

CHOICE AND CHANGE IN RELATION TO IDENTITY AND  
MEANING IN SELECTED PLAYS BY ATHOL FUGARD:  
AN EXISTENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE

by  
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## SUMMARY

The study will explore the existentialist concepts of change and choice in relation to identity and meaning as they manifest themselves in six plays by the South African playwright, Athol Fugard: *Nongogo*, *The Blood Knot*, *Hello and Goodbye*, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, *The Road to Mecca* and *Playland*.

It is evident that Fugard endorses the first principle of existentialism: 'Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself' (Sartre in Friedman 1964:136/20). In terms of existentialist theory, nothing has significance except by virtue of human creation. We are self-determining, the authors and the lawgivers in a world without rules and ethical systems. Our destinies are shaped by the choices we make. Moreover, by exercising choice, we define our identities and realise our potential (Kierkegaard in Grimsley 1967:33).

A choice, however, calls for the recognition of personal responsibility and entails the risk of existential isolation (Yalom 1980:319). On this score, many of Fugard's characters deny their choicefulness and relinquish responsibility to another. Those who flee from their choices lose access to their existential sense (Yalom 1980:320). On the other hand, characters who face the possibilities within themselves and assert the role they have to play in their own existences, are able to transcend despair and invest their futile existences with some significance, as Sartre (1958:554) puts it. More often than not, one of the meanings they discover after having made that 'leap into action and commitment' (Yalom 1980:431) is that they are bound to others and can only become whole and fully alive in interaction with another existence whom they both accept and appreciate.

10 key terms: Fugard, six plays, existentialism, change, choice, responsibility, identity, meaning, death