

EDITORIAL

FORTY YEARS AGO, Nadine Gordimer wrote an essay in *The Dalhousie Review* celebrating the publication of a number of poetry collections by black South Africans. A fierce public opponent of the censorship that imposed a “paralytic silence” on a generation of South African cultural producers, many of whom were imprisoned or forced into exile, Gordimer began her essay by noting that South Africa has “97 definitions of what is officially ‘undesirable’ in literature.” And so, she argued, “suspended between fear of expression and the need to give expression to an every greater pressure of grim experience,” many black writers are turning to poetry, a form that is arguably “less vulnerable” to censorship or banning than prose because its meanings are often implicit, negotiable. Primarily a novelist, Gordimer was careful to acknowledge that “one cannot simply ‘turn’ to poetry” as though it were readily available or easily accomplished, but she took very seriously the idea of poetry as a last and best resort for black writers needing “both hiding-place and loud-hailer” in a country where the law did not permit them to read to whites or mixed audiences in public places: “Poetry as a last resort is indeed a strange concept; and a kind of inversion of the enormous problems of skill and gifts implied in electing to write poetry at all. Many who are doing so in South Africa to-day are not poets at all, merely people of some talent attempting to use certain conventions and unconventions associated with poetry in order to express their feelings in a way that may hope to get a hearing.”

Nadine Gordimer died this summer. She was a person of keen convictions and a writer of extraordinary talent. In all its forms, her writing scrupulously explored the myriad problems of South Africa during and after apartheid and, in its fierce but quiet way, it “loud hailed” an enormous international audience.

And so we hail Gordimer. Doing so feels especially right because this volume of *The Dalhousie Review* contains the work of a number of poets who make brilliant use of the “unconventions” of their discipline to hail other writers. Consider, for example, the wisdom with which Aimee

Penna explores Heaney's thoughts on the self as noun to reconsider "the verb, pure verb" of sexual intimacy. Consider, too, the pathos with which Karissa LaRocque redeploys passages from Phyllis Webb's "Poetics Against the Angel of Death," including the opening line, which feels so fitting here: "I am so sorry to speak of death of again."

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Editor