

Michael Anthony. *All That Glitters*. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1983) 202 pp., \$5.00.

The Trinidadian, Michael Anthony, gives us yet another novel, having previously published *The Year in San Fernando*, *Green Days by the River*, *The Games Were Coming*, *Streets of Conflict* and a collection of short stories, *Cricket in the Road*. For this novel, he has drawn heavily on the native elements of Trinidad and Tobago. Interestingly enough, the political situation plays only a minor role in the novel, unlike the works of other Caribbean authors like George Lamming and V. S. Naipaul, for example.

All That Glitters begins, of course, with that timeless proverb "All that glitters is not gold." The novel explores the proverb on several levels. On the literal level, it is a mystery: "Who stole the gold chain?" On the psychological, it is a study in the exploitation of the initiate. On the symbolic level, institutions and individuals are revealed not as tarnished gold but as dross. Nevertheless, the mystery novel, while providing suspense and some tension, is all but swallowed up by the larger concern: the initiation theme and the rites of passage. The development of a young man (initiation into adulthood) and of a writer are intricately and intrinsically interrelated. On the one hand, we observe the young Horace's journey from innocence to experience and simultaneously his growing awareness of his artistic powers much in the manner of Dedalus in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Finally, the unraveling of the intrigue in the theft of the gold chain contributes to the essential theme in that it exemplifies the "appearance versus reality" motif. Mystery remains on an elementary level; we do not have a full-fledged detective story—only the barest rudiments. The real "mystery" lies in understanding the games people play.

Brought from Panama, the gold chain, which could radically alter the boy's impoverished lot, appears as the controlling motif; the boy's life and growth in St. Joseph have primary importance. One can never forget where the real value lies, especially as the fledgling writer takes clichés and fits experience into them.

To say that we understand character through plot development may be an exaggeration, although we do perceive the growth of Horace as an observer of life and as an artist both through his absorption in his "compositions" and the attitude of adults toward his writing. By far Anthony's greatest accomplishment is his integration of Trinidadian life into the novel. For the most part, we do not feel Anthony's contrivances to portray the life of the island. In fact one of the real achievements of the novel is the author's ability to present the natural flow of life in this small Caribbean community. Insignificant details like the strange names of plants, occupations, customs, and folklore are so skillfully handled that the reader accepts them as normal. Anthony uses dialect to delineate character as well as to reveal the indoctrination of

Horace into an appreciation and manipulation of the English language.

All the carefully detailed nuclei of focus—the school, the fatherless habitation, the fishing excursion, the journey to Mount Moriah, the prison—give insight into life and customs, but more important, their impact on the developing author, as the first person narrator becomes our consciousness. Of primary interest is Anthony's ability to create ambience in his concern with the re-creation of the details of appearance. An individual's appearance—clothes, physique, and so forth—is given minute attention. One cannot help but be struck with the insistence on appearance as indices to character. Nor can the reader be indifferent to the attitude toward institutions. Seeing these through a neophyte's innocent vision gives us some insight into the island's problems; these, however, are not the main thrust. If we read satire here, it is incidental to the total impact.

The primary interest remains a youth's brutal initiation into life's perversities. Horace finds that the one symbol of refinement, of culture, of beauty, is completely hollow, without value. Slowly, layer by layer the scales slip from his eyes until at last he must recognize the truth: he's been exploited in the vilest way by the person he trusted the most—his teacher. Moreover, he discovers that all the high flung phrases which his teacher's ready wit makes available to him have no real relevancy to life. The reader is aware that a symbolic interpretation may exist but the literal has more significance—the youth will be a writer and he will show us a new perspective from which to view these events.

Anthony's major accomplishment in this novel is his depiction of Trinidadian life and its integration into the artistic development of the writer, the artist, the neophyte. This is no diatribe against institution or society; however, hypocrisy and corruption are exposed at every level: familial, educational, judicial. We move with Horace from the blind innocence of youth into the brutal light of the adult world, feeling that in order for the protagonist to become a writer, an artist, he must know that "All that glitters is not gold," that true drama lies in the discovery.

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