

Born in the Ghanaian capital Accra and raised in London, John Akomfrah emerged as one of the pioneers of Black British cinema as the co-founder of the Black Audio Film Collective and the director of the landmark documentary *Handsworth Songs* (1986). A quarter of a century on from this visceral account of an inner-city riot, he has produced another remarkable film, this time about 'those ghostly traces of lived moments, those pariah images and sounds that now occupy a unique space somewhere between history and myth'.

Taking Homer's *The Odyssey* as his exemplar, Akomfrah revisits the theme of postwar migration to these islands and juxtaposes a wealth of archival and newly photographed footage, together with readings from a challenging selection of authors, to journey through 'a museum of intangible things'.

Having explained how the Muses were born of the union between Zeus and Mnemosyne (the Greek goddess of Memory), Akomfrah proceeds to divide the action into headed segments devoted to each one. The recurring figures of men in yellow, blue and black coats make their first appearance in Caliope - Muse of Epic Poetry, as Dewald Aukema's Red camera images of a frozen Alaskan landscape are intercut with shots of the Windrush immigrants arriving in London from the Caribbean to the accompaniment of lines about the Fall of Eden and Telemachus going in search of Odysseus at the end of the Trojan War.

Clio - Muse of History contains footage of black men taking menial jobs in kitchens and on the buses, as they attempt to become part of a society that regards them with suspicion, while Polyhymnia - Muse of Sacred Song follows a song about a child being a long way from home with Richard Burton's interpretation of *Under Milk Wood*, as the visual focus shifts to heavy industry and the appalling weather conditions to which the newcomers had to acclimatise. As the flashbacks show in Melpomene - Muse of Tragedy, they were soon joined by a wave of Asians, who arrived by plane into a country finally shaking off its postwar bleakness and showing signs of embracing modernity.

Against another Alaskan backdrop (to emphasise the alien nature of the climate and symbolise the continued frosty reception of the natives), the Euterpe - Muse of Music section hints at greater integration by showing a black man and a white woman listening to a classical recording together. Indeed, the migrants were now becoming firmly ensconced as citizens and, in Urania - Muse of Astronomy, Akomfrah shows families settling into cities like Liverpool (which had once been at the centre of the Atlantic slave trade) and kids thriving in schools and using sport to make their mark.

But, Thalia - Muse of Comedy opens with a speech by Enoch Powell and features vox pops by white working males opining that their country is being overrun. Yet, the images reveal the immigrants being housed in often derelict properties and still being forced to accept jobs that nobody else was willing to take. As 'Let My People Go' plays on the soundtrack, the scene in Erato - Muse of Love changes to show the religious differences between the Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities. But the concluding entry devoted to Terpsichore - Muse of Dance suggests the cultural benefits of diversity as shots of people enjoying their leisure time are accompanied by Duke Orsino's 'If music be the food of love' speech from *Twelfth Night*.

A stylish exercise in Structuralism that succeeds in being cerebral, artistic, cinematic and accessible, this is an immersive and inspirational experience that wears its literacy and technical mastery with laudable lightness. The mix of spoken word and music (which has been selected from an impressive range of sources) is as rich as the editor Miikka Leskinen's visual blend that often dazzles with its audacity and aptness. Poetic and challenging in equal measure, this is apparently the first part of a trilogy and it will be fascinating to see where Akomfrah takes us next.

Compleatists will need to know that the read extracts come from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *The Odyssey*, Shakespeare's *Richard II*, *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* and *Molloy*, Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Song of Solomon*, Sophocles's *Oedipus*, Emily Dickinson's 'Come Slowly Eden, Eden, Is That Old-Fashioned House', James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* and *Finnegans Wake* (which erroneously spelt with an apostrophe), while the captions have been gleaned from Matsuo Basho's 'The Journey Itself Is Home', Emily Dickinson's 'Our Journey Had Advanced', TS Eliot's 'A Cold Coming We Had of It', ee cummings's 'For Whatever We Lose', Li Po's 'Hard Is the Journey', Rabindranath Tagore's 'Art Thou Abroad on This Stormy Night', 'He Journeyed Beyond the Night' from The Epic of Gilgamesh, Shakespeare's 'How Heavy Do I Journey on the Way' and Zelda Fitzgerald 'Nobody Has Ever Measured, Not Even Poets'. Also worth noting is that the film clips derive from Philip Donnellan's *The Colony* (1964) and *A Stranger in Town* (1969) and Richard Marquand's *Home for Heroes* (1964), as well as from such small-screen outings as John Elliot's *A Man From the Sun* (1956), *Monitor* (1960), *Tonight* (1961), *24 Hours* (1968) and the *Omnibus* episode 'Born Black, Born British' (1972).