

## **SELF-EXILE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY: ATHOL FUGARD'S PSYCHOTHERAPIST SOLUTION TO HIS CHARACTERS IN HIS FILM PLAYS *THE GUEST, THE OCCUPATION AND MARIGOLDS IN AUGUST***

Otieno Tobias Odongo

*Department of Literature, Theatre and Film Studies, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya. E-mail: tobiasotieno@yahoo.com*

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### **Abstract**

*The South African playwright Athol Fugard has crafted more than twenty five plays based on Apartheid South Africa, each of them prescribing a different solution to this malady known as Apartheid for both his non-white and white characters. The three film plays selected for this paper explore the period when the playwright seemed to suggest that self-exile could effectively work against apartheid policies, so his characters withdraw from the community and into themselves as a way of escaping the harsh conditions they find themselves in. The study adopts psycho-analytic theory as propounded by Sigmund Freud and enhanced by Carl Gustav Jung to explore the psychological conditions of the characters as they react to their physical environments.*

**Key Words:** Apartheid, Racism, exile, Gender, Id, Dreams, Religion

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### **Introduction**

Contrary to most critical perception such as those of (Raymer, 1976; Gray, 1982, Walder, 1984; Vandenbroucke, 1986), who all argue that Fugard's main characters either belong to the white world or the black one, this study argues that they belong to neither, and are all neurotics belonging to the playwright's own private world. It is an apartheid world where race has become the only motivating factor, and it manifests itself in the form of guilt, a guilt that forces the playwright not to identify with his own white society, but to find solace in the non-white one. However, due to the permanent dichotomy in apartheid South Africa, the playwright cannot be fully accepted in the desired camp, hence he remains floating in a void. It is this very void that Fugard projects in creating his characters – like him – they too reject their society and are in turn rejected by the opposite society, resulting into their neurosis. Because the Apartheid system has totally dichotomized this society, characters who are uncomfortable in their races either because of its gross injustice to the other race or due to the dehumanizing indignity associated with it find it impossible to cross over and join the other race they would wish to belong to. This leaves them in a *void*, as outsiders belonging to no society, therefore the exhibition of neurotic tendencies. Hence the conflict

within characters and between characters is caused both by psychosis as the society overwhelms them and later by narcissism as they are shut off by, and they too shut off, society. The three plays selected here are unique because almost all the major characters are white, and the first one, *The Guest*, is a biographical portrayal of a character who lived long before the advent of Apartheid in South Africa.

### **Exile and Isolation**

The film play *The Guest*, a biography of Eugene Marais, set in 1926 long before the advent of official apartheid policies, is of great interest here because of its difference especially since it strictly follows the rules of the genre by being extensively factual. One central aspect though, intrigues Fugard deeply enough to persuade him to take up this mission of Eugene Marais: His pain. While introducing the text Fugard writes: “Transmuting the undoubted promise that he had shown as a young man into a life of great pain and loneliness, producing a dark vision which he explored in his poetry and other writings” (p.59). This loneliness and pain is the one characteristic that Marais shares with the other typical Fugardian characters, otherwise he remains largely unique, suffering his own psychosis resulting from morphine addiction, unable to fit into society because of this, but basically not because of apartheid.

Because of the date of the setting apartheid is totally absent in this play: Stuurie the ‘farmboy’ and Lilly the ‘housegirl’ the only non-whites in the text, are not in any way deliberately discriminated against, nor are they uncomfortable with their positions. In fact, Stuurie doesn’t even work in the farm in the course of the play, and much of what he does is collect for Marais the much needed drugs to and from town; and Oom Doors and his two sons Doorsie and Louis love farm work even more. As for Lilly, Tant Corrie (Oom Doors’ wife) personally prepares and serves more meals than her, neither do we see her constantly take care of the family’s nine year old last born, Little Corrie; she’s fairly free and happy. It is a refreshing South Africa we see here, and it is quite informative of the cause of the radical change we see after the ascension of the National Party to political power.

