The Caribbean is a unique amalgam of racial, religious, literary and artistic currents. This results in a rich and diverse Afro-Caribbean culture across the many islands constituting the West Indies - a culture that is neither static nor homogenous.

The literature of the Caribbean has no indigenous tradition. The pre-Columbian American-Indians left rock-carvings and inscriptions, and their oral traditions did not survive sixteenth-century Spanish colonization. The West Africans who replaced them had no written traditions of their own. For about 400 years Caribbean literature was an offshoot or imitation of the models of the colonizing powers- Spain, France, Great Britain and Netherlands. The letters and speeches of Tousaint-Louverture, the Haitian General and liberator, indicate that from at least the end of the eighteenth-century the Caribbean was conscious of its cultural identity. It was not, however, until the 1920s that the challenge of a distinct literary form was accepted. Spanish and French-Caribbean writers began to break from European ideals and identify themselves with fellow West-Indians, most of whom were black. The leaders of this movement, mostly poets, were Luis Pales-Matos, Jacques Roumain and Aime Cesaire.

For nearly four hundred years European powers brought natives from Africa to the New World as slaves. This commerce in human beings existed legally between 1518 and 1860. The concept of slavery is of vital importance to the history of the Caribbean people. An earlier, more traditional, European model of history relied upon a notion of linear chronological progress.
as the basis for its formulation. Taking their cue from this model, earlier historians had focused on the struggle for independence and emancipation from colonial rule as the defining moments of Caribbean history. The notions of race, culture, and history are essentially European in nature. A shift in the practice of recent Caribbean intellectuals is clearly evident as is their desire to abandon an "authoritative" account of historical events based on the earlier European historiography.¹

Brathwaite, arguably, is the Caribbean's leading historiographer/poet. Through his writing he seeks to write an alternative narrative of History, freeing it from its epistemological trappings to become a crucial element in the redemptive schemata of his poetry. The subversive portrayal of accepted historical narratives in his poetry persuasively brings forward the poet's notion of the poem as truth, universal and not temporal.

Brathwaite's Rights of Passage (1967), Masks (1968), and Islands (1969), meant as a predetermined trilogy, were published together as The Arrivants (1973). At one level Rights of Passage can be read as an account of Brathwaite's travels away from Barbados. It speaks of his visits to England

¹ According to Laurence A. Breiner, "As both present-day Africa and its history came to be better known and more positively regarded, they played a potent psychological role for black West Indians...It transformed attitudes toward race and color. It limned a history before slavery, thereby transforming the Middle Passage from a degraded point of origin to a traumatic but finite episode, on the other side of which a sophisticated culture could be discerned. By imputing nobility and historical depth to the African heritage, this complex enhanced the self-worth of the inheritors. At the same time, establishing the continuity of that heritage into the present provided the support of a second parent-culture, alternative to Europe" (141-142).
and America. *Masks*, the second part of the trilogy, is concerned with Brathwaite's voluntary exile to Ghana. The last part of the trilogy, *Islands*, deals with the poet's return to Barbados.

John Povey writes that *The Arrivants* can be read as a diary of Brathwaite's travels and experiences in the "parts of the world that have influenced Caribbean behavior". According to Povey, "this triple collection pursues an individual and cultural hegira in search of some personal accommodation to the different elements that have shaped his (i.e. Brathwaite's) life. Implicitly his private discourse will provide for the more general principles upon which a Caribbean culture could be formulated" (275-289). Therefore at another level the trilogy can be read as an attempt to rewrite the history of the Caribbean in the guise of a narrative of his own history. Anniah Gowda, in his essay on Brathwaite, states that *The Arrivants* is "a kind of an 'Iliad' for Black people", a history of epic proportions (694).

Brathwaite uses his "awareness" of the Caribbean's African heritage and makes extensive use of this knowledge in his poetry. The absence of a national or regional identity has been a predominant theme of literature in the Caribbean. The construction of a significant, valid and unique Caribbean cultural identity can offer a unifying basis for resistance against the forces of colonialism and a means to assert the individuality of a people.

**Rights of Passage**

The first section of *The Arrivants* entitled *Rights of Passage* is divided into four sub-sections; *Work Song and Blues*, *The Spades*, *Islands and Exiles*, and *The Return*. Charting four
distinct periods and aspects of the poet's personal and larger
cultural life the sections rely on an extensive play between
language, emotion and the cultural vernacular. "Rights of
Passage demonstrates Brathwaite's preoccupations not only with
the poetic form but also with content: the experiences of the
black diaspora and its link to the new archetypal themes of
exile, journey, and exploration of the New World" (Gowda 694).

Work Song and Blues concentrates on the inherited black
tradition of the Blues and the work songs of the chain gangs.
The blues emerged as a musical style at the turn of the
twentieth century within Black American Culture as a distinct
response to, and expression of, the experience of slavery. A
mixture of different African traditions, it relied upon the
strength of the voice because of the lack of musical
instruments as a powerful medium. The Work Song preceded the
Blues as it was the main form of communication between
families that were separated in groups of workers in
plantations or in chain gangs.

The Work Song not only established a rhythm that facilitated
the slaves' work (and was therefore allowed by the
supervisors), but its formula of "call and response" allowed
families and friends to communicate with each other even
though they were separated. The Blues were a later, more
entertainment oriented style that emerged in post-bellum
southern America in smaller drinking salons and Black
communities. The poetic a a b tercet in blank verse of the
Blues form contained blunt lyrics about life, sex and the life
of the slaves - which is a style and strategy adopted by
Brathwaite in the next cycle of poems titled The Spades.

