

Kamau Brathwaite's poems from Ghana

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Kamau Brathwaite's Poems from Ghana:

Making Sense of Rhyme

Jarad Zimbler

Edward Brathwaite, as he was then known, arrived in the Gold Coast at the beginning of 1955 as an Education Officer, initially employed by the British Colonial Office, and remained there until 1962. It was a significant period in the nation's history: on 6 March 1957, the Gold Coast achieved independence from Britain as part of the Dominion of Ghana, and on 1 July 1960 it became a Republic. It was a significant period for Brathwaite also. Indeed, it is a staple of scholarship that his experience in and of West Africa induced profound change. It enabled him "to see the components of West Indian life in a new light" (Breiner 160); and left "the most permanent imprint on his sensibility and his art" (Best 34).¹

The purpose of this essay is to look more closely at one aspect of this transformation – the developments in Brathwaite's poetry and poetics. What precisely was their nature? Which specific elements of Brathwaite's practice were acquired or modified during his residence in Ghana? Far from being settled, these questions have been somewhat neglected, and this for several reasons: first, because we lack a clear sense of the chronology of Brathwaite's early poems; second, because there is anyway a tendency to regard these poems as juvenilia, belonging to a period of "apprenticeship" (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder* 4); and third, because interest in Brathwaite's Ghanaian sojourn has inevitably focused on its relevance to *The Arrivants*, and to *Masks* in particular.

In what follows, I look first at the years prior to Brathwaite's departure from England as a way of establishing a compositional chronology and determining the corpus of his Ghana poems. I then turn to the poems themselves, comparing them with previous as well as subsequent works. This leads to the conclusion that Brathwaite's time in Ghana did not

produce any wholesale change in technique. Rather, it provided new subjects and themes, and prompted the emergence of a more concrete, socially grounded register and orientation. Most important, it reconfigured Brathwaite's understanding of elements of pre-existing practice, rhyme especially, bringing into view their organizational and their meaning-making potentials. It was in Ghana that Brathwaite recognized how echoing sounds, words and events might enter together into a decolonizing poetics – an amplification of resonance that would be essential to his subsequent work, and to his sense of the ways in which resources of a submerged past could be activated for the purposes of a decolonial present.

Before moving ahead with this account, however, it is worth addressing Brathwaite's own responsibility for the relative neglect of his early poetry. Certainly, he encouraged the belief that Ghana changed everything, and that what he had written prior to his departure from England was callow, even uninteresting. In "Timehri" Brathwaite describes some of the impact of Ghana on his self-conception as a poet: "When I turned to leave, I was no longer a lonely individual talent; there was something wider, more subtle, more tentative: the self without ego, without I, without arrogance" (38). Regarding the changes in his practice, however, he is far more assertive in his subsequent interview with Erika Smilowitz, published in *The Caribbean Writer* (TCW) in 1991:

TCW: What were your poetic influences?

KB: The basic influence on my work came from Ghana, from talking and being exposed to the work of J. H. Nketia, director of Ghana Institute for Study of African Culture, a remarkable man; and Efua Sutherland, who started the Ghana Folk Theatre, and before that, living in the villages, hearing the drums and the festivals. That is really where my sense of rhythm came from.

TCW: Had you not written poetry before Ghana?

KB: I'd written, but nothing like that—a complete change. If you look at *Other Exiles*, you see the poetry before was almost unrecognizable.

TCW: Before that, though, you thought of yourself as a poet?

KB: I was writing from a very early age, the Keatsian things. (77)

The experience of radical rupture is explicit here, a “complete change” whose ultimate source is traced beyond Nketia and Sutherland to “the villages” and which has to do more with direct sensory encounter than with formal training or informal exposure and conversation. It is entirely in keeping with Brathwaite’s emphasis on prosody as the cornerstone of poetic art – a position he develops most expansively in “History of the Voice” – that what he acquires is a “sense of rhythm” which comes via the ear. What exactly Brathwaite means by “sense of rhythm” remains unclear and is a question at the heart of this essay; but, given his description of the poems composed in Barbados and England as “Keatsian” and “almost unrecognizable”, it is little surprise that critics have tended to disregard them, along with most of the poems composed during his residence in Ghana.

Instead, the focus has been either on the plays for schoolchildren, performed towards the end of his stay and published several years later, or on Brathwaite’s knowledge of West African and specifically Akan cultural practices. This knowledge is very much to the fore in essays such as “The African Presence in the Caribbean”, but nowhere more apparent than in the three volumes of *The Arrivants*, and *Masks* especially. Its significance to these works has been carefully detailed and explored by Maureen Warner-Lewis and Gordon Rohlehr, in whose wake subsequent scholars have followed. However, in spite of Rohlehr’s own warning, that readers should not imagine “Brathwaite suddenly mushroomed into poetry” (*Pathfinder* 4), the poems written in Ghana have slipped from view, along with the question of whether they do in fact attest to dramatic changes in poetic practice.²

Clarifying the Corpus: Staying with *Bim*, Getting to Ghana

Attaining a clear view of Brathwaite's early poems — the necessary first step in any effort to chart the course of his poetic development — is no easy matter. The task is beset by challenges endemic to the study of postcolonial literatures, especially limited resources and access to resources: archives are incomplete, hard to visit, or simply unavailable, and much the same might be said of previous scholarship. These challenges are compounded in Brathwaite's case, in spite of his global profile. There is no published autobiographical source which provides a comprehensive and well documented account of his residence in England or Ghana, and his personal papers were destroyed in 1988 by Hurricane Gilbert. Archival gaps obstruct even a critic as close to the ground as Rohlehr, whose *Pathfinder* is fairly unique in providing a critical survey of Brathwaite's poetry of the 1950s, and identifying several features (use of sequences, importance of jazz, elaboration of sound-echoes) that persist in *The Arrivants*. Although Rohlehr corresponded with Brathwaite and was able to draw on his archive – he refers to several unpublished manuscripts completed in Ghana – his account distorts the chronology of composition in ways that suggest a lack of familiarity with the student publications in which Brathwaite's work had appeared whilst at Cambridge. This affects Rohlehr's sense of developments in Brathwaite's practice, though the difficulty of accessing *Pathfinder* has doubtless played its own part in dampening critical reception of the early poems.³

It is an unwelcome irony that my own account of the early stages of Brathwaite's career depends on proximity to metropolitan institutions endowed with significant economic and cultural capital: the British Library, the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library, and the University of Birmingham's Cadbury Research Library. Even so, lacunae remain – we will not recover all that Hurricane Gilbert took away – and any solution must therefore be imperfect and somewhat speculative. The one I adopt here is to resort to archives adjacent to Brathwaite's own, in particular the Cambridge poetry journals; the early volumes of the

Barbadian literary magazine *Bim*, and the papers of Henry Swanzy, who was editor of the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* from 1948 until the end of 1954, before he too left for the Gold Coast. Brathwaite had begun contributing to *Bim* early in 1950, whilst still in Barbados, and would continue doing so throughout the subsequent decades. As for Swanzy, it seems likely that the two began corresponding in late 1950 or early 1951, and though the archive is incomplete, it provides evidence of an exchange that is kept up with some regularity from 1952 until at least the very end of 1954. Although there is no record in Swanzy's papers that it continued once the two men were in West Africa, the initial correspondence on its own makes it possible to fix with greater certainty a chronology of composition for Brathwaite's early poems. It also sheds light on his decision to move to the Gold Coast.