It is quite true that Marais is exiled and lonely, isolated as he is in a remote farm in Steenkampskraal, among total strangers, and virtually imprisoned in a room for months; but it is only because he is sick and they are all trying to make him recover – there is no hidden hand of apartheid operating in the background. Dr. Andries Visser and all the other characters are at home in their various roles in this quiet Veld, and apart from the usual family tensions, especially the ones caused by the arrival of the strange ‘guest’, there is peace and harmony. Nobody has an identity problem because apartheid has not yet compartmentalized them into various racial cocoons, and therefore the void does not exist for any of them: which goes a long way in confirming our argument that in all the plays set after the onset of apartheid – apartheid is the main problem.

Marais has his idiosyncrasies, but he is not afflicted with the fundamental problems of the other *apartheid* characters. In spite of his drug addiction, he is unquestionably a man, and is able to have normal relations first with his wife and later with Brenda, and it is notable that no other character has an emasculation problem. He is an atheist, but this is because of deep rooted personal studies and family problems. He confesses that when he asked his dying mother what she could see her response was firm: "Nothing. There is nothing" (p. 118). The rest of the characters are deeply religious, and we are always sure the Oom Doors' family will always pray before any meal, before going to bed, setting out for the farm or even for hunting expeditions - there is always time for saying Grace. Marais has a lot of psychic energy, which he puts to good use wherever he is under the influence of morphine (this is also when his lengthy, sometimes coherent, sometimes incoherent dreams come about), and his ego is not crashed, though a large measure of embarrassment assails him because of his self inflicted miserable and shameful condition (p. 69).

*The Occupation* is one of the very few of Fugard's plays which has an all white cast: one Afrikaner, three Britons, all of whom can be mistaken for being non-white because of their homelessness. That this apartheid negatively affects both whites and non-whites could not have been demonstrated better than Fugard does in this play, where he effectively debunks the myth that all whites in apartheid South Africa are a privileged lot. This position has been underscored by among others, to quote a few, Perseus Adams and Ampie Coetzee. Adams says: "I believe the position of the resident White South African artist (including writers) is morally indefensible. They live in a concentration camp – not with the victims but with the guards. They share the guards' food, their privileges, their comfortable lifestyle", while Coetzee wonders: "Is it possible for the white Afrikaner writer, the member of the privileged ruling class, to write significant revolutionary literature about the struggle of a suppressed people, the black people, whom he doesn't really know?" (Both quoted in Colleran, 1988, pp1-2).

Both scholars see white South Africa as a homogenous group, but Fugard grades them in such a way that he has a white class which is at par with the non-whites. They do have the privileges of course, but circumstances have forced them not to partake of them like the four homeless characters, or they have deliberately chosen not to, like the playwright. Once this happens it is easier for the playwright to relate to the 'prisoners' than to the 'guards' in the 'concentration camp', so that his position now becomes morally defensible; and to answer Coetzee – yes ... it can be done, from the position of the 'sympathetic outsider'. Perhaps such an 'outsider' sees things in a more subtle way, in shades of grey instead of black and white, which can sometimes be more effective than were an insider to talk.

Cappie and Serge are ex-soldiers (of the Orange Brigade) destroyed by the war, while Koosie and Barend never went to that war, and seem to have been done in by the merciless apartheid system which demands that you conform or you be swept away. All the four have been isolated by fellow whites because of their dire economic circumstances, and have

chosen self-exile in order to survive, but Barend goes further and distances himself from the other three by refusing to obey group rules and to follow the chain of command. From the way they move and talk they are always at the fringe of society, seeking out abandoned (sometimes hospitable and sometimes not) homesteads for temporary shelter, and foraging for food and water from whatever sources they can muster.

