

Muthal Naidoo
Octogenarian Diary



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Sept2018—January2019

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Marsha House Cann on the beach in Durban in October

September 24: Email from Marsha:

"This is Marsha House Cann, you were my drama professor at Washington University. To jog your memory, I played the role of Amope in The Trials of Brother Jero that you directed at Edison Theatre in the mid 70's. At 6ft tall I towered over my husband, Chume, played by Mike Smith, which added to the level of comedy in this very funny play.



Brother Jero (Byron Thompson) in "The Trials of Brother Jero."

Marsha (Amope) seated in front in the 1976 production of *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

I am living in New York now and my husband's job is sending him to a conference and so I am traveling with him to Durban, South Africa next week. We will be there from October 1-13, 2018. Do you live near there? I am hoping you are available and accessible for a visit with me.

*Muthal you have had and continue to have a huge impact on me and I would love to see you again! It would be great to catch up and become reacquainted while I am in Durban. Congratulations on your new play! Is *Flight from the Mahabharata* showing near Durban while I am there? Like you, I have begun a writing career, since I retired a couple of*

years ago. I pray that I will see you soon, but if not, I look forward to staying in touch with you.”

In that production at Washington University in St Louis, actors were both props and people. In the photo, Jero is peeping from a hut formed by the actors’ bodies.

Sep 25: My reply to Marsha’s email

Hello Marsha, How great to hear from you. I am sorry to say that I no longer live in Durban. I am now in Pretoria so unfortunately for me, I will not be able to visit with you. But we can stay in touch this way.

Flight from the Mahabharath was written 26 years ago. It was staged at two universities in the States – Appalachian State University last year, and by Megan English at Lebanon Valley College in 2016. It has never been produced in South Africa; I am totally unknown here and have not been involved in theatre since I retired in 1998. I have devoted my time to writing essays, poems, biographies, and a couple of novellas – they are all on my website. I am currently working on autobiographical material – really ventures into the meaning of existence.

I want to hear about your writing.

September 25: Email from Marsha:

“Thanks for getting right back to me. I too am sorry I won’t get to visit with you while I’m in Durban, but happy to be back in touch. I visited your website and am impressed by your canon of work and will enjoy reading the essays, poems, novellas, etc., etc. Congratulations on your prolific expressions. You continue to inspire me.

I have been writing poetry for years, started back at

Wash U, but still hesitating to call myself a writer.

So here I am now writing short stories, mostly – and step by step, inch by inch, working on a collection of stories about the magic and resilience of black folks. I'm using the history of slavery in America in general, and my "family" history as the voice I'm speaking through. I have even been entertaining the idea of these stories being the beginning of a novel. So these days I am calling myself a writer. We'll see. So far I have been working on my discipline, writing something every day, and I have gotten three stories published in three different magazines. I will send you the links and look forward to your feedback.

So good to hear from you. Hey, are there some places or activities you would suggest we make sure to experience while in Durban? Please let me know."

Sep 26: My reply

Congratulations Marsha. You are way ahead of me. You are a published author; I am only a self-published author. I look forward to reading your stories. At present, I am working on autobiographical material. As I edit my work myself, I spend weeks correcting; and at the moment what I am working on just won't come right. But I enjoy my battle with words.

Oct 2: Email from Marsha

"Hey Muthal, My husband Clement and I just arrived in Durban last night. The trip was pretty grueling - 20+ hours of flying, the most time I have ever spent on a plane. But we are here safe and sound and so grateful to be. I am so excited to be here, to be home! This is truly a privilege and awesome opportunity.



Clement and Marsha

I wanted to direct you to our website, Icannenterprises.com (we are still working on it, it's not where we want it but getting there, anyway...) There you can access a video of me reading/performing "Holy Ground," my first published story. (Also you'll find other stories/poetry performances, my 40 Corners kids (I'll tell you more about that) and music videos) --- all of the videos

were produced by Clement. You can also find the same story on African Voices website (africanvoices.com) the magazine where this story was published, under its full name "Recollecting Holy Ground, an Iron and a Washtub." My second published story is in *Black Renaissance Noire*, a literary magazine produced by New York University Press. I don't think you can access the story "Dead But Not Gone," that they published, without paying for the magazine, but no worries, I can send you a copy of the magazine when I get back to New York. There is also another story, "Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil" that was published in an on-line magazine, *Arts Today Ezine-Issuu*. It chronicles my time as a young activist at Beaumont High school in the late '60s, early '70s. I'll have to confirm the actual publication dates and tell you how to access.

The two stories I have attached are not yet published. They will be a part of the collection I mentioned before, that will possibly become a novel, God willing. (Please let me know what you think of my work, would appreciate any suggestions and criticisms.)"

My Reply:

I have just read the two stories and found them very interesting. Your subject matter surprised me. I am assuming that you set your stories in the times of slavery to present a picture not simply of abject suffering, but of the strength, courage, love and humanity of a people and their traditions that gave them the strength to survive in inhumane conditions.

Thank you for sharing with me. I am not a storyteller; I write about what I observe. Best wishes for a very successful writing career.

Oct 3: Differences in Approach

When I read Marsha's stories, I saw that as writers, we are both concerned with the dignity and worth of all human beings, but in our approaches we are quite different.

Marsha presents positive images of a people who were forced into slavery, the worst form of racism ever known, worse even than apartheid. In South Africa, we were discriminated against, but we lived in our own families and communities and maintained our traditions. But Marsha's people, torn out of their homes and communities and transported into foreign conditions in which their humanity was not recognized, were denied a communal life and forced into an understanding of existence as cruel and inhumane. Their suffering goes beyond what I can imagine. In Marsha's writing, I read her desire to restore to her people the humanity and identity that were so violently and cruelly repressed. As a writer, she is a healer resurrecting compassion and dignity.

As I come from a background in which racism kept people of different cultures apart, my focus is on discrimination. And my intent is ideological and destructive unlike Marsha's, which gentle, humanitarian and constructive. I wish to root out the idea of race altogether. I see it as a false concept based entirely on acquired differences.

We are all human beings and our differences arise from adaptation to different environments. As different environments present different challenges, people develop in different ways – in terms of cultural practice and physical appearance. But these are acquired differences and as we focus on acquired differences, we do not recognize our common humanity. We do not see that all cultures

develop along the same basic lines. All societies produce families, governments, economic and social systems, religious and recreational pursuits.

In the modern world, people moving into different environments adapt without difficulty to new conditions as their socialization processes are not fundamentally different as the cultures they have developed simply reflect adaptation to differing environments. If they did not possess fundamental similarities, they would remain alienated in new cultural environments. “Race”, therefore, is not an indicator of *essential* differences.

So I refuse to justify being black. With all my vices and virtues, I am a human being. My colour is simply an indication of the environment in which I was born.

As Marsha is a believer and I am an atheist that also contributes to our differences in approach. She writes stories and I write diatribes.

October 6: My last Biography

Since I cannot get it out of my system, I have to admit to a sense of outrage at what happened to the biography that I completed in June. Commissioned by the sons of a man who died forty years ago, it was launched last Sunday. I made the excuse that I was ill and boycotted the launch. Being almost 83, people expect you to be dying so it is a lie you can get away with.

What happened to the book, feels like rape. Apart from the fact that it has been crudely laid out, the text was altered to suit those wanting to promote themselves in the book.

The eldest son, who has a desperate need for recognition, tried his best to make the book about himself. He kept presenting me with interviews that he conducted and with

information about himself. As I never got to meet with his informants, people who knew his father on a personal and social level, I could not get the kind of detail that I needed. I accepted the situation as I thought I would be able to supplement with research.

As I worked on the book, I got no feedback from the men who had commissioned it. I would send them drafts of what I had written that would be followed by months of silence. Then I would be presented with more interviews conducted by the eldest son. I came to realize that this man, in addition to his deep need for recognition, was a male chauvinist.

My being a woman was a subconscious but real threat. It challenged him to assert his authority and prove his superiority. The interviews that he kept sending me were attempts to assert control of the book. Even after I had submitted the completed text in June, I received more superficial interviews from him. When I received the final layout and found that he had made alterations to what I had written, I gave up. It was now his book and I would have nothing more to do with it.

Furthermore, I was forced to conclude that the need to control the information that went into the book hid a deep, perhaps unrecognized, sense of shame. I have no idea why, but they did not want me to get the full story of their father. There were indications that he was a much more interesting person than their narrow conservatism would allow.

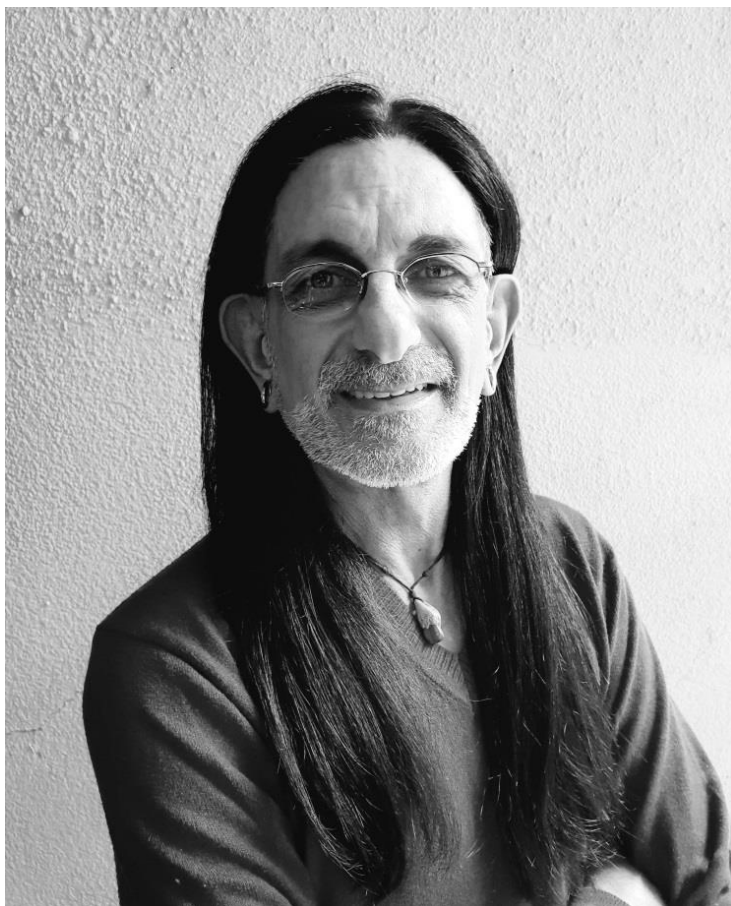
I realise that a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem often leads to hostile and aggressive behavior.

L&T introduce me to author, Olga Tokarczuk

Tom and Lionel brought me a new book: *Flights*, by Olga Tokarczuk, this year's winner of The Man Booker International Prize.



**Tom
(T of L&T)**



Lionel
(L of L&T)

Flights

Richard North Patterson's novel, *Degree of Guilt*, which I have just completed, interrogates our dependence on logic to make meaning of our lives. But Olga Tokarczuk, author of *Flights*, discards the logical sequencing of events

altogether and presents life as unrelated happenings.

I found the opening section of *Flights* amusing but I was not sure I was reacting as I ought. As I read on, it seemed to me that my reaction, whatever it was, was simply my reaction. The author did not appear to be concerned about reactions to her book, or so it seemed to me. Nevertheless, she has received a tremendous accolade – the Man Booker Prize.

Like *Degree of Guilt*, *Flights* presents the underlying arbitrariness of convention, but, unlike the Patterson book, reinforces it by rejecting the traditional form of the novel that tells a story. I will have to read further to discover how she makes meaning of life. Perhaps I will discover that she has no intention of ordering events in a logical way – that she simply accepts and reflects the happenstance nature of existence.

My understanding of life is that we have attempted to tame its happenstance nature and, as Patterson shows us, we have to be able to recognize that the systems we create to bring order into our lives are not perfect and require adjustment when they become inhumane.

Tokarczuk's rejection of the taken-for-granted recipe for a novel is reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's rejection of the well-made play that reduced life to a formula. It is the artist's demand for freedom from mindless conventionality that leads to new trends in writing. Tokarczuk's abandonment of a logical flow of events, or rather, her acceptance of life's volatility, requires us to interrogate the human construction of convention as the basis for existence. At least that is my interim view.

Hopefully, I will have a better understanding once I have

read the whole book. I realize that even this expectation which reflects my belief that we create consistency in order to give meaning to life is contrary to what Tokarczuk demonstrates, i.e. our inability to maintain consistency which is an artificial construct anyway.

By that logic, even reading the whole of her book to understand its intent may be contrary to what she purports. Now that I am writing diaries and putting together unconnected events, I am doing what Tokarczuk is doing – writing about unrelated events; but, as they are events of my life, what I describe are not free-floating ideas and incidents. In Tokarczuk's book events are completely random and reflect the metaphor of travel – flying from one destination to another, from one set of circumstances into another, totally different and unconnected.

Scientists keep searching for a beginning of existence but Tokarczuk, a psychologist, simply accepts its randomness. Perhaps, our insistence on consistency is the real evil in our lives; but how do we make meaning without logic? Reviews on the Internet, in describing the book as a journey that reflects movement through the human anatomy, have given it some kind of logic and consistency. But, I ask myself, does that not defeat the author's intention?

I do not know; I must read on. As this is not a book concerned with a logical progression of events, I jump to sections at the end of the book to see whether I will find a conclusion that brings everything together.

I do not.

Tokarczuk is like a stand-up comedian poking fun at conventions. Her book requires a freer spirit than mine; one that totally repudiates the formulae that we make of life.

The only meaning I am making of the book's randomness is its randomness.

Saccharin is Sweet

I have also received a book from Sivalingum Moodley who lives in the Pretoria area. It is his first novel, *Saccharin is Sweet*. I shall read it after *Flights* which I started reading yesterday.

Downsizing

I have given away most of my jigsaw puzzles and now most of my books. I donated a number of books to the local Lyttelton Library; so they are still available to me if I need them. I was not sure that the library would accept the books. The Librarian looked tentative when I brought in the first lot; she checked the books to make sure they were suitable. She accepted the second and third lots without question.

Now I buy popular novels to read in bed before I sleep. These I get at a nominal price from charity shops. I return them when I am through with them. The one I finished a couple of days ago, Richard North Patterson's *Degree of Guilt*, is an intriguing book, especially in the way in which it plays with logic; the logic of the prosecution versus the logic of the defence. Ironically, the trial ends with an expedient rejection of all logical thinking in order to preserve what is humane.

October 9: Email from Marsha

Muthal you won't believe what has happened. On Thursday, Oct. 4, I had a stroke. I just got out of the ICU Saturday, I'm at St. Augustine's hospital, it was not a massive stroke, thank God and I am hoping to be released tomorrow. Some

vacation, huh, but since it was a mild stroke, I should be able to enjoy the rest of my time here, which has been extended because the doctors are not releasing me to fly until after Oct. 24th. I will keep you posted. I am just trying to stay in the flow.

Marsha's news was a shock, and I felt awful because I could not be of any help. How dreadful to be far from home and not have friends and family around to support you.

But Marsha has a positive attitude and that, more than anything, is curative.

October 10: *Saccharin is Sweet*

I turned to *Saccharin is Sweet*, the novel by Sivalingum Moodley. It captures life in a tiny "Indian" settlement, Mount Edgecombe, on the Natal north coast, the birthplace of the author. Though it is set in modern times, it reveals a people trapped in the slave-like conditions of the original inhabitants, our Indian forebears – indentured labourers imported from India in the 19th century to work on the sugar cane plantations. The title of the book is a reference to those times.

In the trashing of the biography that I referred to earlier, I had discovered mind-sets that have remained trapped in the nineteenth century. *Saccharin is Sweet* is confirmation of the same kind of insularity in its depiction of people who live, no longer with the inhumanity of slavery, but that of poverty. It keeps them tied to a way of life and to mindsets that remain in the past and reflect a minimalist understanding of existence.

The men who had trashed their father's biography are not poor but their adherence to tradition has likewise

insulated them from modern influences.

Birthdays

I have received an email invitation from Diricilla, my niece, to a celebration of her parents' birthdays and mine, all of which occur consecutively on the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd. But I have informed her that I will not attend. Having lived alone with little social contact for most of my life, I have no social graces and now my growing deafness has intensified my inability to socialize.

I know I am a terrible aunt. None of my nieces and nephews can ever count on me.

L&T: re *Flights*

Yesterday, I sent the following email to Tom and Lionel:

You have set me on a quest with this book. I have to find out why it is called a novel. I identify with Tokarczuk's understanding of existence, but I do not agree with her view that making meaning is meaningless. Why write a book if that is so? Why call it a novel? Is that just deep irony? I am going to read her book again; perhaps I will find answers.

October 12

Unless the conventional idea of a novel has changed, I cannot regard *Flights* as a novel. Taken as one continuous work, it does not fit into any recognizable genre. So I have come up with an interim answer as to why *Flights* is called a novel. I imagine that the Mann Booker committee, being at a loss to categorize it, called it a novel in order to legitimize its recognition of it.

I see the book simply as a collection of thoughts, short incidents, essays and stories that reflect the theme of the

arbitrariness of existence. I will continue my investigation.

October 13: *Flights*

In exploring Tokarczuk's book, I will be working on the premise that she presents life's meaning as arbitrary because existence is arbitrary.

For me, existence is arbitrary, but life's meaning, though continuously evolving, is not. Humans have given meaning to existence; meaning by which we abide in order to control the random nature of existence. The fact that Tokarczuk is a professor at a University, the fact that she writes books, that she has won an international award, are all indications of the consistency that we give to life.

Corky Conquest

But – I am often forced to acknowledge the arbitrariness of life's meaning.



I had taken Corky, my car, to Rogen's Auto Centre in Pretoria West as I was having a problem that I could not

identify. When I changed gear, Corky seemed to jerk or shudder. I thought there could be a problem with her gears, so I took her in for a check-up. She remained at Rogen's for three days while they were fixing the problem which they had identified as misfiring.

At the end of the third day, I called to find out when I could have her back. As I live alone, I am very dependent on Corky. Morga, the manager, told me that he would find a driver to fetch me in the morning to come and collect her. The workshop is in Pretoria and I live in the suburb of Centurion.

As I am aware that auto service providers, in general, open at seven in the morning, I called at eight o'clock the next morning and was told that a driver would shortly be sent to fetch me. At nine, I called again and was told that the driver would soon be there. I called again at ten, and Morga, obviously frustrated by my persistent calling, said that they were working under pressure and I should be patient. So I asked whether I would receive the car that day and was told, I would be fetched before lunchtime.

I was annoyed and I had annoyed Morga.

At about eleven, Abraham, the company's driver, came to pick me up and I went to collect Corky and pay for the service.

When I entered the office to pay, I was told to take a seat which I did as I thought Morga had still to make out the invoice. While I waited, I chatted with his assistant. Then Morga left the office and when he had not come back after some time, I asked the assistant where he was, as I wanted to make payment. She was surprised; thought I had come in to chat. Then I discovered that payment had to be made to her.

I was being forced to acknowledge the arbitrariness of conventions. My understanding of words did not coincide with Morga's. I had waited three hours before the driver had come to fetch me. At eight o' clock in the morning, when Morga had said "soon" and "shortly", I had assumed he meant about half an hour, meanwhile he had meant sometime before lunch. Then when I went to make payment, it was interpreted as a social call.

