hope in him. The images of 'green' suggestive of life, growth, hope and continuity throughout the trilogy appear.

And I should like to see my children's children;
slender shoots: the growing green reminders
of the seeds I gave (25)

But instantly his heart is filled with apprehension. 'Will they mock my sons; my own sons mocking me?' (p 25)

Once more doubt and fear set in and Tom's ghost voice expresses the apprehension that the mockery of the father and self-mockery - the legacy of the colonial image projection of a Negro as childish, clownish and servile - may continue.

3.6.2 The Spades

The second section of Rights of Passage is titled 'The Spades' and takes us to the second and the third generations of Tom's children in 1920's, '30's and '40's. 'The Spade' an abusive contemptuous term used for the Negros brings out all the sense of shame and inferiority associated with the
Black ghettos of New York.

The scene is totally different from the earlier section. The aggression of the urban Negros is manifest now, bringing to the fore all the frustrations and anger. "The Prelude" to this section - the second prelude in the trilogy - takes us to the 1920s. "Folkways" the next poem - the title of the Lomax collection of American folk music of '30's and '40's covers the scene of those two decades and once more the spirit (Tom) reverts back to the motif of wanderings in 'The Journeys' which, according to Brathwaite, is at the root of the experience of slavery. This poem functions as the third prelude and summarises all the journeys undertaken by the African people from Egypt to the New World. "The Twist" takes the reader to the 1960's through the title reminiscent of the dance conceived by Hank Ballard. "The Wings of Dove" the last poem in this section, introduces the potentially explosive West Indies.

A somewhat detailed analysis of the section would bring out the sweep and the subtlety of the design, rich and comprehensive allusions and the poet's mastery over the sound and the composition.

With "The Prelude" there is a shift in the poetic persona. Tom's children, having denied links with their timid father, find their memories of the past thinned into smoke. They do not have the torturing memories of the whips, nor do they have 'the dreams'. They say,
To hell with Africa
To hell with Europe too

- What they want is just 'bright bold cash'.

'Folkways' is Brathwaite's detached imagination of the transitional generation trapped in its new economic prison. Derek Walcott, a contemporary West Indian poet and now a Nobel Laureate, reads the poem as a lyric and identifies Brathwaite with his persona.(17) But actually the shifts in the personae throughout the trilogy suggest that the poem can be and ought to be read as a 'dramatic monologue'. It is then easy to see that the persona created in the poem need not be identified with the poet himself, just as the speaker in Browning's 'My Last Duchess' is certainly not Browning but a victim of perverted, obsessive and possessive love in whom the poet is intensely interested but with whom there is no question of his identifying himself. Indeed the considerable force that the poem possesses is derived from Brathwaite's successfully maintaining an ironic distance from either self pity or fury. It is worth noting in passing that it is also the method employed by T.S. Eliot in his early poems. Brathwaite is certainly very greatly influenced by T.S. Eliot.

The second section of the poem is a mimetic reproduction with words, sounds and rhythms of the liberating sensation of the train journey to the northern city. The third section, however, culminates in a question
whether there is anybody who has wandered more than the harbourless and landless spade.

Tom's children, perennial wanderers, have themselves been responsible for their frustrations. In the Akan philosophy, which underlies the trilogy, there is no room for tribal amnesia. The child must reclaim the past by remembering his ancestors, the remembered ancestor then works for the well being of the group. This is the only way the past will be redeemed, the present will be made meaningful and the future will bear fruit. Tom's children have chosen to reject their ancestor. They have thus cut themselves off from the sources of vitality and continuity. Whatever solace and meaning they may find in their existence must come through their own efforts.

'The Journeys' gives the feel of the widening diaspora very effectively. It starts with Egypt and Mesopotamia and ends with references to Little Rock, Arkansas of segregationist fame in the 50's, New Orleans, almost Caribbean in its character, and Detroit, the first city of Black music. The next place mentioned is Chicago, famous for its factories, gangsterism and the bloody race riots of 1919. Finally comes New York, the 'Big Apple' and 'The Promised Land' where Brooklyn and Harlem become the new centres of Black Renaissance. Harlem becomes a centre for immense cultural energy and its influence takes Paris by storm. Its writers also shift to Paris in search of better cultural environment. Cesaire, Damas, Leopald Senghor are achieving in poetry what Charlie Parker and Gillespie
achieved in music. Wright, Himes and Baldwin crowd Paris. Parker and ‘be-bop’ conquer Paris the same way as Armstrong had done with ‘Blues’.

At this point even Tom’s ghost voice asks, ‘Where are the dreams?’ Upto this point the journeying Black American has tommed, rioted and has created a new music which has taken Europe by storm. In the section he appears in a new mask. His dream is of success among the white petty bourgeoisie.

French phrases like ‘la femme / exceptionnelle, coup d’œil’ are part of the style of the new mask. Allusions to Othello figure in continuation with the earlier one in ‘All God’s chillun’ (p.21) continue and the spade is described as in search of the rich-lipped white ‘ewe’. He tries to conform to his Euro-centric image of ‘the congo man’ or his counterpart in the mythology of the Great Tradition ‘Minotaur’. In the eyes of Ariadne he is a monster. The new Ariadne finds the Minotaur more desirable than Theseus. Knowing this the spade ‘courses his own man/oeuvres’. Splitting the word manoeuvres as man/oeuvres (p.38) brings out the spade’s tremendous labours at being a man. It also sustains military imagery which is already prominent in this section and emphasizes the essential sordidness of ‘the spade – white woman relationship’. The counter-imagery of ‘play acting’ in the following part of the same section indicates the facelessness of the inheritors of the middle passage.
In the third section the persona changes and it is the poet's voice which can be heard loud and clear forcing the spade to come back to reality. The period is identified with 'the zoot suit' - the livery of the be-boppers and Avantgardists in Black music like Dizzy Gillespie in the 1940's.

The poet's voice summarises this phase as the passing dream of the 'panama boys' and the hoods from Chicago. The lines

Broad back
big you know what
black sperm spews
negritude (39)

emphasize only the physical (broad back) and the biological (sperm) aspects and the expression 'spews' reinforces the fact that the negritude movement also achieved nothing.

Towards the end of this section the lines

Castries Conway and Brixten in London
Port of Spain's jungle
and Kingston's dry Dungle
Chicago Smethwick and Tiger Bay (40)

produce the rhythm and the sound effect of the train slowing down and the place names appear as if they were stages on a long journey. The journeys have not ended. Though fatigued 'the spade' has to carry on his internal immigration from villages to cities in America or the West Indies. The poem ends on a note of characteristic sadness.

'The Twist' is a link between the American and the Caribbean phases of the book. The tone of studied casualness and banality stands in stark contrast with the next poem. The title taken from the popular dance of the
60's is used as a metaphor for every kind of prostitution and the poem points to the desolation beneath the night club acts but also suggests affirmation of life in spite of frustration. The fourth and last section of the poem is one sentence broken up in short phrases, his wanderings brought out by

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travel more
seen more
lands
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and the quality of his existence by the remaining part of the sentence:

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than this poor
path
less harbour
less spade
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It is worth noting how Brathwaite, by separating 'less' from the noun which precedes it, brings out the destitution of spade. The reader is forced to stop at 'less' so the following 'spade' receives an emphasis which beautifully brings out that this is what he remains - a spade and nothing more.

With 'Wings of Dove' the last poem in the section Brathwaite introduces us to the potentially explosive West Indies. The poem is a dramatic monologue. Brother Man, the Rasta man, whom the poem celebrates is the central symbol of Black consciousness. He is the first person since Uncle Tom to have expressed a need for a sense of Africa and the first one to advocate violence in retaliation for the humiliation inflicted on the Black man. In him the paradox of dispossession and creativity is most completely symbolised.
He is the descendant of Douglass and Garvey. The poem makes extensive use of the dipthong 'ai' to suggest the Rastafarian tendency to stretch the 'i'. Also, the lines become shorter and shorter from 'hawk eyes' till the end of that sub-section in 'rica'. This diminuendo helps to gather strength for the Rasta's cry, shout and song. In the same section the lines when read aloud sound like fierce incantation. The other sound developed is the drumbeat which rises to a crescendo as the marijuana fumes enter the Rasta's head. In the third subsection of the poem there is an evocative description of the birth of ska - the dance of the deprived classes of Jamaica. There is a good deal of wry humour in this section. This brooding and potentially explosive gloom of the sixties was known as 'dreadness'.

Through inner alliterative music, even rhythms, half rhymes, consonance and a high percentage of monosyllables, Brathwaite, like Mais in *The Hills Were Joyful Together*, evokes the totality of the experience offered in the poem in a nutshell while he half narrates and half dramatises it. At the end of this poem we are firmly in the West Indies.

3.6.3 *Islands and Exiles*

The very title of the third section 'Islands and Exiles' establishes that the West-Indian phase of the encounter has set in. This feeling is further reinforced by the title of the first poem in this section, 'Calypso' - Trinidad's indigenous song and dance. The period depicted goes slightly back to the early 50's. Brathwaite writes
elsewhere about this period after the disintegration of the federation and has no 'illusions' about it. In the poem Brathwaite is responding to the rhythms of the steel band which had begun to get recognition in 1951 because of the success of TASPO (Trinidad All Stars Percussion Orchestra) in England. Calypso was also gaining recognition by this time in the U.S.A. Certain American singers had even begun to plagiarise the work of Calypsonians, who were generally unprotected by copyright, as they had plagiarised the Blues, a generation earlier. In Trinidad itself there was much talk about using Calypso, Steelband and Carnival to promote tourism. This had resulted into projecting the image of the Trinidadians as a happy-go-lucky calypso singing masqueraders, in England and the U.S.A. It was partially accepted in the Caribbeans also.

In the poem Brathwaite strongly reacts against this new minstrel stereotype. Brathwaite’s intention is to suggest an irony in the incongruity between the surface casualness and the grim reality in the Caribbeans. The poem begins with a beautiful creation myth.

The stone had skidded arc’d and bloomed into islands;

(48)

The islands are a product of tic-tac-toe in Trinidad. A similar image occurs in Derek Walcott’s ‘Epitaph for the Young’.

‘Islands curved like the fling of a stone to sea’.
Naming follows the creation.
Spanish, British, French and Dutch islands are deliberately chosen to suggest collision, fracture and interplay of alien cultures. They are not a paradise. On the contrary, in the lines to follow Bathsheba and Montego Bay, the tourist resorts are deliberately mentioned to introduce the idea of the prostitution of the islands for the privileged, which will be fully developed in Islands.

In the next section there is a fusion of the syncopated rhythms of the steel band and the verbal exuberance so very typical of the traditional calypso.

'The islands roared into green plantations'. (48)

The poem ends with the lines which are dry, tough minded and have stoical humour of survival. In 'The South', the last poem of this small section, one finds symbolic expression of the need for continuity, for reclaiming the whole of one's time and for moving beyond the strictures of time and history to the sea. The lines from 'Bright Waves' to 'the limitless morning before us' remind one of the final movement of T.S. Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday'. A positive and triumphant passage, it glorifies the flight into the morning. It stands in clear contrast with 'Folkways' or 'Wings of Dove' and celebrates a soaring dream of return. And indeed, the next section itself is titled 'The Return'.

3.6.4 The Return

The glorious dream is a shattered one. The wandering
spirit finds that in Cuba, Aruba and Trinidad, there are political disturbances. The petty selfish politicians of the young democracies have left the poor even poorer. The spirit feels that the islands need a miracle like Christ's in feeding the five thousand. The poem makes use of moving, well shaped plain language and broken rhythms of the march of the desert.

The next poem 'The Dust' takes us to Barbados, the island of the poet's birth. The poem is like a soundtrack capturing the lyrical quality of Barbadian speech. The conversational manner dramatises the timelessness of these people's lives. The use of the solo and chorus voices evokes a sense of felt closeness and a sense of faith in 'community'. The gossipy manner in which the account of volcanic eruption in Martinique in May 1902 has been incorporated in the poem is similar to the depiction of the life in Creighton's village in Lamming's 'In the Castle of My Skin'.

In 'The Cabin', Brathwaite presents the community facing rapid urbanisation and moving away from the land. The use of the 'dissonance' and the lyrical and visually powerful images describe the Barbadian chattel house. Brathwaite has an etcher's eye for fine detail.

One wooden only door, still latched,
hasp broken; one window, wooden,
broken; (70

remind one of Pa's hut in In The Castle of my Skin.

The community in 'The Dust' is facing rapid disintegration and is losing its identity and its centre.
Miss Envy's shop is replaced by a supermarket. 'Postlude / Home' poses the question with great exhaustion and desperation.

Where then is the nigger's home?
In Paris Brixton Kingston
Rome?
Here?
Or in Heaven? (77)

The reference to Kingston is the ironic reference to bulldozing of squatters off Kingston's dunghills in Jamaica, 1960's. The Rights of Passage concludes with the 'Epilogue' which starts by restating the themes of the first 'Prelude' but here the reader is directed towards the future. Within the poem initially there is a revocation of the historic past, tradition and continuity. The images of green are followed by the images of 'fire'. The fire is undefined. The oblique reference to Noah's sons in the lines:

no dove
to return with its love
in the morning (82)

is again a reference to apocalyptic fire. Fire is a purgation rite for a New World poet. Through purgation he will learn the faith that is necessary to bring about and sustain new life.

The images of redemption (rain), resurrection (dawn, morning), inspiration (in the morning bird calls) and sprouting of life (green / opens a crack) suggest the artist's breaking open from the narrow and confining womb of the history.
Shatter the door
and walk
in the morning
finally aware
of the future
to come?
There is no
turning back. (85)

The determination in the lines reveals awareness of the
total responsibility and commitment on the part of
Brathwaite and his fellow artists.