We have seen the description of other white residences, and though four whites live here, the state of the house is the kind non-whites live in: “An old house ... the weed-choked path of a neglected garden – mood of dereliction and decay ... doorknob missing, the paint cracked and peeling ... (p. 17). The state of the characters themselves is also telling: “... unshaven, unwashed, with down at the heel shoes ... shapeless trousers and the same for whatever else they wear – sports coat, lumber jacket or even just a pull-over (p. 19). Barend, the outcast of the group, has broad shoulders, coarse, calloused, empty hands (of a labourer?) and an unloveable face (p. 30). Furthermore, they all go about subserviently selling shoe laces which no one really wants: some buy out of embarrassment, some chase them away.

So they are acutely aware that they are unwanted by their fellow whites, and Cappie says as much: “They hate us. Even dead they hate us. It wasn’t that nigger. It’s not his house. It’s them ... witmense like us” (p. 56).

In their re-enacted confrontation with the white lady, Serge says: “Thank you, Ma’am” (p.38), which is actually the black man’s language towards the white boss, and Cappie says of Barend: “Watch him, lady. A bad eff. Keep your little girl away from him and lock the door tonight” (p.39). This is the kind of thing you say of a black or white man in apartheid South Africa, not of an Afrikaner, who is supposed to be above reproach. So basically there’s nothing, either in their looks or mannerisms or environment, to support the notion that these four are white. A final affirmation of the complete reversal of roles occurs when they see a black man walking towards them:

Koosie: A native. He’s carrying a knobkerrie.  
 Cappie: At the back?  
 Koosie: No Captain. There. The front ...  
*(All four to the shutters. They look out. When they speak again it is in whispers)*  
 Cappie: Watchman.  
 Koosie: What must we do, Captain ...  
 Barend: Maybe he won’t come in. *(Pause)*  
 Serge: *(Rising note of panic; backing away from the double door)* No! No!! No!  
 He’s coming!! (pp. 32-33).

This implies that if the black is economically empowered and the white is not, then power in all its manifestations would be wielded by the former, and it has absolutely nothing to do

with skin colour. In the final analysis then apartheid was never about skin colour, but about the annexation and exploitation of natural resources.

Because of the damaging effects of apartheid, Koosie “lives in a schizophrenic world, constantly straining to reconcile illusion and reality”, while Serge is characterized by “hypertension” and Cappie “...is fascinated by the transience of all reality” (p.20). In the isolated situation in which they find themselves their only recourse is to seek consolation in one another, but since Barend rebels from this neat script, Cappie tells him: “I get the feeling you’re lonely” (p.32). When Barend responds that he does not really care, and would simply like to be left alone, Cappie is left with no option but to exile him from the group: “You’re not one of us ... we’re finished with you here. D’you hear. You’re out. Tomorrow you’ll crawl around like a lost dog. We don’t want you” (p.47). Although he does not verbalize it, Barend does not need them either; he was never comfortable in that group, and as he sleeps alone in his own room on a bed and mattress with candles to spare, whereas the other three run out of candles and share the hard floor, we are fully aware that his self-exile is complete.

*Marigolds in August* (Fugard, 1982) continues this theme of exile and isolation, but this time we return to two black characters, Daan and Melton, and a coloured one, Paulus Olifant. In his introductory comments the playwright characterizes Daan as one who “has resigned himself finally to the little he has, and all he wants is to be left alone to ponder a few basic questions which life, his experience of it, has led him to ask” (p.5). Fugard is writing this from the position of the dissenting writer, one who has decided he must survive through this and avoid the polarization which Colleran (1988) writes about: “... the dissenting white writer was an outcast on both sides of the struggle: to those who wished to preserve apartheid, he seemed a traitor; to those who wished to dismantle it, he seemed an accomplice”

Daan has self-exiled himself in the far flung township of Skoenmaskop, where he works without a valid passbook, and though he is in his late forties, he has never married, and has no true friend except Paulus, who comes round for a few days once in a year in August. Melton also lives as a squatter in the bush in the ironically named Lovemore Park with his wife and two children, but as the play opens he’s burying the younger child who has just starved to death, and the playwright’s comment is that at this time Melton “has fallen into desperate and intolerable circumstances in life” (p.5). Only Paulus does not feel exiled or isolated, he is “... totally at peace with himself and the world in which he has chosen to live” (p.6), and when the white man puts up a notice that snakes can no longer be collected from the forest because it is now a protected habitat, he defies it and quietly continues with his trade (p.52).