If Brathwaite regarded his time in Ghana as a catalyst for a new poetics, he viewed his involvement with *Bim* as no less vital to his career. He makes this point very clearly to Smilowitz:

TCW: How did you first start publishing?

KB: I am lucky in that *Bim* magazine was there. If it hadn't been there, I would have dried up. You have to have an editor whom you know will be sympathetic and take your work. *Bim* kept faithful to all of us who were writing at that time. I was one of them who had work accepted. Every time I wrote something I was pretty certain that [Frank] Collymore would take at least some of it. Everyone had a personal relationship with him. First, he was Bajan and a teacher, and he lived near to me. But the whole thing about Collymore is that if he accepted your work for *Bim*, he wanted to meet you and he'd invite you to his home, and it was traditional that all *Bim* people went there and chatted with him. If you didn't do that, you weren't really in the book. And then you'd meet other writers. It was a sort of salon. Collymore's letters didn't just say he was taking this piece of writing, but he replied to you as how he liked your work. There was always a

sense of a literary community coming through. He was an exceptional man, nobody else like him.

TCW: How important, then, was *Bim* for you?

KW [sic]: For me, it was the only outlet at the time. (74–75)

This is a wonderful account of the distinctive ethos and character of *Bim* and of the role played by Frank Collymore, moving beyond the abstractions of print culture and into the realm of a literary community founded on personalities and personal relationships. And if *Bim* was not quite the “only outlet” for the young Brathwaite – in England, his early poems appeared also in *Pem*, *Cambridge Writing*, *Delta* and *Chequer*, all magazines associated with the University of Cambridge – it was certainly the most important, especially after his departure for West Africa deprived him of immediate access to university circles and venues of publication.

As the following list makes clear (Figure 1), although Brathwaite’s writings appeared in *Bim* sporadically during his studies in Cambridge, he became a far more consistent and even prolific contributor during the years in Ghana.

Title	Issue Number & Date
Poetry:	
“Shadow Suite”	12 (Jan–June 1950)
“Fantasie in Blue and Silver”	13 (July–Dec 1950)
“Elegies”	17 (July–Dec 1952)
“The Day the First Snow Fell”	18 (Jan–June 1953)
“Requiem”; “Gift”	20 (Jan–June 1954)
“Morte de la Femme d’une Jeune Poete”	21 (July–Dec 1954)
“The Prisoners”	24 (Jan–June 1957)
“Doctor Emmanuel Rath”; “The Spade”	25 (July–Dec 1957)
“Sappho Sakyi’s Meditations”	26 (Jan–June 1958)
“Poems from Ghana”: “The Beast”; “News Item”; “The Pawpaw”	27 (July–Dec 1958)
“Two Poems”: “South”; “The Fear”	28 (Jan–June 1959)
“Three Portraits”	29 (July–Dec 1959)
“Machiavelli’s Mother”	30 (Jan–June 1960)
“The Leopard”	33 (July–Dec 1961)
“Poems for the End of Summer”: “The Flood”; “St. George and the Dragon”; “Erzulie”; “Eucharist”	34 (Jan–June 1962)
“Boy at the Blind School”	35 (July–Dec 1962)
Fiction:	
“The Black Angel”	22 (Jan–June 1955)

"Law and Order"	23 (July-Dec 1955)
"Christine"	32 (Jan-June 1961)
Articles:	
"Letter from Cambridge"	20 (Jan-June 1954)
"Sir Galahad and the Islands"	25 (July-Dec 1957)
"The Controversial Tree of Time"	30 (Jan-June 1960)
'The New West Indian Novelists, I'	31 (July-Dec 1960)
'The New West Indian Novelists, II'	32 (Jan-June 1961)
Book Reviews:	
John Hearne, <i>Faces of Love</i>	25 (July-Dec 1957)
Henry Swanzy (ed), <i>Voices from Ghana</i>	30 (Jan-June 1960)
John Hearne, <i>The Autumn Equinox</i>	31 (July-Dec 1960)
Andrew Salkey, <i>A Quality of Violence</i>	31 (July-Dec 1960)
<i>Tamarack Review</i>	32 (Jan-June 1961)
Neville Dawes, <i>The Last Enchantment</i>	33 (July-Dec 1961)
<i>Okyeame</i>	33 (July-Dec 1961)
Fig. 1. Brathwaite in <i>Bim</i> , 1950-1962	

Brathwaite's sense that he could rely on *Bim* – "every time I wrote something I was pretty certain that [Frank] Collymore would take at least some of it" – must be part of the reason that the magazine became his primary vehicle for publication throughout his time abroad. But it would be a mistake to regard his ongoing involvement merely as the outcome of pragmatic calculation, when it speaks also of the manner in which he understood himself and his audience during this long period, that is, as a poet of the Caribbean addressing an audience of Caribbean readers (other poets and writers in particular). In his essays and reviews especially it is clear where his intellectual efforts were focused.

As far as *Bim*'s readers were concerned, there was nothing unusual about contributors living abroad. All the same, if one imagines that the drama surrounding Ghana's independence might have generated some special interest, there is no indication of this in the magazine's pages. The only time Brathwaite's place of residence is mentioned in Collymore's "Notebook" – a regular feature throughout his editorship, used to give news about writers associated with the magazine – is in the issue of January-June 1960, which describes a haphazard and last-minute rush to publication:

August: Another crisis in the life of *Bim*. A. N. (Freddie) Forde, just teamed up on our editorial staff, awarded scholarship and leaving for a year at a Canadian university[...].

September: Month passes. Closing date for contributions to this number the 30th, but only one short story and two poems (one of dubious quality) received so far. Looks like another crisis. [...].

