

27th August, 1963.

Mr. Bloke Modisane,
c/o John Rudd esq.,
2, Charterhouse Street,
LONDON. E.C.1.
England.

Dear Bloke,

Congratulations on your book "Blame Me On History". It was my intention to publish a review of the book in the next issue of "The Classic", or an excerpt from it. I have since learnt, however, that the book has been banned in South Africa. I hope, if anything, that this ban will enhance its success in other parts of the world.

You may know already that I am now editing a literary magazine in Johannesburg. I have written a number of letters to you in the past but it seems that none of them have reached you. Perhaps this is largely because I was writing to you through other peoples' addresses, as I did not have your own. One or two people from London and New York have promised to send me your address but I still have not got it. In my previous letters to you, I asked you to let me have your Mbari prize-winning short-story with a view to publishing it in "The Classic". I am still very keen to see this story. If, however, you would prefer to send me any other contributions I shall, of course, be very glad to receive them. Our deadline falls within the next ten days.

A young woman who now lives in New York, came through Johannesburg and took photographs from me (they were of yourself) which she said she intended giving to you. I wonder if you got them? She did say that you were keen on getting pictures of your daughter Chris. If you still are, please let me know because it should be very easy to have them taken and sent to you.

Johannesburg is a much changed place since you, and several other writing men left this country. I read with a sense of horror the other day that Sophiatown is not only to be occupied by immigrants from all over Europe, but

Mr. Bloke Modisane,

27/8/63.

is also to receive the name of "Verwoedsbag. Those of us who lived in Sophiatown, and loved it, were more than amazed to hear of this.

Finally, may I ask you to give me your frank opinion of the quality of the material in "The Classic", a copy of which I am sending to you. Without trying to influence you one way or the other, let me just say that we have had most encouraging and favourable reviews in Africa, Europe and the United States.

Until I hear from you,

Yours,

October 10, 1963.

Mr. Nathan Nakasa,
Editor,
the Classic,
P.O. Box 6434,
Johanneburg.

Dear Nat:

I hope you understand the disgusting delay in writing to you, but I presume you know what NATIVES are like; this consciousness makes me plead that I'm afflicted with this sore distraction, maybe these trivialities belong in another letter. Now to business.

The short story, THE SITUATION, which you requested was at the time in the hands of Atlantic Monthly, who are publishing extracts of BLAME ME in their November issue; there was a chance they might publish the story too, but they have masses of other material from 'African' writers such as Dan Jacobson, and so decided against it in favour of a more varied selection. So the story is now unfreezed, even though my agent told me that Harper's were looking at it; but this doesn't bother me, except that it insinuates a condition which I'm afraid to have to confront you with. I don't suppose your magazine can afford to pay contributors handsomely, so I think you'll understand that I can offer you only FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN SERIAL RIGHTS, that I reserve to myself the right to publish it again - not in South Africa, though - with perhaps a mention that it was published in 'the CLASSIC'. How's that?

My book has succeeded beyond all expectation, I am staggered by the reception it has had; the prospect of waking up to find myself actually famous is something I still haven't altogether come to understand or live with. Of course I'm sorry it has been banned in South Africa, someone has done the course of reason a disservice; anyway, I hope the decision will be reversed someday. But the book has been bought by America, E.P. DUTTON & CO.; Italy, GARZANTI; Germany, KNAUR; Sweden, BONNIERS (who have published all the Nobel Prize Winners for literature for the past forty years). I don't think this record should be spoilt, do you? Of course, not.

Rights have also been acquired by Norway, Denmark and Holland - Holland hasn't signed contracts yet, but I'm told it's in the bag. France hasn't bought yet, which is a pity because of the French African market; but I'm told the French are like that. But at present count I'm going to be translated into six foreign languages. And I always question my luck.

Last week I signed contracts for my second book, THE NONQGAUSA INCIDENT, which I have to deliver by December 1964; this generous concession is due to the fact that there's still so much material to be collected. I am also working with Raymond Kunene in translating about eighty of his poems, a project which has been dragging on for almost a year now because Raymond has a peculiar sense of discipline; anyway, it is hoped that sometime this year or next, I will have cornered him long enough to explain the intent, the central motive, of the poems I'm selecting. After that he can drop dead and I'll be able to do my translation. By the way, you may help me by suggesting a good Zulu-English and Xhosa-English dictionaries. The few I have done are really something.

I'm also compiling a collection of short stories which I intent to publish in the new year; as you'll notice in THE SITUATION all my stories are in and around the locations, with de manne as the characters. It's amazing that I had to come to London in order to see the people we called Tsotsis, to realise in them a zest for living, or the distruction of live, as a reflection of our times. I may be romanticising them, but in South Africa one say only the brutality and never the people themselves. They are a gift to fiction. In my stories of them I keep the violence only as backdrop, always implicit, never explicit; this way I can focus on them and avoid the blur caused by the violence. I have written four others, mainly about 'de manne' and artists.

