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Mr Langston Hughes
20 East 127th Street
New York 35
N.Y. U.S.A

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University College
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LANGSTON HUGHES AND THE SOUTH
AFRICAN *DRUM* GENERATION

The Correspondence

EDITED BY
SHANE GRAHAM AND JOHN WALTERS



Langston Hughes and the South African
Drum Generation

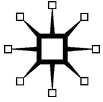
Langston Hughes and the South African *Drum* Generation

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Edited by
Shane Graham and John Walters

Introduction by
Shane Graham

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LANGSTON HUGHES AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN *DRUM* GENERATION
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★ ★ ★

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SHANE GRAHAM

Introduction

SHANE GRAHAM

The letters in this volume are a treasure trove of literary and historical materials. They document an important but until now mostly overlooked exchange during the middle of the twentieth century between representatives of two cultures separated by the Atlantic Ocean. When the correspondence began, in 1953, Langston Hughes was a giant of American literature: One of the central figures of the “Harlem Renaissance” of the 1920s, he is best remembered today for his poetry, but he also left his mark on the novel, the short story, the autobiographical memoir, the stage play, the opera, and the newspaper column. He was essentially the first African-American writer to make a living (albeit a precarious one) entirely through his writing and the lecture circuit. He had traveled all over the world, and by encouraging the many young writers he encountered in those travels, he helped usher in the national literatures of Cuba and Haiti.

Though he never traveled to South Africa, Hughes nevertheless helped to accomplish the same thing there through his involvement with Johannesburg-based *Drum* magazine. While he was judging a short story contest for the magazine, he made contact with Peter Abrahams, a mixed-race or “coloured” writer from Johannesburg who had already won international acclaim for his novels and his autobiography *Tell Freedom*. The other writers with whom Hughes struck up a long-distance friendship were largely unknown outside the readership of *Drum* magazine. But over the next decade, this cohort of artists would come to be recognized as the first great movement of black writers and artists in English in South Africa’s history: Peter Clarke from Cape Town penned a few short stories and poems,

but eventually turned his attentions to the visual arts and became one of South Africa's best-known and most sought-after painters and printmakers. Richard Rive—a high school teacher from Cape Town—would become one of the country's most celebrated writers of short stories and novels.

Three other South African artists with whom Hughes corresponded were central to what has become known as the “Sophiatown Renaissance.” Sophiatown was a black suburb of Johannesburg, often compared to Harlem, and celebrated and demonized in equal measure. Of the writers who made Sophiatown their intellectual home, Ezekiel Mphahlele had the longest and most successful career, with his autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*, his novels such as *The Wanderers*, and his nonfiction prose such as *The African Image* recognized as seminal texts of African literature. Bloke Modisane, the South African writer who seemingly formed the closest friendship with Langston Hughes, drew considerable attention in 1963 for his autobiography, *Blame Me on History*; although he never published another full-length work, he did become known for his work in theater, film, and radio. Todd Matshikiza was a musician and a much-loved jazz columnist for *Drum*, and wrote the score for the highly successful stage musical *King Kong*.

The letters to and from these men give us teasing but provocative glimpses into the personalities of the various writers—Hughes at the end of his life, the South Africans mostly at the beginnings of their careers. The letters show us compelling insights into a period of dramatic social and historical changes in both the United States and South Africa: a time when the United States was moving fitfully and unpredictably into the era of civil rights, while apartheid was growing more repressive and restrictive in South Africa. The correspondence shows us a thriving cultural and intellectual exchange across continents in an era when many might assume that the world was more compartmentalized and isolated than in our own time of globalization. Finally, the letters provide a “missing link” that illuminates the careers of one of America's greatest writers and several of South Africa's seminal artists from the mid-twentieth century.

Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance

Hughes was born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri. He spent much of his childhood in Lawrence, Kansas, living with his grandmother, but spent part of his grammar school years in Lincoln, Illinois, and attended high

school in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1919 he made a trip to Mexico to live with his father in Toluca; the stay was short-lived and ill-fated in terms of the father-son relationship, but it was on the train ride to Mexico that he penned his first mature poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," which remains one of his best-known works.

In 1921–1922, Hughes attended Columbia University in New York. He managed to earn decent grades, but found himself alienated by the racism he encountered there, and far more captivated by neighboring Harlem than by his studies. This was at a time when hundreds of thousands of blacks were migrating from the rural South to the industrial, urban North in search of economic opportunity; in New York, many of these black migrants settled in Harlem, and made it into a vibrant community teeming with cultural activity. Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican Black Nationalist leader, had established the U.S. branch of his Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem in 1917, and soon after began publishing the hugely popular and influential weekly newspaper *The Negro World*. Jazz was becoming popular nationwide, and whites flocked to Harlem for the speak-easies and jazz clubs.

Hughes moved to New York just as this "Black Renaissance" was beginning to take shape, as he describes in his first autobiography:

It was a period when local and visiting royalty were not at all uncommon in Harlem.... It was a period when Charleston preachers opened up shouting churches as sideshows for white tourists.... It was a period when every season there was at least one hit play on Broadway acted by a Negro cast. And when books by Negro authors were being published with much greater frequency and much more publicity than ever before or since in history.... It was the period when the Negro was in vogue.¹

Hughes had already begun to publish his poems in W.E.B. Du Bois's *Crisis* magazine; he soon found himself at the center of what Alain Locke would call "the New Negro Movement," along with James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston, to name only a few of the prominent black writers loosely based in Harlem during this period.

¹Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* [1940]. *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes Volume 13*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002, pp. 177–178.

Scholars in retrospect have dubbed this explosion of activity in literature, drama, music, dance, and art the Harlem Renaissance. It would come to be profoundly influential on future generations of black American writers, as well as on other cultural moments such as the “Negritude” movement, made up of African and black Caribbean students and intellectuals based in Paris in the 1930s through the 1950s. As we shall see, the Harlem Renaissance also exerted an enormous influence on the generation of black writers in South Africa that came of age in the 1950s.

As taken as he was with Harlem, Hughes was also restless and eager to see the world. After dropping out of Columbia, he took to the sea, and eventually joined the crew of the *West Hesseltine*, a steamship headed for the west coast of Africa in 1923. He had romanticized Africa in his earliest poems as a sort of ancestral homeland and the source of original black personality. Consider, for instance, the imagery of African rivers and drums in “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “Danse Africaine”:

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I’ve known rivers:
 I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow
 of human blood in human veins.
 . . .
 I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
 I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
 I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it. . . .²

Danse Africaine

The low beating of the tom-toms,
 The slow beating of the tom-toms,
 Slow . . . slow
 Low . . . slow—
 Stirs your blood.
 Dance! . . .³

²Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Eds. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. New York: Vintage Classic, 1994, p. 23.

³Hughes, *The Collected Poems*, p. 28.

In such works, the imagined figure of Africa was clearly the inspiration for Hughes's almost intuitive sense of Pan-Africanism and black cultural unity. African drums provide the heartbeat that binds together blacks throughout the African diaspora.

His autobiography described his first glimpse of the Senegalese coast in similarly romantic terms: "My Africa, Motherland of the Negro peoples! And me a Negro! Africa! The real thing, to be touched and seen, not merely read about in a book."⁴ However, once the novelty wore off, Hughes began to grow indignant at the European domination of Africans he encountered everywhere from Dakar to Angola.⁵ Moreover, he was disappointed by the reception he received from the Africans he encountered, whom he perceived as fellow Negroes despite his own mixed race and light complexion: "But there was one thing that hurt me a lot when I talked with the people. The Africans looked at me and would not believe I was a Negro."⁶

It would be more than thirty-five years before Hughes returned to Africa. In those years, he traveled extensively in Haiti, Cuba, and Trinidad, among many other countries—societies where his lighter skin and mixed-race heritage would have won him instant social prestige, had he desired it. Instead, as he did throughout his life, he allied himself with the darker-skinned poor, in a self-conscious assertion of Pan-African unity. If his first trip to Africa seemed to shake his confidence in that unity, it might also explain why, many years later, he would so eagerly strike up correspondence with the South African writers. Through his friendship with Modisane, Mphahlele, Rive, and the others, Hughes at last found the acceptance as an African he had always craved. We can see this in his obvious delight at being teasingly hailed by Bloke Modisane as "the greatest American Bantu I know" (January 18, 1961), in response to Hughes's own declaration that Modisane was "my favorite *Bantu* writer! In fact, my favorite Bantu" (December 4, 1960). "Bantu" is a word for black Africans, made derogatory by its association with apartheid, but reclaimed by Hughes and Modisane and transformed into an ironic term of affection.

⁴ Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 36.

⁵ Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes Volume I: 1902–1941: I, Too, Sing America*. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 77–78.

⁶ Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 36.

When the *West Hesseltime* docked in Europe after its trip along the west coast of Africa, Hughes left the ship and stayed for a while in Paris before returning to the United States. He did odd jobs while living with his mother in Washington, D.C., before enrolling at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where he became acquainted with future African statesmen Kwame Nkrumah of the Gold Coast (later Ghana) and Benjamin Azikiwe of Nigeria. After receiving his B.A., he moved to Harlem, where he would live for the rest of his life, though he continued to travel widely—in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, for example, and in Spain during the Civil War. In 1948 he bought the house at 20 East 127th Street, where he lived for the last two decades of his life and where he entertained Peter Abrahams, Bloke Modisane, Richard Rive, and of course many, many other prominent figures of his day.

It is difficult to overstate Langston Hughes's contributions to twentieth-century literature. He almost single-handedly invented "blues poetry," a form of verse that draws from African-American folk and urban traditions. As one critic declares, "Langston Hughes has been considered the most important of the Harlem Renaissance writers, and he had a special relationship with the blues tradition, considering it beautiful folk poetry worthy of comparison with the best folk literature in the world."⁷ Later he would accomplish a similar feat by incorporating the seemingly chaotic forms of bebop jazz into his verse. Hughes used the "street language" of black Americans as successfully as Mark Twain and William Faulkner developed their own vernacular prose styles. And all of Hughes's writings reveal the presence of a profound social conscience; in one critic's formulation, he "advanced, more than any other black artist, a concept of social art."⁸ Sometimes the social and political aspects of his writing landed him in controversy, most notably when he was accused of being a Communist and called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953. But as I will argue in the next section, Hughes's social art, and his development of an urban vernacular literature, exerted a huge influence on his protégés in South Africa,

⁷Steven C. Tracy, *Langston Hughes & the Blues*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 1.

⁸Maryemma Graham, "The Practice of a Social Art." *Langston Hughes: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993, p. 214.

who were searching for both a cosmopolitan urban identity and an aesthetic compatible with political protest. They found a model for both in the work of their American mentor.

By 1954, when Hughes began corresponding regularly with the South Africans, his career was in one of its periodic lulls. His column in the *Defender* continued to be widely read and influential, especially his stories based on the character Jesse B. Semple, which were anthologized in such collections as *Simple Speaks His Mind* and *The Best of Simple*. Hughes continued his lifelong attempts to achieve success on Broadway by writing the librettos for a number of musicals. But his reputation as America's preeminent black writer had long since been eclipsed by the enormous success of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), as well as by such rising stars as James Baldwin and Gwendolyn Brooks. Among intellectuals in Africa, however, Langston Hughes continued to be widely read and respected. His biographer Arnold Rampersad comments that "if, as his critics averred, he was finished in America, perhaps another country would have him—Africa. A world not new, but old and neglected, reopened quietly before him" when Henry Nxumalo of *Drum* magazine wrote to ask him to judge their short story competition.⁹

In Hughes's own words, the stories he read for that contest "moved, surprised, and quite delighted" him,¹⁰ so much so that after the contest ended he began collecting writing by black Africans for what became two anthologies, *An African Treasury* (1961) and *Poems from Black Africa* (1963). He originally conceived of the first volume as a collection of short stories, but as the editing process dragged on, it eventually grew to include articles, essays, and poems as well. He received more than one hundred submissions from writers across Africa; as he writes to Mphahlele, "a number of persons sent animal tales or folk stories, which is not the kind of material we can use in this anthology, since it is to be a book purely of creative fiction in the shorter form" (October 6, 1954). This proved to be an important criterion: Hughes's two anthologies were among the first of their kind, and played a crucial role in publicizing and legitimizing modern African literature. They showed the world the artistic potential in African writing, and took it far beyond

⁹Rampersad, *The Life*, Volume II, p. 236.

¹⁰Langston Hughes, "Introduction." *An African Treasury: Articles/Essays/Stories/Poems by Black Africans*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1960, p. 9.

the folktales that most readers in the 1960s would have associated with Africa (though *An African Treasury* did end up including a few folktales, perhaps at the insistence of the publisher).

Hughes continued to travel widely throughout the 1960s, including three trips to Africa—once in 1961 as a guest of his old classmate Benjamin Azikiwe, who was made governor general of Nigeria, and who would become its first prime minister two years later. During these travels he had the opportunity to meet many of the South African writers with whom he had been corresponding, including Mphahlele and Modisane. The renewed contact with Africa—this time not as an itinerant crewmember on a passing steamship, but essentially as a cultural ambassador from black America—had its effects on Hughes’s own writing. For one thing, it seems to have rekindled his interest in Africa as theme and content for his poems: He began in the late 1950s to publish poems with titles such as “Dixie South Africa” and “Angola Question Mark.” What’s more, the way in which he used images of and allusions to Africa in such works shows subtle maturation from his earliest verse. For example, “Cultural Exchange,” a poem from his 1961 masterpiece *Ask Your Mama*, depicts Africa not as a lost mythical motherland, but as a continent full of diverse countries—knowable places, full of real human beings engaged in real conflicts—and as part of a transatlantic black diaspora. Approximately midway through the poem, the speaker begins cataloging the names of prominent anticolonial African leaders (Nkrumah, Nasser, Azikiwe). The poet then links these names to others throughout the African diaspora:

CUBA CASTRO GUINEA TOURÉ
 FOR NEED OR PROPAGANDA
 KENYATTA
 AND THE TOM DOGS OF THE CABIN
 THE COCOA AND THE CANE BRAKE
 THE CHAIN GANG AND THE SLAVE BLOCK
 TARRIED AND FEATHERED NATIONS
 SEAGRAM’S AND FOUR ROSES
 \$5.00 BAGS A DECK OR DAGGA . . .¹¹

Here, Africa is a place where anticolonial nationalist leaders were engaged in fierce struggle, right at that moment, against European and

¹¹ Hughes, *The Collected Poems*, p. 479.

American domination, as they were in Castro's Cuba and around the world.

This passage also reveals how closely linked the Americas have become with the African continent in Hughes's mind: The cocoa grown in West Africa is juxtaposed to the cane brakes of the Caribbean, for example, and the Kenya of Jomo Kenyatta is linked to the antebellum United States through the oblique reference to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Tarring and feathering was an all too common fate meted out by lynch mobs to black victims in the American South, but here the term is applied to entire nations, suggesting that the colonial occupation of Africa constitutes lynching on a grand scale. And while "deck" was American slang for heroin, "dagga" is the South African word for marijuana—a term that Hughes no doubt picked up from his correspondence with the *Drum* writers. If Hughes had always seen Africa as the root or origin of black American culture, by the time he wrote this poem he had come to see it as a modern, living continent very much in constant dialog with the United States—a dialog he dramatizes through this series of juxtapositions. This evolution in his perspective, I believe, can be at least partly explained by his correspondence with the South African writers.

Of course, Africa was much in the news in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as one nation after another declared its independence from its former colonial rulers. Hughes seems to have found the process of decolonization inspiring for his own struggle in the United States, as he suggested in a speech at the opening of the U.S. Library in Accra, Ghana, in 1962:

Today, when America comes to Africa, as through these library shelves, to offer an *exchange* of knowledge (not merely to *give* in the old patronizing sense), America is bolstering her *own* basic dreams, and finding here in Africa a new strengthening of the old concept of freedom in your liberated lands. Black Africa today is sending rejuvenating currents of liberty over all the earth reaching even as far as Little Rock, Birmingham and Jackson, Mississippi.¹²

Doubtless, too, there are many other reasons for the sudden reemergence of African themes and issues in Hughes's writings from the mid-1950s. But the correspondence and friendship with a whole group

¹²Quoted in Rampersad, *The Life*, Volume II, p. 355.

of South African writers must surely have contributed greatly to his literal and figurative “return to Africa.” He responds to one of Rive’s long, chatty letters by saying: “That was a wonderful letter, yours, telling me more about South Africa, or at least the Cape Town area, than I’ve gotten before from any source” (October 6, 1954). Such a personal connection to the continent no doubt helps to account for the shift from writing about Africa as a distant abstraction in *The Weary Blues* to depicting it as a real, specific place in *Ask Your Mama* and other late verse.



When Rampersad was conducting research and interviewing people for his biography of Hughes, he came across one type of comment again and again: Hughes was always friendly and generous, but also intensely private, always keeping part of himself in reserve. Rampersad identifies a character in Wallace Thurman’s *Infants of the Spring* as a thinly veiled description of Hughes: He was “the most close-mouthed and cagey individual [Thurman] had ever known when it came to personal matters. . . . Either [Hughes] had no depth whatsoever, or else he was too deep for plumbing by ordinary mortals.” Arthur Koestler remembered Hughes as “very likeable and easy to get on with, but at the same time one felt an impenetrable, elusive remoteness which warded off all undue familiarity.”¹³

One gets the same sense from reading Hughes’s letters. He came closest to a true intimacy in the letters to Modisane, for whom he clearly felt much affection, calling him “Blokie” and “my favorite Bantu.” Yet even there he revealed few real emotions beyond this fraternal affection; for instance, in one letter he described the deaths of several mutual acquaintances in New York, but hid his personal reaction to those deaths behind a half-joking wish for Modisane to stay in good health: “Anyhow, I’ve bought at least 20 condolence cards since the first of the year. . . . Take care of YO’ SELF, old boy!” (March 27, 1965). In the penultimate letter in this volume, he passed on the news of the illness of Toy Harper, an old family friend and his housekeeper whom he loved and called “Aunt,” in a noncommittal postscript: “My Aunt, Mrs. Harper, is seriously ill in the hospital since Christmas. Seemingly not much hope” (January 24, 1967).

¹³ Quoted in Rampersad, *The Life*, Volume I, pp. 119 and 260.

Despite his caution and reserve, though, Hughes emerges in these letters as an intensely generous man, especially toward emerging young writers like those of the *Drum* generation. He had always gone out of his way to encourage other writers: He translated the works of Nicolás Guillén of Cuba and Jacques Roumain of Haiti when no one in the English-speaking world knew their names,¹⁴ and he helped launch the careers of countless young African-American poets, playwrights, and novelists. Hughes's embrace of the South African writers was simply a continuation of his lifelong mission of nurturing national literatures where none previously existed, and the letters from those writers acknowledged their debt and gratitude. Rive wrote: “[Y]ou more than anyone else induced me to continue writing when things were at a low ebb, and brother, I ain’t gonna look back” (September 28, 1963). And Modisane told Hughes: “You have always made me feel that maybe something good will come out of me yet; when I think I’m going mad, you tell me: nuts” (May 31, 1962). Hughes sent books, records, clothes, and money to the South Africans; arranged lecture tours for several of them; and introduced them to publishers, agents, radio producers, and other people who were invaluable to their careers. Ironically, he even introduced some of the writers to each other: Rive and Clarke, for instance, knew each other as children, but reconnected via their mutual acquaintance with Hughes. And Rive met Modisane for the first time on a trip to London. Through his tireless efforts and unflagging generosity, Hughes, before his death in May 1967, did as much as anyone to midwife into existence a whole generation of great black writers in English in South Africa.

South Africa and the *Drum* Generation

By the time the editors of *Drum* first contacted Langston Hughes, Europeans had occupied southern Africa for three centuries, dating

¹⁴For discussions of Hughes's influence on these and other Caribbean writers, see: Keith Ellis, “Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes: Convergences and Divergences.” *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans Before the Cuban Revolution*. Eds. Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 1998, pp. 129–167. Monika Kaup, “‘Our America’ That Is Not One: Transnational Black Atlantic Disclosures in Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes.” *Discourse* 22.3 (2000): 87–113. Vera M. Kutzinski, “Fearful Asymmetries: Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, and Cuba Libre.” *Diacritics* 34.3 (2006): 112–140. Edward J. Mullen, *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti*. North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1977.

back to the first Dutch settlement of the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. Although a majority of the white population continued to be “Afrikaners” (people of Dutch descent), the Cape Colony fell under British control in the early nineteenth century, and remained a British colony through the first half of the twentieth century, even while becoming part of the self-governing Union of South Africa in 1910.

Racial domination and white supremacy formed the backdrop to this history from the beginning. Despite the formation in 1912 of an opposition group that would come to be called the African National Congress, the South African parliament in 1913 passed the Natives’ Land Act, which appropriated most of the country’s arable land for whites and relegated black Africans to distant reservations. Blacks and most Indians and “coloureds” (people of mixed African, white, and Asian descent) were denied the vote and subjected to restrictions on where they could live, work, and even travel.

These restrictions were codified and standardized with the 1948 election of the Afrikaner-dominated National Party, which instituted a policy it called apartheid, or “separate development.” One of the crucial early laws passed by the new legislature was the Population Registration Act of 1950, which assigned every individual in the country to a racial category that determined one’s level of privilege in the society. Under apartheid it was illegal for non-whites to live with, sleep with, or marry a person of another race; to own land in most parts of the country; to work in most professions; to attend most universities; to drink alcohol; to swim on white beaches, sit on “whites only” benches, ride on white train cars, or eat in white restaurants. Protest against these laws was criminalized and often met with incarceration, torture, and even murder by the police. The government also had the power to place individuals under “banning orders,” which restricted their movements, made it illegal for them to meet with more than one person at a time, and prohibited their writings from being published.

The apartheid government likewise practiced heavy-handed censorship of books, movies, music, and art. Hughes’s *An African Treasury* was banned after its publication, as were books by Abrahams, Matshikiza, Modisane, Mphahlele, and Rive at various times.¹⁵ As Rive complains

¹⁵ For a complete database of publications censored under apartheid, see the Beacon for Freedom of Expression website: http://www.beaconforfreedom.org/search/censored_publications/

repeatedly and bitterly (e.g., September 7, 1963), possessing a copy of his own book was punishable with jail time and heavy fines. White writers like Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer often had international connections, and could circumvent such censorship by publishing their books in London and New York. Black writers were rarely so fortunate, and sometimes had to leave the country altogether before their works could be published. These censorship policies under apartheid thus partly explain why so many of the writers in this volume were forced to go into exile, and why Clarke, Mphahlele, and others wrote for *Drum* under pseudonyms.

One of the most oppressive and controversial apartheid laws was the Group Areas Act of 1950. Under this legislation, the government had the power to declare any residential zone habitable by only one racial group, and to forcibly remove residents of other races. It was the Group Areas Act that led to the destruction of two of South Africa's most famous urban areas: Sophiatown in Johannesburg, and District Six in Cape Town. These communities had to be removed because they posed a threat to the racist underpinnings of apartheid. The Nationalist government insisted that racial harmony was possible only by keeping each group separate from the others, but in Sophiatown the mostly black residents lived amicably next to Indians in the neighboring "Western Areas"; District Six was predominately coloured and "Cape Malay," but those residents coexisted more or less peacefully with black and even white neighbors. The apartheid government also patronizingly insisted that black Africans could never be happy in the cities, and should instead be protected from vice and corruption in their remote rural "homelands." Sophiatown gave the lie to these assertions, as multiple generations of Africans had grown up in the city and were perfectly urbanized and modernized. For these and other reasons, the government condemned Sophiatown and District Six as slums, declared them "whites only" neighborhoods, and, in the midst of great controversy and resistance, removed the residents to distant townships and tore down their old homes.

The government was not exactly lying when it called these urban areas "slums." In an early letter to Hughes, Rive describes the District Six in which he grew up:

District Six is a Coloured slum area, and notorious throughout the Union as the breeding place of the Skollie. He is the Coloured tough. He wears a distinctive garb, cloth-cap worn back to front, short trousers just below the knees, buckle-belt back to front, and

lives a life of gambling, petty-robbery, dagga [marijuana]-smoking, and drinking cheap Cape wines and making himself generally objectionable and a “Non-European” problem. (December 17, 1954)

Similarly, Sophiatown was home to the “tsotsi,” a stylish breed of gangster who ruled the Western Areas through violence and fear.

Yet for all their danger and squalid poverty, Sophiatown and District Six were vibrant places full of life and cultural activity, and both have been endlessly feted in South African literature and culture in the aftermath of their razing. In his autobiography, Modisane says that the jazz music that permeated Sophiatown contained a “strange mixture of sadness and joy [which] is perhaps the real heartbeat—the song of Sophiatown, whose destruction had shocked and angered me so profoundly.”¹⁶ Mike Nicol has described it as a “place of jazz and beauty queens, of gangsters, folk heroes and witch-doctors, a vibrant, laughing, deadly world.”¹⁷ While in his autobiography Rive resists the impulse to romanticize “slum life,” describing it as “damp, dirty and dank,” he nevertheless complains about the way in which the white minority government robbed him and his fellow residents of their autonomy through the forced removals from District Six: “No White authority had ever bothered to ask me whether they could take my past away. They simply brought in their bulldozers.”¹⁸

Sophiatown in particular looms large in the cultural and literary history of twentieth-century South Africa; indeed, in the 1950s it witnessed an outpouring of cultural activity—especially in literature and music—that has often been called the “Sophiatown Renaissance” and been compared to Harlem’s “New Negro” movement.¹⁹ Sophiatown was so important not least because it was home to so many of the writers for *Drum* magazine, which was owned and edited by whites, but most of whose staff was black. In addition to the writers whose letters are represented in this collection, the magazine helped launch the careers of Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba, Arthur Maimane,

¹⁶ Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963, p. 119.

¹⁷ Mike Nicol, *A Good-Looking Corpse*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1991, p. ix.

¹⁸ Richard Rive, *Writing Black*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1981, pp. 4–5.

¹⁹ See, for example, Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 13.

and others whose work helped define what has been called “the *Drum* Decade.”²⁰

Drum was first published out of Cape Town in 1951, initially under the name *African Drum*. When its brand of popular anthropology focusing on African rural “tradition” failed to sell satisfactorily among the target audience of working-class black readers in the cities, the publisher brought in a new editor from England, Anthony Sampson, and relocated the editorial offices to Johannesburg. One of the first things Sampson did was to conduct informal surveys of potential readers, who told him scornfully: “Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don’t care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo, and hot dames! Yes, brother, anything American.” And: “*Drum’s* what white men want Africans to be, not what they are. . . . And we’re trying to get away from our tribal history just as fast as we can. We don’t want *Drum* to remind us.”²¹

Indeed, after the magazine was renamed and its editorial philosophies overhauled, the secret to its success was in catering to the urban, cosmopolitan identity that blacks in the big cities envisioned for themselves: “The flashy muck-raking journalistic style attempted to capture the vivid life of the townships. *Drum* became a symbol of a new urban South Africa, centred on and epitomised by Sophiatown.”²² And because many urban black South Africans rejected the vision of the tribal past being foisted on them by the apartheid government, they instead looked across the ocean to America for models of the urban identity they desired.

Hollywood movies played a big role, especially for the tsotsis who idolized and mimicked the styles and mannerisms of film gangsters. But black Americans in particular captivated the imagination of black South Africans: actors such as Paul Robeson, sports figures such as Joe Louis and Arthur Ashe, religious missionaries from the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and magazines such as *Ebony*. Mphahlele writes that “this was the overall message that leapt out of every page of *Ebony*: achievements of the black race. Something to celebrate. And oh, how badly *we* needed that in our corner of Africa. Come Sunday

²⁰Michael Chapman, ed. *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001.

²¹Anthony Sampson, *Drum: The Newspaper That Won the Heart of Africa*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1957, pp. 20–21.

²²Paul Gready, “The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties: The Unreal Reality of Their World.” *Readings in African Popular Fiction*. Ed. Stephanie Newell. Bloomington/Oxford: Indiana University Press/James Currey, 2002, p. 146.

afternoon, you heard from a good few homes in any ghetto township the sound of jazz records.”²³

The influence of American jazz was especially strong in Johannesburg: “Above all, it was swing, the blues, and jazz... that took root and inspired, helping South Africa’s most scintillating performers—Miriam Makeba, Dolly Rathebe, Hugh Masekela, and Abdullah Ibrahim—grow cosmopolitan in Sophia.”²⁴ One of Clarke’s letters reveals that jazz was enormously popular in Cape Town as well: “One thing about apartheid, it has made many Coloured people aware of people of similar colour who happen to be living in other countries, especially America. It has also made them aware of the talented musicians in the States and such names as Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald are household words” (May 2, 1955).

I have already noted Langston Hughes’s own interest in jazz and the blues, and his use of such musical genres in his writing. He described his 1948 poem “Montage of a Dream Deferred” as “marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms... punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks and distortions of the music of a community in transition.”²⁵ Urban South Africans in the 1950s constituted a similar “community in transition,” and it is easy to see Hughes’s poetry as a forerunner of, if not a direct influence on, Matshikiza’s idiosyncratic, jazzy prose style in his *Drum* columns: Matshikiza devised an “‘authentic voice’ for *Drum* journalism and of the emergent black modernism [that] was achieved by bringing its style closer to jazz music, and through this turn to musicality to the speech of the urban black community.”²⁶ Even for Rive, who admitted to Hughes that he knew little about jazz (May 4, 1955), the American poet’s invention of a blues vernacular must surely have had a direct influence on Rive’s writing, as when he splices African gospel lyrics into the prose of his short story “African Song.”

The notion of a genealogy of influence linking African-American literature and the *Drum* generation seems very plausible when we consider how many South Africans have claimed the Harlem Renaissance

²³ Ezekiel Mphahlele, “Your History Demands Your Heartbeat: Historical Survey of the Encounter Between Africans and African Americans.” *Es’kia*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2002, p. 161.

²⁴ Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p. 12.

²⁵ Hughes, *The Collected Poems*, p. 387.

²⁶ Michael Titlestad, *Making the Changes: Jazz in South African Literature and Reportage*. Pretoria/Leiden: University of South Africa Press/Brill, 2004, p. 50.

as inspiration and as a literary model. Rive declared this in his first letter to Hughes: “[T]he first literature of this nature which I read was your *Ways of White Folks* which I read when I was ten years old” (not dated, 1954). Abrahams made the same declaration about discovering Hughes’s work in Alain Locke’s *New Negro* anthology as a “semi-literate youngster in Johannesburg”: “That discovery made all the difference in the world to my life because till then literature, like so much else had seemed to me to be ‘Reserved for Europeans only’” (January 14, 1954).

Both authors repeated these claims in their autobiographies. Abrahams, for instance, described coming across *The New Negro* in the Bantu Men’s Social Centre, and thinking: “These poems and stories were written by Negroes! Something burst deep inside me. The world could never again belong to white people only!”²⁷ And long after Hughes and Richard Wright had both died, Mphahlele lauded them for their influence on his own prose: “Although [Hughes] did not have the driving diction that was Wright’s trademark, in their own gentle and almost unobtrusive manner Langston’s short fiction and poetry did things to me. I realized later that I had needed them both—those two antithetical idioms of black American expression, Wright’s and Langston’s.”²⁸ In short, at a time when black South African writers were struggling against apartheid policies designed to impose a rural, tribal identity on their people, they were able to turn to African-American literature and culture in general, and Langston Hughes’s work in particular, to help them establish an urban, modern, and cosmopolitan identity.



Just as the Harlem Renaissance effectively ended with the stock market crash of 1929 and the beginning of the Great Depression, so the *Drum* generation as an artistic movement experienced a disappointingly early demise. *Drum* magazine continued to publish for many years, but after

²⁷ Peter Abrahams, *Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa*. New York: Knopf, 1956, p. 226. See also Rive, who described the revelatory impact of discovering black American literature: “Then I read Richard Wright, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, and discovered Bigger Thomas and Cora who was unshamed and Big Boy who left home, and Simple.” *Writing Black*, p. 10.

²⁸ Es’kia Mphahlele, “The Sounds Begin Again.” *Renewal Time*. London: Readers International, 1981, p. 21.

its initial heyday in the mid-1950s, it changed its editorial policies—ceasing to publish literary fiction altogether, for example, and generally refusing to publish anything that might attract unwanted attention from the government. The demolition of Sophiatown was completed by 1963, but the evictions had emptied it of most of its inhabitants years before. Forced removals destroyed District Six in Cape Town not long after, and by then most of the staff writers for *Drum* had died or gone into exile.

Peter Abrahams (born 1919) had left the country many years earlier, as he was unable to fulfill his ambitions as a writer under the restrictions put on coloured men in South Africa. In 1939 he moved to England, where he met his wife Daphne, established his career as a novelist with the publication of *Song of the City* (1945) and *Mine Boy* (1946), and occasionally had his writings serialized in *Drum*. His 1956 novel, *A Wreath for Udomo*, was dedicated to Langston Hughes, who wrote “to thank you for dedicating that beautiful *Udomo* to me” (March 16, 1959). In 1959 Abrahams moved to Jamaica, where he has lived ever since.

William “Bloke” Modisane (born 1923), who worked as a journalist for *Drum* and published a handful of short stories in its pages, emigrated to London in 1959. His autobiography, *Blame Me On History*, was published in 1963 to great acclaim, but he never published another book. He worked as an actor and broadcaster before his death in West Germany in 1986.

Todd Matshikiza (born 1921), a musician who wrote the jazz column for *Drum* in its earliest days, also moved to London in 1960, where he achieved modest fame as the composer of *King Kong* when it was performed on the West End in 1961. In 1964 he moved to Zambia, where he briefly worked for the Zambian Broadcasting Corporation. He died in 1968, a year after Langston Hughes’s death.

Ezekiel “Es’kia” Mphahlele (born 1919), who had published his first book of short stories in 1947, was forced out of teaching by his opposition to the Bantu Education Act, and briefly taught in Basutoland (now Lesotho) in 1954. His short story “Suburban Train,” submitted under the pen name Bruno Esekie, came in third in *Drum*’s 1953 short story competition. After returning to South Africa and completing his B.A. at the University of South Africa, he worked as a journalist and fiction editor for *Drum* from 1955 to 1957, but was “disappointed to find that my views were rather more left wing than those of the

black editorial staff.”²⁹ He emigrated to Nigeria in 1957, where he still lived when his celebrated autobiography *Down Second Avenue* was published in 1959. He moved to Paris in 1961 to work for the Congress of Cultural Freedom, then traveled throughout Africa before settling in Nairobi between 1963 and 1966. He enrolled in the PhD program in creative writing at the University of Denver in 1966, and returned to Denver as a professor in 1970. He lived there until 1977, when he at last returned to South Africa and eventually took a post at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, where he remained an emeritus member of the academic staff until his death in 2008. Of all the South African writers whose letters are collected in this volume, Mphahlele was certainly the most prolific and internationally recognized. Aside from the works already mentioned, he is best remembered for his short stories, especially those in the collection *In Corner B* (1967), for his novel *The Wanderers* (1969), and for his second autobiography, *Afrika My Music* (1984), as well as for numerous essays and works of criticism.

The two Cape Town writers are the only ones represented here who did not spend significant and sustained time in exile. Peter Clarke (born 1929), writing under the pseudonym Peter Kumalo, was a finalist in the 1953 *Drum* short story contest for “Death in the Sun,” and won first prize the following year for “The Departure.” He also dabbled in poetry—Hughes published three short pieces in his *Poems from Black Africa*—but Clarke’s deepest love was for the visual arts, and for several decades now he has been one of South Africa’s best known and most in-demand painters and printmakers. He still lives in Cape Town.

After Mphahlele, Richard Rive (born 1931) had the most successful career as a writer. He took second prize in the *Drum* competition two years in a row, for “The Return” in 1953 and “Black and Blue Song” in 1954. He won acclaim for his story collection *African Songs* (1963), which he dedicated to Hughes “because I feel that if any, you have through your letters done a helluva lot to encourage me to continue writing” (January 5, 1962). Rive’s novel *Emergency* (1964) was also well reviewed. He traveled around Europe and Africa on a fellowship in 1963, spent a year in New York working on a master’s

²⁹ Quoted in N. Chabani Manganyi, *Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983, pp. 122–123.

degree in literature at Columbia University, and did his PhD work at Oxford from 1971 to 1974. He began publishing again prolifically in the 1980s, including his autobiography *Writing Black* (1981), a collection of stories called *Advance, Retreat* (1983), and the novel *Buckingham Palace, District Six* (1986). Rive was murdered in his home in Cape Town in 1989; his posthumous novel *Emergency Continued* was published the following year.

With this collection, we in no way wish to suggest that these are the only black or coloured writers worth noting from South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Aside from the other *Drum* writers, such as Maimane, Nakasa, Nkosi, and Themba, there were major writers in Cape Town at the time, especially Alex La Guma. The authors included here are simply artists who sustained a correspondence with Langston Hughes over this twelve-year period. As representatives of the *Drum* generation, however, these figures offer us an invaluable glimpse into an important and fascinating moment in South Africa's literary and cultural history through their letters.

About the Letters

This volume is somewhat slighter than we originally intended: We were unable to secure permission to reproduce the letters by Peter Abrahams and Bloke Modisane in their entirety, and have had to resort to summarizing the content of those letters using only brief excerpts. Likewise, we have been unable for various complicated reasons to include Hughes's letters to and from Bessie Head, which are kept in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library.

As for the letters that are included: Langston Hughes was a dedicated pack rat and a scrupulous record-keeper, especially in his more financially stable later years; as a general rule, he kept every letter he received, and made carbon copies of his own letters to keep in his files. Moreover, the staff of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University has done a thorough and meticulous job of cataloging their massive collection of Hughes's papers. Nevertheless, there are some gaps in the correspondence: We do not have the initial letters Hughes sent to Matshikiza, Modisane, or Mphahlele, for example, and there are occasional references to letters that do not seem to have survived. What's more, of course, Hughes met many of these writers at

various points during his travels or when they visited the United States. As a result, there are subtexts and “inside jokes” about which we can only surmise. This is especially true of the correspondence between Hughes and Modisane—Hughes, for instance, liked to tease his South African friend for his philandering exploits on their trip together to Spoleto.

The reader will no doubt notice that all of the writers represented in these pages are men. In part this reflects the gender politics of *Drum*, with “its relentless machismo: the atmosphere was airlessly male and sometimes misogynistic.”³⁰ It also reflects the reality of literary production among black South Africans of the era: “Only two black South African women published books written in English in the 1960s—Noni Jabavu and Bessie Head—and both did so from outside the country. . . . Head survived as a writer in spite of *Drum*,” not because of it.³¹ Finally, the focus on male writers reflects the state of Hughes’s archives. He mentions in several letters an ongoing correspondence with Sylvia Jacobs or Sylvia Titus (the same woman?), but we could find no sign of this correspondence in the Beinecke Library, nor could we find any information about this person’s identity. There are a few letters among Hughes’s papers to and from Phyllis Ntantala, a Cape Town journalist and wife of the famous writer and academic A.C. Jordan; Ntantala’s article “The Widows of the Reserves” appears in *An African Treasury*. However, we have omitted those letters, partly because Ntantala had no apparent connection to *Drum* or the other writers, and partly because the letters are almost entirely composed of mundane details about the anthology and about the Jordans’ move to the United States. Regrettably, then, this volume suffers the same gender imbalance exhibited by midcentury South African literature in general.

Because the surviving letters from Hughes are carbon copies, most of them are missing the signature that Hughes would add by hand after typing the letters. Rather than guessing whether he signed any given letter “Langston Hughes,” or “Langston,” or simply “Lang,” we have elected to leave the signature lines blank, except where an

³⁰Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p. 20.