Denied representation and expression, the slave found the
medium of song, of which poetry is a part as the most
accessible outlet of his consciousness. Along with frank lyrics concerning varied aspects of the slaves' lives, the poetic tradition of the Work Song and Blues always contains the desire/ nostalgia for home, even though it may be imagined or lost. The Brazilian tradition of Bossa Nova and song contains a similar concept called Soudade, a bittersweet longing for home that is distinct from nostalgia in that it does not rely on a complete glorification of the homeland. It is explicit about the limitations and impossibility of an immigrant existence that must always exist in orbit around the imaginary sun of the homeland.

It is a similar concept to which Brathwaite refers in the next section titled Islands and Exiles, and of course the cycle is completed, though ironically in the last section titled The Return. Each of these cycles of poems concerns itself with a "Rite" endemic to the slaves' life. But the presence of each of these "Rites" is predicated upon the absence of a "Right" denied to the slaves' existence, so that, the "rites of passage" that are taken or granted in an individual's life become impossible experiences of conflict and struggle (for Rights) in the consciousness of the Black Diaspora. Brathwaite highlights the distance between the ordinary experiences (Rites) that are the mainstay and surety of human existence and the denial of these Rites/Rights to the Black human experience.

The epigraph to Rights of Passage is from Exodus: 16.1.

"And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came onto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their
This quotation denotes a quasi purgatory of the slaves' journey from Egypt to Israel. Though the slaves in this context are the Jewish tribes of the Hebrew Bible, the epigraph signals a state of anticipation and suspension in the Black slaves' journey from Africa to an elusive final destination. There is an insistence in the use of this epigraph on refusal to accept the poet's Caribbean location as his final resting spot. It is a resistance that has of course travelled through, metaphorically, in the cycle of poems that begin with the refusal but end with the "return".

It is also an interesting juxtaposition of different cultural heritages in which excerpts from the Bible function as metonyms for the existence of the Black slaves. Brathwaite writes against the inherited colonial legacy, and in using the Bible as a frame of reference he is also signalling a new cultural identity bereft of singular frames of references, whether African or European.

The poem ‘Prelude’, which is also the prelude to this section, is the cartography of a Caribbean "wasteland". Harking back to British literary modernism, especially T.S. Eliot's celebrated long poem The Wasteland, the ‘Prelude’ is a pastiche of different images of death, destruction, decay, and desolation. T.S. Eliot wrote in a review of Joyce's Ulysses in 1923 that the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (qtd. in Abrams 119).

dry river beds .....
the slender proboscis of rot......

milk
curdles in
udder in
nipple in
mouth. Flies
nibble and ulcer:
tight silver-
backed swarms bringing
silence, the slender
proboscis of rot.
In the hot
harmattan,

dead bodies settle
and quiver (Brathwaite, Arrivants 5-6).

These varying and yet consistent images of festering dead bodies and decay are the poet’s corporeal manifestation of a culture that is similarly on its way to being ossified.

The hot
wheel’d caravan’s
carcasses
rot. (4)

This image of death is exacerbated by its attention to uncared for carcasses. It is not death the poet is portraying; it is the uselessness, the inconsequentiality of certain deaths that Brathwaite wishes to convey.

The rather morbid imagery of the prelude is the poet's opening invocation of a journey that begins with dissatisfaction,
disillusionment and derision. Similar to Eliot's The Wasteland, Brathwaite expresses his disillusionment and disgust through a series of fragmentary vignettes, loosely linked through a sequence of images ranging from the Bible, to American culture and African mythology. The end of this cycle of poems is signalled by the 'Epilogue' which repeats the opening stanza of 'Prelude' but goes on then to offer a more hopeful, a more accessible venue for the poet to express his angst, and work through his personal and political conflict.

The cycle of poems titled Work Song and Blues is closely linked to Black American culture as it searches for heroic figures from South America as well as North America to lead the poet and his people out of the desolate abyss of despair.

O who now will help us, help -
less, leader-
less, no
hope, no
Hawkins, no
Cortez to come.
Prempeh imprisoned,
Tawiah dead,
Asantewa bridled
and hung.
O who now can help us: Geronimo, Tackie,
Montezuma to come (10)

Ironically, however, all these revolutionaries belong to an idealized past and were neither completely successful nor unquestionably revered. It is the patronizing figure of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom" that provides Brathwaite a
more enduring stereotype of the Black man. According to Laurence A. Breiner, in An Introduction to West Indian Poetry, "...in Rights of Passage, the central figure is Tom, the representative survivor of the Middle Passage who is at once the last African and the first 'New World Negro'.... [and Brathwaite] strenuously re-imagines him" (221-222).

And I
timid Tom
father
founder
flounderer

speak
their same
their lack
of power (Brathwaite, Arrivants 15)

The patronizing figure of the powerful yet subdued Negro reified in nineteenth century American literature is the only literary figure available to Brathwaite. Brathwaite, however, subverts this notion of the "gentle giant" to call into question the accepted stereotypes of the Black man in presenting Tom as a parent worried about his children's cultural inheritance.

Brathwaite rewrites a literary and cultural trope while directing an interrogatory gaze at the creators of such impotent male figures, as the anti-slavery author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe's kid gloved representation of the gentle Tom, though anti-slavery in spirit relied upon an impotent representation of the Black Male. The figure of Uncle Tom calls for acceptance and tolerance - both emotions extended to
entities that are in some ways considered unfit for mainstream society:

But helpless my children are
caught leader-
less are
taught fool-
ishment and use-
lessness and
sorrow (14)

In voicing this anxiety for the future generations through the problematic figure of Uncle Tom, Brathwaite questions the cultural legacy that is propounded in his post-colonial literary inheritance. The figure of the uncle marks Brathwaite's departure from a European based literary and cultural tradition. He goes on in the next section suitably titled The Spades - to forge an identity separate from the emasculated Uncle Tom.