October: Another short story arrives. Also L. E. (Eddie) Brathwaite back home on holiday after an absence of eight years: Cambridge and Ghana. L. E. B. most helpful, contributions now begin to come in and *Bim* 30 takes shape. But I wish that contributors wouldn't wait until *after* the last moment. (69)

This telegraphic acknowledgment is appropriate to Collymore's use here of the diary form, but it is also very much of a piece with the ethos of the magazine, which took in its stride the fact that its community of letters did not map onto a coherent political entity but consisted of writers and readers far removed from one another in place and sometimes also in language and culture. When "back home", these writers could slip easily into familiar roles and even help with production and editorial tasks, but whilst abroad, so long as they continued to contribute, they remained part of the community that Collymore had helped to foster, and which remained relatively indifferent to the actual location of its citizens.

This particular "Notebook" also captures the precarity of *Bim*'s existence. Effectively the responsibility of one man, it relied on the good will of sponsors and contributors who could be more or less forthcoming, leading to occasional deficits in literary as well as financial materials. In different ways, it was also dependent on its relationship with other institutions, including the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*, which would not broadcast what had already been published, but very frequently gave an airing to work that would later appear in print. All of which meant that an author's career might take a rather peculiar shape in the magazine's pages. This is certainly the case with Brathwaite: although they would not be published in *Bim* for several years, "The

Prisoners”, “The Fear”, and “Machiavelli’s Mother” had been completed by 1954, before his departure for the Gold Coast. We know this because these poems are mentioned by name in Brathwaite’s correspondence with Henry Swanzy.⁴

In his dedication to *Other Exiles*, Brathwaite identifies two “godfathers”: the first is Frank Collymore, the second Henry Swanzy. The pairing is more than incidental. Collymore and Swanzy had become correspondents in 1948 and it was in a letter dated 25 February 1950, in which Collymore quoted passages from the poem “Shadow Suite”, that Swanzy encountered Brathwaite for the first time, introduced as follows:

quite young — he has just left school and will, he hopes, be going to Cambridge this year — is obviously a devotee of Eliot and Joyce, and his poem, Shadow Suite, is a remarkably interesting pastiche. I should say he is much more musical than Walcott, but hasn’t the latter’s originality or power. (MS42/1/6/12)

Initially, Swanzy agreed “about Brathwaite being more musical than Walcott” (16 May 1950, MS42/1/6), but in a letter dated 6 September, after reading the whole of the poem in *Bim* 12, he wrote: “preferred the items that were purely literary and not broadcastable, [...] but not Brathwaite” (MS42/1/6).⁵ Collymore, true to his role as sponsor and cultivator, replied:

Sorry you didn’t like Brathwaite’s Shadow Suite. Of course it is pure Eliot – but as I remarked, there is something in it which makes me believe that when he can shed that influence he will produce some original stuff which will be worthwhile. I published S. S. after some deliberation, and concluded that he needed encouragement, and that was what mattered most. Because, and this is important, he is sincere. You will probably meet him soon. He sails to-day for England, and will have a day or two in London before going to Cambridge. (19 September 1950, MS42/1/6/68)

This is an astute assessment of the young poet’s limitations as well as his prospects. It also serves as a form of introduction, facilitating Brathwaite’s entry into an important network of

publication and reception, which would, in addition, give him access to “a small but welcome source of income”, since contributors to *Caribbean Voices* were often invited to record readings of their own and others’ work, for which they were paid (Low, p. 105; see also Smith, pp. 6-7).⁶

Collymore’s letter also helps to date Brathwaite’s arrival in Britain: leaving Barbados on 19 September, he must have reached Cambridge in early October. It seems more than likely that his correspondence with Swanzy began soon after, towards the end of 1950 or the beginning of 1951, though the earliest letter retained in the archive appears to have been sent late in March 1952. In it, Brathwaite mentions an accompanying poem, called “The Caribbean Theme,” completed “soon after [he] arrived in England in Winter 1951”, and offers to record it for *Caribbean Voices* (MS42/1/9/158).⁷ On 3 April Swanzy responds and commits to broadcasting the poem, which, he says, “does interest” him, though it “starts a little diffidently and in a tradition that [he has] learnt to dread” (MS42/1/8/22).

For the following two years the correspondence continues in a similar vein: Brathwaite submits poems or offers to do readings or makes requests for access to materials or passes comment on *Caribbean Voices*, and Swanzy responds saying yes or no or giving feedback of his own. For example, responding to a paper Brathwaite delivered to the Cambridge West Indian Society on 1 December 1952, as well as to his “Elegies”, Swanzy writes on 24 February 1953: “Your own poetry reinforces my opinion. It is a scholastic poetry, tight and inorganic, the kind of thing I have seen very often in academic writers at the University. As I said to you, it bears re-reading, but it is the kind of thing which would make little impact on first hearing” (MS42/1/9/23). In his reply, on 27 March 1953, Brathwaite concedes certain of Swanzy’s points whilst refuting others and sends on a batch of another six poems (MS42/1/9/34).

The forthright character of their exchange seems to have cemented a personal relationship. By the end of 1953, the two men have begun to address one another by first

name, and in a letter of 17 March 1954 Brathwaite writes to ask whether Swanzy would act as a referee “in this business of British Council Scholarships”:

As you know, I don’t want to go back to W. I. yet; and I think some months in a European Country, studying, would do me no end of good. I’m applying for scholarships to Austria, France, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Finland – in one of these I may be fortunate.

I’ve told them that I’m a writer – that I want to see these places because of that. And if any definite academic course is required, I’d like to look at their Educational Systems – this follows-up on my present course at the Dept. of Education here.

(MS42/1/10/16)

In the end, none of these applications was successful, and with the conclusion of his Diploma in Education fast approaching, Brathwaite remained uncertain about his future for some time. In a letter of 5 July, giving news of the failure of another job application, he writes rather mournfully: “Anyway, I’m still here – on the market – not having the faintest idea what to do next. Perhaps I’m unemployable” (MS42/1/10/56).

It was only towards the end of 1954, after Swanzy’s departure from London had been confirmed, that Brathwaite first mentioned his own interest in West Africa:

Dear Henry,

I hope you will accept and perhaps a little like, these poems dedicated to you. [...] I’ve sent them now hoping they may find a place in the programme before you go off to Gold Coast.

The Colonial Office are “considering” me for Gold Coast as a sort of Education Officer, while Sierra Leone has offered me a post at Albert Academy beginning January 1955. I suspect that Gold Coast would be more money: but something tells me there is

more community in Sierra Leone. I like the tone of the people there. I'll probably accept. (27 September 1954, MS42/1/10/76)

Swanzy responded on 4 October, thanking Brathwaite for the poems, and committing to use "Machiavelli's Mother" in his final programme of *Caribbean Voices*, "that is if [he is] still here – which seems likely owing to the housing shortage in the Gold Coast". He then makes a striking suggestion: "Why don't you come there? It may be more 'bush', but it is on a much larger scale, and your fellow countryman Conton prefers it to Freetown, where he was a lecturer at Fourah Bay" (MS 42/1/10/80). Brathwaite replied on 1 November 1954:

Dear Henry,

I want to thank you very much for your letter, and for what you said about me in the summary. [...]

