Boesman & Lena Study Guide

Boesman & Lena by Athol Fugard

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Introduction

Athol Fugard's *Boesman & Lena* is one of the playwright's best-known and most widely respected dramatic works. It established Fugard's reputation as a major playwright. *Boesman & Lena* was first produced at the Rhodes University Little Theatre in Grahamstown, South Africa, on July 10,1969. Fugard played Boesman in this production. The play was first produced in the United States in an Off-Broadway production at the Circle in the Square Theatre in 1970. This production won an Obie Award from the *Village Voice* for Most Distinguished Foreign Play of the season.

Like many of Fugard's plays, *Boesman & Lena* focuses on non-white characters and includes an element of social protest. Set in the mudflats outside of the playwright's native Port Elizabeth, South Africa, the title characters are an ill-matched "colored " (a South African term that describes people of mixed race) couple who have been beaten down by society. From its first productions, the play has been praised for its frank depiction of the affects of apartheid on people of color.

But critics also applaud Fugard because his play transcends time and place. *Boesman & Lena* can be seen as a metaphor for oppressed people of all nationalities, an exploration of the difficulty in relationships between men and women, and the need for human kindness, compassion, and hope. In a review of the original Off-Broadway production, the *New Republic's* Stanley Kauffmann wrote: "This is not a protest play, though the pain of race hatred flames through it; it becomes, quickly and surely, a drama of all human beings in their differing captivities, suffering from and inflicting hate."

Author Biography

Athol Fugard was born in Middleburg, Cape Province, South Africa, on June 11, 1932, the son of Harold David Fugard, of English descent, and his wife, Elizabeth Magdalena, who was an Afrikaner descended from the original Dutch settlers of South Africa. His parents ran a general store at the time of his birth, but when Fugard was three, they sold it and moved the family to Port Elizabeth. Port Elizabeth was home to every racial group and social strata found in South Africa. Growing up, Fugard was keenly aware of the racial divisions and their economic and social consequences. His family had two black male servants, one of whom, Sam, Fugard came to regard as a father figure. Fugard's own father was an alcoholic. As a child, Fugard spat in Sam's face in anger, an incident that Fugard felt tremendous guilt over for many years until he worked it out in his 1984 play *"Master Harold" and the Boys*.

Fugard attended the University of Cape Town on a scholarship and studied philosophy and social anthropology. In the middle of his senior year, in 1953, Fugard dropped out and became a sailor. He was the only white crewmember on the ship for two years. Fugard said the experience left him stripped of any racial prejudice. When he returned to South Africa, he met and married Sheila Meiring, an actress, in 1956. Fugard wanted to be a novelist and composed a manuscript, but watching his wife audition, Fugard became interested in, then involved with the theater. The couple eventually formed the Circle Players in Johannesburg.

In 1958, Fugard took a job as a clerk with a local court to support his family and art. There, Fugard saw racial injustice firsthand in the interworkings of the laws of apartheid (the South African political system that relegated the native blacks to second class status). The playwright was appalled at what he saw. As Fugard developed friendships with black people and saw their living conditions, their plight became even more evident to him. These experiences inspired his first play, *No-Good Friday*, which was performed privately for white audiences.

Fugard left the court position, and in 1959 he and his wife went to London to gain more theatrical experience. Within a year, a campaign against apartheid was being mounted, and Fugard and his wife returned to South Africa.

Upon his return, Fugard wrote the first of his "Port Elizabeth" plays, *The Blood Knot*. In 1962, five Xhosa tribesmen approached Fugard wanting to start a theater company. After some initial reluctance, Fugard formed the Serpent Company, which became the first successful non-white theater company in South Africa. Because of this success, several members were arrested. Fugard's passport was withdrawn by the South African government from 1967 until 1971. Still Fugard continued to write plays exploring racial and economic issues stemming from apartheid in South Africa.

During this time period, Fugard wrote his most successful and reputation-building play, 1969's *Boesman & Lena*. Performed both Off-Broadway and in London, the play garnered Fugard international praise. In the early-1970s, Fugard experimented with

developing scripts in an improvisational theater format. The best known result is 1972's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*. In the early-1980s, Fugard became associated with the Yale School of Drama, which hosted the first production of ' *'Master Harold" and the Boys*. Widely acclaimed, this play is representative of Fugard's autobiographical period. In the 1990s, he split his time between the United States, where his actress daughter Lisa lives, and South Africa.

Plot Summary

Act I

Boesman & Lena opens with Boesman, a colored man, finding a spot to make camp in the Swartkops mudflats outside of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. He is heavily burdened, carrying all his possessions as well as a piece of iron with which to make a shelter. Tired, he drops his load. A few moments later, his woman Lena, who is also colored, enters. She carries all her possessions in a bundle on top of her head and a load of firewood in her arms. She walks past Boesman, realizes her mistake, and comes back. She asks him if they are going to stop here, and through his silence, she realizes that they are. She drops her baggage and looks around. Lena knows this place, and asks Boesman why they have walked so fast to get here. She continues to address him, though his only response is stare at her with animosity. Through her dialogue, it is revealed that their previous home, a shanty, was destroyed by white people bulldozing the area, forcing them to leave.