To sum up Brathwaite's achievement in Rights of
Passage: The sensibility that bears upon the variety of
experience is immensely rich. There is a constant ambiguity
about the nature of the experience treated and about the
quality of mind that the poet brings to bear on it. So the
poem constantly takes us by surprise. The poet means
something quite different from what he seems to be saying.
Deliberate plainness of statement and casualness of style
helps Brathwaite to conceal his meaning on several occasions
and enhance the quality of surprise for which he strives.

Yet ambiguity and surprise are qualified by a context
in which movement seems to be fixed, inevitable and doom
burdened. One knows after a while that each movement will
end in Blues, each generation will be absorbed in its
melancholy and each journey will lead to no destination. 'A
circle of doom is created which counterpoints all the wit
and affirmation and threatens to negate each effort at
survival or affirmation.'(18) The remaining two anthologies
will attempt to break this web of fatality.
3.7 Masks

The second and the central anthology of Brathwaite's trilogy without which accepting the present predicament of the West Indians would have been impossible is a unique, dramatic experience.

This anthology inspired totally different responses in the Caribbeans and in Africa. The Caribbean critics were ambivalent from the start. Edward Baugh found the sequences in the book to be cleverly appealing travelogue. (19) Winnifred Risden's review praised Brathwaite for enriching the commonplace theme namely 'that the survivor of the middle passage must face and understand his African heritage before he can create the future.' But she criticised Brathwaite for his detachment which, according to her, acts as a barrier to the communication of the personal emotion. 'Brathwaite's success is to have endowed a familiar theme with the dignity of a public ceremonial. He offers no message to the heart.' (20) Walcott heavily criticized Brathwaite's attempt at writing 'literature of return'. Walcott frequently expressed his view that 'racial nostalgia' was actually a corrupting influence and said that he preferred amnesia. Walcott, who had always acknowledged the duality of his heritage and had found the European aspect of it far more accessible to him as a poet, found that people were anatomising the honesty of his commitment. He hated the new stereotyping which made Black good, Brown doubtful and White bad. Again there was the sudden emergence of Brathwaite as a significant poet whose
early work Walcott himself had commended. He created the themes of exile, journey, the quest for identity, Africa, history, race and return. The instantaneous reception that Brathwaite's poetry received was mainly because it arrived at the apex of the Black Power movement. Walcott was infuriated. In 'The Muse of History' he wrote of the 'Masochistic recollection' of the poets who look to the brutal history of the West Indies for their inspiration. These poets attempt to write epic poetry without the necessary presence of either a heroic tradition or noble ruins, which together have made an epic credible in the past. 'Morbidity' is the inevitable result and that is the tone of any literature which respects such a history and bases its truth on shame or on revenge'. (21)

Walcott denies Brathwaite any nobility of purpose or any real experience of Africa and arrives at the conclusion that Masks is an artificial and ornamental work.

According to Richard Ho Lung, Brathwaite romanticised an unreal 'exotic' African past, aped an 'old mythology for the sake of becoming rootsy' and is, therefore, incapable of creating symbols and images of any relevance to the present. (22)

Thus emerges the ironical fact: The first African commentators on Masks commend Brathwaite for an enviably skilful use of traditional Akan forms while a leading poet in the West Indies dismisses it as 'morbidity'.

Brathwaite himself wrote to Gordon Rohlehr:
When, on reaching U.K. (autumn 1965) I sent Oxford (O.U.P.) the most recent version of Rights of Passage, I also told them about the wider concept of a trilogy, and enclosed the first part of Masks: I mean all of the first physical half... down to 'The White River'. Now this had been conceived of, and headings for poems written down, in Ghana: probably 1961/62: about the time in Saltpond, that I'd already written A Pageant of Ghana (which contains, in fact, some core sequences included in the first part of Masks), Udale's Choice, and another short play, (Edina) following on from Pageant, which contains the kernel for passages like 'I tossed my net' etc: passages dealing with the confrontation of Fante and Portuguese.

But what you have there as the first part of Masks, was written down, most of, one early morning in my office, just before the term started for September/October 1964; but it was not until just before leaving for England that I came upon this fragment and decided to read it onto the tape. It read, I remember, like magic. And it was then that I decided, or began to get the idea of the trilogy. I typed out part one of Masks and sent it to Oxford on arrival in U.K. along with the revised Rights of Passage.(23)

Like Rights of Passage, Masks also has deeper roots than one may have imagined. When Brathwaite wrote A Pageant of Ghana, which was first performed by Mfastiman Girls Secondary School at their Speech day in June 1961, it was one of his first attempts to write plays for school children. It was a bold and unusual step for a West Indian to have undertaken in Africa, and indicates the confidence Brathwaite felt in his understanding of Akan tradition. In 1956 Brathwaite lived in an inland village Ahamansu where a primary school boy Stephen Agyeman became his interpreter and protege attaching himself to the household as is the custom. Brathwaite saw him through school, helped him into teaching, then to a Teacher's Training College from where he won a place into the University. In the process Agyeman
perfected his English and Brathwaite learned Akan. Several sections of the \textit{Pageant} and \textit{Edina} are in Akan phonetic transcription.

As a resident in an inland village Brathwaite was in the heart of traditional Africa and observed at first many of the rituals and customs which he later included in the \textit{Masks}. He checked his anthropological details from the works of Rattray, Danquat, Meyerowitz etc. As an education officer resident in towns Brathwaite formed a close friendship with Efua Sutherland, who had returned to her roots making a journey from Christianity and Cape Coast to inland traditional Africa. She was determined to set up and develop folk theatre based on Akan traditions and Ananse story. Out of this evolved the Experimental Theatre and the Ghana Drama Studio in Accra between 1958 and 1961. She was aware of the language problem in Ghana and thought of the immense possibilities of English as a link language capable of cutting across the barriers caused by a variety of spoken languages. Her plays were written with this multi-lingual society in mind. Brathwaite shared many of her interests and preoccupations. Like her he also was fascinated by tribal litany and liturgy and their points of intersection with Biblical mythology. Like her he was interested in fable, the Ananse story, praise poetry, the lament and drum storyteller and the Atumpan. If \textit{Masks} were to be produced in Africa since it is partially an African poem perhaps the transcriptions of the various atumpan passages such as "The
Awakening' (pp 98-99) and (156-57) or the Damirifa passages (pp 151-52) would be spoken on the drums, as happened in the productions of the 'Pageant'. The communal spirit revealed in the production of his plays was an impressive experience to Brathwaite. In his notes to the play he wrote:

At Mfanstiman we were fortunate to have children dressed by people well versed in the older Ghanian styles; and the school watchmen helped with the northern costumes. The chiefs of Saltpond, Cape Coast and Mankessim contributed most of the jewellery and ornaments. (24)

Gordon Rohlehr observes in The Pathfinder:

Brathwaite was part of a pioneer group in Ghana and approached his undertaking to promote theatre in Ghana with zest, love and intelligent enquiry, reinforced by warmth of human contact. There was little that was blurred, sentimental, romantic, or traumatic about his personal quest. When he uses Akan prayers or drum language in Masks, he is no more trying to 'adorn' a threadbare sensibility, than is Walcott, when he inserts a passage from a French poet, or a quotation in Latin in his poetry. Both men are using second languages acquired through education or lived experience, for purposes more commendable than mere display. (25)

As one enters the World of Masks one cannot fail to observe its fantastic historical breadth. One begins in the Sahara desert with

this bright
this white
plaque of heaven, (90)

then one proceeds through references to Chaka, the great nineteenth century Zulu champion, medieval Timbuctu, the slave trade, until by movement IV one finds the poet (himself) arriving at the modern port of Takoradi, which itself was not built until the 1920's. Such chronological
and geographical eclecticism produces a dizzying effect, a need to find oneself in place and time, which in itself echoes the poet's own personal need for orientation.

To be more specific the movements with Masks are on the one hand nomadic as there is a constant visualization of a migration down from the desert through the forest and the Savannah to the sea, and on the other hand historical as there is a movement forward in time from the eleventh century A.D. to the present day. These fixed chronological points are also constant throughout the trilogy as a whole, for the perfectly sound reason that they represent the finite ends of recorded Afro-Caribbean history.

The theme of quest is one of the strongest strands in the poem. What is the poet seeking throughout the poem and why? The answer to these questions has already been traced in the Rights of Passage.

The conclusion of Rights of Passage is perhaps a kind of warning issued by the poet to himself as in Masks it is backwards that he turns in an attempt to reconstruct his individual history through a re-enactment of the scenario of his race's subjugation. In so doing he retraces the steps of his ancestors in their nomadic movement to the sea, where they encountered the European slave traders. This establishes the essential feature of Masks which is a contrary but two way dependent movement - the Omowale moving to the ancestral village and the ancestors moving downwards through the forest to meet him - their paths crossing at several imagined points of intersection. It is
this encounter that convinces him that his destined path lies back to the West Indies where he must attempt to forge his personality anew. His earlier sense of shame at his race's failure is revoked and subsumed under a reinvigorated determination to redeem this suffering by this deployment of language and more especially poetry as a means of clear sighted protest.

3.7.1 Libation

Movement One of Masks is appropriately titled 'Libation' as it involves propitiation and prayer for strength, faith and confidence on the occasion of a new undertaking - that is, the poet's entry into a world of ritual and history, after the rootless wanderings of Rights of Passage. The voice is both personal and impersonal and as Masks nears its centre, it is often difficult to distinguish between the experience of the tribesman about to set sail for the holocaust of the middle passage, and the Omowale, the son who had returned, about to pose his overwhelming questions to an unanswering wilderness.

'Libation' sets the tone of the poem, establishes its gravity and decorum. Therefore, part of what is implied in the Prelude to Masks stands in rhythmic, rhetorical and symbolic contrast to the opening Prelude of Rights of Passage. There is an explosion of energy in the opening of the Prelude to Masks. There is a brilliant expression of this energy in the 'sheets of sound' technique Brathwaite uses once more after 'Wings of Dove'.

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Maureen Lewis thinks that Brathwaite begins *Masks* with a West African creation myth, which tells of the birth of the earth from the intercourse of the sun and the moon.

Out of this bright sun, this white plaque of heaven, this leavening heat of the seven kingdoms: Songhai, Mali Chad, Ghana Timbuctu, Volta and the bitter waste that was Benin, comes this shout comes this song. (90)

There are the same ever widening circles of sound one noted in 'Wings of Dove'. Creative expression is imaged by the widening circle, by movement outward from a centre.

The sun, which was associated with slavery's death-in-life and the disruption of harmony between man and nature in the Prelude to *Rights of Passage*, is here a symbol of 'primal' creative energy. After creation comes naming as in 'Calypso' and the seven kingdoms are named. They are not named in the chronological order but rather in a mythological manner for Brathwaite is concerned more about the synthesis of East and West African cultures. The technique of time-shift used by the poet helps the reader to contemplate not on the historical fact but the timeless
The drum is 'heaven' because it is part of the creative process; it supplies the rhythmic language which leads to the release of the primal energy in the dancer and integrates him with the life-force of the Universe. Here Brathwaite offers the concept of the dance as celebration, which links Africans on the continent with the Africans in the New World. Jahn J. has made this point about the African, Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean contribution to the history of the dance from the 'Sarabanda', 'Fandango' and 'Chaconne' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the 'Cakewalk', 'Charleston', 'Rhumba', 'Samba' and 'Tango' in the twentieth century. (26)

The 'dancing roots', are Africa herself, the buds untwisting into life are Africa's offshoots in the New World.

Following the awakening comes libation. Brathwaite employs English translations of traditional prayers which are still in use among the Akan peasants at the time of sowing. The poet is talking about his own enterprise of new
artistic endeavour over an unknown ground. First, a primal ancestor and begetter of the tribe is addressed. He symbolises hope and innocence; he has left the soil green. 'The tuberous smooth of cassava' is an emblem of his phallic potency and fertility.

Asase Yaa, the Earth Mother, is invoked next. It is Asase Yaa who must be appeased if anything is to grow out of the barren earth. As part of his prayer the poet requests

and may the knife
or the cutlass not cut me. (92)

This was part of the peasant's prayer. According to Rohlehr, the relevance of this prayer to Brathwaite's personal quest as a craftsman seeking new ways of shaping ancestral forms should be obvious. The poet is aware of the perilous nature of his undertaking. The peasant, warrior and carver who would have prayed for immunity from the potentially malevolent forces contained in iron are masks for the poet who is fashioning firstly a poetry which places the common folk of the villages and towns at its centre and secondly, it is a poetry which places focus on politics and commitment; and thirdly a poetry based on the concept of the drum and everything it implies of rhythm as image, tonal modulations, music as speech, and an oral tradition in which the drum plays a central part both as a religious and a secular instrument. (27) The knife and the cutlass symbolise the weapons of language. This image of the poet as ancestor and carver of the mask later on appears in Ogun.
Creation leads to the skeletal and ravaged mask of truth.

Brathwaite has in mind the capacity of man to triumph over time through the medium of art. That is why he asks the Earth, the Universal Mother, for affirmative life-force to transcend the agencies of death and to produce fruit, in the words of the Old Testament blessing, 'beyond the fruit of his labour'.

This leads to the second section 'the making of the drum' where the actual process of creation is being described. This poem explores the ritual of the birth of art and its relationship to pain, sacrifice and death.

Maureen Lewis points out:

The fact that Brathwaite talks of a goat-skin drum and of the calabash indicates that he is referring here, not to the making of an African drum, but a West-Indian one. Ghanians use elephant skin for the top of the atumpan and the African calabash bears on a vine not on a tree. It is in the West Indies that the shai shai gourd comes from a tree. (28)

She goes on to show that parallel rituals concerning the making of the drums exist in the West Indies though the poetry and song associated with these rituals have largely disappeared.