Yes, I know I ought to be in Paris: but couldn't resist the temptation to hear your last "Voices". By now you must know how much we'll miss you.

BUT: they have offered me a post in Gold Coast: so perhaps we shall meet there, after all.

Until then,

All my very best wishes, Edward (MS 42/1/10/85)

We need not give this exchange undue weight or imagine that it tells the whole story either of the relationship between these two men, or of Brathwaite's decision to move to the Gold Coast. All the same, it does suggest that, whatever the consequences of his experiences in Ghana, Brathwaite's decision to leave Europe for West Africa was not the straightforward outcome of clearly held convictions or intentions, political or artistic. Instead, his decision seems to have been shaped by an odd mixture of bad luck and good fortune, missed opportunities and personal connections, an artist's curiosity and a young man's desire to see more of the world before returning home.

This is not to say that, once in Ghana, Brathwaite wasn't quickly fired by what he saw, whom he met, and how he lived. Nor does it have much bearing on the more pertinent question, which is whether and in what ways the time in Ghana affected his poetry. But it does clear some space for attempting to answer this question. More importantly, the correspondence with Swanzy makes it possible to determine with greater precision the corpus of Brathwaite's Ghana poems (see Figure 2). It allows us to identify several, which, though they appeared in print between 1955 and 1962, were initially drafted prior to his departure (and are therefore excluded from the table below). By decoupling chronologies of composition and publication, it also allows us to bracket several more (shaded grey), which, without being named by either correspondent, closely resemble others of the pre-Ghana period.⁸

Title	Venue & Date of Publication
"Doctor Emmanuel Rath"	<i>Bim</i> 25 (July-Dec 1957)
"The Spade"	<i>Bim</i> 25 (July-Dec 1957)
"Sappho Sakyi's Meditations"	<i>Bim</i> 26 (Jan-June 1958)
"Poems from Ghana":	<i>Bim</i> 27 (July-Dec 1958)
"The Beast"	
"News Item"	
"The Pawpaw"	
"South"	<i>Bim</i> 28 (Jan-June 1959)
"Three Portraits"	<i>Bim</i> 29 (July-Dec 1959)
"Six Poems":	<i>Kyk-over-al</i> 27 (Dec 1960)
"I Piano"	
"II The Blues"	
"III Skin"	
"IV Solo for trumpet"	
"V Interlude for alto saxophone"	
"VI The listener"	
"The Leopard"	<i>Bim</i> 33 (July-Dec 1961)
"Poems for the End of Summer":	<i>Bim</i> 34 (Jan-June 1962)
"The Flood"	
"St. George and the Dragon"	
"Erzulie"	
"Eucharist"	
"Boy at the Blind School"	<i>Bim</i> 35 (July-Dec 1962)
Fig. 2. Brathwaite's Ghana Poems	

Rhymes of Sound and Sense: Poems from Ghana

Strikingly varied in theme and form, Brathwaite's Ghana poems do not constitute a neat group. Given what scholars have said about the importance of Ghana to Brathwaite's poetic practice, as well as the momentous political changes then underway in the country, they might also seem underwhelming; and only a few give any indication of the locale of their composition. Even in those that do, the evocations of West Africa can be subtle. In "Sappho Sakyi's Meditations" for example, different features hint at a Ghanaian background, but there is little that is explicit. The titular figure, to whom this sequence of short poems is attributed, seems a composite of the Ancient Greek lyric poet identified with a highly fragmentary oeuvre and a member of one of the Cape Coast's prominent families, perhaps even Kobina Sekyi, the nationalist politician and writer who had died in 1956 ("Sakyi", "Sekyi" and "Sackey" are alternate spellings of the same family name). But what purpose do such allusions serve?

Similar ambiguity shades Brathwaite's choice of genre. Of the thirteen poems in the sequence, ten pass comment on or poke fun at social practices by framing them in relation to animal behaviours. Thus, "the deep-sea Angler-Fish/ Who moves through darkest subdiluvial space" (ll. 18-19) is presented as a warning for "interplanetary suitors" (l. 16), who plan to "move forward into space" (l. 1); and "the case of the common Cuckoo" (l. 1), who occupies "the nest/ Of some Christian-like bird" (ll. 4-5), such as "the Sparrow or Warbler" (l. 6), becomes a lesson that "Christianity's/ Almost defenceless/ Without retribution and slaughter" (ll. 23-25). But while the poems, as didactic animal tales, might recall West African story-telling genres, the animals to which they refer are not readily identifiable with these traditions.⁹ The same is true of the human figures, except in the case of the "market women" who are mentioned in the second (l. 7) and eighth (l. 3) poems.¹⁰

The moments in which the sequence cuts through this ambivalence are, however, significant. In the third poem, the persona abandons the animal world entirely and comments directly on nuclear threat and the politics of the cold war through a telling reference to an

African historical personage, a monarch associated with the arts, and especially with sculpture, weaving and textile manufacture:

Shamba Bolongongo, the Bushongo King of the Congo

Patron of the arts and a preacher of peace

Abolished in war the use of dangerous

Weapons and drugs, instructing his soldiers carefully only to wound.

Even this king, it appears, would have come

To agree to the limited use of the hydrogen bomb.

A seventeenth-century king of the Kuba people, Shamba Bolongongo was not in any way connected with Ghana. Nevertheless, the poem indicates a localized and specifically African frame of reference that is entirely absent from Brathwaite's previous poems, and which passes judgement implicitly on the claims made by the twentieth century's various global superpowers to civilizational pre-eminence.

An African frame of reference seems pertinent also to the first poem of the sequence, which concerns a spider:

Like sun-

Rise

The Wise

Old spider

Comes

Into view.

The identification of the spider's ascent with the rising of the sun has a narrativizing purpose:
day breaks and the sequence begins. But the spider's wisdom grounds another figure:

Bone-

Less

His

Brain in

His belly

He is

The perfect

Philosopher.

The source of the figure is initially obscure — why should the perfect philosopher have no bones or a brain in the belly? Does the poem mean to imply that the best philosophy avoids rigidity and remains attached to bodily need? Perhaps, though these are by no means the only significant features.

Thread-

Spinning Socrates

And that other

Fellow

Who

Lived in his
Tub
Might
Easily have become
Spiders.