The corresponding prelude to this section bespeaks the poet's frustration at being "Uncle Tom'd" into submission. The section takes its inspiration from the colloquial phrase "to call a spade a spade". At this level, the poem calls for plain talk, for bluntly stating the facts as they are - for a representation that places the Black Man in all his violence, contradiction, emotion, strength, helplessness and desire that are the due of all human beings:

no sweat-
ing free-
ness either.
Just give us

114
what we earn
in bright bold
cash
before we
smash
and grab
it.
To hell
With Af-
rica
to hell
With Eu-
rope too,
just call my blue
black bloody spade
a spade and kiss
my ass. O-
kay? So
let's begin (28-29)

This beginning, of course, this ability for blunt talk is
predicated upon the Negro's removal from the site of slavery.
Along with this removal is an ironic avowal of the criminal
and sexually licentious stereotype of the Black Man as rapist.
Brathwaite points out that there is no middle ground between
impotence and sexual uncontrollability for the Black man in
white culture. He is either the impotent Uncle Tom or the
"fuckin' negro" with a "broad back/ big you know what" who if
offended turns into a criminal and a rapist:

watch
that house
you livin' in
an' watch that lit -
Anniah Gowda, in his essay 'Creation in the Poetic Development of Kamau Brathwaite', suggests that Tom "the old slave is a symbol of the continuity of the tradition of the poet as visionary and as representative voice in all oppressed third world countries" (694). Such an analysis adopts an unproblematised attitude towards the very controversial figure of Stowe's Uncle Tom. Tom is certainly the continuity of a tradition, but not a tradition Brathwaite, or for that matter, our analysis intends to be a part of.

Brathwaite goes on then to chart the various geographic trajectories that intersect in the life of the diasporic Negro. "Egypt in Africa," "the Nile", "the brittle Sahara" Timbuktu, the Congo, New Orleans, Santiago de Cuba, Haiti, Brooklyn, Chicago, Denver and Harlem are just some of the destinations and displaced homelands that Brathwaite's poetry often does not know how to acknowledge but cannot do without. This wide reach of the Negro is juxtaposed with the poor economic and political status that is the fate of the Black Man in the twentieth century:

But where are the dreams of that bug happy, trash-holstered tropical bed when uncle tom lived and we cursed him? this the new deal for we black grinning jacks? Lights big like bubbies but we still in shacks? (36)
Brathwaite goes through the various re-incarnations of the Black Man in these various geographic locations; the Rastafarian of Kingstown to the "zoot-suited Panama boys" and the hoods from Chicago are all milestones that mark the distance travelled by the Black Man who has ostensibly never had a destination:

never seen
a man
tavel more
seen more
lands
than this poor
path-
less harbour-
less spade (40)

But in the twentieth century along with these destinations of forced exodus lie the destinations of the voluntary exile. For Brathwaite his exile is a necessary leaving, a distance that must be travelled in order to gain a wider, more thorough perspective of his present and his past. It is the poet's belief that the illusion of these concepts of being an origin hampers his future. The personal intersects with the political here as Brathwaite grounds his personal journey of introspection in the larger political framework of a post-colonial immigration.

The poet's wide-ranging geographical and literary journeys ready him to return to what he has known as home. The quintessential contradiction of all diasporas, whether forced or voluntary, are contained in this pattern of exile and return. To recognize home, to acknowledge origin, Brathwaite's poetry posits, is to recognize each individual's personal
distance from these concepts that are understood to consolidate the basis of each individual's life.

On his return from his sojourn in England and New York, the so-called cultural Meccas of the new and liberal life, Brathwaite reflects on the sustained state of discrimination that follow the Black Man wherever he may go. Not tolerated in the city buses of England or the "wood bine pubs", Brathwaite weighs the options available to him in England and the United States. He acknowledges the Black Power movement even as he questions the logic of only being accepted in a larger Black community as a Muslim.

Invoking Malcolm X, Jimmy Baldwin and Martin Luther King, Brathwaite traverses the whole gamut of options open to the Black Man in the supposedly "New World". It is once again either the virulently antagonistic Black Power oriented Malcolm X or the Gandhi following, peace loving, non-violent Martin Luther King who offer the Black Man the possibility of emancipation. The queer James Baldwin is a jarring literary note that once again points towards a whole series of options neither offered to, nor explored by, the Black Man.

Brathwaite's return is neither celebratory nor redemptive:

No one knows tom now, no one cares.
Slave's days are passed, forgotten. The faith, the dream denied, the things he dared not do, all lost, if un-forgiven. This house is all that's left of hopes, of hurt, of history......(71)
Echoing Langston Hughes' poems of a "dream deferred", Brathwaite in his section on the return back from the exile, must now face the disillusionment of the culture and land he was born into and must now call his own. While in his homeland, the poet longed to flee its containment in order to better understand the construct of home. And yet what refrained him from being comfortably ensconced in his new immigrant surroundings was the pull of home. This cycle of poems finds the poet at the quintessential crossroads of the Blues' song. It is an impasse that exacts the highest price of identity from him as it measures the poet against the various denigrating stereotypes open to him. But this exile and return now finds the poet's voice stronger, even more self aware and less reactionary as Brathwaite puts it in his finishing line in the 'Epilogue' to The Rights of Passage:

