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# If God Was a Woman by Stanley Nyamfukudza

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**WORLD LITERATURE IN REVIEW: ENGLISH**

Stanley Nyamfukudza. If God Was a Woman. Harare, Zimbabwe. College Press. 1991. 148 pages.

Written from a male point of view, If God Was a Woman is a book of ten contemporary stories about women's and men's lives and relationships, women's condition, their desires, wants, and needs. The intriguing cover illustration befits the temper of the collection. Against an azure sky, beneath the gaze of a crescent moon are three black, sexy, wind-tossed pieces of female intimate garments: a gauzelike shawl, a lacetop bra, and a garter/ chastity belt--all in the wake of a menacing apple core, the "cancerous, poisoned apple" of the Evean legacy. The shawl, phallic at one end, looks like a half-pair of women's hosiery with a threadlike extension dangling from its tip, suggestive of secretion. This suggestiveness penetrates the book, as the Adam and Eve seduction/fall and the "taint of Cain" themes are developed specifically in the title story, "If God Was a Woman," and with a varying degree of emphasis in seven of the ten selections overall.

What if God were a woman? Would anything change? Were one to compile a checklist, would the problems and/ or perceptions of women as mistresses, unguarded (frustrated) wives, sexually unfulfilled women, whores, concubines, silenced women, sexually liberated urban women, or brutalized and abandoned women be surprisingly altered in the script of "womanbeing?" How would a She-God reconcile "all the suffering and injustice of the undeserving" of this male-created world, with its "tortured, wasteful, convoluted logic"? If God were a woman, would the "dementedly awry days" that have ushered in the fatal HIV virus change the ill-perceived, ill-defined relationship between "the cancerous," [Evean] poisoned apple" and the female anatomy? Nothing is (surprisingly) new or changing in the sex-crazed world of love triangles that witness one sister plucking out another's eye, leaving the (male) cause of provocation unscathed (as usual) in "Unkind Monologue," or of women's/mothers' propagative affirmation of men's "yes I have tasted the forbidden fruit but there had been many fellow travelers before me" excuse for not taking responsibility for getting girls/women pregnant in "Days Without Hope."

As a blend of situational stories, the collection is troubling with its curious mixture of setting, imagery, and language. Although the setting and the characters are clearly African (Zimbabwe, Shona), the language is a hodgepodge of uncharacteristic British and Americanisms. The point of view throughout is American-oriented, with such references as "dollars," "cool . . . bucks," and "outfield number three." Although the language, for the most part, is suggestive of (the desire for) freedom and love, the seemingly overpolished college-English style of "Curious Cows" with its nature imagery and the lackluster quality of "The Power of Speech" (witness the many references to "O" levels in the collection) tends to bog down the reading. However, the technique accelerates after the first two stories, culminating in convincing narration in "Days Without Hope," "Eaten Promises," and "If God Was a Woman."

Curiously, all the characters in seven of the ten stories are nameless, merely referred to as "he" and "she." Apart from a handful of editorial errors, the collection's male-perspective contribution to the study of sex and

gender roles is welcome.

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By Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith, University of Nebraska, Omaha

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