In 2001 Brathwaite formally organized and published the *Mother Poem*, *Sun Poem* and *X/Self* as a single volume titled *Ancestors: A Reinvention of Mother Poem, Sun Poem, and X/Self*. The book is divided into three separate sections, namely *Mother Poem*, *Sun Poem*, and *X/Self*. All three sections have been slightly modified from the earlier version by the author to incorporate the typographic inventions of his “Video Sycorax” style that play an important role in his poetics of colonial dispossession and oppression. *Ancestors* furthers the theme of personal history. Due to the disruption of the collective psyche of the African diaspora in the Caribbean, the *Ancestors* trilogy can be called, in Ngugi’s words, a decolonising of the mind; a decisive move toward something that may be considerably harder, something that requires re-mapping the terrain of the self, reclaiming the soul. It is also as Brian Friel states, a “renewing” of history to prevent the ossification of the postcolonial condition:

> It is not the literal past, the “facts” of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language...we must never cease renewing those images, because once we do, we fossilise (66)

The *Ancestors* trilogy is not only the history of the people and the land but also a personal narrative. The trilogy as an organizing principle plays an important role in the poetics of Edward Kamau Brathwaite. According to him the trilogic form is employed as a means of “raising an issue, replying to that issue and trying to create a synthesis.” In an interview with Nathaniel Mackey, Brathwaite states:
the trilogic form is based upon the question, an answer and resolution of that answer into a third book... Where were you born? The nature of your landscape? Mother Poem: the mother, the coral, the limestone. Then, is that your only source of influence, power, aura? The answer was no, there was a male element as well, your father. Sun Poem: light, air, in addition to water and ocean. And then the third movement, the resolution into myself into X/Self.

In the Preface to the 1977 edition of Mother Poem, Brathwaite writes that the poem is about his “mother” Barbados. It is Brathwaite’s attempt to define and describe the island that he calls home. In describing his land as his mother the poet also genders the landscape, and by extension the history of the land. On a more autobiographical level Mother Poem is not only about the poet’s “mother” but also about the Mother, the women of Barbados and the role men play in the Caribbean and their interaction/relationships with the women.

This chapter will attempt to place Brathwaite’s poetic rendition of the personal landscape within the larger framework of a particularly gendered existence as colonial subjects. By gendering History and consequently using Women as the lens through whom the narratives of colonial History are refracted most brutally, Brathwaite forces the reader to confront the almost always violent forces of European colonial conduct. This chapter argues that the importance afforded by Brathwaite to the Mother in Mother Poem is an acknowledgement of the oppression suffered by the women at the hands of the colonisers, and their own men, and also a redefinition of the postcolonial person’s history as one shaped almost entirely by the efforts of the mothers/wives/women of the land.
The next section Sun Poem regards the male genealogy of the son/sun to chart the emergence of the male individual who must contend with the reduced role of his fathers, as a malaise institutionalised by colonialism, and the strengths of the African mothers. The last section X/Self, I argue, is the eventual resolution/definition of the postcolonial intellectual who is a product of the twin trajectories of a broken African masculinity, and a brutalized but always resistant feminine presence. X/Self is not only an attempt by the poet to re-assemble the myriad fragments of his African and Caribbean past, but also to locate them within the matrix of his present neo-colonial political experiences.

Ancestors: Mother Poem

Mother Poem, the first part of the trilogy, is divided into four sub-sections: Rockseed, Nightwash, Tuk and Koumfort. The first section depicts the destruction caused by colonisation during the Plantation era to the land and the collective male psyche in the Caribbean. The men are described as ineffectual creatures who have become slaves and confidants of "owner-merchants", Brathwaite's trope for colonial rulers and neo-capitalist mercantilists. The "owner-merchant" is described by the poet as "the man who possesses us all/ who has broken the heart of my father's hand/ who shits in the great house" (83). The male populace is implicated in the repressive, and often destructive, policies of the forces of capitalism. The first section details the forces that threaten the existence of the Mother in the contemporary socio-political scene in Barbados.

Rockseed opens with a poem called 'Alpha', the first letter of the Greek alphabet. In a composition that makes extensive use of nation language and breaks with most traditional poetic
practices, the choice of the title signals the poet’s move to indict colonial education. Brathwaite has long implicated the role of colonial education in maintaining, perpetuating and justifying the oppression of the colonising powers. The title, ‘Alpha’, hence does not signal a collusion with long-established conventions of literary production but instead a reversal of perceived norms. It is a gesture of the poet’s dissent, and a sign of the rift between canonical British poetry and his own, in both structure and thematic concerns.

According to June D. Bobb, ‘Alpha’, “the poem introducing the volume, is a gathering-up of forces, a celebration of strength and survival, a praise-song to mother, mother country, and ancestral mother.” She identifies Brathwaite’s theory of “tidalectics”, a “tidal dialectic” that moves “outward from the center to circumference and back again”, at work in this first poem (64). ‘Alpha’ also serves as a forum for the poet to introduce, at the outset, both the destructive and redemptive forces at play.

The poem begins in St. Philip, the largest, southern most parish in Barbados and unites the Caribbean with Africa in a description of its topography (Brathwaite, Mother Poem 119). The “harbour river” mentioned by the poet is actually called the Constitution River. It flows into the harbour at Bridgetown and is now polluted to the point of being sluggish. Its introduction is followed by the reference to Jose river, the river that the poet calls “the water of the Portuguese”, allowing Brathwaite to give the two life giving natural entities a malignant portrayal (Ancestors 15). One is a dying, polluted river and the other in collusion with the first

1 All references in parentheses to Mother Poem, Sun Poem, and X/Self, refer to the original versions of these poems.
European discoverers and colonisers of the island, the Portuguese.

The Mother is a “pool”, a repository of memories and history, a life-preserving personage, diametrically opposed to the two rivers. The poet goes on to identify the different persona of the Mother; as the guardian of culture, the landscape itself and mothers as wise, experienced, resilient individuals whose vision has not been ravaged by the colonial experience.

my mother sits above these on her mountain

curl, leaf of dreamer
drift plantations away
i remember ancient watercourses
dead streams. Carved footsteps

and my mother rains upon the island

w/her loud voices
w/her grey hairs
w/her green love (Ancestors 15)

The land is dry and arid. The waterlessness of the opening part of ‘Alpha’ is identified by the poet as sign of the role of the Caribbean male in the present scenario. From a resistant and dignified individual who fought against the forces of colonisation, he now works for the “owner-merchant” and is listless, feeble and inept:

...the thin skinned merchant lets him in
marker of bags. maker of chalk dust. white
man of sugar (15)
The merchant is identified with the destructive forces of a capitalist system that is widely adopted by many poor Third World nations on the recommendations of the World Bank and the International Monetary fund. Brathwaite describes it as a form of neo-colonialism and fears that it is far more insidious and destructive in the longer run than the devastation caused by colonisation.

At the end of 'Alpha', we are introduced to a female protagonist who is waiting for her husband. This introduces us to another theme of *Mother Poem*, that of the personal narratives of the women of Barbados. *Mother Poem* meditates on the lives of several female characters and weaves their narrative with the story of the land, their collective mother. 'Twine', the poem immediately following 'Alpha', narrates the story of the woman introduced in the previous poem as the poet’s Mother. The narrator is now the woman herself, and she wistfully relates the story of her life with her husband, the poet’s “father”.

Her husband was once an emotionally and physically strong man. He was the kind of person who looked like he could fight not only for his rights but could also “right” other wrongs, both historical and contemporary: “i know when i did first meet e/ e did look like e cudda wrench de wrongs”. Working at the merchant’s warehouse has weakened him. He is now fragile and brittle: “but if you look pun e now/ fragile. fraid a e own shadow/ but e tired. Man. But e tired” (17-18). The effects of hundreds of years of brutal and repressive colonisation are telescoped in the figure of the father. The father is now the slave of the plantation era – financially and emotionally exploited, though there is a vital difference between the portrayal of the “father” and the condition of the slaves. Whereas the slaves had no choice in the matter of their
slavery, the "father" is a willing collaborator in the neo-colonial "merchants" scheme of things:

...my father
the merchants clerk. the merchants man. the merchants prop/erty
black to his poor backra money
back to his poor backra psalm (19)

"Backra", or "buckra", is originally an Afro-Caribbean phrase from a similar Ibo word, for a white man or "boss man". In the context of this poem, though, "poor backra" refers to the descendents of seventeenth century indentured servants who according to Brathwaite, "persist as a kind of white maroon group to this day" (Mother Poem 119). Thus the father is posited as a subservient figure who, unlike the slaves of the plantation era, shows no signs of actively resisting the exploitative "merchant". Instead we see a meek compliance with the state of affairs. The character of the father is one of the most distinct autobiographical features of the poem. He is based on the poet's father, who at about the age of fifty, was "fired or forced to give up his job at the merchant's warehouse/warehouse where he was a kind of tally-clerk" because of his poor health (Brathwaite, Conversations 80).

