

# MAGICAL WORDS & ICEBERG TERRITORY

An exploration of the multifunctionality of language in dramatic dialogue, with specific reference to selected Fugard plays.

by

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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.

## ABSTRACT

Most critics and academics have concentrated on the referential function of Fugard's dramatic dialogue. In this thesis I argue that to notice just one way in which the language functions tends to limit the text. My aim, therefore, is to look at the other ways in which language functions in selected Fugard plays.

I explore the way in which Fugard uses dialect and sociolect to establish a stage world that looks and sounds recognisably South African to South Africans. I investigate how certain assumptions (on the part of the audience) accompany the acceptance of the stage world as 'real' and how Fugard uses subtextual inferences to force the audience to critically re-evaluate these assumptions. I argue that the way to consciously understand and evaluate the subtext is through a detailed investigation of the different ways in which language functions in dramatic dialogue. Therefore, by applying Pfister's theories on the multifunctionality of dramatic dialogue to selected Fugard plays, I look at how characters reveal themselves to the audience through the choice of specific words, subject matter and language variant. I also investigate, by applying Quigley's observations regarding Pinter's plays to Fugard's characters, the way in which language reveals characters striving to negotiate their status within relationships. My argument is that as far as characterisation and relationships are concerned the actual referential function of the words reveals only the tip of the iceberg – the rest lies beneath this and is to be uncovered by looking at the other ways in which the language functions.

Finally I look at the way in which language as the medium of communication *per se* is foregrounded in Fugard's plays and how this accentuates the role that language plays in communication, as well as the failure of communication, in the South African context. Related to this metalingual function of dramatic dialogue I investigate the idea, put forward by Ibitokun, that language can be used as a 'mask' behind which a person can hide his true identity. I agree with Ibitokun that this is not only a strategy for survival but that, when consciously adopted, it is also a means for challenging the status quo.

The Fugard plays I have selected are *Master Harold ... and the boys*, *Boesman and Lena*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*.

## OPSOMMING

Die meerderheid kritici en academici het in die verlede gekonsentreer op die referensiële funksie van dramatiese dialoog in die werke van Fugard. In hierdie tesis argumenteer ek dat so 'n enkele gesigspunt op die rol wat taal speel neig om die teks te beperk. Derhalwe kyk ek in die studie na die ander wyses waarop taal in geselekteerde Fugard dramas funksioneer.

Ek begin met 'n ondersoek na Fugard se gebruik van dialek en sosiolek om 'n wêreld op die verhoog te skep wat herkenbaar Suid-Afrikaans klink vir Suid-Afrikaners. Hierna bekyk ek die wyse waarop sekere aannames (deur die gehoor) saamgaan met die aanvaarding van die "realiteit" van die verhoogwêreld en hoe Fugard subtekstuele verwysings benut om die gehoor te dwing tot kritiese herevaluering van daardie aannames. Die argument is voorts dat 'n gedetailleerde ontleding van die wyse waarop taal in dramatiese dialoog funksioneer onontbeerlik is indien mens die subteks wil verstaan en ontleed. Deur Pfister se teorieë oor die multifunksionaliteit van dramatiese dialoog toe te pas op geselekteerde Fugard toneeltekste, kyk ek dus hoe die onderskeie karakters hulle aan gehore openbaar deur hul gebruik van spesifieke woorde, inhoude en taalvariante. Ek gebruik ook Quigley se observasies oor Pinter se stukke om te bepaal tot watter mate die taal van Fugard se karakters dui op mense wat poog om hulle status in verhoudings te vestig. My argument is dat die referensiële funksie van taal slegs die oppervlak van karakterisering en verhoudings verteenwoordig – die res lê dieper verberg en moet geopenbaar word deur te kyk na die ander wyses waarop taal funksioneer.

Laastens bespreek ek die mate waartoe taal *per se* in Fugard se stukke na vore kom en hoe dit die rol van taal in kommunikasie benadruk, asook die tekort daaraan in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks. Verwant aan hierdie metalinguistiese funksie van taal, toets ek Ibitokun se idee dat taal 'n masker kan wees waaragter die persoon sy ware identiteit versteek. Ek stem met Ibitokun saam dat hierdie nie slegs 'n strategie vir oorlewing is nie, maar dat dit, doelbewus aangewend, ook gebruik kan word om die status quo te bevraagteken.

Die Fugard tekste wat bekyk word is *Master Harold ...and the boys*, *Boesman and Lena*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* en *The Island*.

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## CHAPTER 1

*“Don’t scorn words. They are sacred! Magical! Yes they are ... without words a man can’t think.”<sup>1</sup>*

When Fugard wrote his plays people paid a great deal of attention to the issues which were raised in them. He brought to the attention of South African and international audiences topics that were otherwise shrouded in silence. This conferred on him a great deal of prominence at the time of the liberation struggle. Because of this most people have concentrated on “what he writes **about**, rather than **how** he sets about it” (Hauptfleisch 137). A number of critics and academics have investigated the referential function of his words. I am interested in looking more closely at **how** he says things. The way Fugard uses words reveals that his language functions in many ways and if we do not notice these different functions we limit the impact and meaning that his plays can have for us. In this thesis I want to investigate the multifunctionality of Fugard’s language. I will concentrate on certain specific functions. Firstly I want to examine his use of dialect and sociolect to create regional realism and investigate what this means in a Fugard play. Secondly I am going to look at the interrelational and appellative functions of language in dramatic dialogue whereby characters negotiate their positions within their relationships and strive to reconcile inconsistencies within, and make sense of, their worlds. Thirdly, and very closely associated with this, is the expressive function of dramatic dialogue whereby characters reveal their personalities to the audience. I will also investigate the metalingual function of dramatic dialogue, whereby language and its role in communication is emphasised and, in connection with this, the idea that language can function as a ‘mask’ behind which one can hide one’s true self.

At all times it is important to remember that the language used in dramatic dialogue has to work in a unique way. As far as regional realism is concerned, Fugard has been hailed as an innovator in the attempt to find an authentic South African voice in theatre. Almeda Rae quotes Molly Seftel (Fugard’s first Milly in *People Are Living There*): “His dialogue is authentic as though you were listening to people speaking in the street. There is nothing artificial about it” (44). This is a simplistic assessment.

Dramatic dialogue is not conversation. The most striking thing about conversation is its lack of direction. The conversation of ‘people speaking in the street’ is unlikely to be very focused or to move purposefully towards a climax or resolution. Their conversation would, in all probability, flit from one topic to the next. As Fugard himself has noted:

If one were to, in absolute honesty, put on the stage eighty-seven minutes of pure unedited dialogue between coloured bait-diggers, I don’t think you would have a play. You just wouldn’t have a play. So one has to give them a character. You have to push out the possibilities of their characters, the range of responses and sensibilities beyond what they normally do in life (Rae 8).

This assessment indicates the fundamental difference between conversation, or ordinary dialogue, and dramatic dialogue. Dramatic dialogue is moulded by the requirement that within a very limited amount of time very real communication takes place not only between the characters on stage but also between the playwright and the audience. Because of the time constraints the dialogue has to move steadily and purposefully to the climax/resolution of the play. In other words, the dialogue has to be dramatically efficient as well as interesting. As Hauptfleisch has pointed out: “The basic function of drama is communication of a playwright’s concepts to an audience seated in a theatre. ... The medium for such communication is the total play, the words-in-action performed by actors on a stage” (148). This view is borne out by Fugard himself in his *Notebooks*, where he stresses the “unreality of the stage. And [the need for] efficiency – to use *every* moment, line, pause, gesture, to reveal” (172).

The concept of ‘the total play’, does focus attention on the fact that any play is far more than just dialogue. Fugard drew our attention to this when he wrote in his *Notebooks*: “One of the reasons, I suppose, why I write for the stage – beyond, or before, all the spoken words there is the possibility of this code – the Carnal Reality of the actor in space and time. Only a fraction of my truth is in the words” (171). However, the one constant factor in a play is the text, consisting of words, therefore I am focusing on the words he uses and the ways in which he uses them. “The words-

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<sup>1</sup> Mr M.: *My children! My Africa!* 51.

in-action” reveal a great deal of information that exists in the subtext which we can access through investigating the ways in which the language functions.

According to Hauptfleisch there are certain fundamental attributes of dramatic dialogue. Although dialogue is just one facet of the total communicative experience in a performance, it is integral to this process. Furthermore it is not the creation of the playwright in isolation, but is shaped by various external social and cultural factors; i.e. text and performance reflect their society and time. Finally, and for the purposes of the point I am trying to make, most importantly, stage dialogue is “artificial, it is a distillation of and selection from everyday language for the purposes of communicating a specific message under particular circumstances” (89). Fugard himself has observed in his *Notebooks* the necessity to pare his text, to cut out all ‘unnecessary’ words. This surely confirms that his words are ‘a distillation of and selection from everyday language’.

The view that Fugard ‘created’ his own language is put forward by both Stephen Gray and Bettina Fischer. There is nothing startling in this idea because dramatic dialogue is shaped by the demands of the dramatic form. A play has to communicate its message directly to an audience at its first (and often only) exposure; the dialogue has to be spoken, therefore it needs to be easy to say and unambiguous in meaning; and, in performance, it must be understandable to an audience drawn from widely different social, economic and cultural backgrounds<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, as emphasised by Hauptfleisch, normal, everyday language, as spoken by the average man in the street, has a very limited range of expression, and is quite unequal to the task of the playwright, who, as a verbal artist, strives to “transcend the limitations of ‘normal’ human communication, to somehow say more than words can” (89). As Robert Asahina noted in his review of *Master Harold*: “the three [characters] spend the remainder of the afternoon in the sort of earnest conversation that is *as rarely heard in real life as it is frequently overheard in the theater*” (443 - my italics). Gray supports this view too: “[Fugard’s] synthesised English, however deeply rooted in the recognisable and the every-day, however derived from the market place and the street-corner, is filtered and adjusted to become a go-between medium that is more the

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<sup>2</sup> See Hauptfleisch p89.

language of an ideal state of communication than representative of an existing reality” (*Athol Fugard* 25).

Accepting the artificiality of stage dialogue and the premise that in his plays we are not listening to ‘people speaking in the street’, we still have to account for the overwhelming sense of Fugard having brought a newness and South African ‘authenticity’ to the stage. Van Wyk Smith lauds “Fugard’s superb ability to capture authentic South African tones, conflicts, anxieties and, above all, voices...” (119). And Barney Simon says: “He does something totally new. English theatre never spoke in a South African accent until Athol” (Rae 36).

At this point I think it is necessary to look a little closer at the idea of ‘authenticity’. When *Hello and Goodbye* was first performed, an anonymous reviewer concluded “Johnnie Smit is the first real English-speaking South African on the stage”(quoted in Gray *Athol Fugard* 25). The Smits lived in Valley Road, a railway suburb in Port Elizabeth. The father had lost his leg working on the railways and Johnnie himself had had dreams of becoming a shunter on the railways. The Smit family, therefore, is typical of the poor whites of South Africa, victims of the Great Depression and in all probability Johnnie and Hester would be Afrikaans-speaking. Barney Simon also pointed out that “in actual fact Boesman and Lena would never speak English but it does not bother the audience”(Rae 37). Similarly Gray notes that “it is doubtful whether in the township of New Brighton a Xhosa-speaking Ciskeian migrant would have the command of English that the script [*Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*] convinces us he has" (25). We can therefore conclude that Fugard’s language is not ‘real’, not only in the sense that it is theatrical and therefore simulated, but also because it is English when realistically it would be Afrikaans, Kaaps or Xhosa. Barney Simon sums this up: “ In a way Athol has created a new language, a sort of freak thing, but which gives total dignity to the South African language" (Rae 37). It is important to look at how Fugard achieves his ‘authentic’ multilingual voices – all based on South African English (SAE) – and also what he achieves by putting these different voices on the stage.

Language variety is an integral part of life in the modern world. However, in a country like South Africa the existence of variants and various languages is an

*essential* element for communication within society. Therefore language variety is of “prime importance to the playwright, whose job it is to reflect – and reflect on – certain issues within that society” (Hauptfleisch 90). For a South African playwright to truly reflect his society, it can therefore be seen that he must reflect this variety. A single medium will only reflect a certain section or segment of our society. Fugard’s writing incorporates and utilises many of the different dialects and variants. “[H]e uses language in a way that reflects the multiplicity of linguistic and social codes and traditions in the country. His language is adjusted chameleon-like to the group that he is dealing with” (Combrink 60). It must be remembered that at the time of his earlier plays (for the purposes of this thesis, up to and including *Master Harold . . . and the Boys*) the social dynamics attached to ‘separate development’ included the separation of the language groups. By making his language ‘spill’ out of pure English, Fugard brought to the South African stage a wide range of language-based experience and presented his audiences with an alternative to the status quo. This was against the norms of ‘high art’ at the time and “his act of drawing from a broader linguistic base than that of his own social pigeon-hole [was] itself a statement” (Gray *Athol Fugard* 25).

It is important not to underestimate both the innovativeness and the importance of this representation of a multilingual society. In South Africa the reality of life was – and is – a polyglot language situation, particularly in the cities. Language variety is part of the very fabric of our society and obviously of far greater significance than in monoglot or linguistically less diversified countries. As Hauptfleisch has noted: “The language varieties are not only the means of communicating, but also, at times, become the subject of communication itself or symbolic of the central issues which it raises” (94). One would therefore be justified in assuming that South African texts would reflect our linguistic diversity. However, in the twentieth century, up until the mid-70s, this was not the case. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the *Afrikaanse Taalstryd*, language started to become a political issue and the idea of language purity gained in importance with every passing decade, until it formed one of the cornerstones of the practice of apartheid. South African theatre therefore had to contend with the “discrepancy between the perceived reality (i.e. a multicultural and polyglot society) and the prescribed reality of the stage (i.e. an artificially maintained unicultural and unilingual medium of expression)” (Hauptfleisch 94).

Most South African playwrights coped with this discrepancy by concentrating on a single segment of the population and ignoring the existence of anyone of a different culture or language group. So we have plays by Afrikaans writers (like P.G. du Plessis and Chris Barnard) where there are no English-speaking characters and plays by English writers (like Guy Butler and James Ambrose Brown) which deal exclusively with the South African English group. Fugard chose a different method of coping with the given situation. His plays are all written in the base language of South African English but onto this he plants markers from the character's 'real' language to indicate that the character is speaking in that particular dialect or language. His success in this method is confirmed by many; among them Percy Baneshik of *The Star*, who said "Fugard's ear for the South African nuance - the turns of phrase that dot the speech of the half-Afrikanerized English-speaking South African - is unerring" (quoted by Gray *File on Fugard* 33). Fugard was not the only writer to use this transliteration process. Among others, Adam Small, Stephen Black and Paul Slabolepszy have also successfully utilised it. However, Fugard's work is the most widely played and read and has indeed influenced many of the subsequent writers and makers of South African theatre.

We need to examine these 'linguistic markers' more closely. How does Fugard manage to persuade his audiences to accept his created language as 'authentic'? Secondly, what functions may be served in his plays by his use of these variant linguistic markers?

The most obvious markers are actual words taken from the other language groups in South Africa; words like 'ja' and 'hoer' from Afrikaans, 'haaikona' and 'Nyana we Sizwe' from Xhosa, 'voetsek' and 'ou pellie' from Kaaps. South Africans recognise, understand and place these markers. For overseas audiences these markers give the text an exotic appeal without hazarding communication; as noted by Simon Trussler: "For English readers, of course, such dialogue as this [*The Blood Knot*] has the added charm of genuinely conceived dialect drama, in which the familiarity of one's native tongue is distanced by those slight modifications of expression and emphasis which define the play's locale as precisely in verbal terms as its setting does in physical" (Gray *File on Fugard* 21).

There is also the effect of Afrikaans on South African English. We have translated and incorporated a number of Afrikaans phrases in our normal speech. One example of this occurs in *Master Harold* where Hally says: “Hell, no, that was *now only* asking for a miracle to happen” (my emphasis). This is so ingrained in SAE that it might pass unnoticed by South Africans today, but it does serve to plant the dialogue firmly in our soil. And, not so long ago, this would have been regarded as a remarkable divergence from ‘high art’, a move largely pioneered by Fugard.

In addition to these markers Fugard makes use of a ‘sub-standard’ English for some of his characters. This can be referred to as a sociolectal marker. To give a single example, when Lena says: “There *was* plenty of times his sort gave us water on the road” (22 - my emphasis) the audience recognises certain social and economic ‘facts’ about the speaker, i.e. that she is uneducated and, by implication, of a low social and economic status. Fugard challenges the audience’s acceptance of this stereotyping by revealing the character as far more complex than is automatically expected. In this way the perceptions evoked by the character’s use of language are undermined and members of the audience are forced into a re-evaluation of their preconceived ideas.

A more difficult marker to pin down is the ‘music of language’, which Fugard defined as “the poetic potential of the spoken word” (*Cousins* 37). This ‘music’ has a South African rhythm to it. Overseas actors and directors, like Peter Stevenson, have commented on how the accents seem “to be built into the writing” and how “Athol has an incredibly strong sense of rhythm – ... [not] a sort of scholarly rhythm – but the rhythm of human speech” (quoted in Gray *Athol Fugard* 115). That Fugard regards this ‘music’ as extremely important to his writing is borne out by his comments in the autobiographical *Cousins*.

I am very conscious of that marvellous potential in language of creating a sort of music in our choice of words, and I labour hard and happily at trying to craft that into my work . . . It is also no coincidence that rehearsal room talk is about rhythm, tempo, pause, beat and crescendo as much as about the meaning of words and sentences (37-38).

There are also geographical markers, which pinpoint localities in the Eastern Cape. Lena's litany of placenames, "Korsten, Redhouse, Veeplaas, Bethalsdorp, Coega, Swartkops, Kleinskool, Missionvale" situates her and Boesman explicitly in the Port Elizabeth area. Similarly Hally, Sam and Willie are also placed in Port Elizabeth in the St George's Park tearoom, reminiscing about flying the kite on the 'Donkin' hill. Johnnie and Hester are placed in Valley Road, while Piet and Gladys Bezuidenhout are living in Algoa Park, and Styles has his studio in New Brighton. To anyone familiar with the Eastern Cape these geographical markers enhance the authenticity of the dialogue. So do the essentially South African names of some of his characters, like Piet Bezuidenhout and Sizwe Bansi.

