

GENDER ON THE FRONTLINE :
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN
SELECTED PLAYS OF ATHOL FUGARD AND ZAKES MDA

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DECLARATION

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“ There is nothing more daunting than the inquisition of blank paper ” (Athol Fugard).

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ABSTRACT

It can be argued that critical scholarship has not satisfactorily commented on the portrayal of women in South African theatre by male playwrights. This dissertation will examine the presentation of the female voice in the selected plays of two playwrights, namely Athol Fugard and Zakes Mda, coming from different socio-historical and cultural backgrounds. This comparative study will re-interrogate the selected representative texts from a feminist perspective, and will compare Fugard's subversive distrust of the female voice juxtaposed against Mda's refreshing celebration of the female presence in the selected plays.

Fugard and Mda's female characters are generally seen by their readers, audiences and critics such as Andrew Horn, Marcia Blumberg and Dennis Walder as fundamentally vital, irrepressible and certainly more admirable than their male counterparts, as it is ultimately their quest for symbiosis and affirmation of the self which precludes any passive spectatorship on the part of the audience. However, paradoxically and ironically, it is Fugard, writing from a relatively privileged white male position, who consistently places his female characters in positions where their distinct inner strength is continually undermined. Despite their cognitive ability to engage with their situation, they are seldom permitted to triumph over the bleakness of their lives, but in fact are rendered emotionally impotent in the face of insurmountable existential isolation. Always situated within an interdependent relationship absent of hope and love, Fugard's women characters are never allowed to forget the role they are expected to assume in a patriarchal society rife with political and racial overtones. This very impasse in which they are placed by Fugard generally resonates strongly with the audience, who can identify or empathise with the women, but who are not afforded an imaginative escape by Fugard.

Mda's female characters are created and portrayed within a similar political and universal system

which perpetuates their exclusion from power and keeps them in servitude. However, unlike the ultimately silenced women in Fugard's plays, Mda, writing partly from a historically marginalised position himself, empowers his female characters with the freedom to confront and articulate their emotions and perceptions. His female characters are inscribed in a multiplicity of social positions, within which they most often find a solution to their problems and demand an outcome which is not only determined by outsiders, but by their own inner strength. Although they are less fettered by class and ideological constraints, they are however more naively drawn than Fugard's female characters. Whilst Fugard's female characters in the selected plays are, without exception, left on the periphery of the play as the ultimate victims of their inescapable circumstances, the female characters created by Mda more often than not dominate the stage by virtue of their indomitable resilience, rather than resignation.

This dissertation will also examine Fugard and Mda's presentation of their female characters as wholly a male's construct, set in a political context which subtextually interrogates race and gender. The implied assumption concerning the authority of the male writer over women's narratives will also therefore be questioned. Reference to Fugard and Mda's own personal histories as well as their other non-fictional writing will be seen as relevant in this regard.

In conclusion, this dissertation will focus on the artificially imposed passivity of Fugard's confined and limited female characters, and will compare this to Mda's empowerment of his female characters through critical awareness. The provocative issues of voice and violence as agency in both Fugard and Mda's discourse will be viewed, in particular, from within an apartheid system of governance.

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CHAPTER 1

“ To live is to be marked. To live is to change, to acquire the words of a story, and that is the only celebration we mortals really know ” (Kingsolver 1999: 438).

INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXTUALISING SOUTH AFRICAN DRAMA AND THE DRAMATISTS

The relationship between theatre and society in the industrialised world is especially clear in South African theatre. If the playwright has any significant function, it is to explore the forms of South African social realities. Art, in whichever form, has always served to condition to some extent, some sector of society, depending largely on its function and purpose in the community in which it is presented. South African theatre does not merely respond to challenges, but also has become a vehicle for social mobilisation and political change. Theatre was one of the few mediums through which playwrights like Zakes Mda, Fatima Dike and Matsemela Manaka could communicate black experience to white audiences.

Early South African drama of the 1960s largely written by male playwrights, manifested predominantly as a contestation against an aggressive apartheid orientated social discourse. It sought a definition and found several, such as political consciousness; art as inseparable from social conditions; performances that presented transformation as the ideal ethos for recognition; the refusal to interrogate patriarchal dictates and amend representation of gender differences in theatre; and the creation of women in the object position. This was particularly germane to plays with ascendant oppressed class participation prohibited by draconian state laws, current to a fragmented social order of the silent and repressive 1960s and the rebellious brutality of

Sharpeville and Soweto in the early 1970s. These included various processes of oppression such as, inter alia, the exiling of both black and white playwrights and the banning of their work, legislative and hegemonic censorship, cultural deprivation, mindless violence and the rigorous social divisions of segregation. Increased black militancy resulting from raised political awareness and a need to express this awareness, severed the largely artificial bond between liberal whites and educated blacks, and black consciousness sought to embrace radical politics. Theatre, of both black and white, began to eschew the traditional in favour of alternative theatre, which, despite its attempt at diversifying, remained an index of social consciousness, subservient to culturally defined social relations and political pressures. The scenarios and stories possible in theatre during the apartheid era were inhibited and limited by the prevailing status quo of the time, and essentially attempted to disclose what was concealed in society. To quote Mda, “apartheid itself was so absurd that it created the stories for these writers. Many of the theatre people who became famous during those days were actually reporters who would take a slice of life and put it on a page and thereafter on stage” (Naidoo 1997:251). Apartheid reflected a system of governance which ultimately sought to give rise to a divided society. Hence black theatre was not afforded much recognition and remained subordinate to white theatre.

Established theatre in South Africa during the latter part of the 1970s was produced for a predominantly white audience, and both Fugard and Mda wrote with this audience, and also the international communities, in mind. Both being exposed to a university education, they write from a privileged perspective and thus one may say that they both exhibit the elitist’s concern for the marginalised minority. Their plays are often insightful commentaries on the relationship between theatre, ideology and the political power structure in South Africa, past and present. The discourse of both playwrights reflects a male gendered bias. This bias is concealed in the imaginary political context of the theatrical production. Albeit imaginary, their work nonetheless has the power to

influence the public and the collective voice of theatre, as it subtextually interrogates the social realism of race and gender. This coercive power lies in the fundamental and potential subversiveness of theatre, as these male writers create both text and meaning which the audience must follow. Their plays are powerful legacies of images and words whose sensibilities were shaped in a country advocating harsh political perspectives. Their plays also resonated strongly with South African audiences, as many of the plays called into question the separatist ideology and confronted whites in particular with the organisational violence underpinning a system of apartheid.

Theatre as an art form is, after all, a particular kind of cultural production which closely relates to the politics of power and organisation. The essence of theatre is to confront man, society and civilization with itself:

contemporary playwrights raise the common man to a new level of participation in societal self-examination. They challenge the spectator to move beyond identification and witness to analysis and action... by expecting theatre to shape the values that move our culture.

(Dahl 1987:132)

This is evident in many plays by Fugard, where the power of one is seen to deprive another of autonomy; his male characters only have power and authority when the female characters are denied equality.

Unlike the female characters in Fugard's plays, some of Mda's female characters welcome rather than accept the power of the male characters, as the plays never really admit to any obvious criticism of this power. Occasionally the women might protest or rebel against their love for their men, but in the end they succumb to that form of power, because they are attracted in the first place

by the very qualities they fight against, these being the power, privilege and emotional distance of the unreconstructed patriarch. Unfortunately for the male creator of the play, this conversely shows that however passive the woman character, she is not left completely powerless. In a sense she is not annihilated by her subordination to the patriarch, because the emotionally weak male characters indirectly enable the female characters to acquire some form of control, mostly that of a mother caring for a child. This power, however, is never anything more than a nurturing role. By contrast, women in Fugard's plays are fixed and ultimately succumb to masculinist strategies, as his male characters are resistant to any resolution. The female characters are portrayed as devoid of any sexuality, espousing childlessness and dependancy, imprisoned in a monologic and domestic realism, reinscripting the dominant order to a sympathetic audience, at the same time obscuring the truth of women's alienation.

Significantly, both Mda and Fugard chose to write their plays in standardised English language, interspersed with occasional expressions of indigenous vernaculars, in order to ensure exportability and a much wider accessibility than just the local populace. The style and language demonstrate clearly the idiom of the authors' class and ideology. The dominant discourse is patriarchal, and typically chauvinistic. This discourse is most evident in Fugard's play, A Place with the Pigs, and Mda's The Nun's Romantic Story. The vernacular is also employed by these playwrights to function for comic purpose and also to exclude/include sections of the audience. The performability of their plays in international theatres largely depended on whether the international community could accurately identify the source of a character's emotions and context. However, the choice of language does not function in isolation to determine an understanding of the communication process embedded in the content, but is augmented and underpinned by the visual references and the nonverbal signals themselves, especially evident in Fugard's Boesman and Lena and Mda's And The Girls in their Sunday Dresses. The plays of Mda and Fugard have this in

common, that they wholly eschew spectacle, exoticism and superficial decoration, and focus throughout on character and action. Their plays are purposefully devoid of excessive decor and rely on minimal technical effects, so that the audience is able wholly to become absorbed in the content of the play. In Mda's The Nun's Romantic Story, the stage directions include "three distinct acting spaces ... the first space contains an austere bench, the second space a chair, and the third space is in darkness. When the play opens, there is a small pool of light on each of the two acting spaces. Throughout the play, there are no other sets" (Mda 1996 :80). Mda also mostly avoids any stage directions as to character requirements, thus presenting his characters as universal exemplars of the human condition prevailing in a segregated society. A similar austerity dominates in Fugard's plays. In Hello and Goodbye, the play opens on a kitchen table and four chairs, lit by a solitary electric globe. On the table is a bottle of fruit squash, a jug of water and a glass. In the absence of decoration, the character becomes central to the dramatic space and time, and is thus foregrounded throughout the play. This is especially evident in Boesman and Lena, where the audience is confronted with an empty stage to begin with. Herein lies the true nature of their theatre as a dynamic means of communication, and both Mda and Fugard exploit this to the full.

It is clear that both these playwrights collectively created a cultural awareness that went beyond politics. It collapsed both a uniquely black and a uniquely white theatre into one non-elitist non-racist theatre with a particular identity arising from a common purpose. Caroline Heilbrun comments that "black men do not write very differently from white men" (Heilbrun 1989:61), and this can be said to be true of these two playwrights.

Mda, in an interview explains that:

theatre has always played a vital role in reform and reflection ... it continues to be a significant voice in the resistance of the repressed majority. This it does despite the censorious nature of the environment in which the artists work. In fact, the harsher the hand of the censor, the more impressive our theatre.

(quoted in Daymond et al 1984:295)

Fugard comments that his plays “reflect a certain reality about the South African experience ... my plays come from life and from encounters with actual people ... these are the only things I have been able to write about” (Fugard 1983:8). The above comments place these two playwrights firmly within the South African theatre of confrontation and criticism, addressing the real demands of political awareness and liberation. Not all political theatre can be herded under the collective nomenclature of protest theatre. According to Davis, protest theatre must be seen as “the voicing of disagreement and disapproval, but does not go beyond that. It addresses itself to the oppressor with a view to appealing to his conscience”. He goes on to say that protest theatre is a theatre of complaint, and is variously a theatre of self-pity, of moralizing, of mourning and of hopelessness. It never offers a solution beyond the depiction of the sad situation in which the people find themselves (Davis 1996: 200). This is most evident in many of Fugard’s plays, and especially in Boesman and Lena and Hello and Goodbye. Many of Fugard’s plays evince a clear protest against the Group Areas Act, but unlike reality, Fugard allows his oppressed female characters to suffer in stoical silence. The women in his plays lack the spirit of defiance so visible in the plays of Mda. One may be tempted to say that women like Lena, Hester or Gladys deserve to be marginalised because they refuse to fight back. The desired outcome may not present itself, but at least their voices would have been heard instead of an endless litany of handwringing lamentations.

Contrary to popular assumption, the theatre of Fugard and Mda does not reside under the category protest theatre. Mda has this to say about protest or propagandist theatre:

“ It has the limitation of naivete in assessing problems of social development and advocates short term solutions...this kind of theatre is unable to awaken consciousness concerning wider problems ”.

(Mda 1993:19)

In contrast, agitprop theatre or resistance theatre addresses itself directly to the oppressed, and serves as a “vehicle for sharing insights and perceptions amongst the oppressed themselves with the aim of altering those perceptions ” (Davis 1996:201). Fugard’s plays Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act and Siswe Bansi is Dead and Mda’s plays The Hill and Dark Voices Ring are classic examples of resistance theatre, and conform closely to the insights offered by Davis above.

However, Malcolm Purkey asks whither South African theatre after democracy? He questions whether oppositional theatre can maintain its vibrancy and strength even as its traditional subject - apartheid - finally crumbles. Is resistance theatre in South Africa dead for all times, and if so, what is to be put in its place in a post apartheid society? He answers all of the above by quoting Gramsci, that “ the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms ” (Davis 1996 : 162). The complexity of the South African context obfuscates the term “oppression”. Oppression of gender and race remain, even in the new democracy, which has as yet very precarious boundaries. This is evident from the increased abuse and rape of women and children, now more so than ever before. People are still being denied basic human rights. Racism continues in various forms in South Africa and across its borders. Women continue to be used in power struggles, thus constantly placing gender on the frontline; hence Gramsci’s viewpoint remains current, the old is indeed not dead, it has merely acquired new and different labels. The scope for contemporary South African dramatists remains as varied as it ever

was in the apartheid era, old issues have simply acquired new perspectives. Gcina Mhlope's play Have you seen Zandile? supports this belief, that, despite the fact that apartheid has been dismantled, the "illusions of identity and the inherited structures of power remain, including those which persist in placing women, especially black women, as a nameless, dependent underclass" (Walder 1998:185).

I conclude this section with a quotation by Martin Orkin, who expresses a similar view that, in what must be a hopeful but dangerously unpredictable period, many of the plays discussed in this dissertation:

still bear witness, as they always will, to that which has for so long blighted this country. But, as important, in their very determination to address directly, or fictively interact with the social order, from which they come, they provide a glimpse of and prepare for a democratic South Africa - one freer and more able to tolerate both difference and dialogue than the worlds in which they have until now often had to struggle to claim some space. In the strength and courage of their moves towards contestation, dissent and dialogue, lies part of their value, not only as anti-apartheid statements, but as drama.

(Orkin 1991 : 252)

Mda and Fugard speak as loudly to today's post apartheid audiences as they did in the apartheid days, especially when it comes to the portrayals of gender roles. This is because they both have as central concerns the experiences and activities located in their respective histories in South Africa.

1.2 A DISCUSSION OF ATHOL FUGARD AND ZAKES MDA AS PLAYWRIGHTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In Drama and the South African State, Orkin makes the point that women of the oppressed classes experience exploitation, oppression and struggle in the same way as men, but in the majority of plays portraying this subordinate class oppression, struggle and resistance is presented through the male characters (Orkin 1991:230). This could to some degree explain Fugard's distrust of the female voice. For patriarchy to acknowledge a woman within a political context would be to empower her, and such empowerment by implication, constitutes a threat to the existing phallogentric order. This view is supported by the opinion expressed by Anne McClintock, that:

“excluded as national citizens, women are subsumed only symbolically into the body politics ... the idea of nationhood bears a masculine identity though national ideals may wear a feminine face ... figures as mothers of the nation are everywhere emblazoned but the presence of women in the nation is officially marginalised and generally ignored”.

(quoted in Gunner 1994:112)

Mda confirms this viewpoint when he says that “... a dominant trend in the types of theatre that exist in South Africa has been based on a unidimensional and prevaricated depiction of the South African reality”. He correctly points out that the playwrights tend to focus on the sufferings, the defiance and the determination of men to change their situation, but “they forgot to tell the story of those who did not follow them to jail - the women and children who stayed at home and struggled to make the barren soil yield” (quoted in Davis 1996:196). Peterson concurs and comments that “theatre, in its content, has taken very little on board that has explored the specific concerns of the lower classes, workers and women ... African women are reduced to the periphery in both numbers and status”(quoted in Gunner 1994:52). It seems that women may feature as

icons, but are rarely granted an active and self-defining presence. It is only recently, since the 1980s, that this imbalance appears to have been given any form of recognition in drama. The crucial consideration of plays about women and women's issues is not only to examine the predicament of women, or to educate women on how to challenge both attitudes dominant in the colonial -settler and indigenous patriarchy evident in South African society, but must serve to re-orientate the collective patriarchal mindset. However, more often than not, no real interrogation is attempted. Orkin comments that:

whilst playwrights are able to construct a smooth and continuous narration of a personal history albeit one full of suffering by the woman, and enlisting the audience's sympathy, no interrogation that might prompt analysis of the relation of power underlying this suffering and no hint of liberation from it occurs.

(1991:232)

The audience, presumably satisfied by the cathartic release of their compassion experienced during the play, is able to leave the descriptions of suffering they had witnessed on the stage behind them after the performance. So much then for social conscientisation. It follows from this that South African theatre, reflective of South African society, is and always has been patently a male domain, in which male perspectives and male ethics are primary. Plays in which women featured as central protagonists were mostly written, directed and performed by women themselves. In this respect, one can mention plays such as Fatima Dike's So What's New, Lueen Conning's A Coloured Place, Reza de Wet's Miracle and Three Sisters Two and Muthal Naidoo's Flight from the Mahabharath.

This dissertation will question the propensity by particularly Fugard to juxtapose his women characters against disproportionately weaker male characters, against whom, despite conclusive evidence to the contrary, they are inevitably dismissed as the lesser by the playwright. Mda's

female characters, however, despite their comparative lack of sophistication, and their proclivity towards naivety, are articulate, some vociferously so, and are able to interact on a more equitable level with the other characters than is the case with those of Fugard. Mda's acknowledgement of the marginalised woman in South African theatre possibly explains why the women in his plays enjoy far more acknowledgement than those of most other male playwrights, though this is open to debate.

Fugard's female characters are noticeably inarticulate, their communication often consisting of disjointed and fragmented realpolitik. This is evident upon re-interrogating the text from a different perspective, that of Fugard's distrust of the female voice, as his female characters, subjugated by a triple burden of race, class and gender oppression, seem always to hover on the periphery, engaged in a perpetual quest for emotional and physical survival and existential meaning, within particular political parameters. Mda, by virtue of his historically marginalised position in South Africa, can possibly, more so than Fugard, be regarded as a victim of oppression. Despite this, he is able to create female characters who defy their circumstances and who are able to function from a substantial position of power.

In contrast to this, Fugard's women characters are presented as inevitable victims, because they are constantly being undermined, rather than uplifted, by a relationship of power, in which one sex is privileged over another. Unlike the male characters, Fugard's female characters are never structurally strong individuals, and are not afforded a convincing position of power. Although Mda has created simplistic and naive characters, his characters are women of substance who are able to speak for other women. They may not be as complex as Fugard's characters, but are in a sense more convincing and representative of women in general, as they are able to articulate perspectives which are often personal and powerful. This intimate knowledge about women is

utterly lacking in Fugard's representation of his female characters, as the male characters almost always provide the cues for their thoughts. Fugard's female characters are hence defined in terms of their male counterparts, and are ultimately represented as unidimensional. Mda's female characters are often able to interact on more than one level, and do not always react mimetically to the dictates of the male characters. In the next chapters, the female characters of these playwrights will be considered against their creators' historical backgrounds, in a comparative analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

“ Women will starve in silence until new stories are created which confer on them the power of naming themselves ” (Heilbrun 1989:33).

SITUATING ATHOL FUGARD

This chapter sets out to introduce Fugard historically and to raise general issues about the way Fugard’s women characters are portrayed in his plays. These issues will find specific explanation in Chapter Four, where selected plays will be discussed in order to illustrate my argument. I will critically consider and compare Fugard’s stereotypical treatment of the structurally weak woman in six selected plays, these being The Bloodknot (1961), Hello and Goodbye (1965), Boesman and Lena (1969), A Lesson from Aloes (1978), A Place with the Pigs (1988) and Sorrows and Rejoicings (2002). An exegetic overview of these plays will show Fugard’s proclivity towards themes concerning dissonant male/female relationships, which will clearly reveal Fugard’s distrust of the female voice.

The reasons as to why Fugard consciously or subconsciously consistently denies his female characters any meaningful vestige of authority will be central to my discussion. This dissertation examines the status of women in terms of Fugard’s given historical context and his suspicion of the female voice, contrary to the many critics who read his female characters as strong and dominant. Cogent examples from the selected plays will be discussed individually to substantiate the central thesis.

In order successfully to determine the ramifications of the restrictions of both politics and poverty which inform the selected plays by Fugard, and hence also the representation of his female

characters, it is necessary to situate the playwright within his particular historical and biographical milieu, so as to understand the artist, the man and his work. This information is pertinent to the plays under discussion, because it is within these contextual restrictions that Fugard nevertheless struggles to convince the audience or reader that he has presented his female characters as having agency. Contextualising Fugard does not aim to reduce his work, but is mandatory in order to understand how his art has imitated his life: “Art is no substitute for life. It operates on top of life - rendering experience meaningful and enhancing experience” (Fugard 1983: 59). His plays reflect his sense of moral responsibility for the oppressed, and his love for this country, despite it being a country “ which fascinates as it repulses, a carcinogenic sow that poisons its young even as it suckles them ” (Vandenbroucke 1985: xiv). Much of Fugard’s liberal *angst* must stem from the fact that he, as a white dissenting writer, was inescapably bound to the white minority government, the very system he condemned. In an interview with Wayne Grigsby, Fugard related that he had “an image of myself in the witness box, and I have the opportunity to tell the truth. There is a conspiracy of silence, of blindness, in my country ... and like the three monkeys ... someone has got to take their hands away ” (quoted in Grigsby 1980: 45).

Fugard was born into a lower middle class social background in 1932, in the small town of Middelburg, a semi-desert farming area in the Northern Cape. His mother was Afrikaans and because of her dominant personality, Fugard identified with the Afrikaner culture closely. His father was an English South African who was crippled in an accident and his mother became the breadwinner of the family. They later moved to Port Elizabeth where his mother ran a boarding house. In 1950 Fugard enrolled at the University of Cape Town but did not complete his studies, preferring to do a round-the-world voyage. He returned to South Africa in 1954 and married actress Sheila Meiring, to whom he attributes his subsequent lifelong involvement in theatre. He wrote his first play in 1958 and has continued writing for the past four decades. The question has

been asked of Fugard, whether there still is a need for his stories, since South Africa has become a democratic country. Fugard has responded to this question as follows ... “ if you think there are no stories to tell in the new South Africa, you’re making a bloody big mistake. You open the door and you step outside, and you fall over stories” (van der Walt 2002 :106). Fugard currently lives and writes in southern California, returning to South Africa every six months for a visit. He concludes that despite his 70 years, his passion for the theatre has increased, and he is “ more in love with my craft now than I have ever been in the past ” (van der Walt 2002:111). Fugard undoubtedly remains South Africa’s most well known playwright. He is aware that drama and theatre is a complex phenomenon of social and cultural change, and has therefore moved away from a tendency to write for black audiences as was the case in the early 1960s and 1970s, and has shifted to address the white audiences. Walder, in his critique on Fugard’s most recent play, feels that “ Fugard has turned inward, towards an exploration of memory as a personal allegory for the process of self-questioning which South Africa at large has been experiencing ... he has been redefining himself now that his familiar role as witness to the oppression of apartheid has apparently been overtaken ” (Walder 2002 :1).