I could see where Tokarczuk was coming from.

Though standardized, life is still full of inconsistencies, but the human drive for consistency has, nevertheless, given us the miracles of our existence; electricity and flight for example, which have made possible the landing of a man on the moon. So life is not simply a matter of petty inconsistencies. It may be so at an everyday level but that is not the whole story. There are those great minds that rise above ambivalence and make possible the miraculous nature of our existence.

That Tokarczuk calls her "novel" *Flights* is, for me, ironic. The word takes *her* from one petty event to the next; it takes *me* to a landing on the moon.

Birthdays

Being a loner, I gave up all kinds of conventional celebrations decades ago. I have no use for them. I suppose I could be considered a killjoy as I have thoroughly adapted to life on my own and don't have the need for social gatherings. While others celebrate birthdays, I simply note mine as a means of telling my age. So the invitation last year to celebrate my birthday with those of my brother and sister-in-law – we happen to be born on three consecutive

days in the month of October – was something I responded to out of politeness.

The invitation again this year was unexpected. I am definitely not a party animal and though I know I am being the predictable boor that I am, I declined. I am a misfit at social occasions and the family does not need a wet blanket at their celebrations.

I don't bother about my birthday. I celebrate *every day* in my own way; not as something personal but in wonder of the miracle of life on an obscure planet in an ever expanding universe.

October 14: *Flights*

I have come to the conclusion that if the Mann Booker Prize Committee had simply created a new category for Tokarczuk's book instead of calling it a novel, I would have spent all my time reading it, rather than trying to fit it into the conventional understanding of the genre.

The traditional novel tells a story and depicts a logical ordering of events. Authors play with that logic and through it create tension, intellectual and emotional involvement and enjoyment. If they presented events as completely random, the reader would not become hooked into the narrative as events would be inconsequential and unmemorable. The correlation of happenings in stories and novels allows a reader to enter into the flow of events and become a detective and match-maker. Random happenings do not engage the reader. And when her emotion and intellect are not aroused, she may be lulled into sleep.

In Brecht's Epic Theatre, he created means to alienate audiences from what they were watching. But his alienation techniques, meant to generate greater objectivity and ability

to evaluate events being depicted, depended on intellectual and emotional involvement to awaken awareness of injustice and the need for change. They were meant to stimulate audiences to find the means to overthrow oppression. *Flights* presents a new form of alienation; intellectual rejection of the involuntary acceptance of a perfunctory way of life.

October15

Today I decided to take notes as I began my re-reading of *Flights*. Having disabused myself of the notion that it is a novel, I could now see, in the first three sections, that I was dealing with autobiographical references and as I read them I realized that Tokarczuk was describing her understanding of the events of life simply as a series of flights into unconnected situations; they are not assembled in any conventional form but are like a river, she mentions the Oder, that meanders and is free flowing, though it remains in a channel; Tokarczuk uses travel as the channel for the disparate events she describes.

October 16: Quotes from *Flights*

These quotes from section 3: **Your Head in the World** – based on her study of psychology – and from section 4: **Syndrome**, give an indication of the direction that the book will take.

“Your Head in the World” (16-21)

“The postulate of one personality to one person always struck me as overly minimalist.” (p.20)

“I was witness to a strange phenomenon that occurred in my mind: the more I would find arguments for something, the more arguments against it would occur to me.” (p.20)

“It is tacitly assumed [in psychology] that people don’t know themselves, but that if you furnish them with questions that are smart, they’ll be able to figure themselves out. They pose themselves a question and they give themselves an answer. And they’ll inadvertently reveal to themselves that secret they knew nothing of till now.

And there is that other assumption, which is terribly dangerous – that we are constant and that our reactions can be predicted.” (p.21)

“Syndrome” (21-23)

“My set of symptoms revolves around my being drawn to all things spoiled, flawed, defective, broken.” (p.22)

“My weakness is for teratology and for freaks. I believe, unswervingly, agonizingly, that it is in freaks that Being breaks through to the surface and reveals its true nature.” (p. 23)

Armed with this understanding of her focus, I could now turn to the rest of the book. As her “weakness is for teratology”, I was now prepared to find a complete repudiation of convention. I am beginning to think that *Flights* may be a novel; its main character being anomaly.

Kunicki: Water (I) (p.30-38) (II) (p. 39-57)

The first story in *Flights* is about Kunicki, a visitor to an island. He wakes up in his car and goes looking for his wife and three year old son, who got out to relieve themselves but never came back. He alerts the authorities and others on the island to their disappearance but does not find his wife and son. His desultory search ends with his photographing of all the items in their luggage.

That is the entire story; there are no personal details about relationships or character. It is a freak incident.

As is life? A freak incident?

As a reader, I was placed outside the story to observe and I remained objective as my empathy was not required. And to ensure my detachment, there were two unrelated paragraphs in between the two parts of the story; the first, *Benedictus Qui Venit*; gives the information that the author is driving from the Netherlands into Belgium. The second, *Panopticon*, indicates her visit to a museum. These paragraphs have nothing to do with Kunicki. They merely indicate that unlike a story, life is filled with movement and a variety of disparate activities. What is important is being aware of continuous movement. Life simply means travelling through a variety of unconnected occurrences.

Events do not have a logical structure as is depicted in the conventional novel. So *Flights*, as in reality, presents Kunicki's life as unpredictable. In the conventional novel, movement is through connected sequences that take us through coherent processes that lead to heaven for some characters and to hell for others. It is this coherent, logical structuring that turns the conventional novel into an adult fairy tale.

And life, as is presented in *Flights*, is a series of random events. So why is it called a novel? It presents life as events lacking cohesion. Calling it a novel denies its presentation of the reality of life as free flowing.

But life is not as free flowing as Tokarczuk presents it – life is bound up in relationships and the search for understanding, as in the conventional novel. And we read novels for the pleasure they give us in revealing new insights into human behaviour and relationships at all levels, personal, social, political and existential.

As Tokarczuk eschews bonding, there is little, in my opinion, to intrigue the reader about what she presents. Life for her seems to be about the inability to form relationships. As a loner, I should really appreciate that; but I am also an African and I believe in Ubuntu so it is impossible for me to view life as a series of incoherent incidents.

18 October: Email from Marsha:

"I had my follow-up doc appt Monday and have been officially released to travel on October 24. Yesterday we went on a bus tour around Durban, so it was nice seeing the city and just getting away from the hotel and not just going to the hospital. Looking forward to going to the U Shaka and someone suggested we go to Gateway at Umwanga. Let me know what you think and if you have other suggestions. I definitely want to make the most of my last 5 or so days.

There is a Poetry Africa event on Friday at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. Some of the poets are: Dr. Gcina Mhlope, Nkateko Masinga, Sandile Ngidi, TJ Dema and David Summerhill. Have you heard of this event or any of these poets? I'm kinda excited about checking out some South

African poets, which most of them are. Summerhill is the only one from U.S.

I'm feeling pretty good for the most part. A little worn out but nothing dramatic. Just dizzy at times and a funny headache comes and goes. But yeah, things are pretty much back to normal, I'm claiming so at least.

Here's me from the last few days trying to be a tourist, (lol) with Clement on bus tour, enjoying healing from the sun at beach; also photos with my ICU nurses at hospital on Monday; and with my friends at the hotel restaurant."



Marsha at the Hospital and the Restaurant

Of course, I am hopeless. As I live inside books, I have no idea of what is going on in the world and can make no suggestions of what to see and where to go. Marsha and Clement know more about Durban than I do.

Yesterday, after I dropped off publications at the National Library in Pretoria, I drove over to Rogen's Auto Centre, to give Rogen my latest book: *From my Journals*. Rogen is one of very few people who actually read what I

write. I told him about Marsha and he offered to drive me to the airport to see her off; that is if she is leaving from O.R. Tambo International in Johannesburg.

Flights

I see the book as a journal of sorts – not a novel. It is a record of thoughts about a journey; it comments on airports, means of transportation, events and random encounters. The stories in the book are by a traveller writing about travellers who have only a momentary existence in her consciousness.

On page 61, Tokarczuk writes: “It is widely known, after all, that real life takes place in motion.”

Life on earth certainly evolved on a planet that is spinning on its axis and revolving on an orbit around the sun. But movement is not all; there is the stability of gravity that holds things in place.

As we know of life only on the obscure planet Earth in this vast universe, it is possible to see it as a freak occurrence. But its mysterious origin presents a continuous challenge to human creativity to give it meaning and turn it to opportunity. Humans have made possible a cohesive existence that prevails over the accidental nature of being. So we can either laugh at the human as a freak or we can celebrate human inventiveness.

And what is “real life”?

Tokarczuk sees it as movement.

I see it as the ability to give meaning to existence.

Marsha

Today after I emailed Marsha about meeting her at O. R. Tambo International, she let me know that she and Clement

will be flying from Durban to Dubai. After Marsha's stroke, I assume that they will make short hops back to the States, to avoid the one long grueling flight.

19 October: *Flights*

I have it at last! Man, am I slow! The book is a travelogue. It begins with the author setting out on a journey and ends with her return flight.

I have just read "Ash Wednesday Feast," her story of Eryk. Like Kunicki, Eryk is in constant motion – Kunicki involved in a fruitless search on an island and Eryk ferrying people to and from an island. Both men are islands in themselves. In their stories, they are people with no ties and are presented as travelers – part of a passing parade.

If "real life takes place in motion," and the motion of these men is the real meaning of their lives, it is almost meaningless.

Being from Africa, my understanding of life is based on Ubuntu: "a person is a person through other persons" or "I am because we are." So even though I sit alone in my flat, I know I am a person through other persons. I did not build my flat; I did not invent the laptop on which I am working, I do not bake the bread that I eat, etc., etc., etc.

So, living in society, I cannot be an island.

Boor

Not an island, but I am a boor – I have refused Diricilla's invitation to celebrate her parents' and my birthdays. I really am somewhat like an island, and I wonder why. Apart from the fact that I am a loner and have been on my own for most of my life, I realise that my poor ability to socialize,

probably stems from my childhood. I am from what one could call a dysfunctional family.

That is because my father was from a dysfunctional family. His mother, after whom I am named, died giving birth to him and he was brought up by a tyrannical father and a cold, indifferent step-mother. It was a home in which fear ruled. So when my father, married, he had no positive model on which to build a family. Unlike his parents, however, he was not cruel; he was actually loving, but not demonstrative.

When my brother Reggie, Diricilla's father, married, it was into a family with kind and loving parents, a family that hugged and kissed.



Reggie and Suzie, parents of SQD and Ash

So it was his wife, Soorcilla (Suzie), who brought an understanding of warmth and love into his life and in his own family there is the caring that he had lacked as a child.

In my case, I simply accepted that I was on my own and needed to look out for myself. So I grew up socially inept and remain so to this day.

I am glad of it; it gave me my independence.

Flight from the Mahabharath

I watched the DVD of Professor Ray Miller's production of the play and again could not believe that it was my play that had been so beautifully staged. As Dr Miller did not know me, had thought of me as Indian, he had made his own artistic meaning of the play and had given his production a traditional Indian look.

As Marsha has inquired about the production, I considered putting the DVD on my website. So I wrote to Prof. Miller to ask for permission.

20 October

I had received Prof. Miller's out of office email that he was in New York at a conference and would attend to my query on Monday, 22 October, so I was pleasantly surprised to find an email from him this morning. He has referred my request to Prof. Kevin Warner, Chairman of the Department of Theatre and Dance at Appalachian State University.

Flights

Last night I read another story from Tokarczuk's book. It presented another loner, the Sultan of a desert country. Though surrounded by wives and others, he does not connect with them. His mother urges him to flee with his favourite wives as the country is about to be attacked. He leaves, not with any wives, but with all the children who

sleep with him. Whether they are his or not, is not clear.

I ask myself why I should care about him. My question is irrelevant. I am not required to care; only to observe.

Is life presented as random incidents, great literature? The Mann Booker Prize proclaims it as such. And *Flights* is unusual – unique in that it does not assign any kind of meaning to events; it does not attempt to place them in any belief system academic, religious, psychological or social. The author simply presents events to be accepted as they are without imposing interpretations on them.

Far from the Madding Crowd

Yesterday, I watched the first part of the film of Thomas Hardy's novel and today, the second half. The DVD has, on its cover, the faces of the actors who portray Sergeant Frank Troy and Bathsheba Everdene. They represent romantic love – love based on physical attraction. In most novels, romantic love is shown to be the highest form of love. But as I watched, I saw that the hero, Gabriel Oak, who, to some extent, remains in the background, is filled with love that is not dependent on reciprocity. It is completely unselfish love.

Oak, as his surname suggests, is strong, upright and noble. He loves Bathsheba without receiving the return of his love. As Hardy expects of his reader, I measured Farmer Boldwood and Frank Troy against Oak. Boldwood, who starts off as a proud, independent man, crumbles into a pathetic figure once he falls in love. His need for the return of love reduces him to a weak, dependent human being, and eventually destroys him. Troy, an opportunist, uses his physical attractiveness to exploit everyone around him.

Bathsheba falls in love with him; and he marries her for

the position and power that it brings him. He does not love her but allows her to assume that her love is reciprocated.

When people speak of true love, it is a reference to sexual compatibility. Hardy gives us a different understanding of true love which is not the same as romantic love.

Romantic love, based on sexual attraction, creates dependency as it demands reciprocation; and unrequited love leads to unhappy consequences. Troy's relationship with Fanny destroys her; Boldwood's obsession with Bathsheba destroys him. Gabriel, who gives love freely, without making it part of a bargain, is not undone by love; he is sustained by it. Gabriel's love is not simply fuelled by desire; it is also genuine appreciation of Bathsheba that is sustained despite her follies and her rejection of him. His love is an indication of strength of character. Confident of his own worth, he does not seek affirmation of himself through a return of love and that gives Bathsheba the freedom to discover a deeper love, a love beyond passion.

22 October: 83 today

I opened my email this morning to find two birthday presents; an email from Tom and Lionel and an email from Prof. Kevin Warner, Chair of the Theatre and Dance Department at ASU.

From Tom and Lionel:

We wish you a HAPPY, HAPPY birthday!

You mean SO much to us...

You give us so much courage to be courageous!

You give us so much freedom to be free!

You give us so much love to be loving!

*You give us so many examples to be exemplary!
You give us so much hope to be hopeful!
You give us your truth to enable us to speak our
truth...*

We love you very much! L+T

Of course, it is the other way around; L&T have given me the courage, hope and love, for the freedom to be.

Professor Kevin Warner's email is a reply to my query about *Flight from the Mahabharath*.

"Dear Muthal,

It is so nice to hear from you! Ray shared your original email with me and I am sorry it has taken until now to reply. There is nothing at all inappropriate about your request. I appreciate that you reached out to make the inquiry.

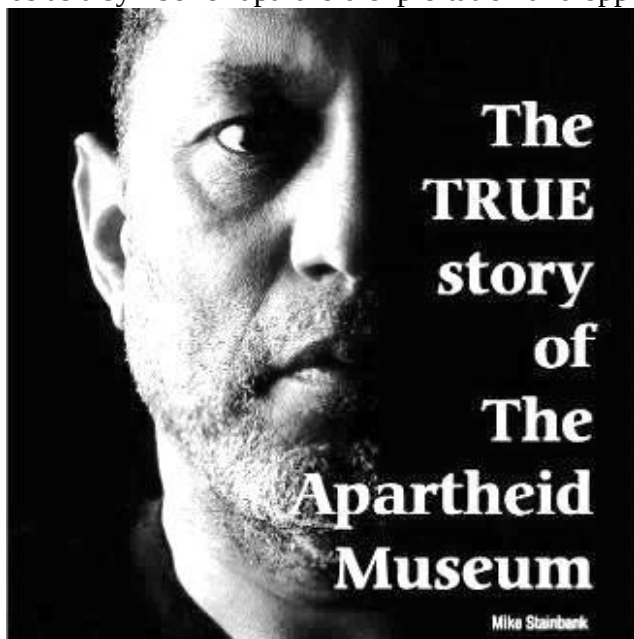
*I do not see any reason why you could not post our production of *Flight from the Mahabharath*, or excerpts of our production, on your website. The department's limitations for reproduction and public dissemination are always set by the publisher of the play, the person who owns the rights to the production in question. In this case, it occurs to me that you that you are that person!*

The only thing that I would like to do as a courtesy is to reach out to all of the creative folks involved in the play: Ray, Martha, John and Todd, to ask them if they are OK with putting their creative work on the web. I think that they will indeed be OK with this and would just ask for some attribution to them. I can send that in a separate email. We get a blanket permission for recording and photos from the actors for each production.

So please stay tuned while I make some inquiries."

But I have changed my mind.

In the afternoon, another birthday present: Mike Stainbank came to visit. Mike has been fighting for almost twenty years for recognition of his original concept of an Apartheid Museum. He came up with the concept in the 1990s and presented his vision in a brochure which he sent around for funding – and that was when the project was stolen from him. And the museum that has been built stands as a symbol of apartheid exploitation and oppression



Mike Stainbank

Mike told me of a playwright in Cape Town who has also created a play which is a feminist critique of the *Mahabharata*.

From his description, I could see that it is a very modern theatre piece, redolent of Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty – very different from my comedy.

I shared with Mike a little of the DVD of the ASU production of my play, but saw that it did not have the kind of impact on him as the production he had seen at the Baxter in Cape Town. And I realized that my play about women liberating themselves from masculine domination, being a comedy, does not evoke emotion – only thought. It shows happy women. Comedy is not as riveting as tragedy.

24 October: *Womb of Fire*

Yesterday, as I could not remember the name of the play Mike had seen in Cape Town, I emailed him and this morning received his reply with a connection to the play on YouTube.

The title of the play is *Womb of Fire*. I took a quick glance and saw that where my play is a fun exposé, this play seems to be intense and tragic. I will watch it later today. My quick assessment: *Womb of Fire* is an expression of suffering.

25 October:

I watched *Womb of Fire* on YouTube, but with my deafness, I could not hear the words. I tried to make meaning of what I could see: the pole and pole dancing, the tailor's dummy, and the silent woman stage left watching the main performer. The pole dancing suggested the sexual degradation of women; the tailor's dummy, shaping of character, the silent woman, the reduction of women to observers of life; and the performer, the narrator-actor, one who confronts her situation. I was not able to determine whether her flight up the pole and her laughter at the end were a triumphant overcoming of her

enslaved condition or a maniacal acceptance of her subjection. So I asked Tom and Lionel and my nieces, Sharmini, Queresni and Diricilla (SQD) to watch *Womb of Fire* so we could discuss it when they come to visit. I also emailed Mike, who had made me aware of the play, to ask what he had made of its underlying meaning.

26 October: Email from Tom

“Thank you for alerting us to Womb of Fire! I have just watched it on YouTube...

It references three women: Draupadi from The Mahabharata, Catrijn (1631-1682), the first recorded female convict slave to be banished from Batavia to the Dutch-occupied Cape and Zara (1648-1671) a Khoikhoi woman born in the Cape and employed as a servant who commits suicide (her dead body is tried and found guilty and impaled until rotten and eaten by scavengers).

