

Christopher Mlalazi

Dancing with Life: Tales from the Township.

Bulawayo: 'amaBooks, 2008.

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[African Books Collective]

The author of this collection of short stories hails from Zimbabwe where he is well-known as a poet, playwright and writer. His plays have been performed throughout Zimbabwe and he is also beginning to work on dramas for television. His writings have been published in several local and international short story anthologies, including *Short Writings from Bulawayo III* (Bulawayo: 'amaBooks, 2006) (Caine Prize 2006 Anthology). For all of those who enjoy his writings and want to read more, his blog may be of interest.

The stories found in *Dancing with Life* are easily read, entertaining and often filled with both sadness and humour. Although quite entertaining, their underlying value lies in the way in which Mlalazi reflects life in contemporary Zimbabwe, especially in the townships (although neither Zimbabwe itself nor any recognizable politician or person is ever specifically named). It is not a pretty picture. Political corruption, stultifying poverty, family and societal breakdown, and violence, as day to day realities are the underlying themes of these stories. There is anger and hopelessness (as well as joy and hope) all on display here in the way Zimbabweans living in the townships, but especially the youth, see their lives affected, diminished. We read these stories and cannot help but feel that people should not have to find themselves facing such a world, and we wonder how they can cope with all the vicissitudes they face.

Mlalazi is an important author whose work should be found in all serious collections of contemporary African literature. In addition, here is a title to be added to collections designed to inform readers of contemporary life in Africa through fiction writing.

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[Editor's note: this book recently was awarded the 2009 Zimbabwe National Arts Merit Award for Outstanding First Creative Published Book.]