There is no turning back (85)

Masks

Masks is the second part of The Arrivants trilogy. It deals with Brathwaite's long sojourn in the West African nation of Ghana. According to John Povey it is because Brathwaite admits there is "no turning back" at the end of the previous book, that he is forced into another cycle of wandering. "Neither the Afro-American society of New York nor the options available to West Indians in London provide guidance nor fulfilment in his quest. A third element must be examined" (282). This third element is Africa; replete with its histories and mythologies, its people and its culture.
Breiner writes that Africa is invoked as an "alternative tradition" by West Indian poets; an alternative to the lack of an indigenous tradition. This is subsequently used as a literary lever to dislodge the prevalent, oppressive, European tradition and make space for themselves. Breiner goes on to argue that "the matter of Africa provides subjects for poems, and materials for addressing related subjects, such as race and history" (xiv). The illusory concept of belonging to Africa is used by Brathwaite as a critical lens in order to re-evaluate his own immediate culture.

Frantz Fanon's work elaborates on the indispensability of reconstructing a people's past in pointing out that:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it (On National Culture 37).

Brathwaite's need to construct an alternative tradition and his focus on history and society are perhaps best explained by his own decision that the "function of the writer is to express and articulate the people's culture in its historical depth, and give it back to them". In his keynote address to the Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS), Brathwaite went further than many commentators in "identifying the matrix of folk culture specifically with the African heritage. What the West Indian writer must help to recover is the true self which the colonized African exercised in the task of survival" (qtd. in Breiner 2).
Of course, as this section on this cycle of poems Masks will attempt to show, the search for this illusive "true self" is neither singular nor easily recoverable. Brathwaite must confront the fact that even in his visage of the African self there are fragmentary aspects. Once again an essential contradiction besets the search for cultural identity.

The poet seeks to find a true pre-colonial African self in his stay in Ghana but he is forced to confront an epistemological shift when he discovers that there is no identity available to him that is either unproblematic or "original". Brathwaite is forced to rethink identity in what Stuart Hall terms "positionality". In his article 'Cultural identity and Diaspora', Stuart Hall states that "...we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (110).

The title Masks provocatively suggests a separation between the self and the masquerade of identity. Brathwaite indicates not only a mask that he wears as given colonial identity but also the guise of identity that forces a separation between one's external corporeal identification and the internal assignation of origins and identity. The title also pays homage to the West African ritual of using different kinds of masks for different ceremonies. It is a complex title that plays not only with West African ritual tradition but also with psychoanalytic Jungian archetypal theories. According to Povey, the title brings to mind the subtle discrepancy between an individual's external form and his corresponding social image, and like the "African dancer, the poet seeks divorce from self and absorption into communality. His private activity must become public gesture" (282).
In the first section, appropriately titled Libation, Brathwaite invokes West African ritual in the order of beginning an enterprise. Unlike the fragmentary and wide ranging cultural topography of reference for Rights of Passage, Masks is more particular in its cultural allegiance. There is no notion of trans-Atlantic negritude or search for mythology in terms of either Black American culture or the Caribbean diaspora. Brathwaite seeks to explore Africa as a source of beginnings, initiations and origins because it is his belief that it is only on doing so that he will be able to reconcile and unify his "disconnected" past. The cycle of poems begins with the Libation precisely to nominate the specificity of West African tradition as the over-arching cultural rubric of Masks.

The opening poem of Libation, 'Prelude', begins with:

Out
of this
bright
sun, this
white plaque
of heaven,
this leaven-
ing heat
of the seven
kingdoms:
Songhai, Mali,
Chad, Ghana,
Tim-
Buctu, Volta,
and the bitter
waste
that was
This litany of the seven kingdoms of West Africa are the cultural co-ordinates according to which Brathwaite intends to chart the rest of his collection of poems. In a drastic shift from the impotent and highly problematic figure of Uncle Tom and the various icons of American Black culture, Brathwaite moves to African cultural icons to signal his alliance with a singular tradition:

news
of ripples reach the awakened zu-lus: Chaka tastes
the salt blood of the bitter
Congo and all Africa
is one, is whole, nim-tree shaded in Ghana, in Chad, Mali, the shores of the cooling kingdoms (90)

The figure of the fierce Chaka Zulu as a unifying hero of Africa is hardly possible but Brathwaite latches on to the figure of the strong African who resisted and fought against the Boers as a unifying and positive stereotype of Negro masculinity. With appropriate acknowledgement of the earth and other elements essential to West African culture, Brathwaite ends the Prelude with an invocation to the West African gods for success and safekeeping.

In the second poem of the Libation section, 'The Making of the Drum', Brathwaite describes the highly ritualised endeavour of
drum making. In it he describes the drum as the more universal of languages that reaches not only the divine but also into his own consciousness to establish a connection between the Africans who remain in Africa and those of the forced and voluntary diaspora.

But no harm comes to those who live near-by. This tree, the elders say, will never die (96)

Unlike the varied and individualized cultural icons of Rights of Passage this section acknowledge community, and in fact "elders". The reference to the wisdom of the elders signifies the notion of a shared and ancestral cultural legacy — a concept that is glaringly missing from Rights of Passage. As Stuart Hall puts it:

within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history ('Cultural Identity and Diaspora' 111)

The third poem in Libation is titled 'Atumpan', which means the talking drum, or the talk of the drums. In an arresting metrical arrangement with an extensive use of assonance Brathwaite configures this poem as the closing prayer to the divine. There is a vast difference between this piece and the opening sequence in Rights of Passage, which focuses on the
sons of Uncle Tom mocking him for his impotence. ‘Atumpun’ ends its musical lyrics by repeating:

listen
let us succeed (99)

This is a far more hopeful note on which Brathwaite begins his stay in Ghana. It is a sincere plea to the Gods to allow him to find what he considers is his "true self" locked somewhere in the African tradition he desperately wants to claim as his own.