Athol Fugard is both a dramatist and an artist who unarguably has a profound insight into the human condition and human desperation, which enables him tenaciously to challenge moral nihilism and advocate the cause of the dispossessed, whilst at the same time evincing an acute understanding and love for his afflicted country. Fugard describes himself “ as a regional writer with the themes, textures, acts of celebration, of defiance and outrage that goes with the South African experience ” (Fugard 1983: 8). Encapsulated within this local experience are also many universal issues, which Fugard acknowledges. “ I think there are writers - maybe all writers - who work in the specifics of one time and place. And if they are any good as writers, then finally a few universals will emerge in the course of their writing about the specifics ” (Vandenbroucke

1985:198). Vandenbroucke goes on to confirm this viewpoint, saying that “in everything he has written, Athol Fugard’s ultimate concern is the universal plight rather than the particular South African one” (ibid.). Universal issues are indeed evident in his plays, because universally the stories that men tell of women are basic to what is termed ‘male bonding’, and have not changed much, primarily because the *attitudes* they express have not changed.

Fugard as playwright has always dealt with his immediate historical environment. Pre 1994, he has as his central concern, the quality of life of the individual living in a society where the decisions of the minority are based on class and colour, thus creating the most abject lives for the marginalised minority, both male and female. The political situation of the early 1960s did not empower, but effectively emasculated the socially and economically ostracised males, and their resultant frustration at the hopelessness of their lives deeply affected the women of that time, as they bore the brunt of the diminished male psyche within this bleak and rigidly politicised society, defined in terms of class and colour barriers. The prescriptive apartheid government of the time thus usurped all decision making, and divided the populace along racially defined lines. The marginalisation of selected race groups through totalitarian and separatist laws such as the pass laws, the Group Areas Act, the Immorality Act, and the ‘Big Brother’ disposition of the Internal Security Branch was the beginning of the symbolic castration of the black males trapped within that particular era. The only rights they could now claim, and the only authority they could wield, was that perceived in terms of patriarchal control over those weaker than themselves, their women and families.

When the Nationalist Government came into power in 1948, privileges for many already marginalised groups began to be curtailed, and many South Africans, both black and white, began to question the insidious ‘us and them’ divisions that began to manifest in various spheres of their

daily social lives. During the 1950s and 1960s the Afrikaners consolidated their grip on power. In 1961 the Union of South Africa became a Republic, and with this severance of colonial ties numerous political changes, accompanied by skewed perceptions, began to take root, especially affecting the black races of this country. Laws were passed to enforce racial segregation. Peaceful rallies were met with police violence, culminating in the Sharpeville shootings in 1960. The ANC was banned, Nelson Mandela arrested and imprisoned and blacks were forcibly removed to tribal homelands, further entrenching the apartheid ideology, as the then Afrikaner hegemony believed that white and black coexistence was mutually exclusive. It is against this backdrop that township theatre in the 1960s tended to focus on township life depicting issues such as alcoholism, love, adultery and crime in general. It also gave rise to black audiences capable of supporting professional entertainment.

In the late 1950s Fugard and his wife Sheila established a small theatre group called the Circle Players. In 1963 he was approached by Norman Ntshinga to write a play for them, and this request subsequently led to Fugard's lifelong involvement with the oppressed classes, his plays embodying a critique on the prevailing political conditions of that time, working from a marginalised position in support of dissident sentiments and anti-apartheid dictates. The state's interference in theatre became more marked as evidenced in the banning of mixed audiences, mixed performances and performances generally regarded as being subversive. It was in this climate of the early 1960s that Fugard wrote and produced The Bloodknot, Hello and Goodbye and Boesman and Lena. These plays contain many stereotypes of the 'good' women: characters who are intellectually plain, suitably cowed, obedient, submissive and passive, and ascribed with a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, to the obvious detriment of their emotional and mental survival. They do have a capacity for idealism and the need to develop their identities, but these remain humiliatingly irrelevant as they are not afforded the opportunity to rise above the bleakness of the men to whom they have

been shackled. In the end they assume an attitude of weakness worthy of a woman and effectively destroy themselves morally and emotionally. Their roles have been defined from the outset; they remain outlines of characters with no real development, or at best, an unconvincing one. The morally weak male characters reflect the broad stereotypes of the time, notoriously patriarchal but essentially emasculated by the prevailing political hegemony. They are to some extent able to conceal their weakness behind the facade of their 'masculinity' and predictably become bitter and twisted when they are forced to confront the possibility of the superiority of the female. Hence it suits the male dramatist to portray the women as the ultimate symbol of marginality in a fragmented society.

Catherine Boyle supports this viewpoint and questions the validity of the male dramatist's portrayal of the woman on stage during the early 1950s and 60s:

... for although they reveal superficial changes in attitude, the question still remains as to the real depth of the portrayal of female characters. The overall impression remains of the woman trapped within the unfortunate confines of her weak body and psyche ... brought about by the dramatists inability to *see* female characters and create them authentically on stage.

(quoted in Redmond:1989:145)

Common to most of these plays, is that the female character is ultimately the victim of patriarchy. This explains the lack of concern by the dramatist to find ways to enable them to escape from their limiting conditions. Boyle also arrives at this conclusion when she states that "the plays are projections of the male dramatist's image of women and his (well) intentioned interpretation of the best way to deal with the female condition, an interpretation which inevitably upholds the patriarchy" (quoted in Redmond :1989:151).

That women in apartheid South Africa have suffered a triple oppression of class, race and gender has become a rhetorical commonplace. A catalyst for this historical position of women was the absence of women's voices in many key spheres such as governance, education, industry and other generators of social structures and authority. This silence was perceived as synonymous to passivity and historical insignificance, hence acerbating the invisibility of women, both in the domestic and the cultural *mise-en-scene*. The colonial ideology of gender and race also defined the permissible boundaries of the woman. It was the development of the industrial capitalism abroad, and later in South Africa, which served as a challenge to women's subordinate status and affected the attitudes of women to the omnipresent patriarchal monopoly. Women in both the developing and developed societies in the 20th century began to challenge their intellectual, emotional and physical marginalisation, believing that their inferiority was not divinely ordained, and furthermore, that gender was a patriarchal construct that was neither insusceptible of change nor natural. Women have thus become involved in a global process to raise collective awareness and deconstruct the myth of phallogentric rule by finally insisting in occupying the subject position.

Literature often offers the best possibility of exposing the politics of gender, because it reflects the socio-cultural reality. One of Fugard's preoccupations apparent in his theatre is the representation of the female subject in his plays, which reflect a patriarchal tendency closely linked to prevalent Western cultural behaviour and attitudes, past and present, which often aims to diminish and demonise women, especially assertive and dominant women. Thus from a psychoanalytical perspective, the eagerness to typify women negatively, stems from a particular and ongoing social pathology within the heterosexual social domain, that of misogyny. According to Lane, casting women characters as subservient and mediocre, when in truth their thoughts and actions refute this, is possibly a misogynist-driven stratagem with its roots in the primeval male

fear of female dominance, female cunning, female sexuality, and a fear of castration (Lane 1998 : 68).

Whilst the universals of patriarchy are evident in Fugard's plays, these plays, however universal, are intensely personal and written for a politically-conscious South African audience, which is fully conversant with the South African context of Fugard's theatre. He illustrates the popularly understood predicament of the colonial condition with profound insight. Theatre, being an immediate art form, is the more able vehicle for political statements, and Fugard is able to maximise this. "The theatre uses flesh and blood, sweat, the human voice, real pain, real time" (1983:89). This statement by Fugard, however, consistently and purposefully writes women into his plays as symbols of marginality. This is in keeping with his refusal to afford them escape from their narrow and limited worlds he has placed them in. Fugard only allows women to experience one reality, that of real pain. Ultimately silencing his women characters, Fugard effectively disempowers them and they therefore become a lesser threat or a total nonentity.

In many instances, Fugard's creative and more admirable female characters are coalesced with essentially flawed and weak males, and undermined in a dysfunctional relationship by these males. Although there are exceptions - Hester in Hello and Goodbye (1974) and Miss Helen in Road to Mecca (1985) - most of Fugard's female characters are reactive, unidimensional characters. Their strength to resist and to rise above their emblematic status as objectified and enthralled dependents is born out of fear of the archetypal patriarchal male of the South African 1960s era, in particular the Afrikaner male. They fear, because they presume an understanding of the male in their given circumstances and their immediate environment. However, their tolerance of emotional mutilation and their perceived inability to escape emphasise their hunger to be loved by their tormentors.

Fugard's characters include a spectrum of different women, who are mostly middle-aged, emotionally starved and sexually repressed women deprived of the natural function of motherhood. Their thwarted maternal instincts create an unnatural dependency in the immature male characters, who mentally and emotionally abuse them in order to maintain control over them. It is their continual search for fulfilment in terms of recognition which dominates the lives of Fugard's female characters. They invariably inhabit a nebulous and undefined social reality and position, constantly negotiating between their needs and the expectations of the male characters. In support of this view, Catherine Wiley states that a woman cannot be conceived by the male playwright nor the audience, until "he translated her into what he desired her to be. He could not see her until he had devised an own image of her and placed it onto that most literal fields of representation, the stage"(quoted in Redmond:1989:109). In A Place with the Pigs, for example, Pavel's needs dominate those of Praskovya, and her inner rebellion finally capitulates to his wants and desires at the expense of her own fulfilment. Protest needs militants, hence Fugard purposefully limits the moral awareness and consciousness of his female characters, as this prevents them from becoming lionised activists and attaining the freedom and fulfilment they ultimately desire. Militant women are incongruent with the rule of the patriarch. However, despite the restraints placed on them by patriarchal constrictions, they are able more fully to understand their predicament than their male counterparts and are able to accept the implications of their concatenated lives with their weak men, who are mostly portrayed as males who disintegrate under the strain of social pressures and their own unbalanced psyches. Their unstable identities give rise to their predilection for violence, violent outbursts and mood swings, which testify to their own alienation.

This dissertation will also aim to expose the position of Fugard's male characters, who, whilst firmly wed to patriarchal ideology and hegemonic rule both rooted in the political developments

of the 1960s, occupy an ambivalent and liminal position themselves. This they do by virtue of their ostracised status in apartheid society, thus conversely and unwittingly, diminishing the centrality and eminence of patriarchal hegemony. The preponderant male protagonists in Fugard's plays exhibit self-absorption, self-righteousness and an arrogance which sharpen to cruelty under duress. At worst, they renege on their humanity in pursuit of their own aspirations, thus perpetuating and ensuring their status as outcasts. This dissertation will posit the male illusion of power as stemming from a position of weakness. Fugard's male characters in the selected plays are to some extent victims imprisoned in their historical and powerless position in the broader society, but they are also victims of themselves. They are mostly portrayed as flawed, uneducated men who are morally and intellectually inferior to the female characters. Of note here is Pavel, a desperate and haunted individual; Boesman, a cruel cynic; Johnnie, a cowering and confused individual; Morrie and Zachariah, both out of touch with the real world; Piet, a vacillating individual haunted by his political past, and Dawid, exiled in his own impotence and failures. None of these characters is able to rise above their circumstances, and they are all similarly locked into flawed relationships with their women. Their only achievements are expressed through their perceived control over women.

Fugard's Notebooks provide an interesting insight into how his own life experiences can be reasonably assumed to have informed this outlook. In his Notebooks Fugard describes in detail the women and also the men with whom he came into contact. He accurately observes the pedestrian in life, and is able aptly to describe the viciousness of old age and the ravages of poverty - the "fucking *ou hoer* ... the mongrel bitch ... carrying her baby, wearing a pair of men's shoes" (Fugard 1983 : 42) If tragedy is essentially based on truth, then one must assume that these are Fugard's truths too, as he admits in his Notebooks, "yes, I know the backstreets, I know the sound of the fight with a drunk husband, screaming children, no money - and yourself. ... that

most terrible of all adversaries - yourself, and why? ... for having been born ” (Fugard 1983:59).

The central characters in many, if not all, of Fugard’s plays are almost always desperate, socially and economically disempowered individuals. These are the people who most closely lived with the ravages of the apartheid system, and whom Fugard most empathetically aligns himself with, having also suffered the indignity of censorship, persecution, poverty and marginalisation. Fugard’s parents were not affluent and he attended school on a council scholarship. He later joined the ranks of the many out-of-work actors and knew some hard and desperate times, having to resort to house-cleaning to survive. The passing of the Group Areas Act in 1960 led to a state of emergency for five months. The political turmoil led to many activists being arrested and exiled, amongst these being Fugard’s friends and co-actors. His association with those stripped of their identity and denied their human dignity, by a government refusing to acknowledge cultural differences and basic human rights was the impetus for his dramatised experiences of those affected and destroyed by the exclusivity and parochialism of a self-righteous nationalism inherent in an apartheid hegemony.

The selected plays for this thesis were written over a period of approximately forty years, and were essentially shaped by the social and political factors of the apartheid policies in South Africa at the time of writing. These plays have been purposefully selected as they are able to show that Fugard’s distrust of the female voice is possibly a direct result of a historicity steeped in protest against apartheid, a process of legalised racism. Fugard’s characterisations are influenced to a large degree by the prevailing conditions of the apartheid era, and hence convey his world view as a political dramatist, and as a man adversely affected by his government’s policies.

A systematic reading of these plays reveals Fugard’s female characters portrayed as objects,

inferiors and subordinates. Woman as abject and object constitutes the pivotal sub-theme. These plays all portray a solitary and often central female character, delineated in a suburban or rural wasteland, struggling, more so than her male counterpart, to come to terms with the fundamental problem of being-in-the-world. '*Weltangst* and *weltschmerz*' are the catalysts to their actions within the constraints of their socio-political *lebenswelt*. The repetition of similar themes in different contexts and variations is characteristic of Fugard's plays which has as central theme, a morally confused humanity. This bewilderment is subliminally contained in the *motifs* which are repeated in many of Fugard's plays, these being alienation, indifference, futility and uncertainty. These abstractions create a disconcerting awareness in the audience/reader of moral relativism inherent to these plays. The way in which women are perceived and treated, and the way they perceive themselves, is directly related to the existing patriarchal power structures within Fugard's constructed milieu of a colonial society. Fugard's preoccupation with a discourse which clearly supports negative feminine representations and a negative female body is questioned. The women constructed by Fugard are portrayed as potentially disruptive forces, and hence enable Fugard a way of writing his own particular cultural moment.

This dissertation will also demonstrate the ideological complicity between power and Fugard's representation of what constitutes agape or affective love. The lack of fundamental human emotions such as affection in his plays, and the lack of any progeny evident in Fugard's female characters; the unrelenting lack of any expression of human affection and humaneness at times towards each other enables Fugard to create male characters of monotonous uniformity. The stereotypical representation of the ruthless male often results in explicit and implicit violence in the plays, which either serves further to traumatise the female character into silence (thus constantly and effectively positioning her in the outer limits of the play) or leads to uncharacteristic explicit retribution by the female character. The question to be explored within

the parameters of this dissertation is why Fugard denies his female characters the right to love and to receive love. The politics of power and the inability to express affection are ideologically determined, and function in Fugard's plays through a process of exclusion, repression, fragmentation and marginalisation. Portraying his characters as affectively dysfunctional is deliberate. Fugard's understanding for the necessity of love and the consequences of the lack thereof, is obvious in his statement that "South Africa's tragedy is the small meagre portions of love in the hearts of the men who walk this beautiful land" (Fugard 1983:83). It is possibly this poverty of love which may explain why all his plays are about essentially tragic people. Lena in Boesman and Lena yearns for recognition and love, yet realises that her attempts to leave in search of a better life are futile. She does not have the inner strength to escape, and is only able to articulate the negative, a violent ending of her life, when in reality, she desires the diametrical opposite. Locked in this conflict of love and hate, Lena reflects both the tension of a desire for love and withdrawal. The women in these plays simultaneously feed off and are destroyed by their need to love and to be loved. Predictably, for Lena, Hester and Praskovya there is no future, as all three these plays conclude with the female characters walking off into the darkness. Before they leave, they try to reaffirm their self worth one last time. Lena says to Boesman "I'm alive, Boesman. There's daylights left in me" (Fugard 1973 : 221). Fugard admits that Hester's assault on Johnnie "is an index of her hunger for love ... you can't hate anything more than you can love it" (Fugard 1983:128). In his play Boesman and Lena, Fugard leaves Lena with the most driving need to have her voiceless self heard beyond the misery of her life. Her mute acceptance of Boesman's viciousness can be read as an inarticulate hunger to be loved. This is in glaring contrast to Fugard's statement that "people must be loved. That is the really crucifying experience in the short time we have as human beings - that intimacy which breaks through our defensive isolation and shows the capacity - if need be no more than that- just an awareness of the potential - of someone else's suffering" (Fugard 1983:40). There is evidence of emotional,

suppressed and implicit violence in the female characters created by Fugard, as they are unable to express love and often assuage this need through verbal and physical violence.

Theatre is traditionally built around conflict, and violence has always been a commonplace in drama, implicit or explicit. Of all the various forms of power, violence remains the most problematic as it is the very bastion of patriarchal power. There are various presentations of violence in Fugard's plays which manifest in various ways and are often misinterpreted in the context of the play. For example, Lena's willingness to be assaulted does not constitute subordination, as men will assume, but in truth demonstrates a fierce and active loyalty to herself. Fugard acknowledges women's capacity for violence, but splendidly chooses to trivialise this by making Lena's responses to Boesman's cruelties comical, so avoiding any real subversion of the traditional glorification of male violence. Lena and Hester's threats of violence towards the men are not realised nor executed, lowering what little status they have as the threats themselves are empty, hence derisory. The patriarchal proverb 'a woman without a tongue is like a soldier without a weapon' holds true for Fugard's female characters. Lena's unwillingness to subject herself to Boesman's cruelties without opposition is her final recourse against attempts to reduce her to the status of a dislocated and ungended object. Aggression and cruelty is most often a response to a threatening situation. Fear of losing control or dominance also promotes an attack on the weaker opponent, and if one is not permitted to express anger, one is by extension, refused power and control. Violence also functions to reduce the victim to the status of object by removing any distinctions, rendering the victim nameless and without identity. Hester as exemplar is given no authoritative voice other than her threats of violence, which are ultimately not directed at Johnnie, but at her own entrapment in her inadequate life. She finds her brother a passive object onto which she can transfer her hurt and anger and thus in some small way is given some cathartic release from her alienated and exiled existence. Fugard's violence against

women by his male characters can hence be regarded as part of a wider repertoire of control tactics by males.

Fugard's use of language often functions to further the plot in favour of the male character. His use of language as a tool of aggression is also used to further our understanding of the characters' violence. The use of violence in language reveals a lack of civilised values on the part of the characters, the 'primitive' patina of the Other. The manipulative power of language as verbal domination and subjugation, and language as a tool of deprivation and imprisonment should be considered in this context, as language is used as a catalyst for violence in Fugard's plays. As Cameron perceives, "women's talk is not inherently or naturally subversive; it becomes so when women begin to privilege it over their interactions with men" (quoted in Heilbrun 1997 : 45). Men trivialise the talk of women not because they are afraid of such talk, but in order to make women themselves downgrade it. Women's talk will indeed remain harmless as long as they trivialise themselves. This is clearly evident when Boesman obscenely refers to Lena's words as "that long drol of nonsense that comes out when you open your mouth" and Lena responds with a triviality, (Fugard 1974:169). Although Fugard's constructs do relate to material realities, it does not imply that he gives them voice and agency. Aggression would signify the possibility for dominance, and is avoided. The problem, according to Heilbrun is that "women's access to discourse involves submission to phallogentricity, to the masculine and to the symbolic: refusal, on the other hand risks reinscribing the feminine as yet more marginal madness or nonsense" (Heilbrun 1997 : 41). Language is hence viewed as a male construct whose operation depends on both women's silence and absence. Abusive language is used by both males and females in Fugard's plays. Many of the phrases are in Afrikaans, the language of the oppressor, emphasising the South African male pattern of dominance stemming from the Afrikaner culture. When Morrie addresses his brother as "Hey, Swartgat", Zach "whips around and stares at Morrie in

disbelief” (Fugard 1974:78). Lena’s repartee is often highly colloquial and energetic, punctuated by oaths, threats, taunts, exclamations and coloured by suggestive imagery. She refers to Boesman as “jou lae donner, jou vark” (180). “you old bastard (219). Her language contains a subversive potential for violence as she is not being festive, on the contrary, her language portrays her sharp sense of division and social disarray. There is latent anger in her debasement of herself as a “Hotnot meid ” (217) and she describes her body in terms of the male gaze of feminine negativity: “Haai jissis, ! Look at it. Pap ou borste, ribbetjies.”(217). The chief purpose is to shock, and translating these phrases would destroy the impact of the brutality, vulgarity, coarseness, denigration and underlying anger being expressed. Gray’s comments support this viewpoint. He suggests that the language in Boesman and Lena is “intensely regional, slangy, abrupt and even obscenely ‘hotnot’ at times, designed to have visceral rather than intellectual impact ... it is the vocabulary of outcasts making themselves heard from beyond the pale ” (Gray 1979:66). However, obscenity as a symbol of protest has lost its impact with the blase audience of today, and Lena’s anguish interpolates with a reaction of mild amusement by the audience.

Fugard maintains that to write about a man’s reality is no greater challenge than to write about a woman’s reality. An in depth consideration of the selected plays in a later chapter will reveal the quality of Fugard’s understanding of what constitutes ‘a woman’s reality’, here considered in the light of male distrust of the female voice. Fugard prohibits most of his female characters from expressing their anger and aggression or even recognises it within themselves. He also denies them the right to openly admit to their desire for control over their lives. Hence by implication, Fugard denies his female characters power and control, effectively silencing them. Power in this sense must be understood as the right to have one’s part matter. The prime devotion of Fugard’s women is to male destiny, their own desires are always secondary. Although Fugard categorises the women in his plays as follows: “In all my plays, whenever there is a woman and

a man, the affirmative, positive statement is invested in the woman” (Davis 1994:40); significantly central to Fugard’s plays are men and their needs. His plays focus on the needs of Morrie, of Pavel, of Boesman, of Johnnie, who find women useful as a mirror in which they can reflect their own importance. Using Fugard’s My Children! My Africa! as a point of departure here, one of the characters, Thami, argues that women are not the equals of men physically and psychologically, and therefore their role in society and in the family is totally different to that of the man (Fugard 1997:136). It is interesting to note that Fugard is critically aware that “a woman has been the vehicle for what I have tried to say about survival and defiance”(Fugard 1983:106) and admits that in South Africa women will have an infinitely more creative role. Fugard, however, consistently ignores the way women’s roles have changed. He offers them only narrow and stereotypical escapes from the drudgery of having been born a woman in the service of his male characters. He does not allow them to escape because when women become the protagonists on stage, the males are weakened or proven to be inadequate. It thus behoves Fugard to portray his women characters as the ultimate symbol of marginality. Geoffrey Davis, in his book South African Writing - Voyages and Explorations (1994:40-50) deals with women journeying at the South African margins, as seen in Fugard’s The Road to Mecca. Marcia Blumberg, the author of one of the chapters in Davis’ book, contrasts her approach with Fugard’s insistence on having created “powerful female characters”, by analysing the female characters in this play. She concludes that it is the presence of the two absent women that pervades the stage that “stresses a differential of marginalisation” (Blumberg in Davis 1994:44). This is also evident in The Bloodknot, which was selected for this very reason. The implications of absence will be investigated more closely, as this could augment the issue of distrust, the key consideration of this dissertation.