By using all of these markers in various combinations, Fugard has managed to create his 'authentic' Eastern Cape voices. The specificity of his location is of tremendous importance to him, as he has acknowledged many times over the years. For instance, in 1977 in an interview with Barrie Hough, while recognising the psychological influence of Faulkner on him, he said: "He (Faulkner) gave me total security to turn around and look at the specifics, the humble specifics of an Eastern Province world – well, made me secure in my love of those specifics, made me hand myself over to my love, love of a region, of a place, of my passion for it" (quoted in Gray *Athol Fugard* 126). Many years later in *Cousins* (published in 1994) he acknowledges the same thing: "Over the years I have readily identified myself as a regional writer ... I have mastered the code of one place and time; it is the Eastern Cape and the time is all of the life that started with that little boy scurrying around the streets of Port Elizabeth like one of the cockroaches that swarm under their lampposts at night" (57-58).

Of the four functions of variant linguistic forms<sup>3</sup>, regional realism is the most obvious and pervasive in Fugard's writing. He uses his 'markers' to "typify characters and distinguish between them ... and to 'place' a play and/or its characters geographically, socially and otherwise" (Hauptfleisch 90). Once the audience accepts the variant as 'authentic' they are likely to accept the character and his/her situation as real too. In this way Fugard uses dialectal and sociolectal markers "to re-create, on stage, a known world in which certain assumptions are accepted as part of the 'reality'

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<sup>3</sup> These functions have been identified by Hauptfleisch as Representation (or realism), Comedy, Poetry and Metaphor. (See pp. 90-94).

sought” (92). He lures his audience into his play world because they ‘recognise’ the frame of reference. As the play progresses, however, many of the assumptions that accompany the audience’s identification of and with the ‘real’ play world are shattered, forcing the spectators in the audience to re-assess a situation they thought they knew. Thus the use of dialectal and sociolectal forms can become far more than mere representation of regional realism. As Hauptfleisch has pointed out: “Sociolectal and dialectal choices may ...[serve] as metaphoric indicators of total value systems, and [elicit] varying responses by audiences in terms of their own ideological and social background” (92).

Fugard’s often quoted comment on the need to “witness as truthfully as [he] could, the nameless and destitute (desperate) of *this one little corner of the world*” (*Notebooks* 172 - my emphasis) is integrally bound up with his need to be a regional writer. Through the realistic representation of the region and its characters, achieved by the use of dialect, colloquialism, speech rhythms, sociolectal and geographical markers, Fugard draws his audience into an exploration of his themes. The more ‘real’ the surface is, the more likely the audience is to accept the characters and the implied frame of reference as real. In this manner Fugard sought to “shatter white complacency and its conspiracy of silence” (*Notebooks* 142) by luring his audiences into his stage world and on to a reappraisal of their own ideological and social assumptions.

Fugard himself has said that the first time he ‘heard his own voice’ was in *The Blood Knot*. To evaluate the importance of regional realism as a threshold leading the audience to consider new ideas, one needs to consider Nadine Gordimer’s comments on the staging of this play in 1965:

One had merely to watch the white audience, streaming in week after week to sit as if fascinated by a snake before Athol Fugard’s *The Blood Knot*, to understand how *in theatre*, as in perhaps no other medium, *one can bring people face to face with those things in their society and themselves which they have long been conditioned not to think about* (quoted in *Gray File on Fugard* 18 – my emphasis).

Part of the reason the white audiences streamed in week after week was the innovative use of regional realism. The members of the audience 'recognised' the voices they heard on the stage. And through this recognition many white South Africans were introduced to a part of their own 'small corner of the world' that had been effectively screened from them by censorship and their own reluctance to evaluate the status quo critically.

I do not think that it is stretching the point too far to claim that at the time Fugard's plays were written, they did more than just 'witness'. Fugard was the 'interpreter' or 'mediator' between white South African audiences and their fellow South Africans, thus fulfilling the playwright's aim to "transcend the limits of 'normal' human communication, to somehow say more than words can" (Hauptfleisch 89). For this kind of interpretation to occur, the writer has to deal with people and places he knows intimately. We have Fugard's own words to substantiate this point:

I'm a regional writer, I've mastered, or think I have, the code of one time and place. When I see a little girl with a bottle of paraffin under one arm and a loaf of bread under the other I make certain guesses, assumptions. By and large these are right because I have a certain intimacy with that world. I couldn't do that in Baker Street or Times Square . . . Yes, I'm a regional writer" (Rae 6).

At the time what he was doing was nothing short of revolutionary on the South African stage. The theatre-going population was schooled in the "colonial heritage of British drama" (Hauptfleisch 138) when *The Blood Knot* (1961) erupted onto our stages, preparing the way for the body of plays we now recognise as distinctly South African, and providing audiences everywhere with the opportunity to explore new ideas through an encounter with his 'little corner of the world'.

For Fugard theatre is not about telling a conventional story in a conventional causal sequence, but about exploring a series of inter-related and emotionally laden images and ideas. On the surface, Fugard's plays often look mundanely realistic – a slice of 'real' life spoken about in an 'authentic' voice. This interpretation, as discussed in this chapter, is, however, too limited. It pays insufficient heed to the condensation of time, space, emotion and language. What it does do, however, is to underline Fugard's success in deliberately using the surface of regional realism to draw his audience into

his play world where they can question the status quo, encounter new ideas and come to grips with issues beyond the personal – to be part of the ‘carnal reality of the stage’.

Traditionally critics have evaluated Fugard’s plays according to **what** he says rather than **how** he says it. He has been lauded for his universal appeal and castigated for his outmoded liberalism that offered no solutions. He has been praised for standing up against the apartheid government, as ‘a voice for the voiceless’; and condemned as a ‘bourgeois white’ living in South Africa. As we now live in the ‘new’ post-apartheid South Africa, we can be more objective about these arguments and instead concentrate on the huge contribution Fugard has made to twentieth-century theatre, both in South Africa and internationally.

He is a playwright with his own distinctive personal style, whereby he uses the particular – the details and regional realism of life around him – to probe and investigate fundamental human reactions and relationships. This brings me to the second aspect of language that I want to investigate – the interrelational and appellative functions of dramatic dialogue. In *The Pinter Problem* Quigley notes that language in dramatic dialogue is multifunctional and that the meaning of a sentence cannot be separated from its use. He contends that “the language of a Pinter play functions primarily as the means of dictating and reinforcing relationships (52). He defines this as the interrelational function of language. If we apply his observations to Fugard’s plays we can observe that Fugard’s characters also use language to try to “give a desired shape and coherence to a relationship” (52).

Pfister also examines the multifunctionality of dramatic dialogue. He applies the label of ‘appellative’ function to the process whereby “the speaker tries to influence or change the mind of the dialogue partner” (111) through the way in which he uses language. He maintains that “the appellative function has been shown to be probably the most important one in the internal communication system of dramatic texts” (112).

Both Quigley and Pfister have emphasised that in dramatic dialogue one of the ways that language functions is to establish, negotiate and reinforce a character’s position in his/her relationships. In other words, the way in which characters use language in

inter-personal relationships both reflects and reinforces the power dynamics between them. This way of interpreting the role of language in dramatic dialogue has a strong theoretical base in Speech Act Theory<sup>4</sup>. I have applied Quigley's and Pfister's ideas to the Fugard plays I have selected.

As Fugard's characters struggle to negotiate their preferred status within their relationships, they also reveal to the audience a great deal about their stage personalities. In this way characterisation is revealed rather than stated. When interviewed by Charles Fourie Fugard explicitly identified this feature of his plays:

I discovered that I was fascinated in particular with language in the way it lives in the spoken word, what happens with it in people's mouths. I enjoy beautiful prose ... but I am excited to see and hear how people try to reveal themselves in speech ... how much we can actually communicate and how much we don't manage to say. Dialogue is iceberg territory where you see very little above the water of the real mass that is hidden beneath (2).

This brings us to yet another function of language in dramatic dialogue – the expressive function whereby a character is brought to life “by the choice of what he or she talks about” (Pfister 109). The audience is made aware of a great number of ‘facts’ about a character through the verbal style and content that he/she exhibits. We frequently assimilate this information without being aware of how we know it. In *Master Harold*, for instance, the audience absorbs, through the verbal style and content used, the idea that Hally has traits we regard as typical of confused adolescents. By consciously noticing this function of dramatic dialogue in Fugard's plays we can ascertain what a character reveals about him/herself willingly and unwillingly, consciously and unconsciously, explicitly and implicitly.

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<sup>4</sup> The term Speech Act Theory derives from the work of philosopher J.L. Austin (1911-1960). Speech Act theorists analyse the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication. They analyse the role of utterances (language) as “a communicative activity (a LOCUTIONARY act), defined with reference to the intentions of speakers while speaking (the ILLOCUTIONARY force of their utterances) and the effects they achieve on listeners (the PERLOCUTIONARY effect of their utterances)” (Crystal 358). Later Speech Act theorists, notably H.P. Grice, have pointed out that the speech act (the real communication) might lie below the superficial ‘meaning’ of an utterance. While Speech Act Theory is implicit in parts of this thesis, I have concentrated on its application as used by Quigley and Pfister rather than the pure theory of linguistics and philosophy.

I will also look at the metalingual function of dramatic dialogue which is brought to the foreground “whenever the verbal code used is explicitly or implicitly developed as a central theme” (Pfister 115). The audience can be made aware of the verbal code used in the communication process when “communication no longer functions because of excessive discrepancies between the codes ... of the individual dialogue partners” (115). One of the results of Fugard’s use of dialect and sociolect is that the role of language and communication is emphasised. Many of Fugard’s plays reveal a lack of communication internally between the characters reflecting what happens in reality within the South African context of multilingualism. This aspect is emphasised in *Boesman and Lena* by Outa’s untranslated Xhosa and by Lena’s inability to communicate with him and also in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* when Styles relates the Ford factory anecdote. The role of language in communication is also highlighted by a “high degree of verbal virtuosity” (Pfister 116) which is evidenced in *Master Harold* by the ‘games’ Hally plays with words and his – and Sam’s – enjoyment of words *per se*. When Boesman puns on certain words he also reveals linguistic ability that accentuates the verbal code.

In the external communication system, i.e. between play and audience, “it is not the reference to language but to drama and the theatre that allows the metalingual function to become predominant” (Pfister 116). Brechtian epic theatre explicitly emphasises the role of drama and the theatre through “the establishment of a mediating communication system by the introduction of ... figures that are supposed to act as a kind of authorial mouthpiece” (113). These characters (figures) make direct appeals to the audience. In Fugard’s collaborative plays we are constantly made aware of the fact that we are watching a stage world and we are distanced from it and forced to assess critically the commentary that is being made on our world.

Finally, and in connection with the foregrounding of language, I will investigate Ibitokun’s idea that language can function as a ‘mask’ behind which one can hide one’s true identity as an act of defiant othering.

## CHAPTER 2

### ***Master Harold . . . and the Boys***

*“Dialogue is iceberg territory where you see very little above the water of the real mass that is hidden beneath.”<sup>1</sup>*

Fugard loves words. He has attested to this on numerous occasions. In the autobiographical *Captain's Tiger*, Owen Sejake asks Fugard: “Why is it that you write so much?” and Fugard’s reply is: “Ever since Tiger was small small bambino; Tiger very much like words.” He says each of his plays starts with an image, which leads him to a word, and from image and word the play is generated. I think that this tends to oversimplify the role that words/language plays in a Fugard work. What I am trying to show in this thesis is the power that any Fugard play derives from the multifunctionality of his language.

At this point it is relevant to take cognisance briefly of Saussure’s theory that language is a sign system (code) whose conventions are agreed upon by a particular society so that communication can take place. The “very shared, communicative aspect of language” makes it “a social and not an individual phenomenon”, so people may be regarded as being shaped by their language and therefore, by implication, language constructs the world as we know it (Webster 34-35). By calling black men ‘boys’ white South African society constructed a world in which men – and women – were denied recognition and respect, and were trapped as children who were to be taught, trained, reprimanded, punished and occasionally rewarded. Through the act of naming Sam and Willie as ‘the boys’ Fugard re-constructs this world on the stage.

Fugard welcomes the epithet of ‘regional writer’. He has adamantly rejected the idea of tailoring his writing to appeal to a wider overseas market. He has frequently recognised the influence Faulkner has had on his determination to remain rooted in his ‘corner of the world’. As he told Barrie Hough in an interview in 1977, “[Faulkner] gave me a total sense of security in the specifics of my place and my time . . . I’ve always just taken on one thing: I am writing a play about South Africa for South Africans” (quoted in Gray *Athol Fugard* 126). With this point in mind it is

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<sup>1</sup> Fourie, Charles: “Interview with the outsider”. *Electronic Mail & Guardian*, August 14, 1997 p.2.

important to notice that there are significant regional markers in *Master Harold*. This play is set in South Africa, more specifically in the Eastern Cape. It has universal appeal, but it is specifically grounded in a South African world.

Within the first few utterances, Fugard places Willie's speech in a South African context with the Afrikaans word "*Boet*" and the very South African "*Ag, no man, Sam!*" and shortly after these, the Xhosa "*Haai*". Interestingly there are only two non-English words used by Hally and Sam, the ubiquitous South African "*Ja*" and "*Ag*". There are, however, some other South African markers in Hally's and Sam's language. One example of this occurs during their discussion about their 'man of magnitude'. In reply to Sam's suggestion of Jesus, Hally responds with "Ja, but still ... No," (17) which can be seen as a variation of the 'yes-no/ja-nee' South Africanism. This is even more explicitly found when Hally is speaking to his mother: "Yes no fine" (26). Similarly his comment (when remembering the kite-flying episode) "Hell, no, that was *now only* asking for a miracle to happen" (23 - my emphasis) clearly shows the influence of Afrikaans, thereby giving the text a South African voice. But these words do more than merely reflect the influence of Afrikaans and Xhosa on South African English; they help to create/construct a stage-world representative of apartheid South Africa.

As Hauptfleisch has pointed out in *Theatre & Society*, a playwright may use dialectal markers to represent a certain regional manner of speech, thereby establishing theatrical realism by placing a play in a clearly recognisable geographical region. Furthermore he may use sociolectal markers to indicate class or educational status, which also helps to establish theatrical realism by placing the characters in clearly recognisable social strata. If the version of the variant appears realistic the audience is likely not only to accept the dialect as genuine but the characters are also seen as 'real' and furthermore the implied frame of reference of the performance - social, political, cultural and/or economic - is accepted. By using South African English, Fugard invokes a very specific frame of reference, enabling his audience to 'place' the dialogue in the region of the Eastern Province and in the South African social context, where a 17-year-old adolescent is 'Master Harold' by virtue of his race and two mature men are 'boys' because of theirs.

In this play we have two language variants: standard South African English (as discussed above) and a distinctly stereotyped black English. There are three characters, two are black and one is white. The language variants, however, do not match the racial classification. While Willie's speech reflects the standard comic techniques of exaggeration and caricature, Sam's is virtually indistinguishable from Hally's.

If we look at Willie's language, we find that his speech is full of 'sub-standard' markers:

WILLIE: I only got bus fare to go home. [*He turns disconsolately to his work.*] Love story and happy ending! She's doing it all right, *Boet* Sam, but is not me she's giving happy endings. Fuckin' whore! Three nights now she doesn't come practise. I wind up gramophone, I get record ready and I sit and wait. What happens? Nothing. Ten o'clock I start dancing with my pillow. You try and practise romance by yourself, *Boet* Sam. 'Struesgod, she doesn't come tonight I take back my dress and ballroom shoes and I find me new partner. Size twenty-six. Shoes size seven. And now she's also making trouble for me with the baby again. Reports me to the Child Wellfed, that I'm not giving her money. She lies! Every week I am giving her money for milk. And how do I know is my baby? Only his hair looks like me. She's fucking around all the time I turn my back. Hilda Samuels is a bitch! [*Pause.*] Hey, Sam! (5)

This speech demonstrates clearly the point I am trying to make. Willie omits the 'little' words, the ones that are not essential for communication but which indicate an educated use of the language. So instead of "I *have* only got bus fare to go home" he says, "I only got bus fare to go home." Similarly he sometimes omits pronouns; as in "but [*it*] is not me she's giving happy endings" and "how do I know [*he/it*] is my baby?" If, however, a pronoun is necessary for the correct interpretation of meaning, Willie supplies it as can be seen in the 'my' of the last quote. In the same way, he omits prepositions that have no effect on meaning ("[*At*] ten o'clock . . .") but supplies those that do ("I start dancing *with* my pillow."). He also does not use the definite article, 'the' or the 'to' of the infinitive. There is no ambiguity of meaning in Willie's speech, but through Fugard's selective use of sociolectal markers, the audience

immediately 'pigeon-holes' him as the 'typical' uneducated black speaker of English. When categorising Willie in this manner the (South African) audience also unconsciously accepts a number of equally stereotyped preconceptions, such as mentally labelling him not only as 'uneducated' but also 'ineducable', and as 'belonging' to the class of servant and being inferior to the white adolescent.

Hauptfleisch has pointed out that one of the functions that variant linguistic forms may have in modern theatre is to provide comic effect (91). Being reported to the "Child *Wellfed*" provides an obvious and immediate comic effect. I think that, to a certain extent, Fugard uses Willie's language for this purpose. Steve Lawson notes the "abundance of humour" in his review of *Master Harold*, and he quotes Fugard as saying: "I wanted to have fun this time, especially after a dour play like *Aloes*. At first it was tough, recovering the light touch, but all through rehearsals I kept telling the actors, 'Think levity, *then* gravity'" (Lawson "Lighter Touch" 6). Later in the play this comic effect helps to defuse the rising tension (in much the same way as Shakespeare used comic interludes partly to lessen tension temporarily in his tragedies). However, there are other effects, apart from comedy, resulting from Willie's specific way of using language and it is interesting to look at these in greater detail.