Their stories are linked by themes of misogyny and abuse. This one-person production with a live sung soundtrack is stupendous – desperately moving – yes, a complete tragedy that presents the “troublesome” women not only as victims, but also illuminates who they are beneath their vulnerability.

The riveting performance by Rehanè Abrahams will stay with me for a long time!”

Rehanè Abrahams is also the playwright. What Tom explains of Zara’s story in the play, demonstrates a psychotic obsession to control that attempts to go even beyond death. And I am beginning to see the flight up the pole at the end of the performance as sadism – a maniacal need to dominate.

I look forward to meeting my nieces and hearing what they made of the play.

Jigsaw Puzzles

When I am not writing or reading, and am between chores, I work on jigsaw and Sudoku puzzles. These days I confine myself to one thousand piece jigsaw puzzles. The 2000 and 1500 piece puzzles require too much space in this little flat. I work on puzzles every day.

For most people, this is simply a somewhat childish diversion; for me it is an essential part of my writing. When I am working on a puzzle, I am not simply involved with jigsaw pieces, I am also juggling with ideas. As my hands sort and assemble little cardboard pieces, my mind is, at the same time, involved in sorting out the pieces of the puzzle of life with which I am confronted at the moment.

Today, while working on my puzzle, I was trying to figure out why, in general, we prefer tragedy to comedy. When we think of the ancient Greek playwrights, we think of Aeschylus and Sophocles, not Aristophanes. When we think of Shakespeare, it is *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Othello* that spring to mind, not *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As you Like it*.

Womb of Fire, which tells the story of three abused women, is a tragedy; my play, *Flight from the Mahabharath*, a comedy. In *Womb of Fire* the women are victims; in *Flight* the women are victors and builders of a new future. I see women in terms of present day circumstances; self-assured and powerful. In *Flight*, the women are independent and do not need sympathy; they have taken control of their lives and are free. So spectators remain objective. As their emotions are not engaged, they are distanced from the women.

In its depiction of suffering, tragedy evokes compassion and emotion, and is empathic. It allows us to identify with those placed in cruel and inhumane situations. We become them and their suffering is our suffering. Comedy, on the other hand, is an appeal to the intellect; it leaves the spectator outside situations as an objective observer. As it does not evoke vicarious emotional experience, it is not as compelling.

My positive understanding of existence makes it difficult for me to see life as tragic.

27 October: Marsha

5 a.m. I opened my email to find a message from Marsha who has arrived safely back in New York. I have recommended *Womb of Fire* to her.

Food

I sat down to my jigsaw puzzle and after setting in a few pieces, was biting into my slice of bread and butter when it occurred to me that for most people a slice of bread and butter is nothing to get excited about; for me it is a most satisfying culinary experience. At eighty-three, long before that even, I came to regard food only as necessary to survival. I eat and drink mainly to keep alive; so my meals are very simple. I do not regard sumptuous dining as a great pleasure; my morning cup of coffee is sufficient to transport me to heaven; and a slice of bread and butter is manna.

As people of Indian descent have a tendency to force feed, I find it quite a burden to visit. For example, one day on my way to see Maniben Sita in Laudium (a group area under apartheid for South Africans of Indian descent), I

stopped at the house of a friend to deliver one of my books. I did not even sit down as I was on my way to Maniben. But this friend kept insisting that I eat and drink something. As I was simply passing by, I refused. So she went to her 'fridge, pulled out four dozen unfried samoosas from the freezer and gave them to me.

Imagine that *four dozen!* For a person who lives alone and avoids fried foods!

For the next six months those samoosas sat in my freezer nervously contemplating being thrown out. But I did not do that; I felt I could not insult my friend by throwing them out, even if she was unaware. And I could not give them away as they had sat thawing in my car while I was visiting Maniben and I had no idea whether they were still edible. Very reluctantly I fried a few at a time and ate them. The whole process was a severe form of punishment.

Somewhere inside me lurks a mindless martyr.

I decided – no more visits to “Indian” people. Their force feeding, meant to show the caring and generosity of the giver, should be rewarded by the gracious acceptance of the receiver. But I am not gracious. I find this forced hospitality a mindless habit that is actually disrespectful. It places form above need, refuses to acknowledge me as an individual and simply sees me as part of a tradition that I have long repudiated.

For most people, life revolves around food and sex; for me it revolves around food for thought.

29 October: *By the Light of the Moon*

I have almost completed Dean Koontz's novel, *By the Light of the Moon*, in which he creates a character, reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Frankenstein. In Koontz's

novel, his Dr Frankenstein gives three people miraculous powers and places them in a situation in which they are pursued by those in authority bent on destroying them. I am enjoying the book, not only for the story, which is pure fantasy, but also for its humour and Koontz's reflections on life.

I discovered Dean Koontz a few years ago and have read over a dozen of his books; he has introduced me to new developments in psychology, science and technology. In reading about Koontz, I have not been made aware of any grand awards received in recognition of his work, but he has sold 450 million copies of his books, has had seventeen of them made into films and earns 25 million dollars a year.

Recognition comes in all forms; Koontz has won popular acclaim which may not be the most prestigious but it certainly has far wider influence.

After a breakfast of papaya with cream cheese, two slices of bread and butter and coffee, I read the remaining chapters of *By the Light of the Moon*, which constituted the resolution after climactic events in a church. Everything was neatly tied up, consistent with Aristotle's Poetics; not a single seemingly random utterance left hanging; all was put in place and the title of the book explained.

Unity of thought and action has been a requisite of literary art for centuries – before it was understood that existence is random with an indefinable beginning and ending.

30 October: *The Summons*

Yesterday I started on another popular novel, *The Summons* by John Grisham. The writing is linear in style unlike

Koontz's which includes commentary on action, humour and fantasy – all of which provide insight into Koontz's individual view of existence. I find I am more interested in authors than in the characters they create.

1 November

Today I start on Richard North Patterson's *No Safe Place*

2 November: SQD – My Nieces



Sharmini (S)



Quereshni (Q)

Sharmini, Quereshni and Diricilla [SQD] will be visiting tomorrow. I have asked them to watch *Womb of Fire* before coming and am hoping to get more views of the lives of the women represented in the play.

3 November: SQD arrived at about 1 pm and we sat down to chat. They had not been able to watch *Womb of Fire* so we talked about things they were involved in. We spent a pleasant couple of hours chit-chatting.



Diricilla (Dris - D)

After they left, I realized that we may possibly be becoming friends. I think that we are beginning to put aside the limiting factors of family relationship and are beginning to communicate as independent individuals, as women not bound by convention. They are modern, independent, strong women and I think I may now have three new friends – all women. My close friendships have been mainly with men.

4 November: Shopping

This morning, I went to Spar to buy a loaf of bread and after wandering leisurely along the aisles of the supermarket, made

my way to the checkout point. I found a queue that stretched well beyond the passages between the two temptation banks of sweets and chocolates that lead to the tills. There were at least fifty people in the queue and I followed it almost to the end, where a man pulled back his trolley and made a place for me in front of him.

He smiled wryly, "I don't think this helps much."

I smiled back. "It helps to know there are nice people in the world."

Then another old woman, pushing a trolley, came along and he did the same for her. Of course, I fell in love right away as I always do when I find kind, considerate people. So there are people walking about who have no idea that this old woman adores them.

Richard North Patterson: *No Safe Place*

This novel is about the race for the American Presidency in which the abortion issue is a pivotal factor.

We live in a paradoxical world. We have abolished the death penalty for crime and at the same time we train people to kill and make war. And we accept that a woman has the right to abort an unwanted pregnancy. In the abortion issue, we see life as an inconvenience and in war, life as cannon fodder.

In Patterson's novel, the hero, though he accepts the legislation that allows abortion, still sees it as a matter of conscience. He is pursued by one who believes in 'the right to life' and murders those who condone abortion. Wonderful irony! The novel demonstrates that there is nothing simple in trying to give consistency and meaning to life; it inevitably brings us face to face with the anomalies of existence.

5 November: Guy Fawkes Day

I remember, as a child in Pretoria, celebrating this day with fireworks and the burning of an effigy. I had no idea who Guy Fawkes was or what he had done; I was just happy to have this day of fun.

We no longer “remember, remember the fifth of November” and now, though I endorse Fawkes’s anarchistic views, I do not see burning down the Houses of Parliament as a solution to government corruption. We, as voters, give absolute power to governments, so corruption is inevitable. That is the real problem. It represents the essence of life’s dilemma.

How do we overcome the abuse that results from the capitalistic nature of all forms of organization – including the family?

7 November: Medication

I have a permanent sore throat. I was diagnosed a couple of years ago with some kind of thyroid problem and put on eltroxin – this in addition to the chronic medications that I take for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and bone deficiency. I have been on pills for these conditions for about thirty years and now with legislation regulating medication, I have to go twice a year just for a prescription for these pills and that costs me R1200. I have decided to find a way to bypass doctors. Medical Aid Insurance has turned health care into a crassly capitalistic venture and doctors and dispensers of medication are constantly on the lookout for ways to increase profits. The pills for my thyroid condition now come in little impossible-to-open plastic bottles, and cost more.

If Guy Fawkes were still around, he would have his work cut out for him.

I do believe that going off salt when I was diagnosed as hypertensive led to my thyroid problem.

8 November: Memory lapses

I am having short term memory lapses. I know that is a precursor to Alzheimer's disease. I can only hope that that is not where I am headed.

9 November: Medical Aid

After that awful spasm in my leg in July, I was forced to acknowledge that I will not live forever. So I have decided that I need to have some form of medical insurance so as not to be a burden on anyone when I do become ill and am nearing my end. So I went to my bank yesterday to apply for a Hospital Plan only to find that they no longer offer it. I will try another bank today. Q, who had made me aware of Hospital Plans, had recommended her bank. If I cannot get help there, I will go back on Medical Aid. Of course my age is a problem; these schemes do not see any financial gain in assisting an 83 year old.

At a new bank, a branch of Q's bank, I found that I could apply for a Hospital Plan, provided I opened an account there. That is what I will do.

11 November: Rising Prices

Yesterday, my nephew, Ashendra (Ash) came to visit, bringing me a present of Gouda cheese, from his sister, Q. When Q and her sisters visited a week ago, we talked about rising costs, and I had mentioned that I no longer buy cheese as I cannot afford it. That was not really an accurate statement. The fact is, I refuse to support the capitalistic tendency of producers to raise prices for products when

they become popular. The block of cheese that I used to buy for about R30, rose steadily within a couple of years and now costs about R120. The 50g container of stevia, the sugar substitute, has risen from R28 to R115. I have given up cheese and am going back on sugar. My pension does not increase at the same rate as food prices.

The number of beggars on the streets has increased quite considerably since 1994. There is no such thing as democracy; government is not for or by the people. It is only of the people by opportunists.

Q is very kind. When I had that severe spasm in my leg during the cold spell in July, she brought me an electric blanket and pain patches. I have never been a real aunt to my nephews and nieces so I do not deserve their kindness. But Q is able to overlook my shortcomings as an aunt. As we are all adults, I would really prefer it if we could be friends rather than relatives.

Affirmation

Ash, Q's brother, like his parents is a satsangi in the Radha Soami movement. I know nothing of this denomination of Hinduism, except that satsangis are strict vegetarians and teetotalers. When I lent Ash's parents my *Judge John Deed* DVDs, they were most gratified to discover that the actor, Martin Shaw, who plays the judge, is also a satsangi. But last weekend when my nieces visited, they informed me that their mother has lost all admiration for Martin Shaw as she has seen him drinking alcohol.

Being an atheist, I am amused by the issues that alienate believers and induce their condemnation. But it is this kind of intolerance, in my opinion, that lies at the basis of fanaticism. I believe it stems from the resentment of not being affirmed.

The most extreme case of such resentment was the 9/11 destruction of the Twin Towers in New York. It was, ironically, a demand for respect.

I have never studied psychology and have no idea where the psychologist places a lack of self-esteem. For me, it is the foundation of all conflict. Self-esteem that is reliant on adherence to convention, elicits external approval and makes one dependent on external affirmation and that is reinforced by the recognition that society offers in awards and citations for exceptional compliance. But genuine self-esteem arises not from external affirmation but from one's own respect for oneself. Without genuine self-esteem one is incapable of genuine esteem for others. It strikes me that Q has a strong sense of self and is not too dependent on external affirmation. Her self-confidence enables her to be caring of others.

12 November: My brothers

I have been thinking quite a lot about my brother, Seeni, who died in 2003. He lived a life of despair. Though he was the most intelligent one in our family, he grew up hating himself and his life devolved into forms of degradation. By the age of nineteen he had become an alcoholic and had given up on life. A victim of my father's thoughtless and selfish opportunism, he became a lost soul.

Both my brothers, Reggie and Seeni, were exploited by my father. When we relocated from Pretoria to Durban in 1948, my brothers could not gain immediate admission to Sastri College, the only high school for "Indian" boys at the time. So my father found them menial work and brought their education to an end.

These teenage boys, being forced to fend for themselves,

were reduced to the level of labourers. Their education had come to a sudden end and with it whatever dreams they had had of the future.

Reggie was able to survive because of his good looks and with girls swooning over him, he did not lose confidence in himself. He became involved in activities that enabled him to maintain his self-respect and he rose from menial work to better positions. He also became active in sport, took up ballroom dancing and was involved in ballroom competitions.

But Seeni, despite his great intelligence – in school he had always been top of his class – was unable to accept himself. His dark complexion and teenage plumpness filled him with shame and self-loathing. He tried to imitate his brother but did not have the confidence to carry it off. He gave in to despair, and took revenge on society in fraudulent activity.

And I have come to realise that destructive and criminal tendencies emanate from a lack of self-esteem. Without belief in oneself, one sees oneself as worthless and society as cruel. And as class systems, like apartheid, which denigrate human beings, make it difficult for those of ‘under-classes’ to develop confidence in themselves, they become involved in a good deal of the violent petty crime in a country.

Respect for others depends on respect for oneself; but how does one develop belief in oneself, without the affirmation of those around us and those in authority?

Hospital Plan

When you are over eighty, everyone is just waiting for you to die and you become marginal in the capitalist system. Like an old car, you have no commercial value.

Antiques have value, not old crocs– like me.

When I went to apply for a Hospital Plan at my bank, I was told they no longer offer it. So I went to a branch of Q's bank where I was informed that I had to open an account in order to apply for a Hospital Plan. I gathered the documents they needed and returned the next day to open an account. But when they looked in my ID book and saw my age, they told me I was not eligible for a Hospital Plan. As I am 83, they expect me to collapse and be hospitalized as soon as I have signed up, and that would mean a total loss for the bank. Being the true religion of the world, commercial capitalism regards an octogenarian as a poor investment and gives the finger to people of my age.

I will go back to my bank, open up an interest bearing savings account, move funds into it from my current account and that will be my Hospital Plan.

13 November

Yesterday, I bought a bag of chocolate pralines and ate quite a few. Last night, I did not feel any irritation in my throat. Is chocolate a cure for whatever is irritating the throat?

How delightful!

14 November: Banks

5am: I opened my email to find a notice from my bank apologizing for the failure of its systems yesterday. I had gone to the bank to open a savings account into which I wanted to transfer money from my current account so that I could earn interest and build up funds to cover future health needs. The transaction could not be completed and the consultant assisting me was not able to determine whether

there was a problem with the system or with my application.

“Here we go again,” I thought, “they are going to tell me I am too old.”

So I was relieved by this morning’s email.

9.00 am: I went to pay my electricity account at the bank. I first approached the booth of the consultant who was dealing with my request for a savings account. He was busy with another client so I simply indicated that I would come to him next and went off to join the queue to the tellers. The service at the local branch is not what it used to be. There was only one teller working and she was dealing with the lengthy requirements of one client, so I took out the novel I am currently reading and after a chapter was eventually served.

Then I went to the waiting area and as I passed his cubicle, indicated where I would be to the consultant dealing with my application for a savings account.

After another chapter of the novel, the consultant came to me and explained that the bank was still checking my account. I told him I had received an email apologizing for yesterday’s failure of the system but he informed me that the email was a reference to a problem with ATMs and had nothing to do with my application.

As I could not understand the bank’s problem with opening a savings account for me, I jumped to the conclusion that they did not trust me even though I am a long-standing customer. Here I was, not even making a withdrawal, simply wanting to move funds from my current account into a new savings account and they were treating me like Al Capone.

15 November: Downsizing

I gave away a few more items that were simply taking up space in the flat and am beginning to see the place becoming a little tidier, a little more spacious. I still have to tackle my wardrobe; I have many articles of clothing that I never wear.

More Bank Business

I spent the whole day waiting for a call from the bank consultant to tell me that I could come in and sign up for my new savings account. I waited in vain.

It is unbelievable that this bank – that I have been with for twenty-four years – is hesitant about providing me with a savings account. If it were not for the fact that my pension is paid into my current account here, I would simply close it and open one elsewhere. But I am reluctant to embark on another fight with another bureaucracy, especially a government bureaucracy.

In today's world, people live longer and at eighty are still fully functional human beings. Bureaucratic systems are unable to take this into account.

16 November

9am. I have not heard from the bank – too early.

2pm. I have still not heard from the bank. It looks as though I will have to open an account at another bank and leave just a token amount in this bank account.

I cannot believe that a simple request to open a savings account is being treated with such suspicion – or is it inefficiency? I am becoming paranoid; beginning to suspect bureaucratic corruption. At present, reading John Grisham's *King of Torts*, enhances the feeling that I am the

victim of some kind of fraud.

I feel like sending the following message to the consultant at my bank:

Dear Sir,

As you are unable to open a savings account for me, I realise that you have discovered my true identity. Now that you know that I am really Al Capone, and have hidden millions of dollars under Die Vroue Monument, I understand that as a man of integrity you cannot allow yourself to be compromised.

Please ignore my request; I have decided to rob another bank.

*Yours sincerely,
Al Capone.*

The King of Torts

I have given up on this novel. I really don't have an appetite for all the intricacies of exploitation and fraud and its revelation of inordinate human greed.

8 November: From L&T

5am: I opened my email to find a passage by Ashim Shanker sent to me by – Tom and Lionel, of course!

... imagine that you hold in one hand an oddly shaped stone. You keep this hand closed into a fist, but still you can feel the stone's curvature and the pointed edges, the roughness—of course, you know the relative size and weight and might even have a mental image of the color of this stone, even if you have not yet laid eyes upon it. Imagine that stone in your hand. Imagine what it is like to know everything about the

way it feels, but nothing of how it looks. Hold that in mind for a moment.

Now, imagine that there is a person standing next to you who tells you that she also holds a stone in her hand. You look down and see the clenched fist and she sees yours and you confess the same.

Neither of you, it seems, has yet opened the hand and seen the stone. Still, you can only trust each other's proclamations. Standing together with your stones in hand, the two of you theorize about whether or not your respective stones are similar to one another. You discuss mundane details about your stones (not the special ones—you hesitate to make mention of the sharp point in the northern hemisphere or the flat area on the bottom). Your neighbor finally notes similarities between her stone and yours and you nod with relief and acknowledge that your stones indeed share reasonable commonalities. Over the course of your discussion, you and your neighbor finally conclude, without bothering to open your hands, that the stones you hold must indeed be quite similar.

Are they? It is only suitable to say that they are.