In discussing the rights of the oppressed, Gayatri Spivak states that : “For me, the question ‘Who

should speak?’ is less crucial than ‘Who will listen?’ ” (quoted in Lenta 1998:101). In Boesman and Lena Fugard creates a female character who speaks in her own voice, but is in fact an individual forced ultimately into silence through social conditioning and a mental grey-out. Lena suffers more than Boesman, because of the conflict raging between her emotions and her intelligence. She is torn between rebellion and resignation - rebellion implies awareness, and awareness implies intelligence, hence Fugard chooses to portray her as the resigned object. Fugard attempts to ‘read’ the behaviour of women who are not able to convey the experiences of their existence on their own. Since he uses models who are unable to speak for themselves, Fugard, from a male’s point of view, imaginatively creates a view of life and related action for them, which at best remains an imaginative creation, as it does not reflect the truth of a woman’s inner experience. Many of Fugard’s women are culturally different from the women whom he intimately knows, that is, women of the white culture, hence it must be assumed that it is more difficult to presume knowledge of their voice.

To conclude this chapter, by virtue of Fugard’s often unintentional patriarchal stance, the postulation is made that Fugard’s plays reflect a society in which the survival of the phallus is the primary concern. In support of the importance given to the survival of male dominance, the focus is placed on the ideological construction of female individuals in male dominated heterosexual combinations. The women in the selected plays are contained in a variety of situations, and are ultimately rendered voiceless as patriarchy succeeds in naturalising sexual identity, thereby continually producing women in a subordinate position. The postulate is made that, whilst this phenomenon is seemingly universal, patriarchy per se is always historically determined. By virtue of his myopic, albeit sympathetic stance, Fugard reduces his female characters to an emblematic status, portraying them as objectified dependents. This also reveals much about the position of Fugard in his own society and what his writings suggest about

marginalisation in that society. Fugard's plays are a product of his status within a patriarchal and political community, and the emphasis is on the role played by gender issues in his work.

The conclusion will show, however, that Fugard as a playwright in recent years has not limited himself to a particular time and place, but is able to move on despite his attitude of aloof cynicism forged in the history of his country. His later works do not evince this distrust of the female voice, but rather aim to describe men and women of a society trying to break with the past and forge a new free and open society based on civilised dialogue. The political edge is lost, the vicious struggle for recognition has abated, and acceptance through democratic rule has finally become an attainable reality for the previously marginalised groups, underpinned by humankind's indomitable capacity for regeneration. A new generation of women is shown with abilities to withstand territorial and chauvinistic behaviour, as is evident in his later plays, My Life (1994), Valley Song (1995) and Sorrows and Rejoicings (2002).

Fugard's own history has enabled him to understand and empathise fully with the pathology of the marginalised other. However, this dissertation will conclude that, although Fugard is able to empathise with the subjugated Other, his representation of the female characters in the selected plays does not validate his postulation that he is able to write from a woman's point of view. This point is made even more obvious by the fact that the play The Road to Mecca is the only play by Fugard which has two female characters interacting with one another. In all the selected plays by this playwright, the female characters are portrayed in singularly dysfunctional relationships, their only other interactive partners being male characters. They seldom interact with other women, which is an interesting phenomenon considering Fugard's insistence that to write about another man's reality is no greater challenge than to write about a woman's reality. The quality of Fugard's understanding of what constitutes 'a woman's reality' needs to be

revisited in the light of his obvious distrust of the female voice.

This dissertation aims to address Fugard's lack of understanding of the woman's reality through his plays, despite the insistence that he uses the woman as a vehicle to promote an understanding of "survival and defiance" (Fugard 1983: 106). It concludes that Fugard consciously exhibits a misogynist's distrust of the female voice in his dystopian theatre of dissonance and dispossession.

In an attempt to provide a point of comparative departure with Fugard, Chapter Three will carry a similar discussion of Zakes Mda within his particular historical context and the presentation of his female characters in selected plays, as there are many interesting parallels and divergencies to be drawn between the lives and the plays of Athol Fugard and Zakes Mda.

CHAPTER 3

“When Africa was Africa

Black was the only colour

And all was perfect ” (Manaka 1986 :95).

SITUATING ZAKES MDA

H.I.E. Dhlomo once said that “drama is the reconstruction, the recreation and reproduction of the great experience of a people ... and it helps them to live more abundantly”. He went on to explain how the disparate roots of Western drama and African drama were the same: the basic urges to recreate through imitation, action, rhythm and gesture the sacred and secular stories of the community, illustrative or symbolic of their lives and the forces which ruled them. Whilst recognising that African and Western drama had developed differently, he argued that “the former must borrow from, be inspired by the latter, indeed be tainted by exotic influence” (quoted in Walder 1998:181). Michael Etherton postulates that it is difficult to determine what precisely constitutes African theatre. He feels that:

the more regionally or ethnically based the theatre becomes, that is, the more essentially African, the less accessible it is to other parts of Africa. Conversely, the more exportable the theatre is within Africa, in terms of the use of English, recognizable situations, and common contemporary themes, the more it becomes like any other international theatre.

(Etherton:1979:57)

African theatre may appear to be eclectic and hybrid; however, having considered the selected plays by these two playwrights, it is clear that black men do not necessarily write differently to white men. A distinction needs to be made here, though. African theatre is extremely fluid in

that the performance may fluctuate between moods, but more important, white and black audiences do not necessarily experience performance in the same way. Where European theatre can create a distance between the audience and the performance through social decorum, black audiences may be more interested in the performative expertise of the actors: “African spectators look for and respond to, virtuosity more than sentiment, and their judgement of the represented events depends more on the ideas and arguments made, than on the emotions portrayed” (Graver 1999:4). This view is also held by Gerard, who maintains that the representation of character in African literature is flawed to the Western eye. The reason for this is that in tribal societies scant attention is paid to individual inwardness. The individual’s awareness of self

is primarily as a member of a group, and not, as in the case of Western society - as an autonomous individual whose chief legitimate preoccupations are with his own personal identity, rights and privileges. This fundamental culture trait has many literary implications. Not only are African writers notoriously clumsy in the expression of strictly personal emotions such as love but also, more generally, their interests are ethical rather than psychological, and they are seldom able to present convincing individual characters. Their societal outlook drives them to turn character into type, so that the reader’s response is one of moral edification rather than one of imaginative sympathy.

(Gerard 1971:111)

In the main, black theatre in its content has shown itself lacking in attempts to explore the specific concerns of women and the lower classes, but Mda succeeds in blending African culture and Western education into a black theatre which subscribes to social mobilisation rather than political mobilisation. His plays are based on simple plots which focus on the poverty and destitution of the underprivileged, but also on their hope and aspirations. He retains a direct experiential link with life lived in the apartheid era, succeeding in creating a social criticism and

commentary, sometimes overtly and sometimes by implication. He is able to use the political platform of theatre as a means of creating social awareness so as to encourage the development of a cohesive group independent of the values of the dominant culture, using art as the touchstone. His plays are not ethnically limited, as he has moved away from particular African reference to a more internationalized theatre. He has hence succeeded in creating a discursive space for black writers abroad through a dramatic critique of the social and economic inequalities in South African society.

Mda's characters are informed by his own personal history and culture, but are portrayed as unidimensional, flat and without much substance. Although characterisation is thin and many of his plays tend towards oversimplification of the story line and dialogue, these flaws do not intrude or affect the story he has to tell. A probable explanation for his understated characters is that Mda's theatre centres on people as a social cohesive structure, and not so much on the individual per se. Sometimes he does not even give his character a name, but emphasises the irrelevance of identity as individual by simply referring to the character as a generic and nameless entity - a Man, a Lady, an Old Man, hence the characters remain broad representatives of Everyman. Being a type, the character is never confined to a particular place and in essence typifies the universal rather than the particular. Unlike Fugard's muted female characters, Mda's female characters do have a voice and they are able to affirm their societal identities with considerable forcefulness. However, at times Mda does assign some individuality, this being evident in the character of the nun in The Nun's Romantic Story, a courageous individual whose actions speak of a will to overcome indignity. The characters sometimes fail to focus on their own experiences because they have very little or no awareness of the self as individuals. Their language forms the theme and medium of the play and so allows for insight into, and interpretation of, the characters. To place women as active agencies in society, Mda empties language of particular social and

historical contexts. He starts from a *tabula rasa* to which he sketches identities forming their own strategies outside the boundaries of tradition, culture and religion, these being important formative elements in Mda's perceptual development. Fugard remains within these boundaries so there is little space to write of women except inside the familiar. Fugard would hence tell us what we already know.

Mda's unique voice has enabled him to emerge as one of the most powerful writers of critical theatre in the past thirty years. He is exemplar of H.E.I. Dhlomo's ideal African dramatist who "cannot delve into the past unless he has grasped the present ... to do this the African dramatist must be an artist before being a propagandist, a philosopher before a reformer, a psychologist before a patriot" (quoted in Barnett 1983:228). Mda's imaginative and articulate plays focus not so much on race as the sole dynamic of oppression in the apartheid era, but rather on class and economic divisions as the root cause for political disunity. The essence of his plays embodies integrant elements of cultural expression, political education, community-building and social mobilisation, rooting his characters, themes and settings firmly in the proletariat. It is for this reason that his plays, although set in a historical context, clearly differentiate between reality and illusion, because Mda wants his audience cognitively to engage with the performance and then take agency in their own lives. Mda is very much aware that the South African independence is riddled with the imperfections of other African nations, and that civil society and the state operate within the colonial strictures of indirect rule, and he powerfully exposes this in his plays.

Although Mda emerged as one of the original exponents of resistance theatre, a theatre which was mainly male-centred and originated from the urban areas after the 1976 uprisings, his plays are possibly the antitheses of the resistance theatre, because it transcends the narrow view of protest theatre, falling rather under the genre of theatre for development, a particular theatre which

attempts to establish both critical analysis and awareness of the human condition. This process of conscientisation “involves the active participation of the people in transforming themselves by engaging in a dialogue through which they identify their problems, reflect on why the problem exists, and take action to solve the problem” (Davis 1996:208). This form of theatre is seen by many black writers as becoming the most relevant in a democratic South Africa. As a theatre for the illiterate, it can be performed in the marginalised areas and urban slums. Mda does not create a theatre for the people, but with the people, and so his writing in a sense transcends traditional forms of black writing. He prefers to portray the realities of life rather than providing escapism, a feature which underpins the formulaic composition of township plays such as Fugard’s Statements and Kente’s Sikalo.

Writing from a privileged perspective, and to some extent exhibiting the elitist’s concern for the marginalised majority, Zakes Mda is a serious and intellectual black South African dramatist who writes in English, and has produced a number of award winning works. Despite the fact that his literary consciousness has been shaped by tertiary education and teaching experiences at renowned international universities, he has remained close to his African roots.

In reading his publication When People Play People, it is evident that Mda is not motivated by race alone. He not only explores issues of importance in the process of democratizing South Africa, but he also includes a female perspective, by writing about women and their experiences. However, Bhekisiswe Peterson points that although Mda’s female characters are broadly representative of a wide range of exploited and marginalised social groups, Mda tends to falter after his initial substantial identification of the problem. He feels that Mda’s shortcoming in respect of gender conflict is common to African performance where women are cast as protagonists who are “broadly representative of a broad range of marginalised and exploited

social groups. Such typification allows for insight into the experiences of the lower classes of which women form a large proportion, but they rarely highlight the specific predicaments that face women as a gendered constituency” (Mda 1993:23). This results in the problematic issues in women’s lives being seen in terms of the broader issues, such as colonisation, and as such do not receive the desired emphasis they deserve. An analysis of his plays does support this point of view to a great extent, with And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses being a very good exemplar of this critique.

Mda’s women characters are neither wholly traditionally African, nor modern westernised, but an amalgam of both. In an interview with Venu Naidoo, Mda admits that he creates his own reality as he sees it. From this it can be said that he also creates his female characters as he sees them. He pertinently points out that:

I write about women the way I write about all my characters. I do not make any conscious effort to portray them any differently. What comes out of that exercise then is not contrived. When I write about women, it is as I have observed them, and I write about them naturally.

(Naidoo : 1997 : 260)

His female characters are seldom portrayed in a domestic setting, unlike those of Fugard. Consistent with their underclass status in a patriarchal society, the female characters are often nameless with little more than their own sense of dignity and survival, placed against the backdrop of a barren, mostly South African landscape. His women are almost always journeying, in transit to some undefined space, which possibly stems from parallels with Mda’s own life as a former exile. Women play a pivotal role in the community, and it is this centrality of the women in rural life that also is evident in Mda’s female characters. Women can be seen as both the preservers and innovators of African traditions and values. This is central to Mda’s portrayal

of his women characters, because he is acutely aware of the extent that gender and domestic struggle shaped the very conceptualisation of political reform in Lesotho. Women were at the core of challenging the models of politics and economic development strategies throughout the Lesotho history. Mda acknowledges the role women have played in shaping politics and culture, and their unyielding tenacity to secure their means of life and have their human status recognised. Fugard does not succeed in portraying this enduring tenacity to bring about change in his female characters, as they yield to their situations and remain on the periphery in his plays.

Plays dealing with issues relating to women's experiences have become a significant trend in Mda's writing. In most of his characterisation he tries to avoid stereotypes of women, he emphasises the courage of his women, their ability to look after themselves and their relative independence from their largely weak men. He provides historical and current points of reference for the culture of black independent women bent on securing their economic and personal autonomy, despite demands made on them by the males. The Nun's Romantic Story deals with a woman who is able to transcend the violence inflicted on communities who oppose the ruling party through her inner strength of character, drawing on her resources of courage and ironic humour to confront the terror that has destroyed her family. It is possible that educating women through his plays on how to contest male chauvinistic attitudes may also reorientate the males at the same time. This is evident in Love Letters where the female characters have the autonomy in negotiating a love match in a story told by women set in the past, whilst maintaining continuity in the present.

Mda's often deceptively simplistic representation of the characters in his plays arises from the fact that he writes for audiences of the local community which are often not literate or comfortable in the medium of the theatre. Like artists such as Maponya and also Manaka, Mda has

deliberately pared down his characterisation, as this was an aesthetic of Black Consciousness Theatre, particularly after Soweto 1976, when the politics in South Africa changed from protest to challenge. Fugard's theatre of protest was the then mode of dramatic expression in South Africa, which by its nature attempted to reveal the blacks to the whites. Protest theatre had an overtly political content and was largely "a theatre of complaint, weeping, of self-pity, of moralizing, of mourning and of hopelessness" It did not offer any solutions to the sad situations the in which the oppressed found themselves, according to Mda (quoted in Attridge 1998:257).

The Theatre for Resistance, a minimalist theatre requiring minimal decor and performers gained in popularity amongst activist writers during the 1970s. It addressed the oppressed people directly and urged them on to oppose, rather than acquiesce to oppression. Culture was viewed as a weapon of liberation and the idea was to communicate as simply as possible to the township masses the need to perceive their situation not as immutable but changeable. Having been an integral part of the masses these dramatists understood the black audience only too well. Theatre for resistance is hence a direct extension of the audience's daily lives with no boundaries between art and life, being grounded in the material and current conditions affecting Africa. Some communities feel that plays are only for women and children, hence in order to draw the audience, the play must be written in codes accessible to all the members of that community. Rural women are generally the central participants of an audience as they are more likely to engage actively with the subject matter and the performance itself. "It may be argued that because the village women initiate the communication process, they are therefore purposive communicators who use the outside agencies as mediators" (Mda 1993:153). Women hence serve as the catalyst to evaluate and question the subject matter.

Mda's plays, with their minimilistic stage requirements and small pared down casts, are suitable

to be performed for smaller audiences, which works especially well in the rural areas of Lesotho and also in South Africa. Smaller audiences create a more intimate atmosphere in the theatre and the pedagogical function of Mda's plays becomes more immediate, thus encouraging interactive participation and debate by the audience into the social issues being raised. This opportunity for immediate debate creates a strong communal bond between the participants. Some of the prominent feminist issues in Mda's plays allow the predominantly female audience to forge a sense of solidarity and to promote debate on cultural norms and women's rights, thus in this manner, achieving Mda's much vaunted conscientisation of the people.

Another possible reason for Mda's empathetic representation of the female character in his plays may be explained in terms of Marc Epprechts' recent research on the construction of gender in Lesotho. Besides the glaring poverty and political instability of this undeveloped and agriculturally impoverished country, migrant labour has had an extreme effect on gender imbalance, as some areas have been totally depopulated of mature males, leaving women to take on the responsibilities of home and hearth. This has resulted in women having a higher literacy rate and a high visibility level in all forms of social structures, the state, politics, development and culture, including activities ranging from parastatal enterprises to civil service concerns. Unusual to Africa, Epprecht points out that there is a large representation of women in the traditional chieftaincy of Lesotho. " Basotho women's achievements stand out in a context of legal disabilities, pervasive sexual violence and structural economic dependency upon men. In the words of a Basotho woman, 'the work belongs to men but we do all the work' " (Epprecht 2000:2). Hence the fact that the women in Lesotho are most often the breadwinners and have, by implication, usurped to some degree the primacy of the male, further emphasises the Basotho woman's resilience, strength and ingenuity and her ability to assert herself against a backdrop of gender inequity, injustice and violence. When Mda asserts that he writes about women as he

has observed them, this assertion is clearly evident in the portrayal of his female characters.

However, though both Fugard and Mda are somewhat fettered by class and ideological constraints, Mda's representations differ from Fugard's, in that Fugard who is a white male from the dominant group tries to think himself into the life of a black man, whereas Mda simply *is* that life though from a relatively privileged class position. In fact, Mda's criticism of Fugard has been that he portrays his characters as "helpless, dispirited, dumb and bereft African workers, suffering in silence and stoically enduring their tragic situation" (Mda 1983:14). In other words, Mda feels that although Fugard's plays express opposition to hegemony through a condemnation of the oppressors, his characters do not authentically depict the South African reality. Mda comments that Fugard's oppressed characters lack the spirit of defiance which was so evident in the real life of South Africans at the time. Not all blacks were as stoical and as long-suffering as some of the characters in Fugard's plays. This postulate can be appended to Fugard's portrayal of his female characters as well. Fugard does not rally his female and male characters to a cause, perhaps because subconsciously he reflects the oppressor's historically held stance towards the marginalised, he himself being a member of the dominant power, by virtue of being both white and male. Mda points out in an interview that protest theatre such as Fugard's was mostly not effective, because it was futile merely to protest to the oppressor, and secondly, plays such as Fugard's were mostly seen by already converted elite audiences. Apart from reinforcing the familiar, protest theatre served no useful function in this case.

Mda's plays have been important to South African theatre, in the sense that it is through this medium that he can communicate his experiences as a black man to white audiences in the suburbs, as well as to black audiences in the squatter camps alike. His plays are characteristically short but powerful, the contents indigenous and the subject matter a celebration of the indomitable

human spirit in the face of adversity. His theatre not only spreads the message through story telling, but *becomes* the message. It is within this milieu that his female characters are constructed, and this is why they ultimately differ from those of Fugard's. The images evoked by Mda's plays represent various phases of the struggle for liberation. They have defined the suffering of the black people and opened a door onto the great divide for white audiences.

Zanemvula Kizito Gatiyeni Mda (which in Xhosa means 'The One Who Came With The Rain,' pen name Zakes) was born in 1948 in Herschel, an impoverished area in the Eastern Cape, a desolate landscape closely reminiscent to that of Fugard's. It was also the year that the National Party came into power, a government whose absurdities were to have profound influences on the work of both Mda and Fugard. It was in this context of deprivation and the bleakness of their environment that instilled in both Fugard and Mda the urge to write about this bleakness, which not only alludes to the geographics of the landscape, but also to the political situation of the people at the time. Mda believes, as does Fugard, that he has a story to tell about the situation of the marginalised, and by writing novels and plays, he tells his story.

At fourteen Mda wrote and published his first short story. His father, a teacher turned lawyer, and his mother, a nurse, relocated the family to Johannesburg. Amongst their many friends were the current prominent political figures of today, such as the Tamboes, the Sizulus and Nelson Mandela, whose political activities served to shape much of Mda's own political consciousness during his youth, which was spent in Orlando East and Dobsonville. His father's association with the ANC Youth League and subsequent clashes with the Security Police necessitated him to seek political asylum in 1963 in the then British Basutoland Protectorate, which was to become Lesotho in 1966, and was joined a year later by his son. Mda attended the Peka High School in the Leribe district and later joined the PAC. At the age of seventeen he turned political activist

with a penchant for writing poetry and art, and seven years later he wrote We shall sing for the Fatherland in 1973, a play in which Mda makes astute observations of politicians and human nature and questions nonsensical political situations in post-colonial Africa. In 1976 he returned to Lesotho, having obtained a degree at the International Academy of Arts and Literature in Switzerland, and taught at various schools in Lesotho. In 1978 he wrote The Hill and soon after left for Ohio University in the USA where he studied for a degree in theatre. After writing The Road in 1982, he became firmly established as an international playwright. He travelled extensively as a UNICEF consultant on social awareness issues and returned to Lesotho in 1984. Mda joined the University of Lesotho as a lecturer and later professor in the Department of English, and in 1989 he received his Ph.D from the University of Cape Town, the thesis forming the contents of his book, When People Play People. In 1991, he spent some time at the University of Durham in England where he wrote The Nun's Romantic Story whilst in residence at St Chad's College. This play has as theme the events in Lesotho during the state of emergency in 1970. He left for Yale University in the United States in 1992 where he wrote his first novel, Ways of Dying. He returned to South Africa in 1994 and was appointed Visiting Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand until 1995. He is currently resident in Johannesburg and is now a full time writer, painter, theatre practitioner and filmmaker (Naidoo 1998:74-87).

