

Women: The Affirmative Element in Selected Plays by Athol Fugard

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this enquiry is Fugard's "Courage in the face of it all" which is the keystone to his idea of affirmation. The selected plays explore this defiance and refusal to surrender when confronted with despair that Fugard has invested in women. At the same time the plays portray the concept of Heroic Pessimism that is the deciding factor in affirmation.

Athol Fugard acknowledges that his mother is the archetypal image for all his women characters. His writing reflects the decisive and sustaining role that his mother played in his life. Fugard's admiration and respect for her encouraged him to portray women with not only the dominant and affirmative voice, but with courage that is worthy of emulation.

The plays chosen depict the growth of Fugard's idea of affirmation and illustrate the various ways in which the women arrive at their affirmation. Central to Fugard's concept of affirmation is the desire to celebrate the human spirit and its capacity to endure, forgive and love. By investing in women a sense of affirmation in the face of suffering and despair, Fugard is presenting his message of hope.

OPSOMMING

Die fokus van die vraag is Fugard se “Courage in the face of it all” – wat die hoeksteen van sy idee van bekragting is. Die gekose dramas ondersoek die teenstand en weiering van vroue om moed op te gee as hulle met wanhoop gekonfronteer word. Terselfdertyd weerspieël die dramas die konsep van Heroïese Pessimisme wat die oorwegende faktor is in bekragting.

Athol Fugard erken dat sy moeder die argetipiese beeltenis vir al sy vroue-karakters is. Sy skryfkuns reflekteer die bepalende en ondersteunende rol wat sy moeder in sy lewe gespeel het. Fugard se bewondering en respek vir haar het hom aangemoedig om vroue nie net die dominante en bekragtigende stem te gee nie, maar ook navolgenswaardige moedigheid.

Die gekose dramas verteenwoordig die ontwikkeling van Fugard se idee van bekragting en illustreer die verskeie maniere hoe vroue bekragting bekom. Die begeerte om die menslike gees se uithouvermoë, vergewensgesindheid en liefde te vier, staan sentraal in Fugard se konsep van bekragting. Deur vroue in die aangesig van lyding en wanhoop te bekragtig, veroorsaak dat Fugard se werk ‘n boodskap van hoop oordra.

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INTRODUCTION

**My mother is a remarkable woman. In fact that's got a lot to do with my plays;
the woman is always the affirmative element.**

(Vandenbroucke 14)

Dennis Walder writes: "Athol Fugard's career as a playwright is marked by a series of attempts to invest in a single character – always a woman - a sense of affirmation in the face of suffering and despair" ("Ways of escape" 289). One sees that Fugard agrees with this statement, because in an interview with Mel Gussow, he says: "For some reason I don't understand I lodge the affirmative note, the ostensible act of courage, with the woman" (Barbera "Fugard, Women, and Politics" vi). In this way "a woman – has been the vehicle for what I have tried to say about survival and defiance" (*Notebooks* 198).

Fugard acknowledges, as well, the role that his mother has played in his life. In *Cousins* he writes: "This dominance of the women in my early family life set a pattern for the rest of it. My relationships with women have always been the decisive and sustaining ones. ... I believe my writing reflects this. Whenever there is a woman present – a Lena, a Milly, a Hester, a Miss Helen, a Gladys Bezuidenhout – hers is always the dominant and affirmative voice" (10,11). Russel Vandenbroucke quotes Fugard recalling on BBC Television in 1974: "My Mother is a remarkable woman. In fact that's got a lot to do with my plays; the woman is always the affirmative element" (14). Recently in October 2001, in an interview with Donald Paul for *Citylife* magazine, Fugard referred to his mother as "that remarkable woman I had as a mother, who you know is the archetypal image for all my women" (69).

Talking about one of his women characters, namely the artist Miss Helen, in the play *The Road to Mecca*, Fugard recounts:

And a lot of my empathy for the character of Helen has to do with my great admiration for my own mother. She was just a housewife, a mother, but she had an inner life that I can't describe. And I just know that in this world there are so many people with these amazing inner lives which are never respected, which are never acknowledged, and they bring to this world something completely special and totally irreplaceable. (Winer n.p.)

I decided to use this quote to begin with, because it enlarges on the kind of woman Fugard has chosen to be “the vehicle for what I have tried to say about survival and defiance” (*Notebooks* 198). This kind of woman is reminiscent of “those little grey bushes in the shifting sands of the dune” (*Notebooks* 172), that life passes by and that nobody notices. It is, as well, this woman with her “secret” life (*Cousins* 74) that Fugard has made it his life’s “order” to explore in his plays (*Notebooks* 172). In *People are Living There*, it is “Milly the crumpled cast-off of a woman” (Baneshik n.p.); in *Nongogo* it is Queeny, a “woman for two and six” (*The Township Plays* 117) and in *Hello and Goodbye*, it is Hester “a woman in a room” “somewhere, in a street somewhere” (234, 200), to mention just a few of his female characters.

In this quote Fugard implies that it is people like his mother, whose inner desires others never take into account, that still manage to produce something very precious out of lives that on the surface seem to be rather dull and meaningless. In *Boesman and Lena*, for example, it is Lena, an “[ou] Hotnot meid” whose “innate kindness, tolerance and courage lends her an aura of nobility” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 244, du Preez 119). In this regard also, Fugard recalls in *Cousins*:

It was a world of so-called “ordinary people”, though that is not the adjective I would use to describe the lives I studied on the pavements of Main Street and in the dark little rooms of the Jubilee, and which gave me my understanding of words like courage and hope and despair. (57)

Fugard knows that in the “world of the so-called ‘ordinary people’”, the chances of their lives ever changing for the better is remote. He draws upon this fact because it enables him to highlight those qualities that permit them to survive in a situation where the status quo is very unlikely to change. This in turn makes the way they approach their lives with courage and hope stand out in relief from their everyday “colourless existence” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 128). Johnny expresses this sentiment in *Nongogo*: “You see, it’s important, Queeny ... trying to make life better. I’m not saying my idea is going to change the world, but maybe it will give us a bit more guts, and make waking up tomorrow a little bit easier” (*The Township Plays* 80). Fugard sees making one’s “life better” and affirming one’s existence very much like the saying that a single grain of sand can change the course of a river. Fugard seems to intimate that the small, everyday changes in living may affect the big changes in life. In other words, it is the

effort one puts into making a change in one's life and the hope that one invests in making a difference in the way that one perceives one's life, that counts.

It is this desire to ameliorate the conditions of their life that spurs on the women in Fugard's plays to affirm themselves. When Milly starts to clear the table after her party (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 161), Hester carries her suitcase to go back to her room in Johannesburg (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 232), Lena balances the bucket on her head (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 292), and Helen blows out her candles (*The Road to Mecca* 78), they all demonstrate in their varying actions that they courageously accept that their life will not change. What will change is the way that their affirmation affects how they will view their life in future. This perception is what allows them to survive in a situation that is beyond their control to change completely.

Du Preez maintains that: "Fugard like Satre, refuses to allow his characters any support external to themselves and that he sees man fully responsible for his nature, his choices and his life" (125). It is, however, this very fact that certain people still choose to take the initiative to affirm themselves, despite all odds and regardless of receiving any support from their society, that makes their efforts so remarkable and monumental. It is their sheer determination to act for what they believe in and not to accept life passively, that Fugard applauds and deems worthy of emulation. This quality Fugard discovered in his mother and it was to influence him significantly for the rest of his life.

The magnificent monument of a woman I remember was grey, a little stoop-shouldered towards the end, and very tired after a long and hard life, but in spite of all that she was still laughing at the follies and essential absurdity of existence, and raging against the injustices she saw around her in South Africa. (*Cousins* 4)

Fugard's mother's ability to still possess the will to laugh, even though she was exhausted by a very difficult life, impressed Fugard so much that he used this quality as the cornerstone of his concept of affirmation. It was around this attribute that he drew the character of Milly in *People are Living There*. In Milly, Fugard explores the inner life that the outer appearance of a dishevelled old landlady conceals. At the end of the play, Fugard immortalises his mother's laughter "at the follies and essential absurdity of existence" in Milly's laughter as she appreciates life's little "random images" such as a "kangaroo, boxing gloves, [and] blue bums"

(*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 169). Fugard later refines this laughter in Lena in *Boesman and Lena*, by making her laughter “at the incongruities of life[,] her best defence against ‘this dark, jaundiced comedy of living’” (Swart 114, *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 240,245).

Fugard expounds on his mother’s difficult life when he recounts: “She was going to need all the resources of her strong Afrikaner stock to cope with her responsibilities as breadwinner of a family of three demanding children and an invalid husband” (*Cousins* 5). It is important to note Fugard’s use of the word “resources” in this account. In his plays, Fugard demonstrates the various resources, those women, in whom he has invested “the affirmative, positive statement” use in order to arrive at their affirmation (Phipson 11). These resources are the outer manifestations of their inner strengths and determination to make their lives meaningful, and thus become the means whereby they affirm themselves. In *People Are Living There*, Milly, instead of despairing and resigning herself to her predicament cajoles, asks a favour, bribes, threatens, seeks revenge and uses emotional blackmail (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 102,118,119,136,138,141). In *Hello and Goodbye*, Hester persists in her determination to find compensation as she unpacks the boxes, and in *Boesman and Lena*, Lena incessantly and determinedly questions her abused, dispossessed way of life.

In this account Fugard also mentions his mother’s “strong Afrikaner stock”. His mother, who was a Potgieter by birth, came from “ the Middelburg district of the Karoo” (*Cousins* 10). Fugard also weaves this fact into what he conceives to be the affirmative make-up of some of the women in his plays. In *The Captain’s Tiger*, Fugard says: “That is what I wanted, what the moment needs, what the story is all about ... the Karoo woman as Hero ... which is what my mother would have been if life had given her half a chance” (35). Miss Helen in *The Road to Mecca*, is the Karoo woman who “affirms [her] right, as a woman” (75). Rebecca, the young Karoo girl, in *Sorrows and Rejoicings*, affirms her responsibility for her own life when she says: “I am going to live my own life the way I want to” (47). Veronica in *Valley Song* affirms herself in her ability to dream of a future away from the suffocating Karoo valley where she lives with her Oupa (65).

In *Sorrows and Rejoicings* Fugard also depicts the stoicism of the “Afrikaner” women in Marta Barends, Rebecca’s mother, as she endearingly polishes the stinkwood table “with her tears”

(50). There are also traces of this stoic quality in Lena, as she knowingly and courageously places the bucket on her head and continues her walk at Boesman's side (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 292). Fischer sees this decision to continue her walk with Boesman as "an act of heroism" (99).

With regard to *Hello and Goodbye*, Fugard recalls:

What I realise now of course is that in studying my fellow passengers with furtive fascination I was feeling my way for the first time into that very specific world of the alienated working-class Afrikaner. It is one that has always fascinated me, and my play *Hello and Goodbye* is my personal celebration of it. I had Johnnies and Hesters sitting all around on those bone-crunching, gear-grinding early morning rides into town. (22)

Here Fugard depicts the hard, mundane world of the lower class Afrikaner that forms the backdrop for Hester's affirmation. In *Hello and Goodbye* Fugard applauds Hester's "pluck" to return to and face a community that is not welcoming and that does not readily show the warmth and affection that she so desperately craves (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 180). He also approves of the courage that it takes for Hester to go back to her lodgings again, as "a woman in a room", and to deal with a future that does not show much promise (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 234). Hester has ventured, as Fugard puts it, "to be conscious of her fate and not squeal" (Richards 198).

In Milly's "cri-de-coeur", Fugard specifies his understanding of words like courage, hope and despair. He says:

Her cri-de-coeur: 'Is this all we get?' Hurt or outrage? Obviously both. Certainly not despair. (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xii)

Ultimately – Pessimism. But Heroic. Heroic Pessimism. 'Courage in the face of it all' Milly in *People are Living There*: 'Surrender? Never!' (*Notebooks* 96)

Here Fugard gives a name to the courage that Milly, for example, shows when faced with her despair, namely Heroic Pessimism. She cannot regain her lost years as no one can re-capture the past. All that Milly can hope to win is "Tomorrow" (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 166). The courage that she shows in hoping to gain something from a pessimistic situation ("morbid society" (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xi)) is heroic. The term "Heroic Pessimism" is Fugard's interpretation of Albert Camus's "Courageous Pessimism" (Swart 6). In the same way

that Milly shows “courage in the face of it all”, the women in Fugard’s plays show their courage in their various ways. Walder refers to this courage as the “[defiance] which transcends the circumstances of everyday life” (“To be Witnessed” 221).

In an interview with Lynn Freed, a South African novelist living in California, Fugard adds further information regarding those qualities that he discovered in his mother, which he views as necessary affirming characteristics.

My life has been sustained by women. I have an inordinate sense of how strong women are, starting off with the most extraordinary woman as a mother. My mother was an Afrikaner, who I don’t think passed Standard Four in the little Karoo village where she grew up, could barely sign her name. But a woman of such moral probity! As I was growing up and becoming aware of the South Africa around me and beginning to ask questions, she was doing the same thing. And she just had an innate, instinctive, inborn sense of morality, of right and wrong. She knew that something was wrong in the world around her. Whatever sort of human being I am now in terms of political convictions and attitudes to things like people of different races, I owe to the dialogue I had with my mother.

And it manifested itself in talk?

In talk. We both had our eyes and our ears open, and looked at the world around us, which was Port Elisabeth in the 30’s and 40’s. We would talk aloud and try to answer them for ourselves. So that sense of women and the enormously rooted moral quality that comes to me from my personal circumstances, started with my mother. She was a very ambitious woman, and she knew she had a good mind. She knew she had a powerful personality, but she had to be the breadwinner. She was a really frustrated, a silenced woman, ... And I think she realised that, through me, she could make a noise. (23)

In his plays, Fugard builds into his female characters the desire to question their world. By questioning, he is demonstrating that they are not prepared to be spectators and to watch the wrongs that they perceive in their midst. By questioning as well, they are attaching not only a value to their world but also a value to themselves. When Lena in *Boesman and Lena*, questions the things in her world that she sees and feels but does not understand, like her abuse, she is attaching a value to herself and her life and trying to find some kind of meaning in the absurdity of her existence. Milly in *People Are Living There* questions a society that condones men, acting in an unaccountable manner by discarding a woman after a relationship of ten years, because she is “no longer a woman” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 138, 157).

When Fugard mentions that his mother was a “really frustrated, a silenced woman” he is talking about the confines that tradition places on women in society. In *The Rainbow*, D.H. Lawrence outlines the frustration and silence that Fugard means.

But the woman wanted another form of life than this,...She stood to see the far-off world of cities and governments and the active scope of man, the magic land to her, where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled.

For her children ... Why must they remain obscured and stifled all their lives, why should they suffer from lack of freedom to move? How should they learn the entry into the finer, more vivid circle of life? (9,10)

Fugard’s mother instinctively defied the silence into which she was born by speaking her mind and influencing change by baring her secret, inner life and desires to her son. In *The Captain’s Tiger*, Fugard describes how his mother’s desire to “make a noise”, that is to be given a voice and to be heard, has happened. Her voice, namely her strength of character, her questioning nature and her ability to survive life’s harsh reality with dignity, permeates the fabric of her son’s plays. Fugard’s mother, Elizabeth Magdalena Fugard, née Potgieter, became his muse and the source of inspiration for all his woman characters. Hester, in *Hello and Goodbye*, like Fugard’s mother, tries to find her value in an Afrikaner tradition that has stifled her. Veronica (a more modern Hester) in *Valley Song* and Rebecca in *Sorrows and Rejoicings* refuse to let tradition silence them. Busi, Riana, Heather, Gamy and Shoki in *My Life* are the new generation of woman who celebrate the freedom of being able to reveal their inner selves openly to others.

Fugard is very adamant, however, that he finds this quality of courage and defiance in the face of despair in women and not in men.

I love women. In all my plays, whenever there’s a woman and a man, the affirmative positive statement is invested in the woman. The men are always the weak links in the chain of life. That’s not by choice: that’s the way I see it. I think men are, and also try to be predictable ... I think that the female psyche works in infinitely more mysterious ways. (Phipson 11)

A sudden and clear realisation at this table of how, almost exclusively, “woman” - a woman - has been the vehicle for what I have tried to say about survival and defiance – Milly, Hester, Lena ... and even Frieda in a way: that correspondingly, the man has played at best a passive, most times impotent, male. Image occurred to me of the large female spider and shrivelled, almost useless, male – there only for his sexual function. Thus Johnnie, Don, Boesman, Errol – all unable to “act” significantly – the image of the castrated male culminating of course in Errol Philander’s nightmare in *Statements*. (*Notebooks* 198)

This view is, as we have seen, predominantly a bias resulting from his personal experience where his mother, out of necessity due to his father's invalidism, had to play the more dominant parent. By implication, Fugard learnt to regard his father as being inferior to his mother, whom he "deeply respected for her ability to survive" (Wertheim 163). In *Notebooks*, Fugard says of his father that "he was misunderstood: the silence taken for vacuity, the groans at night for weakness, the one leg for dependence" (31). Yet in his plays, wherever there is a woman present, the man is always portrayed as being "unable to act" (*Notebooks* 198). In my opinion, it is only Johnny in *Nongogo* who has the makings of being stronger than the male characters that followed him. In *No-Good Friday*, Rebecca's character is not fully developed which by necessity makes Willie the stronger character.

In the interview with Lynn Freed, Fugard also maintained:

My collaborations with men I find predictable experiences. With women, there's a quality of unpredictability. They're more mysterious. At the risk of sounding a little fanciful, I would talk about chemistry with my male colleagues and alchemy with my female colleagues. Chemistry, which is a region of predictability, and alchemy, which is about the mysterious. (23)

Alchemists believed that they could create gold out of base metals. In using the word "alchemy" in relation to his female colleagues Fugard is not only complimenting women for their positive attributes but is also pointing out their value in his craft. He intimates that he has a better rapport with women. That, in turn, implies that he has a fuller understanding of the way they operate and think, than the understanding he has of how men think. Their "mysterious", unpredictable nature makes them, as well, a very useful vehicle for experimenting with a larger range of emotions, dilemmas and hang-ups. The kind of varying nature that women can portray lends dimension to their character sketching and allows the playwright to end up with a more full bodied and interesting personality. Milly in *People Are Living There* for example, depicts a whole range of emotions, namely despair, nostalgia, loneliness, rejection, the fear of menopause, but ends up with the ability to still laugh about the way that life is treating her.

Of his most recent play, namely *Sorrows and Rejoicings*, Fugard still maintains: "You know strong women always fascinated me. I mean this is a play about a weak man and strong women"

(Paul 69). Fugard has furthermore dedicated this play to Mary Benson and Katrina Swiers, his late housekeeper, whom he also saw as “a magnificent woman” (Thamm 108-112). Fugard is also considering writing yet another play about an “extraordinary woman in the 12th century” called *The Abbess* (Paul 69).

Fugard wrote to Mary Benson on 12 December 1964: “I’ve never realised fully how much of an Afrikaner I really am, until this moment when I kicked off my shoes and stood barefoot on the earth. I keep looking at my toes to see if roots haven’t appeared ... Yes – complacency is a danger – the subtle shift of ‘courageous pessimism’ into acceptance, a danger to be constantly on the guard against” (Vandenbroucke 241).

In his letter to Mary, Fugard refers to what he believes to be in essence, the distinguishing difference between how he portrays men and women in his plays. He depicts the women as examples of “courageous (heroic) pessimism”. In doing so, he manifests their sheer determination in refusing to capitulate to the despair in their lives. Milly in *People Are Living There*, to take an example, refuses to accept “Is this all we get?” because she will not be “satisfied with nothing” (156, 149). Helen in *The Road to Mecca* manifests this defiance in the statues that she creates and displays in her garden, for all to see.

Unlike the women in Fugard’s plays, who demonstrate courage and defiance, the men are conversely “[yellow bellied]” and apathetic (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 150). Johnnie in *Hello and Goodbye* does not love or hate. He plays it safe. He says of himself: “I come when called, I go when chased, I laugh when laughed at . . .” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 226). Don in *People Are Living There* can’t “call for help” because when things happen he can only “watch” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 167). Due to the fact that “purpose is dead in [him]”, Don thus remains a spectator of life, never getting involved in anything that he believes in (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 102). Boesman in *Boesman and Lena* cannot continue his walk on his own and stands “motionless” “before Lena, a grotesquely overburdened figure” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 291). Errol in *Statements after an arrest under the Immorality Act* dreams that he becomes a severed man without “a hand”, “a foot”, “a head” and then dreams the final degradation of becoming “a man without his name” (106).

Fugard maintains that because the men in his plays like Johnnie, Don, Boesman and Errol, for example, are unable to act, they accept life and by doing so become complacent. Fugard sees complacency as another word for surrender. He avers that men succumb to their defeat and by doing so are “passive” and at “most times impotent” (*Notebooks* 198). At the same time, I feel that Fugard is implying that it is a depressing fact that men are not affirming themselves and that he regards this “loss of male virility” coupled with “woman’s rebellion” (refusal to be complacent) as “the neurosis of our time” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 113).

When Fugard talks about the “the subtle shift of ‘courageous pessimism’ into acceptance”, he is admitting that he realises how easy it is to give up one’s fight in life and opt for acceptance of one’s lot. In *Notebooks* he plays with this very possibility.

That hill, the sun, the long walk. Possibly even a walk that Lena not yet made ... but will one day in the time that still lies ahead of her when she walks away with Boesman at the end of the play; a walk beyond the moment of rebellion – that possibility past, even forgotten – a walk beyond all the battles, the refusals, even tears. Surrender: Defeat. A walk into the ignominy of silence, the world’s silence and blindness, burdened now as never before by Lena’s unanswerable little words: Why? How? Who?

‘Can’t I stop now. Just lie down and die?’ (167)

Fugard indicates here that he realises that even in the celebration of affirmation there always exists the temptation of negation. In his interview with Peter Wilhelm, he says: “Lena seems almost on the point of a certain reconciliation with the clock, a certain acceptance of her life, her predicament . . . ‘I am going to die somewhere Boesman . . .’” (113).

In his plays Fugard leads us thus to value the courage in his women characters that makes them persist and not reconcile themselves with their lot. Because of this monumental quality in them, he wants us to view their affirmation as something “completely special and totally irreplaceable” that is worthy of emulation (*Cousins* 4, Winer n.p.).

Due to the confines of this mini-thesis, I will limit my exploration of women as the affirmative element in Fugard’s plays to three plays, namely *People Are Living There*; *Hello and Goodbye*

and *Boesman and Lena*. My reason for choosing these three plays is a result of the following statement by Fugard:

For six years my attempts to understand the possibility of affirmation in an essentially morbid society were dominated by and finally invested in three women: Mildred Constance Jenkins was the first, Hester Smit the second, and Lena the culmination. (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xi)

CHAPTER ONE

PEOPLE ARE LIVING THERE

**There must be something we can do! Make a noise!
Lest they forget, as the monument says. I can still do that.**

(People Are Living There 167)

When Athol Fugard was writing *People Are Living There*, he noted the following: “So tomorrow I start again. How many false starts before one finds a beginning that leads through to an end! But I am hopeful. One image has resurrected an old complex of ideas: Milly’s panic when she realises late at night that she’s spent the whole day in her dressing gown” (xii).