At the same time, and in spite of your desire not to offend, there is no doubt in your mind that the stone you hold bespeaks a greater prominence than that of your neighbor. You are not sure how you know this to be true, but it must be so! And I do not mean that this stone simply holds a greater subjective prominence. It has something of the universal, for it is, indeed, an auspicious stone! Silently, you hypothesize in what ways it must be special. It is possibly different in shape, color, weight, size and texture from the other, but you cannot confirm this.

Perhaps, it is special by substance? Still, you are

unsure. The very fact of your uncertainty begins to bother you and unleashes within you a deep insecurity. What if you are wrong and your stone is actually inferior to the other...or inferior even to some third stone not yet encountered?

Meanwhile, your neighbor is silently suffering in the same agony. Both of you tacitly understand that, without comparing the two visually, it is absurd to proclaim the two stones similar. Yet, your fist remains clenched, as does your neighbor's and so you find yourselves unable to hold out the stones before you and compare them side-by-side. Of course, this is possible, but the mutual curiosity is outstripped by an inveterate pride, and so you both become afraid of showing (and even seeing) what you have, for fear that your respective stones will be different in appearance from the model that you have each conceptualized in mind. Meekly your eyes meet and you smile to one another at your new comradeship, but, all the while, remain paralyzed by a simultaneous shame and vanity.

Ashim Shanker

As I had assumed from the name that the author is Muslim, I did not expect what I found – contemplation of the mysterious nature of identity and relationships.

Like Tokarczuk, Shanker relies on symbolism to illustrate his view of the nature of existence. Tokarczuk uses travel and motion to reveal life's randomness; Shanker, in the passage above, uses a stone in the hand as a symbol of the private and hidden nature of being. Though the stones have similarities, their differences remain hidden; similarly, all aspects of the true nature of an individual are never revealed. So the search for total compatibility between individuals can never truly be achieved as it is impossible for them to give up the deepest

secrets of their differing natures.

As Shanker lives in Tokyo, I realized that when one moves out of the environment and/or the culture into which one is born, one loses one's insularity and begins to discover the difference between what is essentially human and what is simply conditioning.

I looked up Shanker on the internet and discovered that I have been introduced to a mind that transcends the limitations of parochial culture. I look forward to exploring his writings.

Another gift from Tom and Lionel!

19 November: Banks Again

9am: As the consultant I had to see at the bank was busy with a client, I sat down in the waiting area and pulled out *Metaphoric Being*, my favourite of all the books I have written, and began reading. I read practically the whole book – my books are very short, more or less a hundred pages.

When I realized I had been sitting there for over an hour, I decided to leave. I am one who never gets angry but I actually lost my temper and after making a snide remark to the receptionist, left the bank and drove off to a supermarket. But as I was seething, I could not function properly. I didn't know why I had come to this supermarket and after wandering aimlessly down a couple of aisles, left.

I decided to go to the branch of my bank opposite Centurion Mall. There I was attended to right away but the same problem arose; they could not open the account into which they were to place my savings. So the consultant told me she would phone me when the problem was resolved. I asked her to email me instead and went home.

I am beginning to wonder whether my funds are safe with this bank. If I do not hear soon, I will go to a different bank.

I am still amazed that I lost my temper today; and even more amazed that that had robbed me of my ability to function. I had not realized that being treated with little respect by business people in general, because of my age, had built up such great resentment in me. I am quite shocked at my vulnerability.

It indicates my own lack of self-respect.

4pm: Jigsaw Puzzles

I completed a tricky jigsaw puzzle with pieces that did not fit together in the conventional one-to-one way but fitted together in part, creating spaces that required parts of other pieces. And I saw that jigsaw puzzles actually help one acquire a variety of ways of solving problems. When people see me working on my puzzles, they condescendingly brush the activity off as ‘keeping busy’, i.e., in a worthless activity. They do not realize – because they get paid for it – that their employment is simply a means of keeping them busy.

And they have no idea of a puzzle’s ability to stimulate more intricate ways of seeing and understanding. I will never insult anyone by referring to what they are doing as “keeping busy”.

21 November: More about Banks

I have not heard from the Centurion branch about the savings account that I tried to open there two days ago. If I do not hear by Friday, I will cancel and go to another bank.

22 November

5:30 am. Opening my email and finding all kinds of advertisements for Black Friday, which is tomorrow, I realize I will have to go to the bank today. I must avoid Black Friday, a day of shopping frenzy created by the promise of ‘crazy’ – ha, ha! – discounts, mainly on food items.

8:30 am. I paid the admin levy on my flat at ABSA Bank and went to the ATM of my bank to get a bank statement which I would need in order to open an account at a new bank. The ATM shut down in the midst of the transaction and retained my debit card. The security officer informed me that I would have to wait for the bank to open at 9 am to retrieve my card. So I pulled out *Metaphoric Being* and read the few pages I had not read on Monday while I was waiting for service at this branch.

9 am. With my card returned, I drove off to the Centurion branch where I found that my application for a savings account, made three days before, could still not be processed. I cancelled the application, got a statement of my account from the ATM outside and went off to a branch of Q’s bank.

There I was attended to almost immediately. A savings account was opened, a card was issued and I was given a statement informing my bank of my new account at this bank and that I would be transferring funds into the new account.

I drove off to my old bank and transferred the bulk of my funds into the new account.

This little experience has made me seriously doubt my

old bank's continued viability. On second thoughts, it may just be that as a pensioner, I am not a valued customer and my savings of a hundred and fifty thousand, though huge to me, is obviously peanuts to them and no loss.

23 November: Black Friday

Today, the third Friday of November, is Black Friday. When I first heard of Black Friday a year ago, I went out, in all innocence, to Centurion Mall where I had great difficulty finding parking. The open parking where I usually park was jam-packed. I eventually found a space, parked and walked down to Checkers. What I saw there turned me off completely.

The place was crammed with shoppers – many commandeering more than one heaped trolley, and the lines in front of tills were endless. I fled.

I wonder where and when this new tradition had originated. Bureaucrats keep finding new ways to profit from our greed and propensity to hoard.

Looking at the bumper crop of Black Friday advertisements in the *Rekord*, the free tabloid delivered weekly to this complex in which I live, I see that Black Friday is turning into Black Weekend. It is the preliminary to the shopping frenzy that turns the Nativity into a capitalist dream. December is really Black Xmas Month. Thank you, Jesus!

24 November: Banks Again

I have received three SMS's on my cellphone informing me that funds have been transferred out of my account. I will check at an ATM to see whether they are in my new account.

I hope I have not been swindled. Such endless paranoia!

I checked at an ATM; the funds have not yet reached their destination. I went to my bank and was told by a consultant that the funds would only arrive in the new account by next Wednesday.

This little struggle with bureaucracy, has given me a new understanding of the need for love beyond its biological, familial necessity. Living in society, one becomes a cipher; and compassionate love is necessary for humane survival below its capitalist superstructure.

Ashim Shanker

Reading quotes from the work of Ashim Shanker on the Internet, I find that like Tokarczuk, he contemplates the mystery of existence. Unlike Tokarczuk, however, who describes life's inexplicability as a freak show, Shanker experiences it as painful uncertainty. And the difference between them, gave me further insight into the difference between tragedy and comedy. The comic attitude acknowledges the arbitrariness of human endeavour and laughs at all the contradictions that arise from it. The tragic attitude sees life as a constant struggle and deplores its contradictions. Its underlying feeling of despair is the cry for certainty, the longing for God, for compassion, for understanding.

1 December

Yesterday I went to my new bank and found that my savings had been transferred from the old bank. Done, at last!

The Season to be Jolly

Today is the beginning of the season when old women like

me, driving alone, get mugged and robbed. I have had two such experiences in the recent past. So December has become stay-close-to-home month for me. My shopping trips will be small ventures to shops close by. Actually, it is no great change; my whole life resembles that of a mouse peeping out of its hole and making little ventures into the open.

And, in general, I am a contented mouse.

2 December: *Out of the Sun*

This morning, when I started on Robert Goddard's *Out of the Sun*, it struck me that conventional novels usually begin with some kind of problem or mystery that needs to be solved. The mystery immediately hooks the reader into the story and turns her into a detective involved in trying to untangle the problem. And that made me realize why I had such a problem with Tokarczuk's book, *Flights*. She kept me divorced from people's problems as the mysteries in their lives were simply accepted as theirs and there was no point in my trying to untangle them.

4 December: Seeni

My brother, Seeni, would have turned 86 today. I remember him as I know I failed him.

5 December: A Thought

Life is like the weather. We know there are seasons and have a general idea of what to expect but we cannot predict with absolute certainty what will happen from day to day or even during the day. Life would be most boring if we could; its unpredictability turns it into an adventure.

Out of the Sun. I am almost at the end of this book. It has

been quite a disappointment – not my cup of tea.

5 December: *The Drowning People*

I now have Richard Mason's novel, *The Drowning People*. It begins with the narrator informing us that he has killed his wife.

I looked up Richard Mason on the internet and found a brief biography on Wikipedia. The following is a quote from it:

Richard Mason was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 4 January 1978. His parents were anti-Apartheid activists and brought Mason to the United Kingdom when he was 10 years old.

*Richard Mason first came to prominence at the age of 21, when the London Times dubbed him "king of the hot young writers".^[1] He had just published his first novel, *The Drowning People*, an "exceptional achievement" (Guardian)^[2] that became "one of the most talked about first novels of 1999" (Daily Telegraph). As *The Telegraph* put it, "If you want to be au courant with modern fiction, you will need to read it."^[2] *The Drowning People* sold more than a million copies in over 20 countries, was translated into 22 languages and won Italy's Grinzane Cavour Prize for Best First Novel. (Wikipedia)*

Amazing! I shall certainly look for more of his work after I have read *The Drowning People*.

6 December: Muffins

I realize that all cake recipes can be used for muffins. So today I am going to use a chocolate cake recipe to bake

chocolate muffins.

7 December

I did not bake chocolate muffins yesterday. I did today. I used the *Devil's Food Cokaigne* recipe from the Rombauer and Becker, *Joy of Cooking*. I have relied on *Joy of Cooking* since the 1970s; I bought the book when I lived in the States.

My effort resulted in muffin shaped cupcakes and I saw that cake recipes don't necessarily translate into recipes for muffins. Cake mixture is too light. I will keep experimenting until I hit upon the right consistency for chocolate muffins.

9 December: Gowrie

I spent hours yesterday and today proofreading Gowrie's draft of her early life. Gowrie Naidoo, née Pather, was a friend from my primary school days. I met her when our family moved to Durban at the beginning of 1948 and I was admitted to Dartnell Crescent Primary School. We were both in standard 5 (Grade 7) and then from 1950-3, we were at Durban Indian Girls' High School and after matriculating in 1953, trained as teachers at Springfield Training College for the next two years.

We were friends even though we were very different. I am an introvert and Gowrie was vivacious, confident, outgoing and popular. So our friendship was not close and we lost touch for most of our adult lives and only renewed our acquaintance when we were both in our seventies. I do not remember how we met up again.

Gowrie was not in good health and was often in hospital. I would visit her at both her daughters' homes. She divided her time between them, staying with each a few months at a time.

After Gowrie celebrated her eightieth birthday in 2016, she began writing her autobiography. She sent me the first part of the story of her life at the beginning of 2017. I found it as lively and interesting as she was and was looking forward to receiving the rest of it.

At the end of April 2017, I flew to the States to attend performances of *Flight from the Mahabharath* in the Valborg Theatre of the ASU¹ Theatre and Dance Department. Before I left, I promised Gowrie a full report of my trip on my return.



Outside the Valborg Theatre with Todd Bush, who composed the music and Prof. Ray Miller, the Director and Choreographer.

¹ Appalachian State University

Soon after I returned, I tried to get in touch, but Gowrie did not answer her phone or respond to my emails. I became concerned as I knew she was not in good health. But I did not have contact numbers for her daughters.

Eventually, I learned from Ramola, a mutual friend in Durban, that Gowrie had passed away.

It was a shock.

Now, more than a year after her death, I have decided to get her autobiography published. I spent yesterday morning and this morning proofreading and laying out the first chapters which describe her early life. I need to get the rest of her manuscript. I have no idea whether she completed her story.

As I do not have phone numbers or email addresses for her daughters, I asked my nephew, Ash, who lives in Randburg, the same suburb of Johannesburg as the older daughter, Dr Seshni Paruk, to get in touch with her. I want her to know that I am working on her mother's autobiography. I have sent my email address and asked for hers so I can explain what I am doing and to request the rest of Gowrie's manuscript. I hope that it has been preserved.

Gowrie's writing reflects her vibrant personality, her wit, intelligence and resourcefulness. Her style, very different from my introspective meandering, will appeal to a wider audience. People will read her book.

10 December: Dr Seshni Paruk

Between 2009 and 2014, when Dr Paruk, was a Member of Parliament, she and I had corresponded by email and I have a folder on my computer containing the articles she sent me. I opened the folder to see if I could find her email address. I found only her government email address.

I began to read the correspondence in the file. It consisted of articles on governance to which she had requested my response. I imagine she was involved in research and was canvassing opinions about the new policies and structures of government.

Excerpts from my Correspondence with Dr Seshni Paruk.

TITLE: ABUNDANCE, HEALING AND GROWTH DURING THE NEXT DECADE: ACCELERATING OUR TRANSFORMATION (20/09/ 2009)

- 1. Have we reconciled as South Africans?(i.e. at collective and intergroup levels)?*
- 2. Have we reconciled within ourselves? (at intra-psychic levels and linked to our self-esteem and progressive growth)*
- 3. How have National values been impacted by Apartheid?*
- 4. What are the longer-term implications of such past societal divisions?*
- 5. How do we consolidate the transition to a society that embraces values of non-racialism, non-sexism and building of a human rights culture?*
- 6. Was the TRC enough of an outlet for long standing collective and individual pain?*
- 7. Should we be leading differently?*

My Response

Taking the second last question first, I would say that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process was an expedient to prevent civil war. It helped in a small way

to appease the agony of those who had suffered greatly under apartheid. It afforded people who had experienced extreme forms of torture and humiliation the opportunity to express their pain. Whether it was possible for them to forget and forgive is something that has not really been examined.

What is not recognized is that ordinary people, who simply kept going without actively resisting, also suffered, not in dramatic ways perhaps, but at what you refer to as intra-psychic and intergroup levels and definitely in terms of economics.

As we lived in the culture of apartheid, most ordinary people still discriminate and are discriminated against. Attitudes of racial superiority and inferiority may have evaporated at the highest social levels but they still inform relationships of ordinary people. I don't, however, expect government to legislate this away. Eliminating racism may be impossible as we were conditioned to accept it. As you suggest somewhere, it is only through interaction and common involvement in processes that the worst forms of discrimination can be overcome. As apartheid conditioning is as ingrained in the oppressed as it is in the oppressors, it cannot easily be uprooted.

Governmental attempts to precipitate change can only bedevil it. We have enough legislation that requires integration and the process must now be left to the will of ordinary citizens. Some are ready for change, some never will be. Let me give you a minute example. I work as a volunteer in the shop that raises funds for Irene Homes. Yesterday, a woman, browsing through our books on religion, came across a book on Hinduism. Outraged, she brought it to the counter, declaring that this was not a Christian book and should be removed from the shelves.

Your last question, *Should we be leading differently?* — the answer is yes and no. The thrust towards transformation is what we need, but the desire for rigid control of the process (bureaucratic centralization) can only lead to frustration or apathy. Bureaucratic control does not encourage initiative and without the feeling that one can initiate, there can be little of the vitalising experience of freedom.

As denigrating and stultifying as it was, even apartheid could not stop certain wonderful initiatives such as the development of the mini-bus taxi industry, for example. In the face of government oppression and apathy, it burgeoned outside the norms of the society. Based on workers' needs, it operated independently of the system.

It was an exception. Daring people will always find ways to self-empowerment outside the norms of the society but the majority remain enslaved by government regulation. And the fraud and corruption that arise from over-regulation, contribute to the escalating poverty and crime that are destroying our society.

The notion of empowerment needs to be more closely examined. What does it actually mean? Does it not mean the devolution of power? If we look at OBE (Outcomes Based Education), we see an approach, meant to empower both teacher and pupil, failing as a result of being bureaucratized.

Instead of allowing teacher and pupil to be creative, energetic pursuers of knowledge, severe regulation turns them into passive receivers of prescribed knowledge as in the old system.”

29 September 2009 : More questions from Dr Paruk

1. Did we make our high level political strategies as

explicit as we could have to the ordinary South African who does not have the luxury to decode political strategy or academia?

2. Have we made enough progress in transitioning class divides in South African society as opposed to building bridges from rich to poor?

3. Have we “operationalised” democracy as a concept so that the average South African experiences and feels it every day?

4. What has the effect of African Renaissance been on inter and intra race relations & personal identity? (articles such as Max Du Preez’s article: I am an African suggest that most South Africans needed to work through issues around identity and sense of belonging)

5. What is the impact on minority South African communities who want to pursue a balance between cultural and South African identities?

My Response

My personal feeling is that we place too much emphasis on cultural difference and that leads readily to discrimination. If one thinks of culture in superficial terms, then South Africa is a land of diverse cultures. During apartheid cultural differences were emphasized and the society was balkanized into cultural ghettos.

Cultures formed the basis of a class structure with Western norms and values being dominant and others relegated to sub-cultures. Consequently, black people were impelled to seek affirmation through adoption of Western cultural norms and values and repudiation of their own. Those who adapted best were rewarded. But that kind of transformation alienated them from the communities in

which they lived.

Though we believe that an African Renaissance will restore dignity and pride, we cannot escape the fact that various forms of imperialism have had an irreversible impact on people's cultures not just in South Africa but all over the world and the attempt to return to former cultural traditions is fraught with problems. It would mean moving back into the past rather than forward into the future.

Consequently, efforts made to reinstate traditional cultural values can focus only on the superficial. And focus on the traditional is focus on the past; we need to focus on the present and the future which, as the Freedom Charter declares, lies in the adoption of democracy, the norms and values of which were developed in the West. Even though we have the wonderful concept of Ubuntu, which, in my opinion, expresses in one word all that is involved in democracy, traditional cultural practices do not reflect the kind of democracy that we are trying to evolve, i.e. a culture in which there is no discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, creed, gender and disability.

The return to traditional values represents an attempt to turn back the clock. When you look at which people are involved in expressions of an African Renaissance, it is generally the rural poor. Those who have adopted Western values, and with it the culture of acquisition, are the leaders in our society. Ubuntu is simply a catchword in their vocabulary.

The fact is we don't recognise that culture is a way of life; it cannot be reduced simply to food, dress, dance, music and religious rituals. During apartheid our culture was the culture of separate development. We lived in our separate ghettos, where we maintained our food, dress,

dance, music and religious rituals, but even those were being transformed to reflect Western values and norms. And we were being changed not only by laws, but also by technology which is really the most powerful agent of transformation.

Since 1994, we have been trying to repress the culture of separate development by transforming our society into a multi-cultural democracy. And that is where our focus should lie. In the modern world, one cannot adequately express a sense of dignity and self-worth simply by returning to traditional behaviours. All assertions of who the first people were to develop this or that are feeble attempts to depose Western hegemony. We live in a world in which Western technology controls our lives. If we are ever to alleviate the problems of the disempowered majority of our people, we need to give everyone access to technology.

