

OCTOGENARIAN
DIARY
IV

Muthal Naidoo

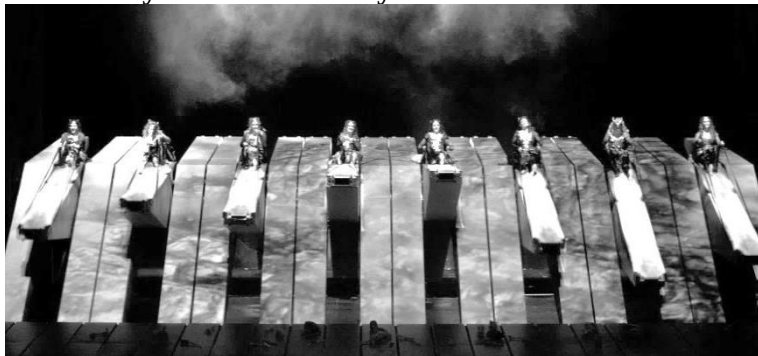
*OCTOGENARIAN
DIARY
IV*

(February- June 2019)

Muthal Naidoo

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ISBN 978-0-9946923-6-8

5 February 2019: The Valkyries



Valkyries on horseback from Lepage's production

I watched Wagner's *Die Walküre* last night. Though still in great awe of Robert Lepage and his Ex Machina team's staging of the opera, but not totally mesmerized by set and design this time, I began to see, what I think could be Wagner's cynicism. His creation of Wotan, a god, came across as ironic. Wotan is a bully, probably as result of being a henpecked husband who has to follow his wife's dictates to the letter. He backs up his cruel behavior with resort to conventions that he regards as matters of honour.

As for Brünnhilde and the Valkyries, whom I had thought of as independent, liberated women, I now saw them as extensions of Wotan's will and lost all respect for them. The opening scene in the final section which shows them riding in on their horses with the ringing call of hey-ya-ho (or something to that effect), gives the illusion of independent, self-assured women. But their subservience to Wotan is revealed in their fear of him. Definitely not free and independent, they are clearly under the domination of a man. And they function as his slaves, transporting dead heroes to Valhalla.

It is no wonder that Brünnhilde commits sati at the end of *Gotterdamerung*, the last opera in the Ring Cycle. Sati signifies that without a man, a woman is nothing in herself.

Furthermore, I regard the title, *Die Walküre*, the second opera of the Ring Cycle, as a misnomer. It is not about the Valkyries; it is actually preparation for the advent of Siegfried, the great hero of the third opera in the Ring Cycle. And though it is Sieglinde who gives birth to Siegfried, Brünnhilde is symbolically pregnant with him in *Die Walküre*.

As this is a complete reversal of my view of the Valkyries as presented in *Octogenarian Diary*, I considered transferring it from this book to that. I did not. I was less perceptive then and I cannot ascribe new ideas to the old me.

6 February

In *Octogenarian Diary*, I had come up with the theory that hatred of others emanates from self-hate. Now I am going to look for evidence around me that confirms or modifies such a belief.

And I have found the first incident to examine.

In December, when my friend, Rogen, told me he was expecting visitors from the States, I had asked if any of them would be willing to take books that I wished to send to my niece, Ragini, and to my friend, Marsha House Cann, and post them when they got back to the US. Our postal system has become totally unreliable and the cost of sending by courier is exorbitant.

Rogen said he was quite sure that he would find someone. When I asked how I could cover the cost, he dismissed it, saying whoever it was, would be happy to

oblige him and there was no need to talk of payment. So I brought him two small parcels, one for Marsha House Cann in New York, and the other for my niece, Ragini, in St Louis.

The relative to whom he gave the parcels left on the 2nd of January. It is now February and I have yet to hear whether Ragini and Marsha have received the books. When I inquired from Rogen, he told me not to worry and indicated that his aunt had taken the books. She is the sister of someone I know; someone who hates me. And as sisters communicate, I did not think that my books would reach their destinations.

This was a situation to examine my theory that hate for others is really a form of self-hate. The woman who hates me, has hated me since the publication of my book *Stories from the Asiatic Bazaar* in 2007. I had interviewed her, her younger sister, not the one from the States, and other members of their family as I was recording the life of their mother, a heroine in the struggle against apartheid.

In the course of the interview, the younger sister had told of incidents of abuse that their mother had had to endure and I was doubly impressed. Here was a woman, who despite her personal suffering, had readily dedicated herself to the fight for political freedom. In my eyes that made her even more of a heroine. And I felt very privileged to be the one to tell her story.

When the book was published, the eldest daughter was mortified as I had exposed the abuse in my account of her mother. She immediately set about denying it and accusing me of making it up. That is when she began to hate me. Her hatred has nothing to do with me and everything to do with herself. It is based on her feelings of

shame; her focus is on an abusive father rather than a heroic mother.

15 February

I have spent the last ten days proofreading and editing *Octogenarian Diary*. Now that I am laying out my books for publication myself, I find it gives me a chance to improve the text and make corrections. As I have also included photos in the book, I have had to make further adjustments in order to place them relevant to text. I use only black and white pictures as colour pictures require a section unto themselves. I am able to change colour photos to black and white but, as I don't have the tools of a layout artist, my work is far from professional. But I am satisfied with what I am able to do.

That old saying, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" applies only to those who believe it. I have a printer-copier-scanner. I have never used the scanner as I used to have a separate scanner. I tried out the scanner on my printer. I can work it! I am using it to scan photos for my books.

16 February

I no longer have internet and email. The service which is paid for by stop order has been cancelled by Telkom which informs me that I am "out of bundle". How can that be when they collect payment from my bank every month? I am fully aware that it is simply a means to force me to upgrade. I don't need an upgrade. Such arbitrary treatment is crass exploitation. I shall cancel the stop order and find a new service provider.

26 February

I have spent the last two weeks editing *Octogenarian Diary*. I finally sent it off to the printer today. So I can now turn my full attention to this book.

I am glad to say that the books that Rogen's aunt was kind enough to post on her return home to the US were duly delivered to Ragini on the 21st of February and to Marsha on the 23rd. I am sorry that I doubted her.

The Mahabharata

I decided to watch Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* today. Being a feminist and atheist, I have no reverence for the great historical drama. And though I had lampooned it in my play, *Flight from the Mahabharath*, those who read the play, tend to imbue it with something of the respect that they give to the epic. I was actually disappointed when Dr. Kathy Perkins chose *this* play for her anthology of plays by or about black South African women. I had hoped she would choose *Luci's Dilemma* which I regard as my most innovative play. But the *Mahabharata* had greater pulling power even though my play is a flight from it. I suppose I am seen as "Indian", not the South African that I am. People function on the belief in race. As Dr Perkins is making a return visit to South Africa in May, I will ask her why she chose *Flight* for her anthology.

27 February

Last night, just as I was about to get into bed, I had a tiny panic attack; I wondered if I would be able to come up with a poem for Lionel's birthday. Just as I switched off the light, a poem popped into my head so I switched the

light back on, got out of bed and wrote it down:

For Lionel
each day
is
a birth day:
the celebration
of a mystery:
an atom
that lives
breathes
and loves
in a universe
ever expanding
ever evolving –
a miracle –
you!

I was amazed. I know it reflects my understanding of existence, but I was still surprised that it just popped out of my head.

And Lionel's birthday is seven months away!

The Mahabharata

I watched the two disc set of this epic drama based on the adaptation by Jean-Claude Carrière and directed by Peter Brook; the first disc yesterday and the second disc today. I could scarcely stay awake. It was extremely difficult to keep track of the characters; I really did not know who was who and I kept nodding off. My age is beginning to affect my perception and it all came across as a pretentious piece of nonsense.

Even though I love Peter Brook's work – I will never forget his circus theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – the *Mahabharata* cannot really be cut down to just over five hours and still make sense. Not that the full version, which I watched about thirty years ago, made much existential sense to me either. Religious symbolism for the mystery of existence is passé. In modern times it has been replaced by science fiction which is as unrealistic. Life is a mystery and the more we dig into it, the more mysterious it becomes. There are no answers.

Human existence is a profound mystery, the profoundest of mysteries. Even as we unfold new meanings of its ever evolving nature, all our explanations turn into fairy tales

28 February: Anti-Semitism

Yesterday I watched *Daniel Deronda*, in which author, George Eliot, deals with anti-Semitism. I followed it up with my most favourite musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. So now I am trying to understand prejudice against Jews. As I believe that hatred of others emanates from self-doubt and fear, I want to understand what it is that people who are not Jewish fear about Jews.

As hate is based on fear, I see that hatred of Jews is really xenophobia, the fear of difference that informs racism. It is the reason that Jesus is not, in general, seen as a Jew, and has become European. What is it about Jews that gives rise to such fear that they had to be persecuted; that turned Israel into a state to be regarded with suspicion?

Look at these Jews: Abraham, the Apostles, Niels Bohr, Louis Brandeis, Martin Buber, Emile Durkheim, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Benny Goodman, Harry Houdini, Franz Kafka, Jerome Kern, Jesus, Gustav Mahler, Groucho Marx, Mary, Karl Marx, Arthur Miller, Moses, Boris Pasternak, Marcel Proust, Carl Sagan, Stephen Sondheim, Stephen Spielberg ... just a few from a long list of Jewish benefactors of humankind; remarkable Jews who have given us new ways to view life and to grow in understanding.

Theirs is the power of ideas and innovation with which they conquer the world. Are they feared because of their power to interpret and create? As culture keeps people in separate groups, Jews are a separate group, so fear and persecution follow them despite their ability to change our understandings of existence. And when Jesus's religion of love brought Jews out of seclusion, the world took it, turned it into Christianity *and* anti-Semitism and sent the Jews back into seclusion.

In *Fiddler on the Roof*, there is one glorious scene in which Jews and Russians forget prejudice and come together in joyful celebration as human beings. It is the scene in the tavern where Tevye and Lazar Wolf go to celebrate Tevye's consent to Lazar Wolf's request for the hand of Tevye's eldest daughter, Tzeitel. The scene is wonderful as it presents people overcoming difference and coming together in the joy of being human. Appropriately, they sing and dance to *Lechaim – To Life*.

In the tavern, Jews are on one side; Russians on the other. But the joyous singing and dancing of the Jews, celebrating Lazar Wolf's engagement, becomes infectious

and draws in the Russians. Though the Russian style of singing and dancing is quite different, after they give a demonstration, they invite Tevye to dance with them and soon Jews and Russians are dancing together, creating a completely new dance form that combines Jewish and Russian movements. It is a wonderfully jubilant moment in which all differences are forgotten in the joyful creativity that combines what is Jewish with what is Russian and reveals race and racism simply as fear of the superficial.

2 March: Osmond and Grandcourt

Last night I watched Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, in which the character, Gilbert Osmond, is presented as a misogynist, as is the character, Henleigh Grandcourt in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Osmond and Grandcourt posed new challenges to my theory that cruelty to others, emanates from a lack of self-esteem. In Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, it is easy to see that Fagin's criminal activity emanates from society's racist attitude towards Jews. But what is it that turns Osmond and Grandcourt into cruel misogynists? I read the books that these films are based on decades ago and, as a young woman, simply accepted these characters as evil.

Now, no longer believing in evil, I look at them to try to determine how they came to lose their self-respect. For me, it is a lack of self-respect that turns one into a predator; but the films simply present Osmond and Grandcourt as evil, as their authors did.

In the twenty-first century, under the influence of

psychology and psychiatry, we no longer see evil as a reality. As a concept, evil has been reduced to the meta-physical. Now we search for social factors that give rise to deviant behaviour. But, as I do not have access to the backgrounds of Osmond and Grandcourt, they appear to be innately evil. So they remain stereotypes; not characters who enlarge our understanding of human behaviour. They remain in the nineteenth century, and are evil – not products of negative social conditioning.

The Believer

I pulled this DVD off my shelf and decided to watch it. I had forgotten that it was about a young Jew who adopts the identity of a Nazi. The film was inspired by the real life story of Daniel Burros, a Jew, who repudiated his identity and became a member of the KKK. And watching this film again, I realize that, among other influences, it must have helped me to see that hatred of others arises from self-hate.

When I pulled *The Believer* off my shelf, I had no idea that I would be continuing my search for understanding of anti-Semitism. In Daniel Balint, the Jew in the movie, anti-Semitism is not external but internal, it emanates from within, from conscious self-hatred.

In racist societies, the oppressed, being despised, learn to hate themselves; as does, Daniel Balint, who adopts the identity of a Nazi. Similarly, black people in systems of apartheid, adopted the ways of white people – some consciously like Daniel Balint and others through conditioning in the racist system in which they lived.

Adapting to a different culture, changes one's identity. Living in South Africa, under apartheid, in a dominant culture of European derivation, one becomes South

African. And like Daniel Balint, those of the subject cultures, learn to despise the cultures from which they originated as they imbibe new ways of being that approximate to the ways of the dominant group. And when we deposed apartheid, we deposed the dominant race but, as we had been conditioned in the culture of apartheid, our identities had been irrevocably changed long before. Though apartheid was a system to keep people separated in racial group areas, it nevertheless brought us together, under racist governments, in a dominant culture of racism and we became South African, i.e. practitioners of discrimination.

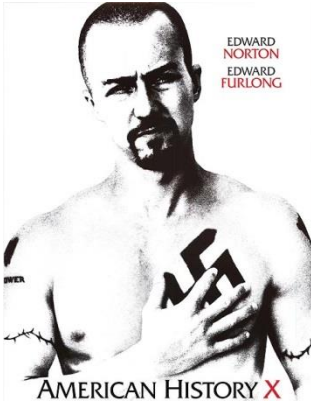
Apartheid taught the oppressed to despise their original cultures and like Daniel Balint, they gave up much of their old ethnic ways and adapted to the ways of the powerful.

The forced separation in group areas, meant to keep people apart, was ironically, undermined by the need of the dominant group to dominate. Through its imposition of official languages, it imposed European cultural norms that brought all people together and created a new nation, a nation of racist South Africans.

Those who still stick to old identities and still call themselves Indians, Europeans, Africans, or Coloureds, are stuck in the race consciousness of apartheid and have not yet recognized their true identities as South Africans. South Africans are people of a mixed culture, people who have been influenced by the different ways that originated in Europe, Africa and India.

4 March

Yesterday, I watched *American History X*. My mind being set on the theme of racism at present, I gravitate



automatically towards movies that examine the subject. In *American History X*, racism is examined at the lower economic levels of society – where it is most obvious and most violent as it accompanies the struggle for survival. In the upper echelons of society, where racial and class differences are blunted by wealth, there is little or no *violent*

racial conflict. And as only very few members of other race or class groups are able to penetrate the upper social sphere, there is no real threat of physical conflict in affluent society.

At the lower social levels, races are thrown together to compete for the same limited resources. That leads to active racist hatred and violence. Liberty, equality and fraternity cannot easily be sustained in circumstances of economic hardship.

