

My Conversations: Collection of Essays

Peter Obidike

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The personal essay collection My Conversations lays bare the reflections of an active, seeking mind.

Peter Obidike's wide-ranging essay collection *My Conversations* reflects on food, family, and Nigerian politics.

Written over the course of a decade, the entries of this motley assembly of online musings on a variety of subjects were first posted in Yahoo Groups, on Facebook, and on a personal website. They often feature humor, advice, and every day lessons. Their subjects include books, including some by Malcolm Gladwell and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; organized religion; the pleasures of sleeping; and the death of a Nigerian radio host. The book also covers issues in the US with surprising frequency, including the country's health care system and presidents. Many entries are confined to their moments, covering heat waves and a new stadium.

Organized by theme, the book is divided into broad sections: contemporary works, food and family, and politics. It hops between subjects, becoming a potpourri of observations and ideas. Additionally, the entries are shared in nonchronological order. They are casual and conversational, and their humor is endearing, as when Obidike dreams about his eventual celebrity status, in a time when "net words" translate to a new net worth.

But the more personal the entries are, the more loose they become. They meander between thoughts, and their discursiveness holds the audience at a distance. Others pile clichés and muddled references into short spaces, as with a nod to Stephen Hawking's theory of the curvature of time, which is used to reflect that history repeats itself, and that people only use a fraction of their brains. The book also misquotes iconic pop cultural lines.

Didactic but friendly, the book dispenses general advice as well. But its recommendations skew banal, as with tips to plant trees around one's home, to eat more fruits and vegetables, to pursue adult education, and to protect one's home with closed-circuit television systems. It also compiles recommendations from others, including civil engineers, construction consultants, and French perfumers. Its provision of contact information, considered alongside its occasional tones of self-promotion, is too open.

Off-putting rants are included in the collection, as with an entry that expresses annoyance with road designs; with harsh words toward a driver who blocked the street at a gas station; and with gripes about having to drive one's kids to school. In covering political topics, the book is too vehement, engaging in name-calling, accusations, and credibility-compromising exclamations. That the book ends with an already dated series of political opinions further undermines it: it closes with an essay that outlines personal hopes for 2019. Spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors are prevalent throughout, as are distracting changes to the book's formatting.

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JOSEPH S. PETE (June 5, 2022)

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