

# *Exits and Entrances: Fugard on theatre in South Africa and the other apartheid*

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Recibido: noviembre, 2005

Aceptado: febrero, 2006

## **ABSTRACT**

A new play by Athol Fugard, an author of unequivocally political but universally appealing works, shows a deliberate break with what have always been his thematic concerns of the past. The *dejà vu* issues of racial strife that have been the source of inspiration for him as for many South African writers have been laid to rest. Maintaining its South African character via language and combined cultural-literary allusion *Exits and Entrances* explores the world of the stage via a delicate technique of metatheatre as well as biography, autobiography and the question of the other apartheid that has seldom been addressed in South African literature: that barrier between Afrikaners and Englishmen. The two-hander containing all the emblematic traits of Fugard's work is served not only as an autobiography of the artist as a young man, but also provides biographical insights into the lives of two larger-than-life South African personalities: André Huguenet and Eugène Marais. By redeeming these two Afrikaner personalities Fugard appears to reconcile his Afrikaner half with those compatriots he was accused of having betrayed via his political plays.

**Key words:** Athol Fugard, South Africa, apartheid, *Exits and Entrances*, André Huguenet.

## *Exits and Entrances: Fugard sobre el teatro en Sudáfrica y el otro apartheid*

## **RESUMEN**

Una obra nueva de Fugard, autor de obras inequívocamente políticas pero universalmente atractivas, muestra una ruptura deliberada con los que han sido habitualmente sus temas del pasado. Los asuntos *dejà vu* de luchas raciales que vienen siendo la fuente de inspiración para él, como para muchos otros escritores de Sudáfrica, se han dejado en reposo. Manteniendo el carácter sudafricano mediante el lenguaje y alusiones literarias y culturales combinadas, *Exits and Entrances* explora el mundo de la escena mediante una técnica delicada de metateatro, así como la biografía, autobiografía y la cuestión del otro apartheid, que raramente se ha tratado en la literatura sudafricana: la barrera entre afrikaners e ingleses. El libro, que contiene todas las características emblemáticas de la obra de Fugard, se sirve no solo como una autobiografía del artista cuando era joven, sino que también muestra rasgos biográficos de dos personalidades sudafricanas más grandes que la vida: André Huguenet y Eugène Marais. Al redimir estas dos personalidades afrikaners, Fugard parece reconciliar su mitad afrikaner con los compatriotas a los que se le había acusado de traicionar en sus obras políticas.

**Palabras clave:** Athol Fugard, Sudáfrica, apartheid, *Exits and Entrances*, André Huguenet.

**SUMARIO:** 1. The other apartheid. 2. Exits and entrances. 3. Fugard on the theatre.

As is the case with many of Athol Fugard's pieces *Exits and Entrances* has its genesis in an incident in the dramatist's life. The woman dismissed from a farm walking along a country road with all her possessions loaded on her head was the seminal image that allowed *Boesman and Lena* to flower into a play about the most destitute and the human degradation brought about by the laws of apartheid. Spitting in Sam Semela's face as a young lad was to inspire one of his most successful plays, "*Master Harold*" ... *and the Boys*, in what appeared to be an attempt to make reparation for his callous behaviour toward the black man who, to a great extent, represented a father figure to him throughout his adolescence. Other ideas were sometimes triggered off by a headline in the paper, a sentence in a book, or a snippet of conversation overheard in the street. If we are to judge by the opening monologue of *Exits and Entrances* the scanty lines dedicated in a Port Elizabeth newspaper to the death of what might well have been South Africa's greatest actor then, André Huguenet, merits a mention in the diary that the dramatist keeps in imitation of his much-admired Albert Camus. The entry made in June 1961 does not bear its fruit till 2004 with Fugard already in his early seventies; the playwright and antagonist of *Exits and Entrances* reading this entry and narrating with nostalgia and pathos the events it evokes is only twenty-nine.