5 March

I watched the film of Dickens's *Great Expectations* last night. And there it was again; self-hate arising from class differences. Pip learns to despise himself and his pursuit of Estella is not out of love but a need for respect, not as himself, but as a gentleman. When Dickens reduces Estella to a lower class, and Pip discovers that his benefactor is a former criminal, he learns to overcome self-hatred based on

class distinctions and he comes to care for Abel Magwitch, the convict, who is his benefactor.

But he is not totally free of the self-hatred that discrimination imposes. Instead of the reconciliation between Pip and Estella at the end of the film, I would have liked to have seen a proper reconciliation between Pip and Joe Gargery. That would have finally exonerated Pip. It would have been a demonstration that Pip now understood the meaning of true nobility – a nobility that Joe exemplifies. But Joe is uneducated and poor – so class has come between them.

6 March: I received the following email two days ago:

Dear Muthal Naidoo

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Devaksha Moodley. I am a Drama and Performance Studies PhD student at UKZN Howard College. My research is centred on South African Indian Women's identity with a particular focus on South African Indian Women Playwrights.

As such, I would like to interview you for my research.

Please see the attached informed consent letter that fully explains my research and the nature of the interview I would like to have with you. We would need to meet in person, for one interview, at any place that is suitable for you.

Please let me know if this is all right with you and if you are willing to be interviewed? It would be most informative and a great honour

to have you be a part of my research.
I look forward to hearing from you
Sincerely
Devaksha Moodley

My reply:

Dear Ms Moodley

I am quite happy to be interviewed, but as I live in Pretoria, I think you could simply send me the questions that you need to ask and I will send you my answers. If this is acceptable, I will sign your formidable contract and send it to you.

I have not been involved in theatre since the 1990s, so I am not sure how relevant my contribution to your research would be. At the time that I was writing my plays, I was involved in the anti-apartheid movement so my plays do not really reflect a search for identity but rather the repudiation of an oppressive system.

My recent books which are autobiographical, (1) *Octogenarian Adventures*, (2) *From my Journals* and (3) *Octogenarian Diary* (still at the printers) interrogate the concept of race and reflect my understanding of my identity as South African, not Indian. You will find my books on my Website. My book of plays, *WIP (Work-in-Progress) Theatre Plays* is also on my website.

Good luck with your project.

That was two days ago. There has been no response. I assume my repudiation of an Indian identity may be a problem.

7 March: Two Love Stories: The first: *Amistad*

Yesterday I watched *Amistad*, a movie about slavery. The film is based on a true story; the story of Joseph Cinqué of Sierra Leone.



Joseph Cinqué

I see the film as a love story; not a love story in the usual sense of romance, but love as I understand it; love that emanates from self-esteem and allows one to respect and love others.

Cinqué who is captured and sent off with others to become a slave, is a man with a powerful sense of self-worth; he does not succumb to the attempts of those who wish to dehumanize him by enslaving him; and his fight for freedom is the assertion of human dignity.

The abolitionists, who take up his cause, are men like him, men with self-respect and an understanding of universal human dignity. These men support his demand for respect and see him as one of them – a man who knows his own worth.

True self-respect does not allow one to become a slave or to enslave others – and it transcends the notion of race.

The second Love Story: *Take the Lead*

Another very different film, *Take the Lead* which I watched again some weeks ago, is also, in my opinion, a love story – again not of the romantic kind but of genuine love that emanates from an understanding of self-worth.

It is based on the true story of Pierre Dulaine, a ballroom dancer and teacher, who teaches a group of potential drop-outs and criminals to value themselves through dance. Despite their attempts to foist their self-hate on him, his love is stronger and they learn, through dance, to respect themselves – and to respect others. True stories give us an understanding of love that is different from sexual attraction; they reveal to us the qualities that make us more than animal



Pierre Dulaine in 2014

In contrast: A Hate Story: *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

This afternoon, I watched the DVD of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and here I found a hate story; Tom Ripley, is a man just the opposite of Cinqué and Dulaine. He has no self-respect. He is like Pip, in *Great Expectations*; he longs to associate on equal terms with those of the upper class but he sees himself as unworthy as he is from a poor and working class environment. When he gains entry into high society, to evade his own disparaging understanding of himself, he assumes fraudulent identities, resorts to subterfuge and when threatened with exposure, kills the very persons whom he wishes he could be.

I wondered who the author of the book was and found it to be Patricia Highsmith, an author of whom I had never heard. I wondered what in her experience had resulted in this bleak portrayal of a human being who, as the title suggests, despite the irony, is a talented individual. But his talents are not enough for him. As he lacks the status of class and wealth, he hates himself.

8 March

Last night, I decided I needed a change from self-persecuting characters and turned to more innocent times. So I watched *Cranford*, based on the novels by Elizabeth Gaskell, and found myself in a time and place in which conventions helped to define people and gave them the stability of knowing and accepting who they were and exactly what was expected of them. Their individuality being subordinated to tradition they were not like Tom Ripley, tortured by an awareness of desirable forms of existence beyond their reach.

9 March: Prisons

I woke up this morning with the thought that imprisonment is a form of punishment based on the belief in evil. Responsibility for crime is placed squarely on the individual. Extenuating circumstances that are to be found in social circumstances, may lead to less severe forms of punishment – but punishment is mandatory. Incarceration disregards the pernicious influence of social circumstances that make crime a permanent feature of communal living. Imprisonment, therefore, is not, in my opinion, commensurate with a modern understanding of the development of character.

Email from Devaksha Moodley

Dear Muthal

Thank you very much for getting back to me and for agreeing to be interviewed. I have checked with my supervisors and email questions will be fine. I am refining my questions for email purposes and will send them to you on Monday.

I have read a lot of your work (your books, plays and academic articles). Your website has been most helpful and accessible. You are one of the foremost South African Indian woman playwrights and your contribution to my research would be immense and greatly appreciated.

Once again, thank you for being a part of my research. I look forward to communicating with you.

Kind regards

Devaksha

My reply

You have defined the aim of your research as follows:

“My research is centred on South African Indian Women's identity with a particular focus on South African Indian Women Playwrights.”

As you have approached me about my work, I must point out to you that I totally reject the designation “Indian” in terms of who I am. I was born and brought up in South Africa and though I was forced to live in group areas set aside for people of Indian descent, I nevertheless regard myself as South African. I believe that the continued use of the word “Indian” with regard to South Africans of

Indian descent reflects apartheid conditioning. Apartheid reified the notion of race, a concept that I completely reject.

People of different cultures are first and foremost human beings; adaptation to different environments led to the development of differences in culture and to minor differences in physical features. These differences are what define race and are generally accepted as essential differences. But human beings are *not different in essentials*, only in terms of their adaptation to differing environments. I see the focus on “race” as focus on the superficial.

To continue to refer to South Africans as *Indian* South Africans is to continue to think in terms of race and apartheid. I totally reject the concept of race; human beings of different cultures are human beings. Being a South African, I went to school where I studied Shakespeare, not Tagore. So my upbringing reflects the dominant culture derived from the descendants of the Europeans who conquered and governed this country. They created an education system based on a Western understanding of existence and that changed our identities. Even though we lived in group areas that reflected the places of our origins, our original cultures were eroded. Elements of Indian culture have been retained by a few, but people of Indian descent in South Africa, have become South Africans.

I do not wish the tag “Indian” to be applied to me. I am a South African. As your focus is on “South African Indian Women’s identity” please take note that my identity does not include the word “Indian”.

I realize that Devaksha Moodley is a feminist, whereas I am a humanist. Her focus is on women; mine on being human.

10 March: Hierarchies

What I understand of Karl Marx is that he envisioned a classless society as the means to overcome the evils of discrimination. But as we see in South Africa, it will take time to rid ourselves of our conditioning in a racist class system. We no longer have an *official* class system based on race; but race is still a major influence in our thinking as well as the usual class systems based on economic-social inequality. Discrimination in South Africa will eventually become only class-based – as in other countries.

Marx's idealistic understanding of how society should work went through various transformations and eventually ended up in Stalinism. The attempt to rid society of the class system, simply gave rise, in the end, to dictatorship. It seems to me that we are stuck with the class system.

Society is like a body with a brain that controls all its functions. Living in communities requires government (the brain); and all governments whether democratically elected or not, assume absolute power to determine how that society operates. As societies are hierarchical organisations, with leaders at various levels, who form the upper classes, we can never rid ourselves of class systems that lead to discrimination and corruption at all levels.

Even at the most basic social level, the family, we have a hierarchical system; FATHER, mother, Sons, daughters.

And abuse in families is common.

At all levels, power is concentrated in the hands of those who govern and control. And as power corrupts, democracy can never be a reality – only an ideal.

The only power that an ordinary citizen in a democracy has – is the vote. And we give that away at elections. So the cry of liberty, fraternity, equality is really a fantasy. The best we can ever hope for is government that is not entirely corrupt and not totally exploitative.

11 March: Prisons continued

I am trying to understand our attitude to crime and how we deal with it. After Freud, we can no longer simply regard the commission of crime as evil, which is a metaphysical concept. We now understand it as a product of conditioning in family and society. And I am trying to understand why we have not replaced prisons with rehabilitation centres. People, who commit crimes, need help, and prisons should be replaced by places of renewal where people put the past behind them, learn to value themselves and develop skills to help them function with hope rather than despair. But we have imprisonment which continues conditioning in negative ways and makes it very difficult for him/her ever to learn self-respect.

I recollect a time almost twenty years ago when I took in a woman I had met in the Pretoria prison. At that time, I had recently retired and was looking for new ways to make my contribution to society. I wished to offer my services as a teacher to women in prison who were illiterate. But it was impossible to penetrate the system. So I simply took to visiting women in the prison.

I do not remember now how I eventually became acquainted with a woman from Soweto, who was serving time for some kind of fraud. She was in a study programme with UNISA and asked me for a dictionary. She introduced me to another inmate, a white woman, who was involved in the murder of her child. This woman was nearing the end of her sentence and would soon be released. I promised to keep in touch when she was out.

When she left prison, she went to live in a Church-run shelter for women. She moved out when she found a job, moved again when she changed jobs and when I went to visit, complained about her miserable circumstances. Eventually, she found a job in Lyttelton, where I live and I offered her accommodation in my home.

She stayed with me for nine months, and when she found a boyfriend, moved out. We were not compatible. I am an old introspective loner and she was forty, needing a normal social life. I wrote a book of very fanciful short stories, *Gansie in Kammaland* (Goosie in Make-believe Land) based on this experience. I named the characters in the book after birds – Gansie, based on her, and Mynah Bird, based on me; they were not birds of a feather.

Looking back on my attempt to help Gansie, the fictitious name I gave to the ex-con, I realize I was not really equipped to provide the kind of support that Gansie needed. I was simply a do-gooder with no real understanding of what was required.

12 March

Gansie in Kammaland rightfully belongs on my website so today I began transcribing it into a document and it will

soon take its place among all the other stories on my website.

14 March

I spent the whole of yesterday answering the questions sent me by Devaksha Moodley for her PhD dissertation. After a break, I wanted to read through my responses before sending off the document but could not find it on the computer. I thought I had saved it but obviously had not. So I worked on it again this morning and have now sent off the following document of my responses.

Devaksha Moodley

Research Questions For Muthal Naidoo

***DM (Devaksha Moodley):** I identify myself as a South African Indian woman. For instance, another woman may say that she is an Indian woman who lives in South Africa. These terms may seem synonymous but, in fact, they carry a great deal of meaning regarding how we identify ourselves. You have told me that your identity does not include the word Indian. Does it include the word woman? Do you identify as a South African woman? Is this how you have always seen yourself?
What led you to this self-realisation?*

MN (Muthal Naidoo): Being South African has nothing to do with race, only with provenance. I am a woman, born and raised in South Africa. That makes me a South African woman. Though that is a very simple statement, it, nevertheless, is a repudiation of race and racism. Race is based on acquired differences in physical features and cultural practices that arise from adaptation to differing environments. Differences acquired from differing responses to differing environments are additional to being human, like the clothes we wear. But these differences give rise to fear, a primitive response that construes danger in the unfamiliar, and that has led to racial categorization of human beings and to the reification of race.

So race as an essential trait is a false concept. Human beings, in essence, are not different and the cultures they develop differ only in content, not intent. The following statement by Ronnie Govender that you have sent me, sums up quite clearly that writers write about the life they know, i.e. the culture in which they find themselves.

“I didn’t write this because I wanted to do something on Indians but because it was my life and my world...I believe one has to find the universal in the unique experience. That is not ethnic, that is how art is made. Outside this country one appreciates this, but here we are invariably dubbed as Indians.” (Ronnie Govender)

Living in apartheid, your culture becomes that of apartheid. Writers from each separate group in South Africa know most about the environment in which they live and that is where they place their stories. People of European descent write about their experiences in their

separate communities and so do South Africans of African, Indian and Coloured descent.

Despite our separation into group areas, we, nevertheless, all live under the same government and are brought together under the same rules and regulations and the same political, educational and economic systems. And as these systems were determined by the dominant group and are based on its culture, we have all come under the same cultural influence and have adapted to it. The fact that we communicate through the medium of English is clear indication of our adoption of dominant cultural norms. Only those who do not use English as a means of self-expression and communication may claim to be Indian or African. To identify ourselves by a racial tag is simply to insist on a heritage that no longer applies to who we are and the way we live.

DM: *In your paper The Search for a Cultural Identity: A Personal View of South African “Indian” Theatre (1997), you discuss how apartheid resulted in segregated communities, and theatre development, as well as that of identity and culture, are not fixed but rather fluid and diverse. You thus write that, “In the ‘Indian’ community, therefore, the search for identity is an ongoing process and underlies all cultural, social, and political activities” (1997: 31). Today, 25 years post-apartheid, what are your general thoughts on the South African ‘Indian community’ and their search for identity? Are we still boxing ourselves racially and culturally because, as you say, there is a “pressure to acknowledge if not assert an ethnic affiliation because race is still a major factor in our thinking in South Africa” (Naidoo, 1997: 39)?*

MN: The continued use of words to indicate race: Indian, African, Coloured, White, keeps us in mental group areas. As long as we feel the need to use these terms, so long will we continue to remain in apartheid. And as long as race consciousness persists, so will racism and attitudes of racial inferiority and superiority. Even people living in India can no longer consider themselves to be purely Indian; they too have come under the influence of Western ideologies, culture and technology. Their only claim, now, to being Indian lies in the fact that they live in India.

Colonization spread the ideas, customs and values of Europeans throughout the world and changed people's understanding of existence. But I do not feel a lack in my identity because I read Shakespeare not Tagore. As Ronnie Govender has pointed out we are products of the environments in which we were born.