³¹Dorothy Driver, “*Drum Magazine (1951–9) and the Spatial Configurations of Gender.*” *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*. Eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner, and Sarah Nuttall. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 231.

actual signature is shown on the archival copies. In most of his letters Hughes used ellipses to indicate a change in topic, much like paragraph breaks. His ellipses can be distinguished from our own editorial interventions because his generally consist of five or more periods in a row.

The stories contained in what the letters do not say are almost as interesting as the stories that are told. For example, the correspondence between Hughes and Rive flowed quite heavily in the mid-1950s, and again in the early 1960s; clearly Rive was determined to maintain a relationship with this valuable and esteemed contact. Ironically, though, when Rive spent a year at Columbia University, he was apparently able to see Hughes only once, when the American invited the South African over to meet Arna Bontemps. Indeed, Rive complained in a letter halfway through his stay in the States: "It seems easier seeing you from South Africa than trying to find you in Harlem. If writers need as close a security guard as that, I'm giving up" (January 25, 1966). Whether the famously reserved Hughes was cautious of Rive's presumption of familiarity now that the latter was living so close by, or he was simply very busy that year, is impossible to say.

There is a chronological gap in most of the files between 1957 and 1960. The correspondence with Rive, Clarke, and Mphahlele was fairly regular between 1954 and 1957, partly because those are the years when Hughes was soliciting stories for his planned anthology of African short fiction. The project then stalled due to difficulties convincing presses to publish the collection, and presumably Hughes grew busy attending to other projects. When Crown finally agreed to publish the anthology with a somewhat revised scope, the letters came more frequently again, and began to include letters to and from Matshikiza and Modisane.

We have treaded lightly in cutting material from the exchanges. Even the relatively mundane letters offer us insights into the lives of the authors: When Clarke describes his visits to local art galleries, for instance, it shows us what kinds of cultural opportunities were available to coloured people in Cape Town in the late 1950s; and Hughes's accounts of his travels make clear how busy this cultural ambassador for black America was in his final decade. The few excisions we have made mostly concern the details of compiling and editing the anthologies (which quickly grow redundant), exchanges about judging the story competitions for *Drum*, passing on the addresses of friends, and so on.

The main reason we have kept so many of the letters intact, however, is that we find the stories they tell—of professional relationships and personal friendships growing, evolving, and sometimes fading over time and across continents—compelling and interesting in their own right. We hope the reader will agree, and will come away from this volume with a deeper understanding of these narrow but important facets of American and South African cultures.

Shane
April 23, 2010
10:05 AM

Sent, July 24, 1954: THE WEARY BLUES 2
WAYS OF WHITE FOLKS
LAUGHING TO K. F. C.

Dear Mr Hughes,
I have received your very interesting and encouraging letter. I'm afraid I do not conform to the pattern of starving-in-the-attic writers. I merely felt like it so I wrote. Unfortunately I have only three or four other short stories, but at the moment it is University Vacation (I am at University of Cape Town) and I mean to write. I assure you that within six weeks I will be able to send you at least half-a-dozen short stories following the theme of 'The Returns'.
It will also interest you to know that the first literature of this nature which I read was your 'Way of White Folks', which I read when I was ten years old. Since then I have voraciously read Richard Wright, Walter White, Du Bois and any literature on racialistic problems I could lay hands on. However I have never since been able to lay hands on 'Way of White Folks' in any library in Cape Town. In fact with the exception of 'The Big Sea' your works are conspicuous by their absence. Sir I would indeed deem it a great honour if you could procure for me a copy of 'Way of White Folks'.

I am also as interested in American racialistic problems as you are, I presume, in South African problems I hope it will be possible for an interchange of ideas to take place, if I can call upon your time. The South African 'problem' is unique, and I will be at hand to give you up-to-the-minute news, and more important, views of the oppressed rather than those allowed out for propaganda purposes. There is a spirit of 'New Africa' awakening in the Dark Continent, in conformity with the rise of colonial masses in the rest of the world. Again, thank you for your kind letter and I hope to hear from you soon.
Yours Sincerely,
Richard Rive

Figure 1 Letter from Richard Rive to Langston Hughes, not dated, ca. July 1954. Published with permission of the estate of Richard Rive. Image courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Letters, 1953–1954

April 7, 1953

HENRY NXUMALO [JOHANNESBURG] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Nxumalo, acting as assistant editor for Drum magazine, is responding to a card that Hughes had sent to the magazine, and asks Hughes if he will act as a judge for the international short story competition and choose winners from the top ten finalists. He also asks Hughes to find “some nonwhite writers in the States” to contribute to Drum.

★ ★ ★

April 17, 1953

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **HENRY NXUMALO** [JOHANNESBURG]

Dear Mr. Nxumalo,

I was very happy to have your recent letter. And I have certainly enjoyed the few issues of *Drum* that I have seen in this country. Miss Kwankwa writes that she will see that I get a copy every month. Certainly I would be pleased to have it, and will do a column about the magazine in the *Chicago Defender* for which I write.

I would be delighted to act as a judge for your short story contest, and I am sending you a picture under separate cover as well as a sheet of biographical information about myself.

Last night I spoke to one of our best young Negro writers and journalists who says that he would be happy to contribute to your magazine:

Mr. Alvin Cooper
178 Stanton Street
New York 2, New York

If you will let me know what sort of articles you might like, perhaps I can do something for *Drum* myself, and I will also speak to other writers regarding contributions.

All my good wishes to you,

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

June 12, 1953

HENRY NXUMALO [JOHANNESBURG] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Nxumalo responds, thanking Hughes for agreeing to serve as a judge for the contest and for writing a profile of Drum in the Chicago Defender. He also asks whether Hughes thinks the Defender might be interested in having Nxumalo serve as a South African correspondent.

★ ★ ★

July 3, 1953

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **HENRY NXUMALO** [JOHANNESBURG]

Dear Mr. Nxumalo,

Thanks for your very nice letter which came while I was away for six weeks in California. No copies of *Drum* have arrived as yet. Here's hoping.

I've transmitted to the editor of the *Defender*, Mr. Louis Martin, your interest in possibly writing for them.

In Germany just now there is an intense interest in Negro literature, and two or three anthologies of American work are in preparation. But one editor is planning a world anthology of poetry by Negroes and poets of color. He would welcome receiving books or manuscripts of poems by any African coloured or Negro writers. Whatever you could send him, or advise others to send him, should be addressed to:

Herr Janheinz Jahn
Dahlmannstrasse 42,
Frankfurt Main,
Germany (West)

He himself is a very good translator into German.

Lots of good wishes to you, as ever,

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

January 9, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK]

Dear Peter Abrahams:

We here in this country admire your work a great deal, and so it made me very happy indeed to receive from Victor Gollancz, Ltd., a copy of the very kind and generous letter which you wrote to Mrs. Sheila Hodges regarding *Simple Takes a Wife*. I am so glad you like *Simple* and greatly appreciate your taking the time and trouble to say so.

I have received many fine letters from readers in South Africa, some of whom have mentioned you in very high terms, particularly the folks who work on *Drum* magazine, and Sylvia Jacobs in Cape Town.

I do not know whether you are familiar with my short stories or not, and so I am taking the liberty of sending you copies of them by ordinary mail.

I wish you continued success and a very happy New Year.

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

January 14, 1954

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Abrahams writes back to Hughes expressing his admiration for his work and recalling his first encounter as a teenager with Hughes's poetry in Alain Locke's New Negro anthology: "That discovery made all the difference in the world to my life because till then literature, like so much else had seemed to me to be 'Reserved for Europeans only'—the sign with which I grew up." Abrahams plans to write as much in his forthcoming autobiography, Tell Freedom, and his agent will soon contact Hughes for permission to quote a poem. He might receive a grant to reside and work in the United States, though he has some trepidation about moving there because of the country's racial problems.

Abrahams thanks Hughes for sending the collection of stories, and mentions reading other works by the American in various anthologies.

★ ★ ★

February 1, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK]

Mr. Peter Abrahams,

On Wednesday, February 17, at 20.15–21.45 P.M. (8:15 to 9:45 P.M.) Radio Vara, Hilversum, Holland, will broadcast over wavelength 402 meters my opera, *The Barrier*, libretto by Langston Hughes, and score by Jan Meyerowitz, with leading Dutch opera stars, actors, and a full symphony orchestra, a full-length performance of this work for the first time in Europe. I hope you will be able to listen to it. Please let me know if you hear it or not, and what you think of it.

How nice it will be to see you in the U.S.! You and your family will get along fine—at least in the North. New York is racially almost like London. And you can lecture at the colleges here, various, and the Negro ones in the South. I've already told two you might be coming. Recently I've judged a short story contest for *Drum* (Johannesburg) and liked some of the stories very much. I think I could get an *Anthology of African Negro Short Stories* published (by Negro in U.S. we mean Colored, too) in this country. Do you yourself have any short stories which might be included in such an anthology? Could you give me the addresses of any other good South African (or any African) writers of color whom I might ask to submit material, either in Africa or in England? I'd appreciate this immensely, and would undertake to edit such a book if I can find 10 or 12 more good stories. Well, I am off tonight for a lecture trip to Virginia for a week, so will close with continued best wishes to you,

Sincerely,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

February 20, 1954

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Abrahams and his wife listened to The Barrier and “were very greatly impressed by it”: “It seemed to me a most faithful musical dramatisation of the mood as well as the contents of the story, and the Dutch artists did it full justice. Jan Meyerowitz was here at my house briefly over last Christmas but I didn’t know he knew you or had collaborated with you.” He asks for more time to send Hughes a list of writers to contact in connection with the anthology Hughes wants to edit, and offers to contact Drum to ask for their help with that project. “I myself haven’t written any short stories for an awfully long time but I’m sure I can dig up something either from one or two of the early books whose copyright I control or, at a pinch, write a couple though I’m doing my damndest to get through a novel at the moment and moving terribly slowly.”

★ ★ ★

May 25, 1954

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Abrahams apologizes for the delay in writing again, and mentions that Drum is planning its own anthology of African short stories. He adds, “I am tremendously pleased with the impact of Simple on the readers of Africa and I am now urging [. . .] that Drum follow up with the second Simple volume as well as The Big Sea. There is a fast-growing African readership and I am convinced your work would go down with them more successfully than that of any other American writer.” Anthony Sampson, the editor of Drum, wanted Abrahams to ask Hughes about the possibility of a visit to South Africa. He then provides a list of names and addresses of African writers, including V.C. Nchami, Cyprian Ekwensi,¹ Amos Tutuola,² and Aaron Cole. He concludes, “I’m happy for you over the Anisfield-Wolf Award³ and can’t myself think of any book that more richly deserves it.”

★ ★ ★

¹Cyprian Ekwensi (1921–2007), Nigerian novelist and short story writer; his first novel was *People of the City* (1954).

²Amos Tutuola (1920–1997), Nigerian novelist, author of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, among others, and one of the first black African novelists published in the English language.

³“The Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards recognizes [sic] recent books that have made important contributions to our understanding of racism and our appreciation of the rich diversity of human culture” (www.anisfield-wolf.org/). The 1954 award was given to Hughes for *Simple Takes a Wife*.

May 28, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[CAPE TOWN] C/O *DRUM* [JOHANNESBURG]

Dear Mr. Rive,

As one of the judges of *Drum's* recent Short Story Contest it was my privilege to read your very beautiful short story, "The Return." I am wondering if you have any more such stories or sketches that you could send me?

There is great interest at the moment in America in Africa, particularly South Africa, it being so much in the news these days. And the books of Alan Paton⁴ and Nadine Gordimer,⁵ among others, have been well received here. So, I have talked recently with one of the best American publishers about the possibility of an anthology of short stories by African writers, and he was most favorable to the idea, asking me to assemble such a collection, and promising to give it very careful consideration when gotten together. If accepted for publication, there would be the usual pro rata payment to each writer for his work used therein.

Should you have a half dozen or so more stories concerning the problems, inter-group relations, or folk life of the people, I would be most happy to see them as soon as you can conveniently send them to me for consideration in such an anthology. I liked the one story of yours which I have very much and would want to include your work in the book. Peter Abrahams has promised to send me some of his stories from London, and we both feel that a very interesting volume can be assembled. I hope to hear from you soon.

With all good wishes to you for continued good writing,

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

⁴Alan Paton (1903–1988), South African novelist and educator. His novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) was a critical and commercial success around the world; it was adapted into a Broadway musical called *Lost in the Stars* in 1949 by Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill, and was made into a 1951 film starring Canada Lee, Charles Carson, and Sidney Poitier.

⁵Nadine Gordimer (1923–), South African novelist and short story writer. She would later win the Nobel Prize for Literature for her substantial body of novels and story collections; in 1954 she was just beginning to win acclaim for her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953), and for two collections of stories.

May 28, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER CLARKE**,
aka **PETER KUMALO** [SIMON'S TOWN] C/O *DRUM*

Dear Mr. Kumalo,

Congratulations to you on your excellent short story "Death in the Sun," which it was my privilege to read as one of the judges for *Drum's* Short Story contest. I am wondering if you have any more like it which you would be kind enough to send me?

[*Ed. Note: The remainder of the letter is identical to the letter Hughes sent to Richard Rive on the same date.*]

★ ★ ★

May 30, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK]

Dear Peter,

Knopf sent me your book to read and I think it's wonderful!⁶ (As you can see from the statement I sent in.) Where you lived as a kid sounds about like 18th and Vine in Kansas City where I lived! I hope you'll continue it on with London and all. I am hoping to spend the summer writing the second part of my autobiography—have a contract for it. Lots to put in it which I hope will be as readable as *The Big Sea*. . . . That business about your first going to school—and the market lady—and the Bantu center—and school teaching at the Cape—and the dung hunting—and the kaffir boy and the African kings—is wonderful! And the old preacher! And the humor of that prayer! But it's all wonderful! Great! I love that book! So alive and immediate and real and moving! From your pictures you don't look like you can write like that. But who does—in a picture! I don't think authors ought to have pictures on books. I try to keep mine off, but not much luck. Anyhow, I'll be doing a column about *Tell Freedom* in my paper I write for when it comes out. . . . I met Alan Paton last week at a big colored party for him, Ralph Bunche⁷ and all there.

⁶The book in question was Abraham's autobiography, *Tell Freedom*, published by Alfred A. Knopf (publisher of many of Hughes's own books) in August 1954.

⁷Ralph Bunche (1904–1971), American diplomat, activist, and intellectual. Bunche played a key role in establishing the United Nations and held numerous positions there. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.

He spoke most effectively. . . . Thanks a lot for those addresses of African writers. I'd already written several folks in South Africa, Liberia, Gold Coast, etc., and to my college mate, Ben Azikiwe,⁸ whom I'll see here next week, so hope to be getting quite a few stories soon. Have a few already. Have a publisher interested, so kindly send me your stories, too, soon, if you can. Knopf won't mind you being anthologised. Good publicity for your books, as anthologies go in lots of libraries and schools that a book may not, unless it's a classic, or something similar. If your short stories are anywhere as near as good as that autobiography, they ought to be great. LEMME SEE! [. . .] I'm delighted, of course, that *Africa* is running parts of *Simple*. They're welcome to use it all, if they wish, from both books. And I'd be happy to see them use *The Big Sea* or other work of mine, too, providing it's OKed through my agent or publishers, since I'm not free to grant the rights myself. . . . About going to South Africa, naturally, I'm pleased no end to be invited. But can't even think about going for a year or two—I'm tied up with a play in the works for next season, and three book contracts (the autobiography being one, a rather big job) and none of them even started in the writing—so I have about 15 months of steady work ahead of me. But if I see my way clear a year or so from now, I might take my friends there in Johannesburg up on it. I want to go to that bioscope⁹ you went to! But right now I'm a literary sharecropper tied to a publisher's plantation. . . . I met a man at the Paton party who knows you, Daniels of the U.N., and told me quite a bit about you that I reckon will be in your memoirs No. II. . . . I know how hard it is to write letters—and books, too, so you don't have to answer right back this year—JUST SEND THE STORIES. With gratitude, as ever.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

June 1, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **HENRY NXUMALO** [JOHANNESBURG]

⁸Benjamin Nnamdi "Zik" Azikiwe (1904–1996), Nigerian journalist and politician. His attendance at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania overlapped with Hughes's time there. He became the first African governor-general of the Federation of Nigeria after its independence from Great Britain in 1960, and the first president of the Republic of Nigeria in 1963. Hughes traveled to Nigeria in 1961 at Azikiwe's invitation.

⁹"Bioscope" was a South African term for a movie theater.

Dear Mr. Nxumalo,

Growing out of my interest in the excellent short stories it was my privilege to read as one of the judges of *Drum's* Short Story Contest, I spoke to a leading American publisher a few weeks ago about the possibility of an anthology of African short stories and he was most favorable toward it, asking me to assemble such a collection and it would get his most careful attention. If it is published there would be the usual pro rata anthology payment to each person whose work is used. I wrote Peter Abrahams in London about it in March and have just received his answer, promising to send some work of his, but telling me that *Drum* itself is also planning such an anthology (which delights me) and that Mr. Sampson, the editor, is now in London. So I've just written Mr. Abrahams to tell Mr. Sampson I'd be happy to work with *Drum* in any way agreeable that we might get an American anthology of African stories published here, too, which should certainly contain some, if not all, of the excellent work *Drum* has collected. I've written friends in Liberia, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and elsewhere where I know writers, newspaper folks, etc., asking them to send me material, and would be glad to let *Drum* see any manuscripts I might get in case you—all didn't already have them. But, since there is a great interest in things African in our country just now (Alan Paton, whom I've met, is here; Azikiwe arrived today; Nadine Gordimer's work and others are widely read) I would very much like to see a volume of the work of non-white African writers published, and it would help greatly in the understanding of Americans concerning Africa. So any help you could be to me in achieving this—by sending me the names and address of any good African writers you know, etc.—or whatever other help you might give, would be greatly appreciated. (And certainly *Drum* would get full credit and acknowledgement, too, in the book.) I've liked recent issues of *Drum* very much—and *Africa* is a honey. I'm going to do a column about them soon in the *Chicago Defender*. And I hope I may hear from you shortly Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

June 10, 1954

HENRY NXUMALO [JOHANNESBURG] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Nxumalo replies that the Drum staff is busy editing its own collection of African writing, and hints that they would like Hughes's help finding an American

publisher for their volume as a prelude to their help with his collection. Nxumalo also thanks Hughes for his compliments on Africa and for helping to promote Drum in the United States.

★ ★ ★

June 13, 1954

PETER CLARKE, aka PETER KUMALO [SIMON'S TOWN]
TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Hughes,

Your letter, which arrived here (via the *Drum* office) on Friday, was a great surprise, you being the last person I expected to hear from. For long I have been one of your most ardent admirers so you can understand how I felt about receiving that letter and your request for stories for the anthology you are planning. I think it's a fine idea and it should cause some interest.

As far as writing is concerned I am still very much a beginner at the game although I have been toying with the idea of becoming a writer for about two or three years now. "Death in the Sun" was my first real attempt at writing a short story although it is based on fact, an experience that stirred me deeply, so much that I thought I might be able to make use of it.

My first real interest started when I was about fourteen years of age and in my 6th Standard at school when I was held up to the class as the best writer of English Composition. This always embarrassed me as then I couldn't bear being so much in the limelight besides I enjoyed writing English Composition. To me it was a means of an outlet, a way of expressing myself because unlike the other kids I wasn't fond of games and was usually left sitting alone in some odd corner with my nose stuck between the pages of a book. I guess I still am a bookworm, very much so; I spent only one year at High School and I loved it; so it was with regret that I left due to financial difficulties, my parents couldn't afford it. So when I was 15 [I] started working rather reluctantly. I had no particular ambition in mind but because I was always fond of drawing and painting it had always been taken for granted that I would become a professional painter. Working in the Naval Dock Yard gave me no chance to think about it; I became a painter's boy and helped to slosh paint onto ships when they came into dry-dock after helping to remove barnacles off its stinking bottom. I remained there for 1½ years and then was made office-boy-messenger after which I was transferred to my present job of store-assistant.

I am now 25 years old and have sold a considerable amount of paintings and drawings and I am now seriously considering making a living by painting and writing.

I've written a lot of poetry for amusement's sake, purely for myself and I've also written odd bits of other stuff as an exercise, nothing of which I consider good enough for publication. Now I am writing my second story which you can have when it's finished, I only hope it will be good enough. With me time is the main factor to be taken into consideration, I only have free time after 5 p.m. and weekends and you can imagine how precious it is. Another thing, I have no privacy to write in so I work on things during my lunch hour or I go and sit in the hills so I can concentrate.

Just in case you are interested in getting one more South African writer to send a story for your anthology, I have a writer-friend, a white man named Jack Cope.¹⁰ Mr. Cope had a story accepted by *Harper's Bazaar* and recently had his first novel accepted by an English publisher. He has written a considerable amount of short stories of an African flavour that could make a hit with the American public. [. . .] I'm sure Mr. Cope would take an interest in any venture to put African writing onto the literary map and would gladly assist you.

You gave no particulars in your letter regarding by when you want the stories. I can't promise to send half a dozen stories for reasons already mentioned but we'll see.

Thanks again for your delightful offer.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Kumalo

★ ★ ★

June 18, 1954

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [MASERU] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Langston Hughes,

Thanks very much for your nice letter which *Drum* sent on to me as I am on a visit to Basutoland.

It is indeed very flattering to me to have such warm complimentary comments from a great writer like you on my amateurish attempt (as I regard it)—for that matter, from a Negro to another. Believe me, we at this end are starved for Negro literature, and I should like to grasp this opportunity of asking you if one can procure regularly some periodical

¹⁰Jack Cope (1913–1991), South African novelist, story writer, and editor who was friends with Peter Clarke and Richard Rive.

Negro literature of a high standard in America. Then, of course, I should so much like to read more of your work which is so robust with down-to-earth humour and life.

As soon as I get back to Johannesburg (next week) I will look through some of my pieces and mail you four or so—I doubt if I could summon up enough courage to send you half-a-dozen—so many read such horrible stuff to me. Still, you'll have asked for it.

Nadine Gordimer is a great friend of mine as black–white friendships go today in South Africa, you know: in fact she has meant a lot to me in my writing. Peter Abrahams I was at high school with, and we are continuing a close association.

I'm a teacher by profession, but was kicked out 2 years ago by the Nationalist Government for my vehement criticism of their corrupt educational policy for our people. I can't get back to teaching anywhere in the Union of S.A. Just now, after roughing it for 18 months jobless, I am starting social work with the deaf and dumb; but I write because I have the tragic urge to. Thanks tremendously for your good wishes.

Sincerely yours,
Ezekiel Mphahlele

PS: BRUNO ESEKIE is my pen-name, my real name being Ezekiel Mphahlele.

★ ★ ★

June 28, 1954

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Abrahams begins his letter: "I've got the blues! I've got the miserable dried-up blues! I've been sitting in front of my typewriter all day sucking my blooming English pipe and not a word would come, not a story. And I've got to knock out a couple of stories for you. And my brain's teeming with stuff and nothing would come! I remember vaguely reading where you got the blues in one of your books and going to bed for a fortnight! Trouble is I'd get indigestion if I did it. World looks ugly to me today. Miserable as hell and I feel unfriendly to all men." He includes some 180 words of dialogue from a story idea, and sets himself a deadline of mid-July for sending Hughes a couple of stories. He complains, "It's supposed to be midsummer in this benighted country and the sky is dark and it's cold and there is no sun shining. I guess I'm humanity's

enemy today.” He also includes a bit of “Poetry, Abrahams version” along a similar theme.

★ ★ ★

July 16, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK]

Dear Peter Abrahams:

Please forgive me for not writing sooner to thank you for the kind gifts of your two books. I am delighted to have them both, and look forward to reading *Return to Goli* soon. As you know, I have already read *Tell Freedom*, but am now happy to have both the English and American editions. Knopf certainly made a beautifully looking [*sic*] book for you, and I hope it will have wide success in this country.

I have received a long, amusing, handwritten story from Amos Tutuola, as well as several other pieces from writers in West and South Africa. So it looks like that shortly I shall have a sizable collection of stories for the anthology. I look forward to the time when mood and moment coincide for you to send me something of yours. I thought you already had some stories previously written, but if not, naturally it would be wonderful to have something brand new. Your letter indicated that you have gotten a good start on one, anyway. It seems that a new book about Africa is coming out here every day, so I think that if I can gather 12 or 15 really good stories, there will be no difficulty in achieving publication of an anthology of fiction by non-white African writers.

I have recently received a copy of *Bronze*, the colored magazine published in London, which I find very interesting. I shall be on the lookout for reviews of your *Tell Freedom*, and will clip and send them to you whenever I see one. My continued good wishes to you, as ever.

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

NOT DATED—July 1954

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Hughes,

I have received your very interesting and encouraging letter. I'm afraid I do not conform to the pattern of starving-in-the-attic writers. I merely felt like it so I wrote. Unfortunately I have only three or four other short stories, but at the moment it is University Vacation (I am at University of Cape Town) and I mean to write. I assure you that within six weeks I will be able to send you at least half-a-dozen short stories following the theme of "The Return."

It will also interest you to know that the first literature of this nature which I read was your *Ways of White Folks* which I read when I was ten years old. Since then I have vociferously read Richard Wright,¹¹ Walter White,¹² Du Bois¹³ and any literature on racialistic problems I could lay hands on. However I have never since been able to lay hands on *Ways of White Folks* in any Libraries in Cape Town. In fact with the exception of *The Big Sea* your works are conspicuous by their absence. Sir, I would indeed deem it a great honour if you could procure for me a copy of *Ways of White Folks*.

I am also as interested in American racialistic problems as you are, I presume, in South African problems. I hope it will be possible for an interchange of ideas to take place, if I can call upon your time. The South African "problem" is unique, and I will be at hand to give you up-to-the-minute news, and more important, views of the oppressed rather than those allowed out for propaganda purposes. There is a spirit of "New Africa" awakening in the Dark Continent, in conformity with the rise of colonial masses in the rest of the world. Again, thank you for your kind letter, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

July 24, 1954

**LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO RICHARD RIVE
[CAPE TOWN]**

¹¹Richard Wright (1908–1960), African-American novelist, poet, short story writer, autobiographer, and essayist. His novel *Native Son* (1940) was an international best seller.

¹²Walter White (1893–1955), executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People from 1931 to 1955, and a journalist, novelist, and essayist.

¹³W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), one of the leading African-American intellectuals of the twentieth century, often associated with the Harlem Renaissance and the Pan-Africanist movement.

Dear Mr. Rive,

It was certainly good to receive your very nice letter today. Yours was one of the stories I liked best of all in the *Drum* contest, and certainly it will be a pleasure to read more of your work. I shall be looking forward to receiving whatever you send me—it doesn't have to be six all at once—and they don't all have to be new stories. But if you're stimulated to write some during your vacation, all the better! It's vacation time here, too, and lots of editors are away, so I won't be assembling my collection until September, anyway. A few very interesting things have come in from Nigeria and the Gold Coast, including a fantastic tale by Amos Tutuola, whose *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was published here last year. And a recent note from Peter Abrahams says he's started a new story he'll send soon.

I'm happy that you liked my *Ways of White Folks* so long ago, and I am sending you a copy today, along with my more recent second volume of short stories, and my first book of poems. I guess it takes about six weeks for you to get a package by boat, but they're on the way.

Several factual books on South Africa have been published here this year, and widely reviewed. And Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* is coming out this month. I already have an advance copy. I like it very much. Your racial situation seems about like ours in our Deep South. In talking with Alan Paton, he says he thinks Atlanta, Georgia, is our nearest city to Johannesburg in race attitudes—but with more hopeful things happening [in the American South]—as I gather from *Tell Freedom*. At least here there are some legal changes for the better, even if they take a long time to turn into everyday realities everywhere in our country. Here there's an enormous variation in race attitudes from one section to another. New York is like London, but Baltimore, only four hours by train to the South, is like Johannesburg in some ways. Anyhow, tell me about you, what you teach, etc., please. Yours,

★ ★ ★

July 30, 1954

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I hope you will not feel offended at my use of your Christian name, as I do wish to break away from Victorian formality and correspond with you on a more friendly basis. I have received your very friendly and encouraging letter and have made a beeline for pen and ink.

I notice with deep egoistical relish and satisfaction that you ask me to write about myself. And I am also highly pleased at the prospect of proving a problem. How lovely to be complex (I hope you don't mind a bit of cynicism).

Here are some of my virtues firstly. Age 23 years. I was born in District Six (one of the most terrible slums in Cape Town, although I come from a cultured family). Had a brilliant Primary School career, culminating in two High School Bursaries and a deep ego. Attended Trafalgar High (one of the foremost Coloured High Schools in the Country) where I did Academics (Latin, Science, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, etc.). Upon finishing in the First Class I entered University of Cape Town where I majored in English Literature in 1949. Then went to Hewat Training College where I finished in 1951. At present lecture at South Peninsula High to Senior Certificate students (one year pre-University undergraduate) in English Literature and Latin. (Imagine me in horn-rimmed spectacles and coughing like a grammarian.)

In other fields. I am a Western Province Athletic Track Blue (440 yards), climb Table Mountain regularly, swim at Kalk Bay, am avidly fond of reading and fanatical about politics.

I belong to a school of thought, Trotskyite and Leftist in its outlook (shades of Senator McCarthy) [which believes] in non-collaboration as a political weapon. After becoming a gold-chorded King Scout in the Boy Scout Movement I was almost forced out because of speeches and reports attacking Imperialistic indoctrination and the division of the Movement on racialistic lines. I'm out of it now. Now that I have praised myself to the skies I shall deflate myself.

I am also extremely emotional, love arguments especially on political themes, verge on cynicism and violently anti-social in certain respects (presumably a result of frustration brought about by limitations in Sunny South Africa).

Cape Town differs from Johannesburg in many respects. It has a tradition of 300 years of white culture and has retired into the smugness that goes with tradition. It is more British than London but conforms to the racialistic policy of the rest of the Country. It is situated amid some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, desecrated with signs reading "Blankes alleen" or "Whites only." It prides itself on liberality because Coloured men are allowed to sit in the City Council and one can sit anywhere in buses, but keeps a dignified silence on the shanty-towns of Windermere and African Locations of Langa and Nyanga 30 miles from its sacred precincts.

The Population composition differs from Johannesburg where Africans are in the majority. In Cape Town the Cape Coloured (people of mixed white, black, Malay and Hottentot parentage, of which Peter Abrahams and myself are members) form the bulk of the population (+/-250,000). The Europeans (whites; in the case of Cape Town mostly British, whereas in Johannesburg it is mostly Afrikaner) number about 250,000 also. The Cape Malays are a fantastic people, the descendents of Malaysian slaves brought to the country 300 years before. They number about 80,000. The Africans form a minority (this is the only major city in South Africa where this is so).

The Cape Coloured form a kind of buffer group, a group enjoying privileges, and are considered for convenience sake as an appendage to the white race, and thus enjoy better social, economic, and political conditions than the rest of the Non-Europeans. The Nationalist "Apartheid" policy has however driven them into the ranks of other Non-Europeans, and as a class they are awakening from political lethargy into a militant group. I indeed profusely apologize for speaking about problems and will without hesitation revert back to myself.

A typical day in my life would be thus. I awake at six in the morning at my home in Walmer Estate (a select Coloured area where Africans are seldom seen, but don't blame me), and catch a bus to Cape Town Station. I am allowed to sit anywhere in the bus, but in Johannesburg I can only sit upstairs, three seats from the back, and in Durban I will be allowed to sit where I like (because I'm Coloured) but Africans and Indians must sit upstairs.

At the station I board a section of the train where anyone may sit, but under no condition may I sit in compartments labeled "Blankes Alleen" as those are reserved for Whites. I have regular friends I meet on the train, Hepburn who is a Master of Arts and has a keen sense of humour, Bill Currie [*sic*] who is an outstanding actor but will never be able to act in National Companies because of his Colour, and Arthur whom I suspect seeks solace in Roman Catholicism. Our conversation reaches a high standard, most probably far higher than most of our white counterparts.

At Diep River I alight and walk 200 yards to pleasant South Peninsula High (a school for Coloured pre-university students) where the students are well-dressed and fed and come from better-class homes. Here I meet fellow lecturers who mostly belong to the Teacher's League of South Africa (a militant teacher's body now outlawed by the Department of Education). I lecture in Latin and English Literature and in addition take students for track athletics and swimming. After

finishing here I attend lectures at the University of Cape Town (one of the two Universities in South Africa where no colour bar is in operation) and am allowed in the same lecture room as white students. I should have mentioned that there is no academic segregation but a rigorous social segregation is observed, and I am not allowed to represent my university at sports or functions attended by apartheid universities. After my lectures I usually go home and then to the athletic track which we are allowed to use on two nights a week when the whites do not use it. After this I either go to a political lecture, N.E.F. (New Era Fellowship, a militant Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) organization) or M.Y.S. (Modern Youth Society, a group of radical youths with Leninist tendencies) or listen to the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra (no colour bar) or have the option of attending a Coloured cinema where a notice is usually displayed bearing the legend, Not for Natives (Africans) and children under 12!!!! Or I watch the University Ballet, in which Coloured Artists are allowed to perform, or drama at the Little Theatre. I belong to the University Library, Public Library and Educational Library (in any other Provinces there would be no library facilities for Non-Europeans whatsoever).

Were I an African, life would by no means be quite as pleasant. I would have to live in a location about 30 miles from Cape Town (Langa), earn a mere pittance and find a social if not economic bar to most cultural matters. I would also be open to abuse from both Whites and Coloureds. An African friend of mine Mchigi was almost knocked over by a Coloured skolly (hooligan) and told "Voetsak Kaffer!" while in my company.¹⁴ Mchigi holds an M.A. degree in philosophy but is spurned as a Kaffer. The favourite term of abuse for Coloured People is "Hotnot" or Hottentot. I have been called Kafferboetie (friend of Kaffers), a frustrated intellectual, a pernicious influence, geleerde Hotnot (educated Hottentot), cynic, etc., etc., etc. During vacation I usually travel extensively through South Africa, and that is when the fun starts. It is then that I am made to feel my Colour and see the system in operation.

Some of the students I teach are very fair and can easily cross the Colour line. So they all trundled along and went to see a "Whites Only" performance of *Julius Caesar* while the lecturer (myself) who is a graduate in English Literature was unable to enter, because of his deep tan.

¹⁴"Kaffer" or "kaffir" is an extremely derogatory word for black Africans. "Voetsak" is a rudely dismissive verb, for which the most polite translation might be "go away."

As far as current literature is concerned, Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* has already been on sale here but is not popular at all. Not only whites but intellectual Coloureds accuse him of escapism and not providing tangible solutions to any problems. A quotation from the *Torch* newspaper (Non-European Unity Movement) reads (concerning *Return to Goli*): "The latest slimy ooings from the pen of that Imperialistic flea, Peter Abrahams." Note the vituperations. Alan Paton is extremely unpopular even with Non-Europeans. He represents a school of thought accepting white trusteeship where all men are equal (but some more equal than others).

I will send you copies of South African newspapers and you will be able to read different views yourself. Thanks very much for your books which I hope to receive soon. I was speaking only last night to a Coloured University student who was appalled because I had not read *Simple Speaks His Mind*. I will read it today. I have read *The Big Sea* so you do not need to expend pages in telling me all about yourself. What a pity I cannot send to you my own *Black Boy* or *Tell Freedom* or *Big Sea*. Perhaps much later. What price fame. If there is anything South African I can send you, please let me know. I hope you reply soon.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

August 2, 1954

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Hughes,

I am sorry for having let you wait so long for the stories I promised to send but unfortunately I have had too much to do and also I have not been very well for some time.

The one story, "The Gift," turned out much longer than I intended it to be so I'm not certain if it really matters. The other one, "Eleven O'clock: The Wagons and the Shore," I had great pleasure in writing, it came fairly easy. Anyway, I am still experimenting until I find a style that suits me.

Here's hoping that you will be able to use one of the two in your anthology. And here's also hoping that the anthology will be a success. My best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Kumalo

P.S. In case you cannot use my longer story and if you think it worthwhile would you recommend it to some American magazine, please? I'd be glad if you would.

★ ★ ★

October 1, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER CLARKE**
[SIMON'S TOWN]

Dear Mr. Kumalo,

Please forgive me for being so long in having acknowledged your two short stories, which arrived while I was away in the country. I have just recently got back to New York City. The response to my appeal for stories from Africa has been most generous and, to date, I have received more than fifty manuscripts from African writers so I have put them all together and am planning to read them all at the same time. So you will be hearing from me again about your stories.

Certainly I will be happy to submit them to magazines in case they seem suitable, and should one of them be sold, I will send the money on to you. As far as my Anthology is concerned, the stories may be published in magazines first, since that makes no difference.

I certainly hope that you are doing better now, as you are much too talented a writer to be burdened by physical illness which might interfere with your work. Keep well.

All my good wishes to you.

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

October 5, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER CLARKE**
[SIMON'S TOWN]

Dear Mr. Kumalo:

Please forgive me for being so long in writing you but I have been away from New York most of the summer and have just recently returned. I very much enjoyed your nice long letter, and it is good to become better acquainted with you, since I liked your story in *African Drum* "Death in the Sun" so much. I hope that by now you have

finished your second story, or maybe two or three, and that you will airmail them to me, as I hope to assemble this anthology soon, some fifty manuscripts having arrived from various English speaking countries of Africa, among them a few good things.

Have you read my own books of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks* and *Laughing to Keep from Crying*? If not, I would be happy to send them to you. Since you say that you are writing poetry, I am sending you by boat mail today some of my poems. And I would like very much to see some of your poems if you would care to send me some.

I again beg your forgiveness for being so long in answering, but I hope that I will hear again from you soon. With all my good wishes,

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

October 6, 1954

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [JOHANNESBURG]

Dear Mr. Mphahlele:

Please forgive me for being so long in answering your kind letter, but I have been absent from New York most of the summer and just recently returned to the city. It was certainly nice to hear from you, and I hope very much that if you have not already posted your stories to me, you will airmail them to me shortly, as I am almost ready now to begin assembling the anthology, and I would like very much to see more of your work for possible inclusion, since I have a belief you have a distinct talent for the written word.

There has been a most generous response from the various English-speaking countries of Africa to my request for short stories, some 50 manuscripts having arrived during the summer. Not all of them, by any means, are good. And a number of persons sent animal tales or folk stories, which is not the kind of material we can use in this anthology, since it is to be a book purely of creative fiction in the shorter form. However, some of the material is excellent indeed, and I think that some of the best African non-white writers are represented. If you yourself know other writers of short stories, please ask them if they will present something to me. And if you see Miss Gordimer, please tell her that I have liked her work very much, as many other readers in our country do. I had the pleasure of meeting Alan Paton when he was

here, and am just now reading his impressions of the American Negro running serially in *Collier's*.