*Exits and Entrances*, viewed against what are Fugard's usual thematic concerns, marks a surprising turn at a late stage of what is a prolific career of play-writing, acting, directing and even cameo appearances in internationally acclaimed films, not to mention the weightier roles in those filmed versions of his own plays. Ever since *The Blood Knot* (1961) drew world attention to his work, Fugard has been hailed as a person who gave voice to the grievances of the voiceless millions in South Africa. Dennis Walder, in his numerous articles and books on Fugard, insists on the idea that Fugard's mission in South Africa as a dramatist was to bear witness to the harsh realities –I might add brutalities– of life there since the Nationalist Party won the elections in 1948 giving them free hand in the consequent implementation of the system of apartheid. However, bearing witness in South Africa prior to 1994 implied political commitment, which in turn led to being harassed by the Special Branch, having one's house searched, one's movements tailed and even, as was Fugard's case, having one's passport confiscated impeding travel overseas. For Fugard, a white citizen, taking a political stance meant confrontation with his compatriots, more specifically the Afrikaner half of the white population and its ineluctable link to the language and ideology of oppression. He has always been grieved by the fact that he should be deemed a traitor to his own people for adhering to his principles. The act of treachery was deemed twofold: his blindness to colour in a country where not even a public toilet was a space common to the multiple races, and his choice of English as the language in his plays to express what, in normal circumstances, would have been expressed in Afrikaans. The "poor white"<sup>1</sup> characters of plays like *Hello and Goodbye* or *People are Living There* would express themselves in Afrikaans as would Zachariah and Morris of *The Blood Knot* or the eponymous Boesman and Lena of an afore-mentioned title.

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<sup>1</sup> Low middle class whites.

Fugard himself is a bilingual South African; thus his choice of English as a medium of literary expression does not stand out as a singular act of rebellion in the South African literary scene. J. M. Coetzee and André Brink exemplify the continuation of what is already an occurrence of long standing explainable by the pragmatism of the book market, as well as, in some cases including Fugard's, the greater ease with which the writer pens his ideas. Fugard's commitment to the plight of the non-white majority has produced a number of unforgettable pieces and his work with young and promising black actors paved the way for the first professional black actors Winston Ntshona and John Kani, as well as talented practitioners of theatre for whom *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* or *The Island* had become paradigms of innovative theatre combined with defiance. Although it was not Fugard's ambition to acquire world fame via his political confrontation with the regime, his plays, most especially those dealing with black-white issues, had possibly a larger impact on world opinion than the anti-apartheid campaigning of some organizations entrenched in the comfort of European capitals. The retrospective criticism of Fugard's intentions and motives for getting involved in the witnessing of black township life suggests a reticence on the part of begrudging black critics to attribute to a white the smallest contribution to what they consider black patrimony and not Fugard's province. Milder in his critique, fairer in his evaluation of the evolution of theatre in South Africa, and kinder to Fugard than most of his colleagues, Zakes Mda has him heading the list of practitioners of "Protest Theatre" (1996:200) in the first two decades of apartheid South Africa, and pioneering the theatrical turn towards plays promoting reconciliation. Mda informs us that "The only theatre that was overtly political in South Africa came from the liberal pen of Athol Fugard." (1995:39) He adds: "In the same way he pioneered protest theatre, Athol Fugard is once again a pioneer of the theatre of reconciliation". (1995:42) Mda's comments come, no doubt, in the wake of *Playland* (1992) in which the black Martinus Zoeloe and the white Gideon le Roux confess to heinous crimes as the play runs to its cathartic end. The two characters of *Playland*, metaphors of two opposed races in South Africa, riddled with guilt for crimes committed against each other's respective race group, enact through their confession and anticipate The Truth and Reconciliation Commission that Bishop Desmond Tutu would later set up, aimed at convincing whites and blacks to admit to past crimes, accept their blame and put an end to the polarization that stood in the way of future political, social and racial harmony. With the demise of apartheid Fugard like so many South African authors seems to have turned his back on political issues which lead to a *cul de sac* in art when not sudden death. After all, as Dennis Walder points out (1992:344): "Furthermore, now that so many of the voiceless are speaking for themselves, who is Fugard to try and speak on their behalf.?"