In 'Alpha' the Mother "calls on jesus name" (Ancestors 16) while waiting for her husband, and in the poem following 'Twine', called 'Sam Lord', Brathwaite implicates Christianity in slavery and colonisation. The title refers to a mythological figure in Caribbean history. Historically, Sam Lord was a sort of English pirate who guided ships on to the reefs that run along the Atlantic coast of Barbados from his castle (Brathwaite, Mother Poem 119-120). In his poem, though, Brathwaite alludes to the "lord" Jesus Christ. By associating
the pirate with Christian theology the poet underlines the exploitation meted out to Caribbean people in the name of the Christian God. The religious framework in the Caribbean during the era of plantation slavery and colonisation is Christian, and the god she put her faith in has betrayed the “mother”. The “mother” is aware of this fact and the poem is a subtle reformulation of her faith to posit a more benign theological framework. The precepts of both systems of faith remain the same, but the practice now invokes an accommodating entity and her faith is rewarded with hope for the future.

thy rod & thy staff no longer assault me
my cup of hands runneth over

surely goodness & mercy. francina & faith
will follow me all the days of my life
& i dwell in the house of the merchant

for nvr (Ancestors 21)

In ‘Bell’, the weak, non-descript husband of the Mother is replaced by a man of the cloth: “parson replace husbann w/the birth/ of her second child/ at the death/ of the third”. Rearticulating the politics of the domestic sphere, the traditional role of the husband as a strong, anchoring presence in the family is taken over by a priest. It is not his physical presence in the household that the poet is referring to, but instead a woman’s faith in the word of god as the last resort: “you cd only touch him w/prayers” (Ancestors 22). The religious patriarchy of the coloniser’s religion has replaced the authority of the black male within the Caribbean household. The husband is never home, working for the capitalist merchant for a paltry salary, and is allied with the fate of the plantation era slaves. This imparts a
sense of immediacy; the plantation experience is placed in the contemporary capitalist exploitation of labour:

\[
i \text{nevva did know dat dat man he didwork for} \\
i \text{dat slack mister merchant wid dat black cattle hat} \\
i \text{An e cravat. dat poor backra rat} \\
\]

after all dem years

after all dem harvests a hogmeat & trash a de names \\
a de canefields
after all dem soft bags a sugar. reaching up to de dark a de ceilin

after all dem books full a figures & blames

cart load. lorry load. spider load. headin
after all dem thousands a other men money dat pass thru e hanns
after three hundred years in de hot sun (26).

The brutality of indentured physical exploitation has taken its toll on the men. Besides leading them into an endless spiral of hard work and low wages, it has affected their physical being, just like it affected the poet’s father who developed a bronchial problem and had to quit work (Brathwaite, Conversations 80):

\[
i \text{nevva did know when e start comin home} \\
i \text{wid a wheeze. wid a cough. wid a stone} \\
i \text{in e chess. so e cuh hardly breed (Ancestors 25)}
\]

The black male, a symbol of masculinity and sexuality, has been rendered impotent. It is the ultimate slight and the
poem’s most poignant comment on the present condition of the men in the Caribbean. Brutalized by history, they are now hapless, weak, impotent creatures who have lost all of their past glory and magnificence. Brathwaite moves from the personal voice of the individual to a larger political comment on the condition of men in the Caribbean. The shift in narrative personas emphasizes the extent to which the condition of the male species has deteriorated. It is no longer the anguished cry of a woman who has lost her husband to the ravages of the island’s history; instead it is an empathetic rendition of the changing role of men in Barbados, and how their shifting social trajectory is intertwined with the fate of women.

A more hopeful nostalgic moment suggests strong masculinity and correspondingly the landscape is fertile and water is plentiful:

and the stone wrinkle. Crack & give birth to water

there was dream in my eye
there was vision of green
i sail forward slowly into a movement of glass

everywhere there were lips. bubble and bud
& the crickets of birds

everywhere there were eyes. dressing me in robes
placing sandles under my feet. praising me
everywhere there are hands. building the temple
(Ancestors 28)

The pride and power of men is refracted through the eyes of the women. The times are good and mutual respect between the
sexes is easy to find. But something happened and, mirroring the change in social conditions, the landscape changes accordingly. The fecundity of the terrain is replaced by images of decay; weeds take the place of beneficial flora and fauna:

pitiful & dim. They resisting erosion
but they have already die the death of sticks & witches

they have lost the drum of beneficial sunlight
they have forgotten how to dance to cool & glint & trinkle

chained among weeds & brambles
they resemble my lost children

those who have died. crossing
those who have had stakes stuck into their courage.
refusing

It is a Mother’s lament for the pitiful fate of her sons, who were once great warriors and fought injustice to retain their culture and their land: “djukas of marsh. maroons/ of scar & cockpit country. boscoes of rock & thicket” (29). The word “djukas” and the phrase “maroons of scar and cockpit country” refer to groups of maroons or Black resistance fighters who fought against the colonising forces and managed to create and retain the Afro-maroon culture in their area during the period of slavery (Brathwaite, Mother Poem 120). This is the proud legacy of the Black male who now seeks refuge in alcohol and hides behind his women: “those who have escaped into rum/ into the long dark drag of the thighs of their women” (Ancestors 29). The present condition of the black male affects the condition of the women too. No longer is he the proud
protector of the family, the burden is now on the women in the household - the Mothers:

so I move down into the old watercourses

echo pebble trickle of worn stone
snaken voice of coral curling its own pattern to the sea

memory of foam. Of fossil. eroded beaches high
above the eaten boulders of st. philip

and I become dry pool. dead eye (30).

The Mother seeks refuge in the glory of her past, hoping to change the present. But the burden of the past is crippling and the present offers no comfort. She realizes History has to be salvaged and more of the present expressed. Her foes have to be brought to light and only then can a remedy be found. The corrupting, vile elements in her life and the life of her family are to be given a voice, and then they can be refuted. She realizes that in confronting them she will be able to enunciate their weaknesses and defeat their designs. The Mother identifies her adversaries and decides to tackle them one at a time: “an I musn fuhget that i ax the teacher to stop in an see me/ tomorrow” (30).

In the poem titled 'Lix' the “teacher” is emblematic of the limitations in an educational system that borrows almost everything from its past colonial masters. The educational system in the Caribbean is based on the British model and employs nearly the same strategies and curriculum. Colonising powers, such as the British, employed the use of their own
educational models to consolidate and justify their rule. This helped in providing the colonisers with a moral basis for the commercial exploitation of human labour. Hence, Brathwaite is very critical of the current system of education in Barbados that does not teach children to pride their History and native heroes. Traditionally, the teacher is the repository of Knowledge and History, and supposed as morally and ethically sound. But the poet portrays him as a selfish, misogynist with no scruples, whose only mission in life is to further his own career:

he was already forty

married/un-
marr ired cow-
ard. livin w/a woe-

man who dusted his chin
every born-
in w/babys talcum pow-
der. hate-
in her. need-
in her dai-

ly. as if she was maid
for the job (32)

The "teacher" is an agent of the "owner/merchant", perpetrator of the tyrannical values of the colonisers. The failings of the educational system, the literary imperialism that it perpetuates, are projected on to the figure of the "teacher".

2 For more about the use of colonial education as an integral part of the colonial enterprise see Gauri Viswanathan's Masks of Conquest.
The education he imparts, according to Brathwaite, is giving birth to a nation of slaves instead of fully rounded, confident individuals with pride in their past and hope for their future. His mission is clearly aligned with the nefarious designs of the colonisers and is a testament of the moral and ethical bankruptcy of the Caribbean male:

```
to build a nation of fork sticks
to kill the blade in those dark mahoe bodies
to iron the devil out of their pants

to see that they spit in tune
that they don’t clap their hands. Shake their heads
tap their feet to the tam......

Knowing their place at the foot of the nation
Backseat bus stop bellboy black (33)
```

The Mother clearly has had enough of the teacher, and is losing her patience with him: “the cool flat of her black/ iron temper getting hotter and hotter” (35). The poem positions the Mother as the locus of a steadily growing confidence, as each confrontation increases her self-assurance.

The Mother’s life, with no male presence to support the family, is a struggle as she becomes both mother and father. Not only does she have to take care of the children, she also has to take up a job to sustain her family. It is in this role that she must deal with the debt collector. He is portrayed as a brutally selfish, greedy man who does not care for the circumstances of the people who owe him money: “so yu losin dis houe/ or i lossin dis job” (42). He shows no sympathy for his people and threatens the living spaces of the poor. He,
too, is an agent of the “owner/merchant”. His menacing presence haunts the mind of the Mother but she is determined to prove stronger and defeat his intentions. She draws on the power inherent, but often denied, to her sex:

She is not god
The stone/breaker

Or a washer
-woman whitening her

boulders from sleep

she is smaller
than these

has be
-come greater

than these (42-43)

A realization dawns upon her as she feels she is up to the challenge, and she begins to come to terms with her own power:

she smiles
at jack strop now because she is stronger

than his pencil or pen (43)

The first section of Mother Poem ends with the poem 'Tear or pear shape'. It establishes, once again, the arid landscape of colonial exploitation as well as the barren state of the colonised lives. “why you remember only its history of green?” The interrogative here is also an exhortation. The
The lines quoted from the poem ‘Casabianca’ by Felicia Hemans indicate the values and the language imposed by the colonial authority as the poem celebrates the colonial virtue of obeying orders. “the boy/stood on/the burn/in deck / whence all/but he/had / flawed”. The lines from the original read “The Boy stood on the burning deck, / Whence all but him had fled”. It is an ingenious inversion of the original poem, as well as context. The original poem celebrates the child “As born to rule the storm; / A creature of heroic blood, / A proud though childlike form.” The battle of the Nile, in which the poem is situated, took place between the French and the British to gain control of the Egyptian lands, and is a testament to the heroism attributed to the colonial enterprise. When Brathwaite substitutes “flawed” for “fled” he shifts the attention from the heroism of the boy who stood his ground in the face of adversity when all had fled, to the apotheosis of the white colonial male who stands above everyone else who is “flawed”.

1 ‘Casablanca’ was written about Young Casablanca, a boy of about thirteen years old, who was the son of Vice-Admiral Brueys, the commander of the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile. The Admiral and his son were on board the flagship, l'Orient. Casabianca remained at his post during the battle, even after the ship had caught fire and all the guns had been abandoned. The boy died when the ship exploded after the flames reached the powder.
While the first section of the poem details the condition of the men in the Mother’s life, Nightwash and Tuk, the second and third sections, depict the effect this has on the woman. With the men in her life crippled, or physically and emotionally sick, the Mother has to venture out onto the harsh Caribbean landscape to try to make a living on her own. In ‘Miss Own’, the first poem of the second section, Nightwash, the poet makes it clear that the Mother/woman is now on her own. The mother has a small farm of her own but that too is not enough to make “enns meet” (52).

