

**ENG2204 - MODERN AFRICAN POETRY**

**FACTS**

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# ENG2214

## MODERN AFRICAN POETRY CONTENTS

1. Introduction to Modern African Poetry
  - *identify the emerging phases of African poetry as it develops...*
  - *distinctive influence from Africa's current events and recent history*
2. Modern African Poetry: Meaning
  - *refers to the verses created by the writers and poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> C.*
3. Features and Aspect of Modern African Poetry
  - *emphasis on strong imagery and emotional content*
  - *less reliance on the use of rhyme*
4. Emergence of Modern African Poetry
  - *political, economic and social evolutions*
  - *mixture of culture, spirituality, politics and emotion of Africans*
  - *human aspiration, development, emotion and disillusionment*
5. Phases of Modern African Poetry and their Development
  - a. Colonialism
    - i. The Pioneering Phase 1930s - 40s
    - ii. The Transitional Phase 1950's -early 60's
      - *against colonial exploitation, racial discrimination, agitation of political independence*
      - *change from – to modern was occasioned by development in two areas:*
        - *technique of poetic expression*
        - *sources of the poetic materials*
  - b. Period of Liberation and Independence
    - i. The Modernist of mid 60's and early 70's/Contemporary Phase/The Millennium phase
      - *struggling for liberation and the struggle for independence*
      - *political, social and economic conditions as predominant themes*

- *Ngugi: “lit. does not grow or develop in a vaccum..”*
- ii. Contemporary Phase/The Millennium phase
  - *increased literacy, grown dramatically in quality and in local recognition*
  - *Ali M. Mazrui et al (1935); seven conflicts theme clashes*
    - *between Africa’s past and present*
    - *between tradition and modernity*
    - *between indigenous and foreign*
    - *between individualism and society*
    - *between socialism and capitalism*
    - *between development and self-reliance*
    - *between Africanity and humanity*
- iii. Liberation struggle and Independence era

## 6. Recommended Poems

### a. Wole Soyinka - *Telephone Conversation* (1963)

#### i. The Poem (*Telephone Conversation*)

#### ii. Author Poet (Wole Soyinka) –

- *born 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1934*
- *Studies at University college of Ibadan*
- *Graduated for the University of Leeds Britain, 1957*
- *Detained from 1967 – 1969*
- *wrote the collection Poems from Prison (1969)*
- *Awarded with Nobel prize in literature, 1986*

#### iii. About the poem (*Telephone Conversation*)

- *poetic satire on racism. A telephone convers. b/w white landlady and a prospective black tenant.*

#### iv. Analysis of the poem (*Telephone Conversation*)

##### 1. Poetic Personae

- *black African and woman prospective tenant, cynical*

##### 2. Style

- *satire, humour, tension, conversational, dramatic*

##### 3. Theme

- *racism – white/black*

#### 4. Paraphrasing the themes of the poem

- *title: telephone conversation indicating a talk between two people of diverse ideologies and two diverse cultures*
- *play of words, literally and figuratively from miles away to conveyed a message of agenda in racism.*
- *self-confession to avoid travelling in vain (line 4-5)*
- *the landlady seems foolish when she ask to describe the colour of his skin (10 - 19)*
- *he throws a plethora colour of comibination towards the woman and mocks her (brunet, line 28)*
- *the poem gives an idea of racial discrimination.*
- *it exemplies how the apprehension of prejudicd response makes an individual cynical*

#### 5. Poetic Devices in Telephone Conversation

- *Imagery – use of words to evoke mental picture in the reader: red-booth, red pillar-box (line 13) to symbolizes anger experienced by the tenant.*
- *Repetition - use of a word or phrase written more than once in a piece of writing for the sake of emphasis: Dark (line 10, 11, 18 and 27)*
- *Alliteration: repetition of similar consonant sound in a line of a poem: silenced. silenced transmission (line 6); button b. button (line 11). Red both, red-pillar, red..(line 13) flight of fancy (line 24)*

#### b. Dennis Brutus – Nightsong: City

##### i. The Poem (*Nightsong: City*)

##### ii. Author Poet (*Dennis Brutus*) (28/11/1924 – 26/12/2009)

- *born in Salisbury, Zimbabwe on 28<sup>th</sup> Nov., 1924*
- *grew up in South Africa*
- *received B.A. degree there, 1947 University of Fort Hare, Alice*
- *Taught English and Afrikaans for 14 years*
- *study law at the University of Witwatersand.*
- *died on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2009 in Cape Town south Africa*

iii. About the poem (*Nightsong: City*) 1979

- *it was written in 1979*
- *depicts the ills of apartheid in S.A.*
- *Apartheid, a segregated political system es. 1948 to earl 1990s*
- *use imagery to express his feeling to the world*

iv. Analysis of the poem (*Nightsong: City*)

