



## **AN EXAMINATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHOICE OF DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES IN FUGARD'S *SIZWE BANSI IS DEAD***

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### **Abstract**

*In their creative works, African writers usually deal with issues concerning their various societies. They talk and discuss social, political, economic and many other problems that affect their immediate societies. For many dramatists, exploring different techniques to discuss issues of utmost importance to them is a big problem. The reason is that the techniques define the success or otherwise of the play they write as far as literary style is concerned. Athol Fugard and his co-writers Winston Ntsona and John Kani lived and wrote the play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* during the era of apartheid in South Africa. They witnessed many of the injustices that happened during the apartheid era. In steering their play to a conclusion that leaves their readers and theatre audience feeling extremely satisfied that they had enjoyed the play, Fugard and his co-writers adopt techniques in drama to create a virtual realism that sends the audience wondering whether or not they were in the centre of the action when it all happened. This paper uses the textual analysis method to explore how these techniques including flashback, alienation effect, minimal set and simple props, small cast; humour and comic elements and the story-within-a-story technique are stylistically used by Fugard and his co-writers in the play to drive home their thematic message to their readers and audience. The study concludes that the major themes of racial discrimination and identity are successfully developed by these dramatists with their careful and appropriate usage of these dramatic techniques to achieve verisimilitude.*

**Keywords:** *apartheid; South Africa; dramatic techniques; Fugard; racial discrimination*

### **INTRODUCTION**

South African literature has evolved through different periods of history, before, during and after the independence of South Africa (Dillon-Hooper, 2014). The writings of authors during the apartheid period are of utmost importance because of the subject matter and writing styles they used in projecting their themes. Donahue (1995) explained that many of such writers wrote stories that carried strong political themes because the environment in which they lived was engulfed in a serious political situation that made all the news on almost every major local and international media station across the globe. Even though some writers were able to push through their thoughts through their writings, they were mindful of the language they used to narrate their stories. It is, therefore, no wonder Catron (1990) explained that many writers, therefore, adopted covert means of sending across their message without coming under sharp censorship and rebuke by the powers that be.

Writers used comic elements and humour, especially, as well as several techniques of literary style, to send across their message. At least, when a story meant to be a satire is written and the writer hopes to cover or reduce the intensity of the criticisms he or she is leveling at a particular



system or persons, humour and comic elements are normally used. It is imperative to comment that the success or failure of a playwright, according to Allison et al (1986) and Diala (2011) largely rests on the techniques he or she employs in developing the story. This assertion by Allison et al and Diala is both technically and factually true because the dramatic techniques are the vehicle on which the story line is driven. Without appropriate choice of techniques the story may end up having a flat appeal and probably, may not be able to send its message across.

Fugard and his colleagues, like many other playwrights including well established and popular writers in the past, all had their eye on presenting good stories that would reach out to a designated audience who would accept and appreciate their message. Obviously, to do this, they knew they had to employ techniques of drama that would enable them achieve this goal. Some well known techniques include the use of limited cast, simple sets and props, stage narrator, humour and comic elements, flashback and/or flashforward, alienation effect, and story-within-a-story technique (Catron, 2002).

Dramatic techniques, according to Catron (2010) in his book, *The Director's Vision*, include literary devices and staging elements determined by the playwright or stage director to enhance different forms of experiences in the audience. These experiences normally range from aural, visual and emotional. All of these make a play a good one. It is important, however, to emphasise that apart from these, some of the main components of a good play, or whether a play is entertaining or successful, are the story itself, script writing, performances of the actors, management of the stage, the props and set design, costumes, lighting design, and sound. Some of these techniques are successfully employed in the play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, enabling readers to appreciate the simplicity of the story line while drawing very serious lessons from it.

The play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is a play about identity. Written and set in apartheid South Africa, it is about how the laws instituted by the apartheid regime on the Pass or legal permits robbed the black natives of South Africa of their personhood; allowing them no official existence beyond where their passbooks allowed or permitted them to be, enforced by brutal policing. The story line is around this conflict that the pass book system creates. It is interesting to note that it is this very notion of the desperate Sizwe Bansi being nothing more than what his pass book says he is that eventually provides the underlining solution to his problems. He is stuck in Port Elizabeth and prevented from working by an official stamp in his book, and therefore, unable to provide for his family back home.

