



GRADE 12 ENGLISH HL

POETRY NOTES: Poem of Return

21 February 2026

Notes Compiled by Ms J.Govender

4. Poem of Return

Jofre Rocha

POEM OF RETURN – JOFRE ROCHA

- 1 When I return from the land of exile and silence
- 2 do not bring me flowers.

- 3 Bring me rather all the dews,
- 4 tears of dawns which witnessed dramas.
- 5 Bring me the immense hunger for love
- 6 and the plaint of tumid sexes in star-studded night.
- 7 Bring me the long night of sleeplessness
- 8 with mothers mourning, their arms bereft of sons.

- 9 When I return from the land of exile and silence,
- 10 no, do not bring me flowers ...
- 11 Bring me only, just this
- 12 the last wish of heroes fallen at day-break
- 13 with a wingless stone in hand
- 14 and a thread of anger snaking from their eyes.

POET - JOFRE ROCHA

The poet's birthname is Roberto Antonio Victor Francisco de Almeida. He used the pseudonym (also known as a 'war name' in Angola), 'Jofre Rocha'. He was born in 1941 in the village of Caxicane, Angola. He is a qualified Social Scientist, Lawyer, short story writer and poet.

Because of political unrest in rural Angola, where guerilla warfare was taking place, his family moved to Luanda, the capital city of Angola. It is here where he became a political activist. As a political activist, he participated in the guerilla warfare for the liberation of his country. Between 1961 and 1968, Jofre Rocha was a political prisoner. It is at this time that he achieved some of his academic qualifications.

After the independence of Angola in 1975, Jofre Rocha, as an active member of the ruling party, MPLA, held several government positions.

He is the founding member of the Union of Angolan Writers. He has written twenty-two works in seventy-three publications and three-hundred-and-ten library holdings. '**Poem of Return**' is one of his poems inspired by his days in exile from his land of birth, when he was a liberation fighter.

DICTION

Word	Meaning
Land of Exile	Foreign place where one is restricted politically, socially & economically.
Dews	Water droplets forming on surfaces early in the morning.
Drama	Historic scenes of war, torture, protests, bloodshed, riots etc
Immense	Great
Plaint of tumid sexes	Arguments between lovers
Bereft	Without
Wingless stone in hand	A stone that was not thrown yet.

SUMMARY:

The speaker is contemplating his upcoming return to his home country. The speaker mentions his return from exile and the anguish associated with those who died whilst oppressed.

The poem is written from the perspective of an individual who has been exiled, someone who had to flee their country of birth. The poem captures the sentiment of loss, lost opportunity and lost experience. He describes his 'host country' as "**land of exile and silence**" – this suggests that he was not happy there. He lists the things he missed while he was away and it is clear that he feels guilty about 'escaping' whilst his countrymen/women suffered.

He makes it clear that he is not a hero and should not be welcomed or treated as one if he returns. He asserts that the real heroes are the ones who stayed and fought against oppression.

The poet is writing about the **lost opportunities, mourning and sadness brought about by colonialism, exile and war.**

- **Stanza One:**
 - No flowers
 - He does not want the symbols of a returning hero

- He believes that those who carry the physical, emotional, and mental scars of the war of liberation against the oppressors are the true heroes.
- **Stanza Two:**
 - An update on what happened when he was away
 - He wants to be updated on '**dramas witnessed**' by those who stayed at home
 - He needs to feel the pains that these people endured.
- **Stanza Three:**
 - The focus should be on those who died fighting in the war of liberation/ those who did not live to see Independence Day.

FORM/STRUCTURE:

Note that even though this poem has 14 lines, it is **NOT a sonnet**.

There is **enjambment** present (where one line runs onto the next to complete the thought. There is **no punctuation** at the end of the line. Refer to lines 5-6, 7-8, lines 11-14. It has the **qualities of a song** as reflected in the **refrain 'do not bring me flowers**. The poem is divided into THREE stanzas of unequal length. It is written in free verse, more typical of contemporary poetry. In **each one of them the speaker is expressing a different idea/s** about what he **anticipates** when he returned home from exile. A **pseudonym** was used because poet was under **ensorship**.

ANALYSIS

THE TITLE

The speaker is returning to his country. At this stage it is **not known** whether it is a **voluntary or forceful return**.

LINE 1

When I return from the land of exile and silence

When – He is **absolutely certain** that he is going to return to his country. He has not yet returned, but it is inevitable that he will return.

land of exile – the country to which he fled

the land of exile and silence – is the place he is in now. A foreign place where there is **no communication - "silence"**. He has **no contact with his family and friends**. This emphasises the **pain and suffering** he had to endure while in exile as he was isolated.

