

An African Thunderstorm

Matthew Williams • English Literature • March 23, 2026

An African Thunderstorm

From the west

Clouds come hurrying with the wind

Turning sharply

Here and there

Analysis: The clouds are described as moving erratically, creating a sense of urgency and instability. The direction "from the west" subtly introduces the possibility of external intrusion.

Like a plague of locusts

Analysis: The simile "like a plague of locusts" emphasizes destruction and inevitability, suggesting the storm will consume everything in its path.

Whirling,

Tossing up things on its tail

Analysis: The wind is depicted as violent and uncontrolled, leaving disorder behind it as it moves.

Like a madman chasing nothing.

Analysis: The simile "like a madman chasing nothing" conveys chaos without purpose, reinforcing the storm's unpredictability and danger.

Pregnant clouds

Ride stately on its back,

Analysis: The personification "pregnant clouds" suggests fullness and imminent release, implying the storm is about to unleash rain. "Ride stately" contrasts calm appearance with underlying threat.

Gathering to perch on hills

Like sinister dark wings;

Analysis: The simile "like sinister dark wings" presents the clouds as ominous and predatory, suggesting something threatening looming overhead.

The wind whistles by

And trees bend to let it pass.

Analysis: The personification "trees bend to let it pass" emphasizes the overwhelming force of the wind, as nature itself submits to its power.

In the village

Screams of delighted children,

Toss and turn

In the din of the whirling wind,

Analysis: The children's excitement contrasts with the danger, showing innocence and lack of awareness. The noise of the storm overwhelms human sound.

Women,

Babies clinging on their backs

Dart about

In and out

Madly;

Analysis: The frantic movement reflects fear and urgency. Unlike the children, the women recognize the threat and react with panic.

The wind whistles by

Whilst trees bend to let it pass.

Analysis: The repetition reinforces the storm's dominance and relentless force.

Clothes wave like tattered flags

Flying off

Analysis: The simile "like tattered flags" suggests poverty and vulnerability, while also emphasizing the violence of the wind.

To expose dangling breasts

Analysis: The storm strips away dignity and protection, exposing the people physically and symbolically.

As jagged blinding flashes

Rumble, tremble and crack

Analysis: The onomatopoeia "rumble, tremble and crack" recreates the sound of thunder, immersing the reader in the sensory experience of the storm.

Amidst the smell of fired smoke

And the pelting march of the storm.

Analysis: The metaphor "pelting march of the storm" presents the storm as a relentless advancing force, almost military in nature, suggesting invasion and domination.

About the poem

Author: David Rubadiri (1930–2018)

Context: African setting; can be read both as a literal storm and as symbolic of colonial invasion

Core idea: The poem captures the overwhelming force of nature while also suggesting a deeper commentary on invasion, power, and disruption.

- **Main themes**

- Power of nature
- Man vs nature
- Chaos and destruction
- Fear and vulnerability
- Innocence vs awareness
- Colonial intrusion (interpretive layer)
- **Mood:** Tense and foreboding, building toward chaos
- **Tone:** Vivid, urgent, and dramatic

-  **Remember**

- Storm progression: **approach 'build-up 'impact**
- Children vs women shows innocence vs awareness
- "From the west" can hint at colonial reading
- Wind is dominant force. Everything else reacts
- Final image frames storm as organized destruction