DM: *In your book A Medley: Women, Writing, Freedom (2017), you write, "There is tremendous pressure on woman to accept her reproductive function as the primary reason for her existence. In addition to the pressure exerted through familial and community expectations there is also the presentation of marriage and childbearing as the ideal of womanhood..." (2017: 4). With this in mind, regarding the terms of "Mother, Daughter, Sister, Wife": What do these familial roles mean to you, as a woman in South Africa, and what implications, in particular, do you think they hold for South African Indian women?*

MN: Just as we live in an ever-expanding universe, so we live in a process of continuous social evolution. And

family which forms the basis of society is continuously evolving as well, and winning greater freedom for its members, in particular, its women members. In the modern world, women are asserting their right to develop to their full potential in the same way as men do. Women no longer see themselves merely in terms of their biological functions, but as human beings with intellectual potential and influence. Just as men have the freedom to explore their full potential, women should also feel that they have the same freedom.

A woman has a brain as well as a body, so she has more than just the capacity for bearing and raising children. A man follows a career and marries. So does the modern woman. And just as there are bachelors, there are also women who do not require marriage in order to fulfill themselves. There will always be mothers, daughters, sisters and wives but these are functions concerned with the survival of the species; the modern woman is one who is also looking to the enhancement of the species.

DM: *You are one of the first South African women (of Indian descent) to write plays and you primarily worked in theatre during apartheid. What made you want to work in South African theatre and write plays? Why did you stop writing plays or working in theatre in post-apartheid South Africa?*

MN: In the 1940s, my father ran the cafés at the Empire and Royal Bioscopes in the Asiatic Bazaar in Marabastad in Pretoria. As children, my sister and brothers and I were often in the cinemas watching films – mostly Hollywood

movies. And that is probably what awakened my interest in theatre.

We moved to Durban in 1948, and after I had qualified as a primary school teacher at Springfield Training College, I enrolled as a part-time student in the Speech and Drama Department of the University of Natal in 1956 or 7. I had already met Ronnie Govender and Kessie Govender, who were playwrights, creating theatre events in the community. And I met Babs Pillay, Eileen Isaacs, Essop Khan, Guru Pillay, Mohammed Alli and others, and we formed a theatre group, which included my sister, Seetha, and began putting on performances. I functioned as director and put on plays by Moliere and American playwrights, Arthur Miller and Clifford Odets.

These performances came to the attention of the American cultural attaché and in 1965 resulted in my being awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study Theatre and Drama at Indiana University.

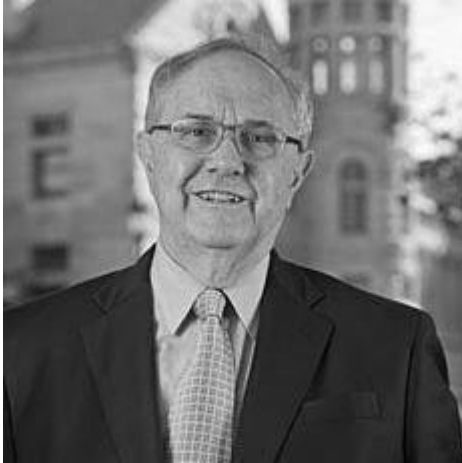
The 1960s were a time of Black Consciousness. In the States, people like Malcolm X were awakening black people to their rights as human beings. I arrived in the States in 1965, the year in which Malcolm X was assassinated.

At Indiana University (IU), I met Patrick O'Meara, a South African and a dynamic person. At that time, he was a student in the Political Studies Department. Patrick sought out Black people and made opportunities for them.

He took me under his wing and gave me opportunities to perform at informal gatherings. He brought Es'kia

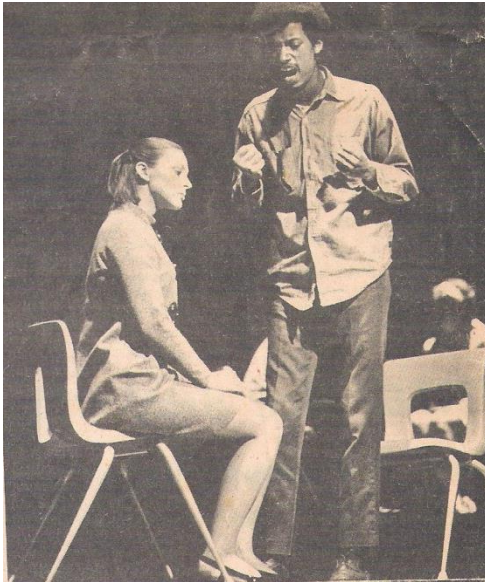
Mphahlele to the campus and organised lectures and readings from his books.

Patrick O'Meara



**Professor and
Vice President
Emeritus at IU**

Patrick promoted an adaptation for the stage of Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* which was titled, *I heard my Woman Call*. He asked me to direct the play.



Scene from *I Heard My Woman Call* presented by the Black Theatre Workshop of Indiana University, 26 and 27 March, 1969

Through Patrick, I became involved in Black Theatre and when I had completed my course work at IU, I joined the Black Artists' Group (BAG) in St Louis. I worked with BAG for a couple of years and then was appointed to the Black Studies Department of Washington University in St Louis where I taught the history of Black Theatre in the States and put on plays by the Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka.

I returned to South Africa in 1976. Back home, I became involved in the anti-apartheid movement and for the next ten years wrote and directed plays. During that time, I had difficulty holding on to teaching positions because of my anti-apartheid plays. And I needed a job; we could not live off our efforts in theatre.

Then in 1988, I met Tom Swart, Vice Rector of Giyani College of Education. He offered me the position of HOD of the Drama Department and I spent the years from 1989-1994 working with Tsonga students, who created plays based on their life in Limpopo and performed them in the Tsonga language. It was an exciting time for me, assisting students to make theatre.

I retired in 1998, came to live in Pretoria and began my life as a writer, not of plays – I no longer had a connection with theatre.

DM: *In A Medley: Women, Writing, Freedom (2017), you explain that writers' works are not entirely autobiographical but rather, "Like a baby in the womb, the story, which takes its nourishment from the author,*

will inevitably reflect her characteristic view of life” (2017: 30). Considering this, how would you say your identity and life experiences have influenced your playwriting? In particular, the characters and narratives in your work?

MN: My playwriting, which happened chiefly from 1976 – 1988, reflects the injustices of apartheid and the attempts of its victims to defy the system and to assert their own power and dignity.

DM: *Your trilogy of plays Three For Tea (1977, 1983), focuses on a lot of issues South African Indian women face in their lives through South African Indian women characters, specifically regarding marriage, divorce and motherhood. In Have Tea And Go (1977), men refer to women as ‘the girl’ and ‘the wife’ and the age of 24 is seen as already too old for a woman to still be unmarried. The Divorcee (1977) has a recurring theme of male ownership of women who supposedly need men but you show in the play that they are more a hassle than they are necessary. It’s Mine (1983) is a radical take on motherhood, boldly seeing it as a singular experience, separate from traditional marriage and family. Considering these works, what have you wanted to communicate about South African Indian society, in particular South African Indian women, through your plays?*

MN: When I present unorthodox views, it is simply to challenge people to think about and question taken-for-granted notions.

DM: In your play Flight From The Mahabharath (1998), Draupadi says, "We are women. We were born to be wives and mothers" (2008: 236). In your play Outside-In (1983), the character Kate says, "Our choices are not really free. Our choices depend on our conditioning" (2002:246). You state in My Search For Meaning (2017: 51-52) that you are an atheist and that, "religious rituals, like social traditions, requiring strict conformity, are a means of maintaining community". In your personal experiences as a South African and in your observations, have South African Indian women been able to escape the restricting customs of their families, cultures and religions? Can they ever really achieve this or are we, as Kate says, too conditioned to ever truly be free?

MN: Every individual is both a conformist and a non-conformist. There are those who are strictly conformist and do not question; there are those who challenge and bring about change and there are those who challenge for greater understanding. It is a destiny that we each choose.

DM: South African comedian, actress and playwright Krijay Govender states that theatre allows South African Indian women a chance to represent themselves (2003). How do you think South African Indian women are represented in plays by South African Indian men, as opposed to how they are represented in plays by South African Indian women?

MN: I cannot answer this question as I am no longer familiar with the work of playwrights.

DM: *In the past and presently, there have only been a few South African Indian women playwrights. To what extent do you agree with this statement? Do you think there has been a dearth of plays by South African Indian women?*

MN: Again, I have no real knowledge of the situation. I can only surmise that output may be small as theatre in the community has always been a struggle. Indigenous theatre requires a good deal of support and that has been lacking.

DM: *Devarakshanam 'Betty' Govinden in her book Sister Outsiders (2008) focuses on literature by South African Indian women and argues that such poetry, plays and novels have been consistently neglected. You have self-published some of your own work. Considering this, do you feel that there is a lack of recognition and publication of plays by South African (Indian) women? What do you think are the reasons for this deficit? Why have you chosen to make all your work freely accessible on your website?*

MN: I think that in South Africa, as we still think in apartheid terms, the work of "Indians" will always seem to lack universality as it emanates from a small, powerless ethnic group.

DM: *In your play Flight From The Mahabharath (1998), the characters' find freedom from the Epic on the stage where they can create a new reality for themselves. One can interpret this as a metaphor that the stage and theatre is a space of freedom. Was this your intention? Do you think playwriting and theatre can be an empowering form*

of expression for South African Indian women? In what ways do you think it is beneficial?

MN: When you think of a stage it is simply an open space that calls for imagination and invention – it provides opportunity. The stage in my play is a space for free exploration of women’s capabilities. It is a symbol of freedom from the conventions and traditions that bind women in *The Mahabharata*.

DM: *Ronnie Govender has said of his work: “I didn’t write this because I wanted to do something on Indians but because it was my life and my world...I believe one has to find the universal in the unique experience. That is not ethnic, that is how art is made. Outside this country one appreciates this, but here we are invariably dubbed as Indians” (Govinden, 2008:112). Do you agree with these sentiments? You write in My Search For Meaning (2017) that, “we work in separate areas, in separate groups, and we write plays that we limit to our own groups in the mistaken belief that other people are different and our plays cannot have any meaning for them” (2017: 47). Do you find that works viewed under the banner of South African ‘Indian’ theatre or plays by South African Indian people are seen as only relevant to South African Indian people? What do you think are the pitfalls of this categorisation? Do you find that this categorisation continues to persist in post-apartheid South African theatre?*

MN: The fact is that the group areas of apartheid kept people apart so African, Coloured, Indian and White

people know very little about one another and do not, in general, care to know about one another. Until we learn to see ourselves as South Africans, theatre will remain segregated and support for theatre will be sectional.

15 March

This morning I emailed the following message to Devaksha: “I did not answer your inquiry about why I self-publish and why I make my work freely available on the Internet. Here is my answer: I self-publish because I can. I make only twenty copies of my books. For a wider readership, I put my books on my website. My writing is not a commercial venture; it is a sharing of ideas.”

I realize that as Devaksha is a feminist, her focus is on women and women’s liberation. My focus is on society, as a whole, and the limitations it imposes on all human beings.

16 March

Yesterday, I received a message that my book, *Octogenarian Diary*, is ready to be picked up from the Printers. I will do so on Monday.

I am now transcribing *Gansie in Kammaland*, and it occurs to me that it has potential for a movie. I asked Tom what he thought; he agrees and has referred me to sites on the Internet that offer methods for creating screen plays.

This old dog is about to learn a new trick.

19 March

Yesterday, I drove to Minuteman Press in Midrand to collect, *Octogenarian Diary*. There were about six major intersections on Route 101 where robots were not working, and they became 4-way stops. It slowed down traffic to a crawl on that busy route. In the old days, there were always pointsmen who kept traffic flowing at such times. Traversing the intersections today was at the discretion of drivers; quite a chancy business.

I eventually got to the printers, picked up my books and drove back again in the same hazardous way.

At home, I examined the books and was very pleased to see that the photographs I put in were quite presentable. Now that I do my own layout the photos are where I want them.

Gansie in Kammaland

I have spent the last few days transcribing and laying out this book which will go on my website and to the printers soon. I have been laughing all the way through the process. It is a funny book. I now think that *Gansie in Kammaland* is my most imaginative and best fictional work. It is based on my real experience of living with a parolee with whom I shared my home from December 2004 – August 2005.

25 March

I received this message from Professor Ray Miller of the Theatre and Dance Department of Appalachian State University. Dr Miller directed the production of *Flight from the Mahabharath* in the Valborg Theatre of the

Theatre and Dance Department of ASU in April 2017. And his Department sponsored my visit to the university to see the production.

Dear Muthal: It has been a while since we last talked and I wanted to check in with you to see how you are doing. I assume that you have been doing more writing. Anything recently? I would love to read what you are writing now. I visited your webpage and I really am very impressed with the section you have focused on *Flight from the Mahabharath*. Have you been getting any inquiries from other universities or theatres to ask to do their own production of your play?

My daughter, Hali, graduated from High Point University in May of 2018 and returned home and started making application for jobs and internships in her field. It took 9 months, but she finally was able to land a job in New York City. We moved her up there three weeks ago. She is rooming with one of her best friends from college and has made the transition very well. Jessica and I are very proud of her but we do miss her lovely presence on a daily basis. But we also know that this is exactly what she should be doing.

I remember that back in October you had requested from Kevin permission to post our production of your play on your website. Have you heard back from him on that?

Anyway, I just wanted to write and check in with you.

My Reply

I am delighted to have received a message from you. I have not had further inquiries about the play. But I have had enquiries from people about my work with the Black Artists Group in St Louis in the early 1970s. Someone is making a film about BAG. So I have been taking an extended trip down memory lane, with a couple of ex-students from that time sending me messages.

I don't know if you know Dr. Kathy Perkins. She chose *Flight* for her book, *Black South African Women*, an anthology of plays. That was more than ten years ago. She is coming to South Africa in May and I am going to send books back with her for my niece, Ragini, and friends, and a couple for you and Jessica. My best wishes to you, Jessica and Hali. I am so glad I know you.

26 March: Email Reply from Ray

Thank you for your quick reply. I, too, have been thinking about you. During the academic year, my schedule gets so full and I lose touch with those I want very much to stay in contact with - at least until the summer when my schedule is my own.

I have been reading the books you list under My Autobiography and I enjoy them immensely. Let me take this time to thank you for what you wrote in *Octogenarian Adventures* on your experience with us here at ASU when you came to see the play and to spend time with us. I am sure you know that we have a kind of mutual admiration society between us. Your warm presence, quick wit and sharing of your thoughts on the play, on the ideas you write about, and on

life itself was truly appreciated by my colleagues and students, as well as myself.

Also, I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoy your poems as well. One of them, "White Hair," is joyfully poignant. In there, you use a term I was not familiar with – sanyasini. I have since looked that up and I will want to learn more about it.

26 March: My Reply

Dear Ray

In case you didn't find the meaning of sannyasini, this is what I know. In the Hindu religion, it is believed that the human being goes through 4 stages of life. The last stage is when you are free of material concerns and can devote your life to the search for the meaning of existence. At this stage, you are a sanniyasi (male) or sanniyasini (female).

Of course in religion, the idea is that your search is for God. For me, God is a symbol for the mystery of existence. People like Carl Sagan, do not wait for the final stage of life to begin their search. And Sagan's *Cosmos* is my Bible.