The play opens in Styles' photographic studio where a young man named Sizwe had gone to take a photograph to send home to his folks to make them know that he is doing well in the big city, though in reality he is not. Through the exchanges that ensue between the photographer, Styles and Sizwe, the whole story line unfolds. Sizwe narrates the reason why he is in the studio and Styles narrates through flashback his predicament way back at Ford Motors, a car manufacturing plant, where he once worked. Through the interaction of the duo, Styles and Sizwe, the story comes to a fulfilling conclusion that makes the readers satisfied that they have read a good play. According to Allison et al (1986), the play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was:

*“conceived as an ‘experiment’ – Fugard’s words – which involves the readiness to risk failure and disappointment in order to explore*



*unusual modes of dramatic realization.*” (p930)

Kruger (2003) also explained that the play is not the usual play that follows the usual straight jacket patterns of writing drama. It is thus not surprising that Allison et al call it “an experiment” by Fugard and two close actor friends of his. It has been explained by authors like Raji (2005) and Larlham (2008) that readiness to experiment is, indeed, an identifying trait of modern dramatists, and it affects the choice of subject, method of acting and stagecraft in all its variety. This assertion is corroborated by Luddy (1976) when he intimated that one result of widespread experimentation has been to emphasise that a dramatic text is not an end in itself, as the literary texts might normally seem to portray or imply, “but essentially demands in production and performance” (p1443).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the importance of choosing appropriate dramatic techniques to write plays. In this instance, the paper explores the choice of dramatic techniques by Fugard and examines their effectiveness in sending home his message to his readers. Some of the techniques employed by Fugard in this particular play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, are unconventional or simply put, rarely used by most modern playwrights. The paper, thus intends to examine these techniques to see why Fugard chose to adopt them to present his message to his audience.

The study hopes to provide answers to two key questions: “what are the dramatic techniques employed by Fugard in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*?” and “how appropriate or effective are these choices in getting Fugard’s message to his audience?”

It is the study’s main objective to analyse all the techniques adopted by Fugard and his co-writers to send home their message to their audience. This study provides insights into the study of drama as an art form that involves the use of literary style to make it complete. It also opens a new door to the teaching of drama and theatre so that teachers and students will look beyond the periphery of the usual subject matter and thematic interests to the writing styles of playwrights. It is the view of this paper to project the idea that the techniques that a writer employs to write his plays make him or her unique and also adds value to the text in terms of literary style.

### **The Problem Statement**

The art of writing plays comes along with it some challenges. This is because unlike the mainstream genres of prose, poetry and literary criticism where a writer just pours out his or her thoughts for the audience to read and interpret, the playwright considers a storyline with actors in performance on stage (Larlham, 2008). This uniqueness of playwriting vis-à-vis the mediums of writing other genres of literature unavoidably puts the playwright in a very uncomfortable corner. In this vein, as Thielman (2008) puts it, the playwright is compelled by his practice to use techniques in drama to enhance meaning and understanding among his or her audience.

The play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is a political satire which is dedicated to the period of the apartheid regime in South Africa. The playwrights were very mindful of their intentions while writing this play. They, therefore, adopted dramatic techniques that would enable them to achieve their aim. Many writers have critiqued this play in many ways but very few have since the play’s



publication focused attention on the merits of the dramatic techniques chosen by the playwrights in driving home the major themes in the play. This study, therefore, hopes to fill that gap by examining the techniques employed by Fugard, Kani and Ntsona to enhance meaning, interpretation and understanding of the play.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Because the study is purely a library based research, it employs the textual analysis method to do the discussion. Textual analysis, according to Frey et al (1999) is a method used by researchers to describe and interpret the characteristics of a recorded or visual text. The text mainly selected as the primary material is a play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* written by Fugard during the apartheid regime in Colonial South Africa. Other secondary sources in the form of published textbooks and journal articles were consulted widely to analyse the subject matter.

