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ABSTRACT

South African society operates a highly exploitative and repressive system that uses race to define relations of power and dependence to ensure the supremacy of its white citizens at the expense of non-whites. The major focus of this study will be to explore the impact of the apartheid policies on individual citizens and race-relations in South Africa as portrayed in three of the plays of Athol Fugard.

Chapter One, as an introduction, will survey the various legislation Fugard alludes to in some of his plays which ensure racial segregation and oppression and serve as the foundation of apartheid. Chapter Two will look at the impact of the society’s obsession with race or skin colour, and its use of it to categorise and control the people as presented in The Blood Knot. In Chapter Three, the restrictions on mobility and human contact, the depravity of the dispossessed, their sense of insecurity, and how they attempt to cope with the absurdity of their existence as exploited victims of apartheid (as evidenced in Boesman and Lena) will be discussed. The relationship between blacks and whites is handled by Fugard in his most autobiographical play "Master Harold" ... and the boys. Chapter Four looks at this play, focusing on how a little white boy under the pressures of personal insecurity draws upon racism in his desire to have a sense of himself but ends up jeopardising the otherwise intimate relationship he enjoys with a black man.

In all the plays of Fugard, brotherhood or the affirmation of the bond of oneness among the characters who are in extreme intimate relationships, is continually contested by the imposition of society’s racist ideology that undermines the relationships. We also see that Fugard condemns and defuses violence, but carefully shows its inevitability if the status-quo continues. His ultimate concern is the universal human plight that results from man’s inhumanity towards man rather than the particulars of the South African system. His
plays examine fundamental truths of existence that are not limited to a single society: man's isolation, his lonely search for warmth, his need to affirm his identity, dignity and existence in a hostile world. Showing how survival in the world of apartheid is made nearly an impossibility, the plays of Athol Fugard are a tribute to the indomitability of the human spirit to survive the dehumanizing impact of this crime against humanity.

In the Conclusion, I explore how Fugard advocates for racial harmony. A study of his plays shows that social and political change grow from individual action as the problem of apartheid is man-made. He suggests as a solution to the problem of racism a change in individual attitudes by calling for tolerance and brotherhood among all races, with the realization that all men are equal regardless of race or skin-colour. In examining human relationships and human survival, the plays of Athol Fugard are a contribution to the field of modern drama in the effort to effect social change.
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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Apartheid as a political system in South Africa is one that is based on racism. It is an institution that practises race separation to guarantee the supremacy of the white race. Most of the legislation and policies are aimed at controlling the lives of the non-white citizens, especially blacks. The effects of this system of government in the multi-racial South African society on the everyday life of the individual white and non-white citizen are the focus of the plays of Athol Fugard.

Under the pretence of "parallel development" which is claimed to ensure that the cultures and values of each race remain intact, the Nationalist government which came to power in 1948 embarked upon policies of racial segregation that institutionalized three centuries of oppression suffered by the non-white peoples of South Africa. "Homelands" began to be created as residential locations or reserves for blacks on the outskirts of the industrial cities and white suburbs. These served both to restrain their contact with whites and also to supply both industrial and domestic labour for the whites. Notable among such "homelands" were the black townships of Soweto and Sophiatown, two satellites for the white suburb of Johannesburg.

Race is a very important distinction between the people of South Africa. This tremendously affects social relations in the country. The basic power structure in South African society has been that of whites controlling and exploiting non-whites, especially blacks, and the crucial division among the races occur between whites and blacks. "White" refers to the European immigrants. They see themselves as superior to all other races. "Blacks" are the native people. They are looked down upon by all the other races. "Coloureds" are people of mixed race, neither white nor black. They have historically
aligned themselves with whites to see themselves as superior to blacks and enjoy clear advantages over them, but never have enjoyed the privileges of whites who accept them as partial inheritors of the European culture. "Afrikaners" are the descendants of the Dutch, French and German settlers. They perceive the English as enemies as they are seen as outcasts by them. Afrikaners, thus, distinguish themselves from non-whites and also from whites who are not Afrikaners.

The assumption of political power by the Nationalist Party in 1948 set in motion the constitutionalisation of apartheid in South Africa. Racial segregation became the cornerstone of government policies. Various laws have since been put in place which have led to disenfranchising all non-white races. The plays of Athol Fugard allude to examples of such laws and policies that have served as the foundation for apartheid in South Africa.

The "Natives Land Act" passed in 1913 prohibited the acquisition of land by blacks outside the homelands and made it a crime for any black, other than servants, to live on a white farm. With this act, four out of five blacks were restricted to a tenth of the South African territory. In 1923, the "Natives Urban Areas Act" was passed to control the influx of black labour in the white suburbs. These acts were broadened with the "Group Areas Act" of 1950 which brought about complete physical racial segregation in all areas of life in South Africa. Certain areas were declared for the use of whites only. Under this law, residents were removed from Sophiatown and many other black townships and homelands which were destroyed to make way for new white suburbs. The result has been that today whites who comprise about fifteen percent of the South African population control more than eighty percent of the country's land. The impoverishment of the homelands and townships has led to the creation of slums and squatter communities on the outskirts and dump sites of the white suburbs and industrial areas by non-whites to meet their housing
difficulties despite the constant slum clearance by the authorities. Coloured people were removed from the Voter's Roll in 1956. They were deprived of their full citizenship and were represented in parliament by white appointees in the "Coloured Persons' Representative Council Act" of 1968. Fugard takes a look at the predicament of the dispossessed coloured people, in invoking this act together with the "Group Areas Act", in his 1969 play Boesman and Lena.

In order to control the movement and residence of non-whites, the "Native Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act" was enacted in 1952. Under this legislation, pass laws were made to require non-whites to carry at all times and to produce instantly on demand an identification called "Reference Book" which indicates their employment and where they are permitted to be. Opposition to the pass laws led to the "Sharpeville Massacre" in 1960 when sixty-nine blacks were killed by the police during a peaceful demonstration. Fugard's play Sizwe Bansi Is Dead, written in 1972, criticises the pass laws, and the title name "Sizwe" is a reference to "Umkonto we Sizwe" (which means "Spear of the Nation") founded in 1961 as the underground armed section of the African National Congress which had been banned after the "Sharpeville Massacre".

The "Immorality Act" of 1927 that prohibits sex between whites and blacks is invoked clearly in the title of the play Statement after an Arrest under the Immorality Act Fugard wrote in 1972. This act was amended in 1949 to include all non-white ethnic groups. The "Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act" was also passed that year to annul or prohibit marriage between whites and all non-whites under the pretence of protecting the "purity" of the blood of individual races against racial mixing. But then these acts were actually passed to maintain the colour bar as a safeguard for the so-called "superiority" and "sanctity" of the white blood/race from "contamination" from the non-white races which
are thought to be of "inferior" blood.

The "Population Registration Act" of 1950 was used to legislate the classification of all South Africans according to the colour of the skin. This law affects and also divides families with traumatic consequences, and it is the focus of *The Blood Knot* which Fugard wrote in 1961. The "Suppression of Communism Act" was enacted in 1950 to suppress mounting opposition to the government's racist policies which people saw as deliberately turning non-whites into second-class citizens in South Africa. This act, which terms all opposition to government policies as "communism", legalises the arrest and detention without trial of people seen to oppose the government on its policies. The most serious offenders were sent to the maximum security prison on Robben Island, which Fugard's *The Island* written in 1973 alludes to in its title and in his documentation of life in the prisons. The "Unlawful Organisations Act" of 1960 was also passed among other security laws to cripple mounting opposition to government policies. This was the act used to ban the African National Congress (which was founded by black activists in 1912 to defend the rights of black people in South Africa against the racist policies in the society, and also call for the recognition of human rights, dignity and opportunities for development of the abilities of all peoples regardless of colour).

The 1950's and 1960's saw South Africa increasingly becoming a police state. There was the intense implementation of racist legislation that brought about total alienation between the racial groups. The South African "issue" has, thus, become more than a conflict between blacks and whites. It is one between Whites and Non-whites, Blacks and Coloureds, English and Afrikaners, as the whole society has increasingly become economically unjust and socially restrictive for non-whites and dissidents of all races. Racial segregation and white supremacy, born out of the most outrageous political
and legal manifestations of this obnoxious system of apartheid, are seen to dehumanize all citizens of South Africa. This is what Fugard writes about.

The plays of Athol Fugard, thus, give a closer look at the pillars of the South African legal system on which the structure of apartheid are built, and more importantly focus on the psychopathic effects they exert on individual whites and non-whites in the race-ridden society. In testifying to the effects of apartheid, the plays bring to the fore and examine the social tensions that exist among the individual races and also among individuals "inextricably entangled by the ties of blood, love or friendship" as they struggle to survive as a race and as individuals against the man-made barriers of racial segregation.

The word "apartheid" is not mentioned in any of the plays of Athol Fugard except once in Boesman and Lena. Nonetheless, as already pointed out, the policies of this oppressive and inhuman system and its devastating effect on non-whites are clearly exposed by the playwright. In a country where the colour of one's skin decides one's social opportunities, rights and privileges, non-white people are considered as subordinates and inferior citizens and are, therefore, subjected to all kinds of restrictions in their daily lives. Blacks are most often denied any personal identity and human dignity, which leaves them with no sense of their selfhood as human beings. This is the result of the system which has entrenched the social status of all non-white racial groups in the society by legislating discriminatory and racist policies. Non-white racial groups are, thus, reduced into an exploitative mass for subjugation by the white race as apartheid sets out deliberately to dehumanize them by denying them opportunities, privileges and rights.

The apartheid political philosophy emphasises and exploits differences among the races to manipulate the vast majority of non-whites for their control by the white minority.
Its racial discriminatory policies which fundamentally keeps one racial group separate from another, with dehumanizing impact on non-whites, do not allow harmonious interaction among people in the multi-racial society of South Africa. Apartheid, thus, makes sure that the possibility of any solidarity among the dispossessed races of South Africa to come together in unity to fight against their oppression is defeated.

The suffering, humiliation, despair and depravity that the dispossessed experience as individuals in their daily lives impede personal and individual relationships. In the struggle for freedom, justice, a sense of self-worth and survival against the anonymity of everyday existence, the situations revealed in the plays of Fugard depict "man's inhumanity to man", and we are made aware of "the secret pain we all inflict upon each other in the private recesses of our closest relationships". The annihilating power of the system forces people to become consumed in their private concerns and struggles to overcome their own desperate situations as individuals so much so that the dispossessed come to despise and hate one another.

The plays of Athol Fugard, thus, reveal that in a race-ridden society where the obsession with race and the colour of the skin is used to define relations of power and dependence, racial attitudes exist even among the dispossessed as they struggle to overcome the shackles that hold them captive to oppression and human degradation. Harmony seems to be far out of reach in the social and personal relationships. Struggling to have a sense of themselves and survive as authentic human beings, the downtrodden of apartheid also come to face the difficulty of coping with one another in passionately close relationships that embody all the tensions of their society.