LINE 2

do not bring me flowers.

do not -**Commanding tone**.

He does not want the **customary gifts** and celebrations that are normally associated with the return of a person from exile.

This emphasises that the speaker feels **guilty** about fleeing his country while other people stayed behind to fight the system. He does not see himself as a hero deserving flowers. **Flowers** are usually associated with a **celebration**, and he feels that this is definitely not a time of celebration: He fled and left the others to fight. Hence, he feels guilty.

STANZA 2 - the poet gives suggestions as to **what can be brought** to “celebrate” his return: **tears, hunger and mourning**, he wants us to remember the reason for his exile.

LINES 3-4

Bring me rather all the dews, tears of dawns which witnessed dramas.

Bring me – **imperative/commanding tone**.

all the dews – an impossible demand. He knows that he **cannot atone for leaving** his people.

dawns which witnessed dramas – dawn is **personified as a weeping witness** to the tragedy that took place as a result of colonisation, exile and loss.

D-alliteration (d- harsh sound) – emphasises the fact that **Nature, too, was horrified** and sad at the oppression of her people.

LINES 5-6

Bring me the immense hunger for love / and the plaint of tumid sexes in star-studded night.

Bring me – **Anaphora(repetition)**

Immense – huge

hunger for love – **natural human connection** that he has missed

Plaint – plea

Tumid – large / swollen

Tumid sexes in start-studded night – romance / intimacy

In these lines, the speaker emphasises the sense of **separation from loved ones and the need for companionship**; the poet highlights the losses experienced due to oppression.

LINES 7-8

Bring me the long night of sleeplessness with mothers mourning, their arms bereft of sons.

long – emphasises that their **pain and suffering** continued for quite some time

Bereft – to be deprived. Many young men (the sons) were **imprisoned or killed**. Some young men also went into exile. They were missed by their mothers.

night of sleeplessness – people were **worried/concerned about the safety** of their loved ones. Mothers were troubled by the death of their sons and family members. Therefore, they could not sleep.

He wants to share the grief of mothers who have lost their sons to the conflict,

STANZA 3 LINES 9-10

When I return from the land of exile and silence, no, do not bring me flowers

The **repetition** of the first two lines of the poem, emphasises that his return **must not be seen as a celebration**. His exile was not a pleasant experience for him, but he did not suffer as much as those who had been left behind.

no, do not – **forceful tone** of the **double negative** emphasises that he does **not** regard himself as a **hero**. He feels **guilty**, he needs to acknowledge their suffering and pain.

LINE 11

Bring me only, just this

Bring me – another **command (imperative)** shows his insistence.
only, just this – the redundancy is used to emphasize that he wants just one thing. Also **emphasises his insistence**.

LINE 12

the last wish of heroes fallen at day-break

the last wish – Their last wish would have been **to see a changed country**.

day-break – the **start of a new day**. This is symbolic of change that the people wanted. In the **political context** of the time, **executions** were **carried out at dawn** and the men who were executed were those who had been **fighting against an oppressive system**. He sees these fighters as heroes for the cause and they “*fall at day-break*”, at the beginning of their lives. These heroes could not see the change because they **died at the brink of change**.

LINES 13-14

with a wingless stone in hand and a thread of anger snaking from their eyes.

wingless stone – **a paradox**. A stone cannot fly; it is **too heavy**. These men never got the chance to “cast their stone”, but paid the **ultimate sacrifice by dying** fighting for freedom, and Rocha wants to remember them and the lost opportunities of those who were forced into exile.

snaking – **connotation of something dangerous** and poisonous. This contributes to a **tone of anger and bitterness**.

and a thread of anger snaking from their eyes – He **demands justice** for all the oppressed people.

Their eyes – reflect only **a small part of the anger at the colonists** who had stolen their land from them.

He does not want to be rewarded with flowers but rather with what he was fighting for.

Their sacrifice needs to be remembered. That which made them angry enough to fight needs to be remembered, and that is the only “gift” he wants when he returns, because he is able to return.

TONE :

- Regret, **sadness**, sombre, loss
- sadness initially, **building up to anger “snaking from their eyes”**
- Militant

- **Earnest tone:**
- To express feelings of alienation/**estrangement when talking about what should happen when he returns home ‘from the land of exile and silence’.**

- **Nostalgic tone:** ○ When he talks about **those at home** what he would like to **hear from them** instead of being given flowers.

- **Humble tone:** ○ When the speaker expresses the fact that he **does not want a heroic welcome** but needs information on the **realities of what happened** during his absence.

