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ESSAYS

PART 1

1918-2018
A Homage To Nelson Mandela
On The Centenary Of His Birth

Image Source: W.J. Vincent II, "Nelson Mandela – An Example for the World", *Think-MoreBeMore.Com*, 12 December 2013, https://thinkmorebemore.com/thinkmorebe-moreblog/great-people/nelson-mandela-an-example-for-the-world/ (last accessed on 29 December 2018).

Abstract. This section of the journal consists of four essays aiming to commemorate Nelson Mandela on his centennial posthumous birthday. While being interconnected by a series of paradigms resonating with the ideas of the struggle for freedom and the hard-won, long walk to democracy, these papers investigate the 'Madiba magic' from different points of view, ranging from the socio-political dimension to the cultural sphere, from a national context to a global scenario.

Keywords. Nelson Mandela. South Africa. Gardening metaphors. Charismatic personality. Moral stature. Political leadership. TRC. André Brink.

Laura Giovannelli

"NO MAN IS AN ISLAND": MANDELA, FLOWERS, AND GARDENING

Tracing an outline of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (Mvezo, 18 July 1918 - Johannesburg, 5 December 2013) is a noble as well as demanding task that would require rivers of ink to flow. Much has been said on the subject, both on a national and an international level, with a surge of interest that predictably reached its height in the wake of Mandela's death at the age of 95. His passing away was followed by a long series of local and worldwide commemorations, mourning gatherings, media-covered events and, of course, the releasing of a flood of publications. Even a brief glance at these printed or audiovisual accounts shows a rich panoply of tributes and portrayals that cast the first black President of South Africa and Father of the Rainbow Nation as a global heroic icon and visionary leader, an agent of multiracial reconciliation and sage unifier, a personification of *ubuntu* and of an inspirational commitment to the democratic ideals of freedom and equality.

A feeling of profound, bewildering loss was thus accompanied by an urgency to remember his extraordinary 'life and times' and keep the South African 'miracle' alive, along with what Mpofu and Chasi call "Mandelaism", that is to say, the "cultural practices and sign systems that surround and mythologise", or purposively exploit, the figure of Madiba (Mandela's clan name):

> Former South African President, Nelson Mandela's death in 2013 saw an extraordinary outpouring of local and global grief. This reflected the worldwide iconisation of Mandela as a popular cultural and political symbol for human rights, political messiah-hood, sainthood, dignity, peace and forgiveness […]. Mandelaism is intermeshed with, feeds into and draws on patriotic sentiments, often invoking notions of magical powers to reconcile racial divisions, to right wrongs of the past and to nation-build. Mandelaism, we notice, is sometimes hijacked by self-serving machinations.[1]

1. S. Mpofu and C. Chasi, "Mandelaism in Newspaper Advertising that 'Pays Tribute' to Mandela after his Death", *JLS/TLW*, 33 (4), December 2017, p. 1. On Mandela as a subject of representation in films, documentaries or made-for-television biopics, see R. Bromley, "'Magic Negro', Saint or Comrade: Representations of Nelson Mandela in Film", *Altre Modernità/Other Modernities: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 12, 2014, pp. 40-58, and L. Modisane, "Mandela in Film and Television", in R. Barnard (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nelson Mandela*, Cambridge, CUP, 2014, pp. 224-43. Modisane significantly opens his essay by remarking that there "are many Mandelas. A revolutionary hero, a prisoner of conscience, a social being, a media personality, and in some eyes a traitor, Nelson Mandela, aka Rolihlahla, Dalibhunga, Madiba, and at one point David Motsamai, is many things to many people […]. He has inspired the birth of a whole industry, partly dedicated to his ideas, but mostly trained on the magnetism of his persona" (*ibidem*, p. 224).

Maria Paola Guarducci

ENKOSI KAKHULU, MADIBA / THANK YOU VERY MUCH, MADIBA

"Admirable Mandela. Point, with no exclamation":[1] so did Jacques Derrida open his 1986 essay originally titled "Admiration de Nelson Mandela, ou Les lois de la réflexion".[2] At that time Mandela had already served twenty-two years of his life sentence and was in the maximum-security prison of Pollsmoor (Cape Town), after having been in many of apartheid's most notorious penitential institutions: in Johannesburg, in Pretoria, but most of all in the jail located on Robben Island, where he was imprisoned from 1964 to 1982. Robben Island prison is today a National Monument and a Museum, one of the most visited sites in South Africa; a sort of sanctuary where not only ordinary tourists stop by, but also political leaders from all over the world go and have a photograph taken in Mandela's old cell. Everyone visiting the country pays homage to a 'memory' that this museum seems to have successfully canonised for good. Before being turned into a jail, Robben Island had been the site, in sequence, of three hospitals (for leprosy, chronic diseases and mental illness), its geographical location a few miles offshore from Cape Town providing an ideal answer to the need to isolate its inmates, whatever the reason, from the mainland. This tiny, flat, rocky island was to become primarily associated with its most famous guest and was informally re-named "University of Robben Island". As a matter of fact, during his stay, Mandela managed to become the catalyst of an intensive intellectual activity based upon study, debates, readings, reflections, and discussions among the prisoners, in spite of the many restrictions that, in theory, should have prevented such activities from taking place. Jailers as well turned a blind eye to all this, as they too were somehow seduced by the man's charisma.

