

Pathos and irony in selected plays by JM Synge and Athol Fugard

by

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***by
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Summary

The main problem addressed in this study was whether the modal concepts of irony and pathos can be said to have permeated and featured significantly in the works of John Millington Synge and Athol Fugard, thus underlining certain similarities and divergences in the selected plays: Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints, The Playboy of the Western World, Hello and Goodbye, Boesman and Lena and The Bloodknot. Analyses of these plays were done in order to identify the manifestations respectively in terms of irony and pathos.

Firstly the socio-political and historical perspective of the countries Ireland and South Africa was noted in order to provide the broader context within which to analyse the work of the said playwrights.

Secondly, a number of critics' views have been considered in an attempt to place each playwright in his dramatic tradition. This account served to indicate that though Synge and Fugard come from different countries, historical periods and cultures, they echo each other very persuasively as they both deal with the human condition at the most basic level, while at the same time limiting themselves to the people in the lower end of the social scale for choice of characters.

The concepts of pathos and irony were defined firstly by explanatory references from literary critics. From their given definitions, a number of working definitions were formulated by means of which the plays in question could be analysed.

Three plays each by Synge and Fugard were thoroughly studied and analysed within a broadly semiotic framework. Irony and pathos have been seen to permeate the works of these playwrights. However, it has emerged from this study that while there is a remarkable similarity in the use of these concepts, *pathos* manifests itself greatly in Fugard's plays while *irony* is more distinct in Synge's plays. For this reason Synge's work could then be regarded as more universally acceptable, while Fugard's work remains more strongly embedded in the notion of "committed literature".

It was further concluded that Synge and Fugard's work is intrinsically involved with the "particular" and yet certainly rises to the "universal". Their works proved to be not only important in themselves, but also to be far-reaching in their influence upon Irish, South African, and European literature.

Opsomming

Die hoofprobleem wat in die onderhawige studie aangespreek is is die vraag of ironie en patos gesien kan word as belangrike vormende modi in die werke van John Millington Synge en Athol Fugard, met die bedoeling om ooreenkomste en verskille in die volgende dramas te onderstreep: Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints, The Playboy of the Western World, Hello and Goodbye, Boesman and Lena en The Bloodknot. Hierdie dramas is ontleed om die manifestasie van ironie en/of patos daarin te onderstreep.

In die eerste plek is 'n sosiopolitieke en historiese perspektief van Suid-Afrika en Ierland verskaf ter wille van agtergrond.

In die tweede plek is gekyk na kritici se uitsprake oor die plek wat elk van hierdie dramaturge inneem binne hulle eie dramatradisie. Hieruit het dit geblyk dat hoewel Synge en Fugard uit verskillende lande, historiese tydperke en kulture kom, hulle werk nogtans eggo's vanmekaar vertoon daarin dat albei skryf oor die "human condition" en dat albei hulle karakters uit die laer sosio-ekonomiese lae van die samelewing kies.

Die konsepte ironie en patos wat die onderhawige dramas deurdrenk is ook uiteengesit uit 'n literatuurstudie, en werkdefinisies is ontwikkel vir doeleindes van die analise van die dramas.

Drie dramas van Synge en Fugard elk is ontleed binne 'n breë semiotiese raamwerk. Daar is duidelik aangetoon dat ironie en patos in die werke van albei dramaturge 'n belangrike, inderdaad vormende rol speel. Dit het ook geblyk uit die studie dat hoewel ironie en patos in beide se werk voorkom, patos sterker manifesteer in die werk van Fugard, en ironie sterker in die werk van Synge. Om hierdie rede is Synge se werke sterker, en kan Fugard se werk eerder as betrokke literatuur, en daarom meer tyd- en plekgebonde gesien word.

Dit is ook duidelik dat Synge en Fugard se werk intrinsiek betrokke is by die "besondere", maar tog tot die "universele" uitrys. Hierdie werke is inderdaad belangrik nie net om hulleself nie, maar ook om die breër invloed wat hulle het in die wêreldliteratuur.

Drama in contrast to all other 'literary genres', is potentially multidimensional, pluricodified, and is not exhausted on the written page but instead needs to be actualised in staging, such that it in fact situates itself, at the same time, both within and without literary genres in the strict sense (Alessandro Serpieri, 1989).

PREFACE: Introduction and contextualization

Repeated and increasingly intriguing readings of certain plays by J.M. Synge, the Irish playwright of the turn of the century, and Athol Fugard, the acclaimed South African playwright of the latter half of the twentieth century, have suggested powerfully that a comparison of certain of their works, embedded in and emanating from two seemingly disparate societies (South Africa of the sixties and Ireland of the early twentieth century) would reveal both striking differences and provocative divergences which will be investigated in detail in the study.

Against the background of both Ireland and South Africa as victims of several kinds of imperialism, political, economic, cultural and religion, a study such as the proposed one, which investigates a number of plays by acclaimed "canonized" playwrights, would be relevant and suggestive as an illustration of the invidious effects of British imperialism on widely divergent cultures.

Ireland, at the time of the colonization by the Britons, appeared a primitive, even savage place, with an "archaic clan system and a decadent, disorganized, and immoral brand of christianity remote from Rome" (MacCaffrey 1979:37). Most Irish Catholic peasants (and such peasants are largely the *dramatis personae* of Synge's plays) led a life of abject poverty - they were illiterate, could speak only Gaelic and were generally condemned to suffer from hunger, insecurity and gross exploitation, both political and economic.

The South African situation, and especially the situation of the "marginalised" populations, reveals persuasive parallels. The situation of such people has been portrayed to world acclaim by Athol Fugard, notably in the Three Port Elizabeth Plays, which is the text proposed for study in this dissertation.

In the work of both playwrights it is impossible to deny the impact of a super-realistic rendering of the humiliation, suffering and despair suffered by ordinary people under unbearable conditions. It will be demonstrated that the playwrights have chosen to deal with their given material in a manner that, on the one hand, suggests detachment (a strong **ironic** tone is maintained) while at the same time infusing their work with a powerful quality of **pathos**. These qualities in Synge's work remain tempered by irony, while in Fugard's work at times they tend to turn the plays into a too strongly propagandistic statement.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Problem statement

Synge and Fugard, as indicated above, come from different countries and cultures, yet have chosen to deal with the (remarkably similar) social conditions in their environments in a way that suggests a strong same-ness of approach.

The questions that have to be addressed would seem to be the following:

- 1 What effect (if any) would the (post-)imperialist backgrounds of the authors have on their work?

- 2 How important could both playwrights be perceived to be within their own dramatic traditions - in other words, to what extent would an extensive study of their work be feasible and justifiable?

- 3 Would a systematic comparison of these two playwrights yield enough proof to maintain that the perceived affective qualities of **pathos** and **irony** play a major role in their work, and that this can indeed be regarded as characteristic of their work? (More particularly in terms of the works chosen for analysis.)

- 4 In furthering this line of inquiry, what could one deduce about their views of the role of the playwright, and to what extent would this find shape in the works under consideration?

The plays to be studied are Synge's Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints and The Playboy of the Western World (plays close to each other chronologically and

thematically) and Fugard's Port Elizabeth Plays, viz. Hello and Goodbye, Boesman and Lena and The Blood Knot, chosen for their coherence in terms of theme, the fact that they belong together as a cluster of plays chronologically, and that they consistently deal with the poor of the earth, the peasant-type that Synge also uses so persuasively for dramatic purposes.

1.2 Aims of the study

In order to investigate this, the following aims will be pursued:

- 1 To study and describe the relevant sociopolitical background to the works of the playwrights in question.
- 2 To make an attempt to situate each playwright within his respective dramatic tradition.
- 3 To undertake a comparative study of the chosen plays, paying special attention to the ways in which the playwrights deal with their material in terms of imbuing the plays with the quality of **irony** and **pathos**.
- 4 To underline similarities and divergences in their handling of the dramatic material and attempt to account for this in terms of their own (published) views of the role of the playwright.

1.3 Thesis statement

It is postulated that both playwrights deal, in the works under consideration, with the human condition and do so particularly through the use of irony (to further an

effect of detachment) and pathos (to involve the receiver/audience/reader more emotionally). It is further postulated that while Synge uses irony more strongly as a controlling affective device, Fugard tends to lean on pathos so strongly at times that the plays tend to become heavily emotional, and thus more easily propagandistic.

1.4 Proposed methods and outline of chapters

- In the first place a literature survey will be undertaken to determine the direction and slant of criticism of the works of both Synge and Fugard.
- A concise historical and political overview (taking cognizance only of major trends and developments) will be done to provide a proper contextualization.
- The plays will be analysed in accordance with the semiotic analytical model proposed by Mouton (1989) and others.
- The plays will be analysed and compared and conclusions drawn as to the validity of the proposed comparison.

Chapter outline

- Summary and Opsomming
- Preamble: Introduction and contextualization
- 1 Introduction and outline
- 2 Ireland and South Africa: A historical perspective
- 3 Synge and Fugard: Their places in their respective dramatic traditions
- 4 Definition of concepts

5 Analyses of the plays:

- 5.1 Riders to the Sea: Awareness of the Irish heritage of story and belief-religion and irony.
- 5.2 The Well of the Saints: Exposure of vanities and fantasies - "Cast a cold eye on life, on death" (Yeats) - the supreme irony.
- 5.3 The Playboy of the Western World: Laughter, violence and the overwhelming love of life - irony and incongruity.
- 6.1 Hello and Goodbye: Fears and frustrations - existential pathos.
- 6.2 Boesman and Lena: Marriage and the ineffable pathos of loneliness.
- 6.3 The Blood Knot: Brotherhood - pathos and politics.

7 Conclusion

We are not free from our past, we are never free of the claims of others, and we ought not wish to be. Existential thought, and emphasis on the "*acte gratuite*", has always seemed to me a very inadequate way of looking at life. We are all part of a long inheritance, a human community in which we must play our proper part (Drabble, in The Author Comments, 1975).

Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, in The Empire Writes Back, 1989).

More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, in The Empire Writes Back, 1989).

CHAPTER TWO: IRELAND AND SOUTH AFRICA - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The mottoes used as guiding notions at the beginning of this chapter are considered to be of prime importance for the chapter in the sense that they are guiding ideas for the whole framework within which the argument is going to be structured. Whereas the primary concern in The Empire Writes Back (1989:3) is with nineteenth century British colonial expansion all across the world, the ideas expressed there are equally pertinent to earlier Irish colonization by England.

2.1 Ireland

In Ireland, English imperialism did not begin as a planned adventure, even though Ireland became England's first colony. McCaffrey (1979:01) mentions that English or Norman intervention in Ireland began when Dermot MacMurrough went to Wales in search of help to regain Leinster, which he had lost in an Irish civil war.

In 1169 A.D, when the Normans under Strongbow arrived in Ireland, it became divided into clan territories. These Norman English had come to Ireland to "civilize" the country by both Anglicizing and Romanizing it. And, as time went on, religious allegiances defined two separate communities distinguished by property and non-property, wealth and poverty, power and impotence.

Before the arrival of the Normans from Britain, the Irish society had been in transition - with European influences working in the change. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Ireland had appeared a primitive, even savage place, with an archaic clan system and a decadent, disorganized and immoral brand of christianity

despite the changing character of its Irish society from a continental or English perspective.

The English colony in Ireland was more concerned with survival than with expansion from the middle of the fourteenth until early in the sixteenth century. As an early manifestation of cultural apartheid in Western civilization, the English in Ireland were forbidden by the Statutes enacted in 1366 to associate with the natives, speak their language, wear their costumes, marry their women, adopt their children, or call on the spiritual services and consolations of their priests. (This notion is of course one of the basic underlying tenets of colonialism, and would be the norm for later forms of European colonialism, assisting powerfully in the creation of the marginalization, the "othering" of the inhabitants of the colonized countries, creating in many of the countries and peoples the invidious practice of "cultural cringe" towards all things British [thus "superior"].)

In the year 1690 Ireland was the pivot of the European crisis. July 1, 1690 saw the battle of the Boyne fought upon the basis of two quarrels. It was the struggle of the Anglo-Scots against the Celto-Iberians for the leadership of Ireland; but it was no less the struggle of Britain and her European allies to prevent a Jacobite restoration in England, and the consequent domination of the world by the French monarchy.

As Trevelyan (1926:484) mentions, the outcome of that day subjected the native Irish to persecution and tyranny for several generations to come, but it saved Protestantism in Europe and enabled the British Empire to launch itself strongly on its career of "prosperity, freedom and expansion" overseas.

In the course of the next few years, the English imposed a code of penal laws (resembling the French laws against the Huguenots) by which the Catholic majority were excluded from public life and from many of the avenues to prosperity and

influence while their freedom of worship was also accompanied by a number of restrictive conditions.

England faced four great political uncertainties at the beginning of the eighteenth century: the succession to the throne, the hostility of France, and the new relations with Scotland and in particular, Ireland.

Horace Walpole had his difficulties in Ireland. The vast bulk of the impoverished Roman Catholic population that was dominated by the ascendent Protestants played no part in the political life of the nation. But, as the Protestants themselves were far from satisfied with their constitutional and economic subjection to England, in 1722 there came the first opportunity for them to stand forth as the patriotic defenders of Irish rights.

All the colonists living in Ireland, however humble, were personally free, but living side by side with them were the native Irish tenantry, who were termed "betaghs" and considered as serfs, who in many cases would seem to have been organized as self-contained communities.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the situation was that the seventy-five percent Catholic majority owned less than ten percent of Irish landed property and were excluded from the affairs of their own country while other events around 1798 were distorted through the mythology of Irish nationalism more than any incident or series of incidents in Irish history.

Trevelyan (1965:111) maintains that at any time in the decade following 1782, a Reform Bill, Catholic Emancipation, and the payment of the Catholic priests by the Government, would have diverted the whole history of Ireland into happier channels.

By 1832 the Irish nation as an entity had been made supreme and so defined as to include half of the middle class. The rest of the middle class and the working-men of the towns were included in 1867. As 1870 arrived, war broke out between France and Prussia and turned the relations of European states into new courses. Other countries, one after another, overtook the lead which Britain had established.

By 1870 Ireland had assumed an appearance of economic, social and political stability unknown since the eighteenth century. Many Irishmen and Englishmen looked forward to a belated realization of O'Connell's dream of an Ireland transformed into a "modern" industrial society, modelled upon England.

The immediate consequence between 1868 and 1875 was a long list of reforms, including, under the Liberals, Irish Church and Land Acts, popular education, army reform, the opening of the Civil Service and the Universities to free competition.

The Irish Question and Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule are the factors which completed the transformation of the political scene. Throughout the century Ireland had been the greatest single source of violence and political upheaval in English politics. Daniel O'Connell's Catholic emancipation in the 1820s had been followed by the "Young Ireland" movement of the 1840s and the crisis of the potato famine in 1846 (which had such a traumatic and profound effect on the subsequent sociopolitical history of Ireland).

Thomson (1950:182) mentions that all Gladstone's efforts to remedy the situation by the Disestablishment of the Irish Church (1869), the Land Act (1870), and the Arrears Act (1882) left the raw sore of fierce Irish nationalism, then content with

nothing short of Home Rule, and likely in the end to demand total independence and separation from Great Britain.

According to McCaffrey, the "Home Rule League" had been formed in 1873 by Isaac Butt, while the Disestablishment of the Irish Church and the first Land Act did not, as Gladstone hoped, "pacify Ireland". "Fenianism became less active and a constitutional agitation grew up to demand an Irish Parliament" (1979:96).

In 1879 the Land League had been founded to fight out the agrarian question against the landlords with the law and Government behind them. As Gladstone's Land Act of 1870 had not given fair rents or security of tenure, his Bill of 1880 for compensating evicted tenants under certain conditions was thrown out by an immense majority in the House of Lords.

The peasantry, in particular, had suffered from the land legislation that was designed to simplify the process of eviction in the interests of efficiency. Ireland itself suffered from the application of *laissez-faire* principles, which however successful they might have been in Britain, were ill-suited to the circumstances in Ireland.

As Beckett (1952:145) mentions, the British mishandling of Irish affairs arose largely from ignorance and neglect and the task of dealing justly with Ireland was infinitely complicated by the intermixture of economic and political problems in the early eighteenth century.

In Ireland there were men influenced by the French liberal ideas of 1789 who called themselves "patriots" and in spite of the extreme differences of social and political institutions, they represented educated middle-class elements who were excluded from some civil rights by ruling oligarchies. This was the case while the

British and Irish Protestants considered themselves as the most enlightened people in Europe, the possessors of the Whig representative government constitutional tradition.

The Gaelic League, organized in 1893, officially rejected secretarianism. During the time of Sean O'Casey and later, many Gaelic Leaguers charged the Catholic hierarchy and clergy with anti-Irish language biases. Many of the priests joined the League and supported its demand that Irish should be taught in the schools, and proficiency in it should be a qualification for admission to the new National University established by the Liberal government in 1908.

In the stormy years before Ireland at last gained her independence, a brilliant (and carefully engineered and structured) revival of Irish drama took place and culminated in the founding of the Abbey Theatre in 1904. Of those who helped to create it - W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, the Fay Brothers, and Miss Horniman - it was J.M. Synge as much as anyone who made the new Irish drama the force it quickly became in the theatres of the world (Synge 1910:ii).

Although the Literary Revival occasionally scandalized and antagonized Irish-Islanders, it made an important contribution to the momentum of Irish cultural nationalism. Audiences and critics disliked the pagan tones of Yeats'¹ Countess Cathleen, but loved his Cathleen ni Houlihan as the best theatrical representation of Irish nationalism (McCaffrey 1979:123).

The year 1914 and after marked a crucial historical watershed. The Irish problem was to haunt British politics because it continued to cause a deep split both between

1 William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was the dominant personality in the Irish Literary Revival which perpetuated the cultural nationalism of Young Ireland and articulated it to a world opinion that pressured the British government into conceding dominion Status to twenty six Irish counties.

and within English political parties. John Redmon led a parliamentary Irish Nationalist Party; but outside formal circles it formed extreme and violent movements like Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and the highly syndicalist Labour Movement.

By 1914 most farmers were paying annuities to the state which had advanced their purchase money, rather than substantially higher rents to their landlords.

Companies of Irish Volunteers and members of the Citizen Army demonstrated in the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains and held public reviews in the streets of Dublin from August 1914 to April 1916. April 23, 1916 was set as a date for revolution by the Military Council of Irish Republican Brotherhood with Germany promising to furnish them with ammunition.

In this very year, on Easter Monday morning, rebels seized the General Post Office and hoisted a Republican tricolour (green, white and orange) while a declaration of independence² was proclaimed from the balcony. This proclamation established an Irish Republic committed to social reform and full civil rights for all inhabitants of the nation.

In part, the words read :

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign an[sic] indefeatable ... The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman ... cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

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Green represented the Catholic tradition, Orange the Protestant tradition, and white the bond of love between the two traditions.

This definitive shift in Irish opinion forced a glimmer of reason to appear in Britain's Irish policy. As W.B., Yeats (1939:203) described the situation in his poem "Easter 1916", blood sacrifice had transformed Ireland: "All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born."

