## *NONGOGO*

Athol Fugard has written that the time he worked as a clerk at the Fordsburg Native Commissioner's Court effected a change in his relationship to his country – and – was definitive in its influence on the writing of *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*. It was one of the most important – and traumatic – experiences of his life. `Having to rubber-stamp a black man's status to that of criminal or alien in his own country' (Fugard quoted in Seidenspinner 1986:122) was a `revelation' to him: I knew that the system was evil, but until then I had no idea of just how systematically evil it was' (1986:121). In an interview, `Afrikaner Humanist', published in *The Observer* of 18 July 1971, he reported that this episode was the `ugliest thing I've ever been part of. I think my basic pessimism was born there, watching that procession of faces and being unable to relate to them' (quoted in Vivier 1983:63-4). The experience left him `... angry. Very angry ... (and) with a such a sense of the need to say certain things, and to say them unequivocally' (Fugard quoted in Vivier 1983:67).

Fugard expresses these things in *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*, his first full-length plays. Together with *Tsotsi*, his only novel, these two works form part of the so-called Township trilogy.

The trilogy gives a taste of life in an African township as it deals with the daily experiences of those who inhabit the multiracial Johannesburg ghetto of Sophiatown. This is an exciting world full of energy and talent, but also of crime and violence. Black gangsters, victims themselves of the South African system of government, victimise other blacks in turn (Post 1985:7). The population of Sophiatown is not only the quarry of the gangsters, but also that of the corrupt `forces of "law and order", who enforce the apartheid system' (Mshengu 1982:172). `The key to life in the townships ... is *survival*' (Walder 1984:24). This is a theme that pervades Fugard's oeuvre.

In the trilogy Athol Fugard tried to tap the resources of black experience and create a specific and indigenous African drama. *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo* then were specifically written for black acquaintances in a workshop setting, called the African Theatre Workshop. Except for a white priest who makes a brief appearance in *No-Good Friday*, the characters are all African.

The production of these plays `quite transformed the nature of the "erudite" theatre of the black intermediate classes' (Mshengu 1982:175). First, the dramas are South African rather than European. More particularly, they draw attention to the dilemmas of `black people in the urban as opposed to the traditional or pre-colonial milieu' (1982:175).

Both *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo* were written during the author's period of social realism in the late 1950's. The works of this formative period treat social issues (Vivier 1983:25) - but in a broad, panoramic manner (Gray 1982:18). They focus on the enervating force of the black situation in South Africa, but they do not do so directly as an agitprop would. Fugard himself sees them as characterised by imitation and derivation (1982:122).

*Nongogo*, reflecting life in the black townships, seems as much in the naturalistic mode as *No-Good Friday* (Walder 1984:47). Fugard called it the `tough neorealism' of the American school (quoted in Walder 1984:47).

The neorealistic touches which are behind the shaping of the two plays disclose Fugard's enthusiasm at having encountered the works of William Faulkner (Fugard 1982:122). Like Faulkner, Fugard admits to his identity (Seidenspinner 1986:222) and uses details of a specific time and place and the experience of the characters in that place to explore general conflicts.

Faulkner's is not the only influence in this derivative early work. Russel Vandenbroucke (1986:39, 63), (to whom I am indebted for much of the information

that follows), notes that there are also traces of Albert Camus's, Eugene O'Neill's and Samuel Beckett's styles in his oeuvre. Barrie Hough, again, hypothesises in his unpublished M.A. dissertation (1979) that *Nongogo* is Fugard's tribute to Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (in Seidenspinner 1986:222).

Fugard, like Camus, reflects on the poverty among people who are often nameless and destitute and the psychological barriers and conflicts which form part of their close relationships. Both examine humans' search for consciousness and intelligibility amid devastating conditions (Raymer 1976:233). The origin of these devastating conditions is the absence of traditional certainties, such as religion, which can supply meaning and hope in the prospect of a vast, indifferent emptiness. The only meaning lies in the search itself. The pessimistic mood of Fugard's plays in general is reminiscent of Eugene O'Neill's work (Munro 1982:19).

To portray the misery and absurdity of human sensibility, Fugard, like Beckett, makes use of minimal staging and modest casts. In the play the `wasteland' is evoked by the broken glasses and vomit of Queeny's customers and the `"smell of filth" that lingers on in Johnny's memories' after his sodomisation in the mines (Seidenspinner 1986:237). In this way Fugard, like Beckett, depicts the disoriented, alienated and absurd circumstances in which humans find themselves. All are victims, the heroic as well as the not-so-heroic. It is possible to claim that the South African playwright's pessimism is so extreme that he, at times, accedes to Beckett's notion that absurdity is an exigency of life itself and not an obstacle that can be overcome. Apartheid itself becomes part of the absurd human condition (McLuckie 1993:428).

