



## Odeeokaa Journal of English and Literary Studies

### Book Review

<b>Title of Book:</b>	<b><i>The Great Temptation</i></b>
<b>Author:</b>	<b>Patrick Mangeni</b>
<b>Publisher:</b>	<b>Spectrum Books in Association With Safari Books (Export) Limited Channel Island, United Kingdom</b>
<b>Year of Publication of First Edition:</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Date of Current Edition:</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Place of Publication:</b>	<b>Ibadan, Nigeria</b>
<b>Price:</b>	<b>Not Stated</b>
<b>Category of Book:</b>	<b>Children and Adolescent Literature (Paper Back)</b>
<b>Number of Pages:</b>	<b>75 Pages.</b>
<b>ISBN:</b>	<b>979-978-029-736-7</b>
<b>Reviewer:</b>	<b>Chukwuebuka Johnbosco Abara</b>

*Of Literary Aesthetics and Pedagogy: Social Stigma, Vices and the Artifice of African Children's Fiction.*

Patrick Mangeni's *The Great Temptation* exemplifies contemporary and contextual African children and adolescent literature, its varied and nuanced themes and lucid style of rendition are simply evocative of the novelistic convention steeped in realism and extensive narrative pattern.

Conceived by the Spectrum Books in its special series, the Spectrum Red Ribbon Books imprint, it stands out as one of those lofty efforts geared towards raising the needed consciousness about the prevalence of the HIV/AIDS and other common diseases of which children and young adults are at the highest risk target and the need for their containment. Given the veracity of the claim

that Children's Literature is a distinct and very delicate sub- genre of literature, one in which the aesthetic and utilitarian demands are inalienable: *The Great Temptation* characteristically epitomizes and satisfactorily fulfills these cardinal objectives of literature especially literature for a definitive category of audience as youngsters, the goals of education, entertainment and information.

Beginning from its unique cover design, the harmonious blend of bright colours especially the predominant and screaming colour of red coupled with the captivating illustration all of which are metaphoric and connotative of emotional intensiveness and signal in a way, the gravity and seriousness of the topic contained therein. In another dimension, the colour and attractiveness of the cover seek to achieve for the novel, a remarkable cataloguing preeminence or distinctiveness when found in the array of other books.

Modeled in the Bildgrounsman fashion, the title is hauntingly compelling, highly suggestive of a thriller and adventure novel for children and young adults. It easily triggers the curiosity of a potential reader to quickly wade into the pages to partake in the vicarious voyage of experience to actually unravel the kernel of the 'temptation', as well as decipher if any, the distinguishing difference between 'a temptation' and 'a great temptation'.

Some scholars have erroneously in the past considered children's literature as trivial and undeserving of quality time and scholarly attention often because of its assumed pedestrian, regimented, and restrictive predilection. However, Patrick Mangeni's elevation of the craft, his ingenious and effective handling of hitherto 'frightening' 'tabooed' or 'unsettling' subject matters is a testament to his genius and a clear and further demonstration that the scope and span of Children's Literature is limitless and unrestricted. That any topic at all can form the material and substance of children's story and what ultimately matters is the elegant and interesting manner of treatment to suit the cognitive level of the 'young people' target audience. This is ostensibly the greatest success of Mangeni in *The Great Temptation*. His ability to pleurably introduce and navigate the murky waters of such hitherto designated 'strictly out of bounds' 'scorn-inviting' 'hush eliciting' topics like HIV/AIDS, sexual predators, homosexuality, coquetry, stigmatization, gangsterism, touting, materialism, alcoholism, drugs and substance abuse, rape, truancy among others in an admirable manner that polishes gold and darkens pebbles. Children need books for their progressive education, information and all round entertainment; sadly, these needs of this

peculiar group of people are not always readily available. Children are universally considered to represent the future and it is therefore incumbent on the practitioners of the craft of Children's Literature to deploy their artistry in ways to foreground the preservation of authentic African ethos and cultural integrity in a globalized world of fractured identity and misplaced values. Magneni's novel immeasurably displays a strong commitment to the ideals of nation building through the inculcation of values and principles that energize or re-invigorate the youth. The novel preaches the African tenets of child acculturation and youth socialization.