1. Paraphrasing the lines of the poem

- *line 1 – “sleep well” to clam “my love” (land)*
- *line 2 - police sirens struggle between blacks residents*
- *line 3 – furtive movement of police patrol cars through the town*
- *line 4 - depicts the picture of shanties area/poor area*
- *line 5 – black surrounded by dread and conflict where no able to retaliate*
- *line 6 – violence endemic to the shanty*
- *line 7 – symbol of the unwinding of tension built up in human during city’s working day*

2. Paraphrasing the theme of the poem

- *theme of resentment – agony, (line), fear (line 6) and how police hunt black (line 3)*
- *patriotism – feeling of love, devotion and sense of attachment to a homeland*
- *apartheid/politics –*
- *poverty - state not having enough money to take care of basic needs such as food, c,h.*

3. Poetic Devices in *Nightsong: City*

- Alliteration – conspicuous repetition of identical initial consonant sound: cars, cockroach (line 3), love, land (9)
- Anaphora –use of conscious repetition of patters: line 1, 9
- imagery – comprises of fs to evoke mental picture in reader. words appeal to over senese of sight, feeling, taste, smell etc. line 1 -2

- simile – use of ‘as’ and ‘like’ to show similarities between persons or objects compared. violence like a bug-infested (line 5), fear is imminent as sound (line 6)
- personification – give animate qualities or characteristic to inanimate object, e.g. cockroach to car (line 3), command land to sleep (line 9)

c. **David Rubadari – An African Thunderstorm**

i. **The Poem (An African Thunderstorm) 2004**

ii. **Author Poet (David Rabadari) 1930 -**

- *born 19 July, 1930*
- *first Malawi’s ambassador to the US and UN*
- *VC of Uni. of Malawi 2000.*
- *Received honorary doctorate from University of Strathclyde, 2005*
- *His poems show a fruitful combination of African influences and Europeans poetical forms.*

iii. **About the poem (An African Thunderstorm)**

- *depicts picture of the coming of the Western by use of imagery (cloud) and how they wiped out African norms, culture, believes etc.*
- *title: THUNDERSTORM; storm comes with thunder, lightning, heavy rain that causes flooding and loss of life, properties, displacing etc.*

iv. **Analysis of the poem (An African Thunderstorm)**

1. **Paraphrasing the words of the poem**

- Cloud: *A visible mass of water droplets suspended in the air. Anything that makes things foggy or gloomy... obscure from sight.*
- Plague: *A wide spread affliction, calamity or destructive influx, especially when seen as divine retribution (punishment). A great nuisance; whatever greatly irritates.*
- Whirl: *To rotate, revolve, spin, or turn rapidly*

- *Perch(intransitive): To rest on something*
- *Sinister: Evil, seeming to be evil*
- *Din: a loud noise*
- *Clinging: to hold very tightly, as to not fall off.*
- *Dark: A sudden turn or fast movement*
- *Whilst(while): At the same time*
- *Jagged: Something that is rough and harmful*
- *Pelt(ing): To beat or hit, especially repeatedly. To rain or hail heavily*

## 2. Major Theme

- *The wind is a major theme in the poem. It is mentioned four times while it is explicitly examined and built upon like a main act in a plot through the interwoven five stanzas in the poem*

## 3. Paraphrasing the themes of the poem

- *1st Stanza - It's origination is identified as proceeding from the west in hurry with the accompaniment of the clouds.*
- *Its form is also brought into the scenario with the adjectival connotations like 'Turning sharply, Here and there', as well as the fixated description attributed to it from the design of locusts.*
- *2nd Stanza - We see here the opportunistic strut the clouds takes as it rides on the wind to make a getaway to the hills. The wind unmistakably is readily on the fore as its presence readily makes room for the transition of the clouds depicted in this fore as a passenger on the wings of the wind.*
- *3rd Stanza - An evil archetype is attributed to the wind here when personified here as sinister. The attribution is however not exemplified here rather what follows is a seeming swashbuckling with the flora and fauna making way for an unfettered flight for the wind as it empties its furlongs on its unpredictable path*

- *4th Stanza - Here even mortal man exemplified by the feminine extraction is seen to be harried by the onrush of the wind Its tell-tales are seen in the last stanza with its work on the upper trunk of the feminine anatomy which inadvertently brings about an exposure of the prized possession of the woman.*

