



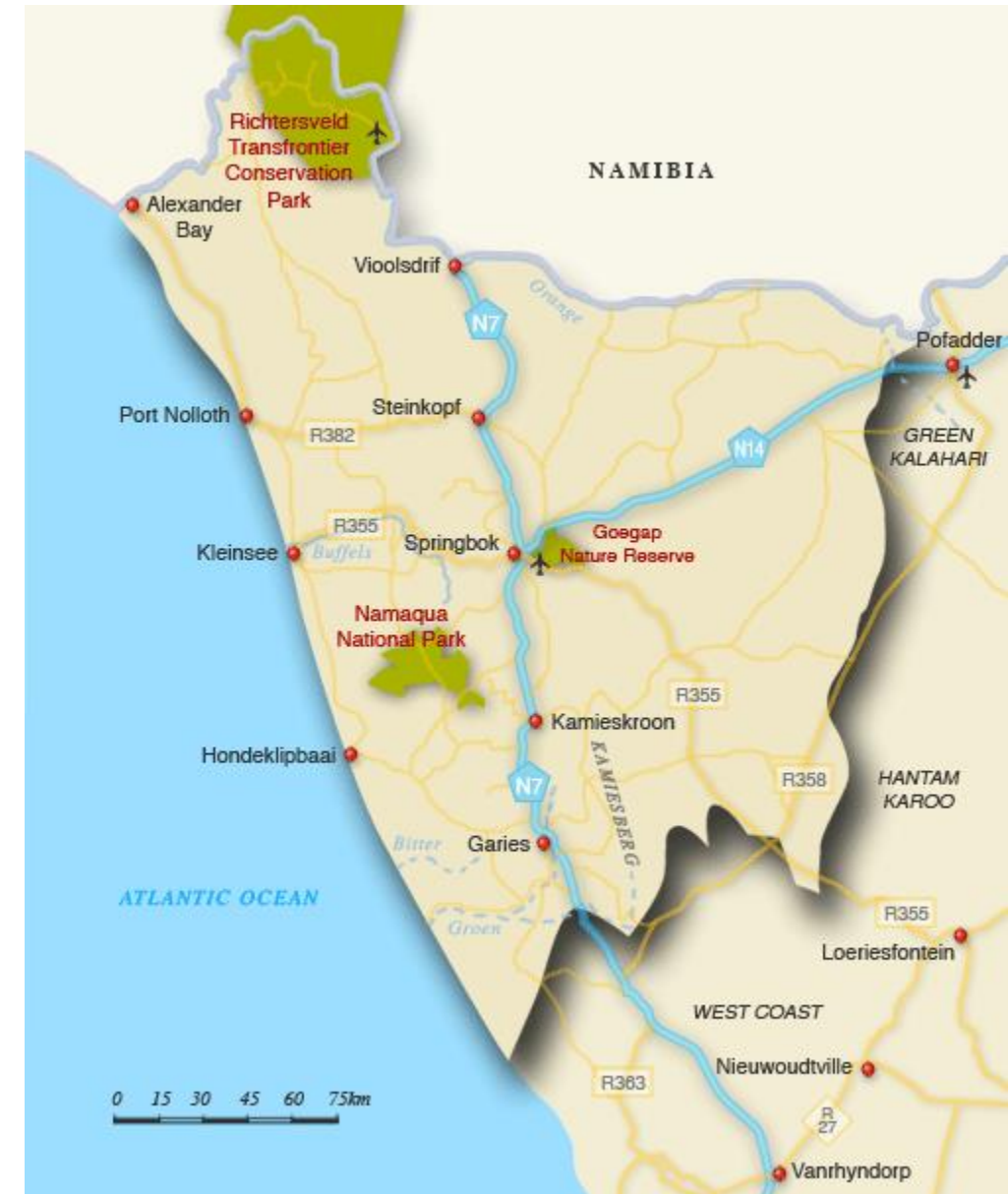
Namaqualand After Rain

By William Plomer



The Title

- The title of the poem confirms that it is set in southern Africa. Namaqualand is the name of the western coastal region that runs from the Northern Cape Province to Namibia.
- It also tells the reader the time that the poem is set – towards the end of Winter, as the rain typically falls there in July and August.
- Rain is symbolic of rebirth and the end of a drought period, especially as this region is normally very dry.

