

Summerday

Andy Chiveto

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In the reverential poetry collection Summerday, each word serves the purpose of illuminating faith.

Andy Chiveto's thoughtful poetry collection *Summerday* traces a personal spiritual evolution.

Summerday is a collection of poems that evolved over a thirty-year period. In the detailed preface, Chiveto describes how his early writing was done on scraps of paper during his youth in Zimbabwe and covers the process of revising these drafts to reflect his developing Christianity. Distinct and heartfelt, the resultant entries are inquisitive; many express faith. Still, they are diverse in terms of their subject matters, settings, and perspectives, though Zimbabwean landscapes and customs form the basis of many. Words in the Shona language appear often—in particular, terms for the titles of God: *Mwari* means “supreme being”; *Ishe* means “one who rules.” A brief glossary of Shona words appears after the preface to help situate unfamiliar audiences in the book's context.

At its heart a book of praise poems, *Summerday* is directed by reverence and solemnity grown from a rich cultural base. The poems are organized into thematic sections, including “Nature” and “Dreams,” that are prefaced by vague explanations of their particular contexts: “Our life experiences are reflected in nature's seasons,” one notes, while another says that it aims to “take people through different seasons of life experiences.” “Afrikanness” includes poems of both celebration and mourning for Zimbabwe as a country and a culture. “Jit” describes community dancing to pounding *jit* music that sweeps everyone into its rhythm, even elders who “ululate and whistle.” The music's power is mimicked in the rhythm of the lines, whose words become wistful and move toward the wish that the community members will seek *Mwari*.

Elsewhere, “Tragedy of a Country” embraces paradoxes, asking “Would a man sell a country / Just to fill his stomach with rot?” and “Can dry tears of millions, / Fill the oceans with sadness?” Fresh images and provocative ideas arise throughout, paired with metaphors, flourishes, visual messages, and philosophical statements. A train is a “steel centipede,” and child soldiers are “orphaned into premature adulthood.” “Malady of Corruption” takes a global view, decrying the spread of greed “across cultures like a veldt fire.”

Slant rhymes are used to creative musical effect, as in “Genesis”: “At genesis, the world was spiced, / With beauty, exquisiteness, might.” However, awkward phrasing also arises, as with “to dream again a world without maim,” and several superfluous pages of aphorisms conclude the book.

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MICHELE SHARPE (January 30, 2024)

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