I am sending you some books and magazines by boat mail, although I understand that some of our Negro magazines may not reach you, in which case *quoi faire?*¹⁵ Anyhow, I am sure my books will reach you. Meanwhile, you have all my best wishes, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

October 6, 1954

**LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO RICHARD RIVE
[CAPE TOWN]**

Dear Richard,

Your most interesting letter arrived some weeks ago, and I beg your forgiveness for not answering sooner, but I had sort of been waiting for your stories to reach me, too, but they haven't come as yet. Please send them on, airmail, as I've almost enough for a good little anthology now, and would like very much to see more of your work before finally assembling the book and submitting it to the publishers. That was a wonderful letter, yours, telling me more about South Africa, or at least the Cape Town area, than I've gotten before from any source. Life there for colored people sounds just about like it is for us in most Middle Western American cities. The East (New York and New England) is much better, the South much worse—we have such a variety of regional attitudes here. And none of it is perfect, most [of] it confusing to travellers, so I can imagine what happens to you when you venture further into your own hinterlands. The Alan Paton articles have just started running serially this week in our magazine, *Collier's*, with the whole front page given over to his photo. I haven't read the first one yet. So many magazines and papers pile up in my place, and with some deadline always staring me in the face, I'm usually too sleepy to read anything when I get through writing at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, so I go out and

¹⁵French for "what to do?"

have a drink and listen to “Simples” in the neighborhood bar for an hour, buy the paper and see what Malan¹⁶ and Talmadge¹⁷ are doing, and go to bed. . . . Thanks for that fine description of your current life and activities. Now all I need from you to feel as if I know you, is a photo—so send me a snapshot or something which looks like you think you really look, since some photos bear but slight resemblance to the subject—as I know from my own! AND SEND THOSE STORIES ON, PLEASE! Did you receive the books I posted you by boat at the time of my last letter back in July—*The Ways of White Folks* you requested, *Laughing to Keep from Crying*, my latest short stories, and my first book of poems, *The Weary Blues*? I hope so. Will send more of my books if you’d like them, and tell me which ones. IN FACT, WILL SEND YOU JUST ABOUT ALMOST ANYTHING, IF YOU’LL SEND ME YOUR STORIES! I hope you’re not one of these pondering procrastinating looooong-thinking writers (although some of them like Arna Bontemps¹⁸ are very good). For me the best way to write a story is like you wrote your last letter to me (or as I am writing this one to you)—just sit down and type it right on out to the end. Then, if need be (and there usually is great need) rework and revise it a couple of times, and copy it again, and that’s it! Most of my work on prose comes in the revisions—sometimes as many as six or seven typed drafts, with usually a great deal of cutting involved. Almost anything is better shorter, I’ve discovered. Boy, I admire anybody who gets up at six A.M. which is usually just about my bedtime—since nighttime is the only time there’s any peace and quiet for writing around Harlem. Did you see any of the nice reviews my *Simple Takes a Wife* got in your Cape Town and Joburg papers? My clipping bureau sent me some fine ones from various English dependencies, including almost half a page from Australia—so I use them for arguments with young colored writers who claim colored characters cannot achieve universal acceptance or understanding (since some of our writers want to imitate Frank

¹⁶Daniël François Malan (1874–1959) was prime minister of South Africa from 1948 to 1954, and one of the architects of apartheid.

¹⁷Herman Eugene Talmadge (1913–2002) was governor of Georgia from 1947 to 1955, and later a U.S. Senator. He was a staunch segregationist and opponent of civil rights for black Americans.

¹⁸Arna Bontemps (1902–1973), African-American writer associated with the Harlem Renaissance; Hughes’s frequent collaborator and probably closest friend. He was also a librarian at Fisk University in Nashville for many years.

Yerby¹⁹ and write only about “people”—which is O.K., too—except that colored are also people!). . . . Do you know Sylvia Jacobs or Peter Kumalo or Dyke Sentso²⁰ whose letters indicate they live in Cape Province, too? I’ve been hearing from Miss Jacobs for a long time, interesting letters, books and things. *Drum* and *Africa* I get regularly now. Also the new colored magazine from London, *Bronze*. . . . So just about the most interesting things you could send me from S.A. would be your stories. (I guess that point is clear!) And write again. I really enjoyed your letter, so hope there’ll be more. I envy fellows who can swim, climb mountains, and write, too. Come visit N.Y.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

October 24, 1954

PETER CLARKE [SIMON’S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Hughes,

I told Sampson, the editor of *Drum*, that I wanted to send “Joe Mkize Takes a Wife,” a recent story of mine, to you for the anthology. This is a story that was accepted for the December issue. It will be fine, depending on if the story is accepted, if you mention its connection with *Drum*. The editor says it will be good for their prestige.

I have only read a few of your short stories here and there in magazines, but very few, and I always wondered how I could get to know your work better. So it will be greatly appreciated if you can send them to me, as you say you can. The titles *The Ways of White Folks* and *Laughing to Keep from Crying* I have heard of but I’m looking forward to reading their contents. I remember telling you that I wrote some poetry at one time. Those poems I have long since dismissed as the gushings of an adolescent fountain because that’s just what they are, hopelessly

¹⁹Frank Yerby (1916–1991), African-American novelist, short story writer, and poet. His popular novels generally focused on historical themes.

²⁰Dyke Sentso, South African short story writer whose story “Under the Blue-Gum Trees” won the first *Drum* story competition in 1953, and was reprinted in Michael Chapman’s *The Drum Decade*. Sentso published a handful of stories in *Drum* between 1951 and 1954, but then virtually disappeared, and little is known about him.

amateurish stuff. They were written between the years 1947 and 1950. One notebook however, containing some of the earliest and probably the most inspired poems, was lost. Actually the book, a cheap exercise one, was lent to a young German acquaintance, living at Sea Point, a suburb of Cape Town, who was passionately interested in poetry and he kept it so long that by the time I tried to get it back I found out that he had gone away suddenly someplace, perhaps to Israel. I never heard of him again.

The others are still in their original rough state and if I send you any I shall have to type them out first so as to make them readable enough. This may not yet be for a while until after I finish my stories.

When I have time I shall be getting a few small sketches together to send to you because I think I told you that I paint.

While I'm about it I might as well tell you that my name is really *Clarke* and not *Kumalo*. The name *Kumalo* was chosen in the first place for that short story contest entry "Death in the Sun" simply because I didn't have the guts to have it put into print under my own name. I suppose it's modesty really. It's most probably due to the fact that I originally wanted to make a name for myself as a painter in the first place but after considering it I don't see anything wrong in becoming known for one's writing as well as for one's painting. Anyway, now you know: All my best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Peter E. Clarke

★ ★ ★

November 1, 1954

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [JOHANNESBURG] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Langston Hughes,

At last I am able to respond to your request—rather a belated reply, I am afraid!

My problem arises from the fact that I am mentally unsettled—if anyone can speak of a settled mind at all in this god-forsaken country. And I have experienced this: that this state of mind, if it is acute, is not conducive to solid creative work.

You see, for the last 2 years I have been out of regular employment: I have been in one thing and out of another. Together with 2 colleagues I

was banned by the government from the teaching profession as a result of which we cannot teach anywhere in the Union of S.A. This came about because we dared to oppose the new educational system imposed on us Africans under what is called the Bantu Education Act, which is calculated to enslave the African child's mind.²¹

Just now I am desperately trying to keep up a family of children on what I can earn in one temporary job or another. Jobs for professional men among Africans are most frustratingly limited. If you are not a teacher you may, if you are lucky and not independent in your way of thinking, become a doctor (at a "Bantu" medical school). If you are a woman you may also become a nurse: thus far, no further.²²

Writing under such conditions may produce astounding results in one's art, but may also destroy one's art when it harps on the writer's rebellious self. To keep a delicate balance between the two is the problem.

I am sending you 5 stories for your consideration. I may point out that one of two stories, "A Winter Story" and "Moon and Fury," may be published by the periodical *Phylon*²³ in your country: a short while ago an acquaintance of mine sent them to the journal but I was asked to rework them and send them back to the U.S.A. for consideration of their publication value. I shall let you know in due course what their fate is.

I shall naturally be looking forward anxiously to a word from you on the ms, with the full knowledge that it will be a candid critique.

Another thing before I bring my letter to a close is this: my wife is most interested in beauty culture. Training for Africans here is out of the question; I promised that when next I write to you, I should ask you if you know some benevolent institution that can provide instruction on a scholarship basis—in the U.S.A. Any suggestion you may make will be most welcome.

²¹ Under the Bantu Education Act (1953), the national government centralized control over public African education, effectively shut down nongovernmental schools, and exerted tight control over curriculum for African students.

²² Mphahlele is perhaps referring here to the Book of Job, when God asks Job, "Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?'" (Job 38: 8–11). He may also have in mind a line from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "V War": "if you pretend to set an arbitrary limit, a 'Thus far, no farther,' then give up the principle, and take that limit which the common sense of all mankind has set."

²³ *Phylon: A Review of Race and Culture* was a journal founded by W.E.B. Du Bois and Ellen Irene Diggs at Atlanta University in 1940.

Thanks immensely for the literature—it is still on the way. I am sure it will be fascinating, any interception or official censoring of the magazines notwithstanding. It is most generous of you.

I wish you success in this anthology.

With all sincere thanks and wishing you all the best,

Yours sincerely,
Ezekiel Mphahlele

P.S.: An old story I reworked—“The Suitcase”—has just been bought for publication in the next anthology of *New World Writing*. Nadine Gordimer has seen it and she “advertised” it when she was there recently.

P.P.S.: Should you find any of them would be a good magazine contribution and you do not want to use it, I do not mind if you seek such publication on my behalf. I should be most grateful for such a service.

★ ★ ★

November 16, 1954

PETER CLARKE [SIMON’S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Hughes,

Many thanks for your delightful book of poems *The Weary Blues* which arrived safely more than a week ago. I was really thrilled to receive it and I’d like you to know that I appreciate it a great deal, I don’t think that I have enough words to say at the moment just how much. Anyway, thanks. Haven’t had a chance to get down to typing those poems of mine yet but am getting down to it soon so you will be able to have a decent batch of them before Christmas.

Looking through two notebooks of my poems I see that several of them are still unfinished. I’m surprised that I actually wrote them because it is only now that I can really appreciate my own efforts and get down to reading them, not as their creator but as a spectator. It’s quite an experience, especially after all these years that they have been written and stuck away in a chest.

I have just finished my short story for the *Drum* short story contest. It is about the friendship of two boys and is set in “local scenery” which made writing it ever so easy. Right now I’m in the mood for working but the only trouble is that I feel I want to write and paint and carve and read and relax all at the same time and feeling that way is rather awkward because I just can’t make up my mind which is to be first.

Well, I have been able to read five books in the last two weeks. It took me two weekends to read Peter Abrahams' books *Mine Boy* and *Wild Conquest* which I enjoyed very much, perhaps because I have never read any of his books yet. The latter book I found vivid and convincingly real. Living in Africa today and knowing this country, I can understand.

I read Erskine Caldwell's *A House in the Uplands* a second time because I read it years ago, when I was still in my teens and didn't even know who Erskine Caldwell was.²⁴ I have a Signet edition of his short stories under the title *The Courting of Susy Brown* which includes the stirring story "Abe Lathan, Colored vs. the People" which, excluding the fact that the people concerned are Americans, could just as well be a story about South Africans. I have already read his *Tobacco Road* which, by the way, is banned in this country. I think he certainly is a versatile writer of drama and humour.

Two favourite books in my collection are Virgil's *Pastoral Poems* and Rabindranath Tagore's *The Crescent Moon*. My copy of *The Crescent Moon* is a 1920 edition, illustrated with paintings by some of India's most famous painters. I rescued it from destruction when I was about nine years old because it had been scratched in by the pencils of my cousins and the edges had been mutilated. For years and years I have been looking for more of Tagore's works but have so far been unsuccessful. But on Saturday I found another 1920 edition of *The Crescent Moon* which I bought for two shillings at a secondhand books and antiques shop in Cape Town. A friend of mine fell in love with it and before I had had it even four hours she was given it as a present.

I have also been painting lately, mainly subjects about Guy Fawkes Day, 5th Nov., which is celebrated out here too although it is actually an English historical event. It's not a public holiday but the children celebrate it with masks and fireworks and dressing up in old clothes and parading about with a stuffed figure which they call a "Guy." It's fun, I can tell you, something like Halloween is, or must be: Found time to carve a small piece of sculpture out of Jarrah wood which is very hard. The figure is only about nine inches high and very simplified so that it is more "modern" than realistic. I've tried to keep the figure as

²⁴ Erskine Caldwell (1903–1987), an American writer whose work often focused on the problems of his native South. His novel *A House in the Uplands* was published in 1946; *Tobacco Road*, about Georgia sharecroppers, was published in 1932, and later made into a highly successful stage drama.

rhythmic as possible and I think I've succeeded fairly well. This is not the first bit of carving that I've done and so far I have carved in wood as well as stone. But these were all experimental pieces. It is not possible for me to think of taking up sculpture seriously because I am trying to concentrate on painting and writing foremostly. Perhaps one day when I am older and have more time to spare...

I am sending you a few photographs and I hope they'll be alright. You won't have to try to imagine what I look like. I saw your photograph in *Ebony* together with a batch of other famous Colored Americans, Marian Anderson (who I greatly admire), Nat Cole, Joe Louis, Gwendolyn Brooks, Walter White, etc., and of course Mary Bethune. It was last year when I saw that issue and it made my heart glad to see a book of that quality that was devoted to Colored people. Any possibility of getting some back numbers for me? It doesn't matter how old the copies are.

I intend sending off a few of my sketches to you during next week. At the moment I am getting my pictures out and having a look through for something suitable.

Till then, goodbye.

Yours sincerely,
Peter E. Clarke

P.S. I selected some small watercolour sketches and posted them on Wednesday morning but I don't suppose you'll get them until early next month. They are in a roll.

★ ★ ★

November 22, 1954

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Hughes,

Here at last are the poems I promised to send you. This is a more or less representative selection of the poetry I have written. Included are some of the earliest ones ("Morning," "Shadow & Sunlight," "Evening," "Song of a Stormy Night," "High Tide & Ebb") and some of the latest ones. The last ones I wrote were "Evening," "District Six," and "Summer Night" and "Tide, 1950."

My favourites are definitely the last three poems and then I also like "Morning" and "High Tide & Ebb." The one, "TO S.D.," is dedicated to Salvador Dali of all people because there was a time when I was a great

admirer of his painting. But most of the “surrealist” poems I wrote and liked because of the play of words, also it gave me a chance to run riot in a sophisticated and flowery kind of way, if you know what I mean.

I hope you will derive some pleasure from the reading of the poems. Do criticize them if possible and let me know what you think of them: I don’t know if I shall ever write any more poetry, when I stopped in 1950 I had no intention of starting again. Perhaps it was because I turned 21 in that year and felt cut off from my adolescence and of course poetry, but now, 1954, I’m thinking that if I had more time for writing and my other interests as well then I would possibly start again. Perhaps...

That’s all for now. Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Peter E. Clarke

★ ★ ★

November 22, 1954

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

My sincerest apologies for not sending the stories at once. My reason is that I have only just received your letter as I was in Johannesburg for a month. I sincerely hope the stories will reach you in time. (I would cable them if I had sufficient money.) The prospect of seeing myself in print is most inviting and I’m afraid you have developed into my fairy godfather (literarily speaking). I faithfully promise to send you my stories as soon as they are written. You must please excuse my typing, as I typed the stories through the night (with the assistance of Caffeine Citrate to keep me from falling asleep).

I have received your books and devoured them. I read all three the day they came. Thanks a million. My matric students already learnt some of them by heart, and it is with great pride I take down “March Moon” and read it to Michael Bezuidenhout at his request. I’ll promise to write as much as possible if you will send me more of your works. Maybe one day I can send mine to you. How wistful.

I have no photograph of myself available, but Bill Curry is taking a study of me, and you will receive it in the next post. What about a photograph of yourself? You mentioned “Sybil Jacobs” [sic] in your letter. I wonder if you did not mean “Stella Jacobs,” who was at Syracuse University a few years back. She is a close friend of mine and I’m always running into her place for political and educational arguments.

I write my short stories in about three hours and seldom revise them. I'm afraid I haven't the patience of Balzac or Carlyle. I write in white heat and most probably tear it up afterwards. I'm only really finding my literary feet now, as I am adding a bit of polish to my rather awkward, school-compositionish writing.

It is well-nigh impossible for stories of the caliber I am sending you, to get published here. Press gags and restrictions are such that a banning notice is possible and personal limitation of movement inevitable. *Drum* policy is not clearly defined and inclined to be muddled, and pay lip service to the ANC. Their short stories veer on the Hollywood boy-meets-girl type, with true blue Sir Harry rescuing the fair heroine from the jaws of worse than death. From all this, Lord deliver us, when there is so much material for writing about.

We are in examination fever here and studying to our wits' end. We study till 1 a.m. (that is from 10:30 a.m. with 10-minute breaks every hour) and then from 4 a.m. in the morning till we write at nine. Besides this I have been selected to hurdle for Western Province in the South African Non-European Athletic Championships, so I study in spikes, with the hurdles set out on the greenery on the other side of the road. My 10-minute relaxation consists of "topping the timbers."

Please note the address at the top of this letter and write to me there. I am no longer in Perth Road.

R.M. Rive
c/o South Peninsula High School,
Kendal Road,
Diep River, Cape Province

But from the 10th December to 20th January:

R.M. Rive
"Beulah"
Second Avenue,
Grassy Park, Cape Province, South Africa

*Tot siens*²⁵ and I hope you can still use my stories,

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

²⁵ Afrikaans for "goodbye" (literally "see you").

December 17, 1954

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I hope you will write to the above address in future as letters are sure to reach me at once. I hope also to hear from you quite soon. I hope my stories were not too late for use. More will be on their way quite soon. What is the form the anthology you mean to publish will take?

You will notice that I am writing this on the 17th December. Dingaan's Day or The Day of the Covenant as it is now called, was yesterday.²⁶ It is a day dedicated to the Boer victory at Blood River where "a mere handful of brave Voortrekkers won immortality" by beating back the numberless black hordes of the tyrant Dingaan (with a cast of thousands and in glorious Technicolour), and with the assistance merely of guns and God. Poor overworked Almighty. Fortunately the day passed without incidents in the Cape Peninsula.

I find your normal working day (or night) very interesting. Don't you ever sleep? The only time I ever see the small hours of the morning is when I study before exams and then I have to use Caffeine Citrate in order to keep awake. Up to now I have defied all medical theories by obstinately falling asleep despite liberal dosings of caffeine. I hope you will send me more of your books, especially your "Simples" of which I have heard so much and read so little. My variation of "Simples" is speaking to people in Cape Town's tough District Six. District Six is a Coloured slum area, and notorious throughout the Union as the breeding place of the Skollie. He is the Coloured tough. He wears a distinctive garb, cloth-cap worn back to front, short trousers just below the knees, buckle-belt back to front, and lives a life of gambling, petty-robbery, dagga-smoking, and drinking cheap Cape wines and making himself generally objectionable and a "Non-European" problem. "The poor dears have no place in which to play table-tennis or discuss Rousseau, therefore they become skollies," unquote. Amaai and Braim in "Black and Brown Song" are typical skollies and the setting of that story is District Six. Here I

²⁶December 16 was a public holiday in South Africa, celebrating the victory of Afrikaner "Voortrekkers" over the Zulu army led by Dingaan (or Dingane) in 1838. It was known as "Dingaan's Day" until 1953, when it became the "Day of the Covenant." Since 1994, December 16 is celebrated as "Reconciliation Day."

meet dagga-peddlers (I think it is called Marijuana in the States), brothel-keepers, fah-fee runners (fah-fee is an illegal Chinese lottery indulged in by the Cape Coloured people in Cape Town only. The runners are people who accept the bets), and smokkelhuis keepers (the Coloured equivalent of Johannesburg's skokiaan queens).²⁷ In fact I have hectic arguments on Shakespeare and Eliot with the son of a shebeen-keeper.

It is from the ranks of the skolly that the Coons come. The Coon Carnival is a spectacle in Cape Town rivaling Mardi Gras or those of the South of France. New Year's Eve thousands of them dressed in rich satins dance and sing their way through the streets of Cape Town to the accompaniment of guitars and banjos. They have unfortunately become very American with such names as "the Dixiana Minstrels" or "the Oklahoma Broadway darkies." They are exclusively Coloured. Their annual competition is held at Green Point where there are special seats for the Whites and other seats for the blacks, although the organizers are non-European themselves.

The "Hollandse spanne" are bands of Cape Malays who also parade the streets New Year's Eve, and sing ancient Dutch airs handed down to their forefathers in the middle-seventeenth century. One of their songs is "the Alabama":

"Daar kom hie Alabama, die Alabama kom oor die see."

"There comes the Alabama, the Alabama comes over the sea."

The Alabama was a Confederate ship used during the American Civil War that called at the Cape and was immortalised in song by the local peoples. There is a strange religious ceremony the Malays have, known as "Ratiep." They go into a religious trance and while in the frenzy hack themselves with knives, pierce their eyes and tongues with sharp needles and burn themselves. There is no blood or no apparent pain. I have seen this many times. Cape Town is fortunate in being the meeting place of East and West, Africa and Europe, Britain and Holland, Boer and Rooinek, Coloured, Malay, African, white, The pace is slower and more cultured than in the rest of the country. Were there to be a revolution overnight, Cape Town would wake up

²⁷A "smokkelhuis" (literally "smuggle-house") was an illegal drinking establishment, or shebeen. "Skokiaan" is a homemade alcoholic drink. Hughes would have known the latter term from reading Abrahams's *Tell Freedom*, which depicts Abrahams's aunt, a skokiaan queen.

to it the following morning, shake her shoulders resignedly, and go to listen to Enrique Jordan conducting the Municipal Orchestra in Mozart's "Eine kleine nachtmusik." In Pretoria and Johannesburg you can cut the tension with a knife. Let me tell you what happened to me when I travelled to East London from Durban. I shared a compartment with Ignatius Temba, the Zulu baritone who was on his way to further his studies at La Scala in Italy. John Matthews, the son of Professor Z.K. Matthews, was also in the compartment as well as one other African and a Coloured friend of mine. Ignatius had to catch a ship at Cape Town and had to leave Durban in a hurry. As a teacher he did not need a pass, but had to have a receipt to exempt him from carrying a pass!! At the station he found he had left his poll-tax receipt at home but fortunately had a newspaper cutting about himself which stated that he was a teacher. On the strength of this he was granted a ticket to Cape Town. You of course know of the limitations of Africans travelling around the country. However, he was given what is known as a Native third-class, which is cheaper than the ordinary third class for the purpose of migrant labour to the mines. However, he was booked second-class with us. It was absolutely necessary that he catch that train otherwise he would miss his connection in Cape Town. When the examiner came around, he was told in no pleasant way to get to the third-class despite the fact that he was prepared to pay the extra money to enjoy the privileges of Second Class. In his third class compartment there was no running water. No washing for three days and water had to be got from every station for drinking. A very hard wooden sleeping bunk, and he could not be served food from the saloon (in the hurry he had brought no food with him). He could also not be supplied with bedding, and as he had none of his own it meant pretty cold nights travelling through the Karoo. I spoke to the Examiner, hoping that I might have more influence in that I was Coloured and needed no pass for travelling, etc. He told me in a decidedly unpleasant way that he knew Ignatius had no pass and if he reported it at the next station it would be extremely unpleasant for Ignatius. Knowing this to be true and knowing that Ignatius' future depended on his getting to Cape Town in time and catching his ship, and that he could not spend the time languishing in prison for a minor pass infringement, we left matters as they were and tried to make things as pleasant as possible for him there. I remember the cool evening while I sat with him in a third-class compartment, travelling through a country hostile to us both but he more so than myself, discussing the purposes of Art and whether creation and interpretation

was everything. Strange world. He is happily in Italy now. Matthews has since been banned as a Communist, in his capacity as President of the African National Congress Youth League.

Well, I hope to hear from you soon and tell you more about this “land in which it seems always afternoon.”

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

NOT DATED, 1954

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Abrahams thanks Hughes for sending clippings from Jet and Newsweek about Tell Freedom: “I am delighted that the book has found this much approval.” He apologizes for not having sent the promised stories: “I’ve had three unsuccessful goes and actually written two stories to the end but of such a low uninspired quality that I’ve scrapped them. I really do seem to have dried up just now.” He offers to send a self-contained excerpt from one of his published books instead. He concludes by updating Hughes on his family.

Shane
April 23, 2010
11:34 AM

Flat 19, Block 5,
Waterfall Road,
Simon's Town, C.P.
South Africa.
Thurs: 7th. April, 1955

19

Dear Langston,

I seem to be getting so many letters these days that I don't seem to have enough time in which to reply to them. So I have to take advantage of every little bit of spare time I have. As a result, this letter is being written at 7.25 am. just before I start work (not that anybody has any intention of working very hard because tomorrow is holiday).

I think I wrote to say thanks for the books "The ways of White Folks" & "Fields of Wonder". I have since finished "The ways of White Folks", having spent part of one week-end reading it. It's a delightful book. The characters live (damn! I should have had the book here with me. When I write about a book I like to have it near so that I can pick on points

Figure 2 Letter from Peter Clarke to Langston Hughes, April 7, 1955. Published with permission of Peter Clarke. Image courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Letters, 1955–1959

January 30, 1955

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [JOHANNESBURG] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston Hughes,

As you will see from the letterhead I am now working for *Drum* as fiction editor—have been since last December. It's no use staying on in teaching these days with everything in African education being subjected to party political policies. My wife has also left teaching altogether and is in a school of social work.

I find this work fascinating and enjoy it thoroughly, as you may imagine.

I have not heard from you personally what you think of the stories I sent you, and am keen to have your expert opinion on them. "Winter Story" and "Moon and Fury" have after all been rejected by *Phylon* a second time, so I must look elsewhere. But of course I leave the choice to you for your anthology. I am sending you my two most recent and unpublished stories to make the choice wider for you. Do not hesitate to let me know if none of them is of anthology standard.

What sort of fiction do Negro journals in America go in for—is it worth trying them? If so, which? As I have said before, I should not mind if any of the stories you find unsuitable for anthology purposes find their way into an American magazine/s.

Thanks a lot for *The Weary Blues* in which I have enjoyed some very moving poetry; and so for *The Ways of White Folk* with a most entertaining style. I got a letter from Customs to say the magazines you sent me are being withheld as objectionable literature!—as you forecast. Thanks all the same for the trouble you went into.

Looking forward to a newsy letter from you soon, and with best wishes,

I am,
 Yours sincerely,
 Ezekiel Mphahlele

★ ★ ★

February 10, 1955

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE, FICTION EDITOR OF *DRUM*
 [JOHANNESBURG] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW
 YORK]

Dear Mr. Langston Hughes,

This is to thank you sincerely for your very kind services as judge in our Third International Short Story Contest, and for your prompt attention to the stories sent for your verdict.

Three of the judges voted for Peter Clarke's story: "The Departure." Second is Richard Rive's "Black and Brown Song"; third—"The Visitor" by Ekwensi and fourth—L.O.I. Nwangoro's "Message of the Drum."

Hoping that we shall always have the privilege of your wise judgment, and again thanking you,

I am,
 Yours sincerely,
 E. Mphahlele,
 Fiction Editor

★ ★ ★

February 10, 1955

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [JOHANNESBURG] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Langston Hughes,

I have been wondering whether there are any journals—Negro or white—in America that you know of that may be in need of a correspondent in South Africa on political affairs. There is so much happening here that such a journal may want to get first-hand information; if so I could do that sort of thing.

I believe most newspapers or periodicals there either have foreign correspondents attached to them or they get their stuff from press associations or syndicates. Still, as a matter of interest.....

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Ezekiel Mphahlele

★ ★ ★

February 18, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL
MPHAHLELE** [JOHANNESBURG]

Dear Mr. Mphahlele:

Thank you very much for letting me know how *Drum's* third contest came out. I certainly agree that the first and second choices are the best stories. Ekwensi, I think, has written a number of stories that are much better than "The Visitor." Nwangoro's "Message of the Drum" I am thinking of using in my Anthology. What is his native country? I shall probably be writing him a letter in care of *Drum* in which case would you kindly forward it to him for me.

As to your request about writing for American papers, as you say most of them get their material from the syndicates and, of course, the big ones have correspondents on the spot. However, I am making copies of your letter and sending it to a half dozen of the larger Negro newspapers and magazines with the request that they correspond with you directly in case any should be interested. Certainly I should think with all the excitement going on in South Africa now, some of them might well wish a correspondent of color there. Luck to you!

I am sorry the magazines which I sent to you did not get through, but I rather expected that they would not. I am glad, however, that books arrive safely there.

My African Anthology—for which by now I have received well over a hundred manuscripts from all over English speaking Africa—is now being typed up to be submitted shortly to the publishers and I am including some forty stories. The stories of yours which I have selected are: "Suburban Train" and "Blind Alley," subject of course to the final approval of the publishers, but I rather think that they will like them too. I like "Saturday Night" too. It is very beautifully written but, from the American viewpoint, is more of a sketch than a short story. Here they go in more for dramatic incident, a single vivid happening. But I know that the English do a rather more sprawling spread-out kind of short story than those most commonly appearing in American magazines.

At any rate I am holding your “Saturday Night” as a possibility for the Anthology too. The other five stories of yours which I have, I am returning to you: “The Woman Walks Out,” “Across Downstream,” “A Voice in the Dark,” “Moon and Fury,” “The Woman.” And I will send you carbons of the ones which are being typed shortly. Meanwhile would you kindly send me a brief biography.

Meanwhile all my good wishes to you, as ever.

Sincerely yours,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

February 24, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER CLARKE**
[SIMON’S TOWN]

Dear Peter Clarke,

I cannot tell you how very much I appreciate your great kindness in sending me six of your beautiful paintings! They are lovely indeed, and I shall frame them to hang on my studio walls—where I have also six black-and-whites by Jacob Lawrence, one of [the] best young Negro artists.¹ It’s certainly good of you, and I’m most grateful. I also have your poems which it is kind of you to take the trouble to copy out for me. They’re very pretty, but I don’t think nearly as good as your short stories or your painting, so maybe there’s no harm done if you don’t go back to poetry—unless, of course, you feel the urge. The poetry in your stories is much more powerful and individual than in your poems. The poem I like most is “Sonnet”—“to play, play, play. . .” etc., which is charming. By the way, did you ever receive a copy of my book, *The Weary Blues*, poems, which I sent you about a year ago after reading your first story in the *Drum* contest? At any rate, I’m sending you now another book of my poems, also *The Ways of White Folks*, and my newest little book, one on jazz with rather amusing illustrations, by boat so I guess you will get them weeks hence. (*The Weary Blues*, by the way, was sent via the *Drum* office. At that time I didn’t have your address.) Now, as to your stories. In the book I wish to use four: “Death in the Sun,” “The Gift,” “Eleven O’Clock: The Wagons and

¹Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000), African-American painter whose work often depicted scenes and people from black history.

the Shore,” and “The Departure”—all of which I like immensely, “The Gift” particularly—a very beautiful story. But all are excellent, I think. You must write more! “Joe Mkize Takes a Wife” I am returning to you by boat mail. It’s a cute story, but for anthology purposes not “African” enough, in that it might happen anywhere. And since I now have gotten over a hundred manuscripts, I’m choosing the ones which give the most distinctive glimpses of your wonderful continent with as much local color as possible, rather than those that are simply plot stories that might happen in New York or London or any other place. Besides, your “Joe” story is what we call here a “slick paper” magazine type story, amusing and nicely written, but not particularly literary, and certainly not indicative of your very fine descriptive and poetic gifts revealed in “The Wagons,” for example, or “The Gift.” The “Joe” kind of stories are good to sell to popular magazines—but the others are of the sort that will make you a literary name over the years. Thanks, anyhow, for letting me see “Joe” which entertained me greatly. We’ve got such muscle-men here, too, and the Harlem YMCA has a show of such each year—which is really something to see!

Sure, I’d say go ahead with both your painting and your writing. You’re OK at both, and both are fun, don’t you think? I hope the time will come when you can make your living from them. Keep well, too. One needs a lot of strength to battle with the arts! Do you know Richard Rive at Peninsula High School in Diep River, or Dyke Sentso, or Bruno Esekie (Mphahlele) who’ve also sent me some excellent stories? South Africa and Nigeria will be well represented in my book which is almost ready to send to the printers.

Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

February 24, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[CAPE TOWN]

Dear Richard,

It was very nice to have your long letter, and your stories I have enjoyed immensely. You write beautifully indeed. And I wish to use in my anthology “The Bench” (wonderful), “The Return,” “Black and Brown Song,” and “Dagga Smoker’s Dream”—all that I’ve seen of yours—so I’m using them all. Have “The Bench” and “Dagga Smoker’s Dream” been published anywhere? If so, where? This makes

no difference to the anthology. But it does to magazines. But if they have not been published (or only obscurely) it may be that my literary agent here in New York can place them for you in some American magazine. If so, the fee would, of course, go to you, minus only the 10% agency fee and the costs of retyping. So please let me know about this soon. Prices here for stories range all the way from almost nothing in the little (or “art”) magazines to three to four hundred in the bigger slick paper publications—or more if you’re a “name” writer. These latter are naturally harder to sell to, using mostly “name” writers’ work.

Also, would you kindly send me a brief biography of yourself for use in the anthology. And your picture might come in handy for publicity purposes when the book comes out—which I hope will be during the summer—about August, which is a good time here, well in advance for Christmas sales.

Since I’d already seen “Black and Brown Song” and “The Return” via *Drum*, I am returning to you by boat mail your copies of those tales, since I know what a chore typing is, and you might need them. Also coming to you by boat is my new little book on jazz music with rather amusing illustrations. Also a couple of pictures of me, as you request. Send me one of you hurdling, heh? I tried out for hurdles in high school, but didn’t make it. Made the 440 relay team instead, and we were city champions for three years. Now, I couldn’t run 40 yards, let alone 440. Nothing but sit down these days running a typewriter!

I really enjoy your letters, and am learning a lot from friends like you so far away. Hope you won’t forget to write me even when our anthology business is over. I guess the Sylvia I must have mentioned in a letter to you is Sylvia M. Titus, “Back of the Moon,” Touws River, who writes me charming letters ever so often, and recently sent me *Cape Scapes*, a happy looking little book. Is it by a Coloured man? I’d rather guess not. Anyhow, it’s attractive.

The anthology is growing and growing. A couple of wonderful stories came from a guy named Nicol studying at Cambridge from (I’m not sure which—since his stories are about both) Kenya or Sierra Leone.² But I’ve written to ask him. From your part of the far-off world Kumalo, Sentso, and Esekie have sent some excellent stories, too. Do you know any of these fellows? Kumalo is of Simon’s Town,

²Davidson S.H.W. “Abioseh” Nicol (1924–1994), university administrator, medical scientist, fiction writer, poet, and scholar from Sierra Leone. One of his stories and two of his poems appeared in Hughes’s anthology *An African Treasury*.

C.P., which must be somewhere not far from you, Peter Clarke being his sure-enough name. I hope to have the book ready for submission to publishers early in March. About 25–30 really good stories, I think. Some splendid Nigerian ones. Their writers have a lot of humor in their work, but not as much poetry as you—all in S.A. have. Interesting difference! One of them sent me a big box of ground nuts. And from Sierra Leone I got a monkey skin! I guess you're having summer where you are, and we're having snow and ice here in New York. I wish I were there! I hate winter! How did you come out in the S.A. Non-European Athletic Championships? And your exams? Certainly, I wish you well in all. And again, thank you for your beautiful stories. "The Bench" sends me! No jive! It's solid gone, man!

Sincerely,
L.H.

★ ★ ★

February 28, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK]

Dear Peter,

One of the bad things about being [a writer] is, I reckon, that it seems to inspire so many other people to want to be writers! (You're guilty, too! Almost everybody that writes to me from Africa mentions you.) Anyhow, I've been just about inundated with Africa lately—two or three hundred letters since summer, and well over a hundred manuscripts! And never having been a very good or very prompt letter-writer myself, well, you can imagine! But I'm gradually getting out from under now, having answered just about everybody Certainly, my appeal for short stories has been gratifying beyond all expectations—happily so—and out of the mass of bad material I've received, I've garnered some very good things, too—some thirty odd stories from which to make a final selection for the anthology which is now in process of being typed up for consultation with the publishers with whom I'll do the cutting down Thanks so much for your other books. I've selected from *Mine Boy* that beautiful section about the fellow walking about on Saturday night and seeing the man fall off the roof and break his arm and going with him to the doctors. It stands

up very well alone as a complete incident in itself. The South Africans will be the best represented—along with the Nigerians. And their differences are interesting: the Nigerians having a lot of humor in their writing, and the South Africans a lot of sadness and poetry—Dyke Sentso, Richard Rive, Peter Kumalo, etc. From England have come interesting stories from John Akar, Aaron Cole, and Davidson Nicol. Nicol, I think, writes very well indeed. Do you know him? He’s studying at Cambridge and is, I gather, from Sierra Leone, although one of his stories is about Kenya. Ekwensi sent some very good things, too. And from Nigeria Nchami sent several that I liked, thanks to your good offices. Amos Tutuola sent an amazing fantasy, and said he would send more when I send money. Wise boy! I wrote *Drum* offering to collaborate with them, but heard nothing in that regard. However, I’ve again judged a contest for them, and get friendly letters from their office all the time. But I guess they wish to go their own way with their compilation. No harm done. And since I imagine they’ll be publishing in England, we won’t be competition for each other. Besides, there being nothing of that nature now, there’s no reason why there should not be two anthologies, or more, if anybody has the energy to gather them together. It’s a lot of work, I’m telling you! I didn’t dream it when I started! Wow! But the results, I think, will be worth it. How is the new baby? And those other beautiful children of yours? And what happened to your idea of possibly visiting us over here in the U.S.A.? Somebody wrote me about a good series of articles on the West Indians in England you’ve been doing. Wish I could see them. Louise Bennett³ (that most amusing woman) spent a year or so here, got married, and just recently departed for her native Jamaica leaving behind with me a copy of her hilarious poem, “Colonizing in Reverse,” and her delightful record of Jamaican songs made here where she was really quite a hit in clubs and TV. Well, I will now sign off and write to a few Gold Coast folks, and Adeboye Babalola⁴ in Nigeria who sent the biggest lot of stories of all, descriptively wonderful, but more sketches than stories, unfortunately, but I’ve worked hard on a couple of them to try to include them in the book and think they’ll make it. One of his about a trip by car from Ibadan to Lagos is so like cullud car trips here with everything breaking down

³Louise Bennett (1919–2006), Jamaican poet, folklorist, actor, and radio broadcaster. One of her best-known poems is “Colonisation in Reverse.”

⁴S. Adeboye Babalola (1926–2008), Nigerian poet, scholar, and folklorist.

on the way that I can't help but love it, even though nothing happens but tires blowing out, etc. Most Negro cars must behave the same way everywhere! *Ay, pobre Lucumi*, as the Cubans say⁵—where cars break down most of all! Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

March 1, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[CAPE TOWN]

Dear Richard,

Well, sir, I just came across your December letter (with another address on it)! You have more addresses than the law allows—especially for cullud! I just wrote you last week to the South Peninsula High School, and also sent you my new *Jazz* book there. So be sure you look that up, if not received by now—as it was a LONG letter—and I can't write all over again. Also returned to you the extra copies of your stories which I'd already copied from *Drum* for the anthology, as I thought you might make use of the copies, typing requiring caffeine Anyhow, what has happened is that I've been SWAMPED with letters from Africa—two or three hundred. And somehow your latest got mixed up with various others with no names on the outside and unopened and unread until today. Sorry. Had I seen your name on the envelope, it would have been read at once—yours being about the most interesting letters I get from anywhere these days. Although I did get a fascinating one from a writer in Australia recently that was so long it had to be sent in three parts day by day! (not that length always creates interest) Our crackers in Alabama, etc. behave the same way as yours did to Temba. Evil is not confined to any one part of the globe Maybe you read about our wonderful shoot-em-up in Harlem recently where one little guy had hundreds of police, firemen, etc. after him Sunday before last, blocks roped off, tear gas and bombs used, house set on fire, other families evacuated, all to finally take him—dead. A cullud Puerto Rican who all by himself turned out the city of New York. I got there just in time to see the patrol wagon pull

⁵In Afro-Cuban Santería, “Lucumi” refers to one of the groups or nations of West Africans brought to the Caribbean as slaves. This expression might be loosely translated as “pity the poor black man.” (Thanks to Rafael Saumell-Munoz for his help in interpreting this expression.)

off with his feet hanging out as the crowd booed the police and cheered him. A bad bandit! Robles by name—with radio and TV coverage for hours before he was finally ambushed in a 3rd floor apartment—real Chicago style. Do you have television in South Africa? It's the death of conversation here, folks keep it going day and night. When you call on somebody, can't even see them in the dark room, nor interrupt long enough to find out how their mama is. Few more years, and nobody will read a book any more—which is why I want to get our African anthology out soon with your FINE stories in it. Next time you change your address again, let me know! How's the high hurdles?