Before exploring those qualities in Milly that enable her to be endowed with “a dominant and affirmative voice” (*Cousins* 11), I think that one needs to begin, as Fugard does, with the image that led to the conception of this play. This image, as he describes above, depicts “Milly’s panic when she realises late at night that she’s spent the whole day in her dressing gown”. The play, *People Are Living There*, opens with the structuring of this exact image. When the building up of the image is complete, Milly switches on “the kitchen light” (which is also the stage light) and one is automatically presented with the identical image that Fugard had in mind when he conceived the play. However, being the master craftsman that he is, Fugard does not present us with a flat or one-dimensional image but with a full-bodied, multi-dimensional image instead. In the same way that the reader or audience gets to know a little about the hero of Molière’s play, *Tartuffe*, before seeing him, an idea of Milly’s character precedes her (Molière 68).

The silence that permeates the opening tableau is broken by a “husky woman’s voice” calling out for attention (101). We are immediately made aware of the force of the woman’s voice as it disrupts this silence. Stillness resumes, just to be gently broken a second time, by “*the frail, silken chimes of a grandfather clock somewhere else in the house*” (101). When the grandfather clock stops before ringing the correct hour, the house is silent once more. Then the sound of a blow to the clock, coupled with the resultant belated chiming of the hour, rudely breaks the

silence for the last time. The word “blow” indicates that the clock has been hit harder than necessary, to get it to work again. This “assault” on the clock in turn, indicates that when the clock does not function properly, it agitates the woman.

The mise-en-scène depicts a rather plainly furnished kitchen in an “*old, double-storeyed house in Braamfontein*”, a suburb in Johannesburg that is no longer a prime area to live in (101). The kitchen window that looks out onto the street permits the light from the street lamp and the odd passing car’s headlights to enter the room, thus breaking the darkness. This setting is Milly’s immediate surrounding and where she finds herself on a cold, cheerless winter’s evening. We are first introduced to her as a “white blur of a dressing gown” (101).

Milly then turns the light in the kitchen on and by doing so, brings the focus of attention directly onto her. The image of her that was formerly blurred is now distinct. We are presented with a visual image that depicts Milly as a dishevelled, middle-aged woman who has just woken up and is still dressed in her gown. When we add what we have learnt about Milly, namely her forceful voice, her call for help and her agitated behaviour, which we deduce is related somehow to time, to the visual image now before us, we arrive at the complete, full-bodied image around which the play has been conceived (xii).

Fugard first introduces us to Milly as “the white blur of the dressing” gown in order to illustrate to us that the mere figure of a woman in a dressing gown is not the full picture that he wants to present of her. Her voice, her call for help, her agitation when the clock does not sound the right hour and finally her age and unkempt appearance develop the picture further and bring the image into the perspective that Fugard wants.

At the same time Fugard moves from the universal image to a particular image. The first image is the blurred silhouette of a figure in a white dressing gown standing in a doorway. When the figure calls out, we discover that the person is a woman. This woman can by implication be any woman. It is only when the light falls on Milly that the woman becomes a specific woman. Fugard’s intention here has been to single out a woman in preference to a man and then, as well, a particular woman, also by implication in preference to any other woman. The light then

illuminates the woman he has chosen. Using this technique, Fugard is trying to say that there is something special about this woman that makes the spotlight fall on her.

With this technique, Fugard plays on the reader or audience's curiosity and expectations as well. When the light falls on Milly, the image that is presented is not what most people expect or possibly want. The woman is old and has not even bothered to get dressed. The usual expectation is of a woman who is young, beautiful or who has status. The picture that Shakespeare paints of Juliet, for example, is of a girl whose beauty "[the] all-seeing sun / Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun" (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.2. 92/93).

Thus, using semi-darkness and then light and moving from the universal ("the figure" and "the woman") to a particular woman (in this case Milly), Fugard is attempting to illustrate the woman you don't see, in the person you see immediately before you. In other words Fugard is saying that one has got to look beyond the image that is being presented and see it as a presentation of something far more complex. Here, Fugard perceives the person as a Gestalt, looking not only at the appearance but also at, what Pound calls, the "psychological and emotional" make-up of that person as well (*Notebooks* 77).

With regard to *People Are Living There*, Fugard is prompting the reader or audience to look beyond the "slatternly" appearance that Milly presents, and to appreciate instead, that inner form of defence mechanism that enables her to survive in what he terms "an essentially morbid society" (Vandenbroucke 109, xi). He is, therefore by implication, looking for those qualities in Milly that make her get through a most difficult day and at the end of it, say proudly: "Mildred Jenkins, you are still alive!" and that still furthermore enable her to appreciate life's little absurdities such as a "Blou Apie's" (Vervet monkey) blue bottom (158, 169).

In this regard Fugard paraphrases Ezra Pound and says:

'An image is the presentation of a psychological and emotional complex in an instant of time.' To which he adds a remark about the 'sense of liberation, of freedom' that follows. I use the word 'Image' a great deal. Pound's definition explains my meaning completely. I cannot add a word to it. (*Notebooks* 77)

Having given us the image as the “presentation of a psychological and emotional complex in an instant of time”, Fugard then proceeds to expound Pound’s “remark about the ‘sense of liberation, of freedom’ that follows.” He does so by embellishing Milly’s “panic” as follows:

Her cri-de-coeur: ‘Is this all we get?’ Hurt or outrage? Obviously both. Certainly not despair. (xii)

Ultimately-Pessimism. But heroic. Heroic Pessimism. ‘Courage in the face of it all’- Milly in *People Are Living There*: ‘Surrender? Never!’ (*Notebooks* 96)

The focus of the original image (“Milly’s panic when she realises late at night that she’s spent the whole day in her dressing gown”) is hereby extended to include those qualities in Milly that stand out and that are noteworthy enough to be remembered. These qualities Fugard spells out in the above excerpt. The characteristics that he wants us to note here are namely Milly’s hurt (her sensitivity to her situation), her sense of outrage, her courage in the face of defeat and above all her refusal to despair or to surrender to her predicament. In other words, Fugard wants us to think of Milly not as a frumpish old woman who has a problem, but as a woman who has enough strength of character to deal with her problem herself and that also has the courage to make the best of her situation. He wants to show Milly as a survivor in “an essentially morbid society” (xi). Fugard also invests in Milly those qualities that he deems worthy of emulation.

The silence that keeps on returning in the opening tableau is evidence of a situation that keeps on reverting to what it had been. In Fugard’s plays the status quo does not change. Fugard, an avid reader and admirer of Albert Camus, sees his characters as having the same relation to their situation as Sisyphus had to his. In Greek mythology Sisyphus was “a king of Corinth condemned forever to roll a heavy stone up a steep hill in Hades, only to have it always roll down again when he neared the top” (Barnhart and Robert 1951). Fugard likes to keep the status quo so as not to provide his characters with any form of outside assistance. He furthermore illustrates that it is not about achieving the impossible, but rather about having the firm belief that one’s attempt makes a difference. At the same time he wants to demonstrate that a certain amount of perseverance is necessary. When Fugard talks about “Heroic Pessimism”, he is referring to the courage that is required of a person to still have the conviction of his beliefs in a near impossible situation, and also to find meaningfulness in absurdity.

When the play *People Are Living There* opens we are immediately presented with the image of Milly at the height of her loneliness and misery. She has just woken up alone to a dark and silent house. Her words aptly sum up the feeling she had when she awoke:

I must have dropped off then, because the next thing I knew it was cold and dark and . . . I don't know. Empty! Waking up is cold business in an empty house. Specially old houses. Wherever you look it's just walls. God, it's depressing! Put out the light and you're as good as in your grave. (105)

However, once awake, instead of succumbing to the silence and darkness around her and thereby becoming even more depressed, Milly sets about creating as much disturbance as possible. She breaks the pervading silence in the house by calling out in a loud voice, inquiring whether anyone is at home. When she is met with no response, she immediately shows her resourcefulness by seeking attention in another way. She calls for help, hoping to get someone to come running to her aid. Still unsuccessful, she then sets out to fetch the person she wants. We learn that the person she seeks is Don. When the grandfather clock stops her, because it fails to chime the correct hour, she creates even more noise by giving the clock a good thump and getting it to sound the hour properly. She finally switches on the light in the dark kitchen. Milly's tactics, in creating as much sound as possible in the quiet house, is her instinctive way of coping with the silence. At the end of the play after Milly has affirmed that her life has meaning, she once more resorts to this instinctive approach when she says: "There must be something we can do! Make a noise!..." (167).

If one looks at how Fugard has built up the image of Milly in his opening tableau, as has been discussed, one sees that he regards Milly's instinctive response to her problem or situation, not only as a positive and valuable part of her character, but also as that inner form of defence mechanism that enables her to survive in what he calls "an essentially morbid society" (xi). This defence mechanism is the positive way in which she responds to her "cri-de-coeur" (xii).

In the play, Milly affirms herself in the way she plans the various strategies she employs in her protest against Ahler's rejection of her (167). Her plans are, therefore, the outward manifestations of those inner resources that she uses to arrive at a self-revelation, that enable her

to make sense of her life, to carry on to the next day, and by implication to carry on for the rest of her life. Milly's terminology for affirmation is "Hit him for it" (107), "he could hit her" (109), and "hit out" (110). Her motto for courage, which is also her outlook on life, is: "If you can't hit out once in a while, you might as well throw in the towel" (110).

Milly's first actions in the play are part of a plan to get Don to come to her. When she does not succeed with all the disturbance that she has created in the house to get him to respond, she then opens the back door and, braving the cold, makes sure that he both hears and sees her by calling and waving to him (101). Don rejects these attempts and tells her to go away. Undaunted and still resourceful, Milly then lures him to respond by promising him a hot cup of coffee. She says: "Come on over and have some coffee. Warm you up. That room of yours must be like a morgue" (102). Milly's words here illustrate just how artful she is at persuading. When she promises Don the coffee to warm himself up, she reminds him at the same time just how cold he is. Milly is prepared to do anything to get Don to keep her company. When she closes the backdoor after inviting Don for a cup of coffee, she makes doubly sure that she has succeeded in getting him to come to her by peeping through the keyhole. This illustrates just how determined she is not be thwarted in her attempt to get Don into the kitchen. Milly's waiting and watching the backdoor for Don to open it and come in, also indicates just how very anxious she is not to be alone.

When Don comes into the kitchen for his cup of coffee, it has not been made. Milly, who has no intention of making the coffee at that moment, does not even bother to reply to Don when he asks about it, and yawning instead says: "I've just woken up. Where are the others?" Here, Milly purposefully evades Don's question and inquires instead where the other boarders are. When Don tells her that Shorty is at Gym, Milly promptly replies: "That's right. Saturday. I forgot" (104). Milly has carefully steered the conversation around towards it being Saturday night, a night that one goes out. This is the topic that concerns her most at the moment. She desperately needs to find out from Don whether Ahlers has in fact gone out without her.

Delighted to hear that Ahlers has not gone out yet, Milly yawns once more, as if to pretend indifference. Then hinting at her hurt by saying that her heart is still asleep, she starts planning her retaliation. She says: "Anyway, I think I'll pop out. What's on your programme for tonight?" (104). Milly, who has gone out with Ahlers for the past ten years of Saturday nights, is not used

to going out on her own and she is slightly hesitant to do so. Her words “I think I’ll pop out” indirectly suggest bravado (my emphasis). Later, once she has directly confronted Ahlers as he is leaving to go out, her sense of injustice is at its peak and she says with fierce determination: “I *am* going out and I *am* going to have a good time” (121).

In the same breath as she expresses her desire to go out, Milly tries to find out whether Don is available to go with her. When Don does not respond as she hopes he will, Milly is suddenly very assertive and full of energy. She then confronts Don directly by saying that he needs some fresh air. Her short staccato-like sentences: “Maybe a walk. Brisk walk. Bit of fresh air. You could do with some too. It’s healthy. What about it?” serve to remind one of a march and you get the feeling that Milly expects Don to jump to her command (104). Besides trying to persuade Don to be more energetic and go out with her, it also seems as if she wants to boost her own courage to go out.

Milly’s ulterior motive here is to show Ahlers that she does not need him in order to go out and that she can still have fun with someone else. At the same time she would prefer to let him hear her go out instead of vice versa, as this would serve to boost her hurt ego. This effort is, as well, an attempt to convince herself that she is not “hard-up” for him and thereby lessen the impact of his rejection (121). This is why she says: “I feel like a bit of excitement tonight. Movies or something. Been in all day” (104). Her plan here pre-empts the birthday party plan, where Milly’s objective is to turn the tables on Ahlers and Sissy by trying to show that they, Don, Shorty and she, have had such a good time that they have forgotten Ahlers and Sissy (139).

How Milly plans her retaliation and any devious methods she uses, such as not making the coffee that she has promised, is not as important as the fact that Milly is not prepared to take her rejection lying down. When Shorty submissively allows Sissy to humiliate him by writing Bad boy on his forehead, Milly shows her disapproval and lack of tolerance by saying: “You idiot! Go and wash your face. . . . If that wasn’t taking it lying down then I’d like to know what is” (113).

Milly's effort in trying to get Don to go out with her demonstrates as well her modus operandi for the rest of the play. Instead of despairing and resigning herself to her predicament, she cajoles (102), asks a favour (118), bribes (119), threatens (136), seeks revenge (138) and uses emotional blackmail (141). This range of resourcefulness indicates her strength and determination to fight back and at the same time belies the appearance of a dishevelled old woman who does not seem to care enough about herself to get out of her gown and get dressed.

Although very willing and desperate to retaliate, Milly does not fight her own battle like Hester, for example, does in *Hello and Goodbye*. She thinks she needs to draw on others for support. When Don does not want to go out with her, Milly then tries to get him to side with her. When he finally admits under pressure that Ahler's rejection was not right, Milly immediately orders him to go and defend her honour as a woman: "Then go up and tell him. You call yourself a man, don't you? Go up and tell him it isn't right. And then hit him. A lady's honour is at stake. Ten years of her life, Hit him for it" (107). Milly cleverly appeals to Don's sense of chivalry. However, Shorty's "untimely" entrance foils Milly's plan much to her annoyance and frustration, and she greets him with: "Go to hell, I'm busy" (107).

Undaunted by the failure of this plan, Milly devises another plan. Reminding Shorty that he has promised her a favour, she sends him to find out which restaurant Ahlers is going to. This time she includes herself in the plan and says:

The plan is as follows. Shorty tells us where he is going. Our first move is to get dressed. We tog up to kill the cats. My white costume with matching gloves! You'll see something tonight, my boy. That done we then descend on the enemy. Ha! That will be triumph. He's sitting there, you see, with his so-called friend from Germany, and in we march, sit down and have a good time of our own! And right under his nose where he can see us. Then when he comes crawling to ask if he can join in, I'll have him arrested for molesting. (119)

The most important sentence in the above excerpt is: "I'll have him arrested for molesting" (119). This is what Milly should be doing. She should be standing up for her own rights and fighting her own battle. The fight is between her and Ahlers. Milly thinks that she needs Don and Shorty for support but finally discovers that she cannot rely on them. After the birthday party fiasco, she calls Don a "coward" and a "yellow belly" (150), and accuses him as follows: "But

I'm accusing you of desertion. That's my charge. That in the hour of need, in the thick of the fight, you deserted a fellow human being who had her back to the wall in a tight corner. Because I'll say it again . . . I tried!" (155). She then accuses them both of not even being able to empathize with her: "But you two? [*Mimicking them*] 'It's not so bad, Mill.' 'Let's call it a day'" (155). In a society such as this, where the men are "deserters", Milly has to stand up for her own rights as a woman and defend her honour herself.

Shorty returns, having been unable to accomplish his mission. Milly, who will not be thwarted in her demands, sends Shorty back to Ahlers. When Shorty fails a second time to obtain the sought-after information Milly is "impotent with anger" because Shorty's helplessness has in fact spoilt her plan of action (120). Shorty then asks Milly what she is going to do. For once Milly is without a plan of attack and replies honestly: "I don't know yet . . ." (120). Her word "yet" not only implies that she has not given up, but more significantly indicates Milly's tenacity. She is prepared to fight to the bitter end for what she believes in. Here she believes that she has been unfairly treated.

However, before Milly has time to muster her "forces" and devise a plan "B", Ahlers is on his way out. Milly then instinctively confronts him herself, as she has no other choice but to do so. She is not prepared to let Ahlers leave and make the "getaway", because she is determined to "spring the surprise when he [gets] to the door" (105). Milly first "*takes up a pose of studied indifference [and smokes]*" (120). Milly's pose of indifference here is the same as her smile-grab a glass-look happy pose (164). She needs to "pretend" to Ahlers that "nothing's happened" (120), as she does not want him to think that his rejection has affected her. Milly's pose is thus a front that she puts on in an effort to conceal her vulnerability, because at present her hurt has made her "most frail and vulnerable" (Wilson 33). She does not want Ahlers to learn that he has succeeded in injuring her as that, in her eyes, would be tantamount to her acknowledging defeat.

When Milly then shouts in a "*loud voice*", one is reminded of how she broke the silence of the empty house when she awoke (101). This in turn, makes us realise that Milly affirms herself when she "speaks out" against her injustice. When Milly "*speaks directly to Ahlers*", she is, to use her own terminology, "[*hitting*] him for it" (120,107). Here Milly lets Ahlers know just how unfairly he has treated her:

Enjoy yourself . . . with your old friend from Germany. And please don't worry about me. I'll sit here in the kitchen and twiddle my thumbs. After all, it was only ten years. Why worry about them! [*Her anger and resentment beginning to break through.*] Well, you'd better, because they were mine. Those were ten years of my life and you had them cheap. (121)

The above excerpt details Milly's "cri-de-coeur" (xii). Here Milly focuses on the real implication of the rejection, namely that she has lost ten, irreplaceable years of her life. Once Milly has finished accusing Ahlers and holding him accountable for her lost years, she then automatically threatens him as she tells him, in no uncertain terms, just how she is going to respond.

Just don't think that means I'm hard-up for you. Because I've got a surprise for you, Mr Big Shot, I'm also going to have a good time tonight. You bet. I'm going to have the best good time of my life. And it won't be beer and sausages at the Phoenix! Put that where the monkey puts his nuts. And when you come home I'll be out and there'll be an account for fifty pounds in your bed. [*Now shouting and gradually moving out of sight into the passage.*] Because if you think this is the end of me you've got another guess coming. I've only started. . . .

Yes, go on! Go on, get the hell out of here, you rotten stinking thief. *Thief!* (121)

If one looks at Milly's confrontation here, Fugard presents us with the "hurt" and the "outrage" of her "cri-de-coeur" (xii). The sheer determination that Milly expresses when she says: "I'm also going to have a good time tonight. You bet. I'm going to have the best good time of my life", is an indication that she will not allow herself to "despair" (xii).

Milly's reaction here reminds us of the words of the English dramatist, William Congreve, who maintained: "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned. Nor Hell a fury like a woman scorned" (Barnhart and Robert 867). Using these words, Congreve exaggerates and possibly disapproves of the rage that women can display when rejected by their lovers. Fugard, on the other hand, applauds such a reaction because it displays "courage in the face of it all" (*Notebooks* 96). Milly's rage, "*her anger and resentment*" that she expresses in her confrontation, and her moving into the passage where Ahlers is, show her courage (121). Ahlers still goes out of the door. This Milly can't prevent. However, the fact that he slams the door

implies that her words must have “hit” home, otherwise he would not have reacted in this manner (121).

Milly would have preferred to see him “[crawl] through that door like a dog with his tail between his legs” (121). Because Milly feels so hurt, she wants to “see” Ahlers getting hurt as well. She wants to “humiliate him in public” because she feels that he has humiliated her in the eyes of her boarders and possibly also at the Phoenix. That is why her first plan of action is to go to the restaurant where he will be and sit at another table so as to demonstrate that she is not dependent on him. In other words Milly wants to publicly announce that she has not been defeated by his rejection and in so doing hide the real hurt she is experiencing, not only from the others but also from herself.

After this confrontation with Ahlers, Milly asks: “You heard that I hope?” (121). She then repeats herself: “What did you hear?” (121). Milly wants to make doubly sure that they have heard her telling Ahlers “[where] to get off!” (121). At the same time she hopes that they did not hear the door bang. Milly should, however, be more concerned with what Ahlers heard. Here, Don and Shorty’s opinion is of more importance to her because she wants to convince them “that she does not care whether Ahlers goes out without her” (Bryceland in Rae 83). She, however, ends up trying to convince herself instead (Bryceland in Rae 83).

Part of Milly’s problem is that she thinks that she is dependent on others, in particular Ahlers, to go out and have fun. After this confrontation where she has just told Ahlers how she feels, and where she expresses her sheer determination to go out and have a good time on her own, she then still turns to Don and Shorty for support. She needs them to come with her.

SHORTY. You told him Milly.

MILLY. Where to get off! Didn’t I?

SHORTY. To get out!

DON. And to go to hell.

MILLY. Thank you. Enough! Let’s leave it at that. Because I meant it. Every solitary syllable. I *am* going out and I *am* going to have a good time. Because, just between you and me, the old Phoenix was a bit of a flop the last couple of times. Strictly speaking,

Milly's words "Thank you. Enough! Let's leave it at that", is not a show of modesty but demonstrate instead, her lack of belief in her own power, in particular her power to speak for herself. The words that follow, "Because I meant it. Every solitary syllable. I *am* going out and I *am* going to have a good time", illustrate that Milly needs to convince herself of her determination to go out. Again, when she then says: "Settled. I'll get dressed," but remains seated, one realises that Milly has not meant "[every] solitary syllable" at all (122). "Where are we going?" indicates further that she expects others, here Don and Shorty, to decide for her how she is to have fun. When she then orders Shorty to "Go out there and stop one of those cars and say 'Milly wants to know where is it? Where do you get this good time every Saturday night?'", one sees that not only does Milly have no idea what fun is, she also can't go and find out for herself what it entails either (122). Milly, in other words, does not take the responsibility on herself to sort out her own life; she expects others to do it for her instead.

However, once Milly has affirmed herself, she simultaneously reaches the realisation that she is her own independent person. She sees that she no longer feels that she needs Ahlers as she always thought she did, and with this perception accepts the responsibility for her own fate. When Ahlers returns home, Milly, pretending that she has just had "the best good time of [her] life", "[*speaks*] *directly to Ahlers in the passage*]" (121).

What happened? She say you were too old for her? You are, you know. Just don't think that means you can come crawling back to me. Because I had a damn good time without you. Didn't we, boys?

[*Ahlers is now moving up the stairs. Milly shifts her position.*]

So don't start banging on the floor at four o' clock if we're still going strong. This happens to be my house! Let's get that straight. And don't bother to ask if you can join in, because you can't.

[*Milly moves out of sight into the passage.*]

And finally, let me tell you nothing is finished. I've proved it. You never had anything to do with it anyway. You're not God. You're a parasite. A bloodsucking Hitler!