Mda's early interest in play writing was influenced by Sikalo, a play written by Gibson Kente, which he thought at the time was a "truly awful play. I felt I could write something better. So that is how Kente influenced me. He was so terrible that I thought I could do something better. ... Later there was Athol Fugard, who definitely influenced the kind of plays I was writing at the time" (quoted in Naidoo 1997:248). He began to consider a serious writing career in the early 1970s, using English as a medium of expression, as he was more proficient in this language than in Xhosa. Despite his fears that writing in English might result in cultural imperialism and

consumerism, Mda may have had the international communities in mind when he said that “ the English language is an important medium and it is now generally accepted that English is the kind of language we could use for effective communication amongst different peoples all over the world ” (quoted in Naidoo 1997:259).

The language used by Mda is sometimes problematic as it can affect the credibility of the character, because Mda writes in an English style which will be appealing to African audiences and which matches the complexities of the African context. Not only do the plays contain more than one major theme, but the language is equally syncretic, as in a single performance it can range from indigenous language to English and Afrikaans or to a mixture of all of these in township slang. To the white audience, the characters may come across as pedantic or inauthentic purely because of the indigenous phrases, stilted semantics and linguistic style. Gcina Mhlope puts the language problem into perspective as follows:

Language should be something that should be respected. I know we have a problem - when some people want to swear in a play they put it in Zulu or Sotho so that only a certain section of the audience understands. Then they switch over to English when they want to speak about the serious things ... we find ourselves forced to write in English because it is the most accessible language and in showbiz you are on stage to be understood ... and I want people to understand what I am saying ... because different people understand different things.

(quoted in Gunner 1994:274)

The following extracts from Love Letters will serve to support her comments on African writers using the English medium:

LINDIWE : Hee-e-ee, Thabisile, What is this I see? You, making a ucu lokuqoma?

THABISILE : Yebo. That is exactly what I am doing.

LINDIWE : Hawu, you have indeed grown up so fast. Only yesterday you were running around in an isheshe (Mda 1998:6).

SIMPHIWE : How is the child of my mother today?

SIBONGILE : All is well with me, Simphiwe.

SIMPHIWE : Why would you doubt my well being when I am actually walking on air, I'm in the clouds, child of my mother, my head is giddy ... I am drunk with the nectar of love (Mda 1998:14).

In the play Love Letters, the discourse of the women is typified by mostly cliched, stilted and superficial conversation, as seen above.

Despite acknowledging that he was to some extent influenced by Fugard (who also chose English as his medium to write in), and that he owes some of his style to Fugard, Mda feels that he has “created a different type of theatre from Fugard, it was completely different, but still there was a lot of him too in the style I used then” (Naidoo 1997:249). Certainly in the representation of his female characters, his plays differ from those of Fugard. Like Fugard, he also bases his characters on persons he had known and interacted with, but unlike him, his plays are not underpinned by the dictatorial harshness of undiluted patriarchal norms.

As a black intellectual he is very much aware of his role as social critic, hence his plays, novels, poetry and art have a strong didactic function which affirms his commitment to the social empowerment of the disadvantaged, underprivileged and the oppressed, which he feels forms the vast majority of the so-called Third World. Mda is adamant that his work

is that of a social commentator and social commentary. I am against art for art's sake - in African aesthetics that is a strange concept because the artist was a social commentator. However, I do not want my work to end as social commentary only. I want my theatre to be a vehicle for a critical analysis of our situation. I want to rally people to action.

(quoted in Holloway 2001:307)

Mda believes that social change can only come about when oppressed people regain their dignity lost by economic and social domination. Black women in particular need a voice and a space in which they can express themselves and create an identity - Mda succeeds in providing this admirably, because his plays seek to provide this enjoyment and opportunity for participation by a new generation of audiences, by establishing a form of cultural intervention which offers a space for both retrieval and growth.

The next two chapters will engage more specifically with the selected plays of Fugard and Mda, which will be discussed in terms of the thesis statement.

CHAPTER 4

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE SELECTED PLAYS OF ATHOL FUGARD

“ Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was Sphinx. Oedipus said, “ I want to ask one question. Why didn’t I recognise my mother? ” “ You gave the wrong answer ”, said the Sphinx. “ But that was what made everything possible ”, said Oedipus. “ No”, she said, “ when I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn’t say anything about women ”. “ When you say Man, said Oedipus, you include women too. Everyone knows that ”. She said, “ That’s what you think ”

(Muriel Rukeyser in Keyssar 1996 : 121).

It needs to be pointed out at the outset that there is a paucity of critical reflection by both male and female critics on Fugard’s female characters - the male characters in the main being the focal point of scholarship and critique. This, in itself, is not surprising, as this stasis in focus points to the historically determined marginalised status of the woman in literature. However, in his plays, written within a male ideological history, Fugard has unarguably created a number of outstanding female characters. Fugard admits that his life “has been sustained by women” (quoted in Barbera 1993:6) and this influence - that of his assertive grandmother, his affirmative Afrikaner mother and his strong-willed wife - is also evident in his strategies of female characterisation, albeit through male gendered discourse. A significant commonality shared by all his plays is that Fugard has not created a single male character within the parameters of male dominated heterosexual couples, who fully embodies what is generally understood by masculinity and manhood. He has consistently juxtaposed his female characters against male characters who,

by his own admission, are men who have played at best the role of “a passive, most times impotent, male (1983:198).

Without exception, as mentioned in Chapter Two, the males depicted in these plays are all psychologically damaged individuals modelled on Fugard himself, who has in the past labelled himself as “a guilt-ridden, impotent, white liberal and a product of cultural miscegenation” (quoted in Sarenjeive 1991:399). This personal viewpoint can also be applied to any one of Fugard’s male characters, who are reflective of Fugard’s perceived position in society and what his writings suggest about marginalisation in our society. Fugard’s plays are a reflection of his own perceived position within a patriarchal community, visible through the role played by gender issues in his work. His plays examine the way men and women perceive themselves as gendered subjects and how they relate to other men and women. Fugard’s anxieties about being a white South African are connected with his identification of himself as being male. This crisis of confidence in his masculinity and his reliance on a woman as rebel/survivor is depicted in a number of his other plays, notably in Boesman and Lena, Hello and Goodbye and The Bloodknot. However, Fugard writes from a specific patriarchal position in a post colonial discourse, hence he is unable fully to relinquish his negative patriarchal stance towards women, despite his many protestations to the contrary. In order to maintain the moral high ground he subtly re-establishes his masculinist credibility through his reductive metaphor of “a large female spider and a shrivelled, almost useless male, there only for his sexual function ” (19983:198), which debases the image of the strong woman to that of a predator bent on sexual gratification and sexual exploitation. This is in keeping with the thesis statement of Fugard’s distrust of the female voice. This is a pity because his plays also admit a feminist reading and, from this perspective, Fugard’s female characters manifest a redemptive potential and a fragile ability to endure and survive which is universal. They are able to adapt to their meagre lives, as there is no escape from a world in which they in truth seek love, relationship and the discovery of value.

Much has already been written and said about Fugard's theatre, and there are many more other issues that are relevant to Fugard's plays, but for the purpose of this dissertation, both the characters created by Fugard and Mda have been discussed from intrinsically a feminist perspective. It is important that this perspective must be not be understood as being feminocentric, but rather that "the aim is to free women from oppressive constraints: the struggle for women is to be human in a world which declares them only female" (Lenz 1980:1). My primary concern here is with understanding the parts women have played and do play in the theatre of these two playwrights, and how these roles are conceived and presented by these male playwrights, as it becomes clear that although their women characters strive to correct or escape the limitations of patriarchal values, they do not succeed in subverting it, but are shown to continue with their allegiance to this system. In Fugard's case, however powerfully they are presented, his female characters continue to remain primarily subject matter portrayed most often in precarious and debilitating positions. Although the plays offer women speaking in their own voices, they are in fact individuals forced into silence through social conditioning. Fugard in particular attempts to 'read' the behaviour of women who are not able to convey the experiences of their existence on their own, and imaginatively creates a view of life and a related pattern of action within the tight ideological constrictions of male centred discourse, as will become clear in this next discussion of the portrayal of Fugard's female characters.

4.1 THE BLOODKNOT

"she was second-hand, the whole world had fingered her" (1974:29).

In the three so-called 'Port Elizabeth' plays which introduce this discussion, Fugard explores the human condition in terms of a number of issues of those who are forced to exist in a social

vacuum. The Bloodknot, amongst the earliest of Fugard's plays, is set in Korsten, a black township on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth. The setting of this play, a shack representing the most abject of human living conditions, reinforces Fugard's bleak yet often sobering portrayal of both men and women, colour-trapped in the ruling hegemony's complex morass of guilt, violence, repression and racism.

The play opens with Morrie in the domestic role of the caregiver, an efficient housewife, carrying out chores stereotypically reserved for a woman in a household. There is something almost effeminate about Morrie, slavishly fussing about in expectation on his brother's return home from work. The interaction of the two brothers and their dialogue is reminiscent of that of a comfortably married heterosexual couple, their initial conversation equally inane. Morrie, the coloured brother, being slightly more educated, defines the direction and purpose in their lives, and for his own selfish reasons continually motivates Zach into working towards realizing his dream of owning a farm and so enabling an escape from the dismal world of Korsten. Zach, however, is unable to sustain the boredom that has now become his life, as Morrie has forced him to forego his two central comforts in life, represented by alcohol and women in order to realise his fantasy of owning a farm. In an attempt to keep Zach from destroying his future plans for their escape from the stench and degradation of the township, Morrie devises a way to satisfy his brother's demands for female company, and suggests he looks for a pen-pal. Zach, being illiterate, selects an address from a newspaper catering for a white readership, and when the pen-pal turns out to be a white woman, and thus unattainable, new plans have to be formulated, as the then Immorality Act would pose a problem for a possible relationship. Morrie, being the lighter-skinned of the two half-brothers, proposes impersonating Zach for the purpose of the meeting. The brothers go to great financial expenses in preparation for the meeting, which never materialises, as Miss Ethel Lange, the pen-pal, decides to marry a local man and cancels all future

liaisons. The play ends by Morrie and Zach playing a game in which they reveal their innermost feeling and aspirations, most of it being counterproductive to their relationship as brothers and to their long-term plans.

This is the only play discussed in this dissertation in which there is simultaneously a complete lack, as well as a surplus of female presence. It is the very *presence* of the absent women which emphasises the various presentations of marginalisation evident in this, his earliest play. The women vicariously referred to by Zach, in often most odious terms, are not able to affirm their rights as women, and hence are denied any choice or empowerment of their reported positions. The implications of this absence of women on stage augments the issue of distrust, a key consideration of the dissertation, because in this play Fugard destroys and dissolves the images of women constituted by their absence, and the authorial demand to speak for them. In a sense this redefining and undermining of the identity of the woman in absentia may be viewed as an act of castration of the woman on Fugard's part, because in this play women function to represent men's desires. Fugard's plays mostly deal with women relegated to the periphery of society and this play, even in the absence of women, continues this tradition. It also portrays Zach as one of Fugard's most pathetically weak male characters, a male devoid of any masculinity and a product of the oppressive social dictates of racism and classism, and the absences of women serve to accentuate this dichotomy.

Morrie and Zach, having discussed topics of male interests such as "the rude odours of manhood" (7) and how to use toilet paper correctly, eventually turn their attention to another primary male interest, the discussion of women. However, it becomes evident that any discussion involving the feminine is done in terms of a savage sexual anarchy, as the gender constructs of 'female', 'woman' and 'mother' are continuously undermined by one or the other male. The first

mention of women in this play is 'woman' as the impersonal, the depersonalised and as object: "that's what we had when we went out at night. Woman!!" (11). Whilst the asexual Morrie is focussed on improving their economic and metaphysical lot through his brother, the breadwinner and hence the foundation of all his aspirations, Zach is obsessed with hedonistic and carnal pleasures - even when as remote as Ethel - and violently affirms this by reminding his brother that he is a sexual being with needs, a man with "two legs and trousers, and in this world there is also woman, and the one has got to get to the other" (13). Women in Zach's world of marginality and oppression have only copulatory or utility value; similarly men such as Zach would hold no real interest for women, as he is neither a romantic nor a stable economic prospect, hence a hindrance to their own fight for survival. Neither the prostitutes nor a disreputable woman like Ethel Lange wants him as a partner. Zach's memory of his mother is also in terms of domestic labour "a grey dress on Sundays and soapsuds on brown hands" (19). Betrayed by the loss of his mother at a young age, and a sister they never had, Zach's limited understanding of women leads him to liken women to snakes "like something snaky in the grass", implying underlying slyness, untrustworthiness and danger (19). Morrie, cognitively more able, has made no provisions for women in his future plans for happiness. He views them as a threat to his relationship with his brother, as to him brotherhood is more important, and envisages an escape from Korsten to a farm idyll which excludes any mention of women. In his regimented caring of his brother, Morrie usurps the role of the woman. Zach, despite his slow consciousness, is not blind to his brother's attempts to alienate him from women, or any other relationship. This only serves to frustrate him even more, driving him to subvert an innocent jingle into a cruel taunt of violence against women, in order to maintain an illusion of authority and power: "did skop and skip the pretty girls" (15). He fondly and satisfactorily recalls his "very first one" (15), a disembodied gendered object whom he rapes when she scorns him. This incident functions on two levels. As a marginalised man, being called a "black hotnot" in the language of the

oppressors by a woman (26), brings back the pain of self-loathing, the grim realisation of being a black man in an apartheid state. The rape of Connie provides him with both a feeble sense of revenge and the opportunity to lash out at the outrage of his life, as do many abusive men, using women as the vehicle for their bitterness. Zach, however, demands female company to appease his hedonistic outlook on life, but has no use for romance, because in his world men and women only know debasement and subjugation through brutal domination. The only way to survive the racist system, is to be “young and not caring a damn” (15). Zach finally succumbs to Morrie’s suggestion to find himself a woman in the pen-pal section of the newspaper, because to Zach women are commodities, “big ones, small ones, young ones, old ones”; objects defined by their only difference, their names, which in any event he selects for them “Cookie ... Bokkie” (31), names which are loaded with sexual bias. The primary function of a woman is to be used “just for sports” (23) and Morrie deceptively cajoles his brother into finally accepting a surrogate woman, a fantasy, as he knows that Zach will not “get hot about a name on a piece of paper” (23). Women like Ethel Lange have no voice and are silenced through their absence, and hence cannot make any demands or affect the fraternal bond. As a pen pal she remains incorporeal, depersonalised and simply the generic object of lust, “Eighteen years and well developed” or just a name: “do you still want her, or Nellie, or Betty. Do you still want Ethel ?” (24). Zach has had a number of prostitutes whom he recalls in terms of the sensual and the sexual, their physical attributes primary: “She had tits like fruits “ (16) and in particular, Hetty, because she was “second hand. The whole world had fingered her” (29). She was “something old”, exempt from respect, and he could abuse her at will. Morrie cautions his brother on his sexual appetite: “a man can’t spend his life with only one thought” (29) sensing that Zach’s preoccupation with women is not hedonistic, but sadistic, re-enacting the vicious macrocosm of apartheid rule. His preoccupation with women centres on the fact that they indirectly provide him with what little stature he has as an emotionally emasculated male. Sexual exploitation of women is the source

of his only sense of power, magnified when he can rape and beat them. He uses them as a cathartic release for “his sort” (40), a life of failure, pain and isolation, injustice and inhumanity. For this reason he wants “the young ones, on the small side” so that he can dominate the situation at all times, as he is no longer “a shy boy with pimples” (29).

When a response from Ethel Lange arrives, Morrie is immediately aware of the implications, because she is a white woman. His brother, however, is adamant to continue with the forbidden, “the dream, and the most dangerous one” (46), because not only will Ethel infuse some status into his life, but also provide a heightened sense of masculinity and adventure, as she represents a different sexuality, “that sweet white smell” (44). Morrie denounces Ethel Lange in terms of the apartheid system racist laws and ensures that she remains unattainable to Zach, enforced through the dangerous legal implications of such a relationship, especially when her visit becomes imminent. However, this results in not only Zach, but he himself having to face up to the truths of their lives, this being that they are ultimately black men subservient to white hegemonic rule, and Ethel Lange is representative of all that which they will never be able to possess under such rule. Failure to abide by the rules will result in incarceration for attempting to: “play with whiteness...as there’s no whitewashing a man’s facts. They’ll speak for themselves at first sight, even if you don’t say it” (58).

However, the idealisation of Ethel - a fantasy of their imagination whose only reality is represented by a piece of paper - transforms and elevates Zach and also Morrie for a brief moment in their lives out of their harsh realities and into her perceived world of “kind words” (43), ignoring the fact that “there’s more to wearing a white skin than just putting on a hat” (73). Confirming Morrie’s fears, this woman succeeds in alienating the brothers from each other: “don’t you see, everything was fine until she came along” (85). As the perceived ‘problem’, she

conveniently becomes the scapegoat for the loss of their future, for having exposed their inability to realise their dreams, for having betrayed them. Only when Ethel, a fantasy who has the power nonetheless to control their thoughts and actions, calls off the meeting as she is getting married, is Morrie able to resume his control over their lives “because the problem’s gone” (86), the “problem” caused by Zach’s preoccupation with women. However, Morrie’s little game using women as pawns goes horribly awry, because too many truths have been revealed about their pasts, and having been confronted with the truth of racial supremacy and bias through Ethel Lange, Zach now distrusts his coloured brother. Morrie and Zach, much like Fugard’s female characters, are also not afforded any escape from their claustrophobic lives and resignedly return to the life they are forced to accept. Zach returns to fantasising over women, and Morrie joins in, signalling his capitulation to his baser nature. In a parody of exorcising the ghost of their mother, they become cruel to the point of excess, re-establishing their control over the situation by hurling a mantra of insults reflecting the racism of prejudice in the denigration of the black woman: “*kaffermeid*”, “*ou hoer*”, “*luigat*”, “*swartgat*” (92), throwing stones at her, thus articulating and enacting universal resonances that underlie the particulars of their severe distrust of all that is woman. The old woman is representative of Everywoman to these men, “bitches” who make life unbearable. Their derision of women in general is complete when they manage to trip her up, forging the bonds of cohesive fraternity, when they both join in laughter at her exposed sex and her “old legs sticking up”, as “she’s got no *broeks* on” (92), thus subverting the male fantasy of the sensual naked woman to that of a spectacle. To the emasculated male, women do not represent a future as they only serve to further expose their inadequacies as a male, and when Morrie concludes the play with : “I’m not too worried. I mean, other men get by without a future. I think there’s quite a lot of people getting by without a future these days” (96), his words reflect a capitulation to an oppressive system which marginalised men and women cannot overcome. Their assimilation into the inhumanity of apartheid is complete.

Although this play has no visible female characters, they are thoroughly undermined in their absence through the brutal games of antagonism and futility played by these males. Morrie and Zach, chained to each other through blood ties, are also simultaneously presented as both oppressors and victims, and hence are able to comment through a male discourse on the lives of women. Women in reality are held in a similar hostile environment of prejudice and oppression, because the politics of racism and prejudice do not differentiate between genders, but oppresses all marginalised subjects equally. The only difference lies in the articulation of their collective yet unique experiences.

4.2 HELLO AND GOODBYE

“ they live in hell, but they are too frightened to do something about it ”
(1974:150).

This play, the second in Fugard’s so-called ‘family trilogy’, is also set in a squalid slum in Port Elizabeth. The action takes place in a two-roomed shack, the home of the “second-hand Smits of Valley Road” (139). This play, concerned with the dynamics of a relationship between a brother and sister, is introduced by Fugard’s typical weak male character Johnnie, an infantile, dependent, cowering social and emotional retard who has withdrawn from reality. Johnnie’s fecklessness is juxtaposed against one of Fugard’s more robust female characters, his sister Hester, a brazenly callous woman filled with hatred and guilt nurtured carefully over the years, a woman with no roots or social support, as a child abused by her father and as a woman by her male customers, a prostitute running away from her life, bent on moral nihilism. Fugard says this of Hester’s character: “an absolute rock bottom, without illusions character” (quoted in Gray 1982:43). Hester’s spirit, mutilated by the patriarchal oppression of a cruel and abusive father,

and her mute resignation to her unchanged circumstances at the end of the play, lead her to question her most daunting adversary, herself: “Me. And I’m Hester. But what’s that mean? What does Hester Smit mean?” (128). Whatever Hester Smit might mean to the male enclave, hers is still the voice of the marginalised in conflict with both the dominant ideological order and with herself, refusing to be reduced to a uniform nonentity. Hester, more than any other of Fugard’s defiant women, embodies the quest for truth and a final identity. The authorial voice provides the answer to Hester’s search for identity, by introducing Hester into her erstwhile environment, not as a celebration of her renewed links with her roots, but as a woman walking in slowly, insecure, defeated, carrying her lifetime of subordination in an old battered suitcase, the symbol of an equally battered life; her erstwhile powerless position as a woman in the patriarchal home clear in the one tentative word, “hello”. Her character, language and demeanour reflect her marginalised position within the subdivisions of the urban subproletariat. Johnnie, her brother, has also not been left unscathed by their childhood of abuse and hardships, and is on the verge of a mental breakdown, his attempts at communicating with Hester often incoherent. Juxtaposed against this male character, Hester, in my view, *appears* to be the strong, hardened, flashy elder sister, portraying the image of a woman in control, but she is in fact a woman almost as debilitated as her brother, a cripple sustained only by the memories of her mother: “she died frightened of being dead” (148), consumed by the hatred of her father, and fractured by her bitterness of a childhood of abuse, her only crutch her knowledge that “Mommie didn’t hate me” (113).

Her sudden arrival after an absence of twelve years is of no consequence to Johnnie, who will remain unresponsive to the reality of her existence, later evident in his suggestion that she commit suicide, and that she can take whatever money she finds provided she promises never to return. He has no use for her in his patriarchally ordained domain, as she poses the threat of female

control and domination. Hester is immediately placed on the defensive by Johnnie's lack of interest at her arrival: "not even a word of welcome" (106). As is the case with the silenced minority, she is yet again forced to prove her existence and corporeality, this time to her brother Johnnie. Fugard succeeds in emphasising the extent of alienation between male and female here as Hester is denied her identity by her own blood relation. To her only brother she does not even exist. "I'm Hester, I tell you! ... How the hell would I know all about you if I wasn't me? If I wasn't Hester?!" (110).

Hester left home when her mother died to escape her father's abuse and poverty. This in itself is an indication of Hester's strength of character in attempting to change her circumstances, but she fails to sustain this change, as she is finally unable to fight against her historically determined marginalisation. Thus hampered by a woman's primary source of exploitation, her economic vulnerability, she enters into a life of prostitution in Johannesburg. Although prostitution empowers her to become economically independent, she is unable to escape from abuse, because prostitution in itself is a dichotomous issue of both a desperate violence which she inflicts upon herself, and brutal male domination. Although she presents a strong and aggressive autonomous front, Hester's quest for freedom is articulated through her silent acquiescence to the hegemonic system, and as a defeated object of her father's violence on her and her mother, prostitution is her exit from a dehumanised world: "I'm not a woman anymore. What's a woman? Not me. They fuck me - but I'm not a woman" (Fugard 1983 : 99).