Sincerely yours,

★ ★ ★

March 2, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER CLARKE**
[SIMON'S TOWN]

Dear Peter,

Although I just wrote you a long letter the other day which I guess you have by now, thanking you for those very beautiful paintings you sent me, telling you how much I like your stories (much stronger than your poetry), and letting you know that the anthology is almost ready to submit to the publishers—I forgot to thank you for sending me the photos of yourself and the countryside. Thanks a lot! I believe I told you I'm sending you my new "Jazz" book, also the two books of short stories you said you didn't have. *Laughing to Keep from Crying* is out of print and rather hard to get, so I'm sending you one of my last two copies. So don't give it away like you did poor old Tagore! Caldwell is a very light colored man, so his friends say—and he looks it. I know him slightly, like his books very much. *Mine Boy* and *Tell Freedom* I like immensely, too. Others of Abrahams I haven't read, although he's sent me some which I hope to get around to soon. Been reading nothing but *your* stories (and other still-at-home Africans) lately. Some really very good! Did I ask you if you know Richard Rive who writes wonderful letters. He's of Cape Province, too, isn't he? And is a hurdler, so he tells me. Speaking

of Marian Anderson,⁶ I attended her debut at the Metropolitan Opera House, which was quite exciting—the first singer of color to break in that citadel of white music. She sang a sorceress—but a very beautiful looking one—like a romantic gypsy—and rocked the place with applause. The boxes were full of Negroes, all dressed up! I guess you know here in the U.S.A. the words *coloured* and *black* and *Negro* all mean the same. We don't have the three-way color line that S.A. and the British West Indies have. Here anybody who is at all colored is segregated in our South no matter how light in skin—which, in a way, is good, since it creates no division between any of us of Afro-American background. We're all in the same black boat! But New York is about like London, maybe better, in that active and insulting discrimination is rare. But a few hours Southward, oh, boy! “Departure” is a beautiful story! A-1 with me!

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

March 2, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [JOHANNESBURG]

Dear Ezekiel,

I came across a picture of you the other day in a back issue of *Drum* and you look so much like a friend of mine, Ralph Ellison (who wrote *Invisible Man*, winner a year or so ago of our big National Book Award, and who used to live at our house) that I sort of feel like I know you. Anyhow, you look like a very amiable guy. And I'm going to show Ralph your photo—and your stories, because you are certainly a good writer. I've just been doing a bit of “styling” on your *Blind Alley*—since English and American ways of paragraphing and punctuating differ—and so your characters are very vivid in my mind tonight. In answer to your recent note, of course I would be happy to serve as a judge for any of *Drum's* future Story Contests, as I believe I wrote Mr. Sampson. I suppose you got the information I sent for your wife

⁶Marian Anderson (1897–1993) became the first African-American singer to perform at the New York Metropolitan Opera on January 7, 1955; she played the sorceress Ulrica in Verdi's opera *Un Ballo in Maschera* (*The Masked Ball*).

regarding the Rose Morgan beauty shop. I attended the cocktail opening of a beautiful new one (that I sent you the invite) last Sunday and spoke to Miss Morgan about your wife. She says she will be happy to try to work out correspondence courses by mail for her Re: your possibly writing for some of our papers, I've had two replies. Here's the main sentence from each: "I certainly think we need to use such a reportorial resource as he is. However, we are not prepared to do so at this moment. I am filing his letter with the firm intention of utilizing him as soon as we have an opportunity." Ex. Ed. of *Pittsburgh Courier*. And, "Although we do not have anything in mind at the moment, we appreciate knowing that he is available." Johnson Publishing Company. But maybe we'll have better luck from some of the others I wrote to Send me a brief biography of yourself for the anthology, right now, please Meanwhile, all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

PS: To each of *Drum's* Contest winners, I sent last year a book of mine. This [means I] have all addresses but L.O.I. Nwangoro. Please send me his address.

★ ★ ★

March 2, 1955

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Hughes,

Just a little more than an hour ago I arrived home, saw your letter, opened it and said "WOW!" Gosh, it sure is good news and now I really feel on top of the world. All this after receiving the *Drum* first prize! Things seem to be taking shape at last but sooner than I expected, much too soon. I was only thinking that perhaps I would be able to get a first place in about two or three years time, not just yet and certainly not now, 1955. Anyway I got it and I feel a great deal satisfied with my effort.

Yes, I did receive the book of poems, *The Weary Blues*, some time ago, 8th November in fact. I think I wrote to thank you for it. But thanks again, it's a swell book and it gave me great pleasure to add it to my collection. I have read it several times over but it is due for another reading again soon, very soon. I find them immensely interesting, each poem, from beginning to end. I used to make a point of reading some poetry last thing at night before going to bed because I found it so

restful. You said you would send *The Ways of White Folks* but I thought you must have forgotten and I didn't like to remind you about it seeing that I was going to get it for nothing. I have heard a bit about that book so I am looking forward to receiving it. Also your newest little book, the one on jazz.

Yes, I was hoping you would *not* accept that "Joe Mkize" story. Although I thought it very funny when I was busy writing it, now I almost regret writing it and having had it accepted for publication. Hell! But the guys thought it great fun and told me so whenever we bumped into each other. But then most of them go for slick stories in a big way. I didn't expect you to want all four stories for the anthology but go right ahead; it's quite o.k. with me. I definitely am going to write much more in future. What with the encouragement of *Drum's* first prize and your good news, I'd be a dope if I did not go on. I certainly enjoy writing as much as I enjoy painting and I think it's fun being able to do both. Of course one needs to put a great deal of effort into both to make them good but it is always nice to sit back and look at it when it is finished. I know Richard Rive and I've seen him around Cape Town but we aren't friends even though we know each other. I know he is a teacher because he taught the class my brother was in last year. Also, somebody told me he writes occasional articles about athletics for some magazines but I didn't think he wrote stories as well. That's nice. I've heard of Dyke Sentso and Ezekiel Mphahlele already through *Drum* and I've read their stories. They are both good. I am dying to see what the finished book will be like because so far there's been nothing like it done out here. Oh, there have been collections of short stories but only by White writers. I guess our writers have been waiting for a chance like your anthology for a long time. I think I can speak for them when I say that I hope this won't be the last anthology.

(5th March). I'm very glad that you like the paintings I sent you and I get a great kick thinking of them being hung up on your studio walls. That's grand. I don't know anything about the work of Jacob Lawrence but if he's a negro I really would like to hear more about him. Is he a friend of yours? I too collect pictures and have a nice small collection of water-colours, drawings, woodcuts and linocuts. A few of them are by amateurs but the majority are by professionals, some South Africans, some Europeans, one Chinese and one American (Virgil Partch, the Cartoonist). I am very much interested in obtaining more graphic art, particularly pen and ink drawings, lithographs, silk-screen prints, woodcuts, etc. but it always takes so long to make

the right contacts. I gained most of my pictures by exchanging with the artists, a picture of mine for one of theirs. I prefer pictures which include figures. Landscapes are nice but I feel anybody can do that but with figures there is always something that can be told. I like that card you sent me at Christmas time, Aaron Douglas' *Africanesque*. Is he also a negro? I know about the work of most of the big names in American painting today but just about nothing of the younger artists emerging now. There is a great variety of styles in art in the United States and I like some of it. One of the painters I admire is Ben Shahn of Roosevelt, [New] Jersey.⁷ I have one little book of his paintings that I bought in 1950 in Cape Town. I really think he is good. (I wrote to him once about his paintings and sometime afterwards he sent me a delightful little booklet about his thoughts on art. I have it now among my other books. While we are on the subject of books now—do you know anything about the American writer Pietro di Donato?⁸ He wrote a book some years ago called *Christ in Concrete* which I thought brilliant).

(6th March). Yesterday being Saturday, I decided to go to Cape Town to see the current exhibition of German Graphic Art (1900–1955). I make a point of seeing all of the big art shows in town and have seen almost every one of them ever since I first started visiting exhibitions in 1947. Last year I saw the 16th to 17th century German Graphic Art exhibit, also at the National Gallery. About both the shows I can say that they were superb. Contemporary German Art is vigorous and stimulating although most of it is very “modern,” by which I mean Abstract. It is mainly the older artists whose work is centred around figure subjects. Of the older ones I like Erich Heckel, Karl Hofer, Kokoschka (I have a book about his work), Barlach, Marc, Nolde and Pechstein. Usually I see these exhibitions about three times before they close and I will most probably see this one again.

No, I don't think I shall be going back to writing poetry again, once was quite enough. In any case I don't think I would be able to make a name for myself as a poet. Another thing, writing poetry is hard work; well, I think so. I would far rather write stories and put the poetry that I have in me into them. That way it comes easier.

⁷Ben Shahn (1898–1969), American artist of the Social Realist school, born in Lithuania.

⁸Pietro di Donato (1911–1992), Italian-American leftist writer. *Christ in Concrete* (1939) was his first novel.

Well, I guess this is all for now so I'll just close. Thanks a lot for your news and I hope it won't be long before there is more good news regarding the anthology. Till then.

Yours sincerely,
Peter

★ ★ ★

March 4, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[CAPE TOWN]

Dear Richard,

Tonight while waiting for the typist to bring the rest of the African stories (2 A.M. and she hasn't come yet and it's raining so maybe she won't and I guess she's not done typing anyhow) I decided to work on the little biographies for the book and was reading Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* and *Return to Goli* to find out about him and so on, and just now going through your letters to see who you are in terms of birth, education, etc. (which are the basic facts required by folks who might "study" our book of stories) and was so fascinated by your letters with their vivid descriptions of life in your to me remote part of the world (although not strange, it being so much like the U.S. colour-wise) that I thought to myself and am thinking now, why don't YOU write a book, a factual one, with just the kind of things you've been telling me in it, about life in Cape Town—as Abrahams did for Johannesburg? You certainly make things come alive in your letters. You could do it either as a book about the Cape, or as a book about yourself and your young life there. In my opinion, no one with a sense of objectivity, such as you have, is too young ever to write an autobiography, if he wants to. When I wrote my *The Big Sea* some folks said I was too young to be writing my life. I said only that I wanted to get the first volume off so I could write two or three more before I forgot what happened. (I'm working on the 2nd now)..... Anyhow, what I've learned from your letters is all NEW to me, as I'm sure it would be to most readers outside your empire of apartheid. Therefore, it's good literary and life material. And you might as well write a book as not, since you can. (Folks who can't I wouldn't advise to try)..... So now I will eat some more of my Nigerian groundnuts (such a BIG box the guy sent me) and have a drink (Four Roses) and go to bed..... By the way, I told a dramatist who's looking for a subject for a one-act play about

your “The Bench” today and he seemed intrigued, so I promised to send him a carbon. With a good actor, it ought to play beautifully How coloured are you? In Haiti they have 15 shades. Me, I’m No. 8ish.

★ ★ ★

March 7, 1955

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [JOHANNESBURG] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I received both your letters which I have enjoyed immensely. I am so glad you are able to include two or three stories of mine in your anthology which I am sure will be of great interest to even readers in Africa where distances are so vast and writers do not have much in common.

I am also thrilled by your identifying me with Ralph Ellison even if it be merely on the point of looks. I have only just got his *Invisible Man*, and will soon read it. Thanks for your willingness to be judge, I shall also pass the great news that we may use any of the fine stories in your collection.

Yes, I gave my wife the printed matter about Miss Morgan’s beauty shop, and she is delighted to know what the possibilities are. She will be writing to Miss Morgan’s shortly.

It is encouraging enough to hear about the journals, and I shall await a word from them. I have just received a letter from the Associated Negro Press Inc. offering me a space every other month at space rate and *Ebony* saying they are glad to know I am available and asking me to do some story about a white child who was taken away from her Negro mother because she is too white to lead a life among Negroes.

Herewith my biographical note:

Bruno Esekie is the pen-name of a 35-year-old African living in Johannesburg. He was born in the slum location of Marabastad, Pretoria. At three years of age his father took him out to the country 172 miles from Pretoria where he spent 10 years as a herd-boy, attending school intermittently. He came back to the city of his birth and had to make tremendous leeway in school. He read every type of old book or paper he could lay hands on. His mother was a domestic servant, and through difficulties she managed to pay for his high school. Bruno gained a scholarship for a first class pass for a teacher’s course. Already he was feeling the urge to write. He took up a job at an institution for the blind as clerk-instructor-driver. At this time

he wrote a small volume of short stories *Man Must Live* which was later published when he was teaching, which he took up after further private study. While a teacher he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree by private study. Some of his short stories have appeared in *Drum* magazine and a bilingual pamphlet edited in Holland, *Standpunte*. His story "The Suitcase" appears in No. 7 issue of *New World Writing* this year, and a number of educational articles have been published in some dailies and weeklies. Bruno Esekie is now fiction editor of a Johannesburg African magazine.

L.O.I Nwangoro's address is c/o Akintola, Williams & Co., 11 Martins Street, Lagos Nigeria.

Best wishes as always, yours,
Ezekiel

★ ★ ★

March 10, 1955

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES**
[NEW YORK]

[*Ed. Note: This letter is dated "10th February, 1955." However, references to historical events suggest a slightly later date, and the "three letters" Rive refers to seem to be the letters Hughes sent on February 24, March 1, and March 4, leading us to suspect that this letter was incorrectly dated and should have read "10th March, 1955."*]

Dear Langston,

I received three letters from you, each more welcome than the preceding one. You can bet your life that I will not cease corresponding with you. I'm sorry about my addresses. It's convenient to have three so that one cannot be found out. My actual residential address is the above. Grassy Park is in the "wilds" of South Peninsula, near Muizenberg and Bill Curry declares that "one needs a compass, has to swim two rivers and fight Zulu impis when visiting dear Richard." I assure you it's not quite as bad and letters are not delivered by ox-wagon. My school address is convenient but during vacation I am not there and cannot thus receive correspondence. Write to "Beulah" please till official notification with liberal supplies of red-tape.

Peter Clarke beat me in the *Drum* competition. You have brought us together again. I say this because, before you wrote I had no idea Peter Clarke wrote. We were together in the same Boy Scout Troop, 2nd

Cape Town, where I was a King's Scout (equivalent to the American Eagle Scout) and he was a Rover. We both made Camps Bay Glen re-echo to war-cries and Scout yells and then parted when I left the Movement because of its racialism, and now we meet again. I taught his younger brother David, English Literature for two years, and David (although only six years younger than myself) still considers me the terror of his young life.

Concerning the Boy Scouts, in South Africa it is divided into racialistic groups. When Lord Rowallen, chief scout of the world visited South Africa, a preliminary meeting of Scouts was called "to decide on the questions he was to be asked." People started asking silly questions like official length of garter-tabs and colours of scarves. Everyone shirked the political issue till I asked "whether the division of Scouts into racialistic groups as practiced in South Africa was in accordance with true Scouting principle and tradition!" Complete chaos. When we met Rowallen I asked the same questions and of course things were made so hot for me that I resigned. My troop threatened to resign in protest. But I objected.

Simonstown, where Peter Clarke comes from, is more British than Plymouth and I believe men still wear Union Jack waistcoats and speak about the way Attlee's messing up the country at home (and don't mention Aneurin Bevan—!!).⁹ I am sure Peter reads Kipling in the privacy of his room.

"This realm! this earth! this England!"¹⁰ (I am visiting him next week).

Another idea of this small world. Miss Titus you wrote to me about is the sister of Alfie Jacobs, principal of Battswodd Training College and I teach his only son (impossible brat) Latin. She came to town and I'm meeting her by appointment Saturday evening having been introduced by Langston Hughes. I am going in full war-dress and I expect there will be a fanfare of trumpets, gold carpet, brass band and mayoral address when I arrive. What price notoriety.

⁹Clement Attlee (1883–1967) was prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1945 to 1951. He introduced the National Health Service, nationalized industry, and began the dismantling of the British Empire by moving to grant independence to India, Pakistan, and Burma in 1948. After Labour was defeated in the elections of 1951, Attlee continued to lead the party until shortly after its second electoral defeat in 1955. Aneurin Bevan (1897–1960) was Attlee's Minister of Health and led the process of instituting the National Health Service.

¹⁰Rive is paraphrasing John of Gaunt's speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, 2.1.50.

Thank you very much for your very fine patronage of me. You picked me up as a literary orphan and fathered me. “I shall never, never forget you, said the distracted maid, as she dropped hot tears on the shoulder of true-blue Sir Harry”—in the best melodramatic fashion.

You say you received a copy of *Cape Scapes*! I saw it at the University Library the other day and browsed through it. It is written by a White man. It gives a pretty good idea of my surroundings. I usually climb Table Mountain from Kloof Nek and sometimes Lion’s Head. I often met General Smuts¹¹ up the mountain while that great mountaineer lived!! I do underwater fishing at Kalk Bay and Muizenberg (fins and snorkels and fighting sea-monsters up to five pounds in the best Hans Hass¹² and Johnny Weismuller¹³ tradition). I teach at Diep River. Under the South African Group Areas Act,¹⁴ I am now living in a White area (although 90% of the people in this area are Coloured). I live in an area designated as white and the University is in a White Area. It seems we will have to sell up and trek if there is no concerted opposition (our home is valued at £3,000) so it’s going to be a big loss. Remember Sophiatown. About a month ago 2,500 policemen armed with rifles removed 150 African families to Meadowville¹⁵ in attempt to clear up Johannesburg’s black spots. We have been photographed under the Population Registration Act,¹⁶ and had to give particulars about our parents, race, etc. which caused an enormous amount of embarrassment. So we all carry passes (including Whites); Africans of course have dozens of different ones.

Another move is to transfer all Africans from the Western Province, the so-called “traditional” home of the Cape Coloured, and I’m sorry to say that some of my people are in agreement with this, seeing an

¹¹Jan Christian Smuts (1870–1950), prime minister of the Union of South Africa from 1919 to 1924 and from 1939 to 1948. He led troops for the Transvaal in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, and served as British Field Marshall during both World War I and World War II.

¹²Hans Hass (1919–), Austrian hunter, deep-sea diver, writer, and maker of documentary films.

¹³Johnny Weismuller (1904–84), American actor who played Tarzan in twelve movies; before becoming an actor, he had been an Olympic champion swimmer.

¹⁴The Group Areas Act (1950), one of the foundations of apartheid legislation, divided South African urban areas into zones where a specified racial group was allowed to live and work.

¹⁵Rive is probably referring to Meadowlands, the township in Soweto to which black residents of the Johannesburg neighborhood of Sophiatown were forced to relocate beginning in February 1955.

¹⁶The Population Registration Act (1950), another foundation of apartheid law, designated a racial category for every individual in South Africa.

economic threat to themselves in the influx of Africans (who can sell their labour more cheaply) into the urban areas.

You know “The Bench” was my first major attempt at a short story after winning “dux” prizes at College for things like “What I want to be when I grow up” and “The veld of South Africa” etc. You are the first ever to praise it. It was my “Cinderella” story and after you wrote about it I even forced myself to reread it and almost liked it. None of my stories have been published (my themes would not go down well with a White South African public). They prefer Non-Europeans who show much promise and know their place. Starve in the garret and play the piano at Madam’s charity concert. I hate patronisation and detest condescension. I would indeed be grateful if your agents could find magazines for publishing any of them.

As for a dramatisation of any of them: “Ooh Monsieur! Oo lah lah!” My writing is top secret and only known to a few bosom friends. When people find out that my work is published! My! What will the Jones’s say!

At University the other day two students were speaking about the poetry they wrote and I listened and kept a discreet silence, for after all it’s my secret. The day I shall stand fingering my first £1 note earned from my own pen. Why I feel like a giddy schoolgirl already!

Your suggestion for me to write my autobiography is frightening—the trouble is I haven’t the sort of life one writes about. I never starved in the gutter (meals pretty regular) and was never subjected to the indignities most Non-Europeans in South Africa suffer. I received for a Non-European a good education, and had only to work once I was qualified. My life is so ordinary that it could have occurred anywhere else in the world. It is only because I am so sensitive to these things that I write about it. I could write a story but my story will have to be creative. Indignities are plentiful in South Africa but besides isolated cases I’ve been fortunate. Although I am dark (as you can see from my photograph, I am sending by boat) I have straight hair and Aryan features, rather athletically built (5’8½”).

I came second in the third heat of the South African Championship 440 yds. (52.8 seconds) and like all good fairy stories won the final (which I expected to do) in 49.8 seconds. I have now announced my retirement at the ripe old age of 23 years. I passed my examination with distinction in Shakespeare and Literature and a bare minimum in Anglo-Saxon. Who the devil wants to know what Beowulf did at Grendel’s Pit or why Athelwold succeeded Athelstane who succeeded Athelred. Shades of “1066” and all that. Bill Curry is taking an athletic

photo of myself, and I have thus decided to don spikes and carry my developed paunch over the timbers so that you can see I am not quite drooling at the mouth as yet.

I would sincerely appreciate it if you could send me Peter Abrahams' address so that I could write to him (although I do not quite agree with his views). I am working on two stories I will send you the moment I have finished.

My latest craze is collecting long-playing records. It started when I received a Deccalian Record Player as a present. I am now building up a drama and ballet record-player. It's fun to see our school rugger players listening while Mr. Rive subjects them to "Les lac de Cygne" and other abominations. Some of them even like it and ask more.

There is of course an appalling amount of ignorance amongst Coloured people about Africans. Social and economic segregation is as vicious as that between white and black. In some Coloured homes it is sacrilege to bring an African into the lounge.

I was a second-year student at University and worked on one particular lecturer's nerves by asking too much questions. I remember coming late and standing outside speaking to a student in the room through the open window. I heard her (the lecturer) telling the class that she thought she heard "that impossible creature, Rive" outside. What price notoriety. But I'm not quite as bad as all that. Beneath this rugged exterior beats a heart of the purest gold!

I am doing (guess what!) at University this year. Pure Mathematics and Economics! My mind is a whirling mass of Cosines and Cosecs and formulae like

$$\cos(\alpha + \beta) = \cos \alpha \cos \beta - \sin \alpha \sin \beta$$

and differential and integral calculus! Don't I sound learned?

Well Langston, photos and stories will be on its way, and I hope to hear from you soon. "When the postman knocks my heart flutters in expectation!"

Wel ek sluit my brief en hoop om van jou te hoor so gou moontlik. Van die beste tot daardie tyd.

(Well I close my letter and hope to hear from you as soon as possible. Of the best till then.)

Totsiens en alles.

(So long and everything.)

Yours,
Richard Rive

Autobiography (the egoist in me).

1. Born. Cape Town. 1.3.31 (24 years).
2. Educated. Trafalgar Junior (Municipal Scholarship Holder. 1943)
Trafalgar High School (First Class Student)
Hewat Training College
University of Cape Town.
3. Occupation. Teacher of Latin and English at South Peninsula High School.
4. Early work. Read and told Shakespeare's stories to children in District Six at age of 12 years.
Prize for literature, Hewat Training College.
2nd prize, *Drum* Competition.
5. Activities. 1) Boy Scouts. Ex-King Scout and holder of record number proficiency badges in South Africa.
2) Athletics. Western Province Champion. Inter-College 880 champ. South African Junior High and Long Jump champion.
3) Mountaineering, underwater spear-fishing and swimming, collecting ballet music, reading, writing!

(Sounds like a page from *Who's Who* or *Dalnet's Peerage*. Who knows...—RMR)

* * *

March 14, 1955

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Abrahams congratulates Hughes on the progress he has made on the anthology and offers to help find a publishing house to release the book in England. He says, "I do know Davidson Nicol and a fine chap he is," and also sends a health report about his friend John Akar. He thanks Hughes for having sent a copy of his First Book of Jazz, and says he's trying to collect the 100 recommended records. He writes, "I'm hard at it on a novel at last. It's just beginning to pick up nicely and I'm feeling quite good. Hope to have it done by September and then to pay you that visit." He writes about his family and a trip he had once taken to the Gold Coast. He concludes by passing on a request from his daughter for a photograph of Hughes.

* * *

April 7, 1955

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I seem to be getting so many letters these days that I don't seem to have enough time in which to reply to them. So I have to take advantage of every little bit of spare time I have. As a result, this letter is being written at 7:25 a.m. just before I start work (not that anybody has any intention of working very hard because tomorrow is holiday).

I think I wrote to say thanks for the books *The Ways of White Folks* and *Fields of Wonder*. I have since finished *The Ways of White Folks*, having spent part of one weekend reading it. It's a delightful book. The characters live (damn! I should have had the book here with me. When I write about a book I like to have it near so that I can pick on points on which to comment. But I will most probably write again about it when I have finished the other book).

I received *Laughing to Keep from Crying* but so far have only had a chance to read two pieces, "Push-cart Man" and "Saratoga Rain," because I was trying to finish off some other books as well. I read quite a lot, always from one book to the other. I bought a batch in December and have not yet finished them. I bought myself *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin* (do you like his work? I certainly do, although I have seen no originals yet, only reproductions and prints). Last week I read Tennessee Williams' *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* and this week I finished off *The Bachelor of Arts* by the Indian writer R.D. Narayan (the book dates from the '30s).

No, I shall hang onto *Laughing to Keep from Crying* and certainly not give it away. That's one thing, I never give books away if somebody has given it to me. The only reason why I gave away that Tagore *The Crescent Moon* was simply because I enjoyed the poetry of his writings so much that I thought somebody else might have the same pleasure. Fortunately, my friend appreciates that type of writing so I knew she would enjoy it too, and because I already had my own copy I didn't mind giving the book to her. (Her husband, who is also a Tagore fan, said if she didn't take the book then she could kick herself afterwards for being a fool).

Yes, I know that in the U.S.A. the words "coloured" and "black" and "Negro" all stand for the same thing. Here in S.A. it is of course different. With the Non-Europeans (by which I mean, speaking as a South African, those who aren't white) the negroes are known as "natives" (because they are more "pure-blooded," if one can use that term) and the coloureds are those of mixed descent (white and black). The educated "natives" prefer to be called Africans. But here I am, coloured, but dark enough to be a "native," so where do I stand? The lighter-complexioned coloured person does not think of himself as

anything else but coloured, unless he “plays” white which many of them do, and then he expects others to think he’s “white.” Actually the terms “Native” and “European” are neither here nor there in this country because most “Europeans” haven’t the faintest idea what Europe looks like and know only the Platteland, the Ox-wagon and “Boerewors” (“*Boere*”—farmers, “*wors*”—sausage). What’s wrong with being “African?” I prefer to think of myself as African because I belong to AFRICA, no matter what ancestors I had (and they’re pretty mixed up). It’s something to be proud about and AFRICA is my home.

Yours sincerely,
Peter

Side note one: Thanks a lot for the photo. I think it’s swell.

Side note two: Last year a friend of mine, a school teacher, emigrated to England with his family. He said he was tired of being “coloured.” So now he’s in England being “white” with his obviously “coloured” skin.

★ ★ ★

May 2, 1955

PETER CLARKE [SIMON’S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Received your delightful book on Jazz Monday last week. Thanks a million. I haven’t had a chance to settle down to reading it yet but had a look through of course. It looks fine. Jazz happens to be one of my interests as well although in the past I have paid more attention to the classics than to jazz.

One thing about apartheid, it has made many Coloured people aware of people of similar colour who happen to be living in other countries, especially America. It has also made them aware of the talented musicians in the States and such names as Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald are household words. My ambition is to build up a collection of records one day, jazz and classics. The only thing that prevents me from doing so now is lack of space. I intend studying music sometime, even if it’s in a few years time, just so as to have some knowledge of it.

(Wednesday, 4th): [...]

I've started drawing and painting again, in earnest. Up to Easter I had been taking things easy. Felt too lousy to work hard. I guess it's a result of wanderlust. Ever since I came back from my Natal holiday in January I've been wanting to do more travelling and just couldn't settle down. But now Winter is here and so I have no other desire to go trudging about in the rain and the cold. So I can get down to working again on pictures and stories.

Read *Laughing to Keep from Crying* over the Easter weekend while out camping and was able to devote all my time to it. Swell book! I liked it.

Yours sincerely,
Peter

★ ★ ★

May 4, 1955

**RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

Dear Langston,

I have received your last letter, your photographs and your jazz book, though all at different times. Your letter was very interesting, though I do hope I can take up more of your precious time and get you to write slightly more often. Your photographs are interesting and I hope by now that you have received mine. My apologies re: photos in Athletic war-dress. To my consternation I found I had none and it is off-season here (winter with plenty of rain) and tracks used for rugby. (I am recuperating after receiving a heavy blow on the forehead while playing for the local student side.) I'll however send a photograph to you within a week. You look pretty well-off and prosperous, not at all like the starving-in-the-gutter type of writer. I expected a touch of bohemianism, long flowing hair, pale languid expression, Oscar Wilde garb and sandals. But I'm not in the least disappointed to see you seeming so wealthy. What about my photographs? Bill Curry says I look like an idiot on the mounted one. Agree?

I have met plenty of people since last I wrote to you. I visited Sylvia Jacobs, the evening before I left to run in Kimberley (600 miles away). We heard your voice reading your poems. Your accent of course is totally different to ours. The nearest I can get to describe ours is a cross between "Oxonian and Cockney." A kind of marbles-in-the-mouth

dialect. Besides this of course, we all speak Afrikaans fluently, although African languages are not taught in European and Coloured school, and at University of Cape Town is considered as a “Foreign Language qualification” for a degree in Arts. I loved the sketches in your book of jazz and found the matter extremely interesting. I also collect records but mainly long-playing Classical. My favourites are “Moldau” from *Ma Vlatva* by Smetana and “Les Sylphides,” Chopin, and “Eine Kleine Nachtmusiek,” Mozart. I listen to jazz also, but know little about it. I hope to know more after reading your book, and being able to wax quite eloquently on “Ragtime” and “Blues.” My knowledge has been limited to Gershwin up to now. Sylvia gave me a jolly fine time at her place and told me [about] an incident which she might have told you, but it’s worth repeating.

You remember the “Van Riebeeck Festival”—the great National Celebration in Cape Town of 300 years of White supremacy.¹⁷ It was effectively boycotted by all Non-Europeans. Sylvia Jacobs, however, went and took her nephew Gavin with her. I teach young Gavin Latin at present, and he’s brilliant. There was an address system there and children were invited to say anything over it which was immediately broadcast throughout the festival grounds. Young Gavin then recited your “Merry-go-round” poem,¹⁸ and I assure you that thousands of white South Africans were not overpleased at what they heard.

David Clark I wrote to and received one or two letters in reply. He is a very busy man. I also met James Matthews,¹⁹ whom you might have heard of through Clarke. I met him in *Drum’s* office. He has good ideas, but has a slum background (preferable for writing), but like most Coloured people of similar background suffers from a gross inferiority complex. We chatted pleasantly till he discovered in the course of the conversation that I had a University background and then crawled into his shell, eyed me suspiciously and was reticent about his methods. He however confided that he was busy on a novel. Seen any of his works? How’s the anthology getting on?

¹⁷Jan van Riebeeck (1619–1677) was a Dutch colonial administrator who founded the city of Cape Town on April 6, 1652 and served as commander of the Cape until 1662. In 1952, the apartheid government sponsored the Van Riebeeck Festival in Cape Town to commemorate the establishment of White settlement in the Cape.

¹⁸Hughes’s poem “Merry-Go-Round” (1942) tells of a visit to the carnival by a black child who asks, “Where is the Jim Crow section / On this merry-go-round, / Mister, cause I want to ride?”

¹⁹James Matthews (1929–), South African novelist, poet, and journalist.

I suppose you would like some local news. The most interesting thing lately is of course the closing of Fort Hare University College because of alleged "secret caucuses." The only post-matric institution open to Non-Europeans, in South Africa is of course Fort Hare, which is a College attached to Rhodes University, Hewat Training College (a post-matriculation teachers' training institution where only Coloured students are admitted, NOT Africans), Wentworth Medical School (a glorified Science laboratory where doctors are trained for work among their own people), and Universities of Witwatersrand and Cape Town where non-Europeans are allowed. Fort Hare is a hotbed of the African National Congress and I am sorry to say that there is a powerful wave of Black Nationalisation sweeping it. Coloured and Indian students have a tough time. I met Fort Hare students when a delegate from University of Cape Town at National Union of South African Students' Congresses. They refused to give their opinions on political issues, and literally pulled their noses up at you if you were not African. Despite this I am violently opposed to the principle of closing the College.

Bantu Education of course has reared its racialistic head and seems here to stay. The organization against it was pitiful and chaotic; children are refused back at school if they in any way associated with the boycott move.

I am Organizing Secretary of the Western Province Senior School Sports Union, comprised of 27 High Schools, all Coloured. There is only ONE African secondary school in the Cape, Langa High, and we roped them in. We have been informed that under no condition are Coloured children allowed to compete against Africans. Divide and rule policy. So Langa is out.

Regulations have been set into action to curtail the activities of Coloured teachers. I belong to a very militant teacher's body, the Teacher's League of South Africa (T.L.S.A.), which has been outlawed by the Department because of its political affiliations. Despite this, most Coloured teachers belong to it. Regulations have just been passed making it possible for the Superintendent General of Education to dismiss any teacher who in his opinion is using his position to sow dissension in the ranks of the Non-European. Virtually this means he can get rid of you, without reasons, if he only slightly suspects that your views differ from his. Shades of McCarthyism! Were you in South Africa you'd most probably be named as a Communist because of your books. A "Communist" is anyone who differs with the views of the ruling class. It is now a matter of time and speculation how long myself and hundreds like myself will remain in our positions.

The Editor of *Drum* has offered me a job as a journalist on his Cape Town staff, but I declined this. I will miss the crowded corridors too much, Sports Day with hoarse throats and war cries; the hushed atmosphere of the examination room, Interval with the toffs of 10A who do Classics, strolling around the quad and discussing Shakespeare and Shaw, and Einstein and Euclid. I'm afraid it's in my blood, and I'll end up as a pretty mouldy schoolmaster, the terror of the Junior School. At the moment there is very little difference in age between myself and the students I teach in 10A and we compete against each other in Athletic Series. I believe it is the dying wish of "Gus Jacobs" to knock hell out of old Rive in the 440 hurdles. After all a person who is mouldy with Latin and English can't really jump over timbers! Even if Old Rive is still a youngster! Ye gods!

I have just seen the latest *Drum*, I suppose you have received yours also, with "Black and Brown Song" in it. It is a wonderful feeling to have people sitting in a bus reading your story and not being aware that you! THE AUTHOR!! is sitting in front or behind them. What price immortality. We had the most pathetic experience coming home from Kimberley.

We had not booked our return journey, but it was imperative we leave Sunday morning to reach Cape Town Monday night, to recommence school Tuesday morning. Our High School girls' softball side were also in Kimberley and were legitimately booked to leave Sunday morning. Well there we stood on the station Sunday morning, and an irate white ticket examiner warned us not to get on the train as we were not booked. We however decided to jump the train and depend on luck to get us to Cape Town. The Examiner was wild when he came around and threatened to put us off right in the veld and miles from nowhere. He was prevailed upon to put us off at De Aar (500 miles from home) where we were promised a fast train within two hours. Also once the train pulled out, 2 p.m. in the afternoon, we found out that the next train was 8:45 p.m., and also carried no dining saloon. Fortunately I remembered that the local Principal of the High School, [was] an ex-Fort Hare man, and we waded through inches of mud, scaled two barbed wire fences, climbed across a muddy river and got lost in the Railway Goods Yard before we discovered his house on the outskirts of the Location. There we slept and ate and ate and slept till 7 p.m. and then went to the station. We bought as much food as we could at a café we found open in De Aar, and then boarded the world's slowest train. The confounded thing stopped at every possible siding and Herby Abrahams declares (honours bright) it stopped in the veld

on two occasions during the night for no apparent purpose other than to view the serenity of a South African night. It pulled out of De Aar two hours late and deposited (or more literally dumped) us at Belville (14 miles from Cape Town) 9 o'clock the Monday night. Then we had to take an electric train to Cape Town, a suburban train to Plumstead, a bus to Grassy Park, and wake Eric Hector at home at 11 p.m. Tell him all about it till 1 a.m. and sleep fitfully and wake at 6 a.m. to go to school. Life can be like that.

Kimberley is a typically South African town, centre of the diamond mining industry, and its other boast is that it has the biggest man-made hole in the world, its depth is about 2,000 feet and its perimeter is one mile. If you fling a rock down, it takes 15 seconds to reach the bottom. An Indian, Kamjee, committed suicide while we were there by flinging himself down the hole. The racialism is mild as in Cape Town, but it was the scene of ugly race riots in 1952.

I am eagerly awaiting news of the anthology. Please give me all the latest news, even if it is only that the typists spelt three words wrongly. No television yet in South Africa, thank god. When your Aircraft Carrier Midway came to Cape Town a month or two ago, it was a revelation to see Negroes working with Whites, and armed Coloured people. One “gob” declared that Cape Town was half the size of New York cemetery and twice as dead.

Cheerio.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

June 27, 1955

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Abrahams thanks Hughes for sending clippings on Abrahams's novel Mine Boy, and congratulates Hughes on all his recent publications, including his second autobiography. He asks Hughes to send his regards to “Lamming.”²⁰ He will be in Jamaica on assignment for two months beginning in September, and

²⁰Probably George Lamming (1927–), novelist, short story writer, poet, and essayist from Barbados. His best-known works includes the early novels *In the Castle of My Skin* and *The Emigrants*, and his collection of essays *The Pleasures of Exile*.

he hopes to visit New York in November. He writes, "Really, this is just to let you know I'm still alive and kicking and have also just finished a new book. A novel this time . . ."

★ ★ ★

July 4, 1955

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I have not heard from you for ages and needs must presume that you have either given up the literary ghost, or attended Bandung²¹ and are still busy trying to get back into the States. I suppose you are busy. I was extremely busy, what with University Examinations and School Examinations and goodness knows what more. I have received *Nocturne* from you, and *Jet*. We have an enormous need for a pocket-size magazine like *Jet*. What amazes me is the high standard reached in almost all spheres by American Negroes. Non-European University graduates are still a rarity in South Africa and Doctors can be counted on one's fingers.

I met Sylvia Titus at the Little Theatre the other evening where we had gone to see a performance by the University Players of *Caligula*. Excellent. Sylvia incidentally was at the same High School with me, Trafalgar High, but she was my senior, being in the Matriculation Class while I was a 12 year old Fresher. She remembers me very well she says, but I at that time treated all women with the contempt of an independent young man of twelve. She says she received some records from you, and I'm going to listen to it soon.

Home news section. Congress of the People raided by police (200) on charges of Treason.²² Western Province delegates in two lorries stopped at Beaufort West. Drivers arrested for having no licenses! ALL

²¹ A 1955 conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, between 29 African and Asian nations with the aim of encouraging cooperation between the countries and opposing colonialism worldwide.

²² Throughout 1955 and 1956 the Special Branch of the South African Police raided the homes and offices of hundreds of people associated with opposition groups. In 1956, this would finally lead to treason charges brought against 156 black, white, Indian, and coloured leaders of the Congress Alliance, including Nelson Mandela. The defendants were all acquitted by 1961, though some of them would later be convicted in the famous Rivonia Trial of 1963–1964.

delegates *subpoenaed* as witnesses. So they can't go to Johannesburg for the Congress, though four got away. I suppose you've read all the news in your newspapers, but what they won't say is that all along the way police were stopping delegates and arresting them for every crime for which they could arrest them. I am to visit Peter Clarke soon, smell the ozone of Simonstown and breath the air Peter Clarkes are made of. I have been working on feature articles for *Drum*, but have plots now for two short stories which I should finish this week. I will immediately make copies and let you have them *sine mora*.²³ Hope to hear from you as soon as possible; how's New York getting on?