[*A door slams.*]

That's right, shut the door. But you'll still hear me! [*She is back in the kitchen now and shouting up at the ceiling.*] If it's the last thing I do, I'll make you hear me! (165)

Here Milly demonstrates that she can fight her own battle as she settles her score, point for point, with Ahlers. She shows Ahlers that she can have a good time without him. When she pointedly

refers to his age and the fact that she does not want him either, she rejects him like he has rejected her. It is interesting to note that this is the first time that Milly refers to Don and Shorty as “boys”. Here Milly’s remark, “Because I had a damn good time without you. Didn’t we, boys”, is very cruel. Besides suggesting a camaraderie that excludes Ahlers, she is also inferring that she can still attract younger men, where Ahlers can no longer attract younger women. Ahlers has rejected Milly by saying that she is “not a woman any more” (157). Milly rejects Ahlers here, and suggests that he is possibly not the man he thinks he is any more. When Milly says that they will make as much noise as they like in her house, she is pointing out to Ahlers that she makes the rules and not him. The final blow comes when she refers to the fact that she can prove that there are still “plenty of kicks left in the old girl” (146). This time, when Ahlers slams the door, Milly is not affected and infers that closing the door will certainly not prevent him from hearing her.

After this tirade, Milly, instead of looking for her boarders’ support, tells Shorty to “Bugger off”, and when Don asks her if she wants his “honest opinion”, she immediately, and without hesitation, curtly replies: “No!” (165). Milly asks Don: “You think he believed it?” (165). Her enquiry here, is to ascertain whether Ahlers got the message. This in turn, however, demonstrates that Milly is rightly more concerned with what Ahlers heard, as opposed to what Don or Shorty heard. Milly then says: “But I bet you anything you like there’s doubt. That’s even worse. I just hope it gnaws” (165). Here, she realises that she has chosen the correct “weapon” with which to deal with the way that Ahlers has hurt her. Don asks: “Suppose his doubt gnaws away all night?” Milly is able to reply: “If that happens, I am a happy woman” (166).

When Milly says with pretended nonchalance that she is going to “get dressed in a mo” (104), she is not just referring to the fact that she needs to get dressed in something else in order to go out, she is more importantly referring to the fact that she has not got dressed yet. When Fugard speaks about the conceptual image around which this play has been constructed, he is very specific when he says: “Milly’s panic when she realises late at night that she’s spent the whole day in her dressing gown”(xii). Milly’s panic is not about the fact that it is seven o’clock and that she is still in her nightclothes, it is more importantly, the fact that she did not get dressed that

day. By not getting dressed Milly symbolically gave in to her hurt and her despair and it is this “surrender” which irks her more than anything else, because it is a negation of herself.

The fact that she is still in her nightclothes is always at the back of Milly’s mind. When she first tries to persuade Don to go out with her, she says: “Get dressed in a mo” (104). Then, working out the details of her plan to go to the restaurant, she states: “Our first move is to get dressed” (119), and after her first confrontation with Ahlers, when she once more tries to go out, she says: “Settled. I’ll get dressed” (122). She remains seated (122). Before the birthday party, Milly shows Don her evening gown, but Don, disapproving of the dress, says that Milly looks better in her nightgown. Milly then does not get dressed. When Don tells Milly that one can end one’s life by just staying inside and not going out, Milly protests:

But there’s a street outside there, Don! All the people! Rush hour-hour traffic. Right outside that front door!

DON. Yes. But you’ve got to open it, Milly. [*Pause.*] Did you, today?

MILLY. [*suddenly conscious of herself and her predicament*}. I’m still in my nightie. I haven’t got dressed . . . yet.

DON. Exactly.

MILLY. You mean . . . it can happen like this? In a dressing gown? (167)

Here, Don makes Milly realise that she has to make things happen herself and not rely on others. The fun is “on her doorstep”: she just has to open the door.

The crux of Milly’s “cri-de-coeur” is this very fact that she has not “opened the door” and by doing so, taken control of her own life. In the same way that Milly procrastinates in making the coffee that she has promised Don, and delays getting dressed, she has always put off taking stock of her life. In this respect she says:

It took its time.’ My time . . . bit by bit . . . yes! That sounds better. Slow, and sly. What I mean is I try to remember when. The Moment When- the way they say: And from then on so and so’ . . . and so on. But I can’t. There doesn’t seem to be a day or a date. Once upon a time it wasn’t, now it is, but when or where . . .? It’s not easy to pin down. Believe me, I’ve tried. (128)

upon a time it wasn't, now it is, but when or where ...? It's not easy to pin down. Believe me, I've tried. (128)

Milly grapples to find the concrete moment when she suddenly started getting old. She does not seem to realise that there is no such moment that one can blame. Milly is disorientated and confused here, as she tries to defend herself against Ahler's rejection, which has brought into full focus "the fact that life dies" and that "one's life is so much" and no more (Wilhelm in Maclennan 518). In this respect, Peter Wilhelm refers to Fugard's "acute paranoia about time" and quotes him explaining these feelings:

It goes back to what I think is man's central dilemma: the fact that life dies. The span can literally be measured ... I've not been able to escape being fascinated, depressed, appalled, challenged by the fact that one life is so much, and that's your chance to do it. And the passing of those seconds ... it's death knocking at the door. (Wilhelm in Maclennan 518)

The past Saturday nights represented Milly's life and the highlight of her social activities. Milly's words "[r]egular as rent" indicate the habitual routine that she had allowed herself to get into (107). The years passed away, taking their toll bit by bit (128), and Milly was caught up in the inexorable trap of time, falling prey to the monotony of existence, where even weekdays lose their name and become "somedays" and where life in general becomes dull ("grey" 129). Milly has also allowed Ahlers to control that existence. Instead of living, Milly whiled away the time until she saw him again. Her constant looking up at the ceiling to detect movement or sound indicates that she had allowed herself to become a puppet to his demands (101,104,106,168). So like the chair Milly became an object, only useful when used, and when discarded by Ahlers, useless (129). Vandenbroucke says that Milly is not altogether certain whether she is a person or a meaningless object (113).

Sartre maintained that inanimate objects simply are what they are. People on the other hand are whatever they choose to be (*The World Book* 17: 98). Choice is a very important aspect of the affirmative element in Fugard's women because it indicates that they, as women, have chosen to have a say in their life. It is also the opposite of accepting one's lot. Fugard's men - Don, Johnnie and Boesman, for example, passively accept what life has to offer them because they believe that they cannot change their destiny. In this way Fugard sees men as "weak" and "impotent" (*Notebooks* 98, Phipson 11).

example, the silkworms do, or a chair or table exists. With choice comes independence. Milly no longer requires Ahlers to amuse her because she can entertain herself. Her laughter at the end of the play is evidence of this (169). At the same time, when Milly says that she is going to make a noise, so that the passers-by, stop and say “People are living there!”, she perceives herself as a person again and not a useless object (168). She is so proud of this perception that she wants to let everyone know that she has “a reason to hope that there is life before death” (Gray, *Universal Fugard* 16).

When Don tries to explain to Milly that Sartrean anguish means “finding oneself” and not “looking for it”, Milly does not see the difference (102). Then, when Milly says: “Well, according to the language I speak, when I want to find something I’m looking for it, and when I’m doing that I can be bloody certain I lost it to begin with” (103), it is evident that she sees things in concrete terms. Speaking about happiness she says: “Happiness. It felt like I was holding it so tight it was for ever and ever”(157). Milly sees happiness as a thing that one can hold onto and keep forever. She also regards having fun and a good time in the same way. In this respect, she says: “Milly wants to know where it is? Where do you get this good time every Saturday night?” (my emphasis, 122). When Milly does have fun boxing with Shorty, she thinks that she is being tricked into being happy so that she can forget her troubles with Ahlers (137). She does not see fun and amusement as something spontaneous that does not have to be looked for. Milly’s revenge, her birthday party, is a “fiasco” because the “laughing and singing and having a good time” is forced and does not come naturally or happily (151,139), as her laughter does at the end of the play (169). Happiness and having fun are not tangible things. Milly has to realise that one can’t make happiness just happen: it has to come from within.

Mary Benson quotes Fugard: “There *are no* promises in this life. We fool ourselves. One moment of happiness is nothing but one moment of happiness” (Benson 25). Milly thinks otherwise and cries out that: “[Somebody’s] a bloody liar. Because there were promises. The agreement was that it would be worth it. Well, it isn’t. I’ve been cheated”(156). Milly has not been cheated in the way she thinks she has. One has to be responsible for one’s own life and by implication one’s own happiness. Milly has depended on other people to make her happy. She has relied on Ahlers to provide her with a good time and he has done so for ten years. When Milly accuses Ahlers of having ten years of her life “cheaply”, she also maintains: “After all, it was only ten years. Why worry about them! Well you’d better, because they were mine” (121). The emphasis is on “because they were mine”. Those years were Milly’s years and she should

have worried about them as well. In this respect, Fugard maintains: "I've always said to others: Life? It's there to be taken. Put out your hands" (*Notebooks* 94).

In *Notebooks* Fugard writes the following: "Camus's *The Outsider* – and the old woman in the home. The paradox of starting to live when life is over" (44). I feel that one can use Fugard's observation in relation to Camus's novel, here, as it describes exactly Milly's dilemma in this play. Milly, rejected by her lover, has suddenly become "the old woman in the home" and this is what upsets her. She still wants to go out and have fun. She does not want to reduce the scope of her life to the four walls around her, and in so doing, bury herself prematurely in the boarding house. The paradox here is that Milly always took "having a life" for granted and now, faced with the prospect of having it taken away from her, she wants it back more than ever. Raeford Daniel sees the root cause of Milly's despair as her asking: "Where is my life? I want it!" (27).

Yvonne Bryceland's explanation enlarges on Milly's dilemma: "To Milly good times means a party, a dance, beer and, very important, a member of the opposite sex. I do not think that Milly could ever have a good time with women. The fact of having a partner when she gets all dressed up in white, and she has a male partner – that is the good time – the chief ingredient for a good time is a male partner. She could perhaps have simulated a good time with Don just because he happens to be the opposite sex" (Rae 84).

At the same time Milly is member of a community that places a lot of emphasis on sexual relationships, as does she. When Ahlers says that he is going out with "an old friend from Germany", Milly is not convinced and remarks: "Old friend, my foot" (107). She immediately sees the meeting in terms of a sexual liaison and says: "From Germany? I wasn't born yesterday. I can also put one and one together and get two evil-minded birds in the bush" (107). Milly also refers to Ahlers spending the money she "helped him earn on some cheap Jo'burg bitch"(138). She indicates here that she is being discarded for someone else to take her place. Don is only attentive when there is a reference to sex. He thinks that Sissy is trying to arouse him (113, 114); he sees Milly's hurt in terms of her having been raped (125,126); and he talks about the "realm of the subconscious, ... [where] lusts and libidos writhe like tormented serpents" (126). At the same time Sissy, a newly-married woman is going out with Billy (111,113) and Shorty, her husband, is allowing it to happen. This, as well, indicates a flagrant disregard for commitment

and responsibility. Milly thinks that it is disgraceful that Shorty knows about his wife's affair with another man and does nothing about it. Don sees it as acceptable (109). When Ahlers rejects Milly because she's "not a woman any more", she sees this dismissal from his bed not only as a direct rejection from Ahlers, but as a possible psychological rejection from her community as well (157).

As we have seen, Milly is very aware of how Don and Shorty, the other men in her life view her. She does not want them to see her as an old woman and in so doing avoid her. When she says: "The rock-bottom boxing match! Get out your gloves and hit", Don, ironically, immediately "hits" her with: "You've started to get old woman odours" (154,155). She enjoys their camaraderie, being able to boss them around and as well, keeping "score" with Don (168). She plans her revenge like a military exercise so as to include the "boys" (165), and thus resorts to terminology such as: "All quiet on the Western Front" (104), "It's on. Anybody who backs out now is a deserter. And on the front line you get shot for that"(141), and "Action stations" (142).

Ahlers suddenly terminates a ten-year relationship by saying that Milly is not "a woman any more" (157). His crudeness in the matter is emphasised by his eating liver sausages in bed and the "matter-of-fact" way that he suddenly ends their affair (157). Milly's constant reference to the fact that she is not "a woman anymore" indicates that this is the focus of her hurt (157). It makes her aware of her not having used her full potential as a woman and also makes her see herself as functionless. At the same time she very much aware of her remaining sensuality and expresses this when she says that there are still "plenty of kicks left in the old girl!" (146). Ahler's relationship with her had been based on her "being a woman". He now discards her because she is physically "no longer a woman"(157). For Milly the rejection is both physical and psychological and the terms of it makes her see herself as a used item: something to be thrown away and soon to be forgotten about, which for her is soul destroying. In *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays*, Lena says: "Something that has been used too long. Time to throw it away. How do you do that when it is yourself?" (244).

In a society where, as Don remarks, "the heart of love throbs below the belt"(116), it is easy for a man like Ahlers to terminate a ten-year relationship with a woman and get away with it.

MILLY. You mean he's going to get away with it?

DON. Why not? He hasn't broken the law. You not married. He pays his rent. In the eyes of the law he's an innocent law-abiding citizen having what you call a good time.

MILLY. And in mine he's a low-down, rotten, stinking bastard, who has done something dirty and must be punished. And if nobody else is going to do it, I will. Tonight I will take my revenge. (138)

In an interview with Lynn Freed, a South African novelist living in California and author of *The Bungalow*, Fugard said of his mother: "She was a really frustrated, a silenced woman, in the Tillie Olsen sense"(23). Unlike Fugard's mother, Milly refuses to be silenced. She says to Don; "And you're going to listen. ... I'll make you listen. I'll make you say it's all wrong and he's bad and it isn't fair, because that's what it is"(138). Later in the play when she finally confronts Ahlers, she says: "That's right, shut your door. But you'll still hear me! ... If it's the last thing I do, I'll make you hear me!" (165).

Refusing to be silent is the most important way in which Milly affirms herself. Fugard is very aware of the desire by women "to be heard and understood by their men who, he is convinced, often fail them" (Freed 23). Milly, like Fugard's mother, has an intuitive sense of what is "right" and "wrong" and she is not prepared to compromise. She will not let Ahlers get away with treating her in this way.

In his *Notebooks*, Fugard writes: "It is Milly's birthday and he is taking someone else out" (52). The implication is that Ahlers should be taking Milly out. By making it her birthday, Fugard wants to illustrate Ahler's lack of commitment to Milly and magnify the intensity of Milly's hurt and disappointment. In the play Fugard also makes it Milly's fiftieth birthday, an important milestone in one's life. Instead of having fun with friends celebrating her having achieved so many years, she is not only deserted but "abandoned" as well (Fischer 64).

In her sheer determination to find happiness and have some fun so as to give her humdrum existence some meaning, Milly bulldozes Don and Shorty into attending her birthday party and "orders [them] to have fun" (Wilson 33). The hurried, rough-and-tumble way that Milly organises this party is yet further evidence of her desperation to cover up the agony of her abandonment with the pretext of having fun. Milly wants all the trimmings of a party, from "paper hats" to songs in order to capture the "sound of merry laughter" (145, 148). She will not be "satisfied with nothing" (149). The more the party falters, the more determined Milly becomes to make it a success. In this respect Milly changes from being "*grimly determined*" to

being “*blinded by determination*” (150, 151). As the “party” dissolves into chaos, Milly, with her eyes closed, sings her song “*in her loudest voice*” (152). The loudness of her voice and the words of the song “Smiling Through” capture exactly what Milly is trying to achieve as she sings this song (151). She is “[calling] for help” (167). Milly is absolutely determined to “smile through” her troubles and not surrender to them in any way at all. At the same time she wants to celebrate her birthday by “[singing] out the old (year) and [laughing] in the new” year of her life (153). At the birthday party Milly symbolically “sings” out the old Milly, and at the end of the play, after she has realised that “Mildred Jenkins, you are still alive!” she “laughs in the new Milly” (158,169). In other words, the “old” Milly thinks that fun has to be manufactured; the “new” Milly learns to “catch life on the wing – to bring down a moment of it, a smell, a sound, a cry” (*Notebooks* 56).

Her methods of attack, for example the birthday party, might not always be the most forthright but they nevertheless illustrate her defiance. Her insistence that she wants a party with all the trimmings down to a “round cake” that can be cut into “wedges with icing” demonstrates her tenacity. (145) However, she does not change into her apricot evening gown (143), but remains in her dressing gown; she does not get a round cake but a slab cake (145), and she has to contend with two misfits as guests and a party that is deemed an official fiasco (151). The main thing is that she has had her party despite the “[slab-cake] and pimples, cigarette butts and silkworms, and nothing to do?” (153), and by having what she has wanted, she has affirmed herself.

In the play one does not see Ahlers or the grandfather clock, yet both the clock and Ahlers play a vital role in the unravelling of the plot as well as in the growth of Milly as a character. They act as a combined catalyst that suddenly makes Milly take stock of her life. Ahler’s suddenly ending a ten-year relationship brings all the forces regarding time into play. When the clock chimes the midnight hour Milly, desperate and confused, tries to hold onto the day but inevitably has to let it go (158). She tries to cling onto the Saturday, because it reminds her of all the Saturdays with Ahlers, and this in turn, makes her think that she cannot survive without him. The day and the clock stop at the same time and with that Milly’s tension. In a soft voice she says: “Mildred Jenkins, you are still alive!” (158). She has survived her ordeal, the first Saturday without Ahlers and her turning fifty. This is the culminating moment of Milly’s affirmation. Here she comes to grips with the rejection and with her age. In this statement there is an underlying note of pride, achievement and also peace, as Milly becomes aware of her strength, her independence and an own sense of worth. She realises that she still has a future. She does not need Ahlers as much as

she thought she did. She still wants him but not in the same way as before. She will have him on her terms, which implies that she is no longer subservient to his desires but will be more independent in the relationship. In the play, Milly grows from “not a woman anymore” to the possibility of being a “happy woman” (157,166). With this growth comes a sense of fulfilment and achievement.

Ahlers is not the only one to blame. The only time when Milly is really truthful with herself is when she admits: “Quite honestly, I saw it coming” (168). She had obviously seen the warning signs but had done nothing about it. When Milly denies wanting a baby: “No! There was no baby. And I don’t care, because I don’t want babies. Understood? Finished. Settled. Next one”(127), she reminds us of the Queen’s words in Hamlet namely: “The lady doth protest too much, methinks” (Hamlet 3.2.24,25). The baby that Milly now so desperately would love to have, would give her existence meaning and value, as well as providing her with a function in life. At the same time a baby would be a witness to her life and she would be kept alive in the memory of the child. Don says: “That warm nest in another mind where ‘You’ is all wrapped up in their thinking and feeling and worrying about ‘You’” (131). Milly will not have that and neither will she have a family nest to turn to for comfort. The best that she can hope to gain is “tomorrow”, namely, another day with Ahlers (166). Part of Milly’s anguish is that she had the chance to be happy but she did not take it. As she rightly remarks: “But I did have it and now it’s gone and nobody ever gets it back so don’t tell me that doesn’t make us victims” (157). At the end of the play Milly realises that she has to play witness to her own life by making a noise, “[lest] they forget, as the monument says” (167). She instinctively knows now that: “[she] can still do that” (167). She affirms herself with this desire.

MILLY. For God’s sake, man! This is a civilized country. Nobody gets forgotten like that. One thing I can assure you, it’s not happening to me. Oh no! there are limits. [Pause.] What were the cases?

DON. A few days ago. An old woman. They had to break down the door. She was found

...

MILLY. I don’t want to hear!

DON. Suit yourself. But it’s happening

MILLY. I said

Don. Here! Tonight!

MILLY. Who?

DON. You. Him. Me. [With sudden violence.] Are you blind? It Happens! Who remembers us? At this moment? Ahlers? Is he thinking about you? With his old friend from Germany? [Turning to Shorty, who has been following the argument for several minutes.] Or Sissy? Billy-boy has just made her laugh. She’s enjoying herself. She’s

forgotten she's got a husband, who he is, where he is. And you're waiting. You are waiting for her to remember you, to come back. And when they do, when they walk in and find us again, it will be the way you will find something old and forgotten and almost useless. Something in a corner, put away a long time ago, and now there it is again, too broken to mend but too much trouble to throw away. So back it goes, because maybe one day ... That's us!....

MILLY. I said shut up! [*Tries to light a cigarette.*] Is it my imagination or is it cold in here? My hands are like ice. (132)

In this excerpt, Milly protests and says that she is not going to be forgotten like the people who merely live out their existence and eventually die without anyone missing them. Ironically Milly has been existing and not "living" until Ahlers breaks off their relationship and gives her a wake up call. Milly pauses and asks about the cases of people dying, forgotten in rooms. Her curiosity indicates that she instinctively realises that she could also become one of those statistics. When Don mentions that an old woman was found, Milly does not want to listen because one of her problems is that she fears to think of herself as an old woman because if she does so, she will be internalising Ahlers's concept of her "not [being] a woman any more" (157). Milly instinctively knows that if she surrenders to Ahlers's concept of her, she will be accepting defeat.

Don continues to tell her that she is far from Ahlers's thoughts at that moment and that she is no more to him than an old, forgotten and almost useless item "that is too much trouble to throw away" (132). Don's disclosure makes her go completely cold because the rejection has suddenly made her a "discarded article". The stage direction indicates that she is severely shaken. (132) She is, however, not defeated and bounces back, saying: "So who cares?" (132). Milly is trying to bluff Don and Shorty but at the same time she is bluffing herself. She does care about Ahlers. If she did not care she would not feel so hurt or wish to retaliate so desperately. When Ahlers goes out Milly shouts at him: "I'll be out and there'll be an account for fifty pounds in your bed"(121). The operative word is "in". She should have said "on". By saying the word "in" she is indicating that that is where she would like to be, namely reinstated in his bed.

Milly wants to spend a little more time with Ahlers. This is what she hopes to win when she says: "Tomorrow". Ahlers taking her back even for a little while will show her that she is still of a bit of value to him, which in turn is worth more than no value at all. Boesman in *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* expresses this sentiment when he says to Lena, as he passes the bucket: "Hasn't got a hole in it yet. Might be whiteman's rubbish, but I can still use it" (292). When Milly gets Ahlers to doubt, she ensures that he still thinks of her, which in turn means that she

will not be totally forgotten but still possibly wanted. In this way Milly will rather be “[content] with the crumbs” than with nothing at all (139).

Milly’s cri-de-coeur is the anguish she experiences when she realises that she has allowed more than half of her life to slip by without really making it meaningful and that there is no way of turning the clock back. Faced with her mundane existence, she demands: “Is this all we get?” When Don responds and says: “Yes! It’s all you get. And what’s more you’ve had it”(156), Milly refuses to accept it and demands some form of compensation. When Mary Benson complained about her “mundane midlife crises”, Fugard replied in the same way as Don and said: “You’ve had it Mary!” (Benson 24).