## 1. THE OTHER APARTHEID

Fugard's new piece, *Exits and Entrances* is in itself an indication that, having borne witness to the South African reality –an almost inexhaustible and still

productive source of inspiration for South African dramatists— while it was ethically necessary, he has now turned to different pastures and, as is his custom, one step ahead of his fellow theatre practitioners in South Africa. André Brink describes very aptly the situation many South African authors are undergoing. (1998:16) “Throughout the apartheid years the urge to report a cause aright was a prime mover in the work of most writers caught up in the culture of resistance”. And with view to future literary aspirations: “The reporting has been done, often quite spectacularly; as in the case of Holocaust literature, there is now a greater pressure on that end of the scale where the imagination (expressed in the process of invention, of fiction) acts more freely” (21). Fugard’s new play is very South African in flavour, but grounded on imagination as Brink calls for. Fugard, as is revealed through the words of the dramatist in *Exits and Entrances*, always strove to create a theatre that would speak about and to his compatriots. His latest brainchild heralds a return to creative writing without the political sword of Damocles pending over his now venerable head. Under the cover of what is a play about life in the theatre, Fugard’s characters soon fall into a repartee which reveals deeper differences than merely those symptomatic of the generation gap that separates them. The dressing room becomes the backdrop against which their ever-growing cultural and political differences are enacted. There are the inevitable references to apartheid —a play set in the sixties would come across as unrealistic without them— but these serve to remind the spectator that in South Africa a parallel apartheid with language, politics and culture as its wedge maintained a wide rift between Afrikaners and Anglo-South Africans and lamentably continue to do so. In post-apartheid South Africa it is the language factor more than the weight of history that goads Afrikaners to suspect a biased attitude towards them as a community on the part of the government. Afrikaans was the language of the Nationalists and as such promoted by the regime, but at the same time the language of the oppressor for the black majority. Willy-nilly the Afrikaner has to accept that a backlash against all things Afrikaner would be felt in the aftermath of the fall of the Nationalists and the coming into power of the ANC. How long this rejection will last is hard to say. Fugard, in an effort to include the Afrikaner half of South Africa in the vision of the country he exports to the wide world, chose as the protagonist of his new play André Huguenet, whose Afrikanerdom is reinforced by the figure of Eugène Marais hovering ever in the background like the ghost of Hamlet’s father. Fugard places the long monologues and practically the entire play at the service of André allowing him to air his views and complaints in the same way the black characters did in his more political works. Not even on the common ground which is the theatre world can André and the dramatist, in representation of either side of the white cultural-linguistic bar reconcile their differences. Yet the mere fact that through Fugard’s play written in English two emblematic figures of South African culture, albeit Afrikaners, will be made known to the wide world is in itself a gesture of goodwill and reconciliation aimed to draw the two white communities together.

## 2. EXITS AND ENTRANCES

A young playwright is writing in a notebook. He pauses to read aloud the entry he has just made. Thus opens the play, divided by a lustrum into two clear blocks set in the Union of South Africa on the eve of its birth as the independent Republic of South Africa<sup>2</sup>. Exit Britain, the empire and its Queen, enter the new nation with its State President to the celebratory sound of bells and car hooters. The detail of the notebook confirming the autobiographical nature of the play—Fugard, following the custom of many authors kept one, which was edited by Mary Benson in 1983. —is reinforced by significant added personal details that any reader or spectator familiar with Fugard's life will not fail to pick up and register: the imminent birth of a child (Lisa, his daughter) and the hospitalization of his father, whose life dangled on a thread, to just mention two. While one loved one in the playwright's life makes his exit, another, by her birth, is on the verge of making her entrance onto the stage that Shakespeare claims the world to be. As the play evolves death will open its doors to yet another two exits: that of the second protagonist of the play, André Huguenet (1905-1961), legendary Afrikaans actor, the report of whose death has not transcended two inches at the bottom of an inside page of that day's daily, and Eugène Marais (1872-1936), the journalist-short story writer-poet better known outside South Africa for his pioneer field-work on primates and the white ant<sup>3</sup>. The playwright, Fugard himself, would at a later stage of his life produce and direct a script for the television on a dramatic episode in Marais' life. And finally the title of this play whose action transpires backstage in the actor's *sancta sanctorum*, his dressing room, "tired old armchair included" (*Exits and Entrances*, 6), evokes actors strutting on and off stage, a player's life of ephemeral success, with an André on the wane struggling against economic privation, ripping stubs off cinema tickets to make a living, and a young playwright on the rise, having almost completed the play, *The Blood Knot*, that would earn him worldwide fame.

