



The Coming-Of-Age Concept In B.K.M. Mtombeni's *Mibya Ya Nyekanyeka*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of coming-of-age, invariably called bildungsroman, induction and apprenticeship literature centres around literary creations that have been written as narrations of developmental or growth novels. The novels normally narrate stories of young protagonist developing in various ways that may encompass physical growth, spiritual growth, artistic development and the like. In this paper, the writer is going to explore developmental trajectories experienced by the youth in Mtombeni's *Mibya ya Nyekanyeka*. The study used a qualitative research approach in the collecting and analysis of collected data. The 'Coming-of-Age' concept served as a conceptual framework for the study. The study found that development is a very critical and delicate transition to both the protagonists in question and their respective parents who spent their lovely years worries about the quality and fate of their siblings.

Keywords: bildungsroman, Mthombeni, Tsonga, development, Coming-of-Age.

Introduction

The Coming-of-Age genre, being a genre that is popularly considered to be of German origin is a fascinating genre that charts the development of a young protagonist from either being a young child usually for boys, and from an adolescence stage for girls, until they reach maturity. Some writers see such genres as "novel(s) whose principal subject is the moral, psychological, and intellectual development of a usually youthful main character" (Brändström, 2009: 4), and "the novel of personal development..." (The Free Dictionary). These stages of development, it is conceded, are full of troubles of various types and growth challenges that at times come as gender specific developmental challenges.

The male and female growth disparities: Challenges and Privileges

It is widely believed that the development of male and female characters in a Coming-of-Age genre differs in critical ways. Male characters are usually seen as fictional personalities endowed with the freedom to do what they want in society. Like real human males, they are free to move in search of greener pastures, unlike females who are often confined to the home to perform domestic chores. This gendered disparity is well articulated by Halberstam (1998: 938) in the following way:

If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage (much celebrated in ... literature in the form of the bildungsroman), and an ascension to some version (however attenuated) of social power, for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression.

The difference between the social and physical development between the dichotomous genre characters clearly reflects how the social systems that be in the real world are cascaded into the mirror portrait of the literary genres. Thus, giving credence to the notion that literature is not divorced from the society from which it is hewn, but reflects the ideologies of the people for which it is meant to be consumed.

As indicated above, the growth route of a female character is characterised by the exclusion from the mainstream society and its core activities. She is limited and excluded by not being involved in critical decision

making even where the outcome should affect her. In the Eighteenth century, the construction of the concept of rationality was such that females are excluded from it since its scope was thought to transcend femininity (Lloyd 1993) according to Šnircová (2017: 17), “Eighteenth century philosophy constructed the concept of rationality ... providing a conceptual basis for both the association of advanced reason with maleness and the exclusion of women from the public domain”. This scenario provides a window through which one can see the place of females in societies. It is also clear how females have for long being viewed as less human by their male counterparts.

Conceptual Framework

The bildungsroman concept will be used as a conceptual framework to buttress the study. The term bildungsroman, being of German origin has ‘bildung’ which means formation and ‘roman’ means novel. The concept traces the development of protagonists in literary works, with a focus on the various challenges that they encounter from childhood to maturity. Thamarana (2015: 23) clarifies the term in the following way:

The term bildungsroman was coined in 1817 by Karl von Morgenstern but not commonly applied until the end of the 19th century and it flourishes through the middle decades of the nineteenth century, both in England and the United States.

The term bildungsroman, being of German origin has ‘bildung’ which means formation and ‘roman’ which means novel (Thamarana, 2015: 23), and therefore details the formation of a character in creative writings. The conceptual framework will assist the writer in developing the current study which is a similar version in Xitsonga. It will assist in analysing and making comparisons on the growth trajectories of coming-of-Age characters.

Summary of the Text

Mibya ya Nyekanyeka is a Coming-of-Age novel that charts the development of two boys, Madambi and Nyiko, sons to Pastor Tlhomadloti. Tlhomadloti desired to see his two sons living according to his instruction and be as exemplary as possible in society as is befitting to sons from a Christian family. Between the two sons, Nyiko was not good at school, but Madambi was very good despite the fact that he was always untidy. Even though Nyiko was not good at school work, he was such a tidy and presentable boy. After they graduated at University of the North, Nyiko, like his father did a pastoral course while Madambi did a course among fellow believers within his Church. Another character is Cheyeza Baloyi whose son Celela hated both attending school and attending church services. Celela ended up being shot while stealing from a white person’s premises and eventually passed on. After school, Madambi starting working while Nyiko was tasked to pastor a congregation at Meadowlands. Madambi fell in love with Soluka, A Xhosa girl but Tlhomadloti turned their ties down on allegations that he cannot not have grandsons that are both Tsonga and Xhosa.