The function of dialect here goes beyond merely representing the region and the two racial groups. Because the audience accepts the linguistic variants (both South African English and Willie's stereotypical black English), Fugard is able to foster the impression of realism on the stage, presenting us with a 'known' world in which certain assumptions are accepted as part of the portrayed reality. The audience relaxes into this 'known' world only to have their preconceptions turned upside-down as they are, in Nadine Gordimer's words, brought "face to face with those things in their society and themselves which they have long been conditioned not to think about" (quoted in Gray *File on Fugard* 18-19).

If Willie's way of speaking conforms to the white South Africans' stereotype of black South Africans, then Sam's way of speaking turns that preconception on its head. The members of the audience are forced to re-consider their unthinking acceptance of this

stereotype. In this way Fugard's writing subtly challenges the status quo and provides another option.

Hally's and Sam's way of speaking is virtually indistinguishable from each other. Obviously on stage there is the visual differentiation between the two characters: the one is a white adolescent and the other a black man; but as far as their language is concerned Fugard has given them linguistic equality. If we omit the stage directions, when reading the text where they are reminiscing about life at the old Jubilee Boarding House, it is impossible to say which of the two is speaking:

"Willie is in bed, under his blankets with his clothes on, complaining non-stop about something, but we can't make out a word of what he's saying because he's got his head under the blankets as well."

"You're sitting on the floor giving Willie a lecture about being a good loser while you get the checker board and pieces ready for a game. Then you go to Willie's bed, pull off the blankets and make him play with you first..." (21).

There are no variant markers here that pigeonhole the one speaker as white and the other as black. Similarly when they are discussing the Ballroom Dancing Championships it is impossible to differentiate their speeches along the lines of colour or education:

"... it starts with that. Without the dream we won't know what we're going for. And anyway I reckon there are a few people who have got past just dreaming about it and are trying for something real. Remember that thing we read once in the paper about Mahatma Gandhi? Going without food to stop those riots in India?"

"You're right. We mustn't despair. Maybe there's some hope for mankind after all. Keep it up, Willie. This is a lot bigger than I thought. So what have we got? Yes, our title: 'A World Without Collisions'" (37).

This exchange indicates not only equality of linguistic ability, but also equality of intellectual interest. So Fugard's words construct for the white South African audience a 'new' world where a white 17-year-old 'Master Harold' and a black 45-

year-old 'boy' are equals in language - and in perceptiveness and insight the black 'boy' is in fact superior. This subtextual inference of equality is reinforced by the contrast with Willie's stereotyped language. The innovativeness of portraying linguistic equality between black and white characters went beyond the borders of South Africa, as is borne out by the words of Fred Steele, a black American domiciled in Australia, who played Sam in the 1983 Melbourne production: "In theatre in this country [Australia], in any country outside of Africa, there isn't much besides the standard, stereotyped black man/older servant types and Uncle Toms" (Hutchinson n.p.). Thus we can see in *Master Harold* an example of how "Fugard deliberately moves into and uses the surface of regional realism in parable fashion making it a medium by which to get his audiences to come to grips with issues beyond the individual, the personal and the parochial" (Hauptfleisch 146).

As has been noted before, language is multifunctional. Language may be used for many purposes, only one of which is to refer to things. Traditionally critics have concentrated on this referential function of language in Fugard's plays. However, I think that if we seek a single or a prime function of language in a Fugard play we underestimate the way in which it speaks to us. As Quigley has pointed out in connection with Pinter's works, the meaning of a sentence cannot be separated from its use and it is important to notice and reach an understanding of the interrelational function of language within a play, because "the kinds of topic discussed and the kinds of explicitness with which they are discussed are derived not from a need to establish some kind of objective truth but from the shifting demands of individual characters attempting to give a desired shape and coherence to a relationship" (52). Both Hally's and Sam's use of language reveals the shifting power relations between them.

At the same time, while the characters are grappling with the demands of their relationships, their personalities are revealed to the audience, making us aware of the iceberg territory below the surface. "*Master Harold* is not a play of action but one of stasis...Fugard focuses on character. As the rain pours down outside that imagined tearoom in South Africa, Fugard delves into the people trapped within. ... He shows us character through language" (Izakowitz 2-3). Bearing in mind these functions of language (interrelational and indirect characterisation), it is interesting to look at the

different 'voices' Hally adopts as he struggles to negotiate his status within his relationships with the other characters in the play, both those who appear on the stage and those whose presence is felt but who are never seen.

By the time that Hally comes onto the stage the audience is already aware of the relationship that obtains between the other two characters: although there is a definite camaraderie between them, Sam takes the lead and Willie follows. When Hally enters his attitude and speech reflect a paternalistic jollity: "Bravo! No question about it. First place goes to Mr Sam Semela" and "How's it, chaps?" (7). In respect of his youth (17 years old) and the age of the other two men, this attitude is surprising; however, what it also does is to construct for the audience an apartheid-dominated stage world. This relationship – an adolescent benignly condescending to two grown men – is reinforced by Willie's response: [Springing to attention like a soldier and saluting] "At your service, Master Harold!" On the other hand Sam's response of "Okay, Hally" (7), indicates a far more equal relationship between them.

Hally participates in the conversation between Sam and Willie, but when Willie responds to Sam's teasing by throwing his slop rag at him, which misses Sam and hits Hally, Hally immediately responds with a new voice to reassert his dominance in the relationship.

HALLY.[Furious] For Christ's sake, Willie! What the hell do you think you're doing!

WILLIE. Sorry, Master Hally, but it's him . . . .

HALLY. Act your bloody age! [He hurls the rag back at Willie.] Cut out the nonsense now and get on with your work. And you too, Sam. Stop fooling around.

[Sam moves away.]

No. Hang on. I haven't finished! Tell me exactly what my Mom said (10).

In this exchange we see Hally not only asserting his position of power over Willie, but also attempting to bring Sam under his authority as well. The irony of his position is visually underlined by his childish reaction in throwing the rag back at Willie. Hally, as a white adolescent, is reflecting his society's commonly held view of white social superiority and demonstrates his need to confirm his status in the relationship by

giving orders and having them obeyed. A great deal of the dramatic impact of this play comes from the tension between Hally's need of Sam as a father figure and his need to assert and conform to his society's racial precepts. This constantly developing tension is presented to us through Hally's changing 'voices' as he struggles with his ambivalent feelings.

When Hally's perceptions of his master-servant relationship with Willie and his filial relationships with his mother and father are unchallenged, his relationship with Sam can develop along the lines of shared interests and enjoyment of each other's company. However, as soon as there is a disruption in any of his other relationships, Hally immediately responds by trying to re-negotiate his position *vis-à-vis* Sam. It appears that Hally recognises, on a subconscious level at least, that his relationship with Sam is out of step with the dictates of his society and that, when his other relationships do not proceed in the way he wants them to, he returns to this 'aberrant' relationship and tries to force Sam into playing the role prescribed by white South African society.

We see Hally and Sam engaging in their intellectual quest for a 'man of magnitude' and enjoying their reminiscences of Jubilee Square and the kite flying. At this point in the play they successfully negotiate a shared reality. In the light of Rob Amato's observation that "[w]henever he has faced the prospect of losing authority in the tea-room Hally has, jokingly or in earnest, invoked his powers as white person, as teacher and transmitter of information, as employer with a massive economic leverage over his two friends/elders/servants/peers/pupils/teachers/employees" (212), it is interesting to note that Hally still resorts to condescension towards Sam when he unconsciously challenges Hally's perception of his superiority as the 'teacher' by producing the 'man of magnitude' that they agree on.

HALLY. [After a delighted laugh.] Penicillin and Sir Alexander Fleming! And the title of the book: *The Microbe Hunters*. [Delighted.] Splendid, Sam! Splendid. For once we are in total agreement. The major breakthrough in medical science in the Twentieth Century. If it wasn't for him, we might have lost the Second World War. It's deeply gratifying, Sam, to know that I haven't been wasting my time in talking to you. [Strutting around proudly.] Tolstoy may have educated his peasants, but I've educated you (18).

In this way Hally re-asserts his dominant social position in line with the prevailing political dogma of his society. We can see Hally as “someone who is trapped” (Lawson “3 Harold Actors” n.p.) by the dictates of his society. Sam does not contest Hally’s approach at this stage and there is harmony within their relationship. They reminisce happily together about their time at Jubilee Square. Willie joins in this exercise but he maintains his subservient role in both relationships and his ‘Uncle Tom’ language. The manner in which they relate to one another is, at this point, uncontested by any character. However, when Hally speaks to his mother on the telephone, his familial relationships are challenged and this has a destabilising ripple effect on his relationships with Willie and with Sam.

The telephone conversation starts off with Hally playing the role of the dutiful son: “Hello, Mom ... Yes ... Yes no fine. Everything’s under control here. How’s things with poor old Dad?” (26). However, as soon as Hally realises that he is probably going to be presented with the task of having to negotiate his way through his ambivalent feelings for his father, his personality changes. His voice alternates between sounding like a petulant child: “You know what it’s going to be like if he comes home ... Well then, don’t blame me when I fail my exams at the end of the year...” and trying to browbeat his mother into doing as he wants her to do: “Order him to get back into bed at once! If he’s going to behave like a child, treat him like one...” (26). In the last example we can see that Hally speaks in a manner that reflects the influence of patriarchal dogma, assuming that by reason of his male gender he has the right to tell his mother (female) what to do. “[He] is a victim of [his] cultural heritage and consequently we find [him] reverting to [his] conditioned role model especially under stress” (Angove 60). Hally’s words and the manner in which they are spoken construct for the audience, albeit briefly, the other foundation stone of white South African society – the belief that maleness automatically confers not only power but also righteousness. In this manner Hally tries to dictate the parameters of his relationship with his mother. However, in response to a challenge from her, we see that he has failed to do so: “All right, Mom! I was just trying to.... I’m sorry.... I said I’m sorry” (26). Under increasing stress because he is likely to have to confront his ambivalent feelings for his father and having failed to assert his male dominance over his mother, he grasps at the other foundation stone of “his

hegemonically controlled consciousness” (Amato 201) and asserts his racially-conferred dominance by issuing orders to Willie and Sam: “My Mom says that when you’re finished with the floors you must do the windows ... So don’t just stand there! Get on with it!” (26).

Dramatic tension derives from the fact that Hally despises his father, while at the same time loving him. When Sam tries to get him to accept the situation and to prevent him from saying things he will later regret, Hally reveals the depth of the conflict within him.

SAM. I suppose it gets lonely for him in there.

HALLY. With all the patients and nurses around? Regular visits from the Salvation Army? Balls! It’s ten times worse for him at home. I’m at school and my mother is here in the business all day (27).

In this manner Hally tries to negotiate consensus from Sam for his interpretation of the situation. Quigley has noted that “[t]hough a private reality can be adapted to meet many of the demands of a particular character it can’t meet the need for external confirmation” (54). If we apply this to Hally, we see that while Hally attempts to convince Sam that he has only his father’s best interests at heart, in reality he is not trying to establish some objective truth, but is rather attempting to convince himself that he has the ‘right’ filial attitude. As J.Dixon has pointed out, “All of us test the validity of what we have said by sensing how far others that we trust have shared our response” (quoted in Quigley 67). Hally wants Sam to corroborate his version of the situation. Sam, however, continues to try to get Hally to accept his father’s needs when he says: “He’s at least got you at night” (27).

By Sam’s refusal to endorse Hally’s representation of the situation, Hally’s self-concept is also challenged and he responds with the voice of adolescent, egocentric agitation: “And we’ve got him!” (27). Hally thus reveals that his professed filial concern is really a mask for his feelings of disgust and distaste. He does not want to examine these feelings and tries to take refuge in silence; “Please! I don’t want to talk about it anymore.” However, he is overwhelmed by the conflict of feelings within himself and continues: “Life is just a plain bloody mess, that’s all. And people are fools” (27).

When Sam still refuses to endorse Hally's version of reality, Hally reacts by trying to relegate Sam to his 'rightful' place by belittling his intellectual ability in order to restore the status quo.

SAM. Come on, Hally.

HALLY. Yes, they are! They bloody well deserve what they get.

SAM. Then don't complain.

HALLY. *Don't try to be clever, Sam. It doesn't suit you* (27 - my italics).

In conversation/verbal communication one is not free to say whatever one wants to; whatever has been said determines what may reasonably follow. Generally speaking this has a positive aspect for the speaker, in that the ability "to dictate to someone the range of his responses confers power on you and dictates (temporarily) his role in relation to you and yours in relation to him" (Quigley 50). The corollary of this is that the respondent may be negatively affected because s/he is left with only a limited range of possible responses and a predetermined role in the relationship. When a character in a play does not respond in an anticipated manner, it indicates a shift in power within the relationship. Therefore when Sam responds to Hally by changing the topic of conversation (to his homework) instead of endorsing Hally's view of the world as a mess, Sam is asserting his independence within the relationship and actually sidestepping Hally's dominance.

If we remember that silence is also a statement, we can see that Hally tries yet again to assert his position of power by refusing to discuss the issue with Sam: "Please, Sam! Just leave me alone and let me get on with it. I'm not in the mood for games this afternoon." He then repeats his orders: "And remember my Mom's orders ... you're to help Willie with the windows." Finally he attempts to underline his superior position over the two black men by talking to them in a way that an adult would address children: "Come on now, I don't want any more nonsense in here" (28).

Fugard has presented his audience with a character who acts and talks like many adolescents, changing his 'voice' as he desperately tries to "give a desired shape and coherence to [his] relationships" (Quigley 52). Hally's continued silence while Sam and Willie interact may be seen as a statement on his part of being separated/apart/isolated from them. However, the audience becomes aware that this

statement also fails to negotiate for Hally his preferred position in the relationship, because when Sam teases Willie into reacting again, Hally shatters his silence and resorts to a blatantly white supremacist voice, matching actions to his words.

HALLY: Sam! Willie! [*Grabs his ruler and gives Willie a vicious whack on the bum.*] How the hell am I supposed to concentrate with the two of you behaving like bloody children!

...

Get back to your work. You too, Sam. [*His ruler.*] Do you want another one, Willie?

[*Sam and Willie return to their work. Hally uses the opportunity to escape from his unsuccessful attempt at homework. He struts around like a little despot, ruler in hand, giving vent to his anger and frustration*](30).

The audience has accepted Hally as an authentic representation of a South African white male adolescent. Therefore when they are brought face to face with him assuming his 'right' to treat the two men as children in a most dictatorial manner the inappropriateness of what was generally accepted as the norm in South African society is visually and verbally reinforced. In this way Fugard 'bears witness' to the grave distortion of normal human respect within relationships not only in the stage relationship between Hally and the two men, but, by inference, also in inter-racial relationships in general in South Africa.

Verbal activity can be the means by which one creates structure in a personal relationship, not just the means of referring to it. When Hally, Sam and Willie begin their discussion about the Ballroom Dancing Championships, they are, in effect, asserting and reinforcing the companionable relationship that exists between them. When Hally feels secure within the relationship again, we notice that his condescending voice changes and he becomes filled with enthusiasm, and even more interestingly, as the discussion/verbal activity develops, we see that the relationship that obtains between the characters is changing - as Sam is the expert, he is the one who controls and moves the discussion, thereby giving him the dominant role in the relationship at this stage.

Instead of using the white supremacist voice we have become accustomed to, Hally responds with “deep and sincere admiration of the man” (37). And the audience becomes aware of yet another voice of this adolescent – that of a son speaking to his (surrogate) father. Herein lies the central dilemma for Hally. In accordance with the dictates of his society, he loves his father and he despises Sam; in accordance with the reality of his life, he despises his father and loves Sam. He genuinely feels both emotions for both men and is therefore constantly confused in his struggles and strategies to shape his relationships with them.

He has been embarrassed by his father’s drinking habits, as revealed in the reminiscences about Jubilee Square, and this continues to be an issue, as revealed during his second telephone conversation with his mother: “For your information, I still haven’t got that science textbook I need. And you know why? He borrowed the money you gave me for it .... Then just remember to start hiding your bag away again, because he’ll be at your purse before long for money for booze. And when he’s well enough to come down here, you better keep an eye on the till as well, because that is also going to develop a leak ...” (38-39).

If Hally just despised or hated his father there would be no change in the voice he uses to talk *to* him as opposed to the one he uses to talk *about* him. When he speaks to his father on the telephone we are presented with an extremely strange piece of dialogue. The stage directions tell us that “[w]hen he speaks again, his tone changes completely. It is not simply a pretence. We sense a genuine emotional conflict” (39). The audience must assume from the tone of the voice (as directed by the author) that he loves/despises his father; however, from the actual words used; the audience also interprets another dimension to this relationship.

Welcome home, chum! ... What’s that? ... Don’t be silly, Dad. You being home is just about the best news in the world. ... I bet you are. Bloody depressing there with everybody going on about their ailments, hey! ... How are you feeling? ... Good ... here as well, pal. Coming down cats and dogs. ... That’s right. Just the day for a kip and a toss in your old Uncle Ned. ... Everything’s just hunky-dory on my side, Dad. ... Well, to start with, there’s a nice pile of comics for you on the counter. ... Yes, old Kempie brought them in. Batman and Robin, Submariner ... just your cup of tea ... I will. ... Yes,

we'll spin a few yarns tonight. ... Okay, chum, see you in a little while. ...

No, I promise. I'll come straight home. ... (39)

This is a linguistic oddity within the play. It is not Hally's normal South African English and presumably takes cognisance of Fugard's father's Irish background. However, far more pertinent than this is the fact that it is so cliché-ridden and artificial that the audience has an immediate and powerful impression of the lack of real communication. Words are said but emotions are not revealed; there is a superficial exchange of ideas, but Hally's feelings are carefully masked. Hally does not speak like this to anyone else and one has the impression that this voice acts as a mask, behind which the 'real' Hally hides, not only from his father's scrutiny but also from his own.

Although Hally is struggling with his ambivalent feelings towards his father, in typical adolescent manner, he is also very concerned with the immediate demands his father's presence will make on him. Sam and Willie try to protect Hally from having to confront the discrepancies in his self-image by attempting to re-establish their private world. As the play nears its climax, however, Hally refuses to co-operate in re-establishing this 'safe' relationship and is determined to voice his anger and frustration with regard to his relationship with his father: "Life's a fuck-up and it's never going to change" (40).

