

It is said that simplicity is at the heart of most things innovative. This is true of the 2008 *Intwasa Poetry* collection; whose cover design and the poems in it reflect the spirit of a new beginning. Intwasa means Spring in the Ndebele language. This is a collection of acclaimed and accomplished local talent, enhanced by the contributions from writers from outside Zimbabwe. All the writers in the book have read from their work at the Intwasa Arts Festival koBulawayo, which takes place each September. The Zimbabwean poets in the book are Julius Chingono, Chirikure Chirikure, John Eppel, Ignatius Mabasa, Shepherd Mandhlazi, Judy Maposa, Deon Marcus, Albert Nyathi, Pathisa Nyathi, Mthabisi Phili and John S. Read. From outside Zimbabwe, the poets are Owen Sheers and Lloyd Robson from Wales, Véronique Tadjo from Côte d'Ivoire/South Africa and Joelle Taylor from London.

Far from being frivolous entertainment or a mere intellectual exercise, it is clear that these poets regard their work as a serious art with a serious aim. For example Julius Chingono's poem, *About Words*, opens the book with a subtle warning concerning the use of words, how they can be used in a devious way, and for people to be wary of their dishonest use. This is particularly important at this time when some politicians take advantage of the gullible to have their own way.

There is also a fundamental seriousness in the writings of the poets that is perhaps indicative of the times in which they live and their accompanying experiences. *Upon Mzilikazi Bridge*, by Pathisa Nyathi, underlines this fact succinctly as he writes of looking down upon 'the sprawling dusty townships' of Bulawayo and the daily grind of the people surviving in harsh times. Amongst Chirikure Chirikure's contributions to the book is his poem *Time to Move On*, which questions the political status quo that sees people oppressed merely because they have 'strayed in the wrong area' or blurted 'the wrong party slogan'. Ignatius Mabasa's aptly titled poem *Epitaph* offers a poignant reminder of the injustices that have befallen society in Zimbabwe and the resultant loss of hope.

Not all is gloom and doom, however, as many of the poems show a spirit of resilience and make for fascinating reading. The merciless fire of the poets' tongues brings out a song of truth that expresses the poets' imagination about their society and what they desire it to be. This is amply demonstrated in Judy Maposa's *How About?* In reading *Intwasa Poetry* we feel the poets' desire to lead a free life, where they are able to chart their own destiny.

The Iraqi poet Jamil Sidq al-Zahawi once declared that 'the best poetry is that which interprets the heart and its sorrows', and that 'in poetry, lying is not sweet and deceit is not permissible'. This is true of this collection of *Intwasa Poetry*, whose poems of love and sensuality expose the writers' ingrained feelings for their subjects whilst on the other hand their sadness, loss and outrage at the status quo cannot be ignored.

In his opening address at the recently held launch at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo, prize-winning poet John Eppel quoted President John F. Kennedy, 'When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him

of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.'

Eppel continued, 'Well, there will always be power so there must always be poetry. When the poet stops speaking that is the time for us to despair; and that is why we should welcome this slim volume of poetry in all its diversity.'

'The diversity can be indicated by looking at a few examples in the book, the overtly socially committed poems of Véronique Tadjo and Ignatius Mabasa; the introspective deeply personal poems of Deon Marcus; the ironic playfulness of Julius Chingono; the lyrical beauty of Owen Shears.'

This is a wonderful book that deserves to be in any serious reader's collection.

(Walter B. Dube)