She takes up a job at the “mercantile shame/-rock”, “sellin calico cloth” (49). The merchant who makes her work hard for a very low wage, exploits her helplessness. In her present circumstances she has no options and she is:

                indentured to the merchants law
                the merchants whip
                the merchants weakly pay (49)

But one job is not enough to sustain her and her family. As a means of supplementing her income she takes up another job “Sellin sunrise biscuit & sawlfish in de plantation shop”. It is “another god way of keeping she body & soul-seam/ to/ - gather” (51). The Mother/woman had to drop out of school when she was thirteen and has had to struggle to make a living on her own since then. Now she has four kids to feed and care for and hence one job is not enough. The absence of a male figure in the household is made very clear in the poem. Continuing from the previous section, which detailed the failure of the men as caretakers and providers, the poem now inverts the traditional role of men and women within a Caribbean family. The Mother which emerges now is strong and resilient, the hard
work has not broken her, it has only made her more introspective and wary:

collec wha little they gi she in small change. handin back wha she owe pun de flock
goin slowly down in de winks a de dark to de haff lot a lann
dat she callin a home
& not sayin a word to a soul what she see what she dream what she own (55)

It is clear, that she has no illusions that life is going to be a struggle and she starts by taking account of her life and keeping her future plans to herself.

The fragmented, bleak landscape symbolizes the struggles of the Mother’s existence. Nature is no longer benevolent and destruction abounds. Things are no longer as they should be, a malignant force wreaks havoc:

who calls the lightning down
to this tilted cracked fragmented landscape
who engineers the landslide

makes the tree walk. The roads disappear over the howl of night
who leaks the soil out (55)

According to Brathwaite:

...in Mother Poem, there is a great deal of leaking - water thru limestone, light thru green, the erosion of the Mother’s hopes dreams expectations etc (Conversations 54)
Brathwaite indicates that this is not the way things were supposed to be; the natural order has been inverted. In an attempt to underscore the extent to which things have gone wrong the narrative shifts to the most vulnerable of the island's inhabitants, a young girl.

In a poem called 'Pixie', which was not included in the original version of *Mother Poem*, Brathwaite makes clear his views on the contemporary socio-economic scenario of the Caribbean. The poem is about a thirteen year old girl whose real name is Stephanie, but who is "known to her peers as 'Pixie'" (Ancestors 62). She is the product of a broken home. Her father left home when she was two and never sent any money home; Stephanie’s mother has been crippled by a stroke and been her only parent. Stephanie’s mother has held several petty jobs over the years but now she cannot work and has to rely on "medicine & the scarce kindness of strangers & the Wildfare Board" (64). Stephanie, or Pixie as she is called, is a sexually promiscuous and rebellious young girl who disappears from her home for days.

In a narrative that moves back and forth between poetry, reportage and radio program transcripts, the poet paints an extremely bleak picture of a family in ruin. Stephanie runs away from her home only to return after twenty-five days and in ‘Heartbreak Hotel’, a "long lost letter from Pixie iout here in the dark" (68), she gives her reasons for doing so, for turning out to be the way she has.

‘Heartbreak Hotel’ is a searing indictment of the failure of the men as fathers and a testament to the effects of a broken home on children, especially homes without a father figure:

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"...I want love. I want attention. I want somebody to care & direct my life & tell me what to do. I have never had a father. Nor do I know who he is. But I have a mother whose only interest is to pose in front of the mirror....My mum don’t and will never care for me. When I am around Mummy, she chase me from around her. She’s too bus-(y) fe me (69)

Denied love and affection, Pixie gets into fights at school and runs away from home because she needs attention; attention from her peers, her teachers and most of all, from her mother. Pixie/Stephanie is so starved for love that she has sex indiscriminately with strangers: "they say they love me, want me give me anything i want." They say they care. They give me all the att in the world" (69). Brathwaite reverses the Mother/ Child relationship by making Pixie’s pain and suffering symbolic of the suffering of women. Pixie is the Mother now, the future Mother to the island’s inhabitants, and the men in her life have deserted her. In a last desperate attempt to seek love and companionship she turns to prostitution - a temporary solution that must suffice.

The entire landscape is hostile; love is the only answer: "o howling city needing/ love" (71). It is the one salve needed to heal all wounds, but is not readily found in an environment that has been so brutalized. The suturing of the ruptured psyche of the land will involve a rebuilding of the foundations of society, a reconstruction of the means of communication. Language itself needs healing; it is a time when "very words need love", and no easy answers are to be found. In a confusing state of affairs, distinguishing right from wrong, good from bad cannot be taken for granted anymore: “how can we tell/ these dancers from they dance” (72).
The Mother’s culture and history need to be resuscitated but the people have exhausted their imaginative prowess and "the mind is dry" (80). The Mother’s chronicle will cull a narrative of totality from the essence of a fragmentary past. According to June D. Bobb, before a new order can emerge "there are many battles to be fought, and at the heart of the turbulence is the mother icon with powers of consecration and damnation, a composite of ambiguities" (65). The Mother’s most important role now is as the guardian of history:

she will remember the floorboards of a cabin
how there was a grave there
where she bury her children......

she wears on her wrist the shadow of the chain
history of flesh
written by whip & torture
legacy of bribe....

& she crumples words
into curses (Ancestors 75)

The Mother will fashion the past into a blueprint for survival in the future. But it is not merely a facile recourse to an uncontested African past, but rather, as Wilson Harris has advocated in his writings⁴, an "imaginative" regeneration of the island’s history of indentured slavery and colonisation. Since slavery displaced not just people but also culture, religion, and the imagination – a refashioning must necessarily contend as much with reconstruction as a (re)interpretation:

⁴ See Wilson Harris’ Tradition, the Writer and Society and The Womb of Space.
For history is not only absence for us. It is vertigo. The time that was never ours we must now possess. “We do not see it stretch into our past and calmly take us into tomorrow, but it explodes in us as a compact mass, pushing through a dimension of emptiness where we must with difficulty and pain put it all back together.”

(Glissant, Caribbean Discourse 161-2)

In ‘Nam(e)tracks’ the Mother’s account takes on a defiant tone; The narrator is now in direct conflict with the colonising invader. According to Brathwaite the word “nam”, as in the title ‘Nam(e)tracks, has several meanings in the African and Caribbean context. It not only means “name”, the name that the African/Caribbean people once had but have now lost to the colonisers; it also suggests “beginnings”, “root”, and “man” in reverse (‘History and X/Self’ 34).

In ‘The African Presence in Caribbean Literature’, Brathwaite writes that the “word (nommo or name) is held to contain secret power” (236). In traditional African society people believed that their name was so important that a change in it could change their lives, and therefore they tried to hide their names. In ‘Nam(e)tracks’, the coloniser is represented by “ogrady”, a childhood game familiar to most Caribbean children, and he is trying to force the Mother’s son, the poet, to reveal his name. The Mother warns her child not to listen to “ogrady” words, and instead be a “Maroon” and remain faithful to the “native aspect” of his history. “You must not listen to Prospero’s commands, but to the memory of the history of your own culture”, she tells him (Brathwaite, ‘History and X/Self’ 39). The Mother succeeds in her mission and the poet/son refuses to tell “ogrady” his name: “but e nevva maim what me mudda me name/ an e nevva nyam what me name” (Brathwaite, Ancestors 94). The resisting on the part of
the poet, denying the oppressor the key to control the oppressed, is invoked as a Caliban gesture defying Prospero.

In 'Days' and 'Nights', the opening poems of the third section, the concept of "nam" resurfaces. While 'Nam(e)tracks' dwelled on the Mother's son, these two poems meditate on the fate of a young girl, who could be the Mother's daughter. The sequence of poems is based upon an event that took place at Port Royal, Jamaica during the 1820's. The protagonist of the poems is a twelve-year-old slave girl called ann, who is mercilessly beaten by her master's nine-year-old daughter, and the last part of 'Nights' tells the story of her enslavement which begins, and ends, with her auctioning.

In 'Brathwaite with a Dash of Brown', Gordon Rohlehr asserts that Mother Poem "recognizes that women's experience in the Caribbean had its own peculiar plantation hinterland, in the historically documentable fierceness of encounter between enslaved woman and slave mistress." In 'Days' and 'Nights' Brathwaite "presents this encounter as the origin of a disruption, via race and class, of the common line of female experience" (233). Being a black woman/girl, ann does not even have the status of a slave, she falls into an even lower category. Her position, and by extension the condition of black female slaves, has been systematically denigrated by colonialist ideologies. Her impassionate and poignant plea at the end of 'Nights' underscores the double marginalisation of women, a complete erasure, by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies:

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how much am i bid?

