

CONCLUSION

Others

One of the premises on which existentialism rests is that who we are is defined and confirmed in relations with others. Fugard's characters who make themselves available to others and communicate their dreams, aspirations as well as their insecurities, anxieties and frustrations (Hauptfleisch 1982:88), discover their existential essence, optimise their potential and 'construct and develop a world out of their experiences' in a meaningful manner (to use Buber's words [1965:107]).

It is possible to take the participation in others too far. *The Road to Mecca's* Miss Helen has difficulty discovering her existential identity because she does not resist the restrictions imposed by her society on individual thought and artistic freedom but conforms to the crowd's norms and standards. Consequently, she finds herself in 'medias res, and does not 'fathom the ... complicity that brought [her] there in the first place' (Foster 1982:220).

Nongogo's Queeny, like Miss Helen, desires someone to insulate her against the limit-situations of desolation and dissolution despair, a rescuer. Such an exploitative relationship, based on domination instead of communication, is known as 'I-It'.

No genuine dialogical relations exist between Morris and his brother. Existing only as part of Morris's experience, Zach feels even more unworthy because embeddedness leads, at best, to an existence in *medias res* (Foster 1982:222) and, at worst, to spiritual disintegration.

In the 'I-Thou' interpersonal alliances (Yalom 1980:365-6), contrarily, 'the original relation of the other and my consciousness is not the *you* and *me*; it is the *we*' (Sartre 1958:264). In other words, one person turns towards and

'move[s] more fully to respond to the other' (Friedman 1964:543). One such character is Elsa who has unselfish love for and empathy with others, and is concerned with guiding even those who do not serve a purpose for her to their full potential.

In contrast to Elsa, there are characters who eschew communication and interhuman relationships in toto. Human connections with others will compel Johnnie Smit to confront the reality of his existential emptiness (Swart 1983:66) - so he attempts rather to exist as a self-contained creature who has to account to no-one but himself.

Because 'every destruction of the other is [one's] own' (Jaspers 1957:91), the existentialist ideal is to balance life-enriching solitude - being apart-from-others - with life-affirming relations - being a-part-of-others. Frieda, for example, in *Statements after an Arrest*, is conscious of her own identity as well as of her having a nature similar to others.

Responsibility

For existential writers, humans are the authors of their own existences. Because there are no unalterable external situations, they can rise above determinism if they choose to confront the challenge of life.

Some of Fugard's characters do not trust themselves to determine their own future. The only decision *Hello and Goodbye's* Johnnie Smit takes is to abdicate accountability. He does not wish to choose himself in order to 'win' himself; he negates his own identity and 'loses' himself. The existence he has chosen for himself is the epitome of Sartre's 'bad faith' (Vandenbroucke 1986:76). Hester Smit, on the other hand, declares: 'It's my life and I'll do what I like' (113). Hester is not fate's puppet but the designer of her own destiny. Because she decides who she is and will become, she displays courage and fortitude even in the face of despair.

Like Johnnie, Miss Helen also pretends to be incapable of autonomous action, but it dawns upon her that her responsibility is, in the first place, towards herself and that she has to assert the role she plays in her own existence. Miss Helen is credited with challenging her friend, Elsa, 'into an awareness of [her]self and [her] life, of [her] responsibilities to both that [she] never had until [she] met her' (66). Elsa realises that she creates her own self by every choice she takes and every act she performs.

Playland's Gideon at first refutes responsibility for the activities of the 'crowd' by rationalising his and his fellow-soldiers execution of the Swapo men. When he 'turns and veers off onto a new road of existence' (Bedford's phrase 1972:279) and assumes answerability for his actions, he empowers himself and acquires meaning.