One must constantly bear in mind that in Masks Brathwaite approaches the African ritual against the background of the New World experience described in Rights of Passage, whereas in Islands he returns to the Caribbeans which he is now able to view against the background of African history, philosophy and myth.
Out of the ritual slaughter and stretching on the rack, the 'voice' is born. The goat is praised for its ability to survive on a diet of pain. The goat is a scapegoat - a sacrificial goat through whose sacrifice music is born. The poet metaphorically offers his poetry as a sacrifice in late atonement, and in acknowledged responsibility - for the sin of the rulers, priests and people of the tribe. The circle of the poem is closed with a calm insistence that the goat must be killed. There is no other way to art or self knowledge. Both the animal and vegetable kingdoms must contribute to the ritual act of sacrifice. The tree will be sacrificed for making the barrel of the drum. The tree represents the feminine principle if the goat represents the masculine; the barrel of the drum is womb-shaped. The shaping of the tree into the 'rounded belly' of the drum is conceived as an act of deflowering virginity.

You dumb adom wood
will be bent,
will be solemnly bent, belly
rounded with fire, wound
ed with tools
that will shape you.
You will bleed
cedar dark,
when we cut you;
speak, when we touch you. (95)

The reconciliation of opposites also occurs in the description of the tree from which the curved drum sticks are cut and of the calabash tree bearing the gourds from which rattles used for keeping time in dance are made. 'Gourds and Rattles' ends with a prayer for energy needed to overcome world-weariness, the natural bequest of so many
cycles of migration and such a long, slow drag of time.

Gordon Rohlehr observes:

'Slow drag' may refer to the 'Slow Drag' which was a way of dancing to slow interminable blues particularly popular during 1920's. Those dead slow blues did convey a sense of world weariness and often spoke of endless journeys down long lonesome roads. This is one example in Masks, of how Brathwaite is able to comprehend traditional Africa and the Afro-American and Caribbean experiences simultaneously, and to unify them in poetry. (29)

Finally the drum speaks. The drum-poetry of the 'Awakening' ceremony is very appropriate at this point. The subject here is the coming to life of new language and new consciousness among Black people, based on a reclaimed knowledge of the continuity of the African oral traditions in the New World. To quote Rohlehr again:

Brathwaite's entire aesthetic is firmly based on a reappraisal of the various features of Africanoid and traditions, and this is, in itself, a recognition of ancestors and an act of homage and reverence to them as primal creators, fathers and founders even if they might also have been flounderers. (30)

3.7.2 Path-finders

With Movement II - 'Path-finders' - the libation is over and the journey begins. It is a re-entry into the world of mythic culture heroes, the explorers and warriors whom the tribes celebrate as god-like ancestors. The poet takes now the mask of a horn-player. The Mmenson, an orchestra of elephant tusks used on state occasions to relate history, starts. The poet has now taken the role of a griot - the communal historian. The basic features of the
tribal history, namely the Arab emirs, Kings of the desert, the medieval empires, the important cities in the Western Sudan and the death of El Hassan along the way figure in. Brathwaite's ironical vision is at work even here as we are told about El Hassan's death before we meet him in 'Axum'. El Hassan's heroic speech in 'Axum' is reminiscent of the Rastafarian's dream of Ethiopian heaven but the confidence it exudes stands in clear contrast with the Rasta's 'illusion'. This is a touching example of epic irony as El Hassan's conquests of Meroe initiated the process that has resulted in Black ghettos of the New World.

From 'Axum' the reader is directly taken to 'Dugadougon', one of the Niger states which lies on the banks of Volta - at the other end of the movement across the desert which the tribes reach centuries later. Brathwaite collapses two moments of history and time. We then move to 'Chad' with the griot which is presented as a 'hub, core, centre, soul and axis of the historical movement'. 'Timbuctu' is a companion piece to 'Chad'. In addressing Timbuctu the narrator's voice straddles both the past and the present. The draining of gold

whose gold you carry, camel,
In this cold cold world! (106)

out of this most famous city of medieval Africa is symbolic of the historic exploitation of Africa. The city is not peopled. The narrator addresses a camel but as we move to 'Volta', the last poem in the second movement we meet El Hassan (now a fugitive) and his caravan. El Hassan is 'the
path-finder' who made a trek over uncharted land much before Timbuctu had risen to prominence. But historical chronology is never important in Brathwaite's poetry. El Hassan's followers dream of 'naderina' - (unattainable Paradise) but he himself knows that it may only be a mirage. He is a man caught up in time, which reduces all human effort to 'whispers' and 'to dust'.

The water
boils white at its whispering edges
(108)
is a metaphor for the advent of Europe and the major disruption of the pattern of the African life. (This whisper could also be the whisper of the Atlantic; which is to prove even more disastrous than the mirage in the desert.)

3.7.3 The Limits

From this desert we are taken to the forest in Movement III - 'Limits' suggesting the enclosed world hemmed in by trees and shadow. The first shock of this encounter with an environment so alien is very powerfully conjured up in the section 'The Forest',

The jewelled sun
has splintered
on these leaves. (114-15)

Agrarian arts become relevant and so the gods of vegetation are created. As the forest kingdoms are established the old gods are slowly obliterated and there is a creation of new masks, new art and new gods. The last subsection of 'The Forest' celebrates the possibility of the arrival of the new god.
From this womb'd heaven comes the new curled god with goblin old man's grinning. (116)

It is to be noted here that Brathwaite uses in the last section of the poem a line which is much larger (a rather unusual occurrence) than the line used in the three preceding sections. The long measured rhythms have a dignity, the slow movement giving significance to the use of 'we', 'us', 'our' (from individuals to a community of souls).

The poem concludes with 'look, we dance' and prepares us for the funeral dance in 'Adowa' reminding us of 'Didn't he Ramble'.

'Adowa' ushers in only a temporary period of tribal coherence after which movement to the West Coast will take place, completing the confrontation between Fante and the Portuguese. Adowa in which the tribe celebrates its new foundation through a dance of death and resurgence deepens the epic irony. The new mask created for the 'new curled god' is part frog, part monkey, part insect, part goblin and part human - a complex and protean image of the forest. 'The Mask' enables the god to take possession of the shaman for the benefit of the tribe. It makes possible an incarnation of the cosmic force in the flesh of the celebrant i.e. the poet himself (the Vishwakarma), who is creating 'a new world'. By accepting this significant feature of the West African religion the poet communicates with the God. Brathwaite has covered in the poem several centuries of uncertain groping towards coherence. The first
part of the poem treats this uncertainty while the second part reveals the slow growth of confidence.

We dance
and we dance
on the firm
earth, certainties.... (117)

In the poem, religion and the historical process have been employed as mutual counterpoints, each illuminating the other. Gordon Rohlehr correctly observes:

The movement from desert to forest also parallels Brathwaite’s personal journey from the wilderness of his experience as a grassed diaspora man, to a newly discovered sense of his lost ancestral heritage. (31)

As ‘forest’ becomes the home, a new god, Ananse, is born out of the webbed pattern of leaves and the sticky humid atmosphere.

Here green’s net sticks
wet, clings soft sweet comfort cunning
like Ananse’s tune
less, once Onyame’s, trap of doom. (119)

There is a shift here in the narrator’s voice. He is already the Omowale, the stranger, who has returned three centuries later and has seen the trickster god Ananse replacing Onyame as the presiding deity of the tribes. Ananse symbolises the ambiguous response of the tribe to the forest. It also symbolises through hindsight the need for deception as the first principle of survival on the part of the emancipated Afro-West Indians. This process is similar to the surrender of identity which I have already discussed in chapter 1.

The tribe next moves down the Volta towards Techiman —
a town in northwestern Ashanti, near the source of river Tano. The sense of a long journey is evoked through the reference to various towns in Ghana and Ga country. These places are endowed with vivid idiosyncratic features.

Techiman drizzles in sunlight; Peki peeps out of the valley; fun-loving Nsuta sleeps in the misty, water-well'd dawn. (120)

Koforidua is addressed and asked to turn in sleep, the sleepers in Kracha (a town in Ghana) are asked to awake for new journeys in which they will stop at Golokwandi, Kpandu (a town in Ghana) and Pong (a town in Ghana) for rest, salt and water and then move on to Teshie (a Ga village), Labadi (a Ga village), Kaneshie (a Ga village on the coast near Acra). The poem concludes

Time's walking river is long. (120)

Two moments of history five hundred years apart are collapsed—the moment of nomadic journey of the tribes full of hope and release from the forest shadows and that of the journey of the Omowale full of hope for the rediscovered heritage.

'The White River' is a narration of how settlements took place on the West Coast. 'Naming'—a device used by Brathwaite throughout the trilogy—beats out enchanting music from the names. In the description of the landscape there is intimacy and immediacy and an actual experience. The tribe finally reaches the ocean and has the illusion.
This was at last the last;
This was the limit of motion;
voyages ended;
Time stopped where its movement began

The ocean symbolises eternity; new gods are again created to grasp the new experience.

gods nudged us like fish;
black bottomless whales that we worshipped

The last question with which the poem as well as the third movement ends comes from the Omowale.

O new world of want, who will build the new ways, the new ships?

The New Ships in the poem of the same title are the ships which will make the return journey across the middle passage with the cargoes of disinherited souls, spiritually starved to their new world of want. The question prepares for the fourth movement.

3.7.4 The Return

The Omowale lands at Takoradi - a mid-seventeenth century outpost of European slave trade - symbolising the collision of Europe and Africa on the West Coast of Africa. The Omowale seeks a release from the memory of this collision but the outcome of his quest is suggested in the lines

Laterite lanes drifted off
into dust
into silence

Yet he is received graciously with water and food by warm, lively, talkative women. Brathwaite uses a beautiful image to bring out their humanity
smooth voices like pebbles
moved by the sea of their language (124)

Their ritualistically repeated obsessive question 'Do you remember?' accentuates his awareness that the absence has been too long. As a historian he has learned quite a lot but all that has been his 'acquired information'. So he begins to speak in riddles.

I tossed my net
but the net caught
no fish.
I dipped a wish
but the well
was dry (125)

The lines that follow read like a funeral lament. The Omowale reveals that he has no illusions about his return. He has found neither his ancestors nor an easy entry into a lost coherence.

'I could not hear the drum' (125)

means that he could not interpret the language of the atumpan. What he remembers is the involvement of the African ancestor in the slave trade. Hence the crucial question

'Whose brother, now, am I?' (126)

What he hears is the voice of Akyere. Brathwaite mentions in the notes to The Arrivants that Akyere is Fante, a female name suggesting revelation and also vindication. (32) According to Rattray 'Akyere is the word used for persons sacrificed or to be sacrificed'. (33) Akyere is thus the intuition that the tribes have of what is to come. But the
fourth part of the poem reveals how the inevitable happens.

Greed of gain prevails; 'love of profit' on the part of the elders, love of cloth and trinkets on the part of the women ruined the clansmen. (129)

For the returned stranger, thus, Africa is as responsible as Europe for the black diaspora, Brathwaite's prayer to the "god of all parting" dramatises the experience and laments the loss of the deracinated rather than expresses hope. These laments

Your tree
has been split
by a white axe
of lightning
(130)

are similar to the laments of the village elders in Achebe's Things Fall Apart.

The last part of the poem 'Masks' expresses a doubt. In Wilson Harris's words:

it constitutes the oracle of the poem. The lightning that stammers across the sky unites the sound and the sight. Here one finds an oral and visual coincidence which invokes a speaking oracular voice as well as imagistic intelligence. (34)

It is clear that the poet is convinced that the problems suggested in Masks will be solved only by facing history very courageously.

'Korabra', the next poem symbolises a signal drum played at the funeral and describes the dissolution of the tribe. Literally the word means 'go and come back'. Those enslaved had become 'dead' to the community. Hence the ritualistic departure. But ironically, the Omowale does
come back three hundred years later. The 'I' is both the tribesman and the Omowale. In a shift of focus the reader reaches barracoon of Elmina.

Back through Elmina, white granite stone stalking the sunlight, the dungeon unbars. I hear the whips of the slavers, see the tears of my daughters; (132-133)

and then

My scattered clan, youngest kinsmen, fever's dirge in their wounds, rested here; then limped on down to their dungeon. (134)

It is here, again that

Nyame's tree bent, falling before the Nazarene's cross (134)

causing religio-cultural dissolution as well.

3.7.5 Crossing the River

The fifth movement of 'Masks' is titled 'Crossing the River' and begins with 'Bosompra'. Here retracing the steps of his ancestor the Omowale arrives at the inland city of Kumasi. Crossing the river is a highly mystical act both in Christian and classical mythology and even in American literature (Huckleberry Finn). Crossing of the rivers Jordan and Styx is associated with the soul's encounter with final things. In Akan legend crossing the river Pra
(Bosompra) was forbidden to Asantehene as Osai Tutu was killed while crossing the river. For the Omowale, too, the act of crossing the river is an important phase in his quest. Brathwaite, while celebrating the positive aspects of the Asante empire is not oblivious of the fact that Asante was born out of the wars which were the by-products of the slave trade. Thus the Omawale enters this central city with memories of both achievement and decay, splendour and pain; religion and its marriage to war and trade.

Before crossing the river he addresses his kinsman walking away down the slope on the opposite bank of the river.

'Can you hear me?' (136)

(Is there any link between Africans at home and abroad?)

The Kumasi he enters is an imagined city of the past and the poet assumes once more the masks of kyere me or drummer or hornblower and Okyeame the court speaker and historian. The stately rhythm employed in 'Kumasi' is identical to the one used in 'Mmensan'. The purpose is to invoke a vision of Kumasi at the beginning of her period of glory. Within this praise song there are several muted ironies. The lines

South the Akyems
Seek their rest.....
Denkyira rests. (138)

evoke the fact that Akyems and Denkyira never accepted the rule of Asante. While he celebrates the glory of Kumasi as the
city of gold,
paved with silver,
ivory altars,
tables of horn. (138)

Brathwaite also brings out the bitter irony that the same gold and ivory attracted the European traders and ultimately brought about the fall of Asante empire.

The Omowale observes the state poet listing the regalia of the king in the poem that follows, namely 'Tutu'.