A Beckettian motif which features in *Nongogo* is the `nexus motif' (Huber 1989:51). This motif pertains to the bond between two characters which is, on the one hand, essential - even vital - and, on the other hand, inhibiting and intimidating. A second motif is that of time (1989:51). Characters are `victims and prisoners' of their past

lives (Brinkley 1988:359)[1] by which their existential sense is distorted. The third motif is role play or game-playing.

*Nongogo* was rehearsed at Jan Hofmeyr, a school for social workers next to the Bantu Men's Social Centre, where the play then also opened on 8 June 1959. Thandi Kumalo was Queeny and Sol Rachilo, Johnny. Fugard directed. From 15 to 27 June the play had a run in Darragh Hall of Johannesburg's Anglican cathedral. *Nongogo* was again produced in Transvaal in 1970. It was first performed outside South Africa on 27 November 1974, in the Crucible Studio as part of the Sheffield Fugard season. Peter James directed the staging. The drama was revived in Cape Town in 1978-79, and again on 12 November 1981, at The Laager, the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. This time the director was Lucille Gillwald. For information on the critical reception of the work, consult pages 210 and 211 of Appendix A.

*Nongogo* is `neo-classical in spanning little more than a day and being confined to a single room' (Vandenbroucke 1986:38). Twenty-four hours after Queeny, a shebeen queen and retired *nongogo*,[2] meets the door-to-door salesman, Johnny, and shares his aspirations of starting a decorating business, their dreams evaporate. Johnny succeeds in temporarily distracting Queeny from her ennui, but after he is told that she was a 25c prostitute when she was younger - and poorer - he leaves. Both he and Queeny resign themselves to the impossibility of ridding themselves of the weight of the past and of turning their lives around.

Not only does this early Fugard play focus on the influence of the past, but it also provides evidence of what would become enduring preoccupation with existential questions. These include the fear of time passing and of death, the assumption of

[1] As Queeny remarks: `I haven't learnt how to laugh it off and call it the good old days, or how to forget it' (69).

[2] *Nongogo* is township slang for a woman for two-and-six; in other words, a prostitute `soliciting among lines of gold-mine workers queuing for their pay' (Fugard 1993:235).

accountability for one's actions, and the quest for identity, love and meaning.

The stage directions to Act One immediately evoke a sense of meaninglessness.

> *The furniture is expensive ... but nevertheless there is a suggestion of slovenliness about the room.... She (Queeny) is a personification of the room: the very best but neglected.* (57)

The shebeen queen supplies the reason for her indifference towards her person herself: `I spend the whole day painting my nails, only now it's not so nice any more 'cause my hands are getting fat ... Fat and a little money. But what else? (66)[3] She also furnishes the reply to this last question concerning life's significance and her destiny: `Nothing' (66). She has gained little, no *raison d'être,* and one may assume that the shebeen queen would be glad to have her existence reshaped.

Yalom (1980:57, 197) takes distress about the visible effects of ageing as a sign of death anxiety. The play tells us that Queeny's mother passed away when her daughter was still young. Nothing now stands between the latter's empty existence and the grave. Yalom (1980:208) writes that if one has not fully lived, one fights shy of facing the prospect of non-being - and this sheds light on Queeny's present discontent.

In the face of mortality and meaninglessness Queeny appears to have found security in her physical appearance and her possessions. Her secret to staying alive has been to keep wanting things (93). She has been preoccupied with the demands of the present, the everyday world of things; this is proclaimed by her expensive furniture which jars with the township setting. Yet, when she acquired all that she aspired after, `that was the end' (94). Together with beauty and money, sex could

[3] Grimsley (1967:45) states that calling itself into question is a fundamental quality of a *Dasein* striving to make sense of itself.

have been another of the shebeen queen's defences against the vision of final dissolution and the abyss of nothingness or groundlessness, through the illusion of youth and vivacity it begets.

These forms of refuge are vulnerable to external circumstances and, in Queeny's case, they have dissolved over a period of time. At the outset of the play, she is disenchanted with the pursuit of material objects and despairs at the vanity of her existence.

Victor Frankl (in Yalom 1980:449) distinguishes between two stages of what he calls meaninglessness syndrome. The first stage is existential vacuum or frustration, a phase which is characterised by boredom, spiritlessness, lack of direction, questioning the point of one's activities and cynicism. Before Johnny's arrival, Queeny `just rolled over and died' (93). She could not distinguish the days from one another: `Giving it a name didn't make it any different from the rest' (94). She existed, as it were, in *medias res*. And this was like being in hell (69).

Whether Fugard consciously intended this or not, the character also seems to exhibit signs of the second phase of the meaninglessness syndrome, namely existential neurosis, which, according to Yalom (1980:450), is marked by daredevilry and depression. Queeny's rationale for funding Johnny's project is that Johnny `can have every penny [she has] got' and she is `going to enjoy waking up in the morning' (97) as she will be a different person.