The relationship between Ireland and Great Britain after seven hundred and fifty years of uneasy maladjustment underwent a transition at the close of 1921. As Ireland ceased to be a portion of the United Kingdom, it became of "the group of self-governing communities composed of Great Britain and the Dominions".

In the 1937 constitution, Irish was declared the "first official language" while in 1937 the new "constitution of Ireland" on behalf of the people of Eire was devised and enacted. This laid claim to the entire "national territory" but limited its jurisdiction to the twenty-six counties.

Fitzpatrick mentions that in 1985 the British government tried to circumvent unionist intransigence by negotiating a bilateral agreement for liaison in security and civil administration with the Irish government at Hillsborough. It was insisted that "Ulster says no" and "that negation seems as unanswerable today as it did in 1914 and 1922" (in Forster 1989:272).

O'Hegarty³, gives a classic account of Irish history, saying "it is the story of a people coming out of captivity, out of the underground, finding every artery of national life in the possessions of the enemy, recovering them one by one, and coming out at last into full blaze of the sun" (in Foster 1989:31).

³ O'Hegarty is the insurrectionist republican well-known for his writing of Ireland Under the Union.

As is still clearly evident today, the Irish question remains unabated. The present uneasy truce, arrived at in the final months of 1994, might prove to be more durable than previous efforts, but that remains to be seen.

What is of importance for this study is the state of affairs in Ireland at the turn of the century: the poverty, the lack of any real freedoms, the simmering tensions with regard to English colonialism, which in retrospect can be seen to have been building up towards the calamitous events of 1916. These form the backdrop against which the plays by Synge which have been chosen for consideration should be seen and assessed.

2.2 South Africa

The arrival of Van Riebeeck on 6 April 1652 to establish a refreshment post at the southern tip of Africa in the name of DEIC (Dutch East India Company) marked an important turning point in the history of South Africa. As this was the beginning of permanent white occupation of this country, it signalled a new Western European society which was added to the existing African societies - the San, the Khoikhoi and other black races.

This event did not only lead to a greater diversity in the composition of the population, but coming with their specific economic, cultural and social values, the Euro-peans also gave new impetus to South African history.

South Africa, inter alia, became part of the international capitalistic world and an inseparable part of the greater European world, and in the long run, the settlement of the Europeans had a determining influence on the interaction between the population groups and the course of history.

It will be proper to note that the history of the Cape was determined largely by the policies and actions of the DEIC⁴ towards the settlement for almost one-and-a-half centuries (1652-1795). As the colonial ruler with extensive power, the executive council of the company, the Chamber of XVII, was in full control of the Cape.

The DEIC was forced by the extension of the colony to make provision for administrative bodies at local level. The areas around Cape Town had to be divided into districts. At first it was one only, but by 1795 already four, with each district having a Landdrost (magistrate) and four heemraden appointed by the Council of Policy.

The colonists were quick to resent the authoritarian rule and mercantilism of the Dutch East India Company. They complained often and bitterly of excessive taxation, restraints on trade, inefficiency and corruption in the administration.

In 1795 when the importance of Table Bay as the key to India and the East came to be considered as paramount in the struggle for supremacy among the European powers, it became acquired by conquest by a British fleet, under Admiral Elphinstone with a large number of troops under the command of General Craig. In the words of Campbell (1897:10), "that was the death-blow of that grasping, mercenary, trading corporation, whose despotic government and rigorous monopoly of all produce raised by the settlers in the country had driven those living outside Cape Town into open rebellion".

⁴ The Dutch East India Company (DEIC) was organized on a federal basis and was a capitalistic enterprise with vast trading powers in the East. Among its policies, it was to build up a trade monopoly in the areas where its authority was established; strive for maximum profits and minimum expense and also for direct or immediate profit.

Accompanied by Hercules Ross as the paymaster of the forces, Earl Macartney assumed the government in May 1797. From this time till 1802, the Settlement at Cape Town and all the country beyond it acquired by the inhabitants owing allegiance to the Dutch East India Company, became subject to Great Britain, and the people were British subjects.

The oath of allegiance to the British Crown was renewed, and merchants and others were cautioned against giving any account of the circumstances in their letters, and foreigners were prohibited from settling without a licence. The captured were treated with great leniency; their laws were guaranteed to them, property was to be respected, no new taxes were to be levied and the DEIC was still to keep its privileges and rights.

There was much friction between the various population groups and a remarkably strong opposition by the Afrikaners to the British rule in the period 1795 to 1802. Many of the Afrikaners were taken into custody and were only free to leave the castle under the amnesty granted by the Batavian Commissioners on the evacuation of the Colony in February 1803.

The Batavian flag was hoisted on the Forts on 21 February 1803 and the government transferred to the Dutch in terms of the Treaty of Amiens. A period of anxious suspense followed, and some of the radical parties in the town did their best to cause a rupture. On March 1 a proclamation was made of the assumption of the government by the Batavian Republic, and in April Dutch copper coin was substituted for the English copper in circulation. This was to be a fragile arrangement, however - in 1805 the first shots in what would be the Napoleonic Wars were fired, and the British moved quickly to reoccupy the Cape (Oakes, 1988:94). The Cape was considered now to be important as a strategic geographical position.

Commissioner de Mist left the Colony in February 1805. "This excellent man, during his residence, had travelled through a portion of the Colony, and had been unremitting in his efforts to improve its trade and resources" (Campbell 1897:13). By this time⁵, a plan for the establishment of public schools had been drawn, a church ordinance promulgated and the courts of Landdrost and Heemraden reformed.

The Cape became increasingly important to the British during this period. The end of the Napoleonic Wars had brought certain dire consequences for British industry, including the discontinuation of war industries, and the return to civilian life of thousands of soldiers swelled the already long queues of the unemployed (Oakes, 1988:94). "As economic and political strains increased, the government began looking to its overseas possessions not only as a means to bail it out of its financial difficulties, but also to serve as labour recruitment centres for British unemployed. In both respects, the Cape of Good Hope played an important role" (Oakes, 1988:95).

The year 1820 thus marked an important event in the history of South Africa when there was the addition of almost 4 000 British settlers to the white society of the Cape Colony. It was hoped that settling those people on the eastern frontier would bring stability in the area as the number would considerably strengthen the British population.

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By the year 1805 both the British and Batavian governments had made the administrative changes that clearly reflected their approach towards the Cape. After conquering the Cape, Britain had found it necessary to establish its authority firmly, while the Batavian Republic was more liberal in its colonial dealings.

For the greater part, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, South Africa went through troubles of its population groups struggling for land. The period 1778 to 1894 marked the territorial confrontations, the breaking of Boer Independence, the shaping of White Dominion up to the consolidation of a White state.

Among other events in South Africa, the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902 came as another distinct and destabilizing occurrence. It was begun on 11 October 1899 by the Boers, following the failure of an ultimatum to the British. Because of an initial military advantage, the Boers found it possible to seize the initiative. The war was fought to determine which white authority held real (economic, hence also political) power in South Africa, and as it was exclusively between whites, it was not allowed, save in a marginal sense, to become a black man's war.

In 1910, May 31, the South African colonies became the Union of South Africa, with Dominion status. The former colonies under the constitution were reduced to the position of provinces with only local tasks left to their governments, which were headed by administrators appointed by the central government. Because of the new conditions set out by the Act of Union, for a while there was a period of inactivity, of consolidation as the racial groups were coming to terms with the conditions. Simmering tensions in the black communities would begin to manifest themselves in the following years, but these would not lead to real gains in any real sense - in large measure also because the European struggles beginning to gain momentum on the Continent would have real ramifications in South Africa, as would emerge from the responses to black appeals for the repeal of land legislation in particular. (This series of events is documented most engrossingly by Sol T. Plaatje in his landmark book, Native Life in South Africa, first published in 1916, and reprinted in 1987.)

Some three years after the establishment of the Union, the government made its policy clear and passed the Natives' Land Act in 1913 in the interest of what was regarded as traditional separation. Drafted in total disregard of claims for land by black South Africans, this Act had put forth a number of controlling measures and restrictions particularly to the natives. One such restriction is mentioned by Plaatjie (1987:36) : " ... what areas should be set apart as areas within which natives shall not be permitted to acquire or hire or interests in land".

In his introduction to Native Life in South Africa, Plaatjie (1987:v) remarks about land division that, "In contrast to the Cape Colony's traditional policy of seeking to involve black South Africans in its affairs on a basis of class rather than race or colour, during the first decade of the twentieth century the predominant ruling-class policy for dealing with "the native problem", was the notion of restricting African land ownership to a very small part of South Africa's land surface ... ".

Troup (1972:215) has also clearly supported this notion: "Once Union had been accomplished and the very limited franchise rights of the Non-Whites entrenched in the South Africa Act, the brief spot-lighting from Westminster was switched off; in self-governing seclusion successive South African administrators settled down to deal with the "native problem" in ways designed to protect White civilization and White privilege".

This idea is further strengthened by the policy espoused by the Sauer Commission in 1947. It envisaged two policies relating to the other races: "We can move only in one of two directions: either we must choose the path of equalization, and ultimately grant equal political, economic, and social rights to the non-whites, which, in the long run, will mean national suicide for the white race and, for the non-white racial groups, annihilation of identity; or we must choose the path of segregation, whereby the character and future of each race will be protected within

its own territory, and whereby each race will be given every opportunity to develop on its home ground, and be assured of its inalienable right to self-determination, without the interests of one race being brought into conflict with those of the other races and without each race perceiving the existence and development of the other races as an undermining of, or threat to, itself" (Muller 1969:456).

There was also a growing need from South African rulers to bring some order into Non-White affairs in the White areas. The first official recognition of the existence of the rapidly increasing African urban population living in deplorable poverty and squalor was made in the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923. With this Act, local authorities were given responsibility for the housing of Africans in segregated locations.

Legislation on land ran side by side with that of labour as the two spheres were often interdependent. The issue of the Natives' Land Act, as with those acts which came later, including the Native Administration Act of 1927, the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act (both of 1950), indicate the extent to which South Africa remained a fragmented ex-colonial culture corrupted in accordance with an ideology which emphasised and exploited racial differences.

The Communist Party of South Africa was founded in 1921 as a mainly White party and, though it repudiated the colour bar, it was largely preoccupied with the white workers' interests and divided in attitude towards Non-Whites. However, its members began to work more and more with the Non-Whites, starting the first night schools for Africans where literacy was taught along with Marxist doctrine.

The National Party came into power in 1948, a year which marked a tremendous change in the politics and history of South Africa - no less than the beginning of the total disenfranchisement of the larger portion of the South African population. On

taking office, Troup (1972:295) states that Malan, conscious not only of the discontented Black masses within his country's borders, but of the millions beyond in Africa and many millions of all colours beyond them, had said that it was only under apartheid that Non-Europeans could enjoy "a greater independence and feeling of self-respect ... as well as ... better opportunities for free development in accordance with their natures and abilities", and that the Europeans would feel sure that their identity and their future were protected.

And indeed, behind what has been going on in South Africa, lies more than a century of open protest against the steadily increasing political and economic restrictions imposed on especially the "marginalised" populations.

But, against this given background of South Africa, Venter (1989:16) noted the other side of this country: " ... taking the political and military questions apart, to everyone visiting the country, South Africa - on the surface in any event - appears to be flourishing like no other country in Africa".

When Fugard wrote the Three Port Elizabeth Plays in the early sixties, a number of things were happening. Apartheid had firmly settled in and the segregation of the various population groups in the country had become solidified within legislation which it would take decades to unravel. People's lives, education and futures were separated. The harsh and intransigent laws which were promulgated to ensure the practical application of apartheid created lives of misery and endless heartbreak for millions of people, and it is this face of apartheid, the very furthest reach that apartheid, as the culmination in many ways of the colonising enterprise could be seen to be guilty of, that provided Fugard with the powerful impulse to write the plays that he did in the early part of his playwrighting career.

No matter how high one goes, there is always argument, disagreement. Always one has an opinion which differs from the one held by others. One has to discuss, to argue, and to forcefully uphold one's own opinion or one becomes a slave, an automaton, ever ready to accept the dictates of another (Lobsang Rampa, The Hermit).

CHAPTER THREE: SYNGE AND FUGARD: THEIR PLACES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE DRAMATIC TRADITIONS.

3.1 J.M. Synge

John Millington Synge⁶ wrote for the stage, specifically the Irish stage, and this has militated against his wider acceptance, particularly as Ireland has an ungrateful habit of neglecting the talents it produced in such profusion (Bickley 1912:61).

A very early critic, Skelton (1972:11) clearly supports this notion when he mentions that Synge is generally regarded as a playwright whose works gave fresh dignity and depth to the portrayal of the Irish character upon the stage and dealt the death-blow to the stock figure of the "stage Irishman" so beloved of comedy writers from the seventeenth century onwards.

The acknowledged influential critic of Synge, Grene (1975:186), maintains that within the very definite limits of Synge's work, it was yet possible for him to achieve plays of outstanding merit which can bear comparison with the best the twentieth century has to offer.

⁶ John Millington Synge was born in Rathfarnham, a suburb of Dublin on 16 April 1871. He renounced Christianity at age 16, and was educated by tutors at home and in private schools in Dublin and Bray. As a youth he developed an intense interest in nature, especially the study of birds.

Yeats met him in Paris in 1896 and urged him to go to the Aran Islands to get the Islanders' way of life into his blood in preparation for playing his part in the Irish literary renaissance. Despite his great admiration for the "life style" and values of the Aran islanders, he was also fully aware of the less pleasant aspects of life in the rest of Ireland.

In the seven and final years of his short life he wrote the six plays which established his reputation as the first great playwright of the Abbey.

Grene goes on to say that like other writers to whom he was, as a critic, attracted at the time, such as William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams, the main significance of Synge's work was that it confirmed the growing sense that he wanted to write drama that was above all, firmly located in the local, in the particular, the microcosmos of society.

Although his vigorous and frequently sardonic treatment of his material has led to his plays being condemned by many contemporary Irish critics as denigrations of the Irish character, as a dramatist, he stands the test of being read as literature; he was studied from the first, particularly in France and Germany where the European quality of his thinking was quickly recognised.

Today especially, when much serious drama either consists still of "pallid and joyless words" or is down-right inarticulate, there is refreshment of the spirit to be found in Synge's plays, allying Irish charm and a rich flow of language with a universal applicability (Strong 1941:83).

And Thornton had this to say: "General opinion was that Synge had found on the islands various folk stories and plots and a living language, and that these enabled him to become a writer" (1979:12).

Synge insisted that the vitality of modern drama depends upon a rich language that grows spontaneously out of the living reality of a folk imagination.

Despite the fact that Synge wrote only six plays, two of them one-acters, he is nevertheless commonly regarded as one of the finest dramatists, if not the finest of the Irish theatre as well as an important figure in modern drama in English. His influence on Irish drama and literature has been particularly important since his realistic assessments and evocation of Irish life and character have proved to be an effective force in opposing the tradition of heroic myth.

Yet Synge's is a complex and curious form of realism, for related to it is his special sense of the mysticism of nature. The hearty earthy souls of Western Ireland who inhabit his plays are inevitably touched by nature; nature becomes one of them, an entity in their lives. Thus nature becomes a virtual presence in the plays - either they are soothed by it or they are undone by it.

Synge's characters aspire to a wild life of fantasy and freedom, and when this quest is limited or denied them in the world of reality, they invariably achieve it in the life of the imagination through the powerful and poetic Irish idiom they speak.

Two of his plays, Riders to the Sea and Deirdre of the Sorrows (the latter unfinished and published posthumously) are lyrical tragedies in a classical style.

The four remaining plays, In the shadow of the Glen, The Well of the Saints, The Playboy of the Western World, and The Tinker's Wedding, might be described as dark comedies or even tragicomedies, for their farcical and irreverent humour is often accompanied by a contrasting mood of frustration or defeat that leads to mock-heroic resolution for many characters - peasants and tramps and tinkers.

Watson mentions that Synge's life and work could be seen as in many ways paradigmatic of the situation and problems of the ascendent writer in Ireland, torn between the desire to identify and merge with a community and the desire to assert the distinguishing and defining values of the individual self (1979:35).

3.2 Athol Fugard

The renowned South African dramatist, Athol Fugard⁷ is in many respects very similar to Synge. He is an artist who has transformed the limitations of his background and situation to brilliant advantage, tapping the tension of South African society to create drama of great power and effect. His theatre is radical, even extreme, but this is in response to an extreme South African situation.

Adey (1986:87) has noted this and mentions that Fugard's achievement to date has been to play a key role in rescuing South African theatre from its dependence on the trivial entertainments of the West End stage, and to lead the way towards a theatrical experience which may be thought of as meaningfully "South African".

As his particular strength lies in a unique combination of a specific social protest and a universal concern with the human condition, he has emerged as one of the major South African dramatists though on the other hand he tends to be highly propagandistic.

Pieterse (in Gray 1982:111) rightly observed that Fugard's plays fall under the heading of protest literature, but the protest is in each case widened out to include comments and reflections on aspects of human nature in particular on the problem of identity.

Each of his plays deals with one or several aspects of segregation, and they all carry a strong condemnation of its inhumanity.

⁷ Athol Fugard was born in the Cape Province, South Africa and grew up in Port Elizabeth. He became a clerk in a Native Commissioner's court in Johannesburg and was involved in non-professional theatre in the black ghetto townships. Most of his very inventive and passionately humane theatre work has been accomplished under improvised circumstances and he has had much practical experience of "poor theatre".

With Fugard, it is primarily a matter of transforming emotions, of arousing in us a powerful and deep emotional awareness which burns into our consciousness the imagery of a group of individual human beings caught within the conflicting tensions of their specific situations (Walder 1984:8).

Many thinking people have recognized and admitted the contradictions and injustices of the separate development system, including most notably, the "liberals". For this reason, Fugard may be said to belong to the liberals who represent an attitude rather than a party.

His drama works at a political as well as a personal level, as any play in South Africa is almost bound to do - but as a comparison with Synge's drama sufficiently suggests, its political importance is illustrative rather than allegorical.

At one level Synge and Fugard differ in that they have different views of the role of the playwright. Synge is outspokenly committed to the "human condition". In the words of Price (1961:39) he "champions the imaginative life and condemns whatever seeks to restrain human liberty; he dramatizes the plight of men and women whose existence in menacing and meaningless world he invests with passion".

His work was rooted in Irish life, but was not overtly motivated by political aims. While investigating the lives of the depressed and the poor in almost naturalistic terms, he brings elements of high and exhilarating comedy to his audience.

Fugard has a stronger, more overt political commitment. His early works, which will be concentrated on, are complex and specific. They all focus upon two or three

people inextricably entangled by the ties of blood, love or friendship. He shows them struggling to survive in an arbitrary, bleak and almost meaningless world.

For Fugard, as he says in his Notebooks, his life's work is just to witness as "truthfully" as he can "the nameless and destitute" of his "one little corner of the world". This notion, correctly understood, could be taken to refer to what in Synge is read as the "human condition". His chamber (or early) plays are committed to the situation in South Africa in that they do not evade, but illustrate the realities of the human condition by making use of the complex anomalies that exist in his country and everywhere.