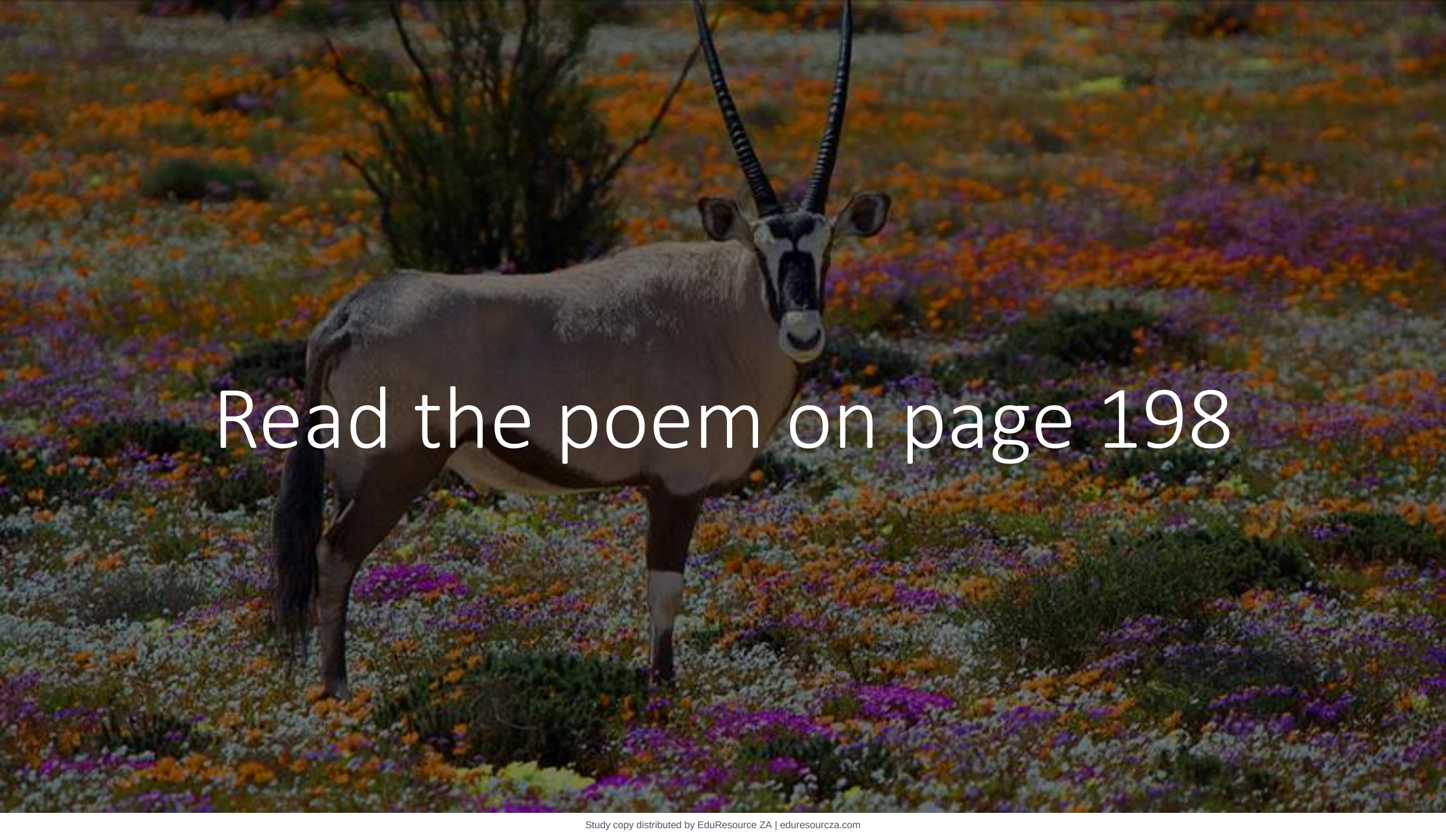




William Plomer (1903 – 1973)

- Born in Limpopo and spent his youth between England and South Africa. He developed a deep appreciation for the South African landscape, which appears in his early works.



A Kudu antelope stands in a field of purple and orange flowers. The antelope has long, spiraling horns and is looking towards the camera. The background is a dense field of small, colorful flowers, with some green bushes visible in the distance.

Read the poem on page 198

What is the poem about?

- “Namaqualand after Rain” celebrates the beauty and rejuvenating powers of nature. The poem exhibits the annual transformation of the arid semi-desert of Namaqualand into a magnificent, vibrant carpet of wild flowers.
- This image is used as a reminder that life finds a way to survive and renew itself, even in the harshest conditions.
- The poem demonstrates Plomer’s appreciation of the nature and wildlife of South Africa.