The use of swearwords by Hally (originally cited as the reason for banning this play in South Africa<sup>2</sup>) reveals his sense of impotent fury. Words dealing with bodily excrement reveal deep disgust on the part of the user. Therefore Hally's choice of words like "shit" and "piss" signifies his consuming disgust and embarrassment. This is reinforced by the way in which the words pour out of him in a torrent, not really asking or allowing either of the other characters an opportunity to take part in a verbal exchange with him. In other words, Hally is not instituting dialogue/conversation; he is venting his feelings in an uncontrolled way:

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<sup>2</sup> In his article "Fugard's Confessional Analysis" Rob Amato states: "The play is banned as an 'undesirable' publication. The censors state that this is because it contains obscene language and not because of its political content ... [T]hose who ... read for the censors use obscenity of language as cover for their act of suppression, which is of course intensely political" (198-199).

HALLY. Do you want to know what is really wrong with your lovely little dream, Sam? It's not just that we are all bad dancers. That happens to be perfectly true, but there's more to it than just that. You left out the cripples.

SAM. Hally!

HALLY. [*Now totally reckless.*] *Ja!* Can't leave them out, Sam. That's why we always end up on our backsides on the dance floor. They're also out there dancing ... like a bunch of broken spiders trying to do the quickstep! [*An ugly attempt at laughter.*] When you come to think of it, it's a bloody comical sight. I mean, it's bad enough on two legs ... but one and a pair of crutches! Hell, no, Sam. That's guaranteed to turn the dance floor into a shambles. Why you shaking your head? Picture it, man. For once this afternoon let's use our imaginations sensibly.

SAM. Be careful, Hally.

HALLY. Of what? The truth? I seem to be the only one around here who is prepared to face it. We've had the pretty dream, it's time now to wake up and have a good long look at the way things really are. Nobody knows the steps, there's no music, the cripples are also out there tripping up everybody and trying to get into the act, and it's called the All-Comers-How-To-Make-A-Fuckup-Of-Life Championships. [*Another ugly laugh.*] Hang on, Sam. The best bit is still coming. Do you know what the winner's trophy is? A beautiful big chamber-pot with roses on the side, and it's full to the brim with piss. And guess who I think is going to be this year's winner (41).

It is as if the floodgates of Hally's pent-up emotions have been opened and he appears to be careless of the consequences of what he is saying, totally ignoring the fact that once something has been said it cannot be unsaid. "Collaboration between the essentially optimistic Sam and the determinedly depressive Hally is shattered" (Amato 202) and Sam shouts at him to stop him from continuing. Sam's reprimand: "Hally! It's your father you're talking about" (41) indicates to Hally that not only is Sam not prepared to endorse his point of view but that he is directly critical of his words: "Do you know what you've been saying?" (41). This marks a definite shift of power within the relationship as Sam maintains his own integrity and tries to enforce his personal code of conduct on Hally. As a result of this interruption Hally is confronted by the realisation of what he has said.

In the midst of his shame, Hally is directly reprimanded by Sam: “Take back those words and ask for forgiveness! It’s a terrible sin for a son to mock his father with jokes like that. ... Your father is your father, even if he is a ... cripple man” (41-42). The roles in this relationship have clearly been turned around. Sam is no longer acquiescing to Hally’s representation of their relationship. Sam is now trying to check the direction and content of Hally’s speech, in much the way that a father would reprimand and direct the speech of his son. In an attempt to divert the attention of everyone, not least of all himself, from what he has said, Hally counters with an attempt to reassert his position of dominance by reinstating the master/servant relationship between himself and Sam. “Although ostensibly fighting with other characters, [Hally] is patently involved in a great judging-against himself” (Amato 206) and once again in the face of extreme stress and the need to turn away from his own imperfections, Hally reverts to the deeply ingrained norms of his racially orientated society.

HALLY: Just get on with your bloody work and shut up.

...

All that concerns you in here, Sam, is to try and do what you get paid for – keep the place clean and serve the customers (42).

Sam resorts to silence to resist Hally’s attempts to force an acquiescence to the status quo from him; in this we are reminded of Quigley’s point that silence is a response, generally contradictory to what the other character has said (65). Hally obviously recognises the resistance that lies behind Sam’s silence and tries very hard to break it.

*[No response from Sam.]*

You’re only a servant in here, and don’t forget it.

*[Still no response. Hally is trying hard to get one.]*

And as far as my father is concerned, all you need to remember is that he is your boss.

SAM. *[Needled at last.]* No, he isn’t. I get paid by your mother.

HALLY. Don’t argue with me, Sam!

SAM. Then don’t say he is my boss.

HALLY. He’s a white man and that’s good enough for you (42-43).

These characters are no longer just negotiating their roles within their personal relationship; Hally is trying to force a verbal recognition from Sam of the racist

doctrine on which white South Africa is built and Sam is refusing to oblige him. Sam's silence and his subsequent words provide a challenge to the status quo, which Hally counters with the demand that Sam should call him "Master Harold" (43).

In the South African context name-calling immediately 'places' a character in a social category, therefore the audience knows that if Sam acquiesces, not only would Hally's superior status within the relationship be endorsed, but also far more importantly, Sam would have bowed to the racist doctrine of white superiority. Hally makes another attempt to reinforce the status quo at this point by categorising Sam and Willie as 'boys' when repeating his father's advice: 'You must teach the boys to show more respect, my son' (44). Simply through the use of these two names, 'master' and 'boys', Hally reflects the depth of "his hegemonically controlled consciousness" (Amato 201).

The climax of the play hinges on the insistence by Hally that Sam call him 'Master Harold'.

HALLY. Think of it as a little lesson in respect Sam that's long overdue and I hope you remember it as well as you do your geography. I can tell you now that somebody who will be glad to hear that I've finally given it to you, will be my Dad. Yes! He agrees with my Mom. He's always going on about it as well. 'You must teach the boys to show you more respect, my son.'

SAM. So now you can stop complaining about going home. Everybody is going to be happy tonight.

HALLY. That's perfectly correct. You see, you mustn't get the wrong idea about me and my Dad, Sam. We also have our good times together. Some bloody good laughs. He's got a marvellous sense of humour. Want to know what our favourite joke is? He gives out a big groan, you see, and says: 'It's not fair, is it, Hally?' Then I have to ask: 'What, chum?' And then he says: 'A kaffir's arse' ... and we both have a good laugh.

[*The men stare at him with disbelief.*]

What's the matter, Willie? Don't you catch the joke? You always were a bit slow on the uptake. It's what is called a pun. You see, fair means both light in colour and to be just and decent. [*He turns to Sam.*] I thought you would catch it, Sam.

SAM. Oh *ja*, I catch it all right (44).

With this 'joke' Hally reveals the full extent of the baseness of his racism. We see a character who, in spite of a really genuine affection for a man, appears unable to rise above the debilitating confines of his racist society. He is a person "damaged by a cruel society and made cruel by it" (Amato 204). Sam's response, to drop his pants and present his backside for Hally's inspection, re-affirms his resistance to Hally's presumed right to dictate the terms of their relationship based on the doctrine of white superiority.

Not having the words to deal with this resistance, Hally resorts to action – spitting in Sam's face - as he desperately strives to re-assert himself. As Amato has pointed out: "Sam can no longer call in question his own manhood by forgiving the boy for the baseness of his racism, as expressed in his desperate hubris. Sam has suffered and accepted Hally's hegemonically induced bullying as a way of building the boy's self-respect (213). He must now stop this process to save his own self-respect: "I mean, how do I wash off you and your father's filth?" (46). Sam now proceeds to reveal to Hally the boy he is and the society he belongs to. From this point onwards Hally is virtually silent, not as an assertion of a different point of view, but because he is brought face to face with his own inadequacies and the destructive power of the doctrine on which his world is based.

SAM. A long time ago I promised myself I was going to try and do something, but you've just shown me ... Master Harold ... that I've failed. [Pause.] I've also got a memory of a little white boy when he was still wearing short trousers, and a black man, but they're not flying a kite. ... You went in first by yourself to ask permission for me to go into the bar. Then I loaded him on to my back like a baby and carried him back to the boarding house with you following behind carrying his crutches. [*Shaking his head as he remembers.*] A crowded Main Street with all the people watching a little white boy following his drunk father on a kaffir's back! I felt for that little boy ... Master Harold. I felt for him. After that we still had to clean him up, remember? He'd messed in his trousers, so we had to clean him up and get him into bed.

HALLY. [*Great pain.*] I love him, Sam.

SAM. I know you do. That's why I tried to stop you from saying these things about him. It would have been so simple if you could have just despised him for being a weak man. But he's your father. You love him and you're ashamed of him. You're ashamed of so much! ... And now that's going to include yourself. That was the promise I made to myself: to try and stop that happening. [Pause.] After we got him to bed you came back with me to my room and sat in a corner and carried on just looking down at the ground. ... You hadn't done anything wrong, but you went around as if you owed the world an apology for being alive. ... That's not the way a boy grows up to be a man! ... But the one person who should have been teaching you what that means was the cause of your shame. If you really want to know, that's why I made you that kite. I wanted you to look up, be proud of something, of yourself ... (47).

Sam resurrects this memory which Hally has buried in his subconscious. It immediately exposes to Hally the conflicting forces of love and loathing in his life. On his own admission he loves his father, but he has been the cause of Hally's deepest shame and embarrassment. Sam, as a 'kaffir', is unacceptable to Hally's society, requiring permission to enter a 'whites only' bar; but Hally owes him a huge debt of gratitude - and love. If one questions what precisely is at the root of Hally's shame - his father's physical disability or his drinking - one realises that both of these are evidence of weakness; and central to both racism and patriarchy is the idea of white/male strength. One can speculate that because of the close blood relationship with his father, Hally feels emasculated by the physical evidence of his father's weakness. The resurrection of this memory leaves Hally practically voiceless, because it undercuts the foundations of his world and removes the source of his power within the relationship between him and Sam.

The void that now exists in Hally's life is revealed by his admission: "I don't know anything anymore" (48). I do not think that this should be viewed in a wholly negative way though, because I think it reveals an honesty that has been absent from Hally up until now. The bombast and the pompousness that has characterised much of his good-natured interaction with Sam, and the blatant racism that has characterised his attempts at domination, are absent from this bald statement of his own

inadequacy. If nothing else, Hally has learnt that he is not the all-knowing “*little despot*” (30) he was earlier in the play. If he had ignored the ‘lesson’ Sam’s words revealed and resorted to the bullying tactics he displayed earlier, we would react very differently to him. As it is, however, the audience can sympathise with the despair that Hally reveals because of his honesty at this point. The real strength of *Master Harold* is its “ability to involve an audience sympathetically in the world [it] create[s]” (Collins 371).

This play is extraordinarily moving on stage. It draws the audience deeply into the world it portrays. Because the audience accepts the ‘authenticity’ of the language, the characters, their situation and relationships are accepted too. When it was first staged in South Africa Joseph Lelyveld’s comment (in the *New York Times* March 24, 1983) reveals the impact that this play had/has:

‘*Master Harold ... and the Boys*’ ... has come home to South Africa, and it left its multiracial audience at the opening performance here on Tuesday visibly shaken.

When the lights dimmed on the powerful last scene ... roughly half of the audience rose to give the play’s three actors a standing ovation. The rest had yet to emerge from a private world of grief and loss into which the play had seemingly plunged them. Many, blacks and whites, were crying (Lelyveld n.p.).

If an audience were to reject the ‘genuineness’ of the stage world, *Master Harold* would not have the emotional impact that it has. Therefore Fugard’s ability to use “language in a way that reflects the multiplicity of linguistic and social codes and traditions in the country” (Combrink 60) and also the negotiating of relationships is of essential importance. Collins pointed out that *Master Harold*’s “real strength is [its] ability to involve an audience in the world [it] creates” (371); and an audience would resist involvement in a stage-world it rejected as ‘unreal’. In order to emphasise this point, I must reiterate Hauptfleisch’s observation that “Fugard deliberately moves into and uses the surface of regional realism ...[to make] his audiences come to grips with issues beyond the individual, the personal and the parochial” (146). The impact of *Master Harold* does not, of course, rely exclusively on its language. Jay Newquist

observed that a “complete theatrical experience like “*Master Harold*” comes along only once in a great while, and its arrival scrambles one’s perception of the criteria that made theater [sic] good or bad in the past” (10). To state the obvious: theatre is not just the text, but the text in performance. And the best of Fugard – amongst which we can number *Master Harold* – become “moments of total theatrical communication in which images, words, sounds, gestures, and actions become one indelible statement” (Hauptfleisch 138). However, in this thesis I am attempting to examine the ‘words’ really closely in order to investigate the ‘iceberg territory’ that lies beneath them.

## CHAPTER 3

*Boesman and Lena*

"I want somebody to listen."<sup>1</sup>

In May 1970, while John Berry was doing an Off-Broadway production of *Boesman and Lena*, his discussion and analysis of the script led Fugard to write in his *Notebooks*: "Realise now vividly ... that more than ever before my 'statement' – the 'action' of the piece – is in the sub-text" (184). The only way to gain access to this 'sub-text' is through a careful scrutiny of *how* Fugard says things instead of concentrating exclusively on *what* he says; in other words, subtext is an aspect of structure as well as content. It is essential to bear in mind the thesis that language should be regarded as "the generator of ideas and meaning rather than as a medium for conveying these" (Webster 32). If we accept this idea, it becomes self-evident that the language in this play is multifunctional and that a close examination of the language will reveal characterisation, intention, motive, perspective - much more than just the referential value of the words

Traditionally critics of *Boesman and Lena* have tended to adopt one of two readings: the liberal-humanist or the Marxist-structuralist. The liberal-humanists have read the text as apolitical, that the predicament of both Boesman and Lena should be seen as metaphysical rather than political or social; in Fugard's own words, the play can be seen as "a metaphor of the human condition which revolution or legislation cannot substantially change" (*Notebooks* 173). This reading tends to link Boesman and Lena to the futility and emptiness of a Didi and a Gogo. The Marxist-structuralists have dismissed the play as merely reflecting the "power of apartheid laws in determining the pattern of individual existence" (Orkin 141) and castigated it for not supplying an alternative, in the way that agit-prop theatre would do. Both of these critical stances rely heavily, if not exclusively, on the referential function of the words used. If we widen our approach to include other ways in which the language functions, we can – as Fugard has pointed out – "see and hear how people try to reveal themselves in speech ... how much [they] can actually communicate and how much [they] don't

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<sup>1</sup> Lena's cry for recognition, p. 10.

manage to say. Dialogue is iceberg territory where you see very little above the water of the real mass that is hidden beneath” (Fourie “Interview with the outsider” 2).

Before examining the ‘iceberg territory’ in *Boesman and Lena*, I want to look at how Fugard has established a stage world that is perceived to be a realistic representation. As mentioned previously, a ‘real-life’ Boesman and Lena would not be speaking English at all. They would be speaking Kaaps or a variant of Afrikaans. Fugard emphasised this point in an interview with Barrie Hough in 1977. He said that he was “conscious all the way through it that [he] was trying to do a very difficult thing – which was to tell the story of these two people in English language, when in a sense Afrikaans would have been possibly a richer medium ... the play was in fact translated before it was written!” (quoted in Gray *Athol Fugard* 126-127). Gray himself reiterates this point: “Fugard has frequently talked of his having to ‘translate’ the entire dialogue from Eastern Cape Afrikaans-based dialect into the slightly more generalised, mostly English, stage version” (*Athol Fugard* 25). I want to establish how Fugard manages to do this and what is conveyed to the audience through establishing ‘regional realism’ in this play.

There are four languages in this play: the base is South African English with Kaaps markers, actual Afrikaans words and untranslated Xhosa. The Kaaps element, indicating that Boesman and Lena are ‘coloured’ (of mixed race), is conveyed through words like “*Voetsek*” (16), “*Ek se, ou pellie*” (17), “*My bleddy bek af praat vir niks!*” (23) and “*Jus a ou meid, baas*” (45). It is also conveyed through the non-standard usage of English. There are numerous examples of this, but I will pick out just a few of them. There are sentences like “Don’t talk big” (17) which is a direct translation from the Afrikaans “*Moenie groot praat nie*”. Similarly on page 4 we have: “That last *skof* was hard. ...Heavier and heavier” in which the Afrikaans ‘*swaarder*’ is translated into ‘heavier’ rather than a standard English equivalent like ‘tougher’, ‘more exhausting’, ‘more tiring’, etc. Another example of non-standard English occurs in “What you up to, Lena?” (32) where the English auxiliary verb ‘are’ has been omitted reflecting Afrikaans grammar: “Wat doen jy, Lena?” Similarly, Lena says “But any name, he’d wag his tail if you said it *nice*” (26 – my italics), which corresponds to the Afrikaans ‘*mooi*’ instead of the standard English form of the adverb ‘nicely’. This transliteration – whereby one language is made to sound like another – occurs

throughout the play. Rae points out that “Fugard has mastered the art of giving us English plays which sound Afrikaans, look Afrikaans and feel Afrikaans” (144). Fischer expanded on this when she noted that Fugard’s “translation process is not just jumping from one language to another. On a poetic level he translates one thing into something else in order to identify its nature” (101).

There are numerous examples of Afrikaans words used in otherwise SAE sentences e.g. “*Babalas* as the day you were born” (37), “The earth will get *naar* when they push us in” (48), “You *mos* know how the whiteman likes to hear it” (51). There are also examples of English used in otherwise Afrikaans sentences, e.g. “*More is somer* a special *dag*” (51) and “These *kaffers* are *onnooslik*” (53). Mixing of languages is a common occurrence in South Africa, therefore by doing this in his dialogue Fugard reflects the reality of the South African situation and this helps to create the illusion of realism on the stage.

In addition to the untranslated Xhosa that Outa mumbles, both Boesman and Lena use Xhosa words interspersed with their English and Afrikaans words. So we have words like “*Haai*”, “*Aikona*”, “*Hamba*”, “*Ewe*” and “*Manzi*”. The last of these is said by Lena when she is trying to communicate with Outa and she produces the English ‘water’, the Afrikaans ‘*water*’ and the Xhosa ‘*manzi*’ thereby voicing all three languages in an attempt to establish a common language between herself and Outa. As already mentioned, the presence of these four language groups – English, Kaaps, Afrikaans and Xhosa – functions partly as a representation of the polylingual nature of South Africa and leads the audience to accept as ‘authentic’ the stage world that is being created in front of them.