When Fugard talks about Milly’s “cri-de coeur”, (xii) his words “Certainly not” indicate that he applauds the fact that Milly does not despair but “[hits] out once in a while” and does not “throw in the towel” (110). In a letter to Mary Benson, he remarks: “Our ‘difference’ must be balanced by our ‘sameness’ – Despair by Courage. Camus speaks of ‘courageous pessimism’. I would be lying if I did not say that Man must Despair – but I would betray as deep a conviction if I did not add: And this despaired-of life must be lived with courage” (Benson 15). Fugard’s conviction is in turn the centre point of Milly’s affirmation. The best years of her life have passed, the remaining years do not hold the promise of being any different but they are Milly’s and she will face them courageously. Talking about Mary Benson’s arthritic hands, Fugard says: “I hope, as I hope for very few things, that you will look at your hands and your feet, your face without makeup and your body without clothes, and say, ‘This is all I’ve got. But it’s real. It’s mine. It’s me’” (Benson 24). Fugard’s remark here reminds us of Milly when she says: “Mildred Constance Jenkins. Fifty years old I’m not a woman any more ... he says” (157). Milly is old and barren but she is still Milly. When she survives the midnight hour that ends her birthday, she realises that although she is approaching the latter years of her life, she is still alive (158). To make the very best of what one has left in life takes courage. This is what Fugard means when he speaks about “Heroic Pessimism” (*Notebooks* 96).

Athol Fugard also sees laughter as “ the only cure to heal the bruised psyche” and as “the most necessary of all the arts of survival” (Meijer, *Cousins* 66). He states that:

At one point I had a quote from Charlie Chaplin on the title page of *People are Living There*:

If the flesh does not laugh in mockery and delight at the world
And at itself, then it will die.

The flesh! What a profound insight into the true nature of laughter to root it in our carnality, because that is what it really is, the most defiant of all the sounds of our mortality. (*Cousins* 67)

Milly's laughter at the end of the play is this act of open defiance that is mingled with mature acceptance of her being and her mortality. Don cannot join in because he has not reached this catharsis of self that Milly has achieved: he can merely watch silently. This laughter is the climax of Milly's growth in the play and the gusto with which she laughs is evidence of her sheer exuberance.

According to Russel Vandenbroucke, when Fugard first conceived *People are Living There*, it was titled *The Silkworms* (109). He adds that: "[Silkworms] remained the central metaphor: of metamorphosis, of the inexorable passage of time and the inescapable process of ageing, and of people as victims" (109). He continues: "The silkies will eventually be discarded, as Shorty has been by Sissy and Milly by Ahlers. Apparently useful only during the time they spin silk, they become unwanted, like Milly herself. ... They evolve into what they are and must be. Nor can Milly be other than she is, though she sometimes tries to be" (109). The operative issue is that Milly tries "to be other than she is" and that is the important part. By trying, she is doing something positive to ameliorate her situation and she, thereby, prevents herself becoming a victim. Don becomes a victim because he watches when things happen and does not protest (167). Not so Milly. She affirms herself by choosing to make a noise. In other words she protests and demands a say in her life. The shoebox of spinning silkworms emphasises Milly's cocoon-like existence and the fact that she feels "boxed-up" and shut off from the world around her (123). At the same time the silkworms symbolize the physical metamorphosis, i.e. menopause that Milly is experiencing. However, when Milly reaches self-awareness, she undergoes a further metamorphosis and changes from existing to living and, as well, from perceiving herself as a spent article to seeing herself as a person that has still value. This transformation is further evidence of Milly's personal growth, the result of her affirmation.

By changing the title to *People are Living There*, Fugard wanted to emphasise the vital difference between existence and living. Silkworms exist but people live. Sartre propounded that there is a difference between things that have a fixed character, for example the silkworms or a table, and a person who can choose his own character or essence (*The World Book* 17.98). The silkworms exist in the continuous cycle of life and death. People also live and die and are part of a life cycle but by making something special out of their lives they can transcend the monotony of existence and become immortalised in the memory of others. Fugard says as well that these people need not be in the forefront of society to be special and have a dominant voice. To illustrate this, his heroines like Milly, for example, are drawn from the fringes of society and are people that rarely get noticed in life. In his *Notebooks*, Fugard refers to them as the “scrub underfoot ... the deformed little grey bushes” that “generally escape notice and concern” (Swart 2). Yet there is an element in them, he feels, that makes them portray their lives with dignity and courage.

It is interesting to note that the name of the pub, the “Phoenix” (107), makes one think of the mythical bird which is referred to as a symbol of immortality, that after burning itself, at the end of each life-cycle, on a funeral pyre of herbs rose again from a small worm in the ashes, fresh and beautiful for another long life (*The World Book* 15. 430). In the case of the silkworm the moth dies. The phoenix, on the other hand, did not allow itself to be defeated by death but vanquished death instead by resurrecting itself. It is for this reason that it is remembered in terms of a legend. When Milly realises her worth as a human being she says: “There must be something we can do! Make a noise!... Lest they forget, as the monument says. I can still do that”(167). In this way, by not allowing herself to be defeated by life’s traumas, Milly is reminiscent of the phoenix and is also likened to Fugard’s mother whom he saw as a “magnificent monument of a woman” (*Cousins* 4).

CHAPTER TWO

HELLO AND GOODBYE

Mommie, not you. I forgot, not you.

(*Hello and Goodbye* 228)

Yes, that is it! What I am searching for in the new play is the moment when Hester ‘wakes up’. Three experiences: Loss of hope, knowledge of death, and finally the only certainty, the flesh . . . ‘truths the hand can touch’. (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xv)

In *Hello and Goodbye*, one finds that Fugard’s enquiry into “the possibility of affirmation in an essentially morbid society” is far more intense and focussed than his attempt was in *People Are Living There* (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xi). What Fugard is looking for in this play is the need for the truth. He is searching for the moment when Hester “wakes up” and sees the truth. In other words he is looking for that split second in time that it takes for the truth to reveal itself. In this play Fugard, however, demonstrates that this truth can only be revealed through one’s affirmation of oneself in relation to the truth. In *People Are Living There*, Fugard’s message is “Life? It’s there to be taken. Put out your hands” (*Notebooks* 94). In *Hello and Goodbye*, Fugard is including the truth in his message and saying that in the same way that life needs to be taken, one needs to reach out and take the truth and by touching it make it one’s own. If one returns to his statement that he is looking for “the possibility of affirmation in an essentially morbid society”, one realises that he sees the truth as a vital factor in his search. Fugard’s message of hope is invested in the truth that Hester’s affirmation reveals to her. Hester’s affirmation becomes thus “like a flower [that is] plucked from the depth of an abyss” (Swan n.p.).

Talking about his sketching of Hester as a character, Fugard states:

I have always regarded Milly as a preparation to the writing of Hester. I feel that there is more truth, more of a rock bottom statement in Hester than Milly. It is almost as if Milly was an exercise, a little preparatory sketch. Having done that character, which I feel is a

little flawed, it was possible for me then to write the Hester that I did write – which is an absolute rock bottom, without illusion character. (Gray *Athol Fugard* 43)

At the same time, I feel that Fugard does not want one to underrate Milly's hurt or the way she affirms herself because it is not a question of what the problem is but rather the manner in which it is dealt with. Milly's dilemmas are as real to her as those of Hester are to her. Fugard refers to Hester as "an absolute rock bottom, without illusion character". Hester has no dreams or fantasies about life, unlike Johnnie, her brother, who dreams of steam trains and who relives himself in "my favourite of all the stories", his father's accident and close encounter with death (201). Hester reminds one of Milly when Milly states: "Well, according to the language I speak, when I want to find something I'm looking for it, and when I'm doing that I can be bloody certain I lost it to begin with"(103). It is this aggression that Hester displays in her search to find the "something" that she knows that she has "lost", that makes her stand out as a character. The hope that Hester's affirmation affords her will not change the physical conditions of her existence. She has no illusion that she will be anything other than "a woman in a room"(234). She realises "the fairy stories is finished"(204). However, the knowledge that her affirmation brings her, namely that her mother loved her, will provide her with enough hope to carry on with her life. She thus inherits her mother's love and that helps her to survive in the nothingness of her existence.

In *Hello and Goodbye*, Fugard concentrates on the relationship between two siblings. He has a specific reason for doing so. He says in this regard: "I like to think of Johnnie and Hester as representing two possibilities of action in a certain situation"(Gray *Athol Fugard* 44). Here Fugard is demonstrating one choice and two opposing decisions. The siblings are each presented with the same choice in life. The choice is either to stay at home or conversely to turn one's back on the home. Johnnie decides to stay and Hester to leave. In providing an option, Fugard is demonstrating how affirmation manifests itself. In other words, Fugard is suggesting that the choice one makes in life determines whether one affirms oneself or not. One can say thus, that the play *Hello And Goodbye* deals with the concomitant results of the two different choices taken by the siblings. At the same time Fugard is illustrating the difference between "courageous pessimism" and "acceptance" (Vandenbroucke 241). It is on this difference that Fugard builds his whole concept of the affirmative element in his plays. By investing the "courageous pessimism" in Hester and conversely, by investing the notion of "acceptance" in Johnnie, Fugard

is once more confirming that he “[lodges] the affirmative note, the ostensible act of courage, with the woman” (Barbera “Fugard, Women, and Politics” vi).

If one also takes into account Fugard’s personal dilemma whether to stay at home or to go to university in Cape Town, one realises that together Johnnie and Hester represent the choice that he had to make. Like Johnnie he was caught in “the trap of a family situation” and nearly stayed at home (Gray *Athol Fugard* 43). Fugard recalls: “Unlike Johnnie,” (but like Hester) “I crossed the bridge. It was also my father. Johnnie represents what I might have been had I not been able to turn around and walk away” (Gray *Athol Fugard* 43). The operative words here are “had I not been able to turn around and walk away”. Here Fugard decides to accept responsibility for his own life instead of letting his father’s life take precedence over his. This ability to accept responsibility for one’s own life is the crux of affirmation.

Fugard considers that to take responsibility for one’s life takes “aggression”, “guts” and “courage” (Rae 106). He sees life as something that must be “taken” (*Notebooks* 94). In this way he views Hester as someone who has “enough strength and enough aggression” to reach out and take her life into her own hands. When Hester first leaves home her aggression enables her to face the unknown. When she leaves home at the end of the play, the knowledge that she acquires as a result of her affirmation, enables her to face and accept the reality of her life. It is, therefore, only once Hester has affirmed herself that she can take full responsibility for her life.

In *Hello and Goodbye*, Fugard sees the opposite of taking the responsibility for one’s life as “the avoidance of the pain of separation, of change” (Fugard in Gray *Athol Fugard* 44). Johnnie thinks that he wants to become a learner-stoker. It is the one thing that he thinks he wants to do because of his love for steam trains (225). His application is successful and he has to leave home. He, however, gets as far as the bridge and turns back (226). In this regard, he recalls: “Yes, I wanted to go. I could have gone. It was up to me. He [the father] didn’t say anything to stop me posting the forms in duplicate”(225). “I got as far as the bridge. . . . everybody busy, happy-only him, back there. . . So, back there. Simple as that. Here. I told him I missed the train” (226). Johnnie does not have the courage to “take a piece of life for himself” (Fugard in Rae 106). He sees his father’s loneliness as an excuse for his lack of courage. He thinks, as well, that by turning back home to look after his father, he is doing something noble. He is instead

showing that he is not manly enough to give up the security of home and to face the challenge of the unknown. Johnnie thinks that to be a man and stand “on his own two legs is a shaky proposition” (234). Fugard says that Johnnie “did not have enough guts to say ‘Well goodbye, I have got to live my own life and I am going’” (Rae 110).

Hester, on the other hand, had said: “It’s my life and I’ll do what I like” (185). Hester’s words display more than the desire to leave home and to start a life on her own. They show her fiery nature. Hester’s ability to place herself first gives her, nevertheless, the courage and the impetus to want to leave home and to survive on her own. Hester’s separation from her home is particularly painful because of the fact that she leaves in anger. This separation brings the accompanying pain of her feeling rejected, lonely and wondering where she belongs (200). In an interview with Barrie Hough, Fugard says: “One of the major Marais statements was that all living, survival, is grounded on pain. Ja, that’s right, it’s really a theme that has gone through all my work; it’s the string that holds all the beads together to make a necklace” (Gray, *Athol Fugard* 125).

With regard to how he attempts to portray Hester’s pain, Fugard remarks: “Isn’t Hester the closest I’ve yet come to the bone? Even in Milly . . . there is too much ‘meat’ – something that must rot or be cut away before the hard, white truth is exposed” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xvi). He, therefore, strips Hester naked to the bone in an attempt to reveal her raw pain. In the play we see how Hester’s pain has manifested itself in hatred. The hatred, in turn, is what is causing the decay in her life. Hester’s “moral anarchy” is a result of her hatred for her father, for what she thinks that he represents in her life (xvi). She thinks that he hates her, that he was the cause for their being the “Second-hand Smits of Valley Road”, that he had made her mother his slave and that he was a hypocrite (185, 211, 222, 182). She demonstrates this hatred for him when she says: “I *Hoer*. I’ve *hoered* all the brothers and fathers and sons and sweethearts in this world into one thing . . . Man” (204). The “fathers” and the “brothers”, however, represent the family that Hester should “love” and “live happily ever after with” (204). Hester’s hatred has warped her view of what a family is and what family life is all about. Her pain is thus the pain that this hatred brings with it. In the play, Hester never gets rid of the pain that her hatred has caused her. Her hatred has prevented her from telling her mother that she loved her. Hester laments: “There was something I wanted to do, but it was too late (222). Hester’s then “[*intoning*

non-stop]. *Aina aina aina . . .*” echoes her pain and remorse as she mourns her loss of what she now realises was the most valuable thing in her life (228).

At the same time, Fugard is not saying that Hester is some kind of hate-machine without feeling. The feelings are still there. One sees this in her “*small impulsive gesture of tenderness*” as she touches Johnnie’s cheek and says to him “Johnnie! It’s been a long time, *boetie*” (182). In the way that she abruptly stops herself and moves away, one witnesses Hester’s pain. One realises, as well, that Hester cannot allow herself to indulge in a more tender emotion, such as endearment. She needs to maintain her façade of hatred; more for herself than for anybody else. At this point in the play, Hester instinctively realises that if she is to give in to any emotion other than her hatred, she will be defeated in her desire to compensate herself for what she thinks her father has made her become. She would also be demonstrating the one thing that she does not want to acknowledge, namely her guilt for acting the way that she has acted towards her family. Her “*flat, matter of fact voice*” here, depicts her disappointment and hurt that Johnnie has still not recognised her, his sister (182).

By wanting to expose the “hard, white truth in Hester”, Fugard is looking for the “for the ruthless honesty [that he so admired] in Faulkner” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xvi). On the surface, it seems that he achieves this in Hester’s brazen candour about her hate and the way she lives. One realises in the play, however, that Fugard is looking for something subtler: the truth. It becomes evident that Hester is also looking for the truth about her past. Her hatred hides the feelings that she craves, such as love and affection. Hester’s quest for compensation, thus, becomes an instinctive search for honesty within herself and in her life. She not only needs to find out where she belongs in life, she also needs to find out where she belongs with herself.

In Hester, Fugard also looks at “[the] ugliness of the unloved thing” (*Notebooks* 92). In *Notebooks*, Fugard quotes Camus; “The misery and greatness of this world: it offers no truths, only objects for love.” and “Absurdity is King, but love frees us from it” (*Notebooks* 94). Hester, feeling unloved, retaliates in hate. It is only when she picks up the dress that she has thrown to the floor in a frenzy of hatred, that she “touches the truth” and realises that her hate has made her blind to the fact that she was loved by her mother (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xv).

Once Hester acknowledges the real truth about the love and the hate in her life, she affirms herself.

In the parable of the lost son (*Luke* 15.20), the son who has left and “wasted his possessions with prodigal living” decides to return home. The father, who patiently awaits the son’s eventual return, sees him from afar, has compassion and runs to him, falls on his neck and kisses him. When Hester, “the prodigal daughter”, returns home, she is surprised by the lack of welcome that she receives from own flesh and blood (229). Johnnie, her brother does not even recognise her or welcome her. She surmises that he is indifferent to her homecoming. He is instead so overwhelmed by his own sorrow at the death of his father that he has retreated into his own world. “Minding [his] own business”, Johnnie’s thoughts are, at that moment, far away from his sister (178). At the same time, as she enters, Hester immediately gives vent to her anger and frustration and blames Johnnie for not responding to her call (178). She has, as Johnnie remarks, barged in, showing very little concern for him or his privacy (180).

In his *Notebooks*, Fugard comments: “Ambivalence in Hester’s return: Why does she come back?” (128). In this respect he says, as well: “What does Hester want? To begin with, the compensation. But only *to begin with*, because she walks into that room unconscious of her life; ‘in it’ as she says in the end” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xvi). Here, Fugard tries to ascertain Hester’s motive in returning. By referring to the “ambivalence” in her return, he is indicating the complexity of her dilemma. Her dilemma is the result of a suffering that has been just as complex. The “pain of separation” from her family as a young woman has resulted in years of pent up emotions such as rejection, loneliness, anger, grief and bewilderment (Fugard in *Gray Athol Fugard* 44). Hester returns as a lost soul in need of being welcomed home. She walks “*slowly*” into the room, nervous and not sure of the welcome that she is to receive (177). Her nervousness, however, immediately becomes anger as she blames Johnnie for having kept her waiting (178). This display of anger not only shows that Hester has a very short temper; it also more importantly indicates how she has alienated herself from her family. She has never looked beyond her own needs. Her return is yet another need that has to be answered.

Talking about Hester’s return, Barney Simon says: “She has come back because she has got no choice. I see the money as an excuse and not the reason for her real return. It’s her vengeance”

Talking about Hester's return, Barney Simon says: "She has come back because she has got no choice. I see the money as an excuse and not the reason for her real return. It's her vengeance" (Gray *Athol Fugard* 47). One cannot agree with Barney Simon here about Hester not having a choice, because Hester's return is a result of a choice taken. She chooses to return just as she had chosen to leave fifteen years previously. Hester confesses to her hesitation in coming back. She admits: "So then I said, No, this isn't wise. Get off at Coega and catch the next one back to Jo'burg. Send them a telegram, even if it's a lie – sick of something, which was almost true. I was ready to do it. 'Strue's God!" (184). Her hesitation here is evidence not only of the courage that it has taken for her to return but also indicates that she is not entirely sure why she needs to return home. If her aim in returning had been only vengeance, she would not have shown the hesitation she did. Her words "Mind you it's easier than I thought", show that her decision has not been an easy one, but that it is one that she is pleased to have taken nevertheless (183). To return as Hester does, takes "pluck", to use Johnnie's expression, because it is not easy for one to return to a place that conjures up unpleasant memories (180-182).

At the same time, if one takes Fugard's statement "I like to think of Johnnie and Hester as representing two possibilities of action in a certain situation" into account, it becomes obvious that choice is a factor (Gray *Athol Fugard* 44). Looking further at Fugard's concept of affirmation it becomes evident that choice is the most important factor. He feels that if one does not exercise one's choices in life, one passively accepts the conditions of one's existence. He calls this acceptance "complacency" and warns that it is a "danger to be constantly on the guard against" (Vandenbroucke 241). I also feel that Simon's word "vengeance" is too strong a word for Hester in this play. She has not come back to inflict punishment on anyone but to take what she argues is rightfully hers, namely her inheritance.

Robert Green speaks as follows about Hester's return: "Hester has returned to Port Elizabeth, not as an apologetic prodigal daughter, but to search for an emotional and spiritual transfusion to inject into life that is completely lacking in beauty" (Green 169). Green's use of the word "apologetic" is important because it highlights the one certainty in Hester's return. She has not come back to apologise for leaving home or to seek forgiveness. She says: "Best thing I ever did getting out of here" (183). Her contention is that her family has not loved her. Hester does not see that she also owes her family love and respect. Instead she feels that they owe her for the fact

that there “wasn’t enough of anything except hard times” (211). Not knowing that her father is dead, Hester also thinks that she would be subjecting herself once more to his authority. In this respect, she says:

I’m talking about coming back. You see I tried hell of a hard to remember. That was a mistake. I got frightened.

JOHNNIE. Of what?

HESTER. Not like that. Maybe frightened is wrong. Don’t get any ideas I’m scared of you lot. Just because I come back doesn’t mean I’m hard-up. (183)

Hester is frightened to return home and face all the memories that have haunted her and at the same time repulsed her. She is honest when she says that she is not “scared of you lot.” Her fear is more the uncomfortable feeling of being scared to confront herself with the truth. When she finds her Sunday best, she “*puts the dress back hurriedly into the box and walks away – sudden fear*”. She admits to Johnnie: “I’ve got a funny feeling” (206).

Hester’s words “hard-up” are slang for not having money. These words become in fact a play on the reason for her return. Hester rationalises her return as a need to be compensated for all the pain and hurt that she has suffered by being separated from her family. She feels that they, and the father in particular, owe her for what her existence has forced her to become, namely a prostitute. This pay-back mentality is an ingrained conception most probably resulting from fifteen years of men paying her for her favours. It was also, when lying next to a stranger in bed that Hester was at her most vulnerable. It was then that the memories returned and she remembered lying in bed as a little girl, overhearing her father’s concern about receiving compensation for his disability (200). In her anguish, thus, she equates her lost innocence with the compensation money. Part of Hester’s return home is, therefore, a need to gain recompense for some of her lost innocence. This is the rationale behind her saying: “Such as anything I like. Once you got money you can do anything you like. Change my name! Stay at a posh hotel! I could. And then let them try and refuse to serve me just because I’m sitting by myself in the lounge” (213). The old adage that money cannot buy happiness is something that Hester does not consider. Hester’s words, “Just because I come back doesn’t mean I’m hard-up” are an ironic twist of the truth that she does not want to consider. She has come home because she is “hard-up”. She is, however, not “hard-up” for money but “hard-up” for love and a home.

This desire for a “home” instead of a “room” highlights the hunger in Hester to find out where she belongs (199). Hester desperately needs to cultivate a sense of belonging to someone and to somewhere. Fugard acknowledges that: “[From] my mother as an Afrikaner comes the sense of roots” (Vandenbroucke 16). Like Fugard’s mother, Hester has an innate sense of roots, which of late, seems to have become important to her. She has discovered that she belongs nowhere, not even in the minds of the men who share her bed with her (200). Hester’s existence in Johannesburg is rootless and her particulars are: “[No] address! No names, no numbers. A room somewhere, in a street somewhere”(200). Her existence, as well, is friendless with “nobody knocking” at her door (200). Furthermore her occupation as a prostitute leads her to many other rooms, which in turn confounds her situation further and makes her in a sense even more rootless and destitute. The meagre contents of her “large and battered” suitcase are also evidence of the little Hester has in life (178). Similar to the old woman on the way to Cradock that haunted Fugard, Hester carries “her life” with her in her suitcase (*Notebooks* 123-124). In the same way that the Cradock woman seeks a place to stay in order to begin a new life, Hester comes home in an attempt to find something that will enable her psychologically to live a better life.