See the bright symbols he's clothed himself in: gold, that the sun may continue to shine bringing wealth and warmth to the nation; mirrors of brass to confound the blind darkness; calico cloth to keep us from sin. (141)

These lines, however, stand in clear contrast to the lines in 'The New Ships' (128-29) and help a proper assessment of history. This device of employing irony on the part of the artist-visionary, of stating the dissolution and death before the celebration of birth is a characteristic feature of the trilogy and a part of Brathwaite's comprehensive treatment of history.

In 'Tutu', the stately rhythms of 'Mmensen', 'Atumpan' and 'Kumasi' continue imparting the whole poem an air of pageantry. Accents of the Omowale appear to be submerged in pomp and splendour of the times three hundred years ago. In the poem that follows, 'The Golden Stool' Tutu addresses the nation. The decay has already set in and Tutu announces in no uncertain terms that the country is 'sick at heart'. (143)

Rohlehr finds in the lines echoes of the opening scene of Hamlet - 'It's bitter cold and I am sick at heart'. (35)
Just as Hamlet found that something was rotten in the state of Denmark when he returned to it after his father's death, Tutu is aware that because of greed everybody is busy destroying 'the great nation'. He, therefore, has, with the help of Anokye the priest, brought down the divine golden stool for the Asante. In the excitement and tumult that follow the Omowale's tribe disintegrates. Whipped for their defeat they are brought to this red town 'Kumasi'. The priest cries:

die: for the stool's
honour, shrine's wealth,
lean slaver's health
of money.... (145)

For the tribe's
sake the priests cried:
die
wear a black mask
of silence; (145)

The victims, thus, die not only for the shrine's wealth but the lean slaver's health/money. Brathwaite hints strongly that the priests equate the slave trade with ritual sacrifice undertaken for the good of the nation. This is probably the most tragic rationalisation of aristocratic guilt and constantly reminds us of Soyinka's 'A Dance of the Forest', which is invested with similar ironic vision.

It is not only that Tutu turns a blind eye to the slave trade as being the root cause of his empire's decay but has invoked a theory of divine right as an excuse to justify his involvement in the slave trade. At the end of the poem he himself says:
I giver of life to my people,  
crack open the skull, skill  
of shell, carefully carved craft  
of bones, and I kill. (146)

The act of selling is an act of killing.

3.7.6 Arriva1

'Arrival', the sixth movement of Masks actually ends  
with a departure - that of the Omowale, who is about to  
complete his backward glance. 'Sunsum', the first poem in  
this movement, is personality or soul transmitted from  
father to son. The Omowale is probably still seeking the  
bloodline of continuity with an ancestral father or mother.

So for my hacked  
heart, veins' mem­  
ories, I wear this  
past I borrowed: (148)

To come to terms with memories felt in the blood the  
Omowale pretends that the borrowed past is truly his. He  
has returned to look for his navel string which symbolises  
some tangible link between the child and his mother. The  
paradox exists even here and the umbilical cord is described  
as 'the thin breeding worm'. The musical images abound  
suggesting the link between traditional African music and  
the various forms of music and rhythms of the African  
diaspora. This link, however, is not enough and ultimately  
the Okyame / Omowale / Spade realises that through  
'Ariadne's clue' in the Rights of Passage and riddles of  
history in the Masks he has returned to himself and the most  
crucial question, 'Whose ancestor am I?' still persists.  
History cannot offer the Omowale the comfort he seeks.
'The years remain silent'. (150)

Brathwaite symbolises here, the difficulty experienced by the New World Negro, who wants to join the travelling river of African history.

The ending of 'Sunsum' also indicates the negation of the artist's prayer in the Preludes to both Rights of Passage as well as Masks that his work be spared the "runneling termites" and their red monuments, graves. Here it seems that the termites have won. Horace's famous affirmation of the supremacy of art over time, one of the cornerstones of Western humanistic ethic is defeated here. Time, the devourer has built stronger than wooden masks, the Benin bronzes, the pyramids. Accepting this with utter humility and resignation the artist-poet says:

the termites' dark teeth, three hundred years working have patiently ruined my art. (150)

After such knowledge what affirmation? Affirmation must be won all over again in a movement from spiritual death (sunsum - casting of spiritual blood) to a renewed sense of life. It is a moment of deep revelation and 'arrival'. This movement from negation to affirmation is re-enacted in 'Tano', the next poem. It takes three days or three phases dramatized in the three parts of the poem. The first phase is a funeral dirge for atumpan and voice.

dam
dam
damirifa
damirifa due
damirifa due
damirifa due
'damirifa due' was originally associated with the custom of human sacrifice at each Odwera festival, and was played on the atumpan before each ritual execution. Though Brathwaite seems to be returning to the priest's rationalisation of slavery mentioned earlier now it is the Omowale / poet and not the original slaves departing. It is a moment of his spiritual rebirth in which the quest for identity will be over and the 'exiled one will reach home'. Though the home is nothing but 'new doubt and desert' of the Caribbean, the artist will undertake the task of creation and establishment of a new tradition there. He will create new language, celebrate new arts in the Caribbeans. The last poem of the movement is 'The Awakening' - the new awakening of the one who died. The poet says

slowly slowly
ever so slowly
I will rise
and stand on my feet...... (156)

and then,

I am learning
let me succeed (157)

Brathwaite has not indulged in either romantic escapism from the sordid reality in the contemporary Caribbean or in the decorative, ornamental aspect of dead ritual. Masks is extremely relevant and a seminal poem linking Rights of Passage and Islands - the worlds of the Afro-Americans and the Afro-Caribbeans. At the end of Masks the seeker is once more stripped of all disguises (like the spade at the end of
Rights of Passage) and is led back to himself. But there is a basic difference. Tom’s sojourn in Europe was well-upholstered but essentially futile. The Omowale’s return to Africa is healthy and complex. This has helped the New World Negro in his spiritual rebirth after shedding the spiritual blood in ‘sacrifice’. This rebirth will ultimately make him look positively at himself, recognise his own potential and to build on it. In Masks the word gathers deeper symbolic dimension. In spite of the theme of disillusioned quest the Omowale/poet is more confident of his ground. The Omowale ‘is learning’ that he has to accept ‘the Islands’ as his own. He has to create his own world there. ‘Islands’ will re-enact the story of the Omowale’s ‘return’ and ‘creation’.

3.8 Islands

Islands, the third anthology in the trilogy celebrates the Omowale/poet’s homecoming. There is no utopia to which he returns. In fact he is not an ‘individual’ returning to his land but also a person who has become alienated in his own land; the archetypal hero of much of modern literature. He himself emerges as the archetype of the diaspora in the New World. The reader acquainted with the Caribbean or African literature has already met so many of them – Ralph Kripal Singh in V.S.Naipaul’s The Mimic Men, Moses in the Lonely Londoners and Lionel Froad in Other Leopards.

The epigraph to this section of the trilogy is taken from James Baldwin’s novel Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been
Gone and echoes ideas conveyed in the epigraph to Rights of Passage. But there is an air of finality and quiet confidence with which the Omowale/poet seems to accept it. It reads like a warning that neither return to the West Indies nor emigration to the metropolis settles the question of identity. One returns to 'this new doubt and desert' and not to any readymade hope or comfortable creed. In fact, Brathwaite is concerned with the fading of the romanticism of the Harlem Renaissance era and with the acceptance of the atonability of city life on the part of Tom's grandchildren — the Omawale is one of them.

3.8.1 New World

'Jah' the opening sequence of the first movement of Islands titled 'New World' offers a quick impressionistic summing up of the years from World War II to the late 60's. The poem is very complex. The density and variety of allusions in it are truly bewildering. It is carefully patterned on the idea of a jazz band in performance.

The poem begins, like the Mmensen — with the elephant tusk orchestra in Nairobi instead of Ghana. Perhaps Brathwaite has in his mind the Mau Mau movement, which triggered off the struggle for independence also in East Africa during the 50's and 60's. Both Havana and Harlem are important as centres of revolution and music. The first ingredient of the revolution in 'sound' was the link which was being established in the 50's between the Black American musicians and their counterparts on the continent of Africa.
Rohlehr observes:

This was also the period when the marriage of Havana and Harlem led to the period of brief partnership between Bebop avantgardist Dizzy Gillespie and Havana's Conga and cult drummer Chano Pozo and later to Gillespie's pioneer work in marrying jazz and Afro-Brazilian Samba and Bossa Nova. It was as if jazz was becoming the form in which a triumphant ingathering of the scattered tribes was taking place. (36)

The lines

bridges of sound curve
through the pale rigging
of saxophone stops.... (162)

suggest that the links between the Atlantic and the ancestor are being re-established.

Brathwaite achieves a blend between the musical and social statement in 'Jam', which opens with a call of Big Band trumpets, followed by a short bridge-passage played against a background of answering saxophones. (This is the structure of the Big Band jazz discussed by Brathwaite in Jazz and the West Indian Novel.)

Next the drummer fills the pause with such driving rhythms that the listener marvels how such skills have survived both the middle passage and the constant attacks of Protestantism against black culture. The drummer (who ought to have been dead) is marvellously alive (quick), a source and nerve centre of ancient polyrhythmic energy in that land of the dead, the Omowale/poet asks with astonishment

Has the quick drummer nerves
after stink Sabbath's unleavened
cries in the hot hull? (162)

The lines establish a link between Atlantic and the
ancestor. 'Unleavened' suggests the link between the African and the Jew whereas 'stink sabbath' refers to the perversion of Christianity which both Roman Catholics and Sabbatarian Puritans were able to reconcile with the slave trade and slavery. Next,

From the top of music, slack Bwana Columbus rides out of the jungle's den. (162)

In terms of jazz he is the owner of the night-club, both sexually and spiritually sterile (slack) descendant of Columbus, pirates, slave traders, bondsmen, bishops, etc. 'Jungle's Den' is perhaps a reference to Jungle's Casino, 'a dancing school' or it may be a sarcastic reference to early white critics who referred to jazz as jungle music and to the night club owners who tried their utmost to highlight the minstrel or the cannibal image of the Black artist. Even Duke Ellington was forced to conform to the stereotype in the 20's when he played at the white owned Cotton Club in New York. Marshall Stearns has mentioned that the motif of the club was a jungle and Ellington was hired to play 'jungle music'. (37) Brathwaite's allusion to the jungle creates, thus, the era of Big Band sound of Ellington and Count Basie and the humiliating conditions within which this music had to be played.

The poem begins by describing the typical jazz performance of the twenties and thirties. It descends, within the music, into its profound depths as the music also grows more introspective. In the lines,
With my blue note, my cracked note, full flattered fifth, my ten bebop fingers, my black bottomed strut, Panama worksong, (162)

the soloist is deliberately revolting against the stereotype of jungle music. 'The flattened fifth', according to Stearns 'was added to jazz during the Bebop age (i.e. the late 30s). ' (38)

In the following section of the poem the poet enters the imagination of the trumpeter and watches his solo taking shape in coils and tight spirals which was the emergent style of improvisation in the fifties and early sixties.

Suddenly the trumpeter/poet stops in mid-air and savours God's withholding heaven of skyscrapers and elevator cages. There, Manchild - Uncle Tom's grandson, sees God.

God in glass with his type writer teeth, gospel jumps and pings off the white paper, higher and higher. (162)

God is the executive behind the glass, the newspaper editor, the white house politician, the grinning mercenary evangelist - all these disguises together. The beatific vision, (which is actually sardonic and surreal) the bridge of sound continues higher and higher. 'High' refers (a) to the trumpet role (b) to the dizzying height of the elevator (c) the surrealist, fragmented dream-like atmosphere created by cocaine and heroin virtually inseparable from the post-war jazz scene, and which actually killed such artists as Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker. The trumpeter's 'high' makes him feel as if he were flying.
The eagle's crook neck,  
the vulture's talons clutching tight  
as a blind baby's fist...  (163)

The eagle is the national bird of the U.S.A. Yet he is  
a bird of prey as suggested by its 'crook neck'. For the  
Blacks it is a symbol not of liberty but of rapacious  
imperialism and genocide. The jazz trumpeter soaring 'high'  
wants to see whether the motto grasped in the American  
eagle's beak applies to him at all. The answer is negative.  
Hence the identification of the eagle with another bird of  
prey. 'The vulture's talons' clutching 'as a blind baby's  
fist' suggest the perversion and corruption of a dream of  
innocence. 'The torn humming bird tree' ravished with fire  
in 'The Prelude' to Rights of Passage and 'split by a white  
axe of lightning' in Masks are linked together in the lines  
up through the torn  
humming bird trees  (163)

Brathwaite next tells us what the members of the rest  
of the band are doing. They, too, are metamorphosed; but  
into the beasts of fertile grassland of Africa. In the jazz  
metaphor Brathwaite is referring to the 60's. The group of  
musicians like John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison  
and Elvin Jones - became the articulate musical voice in a  
rediscovery of Africa as can be seen from Coltrane's  
'Africa', 'Afro Blue', 'Dahomey Dance' and 'Gold Coast'.  
Hence the images of energy and liberation.

But Black dreamers are still prisoners of the New  
World. 'God' here is now Senator Barry Goldwater the  
Republican Senator from Arizona, who voted against the 1964
Civil Rights Bill and later was the republican nominated for the Presidentship. The fresh life and fluid movement suggested by the unusual word 'runnels' upward to them now becomes the stagnant water in the gold fish bowl.

We float round and round in the bright bubbled bowl
Without hope of the hook,
of the fisherman's tugging in root; (165)

The post-Coltrane phase of jazz music is being described here. The music is now a metaphor of the unchanged socio-political status and the mood of confusion and disillusion after the militancy of the sixties. The 'bubbled bowl' is also the emotional and existential void in which the sensibility is now afloat. This sense is reinforced by the context in which the artist is asked to perform. The musicians return to a world in which they are simply performing animals. Their brilliant hard earned talent (skill of fin) is the wonder of America's blind babies who usurp the Black man's music. Brathwaite returns to this type of cultural exploitation in the last lines of the poem. The final vision of 'God' is his strange incarnation as the white jazz musician - Miller, Goodman, Brubeck etc.