The references to “Thread-Spinning Socrates” and to Diogenes the Cynic, “Who/ Lived in his/ Tub” associate the spider’s wisdom with spoken discourse – neither Socrates nor Diogenes committed their thoughts to writing – but also a certain irreverence and even mischievousness, and a disregard for authority. All of which is to say that this “Old spider” recalls Anansi, the trickster figure identified in both Ghana and the Caribbean with story telling and who, in the eighth poem, reappears as “the little spider” who “Lives alone”, avoiding the censure of “Certain loquacious market women”. The epigraphic meditations which follow belong to him not only because of his inaugural role, but also because animal tales of this kind would “be classed by the Akan-speaking African under the generic title of ‘*Anansesem*’ (Spider stories), whether the spider appeared in the tale or not” (Rattray, xiii). Thus, in an understated way, Brathwaite’s sequence invokes an element of local literary culture as well as a connection with the Caribbean.¹¹

If connections of this kind have more to do with theme than with form, what evidence do we find here of a changed poetics? Broadly, the arrangement of short poems into prosodically varied sequences – a noticeable feature of *The Arrivants*, which, “Outwardly [...] presents a great array of rhythmic techniques and textures” (Etherington 191) – is something that Brathwaite does almost from the outset of his career. “Shadow Suite”, for example, written and published before he had left for England, is itself a sequence of nine parts, none of which suggests any attachment to metre. Here, by way of illustration, is the second part:

Before time or existence
There was void
And darkness on the face of the waters.
The palmtrees wither on the beaches
And the islands are without light and scripture.
Across the grey-skinned water
The voice of preparation
Dashes its bitter gospel on the spray chipped rock.
There is now shadow even in the heat of day
And darkness, darkness on the face of inter-island waters.

The biblical allusions, and their accompanying lexicon, syntax and figurations of apocalypse, may seem to belong to a more distant poetic world, but there is little here that might be described as “Keatsian”. On the contrary, both Rohlehr and Warner-Lewis follow Collymore in identifying traces of T. S. Eliot.

Yet “Sappho Sakyi’s Meditations” do seem formally innovative in one important respect: the sharply enjambed “short lines” (Warner-Lewis, *Essays & Annotations* 20) or rather “broken lines” of one or two beats (Etherington 198), which we find in the first and eleventh of these “Meditations”, have no real precedent in the poems published whilst Brathwaite was based in Cambridge but become characteristic of *Rights of Passage* and of *The Arrivants* more broadly.¹² Indeed, lines 7–10 of the first reappear, in modified form, in “Folkways”, the second sequence of “The Spades” (27–46):

I am a fuck-

in' negro,
man, hole
in my head,
brains in
my belly;

But is this what Brathwaite means by his new “sense of rhythm,” the addition to his repertoire of this broken line?⁹ In fact, when we look more carefully at the poems composed before and during his West African sojourn, a more complicated picture emerges.

“The Pawpaw” appeared in *Bim* 27 (July - December 1958) beneath the heading “Poems from Ghana”. Discovering it in this context, readers might have been forgiven for anticipating a missive from the decolonizing vanguard, arriving in Barbados as a harbinger of a future freedom. Yet on first encounter, the poem seems rather anodyne:

Four little boys, tattered.
Fingers and faces splattered
With mud, had climbed
In the rain and caught
A pawpaw which they brought,
Like a bomb, to my house. I saw
Them coming: a serious, mumbling,
Tumbling bunch who stopped
At the steps in a hunch.
Releasing the fruit from the leaf
It was wrapped in, I watched them

Carefully wash the pawpaw
Like a nugget of gold. This done,
With rainwater, till it shone
They climbed into the house
To present the present to me.
A mocking sign of the doom of all flesh?
Or the purest gold in the kingdom?

Some of the poem's distinctiveness, however, and certain of its key innovations, become apparent when we compare it with an earlier poem, "Gift", which has a related theme and was published the year prior to Brathwaite's departure for Ghana, in *Bim* 20 (January-June 1954):

Words are the child we have
The breath that would be worlds
The flesh unborn
Could I, the speaker
Seek them from my dreams.
But no, the worlds are streams
No substance cups the flow
The poem is unborn.

And so for world I give a gift of words
The child beats in my wrists
Would leap to light, would live
And walk in you the streams

That should be cupped with love

But when I turn from dreams

I find the sleeper

Gone—the poem is unborn.

So words will do

Which hearing will be sip and substance of;

The dream I had that you

Had been the cup and keeper

Of the child the poem is unborn.

“Gift” is a poem about the making of poetry, about the poet’s creative urges and capacities. It is also a poem about the substantiality or insubstantiality of verse, and the relationship between words, worlds and the world. Yet for all its talk of flesh and substance, it comes across as oddly bloodless. Even its central motif, “the cup”, seems an artefact of the poet’s delight in morphological play (appearing first as a present tense verb and then as a past participle before resolving into a noun) and of a symbolism lifted from Christianity, an emanation from the landscape of dreams through which “the speaker” “seeks”, rather than a concrete object. One is unavoidably reminded of Swanzy’s assessment: “scholastic poetry, tight and inorganic.”

Read against the background of “Gift”, “The Pawpaw” seems a good deal more solid, for at least two reasons. First, instead of an excursion into the metaphysics of creation we have an anecdote, relating a particular event (and the jarring repetition of “present” in line 16 emphasizes this): an encounter between a far more substantial “I”, who is firmly located in a “house” at the top of some “steps”, and a group of little boys, whom the persona sees, hears and watches approaching. Indeed, the poem foregrounds the persona’s sensorium in its

attention to details of sight and sound which are only gradually or partially disclosed (the colour and texture of the fruit, the indistinct speech of the boys) and in the way its own rhythms mimic the movements it describes (as when the strong-weak-weak pattern of “**coming**; a **serious mumbling/ tumbling**” ends abruptly at “**stopped**”). Second, the poem is attuned to its contexts, infused however subtly with an historical and ethnographic consciousness. We see history in the insistence on the present-ness of the present and also in the reference to the “bomb”, a word keyed to the anxieties of the mid-1950s; and we sense an ethnographic awareness in the references to gold, and its particular value in Akan cultures (“the kingdom”).