It is, therefore, Synge and Fugard's great strength to move us deeply by showing the plight of ordinary people caught up in the meshes of social, political, racial and even religious forces which the very people themselves are unable to understand and control.

These playwrights (Synge and Fugard) are mainline figures who at given times in history, emancipated drama not only from trends prevalent at the time, to reflect the human condition in a middle-class mirror, but also from the settings and neat three-act structures which had been that mirror's framework.

Since there are both suggestive parallels and provocative divergences regarding the plays of these playwrights, their works richly deserve to be studied in great detail. In effecting this, the analysis of selected plays by Synge and Fugard will be undertaken from a broadly contextualized framework in the later chapters.

Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world and all there ever will be to know and understand
(Albert Einstein).

CHAPTER FOUR: DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Before examining some of the plays by John Millington Synge and Athol Fugard, analysing them with special reference to the irony and pathos inherent in them, it is necessary to define these two terms for purposes of a better comprehension and understanding and for purposes of arriving at viable working definitions for purposes of this study.

There are a wide variety of opinions on what could exactly be the meaning of **pathos** and **irony**. In this chapter, I will examine a number of definitions of the two concepts (specifically with reference to drama) as articulated by a number of critics, then attempt the working definition to be used in the remaining part of the study. The idea is that **irony** and **pathos** are used as modes of expression, whether affectively or ironically, employed by playwrights to give expression to their main attitudes to their themes and characters.

4.1 Irony

"Die term ironie (Gr. eironia: geveinsde onkunde, afgelei van eiron: huigelaar, veinser) het eers teen die einde van die 18e eeu in gebruik gekom. Sedert die vyftigerjare van hierdie eeu is dit 'n sentrale konsep in ons kritiese woordeskat" (Pretorius, in Cloete 1992:191).

It is a term from a Greek word meaning "dissembler". Patrick Murray states that at the root of all irony, there is a contrast between what is being said, implied or suggested and what is actually the case. As the ironist pretends to be unaware that the appearance is only an appearance, the victim of irony is really unaware of the contrast between reality and appearance (1978:69).

Irony is a term that always preserves the essence of its original meaning and is a simple technique based on antiphrasis. Considering the various definitions given over many years, the term was defined as "saying the contrary of what one means"; as "saying one thing but meaning another", and as "mocking and scoffing".

On the surface the ironical statement says one thing, but it means something rather different. It involves a discrepancy between what is said literally and what the statement actually means. "In a lighthearted, laughingly ironical statement, the literal meaning may be only partially qualified; in a bitter and obvious irony (such as sarcasm), the literal meaning may be completely reversed" (Brooks & Warren 1972:291).

As a figure of speech, its denotative meaning is "the opposite of that intended". In literature, irony is a technique of indicating an intention or attitude opposed to what is actually stated. One could also define it as the difference between **what is** and **what should be**⁸.

It can further be defined as a mode of discourse for conveying meanings different from - and usually opposite to - the professed or ostensible one; the use of agreeable or commendatory forms of expression enabling one to convey something opposite to that which is literally expressed; sarcastic laudation, compliment, or the like. Irony pre-supposes an attitude of **detachment**.

There are several kinds of irony, though they fall into two major categories: Verbal and Situational. The distinction between Verbal Irony and Situational Irony is generally, though not universally, accepted. "The former is the irony of an ironist

⁸ My emphasis

being ironical; the latter is the irony of a state of affairs or an event seen as ironic" (Muecke 1970:49).

Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren lay more emphasis on this distinction: "Irony of situation is to be distinguished from irony of statement. The former is inherent in the situation itself and does not derive from the writer's manner of presentation. But obviously the two modes overlap, and usually it is the writer who makes his reader aware of the irony that is inherent in the situation" (1970:484).

Because the contexts of situational irony may be primarily social, moral or metaphysical, events in the selected plays will be analysed with situational irony in mind. All irony, however, depends for its success on the exploitation of the distance between words or events and their CONTEXTS, which allows for the sense of detachment essential for irony to realize.

Aristotle defined irony as "a dissembling toward the inner core of truth" while a simple and perhaps more helpful explanation came with Cicero: "Irony is the saying of one thing and meaning another." Among devices by which irony is achieved are hyperbole, litotes, satire, sarcasm, cynicism and understatement.

In the opinion of many, Garber explains, irony is the most effective weapon of satire. It comes from the fundamental distance between the **thing** reported, without importance in itself, and the philosophy contained in the different "voices" of the text" (1988:98).

The frequent employment of the various devices of irony implies an attitude similar to that of a spectator at a Greek tragedy, an attitude of detachment and sophistication and a tendency to perceive life in terms of the incongruities that occur between appearances and reality (Shipley 1970:165).

There are many techniques for achieving irony. Beckson (1960:106) states that "The writer may for instance make it clear that the meaning he intends is the opposite of his literal one, or he may construct a discrepancy between an expectation and its fulfilment or between the appearance of a situation and the reality that underlies it."

Whatever his technique, the writer demands that the reader perceive the concealed meaning that lies beneath his surface statement. This has the effect of making the reader complicit in the reading, while the paradoxical distance is maintained, thus creating a powerful tension.

While States⁹ (1971:141) suggests that irony is the dramatist's way of discovering remarkable situations which compel the attention and satisfy the audience that all that can be said on the subject has been said, Schlegel¹⁰ maintains that irony is the highest principle of art, that the poet stands ironically above his creation, as God does above his own; the creation is utterly objective in character, and yet it reveals the subjective wisdom, will, and love of the creator.

States expands his definition: Irony is the dramatist's version of the negative proposition: it helps him to avoid error, and by this I mean that it widens his vision, allows him to see more circumspectly the possibilities in his "argument"; and in so doing it ensures his not falling into the incomplete attitudes of naivete, sentimentality, self righteousness, or unearned faith. In short, "the complete dramatist - if there is such a person - is unironically ironic" (1971:xviii).

⁹ States is the author of Irony and Drama in which he examines various forms of drama including Tragedy, Comedy, Grotesque, Lyric, Irony, Dialect, etc. (1971).

¹⁰ Schlegel is quoted by States (1971:3) as being famous (or infamous) for liberating the term "irony" from the realm of simple verbal raillery.

But, for Schlegel (in States 1961:227), the concept of irony is more interesting as a balancing of serious and comic or fanciful and prosaic:

Irony ... is a sort of confession interwoven into the representation itself, and more or less distinctly expressed, of its overchanged onesidedness in matters of fancy and feeling, and by means of which the equipoise is again restored.

Solger conceives the finer irony as an almost mystical energy of artistic insight; as the creative act by which idea or essence steps into the place of and annihilates phenomenal reality; as the translation of the world of experience into the artist's ideal dream; as a transcendental means of contemplative "enthusiasm," a union of impulse and rational lucidity, a poise between the extremes of ecstasy and disenchantment (in Brooks 1957:380).

From the given definitions, one comes away with the notion that literature, like other arts, can depict ironic situations. It is therefore proper to see language employed in literature as being far more able to deal with what people say, feel and believe, and consequently with the differences between what people say and what they think and between what is believed to be and what is the case.

4.2 Pathos

It is a word taken from the Greek root for suffering or deep feeling. Its apt presentation in speech and writing is considered a figure of speech. In the Dictionary of Literary Terms Shaw (1972:279) states that "Pathos ... word meaning "suffering"; it refers to that ability or power in literature (and other arts) to call forth feelings of pity, compassion and sadness".

Specialists in the field of literature and related terms often make a distinction between tragic figures and pathetic ones. Hamlet is said to be a tragic hero while Ophelia is a pathetic one. It follows from this distinction that a pathetic object usually suffers helplessly, but a tragic hero, such as Othello, always achieves dignity and the resolution of his pain.

In the words of Shipley (1970:234) pathos is a sense of distress that awakens pity or tenderness in the receptor. Usually it is associated with the sentimental, with melodramatic rather than tragic situations and moods. It is Shakespeare who sometimes uses pathos to lighten the strain of the tragic.

Derived from Greek origins, pathos has come to mean experience, suffering, emotion. The quality in writing which evokes pity or sadness. It is therefore an element of tragedy, removed itself from tragedy (Scott 1965:213).

According to Robert Anderson and Ronald Eckard, pathos in literature is that part which evokes sadness or pity. "Excessive pathos or pathos misused becomes sentimentality" (1977:98). When pathos shifts into sentimentality, it evokes contempt as easily as it evokes compassion.

The definition by Abrams does not evince any remarkable deviation from the definitions given by other critics. He states that "pathos in the Greek means suffering or passion. In criticism it is attributable to a scene or passage designed to evoke tenderness from the audience" (1988:129).

However, Beckson (1960:160) has warned that sometimes a writer, trying too hard for pathos or sublimity, may stumble into **bathos** which he defines as a sudden and ridiculous descent from the exalted to the ordinary especially when a writer, striving for the noble or pathetic achieves the ludicrous.

4.3 Working definitions

The working definitions in this study have the purpose not so much of providing general definitions of the two concepts, but rather to point out those aspects that might have a direct bearing on the presence and implementation of the concepts functioning as modes in the selected plays of John Millington Synge and Athol Fugard.

Although the working definitions may have much in common with prevalent explanations of the concepts central to literature in general, the focus will be on their manifestations in the plays under consideration, and specifically on the way in which the writers in question use these attitudinal notions to elicit the desired responses from their respective audiences.

Irony, in essence, would be used to refer to the degree of **objectivity**, "indifference" and freedom of the writers in relation to their work, while **pathos** would be used to describe the writers' own **subjectivity** in their characters or viewpoints with which the reader is supposed to be in sympathy.

Because of the different opinions regarding the definition of the nature of irony, one recognises the diversity of forms that irony may take, the different points of view from which irony may be approached and the fact that the concept of irony can still evolve¹¹ to include aspects which are not included in the "current" definitions.

¹¹ Muecke (1970:25) has argued that an account of irony ought to indicate not only the agreed or "central" properties of irony but also the various directions in which that concept of irony shows a tendency to drift.

Firstly, the events of the plays will be viewed while keeping in mind the fact that irony demands an opposition or incongruity of appearance and reality. All other things being equal, when the contrast is greater, the irony should be more striking.

The study will further espouse the comic element of irony. Thomson's argument is certainly more striking when he maintains that the ironic contrast must, to be ironic, affect us as both painful and comic¹² (1948:15).

In distinguishing the other feature of irony as it will be employed in this study, I include the element of detachment. This goes well with other terms - distance, disengagement, objectivity, serenity, dispassion, etc. The quality identified by these words comes to reside sometimes in the ironist's pretended manner and sometimes in the real attitude of the ironist.

This fact will hold true for the dramatist who seems to know instinctively that his most effective course in the play(s) is to create cases in which judgement may be called for but to make no judgement himself; one who records as he observes but never passes any judgement. It would further be noted how the dramatists develop the inner lives of their characters and contrast this with the outer world of events. It will be maintained that Synge predominantly uses the ironic mode for purposes of achieving distance, detachment, thus a less emotional effect.

The final distinguishable feature to be used in this study will be the aesthetic element which could be taken to overlap with that of detachment and the comic.

¹² In irony, emotions clash ... it is both emotional and intellectual - in its literary manifestations, at any rate. To perceive it one must be detached and cool; to feel it one must be pained for a person or ideal gone amiss. Laughter rises but is withered on the lips. Someone or something we cherish is cruelly made game of; we [may] see the joke but are hurt by it. It follows from this view that contrasts which conform exactly to the objective definitions of irony are not ironical at all when they do not rouse these conflicting feelings" (Muecke 1970:33).

With the aesthetic quality, I will try to find out the extent to which the playwrights "shape" their irony. This idea emanates from a belief that a sense of irony involves not only the ability to see ironic contrasts but also the power to shape (arranging, timing, and tone) them in one's mind.

And in general, the study will note (if ever they manifest themselves) the principal kinds and modes of sarcasm, impersonal irony, self-disparaging irony, irony and self-betrayal, irony of simple incongruity, irony of events, ingenue irony and dramatic irony.

Pathos, on the other hand, will be regarded as the quality, including events and issues (in the selected plays) that stimulate and evoke our feelings of pity, tenderness, or sorrow - a quality which would normally be linked to a further essence in the play¹³.

I will consider the extent to which the playwrights under consideration have presented their material in a way that appeals to our feelings as readers, and how the perceived helplessness of the pathetic figures invites our deepest sympathies.

To this end, I would borrow support from the publication by Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader, in which he recognises two poles in a literary work, viz. the artistic and the aesthetic. The artistic pole represents that which has been created by the **author**, and the aesthetic that which has been realized by the **reader** - when in the act of reading the reader (or audience), playing a co-constitutive role, is instrumental in creating, from the initial artefact, the aesthetic object, or perceived work of (dramatic) art.

¹³ As will be indicated, pathos becomes a powerful concomitant of committed literature in Fugard's work.

The artistic pole - in this dissertation - is the specific text(s) that have been chosen and considered to be read or perceived, while the creation of the aesthetic object is strongly dependent on the mode (ironic and pathetic) which most informs the plays in question.

The experiences of the reader, both artistic and aesthetic (those that occur while his world is being formed and those that result after) are not only different but also new. These experiences give the reader a new meaning, somewhat of a new perspective or a new paradigm of reality.

In his The Act of Reading, Iser further argues that works of literature, texts, do not try to tell everything. There are blanks which have to be filled by the reader. And further, the dynamism of the reading process compels the reader to move backward and forward, constantly establishing connections and making predictions. Iser refers to this activity as the **wandering viewpoint**, and indicates that it has to do with the special relationship between the reader and the text.

By a process called concretization (Ingarden's word), Iser agrees that the text unfolds itself in the reader. The reader and the text are the most essential participants in determining the high or low quality of the particular interpretation. The reader has to have the tools with which to fill in the gaps, the blanks, so that the text could be able to generate a fulfilling response, or perhaps any response at all.

Applying this idea to the selected writers (Synge and Fugard), one (i.e. the reader) needs to bring with oneself some information to the plays which will help one to decipher the meaning. Choosing Synge and Fugard, and not James Joyce or Conrad for instance, already partially determines one's response. In this particular case, one's choice of the particular **plays** would show something of one's

predilection for engaging with particular aspects of the human condition defined in this study in terms of that unenviable condition of the Irish peasants and the "marginalised" South African populations.

It is therefore correctly stated that "The role of the reader is fulfilled through the continual instigation of attitudes and reflections on those attitudes. As the reader is manoeuvred into this position, his reactions - which are, so to speak, prestructured by the written text - bring out the meaning of the novel [play]; it might be truer to say that the meaning of the novel [play] only materializes in these reactions, since it does not exist per se" (Iser 1978:32).

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts

.....

The last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything
(Shakespeare, As You Like It).

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF SYNGE'S PLAYS

5.1 Riders to the Sea

Awareness of the Irish heritage of story and belief - religion and irony

Riders to the Sea is a play based on Synge's island experience and appears to be a more universal drama than Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan. Its imagery is so organized as to refer us, not only to the world of Irish history and folklore, but also to the world of archetypal symbolism.

The main event of this short play is the death of men at sea, but this is vividly counterpointed by the story about the surviving women. There are only three male characters, and two of them are part of the choric group at the end and have only one speech each. The emphasis upon the dominance of the sea makes the sea itself into a power, a god.

The sea seems to be the main protagonist in the play and the figure of man is placed against the power of the gods who destroy him. An exchange early in the play juxtaposes references to the sea and to God:

Nora: ... the Almighty God wont leave her destitute ...
 Cathleen: Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?
 Nora: Middling bad, God help us (Riders:82)¹⁴.

The view of nature in the play involves not the sense of order behind it, or the possibility of a benign God controlling it, but its power, its inscrutability, its apparent indifference to human concerns (Thornton 1979:111).

¹⁴ (Riders: 82) refers to Synge, J.M. 1905. Riders to the Sea. George Allen & Unwin. Subsequent page numbers in brackets will refer to this edition.

These words of Thornton, to my mind, express the irony of the events in this play because this is not what the Western mind is accustomed to. Scientific empiricism, as well as Greek tragedy or Christian theology - however different they are in other respects - all present nature as ordered, with patterns partly discernible by man at least and conformable to him. This situation we do not find in Riders to the Sea.

Seen from a somewhat different point of view, Riders to the Sea takes on something of a new identity. The very title itself emphasizes the mythic or supernatural element, for there are only two riders in the play, one, the drowned Bartley, and the other his spectral brother. We are all, Maurya tells us, doomed to death, for "no man can be living for ever". We are all sooner or later, called to death.

Skelton (1972:32) has observed that Synge incorporated into the play many images with supernatural significance, so that the events of the drama take place against a backdrop, not of the physical Aran only, but also of the world of the spirit.

There are, thus, references to Samhain (or Hallowe'en) the time when ghosts walk, to holy water, and to "the black hags" that "do be flying on the sea". Michael's body is found by the "black cliffs": these are associated in myths of many lands with the idea of death and the entrance to the underworld.

Riders to the Sea thus achieves its transcendent meaning because island life is life stripped to its essentials and because it appears to be rendered through an accumulation of honest detail.

One may say that the play has a simple plot which has obvious possibilities of pathos. Synge's writing - about the occasion of long years of grief and anxiety,

where the striking event is the death of men, and the inevitability of the men's defeat - makes the play appeal powerfully to our feelings of pity and sympathy.

Within about half an hour on the stage, the play compresses a lifetime of bereavement. Maurya's harsh fate speaks to us of primal fears, hard necessity, suffering, hope, courage, and endurance, and her cottage represents all the shelters that man vainly erects between himself and the destructive forces of nature. All we see on the stage is the human world; the antagonist remains ironically invisible but nevertheless a tangible presence.

"On these islands," Bickley says, "the women live only for their children ... The maternal feeling is so powerful ... that it gives a life of torment to the women". When they bewail their dead in the traditional keen, half spontaneous, half ritual, he thinks he hears "the plaintive intonation of an old race that is worn with sorrow" (1912:53).

There is no better gloss on this central aspect of Riders to the Sea than the following :

This grief of the keen is no personal complaint ... but seems to contain the whole passionate rage that lurks somewhere in every native of the island. In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant, and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with winds and seas (King 1985:46).

Price (1961:78) points out that the setting of the play on "an island off the west of Ireland" rather than on "the Aran island" strikes just the right balance between the specific and the archetypal, between the allegorist universal "anywhere" and the sociologist's documented "there".

In The Aran Islands¹⁵, Synge says, after talking with some fishermen, "I could not help feeling that I was talking to men under judgement of death". So of course are we all, and it is such a continuous, imminent actuality that the whole play is a symbol of all of human life as a brief, embattled stay on a small island in the midst of an implacable sea. We are all in a very real sense, riders to the sea.

James Joyce (in Reinert 1970:592) says of Riders to the Sea that it was "un-Aristotelian" and perhaps meant by that to call attention to a perceived shortcoming. Although I do not find exactly what he found wanting in the play when judged by the norms of Aristotelian poetic tragedy, it is possibly judged as deficient because it deals with a situation rather than with an action.

