Poem of return - Jofre Rocha
About the 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.
About the Poet: Jofre Rocha

- 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.
Summary of the poem

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.

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Summary of the poem

- 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.

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Summary of the poem

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.

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Summary of the poem

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.

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Diction

- 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.
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.
Although 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 the poet was under censorship.
Analysis: Title

Title

“Poem of return”

The speaker is returning to his country. At this stage it is not known whether it is a voluntary or forceful return.
Analysis: 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.
"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.
Analysis: Stanza 2

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.
Analysis: Line 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.
"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,
LINES 7 - 8

“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.
“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.
“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.
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.
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