Meaninglessness is interwoven with leisure (Yalom 1980:447). Because Queeny has not had not much to do during the day, time, to her, has become a repetitive, shapeless, interminable void. For instance, in her opinion, the clock does not change its tune (85).[4] In the distant past, she at least had some sense of purpose. For this

[4] But the clock does change its tune. It ticks off the seconds of wasted opportunities and the time that remains to change one's existence and imbue it with meaning.

reason it is important to her that Sam, who helped establish the shebeen, should remember what it was like before. She confesses: `When I look at you I think: He's forgotten.... I almost hate you when I think that, Sam' (67).

Queeny is aggressive not only toward Sam but also toward Johnny when he first sets foot in the shebeen. The only person with whom she sympathises near the beginning of the play is the wife of a customer, a woman with whom she has no contact. Lucille Gillwald believes that the shebeen queen's life demonstrates the dilemma which besieges the contemporary black woman. Secretly yearning for the traditional family and husband, she strives for personal and financial independence in a confined and confusing environment (Ronge in Gray 1982:38).

But Queeny finds that she cannot always shy away from interpersonal alliances and be entirely self-sufficient. Later in the play she admits that `Nothing buggers you up like yourself. It's good to need someone' (109). She seems to grasp that interaction paves the way towards change, growth and the acquisition of meaning. As Karl Jaspers expounds: `in communication I am revealed to myself together with the other' (in Friedman 1964:204) and *Existenz* `comes to itself through and at the same time with another *Existenz*' (Jaspers 1957:92). Interpersonal union in a loving relationship, moreover, is a mode of coping with the susceptibility of standing out, being `groundless' and unprotected. In addition, since Queeny's physical needs are satisfied, she now yearns for belonging and love, identity and self-esteem. She attempts to acquire the latter by fusing with Johnny in an exclusive affiliation.

This transformation from independence to dependence is expedited by Queeny's desperate desire for change. She is determined to prove herself and to be someone. For her, Johnny holds out the promise of release and a new beginning. His business enterprise is the `best thing' she has ever heard of (83). She has suddenly `woken up to something that looks like it may be fun and nice and clean' (84) and therefore she attaches herself to his venture. Earlier she has lamented: `"If only it was my life lying in pieces on the floor." Just sweep them away and start all over

again' (78), and now she implores the man, whom she views as somebody `trying to do something with [his] li[f]e' (73) to give her a chance (118). He is to re-decorate her existence as he decorates rooms; he is the one to assist her in the rescue of her true self. That Queeny takes the salesman as the object of her waiting is apparent when he leaves to buy material and `*she looks blankly at the door.... She is alone. She is alone again*' (61). Johnny has become her ultimate personal dispenser of protection, purpose and meaning.[5]

The reason for Queeny's choice falling on Johnny, and not on Blackie or Sam, is that he has a cause which she can share with him; secondly, he appears to be a man of action; and, lastly, he treats her as is she were no different from other women. As he informs her: `if other women can, you can. You're the same as them' (90). With the exception of this man, `no one ever really treated [her] like a woman, took their hat off when they came in [her house], said please or thank you or said they liked [her] smile' (99).

It follows that Queeny is eager to discover her similarities to other women. (Her anger towards Patrick, a patron, could be interpreted as an indirect reflection of her aspirations towards a normal life as she identifies with the pregnant wife he has left at home.) At first there is a tentative: `I'm trying to be a woman' (112), and later she declares: `I'm a woman, Johnny. I never stopped being one, but no one's given me a chance' (118). She also owns up: `I've had men but never one who treated me like I mattered far more than just a night in bed. Because that man I'll love' (118).

Because she hopes `to hold [this] man, make him want to stay' (112), she behaves towards Johnny as if he were her husband. She makes him coffee and breakfast, although she has never `cooked for any man before' (92). She gives him a wristwatch so that he will know when it is lunch-time and come `home'. She inquires

[5] But, Yalom (1980:444) cautions, if one actively looks for meaning, it will elude one.

about the prices of sewing machines and sews rings on the curtains. Although red is her colour (red being the colour of the `scarlet woman'), she thinks of hanging yellow curtains in the shebeen. She also buys knives and forks for the kitchen.

