

Parades, Parades

STORY/SUMMARY

The poem opens with natural images and ideas relating to how humans interact with them. We see the desert, where no one marches except caravans (nomadic tribes who travel through the desert), the sea, where the keels of ships cut out the same lines as ships before them, the sky, where aeroplanes leave the same jet trails. The imagery switches to politicians, saying that they perform a similar action of plodding the beaten track. They pass the same motions, and stagnate in the same location. Every year, the Independence parade is also the same, and 'only the name of the fool changes'.

The second stanza begins with questions - why do the children of the country have bewildered (confused) and shy expressions, why are they terrified of the pride that has been drummed into them? Walcott wonders if systems of government were any 'truer', i.e. better, in their country of origin 'when the law lived far away'. Conjuring an image of a queen with her sceptre and orb commanding the realm, Walcott references Queen Victoria. Walcott forms part of a crowd now, waiting for 'the change of statues' and 'parades'.

SPEAKER/VOICE

The poem has a cynical and mocking tone, and appears to be from Walcott's personal perspective. It starts using third person, then switches to first person plural 'we', and finally to 'I' in the final line.

"Here he comes now, here he comes!

Papa! Papa!" > these lines represent the voices of the childlike, innocent people who are fooled by the public celebrations into being excited by the government and believing it will provide a better future. The repetition and exclamatory sentences reinforce this sense of false excitement.

THEMES/IDEAS

Politics - in this poem, Walcott observes that new, independent political systems are not so different from the way in which his country was governed under colonial rule. The poem expresses apathy towards governmental systems, criticising the irony of the country celebrating an independence parade whilst effectively still being controlled under the same governmental system.

Imperialism - as with most of Walcott's poetry, the poem explores the effects of the British Empire upon the people of the West Indies. Here, their customs and governmental structures are shown to last even after the people have gained so-called Independence.

Government - lack of innovation or progress in government is criticised, as a poet Walcott is disillusioned by the Caribbean government. He also wonders whether the British form of government was better employed in its country of origin - when Victoria ruled, or whether all governments are equally ineffective.

Pride/Patriotism - the poem is anti-patriotic, critical of propaganda proposed by governments, where it 'drum[s]' patriotism and pride of countries into its citizens, whilst at the same time doing nothing to make them feel deservedly proud of their country.

Progress and Change - Walcott exposes the irony in overruling a political system, only for the way in which the country is ruled to stay the same. He shows that change is less about re-naming and re-packaging something, and more about actual progress.

There is a semantic field of government and politics: 'electorate', 'white papers', 'white hall', 'Cabinet', that demonstrates that the purpose of the poem is to offer a political critique.

FORM/STRUCTURE

The poem is structured into two long stanzas, using free verse (vers libre). There is a shift in tone from the first to the second (a volta), the first being third person and more descriptive and abstract, with the second using first person plural 'we' to create a collective experience, and then finally 'I' in the last line, to single out the speaker

A double hyphen -- is used to create a pause, a breathing space in the line before the poem delivers its message about ineffective political systems, but also to evoke the image of 'jet trails' physically on the page

There is no rhyme scheme, but there is a lot of assonance and consonance that connects different images together. For instance, marches/caravans/mountains in the first stanza, as well as lines/trails. The line 'those forced, hoarse hosannas' has assonance across the three last words, creating a rasping sound that evokes the image of people being urged to sing hosannas as loudly and often as possible, until it becomes physically painful - hosanna is a praise song, typically religious.

LANGUAGE

The title is confusing, as a parade is generally a positive and celebratory event, but the repetition of the word makes it seem somehow worn out and tired, which connects to the later themes in the poem

metaphor: 'the blue sea above the mountains' is a confusing metaphor, suggesting that the sky is itself an expanse of water, creating the impression of an inversion or mirror image between sea and sky

Analogy: the earlier imagery of the natural landscape and humans following the same route through it is compared in an analogy to the work of modern politicians - 'so the politicians plod/ without imagination'. The verb 'plod' creates an impression of slow progression, perhaps due to laziness, complacency or fatigue.

Anaphora > many lines begin with 'the same', which emphasises the stagnancy of politics and the way in which nothing changes

'The fool' is used as a metaphorical figure, as traditionally festivals and parades would include a fool type figure, whose purpose was to create entertainment. However, Walcott employs a double meaning by treating this figure metaphorically - it also represents his attitude towards politicians and government employees. He states 'only the name of the fool changes',

suggesting that all political figures are foolish and all have the same flaws, so that even though their names change, their ineffectiveness remains the same.

CONTEXT

This poem, as with much of Walcott's work, falls under the genre of 'post-colonial literature'. You can read more about it here:

<http://www.literaturestudies.co.uk/Alevel/PostColonial/PostColonialIntro.pdf>

In 1957 Whitehall was occupied by the Pre-Federal Interim Government prior to the establishment of the West Indies Federation in 1958. In 1963, it became the Office of the Prime Minister occupied by the Hon. Dr. Eric Williams, Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister after Independence. Restored in 2000, Whitehall continued to be occupied by the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago until 2009.

Source: <http://nationaltrust.tt/location/whitehall/>

Vocab

Keel > the ridge at the edge of a ship, the part which gives it its structure and cuts through the water

Grigri palm > a type of tropical palm tree with a spiky trunk

Independence parade > a procession that occurs on Independence day, where a country celebrates its independence

White papers > government reports giving information and/or proposals on specific topics and issues - these help decision makers in the government to understand and act on issues.

Whitehall > a government building owned by the government of Trinidad + Tobago

Hosanna >