Having read the announcement of André's death, the playwright's mind wanders off into the past, 1956, and addressing the audience directly, he recalls those days when, he not only acted as André's dresser at the Labia Theatre, Cape Town, but also played the role of the old shepherd in the production of *Oedipus the King* marking André's thirty years on the stage. André had got himself heavily into debt in order to produce the play and the scarcity of thespian talent in Cape Town at the time had forced him to take on amateurs including the playwright.

Fugard employs flashbacks in many of his plays. In *Exits and Entrances* the audience is offered the opportunity to get a retrospective peek at André Huguenet's masterly performance as the King of Thebes, victim of fate. The actor who lands the plum role of playing André faces the arduous challenge of rendering a double performance: his own as André, as well as that of André, the actor, delivering the

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<sup>2</sup> South Africa gained its independence in 1961.

<sup>3</sup> *My Friends the Baboons, The Soul of the White Ant* and *The Soul of the Ape* published posthumously. Marais was said to have been the master of a science, entomology, before it had been invented.

speeches of “reckless Oedipus, or neurotic Hamlet or love-sick Hassan” (37)<sup>4</sup>. In the second half of the play, the playwright pays André a surprise visit backstage after watching him deliver yet another magnificent performance as the prince of the church of Bridget Boland’s 1955 play *The Prisoner*<sup>5</sup>. We are transported forward to March 1961, five years after the first half, but two months previous to the evening that opens the play with the dramatist reading the entries in his notebook. Although Fugard’s instructions call for segues making the transition from one scene to another flow smoothly, the playwright’s second recollection of André differs greatly from the first. The grandiloquent vocational actor’s spirits have been dampened; like the cardinal he is currently playing he has eaten humble pie in the interim of the two encounters. The advice he gives the playwright just before the two part has the ring of a valedictory piece of advice. “Fan the flames of your purpose. Make it burn as big and bright as you can” (64). We hear the flutter of death’s wings above the protagonists’ repartee; for André still has cynical, camp wit to spare albeit less inclination to the jocular exchange of five years earlier. We learn of André’s death at the very outset of the play, but now, as the play draws to an end, enter Eugène Marais evoked by André in yet another flashback. Eugène, sitting unobserved in an office of an Afrikaans newspaper both he and André write articles for, overhears André rehearsing the lines of the “to be or not to be” soliloquy. Marais, sufficiently familiar with the text he has obviously committed to memory, is able to cue André when he slips up. He reveals to André the true nature and depth of the deliberation running through the lines of Hamlet’s inner debate with himself. Faced with the choice of to be or not to be, neither Marais nor André opted for the latter: life. Fugard was only four years old when the Marais walked into the countryside and put an end to his life with a shotgun in 1936. What method André selected to make his exit is not made clear to the audience nor in the newspaper. The playwright recalls: “No mention of the circumstances of his death, which doesn’t really surprise me. I think I know what happened” (6). But this insinuation of suicide is not borne out by the facts and circumstances of André’s death. In 1977 Athol Fugard wrote the script for *The Guest at Steenkampskraal: An Episode in the Life of Eugène Marais*, a film directed by Ross Devenish, focused on Marais’ attempts to cope with his morphine addiction. Fugard played the part of Marais into the bargain. At this early stage of the playwright’s life, aged 29 in the second half of the play, the name of Marais means nothing. André accuses him of being typically English in his ignorance of illustrious Afrikaners. Taking into account the accuracy of the autobiographical data Fugard has fed into the text, one might safely conjecture that thanks to his acquaintance with André he discovered and developed a fascination for the works and life of “Oom Marais”. The Afrikaans word *oom* not only means “uncle” but denotes respect as well as affection on the part of the speaker. Many years later Fugard was to make repairs for his ignorance of Marais, paying tribute

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<sup>4</sup> The citations from the play correspond to pages of a Word Perfect version kindly sent to me by the author himself and not a published version of the play.

