

# Limbo analysis essay

[Art & Culture](#), [Dance](#)



This poem tells the story of slavery in a rhyming, rhythmic dance. It is ambitious and complex. There are two narratives running in parallel: the actions of the dance, and the history of a people which is being enacted. Going down and under the limbo stick is likened to the slaves' going down into the hold of the ship, which carries them into slavery.

In Roman Catholic tradition, limbo is a place to which the souls of people go, if they are not good enough for heaven or bad enough for hell, between which limbo lies; it has come to mean any unpleasant place, or a state (of mind or body) from which it is difficult to escape. The story of slavery told in the poem is very easy to follow, yet full of vivid detail and lively action. The poem has a very strong beat, suggesting the dance it describes: where the word limbo appears as a complete line, it should be spoken slowly, the first syllable extended and both syllables stressed: Lim-bo. While the italics give the refrain (or chorus) which reminds us of the dance, the rest of the poem tells the story enacted in the dance: these lines are beautifully rhythmic, and almost every syllable is stressed, until the very last line, where the rhythm is broken, suggesting the completion of the dance, and the end of the narrative. This poem is suited to dramatic performance – there is the dancing under the limbo pole (difficult for most Europeans) and the acting out of the voyage into slavery.

The poem can be chanted or sung, with a rhythmic accompaniment to bring out the drama in it (percussion, generally, is appropriate but drums, specifically, are ideal: in fact, the text refers to the “ drummer” and the “ music”).