nan

nan
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As the third section draws to an end we find that the Mother is becoming stronger. "It is at this very moment of extremis", after having being "forced into a series of expedients", that she "discovers her underground resources" (Brathwaite, Preface to Mother Poem). In 'Cherries', she is now self-reliant and resilient, though this has also led to a hardening of her stance with the men in her life. The Mother is no longer complacent and weak-willed, always ready to forgive her husband/man all his failures. Her rage and frustration have
been replaced by a calculated determination. She is changing the way she envisioned her life and there is a conviction now that what she can achieve is a function of her new beliefs. By rebelling against the roles that have been imposed on her she is discovering the way the world should be. This knowledge stabilizes and gives form to both her physical being and the landscape that she inhabits. Her newfound faith is not an abstraction, it is instead, the foundation of the new structure she gives to her life:

if there are ways of saying
i do not know them

if there are dreams
i cannot recall them to the light

if there is rage
it is a cool cinder

in the heat of the day
i swear i will sweat no more

knife. bill-hook. sweet bramble
i will burn in my bush of screams

hoe. i will work
root. mud. marl. burden

needle. i will sew
thread. stitch. embroidered image

...these images of love i leave you
now i no longer need you

169
In the fourth section of the poem, 'Koumfort', as the poem
nears its end, writes Brathwaite, "the mother is beginning"
(Brathwaite, Preface to Mother Poem). In 'Mid/Life', the
second last poem of the section, "the mother speaks for
cultural preservation and history in the language of the
Caribbean which is rooted in Africa" (Bobb 67-68). The poem
weaves a rich, symbolic tapestry and the language now
generates the questions of History and Culture, instead of
being structured by them. In a dream like sequence the Mother
witnesses the birth of a child. Though traditionally an
occasion for celebration, this event is coloured with a bleak
note of caution:

the child
is born to splinters

broken islands
broken homes

driftwood of beaches (Ancestors 140)

According to June D. Bobb, "the child must acknowledge his
cultural history and name his Caribbean experiences and their
connection to the ancestral experiences if he is to refashion
the history of the doomed" (68). As the poem develops, the
dream widens to encompass both child and grandfather. The
Mother finds comfort in their midst, their simultaneous
presence seems to bind her in a protective embrace. But these
comforts are imaginary and deceptive, and in the final poem of
the section the Mother reminds herself of the dangers of a
dream: "my mother rails against the fearlures of these
koumforts she stifles a dream as the whip raids her"
The poet’s pun on the word “failure” underscores the danger of the Mother being lured by something she ought to fear. The “whip” not only serves as a corrective measure, interrupting her reverie, but also as a reminder of her past as a slave. The Mother calls upon the new generation of Caribbean people “who will pick up the broken stones/sloping them w/chip & mallet out of the concave quarries”, to re-write the History of their land and their African origins. For once their History will be central and not peripheral, no longer will it “bleed on other peoples/edges”. This new, re-written History will “cast off political clothing spittle of mon/-key parsing” (Ancestors 145). There is hope for renewal and salvation for her people. But the mood changes in the last few pages of Mother Poem. A bitter, prescient pragmatism steps in and the Mother senses trouble in the future. She offers herself as a sacrifice to save the future of her people. If freedom can only be sought at her expense, she is willing to embrace hardship in lieu of her children. Her selfless drive is centred on her commitment to rid her people of their troubles, on their goal of achieving a lasting peace. She appeals to a divine benevolent being for her people’s salvation:

so that losing her now

you will slowly restore
her silent gutters of word

fall (151)

In the previous trilogy, The Arrivants, Brathwaite “created a skeleton of archipel-ago”, a “string of song celebrating the movement” of the Caribbean people from Africa to the New
World. In *Mother Poem* he populates this island with his family:

> I had to inhabit them with ancestors, with ghosts, with spirits, with *lwa*; trying for a total cosmos. I mean I know this, I have to do it. at least try for it. And at the same time it has to be also a poetry of familiar projects periods and *familial* people. I have to celebrate my mother and my father and the caliban people old and new i grow up with, i know and get to know. (Brathwaite, *Conversations* 44)

Thus, in the first part of the trilogy the poet grounds his past in the collective History of his people, the History of his Mother. The autobiographical elements of the poem are extended in an opaque portrayal of the women in the poet’s life, and Brathwaite’s past is refracted through the feminised narrative of his Mother, the guardian of the island’s African past. In doing so he successfully manages to achieve a great degree of self-authenticity through the apparently random details of the Mother’s experience. The narrative axis of the Mother’s private existence as a woman and a mother, and her public role as the guardian of the their collective past, is used as an anchoring centre of reference and interpretive stability.

**Ancestors: Sun Poem**

The second part of the trilogy is called *Sun Poem*. While *Mother Poem* is Brathwaite’s feminised version of Barbadian history, *Sun Poem* is about the male elements of Brathwaite’s past. Brathwaite moves from the women dominated landscape of *Mother Poem* to speak about the men who inhabit the island and their life. In the poet’s own words: “the second poem had to be about my father” (*Conversations* 52). It is a tribute not
only to his father, but also the fathers and sons of the island, a tribute to what he calls the "male-elements" of/in his life.

Brathwaite has made a few changes to the revised version of Sun Poem published in Ancestors. A few parts of the original have been edited out of this new version, which lends it more thematic coherence. The image of the rainbow still "provides Brathwaite with a structuring device on which the Sun Poem is erected." (Rohlehr, 'Megalleons of Light' 203). In 'Sun Poem: The Rainbow Sign?', Stewart Brown writes that the "rainbow is perceived as a beneficence that comes with the end of the storm, it is a symbol of renewal" (153). Sun Poem moves from the red of its first section to orange, yellow, blue and finally indigo, with a corresponding change in mood and tempo as the transition is made through different phases of History.

The poem begins in what Gordon Rohlehr has identified as Brathwaite's "heraldic style" ('Megalleons of Light’ 201) with the piece titled ‘Red Rising’. It symbolizes dawn, and is the first "voice of the rainbow" (Brathwaite, Sun Poem 98). Brathwaite draws upon Biblical sources to fashion a beginning with Genesis. The narrator is God, watching over the creation of Earth. Mountain landmarks of the Third World are pitted against each other with the phallic imagery lending the landscape a masculine flavour. The Sun is at the centre of this creative process; he is the “father-giver, the sun/sum” (Ancestors 165). Continuing with the symbolic use of colours, Brathwaite juxtaposes Rastafarian ritual words, “jah”, “love” and “thanks” with the North American Indian sacred colours of black, blue, yellow and white painting the landscape with different shades of meaning, each serving as a counter-point to the other (Sun Poem 98).
The imagery is austere and striking, reconciling the immensity and grandeur of nature with its destructive elements. The idyllic setting of the first poem is juxtaposed with the questions of the previous section that still remain unanswered. The doubts persist: "where is my hope. hope where is my psalter/ my children wear masks" (Ancestors 165). The poet continues in this self-critical, interrogative mode to expose the contradictions inherent in the condition of the black male in contemporary times. Nothing escapes the discriminating narrator's self-reflexive scrutiny:

so that for centuries now have i fought against these opposites

how i am suck from water into air
how the air surrounds me blue all the way
from ocean to the other shore
from halleluja to the black hole of hell
from this white furnace where i burn
to these green sandy ant-hills
where you grow yr yam

you wd think that i wd hate eclipses
my power powdered over as it were
but its hallucination my fine friend
a fan a feather. some-

one elses breath of shadow (167)

The contrast in the description of Africa and the Barbadian landscape accentuates the changing plight of the Black males'
condition as he moves from being a proud patriarchal figure to a subservient slave. The waters around Africa are those of the beneficent “ocean” whereas the New World is home to the “other shore”, where evil lurks. The “halleluja” of their celebratory religious fervour has now been drowned in the “black hole of hell” that slavery has made the Caribbean. They have been forced to move from the “sandy ant-hills” of Africa to the imposed labour in the “white furnace” of the plantation. The past seems to have broken the Sun’s/Father’s spirit. While there is an acceptance on his behalf that there is no escaping his present misery or his torturous past: “i will never i know/ make it over the atlantic of this nebula” (168), there is also a willingness to relive the past, to reinforce one’s African roots as a means of recuperation for the present generation:

but that you may live
my fond retreating future

i will accept
the bonds that blind me (168-169)

In ‘Orange Origen’, the next section, the poet introduces the character of adam, with the colour orange itself symbolizing the bright vitality of youth. adam is the central protagonist of the Sun Poem and the choice of his name has myriad literary and political implications. On one level, adam is Adam; the first man, son of God or the father of the human race, but on another level it is a literary device employed by Brathwaite to set autobiography at a distance, helping the poet to achieve a measure of objectivity that would not have been possible otherwise (Rohlehr, ‘Megalleons of Light’ 192). Thus the description of adam’s childhood is infused with the authenticity of the poet’s actual experiences and a retelling
of the communal experience of childhood. According to Gordon Rohlehr, “Adam becomes a little like Wordsworth’s primal child, a representation of childhood itself, where immediacy of sensation transcends meaning” (‘Megalleons of Light’ 192). The poet’s childhood, his sense of history and culture, his lived experiences and the experiences of the people in his life are refracted through his representation of adam.

adam and his sister have moved from the country to the city and the city seems strange, almost brutal to adam. Even the Sun, which was munificent and kind in the country, is manifestly malevolent in the city. Its soft “gooseberry light” is now a “bright green ball” that “pains” adam’s eyes. Brathwaite’s poetry is now suffused with different hues of light drenching adam. There are some shades that adam has seen before and some that he has not, freeing the Sun from the fixity of its traditional representations. The setting sun is also adam’s introduction to the sea where many dramas of his childhood will be played out. The permanence of the Sun is not questioned but adam’s Sun now takes on a kaleidoscope of meanings. The poet thus symbolizes the changing nature of adam’s universe, not only has his physical setting changed but everything else in his young life is in transition. While the Sun is the father figure and life force, the sea “becomes a source of memory and pain” (Bobb 69) and the beach is the setting for adam’s confrontation with batto the bully.