Green sees Hester’s return as a “search for an emotional and spiritual transfusion to inject into a life that is completely lacking in beauty” (169). Here, one is reminded of “the ugliness of the unloved thing” (*Notebooks* 92). When Johnnie finally recognises Hester, he recognises her personality, namely her hatred, and not her person (182). In this respect Johnnie says that he is certain (182). Johnnie, as we have seen deals in certainties such as how many minutes there are in one hour (173). He thus certifies Hester’s hate as well as the impact that it had on the family. He recalls: “I remember your hate! It hasn’t changed. The sound of it. Always so sudden, so loud, so late at night. Nobody else could hate it the way you did” (182). Johnnie’s recognition of his sister should be based on what she looks like. This is what Hester desires when she asks: “My face hasn’t changed?” (182).

Hester defends herself against Johnnie’s candour and says: “This? Four walls that rattled and a roof that leaked! What’s there to hate?” (182). A little later, however, after having said good night, she returns and persistently enquires:

There is something I want to ask you.

Hey! I've got a question.

I haven't asked my question yet! What do *I* look like? When you saw me, and you knew it was me, Hester, did you remember much?

Have you had a good look at me yet?

Rubbish! Look at me. Come close! You're not looking properly! I can see it in your eyes.
(190-191)

When Hester eventually gets Johnnie to look at her, he asks: "What do you want me to say?" (191). Hester is only interested in a truthful answer and replies: "What you saw" (191). Johnnie still evades her request by giving a superficial and pat reply. He replies: "You – my sister Hester- a few years older. Satisfied?" (191). Hester is not satisfied with this objective reply and gives her real reason for wanting to know. She says: "No! Am I also . . . were you shocked? At the changes? My face?" (191). Something in Johnnie's remark that he has recognised her by her hatred has made an impact on Hester and has verified something that she feels but that she does not want to admit.

Her anger and bitterness over the years have resulted in her not being able to see her true self any more. With a mirror in her hand, she continues: "What do I really look like now? I can't see myself. Mirrors don't work. I can't watch . . . Me. When I look, *I* look back" (191). Playing with the concept of the mirror image, Fugard is intimating here that Hester is seeking a truer reflection of herself. In other words, Hester looks for the other side of her personality, namely the Hester that is capable of love.

When Hester and Johnnie look at photographs from the past, Hester recalls how she "buggered up" a girl who had "started telling everyone that [she] had a price" (208). The photos give the exact picture of what Hester used to look like. The photo shows her arm-in-arm with a friend, smiling (207). The mirror on the, other hand, presents her with the image of herself, unhappy and alone. When looking at the photos, Hester does not see herself and remember a past moment of happiness. She can only remember the way she was hated and how she retaliated (207). In the same way that she only sees the hatred in her face when she looks at herself in the mirror, she only sees the hatred of her past when she looks at the photographs.

Instead of responding to Hester's need to know how he sees her now, Johnnie resumes his concentration on "*a commercial circular*" about dishwashing liquid (190, 191). Johnnie's interest in getting dishes clean is fraught with irony. Besides showing that when confronted with a situation his first reaction is evasion, Johnnie is concentrating on getting dishes clean, while Hester, on the other hand, is desperately trying to ascertain whether her image is sullied. She instinctively knows that there is something wrong with the way she is looking at herself and by implication at the way she is looking at her life. Hester has asked for Johnnie's help. She needs his help. Here Johnnie shows that when needed, "his helping hands [are] useless and empty" once again as they had been when his father died (175). Johnnie concentrates instead how difficult it is to get egg cleaned off a plate. He later refers to Hester as "a rotten egg. There's one in every dozen" instead of saying that she is a black sheep in the family (199). One gets the feeling that Fugard's dry humour here is a way of suggesting that Hester's task to improve her image is not an easy one.

The way Hester wants to look in the mirror is the way she looks at life. She wants to see what she wants to see in the mirror and not what the mirror reflects (191). In other words, she only wants to see her perspective, which is a distorted version of reality. The warped way in which Hester sees things is the reason for all her prejudices. Her prejudices in turn feed her hatred.

Hester tells Johnnie about her experience of not being served in a bar:

Some of those big-shot places don't serve you if you're a woman by yourself. I wasn't trying for a pick-up. I just wanted a few beers and a little peace and quiet somewhere nice for a change. They're supposed to be open to the public! But when I walked in they all started staring and then this coolie waiter comes to me and says they don't serve 'ladies' by themselves. Well this time they will. Because I'll be a boarder. I'll pay in advance. (214)

The Indian waiter was doing his duty and told her in a polite manner that he could not serve her. Hester's prejudice makes her see him as a "coolie", a term of abuse for an Indian. Hester was possibly not suitably dressed either. The waiter did show his disapproval of her. Instead of accepting the rules of the establishment and learning by the experience, Hester is immediately on the defensive and can only think of retaliation. When a lady smiles at her, Hester automatically

sees her as a common prostitute like herself. Then feeling even inferior to the married women sitting in the bar, Hester then belittles the institution of marriage by saying that it is the way of legalising prostitution (214). Hester's perspective here is the distorted view of someone who is envious. Hester is an "extremely lonely person, [who feels] empty, unknown, unwanted [and] wants to belong to somebody or something or even some place" (Barney Simon in Rae 104). She thus feels that she has nothing. This makes her lash out at anyone that she thinks has more than her. As a child, Hester, who had parents, was even envious of the Abel orphans who were left with their grandmother (212). Hester has thus always looked at what others have and not at what she has. She has never learnt, therefore, as Lena says in *Boesman and Lena*, to "[put her] hands on the things in [her] life" and to count her blessings. By airing her prejudices, Hester has indeed exposed her "dirty linen in a place of public entertainment" (214).

The distorted way that Hester sees things also affects the way that she sees her home. She rebels against the Christian upbringing that she had found in her home. She says:

And when you got big and Daddy got worse it was you used to look after him . . . and all our life it was groaning and moaning and what the Bible says and what God's going to do and I hated it! Right or wrong? Right! And it was hell. I wanted to scream. I got so sick of it I went away. What more do you want? Must I vomit? (182)

When Hester asks Johnnie whether she must vomit in front of him, she is asking him to what extent she must go in order to demonstrate to him her hatred for all that she thinks that she has had to swallow at home. By using the word "vomit" in this context, Fugard is intimating that Hester needs to purge herself of all the hatred and prejudice that is so deep inside her.

Hester's "moral anarchy" as well as the distorted way she sees things presents her with a life that is a lie (xvi). With regard to Morris in *The Blood Knot*, Fugard states: "He is concerned with the future which is a lie, . . . It is basically a morbid thing, because it is not the truth. It is not real. It involved cutting off life and if you cut off life you are in a morbid world" (Rae 111). Fugard also regards Johnnie to be "morbid in his withdrawal" (Rae 111). I, however, think that Hester's critical way of looking at life has also made her "cut off life" and that has resulted in her world becoming a morbid place in which to live. Her criticism and rebellion has not enabled her to be part of life. The fact that she says that she has had an abortion also demonstrates that she has not

been able to give of herself to any other living thing. Yet her “*small impulsive gesture of tenderness*” as she reaches out to touch Johnnie’s cheek is evidence that she cares (182). Here Hester “[reveals rather than states]” her loneliness, her need for affection and her desire to have another person in her life and more importantly, that she can reach out and touch the “flesh” of someone who can love her in return (Fugard in Gray *Athol Fugard* 51, *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xv).

Johnnie intuitively sums Hester up as “The heart that hurts” (230). In this regard Fugard remarks: “Her [Hester’s] assaults on Johnnie – an index of her hunger for love. ‘You can’t hate anything more than you can love it’” (*Notebooks* 128). Hester’s hurt and her need to have her love reciprocated show that there is a gentler and caring side to her. Green sees this “combination of brazen callousness and a tender need for affection that has always been denied to her [as] both real and very moving” (164). Deep down, Johnnie also cares. One sees this when he says of his father: “He died in my sleep” (231). In the sibling’s ability to care, Fugard demonstrates that there must have been some love given out in the family, even if their life had been spoiled by the father’s pain. At the end of the play, Hester reaches out to Johnnie and tries to establish some kind of future for them together as family.

Fugard’s remark: “You can’t hate anything more than you can love it” may also refer to the relationship between Hester and her father. Hester, not knowing that her father is dead, comes home to confront him. The very first thing that she does, after she has put down her suitcase, is to move in the direction of her father’s room. It seems as if she is going to confront her father. Instead, she enquires: “Sleeping?” (178). Her consideration for her father prevents her from barging in on him, as she has barged in on Johnnie. However, the brusque manner in which she responds to Johnnie’s “Who?” indicates her frustration at not being able immediately to accomplish what she has come home to do. Hester’s consideration on the one hand and her frustration on the other hand, indicate the ambivalence of her feelings for her father. It seems as if Hester is confused. She does not really know if she loves or hates her father.

Later, Johnnie wants to know how long Hester is going to stay because, having deduced that she has come back home for something, he suddenly feels threatened. Hester replies: “It’s also my home. I’ve got a right to come here if I want to. I’m still his daughter. How is he?” (185). Here

Hester not only sees herself as part of the family, she more importantly acknowledges her father. She is genuinely concerned when she asks: "How is he?" Johnnie evades her question. Hester persists: "And him?" (185). When Johnnie still does not answer her because he wants to avoid the fact that the father is dead, Hester becomes defensive. She then draws her own conclusion that her father has not forgiven her and that he hates her (185). She was hoping that he had forgiven her. Hester needs her father to care for her. The compensation that she seeks and which she rationalises as "compensation money" is something subtler. She seeks some kind of link, even if as in this case, it is a morbid one, between her and her father. The connection here is thus between her pain and his pain. When she says: "So he still hates me. I wasn't expecting miracles", she experiences her "[Loss] of hope" (185, xv). It is this loss of hope that becomes the impetus that leads her to unpack the boxes. Ironically, it is Johnnie in the end who inherits this link with the father that Hester seeks, as he takes his father's crutches as his own.

Hester unconsciously gives Johnnie the cue for deceiving her when she says: "Speak up! I don't care what you say" and "So he still hates me" (185). Johnnie cannot admit that his father is dead to himself so he is unable to tell Hester as well. He can only stare as he realises that Hester does not know that their father is dead. He starts his deception by automatically repeating Hester's words (185). Hester then says: "So what? Just remember Mommie didn't hate me and half of this house was hers so I'm entitled to be here. You can tell him that from me" (185). Hester's reply is important because it reveals how she has always faced her dilemma. Her words "So what" show that when presented with anything to do with her father, she is immediately defensive and pretends that she does not care. When she says to Johnnie, "You can tell him that from me" she tells him to do the very thing that she should be doing herself. She should be the one to confront her father and find out the truth as to how he feels about her. A few moments later she does the same thing again when she says: "Don't tell him I'm here. I'll be quiet" (186). Later, while they are unpacking the boxes, Johnnie defends Hester's accusation that their parents had been unhappily married. Hester retorts: "Then tell him from me he's a liar" (220).

Hester's desire to return home for the "five hundred pounds" is another way in which she deceives herself (229). It is, as Robert Green suggests, "only a rationalisation of her return to Port Elizabeth" (169). It is the unconscious excuse that Hester latches onto in order to give herself the courage to return home. She is scared of what she might find at home. She admits this

when she says: “Somebody in the gangway said we were two hours late and it will be dark when we get in. That will help me, won’t it, I think to myself. And it did. Because it was-dark and me feeling like a stranger in the taxi” (184). She is also scared of her father and the fact that he possibly still hates her. She says: “Don’t tell him I’m here. I’ll be quiet. I’m not scared of him! But I can’t stay long. Maybe tomorrow. Like I said it’s just hello and goodbye. Anyway, let’s see. Yes” (186). Hester grapples with her courage here. She is also embarrassed to face her father because deep down she feels guilty about leaving her home as she did and also feels guilty about her revenge. When she says, “it’s just hello and goodbye”, she means that she has only planned a quick visit. These are most probably the words that she has used to encourage herself to return home. They indicate that she has thought of not going though with her plan to come and get the compensation. Her next words, “Anyway, let’s see” indicate that she will not allow herself to give up so easily.

Hester’s tension, here, refers to the choice that she must make whether to affirm herself or not. It is the choice between “courageous pessimism” on the one hand, and “acceptance” on the other hand (Vandenbroucke 241). She has to decide whether to accept the conditions of her existence as she sees them or whether to affirm what she believes is her right. She says in this regard: “Here we go again! And I’m his daughter and you’re his son and I’m your sister and where’s our mother? Well, I’m also ME! Just ME. Hester. And something is going to be mine – just mine-and no sharing with brothers or fathers . . .” (195). The “ME” that Hester spells out here is what she has to affirm. She has to affirm her own identity. She can only do that if she reconnects with her family. In other words she has to make peace with her past, (her feeling of being unloved and hated by her family), in order to affirm her future and, in so doing, accept the responsibility of her life as an autonomous human being.

Preying on Hester’s ignorance, Johnnie uses his deceased father’s putative presence in the closed room as his ally in dealing with his loneliness and in bracing his sister’s onslaught on his privacy. Desperate to know whether she is still part of her home, Hester asks her brother if her father asks about her, then if he remembers her and finally if he thinks about her. Johnnie replies in the negative to all these questions and adds: “When you left he said: ‘We won’t speak about her any more.’ You weren’t a real Afrikaner by nature, he said. Must be some English blood somewhere, on Mommie’s side. He hated you then. He doesn’t dream about you” (197).

Johnnie's answers are in fact a play on the truth. The father can no longer ask about her, remember her, or think about her because he is dead. Hester does not know this and Johnnie does not tell her. He plays a cat and mouse game with Hester and artfully manipulates the situation instead so as to intimate that she no longer exists in her father's mind, thereby implying that her father no longer bothers about her.

At the same time he is inferring that the father still cares about him. Besides excluding Hester from the relationship, Johnnie is also trying "to make Hester jealous of his relationship with their father" (*Notebooks* 128). By saying that the father refuses to speak about her and that he questions her heritage, Johnnie is implying as well that the father is in fact psychologically disinheriting her. Hester refuses to be eradicated from the family in such a way and protests vehemently, maintaining that in the eyes of the law he is still regarded as her biological father whether he remembers her or not. It is here, when Johnnie tries to make Hester feel ousted from the family, that she affirms her name and her roots and says: "I'm passing through and my name is Hester Smit" (197). It is because she refuses to be forgotten about that Hester decides to search for the compensation money. Believing Johnnie, she loses all hope of reconciliation with her father. Her words "So hello be damned and goodbye for good and go back home" indicate that she feels as if she has nothing else to gain from her family or her home (199). She realises as well that she does not have a home only a room. She feels as if she belongs to no-one and nowhere.

Later, when Johnnie asks Hester what she is going to do with the money, she replies in a noncommittal way and says: "Plenty" (213). Johnnie requests her to be more specific. Hester then replies: "Such as anything I like. Once you got money you can do anything you like. Change my name! Stay at a posh hotel! And then let them try and refuse to serve me just because I am sitting by myself in the lounge" (213). Hester's reply shows that she has not given any real thought to what she would do with the money. Her desire for compensation is less revenge and more the same need that Johnnie expresses when he says: "I NEED SOMETHING! LOOK AT ME!" (227). Ironically both children turn to their father in their need. Hester thinks that she has to settle the score with her father for the way that he has psychologically disabled her. Johnnie refers to the connection between the pent up hurt in Hester's heart that has caused her disability and the dynamite, set to explode, that has disabled the father (230). When Hester says, "Stay at a

posh hotel”, she refers to the way that society places emphasis on money. Hester always refers to her family as “the second-hand Smiths of Valley Road” who did not have money (211). She has placed her emphasis on her family’s lack of money and has thus correlated the lack of money with a shortage of love.

When Hester unpacks the boxes, she looks at the contents as “Second-hand rubbish” (212). She also sees the family memorabilia that her mother has lovingly preserved as, “All I’m inheriting tonight is bad memories. Makes me sick to look at it. Can’t we pack some away?” (212). In the same way that the mother has wanted to keep the good memories of the family, (the photos, Hester’s little dress, her shoes, the parent’s marriage certificate and so forth), Hester wants to preserve a good memory of her family. Overwhelmed by the “floods of rubbish” that spill out of the boxes, Hester becomes disillusioned in her search and remarks: “Wasn’t there one thing worth saving from all those years?” (218) Johnnie asks her what she will do if she does not find it. Hester replies: “I don’t even know what it is yet. Just one thing that’s got a good memory. I think and think. I try to remember. There must have been something that made me happy. All those years. Just once. Happy” (218-219). Johnnie perceives here that she has forgotten about the compensation money and that she has forgotten what she is looking for. Bewildered by the chaos around her and the fact that she does not know what she is looking for, Hester “*collapses into a chair*” seemingly defeated (219). It seems as if all Hester’s fierceness and energy have been sapped. Hester, however, resumes the search. The methodical manner in which she does so illustrates her sheer determination to find “one thing worth saving” that will make her happy.

The further unpacking of the boxes highlights the individual weaknesses of the siblings. Finding written proof that Johnnie’s application to become a learner-stoker had been accepted, Hester gets Johnnie to confess that he had decided to stay at home with the father instead of pursuing his own career. Johnnie’s weakness is that he is unable to stand on his own two feet (234). He cannot take responsibility for his own life. He has and will always rely on his father for support. Hester discovers her parents’ marriage certificate. The certificate makes her recall her mother’s death and funeral. She says: “Because suddenly I knew she was dead, and what it meant being dead. It’s goodbye for keeps. She was gone forever. So I cried. There was something I wanted to do, but it was too late” (222). This indicates that Hester’s weakness is that she does not bring herself to tell others that she loves them.

When Hester starts to unpack the boxes, she finds her mother's dress. She puts it aside and says that she wants to pack it with her things. She also recognises her mother's smell in the dress (206). Although Hester instinctively treasures the dress, she fails to recognise it as the "one thing that's got a good memory" that she is searching for (219). Later, unpacking the boxes, Hester does not lay her hands on anything tangible that makes her remember a happy moment in her past. Disappointed and angry, she "[hurls] *her mother's dress to the floor*", realising too late what she has done (227, 228). Having lost its smell, the dress becomes "an empty rag" (228). Hester's agony, as she picks up the dress, makes her "wake up" to the truth. In her anger she has destroyed "the one thing worth saving" that she was looking for. Hester laments: "That's how it happened. She got lost, among the rubbish. I forgot she was here – in here alive, to touch, to talk to, to love. She was a chance in here to love something. I wanted to. The hating was hard. Hate! Hate! So much to hate I forgot she was here" (228). Hester only sees the dress's true value once she has thrown it to the floor. In her action, she realises how her hatred for the poverty in her home, has made her impervious to her mother's love. She also realises that she had loved her mother because her mother had loved her in return. With this realisation Hester affirms the fact that her mother loved her.

Hester's affirmation of self, however, only really occurs when she says: "No, no! Look what I've done . . . Mommie, not you. I forgot, not you" (228). Here Hester, for the first time, accepts the responsibility for her actions. This is the moment of truth that Hester is searching for. She sees not only the true reflection of herself, but also, more importantly, the true reflection of her actions. She realises that her hatred has made her blind to the fact that her mother was there to love. She just had to reach out and touch her mother, to feel the "flesh" in order to touch the truth (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xv). She needed to tell her mother that she loved her. She realises, as well, that one needs to love in order to be loved in return. Her hatred, the opposite of love, does not bring her love. It only brings her pain.

Even after Hester has affirmed that her mother loved her, the pain is still there, deep inside her. Johnnie tries to alleviate what he assumes to be a physical pain. He then realises when Hester storms into her father's room that Hester's pain is the pain of the "heart that hurts" (230). Hester's anger at Johnnie's deception and the shock that her father is dead causes Hester to

explode. She beats Johnnie until she stops in sheer exhaustion. This action provides Hester with the catharsis that she so desperately needs. Once Hester has purged herself of all her hatred, she is able to reach out to Johnnie. She apologises to him for beating him and invites him to come with her. Johnnie does not want to come. Giving him the house she says: "Read the newspapers, plant the seeds, have a garden. . . ." (233). She adds: "Live happily. Try, Johnnie, try to be happy" (233). Johnnie asks "Why? What's this?" Hester replies: "I don't know. I don't know what it is. But there's something else - something we never had" (233). Hester is referring to the family feeling of belonging to each other, which they have never had. Johnnie is speaking about the difference in Hester's attitude. Here Hester's message of hope to Johnnie shows Hester's more positive and hopeful outlook on life.

Having assessed her past, Hester has affirmed herself by making herself psychologically stronger. She now knows where she stands in life and what her future holds for her. Her way of life will not change. What will change is her perception of the future. The nourishment she receives from the realisation, that her mother had loved her and above all had accepted her for what she is, provides her with the cornerstone on which to build a new future where she alone is the architect of what will happen to her. In this regard Hester's final words are: "I want to get back to it, in it, be it, be me again the way it was when I walked in. It will come, I suppose. But at this moment – there she is waiting, here she is going, and somebody's watching all of it. But it isn't God. It's me"(234). These words symbolize the culmination of Hester's growth where she realises that she must accept full responsibility for what she makes of her life. Hester's realisation encapsulates the affirmative element of Fugard's women, namely that one can only really affirm oneself when one takes complete responsibility for one's own life.

Realising that with her mother she had the chance "to love something" and with the certainty that her father is dead, Hester knows that she cannot really change her situation, and "that she is used to it now" (228, 234, Notebooks 131). She no longer has to regard her past as having only bad memories. She is able to achieve the independence and freedom she needs to survive her future (228, 230). She thereby becomes rooted in the knowledge of knowing exactly who and what she is, namely "a woman in a room" (234). This knowledge is worth more than the monetary compensation that she thought that she was after. The knowledge allows her to affirm herself.

The journey back to a life that does not offer much is as Hester remarks “hard” (234). The realisation “Mommie, not you. I forgot, not you” is the painful reality that Hester has to face. It is part of the pain of her survival (Hough in Gray *Athol Fugard* 125). Yet in this reality one finds, as well, the resilient hope that is born out of the “truths the hand can touch” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xv). The truth that she was loved is Hester’s hope.

CHAPTER THREE

BOESMAN AND LENA

“Give”

(*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 292)

Coming from a completely different direction was the need to make a personal statement. I felt that I had reached a point where I wanted to write about the relationship between two people not bound together by blood. In other words, what I am saying is that I wanted to write about love. Although that which apparently operates between Boesman and Lena is hate, abuse and acceptance, the play is really about love. Not just a ‘non-white’s’ idea of love. It is a statement of love, pure and simple, as it would be between any man and any woman anywhere. If I have left the impression that I wrote about love amongst coloureds, then I have failed. My intention was to write about love in its purest sense, so I took the reverse of love, because you know hate is the other side of the coin. Although I examine the relationship at a point where the love has soured and turned into something ugly, I was really concerned with examining a love relationship between a man and a woman. (Fugard in Gray *Athol Fugard* 48)

Boesman and Lena is a love story. Lena’s love for Boesman has remained constant but Boesman’s love for her has become warped over the years because of the society in which they live. Their dispossessed way of life and the factors contributing to the way they have to live have resulted in their existence becoming one of extreme suffering and deprivation and because of this, their relationship has suffered.