The audience does not only interpret Boesman and Lena as belonging to the racial group that speaks Kaaps, however; we also ‘place’ them in a socio-economic pigeonhole, according to the way they speak. For a South African audience the numerous forms of non-standard English, as discussed above, place the two characters in the social class of ‘outcast’ and the economic class of ‘destitute’. This is obviously strengthened by the referential value of words like “*dop*”, “*moer*”, and “*poephol*” which function in a sociolectal manner.

Through his use of other languages, dialect, sociolect and non-standard word choice and syntax, Fugard creates a stage world and characters that the South African theatregoer 'recognises' and 'places'. We are drawn into this world by the surface realism without realising that it is only a 'thin crust of ice'<sup>2</sup>. As the play progresses we fall through this into the 'deeper, darker reality'. In this way Fugard overturns our preconceived ideas and make us re-evaluate situations we thought we knew. Having established that the 'regional realism' is just a surface, I would like to move into the 'iceberg territory' of dialogue now.

When the play opens we are presented with the immediate visual impact of Boesman and Lena poorly dressed, barefoot and heavily burdened. Almost immediately that Lena starts speaking, we become aware of some of the 'iceberg territory' below the surface of her words. The most striking thing about the first few minutes of 'dialogue' is that it is a 'monologue'. To all intents and purposes, Lena is talking to herself. Boesman clears his throat, he spits, he watches her "with undisguised animosity and disgust" (4), but he does not answer her. Even when he does speak for the first time, it is not an answer to her question: "What you waiting for?" but a rebuke for her talkativeness; that the next time they walk, he'll keep going until she is "so bloody *moeg* that when [he] stop[s she] can't open [her] mouth!" (5). Immediately we hear this, we start considering why Lena talks so much and why Boesman does not respond directly to her<sup>3</sup>.

Vandenbroucke maintains that "Boesman resists Lena's endless interrogations because they demand his attention, energy, and patience but also *because she prattles*" (93 – my emphasis). I think that this interpretation misses the fundamental point that, through her incessant chatter, Lena is trying to make sense of her world. As Dixon observed, "The fact is that in sharing experience with others man is using language to make that experience real to himself" (quoted in Quigley 66). Boesman resists communication and thereby human relationship. Undeterred by this, Lena

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<sup>2</sup> Fugard commented on the use of subtext as "words acting as a thin, frozen crust to a deeper, darker reality. The ice on the pond." In the same interview he went on to say: "The technical development that I think *Boesman and Lena* represents ... is the movement of more and more of the content of my writing away from the actual word and into the sub-text" (quoted in Gray *Athol Fugard* 51).

<sup>3</sup> In terms of Speech Act theory, when one looks at Lena's utterances in terms of the intentions of the speaker (Lena) and the effect they have on the listener (Boesman) one can see that the real communication lies below the superficial meaning of the utterances.

verbalises her frustration (the seagull's freedom as opposed to her entrapment on earth), her exhaustion, her memories of a younger Boesman and Lena who could run, and her recent memory of that day's demolition of their shack. She is using language to interrogate, for herself, the reality of her existence and in an attempt to share experiences and reinstate a sharing relationship with Boesman. As audience, we are already becoming aware of a resilience in Lena, an indomitable determination to have value as a human being.

Lena's incessant 'prattle' emphasises the phatic function of language – the way in which words are used to create or maintain a channel of communication between speaker and listener. Quigley noted (in connection with Pinter's characters) that "verbal activity can be the means of creating structure in personal relationships not just the means of referring to it" (65). If we apply this to Lena, we see that her 'chatter' functions as an assertion of the relationship between her and Boesman. Regardless of Boesman's lack of co-operation, Lena's insistence on speaking and attempting to maintain conversation, i.e. an exchange of language and meaning between two people, indicates that she is a socially orientated person. She may be a destitute and homeless alcoholic, but subconsciously she values her humanity and her social being; she is someone who knows intuitively that "a man's scenery is other men" (Fugard *Notebooks* 141).

Boesman reveals to us that he does not recognise Lena's attempts as having value. He derides her words as "rubbish" and "[t]hat long *drol* of nonsense that comes out when you open your mouth" (5) and a "*gebabbel ... just noise. Nonsense. Die geraas van 'n vervloekte lewe*" (10). He tells her to "shut up" and that if her "legs worked as hard as [her] mouth" (6) they would have reached their destination long since. By deriding Lena's attempts to communicate, and thereby assert her value as a human being, Boesman denigrates her value as a person. At the same time, he is trying to sustain a relationship in which he, as male, is unquestionably the dominant partner. This indicates to us that Boesman has, to some extent at least, internalises apartheid's view of himself in terms of patriarchal discourse.

We are aware that in this relationship he appears to be the dominant partner, the one who remembers the order of their wanderings, the one who leads as they walk and

decides where they are going. However, we become aware that he asserts his dominance by belittling her. In addition to deriding her speaking, he implies that she is mentally confused when he says that she is “a big joke” (6) and that he is “not mix-up like [her]” (7). The implication becomes even more definite when he says: “What do mean, ‘go mad’? You’ve been talking to yourself since ... our first walk” (9). If we consider Saussure’s theory that “language can be said to signify or construct the world rather than passively reflecting it” (Webster 36), we can see that Boesman is constructing a persona for Lena that is garrulous and mad, in other words he sees Lena as an individual without value. We become aware that not only does Boesman perceive her in this way, but he also is trying to make *her* accept his linguistic construction of her.

Their dialogue reveals the struggle between them, over which of them will dictate the nature of their relationship. By the action of her speech, Lena is resisting Boesman’s dominance and his perception of her, and asserting her belief in herself and their relationship. Boesman, on the other hand, denigrates her, not only through his words, but also through his silences, because “silence is a statement” (Quigley 65) which usually refuses to affirm another’s view. We need to consider Fugard’s observation that his “whole sense of the play is that it must have a core of silence” (Vandenbroucke 93). In this play Boesman’s silence resists the forging and maintenance of a ‘normal’ relationship based on equality and sharing.

While Lena attempts to reconstruct their history through her words, Boesman resists her because to remember and share a personal history, implies value for those involved in it and Boesman’s “denial of value [is] the price of his uneasy and violent acceptance of the world he finds himself in” (Fugard *Boesman and Lena* xxiii). So when Lena says, “Boesman! When was our last time here?” he “deliberately ignores her” and when she continues: “Don’t be like that tonight, man. This is a lonely place. Just us two. Talk to me.” His response is “I’ve got nothing left to say to you. Talk to yourself” (9). This is a denial of her, her needs, their relationship, in fact their whole shared life. One can speculate that if Boesman were to accept Lena as equal, thereby rejecting the one foundation stone of apartheid, he would have to reject the other foundation stone – racism – thereby losing ‘his uneasy and violent acceptance of the

world he finds himself in'. However, with no means of changing that world, this would be unbearably frustrating for him.

He makes the ultimate denial of Lena when he tells her that he has “stopped listening” (10). Many people would find it impossible to rise above this negation, but Lena shows her indomitable determination by her immediate response, which is “I want somebody to listen” (10). If we look at Finlan O’Toole’s review of the play in 1983, we see that he believes that Lena “talks incessantly but is in reality voiceless. Boesman ... sees things more clearly than she does but understands even less” (quoted in Gray *File on Fugard* 38). I believe that she understands more than Boesman precisely because she “talks incessantly”; she is exercising her human ability to use language in an endeavour to understand her world. In the context of South African society, Lena was – and still is – so marginalised as to be “voiceless”, but through her ‘incessant chatter’ she resists this interpretation of her and asserts her value as a person entitled to a voice.

Lena uses language to explore her own feelings, and Fugard uses it to reveal Lena to us. In this way the language fulfils the expressive function of dramatic dialogue, whereby Lena’s “verbal behaviour and style” and “the choice of what ... she talks about” (Pfister 109) bring her character to life and reveal her ‘personality’ to us. Lena voices her feelings and her sense of unfairness, when she indicates to Boesman that he is responsible for some of the emptiness in her life.

LENA. Roll up my blanket and crawl into that! [*Pointing to the shelter.*]

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! (19).

One cannot feel the unfairness of a situation if one does not value oneself. Lena feels a “sense of injustice, implying therefore a value of self” (Fugard *Boesman and Lena* xxiii). Boesman has rejected the idea that he has value; he has, in fact, internalised the government discourse that sees him and Lena as “rubbishes” (41). He resists all her attempts to draw him into conversation – exchanging and sharing information -

because this will be an admission that they, as functioning participants in a relationship, have value.

Lena verbalises the idea that being with someone “who doesn’t want to know you are there” (19) is the loneliest place to be. One is less alienated if one is alone, because there is no rejection to contend with. Lena reveals that she has actually considered a ‘deeper, darker reality’ than the surface of her ‘prattle’ indicates.

When Outa arrives he is “somebody to listen” (10) and Lena states, quite explicitly, why she wants him to join them: “Sit in the dark and talk to myself because you don’t hear me any more? No, Boesman! I want him!” (20). It is not that she is filled with an overwhelming love and camaraderie for the marginalised of South African society; it is rather her need to express her life out loud to somebody, to have somebody witness it, that drives her.

Lena’s subconscious belief in her own value as a person comes to the fore when Outa arrives on the scene. If we apply Dixon’s point – “that in sharing experience with others man is using language to make that experience real to himself” (quoted in Quigley 66) – to Lena, we realise that she is using the appearance of conversation with Outa to try to reach an understanding of herself and her world. The topics she chooses to talk about range over all aspects of her life. One of Fugard’s firm beliefs is that “a man can’t ever escape the need to talk to his brother [or h]imself” (*Notebooks* 129). We should see Lena’s ‘chatter’ in terms of this belief. Lena uses language to talk to Boesman, to Outa and to herself, in an effort to reach an understanding of her life. The fact that this down-and-out woman *does* struggle to remember and to orientate her memories in terms of *why* things are as they are shows an incredible defiance of her ‘fate’ and a determination to resist the double oppression of “the apartheid system and traditional patriarchy, to have [her voice] heard” (Walder “Resituating Fugard” 358). This resistance, to her fate and the apartheid system that ordained it, is not a conscious act of defiance. Nowhere in the play does Lena say that she is resisting what her life is. We pick this up from her actions, among them her refusal to stop talking, and by observing and interpreting the ‘iceberg territory’ below the surface of her words. It is important, at this stage, to consider Fugard’s espousal (as related to Mary Benson) of Brecht’s belief:

Crying doesn't express sorrow so much as relief. But *lamenting by means of sounds, or better still, words, is a vast liberation*, because it means that the sufferer is beginning to produce something. He's already mixing his sorrow with an account of the blows he's received; he's already making something out of the utterly devastating. Observation has set in (Benson *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon Bare stage, a few props, great theatre* 33 – my emphasis).

Lena's 'chatter' therefore liberates her; instead of passively suffering her fate, she is querying it. Thus to label her speech acts as 'prattle', 'chatter' or any of the other derogatory names that Boesman, critics and audiences use, is to miss the fact that she is making something of the utterly devastating through her observations.

Lena's determination to have 'somebody to listen' reflects her "demand that her life be witnessed" (Fugard *Notebooks* 173). This need for somebody to witness her life, her bruises, her pain and suffering overrides her disappointment that the 'somebody' is an "*Ou kaffer*" (20); he is "[b]etter than nothing" (21). The audience is then faced with the irony that Lena's 'witness' cannot understand or be understood. Outa "*murmurs a greeting in Xhosa*" (21). Lena responds with "*Molo, Outa*" but because of Boesman's reaction ("cruel amusement") we are immediately aware that she does not speak much more Xhosa than this. She tries the other languages of the play world; first English: "I am Lena. This is my man, Boesman" (21). Boesman derides her attempts with the words: "Shake his hand! Fancy *Hotnot* like you. Give him some smart stuff. 'How do you do, darling'" (21). We can tell from this that Boesman is using the device of naming to construct who Lena is. In his view, Lena is a '*Hotnot*', which "is the *abusive* term derived from the earliest naming by Dutch settlers of one of the original pre-colonial inhabitants of the country" (Walder "Resituating Fugard" 360 – my emphasis). We are aware that Boesman has accepted apartheid terminology; that he has internalised the derogatory naming device and that he has allowed this to determine his perception of who he is and who Lena is.

Lena ignores Boesman's construction and continues with her attempts to establish communication with Outa. She asks Boesman to interpret the old man's murmurs, because he "know[s] his language" (21). Boesman offers no help, only laughter, so Lena tries Afrikaans: "Don't you speak English or Afrikaans? '*More, baas!*'" (21). She goes on to invite Outa to sit down, but nothing happens, so she asks Boesman:

“How do you say that in the kaffir taal?” (21). Boesman’s reply of “*Hamba*”, meaning ‘go away’, reinforces our perception that Boesman does not want any sort of social intercourse, not with Lena or with Outa, or presumably anyone else. Lena, however, persists with her attempts to establish conversation with Outa.

LENA. Does *Outa* come far?

[*She stands and waits ... Nothing.*]

We’re from Korsten. They kicked us out this morning.

[*Nothing.*]

It’s a hard life for us brown people, hey.

BOESMAN. He’s not brown people, he’s black people.

LENA. They got feelings too. Not so, *Outa*.

BOESMAN. You’ll get some feelings if you don’t watch that fire.

[*Lena is waiting for a word from the old man with growing desperation and irritation.*]

LENA. What’s the matter? You sick? Where’s it hurt?

[*Nothing.*]

Hey! I’m speaking to you.

[*The old man murmurs in Xhosa.*]

Stop that baboon language! *Waar kry jy seer?*

[*Another unintelligible response.*]

[*Lena turns away in violent disgust.*] *Ag, go to hell! Onnooslike kaffer! My bleddy bek af praat vir niks!* (22-23).

As audience, we are made aware of a great deal of information from this piece of dramatic dialogue. Firstly we are aware of Lena’s persistence in trying to establish a ‘conversation’. We see that she supplies both sides of the ‘exchange’ when Outa does not respond to her question “Does Outa come far?” by continuing as if conducting a normal conversation with verbal exchange of information. Lena ‘wants somebody to listen’ but of even greater import is her need to vocalise her thoughts - to say them aloud and hear them herself.

Secondly we become aware that, although Boesman says he does not want to talk to Lena and he implies that she has no value as a human being, he is worried by her attempts to create contact with another human being: he is jealous. He tries to take control of the situation by emphasising a division between Lena and Outa, “He’s not

brown people, he's black people" (22). Lena sees herself, Boesman and Outa as 'people', whereas Boesman sees their racial difference.

It is noticeable that apartheid discourse has invidiously embedded itself in the psyches of both Boesman and Lena. She denigrates Xhosa as "that baboon language" (22). The connotations are that, in her eyes, people who speak it are 'baboons', that is less than human. Lena desperately tries to establish human contact with Outa, but it is contact on her terms, in a language of her choice, anything else is rejected by her as 'non-human'. Animals may be able to communicate but they cannot use language creatively to exchange ideas and emotions, therefore these words in Lena's mouth reveal that she has, to some extent anyway, internalised the prevailing discourse of the establishment. Boesman has also internalised apartheid discourse and sees people in terms of their skin colour. The words he uses signify a world constructed on the basis of racial classification. By his choice of words he tries to influence Lena to accept his racially constructed view – and he reveals to the audience the extent to which he has internalised apartheid discourse.

This exchange does emphasise the multilinguality of South Africa. However, the issue of language *per se* is emphasised because it draws our attention to the fact of non-communication between South Africans. Lena cannot speak Xhosa and Boesman refuses to act as translator. If we view Boesman and Lena as marginalised people, people who are practically voiceless in society, then Outa must be regarded as being the extreme of marginalisation and voicelessness. He can speak but his untranslated Xhosa does not communicate with anyone.

Boesman's manipulation of words continues with his pun on 'feelings'. He takes the word Lena uses to convey 'emotions' and uses it to mean the physical impact a beating from him will have for her. We realise that Boesman veers away from emotions and resorts to his physical strength to 'sort out' any problems he has. He is clever with words, as evinced by his ability to pun, but he chooses not to use them to 'make something of the utterly devastating'. His method of dealing with the 'utterly devastating' facts of his life is violence and a denial of his value as a person. Later Lena conveys this idea explicitly when she "*holds up a clenched fist in an imitation of Boesman*" and says: "That's how he talks to the world" (28). Boesman's creativity

with words indicates an intelligence and ability that he is at great pains to suppress. At some level of his subconscious, one feels he knows he is letting himself down and that is why he focuses “his self-hatred ... on Lena” (Fugard *Boesman and Lena* xxiii).

Lena temporarily gives up trying to establish a verbal and emotional connection with Outa and asks Boesman for a ‘*dop*’. In an attempt to re-assert his view of their world Boesman chooses words that define Lena – and himself – in terms of apartheid discourse: “Now you are talking like a *Hotnot*. *Weg wereld, kom brandewyn*. ... *Gat op die grond en trane vir 'n bottel*” (23). Boesman resists Lena’s request to open a bottle of wine. Coming on the heels of Lena’s attempts to interact with Outa, he wants to prove his dominance in their relationship by telling her he’ll open it when he is “ready” (23). Lena decides to assert her independence by claiming one of the bottles as hers, and says that she is going to take it. When Boesman grabs a stick and threatens Lena, he reveals to us that he has abandoned words as a means of negotiation.

The threat of a physical beating re-directs Lena to Outa and she calls on him to “be witness for [her]” (24). Boesman abandons his violence and leaves the two of them. We now have a long monologue in which we observe a great deal about Lena. Her desire to have contact with another human being is shown by her excitement when Outa calls her by name.

LENA. My name is Lena.

[*She pats herself on the chest. Nothing happens. She tries again, but this time she pats him.*]

Outa ... You ... [*patting herself*] ... Lena ... me.

OLD MAN. Lena.

LENA. [*excited*]. *Ewe!* Lena!

OLD MAN. Lena.

LENA. My God! (24-25).