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

July 24, 1955

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Abrahams sends Hughes his itinerary for his West Indian trip in September. He will be in New York for a few hours on September 3; will Hughes be able to meet him? And can Hughes help arrange some lectures for Abrahams's return to the United States in November, and help Abrahams find a place to stay in New York? "Sorry to be asking so much of you but you know how it is with a stranger in a strange land." He has some possible speaking opportunities in Boston, Chicago, and Nashville, the latter through Arna Bontemps, who has recently written to him. He concludes, "Can't tell you how much I look forward to seeing you."

★ ★ ★

July 31, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK]

Dear Peter,

I trust this will reach you before you depart for the seashore, in case the information herein may be of some use to you. Regarding

²³ Latin for "without delay."

lectures: Fisk, so a note from Arna Bontemps tells me, is already set for you. I suggest that en route to, or returning from Fisk, you try to book Howard University in Washington, Hampton in Virginia, and Atlanta in Georgia—then you'd have four of the major Negro colleges. In New York I suggest trying the Town Hall Forum, the Community Church, and Harlem's Church of the Master. If you get six paying dates during the short period you'll be here, that wouldn't be bad, and would leave you some time for other things, too. I suggest that you ask Knopf to put you in touch with the Colston Leigh Agency or some other lecture agent to make these and other bookings for you. Booking lectures takes quite a lot of doing—unfortunately, much more work and letter writing than I have the facilities for doing myself at the moment, having only a part-time secretary and two fall book contracts on my hands to complete, plus about 300 unanswered letters piled in front of me on which I'm weeks behind. So best I can offer to do is to drop a few notes to the colored colleges in question as to you being here in November, and suggest they write you c/o Knopf. But it would be better to have an agent or Knopf write them suggesting dates and a fee. There are two factors against arranging dates at this time of year—first: college folks are mostly away on vacation, and may not be back before opening of classes in late September or October. Second: Most of the larger colleges and forums already have their autumn programs booked—so would have to be persuaded to take you on as an extra special lecture, which no doubt some of them would do if an evening is vacant. Third: November is running pretty close to the Christmas holidays, when some colleges close in mid-December, or are having quarterly examinations. Fourth: November is the very middle and end of the football season, homecoming games, etc., which occupy more time and attention in the U.S. often than intellectual activities in the fall. I simply tell you all this so you realize the obstacles to booking lecture dates this late on so short a notice for the autumn season. But still I think you should be able to get at least a half dozen, if someone works hard at it between now and then—I mean that many that pay enough for you to clear several hundred dollars. Free dates or at low fees wouldn't be any problem at all. I'd say you'd need \$300 for a month in and around New York. More wouldn't do any harm—according to what you want to do. As to a place to live, I just called Ralph Ellison to see if his apartment would be available, since he's going to Rome for a year, but he says he's sublet it already. Personally, I think for all

around convenience, a small hotel in the midtown (not Harlem) area, near Times Square and the theatres and publishers, would probably be most convenient, and not too expensive—from maybe \$15 a week up, or one of the bigger and better hotels from \$5 a day up with phone and all. What airport will you come into? Is it British Overseas Airways you're coming on? The Editor of *Our World* says he'd like to meet you. Probably for pictures, when you go through. Maybe I can get out to the airport, too, if not up in country where I'm working off and on with a photo compiler on a *big* Photo History of the Negro to be done by Nov. 1. At any rate, I'll see you in November. With only four hours between planes, probably you won't come into the city on your way to Jamaica. Be sure to meet John Searchwell at Cornwall College in Montego Bay, who was here once and in London. Nice guy. And Philip Sterling at the Univ. W.I. in Kingston. And Andrew Pearse, Ed. of *Caribbean Quarterly* in Port au Spain who knows a *lot* about Trinidad. All nice folks, too. Best Regards,

★ ★ ★

NOT DATED—September–November 1955

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I have not received a letter from you in months. Is there a hold-up somewhere? The last matter I received from you was a copy of *Jet* and an hotel advert. I hope however I will receive a newsy-juicy letter from you soon. How's things in the States?

In South Africa we're just about having Spring after Winter floods and great misery in shanty-towns (such as Cook's Bush near my home where 5,000 Africans live in miserable and pitiable conditions). I am looking forward to Summer. What with Athletics, swimming, hiking, mountain-climbing. Our Christmas here is as hot as hell. Imagine a hot Christmas with the traditional hot plum pudding and holly. Silly isn't it? Cape Town is more British than Britain. We have had an intensification of the political machine here with raids throughout the Union by police on charges of treason. The historical "Congress of the People" was raided by police in Johannesburg. There has been more bannings under the

“Suppression of Communism” Act,²⁴ including a member of our High School Committee etc. etc.

The other craze in South Africa is Rugby (something like football). A test series has just been finished against the British Isles. Needless to say South Africa is represented only by Whites. The fun started when New Zealand wanted to tour South Africa with a team including Maoris. Needless to say the tour materialized with a “White” only New Zealand side coming. The United States Athletic side which visited South Africa about 3 years ago was a “White” only side (it included Fortune Gordien²⁵). Had it not been for my Colour I might have represented South Africa as a quarter miler at the Olympic and Empire Games. Imagine Rive of South Africa on the victors rostrum smiling benignly at Shakolovitch of the Soviet Union who came second and Rajagopalcharria of Pakistan who came third and is fuming behind his Oriental moustaches because he had been robbed of immortality by that tan streak from the Cape vineyards. Ye immortal gods!!!

I have sad news for you. Sylvia Titus’ husband passed away a month ago. I met him when we were introduced by you. I again met them at a University performance of *Caligula* at the Little Theatre. It was a blow to hear he had passed away. She has a young son though. She now resides in Wynberg, a mile or two from my place.

I was successful in the *New Age* short story competition, judged by the authors Uys Krige,²⁶ Jack Cope, and the philosopher Van der Ross.²⁷ They said some very nice things about me, and I am quite impressed with myself. Enclosed find a criticism of “Dagga Smokers’ Dream.” I have written another story, “Rich Black Hair,” but the only copy is in the possession of a friend of mine, Aubrey Dean. I shall get it from him and send it along to you. I have a wonderful story in mind, “Queue,” but somehow can’t just get started. I shall and must write! As I feel I

²⁴The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) defined communism in very broad terms to include virtually any opposition to apartheid laws, and gave the minister of justice nearly unlimited powers to ban or detain any person he deemed to be a communist.

²⁵Fortune Gordien (1922–1990) was an American track and field athlete specializing in the discus throw. He won a bronze medal in the 1948 Olympics, and a silver in 1956.

²⁶Uys Krige (1910–1987), South African playwright, poet, short story writer, and translator.

²⁷Dr. Richard Ernest van der Ross (1921–), South African academic and university administrator. From 1958 to 1965, van der Ross worked as the first coloured columnist for the *Cape Times* newspaper.

am improving with every story. I really have you to thank for putting me on the road with your encouragements. Else it is obvious I would never have bothered to write. How's the anthology? Do I get a copy? I am eagerly hoping to hear from you.

Drum has been worrying me to throw up my Schoolmaster's job and become a journalist. I have turned it down. I don't know how wise I am, but I prefer the Academic life, cloistered corridors, the smell of musty books and science equipment and myself regally strolling along becaped and begowned and imparting scraps of wisdom to admiring Juniors, while delicately trifling with a copy of Ovid or "De bello Gallico."²⁸

"And still they gazed and still the wonder grew,
How one small head could carry all he knew."²⁹

Can you imagine me doing this at the tender age of 24!!!! I'm not that bad though.

I read in *Post* about a world Congress of Black Writers. Could I know more about it as I am very interested.

I would also love to visit the States someday or other. We in South Africa have a wonderful and completely erroneous misconception of life there. Apparently it flows with milk and honey and one rubs shoulders with film stars, nabobs and television quiz programmers. What about the Universities? Are there any scholarships available for promising "cullud" students (like myself) who would like to feel a human being for a year or two? The experience would be wonderful and I would most probably write volumes about it.

Received my photographs? Disappointed? I am not exactly Rock Hudson but the photographer tried his best. Hope to hear from you very soon.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

²⁸ *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* is Julius Caesar's account of his exploits in the war in Gaul.

²⁹ Lines from Oliver Goldsmith's poem "The Deserted Village." These lines complete a stanza which describes a village schoolmaster.

November 16, 1955

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

It has been months and months since I last heard from you. I have been wondering why the long silence or am I the one who is to blame? I hardly think so because the last letter I wrote to you was posted on Wed. 4th May (I keep a check on the letters I post people as a matter of habit so I am absolutely sure that the letter was posted on that date). Did you get it because I have been thinking that perhaps it got lost in the post. I certainly hope not.

I saw Richard on Saturday, in fact I spent the afternoon at his home. He was having a little party for a small group of us which included another writer friend James Matthews and a photographer Lionel Oostendorp and one other friend. (*Drum* was responsible for our getting to know each other.) It was quite a happy little affair and we spent the time eating and drinking and being merry while talking books and stories, art, poetry, music and that great old one and only subject, W-O-M-E-N. (What bunch of men getting together informally don't talk about women?) We listened to Beethoven as rendered by Malcuzyński, we listened to Borodin's "Prince Igor," Prokofiev, Smetana, excerpts from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and John Gielgud reading T.S. Eliot's *Preludes* (which begins "The winter evening settles down with smell of steaks in passageways. Six o'clock. The burnt-out ends of smoky days . . ." and so on. A nice poem beautifully recited). There was also Chopin and Delibes. Richard really has a fine collection of records which make truly enjoyable listening.

So far none of us know what to write about for the *Drum* competition. Yes, we do intend entering again. But we just can't think of a plot for a story that is sure to bring home the jackpot and you can guess that we all are keen on laying our hands on the prize this time. To tell you the truth, I am not so fussy but I am going to enter just for the fun of it. Having won once I am quite willing that somebody else should win next (not that I couldn't use that dough. I could chuck my job and write and paint seriously as I so much want to do. Like any other artist, or should I say like the traditional artist, I could live indefinitely on bread and cheese—providing the bread is just the right brown whole-wheat and the cheese has just the right tangy flavour that I like so much—and wine in this country is cheap enough, too darn cheap).

It is supposed to be summer out here at the Cape right now but we have been having quite a variety of weather, warm, cold, dry, wet, bright, gloomy, I think we've gone the whole hog. But on the fine weekends I go out painting landscapes in watercolours. These little painting outings take me to the places where I don't go as a rule. In a way it has amounted to quite a tour of the Peninsula. But I still have to go over onto the Atlantic coast side of the peninsula still. I do enjoy going out like that but I would enjoy it even more if I had a friend to go with me. The few friends of mine who do paint live miles away from me and it takes us too long to get together on a sudden impulse. Most of them are too lazy anyway so I go alone.

How is the anthology coming on? We are all anxious to know. How about writing sometime soon, before the New Year anyway? That's giving you a lot of time. Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Peter

★ ★ ★

December 9, 1955

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [NEW YORK]

Dear Peter:

I trust that you are back safely from your Southern trip, more informed than when you left here and also more rested. You will recall that tonight, Saturday, December 10th, from 8 until 11 pm, I have asked all of the Negro writers whom I know in the New York area to my house to meet you. Perhaps there will be about a dozen and a half, including a few of our leading librarians. So, if you will come down about 8, you will have a chance to talk with some and have a few drinks. I made it early in case you wanted to do something else later in the evening, or if you wanted to get home by midnight to get your rest.

I contacted the former Mrs. Cullen (Mrs. Robert Cooper) as well as Harold Jackman, a good friend of Countee's and both said they would be happy to give you as much personal information about him as you might wish. Mrs. Cooper says she will be at the YMCA to hear you speak on Sunday evening and will make an appointment with you then for further conversations if you wish.

It will be good to see you tonight.

Sincerely,
Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

June 11, 1956

PETER ABRAHAMS [LOUGHTON, ESSEX, UK] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Abrahams apologizes for having taken six months to thank Hughes for making him “feel so very much at home in N.Y.” He confesses to having over-indulged in Jamaican rum, and he continued that habit after returning to England, which caused him to put off finishing his book on Jamaica: “I’d forgotten the English climate was riddled with prejudice against us culluds and that you can’t behave like you are in Jamaica when you are not in Jamaica so I behaved like I was in Jamaica when I was not in Jamaica,” and as a result got sick and had to postpone the book. He sends his greetings to some mutual friends, and asks, “[D]o I apologise for inscribing the controversial Udomo to you?³⁰ I hope not? It’s had a very controversial reception here which, perversely perhaps, pleases me.” He notes that both he and Hughes are listed as speakers for the upcoming Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris in September, even though Abrahams knew nothing about it previously; has Hughes been invited and does he intend to go? Abrahams hopes to be back in the West Indies by then.

★ ★ ★

NOT DATED—1956–1960

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES**
[NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I suppose you have wondered whether I’m still alive. Well I am despite this government. Thanks (rather late) for *I Wonder as I Wander*. Great stuff, human and very interesting. However I would appreciate

³⁰*A Wreath for Udomo*, a novel by Abrahams published in 1956 and dedicated to Hughes. It depicts intellectuals and revolutionaries from a fictional African nation in the years after World War II, first in London and then back in Africa during the struggle for independence.

it if it would be possible for you to send me “classics” by American Negro writers like *Black Boy* of Richard Wright, *Tobacco Road* Erskine Caldwell, *A Man Called White*. Don’t say I’m asking too much but we darkies are starved literally in sunny South Africa. So finally our anthology will be out. Do we get author’s copies?

Did you by any means meet a friend of mine Dr. Van der Ross while he toured the States last year? He is from “Plumstead,” a mile from Grassy Park and headmaster of a big school here. I am still teaching Latin and English at school and still a better-than-average Track athlete. However, I am now studying Economics at University of Cape Town (one of the two Universities in South Africa which allows Non-Whites to attend). However there is every likelihood that the Nationalist Government now in power and pledged to a policy of white domination will kick us out of here by next year.

We have also been disenfranchised. The African (Negro) inhabitants of South Africa had been disenfranchised in 1936 already. We (half-caste, white/negro but enjoying superior status to the African) have just been disenfranchised. We are allowed (1 million of us) to choose 4 delegates to represent us in a Union parliament of 197 (representing 3 million whites). 12 million Africans have hardly any representation. We have been working hard to get our voters (or half-voters) to boycott this election but with moderate results. 44% voted. Hell.

However life in Cape Town is more civilized than in the rest of the country. However Apartheid (Segregation) sometimes works the other way.

Millionaire white publisher Jim Bailey,³¹ his girlfriend and I were skin-diving off a beautiful beach near Cape Point in the Cape Point Game Reserve. His girlfriend and himself were arrested for swimming off a Non-European beach. I was let alone because of my golden-tan complexion. However Jim got off because his father is the chief trustee of the game reserve.

Also while on my way to visit Jack Cope, writer, in Sea Point I boarded a bus, Whites in front, blacks behind. The bus was crowded with Whites standing, old women and all, while I could lavishly recline on any of 20 empty seats.

But it doesn’t always work out that way and in 99% of the cases we are at the wrong end of the stick and Apartheid can become as

³¹James R.A. Bailey (1919–2000), heir to a fortune from diamond mining and finance, and publisher of *Drum* magazine.

absurd as that of one municipality in the Cape Province which has separate funeral hearses for white and black corpses “for hygienic reasons” (sic).

However it will be worth your while to visit this absurd country (if they will allow you in). And I would like to visit your country (if they will allow me out). Both of which are problematic speculations.

Have you written anything lately or are you still lecturing and touring? Have you made any recordings of your works?

I believe there is a recording in the States of Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country* done as a musical and called *Lost in the Stars*. Ever heard of it? If so let me know and tell me whom I can order it from. Also the Robeson recording of *Othello*.³² Robeson just isn’t allowed on sale in this country. “Uppity nigger” I suppose. Well write soon with tons of news.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

March 6, 1959

PETER ABRAHAMS [KINGSTON, JAMAICA] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Abrahams will be arriving in the United States on March 22, and hopes to see Hughes while he is in New York. He marvels that four years have passed since they last saw one another: “Time does fly daddy!” He passes on greetings from his wife, Daphne.

★ ★ ★

March 16, 1959

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [KINGSTON, JAMAICA]

Dear Peter:

Man, it will be wonderful to see you! Come on here. I wrote you once long ago to England but it came back. Then I heard you were in

³²Paul Robeson (1898–1976), African-American actor, athlete, singer, and controversial civil rights activist, starred in the title role in the 1943 Broadway production of Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

Jamaica, but didn't know where. I wanted to thank you for dedicating that beautiful *Udomo* to me.

My *Street Scene* opens (revival) at City Center on April 2nd. Hope you can catch it. And that midnight I have to fly to St. Louis. But can give you a few pointers on Harlem before I depart. So let me know the moment you get to town—Le. 4–2952 or At. 9–6559 after 3 P.M., both home phones.

Be seeing you,

Sincerely,

Address: June 28 to July 22: → University College,
Ibadan, Nigeria. 24. VI 61

24

My dear Langston,

It was good to hear from you, however briefly. Glad too to hear you found the F.T. piece interesting. Black Opheus is bringing our 7 short stories of mine in a special number. Will send you copy as usual. Unreconomical venture (for me), but then it helps to put things together & when I've added to them, will confront my publishers with a volume. Otherwise, these folks won't bite short stories. A factual work - The African Image has gone into production: maybe autumn or early Spring will see it out.

You are a very busy guy, and I'm amazed at your agility to take in so much travel & lecturing. Bravo!

Has lined up M.I.T., Columbia, ~~North~~ School & Northwestern for visiting lectureships in African contemporary writing from Oct. '61, & was arranging their sequence when I was invited to Paris last week as guest of the Congress of Cultural Freedom - the international body of artists, writers, scientists & scholars. Beier & some other folks had given them the idea I could be the best chap for director of their African Program which they have just opened. Mercer Cook was their first director for 9 months & now, as you know, he's going to be ambassador to Niger.

Figure 3 Letter from Ezekiel Mphahlele to Langston Hughes, June 24, 1961. Published with permission of the Professor Ezekiel Mphahlele Trust. Image courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Letters, 1960–1961

NOT DATED—1960?

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane thanks Hughes for writing to him and for selecting his article for the African Treasury anthology: "I am honored, sir." He asks that the New Statesman be credited with having first published the article, and asks Hughes to send him a signed copy when the book is published. He may be in the United States by the end of the year. Can Hughes help him find any writing assignments?

★ ★ ★

February 8, 1960

TODD MATSHIKIZA [JOHANNESBURG] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Langston Hughes,

I hope you received my cable giving your publishers the permission you requested to use some of my "Lid Off." I thought a cable would be quicker than a letter.

Enclosed is the form you sent me duly completed. I do not mind in the least what you say in the credit in addition to what I've put in. Tom Hopkinson, Editor of *Drum*, who I think you know, has kindly put in a footnote.

Shucks, it's great for me to hear from someone whom I have admired for ages. Your wire of course sent me completely, and when your letter came, well, I just went "gone." Thanks for honouring me so much. Africa appreciates it highly.

Thanks to your great country, too, for looking after our little Miriam Makeba¹ in such a big way. We hope she keeps it up.

Thank you again very warmly,

Yours sincerely,
Todd T. Matshikiza

★ ★ ★

February 10, 1960

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [OFFA, NIGERIA] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

My dear Langston Hughes,

It was a pleasant surprise to receive your letter forwarded to me from my University College. Incidentally, I've moved from Ibadan to the town in the above address, although I'm still under the College. I shall be here for the whole of 1960—at any rate until the end of the academic year in June, 1960.

I have been wondering, so have my South African friends Richard Rive and Peter Clarke (in Cape Town and Simon's Town) what had happened to your anthology.

I came to Nigeria two years ago, to flee from oppression, and now I can do the job I was born for which I was forbidden to do in my own country—teaching—and of course writing. Last May my autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*, was published by Faber & Faber in London, and had a terrific reception. I have just returned from leave in London and was on the point of sending you a copy at the AMSAC address which Prof. Mercer Cook² gave me. You see, it's so long we heard from each other—you and I—that I wasn't sure you're still at the address I have had all this time. It goes off to you—the book—today by ocean mail. An American agency has declined to hawk the book for a U.S. edition on the grounds that it requires a “specialized audience” and there are already too many books in the USA about Africa. You will judge for yourself when and if you can spare the time to read it. Two weeks ago my publishers told me that a Czechoslovakian publishing

¹Miriam Makeba (1932–2008), South African singer who left the country in 1959 and did not return until 1990, having lived in the United States for much of that time.

²Will Mercer Cook (1903–1987), American educator and diplomat. Ambassador to Niger from 1961 to 1964, and special envoy to Senegal and Gambia from 1964 to 1966.

house is making a translation of it. Please accept my inscription which I make in the same spirit as you so kindly made yours in your book you sent me in South Africa—*The Ways of White Folk*.

Are you going to exclude the short stories by me you once thought you would put into the anthology: “Blind Alley,” “Saturday Train” (can’t remember the exact title offhand)?

Of course, you are at liberty to use “Accra Conference Diary.” I don’t know if the enclosed is what you call the credit you intend to give me. If not, you may indicate roughly what you require—in any case, you have my permission to use the piece.

I’m so looking forward to coming to USA one day, and I’ll remember to take your offer of hospitality—thanks.

Best wishes. Yours very sincerely,
Ezekiel Mphahlele

Credit to read:

By Ezekiel Mphahlele, who was a delegate for the African National Congress (South Africa) at the first All-African People’s Congress in Accra in 1958. This piece was originally published in *Fighting Talk*, a South African journal.

★ ★ ★

April 1, 1960

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[CAPE TOWN]

Dear Richard,

How are you? Hope all is O.K.

An African Treasury is ready to go to press (at last) and has Africa’s best known short story, “The Bench,” in it. But your permission form never came back to me. Did you post it as yet? If not, please send it on, or drop a note giving your formal O.K. for its use.

Last week I had a very nice visit from Jim Bailey of *Drum*, and he told me a bit about you. Some time ago I met Sidney Petersen of Cape Town, too. New York these days has visitors from all over Africa, coming and going.

Me, I’ve been doing plenty of coming and going myself all winter—lecture tours—to California, Trinidad, all around, and tomorrow I leave for programs at various colleges in the South—where the Negro students are conducting their sit-downs in Jim Crow eating places. That is our exciting part of this country just now—but not as tense as your part of the world. You-all are the MOST in the news.

I really owe you a LONG letter and if I didn't have to pack and leave in a few hours I'd write it—but more next time. Meanwhile, cordial regards and good luck to you.

Sincerely yours,

★ ★ ★

June 30, 1960

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

O.K. I did forget about the poems. But only because I was so damn busy I just didn't give it a thought except in very odd moments of relaxation... when I was too tired to pull it out and send it off to you. Of course I also haven't had a chance to settle down and write some new poems. So you'll have to make do with these. Use what you can, if you can, and reject the rest. Sorry there is so little of it. But as I said before, I have never taken myself very seriously as a poet.

Maybe I'll still get down to writing more poetry some time and I also want to get down to writing more short stories too. The urge is still there. The time isn't. At present I'm giving all my time to making prints, lino-prints that is. I'll probably send you a few some time too. These are a bit better than the others but all small stuff, small-scale stuff. I find colour prints interesting, not at all as difficult as I thought at first. A friend of mine kept a pile of lino for me, left-overs from a new office block where he works in Cape Town. It was a jolly good idea. The stuff was in odd little shapes. But I found I could use it. The prints are, in some cases, just a few inches in size.

Even though I'm not doing any writing for publication I'm still writing. But this is all odd stuff going into a kind of journal I've been keeping over the years, a whole lot of odd items, thoughts, observations, notes about people and characters and events and heaven alone knows what all. One or two friends have been allowed to read parts of it and said they found it fascinating. A few fragments, scenes from childhood, were flung together and a Swedish publisher has decided to use it in an anthology of African writing due to come out later this year. Keeping this journal has given me a lot of fun... besides keeping me in action from a literary point of view. I wish I really was more of a writer than I am. Hell, there's such a lot of material available to choose from and write about. One need never run out of the necessary material.

Looking at this “bundle” I don’t know whether it’s a writer’s notebook or an artist’s notebook. If I should ever amount to anything as an artist then I think it would provide a good background to “the art of Peter Clarke.” But if I don’t ever amount to anything at all, I might just be remembered for the journals.



“What happens to Life’s character actors, the ones who are only bit players, those who come in from the wings and are seen for a short space of minutes or seconds before they disappear again? The one-legged violinist in Queen Victoria Street who plays his violin like a fraud, the white-aproned plodding old woman who lugs the sack on her back, the bearded hobo who looks like the Wandering Jew or a modern-day John the Baptist just returned after eating locusts and honey for several months in the desert, the stitched-up old man who looks like a late nineteenth century misplaced English country squire, the bare-footed grey-haired woman who wanders aimlessly in the city? What happens to them all, why are they like that, where do they all go?

One can surmise all kinds of things about them and be wrong every time! They are so odd, so mysterious, that they really keep one guessing.”



And old prostitutes . . . don’t they ever die? Or do they, like old soldiers, only pass away?



. . . There is this challenge to do a lot of prints . . . in black and white and in colour, and of a whole variety of subjects . . . but particularly of people doing different things, living, dying, suffering, rejoicing, playing, eating, sleeping, drinking, working, loving, all the things that people do . . .



“I’m supposed to go to a funeral this afternoon,” H. said.

“Here in Town?” I asked.

“Yes,” H. said. “A chap who got killed. Just over the way from where I live.”

“Well... why don't you? Or don't you want to go?”

“Not particularly. But I'm thinking of all the booze they've got in the house,” H. said.

“Booze?” I said. “Are they going to serve it to the funeral guests?” I asked. “That is an ancient custom, you know.”

“No. It wasn't meant for the funeral guests. They guy was going to get married on Saturday and they got all this booze in. Now he's got himself killed... and his girlfriend is seven months pregnant... and all that wine standing around there.” He looked wistful.

“Oh well,” I said. “Perhaps they will serve it to the funeral-goers after all. They might even save some for you.”



Winter, Cape Flats

Early morning after rain, the air sweetly fresh and cold as it enters the lungs, the cold making one's flesh tingle; mist partly obscures the landscape. The sun, a golden-red glowing ball, rises slowly, almost hesitantly above the veils of mist shrouding the dune country, lighting up glistening dewdrop-sprinkled bushes and plants, reeds and grass.



Down the street came this group of little girls from their concert practice, hopping, posturing, legs crossing this way and that way, feet tapping each other this side and that side, very seriously engrossed in the dance steps they had just learned, but in their seriousness of the hopping resembling nothing so much as a batch of crippled ballerinas.



Well, those were some pieces from my journal. At least it's a variety. Some are only bits a few sentences in length and others go on over several pages. I write at random, when I have time. So often I don't write for weeks.

I was surprised to hear from Harmon Foundation that they were interested in seeing my work and getting information about me. Nice to feel that people are interested in one and in one's progress. So *An African Treasury* is getting about. That's grand. I saw a few copies of the book in a bookshop in Cape Town on Monday evening. Well, this is

all for now. It's chow-time. Incidentally, we (James Matthews, Richard Rive and I and friends) often eat at Councilman Hoosain Parker's restaurant "Naaz." They serve fine Indian dishes and I just love their curries.

Yours sincerely,
Peter

★ ★ ★

July 27, 1960

EZEKIEL MPHAAHLELE [OFFA, NIGERIA] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

It was indeed an immense delight for me to meet you personally. I had come to know you so well through our correspondence and through your works that it seemed we had met. So when we did see each other, it was like a reunion.

You have done an excellent job of this anthology of African writing: congratulations! It simply bristles with life and newness, unlike Peggy Rutherford's *African Voices* (seen it? It came out in Britain as *Darkness and Light*), which is cluttered with statuesque pieces. I notice you excised those juicy bits from my piece about personalities like Kenneth Kaunda³ (you may have heard he has become really big in Northern Rhodesian and Federation politics) and Harry Nkumbula⁴ (who has been eclipsed). How gravely prophetic I would have sounded. No, I don't really care: what delights me is that you have captured African writing which resounds through and through like the footsteps of a giant rubbing his eyes as he walks, just from a deep sleep.

³Kenneth Kaunda (1924–), nationalist leader in Northern Rhodesia who helped Nkumbula found the African National Congress, but later split with him and founded his own party, the Zambian African National Union. Kaunda was president of Zambia from independence in 1964 until 1991.

⁴Harry Nkumbula (1917?–1983), Northern Rhodesian nationalist leader; more open to compromise with white settlers than Kaunda. Once the most prominent nationalist leader, he was, as Mphahlele says, "eclipsed" after the split with Kaunda and played little role in post-independence Zambia.

Sam Allen hinted to you that I have taken up the co-editorship of *Black Orpheus*⁵ (together with Ulli Beier⁶ and a Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka⁷). I am going to put in a full-fledged essay about you and your poetry in *Black Orpheus*—the coming issue. I meant to ask that night (if we weren't so rushed) about your *Big Sea*. Is it still available?

I hope the filming of *A Raisin in the Sun*⁸ is going beautifully. I saw the play in London last year, and was thrilled.

I haven't forgotten your proffered hospitality if and when I come to the U.S. Be sure I'll love to take it.

Cheerio for now, and much love.

Yours ever,
Zeke

★ ★ ★

September 16, 1960

TODD MATSHIKIZA [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Mr. Langston Hughes,

I am now in England as you will have noticed from the address above, for a little bit of air for my family and work. I had very highly hoped to come to your country but my plans misfired, so I shall have to wait a while before I can gather wings to come and see and worship you in the flesh.

Ezekiel Mphahlele told me he saw and read the complete *African Treasury*, and I am writing to ask you to please send me an autographed, personal copy. If I knew the price I would have sent the order herewith, but could you please hurry me one to pay for on delivery if it is not too much to ask? I am dying to see it.

I continue to adore you.

⁵ *Black Orpheus: Journal of African and Afro-American Literature*, a journal founded in 1957 by the Mbari Club in Nigeria.

⁶ Ulli Beier (1922–), German editor, writer, and scholar, and a pioneer of African literary studies.

⁷ Wole Soyinka (1934–), Nigerian playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist, and the first black African Nobel Laureate in Literature.

⁸ *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play; the title is taken from Hughes's poem "Harlem [2]" from *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. The play was made into a film in 1961, starring Sidney Poitier and the rest of the original Broadway cast.

Sincerely yours,
Todd T. Matshikiza

★ ★ ★

September 19, 1960

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [OFFA, NIGERIA] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I have just finished a full-length essay on your poetry for *Black Orpheus* No. 9. A copy of this will be sent also because it includes a review by me of *An African Treasury*, which was a delight to do.

This is to ask you if you think the music shops still have these recordings by you:

Tambourines to Glory
The Glory of Negro History
The Story of Jazz
Simple Speaks His Mind
The Dream Keeper
The Rhythms of the World

I should so very much like to procure them.

Sorry for haste.

Best wishes as always,

Yours ever,
Zeke

★ ★ ★

October 6, 1960

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **TODD MATSHIKIZA** [LONDON]

Dear Todd:

What a pleasant surprise to get your letter from London. Your book and check went to you *c/o Drum*, but a recent letter from there tells me it (the book and check plus, I think, some clippings, too) is being forwarded to you in England. Hope so. At any rate, I am posting you today another book—personal gift. And as you can see from the enclosed clippings, it is being well reviewed. The Peggy Rutherford *African Voices* and mine both came out the same month—which is good as our U.S.A.

has had no knowledge of the indigenous writers at all up to now. And you-all (yourself, for instance) write well. I do hope you get over to New York some time. Peter Abrahams has been at my house several times, and it was good to meet Mphahlele, too. I've gotten many interesting letters from writers in South Africa. But I keep so BUSY (and have so many business letters to write) that it is VERY hard for me to keep up a regular correspondence with distant friends, as much as I'd like to. 24 hours in a New York day just isn't enough. And lately I've been engaged night and day with a show, *Tambourines to Glory*, that is due to come to Broadway this season. As you probably know from *King Kong*,⁹ there is nothing, BUT NOTHING, that can take up as much time as a play. Mine I've revised for the 10th time, and this week it is being typed again—some \$600 worth of typing all told in its various versions. I hope this is the LAST one. It had a successful summer theatre tryout and is now waiting for a theatre to come to New York—maybe like December. The Dutch lady translator of American Negro poetry now living in London first played for me your *King Kong* disc when she lectured in U.S. last winter. She is a very lively person and I think you both would enjoy knowing each other. Contact her if you can:

Miss Rosey Pool
23a Highpoint, North Hill
London N6

She will tell you all about our writers over here. Tell me about your family and you next time you write. I have recently done a little book on Africa for children. Do you have any children of reading age? If so, I'll send them the book. Last week I saw the *Ballet Africains* from Guinea now a big hit in New York, their second visit to us. And last winter I saw and heard and met Miriam Makeba. Azikiwe was a college classmate of mine at Lincoln University, so I see him most times when he comes to the States. Last night I played *King Kong* for two of our best jazz composers, Randy Weston and Melba Liston¹⁰ who are composing an African-American jazz

⁹*King Kong*, a South African musical about an African heavyweight boxer, with music by Todd Matshikiza. It debuted in South Africa in 1959, and played in the West End of London in 1961. Many of the cast members and musicians went on to have successful careers in music, including Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, and Kippie Moeketsi.

¹⁰Randy Weston (1926–), American jazz pianist, composer, and bandleader. Melba Liston (1926–1999), American jazz trombonist, composer, and arranger, and frequent collaborator with Weston. Hughes occasionally wrote lyrics and liner notes for Weston and Liston, and performed at jazz poetry readings with them. Weston played at Hughes's funeral in 1967, including a blues tune written specifically for the occasion.

disc using African and U.S. musicians, which ought to be nice. I'll send it to you when it comes out long about Christmas. So keep in contact with me. I wish *King Kong* would be performed in New York..... Cordial regards and lots of good wishes to you ever,

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

October 20, 1960

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane, still referring to his correspondent as "Mr. Hughes," thanks him for having sent a copy of An African Treasury and clippings about it. He asks about another anthology called African Voices; can Hughes send him a copy? He has enclosed a new short story called "The Third Arm," and hopes that Hughes will help him place it in a magazine or newspaper. He calls himself a "struggling artist": "I drift from job to job, working my guts out by day and writing by night. I'm 36 and like 'Simple' I haven't worked my way through to the first alimony." He hopes that he will someday write the "great South African novel," but he cannot find the time because of his job working in a bookstore.

★ ★ ★

October 20, 1960

TODD MATSHIKIZA [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston Hughes, Friend,

Many, many thanks for the book, *African Treasury*, the cheque and above all your wonderful letter. I know what it takes to sit down to write a personal one so I do very highly appreciate it all.

You made me want to come straightway to the States when you told me of all the exciting work you're engaged in theatrically. Wish I could see *Tambourines to Glory*. What a magnificent title. Somehow I have a feeling my dream will come true to work on a musical with you. I live and die by your poetry. God what magnificent prophecies, for "I, too, sing America." Here I am now in London sitting at the table with them. But your "Old Lem" (Sterling Brown) did say, "They don't come by ones, they don't come by twos, but they come by tens." But in South Africa they won't ever see the importance of such strides as your *Treasury*. Thank you, Langston, very much.

I had to come here to give my son aged five-and-a-half and my daughter eight-and-a-half the chance for a better education. I was brought up a slave and I won't let it happen to them. Would you believe that already they can feel the difference even at that early age. The big one can read the little is beginning to spell. So if you do send that children's book it would be great.

My wife and I are very surprised to hear you say *Ballets Africains* from Guinea was a big hit in New York. We saw it here and thought it was rather childish. I always have the feeling that whatever Africa exports, (Black Africa), it should be strong stuff that can take a beating on even ground. The English all came out saying, "How sweet," on seeing that particular show here. I could have died. *King Kong* is due in London in February 61. We should have been playing here by now but our paternal Government would not issue passports until it pleased them. They also said they wanted to be sure we send out with the cast a welfare officer to nurse them while here, because "London is such a big place and we don't want our Natives to fall into evil hands and ways." I want to write this story for one of your big papers when I am quite sure the cast has safely boarded a plane to England.

But I do also want to write more seriously about the problem in Britain which I think has been very carelessly handled journalistically. London for the Black man isn't even a fool's paradise. One day someone ought to take out these dirty old carpets and give them a good solid, shaking and airing. It is a great pity that Peter Abrahams left without doing it sufficiently. But then it's not a one-man job and I suppose one could say the same about my having left South Africa without even having touched the surface.

I have contacted Miss Rosey Pool and we should meet soon after a long spell of rushing around looking for accommodation. My family and I are now settled at the above if you should ever have the chance to drop me a line about *Tambourines to Glory* and how to get the record.

I asked Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela¹¹ to give you my love if they should bump into you. Till we write again, all of the very best wishes to you.

Yours ever,
Todd Matshikiza

★ ★ ★

¹¹Hugh Masekela (1939–), South African trumpeter, composer, bandleader, and singer who went into exile in 1960.

October 24, 1960

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **TODD MATSHIKIZA** [LONDON]

Dear Todd:

I am so glad you are settled in London and have found a place to live. I was there for a few days years ago and sort of liked it—the sights and shows. But some of the actors who went over two years ago for my *Simply Heavenly* show didn't care for it much. Anyhow, I'd rather be there than in South Carolina—or South Africa!

You didn't tell me the names of your little ones, so I just inscribed their books to the Matshikiza children—and they both can look at the pictures. My next kids' book is to be about the Gypsies—whom I love. But first I've got to get a BIG book about Harlem done, long contracted for, but not a word yet written. *Tambourines to Glory* threw me way behind. I'll send you the cast recording to be made (so they say) when the show hits Broadway. The other one is not very good, and does not have all the songs on it.

Tonight is the first cold night of the year here, trying to snow a bit. I hope you don't freeze in damp old chilly London. I HATE cold weather myself, although I was born in it—February—in the windy Midwest. But if I could, I would do like Peter Abrahams and live in the West Indies where it is sunny all the time. The play based on his *Udomo* novel is to be done here this winter, they say—as one always has to qualify any statement about the theatre, the most uncertain of the arts. Each time I do a play, I swear I will never try another one. Too many other folks involved! A worriation! And here they cost so much money to produce. *Tambourines* will cost \$130,000 dollars. Wow! I couldn't even count that much money!..... Regards,

[LH]

★ ★ ★

November 6, 1960

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [OFFA, NIGERIA]

Dear Ezekiel:

If I can get passport, visas, inoculation and everything in time—since the invitation just came the other day—it looks as if I might be in Lagos for Zik's inauguration on the 16th. But have to turn around and come right back to New York as I have a TV show coming up at the end of the

month, so don't think I'll have a chance to come up to the University. Would you by any chance be in Lagos? Drop me a note: c/o Nigerian Airways, P.O. Box 136, Lagos, and let me know, as I'd love to see you.

Cordially,

★ ★ ★

November 24, 1960

EZEKIEL MPHAAHLELE [OFFA, NIGERIA] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

A million times sorry, old boy, for my abortive attempts to catch you in Lagos. Did you come? This was how: I received your note on the Saturday preceding the event. On the day I tried to wire Nigerian Airways to say please wire me soon as you arrive to say you are there and I can motor down. We are 190 miles from Lagos (102 from Ibadan) but I was keen to meet you and wanted to be sure you'd be around. But the telephone lines were bad, and the wire could not go off. That's how underdeveloped we are here, alas! Until Tuesday I couldn't get through, and so I threw up the sponge.

