

Book Review

Ikpi, Bassay. *I'm Telling the Truth, but I'm Lying*

New York: Harper Perennial, 2019, pp. 272.

This book includes a collection of autobiographical essays by a Nigerian-American writer, spoken-word poet, and mental health advocate Bassay Ikpi. In the text, the author narrates the difficult experience of a black woman dealing with a psychological illness. The book describes how the author's life drastically changes after moving to Oklahoma from her homeland Nigeria. Ikpi had a troubled relationship with her mother, predominantly due to the stern behavior and workaholic nature of her mother. The text also gives an account of how her mother's obsession with her having a successful career creates a mounting distance between two of them. As a result of that, Ikpi leaves her home at an early age. Hence, the writer describes how a problematic relationship with her family and living alone from a young age further deteriorates her mental health.

At the age of twenty-eight, Ikpi is diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder II and persistent anxiety. The realization of consuming the prescribed medicines "for the rest of her life," after her diagnosis, keeps her in denial of her condition for some time. She expresses her desire to be seen as a functioning individual and not being labelled as "crazy" and deformed. The essays thus give details of her struggles to cope with the disorder and finding "normalcy" once again in her life. However, when she fails to find it the author challenges the idea of normalcy and aims to educate her readers to become more acceptable towards mentally ill people by providing an account of her own concealed emotions and sufferings.

The recollection of her memories is in a non-linear form and contains flashbacks of happy days in her hometown which she calls "a patchwork of feelings and sensations." Ikpi's remarkable writing style, which results from her poetic skills, gives her an edge of writing a painful narrative in a beautiful way. Her narrative style, especially, the use of internal monologue, provides a more genuine experience about the thought processes of a person dealing

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with a psychological illness. Therefore, Ikpi's prose is captivating for the readers as it gives glimpses of what happens beneath "the façade of a confident performer when their brain starts malfunctioning."

Ikpi's memoir is quite valuable and inspiring as it allows the readers to sympathize effectively with the individuals struggling to survive mental illnesses. The structure of this memoir is interesting as it reflects the inconsistent thinking patterns of the author during the episodes of hypomania and depression. Her writing style, for that reason, is praiseworthy as it brings to the surface her true feelings and turmoil which otherwise would be impossible to perceive for the readers. However, the details of obscene imagery in the text are of little use and they distract the readers from the actual problem of writer's inability to maintain healthy relationships before her diagnosis. The details about the physical aspects of the author's relationships seem unnecessary and therefore should be kept private. In a nutshell, Ikpi's work is useful for the people who are concerned to know more about the difficulties of people who are subject/susceptible to mental illnesses.

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