<sup>5</sup> The prelate in question is the Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty persecuted in Communist Hungary.

not only to him via the above-mentioned film, *The Guest*, but to André as well on creating this gem of a piece around his personality. André has surely acquired with time a stature in Afrikaans culture on par with that of Marais with even a theatre complex in his home town bearing his name. Certainly the André depicted by Fugard towers above the average man in the street, and the actor playing the role of the playwright will be hard put not to be totally overwhelmed by his overbearing persona.

*Exits and Entrances* is not constricted by its autobiographical and biographical nature. Fugard goes beyond the bounds of personal data and the anecdote to reflect on ancillary matters such as the driving force behind every artist: dreams. André's dream enabling him to emulate Pavlova, to disconnect from harsh reality on the stage by adopting other identities and shedding his own; André's dream of transforming via the theatre the cruel, hypocritical, straight-laced, self-righteous Afrikaner society he had been born into, of leaving behind the ugliness of the poor-white environment he had been raised in. For the idealistic playwright plays are the fruit of "the hard labour of dreams" (22), "what all creativity is about." Looking back, André well knows at what cost his aspirations have been fulfilled. He puts it aptly in a phrase combining English and Afrikaans, a common occurrence in South Africa, providing the play with a touch of the local colour: "snot en tranen and angst" (21)—mucus, tears and anguish. Or for lack of better words in the Queen's English: blood, sweat and tears. In 1961 the playwright had as yet to reap the theatrical success and worldwide attention that would confront him with the authorities. Ironically enough, those readers or spectators familiar with his life and works know he will be hauled over the coals in the years ahead. Might not both André and the playwright wonder if it was worth it? In his poem "Mar Português", one of several dedicated to the Portuguese navigators in *Mensagem*, Fernando Pessoa poses the same question: "Valeu a pena? Tudo vale a pena se a alma não é pequena". It's well worth it if one does not possess a small soul. Fugard has written a play to the measure of André Huguenet's soul: on the mammoth scale of legends.

Fugard was often accused of betraying his Afrikaner origins, at least on his mother's side. The bad blood his plays on black-white issues provoked among his Afrikaner compatriots, supporters in their majority of the Nationalists' apartheid policy, brought on feelings of guilt and the sensation of having betrayed his people. Though written in English, as are all Fugard's plays, *Exits and Entrances* vindicates two truly Afrikaner figures of relevance making the play a genuinely South African product, an event in which the two cultures stemming from Europe but historically opposed are reconciled. It is replete with South Africanisms and allusions to local culture. Afrikaans words appropriated by English-speakers and incorporated into their daily speech impregnates the text. This ease with which the characters slip from one language into the other speaks for the degree of bilingualism attained in South Africa, and in the case of the black population trilingualism. The subtle half-serious half-jest bantering between the Afrikaner and his English-speaking compatriot is but the iceberg tip of jokes made at each other's expense, under which lies a deeper resentment and mistrust, the vestiges of historical confrontation that led to the Boer War during which Afrikaners died in what may well have been the

first concentration camps ever set up. If Rome is also known internationally as the eternal city, we learn that in South Africa Port Elizabeth is often referred to as the windy city and Cape Town the mother city. DRC stands for the Dutch Reformed Church and its implications in the South African way of life. South Africans will appreciate best the despair of André's childhood and upbringing in the provincial backwater of Doppe Bloemfontein and the sacrifices required to have made it in the wide world beyond.

"It is straight autobiography in the style of *Master Harold*"<sup>6</sup> says Fugard about *Exits and Entrances* in an e-mail to the author of this paper on May 19, 2005. *Master Harold and the Boys* deals with an episode in his adolescence that Fugard has always felt ashamed of. *Exits and Entrances*, appearing twenty-two years later, deals with Fugard in his twenties. The time span of five years shows a growth in both characters. André has suffered reversals while the playwright comes across as more confident. At the age of twenty-nine Fugard was soon to see his plays billed next to the cutting-edge productions of the time in the theatre Meccas of London and Broadway, a far cry from the school halls or makeshift township theatres of the early days. Yet of the two characters it is André who grows to overwhelming, almost tragic proportions.

