

Ben Okri's aphorisms:

"Music on the wings of a soaring bird"



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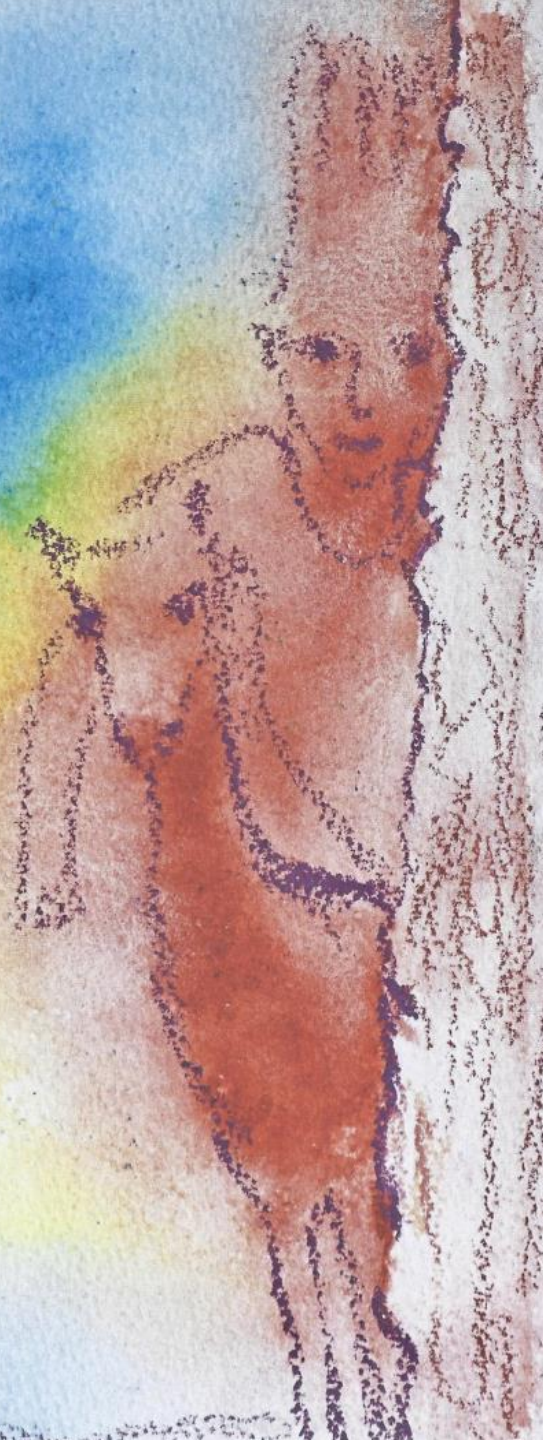
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“Music on the wings of a soaring bird”



My title is from *The Magic Lamp* (2017), an intersectional text featuring Rosemary Clunie’s art and Ben Okri’s ontopoietic prose. This paper traces the trajectory and suggests the import of Okri’s blueprints for regaining our true state of being: his aphorisms in *Birds of Heaven* (1996), *A Time for New Dreams* (2011) and *Callaloo* (2015). Reviving a wisdom corpus from antiquity, these are guidelines to counter postmodernity’s obsession with the pleasure principle, fast living and hyper-connectivity: “And out of the wilderness/ The songbird sings/ ‘Nothing is what it seems./ This is a time for new dreams’” (2011). The quintessence of aphorisms is their pithy wisdom that provides fertile ground for new connections, new depths, and new transversals; for the alchemy of ‘serendipity’. A fragment in *Birds of Heaven* highlights the moral purpose of Okri’s aphorisms: “It is precisely in a broken age that we need mystery and a re-awakened sense of wonder: need them in order to be whole again.”

2017




The
**MAGIC
LAMP**

Dreams of Our Age

**BEN
OKRI**

with paintings by
ROSEMARY CLUNIE



Wisdom reigns in hidden symmetry
And colours are but charmed invisibility.

