Letter to Martha Dennis Brutus

DENNIS BRUTUS (b.1924), a noted south African poet has written prolifically

on apartheid. The following poem (no 17) is taken from Letters to Martha written while the poet was in prison. It recounts the poet's experiences in the prison.

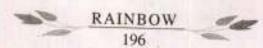


Letter to Martha

In prison
The clouds assume importance
And the birds

With a small space of sky.
cut off by walls
of bleak hostility
and pressed upon by hostile authority
the mind turns upwards
when it can -

- there can be no hope of seeing the stars: the arcs and fluorescents have blotted them out _ the complex aeronautics



of the birds and their exuberant acrobatics become matters for intrigued speculation and wonderment

clichés about the freedom of the birds and their absolute freedom from care become meaningful

and the graceful unimpeded motion of the clouds
_ a kind of music, poetry, dance —
sends delicate rhythms tremoring through the flesh
and fantasies course easily through the mind:

where are they going
where will they dissolve
will they be seen by those at home
and whom will they delight?

LET'S THINK AND DO

1. Why and how do 'the clouds' assume importance in prison?

Does the poem look at the nature or birds in the same way as does Nehru in 'Animals in Prison'? Discuss.

 Can you remember any poem in any language that you know in which clouds play a major role in the speaker's life living in isolation. Translate that poem into English and show it to your friends and your teacher.