The analyses focuses primarily on the relevance of the dramatic techniques that are employed by the dramatist to create his story line. As such, in using the textual analysis method, the study considered the content, structure and functions of the messages contained in the text. It is instructive to note that there are four major approaches to textual analysis: rhetorical criticism, which deals with conjuring up interesting images; content analysis, which deals with identifying, enumerating and analyzing occurrences of specific information laced within a given text; interaction analysis, which focuses on the complex accomplishments requiring much information and knowledge on the part of individual interactions and their ability to coordinate behaviour with others; and finally, performance studies, which also looks at engagement between a writer and his own texts as well as that of others through the means of performance.

The approach adopted under the forms of textual analysis method is the second one – content analysis. It is in this light that various techniques of drama are explored. A very good example is the use of minimal cast and simple props to convey the story line. It has been explained by Crow (2002), for example, that there are very few reasons why only few characters and simple props, are used, among which is the fact that this is a protest play/literature and the political environment does not induce a playwright to bring together a large cast and many equipment to stage a performance of such a simple story line as he travels across the country and continent to transmit his message about the horrific plight of the Black South Africans.

## **THE ERA OF APARTHEID AND THE WRITINGS OF ATHOL FUGARD**

Davis (2013) explains to his readers that the creations of Athol Fugard are not mere performances or texts, but they are material objects. The paper examines further how the meaning and value of Fugard's plays are constructed through the interventions of his publisher. This is so because Fugard's writings invoked different emotions that could be assumed by pro-apartheid supporters to mean a different kind of protest literature (Davis, 2013; Campbell, 1997; Colleran, 1995). The publishers, therefore, got involved so much in shaping the scholarly works they were contracted to publish. In his paper, Davies (2013) successfully draws attention to the sharp distinctions in the way that Fugard's published plays have been received, especially focusing on the enormous reception received by *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and some other protest plays.



According to Burns (2002), Fugard's identity as a playwright is firmly rooted in the struggle against apartheid. As such, plays like *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and many other protest literature of this kind confirm this notion of rebellion. The playwrights Fugard, Kani and Ntsona dedicated their life to works that would overturn the prevailing racial and apartheid situation in South Africa. Thielman (2008) explains how the collaboration between the writers earned them Tonys from Broadway community in 1975 and harsh jail sentences from the government they were criticizing. This, obviously, is very ironical. Whereas, the writers were receiving honours overseas for their brilliance in writing this form of protest literature, they were being prosecuted and incarcerated for their writing at home in South Africa. Donahue (1995) in his paper "Apartheid Dramatic Legacy: Athol Fugard" clearly amplifies this point when he urges historians to use the theatrical works of Athol Fugard as sources on the human victims of apartheid in South Africa. The paper of Donahue cites the varying degrees of ideas portrayed by Fugard in his plays. He mentions the exploration of the consequences of apartheid and Fugard's dramatic inspiration, and finally Fugard's dramatization of the problem of identity in his plays.

Kruger (2015) by way of comparison, explores two major figures of Chilean and South African theatre, in particular two intimate realist dramas onstage and onscreen in the 1970s and 1980s, when both countries were ruled by tyrannies tolerated by governments in the so-called free world. Even though the play of Fugard selected by Kruger for his analysis is not *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* but *Boesman and Lena*, the atmosphere and setting of the play is very similar to that of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, hence making it appropriate for a discussion of this nature. Kruger depicts the scramble for solidarity and freedom from dispossession caused by the apartheid regime. Kruger even explains that such dispossession caused by the Afrikaner capitalism in apartheid South Africa still resonates today.

The play thus critically depicts the sordid situation many native black South Africans found themselves in during the apartheid regime because of the colour of their skin. The segregation laws that existed are clearly brought to the fore in the play using the condition in which Sizwe, the main character finds himself and how he changes his identity with a dead man's pass book just to be able to survive and make a living to support his family back home in King William's Town (Davis, 2013; Burns, 2002; Larlham, 2008;).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theatrical representations have evolved in different forms since the time of Aristotle. Szondi (1987)'s *Theory of the Modern Drama* presents a brilliant analysis of the emergence and development of modern drama from the Renaissance to the present day. The presentation presents a wide-ranging explanation of the works of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Satre, Brecht and Wilder, among others. His explanation of the drama theory clearly explains the various processes a story line goes through in order to achieve full recognition as a well written play. These, according to him, are built along the Aristotelian lucid requirements for writing a successful story line: good plot, setting, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement, all woven together by a conflict of some sort, which keeps the story going.