The later poem, then, is far more alert to its surroundings, and so feels less abstract. It gives evidence of a change in orientation, which Rohlehr finds also in Braithwaite’s essays, where there is “a much more positive and direct commitment to public and social issues, and to the concrete solid world of facts, objects and events” (*Pathfinder* 15). But there are nevertheless continuities, even beyond the thematic resonances of children, gifts and flesh, which are especially pertinent to the question of Braithwaite’s changing “sense of rhythm.” Both “Gift” and “The Pawpaw” make use of occasional but pronounced rhyme, especially internal rhyme, as the source of a kind of rhythmic energy that dynamizes the lines, but also cuts against their individuation and organization. For example, in the first verse paragraph of “Gift”, the lines vary somewhat in length, but all except lines three and four have five or six syllables, and the preponderance of monosyllabic words helps to establish a three-stress pattern (“**Words** are the **child** we **have** / The **breath** that **would** be **worlds**”). The basic shape in all of the lines seems to be iambic with metre itself creating some interesting adjustments in articulation: we are invited to treat the final /ə/ in line four as the initial syllable of line five, and to distinguish more clearly the two syllables of “poem”. However, although the rhythm created by syllabic arrangement and lineation is affirmed in the end-rhyme of “dreams”/ “streams”, for the most part rhyme produces a subtle current that moves beneath this rhythm, as in “words” and

“worlds”, “breath” and “flesh”, “speaker” and “seek”, “no” and “flow”, “substance” and “cup”, and even “flow” and “poem”. If the general effect of this is to give special weight to already stressed syllables, it is also to disturb lineation, often by emphasizing initial beats in a way that suggests syncopation.

If we turn back to “The Pawpaw” we see a similar interaction between the rhythms of lineation and rhyme. Across the poem, three-stress lines predominate, with variations at significant moments: two-stress lines where the motion described is somehow arduous, halting or tentative, and a four-stress line where the poem becomes meditative. Repeated patterns of phrasing and stress also establish significant correspondences. Lines six and thirteen, for example, which figure the pawpaw first as a “bomb” and then as a “nugget of gold”, have an identical pattern of stress, and especially strong caesurae marked by full-stops (“Like a **bomb** to my **house. I saw**”/ “Like a **nugget of gold. This done**”). This pattern is recalled in line nine – “at the **steps** in a **hunch**” – though the final phrase is omitted, making the pause at the end of the line emphatic. In contrast, the deviation in line eleven, which is the only two-stress line in which caesura and ending occur after an unstressed syllable, produces a lull and a hushed quality, just at the moment that the poem describes a more delicate activity (unwrapping the fruit) and implies the persona’s concentrated attention.

As in “Gift”, rhyme in “The Pawpaw” works sometimes with but often against these rhythms established by lineation and stress. In the later poem, however, there seems a far greater or fuller awareness of rhyme’s rhythmic and organizational potentials. The reduplicating “pawpaw” itself plays a part in patterning, since end-rhyme, which is used in the opening lines (“tattered”/ “splattered”; “caught”/ “brought”), appears to be interrupted by the arrival of this word, which disturbs the poem as much as its referent disturbs the persona, initiating a different set of repetitive strategies, with rhyme now working within and across the lines. For example, “pawpaw” is echoed in “saw”; “coming” in “mumbling” and “tumbling”; “bunch” in “hunch”;

“releasing” in “leaf”; and “watched” in “wash”. Then, at the end of line twelve “pawpaw” comes back, with several consequences: there are no more of these internal rhymes, but there is a slight return to a muted end-rhyme (the slant rhyme of “done” and “shone”); and there is an almost chiasmatic repetition of single words from the first part of the poem (“rain”, “climbed”), and a doubling of words of the final part: “gold” and, rather jarringly, “present”, which appears first in the infinitive “to present” and second in the noun phrase “the present”; finally, there is a shift in tone and in rhythm, as the lines lengthen and become more reflective.

We might therefore say that rhyme is used in “The Pawpaw” with greater purpose: interacting with syllabic arrangement and lineation, it helps to organize the movement of the poem, creating three distinct and differently textured sections (lines 1-6, lines 6-13, lines 13-18). But this purpose is also semantic: rhyme is used to give further emphasis to the pawpaw, which is anyway foregrounded by the title and by the very strange simile that figures the fruit as a “bomb”. And this intensifies questions about other of the work’s oddities: at the very moment of the African nation’s independence, why send a poem about a pawpaw back to Barbados under the heading “Poems from Ghana”?¹³ Why figure the fruit as an explosive, and treat it as the site of so much meaning and ambivalence, a gift which makes manifest the singularity of the moment but conceals its intentions? And why call special attention to the word’s reduplicative, rhyming qualities, as if these had special significance?

An answer to all of these questions turns on the several ways in which pawpaw and poet constitute what we might call, after Hugh Kenner, a “subject rhyme” (399). In one sense, both are transplants from the Caribbean, the tree as genus, the man as individual. In another, thinking of the poet in light of his ancestry and the tree in light of its individuality, we might say just the opposite, that both belong to the Gold Coast. And then there is a further echo, which is made audible precisely because of the manner in which the reduplicated, internally rhyming word is made to bear so much weight, so that readers become alert to rhyme itself, and thus to

the possibility that rhyme might be working not only within the poem but also beyond it. Attuned by echoes of sound to echoes of “sequences, [...] deeds, [...] energies” (Kenner 399), we may begin to hear in the reduplicated word “pawpaw” the resonance of its homophones – “papaw”, “papaa”, “popo” – and thus of the long history of transatlantic slavery.

Grand-Popo (Pla or Hula), now a town in south-western Benin, and Little Popo (Aného), now a town in south-eastern Togo, were two slave-trading ports in West Africa whose names (non-indigenous, but perhaps derived from a Yoruba term for Gbe-speakers) became metonymically attached to their inhabitants, as well as those they delivered into slavery. It was sometimes used in an even “wider sense, to include persons from other communities in the region” (Law 257). Indeed, precisely this use is “attested in the British West Indies,” where “Papaw” was “applied generically to slaves exported through Ouidah” (Law 257–58). One especially striking instance is found in James Grainger’s long poem *The Sugar-Cane*, where “papaw” refers both to trees beneath which the “GENIUS of Africk” reclines, and also to the peoples best suited to “labours of the field”. Indeed, taking homophony to indicate lexical identity, Grainger makes the mistake of suggesting that the tree, like the people, has been named for its West African origin. Whether others have made a similar mistake, the several variants of the ethnonym (*pawpaw*, *papaw*, *popo*) are attested late into the twentieth century, and, though associated by the Oxford English Dictionary with British, US and West African English, the word is included in Cassidy and Le Page’s *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, where its usage is identified also in Barbados and Guyana. As for the tree and its fruit, *pawpaw* has been connected from the outset with the history of empire and trade. Up to the 1950s, almost all references attested in the OED are found in accounts of travels in Central America and the Caribbean, and the fruit early on becomes one of those exotic species included in lists – a trope of colonial travel writing and verse – that signify the fecundity of the tropics, and the Caribbean especially. Where such lists go hand-in-hand with accounts of slave labour, as in

The Sugar-Cane, the texts themselves disclose the truth of bountiful nature's material conditions.