The poems of the next section, titled Path-finders, actually trace a geographic journey through the West African kingdoms of Axum, Ougadougou, Chad, Timbuctu and Volta. Brathwaite's journey through these kingdoms, some ancient and some contemporary, of what he perceives is his ancestral homeland, are the focus of this section. It is this prodigal return to his homelands that form the content of these poems:

this sacred lake
is the soul
of the world (105)

At this celebratory juncture, Brathwaite imagines his African experience to be the repository of answers for all his questions of being, identity, race and history. The poems depict all these kingdoms as prosperous worlds untouched by the exploitation of slavery and colonialism that are so immediate to the poet's own post-colonial existence. The last poem, titled 'Volta', the name of Ghana's major river, is a narrative of exodus:

Can you expect us to establish houses here?
To build a nation here? Where
Will the old men feed their flocks?
Where will you make your markets?

So must we march
All the time? Walk in this thirsty sun
All the time (108)

Unlike the disjointed words and staccato rhythm of the earlier volume, Rights of Passage, the language in this section is studied, more serene and even complete. The poet expresses himself in full sentences and there is a note of reverence that creeps into this encounter with the literary and cultural tradition of Africa. The poem ‘Volta’, unlike the bitter questioning of the forced diaspora, is a narrative of a voluntary exodus undertaken by the people of the kingdom in search of a better life for their children. This poem emphasizes the difference between the forced immigration of slavery, and the consequent exploitation, and the voluntary diasporas of Africans looking for respite from an especially cruel and unforgiving land.

The next section, titled Limits, follows a linearly chronological movement. The last section had ended with the voluntary exodus, and this section begins with a series of obstacles/limits that the émigrés must contend with on their journey. In this section one notices the beginning of the breakdown of the cohesive West African tradition. Though Brathwaite writes primarily of a West African exodus and places it specifically within a West African mythology, his description of the voluntary exodus of Africans and the "limits" placed upon them closely replicate the Biblical migration of the Jews from Egypt.
No longer singularly West African, the first note of disbelief and disenchantment begins to creep into this series of poems:

Time's walking river is long (120)

The journey here is not only a trope for the geographic meandering of the African, but also a trope for the temporal journeys through history and culture. Though measured in material destinations and beset by real dangers of famine, death, illness and destruction - the journeys are a complex symbolics of the temporal shifts effected by multiple displacements of the Caribbean Negro.

This was at last the last;
This was the limit of motion; voyages ended;
Time stopped where its movement began;

Horizons returned inaccessible.
Here at last was the limit; the minutes of pebbles dropping into the hourless pool (122)

Whether "time stopped" as these communal voyages fragmented into varied and separated settlements, or "time stopped" for Brathwaite as he begins to realize that the notion of an overarching African past is ephemeral remains the central question of this section. Brathwaite is faced here with a conundrum he had not set out to answer. The search was for a sense of an African past that would give meaning to the poet's displacement. But as this section winds down, the poet begins to realize that his sojourn in Ghana has not offered him answers for his questions but in fact has changed the very questions themselves. It is no longer a question of finding an ancient past to which the poet belongs, but of realizing that
should he find this past - how he will stand in relation to it will be the primary concern.

you who have come
back a stranger
after three hundred years (124)

On his arrival in Africa the poet must confront the reality that there is no easy return, no immediate conjuring of home that he can effect. He carries the displaced nostalgia (though nostalgia seems a rather euphemistic term) of his ancestors who were brought from Africa to the Caribbean. But like all nostalgias even this one carries the curse of reification. Though the slaves' memory has kept alive his longing for his homeland, the poet must now confront the fact that what he thought constituted his stable foot that allowed him to wander is in fact as illusory as his notion of an authentic, cohesive origin.

He is a stranger, not only to Africa, where he has at best a tenuous notion of his ancestry but now also to the Caribbean, to which he has returned with new, more critical eyes. The poet begins to synthesize his various origin stories in order to acquiesce in the influence of Caribbean, West African, European and contemporary Black consciousness. He begins to realize that even the notion of his African past is in many ways a product of his European influenced colonial education. The poems convey the realization that the insidious policies of colonialism and exploitation in fact fostered a notion of a removed African past in order to further its policies of "othering" the black slave, so that even after independence the slave cannot inhabit his freedom because he is not free in his homeland, in fact he is not even free to refigure his notion of a homeland.
Unlike the populations of newly independent African or Asian countries, the populations of the Caribbean cannot stake a claim to a similar nationhood. Their forced migration as slaves roots their presence in the Caribbean as that of exploitation and coercion. Even after independence the Black Caribbean citizen must contend with his notion of home and belonging:

I travel to a distant town
I could not find my mother
I could not find my father
I could not hear the drum
Whose ancestor am I? (125)

The poem titled 'Masks' uses the metaphor of the ceremonial wooden masks used in West African rituals to signify the passivity and muteness African culture has been reduced to.

The use of masks in West African rituals symbolizes the donning of certain divine personalities by the persons wearing the masks. Brathwaite's poem uses this symbol of power to express exactly the opposite powerlessness.