Throughout the first half, the playwright, infatuated with André's talent and capacity for slipping into the skin of Oedipus, prompts him into confessing episodes of his childhood. Fugard's biographical information about André reaches the reader or audience in an autobiographical fashion. We learn it from the horse's mouth, Mr. André Huguenet himself in one-on-one conversation with the playwright. In that uptight, provincial atmosphere of Bloemfontein, André, nicknamed "the little predikant" (the little preacher), throwing caution to the wind, spends his pocket money on an admission ticket to see Pavlova, the legendary Russian ballerina in the *Dying Swan*. The die was cast. The theatre had worked its way into his system. It was to become the place of escape, a haven for a sensitive lad bullied by the local schoolboys for not playing rugby, and, worse still, for showing different sexual inclinations. André bore his homosexuality like the mark of Cain. It corresponds to the hubris of all tragic characters, like the Oedipus he is playing, and permits him to identify with them fully. But the stage provided him with a means of escape: "I briefly escape my curse pretending to be a man who can't escape his" (23).

The two characters in *Exits and Entrances* have ambitions connected with the theatre in South Africa. André wants to contribute to the building up of Afrikaans theatre. Afrikaans, declared official language in 1925, could boast of no literary tradition. Its origins are linked to Dutch combined with borrowings from the indigenous languages the settlers encountered as well as English. In the Netherlands it was always scornfully referred to as baby Dutch or kitchen Dutch. Of the literary genres poetry was the first to flourish. Unlike the English-speaking community, who were able to enjoy productions from abroad, no overseas productions in their language was available to the Afrikaner community. Companies from Holland

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted from an e-mail to the author of this paper. *Master Harold and the boys* appeared in 1982.



might enjoy some degree of success among them. In fact it is Paul de Groot of a touring Dutch company who gives André Huguenet, *né* Gerhardus Petrus Borstlap, his more palatable stage name as well the first opportunity to show his mettle on the boards. The Playwright, Fugard's *alter ego*, aspires to create a truly South African theatre which departs from precisely all those imported productions that could not be farther apart from the reality of day-to-day life on the South African subcontinent. Thus in the first half of the play, the playwright confesses his penchant for playwriting which, perhaps despising local talent, André does not take too seriously. "Lord have mercy on us! Another one" (13). Five years later the playwright has done the rounds of London with his plays under his arm, which nobody showed the least curiosity about. In another autobiographical allusion to himself Fugard has the playwright describing the gist of a new play; an irony that Fugard followers will pick up as it is none other than *The Blood Knot*, a play-title that even today is the first to pop up in connection with Fugard's name

ANDRÉ: What's it about?

PLAYWRIGHT: Two brothers

ANDRÉ: That's a good start.

PLAYWRIGHT: Coloureds.

ANDRÉ: Oh.

PLAYWRIGHT: One is light skinned, one is dark ...

ANDRÉ: And both of them no doubt nose-pickers who speak the English language badly. I knew I shouldn't have asked (50).

There is no going back on the words André has uttered! Their differences are out in the open. The playwright and the actor are on the verge of a serious rift. André recommends drawing-room farces whereby the playwright may make oodles of money and live happily ever after. Even a play about a father and a son in which the playwright might delve into the feelings of unimportance that led to his father's pining at a later stage of life. But the dissimilar taste in plays is not what lies at the heart of the discord, not the pith of the question. André, of Dopper religious background, born into a self-righteous Afrikaner family in the ultraconservative Afrikaner territory of Bloemfontein cannot conceive of a young white man appointing himself the prolocutor for blacks by writing plays based on their lives on the locations. For André the theatre has a clear function, a *raison d'être* outside of politics and the seamy side of life in a black township. Or anywhere else at that!

ANDRÉ: People go to the theatre to be elevated above its squalor and filth not to have it thrown in their faces.

What's the name for these new plays? Kitchen-sink dramas?

PLAYWRIGHT: That's a few notches up from the world I'm writing about. There's no kitchen sink in my pondok<sup>7</sup> (51).

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<sup>7</sup> In South Africa a shack.

The vision each has of the black slums is irreconcilable: for André “a nightmare” and for the playwright “a world of untold stories” (52). Does André, blinded by the theatre spotlights, live in blissful ignorance of the plight of blacks? Is he too immersed in the alternative reality the theatre offers to care? Or is he merely another bigoted Afrikaner endorsing the white supremacist policies of the Nationalists?

