

PC11/8/5/43



23 Lynton Road,  
KLOOF,  
Natal, South Africa.

25th October, 1963.

Dear Krishna,

You must not be full of anxieties. You must set yourself the task of doing SPONONO with all your strength and devotion, and leave the rest, as you used to say, "to the God". Meanwhile I shall do my best to do everything to compensate for face-to-face consultation. We need not panic, and I shall try to answer the big questions immediately.

You say I may not be able to stomach some of your ideas. You also may not be able to stomach some of mine. You must remember that you intervened to change the story more than once. The idea that the Principal should leave the Reformatory was yours, but I do not object to it. Now you say it bothers you. You must not let it do so. I shall answer your important question about this in due course.

There is another point to remember. After seeing a play many times, parts of it appear stupid, boring, and gauche. I shall tell you when I have this reaction, then you must decide soberly, bearing in mind that I have seen the play many times. I shall do the same for you.

THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY ME ON FEBRUARY 4

1. The comment in regard to Ha'penny should have referred to Act I, Scene 1, P.2, NOT Act I, Scene 2, P.2.
2. SPIKE'S FEAR P.1-2-25. My proposal is to follow the script up to "Spike, what's troubling you?" THEN CONTINUE - When Spike does not answer, she tries to turn his face so that he looks at her, but he will not. There is a certain childishness in his behaviour, and this will be noticeable throughout the play. He is not a strong character, and he is being subjected to terrible pressures. In all these scenes ELIZABETH shows herself, not only as a strong, but as a fine character. While ELIZABETH is trying in vain to make him confide in her, SPIKE GETS up from the bed suddenly, and goes to.....

(CONTINUE TO "LIGHTS DIM")

NOTES (1) Do you approve this change? I grew more and more apprehensive as SPIKE approached the dream scene. It always seemed contrived to me.

(11) SPIKE had a habit of crouching, with arms and legs wide, that made him look a gorilla, and made some of the audience laugh. You could correct that, I think.

(111) Now we come to the character of ELIZABETH. Athol told me that when he read the script, he thought of her as a simple faithful girl, whose appeal to the audience would have been immediate. Whether she had had previous sexual experience is quite beside the point. But, said Athol, our ELIZABETH looked and acted like a tart. Her very first appearance emphasised sophistication, not simplicity. I agree with this. The real ELIZABETH was seen best in ACT III.

3. You remind me that three persons had said that they had not known the second boy was SPONONO. Forget them.
4. Yes, I much prefer the original script. (Why did we depart from it; do you remember?) It makes the Principal a stronger man

#### SUGGESTIONS

- (1) Page 1A. Change "with dignity" to "subdued", and omit "I couldn't get Henry for you because of all the trouble".
5. Unfortunately I didn't see the new Mrs. MAKATINI. She was called to the office but didn't arrive.
6. I note you don't think much of John Schlesinger's comment that he didn't like MABASO. I reply to you - gently - that because of your theory of conflict, you emphasised MABASO'S unhappier side, both in the writing and in the directing. Therefore he appears self-satisfied and shallow. Let us try to soften this a bit, and let us, in ACT III make the PRINCIPAL as understanding towards him as he was towards SPONONO.

#### CONTINUE THUS ON P. 2-1-7

PRINC: So you were right, eh? (He looks frankly at MABASO. Their discussion is without rancour. The TWO MEN understand each other very well)

MABASO: (almost humbly) Principal, don't think I like always to be right. I'd like to be wrong sometimes, like you.

PRINC: Why?

MABASO: I'd feel warmer, somehow. None of these boys could break my heart, but some of them could break yours. (MABASO frankly admires the gift he does not possess). That gives you power. (They think it over) Principal.

PRINC: Yes.

MABASO: I must tell you something. I have good reason to believe that long before SPONONO received any freedom, he was seen on Victoriatown at night.

PRINC: (disturbed) You can't mean that?

MABASO: And more than once.

PRINC: And how did he get out? Surely you don't mean the main gate?

MABASO: I swear by every man who works at the main gate. Principal, he must have some other way. And if he knows it, there may be others who know it too.