What Athol Fugard writes about in his plays are, in his own words:

the themes, textures, acts of celebration, of defiance and outrage that go with the South African experience.
In reflecting the reality of life in apartheid South Africa, the playwright, above all, proclaims the possibility of human dignity surviving even under suffering and oppression. His works, as evidenced in the three plays that I will discuss (The Blood Knot, Boesman and Lena, and "Master Harold"... and the boys) are a celebration of the human will and potential to overcome the crippling circumstances of deprivation, humiliation and subjugation.
FOOTNOTES


5. ibid p.346.


7. p.345.

8. p.346

9. p.346

10. p.348.


Chapter Two

THE BLOOD KNOT: LIVING TOGETHER

Athol Fugard’s dramatic works provide a documentary on the social life and lived experiences in South African society which is based on a system and ideology of racial segregation or apartheid. His Notebooks and published interviews provide the background and context of his compositions about the life of people and places he has known in his home country. As noted in the Introduction, apartheid in South Africa is a perfected system of restrictions and prohibitions that severely limits and controls the population who have been segregated according to race and skin colour. The Blood Knot which Fugard wrote in 1961 tackles the effects of some of the obnoxious laws that regulate the daily lives and relationships among the different peoples who constitute the society, notably the "Population Registration Act" of 1950 (which effectively brought racial classification to the point of dividing families), the "Group Areas Act" of 1950 (entailing complete racial segregation in all areas of life and enforcing residential segregation between all races), and the "Immorality Act" of 1927 (prohibiting inter-racial sexual relationships) which was amended in the "Immorality Amendment Act" in 1949 to include the Coloureds. These laws, among others, limit and control the mobility and human contact of mostly the non-white population and the sexual choices of the white population. In his Introduction to Three Port Elizabeth Plays, Fugard says he wrote The Blood Knot as "a compulsive and direct experience" of life in his native Port Elizabeth and continues with an entry from his Notebooks on the place the play is set:

Korsten in Port Elizabeth: up the road past the big motor-assembly and rubber factories, turn right down a dirt road, pot-holed ... ... Down this road until you come to the lake - the dumping ground for waste products from the factories - a terrible smell. On the far side - like a scab on the hill rising from the water - is Korsten location: a collection of shanties, pondoks and mud huts. No streets, no numbers. A world where anything goes - any
race, any creed. When the wind blows in the wrong direction, the inhabitants of Korsten live with the stink of the lake.

In one of these shacks at Berry's Corner are the two brothers Morris and Zachariah.3

This is the image of the shanty-town of Korsten on the northern fringe of Port Elizabeth, a place very representative of South Africa where all non-whites are forced to live as outcasts in poverty-stricken slums or "townships" on the outskirts of the cities to provide labour to the industries and the white population.

The image of poverty and deprivation in Korsten is recreated on stage through the set to aptly portray the living conditions of non-whites, especially blacks who live there. The one-room shack as described in the stage directions of The Blood Knot is "a patchwork of corrugated iron, packing-case wood, flattened cardboard boxes, and old hessian bags" (p.2). Chris Wortham correctly describes this portrait which is a microcosm of the world of non-whites in South Africa as "one of monstrous collage, ...a collection of waste products cast off by a dehumanized industrial society, accidentally gathered and arranged haphazardly into an arbitrary pattern out of need to make a home".5 The set, thus, tells what the occupants, like all non-whites in South Africa, have been reduced to.

The play opens and we see an untidy almost-white coloured man, Morris, preparing a foot-bath. A darker-skinned Zachariah enters, also poorly dressed. The action that begins has very disturbing implications in this racist society: a white man as a servant to a black man. Here, Fugard subverts the very foundation on which race relations at the centre of the South African society are based by defying its racial practices. The society's obsession with race and skin pigmentation, and its use of them to define relations of power and dependence among its people, begin to be explored. Morris and Zach are two coloured brothers born of the same mother but of different fathers, Morris' being "white" and Zach's being "black". The brothers, thus, represent the white and black races of the
South African society. It is their skin colour that has established their identities and even chances for success from the moment of birth. The play, thus, examines the relationship between these two brothers created by the policies of a racist system.

The difference between the two brothers is not only racial, but also psychological, social and cultural. Morris' light skin has enabled him to "pass for white", to be prudent, controlled and literate. Dark-skinned Zach has the white man's prejudiced image of blacks reflected in him. He is sensual and illiterate; he smells, lacks sophistication, and thinks only of momentary pleasures. He is only good for his labour in making profit for the white man. Speaking of the foot-salts manufacturer, he says: "I do the work ...Not him. Its my stinking feet that got the hardeness. But he goes and makes my profit" (p.5). It is also the money from Zach's labour that Morris is saving to secure their future, and which is used to buy "the outfit for a gentleman" (p.72) that enables Morris to assume the role of the white man. This reminds one that the wealth of South Africa is built on the labour of blacks.

Morris portrays himself as a man with conscience and a mission who has recognised his tie to the black man, his fellow man and brother. Fugard, in an interview, draws a parallel between Morris and himself as "a man on the road with all the possibilities ... going somewhere" when he "developed an enormous guilt" about his brother because he was going through a hard time ... There was just the sense of responsibility for another man, for another existence"⁵, that of his brother. Morris, thus, explains his return to Zach as the result of acknowledging his guilt and shame in using his light complexion in a dangerous attempt to try for white, abandoning his dark-skinned brother to the struggles in their poverty-stricken homeland. He recalls how he had wandered like Cain after leaving Zach and as it were had a revelation from God: "And he said: What has thou done? The voice of thy Brother's blood crieth unto me! [Morris drops
"his head in an admission of guilt." Oh Lord! Oh Lord! So he becomes a hobo and wandered away, on a long road until a year later, in another dream, He spake again: Maybe he needs you, He said. You better go home, Man!" (p.19). He has, therefore, given up his personal goal to shoulder his responsibility of sharing in the life and struggles of his brother. It's "our meaning", he tells Zach, "me and you ... in here" (p.27). As Russell Vandenbroucke puts it, Morris hopes his returning home and caring for his brother will be an "atonement for what he perceives to the betrayal of a Cain, the desecration of a blood relationship". It was Morris' need to feel at home with himself which impelled him to return to Korsten and to his brother.

Morris sees his mission as bringing order and civilised virtues into the life of his dark-skinned brother. He makes sure Zach does not smell; he teaches him how to use toilet paper, and also how to entertain a lady friend. This is suggestive of the supposed superiority of the white man and his culture which Morris tried to pass for. Morris is the one concerned with their "saving for a future" (p.8), the implication being that the black man/Zach on his own does not worry or think about his future. But the truth is, it is Morris' own desires for the future, a "two-man farm" (p.9), that he imposes on Zach. Morris lives on the toils of Zach and is the subservient brother in the domestic arrangement under which they live, yet he is able to control Zach with his superior command of words. He, in effect, dominates the breadwinner and is able to keep him under his spell. Zach is, thus, exploited by Morris for his own ends. Morris tries to blot out Zach's memories of his old friend, memories that remind Zach of the pleasures of drink and women that he used to enjoy with Minnie, but seen by Morris as threats to the future he is planning for. By imposing supposedly better values on Zach, Morris actually manipulates his brother to serve his own purpose.
Zach recounts his inhuman treatment at work which typifies their society in its exploitation and disrespect for the non-white races. Morris joins him in longing for the day "when all the world's my neighbour" (p.7) in shared labour devoid of isolation. Yet in spite of aligning himself with his black brother, "I'm on your side, they're on theirs" (p.6), Morris is still destructive of Zach's happiness. Indeed, Zach remarks: "We ... had a good time, for a long time. And then you came..." (p.12). Whereas Zach seeks to escape the hardships of his life through immediate sensual pleasures, Morris impresses upon him the benefits of sacrificing for the future.

To strengthen his grip on Zach and fearful of anything that might spoil his "plans for the future" (p.13) when Zach makes it clear that he is not going to be deprived of fun and woman, Morris offer "A corresponding pen-pal of the opposite sex " (p.17) as a substitute to Zach. The discovery that Zach's pen-pal, Ethel Lange, is a white woman brings fear and complicates the relationship between the two brothers. The social reality makes it impossible and dangerous for Zach to have the white woman as a pen-pal. South Africa is a shrunken world where individuals, groups, communities and races are walled within physical and social space allowed them by the system. Indeed, we do not fail to recognise which of the country's laws Morris' line "how to love and what not to love" (p.63) refers to. But Morris rather chastises his brother for his hopes of inter-racial relationship instead of expressing opposition to the system that forbids such a relationship. Zach, convinced that his brother is not interested in his happiness, makes it clear that he likes "the thought of this little white Ethel better than our future, or the plans, or getting away, or foot-salts, or any damned thing in here" (p.44). Morris tells Zach: "...it's a dream, and the most dangerous one" (p.46), and cruelly exposes Zach to himself in all his blackness with the brutal facts of the legal status of South African blacks, pointing to the horror and
impossibility of "a dark-born boy playing with a white idea" (p.58).

The outside world hardly ever intrudes on the world of the play. It is more insinuated in the fears and anxieties of the brothers. Zach sees nothing wrong with his wanting a relationship with a white woman, but Morris reminds him that their society is one in which, as Dennis Walder points out, "to deny the congruence of individual, social and political aspects of life is to play into the hands of the authorities". Morris takes it upon himself to help Zach to understand his identity and stay away from the white woman, but he does this with violence and fear constituting his argumentative weapon. As Anna Rutherford comments in an article, Morris "forces Zach to see himself through the eyes of a white man and presents him with the white man's archetypal image of the black man". The colour problem and its gravity in his racist society dawns on Zach from his self-examination as a result of Morris' hard questions and exhortations. Zach acknowledge his status in his society and his dream of meeting the white Ethel becomes exorcised:

ZACHARIAH: I can never have her.  
MORRIS: Never ever.  
ZACHARIAH: She wouldn't want me anyway.  
MORRIS: It's as simple as that.  
ZACHARIAH: She's too white to want me anyway. (p.61)

He admits that: "The whole, rotten, stinking lot is all because I'm black." (p.62) Zach resigns himself to accept the inferiority of his blackness, proclaiming how proud he is about his race: "I take it. I take them all. Black days, black ways, black things. They are me. I'm happy. Ha ha ha! Do you hear my black happiness?" (p.62) Subsequently, he declares his intentions: "...from now on, I'll be what I am. They can be what they like. I don't care. I don't want to mix. It's bad for the blood and the poor babies. So I'll keep my clean, and theirs I'll scrub off..." (p.63). Ironically, Zach appears to be siding with the racist policies against inter-racial marriages because of the humiliation and human degradation
that the coloured suffers under racial segregation. First, he loathes his blackness and then turns to exult in it. He finally recognises that "after a whole life I only see me properly tonight" and with delight, thanks Morris for the exposure: "You helped me. I'm grateful" (p.64).

