

*Revelations* by Lauri Kubuitsile (Love Africa Press, 2020), 266 pp., ISBN: 9781916362864

Lauri Kubuitsile is a gifted local writer who continues to grow her literary footprint on the continent and beyond. *Revelations* (2020) is her latest offering (excuse the pun) that peels away the veneer of respectability of some so called ‘fire’ churches to reveal the sordid yet enthralling lure of power amid ignorance and HIV/AIDS.

This novel continues the religious conflict of her previous novel, *But Deliver us from evil* (2019), with the exception that it is much more contemporary in theme and scope. The novel tells the story of a foreign white woman, Elizabeth who is experiencing a marriage that is treading water with a high-profile lawyer husband, Ditiro Molosiwa. ‘She loved him, but she never quite trusted that love. Love was tricky and deceiving. People could change the terms in their own heads without informing you, leaving you out in the wind to stumble upon the truth long after it had been decided for you.’ (Kubuitsile, 2020, p.33) She is an outsider who feels that the cultural practices of Botswana prevent her from immersing herself in this foreign land that is now home. A chance encounter with a hitchhiker while on her way to an art exhibition in Francistown, ends up with her contracting HIV. This is the start of her nightmare. The hitchhiker, who we later know as Tumelo, a University of Botswana dropout, starts to stalk the older woman in macabre fashion. What follows is a myriad of revelations, hence the title. Some of them are predictable like Ditiro’s reaction when he learns of the affair, others are less so. For instance, the marriage between Bishop Kissi (the chief villain of the text and founder of African Church of Spiritual Revelations) and the president’s daughter, Dora.

What makes this story interesting is that it highlights the plight of being HIV positive without moralizing. It is refreshing how the book looks at the rich and powerful from a position of self-preservation and hypocrisy. As the rumours of Elizabeth’s HIV status become headline news and she is hounded by Bishop Kissi’s thugs, it becomes clear that this is a disease that knows no social status. More importantly, the novel exposes the real danger with HIV/AIDS, the lack of accurate information regarding how it is transmitted. Lauri Kubuitsile does this quite well by showing how different aspects of society, from the President of the country, right down to friends and family, treat those who are infected and affected with the virus. It makes for some candid soul searching, made worse by the fact that the church, which should be a place of refuge during such tough times, becomes a weaver of untruths and sows division among the community. At one point, Ditiro confronts Bishop Kissi and states, ‘*You grow rich and fat on their vulnerabilities. You have no shame using their faith to manipulate them into your racist beliefs, finding an easy scapegoat to lay the problems of this country on*’ (Kubuitsile, 2020, p. 104).

It makes for bleak reading at times as one fears if Elizabeth will finally get justice. It is a great text on trust, forgiveness and resilience. There are two areas that might irk readers. The first of these is reference to Elizabeth’s mother who is said to have struggled with mental illness. This revelation does nothing for the story nor does it justify Elizabeth’s psychological battle with her HIV status. It is when it is revealed that Elizabeth’s mother had a history of mental illness and

perhaps why Elizabeth has issues with fitting in the local community. The second is the ending, particularly that of Bishop Kissi. By the time his sins catch up with the pastor, a lot of readers would be baying for blood. However, the ending does not quite give us the public lynching Kissi deserves. This is what I meant earlier when I said the novel does not moralize. This takes nothing away from the intensity of the text. In essence, it keeps the text grounded. It would also be understandable if some readers took issue with the relationship between Ditiro and the president in that it lacks some intimacy that the narrative suggests. However, the story is not really about these two characters but about the power of the church in corrupting minds. My favourite character is Lorato, the five-year old child of Elizabeth and Ditiro. She is beautifully brought to life, as sweet as can be in a world soiled by the sordid escapades of the adults. Whenever she appears, she reminds one of the purity that still exists in the world, one that we must guard with everything that we have. For me, that is the story's greatest revelation.

Kubuitsile's style is engaging right from the start and it is quite a page turner. It would fit right well in senior school reading literature as the themes of betrayal, faith, leadership among others would make for riveting class debates.

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