What lingers in the soul
Often bypasses the eye
And the birds of heaven, without wings
– How much more sublimely do they fly.
(Stanza 4)

...to weave adages deftly and appropriately is to make the language as a whole glitter with sparkles of Antiquity, please us with the colours of the art of rhetoric, gleam with jewel-like words of wisdom, and charm us with titbits of wit and humour. In a word, it will wake interest by its novelty, bring delight by its concision, convince by its decisive power. ([1540]1982: 17)

The trajectory of Okrian aphorisms



The book cover features a vibrant, painterly illustration. In the upper right, a large, bright green and yellow crescent moon is set against a dark, starry night sky. Several pink and white flowers with red centers are scattered across the upper left and center. The background is a mix of deep blues, greens, and yellows, suggesting a celestial or dreamlike atmosphere. The title 'BEN OKRI' is written in large, white, serif capital letters across the middle. Below it, the subtitle 'BIRDS OF HEAVEN' is written in smaller, white, serif capital letters. A small, five-pointed star is visible in the bottom right corner of the illustration.

BEN OKRI

BIRDS OF HEAVEN



A TIME
& FOR NEW
DREAMS

BEN OKRI

The Booker Prizewinning Author of *The Famished Road*



Callaloo



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BEN OKRI
Photo by Geraint Lewis