Hester's return to the family home remains centred on her quest for financial improvement, a primary consideration to the marginalised, as financial freedom also represents liberation from her moral anarchy. She has returned to claim her part of the inheritance from the indemnity which she presumes her father had received as compensation from the Railways for the accident in

which he lost a leg. Hester is not aware that her father has died, because Johnnie leads her to believe otherwise. He desperately needs the support of his father in order to present a united patriarchal front in the face of Hester's aggression and hatred, as he alone is too weak and too terrified to confront her: "a man on his own two legs is a shaky prospect" (162). The character of Hester dominates the plot as she introduces most of the climatic events in the play, which are mostly preceded or followed by a liberating discovery of the self, or acts of violence. Fugard has finely observed and reflected the hardships of the life of women living on the fringes of society, embodied in the words of Hester's bitter tirade against her father in her description of what it means to be a woman in her world. She aligns herself closely with the memory of her mother, viewing marriage as "one man's slave all your life, slog away until you're in your grave ... Ma and all the others like her, with more kids than they can count, and no money; bruises every payday ..." (150). Hester's violence on Johnnie and her surroundings reflects her female rage at having to fight for survival. She undermines the phallocentric domination of men, by usurping the role of the threatened and enraged male. She uses violence as a reaction to men's violence against her as a preemptive strike to deflect their abuse against herself. Hester represents the futility of women contesting their marginalised positions; her exit from home, her life in Johannesburg as a prostitute and her return to her roots are all actions steeped in ultimate futility, leaving her finally with only her sense of alienation and a deep cynicism towards life. She has only her intense hatred of her father to sustain her, "something bright and sharp and dangerous" (154), her only defence against "the way the night works, the way it makes you feel home is somewhere else" (112). Her life is defined by the memories encapsulated by the detritus of their lives spread across the stage, in which they both attempt to find the histories of themselves. However, this also ends in futility, as Hester realises the absurdity of her life: "there is no God. Nothing but rubbish. In this house there was nothing but useless second hand poor-white junk" (155). Fugard ensures that for Hester, as with the other female characters discussed, despite her

obvious qualities of strength, there is no escape from her subjugated position.

When Hester finally realises that even her memories are flawed and empty, that her father is dead and that even her hatred has become futile, and that there is no money to be had, her outrage at her hopelessness knows no bounds. Her rage finds an outlet in the final scene, culminating in a brief moment of catharsis. Her furious beating and kicking of her brother, “stopping eventually from sheer exhaustion” (158), is the manifestation of the sum total of her life, a life filled with torment, hatred, guilt and a terrible need to be loved. She is tormented by the failure of her dreams to escape the life she leads in Johannesburg; she feels guilty at having in a sense failed Johnnie, leaving him clinging to his father’s crutches, and she fears the loneliness of abandonment. The play goes full circle, in which Hester, much like most of Fugard’s female characters, is finally left on the periphery, with no real identity other than “a woman in a room” (162). Instead of being able to expurgate that which she is forced to confront, Fugard leaves Hester, as he does Lena and Praskovya, and Gladys and Rebecca, with “a heart that hurts” (156), “lost amongst the rubbish” (158) of their lives. She is finally defeated, wanting only to return to the illusory security of the present, her life in the city, accepting that for women like her, there is no escape: “I want to get back to it, in it, be me again, the way it was when I walked in” (162). Fugard’s women characters are without exception left with the most driving need for recognition and love, and Fugard, in closing, leaves Hester with no capacity for regeneration, nor an escape from her realisation of her impending mortality. She has thus earned the right cynically to verbalise the universal truth of the disempowered woman entrapped in a patriarchal hegemony: “they live in hell, but are too afraid to do something about it” (150).

4.3 BOESMAN AND LENA

“...your words are just noise. Nonsense ” (1974:174).

The general comments made in Chapter Two on this play will be relevant to this discussion, but for the purpose of this chapter, the discussion will predominantly focus on Lena, the female character of this play. Lena is possibly the most poignant of all Fugard's female characters, a woman in whom he artistically portrays the collective image of the historically marginalised Other. Trapped in the vicious circle of hardship based on division and privileges, Lena fully demonstrates the repercussions of a woman living in a divided and fragmented society, her problems stemming from both the patriarchal tradition, and also, to some degree, of her own making.

Fugard describes Lena's real life *mon semblable* as follows:

an old woman - she was carrying her all her worldly possessions in a bundle on her head and an old shopping bag - walking away, her thin scrawny ankles between her old shoes and the edge of her old skirt, trudging away into the bush ... but in that cruel walk under the blazing sun, walking from all of her life that she did not have on her head, facing the bitter Karoo night in a drainpipe, in this walk there was no defeat - there was pain and great suffering, but no defeat.

(Fugard 1983 : 123)

Lena as a woman embodies the universal suffering of the oppressed woman, an image which neither Fugard nor his sanctioned voyeurs can escape, and which has the extraordinary power to leave the audience squirming at their “limp, useless consciences” (179). The definition of the human condition, and all that a woman is when held in bondage by men, is embedded in Fugard's portrayal of Lena.

This play confronts the audience with the starkness of an empty stage which foregrounds an atmosphere of nihilism and barrenness, and into this setting Fugard introduces the two old coloured derelicts, Boesman and Lena, in search of temporary shelter. Lena, entering the stage silently and heavily burdened, is much like Fugard's other female characters, not presented as an individual by Fugard, but is placed firmly entrenched within the context of a heterosexual relationship, in a disadvantaged and secondary position to the male. Fugard points out that Lena cannot authentically be portrayed singly, or as a victim of Boesman the oppressor, because "both are ultimately victims of a common predicament, and of each other" (168). It is because of what they share that they are bound to each other and hence are each other's fate. Yet Fugard presents Lena unquestionably as the victim of male ideology that inflicts personal violence and accords woman her sub-human status, a claim that can be made for his entire canon where he repeatedly and necessarily positions women in the oppressed subjectivity. Lena comments on her entrapment: "Run your legs off the other way but at the end of it, Boesman is waiting" (175). It is Lena who, being the more cognitively able and more aware, is made to view herself and Boesman as an immutable entity, emphasising this in her litany of "Boesman and Lena" (182). It is also for this reason that she cannot, and will not, escape the poverty of her life, and must submit unquestioningly to Boesman's ruthlessness: "and if you're still alive when I've had enough of this, you'll load up and walk, somewhere else" (182). Lena is the prototype of a woman who has been abused into submission and cannot see a life away from her abuser, simply because she does not know *how* to leave: "Sometimes loneliness is two ... you and the other person who doesn't want to know you are there. I'm sick of you too, Boesman" (183). She only realises towards the end of the play, that in her relationship with Boesman, she has equal power, because she provides the definition to his life. Without her, he is just another derelict; with her, he is a man with authority through ownership. His physical assaults on her assuage his self-hatred, and conversely also concretise Lena's existence. Lena reflects the exposure to a life "that

has known innocence and the loss of innocence, been the victims of brutality and itself brutalised, hoped, despaired, laughed, loved”(Fugard 1983:146), facets of which are revealed through her monologues with Outa, which are solipsistic and circular determinants of her awareness of self.

Lena, trailing after Boesman like a dumb mule, enters the stage and is the first to focus the attention of the audience on her surroundings - place being the primary site which inscribes their lives and informs their rootless existence. Fugard gives Lena primacy on the stage and her first utterance irrevocably sets the tone for the entire play. She comments on her acute sense of being in bondage - constricted even by her shadow, the masculinist and racist hegemony preventing her from attaining the freedom she so desires. Fury at her entrapment and envying the birds their perceived freedom and hence their potential for escape, her sense of futility is expressed in her gestural violence “*jou moer!*”, an obscenity usually reserved for the male. As mentioned earlier, Fugard’s women characters turn to verbal violence once they realise their entrapment, and Lena is no different. She is aware of her hopeless and degrading life of servitude to Boesman, as expressed in: “Look ahead, sister. To what? Boesman’s back. That’s the scenery of my world” (171). Lena attempts to escape from Boesman’s “undisguised stare of animosity and disgust” (168) by making small talk, the way a woman would when she fears the impending brutality of abuse, because Boesman’s self-hatred consistently drives him to focus on Lena as a tangible and immediate object to be hated, abused, assaulted, derided, and worst of all, rejected. He justifies his assault on Lena from a man’s point of view of ownership of an object, “she’s my woman” (181), his self-interested possessiveness enhancing awareness of the pervasiveness of men’s hatred and violence towards women as a social phenomenon in Fugard’s plays. Boesman’s verbal and physical abuse drives Lena to a realisation of what her life is, and she pleads for recognition as a subject: “Look back one day, Boesman. It’s me, that thing you *sleep* along the roads. My life” (172). Lena’s innate spiritedness is reduced by Boesman’s silences and his cruel

objectivity to the dumb submission of an objectified 'thing', her pessimistic rebellion is thus against the abusive world that he represents: "I was still sore where you hit me". Boesman's physical 'branding' of Lena is the masculine voice materialising on her body, emphasising her extreme victimisation by male controlled discourse. Lena's 'willingness' to be assaulted does not constitute subordination, as men will assume, but in truth demonstrates a fierce and active loyalty to herself. This awareness creates the necessary defiance in her to define herself more clearly and also to ascribe value to herself despite Boesman's inability or refusal to do so through his injustices to her. Boesman considers Lena and her attempts to communicate with him inconsequential, and addresses her in the most denigrating scatological image: "a long drol of nonsense that comes out when you open your mouth" (169). Significantly, Boesman's first words on stage are a threat of cruelty to Lena, reinforcing his dominancy over her. However, Lena is aware of Boesman's vulnerabilities as a male who is afraid and weak, and hence does not fear him completely, as she has perfected the art of selectively armouring herself against abuse - she knows when to 'keep her mouth shut'. She is equally able to vilify him angrily when he mocks her fear of alienation, because more than anything, Lena as an abused woman fears the isolation and loneliness caused by indifference. When Boesman withdraws - "I got nothing left to say to you. Talk to yourself"(173), Lena's feisty nature is unable to absorb this rejection. She is able to withstand physical abuse, but cannot bear rejection through silencing, and Boesman's refusal to speak signals his non-recognition of her very selfhood. Lena responds with the threat of becoming mentally unstable, Fugard's sense of a woman's refuge from reality. Boesman is a man made insensate to the pain and the fear of others through his own ill-treatment as a miscegenate, and, being a weakling, he becomes pejorative to the point of sadism when he trivialises Lena's insecurities in scatological terms "When you *poep* it makes more sense ... you know why? It stinks. Your words are just noise. Nonsense" (174). Lena exhibits a strength of character which belies her servile attitude to Boesman, and this manifests in her actions when she

finally begins to respond with anger and hatred at Boesman, questioning his abuse of her: “You blame me. You hit me. Why must you hurt me so much ? What have I really done?” (209).

When she becomes involved in the chores of setting up a shelter for the night, Fugard presents her as a transformed “ very happy ” (177) woman, even singing to herself at having found a purpose to her life, reinforcing the constructed myth of the contented housewife in her domestic setting. However, Lena only turns to laughter and humour to ease and mask the pain of her barren life. In her pathetic attempts at singing and dancing, she attempts to black out the bitter moments of the present by trying to infuse some happiness into her bleak world, knowing that, when her song ends and her legs tire from dancing, everything around her remains her inescapable reality.

Fugard’s father commented on his own singing prior to his death - “ You want to know what that is? My pain. I’m making my pain sound nice ” (Fugard 1983 : 4). Music, song and dance, particularly in black cultures, channel collective emotions such as fear, hatred, anger and love, and create an active collective which enables characters like Hester and Lena to manage their fears, hatred, anger and aggression, even in the face of potential violence. It acts as both a model and a medium for different groups in the social spectrum, and sets them apart. The words Lena sings are partly nonsense, partly sly innuendo, but the song functions to express the way she perceives herself and to recall “ all the happies. We danced them ... it helps us forget ”. (Fugard 1974 : 208) She is able to express herself in a small moment of her life.

When an old black man named Outa by Lena shuffles into their lives, he indirectly initiates the beginning of change in Lena’s relationship with Boesman, and is also the harbinger of death and increased menace for Lena. Lena, however, only recognises in Outa a kindred spirit of her own marginality with whom she desperately needs to bond. He not only represents a sympathetic ear, but more importantly, a witness to serve as the antidote to her life of brutality and a confirmation

of her existence. Outa in a sense helps her to celebrate her life and for a brief moment he elevates her out of her life of drudgery. By being a witness, he also gives her life direction and purpose. Barren and loveless, yet compassionate, Lena fights to protect Outa from Boesman's abuse like a mother would a child; Boesman subverts her defence of Outa in terms of degrading sexual coupling and hence exhibits the male's sexual objectification of the woman. Only too grateful for someone who will provide meaning to her existence and acknowledge her being in the world, the dreadful irony of her distorted reality escapes Lena - Outa is in fact utterly useless to her as a witness or any form of companionship, as Fugard renders him inarticulate, incomprehensible and physically on the brink of death. In addition, because of Lena's possible defection, the black man becomes a handy target for Boesman's racial hatred and frustrations, upon whom he inflicts the same inhumanities meted out to him by the white hegemony. As a victim of oppression, he is caught in an endless cycle of becoming an oppressor himself, inflicting his distorted sense of authority on the defenceless old man and Lena. Outa's subsequent death is also in a sense her death, signalling the end of her attempt to escape from Boesman's cruel indifference: "I tried to keep them open, make him look. When he closed them, his darkness was mine" (212). However, through his death, Lena acquires a sudden realisation of value. She torments Boesman and exhorts him into a state of frenzy, driving him to take out his frustrations and anxieties on the dead Outa. In a sense Lena has become as vicious as Boesman, the relationship of uneven power now levelling out. She makes no move to protect herself against his threats and is gradually assimilating Boesman's characteristics, egging him on in his violence. Thus Lena's composite is succinctly drawn as a woman who is capable of compassion towards the weak, but also capable of acting decisively and lethally, if necessary. Now fully cognizant of the altered personal dynamics, Lena goads Boesman into a state of panic when she decides to take a stand and announces that she will not follow him any longer. "No, Boesman I am not going with you ... this time you run alone ... don't wait for me to find you. I'm not running the other way that leads

me back to you ” (218). Boesman, shocked out of his complacency and thoroughly unnerved at Lena’s newfound strength to challenge his male authority, attempts to thwart this emergent power struggle with violence, and smashes the shelter. A sharp reversal of roles become evident when Boesman packs up all their belongings and stands before her, “a grotesquely overburdened figure ” (219). Lena is finally given voice and a position to speak from, albeit for a small moment in her life, when she refuses to be burdened with their belongings. By discarding her possessions, she symbolically also discards her own past, both materially and emotionally. The conflict between the rebellious woman and patriarchal authority is displaced into the conflict between Boesman and Lena. Disillusioned and worn-out, it is the recognition of her self awareness that enables Lena to challenge Boesman’s position of dominance. Her defiance stems from her realisation that she *does* possess value and that she *is* in fact able to attain that freedom she begrudged the birds, *if* she so chooses. However, conditioned by her years of abuse, Lena, not knowing how to leave, is unwilling and unable to face the future alone and elects to enter the darkness with Boesman. Thus Fugard has Lena remaining an object to be essentially defined by her male companion rather than a self-defining subject. Life for her will continue as it was before, except that this time she carries within her the knowledge that perhaps she need not be the helpless victim, and demands that Boesman acknowledges this liberation from herself. She is “alive, and there’s daylights left in me.” (221). Her closing statement, however life affirming, acknowledges the continuity of male supremacy: “ next time you want to kill me, do it. Really do it. When you hit, hit those lights out ” (221). Leaving the stage together, Fugard offers Lena a small concession of recognition of her womanhood, that she is no longer alone in a relationship of inequality, but she is in partnership with Boesman, facing their darkness together.

Critics such as Wertheim suggest that the play illustrates that love conquers adversity and hence ends with Boesman and Lena being placed in a ‘happy ever after’ ending, “ their relationship

finally whole ” (Wertheim 2000:68). However I would like to refute this by remaining with the central claim made in this dissertation that despite Lena’s unquestionable strength of character and her evident ability to transcend her doubly marginalised position in a patriarchal and racist hegemony, the authorial voice of Fugard restricts the degree of empowerment in his phallogentric theatre. Whilst Fugard may sympathise with the predicament of women under patriarchal oppression, he ultimately cannot identify with women. Lena is left with a divided consciousness, a woman who is acted upon, who arrests this action, but who fails to carry out her own intent. She is thus *not* afforded an escape from her circumstances by Fugard, but merely given a conditional reprieve, because placed within the pre 1994 South African context, Lena’s life as a woman, worse still, a miscegenate vagrant without cultural pride or dignity, will remain a quest for survival, and not that of a victorious conquest.

4.4 A LESSON FROM ALOES

“ they’re turgid with violence, like everything else in this country ” (2000 : 230).

This play was first performed in 1978, and was ironically inscribed by Fugard as dedicated “in celebration” of his mother.

There is a sense of deep despair and disharmony evident in this play, established largely through the bleakness of the ill-formed shapes of the aloes and the often disjointed dialogue of the female character, Gladys, a haunted victim trapped within the masculine driven social order of apartheid. From her own distorted perspectives also flows a dangerous sense of underlying violence, which is evident through her interaction with the two male protagonists. Gladys’ realities are also to some extent distorted through her mental condition. The fact that she voluntarily wishes to return

to the mental institution from which she has recently been released, is indicative of her inner turmoil and need for trust and recognition, even if it is to a place where “ they burn my brain ”... (268). It is the one place where she has a friend, Marlene: “ She has been there a long time already ” (268), whom she can trust. Significantly being another woman, this further endorses her distrust of men and the entrapment they auger, hence being rendered insensate is almost preferable to being entrapped, “planted in a jam tin ”(221). She has an urgent desire to live her life, “ not just survive it ” (230). Like her mother, Gladys also has “ a terrible purpose, not to die ” (234), terrible because as gendered constructs in a male enclave, these women constantly need to find the purpose to live in a society only seeking their alienation and debasement. She wants desperately to be heard and recognised as an independent individual “ what did I look like? ... tell me, what did I look like! ” (236).

Gladys is a very angry woman, filled with anxieties of present and past experiences directly attributed to the injustices and discrimination stemming from the culture of violence of her social environment. Ironically, her home is named Xanadu, originally a place of mythical beauty, which bears no semblance to her actualities of stark reality, surrounded by “ aloes in a variety of tins of all shapes and sizes ” (221), an image suggesting Gladys’s sense of enclosure and entrapment. She detests these repulsive and bitter plants with their fat, fleshy serrated leaves, described by Piet her husband, who collects them, as being “ tuberculate, having knobby or warty excrescences ” (221) and by herself as “ turgid with violence ” (229). She views them as monstrous, symbolic of her experiences and perceptions of her macro-environment. To her they symbolise “ the price of survival in this country. Thorns and bitterness ” (229), and it is these plants which provide a focus for her thoughts and actions. The couple, Gladys and Piet, deviates slightly from the norm of Fugard’s usual portrayal of a heterosexual relationship. His female character is not placed in the usual subordinate position, but rather, complements the male character, as there is a sense of

sado-masochism underlying this relationship. Gladys is in a sense reminiscent of Martha in Edward Albee's Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf. When Piet defends his aloes against her denigration, by admiring them for their ability to survive adverse conditions, Gladys vents her pent-up anger, frustrations and fears on him, pointing out the social conditions prevailing in a masculine-dominated dispensation in her tirade: "that is what a conversation with you has become - a catalogue of South African disasters. And you never stop! You seem to have a perverse need to dwell on what is cruel and ugly about this country" (230). She speaks for all marginalised feminised subjects when she accuses him of being a man with no compassion. "Is there nothing gentle in your world?" She is no "little lady who laments ..." (222), as Piet patronizingly refers to her, but has become hardened and insensate through betrayal, violation and isolation by the dominant male order, and is portrayed as utterly defeminised. Most of Fugard's female characters have been portrayed as being childless, a condition which further alienates them from their femininity, and Gladys is no exception, her depth of alienation foregrounded when it becomes apparent that she dislikes and even distrusts children, despite her protestations to the effect: "its not that I don't like children ..." (226). Blunted through male values, she also refuses openly to show compassion and emotion: "My mother died today. I haven't cried yet, and I don't think I'm going to" (235).

Gladys concedes that Piet has also suffered the effects of marginalisation, but she also understands that his depravation is as a result of the choices he made. Her violation and subsequent mental problems are as a result of having been victimised by the apartheid policies of the time, without being afforded a choice, but to her mind it is also more than that - it is the collective betrayal of women by the fraternity, which forces them to rely on their own strengths: Gladys, another example of Fugard's roaring women, screams at Piet "I don't need you. I don't need you to protect me anymore! You never did, anyway" (267). Her screaming emphasises her

helplessness at the loss of her wholeness and her loss of perspicacity, as do his other characters. Gladys' dilemma is the dilemma of all women, who each have their own particular oppression and marginalisation to deal with, each woman has "her own story. I don't need yours. I have discovered hell for myself ... Politics and black skins don't make the only victims in this country" (267). Gladys is the epitome of women who, irrespective of race, colour or creed, have been alienated and left on the margins of male centred discourse, isolated in a life of domestic subservience, in "the same old humdrum existence .. I putter about the house ..." (254), forced to take the values of men as the norm. Gladys is able to acknowledge that Piet, compared to the system he subscribes to, is "a good man", but her ambivalency in her distrust of men, whom she holds responsible for her state of alienation, her lack of identity and enforced interdependence has also "become a terrible provocation. I want to destroy that goodness. Ironical, isn't it! That which I most hate and fear about this country is all I seem to have learned" (265).

Fugard does not afford this female character an escape from an inherently cruel and violent polity, but effectively silences her by denying her any socialization, as in: "you see, the others have been avoiding us as if we had the plague. At first I thought it was because of me ..." (264), and then further dehumanises her by preventing her escape from hegemonic dictates, symbolised by the rigidity of institutionalised life in the mental home, because "shock therapy is also a function of the state's, the system's, the culture's control of her consciousness" (quoted in Daymond 1184:207). Gladys in her despair, sees her escape to the home as a safe haven, a private world where her vulnerability as a woman is inviolate. The ugly realities of her existence embodied in the turgid aloes, is negated by the ideal world of rural beauty and romanticism symbolised by the picture 'Sunset in Somerset'; an ideal world she prefers to share with a woman, as opposed to a male, and who has provided her with a weapon against her fear: "Do you know any swear words? It will make you feel better. Go on, swear, man. As hard as you can" (268). Fugard has

Gladys thus resorting to male tactics, inescapably remaining within male ordained socio-political parameters and evincing the male distrust of the female voice in Fugard's theatre. Whilst Fugard's plays are a discourse on female marginalisation, they are also a discourse on the legitimisation of this marginality, hence Gladys can only escape through entering misinformed fantasy.

4.5 A PLACE WITH THE PIGS

“Don't argue with me, woman!” (1988 : 2).