With the assistance of Morris, Zach loses his racial innocence to find his true identity as a black man. It remains for Morris to discover and accept his. Zach, with the security of his true identity, decides to help Morris as "a brother" to find his. He tells Morris to stand in for him as a white man and meet the white pen-pal, because being of light skin he "would be all right, with her" (p.65). With the savings for their "future two-man farm", Zach gets Morris an "outfit for a gentleman" (p.72). Just as Morris got Zach to forget the memories of his past with Minnie, Zach does away with Morris' hopes for the future. Morris’ agreement to the spending of the savings is a sign of his willingness to forget the future and live in the present. Zach tells Morris: "You must learn your lesson, Morrie. You want to pass, don't you?" (p.78), getting him to actively desire meeting Ethel and once again try to pass for white.

The world of racist South Africa is hostile to non-whites who are always overwhelmed with a sense of alienation. The dispossessed, therefore, always long for recognition and a sense of self-worth. As coloured people in a society dominated by the ideology of white racial superiority, Morris and Zach in some measure accept the degrading status of blacks as social misfits. At the same time, the two brothers long with part of their being for the whiteness which could give them self-respect, dignity and recognition in their society which is filled with prejudice against non-whites who are oppressed and humiliated. However, the different chances for success available to the two brothers from the same mother resulting from the difference in their skin colour is indeed
very tragic. When they recall their childhood, and all the humiliations of being a Capie (coloured) or Kaffertjie (little black Kaffir), Morris "with agitation" doubts the mother that Zach knew: "Zach, are you sure that wasn't somebody else?" (p.48). Their inability to completely recognise the same woman who gave birth to them points to their uncertainty about their own past and how they have presently been polarised as two entirely different people. So efficient and ruthless has been the white man's propaganda about the inferiority of the black man that Zach begins to doubt his own dignity and beauty as a black man. In a dream monologue he wears Morris' suit to assume the white man's identity to confront his mother. It is a yearning for recognition and acceptance of the dispossessed robbed of his future by an inhuman system. Earlier on his return to Zach, Morris has also tried to come to an understanding of what it means to be black in their society by wrapping himself in Zach's coat to immerse himself in the brother's smell, flesh and pain. Explaining later that his return to his brother after trying for white proves "I'm no Judas" (p.80), Morris sincerely believes he has not betrayed his black brother, but we know otherwise. His control and imposition of the white man's values on Zach makes his dark-skinned brother point out to their mother that "he's been such a burden as a brother" (p.81).

The two brothers enact an episode of South African racial interaction in their respective stereotype roles before an imagined Ethel. Morris wearing "the outfit for a gentleman", and passing for white, unleashes a vicious racist taunt, Swartgat (black arse), on Zach who is in the role of a black street vendor. Morris realises that he has gone too far and apologises to Zach, acknowledging that this parallels the rejection he had exhibited when he abandoned his dark-skinned brother to pass for white. Knowledge that the white pen-pal will not be coming after all plunges the two brothers into their most
dangerous game about the social and political reality of South Africa as enemies across the colour bar. It is a scene of shame, hatred and fear. Morris plays the indifferent, and arrogant white *Baas* (master), and Zach as the servile *Swartgat* (a black arse). Zach, more racially and politically aware, decides to exhibit an additional side of the stereotyped black.

"The simple, trustworthy type of John-boy" (p.95) turns furiously on his white *Baas*, ready to strike him. The alarm clock rings, catching the black man standing above the frightened, praying white man who crawls away frantically. This climactic image is pregnant with great implications: What happens if the black man decides to assert himself to fight for his dignity and refuses to accept the role thrust upon him by the white man? There is a potential for inter-racial violence as the black man can no longer stand humiliation and inhuman treatment at the hands of the white man. Zach’s victory forecasts that the white man is not going be in control of the black man forever and that violence or destruction is inevitable if there is no end to the humiliation, exploitation and inhuman treatment of non-whites by whites in South Africa.

Fugard, however, does not bring the curtain down on that dreadful image. There is a reconstruction of calm before the play ends. The two brothers are shocked back to reality. As Morris draws back in horror, he becomes aware of the full meaning and possible consequence of the white man’s treatment of the black man. Through Zach’s instruction, Morris forgoes his desire to pass for white. He also abandons his illusions about the future and hopes that things can be better for him even as a coloured South African. He says: "...it’s a good thing we got the game. It will pass the time. Because we got a lot left, you know! *(Little laugh.)* ... ...I’m not too worried at all. ...I mean, other men get by without a future. In fact, I think there’s quite a lot of people getting by without a future these days." (p.96). He has resigned himself to living in and being content with the
present, and with his brother. To convince himself of Morris’ sincerity, Zach asks:

ZACHARIAH: What is it, Morrie? The two of us ... you know ... in here?
MORRIS: Home.
ZACHARIAH: Is there no other way?
MORRIS: No. You see, we're tied together, Zach. It's what they call the blood knot ... the bond between brothers.

Morris assures Zach that he is content to remain with him and live as a brother with a brother. The brothers are resigned but not defeated even though their future may be unclear. As Fugard noted two years after writing the play: "Far from 'leaping', Morris and Zach wake up to find themselves heavy, hopeless, almost prostrate on the earth. ... ...
Morrie and Zach at the of The Blood Knot are men who are going to try to live without hope, without appeal. If there is anything on that stage before the curtain drops it is lucid knowledge, consciousness. In effect, Morrie says: Now we know."10 Their brotherhood is the only certainty that can see them through their difficult life under the oppressed system. As Fugard writes in his Introduction to the Three Port Elizabeth Plays, the bond between Morris and Zach as brothers is the truth the hand can touch.11 When all else fails, their bond of blood and love remains. Like all Fugard characters in very close relationships (for example, Boesman and Lena in Boesman and Lena, Sam and Hally in "Master Harold"), what Morris and Zach need from one another is mutual dependence, love and respect. Here, we have the true meaning of the blood knot. Polarised to see themselves as different individuals and torn apart from each other in a racist society, they may wish to deny the natural bond between them (as in that awful moment when together they revile the memory of their mother in the final game). But no matter how hard they will try they are bound to one another. It is precisely the false separation of people into races for differences in their pigmentation, and the prevention of any cordial relationship among them that serve the ideology of apartheid and permit practices of inhumanity, prejudice,
exploitation and injustice to continue. The promise of feeling at home in this world lies in essential unity of all men.

Since Fugard is exploring the basic South African issue of race, the normalisation of the situation at the end of the play seems to endorse the status-quo, permitting no challenge to the political and social reality. This may be worrisome to anyone concerned about the possibility of change in the present South African situation. To that individual, the only logical option for the oppressed and dispossessed non-whites is to assert themselves through revolution and violence. But this solution is seen to be discarded by Fugard. One may say, therefore, that *The Blood Knot*, in offering no proposal for change in the political and social situation between whites and non-white suggests an acceptance of human degradation and oppression as permanent features of life, especially when we recall that Fugard writes in his *Notebooks* that there are no choices for Zach to overcome the brutalities imposed upon him because of his skin colour. But the message in the climactic image of the final confrontation between the two brothers should not be taken lightly. Fugard brings home the reality of what can happen if oppressed people continue to be held in bondage. However, instead of violence Fugard offers the brotherhood of all men as a solution.

*The Blood Knot* emphasises that the individual needs to accept who he is, and not see himself as inferior to anyone in any situation. This is the message in Zach’s affirmation of his race and Morris’ abandonment of his hope to pass for white. It is, therefore, difficult for anyone to suggest that the play gives credence to the notion of the superiority of the white man. Athol Fugard examines the South African race issue through *The Blood Knot*, as he does with all his plays, to stress the universal fact that all men are brothers and that there is the need for people of all races to live peacefully together. The
foreboding and tension of the confrontation between Morris and Zach in the climactic scene of the play portrays the time-bomb on which apartheid in South Africa presently sits with its policies of segregation. Fugard, however, shows that the way out of the situation is racial unity if only man can acknowledge the root, the basic humanity and the brotherhood of mankind.
FOOTNOTES


4. *The Blood Knot* in *Three Port Elizabeth Plays.* "All quotes throughout the chapter are from this text.


Chapter Three

BOESMAN AND LENA: BEING TOGETHER

The predicament of the non-white population of the South African society is once again brought into focus by Athol Fugard in Boesman and Lena, written in 1969. The play begins with Boesman and Lena, a coloured couple, arriving at the bank of the Swartkops River. They have been evicted from Korsten where we had found the two brothers Morris and Zach. The state has consistently claimed that such action of forced removals is to restructure space to ensure the best resort and welfare of the individual races. Boesman and Lena, however, refutes such claim. Under the slum clearance policy of the South African government, the Korsten shanty has been destroyed, leaving its inhabitants who are all non-whites homeless. The society in which the couple live treats them as "rubbish", as objects, and not as human beings because of the colour of their skin. Boesman and Lena, like all coloured people, have become the rejects of the whiteman's world, chased out of their shelter by the whiteman's bulldozer.

Poverty-stricken and carrying with them all that they own in life, Boesman and Lena have walked many hours in search of a place to make their new home, but not knowing where. There is, however, a difference in the attitude of Boesman and that of Lena towards their predicament. With the possibility of making a new beginning, Boesman sees the destruction of the Korsten shantytown as a kind of blessing that has enabled them to leave the rotten place. This is why he thanked the white baas and even gave a helping hand in acquiescence to humiliation and role-playing which is essential for the survival of the dispossessed of South Africa. Lena, on the other hand, sees what has been meted out to them as a "sad story" which is a rape of their life. To her, it is an act against their very humanity and survival. She tells Boesman:
LENA: ...When I want to cry, you want to laugh.
BOESMAN: Cry!
LENA: Something hurt. Wasn't just your fist.
BOESMAN: Snot and tears because the whiteman pushed over a rotten old pondok? ...He did me a favour. I was sick of it. So I laughed.¹

Boesman seems to accept their fate of being rendered homeless with a positive attitude, claiming it to be an act that has given him "freedom". He sees the slum clearance as the whiteman doing away with "something rotten. Us! Our sad stories, our smells, our world!" (p.203), all that which has come to represent the dispossessed. Boesman effectively reduces his past to nothing. As Russell Vandenbroucke explains, Boesman's attitude is his attempt to accommodate the situation by denying its effect on his life ---"a means to exert control over himself when surrounding events are beyond his command".² To Lena, their being driven out of Korsten is something of great injustice, "...to have your life kicked in its moer (womb)" and to be made to "Put your life on your head and walk" (p.170). The woman sees this as having to do with their very existence as decent human beings.

Playing out in his mind the luxury of having the opportunity to make a fresh start in life, Boesman, unlike Lena, seems to care less about this real predicament and easily dismisses Lena's sense of anxiety and insecurity. Whereas Lena manifests clearly her sense of loss throughout much of the play, Boesman refuses to admit his own insecurity. All he can do is to blame the woman with her constant questioning for their inability to find "freedom". The truth is that he is himself lost and not sure of where to go.