#### 4. Poetic Devices in An African Thunderstorm

- Simile - *The use of this figure of speech is seen in line 6 'like a plague of locusts' .The use of simile serves to pinpoint the unrelenting force of the wind which comes noisily and often in a discernible pattern. Again we see it in lines 11 and 25 'like dark, sinister wings'. 'Clothes wave like littered flags.'*
- Metaphor - *"As an effect, a metaphor functions primarily to increase stylistic colorfulness and variety. Metaphor is a great contributor to poetry when the reader understands a likeness between two essentially different things". '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 in the flare of the author, a nascent display of trees in the heat of the storm is rightly captured in the expressions above.*
- 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 ' ..in the last line of the poem. The attribution of animate features to the cloud and wind captures the uncanny weaving of the Poet's intuitive perception.*
- Alliteration - *The usage of words producing similar sounds or letters is manifest in this poem....see 'here and there' ..in line 5 as well as. 'In the din of whirling wind' in line 17*
- Cacophony - *This is shown in line 29,,' Rumble ,tremble...'* *The interplay of words here produces a harsh sound*



- **Form and Structure**

- □ *The poem is divided into two parts which divide the content into the general and the specific. The first part, make up of stanzas one and two, describes the storm as it gathers momentum, and the third stanza describes its impact on human existence.*
- □ *The irregular number of words on a line, with many single-word lines, captures the unpredictable progress of the wind and the accompanying clouds. This technique is also evident in the second part of the poem, where the frantic movement of the village women as they ‘Dart about/in and out/ Madly’ (lines 22 – 24) is physically demonstrated by the line divisions.*
- □ *The description of ‘The Wind whistles by/And trees bend to let it pass’ in the second stanza in lines 25-26, although ‘And’ has been replaced with ‘Whilst’ (line 26). The path of the storm has not been diminished by the trees. In fact, the trees give away to allow it to progress unhindered.*

d. **Niyi Osundare – A Song for Ajegunle**

i. **The Poem (A Song for Ajegunle)**

ii. **Author Poet (Niyi Osundare) 1947**

- *born in 1947 in Ikere-Eikiti, Ekiti State Nigeria*
- *called poetic Messiah because of his new breed poems*
- *Professor of English at University of New Orleans, USA*
- *His works: The Market Place (1983), Village Voice (1984) etc.*
- *Received Commonwealth Poetry Prize and NOMA in 1986 .*

iii. **About the poem (A Song for Ajegunle)**

- *Seating in Ajegunle, urban ghetto area in Lagos, Ajeromi-Ifelodun*
- *images: weed infected, calloused hands, portholes, barns, mosquitoes, weeping wives, idle kitchens, beer parlor depicts the social condition of the place.*
- *Use of expression as brimming gutter, swansongs of beggars too.*
- *show a contrast between the rich and the poor in the society.*

**iv. Analysis of the poem (*A Song for Ajegunle*)**

- 1. Paraphrasing the themes of the poem**
- 2. Poetic Devices in *A Song for Ajegunle***

## 1. INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN POETRY

In studying the development of African Poetry we are expected to identify the **emerging phases of African Poetry** as it develops through the phases of African literature with the Political, Economic and Social evolution of African States. With such **thematic phases in the historical emergence of modern African poetry**, **poetic samples** that enact themes of importance to the socio-economic and political development of Africa, we will also look at the Contemporary Poetry in Africa with its **distinctive influence** from Africa's current events and recent history, including such themes as post imperialism, cultural upheaval and violence, religious intolerance, economic struggles of the people, the divisions of classes and the various other conflicts that modern day African nations face.

## 2. MODERN AFRICAN POETRY

Modern African poetry refers to the verses created by the writers and poets of the 20th and 21st centuries. The actual definition of “modern” varies, depending on the authority cited.

## 3. FEATURES AND ASPECT OF THE MODERN AFRICAN POETRY

Recognizable aspects of modern poetry include:

- a. An emphasis on strong imagery and emotional content, and
- b. Less reliance on the use of rhyme.

## 4. EMERGENCE OF MODERN AFRICAN POETRY

It is no doubt that, the political, economic and social evolution of African states have really influenced the emergence of African Poetry. A mixture of culture, spirituality, politics and emotions of Africans carefully crafted through European Languages;(English and French) These languages were domesticated to communicate African feelings in diverse areas of human aspiration, development, emotions, as well as disillusionment in some cases while in others Love and Cultural Heritage of Africa are clearly enacted.

## 5. PHASES OF AFRICAN POETRY AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Reflectively, four phases were identified as to have constituted the emergence of Modern African Poetry:

- (a) The Pioneering Phase 1930's- 40's
- (b) The Transitional Phase 1950's-early 60's

- (c) The Modernist of mid 60's and early 70's
- (d) Liberation struggle and Independence era

These can be merged into twos; (a) and (b) falls within the period of Colonialism, while (c) and (d) fall within the period of liberation and independence.

It is divided into phases to enable us identify and understand the thematic preoccupation of African Poet's rendition within a given periods in Africa's Socio-political History, acting as a tool in public outcry serving as garments for protest. Enacting poems that speak of: colour, of Africa, politics and human behaviour with some addressed directly to an audience whom the poet wanted to teach, advise or criticise.

