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Advanced Placement Literature

Third Period

*Ogun*

*“Ogun”* is a compelling poem which studies the life and work of a carpenter who suppresses the true artist within himself to succeed in the world. The theme, which Braithwaite delineates is understood when he exemplifies the carpenter’s shift from an apollonian designer to a more dionysian artist who does not work for “what the world preferred,” but for his own release of anger.

The carpenter’s very structured and routine occupation is presented to the reader in the first stanza as the speaker lists the tasks of his uncle’s carpentry: “My uncle made chairs, balanced doors on, dug out coffins, smoothing the white wood out.” From this nothing unusual or special is inferred or hinted at about the uncle or his work. The physical illustration of the uncle is connected to his work by the comparison of the smoothed white wood to the shine of “his short-sighted glasses,” thus the poem changes subjects without losing any of the poem’s consistency.

The reader recognizes an abrupt shift at the beginning of the eleventh stanza with the very melancholy tone. The mood becomes more somber with the rest of the line, creating an image contrary to the one of a skilled and accomplished worker described in the preceding stanzas, “He was poor and most days he was hungry.” The single line is a complete sentence making both a very final idea, as well as one not to be expanded on.

The author returns to listing objects, not addressing them till the end of the sentence. Because of this syntax, more weight is bestowed on the objects than the eventual commentary delineated about them. The reader is presented with the image of “Imported cabinets with mirrors, formica table tops, spine curving chairs made up of tubes,” and “thin beds, stretched not on boards, but blue high-tension cables,” before being told that these “were what the world preferred.” The author's use of simile and metaphor become more pronounced, giving many of the objects less realistic and more figurative imagery.

A dramatic shift in the poem occurs once again when the speaker states that his uncle “Had a block of wood that would have baffled them,” which becomes a protest against “what the world preferred.” This stifles the uncle's control over his own work. He lives an apollonian lifestyle during the week as he limits the artist within him for the income he needs to survive. On Sundays, however, the carpenter sets the dyonysian within him free and spiritually explores carpentry.

The poem concludes with the block of wood having been transformed into an idiom of the uncle's anger, which signifies that he has let his work become a true expression of his soul and spirit. The character of the uncle is changed by the expression of the uncle's anger: from a restricted and tortured craft-man of "lost pain, lost iron," to an artist who stays true to his spirit and who does not set himself limits to how far he can go in his carpentry.

Work Cited:

Braithwaite E.K. *Ogun*.

The poem concludes with the block of wood having been transformed into an expression of the uncle's art. The characterization of the uncle changes through the poem from one of a two-dimension craft-man, to a man fighting to stay in his desert livelihood, to a tortured man of "lost pain, lost iron." It is the change in the author's choice of words to create more powerful images leading up to the final disturbing pictures of "cracked gullet crying for the desert, the heavy black clouds" which create a shock for the reader.