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## “Rock” by Lindiwe Nkutha

The short story “Rock”, written by Lindiwe Nkutha is about Zibusiso, a girl that lives and grows up in poverty. Zibusiso stays in a shack in Soweto with her family. Zibusiso is called “rock” by the kids in the neighbourhood, because she is in a wheelchair, due to a dog being so hungry, that he had mistaken her legs for a lamb shank, causing her to lose both her legs and being in a wheelchair. The story is also about Ncedi (Zibusiso’s mother) who no longer plays the guitar which belonged to her lover (Danisile) because she believed Danisile died in exile. Later in the story, it then appears that Danisile did not die in exile, but that Danisile was roaming the streets of different countries looking for Ncedi. Ncedi and Danisile eventually found each other again, which led to the guitar beginning to be played again and brought joy and laughter in the household, and caused Zibusiso to accept and make peace with her nickname “rock”. Huggan said: “A short story is an ideal vehicle for social and political criticism” (Huggan, 1994: 63). Lindiwe Nkutha, uses this short story as a vehicle to express the social and political concerns of today, as the story is charged with social and political issues of today such as poverty, discrimination against the disabled, status and social ranking, racism and heteronormativity. These issues are enhanced through the typical characteristics of a short story such as in media res, the narrative arc, dense setting, brevity, characterisation and an unresolved ending.

The story begins in media res, meaning that it begins without a proper introduction, this is where it begins: “Now as far as music goes I’ve always preferred rock and roll and nothing else” (Nkutha, [2006] 2017:219). The reader is not given any background information about Zibusiso, and is therefore effective in revealing the nature of Zibusiso’s circumstances and shows how the situation about her losing her legs, which was indirectly caused by poverty, was very sudden, and therefore highlights this particular circumstance as well as the social issue of poverty in South Africa. The story is narrated by Zibusiso, and is a first person narrator. The story is thus told from Zibusiso’s perspective, thus making it more personal, the reader is immersed into the consciousness, which is evident when Zibusiso says: “I too, had been so hungry I had fantasised about eating the same dog” (Nkutha, [2006] 2017:219). This is effective as the reader experiences Zibusiso’s circumstances of poverty first hand, and therefore makes the social and political issues of today more immediate and urgent. This particular narrative style is used as it is more intimate, and because it is intimate the reader can relate more to Zibusiso, and experience the struggle of having to live in poverty and to be discriminated against. The narration therefore contributes to expressing the social and political concerns that South Africa faces today.

In the story, poverty is one of the main social and political concerns that is addressed, as the

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reader is told that Zibusiso lives in a shack in Soweto and Zibusiso says that : “ there were church mice that had managed a level of affluence higher than her {mother’s}” (Nkutha, [2006] 2017:219). Brevity which is a central characteristic of a short story is used here and throughout this story to express this particular concern. The story uses brevity by using dense language such as the words “church mice”, giving detailed information and creating a dense setting, but also keeping it short to create a sense of urgency and to get the message across to the reader. Lindiwe Nkutha therefore uses brevity to create a sense of urgency and to draw people’s attention to this social and political concern of poverty, as it is currently happening in South Africa and to bring about change. Another social and political issue that is addressed in the story is the fact that people are ranked according to statues and that there is a big gap between the upper class (the rich) the lower class (the poor). This is evident when Zibusiso asks:” why is it that people with money find it necessary to rub coins against each other “ (Nkutha, [2006] 2017:220). This indicates that people are ranked according to statues in society and that they are identified as rich or poor. Lindiwe Nkutha addresses this issue in the story to highlight South Africa’s social issue of statues and the social ranking system, and to inform the reader’s about these concerns and to bring about change. The social and political issue of unemployment and racism is another issue that is addressed in the story, as the reader is told that Bra Phandi lost his job because the “ Unharmonious gold mine closed down “and “ white people are funny that way and never hesitate to call you whatever their tongues can master “ (Nkutha, [2006] 2017:221.226). Lindiwe Nkutha, addresses these issues because South Africa has a high unemployment rate and racism is a big issue, by using the short story to express these issues, Lindiwe Nkutha is creating awareness of them and indicating that something needs to be done about these issues.

“Rock “uses the typical characteristics of a short story such as brevity and density of description, to explore how discrimination against the disabled and heteronormativity is depicted in the narrative. Zibusiso is bullied and mocked because she is disabled, this is evident when she says :”I had to make peace with the children in my neighbourhood whispering ‘Rock and Roll’ every time I rocked and wheeled myself from my house’..” And “ to them I was in every sense as good as everything Ncedi owned: there but not fully functional and thus not worthy of any serious attention” (Nkutha, [2006] 2017:219,223). These two quotes show how society treats people with disabilities differently and frowns upon them. Lindiwe Nkutha makes use of these quotes to indicate to the readers that discrimination against disabled people happens still today in South Africa and that it is a social and political concern that needs to be addressed. The last major social and political concern addressed in the story is heteronormativity. The story indicates how homosexuality is frowned upon by society, which is evident when Danisile’s dad said that she should not return to them unless she was married to a man.

This story breaks the norm of having few characters, because it is used to show how many people are living in poverty, and how many people are affected by the social and political

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concerns of today in SA. The story ends with music, joy, and Zibusiso finally accepting her nickname “rock”, because Ncedi and Dan found each other again. The resolution of the story is left out, as the reader does not know what happens next to Zibusiso, which is a typical characteristic of a short story and is effective as it causes the reader to come up with their own conclusion.

Thus, it is evident that Lindiwe Nkutha uses typical characteristics of a short story to express the social and political concerns that South Africa faces, and uses the story to create a sense of urgency and bring about change.

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