27 March

It has taken me eight more days to edit *Gansie in Kammaland* and layout the book, but that is done now and Anna Kirchner of QUBA Motion and Design has sent me six stunning front covers for the book. I had to choose *one* – that was so difficult. Now the book will go on my website. I am also going to send the pdfs to Johan Botha at Minuteman Press and have ten copies made.

When I checked, I found that the original publication of *Gansie in Kammaland* has been on my website all the time

and I did not have to go through the whole process of laying it out again. But I am glad I did, because I enjoyed reading it again. I will have the new version placed under My Publications and the original publication moved to Other Publications.

Until now I have taken my writing for granted, like eating and sleeping. But having reread *Gansie in Kammaland*, which I wrote almost a decade ago, I can accept myself as a writer. I spent the whole day from about six in the morning to about eight at night, finalising *Gansie*. I love *Gansie* and I think it would make an intriguing movie. Not of the popular kind; I don't believe that my writing has wide appeal.

Those who give me feedback on my work are obviously kindred spirits. And they are very few and far between.

Stupid Mynah Bird

Mynah Bird is the name of the character based on myself, in *Gansie in Kammaland*. And I am calling myself stupid because I had no idea what I was getting involved in when I undertook to write a biography last year. I had made the simplistic assumption that it was to honour the person whose life I would be unfolding in the book. But nothing is as simple as that; there is no one to one correlation of the actions and intentions of one individual to those of another.

When I decided to devote my life entirely to writing after I retired from teaching in 1998, it was with the intention of giving recognition to the small minority community of

people to which I belong – the so-called “Indian” community. And I began to record the lives of the descendants of Indian labourers imported from India in the 1860s and other Indian immigrants. Those early labourers were soon followed into the country by people of the merchant class. As Indians they lived in their own group areas, as did African and European people and the mixed race group called Coloured. And in South Africa, as in all colonial situations, difference was reified and led to racism.

[I have recently reread *Statement by Nana Sita at his trial under The Group Areas Act*, and have come to realize that the Group Areas Act was aimed primarily at people of Indian descent. The government had hoped to force repatriation to India. I had not realized that the Indian community had posed such a threat to the apartheid government.]

Being of a despised minority group, gave rise to feelings of inferiority. And the need to assert one’s worth, led to a variety of coping mechanisms. Some “Indians” imitated the ways of the group in power, some clung to their original traditions as a matter of pride, some adopted ideologies such as communism which expounded belief in equality and repudiated the system; but all adapted to the conditions that were imposed on them as a matter of survival.

Such conditions were not conducive to the development of true self-respect. And pseudo self-esteem emanated from adaptation and, in differing degrees, depended on approval and endorsement of the governing group. People of Indian descent, became conditioned to regarding themselves as inferior and needing to prove themselves to the ruling race.

Where one's worth is based on something as arbitrary as race, one grows up believing that one is "less than" if one is of the "lower races" or "more than" if one is of the governing "race". So people of Indian origin, in general, grew up with diminished self-respect and dependent on external affirmation. And such feelings were imprinted on them through the education system which inducted them into a foreign culture.

What has all this to do with the biography that I was commissioned to write last year? Everything! All the misunderstandings that arose!

There I was using my skills to honour the man whose life I was describing without realizing that this commission was really a cry for recognition of those who had commissioned the book. My focus being on the subject, I was blind to the needs of his descendants. They were looking for affirmation of themselves through their father.

Had I been truly sensitive, I would have understood their need. But it was only last Saturday, when I received copies of the biography, six months after its publication, and saw the insertions that had been made into it that I began to interrogate the underlying meaning of the misunderstanding that had made me distance myself from the book.

Perhaps the next generation of "Indians" will have freed themselves of the ethnic tag which, in South Africa, declares difference and inferiority and denies a true understanding of identity. Conditioning in racism, which

began with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape in 1652 and continued for at least three and half centuries, may take as long to dissipate.

28 March

This morning I opened my email to find Anna Kirchner's pdf of *Gansie in Kammaland*. I am delighted with the cover that she has designed. I sent her a poem for the back cover and the book will soon be on the website.

I have also asked Francois Smit who established QUBA Motion and Design and for whom Anna works, if it is possible to put a DVD on the website. If it is, I will send him my DVD of *Flight from the Mahabharath*.

Francois gave me my website and that is a gift on which it is impossible to place a value. It has allowed me to explore and develop my ability as a writer and to become a *sannyasini* – a seeker after understanding.

I am blessed with wonderful friends.

11:30 am: Reply from Francois to my enquiry about posting a DVD on the website:

“What people normally do is to use the video that is already loaded onto an online space, (like on YouTube) and then also play it on the website at no cost and very little effort.

Are you able to find out if it has been loaded it onto YouTube?

Or you can send me the full title and venue and we can search the web. If we are lucky it could already be there.

The DVD option: The DVD has to be digitized back to a normal video clip, then uploaded onto the internet, and is a much bigger whohaa!”
(Francois Smit)

29 March

I have received an email from Ray, the director of the production giving me permission to put the DVD on YouTube. But I have decided to abandon the whole notion. It is more than enough for me that I got to know and respect Dr. Ray Miller, a wonderfully creative theatre director and choreographer.

I felt sorry to think I may have offended the staff at ASU with a request that was just a fancy of the moment – not in the least a desire for pomp and glory – simply a means of sharing the play with my friend, Marsha House Cann in New York.

New Neighbour

I went out to fetch something from my car and met my new neighbor, a young man, young enough to be my grandson, who will be moving in next door.

30 March: Bank

Yesterday I received an email from my branch of Standard Bank that it has closed. The service there has deteriorated over the last couple of years. I wonder if this is a warning sign for Standard Bank in general. I am glad that I moved most of my funds to another bank last year when I could not open a savings account at Standard Bank.

Larkrise to Candleford

I have been watching the series *Larkrise to Candleford* again. I am no longer able to find DVDs in Centurion that are to my taste. Fortunately the ones I purchased a long time ago are worth watching over and over. When the video shop at the mall changed hands, it became filled with DVD's that cater for those seeking action, violence, sex and romance.

Today I watched episode 8 of Series 3 of *Larkrise*, in which Enid Fairley, who has run away from her husband, is making her way to freedom in America, and a life in her chosen profession. Against her, people like Laura, the main character, and Margaret Ellison, another important character, seem pathetically normal, tied to the traditional expectations of women. Enid is made to seem somewhat outré simply because she has the temerity to assume a man's freedom to explore her full potential as a human being.

1 April: *Larkrise*

I watched again the episode of the snake in the last series, an episode, in which even Thomas Brown is made to question his simplistic understanding of faith. It is another of my favourite episodes

2 April: Revolution

This morning, I woke up with thoughts of what the word "revolution" implies. I realize that I had formerly thought of it in romantic terms as the fight for liberty, fraternity, equality. What nonsense!

Revolutionary struggles are not about spreading democracy; they are about seizing power and creating

conditions conducive to new forms of exploitation. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, and revolution is about seizing power, taking control, and thus gaining the means to exploit.

What inspired my thoughts about revolution is that the capitalist systems in which we live under so-called democracy, tend to dictate to us in their need to increase profits. My internet and email provider, a parastatal, has taken to punitive methods to force me to upgrade to a new and more expensive provision of services which I do not need. As I do not upgrade, I find myself being cut off from service, despite the fact that the parastatal is paid by debit order for the service that I originally acquired. To restore service, I now have to buy airtime.

As I don't have the freedom to choose what suits me, and am being forced into an increase in tariffs for the simple service that I have, I have come to see revolution simply as the fight for the power to take over the exploitation of the people.

At seven this morning, I took my car in to Rogen's Auto Centre for my usual annual service and after his mechanic had inspected the car, Morga, the manager, told me I did not need a service and I should come back in two months' time. I was not charged for the inspection. That is typical of this company: they could, but do not exploit their clientele.

To me *that* is revolutionary.

My car does not need a service as I do not drive it about as I used to in the days when the M1 highway was not a toll road. Once it became a toll road, it cut off my visits to friends in Johannesburg. I am not a poor person, but my

pension does not stretch to upgrades of internet service and to toll roads.

Revolution gave us the toll highway.

I wish I could go back to simpler versions of Internet service. The constant updating, which is done automatically, is excessive and requires constant readjustment to new controls. The updating seems to be the work of obsessive compulsives, who cannot believe that I do not require all the new gimmicks that they invent. Computer programmes are becoming extremely intrusive; trying to out guess you, providing you with suggestions and even the wording with which to answer email queries. I refuse to be standardized even in the way I express myself.

In addition, there are those who trawl the Internet looking to offload articles that someone somewhere has decided I need. Academic articles that I do not request, are offloaded onto my email every day, as are advertisements from online shopping sites.

4 April

I have just received another Academic article. I usually just delete them but as this one describes the plight of the Zambian economy, I read it. With its reference to the overthrow of colonial type governments by the colonized, it reminded me again of the problems of revolution which arise from the fact that colonization imposes foreign forms of organization upon the colonized.

Adaptation to these new ways requires the adoption of the ever-changing technological culture from which they originate. As change in behaviours is enforced in this way, it is accepted with degrees of resentment. But innovation

has become a modern catchword, and adaptation to new ways, is seen as a modern necessity.

So people of the Third World are in perpetual catch-up mode.

5 April: Beggars

I do not know whether the number of beggars in our country has increased, or whether apartheid with its group areas kept us unaware of the numbers of people who are unable to earn a living in our society. Living in an Indian Group Area, I never saw beggars on the street. Now, living in Centurion, I see beggars on practically every intersection.

They are an indictment of me and the conditions of my existence. I live in a housing complex behind gates that keep them locked out so I can close my eyes to their suffering. But their existence haunts me. Their struggle is a contradiction of everything in which we profess to believe; and especially of religion and democracy.

The word democracy derived from *demos* (people) and *cratos* (power) ensures the power only of those who govern and those who can fit into systems. Those who cannot must give up their humanity and rely on handouts. Democracy does not cater for them.

I realize that as a pensioner, I too survive on a handout – but an official handout that allows me to live in comfort.

6 April: Cat

This morning, when I woke up and went into my kitchen, I saw a cat ensconced on the windowsill. As

soon as it saw me, it ran off. When I went back into the kitchen, a little later, to make a cup of coffee, it was back on the windowsill, standing on its hind legs, examining something in the window casement. As soon as it saw me, it disappeared again.

I wonder why it chose my windowsill. How did it spot, whatever it is, that fascinates it? I live on the first floor and have seen the cat before at the ground floor flats in the opposite row. Perhaps, it is because I am watching *Twin Peaks* again and its immersion in the mystical has somehow stimulated the cat. Perhaps the cat knows I am a witch and wishes to be my familiar. But as an atheist, I am a non-conformist witch and I simply view *Twin Peaks* as a fairy tale, an evil one, but a fairy tale nonetheless. So I don't qualify for broomstick or cat.

Poor cat! We all live with our illusions and delusions.

7 April

The cat was back on my window sill when I went into the kitchen at about 5:30 this morning and opened my blinds. It ran off again. Later, when I went to make a mug of coffee, I saw it on the grass outside the flats on the opposite side. It did not look comfortable. I wonder who owns it.

8 April

No cat this morning. It has been raining all night and is still raining. Cat needed less exposed sleeping quarters.

9 April: Banks

This morning I am in a tangle of bank accounts. Yesterday my card payment was declined, so I have to check with the bank. I may have used up all my funds. I also found a 2015

bank statement from another bank and have no idea whether that account still exists. I had opened a new account at that bank last year so I don't know whether I have two existing accounts there.

I realize I am somewhat of a financial idiot. Thank goodness I have only myself to support.

11.am. Back from the banks.

My visit to my bank was a shock. I have money in the account but I am denied access to any of it as my card is over five years old. I had no idea that a bank card expires after five years. I will have to check other bank cards to see whether this is so with them as well.

10 April: Banks

I will renew my card today. Getting cross and self-righteous is pointless. I have learned a lesson; but I am ungraciously unforgiving.

Loot

My order of the DVD of George Eliot's, *Middlemarch* has been dispatched to the courier by Loot and I will receive it within the next couple of days. I placed a new order for *Mulholland Drive* and *A Very English Scandal* a couple of days ago. I should get those by the end of the month.

I have just received an SMS informing me that my DVD *Middlemarch* will be delivered today. So I have to wait for it and cannot go to the bank – will do tomorrow.

April 9: Marsha

Earlier in the year, I sent Marsha House Cann a couple of

my autobiographical books – from my Octogenarian series and on Feb 23, had received the following email from her

Feb. 23 email from Marsha eight weeks ago:

Hi Muthal,

So happy to say I received the books from you today. Thank you so much for sending them! It was especially thoughtful of you to include Clement in your dedication. He was pleased and very grateful to be included. We are both excited to savor your work. I will stay in touch and keep you posted.

Again thank you Muthal for these wonderful gifts, and this great inspiration!

My reply that same day, Feb. 23.

Glad the books finally arrived. Hope you won't be bored reading about my attempts to understand what it all means. Will send you my next book which features you and Clement. It is almost ready for the printers.

April 9: From Marsha

Far from being bored, I have thoroughly enjoyed reading and re-reading your books, journeying with you. Walking a bit in your shoes, witnessing your strength and grace in this thrilling chapter of your life truly inspires. There was much beauty and many lessons for me in your work.

Your story, your life has sparked a time of discovery, questioning and identification that I will ever treasure. I look forward to the next book that you say features me and C?

Wow, you know I am honored, intrigued and can hardly wait! Thanks again for sharing your treasures with me Muthal, I am inspired.

April 10

Hi Marsha, Thank you for your comments on my books. I really appreciate feedback, positive or negative, when I get it. I am glad you found the autobiographies of value. I will be sending you the new one(s) when Dr Kathy Perkins comes to visit in May. Do you know Kathy; she worked with Ron Himes in St Louis. Do you remember Ron Himes? You probably acted with him in some of the productions we did in the 1970s.

I looked him up on the Internet. He has done wonderfully well and made a huge success of his Black Theatre Rep.

I also got a message from Richard Bowman.

I was thrilled to hear from them.

Later the same day: Hi Marsha, If you want a preview of the book that begins with you, you will find it on my website. It is *Octogenarian Diary*.

Marsha's Reply

Wow! I checked it out and Muthal, you are SO fabulous to include me and Clement in your story in this way! Thank you from both of us. I am just thrilled. What an honor this is for me! I truly am grateful that we are back in each other's lives.

I noticed on page 4 that Clement and my names are under the picture of me and one of my nurses. Oh well, hahaha!

Yes, Ron Himes and I have stayed in pretty close touch since college. I worked with the Black Rep extensively over the years. And yes I know Kathy, she is lovely and a great talent! The Black Rep is where we met, haven't seen her in many years though. Clement produced two great videos for the Rep's 15th and 25th anniversaries. I will check if they're up on our website, if not I will send you links.