Queeny, certainly, appears to be committed to change. She announces: `I'm going to start to live' (99). To convince Johnny she is prepared to transform her life and to exemplify her devotion to her potential self, she slams the door of the shebeen in the face of would-be customers, a deed which is decried by Sam, amongst others, but which she feels is necessary. This is because the shebeen is the only thing anyone can point at in her life (113) - as she optimistically remarks - and because she believes that it is possible to change in one day (97). She is shown to have acquired a sense of pride in herself and her home. She divulges: `I [am] sick of drunks messing up my place' (116). She has reassessed her priorities and divested money of its former significance - no longer is she engrossed in material matters. (Sam, for one, cannot fathom how Queeny can `let ten quid walk out of [her] life without a farewell tear' [84].) She is now ready to make the leap into action and commitment and to assign the actuality of the past to oblivion (`those years are past and better forgotten' [66] and `I don't want no more talk about the old days' [87]). She will seize a present[6] and a future that promise so much more. She notifies Johnny: `This is our day' (91) and `We got the future to burn up. Tomorrow and the day after ....' (110). Merleau-Ponty (in Friedman 1964:385) maintains that by taking up the present one is able to liberate oneself from one's past.[7] Anticipation of the future and living in terms of the possible, according to May, constitute the `foundation of psychological freedom' (1961:79). The reason, Grimsley (1967:46) proposes, is that the more *Dasein* advances beyond and outside itself, the more it progresses toward itself.

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[6] Martin Heidegger refers to the present as the `moment of vision' (1962:387).

[7] Fugard implies, however, that one cannot simply forget the past as it `actually has happened' (1982:121). It remains part of the being-in-itself and exercises an influence on the present (Bedford 1972:316).

In the process of becoming the `clean' (93) woman the man seeks, the fallen woman transcends her concrete situation and seems to acquire a lofty purpose for her existence. She is idealistic, dedicated to Johnny's cause, and has adopted new goals. Queeny's concerns are now less personal than before and more self-transcendent and long-term. Her aim may even be that of guiding and aiding the next generation as epitomised by Johnny.

As the shebeen owner changes, the shebeen changes accordingly. The stage directions to Act II scene i disclose that the room's appearance has also improved. There are now yellow curtains, a tablecloth and flowers on the table. The shebeen functions as a physical image of conversion, and Margaret Munro (1982:18) advances the notion that with it Queeny's chances for `rebirth' have also improved. Nevertheless, the walls of the room and their functionality `define the limits of her freedom and power' (1982:19) to revise her existence, as does the name of the play.

Although Queeny claims (in Act II scene ii) that `it's the first time I've ever felt like this about someone' (112) (implying that she loves Johnny), the sentiment she feels for him could be put down as exploitative. She is not interested in his total being, particularly not in his past existence. Even though he must apprise her of `everything that happened to [him] from the moment [he] left [that] morning' (108), her reaction when he tries to tell her of his `initiation' into the brutality of the urban slums and the perilous nights in the men's hostel (Seidenspinner 1986:237) when the `big bursting men in [the] compounds' (95) blackmailed, robbed, beat and even sexually abused `the boys, the young ones' like himself, is: `Okay, Johnny, I heard you' (95).

Thus, the affection of the female protagonist is based on the need to have somebody. Johnny has to absorb her into himself as she has absorbed the bouncer, Blackie. (And now that Johnny is there, she will get rid of Blackie `just like that. That's how he came and that's how he can go' [110].) Hence both men are reduced to objects and

perceived in terms of their utilitarian function[8]. Johnny's role - as was Blackie's - is to safeguard the female protagonist against a confrontation with the limit-situations of desolation and dissolution despair. Moreover, he offers her a different role, a new sense of self, and, above all, meaning - something Blackie could not give her.

It is possible that Fugard dramatises Queeny's inability to establish a vital connection with others as an absence of a firm sense of her own identity. This is patent from her not wanting to take responsibility for her own future but instead transferring her choices to the active and directive Johnny. She is caught up in a *cul de sac*: in order to have worthwhile relationships she must probe herself and accept authorship. Yet, taking a major decision often serves to remind one of how much one has wasted and wrecked one's own existence. This could elucidate why the shebeen owner shies away from exploring her existential being - so much so that she evades her real name, Rose. Fugard calls the ability to name something `a small act of possession' (quoted in Vandenbroucke 1986:36). The denial of one's name corresponds with a disavowal of one's true identity and dissociation with the *Dasein*. This could explain why Queeny is confused - or deliberately misinforms the salesman - about how long she has had the shebeen.

Yalom notes that `responsible action begins with the wish' (1980:302). Despite testimony to the contrary, the shebeen queen cannot really wish. When Johnny suggests that she also sell, she counters: `Not today ... I got to prepare for our celebration' (95). And in her mind the business venture will only `last as long as it's got to' (98).