In Stephen Irete the child protagonist, a handsome boy of twelve, Mangeni presents a virtuoso hero-like character born into a poverty-stricken family in a rural Ikire village in the remotest southwestern part of Nigeria. Discriminated against because of his father, JumokeSowande's deteriorating HIV/AIDS ailment. JumokeSowande had contracted the disease from a woman he had inherited following strict detects of village custom from his late elder brother. His son, Stephen is an inexplicable bundle of joy and beacon of hope for his poor family, being the only surviving child after six others before him died before their first birthday. His native Yoruba name 'Ireti' speaks volume and is equally indicative of the restoration of hope lost by his parents before his arrival and their reluctance and near refusal to christen him until he was about three months to be sure he would not go the way of several others before home.

Stephen's admission into the secondary school is a miracle judging by the prevailing circumstances in his family. Despite coming tops in the common entrance exam, he is helplessly constrained to waste about eight months at home with his impoverished mother looking after his very sick father and working tirelessly in the garden, tending and milking *Apala*, their spotted cow and taking it to the pastures with *Lanrodo*, fervently praying and wishing that *Lanrodo* grows into a bull so that the proceeds could be used to offset his registration fees.

Undeterred and unwavering in his avowed commitment to education for upward social mobility, he out of sheer determination, lies in patient wait for his former classmates who had joined secondary school on their way home every day to borrow their notes and text books to read and copy notes by candlelights at night. His continued absence from school worries him that he summons courage to approach the school principal to beg to be allowed to sit end-of-term examinations, since he had been copying the notes.

Mr. Agofure, his former class teacher and coordinator of drama club sees him in such inconsolable state and intercedes on his behalf because of his impressive academic antecedents as a plenipotentiary particularly as an incredibly talented dancer. He is allowed to join the contingents to represent Osun state in the National School Arts competition where he remarkably 'out-dances' other contenders from other schools across the states and 'dances' himself into fame.

Stephen's bold step and consequent meteoric rise to fame is instructive. At first when he is called upon to showcase his talent, he is seized by fear and trepidation, dazed and weighed down by self-doubts and disbeliefs; he nonetheless charges forward, confronts the imaginary obstacles and gallantly rises above them.

*"During the climax, while shaking only has shoulders and keeping his buttocks raised like a lonely wingless ant, Stephen danced around... shaking his shoulders rhythmically... within Seconds, he had slipped off the stage and landed on the top of the orchestra pit. The whole audience went still... Then he realized that he had fallen down, but did not want to show that he had made a mistake so he started shaking his shoulders while still seated, as he had been doing before the fall. He got onto his feet and continued dancing, and the bata drums resumed. The audience went wild. They yelled for more" (17)*

His ingenious redefinition of a mistake to become an opportunity for greatness symbolizes and implies a redefinition of his personal and family mistakes and setbacks to his stepping stones for progress. Setbacks and encumbrances not limited to social, material inequalities, health, educational, traditional and cultural inhibitions and the likes.

The media report by different media houses of a boy who moves from grass to grace after a state dancing competition opens a vista on stigmatization which causes him incalculable emotional harm. The media unwittingly wrote him in to shame instead of fame *"Stephen Sowande, a pupil whose father is bedridden with AIDS, yesterday won himself a scholarship (24)*

A development that should ordinarily confer honour and dignity ends up impugning on his identity and negatively influencing public perception of him. As a news item in print, written texts transcend time and space. The content of the news article remains an injurious label on Stephen and goes before him everywhere, it also inadvertently dwarfs his hard earned achievement as winner of a state scholarship. He carries the badge as the son of a man living with HIV/AIDS so

much that when he arrives the dormitory to resume as student, his fellow students recognize him first, harass and taunt him, as the brawl between him and them ensue "*Do I look like somebody having AIDs?*" one of the students said in a derisive manner (38).

This is a graphical illustration of stigmatization and a telling indictment on the ignorant perception of most persons towards the relatives and children of persons living with HIV/AIDS. This informs the reason that a number of persons tested positive to the virus in a bid to evade the trauma of stigmatization by friends, family, neighbours, colleagues and relatives, hide in shame and fear and in the long run, unwittingly become agents of massive spread of the virus. It also points to the compelling need for greater awareness and sensitization campaigns on the virus, its modes of transmission, care and caution against contracting and practical means of containing it.

