

INTRODUCTION

Mma may be read as, universally, a tribute to souls that stand on 'bended knees' humble and submissive before the sublime infinity of their maker and, particularly, a dedication to many years of fruitful service through life's transitional phases offered by the major inspirer of these verses, the great 'Mma Teacher' herself.

It also affirms the conviction of our generation that good poetry comes through in the greater feeling, an often neglected aspect –neglected, that is, by its subjugation under rigorous theoretical preconditions– of human creativity lost at times in the pursuit of labyrinthine dissociations by and to the delight of many academic schools.

To this end we probably owe to the Romantics –if the appellation may be tolerated– the constant negotiation of the capability of the emotive response over the insipid formalism that would only ultimately becloud the creative expression of any artist who makes the mortal error of taking those myriad theories and schools with no more than a deserved pinch of salt in the course of his or her creative endeavours.

Etiowo encapsulates this sublime triumph of essence over precept at the point of her early encounter when the confusion that 'frighten(s)' and 'stiffen(s)' her nerves becomes, much later with the bold plunge into its depths, 'a nourishment' of self and a 'discovery' of channels of imagination which the 'assemblage of

words' offers both the creative writer and her listener. She also mourns of our 'hero(es)' who by their legacies prod us to reflect on our bond of kinship and affinity, no matter how distant, with their rare existence, and the natural feelings of loss that come with our final separation from them.

An exhortation is worthy at this juncture which is that the *Mma* collection is read not so much for the intent to correct perceived notions as the one among many expressions that challenge the aesthetic and cognitive appeal of the individual within the macrocosm.

Touching communal base such as can be evident in these poems often does not fail to take in its sweep the political environment. In this case modern Nigeria offers the spatial particularity from which the centre revolves through other equally valid dimensions of life. Here we are reminded of the three Rs in 'The Cry' that are part of the Nigeria's national monuments of 'dreams destroyed' But as the product of the visioning is not inured in bashful memories, there is a balance of feeling which gives one the satisfaction that our poetry can be temperate even as 'we decry/...our obsession(s).' Thus even as

dogs have their meals
in silver plates
and humans beg
for unequal portion

we can celebrate friends that wipe our 'tears of lust and pain/sharing (our) mat of sorrow.' We can dedicate our grateful hearts to an icon like Mma herself who is mother of not only one but all those whose paths had crossed with hers in the inspiring course of her exemplary life. Poetry here returns to its primordial ancestral roots as both the art of teaching and the pleasure of expression for both poet and readers alike.

As a maiden attempt Joy Etiowo's *Mma* is an encouraging work that one can only hope will earn further mention when she sharpens the edges of her craft with, perhaps, some other sequel or addenda to these burgeoning repertoire.

Chin Ce
Ghana, W. Africa