I further find difficulty in following the criticism voiced by some other critics that the play lacks progression, is a stasis, that it is "a slice of life set in the atmosphere of tragedy". It is possible to argue that the play has no distinct beginning, middle, and end. Since local conditions of climate and topography determine events and since a particular way of life determines response to the events, the real protagonist could be said to be the communal ethos rather than the individual. In this sense, the play is both a naturalistic and a folk or group play, and Maurya has archetypal dimensions largely because she represents feelings and attitudes common to all island mothers.

¹⁵ The Aran Island is not a Utopian dream. It is proper to remember that Synge had been told to go to the Aran Islands - to express life that had never found expression - by Yeats, whose own version of the Irish awareness of the forces of nature, and of the supernatural, was given in the books which Synge read in 1897.

His experiences on the Aran Islands were seen as being fundamental to the emergence of his genius. "He found in the Aran Islands that "every symbol" was "of the cosmos", in that the whole pattern of man as spirit, as animal, as social being, was there displayed in images as timeless and fundamental as those of universal myth" (Skelton 1971:39).

One realizes that Riders to the Sea is not a play of ideas. There is in it no open or hidden theme of social or metaphysical protest. Its world is ruthless, but not evil. Most essential, what happens has no moral significance (in terms of a catastrophically wrong choice made by the protagonist) since the human sufferer is remarkably passive under the catastrophe and the destructive agent is an amoral, mindless force built into the physical universe.

The very events of the play which prove the young priest wrong when he reassures Nora that God will surely spare Maurya's last son express the irony of the situation. Johnston has referred to this point as a misplaced faith but mentions that "it is not atheism or human indictment of divine severity" (1965:119).

The young priest speaks for the christian world view. Earlier in the play, the priest is quoted by Nora saying:

I won't stop him [Bartley] ... but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute, ... with no son living (82).

There is a dramatic irony in this play as powerful and as strongly indicative of the malice of fate to that found in Greek tragedy. Nora reports the priest's words thus:

"she'll be getting her death" says he "with crying and lamenting" (83).

It is, indeed, Maurya's lamenting Bartley's going down to the sea that prevents her from giving her blessing and thus, in the eyes of the superstitious islanders, causing his death.

At the time when Bartley has left Maurya and has seen Michael's ghost, Cathleen begins to keen and says, "It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely," and from this Norah wants to know, "Didn't the young priest say the

Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living?" and Maurya responds simply, "it's little the like of him knows of the sea" (89).

The words of the priest claim to guarantee payment in kind for Maurya's costly spiritual investment in the good credit of the Almighty. King correctly states that:

The glossing of "destitute", deprived of all worldly wealth, as the equivalent of being left "with no son living" brings into sharply ironic conjunction the economic and personal dimensions of Maurya's tragic dilemma (1985:50).

Irony returns to the play upon the vernacular usage of the word "destroyed". It is Nora who says: "And its destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up" (85). The effect is reinforced by Cathleen: "It's destroyed he'll be, surely."

Maurya, like Oedipus, bows to the will of the gods, and, like Job, finds at last in humility and endurance a dignity and greatness of spirit, turning down the empty cup of Holy Water in a last symbolic gesture, and asking for mercy upon the souls of all mortal kind.

Synge has recorded his observation of the incongruity of reality and imagination in this play wherein his characters are really unaware of the opposition. Commenting in The Aran Islands on the actual incident on which he based this play, he writes:

These people make no distinction between the natural and the supernatural (in Reinert 1970:594).

This is clearly the case with Maurya, but Synge has transmuted island superstition into a dramatic image that achieves an effect of catharsis - Aristotle's term for the

final release of the spectator's feelings of pity and fear at the end of the tragic action¹⁶.

The irony in the play is strengthened by the stated contrast. A number of critics have noted rivalry in the play between two world-views - between the rational and the Christian view that nature does involve order and has some regard for human needs, and the "pagan" view of nature as sheerly indifferent power. Thus the play becomes an amalgam of "pagan" and Christian (what could be supernatural and naturalistic) that resists easy compartmentalization and demarcation.

Qualifying the play as an ironic piece, King (1985:48) says that "the play explores the tensions which exist between determinism and freedom, between the dark words and the words of blessing". These tensions are concentrated most powerfully upon and within the person of Maurya, at once their victim and in part their source.

At one stage, Bartley has need of Michael's shirt. And so, he "put it on him in the morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it". The girls, Nora and Cathleen, are there to compare a saved remnant of sleeve with the material from which the shirts are made. Ironically, however, they realize once they do so that the very sameness - the identity - of these two pieces of purchased and machined flannel prevents them from establishing, with certainty, their owner's identity:

Cathleen: It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself? (87).

16

Among the ideas involved in Aristotelian tragedy are some degree of order in the world about us (even if we are not wise enough to see it), and some degree of self-determination, of attitude, if not of action. As Aristotle tells us, it would be decidedly un-tragic to see a bad man prosper, or to see a truly good man suffer, because such situations would be repugnant to the view of reality that tragedy involves (Thornton 1979: 110)

Further, we see Bartley's body carried in just as Maurya is telling Cathleen and Nora how the men brought Patch in many years ago, wrapped in "the hall of a red sail". The room in which she is lost in memory is the same as it was then. The distinction between naturalism and the supernatural disappears, as reality and imagination, past and present become one in the spectacle that stages the past she is narrating.

If there is no moral victory in Maurya's final serenity and peace, if she is only a woman to whom things have happened, she speaks from an awareness for which mere exhaustion is an inadequate as well as an irrelevant explanation.

She has gained recognition and she accepts her destiny: "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" (93). There is nothing in her final calm that does not meet the Aristotelian requirements of character (*ethos*) and thought (*dianoia*) proper to tragedy.

The maternal feeling has been shown to be so much powerful in these islands that it gives torment to the women. The play is Synge's commentary, with the mother's cry when the last of her six sons rides down to the waters that have destroyed the rest:

If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only? (83)

And the hardness that must come when life is at an everlasting and hopeless war with the elements, is in the daughter's words:

It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over? (84).

In the mother's complaint, there comes the bitterness of her futile revolt:

In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old (85).

In this speech the emphasis upon the way in which the world of Maurya differs from the "big world" appears to set the island community apart from all other communities. In addition, while in Greek tragedy and story the suffering of the protagonist is the consequence of the sins they or their kin have committed, ironically, in Riders to the Sea there appears to be no reason for Maurya's tribulation.

Skelton (1971:51) mentions that the fact of Maurya not finding comfort or hope for all her observances, is the dark message of the play which ends as a cry, not against God, but against the principle of mortality, for "No man at all can be living for ever and we must be satisfied".

When the tale of her loss is complete, the tragedy of the old woman's revolt is as nothing when compared to the tragedy of her resignation :

They are all gone now, and there isn't anything the sea can do to me ..., I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening (91).

It suggests itself powerfully that though the island of Riders to the Sea is set in Ireland, it is more than Ireland. Its harshness and predicaments are those of the Irish peasants, but they are also those of all men who are subjected to the tyranny of forces they do not understand.

The beliefs shown are those of the Irish peasants, but they are also those of all people who combine christian beliefs with superstition, or who are troubled and manipulated by thoughts of spiritual realities beyond their ability to comprehend and control.

In King's view, "Synge has taken the apocalyptic Christian myth of collective death and resurrection as it is presented in Revelation and brought it into engagement with the changing way of life and the dynamic religious vision and folk imagination of the island people" (1985:64). This results in a dramatic reworking of both traditions, in which each is dissolved and a new vision emerges thus showing the contradictory nature of reality.

The fusion of pre-christian and christian belief is characteristic of many peasant communities. Synge was thus not playing fast and loose with the facts. He was, rather, portraying a world in which people, insecure and desperate for help against the forces of death and the tyranny of the natural world, seized upon any belief or superstition that might give them comfort and hope.

Taking this notion further, with this situation, Synge seems to raise questions about the relationship between our abstraction and reality. Without allowing any predilections to intrude, he simply depicts as truly as possible, a situation inherently strange to a modern Westerner, and further allows us to decide for ourselves. When we need to respond to what he has presented to us, we stumble onto the incongruity of the situation and find it difficult to fit this new experience in our frames of reference.

This suggests to us the aesthetic element which was said to overlap with that of detachment and the comic. With this situation, Synge presents his audience with challenges to the received or stereotyped ways of thinking or responding. He

presents a milieu that does not conform to our Western conceptualizations and this expects of us to "shape" (arranging, timing, and tone) these contrasts in our minds.

Synge's detachment from his subject comes out clearly in this play. His characters (almost all of whom are Irish peasants, presented with clarity and force as well as a searing compassion) are well-rounded portraits in which the playwright achieves a balance of weakness and strength, naiveté and shrewdness. He objectively presents these individuals as they are and never tells or suggests how they should or might be.

This qualifies Synge as a dispassionate observer and recorder rather than a theorist. He saw life in sharp and vivid detail, and grasped all that would be useful in the artist in him. He records the unceasing progression of deaths, the plight of Maurya, her suffering and despair, but appears to have no subjective connection with it. At this point, he is seen at a distance, disengaged from his material, yet recording events as he observes without passing any judgement.

To the people of Aran, the educated and cosmopolitan Synge can hardly have been more than a likeable outsider, but this was not a handicap to his writing about them. His detachment kept his intuitive sympathy with those who lost friends and kin at sea from subverting the objectivity of his perceptions, and he had the philosophical sophistication and the right words to express the timeless, placeless quality of their grief.

One comes away with the idea that the events of Riders to the Sea make it a powerful and comprehensive drama. It is a play that includes, at a more profound level, an awareness of the Irish heritage of story and belief. Its portrait of the island is that of a place shut off; a portrait of a place bewildered by two cultures, the ancient and the new, and by two visions of the nature of the spiritual world.

All the terror of life in the fretted islands, all the mystery and cruelty of the sea are in it, and the paganism bred therefrom, the ironic fatalism which can synthesize the almighty and most merciful father with the "blind gods that cannot spare".

The soft-minded man fears change. He feels security in the status quo and he has an almost morbid fear of the new. For him the greatest pain is the pain of a new idea

(Martin L. King, Strength to Love).

5.2 The Playboy of the Western World

Laughter, violence and the overwhelming love of life - irony and incongruity

While we observed and acknowledged Riders to the sea as a tragic fragment of which the basic element is documentary naturalism, isolated to what is in effect a chorus, The Playboy of the Western World appears to be a more "serious drama". It is seen as a more satiric comedy which at another stage could be regarded as an important example of "critical naturalism".

During its earlier performances, The Playboy of the Western World was received with nationalist indignation, particularly in Ireland, with many people attacking it as a slander upon the Irish race. One immediately observes an irony in this situation that whereas the play could have been written in no other country, Ireland was the worst country in the world for its earlier performance.

For purposes of this study, The Playboy of the Western World will be analysed in terms of irony with pathos as an undertone. On the one hand, The Playboy is seen to have an objective or ironic side which makes it an absolutely pessimistic representation of Irish character. But on the hand, this gloomy reality is somewhat relieved by an element of purely subjective "joy" that makes the play true to Synge himself in the person of the playboy.

Although we find the plot of this play relatively simple, it has become evident that its language is not. The play as a whole could be regarded as ironic seeing the fact that the characters act as vehicles for themes of which they themselves are not aware.

There is an abundant use of comic convention throughout the scenes, which seems to grow into a different sort of dramatic reality. Looking at the use of violence in the play, pain seems to be dissociated from violence by virtue of the comic immunity. The story of Christy's deed in the opening scenes makes us laugh :

I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at a all (Playboy:24-25).¹⁷

The play traces Christy's development from dependence on his father, through dependence on his first love, to a healthy and mature self-sufficiency, which is the hallmark of great comedy. As Grene (1975:139) would describe this situation, "we witness the metamorphosis of a figure of farce into a dynamic character. He is rather like the tramps of Wicklow, a temperament of distinction", a man capable of imaginative reflection.

Bickley rightly acknowledges the comic hypothesis with which The Playboy starts: a man who thinks himself a parricide finds that he is not regarded with horror but with respect, that he has come by means of his deed to a brave new world of glory (1912:46).

One notices the irony of the situation at this stage. Christy is ironically a man of brave deeds, commands respect and has just become a different person. We know certainly that this is not what he should be, or what he deserves, but those who "hail" him a great man do not know it.

Although the cue to this hypothesis appears to come from the abnormal attitude to crime among the Irish country people, it remains essentially a hypothesis agreed

¹⁷

(Playboy:24-25) refers to: Synge, J.M. 1907. The Playboy of the Western World. George Allen & Unwin. Subsequent page numbers in brackets will refer to this edition.

upon between the author and the audience - with knowing glee by the audience and with irony by the author.

Christy Mahon begins to believe in his own lie and in the long run he falls victim to it. His self-deception and illusion of greatness are nourished and raised to the heights by a community where the mythology of force is dominant.

Yet, quite ironically, romantic illusion has results that are extremely real. Christy, a shy, simple lad suddenly finds himself hero-worshipped and thereby grows transformed into something, if not heroic, at least significantly bolder and more confident than he ever was before.

For most critics, Christy is like the romantic poet, a self-created myth-maker. Grene (1975:134) holds that the play is in fact a direct satire on Irish romanticism - on blather and blarney. As the "poetry talk" of all the characters is uniform, and the Mayo men are as poetic as Christy, he argues that they are all equally satirised and that it is unreal to distinguish between the imaginative playboy and the prosaic "fools of earth".

As literature, The Playboy remains a miraculous example of the power of style. Quite apart from its moral satire, the play also lives by what Lucas refers to as *diablerie*, for its ironic humour and its glory of imaginative language (1963:220) .

A number of critics interpreted this work as either a direct satire on Irish romanticism or as an ironic qualification of the romantic vision of the play itself (King 1985:152).

The playboy is seen as the poet, the man of imagination. Even though the world was too much with him, he finds himself in the actual world of sinews and

admiring women. He is seen as an able fellow with his fists, at the sports, and most of all with his tongue. As he tells it to the village girls, the story of his crime becomes wildly cruel.

According to Patricia Sparks (in Grene 1975:134), Christy, through a series of fantasy adventures, reaches a peak of real achievement in the dominance of his father and the crowd.

Coxhead has said of The Playboy of the Western World that it is "the triumph of a myth which, because it is believed in, becomes fact before our eyes" (1962:18). It is given tragic overtones as Synge contrasts the world of gross reality unredeemed by the imagination (the peasant world) with the world of dream or illusion (the Playboy's world).

Synge's use of the ironic mode reaches its heightened effect with this contrast. The irony is more striking because the contrast is greater. When Synge goes out to illustrate this contrast, his characters - the victims of his irony - are really unaware of the opposition between reality and appearance.

While the myth of the playboy remains static, and Christy tries to live up to it, a real and organic change is taking place in his personality. At the end of Act 1, Christy with devastating complacency sums up his position:

It's great luck and company I've won me in the end of time - two fine women fighting for the likes of me, till I'm thinking this night wasn't I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by (35).

Where Shakespeare seems to complicate the comic pattern by a moment of human reality, as in the play, All's Well that Ends Well, after the exposure of Parolles,

ironically, in The Playboy of the Western World, Synge turns it inside out, so that the scorned butt of laughter becomes the hero.

Synge appears to have his eye on his Sophoclean model as he celebrates the killing of a parent - something that had been traditionally regarded as the most heinous of crimes. Bourgeois describes the whole play as "Irish in view of its being extremely searching study of the Celtic temperament, with its ever-possible imaginative perversion of ethical ideals" (1913:203).

The West of Ireland, particularly Mayo, reinforced Synge's attraction to the violence and lawlessness of the Irish peasants. In The Aran Islands' account the parricide is excused, in The Playboy of the Western World it is glorified.

There is a clear enhancement of incongruity and irony in this play. Christy Mahon knowingly kills his father but is rewarded by the approval of the villagers, the admiration of the local girls and the courtship of the two fine women who seek in marriage. With this, Synge introduces a new motif of incest which is found in his Sophoclean model but is completely lacking in the Aran account.

Because Synge considered Mayo to be a lawless place, little touched by "the moral facts of society", he could allow "Eros" a versatility that embraces both parricide and incest. The Widow Quin is an Irish Jocasta, a cynical mother-whore figure, who challenges Pegeen for Christy (Williams 1968:141).

In the figure of the Widow Quin, Synge manipulates the balance and extends the opposition between comedy and realism in a different way. Widow Quin seems at one point to be closer to Christy than Pegeen could ever be, with a feeling of loneliness very like Christy's, yet Pegeen is in her own way closer to Christy than Widow Quin.

The Widow Quin has a very functional part in the play. She appears to be the stage-manager of the piece, in which she gives action, supplies information, and further provided links between one scene and another. She is also what Grene has referred to as the comic *raisonneur*, giving us a clear-sighted and realistic commentary on the action (1975:140).

Synge uses Widow Quin in various ways. She is made to be a catalyst in the affairs of Christy, yet she harbours her own deep feelings for him. She gives information to the audience at one stage, but is also used to counter-balance realism and comedy within the framework of the play.

On the other hand, Pegeen Mike may seem at first glance to be an exception to the people who surround her. She appears a challenge to any young actress as she is one of Synge's first creations. I would be inclined to support the idea that people sometimes err in giving Pegeen a glamour and beauty she possesses only for the playboy because they get influenced too heavily by Christy's love speeches extolling her beauty and wonder. She is in the end a hardy peasant girl, familiar with hard work and privations of various kinds.

Despite the fact that Pegeen is feared by all, it is Jimmy Farrell who calls her "a fine hardy girl would knock the head of any two men in the place" (considered by him to be a fine compliment, but hardly the stock of refinement and glamour), and Shawn says she has "the devil's own temper". Pegeen herself admits to being "the fright of seven townlands" (66) because of her biting tongue.

Likened to Katharina in The Taming of the Shrew, Pegeen is also given to violence, and this predominant aspect of her nature is expressed in images of brutality and torture that recur in many of her speeches.

In the final act, violence suddenly becomes immediate and real. When Old Mahon reappears, Christy becomes harshly exposed and the emotional level of the play rises. His father knocks him down and beats him. Pegeen, first not comprehending the situation, orders Mahon to stop it. Coming to the understanding that Christy's father had not died, she turns against him: "And it's lies you told, letting on you had him slitted, and you nothing at all" (70).

The cruelty of Pegeen and the crowd becomes apparent when they ironically turn on Christy at the moment of his humiliation. As the (newly-developed) victim, Christy "swings round with a sudden rapid movement and picks up a loy" (72), the play has its climax. The crowd, half-frightened, half-amused, now see Christy as a mad man: "He's going mad! Mind yourselves! Run from the idiot!" (72).

The situation in which Christy finds himself at this point evokes some feelings of pity. He is humiliated at the time when everybody has been holding him in high esteem. Through him, Synge illustrates to us the opposition between wishful thinking and the real situation. On this point, the ironic contrast is truly ironic as it affects us as both painful and comic.

The comic prop has now become a real instrument of violence. With this, Synge has led us across the "great gaps between a gallous story and a dirty deed", from mock murder to real violence. And as Christy is remade by "the power of a lie", it is in this case where Synge presents a more dynamic and satisfying relation between idea and reality.

As he first surveys the shebeen and its inhabitants, we come to realize a profound and comic irony in Christy's remark: "It's a safe house, so" (21). His first

exchange with the villagers is an essential one because it informs us about his character and about how Synge means to gauge his irony.