I would be eternally grateful for photographs of Chris, I don't know what she looks like today; she and Fiki should join me by the end of the year, but still I'd love some photos of her.

I was faintly amused by the swollen-headed review of 'the CLASSIC' by Richard Rive; God, that chap is a pain, we had a marvellous verbal duel, with Mr. Rive, on the one side, arguing the South Africa 'logie' that I was all confused, that the arts in Cape Town are integrated - the sign of a solution to the country's problems. He was even more 'African' than I was, insinuating logic on an illogical situation; and because I hope to foster African solidarity I conceded him the courtesy to call me a lot of nasty names in the presence of a West Indian (playwright, Barry Reckord) and West African (playwright and poet, John Pepper Clark). Anyway, Mr. Rive stood out as the friend of the African. He emerged as a great friend of the African, he knows what the African thinks, feels and wants. I'm told one has to bear the infirmities of one's 'friends'.

How Nimrod? I've lost his address when I lost my address book, together with all my South African addresses. I would like to write to him. How's the Motsisi? Magubane? Anyway, remember me to all my friends. There are two women whose address I would like to track down, one is Martha Madumo, the other is Margaret 'Selloane' Sedume, who used to work for a tobacco company. She's sometimes known as 'Princess', and if you know Dwarf, he will know her. And if you should him pass him my address.

If you do nothing else for me, I would like you to buy me two penny whistles - a B-flat and a G; I believe there's a shop in Eloff Street, possibly called KOINORR, or something like that; they sell musical instruments, and they make penny whistles KOHINOR, which are solid ones. Please post them to me or if there's somebody coming to London in a week or two they might bring them over.

yours,
bloke

Bloke Modisane,
56 Eton Avenue,
London, N.W. 3.
Tel. PRIMROSE 5371

P.S. I've just discovered I only have the master copy of THE SITUATION. You'll have it soon as the typist has done copies. Sorry.

October 23, 1963.

Mr. Nathan Nakasa,
The Classic,
P.O. Box 6434,
Johannesburg.

Dear Nat:

Frightfully sorry about THE SITUATION; you see, my New York agent cabled me about a couple of days of writing to you, with the information that The Reporter had bought the story. This was even before I could write to you that I had transferred your request for the story to her, and even before I could write to her informing her of the decision to give the story to you. It's all terribly complicated. You see she handles all my work, and I suppose she has some say as to where or to whom I shall pass my work on to.

But I have here writ to her to contact you about a possible arrangement with THE SITUATION; she, of course, will hold out for the best possible terms. Perhaps the two of you might come to some ^uequitable arrangement. The story has, by the way, been bought by a German magazine which circulates also in Sweden, and my agent also informed me of placing it in Italy and France. At least, it seems, I might be able to make some money from it. The Reporter is paying handsomely, and one rather hopes the same will hold for the continent. I hope you do come to some arrangement.

The story had been floating around the magazines, being rejected by Esquire, The Yorker, and when I wrote to you I was slightly annoyed and hoped for the pleasure of seeing it published. But now, it seems that since I have been published magazines are beginning to discover me and actually asking for material. I'm flattered. Yet there's a possibility I could persuade my agent to consider your magazine for South African rights. You'll be hearing from her. Her name is Roslyn Seigel.

sincerely,

Bloke

bloke modisane

56 Eton Avenue,
London, N.W. 3.

24th October, 1963.

Mr. Bloke Modisane,
56, Eton Avenue,
LONDON N.W.3.
England.

Dear Bloke,

I have received your letter of the 10th October with thanks.

I am still busy collecting the various things you asked for and
I shall be writing to you later.

Yours always,

14th November, 1963.

Mr. Bloke Modisane,
56, Eton Avenue,
LONDON N.W.3.
England.

Dear Bloke,

Thanks for writing to explain about your story. I am afraid, however, that we won't be letting you off.

Our second issue is now out - please find a copy herewith. Once again I would like to hear what you think of it.

Before I start badgering you about a contribution let me tell you what I have done for you so far. The Zulu-English dictionary you asked me to recommend is by C. Doke and W.D. Vilakazi published by University Press c/o University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I have not been able to find your flute yet but have placed an order for it. I expect the photographs of Chris to be ready by next week.

Now to my business. Have you a story you can give me? Or could you not give me an article on your travels on the deep South? Something like an African In The South? I am not particularly fussy about the number of words but I suppose two or three thousand words would do. Please let me know about this as soon as possible because I would like to go to press in six weeks for the third issue.

If everything else fails you could give us a piece telling simply of your impressions of London and how you progressed from the time of your arrival to the days of "Blame Me On History". This would be of great help to people who are beginning to write here in South Africa.

Yours truly,

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