From Pollsmoor, where he was at the time Derrida wrote his essay, Mandela was finally transferred to Victor Verster Prison (Paarl) in 1988. After a very complex process of negotiations which had lasted several years, on February 11th, 1990, it was through Victor Verster's gate that he walked out as a free man amongst a crowd of reporters and ordinary people alike who came to witness that spectacular event. He was smiling at the cameras broadcasting all over the world, his right fist up in

1. J. Derrida, "Admiration of Nelson Mandela, or The Laws of Reflection", *Law & Literature*, 26 (1), 2014, p. 9.
2. The original version of the essay features in the collection *Pour Nelson Mandela*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986. It was translated by the Cardozo School of Law of Yeshiva University in 2014 and it is now also available online at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1535685X.2014.896149 (last accessed on 30 December 2018).

Francesca Mussi

NELSON MANDELA AS A SYMBOL OF NATIONAL UNITY AND RECONCILIATION

In tribute to former South African President Nelson Mandela, and on the occasion of his birth centenary in July 2018, this essay focuses on Mandela's contribution to South Africa's reconciliation process, on his role in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 1995-2001), and on his status as an iconic figure. In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, a memoir about his experience serving as the Chairman of the Commission, former Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu underlines Mandela's extraordinary character and fundamental role in the reconciliation process by depicting him as "a potent agent for the reconciliation he urged his compatriots to work for and which was central to the purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission he appointed to deal with our country's past".[1] Despite his prison years and the constant harassment he had to endure during the apartheid regime, Mandela, Tutu points out, "did not emerge from prison spewing words of hatred and revenge" (*NFWF* 39), but dedicated himself "to the reconciliation of those whom apartheid and injustice and pain of racism had alienated from one another" (*ibidem*).

As he cast his vote at Ohlange in the 1994 first democratic elections, which would pave the way for his presidential nomination, Nelson Mandela carried a message of forgiveness and reconciliation and spoke of his dreams of "one nation": "This is for all South Africans an unforgettable occasion. It is the realisation of their hopes and dreams that we have cherished for decades. We are starting a new era of hope, of reconciliation, of nation-building".[2] With this optimism and willingness to forgive, Mandela set both an example for his countrymen and the underpinning tone for the work of the TRC. In his 100-Day Speech to Parliament on 18 August 1994, Mandela continued to emphasise the need for reconciliation by acknowledging that the new government of National Unity had two primary goals: reconciliation and reconstruction, and nation-building and development, which were South Africa's main challenges at that time.[3] He went on to observe that "the issue of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission has generated much public debate and some apprehension … [but] what this issue raises is how we

1. D.M. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, London, Rider Books, (1999) 2000, p. 7. Subsequent citations will be given directly in the text, with bracketed page numbers and preceded by the abbreviation *NFWF*.

2. See "Watch: Milestones in Mandela's Long Walk", 5 December 2014, https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/people-culture/mandela/milestones-in-mandela-s-long-walk (last accessed on 8 October 2018).

3. In this regard, see Nelson Mandela's 100-Day Speech to Parliament, 18 August 1994, http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Govern_Political/Mandel_100.html (last accessed on 8 October 2018).

Linda Fiasconi

REMEMBERING MADIBA: A PORTRAIT BY ANDRÉ BRINK

When Nelson Mandela passed away in 2013, André Brink lamented his death as a personal, irreparable loss: "When my own father died", he wrote in *The New Yorker*, "I felt diminished, but given his painful effort of getting it over with, it brought both relief and release. This time, everything feels more final; the agony is more acute and more unavoidable".[1] A white Afrikaner writer polemically opposed to the apartheid regime and the moral myopia of his own 'tribe', Brink nurtured a sort of veneration for Madiba and was highly inspired, throughout the liberation struggle, by the non-racial, democratic values of the African National Congress. He came to know many of the ANC's leaders during their years of exile, and their ideals reverberated in his non-fictional writings as well as in his fiction. His special relationship with Nelson Mandela, whom he met for the first time in 1994 and later felt privileged to call a 'friend', stemmed from a sense of mutual respect and admiration, and was certainly made possible by a charismatic black leader who placed a high premium on the idea of reconciliation, especially with Afrikaners, and whose primary legacy would be a multiracial South Africa.