Queeny is shown to have shirked responsibility since her youth. After her mother's death, she `got out' (94), though she admits that she `should have stayed and tried to help' the other children (94). Many years later she comprehends that `you can't get

[8] In the `I-Thou' relationship, in contrast, the partners stand in an interaction in which each becomes more deeply him/herself as s/he `moves more fully to respond to the other' (Friedman 1964:543).

anything for nothing in this world' (65). Nevertheless, she still repudiates authorship when she insists: `I don't suppose it's my fault, or even Sam's' (62) (that they are the way they are). When she throws Patrick's coins back at him, it is Johnny who has made her do it (78). Later it is society which is blamed for her former lifestyle: `I did it because I was hungry' (117). She also has an excuse at hand for returning to being a prostitute: `If you were trying to forget something, but others kept reminding you of it ... wouldn't work, would it?' (94).[9] Although others may limit one's freedom, it is still the shebeen queen who chooses her own damnation.

Queeny does not embrace responsibility because she is unable to accept that disappointments and failures are the products of her own actions, and not accidents. Likewise, she cannot tolerate guilt, and tries to flee from it. Sartre suggests that assuming the `situation with the proud consciousness' that one is its author and that it belongs to one since it is the `image of [the] free choice' of oneself (1958:554) can lend some meaning to an absurd universe. This, then, is the constitutive function of every individual in the world, but it is a function Queeny does not fulfil. Consequently, her existence will remain devoid of purpose and she will not realise her unique nature. The bright colours of the curtains and tablecloth which are still visible at the end of *Nongogo* (when the shebeen queen dons her scarlet dress again) act as an `ironic commentary on lost possibilities' (Munro 1982:19).

Frankl stresses that, when tragedy seems to eclipse everything, one may still find meaning in assuming a heroic stance in facing one's fate (Yalom 1980:445). Queeny is left with a sense of all-encompassing despairing futility and fatalism after Johnny has raked up her past and rekindled it with the `warmth of [his] hate, the breath of [his] disgust' (118). The salesman, certainly, is not her Godot. And she may be seen not only as Vladimir or Estragon but also as Sisyphus, carrying the weight of the world by herself without anything or anybody to lighten it, unable to escape from the

[9] Her playing the role of the innocent and powerless victim at the mercy of the `vicissitudes of a capricious world' (Yalom 1980:246) and the hell caused for her by others is made manifest by the avoidance of the first-person pronoun.

labyrinth of the past. As long as she is confined in finite being and lives in a country whose government has, to a large extent, dispossessed her race of the right to improve their situation by honourable means, she will never be able to purge herself completely of sin. In fact, she may sink still deeper. Notwithstanding this consciousness, the character displays courageous pessimism when she concludes that all is well: there `are a lot of streets I haven't walked, lamp-posts I haven't stood under, faces I haven't smiled at' (119). At the end of the play she once again `dolls herself up into the real tart' (119) and pours the champagne she has bought for Johnny and herself for Sam and Patrick. The `self' the shebeen queen, like *Hello and Goodbye*'s prostitute, discovers `reside[s] in the carnality of her worn-out body' (Seidenspinner 1986:272). Despite a lack of respect and hope she will continue to serve the flesh; she will endure (Peck 1992:71). In this way she attains, what Camus calls, the absurd victory (in Friedman 1964:250).

A reason why the shebeen queen takes so quickly to the salesman may be that there are many similarities between their characters. In fact, Johnny may be seen as a younger version of Queeny.

Like Queeny at the beginning of *Nongogo*, Johnny values his uniqueness. He informs Sam: `Name's Johnny, I come from Alex and I sell table cloths' (72). He ostensibly has a solid identity, being conscious of his `I'-ness or existential presence. He is a man with `big plans for the future ... Somebody who's got somewhere to go' (112). Thus, he seems to have a goal in life (at least in Queeny's eyes) and actively engages in the universe.

Behind `recourse to small business enterprises lies confidence in ... individual initiative' and the possibility of upward mobility, which, to Russell Vandenbroucke (1986:169, 37), is a theme central to both *Nongogo* and *No-Good Friday*. To all appearances, Johnny pins his faith on the first principle of existentialism: `Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself' (1948:28). As he assures Blackie:

`Of course you can if you try' (103). He foresees that trading in table cloths - and ultimately having his own interior decorating business - will realise his dream of independence and provide an asylum from the haunting memories of his past (concerning the sexual degradation he experienced at the mines). Furthermore, dedication to this creative cause could afford an escape from nothingness as well as a sense of purpose. Queeny might also be perceived by Johnny as an opportunity to be creative: he tries to revive something in her. He philosophises : `You see, it's important, Queeny ... trying to make life better. I'm not saying my idea is going to change the world, but maybe it will give us a bit more guts, and make waking up tomorrow a little bit easier (80).

Besides the creative cause, money is also conceived of as a defence against groundlessness and the deprivation of *apartheid*. As Johnny sighs: `Money. It could mean security, three meals a day, a roof over your head and independence ...' (73). From this statement it is clear that he is concerned with his physiological well-being as well as with his safety.