Your tree
Has been split
By a white axe
Of lightning;
The wise
Are di-
Vided, the
Eyes
Of our elders
Are dead (130)
The wooden masks are made from specifically designated trees. The splitting of the tree in the poem by a "white axe" symbolizes the destruction, not just of the African ritual, but also of the very core that constitutes the ritual's central icon. The beginning of this volume departs from Rights of Passage by invoking the communal wisdom of the "elders". In this poem the poet's initial euphoria of finding a sense of belonging in Africa is on its ebb. He finds that the so-called repository of ancestral wisdom is available neither to him nor to those Africans who never left Africa.

In 'Masks', the poet finds that the "wise are divided" and the "eyes of our elders are dead". For the first time since the beginning of this cycle of poems Brathwaite expresses disbelief at invoking the African gods:

Will
the tree, god
of path-
ways, still
guide us? Will
your wood lips speak
so we see? (131)

Unlike the earlier supplication to the gods for guidance, the poet finds himself at a juncture where his belief in the African culture is called into question against its own history of exploitation, destruction and reprisals. From an initial quick absorption into what the poet thought was his "authentic" ancestral culture, the latter half of the poems find him questioning the validity and endurance of the same religious and cultural images from the point of view of an outsider.
The poem titled the 'Golden Stool' recreates the years of the prosperous Ashanti kingdom of West Africa. The Asantehene of that kingdom and the figure of the "Golden Stool" emerged at a time when the kingdom was at the peak of its prosperity. The golden stool was carried in front of the king's procession and signalled the king's presence among his people. It came to be understood as a powerful symbol of royalty among the Ashanti. But the flip side of this prosperity was the beginning of the slave trade. Often termed an embarrassing fact of African history, the slave trade was in fact begun by the rulers and chief of the Ashanti Empire. They sold their own people and captives of war into slavery. The Ashanti conducted raiding sorties specifically for the purpose of capturing other fellow Africans to sell into slavery. It is this problematic history that the poet must confront now in his encounter with his African past:

When a cancer has eaten the guts
Of a man, what will surely happen?
He will die
My people, tat is the condition of our country today:
It is sick at heart, to its bitter clay.
We cannot heal it or hold it together from curses,
Because we do not believe in it (143)

The poet acknowledges the once great, though often shameful, past of the Ashanti kingdom, even as he must contend with the desolation and decay he finds in present day Ghana. Now the focus of the blame shifts from the exploitation by European colonialism to the opportunistic and also fatalistic attitudes of the Africans themselves. It is no longer sufficient now to say how colonialism and the slave trade wreaked havoc on the Negro. The poet draws attention to the passivity and fatalism
that he finds have beset post-colonial African countries and their inhabitants.

In the poem ‘Sunsum’, Brathwaite crafts a visually striking narrative of his pain at not finding the acceptance, the belonging he had hoped for in his self-imposed exile to Ghana. "Sunsum" is the Ghanian word for spiritual blood, and in this poem the poet battles for this sustenance:

So for my hacked
Heart, veins' mem-
Ories, I wear this
Past I borrowed; (148)

Brathwaite explicitly portrays his disassociation from African culture in this poem. The belonging the poet had hoped so desperately to find is not available to him. In fact, he is openly critical of this apotheosised African past:

Why did our gold, the suns
Sunsum, safe against termites, crack
Under the white gun of blunder
Why did the gods
Stool you gave us
Anokye,
Not save us from pride,
Foreign tribes' bibles,
The Christian gods hunger (149)

Once again the poet is questioning his cultural inheritance by demanding answers. He wants to know why none of this cultural inheritance protected the Africans from the various scourges they were subjected to. He demands to know why his cultural inheritance could not withstand the onslaught of European
colonization. This disenchantment with the mythology of Africa as an answer and an alternate tradition to Europe is reflected in a powerful line:

home-less departer who stumbles on dark (150)

At this point, neither Africa nor Europe is acceptable to the poet as cultural inheritances. The figure of the "homeless departer" is especially powerful in conveying the poet's sense of rootlessness. To depart implies leaving from somewhere, but what possibly can someone who is homeless depart from, leave alone arrive at?

The penultimate poem of this volume titled 'Tano' is the poet's leave-taking from Ghana. Acknowledging himself as a cultural orphan, Brathwaite must clearly accept the fact that though he returned to what he considered his place of origin, neither the materiality of geographic location, nor the transience of cultural specificity offers him redemption:

Not Chad,  
The niger's blood, or benin's  
Burning brongs  
Can save me now (153)

Yet the last poem of Masks is titled 'The Awakening'. It is an unexpectedly hopeful poem to conclude with. In this poem the poet accepts the fact that he must go back to the Caribbean to consolidate "home", yet he must also carry the cultural inheritance of Africa back with him. The oppositional polarities of neither Europe nor Africa offer him the cohesive cultural paradigm he was hoping for. The poet realizes that his predicament depends upon his being able to fashion a
synthesis acknowledging his allegiance to both Africa and the Caribbean culture.

Though he is going away to the "modern" world of the Caribbean, he invokes the traditional gods of the earth and the divine drummer to help him through this passage:

I am learning
Let me succeed

I am learning
Let me succeed... (157)

This plea for success shifts now from the larger collective of the first section in which Brathwaite repeats "let us succeed" to the more individualized plea of the poet to "let me succeed". This indicates that the poet's search is neither successful nor complete, but it remains integral to his quest for personal fulfilment. It is also an acknowledgement of the fact that though he may find security and belonging in the expance of the community, it is still him as the individual who must work through his conflicts of culture, history, identity and personal experience.