Our system of education with its impossible demands will not do it. We need to provide people with opportunities for a hands-on approach to learning without cluttering their lives with SETA (South African Education Authority) and SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) requirements. The word Authority in each of these titles is significant – emphasis on central control not individual initiative.

We need to take an old-fashioned approach where people are apprenticed to various practitioners, not on the basis of certificates but on the basis of interest. Those who have aptitude will develop and educate themselves. Those who have little aptitude will acquire basic skills that will allow them to survive.

The following seems to be my response to the document, “The U Model”, that Dr Paruk sent me.

Why do we have a multi-party system of government? When I look at the way in which parliament functions, (from parliamentary debates presented on TV), I see a continuation of apartheid, with only one significant difference: power is now in the hands of Black politicians. Though political parties may present seemingly non-racial affiliations, they are, nevertheless, associated with race and ethnic groups and the value systems that were developed under apartheid.

I had naively assumed that the need for a multi-party system was to allow the various race groups to work *together* to overcome xenophobic perceptions of one another and so ensure that all people in South Africa, regardless of race, colour, creed, gender and disability, can contribute to the betterment of the society.

But from what I see, parliament itself has not transformed. Though it calls itself a multi-party government, it still functions in the Westminster style. People in that tradition cling primarily to party and power; democratic governance is only a secondary consideration. In the South African parliament, parties have adopted the Westminster style of hurling brickbats and slinging mud at one another rather than working together for the good of the whole.

What parliament needs to do is to adopt the basic premise of the much maligned Outcomes Based Education, i.e. to set outcomes that have to be achieved by multi-party committees, in which party allegiance is irrelevant, and to look for the best ways to achieve set goals with only one thing in mind, the good of the whole. No one party has the solution to the many problems besetting our society and a meeting of minds is what is needed not blind clinging to

power for the sake of power.

Unfortunately, that requires integrity. People in government, rather than demonstrating commitment to democracy, are engaged in exerting power or sucking up to those in power. According to your U model, “Compliance is easier to secure than commitment – but no team ever won a championship by being compliant.”

Because we follow a Westminster parliamentary culture, we are in mindless opposition to one another and are unable to develop a co-operative style of governance. Co-operation does not mean blind compliance; it does not preclude debate. In a multi-party system, it should mean carefully weighing the diversity of views and working out ways to proceed that attempt to ensure the maximum benefit to all regardless of party affiliation.

One of the problems with parties is that each clings to an ideology which it believes is infallible; but ideologies are only theories and all theories have to be put to the test in practice. Though politicians are given empirical evidence of the failure of policies based on their theories, they continue to cling to them as though their lives are dependent on them.

The belief in the infallibility of ideologies makes it impossible to adopt change, despite continuous lip service to the idea of transformation. Politicians ignore Kurt Lewin and those theorists who have developed the U theory which points out that transformation and change require an acceptance of fallibility.

“Lewin...envisioned a continuous process of unfreezing, changing and refreezing, during which one set of changes is followed by another set of changes in a constantly evolving pattern.”

Excerpt from *The U Model*

They make the point that, in prototyping, you construct and test a model before you understand the whole of the emergent situation. It is only through a rapid cycle of experiments involving the “capacity for self-observation and course correction in real-time” that a sustainable new operational design can emerge. Prototyping is not about abstract ideas or plans but about entering a flow of improvisation and dialogue in which the particulars inspire the evolution of the whole and vice versa.

What these theorists are saying to me is that development is a heuristic process. And the prototyping that the U model proposes, indicates that policies have to be regarded as experimental and, therefore, require continuous monitoring.

And people in charge of developing policies, should remain in charge when their policies are put into practice in order to learn about their shortcomings so they can make changes to minimize negative effects. The emphasis, therefore, should not simply be on policy-making but equally on follow-through of application. Initiators should be involved in constant monitoring and adjustment of the processes and laws that they devise.

For deep organizational and societal change to occur, there must be an ongoing synergy between the personal and the collective. Generating new options depends both on the inner development of individuals and on collective processes in which they mutually enact the field of the emergent future.

I agree with this statement and believe that it again points to development as a heuristic process that needs active monitoring: policy makers should spend as much time in the field as they do in discussion. Then perhaps governance would not be top-down and may actually begin to be democratic, i.e. not government of the people, by the party, for the party, but government with the people, for the people.

As long as politicians see themselves as an elite class, separate from the people, there can be no democracy.

In the excerpt from **“OVERCOMING APARTHEID”**: **Can truth reconcile a divided nation?** James L Gibson states:

“...Social psychologists have long put forth the hypothesis that positive interracial attitudes emerge from interpersonal interactions between people of different races. This hypothesis has rarely been tested outside Western developed democracies; adding evidence from a multiracial political system like South Africa can contribute significantly to expanding the generalizability of the theory. This is just one example of the multiple ways in which theory is mobilized and tested in an attempt to understand individual-level reconciliation in South Africa.”

Here again, the idea is put forward that change comes from interaction and I interpret interaction to mean actively working together. People tend to spend too much time theorising and too little time in practical application. Theorising cannot by itself lead to the truth which can only

be verified in empirical situations.

Empowerment

The following is a quote from your paper:

“The identification of a kind of apathy and hands off performance style by many South African workers, a learned helplessness demonstrated in work place attitudes and behaviours suggesting “the impact of what I do doesn’t matter”. The result was the growing challenge of transforming this ethos and building contexts for high performance.”

I believe that even in parliament you have people who are apathetic and do not believe that what they do matters. Apathetic people, in my opinion, are disempowered people. They feel marginal to processes; often because the culture of the workplace in which they find themselves is foreign to them in terms of their socialization, their hopes and ambitions.

I do believe that the tremendous controls that SETAs and SAQA place on learners have actually perpetuated and increased the apathy developed in apartheid institutions. SETAs and SAQA place advanced Western notions of education, skills training and development on people who have grown up in apartheid conditions.

The majority of people were educated in a language other than their home language; ceilings were thus placed over their ambitions and they were forced to restrict their aspirations. Instead of addressing the inequalities perpetuated by the former education system, we have

simply tried to create a uniform system which still leaves a majority at a disadvantage. No amount of affirmative action is going to benefit the previously disadvantaged without a real understanding of their situation.

Before SETAs and SAQA, people entered freely into apprenticeships and learned trades but this kind of initiative seems to have been taken over by SETAs. Now people with talent but minimal educational qualification, cannot as they did before, enter as freely into trades. Over-regulation of skills training through the demand for qualification and certification, makes this impossible.”

Now reading through my responses to Dr Paruk’s articles and questions, I realize that I am hopelessly idealistic.

11 December: Gowrie’s Biography

After Ash got in touch with Dr Paruk, I have not heard from her. Perhaps she does not understand that I need to communicate with her. I will send off postcards to her and her sister, Dr Thanushree Naidoo, to let them know that I need to get in touch so I can share my intention of publishing their mother’s autobiography.

12 December:

I had, the day before, completed Richard Mason’s *The Drowning People* which is an amazing accomplishment for a twenty-one year old, but it is for the young.

The Edge of Sleep

Yesterday I turned to another popular novel, David Wiltse’s *The Edge of Sleep*. This novel about child abduction and

murder, features a most depraved and violent female character – it is a horrifying story, the worst choice of all the novels I have been reading..

It forced me to take refuge in the DVD series, *Larkrise to Candleford*, which presents intelligent, enterprising women, who understand the meaning of Ubuntu. In the episode with the snake, shown as a symbol of human ambivalence, I could see what a wonderful writer, Flora Thompson was. Her depiction of life in the town of Candleford and the village, Larkrise, reflects a compassionate and humane understanding of human existence.

But I have to try to understand why, apart from sensationalism, one would write a horror story like *The Edge of Sleep*. Is it simply meant as a titillating and perverse repudiation of gender discrimination? The novel presents two women, one, a serial killer, the other, a detective, in pursuit of her. As we, in general, are conditioned to seeing men as serial killers, the detectives in the story make the false assumption that they are in pursuit of a man.

They are wrong. Hooray for Women's Lib! We have now reached the giddy heights of gender equality; we have been promoted to serial killers!

15 December: *Boston Legal*

About a fortnight ago, I picked up season three of *Boston Legal* at the Irene Homes' shop. I was not familiar with the *Boston Legal* series and expected it to be typical of those dealing with legal battles. I watched the first episode last night and found myself in the midst of a soft porn comedy

show – a send-up of the typical courtroom dramas, completely irreverent, with every intention of being politically incorrect. Its perversity is, nevertheless, the means of exploring the shortcomings underlying social norms – particularly in the legal regulation of human behavior.



Irene Homes Volunteers (2005)

Carol Parsons, Manager of the shop, (seated next to table), next to her, Lindsay, assistant manager. I was a volunteer, 2000-12.

16 December: *Protect and Defend*

I am not really fond of murder mysteries, e.g. *The Edge of Sleep*; they tend to concentrate on human depravity. So I am happy to have found *Protect and Defend* at the Irene Homes Shop. It is another Richard North Patterson novel that I have

not read and is the sequel to *No Safe Place*, which I read last month. These novels appear to have been inspired by the lives of President John F. Kennedy and his brother, Senator Robert F. Kennedy and are about a man who becomes the President of the United States.

Protect and Defend, like its prequel, continues to interrogate the issues around abortion.

Boston Legal

I am also watching the DVDs of *Boston Legal* that I picked up at the Irene Homes charity shop. Beneath humour, dependent on sexual activity, is an exposé of the contradictions that arise from the social contract as well as strong criticism of administrative and judicial systems.

17 December: Racism

I have just read a paper which examines the association of racism with the white working classes in the USA and the UK that is assumed to have led to the election of Donald Trump as US President and to Brexit (Britain's exit from the European Union).

The paper challenges the view that it was the support of white workers that led to these movements towards conservatism. It asserts that racism is not confined to the white working classes; that people at all levels, including the wealthy upper classes, voted for Trump and for Brexit.

After reading the paper, I began to see nationalism as a form of racism – this is not implied in the paper. It is an off-shoot of my thinking. Racism, in my opinion, is based on the fear of difference and the unfamiliar, which are perceived as threats to an accepted, insular understanding

of a way of life. As nationalism and patriotism are means by which we create divisions and attitudes of superiority and inferiority, they give rise to xenophobia, and are forms of racism on a larger scale.

18 December: Definition of Patriotism from *Boston Legal*

Alan Shore: There is nobody more red, white and blue than this man here. He's for the death penalty; he's pro-life; he doesn't read newspapers. He's exercised every loophole to avoid paying taxes. He's even donated to the Jack Abramoff ball.

I have to get the rest of *Boston Legal*!

19 December: The Law in Fiction

When I play a DVD, I am first bludgeoned by the insistence that I may not copy the disc as that would be a form of theft and against the LAW which is presented as all powerful and vindictive, like Satan. Used as a threat, the law functions at its lowest level. And novels and TV dramas, based on litigation, focus on the fallibility of the law in this, its punitive capacity.

In *Protect and Defend*, Patterson's novel, he involves us in a court case in which a lawyer defends a fifteen-year old who is pregnant with a hydrocephalic foetus, i.e. it has a head, filled with water and probably no brain. The lawyer is engaged in a legal battle to have a law repealed that does not allow late-term abortions.

A novel like *Protect and Defend*, as its title indicates, places emphasis on the law as a means to ensure humane justice, not simply to punish. It exposes as short-sighted and inhumane, the stance of the LAW as inviolable. Made by human beings, laws, like their makers, are not infallible and

in novels and TV dramas, legal battles are concerned with protecting the individual against the unforeseen harmful consequences of the generalizations that become the law.

As abortion means the taking of life, it is only natural that a society is conflicted about the issue. Whom do we protect and defend; an unwilling mother or an unborn child?

In Patterson's novel, the unborn child of a fifteen-year old, has no cerebral cortex and its uncertain survival after birth can only be as a sub-human being. Its head is so large that a normal birth will destroy the teenager's ability to bear more children. So a decision to abort in such a case cannot simply be condemned as murder.

But in real life most abortions are of normal foetuses and it is not possible simply to dismiss potential life as an inconvenience. Though pro-lifers are generally shown to be narrow-minded and conservative, they are there to remind us that human life is precious and we have set up societies in order to protect it. Abortion cannot simply be taken for granted.

Boston Legal

I have just watched an episode that deals with religious beliefs; it includes consideration of life after death, belief in God, the dignity of the human corpse, and extra-terrestrials. When I heard the statement: "God made man in his image", I immediately reversed it.

Man made God in his image.

Women had nothing to do with the whole business.

21 December: Freedom

According to Rousseau, “man is born free, but everywhere is in chains.” I believe this to be true but I see the chains as the means to becoming human. There can be no such thing as total freedom; one becomes human through relationships and relationships place restrictions on the way we behave. Being considerate of other human beings, therefore, is not simply a courtesy, it is a necessity.

So the idea of freedom as having no constraints can only be achieved if one lives in isolation from other human beings. And living in isolation, one cannot become human. A totally free human being would be an uncivilized creature – not even as civilized as a gorilla which has a rudimentary family life. The idea of total freedom is a chimera.

I am as free as anyone can be. I live alone and have no formal ties to any individual, but I live in society, dependent on the opportunities it provides that give me the freedom to develop as a human being. That is the freedom that I recognise; it comes with the obligation to honour the social contract. It is a qualified freedom.

Boston Legal

All TV series, about lawyers and legal battles, probe ways in which the law limits our ability to be humane. Their main function is to make us aware of short-comings in the law and to evoke compassion.

In *Boston Legal*, the people portrayed are as unconventional as you can get, but even they live within the rules that they often flout. As the non-conventional is a device used to evoke laughter, comedy depends on the breaking of rules to create the fantasy of a seemingly unregulated life. But even in this series, underlying prurient

humour, is the exposé of the law and government as fallible human constructs.

22 December: Sixty

One of my nieces turns sixty in a few days. From an antiquated viewpoint, sixty means the beginning of old age. That may still be so for those with children and grandchildren who anticipate their deaths. But for modern, single women, sixty is simply the continuation of life's adventure. My nieces, SQD, modern, single women, have, thus far, been the confident creators of their individual existences – continuously finding new opportunities that extend and develop their abilities. Turning sixty does not end that; it only makes possible more exciting discoveries that come with greater intellectual maturity.

SQD's parents, in their eighties, their father 87 and mother 84, are adequate proof of that.

Ninety-two: Maniben Sita

Maniben Sita turns ninety-two on Boxing Day. Also a single, independent woman, Maniben, who carved out her own unique life path, continues to live independently as a single woman. At the age of thirteen, following in the footsteps of her father, Nana Sita, she became an activist in the struggle against apartheid. She decided that that was her destiny and liberated herself from the stereotypical existence that is generally anticipated for women.

And she still prefers to live alone, despite diminished mobility. Her relatives provide the help she needs to secure her independent existence.



Maniben Sita

23 December: Religion and Ubuntu

Most human beings, having blinded themselves with religion, do not understand their personal roles in the formation of their lives. Because of its physical pleasures, they give themselves eagerly to creating life, but do not as readily take responsibility for how they mould their lives.

In childhood, human beings begin to interact with other human beings and through interaction gain awareness of their individuality without having to take responsibility for their personal development. The realization that as adults we have to take that responsibility seems to have terrified primitive man. So he created a surrogate parent, God the Father, and recorded “His rules” for living in Holy Books. Having thus

transferred all responsibility for human life to Him, primitive man was happy. Even death became bearable; not the end of life but the beginning of a new life – a return home to Father.

But in Africa, we have Ubuntu

UBUNTU

Stanlake J. W. T. Samkange (1980) highlights the three maxims of Hunhuism or Ubuntuism that shape this philosophy: The first maxim asserts that 'To be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish respectful human relations with them.' And 'the second maxim means that if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life'. The third 'maxim' as a 'principle deeply embedded in traditional African political philosophy' says 'that the king owed his status, including all the powers associated with it, to the will of the people under him'. (Wikipedia)

Popular Definitions of Ubuntu: “A person is a person through other persons,” or “I am, because we are.” Ubuntu ascribes the development of personality to social interaction and places full responsibility for the human condition on the human being.

It is mature, adult acceptance of responsibility for life

on earth; not childish dependence on a surrogate Parent. Ubuntu does not attempt to demystify the inexplicable occurrence of life on earth; it simply and unequivocally places human development in human hands.

That makes sense to me.

For my personal understanding of existence, I am also dependent on scientific discoveries about the riddle of life on earth. In their efforts to find extra-terrestrial life, scientists have opened up the universe and the possibility of endless universes. And the more they seek, the more they reveal of the infinitude of existence and the anomaly of life on a remote spot in a vast, expanding universe.

Without doubt life is a miracle – and Ubuntu, the means to nurture it.

Protect and Defend

This novel presents the battle of a lawyer to have rescinded the *Protection of Life Act* that bans abortion in late term pregnancies. The lawyer represents a fifteen-year old who desperately wants an abortion as the child she carries, being hydrocephalic, is unlikely to survive after birth. Furthermore, giving birth will result in the teenager's sterility.

The author, Richard North Patterson, presents the father of the teenager as a pro-lifer who opposes abortion. Despite the expectation that the baby has no brain, and is unlikely to survive after being delivered, and that natural birth will render his daughter infertile, the father cannot agree to an abortion. He believes in the sanctity of life and places his faith in God above the prognoses of the doctors. He depends on a God-given chance that the child and the mother will survive intact. He is made to sound unreasonable as he places

his faith in God, not in doctors, and opposes abortion.

I am not a believer, and though I see the father's faith as a desperate hope for a miracle, I nevertheless, sympathise with his unwillingness to regard the doctors' diagnoses as absolute. Though I am being programmed by the author to regard the father as unreasonable, I have found, from personal observation that doctors have a tendency to go by the book and are not as attuned as they imagine to a patient's condition. Doctors are human beings and as human beings are not infallible – that leaves open the possibility of the unexpected.

Only an author, who is God-like in terms of his creation, knows with absolute certainty what is to happen to characters he creates. But what he creates is *fiction*. Nothing in real life is absolute. Life is a game of chance.

24 December: Wagner's Ring

What I love about the festive season is that it empties out this housing complex with its thin walls that separate flats. Most people rush off to holiday away from home and just a few are left here. It means I can listen to Wagner's operas – *Der Ring des Niebelungen* – without having to worry about whether I am disturbing my neighbours.

25 December: Witches

I checked the copyright date of *Protect and Defend* as I am amazed at the prejudice it presents against the single woman. It is a form of homophobia as a single woman usually translates as a lesbian. In the novel, the prejudice against a single woman who seeks high office is only abated when it is discovered that she has a daughter born out of wedlock.

That, of course, establishes her “normality”. Ha, ha!

The book was published in 2000. I think that in the 21st century, attitudes to single women are changing. For men sex is an adventure; for women the threat of pregnancy, a burden. Truly liberated women are not dependent on affirmation through sex; they are in pursuit of the freedom that men have always enjoyed – the freedom to explore their individual potential, not as sex objects, as intelligent human beings. But single women have always been considered abnormal and through the ages have been vilified as witches. As such, they are considered to have supernatural powers, so fear of the single woman is really a primitive fear; she represents a threat to male dominion. And that is what has given rise to male chauvinism and the macho man.