Seen through the eyes of adam, batto takes on a heroic mould as he excels in almost every form of physical activity: “Of all the boys on the beach/ Batto was the biggest brave. Best swimmer/ Best diver best floater” (Ancestors 191). Batto’s brutish nature is explained by adam to be the result of his upbringing. He grew up in a home ‘without a mother and never went to school. He had already served a term at “dodds”, a
correctional facility for children and his ambition in life is to one day "go to a proppa prison" (192). He is the product of a broken home, a feature of the island’s social environs that the poet has documented earlier in poems like ‘Pixie’. Batto’s strength and bravery are not isolated from his thuggish nature and his bullying tendencies. Adam describes him in the context of his criminal intentions:

he was the shark of the sea-egg season

& he duck every boy he was sure he cd beat
any time any place like down in de dark
w/out reason (191)

The idyllic setting of the initial scenes takes on a malevolent edge as Batto tries to drown Adam. Their struggle serves as a reminder to Adam of the other evils that lurk in his path. Adam is learning that life is a struggle and one must fight to survive, not give up meekly. Appropriately, the title of the next poem is ‘Yellow Minnim’, which according to the poet suggests “early morning (yellow light) and young, learning time” (Sun Poem 99).

Adam is now the poet himself, reminding his people that it is in their past that hope for the future lies. Their struggles against injustice and oppression can only be won through an acceptance of their History, which will also provide them with the tools to fashion their future. People have to envisage themselves not as part of a tradition that was imposed on them by the colonisers and which has always sought to denigrate their existence, but as part of their own History. The socio-political implications of an imposed Historical narrative are visible everywhere in the Caribbean where the indigenous has been completely effaced by colonisation: “not knowing the
names of our flowers & trees..../ we cd only call our brothers robinhood/ or barnabas collins” (Ancestors 202).

The true History of the Caribbean has to be recovered but this can only be done by excavating it from beneath the rubble of colonial history; this is also adam’s dream: “in my back/ yard that I will shift the boulder” (203). Underneath this boulder he expects to find a “crab” and this “crab know ancient histories” (204). The poet makes it clear that though the burden of colonial history is substantial, it is still possible to recover an untainted version of their past. By identifying the “crab” as the repository of the Caribbean past, the poet is highlighting the resilience of their historical past and their stories. Diving in the sea for “sea eggs” is used as an analogy for the process of Historical recovery, the fragility of the eggs symbolizing the fragile nature of the Caribbean past. Just as the eggs are carefully split open to reveal a “gold core”, the recovered Historical narratives need to be carefully scrutinized to reflect their perspectives and imperatives. But this recovery is fraught with many dangers. If not put to constructive and helpful use, this recovered History has the power to inflict harm: “then carefully cupping the psalm of your hann/ so it wdnt be prick by prick-/ les” (207).

The poet asks his people to not only contest their imposed Historical narratives but to also actively engage in the process of re-structuring them. Orphaned from their true historical moorings, Caribbean people now have to re-situate themselves within a narrative that has long sought to marginalize them in the coloniser’s world. This shift in perspective marks a culture trying to establish legitimacy through a strategic redefinition of its existence. By invoking the symbol of the “crab” as the bearer of History the poet is
trying to establish an indigenous context within which adam realizes both the importance and the urgency of such a Historical recovery. Frantz Fanon’s work in the restructuring of the postcolonial psyche posits such an excavation as a “rediscovery”:

This rediscovery, this absolute valorization almost in defiance of reality, objectively indefensible, assumes an incomparable and subjective importance... the plunge into the chasm of the past is the condition and source of freedom. (Toward the African Revolution 43)

The staggering burden of the task is brought to the fore in ‘Bubbles’, the next section, in which adam wants to “make a bubb/ le in my mouth” with which he could “suck in air when i < needin it. an breed back out in de bubble” (Brathwaite, Ancestors 215). The bubble is his way of insulating himself from the rest of the world. It offers him not only protection but also isolation, severing his link with reality. In the larger context, this is also symbolic of the condition of the Black male who has not been able to come to terms with the task of historical recovery and instead seeks refuge in a make-believe world where he could “fine my own way to the floor in the bay/ w/out losin my way” (215).

The words of his sister serve as a corrective. If adam is a dreamer then his sister is the realist. The differences in their opinion are also the difference in male and female perspectives on the island. She light-heartedly mocks his surreal plans but in her heart she understands the reasons behind his impossible plans. She wishes that he, like all the men folk, could break free of this vicious cycle of hopelessness and denial:
& yet she love to think them tryin to be birds tryin to leave the dark heavy water dragging the links of the chains of the water. poor slaves....

it wasn't nat -ral. but they wish it

& she wish them wings as he wd seek their secret bubble as he call

it (230)

The poet has great faith in the imaginative powers of his people, but they have lost the use of this faculty: "sons of the earth ignore dreamers" (236). They have been reduced to "barbecues of grit grief lip printless word...scheming but w/out plans" (237). Plantation slavery has crippled their ability to dream and it is this ability that has to be resuscitated. By partially restoring in adam the ability to dream, the poet devises a means of healing the wounded psyche of the Caribbean people, and also points towards the possibility of a newly fashioned landscape.

Brathwaite makes it clear that adam is still not empowered with an imagination that can deliver him from his self-doubts. One of the reasons for this is the absence of an authentic past, for as adam grows up, he is also growing "down", "to the darker soil of himself" (241). This absence manifests itself as an inability to reconcile the different elements of his maturing but fractured consciousness:

180
like the roots of a tree
he is silent, having no words to nourish
this darker feeling (241)

He is gradually becoming aware of an existence that lies
hidden beneath the rubble of history:

for growing up is finding for the first time
there is other sea behind the high hills (242)

In an effort to reveal the past to Adam, Brathwaite reverses
the journey of the Middle Passage. "In 'The Crossing,' as Adam
goes on a Sunday school excursion to Cattlewash, the poet
rewrites history in the song that the children sing" (Bobb
69):

we’re going to a wonderful place
we’re going to a wonderful place
over the hills and far away
we’re going to a wonderful place (Brathwaite,
Ancestors 243)

The "wonderful place" symbolizes Africa, but this imaginary
journey back to Africa, symbolized by the school trip, is very
complicated. As they move further away, towards their
destination, what was familiar back home is now losing its
familiarity. It is also an indicator of things to come; when
confronted by their true past, the perspective of Adam and his
friends will change. What they had always taken for granted
becomes barely recognizable: "they are losing their colour/
they are closing their names" (246). As the bus labours to
make its way up the mountain called "hearse hill", there is an
impending sense of doom. As the engine of the bus strains to
make the climb, Adam fears that the bus will "slip-back-down-
to-the-gully” “into-the-dark” (251). Though there is recognition of the lived present as a “dark” phase of his life, adam becomes aware that the confrontation with his past is going to be painful. At this moment he is willing to go back to his ignorant present: “leh we turn back/ now/ turn back/ now/ i own to go home” (250). But the bus makes it to the top and adam gets a clear view of the “promise land” (252). It is clear that the attempt to exhume adam’s true historical and cultural identity, prior to its destruction by colonising forces, is going to be a struggle. But whatever the inconsistencies and contradictions of adam’s consciousness might be, he is now brought face to face with his, and his people’s history.

‘Noom’, the following section, marks the end of adam’s childhood innocence, and his first step towards adulthood and responsibility. In his notes to the original version of *Sun Poem*, Brathwaite defines ‘Noom’ as the “sound of noom”, the “angelus of doom”, aptly describing the dilemma of adam’s ambivalent negotiation with history (101). Stewart Brown writes that ‘Noom’ corresponds to the green colour of the rainbow and that green in Akan tradition is associated with new life. While in *The Arrivants*, it is symbolic of growth and transition, in ‘Noom’ it “marks the end of innocence and a shift of tone into the public, political voice more reminiscent of *Rights of Passage*.

In sharp, livid imagery spiked with Brathwaite’s characteristic dark wit, we are shown another history of the island, that which has occurred since the arrival of Europeans ‘fleeing from torture and sword’ who, by dint of a convenient sleight of conscience, could justify the terrible Atlantic slave trade. And although, or because, it was the slaves’ labour which made the plantations
prosper, Africa and slavery were erased from the official memory, and all things associated with the past denigrated... ('Sun Poem: The Rainbow Sign' 158)

Thus in 'Noom' the poet presents in detail the history of the island after the arrival of the first colonisers. The ready supply of slaves from Africa made the plantations very profitable. The slaves were denied any rights, they were not allowed to follow any of their native customs and also not allowed to speak their own languages: "& don’t try to learn their langridge. Teach/ them spanglish" (Ancestors 258). History, as available to adam and his generation, is stained by this violent interaction between the slaves and the coloniser. It is no longer a factual account of the past but instead the coloniser’s discourse. So completely has the past been distorted and denied that even major African deities now find their roles reversed. From its beneficial, life-giving role, the Sun has now become:

...a curve glass that smokes black ness
that scores holes in leaf and paper
that destroys archives and the parchments of industry

it is a baas eyed gaoler. keeping our people back (268)

As the poet implicates the Sun as an agent of the coloniser, he also highlights the implications of a biased History. The Sun is now working against the Caribbean people and helping the coloniser by destroying the true account of History. The
In a bold attempt to help adam recover, and deal with, his past, the poet brings him face to face with the Gods of the Middle Passage. Not only could they help adam in uncovering the past, the poet feels that they could also be the source of his future liberation. adam watches “oggum”, the god of war and metals, and “legba”, the go-between and interpreter of gods, rise out of the ocean as they make their journey from Africa to the New World. The gods are “led by a one dem call-/im dem callin Kalinda” (261). Kalinda stands upon “hackletons cliff”, which was also the site of *Mother Poem*, and watches not only the land but also its entire past of slavery and exploitation, looking for answers and hope. However, the forces of History prove overwhelming for Kalinda and “as the pain of the world grow black for him” “e stagger & fall” (263). Thus the gods’ promise remains unfulfilled and adam has to look elsewhere for redemption and help.