I look forward to reading *Octogenarian Diary* and I want to purchase several copies for gifts to friends and family! I am so excited! Can I buy through Amazon?

April 11

Hey Marsha, unfortunately, I self-publish and do not print more than 20 copies. I will send you as many as are left after I give to friends here. I will send with Kathy who is visiting in May. I am glad you are happy with it. I am simply reflecting what happens to me on a daily basis, so whoever I am in touch with comes into my book. Sorry about the wrong identification in the picture.

A Little Later I sent this email: Hi Marsha, Please send me a picture of you and Clement and I will put it in the book I am writing now. Thanks.

14 April

I received the following photo of Marsha and Clement this morning.



CLEMENT AND MARSHA CANN

The picture I put in *Octogenarian Diary* that was mistitled, shows Marsha with a nurse, *a woman*! What an awful mistake – and Clement is such a handsome man.

I am a very lucky old woman. In my eighties I am still making new friends. And as I live in the twenty-first century, I have the advantages of modern computer technology so I can keep in close touch with people. I wonder, how I would have coped, living in my mother's time without a laptop. I suppose, I would have had to keep journals as I used to do but I would have been without the ability to communicate as easily as I do now. I would have been a total recluse and would not have been able to self-publish.

Women who wrote and were published prior to the computer age are people I have to admire; they wrote without all the advantages that modern writers have. They lived in constrained circumstances, both socially and technologically, and still they made their mark on the world.

Middlemarch

I am watching George Eliot's (Mary Ann Evans's) *Middlemarch*. Her heroine, Dorothea Brooke, is a woman trapped in a marriage with a man who personifies the circumscribed conditions under which traditions place women. Eliot was a remarkable woman as well as a remarkable writer. She lived her life outside of limiting conventions.

Gansie in Kammaland

This book is now ready to be picked up from the printers. I will do so tomorrow morning. I hope all the robots on the R101 to Johannesburg are working.

15 April: Middlemarch

I watched the second disc of *Middlemarch* last night and I see this BBC portrayal of George Eliot's novel as the anatomy of two marriages, that of Tertius Lydgate to Rosamund Vincy and that of Dorothea Brooke to Edward Casaubon. Both marriages reveal love as an illusion. Dorothea's marriage is based on intellectual attraction and Lydgate's on physical attraction. Both prove to be misalliances. Edward Casaubon is not the genius that Dorothea imagined. His intellectual pursuits are outdated and reveal him to be somewhat obtuse. So he keeps

Dorothea at a distance to maintain the illusion of his brilliance.

Lydgate, blinded by Rosamund's beauty, learns the hard way that she is completely self-centered and has no ability to care for anyone but herself. For her, Lydgate is a means to an end. Rosamund's worldly ambitions make it impossible for Lydgate to pursue his vision of establishing a hospital and providing extensive and progressive medical care in the community.

Why did these couples marry? For both Lydgate and Dorothea, it was based on the illusion that the object of love was capable of love for others. But neither Casaubon nor Rosamund understands the meaning of love as a form of giving. They see it only as receiving. Casaubon accepts Dorothea's admiration of him as his due and has no understanding of love except as affirmation of himself. Rosamund sees in Lydgate the means to establish herself in material comfort and has no understanding of the meaning of love beyond her need for status. The only love that both Rosamund and Casaubon exhibit is love of themselves.

Rosamund destroys Lydgate and Casaubon attempts to destroy Dorothea. It may be that Dorothea's love for Will Ladislav protects her from Casaubon's vindictiveness. But I see her ability to survive as based on her own strength. I find the relationship with Ladislav to be artificial and perhaps a concession to convention that requires a happy, romantic ending. Ladislav, who fulfills that requirement, is not of great substance.

16 April

Yesterday, I drove to Midrand to collect copies of *Gansie in Kammaland*. Of the main traffic intersections on Route 101, there were only two, this time, where robots were not working.

I am very pleased with the book and my ability to lay out my work for printing.

Seven

Last night I watched the horror film, *Seven*, a film about seven gruesome murders which take place over seven days, each one revolving around one of the seven deadly sins: envy, gluttony, greed, lust, pride, sloth, and wrath. The victims, unrelated to the killer are chosen as symbols, each representing one of the deadly sins. What is to be learned from a film like this? A film that simply exults in the macabre depiction of scenes of the most inhumane and depraved cruelty?

The detectives have no clue as to the murderer who gives himself up towards the end of the movie to witness, like a proud author, the effects of his final efforts and to participate in them by becoming the sixth victim, a symbol of pride, and turning the detective pursuing him into a murderer and a symbol of the deadly sin of wrath.

The author delights in giving us this sadistic and perverse view of religious retribution. The murderer sees himself as the Archangel Michael and wields the sword of retribution in the most obscenely cruel manner possible for his personal entertainment.

17 April

I keep getting gifts all the time. This morning, Tom, looking very handsome, came to visit. We talked about Olga Tokarczuk's book, *Flights*. We don't agree about its value. Tom finds it exhilarating and inspiring; I don't.

As Tom has experience of creating a screenplay, I will be able to consult with him once I get started on turning *Gansie* into a film script. I told him I want to begin by creating a scenario; he explained that in filmic terms that would be a Story Board.

When Tom was leaving he said he would be accompanying Lionel to the doctor in the afternoon.

I am very sorry to hear that Lionel is not well.

19 April:

GOOD FRIDAY

What's good
about
Good Friday?
a day
when fear
spawning hate
hung love
on a cross
to put
on a bun

FEAR

fills
hearts
with hatred
minds
with suspicion
wills
with vengeance
hands
with weapons
turns love
into crusades
of slaughter
conquest
and control

20 April: The Barbershop

I had been meaning to get a haircut and at last did so today. As I entered the barbershop, I could see the frost creep into the faces of the women barbers. Apartheid having been legally abolished, they could not turn me away. I am used to being thought of as an old idiot and in this shop run by Afrikaner women, I was also a despicable *koelie*.

I felt sorry for them. They cannot overcome their conditioning. Because women are second class citizens, they carry prejudice longer than men. I had just come from the bank where an Afrikaner man had gone out of his way to help me with my transactions.

People who are despised, as women generally are, learn to despise themselves and consequently adopt the tendency to despise others considered inferior like themselves. And

in racist societies, women, in general, tend to be more racist than men and remain prejudiced longer.

Still, I did get a really nice haircut and look quite civilized again.

21 April: Updating

Yesterday I received a notice from Microsoft that my computer programme is to be shut down at the end of the year and I will have to buy a new computer to accommodate their new programme.

First my internet provider begins to shut me down, then my bank closes down, and now my laptop has been condemned. Capitalist greed has turned the world mad with updating. I am being forced to adopt new modes that I don't need.

22 April: Afrikaner

It has taken me eighty-three years and six months to recognize, at last, a huge irony; it may have been my visit to the barbershop that made me see it.

In 1652, the Dutch set up a refreshment station at the Cape for ships making the long journey from Europe to India for spices, etc. That eventually led to the colonization of South Africa by the British in the late 19th century. Under British control, the Dutch, to distinguish themselves from the British, called themselves Afrikaners – *Africans!* It was a way of (i) asserting their prior claim to the land, (ii) declaring the British as usurpers and (iii) dispossessing the African people of a claim to the country. The descendants of the Dutch thus became proudly African. And it was their struggle for survival that turned them into racists and gave rise to legal apartheid.

I began to wonder whether I would have to gather together an army, depose the government and declare myself – Oh dear, I have no idea of the Indian word for African! So my declaration that I am African remains my private revolution against the concept of race.

23 April

Today I received my DVDs of *A Very English Scandal* and *Mulholland Drive*. When I looked at the cover of *A Very English Scandal*, recommended to me by my niece, Diricilla, I realized that I would have to recommend it to Tom and Lionel. *Mulholland Drive* is by David Lynch who wrote *Twin Peaks*, which I watched a few weeks ago. *Twin Peaks* made me curious about David Lynch. I find that I can no longer read a book or watch a DVD without knowing something about the author.

24 April

I lost my bankcard and had to go to the bank today. I have never lost a bankcard before. I am getting careless in my old age.

After the bank, I worked on my jigsaw puzzle; a picture of the Thames with several of its bridges and the buildings on either side of the river – a present from Sharmini, a niece, Dris's sister.

Last night I watched the first scene of *A Very English Scandal*. It depicts the affair between Jeremy Thorpe and Norman Scott. At about noon today, I sat down to watch the second and third scenes.

This mini-series depicts a time when homosexuality, which being unconventional, was considered sinful and a crime. That we no longer see it in those terms, indicates movement towards greater individual freedom. Art and literature, often reveal to us the limitations of conventions.

We do need conventions as they give us stability and the means to communicate. In general, we do abide by them. But conventions being manmade are not perfect; rules and regulations, which we tend to regard as absolute, often restrict, confine and become inhumane.

As human knowledge and understanding expand with changing times, some rules and regulations become outdated, restrictive and cruel. It often takes a minor or major revolution to bring about social change and greater individual freedom.

Jeremy Thorpe, whose experience is depicted in *A Very English Scandal*, was a victim of narrow, inhumane social convention; its intolerance turned him into a criminal. Ironically, he was not punished for his resort to crime, i.e., ordering the execution of his lover in order to hide the fact of his homosexuality. The judicial declaration of his innocence was a legal attempt to negate the notion of homosexuality – but it did not work.

Society punished Thorpe by ostracizing him.

While I was at the bank earlier, I had had to wait a while before it opened and again before being served once inside. I always carry a book with me as one inevitably has to wait for service wherever one goes. I had with me my little book of poems, *Karma*, and in it I found a poem which summed up what I felt about *A Very English Scandal*. This is the poem.

CONVENTION

fence against
inconsistency

prison of conformity
to contain in vain
human volatility;

cage
to define and confine
the mystery of existence
inherent in ambivalence,
and separate
good from evil
God from Devil
and thus eliminate
human equivocality

25 April: *North and South*

Last night, I watched the first episode of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. Today I watched to the end. I have to temper modern dramas with earlier ones in which romantic notions, blind us to human cruelty and allow us to live with our illusions. But I am amazed by Gaskell, obviously an early women's libber, who subordinates a love story to the complexity of the human condition. In this novel, she tackles the rapacious nature of capitalism and gives it a humane form, in which employer and employees collaborate to create beneficial conditions for manufacture and work.

Though Gaskell concludes her novel with the typical mindless, romantic boy-meets-girl ending, she gives it a feminist touch. It is the heroine who rescues the hero, saves him from ruin and gives him a home and security.

27 April: Maniben Sita



Yesterday, I visited Maniben, who is 92. From her own experience, she confirmed my opinion that doctors have thrown in their lot with capitalism and all they see in patients are the means to build their own personal fortunes.

Sometime last year, Maniben spoke to me about her autobiography and I offered to type and lay it out for publication. But she still does not have all her papers in

order, so I asked for items that she wished to include so I could begin the work of typing up her manuscript. I tried to get her to understand that it would be easy to reorder items on a laptop, but she is fixated with the necessity of giving me a properly sequential draft.

As we are both old, I am afraid we may not have the time she requires to get everything in order.

I did manage to get a few odds and ends with which to begin the work, including several copies of the statement made by her father, Nana Sita at his trial in 1967, in which he repudiated the Group Areas Act. It is to go into her book. So I began transcribing Nana Sita's Statement. In it I found the following passage which explains why South Africans of Indian descent were, and to some extent are still considered aliens.

“The basis of this fixed policy of the Government [the Group Areas Act] is to be found in the election manifesto of the Nationalist Party headed by Dr. Malan, who won the election and came into power in 1948. Referring to Indians, the Manifesto said: “The party holds the view that Indians are a foreign and outlandish element which is unassimilable. They can never become part of the country and must therefore be treated as an immigrant community. The party accepts as a basis of its policy the repatriation of as many Indians as possible and proposes a proper investigation into the practicability of such a policy on a large scale in co-operation with India and other countries.” (Statement by Nana Sita at his trial (7 August 1967) under the Group Areas Act, p.2-3)

Though people of Indian descent are no longer regarded as aliens, the term “Indian” still persists and keeps them separate despite the fact that they are South Africans. It will take many years before we are completely free of apartheid; before terms referring to race – European, African, Coloured, Indian, – are abandoned; before all of us born and brought up in South Africa accept that we are all South Africans, NOT European, Coloured, Indian and African – but South Africans.

Today, all formal business transactions in South Africa are still conducted with the consciousness of race. In the old days white shop assistants treated black people with suspicion and contempt. “Freedom,” however, has certainly not put smiles on the faces of black people who now provide services in banks and shops. They also regard you, if you are “Indian” as a number rather than a human being.

It will take decades before all people in South Africa can overcome their conditioning under apartheid which taught us to be race conscious.

And today is Freedom Day, a public holiday to celebrate the end of official apartheid. But as we still identify ourselves in racial not national terms, “freedom” is an illusion; it certainly has not resulted in the alleviation of poverty in the new South Africa. I see more beggars on the streets than before.

28 April 2019: *The Shawshank Redemption*

Yesterday, I watched again one of my favourite movies, *The Shawshank Redemption*, based on a novella by

Stephen King. One can look at the movie and see it as happenings in a prison and one can also see the prison as a metaphor for society – the prison, with its strict controls, representing the cage of conventions in which we live; conventions that blind most of us to the opportunities that life presents. We cling to conventions out of fear of the unknown and feel trapped in them so we abuse and use one another. Those with power do so more than others.

In the movie, Andy Dufresne, who is wrongly imprisoned, looks at the structure and its conventions, and, despite cruel treatment, sees opportunity to create, build and free himself from a stultifying situation.

My cellphone

One of those old-fashioned little numbers which is 'phone and little else, suddenly slipped back to 5 January 2014. How? Why? All I had done was to switch it on this morning. Is it some form of envy? Does it yearn to be one of those that are cameras and have internet access? Am I holding it back? Does it resent me for not keeping up with the times?

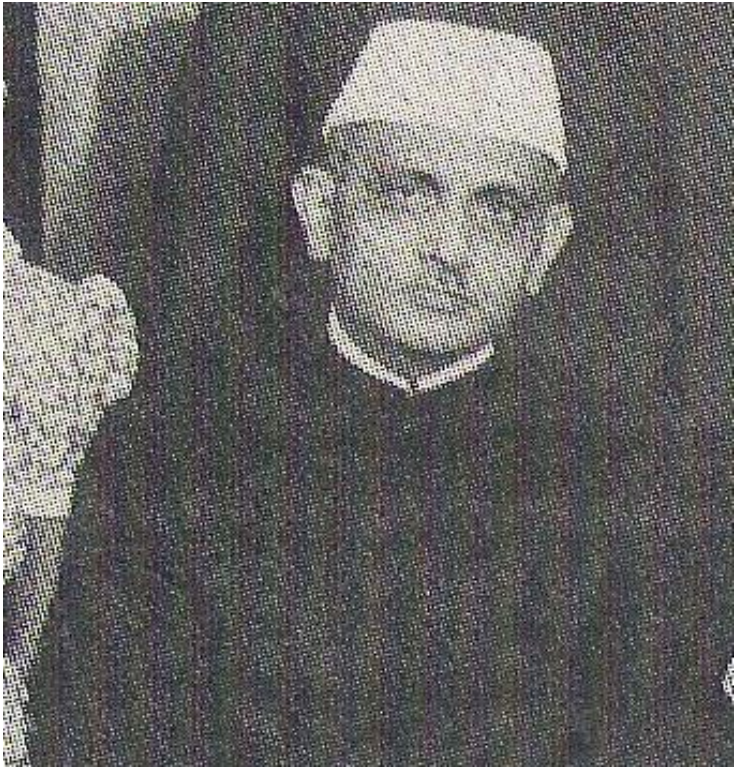
And what is the significance of 5 January 2014?