26 December: Wagner

I watched *Das Rheingold* yesterday. It begins with the dwarf, Alberich, trying to win the love of the Rhine maidens. They ridicule and reject him and he bitterly declares, “I renounce love, and curse it.” His renunciation makes possible his theft of the Rhine gold from which he manufactures a ring that gives him supernatural powers and allows him to avenge himself on the world.

Love is the most powerful form of affirmation of a human being. And the ways in which an individual develops depends on how he is affirmed in the family and the society in which he lives. When he is shown love, he is most likely to grow in love. When he is despised, he may, like Alberich, renounce love, become resentful and seek revenge on all those around him.

Though Wagner’s opera reveals this, there is, however, no sympathy for Alberich, who is treated as evil. As Eric

Owens, who plays Alberich, is African-American, and as I grew up in racist South Africa, I cannot hate Alberich. The treatment he receives from the Rhine maidens is racist; it turns him into a bitter and vengeful human being in whom hatred begets hatred. The ring that he forges from the Rhine gold gives him despotic power and he enslaves his own people, including his brother, Mime. As Mime is also unloved, he too becomes evil and in the later operas, seeks to avenge himself on society.

Racism is the negative form of Ubuntu. In Ubuntu, a person becomes a person through other persons, so, in its negative form, when I become a dictator, you become a slave.

It is a matter of social conditioning.

27 December: Robert le Page

Unfortunately, as I don't have *Die Walküre*, my set of Robert le Page's production of Wagner's Ring Cycle, is incomplete. So yesterday, I watched *Siegfried* and the first disc of *Götterdämmerung*.

Le Page's staging is magnificent. With a set and lighting that become characters, moving and performing along with the actors, the stage is turned into a dynamic environment. Carl Fillion's set of wooden beams is wonderfully versatile; it is choreographed and dances throughout the performance. And the lighting, designed by Etienne Boucher, is used to paint and transform the beams into a myriad artistic environments representing forests, mountains, rivers, stairs, caves, homes, times of day, a fire on a hill, heaven and hell, etc., etc., etc.

It is mind-blowing to see a stage setting that is not simply the static backdrop against which action takes place

but one that comes alive, moves, changes and transforms the performance into a dynamic experience. Le Page founded his Ex Machina² Production Company in Ottawa and, as the name of the Company indicates, the staging of the opera is magical, a gift of the gods.

The Niebelungs

In this production, the Niebelungs appear to be dwarves and cave dwellers, given to evil. In *Gotterdammerung*, the fourth and final opera in the tetralogy, Wagner introduces us to Hagen, the son of Alberich. And in him, we see again a despised individual, committing crimes to avenge himself on a disparaging society. Alberich also appears in this opera to enlist his son's aid in getting back the magic ring which is now in Siegfried's possession.

Like all things human and consequently, ambivalent, Christianity, the religion of love, was used to conquer and enslave black people. And as a person becomes a person through other persons, so slavery and its milder form, colonialism, inculcated a return of hatred and violence in the oppressed. And they became Christians.

In Wagner's Germany, racial prejudice took the form of anti-Semitism. Siegfried's treatment of Mime, which is execrable, is justified in the opera as Mime is presented as an evil schemer, like Alberich and Hagen.

But that makes of Siegfried an anomaly; how did he become a noble hero? He was brought up by Mime, a Niebelung, how did he escape becoming one? He grew up with hatred in his heart for the only person with whom he has ever had contact; a person who had rescued him as a baby

² from *deus ex machina* – god from the machine

and brought him up. So his hatred of Mime has no substantial foundation and as such is pure racism. Siegfried instinctively hates Mime for his physical appearance. He can love a bear which is different from him; so what makes it impossible for him to care for Mime?

Siegfried acts on a taken-for-granted attitude of a society with which he has had no contact. And as racism is a learned attitude, he has had no opportunity to learn it. Siegfried's racism, therefore, represents the author's imposition upon him of the anti-Semitism prevalent in Wagner's time.

Brünnhilde

As a Valkyrie, Brünnhilde is an independent, powerful woman.³ She gives that up in favour of "passion" and becomes human. That reduces her to a weak, complaining, vengeful female, resentful of her lover Siegfried's infidelity. And she makes possible the murder of this man, the object of her passion. But in the end she commits *sati*, like a totally subservient Hindu wife.

Her example won't do for a liberated woman of the twenty-first century. It is a fall from grace.

28 December: *The Last Witness*

Yesterday, I found a novel by Salman Rushdie in the Hospice Charity Shop. I am struggling with *The Last Witness* by John Matthews. As I am not enamoured of depictions of mafia activity, I may give it up now that I have a Rushdie novel.

³ After I watched *Die Walküre*, I changed my mind about that.

Discrimination

The meaning of the word discrimination is two-fold: it implies apartheid and racism on the one hand; good taste and refinement on the other. Quite ironically, though refinement and good taste exemplify the ability to distinguish between excellence and mediocrity and is a valued form of discrimination, it also becomes classist and racist as it is generally scornful of all that is regarded as inferior – e.g. those of a different race, culture, class, status, religion, competence, ability.

December 29: Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Yesterday I watched the first Act of the La Scala Milan production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. What a contrast to Wagner's *Ring* in terms of staging. The set and lighting of Wagner's operas, designed by the artistic genius of the Ex Machina team, fill the height, breadth and depth of the Metropolitan Opera stage, to simulate a living, evolving environment.

In Mozart's opera, the production design follows a Brechtian approach that leaves the stage as a stage and does not disguise it as a living environment. And some of the action happens on the apron of the stage, with the huge stage curtain as backdrop. In addition, the auditorium lights are not turned off, so the audience is not left in the dark in a state of emotional empathy. Furthermore, as the action is not confined to the stage but moves into the audience, the performers lose the mystique with which we usually endow characters. Actors in the midst of spectators, force the spectators to regard them objectively and to evaluate what is being presented.

As Bryn Terfel, plays Wotan in Wagner's operas, and

Leporello in Mozart's opera, he is a constant reminder of the differences in production style.

I looked up the date of the La Scala production as I thought it perhaps reflected a less technological era and found that it had been performed in December 2011, after the Metropolitan Opera production of Wagner's Ring. Its modernity is expressed in the costuming, the readiness of female characters to disrobe and explicit indications of sex. *Don Giovanni* is all about the "passion", for which, in Wagner's Ring, Brünnhilde gives up her independence as a liberated woman.

Mozart's opera hovers between tragedy and comedy. Mozart was probably caught between his impish delight in the Don's lascivious exploits and the general condemnation of their predatory nature. I base this opinion on Peter Shaffer's portrayal of Mozart in *Amadeus*.

Though Le Page's staging of the Wagner operas is very different in style, it, nevertheless, also awakens critical evaluation. As the set presents a continuous reconfiguration of twenty-four or more wooden beams into different forms and environments, my delight in watching the continuous transformation keeps me alert and allows me to evaluate as well as enjoy the performances.

December 30: *Boston Legal*

Last night, I watched another episode of *Boston Legal* – I am going through the discs of the third season again. I will try to get the whole series soon. *Boston Legal* depicts ambivalence with regard to male sexuality. The two main characters could be bisexual, another is an intermittent transvestite, subservient as a male, very assertive as a woman, and there is a homosexual judge. He is diagnosed

as having SSAD (Same Sex Attraction Disorder) by a group that offers to cure homosexuality. The show exploits homosexuality as a means to titillate – especially in the relationship between Crane and Shore, where it is explicitly denied.

Loot

This morning I checked out Loot, a different online shopping provider. It also has the box set of *Boston Legal* but does not insist on on-line payment; it allows me to make payment at shops. So I went to Shoprite and when I got back, there was an email on my laptop that payment had been received – all done between 8:30 and 9 a.m. Such efficiency! I am glad I have found this online provider. The one I had contacted earlier does not believe in two-way communication.

In the afternoon, I received another email request for payment of the box set. I replied that I had made payment, receipt of which had been acknowledged. This request for payment, after I had paid, shook my confidence in this online shop; you can't really trust any of these opportunistic businesses.

31 December

When I opened my email this morning, I found a flurry of messages from Loot in response to my reminder of their acknowledgement of payment. My reminder was taken as a demand for immediate delivery. So their response was overkill. They probably have people working different shifts and the right hand is not aware of what the left hand is doing.

Either that or they can't read.

2019

1 January: What's New?

It rained all day yesterday – a wonderful respite from the summer heat. This morning I got up to find it was still raining – and still cool! A great start to the new year.

When I discovered I had only very little milk left – a threat to my morning coffee – I decided to take a chance and ventured out to see if any shops were open. I was surprised to find the Spar open early as usual. In the old days shops always stayed closed on public holidays. They do not anymore.

Is it because modern capitalism cannot allow for a more relaxed way of life? Or are traditions and religions losing their rigid hold on existence?

Or both?

As a pensioner, I am somewhat of an outsider, so mine is a totally relaxed way of life, and I benefit in small ways from others' need for profits.

Like today.

January 2: Loot

I checked out the offerings on Loot and found that Le Page's Met Opera production of Wagner's *Die Walküre* is available. I will purchase it and that will complete my set of *Der Ring des Niebelungen*. I also found lots of books by Richard North Patterson, whose novels I enjoy, and Matthew Bourne's, *Swan Lake*. I already have two versions of *Swan Lake*; the Bolshoi version by Yuri Grigorovich, whose work as a choreographer I love, and the other from

the Kirov Ballet. Tom and Lionel, who had introduced me to Le Page's production of *Der Ring*, had also made me aware of the Bourne *Swan Lake*.

I am lucky to have such good friends, who are always connecting me to the new and innovative. I live like a hermit, but they keep me up to date.

January 3: An Unsatisfactory Day

Followed my usual routine. Up at 5a.m., on my laptop, writing. No shopping today. Worked on an untamable jigsaw puzzle; never had one before with so many pieces identical in shape with only slight or no variations in colour. And a Sudoku puzzle, with a cynical smile on its face reminded me I am not as smart as I think I am. And still reading *The Last Witness*, though I had thought of abandoning it.

I took refuge in an episode of *Boston Legal*.

January 4: Retirement

In one of the last episodes of the third season of *Boston Legal*, the character Denny Crane, who is in his seventies, gives vent to his unhappiness as he sees himself as redundant. He is no longer involved in trials and he sits in his office – a symbol rather than a participating human being.

Retirement, a product of the factory system, is churned out at the end of the production line. Determined by age not ability, it leads to feelings of redundancy as it leaves one without a function. Having spent about forty years of their lives servicing the social machine in a specialist function from which they are now released, most people are at a loss. They feel like a used product, a reject, without value. Retirement for them is a burden.

Alvin Toffler⁴ has shown us how the system turns us into products. Being employed in processing, we become processed ourselves. We follow routines and all our creative energies are focused on the particular requirements of the conduit that we have chosen as a career. And as we conform to it, our development becomes narrowly conditioned. And at age sixty-five when we retire, imagining that we have exhausted all our resources, we become hangers-on in society, condemned to a prolonged form of euthanasia.

As the system, in general, provides opportunity for only one set of our capabilities, we forget that we are multi-faceted beings. This is where education, which is totally utilitarian, fails us; it ignores the diversity of the individual and prepares us for only one function in the system. What education should do is help us discover and develop all our talents and abilities. Instead it streamlines us into one-dimensional human beings; specialists with a narrow focus on one aspect of society's needs and we discard the notion of ourselves as individuals with diverse interests and aptitudes.

So on retirement, when we are ejected from the system, we feel redundant. We do not realize that we are really on the brink of a new adventure. We now have the freedom to explore all our talents, all those interests and capabilities that were not required by the system but are the means by which we can become our genuine multi-faceted selves – much more than just cogs in the machine. Retirement provides you with the opportunity for real adventure; the discovery of a holistic you.

⁴ Author of *Future Shock*, *The Third Wave* and *Power Shift*

For those involved in the arts and sciences, there is no such thing as retirement. As we live in an expanding universe, the meaning of existence has no absolute definition; so artists and scientists are in a never-ending search for understanding. There can be no end to their exploration.

For them, life is a continuous adventure.

And we can follow their example. Once outside the perfunctory needs of society, i.e. once we have retired, we can embark on the exploration of all our talents and interests and make new discoveries for life and living. This is what the *sanyasis* proclaimed thousands of years ago – only theirs was a search for the metaphysical not the real. The search for meaning that each one makes of his own life is part of a never-ending exploration of ever evolving human potential in an ever expanding universe.

L&T

I was kicked out of the system just a couple of years before official retirement, so I was in my sixties before I dedicated myself totally to my search for understanding. But Tom and Lionel, younger and more adventurous, opted out of the standardizing social processing of the system long before retirement age and began the exciting process of creating their existences in terms of their individual understandings of the meaning of life. Not all of us are so brave, so clear in our intentions.

*"Men at some time are masters of their fates:
the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
but in ourselves, that we are underlings."*

Though Cassius was speaking of political ambition, what he

says applies to life in general; we are the masters of our fates. Tom and Lionel, constantly creating and recreating their lives, know that. They show us that as human beings we are all in a process of continuous evolution.

January 5: Out of Time

I never know what day it is. I thought today was Friday until I consulted my cellphone. Thank goodness for cellphones; they give you day, date and time, and a sense of fixity.

January 6: Beyond the Factory

The need to earn a living diminishes our status as masters of our fates and turns us into underlings. But we can make up for it in retirement; it is not too late. Once off the assembly line, we have the opportunity to explore all our interests, all facets of ourselves.

January 7: Rain

It rained heavily last night and the night before. It has rained off and on since New Year's Eve and the weather remains refreshingly cool. I had bought a container of ice-cream anticipating unbearable summer heat. I have yet to open it. It has been cool all week; no need for ice-cream. Only hot glorious coffee!

It is quite strange. I never drank coffee until about a year ago – never liked it before. I have no idea how that changed – part of my evolution? Devolution?

January 8: Gifts

5 a.m. I opened my email and found two lovely surprises: a notice from Loot that my box set of *Boston Legal* is to be

delivered within the next two days and even more delightful, a message from Tom and Lionel that they will be visiting the day after tomorrow.

11:45 a.m. It arrived TODAY! my *Boston Legal* box set! I am such a lucky person! Now I will order *Die Walküre* and the Bourne, *Swan Lake*.

Less-than

I watched the first episode of the very first season of *Boston Legal* to find Denny Crane telling, Ernie, an older man, with whose wife he is having an affair:

“You’re seventy-six years old. You wanna feel you still mean something.” You think you still mean something. ...

“The worst thing about growing older, Ernie? You begin to slip. One day you wake up and you’re less- than. I don’t ever want to be less-than. Don’t let me become irrelevant.”

And that pushed me into more contemplation of the retirement syndrome.

I am 83 and I don’t think I am less-than; I think I am more-than. Fortunately, I have never valued myself in physical terms; perhaps if I had been good-looking, I may have. Thank goodness I have always been a frump.

What Denny says applies only to people like himself: people living in the moment, trapped in carnal pleasures. They don’t see their lives as an evolutionary process. It is in this sense that they are “less” as they have remained fixated on the body, which is subject to the ageing process. As one grows older, if one’s fulfillment is still mainly dependent on

the corporeal, the process of physical decay must lead to despair.

Human beings are in a state of continuous evolution – physical as well as intellectual – from the moment they are born. Those who stop evolving after retirement, are either like Denny Crane in *Boston Legal*, who, in an aging body, is still focused on physical pleasure; or like those who have attempted to keep life boxed up in set ways – conservatives. In conserving a fixed understanding of life, they bring intellectual evolution to an end in the stultifying belief that they have all the answers to existence. Theirs is a form of living death. They do not understand that evolution is not a one-off thing that began and ended with Darwin but is in every breath that each one of us takes and there is no need to give up on life to wait for death. “Death, a necessary end, will come when it will come.” Evolution – in terms of the physical – ends with decay. In terms of the intellectual, it continues right to the last breath.

9 January: Gowrie

I received the following email from Dr Seshni Paruk this morning:

I have tried my best during the year to NOT contact you as writing to you would confirm mum's passing. A part of my heart has died & I may never be whole again.

I have none of the extended family concerns about her dying unrecognised.

My dear friend, ex Speaker of Parliament came to her funeral along with 2 MK commanders, one of whom trained me in the technique of information extraction. Mum &

those closest to her, knew her & everything she represented.

Praveen [Seshni's brother] is a medical Dr & father & Thanushree, my baby sister an oncologist & mum. Zain, my husband of 17 yrs is a self-made man , National Sales Director of Regal. As you know mum never regarded him as a son-in-law, but a son.

Mum's biggest worry was that her book on my Dad would never be written. She could not tolerate his story not being told & his utter service to humanity in more ways than just medicine. Feeling like a 2nd class Dr after 8 yrs in Patna, he studied orthopedics at the globally acclaimed Princess Margaret Rose hospital. He brought an operation called the Clark's transplant to Africa; he arranged for his black patients to see him at Addington (whites only) hospital - a tough time as our family were regarded as sellouts by extended family.

I think I have found mum's book on dad tho. As for mum's autobiography, her 2 younger sisters believe they should edit it.....which makes me laugh & want to kill at the same time.....the gall of it. The fact that they referred to her as "Dbn Carnatic singer dies" (in Indian newspapers) proves to me how little they knew about Gowrie – the woman. Praveen & I will read the copy Thanu has typed up. I would be thankful if you could read & give us some suggestions.

If you & Aunty Dorothy could write forewords, I would be delighted. You in particular Aunty Muthal understand how much mum had to suppress about who she was.

I realise that Seshni is still in mourning for her mother and I am sorry now to have been badgering her; even more sorry, for my presumption in assuming I had the right to publish her

mother's autobiography. I have sent her the draft of her mother's early life that I had received from Gowrie.

10 January:

5 a.am. I open my email and am whisked back fifty years into the past.

Hello Ms Naidoo,

I hope that you are doing well. I'm an independent documentary filmmaker based in St. Louis currently working on a documentary about the Black Artists' Group of St. Louis (BAG). I am hoping to find people who might be able to share their views of BAG, and beyond that, stories about the larger cultural/ artistic/political context of St. Louis during the late 1960s and early 1970s. I understand that you were a theater director with the group and I was hoping that you would be open to discussing your experience. If you are open to the idea, please feel free to email me back at this address, or call me at 1-314-805-4160.

I hope to talk to you soon!

We are still completing interviews for the documentary, but have put together a trailer for promotional purposes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO2HtjzpFU8&t=>

Best,

Bryan Dematteis

My Reply

Good Morning Mr Dematteis

I was with BAG for a couple of years in the early 1970s. I was introduced to BAG by Dr Portia Hunt who became a

professor at a university, in Philadelphia I think. If you are not in touch with her, you should try to find her. I think I have written about my experience at BAG somewhere. I will look for it and send it to you. I am not able to put the work of BAG into the wider artistic and political context of St Louis at the time except to say that it was an assertion of Black power and BAG was the initiative of the musicians in the group. Someone has written a book about the BAG experience; I will try to find the author's name for you. Good luck with your project.

5.40 a.m. From Bryan Dematteis.

Thank you for the prompt and thoughtful response. I did interview Dr. Portia Hunt and have continued to stay in touch with her. She is a truly amazing person and she also suggested that I speak with you. I also have an interview with Ben Looker, the author of BAG: the Point from Which Creation Begins and we are still in touch as well. He has been unbelievably helpful connecting me with people.