However, because of the issues of racial segregation and apartheid which are predominant phenomenon prevalent in the story line, one cannot help but appreciate that Critical Race Theory



(CRT) is a far more appropriate framework on which this paper can be built. Delgado and Stefancic (2006) explain critical race theory as having a subjective interpretation depending on where the observer or reader is standing. They highlight that CRT movement is “a collection of activists or scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power.” (p1) Basically, this theory considers many of the same issues that proponents of the Civil Rights Movement look at. Brooks and Newborn (1994) in their explanation of CRT pointed out that unlike activists of the traditional Civil Rights, CRT activists do not accept incrementalism and step-by-step progress in achieving the visions of the group to solve the racial divide problems existing at their time. CRT proponents, in their view, question the “very foundations of the liberal order, including the theory of equality, legal reasoning, and even neutral principles of constitutional law.

It is thus critical to use the CRT as the underlying foundation to develop this paper. The whole story of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is a sharp reminder of the emotional, economic and physical atrocities that native blacks in South Africa were subjected to due to the whole ideology of racial segregation. The Critical Race Theory issue thus helps to question the legality and morality of the practice of segregation and the unjustifiable economic disparities that the ruling colonial government of South Africa subjected the majority black race to when they colonized the South African population.

This enables readers and viewers of the play to appreciate the fundamental problem created by the unacceptable situation that Sizwe Bansi, the main protagonist, Buntu and Styles all find themselves in. It is in this light and against this backdrop that all the various episodes in the story are shown to readers. The CRT explains why Sizwe, Buntu and Styles take the various decisions they took to enable them survive the harsh race question. Sizwe has to die of his actual name to take on the name of a dead man to become Robert Zwelinzima. Styles, for instance, decides to take on his own destiny by leaving the Ford Motors Plant where he feels he has no future because of the race question with all its attendant discrimination issues to set up his own photographic studio.

### **Dramatic Techniques in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead***

The play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is about a man's struggle to survive in apartheid South Africa. The man Sizwe Bansi had a passbook which has expired hence preventing him from getting a job. He tries hard to get a job in a neighbouring town King William's Town but he fails. He puts up with a man named Buntu. Later, he is fortunate to find a valid passbook belonging to a dead man Robert Zwelinzima. He takes up the dead man's name and forfeits his name in order to survive. In dramatising the story, Fugard uses several dramatic techniques. Some predict the future.

### **The Flashback Technique**

In drama, the flashback technique plays a very important role in reinforcing the theme and carefully organising the plot. Trussler (2000) defines the flashback as a device by which an event that took place before the present time is recalled into the present narrative in a uniquely chronological structure or whichever way the writer wants to use it. It normally results in an interruption in the chronological sequence by an



infusion of events of an earlier period.

In the play, Styles, a character in the play, is first seen on stage reading a newspaper. It is the newspaper headlines that trigger his memory to an event in the past, when he was working at the Ford Motors Plant and with the visit of Mr. Henry Ford Jr. to his factory in South Africa. Styles recollects the discrimination at the factory. We know from here that the blacks are clearly relegated to the background in apartheid South Africa. The plight of the Black South African worker, as Styles tells us through the flashback, is very sad. We hear Styles recollecting this when he says: “safety-precautions after six years?” He says this in relation to the visit of Mr. Henry Ford to show how after many years the safety of the black workers at the factory is not given any premium. Fugard is being sarcastic in this particular pronouncement of Styles such that we realise that for the six years that Styles worked at Ford Motors he and his colleagues were exposed to danger. Through this flashback, we know about the concerns of the white bosses, their intention being only to make profit and not about the safety of the black workers in the factory.

