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An African Elegy

Theme

Hope, pain, suffering, poverty, miracle

Tone

Thoughtful, not mournful, reflective, optimistic

Mood

Hopeful

The title

Elegy is usually written in response to death. The poem talks serious matters and grief. However this is an 'African' elegy. It therefore also speaks about their ability to enjoy life despite of the pain.

Stanza 1

- 1 We are the miracles that God made
- 2 To taste ^{bitter} ~~better~~ fruit of Time
- 3 We are precious.
- 4 And one day our suffering
- 5 Will turn into the wonders of the Earth.

"We" can imply African culture and makes the reader become part of the miracle created by God. "Bitter fruit" is an **Oxymoron**. This implies that life experiences may not always be pleasant. The fruit has connotations of sweetness. "Time" is capitalised as it is personified. This suggests time has the power to expose us to different experiences. Lines 4+5 implies that suffering has the ability to change into something good. It is only through this suffering that we will appreciate the miracles of nature.

Stanza 2

- 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 thing.

"Burn" indicates pain and sorrow. "Now" indicates there is sorrow presently. "Golden" shows something valuable will emerge from suffering. It will allow us to grow into something better. "Mystery" an indication that are experiences are unexplainable. It is also a rhetorical question ~~and search~~ which reminds us it is not necessary to question ~~which~~ and search for meaning. "Bear" shows the burden we carry because of poverty and the endurance showed despite life's difficulties.

Stanza 3

- 11 And that we never curse the air when it is warm
- 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
- 15 We bless them in silence

In this stanza each negative idea is countered by a positive reaction. "curse the air" is like cursing God. We project our anger onto God in like difficult times. "Fruit" is a metaphor and life is compared to a fruit. We don't curse life when it is good. Line 3 As long as life is flowing in a way that shows happiness, we are hopeful. Africans count our blessings.

Stanza 4

- 16 That is why our music is so sweet
17 It makes the air remember
18 There are secret miracles at work
19 That only Time will bring forth
20 I too have heard the dead singing

"Our music is so sweet" suggest other elements bring joy and that other miracles are happening to add to sweetness. "Air remember" **personification**. Links back to "We never curse the air" [Stanza 3] since the air will represent the supernatural. "Miracles" associated with the spiritual world. "Time" **Metaphor** suggests time as a mythical figure and has the power to heal all suffering and to turn things golden. Line 20 **personification**. Speaker continues the next stanza with the advice from the ancestors

Stanza 5

- 21 And they tell me that
22 This life is good
23 They tell me to live it gently
24 with fire, and always hope
25 There is ~~mon~~ wonder here

"They" are the 'dead' mentioned before. In African culture much respect is given to the ancestors. "Life is good" this is **ironic** as before it mentioned the suffering and poverty experienced. "Fire" represents passion. "Hope". The desire for change will bring hope. "wonder" Alludes to the miracles

Stanza 6

- 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.

"Surprise": The miracles and wonder of life "unseen moves": The hidden miracles that happen "ocean": The vastness of the world. "Songs" could be life experiences. Or the ocean is being compared to the sweetness of music. It is this music that can perhaps conceal the bitterness and hardships. The possibilities for a positive outcome are endless. "sky" is representation of heavens or God. After death our soul will depart the physical body and ascend to God. This encourages us to embrace whatever difficulties come our way. "Destiny" is a **metaphor** that shows us we will never know what lies ahead. It is our choice to treat it as a friend. This is how Africans are and put their trust in God during good times and bad times.

Structure

The poem is in free verse and has no particular rhythm or rhyme scheme. There is a lot of enjambement.