### THE PIONEERING AND THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE

Poets of this era or period are basically protest based; against Colonial exploitation, racial discrimination as well as agitations for political independence. Therefore, the change from 'pioneer' to 'modern' was occasioned by development in to two areas: techniques of poetic expression and the sources of the poetic material.

### THE MODERNIST OF MID 60'S AND EARLY 70'S

These periods saw African poets struggling for Liberation and the struggle for Independence. The Political, Social and Economic conditions of Africans are the predominant themes in this period. As Ngugi Wathiango puts it:

*'Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by the social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and other forces cannot be ignored especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Our culture over the last hundred years has developed against the same stunting, dwarfing background'*

**THE CONTEMPORARY PHASE OR THE MILLENNIUM PHASE  
(POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE)**

Most African nations gained their independence in the 1950s and 1960s and with liberation and increased literacy, African literature written in English, French and Portuguese and traditional African languages, has grown dramatically in quantity and in global recognition.

In "*The development of modern literature since 1935*" as **ch. 19 of UNESCO's General History of Africa, vol. VIII, pp. 564, Ali A. Mazrui (1933-2014)** and others mention seven conflicts as themes: <sup>1</sup>the clash between Africa's past and present, <sup>2</sup>between tradition and modernity, <sup>3</sup>between indigenous and foreign, <sup>4</sup>between individualism and community, <sup>5</sup>between socialism and capitalism, <sup>6</sup>between development and self-reliance and <sup>7</sup>between Africanity and humanity. Other themes in this period include social problems such as corruption, the economic disparities in newly independent countries, and the rights and roles of women. Female writers are today far better represented in published African literature than they were prior to independence (**Donna Seaman** *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry*, edited by **Frank Chipasula** and **Stella Chipasula (1995)**).

**ROCOMMENDED POEMS**

**TELEPHONE CONVERSATION**

*Wole Soyinka*

*The price seemed reasonable, location 1  
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived  
Off premises. Nothing remained  
But self-confession. 'Madam,' I warned,  
'I hate a wasted journey—I am African.' 5  
Silence. Silenced transmission of  
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,  
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled  
Cigarette-holder piped. Caught I was, foully.  
'HOW DARK ?'... I had not misheard... 'ARE YOU LIGHT 10  
OR VERY DARK ?' Button B. Button A. Stench  
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.  
Red booth . Red pillar-box . Red double-tiered  
Omnibus squelching tar . It was real! Shamed  
By ill-mannered silence, surrender 15*

*Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.*  
*Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—*  
*'ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?' Revelation came.*  
*'You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?'*  
*Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light 20*  
*Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,*  
*I chose. 'West African sepia'—and as afterthought,*  
*"down in my passport." Silence for spectroscopic*  
*Flight of fancy, till truthfulness changed her accent*  
*Hard on the mouthpiece. 'WHAT'S THAT?' conceding 25*  
*'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette.'*  
*'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' 'Not altogether.*  
*Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see*  
*The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet*  
*Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused— 30*  
*Foolishly madam—by sitting down, has turned*  
*My bottom raven black—One moment madam !'—sensing*  
*Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap*  
*About my ears—'Madam,' I pleaded, 'wouldn't you rather*  
*See for yourself?' 35*

## ABOUT THE POET

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka was born 13 July 1934 near Abeokuta, Nigeria. He studied at the University College of Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan) and graduated from the University of Leeds in Britain in 1957. During the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), the government arrested Soyinka and held him in solitary confinement from 1967 to 1969. His time in jail prompted him to write the verse collection *Poems from Prison* (1969) and the prose work *The Man Died* (1972). Soyinka was first black African to receive Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986.

## ABOUT THE POEM

The poem is a poetic satire on racism. It is a telephone conversation between a White landlady and a prospective Black tenant. Racial bias and colour prejudice of the landlady and controlled anger of the tenant has been highlighted. The caller was happy with the location of the house and the rent, however he had to disclose that he was a black man so that he would not waste a journey.

## POETIC PERSONA

- **Black - African and Woman - Prospective tenant, Cynical**

## ANALYSIS OF THE PEOM

- **Theme** – Racism – White/Black
- **Style** – Satire, Humour, tension, Conversational, Dramatic

## PARAPHARAZING

When we look at the title of the poem ‘Telephone Conversation’, it has a deeper meaning, indicating a talk between two people and here it is of two diverse ideologies and two diverse cultures, the white Englishwoman and the Black prospective tenant. The author conveys to the readers to understand the play of words that is conveyed in the title, literally and figuratively the speakers are miles away but their conversation opens to the world this agenda of Racism.

The poem depicts a telephone conversation between a black African looking for an apartment to rent and a white landlady owning one. After discussing, the issue of the rent, i.e. after inquiring for the location of the price the apartment and being happy that the location is good and the price is reasonable (*line 1-2*), the black boy, who might have seemed very polite and kind over the phone, deduces that the white landlady has no idea that he is black. So, to avoid travelling there in vain, the African made a self-confession that he is black.