Sizwe Bansi also tells his story to Styles through flashback. When he comes to Styles' studio, his aim is to take a picture which he will send home to his wife and children in King Williams Town. He starts to read the letter to be sent together with his picture to his wife. It is while he is reading the letter that he takes us back to the past. In retrospect, he relates his bitter experiences through his interactions with Buntu and when he ends the letter, readers or the audience find themselves back in Style's studio. The experiences he recounts clearly show how the blacks suffer in South Africa. This flashback technique, therefore, to a very large extent, helps to highlight Fugard's themes of racial discriminations and death in the play. It is important to note that the flashback employed by Fugard is very effective as it helps the dramatist to artistically dramatize his propagandist aim and to criticize the obnoxious apartheid system which meted out inhuman treatment to many South African Blacks. Catron (2002) explains to his readers in his book *The Elements of Play Writing* that the flashback technique can help set the tone to reveal the serious defining moments in a play.

There is also the technique of Flashforward used by Fugard in the play. As such, readers are taken into the future through the avid imagination of the protagonist about how he hopes to see his native land without all the elements and features of racial segregation. This, obviously, is achieved by his imagination. It is arguably based on lies because in the context of the story line, this utopia is a never-existent situation. Fugard portrays this whenever Sizwe, Buntu and Styles reflect carefully on what they hope to see happening around them: being considered equal members of the society with good working environments, same working permits for everybody, freedom of movement to any part of the country without any laws of segregation, among a host of others

### **The Alienation Effect Technique**

The Alienation Effect technique is rarely used in drama. It is a technique that allows the playwright to break down the imaginary fourth wall that exists between the actors on stage and the audience watching them (Neelands et al, 2003). In drama, every actor on stage is expected to act out an episode without assuming that there is an audience seated watching his or her every move. This



practically frees the actor from feeling tensed and allows him or her to be more natural in acting. It is also sometimes called the *a-effect* or *distancing effect* (Bogard, 2012). It actually involves the use of techniques designed to distance the audience from emotional involvement in the play through jolting reminders of the artificiality of the theatrical performance (Squiers, 2014).

This is one other dramatic technique which Athol Fugard uses in developing the main theme of racial discrimination in the play. The alienation effect technique is used by the dramatist to break down the imaginary 'fourth wall' of the stage so that the audience and the actors get the chance to interact with one another. The aim of Athol Fugard when he does this is probably to make the audience have a better feeling and understanding of the story or drama that is being unfolded in that part of the play. Fugard also aims at arousing the sympathy of the audience towards the protagonist, Sizwe Bansi. We, therefore, see Sizwe Bansi at a point in time tearing off his shirt and inviting the audience to sympathize with him. He appeals to the emotions of the audience when he explicitly says without any equivocation in Fugard in Allison et al (1986):

*"Look at me! I'm a man. I've got legs: I can run with a wheelbarrow full of cement! I'm strong! I'm a man. Look! I've got a wife. I've got four children. How many has he made, lady? [The man sitting next to her] Is he a man? What has he got that I haven't..."* (p.946)

Through the use of the alienation effect, readers or the audience experience emotionally the frustrations of the character. As such, they (readers) get the chance to see how frustrated the blacks in general become after being subjected to many forms of discrimination by the apartheid system. The effectiveness of this technique lies in the fact that it helps to develop the theme of racial discrimination and arouse the sympathy of the readers, and the whole world in general for the blacks in apartheid South Africa.

### **The Story-within-a-Story Technique**

The story-within-the-story technique is another one employed by Athol Fugard to clearly show the way the blacks suffered in apartheid South Africa. In the context of a play, it is a dramatic plot device or extended metaphors where characters or a character narrate(s) one story while still a part of another (Banham, 1995). Pfister (2001) also explains that it is used by playwrights to give a performance on stage a moment of self reflection and to reinforce the major themes in the play. The effectiveness of this technique lies in the fact that it enables the readers to get a clear understanding of the message the author seeks to impart to his audience (Taylor, 2000). It is known in French drama as "Mise en abyme" It has been used since the days of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, for instance, uses it in plays like *Hamlet* and *Murder of Gonzago*. It is worthy of note that though this technique has existed for a long time in drama/theatre, it assumed a unique standard set for the modern day theatre in late sixteenth century, specifically between 1587 and 1590. This was after the production of the revenge drama of Thomas Kyd titled *The Spanish Tragedy*.

