Contributor: Kgomotso Masemola

Brutus, Dennis (1924-2009)

Dennis Brutus was born in Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe). He was raised in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. He was classified as a “coloured” because of his racially mixed parentage. A political activist as well as a writer, he spent eighteen months on Robben Island for defying a banning order in 1963. After this, he went into exile but continued working as an activist, a poet, and an academic. Banned for many years in South Africa, he wrote ten volumes of verse, from Sirens, Knuckles,Boots (1963), for which he won the Mbari Prize (he returned the prize because it was reserved for non-whites), to Leafdrift (2005). His poetry is notable for its pared down realism, its social commentary, and its resilience to oppression. Brutus won the Langston Hughes prize in 1987 and the Paul Robeson Award in 1989, rare feats, considering that these prizes are traditionally reserved for the best African-American poets. He held faculty positions at the University of Denver, Northwestern University, and the University of Pittsburgh before returning to South Africa as an acclaimed writer and academic after being officially unbanned in 1990.

References and further reading

McLuckie, C.W. and Patrick J. Colbert (eds.) (1995) *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*, Colorado Spring: Three Continents Press.

List of works

*Sirens, Knuckles, Boots* (1963)

*Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison* (1968)

*The Ordeal: Poems of Anguish, Resistance and Hope* (1977)

*Remembering Soweto* 1976 (2004)

*Leafdrift* (2005)