The poem is so richly suggestive that an interpretation of the poem depicting the journey of the Black man from the moment of slavery with the cries in 'the hot hull' muted by the quick drummer and the Mmensen orchestra to his meaningless existence in the New World like a goldfish in a bowl is possible. 'Jah' or Jehovah, the white man's god or
rather the white man as God, has ironically sided with the ‘Bwana’. The second (and the last) part of the poem celebrates the sapping of the cultural and religious roots. The land - the Caribbean islands has become a cultural void because the Blacks have forgotten their 'secret' places and the meaning attached to them as well as to several objects in nature. 'Moon' is mere moon. Black skin is only 'a chain' or a prison but the name of the clan and through it the link with the ancestor is gone.

The spider is no more looked at as a manifestation of Ananse - the creator and the islands are the green turtles (a visually powerful image) who have lost their way. Volcanoes on them have shut their red eyes. Even the sun that was a doom of gold to the Arawaks (the race of the original inhabitants of the West Indies) is now 'a flat boom' in the sky.

The trumpeter/poet's task is to give new meanings to all these. But before he commences he will 'create' the islands as they exist in their spiritual exile. Then would begin the journey of the soul to the 'Limbo' against which the creator will rebel and succeed through the act of 'Possession' marking the new 'Beginning'. The exile/creator/ Vishwakarma will have arrived 'home'.

Back to the full experience of expiation and reaching the 'paradise' of the 'New World' now accepted positively.

The African archetype of the New World experience is Ananse - a symbol of the principles of cunning, subtlety and intelligence as techniques of survival which the slave/
black had to employ for his survival. Ananse is at once the neglected, forgotten or fossilized past of the colonized which has weathered to fragments of folk tale. He is a potentially venomous threat to the Oppressor and finally a source of silent creative force. The archetype illuminates the role of the poet as a weaver of words whose 'silver skin webs' link him in aim as well as style to the jazz musician and the pan-man. The poet celebrates the impact of Ananse on the slave rebels like Tacky, L'Ouverture who spat their death into the ground. He was also remembered in the Caribbean villages, Goave, Port-au-Prince, Half Moon Fort etc. But today he is forgotten. He is just a spider in the corner of the ceiling plotting his 'new fall from heaven'. Ananse is the many-eyed maker/creator but 'in the yard the dog barks at the stranger'. The line is very cryptic. It means either that this community does not recognise 'the god' or that it does not recognise 'the Omowale poet who has returned from Africa and has to gain acceptance in the islands all over again.

If 'Jah' depicts the fanfare of creative energy reaching a crescendo through resounding horns and drums and fading away into circles of disillusionment, 'Ananse' begins with the sterility of the spirit of the colonized. Together they form the complementary halves of the New World consciousness. Ananse - the counterpart of Jah is by turns a slave, trickster, puppet/chrysalis, drummer, obeah man, rebel, shanty-town dweller, neglected folk hero, sexual
cannibal, creator, word-breaker and 'Stranger'. The rest of
the poems will reveal the subtle process and counter process
traded here as Islands moves dialectically through limbo
towards self-acceptance, creative rebellion and affirmation.

In 'Trade Winds', the Trade Winds blowing from 30
degrees North as well as South of the equator are used by
Brathwaite as a metaphor of commercial and cultural bonds
between the Caribbeans and Europe. The poem depicts 'the
neo-colonial situation' which is the outcome of these bonds.
Here, the descendant of the slave tries to liberate himself
through the education which was designed by the colonizer to
establish his supremacy. That is why the scholar's desk is
also a prison cell and the chosen process of liberation
turns into a new kind of slavery. The Caribbean politician,
the end product of this system, is 'a mimic man' an arrogant
Black Sahib - a parody of Jah.

'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's ox, nor his ass,
nor his wife,
nor any thing that is thy neighbour's'
Leave that to me. (168)

At the end of the poem all the figures of the past
return in disguises - the robber, the thief, the samfie man,
the gold-tooth dentist, the master man on the horse. The
Black intellectual in power is the Jah/Tutu, who has failed
his people.

In 'Littoral' there are first signs of the acceptance
of the rough sands of the islands as home. The blind old
fisherman symbolises the capacity for introspection and deep
inner contemplation. Like Gerontian, T.S. Eliot's ageless
old man, the poet's shuttle will weave the wind if necessary. The fact that he is making a 'new net' is significant showing that he has moved beyond the stage of the 'Omowale' in *Masks* who 'tossed his net but caught no fish'.

In the second section Brathwaite celebrates the feminine principle. 'She' in the section is the poet's dream of certainties and the feminine principle necessary for continuation.

In the last part of the poem there is a tender, fond note of hope expressing the poet's intimate concern for the land to be tilled, caressed and put to seed.

'Legba' introduces another counterpart of Jah from the little or folk tradition. The poet tells us in the notes that Legba is Dahomean/Haitian god of the gateway. (39) But more significantly 'he is the crucial link between man and the other gods and as such is often first to be invoked at a ceremony'. The poem is one such invocation - but not without the expression of the ironies implicit in the situation.

Legba is here a 'cripple' as he should be at the beginning of a voudoun worship. He is a ruined peasant, a victim as well as an instrument of imperialist rapaciousness. But since Legba is also the God of all new beginning without whose intercession no celebration of life can start, the artist penetrates beyond the immediate vista of gloom and points to the resurrection. Beginning with the image of the diminished man he moves steadily and in circles
to a vision of creative possibility.

The colonial education is once more blamed for dividing the black between 'the coloured' and 'the black'.

In the second part of the poem the focus shifts to the poor blacks - the uprooted peasantry whom one also meets in Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin* and Roger Mais' *Brother Man*. The poet's comprehensive vision, however, moves to the celebration of fruition and ripening of avocado and the beauty of the queen of birds of the ringing bramble - the Jacanna mentioned as 'Jack bird' in the poem. The bird, 'cracking the blue' of its wings is an image of poetic inspiration which survives the brambles of experience.

As Rohlehr observes, 'Legba is a remarkable marriage of sound, image and idea', (40) which is what a poem at its best is.

In the last poem of 'The New World' group of poems the poetic persona we meet is distinctly the Omowale returning to his land where he was psychologically an alien, which he must now learn to love and by which he must become possessed. This two way process of possessing and being possessed by a particular landscape as well as people is dramatized in the remaining poems of *Islands*.

The tone of the poem is dry and resigned. The Omowale is the black consciousness and relives the experience of the slaves from the early days of slavery. The dignity of the cloth covering the shoulder (only the respectable in Africa used to wear cloth knotted on the shoulder), and the name
of the tribe, a matter of self-respect are forgotten. The skin has forgotten its sense of shame, disgust and humiliation and the eyes do not wink away to hide the shame. Invested with great irony the images of snake, dog and cat bring out the 'dehumanization' of the slave. A snake rejuvenates after casting away its skin, the slave casts away the pride and the self-respect in order to survive and is thus born anew with the psyche of the 'colonized'. The black, forked tongue of the whip/snake enjoys the salt-red liquor (blood) of the beaten labourer and the shackles are like bulldogs gripping the ankles. In the last part of the poem there is a transition from 'I' to 'We' on the part of the narrator. The dog eats the honour of the slaves for dinner - (the honour is nothing but refuse on the waste heap). The caged cat symbolic of fiercely independent spirit expresses his hatred for the slaves through its slit eyes burning with fury. (The slaves have learnt to accept their state as slaves/colonized). There is no turbulence left in the slaves which would bring them to God, to the unexpected lover.

3.8.2 Limbo

With this state of psyche the journey towards a positive acceptance of reality and identity begins. Characteristically this world is the 'Limbo' - neither heaven nor hell. 'Limbo' is a term rich with multiple layers of meaning. In Virgil and Dante it is a state encountered by those who have qualified neither for heaven
nor for hell. In the present context it suggests the death-in-life state of the New World sensibility.

Brathwaite's ironical vision also builds on the situational irony. Limbo happens to be the hackneyed dance in the night clubs performed as an example of folk culture and native spontaneity. Brathwaite states in the notes to *The Arrivants*:

> It is a dance in which the participants have to move, with their bodies thrown backwards and without any aid whatsoever, under a stick which is lowered at every successfully completed passage under it, until the stick is practically touching the ground. It is said to have originated - a necessary therapy - after the experience of the cramped conditions between the slave-ship decks of the Middle Passage. Now very popular as performing act in Caribbean Night clubs. (41)

What the slaves suffered with great pain just for survival has degenerated into a 'performing act'. The Limbo of the Caribbean is in this sense analogous to the Cakewalk, the Minstrel dance etc. in Black America.

In his notes to the Argo recording of *Islands* Brathwaite says before the recording of 'The Cracked Mother':

> We now hear the see-saw effect of the imposition of an alien god on an integrated personality. Caonoba, the Carib daughter of this section, trapped in a convent garden, surrounded by black-robed nuns, experiences the collapse and fragmentation of her world through a series of water images ending in hurricane and emotional blindness. (42)

From the *History of the British West Indies* one comes to know of a historical Caonoba, Carib by birth, married to Anacaona of an Arawale cacigne. A brave man, he fought
desperately against the Spaniards but was captured and finally died at sea while being sent to Spain as a prisoner.

In the present poem she represents the primal coherent consciousness of the original inhabitants of the West Indies. Hence the 'Cracked Mother' is the soil of the West Indies or rather the Caribbean Islands. 'Cracked' suggests disintegration, insanity, schizophrenia—the emotionally torn condition of the originally innocent mother accepting the white man's God through conversion. The Mother tells Caonaba to accept the teaching of the convent, represented by the nuns, Santa Marias as they are called (Santa Maria was also the name of Columbus' ship). Invasion, religion and education unite to fracture the coherent and consistent life of the people. She, being innocent, has hoped like her counterparts we meet in Weep Not Child, Arrow of God and In the Castle of My Skin, that the education the white man brings is 'the key' to better life. Little does she understand that it is a package deal. The innocents in Dante's 'Limbo' were not saved because they lived before Christ's Nativity. The innocents in The Arrivants die because the light has come. The see-saw imagery parodies the way reading is taught in West Indian primary schools and suggests the passage of time.

You gave your beads, you took my children and now I cannot reach them (182)
'Beads' are the beads in the trinkets of the slave-trader as well as the beads in the rosary. Christianity, thus, divides the tribe on both sides of the Atlantic.

The third part of the poem brings out the material success at the cost of the people's faith.

the wells running over but our cups broken? (183)

The fourth and the last part establishes the topsy-turvyed relationship between the sea, the land and the sky. The third, fourth and fifth stanzas create a serene dream of the proper relationship between man and nature. The poem ends with the reality of 'the breach of the sea's balanced treaty' ending in a hurricane. Through visually powerful images of the loud gallopers devouring the promenades, gardens, clubs, merry-go-rounds and trapping the fish and smashing the balance between the land and the sea make the poignancy of the questions

How will new maps be drafted?  
Who will suggest the new tentative frontier?  
How will the sky dawn now? (184)

with which the poem ends even more acute.

After this bitter celebration of the land which has lost its balance the poet takes us to the indigenous religious groups in the West Indies, as 'Shepherd' the name given to 'Pocomania' and other religious groups, suggests. The poem stands in clear contrast to 'The Cracked Mother' as it explores the possibility of roots, acceptance and affirmation on the part of the descendants of Ananse and Legba. There is a shift in the imagery from water and sea
to 'Pukkumina Balm Yard'. The sounds, rhythms and rituals of the pukkumina / revival cult are employed symbolically. The Omowale brings his maimed soul and his despairing sense of void and attempts the inner descent to the 'centre self' for the first time. Brathwaite offers a different conception of the possible relationship between the artist and the Caribbean society. 'Shepherd' is the name given to Afro-Caribbean cult leader. His role as a healer, a diviner, an orator, one who organizes and integrates the community has been dramatized in Roger Mais' Brother Man. In Brathwaite's own article 'Art and Society: Kapo: A Context', he regards the ways of looking at the artist as a lonely talented individual more or less alienated from his society, (Keats, Shelley, Mozart, Kafka, Gaugin, Van Gogh, Dostoevsky) as the ways which are assumed by the community of the elite, the inheritors of a Great Tradition. He then suggests the alternative way:

But there is another way of looking at the artist and at society: and this is a view which begins by looking upon society as made up of elite and the masses (the people or folk); in according to them an equality of consideration, and equilibrium of attention. (43)

The artist here becomes a moderator, a mediator and a medium, bridging the gap between the psyche and society, and between the elite and the folk. In 'Shepherd', the Ananse and shepherd personae are fused, Kapo is for Brathwaite a symbol of potential psychic wholeness, fusing intellect and instinct. 'Shepherd' thus traces the process by which the Omowale, who has returned, experiences a capacity for
wholeness and depth, in spite of the schizophrenia which threatens to fragment the psyche of both the artist and the society.

Thus he begins with the Caribbean re-interpretation of the sound of the Atumpan, 'the dumb-speaking god' of the Masks.

The line, 'the water is waiting' refers to the spiritual journey which is the integral part of the pukkumina or vodun worship. Metaphorically, it is reclaiming and being possessed by the spirit of the past on the part of the poet/Omowale.

The triple drum beat a few lines later introduces the second stage in this soul's journey into night. Brathwaite is busy creating new symbols here. 'The Dark Room' is the psyche and so is 'The Balm Yard'. One also witnesses here the preparation of the ground for germination and growth.

There is a triple drum beat again, introducing the third phase of the journey. The poet has rediscovered his sound. Here is an allusion to the awakening ceremonies presented in Masks. What follows is the total acceptance of the fragile, explosive vision, 'the bubble eyes of the river' and 'the cracked ground' of the Caribbean experience.

