

## AN AFRICAN THUNDERSTORM - DAVID RUBADIRI

### SUMMARY

- 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 with flashes of lightning and crack of thunder.
- **The poem can also be interpreted as an analogy of the effects of colonial domination on the native land.**

### Stanza 1

#### Line 1

*From the west*

The storm originated in the west.

#### Line 2

*Clouds come hurrying with the wind*

The clouds are gathering very quickly. The frantic movement captures the build-up and unpredictable nature of the storm.

#### Lines 3-4

*Turning / sharply*

The single-word lines emphasise the chaotic/unpredictable nature of the wind. It was blowing in different directions.

#### Line 5

*Here and there*

The constantly changing direction of the wind emphasises the disorder. Implies that a powerful storm is imminent.

#### Lines 6-7

*Like a plague of locusts / Whirling,*

Simile – the wind is compared to a plague of locusts. Just as a plague of locusts will cover the entire area and cause a great deal of damage, so too does the wind. There is no escape from the powerful winds. The wind has no discernible pattern (*whirling*). This emphasises the potentially destructive nature of the storm and the pandemonium that will follow.

#### Lines 8-9

*Tossing up things on its tail / Like a madman chasing nothing.*

*Tossing up things* – emphasises the destruction and unpredictable nature of the storm by comparing the wind to a monster thrashing its tail about. This adds to its danger.

*Like a madman* – Simile: the movement of the wind is compared to the movements of a madman. Just as a person cannot make sense of the movements of a madman or predict his movement, the direction of wind is not fixed. This emphasises the power of nature.

- **The storm is symbolic of the arrival of the Europeans who came from the west. They colonised Africa very quickly. They could not understand or predict the movement of the colonists. Their arrival caused a great upheaval in the lives of the Black people.**

## Stanza 2

### Lines 10-11

*Pregnant clouds/Ride stately on its back,*

*Pregnant clouds* – Personification. The clouds are compared to a pregnant lady. This emphasises that a storm is about to start.

*Ride stately on its back* – metaphor: The clouds are compared to a person of royalty on a horse. He will sit upright, full of dignity. Similarly, the clouds are carried by the wind.

Irony – the wind has caused damage on the ground. The clouds are not affected by the wind.

### Lines 12-13

*Gathering to perch on hills/Like sinister dark wings;*

Personification of the clouds is extended in these lines.

Simile – the clouds are compared to birds of prey. Just as they come together to feast, so too do the clouds. The birds are evil, menacing; the clouds are ominous like birds of prey waiting for the opportune moment to strike.

### Line 14

*The wind whistles by*

Onomatopoeia – the sound of the wind emphasises the force of the wind

### Line 15

*And trees bend to let it pass.*

Personification – A person will bow to somebody superior. Trees are associated with strength. However, even the trees are bowing to the power of the wind. The path of the storm has not been diminished by the trees. Instead, the trees give way to allow it to progress unhindered.

- **The trees are symbolic of the local people who could not resist the advance of the colonists. They had to bow down/submit to their power.**

## Stanza 3

### Lines 16-17

*In the village /Screams of delighted children,*

The children are excited by the impending storm/prospect of rain. They are unaware of the any danger.

### Lines 18-19

*Toss and turn / In the din of the whirling wind,*

Their screams are mixed with the sound of the wind.

*In the din* – the sound of the wind is very loud

### Lines 20-24

*Women, / Babies clinging on their backs / Dart about / In and out / Madly;*

The short lines convey the urgent and frantic movement of the women. The women, unlike the children, are aware of the possible dangers of the impending storm. They are rushing in and out of their homes, trying to ensure that everything is safe.

*Dart, In and out,* – convey urgency, frantic movement. The women hurriedly attempt to prepare for the storm

*madly* – emphasises their panic

### Lines 25-26

*The wind whistles by*

*Whilst trees bend to let it pass.*

Repetition of lines 14-15. Almost exactly the same; 'And' has been replaced with 'Whilst'. While the trees have surrendered to the power of the wind, man is trying to resist. Such resistance will be futile.

- **The children are excited by the arrival of the colonists/strangers. However, the women were aware of the impending danger.**

### Stanza 4

#### Line 27

*Clothes wave like tattered flags*

Simile – their clothing is compared to torn flags. There is nothing regal/majestic/stately about torn flags. Their clothing flaps about just as torn flags would.

### Lines 28-29

*Flying off / To expose dangling breasts*

The wind is extremely strong. It strips people of their dignity as they are completely at the mercy of the wind. They have no protection from the storm.

### Lines 30-31

*As jagged blinding flashes / Rumble, tremble and crack*

*jagged blinding flashes* – vivid description of lightning emphasises that the storm is about to break

*Rumble, tremble and crack* – onomatopoeia – uses similar words to emphasise the sound and intensity of the thunder

### Lines 32-33

*Amidst the smell of fired smoke / And the pelting march of the storm*

A tree was struck by lightning. The fire spread and they could smell the smoke of the burning tree.

*Smell* – negative connotation - unpleasant

*pelting* – emphasises the intensity of the storm. The rain was falling with a great deal of force.

*march of the storm* – the storm was moving with the wind.

*march* – suggests a relentless movement. It could not be stopped.

- **The Blacks were enslaved and stripped of their dignity. They lost their identity - their flags were tattered. The thunder and lightning is symbolic of gunfire and battles.**

### **THEMES**

The power of nature.

The suddenness and violence of the storm

Implied reference to colonialism

### **THE TONE**

Dismay – the author is not happy; he concentrates on telling us about the damage caused by the rain and wind e.g. a plague of locusts is never a good thing, at least for the crops.

This contrasts with the usual view of rain in African society: rain is a blessing; everything loves the approach of rain, not just children. It is good for the crops and the animals, as it increases the harvest. However, this storm causes destruction. Therefore, it is not good.

Fear/ Panic/ apprehension – stanza 3 – the way the women run around

Destruction – stanza 4

### **MOOD**

Chaos/distressed

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Identify & discuss the effect of the imagery associated with the impending storm. (3 x 3)
2. How does the poet create a sense of movement in the poem? (2)
3. Does this poem do justice to African rainstorms? Why? (3)
4. Discuss the political/ historical themes that could underscore this poem. (3)