Her desire for interaction is shown by the way she simulates conversational practice with Outa. When he murmurs in Xhosa she “picks up the odd phrase and echoes it” until finally “surrendering herself to the illusion of conversation” (25). Lena takes the opportunity of telling Outa about “Hond”. He obviously does not understand her words, but she finds relief in being able to voice her feelings about having had Hond

and having lost him. She is using language and the pretence of conversation to sort through her emotions. When she comes to terms with the loss of Hond, we are startled by her words: “So what! Now I got *Outa*” (26). Lena is driven by the need to voice her feelings, to talk about her life and experiences. If she equates *Outa*’s value as a listener with Hond’s value for her, she obviously is looking for someone to act as a receptor for her words rather than someone who would interact with her verbally. We become more aware that what she is really trying to do is to sort out her own understanding of her situation.

Then she talks about the events of the morning and we are shown a glimpse of a world in which collecting “empties” means that life is “going easy” and that there is money for “proper chops” (26). As she gets into her verbal stride, she inserts a piece of interaction which reveals the extent of her assimilation of apartheid doctrine. “You’re a nice *Ou* ... [*correcting herself*] ... you’re one of the good *Bantoes*, hey. I can see it. Sit so nice and listen to Lena” (27). Lena reveals not only that she has absorbed and uses government terminology – “Bantoes” – but that ‘good’ is equal to doing what she wants him to do, i.e. sit and listen. She does not really require a response from him, certainly not one that indicates contradiction. In her imagination she will supply relevant responses. So when *Outa* mumbles away in Xhosa, Lena says things like: “That’s right. Of course, *Ja*, it’s going to be cold tonight. You never said a truer thing, darling. I know, I know. Don’t you worry” (28).

Lena opens her heart as she talks. She evaluates her relationship with Boesman, what it is and what it was. “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” (28). Taken metaphorically this suggests an internalisation of patriarchal ideas: the man in front, the woman behind. Once they had walked side by side, as partners, but now they act out the patriarchal dictate of male superiority. We are also struck by the contrast between walking with “jokes” and what we have observed of their relationship – the derision and taciturnity of non-sharing. In the old times Boesman “listened” to her songs; however, we can observe two indicators that this was unlikely to continue. The first is that he “let [her] sing”; in other words, his permission was required for her to sing. Whether he felt the need to assert his dominance or whether she felt the need to be subservient to him is of little importance. There is evidence of

the seeds of gender discrimination through male domination, propounded by patriarchal discourse, which is the twin of racial discrimination, propounded by apartheid ideology. The second indicator that this happy past was unlikely to continue is contained in the communication that Boesman “[n]ever learnt any songs himself”. Even then, we can deduce, Boesman did not want to share in Lena’s need for verbal exploration.

Now as Lena uses her ‘conversation’ with Outa to explore the reality of her life and the things that cause her emotional pain, we notice that Fugard “use[s] the rhythms and sounds of the dialectal forms for more than realistic purposes” (Hauptfleisch 91). Lena’s words have a definite poetic quality about them. This is the result of using variant linguistic forms, which are “rich and living” (92). There are numerous examples of this throughout the play, but I will look at a few from this monologue. When Lena remembers her past we are struck by the beauty and poetry of the words:

Those little paths on the veld ... Boesman and Lena helped write them.

I meet the memory of myself on the old roads. Sometimes young. Sometimes old. Is she coming or going? From where to where? All mixed up. The right time on the wrong road, the right road leading to the wrong place (28-29).

This reveals to us the confusion that Lena feels. Her memories are ‘all mixed up’ but her life never works out properly because it is either ‘the right time on the wrong road’ or ‘the right road leading to the wrong place’. Her wanderings have helped to ‘write the paths’ on the veld but the paths never led her to the destination she was looking for.

Another example of the poetry contained in her words occurs when Lena says, “Once you’ve put your life on your head you never get light again” (28). We are reminded of the opening image of the heavily burdened Boesman and Lena entering the stage, but we also think of the metaphorical burdens in their lives that have already been revealed to us: their destitution, the loss of their home, the loss of Hond, and their lack of a sharing relationship. As the play progresses we become aware of another way in which they are burdened: their lack of living children. This is clearly a huge burden to Lena, because she raises the point with Outa in this monologue: “One, Outa, that lived. For six months. The others were born dead” (29). Later in the play we realise that it is also a terrible burden for Boesman, when he says:

*Sies wereld!*

All there is to say. That's our word. After that our life is dumb. Like your *moer*. All that came out of it was silence. There should have been noise. You pushed out silence. And Boesman buried it. Took the spade the next morning and pushed our hope back into the dirt. Deep holes! When I filled them up I said it again: *Sies* (48).

When Boesman says that their hope was 'pushed back into the dirt' it reverberates through their whole lives; it was not only their dead babies they buried but also their hopes for a life in which they were valued people. It is through these sustained verbal images that much of the texture<sup>4</sup> of the play emerges and the cumulative dialogue gathers impact.

Towards the end of the play we notice that there has been a real change of power within Boesman's and Lena's relationship. Whereas at the beginning Boesman appeared to be the one with power, the one who led and who 'named' the world, by the closing stages Lena has gained in power and controls the conversation. She remains calm and even humorous, while Boesman grows more unsure and nervous with every exchange.

BOESMAN. That's big trouble lying there.

LENA. His troubles are over.

BOESMAN. And ours? What do you think is going to happen tomorrow?

LENA. I don't care.

BOESMAN. Well, I'm warning you, you better have answers ready. Dead man! There's going to be questions.

LENA. About him? About rubbish? Hey, hey, hey! *Outa* hear that. '*More is sommer* a special *dag*.' They're going to ask questions!

About you! Hot stuff, hey. 'What's his name?' 'Where's he come from?'

BOESMAN. Never saw him before in my life!

LENA. 'Who did it?'

BOESMAN [sharply]. Did what? He died by himself.

LENA. Too bad you can't tell them, *Outa*.

BOESMAN. I did nothing.

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<sup>4</sup> Texture refers to stylistic features, syntax, rhythm, range of vocabulary, and use of sounds. See Du Preez 25.

LENA. Why don't they ask some questions when we're alive?

BOESMAN [interrupting her]. Hey! You saw.

LENA. What did I see?

BOESMAN. I did nothing to him. You saw that.

LENA. Now you want a witness too (50-51).

Boesman cannot remain silent any more. His rapid responses reveal that he is too worried about the consequences of Outa's death to be able to keep himself aloof from Lena. Earlier in the play Boesman's silences reflected his decision to remain remote from Lena. His silences have borne out Pinter's observation (made with regard to his own plays) that "we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility" (quoted in Quigley 12). The fact that Boesman is talking to Lena now, responding to each question, comment and innuendo indicates the depth of his fear and anxiety. Lena appears to revel in the change in her status in the relationship at this stage. She teases him and goads him into action, displaying verbal dexterity and enjoying the fact that she is the dominant partner in their exchanges.

BOESMAN. Stop your jokes, Lena! When they come tomorrow you just tell them. I was minding my own business. I only come here to dig for prawns.

LENA. Teach me again, Boesman. You *mos* know how the whiteman likes to hear it.

'He's just a *Hotnot*, baas. Wasn't doing any harm.' How's that? Will that make him feel sorry for you? (51).

We would expect him to use his fists on Lena or, at the least, to deride and belittle her, but instead he is so agitated that he does not respond to Lena's teasing in the way he would have done earlier in the play. From this uncharacteristic behaviour we can deduce the extent of his fear. He tries to apportion the 'blame' for Outa's presence there to Lena, but she resists his efforts with humour.

BOESMAN. Then the *kaffer* came. And you called him to the fire.

LENA. '*Siestoggies, my baas*' (51).

Lena's response reflects the beginning of Act 2 where Boesman was tormenting her and Outa and forcing them to act out his little 'play' of subservience. He told her that she "must make the words crawl to him, with your tongue between their back legs.

Then when the *baas* looks at you, wag it a little ... ‘*Siestoggies, my baas!*’” (36). Boesman does not respond to the challenge that is contained in Lena’s answer. He is so worried that he continues single-mindedly to review the arrival of Outa and to verbalise his distance from the events of the evening, while Lena plays a verbal cat-and-mouse game with him, virtually forcing him into incriminating himself. Lena’s dominance is underlined with every exchange.

BOESMAN. I didn’t want him. I didn’t touch him.

LENA. ‘Boesman didn’t want him, baas.’

BOESMAN. I hate *kaffers*.

LENA. ‘He hates *kaffers*, baas.’

BOESMAN. NO!!

LENA. ‘He loves *kaffers*, baas.’

BOESMAN. God, Lena! (51-52).

Lena is completely in control, not only of their relationship, but also of how Boesman will perceive events – their world. He has been the one who ‘names’ the world. He is the one who has earlier tried to construct their world through the words he used. He had labelled Lena as ‘mix up’ and tried to get her to accept his construct of them as valueless, for instance when he said: “Now you’re talking like a *Hotnot*. *Weg wereld, kom brandewyn*” (23). Now it is Lena who controls the conversation and the construction of their world.

LENA. Maybe he’s not dead, and everything is still okay.

BOESMAN. You said he was.

LENA. You believe me? You mean you’re listening to Lena tonight. Are we talking to each other?

BOESMAN. Is he dead? (52).

This is Lena’s triumph. From being told to ‘talk to herself’ and that he had ‘stopped listening to her’, Boesman now relies on her interpretation of ‘the facts’. Through her words, Lena goads him on to use physical violence on the dead man. Boesman reacts like a puppet whose strings are being pulled by a master puppeteer. When he has kicked and hit the dead man, Lena wakes him up to the consequences of his actions: “No bloody good. He’s dead. And you, *ou boeta*, you’re in trouble!” (53). Lena achieves momentary revenge when she says:

You shouldn’t have hit him, Boesman. Those bruises! Finger-prints. Yours.  
On him. You’ve just made it worse for yourself. Dead *kaffer* and a *Hotnot*

*meid* with bruises ... and Boesman sitting near by with no skin on his knuckles. What's that look like? The answer to all their questions. They won't even ask them now. They'll just grab you ... [*carefully*] ... for something you didn't do!

That's the worst of it. When you didn't do it. Like the hiding you gave me for dropping the empties. Now you'll know what it feels like. You were clever to tell me. It hurt more than your fists. You know where you feel that one? Inside. Where your fists can't reach (53-54).

However, rather than revenge Lena's triumph is that she has made Boesman aware of his feelings - she has forced him to change from being someone who negates his emotions and seeks solace in inanimate things and violence, to being someone who has to confront his fear, acknowledge it and take responsibility for his actions. This 'revenge', in fact, has a 'humanising' effect on Boesman.

Lena finds her own strength and the ability to make her own decisions, unlike in the beginning when she was constantly asking Boesman to tell her what had happened and how they had arrived where they were. Now when he asks her if she's coming with him, she has the self-confidence to say "No" and to turn her back on him. It appears that he will be unable to leave without her, because he "stands motionless" (56) while she goes to 'talk' to the dead man. However, with the words "Can't throw yourself away before your time" (56) she makes the decision to go with Boesman. We feel that this is on an entirely different footing from earlier, however. She asks to take a share of the load, and in response to her decision to go with him, Boesman shares his knowledge of the order of their wanderings. Lena's comment that "It doesn't explain anything" (57) indicates that she has been searching for reasons in the wrong places. Maybe, with her desire to sort out their personal history through correctly naming these places, she was on the 'wrong road' but it was 'leading to the right place' - an affirmation of her value as a person and of their value to each other within their relationship.

Because language functions simultaneously in many ways in dramatic dialogue, it is impossible to isolate a single function and just discuss that. The functions overlap and contribute to the cumulative dialogue. However, by being aware of how people negotiate their position within a relationship, one can look at how the changing status

is revealed. We can also explore the 'iceberg territory' of character revealed through dialogue rather than stated. Finally we can look at how all the functions and uses of language contribute to creating the stage world and to jolting us, as audience, into a re-assessment of a world we thought we knew. We look at Boesman and Lena and because "Fugard is a specialist in damaged psyches, a portraitist of individual, valuable people damaged by a cruel society and made cruel by it" (Daymond *et al.* 205), we no longer see them as 'rubbishes'.

## CHAPTER 4

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead & The Island*<sup>1</sup>

“What am I trying to say? That a man can’t ever escape the need to talk to his brother? (Himself?)”<sup>2</sup>

Of all the Fugard texts, the collaborative plays are the most overtly political. The apartheid system prevented the “reciprocal recognition [between the races] which is the basis of civilised society” (Davis and Fuchs 14), thereby rendering millions of South Africans ‘voiceless’. These collaborative plays set out to present a world that was, through the use of regional realism, observably realistic to white South African audiences in the ’70s, but which, at the same time, exposed what was normally hidden (by censorship) or, at the very least, unexamined. As Brian Crow has pointed out: “At its very best, during the apartheid years, South African theatre not only identified and protested against the political and social evils of the system but explored both the constraints on social interaction and expressiveness, and their psychological consequences” (Davis and Fuchs 15). *Sizwe* and *The Island* both involve what Fugard calls “an appointment with self” (*Notebooks* 102) because they explore the characters’ subjective responses to social relationships and interactions. They offered whites a view of the lives of millions of South Africans screened from them by censorship and the “conspiracy of silence” (quoted by Gray *Athol Fugard* 56); and for blacks they offered the chance “to inform victims about the truth of their situation and as a means for them to voice the truth of their life as they feel it” (Gray *File on Fugard* n.p.). This innovative line of communication was not created only through the referential function of language. I will look at another way in which language is used in these two plays to give a ‘voice’ to the formerly ‘voiceless’.

I want to explore the idea that language may serve as a ‘mask’ and that (coupled with action) a man can play whatever part he chooses in order to protect his true identity. In both *Sizwe* and *Island* the characters reveal that they deliberately wear ‘masks’,

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<sup>1</sup> Both of these collaborative plays exhibit a number of similar uses of language. Whether this is due to the influence of John Kani and Winston Ntshona or whether it reflects a new direction of experimentation on Fugard’s part or a combination of the two is not important here. This thesis is concerned with looking at the different functions of language, not at who is responsible for the original idea.

<sup>2</sup> Fugard *Notebooks* 129.

thereby presenting whites with the character they (white South Africans) expect and want to see. As Ibitokun has pointed out, during the apartheid era, whites saw blacks as ‘other’. As no man can penetrate another’s mind *in toto*, this ‘othering’ must be seen as objectivist, in other words, it is imposed by whites on blacks. He asserts that this “white-othered, black mind simply does not exist outside the imagination of the white man ... [and that] the white man wants to see in the black man only the image he has created for himself” (99). Ibitokun believes that in defiance of this ‘objectivist othering’, thousands of black South Africans wilfully adopted “a self-protectionist mask of otherness. [This] subjectivist mask of otherness, ... whereby the oppressed black in South Africa, deliberately, out of his own accord, fully as subject, puts on a psychic alterity to hide away his true identity” (99), should be seen as an act of defiance.

The idea of wearing a mask to disguise one’s true identity, was criticised by a number of people in the 70s, among them Siphosiphophane Sepamla, who wrote in the Summer 1973 edition of *Sketch*:

I hope they [black audiences] dismissed, like I did, his [Styles’s] advice about adapting oneself to the requirements of the moment. Winston as Sizwe can’t be a man if he gives up his name to avoid starving in the Bantustans. That starvation he must face to become a man and retain his pride as a man! For me this is what is meant by sacrifice – which many of us have forsaken for the comforts of the day! (quoted in Gray *File on Fugard* 46).

This reflects a relatively standard reaction from many Black Consciousness Movement adherents. However, I think that we need to consider the point of view put forward by Ibitokun, who sees the mask as “philosophic self-maskedness” (106) behind which the black person can preserve his selfhood. Ibitokun has shown that when one is subjected to harsh oppression, as was the case for blacks in South Africa in the time of apartheid, “the psyche splits itself in two: the self at the rearguard, the other at the forefront. No oppressed man ... is in reality what he appears to be, because it is foolhardy and unsafe to open out, and to risk the self in a system which does not believe that one has any modicum of the human in one” (98). The crux of the matter is that the act of adopting a ‘mask’ should be deliberate. If the ‘mask’ is “wilful othering” (106), it is not simply a means to survive, but also contestatory. If

we accept this idea, we can reject, as based on too narrow an interpretation, criticism like that from Sepamla and also from critics like Hilary Seymour, writing in *Race and Class* (XXI, No 3 1980):

There emerge two contradictory messages in the play: a cry of outraged human dignity stemming from the indignities of the urban situation confronting Sizwe Bansi (a cry echoed in Styles's earlier commentary on his work routine at the factory) and a plea for patient endurance on the part of Styles the photographer, a plea which at moments does not escape the charge of complacency (quoted in Gray *File on Fugard* 48).

After considering Ibitokun's argument that "[b]lacks in Fugard's black-centred plays *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island* are maskers, hence one can talk of the mask of otherness under which they hide to launch their missiles of revolt at the oppressor" (98); I cannot accept that Styles/Buntu is advocating "patient endurance". Instead I think that he indicates to Sizwe (and the audience) that by deliberately 'playing the system', he (they) can free himself (themselves) from its control.

In *Sizwe* we are shown Styles as a consummate 'donner' of masks. In the opening monologue he tells the story of the visit to the Ford Motor plant of 'Mr Henry Ford Junior Number Two' and his (Styles's) activity as translator for Mr 'Baas' Bradley. The anecdote is preceded by Styles's comment regarding Mr 'Baas' Bradley: "[g]ood man that one, *if you knew how to handle him*" (150 - my italics). In this way, Styles reveals to the audience – both black and white, oppressed and oppressor – that he has learnt how to manipulate the system. He offers to the black oppressed a means of rising above the dehumanisation of apartheid practice and to the white oppressor he offers a view of the black man which was contrary to that produced by the prevailing discourse (pedalled by the government of the time) that the blacks were submissive and without any desire for or means of contestation.

Styles continues with his anecdote, revealing the empowerment that his knowledge of both languages (Xhosa and English) bestows on him. Contrary to the 'normal' scenario of white dominance, Styles is seen and heard by the audience to be the character with power.

'Styles!'

‘Yes, sir!’