Time: Past, present and future

The motif of time features in all Fugard's plays. As Abrahams avers, one of Fugard's strengths is his Proustian ability to make the past come alive and haunt his characters in the present (1982:174). Although remembering the past may sustain one in the present (Swart 1983:72), many of the dramatist's characters are portrayed as prisoners of their personal history (Huber 1989:51-2). For instance, Johnnie Smit and *The Blood Knot's* Morris cannot liberate themselves from the captivity of the past and endeavour to locate meaning, happiness and hope in what was. On the other hand, Johnny and Queeny in *Nongogo* wish to believe that 'you can wash off something from the past if you try hard enough' (92). It is *Hello and Goodbye's* Hester who discerns that one cannot assign the actuality of the past to oblivion. It explains and influences the present and remains part of being-in-itself. Journeying back into the past, moreover, can assist the disorientated personal in the consolidation of a consistent identity, an identity that can progress into a present that is a little more stable because it is anchored in something (Swart 1983:72). *Carpe diem* is, after all, a theme that

permeates Fugard's oeuvre.

As for the future, Eugene Minowski holds that the 'inability to conceive of and live in the future is the fundamental condition of depressions and other forms of psychological unhealth' (quoted by May in Friedman 1964:450). By contrast, anticipation of this 'dominant mode of time' (May in Friedman 1964:449) and living in terms of the possible may be the 'foundation of psychological freedom' (May 1961:79). Hesitating to envisage the future and projecting oneself into it (Grimsley 1967:46) - as illustrated by Johnnie Smit in *Hello and Goodbye* - reflects a reluctance to change one's existence.

Death

Fugard's fascination with time goes back, in his words, to humankind's 'central dilemma - the fact that life dies. And the passing of those seconds. The span can literally be measured.... It's death knocking at the door' (1982:112-3).

Heidegger describes death as 'the very summit' of existence (quoted in Friedman 1964:542). This is because, at the limit-situation of death, *Dasein* sees the simplicity of its fate (Heidegger 1963:435): that its uttermost possibility-for-Being lies in giving itself up' (Heidegger in Friedman 1964:129). This is what Miss Helen does when she blows out the candles in her self-created Mecca and resigns herself to the inevitable: 'The journey is over now. This is as far as I can go' (73). On the one hand, resignation could result in disintegration, as Levy (1973:79) advances. From a Faulknerian perspective, however, Miss Helen may be seen as immortal because she has a 'soul, a spirit, capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance' (quoted in Collins 1983:370).

Meaning

Fugard focuses on disorientated human beings who are 'heavy, hopeless and

almost prostrate on the earth' (Fugard quoted in Weales 1978:8), yet search for intelligibility and significance. There is nothing for them to cling to: no guidance from an omnipotent and just force, 'no stabilising belief on which to build (and no faith to justify' their lives or explain their fate (Swart 1983:38). In a nutshell, the world has no pre-ordained grand structure. Locked into 'a dreadful routine of simply carrying on' (Cohen (1977:72), struggling with all their available resources to understand, and failing to do so, just how and why they got there in the first place (Foster 1982:221), a large number of his characters are forlorn. There is no glittering Mecca at the end of their roads. They will die as gracelessly and anonymously as they have lived (Levy 1973:79). Tragedy seems to eclipse everything.

Hello and Goodbye's Hester craves one memory of herself 'somewhere, some other time' (128) which she can take back with her and use as an 'emotional and spiritual transfusion to inject into an existence that has become only a matter of endurance (Levy 1973:79). Instead of a memory, she finds only 'rubbish' (155). Bravely returning, like Lena and Queeny, to the 'same form of bondage [she] had when she entered in the opening scene of the play' (Hauptfleisch 1982:188), the character invents her own life meaning and commits herself to the fulfilment of that meaning, even if this entails resigning herself to the emptiness of her existence. 'She knows what life is waiting for her' (Vandenbroucke 1986:76), a life during which she will be, to quote Sartre, engulfed by this 'monstrous silence, free and alone, without assistance and without excuse, condemned ... forever to be free' (1947:290). As Levy declares, 'Fugard's empty stage disguises no untold secret, no hope ...' (1973:79).