The opening line starts with the word 'again' symbolizing that the event it is about to describe has happened before.

'veld' describes the land and re-inforces the notion that the poem is set in South Africa.

'revives' emphasizes that this event is a repetition and that the land is being brought back to life.

Again the veld revives

Saturated or soaked, emphasizing how the rain has soaked into the soil and suggests how it has changed the atmosphere.

Imbued with lyric rains,

Something light/melodic. Lyric gives the image of flowing water nurturing the things it falls on.

And sap re-sweetening dry stalkss

Perfumes the quickening plains;

The last lines of the stanza highlight that it is time of resurrection and growth. 'Sap' flows through the 'dry stalks' and the 'plains' are 'quicken[ing]' (awakening/resuscitating). The landscape feels alive and the smell of the sap is described as 'perfum[ing]' the veld, engaging the reader's sense of smell. The 'sap' is described as fuelling the veld's growth.

The roots are exploding and resemble 'strings of stars'. The perspective has changed from the first stanza from the open plains to the 'small roots'. 'Explode' captures the intensity of the burst of activity and the way the roots are spreading out in every direction.

'String of stars' suggests that the roots are thin and glistening with water droplets from the rain.

The 'bulbs' are described as 'giv[ing] up [their] dream[s]' – a vulnerable image that suggests that the bulbs are flowering reluctantly or 'giv[ing] up' implying that what is being revealed is done unwillingly, with a sense of defeat.

Small roots explode in strings of stars,
Each bulb gives up its dream,
Honey drips from orchid throats,
Jewels each raceme;

Decadent imagery created in this line. Honey drops look like precious gems on the clusters of flowers ('raceme'). This image transforms the sticky 'sap' (line 3) into glistening honey-coloured droplets.

The image also alludes to the abundance and wealth of nature in Spring. By referring to the petals of the flowers as 'throats' is fitting as Spring is a time commonly associated with rebirth, and flower nectar is believed to rejuvenate.

Personification of the desert exhaling creates an image that reinforces the idea of the landscape being alive and awake. 'Sighing' is an ambiguous image because the desert could be sighing with relief because of the rain or sighing because it is sad that the rains have arrived because they threaten the desert's existence. It could also be sighing because it is fatigued by the idea of having to absorb another day of hot sun.

In terms of the celebratory theme of the poem so far, the fact that 'dawn' is a symbol of hope and rebirth, the sight could be one of relief.

The temple reference, which is traditionally a place of silent sanctuary, lends the scene an atmosphere of calm serenity.

The desert sighs at dawn –

As in another hemisphere

The temple lotus breaks her buds

On the attentive air –

The dash indicates that additional information is to follow in the next line. It could suggest that the arrival of Spring feels like waking up on the opposite side of the world to the desert (and opposite seasons).

The lotus is described as opening ('breaks') her buds and the morning air is depicted as 'attentive'. The delicate image of the lotus flower opening up to greet the morning. By referring to the flower as 'her', its soft, delicate nature is highlighted.

'attentive' creates a sense of alert expectancy as the air takes on the role of a considerate servant, hovering around the flower.

Spiritual allusions in Stanza 3

- Dawn – symbol of awakening
- Temple – direct reference to a place of spiritual worship
- Lotus flower – sacred and spiritual and often planted in temple ponds. It is also a symbol of rebirth and awakening

This stanza returns to exploring the landscape. The flowers are 'new' and are swaying in the wind, making a 'frou-frou' (the flow of women's skirts). The flowers are smoothing 'unruffling' out their petals, in the same way that women will smooth out their skirts. The use of alliteration creates vivid imagery of material being touched.

A frou-frou of new flowers,
Puff of unruffling petals,
While rods of sunlight strike pure streams
From rocks beveined with metals;



The sunlight strikes the water with its rays 'rods'. The streams are new and 'pure' from the freshly fallen rain that now flows like 'streams'. Sibilance creates the impression of renewed nature.

The rocks are brought to life with veins of metal. When a rock erodes, one can sometimes see the different colour streaks that look like veins.

Striking contrast between the karroo and the previous stanza. It is emaciated 'gaunt' (like an exhausted person) and the earth is stripped bare ('denude'), emphasizing how barren and dry the land is.



Far in the gaunt karroo
The winter earth denudes,
Ironstone caves give back the burr
Of lambs in multitudes;

This line could be interpreted literally. It is describing how thousands shrubs called Sheep's Buur are starting to grow around the edges of the caves. This description fits nicely with the theme of renewal and rebirth and the lined would be emphasizing that new life is growing even in a semi-desert.