But the character occupies himself not only with his own needs. His *Dasein* is `concerned' (Grimsley's expression 1967:51). He ostensibly has mature, brotherly love for other people who are the `subject[s] of "care"' (1967:50). He feels accountable for them, believes that he owes them a chance, just as he should also be given a chance to change. (`It wasn't just that I owed you a start ....'[91], he tells Queeny.) For instance, he offers Blackie a job and encourages Queeny to better her situation and herself:

> You said you were getting sick of life the way it is ... so why don't you start changing things? You could start with this room....
> And you'd start getting proud ... and *then* let anybody try leaving marks on your table, or on your cloth, or messing up your floor. (80)

Johnny also attempts to reconcile the shebeen queen to her existential being. He asks what her real name is and why she keeps running away from it. He inquires

whether there is anything she wants (93).

Johnny comes to the understanding that in Queeny's eyes he is an `it' and not an `other' or a `thou'; he is an object and not a person. He is not so much loved as needed as he is her means of eschewing existential isolation and groundlessness. The perception of this prompts Johnny to ask: `And when you get tired of selling rags, will I also go just like that?' (110).

On the other hand, Fugard's design may be that Johnny's character be regarded in a less flattering light. Johnny is intent upon self-expression and privileges his self; therefore he cannot establish true rapport with others. For example, he has never had a girlfriend. He also does not fully enter Queeny's world - including her past - and accept her otherness. She is only a `court of appeal' (Buber 1965:79) whose function is to listen to him. When he tells her: `It wasn't just that I owed you a start ... I looked at you like I've never looked at another woman before' (116), he has already compared her to a good-looking apple with a worm in it (112) and is on the verge of bidding her goodbye.

After being disillusioned with Queeny, Johnny voices his opinion of other people and the world in general: `It's when you're small and need people that you get buggered around. We've got to be so big we don't need anybody' (108-9). Hence he engrosses himself in his professional endeavours and material objects. When he has a toast, it is to themselves since `nobody else gives a damn' (115). All he strives for is to `get away from a world that is small' - too small to recognise his humanity and potential - and `stand in the street and have a damned good laughing session at the world' (110).[10] He does not even fancy having Queeny, for: `Maybe we'll still be buggered around, by each other. I suppose the only time you're really safe is when you can tell the rest of the world to go to hell' (109).

[10] Camus hypothesises that it is the metaphysical rebel who `attacks a shattered world.... He confronts the injustice at large in the world with his own principles of justice' (1961:29).

Thus, in this play, Fugard dramatises the plight of an individual whose goal of self-sufficiency affects not only others adversely but also himself. Johnny is interpersonally isolated - he does not `know [him]self any longer' (112). According to Buber, the world and every one in it are `mutually included, the one in the other' (1937:93), and `it is as We, ever again as We, that [we construct and develop] a world out of [our] experiences' in a meaningful manner (1957:107), meaning being derived from reaching out to and engaging in dialogue with others and establishing unity with them. Confirmation that Johnny's existential sense has gone astray is his aversion to waiting. Waiting drives him `mad' `because you don't stop thinking when you're waiting' (117) and he has `got to stop [him]self thinking' (112). He furthermore lies to Queeny. Yet, in an ironic display of double standards, he demands of Queeny that she be honest with him (116) as he has been honest with her.[11]

With regard to his potential for success in business, or in anything for that matter, Johnny is unable to sustain action. Long before he is acquainted with Queeny's past, he checks her enthusiasm about the business with: `It might work' (82) and then with: `Maybe it doesn't work' (92). A possible explanation is that Johnny does not want to be held accountable for his deeds; his dreams and wishes are just that. So others have to take authorship for him,[12] for example the men in the mines who physically and sexually assaulted him until he was `worse than an animal' (113) and the shebeen proprietor. She is to give him a chance: `I'll go out there just now and do my damnedest to sell ... but don't make me. Let's just see how it goes' (92), and not make him `scared to come back' (92)[13]. Johnny also lays culpability at the door of

[11] Johnny also demonstrates his double standards in his insistence on having a `clean' wife (93), whereas he himself is not clean.

[12] In this respect he is similar to Patrick. Johnny, in fact, identifies with the lost dreams of this frequenter of the shebeen: `I also felt like that' (79). Johnny spills the champagne Queeny has bought; Patrick, in turn, spills his drink, as served by Queeny, on Johnny.

[13] As he measures success in objective and material terms, he is convinced that

society (`Let's blame the stinking bloody world' [113]) or a higher power (Let's blame what sent us into this world because nobody with any sense would choose to come' [113]).