When Christy is referred to in the play long before his appearance, he is described as a fellow "above in the furzy ditch, groaning wicked like a maddening dog" in a "dark lonesome place" (17). Benson has referred to this as an early suggestion that Christy is like the Tramp in The Shadow of the Glen who comes into the house from a dark, stormy night (1982:122) .

Like the tramp, Christy is a solitary man and this solitude is precisely what Pegeen fears and does not understand. "And it's that you'd call sport is it, to be abroad in the darkness with yourself alone?" (65). One observes here that the play draws a clear opposition between the shebeen and nature - what seems to reside in the real attitude of Synge as the ironist.

Christy is actually all that the villagers thought him to be, a hero. He has beaten every man in the sports, over-thrown Shawn, wooed and won Pegeen in a way that any fiery poet of the old world could hardly surpass, and he has felled his father. The apparent irony one draws from this situation is that Christy is the "ideal" man and exists as such in the minds of his admirers.

There is a masterly piece of dramatic irony when Pegeen, much against her will, saves Christy, and makes his transformation complete. Her affection and admiration previously had inspired Christy, but now, her unjust taunts and her coldness move him to resolute and effective action.

Pegeen refers to Christy as "a saucy liar", and together with Shawn, they torture and capture him. In his dealing with this, Christy's spirit is enhanced and he actually becomes the playboy - he becomes fully transformed:

Pegeen: (Blowing the fire with the bellows). Leave go now, young fellow, or I'll scorch your shins.

Christy: You're blowing for to torture me. (His voice rising and growing stronger). That's your kind is it? Then let the lot of you be wary, for, if I've to face the gallows, I'll have a gay much down, I tell you, and shed the blood of some of you before I die (75).

Irony comes back to the play when Christy alone knows that Pegeen and the villagers have, unwittingly, helped to "make a mighty man of him by the power of a lie", and his last words are of gratitude:

Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me into a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the Judgement Day (77).

Synge effects a marvellous marriage of the naturalistic and the grotesque. At one stage Pegeen is afraid of spending the night alone and Shawn Keogh is afraid to stay with her lest he incurs the wrath of Father Reilly; Michael James on the other hand wants to get away to Kate Cassidy. It is Christy who provides the best resolution; he is in the words of Benson, *a comic deus ex machina* whose acceptance as pot-boy solves the difficulties.

Grotesque as the solution may be, within this lawless society of Mayo it appears to have its own compelling logic; the entire scene is a classic ironic example of Synge's penchant for turning values and norms upside down.

There is also much irony in this play alongside dramatic contrast. It is ironic that throughout The Playboy there is almost continual talk about mighty sensations and stimulating deeds, people or things easily become "wonders", everything is coloured and made to appear somewhat more startling and greatly important than usual; yet really there is very little action, except for the sports (off-stage) and the

disorder at the end. To the impartial observer all the objects referred to or utilised would appear most prosaic.

It is ironic also that as Pegeen's admiration for Christy impels him to make himself like the image, her loathing at the end is a decisive factor in making the transformation complete. Pegeen deludes herself during the greater part of the play, believing in the dream, but when the dream becomes actual she rejects it and takes up another delusion - that Christy is "a crazy liar".

The play offers full and varied testimony of the power of implicit abstractions. Synge arrives at the realization that abstractions can, if properly used, be a subtle means of seeing new aspects of reality, even if altering the nature of reality.

Ironically enough, Pegeen and the villagers in The Playboy of the Western World are considered to be "practical, sensible people" in contrast to the more imaginative figures who are thought to be "queer"; yet there is no reason to doubt that Christy (especially as the play progresses) has a much firmer grasp of reality than anyone else has.

The playboy appears confused about an understanding of his own symbolic standing, yet, at the close of the play, he triumphs not only over his rejection by the society that first admired him, but also over the irony which is inherent in all human yearnings after dignity (Skelton 1971:124).

One comes away with the idea that with The Playboy of the Western World, Synge was out to satirize the folk-fantasy of the Irish. The play comes out as a fine illustration of life among the peasants and its activities. It abounds in rebellion, is electric, tingling and somewhat dangerous.

It is a play with which Synge is deliberately exploiting a pattern of unstable and fluctuating convention, so that uncertainty and confusion is built into his dramatic strategy. "The success of The Playboy is that the precisely achieved structure holds together the different modes of action in a complex and resonant whole" (Greene 1975:145).

It is indeed an amazing piece of work. It readily suggests itself as a play with richness of language and variety. As it mirrors the surface of life, it remains tense with imaginative passion. It has a laughter and violence and overwhelming love of life which since the Elizabethan had not been recaptured by other dramatists.

While the review in the Irish Times called the play "excessively distasteful", it later on supported the fact that Synge uses irony powerfully in this play:

Mr Synge has distinct power, both in irony and in dialogue, but surely he could display them better in showing in some other way the way that should above all cast no slur on Irish womanhood (in Thornton 1979:101).

As will be shown in the next chapter, The Well of the Saints and The Playboy of the Western World are complementary in important respects as they both present a fairly comprehensive treatment of the workings of the imagination.

Both embody several degrees of blindness to or awareness of dream and actuality; instances of deception occur, but the conscious deception (cf. the Douls) brings unhappiness when confronted with actuality (in The Well of the Saints), while the unconscious deception, the poetic fiction (cf. Christy), helps to create a new and better actuality and to bring happiness (in The Playboy).

Through laughter at others we purge ourselves to some extent, but we can never escape an uneasy awareness of being in the same boat, belonging very much to the same race as the one being exposed (Annette Combrink, 1994).

5.3 The Well of the Saints

Exposure of vanities and fantasies - "Cast a cold eye on life, on death" (Yeats) - the supreme irony

The Well of the Saints, not all that different from The Playboy of the Western World, might well be described as a dark comedy or even tragicomedy. The humour of the plays is often accompanied by a contrasting mood of frustration or defeat.

When The well of the Saints is examined in greater detail, its motif of the Irish preference for the dream before the reality will become clearer.

Benson (1982:97) has described this piece of writing as "a play about the blind leading the blind". The key characters who are physically blind live contentedly enough in a world of illusion; while the village people are sighted, figuratively they are blind and live wretchedly in the world of reality where they deliberately cultivate illusion.

The play is marked by a very vivid irony in the conversation of the two blind beggars, Martin and Mary Doul. Mary, with full assurance that she is beautiful, something she has not seen before, refers to what people have said about her:

Let you not be making the like of that talk ... and you know rightly it was "the beautiful dark woman" they did call me in Ballinatone. (3)¹⁸

Martin, the blind beggar, however, has a feeling that what one sees is better believed than what one hears. He mentions outrightly that "if we could see

¹⁸ Saints refers to Synge, J.M. 1905. The Well of the Saints. London: George Allen & Unwin. Subsequent page numbers in brackets refer to this edition.

ourselves for one hour, or a minute itself, the way we'd know surely we were the finest man and the finest woman of the seven countries of the east" - the very notion of "seeing is believing" is expressed here.

The opposition between priest and beggar is developed with the entrance of the Saint. The play employs a dramatic irony to undermine the seemingly sympathetic role played by the Saint. In his own words, "It's the like of you who are brave in a bad time will make a fine use of the gift of sight the Almighty God will bring to you today" (11).

With the use of the holy water of the Saint, their sight is restored, and their revealed ugliness comes near to destroying them. It becomes ironical that, rather than finding happiness, the beggars become more miserable. They have many issues over which they quarrel, and inexorably drift apart.

As the sight of the two beggars is restored, and their ugliness revealed, they see each other as worse than they really are. The climax of their excessive worry and torment comes with the unconsciously ironic and prophetic words of Martin - the words which suggest that as they become blind again, they will welcome that blindness:

Go on now to be seeking a lonesome place where the earth can hide you away; ... for there's no man but would be liefer be blind ...(16).

One observes a further irony in the fact that when their sight fades again, they become reconciled and abandon the gross world of reality; they achieve a new illusion: of their dignity in old age, the woman with her white hair, the man with his flowing beard.

They are appalled at the reality of the ugliness that they encounter in each other. This is ironic that in their blindness, they have indeed been looking on in the inward splendours of human dreams and imagining ideal beauty although they are themselves ragged and starving. When able to see, they find themselves obsessed with the faces of humanity.

Supporting this idea, Skelton maintains that "the pathos of the Douls is intensified by their laying claim to lesser dignities than they in fact possess by being so committed to the life of the inward vision and so resolutely opposed to the big world of materialism" (1972:63).

One further realizes that Synge presents his material far more effectively by contrast. Martin when still blind, has his firm and rightful place in the society - people communicate with him and make him feel part of them. But in contrast to this position, with sight, he finds no place in the community. He is feared as one who does the devil's work. He is continually blamed and charged with indolence as he lacks the ability to perform the odd jobs that are given to him.

The beggars, however, flee in terror from a renewed offer to restore their sight (in this case permanently) of the real world. They are cherishing their illusion to the starkness of reality. Their neighbours though, realize that their continued blindness, leading them along "a stony path, with the north wind blowing behind" would mean their death.

The play has some obvious possibilities of pathos. Skelton observes pathos in the fact that Martin Doul prefers his physical blindness to the spiritual blindness of the Saint and unwittingly epitomizes heroically one aspect of the Protestant ethic and the principle of dissent (1971:124).

It is Martin himself who at another point remarks about what nature has endowed them with. His remark "... and we don't want any of your bad tricks, or your wonders either, for it's wonder enough we are ourselves" is a way of acknowledging their being and their helplessness. This marks a very vivid ironic situation - the difference between *what is* the situation and *what it should have been*.

Timmy's words "The two of you will see a great wonder this day, and its no lie" express a very acute ironic situation. Firstly, it is great wonder that only because of holy water they are able to see just as other people; it is indeed a great wonder that in the second instance, the beauty that has been expressed in no uncertain terms by the "seeing people" was actually not a reality, and great wonder lastly, that the performance by the Saint turns out to be the revelation of mutual repulsiveness to both husband and wife.

A very real and practical situation is presented by Synge in this play. People in ordinary life situations let themselves deceive others. Mary and Martin are being flattered and deceived, and this makes them live and survive on a lie. Ironically they live a happy and contented life, having been persuaded by the villagers that they are a distinguished couple.

Timmy the Smith becomes anxious at one point when Martin is about to realize the irony they have lived by seeing that his wife is indeed not what they were made to believe. Timmy realizes the folly of flattery and acknowledges their bad work ::

I'm thinking it was bad work we did when we let on she was fine-looking, and not a wrinkled, wizened hag the way she is (48).

Skelton (1972:52) has correctly remarked that Synge, when contrasting the Douls' passionate and simple poetry with the brutal humour of the seeing characters, steers

his play in such a way that the beggars become figures of heroic pathos rather than contemptible dreamers.

In the opening scene of the first act, Synge handles the exposition of "character and physics" quite remarkably. When the beggars Martin and Mary first converse with each other, the "physics" of their relationships are revealed. They share a degree of good humour even though they would quarrel and wrangle with each other - this humour prevents their altercations from developing into the stark cruelty inherent in their exchanges after their cure.

Martin's remark that there is a puzzling disparity between his wife's beauty of person and harshness of voice, is an unconscious irony which marks a further development of the "physics" of the scene :

Martin Doul: (teasingly, but with good humour) I do be thinking odd times what way you have your splendour; or asking myself, maybe, if you have it at all, for the time I was a young lad, and had fine sight, it was the ones with sweet voices were the best face (3).

Laying emphasis on their differences, Synge has gone out to develop his characters as he does with the "physics". Mary Doul's character is marked by her vanity and her smug complacency. Obversely, Martin appears to be of passionate nature and has a strong sense of distinction. Although he lacks the complacency that Mary his wife has, his speeches are full of the ambivalence that seems to be at the core of the play.

An analysis of the play could make one believe that Synge was primarily interested in the "emotional subtlety" of his characters (Yeats's phrase). The first act probes the intimate relationship of husband and wife; the second sketches Martin Doul's lust for the physically beautiful; the third and last act sketches the mutual concessions that life forces on its victims.

In the words of Benson, "Synge intended the love scene between Martin and Molly to act as an ironic commentary on the discovery scene of Act 1" (1982:102). The scene derives its effectiveness from the disproportion between the lovers in terms of beauty and age.

Following the events in Act III, one readily observes how Synge went out to illustrate the force of nature, nature that has turned people into helpless victims. We see the villagers entering the church to witness the marriage of Timmy the Smith and Molly - a wedding which becomes a clear representation of an utter loss of freedom and creativity; in the other instance, the beggars themselves escape to what is probably the illusory hope they have from their own nature.

The beggars seem to have gathered some wisdom or knowledge from their experiences and their bitter journey: they would prefer mutual self-deception rather than deception based on the lies of society. They now would choose blindness and not reality because they are disillusioned by the impossibility of ever attaining their dream.

The events with the Saint depict a further irony of the situation. In Synge's fusion of heaven and hell, the Saint becomes something of a devil, his words become lies, and the gift of sight a curse. In this scene, Martin's speech evokes a somewhat incongruous vision of people screaming for holy water that will bring happiness through blindness, and not through sight:

Martin Doul: Go on now to be seeking a lonesome place where the earth can hide you away, go on now. I'm saying, or you'll be having men and women with their knees bled, and they screaming to God for a holy water would darken their sight, for a holy water there's no man but would liefer be blind a hundred years, or a thousand itself, than to be looking on your like (16).

Skelton has noted an irony in another situation in which the Saint, because of his belief in the dedication to the things of the spirit, does not recognise that in curing the Douls, he is actually depriving them of their vision of God's greatness (1972:55). Secure in his belief that physical sight should bring spiritual awakening, the Saint is equally dominated by irrational fantasy as do the Douls themselves.

At this point strains of pathos are poignantly visible in the plight of the beggars. When Martin receives sight, his happiness builds up while at the same time it is his delusion. He is ready with his admiration and thanksgiving, yet these soon turn to bitterness and despair when he realizes and knows the truth; instead of being richer than the great kings of the East he has become poorer than he ever was.

The Saint's mission is to show the glory of God by removing the Douls' blindness. The situation becomes particularly ironic because when he removes Martin's blindness, Martin sees horror only, and not glory; he is, according to the Saint, still spiritually blind. As physical blindness returns to him and to his wife, the Saint remarks: "I'm thinking the lord has brought you great teaching in the blinding of your eyes."

There are further instances of ineffable pathos in this play. Synge seems to have constructed this play to have all our sympathies with the old beggars, particularly when they desperately seek to hide from the Saint. There is a profound pathos when Mary, nearly in tears, cries out:

... what good'll our grey hairs be itself, if we have our sight, the way we'll see them falling each day, and turning dirty in the rain? (74).

Price has also underlined the incidence of pathos in this play, seeing it in "the contrast between Martin's ardent praise and the fact that he is addressing Molly and

not his wife Mary," and this pathos increases as Martin moves around trying to see his dream realized in the flesh (1961:141).

A number of critics believe that it is part of Synge's purpose not to have us pity his beggars. But one finds it somewhat difficult to avoid feelings of pity when in the final scene of the play the beggars, blind as they are, are stoned by the sighted people and are also driven away. In this gloomy pathos, this ascetic pity, we realize how Synge dramatically externalizes his inmost consciousness.

In Benson's words: "Synge's genius is manifest in his ability to take a complex and literary theme - the power of imagination to transform reality - and make of it a work of art instilled with drama and theatricality" (1982:111).

This line of thought, in this as in other plays, could be considered as typical of Synge's dramatic method in rooting complex ideas in physical and practical detail. One would take it that he has an ability to dramatize the possibility that reality may be inferior to illusion.

Acknowledging Synge's ability, Strong unhesitatingly puts Synge on a high level in Irish drama in commenting upon his use of wit in writing :

Cruelty, tenderness, mockery, passions of every kind; the arrogance of beauty, the coarser arrogance of strength, the holiness of the saint, admirable in itself but folly here; the humour of a sly mind that in a moment turns to spite; all are together in a unity in which the writer seems to watch without censure or interference. As in all his works, Synge records, but never judges (1941:33).

From a careful examination of this play, as with those that came before it, one comes away with the idea that Synge was for the greater part of time more concerned about beliefs than he appeared to be in his taciturn public manner, and

that the theme of the relationship or contrast between "beliefs" and "reality" is basic to his work.

Martin's situation comes out both pathetically and ironically. His devotion to a dream has left him desolate and disillusioned. He has found only disappointment in men and the natural world. Like Maurya in Riders to the Sea who had said that there was nothing anymore the sea would do to her, for Martin, there would be nothing left for him to fear or to be deceived by. Ironically, while he was being fooled by Timmy and others, he is not aware that he is also fooling himself about Molly.

It comes out clearly that the Douls are building their lives upon a lie that has no power to modify the reality they cannot accept, a lie that can only delude them. The play thus dramatizes the relationship between reality and abstractions with particular emphasis upon why some abstractions have the power to modify that reality.

In the analysis of Riders to the Sea in chapter 5.1, I referred to the peasants who combine christian beliefs with superstition, those who are troubled by thoughts of spiritual realities beyond their ability to understand and control; in The Well of the Saints there is a fusion or even a tension between reality (actuality) and dream for Martin and the Saint. As for the villagers, they do not at all come into contact with actuality, but live entirely in the dream.

In earlier chapters I also indicated that Synge wanted to write drama that was, above all, firmly located in the particular, the microcosm of society. As he illustrates poor Irish religious faith and miserable standard of living, I do not reckon that this act could rate his plays (in particular The Well of the Saints) as

offensive and irreverent. It is more an expression of his particularly harsh and bleak sense of irony.

For this reason, I am inclined to differ with the remark of Halloway (in Thornton 1979:128) who found the play irreverent and coarse, almost blasphemous, when he said:

Making a jeer at religion and a mock at chastity may be good fun, but it won't do for Irish drama. If there are two things ingrained in the Irish character above all else, they are their respect for all pertaining to their religious belief and their love of chastity, and these are the very subjects Mr Synge has chosen to exercise his wit upon.

The next critic to voice misgivings about the content of Synge's work was Thomas Keohler. He criticised the play for being based upon a supernatural event. He says that "the very fact of a play being based on an incident of this nature precludes it in a measure from any vital connection with the tendencies and developments of modern life and thought" (in Thornton 1979:129).

Keohler went on to label this an "incongruity" on the part of a playwright who has been realistic and further deplores the effect that the play might have if produced before a gullible audience.

This remark can be regarded as perhaps the most note-worthy criticism about Synge. A great number of ignorant people believe quite easily in miracles, and if a play like The Well of the Saints may be produced in rural districts, there is a strong likelihood that it can strengthen this type of belief.

However, one of the very intelligent critics of Synge, Alan Price, picks up something that seems to interest him, nihilism, and praises it as he took Synge for a nihilist:

Synge's own view of human life appears to have been a melancholy one. He felt that although everyday existence might be, for most people, tolerable, and even happy at times, life in this universe, stripped of all its comforting camouflage, was in essence meaningless: Man's aspirations, his ideas of love, goodness, beauty, vital though they may be for a few years, all alike find the inevitable end; and beyond the grave there is nothing (1961:138).