Literature Review

Šnircová, (2017) explores the presentation of females in Coming-of-Age genres by embodying how females are treated unfairly by the systems that be. The juxtaposition of the male and female option of the bildungsroman throws light upon the treatment disparities that society affords to both girls and boys. It is pointed out that males enjoy public space while females suffer restrictions and depravity to mobility. In the article, it is clear that the views of society upon females is that mature and profitable reasoning that normally culminates in the construction of society can only be taped from males and not females - the immature state of consciousness. This ideological mindset is the major cause for the construction of modern societies in females are the “other” side of humanity.

Mapindani and Chauke (2016) explore the female option of the coming of Age genre through an analysis of the Tsonga novel *Ndzi ngo Tinciki!* by Thuketana. The article points out how females, among the Vatsonga are subjected to patriarchal repressions early enough in their development, and how such oppression escort them through to maturity. The writers embodies how society treats males and females differently thus:

That 'man' means boss and 'woman' means subordinate avails a determining epicentre of all the strenuous and hacking news that break today's social networks. Because conditions for self-development are vastly different for women (psychologically and culturally), the process leading to selfhood and creative self-assertion consequently varies from that of the male counterpart and his quest toward actualization (p. 6705)

The exempt makes it visible that the social impediments that thwart females are the same that open wide for masculine supremacy and autonomy. The writers explore Chifunyise’s (1998) assertion, by saying “for this

cause, girls tend to have negative concepts about themselves and as a result, carry along with them limited aspirations about their future live”.

Svensson (2009) analyses the “old-fashioned, classical Bildungsroman, *Great Expectations*, and the contemporary, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, (by) show(ing) the main characteristics of the Bildungsroman” (P. 5). the research indicates how “the presence and importance of some kind of faith and the search for inner peace are key traits which are highly prominent in both books”. The writer also explores “the genre of the Bildungsroman (and how) it serves as an intermediary between the moral values of society and the maturation of a fictive character”. In the essay, the writer endeavours to reflect on how the old genres of the Coming-of-Age approach differed from modern ways of exploring the same. The author also shows how a Bildungsroman tracks carefully and creatively, a typical young protagonist along each step of his/her growth, with every experience displaying a certain measure of its own and serving at the same time as the jumping-off point to the succeeding state of development (p. 14), (Gohlman, 15-16).

Brändström (2009) explores the notion of a bildungsroman, pointing out how a female make of the bildungsroman differs from its male counter part. The study was carried out through an analysis of *Martha Quest* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The study revealed how the female protagonists follow, in many ways, the bildungsroman traits, in contrast to the male option which is thought to deviates from it. In the study, it is evident how the female protagonist, in her search for self-hood, is thwarted along the way by the many social injustices encountered through the oppression of patriarchy, and from which she is dis-empowered to disentangle herself. It is also observed that male protagonists may normally seize the opportunity to defy societal norms regarding sexual initiation, but it becomes dangerous if a girl does the same because she should remain chaste until she is deflowered by the legal husband. The comparative analysis of the two texts reveal how masculinity, in the fashion of patriarch has succeeded in creating societies that favour males at the expense of females.

Discussion

The coming-of-age narrative as depicted in the novel Mibya a Nyekanyeka is particularly embodied in the personages of Madambi and Nyiko, who are both sons to Pastor Tlhomandloti. The two sons face developmental challenges right from within the family under the strict patronage of their purist father. Tlhomandloti embodies a very stern control of his sons, at times in ways that makes life very difficult to them. Tlhomandloti is enraged by the disparity between his two sons; that one is good at school work but very untidy. This is expressed in the ensuing way by Tlhomandloti who says:

Xana vana va ka hina va lo ngeniwa hi yini lexi dyaka mongo wa vutomi bya vona? Loko Madambi, mativula ya hina o fana na Nyiko a swi ta xonga leswi hetisekeke, kambe i xifendze lexo tlula na mpimo — wo tshama a lo pyi hi thyaka, xa yena, vutlhari lebyi hlamarisaka