Just as Johnny permits himself to become the prey of his surroundings, he lets Queeny's past linger on in his memory. Even though he has assured her that you `can wash off something from the past if you try hard enough' (92); `Of course you can if you try' (100), he does not allow her or himself to assert their role in their existences and alter their lot. After this disillusionment with her he concludes, `sometimes I get the crazy idea that a man can change the world he lives in. Hell! You can't even change yourself' (113). Queeny is `filth' (118) and that is all she can ever be because one cannot simply sell oneself and buy `a brand new person' (114).

Since the character cannot make a lasting commitment, he also considers it a waste of time to talk about the future (110). His fatalism (`The only future we've got is tomorrow if we're unlucky enough to wake up' [110]) proves that the creative and productive approach have provided only temporary respite from meaninglessness and nothingness.

Some critics, such as Russell Vandenbroucke, submit that the obliteration of Johnny's - and Queeny's - dreams is `largely foreordained' (1986:37). `As if written to conform to Zola's dictates in "Naturalism on the Stage", Johnny and Queeny have been mechanically predetermined by their milieu' (1986:37) and made impure in moral terms by forces outside their control. They are innocent victims, defeated by of South Africa's socio-economic system. Johnny blames `the stinking world out there' (113) and Queeny explains prostituting herself by saying, `I did it because I was hungry' (117). I concede that the South African society of the time provides a strong case for this argument.

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he will be rejected for not being financially successful.

Nevertheless, deterministic explanations of one's predicament still do not constitute a denial of personal responsibility, as Tillich (1968:65) avers. Lena, for one, (in *Boesman and Lena*) heroically assumes authorship for her life despite the most debilitating circumstances imaginable (`Can't throw yourself away before your time' [220]). Johnny, however, fails to change. This is because he chooses to be a victim. He is no longer a man `who's got big plans for the future, somebody who's got somewhere to go' (108), but elects to remain locked in a present purposeless existence and the past, without any alteration effected. As he says, `I still got the same thoughts. I'm the same man as yesterday, the day before yesterday and the day before that right back to the mines' [114]). The meaningless existence will be resumed, and Johnny, once again, will tread the streets that lead nowhere (111).

The salesman's intrusion is resented by Sam, part of Queeny's life, and he plots to reveal her history to the newcomer, Johnny. The charade's intention is to wreck illusions by revealing to Johnny that Queeny's past will be part of her future.

Sam is like Johnny in many respects. He is independent and shares Johnny's belief in personal grandiosity. This is exhibited by the stage directions by which the playwright introduces the character:

> *He is a large and self-assured man full of the sort of confidence that a little money breeds.... In his movements about the room he frequently stops in front of the mirror for inspection and small adjustments to his clothing.* (63)

Both Sam and Johnny are power-seeking and strive for total autonomy.[14] Isolation[15] and existing in `bad faith' (Bedford 1972:267) are the outcome.

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[14] Queeny even observes that they talk alike (91).

[15] As Queeny points out, Sam has nobody (97).

Sam, like the shebeen queen before Johnny's arrival, is caught up in an existential vacuum. Fugard reveals this in the character's cynicism. Queeny notes: `It's a bad habit Sam's got. He doubts everything' [96]. The character's cynicism, which manifests itself in the disparagement of activities which have meaning for others (such as Johnny's venture), reveals that he also suffers from existential `sickness', as cynicism can masquerade as a sophisticated approach to life.

Sam seems sophisticated because affluence is his escape from the awareness of nothingness and mortality. He immerses himself in his business, this representing the world of appearances and things (which is in opposition to the world of emotions, imagination and fantasy). Existentialists might say that his *Dasein* has fallen away from itself, and has `fallen into the "world"' (Heidegger 1963:220), more specifically, the environment of shop and shebeen. Without a sense of self, the objects in his shop, his attributes and attainments are to sustain him in the present. On this score, he cannot comprehend how Queeny could `just let ten quid walk out of [her] life without even a farewell tear' (84). He also wonders whether it is `that bad' (97) when she announces that Johnny can have all her money. Sam furthermore is sure that Patrick will not denounce him to Queeny, because he has paid him (101). The character's materialism and his tendency to objectify are reflected, finally, in his approval of `Sixpence' as a name for Patrick's child.

Unlike the shebeen queen, Sam is unable to divest objects of their meaning. This exploitative and hoarding character is accountable to no-one but himself and lets others exist only as part of his own experience. As the pimp of the sixpenny whore, he actually succeeded in making an object of a human being, whose life he controlled and manipulated and whom he treated as a parasite would - as a source of supply. She had to take the `whole Goddamn city to bed with [her] so that [he] could get fat and rich' (99). As she exclaims, putting herself in the object position: `You got fat and rich and smooth on me. You worked me like men work horses and it lasted a long time' (99).