29 April

I have this morning finished transcribing the statement that Nana Sita, Maniben Sita's father, made at his trial in August 1967. He was imprisoned for his defiance of the Group Areas Act by which the Apartheid Government sought to isolate and impoverish the "Indian" community in South Africa.

Something I had forgotten, but of which I was reminded on reading Nana Sita's Statement, is that in

colonial and apartheid times, White people were called Europeans and Black people (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) were Non-Europeans. At some stage, I don't remember when, I repudiated the terms Non-European and Non-White, as I did not regard myself as a non-being.



NANA SITA

30 April

This morning I sent Anna Kirchner my transcript of Nana Sita's Trial Statement. She will put it on my website under *Other Publications*.

Something else struck me about Nana Sita's statement; the reference to "the public mind" and "public" in the reports of Apartheid Committees. The following quote from Sita's Statement is from a joint report issued by the Asiatic Land Tenure Laws Amendment Committee and the Land Tenure Act Amendments Committee appointed in 1948 by Dr. Donges, the Minister of the Interior.

"Before stating our recommendations we feel that reference should be made to one matter which, strictly speaking, falls outside our terms of reference but which is so closely associated in the public mind with the Asiatic question that it has a determining influence on the evidence tendered to us and accordingly also on recommendations based on such evidence and that is the possibility of repatriating the Asiatics from South Africa. There appears to be an evergrowing belief in the public mind that the only satisfactory solution of the Asiatic question is repatriation, and that whatever is done by way of legislation should be such as not to endanger the possibility of repatriation and deprive the public of one of its most deeply cherished hopes."(*Statement by Nana Sita at his Trial under the Group Areas Act*, pp.3-4)

Here “public” refers exclusively to the white section of the population. And as Sita pointed out, the reference to the desire for repatriation, did not truly reflect the opinion of the “public mind”. White people were divided with regard to the question of repatriation. Mr. D.E. Mitchell, leader of the opposition at the time, had challenged the Government’s insistence on repatriation. (*Statement by Nana Sita*, pp.5-7)

The Apartheid Government called its desire to rid South Africa of the people of Indian descent – “repatriation” but the more correct term would be deportation. Indians had been in the country for just over a hundred years and the Indian community was a settled community. Its members had no intention of returning to India, which was now a foreign country to most of them. But they were a community feared by the government as they were in the spearhead of movements against oppression.

In 2019, South Africans of Indian descent have been in the country for a hundred and fifty-nine years. But my Afrikaner barbers still see people like me as interlopers. And they have still not interrogated their claim of being African (Afrikaner).

1 May: Workers’ Day

Up early as usual and after about two hours of working on my laptop, I went to get some breakfast and looking out of my kitchen window saw that the cars across the way were still in their usual parking spaces. Is no one going to work today? Is this a holiday? It’s not Sunday – today is ... I never know what day it is, so I checked my calendar. It is Wednesday, the first of May and the number 1 on the

calendar has a red ring around it – I had marked all holidays in this way as I never know what day it is and whether it is a public holiday or not.

I looked on the list of public holidays that I had put up on a door and found that today was Workers' Day. Not being in employment, every day in my life is, I suppose, a holiday, as I do not have to leave the flat. But every day of my life, including Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays is a working day. I spend the first three or four hours of the day at my laptop, return to it after breakfast and in the late afternoon. But my work is also my fun. Not so for people who have to go out to keep the world turning.

May Day in the Northern Hemisphere is the celebration of the coming of Spring. In South Africa, May Day is a day to honour the worker.

But I wonder if it is a holiday for all workers. When I was a child a public holiday meant that all shops, businesses, banks and places of work were closed. But nowadays public holidays are holidays mainly for educational and official institutions. Business in shopping centres goes on as usual. Workers there do not get a holiday; I wonder if that means double pay. I doubt that.

2 May: Hot Cross Buns

Change of routine: I did not switch on my laptop as soon as I got out of bed. Instead I went into the kitchen and set about baking buns. I had thought about trying my hand at buns at Easter time but only got down to it today. My efforts resulted in buns that looked like a cross between cookies and buns.

I guess I will have to train myself in the proper use of yeast.

3 May: Maniben

I got a call from Maniben a day or two ago. She wants all her photographs back. I have copied all so that's no problem. From the family photo, I imported the portrait of Nana Sita and have now included it in his statement.

5 May

I woke up this morning with a head full of thoughts about my play *Luci's Dilemma*. I am thinking of transcribing and sending it off to Ray Miller and Ron Himes. I am not sure if it would appeal to them and whether they would think of producing it. It is my favourite of the plays I have written. I wrote it 1982, but it has never been performed. Luci is the abbreviation of Lucifer, who is looking to colonize South Africa as an extension of Hell which is overcrowded. The play could be construed as blasphemous. It is simply an anti-apartheid play that lampoons the Group Areas Act.

I have decided to send my book of plays to Prof. Ray Miller with an inscription that directs him to the play.

6 May: Prisons

Last night, I watched the episode in G.F. Newman's series *Judge John Deed*, in which he examines the prison system. What he shows us is worse than what Stephen King presents in *The Shawshank Redemption*. In Newman's portrayal, prison is the real, not metaphorical, hell. And all the evil in it stems from Prison Officials who have absolute power and assume the right to defile and execute prisoners.

It is a place where hell is other people.

Writers depict prisons as inhumane; yet we still have prisons. Instead of helping people who commit crimes, we imprison them and subject them to greater evils. The *absolute* power that prison authorities assume over inmates is Satanic. Furthermore, prison deprives a prisoner of free will. That can only exacerbate his or her propensity for wrongdoing. How can depriving a person of the ability to make choices, prepare him/her for life in society.

7 May

Last night, I watched another episode of G.F. Newman's *Judge John Deed* series in which he again attacks the notion of absolute power; this time in the Medical profession – in a doctor who assumes authority over life and death. The doctor condemns a baby to death but is proved wrong when the baby that has been lapsing in and out of consciousness, suddenly recovers. Newman shows us that expertise is not equivalent to infallibility.

Dr. Kathy Perkins

I have received Kathy's email in which she introduces me to Khubu Methz, the friend who will be hosting her visit to South Africa. I will meet them at my niece, Dris's (Diriscilla's) for lunch on the 18th.

I have been trying to figure out the route to Dris's place; I may have to give up my boycott of the M1 highway and pay the toll to get there.

Election Day

I took a drive to the mall and walked around. The reconstruction begun there – it seems to me much more than a year ago – is still going on. At one shop there was a

sign at the door notifying us that it would be open tomorrow, Election Day. That was a surprise – I had no idea that it was time to elect a new government. I live completely cloistered from the world, no TV, radio or newspapers – so I have no idea of what is going on.

Whoever the new government consists of will simply be a new set of opportunists. I wonder if sometime in the distant future, human beings will have found a way to eliminate government corruption. It would of course require a means of neutralizing the absolute power that governments assume.

8 May

Today this Octogenarian was out organizing a meeting of the owners of flats in this complex. We have been getting emails from Jotam Management Company about the termination of its contract by the Trustees. The Company made some disparaging comments about the Trustees, so I asked my neighbour, also an owner, if he thought it would be a good idea to call a meeting of owners and trustees to get a better understanding of the problem. He thought it was; so I wrote out a notice, made copies and went out with him to distribute them and explain the reason for the meeting.

This is the notice:

**TO RESIDENT OWNERS IN 238 BASDEN
COMPLEX (Flats 4, 14, 31, 43, 44, 56, 58, 78,
87, 89, 90, 91, 92)**

We think it is necessary for all owners to meet
with the Trustees of Basden Complex (owners

of Flats 3, 13, 40, 61, 84) to discuss the recent emails that all owners have received from Jotam Management.

Please let us know if you are willing to attend such a meeting. We suggest a meeting on Sunday, 12 May at 3 p.m. Venue: the parking lots outside the swimming pool.

If you know of any owners not included here, please inform them of this proposal.

Thank you.

Flats 43 and 44 (Tel: 072 883 0963)

Suddenly, I am an activist again. My whole existence is quietly falling apart; threats to my laptop, my bank and now my flat.

So I am back in the world.

9 May

This morning I typed up an agenda for the meeting, made copies and pushed them under the doors of members of the Body Corporate.

AGENDA FOR MEETING OF THE BODY CORPORATE (THE OWNERS)

Venue: Swimming Pool; bring a chair

Welcome and Thank you

Request to Trustees to inform the meeting of the reasons for the Termination of Jotam Management's services.

Formal organization of the Body Corporate

Quarterly meetings of the Body Corporate

Any other matters.

The Caretaker of the complex, a Trustee, came out just after I pushed my agenda under his door and informed me that nobody would be attending the meeting. I got the impression that there was some kind of intimidation. If that is really so, then I have no option but to believe the accusations made by Jotam; especially as my neighbour, who went with me to deliver the notice of meeting yesterday, is now distancing himself from me. What is he afraid of? I know what I fear – this new situation smells of corruption and will mean an increase in tariffs.

I have received several phone calls from a trustee, a Mrs Van der Linde, who does not live in the complex. She is sending one of the Trustees to me to explain the problem with the Management Company. I have put on my hearing aids in the hope that I will be able to hear what this Trustee has to say.

I received an SMS from another Trustee who will not be able to attend, as Sunday, the day of the meeting, is Mother's Day. Of course I have no idea of these kinds of occasions. At least, he had the courtesy to excuse himself. I expect that no one will turn up for the meeting.

So my return to the world will be quite short-lived. The Trustees have been accused of not paying the levy imposed by management on all owners. I expect the new management that they appoint will be under obligation to them and will have to pay for it. So levies will probably increase. Perhaps I should adopt the strategy of the Trustees and not pay as well.

Power wears red and has horns on its head. It is the devil we know; there is no other.

Last night, I waited for the trustee who had been appointed to come and reason with me. As I am “an early to bed, early to rise” person, when he did not arrive by my bedtime, I gave up on him and went to bed.

He is an “Indian” man, chosen to deal with an “Indian trouble maker.” Race remains a strong factor in all our dealings in South Africa. I suspect the man is also a male chauvinist, as traditional “Indian” men tend to be, and did not relish the notion of having to deal with me.

10 May: A Little Calamity

This morning, as I was at my desk in the bedroom, working on my laptop, I suddenly found wet patches on the carpet behind me. As I was examining them, it felt as though it was raining in the bedroom. I looked up to find leaks in the ceiling.

My whole world is definitely falling apart.

I put a basin under the most fluent leak and little containers under ones I could identify. Then I dashed off to the Security Station. Lazarus was on duty and we went looking for the plumber in the complex. No one was around— off to work or still in bed. Lazarus came back to my flat and helped me move everything out of the bedroom. He shut off the water and I switched off the geyser. Then he phoned a plumbing company.

About an hour later, Irwin the caretaker came in to check. Lazarus had told him of my little catastrophe. He identified the problem as a burst geyser. So he got in touch with the company that Lazarus had phoned, and made some arrangement with them. They would arrive at 9:30.

The plumber arrived, examined the geyser and told me it would have to be replaced at a cost of R7500. After he left to speak with Irwin, the caretaker came to see me and said he would find another plumber who would be less expensive. My neighbour, right next door, apparently had had to have his geyser replaced and Irwin is arranging with the same firm to have my geyser replaced.

After an hour or so I phoned to discover that he had tried to find a less expensive option and had failed. I was irritated. He could have phoned and told me. I asked him to get back to the first plumber. He did and the plumber arrived at about twelve with his crew. They disconnected the old geyser and moved it to one side. Then the plumber went off to buy a geyser.

I realized then why he needed payment beforehand; it was for the purchase of the geyser.

When he got back, he worked on the geyser outside; then two of his assistants brought the geyser up the stairs and into the flat. In the bathroom, they hauled the geyser into the roof. They did it quite expertly using a rope.

While they were working on the geyser, I spent my time on a jigsaw puzzle; a different sort of construction work.

11 May

Yesterday, after the new geyser was installed, my neighbor from downstairs with whom I share the same connection to the water supply, came up to see me. In my note on her door, informing her that the water would be shut off, I had mistakenly indicated that there was a leak in the roof. When I wrote the note, I was unaware that my problem was a burst geyser. Apparently someone had

informed her about the old woman upstairs who was having repairs done.

The neighbour had come in to inquire about the leak in the roof and after I apologized about my misdiagnosis, she kindly helped me move my bed back into my bedroom.

This morning I am waiting for the same plumber who will do some additional work in the bathroom – re-arranging my wash basin and washing machine. My washing machine makes it difficult for visitors to get to the washbasin; so I am having them swopped around.

The workmen arrived at about 9:30 and the work was done by about twelve noon. The bathroom looks much better, more spacious. But unfortunately there is a leak somewhere in the pipes under the washbasin. And I am discovering a little problem. When I turn on the hot water tap, it shudders violently. I hope that is a passing phase and it will calm down and resume its former sedate behaviour.

This experience has taught me that companies that provide services, because of their specialized training, skills and knowledge, are like doctors. They also try to turn people like me into cash cows. Doctors keep you returning forever for further check-ups; workmen keep finding more and more things wrong in your home.

Boston Legal

In the afternoon, I decided to watch the *Boston Legal* series again and in it people like the character, Alan Shore, have no compunction about going outside the limitations of the law to achieve justice. Both G.F. Newman, in the *Judge John Deed* Series, and David E. Kelly, the writer of *Boston Legal*, demonstrate that the law is not infallible. In *Boston*

Legal, Alan Shore, even uses information gained as a lawyer, outside the strictures of the law, to ensure that justice is done.

Meeting in the Complex

Tomorrow is the day of the meeting that I have called of the body corporate. I don't expect anyone to turn up. Other people are more in awe of authority than I am. It is unfortunate that people who assume power, also have available to them the power of retribution. Fear rules; even in a democracy.

12 May

This morning, I received 4 emails, with seven pdfs, four of which were pictures of the sender, Mrs. Van der Linde, and three, prospectuses of new management companies, one of which I had had dealings with many years ago and found to be quite exploitative. I assume the Body Corporate is expected to make a choice of one of them. All this has arrived, I presume, to pre-empt the Body Corporate meeting that I have called for this afternoon.

I am a fool for coming out of my seclusion.