This is clearly the case as Fugard puts it in the play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. The play itself is a story about Sizwe Bansi struggling to survive and be alive in an otherwise wicked world of racism. It is important, however, to note that this technique is used alongside the flashback technique. In the play, two people, Styles and Sizwe recall their past experiences and in one





case the life experience of a fellow blackman Outa Jacob. They weave these stories nicely into the main story line so that we get other stories within the same piece of story. This technique is best displayed in Styles' re-enactment of his experience at Ford Motors where the safety of the black workers were not prioritized by the white “baas” or supervisors and Buntu's recollection of the life, suffering and death of Outa Jacob, a fellow black man caused by the inhumane treatment the apartheid system subjected him to. The effectiveness of this is that Fugard uses this technique to create suspense and to develop the themes of life and death on the one hand and racial discrimination on the other in the play (Columbia Electronic Encyclopaedia, 2015).

### **Limited Sets and Props**

According to the Catron (2010), a prop, which is formally known as theatrical property, is an object used on stage or on screen by actors during a performance or screen production. In other words, a prop refers to all the movable things used on stage to act out an episode. This includes but not limited to costumes, tables, chairs and electrical equipment. A Set, however, is the stage and setting that brings out the scenery in any play. Brauer (2002) explains that the Set refers to all the scenery, furniture and props the audience sees at a production of a play.

Another technique which Athol Fugard uses in his play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is limited sets and simple props. They present the picture of an area or locale for the performance of an event in a play. Thus by using limited set and props, Fugard shows only a small photographic studio with a few things arranged there to occupy limited space. Most plays are written with well developed sets and props to enhance the actual message being presented in the story. However, for a playwright to use minimal sets and very simple props, one gets the impression that the playwrights aims at cutting cost to present a simple story.

The simplicity of the sets and props could be an indication that the story line is a simple one with a simple message – a protest against racial segregation and apartheid. It is important to recognize or realise that the whole story takes place over a few hours in the small photographic studio of Styles. Athol Fugard portrays a simple setting at the beginning of the play in Styles' photography studio. The simplicity of the setting goes a long way to show the simple nature of the blacks in apartheid South Africa. Obviously, when one listens to Styles, the owner of the studio, there's a feeling of humility that comes to the fore. His narration of his past experiences at Ford Motors reminds readers and the audience that he has gone through hardships in this political system. It is, therefore, not surprising that the studio carries an air of simplicity about it. This is even more highlighted by Vandenbroucke (1975) and Davis (2013) in the review of the play. For the dramatist to choose to use minimal sets and props, it is an indication that he or she wants to symbolically portray the simplicity of the black race amidst the different forms of segregation to which they are subjected. The minimal set and simple props are illustrated in the stage direction:

*“Positioned prominently, the name-board:...  
Underneath this a display of photographs of various  
sizes centre stage. a table and a chair... There is also  
another table or desk...”(p 940 )*



Fugard, himself, points out in the stage-direction:

*"The setting for this and subsequent scenes should be as simple so that the action can be continuous." (p 944 )*

The minimal set and simple props are techniques used by Fugard to make the play easy to produce. It can be said that the restriction in setting could also be a statement on the lives of the blacks in South Africa: life is bare and movement is restricted through the Pass Laws. The effectiveness of this technique also lies in the fact that it adds meaning to the theme of life and death in the play. Simple as it looks the studio gives emotional warmth and life to the blacks and serves as an escapist world for them. It also defines the level of restriction to which the blacks are forced by the white apartheid government (Gantt, 2009)

### **The Use of Small Cast**

In addition to the above, the use of few characters or small cast in the play by Athol Fugard makes the play easy to produce. The dramatist uses a limited cast of three in the characters of Styles, Sizwe Bansi and Buntu.

The small cast of three or in some cases two, depending on how fast the characters would be makes the characters versatile. This really accounts for why one character, Styles, comes before the audience for over thirty minutes without any feeling of boredom in the audience. Styles, Buntu and Sizwe Bansi are the only characters we physically see on stage, yet we are able to understand Fugard's aim of writing against the obnoxious apartheid system which sent out different forms of discrimination against blacks in South Africa. It can be said that this technique is very effective indeed, since Fugard aims at arousing sympathy for the blacks in apartheid South Africa. With the limited number of characters, the attention of the audience or readers is focused only on a few characters. By so doing, the reader is able to follow the events that unfold in the play closely.