I hope the TV show came off all right.

I am trying desperately hard to find a place in the USA that could take me for a year or two as visiting lecturer in African Studies and literature and English literature (poetics, practical criticism) as from Jan. 1962. I want to clinch arrangements long beforehand. If you sniff around and find something, please shout across. I'd have to bring my wife and four kids.

Cheerio for now.

Yours,
Zeke

★ ★ ★

November 24, 1960

TODD MATSHIKIZA [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Very dear Langston,

There's a big "Wow" in the house. All four of us grabbing away at the wonderful books you sent for Marian (8½) and John-Anthony (5½).

It was the most generous thing to happen to us since we left home to receive the book parcel. I can't thank you enough. And this morning the postman delivers the music and I go straightway to my piano and play. And I get a tremendous kick, so does my wife Esmé, especially out of the "Six Shades of Blue" particularly with "Tired as I can be." What meaningful things you say there! And "If my luck holds out she (England to us) will treat me better than a dog." The English dog is the most comfortable living thing on earth.

When did you do this tremendous book on Africa? Filled us with nostalgia...and showed us how ignorant we are of that tremendous continent of which we are a part. I cannot tell you how much we appreciate it all; your gifts in the books and music, and above all, having "met" you in person AT VERY LONG LAST.

As soon as you told me of Rosey Poole, I did not hesitate in contacting her and she asked us to dinner at her beautiful flat on the heights of London with that very grand man Arthur Spingarn¹² and Dr. Davies whom we liked tremendously also. What warm people you Americans are. So very different from these boring English of whom we've had plenty already in these five months. Rosey works fast and already she and I have recorded an interview for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation which I hope you'll hear. I don't know when they'll release it yet. She bullied her way right across the BBC's red tape of which quite honestly I've had a mouthful...a sickening mouthful!

Esmé and I have already decided to quit this cold and damp peopleless place for America. I have a study grant which I have not taken up yet 'cause I don't think I'll get what I want here. Do you know who I could come to do orchestration with over there? I had hoped to work with Seiber here, but he died in a motorcar accident a few weeks ago, ironically in South Africa while holidaying there.

Now tell us. Why on earth did you not so much as telephone Rosey or me when you passed through London ten days ago to Nigeria? Bloke Modisane buzzed my wife as I was away on that day to say you were at London Airport. I was glad you were able to speak to her, though she says your voice didn't sound like it ought to be, big, and warm hearted as Rosey said it is.

¹² Arthur Spingarn (1878–1971), New York lawyer, NAACP president from 1940 to 1965, and avid collector and champion of African-American literature. Spingarn represented Hughes without charge for most of his career. He was brother of Amy Spingarn, one of Hughes's earliest patrons.

Rosey nearly collapsed an' died when I told her you'd actually spoken to Esmé. We both felt it would have been nice for Rosey to get a message. But I guess you were madly rushed. How was Nigeria?

Your *African Treasury* is a tremendous achievement. It pays us a high tribute such as has not succeeded in white hands, and could never. The whites I know have no feeling. They could never understand "negritude" which I'd love to discuss with you one day. Thanks a helluva lot for this book. It's become part of our daily routine.

God, I wish I had something to give you in return. I have nothing. I left my heart in Africa South, and the sunshine. But I brought my soul with me, and this I share with you everyday.

Much love, much love, much love.

Todd

P.S. When Bloke Modisane phoned to say you were in London I had that day written to you, but when he said you'd be back here in ten days I held the letter back, in the hope of thanking you in the flesh.

★ ★ ★

December 2, 1960

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

I had a fine flight across the Atlantic and got to Harlem about 10 p.m., and all unpacked before bedtime. Today I put the snapshots in to be developed, and in a few days they should be ready, and I will send you some of yourself and Paul in front of the hotel.

I am still remembering that delightful little party at your place, and I enjoyed meeting Todd, Jimmy, Sonny,¹³ and the others very much. It was fun.

Wednesday I start working on one of the TV shows. I have another one coming up later in the month, after Christmas. So I will be BUSY.

I hope you found all your things from home O.K., and that now that you have the rest of your material, you'll be able to finish your book soon. I've told Crown Publishers and my New York agents about you today.

¹³Most likely Todd Matshikiza; J. Koyinde Vaughan, a Nigerian writer and filmmaker whose essay "Africa and the Cinema" appeared in Hughes's *An African Treasury* anthology; and Sonny Pillay, Miriam Makeba's first husband, who lived in London.

I'm sending you my blues record today. And when the African one is ready, it will be along, too. Already recorded, but not released yet. I'm also looking into the matter of the overcoat tomorrow.

So, best of luck,

Sincerely yours,

★ ★ ★

December 4, 1960

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

Please put a stamp on and post enclosed card for me—one I had in my pocket and forgot in London.

Man, I had good luck today in looking for things in the basement. I found the zipper lining of my tan topcoat I had on in London, but had lost the winter lining for two years. I also found a quite nice blue overcoat, left here by a Harvard student two or three years ago, and he never came back after it, so I am sending it to you, as I think it might be just about your size. In the box with it will be a tweed jacket and a sweater. A second smaller box coming your way contains a blue suit, and some scarves. All of which I hope will be of some use in damp old England. Boxes marked: UNSOLICITED GIFTS—Used Clothing; so I trust you will not have to pay duty. Hope not.

I've also sent you my *Blues* record, and a packet of books. All by boat, so you probably will not receive them for two or three weeks. But let me know if they finally reach you O.K. I pray they won't take as long to get to you as did your things from South Africa.

I haven't been out of my house since I got home: too cold! And too much mail piled up to answer during my absence. But tomorrow appointments downtown start—and from then on, I'll be BUSY. Missing is your genial personality to cheer me up! Come on over to New York, man, so I can see you more often. You are my favorite *Bantu* writer! In fact, my favorite Bantu.

Best ever, Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

December 14, 1960

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [OFFA, NIGERIA]

Dear Zeek:

Certainly was sorry not to have seen you while I was in Nigeria, but I had only 5 days in Lagos—and something happening every minute. I enjoyed it all immensely, and was delighted that I could come—for even so short a time. I've got two TV shows here this month—been filming one of them all this week—which is why I had to fly right back. But I did have a couple of days in London and Bloke Modisane gave a little party for me where I met Todd Matshikiza, Sonny Pillay, and a British friend of yours whose name I can't recall, but who calls you ZEEK. Anyhow, it was good to find your note on my return. It was something of a madhouse at Nigerian Airways in Lagos. They couldn't find any communications for me from other Nigerian residents to whom I had given that mailing address (on advice of BOAC in New York) and they took plane and hotel reservations for my return trip that never got on the record in Kano or elsewhere. But I can understand—with so many visitors and folks flying in and out—those young clerks might get a bit confused. But they were so sweet and polite, I love them anyhow. And, being an old traveler, I did not mind too much arriving in a strange town and having nowhere to sleep—Kano for example where I stopped over for a couple of days. In Paris it happened I was with Richard Wright as he left for the hospital—his last visitor at home. And he died while we were discussing him at Bloke's party in London, Koyinde Vaughan talking particularly about his *Black Power* which nobody liked much. And I was telling them how Wright told me he'd picked up an amoeba in Africa that sent him to the hospital ever so often for treatments—for which he was going when I saw him. Arna Bontemps is just back in N.Y. tonight from Uganda. I'll ask him about your maybe coming to Fisk University to lecture. Meanwhile, if you know any good African poets (indigenous) ask them to send me some poems for a possible [second page missing].

★ ★ ★

January 1, 1961

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane addresses the letter to "My dear Langston." He had entrusted the mailing of his Christmas cards to an office assistant, who sent them surface mail rather than airmail, on the last day of the year for overseas mail. So, when Hughes receives his card, he should save it until next Christmas. Modisane will

have to come to the United States, as he and Hughes have a “long drinking date”: “No kidding, I think of you every time I call: whisky.” His son Jimmy really likes the books Hughes had sent: “You seem to have got yourself a fan for life.” He praises a record for which Hughes had written the lyrics. Lewis Nkosi¹⁴ will be in New York on his way to a fellowship at Harvard. Nkosi has an idea for an arts festival to be held in Basutoland: “The idea sounds fascinating, since to get to Basutoland we would have to travel through South Africa. It’s a great subversive plot to embarrass the S.A. government.” He thanks Hughes for having sent books and clothes. He has written seven short stories to be included in a collection, and Crown has expressed an interest in seeing it; he thanks Hughes for having put in a word for him with the editor. He remarks on the recent blizzard in the United States. He will soon change flats and possibly jobs. He had an enormous Christmas dinner, “which left me immobile for at least 48 hours, completely shocked my system by the elegance of the dishes.”

★ ★ ★

January 5, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Bloke:

What’s happening? I hope everything is O.K. and you’re busy finishing up your book. I’ve been real BUSY since my return—filmed two TV shows, shown last week, and this week recorded two radio things: a writers roundtable, and a narration for my opera, *The Barrier*, for the playing of the Italian tapes next week. And shortly I start out traveling and lecturing. In February I go all the way to California. . . . I guess Miriam Makeba is out of town as I’ve not been able to reach her. But wrote a note saying I’d met Sonny. Please give Jimmy Vaughan the enclosed piece which might interest him. And drop me a line and let me know your news. After all, you’re my favorite Bantu! (What jazz, heh?)

Sincerely,
Langston

★ ★ ★

¹⁴Lewis Nkosi (1936–), South African journalist, fiction writer, playwright, and critic who worked for *Drum* magazine from 1956 to 1960.

January 10, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

BLOKE, ole boy:

Our letters must have crossed in transit! I posted mine on the weekend and yours arrived on Monday morning. And your beautiful gift right after. DELIGHTED to have both—as I'd gotten worried about you, not hearing from you for so long. So this is just to let you know I'm glad you're still living! I have a deadline to meet tomorrow (otherwise would write more) on Randy Weston's jazz salute to African freedom—so am playing the tapes right now. It's an LP in four tracks. The Third Movement is called "Bantu"—perhaps in honor of you! Anyhow, when it comes out, I'll send you a disc so you can (as they say in Trinidad at Carnival time) jump to it! More anon!

Sincerely,
Langston

★ ★ ★

January 14, 1961

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [OFFA, NIGERIA] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Thanks immensely for the records. These are superb recordings and are a worthy monument to your versatile capabilities. I shall treasure them, like your written work, till the end of my days. I keep thinking all the time what I've done to be placed at the receiving end of so much goodness, a thing my folk down south are so remote from.

I'm happy you have sounded a friend about Fisk. It has become an obsession with me and my wife now to come and work in the U.S. By June this year, I must be able to let my college know what my plans are. And then, as I'm thinking in terms of Oct. or Nov., immigration red-tape must be got over as early as possible. Then there is a boat passage to book in good time.

Did I tell you what I'm offering? I forget. Just in case: M.A. English Literature. Doing a doctorate thesis on Contemporary African writing. Poetics; Practical Criticism; Victorian Literature; Contemporary African writing; African affairs are an extra interest, having done courses in this for my junior degree.

So, whatever you can do for us by way of contacts, we shall be grateful.

The very best wishes for 1961.

Yours very sincerely,
Zeke

★ ★ ★

January 18, 1961

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane begins: "I'm overwhelmed by the things which keep turning up from you; what with the record, the books and others." He particularly appreciates Ollie Harrington's cartoons,¹⁵ and says, "[M]an, I'm real glad I'm black; the black positiveness of life complete, the total capacity to accept the living of life, the stupor drunkenness of happiness; the depth of hurt, anger or sorrow: the synthesis of happiness and sorrow." He complains of loneliness, and asks, "[W]hat makes writers such lonely people?" He also asks, "What's with me, tonight? Must be something I drank. Jazz." He tells Hughes about his wife and daughter Chris; he has a lawyer in South Africa trying to arrange for them to join him in London. He sends Hughes updates about several mutual friends in London, including Todd Matshikiza's wife, who is ill. He has recently finished two short stories and a chapter in his book. Has Hughes met Lewis Nkosi? Hughes is "the greatest American Bantu I know." Modisane must sign off "sin'cerely . . . to stop myself going all the way down loony lane."

★ ★ ★

April 5, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON]

Bloke:

You've been on my mind lately and I hope you are O.K. and having a high old time and such-like jazz. But you didn't tell me if you've moved yet or not. If so, where?

¹⁵Oliver Wendell Harrington (1912–1995), African-American cartoonist and civil rights advocate. He was loosely associated with the Harlem Renaissance, and from 1935 published a cartoon called *Dark Laughter* in the *New York Amsterdam News*. Its main character, Bootsie, lived in Harlem.

I was just talking to Maya Angelou¹⁶ on the phone, and she said she enjoyed meeting you SO much in London. And so I thought I would write and tell you what she said.

This is about my busiest night, so I shouldn't be writing anybody. Got to get all my income stuff ready for the accountant who charges me \$50 each time to put it into proper form. (His charge usually being more than the tax!) Anyhow, it is a bit complicated, since it comes from so many sources, a mite here, a mite there. All of which adds up to a hand-to-mouth living. I was most flattered yesterday to get a letter from an African student asking for \$1,800 to come to the States to enter college! I haven't seen that much all at once for years—since I had a show on Broadway, *Street Scene*.

Tell Todd I'm DE-LIGHTED to hear of the success of *King Kong*, and to read in the New York papers that it will eventually come here. Why don't you come, too? Can't you get a part in it? I have not seen a Bantu since I left London!!!!!! Nary one!

I'll have to write you later about your stories and things. All is confusion tonight! Did you get the little check for the *Post* reprint of your piece? Don't write if you are creating. But if you AIN'T, drop me a line.

L.H.

★ ★ ★

May 3, 1961

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Many thanks for your letter asking for poems for use by Indiana University Press. Unfortunately I haven't had time or the inclination to do any poetry-composing. Much too busy with painting. Some time ago, more than a year ago, I turned out four short ones, not very spectacular though. I am letting you have them. I'll probably be writing a few quite soon and will send these to you as soon as they are ready.

As far as my painting is concerned, I seem to be making a lot of progress. In January this year I had an exhibition of paintings, drawings and prints in Cape Town at the Rodin Gallery. Several good

¹⁶ Maya Angelou (1928–), American writer and civil rights activist.

write-ups and lots of interested people turned up. Sales at the exhibition weren't so hot but lots of people bought pictures outside of the exhibition and that was fine. My sales are much better now than they ever were before. More people are getting to know about me, I get more publicity and all that. An exhibition of South African graphic art is one of the shows being held at the National Gallery (the biggest and main one in the Cape Province) at the moment. This collection of graphic art was selected from the best available in the whole of the country for the purpose of touring Yugoslavia last year. I am represented by two prints, "The Kite Season" (a linocut) and "Girl with Cocks" (a monotype).

Harmon Foundation Inc., New York, has heard of me too. It asks me to send information about myself and photos of my work for use in their publication "Contemporary Artists of Africa." The Foundation also wants to arrange exhibitions consisting of the work of various African artists. This will be for circulation in the States, partly for the benefit of study groups, and will very likely circulate through the African continent too. I'm going to cooperate.

An Alan Paton novel *Too Late the Phalarope* was published in a German edition last year by Bertelsmann Lesering (Gütersloh, Germany) with 60 illustrations I did. The book came out under the title "Aber das Wort sagte ich nicht." Last year I did drawings for a collection of short stories by Zeke Mphahlele which will make its appearance this year. A new weekly newspaper (Cape Town) will be using a drawing of mine in each issue. So I am fairly busy.

What I'd like to do and what I plan to do is get back to writing again sometime. I feel I really should because I've had a fairly long rest from it—almost too long.

I won't forget about the poems.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Clarke

P.S. And I think we should cut out "Peter Kumalo" from now on. I would like whatever goes into print in future should be published under the name Peter Clarke, and no pen name.

★ ★ ★

June 24, 1961

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [IBADAN, NIGERIA] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

My dear Langston,

It was good to hear from you, however briefly. Glad too to hear you found the *F.T.* piece interesting. *Black Orpheus* is bringing out seven short stories of mine in a special number. Will send you copy as usual. Uneconomical venture (for me), but then it helps to put things together and when I've added to them, will confront my publishers with a volume. Otherwise, these folks won't bite short stories. A factual work—*The African Image*¹⁷ has gone into production: maybe autumn or early spring will see it out.

You are a very busy guy, and I'm amazed at your ability to take in so much travel and lecturing. Bravo!

Had lined up M.I.T., Columbia, New School and Northwestern for visiting lectureships in African contemporary writing from Oct.'61, and was arranging their sequence when I was invited to Paris last week as guest of the Congress of Cultural Freedom—the international body of artists, writers, scientists and scholars. Beier and some other folks had given them the idea I could be the best chap for director of their African Program which they have just opened. Mercer Cook was their first director for nine months and now, as you know, he's going to be ambassador to Niger.

I've accepted the job and called off the United States tour, for better or for worse. Only thing that worries me is having to tell this to Harold Isaacs of M.I.T. because he did plenty to secure me two of the appointments and has been an industrious liaison for me. Still, these are things that can't be deferred any longer in Africa. Will be based in Paris, and we are moving there in mid-September after 1½ months in Britain (from July 23rd).

I shall yet come to New York one of these days, and maybe when you are in Paris—well we'll be right there.

My very best wishes and regards,

Yours ever,
Zeke

★ ★ ★

June 24, 1961

**LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO PETER CLARKE
[SIMON'S TOWN]**

¹⁷ *The African Image*, published in 1962, is a collection of essays on representations of Africa in African and American literature.

Dear Peter (Clarke—no more “Kumalo”):

You did forget about the poems! Send them on, please, sir, right now by air—as the contract has come for the anthology and it will go to press soon. It would be a shame not to have you in it. But I am delighted to hear about all your activities in the field of the graphic arts. One of your little water colors which you sent me a long time ago, now framed, decorates my studio walls. Mrs. Brady at the Harmon Foundation is a friend of mine (the Foundation once awarded me a Gold Medal for Poetry) and I shall phone her and tell her they should not only bring your paintings to America—but YOU, too. When Ben Ewanwu¹⁸ of Nigeria (the sculptor) was here under Harmon auspices, he stayed at my house in Harlem for a short time. A few weeks ago Councilman Parker from Cape Town was here, came to call on me, and told me about you and Rive and others in the arts at the Cape. He was on a trip around the world. A couple of Afrikaans poets were here, too, this winter, but I can't at this moment recall the names. A year or so ago Peterson was here, but is now in Germany, he writes me. We have lots of African visitors in New York these days, so it is about time for you to turn up, too. *An African Treasury* is slated to appear in France, and probably also in Germany, and the publishers have been directed to make their own arrangements with each author, and payments directly to them—since Crown acquired only English-speaking rights. Any translations must be paid to the individual authors whose addresses I have sent the foreign publishers. I trust you will hear from them in due time. Meanwhile, kindly AIRMAIL me a few poems. And lots of good wishes to you, as ever,

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

June 24, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

¹⁸A misspelling of Ben Enwonwu (1921-1994), Nigerian sculptor and painter, educated in England.

I see via the London review of *The Blacks* in our *Variety* where you are Diouf.¹⁹ But when I saw the play here, I never knew who was what. Must say it baffled me, but the New York critics were kinder, and it seems to be a hit. Is it still running in London?

And have you moved yet? If so, send me your address, as I'll have a new book to send you soon.

And how about *King Kong*? Still on the boards? I hope so. And hope it comes here.

Your story about the girl who got raped (the nurse) packs a punch. I'm still remembering it, read it on the plane to California weeks ago. But it's the kind of realistic vignette I am afraid would be very hard to sell here—until one already has a “literary name.”

Tell Brunetta²⁰ hello! She's a friend of mine—once played the lead in one of my plays in Chicago.

And write when you have time.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

June 26, 1961

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane has been acting in a production of Genet's The Blacks that opened at the Royal Court Theatre in London to poor reviews, before touring to Cambridge and Cardiff, where the local papers were more “analytical.” Theater and television producers are interested in his work, he's been offered a part in a TV series called Hurricane, he starred in Empress with Teapot by B.R. Whiting, and he is to star in the Nigel Dennis play August for the People, in which he plays an African politician who “goes into a terrific explosion when told that although he may be black on the outside, inside he is really white. It is at this point that the African in him emerges.” He wrote and directed a radio program for the BBC called The Kwela—Jazz of the Townships. King Kong is still running, but houses are growing smaller and it may close soon; its Broadway prospects are still uncertain. “I am giving serious consideration to writing poetry and the only reason I haven't written is because I don't see myself as a poet. With a bit of luck

¹⁹ *The Blacks: A Clown Show* (1959), a play by French avant-garde writer Jean Genet in which Diouf is a character.

²⁰ Brunetta Bernstein, an actress who appeared with Modisane in the production of *The Blacks* that played in London in 1961. In 1942, she had appeared in Hughes's play *The Sun Do Move*.

and a lot of hard work I may surprise my friends (you, primarily) into discovery that I can—just possibly—write poetry. Some two months ago I was sitting with a girl I have loved for four years without telling; she was completing her essay, and suddenly I was possessed by a thing to write a poem for her.” He claims not to know many South African poets beyond those Hughes already knows, but mentions a Xhosa-language writer who lives in London, and tells Hughes that he can reach *Can Themba* through Drum.

★ ★ ★

July 3, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [IBADAN, NIGERIA]

Dear Zeke:

Delighted to hear about your new job in Paris—which means we might see each other sooner, as you’ll get over here, or I’ll get over there. It’s only 4 or 5 hours flight. Putting off the U.S. lectures is O.K. as you can do them later—or get others after you are settled in Paris. You’ll probably see Bloke Modisane and Todd Matshikiza in London. Bloke is becoming quite an actor, was in *The Blacks*, and now another play, he writes me. His address: 27 Parkhill Road, Hampstead, London NW3. Also in London I think you’d like Rosey Pool, Dutch authority on Negro poetry, who has lectured in the U.S.: 23-a Highpoint, North Hill, London N6. She does BBC shows on us, too. Nice jolly chubby lady who was Anne Frank’s teacher in hiding during war. Peter Abrahams was here last week, on assignment for *Holiday* magazine to do a piece on the African diplomats in Washington. Councilman Parker from Cape Town came through on his way around the world. And almost every week I have a visitor or two from some part of Africa. Today the contract came for the African poetry anthology. So if you’ve got new poetry, or know of anybody good in Nigeria who has, tell them to airmail it to me this month. Mabel Imoukhede²¹ I’ve written. If you know her, tell her *depechez-vous, s’il vous plait*,²² and send me some poetry, as I’ve heard of her but never read a word. Nicol in Sierra Leone²³ sent some beautiful

²¹Mabel Aig-Imoukhuede (1930–), later Mabel Segun, Nigerian fiction writer, poet, and essayist.

²²French for “hurry up, please.”

²³Davidson “Abioseh” Nicol. See note from February 24, 1955.

things. Okara,²⁴ too. So it will be a good anthology At AMSAC²⁵ last week, they tell me Isaacs caught hell from the other speakers for writing in the *New Yorker* that Africans and American Negroes didn't like each other.²⁶ I never heard tell of such myself. Drop me a card from Europe Best ever.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

July 27, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke—my very favorite Bantu:

Last night I met your friend Lewis Nkosi who came up to Arthur Spingarn's apartment about 10 with a very pretty little English girl who had been in South Africa and Uganda and who is working for a publisher in New York now and we had drinks and Nkosi saw Spingarn's big collection of African and Negro books and told me he had just written you a letter so I am sure told you all his own news himself. I was trying to find your last long very nice newsy letter with the enclosures of *The Blacks* programs and all to show Nkosi but being late starting out in the rush I could not locate it, but I told him what news of you I remembered and about your acting activities and all and Nkosi said you are a very good actor, and I said you are a very good writer, and we both agreed you are also a good guy. So maybe you could hear us talking about you way over in London. As the old saying goes, "Your ears should have burned."

I wanted to meet Nkosi before I went away tomorrow to try to finish a book—else I might go to jail as I long ago took the advance and spent it, and the publishers have the cover [of] the book printed—and I have no book! Pray for me or something!

Did you ever get your family to London?

²⁴ Gabriel Okara (1921–), Nigerian novelist and poet; several of his poems appeared in Hughes's anthologies *An African Treasury* and *Poems from Black Africa*.

²⁵ The American Society for African Culture, a Pan-Africanist organization.

²⁶ Harold R. Isaacs (1910–1986) published an article on May 13, 1961, in the *New Yorker* called "Back to Africa," about the experiences of African-Americans in West Africa.

What show are you in now?
 Did you finish your book?
 Is *King Kong* really coming to the U.S.A.?
 Is you is or is you ain't happy?

RE-gards—
 Langston

★ ★ ★

July 31, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE
 MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

Well, a week after I was meeting Nkosi I found your letter I wanted to show him—all mixed up in the ENORMOUS pile of mail and things that outrun me forever. (Sometimes I get 30 letters a day. So who can keep up with them? But I try. My current secretary does not take dictation, so isn't too much help on mail, but most helpful otherwise. And is busy enough copying what I write creatively, anyhow.) So I am just re-rereading your letter, most interesting, all about your current theatre activities. Next time you write, tell me how *August for the People* came out. But DON'T feel you have to write when you're busy. I get that feeling with some folks, too, and it BUGS one. And you, being a sensitive Bantu, like me, should not be bugged. Just write when you have time and feel like it and think of me and Nkosi and us poor souls in Fight-for-Berlin America but not Mississippi or Tunis. Look here, since you've gone in to the theatre in a big way, why not go native, too, and get in the cast of *King Kong* so you can come to New York if it comes. Then you wouldn't have to write trans-Atlantic letters at all. We could see you? Or better yet, get a Hollywood contract, and fly through here for a day going and coming, since a fleeting glance would be better than none, and you'd be headed for MONEY. Meanwhile, send me some more poetry. If you write poetry, no need to write letters. A poem is a letter-to-the-world. And I can put them in my *Poetry of Black Africa* anthology coming up. And you will get a few \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ less than these marks, though! I am supposed to be in the country hiding away finishing a book due last week. So am going to go tomorrow. It

is real HOT in town now. Almost as hot as Nigeria was last fall
Be cool.

★ ★ ★

November 10, 1961

TODD MATSHIKIZA [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

This advance Christmas present is to say the kids and we haven't forgotten you at all.

We mean to write each day, then we are put off from writing by having to cope with the English and their land. And if I have paid them any compliments in this little book,²⁷ it was in error.

We send you warmest love, and hope to see you again sometime. Will write longer soon.

Yours ever,
Todd

★ ★ ★

November 10, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

Rosey Pool tells me you've moved. I sent you my two new books to your Parkhill address. I hope you received them OK. If not, let me know. And send me your new address.

Also let me know if you'll be in London around Christmas time. I'm going to Nigeria for the Lagos Arts Festival at the middle of December, and maybe can stop in London on my way back home.

Did you see *A Wreath for Udomo*? Or are you in it—the play from Peter Abrahams' novel which was due to open recently at the Hammersmith Theatre? William Branch, who wrote it, is there and is a friend of mine. Meet him if you can, tell him hello for me, and let me know how the play came out.

²⁷ Matshikiza's letter was probably included with a copy of his just-published autobiography, *Chocolates for My Wife*.

I'm busy trying to clear up things so I can go to Africa. My two most urgent deadlines I've gotten just about done—except for minor revisions. But still have a couple of promised magazines pieces, etc. to do before I can leave.

Write soon—just your address, if nothing more, and if you received my *Ask Your Mama* and *The Best of Simple*.

Regards,

★ ★ ★

December 4, 1961

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

How are you? I have heard very infrequently, but I am determined to remain in closer contact. However I am now busy on a novel which should be ready in about three months time.

However I now have my volume of short stories ready and although it will be relatively easy for me to find publishers on the European continent, I would very much desire to see it in English. Do you think that you could be of any assistance? Suggest publishers or let your agents negotiate for me?

I am including the following stories in the anthology. It is to be called *African Songs*.

1. African Song. *Drum* Prize-winning story. Also published in *Christ Erseint am Congo* (Germany).
2. Dagga Smoker's Dream. *New Age* Prize-winning story. Best contribution to *Groot Schuur* (Cape Town). Also published in *Christ Erseint am Congo* (Germany).
3. Resurrection. Published *Afrika Berattar* (Norway) and *Athena* (Germany).
4. No Room at Solitaire. New story.
5. The Bench. Published *Fighting Talk*. *Darkness and Light*. *African Treasury*, New York Post, *Christ Erseint am Congo* (Germany), *Almanaco Litterario* (Italy). *Peaceful Heroes* (USA).
6. Arrest. New story.
7. Moon Over District Six. *Fighting Talk*. Jack Cope recommended story.

8. Street Corner. New story.
 9. Rain. *Contrast* (South Africa).
 10. The Return. *Christ Ersceint am Congo* (Germany).
Der Krystal (Austria).
 11. Saturday Morning. New story.
 12. Willie-Boy. *Drum*.
 13. Black and Brown Song. *Drum* Prize-winning story.
 14. Rich Black Hair. *Fighting Talk*.

Here are some recent reviews of stories of mine.

[Reviews omitted.]

If it is possible to find a publisher, Peter Clarke is more than prepared to do the illustrations. You can imagine how thrilled I will be at the prospect of my work coming out in one volume for a change. South Africa is obviously out as far as publishing my work is concerned. Most publishers are far too scared. You of course know that *African Treasury* is banned here. The penalty for having a copy is £1,000 or 5 years in gaol. So what? Please reply and let me know if there is any sense in sending the manuscripts along. I will reply with a newsy, human interest letter, telling you all about racial hotspot number 1. I believe you have met some of my colleagues. Unfortunately the wrong ones. Doctor Van der Ross has a long role as a collaborator with the powers that be, but is very sincere now and showing powers of leadership. Councilman Parker is a dead-loss and doing the progressive movement far more harm than good. S.V. Petersen and Philander,²⁸ the poets are both Government good-boys although I dare say they will speak very progressively once outside South Africa. However that is all in the meantime. Do tell me whether it is worth pursuing the publication of a volume of short stories.

Best of luck,
 Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

December 10, 1961

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
 [CAPE TOWN]

²⁸S.V. Petersen and P.J. Philander, coloured educators and renowned poets who wrote in Afrikaans.

Dear Richard,

This has to be a very hasty note. It's dress rehearsal of a play of mine today, to open tomorrow, and the next day I leave for Nigeria for the Lagos Arts Festival. Back in New York in January. Anyway, I am delighted to have your letter and to know you've a novel near completion. That fact will make it a little easier to place your short stories—should such luck come, for short stories are the hardest kind of books to place, since they do not sell very well—like poetry. However, I phoned my agent yesterday and told him about you (he liked “The Bench”) and he said he would handle your stories for book publication (in London their branch is Hughes, Massie in Bloomsbury). So send your manuscript to:

Mr. Ivan von Auw, Jr.,
Harold Ober Associates,
40 East 49th Street,
New York 37, New York, USA

Send a note along reminding him that I spoke to him about your work, and tell him the novel is almost done. (It is because of a possible novel that the good agent will consent to try to sell short stories for beginning authors). Drop me a line and let me know when the stories are posted to New York, so I can follow up for you with the agency. It is a very good agency (mine for 10 years) and they also have an excellent play and film department, in case any of your work has Hollywood possibilities. When I get back from Africa I'll phone and see if your script has arrived. Wish I could come to Cape Town (Mississippi). Sure I know—those guys I met. We have them here, too. So has Katanga.²⁹ Anyhow, *quand meme*³⁰—as Sarah Bernhardt³¹ used to proclaim, in spite of her wooden leg. Dig?

Sincerely,

²⁹Katanga is the southernmost province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Shortly after Congo's independence in 1960, the province seceded from the Congolese government and became an independent country until 1963, when United Nations forces seized the capital Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi) and reunited the province with the rest of the Congo.

³⁰French for “even so” or “all the same.”

³¹Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) was a famous French actress; she continued to perform even after her right leg was amputated in 1915.

Blake

2.

May 4, 1962

LOST

LOW LOST

LONG LOST

FOUND BLOKE: I thought you had gone to Limbo, wherever that is---until Rosey Pool just now sent me your new address.....Where have you BEEN and what happened to the girl you wrote the POEM about? And have youx written any more poems? If so, send them to me to consider for my anthology.....If I'd know where you were, on my way back from Lagos, I had some hours in the London airport and would have phoned you to take a helicopter out for a drink. Or maybe I'd have stayed over a day to see how you are doing.....Anyhow, I was going to send you some books when I got home, but knew you had moved, and didn't know where.....Then I went off to California and am just now back in New York. And maybe might be going to the MBARI Writers Conference in Uganda in June, and to Spoleto where my BLACK NATIVITY show is to be performed. So will probably stop in London on the way to or from---mostly likely from---on the home bound trip.....So you live in Soho?.....Are you still working for the bookshop?.....Have you got a telephone? Send me the number, please.....And tell Rosey thanks for letting me know you are still in the land of the living. I'd gotten a bit worried since NOBODY had news of you---and you are my favorite Bantu.

Quel negritude?!X?;!

Figure 4 Letter from Langston Hughes to Bloke Modisane, May 4, 1962. Published with permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc. Copyright © 2010 by the Estate of Langston Hughes. Image courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Letters, 1962

January 4, 1962

**EZEKIEL MPAHLELE [PARIS] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

My dear Langston,

Bon jour! This is just to ask you on behalf of Mbari¹ in Ibadan to be one of the three judges of their literary contest which Congress is sponsoring. I am one judge myself. The idea is to have the MSS sifted by local persons in East and Central, West and South Africa before we get them. Only English MSS.

Could you please help us, and can I have your reply in quick time so that we are able to put out notices in the African press?

In haste. Yours very sincerely,

Zeke

★ ★ ★

January 5, 1962

**RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

¹Mbari (from the Igbo word for the special hut used to pay ceremonial tribute to a deity) was a club founded in Ibadan as a gathering place for writers and artists. Mbari sponsored the Writers Conference in Kampala, Uganda, in June 1962, which Hughes attended. There he met some of the most famous African writers of the time, including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Cyprian Ekwensi, as well as Modisane and Mphahlele.

Dear Langston,

Thanks very much for your letter and your offers of agents. I think it's real wonderful of you. *Eersteklas*² as the Afrikaners say. I have sent my book of short stories by ordinary mail to the agents you suggested so it should get there about the end of January. I have dedicated the slim volume to you because I feel that if any, you have through your letters done a helluva lot to encourage me to continue writing. I have not confessed before but "The Bench" was my first real bit of writing. I have also taken the liberty of including a poem of yours in the front, "Our Land," because it is so appropriate to South Africa as well. I hope that this is possible and that you have no objections (or your agents). No I have not received your book of poems and upon enquiry apparently the post office knows nothing about it, but Peter Clarke did receive his. If it is at all possible do send me another, as I have read reviews about it in *Fighting Talk*.

You of course know that *African Treasury* is banned here. The penalty for having a copy is R2,000 or 5 years in jail. How pleasant. What price immortality. Concerning the book, I am now at the final stages and will have it complete by June. I will send you or your agents a copy immediately. I am certain that no South African agent will handle it as it is fighting talk. It might also spell the end of my career as a teacher, as it is doubtful whether I will be kept on by the Education Department. Already I am a persona non grata.

Four of my stories in the collection concern the strike called by the Congress Alliance in May, 1961, the celebration of Verwoerd's Republic. Schools were offered medals and flags to celebrate. Not a single high school student (Coloured) accepted a flag or medal, and most of the students came out on strike. At our school three children out of 600 turned up. And they had apparently been forced by their parents. The authorities were powerless. The organization was entirely done by students, who at great risk put up placards, posters and generally asked for trouble as students the world over do. What is more unusual is that the school I teach at is the Coloured Eton. You know, smug, and petit bourgeoisie, people from professional homes who have not really appreciated oppression. If it can happen here ye Gods it can happen anywhere else. However this is South Africa, land of paradoxes. I really wish you could come here. But it seems that that will have to wait. Did Sylvia Titus write to you that she played Lady Macbeth in a Drama Centre production in which I played Ross? It was great fun and we crowded the City Hall with Whites who came to hear Non-Whites

²Afrikaans for "first class."

who spoke impeccable English and even knew what they were speaking about. We found it most amusing. One critic said that "after 5 minutes one accepts these dusky Scotsmen as genuine." I ask you. However best of luck till we write again which I hope will be damn soon.

Yours,
Richard Rive

PS: Ignore the addresses I will put on the back. This will be done for obvious reasons. My address remains the same.

★ ★ ★

January 18, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [PARIS]

Dear Zeke,

I'm just back from Nigeria to find your letter among a mountain of mail. Of course, I'll be happy to be a judge for the Mbari Literary Contest.

With cordial regards,

Hastily but Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

March 14, 1962

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [PARIS] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

It was very good of you to consent to be judge for the Mbari literary contest.

You will be receiving shortly my new book *The African Image* which is out March 23rd. I have tried as much as possible to make it controversial so as to stimulate and even provoke angry but useful discussion. You see, so many of these things I speak about do need to enter the dialogue of Africa, stripped of all the clichés.

But this is not what I wanted to write you about. Mbari is calling a conference of English-speaking African writers at Makerere College, Kampala, Uganda, June 8 to 17, 1962. After this Mbari will celebrate its anniversary. I am still waiting for Ulli to give me the date for this later event. It would be very good if you could come to the conference

to give a talk on the Negro literary scene in your country: something in the nature of a brief (approximately 45 minutes), sharp and explicit statement, to be followed by discussions. We are also inviting Ralph Ellison. I only have the London edition of his *Invisible Man*, and so cannot send his letter direct. Can you pass it on?

I have not received your latest poem: I think I heard you say last November that it was on its way.

Please let me know within a week or so if you will be available as a guest of Mbari on June 8 and soon after.

Best wishes,
Zeke / E. Mphahlele

★ ★ ★

March 15, 1962

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

How did you find Africa? Hope you had a fine enough trip. Thanks for your kind offer of the use of an agent re: short stories. I have sent them off to Harold Ober Associates and they have replied that they have received them. I also sent them the reply I received from *Harper's* and they are investigating that angle.

I wrote to you previously asking your permission, whether I could dedicate my first short stories to you. I feel that more than anything else it was your encouragement that made me write. I have a confession to make. When you first read "The Bench" it was the only real story I had written. But how could I admit that to anyone? I also request your permission to use your poem "Our Land" from the "Weary Blues" in the frontispiece. Is it possible to get your permission to do so at once?

The reason for the urgency is that Sweden has accepted it for publication in Swedish (1,500 copies), and Germany for publication in English (10,000 copies). Both publishers wrote to me asking me whether I had received your permission. Could you please reply to me as soon as possible as well as writing directly to the publishers concerned? I would very much appreciate it as well as feel honoured. Their addresses are:

Bo Cavefors Bokforlag
98, Ostanvag,
Malmo SV,
Sweden

Seven Seas Publishers,
Glinkastrasse 13-15,
Berlin, W 8,
Germany

My novel is nearly completed. Last 5,000 words and then polishing. By the end of June it should be quite ready, or as the Afrikaners say "*Kant en klaar*."³ In fact the Seven Seas people have asked me to include excerpts in the short story collection, which should be good advanced publicity. If I am allowed to, I shall leave South Africa for two years in December in order to meet other writers on the African and European continents. Who says but that I might even land up in the good old U.S.A. A very interesting feature of my life is that my father is an American Negro, but he left home when I was a mere three months old. I never saw him. I believe that he might still be frequenting the New York waterfront. He was apparently a ship's cook. Name Richardson Moore. Interesting if we should ever meet again. My mother is from an upper class family, and the subject of my father is never brought up. The scant information I gleaned from my old governess. So there I am 100% South African Coloured, accepted as a spokesman, without anyone suspecting that my paternity is suspect and that from my father's side I might only be first generation South African. What a quaint story. Reads like a magazine feature doesn't it?

