



An African thunderstorm – David Rubadiri

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CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION About the poet: David Rubadiri was born in Liuli, Malawi, on July 19, 1930. He is a poet, novelist, playwright, university professor, diplomat and permanent ambassador of his country to the United Nations. His poems show a fruitful combination of African influences and European poetical forms. Although there is a certain melancholy in his poems, a common characteristic of certain black African poets it is maybe his black humour that better describes the poetry of Rubadiri. About this poem: Title: • The Poet addresses the subject of thunderstorm in Africa. He closely examines the onset, features, manifestation and the effects of the storm on its environment-animate and inanimate, people, as well as flora and fauna, are closely outlined in free flowing subjective prose. • Rubadiri's poem captures the looming arrival of a fierce storm. The anticipation of its arrival is both exciting and frightening, the wind is described as a mighty force, unpredictable in its direction, and carrying with it ominous clouds. The strength of the wind seems to suggest that worse is to follow once the storm hits. • The poem describes nature's forces conspiring to bring this powerful storm, and then narrows the focus to its effect on people in its path. • The inhabitants of a village are seen reacting to its approach, with the contrasting responses of children and mothers. • The village is clearly vulnerable to the force of the storm. The poem ends with the storm almost breaking overhead as the flashes of lightning and crack of thunder arrive.	IMAGERY METAPHOR – • The title itself is metaphoric as it is an allusion to the romantic view of beautiful African landscapes but the beauty here comes accompanied by a powerful living destructive force, a fearsome wind, which could be a reference to 'the winds of change' that swept Africa to break free from colonialism. • 'Trees bend to let it pass' (line 13) and also in line 2 'clouds came hurrying with the wind'. The trees ordinarily do not possess a volition as to exhibit an element of will in making a passage way for the wind, however a nascent display of trees in the heat of the storm is rightly captured by the author in the expressions above. Simile In line 6 'like a plague of locusts', serves to pinpoint the unrelenting force of the wind which comes noisily and often in a discernible pattern. This image is an almost prophetic, biblical reference to people being led to freedom from oppression. Again in lines 11 and 25 'like dark, sinister wings' is a veiled reference to the growing swell of resistance to colonialism. The 'Clothes wave like littered flags.' is a vision of a future where African national flags will replace those of the colonialists. Personification We see the use of this literary term in line 8 'Pregnant clouds...line 6 'Tossing up things on its tail' as well as 'Pelting march of the storm ' (line 32). The attribution of animate features to the cloud and wind captures the uncanny powers of observation of the author, creating a sense of anticipation of change. Alliteration The usage of words producing similar sounds or letters is manifest in this poem...see 'here and there' (line 5) as well as 'In the din of whirling wind' (line 17).
STRUCTURE • The poem consists of four interwoven stanzas of irregular length in lines and stanzas. • The wind builds up four times reflecting the stanzas • The irregularities capture the unpredictable progress of the wind and the building expectation as to where the storm is going to hit.	THEMES • The literal meaning focuses on the chaos and destruction of a storm and the helplessness of the people caught in its path. • The storm and its accompanying wind is a force of change which can be seen as a metaphor which could imply the British and European colonialism and its destructive impact that it had on the people of Africa.

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Africa. It can also be seen as the growing storm of dissent and resistance to colonialism that pervaded Africa.

TONE/MOOD

Mood: despairing/chaos/destruction/dynamic/anticipatory/ominous

- There is a sense of anticipatory dismay at what damage the impending storm can caused based on past knowledge.
- The chaos and destruction caused by storms adds to the feelings of despair.
- However the dynamic and ominous nature of the building storm is almost hypnotic in its power.

Tone: dismay/fear/anxious

- The dismay stems from the expected damage that can be caused by the rain and wind.
- The fear and anxiety about what can be lost and when the storm will hit is ever-present.
- The tone is unusual as it contrasts with the normal African view that rain is a blessing, however this storm is anticipated to bring destruction.

DICTION

- The encapsulates the author's powers of observation and his skillful use of poetic devices to capture very subtly the winds of change that blew through Africa in his time. The wind and the storm are metaphors for the turbulence that Africa endured for decades and of which the effects are still seen and felt today. The reality of a storm is destruction and the metaphor is the destruction of the colonial system and the creation of the African Renaissance.
- Rubadiri makes use of vivid imagery and figures of speech to convey the various elements of the storm. Line 6 introduces the simile of the approaching 'plague of locusts', underlining the appearance and potentially destructive nature of the storm. It also locates the setting in Africa. The further simile comparing the wind to a monster thrashing its tail about 'Like a madman chasing nothing' (line 9) emphasises the unpredictable nature of the storm, which adds to its danger. The description of the clouds 'Gathering to perch on hills/Like dark sinister wings' (lines 12-13) makes the clouds reminiscent of some bird of prey waiting for the opportune moment to strike.
- The third stanza continues in its depiction of noise and movement as villagers anticipate the storm's arrival. We notice how the children react with 'Screams' (line 17) of delight, possibly because of the thrill of potential danger. The women hurriedly attempt to prepare for the storm, although it seems that their efforts may be pointless as the 'Clothes wave like tattered flags' (line 27), completely at the mercy of the wind.
- The poem ends with the storm breaking, but stops before it actually hits creating a sense of anticipation as to when it is going to hit. The progress of the 'pelting march of the storm' (line 33) tells the reader that this storm cannot be stopped and will be a mighty one.