After a quarter of a century of creating characters for his plays, Fugard's treatment of his female characters as ideologically constructed women does differ to some extent to his initial constructs of the early 1960s. However, the range of his gender roles has remained largely similar, as is evident in this later play produced in 1988, which has as basis the dramatisation of an actual event reported in the New York Times about a deserter from the Soviet Army during the Second World War, who spent 41 years hiding in a pigsty. A Place with the Pigs transcends time and place and becomes, rather than a *personal* parable, a *universal* tragedy about destructive human behaviour and choices made. Fugard places the two characters in a world that resembles the title, a “dank and unwholesome world” (1), a primitive, mundane and dingy space of domesticity inhabited by Fugard's stereotyped dissonant husband /wife presentation, a relationship dulled by hopelessness and routine. Furthering Fugard's subliminal patriarchal stance, the first words on stage are spoken by the male character, Pavel - a Boesman, a Johnnie and a Zach, but under a different name and in another lifetime. Pavel's opening statement “Pavel Ivanovitch Navrotsky is not dead” (1), centralises the male dichotomy and establishes his dominance over the female character as immediate, reaffirming his existence and his authority simultaneously, presenting the

patriarchal with fanfare. Fugard comments on Pavel as being a “ pompous, self-indulgent, self-deluding fool ” (quoted in Thamm 1987:10), but is significantly silent on his female character.

Pavel’s ill-treatment of the pigs is significant. He is essentially a buffoon, a capering, pathetic weakling, a deserter who has voluntarily elected to confine himself in a pigsty for the past decade. He is continuously forging grandiose plans to end his self-imposed exile but consistently fails to realise these, as he is a coward. It is Praskovya who finally lifts him up out of the squalor of his miserable life and provides the impetus for regeneration. She is the one who is able to make sense of her past and her present and see a positive future for herself and for him: “ I think we are in time for the sunrise you missed yesterday ” (40). Pavel is acutely aware of his insignificance as a male, and his guilt breeds a weakness that further debilitates his authority. It is this realisation of his vulnerability which reinforces his phallocentric ideology and which drives him to use the pigs and his wife, whom he regards as being analogous and thus having similar commodity value, as the repositories of his frustration and rage, as they are easier to victimise and control than the dominant powers. The action opens where, having done violence on the pigs, Pavel proceeds to yell for his wife, who “ burdened with buckets of pigswill ”(2) enters the scene as a stereotypical male representation of ‘the good wife’, with the emphasis on her domesticated subserviency, her role in life to attend to the bodily needs of Pavel: “ I’m coming, I’m coming... I’m coming as fast as I can ” (2). Ignoring her involvement in clearly obvious and unpleasant domestic chores, he flaunts his authority by accusing her of disobedience, and when Praskovya dares to contradict him, he immediately silences her with the archetypical patriarchal command, “ don’t argue with me, woman ” (2); words which express clearly the hegemonic exertion of men’s power over women, individually and generically. He typically does not call her by her name, but objectifies her as the generic rather than the particular. Pavlov’s perceived authority over his wife is farcical, as he is in truth a failure, a man whose primary concern is himself.

Praskovya typifies the woman's role as care-giver and home-maker. She sees it as her duty to be the docile receptacle for her husband's abuse, resentment, failures and bitterness. Praskovya is another Lena, who, whilst realising that she needs to find her own worth and strength to survive, as she cannot depend on her husband, yet elects to remain imprisoned in servitude to Pavel and his pigs, thus emphasising the limitations of challenging the male. Praskovya's role is that of nurturer and caregiver, rather than that of a wife and partner, because Pavel in many ways mirrors the naivete and helplessness of a young child. When he kills a fully grown pig with his bare hands, Praskovya is impressed with him, only for this reason. She praises him proudly as a mother would a child who has managed to complete a task without her assistance, but as a wife, patronises him: "Did you do this Pavel? And all by yourself!" (18). She maintains this stereotype of femininity throughout the play, at times admonishing him, pandering to his needs, praising him, motivating him, all the while merely enhancing Pavel's image as a grotesque parody of a male. Praskovya's only modicum of freedom is also in service of her husband, when she leaves the sty for the village to keep him informed on the outside world. Praskovya initially functions as a mute and empathetic human listening post, who lives her husband's life, never her own. She finds herself facing a wall of futility daily, and her situation as a powerless gendered object is evident in her rebuttal to his demands, which subversively hints at her underlying discontent and anger :

God gave me two arms and two legs, and I've been working them since I woke up this morning as if I'd been sentenced to hard labour ... I'm feeding the pigs an hour earlier than usual so that I will be free to give you all the attention and help I can (2).

Pavel is an egotist who is full of weak sentiment, self pity and uneasy romantic images, a character who deliberately propagates and establishes an image of weakness, cowardice and

dependency. By contrast, Praskovya is the antithesis of this male and is the one who holds everything together, despite her perceived and sometimes feigned obeisance and submissive pliancy towards Pavel. Her actions and her thoughts are the catalysts which eventually enable Pavel to face the realities of his life. Yet Fugard allows the foolish Pavel to dominate the stage, constantly leaving Praskovya on the periphery of the audience's attention as part of the background. However, when she, in an unprecedented move of almost masculine action, draws the line at Pavel's histrionics, and when, much like Hester in Hello and Goodbye, gives him a trouncing, she in some way liberates both herself and him from his constant demands on her resources of strength and abilities. "You're on your two legs again Pavel ... that's as much as I can do for you. Now help yourself"(33). Praskovya understands Pavel as perfectly as a mother would her child, and comments on his ridiculous inability to be a partner to her, voicing the truth of the lives of many women: "Yes, *we've* caught you at it again ... backing away from the moment of decision and action" (36) (my emphasis). She is more than able to succeed on her own, away from Pavel and his pigs, but Fugard is again privileging the male over the female and refuses to grant Praskovya her release from male bondage. She will remain trapped with this man who always reneges on any decision he makes, and the fact that they leave the sty together is no guarantee that Praskovya has succeeded in shaking off the shackles of his claustrophobic need for her. She knows she cannot leave this excuse of a man despite her open revolt: "No, you walk alone. I've had enough. This is as far as I go" (30), words very similar to those of Lena when she too finally discovers her own worth. She has already resigned herself to this bondage even before she tells Pavel that his plans to leave will not succeed "let's just turn around quietly and go home" because they are "too old for these grand ideas" (29). She knows that a woman in her position can seldom escape from male oppression, and change has in any event come too late for her. Her indomitable spirit is still evident, but a lifetime of servitude to Pavel has conditioned her mental attitude and the way she perceives herself. Her self-derogation stems from the values

she has been subjected to in a patriarchal society, and she therefore regards herself as a “ simple woman ” (15), incapable of intelligent decision-making, rather leaving that ironically to Pavel. Her female position of inferiority prevents her from seeing herself as a worthy opponent to masculine domination, and hence her freedom from a male dominated society can only be effected in terms of masculinist thinking. Yet despite her inferior position, it is her voice which leads this play to a possible positive conclusion, only if, of course, Pavel can redeem himself as a man on whom she can finally depend. Judging Pavel by Fugard’s depiction of his male characters, I think not, as Fugard persistently denies his female characters an escape from their suppressed and silenced positions.

4.6 **SORROWS AND REJOICINGS**

***“Nothing has changed”* (2002 : 5)**

In this study of Fugard’s exploration of the complexities of women’s relationships with each other, the opening words of Allison: “ My word! Nothing has changed ” (5), are more than applicable to the thesis statement. Indeed, in respect of Fugard’s representation of his female character, nothing has changed. Patriarchy continues to have the upper hand in naturalising sexual identity, thereby continually producing women in subordinate positions, because the women are constantly represented through the writing of their male creator, never in their own. The women he creates on this stage are as memorable as in the past, but similarly, are not afforded an escape from patriarchal dictates by Fugard because they are constructed within the playwright’s male ideology and hence must remain in their subordinate positions to the male. The central character is a male whose centrality is emphasised by his absence, present only in the third person, and existing only as a memory in the minds of the women. Yet, typically, he

dominates the stage as yet another example of Fugard's weak male characters. Dawid Olivier is a pathetic failure, a man who is unable to accept his exile from his country, a failed poet who finally seeks solace in alcohol to mask his impotence and despair. He finally succumbs to ill-health and returns to his native soil, where he intends to make peace with Marta and his daughter, but dies of leukemia without realising his plans.

Sorrows and Rejoicings is a biographical account of Fugard's empathetic stance towards the theme of exile, though Fugard himself was never forced to leave the country, but had his passport revoked for a while. The play, in brief, is set in the lounge of Dawid's home in a post-apartheid Karoo village and, on the surface, tells the story of the troubled exiled activist Dawid Olivier, and the women who loved him. The action centres on the meeting between Dawid's estranged English wife, Allison, and Marta, the coloured family maid with whom he had an affair and who is also the mother of his daughter, Rebecca, also present. The three women have just returned from Dawid's funeral, and the action begins with the characters alternating between the present and the past, revealing a number of underlying tensions and unresolved issues, sorrows and regrets too late to resolve. The play focusses primarily on the two adult women, who discuss their lives in terms of their relationship with Dawid, and then moves on to focus on the adolescent daughter, Rebecca, who hates her father. She has reason to hate as she has witnessed her mother's life spent waiting on unfulfilled promises, a mother whom she wants to "wake up" to face the truth about her life: "that's what you've become ... the ghost of a stinkwood servant looking after her dead Master" (42). From a feminist perspective, Fugard has not deviated in the least from his patriarchal stance on women in his theatre. Both women reveal their personal perspectives through a series of monologues, which Walder sees as significant in Fugard's plays, as it "serves as the voice of the suppressed, the silenced, ... its drive to bear witness, through providing a voice for the voiceless" (Walder 1999:344).

The three women begin a journey of discovery and exploration of their personal feelings, experiences and their reconciliation with each other, but are constantly overshadowed by Dawid's presence, because the women continually evoke him in the pivotal moments of the play, thus allowing the process of his ruin to dominate the play, accentuated by his physical absence. His spiritual presence also ensures that the three women define their aspirations and inner needs in terms of their individual relationships with Dawid, and hence through the male. The women represent two different realities: Allison, a cool and distant educated English white woman from the city; and Marta, a passionate, optimistic coloured servant who has lived with her fantasies, preserving Dawid's home in the hope of his promised return to her. Whilst both women hold different perspectives on the man they both loved, they similarly seek an emotional cathartic release from their lonely bondage to this man, which will allow them to overcome the resentment and hurt he has caused, and replace it with love, a scarce emotion in Fugard's plays. Marta justifies her failed life of loyal, faithful womanhood and places it in perspective: "You see, he was the reason for everything in here ... he gave it its life. Everything had its place because he was coming back. And that included me. From the day I was born I had my place in this room. Stinkwood Marta belonged here as much as that table and chairs so she swept and dusted and polished and waited" (Fugard 2002:52). Marta reflects the slave woman's mentality enforced through eons of patriarchal domination. Allison is less subservient and realises the futility of having been "made to do the impossible" (19) through Dawid's dependency on her: "my vigil is measured in years ... everything I had as a woman to give ... my love, my caring, my anger ... God! The stupidity and waste of it all" (36).

Their monologues are a reflection of a journey they need to undertake which will lead them to freedom from oppression and herald a new beginning. This play presents the different roles of a woman in a patriarchal dispensation, collective images of subserviency to the male social order:

that of the long-suffering wife, the widow, the lover, the hopeful mistress, the servant, the mother and the daughter. These are all fragmented relationships which invariably end in “as it always does, with the image of a woman weeping” (50), despite Dawid’s insistence on celebration. He is a man who is able to trivialise Marta’s years of devoted waiting with an attitude that reflects his superficial understanding of her wasted life of waiting for him with a hearty: “hey, hey, hey, come on now. No tears, remember. I kept my promise! I’m back! We must celebrate” (17). This is the only play discussed of Fugard’s that includes a mother and child relationship, albeit an illegitimate one, as all Fugard’s women characters have been denied motherhood thus far. Fugard is unable to fully depart from this, as he grudgingly allows for this relationship, appending illegitimacy and fractured connotations to sustain his portrayal of the dysfunctional and barren woman. Rebecca, the daughter, is mostly silent throughout the play, but her brooding presence suggests anger, resentment and a latent rebelliousness due to her fragile relationship with her past. Her unrelenting hatred for her father and everything he represents culminates in her destruction of his poems, effectively overturning the tradition of the male’s prerogative of silencing the oppressed: “she wanted so badly to get rid of him” (50). To her he was no father but a man who was more concerned with his love for his country, rather than with the women in his life, hence she trivialises what little recognition he gave her and her mother by turning it into “ash and smoke” (51). She is unable to come to terms with her life of rejection, both by her father and by society, being of mixed race. Unlike the two older women, who finally are released through their mutual understanding and acceptance, Rebecca remains trapped by her colour, remaining unrelenting and bitter, despite her mother’s caution against harbouring hatred and resentment. Rebecca is “a daughter of generations of servants, her naive desires may be threatened by the triumphalism of the first years of the new dispensation, but they remain important, expressing the driving needs of those who remain marginalised” (Walder 2002:5). Rebecca is symbolic of the personal as the political, a new generation of women, who despite their liberation under a

democratic rule, will not escape the oppression of their gender, as the conclusion of this thesis will show. Rebecca as a woman can never be the addressee, because history is not written for her, but against her, and thus she remains the silent, sullen yet feisty symbol of Everywoman, her anger and inability to forgive a portent of unabated future political strife. Despite the possibilities of the new South Africa, it also presents perils, as is evident in Allison's warning to Rebecca: "if you think you and your new South Africa don't need it, you are making a terrible mistake. You are going to need all the love you can get, no matter where it comes from" (51).

This play concludes the discussion on Fugard's plays and the next chapter will similarly deal with the plays of Zakes Mda, in terms of the thesis statement.

CHAPTER 5

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE SELECTED PLAYS OF ZAKES MDA

“ Deal with us nobly, women though we be, and honour us with truth if not with love ”
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Breitinger 1994:13).

If there is a paucity of literary critique on the female characters created by Fugard, critiques on the black women in the plays of Mda are almost non-existent. What literary criticism exists on the plays of Mda, has been written by predominantly male writers who have largely placed the focus on the masculinist aspect of theatre, namely the overtly political issues inherent in Mda's plays. Black theatre has often had a fiercely male-dominated and chauvinistic focus, and Mda has inadvertently contributed to this skewed perception, favouring political issues of race and class at the expense of those of women, thus perpetuating and retaining the patriarchal mores of the social system in which he writes. As Stephen Gray remarks, “ in a land where, under apartheid ideology, race is the cutting edge of discrimination and class its reinforcement, gender as the third means of dividing and ruling the population had not before enjoyed much prominence as a political issue ” (Gray 1990: 83). Mda 's later plays begin to reflect the changing attitudes to women's issues, as women's liberation movements began to gain momentum in Lesotho and elsewhere, especially in the 1980s. Mda has created a number of credible and memorable female characters, which, although representative of types, are deserving of far more scrutiny and debate than is currently the case, because it is through the representation of these characters, who often manifest the most profound humanity and resilience despite their circumstances, that we are able to share in the social and political contexts which inform Mda's political awareness, as well as his imperatives on gender issues and conflicts. Most of Mda's female characters have suffered

the triple exploitation of being black, female and working class in an apartheid society, yet he does not allow them to succumb to the disabilities these positions create, but rather, his characters reflect the hidden strengths of what it means to be female and so lionize their indomitable spirit to close ranks against their oppressors and emerge, perhaps not always unscathed, but most often, victorious.

5.1 DEAD END

“Women! I cannot claim to understand them” (1990 : 51).

This play was written in 1966 and first performed in 1979, and has as its theme the subordinate status of the black man under apartheid rule. The title accentuates the futility of the endeavours of a black man under white domination, thus Dead End emerges as a bitter indictment of apartheid policies.

This play is rather innovative in its representation of the woman on stage by a black male writer, in that the woman determines the course of events. Most conventional interpretative strategies produce readings of Mda’s plays that place him in the role of the champion and spokesperson of the oppressed and marginalised. However, a reading of Mda’s plays from a feminist perspective will notably result in a different perspective being generated, one which will focus on deconstructed male dominated representations of women and the extent of their marginalised positions. It is interesting to note that Mda did not *develop* into a liberated writer on feminine representation and issues, but has presented his women characters with relative voice and agency throughout.

Dead End revolves around the relationship between Charley, a pimp, and his pregnant girlfriend, Tseli, both damaged individuals who nonetheless see themselves as possessing some social virtue despite their questionable professions. The action opens in a prison cell where Charley has been implicated for the attempted murder of his girlfriend Tseli. From a feminist perspective, Charley's opening dialogue with a symbolical and unsympathetic character whom he assumes is God, portrays him as being an utterly absurd man; he offers God a cigarette which they smoke together. Conversations with 'God' is a recurrent device in Mda's plays, and one which functions on a subtextual level. Chellapan explains that "the image of God fluctuates from an authoritarian, omnipotent being to one who shares our helplessness", but more importantly, "talking with God is also talking to the unmasked self: questions remain largely unanswered, but can be faced with some degree of honesty" (quoted in McLeod 1996:89).

Charley is a self-professed racist, pimp and atheist, a man with evidently low morals. He is a man who, despite his impending fatherhood, refers to women as "bastard woman" and to children as "a brood of brats" (58), and a man whose business is the exploitation of the material value of the female body. His introduction is dramatic and designed for maximum audience exploitation when he makes an impassioned plea for Tseli's life: "Please God, don't let her die". The Voice is predictably surprised at the focus of Charley's concern, as concern for a prostitute, even if "a decent type" is not in keeping with patriarchal premise. Mda subtly inverts male sentiment here, but we realise that Charley's concern and regrets may or may not be altogether altruistic, because his concerns refer to Tseli's marketability and her contribution to value in his life, expressed in the past tense, that "she was beautiful and she loved me" (Mda 1987:49). However, the point is that Mda foregrounds the female character from inception, albeit in the third person. This scene elicits immediate sympathy for Tseli and her plight and sets the tone for the rest of the play.

The play is set in a typical township environment, represented by the sparseness of decor and the dialogue of the characters. Tseli comments on her domestic space as “ Look at all this rot. It’s like living in a dustbin ” (1987:57). Tseli is not portrayed as the stereotyped subservient woman, despite her double role of enslavement: to males as a prostitute and to the dominant culture as domestic servant. She is given a fairly vociferous voice and we sense that she is used to manipulating males when she disparagingly criticises Charley and his way of life, of which she clearly disapproves. That his way of life is but an extension of hers, is not an issue here: “ You and your matriculation certificate. Why don’t you go and look for a job like the other men. Instead of using your English in the office you use it in the streets and hotel lobbies as a pimp ” (1987:52). Charley is constantly being placed on the defensive by Tseli’s criticism of him, and submits to her admonishments willingly, commenting mildly that there is no need to “get violent over such a small matter ” (1987:52). He defends his submission to her by offering the stereotype response of the ‘mystified’ male: “ Women, I cannot claim to understand them ” (1987: 51), thus neatly relegating woman as the ‘Other’. As a black woman, Tseli’s unusual control over Charley is evident in the reversal of authoritative roles through his non-aggressive responses to Tseli’s ‘violence’. This can perhaps be attributed to the black man’s inferior position in society at the time of apartheid rule. This emotional emasculation through victimisation is evident in the responses of Charley, a weakling who is unable to dominate Tseli in the usual mode of the patriarch. He is as much haunted by the inequalities of the political system as he is by the similar control tactics of another woman who previously succeeded in having him incarcerated for alleged rape.

The five scenes alternate between Charley’s prison cell in the present time and a room in the township the previous day. The audience has sympathy for the characters, largely established through Charley’s witty repartee, despite his deplorable profession. Tseli is also not portrayed

as the generic prostitute; she emphatically states that she “is not like those girls you tout for sex-starved whites” (1987:51). With similar aspirations held by the women in And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses, Tseli does not view marriage in terms of romance, but rather as an economic alliance which is a vehicle of upward social mobility in a male-dominated world, aspiring to transform herself to a more socially acceptable normative status of mother and wife. Being pregnant with, presumably, Charley’s child, she now desires the domestic security of marriage, hence demanding financial insurance for the future and normative respectability for herself through Charley, whom she sees an extension of her economic significance. She demands a relationship on her own terms, instructing Charley to get a job as she does not need a husband for whom she would have to take responsibility. Marriage for Tseli will also confer upon her the respectability of being a ‘wife’, a biased label but one preferable to that of a loose woman, and for her a slight advancement up the social ladder of male perceptions. The ever-popular polarity of the Madonna/ prostitute image evident in many of the plays by both Mda and Fugard, is again present here. Unlike the three prostitutes in The Hill, Tseli has a moral conscience in that she questions Charley’s demand for an abortion. Mda makes a stand for black women in this predicament; he does not allow his female characters stoically to accept their adverse situations. This is possibly due to his understanding of their plight resultant from his experiences in the historically underdeveloped economic infrastructure of Lesotho. Prostitution is a recurrent theme in Mda’s plays and Masefinela Mphuthing argues that

prostitution in Lesotho arises from three major factors: unemployment (a result of both economic conditions and inadequate education), desertion by husbands who have disappeared into the mine diaspora, and the strong social depreciation of illegitimate girls...each of these a product of migrant labour.

(Mda 1990 : 31)

Charley, however, resents the idea of being fettered by a woman in something as permanent as

marriage. The fear of responsibility, especially in the light of his nonentity status in the workplace, ‘feminises’ him such that he, “laughing hysterically,” describes to Tseli the burden of having to support a child, in classic patriarchal terms of terrified misogyny and violence: “We can tear the baby to pieces - limb by limb...we shall cook the best meat you have ever had. Baby meat. We shall make stew” (1987:53). These are distressing images to most women, but Tseli remains unmoved as she intuitively and shrewdly is aware of her position in the hierarchy of dominance in the relationship, and Charley’s anxiety. Charley’s abhorrent description also reflects the little value modern society places on mothers and children, and on life itself. By attempting to preserve the life of her unborn child, Tseli takes responsibility for the lives of all children and women. Charley’s fulsome expressions of affection however manage to entice her into seeing an abortionist. Tseli becomes ill from the prescribed medicine and they return to see the herbalist. En route they are confronted by the obnoxious Frikkie du Toit, a white man whom Charley has had dealings with in the past. Du Toit assumes that Tseli is just another of Charley’s prostitutes and when he demands her services, a fight ensues and Frikkie possibly fatally injures Tseli. Frikkie represents the destructive force of white supremacy and its concomitant racial cruelties, whose policy of apartheid was the root cause for many of the injustices against the black woman. In the end it is not clear who must bear culpability for Tseli’s silenced position: the powerful or the powerless of the political system. Charley once again suffers injustice at the hands of the dominant rulers and again is wrongfully imprisoned, this time for the possible death of Tseli. In a government system that advantages whites, Charley is representative of the young unemployed township criminal and his protestations and explanations as to the true nature of the events are thus ignored.