This scenario was very much disturbing to Madambi whose concentration was sorely anchored on school work and not keeping himself tidy. This, in the growth of Madambi could distance himself from his father whose standards were not attainable to him. This stressful environment reflects the socio-psychological turmoil Madambi, during his growth, suffered within his family. This also gives credence to the fact that growth trajectories in coming-of-age novels unveil social relations both in society and at the level of family members when parental expectations reach level where their children cannot reach. In tracing Tlhomandloti's ideologies and expectations, we come across the following words which unpacks how enraged he is over his son:

A wu pfumeli ni switsanana, ni le tindleveni a swi ngeni, i khale ndzi ri karhi ndzi holoka ni ku holova na wena hi vufendze bya wena, kambe ku hava ku tihlukurheta. Ndzi ku byela masiku hinkwawo leswo byewula malebvu, u tsemeta ni misisi kambe do! (p. 36-37) (You don't agree at all, it doesn't even enter your ears, I have long been talking and quarreling with you because of you untidiness but there is no improvement. I ask you daily to cut short your beard and hair but you don't do it.)

Pastor Tlhomandloti concludes by telling Madambi, metaphorically that he is more or less a pumpkin when he says, “Ndzo vulavula na tamba leri ngo tshama ri lo pyi hi thyata”. (p. 37). this metaphorical comparison reduces the figure of Madambi to an inanimate creature that is removed from the world of human beings - worse still, that it is dirty-covered and unpleasant to look at.

On another note, Madambi emotionally suffers at the hands of his conservative father who vows not to mingle with other tribal groups - not even his grandchildren. He attempts to divert Madambi's love affairs by vehemently telling him that he should marry a Tsonga girl and not a girl from a Xhosa ethnicity thus:

Ndza ku alela Madambi, ndza ala ku amukela n'wingi wa Muxhosa vatukulu va mina va va vatukulu va MaXhosa hi hala tlhelo — ndza ala. (I refuse Madambi. I refuse to welcome a Xhosa daughter-in-law lest my grandchildren will be grandchildren for the Xhosa people as well - I decline this.)

Madambi is strongly directed to look for a Tsonga girl with whom he can arrange marital ties. This struggle through family challenges as well as marital problems makes Madambi's journey towards self-hood very difficult. He is trudges a tedious and pathetic journey in his development. It is only after the demise of his father that he finally marries the girl of his heart, Soluka - the loathed Xhosa girl.

Also Nyiko, despite being the favourite son in the family, and especially hi father, equally tragically undergoes strenuous moments during his development. During his days as a students, he is confronted with challenges of struggling with his studies. He is not that good at school compared to the sharp-minded Madambi. This scenario makes his development, educationally, very tiresome and dissuading.

It is also painful to consider how Nyiko, as a minister of the word is seduced by N'wa-Mdanisi who, ostensibly posed as a devout Christian, but insidiously masquerading as an iron hand in a velvet glove. Nyiko's tragic fall from his high reverent post of a church minister was not only remorseful, but culminated tragically into a tense, disturbing mood among the church and more importantly, his loving father whose permaparenting propensity eventually led to his demise. Tlhomandloti gives a painful sigh of bereavement thus:

Vamakwerhu ku hela ka vutomi bya Nyiko laha emisaveni i khombo lero chavisa eka hina, i nhlomulo eka vanghana va yena; a rhandzeka ni ku khatisa vafambi ni lava a va nga n'wi tivi. (fellow Christians, the demise of Nyiko here on earth marks a remarkable tragedy to us, it is troublesome to his friends; he was loved and khatisa the passersby including strangers)

The growth impediments and subsequent temptations and fall of Nyiko hit at the very tender portions of Tlhomandloti's heart. His whole life was shaken, and his son's failure incisively struck him to a level where he regarded himself as having failed as well, and the subsequent death of Nyiko meant Tlhomandloti's death as well.

The bildungsroman trajectory embodied in Mthombeni's *Mibya ya Nyekanyeka* reflects depicts the tragic and cumbersome associations and setbacks in the life's of the chief characters. In their development, life is not an ease go and the future is not predictable on the basis of the present. Madambi grows up as an unfavoured child at home but his end is more aspired as he ends up marrying the girl of his heart. Nyiko, on the contrary, who grows up being the favourite child especially to his father falls into temptations that opens a course for his demise resulting the death of his father as well.