The author’s usage of the word ‘**self-confession**’ (*line 4-5*) conveys the apprehension that lingers in the mind of the tenant about not being able to get the accommodation because of his race.

In line 6 - 9, the poem satirizes the hypocrisy of the white woman who is dumbstruck when she comes to know.

*“Silence. Silenced transmission of  
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,  
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled  
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully” (Line 6 - 9)*

The landlady seems foolish when she asks him to describe the colour of his skin. The caller feels insulted and being a victim of racial prejudice hits back

by giving details of his skin. But the lady is unaware of the irony hangs up the phone.

*“HOW DARK?” . . . I had not misheard . . . “ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?”* Button B. Button A. Stench  
*Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.*  
*Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered*  
*Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed*  
*By ill-mannered silence, surrender*  
*Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.*  
*Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—*  
*“ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?” Revelation came.*  
*“You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?”*

The satire on the good breeding and mannerisms of the lady is very striking and the retort of the caller is equally remarkable. He throws a plethora of colours and colour combinations towards the woman and mocks her. The poem is a bitter satire on the racial discrimination of the time and one of the most read and admired poems. He uses a lot of symbolism, similes, metaphors and irony.

The poem gives an idea of racial discrimination. It also exemplifies how the apprehension of prejudiced response makes an individual cynical. There are several kinds of discriminations in the world and this spoils social harmony.

### POETIC DEVICES IN SOYINKA’S TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

- 1. IMAGERY:** Imagery is the use of words to evoke mental pictures in the reader. They are the words that appeal to over senses of sight, feeling, taste, smell etc. Examples:  
 We can see that the poet uses the colour red to convey the anger experienced by the prospective tenant as in ‘**Red booth**’, ‘**Red pillar-box**’, ‘**Red double-tiered omnibus**’. The colour ‘**Red**’ also symbolizes ‘**love**’, ‘**passion**’ and at times it has a negative connotation depicting bloodshed and anger.
- 2. REPETITION:** In this device, a word or phrase is written more than once in a piece of writing it is used for the sake of emphasis. Examples:
  - **Dark** (Line 10, 11, 18 and 27)

In the above example “*dark*” is repeated for emphasis.



3. **ALLITERATION:** This involves the repetition of similar consonant sounds in a line of poem. Examples:

- *Silence. Silenced transmission of* (line 6)
- *Button B, Button A.\* Stench* (line 11)
- *Red booth. Red pillar box. Red double-tiered* (Line 13)
- *Flight of fancy,* (line 24)

## NIGHT SONG CITY

*Dennis Brutus*

*Sleep well, my love, sleep well:  
the harbor lights glaze over restless docks,  
police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets;  
  
from the shanties creaking iron-sheets  
violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed  
and fear is immanent\* as sound in the wind-swung bell;  
  
the long day's anger pants from sand and rocks;  
but for this breathing night at least,  
my land, my love, sleep well.*

## ABOUT THE POET

Dennis Brutus, born on 26th November 1924 in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (Harare, Zimbabwe), he grew up in South Africa and received his B.A. degree there in 1947 from the University of Fort Hare, in Alice. Brutus taught English and Afrikaans for 14 years in South African high schools before going on to study law at the University of Witwatersrand. Dennis was died on 26th December, 2009 in Cape Town South Africa.

## ABOUT THE POEM

The *Nightsong: City* is a poem written by Dennis Brutus in 1983, it starts as if it was a love poem address to a person, e.g. “my love” (line 1), figuratively refers to the city (his homeland; South Africa). In his poem, Dennis depicts the ills of apartheid that inflicted his country that he experience within his lines. It was a time where Black citizen suffered from the White people after enactment of segregated political system (apartheid) in South Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s that separated the different peoples living there and

gave privileges to those of European origin this is the why he composed *Nightsong: City* by use of figurative language to express his people feelings to the world. The imagery described in this poem describes the sounds of a typical night in a South African shanty.

## ANALYSIS

Dennis Brutus' poem represents scenes of sufferings by South Africans; each line of this poem portrays true-to-life where Blacks of South Africa treat mediocrely and their rights were subjugated. The whole line of the poem can be analyzed as:

- **Line 1** - "*sleep well, my love, sleep well*"; Dennis used the '*sleep well*' to calm, soothe and appease "*my love*" (his land and its people), and preach peace to his dear nation.
- **Line 2** - "*the harbor lights glaze over restless docks*", the white men dog (police) struggle through the city street by night to oppress restless Blacks citizens, this hide the details of normal daytime bustle.
- **Line 3** - "*police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets*"; this describes furtive movement of police patrol cars in and out of the apparently narrow streets which wind round the tall city buildings. They were wailing the sirens of their car which could be a source of fear. At that White people were using police to abuses and oppress the Black citizens.
- **Line 4-5** – "*from the shanties creaking iron-sheets, violence like a bug infested rag is tossed, and fear is imminent as sound in the wind-swung bell;*" this implies how the whole nation (South Africa) was surrounded by dreads and conflicts. The blacks were not able to retaliate; ultimately phobias grew in their mind.
- **Line 6** - A very expressive simile. Just as the bell *contains* sound all the time which can be brought out even by its being merely *swung* by the wind, so violence is endemic to the shanty-dwellings of the city.
- **Line 7** - The reference is to the heat, stored in the rocks during the day, escaping at night; but this in itself becomes a symbol of the unwinding of the tensions built up in human relationships during the city's working day.