Islands

Islands, the last volume of poems in The Arrivants trilogy, is a verse narrative of the poet's eventual return and rapprochement with the Caribbean. Brathwaite finds no clear welcome on his return to the Caribbean islands. His estrangement from his Caribbean homeland was the impetus that drove him to seek a wider understanding of his origins during his sojourn in Ghana. The end of Masks found the poet at a juncture where the poet managed to assimilate, in some forms,
both the Caribbean and his African ancestry. On his arrival in the Caribbean, the poet realizes that he must begin again a series of exercises in order to make himself not only comfortable in his surroundings, but to be able to claim the Caribbean as his own.

The poems in *Islands* range across a series of emotions and experiences that include the initial disappointment at coming home, the poet's estrangement from his society, his viewing his homeland with a freshly honed critical lens, and the eventual realization of the poet that the revolution he must effect will be through his words. At the end of this cycle of poems, Brathwaite reconciles the figure of the artist and his sense of alienation by taking up the work of re-fashioning and re-possessing his Caribbean homeland through his poetry.

*Islands* is divided into five sections: *New World*, *Limbo*, *Rebellion*, *Possession*, and *Beginning*. Even without considering the poems of these sections one can fathom the trajectory of experience and thought followed by Brathwaite from the titles of these sections. The first section, titled *New World*, is an exploration of the poet's return to the Caribbean. But the New World signifies a return not to the familiar but to a land that is entirely new in its signification for Brathwaite. The next section then, *Limbo*, is an exposition of the estranged state of the artist from his community and land. His estrangement then translates itself into a state of "Rebellion". The poet's navigation through these states of "Limbo" and "Rebellion" result in a (re) - "Possession" of his earlier identification with the Caribbean. This coming to terms of the individual Caribbean citizen and the figure of the artist to his sense of community finds itself explicated in the last section in which the poet finds that it is not enough merely to express disavowal and distance from his
"origins" but that he must also participate in the re-creation of a new community by using his poetry as a means of both political, and personal, intervention.

The first poem of the volume is titled 'Jah'. It is a derivative of Yahveh, the Hebrew Bible's designation for God. It is adopted by Caribbean Rastafarians, a religious group that rejects Western Culture and believes that the Ethiopian emperor Hail Selassie I is a representative of "Jah" on earth. In the Hebrew Bible, Yahveh is not just the name for God, but in fact the very word symbolizes divinity. As in the Koran, God is not manifested in any physical representation in the Hebrew Bible. Yahveh symbolizes the Word, and its utterance symbolises God, divinity, the creator. This is an especially portentous image to begin this collection of poems with, as the end of this cycle of poems finds Brathwaite reaffirming the centrality of the "Word" as a political force in refashioning his world. A corresponding figure of the divine is paid obeisance to in another poem in this section titled 'Legba'. Legba is the Haitian god of the gateway. He is the crucial link between man and the other gods and, as such, is often the first to be invoked at a ceremony. In Haitian mythology he is also a trickster god often disguised as an aged man with a crutch. The voice of the poet takes on a distinctively Caribbean intonation as his mythological and socio-religious paradigm is restricted to the Caribbean.

The poet's homecoming in a poem with the same title is an account of disappointment and alienation:

To this new doubt
And desert I return, expecting nothing;
My name burnt out (177)
There is an admission of vulnerability in the poet's return; even though he has come back he realizes that this is no utopia he has returned to. He finds that though the structures of slave owners and slaves have been dismantled, the structures of discrimination and inequality remain:

So the stars  
Remain my masters  
Property; moon is a bone

To howl at; clinks  
Of dew in the grass  
Is the nearest we will get to god (178)

Echoing the end of Rights of Passage, he writes:

No lover  
To call like a bird in the green (84)

This poem finds the poet accepting the desolation of what he has returned to in the form of home:

For like him we have no name  
To call us home, no turbulence

To bring us soft-  
Ly past these bars to miracle, to god,  
to unexpected lover (178)

The poet finds that the forces of modernity have relentlessly taken over his islands and the neo-colonial economic policies have once again reduced the Caribbean to an economic void and "his society has none of Africa's innocent continuity. International investment encourages greedy possessiveness
while ignoring the production of staples on which human survival depends" (Povey 286).

The Chrysler stirs but does not produce cotton
The Jupiter purs but does not produce bread (Brathwaite, 191)

The emphasis here is not just on the staples of material sustenance but also on the spiritual hollowing out of the Caribbean's social fabric. In his poem titled 'Islands', Brathwaite delivers his most incisive indictment of the forces of slavery, colonialism and contemporary economic neo-colonialism:

Descendents of the slave do not
Lie in the lap
Of the more fortunate gods (204)

The poet finds that he must rely upon "Words" as his tools of awakening. In his poem titled 'Wake', the poet takes on an exhortatory voice to wake his community, to force it to open its eyes to the state of the community in his homeland. The title of the poem hinges on an understanding of its double meaning: the "Wake" is also the period that immediately follows a Christian funeral, and it is also an imperative issued by the poet to his community to wake up from its self-induced soporific state.