Thorntorn (1979:131) rightly observed and explicitly described the conversation of the hideous beggars as a strange mixture of elaboration of new fantasies mixed with explicit discussion of and resentment about lies they were earlier subjected to. And after they have begun to bask in the warmth of their new dreams, Mary shows how clearly they see their own lies and their need for blindness by saying "and what good'll our grey hairs be itself, if we have our sight, the way we'll see them falling each day, and turning dirty in the rain?

The escapism of their blindness becomes evident when Martin himself ironically says to the saint:

Them is great sights, holy father ... What was it I seen when I opened my eyes, but your own bleeding feet, and they cut with stones, and my last day, but the villainy of herself that you are wedding. God forgive you, with Timmy the smith. That was great sights maybe ... "(36).

Martin knows that there are true things which he does not prefer to see, and if permitted to be blind, he can certainly put them out of his mind. He certainly wishes to retreat from realities into fantasies. This idea does hold with a number of people in normal life - they would prefer to forget something or take it out of their minds when it makes them feel uncomfortable.

With The Well of the Saints, Synge has gone out to illustrate the double nature of the imagination - its capacity for simple deceptive fallacy, and its frequent role as a liberator. Mary and Martin are sustained in joy and self-respect by the illusion of their own beauty and comeliness.

Lucas (1976:145) has also shared the view that the scenes of the beggars' realization of their actual state are painful, but they provoke an acute embarrassment which has less to do with the elements of the situation than with what seems to be a direct appeal to the audience or the reader.

As has been indicated earlier, The Well of the Saints has some commonness with The Playboy. The event where Martin Doul faces the hostile mob with a stone in his hand calls back to memory, the torturing of Christy Mahon and his final defiance of the jeering villagers.

Thus, following a careful consideration of the characters and their deeds in this play, it now emerges that the religious miracle which temporarily restored the sight of the blind Martin and Mary Doul only serves to expose their vanities and fantasies.

Skelton describes it as another of Synge's attacks upon conventional thought, and another paean in praise of the passionate and courageous rebel against the shibboleths of the "big world" (1972:56).

The Well of the Saints is a unique play among Synge's work in that it exploits as the central action a supernatural element. Among others, it would seem that Synge's laughter is more bitter in this than in any other play. His language here, however, lacks the richness, humour, vigour and vitality that strengthen and characterize a greater number of his works.

The play to my mind is certainly the most sombre and philosophic of all Synge's work in which he fuses a number of themes he had already sounded. Contrast (and thus implicitly ironic potential) is at its greatest where we have the outside versus

the society; the pagan versus the church and the priest; with the clash of reality and dream, and of truth and illusion.

One may conclude that The Well of the Saints is one play in which Synge clearly and unequivocally states his passionate objection to all constricting orthodoxies and his belief in the significance of individual conscience and the individual sensibility. He portrays these notions with a poignant and searing irony which does not preclude the sense of compassion which renders the play above all else intensely human.

Poor people are poor because they don't know how to get rich. I am going to be a millionaire. But poverty is like glue. All people stick on me and they have to be millionaires with me. By this I mean that there will be no poverty left in Africa by the time I die
(Bessie Head, 1986).

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF FUGARD'S PLAYS

6.1 Hello and Goodbye

Fears and Frustrations - existential pathos

As it came out in the last chapters that Synge uses the ironic mode for purposes of achieving distance and detachment, it will be illustrated in this chapter and those that follow, that Fugard leans more on pathos, and as he is more emotionally involved, he becomes overtly "political" and moralizing.

Centring around irony, the earlier chapters indicate the playwright's degree of objectivity and his indifference and freedom in relation to his subject. And, centring around pathos, the chapters that follow will indicate the playwright's greater degree of subjectivity and his (at times dishonestly emotional) appeal to the feelings of his audience.

In Hello and Goodbye, Fugard, in similar fashion to Synge, shows his ability to portray the contrast between dream and reality in a disturbed mind. The characters Hester and Johnnie are shown as fencing with each other and are both evasive about their own feelings.

Hester and Johnnie did not experience any love from their parents, which contributed largely to the departure of Hester to Johannesburg. Even when she arrives in Johannesburg, she decides on (or is forced into) a free and cheap life, becoming a prostitute. Although for Hester this was to be her new way of life, there was still no compensation for the love she missed while she was still at home.

It is that loss of love and prostitution in Johannesburg which make Hester think of going back home to claim her "compensation" in the form of money following her father's accident. She is aware, or rather has a reason to believe, that she should have changed because of the time she spent away from home and her involvement in many other activities.

She displays her willingness to receive criticism and feedback (she is not sure whether people see a prostitute in her) by asking Johnnie to tell her what she looks like:

Hester: What do I look like? When you saw, ... did you remember much?

Johnnie: Hard to say ... It's rude to stare.

Hester: What you saw?

Johnnie: You - my sister Hester - a few years older. Satisfied?

Hester: No! Am I also ... were you shocked? At the changes? My face? ...

(Plays:118-119)¹⁹

Haarhof (in Gray 1982:178) mentions that Hester is continually in search of a growing awareness of herself and prepared to entertain the possibility of change which is, for her, the uncomfortable prerequisite to her growth. Knowing her contemptible past, she would be frightened if there weren't any change.

Hester finds it difficult to be reconciled with her past, and does not have anything valuable in her present life. As she had never experienced anything in the name of love, she has learnt to hate and is not prepared to share anything with anybody (especially men):

... And something is going to be mine - just mine - and no sharing with brothers or fathers ... (123).

¹⁹

(Plays:118-119) refers to Fugard, A. 1974. Three Port Elizabeth Plays. London: Oxford University Press. Subsequent page numbers in brackets refer to this edition.

Johnnie does not leave his home as Hester did, but he is himself no better. He decides to be his father's caretaker because he cannot be a different man in the outside world. This situation makes him an idealist and a dreamer. He has even failed to have any sexual relationship in his life and has therefore never given love to anybody of the opposite sex.

In his father's home Johnnie feels safe and secure. The home becomes something like a prison for him. It is like a cell in which he is to serve a life-long sentence. Because of his seclusion, one could label him a coward. Johnnie has fears for the unknown and is not prepared to examine the life beyond his home. I recall at this point the words of Socrates in one of his writings when he says that "the unexamined life is not worth living".

There are many instances in the play which further indicate that the characters, particularly Hester and Johnnie, have met with countless frustrating issues in their lives. It is very difficult to believe that they actually belonged to a family, not because they were born of no parents, but because they lacked parental love, did not experience warmth, and to a greater extent had more frustrations than anything else.

The play is pervaded by the frustration of two people terribly aware of the past haunting their decisions and their day to day living (Angove 1986:30). It is Hester and Johnnie who are the only two characters physically present in this play, but they are haunted by their parents to such an extent that the parents could be regarded as being actually physically present in the play too.

Johnnie is frustrated by struggling to develop and assume his own identity. Looking after his sick father, he became something like an extension of him as if they are

one thing; ironically his father is a cripple. Johnnie admits at one point that he is not himself and so, holding his dead father's crutches, he takes his identity:

Why not? It solves problems. Let's face it - a man on his own two legs is a shaky proposition" (162).

He is one character who is remarkably purposeless in life. His father's death seems everything to him. He has not allowed himself to forget the time of his father and plan his own life. He remains obsessed by the death of his father and is unable to face it and adjust accordingly. He finds "joy" in and endures the frustration of isolated life. Having no other thing to do, he finds himself describing things that are of no value to his life:

Walls. The table. Chairs - three empty, one occupied. Here and now. Mine. No change ... more memories. All the others!" (101).

Frustrating measures lend particularly different aspects to the two victims, Hester and Johnnie. For Hester, the outside world is desirable. She gives herself uncontrollably to the ruthless outside world. For Johnnie life outside is not desirable. He decides to withdraw from the outer world and remains secluded. He is described by Walder as the neurotic who is unable to take on work, and Hester as the spontaneous, less educated sibling (1984:66).

The play has been described by Vandenbroucke as being "not so much the story of their sibling relationship, of their bloodknot, as it is of their separate personalities and different relationship to their past, especially to their father who was the most influential element of it" (1985:60).

Johnnie himself at one point has shown Hester that they are different from each other and that they also act differently:

Arrive in peace not in pieces ..." (105),
I don't love, I don't hate. I play it safe" (154).

Morris and Zachariah (in The Blood Knot) are tied together by the blood knot, but for Johnnie and Hester, the opposite is true. Abrahams has emphasised the difference between the brother and his sister:

Johnnie and Hester are absolute opposites, contradictions of each other. They can only be brought into conjunction for the briefest interval - hello and goodbye (in Gray 1982:77).

For the greater part of time Hester has always felt unhappy in her life. From childhood onwards she was always blamed for this and that and was never exonerated when things went wrong - the thing which made her believe that life outside would be better. From her own words, one perceives frustration:

... Home sweet home where who did it means Hester done it ... sit still and mind your own business but sure as the lavatory stinks that will also do it ... (127).

At a stage later Hester questions her own decision to have left home twelve years ago. She feels frustrated by the fact that where she now lives, there is no certainty of identity. This issue reminds one of the parable in the Bible - the prodigal son who, after wasting all the wealth that his father had given to him, started thinking of his place at home, his real self, and ultimately returned home.

Hester, when back at home, still has trouble in finding her own identity. She is seen as a lonely character because she does not admire anything, has no love for anybody and sees no possibility of life anywhere. This frustrating isolation troubles her identity further:

Who was where? Me. I'm Hester. But what's that mean? What does Hester Smith mean? ... Where do you belong? (128).

And Green (in Gray 1982:164) has appositely remarked: "The portrait of Hester is indeed one of Fugard's best characterizations: the combination of brazen callousness and a tender need for the affection that has always been denied her is both real and very moving."

This situation evokes feelings of pity for Hester in the reader or the viewer. It is indeed moving that she has been denied affection which like any child she was entitled to from her parents. Fugard brings to his theatre audience and play readers an object of pity that leaves them with compassion and deep feelings.

We feel with Hester, understanding the pressures and frustrations she has had to contend with at an early age, and further frustration in the outside world. As readers, it is as if Fugard involves us to pity Hester's grief and raging resentments. We are to some extent bound to share in her desperate hunger for anything different and better than she has experienced from life. We may not only notice her hate and disgust, but also perceive her deep feelings of indignation, rebellion, loneliness and temptation that culminate in frustration.

Through the life of Hester Fugard has gone out to illustrate the deplorable conditions and squalid ways of life in the big cities. Hester's life is that of a prostitute, typical of the lives of those who live (as she did) in the other parts of the big cities. When she remembers this demeaning state of affairs, she hates it, she hates everything, and in the words of Angove, "she is involved in an agonized quest for her distinctiveness" (1986:30).

She reflects on her past, but draws from all her experiences only pain and agony. Similar to many other characters of Fugard who are haunted by their personal history, Hester also lives in painful memories. She has no time in her past that seems to console her frustration:

... I remember ... All these years. Hell man, it hurts (134) and "All I'm inheriting tonight is bad memories (140).

She hates the thought of her childhood: " ... all our life it was groaning and moaning ..." (109) and her own religion in which she was strictly brought up " ... and what the bible says and what God's going to do and I hated it ... " (110). She rejects it completely: "God help us. No chance of that, my boy. He never ..." (146) and later "THERE IS NO GOD. THERE NEVER WAS" (155).

Hester's frustration swells when she discovers that she has not only hated her past, but her present too, and maybe even her future:

... we must all love each other ... I don't ... The fairy stories is [sic] finished. They died in a hundred Jo'burg rooms ... (132). I've hated rain all my life ... (140); I hate him! ... I hate my father ...

Abraham observes that Hester could be seen as standing in a direct line of descent from The Blood Knot; she is Zachariah stripped of his innocence and tractability, wrought to desperation (in Gray 1982:75).

Pathos is powerfully evinced in the play when Fugard goes on to illustrate the extent to which poverty can cause frustration in people's lives. He seems to draw our attention to the abject poverty and suffering of the people in the lower class of the social scale in this country. In various instances, this idea is highlighted:

If I could afford it beer and lemon ...(119) ... they pinched so much I couldn't wear them anymore; ... Mommie in his old shoes. There wasn't enough of everything except hard times (139).

Hester's words evoke a sense of pathos that is at times ineffable and wrenching. As a poor and low class individual, she consoles her frustrated self with lemon and beer. She painfully recalls her old shoes, how they pinch, and it is clear that she

cannot afford new ones. She lacks everything and is always on the verge of destitution.

Hester persuades Johnnie to return with her to Jo'burg. In Hester's words: "Get a job, a girl, have some good times ... ". Implicit in this statement is the irony inherent in the situation of this country. A great number of people have come to Johannesburg to get jobs - what Hester expresses - and as they get money, they look forward to "the good times", which then, with an awful inevitability, become the times when they mess up their poor lives. Fugard at this point allows his audience to see South Africa and the South Africans from below as he uses the basest class of people, the unprivileged working class.

This is the case with the people who live in the ghettos. One may admire at the fact that these people do manage to lead some form of life in these shacks. Typical of these ghettos, the place where Hester lives, there is dilapidation and squalor. Ironically (and more pathetically) she can hardly describe these places:

There's no address! No names, no numbers ... Who was where? ... You don't know the room ...(128) That's how I live and I don't care ... (132).

Hester's position emerges from the play as one of complete pathedy. She discovers that she is no longer herself and that the type of life she has led is scandalous and despicable:

I'm too far away from my life. I want to get back to it, in it, be it, be me again the way I was when I walked in. It will come, I suppose (162).

Irony is, interestingly enough, powerfully introduced into the play with the statement "have some good times". Hester knows fully well that there are no good times in the ghettos, in fact, as a prostitute herself, she never had good times. She

knows even further that her suggestion to Johnnie about "good times" is actually the opposite of what Johnnie will find and do when he arrives in the big city.

Hester's expectations are thwarted when she discovers that her father is already dead and that there is no money available to her. Ironically enough, she loves her father's money, but does not love him. Walder mentions that Hester's search for the "compensation" becomes a search for her childhood, for the feelings generated by memory and long suppressed (1984:68).

One would regard this as a search for a kindness to compensate for the coldness and sterility of her upbringing. She is in search of a moment when life is normal, the realities of love of her parents and above all, a search for her true self. Although at one point she seems to denounce the power of the Bible, the irony of it could be that she is still in search of her own religious stand and her image before God.

One perceives a pervasive sense of pathos in the life of Hester. She has led a life characterized by suffering. More than anything, she has suffered spiritually and had nothing that could comfort her. We further observe how she has even lost faith in religion, in her own God, the very last human dimension that she would hold on to as the last resort particularly as her own home could not avail anything pleasant.

At a later stage Hester returns to her life of prostitution, a life devoid of all illusions of love. She goes back to this life being fully aware that she perpetrates squalor. Contrary to this situation, her brother Johnnie takes the final step into madness, assuming his father's identity, he ironically says that "I'm a man with a story."

Fugard has presented his work in a way that strongly appeals to those who know the South African situation and those who do not know it. The non-South Africans

would still observe situations similar to those that Fugard portrays. Supporting this notion, Jacobson says:

... his work appeals strongly to audiences unfamiliar with its South African settings. But those who do know at first hand the circumstances in which the plays are rooted, and the people about whom they are written, must respond with a special intimacy (in Gray 1982:82).

It is proper to conclude with the view expressed by Green that Hello and Goodbye can be considered as the dramatist's exploration of some of the doctrines of Sartrean existentialism in action (in Gray 1982:173). The play comes out as a coin with two faces: Johnnie's self-exploration being the first, and Hester's quest for self-knowledge being the other.

Hello and Goodbye is a seminal work, for it is not only one of the best examples of "English" writing in South African theatre, but it was the first play in which Fugard looked closely at his own Anglo-Afrikaner roots and the whole guilt-ridden Calvinist ethic that invests the lives of the Hesters and Johnnies of the Country and raises many issues which characterize his writing (Hauptfleisch 1982:89).

It is to Fugard's credit that in Hello and Goodbye he has presented the victims with such intimacy, intensity and humour, such a loving elaboration of concrete detailing, such a thrust of poetic realism, that they live for the imagination as no other characters in South African drama (Brown, in Gray 1982:74).

The protagonists, Hester and Johnnie, are the pathetic figures in this play. One could conclude that the play is a mirror of existential pathos - it easily becomes an allegory for an existentialist dilemma, and concomitantly a powerful study of despair and desolation. What it does not become, however, is a ironical comment on life - here Fugard does not, as Synge might perhaps have done, comment on life in the very acerbic and detached manner that would elevate the play above the very personal and intimate comment on life where one is searingly aware of the

weaknesses of people and their suffering, but it remains an intimate, rather than a universal experience.

Marriage is the destiny traditionally
offered to women by society
(Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 1949)

Before they are married, women want to know if there's a man in their future;
afterward, they want to know if there's a future in their man
(George Jessel, 1969).

6.2 Boesman and Lena

Marriage and the ineffable pathos of loneliness

As with Hello and Goodbye which looked into the relationship between a brother and sister, this play, Boesman and Lena also portrays a relationship between two people, a man and wife. Not different from the characters Hester and Johnnie as shown in Hello and Goodbye, in Boesman and Lena, the awareness of existential crisis also comes into the picture.

The play is an illustration of a life of an even more wretched and marginal couple. Through its conditions and circumstances, the life of Boesman and Lena heightens the feelings of pity and sadness in its readers. As man and wife, they are in a dilemma, somewhat like of Martin and Mary Doul in The Well of the Saints - a similarly disenfranchised, nomadic couple.

This play opens with an empty stage although there would normally be lights on it. The emptiness could readily symbolize the empty life of the characters Boesman and Lena. Following the view of Hauptfleisch, the open space, presenting no fetters to the imagination of Boesman and Lena, both emphasizes their isolation and poverty, and symbolizes complete freedom (in Gray 1982:184). We already perceive empty life even before we make any encounter with the people.

The pathos that the life of Boesman and Lena evokes is at times unutterable. One readily perceives hardships in a marriage that is conducted in a pondok. A man and wife have to scrounge around in a most debasing circumstances for the basic necessities of life.

One perceives further the plight in which this couple find themselves. Life does not only seem unfair to them, but as members of a coloured group, they find themselves among the lowest strata of the South African population. Poverty and pain-stricken, they have the added problem of being marginalised and also being aliens in a land where they are irrevocably marginalized:

Not even a dog to look at us ... Remember, that boer chased us off his land
(Plays:174)²⁰ When he showed us the bullets Boesman dropped his tin and
went down that road like a rabbit ... (175)

In their pondok, they only have to stay on until they are evicted, have to collect their garbage (their pitiful possessions) and move to the next place where the whole process repeats itself.

These two people (man and wife) are lonely as they do not belong to any community. Through their conversation, which the husband disturbs frequently, we only learn and understand their painful past. They have not lived with the people of their race, seem to have no relatives and even a fixed place of abode. The woman is an object of pity, reduced to a dumb, animal-like submission by the weight of her burden, while the man is a shabby individual, barefoot and ragged. We are touched by the condition of their clothing and immediately sympathize with their evictions and their life of hardships and dissipation.