In capitulating to Charley’s final attempt to regain control of his domestic situation, Tseli is doubly betrayed by Charley, and unwittingly becomes the victim of both male brutalisation and

the political system, a system which leaves both characters isolated in fear, death and imprisonment. The dead end is finally reached: for Charley, the end of a squandered life and squalid ‘career’ on the streets, for Tseli, the end of an unborn life and possibly her own, and the end of her aspirations to a new life of preferred conventional morality. Whether Tseli lives or dies, does not make her the ultimate victim, because Mda has given the woman a platform from which to speak, and so “achieves social and political purpose ” (Holloway 1988:27).

5.2. DARK VOICES RING

“She kicked her way into the world, that one ” (1990 :33).

Dark Voices Ring, a play comprising of a single scene, was written in 1976 and premiered on 9 October 1979. The play sets out to expose the vagaries and cruelties of racial discrimination and inequalities. The scene is set in a hut, in which we meet the three characters, who have no identity other than that defined by the gendered terms ‘woman’ and ‘man’. Central to the play is not so much the political vengeance intended by the Man, but rather the Woman and her responses to her experiences. This play, as with Dead End, also brusquely alternates between the present and the past, as both contain different realities of the lives of the characters.

The play’s opening dialogue gives the primacy of voice to the Woman, who questions, instructs and cautions the male protagonist in the first few seconds of stage action. It is clear from her retort: “you are not his wife ” (1987:32) that she is the controlling force in the development of the play. She is a woman with no illusions - “there are no decent dreams ” (1987:32) - and also no aspirations, other to take care of a husband who has been reduced to a vegetative state, whose cry is “like the cry of a baby ” (1987:32), and who is utterly dependant on her. The young Man

addresses her as Ma, thus setting up a second relationship of mothering, emphasising the domestic role of woman as nurturer, but ironically also subverting this role, as the men she takes care of are adult men, and not the child she mourns who died in the fire. The Old Man's present condition is contrasted with his earlier role as "baas boy" on the farmer's land where they worked and lived. The Old Man has in a sense been emasculated, toppled from his position of command as the prestigious leader of the workforce, left insensate and scarcely human, and relegated to obscurity. The Woman has now usurped his erstwhile role as the leader and further refuses to admit that their misguided servility to the white man had been the catalyst to the death of their child and their resultant misfortunes. Nontobeko is central to this play and is hence the only character who is given a name. The reason for giving her an identity is obvious - she will never have a voice or a position from which to speak from other than that of absence. As a dead infant, she symbolises the weak's inability to pose a threat to male centred ideology. The Woman's innate strength of character which has enabled her thus far to survive the atrocities meted out by the apartheid mentality, a system which conversely annihilated her husband, is not stated overtly but is indirectly ascribed to her by the Man, who symbolises regeneration and action. His respect for her as a black woman and his admiration of her enduring strength of character serves to centralise her as a woman with agency and purpose: "You have always been strong, Ma. My mother never forgets how you used to gather the biggest bundle of wood when you were girls" (1987:33). The Woman immediately picks up on this seemingly indirect acknowledgement of her former self-worth, but responds with a slight variation on emphasis. She refers to the birth of her daughter, proudly seen as an extension of herself, whom she feels exhibited similar qualities from inception. "She kicked her way into the world, that one" (1987:33) thus placing a double emphasis on the Man's affirmation of the strength of women.

However, it becomes clear that the Woman shifts to another reality; that of herself as mentally

enervated, broken like the Old Man. Her ability to command respect in the community has been eroded through the memories of the past. She is not able to confront and accept the horror of her husband's dehumanisation and the burning to death of her baby. In this, Mda reveals a convincing socio-psychological insight into the realities of the human condition, that men and women are equally frail in the face of inhuman cruelties and catastrophic situations, and that some events and experiences defy gendered arguments.

The Woman is however judged and found lacking by her society for her indirect betrayal of others, a fact she refuses to acknowledge. She is torn between her guilt of betrayal in serving the interest of the whites, and her pride at having commanded an elitist position on the white man's farm, resulting in her subsequent alienation from the other workers. In true Mda fashion, her cathartic release is brought about by the younger man's efforts to assist her in regaining her innate strength of old which he had admired in her, by forcing her to confront her personal burden of guilt. Her understanding and acknowledgement of her reality through the unburdening of her conscience, heralds the renewal of her emotional strength and social affirmation.

Mda enables his female character to neither accept nor deny her alienation, but to defy it, and presents her ultimately as the victor. In this female character Mda has created a credible individual with perhaps not much focus on a victory over patriarchal dictates, but certainly a personal victory in the face of the destructive impact of racial inequalities. She finally is able to admit to herself that the root of her collective misfortunes lay in her misguided pride. Her sense of prestige thus relinquished, she is now able to cognitively re-engage with reality, which is affirmed when she asks the Man, and ultimately also herself: "... do you know what you are up against?" (1987:43). The Man answers for both of them, offering a profound solution for all women who have been oppressed: "A war of freedom is never lost...when people fight for the cause of justice, their will to continue is indestructible" (1987:44).

5.3 THE HILL

“ He will learn soon enough that he is playing with fire ” (1990 : 101).

The Hill was written in 1978 and first presented at the People’s Space Theatre in Cape Town in 1980. The play, set in Lesotho, consists of four scenes in which gendered entities such as Woman and Veteran form the central focus of the action. However, it is the female characters who control much of the action in this play. This play attests to Mda’s theatrical skill in presenting the debilitating consequences of the migrant labour system underpinning the realities of the characters. Although most of the action is centred around the Man, the Young Man and the Veteran, Mda, in keeping with much male centred writing, includes also the old moth-eaten dichotomy of the Madonna / prostitute as his female characters. The surrealistic opening scene of The Hill centres on a nun transfixed in prayer, isolated in an aura of exclusivity and sanctification. She serves as a symbol of religious aloofness and perfection, hence is untouchable and unattainable by mortal men. Throughout the play she remains steadfastly deaf to Man’s entreaty for absolution and compassion. Mda’s anti-clericalism is reflected in this deistic indifference to man’s human plight, and as such the nun is portrayed by Mda as an artificial creation in a system as devoid of life as the plastic rose she clutches, and cannot in this sense be regarded as being representative of women. However, the nun also admits to a feminist reading, and hence her inability to communicate can be interpreted to be representative of all the women who have been marginalised, isolated and silenced by the patriarch. She is in a state of non-being and as such is denied her womanhood, evincing the traditional image of women bound to silence and inaction. Mda the male playwright, *chooses* not to give her a voice. Her lack of voice renders her powerless with no control over her destiny, and forces her to internalise her oppression. She cannot retaliate because her only weapon against oppression has been denied her. Not only has she been silenced, but she has been dehumanised by denying her a consciousness and a place in

history as a gendered being. She is now the symbol of absolute depersonalisation and alienation, essences universally understood by the deprived and the silenced minority. However, for voiceless women imprisoned in an unjust society, anti-social actions become inevitable: the three prostitutes' treatment of the males in this play bears witness to this statement. However, remaining with the first reading of the nun, the ominous atmosphere serves further to enhance both the nun's mystique and aloofness, and removed from reality she hence symbolises a system which has become impervious to the human suffering that surrounds her on the hill.

The theistic mood induced by the ghostly setting is soon shattered and replaced by a mood of comic, albeit bleak parody, introduced by the typically male preoccupation with the scatological. A naked man and a trouserless man, their nakedness representing the universal plight of the oppressed, appear on stage and instead of comparing the size of their penises, compare the size of their excrement. During the ensuing graphic discussion, the nun, predictably is made to exeunt. Although humour, albeit tinged with a mixture of mockery and irony is evident throughout the play, this drama focuses on serious economic issues facing Lesotho's men and women and its devastating effect on their lives. The women, rendered destitute through the neglect by their men due to their own marginalised positions, are typically forced to use their bodies as commodity in order to ameliorate their plight; the men sell their blood to blood transfusion services.

The nun's refusal to engage with the men or adhere to their pleas does not represent purity and Christian love, but rather is representative of a system which dehumanises, rather than uplifts its people. Here Mda's theatre is true to form - he foregrounds the political at the expense of feminist issues, as the focus is less on the nun as a woman as it is an indictment of a political system. The Veteran's comments on her refusal to bless them, metaphorically refers to the system

of governance which refuses to acknowledge them as humans, and this metaphor can also be extended to the predicament of women placed in inferior positions through political ruthlessness, in that

“ she doesn’t know that you exist. She knows about your soul. Not about you....when you get to the land of gold, - if you ever get there- you’ll find people like her - representing their particular kind of system - Only they, unlike her, are part of a system which strives to castrate us”

(Mda 1990:97)

Scene Three forms the climax of the play and it is here that we meet the forceful triumvirate of the three prostitutes. Despite the fact that Mda has created types in his characterisation of the women, this does not affect his outstanding portrayal of these characters as women rooted in a sisterhood of angry pain. Mda effectively counters the problem of unidimensional representation, by allowing the characters to speak for themselves. The women are portrayed as lively characters who enthusiastically seek the downfall of the libidinous Veteran, who is representative of the male at his most contemptible. The Veteran, naked apart from a shirt, symbolises through the body, as with the women, the degradation and humiliation of the individual living in a fragmented society. The incongruity deepens when The Veteran, still in his naked state, assumes the role of minister as an irreverent foil to the nun and her illusionary spirituality. The three prostitutes, together with the Man and the Young Man, are presented as a parodied congregation. In his ridicule of a mine service and everything that represents Christian principles, The Veteran pointedly welcomes the women. Women were not allowed into the single- sex compounds of the workers, and their presence on the hill possibly heralds a welcome change from “ fucking each other when the desire comes upon us” (Mda 1990:96). The “ confessions ” of the mixed congregation centre on descriptions of sexual transgressions, thus publicising that which women usually hold private. The parochial and critical views men hold of the sexual behaviour of

women, as opposed to their own, are evident in the Veteran's self-righteous condemnation of the three women, when he commands them to " Stop! You wicked women! God is not interested in your confessions. Confess, my brothers, God loves you " (100). In the narrow phallogocentric view of the world of the male underdog, God here is portrayed as the archetypal male, who will support the brotherhood's view of the " immoral " woman, conveniently forgetting that they have created the market for this immoral behaviour in the first place. When the Man in fact points this out to the Veteran: " those of us ... are helped to relieve their frustrations by these sisters, at a price " (Mda:1990:101), the Veteran, his personal identity at stake, responds with more condemnation. The true reason for his actions becomes clear in his final accusations - one of the women had robbed him of his money and clothes after an earlier sexual liaison with her. Still viewing the woman negatively, his scorn enables him to turn nasty and he demands his money back, but typically Mda, who avoids depicting his female characters as victims, presents the women as remaining undaunted, revealing their underlying strength of character and solidarity despite their inferior status:

“ 3rd Woman : It seems he is threatening you, my sister.

1ST Woman : He will learn soon enough that he is playing with fire ” (101)

The veteran recognises this implied challenge to his male authority and immediately demands back his trousers “ at least ” (102) in an attempt to regain his dignity in the event of a possible showdown with the women. As a male he is able to sense the danger their threat poses, as already the women, all impoverished, itinerant and unemployed, have formed a cohesive bond through their common disenfranchisement.

The women dominate the dialogue and continue to toy with him verbally, then drive home the supreme insult: “ who would want to sleep with a pathetic creature like you? ” (Mda 1990:102).

This direct attack on the male ego is the ultimate catalyst to violence for most males, and the Veteran, now thoroughly humiliated in front of his peers, resorts to the bastion of patriarchal power, this being the archaic male stratagem of violence: “You wicked witch! You’ll pay for this! Right now!... I’ll kill you!” (Mda 1990:102). This illuminates the male fear of domination and social control by women, as violence against women reinforces the woman’s dependency on the male, conversely allowing them to exert authority and control over the woman. However, in this context the Veteran’s threats are ludicrous as he is clearly a man already emasculated by the political system and is hence no match for the women, particularly one who calmly takes out a knife from her bra and unclasps it with her teeth. This clearly shows that to be weak, powerless and violable is to be woman, but given power, a woman will be a man, the knife symbolising the extent to which women have to go to protect themselves. She has to protect herself not as a woman, but as a man would and so emphasises the woman’s alienation of the self. The image of the woman with the knife challenges the societal conventions imposed upon women, and by unclasping the knife with her teeth, mocks the masculinity of the male. The woman indirectly expresses her anger, rage and frustration at her own miserable existence by challenging the masculinist behaviour of the Veteran, who, as his name suggests is a seasoned chauvinist.

The lecherous Veteran clearly views women as commodities to be sexually, physically and verbally abused. When he attempts to rape one of the sleeping women, he is confronted by the indomitable spirit of the “Other” who speaks for Everywoman when, usurping the male role, she confronts him with “you come any closer, dirty rapist, you’ll learn a good lesson”(106). In the face of this overtly ‘masculine’ show of power visible in the image of the warrior woman he retreats whilst spuriously imploring their forgiveness and mercy. I imagine this would elect considerable audience commentary here, but from interestingly different perspectives. The Veteran, in a final show of bravado, carefully addressing no-one in particular, attempts to justify

his recent humiliation by questioning the brotherhood's stupidity for soliciting prostitutes at all. In an ironic reversal of male representation, the Young Man, having witnessed the women's recent victory over the Veteran, is skittish of them when they invite him to sit with them: "sit down, man, we will not eat you ... we like you, you see" (107). He apprehensively addresses them respectfully as 'ladies' and, as insurance against their unpredictability as women, he assures them of his non-affiliation with the Veteran. The women however, are drawn to him through motherly and not carnal love, because he is family and also because of his childlike innocence, and want only to protect him. When the Veteran discovers him, cuddled up with the women, he has his own small revenge by calling the Young Man's manliness into question. The women silence him by threatening to "cut his balls off" (109), a threat which places the women in the ultimate position of power. The phallus ("balls") denotes male superiority and male power, and is the ultimate manifestation of masculinity. The idea of a castrating woman is an untenable image to any male fantasy, but by placing the blame on the system for their inferior position, they are indirectly divesting the woman of any presumed authority over the male. The women dominate the entire penultimate scene, their discourse a monument to Mda's literary liberation of the silenced woman, as he draws on their individual and collective strengths to displace the perception of women as subordinate and dependent. Mda succeeds in telling the story of these women with dramatic skill, undercutting the male's smug assumption that women are weak, harmless, ignorant, stupid and easily swayed, and perhaps implicitly points to the moral that despite the division between men and women, men would do well not underestimating the woman.

Mda's women characters are a refreshing change from those of Fugard, who in the main are victims to whom everything gets done. Mda's often nameless female characters ably subvert the stereotype image of women churned out by male writers, and are presented as self-willed and

motivated individuals. It can be argued that Mda's female characters are portrayed more authentically than those of Fugard, because Mda presents them with a spirit of defiance evident in black communities at the time. One needs not to have lived in a township to realise this, and Fugard's omission of this can be seen as evidence of his bleaker vision.

5.4 AND THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUNDAY DRESSES

“ Men are all the same ... I hate the bastards, sister woman ” (1993 :20).

This play was written in 1985 and was first performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland on 14 August 1988. The play is a piercing critique on social and political problems, including feminist issues, using as vehicle the intelligent and witty dialogue of the two female characters, simply identified by the broadly representative gendered terms 'Woman' and 'Lady'. It also includes a critique of the concerns of women, which distinguishes this play from all Mda's other plays, which most often focus on issues of masculinity. This is Mda's only play in which women are the central figures, forging solidarity with female audiences through the characters, as he wants women to view themselves as agents, capable of making choices about their lives. Mda's identification of people as nameless, hence in a sense anonymous, strengthens the resonance of the scenes, and Loren Kruger suggests that “ by making the women anonymous, the playwright emphasises the collective nature of their actions ” (quoted in Keyssar 1996:58). Mda asserts the legitimacy of women as the general vehicle of social change, rather than merely the subject of historical variations on the woman's question through his depiction of his female characters. He establishes and conveys the characters of the two women to the audience through their physical appearances from the first scene. In terms of presenting characters with precise character traits and a physical identity, compared to his requirements for his previous characters,

this is a change, as Mda's stage requirements are rarely this particularised. The physical appearance of the Lady is explicit. She is about forty, chic and sexy, a sophisticated woman of the world, pretentious, ridiculous. The Woman on the other hand, is much more simplistic, soberly dressed with a motherly appearance and roughly the same age as the Lady.

There are striking similarities to Beckett's Waiting for Godot in this play, in respect of character dialogue and setting. Like Beckett's play, no particular place is *specified*, although by inference the audience knows it is somewhere in Lesotho; there is also a similar sense of time passing, and the fragmented and disjointed initial dialogue of the two female characters in this instance, waiting to buy rice, evinces a similar mutual dependency to that portrayed by Beckett's characters, one continuously assuring the other that "things are about to get right" (Mda 1993:5). The play looks at the (futile) efforts of two women who have been standing in a queue for days, waiting to buy the cheaper government allotment of rice. Waiting patiently in line on the favours of those in power, they are presented in the roles of domestic passivity, women shopping for food. They are painfully aware of the contrast they must present to the office girls in their 'Sunday' dresses, who represent financial independence and social acceptance, a clear reference to the dichotomy of the existing bifurcation of wealth and status in an economically unstable society. Like the characters in Waiting for Godot, the women, alternating between hope and despair, pass the time by gradually revealing their personal lives to each other. Unlike Beckett's male characters, the women are in a specific cultural and political situation, albeit universally applicable, and we are alerted to a system which forces them into servitude, prostitution and other oppressing practices that prevent women from attaining any form of recognition.

There is an interesting inversion of roleplay between the prostitute and the housewife. The stylish "Lady" is anything but a lady - she is a self-proclaimed prostitute, a woman who "wolfs her

food” (Mda 1993:5). She is an educated and sophisticated product from a private school who incongruously educates her teenage daughter in the prostitution business as insurance against old age, but must now compete against her youth for future trade. The practical Woman, by contrast, is a politicised domestic servant, who is able clearly to express her sense of outrage against a system which only has the interests of the fraternity at heart, and at the same time challenging the domestication of women’s speech: “ The fucken rice we are waiting for. They are loading it into those trucks! ... Fuck you all, big-bellied business men! ” (13). The plight of these two women evokes laughter with the audience because the conversations between the women are at times comical, but similarly their plight also evokes pathos, as underlying the humour is a deep sense of sadness, isolation and insecurity.

The Woman’s diction and actions belie her motherly appearance and she is clearly established in the leadership role as she is the “ agitator ” (27), a political role normally ascribed to the male, her name also ironically subverting this role. Her political awareness and active involvement in revolutionary activities provide a challenge to the multi-faceted oppression of victimization, impoverishment and ostracism. She at least tries to make a difference: “ When the revolution comes, I want to carry a gun. I don’t sit in the sidelines darning socks for soldiers ” (1993:33). Her description as a dowdy *hausfrau* and her initial subservience to the Lady fails to corroborate her subsequent eloquence in political rhetoric and her membership of the Domestic Workers Union. She revolts against the very idea of being thought of as an inconsequential and domesticated nonentity ‘darning socks’, but rather, assumes a male centred sentiment towards conflict; she wants to participate in active revolt against her oppressors. ‘Darning socks’ is a symbolic image encapsulating pedestrian domesticity in which women allow themselves to be robbed of having agency, hence removing any hope on a future, because having a sense of agency is paramount to the oppressed if they want to escape the shackles of patriarchy at all. The Woman

is presented as the binary opposite to the “pretentious, even ridiculous” Lady (4), who epitomises the fearful and insecure woman who is unable to take a stance for her rights, having been silenced by her sense of inferiority as the ‘Other’. She hides her insecurity behind her mask of the sophisticated woman of the world. ‘Lady’ in any event is a term which most feminists frown upon as it contains biased and judgmental constituents. The Lady emphasises the importance she places on appearances through her careful application of her make-up when the play begins. However, herein lies another ironic reversal, in that her excessive application of the make-up emphasises her occupation as a prostitute, rather than enhances her appearance as a lady.

The bond between the two women is strengthened by their abandonment by men. They begin to acknowledge this bond by calling each other “sister woman” doubly affirming their feminist autonomy, and by sharing a vociferous opinion of men in general and their acceptance of mutual dependency: “Men are all the same ... I have been used, so now I use them. I hate the bastards, sister woman ... They are not human beings” (Mda 1993:20). Mda shows his obvious empathy and understanding of women throughout in this play. The two characters, representing broad social types, are linked through contrasting identities to their mutually shared experiences rooted in gender inequalities and the perceived social roles of women. These two characters are in a state of constant flux, seeking fulfilment in their abject lives, and both women embody the notion of the ‘superior woman’ in socially inferior situations. Mda’s female characters have no delusions about life, yet attempt at all cost to maintain their dignity despite their impoverished positions: the Lady attempts to keep up appearances despite her admission that she owns nothing but the money intended for the purchasing of the rice; the Woman elevates herself through rhetoric from a domestic drone to a warrior woman.

The play concludes with Mda's insightful understanding of the abandoned and scorned woman so vividly portrayed through his female characters. They reveal their solidarity as women against the world and are able to turn and face the world as women with agency rather than as victims. Yet, under the surface and free of pretension and veneer, they share one common emotion, pain. They wistfully admit that their longing remains for the men they have lost, despite their protestations about men. This is evident in the relatively surprising concluding lines of the play:

"LADY : Sister woman, do you still think about him?

WOMAN : Who?

LADY : The man.

WOMAN : The man I ran away with? Yeah, sometimes.

LADY : The man who left me. Sometimes.

WOMAN : Well, mine left me too.

LADY : Men... They are the same. They are like children of one person " (Mda 1993:37).

The binary relationship of man/woman is taken as immutable. The two women have a predilection for defining themselves in terms of the male, one by making a living out of them, the other as a servant to them. They both view marriage as a bond that can bring them salvation, because a relationship with a man holds the promise potentially of a secure financial future. This is a portrayal of women at its most sane. It pleads for the recognition of both male and female, as *together* they can overcome oppression and exploitation. As the Woman says, "It is now time for us to change things. To liberate not only ourselves, but the men themselves, for we are all in bondage. Yes, the men in this free and independent country are in bondage, mostly to their attitudes " (1993:27). Ebert has this to say about the ideological construction of gendered individuals, especially in male dominated heterosexual couples: " By producing the female subject as complemented and completed by her relation to a male partner, patriarchy naturalises

sexual identity, masking the cultural construction of the feminine, thereby continually reproducing women in a subordinate position ” (Ebert 1988:19). Mda, however, wants to promote the recognition of the woman, by giving her an own physical and cultural space from which to speak from and from where she may view herself.

Although And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses is essentially a play about women and for women, it nevertheless fails to focus exclusively on women and their problems, because subtextually this play centres around a number of complicated issues and themes largely pertaining to the political struggle in Lesotho. To some degree Mda has attempted to portray women who seek definition as individuals, and who do not want to conform to the roles established for them in a predominantly patriarchal society. The Woman and the Lady are no longer portrayed as women who feel that they have nothing of their own and who need to surrender themselves to men out of fear of being alone; they are not left clinging to the idea of romantic love, but finally discover a need to define themselves in their own terms.