Exiled and isolated by the Apartheid system, Daan has become paranoid, and after spending several stints in jail he now trusts no one – especially anyone that he sees as constituting a threat to his job security. Since Melton falls into this category, he immediately becomes

Daan's chief adversary, and he quickly informs Paulus that Melton "is not my friend" (p.33), and warns Melton that they could never be on friendly terms "until you're back at Lovemore Park" (p.34). As for the whites, they "pass Daan without greeting ... staring vacantly ahead" (p.8), which sharply contrasts with the way the whites in *The Guest*, especially Advocate Marais and Dr. Visser, relate with Stuurie. Daan fears and respects whites, and does not see them as the real enemy until both Paulus and Melton opens his eyes to this fact towards the end of the play and he comes up with his own superb conclusion: "You got the right ... the notice is wrong" (p.52).

Daan and Melton are like "Marigolds in August" – in the wrong place at the wrong time. In this terrain and at this time they must strive to survive through whatever leeway apartheid has granted them, even if the habitat of their first face to face encounter is described like this: "An abandoned military blockhouse ... an ugly, double storied concrete structure ... the floor is littered with human excrement, the remains of fires and empty food tins. Crude graffiti on the walls" (p.26). This kind of degradation kills all sense of human dignity, and there can be no pride, no self esteem in people who live worse than monkeys. Daan and Melton's situation contrast with Paulus "walking through the bush. The effortless stride and ease of a man totally at home with his environment (p.29). Paulus can afford to walk thus, his head held high, because he does not work for the white man, and we recall the pride and dignity of Styles upon opening his own studio in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*.

### **Un-gendering, Sex and Psychic Energy**

*The Occupation* has four white men who don't tell any stories of their past escapades with women; they recall the war, they recall working in the farm and keeping poultry, but the subject of the opposite gender is unconsciously out of bounds. The only women mentioned are bossy, suspicious ladies they encounter when they are selling their shoelaces. But the hoboes have an idea of the defining quality of a man: bravery and courage, both of which they don't have, going by their reaction to the appearance of the black man. In announcing the imaginary death of Koosie Rossouw, Cappie says: "I can say without hesitation that he died like a man. He was wounded. Badly wounded. But he faced the end without flinching" (p.42). Perhaps they had these male defining qualities once, but it appears economic emasculation has un-gendered them, and just like the case of the blacks, one cannot be a 'man' without independent abilities of self-sustenance.

In *Marigolds in August*, Daan inadvertently recognizes his impotence when he is eagerly looking forward to the arrival of his friend Paulus: "It's getting to his time. July, August ... Paulus comes. Yo! That's a man" (p.17). Working for whites in their farms has reduced Daan to a useless "Yes Miesies" (p.12) slave, and he is very much ashamed of it, only that he does not see what he can do about 'the inevitable'. Melton behaves in exactly the same way: "Melton is trying timidly to attract attention. Miesies ... miesies ... (No response) Miesies!" (p.18). The white ladies Melton is trying to attract their attention totally refuse to recognize him, just like the jogging man and his driving wife refuse to acknowledge they

have met a fellow human being when they come by Daan on the road, and it is all because of the rules and regulations created by apartheid.

The three Abakwetha (freshly circumcised boys) seem to exist in this play to strongly reinforce the idea of a yet to be attained manhood: indeed, the play ends before they mature into the manhood for which they aspire. Daan chases them away so that they don't talk to Alice: "They're not men yet, they can't talk to girls" (p.10). Daan misses the irony that he is a farm 'boy' and will remain so till death relieves him from slaving for the white man in his gardens and farms. It is important to note that it is only apartheid that does not recognize the manhood of these men; culturally they are fully initiated, and Melton watches the Abakwetha round their bonfire singing, roasting and eating ... "He is cold, hungry and lonely but custom prevents him from joining their circle ... they are not yet men" (p.24). Before apartheid, qualification into manhood was quite simple: one reached a certain age, went to the forest, was initiated and came out a man. Now the rules have changed, and that initiation process has been rendered null and void, and the men, still stuck in their traditions, wonder what else they could do to be appreciated as 'men'.

