

Home-grown short stories

BOOK REVIEW

Homing
Henrietta Rose-Innes
Umuzi

HOMING is a collection of fifteen skilfully written short stories by Henrietta Rose-Innes. Set in Cape Town and its environs, the stories highlight the situations of miscellaneous ordinary citizens as they individually engage with the present, confront their pasts and move — sometimes liberated, sometimes strengthened, sometimes altered — into the unwritten future.

It is what is unwritten as much as what is written that gives these stories their strength and appeal. What is written is sensitive, concise, original (in both content and use of language); what is not written stimulates thought.

Some of the protagonists are young, still learning the wiles and guile of the world: a would-be female writer, who hands her treasured manuscript to an established author with a notorious reputation; a little boy who witnesses a fleet-footed youth being pursued by knife-wielding thugs; a sixteen-year-old who finds himself out of his depth in a relationship.

Some of the characters, who are weighted with emotional or psychological baggage, have experiences that unburden them: there is the young woman who is afraid she will inherit her mother's manic-depressive condition; the man who has a childhood memory of dislodging a brick that kills a builder; the teenager who refuses to talk about her ordeal during a burglary until she finds a corpse in the park; women who need to resolve the relationships they are in.

In some stories the protagonists are older — in *Star*, which cleverly fuses topical issues such as the football World Cup and xenophobia, an elderly woman thinks she has found the missing black member of the French national squad and brings him home to nurse; in *Promenade*, a fifty-four-year-old thinks he has achieved stasis (in terms of ageing) through a careful regimen of diet and exercising until the witnessing of an accident undermines his confidence. In the title story, *Homing*, an older woman has a flirtation with adventure in a smart new hotel before returning to house and husband like a homing pigeon.

This is a collection of quality stories from a talented South African writer.

Moira Lovell