But these happenings confirm my understanding of the principle underlying social organization; it is simply capitalism. Religion tries to blind us to its predatory nature with its references to life hereafter but heaven and hell are the conditions we make for ourselves here on earth. All that metaphysical stuff about life after death is simply a way to hide from ourselves our true reality. We are first and foremost human animals.

I shall go this afternoon, with my chair and book, and sit

outside the swimming pool enclosure to wait for members of the Body Corporate. But with the efforts of the Trustees, who seem to be controlled by Van der Linde, I am chasing after a ghost. The Trustee that Van der Linde had sent to reason with me never pitched. He must be even more of a male chauvinist than I had suspected. Or perhaps, he was motivated by religious prejudice. My name suggests that I am Hindu.

At about 2:50 p.m., I went down to the swimming pool enclosure to wait for members of the Body Corporate to arrive. Three people turned up, the first, a man, the second and third, women. We waited a while and then decided to abandon the meeting. Just as we were leaving, a car pulled up. I thought it might be someone for the meeting but it was an owner visiting his son in the complex. He informed me that Van der Linde had cancelled the meeting that I had called. I was shocked.

What a dreadfully underhanded manipulation of the situation. What paranoia! This stranger also informed me that Van der Linde and her Trustees, are the people behind Jotam's withdrawal and are busy manipulating a new take over. Now I suddenly find myself right in the midst of an unnecessary conflict but I have to take action. I will have to find a way to get to the owners without alerting Van der Linde and her Trustees.

13 May

Yesterday I sent the following email to Van der Linde:

“You cancelled the meeting that I had called of resident owners of Basden Complex – without informing me. If that

is the way you deal with people, I can have nothing to do with you.”

Her Reply

“I have no idea what you are referring to. As far as I know I said that I can’t attend. And when someone asked earlier I said that it was cancelled as far as I know. Nothing stopped another owner from saying it was not.

I don’t think you’d apologise to me, but for some reason you don’t like me.”

Such convoluted thinking! Fortunately, her email came, inadvertently I realise, with a list of email addresses of the Body Corporate. So I now had a way of communicating with owners without the interference of the Trustees. I used it to canvass all owners about whether they wanted a change in management?

I received one immediate reply and several automatic out-of-office replies that make people unapproachable. During the day I received more replies. There were four owners who did not want a change and ten who did. Fourteen! Out of owners of nearly a hundred flats! The majority remained silent.

I realise that I did not do much good; and in fact, have precipitated the changeover. I have aroused all kinds of fear and animosity and all I wanted to do was find out why Jotam was sacked or withdrew and to get the Body Corporate properly organized.

14 May

This morning I drove to Laudium to return the material Maniben had given me to copy for her autobiography. We spent a couple of hours sorting through articles and photographs to find an essay that she had written about her father Nana Sita. As she could not find all the pages, she gave me her CV instead.

Now I am receiving emails from Van der Linde that I don't read.

15 May

Last night I began transcribing Maniben's CV. She has made great sacrifices in her activism against apartheid.

What struck me, however, was the paradox in the boycott strategies that political activists adopted during apartheid; in particular, boycott of universities because of their provision of racially segregated facilities – the most ludicrous of which was the creation of an “Indian” University situated on an island in Durban Bay. That was segregation indeed!

But education is necessary for the progress of a community. So a boycott of higher education meant cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. And that would have worked in favour of apartheid.

Black students had no choice but to accept separate education; they had lived all their lives in racially segregated areas and had gone to racially segregated schools. Segregation was a fact of our lives. Apartheid had simply legalized the segregation that had existed in the country since 1652.

16 May

I spent many happy hours searching for photographs on the Internet to illustrate the events that Maniben refers to in her writing.

17 May: *Boston Legal*

Yesterday I watched more episodes of *Boston Legal*. This series clearly demonstrates the difference between sex and love. In the show, the only two characters who express love for each other are Alan Shore and Denny Crane and it is genuine appreciation of each other as human beings. They are not gay and there is no sex involved in their friendship even though both men have inordinate appetites for sex as all their sexual interludes with women reveal.

Sex is shown simply as appetite and has nothing to do with love. And once these men have tasted a particular dish, they move on to the next.

What I was surprised to see was the acknowledgement that Alan Shore's attitude to women is sexist. I have never heard anyone call a Don Juan sexist before. But Denny and Alan are completely sexist and the camera, which represents their gaze, never fails to focus on a woman's backside as she walks away from them.

In general, fairy tales and romantic fiction end "happily ever after" with a man and a woman coming together in the belief that sexual attraction is love. Such stories dare not venture beyond the wedding.

18 May: Dr. Kathy Perkins's Visit

This morning, I will be off to my niece Dris's place in Bryanston. Dris and her sisters have undertaken to

entertain Kathy Perkins and are providing lunch..

Driving to Bryanston

On the map it looked really easy – a straight route along the M34 to the R511 which is William Nicol Drive, off which is the street to my nieces' complex. So I set off at about 9:30 and drove along quite comfortably but long before I reached the R511, the road suddenly disappeared and became a very rough undeveloped stony stretch and no signs to indicate where I was. I was horrified. I drove along thinking this would be just a small patch, but it continued and I thought I should turn back as I had no idea where this was leading.

As I turned, I saw a messenger on his motor cycle and stopped him to ask for directions, He took pity on me, white hair, as always, is an indication of age and helplessness and he led me over what seemed like a million miles of stony, undeveloped terrain. I was terrified I would get a puncture and be stuck in this wilderness without help. Eventually he brought me to the end of this hell, and the beginning of a paved highway that is William Nicol Drive, running along a decently built up area. Then he turned back into the rough terrain through which he had brought me. I was most grateful to him, my unknown saviour.

As I drove along William Nicol, I realized that the undeveloped stretch of road runs past settlements of poor people and I wondered if any of them had voted last week for a government that would allow such conditions to continue without a thought for them. Governments in newly liberated colonial situations, tasting power for the first time, become intoxicated and have no thought for any

but themselves. They exemplify, to an even greater degree than the former rulers that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

I got to Dris's apartment and found her busy in the kitchen. She was surprised to see me a half-hour before time. But I had wanted to be there early so I could greet Kathy and Khubu at the gate and bring them up to the apartment.



Dr. Kathy Perkins and I at Dris's apartment.

Dris, Quereshni and Sharmini are confident independent, professional women, and, at the dinner table, they were drawn into an animated conversation by Khubu about Jews and Palestinians and South African politics. As I am extremely hard of hearing, and though I was wearing my

hearing aids, I could not make out what was being said, so I was a silent observer and so was Kathy, as the subject matter of the conversation at the dinner table excluded her.

I have apologized to Kathy and am hoping to meet with her on one of her days back in Johannesburg.

20 May

I have received an email from Kathy informing me that she is free on Friday so she will get an Uber and come to visit. I have no idea what an Uber is, but I am grateful that we have a second chance for a get-together.

Insurance

When my geyser burst, Irwin, the caretaker voluntarily made arrangements with the Insurance Company that covers the complex, for payment of part of the costs. Now there is a bit of a mix-up about payment. The Insurers want to pay the plumbing company that replaced my geyser even though I have explained several times that I had to pay upfront for purchase and installation of a new geyser. The plumbing company demanded payment, which amounted to my entire pension for the month, before undertaking the work. As it was an emergency situation, I paid.

I have sent the Insurers several emails and have now asked the caretaker to explain the matter to them. I know if payment is made to the plumbing company, it will be impossible to get it back.

I have now received an email from the Insurance Company, informing me that it will make payment into my bank account.

21 May: Boston Legal

I watched the final episode of Boston Legal last night. In addition to a Chinese takeover of the firm, it presented two weddings.

Romantic literature usually ends with marriage, and David E. Kelley ends his series in the same way, only, in typical fashion, his is a complete send up. He gives us two odd couples; one, a Jew and a Christian, and the other, two heterosexual men. With the Jewish-Christian wedding, he reveals the irrelevance of religion to the union and in the wedding of the two heterosexual men, he reduces marriage to the safeguarding of inheritance from the predatory nature of the State. The combined ceremony takes place on the deck of a fishing resort, and is performed by a judge in his fishing gear.

In society, marriage is the means to legitimize sex and reproduction but in this episode of Boston Legal, one marriage is of two men and in the other, the woman is past childbearing age, so these couples have come together in genuine love for each other. The marriage of the men demonstrates that love and sex are two independent emotional states. One involves the intellect; the other, the physical – the sexual consummation that is to be found in most romantic literature and is for the young.

In the final series, the focus is also on the attitude of society towards senior citizens. The general view of the elderly is of people on death row with nothing more to contribute to society. And the lifetime of skills they have acquired, which could be usefully employed, are simply disregarded as everything they stand for is taken as passé.

But *Boston Legal* repudiates the notion of useless old age; in the series people over fifty and sixty are main characters. It does not include octogenarians. But this is the twenty-first century and people live longer; perhaps when David Kelley is nearing my age, he will also stand up for people in their eighties.

22 May

Yesterday, I received an email from Kathy Perkins that Uber is an international taxi service that offers more reasonable rates. I am sorry she has had to resort to a taxi.

I hope she will allow me to reimburse her.

23 May

I have received another email from Kathy informing me that she will be coming in by the El train that connects Pretoria and Johannesburg.

24 May

I went to the bank at 9 a.m. to authorize a debit order payment to the new Management Company of the complex. After I had completed the transaction and as I was passing the Telkom shop, I decided to go in and inquire about Internet Service and a very helpful young assistant, Louis Wade, put me on to a new deal which gives me more gigabytes and *costs less*. Miracles do happen!

When I went to Telkom earlier in the year, I was attended to by a person who could not see me as a human being and was focused only on business. His solution to my problem was to sell me a six month package that cost R900. I almost gave up my contract with Telkom because of him.

Unlike Louis, he had absolutely no empathy.

After a little shopping, I went home and got ready for Kathy. At about one, I met her at the Gautrain El Train Station in Centurion and we went to the little Indian restaurant in the Jean Crossing Shopping Centre. The Pakistani owner of the restaurant, a young man of twenty-five was intrigued by Kathy; he had recognized her as American from her accent and came to talk to her. Apparently he has a sister in America but has no idea where she lives. He shared a little of his experiences in Pakistan and the conflict with India, and was very glad to be living in South Africa.



After lunch, Kathy and I came to my flat and we continued chatting. It was really fun sharing views, recollecting experiences of theatre in the 1970s and remembering people we both know. She will be leaving for Cape Town tomorrow to visit a friend there. She took this picture of me on the stairs to my flat. The security gate to the left of me leads into my flat.

25 May

This morning I cleared out my bedroom for the painter who came to paint the ceiling which had been discoloured by the leak from the geyser when it burst two weeks ago. The whole morning went into the repair and I now have a clean ceiling again.

I have had a couple of weeks of activity and interaction with other people and, this afternoon, am back to a secluded existence.

26 May

Up just before five this morning, I found my bathroom flooded and part of my bedroom carpet soaking wet. I looked up to see if the leak was from the ceiling; it was not. Nevertheless, I switched off the geyser and went down to close off the water. I came back to check. As I had used my washing machine last evening, I examined it and found it standing in water.

Should I call the same plumber? I suppose I have to. I emailed him; then spent all my time mopping up while waiting to hear from him.

The plumber did not get in touch. I assume he is not prepared to rectify whatever has gone wrong with his connection of the washing machine to the water supply.

I found that the hose from the machine was not in the water outlet pipe and I thought perhaps that had been responsible for the flooding. So I put the hose back in and hoped that it was the solution. I stacked wads of paper around the base of the machine to absorb the water. I decided to wait and see if my diagnosis of the problem was correct.

28 May: Another Friend from St Louis

I found this email on my laptop:

Hi Ms. Naidoo.

I'm Veronica Walton, great niece of Ms. Mildred Mitchell of St. Louis MO and Washington DC. I have heard Aunt Mil speak FONDLY of you over

the years, and she has shown me the painting you made for her, and I just wanted to reach out to you today to mention how wonderfully you have impacted Aunt Mildred's life.

She is living comfortably in a skilled nursing facility, Barnes Jewish Extended Care, in Clayton Missouri.

I wanted you to have my cell number so that one day soon, perhaps you and Aunt Mil could converse voice to voice.

Thank you and have a great day.

What a lovely surprise! Mildred Mitchell was the person who had made possible all my theatre ventures in St Louis. In the 1970s, she was Chairperson of The St Louis Committee on Africa and had asked me to direct a play to raise funds to support black students at Washington University. So in February 1973, I put on Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* in the Brown Hall Theatre at the university. And that led to my appointment in the Black Studies Department there.

Plumbing Problems

I checked my washing machine when I got up to find all the paper stacked around it soaking wet. I am still not sure whether it is still residue from the original leak or whether a pipe is leaking.

31 May

I have spent the last two days trying to find a plumber to come and fix whatever is wrong with the washing machine

connection. No luck! Eventually, I went to Irwin, the caretaker of the complex, He came, had a look and sent Johannes, the handy man of the complex, who found the source of the leak and fixed it. Now I have decided to get rid of the washing machine and Reckson, one of the security guards, will have it removed today.

I had no idea that Johannes was such a skilled person. I have only seen him walking around cutting grass and organising refuse bins. But he was able to plug off the water supply to the washing machine and then to fix the leak under the bathroom sink. He saved me the thousands that plumbers charge. He and the security guard have removed the washing machine and I now have a space in the bathroom for buckets and mops.

I tend to panic when I have plumbing and electricity problems. Vicariously, I become the objects that are malfunctioning and see myself nearing my end. It's a weird form of projection. I wonder if that is because I live alone and tend to turn my possessions into extensions of myself.

Luci's Dilemma

This anti-apartheid play that I wrote in 1982, which I find hilarious, and is my favourite of all the plays I have written, has now been transcribed and will go on my website as an independent work, independent of the anthology in which its delights have been hidden.

4 June

In the last three days, I have been working on Maniben's autobiography, transcribing her essay of her father's life and finding appropriate photographs to include with it. I

find the size of the book that she requires is not commensurate with the amount of material she has provided. It will be a big, very thin, book. I hope there is more information to come.

Kathy Perkins

Yesterday, I emailed Kathy Perkins who returned home to the States at the end of May. I was sorry I had not wished her goodbye. I realise I never know what day it is or even what month. I live a timeless existence, aware only of day and night as that is obvious. Kathy emailed back and informed me that she has posted all the packages I gave her for people in the States and is very busy – involved in designing, I am not sure what; I imagine it is a show since she is interested in the work of playwrights. I realize I have very little idea of Kathy's work. I had imagined she was exclusively a writer

Garrow's Law

I have been watching this series again as it is based on the career of a man, a lawyer, who could see that law does not necessarily mean justice. I think the following poem sums up what I see in him:

AUTHENTIC BEING

not mindless
conformity
not opportunistic
criminality
but awareness
of karma
indeterminate nature

of consequences
of action
and striving
for understanding
in compassion
and love

As such he is contrasted with the husband of the woman he loves, who upholds the moral values of his society on the surface but, in private, has absolutely no regard for them. This husband represents the majority. Garrow represents a minority that understands the necessity of the law, but will challenge it when it becomes oppressive, cruel and unjust.

