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PAM

Dr. André Ungar  
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Dear Mr Paton,

I am not in the habit of writing fan letters, nor do I often indulge gestures of easy sentimentality. But somehow I have for long wanted to drop you a line, just to express my feeling of deep personal indebtedness to you. And now, prompted by a recent letter from our mutual friend Dennis in Port Elizabeth, I am giving way to this temptation. Not that I have anything exceptional to say...simply to renew an old and rather superficial acquaintance and, more importantly perhaps, to give a humble indication of the reality of the global fellowship of those who care.

In a few months' time it will be ten years since I left, under orders from Pretoria, my pulpit in PE. Altogether I spent two years in South Africa: and still, in a very real way, I have not left it at all... or maybe, it has not left me. Just as I am about to succumb to the all too delightful lures of comfort and freedom here, something mocking and pitiless inside me reminds me of the stark contours of South African life. Something in the newspapers, or no outward stimulus at all, or a glance at your books, sets off a train of thought and feeling that ends in total frustration. For what, dear God, can one do here? I wish I knew. And I almost envy those who remain within arm's reach of the truth, tragic though it is.

I have just read your biography of Hofmeyr. More competent critics than myself will have appraised it by now, in Africa and elsewhere. To me, it was, indirectly, a searing declaration of faith: for this, I thank you again. My wife - a Texan girl of 25 who had spent a year in India as a teacher, but is wholly innocent of the African complexion of things - found it, and all your other writings, immensely revealing and moving. Does it make sense, Sir, for a stranger to beg you to go on writing, to tell you that literally millions of human beings gain not merely factual awareness but moral stature too through what you have been giving them...us, to be more accurate? Because the Phalarope is in Mississippi too, and the beloved country is crying in Viet Nam and Haiti and New York as well.

Very truly yours,