Twice (p. 30 and p.45) Melton argues with Daan on the issue of his manhood, the same argument that we see between Sizwe and Buntu in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1974):

Daan:           He's a man.  
 Melton:        So am I. I've also been to the bush.  
 Daan:           Shit on the bush.  
 Melton:        And I've got a wife.  
 Daan:           I don't want to hear. (p.30)

Evidently in this context Daan is more informed than Melton, and he understands that apartheid has closed all doors which might lead to the attainment of manhood for the black man, leaving only what the Americans famously refer to as the positions of 'the field nigger' (for the men) and 'the house nigger' (for the women like Alice). Paulus had managed to see one loophole in this tight system and rushed to exploit it. That of collecting poisonous snakes from the forest and selling them to snake parks. Yet as the play ends, hawk eyed apartheid has noticed this opening and hastened to block it by declaring the entire forest a "Nature Reserve", meaning they are likely to arrest you next time you try to sell to them snakes. Paulus laments: "They're protecting everything ... flowers, buck, fish, alikruikel" (p.51); so that every non white can be effectively prevented from attaining manhood.

Being a man fully preoccupies the three characters until the end of the play. From Melton's wife ordering him to "find work, you're a man" (P.15) to Daan advising his friend Paulus: "Don't be too friendly Paulus (to the Abakwetha). They must still learn to be men."

Paulus: To be a man! It's abig word hey Daan.  
 Daan: Ja. It's a big word Paulus.

Apparently, the word is so big for Daan whose "sense of impotence is more than he can endure" (p.46). But Paulus, the only 'man' among the three, enhances the meaning of manhood as the play comes to an end. He believes there is another way for the black man to attain manhood: by attaining inner good, by recognizing a comrade in suffering, by helping alleviate such suffering and humiliation – only then can one claim to be a man. We recall Queeny's declaration in *Nongongo (1983)* that "there was no man here" when we witness Paulus invite the Abakwetha to have no fear and join them in the fire: "Come! Come to the fire. Don't worry. There are no men here. Only white men's boys. Come and join us. Real men help each other. Real men don't laugh when somebody else is in trouble" (p.48). Hopefully, by showing Daan how to help Melton, and by showing Melton how not to laugh at Daan, he has succeeded in turning the two into real 'men'.

### **Id, Super-Ego and Ego**

In *The Occupation*, the two ex-soldiers live in the past, in the battlefield where they fought heroic wars, where they once had pride, as they try to forget their present miserable circumstances where they have no home, where they beg and loiter around scavenging for food and going without it once in a while. Barend attempts to salvage his ego by defiantly declaring "I don't run from a kaffir" (p.36), but Cappie immediately challenges this assertion: "But you did, Barend! We were running. All of us. Serge had a dose of the jitters. Me too. Koosie. And you" (p.36). It is an assertion Barend cannot challenge, so all of them have no egos left to boast of. They had gone to war to protect "Justice, dignity, freedom" (p.43), or so they were told by the politicians, the same ones who summarily dismissed them at the end of the war and left them in the merciless hands of injustice, indignity and enslavement. Cappie fittingly summarizes it thus: "What?" I asked. "What must go home? Are you blind? We're also ruins. The guns have left our hearts in ruins" (p.43).