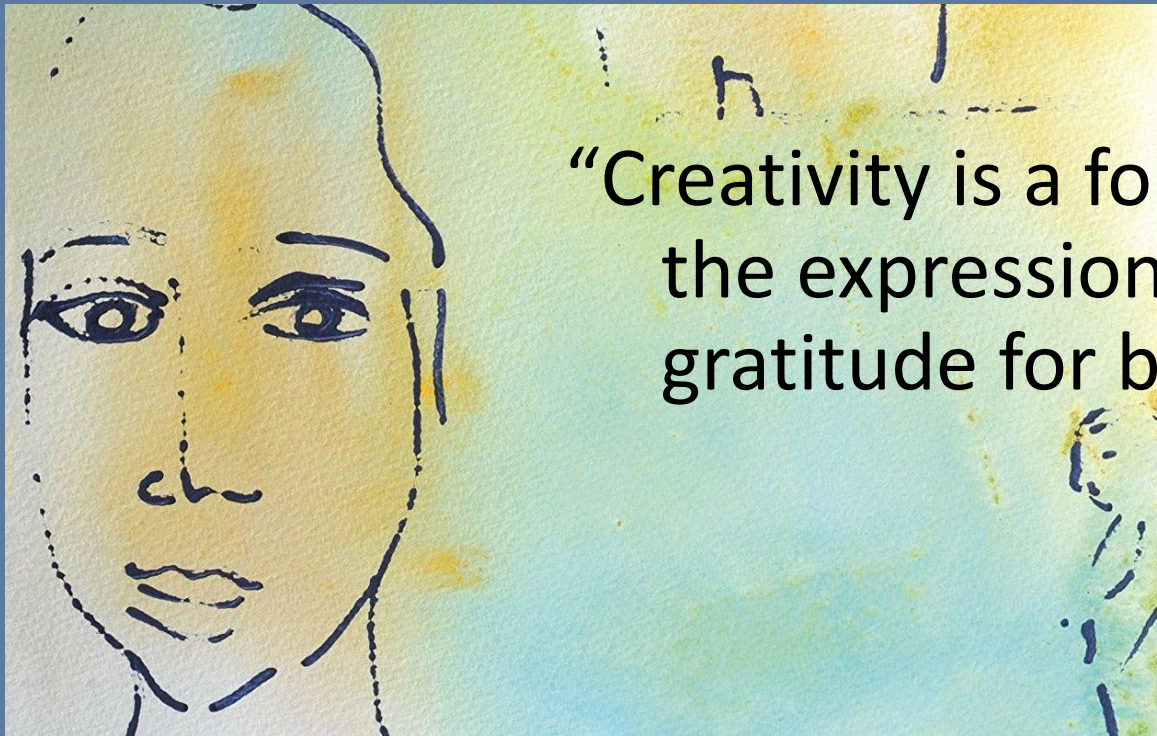
BEN OKRI

A Special Issue

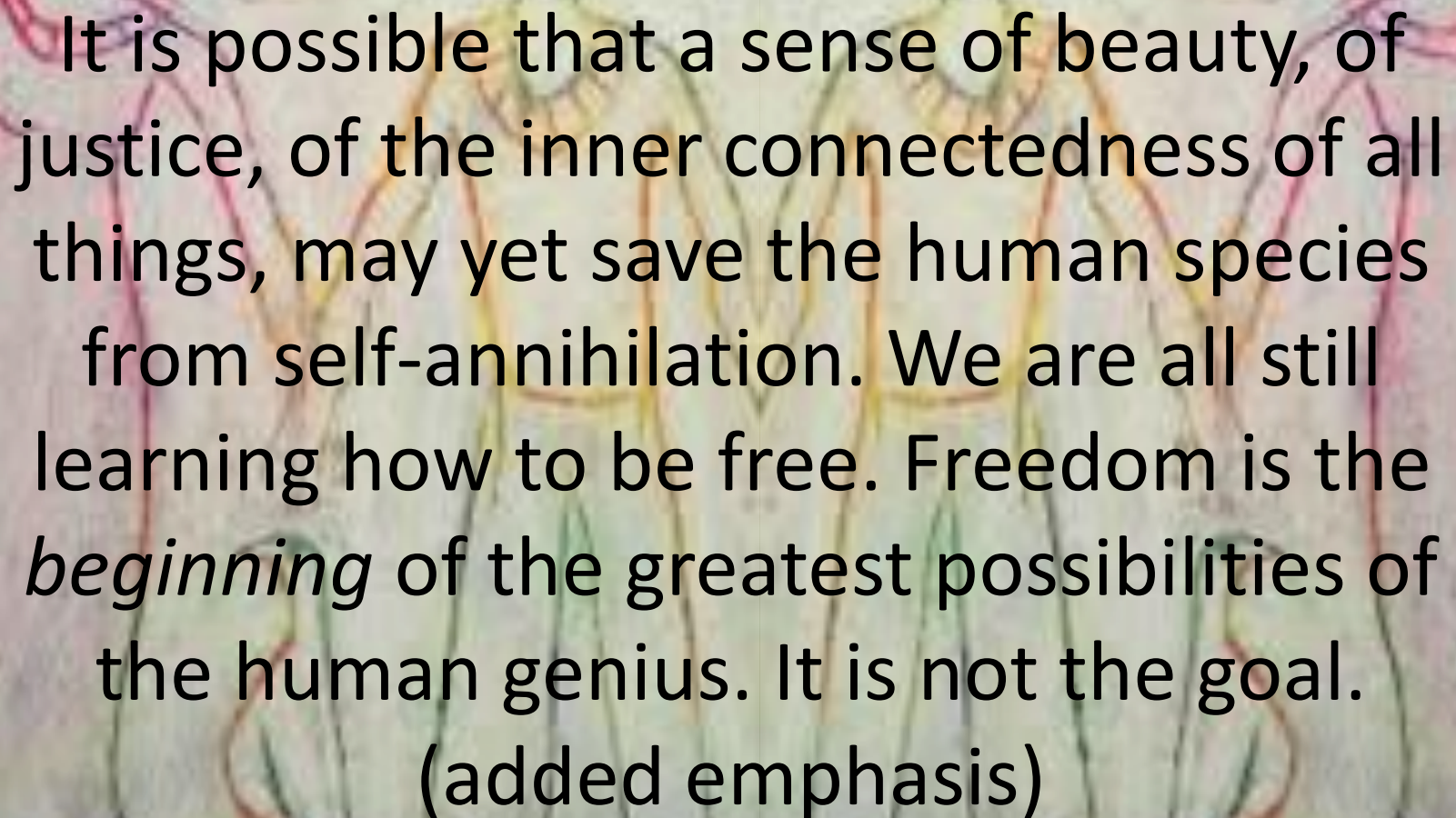
“Love is the greatest creativity of them all, and the most blessed.”

“Creativity is love, a very high kind of love.”

“Humility is the watchword at creativity’s gate.”



“Creativity is a form of prayer, and the expression of a profound gratitude for being alive.”

The background of the image is a colorful, abstract drawing. It features four figures with large, stylized heads and long, flowing hair. The figures are arranged in a row, with the two outer figures having more prominent, sun-like heads with many radiating lines. The two inner figures have more elongated, flame-like heads. The colors used are primarily red, orange, yellow, and blue, with some green at the bottom. The overall style is reminiscent of a child's drawing or a folk-art style.

It is possible that a sense of beauty, of justice, of the inner connectedness of all things, may yet save the human species from self-annihilation. We are all still learning how to be free. Freedom is the *beginning* of the greatest possibilities of the human genius. It is not the goal.
(added emphasis)



“THINK DIFFERENTLY,” he shouted, “AND YOU WILL CHANGE THE WORLD.”.

No one heard him.

“REMEMBER HOW FREE YOU ARE,” he bellowed, “AND YOU WILL TRANSFORM YOUR HUNGER INTO POWER.”



Artwork by Rosemary Clunie
<http://www.rosemaryclunie.com>