Fugard introduces his material by contrast and irony. When the pondok of Boesman and Lena is demolished, literally it is to show them that they are not free to stay and live at the place of their choice. Yet, Boesman refers to this as a freedom that they have received from their destroyer:

²⁰ (Plays:174) refers to Fugard, A. 1974. Three Port Elizabeth Plays. London: Oxford University Press. Subsequent page numbers in brackets will refer to this edition.

You know what that is? Listen now. I'm going to use the word. Freedom! Ja! I've heard them talk it. When we picked up our things and started to walk I wanted to sing. It was freedom (203).

There is a vivid irony that comes with the vagrancy of Boesman and Lena. Everytime they change from one place to the other, carrying their almost valueless pathetic possessions, they are indeed carrying their lives on their backs. Dilapidated as the blankets and mattress, a piece of corrugated iron, shapeless grey trousers, faded and torn sports-club blazer, they all give a picture of a dilapidated life and of course, a "dilapidated marriage".

Their life becomes more pitiable when Lena draws their past on to the stage. The vivid irony of such a moment is off-set by the searing sense of pathos Fugard evokes when Boesman goes into a frenzy of laughter and dancing at the sight of the bull-dozer flattening their "home".

The quality of pathos in the play is best given shape by the ineffable loneliness of the characters. They are only by themselves and are without land and fixed jobs. Trekking from one place to another, they are also carrying their hurtful past and their ragged lives on their heads and their backs. Their shared life is just like the rubbish they are carrying with them.

This perception of loneliness is best understood through the characters of Lena and Boesman. Lena is completely uncertain about herself, and as she is obviously ignorant about where she belongs, she cannot find meaning in her own existence. For the greatest part of her life, she has depended on Boesman and has always followed him:

Ja so it goes. He walks in front. I walk behind ... Boesman's back. That's the scenery in my world ... (179).

In the old South African law of husband and wife (especially traditional law), the man used to have a decisive say over his wife in all matters concerning their common life. He had to determine, *inter alia*, where and in what style they were going to live. Boesman clearly perceives his role in the light of this obsolete system. He gives himself the right to demand Lena's obedience and submission, to control her life and conduct.

Taking a closer look to the South African societies, there are numerous differences between the white society and the other societies. As we find the white society privileged, it is not surprising that it is patriarchal. But a marked difference is seen when one looks at the black society. They are unprivileged by the system, yet they are also, and perhaps more invidiously, strongly patriarchal. Traditionally black women are the subordinates of their spouses and are thus doubly marginalised.

The situation of Lena and Boesman is the worst of all possible worlds. Boesman arrogantly (and pathetically) assumes the traditional role of the dominant male. He demands authority and takes a leading oppressive role to the extent that Lena makes no impact as a wife in his life and is almost non-existent.

The question of removing a pondok of the coloureds by a white bulldozer also mirrors the question of the Land Act of 1913 and the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 as referred to in the earlier chapters. As explained earlier, the white authorities of South Africa were the ones who were responsible for the housing of Africans in segregated locations. These Acts, as others, ensured the absolute control of the non-whites, set in place to protect white civilization and white privileges and of course emphasised and exploited racial differences.

In this play, Fugard further portrays a marriage in which a man, because of his shame, vents his frustration on his wife. While Boesman is defined by his feelings

of distress and humiliation, Lena seems to be defined by her suffering and defeat. She has no pleasure in her life and this is aggravated by torment and torture caused by her husband.

Boesman and Lena's marriage is a very desolate and frustrated union. They are childless, and Lena's continuous record of stillbirths earns her the continual abuse in the shape of the swear word "moer" as used by her husband Boesman. Without comfort and a proper place of abode, there is nothing that comes to normality in her life. Boesman's continual beating of her has also added to her pathetic situation.

One sympathizes with Lena's condition and her life that seems to have been relegated to a state of nothingness. From her own words, one perceives submissiveness, dejection and despondency:

Look back one day Boesman. It's me, that thing you sleep along the roads.
My life (172).

Lena is seen as a lonely spirit. She is seen as a token of pathos in her stream of febrile chatter with Boesman remarking:

That gebabbel of yours ... Your words are just noise. Nonsense. Die geraas van 'n vervloekte lewe (174).

She is trying to recollect her life in a reconstruction of their wanderings and from her bruises following the assault (deemed deserved punishment) by her husband.

Their marriage is put under stress by Boesman's reaction to Lena's speeches. When Lena attempts to "build" their relationship on one side, Boesman "destroys" it on the other. He makes no sense of what Lena is saying. When she asks for anything, she is only given:

Yes! that's who. That's what. When, ... where ... why! All your bloody nonsense questions. That's the answer (182).

Theirs is a very pathetic condition of life. Their marriage is punctuated by filthy language, ridicule, punishment, isolation and defeat and suffering. From the beginning, we see Boesman staring at Lena "with a hard, cruel objectivity". When she starts asking questions, Boesman's response is predictable and destructive:

When she puts down her bundle, she'll start her rubbish. That long drol of nonsense that comes out of your mouth! (169).

As Boesman and Lena are alone, cut off from the world, they are also cut off from each other. When Lena attempts to come closer, trying to speak to Boesman, we notice that Boesman has accustomed himself to loneliness and isolation. He doesn't want Lena to talk and therefore creates a barrier between them:

Boesman: The next time we talk...

Lena: Where

Boesman : I'll keep on walking. I'll walk and walk

Lena: Eina

Boesman : Until you're so bloody moeg that when I stop you can't open your mouth! (169)

There are strains of irony in their conversation. Boesman joins Lena in her vain and pitiful attempt of getting the order of their evictions and wanderings "Redhouse - Swartkops - Veeplaas - Korsten". Their life has no definite pattern as it is characterized by vagrancy and disorder, yet, ironically enough, they consistently and with dogged determination attempt to structure a pattern of their existence following their evictions.

As Branford describes, the repetitions of names, places and incidents are:

All reflecting the fate of these people whose journeys start, proceed and end the same way and whose toughness and unwilling need for each other on the whole triumphs over despair (in Gray 1982:81).

They are burdened figures, a marginalized and wretched microcosm of an unjust social system whose life calls for sympathy and compassion.

Yet, against this background, Boesman and Lena are not simply the epitome of gross injustice, but are also living figures. They still possess emotions and feelings like ordinary citizens. As Powell describes them:

Boesman, a quick, stringy figure and Lena at once more solid and more resilient, still capable of sympathy (in Gray 1982:91).

The marriage of Boesman and Lena seems a very difficult one. Boesman is dominating Lena both mentally and physically. Given this situation, Lena finds herself in an unenviable position. She is also a laughing stock of her husband who finds her to be very stupid and denigrates her with remarks such as:

I thought you knew. One day you'll ask me who you are (181). You were a big joke ... you'll be a big joke ... (170).

One would expect that when Boesman beats her wife, the law would take its course. Ironically, there is no protection for Lena, because, as Boesman says:

They know the way it is with our sort. She's my woman ... Net 'n bietjie warm gemaak (181).

It is again only in the old law where in their marriage the husband's power over his wife's person was all-inclusive. He would inflict "moderate chastisement" upon her if she failed to obey her "lord and master".

At one stage, because of desperation and a dire need to have company, somebody, just anybody who would see her as a person, she tolerates and accepts the company of a dying old black. Lena's loneliness and contemptuous rejection by Boesman is

ameliorated by this mysterious appearance of the silent, puzzling black man referred to as Outa (the use of the anonymous generic name for an old black man - underlining his own marginalized and "othered" status). It is ironical that this stranger becomes the captive listener of the rejected Lena. When given trouble by her own lover and husband, Lena takes recourse to a stranger who appears to be the sole consolation of her laments and tribulations.

This mysterious appearance of Outa also makes the dynamics of this marriage more complex and increases the rift between man and his wife. Because of Outa, Boesman gets more distanced from Lena. He hates this black derelict and refuses to accommodate him:

Boesman: This is wine, Lena. That's a kaffer. He wont help you forget (196). To hell! He's not coming inside. Bring your kaffer and his fleas into my pondok. Not a damn (197).

Lena's future seems to be obscured by her husband. She doesn't have anything significant that she knows or remembers. She reports to Outa that she has not seen the mountains for a long time, although she used to trace the mountain ranges with her fingers in the air. At this stage, one realizes that Boesman has indeed become an added problem to the poor, desolate and pitiable life of this coloured woman.

One cannot escape noting layers of Lena's suffering which become ever more gut-wrenching in intensity. Her husband is an added problem to her existential crisis. She also lacks a noteworthy past, which causes her further loss of identity, pride and dignity. When their dog dies, Lena has Outa to watch her and assure her of her own existence. When Outa also leaves her, "dying", she goes back into the problem of existence.

This situation of pity and compassion is made infinitely worse by Boesman's beating of Lena. The punishment that she has to endure everytime Boesman hits her only intensifies her pain. For Boesman, it appears that the inflicting of pain rewards him with some security and relief from frustration. He derives pleasure from Lena's pain. As Lena wants to talk about this pain, she addresses Outa as if he had asked her about this pain:

What are you asking me about? Pain? ... Pain is a candle entjie and a donkey's face ... (193).

It is as if man can merely experience his existence through pain and suffering.

In the person of Boesman, Fugard has succeeded in illustrating the realities of segregation. With the arrival of Outa, that black man who is obviously not of their class and group, Boesman makes cruel and utterly derogatory remarks to him:

Black Bastards ... a tribe of old kaffers ... Turn my place into a kaffer nes! (187).

His cultural preoccupation becomes a clear barrier between himself, a coloured, and Outa, a black. It is important to point out that Fugard resorts to pathos to evoke the realities of South African life, but he tends, because of his obsessively subjective emotional involvement, to become overtly "political" and moralizing. This is a point that marks a divergence from Synge's approach. When Fugard becomes emotionally involved in his material, Synge maintains a distance and remains completely detached from his subject.

When Lena, in some supremely ironical situation within the complex South African situation, finds a friend and companion in Outa, one is again reminded of the South African societies that Fugard so aptly portrays - their togetherness as South African citizens, yet, their segregation because of cultural differences including colour and

creed. In the case of Lena, one is led to believe that because of her frustrating husband, her need for company and somebody to talk to, she finally overcomes her own pride and prejudice and accepts the black man as company, but his silence is also the silence of Friday in Foe - the final silence of the definitively marginalized man.

At the beginning of the play, Boesman is seen to be dominating the life of Lena, but, towards the end, Lena has asserted herself and with an upsurge of irony, Fugard shows Boesman as being forced to acknowledge her and to accept certain things about himself:

As her awareness grows, her independence and her ability to dominate Boesman also increases (Hauptfleisch, in Gray 1982:182).

One further realizes that Lena's major problem is her identity crisis. She sinks further into loneliness when her husband ridicules and frustrates her. She is lonely even if her husband is with her:

You make it worse. When I call you, and I know you hear me, but you say nothing. Sometimes loneliness is two ... you and the other person who doesn't want to know you're there (183).

When one would expect Boesman to be the consolation in the poor life of Lena, it is ironical that he becomes the main impediment in her life. As Boesman makes fun of her, she gets more confused and is further unable to identify herself: "Mary. I want to be Mary ... " (181).

On the other hand Boesman is further isolated when he rediscovers the truth about himself. It would seem that he had falsely assumed superiority over Lena who lately appears to have regained her rightful position. One could mark further strains of irony in this situation. The pseudo-security that Boesman has derived

from beating his wife has now actualised into a reality of uncertainty and apprehension. Lena is ultimately triumphant and by contrast, now has Boesman to follow her:

Lena: I'm alive Boesman ... (221) That's what I'm going to be now. I want to laugh as well. Get ready, Boesman. When you walk I'm going to laugh! At you! (219).

The marriage of Boesman and Lena could have been used as a practical illustration of some of the problems that occur between any man and any wife. This seems possible when we acknowledge that different people have different ways and approaches to their marriages. Though Fugard has portrayed this love at the time when it had turned bitter, he could not have intended the play to be at an allegorical level of meaning.

At one point Fugard is seen to be building his characters by contrast, the greater sense of irony inherent in his characterization. This manifests itself in Boesman and Lena who appear to be opposites of each other like Hester and Johnnie. In Boesman there are traces of hate or feelings of resentment. He does not experience any joy and this makes him hate any joyful moods of his wife. On the contrary, Lena prefers joy and would easily welcome it. Through her singing and talking, she appears to be joyful and hopeful.

These differences in persons also breed differences in terms of the broader outlook of life. There are clear-cut discrepancies of optimism and pessimism respectively in Lena and Boesman. Lena may welcome joy and happiness if she gets it, Boesman hopes not to be a different person, but only keeps to his pride. They even approach their moments of life in different ways:

Boesman: [aggressively]. I'm always happy.

Lena: ... but Boesman's happy. This is a new sort of happy, ou ding...

Boesman: Why shouldn't I be happy ?

Lena: Ja, that's the way it is. When I want to cry, you want to laugh (169).

When the pondok of Boesman and Lena is bulldozed, Boesman refuses to let Lena feel as he does. It becomes clearly ironical for Boesman to impress upon Lena that the white man did him a favour when he pushed over a rotten pondok because he was sick of it. Boesman is himself not only frustrated by this situation, but pretending about his feelings, he uses it to frustrate Lena even more.

Walder mentions that because of Lena's pain and Boesman's shame, they are caught between the white man who despises and rejects them, and the black who can sympathize but is in his own world of even deeper, even more incomprehensible suffering (1984:73). That the plight of Boesman and Lena puts them between the white on the one side and the black on the other, is a symbol of the position of the coloured in the social scale of the South African populations.

It would appear that Fugard's reaction to why he wrote Boesman and Lena would be that he wanted to tell the truth about his country and its people. In his interview with Barrie Hough, Fugard responds by saying:

We were conscious of trying to tell a simple South African story ... whatever its flaws might be (in Gray 1982:128).

Though the play could be categorized as South African, there is no doubt that there is an underlying universality in the play which comes to surface in the characters' view of life.

The play portrays very serious issues of marriage, yet, as it mirrors the suffering and strange relationship, it evokes the ineffable pathos of Boesman and Lena's isolation. Pathos is heightened by Boesman's shame and Lena's pain. But, in spite

of these far-reaching conundrums, they are still living human beings. In Walder's view (1984:73) the play suggests the depths to which the human spirit can be made to sink in South Africa, the extent of the denial of the most basic of human rights.

Boesman and Lena is a kind of play that easily invites and involves the reader in its world. Reading this play, one experiences deep feelings, understanding, compassion and pity for the people who can only laugh at their pitiful, futile exercise. Frustration and desolation seem to have conditioned them and made them accept themselves as they are. They acknowledge their being and have given up hope that there is anything they can do with their condition and circumstance.

The history of all living creatures testifies to the dominance of the strong over the weak, justifying the will to power and accepting it as the moral goal of the strong, their natural responsibility to rule the weak (Collingwood, Essay on Metaphysics).

6.3 The Blood Knot

Brotherhood - Pathos and politics

The play deals with the situation of two half-brothers living together in a one-roomed shack. Its cleanliness readily illustrates and foregrounds its emptiness, poverty and isolation of its occupants. The two brothers are alone, and Morris, the light-skinned, cooks and cleans, while Zachariah, the dark-skinned, has a job. Morris assumes the role of the "housewife" and saves the money of Zachariah the breadwinner.

In this play, The Blood Knot, we find the compassionate situation of the people who are tormented by their past which they cannot escape. Struggling against the forces beyond their control, they become typical of Fugard's characters. In a stark reminder of the pathetic life of a wretched couple, Boesman and Lena, Morris and Zachariah also see no future in their life. Similar to the frustrated Hester and the shaky Johnnie, they also have an identity crisis.

Brotherhood as a theme emerges from this play as the main concern of Fugard's writing. Yet Rutherford says that the play explores what in the world of today can only be termed a myth, namely that all men are brothers, we are all descendants of Adam, and share a universal mother: "There was only one mother, and she's what counts" (in Gray 1982:151).

In this play as in others, Fugard gives an account of his material by contrast. He clearly contrasts the white man's bright world with the squalid and offensive black township. Korsten itself could represent Zachariah in his primitive and barbaric nature while the park symbolizes Morris' "civilization" and his smartness. Morris

himself has marked this contrast and spells out the differences to Zachariah: "You're horrible ... a two-legged embarrassment" (95).

Morris and Zachariah are brothers, but they are differentiated by the content of their character and the chemistry of their psyche and intellect. From their differences in skin colour and their game play which clearly emphasizes their roles, the two brothers' ostensible hatred for each other is outspoken:

Morris: You know something? I hate you. ... Is that it? ... Well, I hate you, do you hear! Hate! ... Hate! ... Hate! (Plays:93)²¹

Yet, for all their differences, and their realization that they hate each other, they cannot escape the fact that they complement each other and are tied together by an unbreakable bond, the blood knot:

Morris: No. You see, we're tied together, Zach. It's what they call the blood knot ... the bond between brothers (97).

Morris is literate as he is able to read and write. "He at times adopts a patronizing attitude towards his brother" (Rutherford, in Gray 1982:156) and knows all the "social graces". In the postcolonial context he is an extension of paternalism. On the other hand, Zachariah is functionally illiterate, cannot read and write, and has to depend completely on Morris. The irony of this situation is that Morris is somehow "licensed" to dominate Zachariah and to manipulate his moves and actions.

There is a remarkable contrast between the two brothers Morris and Zacharia. Because of his light skin, Morris is tempted to leave his brother to "try for white". Perhaps his conviction was that he would secure the material and social privileges

²¹ Plays Refers to Fugard, A. 1974. Three Port Elizabeth Plays. London: Oxford University Press. Subsequent page numbers in brackets refer to this edition.

of that position. On the other hand, Zachariah is somewhat naive and simple, and so he contents himself with what he is. He has no yearning (as yet) to escape his blackness.

The notion of brotherhood is mostly essential to Morris and thus becomes a subject of his concern. He is sentimental about this concept which does not seem to interest his brother. The reference to the eggs in a nest becomes an image of a secure relationship. Contrary to his pronounced hatred and with a feeling that they belong to each other, Morris reassures Zachariah:

Morris: We are brothers, remember. ... Brotherhood. Brothers-in-arms, each other's arms. Brotherly love ... of all the things there are in this world, I like to hear you call that ... (19).

As Forster accurately maintains, on the surface level Zachariah and Morris act out their day to day life as brothers living near Port Elizabeth, South Africa. At the underlying level, they relate symbolically to each other as black oppressed and white oppressor (in Gray 1982:207). From the development of these two levels, the audience is given the opportunity to observe the connection between the black South African individual and the existing segregation.

They have different outlooks on life. Morris is an idealist and a dreamer. His imagination leads to an equitable and exultant world of dreams. He rejoices over fantasies and ideals and is not bold enough to face the realities of life. He removes all the pleasures from life and substitutes them with dreams.

Obversely, Zachariah seems to have a more realistic approach toward life. For him dreams and fantasies about the future do not work. We come to realize how he is infuriated by Morris' attempt to dominate his life: "I work for the money. Not

him" (5). And, looking into his past, he remembers Minnie who used to keep him company, give him joy and happiness and who never sought to control his life.

