

23 Lynton Road,
KLOOF, Natal,
South Africa.



9th August, 1966.

Dear Prof. Callan,

Through all my recent difficulties I have not been able to give as much time to you as I would have liked. I am not even quite sure whether I replied to your letter about Spenene. This I do now.

I have considered the possibility of re-writing Spenene in the way that you suggest, that is to begin with the third act and to flash back to the events of Act 1 and 2.

I have written to Krishna Shah and have put this criticism to him, but so far he has made no reply. In any case I should tell you that at the moment I am in no mood for creative writing.

Your first question was about Mkhumbane, this play was written especially for the Institute of Race Relations and was performed in Durban during the week of tremendous anxiety following the tragedy at Sharpsville. Africans were marching through the streets of Durban and Cape Town and the white population of South Africa was in a state of fear and anxiety. During this momentous week we played to full houses in the Durban City Hall, people of all kinds and races. It was indeed a moving experience to go into that hall and to see there the absence of all fear or hate. The play was a musical and the music was provided by Todd Matshikiza. We have thought of reviving the play, but the trouble is that we cannot get Todd to provide the written music. He left South Africa some five years ago and went to London and finally ended up in Zambia. Although I have written to him there he has made no response. He suffers from melancholy and when this is upon him he does nothing - he neither works or makes music. The play was never published, and in fact it was written with the object of giving African Actors and Actresses a chance to display their gifts.

In regard to the play "Last Journey" I have a kind of recollection that I have already answered you on this point. I would certainly not think of having the play published. It deals with the life of Livingstone - I beg your pardon, it deals with the events after the death of Livingstone, when two of his faithful servants carried his body 900 miles to the Coast.

Your next question applies to any work which may be in progress at the moment. I wish I could say that there was but there is not, largely owing to the fact that my wife's health has deteriorated so much the last two years that I have not really been able to give my mind to any kind of creative work.

Your next question deals with the possibility of publishing Long View. A friend of mine in Cape Town was very anxious to do this and he approached the Oxford University Press which said unfortunately that they did not publish material of that kind. It seems to me that however important some people may think such a project to be, the climate here at the moment is not favourable. I do not think that your own suggestion is unrealistic at all and in my present situation I would be pleased indeed if you undertake it.

Now we come to the question of chronology. Let me first say I do not object at all to the method which you propose to use, namely, to publish pretty freely from the poems. I should make it clear to you that I have never really considered publishing a volume of poems. I have never, in fact, regarded myself as anything but an occasional poet. You mention the poem "To a Picture" and you say that if I would rather not have this piece appear could I substitute another. I am not sure which of two things you may mean - you might mean that I objected to having whole poems of mine quoted because it would in some way damage my chances of publishing. Or you might mean that I now regard the poem as immature and would be embarrassed by it. I would be glad to know just exactly what is in your mind. You are also free to use any quotations from the Forum. I may say to you that I do not object to the use of quotations at all, no matter how long they may be. I am sure that you would like to know the Librarian of the University of Natal is Miss Ruth Lundie, not a man as you apparently think.

I was also interested to note that you had already read "Waiting for Robert". The excitement of his visit is new ever but if you have been following our news you will know that certainly one of the consequences is that the Government now intends to exercise stricter control over the campuses.

Before I go on to discuss the excerpt from your first chapter I want to tell you that I am enclosing a poem called "The Prison House". Unfortunately I cannot remember the year in which it was written. It is, of course a christian poem and reading it after so many years, my opinion of it still remains favourable. Now, as you know, it often happens that when we read stuff that we wrote twenty or thirty years ago, we can barely tolerate it.

I am also sending you some other pieces because it seems to me that you have been so thorough in your work that I should help you further as far as I am able.

I am now going to deal with the chronology and then proceed to Chapter 1. Here are my comments.

- No.1. 1925. Instead of European say "White"
- No.2. 1928. Change Anglican Church, Pietermaritzburg to Anglican Church, Ixopo.
- No.3. 1946, Do not quite understand the sentence "Great Conference of Christians and Jews at Oxford".

I attended this Conference and was one of the Chairmen of its Committees but I do not understand why you call it "Great".

- No.4. 1952. I think that you might here put in some tactful reference to the fact that the work on Hofmeyr was put aside owing to the fact that Mrs. Hofmeyr, the Mother, took a dislike to the work and wanted it to be of quite a different Nature. I then decided not to proceed any further, in her lifetime.
- No.5. 1959. Change the word "lecture" to Sermon.
- No.6. 1960. When you deal with Mkhumbane, perhaps you could add some of the details of the anxious times in which it was performed.
- No.7. 1964. Your statement in regard to the trial is not quite true. I did not appear on behalf of the defendants, but I pleaded in mitigation because I feared that they would be sentenced to death.

Now we come to Chapter 1. Here are my comments.

No.1, page 13, line 3 of the poem. The word hilt-stabbed should read hilt-stabbed.

No.2, page 15, You say that both poems are presumably products of his lone camping trips. In fact, the camping trips were always made in the Company either of Pearce and Armitage or of Pearce alone. I never made a lone camping trip but I did walk through the country which is described in these two poems and at that time I was walking by myself.

No.3, page 18. You quote correctly as follows:- "I have come" he said, but I changed it in a later version to "This is mine" he said. I think the amendment is better.

No.4, page 18, beginning at the bottom line - your summing up of the next three lines is perfectly correct.

No.5, page 21. I am embarrassed by the quotation "It was necessary to point out to them that their compatriots in Natal were not of the same class". I do not for a moment, however, suggest that you should omit it. I have no time whatsoever for biography that omits details of which perhaps the biographic is now ashamed. In fact the comment was perfectly correct. Fifty-nine years ago the standards of Indian education in Natal were vastly lower than they are to-day, but nevertheless if I were making this remark to-day I would make it quite clear that the reason why their compatriots are not of the same class was because they had not enjoyed the same opportunities. Later down on the page you say that I was embarrassed to be embraced - well, that was also perfectly true and it is an embarrassment which I have, thank God, completely outgrown but an interesting remark would be made by you at this point, that it reminded you a good deal of the evolution of another South African, namely, Hofmeyr.

A few lines later I referred to the Native question in an incredibly naive manner. Again I would not wish for you to withdraw this statement but I think that you could soften it in some way by a comment of your own.

No.8. Are you sure that I described a certain part of the Natal countryside in that little book. You say that I describe the country round Ixope in the land and people of South Africa as the most beautiful in the world. I don't think that this is correct. I think that you may be thinking of the opening passages of "Cry, the Beloved Country".

Kind regards from,

Yours sincerely,