If this is all
I have
if this is all
I have
I can travel no further. (186)

The 'I-consciousness' of the traveller becomes the blood and water of the shepherd's libation. It does not
only discover its ground; it becomes the earth, the dust, the pebble of the room of worship which now thunders with drums as 'possession' is near. Acceptance leads to an 'incarnation' of the history of the tribe in the flesh of the protagonist. No longer harbourless, the artist/dancer accepts the scorched soil of the Caribbean as home. 'The noon is history whose sun has not only burnt the earth but cast shadows' i.e. the ancestral presences. The implied image of 'the tree' is important in vodun worship. (In fact in Indian rituals of possession also the possessed is termed as 'tree'). Roots of trees are supposed to be the points of intersection between the world of human beings and the underground world of 'les invisibles'. The repetition of triple drum beats introduces the next stage in the journey, the achievement of visionary language

now the drum speaks
flat palms open their lips
give light to the tight eyes. (187)

The next few lines describe the state of someone actually possessed. The entire ritual is used here as a metaphor to illuminate a cardinal feature of his 'personal aesthetic': that of consonance and atonality which is projected by Brathwaite as an inalienable part of Black sound in the New World.

Finally, slowly, the possession takes place.

This movement from ego to egoless empathy with 'the tribe' or people is what has been taking place. The 'I-consciousness' in 'Shepherd' moves from observation to participation which is so total that he loses the 'self' and
becomes one with the ritual objects in the room, as well as
with worshippers surrounding him.

The first part ends with 'the dumb speaks' - the dumb
one is the poet who has gone through a healing ritual in the
Balm Yard of the Caribbean.

Part two of the poem is a bridge passage of contrasting
tone. Yet the protagonist no longer accepts that he lives
in a world where all myth and metaphor have decayed.

The streets of my home have their own gods
but we do not see them (189)

What the poet is trying to suggest is that symbols and
metaphors rooted in the landscape and experience of the
Caribbean do exist but blacks in modern times do not use
them.

The streets’ root is in the sea
in the deep harbours;
it is a long way from Guinea
but the gods still have their places (189-190)

Brathwaite’s metaphorical Guinea is acreage to be
possessed by the living. This was still possible because of
the acculturation and syncretism involved in the process of
creolisation as a result of which the old capacity of
symbol-making does not die but goes on adding to its
complexity by accommodating new symbols taken over from
Christianity. Brathwaite accepts such accommodation as
fertile ground for the rebuilding of his own faith in life
and the healing of his own schizophrenia.

'Caliban', the next poem, is about Caliban as a major
archetype and a stock-figure in West Indian literature.
Mannoni used it as the title of his book analysing the colonizer-colonized relationship in his famous book *Prospero and Caliban*. Fanon used the 'Caliban metaphor' in his *The Wretched of the Earth*. Lamming titled one of his novels with the line Caliban utters in The Tempest, 'Water With Berries'.

The poem begins with the poet's reaction against the tiresome statistics of imperialist exploitation. Addressing Leviticus, Jeremiah and Jean-Paul Sartre, the poet denounces the decadence and crippledom of his society, reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's *Choruses from 'The Rock'.*

and now I see these modern palaces have grown out of the soil, out of the bad habits of their crippled owners

The Chrysler stirs but does not produce cotton
the Jupiter purrs but does not produce bread.

(191)

Chrysler and Jupiter are references to automobile manufacturers suggesting how the islands are now victims of American imperialism in the Third World. Not only Afro American but also Afro-Caribbean peoples are victims of Yankee economic/military hegemony.

The following stanzas reveal how the islands have become victims of 'tourist culture' selling themselves to the rich Americans and becoming degenerate, corrupt and parasitical new colonies. In Havana the police collected tribute 'touring the gambling houses'. In Andro Island and Isle of Pines the moral squadron fleeced the whores Mary and Mary Magdalene. But this exploitation of the poor went unnoticed; it was probably internalised by the people. The
newspapers, the supposed guardians of law and order, spoke of 'The Wall Street', of war medals the consulate's Assistant wears. Reminding one of W.H. Auden's 'To An Unknown Citizen', the lines read:

The sky was cloudy, a strong breeze;
Maximum temperature eighty two degrees. (191)

Is the scene ever going to change for the wretched of the Earth? With great pain the narrator asks:

It was December second, nineteen fifty six
It was the twelfth October fourteen ninety-two
How many bangs how many revolutions? (192)

All the three dates are very important - 1492, referring of course to Columbus's discovery of the West Indies - the starting point of the suffering of the Black; 1838 - the slave insurrection in Haiti challenging the colonialism; and 1956 - Fiedel Castro and Che Guevara starting the second revolution. But things have not changed. Will they ever? That is the scarily disquieting question the poem powerfully presents.

The second and the third parts of the poem are parallel to sequences in 'Tano' in Masks dramatizing the movement from death to regeneration. In the second section Caliban entering the moment of ecstasy through the dance at the carnival is observed and described.

down
down
down
and the darkness falling; eyes
shut tight
and the whip light
crawling round the ship

189
where his freedom drown down down down to the island town. (192-193)

Again and again the pain of the first loss of freedom is `relived'. The mask-playing Trinidadian who is the result and victim of crippled mimic man politics, appears as a drunken pan man, hiccupping his freedom across the carnival stage, triply debased by his contact with Britain's Prospero, America's Trinculo and his new local masters. Behind and beneath the gaiety and confidence lies a fear of the overwhelming oppression maintained by the `god' who rules his island-town—the politician/businessman/scholar alliance. The carnival is indeed an escape from the daily encounter with the agencies of oppression. This use of carnival music as escape leads him back to where silence lies.

In section three, the poet accepts the mas' man as another persona. At this point the three meanings of `limbo', the silent neuter void, nightclub minstrel dance and symbolic insurrection ritual-intersect one another. In the lines that follow there is first the downward movement to the dark underground till he hears the drummer calling him, where the lowermost point is reached and resurrection, suggested by upwards movement into sunrise, begins. The tension continues in the final line of the poem when the carnival, the dance through night, is over and caliban
senses his

hot
slow
step
on the burning ground. (195)

as he walks home.

The next poem 'Pebbles' is a metaphor for the islands. It brings out the similarity between a pebble and an egg - the cool surface, the creamy whiteness, the shape and the smooth touch. But an egg is breakable if you crack it

a glue of life exudes
a sticky death (196)

A pebble, on the contrary, excludes death. A knife will not snap it open and

It will slay giants
but never bear children. (196)

Brathwaite himself says in the notes to the recorded version of Islands 'A state/dynamic equilibrium is reached in 'Pebble' which is, in a sense, the metaphorical crux and centre of the poem.' (44)

Is the egg a symbol of barrenness of West Indian life? Or does it culminate the movement from an egg - i.e. life to a pebble on the surface of which seeds do not take root? If so, it suggests the movement from a pebble to an egg - in the remaining sequences of Islands.

'Rites' is, therefore, aptly placed in the process of Islands. It describes the encounter between black West Indians and their white overlords, both local (Gullstone) and the M.C.C. on the field of cricket in the late Crown
Colony period. This encounter is a metaphor of the early phase of the struggle for Self Government and Independence in the West Indies; for the colonizer the crucial question in politics, cricket and art was whether the Blacks could or would maintain the 'traditions and standards of the game'. For the colonized, the desire was to prove that they were not only fit to rule, but capable of beating Massa at his own game of politeness, sportsmanship and diplomacy. Genuine rebels such as Dr. Cheddi Jagan of Guyana who called the rules of the colonial game and the very game itself into question, were driven off the playground and not allowed to participate unless they played by the rules.

Brathwaite in 'Rites' sustains the image of the Caribbean as a playground first stated in the 'Calypso' sequence and repeated in 'The Cracked Mother'. The main difference is that the West Indies is both a theatre of the encounter as well as of entertainment and escape. If Brathwaite places the white West Indian represented by Gullstone rigorously he does not view the Black (represented by 'Hop-a-long Cass') with any complacency. The nickname itself, taken from Hollywood Westerns and comic strips, suggests the grip which America had begun to exercise in the forties on the sensibility of the islands.

The actual cricket match on which Brathwaite bases his story, told significantly enough by a tailor in West Indian dialect (Brathwaite's national language), was the first test of the M.C.C. 1948 tour of the West Indies. This was played at Kensington Oval, Barbados. But Brathwaite is not much
interested in the facts of the event as he is using it as a metaphor of the post-World War II encounter between the colonies and the 'Mother Country' on the field of political exchange. 'Rites' is an allegory about the exchange of power in that crucial and uncertain period of West Indian history. In the words of Rohlehr

'Rites' is a daring experiment and brilliant achievement. It had first appeared in Andrew Salkey's Caribbean prose where the point was made that Clyde was 'un man who could hit a fas' bowler fur six off he back foot', one of the rare feats of batsmanship as power. Brathwaite in inserting what was a short story in the middle of Islands is attempting to reduce the distance between the short story, the dramatic monologue, the one-act play and narrative poetry. This fluidity of genres has been brilliantly explored by the Guyanese actors Ken Corsbie and Marc Matthews, who have appeared as 'Dem Two'. Together with Henry Mootoo and a small group of musicians, they subsequently appeared as 'All Ah Wa', and have done a particularly exciting interpretation of Brathwaite's 'The Dust', which comprehends the interplay between ward, rhythm image, gesture, music, and how all of these things come together in folk religion of the Caribbean. What Brathwaite has done in monologues such as 'The Dust' or 'Rites' is to extend the frontiers of both poetry and drama in the Caribbean. (45)

The poem uses the free flowing technique of the folk tale. It is full of humour and warmth of the Caribbean people. All the characteristic features of 'Orature' - changes of tone, pace, pitch, a feel for simile and a comedy of the grotesque, suspense, and the inclusion of a story within a story - are present here and as it happens in many folk tales, the story functions at two levels.

'Islands', the last poem in the second movement, serves as a coda. It summarises in a fairly straightforward fashion all that has gone on before. Appropriately, it is
concerned with modes of writing Caribbean history

history's hot
lies
leading to ruin and moral squalor
The sun's slums:

But Brathwaite's comprehensive vision would not allow the presentation of only this aspect of reality. One can see through the eyes of delight.

Jewels,
if there is delight
in your eyes.
The light
shimmers on water,
the cunning
coral keeps it blue

This delight requires a capacity for participation in the strength of the Caribbean people in survival of their ordeal, as well as in the natural beauty of the island.

The second stanza uses geography as a metaphor for history. History is a trap, cul-de-sac for time's humble servants.

Descendants of the slave do not lie in the lap of the more fortunate gods.

But again, if your eyes are kinder you will observe:

butterflies
how they fly higher
and higher before their hope dries with endeavour
and they fall among flies

The butterflies are used as a symbol of fragile hope, resurrected spirit and beauty.

The final stanza points to the fact that lessons of
history are pointless unless they lead to creative choice in the present. When human values do not govern the lives of people, the island's jewels

Saba, Barbuda, dry flattened Antigua, will remain rocks, dots, in the sky-blue frame of the map. (205)

As one moves to the third movement 'Rebellion' one notices the beginning of a counter-process. It is the consciously chosen movement from 'death' and 'silence' to the will to create even in the face of ultimate contingency. It involves a commitment to a particular social landscape, a commitment to bearing the burden of conscience in this society and finally and most significantly the commitment to the true decolonization of this society by attaining not only political but also economic freedom of this society.

3.8.3 Rebellion

'Wake' the first poem in 'Rebellion' is similar to 'Didn't he Ramble' and 'Adowa' from Rights of Passage and Masks respectively. In the words of Rohlehr: 'In 'Wake' the Omowale of Islands begins his slow journey out of the spiritual paralysis of Limbo', towards a capacity for choice and positive commitment.' (46) It is a poem summarizing the journey from negation to affirmation and thus functions as a prelude to the second half of Islands.

There are three dimensions, namely African, Creole and Christian/ animist present in 'Wake'. The 'ship' in the poem is first of all the ferry which takes the dead spirit across the River of Death. It is like Charon's bark in
Virgil's Aeneid, Book VI. In this context the river is the Black Volta. But the death ship is equated with the slave galleon and then with the islands themselves, adrift and plundered by butterflies. The first half of the first section revives the slave ship's journey into darkness (death) and tells the ship returning to Africa

and on arrival
if someone should ask you how you left us
we on these islands
with their rockets of grief
say
that you left us
eyes still closed
fists still curled
bones still lapped with milk. (209)

The lines not only suggest the 'new birth' on the islands but the entire process is a clear indication of the beginning and acceptance of this new life in the next stanza firmly describing 'the geography' of the islands 'teeth of the rocks' (coral), 'pathways leaking up from the beaches', 'the wall with its cracks', 'frangipani blossoms', 'grave of the soldiers' (suggesting history) and the 'tales of the sandbox tree' (suggesting folk tales). The spirit living in the new land also sends a request to the 'never returning ancestors' through the spirit of the returning ship which is in the form of a prayer for rain and fertility but deeply linked with the act of remembrance and reverence for the ancestors.

tell our never returning grandfathers of old
that the houses are damp, the verandas are cold
with the wind weeping in from the sea
that the hedges are dusty and the tubes of the cane are dry
let there be rain (209)
The houses, the hedges and the dry cane suggest a firm beginning of new life. In fact, this passage is fashioned after the Haitian address to the dead and would make a literal sense to the Haitian peasant faced by constant drought and starvation.

The poet then says that after the soul’s journey for eight days, on the ninth night when the flesh will begin to speak

out of the dark I will call you  
my warned dead
Ibo cane - cutter
priest of my silent bread  (210)

This will be his Barbadian slave ancestor. By calling him he will start the task of forging links with the West Indian ancestors and thus establish the African custom of ancestor-worship in the West Indies. He will seek the blessings of his Afro-West Indian slave ancestor

mother me with words,  
gems, spoken talismans of your broken tongue  (210)

At this point the poet invokes rain and then invokes Legba, the doorkeeper of gods, the intermediary between the dead and the living. He is invoked here as a symbol of Caribbean Man’s potential for: (a) cultural wholeness (b) psychological wholeness and (c) historical continuity - blending the life currents of the living and the dead.