The image of the empty stage that opens the play symbolises in a way the limitless possibilities and choices that are available to the couple. But as we see the grotesquely burdened coloureds carrying between them all that they possess staggering on to the set, we realise that they have come to a no-man's land. They are homeless with no hope of
survival. Cast out of Korsten, Boesman and Lena seek refuge in the cold Swartkops wasteland. The couple experience a desperate need for a home in their homelessness. Boesman can only make their latest makeshift shelter from "an old sack, a few pieces of wood, an old motor-car door" (p.177). Being "whiteman's rubbish" (p.205) themselves, their home is fashioned from the leftovers of the society which has dispossessed them that morning. They will be joined later by an old black man who dies in their company. The empty landscape on which the coloured couple make their makeshift abode for the night, their predicament and ensuing experience suggest the thousands upon thousands of squatters who inhabit present-day South Africa.

Boesman realises that though the possibilities to make a fresh beginning in life are there, none would make a difference in the society in which they live. Their plight as coloured people is caused by a system that sees them as the "whiteman's rubbish" (p.205). There is no way in the system for them as non-whites to improve their lot. The situation in which they find themselves is the result of the whiteman's inhumanity towards non-whites. They are the by-product of the society in which they live. He and Lena, thus, are left to keep wandering about in the wasteland equally lost.

The predicament of the couple is the result of the policies of a society where the colour of the skin makes non-whites to be treated as outcasts and dispossessed. The empty and wretched land of the riverbank which is the setting for the play represents aptly the world of South Africa where non-whites experience great deprivation with no opportunity for survival. Lena’s first comments are about the fact of their being on a wasteland, a rotten land that swallows its inhabitants: "This piece of world is rotten. Put down your foot and you’re in it up to your knee." (p.168).

Boesman’s inability to succeed in life and provide for his wife, as a man, has made
him feel ashamed of himself. He is overwhelmed with self-hatred, becoming insecure about his own self-worth and doubting his manhood. Whereas Lena can honestly admit her insecurity, Boesman cannot. Boesman's situation is the constant emasculation of manhood by the South African system which denies non-whites the opportunity to have a life-fulfilling existence.

Boesman is convinced that he and his wife are worthless. Without a permanent home and any offspring, he knows they will disappear into oblivion with no remembrance for their lives. He tells Lena their life is not worth living: "We are not people anymore. ... ...our life is dumb. Like your moer (womb). All that came out of it was silence. There should have been noise. You pushed out silence. And Boesman buried it. ... ...One day your turn. One day mine. Two more holes somewhere. The earth will get naar (sick) when they push us in. And then it's finished. The end of Boesman and Lena." (p.212). Their childlessness is a form of castration representing the failure of their lives. Boesman, thus, recognizes the futility of their efforts. His response is his passivity.

Guilt for not having the means for a successful life as a man, prejudice and fear of not knowing his chances for survival, all conspire together to finally undermine Boesman's ability to love another person directly and forthrightly as he becomes preoccupied with his own predicament. His failure and resultant self-hatred has consumed him, making him violent, insensitive and abusive to Lena. Loosing his ability to prove himself a loving and caring husband, Boesman portrays himself rather as someone with no feeling or sensitivity towards another person. His alcoholism intensifies his weakness and helplessness. He only convinces himself that by being abusive to his wife, he proves himself to be a man. This picture of Boesman demonstrates how the human qualities important for a decent relationship are effectively destroyed by the obnoxious system of
apartheid in South Africa. Boesman can hardly be seen as a loving, caring, human being. His manhood and human feelings have been effectively negated by the system.

With Boesman focusing his self-hatred on her, Lena feels a sense of injustice in being reduced to an object in Boesman’s life. She worries at Boesman’s brutality and insensitivity, especially his neglect of her which worsens her life in the wasteland which she sees as black and empty as hell. Lena, thus, becomes more uncertain about her identity, existence and self-worth. To get a sense of herself as an authentic living being, she begins her quest with questions directed to Boesman in search of the truth of herself.

Lena attempts to unravel and order her memories of the past. Since man is a product of the past and the present, and the loss of one’s past is the loss of one’s identity, she tries to work out how she got to where she is. Yearning to locate herself in time and in space, Lena, like Zach, recollects memories of her past and identifies the places she’s been to through physical and sensory associations, remembering, for example, the pears she collected at Redhouse, the wood chopped at Veeplas, the mountains near Kleinskool, and the mud of Swartkops. She realises, however, that she needs more than just remembering the past. Getting accurately the order of that past will give her life a pattern, a certainty and the sense of purpose that will assure her of her existence.

Lena’s obsession to remember and re-order the past in a way prevents her from focusing on the future. She becomes more concerned with her past than her future. By making non-whites insecure about the present, the South African system deprives them of the hope of the future. As the dispossessed is consumed by the insecurity of the present and all the deprivations they suffer, the sense of injustice and abuse that they feel about their predicament in no way allows them to think about the future.

Lena’s quest, nonetheless, is about the authenticity of existence. As Russell
Vandenbroucke correctly points out, the condition of Lena is that of all men. It is the product of a past and forces beyond man’s control, and from which man cannot escape. No wonder to keep herself sane and soothe the pain of their predicament in the forsaken land, Lena and her husband take to drinking.

Lena’s struggle is to come to know who she is and the purpose of her existence. Hers is a journey towards self-discovery. Lena repeatedly seeks confirmation from Boesman for the sequence of their past sojourns. But when she thinks she has discovered or remembered the past which gives her the assurance of herself as being autonomous and alive, Boesman viciously destroys her elation by tormenting and deriding her with her mistakes rather than presenting her the truth.

Since Lena needs her identity and her self-worth to be confirmed in a way to make her certain about her existence, Boesman’s attitude towards her only serves to increase the pain of her sense of insecurity. She, thus, bluntly asks Boesman to help her. Boesman’s responses, as sarcastic as they are -- "What? Find yourself?" (p.180) and "One day you’ll ask me who you are." (p.181) --clearly tell Lena’s basic need. Lena knows "I’m Lena" (p.182), but realise a mere name is not enough. She is disoriented in her world and would like to believe she belongs. She wants to be seen and also heard. Her search is for the truth about her life. What obsesses Lena is that her degraded condition should be observed or witnessed by another human being. Her predicament is what Fugard describes as "ontological insecurity". Lena knows a man’s identity in a place is defined not necessarily by where he is but more importantly by whom he is with. To her, existence is necessarily social. This explains her desperate need for attention and recognition from her mate.

Dispossessed, uprooted and driven out of their home, all that Boesman and Lena
have are each other --the one sure thing they can never loose. All that Lena is left to look up to is Boesman, whose back is the "scenery in my world" (p.171). She reminds Boesman of the bond between them as husband and wife: "You don't know what it's like behind you. Look back one day, Boesman. It's me, the thing you sleep along the roads. My life." (pp.171-172). They are bound to each other. Yet, to Lena, the way Boesman treats her seems to suggest he is tired of her: "Something that's been used too long. The old pot that leaks, the blanket that can't even keep the fleas warm. Time to throw it away. How do you do that when it's yourself?" (p.172). This is just like what Morris felt when he tried to pass for white in abandoning his dark-skinned brother Zach. There is the realization that the tie that binds the couple, like the two brothers, can never be broken. They need each other to make their individual lives complete.

The fate of Boesman and Lena are basically the same. But whereas Boesman has resigned himself to his impotence and passivity, and is unconcerned with Lena's questions, Lena presses for answers and acknowledgement to her existence. Unfortunately, Boesman is not able to provide answers for her. What Boesman does from the very beginning of their journey is to deliberately disorient Lena, hoping that her confusion will cause her to stay with him. He is far more insecure than she is, and needs her far more desperately than she needs him. Indeed, while Boesman has led their hikes from one place to the next, and Lena is not sure about her bearings, he is equally lost (a fact he refuses to admit). Lena, thus, becomes desperately in need of someone to witness and acknowledge her life. She desires community. Lena believes man needs to be sociable, which is why she prefers the community of Veeplas to the uninhabited wasteland of Swartkops. She yearns for human contact, interdependence, and a way of sharing her plight, but these are what Boesman is incapable of giving her.
Desiring to be a part of something, Lena finds a dying old man, Outa. She is initially disappointed at Outa being black. This is an indication of the prejudice against blacks as being inferior in the South African society. Nonetheless, Lena discovers the brotherhood of all men. Identifying herself with the plight of the old man, she cries out for Boesman to "Do something. Help him. ...It's another person, Boesman." (p.184). With the realization of her own desperate need for someone, she reaches out to Outa saying he's "better than nothing" (p.185) even though Boesman ridiculed her for paying attention to a black man who he sees as being of no value.

With the appearance of Outa, both Boesman and Lena in their individual relationship with him reveal their true human nature. When Boesman threatens to kick this man out, Lena bribes Boesman with her share of the wine to bring Outa into her life to meet her needs. Lena tries to care for Outa, albeit out of her own need for company. Outa, thus, affords Lena the opportunity to satisfy her desire for human contact and interdependence. With him, Lena now has the chance to experience herself.

Outa's presence offers Lena hope. He fulfils her desire for a witness to the trials of her life. Even though the language barrier between them prevents any meaningful communication, Lena tells the old man those parts of her past that she longs to disclose to another person, especially the loss of her six-month-old child, the others born dead, and the abuse she suffers at the hands of Boesman. "Look, Outa. I want you to look. [Showing him the bruises on her arms and face.] (p. 188)... ...Only a few words I know, but a long story if you lived it." (p. 193). The fact of Outa not comprehending what Lena says emphasises Lena's desire for community or human contact and not necessarily gaining sympathy from another person for her pain.

Lena is afforded the opportunity to reach out to another person, to gain the
satisfaction that she is human and alive, and to know that she is not alone through Outa’s presence. The apparent attention that he gives to her as she speaks to him allows her to have a sense of her self-worth. When he mentions her name, Lena receives enough certainty about her existence. Outa’s weakness and frailty also give Lena the opportunity to be the mother she never had the chance to be.

Prevented by Boesman from spending the terribly cold night in the couple’s shelter, Lena and Outa protect each other with the warmth of their human contact. With Boesman staring at them silently from inside the shelter, Lena and her black companion stay by the campfire, share a mug of tea, and break bread. This episode with its religious allusions suggests something of a social if not sacramental quality in Lena’s sharing. It is a celebration of Lena’s life that she cares to live and share her life for the benefit of others. Whereas Boesman suffers from the whiteman’s desire to distance himself from others, Lena transcends the constricting physical, social and human space in which she has to live to go beyond the material confines of her determined condition. Upon encountering the old man, she finds an existential authenticity that is quite beyond the comprehension of Boesman.

Cruelly amusing himself at the expense of the old man, Boesman’s contempt and sense of superiority, as he even tells Lena that “He doesn’t belong to us” (p.186), turn to jealousy. The husband who has gleefully invited his wife to leave him on their arrival at Swartkops and has showed a great sense of indifference to her needs now sees Lena’s true worth and importance as she gains the attention of Outa. Boesman feels threatened by the independence that Lena has gained with the arrival of Outa. He experiences terrible fear and loneliness, sensing his control over her is lost. What makes Boesman very mad is the fact that the one usurping his position is old, feeble and, more particularly,
black ---someone of less value than a corrugated iron sheet, and "for the first time he is unsure of himself" (p.197).