From the interviews that I've done so far, it sounds like the theater group (Malinke Elliott, Vincent Terrell, and a few others) were more politically active than the musicians. Even though their activism may not have been done under the banner of BAG, I feel that it is integral to the story. I'm continuing to search for interviews and archival materials (newspaper articles, photos, film) that can help explain the artistic and political context. If anything comes to mind, please let me know. I really look forward to reading about your experience with BAG.

Thanks again and I hope to hear from you soon

8:50am I sent the following to Bryan

My BAG Experience

I came to BAG in about 1970 after Malinke Elliott and Vincent Terrell had left. BAG operated in a big open area, a kind of basement at street level in a building on Washington Boulevard. Portia Hunt, an actor at BAG, invited me to join BAG when I came to live in a flat in the same building in East St Louis. She and I travelled by bus to St Louis every evening. I joined the theatre group and as I was a fan of Commedia dell Arte, I introduced its improvisational style to the actors at BAG. We created plays based on scenarios that reflected the injustices suffered by black people. The dialogue was improvised and we used the tables and chairs at BAG, which operated as a kind of nightclub over weekends, to create sets and we performed in the midst of the spectators.

One of the improvised plays was “Project Slavery” which depicted the poor conditions and the overcrowding under which black people lived. We set up two of the little tables, one on top of the other, and put as many actors as we could into the spaces above and below and that represented the Projects.

I left BAG at the end of 1972 as I had obtained a post that straddled the Black Studies Program and the Performing Arts Area at St Louis’s Washington University.

11 January: BAG: Email from Bryan

Thank you for sharing the memories. These are the types of

stories that I would like to include in the documentary. The stories of art reacting to or reflective of the racial/social injustices of the time. If any other performances come to mind, please let me know. I was hoping to find more pictures or film from some of the theater performances, but I haven't had much luck.

I am now searching for material about BAG. I have asked Dris, my niece, for the box of photos I sent her. But I am not hopeful. BAG was nearly fifty years ago.

L&T

Tom and Lionel came to visit yesterday and as usual presented me with an intellectual puzzle: an article: *The Perils of Short-termism; Civilizations' Greatest Threat* by Richard Fisher. This morning, I sent them the following, my response to the article.

Fisher is concerned about the legacy that we leave for future generations. I read through the article and found that there are new initiatives, “The Rosetta Project” and “Long Bets”, focused on future civilizations.

The Rosetta Project

The Rosetta Project is a global collaboration of language specialists and native speakers working to build a publicly accessible digital library of human languages.

Long Bets

The Arena for Accountable Predictions

The purpose of Long Bets is to improve long-term thinking. Long Bets is a public arena for enjoyable competitive predictions, of interest to society, with philanthropic money at stake. The Long Now Foundation furnishes the continuity to see even the longest bets through to public resolution.

To me, this seems like the beginning of a new religion and being an atheist, I am afraid I am only concerned with the here and now. I believe that our best gift to the future would be formulas for:

1. Government that is not corrupt and exploitative
2. Eradicating poverty and unemployment
3. Ensuring education for all

In my opinion *The Rosetta Project* and *Long Bets*, are attempts to exert control of the future; they do not address present-day evils and are an escape from reality. For me, our best gift to the future would be in establishing *in the present* a foundation of fairness and equal opportunity for all human beings.

9:30 a.m. Maniben Sita

I went to visit Maniben Sita, who is 92. Although a fall sometime last year, has seriously affected her mobility – she has great difficulty walking – she is still the same alert citizen, keeping abreast of political happenings in the country. As she is no longer able to drive – the injury to her leg has made that impossible – she has become dependent on outside help for needs beyond the home. It is most frustrating as she has always prided herself on her independence.

12 January: Loot

I had forgotten my password for Loot, my new online shopping provider, and after struggling for several days to set up a new one, I have at last been able to change the password. I shall place my order for *Die Walküre* and the *Bourne Swan Lake* on Monday.

14 January: I had to jump through a few more hoops this morning before I could finally get my order number to pay for my DVDs. These online shopping people are like machines; anything slightly outside their programming is beyond their comprehension.

When I went to Shoprite to make payment, the person who had assisted me the last time was not there and nobody else had a clue. Eventually, I got to Checkers and payment there took a few minutes.

15 January: The SB

I have discovered that sleep is a time when the SB (not the official Special Branch – my sub-conscious) freed from my control, goes off on its own investigations, and at about 3 or 4 in the morning, takes complete control of me and forces its findings into my semi-consciousness and as the sun rises, pushes me out of bed, requiring me to switch on my laptop and spill the beans. Last night it was memories of my activities at BAG (Black Artists' Group) that I was being made to recall in the SB's response to Bryan Dematteis's plea for information. So obeying the SB's summons, I was up by 5am, writing at its dictation the following that I emailed to Bryan.

Contrary to what I indicated earlier, I do remember the

times in which BAG functioned and am sending you what I remember.

The political and revolutionary culture of the times in which BAG functioned.

I arrived in the States in 1965, the year in which Malcolm X was killed. It was the time of the Black Power movement; a time of slogans such as Black is Beautiful; a time of public assertion of Black pride and dignity. It was a time of public rejection of racism and the negative psychological conditioning of slavery through a return to African culture. White ways and white culture were jettisoned in favour of new ways that reflected a positive African identity. A new religion, Islam, replaced Christianity and Black people began the search for their roots in Africa and African culture. The poet and writer, Leroi Jones, who had become a Muslim and had changed his name to Amiri Baraka, visited St Louis around 1970; I am not sure whether it was at the invitation of BAG, but I remember that he sat on the floor with us as he shared his views and his work in the new African Renaissance.

The 1960s was also a time of defiance and political resistance; the time of the Black Panthers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. And after the assassination of Dr King, we, at BAG, created a play that reflected the injustice of his death.

Luisah Teish. At the end of 1969, I went to East St Louis, to work for Katherine Dunham, who had set up a School of African Dance and was now looking to extend it to include drama and other performing arts. That is how I met Portia

Hunt and Kathy Perkins⁵. They were involved in the African dance classes offered by Katherine Dunham. Kathy also joined BAG, became a dancer and choreographer there and put on dance performances at BAG. Inspired by people like Imamu Amiri Baraka, Kathy changed her name to Luisah Teish.

I do not know whether you have heard of Luisah. I believe she went to California (San Francisco?) after she left BAG. She probably has photos of her dance group at BAG.

The SB

The SB who invades my sleep, strange to say, is far more compassionate than I am; she goes searching through the volumes of my memory library to find all kinds of information stored in them. I don't think what she dug up will be of much use to Bryan; he probably has all that information and in more detail.

From Bryan Dematteis (8:06 am)

Thank you for sharing. It's very interesting to hear your perspective on the time and the experience with BAG. I wish that we had the opportunity to meet for an interview! Your description of time and place would be very helpful in establishing context in the documentary. I have heard of Luisah in Looker's book and through speaking with Portia. I believe that she might be in Arizona now and plan on sending her an email. Thank you for continuing to search for the pictures. I hope to talk soon. Thanks again.

⁵ Error: not Kathy Perkins but Cathy Allen

Bryan's reply, so prompt, we could almost be on the telephone. Thank goodness we are not; my 83 year old ears have gone into retirement.

3pm: *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg*

I am reading this novel by Harry Kalmer – another gift from Tom and Lionel. *A Thousand Tales of Johannesburg* presents a series of short incidents involving several different groups of people living in and around Johannesburg. It deals with the violence and multi-racial nature of the society. It is in the episodic style of a diary or journal.

16 January: Loot

There seems to be something wrong with their programming; though Loot has recognized my new password for my order of *Die Walküre* and the Bourne *Swan Lake*, when I tried to make another order, it could not recognize the new password.

I give up.

17 January: Sell-by-Dates

Yesterday, I was about to open a container of cashews but was stopped by the following notice on the bar-code label:

**AFTER OPENING,
RESEAL WITH FILM
AND LID. CONSUME
WITHIN TWO WEEKS.**

I have long regarded sell-by-dates as part of the racket to increase profits by forcing consumption at an accelerated rate. Now, even nuts have a sell-by-date. I will ignore it.

Even though I am a cashew-nut nut, I can't see finishing a 500g container in two weeks.

Boston Legal

I watched an episode in which a man with ALS was applying for permission to be frozen and preserved for a time in the future when a cure for the condition would have been found and he could be re-awakened and cured.

As I have no idea what ALS stands for, I decided to look it up on the Internet. The Internet Program on my laptop has now embarked on a style of obfuscation in which I am given page after page of lists of places where information can be found, but I never get to view the information. So I could not find out what ALS stands for – except that it is also called Lou Gehrig's Disease. I looked up Lou Gehrig in the spell check column and found an answer there. ALS stands for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. It is a progressive nervous system disease that destroys nerve cells and causes disability.

18 January: Harry Kalmer's *Tales of Johannesburg*

Last night, reading this novel, I realized it is not only Tokarczuk who has decided to abandon the conventional narrative style. In Kalmer's novel, he not only presents us with random episodes from the lives of people, he also brings past events into the present, and treats them as contemporaneous – an interesting way to present the influences on a character's understanding.

19 January: *Boston Legal*

The character Denny Crane, focused on past glories and exhibiting symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, epitomises our

view of old people. Though Denny seems in good physical condition, his mind is shown to be deteriorating. He is becoming, “less-than”.

As I see it, it is his desire to remain in the glory of past achievements that has stopped his intellectual growth. Phenomenal success, achieved in the past, keeps his focus on the past; on his once great competence as a lawyer. But “Denny Crane”, his mantra, is all that is left of what he once was. He illustrates perfectly my understanding that the streamlined function that one performs in society leads to tunnel vision. Denny cannot conceive of himself functioning meaningfully in any other way.

Our jobs in society turn us into one-dimensional beings and retirement is taken as the end of our usefulness.

What rubbish! Where there is life, there is opportunity.

20 January: BAG

Yesterday, my nephew Ash brought me the box of photos I had given to his sister, Diricilla. When I opened it and looked through it, THERE THEY WERE – articles of BAG’s theatre ventures in St Louis in the 1970s. My sister, Seetha, who had emigrated to the States



Seetha

with her husband and baby daughter in 1970 and came to live with me in St Louis, was the one who had collected and pasted them into a scrapbook all those years ago.

She was always more forward looking than I.

It was fun going through the articles. I will ask Dris to scan them and send them to Bryan Dematteis. As he may also be able to get them from newspaper archives, I have sent him the dates of the articles in the St Louis Post Dispatch and The Monitor.

And I began to reminisce about my time in St Louis and East St Louis, which is just across the Mississippi River in Illinois.

I had come from Indiana University to East St Louis, to establish a drama section at Katherine Dunham's School of African Dance. But students who came there were interested only in dance. So I found another job, teaching reading and writing skills in the Head Start Programme set up by the University of Southern Illinois and run by Mildred Mitchell, just across the road from Katherine Dunham's dance workshop.

I became good friends with Mildred, who was from St Louis, and was Chairperson of the St Louis Committee on Africa. She invited me to direct *The Strong Breed*, a play by Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright, as part of the Committee's promotion of African culture. Thereafter, I approached Dr Robert L. Williams, Director of the Black Studies Program at Washington University (in St Louis) and he secured a joint appointment for me in the Black Studies Program and the Performing Arts Area (PAA).

At Washington University, I taught drama and began producing plays by African and African-American

playwrights. The first African-American play was *Our Lan'* by Theodore Ward. There were no African-American students in the PAA so my actors and actresses were drawn from Black Studies and other departments. This was how I met Marsha House who was a student at Wash U.

When I left to return to South Africa in 1976, the PAA had begun to admit African-American students and had appointed Alvin Major, our Music director, to the staff.

22 January: *Tales of Johannesburg*

Reading this novel and finding its presentation of the past in the present, I have to figure out how this innovation influences meaning. I get the feeling that it epitomises disappointment in discovering that things do not change; the past is still the present. Democracy has no reality and the struggle that ended apartheid simply gave opportunity for new leadership. The majority continue to live in violence and poverty.

Conditioning in violence over a couple of centuries under colonial and apartheid oppression may take as many centuries to dissipate. In addition, social and civil services have become blatant opportunity for exploitation.

23 January

What Harry Kalmer describes in *Tales of Johannesburg* makes me think of Wagner's dragon in *Siegfried*. The giant, Fafner, who expropriates all of Alberich's gold and the ring that gave him inordinate power, becomes a dragon to guard his treasures.

It is an appropriate allegory for the capitalist and racist exploitation on which South Africa was founded. People who are exploited and treated with hatred, contempt and

violence, as the majority of South Africans were, learn these lessons of hatred, contempt, and violence and become practitioners of the same.

How could a “new” South Africa be built on the old inhumane foundations of racism and exploitation?

As a consequence of a couple of centuries of conditioning in violence, contempt and racism, all of us in South Africa, will have to pay for a long time to come. If only overcoming racist conditioning were a simple matter of killing a dragon. Unlike a dragon, conditioning cannot be removed with the single stroke of a sword.

Racism is in our DNA.

BAG, St Louis

I was with BAG at the time of the Black Power movement that demanded respect and equal treatment for black people. As in all revolutionary movements, adherents do not tolerate any deviation from ideology. I don’t know what I did, but the members at BAG suddenly felt that I did not conform to the requirements of the movement.

I know that I am not capable of total conformity to any ideology as ideologies are based on absolutes and I do not believe in the absolute.

At BAG, I think they suddenly saw me as “Indian” and felt I was there under false pretences. I left under a cloud.

25 January

This morning I received an email from Professor Kathy Perkins and discovered that I had confused her with Luisah Teish. Before Luisah changed her name, I knew her as Kathy, but I don’t remember her surname.

Professor Kathy Perkins, author of *Black South African*

Women: an Anthology of Plays, is definitely not Luisah Teish. I met Dr Perkins when she was looking for plays for her anthology, in which she included my play, *Flight from the Mahabharath*. She will be visiting South Africa in May and we plan to meet.

I have now looked up Luisah Teish on the Internet and think that she was Cathy Allen when we met at Katherine Dunham's school in East St Louis in 1969 or 1970.

Luisah Teish has a website which I plan to visit.

25 January: I received the following email:

Greetings, I am Relo Malepe from Ga Mphahlele and I came across your review on Down Second Avenue of the late Grandpa Es'kia. I am currently doing research on his work and I would appreciate your input. I haven't read the autobiography yet but I plan to. I have done his short stories in high school and I would like to involve you on an upcoming project about him.

I would love to divulge more after your response on this. I am kindly hoping for your response.

kind regards

Ms Relo Malepe

My response

Hello Relotegile. I am happy to help in any way I can. It's a long time since I read *Down Second Avenue* but I can always read it again. Good luck with your project.

26 January: *Tales of Johannesburg*

I have completed the novel and it has given rise to more thoughts about racism. Strangely, I found the book in some ways more foreign to me than the American novels I have

been reading. Recalling my experience with BAG and reading *Tales of Johannesburg*, made me give more thought to why things change but stay the same.

I realise that in the fight to end racism, we adopt an opposing form of racism. We go back to our roots and we come up with slogans such as “Black Pride” and denigrate those who denigrated us. And when the battle is over, all we have done is to reverse power without eliminating racism.

So we still have racism. We sow as we reap.

And having lived under oppression, we are no longer the same people; we adapted under domination and learned new ways. And, in my opinion, what we have to do is to recognise and accept our changed identities. Most of all, we have to respect the new people that we became under oppressive circumstances.

Now after apartheid, why do we still fear and despise one another? Instead of discovering what we have in common, and recognising the superficiality of difference, we still cling to difference. The primitive fear that leads to the need to dominate, still blinds us and keeps us living in mental group areas.

We are now in the twenty-first century! Why are we still ruled by fear? Is it still not time to accept our common humanity and stop imposing superior or inferior status on one another?

Friends from St Louis in the 1970s: Ron Himes and Richard Bowman

Ron Himes: *Muthal, Kathy tells me you are doing well and that she hopes to see you soon. I'm doing well, The Black Rep is now 42 years old. Thank you for your inspiration.*

I apologized as I did not recognize the name so Ron sent me the following reminder.

Muthal, I was a student at Wash U in St. Louis. You introduced me to theatre ... I acted in No Place To Be Somebody. I later started a student group that became The Black Rep. We've worked for years with Kathy Perkins.

I had an article with a photo of a scene from *No Place to be Somebody*. But I did not find a picture of Ron.

Then I received a message and photo from Richard Bowman

Dr. Naidoo,

I don't know if you'll remember me but I was a student at Washington University during your tenure there. I was part of your theatre group. I was going through a box of old keepsakes and found a picture of you and me. I believe it was from the performance of "The Strong Breed". I always cherished the memories of my involvement in the group.

I truly hope that this email finds you well and enjoying a life fulfilled.

A copy of the picture is attached.

Of course with the photo, I remembered Richard. I have forgotten names but not faces.



Richard Bowman and yours truly

Suddenly my past has come alive in the present – first with Marsha, last October, then with Bryan’s enquiries about BAG and now my students at Wash U. I left St Louis forty-three years ago and I still have friends there! How marvelous!

My time in St Louis was very exciting; it was a time in which we ignored racist restrictions and opened up a space for our creativity and positive understanding of existence.

Ron Himes, continuing that work, has taken it to its rightful place in the US: his Black Rep has become a national institution.

Ron Himes is the Founder and Producing Director of the Saint Louis Black Repertory Company which has developed a national reputation for staging quality productions from an African-American perspective.

Ron founded the Saint Louis Black Repertory Company in 1976 while still a student at Washington University, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration. The Black Rep began touring to other college campuses and, in 1981, found a home in the former sanctuary of the Greely Presbyterian Church in north St. Louis City, which the company converted and renamed the 23rd Street Theatre. In 1991, after a multi-million dollar renovation, the company moved into the former First Congregation Church building, located in the heart of the Grand Center arts and education district in midtown, renaming it the Grandel Square Theatre.

The Black Rep is the largest, professional African-American theatre company in the nation and the largest African-American performing arts organization in Missouri.

After its inception, Himes began to take the company on the road, performing for people everywhere by touring college campuses, community centers and various art / theatre festivals. The Black Rep started to draw such huge

crowds when they performed and in 1980, the company took residence in the former Greeley Presbyterian Church's sanctuary on the corner of St. Louis Avenue and 23rd Street, renovating the interior into a theatre space. During the 1980's, the company began to hire guest actors, directors, designers and choreographers locally and nationally. In addition, The Black Rep began presenting regional dance companies and a musical film series. By 1986, the company became the only African-American theatre in the Midwest to operate under a contract with the Actor's Equity Association, guaranteeing union wages to its actors and stage managers.

Later in the eighties, The Black Rep decided to narrow its focus to only producing African-American live theatre.

Today, The Black Rep performs at the Edison Theater at Washington University in St. Louis. The company continues to produce quality professional dramas, comedies and musicals by primarily African-American and third world playwrights. The company has produced the works of Pulitzer Prize winning playwrights August Wilson, Dominique Morisseau, George C. Wolfe and Lynn Nottage, and Tony Kushner. In addition, the company maintains an award-winning Education and Community Program, including classes and workshops for adults and youth, touring productions, the Summer Performing Arts Program, the Teen Tech Program and the Professional Internship Program.