This is basically the only moment in which the thorny topic of politics looms in the play, not because Fugard wants to pursue a political debate between his two characters –it never becomes quite that– but because it is 1961, and this being an autobiographical piece, the political tenets held by the playwright mirror those of Fugard’s at that moment of South Africa’s history. Many whites turned a blind eye like André. The playwright has adopted a political stance. He places himself in the socio-political climate of *The Blood Knot*. Sharpeville is still too fresh in his memory, the laws regarding the passbook every black citizen had to carry are in force, and the playwright’s impassioned monologues evoke pictures of township misery André ignores or chooses to ignore. Further autobiographical information in this dialogue with André informs us of Fugard’s post in Johannesburg at the Native Commissioner’s Court where he worked as a clerk and the injustices perpetrated there. “we sent a black person to jail every five minutes” (52). One could point to this monologue as Fugard’s apologia for his playwriting, the revelation of an epiphany of sorts related to the place and times he was born into.

### 3. FUGARD ON THE THEATRE

*Exits and Entrances* is to a great extent a theatre piece that refers constantly to theatrical activity, traditionally awe-inspiring roles like Hamlet or Lear, challenging plays for ambitious players, the bitchy critics, the expectant audience, the backstage nerves of premières, the financial risks of production, the often long and winding road to success, the tours on the road, the loneliness of one hotel room after another; it is a world Fugard the playwright/actor/director knows well and moves comfortably in, like a fish in water. It is also a play in which the word prevails. True to Grotowsky’s ideals of a poor theatre, Fugard keeps props to a bare minimum, relying on the actors and the text to fill the space stretching out beyond the proscenium and into the auditorium. He believes a play’s potential is at its greatest “when the tricks associated with so much of present-day theatre are reduced to a minimum”. (Benson 1997: 6). Clothes are donned and taken off in the style of the *commedia dell’arte*. The theatrical act of disguise, an attempt at acquiring another personality is at the heart of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Two sole actors take on various personalities aiding their characterization with clothes changes. As in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* the scarce means available to the actor are cleverly put to use. In *The Blood Knot* the two brothers toy with disguise. Morris and Zach take turns in putting on the suit that Zach has spent their entire savings on so that his brother might impress Ethel on their first meeting. Contrary to the proverb, the suit makes or breaks the man. Morris becomes the man-about-town as soon as he tries it on, but it’s an impossible fit for Zach, who can never pass for white by the mere act of putting on a white man’s outfit. That will never blanch the hue of his skin. In an early scene of

the play Morris returns to Korsten after a prolonged absence. He dons his sleeping brother's coat, smelling it to confirm, animal-like, the presence of kith and kin via his brother's reassuring body odour. In *Exits and Entrances* the technique of a performance within a performance, for instance, an actor playing André interpreting Oedipus, is aided by the clothes changes. The playwright acts as André's dog's body, not only making him hot drinks, but also bringing about these transformations with the audience looking on. André's performances come alive through the playwright's recollection of helping him dress and undress for the role. The point of view is that of the playwright, who not only controls the biographical and autobiographical revelations to be made about both André and himself, but seeks the reader/spectator's complicity in monologues directed at them, emulating the *tête-à-tête* technique of the intrusive narrator of novels. The stage direction "From this point on he slips easily into a direct relationship with the audience" (6), that appears practically at the outset of the play serves to establish the flashback, bring André on stage, and set the play in motion. The playwright like the all-powerful author/narrator places André on stand-by on two further occasions. Halfway through the play another stage direction: "The playwright leaves André and comes downstage to talk directly to the audience" (40). The play draws to an end with the playwright leaving André seated in an armchair, that ever-present item of furniture of dressing rooms, sipping his brandy, like a marionette whose strings he will no longer be pulling, while he continues to engage the audience in what are his final reflections on André and the final entry in his diary of that day. Exit playwright.

*Exits and Entrances* premièred at the Fountain Theatre, Los Angeles, on May 13, 2004 and in South Africa it ran from July 13-August 6, 2005 at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town.

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