In Exile

Arthur Nortje (1942-1970)

Time is the 1960’s, during Apartheid. The title accurately reflects that the poem is about being “in exile”. The speaker has fled his birth land (on his own accord on an Oxford University Scholarship in the UK) & now lives abroad, in a foreign land. He feels as if he is in exile. He is also in two minds.

Stanzas 1-4: Many images that point to the speaker’s yearning to return to his homeland. These images all suggest the positive & uplifting role of memory in bringing about comfort.

Contrast: The speaker’s dream of “paradise” (line 14) evoked by his efforts to find comfort in memory is contrasted with the awareness that “My heart is/hollowed with the boots of passing time” (lines 7-8).

Image: The speaker’s heart being “hollowed” evokes the notion of the heart (memory) being “hollowed” out. The idea of “the boots passing through” the speaker’s heart imply that memory can no longer be a source of comfort.

Stanzas 5-6: The speaker’s hope of a homecoming is killed off altogether by the facts of how complex the situation is in his home country. These two stanzas presents a reality check.

Conjunction: The speaker “comes down to earth” with the knowledge that he cannot fulfil his deep, nostalgic desire to return home, because of line 17.

Lines 19-20: The same as “build castles in the sea” - a day-dreamer.
The grains that slide away are wind-breathed, are stirred by finger.

Benign, a cloud obscreens the sun, this hunger.

*nimbus – storm-cloud
*transient - passing

Conclusion: The speaker states that “this hunger” for homecoming is “benign” and therefore not dangerous.
What is the poem about?

What is the subject of the poem?
- Time is the 1960’s, during Apartheid. The title accurately reflects that the poem is about being “in exile”. The speaker has fled his birth land (on his own accord on an Oxford University Scholarship in the UK) & now lives abroad, in a foreign land. He feels as if he is in exile. He is also in two minds.
- The poem resolves around the speaker's desire to go back home, and we learn his feelings through his attempts to remember his homeland. Memory is central to the poem.

Who is speaking?
- A man that fled his home land (South Africa) to go live in the UK.

What is the location/setting of the poem?
- Time is the 1960’s, during Apartheid.
- Images of nature throughout the poem (these are the things he remembers of his homeland). Words such as “skies”, “nimbus”, “wind”, “leaves”, “blue-sky”, “wind-beautiful”, “sand”. “sea”, “cloud” and “sun”.

Themes and messages of the poem:
- The poem resolves around the speaker's desire to go back home, and we learn his feelings through his attempts to remember his homeland. Memory is central to the poem.

Attitudes and feelings in the poem:
Emotions and feelings of the speaker:
- The speaker is longing to go back home and tries to remember his homeland.

Tone of the poem:
- Nostalgic and longing in stanzas 1-4; tone of recognition in stanzas 5-6.

Form and structure of the poem (rhyme, rhythm, line length, stanza length, etc.):
- No rhyme scheme - free verse (lines with no prescribed pattern or structure).
- Made up of six stanzas of 4 lines each.
- The lack of rhyme scheme and enjambments let the speaker's thoughts, in this case his memories, flow freely.
- The short stanzas emphasise the fact that his memories are not worth thinking of and that he should no longer long for his homecoming, because it is not a reality any more.
Type of poem:
- Free verse (lines with no prescribed pattern or structure).

Poetic devices (e.g. metaphors, similes, enjambment, alliteration, personification, etc.):
- Explained in the poem above.

Personal response to the poem (how do I feel, what impact does the poem have on me):
- YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE!