

Mandela's Cell

I stood among a crowd
of tourists from abroad
and stared into his past:

a cage of bricks and bars
as gloomy and as cramped
as racial bias in the mind.

And in that ancient tomb
a bench, a gleam of bowl,
a stone-cold strip of floor.

I could not hear the clang
shook from a gate of steel
that bigotry kept locked,

nor see a gaunt-faced man
fold up each dawn for years
the mat on which he'd dreamed.

Instead, far off, I heard
the cheering of the world
when he, the era's Lazarus,

walked out into the sun.

Around that unlocked gate,
that legacy's stark shrine
the cameras flashed applause.