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Foreword

How does one define greatness? There are two main categories, surely. There is intellectual greatness. There is the greatness of the individual human spirit in activity of body and mind down among fellow human beings: the greatness of total courage in commitment to attainment of freedom – for everyone; freedom by definition knows no boundaries.

Looking back at the century we have so recently left behind, there are two men whose greatness stands out, and forever. Mahatma Gandhi is dead; his inspiration is not. Nelson Mandela is with us, inspiration for the struggle of the past, inspiration for the present, for the future.

An anthology of poetry dedicated to him, not by a few lines preceding the contents, but inherent in the works of the poets themselves, transformed expressions of a pervading, deep consciousness of the meaning of a great presence invigorating our lives, was an idea waiting to happen. Richard Bartlett and Morakabe Seakhoa have taken it up boldly, innovatively, on the principle well asserted by lines from one of the contributing poets, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac: ‘poetry has the strength/To tell the story well’.

Why poetry rather than prose? What is there that the biography and even autobiography cannot tell, of greatness? Poetry, the highest literary form of the gift of intense imaginative identity with the subject, goes beyond the objective and subjective with the prescience of something almost like an act of faith. Faith that the truth of the great man or woman lies somewhere to be expressed, in between, and in synthesis with the complexities of what the great individual has meant, and means, with the consciousness and subconscious of others. This goes beyond influence in the ordinary sense of the term, does not depend necessarily on contact with the great one, even with sharing the same conflict and conditions, the same country.

The poems in this book come from South Africa, yes, but also from all over the world, the USA, Ireland, England and other countries, some are translated from French, Portuguese, Somali. The phrase ‘A Man of The World’ usually denotes someone sophisticated, aware of this wide context but debonairly detached from commitment to any particular country or politics. There is quite another definition remarkably evidenced in the ori-

gins of the poetry gathered in this collection. Mandela is a Man of The World in this other sense. The real, the vital one, the shouldering of huge human responsibility, far beyond the personal. He is often described admiringly, but mistakenly, now, as an icon. But he is not, even cast within the reverence of old age, a figure on a pedestal, in a niche or as depicted in a shopping mall square in Johannesburg, a bronze giant. He continues to be a living and highly vocal proponent of not just the ideas, but vehemently the practical implementation of what people worldwide recognise in themselves and their societies, as wanting in their political formations, their health and other social services, their right to free speech. His words have become a litmus by which others can test the authenticity of justice, free of cant. And he shows it is a moral condition that one must not be afraid to criticise when wrongs are committed in one's own country by one's own political formation.

The poems in this collection confirm all Mandela has been and is, his relevance at home in South Africa and to a world where conflict proliferates, with analogies to the long historical one that, without him to lead us, would not have been overcome. Mongane Wally Serote's poem 'History is the Home Address' brings poetry's succinct beauty to sum up what has come about. Mandela provides the unmatched guidance of his historically hard-earned wisdom to the outside world, from home in our country, where it all happened.

There is much enjoyment as well as thoughtful stimulation in the book. Inevitably, some of the poems fall into the cliché mode with verbal toy-toyi, worn slogans of the past. But most, particularly those that come out of what Dennis Brutus names a 'barred' existence, in his poem 'Robben Island', have their own powerful, individual voice that echoes strikingly after the poem is read. For *Halala Madiba*, as Mandela would be the first to insist, is not about Mandela; it is about all who have lived through and are living in his times, in South Africa and, as we have come to realise, the times of the world. The Irish Nobel Prize poet, Seamus Heaney, promises for the present "...someone is hearing/The outcry and the birth-cry/Of new life.../It means once in a lifetime/That justice can rise up/And hope and history rhyme'. Mandela's daughter Zindzi writes movingly and with originality to her 'Tata'. There's delightful humour in the West-Indian English of Benjamin Zephaniah's satirical poem taking on those who with hasty pragmatism changed sides after 1994: 'Nobody done apartheid/Dey were all revolutionaries'.

Everyone who reads this anthology will have a favourite poem. I have

hope that the pleasurable revelation of rewards to be found in poetry may mean that this bold venture into publication will find the wide readership it deserves and encourage publishers to think again about their reluctance to take on the work of poets. It cannot be left to 'performance' poets to keep the ancient art alive; often the poem has no life to it without the physical medium of the poet's body and voice. We need books like this generous one, to take in our hands and return to, when alone.

Nadine Gordimer
Johannesburg, February 2006