~

For almost a quarter of a century, Mandela managed to move André Brink from a distance. During the twenty-seven years of his captivity, he represented – for the writer, as for many South Africans – a symbol of freedom, a living myth, a powerful name celebrated in underground songs, although, by force of circumstances, he was a faceless man, since it was forbidden to circulate his picture in South Africa. Through his famous three-hour speech given at the Rivonia Trial in 1964 he had passionately asserted his readiness to sacrifice himself for the cause of freedom, and his inspirational words would resonate in every corner of the world up to the moment he finally walked out of Victor Verster Prison in 1990. In "Nelson Mandela: Myth, Man, Magician" (2010), Brink also looks back at the feelings of doubt and anxiety associated with Mandela's 'mythification', observing that, "emerging from prison, there was a real danger that the man could no longer match the myth".[2] Mandela's physical absence but symbolic presence throughout the years had kindled unattainable high expectations, which, nevertheless, Brink feels he managed to live up to – even surpass – without ever sacrificing his humanity. In fact, it was

1. A. Brink, "A Letter to Madiba", *The New Yorker*, 15 December 2013, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-letter-to-madiba (last accessed on 19 December 2018).
2. A. Brink, "Nelson Mandela: Myth, Man, Magician", in H. Russell (ed.), *Let Freedom Reign: The Words of Nelson Mandela*, Northampton, MA, Interlink Books, 2010, p. 8.

Martina Coppola

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S LIFE-WRITING: A (CON)TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Abstract. This article explores some aspects of the historical and socio-cultural context in which Australian Indigenous women's life-writing has developed over the past thirty years, after it burst into cross-cultural notoriety through the publication of Sally Morgan's *My Place* in 1987. Given the role that questions of genre play in the examination of texts, my paper attempts to show how this fluid, hybrid, and postnational kind of life-writing transcends the boundaries of the European autobiographical canon. Through a brief historical *excursus* and a discussion of Morgan's *My Place* and Rosalie Fraser's *Shadow Child: A Memoir of the Stolen Generation* (1998), attention will be paid to the destructive effects of a complex and often discriminatory political system on native peoples' lives, with the heavy responsibility relating to the 'Stolen Generations'. Room will also be granted to the steps that the Australian government has recently taken towards a plea for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Keywords. Contemporary Aboriginal women's life-writings. Sally Morgan. Rosalie Fraser. Stolen Generations.

In Australia, approximately between 1910 and 1970, many Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their home and families in consequence of several government measures introduced through the Assimilation Policies, whose guidelines had been set at the Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities (21-23 April 1937, Canberra). These children, torn away from their parents, were obliged to renounce their heritage by adopting the white culture; their names were changed and they were prevented from communicating in their traditional languages. Some of them were adopted by white families while many others were placed in institutions where abuse, loss, and neglect were unfortunately daily occurrences. With hindsight, it can be claimed that the notion of assimilation, together with the child removal policies, did anything but achieve its aim to 'improve' the lives of the Indigenous people, mainly because white society, despite its utopian integration projects, refused to deal with them as equals. In this essay, attention will be focused on two Aboriginal women life-writers, Sally Morgan (1951—) and Rosalie Fraser (1958—?), who found the strength and courage to delve into such a controversial and painful topic, with its connections with the Stolen-Generation policies and their disastrous effects on their lives and an entire people's existence.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the Dutch were the first Europeans to come into direct contact with the Aborigines inhabiting the Australian continent. However, the first explorer who described an encounter with them, if in racially biased

Laura Giovannelli

GLIMPSES IN THE DARK: A CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF NADINE GORDIMER'S *JUMP AND OTHER STORIES*

Abstract. This paper should be read as a homage to another remarkable figure within the South African panorama and in a transnational scenario: Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014), one of the most significant voices and acute observers of her country's turbulent and dramatic history and its people(s). In particular, attention is drawn to Gordimer's aesthetic tenets, to her poetics regarding the short-story genre and to *Jump and Other Stories*. This 1991 collection remains a crucial and somewhat unique work which, if coming out after Mandela's liberation (11 February 1990) and in the happier interregnum of South Africa's transition to democracy, actually puts together texts that were mostly written when the demise of apartheid was approaching but the downfall of the regime was not yet a fact.

Keywords. Nadine Gordimer's poetics and commitment. South African socio-political transitions. The racial issue. Storytelling. Truth.

I would like to open this presentation[1] by quoting a comment by Andries Walter Oliphant, a South African writer and committed literary scholar and editor who also chaired the Arts and Culture Trust in South Africa (1995-2007), and who was a friend and admirer of Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014). In the 1990s, Oliphant edited a rich and diversified collection of essays, literary pieces, and interviews meant as a tribute to the life and works of the then 75-year-old Gordimer. In his Foreword to the volume, he drew on a figurative language where compelling metaphors and hyperbolic statements intermingled so as to provide a striking, quintessential portrait of the writer's temperament alongside her physical traits:

> Nadine Gordimer is the colossus of South African literature. Her figure as a writer majestically straddles the literary landscape. Although petite, her formidable image looms so large, it seems to fall over every feature of the South African aesthetic topography. This characterisation is not, as one might think, a mere paradox. Neither is it a metaphor of domination. Both these tropes, anyway, do not belong to Gordimer's affirming vocabulary. In her aesthetics, the concept of domination features only as something to be challenged and opposed. Rather, her prominence is the consequence of her genius.[2]

1. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the International Colloquium "Story into History: Nadine Gordimer's Short Stories", 10 May 2019, organised by Héliane Ventura and Mathilde Rogez at the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, France.
2. A.W. Oliphant, Foreword to Id. (ed.), *A Writing Life: Celebrating Nadine Gordimer*, Photographs by D. Goldblatt, London, Viking, 1998, p. xi.

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