The second section of the poem begins with the celebration of the beauty of the world received through sensory perceptions - eyes, ears, lips and touch - and then sings the glory of the Word. The tone changes from praise
to irony and brings out the superficiality of the imposed religion of the Orthodox plantation Church, which says that at the beginning there was 'Word'. The poet says

Welcome the Word

For the word is love
and has been absent from our butterflies (212)

The word has degenerated into an empty catch-phrase and cannot live among us. The lines remind one of A. Césaire's *A Return to My Native Land* (82) and Eliot's *The Waste Land* (385-88). Bringing out the emptiness of the Roman Catholicism that was practised during the days of plantocracy and is followed even today, the poet points out that the only gods worshipped on the islands which led to its moral destruction are

our gods
of righteousness and mammon (213)

The irony is very intense here as the poet means exactly the opposite i.e. 'unrighteous mammon' (material wealth).

The next poem 'Francina' is written in a totally different style. It is plain and dry suggesting an aspect of Caribbean reality. 'The humped hundred year old turtle' (164) is an image for the island itself. (The islands as has been already noted were popularly known as turtle islands) and Francina the ex-fish vendor - rheumatic, nervous, weak-bladdered, catarrhal and nearing extinction is an outcast among the outcasts. The first section of the
The poem develops the 'islands' as a park which is converted into a dance hall and a barbecue so that the city-sick electorate can brawl and stew their buttocks (214).

The lake is converted into a parking lot. Yet the publicists bawl about how they will build the island: hotels where there were pebbles, casinos where the casuarinas sang, and flowing fields of tourists for our daily bread (214).

The animals in the park are for 'sale'.

The second section of the poem offers the portrait of Francina, who buys the old turtle for 'nine dollars and thirty five cents'. The narrator, who is an ordinary West Indian living a 'hand to mouth' existence does not understand how she could afford to buy 'a wrinkleface monster you can't even eat' and sincerely says:

But I wish she wa'n't wastin' she cash pun a turtle! (215)

The dead pan style and the wit bring out how the moral destruction caused by neo-colonial forces is almost complete.

The following poem 'Unrighteousness of the Mammon' begins where 'Wake' ends and continues to say how changing the islands into tourists' paradise is an ongoing activity in which the current politicians prostitute their culture. The speaker laments that in pre-emancipation and pre-independence days even the fear, the hope and the protest offered the common ground which does not exist today to hold them together.
Through all these poems the poet moves through history unflinchingly. There is a constant descent into the personal areas of trauma. This is not in despair but in order to gather strength and faith for new affirmative encounter with this inheritance. Naturally the next poem 'Naming' proceeds to redefine a world where 'the other' still presumes control. The concept of naming is here connected with the quest for identity and as well as self identification. 'Naming' is associated here with the magical power of utterance, the power of an uttered word as 'primal creative force' and the utterance making the perceived cognitive reality meaningful. The act of naming is thus related to the ritual of a symbolic or psychic return to primordial roots. But even at the level of perception of nature's cycle the poem reveals the hypersensitive visionary in Brathwaite.

There is a gladness
in the trees
when the rain stops
before the rains stop.
This is the drought
It is a fine haze. (218)

In his notes to the Argo recording of Rights of Passage Brathwaite narrates his experience in St. Lucia while he lived there in 1962/63:

But living in St. Lucia at this time, I watched this drought drift in towards the island moving in across the ocean from the east, obscuring Martinique, obscuring sails beating towards Castries. And I suddenly realised what I was witnessing - that milky haze, that sense of dryness - was something I had seen and felt before in Ghana. It was the seasonal dust cloud, drifting out of
the great ocean of Sahara - the harmattan. By an obscure miracle of connection, this Arab's nomad wind, cracker of Fante Wood a thousand miles beyond, did not die on the sea-shore of West Africa, its continental limit; it drifted on, reaching the New World archipelago to create our drought, imposing an African season on the Caribbean sea. And it was on these winds too, and in this season, that the slave ships came from Guinea, bearing my ancestors to this other land. (47)

Rohlehr has points out that what Brathwaite intuitively felt was validated by satellite pictures of dust hazes in the Caribbean atmosphere. He quotes from the news report:

Atmospheric chemist Joseph Prospero says there's a direct correlation between the severity of drought in West Africa and the amount of dust in the Caribbean skies. Dust from the Sahara region is found a week later, thousands of miles away in the Caribbean. (48)

The long quotations cited here reveal not only the sixth sense that the poet is gifted with but his deep yearning to find links between the Caribbean and Africa which justify the perpetual wandering of the black man.

The poem itself is thus a glorious celebration of the 'rejuvinative' cyclic power of nature visually depicted in Serengetti Shall Not Die (49), which in its turn suggests that there is 'hope'. One can live in the Canbbeans.

In the poem that follows, namely 'Eating the Dead' there is a ritual in which a syncretic blend of African, Afro Caribbean and European cultures occurs. The Akan ritual of eating the dead was associated with the taking of oaths involving the affirmation of the loyalty of people to the chiefs and Asantahene. 'Drinking the gods' involved the drinking of water made potent by pouring over an object
particularly sacred to the God or an ancestral spirit. This parallels the Catholic eucharist in which Christian ritualists eat the symbolic body (bread) and drink the symbolic blood (wine) of Christ as a part of the ritual called 'Communion'.

The poet knocks thrice on the doors of his own inner self, to summon gods and creative forces which will strengthen his creative endeavour. The first one summoned is Ananse.

I need your speed
and your enduring cunning (219)

Ogun is summoned next because of the poet's concern with interrelationship between creative power and politics. Damballa, the snake god, is invoked next for vulnerability and wisdom. Next, he refers to the ordeal of thrusting one's hands into boiling oil seven times. The image suggests the ordeal of years of preparation in which the artist learns how to endure both the fire of history and the inner refining fire of spirit which sears away the dross of failure and materialism. The poet, though gifted with new language, cannot sing as he is confronted with moral crippledom. But ultimately he swears a bitter oath of dedication on behalf of this modern diminished man.

The next poem, 'Negus' renames the colonizer's god in Afro-Caribbean terms in an act which syncretically reinterprets the imposed religion in the image of the colonized. 'Negus' is the title used by the Rastafarians for Haile Selassie, whom they substituted for Jesus. Though
the style employed is that of the preacher the text is not the Bible but Fanon’s classic *The Wretched of the Earth*. The rhetorical model is that of the Haitian prayer to Legba and the musical model — the Rastafarian drumming — reinforces the rhetorical one. The poet finally prays

I
must be given words to refashion futures
like a healer’s hand (223)

‘Cane is a coda to the ‘Rebellion’ sequence. It depicts the community of Caribbean peasant women moving in order to adjust to the bleakness of modern society. Written entirely in the West Indian dialect — Nation language according to Brathwaite, through narrations and conversations among Miss Maisie, Miss Envy, Miss Maud, Olive and Pearlie — the Black matriarchs gradually become a single representative choronic voice and like the Mmensen they recall the losses of the tribe. They are expressing a need for the recognition of the African presence as a major shaping force in New World Civilization.

But the time is come
when you got to speak
when you got to face fac’s
when you got to ax (227)

Yet all that is being ‘axed’ for is man’s minimal right:

... to dead, born
an’ beget in de dark
jes like the rest o’ you;
to eat, drink an’ forget
that we ‘fraid o’de darkness
we loss in, crossin’
a field when the moon
isn’t showin’ the path-
way (227)

These are the people with the stark grasp of minimal

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rights and they rebel when they feel that this, too, is being denied.

3.8.4 Possession

With this, we move to the next movement which is more affirmative and is aptly titled 'Possession'. According to Gordon Rohlehr:

'Possession' implies not only the rituals of Afro-Caribbean cults and Pentecostal sects, whose symbols Brathwaite has freely employed, but, as in Mark Kennedy's speech in Lamming's Of Age and Innocence the state of possessing and being possessed by a particular history, landscape and people.' (50)

'Coral', the first poem, is a creation myth and itemizes the poet's possessions from the beginning of his history as a Caribbean Man.

The image may have been suggested by a line in Derek Walcott's 'The Castaway' - 'If I listen I can hear the polyp build' (51) - but Brathwaite develops it in a quite original way.

Corals are an apt image of the Caribbean historical process. When the poet says 'the coral needs this pain' he is suggesting that the growth of the coral like the growth of the pearl in the oyster is a symbol of the artist's capacity to make creative use of his pain.

In the third stanza when the poet says

the ducts and factories sucking
the rivers out, engineering
their courses

(232)

he fuses the idea of the coral being sucked of life, with the sugar factories squeezing the juice out of canes and the
primal energies out of lives.

The rest of the poem is the depiction of the historical process of the West Indies. It concludes

and slowly slowly
uncurling embryo
leaf's courses sucking grain's armour,
my yellow pain swims into the polyp's eye.

The poet's yellow pain will also be absorbed by the 'polyp's eye' - that is, it will become a miniscule contribution to the slow organic growth of the island's sensibility. The next poem 'Dawn' is naturally the one that refers to the awakening sensibility. Like 'Coral', the 'Dawn' also is associated with seascape. The first section describes the sea in its splendour. But when the first light appears in the sky

the dawn
blinds, open eyes, (235)

From the glory of the dawn we move to the grim reality of Kingston slums in the second section. These are strongly romantic images like flowering and chrysanthemum mixed with the horror of slum life which the same light of the sun illuminates.

the dump
heaps sprout pain again and again: (237)

From this sordid reality of the Islands the third section once more takes us to a 'possibility'. The poet, here, claims the island itself as his 'father'. His 'mother' is still water. Both are associated here with a sense of wholeness, confidence and fulfilment and with the
restoration of time past. This section of 'Dawn' relates to Coltrane's slow prayer movements such as 'After the Rain' or 'Welcome'. Brathwaite seeks to convey the welcome feeling of peace after the struggle by employing liquid semi vocals and sibilants in abundance.

In the third poem of this movement titled 'Ancestors', the poet celebrates his more recent ancestors on the islands. They are an Afro-Saxon grandfather who is an independent yeoman farmer and a submissive but subtly rebellious grandmother, who is always singing. The style is dry and plain once more. The grandfather is timid Tom's alter ego, the Great Tom. His farm of canefields places him in the tradition of plantation owners. He is a dandy, a junior massa, he has his own personal boot-black and nigger's nigger in the figure of his wife.

Now he is dead. That his 'trap' is used both for fuel and to patch holes in fences suggests that some have razed the past whereas others have retained it in fragments. 'Only his hat is left' and the narrator is lost in it, temporarily inheriting his personality and his heart.

I used to try it and hear the night wind man go battering through the canes, cocks waking up and thinking It was dawn throughout the clinking country night (239)

The grandmother, whose portrait is offered in the second section is Great Tom's slave and wife, a typical relic of the Victorian age, the age of the Empire on which the sun never set. She churns white cream into yellow butter. She makes something golden and new out of her
European and West-Indian songs. Her song ‘Great Tom is cast’ is about the casting of the bell which was mounted in the bell tower of Christ Church, Oxford. A popular English ballad — here it suggests that her husband is cast in the ‘English’ mould. The grandmother, however, has other songs — the blues, mentos and worksongs of slaves. The third section of the poem presents one such song. It is stark and tells of hard labour unto death. But the tone is soothing suggesting the the pain has been lived through and seen in context. G. Rohlehr observes, ‘Brathwaite accepts his grandmother’s ‘voices’ — traditional English and West Indian Creole — and freely employs them for his own self-definition’. (52)

The third ancestor is the most unlikely vessel of the manifestation of Ogun, here symbolizing ‘the craftsmanship’ and creativity, the god as carver and shaper. Like the earlier two ancestors Ogun also relates to two worlds, styles and traditions. His uncle, the carpenter is grotesque in appearance, and is silent while others talk in his workshop. He was a master craftsman

cold
world of wood caught fire as he whittled: (242)

He made chairs, tables, doors, coffins, donkey box carts, window frames, triangle trellises...

But he was poor and most days he was hungry
Imported cabinets with mirrors, formica table tops, spine-curving chairs made up of tubes with hollow
steel-like bird bones...
were what the world preferred (243)
The poem traces the period from immediately after World War II to the mid-sixties. Structurally the poem balanced two units of twenty lines each on the bridge of six lines. The first twenty lines describe Tom and the last twenty lines describe his creative magic with the medium of wood. Rohlehr observes,

These final twenty lines, then, are a good illustration of Brathwaite's mastery of two types of sound: the first that of pastoral woodwind or muted saxophone, the second that of drums being cut with the flat palm of the hand. (53)

....Brathwaite reads this passage to convey a calm dread urgency, rather than anger. Here too his concern is with process rather than protest.

After meeting Tom who becomes 'Ogun' on Sundays by entering the spirit of the god through the mask we are taken to another image, that of 'the leopard', which stands for the West Indian who is trapped in his own sterility and encircling doubt.

'Leopard' first appeared in BIM Jul-Dec 1961. But that poem lacked the precise symbolic focus. In it the Leopard was only a broad symbol of passion and instinct and had only an indirect connection with the Afro-Caribbean problem. But in the 'Homecoming' section the 'Leopard' symbolises a rebellion rendered incomplete by inner division, the tension of schizophrenia and the reality of his prison. The cage is 'glint, rock, water ringing the island's doubt'. The lean flanks of the leopard 'quick and quiver until the tension cracks his ribs' (244)
The second section of 'Leopard' goes back to the post-medieval African past - when the weaker peoples (the antelope and duiker) such as Ga were preyed upon by warlike tribes like Akwamu. With the European slavery 'survival of the fittest' - a natural law - turns into the morally damnable act of murder.

The third section offers rationalization of History which excludes the element of human free will. The African Imperialism (powerful river) breeds the same arrogant sense of manifest destiny.