Before discussing the “woman” Lena as the affirmative element in *Boesman and Lena*, I want to discuss the relationship between Boesman and Lena and look at what connects Boesman to Lena, as it is fundamental to this study. One needs to look at Lena’s affirmation in the context of her relationship with Boesman and understand that her need and love for Boesman on the one hand, and the intensity of her suffering because of the way he abuses her on the other hand, are the underlying factors leading to her wish to affirm herself. In this respect Fugard writes in *Notebooks*: “Lena, reduced to a ‘thing’ in Boesman’s life. Lena’s rebellion is focussed against Boesman. He represents, is, the source of abuse of herself. He is her world” (181).

In the same entry as the above, Fugard notes not only Lena's reaction to the problematic relationship but Boesman's as well: "And, on his side-the shame of it all. And then his terrible fear and loneliness when she finds something" (*Notebooks* 181). He mentions the words "abuse", "shame", "fear" and "loneliness" to describe Boesman. These characteristics that Fugard depicts will be discussed in the course of this chapter, but what is important here is to note that Lena is not the only one suffering in the relationship. Both parties suffer. The significant difference, however, between Boesman and Lena arises in their response to their situation. Lena's response is positive. The word "rebellion" implies that Lena reacts in an endeavour to ameliorate the condition aggravating her. Her positive response leads to the affirmation that her life has value and meaning. Boesman's response is negative. He is ashamed. He does not react but withdraws within himself, bottling up the problem as he does so. In this respect Boesman acquiesces to his situation and his oppressors, and adopts their way of thinking. This is predominantly the reason why he does not achieve the assurance that his existence has meaning and value. When the problem becomes too much for him to bear alone, he finds release in abusing the person he loves, namely Lena.

Mel Gussow quotes Fugard saying about *Boesman and Lena*: "It's an examination of a relationship between a man and a woman in which the man is a bully and a chauvinist.... I think my wife has been on the receiving end of a lot of that sort of greed and selfishness. We've got past that. I'm a feminist now - and the play is dedicated to Sheila" (Barbera, "Introduction: Fugard, Women, and Politics," vii). The words "chauvinist" and "feminist" as used in the above excerpt may be employed to reflect both the broader or more formal area of gender politics as well as the more informal or personal side of gender politics in a patriarchal society. Knowing that Fugard does not like to be labelled a "political" writer and noting the following words of Phipson that he "resists the label 'political' because he feels that 'politics, as such, is an area of the most disgustingly flat, stale, two-dimensional reality'"(5), one may be induced to avoid looking at any political implications that may relate to *Boesman and Lena*. This would be a mistake. This play operates on both political planes. It has a strong "formal" political resonance as well as very definite "informal" or personal political echoes. The politics referred to in this play would be political ideologies that relate to race and gender. Therefore, when one looks at *Boesman and Lena* as "an examination of a relationship between a man and a woman", one cannot exclude the political. In this chapter, however, due to the nature of my enquiry, I will limit my discussion to the personal politics evident in this play.

While writing this play, Fugard noted:

To be careful that I do not pitch Boesman at a level of monotonous hatred and abuse. Not just the technical problem of variety of tone and tempo - the more basic issue that it is not as simple as Lena being the victim and Boesman the oppressor. Both are ultimately victims of a common, a shared predicament and of each other. Which of course makes it some kind of love story. They are each other's fate. (xxiii)

Exactly as there is a shallow and pointless reduction of Boesman to the oppressor, so there could be a shallow reduction of their relationship as a whole to violent, bitter discord. They did laugh, they did love and share ... it is because of this, what they have in common and has bound their lives together, that they are each other's fate.

As much Hate (real) as there was Love. (*Notebooks* 169)

The following words of Lena describe the relationship: "Ja, so it goes. He walks in front. I walk behind. It used to be side by side, with jokes. At night he let me sing, and listened. Never learnt any songs himself" (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* 264). These words refer to a happy past when she and Boesman were lovers and enjoyed each other's company. The phrase "with jokes" refers to a relationship that is healthy, alive and mutually beneficial. The relationship, that has now turned bitter, has lost its vitality and nurturing qualities as she follows him, deprived now of the status of being his equal partner in life, and there are no more "jokes" to share. She yearns for the relationship she used to have and no longer has. This yearning indicates that she still cares for Boesman. At the same time she points to a fundamental difference between her and Boesman. She learnt to sing. He did not.

The essence of this play hinges on this dialectic between "hate" and "love" (*Notebooks* 169). Lena loves Boesman. This is evident in the fact that she always relates to him, (Gray *Athol Fugard* 50), her endearment "*ou ding*" (241), and the way her memories include Boesman (244,245). It is because she loves him so much that she responds to his rejection of her, his denigration of her and above all his hate for her with a sense of total bewilderment and hurt. Hence her disorientation in the first act of the play is not simply a logistical one; it is also the confusion and sense of being suddenly lost. It is experienced when you are no longer wanted in the life of someone whom you care for. The reader or audience empathises with Lena when she laments: "When I want to cry, you want to laugh" (241), and when she discloses:

Never enough wine to make us sleep the whole night. Wake up in the dark. The fire cold. What time is that in my life? Another now! Black now and empty as hell. Even when you're also awake. You make it worse. When I call you, and I know you hear me, but you say nothing. Sometimes loneliness is two...you and the other person who doesn't want to know you're there. I'm sick of you too, Boesman! (255)

Both Boesman's fist and his tongue set out to abuse Lena in one way or the other. He derides, belittles and denigrates her with his words and beats her black and blue with his fists (241,242, 252,253,244). In the play, one realises that Boesman speaks to Lena just as society speaks to him, namely with abuse. In the same way that society tries to tell him, by always breaking down his *pondok*, that it does not want him: he tries to tell Lena that he does not want her (241,244). Yet when Lena chooses the old man and rejects Boesman, his actions speak louder than any words that he could utter and harder than any fist that he could make. "[He] *stares at her with hard disbelief*", he "*pulls the blanket away from [Outa]*" and "*sends the old man sprawling with a shove*," and leaves "*his bread and tea untouched before him*" (270,271). When Lena says she wants Outa, implying at the same time that she does not want Boesman, he laughs with "violent bewilderment" and demands: "Why! Why!!!" (278). Lena's asking these "bloody nonsense questions", is ironically her attempt at finding out why Boesman is rejecting her. Boesman's outburst and his actions bespeak his jealousy. His jealousy, in turn, depicts his need of and love for Lena.

In this respect Fugard says:

Where does he ever articulate or 'state' this terrible jealousy and loneliness? - nowhere. Yet it is there on the stage, it is behind the 'word', revealed rather than stated. Boesman kicking over his mug of tea and the throwing his bread into the river is 'saying' something as clearly, if not more so, than at any of the moments when he finds a few of his old and blunted words in his mouth. (Gray *Athol Fugard* 51)

One may ask why Boesman abuses Lena so much if he loves her. Lena asks Boesman the same question: "Why must you hurt me so much? What have I really done?" (281). Fugard states in this respect: "And if I don't love myself, nobody else can love me. So, not even the love of someone, of a loved one, is of any value. It just adds to your torment, because how can something worthless be loved?" (Freed 23).

Assaulted and mutilated by society, Boesman has internalised and accepted as his own the hatred and disgust it has meted out to Lena and him. Under these circumstances he cannot love himself and by not loving himself, he cannot show Lena the care and affection due to her. He only knows abuse. Lena tries to show him another way to respond to abuse: “Maybe you just want to touch me, to know I’m here. Try it the other way. Open your fist, put your hand on me. I’m here. I’m Lena” (282). He cannot respond to Lena’s plea and the love she shows him in these words. He says, as he hits the palm of his hand: “It doesn’t hurt” (282). Boesman’s only response to his situation is to hurt someone else in return for the hurt he has suffered. It is for this reason that he is unable to “[put his] hands on the things in [his] life” and is unable to count the little blessings he has (286), the most important blessing being that he still has Lena as his companion. By counting blessings one invests one’s life with meaning. In an interview with Hodgins, Fugard talking about poverty, remarks in this regard: “Somehow they [the poor] invest their lives with meaning, put it into the things they touch and feel and handle” (27). Boesman feels that he has nothing to value and that includes not only his existence but his relationship with Lena as well.

Unlike Boesman, Lena, abused, is still able to reach out in love towards her abuser. Lena wants to put her “hands on the things in her life” and count her blessings. One of those “things” is Boesman. She wants him to touch her and love her again, because if he loves her or needs her, he will value her and she will be able to value herself in return. At the same time she will value him. This will give her life meaning. Lena’s words sum up what a meaningful existence is all about: “I’ll tell you what it is. Eyes, *Outa*. Another pair of eyes. Something to see you”(262). What Lena wants is a companion to fill the void that her life has become. Someone in her life who will appreciate her and make her feel useful again.

With regard to Lena’s affirmation Fugard writes: “For six years my attempts to understand the possibility of affirmation in an essentially morbid society were dominated by and finally invested in three women: Mildred Constance Jenkins was the first, Hester Smit the second, and Lena the culmination” (xi).

Fugard sees Lena’s affirmation as the climax of what he was trying to say about “the affirmative positive statement [being] invested in the woman” (Phipson 11). For Fugard to regard Lena’s affirmation as having reached a higher point than that of “Mildred Constance Jenkins” and

“Hester Smit” implies that there is something more profound and complex in Lena’s affirmation than in Milly’s or Hester’s affirmation. When Lena affirms herself, that is when she tries to re-instate herself as a woman of value and dignity, she not only has to do so in her eyes but also in the eyes of her “husband”, Boesman, as well. In other words, Lena not only has to define herself as having value and dignity in order to have a positive self-concept, she also has to re-establish herself as a valuable partner in a relationship where she is ridiculed, denigrated and physically abused. Above all this, she has to prove to herself that her life has a purpose and a meaning and she cannot do that unless she affirms that she has value and that her relationship with Boesman also has value. It is not enough for Lena to value herself if she is not valued in return by the people in her life. Only once she has achieved all these aspects of her affirmation is Lena able to discover her *raison d’être*.

Milly’s affirmation is to boost her self-concept and reassure herself that she can still have fun and a good time (169). Hester’s hurt is “closer to the bone” (xvi). Her affirmation was to assure her that somebody, namely her mother, loved and valued her (228). Lena not only has to confirm to herself that she still has value, she has to convince Boesman as well that he still values her and needs her.

Fugard mentioned in the first excerpt quoted that “both are ultimately victims of a common predicament – and of each other” (*Notebooks* 168). Taking this into consideration as well as the nature of Lena’s affirmation, as discussed above, one cannot, therefore, regard Boesman and Lena’s relationship as a one dimensional one: looking at it solely as a relationship in which Lena is oppressed and abused. At the same time, one cannot regard Lena as being the only victim of this relationship either. Fugard, discussing Boesman as a character states:

He met Lena somewhere, she went off with him and they lived together. Over the years, starting with the death of the children ..., something terrible happened to Boesman’s psychology. Society assaulted him, mutilated him, crippled him. He lost a sense of his own value, of his own dignity, and if a man has not got a sense of his own value within himself he will never have it in his relationship with a woman. Because he did not have it within himself, I think, a little seed of shame was planted in his relationship with Lena. Because this is the woman he loves, who sees him mutilated, kicked around.

He has failed as a man. This soured his love, turned it to hatred. Though ‘hatred’ is the wrong word, because in some way the need for her remains. (*Gray Athol Fugard* 50)

In this chapter I will look at the problems that Lena faces in her day-to-day life and how the culmination of them leads her to start evaluating her life. She looks at her life and the way it has turned out and realises that something is wrong. Her existence has lost all meaning and value and it is as if her nomadic, dispossessed way of life endeavours to strip her of the last vestiges of worth and dignity as well. Lena's indomitable spirit, however, forces her to cling to and defend her sense of self from becoming lost in the process.

At the same time her relationship with Boesman, which in its initial stages had promises of love, companionship and hope for the future, has degenerated into rejection, hatred and abuse. Lena's acute sense of responsibility towards herself, her life, Boesman and the relationship prevents her from surrendering without a fight. Her fight is a lonely battle because she has nobody that can empathise with her or even help her. Boesman purposefully avoids listening to her problem because it adds salt to his already festering wounds. [Her gaunt body, suffering from malnutrition and physical hardship, and covered by a multitude of bruises, speaks of the way her partner in life assaults her.] This is the tangible evidence of her misery and torment and the reality of their relationship.

Lena's ability to affirm herself in a society that would rather abort her than sustain her, and her perseverance in a relationship that rejects and torments her both physically and mentally, lends her a statuesque quality. This in turn is reminiscent of the way in which Fugard saw his mother, namely as a "magnificent monument of a woman" (*Cousins* 4). The cornerstone of this admiration for his mother was her determination to "still [laugh] at the follies and essential absurdity of existence" and to continue to "[rage] against the injustices she saw around her in South Africa" (*Cousins* 4).

Likewise, Lena's spontaneous laughter in the face of defeat coupled with her questioning nature indicates her strength, her courage and above all her innate, defiant refusal to surrender. "Remember the old times? Quick march! Even run . . . [a little laugh]" (240), and "Haai, Boesman! Why here? This place hasn't been good to us. All we've had next to the Modderspruit is hard times. [A little laugh]" (245). Swart remarks that "the fact that she can laugh at the incongruities of life is her best defence against 'this dark, jaundiced comedy of living'" (114). By

laughing in the face of despair Lena does not allow her troubles to get the better of her. In other words she does not give way to her distress. In this way her woes do not defeat her.

Boesman, on the other hand, cannot laugh in the same manner as Lena. Instead he represses his problem. He ironically admits this when he tells Lena: "I'm a happy *Hotnot*. Laughing all the time...inside!" (242). He is, however, not really laughing because people deride him by calling him a "hotnot". He therefore confuses laughter with cynicism. This in turn clouds his view of laughter when he does laugh. He should instead, as Lena rightly remarks, "laugh at himself" in order to learn about the lighter side of life, and by so doing, not internalise so much of his distress (247).

I see Lena's laughter also as possibly the most important way in which she compensates for a deprived and dehumanising existence. Her laughter and buoyancy, in the face of despair, indicate the perseverance of a sensitive, generous spirit who desires to hold on to some essential part of "self" and above all to value that "self". This desire spurs Lena on in her quest to affirm herself. Her ability to laugh in the face of misfortune, as well as the fact that she queries her situation, shows furthermore that she refuses to become trapped into a particular frame of mind and thereby become totally effaced as a person by the absurdity of her existence. Boesman, on the other hand, cannot escape a mind frame of subservience (McLuckie 426). This implies that he has adopted and accepted the hopelessness of his life. Lena refuses to do so.

In his *Notebooks* Fugard refers to a char who worked for his mother who had reached a state of complete effacement and who no longer valued herself. When we first see Lena, she seems to be cast by her situation in life into the same mould as the char.

A life of hardship and dissipation obscures [her age]. She has been reduced to a dumb, animal-like submission by the weight of her burden and the long walk behind them, and in this condition almost misses him sitting to one side, propped up against his bundle. Realising she has passed him, she stops, but does not turn to face him in case they have to walk still further. (239)

But having sat down, exhausted, she removes some mud from her toes, looks at it and squashes it. This seemingly arbitrary action of squashing the mud is, however, immediate evidence of an instinctive, innate defiance and indicates that there is something in her that wants to fight back

and not allow herself to be swamped by her situation. This indication is reinforced by her exclamation: “Mud! Swartkops!” (239), followed by her swearing twice: “*Jou moer!*” whilst scrambling to her feet and shaking her fist, although she is totally exhausted by her long, strenuous walk (240). This outburst tires her even more (240). The mud between her toes makes her realise that she is at “Swartkops” and that upsets her (244).

The words and the way she squashes the soft, sticky ooze indicate her hatred and distaste for both the mud and the location where she finds herself as they recall her situation in life. This hatred serves as a form of protest against the life she leads and the immediate world around her. Her subsequent searching for a bird, her observation of it, flying unencumbered in the sky above, and her crude swearing at it indicates further that she feels that life has treated her unfairly. Lena’s swearing, however, not only shows her latent anger at her lot, but also indicates that she refuses to be silenced by her defeat. She insists on having her say and the very crude way that she expresses herself, using an ultimate obscenity, is yet further evidence of just how deeply she has been affected (240 and glossary, 296).

Lena’s deliberate choice of crass expressions reflects her social status, which is on the very periphery of society. Her coming from the lowest strata of society indicates that she is not a particularly desirable member of her community. This adds to her predicament and general sense of rejection. Her swearing in this coarse manner demonstrates as well that her voice is all that she has left to fight with. Boesman, her partner, on the other hand, succumbs to his predicament by his silence and his first words on stage are ironically an attempt to silence Lena as well. He concludes his first statement with “until you’re so bloody *moeg* that when I stop you can’t open your mouth!”(241). But Lena needs to open her mouth. She needs the comfort, the reassurance and the analytical properties of speech. Boesman’s words in the above excerpt reveal the essential difference between the two of them. Lena realises that she can only come to grips with her dilemma by verbalising it. Boesman retreats into a brooding silence and only “talks to the world” with his fist (264). The importance here is the difference in the way Boesman and Lena react to the absurdity of their existence. Lena’s response is as outgoing and as positive as one can be in a morbid situation. Boesman, on the other hand, retreats into the negative and soul-destroying world of violence.

That Boesman resorts to violence is further evidence of his cowardice and inability to confront and deal with the issues that are tormenting him. The violence is a form of escapism from the reality that he has to face. Sadly, he uses Lena as his punching bag to relieve his fury. Lena's "questions," as Boesman describes them – "When ... where ... why! All your bloody nonsense questions!" are how she verbally queries and tries to make sense of her dilemma (254, 276). These are the very questions that Boesman shies away from answering because he does not have the pluck, like Lena does, to face them. Furthermore, these questions enrage Boesman because he knows that he has done nothing about his hopeless situation and that he surrenders every time when he builds his pondok. The questions become thus a daily reminder of how he has allowed himself to be defeated.

When we first see Lena, she is portrayed as a beast of burden, overloaded by carrying all her household effects with her (239). She is also encumbered by the baggage of her past that has, in its turn, become a psychological burden to her (263 –266). This load is made even heavier by the loss of her children. Above all this she bears the burden not only of her own oppression from society but that of her husband's oppression as well (Gornick 55). For Lena, bearing the additional load of her partner's oppression from society is particularly difficult because Boesman, "who carries with him the endless burden of racism", makes her pay for his oppression by physically abusing her (Harrison 14). In this regard Lena, as a woman, bears the dual burden of being ostracised by her society and suffers the plight of women whose society condones their abuse by their men.

Boesman feels safe when he abuses Lena because the authorities in the form of the police condone his actions:

LENA: *Aikona!* I'll go to the police.

BOESMAN: You tried that before and what happened? 'She's my woman, *baas*. *Net 'n bietjie warm gemaak.* 'Take her' ... finish *en klaar*. They know the way it is with our sort. (253)

Ironically, when Boesman hits the dead body of Outa, he does not feel safe at all and panics because he knows that assault of this nature is not permitted in society (289, 290). This, by implication, illustrates the very vulnerability of women who share the same social status as Lena.

They carry the unenviable burden of being society's scapegoats for abuse. At the same time one becomes aware of just how difficult it is for someone like Lena to affirm herself in a society that does not value her.

LENA [to the old man]. He wanted to count the bottles before we left. Three were broken. He stopped hitting when the white-man laughed. Took off his hat and smiled at them. '*Jus a ou meid, baas.*' They laughed louder. [*Pointing to her bruises.*] Too dark to see them now. He's hit me everywhere. (281)

The scene depicted in the above extract is particularly horrendous when one discovers that Lena has been brutally assaulted ("He's hit me everywhere.") for something that she did not do and that the person hitting her is not only the guilty party but also her "husband" (281). Boesman creates a pantomime effect when he successfully obtains the approval of the "white-man" audience, by smiling and removing his hat. Ironically the "white-man" has just as little respect for Boesman as Boesman has for Lena as he assaults her in public before them. Boesman's fawning before the "white-man", makes him an even greater object of ridicule. Their laughter is just derision. For Lena, however, the incident is not some kind of farce but the reality that she has to deal with daily. Her body's bruises are evidence of that.

Boesman's words "*Jus a ou meid*, [coloured servant, derogatory term for woman] *baas.*" rob Lena of all value as a person (281 and glossary, 297). The people who laugh show their blatant disrespect for her by laughing even louder. Boesman's disloyalty to her as her partner in life is most evident when he barter her reputation for the "approval" of the "white-man" whom he in any case despises and who despises him in return. Lena, meanwhile, has to suffer the pain and shame of this denigration. This humiliation is, however, nothing compared with Lena's final abasement when Boesman not only contemptuously refuses to hit her but spits out instead: "Sies"(283). With this abusive action he implies that she is too low and vile for him to hit.

Lena is totally disorientated not only by the route she has taken to get to Swartkops but also by the chronological order of her past (240). Her disorientation is also a result of the terrible confusion she experiences by not belonging anywhere. It is a bewilderment resulting from and exasperated by the fact that she and Boesman have "drunk away their lives" (Gray *Athol Fugard* 49). Boesman, the man she has chosen to spend her life with, also does not comfort her and that

exacerbates her confusion and feeling of being lost. Instead, he looks at her with “a hard, cruel objectivity”, symbolically shutting her out of his life and his feeling (239). Furthermore, Boesman’s tormenting her makes her feel even more rejected and lost (250, 251, 252). Lena’s disorientation is part of her “existential dilemma: Who am I? Where am I? How did I get here? Where do I go from here?” (Fugard in Freed 23).

Lena’s envious admiration of the bird’s flight, as well as her observation of the bird’s shadow being left on the ground, shows her incredibly acute sensitivity to her predicament as well as an innate desire to somehow be like the bird and to effortlessly fly away and leave her weighty burden on the earth (240). In the bird she recognises all that she does not have in her life, namely freedom and in particular freedom of choice and movement. Unlike the bird she cannot come and go as she pleases. She has bound her life to Boesman. The harsh laws of the country in which she lives affect her place in society, and deny her freedom of movement and choice of where she may stay. This sensitivity to her predicament is in itself a reaction to her situation because she instinctively knows that something is wrong. Fugard says the following:

But she has in her confusion and bewilderment thought of one simple little thing. It comes by accident in the course of the play. If she could work out how she got here, maybe some sort of sense of her past and the way it all happened, she would understand why she is here. Why in a very important sense – why she is Lena, why she is a woman with bruises, why she is the person with no hope, why life is now such a burden on her back that she says to Outa: “Am I crooked, because it feels that way?” (Gray *Athol Fugard* 49)

Having walked like a somnambulist, Lena only realises that she is in the desolate mud flats of “Swartkops” once she feels the mud between her toes. The bleakness and solitariness of the venue mirrors her deep sense of loneliness and as well her rejection from normal society. This “ostracism” is particularly severe for Lena who is a communal being and enjoys socialising (279, 280). This explains her desperate need to have other life around her (246). The loneliness that pains Lena the most, however, is the loneliness experienced with rejection, coupled with the void of having no-one else to turn to for empathy. Boesman’s rejection of Lena is agony for her because he is the person whose rejection she most takes to heart. He is also the person who lies next to her in the even lonelier hours of the night, refusing to respond to her. “Loneliness” Lena maintains is “two . . . you and the other person who doesn’t want to know you’re there” (255).