[*Mr. ‘Baas’ Bradley’s heavy Afrikaans accent*] ‘What do you say in your language for this? Eye Protection Area.’

It was easy, man!

‘*Gqokra Izi Khuselo Zamehlo Kule Ndawo.*’

Nobody wrote it!

‘Don’t bloody fool me, Styles!’

‘No, sir!’

‘Then spell it ... slowly.’

[*Styles has a big laugh.*]

Hey! That was my moment, man. Kneeling there on the floor ... foreman, general foreman, plant supervisor, plant manager ... and Styles? Standing!

(151-152)

Styles’s use of ‘sir’ provides him with an effective mask. On the surface he appears subservient, because of his verbal ‘recognition’ of Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley’s position. However, he reveals to the audience that he is well aware that in actual fact he holds a superior position because of his linguistic ability. He is “wear[ing] self-consciously a mask over [his] selfhood, assum[ing] wilfully the other which the white oppressor wants [him] to be” (Ibitokun 106), and in the process he is effectively putting on “a psychic alterity to hide away his true identity” (98).

Because Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley cannot speak Xhosa, the issue of language itself is foregrounded. When Bradley instructs Styles to “[t]ell the boys *in your language*” (my emphasis) the audience is alerted to the metalingual function of language in dramatic dialogue. Because of “excessive discrepancies between the [speech] codes” (Pfister 115) there has been a disruption in the communication process: Bradley cannot speak the language of his workers, therefore without an interpreter no communication can take place. Direct communication between Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley and the workers is impossible and, as the anecdote continues, the audience becomes increasingly aware that for Styles and his co-workers, at this stage, the function of language is not primarily intellectual, but sociological and psychological.

‘Tell the boys in your language, that this is a very big day in their lives.’

‘Gentlemen, this old fool says that this is a hell of a big day in our lives.’

The men laughed.

‘They are happy to hear that, sir.’

‘Tell the boys that Mr Henry Ford the Second, the owner of this place is going to visit us. Tell them Mr Ford is the big Baas. He owns the plant and everything in it.’

‘Gentlemen, old Bradley says this Ford is a big bastard. He owns everything in this building, which means you as well.’

A voice came out of the crowd:

‘Is he a bigger fool than Bradley?’

‘They’re asking, sir, is he bigger than you?’

‘Certainly ... [*blustering*] ... certainly. He is a very big baas. He’s a ... [*groping for words*] ... he’s a Makulu Baas.’

I loved that one!

‘Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley says most certainly Mr Ford is bigger than him. In fact Mr Ford is the grandmother baas of them all... that’s what he said to me.’

‘Styles, tell the boys that when Mr Henry Ford comes into the plant I want them all to look happy. We will slow down the speed of the line so that they can sing and smile while they are working.’

‘Gentlemen, he says that when the door opens and his grandmother walks in you must see to it that you are wearing a mask of smiles. Hide your true feelings, brothers. You must sing. The joyous songs of the days of old before we had fools like this one next to me to worry about.’ [*To Bradley.*] ‘Yes, sir!’

‘Say to them, Styles, that they must try to impress Mr Henry Ford that they are better than those monkeys in his own country, those niggers in Harlem who know nothing but strike, strike.’

*Yo!* I liked that one too.

‘Gentlemen, he says we must remember, when Mr Ford walks in, that we are South African monkeys, not American monkeys. South African monkeys are much better trained...’

Before I could even finish, a voice was shouting out of the crowd:

‘He’s talking shit!’ I had to be careful!

[*Servile and full of smiles as he turns back to Bradley.*]

‘No, sir! The men say they are much too happy to behave like those American monkeys.’ (153-154).

As Ibitokun has noted, “Styles has with his language fused with his fellow blacks in a world in which people like Bradley are a nuisance” (103). First we notice that Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley’s derogatory term of address, ‘the boys’, is changed by Styles to ‘gentlemen’. Styles’s speech repudiates the prevailing white discourse that sees grown men as ‘boys’. The practice of labelling and perceiving ‘men’ as ‘boys’ is revealed in this play and in *Island*, as being anathema to blacks. Although Styles’s speech act is not directly confrontational, it can be seen as a conscious act of contestation of the status quo. Styles then invites the workers at the Ford plant into partnership with him, to hide and protect themselves behind a communal mask, when he says “you must see to it that you are wearing a mask of smiles.” He continues by appealing to their common cause; “Hide your true feelings, brothers.” By calling them ‘brothers’, Styles presents the audience with the idea of a united group of people. In addition, ‘brothers’ carries with it all the connotations of the struggle and can, thus, be viewed as contestatory. Styles is offering the workers at the Ford plant, and the ‘workers’ in the audience, a blueprint for survival within the confines of the South African state at the time: wear a mask of smiles and speak and act like you are expected to, and while playing this part you will be able to preserve your selfhood – which, in itself, is an act of contestation.

This whole anecdote bears out the Yoruba proverb which says: “One does not fight the enemy ... while the enemy is still holding on to the handle of the sword. One should wait until one gets hold of the handle” (Ibitokun 98). Styles shows the audience a way of ‘getting hold of the handle of the sword’ – wear a mask and consciously play a part, while knowing that it is a part and not reality, and this becomes “subjective othering” (Ibitokun 106). The balance of power shifts to the mask-wearing player, as is indicated in this incident. Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley exposes himself to ridicule with his erroneous attempt at linguistic parity. The offering of a “*Makulu Baas*” gives Styles ‘the handle of the sword’ and enables him to expose the inadequacies of the white ‘baas’ to the other workers.

The essential element of successful mask-wearing is that it is a conscious act. Although Styles is “[s]ervile and full of smiles”, answering ‘Yes, sir! No, sir! Three bags full, sir!’ it does not make him an impotent pawn, because he is consciously using his words and actions to play a part. “The so-called obsequious, stupid and monkeyish servant is in reality a quick-witted, well-informed, subversive and indomitable person. His true self is deep down below, erect and confrontational, systematically juxtaposing by its ironic sparks *what is* and *what ought to be*” (Ibitokun 103). The whole Styles-Bradley exchange is “garbed in sophisticated wiles, the truth of which eludes the big Afrikaaner baas who takes his servant for a sychophantic idiot” (Ibitokun 99). Later in the play when Buntu encourages Sizwe to assume Robert Zwelinzima’s identity, he advises him to *consciously* play the part and to dupe the system rather than to be negated by it.

Sizwe is concerned about the loss of his name. He sees his identity as being bound up with the words that name him: Sizwe Bansi<sup>3</sup>. However, Buntu shows him an alternative: play the part that is expected of you; “be a real ghost, if that is what they want, what they’ve turned us into” (185). By consciously assuming this role, Sizwe will empower himself. He will be the one who can “[s]pook them into hell” (185). Even if this empowerment is qualified and not complete, it does not sound like Seymour’s “patient endurance” (quoted in *Gray File on Fugard* 48). If we refer to Ibitokun, we can consider the alternative view - that Buntu believes that “[w]hat is required now as confrontational ploy is not force but “fraud” or philosophic self-maskedness. ... If this process is wilful, as intended by Buntu, it will be subjectivist othering” (106).

Buntu castigates the *unconscious* servility shown by many, because it indicates that they have succumbed to and absorbed the prevailing discourse of the apartheid system - that they perceive themselves in terms of ‘objectivist othering’.

Take your name back, Sizwe Bansi, if it’s so important to you. But next time you hear a white man say ‘John’ to you, don’t say ‘*Ja, Baas?*’ And the next time the bloody white man says to you, a man, ‘Boy, come here,’ don’t run to

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<sup>3</sup> The meaning of Sizwe Bansi is ‘The people are strong’. This, in itself, sends a message of defiance to all those in the audience who can speak Xhosa. It may be seen as a type of collaboration coding.

him and lick his arse like we all do. Face him and tell him: 'White man. I'm a Man!' *Ag, kak!* We're bluffing ourselves.

It's like my father's hat. Special hat, man! Carefully wrapped in plastic on top of the wardrobe in his room. God help the child who so much as touches it! Sunday it goes on his head, and a man, full of dignity, a man I respect, walks down the street. White man stops him: 'Come here, kaffir!' What does he do?

*[Buntu whips the imaginary hat off his head and crumples it in his hands as he adopts a fawning, servile pose in front of the white man.]*

'What is it, Baas?'

If that is what you call pride, then shit on it! Take mine and give me food for my children (190-191).

If we accept Saussure's theory that "people are shaped or determined by language" (Webster 35), we realise that Buntu is making the point that by unconsciously accepting 'John', 'boy' and 'kaffir' as generic names, the black man is shaping himself to the form that apartheid doctrine has designated for him. In other words, by doing this, the black man internalises the objectivist othering he is subjected to. Buntu's alternative is that *consciously* playing a part can become "a way of life, a communication code, especially in the community where all blacks are considered to have the same faces, and are derogatorily called John-boys" (Ibitokun 107). This will not only be a unifying process but will also challenge the psychological control that the apartheid government sought to impose through objectivist othering.

The recommendation is that language should be wilfully used, as a tool, to mask the real person and his real identity. This recommendation is borne out by the action of the play where we have the same actor not only playing Styles and Buntu, but also playing roles 'within' each character. So when Styles "*pulls out a chair [and] Mr 'Baas' Bradley speaks on one side, Styles translates on the other*" (153), he is explicitly 'acting out' the two parts. He also plays the parts of himself and the cockroaches in the story about Doom and when telling the audience about his customers, he plays all the parts until the entrance of Sizwe. Similarly Buntu playacts the roles of clerk in the Labour Bureau and salesman in Sales House. The idea

conveyed is that people can play as many roles as they choose; and as long as this is a conscious choice, it is empowering. It is well to refer here to Ibitokun:

Through such histrionic flexibility, a South African black man is able to achieve what Jeyifo rightly calls “a thorough-going de-totalization of the inhuman claustrophobic space.” The apartheid system, on the one hand, restrains the black man’s movements, and reifies his existence; othering, on the other hand, liberates and enriches his scope of life, with the result that he experiences once more a wholesome totalization of being, self-plenum and self-expansiveness or a self-in-a-series-of-others (107).

The play highlights the role of language to enable characters to present different personae, thereby also emphasising the fact that the stage world is a ‘created’ and artificial world. The audience’s attention is constantly drawn to the fact that this is not ‘real life’ that they are watching. Styles comments on theatre itself and western story-telling devices. In the opening monologue, Styles is very aware of the audience and attempts to establish them as his dialogue ‘partners’. When he first starts reading and commenting on the day’s newspaper, the stage directions tell us that he “[l]ooks around as if someone might be eavesdropping on his intimacy with the audience” (149). The audience is also consciously regarded as the listener to the Ford factory anecdote.

I used to like General Cleaning. Nothing specific, you know, little bit here, little bit there. But that day! Yessus ... in came the big machines with hot water and brushes – sort of electric mop – and God alone knows what else. We started on the floors. The oil and dirt under the machines was thick, man. All the time the bosses were walking around watching us:

*[Slapping his hands together as he urges on the ‘boys’.]*

‘Come on, boys! It’s got to be spotless! Big day for the plant!’

Even the *big* boss, the one we only used to see lunch-times, walking to the canteen with a big cigar in his mouth and his hands in his pockets ... that day? Sleeves rolled up, running around us...

In Brechtian epic theatre characters often follow a similar practice to that of the chorus in ancient Greek theatre, commenting to the audience on the stage action, thereby creating “an overlapping of the internal and mediating communication

systems” (Pfister 80). Brecht himself has described this phenomenon in his poem ‘The Songs’:

The actors  
Change into singers. They have  
A new attitude  
As they address themselves to the audience, still  
Characters in the play, but now also undisguisedly  
Accomplices of the playwright (Quoted by Pfister 80).

If we consider *Sizwe* in the light of Brechtian practice, we can see that Styles acts as both ‘character in the play’ and as ‘accomplice of the playwright’. Pfister’s comment, that “as ‘accomplices of the playwright’ [Brechtian characters] address the audience directly, establishing a mediating communication system that exposes the fictionality of the play and subjects it to a critical and distanced commentary” (80), can be applied to Styles. As he explains and recounts the incident, he invites us to share his view and see how pompous and ineffectual the ‘bosses’ are. Fugard is using theatre, deliberately and explicitly, to create awareness of issues and to allow the characters, in all their different roles, to debate these in front of the audience. Gray has pointed out that “[t]he creative pleasure released by these experiments is a sure validation of their aim: releasing an audience from conventional modes of thinking” (*Athol Fugard* 21). In 1972 Jean Marquard reiterated this point in *To the Point* when she observed in a review of *Sizwe* that:

Theatre, as these actors conceive it to be, is not a separate structural entity, divorced from the empirical here and now, but an opportunity for the close scrutiny of immediate realities. Thus the audience, as well as the actors, must be ‘used’ since they too have a part to play – and it is not one of passive acquiescence in an evening’s entertainment.

...

The first 30 or 40 minutes of the ‘play’ are devoted to the task – and it is a tricky one – of breaking down the audience resistance: the old ingrained habits, that is, of passive attention, polite applause, and an expectation of ‘forgetting’ oneself for a couple of hours. The tone of the opening half of *Sizwe Bansi*, then, is light, humorous, vivacious. After some moments of wondering when the actual ‘play’ is going to begin, one begins to realize that it never will, in *that* sense.

(quoted in Gray *File on Fugard* 45-46).

We have here an innovative combination: a stage world that is recognisable to the audience by means of its regional realism and a theatre form that is new to those South Africans steeped in Western theatrical traditions. Because of the nature of its structure – the way in which dialogue is used – *Sizwe* presents an alternative form of story telling, far more Afrocentric than had formerly been the case in English-speaking South African theatre. Styles recounts a series of anecdotes which Gray views as having “more in common with African modes of narrative than anything that is contained within the parameters of Western orthodoxy” (*Athol Fugard* 21). *Sizwe* comments self-consciously on Western story-telling techniques (letters, photos, theatre) and replaces these with “semi-organised talk” (Gray *Athol Fugard* 21). The subtextual implication, therefore, criticises the traditional Eurocentricism in South African theatre. The impromptu inventiveness that accompanies the reading of that day’s newspaper means that censorship is practically impossible. This part of the ‘text’ is unwritten and therefore uncensorable. In addition to this, the play can be presented with local immediacy and relevance. The issues pertaining to a certain time and place can be presented and debated.

The anecdotal telling of experiences in *Sizwe* has more in common with African folktales being told around a fire or Oom Schalk Lourens sitting on the stoep and telling his stories. It also reflects Fugard’s assessment of his own position: “My sense of myself is that I’m essentially a story-teller: I have on any number of occasions found myself saying and writing in my notebooks that the only safe place I’ve ever known is at the centre of a story as its teller” (Daymond *et al.* 28). The narrative form, used in this play, helps to evoke regional realism, drawing the audience into the stage world, which they recognise and identify with; but at the same time they are constantly being reminded that it is a *stage* world and not real. In this we must recognise the influence of Brecht and epic/dialectal<sup>4</sup> theatre which aims to push the spectator “into awareness of the true causes of the circumstances in which he finds himself, encouraging him to take a critical attitude and prodding him into action” (Fischer 12). In this way the dramatic dialogue fulfils the phatic function of language,

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<sup>4</sup> Brecht later changed the term ‘epic’ to ‘dialectal’ when identifying his form of theatre.

to create and maintain the channel of communication between the speaker (the stage character) and the listener (the audience). That *Sizwe* was successful in this aim is borne out by Fugard himself.

As I stood at the back of the hall listening to it all I realised I was watching a very special example of one of theatre's major responsibilities in an oppressive society: to try to break the conspiracy of silence that always attends an unjust social system. And most significant of all: that conspiracy was no longer being assaulted just by the actors. ... A performance on stage had provoked a political event in the auditorium ... The sense of people wanting to speak, wanting to be heard, had been very urgent and real.

(Fugard "When Brecht and Sizwe Bansi Met in New Brighton" p.31).

Once again in this play and in *Island* regional realism is enhanced by the use of recognisably South African words and phrases. Polyglot black urban life is represented by markers of Xhosa, Afrikaans and tsotsitaal on the base of SAE. From Xhosa we have words like 'Yo' and 'Haai', phrases like 'Nyana we Sizwe!' and all the names like *Sizwe Bansi*, *Zwelinzima*, *Miss Nkonyeni*, *Nowetu*, *Hodoshe*, etc. From Afrikaans there are words like 'Ja', 'poes', 'lappie', 'broer', and 'moer', names like *Koekemoer* and *Prinsloo*, phrases like 'Dankie, my baas!' and sentences like 'Hier is ek, my baas!' and 'Hell, ons was gemoer vandag!' From tsotsitaal there is 'punkies'. There are South Africanisms like 'struesgod' and 'Yessus'. There is also evidence of typically South African word order, for example 'It almost looked pretty, hey, with all the mist around it' (the ubiquitous South African 'hey' and the incorrect placing of the adverb, instead of being next to the word it is modifying: standard English would be 'it looked almost pretty'). I am not going to go into great detail on this point, as I have examined these effects elsewhere in this thesis. I merely wish to establish that Fugard uses language to represent the polyglot reality of South Africa in these two plays, as he does in all his South African plays.

By using dialect to produce a stage world, which is a recognisable representation of the outside world, both *Sizwe* and *The Island* create the illusion of reality for the audience. This produces audience identification with the characters and their world. According to Shklovsky, when one believes that one knows a situation, one's "perception becomes a habitual, automatic process where [one is] often unaware of, or

take[s] for granted [one's] view of things and the relations between them" (quoted in Webster 38). In order to 'defamiliarise' the known world and make the audience reassess their perception of the norm, Brecht developed his 'alienation effect', whereby the audience is constantly reminded of the constructed nature of realist drama. Influenced by Brecht, both of these plays use obvious means to ensure that the audience is aware of the fact that theatre is illusion, thereby "forcing the audience to see the action from different perspectives and making their position in relation to the text less obvious or naturalized" (Webster 39).

In both of these plays language itself is foregrounded. It is the medium whereby one's stories may be told, and it is important to remember that a listener is required for the effective communication of a story. Styles consciously invites the audience to play the role of listener. As listeners, we should remember what Barney Simon had to say about listening: "*maybe* if I ... listen carefully, I will learn a lot of things that I don't know about because they are seeing something else. I think story-telling and listening to stories is as organic to our survival as oxygen" (quoted in Benson 153). So we too are invited to listen carefully and learn a lot of things that we don't know about because they are generally shrouded in silence.