The attitude of Boesman towards Outa points to the plight of the dispossessed of South Africa. Unsure of himself, the dispossessed feels threatened by any person whom he sees as invading what he can claim as his own. This in a way shows how the South African system manages to get the dispossessed to endorse its apartheid policy of racial segregation and discrimination. Boesman hates the fact of Outa being black, fearing that he and Lena might "end up with a tribe of old kaffers sitting here" ... ...to "turn my place into a kaffer nes!" (p.187). By throwing his share of the bread and tea away instead of giving it to Lena for Outa as she requested, Boesman amply demonstrates his intention of being of no help and comfort to the black man.

Boesman rejects Outa in precisely the same terms that he, Boesman, has been rejected on social grounds by the inhumane white society. Iniquity is learned by its victims. As Lena questions Boesman's conduct of insensitivity towards the plight of an equally dispossessed fellow human being, we appreciate the fact of Fugard's pointing out that an individual's behaviour is not necessarily determined by his racial, social or cultural identity but rather his commitment to making the world a better place for others. Boesman is as guilty in his treatment of Outa in just the same way as the whiteman who demolished his shack in Korsten.

It is quite significant that Lena manages to reverse the apartheid system being reinforced by her husband by calling Outa into her life. She sees Outa not as someone of a different race and therefore inferior, but as another human being just as herself and in need of help. It is, therefore, her moral duty to help alleviate or share his pain and suffering. As Boesman denies them shelter for the night, Lena sits outside with Outa,
sharing her blanket and body warmth with him to protect him from the bitter cold. She tells Outa to "Sit close. Ja! Hotnot and a Kaffer got no time for apartheid on a night like this" (p.207). (This is the only instance in which Fugard uses the word "apartheid" in his works).

In the play, Outa represents the black race, and his presence suggests all men are bound together. His presence again suggests the dream and hope for the day when South Africa can accommodate black, coloured and white people living together as equals regardless of race or skin colour. It is a celebration of the brotherhood of mankind that Fugard envisions for the South African society.

Reminding Boesman that his shelter is "a coffin" in which he is trying to bury her life (p.206), Lena makes clear her desire to free herself from him. Calling Outa into her life and clinging to him with growing intensity of involvement, Lena effectively neutralises the control Boesman has over her. Like her insistence on imposing some sense of order on her past, Lena's choice to stay and be of assistance to the old man despite violent opposition from Boesman shows her determination to take control of her own life and reassert herself against the demands of her abusive husband. This is what Russell Vandenbroucke describes as Lena's attempt to "locate herself as an autonomous being".5

When Boesman cannot diminish the pleasure, attention and recognition Lena finds with Outa despite his cruel intimidations, he reveals that he had beaten her for the empty bottles he himself got broken. It is a very calculated cruelty of Boesman which Lena admits "hurts more than your fists. You know where you feel that one? Inside. Where your fists can't reach." (pp.217-218). This is a classic example of Boesman'a penchant for releasing his frustration onto Lena and blaming her for his predicament.

As Lena experiences alienation on Outa's death, she revenges herself by convincing Boesman that he will be suspected of the old man's murder. With fear, anger
and frustration Boesman beats the dead body, but finds no relief other than making it easier for Lena to point out he has incriminated himself with his bruises on the body. Echoing Zach's refusal to accept responsibility for the proposed visit of Ethel, Boesman wishes not to accept responsibility for Outa's death. He explains to Lena: "Why must I worry? I did nothing. clear conscience! This is my place. I was here first. He should have stayed with his own sort" (p.214).

Nonetheless, Boesman sees the dead Outa as more of a threat to him than when he was alive. He finds it difficult staying "free" of the dead man. Fearing he can be charged with murder, he pleads for Lena to be his witness. He tells her: "Dead men are dangerous. You better get rid of it" (p.214). The effect of the dead Outa on Boesman points out that all men are bound together dead or alive, regardless of race and skin colour.

When Lena asks "How do you throw away a dead kaffer? (p.214), we know she is pointing out the value of blacks also as human beings and, thus, not to be treated as "rubbish". She later questions the integrity of the authorities with regards to the interest of the state in the welfare of its non-white citizens, demanding "Why don't they ask some questions when we're alive?" (p.215). We know Lena is concerned about a system that takes no interest in the survival of non-white people whom it treats as "rubbish" or sees as non-existent when they are living, but come showing apparent concern when they are dead. This suggests the extreme indifference of the apartheid system toward its victims.

With great fear, Boesman begins packing their belongings so they can leave the place. Threatening not to follow Boesman now that she has been able to free herself from his control, Lena turns her back on him violently and walks away, with Boesman standing motionless (p.220). Ending up beside the dead body of the old man, Lena is, however,
forced to recognise her loneliness. It dawns on her that she still needs somebody to affirm her sense of self-worth and existence. She realises that her relationship with Boesman means something and, therefore, decides to follow him even though they still do not know where they are going. She makes Boesman pass over a bucket which she puts on her head, saying "Hasn’t got holes in it yet. Might be whiteman’s rubbish, but I can still use it." (p.220) Lena is acknowledging that she still needs Boesman. However, by making it her own decision to follow Boesman, Lena effectively takes control of her life. They both load up again and leave into the darkness.

Lena has always desired to know the proper order of their past journeys, believing that her past will explain her present. But when Boesman finally tells her the exact order of their past journeys, she realizes as Boesman had long before that "It doesn’t explain anything." (p.221). Lena has, thus, finally come to recognize and accept the fact that their existence as the dispossessed of their racist society is beyond comprehension and explanation. Boesman is able to give Lena a clear indication of where they have been and where they now are because he realises the agonising fact that she articulates the pain he feels, and which they both share.

Deprived of self-hood and identity by the system because they are not whites, Lena manages to become the vehicle for survival and defiance, while Boesman is passive, impotent and unable to act significantly. As Boesman works out his self-hatred on her, she becomes aware of what her life and her predicament really are. Lena represents extreme suffering and pain, yet she is able to survive. Even at one moment, she sings and dances, stamping defiantly down on the earth to which her poor body will soon return. Her sense of injustice in her society gives her a value of self that drives her to overcome the self-pity that afflicts Boesman because of his acceptance of the world in which he finds himself.
It is in Lena that we see the possibility of hope and the will to survive the odds that stack against them.

*Boesman and Lena* is indeed Athol Fugard "protesting against the conspiracy of silence about how the next man lives and what happens to groups other than our own."

Fugard shows there is the need for each individual to take time and be of concern and help to the needs of the next person. This is a sure way of making life a little bit easier for all in this difficult world we live in.

Throughout the play we see no emotional verbal or physical sign of love or deep affection passing between Boesman and Lena as husband and wife. Boesman is pushed to the edge in his maltreatment of Lena because he fears loosing her, especially with Outa's presence. Fear and dependency, therefore, link Boesman to Lena instead of love. Boesman's extreme insecurity, hidden beneath an attitude of indifference and bravado, makes him totally dependent on Lena. This explains why he deliberately confuses her in an attempt to make her subservient, depriving her psychologically of the "freedom" to leave him. Their relationship as a whole is, thus, reduced to violent, bitter discord.

Dispossessed and humiliated by their society, Boesman and Lena share a common predicament. Each feels insecure and has no sense of him/herself without the other. They are each other's fate and cannot do without each other. Finally at the brink of despair, the couple find that the only certainty they have in their deprivation is each other. In their struggle to regain their humanity and dignity, their relationship is what they have to and can rely on as "the truth their hands can touch". It is with this knowledge that Boesman and Lena journey on with no expectations of finding a better place to live.

The couple proceed together into darkness. It is a walk beyond rebellion. They seem to accept their fate as the dispossessed of their world. Their next stop will be no
different from the wasteland of Swartkops. Boesman will be followed by Lena for him to possibly intimidate, but we know that Lena will at least be able to stand up to him. Lena's statement "I'm alive, Boesman" (p.221) is set in a world full of exploitation and human degradation, one that does not go away at the end of the play.


3. Ibid. p.60.


Chapter Four

"MASTER HAROLD" ... AND THE BOYS:
A PLEA FOR THE BROTHERHOOD OF HUMANITY

Most of Fugard's plays, certainly *The Blood Knot* and *Boesman and Lena*, are informed by his observation of lives and experiences around him. None is based solely on his own life as "Master Harold" ... and the boys, written in 1982.

"Master Harold" ... and the boys is Fugard's most autobiographical work. In this play, he probes his own pain with regards to his relationship with his father and with his only childhood friend. Fugard greatly loved and respected both men. However, each of the two men had what was in Fugard's perception a "shortcoming" which he, as a little boy, could not so easily bring himself to accept and be identified with. This had a tremendous impact on the relationship between Fugard and each of the two men in his childhood life, something that he grew to feel guilty about.

For fifteen years Fugard's mother, Elizabeth Magdalena Potgieter, had employed Sam Semela, a black man, as a servant and a waiter at her Jubilee Boarding House and at the St. George's Park Tea Room in Port Elizabeth. Fugard, as a little boy called ‘Nally’ until his teens, was especially fond of Semela. He acknowledges that Semela "was the most significant - the only - friend of my boyhood years."¹ Fugard's friendship with this man was one of intense intimacy during what he considers his "most formative and definitive years, the age between 11, 10 up until the age of 21."²

In what was indeed a very close and shared relationship between a man and a little boy, Sam Semela, the family's servant, became in every way a surrogate father to Fugard. However, since it is very easy for a child to be influenced by the currents of the culture of his society, the little white boy, sought to be the "Master" by lording it over the
black man. The reality of the South African situation in which coloured people, especially blacks, are treated as inferior and sub-human, therefore, had an effect on Fugard’s relationship with Sam Semela.

When Fugard was about thirteen, and was helping behind the counter in the St. George’s Park Tea Room while Semela waited at the table, he and the man had a rare quarrel. Fugard cannot recollect the subject or the cause of this quarrel, but he remembers it made him burn with hatred and resentment towards the black man. He writes about this in his Notebooks:

Can’t remember now what precipitated it, but one day there was a rare quarrel between Sam and myself. In a truculent silence we closed the cafe, Sam set off home to New Brighton on foot and I followed a few minutes later on my bike. I saw him walking ahead of me and, coming out of a spasm of acute loneliness, as I rode up behind him I called his name, and he turned in mid-stride to look back and, as I cycled past, I spat in his face. Don’t suppose I will ever deal with the shame that overwhelmed me the second after I had done that.  

Fugard has often said that his ten-month experience of living and working with people of all races as a deckhand on the British trampsteamer SS Graigaur in 1953 liberated him from the prejudice endemic among his white folks towards people of colour. He also attributes his awareness of the full impact of the racist policies of the South African government on coloured people to the time he worked as a clerk in a ‘Native Commissioner’s Court’ in 1958. However, Fugard minces no words in making it clear that he traces his deep sense of guilt and remorse as a white man over the abuse, degradation and inhuman treatment that are meted out to coloured people, especially blacks, in South Africa to this specific incident between him and his friend Sam Semela during his Port Elizabeth childhood.