Mainstage productions and Education programs combine to reach more than 80,000 people annually. The company is pleased to entertain the most diverse theatre audience in the St. Louis region. (From the Internet)

28 January: Email from Tom re: *Flights*

I have started reading Olga Tokarczuk. I find her breathtaking!

I found this on the internet about her writing, and in particular her “novel” style:

“Tokarczuk prefers an astronomical metaphor, explaining that, just as the ancients looked at stars in the sky and found ways to group them and then to relate them to the shapes of creatures or figures, so do, what she calls her “constellation novels” throw stories, essays and sketches into orbit, allowing the reader’s imagination to form them into meaningful shapes.”

Interesting, hey?

If you have to give meaning to the random events of a novel, does that make you its author?

If a baker puts flour, baking soda, salt, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, oil, milk, walnuts and dates in front of you, does it mean you have to bake these ingredients and create something with them? That is what Tokarczuk is asking us to do – give form to her ingredients. Novelists usually give us the whole cake and ask us to evaluate it, the cake, not just the ingredients. They don’t ask us to bake the cake; just to taste the cake they bake and enjoy.

I shall wait to hear what Tom makes of *Flights*. Will he bake a cake or muffins?

I left Tokarczuk’s ingredients as ingredients.

29 January: To Relo

“You may want to get in touch with Mike Stainbank. He set up the ES’KIA INSTITUTE and worked closely with your grandfather.” I sent Relo Mike’s email address.

From Relo

Oh great...thank you so much. And I just call him (Es'kia) grandfather out of respect by the way. we're not blood related. My English teacher back in high school made me love his work when we did his short stories.

Loot

Received today My DVDs of *Die Walküre* and the Bourne *Swan Lake*. Hooray!

29 January : I find all kinds of requests on my website.

From A.G.Sithole:

Good day Sir, I am urgently looking for a phone number for a person in Laudium that makes hindu murthis. I want to order a standing murthi⁶ of: the Nataraja in bronze (60 cm in height.

As my name is neither common nor gender specific, people often mistake me for a man. In my first year at school in 1942, there was a boy in my class with exactly the same name, Muthal Naidoo. My asexual name is perfectly appropriate.

I sent Jeram Bhana's name, address and telephone number to Mr Sithole. Jeram is a friend from the turn of the century when I interviewed him and Jaydevi, his wife, for my book *Stories from the Asiatic Bazaar*. Jeram is a sculptor and he and Jaydevi are both musicians.

⁶ A murthi is a sculpted image

I often find email requests for information about religious rituals as a result of my book: *A Little Book of Tamil Religious Rituals*. Mr Sithole must have found it on the website.

My website brings me lots of new friends.

I am eternally grateful to Francois Smit of QUBA Motion and Design, who created my website as a gift.

30 January: From Relo

More about the project, I am planning a book fair day or a week even. I'll see how the planning goes.

Right now I'm still much on the research phase about Grandpa Mphahlele and haven't told anyone about this yet except for you.

I plan to invite and find writers from ga Mphahlele, story tellers, musicians, pageant queens, and just about the general public from here and Lebowa kgomo as well as Polokwane and the general public... whoever will be interested in attending. I was hoping to have a conversation type of affair at the hall around home or sports field in ga Mphahlele, I'm still looking and writing to possible sponsors. Thanks.

My aim is to mark his centenary and spark interest about him and find out what his people know about him and what he's contributed not only to South African literature but the country at large.

This is why I need your assistance. I will write to you on what I've gathered so far later this week. On Friday preferably. And Down Second Avenue, I couldn't get the PDF, will I still find the book in stores??

I offered her my copy of *Down Second Avenue*.

1 February: Love and Self-Esteem

Boston Legal shows people obsessed with sex and makes it clear that sex is not love. The two people who truly love each other are the two main characters, Alan and Denny, and they are at pains to reveal that it is not a sexual relationship. Though there is great ambivalence about that, it nevertheless underscores the idea that sex is not love but pure appetite.

And *Boston Legal* presents far too much appetite.

If not sex, what is love? I see, it as affirmation and appreciation of the qualities of another. Such appreciation may lead to sex where there is physical attraction. Sex, however, is not a necessary element of love. But love is a necessary element of relationships.

Love for others, in my opinion, is based on self-esteem and is an extension of one's respect for oneself. Friendship begins with self-respect. One can only offer oneself in friendship if one accepts, consciously or unconsciously, that what one offers is worth offering. Those who commit crimes against others do so as they do not respect themselves; society has failed them in some way and their circumstances have not allowed them to develop self-esteem, so they cannot develop respect for others.

Alberich, in Wagner's Ring Cycle, is treated with scorn and, as a result, takes revenge on society. He renounces love, which, more significantly, is *his own* confirmation of his unworthiness, a renunciation of his self-esteem. It is that which reduces him to a cruel and vindictive being and impels him to take revenge on everyone else. Like many of those who are despised, and who, however unwillingly, imbibe the negative images projected on them, he becomes a criminal.

Self-esteem would have armed Alberich against the

ridicule of the Rhine maidens. He would have realized that their scorn emanated from their fear of difference and he would not have fallen prey to self-hatred. Evil is not a metaphysical phenomenon; it emanates from the fear of the unfamiliar that resides deep within. It is that fear, xenophobia – that gives rise to racism and leads to hatred and oppression on both sides. Oppressors fear contagion and force those whom they oppress into an understanding of themselves as inferior and they begin to disparage themselves. It is self-hate that impels the oppressed to avenge themselves through violence.

Fear and hatred of others emanate from a lack of self-confidence. And the oppressor is as much a victim of fear as the oppressed and his fear accounts for his cruelty and need to dominate.

In South Africa, discrimination turned us all into criminals and it will take more than street name changes for us to learn to truly love ourselves. Black is Beautiful, a slogan of the Black Power movement in the 1960's and 1970s, was an assertion of self-esteem. Once one can truly believe in oneself, one has power and is on the way to freedom.

Steve Biko, advocate of Black Consciousness, was, in my opinion, the most powerful threat to the negative conditioning of apartheid; so he had to be eliminated.

And now, though apartheid has been abolished, we still have apartheid; it is difficult to free ourselves from the fear that made us all – oppressors as well as oppressed – see ourselves as “less-than”.

Racism is in our DNA.

Black Theatre, St Louis, 1970-6

Scans of newspaper articles

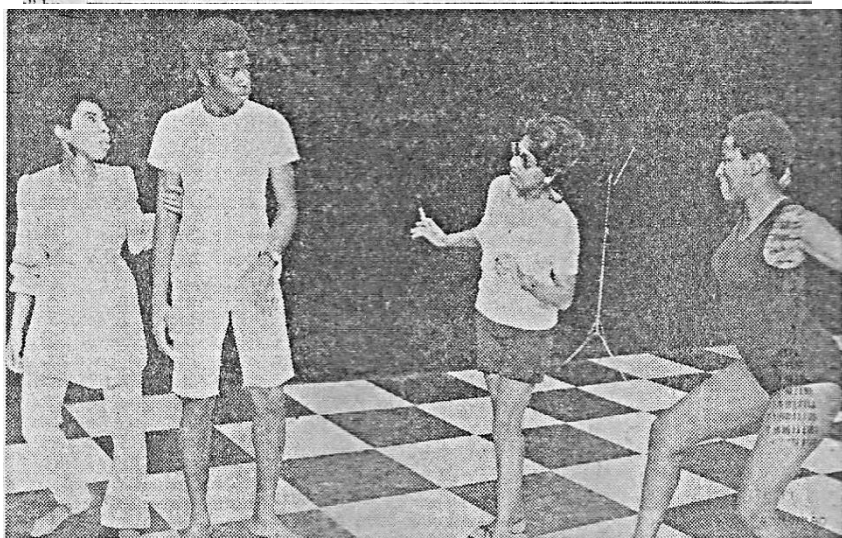
I end this book, à la Harry Kalmer, by bringing the past into the present with all the copies that Dris and I have made of the articles of my years in theatre in St. Louis.

It was an exciting time, a time of assertion of our self-esteem as Black people.

A time when we saw ourselves as “more-than”.

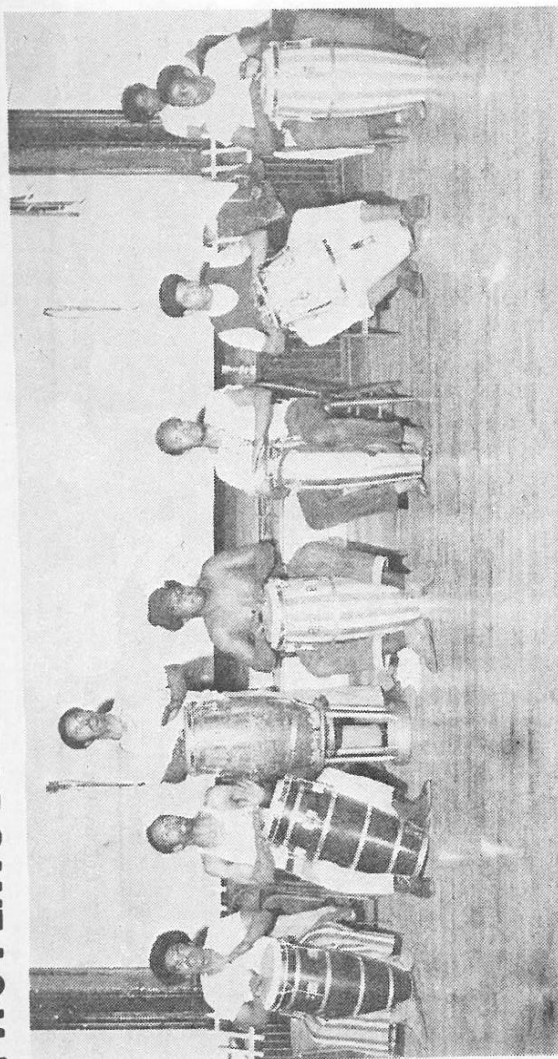
20 August 1970

Black Artists' Group



DURING A REHEARSAL for "Volunteered Slavery," an original production based on the "Autobiography of Malcolm X," Miss Portia Hunt (right), portraying White Woman, attempts to lure young Malcolm away from the influence of his sister, Laura. Frank Scott and Pat Montjoy follow the directions of Miss Naidoo. (Post-Dispatch Photos by Ted Dargan)

TWO PLAYS BY BLACKS TO BE GIVEN FRIDAY



St. Louis American June 3, 1971

THE BLACK ARTISTS GROUP DRUM ENSEMBLE, shown in a practice session, will share the spotlight wit BAG's dancers when they appear between two dramatic productions this Friday evening, June 4 at Forest Park Community College. The program, a benefit for the African Students Emergency Fund, is sponsored by the St. Louis Committee on Africa.

ST. LOUIS ARGUS, FRI, JUNE 4, 1971



Plays And Dances Performed By Black Artists Group

The St Louis Committee on Africa presents two plays and dances performed by the Black Artist Group Friday, June 4th, 8:00 p.m. at Forest Park Junior. Tickets 3.00, student tickets 1.50. Tickets may be purchased at the door. For information Call 862-4543 or 382-1549. M. Mitchell, Chairman.
[Transcript]

[The picture above was taken at a rehearsal of
The Trials of Brother Jero]

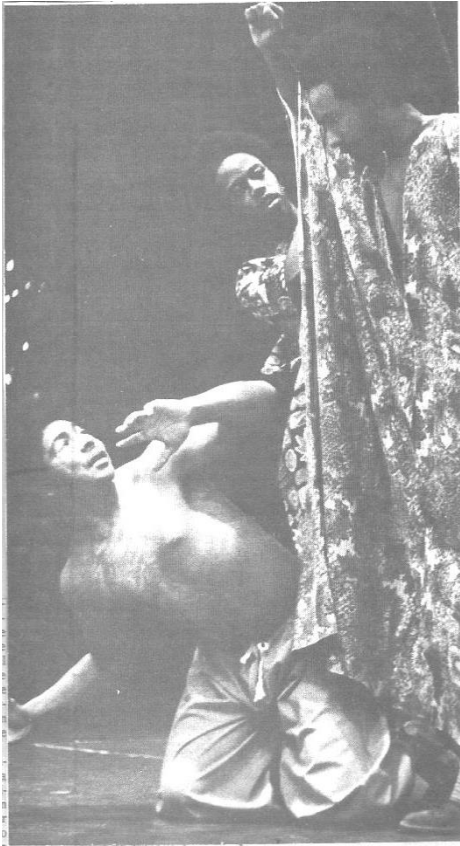
Music And Dance For A Benefit

[Music and Dance for Benefit]

By Carter Stith
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff



Luisah Teish's Omawali Dance Troupe



**Wole Soyinka's
The Strong Breed
Feb. 15-18 1973**

Three Washington University Students rehearse a powerful scene from "The Strong Breed," to be presented by the University's Black Theatre Workshop for four evenings, February 15-18 in Brown Hall Theatre on the campus at 8 p.m. Kneeling is Rich Bowman as "Eman," the central character in the drama by the noted Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka. Gregory Edwards as "Jaguna" is the actor in the flowing robe. In the center Charles Vaughn, an

engineering student at Washington University. Proceeds from the Production will be given to the St. Louis Committee on Africa Emergency Fund for Students. General admission is two dollars With student ickets priced at a dollar each. For further information, please call 535-6243 or 725-4048

**1974 Black Theatre Workshop, Washington
University**



...ert, a scene
from Theodore Ward's *Our Lan*,
presented by the PAA and directed
by Muthal Naidoo March 1-3.

Our Lan'

photos by john fu

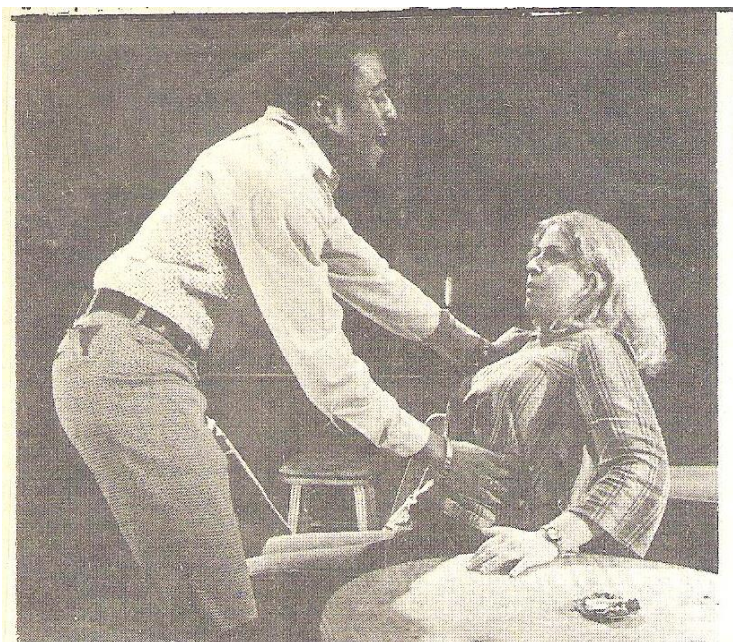


Kem Mosley, Randy Partee, Rudolph Nickens and Abu Bakka in Our Lan'.

**"No Place To Be Somebody" Set For
Washington U. Nov. 15, 16, 17**

St Louis American, Thurs. Nov 7, 1974



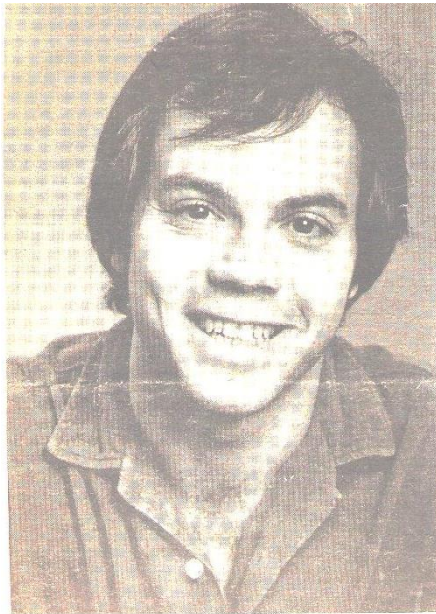


ACCUSATION:...Tracy Smith as Johnny Williams in the Pulitzer Prize winning play "No Place To Be Somebody" humiliates Mary Lou Bolton, played by Roberta Silver, in rehearsal for Washington University's Performing Arts Area production the weekend of Nov. 15-17. Curtain is at 8 p.m. in Edison Theatre for the Friday and Saturday evening performances; the matinee on Sunday is at 2:30 p.m. General admission is \$3.

No Place To Be Somebody

From CURTAIN CALL, MARCH 1975

Steven Pasternack

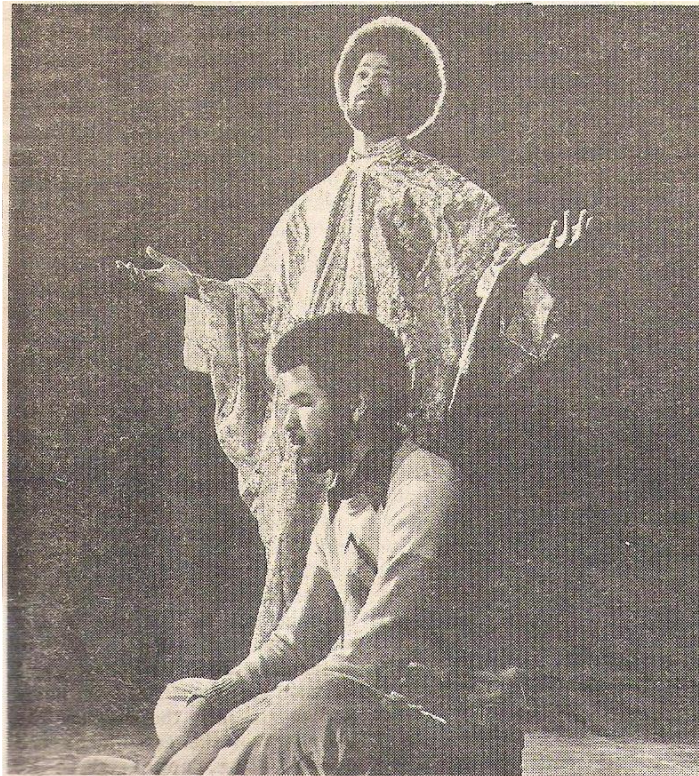


“Steven Pasternack, theatre major at Washington University and winner of the Irene Ryan Foundation \$500 Acting Scholarship in regional competition, will Compete in Washington D.C. for one of two \$2000 scholarships at the American College Theatre Festival April 7-20. The Festival is presented by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing art, The

Alliance for Arts Education and the Smithsonian Institution.”

“Nominated for his performance as Shanty Mulligan in Washington University’s Performing Arts Area fall production of No Place To Be Somebody, Pasternack gives special tribute for his success to the director of the play, Nuthal Naidoo, assistant professor of Black Studies at the University. As one of 17 finalists in the regional competition, he presented a scene from the Charles Gordone play and an excerpt from Ronald Ribman’s “Fingernails Blue as Flowers.”

Student Life, 10 Feb. 1976



With lying charm, Brother Jero the self-seeking preacher deludes all who come in contact with him in "The Trials of Brother Jero."

Brother Jero (Byron Thompson) miraculously appears before a Member of Parliament (Dwain Doty) in a scene from **"The Trials of Brother Jero."**



Life is a Miracle