Well Langston, please let me know as soon as possible whether you agree to the dedication as well as the use of your poem. Also write to the two publishers at your earliest convenience. Thanks.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

March 17, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [PARIS]

Dear Zeke:

As far as I know now, I can come to Uganda in early June. My recent song-play, *Black Nativity*, is going to Italy in late June for the Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds, and I intend to be in Europe then, so I could come to Africa first. Thanks so much for thinking of me in regards to the Mbari Conference.

³ Afrikaans expression meaning "quite ready."

Just last night I wrote Wole Soyinka, sending him J. Saunders Redding's⁴ article from the *Afro-American* mentioning his plays and Mbari, and comparing current Nigerian artistic activity to that of Harlem in the '20s. Redding is, as you no doubt know, in Africa now for some months of lecturing. Will he be in Uganda, too? He is a stimulating speaker and (contrary to myself) an intellectual. Ellison is, too.

Your letter I've forwarded on to Ralph. His address is:

Mr. Ralph Ellison
730 Riverside Drive
New York 31, NY, USA
(Phone: Watkins 6-6804)

I don't know if he's in town or not, as I got no answer by phone today.

The African Image sounds exciting. I'm looking forward to it. I loved *Down Second Avenue*.

Hastily, but with cordial regards,

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

March 27, 1962

**LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO RICHARD RIVE
[CAPE TOWN]**

Dear Richard,

I've been away from New York, but find your letter on my return, and am tonight writing now to the German and Swedish publishers of your book granting them permission to use my poem, "Our Land," in front. You hereby have my permission to use that poem in any other editions there may be. And, of course, I would be delighted to have the book dedicated to me! You probably know Peter Abrahams dedicated his *Wreath for Udomo* novel to me a year or so ago.

I'm happy to hear that your novel is almost done. Good! And I do hope your December plans come to pass. I'm pleased to hear

⁴J. Saunders Redding (1906-1988), African-American literary critic and, in 1962, professor at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. He may be best known for his book *To Make a Poet Black* (1939), which attempted to establish a canon of African-American literature. He attended Hughes's alma mater, Lincoln University, for one year, in 1923.

that you are related to Harlem in some sort of way. When you sent me your picture, I thought you looked like us. Anyhow, we will receive you with open arms whenever you come this way—and may it be soon. I'll open a “keg of nails” for you—my best drinks! My father went off to a foreign land when I was a baby, too—as you know if you read *The Big Sea* My theory is children should be born without parents—if born they must be.

Ezekiel Mphahlele's new book, *The African Image* (Faber and Faber, London) has just come, and looks most interesting. He sort of takes negritude apart therein. He was in New York not long ago; and in London I saw Todd Matshikiza and Bloke Modisane, but missed *King Kong* last year when I was there. Bloke is “my favorite Bantu.” Nigeria was HOT but fun. I went to Benin this trip, and Ibadan, which I didn't have a chance to visit when I was there in 1960. New Years in Lagos was wonderful—did all the shebeens!!!

Best wishes. Write again when you can.

★ ★ ★

May 4, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

LOST
LOW LOST
LONG LOST
FOUND BLOKE:

I thought you had gone to Limbo, wherever that is—until Rosey Pool just now sent me your address Where have you BEEN and what happened to the girl you wrote the POEM about? And have you written any more poems? If so, send them to me to consider for my anthology If I'd known where you were, on my way back from Lagos, I had some hours in the London airport and would have phoned you to take a helicopter out for a drink. Or maybe I'd have stayed over a day to see how you are doing Anyhow, I was going to send you some books when I got home, but knew you had moved, and didn't know where Then I went off to California and am just now back in New York. And maybe might be going to the *Mbari* Writers Conference in Uganda in June, and to Spoleto where my *Black Nativity* show is to be performed. So will probably stop in London on the way

to or from—most likely from—on the home bound trip So you live in Soho? Are you still working for the bookshop? Have you got a telephone? Send me the number, please And tell Rosey thanks for letting me know you are still in the land of the living. I'd gotten a bit worried since NOBODY had news of you—and you are my favorite Bantu.

Quel negritude?!X?;!

★ ★ ★

May 10, 1962

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Modisane addresses his letter “Dumela/Sakubona Langston,” and explains that this means “hello” in Sesotho and isiZulu. He has just come out of “hibernation,” where he went to “lose something—I’m not sure what—but I wanted to lose it. Maybe I thought I might bleach, but alas (poor bloke) I am still the same.” He jokingly admits to having seen a psychiatrist, and tells Hughes that his landlord has threatened him with eviction, as his union went on strike and he was unable to pay the rent: “I want to dare [the landlord], but it’s not warm enough yet to move into Trafalgar Square or Hyde Park. You may, however, note the two landmarks as my prospective address.” He is tired of London; he wants to come to the United States; he promises to meet Hughes at the Mbari conference, if not before; and he’d like to go to Spoleto with Hughes to see Black Nativity. He writes: “I seem to be suffering from a paralysing dose of anxiety. . . . South Africa has done a good job, I’m completely emasculated; everything seems so pointless.”

★ ★ ★

May 14, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

BLO-kie:

What is *hello* in Bantu? Sakubona to you! And just to embarrass you, since you haven't written me for so long, I am sitting down to answer you RIGHT back. Greetings! What union dragged you out on WHAT strike? And no need to hide from New Yorkers. We can't see all the way to London (*gracias a dios!*). Folks who know they are going

crazy, aren't. It is the ones who don't know who are crazy already I did NOT get any magazine with any essay of yours in it. You probably just thought you sent it As beautifully as you type, you can't be dead. Why don't you get a job as a typist, copyist for writers, or something like that? Such folks are not easy to find here. If you were in New York, you could copy and COPY and copy for me. As my one lone assistant is hard put to keep up And, hey, Bantu, you are not really BLACK. Me neither. Wish I was—so, like Simple says, I could scare the white folks to death. (Not Rosey Pool, who is a Dutch bonbon bar) Hey, don't you sign your letters? Or maybe there's a page missing. Where is the rest of it—B-l-o-k-e—wrote out long hand good like you can write? Bloke, don't be simple-minded. Just be simple. Why didn't you write me a long time ago if you were having it rough? I could have sent you a little something—like the enclosed*. And no obligations. You don't even need to say, Thank you, or anything except safely received, maybe, so one will know it is not lost. Not really necessary either. It's a bore to HAVE to do anything My plan is to leave London for Entebbe (Kampala, Makarere) on BOAC Flight No. 161 on Wednesday, June 6th I'll have 5 hours at airport. If you're not on my flight, come out and have luncheon with me. Or I'll see you [ending missing].

SIDE NOTE: Let's come back on 19th or 20th via Cairo, Athens, Rome, and you can see my show at Spoleto. (And the Sphinx, and Parthenon, and Vatican.) O.K.? No problem

*Sent by cable instead, as maybe you can use it NOW.

★ ★ ★

May 18, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [PARIS]

Dear Zeke:

I have been trying to write you for weeks to tell you how much I was absorbed by your *African Image*, and especially by your discussion of *negritude*—with which conclusions I agree—and what you say about African-American relations of color. A fine and thought provoking book! I hope it is soon published here *The Living and the Dead* I liked, too, with the Clarke drawings. And I would have written sooner, but I have been in California helping out my 86-year-old uncle with his affairs. And stopped a couple of other places en route back home.

So travelling about, it is well nigh impossible to keep up with my mail. Then when I get home, 50–11 things of an *urgent* nature have piled up to do. And I still have two most pressing deadlines to complete before I can take off for Uganda. How I will make it, I don't know. The wire concerning the Air France ticket just came an hour or so ago. So now I'll set about getting my visas and all on Monday. . . . I hear tell Bloke will be going to Uganda. Good! He's a talented fellow. Did you ever hear from Ellison? I haven't seen or talked to him. He's probably still teaching out of town. First copy of my *Fight for Freedom, The Story of the NAACP* came today, just one. But I'll probably have copies by the time I leave, so I'll bring you one to Africa. Of my other books, I sent copies to Uganda already, marked to *hold* pending my arrival. Nobody has ever told me what I am expected to do at the Conference—except be there. But at least I'm prepared to give a reading of my poems, if desired, and to talk briefly about fellow writers of color. Or on the subject of the Negro in the American theatre. Or the use of black folklore in writing. Right after Makerere, I'm invited by the USIS to the opening of the new American library in Accra, which means I cannot linger in Kampala or go to Kenya as I would like to do.

Langston Hughes

PS: Finally got Ralph Ellison on the phone—just now, midnight—and he says he had to decline invite to Uganda, pressure of work, and having been away from home most of year at University of Chicago teaching.

★ ★ ★

May 22, 1962

**EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [PARIS] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

Dear Langston,

Thanks for your nice letter.

I am sure I wrote to you—evidently during your wanderings—to say please give a 45-minute statement on the American Negro literary scene: trends; the relevancy of protest; problem of roots and identity if and where they are relevant to the creative process (if the problem is not relevant, cut it out!). I'm going to insist that we do not spend useful time on sterile arguments about negritude. Only where and as it affects the writers' activity.

We have times for the reading of works by their writers, and you will please go into the box when the sessions come. Thanks for sending your books to Makerere.

Pity you can't attend Mbari's first anniversary after Makerere—from what you say in your letter.

Good luck.

Yours ever,
Zeke / Ezekiel Mphahlele

★ ★ ★

May 27, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

Sakubona! I have seen a couple of numbers of *Twentieth Century* in the past and found it a most intriguing magazine. Now comes an issue with both you and Brigitte Bardot⁵ in it. The most! Your article is excellent, and the entire issue on privacy in life and TV very interesting. Thank you so much for having a copy sent me.

Am I going to see you on my way through London—or later at Kampala? Where and when? Next Wednesday, June 6, if Flight 500 from New York gets in approximately on time: 9:30 A.M., I'll have about 5 hours at the London Airport—not really enough time to come into the city. So maybe you could come out (if you're not working) and be my guest at luncheon (I've asked Frank Parkes,⁶ too). Anyhow, let me know, either beforehand via air letter here, or a message c/o BOAC at the Airport. And if you have a phone number, maybe I can phone you, in case you can't make it out to the field. Sure will be good to see you in any case, in London or in Africa. And if you're coming back around the time I go to Europe, why not stop over in Rome with me and we'll go to Spoleto to see my *Black Nativity* show at the Festival there.

If Sakubona is *hello*, not know what *so long* is in anything approximating Bantu, at the risk of being colonial, *Cheerio!*

★ ★ ★

⁵Brigitte Bardot (1934–), French actress who was at the peak of her career at this time.

⁶Frank Parkes (1932–2005), Ghanaian poet.

May 28, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [PARIS]

Dear Zeke:

Our letters crossed, as I'd just posted one to you yesterday asking for time and place of the Mbari celebration. As I informed you, U.S. Information Service has asked me to go to Ghana for the opening of a new American Library there on June 28–29, and then wish me to go on down to Ibadan for a few days. I see no reason why I should not go to Ibadan first, in time for the Mbari Anniversary, and perhaps stay there until the 26th or 27th of June. Since the USIS will be paying my fare Rome-Accra-Ibadan, there would be no expense to Mbari. Only thing is I would have to miss the opening of my *Black Nativity* at Spoleto on June 24th, but since it will be there a month, I can catch a performance on my Northward return from West Africa. I would say then, that I would leave Kampala on June 18th so as to stop in Cairo to see the Pyramids, thence on to Rome, and down to Ibadan. All of which would dove-tail O.K., I believe, as USIS is giving me an open ticket from Rome as to time. And I am glad to get the information from you today, so I can arrange the routing in New York before I leave. My BOAC ticket N.Y.-London-Entebbe is OK and I have it in hand, so I don't think you-all need do anything more about it in Paris. But I've still to get Ghana and Nigeria visas, as the OK and information for that part of the trip just came today, both yours and the State Department. Samuel Allen, USIS (Paul Vesey), is also going to West Africa, so perhaps you'd like to invite him to the Mbari Anniversary; address: Samuel Allen, Legal Department, USIS, Washington 25, D.C. He is, as you know, an interesting poet, and a negritude-ite. So can liven up arguments. I'll be seeing you in Kampala.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

May 31, 1962

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Modisane begins, "Sakubona, Langston." He has been registered as a British citizen and will soon have his first passport; he will be on Hughes's flight from

London to Entebbe. He has submitted an essay and a poem to Negro Digest, and will soon send a short story. He had a recent conversation with Rosey Poole. He is translating a series of poems by a Zulu poet. This is his second priority, after finishing his autobiography Blame Me on History, which he plans to dedicate "to my favorite American Bantu. You have always made me feel that maybe something good will come out of me yet; when I think I'm going mad, you tell me: nuts." Would Hughes send him copies of two novels by James Baldwin? Does Hughes know a woman named Sarah Wright? A formal word for wishing someone goodbye is "pula," which means rain, "and it's proper to wish for rain . . . Pull it on Ezekiel Mphahlele, and watch the twinkle come to his eyes. So when I see you on Wednesday the greeting will be, Pula."

★ ★ ★

June 1, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

Since the latest communications indicate the Kampala conference begins on June 11 (maybe on 10th with a cocktail party) instead of on June 8th as Zeke at first wrote me, I am not leaving New York on Tuesday, but on Thursday instead. So I will now arrive in London on BOAC Flight No. 550 at 9:35 A.M. on Friday June 8, and leave that afternoon. My invite for luncheon at the Airport still holds good for Friday, if you are not working, and can make it out there. At any rate, phone or write a message and I'll ask for it when I arrive. (Leave a phone number.)

I'm wondering when you're going to Kampala. Maybe at the same time?

Anyhow, I hope to see you, or talk to you by phone, next Friday.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

June 5, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

TELEGRAM: PULA BANTU ME GO FRIDAY FROM LONDON BRINGING YOU BOOKS—L.

★ ★ ★

June 20, 1962

PETER CLARKE [SIMON'S TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Just a few days before receiving the books from you, I had a letter from Alan Rake (of *Drum*, Ghana). He was writing about stories for a book and wanted to know about illustrations and said that you had mentioned my name to him. Thanks for doing so.

Thanks a great deal for the Lorca books too. I was, at one time, intensely interested in him, when I came across the book *Garcia Lorca* by Edwin Honig, some time back, in a small second-hand bookshop in Cape Town. I was absolutely enthralled and always looked for more books on his writing but without success. (It's the same with the Mexicans. We never see books on their art or theatre or poetry or literature or hear their music. Well, some months ago, someone got a record out of the library and on one side was a composition by Chavez. But, hell, I would like to hear a great deal more and read a great deal more.) During the last few days I have been reading the Lorca plays. Actually, I have read these three plays before (once some actor-friend of mine had the book, too).

Have you any addresses of friends in Europe, particular in Paris, Rome and the Netherlands that I can look up? It is my intention to leave for Europe at the end of August. Congress of Cultural Freedom (Paris) has awarded me a grant for studying in Europe for a year. I shall be concentrating on graphic art at the Rijks Akademie voor Beeldende Kunsten at Amsterdam. There is supposed to be a grant too from a Cape Town group but they are still dithering away as to whether I should get it or not. I felt and my friends and acquaintances felt that it was time I went overseas for a while. This is what I wanted to do ages ago. So now I'm quite happy that it's possible at last. I need the technical knowledge. I haven't quite worked out all of my plans yet but I'm optimistic about everything working out alright—even a passport.

Since you last wrote I have been busy. In fact I haven't had a proper vacation since 1960. Early in February I managed to go up country

for a week. It was hot as hell, being the tail-end of the Summer, and the country was in the grip of drought. But I loved being in the country. It was a nice break, but really too short for me, I who like doing most things with enthusiasm, and that includes vacations. Possibly you have seen Zeke Mphahlele's book of short stories *The Living and Dead and Other Stories* with my illustrations. Recently I did a cover for a novelette by Cape Town writer Alex La Guma.⁷ Earlier this year I illustrated a collection of stories by my friend James Matthews. This book is being published in Sweden in August and I'm looking forward to seeing it. This book will be in Swedish, however, as it is meant for circulation in Sweden. I think James is looking for an English or American publisher now.

Recently I had two exhibitions in Cape Town. One was in the suburbs at an art centre for children and was a small show of graphic art. That was in late April. The other was in May at the Henri Lidchi Gallery in the city. I sold nine pictures and besides that four were going into a private collection in New York when the exhibition closed. Those four were bought some time before the exhibition was hung by a man named David Lowe who is a producer for CBS News in New York. He bought them while on a visit to South Africa earlier this year. He said he was keen on getting them into his collection because they were so striking. I've also had a number of small sales, mainly of graphic work. So I'm not at all displeased at the way things are going. Harmon Foundation bought a gouache painting and three linocuts. Did you perhaps see the exhibition of African Art that they arranged in New York? I'm exhibiting in Cape Town again at the end of July, this time just graphic art. Thanks for sending *Jet*. American coloured mags are never seen in S.A. unless they've been brought in by U.S. cargo seamen. That's why occasionally we get it. Must stop now. Write again some time.

Yours sincerely,
Peter

★ ★ ★

⁷ Alex La Guma (1925–1985), South African novelist, short story writer, and anti-apartheid activist. Clarke's illustration adorned the cover of the first edition of La Guma's novella *A Walk in the Night*, published by Mbari Publications in Nigeria in 1962.

August 2, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

The snapshots are being developed and I'll be sending you some next week. But I'm wondering if you're perhaps planning to take off for Spoleto soon????? If so, I'll hold the record and books until I know where you're settled.

Are you seeing any of my *Nativity* folks in London? And are they living and eating regular, or out of work like most actors?

I'm going up in the country tomorrow for a weekend of conferences on my *Tambourine* show. But travelling light. It cost me \$16 to ship home by boat my excess luggage from Paris! And it won't arrive for a month. The Lagos box hasn't come yet either. Next time I travel like Barry Record. Tell him HELLO, also Frank Parke, and Arthur and Lewis.....

* * *

August 8, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

I hear tell *Black Nativity* is opening in London, so if you see any ads, advance notices, or reviews of it within the next few days, please clip and send me.

Shakespeare in Harlem closed in Rome, to reopen at the end of September, they say.

It looks like *Tambourines to Glory* will really come to New York this fall. We start conferences on it again this weekend. Meanwhile, I'm getting another gospel-song show ready to be done in Brooklyn in October. Some of these shows just might make a little money \$\$\$\$\$\$. Do you reckon???????

Franke Parkes writes asking where his manuscript is. He has moved: 63 Bridge Lane, Temple Fortune, London, N.W. 1, in case you haven't found him.

Are you going back to Italy? Or what's happening? I'll send the books and records as soon as I know where to address them.

Best ever,
Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

August (?), 1962

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

*Modisane thanks Hughes for a great holiday, and complains about how much mail and work accumulated in his absence. He worries that the deal with André Deutsch⁸ will fall through and endanger his trip to Spoleto and Rome. The production of *Black Nativity* is doing fine and has just opened at the Criterion. He gives news of several people Hughes knows, including Gerald Moore⁹ and someone named Alex. Modisane took Sam Allen out “to see London by night—which is a drag. The bars were closed, the shop windows dark and everything was miserable, but we dropped in at the Club Afrique and listened to a reasonable highlife band. It was like being back in Lagos.” Wole Soyinka is coming to London soon, and Modisane will probably have drinks with him; Christopher Okigbo¹⁰ may be in town as well. He signs off, “Pula, Bloke.”*

★ ★ ★

August 15, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

Sam Allen came by last night bringing news of you—and that very handsome tie. Thanks a lot. And thanks for letting me know Miller needs funds to send my books back from Kampala. I’ll send him a cheque. Frank Parkes wrote a letter of gratitude for his manuscript. and today’s *New York Times* reports briefly that *Black Nativity* received an ovation. (Reuters. If Arthur M. had anything to do with so glowing a dispatch, tell him THANKS!) And if you’re buying the

⁸ André Deutsch (1917–2000), Hungarian-born British publisher.

⁹ Gerald Moore (1924–), pioneer of African literary criticism.

¹⁰ Christopher Okigbo (1930–1967), Nigerian poet who won acclaim for his innovative use of English in his poetry before his early death in the Nigerian Civil War in 1967.

papers anyhow, I'd appreciate any reviews or pictures you might send me, as Vinnette, Alex, and all are probably too excited to do anything so down to earth. BBC phoned asking if any of the songs were recorded, so if you see Alex or Marion tell them to send their records over to BBC radio folks and they might get a few spins. I haven't been downtown in New York since I've been home—been mostly up in the country a hundred miles away working on my next show with the director. But soon as I get where the big record shops are, I'll send you the promised record. And I've ordered some books from the publishers that ought to be along any day now. So, until—

Hastily, but sincerely,

★ ★ ★

September 26, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

Your record of Marion Williams' Christmas songs is on the way. Being a holiday item, I couldn't find it in the shops at this season of the year, so ordered it sent you from the recording studio. It has on it several of the songs from the show. For the life of me, I can't remember now just which books I promised to send you of mine that you don't already have. (I had no books on hand either when I got back home but have ordered most of them now.) If you let me know, I'll send them to you post haste. And what I'd appreciate from you would be a couple of programs of *Black Nativity* at the Phoenix Theatre, as it seems nobody else will post me any. Finally I got some from the stage manager of the Criterion—after about 50 requests. And Rosey Pool and Isa sent me bundles of clippings. But since Rosey left for America, no more. Rosey is now in North Carolina, didn't stop in New York at all, but hopes to come here Christmas. I'm busy with my new gospel-song-play, *Gospel Glow*, in rehearsal in a big Brooklyn church to be done in October with a 70-voice choir—so, as loud as gospel singers sing, you can probably hear it in London. It will be recorded, I think, and I'll send you a disc. Frank Parkes writes he's been ill—and broke. But happy to have his manuscript. Lots of mad people wandering around the streets of New York. Never saw so many folks talking to themselves, dancing in front of traffic, and so on. Never did get either of the boxes I left in Africa with USIS, neither Kampala

nor Lagos!!! What folks! I'm glad I brought my white slippers you gave me back myself.....

Regards,

★ ★ ★

November 15, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

I've been talking again with United Negro College Fund and AMSAC [American Society of African Culture] about you doing a college tour over here. It looks promising, and I hope you will be hearing from them soon..... If you have a new address, you should send it to me, so business letters will not go astray. I gave AMSAC and UNCF your Berwick number—but I hear you've departed those diggings. Is that true? Anyhow, I hope this reaches, also the record I sent you, etc., and that all goes well (or halfway well) with you.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

November 21, 1962

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Modisane asks Hughes's forgiveness for neglecting to write sooner. He withdrew his manuscript of Blame Me on History from André Deutsch, because "he wanted a straight autobiography, and I was writing something else." When Deutsch offered him an untenably low advance to finish the manuscript, Modisane ended the negotiations, even though he desperately needed the money: "I've seldom been hungrier in my life, not even in South Africa." After getting evicted from his flat and moving in with a friend, he finally signed a contract the previous week with Thames and Hudson for a £150 advance. He will try to track down the material Hughes had requested. In turn, could Hughes please send a copy of An African Treasury and a signed copy of Hughes's Collected Poems as a gift for a friend? He concludes, "Anyway, I'm writing my book and if I didn't have to dedicate it to my mother it would have been for you. I'm frightfully proud to know you. Just keep believing in me, maybe some day I'll

justify it. Keep swinging." In a postscript, Modisane asks Hughes to recommend an American publisher that his British press could approach.

★ ★ ★

November 23, 1962

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Their last letters crossed in transit, since Modisane's mail is delayed due to lack of a fixed abode. "I'm depressed like hell, I can't seem to find anywhere to live," and he feels like he has overstayed his welcome at his friend's house. He asks how Hughes's writing is coming, and about Rosey. His own book is about forty percent complete, and he is working diligently to meet an early January deadline. He inquires, "Do you remember the doll we met at Ibadan? Geneveive, the French chick reading in Brazzaville, I had her spending a week with me in London."

★ ★ ★

November 27, 1962

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [PARIS]

Dear Zeke:

Fog delayed my jet plane for 18 hours in Los Angeles, so I am just back yesterday from California. But have carefully read all the material you sent me. I suppose you are aware that the manuscripts came to me by boat mail, arriving just before I left for the Coast a week ago, although your letter telling me they were coming (dated October 26th) came by air and was here two or three weeks before the stories and poems came. I think you must have meant to send the manuscripts by air, too, but someone in your office neglected to put the proper postage, or to stamp the envelope PAR AVION. At any rate here are my choices in order of preference:

SHORT STORIES

- 1st Prize: "A Kaffer Woman".....J. Arthur Maimane
- 2nd Prize: "The Situation".....Bloke Modisane
- 3rd Prize: "The Bed Sitter".....Gaston Bart Williams

POETRY

- 1st Prize: "Debut".....M.J.C. Echeruo
 2nd Prize: "My Pass".....Leslie Schume
 3rd Prize: "Nothing Unusual".....K.A. Nortje

Since you request the material returned by Registered Mail, I must wait until the Post Office opens tomorrow to register it, and will then send it to you by air.

I regret that most of the short stories seem to me not very good. I wish Christina A. Aidoo's tale were less of a sketch and more dramatically or poetically told, since it has most interesting local color in it. The three I have chosen are good narratives, I think, with Maimane's being much the best of all.

With cordial regards to you,

Sincerely yours,

★ ★ ★

December 9, 1962

PETER CLARKE [AMSTERDAM] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Briefly, I received a grant from a cultural organization in Paris, Congr s Pour La Libert  de la Culture, this year for graphic art study in Europe; left South Africa on 31st August by ship and enjoyed the fourteen day voyage to England. Delightful. Spent a few days in London with ex-South African friends living there since about 1958. It was great. Also met Todd Matshikiza there (he had a short piece in your *African Treasury* too, I think). He's living there now.

Arrived in Amsterdam on the 19th September and started at the Rijks Akademie on the 24th September. At the moment I'm concentrating on lino and woodcut printmaking. This will be until the school closes in late December, that is the 22nd. Next year I'll be concentrating on lithography, etching, engraving, etc. until I return to South Africa about early May. Right now I am working very hard, learning as much as possible and not wasting any time. Will be going home with a load of work. Will probably be having an exhibition here before going home in 1963.

Going to spend Christmas in Germany and will be going afterwards to Paris to meet Ezekiel Mphahlele with whom I'll be staying for a

while during my vacation. Looking forward to it all. What I would like later, say a year or two, is to get hold of a grant for travelling and also perhaps studying. Would like to see more of Africa, as much as possible. Coming to Europe, our ship went to Free Town, Sierra Leone, British West Africa, to pick up President Tubman of Liberia¹¹ and his party. I became friendly with some of them and met the President too. They were nice, warm people, interesting. The Liberians were going to England on their way to Holland and Sweden. We hope to meet again in the future and maybe it will just work out that way too. I hope so. Unfortunately, we arrived at Free Town at night. We didn't stay until daylight but left at 3 a.m.—but the atmosphere of the place, warm, humid, moonlight and cloud and black tropical night, land under heavy African foliage and black people. A short beautiful memory, unforgettably sweet to my soul. I'd like to get back there again and stay for some months and paint it all. Maybe I will get there one day. I waited a long time for this trip to Europe and here I am. Maybe a trip to West Africa will work out too. After Africa I find the Dutch rather cold and lacking in "passion." At first I felt terribly depressed by it all, finding this completely different set-up to what I had known back home. I find the people of Amsterdam very tied up in traditions or conventions and not very keen on being conspicuous by stepping out of line. In a way they are even less free than they think. I am surprised at the amount of self-centeredness and "lack of soul" here. That's why I do look forward to going back to Africa next year. Anyway, that's the way it is. Write soon and best wishes for the Festive Season from

Peter

★ ★ ★

December 28, 1962

**EZEKIEL MPAHLELE [PARIS] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

Dear Langston,

The judgments of the three of us were pretty close. You had Maimane as first and Bloke as second, and Ulli had Bloke as first. I thought

¹¹William V. S. Tubman (1895–1971), president of Liberia from 1944 until his death. As president, Tubman worked to increase foreign investment in Liberia and to improve relations between the Americo-Liberian elite and the tribal peoples.

Bloke's story has greater breadth than Maimane's and rather found the latter's too hackneyed. I thought I should vote for Miss Aidoo for third because although hers is amateurish, it captures local colour quite well. We are all agreed on the first for poetry. But you differ with us on the second. I found rather more meat in Brutus' poetry than the slight one you thought worthy of second place. This communiqué will indicate how I have reconciled our results. It seemed fair to me that Maimane and Miss Aidoo should both take third place which does not mean sharing the prize but each receiving £30. Thank you very much for all you have done so promptly amidst all your travels, lecturings and creative writing.

I am rather excited by the production of *Beyond the Blues* by Rosey Pool. There is real good stuff in it. I shall be sending you a copy of Gerald Moore's lovely book which has just come out—*Seven African Writers*. It makes history in the field of African writing and I am circulating it among all the Makerere participants as complimentary copies. You may by now have received the Makerere report. I must again apologize for not having been able to get in your talk but I think you will like our little brochure.

Best wishes and compliments of the season.

Yours sincerely,
Zeke / Ezekiel Mphahlele

South Peninsula High School,
Kendal Road,
Diep River,
Cape Town.
22nd Nov. 1954.

Dear Langston,
My sincerest apologies for not sending the stories at once. My reason is that I have only just received your letter as I was in Johannesburg for a month. I sincerely hope the stories will reach you in time. (I would cable them if I had sufficient money). The prospect of seeing myself in print is most inviting and I'm afraid you have developed into my fairy god father (literarily) speaking. I faithfully promise to send you my stories as soon as they are past writers. You must please excuse my typing, as I typed the stories through the night (with the assistance of Caffeine Citrate to keep me from falling asleep).

I have received your books and devoured them. I read all three the day they came. Thanks a million.

My matric students already learnt some of by heart, and it is with great pride I take down 'March Moon' and read it to Michael Bousiehout at his request. I'll promise to write as much as possible if you will send me more of your works. Maybe one day I can send mine to you. How wonderful.

I have no photograph of myself available, but Bill Curry is taking a study of me, and you will receive it in the next post. What about a photograph of yourself? You mentioned 'Sylvia Jacobs' in your letter. I wonder if you did not mean 'Stella Jacobs', who was at Syracuse University a few years back. She is a close friend of mine and I'm always running into her place for political and educational arguments.

I write my short stories in about three hours and seldom revise them. I'm afraid I haven't the patience of Balzac or Carlyle. I write in white heat and most probably tear it up afterwards. I'm only really finding my literary feet now as I'm adding a bit of polish to my rather awkward, ~~raw~~ school-compositionish writing.

It is well-nigh impossible for stories of the calibre
R.T.O.

Figure 5 Letter from Richard Rive to Langston Hughes, November 22, 1954. Published with permission of the estate of Richard Rive. Image courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Letters, 1963–1967

February 9, 1963

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Bloke:

The enclosed note is the “official” one, a copy of which I’ve sent to Carmel Simmons at AMSAC (a charming girl, by the way—whom Wole knows). But this letter is to express further my happiness that things have worked out O.K. for you to come over—as I hinted they would in my last letter, meaning to write more, but have been so BUSY (and out of town lecturing, too) that I didn’t get a chance. But Bill Trent, head of the United Negro College Fund booking your tour, is an old friend of mine, and was most interested from the beginning when I told him about you on my return from Rome last summer. It just took a little time to work out the details.

Maybe they’ve arranged for you to stay at a midtown hotel (the Tudor, where John Pepper Clark¹ stays on weekends, seems to be the one Africans like best) but if you’d like to be my guest, fine. Harlem is only 8–10 minutes from the heart of town and the AMSAC office. Let me know, and I’ll try to meet you at the airport. It’s COLD over here, so bring your warm things. But there’s plenty of heat in our house, and some spirits, too. I guess I better have my party for you when you return from the South, as your official hosts will probably have things for you to do the few days before you depart. In April, probably, if you’d like, some additional talks for you at other colleges and clubs might be arranged. I’ve been talking to Columbia Artists Bureau about you, that wanted to book me this Spring. (But I’ve got too much writing to do.)

¹John Pepper Clark (1935–), Nigerian poet, playwright, and essayist.

Man, I LOVE that *King Kong* record. Thanks a lot. Shosholoza!²
Drop me a quick line as to when you'll be arriving, etc. WELCOME
beforehand.

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

February 16, 1963

**BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

*Modisane thanks Hughes for offering to let him stay at his house in New York—if Hughes is sure it's okay, as “you know I'm a bit wild—the jungle and everything, you know? I still carry traces of the flora.” He has finished his book, after delays due to his transient status for six weeks. He congratulates Hughes on the continuing success of *Black Nativity*; he likes the soundtrack record. A girlfriend of his whom he had “got into trouble” had attempted suicide at Christmas, but she was found in time to save her. He gives Hughes his information for a flight arriving in New York on March 1. He complains about the snow in England, and says, “if NY is colder than London, I'm going back to the jungle to do orgiastic dances to the moon god.”*

★ ★ ★

February 22, 1963

**LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO BLOKE
MODISANE [LONDON]**

Dear Bloke:

Your note says you're arriving March 1. The note to me from AMSAC says you'll arrive on February 28, BOAC Flight 509, reaching New York at 9:40 P.M. So which is it? Thursday, February 28? Or Friday, March 1? Anyhow, I'll check with AMSAC by phone (as today is a holiday and nobody there). If I find out what day and date you're arriving, I'll meet you at the airport. If I don't, and nobody meets you, just take a taxi to my house: 20 East 127th Street, and ring the bell. (Taxi costs about \$6.00 and give the guy a \$1 tip—so have about \$10 American dollars in your pocket to get to Harlem. If you don't, ring

²“Shosholoza” is a traditional South African call-and-response folk song.

our bell and holler HELP and tell the taxi to wait until you get his \$\$\$\$\$\$\$). Or phone me from the airport: Lehigh 4–2952. But you will be met, if we know when to be at Idlewild. The above instructions are just in case you find yourself unmet. Probably some of the AMSAC folks plan to meet you. In any case, it's all fixed for you to stay at my place—where you can sleep all day like me.

Bring your manuscript along, so you can investigate New York publishers. Bring copies of all your articles, poems, and stuff. Bring your Bantu self. Come on! I have the feeling New York has seen nothing like you. WELCOME! If it's a clear night, look out the window and see the wonderful lights of NEW YORK. Isa is flying over, maybe same day you are, to meet Rosey. She can tell you about all the colleges you are going to, as she's been lecturing all about, too.

L.H.

★ ★ ★

March 5, 1963

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **PETER ABRAHAMS** [JAMAICA]

Dear Peter:

Dr. Rosey Pool from London, who has recently been lecturing here in the States, is having a brief holiday in the Caribbean. Her anthology of poetry, *Beyond the Blues*, has recently been published in London and she has given many programs of African and American material on BBC and elsewhere in England. Here in America, through her lecture tours, she has generated much enthusiasm for contemporary Negro writing—being a bubbling and lively personality herself. I think you will enjoy meeting her and so I have taken the liberty of giving her your address. I wish I were making the same trip and would be having the same opportunity of seeing you soon.

With cordial regards,

Sincerely,

L.H.

★ ★ ★

March 14, 1963

BLOKE MODISANE [SALISBURY, NC] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Modisane offers Hughes his assessment of his speaking tour so far, having done four colleges. He had trouble reaching the students at Virginia Union until he spoke to them "about African rhythm in music and dance [and] they started jumping." He was well received at the Hampton Institute, where friends send their greetings to Hughes. At the women-only Bennett College, "I had the girls lining up for autographs, made me feel like a matinee idol." The Livingston [sic] College talk was okay, but the students seemed uninterested in the situation in South Africa, but "American kids are on the whole lively and concerned." He complains good-naturedly about being overbooked in his speaking arrangements, especially at Livingston College. He has lined up new speaking opportunities in Delaware and Philadelphia.

★ ★ ★

May 17, 1963

RICHARD RIVE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I have not written to you for a very long time. However since then things have happened at a fast rate. You should have by now received a copy of *African Songs* dedicated to you. My novel is finished and is at the moment being considered by Hodder and Stoughton. I am almost certain of a favourable reply. Thirdly I compiled an anthology of South African short stories by four writers. This has been accepted by Crown Publishers in the United States. So you see things are moving.

I received a Fanfield Foundation Fellowship award from the States in order to travel through Africa and Europe studying literary tendencies. I am now halfway through, having been fairly thoroughly through Central and East Africa as well as Southern Europe. I stay in London till 7th June when I leave for Scandinavia and Germany. By the way I left on a legitimate passport. They granted me one, which was highly welcome.

For goodness sake send me reading matter, any of your latest works as well as a copy of *Poetry by Black Africans*. I would appreciate it if you could send it second class airmail or in such a manner so that it reaches me by the end of the month at the above address. Also please send another copy of *Poetry by Black Africans* to me c/o Mr. M.N. Moerat, South Peninsula High School, Kendal Road, Diep River, Cape Town, South Africa. Any finance accruing to me can be sent to the Standard Bank, Main Road, Claremont, Cape Town, South Africa.

Please do write as I am longing to hear from you and put an end to my cultural isolation by sending some of your latest.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

June 6, 1963

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [LONDON]

Dear Blokie:

We miss you! Did you get home O.K. and have a nice flight?
Have you found any trace of Dr. A.C.L. Jordan?³

I'm off to Howard today to receive my degree. Aunt Toy has decided to drive over with some friends, too.

Hope to leave for Europe in about two weeks, might try to catch up with *Black Nativity* somewhere, maybe in Paris at end of June. If not there, later. Since I'm not yet sure exactly when I'll get off, nor what point first.

Shall I keep your boxes here until I come back, or what? O.K. in any case.

Still nothing but a workhouse around here, so I'll be glad to go away. I refuse to be an author in my next reincarnation!

Best ever,

★ ★ ★

June 17, 1963—POSTCARD

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Modisane addresses this letter simply "Lang," and reports a safe trip back to London, where he has succeeded at finding a new flat to rent. Dutton, his publisher, is late in paying his advance; would Hughes pay the expenses to ship a box of Modisane's

³ A.C. Jordan (1906–1968), South African Xhosa-language novelist, folklorist, and educator. His wife, Phyllis Ntantala, corresponded briefly and sporadically with Hughes in the early- to mid-1960s.

possessions he left in New York, to be reimbursed after Modisane receives his advance?
 “I’ve just received the proof of my book and publication is almost any week.”

★ ★ ★

June 19, 1963

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
 [LONDON]

Dear Richard,

So sorry I didn’t get a chance to answer your London letter until now—I’ve been away out of town a great deal, so my correspondence has suffered. And now I am about to go to France and Italy next week. Please write me c/o American Express, Paris, France, and let me know where you will be in July and August. If you are still in Europe, it might be that I can meet you, as I will be travelling about. Italy most of July, but Paris most of August, I hope.

I will have to send your books to Cape Town now—too late I guess to reach you in London—so this I will do when I return from Europe. I think Indiana U. Press has already sent you a *Poems from Black Africa* to your former address, and should have sent a check, too. But these things are attended to from Indiana, so I don’t know.

If you are still in London, please call on an old friend of mine there until June 27: Arthur Spingarn, President of the NAACP, 86 years old and most interesting, who has all the African books, and knows your work. Also Bloke Modisane, who just left New York: Transcription Center, c/o Dennis Duerden, 4/5 Norfolk Street, London. He knows Frank Parkes, Ghana poet, 14 Adamson Road, London, NW3, and Todd Matshikiza, and all the African writers in London, in case you have not met them. (I did, when I was there a year or so ago) It would be wonderful to see you in Europe, so let me know about your summer.

