

Book Review

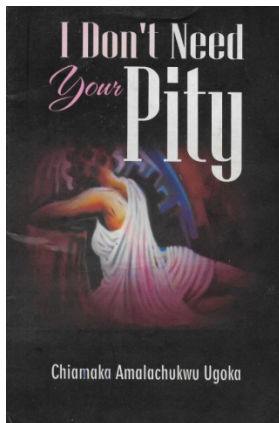
Title: I Don't Need Your Pity: Collection of Sounds and Motions
Genre: Poetry
Author: Chiamaka Amalachukwu Ugoka
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I Don't Need Your Pity: Collection of Sounds and Motions is an anthology of poetry with a range of thematic interests, the major themes, being the daily struggles confronting humanity and uncertainties, resident in man's existence or journeys. It appears that the unifying thesis of interest in Chiamaka Ugoka's collection is the title, which is within the tramlines of personal experience and expeditions. The work's titular poem gives off the feeling of emotions of pathos and invulnerability. Moreover, the rest of her poems exude thought-provoking and didactic

memoirs of the living, dead, friends, relatives, mentors, acquaintances, journeys, motives, hopes, identities, aspirations and social commentaries; some of which relate directly to the poet, her environment and the readers.

Interestingly, the poet assumes the responsibility of a choral versifier whose simplicity, rests in the deploying of ideas that are commendably impactful. At some points, she speaks for the voiceless, the disabled, the sojourner, the dreamers, the hopeless souls, storyteller, champion, fighter and the scholar. At other points, she philosophically digresses to issues of public discourse and inquiries. Remarkably, one of her most iconic poems ‘I don’t need your pity’ reflectively captures the piteous feelings directed towards her personality. Indeed, she appears undaunted by the reactions she gets from public sympathy towards her physical wellbeing:

Mellowed eyes with tears of pity
looking unjust fault that is not mine.
Thinking sprinkled you away,
like a Monday owl perching at the window of
Eze the troubleshooter.
Is your care really meant for me?

Why should I need your pity?
Why should I wait for your pity?
Heavens know I don’t need it.
Earth knows I can do without it.

Your pity cracks no kernel of my worries.
Your justful hands scare no change in me...

Structurally, the anthology divides into four major parts – ‘Standing Times,’ ‘Willing Hills,’ ‘My Portrait’ and ‘Six for the Days’. Each of these headings has succeeding poems under them. They are free verses. Her eloquent style of writing is somewhat tear-ridden or lachrymal. The first, and perhaps, the most salient part of the divisions ‘Standing Times’ accommodates six poems, presented as tributes or encomium, recounting the historical contributions and ingenious literary legacies of eminent scholars in their intellectual musings. Chinua Achebe, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Ikemefuna Christopher Obizoba, Greg Mbajiogu and Fidelis Okoro enjoy the poet's

eulogy for their humanity, socio-political and cultural commitment, and rarity towards galvanizing society for progressive transformation. ‘The Village Bard Speaks No More’, ‘The Ikolo is Gone’, ‘Beyond Measures’, ‘Things Completely Fall Apart’ and ‘Charity’. The most engaging poems are ‘The Village Bard Speaks No More’, and ‘The Ikolo is gone’. The former is dedicated to Achebe while the latter is devoted to Ohaeto. In ‘The Village Bard speaks No More’, the poet-persona takes a reminiscent journey through Achebe's works and the discursive issues prevalent in them. Suggestively, Achebe’s death as an icon of letters has enabled a lacuna within which only new voices can help to bridge. This notion resonates in the succeeding lines:

...Our homes have been deserted
Our hut has been burnt.
What we realized in our father’s land
is the Anthills of the Savannah.
We shouted, our voices are not heard.
We shivered, we are not pitied.
We presented ourselves as Sacrificial Egg.
Yet our land is No Longer At Ease...

The poet-persona feels that the new bards should fill the vacuum left by the old bards. In ‘The Ikolo is gone’, the poet evokes the creative ingenuity of Ohaeto in his masterpiece, particularly in the late poet’s recourse to witticism in the interplay between Pidgin and English languages for political consciousness:

...If to say I be soldier
I will not intone
faithful, loyal, honest
in the missile’s bra.
I will not tutor the keys
to clog the honour in glory
I will not thumb holy self pledge....

The second section ‘Standing Times’ introduces ‘Beasts of no nation’, which examines contemporary discourse on nation-building. ‘The wounded crucifix’, ‘My 21st marriage amendment’, ‘The crying womb’, ‘The journey of seven lambs’, and “The life I am not for” are

poems that largely betray a plethora of melancholic accounts of childbirth, sorrows, choice and human voyage. 'My Portrait' has a personal poem, portraying the poet's muse for her guardian, ambition, fate and idols/admirers. In 'My naval watchmen', the poet-persona dedicates the poem to Mrs Omelebele Gloria Ugoka, for her care and sincere nurturing, which formed the crux of her being. 'There with me' passionately recounts the fondness and memories of the subject Obianiju Onyinye Ugoka. 'I don't need your pity', 'What will be will be', 'All I want is my voice', 'My Moment', 'I go rise', and 'Garmented figures' are poems mirroring the poet's desire to be heard, her personal and direct life encounters. The final division 'Six for the days', houses poems such as 'The twin', 'The dreaming candle', 'My admirer', and 'Identities'.

The language is realistic, delightful, lucid and free-flowing. There is the use of poetic elements – repetition, metaphors and alliterations. There are non-English words in some poems, which are likely to pose a challenge to foreign readers unfamiliar with the language. However, the book provides a timely remedy by the array of word-glossary offered at the end. Although some poems tend to veer off the track in their thematic sense and harmony, the average reader can deduce them, coupled with the meanings projected without difficulty. Above all, the entire work is in itself a unique piece of creativity, conjured up from the poetic muse of a promising female bard.