In the section titled ‘Hereroes’, the poet introduces adam to Bussa, the leader of the slave revolt in Barbados in 1816. The revolt started in the parish of St. Philip, where *Mother Poem* began. Bussa was a black slave who was aided by a mulatto called Washington Franklin who until recently was given sole credit for the revolt (*Sun Poem* 101). Not able to take the injustices of the plantation system, Bussa rebelled against the colonisers. According to him, since the slave owners could not take care of their slaves and their treatment of the slaves was worsening, the slaves had to stand up for themselves: “cause if gole russ. wha i:ron muss/ do?” (*Brathwaite, Ancestors* 277). Bussa’s spirit is indomitable and he is willing to stand up and fight for what is right. His strength of body and character are presented as an example for
adam whose fear and hesitation to face his past are symbolic of a generation’s rootlessness:

   do as dem like & push we dounn
   cause dey white

   we got to brek fuh we-self
   an mek-out wid wha we got

   in dis country (278)

But success eludes him again and adam is faced with the realization that “heroes are in books/ and few of our fathers were heroes” (280). His lived experience contradicts historical fact. The father he grew up with showed none of the characteristics of a bold rebel; the fathers of the island are now “helpless” (280). Thus adam’s fragile historical consciousness has to contend with the contemporary condition of black men as impotent and weak. adam’s understanding of the male condition, and his inability to reconcile the historical legacy of the black male with his present state, is put into perspective by providing the reader with a catalogue of the Caribbean male’s deficiencies.

To refresh adam’s memory, and to help him resolve all the contradictions, the poet lists in detail the failings of the islands’ fathers and husbands. This is achieved using “Clips”, as the section is titled, or vignettes documenting the state of men. The poet describes ‘Clips’ as “eclipses/ film clips” (Sun Poem 101). They are a poetic version of documentary film clips as they deliberate on the lives of various men. The incendiary heat of the plantations has “destroye auras & auroras/ of unpaid-for sweat” (Ancestors 291). The father’s role in the “secular bourgeois family” household has been
relegated to that of a bystander, "juss sittin around & reading/ playin games" (295). The mother/wife has taken on all the traditional roles of the father, while the father waits to be rewarded for his past glory: "waiting for the bells/ to ring/ bring news of recognition/ the metals he had work for work for work" (297). The father does not have anything to look forward to in the future, no concrete ambitions except that "the sons will rise up/ rise up rise up rise up/ brighter than their farthers" (298). The father’s spirit has not been completely crushed and in the stoic acceptance of his present fate there is hope for their sons. The poet’s lament is coloured with an admiration for his father, notwithstanding his current condition or role. The celebratory note is the straw that Adam must use to better his own lot.

In Conversations, Brathwaite observes:

...in the Caribbean...we’re face with this awful axe/ ione that it’s the mothers who father us* and that we don’t in fact have no fathers! And I grow up with this although my father is with us all hi(s) life - and so i discover that my poetry, and my ‘vision’, my cosmos, had assume, as was the popular notion, that he didn’t ‘exist’; that he was involve, if you see what I’m saying, in a double absence- cultural/ colonial as well as - as bad as - metachillically personal (52-53)

Thus ‘Clips’ also serves as the poet’s attempt to write his own father into existence. Brathwaite foregrounds the

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5 The phrase "My mother who fathered me" is taken from George Lamming’s first novel, In the Castle of my Skin. Also see Brathwaite, Conversations.
problematic and makes it a strategy for survival. Sidelined in his day-to-day existence, marginalized by an inaccurate historical interpretation of his role, the father has been effaced from contemporary Caribbean social discourse. Now the poet offers his “fathers” history as testimony to the black male’s deteriorated condition and as a blueprint to navigate the path to a complete psychological regeneration.

But History still compels adam down, and he can discern no positive model for his own existence. adam’s assessment of the “fathers’” failures seems to signal a better chance of his own revival, but this triumph, as many times before, is deferred, and adam’s interrogation only serves to underline their insufficiency and incompleteness as positive role models. His present condition is hopeless and bleak; conventional means of learning and experience fail him: “school went so far & no father” (Ancestors 304). A discourse of deliberate distortion makes it impossible for adam to resolve the different components of his communal past. The narrow window of opportunity provided to him is closed and the debris of his “fathers” failures always keeps the promise of his destiny a step too far:

cause no bright
man cyaaan be

faddah to faddah to faddah
to sun

if e nevvah get chance
to be son

light (308)
In ‘Return of the Sun’, which follows ‘Clips’, adam has grown older and matured. He is courting Esse but their relationship is only hinted at: “th swee thin between them was secret & cdnt be share/ or be end/ -ed” (314). Their bond is both tenuous and permanent. Esse has inherited her mother’s mistrust as far as men are concerned. She does not trust adam and the flirtatious episode soon takes on ominous overtones: “so all of a sudden is like raincrowds wid notice/ of rain comin up over the canefeels” (318). The legacy of the plantations haunts adam and his sex; men have lost the faith of their women as the inevitable facts of History rear their head. Years of suffering and privation have hardened Esse’s mother’s perspective and she wants to spare her daughter the same anguish:

cause paul pay fuh peta
& uh doan want to hear a nun a dis cunt
from no boy man nor boast rounn me daughter (323)

Her feelings of repugnance and pessimism translate into Esse’s tentativeness towards adam. But Esse’s pessimism is tempered with the prospect of a new beginning and she is willing to give her relationship with adam another try: “But yu still wann to drive/ it?/ ....she lisp” (323-324). This willingness is conditional, though, dependent as it is on adam’s ability to rise above the failings of his sex: “no/body int drive thith lil lorry yet.....unleth they kin show me thuh lthinusne” (327). The poet’s faith in Barbadian sons and fathers is revealed through the steady burgeoning in adam’s self confidence. His discomposure recedes and is replaced by a growing faith in himself, an increased self-confidence as he seeks to bring this encounter to a fruitful conclusion. Bundled in adam’s resurgent conviction in his own capabilities, is also a belief that he can finally fulfil the historical promise of his
people. Not only can he be a strong, successful son; he now stands on the threshold of being a committed, proud father:

“but e know e cd breathe. e cd breed” (333).

Buoyed by a newfound self-assurance, adam finally summons up the courage to kiss Esse. Their brief, though furtive, attempt at physical intimacy serves as a reminder of the poet’s belief in the resuscitative capability of love. Women, and love, are offered as the only hope, but they are an elixir that is extremely hard to acquire for a generation to whom they hold no meaning. Correspondingly, Esse “twiss/ her/self free” and leaves (337).

A temporal shift in the poem now locates the action in Esse’s life following the death of her husband, who might, or might not, have been adam. adam’s belief in his fertility is now contrasted with Esse’s husband’s apparent sterility. Not only is her husband dead, but it is revealed that he had also “died in his testicles” (337). The promise of renewal and re-envisioning that was hinted at, has failed to be realized. Though the poet is not convinced that the love can help rewrite the history of despair that is the island’s legacy, he places his faith in the healing power of words. In a world that stripped away his people’s language, their ability to communicate with each other, in an age of “Dis.tress Dis.pair & Dis.respect. Dis.trust. Dis.truct. Dis.truction” (351), Brathwaite infuses the most important gift that he, as a poet, can, the gift of words. Coupled with the music of the Black people, the blues, this could conceivably be the blueprint for his people’s revival, in fact, for their very survival:

to the blues
& the worlds that know that words need love
love too

189
In 'Dis', Brathwaite depicts the present socio-economic condition of the Caribbean where crime is rampant and violence reigns. The populace has been brutalized and insensitised by a repressive history. This is the environment that Adam inhabits, and the distortions of uneven development are brought into sharp relief by Brathwaite. It is a panorama marked by the absence of compassion prompting the poet to return to the purity of “beginnings” in the final poem, ‘Son’. The poem goes back to an epoch before creation, a time before water, land and any sign of life. This was an age when even the Sun had not been created, a time when the “dark had not gone away” (368). It was out of this darkness that “nam” was created. “Nam” is identified by Brathwaite to be an amalgam of the soul, the secret name and the name of God (Sun Poem 104). The poet invests “nam” with tremendous creative and destructive energy. In an attempt at a fresh start, everything is obliterated until all that remains is “meer”, which the poet identifies as the “sense” of the Mother. This is followed by the restructuring of the fragmentary landscape; a reshaping of the island’s topography and a nation’s destiny. The elements come together to initiate the creation of a new generation; the poet, too, is born again with new knowledge of his genesis:

and the light grow
and open the eye of its flower....,

light
they say
Ancestors: X/Self  
The new Caribbean persona that Brathwaite brings to life at the end of Sun Poem is the subject of X/Self. It is a fragile and sensitive consciousness that is forever struggling to come to terms with its past. X/Self is Brathwaite' attempt to theorize his multiple points of historical and political articulation and their inherent contradictions. The last part of the trilogy dramatizes the instability of the postcolonial psyche and the forces that cause this instability. The history of the postcolonial, forever undermined by the erosive forces of the imperial venture, is re-inscribed into the Caribbean discourse, by situating it within its context of decolonisation. Stuart Hall, in 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', suggests, in a parallel narrative, that:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (310)
According to Brathwaite:

X/Self - like all the trilogies, I suppose - is an antimendicancy poem; an attempt to explore the nature and effect of our - my - major (colonial) damnation & ambiguous education and influence - the major conscious ('daylight'/ 'lux ex occidente') educational influence: Europe, our European/?European (in my case English(?)) education...that which leads us, teases us out to what we are - which = what we are not (Conversations 110)

Thus the fragile self that Brathwaite structures at the end of Sun Poem has to come to terms with his maturing consciousness and the myriad influences that shape it. X is the unfathomable psyche, and the poet wants to expose it to his history of discontent, ambivalence and fragmentation in an effort to piece together a whole. In X/Self, Brathwaite takes it upon himself to analyse the fragmented consciousness of the postcolonial intellectual. The poet believes that the self has to be carefully taken apart before it can be put together again; the re-fashioning of the self hinges on its ability to deconstruct itself first. Transcending the destruction wrought by History entails, first, its authentic reconstruction and its subsequent re-ordering.

