

BOOK REVIEWS

Manyobonyobo - D.P. Moloto, *Via Africa, Johannesburg, 1985*,
pp. 122, price P6.00.

The book portrays and captures neatly a modern African life beset by political and social problems, both at general and individual levels. Both the trends of traditional and modern democratic government of a community are assimilated, whereby a traditional society like a municipal council has its ruling members elected and not born into their positions. It is against this background that the themes of whatever the case, in the final analysis, good will always triumph over evil', or 'truth over fallacy' and that of 'measure for measure' are presented.

The leader of the community who had ruled his community with uncompromising strictness with regard to social morals falls victim to his own laws, though not through his fault or action directly; but through his child's action. He had preened himself in morals; in fact his rule was perfectionistic and puritanical and many a subject of his had suffered a severe punishment for even a minor moral fault. The irony here is that the leader was oblivious of the fact that he was just as human as his own subjects and therefore equally vulnerable to the effects of social change as they were. Through the action of his daughter, which for him was a scandal, he found himself in a worse position than any one had ever been regarding the contamination of the community as a result of an imperceptible social change which had overtaken him. The moral sin

committed by the daughter had, looked at according to his laws, defiled the community and deserved the worst punishment. The daughter had violated her virginity and become pregnant whilst at school and worst still the born child who had to be kept as a closely guarded secret by Kgomo (the leader) and his wife, was a progeny of a white and a black. This is the event around which the main conflict of the novel devolves. For this, the leader's position was threatened and he had to work hard to retain it.

On the other hand this social accident was used for campaigning against the leader by the sycophant aspirants of the position of leadership-aspirants who were not interested in the welfare of the people but in themselves. In their campaigning they defeated their own ends by distorting all the truth about Kgomo, (the leader) for though Kgomo was a hard and strict ruler, he was only cruel in order to be kind. The book portrays all this picture of life imaginatively and artistically well by a deft stroke of irony which is two pronged-situational and scornful. The scornful irony is given an upper hand over the situational one, because the theme of 'measure for measure', which is contained in the situational irony, is not brought to its logical conclusion. In stead, it is later romanticised, suspended, and overtaken by the theme of 'good versus evil' or 'truth versus fallacy' which concludes the novel. The action of the novel followed from the beginning to the end, has a thematic significance. It is the one in which the ironies of the text are tugged. The book does not succeed only by the balanced deployment of its structural elements and the deep insight into its themes by the author, but also by the excellence of its narrative technique. The successful blending of its narrative elements i.e. (description, scene and summary) and the dovetailing of its various aspects attribute to its towering above Mokwena and Moji Motlhabi which tend to over-indulge in description, summary and authorial intrusion at the expense of scene and dialogue; and Motimedi which though structurally was a great improvement on the two works mentioned above has a poorly constructed plot in its latter part which in turn vitiates characterisation.

Because of the skillful harnessing of dialogue and scene, punctuated by relevant and brief summary or description at appropriate moments, supported also by the setting, the story is *lent immediacy and effectiveness* unlike the stories of Mokwena and Moji Motlhabi which by *excess of summary and insufficiency of scene* are remote and without bite.

The novel makes immediate appeal to the current readership because it communicates experience about the current issues and problems.

Although the diction of the book is clear and less cumbersome for both young and matured readers, it does not attain the standard of Mokwena's in richness and quality.

A suitable text for study at both High School and University levels.

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