In several interviews, Fugard has described this spitting incident, and most importantly pointed out that he had tried unsuccessfully for many years to bring himself
to deal with his shame and guilt for what he did to his childhood friend. This he finally does thirty-seven years after the incident with "Master Harold" ... and the boys, a play he wrote to celebrate Sam Semela. In one interview, Fugard states that "one of the climactic moments in the play is autobiography, straight from my life, when a sixteen year old boy, trying to deal inadequately with an enormously painful conflict within himself, spits in the face of one man he loves, and that man is black." The play is, therefore, Fugard's attempt at exorcising his pain and unburdening himself of the shame and guilt he had borne all those years for mistreating his childhood friend.

Fugard also alludes to complex parent-child relationship he had with his father in the play. The father, Harold David Lannigan Fugard, was a cripple. This disability made it difficult for Fugard to see in his father the role-model and man that he needed to look up to as a child growing up. Fugard, thus, harboured resentment toward his father (who was an alcoholic, a bigot and a layabout) for his infirmity and weakness which meant his humiliating servitude to the father, like emptying chamber pots, despite loving him so. In writing the play, Fugard hoped to deal with the very complex and ambivalent relationship he had with his disabled father just as he had attempted before in Hello and Goodbye which he wrote in 1971. "Master Harold" ... and the boys, thus, also provides an insight into Fugard's attitude towards his disabled father whose "absence" could be inferred as that which drew Fugard to look up more to Sam Semela, the only man he knew during his childhood years.

Fugard explains that in writing "Master Harold", the real dialogue was with myself, because I was dealing with ghosts. Because I've got a few left. Certainly in my notebook there were any number of entries asking the question, "Is the writing of this play an attempt at something way, way back, most probably the genesis of myself as the man that I am - which over the years has not been resolved and which I was coming to terms with?"
Indeed, one of the central themes in the play is Fugard's unqualified hope in the ability of the individual as an authentic person to make choices for himself and determine the quality of the life he is going to live regardless of the existing social and political reality.

"Master Harold" ... and the boys is, thus, primarily about the failed relationship Fugard had as an adolescent with his black friend Sam Semela, and another black waiter, Willie Malopo, who had supposedly also worked for his mother during the same time, while sharing an insight into Fugard's attitude towards his crippled father. At the play's centre is that traumatic spitting incident, and Fugard's attempt to deal with its consequences in terms of race relations in their race-ridden society. In exploring his own despair at race relations in the play, Fugard has tried to explore that of the people of South Africa.

"Master Harold" ... and the boys is set in 1950 in the St. George's Park Tea Room. The play opens with Sam and Willie, the waiters, enjoying their work and surroundings. Willie painstakingly mops the floor as he sings. Sam, leaning nonchalantly on a solitary table, pages through a comic book. Suddenly, Willie swings heavily into a dance step with an imaginary partner. This leads to a discussion of the forthcoming New Brighton Ballroom Dancing Competition with Sam instructing Willie.

Like Styles and Robert/Sizwe before them (Sizwe Bansi is Dead written in 1973), the two men are a contrasting pair: Willie is as awkward as Sam is graceful, and he has to listen as Sam offers guidance and instructions to him on the quickstep and on how to treat his partner, the unseen Hilda. "It must look like romance", Sam tells Willie, "...when the judges look at you and Hilda, they must see a man and a woman who are dancing their way to a happy ending. What I saw was you holding her like you were frightened she was going to run away!" "Ja!" replies Willie, "Because that is what she wants to do!"7 The
gap between the ideal world imagined by Sam and the harsh, even violent reality known to Willie is clearly established in this short exchange.

Sam and Willie are joined by the seventeen year-old ‘Hally’ - as Sam affectionately calls the white schoolboy whose mother runs the tea room. Hally inquires from the two black men on his arrival: "How's it, chaps?" Willie responds, springing to attention and saluting: "At your service, "Master Harold" (p.9). This initial exchange clearly portrays the existing "Master-boys" relationship between the little white boy and the two black men as expected in the South African racist society. Hally’s condescending attitude towards his "boys" is deduced immediately from the way he furiously orders them to "get on with their work and stop fooling around" as the rag Willie hurls at Sam for teasing him about his trouble with Hilda misses and hits Hally instead. And when he is informed about his mother’s visit to the hospital, Hally shows his frustration at the possible home-coming of his disabled father who repels him.

As Hally begins to talk about his school-work, he and Sam soon engage in their favourite game of teaching and learning, something that has established a teacher-student relationship between the little white boy and the black man. We see that Hally takes genuine pleasure in imparting to Sam whatever he learns, be it mathematics, vocabulary, history, literature, or geography. Here, one becomes aware of the adolescent naivety and the feeling of racial superiority of the little white boy. "There's something called progress" (p.15), he informs Sam, when the servant tells him about the beatings black men receive in prison. Indeed, Hally's idea of progress is as limited as his idea of history: "You've never been a slave, you know" he tells Sam, "And anyway we freed your ancestors here in South Africa long before the Americans." (p.20). What Hally seems to forget is the plight and subservient status of blacks in apartheid South Africa. Even though they are not
slaves in the official sense of the word, blacks have no right to self-determination in the society. Nonetheless, the exchanges tell of the closeness and warmth between the "teacher" and his "student".

The rainy day prevents customers from patronising the tea room, so Hally, Sam and Willie spend the rest of the afternoon following the threads of shared memory. The only interruptions are by the telephone calls from the hospital where Hally's father is being treated for his amputated leg. These calls will provoke the frustrated, unhappy outbursts which culminate in Hally's abuse of Sam.

The exchanges, which the three men do enjoy, take them back to the old Jubilee Boarding house servants' quarters, where Hally first met Sam and Willie. The little white boy, having no place to which he undeniably belongs, recollects spending more time with the two black men in the servants' quarters than anywhere else during the years "not remembered as the happiest ones of an unhappy childhood" (p. 24). Hally admits that but for Sam, he would have no happy memories, the most special one of all being the day Sam made him a kite.

The flying of the kite reminds us of the car ride reenacted by Morris and Zach in *The Blood Knot*. It is an act that tells of the special bond between the two characters, sending their minds to a shared happy moment in their past. Flying the kite had not only appeared strange to Hally as he points out: "Little white boy in short trousers and a black man old enough to be his father flying a kite. It's not every day you see that" (p.31), but it had also made him appreciate the kindness and humanity of his friend Sam. This is the only time in the play Hally refers to Sam as if he were his father. However, the comparison that exists throughout the play has already been implied in Hally's earlier fear of being laughed at and embarrassed by other kids if they were to see him with Sam flying
the kite. This feeling of embarrassment is again what comes over Hally when his mother wears an evening gown, but it is no where near the public humiliation he felt when he followed Sam carrying his drunken father down the crowded Main Street.

Just as Hally and Sam seem to be closest, the present reasserts itself in the telephone call from Hally's mother. The prospect of Hally's father returning from hospital is no good news for the little white boy. The thought of further humiliating service to his disabled father plunges Hally into despair and anger, which he vents on the servants. When Hally is supposedly disturbed by the two men with their dancing practice as he tries to do his homework, he grabs his ruler and gives Willie a vicious whack on the bum, saying: "How the hell am I supposed to concentrate with the two of you behaving like bloody children! ... ... Get back to your work. You too, Sam. (His ruler) Do you want another one, Willie?" (p.38) The basic structure of the South African society in the exercise of power is revealed here: the white child can hit a black man, and the black man hits the black woman (Willie abuses his partner Hilda just as Boesman does to Lena). It is a system in which violence spirals down in a hierarchy of degradation. Hally, thus, exercises his power as "Master" to humiliate the black men, who have been dispossessed of their dignity and respect by the system of apartheid, as the means of getting rid of his frustration.

Sensing Hally's frustration, Sam attempts to console him by evoking the pleasure of dancing which to him is "like being in a dream about a world in which accidents don't happen" (p.45). With a vivid description of the 1950 Eastern Province Open Ballroom Dancing Championships, Sam gets Hally interested to write about this "significant event" (p.42) for his school assignment. Sam's utopian vision of the dance floor where people are harmoniously related becomes a portrait or metaphor for the ideal world they both yearn
for: an ideal state of human co-operation and avoidance of "collision". Hally becomes impressed and shows his patronising affection for his mentor, saying: "You've got a vision Sam!" (p.46). He subtitles his essay "Ballroom Dancing as a Political Vision" (p.47), hoping for a world in which powers and people can come together in harmony.

This joyous dream, the imagined world Sam and Hally have created, is finally destroyed by the second telephone call which reminds Hally of the harsh reality that haunts him: his father is, after all, returning. We can remember Hally saying after the first telephone call from his mother: "Just when things are going along all right, without fail someone or something will come along and spoil everything. Somebody should write that down as a fundamental law of the Universe. The principle of perpetual disappointment." (p.35) This time, he cries out to Sam: "So much for a bloody world without collisions." (p.50)

The utopian world they are fantasising about comes crashing down in the face of reality, and Hally tears up the notes for his essay. His father is indeed returning home, and so will he, as he says, to "Home-sweet-fucking-home. Jesus, I hate that word." (p.51) Showing his disappointment, Hally draws Sam's attention to the real world they know as opposed to their dream: "Do you want to know what is really wrong with your lovely little dream, Sam? ... You left out the cripples." With pain, he paints a chilling image of the reality: "When you come to think of it, it's bad enough on two legs ... but one and a pair of crutches! Hell, no, Sam. That's guaranteed to turn the dance floor into shambles." To Hally, this is the way things really are in the ballroom and in the real world. He, thus, renames the dancing competition: "the All-Comers-How-to-Make-a-Fuckup-of-Life Championships" (pp.51-52), making no secrets about his anger at the imposition on him of responsibility towards his own disabled father who shames him and is the source of his
frustration.

Aware of Hally's true feelings in the mockery and derision of his father, Sam reproaches him, saying: "It's your father you are talking about. ... It's a terrible sin for a son to mock his father with jokes like that. ... Your father is your father even if he is a ... cripple man." (p.52) The older and wiser man, thus, draws the little white boy’s attention to his unfilial attitude. The little white boy becomes ashamed of himself.

What Hally does is once again to redirect his anger and frustration at what Russell Vandenbroucke sees as "a safer object, Sam." He takes advantage of his whiteness as granted by his society to save face by turning his shame and guilt into rage by humiliating the black man. His guilty wish to avoid coping with his invalid father turns into a racialist explosion against the only person closest to him. With rage and in fury, Hally warns him: "be careful, Sam. Very careful! You're treading on dangerous ground. Leave me and my father alone." (p.52.) He reminds the black man of his position within the South African society as a servant who is to be concerned only with his work.