"The poetry of X/Self" writes the poet, "is based on a culture that is personal - i-man/Caribbean - and multifarious, with the leaning and the education that this implies" (X/Self 113). Hence in the last section of the trilogy the poet brings to bear his vast learning and the imprint of his colonial education. The poetry is dense and intensely symbolic, almost to the point of obscurity, incorporating a "magic realism" seldom, if ever, seen in the genre of poetry (X/Self 113). Culture is seen as "dialectic of motion" and History as
“achievement/failure, flux & equilibrium; as catastrophe; or rather, as equilibrium and catastrophe” (Brathwaite, ‘Metaphors of Underdevelopment’ 232). The History that Brathwaite elucidates in the poem is not a simple re-telling of the past but instead a multi-layered, many dimensional entity which, while implicating the imperial venture, does not spare his own people’s wrongs. X/Self begins with ‘letter from roma’, in which the narrator has been elected by the “emperor” to be the governor of the “thirteenth provinces” (Ancestors 384). The poet is referring to the many African kings who sold their own people into slavery and profited from this trade. The narrator confesses that he has become the “sir-vant” of the emperor and that he has done so for the sake of his parents, but in his confession there is also an admission of greed and vanity:

an also to confess
because i love the guiles of velvet & the plumes
of pride
because i like to point commands & know that slaves will run (384).

The people of the Caribbean and their African ancestors were betrayed by their own people, in the lust for money and power. Thus justice has always been the domain, and right, of the rich and powerful who usually were corrupt and “incom-potent” (388-389). The poor and disenfranchised never had a say in their future and were exploited ruthlessly. This exploitation, according to the poet, began with the fall of the Roman Empire, and in the next poem, ‘Salt’, he identifies the exact moment:

Rome burns
& our slavery begins (393)
In ‘Salt’, Brathwaite paints an epic portrait of upheaval and destruction. In an intensely bleak scenario ancient black, Creole, slave kings are pitted alongside contemporary leaders such as Che Guvera, Ho Chi Minh and Castro, whom the poet calls “Third World Liberators” (X/Self 114). “Time here operates at any point in ‘time’, writes the poet, “and in its own space, as in a dream” (‘Metaphors of Underdevelopment’ 242). In a narrative of chronological disjuncture, a mood of desolation pervades. The signs are ominous as the poet inverts several benign references to indicate that something is wrong. The architecture of the coliseum is distorted, “liberators are being guillotined from heaven”, missiles and prisons are being created in a world without laws (Ancestors 394-396). In fact, the world itself has morphed; it is no longer round, but instead flat, and the “harm-attan”, the dry, drought causing wind of the Sahara desert saturates the poem and the landscape.

Death encompasses the globe and is signalled by vultures that can be found everywhere. To better emphasize the catastrophe that History has been for the Caribbean people, the poet couples the morbid imagery with scenes of drought. The arid landscape signals the end of hope and belief, and in ‘The edges of the desert’, despair reigns:

\[\text{Drama burns}\]

\[\text{the desert multiplies its drought into this child whose only drying water}\]

\[\text{is his pools of singing eyes there underneath the long thin}\]

\[\text{194}\]
Camel shanks of what will be forever noon (399)

Centuries of pessimism and desolation have damaged the psyche of the Black people. The trauma of slavery is manifested in their ignorance of their culture and history and in 'Julia', the poet questions the values of his people. 'Julia' refers to the first Black prime time television show, while in the magic realism of Brathwaite’s poem she also appears elsewhere as Caesar’s daughter and his sister. The different personas also represent the schizophrenic nature of the Black psyche as it grapples with issues of identity and the self. Their history of subjugation does not make them immune to corruption and the lust for money. The poet is critical of the few successful Black people and questions their willingness to help their own: “now we are the world will the new posse take you along?” (401). The colour of one’s skin does not ensure the integrity of their spirit and salvation is hard to find: “there are no watermarks along the edges of the desert” (401). Alongside the images of destruction the poet also hints at strategies of salvation. The female essence is the only glimmer of hope in an otherwise uncompromisingly grim world:

her feet wish fish these reeds tomorrow
for then there wd be water
not dark dark dark chimera (402)

She is also the only anchor that the poet has in a world that embodies transience as the only marker of permanence. If the female symbol offers hope, then hope is also to be found in the return to one’s roots. The poet calls on his people to adopt the rituals and practices of their cultural past, and to forsake their newfound love for the materialism of the First World and its obsession with commodity fetishism that has turned them into “wise foolish virgins” (406):
our women have forshook their herbs
forshorn their naked saviours
the ragged dirt yards where they live their words (405)

Thus the poem, 'Phalos', offers two intrinsically different versions of the female persona. On the one hand women are presented as saviours and, on the other hand, they are projected as the most vulnerable segment of the population as shown in their attempt to assimilate with the cultural mainstream.

In 'Nix', a "magical montage with a vengeance" as Brathwaite describes it; Caesar becomes Richard Nixon and Nixon Caesar, as the poet details the injustices of imperialism. The Roman Capitol morphs into Washington D.C. as the momentum of the colonising forces shifts from the past to the present, from the Roman Empire to United States. According to Gordon Rohlehr, Rome "emerges as a metaphor, a paradigm of the convergence of forces into a massive and dominant polity" ('Rehumanization' 181). The "ides of March" become the "day of pigs" to imbricate the changing modalities of oppression by situating each within a trans-historical, trans-national context. The poet's intention is not to transcend or transmute the injustices, but instead to position them within the same frame of reference by isolating the "machinery" of imperialism, the one ageless instrument of exploitation.

The imperial machinery developed by the Roman Empire has now transformed into the repressive neo-colonial powers of the present era. In ‘Metaphors of Underdevelopment’, referring to the creation of the colonising government in the form of Rome, Brathwaite writes that:
this imperial achievement had created an equilibrium of materia and spirit, of metropole and province, of law and chaos; and this entity which we call ROME made possible therefore, within the world that it in a sense had created, a definition of values: judex, index, lex (233)

The Roman Empire has metamorphosed through the ages and now manifests itself in the form of what the poet calls the “fapal state machine”. This state machinery lies at the heart of neo-colonial, first world capitalist countries. Traditional interpretations of imperial power now have to be seen in the context of the global economy with the developed countries exercising unprecedented financial control. Brathwaite’s views on the current global political and economic scenario are inscribed in his implicating of the first world, specifically the United States, in their role as repressive, dominating regimes. The intimacy of the colonial setting of the Roman era is reiterated in the poet’s description of capitalism’s authoritarian intransigence as he constructs a narrative of mutual complicity and tyranny.

By conflating the practices of two powerful regimes, one of the past and the other in the present, the poet conceives an idiom of trans-historical oppression in which the powers of colonisation have not abated but instead consolidated with the confluence of state and wealth. The new government is marked by its disavowal of tradition and culture, as accumulation of capital becomes its only goal:

the state machine cannot function on myst on mystery on magic. al

realism. on char. on char. on char. ity & char. nival
Law and order are the domains of the rich and powerful as the few governing elite fashion international jurisprudence to empower only themselves. These rich states have the political and economic power to sanction and enforce their narratives of violence and greed while subsuming the demands and needs of their poorer counterparts. Their cynical use of a biased moral pretence seeks to enforce a moral uprightness completely lacking in any ethical values. They “consider law/ itself/ & for/ itself itself” (409) in their marked diffidence for an overarching concept of justice that embraces all. The injustices of the past are echoed in the deeds of these “fapal state machines” and their attendant policies of coercion and subjugation.

In ‘Mont Blanc’, the poet uses a geographic monument to describe this sense of cultural disequilibrium. He believes that Mount Blanc is the “centre of europe” and their “holy mountain” (‘Metaphors of Underdevelopment’ 245). It stands at the heart of the capitalist enterprise and is used by Brathwaite as the pinnacle of materialism. It is diametrically opposed to lake Chad, which is a symbol of Africa and its benevolence, a symbol of home and warmth. Nestled in the heart of Mount Blanc the capitalist venture blossoms: “industry was
envision here in the indomitable glitter" (Ancestors 421). Capitalism is identified as a greater colonising venture than the world has ever seen before; it is an accumulation of economic and political power that is far more threatening than the historical forces of colonialism. The rapidly globalising economy has extended the reach of the trans-national corporations to the poorest of the nations but there is stark inequity in the distribution of wealth as it benefits those already rich. The reach of commodity culture extends far beyond the shores of the United States, but the movement of capital is restricted to within the confines of corporate America, which exemplifies the imbalance of power and wealth. Industries in the west have fostered an epoch of violence, as they have been the source for great tools of destruction: "volt crackle & electricity it has in/ vented. buchenwald nagasaki & napalm" (422). Thus by positing these industries as the core of the capitalist system and then implicating them in violent oppression, the poet establishes them as the locus of a repressive regime. "w/out it the sahara wd have been water", says the poet.

The poet is aware of the fact that capitalism is so deeply entrenched in the global sphere that it is going to be much harder to fight it than similar forms of oppression in the past: "but being immobile:e here/ more permanent than pope or Charlemagne" (422). Money, or Mammon, has now become the centre of the universe. Even the suffering of the starving, famine and drought ridden, African people is transformed by Western media corporations into a spectacle for Western viewers. The perversity of the vision is not lost to the poet as he compares the television crews to vultures awaiting their prey's death: "the film crew cameras already closing in/ like buzz like buzz like buzz-/ ards" (423-424). Death is viewed in terms of profit and loss in Brathwaite's catastrophic re-
envisioning of History where apocalypse always beckons and the poet’s sense of despair and fragmentation torments his psyche, his X/Self.