When Outa approaches, Boesman says that they have no help to give the old man (256). Lena quickly replies: "I'm not thinking of him.... It's another person, Boesman." (256). Boesman can only stare in return as he does not comprehend her need for company. He does not want any form of human contact as he has only ever received abuse from his fellow men (250). The word "*Hamba*" (go) that he uses to "welcome" Outa with is most probably the word that society has used to chase him away with (257, and glossary 296). He forcefully tries to stop her calling out to the stranger and inviting the person to join them (256). Lena disobeys him and retorts: "To hell with you! I want him. ... Sit in the dark and talk to myself because you don't hear me anymore?" (256).

Previously, Lena had also disobeyed Boesman with regard to the dog. She had encouraged the dog's company by feeding him (261, 262). Her disobedience both these times demonstrates even further her desperate need for company. This disobedience is also Lena's retaliation against the shackles of Boesman's brutish authority over her and illustrates her slowly, unconsciously, beginning to take her own rights into consideration and to assert her self. When Lena trades her only bottle of wine for Outa and says: "I want him!" she begins to accept responsibility for her own life (268). This is the moment when her affirmation really begins. It is also the moment when she breaks Boesman's power over her.

Lena's desire for company is later reinforced by her words, when she disappointedly finds the newcomer to be an old black man who is still "Better than nothing" (256, 257). When Lena gets no intelligible response from the old man, "[she] turns away in violent disgust]" and retorts: "Ag, go to hell! *Onnooslike kaffer. My bleddy bek af praat vir niks!*" (259). Behind her disobedience towards Boesman and this crass retort lie Lena's real reason for wanting company. She desperately needs to talk. Her use of the derogatory "*kaffer*" (black man) coupled with the slang word "*bek*" (mouth) illustrates the depths of her disappointment, which in its turn highlights her need for company even more. Her undignified expressions are furthermore an outward cry for some form of dignity in her absurd and dehumanising way of life. She desperately needs to make her dilemma known in order to come to grips with it and in so doing attempt to "clarify her own state of being to herself" (Fischer 92).

Lena tries to converse with Boesman, the only person left in her life, but he purposefully and cruelly rejects her, then ignores her. She tries to explain to him how she feels about herself and her position in the relationship. She has now to walk behind him; she feels old and useless and her body is sore and covered with bruises (243,244). She appeals to his sympathy but receives a derisive laugh and rejection instead (244). Boesman then repulses her by saying: “You think I want you?” (244). (Later in the play when Lena trades Boesman’s company for that of Outa, Boesman’s actions belie these words (288).) With the emphasis on the personal pronoun ‘I’, Boesman rubs in his sense of superiority to her, and by implication her inferiority to him, as well as his power over her. Lena undauntedly and replies simply: “You took me” (244). She will not allow herself to be repulsed so easily.

The stage directions here “[*she also thinks about this before answering*]” (244) imply that Lena’s response is a calculated one. She is normally quick to respond. She seeks the right words because the reply is important to her as it pertains not only to their relationship but also to her affirmation. She says:

You took me. You came out with the wine, put it in your bundle, then you said ‘Come!’ and walked. I wanted to say something. The word was in my mouth! But the way you did it ... no questions, didn’t even look at me ... just picked up and walked. So I followed you. Didn’t even know where until I felt the mud between my toes. Then I knew. Swartkops again! (244)

“The word was in my mouth” is the most important sentence in this excerpt. After being brutally beaten for dropping “sixpence” worth of empties, Lena desperately wanted to say “NO! Enough!” when Boesman commanded her to follow him, but her courage failed her and she once more submitted to his authority, as she had been conditioned into doing (244, 290). Boesman tells Lena to come in the same way that one would command a dog to follow, knowing at the same time that the dog will obey. Lena instinctively obeys like a dog and follows. When we first encounter Lena, “she has been reduced to a dumb, animal-like submission” (239). This excerpt not only illuminates Boesman’s power over Lena but also the fact that he expects her to be submissive and that he likes to keep her that way. Here Boesman treats Lena in the same way that the erstwhile apartheid Government treats him.

When Lena rejects Boesman for Outa, she not only defies him but refuses as well to continue to be submissive to him. At the beginning of the second act Boesman tries to regain his power over her by trying to condition her to be “obedient” once more. The words that Boesman cruelly forces her to repeat, namely “Please, *my baasie!*”, are the same pleading words that Lena had used to beg the “white-man” for mercy that morning when her home was being destroyed (272). By using these words, Boesman is also trying to make Lena beg him for mercy and in that way reinstate his authority over her. (Here Boesman symbolically steps into the very “shoes” of the “white-man.”) Lena refuses to beg and jumps up, shouting: “Enough, Boesman!”(272).

Boesman has mastered the art of fawning. When he advises Lena how to beg for favours, he likens the method that one needs to use to the begging for pardon actions of a dog, with his tail between his legs (272). Lena is quick to sum up his advice as this kind of behaviour and calls him “Whiteman’s dog,” implying that he is the one who fawns to the whiteman, not her. In this respect her command “*Voetsek!*”, implies more than “Bugger off!” (Glossary 299). It indicates Lena’s disdain and contempt for Boesman and his obsequious behaviour and shows that she sees him as a dog because of it (272). Boesman, remembering their eviction that morning, remarks: “But the dogs knew. They had their tails between their legs. They were ready to run” (274). The dogs, used to being chased away, will run when scared again (274). Boesman like a dog, “with [its] tongue between [its] back legs”, comes back for more by fawning instead of leaving quietly: “*Ek sê, my baas ... !*’ He threw me the *stompie*. ‘*Dankie, baas*’” (272, 274). Boesman is worse than the dogs because he belies his dignity as a human being. Degraded and dehumanised by the whiteman evicting him, Boesman still humiliates himself further by begging for the cigarette butt that his “abuser” is about to throw away as refuse. The term “whiteman’s dog”, that Lena applies to him, indicates that he allows the whiteman to treat him like their dog and in so doing, allows them to abuse him.

Lena’s words “This one’s [this “dog” but referring to Boesman] following me to my grave.” depict not only her agony and disappointment in their relationship, but more importantly her feeling of being locked into this relationship with no escape, not even in death. She feels with Boesman around that there will be no “till death do us part” for her. She later compares his “pondok”, (their home) to a coffin (278). Boesman’s obsequious behaviour to the “white-man” is

comparable to Lena's inability to say no to Boesman (244). Both are admissions of defeat. Willie's words in "*No Good Friday*" explain this kind of surrender.

The world I live in is the way it is not in spite of me but because of me. You think we're just poor suffering come-to-Jesus-at-the-end-of-it-all black men and that the world's all wrong and against us so what the hell. Well I'm not so sure of that any more. I'm not so sure because I think we helped to make it, the way it is. (*The Township Plays* 50,51)

The "word" remains in Lena's mouth and with it she swallows all hope of breaking Boesman's abusive tyranny over her. Lena thus remains "voiceless". By not voicing her rights she denies herself. At the same time, by being quiet and silently obeying, Lena is not only surrendering to her plight, but she is also helping to make the situation what it is. At this point Lena is also doing exactly what Boesman is doing, except worse. Boesman by "[talking] with his fist" hits out in denial (264, Mc Luckie 425). Lena, by remaining silent, accepts her degradation and abuse without a murmur. By remaining "dumb" Lena cannot affirm herself but has instead silenced herself.

When Lena feels the mud beneath her feet and realises that she is back in Swartkops, she realises at the same time that she has not broken the cycle of following Boesman and being abused by him and also by following him, returning once more to their vagrant existence. While referring to her last stay at Swartkops, she remarks: "Run your legs off the other way but at the end of it Boesman is waiting. How the hell does that happen?" (247). At the beginning of the play when Lena, after squashing the mud between her fingers with hatred, rises with her last bit of strength and swears at the birds, she is also disappointed with herself for submitting once more to the shackles of Boesman's authority over her (239, 240). Her defiance begins when she squashes the mud, indicating as she does so that she has had enough. This defiance is later enforced by the words: "I [want] somebody to listen" (246). She does not want to remain voiceless. She wants someone to listen to and witness her plight.

LENA. Boesman! When was our last time here? I'm talking to you.

[*Boesman deliberately ignores her, and carries on sorting out the contents of his bundle.*]

Boesman!!!

[Pause ... No reaction from him.]

Don't be like that tonight, man. This is a lonely place. Just us two. Talk to me.

BOESMAN. I've got nothing left to say to you. Talk to yourself.

LENA. I'll go mad. (245)

Boesman ignores Lena when she starts her "Where we going? 'Let's go back.' Who? What? How?" questions (246). He usually responds to her even when he is taunting her (250 – 253). These are the questions that Boesman refers to as "All your bloody nonsense questions" (254). They are also the very questions that Boesman has failed to answer for himself and he defends himself for his failure to do so by calling them "bloody nonsense" questions. Lena cannot stop asking them. These questions are important to her and she surmises that they are to provide the answer to her *raison d'être*. The question she asks here is: "When was our last time here?" Boesman ignores her because he does not want to be reminded of their previous time at Swartkops. Swartkops, like all the places they visit over and over again, reminds him of his lost "freedom" (275, 276).

Lena asks her questions with such intensity that Boesman likens her questioning to nagging. He "*deliberately ignores her,*" and calls her nagging "[that] *gebabbel* of yours" (245, 246). However, to see Lena's repeated questioning as "nagging" is nothing more than Boesman's excuse for not confronting the real issues of Lena's problem and by implication the real issues of his problem as well. Here Boesman blatantly transfers the blame for his inability to determine where they are to go on to her (245). Lena's persistent enquiry not only indicates her tenacity but also shows how crucial it is for her to find answers to her problem. Lena demands answers that Boesman does not want to give.

Boesman not only refuses to respond to Lena talking to him, knowing that he is rejecting her as he does so, he also tries to belittle her and devalue her by deriding her speech in an effort to silence her.

BOESMAN. To what? That *gebabbel* of yours. When you *poep* it makes more sense. You know why? It stinks. Your words are just noise. Nonsense. *Die geraas van 'n vervloekte lewe*. Look at you! Listen to you! You're asking for a lot, Lena. Must I go mad as well? (246)

Behind this rude and horrible remark is a man who is hurting inside and whose only defence is to hurt with the same intensity in return. Comparing the air that is forced through the vocal cords to produce the miracle of speech found in human beings in a very vulgar way to the gas expelled from the anus, Boesman remarks that Lena's fart is of more value than her words. The fart smells whereas the words have no meaning. His crudeness here and the fact that he is addressing this remark to the woman who has shared his life with him, illustrate even further just how very foul he feels about himself. He sees their life as being cursed ("*vervloekte lewe*") and Lena's words only serve to articulate his abhorrence of the way their life has turned out. Her questions magnify his impotence to change things and he does not want to hear them as they add salt to his already festering wounds. In this respect he blames Lena: "Every time you opened your mouth it got worse" (276). Boesman finds his escapism from their situation instead in silence, solitude and drink. ("*Hotnot's* forget-me-not. *Weg wêreld, kom brandewyn*" (269).) In Lena's presence he sees a walking, talking reminder of the route their lives have taken: "I look, and I see you. I listen, I hear you" (282). His constant awareness of her brings him back to the world he wants to forget and escape from.

Fugard, commenting on characterisation in Boesman and Lena, remarks: "Lena has been the victim of so much abuse from Boesman, and of so much degradation, her life as she sees it is teetering on the point of being absurdly meaningless" (Gray *Athol Fugard* 49). Yet confronted by this vulgar comment from Boesman, Lena still stands her ground, like she does when she waits for the blows from his fist to pound her frail body. "*Ja*. That's when I feel it most. When you do it carefully. The last few...when you aim. I count them. One...another one... wait for the next one! He's only resting" (254). She does not cower but defends herself against this remark: "I asked you when we came here last. Is that nonsense?"(246). Boesman avoids a direct answer. Lena's sense of injustice here implies a value of self while her "*surge of anger*" manifests growing defiance (xxiii, 246). Her life may at this point in time be meaningless but she endeavours to protect her concept of self from losing all meaning as well.

Lena thus retaliates by blaming Boesman for their being at Swartkops instead of at Veeplaas and asks: "Is this the best you could do?" (239, 246). She then astutely targets in on the real reason for Boesman's remark: "Ashamed of yourself?" (246). Instead of taking the crass remark to heart, Lena has the strength of mind to check Boesman in his attempt to hurt her and silence her,

just as she had done when he had referred to her words as “That long *drol* of nonsense that comes out when you open your mouth!” (241). It is important to note that Lena now refuses to be silenced. Her rhetorical question hits home and “*Boesman turns away from her*” (246).

As we have seen above, Boesman tries to dissuade Lena from asking her questions, either by ignoring her or by belittling her speech. When confronted by Lena the first time, he “*deliberately ignores her and carries on sorting out the contents of his bundle*” (245). The second time when Lena accuses him of being ashamed of himself, he “*turns away from her, dragging their one mattress to the spot where he will build the shelter. He then picks up the piece of corrugated iron and examines it, ...*” (245, 246). What is interesting to note on both these occasions is the real focus of Boesman’s attention when confronted by Lena’s questioning. He looks at the concrete things in his life, namely the things relating to his pondok and the building of it. These are the “contents” of his life, not Lena. When Boesman is finished hitting Outa, “*he goes back to his place in front of the shelter*” (289). This is where his security lies. In the end when he loads himself up with their belongings “*He stands before Lena, a grotesquely overburdened figure.*” (291) Here Boesman becomes the proverbial rubbish dump, in this case the “whiteman’s rubbish” dump, as he “wears” the rubbish he “[sleeps] in” (namely the pondok) (277). Boesman has internalised so much of the whiteman’s concept of him that he has also in fact “eaten” their ideology, and by so doing, allowed himself to perceive himself as rubbish instead of a person of value (277). In this way the pondok, that Boesman makes the centre of his existence, is nothing more than a “*vrot ou huisie vir die vrot mens*” (254).

In his interview with Lynn Freed Fugard states: “Lena is an embodiment of an existential dilemma: Who am I? Where am I? How did I get here? Where do I go from here? What is my life about? Those questions as Boesman describes them – ‘Who? What? When? Where? Why?’” (23). Boesman asks Lena to “stop asking them” [these questions] and by so doing to stop complaining about her life and accept it the way it is, like he has accepted it (254). He adds: “It’s all you’ll ever know” (254). This is not good enough for Lena and she complains further: “I’m sick of it”. Boesman retorts: “Sick of it! You want to live in a house? What do you think you are? A white madam?”

LENA. It wasn’t always like this. There were better times.

BOESMAN. In your dreams maybe.

LENA. What about Veeplaas? Chopping wood for the Chinaman? That room in his backyard. Real room, with a door and all that.

BOESMAN. Forget it. *Now* is the only time in your life.

LENA. No! Now. What's that? I wasn't born today. I want my life. Where's it?

BOESMAN. In the mud, where you are, *Now*. *Tomorrow* it will be there too, and the next day. And if you're still alive when I have had enough of this, you will load up and walk, somewhere else. (254)

Lena's demands are not outrageous. She wants what every woman wants namely: "[love], protection, care, consideration" (Gray *Athol Fugard* 50) and a proper home. Lena does not get that and that is the basis of her problem (Gray *Athol Fugard* 50). At the same time Boesman cannot give Lena what she craves and that is the root of his problem. His words "A white madam" imply that the "white-man" can give his wife a home yet he can't. This attacks his sense of pride as a man and highlights his sense of failure. It also reminds him of his plight of being homeless. It is interesting to note how Boesman interprets Lena's complaint. He always sees all his problems relating in some or other way to the "white-man" or to Lena, but never to himself.

When Lena intimates that she desires a "real room" [i.e. not a pondok], she is also saying that she wants a home in the full sense of the word. Lena aspires to all that a home represents: permanent residence, place of safety, children, and above all a man in it that loves and respects her. Boesman calls her aspirations "dreams" in an attempt not only to highlight the unreality of her hopes but also to deter her from thinking along those lines and thereby keep her as a "person with no hope", like himself (Gray *Athol Fugard* 49). The pondoks that Boesman offers her provide her with nothing: not even shelter from the rain (254). Lena wants something better. She later likens the pondok to a coffin and remarks: "You bury my life in your pondoks" (278). The pondok has become a symbol of Lena's degradation and abuse and she blames Boesman for that. For Lena life is no empty dream and her aspirations are necessary as they influence and affect change. Lena sees the need to change her life that has become a living death. She refuses to "[crawl] into darkness and silence before [she's] dead" (278).

The recognition of her life having value is important to Lena's affirmation. She expresses an awareness of the value of her life as a human being when she says:

Look back one day, Boesman. It's *me*, that thing you *sleep* along the roads. My life. It felt old today. Sitting there on the pavement when you went inside with the empties. Not just *moeg*. It's been that for a long time. Something else. Something that has been used too long. The old pot that leaks, the blanket that can't even keep the fleas warm. Time to throw it away. How do you do that when it's yourself? (243, 244)

Lena asks a very valuable question here. She has in fact "drunk" her life away by "a lifetime of drinking" (Gray *Athol Fugard* 49), and as a result her appearance is haggard and dissipated (239). Lena's dispossessed way of life has resulted in her becoming "a walking junk heap of dented pots, tin cans, rags and firewood" (Prideaux n.p.). She questions, however, whether her appearance and her physical decrepitude justifies her discarding her life like one does an object that is worn with use. When one discards an object one is confirming that it is rubbish and that it is of no more value to one.

When Boesman says: "And I knew it. 'When she puts down her bundle, she'll start her rubbish.' You did." (241), Lena immediately homes in on the word "rubbish" and questions it. She then defends herself against his accusation (241). Although socially they come from "the dustbins of South African society", Lena refuses to see herself or her speech as rubbish, unlike Boesman whose motto is: "We're whiteman's rubbish" (Lambert in Vandenbrouke 196, 277). Boesman has accepted the "white-man's" view of him as his own. Lena chooses not to do so. Lena has the choice to either throw her life away or keep it for what it is worth. Boesman, by viewing himself as trash, has decided to discard his life. Lena reiterates this when she replies: "Throw yourself away and leave us alone" (277). Lena refuses to be conditioned to Boesman's way of thinking. Although she is in the same boat as Boesman with regard to the problems that they experience by being non-whites in the Apartheid Government, she refuses to agree, as it would be tantamount to admitting defeat. Her agreement in this regard would be the same as accepting the label "rubbish".

Like Milly, the middle-aged dishevelled landlady of a run-down establishment in *People Are Living There*, Lena's appearance is unappealing. Bob Hitchcock of the *Rand Daily Mail* referred to Lena as:

A hard-drinking Coloured hag. She positively sags with the weight of life's harsh injustices and her own traumatic drinking bouts. Yet as well as drinking spirits, she has spirit.

Knocked about by her man, treated as rubbish by The Authorities, life's crumbs for Lena are hard and tasteless. But she refuses to capitulate. (31.8.71)

Hitchcock sees beyond Lena's outward appearance and commends her for her "spirit" and her defiant nature that refuses to surrender. Fugard applauded Milly in similar terms: "Her cri-de-coeur: 'Is this all we get?' Hurt or outrage? Obviously both. Certainly not despair" (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xii).

Both women harbour an innate demand to be more than they appear to be. Neither one is happy with the way their lives have turned out. This desire to be other than they have become is the root of their affirmation. The reader/audience realises with heartfelt poignancy that the day-to-day living of their lives cannot change. Both Lena and Milly know this but this does not prevent them from doggedly and courageously trying to embellish their lives with some meaning and function. It is this determination to find what their lives are lacking and to try and improve on that, that makes them people worthy of emulation.

This desire to take stock of their lives is also precipitated by their realisation that time does not stand still for them. Milly and Lena realise with anguish and despair that they have been caught in the trap of time in that their life is passing them by and they have nothing to show for it. Milly laments: "It took its time. My time ... bit by bit ... yes! That sounds better. Slow, and sly. ... It's not easy to pin down. Believe me, I've tried" (128). Lena is more specific when she remarks: "Another day gone. Other people lived it. We tramped it into the ground. I haven't got so many left, Boesman" (242).

In the above excerpt, Lena refers to the choice of either living one's life or trampling it into the ground. Here Lena is implying that one is responsible for one's own decisions and choices in life and at the same time, that in order to be responsible for one's life, one is compelled to make choices. In *Boesman and Lena*, the concepts choice and freedom are interchangeable.

Remembering their eviction that morning, Boesman, now slightly intoxicated and as a result less inhibited than usual, confides to Lena about his concept of "freedom" (275). Boesman starts this disclosure by saying: "I'm going to use a word. Freedom! *Ja*, I've heard them talk it" (275).

Judging from this statement and Boesman's actions throughout the play, one realises that his "concept" of the word "freedom" is the concrete word itself and that it has got nothing to do with the real concept of freedom as such. He has a misguided idea as to what freedom entails. Lena realises this when she says: "So that's what we were looking for, that *dwaal* (directionless confused state) there in the back streets. . . . looking for Boesman's Freedom" (276 and Glossary 296). Lena's sarcasm here and later in her remark about "Three empties and Boesman's Freedom in pieces" as well as Boesman's words "I had it!" reinforces the idea that Boesman's idea of "freedom" is something tangible. The phrase "in pieces" highlights the fragile nature of his concept of freedom.

Boesman's words: "I've heard them talk it", indicate not only that Boesman has no first-hand knowledge of the idea "freedom" but also shows that he has never experienced it. He therefore misinterprets how the "whiteman" treats him. When the "whiteman" evicts them and burns down their shacks, he is not dishing out freedom as a benefit per se, but is instead robbing them of their freedom to live and with this their right to dignity as human beings. Boesman feels that he gets his "freedom" as he stands erect like *Homo sapiens*, a man once more. When Boesman is able to stand up straight again, he feels as if he has been reinstated as a person of value and, more importantly, as a man once more. This feeling makes him happy and he wants to laugh. He experiences the exuberance of freedom. What Boesman does not comprehend here is that, when he, the "whiteman", burns down the shacks, he does not see him, Boesman, as his fellow human being and as a man, but as some kind of animal full "of disease" that needs to be eradicated (275).

Boesman's misguided loyalty to the whiteman influences his loyalty towards Lena. Instead of holding the "whiteman" responsible for his predicament, namely his continuous state of dispossession and submission that has influenced his life, he blames Lena. In this regard he accuses her: "It was you with your big mouth and stupid questions. They were like fleas on my life. I scratched until I was raw" (276). Boesman equates Lena's questions to fleas and thereby indicates that he sees her querying as something physical and not existential. This indicates that he does not understand her need at all. Simultaneously, in the same way that a flea bites a dog, Boesman feels that Lena's questions seek to attack him. He is frustrated by her questions because he cannot make up his mind where they are to go. He also thinks that she wants to

induce him, against his will, to camp at one of their old haunts and build another pondok. He feels that her insistence is like a proverbial itch because he knows that if he gives into her, he will once more lose his freedom. Like the dog tries to get rid of its fleas by scratching, Boesman tries to get rid of Lena's questions by demeaning them as "stupid" questions and also by not listening to them (276).