The co-presence of poet and tree in rural Ghana therefore speaks to a submerged history of a global trade entangled at its roots with empire, slavery and the settlement of the Caribbean. And the poem itself seems to suggest that, in seeing and touching this golden fruit, the persona apprehends something familiar, something that rhymes with and reminds him of home; but in its name, itself made by a doubling of a sound, he is also reminded of, alerted to, a people and place identified with the history of slavery. Thus the pawpaw — the present or gift which is presented by the boys — is also the present, a moment in time, but one which must be jarring, disturbed by echoes of a past whose consequences endure in forms of dispossession. It is for this reason that the persona cannot decide whether the pawpaw is given as mockery or tribute. All of which is to say again that, although we find a similar rhythmic rhyming in “Gift” and “The Pawpaw”, it is only in the later poem, after his arrival in Ghana, that Brathwaite seems to realize all of its semantic as well as organizational potential. What the poem seems to demonstrate, in other words, is a growing consciousness of something already embryonic in Brathwaite's earlier poetry, an understanding that the “poet may rhyme without rhyming the sound of words: he may rhyme events” (Kenner 395); and that rhyme might therefore be used in order to think about social and ethnographic relations and of the persistence of the past in the present. It is in “The Pawpaw” then, where there are echoes of subjects as much as sounds, that rhyme achieves a fullness of sense and purpose.

Rhyme to Rhythm: Three Calypsos

If what I have been suggesting seems rather speculative, there is more evidence to support the claim that Brathwaite's experiences in Ghana precipitated conceptual and aural adjustments — changes in the way he understood and heard his poetry — rather than wholesale modifications

in technique. The most pertinent are poems that take shape early on and are later incorporated in *The Arrivants* with relatively minor revisions. Some, such as “The Spade” and “South”, were first published while Brathwaite lived in West Africa. The former appears with the addition of four lines as the second poem in “The Journeys”; the latter is included under the same title as the final poem in “Islands and Exiles”, with changes in tense and pronoun across the first five stanzas, the lines of the sixth stanza rearranged, and the final stanza deleted. But there are other such poems completed long before Brathwaite’s arrival in Ghana.

The most important is “A Caribbean Theme,” which Brathwaite sent to Swanzy early in 1952 when it had already been published in *Poetry from Cambridge* (1951). It would appear again in *Caribbean Quarterly* (1956) as “Caribbean Theme: A Calypso,” before taking up residence as “Calypso”, the opening sequence of “Islands and Exiles”, the third part of *Rights of Passage*. It is an extremely well known poem, not least because Brathwaite cites its opening four lines in “History of the Voice” in order to illustrate “an ancient form which has always been there, the calypso”, which he regards as central to the project of breaking “down the pentameter” because it “employs dactyls” and “therefore mandates the use of the tongue in a certain way, the use of sound in a certain way” (271-272).

In *Rights of Passage*, these initial lines appear as follows:

The stone had skidded arc’d and bloomed into islands:

Cuba and San Domingo

Jamaica and Puerto Rico

Grenada Guadeloupe and Bonaire

But here are the two earlier versions:

The stone had skidded, arched, and bloomed into islands Cuba and San Domingo Jamaica and St. Christopher Grenada, Guadeloupé and St. Kitts Nevis, Barbados, and Bonaire	The stone had skidded, arc'd, and bloomed into islands Cuba and San Domingo Jamaica and Puerto Rico Grenada, Guadeloupe and St. Kitts Nevis, Barbados and Bonaire.
“A Caribbean Theme” (1951)	“Caribbean Theme: A Calypso” (1956)

On its way to the final version, there are certainly some important changes. In the second version, the soft /tʃ/ of ‘arched’ is replaced with the hard /k/ of ‘arc’d’, strengthening the alliterative run on /s/, /d/ and /k/ (stone... **skidded**... **arc’d**), whilst the deletion of the commas in the third version helps “the voice” to travel “in a single forward plane toward the horizon of its end” (Brathwaite, “History” 272). Replacing “St Christopher” with “Puerto Rico” in the second version corrects the odd double reference to “St. Kitts” in the first, but, as with the deletion of “St. Kitts/ Nevis, Barbados and” in the third version, the change also ensures more energetic line-endings and rhythmic consistency. In spite of these several adjustments, it is difficult to ignore the fact that, rather than being “unrecognizable” or “Keatsian”, Brathwaite’s earliest poems appear more than capable of working through the propulsive dactylic or trochaic patterns celebrated in his mature work.

The continuity between the three versions is clearer still in the lines which immediately follow:

The speed of the curving stone hissed into coral reefs White splash flashed into spray Wave teeth fanged into clay Bathsheba Montego Bay. Bloom of the arching summers:	Speed of the curving stone hissed into coral reefs White splash flashed into spray Wave teeth fanged into clay Bathsheba, Montego Bay. Bloom of the arcing summers:	curved stone hissed into reef wave teeth fanged into clay white splash flashed unto spray Bathsheba Montego Bay bloom of the arcing summers...
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"A Caribbean Theme" (1951)	"Caribbean Theme: A Calypso" (1956)	"Calypso" in <i>Rights of Passage</i> (1967)

Again, there are noticeable changes – the compression of the initial line especially, which makes emphatic a four-stroke rhythmic pattern – but so much of the third version, including the pattern itself, is already present in the first.

Even small changes might point to and depend upon profound or fundamental shifts in perspective and understanding. In his “cellular approach” to the “rhythmic methods” deployed in *Rights of Passage*, Ben Etherington cites lines five to seven of the third version of “Calypso” to illustrate the manner in which the collection’s cellular elements “reappear not as whole words or morphemes, but as phonemic elements, or close approximations” (193). The first cell’s “**Drum skin whip/** lash” – encountered at the outset of the collection in “Prelude” – is recalled in “**curved stone hissed**”, guiding the “reading of ‘wave teeth fanged’ [...] such that emphasis is distributed more evenly and deliberately, and this is confirmed and rewarded in the third line when ‘lash’ [...] occurs twice, the second time with particular onomatopoeic force” (193). Here we find a motive for the changes in the third version of “Calypso”, not only the compression of the first line, but also the reordering of the second and third and the segmentation into verse paragraph. Far from localized revisions, these are adjustments made in light of large-scale “strategies of rhythmic organization” (Etherington186).

