

A Critical Appreciation of "Limbo"

The title Limbo suggests to me that the poem is about the traditional dance form from the West Indies which originated from the 1800's. The dance was invented by slaves aboard the slave ships to keep fit and healthy during the long journeys across the sea. The word Limbo can also be treated as a place between Heaven and Hell where unborn babies and un-baptised people go when they die. When you say it, it sounds happy and rhythmic giving you the impression that the poem is going to be a joyous poem.

The poem bears a lot of repeating rhymes which add to the effect of the poem, the rhyme:

"Limbo, limbo like me, limbo, limbo like"

Is repeated throughout the poem and helps give the impression of a rhythm. The rhyme also indicates that it is quite a musical poem and contains a beat to it. One of the most well used forms of language used in this poem is alliteration; there are hints of it everywhere:

Stick, silence

Stick, sound

Dark, deck

All these are examples of alliteration in the poem and they add to the overall atmosphere. When considered in the context of "Limbo", they give the steady beat of drums as a beat for the dance. Assonance is also used in this poem; it can be found in phrases such as *"long dark night is silence in front of me"* the assonance is in the words "night" and "silence" where the "i" are matching. Consonance also appears in this phrase, it can be found in the words "long", "silence" and also in "front". The "n" sound is found in "long" and "front", the sound can also be located in "silence". The overall effect of these two terms gives the impression of a sinister ship or a place where there is no good.

Unusually in this poem, there is no punctuation whatsoever, there are a few reasons for why I think this but the most probable reason is the fact that the poem is supposed to read with a beat like a song not a poem.

The only adjectives that are used in this poem are describing the ship and never to describe the limbo. I believe this is because the poet wants to create the effect of a ship filled with evil and is trying to make the reader see that slavery is far from good but cruel.

The entire poem is written from the view of a slave on the ship; it describes his sensations before the dance, during the dance and after the dance. This is all in the present

tense. The poet is clever by writing the poem in this view because if you were writing it from your view as a memory in the past tense then you cannot fully appreciate the horror on the ship and exhilaration of the limbo dance. Edward Kamau Brathwaite (poet), I believe has written this poem from his memories because the way the dance is described gives the impression of actually experiencing it on those ships.

The poem is spoken to the audience as if it was a close friend, the tone of the poem suggests this, and it is spoken to a particular person. The attitude the poem has towards the audience though is like it doesn't exist and the poet is

re-living the danger and exhilaration of the dance on the ships. The poet has written it in a bitter attitude towards the ships, as shown by the adjectives used and the way they relate to each other. The adjectives are all dark and sinister giving the impression of evil until the dance starts then they become joyous, fun and happy. However the dance described in the poem makes a vast contrast to the beginning of the poem; it is in a completely different tone. Instead of being bitter and sinister, it is exhilarating and joyous for the fact that he succeeded in the dance.

The poem is organised in a strange way, at the beginning you get the impression that the poem is like a song, but towards the end it begins to take the form of a poem again. The reason why I believe it is written like a song is because the first stanza is like a verse in a song then the "limbo, limbo like me" is the chorus and it continues in that pattern until the dance is reached then every stanza is different. The effect of the poem being written like a song is clever because it involves the reader and gives the impression of the drum beat and music to the limbo dance.