As Morris comes back home after his attempt to pass for white, he fears the world and cannot go back into it. He brings with him a new version of his other life, to be indoors and divorced from the outside world. He doesn't want his brother to go to the outside world. Compared to Hester (in Hello and Goodbye), as she comes back home and realizes that her brother fears the outside world, she plans to go back into the ruthless outside world and invites Johnnie to join her.

In purposeful opposition to the African time concept, Morris uses the alarm-clock to "time" and regulate their lives. He prefers a life that is certain and disciplined. He removes Zachariah from the rest of the world so as to direct his life and "shape" his behaviour. Zachariah works and seeks momentary pleasures while Morris becomes an archetypal white man who receives money and saves it for "our plans in future".

Morris is a symbol of sophistication to Zachariah. He is not only able to read and write, but also goes further to teach his brother to use a paper - something that emphasizes Zachariah's primitiveness. Zachariah's life was empty and unsophisticated before the arrival of Morris. He has not known time and has had no definite plans:

Zacharia: But I was also here ten years without plans and never needed them ... and didn't worry about my feet, or a future, or having supper on time!(13)

And later on:

"You see, he's been such a burden as a brother (81).

The strength of brotherhood is further emphasized by the fact that Morris has to put into words what Zacharia feels but cannot say. This situation further mirrors the differences between the two brothers' extent of vocabulary and exposure. Their conversation is characteristic of the discriminatory ways in which they were brought up:

Zachariah: What is it?

Morris: The muscle of your heart.

Zachariah: ... That sounds like it all right. The muscles of my heart are weary ... what?

Morris: Beating. That's what a heart does to a man.

Zachariah: (gratitude). By God, Morrie, you're on to it tonight. I'm tired of beating, beating, everyday another beating (pause) What's the beating for anyway?

Morris: Blood (36).

In the later scenes of the play brotherhood and the related problems of race and colour are further explored: "... this whiteness of theirs is not just in the skin...it's even in their way of walking". When Morris insults and swears at Zachariah, their relationship (brotherhood) is embittered and strained. Zachariah almost fails to acknowledge Morris as his brother with Morris saying: "Just a joke... Forgive me, Zach... I didn't mean it now...I'm your brother". Zachariah is unable to comprehend this "my brother" (78) but stares strangely (and very sceptically) at Morris.

This strained relationship reaches its climax when Zacharia's anger and jealousy lead him to a point where he attempts to assault Morris, almost kill him. This crude desire is at one stage held in check by the alarm-clock - just before Zacharia could attack Morris. Still playing the game, Zachariah locks the gates and hides behind the tree:

Morris: ...where are you?

Zachariah: Behind a tree.

Morris: But ... but I thought you were the good sort of boy?

Zachariah: Me?

Morris: The simple, trustworthy type of John-boy. Weren't you that?

Zachariah: I've changed (95).

Since Zachariah never retaliates in their drama, the tension they have created is not released through catharsis [Aristotle's term] but is held in abeyance and perhaps relegated to the social arena (Forster, in Gray 1982:207).

Hatred swells up as Morris abuses Zachariah. When at one stage Zachariah plays the role of a monkey-nut seller, Morris uses words which give Zachariah a shock. To my mind, Morris and Zachariah's altercation expresses the irony of the situation in this play. One would not expect within the framework created in the play that Zachariah, the black brother, would correct Morris, the light skinned (who attempted being white) on how to address a brother.

Realizing their hatred for one another, Morris and Zachariah attempt to break the bond that links them by attacking their mother symbolically and driving her away from them:

Zachariah: So she must go.

Morris: I think so, too [a step in the direction of the old woman] Go away. Go away. old one! ... be gone! It's no use. Yes ... We don't want you!

Zachariah. Bugger off.

Morris: You made life unbearable.

Zachariah: ... Hamba!²² (92).

There are obvious instances of pathos in this play. Zachariah is flattered at the discovery of the fact that his pen-pal Ethel Lange is a white woman. He wants to maintain the pretence. Seeing that Morris is light-skinned, he believes that Morris can be used to meet and address Ethel as if he were white.

There is an irony in the fact that when Morris has to play white for Ethel, he is the one who tells Zachariah about the dangers of playing white and in fact dissuades

him from that idea. We see Zachariah in a very pitiful state when he painfully casts out all fantasies about whiteness and acknowledges reality:

Zachariah: (severe and bitter). Ethel is white. I am black.

Morris: That's a very good beginning, Zach.

Zachariah: If she sees me ...

Morris: Keep it up

Zachariah: ... she'll be surprised ... she'll laugh ... she'll swear ... she'll scream (59-60).

Zachariah's conditions of life as they have been from childhood evoke more pathos. He was brought up as an ordinary boy who accepted only the pleasures he could get. He recalls his painful past which is completely different from that of Morris, his brother. Morris was handled and treated with more care and love than Zachariah: "Don't you remember? You got the toys ... She said she only had one. There was always only one" (46-47). We "hear" from what they relate that Morris was often taken to church. Talking about their mother, what Zachariah has experienced and remembers differs from that which Morris recalls:

Zachariah: There was her feet.

Morris: Who had feet?

Zachariah: Mother, man.

Morris: I don't remember her feet, Zach.

Zachariah: It was mother's feet...

Morris: ... Stop, Zach. Stop. We must sort this out, man. I mean ... It sounds like some other mother (47-48).

As a non-white (half coloured) Zachariah has an added problem which evokes further pathos. The situation described above illustrates that he has not only been dehumanized by the system which led him to live in a one roomed shack, but he is also marginalized by his mother. This ironic situation could be attributed to the fact that he is black, and this distanced him even from his own mother and earned him the discriminatory treatment.

Zachariah's illiteracy, loss of identity, and his futurelessness are also causes for concern. Morris has also referred to Zachariah's inability to read and write. This

regrettable condition at one stage is a deciding factor for Morris to remain with Zachariah when he was almost decided to leave him alone. Remembering that Zachariah would not be able to read his farewell note, he decides to stay with him:

Morris: Stop it, Zach! I'm still here. I know I can't go. You see this morning when you were at work, I thought it out. It's no use any more, I said ... I was ready to go, man ... until I realized that you can't read. My God, that hurt me! That cut me deep! Zach can't read without me!.. so you see, I know I can't go ... (84).

Zachariah is harshly revealed to himself by his brother Morrie. He has to acknowledge that he is black, the very fact that renders him unacceptable to a white woman. Brown has observed two moments of high drama at this stage; the first when the White brother forces his illiterate Black brother to examine his blackness ... and then to exult in it. The second is when they enact a scene, Morris becoming "white" in his mind and his brother becoming "black" in his. The scene is charged with tingling horror - a moment in which they become enemies across the colour line (in Gray 1982:71).

While he painfully accepts his blackness and the existing differences between black and white, he is also supposed to act appropriately and accordingly. His expectations about Ethel are thwarted and frustrated, and he is further disillusioned by the fact that he cannot change himself to be other than black.

Morrie, on the other hand, as Angove (1986:26) observes, confesses that he may possess the necessary qualities to be accepted into the cultural society he is aspiring to, but that he realizes he falls short in terms of a deeply embedded heritage that he was born with.

Further strains of pathos are discernible in Zachariah's actions. His jealousy is readily perceivable at the time he surreptitiously exchanges roles with Morris and

wears the garments he has bought him, but "the final effect is an absurdity bordering on the grotesque" (81). Rutherford mentions that the putting on of clothes is an objective correlative of his own state of mind, an admission of the doubts which assail him (in Gray 1982:154).

By so doing, he gets "nearer" Ethel and further experiences the feeling of being the white man that he always persuaded Morris to be:

Zachariah: ... Didn't think I could do it, did you? ... I got sick of myself and made a change. I got beauty ... too. Haven't I? (81-82).

One sympathises with Zachariah's failure to accept himself as he is and to sacrifice his desire to keep to his pen-pal. He is also not ready to tell the truth which Morris suggested that "he is a sort of boy who wanted to play with whiteness ..." (58), even though Morris goes to the extent of labelling it crime:

Morris: They don't like these games with their whiteness. You've heard them. "How would you like your daughter to correspond with a blackman? ... That's the question. That's the crime (58).

Morris at some stage also becomes an object of pity. That he had left his brother in the past to play white, left him with apprehensions and fear of society and the world. He seldom goes out of their shack because of uncertainty and shame, and only feels safe and secure in the shack in which he is virtually "jailed".

Confined and secluded as he is in this cell, he is still not free at all. He doesn't seem to be able to regain his position, and is now more confused about where or to which group he does belong. He tried to hold to some certainty when playing his role as the white master but in the long run he is in an unresolvable dilemma with his identity:

Morris: When I hear that certainty about whys and wherefores, about how to live and what not to love, I wish, believe me, deep down in the bottom of my heart where my blood is as red as yours, I wish that old washerwoman had bruised me too at birth. I wish ... (63).

The Blood Knot as a play has a clear political slant, and as such can be termed a committed play. Through Morris and Zachariah it mirrors the relational stance of the whites and blacks. The fact that Morris "tries for white" prompts a number of ideas in the mind of the reader of the play, for example that Morris is hindered and incited by something - supposedly his awareness of the disadvantages coupled with being non-white and in a lower class. It would appear that he wanted freedom and recognition. He is reassured that by being white, he would have a different way of looking at things, that would change his thinking, his manner of dress and even his way of walking; He would possibly inherit the injunction to be superior and dominate others.

This relationship of black and white gives prominence to the notion of race and colour which remains understated in the play. In Morris and Zachariah's game play, one notices how they themselves perceive their relationship and become prejudiced by their blackness and whiteness. However, reacting to this situation, Fugard has maintained that he attempted to make a personal statement in the play, and not a social one (Fugard & Simon 1982:40).

Yet, at other levels of Morrie and Zachariah's confrontation, it would seem that Fugard brings into the picture the social strata that existed in the country at the time with one dominating and the other dominated. Because Morris is light-skinned, "a white", Zachariah subjects himself to his superiority and addresses him as Baas²³:

Morris: Who are you?

23

The Afrikaans equivalent for Master - has a very derogatory connotation, strongly in line with ideological notions of "baasskap" within the framework of Apartheid.

Zachariah: I'm your boy Zach, Baas
 Morris: Who am I?
 Zachariah: Baas Morrie, Baas
 Morris: Baas Morrie and his boy, Zach! (88)

In his description, Rutherford mentions that Zach is no more than a labour unit, only one of the group of people described by the South African Deputy Minister of Justice in 1969 as "surplus appendages" (in Gray 1982:154).

One could easily maintain that this play sketches the opposition between the "white man" and the black one. Morris, in assuming the role of the white man, ironically becomes superior to Zachariah the non-white. In his role as the black man, Zachariah is oppressed by Morris who on the other hand subjects himself to the retaliation of Zachariah.

The fact that Morris wants to discontinue their correspondence with Ethel because she is a white woman also reflects the issue of the relationship between black and white and its politics. Morris acknowledges the fact that Ethel cannot be in a position to visit them - the non-whites - and therefore advises Zachariah to write to Ethel and surrender their mission:

Morris: The truth. You know it.
 Zachariah: I don't. I don't know nothing.
 Morris: Then listen, because I know it. "Dear Ethel, forgive me, but I was born a dark sort of boy who wanted to play with whiteness ..."
 Zachariah: [rebellion] No!
 Morris: "... and that's the truth,..." (58)

Zachariah unwittingly and pathetically has all the irony to pronounce: "After a whole life I only seen ne properly tonight. You helped me. I'm grateful" (64). It is indeed ironical that Ethel's whiteness alone gives her a superiority against which Morrie's coloured sense of inferiority is emphasized (Angove 1986:27).

The Blood Knot is one of the greatest plays in this genre because of its thematic and modal richness in terms of brotherhood, irony, pathos and contrast. Brown mentions that he is particularly impressed by "its subtlety, its sparks of penetrating dialogue, its humour and its deep pain ..." (in Gray 1982:71).

In essence, it clearly portrays the difficulties of race and colour, of those people who would try to cope with the reality of another existence, "of somebody else whose pain he feels, whose suffering he witnesses" (Fugard & Simon 1970:40).

It would be apt to conclude with the words of Rutherford:

The theme of universal brotherhood is a seemingly ironic choice of subject for a South African setting, but it is typical of Fugard that he does not use his South African background simply to explore racial problems, but in this play as in most of his others, takes a particular South African issue and uses it to explore a larger and more universal one (in Gray 1982:152).

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

In this study an attempt has been made to place Synge and Fugard in their respective dramatic traditions and examine the extent to which their particular notion in their writing rises to the universal. The study further attempts to show that Synge's irony and Fugard's pathos are the most decisive shaping modes in the development of their material.

A strong deduction that one can make from the study of Synge and Fugard is that while they are respectively more objective and detachedly ironic (Synge) and subjective and inclined to pathos (Fugard) in their writings, their works seem representative and illustrative of the periods in which they lived.

The Three Port Elizabeth Plays, evoking a dominant sense of pathos in its readers, have shown Fugard's passionate and raw sense of involvement in South Africa and its culturally different people and their proclivities. The more "detached" Synge seems to succeed more in terms of being an ironic onlooker, an alien in Ireland, recording events as a historian would do - and then imbuing them with a poignancy and mordancy all the more striking for being almost fastidiously distant.

From a careful consideration of Synge's dramatic tradition and contribution in some of his works, I have come away with the notion that a good deal of his unique power resides in his ability to synthesize, to create in the same figure both individual states (pertinent to Irish life) and also universal kinds (true to human nature generally).

The portrait of the Mayo peasants that Synge presents is not quite as savage as his earlier critics felt. From the plays studied, he appears to enjoy the vigour of their

speech, their wildness at one end, and their simplicity on the other. To some extent he exposes their moral weakness and also their greed.

His ironies are not as totally destructive as those of Beckett. If the society he shows is an absurd one without real meaning and value, there is still at least one individual in each play who refuses to conform, and who expresses genuine beliefs (Greene 1975:158).

Synge has been established as a playwright who knew instinctively that his most effective course in the plays was to create cases in which judgement may be called for but to make no judgement himself. The plays show that he goes out to record his observations and the experiences he had with the peasants, but he never passes judgement. Through his contribution, we note his development of the inner lives of his individuals and how he contrasts them with the outer world of events.

Through his adept use of the ironic mode in the plays, ranging from his tragedy of classic simplicity (cf. Riders to the Sea), to his rich tumbling comedy that also turns to be a very serious drama (cf. The Playboy of the Western World), Synge has shown his flair for distilling the richness and diversity of the Irish spirit.

He shows in Riders to the Sea that its world is not evil, but ruthless. There is no moral significance in the occurrences of the play. The human sufferer is remarkably passive under the catastrophe and the destruction agent is an amoral, mindless force built into the physical. This vividly underscores his sense of irony as it pertains to received religion.

In The well of the Saints Synge's individuals are sustained in joy and self-respect by the illusion of their appearances. The analysis indicates that he uses the play to

illustrate the double nature of the imagination, its capacity for simple deceptive fallacy, and its frequent role as a liberator - thus highly ironic.

With The Playboy of the Western World, he goes out to satirize the folk-fantasy of the peasants. He deliberately exploits a pattern of unstable and fluctuating convention so that uncertainty and confusion are powerfully built into his dramatic strategy.

While a number of critics saw Yeats' Cathleen in Houlihan and the Countess Cathleen as more real plays, the study of Synge's plays has suggested something with a difference. Synge comes out as a more serious realist who does not make a poetical and polemical point by simplifying reality and the real issues.

Fugard, on the other hand, has been seen as an important contributor to the significant development of South African literature in English. I have examined his work as a vital extension and addition to my study of South African "history", its regime and the land politics.

I further realized that he is more of a painfully subjective writer. At one stage he is deeply involved because of his theatre becoming the embodiment of his time, place, "truth", and politics. At another he seems to target the people of his race, causing negative feelings, attitudes and antagonism in the people of other races.

He records with searing and meticulous intensity people's poverty, suffering and isolation, and comments on their relationships with each other, their reaction to societal expectations and prejudices, their ability or inability to deal with essential and difficult experiences such as marriage and brotherhood, their own short comings, deficiencies and problems of their existence.

In his plays, he focusses on the lives of mainly the low class people and foregrounds the dilemmas of being a South African non-white citizen. "In his engagement with the subject of apartheid, Fugard's work dramatizes attention that is in fact far more complicated than the ethical framework in which it is placed" (Mustafa 1986:85). As allegories of the human predicament, the plays allow anyone viewing them as representations of apartheid the exercise of encountering it in a larger context.

Writing for South African and the universal audience, one realizes that the audience is allowed to see the South Africans and South Africa from below. Fugard uses the viewpoint of only the basest class of people, half coloureds, a prostitute, a shaky proposition, a beaten-up coloured woman with her alcoholic husband and a cripple.

From the analyses of the plays, it is evident that Fugard wrote these plays during the period which was more dehumanising and which presented the most overt abuse of personal freedom and self-esteem. It is observable that his characters as shown in the plays are in search of escape as much as they are in search of fulfilment. Although somewhat politically inspired, he is to a larger extent still able to reach dramatic heights.

Fugard's sentimentality is confirmed most strongly in his subjectivity about his material. More specifically, The Three Port Elizabeth Plays seem to display a lack of maturity of technique that encapsulates elements of pathos as a basis while displaying only a slight shift towards the detachment and objectivity of the playwright.

In Hello and Goodbye, Fugard explores Johnnie's self-exploration and Hester's quest for self-knowledge, invites compassion from his readers/viewers through their existential dilemma.

With the life of Boesman and Lena, he evoke ineffable pathos for these tattered people who can only laugh at their pitiful, futile life. Because of frustration and desolation, they are conditioned and bound to accept themselves as they are.

In The Blood Knot, the image-making of the relationship between black and white comes across as a hideous irony. The audience is easily seduced by the derogatory and the defamatory words exchanged by the two brothers.

For all their comments on the social and political systems of South Africa, the Port Elizabeth plays are not really intended only for a particular situation in South Africa. They share, to a larger extent, the universality that makes the playwright a force to reckon with in English drama. Truly, issues like those of racial discrimination are not only South African and the "messages" of the plays do in the final analysis go far beyond the borders of this country.

Vanderbroucke, in his book devoted to Fugard's work, reached a conclusion which to my mind, is a comprehensive view of what Fugard's plays are about, "for in everything that he has written, Athol Fugard's ultimate concern is the universal plight rather than the particular South African one. Man's isolation, his lonely search for warmth, intelligibility, and meaning in an alien world, his avowal of human dignity, affirmation of his identity, and temporary recourse to dreams of illusions ..." (1985:194).

To my mind it is more strongly in the human qualities and directness which permeate their dramatic technique that Synge and Fugard's significance as shaping influences on drama has been detected, and which has allowed them to become major forces in the wider context of English drama.

CODA

Further research might be based on:

- * The semiotic fun in the selected plays by JM Synge and Athol Fugard.
- * Synge's use of "fine extravagance of language".
- * Fugard's use of other languages in the English plays (his variations of the South African dialects - first touched on by Du Preez [1984]).
- * Theoretical interpretations of Fugard's work in line with his propaganda.

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