

## *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 trembling 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?
2. Does the poem look at the nature or birds in the same way as does Nehru in 'Animals in Prison'? Discuss.
3. 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.

