

ABSTRACT

Edward Brathwaite's poetry pursues a pattern where each volume represents an arrested movement in the evolving process of black consciousness. Each arrested phase, though part of a progression, is also a moment in the eternal circularity of human history. The poems are patterns of experience in the black man's social, psychological and cultural history. At the same time they present a transcendent vision where the human experience is seen as a dimension of a universal pattern of movement.

A sequential examination of the various volumes reveals a pattern of parallels between the human movement and images of nature's regenerative cycle. Rights of Passage moves from disintegration and despair to a vision of hope and a new dawning. The forms of physical and spiritual deprivation that plague the frustrated black man in the New World are herein traced to the initial confrontation of black and New World cultures. Ultimately, the poetic experience moves beyond the literal and historical realities. As in all the volumes, the poetic artifact becomes apt media for the communication of the emotions, thoughts and actions of the black man and for extending the specific realities

to the general and universal.

Through images of seasonal recurrence, Masks reinforces the concept of cyclic renewal. This poem is a vision of psychic and cultural revolution. Herein the black man is made aware that he can repossess images and rhythms of his being. The rich cultural and spiritual potential is presented through the poetic reworking of African symbols and rituals. Nevertheless the volume presents an inherent paradox where such potential cannot be separated from the innately hideous and unpleasant dimensions of being, which are simultaneously unmasked through the poetic reworking of the tribal symbols.

In Islands the black man is in a state of inchoate self-discovery. This volume carries on the note of hope and cyclic renewal on which the entire poetry is built. This cyclic motif becomes a significant influence upon the poetic structure. It is noteworthy that the final poem or movement in this volume is called "Beginning".

Other Exiles is an ironic juxtapositioning of man's spiritual and secular realities. Amidst these concerns the black man is seen to be striving towards a spiritual counterpointing of his "hellish" experiences. In Black and Blues the poet returns to highlight the condition of distress and degeneration. Nevertheless, the imagery takes on suggestions of a phoenix-like regenerative potential. The idea of such

a paradox is strengthened in the dominant Easter imagery.

Mother Poem and Sun Poem significantly develop this pervasive motif of cyclic reiteration. These volumes serve as a consummation of the poetic preoccupation. The religious images and allusions imply the idea of spiritual recreation and the significance of a myth-making process. Cyclic renewal has been realised, for the presence of the sun affirms the reality of a new dawning. This significant metaphor moves beyond the intrinsic concerns of this particular volume and incorporates a greater significance for the entire poetry. The sun/son idea becomes a meaningful symbol for the new creative consciousness which is an essence in the pervasive myth-making enterprise, a motif that knits the entire collection of volumes into a whole and unified purpose. This motif influences many thematic and formal concerns throughout the entire sequence.

The volume realises an awareness of the sense of pattern that the poet can impose on his work. Through the patterns of his artifact, Brathwaite is able to endow his material with vision. The imaginative linkage of fact (history) and artifact (shapes and outlines) serves to create a satisfying aesthetic experience.