'Multitudes of lambs' is a description that suits sheep farming, which is common in this area. Because of the rainfall, the lambs are out in the fields grazing in their numbers.

This stanza returns to the reviving 'veld', where the 'grass' is waving and bringing back life and colour to the 'bleached' 'kraal[s]'.

'Wav[ing]' alludes to the way the ripples created by the wind looks like waves on an ocean and suggests the grass is signaling a happy greeting.



Grass waves again where drought
Bleached every upland kraal,
A peach-tree shoots along the wind
Pink volleys through a broken wall,

The 'drought' 'bleached' the 'kraals', ie: removed the colour from the kraals among the hills 'upland'.

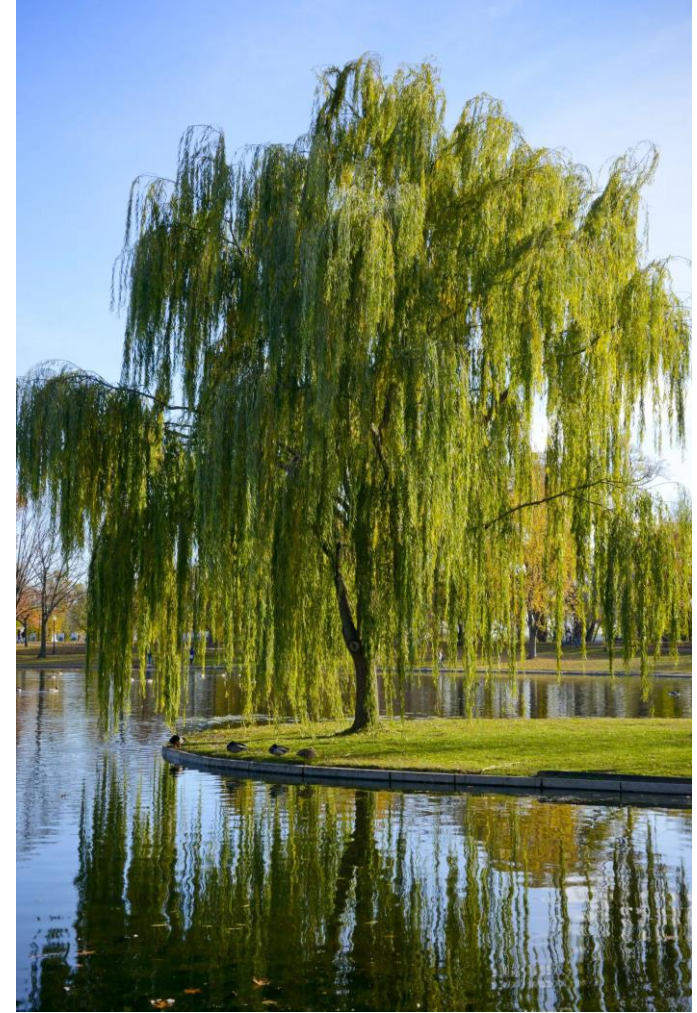
A peach tree is described as 'shoot[ing]' – its pink blossoms are starting to grow through a crack in the wall. Peach trees blossom in the Spring and so are considered symbols of rebirth.

The imagery in this stanza shows nature's powers of regeneration and certainty of new life, which will return even after a drought.

Our focus is now on the dam and how the 'willows' are hesitant to regrow.

The branches of these trees are described as delicate 'traceries of twigs'.

And willows growing round the dam
May now be seen
With all their traceries of twigs
Just hesitating to be green,



Traditionally, they are the first trees to rejuvenate after a dormant period, however these trees are hesitating when everything else around them is regrowing. Why might this be? What do willows need a lot of?

The final stanza looks forward to the near future, when 'swaying' birds' nests will be filled with 'leaves'.

Soon to be hung with colonies
All swaying with the leaves
Of pendant wicker love-nests
The pretty loxia weaves.



Loxia is a type of bird, known as weavers. They will build their 'pendant wicker love-nests' which will hang from the trees, the same way a pendant hangs on a necklace.

Their nests are referred to as 'love-nests' creates an optimistic image of the birth of new birdlife and reinforces the hopeful message of the poem that life is a cycle of birth and death and natural regeneration. Nature will always burst with new life, no matter how dry the Winter has been.

How does style convey the message?

Create an answer for this question, as a class.

How does structure convey the message?

Create an answer for this question, as a class.