PRINC: I'll look into it at once.

MABASO: Don't you ever get frightened?

PRINC: Sometimes I'm anxious. When boys go out on leave, I never rest till the last one's back. (he makes a confession) I'm not telling you the truth. Sometimes I do get frightened. When the telephone rings at night. I know that a boy could take the life's work of a man, and break it to pieces in a minute. Brutal assault, murder, rape. What would the public say? They'd say, who let this boy go out? What's all this nonsense about freedom? They'd say, we want security for decent people, not freedom for criminals. At my age who would give me another job?

MABASO: (soberly) That's what Sponono could do.

PRINC: If he did - that might finish me.

(CHORUS deepens the mood by singing SERA)

LIGHTS DIM.



- 7. White Lily. I agree.
- 8. I drop the suggestion.
- 9. O.K.
- 10. Good.
- 11. Good.
- 12. ELIZABETH's simplicity. You ask me to elaborate on the point. I have done so under SPIKE'S FEAR. But if you want further elaboration I'll try.
- 13. Marriage of drama and spectacle. I agree that spectacle makes a difficult theme more comprehensible, and you did it well. You ask me if I have any suggestions. I hesitate to make any. If you have decided to moderate the spectacle, then you must go ahead. I have confidence that you will produce the right synthesis.
- 14. (1) Why did the Principal leave the reformatory? To tell the truth he left because you wanted him to. But you were right I think. Otherwise SPONONO would not have felt the desertion. The PRINCIPAL did not leave because of Spike's murder, though it clearly shook him. He did not leave because he thought SPONONO had murdered SPIKE. He left primarily because of the rape of ELIZABETH. Perhaps we made a mistake never showing the PRINCIPAL with ELIZABETH. Perhaps even now the PRINCIPAL should speak to SPIKE about ELIZABETH. What do you think? And if we do it, where shall we put it?

No, the PRINCIPAL must not disintegrate. In ACT III the PRINCIPAL is humble about his desertion - he says to SPONONO, "I was finished. You finished me, Sponono". Let us simply believe that.

Now what about this?

SPONO: (he can hardly believe it) I finished you? Me so small, and you so great. (He is filled with anguish).

PRINC: (humbly) I wasn't great, Sponono.

SPONO: But even if you had been there...

CONTINUE AS BEFORE.

14. (ii) I do not think that the Principal ever believed that Sponono killed Spike. Therefore his guilt lay, not in believing Sponono killed Spike, but in not realising Sponono's extremity, in not realising that he should have made it clear to Sponono that he did not believe it. He was also guilty because he placed his own pride, his own position as Principal, his own right to ask questions, above Sponono's extremity. He did ~~us~~ in fact exactly what Mabaso did at the end of ACT III. I propose therefore in ACT III to do two things

(i) that the Principal should make it clear that he behaved wrongly on that occasion

(ii) that the Principal should say something different to Mabaso, something humbler.

Finally, when the Principal says, I am guilty, he means it; he means that he did not realise the depth of Sponono's extremity. If he had realised it, he would not have chosen the easy course; he would have waited for Sponono to return.

14. (iii) Why did the Principal have a soft spot for Elizabeth? In ACT III it is clear - Elizabeth would appeal to anybody. I ask again the question whether we should not have shown the Principal with Elizabeth in some earlier scene.

No, the Principal is not a Calvinist for whom rape is worse than other offences. He is not overwhelmed by the crime of rape, but by the fact that Sponono had committed an offence for which, in a way, he the Principal was responsible. But you must add something else - in the eyes of the public rape is a terrible offence, and the Principal was responsible for the safe custody of the boy who had committed it. I hope the new piece on P.2-1-7 brings this out.

I am sending this first half of my reply immediately. On Monday (today is Saturday) I am discussing the major changes contained in your script. Also my views on ACT III. This should be mailed on Tuesday.

One important question - can I keep the script copy? Second important question - Bernhardt says he must have copies of final script. He suggests these should be typed here. That means I must prepare the final script, and this must be done by November 15. So please reply at your very first opportunity.

Love from us both.