

PART TWO CORRESPONDENCE

SECTION 2 GENERAL (Undated)

Document 1 **Alan Paton, Prayer** [Before 31st May 1971]

Almighty God, the Judge and Lover of mankind,
Look with mercy upon us, and make us merciful to others,
Especially to those who have offended against us.
And may the Government also be merciful, at this time of the celebration of the tenth
Anniversary of the Republic, to all offenders, not forgetting those
who have offended against the State.
May the government show clemency to them also,
And to all restricted and exiled persons, and may this be
The beginning of a new era for our country.

Amen. Shanti. Peace.

Alan Paton

Document 2 **Priscilla Jana – MR** [C. 1980]

Dear Mewa,

Re: Modderbee Detainees

We thank you for your cheque in an amount of R500.00. We have put into our clients account R50.00 for their use and relayed the message that it was sent from Durban.

They have requested us to thank you most sincerely for same and to relay the message to all who have contributed. We are pleased to advise that our clients are in good spirits.

Regards to you and your wife.

Yours sincerely,

Priscilla Jana and Associates

Document 3 **Ann Oosthuizen – MR** [C. early 1986]

Dear Mewa,

Foszia said it was best that I do not phone, so I am typing this in some haste before leaving.

I appreciate it very much that you have shown me the draft of your novel, and have had some three hours living the story of Nomsa and Elias and am sure that I will carry this now with me throughout my life. Thank you for that.

I feel that you have a great capacity for bringing in the landscape into your writing and using it in such a way that it enhances the meaning of the action. I think especially of the storm which accompanies their departure from the village, or the incident with the fallen nest on p83 where the detail enhances the mood and emotion of the particular moment.

I also feel that your grasp of an alternative political reality is very important and that it should be pointed out in more concrete terms *i.e.* that you do not always make the best use of a reality that you understand very well, but because it is rather rushed over, or even not quite integrated into the action of the story, you are unable to use it to its fullest effect. Two examples of this are your references to alternatives, like bulk buying without a really dynamic description of African communalism as a reality that Elias would know about so that it is hard to think of him as knowing about any such alternative in the state of mind you have put him (what I am saying, I suppose is that I have trouble with your authorial voice, and I will return to this point later). Another example of something mentioned, and obviously relevant, yet because it

is not used to its fullest extent seemed artificial is the reference to Peter and Mary's visit to Othello which has as its only comment "Poor Desdemona!", yet this is a highly controversial play especially in a South Africa context.

The main thing I think you should look at therefore is to ask yourself the question; who is telling the story? If this is really Elias telling the story to Temba, then it is important that the language and concepts are such that they fit into his understanding of the world, and this can be done without sacrificing any of the perceptions that he would have. In fact I believe that they would become sharper, in that because what I do miss is a sense of the story being rooted by the characters it involves into a specific, directly experienced time and place. This makes for sameness in the narration which is unfortunate when you are describing such different people as Peter and Mary and/or Elias and Nomsa. Also it can make you gloss over important detail which would make the story come alive and can sound patronising. An example is on p13 when you describe Nomsa tearing at the mealie stalk, 'In her native way'. A time when you seem to have direct access to the experience is on p16 when you describe Elias's reaction to the way the men are smoking, yet later on that same page you say 'Nobody squealed' which is the kind of language that Elias would not have used at that time.

I am asking you to do a lot of work and I expect you are fed up by now. Yet I do think it is important that you try to expand those moments which are authentic experience so that they can be understood in deepest essence by the reader and cut those moments when you are cramming too much into the narrative and it becomes a lecture alienated from the characters. Both the incidents I have mentioned for e.g. (the mealie and the smoking) could be the core of a complete chapter and not, as you have them as part of rather a long list of events.

I know how hard it is to write and how much agony goes into such a struggle for form and shape in narrative. And you have been most ambitious. I do not want to carp at trivialities or to discourage you from writing. I have two further points that I must mention and then I will leave you alone. You have asked for comment, but there is no reason why you should consider anything I say to be valid.