It is also clear that Nyiko's failure and death psychologically affected his father since it conflicted with the father's aspirations and missions. Tlhomandloti esteemed himself as an exemplary father-figure-cum-pastor to the people around him. It is likely that his son's fall made him believe that the very people he has been ministering to could then consider him a fake pastor who equally (in the fashion of his son) preaches what he does not practise. Tlhomandloti confirms how his family has become a beacon of light to the entire region as indicated by Mutunda, (2017) as follows:

You know that our home has turned into a lamp in the night which is seen from far by people. We are lamps to light up the darkness of our people; we have duty to lead them well in everything and in a good way with humanity and for the development of our people.

The lofty nature of Tlhomandloti is intricately connected to his fall. He consciously and with evidence that was very clear to him, saw his family as leading in all goodness and therefore must be teaching the entirety of his surroundings. This quality of existence was supposed to be embodied and evident as well in his siblings. The contrast between his narcissistic desire to be permanently outstanding in society and the reality of existence cracked out a hubris that was catalytic to the sons and their father's clumsy life and subsequent downfall.

Permaparenting in Mibya ya Nyekanyeka

Permaparenting refers to a tendency by parents to take their children through to extreme levels of development (*adulthood*) still considering them minors to be cared for in every way. In permaparenting parents play key roles in their children's lives continuing to financially and emotionally support them after they have long reached adulthood. Thus, a child does not grow. Parents continue to look after him/her and strive to advise on matters that they feel their son or daughter should be guided upon, though this normally comes with

misunderstandings between the children and parents when children feel that they are now old enough to take care of their own affairs.

Instances of permaparenting surface when Pastor Tlhomandloti decides turns down Madambi's decision on choosing a life partner. Madambi had fallen head over heels in love with Soluka, a stranger in the eyes of his father who poses as an ethnic purist. Notions of permaparenting come into play when Tlhomandloti rejects the daughter-in-law from a Xhosa ethnic group in favour of someone from a Tsonga ethnic background. It can be conceded that as a grown up young man, he has the right to choose a girl that he desired to marry. Unfortunately, he is denied the right to choose because the father continues to manipulate the affairs of his son. This results in misunderstandings between the son and his father as Madambi insists that he won't marry unless he is given room to tie a not with Soluka.

The misunderstanding brought about by the act of permaparenting is also evident in N'wa-Basana's behaviour and attitude towards the same issue. N'wa-Basana, Madambi's mother, remains calm when Tlhomandloti vehemently warns Madambi not to marry a stranger, but welcomes the idea after the death of Tlhomandloti, an act which also gives credence to the fact that the practice of permaparenting may result in divided intentions among family members. This division is made explicit by Shirilele (2011) thus:

N'wa-Basana welcomes Soluka into her family after Tlhomandloti passes on. She says 'I would be happy to see my daughter in-law my first son's wife while I am still alive'. She gives them her blessing so that they can marry each other.

The concept of permaparenting, as highlighted above, stems from Tlhomandloti's over-zealousness and bigotry. He believes in himself so much that he cannot stand ideas of anyone or any family surpassing his own crossing his mind. This incites him to strongly advise his son thus:

Ndzi ri u nga fani na van'wana. Madyondzelo ya wena a komba leswaku u le mahlweni ka hinkwavo, kutani u fanele ku endla leswi hlawulekeke, u tlula hinkwavo eka hinkwaswo - fungha marito ya mina (p. 19). (I am saying you must not be like others. The way you learn indicates that you are ahead of all, and you must be exceptional - mark my words)

As cited above, Tlhomandloti seem to have studied himself and reached a conclusion where he could judge the level of understanding and perfection that characterise his surrounding societies. Thus, this mentality of self awarded perfection seemed to overpower him so much that it could cascade to control, through his paternal prowess, the affairs and aspirations of his sons.

Recommendations

It is recommended that parents accord their children space to look into their own affairs especially when they are grown up. It is also recommended that parents strive to understand the differences between their children. This will also give children a healthy emotional state to acquire learning.

Conclusion

The coming-of-Age genre, as unveiled through the analysis of Mthombeni's novel *Mibya ya Nyekanyeka*, is a critical presentation of the traditional bildungsroman that charts the development of two boys alongside the direct and coerced influence of their father Tlhomandloti. It can be conceded that the influence and aspirations of parents can either direct or divert the course of life that children aspire to take, at times for their good or otherwise. The analysis also shows how both the male and female coming-of-age genres present characters as trudging painfully through the contours of social life. It can be deduced that life is not an ease course but needs dedication and acceptance of one's failures in order to move on.

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