This poem concisely represents the Black's effort to resist the brutality inflicted upon them by White people. He used descriptive words that exactly show the fear felt by the blacks, and disturbance created by the white people and in fact the all incidents happen in South Africa.

## THEMES

Theme refers to subject matter of with artistic work. Every writer or poet writes with a purpose in his mind. This is true of the poet as well. A poet writes a poem only because he wants to share his view or to express his feeling on a particular matter to his audiences. Poets usually use poetic or linguistic devices (figurative language) in telling their feeling, ideas and views. The Dennis' poem *Nightsong: City* made of assorted themes; specifically:

1. Theme of resentment
2. Theme of patriotism
3. Theme of politics/apartheid
4. Theme of poverty

### 1. THEME OF RESENTMENT

The resentment is the major theme dominants Dennis Brutus' poem *Nightsong: City*. Because, distress, physical and emotional pain, sorrow, anguish, agony, grief, misery, ache, pang, concern, worry and angst were melt in South African Black citizens. The poem has a sound that the reader can realize that the poet has the experiences of agony within the line of this poem; for example "*the long day's anger pants from sand and rocks*" (line 7), "*and fear is imminent as sound in the wind-swung bell*" (line 6), because "*the police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets*" (Line 3). The poet expresses what he was experiencing happen to his people, where white people used police and threat the peace of people. Concisely, the apartheid that separated between the prima black citizens of South Africa and white settlers; had been source that introduce stress and worry to South African people. Apart from Dennis's poem, many writers for example Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy* (1947) also portrays how there were treated by white people.

In this poem, Dennis Brutus used words that are captivated readers mind, impeccably portrayed the fear sensed and the way Black citizens of South African were treated by white people.

### THEME OF PATRIOTISM

Patriotism is the feeling of love, devotion and sense of attachment to a homeland. Dennis Brutus can be considered as patriot, because all the lines in his poems portray what he feels to his land and citizens of his homeland. For

example, line 1 “*sleep well, my love, sleep well:*” and line 9 “*my land, my love, sleep well*” show the immensental and enormous love that the poet does to his homeland.

## THEME OF POLITICS/APARTHEID

Politics is activities associated with government; it’s a relationship between people and their life with those in power. It’s from 1948 to the early 1990s white people introduced a political system of apartheid. The word *apartheid* was derived from Afrikaans (a language in South Africa) literally (*aparthood*) means segregation “apartness”. Such system of government encouraged state repression of Black citizens and deprived most of their common rights economically, socially and politically. Through the line of this poem, Dennis describes in line how “*police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets*” were arresting and oppressing black citizens right. suffering that the blacks of South Africa suffered including the poet. The poem is mauled the system of apartheid and pray peaceful existence to his nation “*my land, my love, sleep well*” (line 9)

## THEME OF POVERTY

Poverty is the state of not having enough money to take care of basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing. As we can see in this poem, in **line 4**; he mentions shanties, ghetto areas. The term ghetto initially referred to a segregated area. The poet created a setting of sound “*creaking iron-sheets*”. Usually in shanties area iron-sheets were used to flat and roof the houses and roof, unlike in upper-class social class area.

## 2. POETIC DEVICES

Poetic device are a form of literary device. Dennis Brutus's "Nightsong: City" is full of figurative language, which the speaker uses to describe the physical details and mood of the city to which he dedicates his poem. *Nightsong: City* is made up of **alliteration**, **anaphora**, **imagery**, and **similes**, **symbolisms** and **personification** that depict perfectly and concisely actual events, particularly what that happened in South Africa during the Apartheid.

### a. ALLITERATION

Literally, alliteration is from Latin word *littera* “letter of alphabet”. Alliteration is the conspicuous repetition of identical initial consonant sound sounds in successive or closely associated syllables within a group of words.

This involves the repetition of similar consonant sounds in a line of poem. Examples:

- “cars” and “cockroach” (line 3)
- “love” and “land” (line 9)

As a sound device, alliteration is used to bring out the musical effects in the poem.