5.5 THE NUN’S ROMANTIC STORY

“ They have decreed that I should not be happy, but I decided to defy that ” (1996:86).

This play was adapted for radio and broadcasted by the BBC in 1992, and first performed at the Civic Theatre Johannesburg in 1995. The setting of this play is unspecified, but it is obvious that the content was influenced by the political situation in Lesotho. The title of this play is deceptive, as this play is not a romantic melodrama, having been variously described as “ a story of brutality in the name of democracy, and a ‘miraculous’ story, a story with its roots solid in the neo-classical revolution in Africa ... as well as the first uncertain steps of democracy ” (quoted in Mda 1996:24). From a feminist reading, this play appears to flaunt masculine values, such as the love

of power, sex and rules. This title is rather ambiguous, as it is not a story *about* a nun, told from a male point of view, but is in fact her *own* story, using the men as mouthpiece, and hence subverts the implied authority of the male over the woman. The conclusion of this play will bear this out, as Anna-Maria simply vanishes, thus leaving no opportunity for the men to dictate her future to her.

Anna-Maria is an extremely complex character, and submits to a number of interpretations. Overtly, and unlike Mda's representation of the nun in The Hill, this nun is a woman complete with a persona and a name. She is the image of the classic successful woman, "very beautiful" (80), popular, courageous and intelligent, who teaches mathematics and who is an accomplished musician. Subtextually, however, there is a much darker side to this character, constantly glimpsed in seemingly unimportant or trivial remarks. She is a woman who by her own admission plays on "the ribs of the devil" (81), here a subtle reference to her underlying propensity for violence. Male critics such as Chris Dunton view the character of the nun as "ethereal", a woman of "transcendental" stature and calm, courageously carrying the burden of her childhood scars (Mail and Guardian:1997). This postulation needs to be revisited, as this may not be an accurate assessment of her character, because Mda clearly does not present his female characters as stoically passive victims, but rather as being robust and vigorous. He does however attempt to instill in the audience a prescience of tragedy as he refers to her in his stage directions as the "poor Anna- Maria" (80). A further reading will show that the nun does possess traits of strength, as she is neither politically nor linguistically innocent. Mda blends many aspects of being female into this character, who is able to alternate from being a little girl to a sensual woman to a determined killer.

The events unfold through the narratives and dialogue of two male characters, and, as in Dead

End, this play similarly opens on a scene of restrictive confinement where one has the sense of prey surrounded by predators. In this play, imprisonment functions as a metaphor symbolising the confined condition of women in the existential and political sense. The plot tells the story of the trial of Anna-Maria, a nun who has shot and killed a prominent government official for his presumed participation in the atrocities carried out against her family in the name of politics. This is possibly analogous to the atrocities committed during the 1970 State of Emergency rule in Lesotho. The nun has recognised this official as the man who was involved in the brutal slaying of her entire family twenty years ago. She succeeds in procuring a gun, and in an attempt to change the unchangeable, she kills him just as he is about to receive communion, thus effectively, in accordance with the Roman Catholic canon, condemning him to Hell for eternity, a punishment no man-made legal system can match, reminiscent of a similarly proposed revenge in Shakespeare's Hamlet. The nun assumes the role of both judge and jury and finally mocks the legal system by miraculously disappearing in the closing scene, thus prohibiting any further assassination of her character by the men. The posturing lawyers attempt to destroy her, as she poses a threat to their authority, and attempt to diminish her credibility as a human being by accusing her of being insane, emotionally stunted, obsessed, possessed and hearing voices in claiming to communicate with the Virgin Mary. They even presume to prescribe her feelings for her: "no, you want to be happy Anna-Maria, but you cannot be happy. Circumstances do not allow you to be happy" (86). In terms of patriarchal dictates, the men attempt to prove her 'Otherness' in order to justify their authority over the woman. Alternative readings however force us to scrutinise Mda's disaffiliation with the norm here, which offers a number of possibilities regarding the nun's character.

There are various subtextual references to the fact that Anna-Maria may not be a wholly balanced woman, but that she has in fact subconsciously been affected by the killing of her family, and that

perhaps suffers from a psychosis. Her instability becomes apparent in the ease with which she is able to change from one personality to another. The veneer of the docile, childlike girl and the dignified intellectual is soon dissipated by her later actions, because she is not an innocent nine year old ‘child’ as the lawyers want to make one conveniently believe, but rather a calculating and vengeful woman, who is able to look her quarry in the eyes and smile at him before dispassionately killing him. She also is able to “smile sweetly”(86) when recounting to the court the horror of the events on the night her family was attacked and killed . Here Mda tentatively enters that dark space of human behaviour which can neither be assuaged nor healed by political action or any other action. Premeditated murder will not set Anna-Maria free, but only deepen her isolation from society. She is in fact a besieged woman with absolutely no support to draw on other than her spiritual beliefs, surrounded by the unsympathetic male gaze; men who view her as an oddity. However, she remains obstinately recalcitrant in the face of the enormity of her predicament. Readers and audience alike must share surprise at the bizarre disproportion between Anna-Maria’s purported image and her actual image established through her actions and dialogue. Nuns generally represent women who are in servitude to a male centred construct and portrayed within a theme of virginity. Anna-Maria states that she is “ married to Jesus ” (96), and as a nun, is a woman typically excluded from participation in public life and hence alienated from social intercourse. However, this nun is the antitheses of this virginal concept, as Anna-Maria is a virile example of self-domination, albeit sexually repressed. Pampiri states that they tried to make love but “ it didn’t work out ” (118). She is not given the opportunity to celebrate even her own sexuality which is revealed and denigrated through male perceptions.

Mda’s ironic reference to T.S. Eliot’s play Murder in the Cathedral as being a romantic play could be of some significance here, in terms of gender issues. Romantic love with its connotations of strong emotions and voluntary reciprocity is being parodied here, as it is glaringly

absent in both these plays. None of the characters, including that of Anna-Maria, is able to experience this emotion. Eliot's tragedy is in fact a male spiritual odyssey, and deals with issues such as regeneration, hope and a personal struggle against ambition. It centres on an Archbishop as central figure, a character who is facing death possibly for his own personal glorification. Similarly, Anna-Maria as a nun is adamant that she must be martyred, as a sacrifice representing all women who have been unjustly silenced through oppression. She refuses to be moulded into the male's perception of her selfhood, and is adamant to be heard: "No, I am not innocent. It is an utter insult to refer to me in those terms. I cannot be innocent. And if anyone wants to order that I be granted freedom, I will resist with all my might" (85). Her unlikely feat will serve as a feminist triumph as Mda explicitly uses virginal martyrdom, the weak and the feminine, as an agent of subversion of the institutionalised power of the male. The nun is hence able to transcend gender to subvert the traditional glorification of male violence against women. Pampiri the lawyer represents the oppressor, powerful, male and pagan. He is a self-confessed atheist who has no illusions about religion and the Church, and in fact encourages the nun to resort to male tactics in a sardonic and disparaging manner. On hearing that Anna-Maria wants to kill the general, he smugly suggests that she: "try to be merciful ... don't kill the poor bastard too painfully. Let's not have too much of a bloody mess" (114). Anna-Maria responds on his own terms with equal smugness: "fancy teaching a nun to swear" (101). Her dialogue constantly alternates revealing different personas ranging from innocently childlike to calculating and cold, a woman who "sets her own procedural rules" (109) in her gameplay. Her diction changes to authorial male centred responses which further subverts her erroneously perceived innocuous geniality. Using graphic imagery of violence wholly unbecoming 'the poor innocent nun' image, she scoffs at the masculinist legal system for thinking her weak and cowardly: "Imagine! They were saying I might use it to commit suicide! Perhaps cut my wrists ... tie the strings around my throat until I could not breathe anymore ... desecrate an instrument ... How crude can you get!

They may as well leave me naked. I might hang myself with my knickers ” (81). She accuses the lawyers of being “ smart-arsed ” and angrily questions their bias against her abilities as an intelligent adult: “ in other words, I am a nine year old moron in a twenty-nine year old body? ” (115). She is more than able to assert herself, despite the social censure, and admonishes Pampiri by accusing him of saying “ such stupid things ” (97). She remains confrontational throughout, and never defensive, despite her loss of freedom. “ I should know my emotional growth better than anyone of you here ... accused my foot! Who is the accused here, you or me? ” The men attempt to regain a foothold through chauvinist driven stratagems and a frustrated Malibu accuses her of wanting to “ snatch my fame and glory ” (117) which reveals his true motives for his involvement in her trial, another male bent on achieving power and fame riding on the fate of a woman. The men stoop to the unacceptable use of hearsay in court as a means to destroy Anna-Maria’s spirit and justify their inaccurate perceptions: “ we have heard from various witnesses ... that she has never grown up ... frolicking with children in the playground ” (116). This ploy shows that they realise only too well that this woman is disrupting the concord of their male power structure. However, when Pampiri admits that he had “ lusted after her ” and “ had many fantasies about her ” (117) which were not wholly reciprocated by the nun, she conveniently becomes “ a woman with normal adult passions and not a child of nine ” (120). Anna-Maria has no fear of her oppressors and criticises the unprofessional behaviour of the lawyers: “ should I seriously stand here and listen to all these insults directed at my person? ” (117). The males then resort to the clichéd patriarchal trump card in their patronising response, “ you have no choice, Anna-Maria. You are on trial ”, and of course is found wanting. When she mysteriously disappears from her prison cell leaving behind only her clothes, the patriarchal Mda effectively silences his female character and leaves her powerless, but the playwright Mda who avoids weak female characters, allows her to dominate and cause dissension and confusion amongst the men, splitting them into two camps, the one who with bravado asserts that she is “

just like a witch ... witches fly naked, riding on a broom ” (123) and the other, now uncertain, want to canonise her: “ she was truly a saint ” (124). Neither perceptions are correct, as Anna-Maria shows that feminine fragility can withstand the strength of men. In her universal act of revenge, which for her offers some small degree of closure to her nightmare, she portrays the human condition of Everyman when faced with her particular history of horror. She effects this revenge not as a hysterical woman in an emotional burst of passion, but as would a coldly calculating male. Despite their differences, men and woman have much in common, and when driven, as previously illustrated in The Hill, women can ably defend themselves against male dictates. The nun supports this in her own words: “ That’s right, I had a whole week. I didn’t just stand up and kill the man. I thought deeply about it. I prayed and meditated about it. What do you say to that ? ” (Mda 1996:118). The effect of this gauntlet being flung at the men, helps the audience to redefine the nun’s character and role.

Although the central concerns of the play attempt to criticise the role of the church in politics, Mda does also address women’s issues subtextually, and remains true to his assertion, that he portrays women as he sees them, giving them agency and a place from which to defy male autonomy over their lives. Moreover, Mda is able to empathise with his women characters through a clear understanding of their deep emotional turmoil and dilemma and their position as the outsider, alienated in a male centred society.

5.6 LOVE LETTERS

“ Not all was war and death ... there was life too. And there was love ” (1998 : 5).

Love Letters was a play commissioned by the Windybrow Centre for the Arts in Johannesburg

and was also first performed there in 1995. It is one of Mda's very few plays to incorporate music and dance in the true spirit of African drama. Music and dance in black drama largely serve to unify the audience, negating time and place. Mda, in an interview with Nuttall, states that African identity is important in most rural traditions, as Africans see themselves in terms of their human identity, referring to themselves as Abantu, meaning simply 'people', exclusive of race, colour or gender, and celebrating their various identities of clanship, ethnicity, gender and family in the oral modes of song and dance, which have didactic relevancy (Nuttall 2002 :265). However the play does not only reflect local history but also reflects the history of the individuals, that of the women in rural society. Love Letters, essentially a didactic play, consists of eight very short scenes which aim to revive both the function of art and values in African society.

Alternating between present and past, this play strives to explore the control young men and young women have over their relationships in negotiating a love match, albeit within the confines of perceptions skewed mostly in favour of the male. This lighthearted drama focusses on deception and misunderstanding between lovers, and centres on the application of Zulu beads in creating text as visual language, emphasising the functional rather than the aesthetic value of art.

The main action takes place in the distant past, where a woman in the role as the nurturer of the younger generation is teaching young girls the art and function of beadwork, the theme being love and marriage. The characters, consisting of six females and one male, are textually and dramatically insubstantial and presented as two dimensional. The dominance of the male perspective seen in many of Mda's other plays, is consciously absent here, women being the central protagonists. This is evident in the lively discussion between the female characters, who in the present time, are discussing wedding plans in a discourse and perspective rooted in western culture, and evidencing Mda's intimate understanding of women issues. The play is written in

highly stylised English, complete with clichés, anachronisms and simple metaphors, blending Zulu vocabulary into English. The mother - “ an ordinary township mother ” (Mda 1998 : 2) - and daughter relationship is presented in the stereotype of the happy family. The dialogue is a clichéd one of women discussing a forthcoming wedding, complete with the fear of the male reneging on the day. The women, in terms of producing meaning through beadwork, are the literates. Literacy provides these women with a position of power despite their positions in a male centred society, and in this sense they achieve superiority over the male: “ Ha, just like today’s illiterate man who will ask his relatives to read and write letters for him ” (4).

The story is a rural story of love and misperceptions through failed communication; an old tale with a fairytale ambience which concludes with the characters living happily ever after: “ Not all was war and death ... there was life too. And there was love ” (Mda 1998:5). It is a play in which women are portrayed in an idyllic rural environment, devoid of their rural contemporary truths of poverty, crime, rape, unemployment and social oppression. The play, although attempting to preserve African identity, also masks a number of feminist concerns. The characters’ dialogue emphasises the definitive roles that male and females must assume in rural society evident in the ceremonies and rituals exclusive to both sexes. There is no gender uncertainty here, as women are firmly placed in gender specific roles of wife, mother and daughter, and these roles are perpetuated through the perceptions upheld by the *women*: “ ... for beautiful brides like you to induce fertility and the birth of beautiful children ”(Mda 1998 :22). The dominance of the male is hence perpetuated through the perceptions of the women. The woman’s utility value is enforced through their own impetus thus preserving the erroneous image of ‘true womanhood’ as married woman and mother. Women themselves encourage male domination through their acceptance of male values in this play, unlike those plays of Mda previously discussed. The suggestive male centred dialogue promoting the picture perfect

“beautiful brides and beautiful children ” obscures the truth of the rural woman’s hardships. Cherryl Walker explains the origins of black male’s disapproval of the independent black urbanised woman, who was stereotyped as immoral and irresponsible:

Ultimately what allowed these societies to export male labour was the system of homestead production in which women were the primary producers men were violently opposed to female migration for this reason. It would seem that African societies relied on internal structures of control - gender ideology, social pressure as well as women’s economic dependence - to uphold the sexual division of labour and keep women in the homestead.

(Walker 1990 :179)

Mda through his character Lindiwe, who attempts to justify the patriarchal domination of women, in the concluding lines of the play illustrates the situation for rural women: “ Of course, it is our custom ... and a symbol of your conquest ” (Mda 1998:12). This play forms an interesting counterpoint to Mda’s other plays discussed - it is the only play in which the woman’s voice is static and predetermined. If the rural woman’s voice is central, it is however not one of contestation and defiance as in his other plays. Love letters has been included in this discussion for the following reason: the authorial voice of Mda the *playwright* problematises male power and control over his female characters, but the voice of Mda the *patriarch* reflects his own personal history and culture, and this is subtextually discernable in this play, despite his obvious regard for and understanding of his female characters.

CHAPTER SIX

“ The play’s the thing ” - (Hamlet Act II Scene ii).

CONCLUSION

Apronti observes that virtually the whole of South African society has in one way or another been affected by the constraints of apartheid, to the detriment of the freedom of the spirit of man, but

artistic people - writers, composers, musicians constitute a special category of victims, bearing as they do, not only their personal burdens but also that of the wider society to whom they play the role of spokes-man. These are people with an acute awareness of the common humanity of all men. Yet their conception of the ideal life in a non-racial and just society has been frustrated by the oppressive and racist regimes that rule that unhappy country.

(quoted in Jones 1976:107)

In his most recent play Sorrows and Rejoicings Fugard also emphasises the role and the importance of the artist as the catalyst in the changing mindset of society: “without people like him, Marta, you would still be living in the old South Africa” (Fugard 2002:24).

What is important about any playwright’s work, here in particular that of Fugard and Mda, are the insights contained therein and their ability to impart these insights to the audience. Mda and Fugard have acknowledged through their representation of the female character, that a woman is a multifaceted and complex being, often embodying irreconcilable opposites. They both show their acute understanding of the many women whose lives are incomplete, and who destroy themselves waiting and hoping for the rules to change. In Dark Voices Ring, it is the Woman who demands redress, and it is her regeneration which also resurrects the Old Man, thus

empowering them both to go forward into a new life of hope.

Mda, unlike Fugard, claims that he does not wholly depend on a political situation to remain creative, because he writes from the imagination; he portrays the characters as he sees them, and uses the power of language to give his characters voice. He comments during an interview that “the world that I was writing about was the world I created...I am the God of that world, so I can make things happen the way I want them to happen. Whether in the so-called objective reality things happen in that way or not, is not the issue for me” (Naidoo 1997:250). Fugard however, places his characters wholly within particular political restrictions, and hence portrays them with no hope of escape, despite their obvious latent strengths.

The evolution of the apartheid policy caused the role of theatre to change in South Africa, and Mda himself points to the need for a new focus in drama, because South Africa is a dynamic society which must reflect this dynamism in its art. Both Mda and Fugard’s theatre is thus unavoidably provocative as theirs is a theatre in the exploration of the ambiguities of the human condition in different contexts. The political and its concomitant politics is understood to include all the structured links between the individuals, their community and their society, hence gender politics cannot be divorced from the political situation, these concepts being cohesively linked in any given society at any time. In all these plays there is a dual focus on violence, both in the macro society and in the micro environment of the domestic home. The abstract concept of love is largely absent in the relationships of the characters portrayed in Fugard’s plays, but noticeably also in Mda’s plays. Love is rewarding for very few characters. If it is at all present, it is defined in physical terms. In all the plays discussed, the women forge the bond of love amongst themselves, rather than with their male counterparts.

In the introduction to this dissertation the claim was made that Fugard and Mda present their female characters as being wholly a male construct, but with different degrees of agency. In the plays of Mda, the focus is placed on the importance of humanising his characters; in those of Fugard, the focus is on the cause and effect of the political system as a dehumanizing agent. Both these male playwrights represent women as they see them, leaving the reader to determine his or her own textual meanings. In his depiction of his female characters, Mda points at the choices the women are faced with and describes the outcome of these choices made. Mda's artistry brings his women characters to life, but it is his obvious regard for them which gives them their rightful place in black theatre. Mda appears to understand the female character better than Fugard. Fugard, however, is more able keenly to observe and portray that which he sees and defines more artistically than Mda. Nonetheless, however representative and often lacking as convincing constructs Mda's characters might be, they are mostly engaging and memorable, because he presents them with a touch of parody and the comedic, despite their adverse and often harrowing circumstances and experiences. This is because Mda's optimistic tragedy embodies a determination to resist and to overcome adversity. Conversely, the *leitmotif* which marks most of Fugard's plays discussed herein remains that of a failed and denied womanhood.

Interestingly, Gorak offers a rather different perspective on Mda's plays. He accuses Mda of displaying "the anarchist's hostility to the dominant system rather than a radical's fascinated analysis of it" (Gorak 1989: 482), and concludes that Mda, in the true spirit of the doubting anarchist leaves the stage with very little positive commitment. "With its thorough suspicion of systems of every sort, his drama comes closer to the theatre of the absurd than to the theatre of commitment" (ibid.). Indeed a very different reading to that of a feminist reader.

Mda admits that black theatre in South Africa has largely been a masculinist and sexist kind of

theatre, and I think he sets out to change that, because presenting women as victims will only serve to maintain the status quo. Mda advances the need to re-examine society in terms of its values, a society which has turned gang rape into a sport and socialised women into a culture of silence, forcing them to internalise their oppression and accept that because they are women, men may violate them any way they like. His plays are turning away from examining the overtly political and rather examine the social situation of the poor and the underclass, more subtle political themes. His theatre implicitly suggests that “ the period of resistance when affixing blame and making demands was most important has passed and a period of reconstruction when personal empowerment and co-operation are paramount, has begun ” (Graver 1999:9). He fully acknowledges that dependancy on historical issues will eventually lead to a stasis in representation. Mda insists that we face the past without baggage in order to effect a true reconciliation, and this particular imperative has formed the touchstone of his recent plays. Fugard, however, chooses to maintain the status quo evident in most of his plays, yet again placing women within the confines of the patriarchy of apartheid, as is evident in his most recent play, Sorrows and Rejoicings.

This is not to suggest simplistically that Fugard’s work has no relevance any longer, but must serve to emphasise the differences in the plays of these two most accomplished playwrights. Fugard’s plays, says Margaret Seidenspinner, “ will stand the test of time, especially the plays in which he joined forces with the theatre of the dispossessed, because it is an authentic and thought-provoking report of his life and times and comprises the ‘human story’ he has always wished to tell ” (Seidenspinner 1986: 339).

Mda is critically aware of the hardships of the oppressed, being a life member of this group, if not in gender, and has hence insight into the nature of anguished and catastrophic lives of black

people. Fugard, by contrast may empathise with blackness, but can never *be* black, much like the Lady in And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses, who futilely persists in applying skin whitener to achieve whiteness and hence reconstructs herself in terms of another authentically unattainable reality. Mda tells the story of the black condition as he experiences it, Fugard tells the story of the black condition as he imagines it. Bhabha clarifies this notion as follows: “Most people will agree that a sense of the Other is necessary in order to define oneself. What one is not helps to affirm what one is” (quoted in Duggan 1997 : 37). This is a very important distinction to make, not just in terms of the playwrights but also in terms of the representation of their characters.

Most conventional interpretive readings will show that both Fugard and Mda demonstrate through their plays their concern and preoccupation with the divisive forces of the apartheid system, but it is the representation of their women characters, as I have shown in this thesis, which finally sets these two playwrights apart. While Mda has centralised the female character in some of his plays, Fugard has consistently placed them as secondary constructs within binary structures of relationships such as husbands and wives and brothers and sisters, thus supporting the historically determined patriarchal division of gender and the privileging of one gender over the other.

Re-interrogation of these texts from a feminist perspective shows that their plays are rich in offering perspectives of what it means to be a marginalised subject living in a male world. From these plays emanates a sense that to be female, is to be faced with a special quality of violence and violation. Their depictions of the cruelties against women will remain relevant in view of the still largely unchanged gender imbalances in the contemporary South African context. The plays of both Fugard and Mda have collectively produced the sound of the many voices of the previously silenced ‘Other’ now demanding to be heard.

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