I think you should guard against male chauvinism and that a phrase like 'She didn't mind his slippers' is unfortunate. I know that this is the story about Elias and Temba, a father and his son and that the women are peripheral, nevertheless if you could develop the characters thematically, they, the women, become very important. It is possible to see Nomsa as symbolic of the traditional innocent while Lucy then is the woman of the cities who now is also Temba's mother. He must, I expect come to terms with both, but you have not given them enough weight.

And this links with haziness about what you mean to say, linked to the idyllic picture of the tribal life. I find it difficult to know why Elias went to the city in the first place and also why he insisted on bringing up his child in the city. I think all this is related to the points I made earlier.

If it would be of any help, perhaps it would be worth reading Chinua Achebe's book Things Fall Apart which is a magnificent description of the destruction of traditional life by the advent of the white culture in Nigeria. Also our own Morabi Dance (I don't know the author, but both these are in the Penguin African Writers series) is very good on characterisation and the whole question of how you use the authorial voice. And Doris Lessing in Martha Quest has the same feeling for landscape that you have and uses it in the same way.

So... Hope you will see me again. I so enjoyed seeing you and Ela yesterday. Hope it is not too long before it will be repeated.

Much love,

Ann

Document 4

Mrs L.J. Mdluli – Ela

Dear Mrs Mewa,

I shall be very glad to hear that you are in a good condition there at Verulam; here out Lamont we are safe and sound.

My daughter, I write to tell this, Daddy Joseph comes to me through the dream and we talk to each other, nothing had he said.

I am very thankful for the parcel you sent me and I received all of them.

Convey my sweetest regards to my son Mr Mewa and kids not to forget my loving grand-mother.

I beg to pen off here.

All from you loving Ma.

Mrs L.J. Mdluli

Document 5**MR - Pieter and Gerti***[C. early/mid 1990]*

My dear Pieter and Gerti,

Greetings to you both. Thanks a stack for the photographs. My meeting with you two and the experiences shared, especially at the Cologne Cathedral, are indelibly imprinted on my being. Thanks for the support to cultivate your friendship – which is so rare in the world seized with “self”.

Many things are happening out here that disturbs one. But, change demands changes. Is this the right way to put it? But, especially for current South Africa the German saying (translated freely) is very apt. “Better horror now to end all horror than to have horror without end”. Apartheid was and is horror. Of course I was happy to be back here but I do have poignant memories of my first visit to your part of the world, which has become “so small”, that I can feel you and Gerti around.

However, keep well and I do hope to see the two of you very soon here. Thank you for everything that you did for me and I pray to God that I'll have the privilege soon to host you two.

With solidarity and greetings and lots of love.

Mewa Ramgobin

Document 6**MR – [Undisclosed.]**

I have no doubt in my mind that our grand-parents, if they were alive today, they would have said, “That’s our family”. Let us work hard as we have done, and as we do not forget where we came from and what is expected of us from society, generally.

We have a responsibility not only to ourselves. In order to secure the wellbeing and security of our family we must remember that there is a wider human family. Their well-being is equally important.

Mewa

Document 7**[Undisclosed] – MR**

Hello Mewa!

I'm a 16 years old boy, from Sweden and I think that Apartheid is a crime against humanity.

To struggle for peace and justice is not an act of treason!!! Unban the ANC!

You have my support!!

Document 8**Christy - MR**

Please! Last time I said something I was not received warmly. Why can't the consciousness of LOVE be sought after?

The SACP alliance is causing problems.

I am sure that they should understand that Human Rights are the VEHICLE for people to live harmoniously with one another.

Multi party: The existence of multi-Party Systems is a prerequisite for the control of the majority.

Of course the happiness of the majority is also not the means to end, BUT the majority COUNT in the end of the day.

You don't even phone!

Regards and be GOOD

Christy