Here, Hally resorts to the racial relations within the apartheid system which to quote Errol Durbach, "ignores traditional relationships of labour and management, of paid employee to paying employer, or contractual relationships between freely consenting parties" to rebuff Sam's explanation of the nature of his employment:

HALLY: You're only a servant here, and don't forget it. ... And as far as my father is concerned, all you need to remember is that he is your boss.
SAM: (Needled at last) No, he isn't. I get paid by your mother.
HALLY: Don’t argue with me, Sam!
SAM: Then don’t say he's my boss.
HALLY: He's a white man and that's good enough for you. (p.53)

Hally is, of course, clinging to his father's whiteness in the hope of regaining superiority for himself and his father over the black man. Within the South African system, every white man is the "Master" to the black man who is a "boy". Hally's misguided attempt to
achieve self-worth and status take the form of humiliating the one person he can demean—a black man in his parents' employment. What pains Sam greatly is that he is being denied his basic human respect and dignity by someone he cares about. He is in a society that degrades him as much as Hally is in a family that shames him. Hally's quest is to secure his self-respect and identity at Sam's expense with no regard for their intimate relationship which ought to provide them with mutual support and love in their individual predicament.

The little white boy demands that Sam address him as Willie does: "Master Harold" (p.54), a sign of respect "that's long overdue ... ... I can tell you now that somebody who will be glad to hear I've finally given it to you will be my Dad. Yes! He agrees with my Mom. He's always going on about it as well. "You must teach the boys to show you more respect, my son." " (p.55) Within a racist society, respect is taught through intimidation just as giving respect is by self-abasement. It is easy to teach Willie respect by whipping him because he lacks the ability to oppose such treatment. All Willie can do is to insist that others be made to share in his suffering (that Hally should whip Sam as well) or visiting his pain upon his dancing partner, Hilda, the black woman. Hally cannot command respect from Sam who demonstrates compassion and moral strength, so he resorts to humiliating him through the insult, abuse and blackmail of the system. He is able to degrade and humiliate Sam and even trample upon him because the black man is a servant. His demand, therefore, to be called "Master" is a proclamation of his racial superiority.

The little white boy, in a determination to increase his sense of self by humiliating the black man, next associates himself with his father, the very cause of his shame, by telling a crude racialist joke they both enjoy about "A nigger's arse" not being "fair" (p.55). As the two black men *stare at him with disbelief*, he gives the meaning of "fair" as light
in colour and just and decent. Sam understands clearly what Hally is implying morally in his attempt to redefine his relationship with the two black men within the context of a system which sees "black" as base. Seeing this as an attempt by Hally to demand respect through insult and abuse, Sam addresses him: "You're really trying hard to be ugly, aren't you? And why drag poor old Willie into it? He's done nothing to you except show you the respect you want so badly. That's also not being fair, you know ... and I mean just or decent." (pp.55-56)

In an act of self-abasement that severely rebukes and shames the little white boy, Sam drops his trousers and underpants and presents his backside for Hally's inspection (p.56) to see how "fair" it is. As Errol Durbach correctly points out, the justice, decency, and fairness of the system which encourages a child to humiliate a man because the man is of a different skin-colour is called into question through Sam's potent act. Greatly embarrassed, Hally calls Sam quietly and spits in his face in a desperate attempt to preserve his wounded pride and protest his own sense of degradation.

This is the climax of the play, and as Dennis Walder describes it, the image of the white teenager spitting in the face of one of his mother's black servants is "one of theatre's most disturbing moments." It is an image that symbolises the very ugliness of racism in South Africa. As shocking and unexpected as it is, it causes a long and heartfelt groan from Willie who looks on dumbfoundedly (p.56). It is not surprising, therefore, that this racist and adolescent betrayal, which completely makes Hally lose his racial innocence, is the source of Fugard's deepest feelings of guilt and remorse about race relations and the way coloured people, especially blacks, are degraded and humiliated in his society.
The spitting incident at the centre of "Master Harold" ... and the boys epitomises all the personal roots of racism and the worst excesses of behaviour a person can exhibit in his most intimate relationship. As in the climactic moment of The Blood Knot, further outburst of hatred and violence seems imminent. However, the natural, expected response is resisted by the black man. With an overwhelming sense of maturity and moral intelligence, Sam avoids the temptation to be dehumanised. With tremendous amount of self-control and great restraint, Sam wipes his face instead of retaliating.

Sam distances himself from being a father to Hally by making the little white boy acknowledge his misdirecting the frustration he feels against the wrong source: "The face you should be spitting in is your father's ... but you used mine, because you think you're safe inside your fair skin ... and this time I don't mean just or decent." (p.56) It is Hally's white father who ensures the "principle of perpetual dissappointment" (p.35) in his life, and whose imminent home-coming he cannot cope with; yet it is on Sam that Hally visits with impunity his anguish and contempt because he is black.

With a careful thought about aggression, Sam points out to Hally (just as Willie will also remind Sam later) that the individual who persecutes is as much a victim as the person whom he persecutes regardless of one's status, class or skin colour. Indeed in his racist outbursts, the little white "Master" manages to humiliate and demean only himself. Sam would feel the same if he were to retaliate. One agrees, therefore, with Russell Vandenbroucke that it is the blackman who "keeps his dignity" and forces the little white "Master" to "feel ignominious".12

Instead of striking Hally for the spitting, Sam and Willie agree to endure the insult with weeping and groaning as Willie reminds Sam that Hally is a "Little white boy. Long trousers now, but he's still a little boy." (p.57) Further violence is, therefore, averted not
because the black man accepts suffering as his lot, but because through exemplary behaviour and forgiveness "Master Harold" will come to acknowledge the implications of his cruel conduct. Here, Fugard has been criticised as condoning the racial insult and humiliation at the centre of the play.\textsuperscript{13} It is true forgiveness rather than retaliation for Hally's racist behaviour is offered. However, this does not necessarily mean the play is limited to serving the status quo. As in \textit{The Blood Knot}, violence is presented and defused. Fugard shows that more violence is imminent unless there is a change in the attitude of whites towards people of colour.

Sensing Hally has lost his sense of self-worth and dignity, Sam recollects the promise he made to himself after carrying home the little white boy's drunken father, which was to help Hally to believe in himself instead of being ashamed of his father. He acknowledges that Hally's distress is the result of inability to cope with his shameful father whom the little white boy admits he nonetheless loves. Sam then tells the little white boy: "That's not the way a boy grows up to be a man! ... But the one person who should have been teaching you what that means was the cause of your shame. If you really want to know, that's why I made you the kite. I wanted you to look up, be proud of something, of yourself." (p.58) The kite was a symbolic gift from Sam to console Hally and help raise him above the ground of shame in taking responsibility of his drunken and crippled father, and to think of his own capabilities. Sam made Hally the kite and taught him how to fly it as a means of salvaging the little white boy's pride.

Sam explains further that he could not join Hally to share in the experience of the high-flying kite because the little white boy was sitting on a bench marked "Whites Only". Here, he draws Hally's attention to a system that deliberately sets out to separate and humiliate blacks in every social sphere of existence and regulate the relationship between
whites and blacks. Within the context of attitudes and relations promoted by apartheid, the little white boy is "Master Harold" and the black man is the "boy". This is how the South African system defines white and black relationship. Hally has the system on his side to resort to subjugating his black companions into servitude as his "boys" and playing "master" to them. As he realises the full implications of his attitude towards Sam, Hally becomes much more ashamed for betraying his friend, mentor and surrogate father who has shown him nothing but compassion, love and moral strength.

We see that Hally has in the course of the afternoon's events undertaken a rites of passage, a journey from innocence to knowledge at great personal pain. The little white boy has been shamed into self-knowledge about the implications of his actions. He has become aware of betraying both his father and his friend to the extent that in the end, he cannot bring himself to remain with the two black men in friendship. Finding it difficult even to say anything, he is ready to leave with the shame and guilt that have come over him.

Having taken off his servant's jacket that had made him a "boy", Sam stops Hally from leaving, and offers him an olive branch. He addresses the little white boy informally again despite his previous vow, saying "I've got no right to tell you what being a man means if I don't behave like one myself, and I'm not doing so well at that this afternoon. Should we try again, Hally?" (p.59) It is with compassion that Sam forgives the little white boy who knows no better for his racist behaviour. He behaves like a man in order to teach Hally how to grow into the man he seeks to be. Sam offers to Hally the chance to "fly another kite", saying "it worked once, and this time I need it as much as you do." (p.59) What Sam does is to open the door for a second chance in the hope of salvaging their friendship. By the extention of his gesture to Hally, Sam also offers the hope and the possibility that all humanity, regardless of race and colour, may come to accept each other.
and live together in peace and harmony.

Throughout the play we feel quite ambivalent about the little white boy. Hally is essentially a good boy. Unlike most white people in South Africa, he is open to blacks, willing to teach them and to communicate with them. We can see that he is not racist until he becomes unyielding as "Master Harold" in an attempt to preserve his pride, cover up his shame and avert criticism. This is evident in the way he dictates the nature of the relationship with Sam. He forces the roles of a servant, a pupil, or an intimate on Sam at one moment or the other. As he and Sam try to discuss people whose works have been of benefit to mankind, the little white boy shows extreme satisfaction at the work he has done in "educating" Sam. At one moment, he will yell at Sam: "Just get on with your bloody work and shut up." (p.53) At another time, he will let Sam become intimate and show his genuine admiration of his vision of an ideal world, saying, "Jesus, Sam! That's beautiful! ... You've got a vision." (p.46) He shifts from intimate familiarity with his black friends by realigning their friendship into the social and political reality and playing "master" as a means of saving face. In the end, Hally is faced with the choice of joining with the two black men in harmony and brotherhood of mankind, or remaining "master" in isolation.

Sam tries to re-establish his friendship with Hally, warning that something should have been learned that afternoon, but the little white boy leaves the tea room saying helplessly, "I don't know. I don't know anything anymore." (p.59) We remember Hally saying he oscillates "between hope and despair for this world" (p.15). He hopes that through the efforts of some "social reformer", the world can be transformed for the better. However, for most of the time, we see him manifesting his despair because of the social and political reality of apartheid and man's inhumanity towards his fellow man. As Sam
offers Hally the chance to salvage their friendship, the little white boy reminds him of what he told him earlier about the impossibility of flying a kite on a rainy day. They both acknowledge that the South African political reality (represented by the rain pouring outside the tea room) has constraints on the choices individuals make in their personal relationships. This fact notwithstanding, the challenge Sam offers Hally stresses the hope and certainty of Fugard that through personal determination on the part of individuals apartheid can be brought down regardless of the political and social condition. It is this faith in the individual to work for racial harmony that gives Fugard hope for a decent social order in South Africa. Fugard is emphasising the point that the task of ensuring that the South African society is free from racial discrimination, bigotry and man's inhumanity to man is primarily the responsibility of every single person. It is an expression of confidence in the ability and conscience of the individual South African to bring about the change needed for all men to be seen, accepted, and treated as equal, regardless of race or skin-colour in that society. The task of dismantling apartheid becomes centred on individual attitudes and behaviour. Viewed against the arrogance, disrespectfulness, and racist behaviour of Hally is the compassion, humanity, and friendship exhibited by Sam. There is the hope here in the possibility of reform in the individual to achieving racial harmony in the society. It is no wonder that individual responsibility is emphasised as Sam points out to Hally: "You don't have to sit up there by yourself. You know what that bench means now, and you can leave it any time you choose. All you have to do is stand up and walk away from it." (p.60) Sam expresses much hope in Hally to make the personal choice to restore their friendship which can mean helping to foster racial harmony regardless of the social and political reality of the South African situation.