MOOD:

Pensive: Engaging in, or **reflecting on** (thinking about) serious issues

THEMES:

- The poet captures the **sentiment of loss:** lost **opportunity** and lost **experience**.
- A poignant poem about the return from exile which should be celebrated but the poet is rather sad, mournful and inevitably becomes filled with anger. Rocha ends on an angry note due to the **lost opportunities and experiences that some young people suffered as a result of colonisation, civil war and exile.**

Question 1: Essay

In the poem ‘**Poem of Return**’ the speaker believes that the people who were not in exile suffered a great deal’

With reference to diction, tone and imagery discuss to what extent do you agree with the above statement. Your response should be in the form of a well-constructed essay of 250-300 words (about 1 page)

TOTAL :10 Marks

Suggested Answer for Question 1 : Essay

The following are points that could be included in in your essay:

The following are points that could be included in your essay:

- People who were not in exile suffered a great deal
- They were subjected to (police brutality, torture, riots etc. ‘dramas’)
- The poet uses personification to show that even nature was distressed by the suffering it witnessed ‘**tears of dawn...**’
- People were deprived of physical connection and overwhelming need for love ‘**bring me the immense hunger for love**’ for each other. Families and couples were separated.
- Mothers are having ‘**long nights of sleeplessness**’ and mourning for the absence of their husbands /sons, who have died fighting for liberation.
- The mothers’ arms are said to be ‘**bereft of sons**’
- Some of them died just before freedom was achieved ‘**day-break**’ and never got to witness the new dawn.
- They died thinking that their attempts were futile.
- They were only disgruntled, powerless as they were equipped only with anger ‘**thread of anger snaking from their eyes**’ and ‘**wingless stone in hand**’
- The speaker uses an **earnest tone** to express feelings of alienation/ estrangement

POEM OF RETURN

Questions and Answers

1. Why does the speaker not want flowers upon his return? (3)
(**Flowers are superficial. He does not want superficial things, he wants emotion. He also does not believe himself to be a hero who deserves flowers or accolades upon his return. He fled and left the others to fight.**)
2. What does the speaker want instead of flowers? Why? (3)
(**He wants tears, hunger, intimacy, mourning and sleeplessness. Flowers are generally celebratory, and this is definitely not a time for celebration. He wants, instead, an acknowledgement of suffering. His return is indicative of something much bigger than just himself.**)
3. Comment on the description of the speaker’s “host country” as the “**land of exile and silence**”. (2)
(**Exile – he fled there to escape from oppression; silence – perhaps he did not speak the new country’s language. He could also have been alone there / isolated / unhappy / no communication with home country or his people.**)
4. Identify and comment on the effectiveness of the figure of speech in “**tears of dawns**”. (3)
(**Personification – even the “dawn” is crying. Even Nature is upset at the atrocities committed by people.**)

5. Why are the mothers “**bereft of sons**” (line 8)? (2)
(Due to the political strife of the time, many young men (the sons) were imprisoned or killed. Some young men also went into exile. Some mothers also couldn't have sons because their husbands/partners were killed or imprisoned. Thus, mothers were denied the presence of sons.)
6. Comment on the figurative interpretation of the “**day-break**” in line 12. (2)
*(The brink of change – the **new day symbolises his hope** that things will change / they will get justice / freedom. It could refer to **those who died so shortly before the oppression ended.**)*
7. Comment on the effectiveness of the anaphora (“**When I return...**”). (3)
*(The title is echoed in the **anaphora**, “When I return”. This emphasises the context of an individual who probably had been forced to flee his home country and had to live in a foreign country for a while. This emphasises the prospect of coming home and his anticipation at the welcome he would get. It is clear that the speaker **feels guilty about having gone into exile whilst his compatriots fought the oppressive system.**)*
8. Discuss the change in tone from stanza 2 to 3. Quote in support of your answer. (3)
*(In **stanza 2** there is a tone of **longing and yearning** – the grief is immense. He cries out for the homeland to meet him with ‘real’ emotions, not flowers, nothing superficial. In the **3rd stanza** the tone shifts to **anger and bitterness**. Although he is happy to be home, he realises the **enormous sacrifice made by some in the struggle for liberation.**)*
9. How does the last stanza successfully convey the speaker’s intention? (3)
*(Cleverly chosen **diction** – “**anger**” and “**snaking**” – implies that although the speaker is happy to be home, he still carries an enormous amount of anger and **resentment towards their oppressors**. He is definitely not forgiving. He seeks and demands **justice for all those who were scarred/killed** in the fight for freedom. “**Snaking**” alludes to something dangerous and poisonous – he will **expose the atrocities** and get justice for all. There is definitely **an ominous tone.**)*