

**Classic Poetry Series**

**David Rubadiri**  
**- poems -**

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# David Rubadiri(19 July 1930)

James David Rubadiri is a Malawian diplomat, academic and poet.

At independence in 1964, Rubadiri was appointed Malawi's first ambassador to the United States and the United Nations. On Tuesday August 18th, 1964, he presented his credentials to President Johnson at the White House and expressed the hope that his newly independent country would get more aid from the United States. Ambassador Rubadiri said that Malawi needed help to build its democratic institutions and noted that Malawi was already receiving US economic and technical help. David Rubadiri left the government in 1965 when he broke with President Hastings Banda.

## <b>Education</b>

Rubadiri attended King's College, Budo in Uganda from 1941-1950 then Makerere University from 1952-1956, where he graduated from with a bachelor's degree in English literature and History. He went on to the University of Bristol from 1956-1960, where he received a master of arts degree in English literature.

## <b>Publications</b>

His only novel, No Bride Price was published. The novel criticized the Banda regime and was, along with Legson Kayira's The Looming Shadow, some of the first published work by Malawians.

# An Africa Thunderstorm

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.

David Rubadiri

# Begging Aid

Whilst our children  
Become smaller than guns,  
Elders become big  
Circus Lions  
Away from home.

Whilst the manes age  
In the Zoos  
That now our homelands  
Have become,  
Markets of leftovers,  
Guns are taller  
Than our children.

In the beggarhood  
Of a Circus  
That now is home,  
The whip of the Ringmaster  
Cracks with a snap  
That eats through  
The backs of our being.

Hands stretching  
In a prayer  
Of submission  
In a beggarhood  
Of Elders delicately  
Performing the tightrope  
To amuse the Gate  
For Tips  
That will bring home  
Toys of death.

David Rubadiri

# Death At Mulago

Towers of strength  
Granite  
Enduring  
Like life itself.

Up they rise  
Tall and slender  
And around them  
White coats flit.  
Like the magic they spell.  
New Mulago Hospital  
-the name shakes -  
she stood firmly  
on that cool afternoon  
giving names, tribes and sex,  
a woman clad in busuti.

As the fullstop was entered  
On a white sheet of paper  
A whitecoat gave a nod.

Her hands cross her chest  
And the message unsaid  
Crushing granite and concrete  
In gushing tears of pain  
And a lonely sorrow.

David Rubadiri

# Kampala Beggar

Dark twisted form  
Of shreds and cunning  
Crawling with an inward twinkle  
At the agonies of Africa.

Praying and pricing  
Passers by  
As in black and white  
Jingle pennies past;

A hawk's eye  
Penetrates to the core  
On a hot afternoon  
To pick the victims  
That with a mission  
Dare not look at  
This conflict.

A dollar drops,  
An Indian sulk  
Passively avoids-  
I am stabbed to the core;  
Pride rationally injured.

In the orbits of our experience  
Our beggariness meets  
With the clang of symbols,  
Beggarily we understand  
As naturally we both know  
The Kampala beggar  
Is wise-

David Rubadiri

# Stanley Meets Mutesa

Such a time of it they had;  
The heat of the day  
The chill of the night  
And the mosquitoes that followed.  
Such was the time and  
They bound for a kingdom.

The thin weary line of carries  
With tattered dirty rags to cover their backs;  
The battered bulky chests  
That kept on falling off their shaven heads.  
Their tempers high and hot  
The sun fierce and scorching  
With it rose their spirits  
With its fall their hopes  
As each day sweated their bodies dry and  
Flies clung in clumps on their sweat scented backs.  
Such was the march  
And the hot season just breaking.

Each day a weary pony dropped  
Left for the vultures on the plains;  
Each afternoon a human skeleton collapsed,  
But the march trudged on  
Its Khaki leader in front  
He the spirit that inspired  
He the light of hope.

Then came the afternoon of a hungry march,  
A hot and hungry march it was;  
The Nile and the Nyanza  
Lay like two twins  
Azure across the green country side.  
The march leapt on chanting  
Like young gazelles to a water hole.  
Heart beat faster  
Loads felt lighter  
As the cool water lapt their sore feet.  
No more the dread of hungry hyenas

But only tales of valour when  
At Mutesa's court fires are lit.  
No more the burning heat of the day  
But song, laughter and dance.

The village looks on behind banana groves,  
Children peer behind reed fences.  
Such was the welcome  
No singing women to chaunt a welcome  
Or drums to greet the white ambassador;  
Only a few silent nods from aged faces  
And one rumbling drum roll  
To summon Mutesa's court to parley  
For the country was not sure.

The gate of needs is flung open,  
There is silence  
But only a moment's silence-  
A silence of assessment.  
The tall black king steps forward,  
He towers over the thin bearded white man,  
Then grabbing his lean white hand  
Manages to whisper  
"Mtu Mweupe Karibu"  
white man you are welcome.  
The gate of polished reed closes behind them  
And the West is let in.

David Rubadiri