It is pathetic then that the play ends without reconciliation between the two people.
who have been close and then become estranged. However, we have been made to acknowledge how difficult it can be for the little white boy to re-establish his relationship with Sam. Hally cannot so easily bring himself to accept Sam's offer of reconciliation after his shocking racist attitude which has shown him betraying their friendship. Paralysed by shame, he lacks the strength to join Sam and Willie. So he stumbles off into the dark, leaving the two black men alone in the tea room.

We can, however, be certain and hopeful that as the little white boy leaves, he realizes fully what has been spelt out very clearly for him by Sam. The choice is his, whether to accept Sam's challenge and decide what man he is going to be within the South African situation. Hally must acknowledge that to remain sitting on a "Whites Only" bench is to do something damaging not only to Sam, but to himself also. He has a responsibility to himself and to his friendship with Sam to help make their world a place "with no collisions". The decision is Hally's. It is within his power as an authentic individual to break away from supporting the status-quo which seeks to place barriers among men because of the differences in the colour of their skin or their race.

With Sam and Willie left alone, the latter expresses the hope that a lesson has been learnt that afternoon and that it "is going to be okay tomorrow." (p.60) At least he has learnt his. Promising not to be violent against his dancing partner, he comforts Sam by endorsing his dream of life as a ballroom. He puts his bus fare into the jukebox which comes to life with a song that expresses pity for an unhappy child who is a product of his society. "Let's dream" (p.60), he tells Sam, and they begin to dance together to achieve a moment of grace denied to them by their social context. Perhaps we can interpret this final action to mean that in spite of the cruel and mean attitude of whites towards them, life goes on for black people, at least on their own terms.
The final image Fugard presents is not all that reassuring in terms of racial harmony. It is an image of a world where people are driven apart by racist attitudes and whites leave blacks to act in solidarity. This is because we see that "Master Harold" by not joining Sam and Willie has excluded himself from the harmony and brotherhood offered by the two black men. However, one can be reassured that Sam and Willie dancing happily together presents us with a resonant image of the brotherhood of humanity. The idea of dancing as a paradigm of universal harmony is used to offset the terrible loneliness that descends on Hally for betraying his friendship with Sam. Since there is the hope that the shame and guilt that Hally has experienced might cause him to restore his friendship with the two black men, the final image envisions the possibility of racial harmony.

It must be acknowledged all the same that the final dramatic image that we are left with is quite ambiguous in oscillating between hope and despair at the possibility of harmony among all races. It is Fugard at his best. He emphasises individual experience and commitment to change situations for the better. Fugard sees the South African experience as one that demands choices on the part of individuals in that society. Each person has got to make his own decisions in the way he lives and relates to people from races other than his own. It is indeed Hally's choice to get up and walk away from the "Whites Only" bench any time he decides, as Sam suggests. In "Master Harold" ... and the boys, Fugard provokes us to think about what can happen if racist attitudes continue. Fugard seems to be asking through the final image of the two black men dancing together: Do we allow a situation where racist attitudes set people apart?
FOOTNOTES


6. Ibid. p.4.

7. Fugard, Athol. "*Master Harold* ... and the boys." Viking Penguin Inc. New York. 1982. pp.5-6. *All quotes from the play throughout the chapter are from this text.*


10. Ibid. p.508.


Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

The three plays of Athol Fugard that I have discussed, (The Blood Knot, Boesman and Lena, and "Master Harold" ... and the boys), are primarily about relationships, although they have their broader social and political implications. These plays, like all others written by Fugard, focus on people inextricably involved in passionately close relationships of blood, love and friendship that embody the tensions of the South African apartheid society. The nature of the characters' relationships points to the profound social, political, and racial forces prevalent in their society. Relationships in Fugard's plays are interdependent. The characters are involved in intense emotional relationships between brother and brother, brother and sister, husband and wife, and friends. These characters demand love, attention, sympathy, mutual support and respect from one another which are the fundamental needs of man's existence as he searches for his identity and dignity amid the pressures of apartheid.

Apartheid as evidenced, for example, in the climactic image of the confrontation between Zach and Morris as enemies across the colour bar in The Blood Knot and through the petty dehumanizing attitude of Master Harold towards Sam in "Master Harold", inherently leaves no room for compromise and survives only by coercion and violence. The horror and injustice in the lives of black people become unbearable. The characters in the plays of Fugard struggle to survive the intolerable suffering imposed on them as a result of the basic relationship at the centre of the structure of the South African society. One would, therefore, agree with Errol Durbach that characters like Lena and Sam "turning the other cheek" to their oppressors "may not be politically expedient as a response to apartheid". However, as he continues to point out, where problems are
engendered at the personal level in the way people relate to one another, we cannot fault Fugard in his suggestion that it is only at the personal level that these problems may be resolved.¹ For instance, instead of responding with violence and fury to Master Harold’s insulting and dehumanizing behaviour towards him, Sam uses moral suasion and exemplary behaviour to move the little white boy to abandon his racist attitude and salvage their friendship. This is what Margarete Seidenspinner sees as Fugard’s "search for values more profound than those motivated by mere political gestures".²

Nonetheless, since relations within the South African context are built on the principle of apartheid that is given statutory enforcement, every social gesture becomes an affirmation or negation of the system. Every act becomes more or less political. The political reality of the question of race and racism in the world of apartheid is, thus, reflected in an individual’s social attitudes. To deny this is to serve the system’s ruling ideology. For this reason, to offer solutions to the South African predicament in personal, rather than political terms as Fugard does in his plays may be seen as a response that is lacking in revolutionary fervour.

By concentrating on individual character and personal truth, Fugard, indeed, addresses concerns such as the need to relate his characters’ predicaments to their social class, and to understand the nature of social relations in South Africa in the proper historical and political perspective. This is Fugard’s way of dealing with the South African situation which he sees as a potential for inter-racial violence if the downtrodden and the oppressed choose to respond to their inhuman treatment at the hands of the oppressor by retaliating with violence and even revolution. What he aims at is to show that violence and destruction are inevitable, unless whites see and respond to the demands of their submerged and dispossessed non-white population by changing individual attitudes of
racial discrimination and bigotry, but he disavows violence as the only necessary or acceptable response.

Fugard allows us to recognise a radical impetus for change by exploring the effect of violence on those who carry it out. In a manner that may portray the tendency to reflect and even endorse the status quo, as he does in "Master Harold" ... and the boys, Fugard chooses the path of love and denounces that of hatred as the answer to the question of racism. His characters may show passivity in the face of oppression in a bleak and almost meaningless world, but (as in the climactic scene of The Blood Knot) he demonstrates the potential of revolution or subversion to undermine the status quo if situations continue without any effort to address the inhuman treatment that they are subjected to. The message revealed to us in the plays of Fugard is that things need not be the way they have been, or the way they are. Fugard condemns and defuses violence, but he carefully shows its inevitability if oppression continues. The Blood Knot and "Master Harold" ... and the boys call for change in individual behaviour and attitudes, if not revolutionary action, by making us aware that better political systems ultimately depend on changes of heart. Fugard stands between the lines of racial intolerance and advocates a non-racial society. Indeed, he sees social injustices as evils caused by men and that can, therefore, be unmade by men. Fugard's hope is that in the little acts of decency that individuals may show to one another in their personal relationships, a South Africa free of prejudice and racism may be born.

The South African experience which emerges from Fugard's plays is bitter and painful to think about, but at the same time, there is a deep faith in the potential of the individual human being to change things for the better. For all their apparent bleakness, the plays are uplifting testaments in celebration of the indomitability of man. The
characters suffer crippling oppression; yet, somehow their survival becomes an affirmation of the durability of life and the human spirit in the face of almost impossible odds. Fugard's characters do not affirm or cure their plight, but they learn to live with it. They are isolated men and women who toy with their hopes and dreams before discarding them as illusory to embrace lucid consciousness. In *The Blood Knot*, Morris attempts "passing for white", while Zach hopes for a relationship with a white woman. At the end, both brothers become aware of reality and affirm their black race. *Boesman and Lena* suggests that men may survive the most intolerable conditions if they are able to discover and articulate a meaning for their suffering. As the play ends and Lena follows Boesman, we know that she is no longer going to allow herself to be pushed around by her partner because she has her sense of self-worth. Sam and Willie dance happily together in solidarity and brotherhood at the end of "*Master Harold*" when Hally leaves them in shame for his insulting behaviour towards them. In all his plays, we see Fugard's characters trying to transcend the horizons and possibilities decreed by the restrictive social structure of the South African situation. They are victims of the system that seeks to deny them their humanity and existence. Their only wish, then, is to survive. The suffering, humiliation and despair the characters suffer never totally destroy the possibility of their survival with dignity. Indeed, survival is the key to life for the oppressed in South Africa and is, thus, one of the main themes in the plays of Fugard. The plays, in effect, affirm nothing but man himself.

Grounded in the particulars of race and racism, and particularly making observations about life in his native Port Elizabeth, Fugard's plays depict people trapped in the struggle for freedom from indignity and servitude. The plays, thus, portray and protest the quality of life in apartheid South Africa. They achieve the expression of the
everyday experience of suffering and protest by the dispossessed of South Africa, and in so doing help ensure the continuity of that protest. In short, Fugard’s plays tell the human story of South Africa, and show the time-bomb on which the society sits in terms of its race-relations.

By extension, if Port Elizabeth is a paradigm, or a microcosm of South Africa, so is South Africa for the world. The inhumanity and exploitation of man on the basis of race is a constant reality in all societies. The plays, therefore, have universal application. The characters are brother and brother, brother and sister, husband and wife, and friends. These primal relationships that Fugard deals with in his plays suggest that his ultimate concern is less with the particulars of the South African situation than with those besetting the whole family of man. His concern is about the alienation of all men wherever they are. The goal of the writer, then, is that of bridging the gap between the races not only in his home country of South Africa, but in all societies for racial harmony with the acceptance and treatment of people of all races and colour as equal. By examining human relationships and human survival in his plays, Athol Fugard contributes to the field of modern drama in the effort to effect social change. This is what makes him a playwright of great repute.

Chris Wortham, writing about the Port Elizabeth plays, testifies to the durability and timelessness of the plays of Athol Fugard. He states:

However much South Africa may change in the future, Fugard has faithfully recorded in his... plays what it was to be in and a part of a particular place at a particular time, what it meant in terms of human needs and sufferings that never change in themselves but only in intensity. The authentic, living world of the... plays will assuredly continue to hold the attention of audiences and to move them to recognition of themselves, long after apartheid has become a record of an evil hour in which men acted perversely and, not for the first time and not for the last, excluded themselves from making the world a home.\(^3\)


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Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act (1972)
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