It is in this poem that Brathwaite rediscovers the power of words as a tool of protest and community consolidation:

For the word has been destroyed
And cannot live among us (212)
The poet refers here to the loss of communication, to the loss of language and faith. It is not just that the African languages and their particular heritages destroyed through these forced migrations of slavery and colonialism, but also that there is no mode of communication available now to these post-colonial societies. Brathwaite's evangelical tone here is necessitated by what he perceives to be a state of complacency and defeat in his community. The poet, at this point is identifying the difficult problem faced by his community and is asking it to help him in locating a solution amenable to all:

We seek we seek
But find no one to speak
The words to save us;
Search
There is no destination;
Our prayers reach
No common
Sun
No
Sum (213)

Admitting this loss of words, the poet seeks recourse in African mythology and the concept of "Sunsum" (spiritual blood). The lines -

No common
Sun
No
Sum (213)

are as much about the concepts of the absence of a guiding light (Sun) and the absence of a collective voice (Sum) --
which translates into the lack also of "Sunsum" (spiritual blood).

In this project of re-appropriating his community's culture, the poet focuses on the centrality of nomenclature in the poem titled 'Naming'. An especially insidious part of slavery was its ability to refuse slaves to choose their names. Not only were old names cast away but also every new slave that was born was given its owner's name. To be able to name yourself and your progeny is considered an inviolable human right and Brathwaite focuses the attention on naming not just in terms of choosing personal names but in choosing where and whom one's community can belong to. It is not only slavery that restricts his community from fully realizing itself as a nation, but also, as the poet states, the "gift" of freedom that has now chained his community from becoming a truly independent people:

Freedom surrounds us
Like the wave around rock;
Enchants, encircles, isolates us from
That fear, that hope, that protest,
that was our common ground (216)

The end of this volume is titled Beginning. For Brathwaite it is the start of a project in which he feels that he is an integral part of this society. From his earlier rebellion against the bindings of home the poet goes on to say:

Shackles, shackles, shackles
are my peace, are my home
are my evening song (178)
The poet realizes that he must root himself in his immediate homeland. The reliance on the circuitous root back to Africa is based on the notion of an authentic self that is neither feasible nor, in any way, helpful to the poet. He comes to realize that his emphasis on the representation of the true self failed to take into account the fact that even the true self is capable of false representation. Commenting on the poet's inadequacy in finding an appropriate mode of representation and communication:

My tongue is heavy with new language
But I cannot give birth speech (Brathwaite, Arrivants 221)

John Povey writes:

He calls upon a new muse that will speak for all.
Repeatedly in these late poems he talks of poetry; of its essential and urgent status in the new community (287).

Like the people of the islands Brathwaite realizes that even his language must be freed from the overwhelming servitude of its past and the debasing materialism of its present. The end of this volume of poems is revolutionary in Brathwaite's personal quest. The poet realizes that language is not only what he has inherited nor merely a medium that reflects its immediate surrounding. Brathwaite is faced with a startling discovery in finding that he can use his language to create. The figure of the poet in Brathwaite's poetry finally comprehends that his poetry is not just an amalgamation of words contained within the limits of the poem but in fact an instrument that shapes a people's consciousness:

I must be given words to shape my name
To the syllables of trees
I must be given words to refashion futures
Like a healers hands (224)

He goes on then to state:

It is not enough to be free (223)

Brathwaite calls for a radical reworking of the islands' cultural inheritance. He maintains that it is language through which the "Beginning" of this cultural refiguring must take place. The restructuring of language is not akin to a complete reworking or reconfiguring of slavery and colonialism's cultural legacy. But it is where the poet must begin:

It is not enough
To be pause, to be hole
To be void, to be silent
To be semicolon, to be semicolon; (224)

The poet reinstates a sense of the sacrosanct in what he perceives is his empty world. Ideology and political solutions are not adequate for this level of restoration. Though daunted by the task of effecting a revolution through his poetry the poet comes to realize the full literary and religious significance of the poetic word as a means of redemption. The final poem, 'Jou'vén!', is Brathwaite's attempt to include the local tradition of carnival in his socio-cultural imaginary. It also represents the dawn of the word and the poetic vision retrieved with all its positive and healing resonance (Dash 223):

Making
With their
In *The Arrivants*, Brathwaite questions the notion and concept of nationality. His posture is in sharp contrast to the sanctioned historical narratives of the colonial era. Brathwaite's poetics are a strategic intervention in the literary and academic understanding of the history of the Caribbean. *The Arrivants* functions as a counter-narrative, both personal and public, subtly and effectively dismantling the apparatus and effect of colonialism. Gordon Rohlehr, in his essay, 'The Re-humanization of History' states that Brathwaite is centrally concerned with a history that he presents as dense, multi-layered, many-dimensioned and meaningful. He focuses both on its particularities and on the vast wide frame of human movement and making, within which particular moments of history are located (163).

In *The Arrivants* Brathwaite attempts to grapple with a very large question exploring the relationship between literary output and its historical implications. Though *The Arrivants* moves through a history of exploitation and forced and voluntary exile, it does not attempt only to recreate or impose a new history; it is concerned also with fashioning a new lens through which the processes of Caribbean history can be viewed. The poet traverses political and personal territory in trying to find a mode of communication by which the intersections between the personal and the political can be
understood. Stuart Hall, in 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', states that the "hidden histories have played a critical role in the emergence in many of the most important social movements of our time and rewriting history can offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation" (112).

Brathwaite's The Arrivants is essentially the account of his personal quest to reconcile his role as an artist and his status as a Black Caribbean male to the material reality of the world around him. Yet, it also turns into a project to retrieve a denigrated past in order to remove a strategic amnesia enforced by colonialism. Though the poet begins the trilogy as an alienated subject who perceives his place in the Caribbean, where he has been born, as a site of exile, his only solution to alienation is another exile, though self-imposed this time. The contradictory state of finding himself exiled while at home and attempting to find home through exile leads the poet on a journey that expands the very concepts of exile, exploitation and consequently, history.