In *Sizwe* the audience is presented with all these anecdotes/stories and invited to listen to the story-telling and watch the visual representation of these anecdotes, whilst constantly being reminded that they are 'just' stage representations of mask-wearing people. "The positive result of this chameleonic existence is the black man's ability to assume as many characters or others as he chooses, a phenomenon which corresponds to Fugard's aesthetic dramaturgy of the pre-eminence of performances – '*the actor on the stage*'. On the apartheid stage of life, blacks are *feigned performers*" (Ibitokun 107). In *The Island* this examination of Western story-telling techniques is more specifically focused on theatre. As Albert Wertheim noted:

What Fugard's opening mimes poignantly show is the way the South African authorities have created a system that is meant to reduce men to beasts, to annihilate the last shreds of their humanity. Their humanity, however, remains intact, even flowers amid a situation that is meant to be death in life or living death. And it does so because the two men continue to act as humans by using dramatic acting as a means for sustaining their humanity. Improvisation – that

tool through which an actor learns to understand and practice [sic] a role – becomes the means through which John and Winston understand, practice [sic], and enact their humanity. Acting, moreover, becomes both shield and sword to the two prisoners: a means for self-protection, for protection of the self, and a means for taking action or acting against their captors, against the State. Fugard thus asserts that acting is no idle art, no end in itself, but the very essence of life and of being human (230-231).

The technique of a play-within-a-play has an established history, but, in terms of this thesis, it is important to recognise that this technique of necessity draws attention explicitly to the function of dramatic dialogue and theatre as a vehicle for communication and a means of survival. *The Island* is, in itself, a statement about theatre and the function of drama in a society burdened by oppression and struggling to offer an alternative to a government-determined status quo. Whereas the audience is approached as co-conspirators in *Sizwe*, in *The Island*, the audience within the play is the ostensible target of the performance of *Antigone*. The ‘real’ audience is exposed to the stage world of Robben Island and the resistance of the characters to the status quo as shown by the staging of *Antigone* for the inmates and warders. Winston and John demonstrate that men can survive the most intolerable conditions, providing that they can discover and articulate a meaning for their suffering – and if they can communicate this to others, the suffering becomes a weapon of resistance and a uniting factor. I think it is pertinent, at this point, to reiterate Fugard’s espousal of Brecht’s belief that “lamenting by means of ... words is a vast liberation, because it means that the sufferer is beginning to produce something” (quoted by Benson *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon Bare stage, a few props, great theatre* 33).

*The Island* opens with the opposite of communication through language: there is *silence* on the stage as John and Winston mime “the digging of sand” (195). This demonstrates the fact that their protests have been silenced by imprisonment and that the reality of life on the island has been effectively withheld from the audience through the silencing mechanism of censorship. According to John Kani, “Athol came up with the idea that there is a place we never talk about, no one can write about, the press cannot talk about, not even white South Africans, free as they are, can talk about. ... That is Robben Island” (Vandenbroucke 171). Against the background of

this all-encompassing silence, *The Island* speaks out on behalf of the ‘voiceless’ to those whose ears have been blocked. The importance of language as a key to being able to verbalise one’s life is demonstrated by the play, which develops as a ‘voice’ saying and showing the things that have been kept quiet.

When John tells Winston that “[w]hen Hodoshe opens that door tomorrow say ‘*Ja, Baas*’ the right way. I don’t want to be back on the beach tomorrow just because you feel like being difficult” (204), it appears that he is advising Winston to ‘wear a mask’ and play the system, in much the same way that Styles advises the Ford factory-workers and Sizwe. We are shown that by using the ‘right’ words, a victim can circumvent the system. By consciously donning a mask of servility and obsequiousness, he can maintain his selfhood beneath it and not only survive the system, but challenge it too.

We are then given evidence of how ‘theatre’ – acting a part – is used by the two characters to enable them not only to survive the horrendous conditions on the island, but also to articulate their suffering. In the light of this statement, the ‘telephone call’ to Sky can be viewed as an example of their regular use of ‘theatre’ for “creative illusion which at some climacteric phase of life allows wholesome othering for self-catharsis” (Ibitokun 109). It offers John the means to articulate his worries about his family. In Brechtian style “[h]e’s already mixing his sorrow with an account of the blows he’s received; he’s already making something out of the utterly devastating” (quoted by Benson 33).

And look, Sky, you’re not far from Gratten Street. Cross over to it, man, drop in on number thirty-eight, talk to Princess, my wife. How is she keeping? Ask her for me. I haven’t received a letter for three months now. Why aren’t they writing? Tell her to write, man. I want to know how the children are keeping. Is Monde still at school? How’s my twin baby, my Father and Mother? Is the old girl sick? They mustn’t be afraid to tell me. I want to know. I know it is an effort to write, but it means a lot to us here (206).

This ‘monologue’ works as a dialogue, between John and Sky, and also between John and Winston as it communicates John’s worries in an acceptable manner. It also functions as ‘verbal action’, whereby the character “completes a spoken action which

changes the situation and thus the relationship of the figures to one another intentionally” (Pfister 118). By ‘betraying’ the secret of his fears and concern, John can verbalise his personal worries without appearing weak. As Ibitokun has pointed out, “[t]he duo want to speak out with anything or anybody about their present predicament of slow dying. They end up speaking to and with themselves, each dividing himself into the self and other” (109). By using theatrical devices, they articulate their deepest fears and concerns and prevent themselves from being overwhelmed by them.

That John, Winston, Styles, Buntu and Sizwe are not overwhelmed by the awfulness of their conditions, is nothing short of astounding. Both of these plays are permeated by an amazing *joie de vivre*. There is so much humour and enjoyment of the simple pleasures of life in the face of their ghastly living conditions that we can only marvel at the tenacity and commitment of these men and applaud their ability to rise above their situation by playing whatever part is required of them.

The performance of *Antigone* becomes a mask behind which they can defy the law and use their words to uphold the dignity of man. When Winston refuses to play the part of a woman because he fears being the butt of everyone’s laughter, John explicitly states the function of the performance: “But just remember this, brother, nobody laughs forever! There’ll come a time when they’ll stop laughing, and that will be the time when our Antigone hits them with her words” (209). Once again the audience’s attention is deliberately drawn to language. We need to examine the function that Antigone’s words will fulfil. Through the character of Antigone, John, Winston and Fugard establish a “mediating communication system by the introduction of [an] epic commentator figure” (Pfister 113). Antigone serves as a mouthpiece for John, Winston and Fugard to communicate to the characters within the play and to the audience what should be, as opposed to what is. We know that the purpose of the performance, of the words used, is to convey to both the prison audience and to us a statement which is as relevant to our lives and time as it is to Antigone’s.

To ensure that the audience does concentrate on his words, Fugard bares his stage, using the minimum of sets, costumes and props. He felt the necessity for “[g]reater

honesty about the unreality of the stage and the need to use every moment, line, pause, gesture, etc to reveal" (*Notebooks* 172) and hit the audience with the truth of his words. John emphasises the unreality of the stage and its importance as a vehicle for communication when, dressed in the wig and false breasts, he tries to persuade Winston with the words:

Go on laughing! Why did you stop? Must I tell you why? Because behind all this rubbish is me, and you know it is me. You think those bastards out there won't know it's you? Yes, they'll laugh. But who cares about that as long as they laugh in the beginning and listen in the end. That's all we want them to do ... listen in the end (210).

Winston's argument that, as a Greek legend, Antigone has no relevance to his life and that it is just "a child's play" is seen by John as evidence that Winston has succumbed to apartheid discourse, that he is talking "Hodoshe's talk". John's determination to stage Antigone and his conviction of its validity as a comment on their lives is revealed to the audience by his words.

Hodoshe's talk, Winston! That's what he says all the time. What he wants us to say all our lives. Our convictions, our ideals ... that's what he calls them ... child's play. Everything we fucking do is 'child's play' ... when we ran that whole day in the sun and pushed those wheelbarrows, when we cry, when we shit ... child's play! Look, brother, ... I've had enough. No one is going to stop me doing Antigone (210).

In this speech language functions in two distinct ways. Firstly it is used for indirect characterisation to expose John's temperament and disposition to the audience. This is what Pfister calls the "expressive function" (109) of dramatic language. It is always of great importance in a play because it is the way in which a character is revealed. To emphasise his point, Pfister quotes Ben Jonson: "Language most shows a man: speak that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the image of the parent of it, the mind. No glass renders a man's form, or likeness, so true as his speech" (109). We learn from the words that John says that he is a man who is convinced of the righteousness of his convictions. He is prepared to stand by his beliefs and voice them despite all opposition, whether it comes from Hodoshe and the warders, or, more insidiously, from his friend and confidant,

Winston. Instead of passively enduring his prison sentence, he is defiantly determined to challenge the system and communicate his view to the other prisoners, the warders and the audience. The force of his feelings is conveyed by the brevity of his utterances and the repetition of the phrase 'child's play'. John's determination and commitment is evident in the final two sentences: "I've had enough. No one is going to stop me doing Antigone" (210).

Secondly, his words function to negotiate his desired position within the relationship between him and Winston. This is what Quigley refers to as the interrelational function of language as a "means of dictating and reinforcing relationships" (52). The speech also reflects Pfister "appellative function" (111) of dramatic dialogue. In this case John uses language to try to change Winston's mind and persuade him to deliver Antigone's words at the prison concert. He does this by highlighting the way Hodoshe belittles them. Just as grown men are 'boys' and have to wear short pants, as 'evidence' of this, so too are their "convictions" and "ideals" merely "child's play". If Winston accepts Hodoshe's interpretation, his being in prison is absolutely pointless; his action against apartheid practice is rendered meaningless, and he may as well become a 'stone' man like Old Harry, who has succumbed to the "objectivist othering" (Ibitokun 112) and been changed by 'them' so that "[h]e's forgotten everything ... why he's here, where he comes from" (221). Throughout this speech there is a constant weighing of 'them' and 'us' – what Hodoshe (and the authorities) say and do is contrasted with what John and Winston (and the others like them) believe and do. John reinforces this idea of 'us' and 'them' by calling Winston "brother", thereby uniting the two of them against the authorities. The connotations of the struggle associated with the term 'brother' also serve to unite John and Winston with all those who seek to change the system.

Winston does not immediately succumb to John's persuasion. He thinks that playing a character, especially a woman, will emasculate him and "[l]ike Sizwe he has to be convinced ... that the theatre is a make-believe" (Ibitokun 110). He has to be convinced that he can play a part and through his choice of language, which words he uses, he can not only survive the system, but challenge it too.

When the two men stage *Antigone* for the warders and the other prisoners, our attention is drawn to the fact of its being a theatrical performance and not 'real life'. The stage directions at the beginning of Scene Four read as follows:

*The two men convert their cell-area into a stage for the prison concert. Their blankets are hung to provide a makeshift backdrop behind which Winston disappears with their props. John comes forward and addresses the audience. He is not yet in his Creon costume (223).*

It is obvious that the men are creating a stage and a stage world. The audience that John addresses is "Captain Prinsloo, Hodoshe, Warders, ... and Gentlemen!" (223). The artificiality of it draws our attention to the possibilities that theatre and dramatic dialogue offer as a vehicle for presenting an alternative way of life, for challenging the status quo and offering the chance of revealing the truth of a situation. As John Kani told Peter Rosenwald, "Athol taught us that we need our art, not propaganda. We tell a story in the simplest form and then add art to the telling of it. Athol always reminds us that the story is enough and the message will take care of itself. The truth is bigger than ourselves and we should tell it as simply as possible." (quoted in Gray: *File on Fugard* 50).

The dialogue in *Antigone* is used to produce an allegorical commentary on the law and law-making. We can easily see Creon's defence of the maintenance of law as mirroring the defence that the apartheid government put forward to justify its laws. Creon claims that the law defends the ordinary people and that, as it is their defence, it has to be protected from any challenges or threats. We are then presented with the character who has challenged the law and who, Creon says, must be summarily dealt with as a threat to the state. This is the stage at which *Antigone's* words 'hit' us with the truths they speak.

We are not simply affected by the referential value of the words in this play-within-a-play; we are intended to interpret them as a commentary on our own world as well. Therefore when Winston, as *Antigone*, says: "Even as there are laws made by men, so too there are others that come from God" we apply this idea to apartheid-ruled South Africa; that laws are not right merely because men have written them in statute books. Winston goes on to make the connection even more explicit: "If I had let my mother's

son, a Son of the Land, lie there as food for the carrion fly, Hodoshe, my soul would never have known peace.” Here we recognise the English version, “Son of the Land”, of the Xhosa rallying cry, “*Nyana we Sizwe*”, used earlier in the play as verbal confirmation of their resistance to the inhumanity of their treatment on the beach. The connection between the carrion fly (Hodoshe) and the warder, Hodoshe, is obvious. Just as Antigone cannot leave her brother as food for the carrion fly, so too Winston affirms that they cannot leave their brothers as ‘food’ for Hodoshe. They will stand together and support one another. He has used language in his speech as a form of action, to confront and challenge the system. The question he asks Creon: “Do you understand anything of what I am saying?” (226) is directed just as much at the real audience as it is at the character (Creon) and the play audience of warders and prisoners.

The fact that Antigone’s stand makes no difference to Creon or to her sentence of “living death”, once more comments on the situation within the ‘outer’ play and also on that in the world outside the stage. The final speech that Winston delivers shows no signs of “patient endurance”; it is fiercely contestatory and Winston delivers it as himself, not as Antigone.

WINSTON: [to the audience]. Brothers and sisters of the Land! I go now on my last journey. I must leave the light of day forever, for the Island, strange and cold, to be lost between life and death. So, to my grave, my everlasting prison, condemned alive to solitary death,

[*Tearing off his wig and confronting the audience as Winston, not Antigone.*]

Gods of our Fathers! My Land! My Home!

Time waits no longer! I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs (227).

The play demonstrates the power of theatre – and its limitations. It deliberately draws attention to the tools that are used in performance, amongst which dramatic dialogue is of great importance. The fact that John and Winston have the same names in the play and in real life “does not [however] bridge the gap between art and reality” (Ibitokun 111). Winston, the *character* playing Antigone in the play-within-the-play, demonstrates his awareness of this fact when he strips himself of his mask and restores his *play* self. With this gesture he “turns art into life, the proscenium into a

podium from which he raves directly and uninhibitedly at the prison authorities who comprise the audience” (111). One must, however, remember that this action is carried out within the ambit of his play persona and not his ‘real life’ self. Thus the Brechtian role of “establishing a mediating communication system that exposes the fictionality of the play and subjects it to a critical and distanced commentary” (Pfister 80) is fulfilled by the characters, thereby forcing the audience to re-assess the world they thought they knew with newly critical eyes.

If we open our ears and our minds, we can hear the formerly ‘voiceless’ telling “the truth of their life as they feel it” (quoted in Gray *File on Fugard* n.p.). For white South African audiences in the 70s these plays showed them how erroneous their perceptions of black South Africans were and brought out into the open issues that most were too afraid or too indoctrinated to have thought about. Therefore in the 70s the referential function of the language was of prime importance. Audiences were very aware of *what* was said. Today, however, we need to become more aware of *how* the dialogue operates. Once we notice the many ways in which language functions, resonating through the subtext of both *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, we can appreciate the ideas this communicates.

## CONCLUSION

The way in which Fugard uses words reveals that the language in his dramatic dialogue functions in many ways. If one takes cognisance of only the referential meaning of an utterance one limits one's appreciation and understanding of the diversity and subtlety contained within the dialogue.

Fugard uses selected words and word order to represent a South African way of speaking and, by implication, a South African way of life. In his plays Fugard uses language to reflect the multiplicity of linguistic and social codes and traditions in South Africa and to create, on stage, a world that is recognisable to South Africans. Through the surface of regional realism, the audience is drawn into this stage-world and accepts it as 'real'. Certain assumptions accompany our acceptance of the stage-world. Fugard's plays then lead us on to a re-evaluation of our assumptions concerning it.

It is through a close scrutiny of the different ways in which language functions that one can understand and evaluate what is happening in the subtext. Not surprisingly, a study of the dialogue reveals the power dynamics that exist in the relationships and lie beneath the surface of the words. If one were to approach this material within the framework of Postcolonial Theory many additional dimensions of the political relationships would emerge. Fugard does not sledgehammer us into seeing the political implications of his dialogue, he allows us to draw our own inferences from the personal to the national. This thesis has sought to concentrate on the interrelational aspect of dialogue on a personal level.

As characters negotiate their way through their relationships with others they reveal themselves to us. We realise, for instance, that Lena grows in self-confidence as she verbalises her view of her world. We realise too that this kind of abstract use of language is beyond Boesman because he has abandoned words as the means of negotiating his position in his world. His denial of Lena's attempts to understand her world through verbalisation constitutes a greater abuse of Lena than any physical beating he has given her because through it he is undermining her mind and soul and not simply her body. These kinds of conclusions are integral to a more complete understanding of the play, but they are implicit in the text and we will only uncover them by an approach that considers the many ways in which language functions in dramatic dialogue. We need to remember that the 'tip of the iceberg' conceals a vast area below it, which we can begin to access only once we are aware of its existence.

Fugard explores the dynamics of empowerment through language. In *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island* his characters not only use language to negotiate their way through stage relationships but also reveal to the audience the potential for empowerment through the conscious manipulation and control of language. As Ibitokun has pointed out, language can be used as a mask to hide, and thereby preserve, one's true identity when one is subjected to a system that seeks to equate one with the sub-human. The conscious choice of a speaker's utterances and his intention while making them can work as a means to resist a form of othering that is imposed on him and thereby to subvert the status quo.

In this thesis I have sought to make the point that the dramatic dialogue functions in many different ways and that through an awareness of these functions one can appreciate the numerous ways in which the language 'works'. Through a close study of how the words are said one can offer ideas on why a particular character says a specific utterance to another character at a specific time. In this way we will not only observe the results of a specific use of language but we will also be able to offer an explanation of how this result has been achieved.

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