

Glossary

Elegy — mournful poem focuses on death
Shalt — shall/will do
Miracles — acts of God
Destiny — inescapable fate

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Not mournful reflective + thoughtful

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Hopeful

An African Elegy

Ben Okri (1959-)

Post-modern/colonial/African Poet

Understanding:

The speaker asks the unique African spirit for answers to life's paradoxes. He explores the miracle of what being African means to him: the endurance for suffering, the ability to find joy and beauty in the midst of pain, a spiritual union with nature's bounty, and an irrepressible sense of optimism despite all indicators pointing in the opposite direction. The speaker seems to believe that the tendency to hope and the sensitivity to recognise wonder is a shared trait of Africa's people.

Theme:

One who forgets suffering no longer suffers. Poverty, pain, hope, miracles, destiny, time.

Stages:

1. Grief
2. Sorrow
3. Praise

Form:

Stanza of 5 lines
Regular form with distinct pattern
Variety of line lengths
Short lines—isolated from enclosing lines + tend to stand out for being short
Line breaks add an additional dimension to the interpretation of the poem—promotes multiple interpretations

Sound Devices:

demands to be read aloud. The pauses, bound by the punctuation and line breaks, create a rhythm that contributes significantly to the reader's appreciation and understanding of the poem.

Language Devices:

The poet's diction reflects his interest in African mysticism. He uses words that have religious overtones. He implies that all Africans are able to bear poverty and hardship because they 'are the miracles that God made' (line 1).

1 **We** are the **miracles** that **God made**
2 To taste the **bitter fruit** of **Time**. Metaphor Oxyoron: Bitter but optimis-
3 **We are precious**.
4 And one day **our** suffering
5 Will turn into the wonders of the earth. 'We' + 'our' African culture
6 There are things that burn me now
7 Which turn golden when I am happy.
8 Do you see the **mystery** of our pain?
9 That we bear poverty
10 And are able to **sing** and dream sweet **things** Assonance
11 And that **we never curse the air when it is warm** Sensory imagery
12 Or the fruit when it tastes so good
13 Or the lights that bounce gently on the waters?
14 **We bless** things even in our pain. contrast
15 **We bless** them in silence.
16 That is why **our music** is so sweet.
17 It makes the **air remember**. Personification
18 There are secret **miracles** at work
19 That only **Time** will bring forth. Metaphor
20 I too have **heard the dead singing**. Personification
21 And they tell me that
22 This life is good
23 They tell me to live it gently
24 With **fire**, and always with **hope**. Optimistic Passion
25 There is wonder here
26 And there is surprise
27 In everything the unseen moves.
28 The ocean is full of songs.
29 The sky is not an enemy.
30 **Destiny** is our friend. Metaphor