The fourth section describes his 'caged' state. The cage is both the real prison in which the colonizer keeps the native rebels and also the barriers of rationalism behind which instinct is caged. Yet even here a sort of self-knowledge is possible out of a detached contemplation of the two. The hunter and the hunted, the master and the slave will recognize mutual guilt and responsibility, and their humiliating capacity to exchange the roles. If reconciliation of the polarities - domination with submissiveness, sadism with masochism - will be won with catastrophic encounter, it will contain nothing but tragedy. It will be of no use to the society, for tragedy always implies the withdrawal of the individual from the society. 'Anvil', the sixth poem in the group, moves from the revolution in art to the revolution in politics which has not yet taken place but which is suggested by the change in the persona from the carpenter/wood-carver to the
blacksmith. The suggested deity is again Ogun, in its African aspect.

The first section of ‘Anvil’ presents Tom’s cabin and yard. Like the grandfather’s, this also looks so left so unlived in: yard, fence and cabin (248)

The second section takes the reader to the past and suggests that beneath this ruin and holocaust,

beneath the docile smile, lies this unbridled monster’s breath (249)

but whether the monster will demand retribution or not is uncertain.

In the third section the focus shifts from the era of slavery when Tom rejected the ethic of retribution to today’s rebels and their law of fang and tooth. The poet cannot judge whether

...Force

fashions force;
master makes over
mastering slave
and cruelty breeds
a litter of bright evils (250)

or whether Tom is an imperfect Blacksmith (Toussaint and Cuffy) who fails to strike when the metal is hot and so cannot forge ‘the future of heroic bronze’. As a result, he bequeaths the posterity no image at all. He made / nothing, un- / made nothing (251). The poet wants to suggest that the artist who does not ‘rebel’ and negate the void ends up being trapped in it. Even in the fourth section it remains uncertain whether Tom acted out of humanity or out of
cowardice in failing to strike the slavemaster. But what is certain is that his failure has produced today's paralysis of will. In the last ten lines there is a challenging question that the narrator poses, suggesting that only an act of faith will help breaking the circle, when returning to the future will be possible.

The theme continued in 'The Stone Sermon' as the Baptist preacher is invoked here as an example of working faith in the face of destitution and scepticism. The title of the poem is a parody of the Buddha's 'Fire Sermon' and T.S. Eliot's 'The Wasteland'. The poet is parodying the possibility of religious ritual as a metaphor for socio-political and aesthetic process. Probably Brathwaite has in mind Stokely Carmichael's visit to England in 1967, which electrified the Black community and converted a small but significant number of Black people into militant activists. Stokely Carmichael used the idea of journey home in his final speech in the Round House. (54)

The sermon is followed by a hymn based on the folk song 'Sammy Dead', which we have heard earlier as grandmother's song in 'The Ancestors'. Here, of course, though the refrain is 'sookey dead' the content is different. It brings out the emptiness of the establishment church. God becomes 'Shark' and a bird of prey - vulture and ultimately a gaulin. The congregation here sings a hymn of despair and accuses God of hatred. Faith is the existential courage to
be' and hoping against hope in the face of spiritual
nakedness.

3.8.5 **The Beginning**

The cyclic movement of Brathwaite's trilogy comes to an end with the new 'Beginning'. There is an ingathering of themes and images which is part of the process of closing the circle. There is also a suggestion that now the ground is prepared for fruitful cultivation.

The first poem in this movement is 'Tizzic', a dialectical form of 'Phthisic' which means consumption of the tissue in tuberculosis. Tizzic, the ultimate peasant, is a rum guzzling tubercular ruin whose sexual irresponsibility is celebrated by Calypsonians as 'manliness'. Yet he is a symbol of both survival and independence. The narrator gives a portrait, like Francina, of someone who belongs to the past. Hardworking with his soil he was a slave to drums, the flute, brave brass and rhythm. (The second section of the poem enacts a carnival rhythm. Pauses are orchestrated to suit the mood the poet wants to create) As in case of everyone else, even in his case the song and dance provide a partial escape from the utter destitution. He danced Calypso, and Limbo, Maraval, Kitch, Sparrow, Dougla were stars of his melodic heaven. He is a stilt dancer who has to balance under most difficult conditions.

He walked so far on stilts of song, .... stars were near. Doors of St. Peter's heaven were ajar.
Mary, Christ’s Christmas mother was there too. Her sweet inclined compassion in full view. In such bright company he could no longer feel the cramp of poverty’s confinement.

The intense irony lies in the suggestion that on Ash Wednesday Tizzic awakens to his destitution. After his display of ‘bambalula bambulai’ (the African rhythm) he was a bambalula ‘slave’ of his circumstances.

In the next poem the countermovement to ‘Tizzic’ is provided. The title of the poem ‘Veve’ suggests a new beginning. Veve is a symbolic drawing with flour or chalk on the ground before the voudoun worship starts. The fisherman-artist creator is going to start his act. We earlier met him in ‘Littoral’ - busy making his net. The net is now complete. The images of dawn, morning, green fields and green water abound. The voices fill the green with hurricane.

it is the bird that sings, the green that wavers, wavers, wins the slave rebellion of the rot of dust that matters (264)

Paying a glorious poetic tribute to Tacky (the leader of slave rebellion) the poet worships the ground preparing it for the sacred act of ‘living with confidence’ and says. So on this ground, write, within the sound of this white limestone veve, (265)

The poem is a celebration of the magic gift of ‘Word’. Ironically the word is borrowed - hence in rags. Yet the
'Vishwakarma', the sculptor who fashions with 'words', has created his new 'Vishwa' - a new universe and is now consecrating it.

the word becomes
again a god and walks among us
look, here are his rags,
here is his crutch and his satchel
of dreams; here is his hoe and his rude implements
on this ground on this broken ground (266)

The poem ends indeed with a great statement of faith. The broken ground (shattered, impoverished and also ploughed for planting) manifests loss as well as possibility. There is fusion of Legba and Christ in 'Word', suggesting the burgeoning of West Indian culture.

The very last poem with which the epic ends of 'Jou'vert' a French Creole for 'Opening Day' and refers to the dawning of each carnival Monday.

So
bambalula bambulai
bambalula bambulai

'strech the drum and create music and dance' - these are the true West Indian arts. Own them with confidence. The poet says:

Christ will pray
to odomankoma
Nyame God
and Nyankopan

Christianity will assume a role in which supremacy of the sky-creator God of the African origin will be accepted and fusion will be sought. The names Odomankoma and Christ will be recognised as different names of the same concept of God.
Brathwaite rounds up the poem by offering a brief description of the experience of sixteen centuries that have intervened since Egypt. The reiteration of this experience and the end of the trilogy are both suggestive and significant. It is suggestive of the cool, instead of anguished, acceptance of the historical process on the part of the poet. This in its turn suggests that the process of healing has taken place and the creative confidence restored. The poet and his people have truly become 'arrivants'.

3.9 Brathwaite's Achievement

It is in this final achievement that one would like to accord the status of an epic to Brathwaite's extraordinary trilogy. It justifies the adjective 'epic' for it has the breadth and the scope of an epic. It has a grandeur of movement both in time and in space and more importantly there is embodied in it the vision that builds, on the foundation of what is positive in the past, a system of values for the future. An epic is a repository of cultural values. It enumerates what is still vital and what is worth preserving for the people who have inherited the culture from which the epic came forth. In this sense also Brathwaite's achievement is of great significance for the contemporary black man.

A great epic, though it springs from and is bound to the culture and times it comes from, contains much that is of universal significance. The greatness of the epics like
the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Iliad, the Aeneid, The Divine Comedy or Paradise Lost lies, surely in their being able to convey across time and across cultures the vision of fulfilment and realisation of the full potential of human beings. It is not at all an exaggeration to say that Brathwaite achieves at the end of the trilogy the creation of such a feeling about human potentiality and creativity.

Indeed, the achievement is all the more remarkable because it is executed with such consummate artistry. Brathwaite's poem has the unity of a revelation - the revelation which came to him and which he now expresses in words which must necessarily move in time. To preserve his unity of the vision - that is to say, to preserve the unity of the poem as a whole - Brathwaite falls back on every resource that poetry offers to a poet who is trying to communicate a profound vision and who is carrying out in T.S. Eliot's words 'a raid on the inarticulate'. In a sense, Brathwaite's poem is composed of several lyrical pieces. As in a lyric each experience is intensely felt at the subjective level. The poet's personal involvement and commitment to the overall vision is apparent at every point in the poem. Again a lyric poet is anxious not only to communicate his experience - the revelation that he has been entrusted with but also to persuade the reader to accept the truth of the experience, of the meaning of revelation, Brathwaite, too, creates a 'logic' within his poem - a poetic logic - which convinces us both of the profundity and the value of his vision. He achieves this with usual poetic
categories such as metaphor, imagery, mythmaking and so on.

I have commented on the use of these categories in the discussion of the poems in the foregoing pages. Here it should be pertinent, however, to mention some of them again with a view to bringing out the function they play in the overall structure of the poem.

First, let's turn to the images Brathwaite employs in individual poems. These images are vivid and mainly drawn from the world of nature. They suggest something primordial and fixed such as his images of turtles, pebbles etc. Then there are images that suggest transformation such as butterflies, coral etc. These images are used throughout the poem and like patterns in a kaleidoscope they impart different shades of meaning to the context. Yet another function that these recurrent images perform is to hold the different individual parts of the poem together. They poetically bridge the various aspects of the vision and offer unity to them. In a poem with such a vast scope, it is but inevitable that the poet should make use of imagery related to the basic elements that go to make up the universe. Most important of these is fire. Fire is used to symbolize, at times, a destructive force - an agent that takes away individuality (fire that brands human beings to make them, as it were, non-human). Sometimes fire is generated force, it is the blacksmith's fire that forges the weapons of liberation. And towards the end, fire is what cleanses the consciousness of the persona of its anger and
hatred so that the generative and creative powers are fully liberated. Indeed the changing ‘fire’ imagery in the poem maps the loss of self, preparation for regeneration and ultimate attainment of the self and ‘home’. It convinces us that:

When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one. (55)

Another elemental image used is that of the sea which plays a similar binding role in the poem. The sea is a destroyer in the sense that the sea carried the black man from Africa to the New World but it is, again, as in the last plays of Shakespeare, the sea that is instrumental in bringing the poet to his past by carrying him back there. It is out of the sea that the islands which are like some primordial turtles have come up and on which the poet now inhabits and on which he will found his ‘home’. Such imagery is essentially archetypal and arouses in the reader deeply felt relationships of which he is not for the most part fully aware. The archetypal images establish the lost connection.

One extraordinary instance of this is Brathwaite’s intuitive perception of how the Sahara is even today connected with the Caribbean islands by the winds which blow across the Sahara—over the Atlantic (to settle the sand which they carry for well over a thousand miles). By using land and sea imagery Brathwaite is able to communicate to the reader and convince him of the underlying unity and
continuity of the Black experience. It is, indeed, an exquisite example of imaginative faculty at its best. In it a revelation is given a concrete shape and is made apprehensible; it is thought made sensuous.

Coupled with these categories, there is also Brathwaite's superb handling of a variety of styles in the course of the trilogy. Some poems use short lines. Brathwaite has a way of breaking off a lexical item at the end of a line and carrying the rest of it to the next line. A comment on this has already been made above in the discussion of the poem 'The Journeys'. Very often he breaks proper nouns like Africa into fragments and the effect usually is to suggest fragmentation, uncertainty and hesitancy.

Brathwaite's range of styles is truly remarkable. He can mould his line to any purpose. His verse now gives an intensely moving, passionate account of pain and humiliation; now it is dry and matter-of-fact, now it re-enacts a litany and now a prayer. Now it is an ironic, sarcastic, dismissal; now it is stately, measured vehicle with great dignity. At every point Brathwaite knows what he is aiming at and invariably like an unerring arrow his style and his wordplay hit the target. Brathwaite's use of national language (Creole language) is not just ideological. The sections where he uses Creole underline the basic theme that out of the materials available one must forge a new
vision rather than go on carping and feeling inferior and
humiliated by the low status given to the Creole by the
colonisers or neo-colonisers. Using available creative
resources to greater purpose is also evident in Brathwaite's
use of the jazz rhythms. In fact, his very imaginative use
of jazz as a genuine art form helps him to tap the deeper
emotional energies that music can release (It is worth
remembering that T.S. Eliot also did the same thing in
fashioning his Four Quartets (56)) and to underline the
continuity of the African past and the Caribbean present
through music.

A sign of Brathwaite's greatness lies in his trenchant
refusal to be carried away by the very considerable artistic
virtuosity that he possesses. His constant play with sounds
of the words - assonances and dissonances - keeps us
astonished all the time. But at no point are these
kaleidoscopic designs created through the patterns of sound
for their own sake. They are always made to submit to the
overriding interests of the poem. It is in this extremely
rigorous commitment to his art, born out of a sage's
compassion for his people, that Brathwaite's greatness lies.
NOTES


8 Gordon Rohlehr, Pathfinder op. cit. p. 27.


For all the subsequent references to the poems in this anthology the page numbers are given at the end of each verse cited and are not included here.

14 Gordon Rohlehr, op. cit. p. 27.


16 Ibid

17 Walcott, D., 'Tribal Flutes: Review, Rights of Passage', Sunday Guardian, Part of Spain (March 19, 1967)

19 Edward Baugh, *Review of Masks*, Bim xii, no.47.


27 Gordon Rohlehr, *op.cit.*, pp. 120-121.


30 Ibid; p.126.

31 Ibid; p.136.


34 Wilson Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas", Caribbean Quarterly, XVI, No.2 (June 1970), p.27.


36 Ibid; p.168.

38 Ibid; p.229.
41 Edward Brathwaite, op.cit., p.274.
44 Edward Brathwaite, op.cit.
46 Ibid, p.239.
47 Edward Brathwaite, op.cit. (note 12)
49 Bernhard & Michael Grzimek, Serengeti Shall Not Die (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 14th imp. 1977)
50 Gordon Rohlehr, op.cit., p.274.
51 Derek Walcott, 'The Castaway and Other Poems' (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965)
52 Gordon Rohlehr, op.cit.286.
53 Gordon Rohlehr, op.cit.293.
56 Ibid; East Coker v line 179.