### b. ANAPHORA:

This is a device that makes use of conscious repetition of pattern. It is a sound device. e.g.:

- *Sleep well, my love, sleep well* (line 1)
- *my land, my love, sleep well* (line 9)

As a sound device, alliteration is used to bring out the musical effects in the poem.

### c. IMAGERY:

Imagery in poetry sustains or comprises figure of speech to evoke mental pictures in the reader. They are the words that appeal to over senses of sight, feeling, taste, smell etc. Examples:

- *Sleep well, my love, sleep well*
- *the harbor lights glaze over restless docks,*
- *police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets* (line 1 & 3)

### d. SIMILE

Simile is derived from the word “similar” which shows similarities between persons or objects being compared. It is used to compare things, persons, objects or situations because of certain qualities common to them, although they may be different in other areas. It uses “as” or “like” in making its comparison. Examples:

- *violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed* (line 5)
- *and fear is imminent as sound in the wind-swung bell;* (line 6)

The above device is used to bring out the qualities of “bug-infested rag” and “sound in the wind-swung bell”.

**e. PERSONIFICATION:**

Personification is given animate (human or living animal) e.g. “*cockroach*” (line 3) characteristics to inanimate object e.g. “*car*” (line 3). The “*anger*” (line 7) of the day is personified, as it making it seem like it's out of breath. The “*city*” (line 1 & 9) is again referred to as “*my love*” and the command to “*sleep well*” (line 1 & 9) is repeated. The city is treated as a person or an entity that can be cared for by the speaker, which is also somewhat ironic considering the figurative language couched within the middle of the poem.

The poet formed the physical structure of his poem by use of poetic devices; all ideas and emotions are reinforced through these structural embodiments.

Dennis Brutus (1924 - 2009)'s *Nightsong: City* is a patriotic poem, the poet tendered his love to his nation, and prayed peaceful co-existence of his homeland. He poeticized his *Nightsong: City* by used of imagery, symbolisms and other figurative words and structure to portray without a glitch the sufferings that South Africans were felt in the hand of white people. As he experienced all the happenings, Brutus was able to convey and describe black citizens' feelings and suffering lullaby.

**AFRICAN THUNDERSTORM**

*David Rubadiri*

*From the west  
 Clouds come hurrying with the wind  
 Turning sharply  
 Here and there  
 Like a plague of locusts  
 Whirling,  
 Tossing up things on its tail  
 Like a madman chasing nothing.  
 Pregnant clouds  
 Ride stately on its back,  
 Gathering to perch on hills  
 Like sinister dark wings;  
 The wind whistles by  
 And trees bend to let it pass.  
 In the village  
  
 Screams of delighted children,*

*Toss and turn  
 In the din of the whirling wind,  
 Women,  
 Babies clinging on their backs  
 Dart about  
 In and out  
 Madly;  
 The wind whistles by  
 Whilst trees bend to let it pass.  
 Clothes wave like tattered flags  
 Flying off  
 To expose dangling breasts  
 As jagged blinding flashes  
 Rumble, tremble and crack  
 Amidst the smell of fired smoke  
 And the pelting march of the storm.*

### ABOUT THE POET

David Rubadiri was born in **Liuli**, Malawi, on July 19, 1930. He is a poet, novelist, playwright, university professor and diplomat, permanent ambassador of his country to the United Nations. His poems show a fruitful combination of African influences and European poetical forms. At Malawi's independence in 1964, Rubadiri was appointed Malawi's first ambassador to the United States and the United Nations. He is vice-chancellor of the University of Malawi in 2000. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Strathclyde in 2005.

### ABOUT THE POEM

African Thunderstorm depicts the coming of European and how they wiped out African norms, culture, believes as well as socio-economic and political activities criminally. He refers their coming with *Thunderstorm* coz it's a storm that comes with thunder, lighting, heavy rain and sometimes with hail that causes flooding, loss of life and properties, displacing etc.

### ANALYSIS: PARAPHRASING

- **Cloud:** A visible mass of water droplets suspended in the air. Anything that makes things foggy or gloomy... obscure from sight.

- **Plague:** A wide spread affliction, calamity or destructive influx, especially when seen as divine retribution (punishment). A great nuisance; whatever greatly irritates.
- **Whirl:** To rotate, revolve, spin, or turn rapidly
- **Perch(intransitive):** To rest on something
- **Sinister:** Evil, seeming to be evil
- **Din:** a loud noise
- **Clinging:** to hold very tightly, as to not fall off.
- **Dark:** A sudden turn or fast movement
- **Whilst(while):** At the same time
- **Jagged:** Something that is rough and harmful
- **Pelt(ing):** To beat or hit, especially repeatedly. To rain or hail heavily

## ANALYSIS: LINES

### • Stanza One

The poem opens with the first line specifying where the wind is coming from. The wind in question, which is also accompanied by the cloud, is portrayed to have speed and strength:

*“Clouds come hurrying with the wind*

*Turning*

*Sharply*

*Here and there”*

In this stanza, the wind is depicted as being destructive (line 6): **“Like plague of locust”**

A plague of locust inflicts pain and destruction wherever it visits. Take Egypt in the days of Moses for example.

