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Denis Hirson, editor with Martin Trump. The Heinemann Book of South African Short Stories

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excellent resource for scholars, teachers, librarians, parents, and students. Because it provides the much needed contribution to modern scholarship. Besides, it illuminates both the strengths and weaknesses of critical representations of literary works of education and society; thus suggesting the need to replace Eurocentric metanarratives of modernity with more situated discourse and ways of seeing. This is the contemporary challenge not only for authors or writers, but also for all who are connected with the education industry.

Prosper Godonoo

Denis Hirson editor, with Martin Trump. *The Heinemann Book of South African Short Stories*. Portsmouth, NH: UNESCO, 1994.

The short story is a literary genre that compensates, by the sheer force of its message, for the difficulty that it has in creating character depth. The shocking intensity of the subject matter spawns emotional reactions that would otherwise be described in detail in lengthier prose. The anthology of 21 short stories collected by Denis Hirson with the help of Martin Trump is no exception to this rule. They have successfully combined powerful short stories that were authored between the periods of 1945, around the same time the National Party was on the rise, and 1992, the period which witnessed the formal abolition of apartheid and the release of Nelson Mandela. All of the stories were either written in English or translated from Afrikaans. Denis Hirson deeply regrets that no stories were translated from an African language however the logistics of translating the works into English proved inefficient and rendered the works a far cry from the originals.

This compilation of stories, when viewed in relation to one another, offers the reader an invaluable window into the lives of the oppressed and the oppressors and provides a glimpse at how their perceptions toward each other changed throughout time. Within the relationship between ruler and subject there also exists the relationship between male and female. However, while the superior/inferior theme is dominant, gender as a theme is a nearly non-existent sidecar. *The Suit* by Can Themba and *Mad Dog* by Etienne Van Heerden depict their indigenous female characters as weak, dependent and subservient. In striking contrast, however, the non-indigenous, white woman in *The Hajji* by Ahmed Essop has the strength and individuality to demand equal recognition with the men that she encounters.

Mistrust between races is manifest in several stories that resound with an ever present fear of sudden death or the fear of losing a loved one to uncontrollable circumstances. In *Bloodsong* by Ernst Havemann

a little English boy is left alone on his family's plantation coincidentally at precisely the same time that an ancient Zulu ritual was being performed by neighboring Zulu. The cacophony of the drums and chants terrified the boy, causing him to reach for his father's gun. It can be argued that the ignorance, or simple lack of concern for Zulu culture, inherited from the boy's parents, foments adversity rather than peaceful coexistence. In addition, the story by Alan Paton, *Life For A Life*, conveys a similar theme. The fear that an indigenous shepherd woman feels about her husband being falsely accused of their master's murder becomes a harsh reality. The inherent mistrust elaborated in this story led to the detention of the husband who was eventually killed, despite the fact that he never actually committed the crime.

I Take Back My Land, a story by Bartho Smit, highlights the differences between the white and indigenous cultural interpretations of Africa. One of the main characters, an English art dealer falls in love with the artwork of a "colored" artist. His first impulse is to arrange an exhibit to sell the brilliant landscapes. The artist objects, saying that they are for his people, in the hopes that one day they would be able to buy and appreciate his paintings. In addition, the white people were not supposed to see the flourishing life and beauty of Africa that the artist painted: this beauty was only for Africans. The cultural interpretation of art for monetary gain was inconsistent with the artist's objective of creating art for the benefit of giving the beauty of Africa back to his people. At the conclusion of the story, the artist is forced, out of financial necessity, to sell one of his paintings. The story, written in 1951, expressed a desire for self-determination within an environment in which people lacked resources to allow their desires to reach fruition.

The stories chosen for the periods that mark the early 1980s represent a change of subject towards issues that are illustrative of a race which is confident and possesses the capacity to make social demands. *Mamlambo*, by Bheki Maseko, is a tale of a magical snake that curses the life of its owner. Bheki uses the snake to demonstrate the Karmic forces at work, in which "what goes around comes around." Those who have acted poorly towards other people in the beginning of the story become the owners of the demon snake by the end. In Christopher Hope's story, *Learning To Fly*, the villain, who is a police interrogator of political prisoners, dies by the same inhumane methods that he has employed on others. These stories depict a people who believe that the time has come for them to turn the tables. The indigenous person is now vanquished and the former perpetrator is punished. These latter stories exude an aura that mirrors the groundswell of social unrest within the current political system.

The short stories as a whole are written in a style that first appears crude and difficult to follow. This wears off as the reader stops measuring the world with his/her own yardstick. The stories possess

social and political symbolism conveyed with such vivid pictures of everyday life that the reader cannot help but feel its intensity. Those readers with a basic knowledge of political and social conditions in South Africa would gain special insight into the stories included in this text. Overall, the reading is useful for personal edification and would make an excellent supplementary reading that would give depth to any class, particularly literature, history or political science courses.

Anthony Liberatore