In the nineteenth century, the law regarded a woman and everything she owned, as her husband's possessions. She had no rights as a human being; she was simply a possession.

5 June

I spent the whole of yesterday and most of today working on Maniben's autobiography. I have scanned all the relevant photographs from the album that she has given me and included them, changed the size of the pages from A4 to Executive, increased the size of the font and now have a document of about 70 pages. Yesterday, I phoned Maniben to indicate that I needed more material to create a substantial book. With all the changes I have made, the book has filled out quite a bit more, but I still need more material.

6 June

I spent five hours this morning, correcting this manuscript.

I had not realized that importing emails into it had altered the modes I had set.

7 June

I spent practically the whole day working on Maniben's autobiography – mainly looking for and inserting photos into the text.

8 June: *Strange Fruit*

Last night, I started reading *Strange Fruit*, the book of anti-lynching plays that Kathy Perkins gave me. The plays are set in the early twentieth century in the Southern States of the USA.

This morning, I sent Kathy the following email:

Dear Kathy

I am so dumb. When you gave me the book, I did not look at it properly and didn't realise that you are the co-author and that this was a great honour, receiving a book which you and Judith L. Stevens have put together.

I started reading the book last night and have read the introductions by you and Judith and I see that you have embarked on a similar quest to mine. You look at lynching in the attempt to understand the psychosis that produced it; I look at apartheid for the same purpose.

In the States, because Black people are a minority community, the lynching was a physical phenomenon. In South Africa, as Black people are in the majority, the lynching was psychological and manifested through pass laws and inferior facilities.

Thank you so much for the book. I look forward to reading the plays.

9 June: *Rachel*

Yesterday, I read *Rachel*, the first play in *Strange Fruit*; the book of plays on lynching by American women. *Rachel* was written in 1916 by Angelina Weld Grimké. In the foreword to the play, which presents an outline of the playwright's life and career, the play is described as "the earliest known example of a full-length drama written in the anti-lynching tradition."

As a black woman, born brought up in a racist society, I found it to be not an anti-lynching play but rather a self-lynching drama. In the foreword to the play, the compilers of the anthology, write, "Present-day readers may find the play's sense of futility objectionable, but according to Brenda Murphy, leaving problems unresolved was the predominant characteristic of early realism as it developed on the American stage." (*Strange Fruit*, pp. 23-4.)

But Grimké does not leave the problem unresolved. In her play, *Rachel* resolves it in a way that is self-destructive. It speaks of defeatism and an acceptance of the dehumanization imposed on Black people in a racist society. *Rachel*'s sacrifice of love and motherhood reflects her intense despair and if generally accepted, would lead to the annihilation of all Black people. Hitler would have approved.

In a racist society, Black men are seen as rapists and criminals and Black women as mindless vaginas; not much more than animals. If we accept these inhumane reflections of ourselves, we can never be free, and like *Rachel* we will see solutions only in terms of self-destruction.

Though it is difficult for Black people to develop self-respect in a racist society, it is essential that we learn to

value ourselves. We owe a debt of eternal gratitude to the Gandhis, Mandelas, Malcolm Xs, and Martin Luther Kings, who overcame racist conditioning, gave back to all Black people their self-respect and led us into freedom from lynching – in particular, psychological lynching – the self-denigration that racism imposes on Black people.

11 June: Angelina Weld Grimké

On second thoughts, I think that Angelina Weld Grimké presents her play, *Rachel*, as an appeal to the conscience of those who value human life to take action against those who cannot see black people as human beings.

The whole lynching syndrome presents a huge irony. Those who lynch cannot see their own inhumanity which they project on their victims and which reduces them to the kind of beasts they imagine black men to be.

12 June: Self-respect

I believe that self-respect is the key to freedom. Without self-respect, one remains a victim.

Reading the anti-lynching plays, I see both the perpetrators and the victims as people without self-respect. Those who lynch are as much victims of their own inhumanity as the people they lynch. Black people are conditioned by racism to see themselves as inferior. White mobs that enslave and lynch Black people are men who feel their manhood threatened and need to prove their worth by lynching. The fact that they go on and on lynching, is an indication that it becomes an aphrodisiac.

Those who lynch, mistake power for decency and humanity. As Black people are made powerless by

their circumstances, they become victims of those who lynch. When Blacks throw off feelings of inferiority and realize their worth as human beings, they achieve freedom. But those who lynch can never achieve self-respect. They deceive themselves that power is self-respect. As long as they hold fast to that, they can never be free. They may give up the physical act of lynching, but they will find other means, such as exploitation, to continue to feed their need for self-respect.

People with genuine self-respect do not need external means to convince them of their own worth.

13 June: Castration Anxiety

This morning I woke up with the thought that lynching is a form of castration anxiety. The people who enslaved, saw African people as very potent sexual beings and their ill-treatment of African people was based on such a perception.

Black women were often victims of rape, and black men, victims of lynching. Black men, for the most part, innocent of the accusations made against them, had to be lynched; had to be annihilated. Filled with feelings of their impotence, the mobs resented black men and lynching became the substitute for sexual fulfillment. Lynching, being orgasmic, had nothing to do with justice, so the innocence of the victim was totally irrelevant.

14 June

I wake up each morning to find my mind engaged in resolving some problem or the other. In the last few days it has been on the problem of lynching. My mind is like an independent entity, working on problems while I am asleep,

finding solutions and waking me up in the early hours of the morning to take note. It is like being possessed. It is probably this kind of experience that led to the belief in the spirit world.

I am now reading *Strange Fruit*, the play from which the anthology of plays on lynching takes its title. Since my mind seems to be independent of my consciousness, I wonder what it will make of the play. I will only find out in the early hours of tomorrow morning. My mind does not want me interfering, seems to need total privacy, and finds it when I am fast asleep.

15 June

The play, *Strange Fruit*, illustrates once again the confusion of sex with lynching. In the racist culture of the South, a white man is murdered and the lynch mob arbitrarily chooses a black man to lynch, someone who happens to be around; someone, in this case, who was associated with the murdered man. His innocence is irrelevant to the mobs sexual urge to lynch.

Das Rheingold and Swan Lake

Last night, I watched again Robert le Page's production of Wagner's opera and again was uplifted by the way in which the stage set dances to the music. I found it much more enjoyable than the ballet, *Swan Lake*, which I had watched the night before. Everything in the opera was totally integrated, music, setting and action. It was perfection. In the Kirov *Swan Lake*, much of the dancing was simply to exhibit the skills of the dancers and a variety of dance forms. It was like going through a catalogue of dance. I found it repetitious. I realise I don't

have the ability to really appreciate ballet. I suppose having spent many years working in theatre, I expected a more dramatic rendering through dance. I shall have to watch the ballet *Spartacus* again for that. I also have Yuri Grigorovich's version of *Swan Lake*. As I love Grigorovich's choreography, I shall watch it to see if he has made it more dramatic.

16 June 2019: Youth Day

Today is Youth Day, a holiday to commemorate the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976 when African school children marched in protest against the apartheid government's attempt to impose Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in African schools. The imposition on a subject people of the language of the ruling powers is the most effective way of gaining control over them. However, Black people in South Africa had already been conquered earlier and were communicating through the medium of English.

In 1994, when the new government came into power, it maintained communication through the medium of English. So we remain a subject people of the English rather than of the descendants of the Dutch.

Father's Day

I had to pop out quickly as I wanted to bake but had no eggs. I wondered if shops were open as this was a long weekend. Shops were open and there I discovered that it was Father's Day, a happy replacement for the Soweto uprising, which people have forgotten.

17 June

I sent Kathy Perkins the following email yesterday:

I am still reading *Strange Fruit* and am wondering why you and Judith L. Stephens chose to create an anthology of plays on lynching. Does it have relevance in the USA of 2019?

I received the following answer this morning:

“Glad to know you are reading *Strange Fruit*. It was my friend, Judy, who came up with the idea for lynching plays. There were so many written by both men and women, we realized that it should be its own genre. We started out collecting plays by both men and women, but realized there were so many by women that we settled on this collection by Black and white women,

These plays are very relevant today. 2019 marks the 100th anniversary of Red Summer 1919, where there were unprecedented numbers of lynchings in America. People are comparing these lynchings to the large number of police killings of black men.”

As a South African, I am aware of how difficult it is to rid oneself of racism when it has been part of one's conditioning in the society in which one lives.

Being human, we have a propensity to differentiate; if it is not racism it will be sexism, classism, religious prejudice, etc., etc., etc. Human beings have this need to prove themselves superior to others and we always find ways to differentiate between ourselves and others. All

forms of competition attest to this. And we always reward those who win – trophies, medals, promotions, special treatment.

Racism is a negative form of the striving for superiority; skin colour is not something we strive for, it is a given and it provides a natural means of differentiation. And as white skinned people have always subjugated black skinned people, they are the winners and, therefore, the superior race. But colonization led to the adoption of Western cultural and technological norms by black people, and that has led towards the ending of racism.

18 June; Brides from India

Yesterday, I learned of a horrendous form of exploitation, which amounts to slavery. Those South African “Indian” men who are very traditional, go to India to find brides and come back with teenage wives who have practically been sold to them. They regard their wives simply as chattels and continue to seek sexual pleasure outside the home. Being cut off from families and bound by their own stultifying cultural traditions, these imported wives are completely isolated and have no means of escape from their cruelly oppressive situations.

Men who go to India for brides suffer from castration anxiety, fear of emasculation. They are afraid of South African women of Indian descent who, though living in a racist society, have nevertheless developed independence of mind and spirit through education and adaptation to a different set of cultural norms. South African women are a threat to male chauvinists: thus the resort to brides from India.

Portrait of a Lady

Last night, being preoccupied with the cruel and demeaning situation of brides from India, I automatically gravitated to the DVD of Henry James's novel. In *Portrait of a Lady*, we are shown a wife who is treated as an extension of her husband's will. Marriage for the woman becomes a form of slavery; a slavery that she chose for herself under the illusion of being in love. It reveals how gullible, even an independent woman can be.

It is not a favourable portrait of womankind, or of marriage.

19 June

Yesterday, as I no longer have a washing machine, I decided to use the launderette a couple of streets away. It is a very little launderette with only about four washing machines so it was very busy. The assistant there took my small basket of clothes and told me she would get it washed when a machine was free. So I did not have to wait around and went back to collect my clothes a few hours later. They were very helpful and kind and I shall continue to use this launderette. My laundry problems are solved.

Friends

I had a visit from Tom and a visit from Tom and Lionel the day before. Lionel has made a miraculous recovery from a very serious illness. As they are my dearest friends, I was very happy to see them. We have been friends for at least forty years since 1989, when we were colleagues at the newly established Giyani College of Education to which Tom had been appointed Vice Rector.

Sad to say the college no longer exists. One would have imagined that with the changeover of government, educational institutions would have increased, not decreased, to make up for the lack during apartheid.

20 June: My Understanding of the Meaning of Life

We live on a planet in an expanding universe that has no beginning or end that we can identify and, as far as we know, the Earth is unique in having given rise to life. As we are human beings in an ever evolving situation, we have a strong sense of insecurity and a strong need for stability.

Consequently, we have created concrete modes of living with fixed definitions of existence that offset the continuous motion of a planet that is spinning on its axis in an ever evolving universe.

Furthermore, being mortal, with birth and death marking the beginnings and ends of human life, we see things in terms of beginnings and ends. That is also contrary to the timelessness of the universe.

So our existence is marked with ambivalence as everything that we regard as absolute is constantly being revealed to us as relative. So what we regard as truth is truth only in the moment and is not universally applicable.

As we cannot conduct our lives based on the ambivalence of our existence, we have created “absolute truths” in order to be able to understand and relate to one other. We have developed customs, traditions, religions, political systems, etc. based on principles which we regard as absolute in order to give ourselves a sense of stability.

But in our everyday lives, we are constantly faced with contradictions of these principles, and are thus made aware, to put it in Shakespeare’s words, that “nothing is but what

is not,” that static appearance is an imposition on ever evolving reality.

As I see it, everything that we regard as absolutes, because they are necessary to our safe existence, are in reality expedients. This becomes very clear when you watch legal dramas where the law is shown to be inadequate to a situation, and in order to achieve justice, has to be moderated. Justice and the law cannot always be equated.

Laws and beliefs, therefore, do not remain permanently fixed; they change as we develop new understandings of what is humane. Like the ever evolving universe, the societies in which we live are also evolving as we continuously adjust our attitudes and beliefs based on new understandings and new developments.

Take for example our attitudes to women. It took centuries before women became free. Now in the twenty-first century, women have finally achieved full human status and the freedom to develop in accordance with their interests, talents and abilities.

As human beings we strive for perfection, which we regard as absolute but in an ever evolving social situation, our understanding of perfection is constantly changing so we can only chase after it without ever achieving it.

PERFECTION

born
in the mind
remains
in the mind

unattainable
receding
like the horizon
there
but not there
just beyond
beckoning ever
desirable ever
unattainable ever
giving rise
to creative
human
initiative.

Out of our need for stability and safety, we have created rules, regulations, customs, conventions, laws etc. that we regard as absolute. Uniforms and fashions are indications of adherence to set formulae of behaviours and practices which in turn lead to all forms of stereotyping. And we tend to judge people by their appearance, the clothes they wear and their conduct in our expectation of conformity to convention. Those who do not conform are considered deviant or exotic.

And when we encounter people whose customs and conventions are different from our own, we call them strangers or foreigners. What is different or strange is vaguely threatening and is often regarded with suspicion.

We tend not to take kindly to difference. Disregard of conventions evokes uneasiness, is often derided and subjected to suspicion and censure. We depend on conformity for understanding; what is conventional is

familiar and therefore acceptable.

When you do not conform to a stereotype, you become a threat.

I give as example, my wearing of a hat. Women of Indian descent do not customarily wear hats. So being black, my cheap little blue denim hat that has become associated with thieves, turns me into one. When I wear the hat, I am followed around in shops by security guards. Recently, I was challenged by one who followed me out of the shop and demanded to inspect my shopping bag.

When I do not wear my hat, I am still reduced to a stereotype. My white hair declares me a fragile, somewhat confused, perhaps even idiotic, old woman – but harmless.

So now I take my hat off inside shops.

Social conditioning is a strong factor in our lives, and we are conditioned to thinking of people in terms of type.

HUMAN BONDS

custom, convention, tradition:
harnessing impulse
in
norms and standards
controlling
natural instincts
creating
stability.
conformity
and
harnessing
non-conformity,
challenge, defiance,
rebellion, revolution:
waves on the surface
that reform
but never remove
custom, convention, tradition

LIFE

*a beginning
and an ending
on earth
in a universe
of no beginning
no ending
seeking
immortality
in the stars
on earth
erecting
tombstones
over dead bones*