Line 9 tells the reader that the wind is not only destructive, but it has no specific direction or destination.

*“Like a mad man chasing nothing”*

A mad man has no focus in thought, dangerous to anyone around and moves often without a specific abode.



- **Stanza two**

What can one make of a “*pregnant cloud*”? The word, “*pregnant*,” added to the word, “*cloud*,” informs the reader that cloud carries more things that are yet to be unleashed. It moves in line (stately) with the wind and poses a threat (dark sinister winds).

*“Gathering to perch on hills*

*Like Dark sinister winds”*

*The last two lines of the stanza tells us that the wind make noise and forcefully subdue the trees.*

*“The wind whistles by*

*And trees bend to let it pass”*

- **Stanza three**

In this stanza, the image of a village with children and women is created in the mind of the reader. Children appear to be screaming in joy, probably in anticipation of a rainfall or maybe the joy is triggered by the way the wind tosses things.

Nonetheless, in line 21, the children cling to the back of women (their mothers). Looking at the meaning of the word, cling, and the context of usage, it seems that the children are equally afraid.

As the sound of the wind roars and its strength forcing the trees to bend, clothes fly and fall from ropes and even from the women’s body.

*“Clothes wave like tattered flags*

*Flying off*

*To expose dangling breasts”*

For better understanding, try to imagine those windy periods when the wind fling clothes off from the ropes and hanging places.

Then, from line 30 to the end, it seems the pregnant cloud has delivered its offspring as lightening and thunderbolts strike.

## A SONG FOR AJEGUNLE

*Niyi Osundare*

*You stretched out your calloused hands  
 Switched on your weed-infested smile  
 And spread our battled history  
 Like a tattered mat for my calling feet  
 I who like a curious bird  
 Have seen you sprawled out  
 Like an empty bag on the threshold  
 Of Ikoyi's bursting barns  
 Through roads portholed by callous rains  
 Through hovels eaves-deep in swelling pools  
 Through gutters heavy with burdens  
 Of cholera bowels  
 Through he feverish orchestra  
 Of milling mosquitoes  
 I saw you sprawled out  
 I like the daub of apprentice painter  
 Here evenings are pale smokes  
 Sneaking out of idle kitchens  
 The toothless swagger of beer parlours  
 The battering clamour of sweeping wives  
 The satanic rumble of supperless stomachs  
 The salaaming clarion of marching mosques  
 I saw you sprawled out  
 Like a sheath with an absent cutlass*

### ABOUT THE POET

Niyi Osundare was born in 1947 in Ikere-Eikiti, Ekiti State Nigeria. He is a prolific poet and literary critic. He is called Poetic Messiah because of his new breed poems whose style marks him out as fitly messianic. He is also a Professor of English at University of New Orleans, USA, and one of the best-known poets from Africa. His works of published poetry include *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), *Village Voices* (1984), *A Nib in the Pond* (1986), *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), which won both the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize and The Commonwealth Poetry Prize in its year of publication. Osundare published many literary books and essays, he also received many literary prizes and awards including Noma in 1986.

## ABOUT THE POEM

The setting of the poem is Ajegunle, an urban ghetto area located in the heart of Lagos, it is located in the Ajeromi-Ifelodun local government area of Lagos. The community of that area is popularly known as AJ City/AJ.

In A song for Ajegunle, the poet uses images like weed infected, calloused hands, portholes, barns, mosquitoes, weeping wives, idle kitchens, beer parlour, to give readers a picture of the indecent social condition of the place. In They too are the earth, his choice of words presents images of underprivileged citizens in the society.

The use of expressions such as brimming gutters, swansongs of beggars in the first stanza depicts the social condition. **Images of poverty** are portrayed with the use of the phrase snakeskin shoes and that of affluence with Mercedes tyres. His use of language in They too are the earth show a contrast between the rich and the poor in the society. His repetition of They too are the earth in this poem emphasizes the theme of the poem which is that of recognition of the less privileged who are considered insignificant by the society.

## THEME

### Theme of Poverty

Like Dennis Brutus *Nightsong: City*, for example his poem depicts the picture of shanties areas of South Africa where iron-sheets crank. *A Song of Ajegunle* too depicts such image of the *Ajegunle* environs and the social condition the its inhabitants living with.

### Theme of Economic disparities

Unlike Dennis *Nightsong: City*, where White and apartheid doctrine led to the discrimination of the Black Citizens of South Africa. Osundare's *A Song of Ajegunle* depicts the picture of economic disparities of Nigerians in post-colonial period. Mansions were built by the leaders, while citizens live in a worthless life and social condition as *Ajengule* as an example.