In *Marigolds in August*, only Paulus is at peace with his ego: Both Daan and Melton have crushed egos – the latter by shame, the former by paranoia. Melton buries his child who has died of hunger in the most pathetic way possible: He has to take away even the old torn blanket and replace it with a sack, and then shove in soil without uttering a single word of prayer. In this kind of situation, it is impossible to have a sense of pride: in what? Daan feels good saving tortoises from being crushed by the white man's vehicles and feeding hungry monkeys on his last morsel in public parks, but he has neither time nor similar sentiments for a fellow black man in distress, because he feels this man threatens his space. His philosophy of survival under apartheid has hardened into be good only to whites and to female workers who cannot take over your job, but be ruthless to any pretenders to your throne.



Evidently the playwright disapproves of such a philosophy, and Paulus is tasked with educating Daan on ways of boosting his ego and self-esteem by helping fellow blacks; apartheid can be tackled by solidarity among non-whites. Arguably an important first step, one that we see Fugard improve on in later plays (From *My Children! My Africa!* [1990] onwards.) Paulus is the embodiment of this philosophy, and in his limited way he listens, sympathizes and helps. There was a time he too was not as smart as he is now, when he had tried to join the system and weld himself to it; but not anymore. When Daan reminds him that with his light colour he could easily pass for white, he confirms he has been through that stage.

Daan:        You could be a white man, Paulus.  
 Paulus:      I know, I've tried.  
 Daan:        And?  
 Paulus:      It didn't work.

His attempts at assimilating himself into the system had failed, and his experiences has led him to conclude that the best way is to cope with it in his own terms; this is the psychotherapy the playwright is able to prescribe, for the time being.

### **Dreams, Myths and Religion**

Because of the deep poverty in which they live, the hoboos in *The Occupation* can only dream of wealth, and Cappie sums it up by informing Serge: "Wealth doesn't stink, Sergeant. It has a fine cultured aroma. Good cigars and scented bath-water" (p.21). And in such fine rooms men dream (of) "the generations to come ... of 'the future'" (p.24). Of the four only Barend, with his rebellious and independent attitude, dreams; the others appear set to forever remain a homeless and wandering lot. For this reason Cappie hates Barend with a passion, and swears to take it upon himself to destroy this dream. "You dream, don't you Barend? ... What do you dream about? ... I'll find that dream, Barend ... and then I'll piss on it" (p.45). Unfortunately, it does not take long for Cappie to discover what Barend's dream is all about, since he does not try to deny it.

Cappie:      So that's it.  
 Barend:      Get out!  
 Cappie:      Home.  
 Barend:      Get out!  
 Cappie:      Your dream is home.

As Cappie promised, he has to 'piss' on this dream. It is no longer tenable for Barend to be part of the group, and as the play ends it is clear the group will be setting off for their next destination with one person less.

In *Marigolds in August* the characters are too concerned with basic issues of survival to even dream, but they do raise fundamental moral issues of right and wrong. When declarations of right and wrong are done by the dominant repressive ideology of apartheid, are the non-whites obligated to obey? When you have been excluded from the formulation of rules and regulations, customs and norms, what business do you have subscribing to abiding by them? The white man harvests rain in tanks and locks it so the non-whites cannot partake of it; he denies the black man permission to engage in certain jobs, he forbids him to live in certain places, limits him from going to certain areas, from eating certain foods – even from associating with certain people. The white man has filled his shelves with food which will expire un-eaten, yet in his backyard the black man is burying his emaciated children who are dying of starvation: Even “God and his Angels” (p.16) cannot tolerate this kind of injustice. With great insight Paulus concludes: “Right and wrong? What does that mean! Bible stories Daan. For children. White children. What’s right about an empty stomach?” (p. 41).

### Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that Fugard’s main characters are extensions of himself struggling with the monstrous Apartheid system, actively seeking for loopholes, for ways to outwit it, and thus point the right direction to both the whites and non-whites, on how to successfully live in the system through avoidance of the entire community – that is – in total self-exile. This is a different position from his earlier plays, when he still thought integration between whites and blacks was viable, to much later plays where he advocates for assimilation, before declaring this unworkable too and embracing narcissism – the inevitable tragic consequences of the evil system that is Apartheid.

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