

Limbo

In 'Limbo', by Edward Brathwaite, I feel that there are numerous ways to look at the story. One idea is that the poem is a journey, most likely on a slave ship. If you were onboard a slave ship, and you were a slave, you would be placed underneath, on the lowest deck with no lights or window. This lets in very little light, creating the dark. Limbo is a dance slaves used to do on slave ships basically to keep themselves fit and in shape. The limbo dance is connected with the cruelty of slavery, Brathwaite explains this "stick is the whip" This metaphor connects the dance with its origins in the slave trade. In limbo I think objects take on many levels of meaning like the limbo stick for example explains to us how far slaves had to bend backwards to win the game. The poet uses the limbo stick to describe the action of the slaves: the stick is lowered towards the ground. I feel the slaves are being forced down into the holds of the ship, becoming more down trodden as their lives are taken away. The poet also uses the stick as a source of comparison: the whip used to beat the slaves and the stick used to beat the drum, as the slaves rowed themselves further towards life imprisonment. The poem is about the tragedy and suffering of the black democracy during the slave trade we know this because Brathwaite says 'dark deck is slavery' here he reminds us of the slave ships going from Africa to the Caribbean. This alliteration Brathwaite uses creates a harsh feeling and effect on the reader. The layout of the poem itself is quiet irregular. "Down, down, down". The layout sort of follows the pattern of the dance itself yet it can also suggest the slaves going down into lives of slavery.

The word 'limbo' also suggests being stuck between two places. 'Long dark deck and the water surrounding me' this makes us think of the long, cruel journey from freedom into slavery. I have found that in limbo Brathwaite uses a lot of religious images 'drummers are praising me' but 'dumb gods are raising me' one interpretation of this might be that their gods have deserted them to be replaced by the god of their white masters.

This is a very complex poem with many levels of meaning. The music appears to 'save' the slaves until they step onto the 'burning ground'. Music/dance is a part of culture and tradition. This indicates that there origins maybe in pain or suffering.

In the poem Limbo the writer uses a lot of repetition for example "Limbo, Limbo like me". The writer may use this to be ironic because of where the Limbo dance originated from. Another repetition the writer of Limbo uses are words like "Stick, Ship, Hit, Whip" etc. The writer uses these to give the poem a sense of rhythm like the limbo song. The writer may also use these to give the reader a sense of how the traveller may be feeling for example "whip" may make the reader feel that the traveller is being hit, or is frightened.