Sam's jealous panic after the arrival of the `fancy boy[, a] straight man that makes like everything else is crooked' (99) may be ascribed to the insecurity which is produced partly by Queeny denying his contribution to her enterprise and existence: `It was my money, Sam, and this is my place. It's got nothing to do with you' (78). Insecurity is also the motive for his apprehension of the future and clinging to the past. He reminisces: `In the old days when we were ... you know what I mean ... I used to talk about the shop and you used to talk about having your own shebeen' (65). He exhorts Queeny not to forget the past. At the end of the play he is heard to announce complacently: `It's like old times again' (120). In essence, Sam does not transform himself but instead arrests his own development. The reader has to agree with the summation of him as supplied by Queeny: `You haven't changed, Sam' (66).

Blackie is Sam's accomplice in disclosing Queeny's unsavoury past to Johnny. Blackie aids Sam because he is terrified of losing his employer. He depends on a limited environment, the shebeen, and disperses himself in participation with its `queen'. He could be seen as simply an adjunct to the shebeen owner and not a character in his own right. This may suggest the reason for the `made-up' quality of his name and his reluctance to make his own decisions.

In an indifferent world Queeny affirms this `wish-blocked' (Yalom 1980:303) individual's existence and gives him a sense of identity. She reprimands Sam: `His name is Blackie' (63). She also supplies him with a function. She needs him for protection (64) and he `stays around because it's nice to have a man around' (64).

Queeny furthermore removes responsibility from the bouncer. She apprises Johnny:

> Blackie's not the same as Sam. He's ugly, all right ... but then he was born that way. He didn't choose it. If he was straight I think he would have been a good man. But being crooked like that nobody has given him a chance. (75)

Thus, the shebeen queen assumes that the bouncer cannot shape his own future by choosing for himself and acting autonomously on these choices. Her opinion is that his handicap and society's reaction to it have pre-determined his destiny.

Blackie's attachment to Queeny is exclusive since she is his ultimate rescuer. His existential dependence on her may be deduced from Fugard's stage directions. He waits `for Queeny to say something else ... something he will understand' (65). Later he attempts to attract her attention, and, when she finally does notice him and he shows her the clock he has stolen as a gift for her, he receives a curt: `I heard it once and it doesn't change it's (*sic*) tune' (85). Blackie's response to this rebuff is to remind his employer that he will do anything for her provided that she does not shout or laugh at him (86).[16] The bouncer goes along with Sam's scheme only because he is convinced that Johnny will drive a wedge between himself and Queeny: `If he comes, I must go' (100). Blackie cannot love Queeny, but needs someone greater than himself, to protect, take responsibility for and dominate him, someone to whom he can abdicate choice.

The bouncer is unaware of his existentially empty condition and the complicity which induced this state in the first place (Foster 1982:220). For example, he imparts to the salesman that he has no desire to turn his hand to anything else: `I don't even want to try' (103).

Another character who is shown to be oblivious to his existential predicament is Patrick. As revealed by the stage directions, he is `the true "little man"' (67), anxious to please others, who, in Heideggerian terms, allows his *Dasein* to get carried along by `the nobody' (1962:312), and surrenders his identity to collectivism. Living and acting in collectivism is what Binswanger calls the `anonymous mode' (quoted in

[16] When Patrick laughs at Queeny, and in particular her past, he is almost killed by Blackie.

Friedman 1964:516). In this mode one is separated from one's personal self and is reduced to an `impersonal entity which is "everybody" and "nobody"' (Grimsley 1967:51). Not perceiving that complicity with others lies at the root of his `*medias res* existence' (Foster 1982:220), Patrick displays a dependent pose towards others. Not only does he respond to what they say and do, but bends himself to their norms and standards. In brief, others are to swallow him and decree his destiny. For example, Sam has to pick a name for Patrick's fifth child. Naturally, neither communication nor meaningful relationships are brought about in this way and growth is checked.

Like Sam, Patrick considers money to be the solution to his difficulties and is astounded when Queeny no longer wants to sell liquor to him. He furthermore wryly observes that the only thing he will ever be likely to give his fifth child is a name and `that's not much, huh?' (76).

It is patent that Patrick has not planned for the future of his child. Neither does he accept the fact that his failures are the product of his own past actions (or that, as Queeny puts it, `you mess up your own life' [77]). Like Sam, he transfers responsibility. Apartheid South Africa is the justification for his and other blacks' distress (`They just about made it so we can't live' [76]).

Regardless of the depressing circumstances in which Patrick and the rest of the characters of *Nongogo* find themselves, they are not the prey of their predicament (Seidenspinner 1986:337). They may still seize the opportunity of their togetherness and defy destiny, yet they do not choose to. Neither do they alter their perception of their lot. Instead, they prefer to remain long-suffering, passive victims. This is because stagnation is safe whereas reformation and innovation challenge the status quo. However, as Munro postulates, the existences of Fugard's characters are never again quite so contingent upon social and environmental imperatives as in this play (1982:20).