Broadly, these strategies involve the use of “Lexicon” as “an instrument for the dissemination of melodic and rhythmic energy”, that is, as the basis for making thematic and rhythmic links across *Rights of Passage*, and for amplifying resonance and distributing emphasis (Etherington194-195). In Etherington’s account, the basic units of this energy are strokes, rather than the accentual stress associated with the metrical norms of British Standard English. These strokes are summoned in several ways, including through the kind of repetition we see

in “Calypso”, where the delivery of groups of four consecutive strokes is accompanied, or perhaps made manifest, by phonemic parallels and approximations. This is an instance of what Etherington describes as horizontal coordination. A no less important means of coordinating rhythmic strokes is “vertical” (because operating across multiple “broken lines”) and depends principally on “rhyme” (194). Indeed, it depends on precisely the kind of internal rhyme and half-rhyme that comes to the fore in “The Pawpaw”, and which, along with other varieties of phonemic and morphemic repetition, help to generate the “inter-related skeins of sound” (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder* 59), thereby producing “poetic coherence” across the whole collection (Etherington 194). With this in mind, it seems reasonable to argue that, while many of the features associated with Brathwaite’s mature poetry are visible in the poems of the early to mid-1950s, it was only during his residence in Ghana that their potential was realized, in a movement of discovery not very different from the calypso’s disclosure of an “ancient form which has always been there”; nor from the one he describes in “Timehri”, when he returns to the Caribbean to find that “it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean” (38).

But what are we to make of Brathwaite’s insistence that it was from Ghana that he acquired his “sense of rhythm”? Perhaps the solution lies simply in hearing the phrase less as *feeling for* or *facility with rhythm* than as an *understanding of rhythm*, and of its manifold expressions and possibilities. Then we might say that, along with new themes and subjects, a more grounded, concrete register, a more sharply “broken line”, and an appreciation of rhyme’s historical as well as poetic significance, what Brathwaite found in Ghana was how much rhythm could mean, and how much it could make possible.

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Notes

¹ Similar claims about the importance of Brathwaite's Ghanaian residence are made by Hitchcock (69) and Gilbert and Tompkins (217).

² Even Warner-Lewis and Rohlehr tend to skate over the earliest works. For example, both discuss "Shadow Suite", the first of Brathwaite's poems in *Bim*, but Warner-Lewis does so merely to suggest an abiding preoccupation with the "motif of Time's circularity" (*Essays & Annotations* 36), whilst for Rohlehr it is one of several early poems – the others are "Caribbean

Theme: A Calypso”, “Sappho Sakyi’s Meditations”, “Six Poems”, and “The Leopard” – “organized along the lines of musical suites with four to eight movements each” (*Pathfinder* 4).

³ These effects are apparent in Rohlehr’s discussion of “Caribbean Theme: A Calypso”.

Reading this poem in the context of “the Trinidad Carnival issue of *Caribbean Quarterly*” published in 1956, and the increasing popularity of Calypso in Britain and the US in “mid-fifties”, Rohlehr identifies it as “a reaction against this new minstrel stereotype” (*Pathfinder* 98, 101). However, a version of the poem had appeared in print as early as 1951.

⁴ “The Prisoners” is mentioned in Brathwaite’s letter of 3 April 1954, “The Fear” in Swanzy’s of 25 March 1954, and “Machiavelli’s Mother” is Swanzy’s of 4 October 1954. Given what Kelly Baker Josephs describes as Brathwaite’s “penchant for revision” (6), especially his tendency to incorporate lines or passages from one poem in another, we cannot be certain that the poems themselves remained unchanged. Nevertheless, they clearly had their origins in Brathwaite’s European travels of the early 1950s.

⁵ In the same letter, Swanzy reflects on the relationship between *Bim* and *Caribbean Voices*: “I realise that, in our yoked chariot, the BBC represents Mammon and cash, the magazine the spirit and credit.”

⁶ Smith also describes the ways in which Swanzy, through “social gatherings” not unlike Collymore’s, attempted to “create a sense of community amongst young men and women who were a long way from home; and to provide work-in-progress sessions for writers wishing to develop their art” (7).

⁷ What I have identified as the earliest letter is in fact undated and currently placed in the folder for Swanzy’s correspondence of 1953. Internal evidence, including the reference to the date of composition of the poem, suggests it was sent in 1952. A letter included in the folder for 1950 likewise seems misplaced. It is dated 18 November, by which point in 1950 Brathwaite was in England, but a reference to the “Spanish incident” – presumably the robbery mentioned in a

letter of 6 October 1952 – and Brathwaite’s gratitude for the “guineas”, suggests the letter was in fact sent in 1952.

⁸ It is striking that neither the two poems published in *Bim* 25 nor the “Three Portraits” published in *Bim* 29 contain any reference to Ghana. On the contrary, “The Spade” specifically evokes an “urbane” Parisian setting (53), whilst “Doctor Emmanuel Rath” alludes to the central character in the film *Der blaue Engel* (1930), and has a title almost identical to Peter Redgrove’s, “Dr. Immanuel Rath”, which appeared in *Delta*, 2 (Spring, 1954), within a few pages of Brathwaite’s “Spring”. As for the “Three Portraits”, these seem considerably closer to “Machiavelli’s Mother” than to the “Poems from Ghana”, not only because they explicitly name Italian or Spanish persons and locations (Franchi, Sorrento, Barcelona), but also because they describe particular individuals. It is certainly possible that, like “Machiavelli’s Mother”, all three were included in one of the batches sent to Swanzy in 1954.

⁹ This in spite of the fact that more than fifty individual animal species appear in the *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* collected by Ratray, who notes that “The beasts and birds and fishes and insects which masquerade as human beings in these tales were not [...] selected haphazard. They were chosen with all the cleverness and insight into their various characteristics which one would expect from a nation of hunters and dwellers with nature” (xii). Brathwaite’s familiarity with Ratray’s work is well documented by Warner-Lewis.

¹⁰ Market women appear in other Ghanaian writings of the period, for example Albert Kayper-Mensah’s “Mami Takyiwa’s Misfortune” (106-109). Richard Wright, in *Black Power*, his account of his visit to Ghana in 1953, reflects at some length on the capacities of “an average ‘mammy’ who buys and sells staples in the open markets” and who “handles, during the course of a year, a turnover amounting to £50, 000!” (142-43). It is not entirely clear why Rohlehr believes “these ‘market-women’ have been selling more than peanuts”, or “vending their sexuality” (*Pathfinder* 59).

¹¹ The first edition of *Anancy Stories and Dialect Verse*, put out by Pioneer Press in Jamaica, and featuring Louise Bennett, had been published in 1950.

¹² As Etherington remarks, effects associated with enjambment depend on syntactical surprise, which recedes as a condition of possibility where lines are so regularly broken as in *The Arrivants*.

¹³ Without further archival evidence, we cannot attribute the heading “Poems from Ghana” with absolute confidence, but it seems likely it was Brathwaite’s own, given that Collymore was otherwise happy to gather poems by single authors under more prosaic headings, such as “Two Poems” (Daniel Williams, *Bim* 17; Raymond Tong, *Bim* 22; Stuart Hall, *Bim* 23; Brathwaite, *Bim* 28), and “Three Poems” (Mary Jackson, *Bim* 24 and *Bim* 25; John Figueroa, *Bim* 27).