Lena knows that she gets blamed for everything and sarcastically says: "Bad day for Lena. Three empties and Boesman's Freedom in pieces" (276). Behind the sarcasm, however, Lena also depicts a kind of tiredness. She has had enough of always being blamed for everything. In the same breath she talks about the empties and Boesman's lost freedom. This implies that she no longer cares for what she is being blamed. This is what she means when she says: "Not just *moeg*. It's been that for a long time. Something else. Something that's been used too long" (244). It is at this moment, sitting outside the bottle store after she has been severely beaten by Boesman for dropping the empties, a public spectacle of abasement, humiliation, abuse, a woman who has been stripped of all dignity, that Lena is at her lowest ebb. She looks and feels totally extinguished by life. She is close to defeat and contemplates: "Time to throw it (meaning herself here) away." She then asks: "How do you do that when it's yourself?" (244). It is in this reply that Lena shows her indomitable spirit and indicates that she values her life too much to throw it away. This sense of "just having had enough of everything" is the reason why Lena cannot share in Boesman's exuberance when he tells her about his "freedom" (275–277).

Later when Boesman admits to dropping the bottles, Lena suddenly comprehends the full horror of her abuse. She says: "Why must you hurt me so much? What have I really done? Why didn't you hit yourself this morning? You broke the bottles. Or the whiteman that kicked us out? Why did you hit me?" (281). Lena realises here that all the humiliation and pain that she has suffered, by being abused, has been a mockery (Swart 136). It has been "for nothing" (281). She looks at what her body has become and as she feels it, she perceives the reality of her abuse and the pain she has endured. The very frailty of her body indicates her vulnerability and highlights the horror of her abuse. Boesman admits, after hitting the palm of his hand, that: "It doesn't hurt." Lena is "outraged" and demands: "And when it's me? Does that hurt you?" Lena is indignant as she discovers that her hurt is not Boesman's hurt as well. She is the only one being hurt and

victimised in the relationship. Normally in a relationship where two people love each other, they share each other's hurt.

Confronted by the horrendous and devastating disclosure of her abuse, Lena very quietly says: "Maybe you just want to touch me, to know I'm here. Try it the other way. Open your fist, put your hand on me. I'm here. I'm Lena" (282). One is struck here by the immense dignity, love and mercy of Lena's words as she reaches out to her abuser - who is also the man she loves. With this approach, Lena transcends the violence and horror of abuse and "turns the other cheek" (*Matthew* 5.39). Instead of hitting back at Boesman she offers him her bruised body to touch so that he may know that she is there for him. At the same time, Lena wants to induce Boesman to feel again so that he can learn another emotion besides anger. She wants to make him sensitive and loving to her again. In her compassionate and forgiving approach to retaliation, Lena tries to demonstrate to Boesman that violence is not the only answer. In this way Lena demonstrates true superiority over Boesman, whose motto for retaliation is more: *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth* (*Matthew* 5.38). Boesman, however, does not lash out at society, the real perpetrator. He takes the cowardly alternative and beats a frail and defenceless woman, who at the same time happens to be his "wife", instead. When Lena tells Boesman to learn to dance, she is actually advising him to release his emotions in a more appropriate way. Lena has learnt to find relief from her misery and frustrations in song, dance and laughter, whereas Boesman only finds more torment as he fights back in denial.

Boesman has been so "mutilated" by society that he cannot turn his anger into something positive because all his feelings have been severed (Fugard in Gray *Athol Fugard* 50). The feeling of jealousy that he experiences when he feels ousted from Lena and Outa's company is not a positive feeling as it brings him more hurt and aggression. Boesman laughs in "violent bewilderment" and then "leaves her and sits down in front of his shelter, drinking in a withdrawn and violent silence" (278). Boesman's confession that he hears Lena cry when he hits her indicates his lack of feeling for Lena. This confession hurts Lena more than the physical abuse that she endures. It also hurts more than his confession about dropping the empties because that confession, although agonizing, was not a direct attack on her. That Boesman can tolerate her suffering without any feeling indicates to Lena that he hates her, because if he loved her and she cried, he would not hit her any more. Lena is "outraged" because she realises that

not only has her abuse been a mockery but their relationship as well. Boesman's admission is a blatant betrayal of her love.

Lena is so angry that she wants the world to hear that she has been a victim. She has been abused for nothing. Outa is the only person present. Boesman points out to her that even if Outa hears her, he cannot understand her. Undaunted Lena retorts: "Say it in *kaffertaal*" (an African language so that Outa will be made to understand (283). Boesman refuses to say out loud that he has hit her for nothing. Lena persists and "[crawling]" "in an attitude of abject beggary" begs Boesman to give her the final blow, adding sarcastically that he usually does not require a reason to hit her (283). Instead of the physical blow that she waits for, Boesman gives her the ultimate blow that she does not expect namely, his contempt. Hereby he implies that she is too low for him to hit. This is too much for Lena to bear. It is the final annihilation. If Boesman had killed her, her life would not have been in vain. She would have become a victim but at the same time, by her death, she would have made him pay for his deeds in that he would have been held accountable for her death. Boesman's contempt adds a new dimension to her suffering. It frustrates her attempts to find meaning in her life because in Boesman's eyes, the person she loves, she is despicable as well. In Lena's eyes this implies that if she is of no value to Boesman, she is of no value to anyone, not even to herself. At that moment, Outa dies and she loses the person whom she has used to witness her life as well. He can no longer hear or see her suffering. She is alone in her misery.

Boesman's behaviour towards Lena, blaming and abusing her, shows that he is a coward. It indicates, as well, that he is unwilling to take responsibility for his actions. His words: "When the robot said 'Go' there at Berry's Corner I was nearly *bang in my broek*" (shit scared) (276 and Glossary 295) illustrate that at the proverbial crossroads of his life, when faced with possibly the most important decision of his life, namely the decision regarding his freedom, Boesman can't act and "make the crossing". This implies that he cannot accept responsibility for his own life. It is interesting to note that the phrase "*bang in my broek*," is reminiscent of the Afrikaans word "bangbroek" that means coward.

Boesman's words: "Don't listen to her, Boesman! Walk!" indicate that Boesman takes note of Lena following him behind his back (276, 243). What is important is that he allows her to

influence his decisions. If this were not the case he would not have taken any notice of her. This indicates Boesman's hesitation to make decisions on his own and it demonstrates, as well, that he still sees himself as part of the relationship with Lena. This reveals his dependence on her. When Boesman picks up that "*sinkplaat*," he does so partly because it has become his way of life to always be building a pondok, and partly because he knows that he has to provide some form of shelter for them both for the night (276).

It is evident from the way that they blame each other that Boesman and Lena have also come to a crossroads in their relationship. They instinctively know that some form of change is vital. In both cases their needs are similar and relate to their abuse. Lena needs to work out why Boesman is abusing her and why their relationship has changed. Why that feeling of togetherness that they had when they, "Boesman and Lena helped write" "[those] little paths on the veld", has disappeared (264). Boesman's needs revolve around his "freedom" because in some way that he tries to articulate, he has worked out that if he gets his freedom, society will stop abusing him. He thinks that if he does not build his pondok, society cannot break it down and humiliate him. At the same time he also realises he needs to break the temptation to build the pondok, so that he and Lena will not be induced once more to "crawl in and out [of it] like baboons"(275). In their separate ways, both Boesman and Lena demand that their life have value. Lena, always being told by Boesman that she has no value, demands that value. Boesman, by always saying that they have no value is instead, by his very denial, craving their reinstatement as people of value. He does not want to see Lena and himself coming to the end of their days as "two crooked *Hotnots*" (284). The underlying feeling here is that, as in any relationship that has gone sour, there exists the need to talk. In the same way that Boesman needs to reply to Lena's questions, Lena in turn needs to listen to Boesman's needs.

In *Boesman and Lena*, Fugard also suggests that it is not always easy to take a decision to change one's life when one is bound in a relationship. When Lena realises that she needs to get out of the relationship, she states: "I'm sick of you too, Boesman!" (255). Boesman then, ironically tells her what to do as he nonchalantly and jokingly says: "So go." Lena's threat: "Don't joke. I'll walk tonight. *So waar*", holds no water. She won't go. Boesman, knowing this, says tauntingly: "Go! Goodbye, darling." One senses Boesman's power over Lena and, his knowledge that he has this power over Lena. His power in this case does not refer to his physical abuse of her. It is instead the "hold" of being the "other" in a relationship and the dominion of being the "man" in a man-woman relationship.

Fugard uses Outa as a catalyst to provoke a reaction in the relationship between Boesman and Lena, so as to open up and expose the underlying tensions inherent in their union and in so doing, break the impasse that now exists in the relationship. Outa, by being the third person to come onto the mud flats, becomes also the third person in the relationship. Automatically his presence threatens the relationship that has previously existed between the first two people there. The dynamics of the relationship changes and that relationship, that has previously been a union, suddenly becomes some sort of “love triangle”. At the same time when the dynamics of the relationship changes it affects the focus of each individual involved.

When Lena first sees Outa, she sees him as a person who can break the loneliness that she experiences in her relationship with Boesman. She thus first focuses on him as a person, saying to Boesman: “It’s another person Boesman” (256). Her first response to Outa is to communicate with him in an effort to find out more about him and by so doing establish a rapport with him. Receiving no intelligible response from the old man, Lena turning away, seeks to drown her disappointment in drink (*Hotnot’s* forget-me-not (269)). When Lena is about to take one of the bottles that Boesman has hidden, Boesman grabs a stick in order to hit Lena for taking the wine. Lena quickly runs to the old man and says: “You be witness for me. Watch! He’s going to kill me” (260). Lena’s focus suddenly changes. She now sees Outa as a witness to her suffering and also as an ally. Outa’s presence is a deterrent to Boesman abusing her. She shouts after Boesman, as he leaves without hitting her: “Why don’t you hit me? Does this old thing worry you?” (260). When Outa does not laugh at Boesman’s attempt to hit her, she sees him not only as someone that is sympathetic but also as a gentleman that is not going to laugh at an “*Ou meid being donnered*” (an old coloured servant being beaten) (260, and glossary 296, 297). Thus when Outa says “Lena” he not only confirms to Lena that she exists as a person, by calling her by her name, but also verifies that he accords her the dignity that befits a woman.

When Outa calls her name, he is also responding to her. This excites Lena and automatically induces her to converse with him. No meaningful communication takes place, however, and Lena “[*surrenders*] *more and more to the illusion of conversation*” (261). When Lena starts to speak, her focus turns inward towards herself and she finally starts exposing her hurt. In this way Outa not only becomes the catalyst that promotes change in the relationship, he also becomes the stimulus that leads Lena towards her introspection and self-discovery. This in turn encourages her to affirm herself.

With Outa at her side, Lena starts to challenge Boesman. When Boesman does not hit her in the presence of the old man, Lena shouts after him (260). Until now she has silently waited for the blows to pound her frail body (254). Lena's good humour makes Boesman suspicious and he wants Outa to leave. Lena then impulsively trades her share of the wine for Outa. When Lena invites Outa to spend the night in the pondok with them, Boesman refuses and says: "You can choose. Inside here or take your fleas and keep him company" (269). Here Boesman, ironically, gives Lena the idea as well as the opportunity to choose between Outa and him. She has not thought of it herself. Until now Lena has only thought of Outa as company and not as someone in lieu of Boesman. When she invites Outa to share their shelter, she says: "You can stay the night with us" (My emphasis) (269). The flatness in her voice as she responds to Boesman's demand that she must choose between the two of them ("I heard you, Boesman") and the way she "*moves slowly to their things*", depicts firstly, the tiredness she experiences by being "used too long" and secondly, but more importantly, the awakening of her silent, inner rebellion (260).

Boesman, expecting Lena to follow him like she has in the past, thinks that he can still manipulate her. He says in a voice resonant with macho authority: "I said you can sleep inside with me ..." (269). Lena's actions indicate that she will not do so. As Lena breaks Boesman's authority over her, she gains her own authority instead. Her voice becomes the deciding voice in the "relationship" between Outa and herself. In this respect, she says: "Here, *Outa*. We'll need it," and "We'll need more wood. And something in case it rains. I'm not so handy at making shelter, *Outa*." (270). Lena's words illustrate furthermore that she is now starting to take responsibility for her own state of well-being. Once Lena has taken this decision, both in her mind and her actions, she challenges Boesman, using the only "weapons" that he understands, namely a commanding tone of voice and a clenched fist (269, 270). Here, as she challenges Boesman in this manner, Lena also symbolically breaks his dominion over her as a male. Lena's focus is now set squarely on her own survival.

When Outa dies the focus returns once more to the relationship between Boesman and Lena. Boesman, delighted that things have reverted to "normal", pretends indifference and says; "I'm going to sleep." With these words Boesman tests his power over Lena and his position of being the man in the man-woman relationship. Lena, having affirmed that she has value in herself, cannot return to the relationship where she is not valued. Reflecting on the value that is possible in their relationship, Lena says: "Put your hands on the things in your life. Yours were full. Mug

of tea, piece of bread . . . Me. Somebody else. Touch them, hold them. . .” She then looks at Boesman and continues: “or make a fist and hit them” (286). Lena’s words express sadness as she realises the damage that Boesman’s anger has done to their relationship.

Boesman, referring to Outa’s corpse, says: “You better do something.” These words become ironic when Lena, spurred on by Boesman’s fears about the dead man, reverses their positions and becomes the tormentor (Swart 144). She taunts him with the same kind of cruelty and cold detachment that he has always meted out to her. Here Lena makes Boesman feel what it is like to be blamed for something that you have not done. When she induces Boesman to assault the body, she does so in order to make him realise that he is accountable for his actions and as well to make him visually aware of the horror of his abuse, especially when the person he abuses is defenceless.

When Lena becomes the tormentor in the relationship she not only settles her score with Boesman, but she also exposes all the pain and agony that she has suffered in the relationship. When she does this, she distances herself from her suffering and by so doing frees herself from the relationship. This catharsis enables Lena to tell Boesman: “ No. The first time I tell you. No. I’ve walked with you a long way, *ou ding!* It’s finished now” (290). With these words Lena affirms herself not only as an independent person, but also as one that is able to have a say in her fate.

Lena’s words which could echo the words of a love song, when she finally tries to leave Boesman: “Can’t we say goodbye?” sum up their relationship. They cannot say goodbye because of what they have experienced together and their relationship, as Fugard maintains, becomes their fate (*Notebooks* 169). Lena’s heart is not in her words: “We’ll have to do it one day. It’s not for ever. Come on. Let’s say it now. Goodbye! Okay, now go. Go!! Walk!!” (292).

Yet Lena realises that the “walk” at her partner’s side is something that she can’t throw away. The relationship has become part of her and part of her existence and as such is of value to her. Expressing the command “Give!” she offers to lessen Boesman’s burden of household effects, by carrying her share (292). With this action, she willingly and knowingly renounces the freedom she has just obtained from Boesman but, at the same time, with the command “Give” she reinstates herself as a person of authority in the relationship. Boesman then meekly passes Lena a bucket that she immediately balances on her head. She thus symbolically and

courageously decides to accept her life's load and one is reminded of: "Put you life on your head and walk, sister" (242). This in its turn is reminiscent of the Cradock woman's walk: the image of the woman carrying her life on her head, which is also "the primary image regarding this play" (xxii, Fischer 101). When Lena puts the bucket on her head she demonstrates that she knowingly accepts responsibility for her life.

Lena's word "Give", coupled with the way she takes the bucket and places it on her head, demonstrates her decision to continue her "walk" "beyond the moments of rebellion" (xxii). This is the true moment of Lena's affirmation. In this moment she transcends the mere affirmation of achieving value in one's self to the ultimate affirmation of realising the value of one's self in others. When Lena stands at the body of Outa, she knows at that moment that, in the same way that a person must die, the value that one treasures in one's self is also just a transient thing. With this knowledge, "*she gets up slowly and goes to Boesman*", and seeing his need (he is at that moment "*a grotesquely overburdened figure [standing] motionless*") reaches out and offers her service to him (291, 292). Thus she symbolically "puts [her] hands on the things in [her] life" and by doing so, celebrates the true meaning of her life with Boesman (286). This is her real moment of communion. Here she partakes of her life with her partner. Her communion with Outa was only the celebration of herself but as such was the necessary route to the real moment of communion of herself in the service of someone else. The true test of a meaningful existence does not lie in the value of one's self, but in how one can make oneself of value to others. It is the deed that is remembered: the person only becomes immortalised by the deed.

The bucket that Lena puts on her head symbolises the choice that she has had to make. In this respect she says: "Hasn't got a hole in it yet. Might be whiteman's rubbish, but I can still use it" (292). The emphasis is on the little word "I", which emphasises that this kind of decision is a personal decision. Lena has the choice to see herself as an old bucket that nobody wants anymore or as a bucket that still has a purpose. In the same way that one would throw a bucket like this away, Lena can choose to see her life as useless and thereby "throw herself away" by taking a negative view of her existence. Alternatively, she has the choice to look beyond the appearance of the bucket and see it as a container that can still hold water, and thus be of use to someone. To see herself as the "useless bucket" would be tantamount to admitting defeat. Lena cannot surrender in this way, because she would thereby negate any affirmation of herself. This in turn would lead her to see herself in the same way that Boesman sees himself, namely as "whiteman's rubbish." Boesman cannot see beyond his negative concept of himself and is in this

way “impotent” (*Notebooks* 198). He has thus no hope of affirming himself. Lena decides to see herself as the “bucket without the hole”. She realises that her function in life is to continue her walk by Boesman’s side.

The play ends with the following stage directions: “[*They look around for the last time, then turn and walk off into the darkness*]” (293). Boesman and Lena bravely walk off into the darkness: there is no light in the future for them. Their future is as bleak as their past. Fugard paints a pessimistic but realistic scene for the conclusion of this play, as there are no fairy-tale endings for the likes of Boesman and Lena. They will continue as they always have done: obscure and unwanted. Lena’s life will not have changed, but her perception of her life will have changed. This change will in turn affect a change in their relationship towards each other. Hopefully, a life of mutual respect and consideration will make the hardship of their lives more bearable. As they continue their walk into “the final ignominy of silence”, Lena, as she helps “[write] those little paths on the veld”, at Boesman’s side, will have the knowledge in her heart that she has made her life meaningful by giving him the gift of herself: her love (xxii, 264). And thus we will remember Lena as an embodiment of the words “a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.”(William Faulkner’s speech of acceptance upon the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature. December 1950)

CONCLUSION

One needs to return to the following statement by Fugard in order to ascertain what he wanted to achieve by making women the affirmative element in his plays.

For six years my attempts to understand the possibility of affirmation in an essentially morbid society were dominated by and finally invested in three women: Mildred Constance Jenkins was the first, Hester Smit the second, and Lena the culmination. (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xi)

If one analyses this statement in relation to the three plays discussed, one realises that what has been invested in the three women is a sense of value made possible by their affirmation. Looking at these three women's affirmation in the order given above, it becomes clear why Fugard states that Lena's affirmation was the culmination. Lena transcended her affirmation of self by also affirming herself in somebody else's life. Milly learns to value herself and her existence for what it is worth. Hester learns to value herself because someone has valued her by loving her. Lena, however, learns not only to value herself and her meagre existence, she also makes herself of value in the life of someone else. Her action becomes an act of heroism if one takes into account that the person she reaches out to, is the person who has abused her and has been the main cause of all her suffering.

Lena's act of heroism is furthermore evidence of what Robert Hurwitt calls "the enormous elasticity and durability of the human spirit" that provides hope in extreme degradation (20). In this respect, one can add what Milton Shulman says: "Degrading as any society must be that can view with indifference such demeaning of the human spirit, the author is less concerned with a political indictment and more concerned with the wonder of man's questing, resilient and unconquerable soul" (*Evening Standard* n.p.).

Discussing "some problems of a playwright", Fugard said the following:

I became conscious, as I was thinking about talking to you today and as I was looking over my plays, that in addition to all the judgements, the condemnations, the angers, the outrages, the whatever else I have expressed, I've tried to celebrate the human spirit – its

capacity to create, its capacity to endure, its capacity to forgive, its capacity to love, even though every conceivable barrier is set up to thwart the act of loving. Yes, I would like to leave you with that as a final word on my side about my work and my dilemmas. (*Some Problems of a Playwright from South Africa* 390)

It is this “elasticity” of the human spirit that makes one able to “endure”, “to forgive” and “to love” in the face of despair that one could say forms the basis of humanity. This is what Fugard was searching for when he was trying to determine “the possibility of affirmation in an essentially morbid society”. In *Lena*, Fugard captures the essence of humanity in her “unconquerable soul”. At the same time, I feel that Fugard is not only intimating that he respects someone like *Lena* who is able to rise above her situation in life with such dignity and nobility, he is also inviting the more privileged in our country to show their humanity and to reach out to those in need.

If one looks at all Fugard’s plays where the woman in the play is the affirmative element, one sees that what Fugard wants to celebrate is the value of “the woman’s life” as captured in the title of his play *My Life*. This celebration is based on the “need to listen” to the woman in a woman (Wertheim, *Dramatic Art* 203). In her book *A Revolutionary Woman*, Sheila Fugard sums up “the woman’s life” that Athol Fugard wants to proclaim in the words “She needed a sense of herself” (112). By using a woman as a “vehicle for what [he has] tried to say about survival and defiance”, Fugard is sending out a message to women in general to expose that sense of self and not to keep their inner lives stifled by a “self-imposed silence” (Estes 228). Alternatively, he is requesting that men listen to their women’s needs instead of trying to keep their women silent.

Fugard says that his humanity came from his mother, “who had the capacity for rising above the South African situation without trying to escape from it, and for seeing people as people” (Maclennan 524). In his writing Fugard affirms himself in this way. He looks beyond the political situation in South Africa. His inquiry is instead in the hearts of the little, anonymous people that are the real victims of any political situation. It is in them, these poor and “humble” people, that Fugard, like Camus, is touched by what he feels is “the true meaning of life” (Walder *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 62). In his plays Fugard shows his love for these

unloved people in society, whom he refers to as “the little grey bushes”, by making us the reader or audience aware of the very special qualities that exist in them.

The true value of any art lies in the message that it leaves in your heart, because that is what influences your perspective of life. This enquiry has left me with a very strong affirmation of hope as Milly, Hester and Lena’s affirmation is built on the foundation of hope. It is this hope that enables them to “[flower] on the dungheap” (*Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* xxi).

I would like to conclude this enquiry with the following lines from Chinua Achebe’s poem “Mango Seedling” because it encapsulates the “Courage in the face of it all” that is the keystone to women being the affirmative element in selected plays by Athol Fugard (*Notebooks* 96).

Through glass window pane
Up a modern office block
I saw, two floors below, on wide-jutting
Concrete canopy a mango seedling newly sprouted
Purple, two-leafed, standing on its burst
Black yolk. It waved brightly to sun and wind
Between rains – daily regaling itself
On seed-yams, prodigally.
For how long?
How long the happy waving
From precipice of rainswept sarcophagus? . . .
Then I saw it
Poised in courageous impartiality
Between the primordial quarrel of Earth
And Sky striving bravely to sink roots
Into objectivity, mid-air in stone. . . .
Today I see it still –
Dry, wire-thin in sun and dust of the dry months –
Headstone on tiny debris of passionate courage. (Achebe 5,6)

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