In his essay ‘The Rehumanization of History’, Rohlehr argues that it is “in the face of this reality that X/Self invokes the Dies Irae, which employing dread talk, he converts to ‘Dies Irie’, a much desired, highly gratifying day”. Having located the “contemporary structures and practices of Empire in their historical context” Brathwaite suggests the future, which is the downfall of the Empire (179). The poem ‘Dies Irie’, a parody of Dies Irae, is a sombre evocation of the ideas of doomsday and judgement. It is also a dramatic re-conceptualisation of the concept of Apocalypse, an idea shared by both Christians and pagans. In Brathwaite’s version of the Apocalypse the oppressed people from all over the world rise to question their oppressors’ injustices. It will be the “day of judgement/day of sorrow/day for which all sufferers pray/where no sword shall rule the high/way” (Ancestors 431).

Using his “magic realist” style the poet brings together revolutionary leaders and freedom fighters from different ages and regions in a confrontation with their oppressors. Thus Ho Chi Minh, Jose Marti, Che Guevara and Sun Yat Sen are brought face to face with Malan, Pik Van Botha, Verwoerd, Hitler and Goering in an effort to obtain answers for the injustices of History. The positions of the two camps reflect the polarities of their ethical positions, and communication between these historical subjects offers little hope of any reconciliatory measures. The poet cannot envisage a resolution that attempts to reconcile the brutality of colonisation within an exculpatory rhetoric:

what defences will they fascist
verwoerd voster pig van botha
where redemptions will they bait me

w/what reparations will they hate me (430)

A note of futility creeps into the poem as the poet’s self
improvises its sinuous past through the competing meta-
narratives of his tormentors. He realizes that his radical re-
visioning of History cannot be reconciled within the
exigencies of the lived present. But within the bounds of this
tacit acceptance lies a belief in the promises of the future
and the poem ends with a tenacious attempt to break free of
his oppressors’ yoke. He, again, seeks solace in the “word”
and its power to exact retribution:

bring me solace bring me fire
grant me penance grant me power
give me vengeance w/thy word (431)

“‘Word,’ in this context,” writes June D. Bobb, “is imbued
with the special spiritual qualities of the African ‘Nommo’”
and it is through Nommo that man establishes his supremacy
(74). Thus in an attempt to transform his culture and his
History through the healing power of his “words”, Brathwaite
re-creates the figures of his shared communal past in the poem
‘Titan’. The shared communal and fictional past is the basis
of his historical re-convergence of events. It binds the
Caribbean in an inclusive history of the Black experience.
According to Stuart Hall:

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
Along with the African and European influence on his sensibility, the Maroon experience in the Caribbean, 'Titan' is one of the focal points of the poem (Brathwaite, 'History of the Caribbean and X/self' 23). The subject of the poem is Hernando Cortez’s brutal colonisation of Mexico. Brathwaite uses it as a model of European - native relations.

Mexico had been discovered by Juan De Grijalva, and Hernando Cortez was sent with an expedition to conquer it. He landed on the shore of Tabasco on the 4th of March 1519 and fought a battle with the natives. The natives, frightened by his artillery and firepower, fled. The city of Vera Cruz was used as a base for his further incursions after several victories over the natives, who were often repulsed with great violence and slaughtered. Cortez destroyed his ships to prevent the malcontents among his followers returning home in them. He joined forces with several native tribes, who had suffered from Montezuma, the Aztec Emperor's tax-gatherers and were ready to rebel. After defeating the Tlascalans and making them his allies and murdering a large number of Cholulans, Cortez advanced on Mexico City where Montezuma received him with great pomp and kindness. Cortez imprisoned the Emperor and was able to rule through him for several months. Montezuma was subsequently slain and impelled by his own religious zeal Cortez destroyed the temple and idols of the natives. Alluding to a shared history of strife with the Titans of Greek mythology, Brathwaite presents Cortez in all his violent glory and misplaced zeal. Like most colonisers he is ruthless in his killing of native inhabitants and believes in the righteousness of his colonising endeavour.
Cortez actually believed, for some time, that the Aztecs he was conquering were "deifying him, not defying him" (X/Self 124): "I will let them worship the head of my horse" (Ancestors 437). He swears to destroy the natives' "mosques" and "overturn their idols" in an attempt to wipe out image-worship. In the great square in Mexico, the conqueror and his followers, with their garments stained with the blood of their fellow creatures prostrated themselves before the image of the Virgin Mary and thanked God for permitting them to be the instruments of the destruction of image worship. Cortez himself became identified with "akbal", the god of death and the underground. According to the poet:

Cortez is both searcher for bones and origins, and is himself the afflicting darkness (of conquest) being sucked (back) into the dark, so that he has to 'vomit out destroy destroy destroy...,' (X/Self 124)

In 'Palmares' Brathwaite locates the fourth node, the fourth focal point, of the poem. He aligns the senseless savagery of Cortez's rule with the brutal colonisation of the Brazilian Maroon Republic of Palmares by the Portuguese. "Maroon" here becomes the metaphor for resistance and revolution, for standing up for one's convictions. The fall of Palmares led to the death of around ten thousand African and Brazilian warriors who had once been slaves. "Most of the warriors committed suicide, and those who were captured, being deemed too dangerous to be reenslaved, were killed" (Herskovitz, qtd. in X/Self 129).

In Brathwaite's "Calibanized" interpretation of history, the Portuguese warriors are represented as American soldiers carrying M-16 rifles. The disruption of time and place underscores the brutal colonising efforts of the United States
and its willingness to use force for material gain; Palmares could just as easily be Vietnam. Brathwaite’s interweaving of temporally separate historical realities becomes not an abstract rendition of facts but instead an unequivocal belief in the insidious nature of neo-colonialism.

In the next poem titled ‘X/Self xth letter from the thirteenth provinces’, the poet uses a computer, the dominant signifier of a capitalist economy, to write himself back into contemporary Caribbean discourse. In a strategic reversal of tactics, Brathwaite’s disavowal of the apparatus of capitalism is transcended by his creative needs. An original version of the poem was titled ‘Letter Sycorax’, alluding to the character by the same name in Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*. The Prospero/Caliban binary has provided Brathwaite with an array of literary devices with which to elucidate his concepts of language and colonisation. At a conference, Brathwaite spoke of Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, as the muse in his computer. In doing so the poet situates the genesis of creativity in Sycorax and not the computer, hence wresting the potential for ingenuity from machine to myth.

While in *The Tempest*, Caliban’s eventual empowerment is associated with his ability to speak Prospero’s language and to curse him in it, in this poem Brathwaite enlarges the idea to embrace the possibility of Caliban “returning home, linguistically and therefore spiritually, to his mother, Sycorax”. Brathwaite points out “there is more freedom for Caliban in turning to his mother’s language” than in cursing Prospero in his (Savory 211):

```
if yu cyan beat prospero
Whistle?
```
Brathwaite does not propose a simple reworking of perceived notions, instead he seeks a more strategic use of the capitalists’ implements; a more creative alternative that sustains the vigour of his decolonising efforts: "not fe dem/not fe dem/de way caliban/done/but few we/fe-a-we" (449). The poetic persona of the poet is appropriating the tool of the coloniser and using it against them just like the white colonising powers learned about gunpowder from the Chinese and then used it effectively, and brutally, to colonise and plunder:

Dear mumma
uh writin yu dis letter
wha?

guess what! pun a computer O
kay?

like a jine de mercantilists?

well not quit!

uh mean de same way dem tief/in gun
-power from sheena & taken we blues &
gone (444)

The poet’s goal is to break free of his perpetual enslavement by learning to beat his captors at their own game. The arena of contest is now the world of ideas and the poet intends to fight it out in his oppressor’s domain. He refuses to accept the trappings of his enslaver’s world, instead adopting a
stratagem that aims at composing the discordant elements of wounded psyche into a harmonious whole.

The poet discovers that even though he is proficient in the use of the computer he cannot get anything written. Not only does his past haunt him but also the use of this tool is fraught with many dangers. The use of the colonisers' tools evokes in him the memories of the plantation era that he has inherited as part of his shared historical experience. As his experience with the computer spirals into a nightmare of torturous reminiscences, Brathwaite reconsiders his predicament and turns to his Mother for answers:

&mumma!

why is dis
what it mean? (456)

In response to the poet’s questions the Mother conjures up historical personalities and monuments. In an effort to soothe the poet’s troubled X/Self, reassuring geographic and mythological symbols are resurrected in the next piece titled ‘Troia’. “Ankh”, the ancient Egyptian symbol of life is invoked in tandem with Mount Kilimanjaro, which the poet labels as Mount Blanc’s “cultural opposite” (‘Metaphors of Underdevelopment’ 246). Kilimanjaro is a symbol of spirit and it seeks to anchor the poet’s consciousness adrift in the miasma of historical debris. But what the poet really wants is a return to the glory of his past: “I desire the yams of ibadan/ the lambs of the lake shores of the luo”. He desires to reconnect with a forgotten heritage, the dissonance of whose ambivalent structures have often perplexed him.
In the final poem of the trilogy, ‘Carab’, the poet questions his own motives and the consequences of his venture. If the success of his endeavour is to be measured by the ability to resolve the contradictions of his fractured self, then what has he achieved?

Galleons of spain at my commandant masthead
And there was music. Serenes of slaves
Syracuses of their chains bound to the vision of my sail

......

and the dawn to have set us down here
by the lake of invisible heritage
heroless savages civilizations
reflected in mirrorless walls (466-467)

If the poet’s quest was to discern patterns of meaning in his past, then he knows that he has failed. History abounds with unresolved contradictions, with wrongs that cannot be righted. Brathwaite opines that abiding hope is to be found in a tenacious acceptance of one’s past, a resolute belief in the lived experiences of one’s community. The poet believes that all one needs to break free of the trappings of the fragmented world is “to have survive these terrors”, to have endured in the face of opposition (468).