The versatility with which the small cast of three brings out the best in Fugard cannot be overemphasized. The truth still remains that these three characters are able to display an all-round projection as characters and without any surprise are able to explore every act and scene to the realization of the themes in the play. It is only a talented playwright like Fugard who can beautifully craft such situations and pull it off without making his audience feel bored. He even enables the reader to share in the experience of the actors. The plight of the blacks among a host of other pressing issues concerning the South African Black population as recounted through the characters used in the small cast of three, therefore, easily arouses the sympathy of the audience in the play.

### **The Use of Comic Elements and Humour**

Humour is the tendency of an incident, speech or event to arouse or provoke laughter or amusement. Many writers and playwrights use humour and comic incidents to take away boredom in a story. When the comic elements are not developed properly, they may fall flat and that will rather do the exact opposite of what the writer intends to do. As such, writers are extremely careful in choosing which type of comic elements and humour to inject into the



body of a story. There are many types of comedy that playwrights are at ease to use in developing their story lines.

Athol Fugard and his colleagues, as we have already noted, are South African dramatists who are against the apartheid system. Since he does not aim at calling for violent action against members of his own race, he employs comic elements and humorous scenes to tone down the language of the play. The comic elements and humorous scenes and episodes help us to understand the message of the play and also enable us to enjoy it. The use of humour and comic elements as a technique brings out instances of sarcasm in the play. We first encounter Styles laughing to himself as he reads the newspaper headlines and tells us many of the stories about himself and other events in a very humorous way.

At Ford Motors, the description by Styles of the activities that went on before the visit of Mr. Henry Ford Jnr. "the grandmother Baas of them all." is quite funny and sarcastic. This is because Styles' interpretation of Mr. Bass Bradley's orders to his fellow black workers is very humorous and it seeks to criticize the hypocrisy of the white bosses. We hear Styles interpret Mr. Bradley's orders saying. "Gentlemen, the old fool says this is a hell of a big day in our lives." Again, he says in his interpretation:

*"Gentleman we must remember when Mr. Ford walks in that we are South African monkeys, not American monkeys. South African monkeys are much better trained" (p 942)*

Styles even goes on to say that before he could even finish with his interpretation, he heard a voice shouting from the back saying: "He's talking shit!" And he realises that he has to be careful because he knows how violent some blacks can get when offensive language is directed at them. Styles' interpretation of Bradley's orders greatly amuses the audience. It can, therefore, be seen that the play contains humorous episodes, which provide comic relief to help diffuse tension in the play.

When Styles, for example dramatically narrates the hurried preparations made by the factory workers because of the impending visit of Mr. Henry Ford, there is so much tension on readers' minds, especially because of their exposure to the bad situation of the blacks. Fugard, therefore, introduces the humorous and comic elements in the form of comic relief to diffuse tension in the play. It can be said from the above that Athol as a skilful playwright, uses various dramatic techniques to highlight the theme of racial discrimination in the play.

## **CONCLUSION**

It has been made clear from the foregoing that the art of writing plays is a technique that one must develop in order to achieve success. In order to successfully develop all the themes a playwright seeks to send across to his readers, he or she must write the play taking into consideration certain techniques to craftily weave his message. These techniques help to, in a larger framework, define the artistic prowess of any writer. The foregoing has been zoomed down on the play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* taking into consideration the dramatic techniques used by the playwright Athol Fugard to explore the thematic highlights of the play.



The techniques considered by Fugard in the play include but not limited to the following: flashback, alienation effect, minimal sets, simple props, small cast, humour and comic elements, and the story-within-a-story techniques. The techniques are carefully chosen and woven into the main framework of the play to help Fugard achieve verisimilitude and send across the main theme of racial discrimination in the play. In some cases, humour and comic elements are used to diminish tension that arises as a result of the turpid political environment of apartheid South Africa coupled with its attendant rippling effects on the native ostracized black population. Again, in some cases, the alienation effect technique is used to explore the case of empathy towards the plight of the black population facing all the hardships of segregation in apartheid South Africa. All the other techniques Fugard uses are significant or important enough to help him reveal something vital towards the development of the themes in the play for the consumption of his readers and audience or his critics. It is in this light that this paper concludes that Fugard is successful in carefully using these techniques to drive home his message to his readers.

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