With cordial regards,
 Langston Hughes

★ ★ ★

July 5, 1963

RICHARD RIVE [HAMELIN, GERMANY] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Received your letter while happily ensconced here in this charming German village. This makes life worth living, the respite from

discrimination, tension, and the infamy that is South Africa. I shall certainly be in Europe during July and August. I leave here for Scandinavia where I'll be during the whole of July. During the beginning of August I had meant to go back to London and stay till mid-September. My address there will be 106, Regents Park Road, London NW1, England. I can certainly come to Paris if only to meet you. In April I was in Paris staying with Zeke. Peter Clarke was there at the same time. I had meant to go back to Paris in order to discuss workshop projects for West Africa with Zeke, but he is leaving Paris for Nairobi during August. However I can spend a few days in Paris and find a modest hotel somewhere. This is if you will not be in London in August. If you will not be in London at all then I will come to Paris. Please let me know. I feel that it is a chance not to be missed, as we might never have the opportunity again. It is almost certain that when I get back to South Africa in December my passport will be confiscated. I hope not but the possibility is ever-present and one has to be resigned. Did you receive a copy of *African Songs*? It has already been accepted for translation into German and Swedish and negotiations are continuing for Portuguese, and Greek rights. My first novel *Emergency* has been accepted by Faber and Faber and will be out next year. I feel that it is the best writing I have done. I also compiled an anthology of protest writing called *Quartet*, with stories by myself, Alex La Guma, James Matthews and Alf Wannenburg. This has been accepted by Crown Publishers in New York and will be out in October. So the volume of credits is mounting. I have all sorts of ideas for next year, and am itching to settle down and write.

Thanks for the books. I'll have to read them at home. I have already met Bloke, and stayed in London with Todd. Finally let's not miss one another. You might find me slightly different to what you have expected, but more of that when we meet. Well then let me know in early August where and for how long you will be in Paris, and I'll be there. Write to my London address and ask them to retain the letter until my arrival back in England.

Yours enthusiastically,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

NOT DATED—July 1963

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane apologizes for his delayed response. He thanks Hughes for having sent the package, and complains of being already bored with London: "Things

are as usual in a muddle, I'm in my usual state: I'm broke, depressed and irritated." The publication date of his book has been postponed to September 2, and he won't be paid until then. The *Atlantic Monthly* will be serializing the book, and will pay \$1,500 for the rights; he has also sold the rights for Italian and German translations, and is in negotiations for a French edition. Until the payments for those sales come in, however, Modisane has to put aside writing the next book to work a day job. He recently went to a party where the Black Nativity cast were in attendance, along with Rosey and Liza. He advises Hughes to write him before his next trip to London, as Modisane has no telephone. He is writing a short story whose themes are drawn from the lyrics to a popular song. He is so happy with it that "I might try my hand at writing pop songs." He encloses the lyrics to the song, called "Free, Available, and Reasonable." He signs off the letter, "Swingcerely, Bloke Modisane."

★ ★ ★

NOT DATED—July–October 1963

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

*This letter is written mostly in lowercase letters, even at the beginnings of sentences. He refers to himself as "the modisane." He reports that his financial situation has improved, and "I'm probably the richest broke man you know." Blame Me on History has now been published for a month and has received favorable reviews, though he feels that most of the critics have "failed to realise the real intent of the book." He complains in particular of being compared to Baldwin. Rights have been acquired in the United States, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Norway, and Holland, but the book has been banned in South Africa. He hears that the forthcoming November issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* is being dubbed the "modisane issue." He was delighted at seeing his poems printed in *Time* magazine in their write-up of the anthology *Poems from Black Africa*: "I had been disappointed that you had not mentioned me in the foreword, a point I rationalised by saying the poems weren't any good any way. a point which Lewis Nkosi, in his unfettered arrogance, delighted in articulating." He has just signed a contract for his second book, for which he received a £500 advance. *Blame Me* has earned him seven figures, which he will not see for some time yet. He sends his regards to "the Harpers,⁴ George*

⁴"Aunt Toy" Harper was a friend of Hughes's mother from Kansas; she and her husband, Emerson, had a house in Harlem where Hughes frequently stayed in the 1920s through the

and Abdul.”⁵ He asks for more details about possible film work in Africa, and mentions his efforts to obtain grants from various funding agencies.

★ ★ ★

September 7, 1963

RICHARD RIVE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Thanks for the aerogramme. I knew how busy you were but had no idea you would write so soon. Well meeting you was an experience and worth coming to Europe for. What more could I want? Somehow you didn't quite fit the picture I had formed, I hasten to add, more preferable and far more human. Somehow I expected that someone with your reputation would be a bloody intellectual, cough like a grammarian and have a delicate veil of learning clinging around a dome-like brow heavy with erudition. Thank god I found you exquisitely human.

Since you left I have been doing a series of programmes for Dennis Duerden.⁶ I told him that you had been around for a weekend. This evoked mild interest. Christopher Okigbo also turned up. After meeting him, and having met J.P. Clark, I had come to the conclusion that all Nigerians were extroverts in an offensive sort of way. Achebe⁷ righted the balance. He is in London now. A fine guy without the smallest chip on his shoulder. I am also in the throes of finishing off *Modern African Prose*, a book designed for school reading, containing works by 18 African writers. I am hastening to finish this in order to do a short work of child-hood reminiscences, pure District Six stuff called *Moon Over District Six*. I am itching to get on with this and will most probably next week. I have so short a time in which to achieve so much. Nevertheless the best thing seems to be to keep plugging away.

1940s. Toy sometimes acted and sang in Hughes's theatrical productions, and cowrote songs with him. When Hughes bought his house at 20 East 127th Street in Harlem, the Harpers moved in, and Toy rented out and managed the extra rooms.

⁵ George Bass and Raoul Abdul both worked as secretaries to Hughes in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁶ Dennis Duerden (1928–2007), director of the Hausa service for the BBC World Service in the 1960s, and founder of the BBC's Transcription Centre. In the latter capacity he established an archive of tape-recorded interviews with African writers.

⁷ Chinua Achebe (1930–), Nigerian novelist, short story writer, and critic. Achebe is the author of *Things Fall Apart*, and probably Africa's most famous literary writer.

By the way I received news that *African Songs* has been banned in South Africa. This means that if I am found with a copy in my possession it is a criminal offense. Obviously I can now expect anything to happen once I get home. This has however not deterred me and I shall be back next month. It will be interesting to see and I shall let you know of the repercussions. One can expect anything from fascists. Cold indifference, imprisonment or just ignoring one. I saw the march on Washington on television and how I wish I were there. There is something about protest for a worthy cause that brings about my emotional identification, and especially in a cause so close to me. When they sang "we will overcome" I really felt one with it. We used to sing in S. Africa also, but that is all over now and any form of organizational protest is driven underground.

I did a book review on Bloke's book. I liked the personal reminiscences very much and I thought the style was vital and palpating, but when he tried to generalise his particular experiences into a political thesis, he produced a hodge-podge of jumbled argument, political naiveté and ridiculous generalizations. However there is no doubt that *Blame Me on History* (what an awful title) deserves a worthy place in littera [*sic*] Africana.

By the way I was so impressed with *Black Nativity* that I have bought the recording to take back home with me and revive memories of our meeting. By the way Langston please don't forget to do your best to try and make a lecture tour of the United States possible for me, sometime towards the end of 1964. I shall be at the above address until 10th October. After that my address is 4, Selous Court, Rosmead Avenue, Claremont, Cape Town, South Africa. *Alles van die beste* (everything of the best). Hope you enjoyed Paris. I did not.

Richard

★ ★ ★

September 22, 1963

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO RICHARD RIVE [LONDON]

Dear Richard,

Sometimes things happen quicker than one thinks possible. Do you think you could put off your returning to Africa until toward the end of October? It seems rather possible that I've achieved a trip to New York for you right away soon, if you can come. (And, I hope, if it works out you can).....Our biggest educational television station here is

doing a series of six to be filmed programs on various aspects of African culture and literature, of which I was to moderate two, but cannot do so—therefore I suggested you flying over from London for them. Crown Publishers and AMSAC (with whom I talked on the phone today) would also be delighted to have you come, and will help a bit financially. AMSAC can get you two or three lectures, so you'd make a little extra spending money. And you could be my house guest for a couple of weeks. The time required would be 10 to 14 days, from early October through the 18th to 20th. And of course you could stay longer if you wished. All this is still contingent upon what the TV folks decide, but today they seemed on the verge of bringing you over, expenses paid and a small fee, if you can come. So you probably will hear from Miss Elinore Finklestein, WNTD-Channel 13, Education Broadcasting, 1657 Broadway, New York 19, USA. Ask Dennis Duerden about them, as I think they exchange tapes and things. I do hope it works out and that I will see you in New York soon. So nice to have your letter the other day. And I'm keeping my fingers crossed for your coming to New York. Hastily but—

Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

September 28, 1963

RICHARD RIVE [LONDON] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES**
[NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

I received your wonderful letter yesterday morning, and had to do some quick thinking. Firstly my passport is not endorsed for the United States, secondly I had arranged to leave by ship for South Africa on Saturday 28th September (tomorrow) and all advance luggage had already been sent off. However I decided to do first things firstly and immediately went to South Africa House where I know I am persona non grata. Both *African Songs* and *Quartet* have been banned in South Africa. I asked whether I could get an immediate endorsement to the United States and they said that such a matter could only be done through my local passport office in Cape Town. Otherwise they would have to refer to Pretoria and that would take a minimum of three months. I was also warned that to go without an endorsement constitutes a crime, and South African penalties are heavy.

It is thus very unfortunate that it seems that I shall not be able to take up the offer immediately. However what I shall do once I get back, if my passport is not confiscated, I shall get an endorsement at once to the States. (This is possible as I have certain influence in Cape Town). Thus I shall be in a state of preparedness in case any offer does turn up. It is most regrettable after all the trouble that you have gone to, but I assure you that I sincerely appreciate this. It is unfortunate that I live in a fascist state, but things will change bloody soon.

By the time you receive this I shall already be at sea. My address in South Africa will be 4, Selous Court, Rosmead Avenue, Claremont, Cape Town. I shall keep in touch with you and certainly do my best to get to the United States sooner or later. Please tell Crown that I saw a copy of *Quartet* and I think it is a beautiful book. What a pity I cannot have it on my shelves. In fact up to now I cannot have any of my books on my shelves. How bloody silly. As if my not having them will stop me thinking ideas. However I presume that has happened to the best writers.

While here in London I finished a book for Heinemann, *Modern African Prose*. Contains short stories and excerpts from 18 African writers. You certainly started something with *African Treasury*. Also working on my fifth book, *Moon Over District Six*. Nothing serious, light-hearted and frolicsome and gay writing. Signing off now, but do contact me in Cape Town. Once again I repeat that you more than anyone else induced me to continue writing when things were at a low ebb, and brother, I ain't gonna look back. Pardon my American accent is showing.

Regards.
Richard.

★ ★ ★

October 28, 1963

BLOKE MODISANE [LONDON] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane thanks Hughes for the endorsement he wrote for the jacket of the American edition of Blame Me on History. The book will now be translated into six European languages, with Denmark and Finland being new additions to the list: "I think I've had all the luck I deserve with this book." Work proceeds slowly on his second book, which the publisher has given him until December 1964 to finish. His short story "The Situation" was bought by The Reporter for "a princely sum of \$450." He complains, "Our 'friend,' Richard Rive, has written what can

only be described as a maliciously hostile review of my book for Forum Services It was putrid.” He thanks Hughes for having sent Katie Cumbo⁸ tickets to see his play. Modisane has been rejected for grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and the John F. Saxon Memorial Trust, but he is still hoping for positive news from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. He asks about Hughes’s most recent play and the members of his household. The letter concludes cryptically: “How is D? Never heard from her, which is not surprising.”

★ ★ ★

July 25, 1964

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [NAIROBI] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

It’s a long time since we heard from each other. How’s life these days?

What I am writing to you about is theatre. I have established a theatre group attached to this Centre—the African Theatre Company. We are doing a play—*The Prodigal Son* by Bob Leshoi⁹ (South African) in which I want to incorporate Gospel singing. I am asking you to send us Gospel music—preferably in tonic solfa,¹⁰ but if impossible, send it to us in staff notation—as many pieces as possible.

Your *Black Nativity* I saw in Paris inspired me to this sort of theatre. If you can send it by air, so much the better. Also, if you can send us a book of Negro spirituals, also preferably in tonic solfa etc. We shall regard this as a most treasured gift from you.

Best wishes as always,

Yours ever,
Zeke

★ ★ ★

⁸Kattie Cumbo, American poet. In 1972, she published a poem called “I Too Hear Amerikkka . . . Sing,” which plays on the title of Hughes’s famous poem “I Too Sing America.”

⁹Bob Leshoi, playwright and scholar from Lesotho. From 1961 to 1964, Leshoi was associated with a South African cultural organization called Union Artists, which in 1964 took a production of Hughes’s play *Prodigal Son* on a tour of schools across South Africa.

¹⁰A “system of musical notation based on the relationship between the tones of a key, using the syllables of solmization (*do, re, mi*, etc.) instead of the usual staff symbols.” Source: *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*, Fourth Edition, 1508.

July 30, 1964

**RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

Dear Langston,

Richard Rive here, writing at last. How are you? I have been back home for about eight months now and things are really tough here. In spite of all this we still laugh and grow fat. Received your book about modern American Negro poems and found it very interesting. I have been writing myself. As you know my novel *Emergency* is coming out next month. Faber and Faber, real posh publishers. I have asked them to send you an advance copy. Also compiled an anthology for school use throughout Africa, *Modern African Prose*, which should be out already, Heinemann of London. I am now finishing my travel experiences, *A South African Abroad*, and it is in the typing stage. What a bore. However it must be done. By the way I might be given a grant to come to Columbia University for 18 months to do an MA in teaching of English. That means I shall then be able to see much of you. If this materialises I shall only be there September next year. Keep thumbs up for me.

By surface mail I have sent you a tape. It is of myself interviewing the Cape Town Boys Choir, with songs by themselves. This is a group of Coloured kids, drawn from the slums, carefully selected, so that now they are the equivalent of the Vienna Boys in Africa. They have a remarkable reputation, not only is their singing superb (as you can judge from the tape), but every youngster (ages 8–12) is an instrumentalist and soloist in his own right. I am sending the tape to you hoping that you can get it broadcast on one of the numerous American radio stations. When I told them that I would try and place it in the States they were as excited as anything, and we all pooled our money to have the tape made. I sincerely hope that you will see what you can do about it. They need wider publicity, these Coloured kids from the heart of notorious District Six.

Otherwise the sun still shines here, Cape Town is still beautiful, and in spite of the tension (which is hardly noticeable I am sorry to say) life is so humdrum, that other than write I play table-tennis and swim. Do write another of your juicy letters and let us not break up a long-standing correspondence.

Regards,
Richard Rive

P.S. “The Bench” has just been translated into Yugoslavian. Sanskrit next.

★ ★ ★

August 10, 1964

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [NAIROBI]

Dear Zeke:

I am purchasing some gospels and spirituals for you and airmailing them tomorrow—some, at any rate, if all are too heavy for air, as I’m rather broke right now. *Black Nativity* closed owing me \$10,000 on the American tour. So I am suing, case in court now. And the management has the gall to announce now a European and Australian tour this fall—2 companies!! Anyhow, *Sponono*,¹¹ beautifully done here, did not have a run, but almost everyone is in the African Pavillion’s show at the World’s Fair. Unfortunately, Barney Qhobosheane¹² was in a bad auto accident and all smashed up, but I spoke to him on the phone in the hospital today and he is getting along. I am going to see him this week Is Bob Leshoai there with you? If so, tell him HELLO and ask him when he [is] coming back to go to the University.

I am head-over-heels busy trying to get ready to leave for the Berlin Festival of the Arts in September. Are you going to be there—since the accent is on things African and Afro-American. If you are coming, it will be good to see you again. On the way back, I hope to stop by Paris, then London where I am helping BBC edit a series on American Negro culture for which I just taped 12 poets here in the States. My own interview has to be done all over again, since the Harlem riots¹³ upset the apple cart. You should’ve heard the shots around the corner from my house! And I was in the middle of the first firing!

Let me know if you get the music O.K.

Regards,

★ ★ ★

¹¹ *Sponono* (1964), a play cowritten by Alan Paton and Krishna Shah, based on Paton’s short stories.

¹² Barney Qhobosheane, an actor in the 1964 production of *Sponono* on Broadway.

¹³ Riots broke out in Harlem on July 18, 1964, over a police shooting.

August 19, 1964

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [NAIROBI] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Thank you very much for the music you are sending us, some of which has arrived.

No, I have not yet received *New Negro Poets: USA*, and I am looking forward to seeing it. I do have *Poems from Black Africa*. Maybe your publishers there may want to send us your 5 plays? I am told that there is a booklet called *Literary Market Place*. I would very much like to get from it titles by and about American Negroes for our library. I would like you to ask your American publishers to send us such literature as part of their advertisement. Do you think they would be impressed?—I mean gratis?

I am sorry to hear about the misfortunes of *Black Nativity*. I hope sincerely you will recover some or all of the money you claim.

Thank you again for everything and warmest regards,

Yours ever,

Zeke / Ezekiel Mphahlele

★ ★ ★

March 17, 1965

BLOKE MODISANE [DAR ES SALAAM] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Modisane has been in Africa since mid-January, and will be there until August or September before moving on to Germany. He has received a Rockefeller Foundation Grant to research and compose a book on the Maji-Maji Rebellion in Tanganyika against Germany just after the turn of the century. A series of rebellions "were put down with Prussian efficiency," with the ringleaders executed en masse. Modisane complains that most of the materials he has been able to access are in German, so he is trying to learn German without the benefit of a formal course. He may go to Zanzibar to study it. He is also learning Swahili. He complains about the slow pace of life in Dar es Salaam, and about the mosquitos: "[T]hese winged downs think I must be a chunk of prime steak, and they're biting away cheerfully, leaving me with lumps all over. It's too hot, even for sex, and I keep wondering how people procreate." He is staying at the

home of Bill Sutherland,¹⁴ an “American Bantu” who believes fans and air conditioners are just fads. He asks after Hughes, and expresses his sorrow at the assassination of Malcolm X. His second book is finished, having been rewritten entirely, and is scheduled to come out next year.

★ ★ ★

March 27, 1965

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [DAR ES SALAAM]

Blokie:

Just yesterday I dropped a card to Carmel Simmons in answer to one from her, telling her I'd seen you in London last fall, and that I hoped to see you again in May when I come back that way. And lo and behold, you are way down in Africa! (If it's like the Lagos Airport, I bet you can't even find a piece of string!) Bad news: everybody is dying this year—Dupree was buried last week after having been ill for more than a year; you remember the tall fellow, Charlie, who cleaned my studio? He was buried about a month ago; and a week ago, the nice quiet deaf old fellow, Mr. Pool, who lived in the little front room on my floor, apparently went to sleep smoking in bed during an afternoon nap, set the mattress to smouldering, and was asphyxiated. Had it not been for little Luis, my Puerto Rican errand boy who forgot your suit that time, coming in from school as usual (since I wasn't home) the whole house might have burned, as Mrs. Harper was way down in the basement. Smelling smoke, he banged on the door, no answer. By the time the firemen came, the heat had turned on the sprinkler system, spraying water all over the place. So much smoke nobody saw Mr. Pool in the room, so after the fire was out Mrs. Harper got busy with mops on the lower floors, telling everybody meanwhile she was going to put Pool out for being so careless, as soon as he came home, he'd have to move! Meanwhile, Luis was afraid to tell her he had already suffocated—so the firemen when they came downstairs thought she was crazy! Me, I was working that weekend downtown—and did not even hear about the excitement for three days. Anyhow, I've bought at least 20 condolence cards since the first of the year Take care

¹⁴Bill Sutherland, African-American peace activist who lived in Africa for many years.

of YO' SELF, old boy! Alex closed in Australia last week, Marion in Belgium—which I guess ends both companies of *Nativity* for a while. But my new one *Prodigal Son* is now casting for a May opening. Good to have news of you. Write again soon, before I go to Paris end of April. Hastily,

Langston

★ ★ ★

April 14, 1965

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

How are you? Richard Rive writing from Cape Town. Enjoyed *Emergency*? Sincerely hope so. Langston, I've gotta problem.

I went back full-time to University this year, to study for a post-graduate degree. At present I am one of a handful of non-white students at the University of Cape Town, which has legally been declared an all-white University. So life has lately been a struggle trying to study by day and work by night. However last year I applied for a Fellowship to enable me to study at Columbia University in New York for an M.A. The applications came from all over the world. I have just been informed that I have been accepted. The grant is a fair one, and the United States Government is paying my airfare. However I am required to pay \$250. Besides this I cannot leave my University until I have paid fees, to the value of \$500. This I hoped to work for during our long vacation, as most students do. (This is November–March.) However I am to start at Columbia in September so there will be no opportunity for work. I am unable to raise the amount, and cannot ask my community for assistance as I know they are in no position to do so. Would it therefore be possible for you to assist me, or get some organization to assist? This would indeed be greatly appreciated as without the money I will be forced to give up this glorious opportunity. It is terrible when a criterion like \$250 should stand between me and such an opportunity. Once I am in the States I am sure that I will be able to pay it back by working at writing, broadcast, television, lectures etc. So Lang, if you could possibly help me this would be of tremendous importance to me, besides the fact of being able to see you in September. Do let me know as soon as possible, as (you can imagine) I am under tremendous strain.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

April 18, 1965

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[CAPE TOWN]

Dear Richard,

It was good to receive your letter yesterday, and to know you may be coming to New York in the fall. Certainly I will be happy to see you But, so that you will be under no illusions about things financial here (and won't be kept waiting to get my opinions) let me tell you first about my own monetary condition. In a word, BROKE! The 15th of April is income tax deadline, and this year American taxes are higher than ever. My own so much that I could pay only half of it last week, so must pay the rest off plus interest in quarterly installments for the next year. I am also currently paying off a \$3,000 bank loan from my European trip last summer in monthly payments. Plus that, I signed the Immigration sponsorship for a talented actor member of the *Sponono* company to remain in New York and study at the Academy of Dramatic Art, which means that I am responsible for his scholarship payments and board and keep. Result is that I live only from week to week—since I am sure you know one is never sure of exactly what may come in dollar-wise in the writing game. All this is to say that I cannot now be of any financial help to you at all, as much as I would like to be, especially since both the European and Australian companies of *Black Nativity* closed last month, so nothing is coming in regularly from any sources at the moment. (And I had to sue to get back royalties of *Nativity* with lawyers' bills amounting to over \$3,000—in order to collect not much more than that). So, if there were a personal emergency, I couldn't even help myself right now.

As to other sources of help, I have just made a half dozen copies of your letter to send with a personal note to the Funds and Foundations in New York that aid African students. But I am not too hopeful, since it seems that every young person in Africa wishes to come to the U.S. to study, so they are flooded with hundreds of applications a month. I was able last year to get one Fellowship for another member of the *Sponono* company to the University of Illinois (that edited my plays and have done one there); and a scholarship for another to Karamu Theatre in Cleveland. The year

before I got the United Negro College Fund to bring Bloke Modisane over for a lecture tour. But a recent appeal to one of the funds for a student already here and having a very hard time, brought the reply that funds are exhausted and no more applicants at all can be considered this year. And friends I know in the aid set-ups tell me they have a big backlog of unfulfilled applications. Nevertheless, I shall try on your behalf. Maybe the \$250 can be raised, but that additional \$500 you write about will be more of a problem. Perhaps some private person might be persuaded to lend the \$250, maybe. But, like myself, they get SO many appeals, the folks I know. Since publishing the *African Treasury* I've gotten at least 100 or more letters from worthy African students asking for funds. Regretfully, nothing I could do. (I'd have to be a Rockefeller or the Chase National Bank.) I've several nieces and nephews and a teenage godson I'm helping (when I can) to get through school—but right now the Lord needs to help me, too!! I wish I could write you more cheerful news—but at least, the truth is the light, as the old saying goes, and you'd best better know than not. . . . One suggestion is, ask the U.S. Embassy there about possible Foundation aid, or if there is a Ford Foundation office in Cape Town, see what they suggest. I am about to go to Missouri and Kansas on a lecture trip, then to Europe for student seminars until August, so am asking the organizations to get in touch with you directly if any can be of help, as I'll be away from N.Y. after early May—in Europe. But certainly, I wish you luck, and wish I knew how to do more, quickly. If, by August, nothing has happened, and you haven't the needed money, write me again to New York. I should be home then. Cordial regards, and hope to see you in the fall regardless.

Sincerely,
Langston

★ ★ ★

August 7, 1965

**RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

Dear Langston,

Thanks for your letter. However everything has worked out splendidly. I am leaving South Africa on Thursday, and arrive at Kennedy Airport at the International Arrivals Building on Friday, 13th August at 7:15 a.m. on Pan American 151. I have to remain there till 12:10 p.m. when I take a plane from North-West Airlines Terminal for Minneapolis (Flight N.W. 207) for a three weeks Summer School at the University there. I come back to New York on September 2nd, and my address then will be,

Room 345
Whittier Hall
1230 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10027

Hoping to see you. If you're free on Friday, 13th August I would indeed look forward to seeing you at the airport.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

September 14, 1965

BLOKE MODISANE [IRINGA, TANGANYIKA] TO
LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK]

*Modisane begins, "Langston, old buddy: The old country is playing tricks on me. I find I am falling in love with it all over again, and I've got it so bad and that ain't good." He describes the geography of the town of Iringa, which reminds him of Spoleto. He recounts the history of the place and its role in the Maji-Maji Rebellion in some detail. Of his research, he says: "I'm beginning to feel like Stanley in search of Dr. Livingstone, with this striking exemption—I haven't got a train of native porters." He finds the work of weaving historiography out of oral narratives "madly exciting." He has been invited to present a paper at the International Congress on African History at the University College, Dar es Salaam in September: "Langston, I'm scared, I don't know what to say. I'm just a bum writer with pretensions about writing books on history." Modisane congratulates Hughes on the positive reviews he received for *Prodigal Son*, and for having shared a building with Brecht: "[I]t couldn't happen to a more favourite Bantu (American variety) of mine." He has applied to be a resident author at UCLA; even if he does not receive it, he plans to stay in the United States for a while: "I think I'm ready for New York now. To turn that jazzy town into a crown on the head of one, Bloke Modisane." Before he can go to America, though, he must spend four more months in Germany, completing his course in German and conducting his research. And he must spend a few weeks in England.*

★ ★ ★

November 6, 1965

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [DAR ES SALAAM]

Dear Blokie:

Wonderful to have such a long and newsy letter from you, which came while I was in Hollywood working with Harry Belafonte¹⁵ on a TV show. Before that I was in Europe. Travelling a lot lately. Tomorrow off to Cleveland for a week of seminars. In April to the Dakar Festival of Negro Arts. Will you be there? Seems lots of writers are going from every-which-awhere. After Dakar, I'm to do an African poetry reading tour—which might include Tanganyika and Uganda again. Where will you be in May?

Lincoln University, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania (that is the way the address should read) has a Department of African studies now, and many African students—it is my college, and Zik's and Nkrumah's—so you might apply there for an instructorship—it is about 90 miles from New York, near Philadelphia.

I certainly hope you make it to the States again. I imagine that young lady in Brooklyn does, too!

I'll send you my new Simple book (by boat) if you'll let me know where you'll be in 6 or 8 weeks, as it takes that long for books to get to East Africa, and I know it would not follow you on safari.

Hastily, while packing to leave, but sincerely,

★ ★ ★

January 25, 1966

**RICHARD RIVE [NEW YORK] TO LANGSTON HUGHES
[NEW YORK]**

Dear Langston,

It seems easier seeing you from South Africa than trying to find you in Harlem. If writers need as close a security guard as that, I'm giving up, but I suppose it has its redeeming features. I know it is not so long since I saw you, but it is almost time for me to return to sunny South Africa. I go back at the end of May which is in a few months' time. So I hope that we can meet before then. I have been doing quite well at Columbia. At the end of this semester I wrote five courses and gained five As, so much so that I have been invited to join Phi Delta something or other. Never let it be said that I turn down any accolade, so the

¹⁵Harry Belafonte (1927–), American-born calypso singer, actor, and civil rights activist who spent part of his childhood in Jamaica.

Phi something something might eventually lead to a Luthuli prize¹⁶ or something. I am doing a course this semester, and conducting part of it, on Negro literature, so I was wondering whether you could let me have the loan of the following books. You can either send it through the post or ring me (870–4515) and I can pick it up. I need them from next Wednesday (Feb. 2nd) onwards and will be using them until I leave.

1. Bontemps (ed.) *American Negro Poetry*.
2. Hughes (ed.) *New American Poets*. USA.
3. Paul Lawrence Dunbar, *Collected Poems*.
4. Claude McKay, *Selected Poems*.
5. Countee Cullen, *On These I Stand*.
6. Langston Hughes, *Ask Your Mama*.
7. Leroi Jones, Preface to *A Twenty Volume Suicide Note, The Dead Lecturer*.
8. William Demby, *The Catacombs*.

If you have none of the above, I know you will at least have your books listed. I would like to take you up on that offer of a belated eggnog, but I fear I shall have left the States and not seen you again.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

February 3, 1966

RICHARD RIVE [NEW YORK] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES**
[NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Thank you for replying so promptly to my letter, and sending those books in spite of your heavy schedule. I realise what it must be like. Taking credits is mild by comparison, and I am treating Columbia as an academic laxative. However I still do require your assistance. When you are not so busy I would like a reunion, and I would especially, if it were possible, like to meet Arna Bontemps.

¹⁶The Chief Albert Luthuli Prize, named after the African National Congress president and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, was awarded by the ANC for commitment and dedication to the struggle against apartheid.

However the assistance I require is a very formidable amount of background material about the people in your *Negro Poetry* collection. So that if time allows you can suggest to me when to come, and your secretary or someone can give me information you might have about them.

Would it also be possible for you to send me the addresses of Julian Bond;¹⁷ Julia Fields¹⁸ (whom I met with you in London). I would like to contact the two of them and do some work on their poetry, which is one of the projects I am undertaking. Then I am hoping to do a fairly detailed study on the effect of Negritude on modern American Negro poetry, all this, if possible, to be finished within 14 weeks.

I am scheduled to leave here the end of May, so time is running out for me. HOPE TO SEE YOU BEFORE THEN. Thanking you once again for the books and the autobiographical material about yourself will use it in an assessment of *Ask Your Mama*.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

February 4, 1966

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[NEW YORK]

Dear Richard,

Arna Bontemps will be in New York again about the 15th of this month and will be working with me in assembling the updated version of *The Poetry of the Negro* which we are going to revise. He is here now, but I am so busy on my *Negro in the Theatre* book that we have decided to put our poetry assembling off until he returns from California. Perhaps on the 15th or 16th you would join us for dinner and a couple of hours of looking through the large amount of new Negro poetry we have assembled, which I imagine would be helpful to you in your study. I will let you know which evening at the middle of this month will be agreeable to Arna. Meanwhile, here are the two addresses which you request:

Miss Julie Fields
(Mrs. Lloyd Lawrence)

¹⁷Julian Bond (1940–), African-American civil rights activist and poet. In 1998, Bond became the chairman of the board of the NAACP.

¹⁸Julia Fields (1938–), African-American poet, short story writer, dramatist, and educator.

675 Madison Avenue
 New York, NY 10021
 Mr. Julian Bond
 c/o Dr. Horace Mann Bond
 672 Beckwith Street, SW
 Atlanta 14, GA

By the time I see you, I will be able to give you a complete address list of all the contemporary Negro poets in case you wish to write them.

Cordial regards,

★ ★ ★

February 10, 1966

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
 [NEW YORK]

Dear Richard,

Arna Bontemps will be in New York at midweek and says he would like to meet you, too. While he is here, we are going to assemble the updated material for the new edition of the *Poetry of the Negro*, so you can look at a lot of new poetry by the younger poets, if you wish; also at files of my material now all in one spot assembled last week for Takao Kitamura from Tokyo who is doing a study similar to yours at Howard. This is to suggest that if you like, and can, on Thursday, February 17, come over to my house about 5 and look at poetry, etc. with Arna and I, then about 7 or 8 we can all have dinner together. I invite you. Or if you can't make it in the afternoon around 5, come between 7 and 8 for dinner, maybe at Frank's. But meet us here. Let me know
 Sincerely,

★ ★ ★

February 11, 1966

RICHARD RIVE [NEW YORK] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES**
 [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Thanks very much for your invitation. It will be fine, but unfortunately I have a seminar on Thursday, but I can break away at 6:30 p.m. and be at your place by 7 p.m. Unfortunately I have late lectures every day, although my weekend starts on Thursday evening. I have conveniently

scheduled long weekends this semester as I have to commute quite often between Columbia and Harvard.

My work will be primarily with younger Negro poets, but I am also doing research and preparing material on "Negritude and the American Negro Poet," which means a fair amount of research into the Harlem Renaissance period, in which respect Arna and yourself would be invaluable.

I hope that we will be able to effect an arrangement whereby I will have access to your material without having to bother you. I shall also draw up a questionnaire, which I will leave for you on Thursday, and which I hope you will be able to reply to when your time allows, this will facilitate quoting in my paper.

Thanks once again for everything, and looking forward to meeting you Thursday 17th at 7 p.m.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

February 15, 1966

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE** [NAIROBI]

Dear Zeke:

I hope I shall be seeing you at the Dakar Festival in early April. And where will you be later? The State Department has asked me to read my poems in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda in late April and May. Where will you be then? Certainly, I hope our paths will cross somewhere. So let me know. Besides, how can I send you my new books, if I do not know where to address you or where you are? Long time no hear, so drop me a line soon.

Cordial regards, as ever,

Hastily (so BUSY!), but sincerely,

★ ★ ★

February 26, 1966

EZEKIEL MPHAHLELE [NAIROBI] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Hi Langston!

It was good to hear a snatch from you after such an age. I know I have been the guilty party, and the last 2 years have been hectic—organizing

culture. Now I have joined the English Department of University College, Nairobi as lecturer. It's an easier pace, so I can surface and write to friends like you.

It's exciting to hear you are coming this way in April-May. Please make a note of this. I am helping a literary club at the College and would like to ask you to keep a special day free to talk to them as the guest speaker for the inauguration. Please tell your programme makers to give us a day, preferably at 5:30 pm on a Thursday. Please, Please, Please. Don't let the State Department tie you up too much—I'm in your hands—that sort of thing!

Best wishes,
Zeke

PS: Can't go to Makerere. Could if I wanted to. I'm getting too old to find fun in art festivals, even at 45!

Please send me your latest books.

★ ★ ★

March 10, 1966

RICHARD RIVE [NEW YORK] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES**
[NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Thanks for the excerpts from AMSAC News. I seem to photograph just a bit too beautifully. I attended a lecture last night on *Ask Your Mama*. The Professor made such a hash out of it that I will have to catch you when you're not so busy and go over parts. He confessed it baffled him no end. When are you leaving for Dakar, and when do you return? Before June 2nd? (The day I leave.) Enclosed please find a questionnaire which I hope you will have time to reply to before you leave. It is not for publication but for my own, personal research, and essential to clarify certain uncertainties. Thanks very much for the study, I shall certainly use it.

Yours sincerely,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

March 27, 1966

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **RICHARD RIVE**
[NEW YORK]

Dear Richard,

I'm delighted to hear you are going to Fisk for the Spring Festival. I had spoken to Arna Bontemps about you in that regard. Too bad I have to miss it, but I am off to Dakar tomorrow for its Festival. If you need to research any more at my house, the material (most of it) is still downstairs, and anything else you want, just ask Raoul Abdul or Lindsay Patterson for it. But phone to let them know when. Hope it won't be too long before we meet again. Best ever—

★ ★ ★

May 25, 1966

RICHARD RIVE [CAPE TOWN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Dear Langston,

Thank you for everything you did for me in the States. It was most helpful. I'm only sorry that pressure of work was such that we couldn't see more of each other. However my address in South Africa still remains the same, 2 Selous Court, Rosmead Avenue, Claremont, Cape Town. Enclosed please find Demby's *The Catacombs*.

Yours,
Richard Rive

★ ★ ★

May 29, 1966

BLOKE MODISANE [WEST BERLIN] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Modisane couldn't make it to the Dakar festival because he was finishing his course in German at that time. The documents he needs for his research project are in East Germany, where, he says, visitors are milked of foreign currency at every opportunity. He complains about "being Coloured in a small town in East Germany. It's almost like being caged in a zoo with children giggling at one and having parents drawing their children's attention to you, saying Nigger—which sounds dangerously like Nigger." He is bored and wants to leave for the United States now, but must stay another fourteen days in Germany.

★ ★ ★

January 20, 1967

BLOKE MODISANE [KINGSTON, JAMAICA] TO **LANGSTON HUGHES** [NEW YORK]

Modisane ruefully recounts trying to call Hughes from JFK Airport but being unable to find Hughes's (unlisted) number. He is in Jamaica filming a movie for MGM—"an adventure story set in the Congo during the emergency," in which he plays a mercenary working for Tshombe.¹⁹ He plans to spend a week in New York in March before returning to London. He writes: "I haven't been doing much writing and sort of got bored with scratching for a living, so I've turned to making money." He had to turn down a film shoot in Kenya in order to take the part in Jamaica. Modisane's friend Lisbet Holmes is visiting New York to show her dress designs, and is bringing Hughes a selection of teas as a present from Bloke. Modisane never received the books that Hughes mentioned having sent. The weather in Jamaica is beautiful, but Modisane feels the compulsive need to do something constantly, "like writing letters on such a beautiful day." He has made plans to see Peter Abrahams while he is in Jamaica. He invites Hughes to "fly down to Kingston where the girls are barely dressed and Bloke won't sun bathe because it does nothing for his tan."

★ ★ ★

January 24, 1967

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE**
MODISANE [KINGSTON]

Blokie—

Come here!

Just had a nice phone conversation with Lisbet Holmes who gave me your current address. I'm to see her on the weekend.

I'm going to California in February, but will be back before you get here in March (when she says you might be coming to New York—hope so).

Right now I've got the flu! Feels like the end of nowhere.

So—till I hear from you.

Sincerely,

¹⁹Moise Tshombe (1919–1969), Congolese politician. Tshombe was president of the break-away province of Katanga after Congo's independence in 1960 until the secessionist state collapsed in 1963; he then served as prime minister of the Congo until 1965. He fled the country in 1966 after Mobutu Sese Seko's military regime came to power in a coup and charged him with treason. Later, in 1967, he was kidnapped from Europe, and spent two years in prison and under house arrest in Algeria until he died of a heart attack in 1969.

P.S. My Aunt, Mrs. Harper, is seriously ill in the hospital since Christmas. Seemingly not much hope.

★ ★ ★

February 1, 1967

LANGSTON HUGHES [NEW YORK] TO **BLOKE MODISANE** [KINGSTON]

Dear Blokie:

DE-lightful hearing from you. I'd already talked with Lisbet by phone, and had a drink with her the other day and got my tea—a wonderful assortment—and saw some of her block prints and ties and things, which are beautiful. We hit it off well, and she gave me her London address—where she says I can also find YOU. (Shades of Spoleto! Also Brooklyn!)

I just might go to Paris for a couple of weeks in March since my *Simple* book is coming out there on the 15th of that month. So if I miss you in New York, I'll maybe see you in London, since I could stop by there on the way back. When you know, tell me about when you'd be coming through New York; and when you might be back in England.

At the moment, I'm getting ready to go to California for Negro History Week programs at the University in Los Angeles. But I'll be back in town by the end of the month. My aunt is very ill in the hospital, so I don't want to be away too long.

If you see Peter Abrahams and Louise Bennett tell them HELLO, and tell Louise I love her book of folk poems and songs she sent me.

Hope you become a movie STAR and make \$\$\$\$ and pounds and francs and more \$\$\$\$\$\$. Best ever,

Langston

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