Stephen loses his father to the cruel hands of AIDS after the frantic but futile effort of his family to save him. He however finds solace in the eventual fulfillment of his long time cherished dreams of being in a secondary school, and makes a strong resolve to make his mother proud by excelling in his studies. At The Lord is Able Secondary School, his bitter encounter with the bullies set the tune for his derailment. We see the archetypal bully in Children's Literature reminiscent of Jasper Onuekwusi's Equalizer 2000 in *Hassan and the car thieves* and Chinua Achebe's Professor Chandus in *Chike and the River*. After saving him from bouts of attacks by the Suicide Base 599, the gang of bullies, Stephen accepts Jimmy's friendship in a bid to enjoy further protection from the continued attacks of the bullies. Jimmy, a recalcitrant pervert appropriates Stephen to himself as his pawn. It is Stephen's failure to promptly report to the authorities about the molestations by the bullies that puts him at Jimmy's mercy.

As it is said in popular parlance, evil communication corrupts good manners. Jimmy exploits the avowed love Stephen has for the theatre and proclivity for dramaturgy in his confession "*I don't think i want to be a doctor. I will study and become a dramatist like Shakespeare and Soyinka. I will write educative plays*" (45) to orchestrate more harm. He lures him deeper into labyrinths of decadent tendencies particularly developing an obsession for pictures and videos laced with pornographic contents. He preaches to him:

*"Shakespeare and Soyinka are for teachers and old men If you want to see real acting, come with me to video hall tonight. You will see James Bond and the Ninjas at work (45)*

Unbeknownst to Stephen, Jimmy is incorrigible. He has links with some unscrupulous agents in town who lavish him with assorted gifts and promises of protection. He often scaled the high fence of the boarding school at midnight to indulge in these vices.

In a show of blind trust and loyalty, he follows Jimmy to see for the first time, Jimmy's friends whom he had often told him about. These friends of his who arrived from Cotonu, who *"have colour and real money... They go to Cotonu every week. They like young people."* (47)

We witness a peripeteia; Stephen descends from the olympian height of an exemplary character to an ignoble delinquent lilliputian. A fall that is attributable to an intrinsic hubris – gullibility.

His change of name from Stephen to Stevo Rhombus signals his acceptance and embrace of the primrose path. Such tendencies like gangsterism, after which every other thing about him goes awry. He not only doctors his end of term result on Jimmy's advice after slouching a distant last position in class to deceive his mother he also engages in all manner of despicable vices.

The last straw that breaks the camel's back is the rendezvous he attends with Jimmy on the invitation of Jimmy's Sugar mummy, Mandy somewhere in town. Mandy treats the two boys to a lavish banquet in company of her other group of sexual predators. After the party, they retire, Stephen is drugged at the party and consequently gang-raped. He escapes death by the whiskers as the conspirators who for the fear of their exposition and trailing, plot to kill him. He overhears the plot and luckily places a call home on his mother and the police is alerted.

The culprits are rounded up and arrested. The severely injured Stephen is wheeled into an ambulance and taken to hospital. Mandy escapes but with Jimmy's arrest, she is trailed and eventually arrested, and she makes a shocking revelation about how a certain man who had infected her with HIV and how she had resolved to infect as many as she could. Stephen loses his scholarship as the authorities learn of the sad developments around him as reported in the media. Sadly, he contracts HIV/AIDS after the sad first experience of sodomy. Some years after, he sets up a Youth Alive Drama club with the aim of moral rearmament with regular visits to schools, performing plays on life skills, HIV/AIDS and positive living and sharing his personal experience with young people with stern warning to steer clear of bad company and give their education and personal development the attention they deserve.

By Mageni's magisterial imaginative and fictive exploration, himself a Ugandan, he strives for a place in the hallowed ranks of important precursors and contemporary practitioners of Children's literary art in Nigeria like the Ekwensis, the Mabel-Seguns, the Achebes, the Akachi-Ezeigbos united in the artistic manifesto and visions of moralism and the Africa centered approach of enculturation and acculturation.

In ten chapters, representative of a fine and impressive blend of different elements of the novel-familiar and relatable setting or locale, simple, unambiguous and easily accessible diction, an intriguing and gripping plot, suffused with suspense and surprise, plausible characterization and character development, *The Great Temptation* emerges as a striking children and adolescent novel.

As against the linear, simplistic adventure topoi of Children's Literature, *The Great Temptation* is protean and achieves a staccato of topical themes and engaging techniques such as didacticism, poetic justice as well as and the touch of the motif of the picaresque novel, all of which are every young readers delight.

Aside these numerous literary excellencies, the novel meets the targets of other key qualities in terms of physical outlay, there is effective layout and the artistic illustrations appear in close proximity to the text they illuminate, and the amount of text and illustration on a page does not make the page appear crowded or overwhelming.