To Cohen, 'what is so ineffably human and normal and affecting' is the ways in which Helen and other Fugard characters who are in intolerable situations 'cope with hopelessness' (1977:77). They recognise that the 'present is illusory, the past ... unreal (and) the future empty' (Foster 1982:223). 'They recognise that all is useless, yet they do not go mad with grief, despair and incomprehension' (Cohen 1977:76). 'They do not just give up and they do not, in fact, do the rational thing: they do what is irrational and yet inevitable'. They defy destiny

when `they continue to live, not in hope of future succour, not in the hope of a better after-life - (but) simply ... as they must' (1977:77). `Their heroism, if we may call it that, consists principally in their ability to continue day after day as even slim hopes are finally extinguished' (Levy 1973:79). Fugard adds in *Twentieth Century Literature*: `Whatever else I have expressed, I've tried to celebrate the human spirit - its capacity to ... endure ... even though every conceivable barrier is set up to thwart the act of (endurance)' (1993:390).

The human spirit endures once it creates and interprets its own reality and fate (Bedford 1972:265) and articulates a meaning for itself. This meaning hinges on coming to grips with the `senselessness of ideals and purpose' (Walder 1984:78). In other words, stoic endurance of an absurd condition - Fugard's characters' `spiritual lot in a godless world' (Wortham 1983:173) - is the keynote (Edmans quoted in Mshengu 1982:171). Only then can the characters transcend the meaninglessness of their existences.

Change

Fugard seems to subscribe to the notion that *Dasein* is not a static entity which remains unchanged but a `possibility' and a `project', perpetually moving ahead of, outside itself, and directing itself upon the future (Grimsley 1967:46). In other words, `existence is not; existence becomes' (1967:24). By virtue of this, the dramatist's characters have to muster the courage to risk everything by breaking with their previous conditions, and transform themselves. Otherwise they will remain trapped in circular, futile existences.

The two female protagonists, Hester in *Hello and Goodbye* and Elsa in *The Road to Mecca*, do not shrink from change. *Mecca's*, Marius, *per contra*, wants his world has to remain as it was in the past, and he resents any disruption to his routine.

Identity

Fugard often presents characters who are, at best, ontologically bewildered and, at worst, in an identity crisis (Vivier 1983:29).

Nongogo's Queeny's continuous denial of her own name corresponds with a disavowal of her true identity. In other words, she is dissociated from her *Dasein*. Morris, likewise, is so anxious about losing his own conflicted centre that he refuses to go out, but holds fast to routine and adjusts to a 'shrunk world space' (May 1961:78). Lost to the world, he is also lost to himself (Jaspers 1950:39). Johnnie Smit, like Morris, affirms something which is less than his unique 'essential or potential being', in Tillich's words (1952:71). He is too much of a coward to confront his insubstantiality, depersonalisation and anonymity (Swart 1983:84). So he settles for a false identity (Foster 1982:222) and lives a lie. For this reason, the most extreme form of missed being or non-being, namely insanity, already lurks on his horizon (Swart 1983:65).

Johnnie's sister, Hester, quite the contrary, has returned to her family home to discover 'the meaning of [her] name' (128). In order to do so, she probes herself and her brother. Exploration of the past and introspection result in traumatic revelations, self-delusion giving way to insight, and psychological exorcisms (Swart 1983:48). At last, Hester - and other Fugard characters who follow her example - is rewarded with the profound perception of her 'personhood' (1983:86).

Rebellion

According to Camus, 'only two possible worlds can exist for the human mind: the sacrosanct (or, in Christian terms, the world of Grace) and the world of rebellion ...' (1971:26-7). 'In order to exist, man must rebel' (1971:27), not merely endure. This is because 'every rebel pleads for life' at the same time as s/he struggles against 'servitude, falsehood, and terror' (Camus in Friedman

1964:217), and affirms that these three afflictions are the cause of silence between human beings and prevent the latter from rediscovering themselves in the only value which can save them from nihilism - the 'long complicity of men at grips with their destiny' (Camus 1971:248). Like Elsa Barlow, the rebel attacks the world and suffers the risks involved in an attempt to acquire totality of being (Swart 1983:77). As Elsa apprises her friend: 'Rebellion starts, Miss Helen, with just one man or woman standing up and saying, "No. Enough!"' (28).

Among South African dramatists, Athol Fugard is certainly that man. His dramas comprise the 'human story' with all its ambiguities. Because they are an 'authentic and thought-provoking report of his life and his times', they will stand the test of time (Seidenspinner 1968:339). Fugard himself will rank among twentieth-century theatre's great dramatists (Raymer 1984:238).