Boesman finally speaks and threatens to leave her next time they walk. They argue, and Lena acknowledges that they are opposites: when she wants to cry, he wants to laugh. Boesman accuses her of looking back as they walked because she was trying to find a dog that had been following the couple. Lena says that Boesman did not know where he was going. When they rested earlier in the day, Lena says she counted her bruises, the result of Boesman beating her, as some white children watched her. She says she asked them if their mother needed a servant, but they didn't want her. Boesman says he did not want her either.

Lena tells Boesman that she wants him to talk to her, but he says that he does not have anything to say to her. He starts to unpack their belongings and build their shelter. Lena tries to figure out the last time they lived in this location, and Boesman does not help her. Lena then tries to figure out the many other places they have been, attempting to catalog the places in correct chronological order. When she believes she has succeeded, she is happy. Boesman sees her happiness and is certain she has broken into their wine supply. He goes back to building the shelter, while trying to make Lena believe she has got the order wrong. Lena gets frustrated, and threatens Boesman, telling him that someday something will happen to him. Boesman counters by trying to make Lena doubt her own name.

Lena continues to try to reconstruct their past, while Boesman says the only thing that matters is today. Lena threatens to leave and takes a few steps away from the camp. She sees someone out walking on the mudflats, and Boesman comes to look. Lena waves the person over, much to Boesman's disgust. He does not want anyone to join them. The stranger is a "kaffer," an African man. When they try to figure out who he is, the man, who comes to be called "Outa," can only reply in Xhosa, a language neither Lena nor Boesman can understand. Lena makes the old man sit by the fire and tries to

communicate with him. She grows frustrated because he can only speak Xhosa. Boesman threatens to hit her when she tries to go for a bottle of wine. Lena tells Outa that he is a witness to Boesman's abuse of her. She shows the old man the bruises on her arms that she received from Boesman when she dropped the sack of empty bottles that were to be returned for money. Boesman beat her, accusing her of breaking three of the bottles.

Boesman goes in search of more metal scraps and other materials for their shelter. Lena again grows frustrated with the old man's incomprehension, but finally gets him to understand that her name is Lena. With this breakthrough, Lena gives him water and tells him her about her life: her dog, the incident with the bottles, their walking, and their children (all but one born dead and that one only lived six months). He responds to her in his own language throughout, then tries to leave. Lena makes him stay, then Boesman returns. He is suspicious again, and watches them carefully as he continues to make the shelter.

Lena starts to make supper, asking Boesman if their bread can be cut into three pieces to share. Boesman says no, and Lena promises to share her portion with the old man. Lena seems happy, and Boesman insists the old man must go. Lena barters with Boesman foregoing her wine for the old man's presence. Lena wants the old man to sleep with them in the shelter, but Boesman refuses to allow it. Lena decides to sleep outside with the old man wrapped in a blanket. This upsets Boesman, and he shoves the old man when Lena goes in search of firewood. Lena returns and shares her bread and tea with the old man while Boesman does not eat or drink at all.

Act II

An hour later, Boesman is on the second bottle of wine while Lena and the Old Man are huddled under the blanket. Boesman is drunk and taunts Lena and the old man. He goes on to verbally torture Lena for trying to save things and crying while the bulldozers destroyed their home. He says that the experience liberated him, made him free, and he thought about going somewhere else. But his feelings of freedom were short-lived, when he says he realized that they were the whiteman's rubbish. Boesman does not understand why Lena traded a bottle of wine for the old man's company. Lena says it is because he sees where her life has lead: to this place at this time. As Boesman goes into the shelter for the night, he tells her that she cannot join him.

Lena starts talking to the old man again, telling him about dances they used to do. After she demonstrates some steps and sings bits of several songs, she huddles under the blanket again with him. Boesman watches them from the shelter and tells Lena that he is the one who dropped the empty bottles. Lena asks him why he hurt her and what she has done to deserve his bad treatment. Boesman strikes her several times, and Lena finally says that he should hit himself. When he says it does not hurt, she asks him if hitting her hurts him. Boesman says she is there and he hears her.

Lena shakes the old man to get him to stay awake, but he does not respond. Lena begs Boesman to say that he hit her for nothing, but he will not, nor will he hit her when she begs him to. Lena loses her composure and wonders what she has done aloud. Lena sits next to the old man and realizes that he has just died. Lena wants Boesman's help in putting him down, but Boesman refuses and decides to go to sleep instead. He goes into the shelter, then comes out and tells Lena to get rid of the dead man. Lena tells him to go back to sleep, but Boesman is agitated by the old man's continued presence. He worries that there will be trouble in the morning when people find out about the dead man.

Boesman gets so upset that he almost hits Lena, but she says that he has to be careful because there is already one body present. She taunts him further, suggesting the old man might not really be dead. Boesman checks the status of the old man by kicking him. Lena eggs him on, and Boesman kicks and beats the old man's body. Lena says she now knows what it looks like to be beaten and that the bruises he has caused will be suspicious. Boesman panics and starts packing up their things to leave. Lena refuses to help. She does not want to leave. Boesman smashes their shelter, and tries to carry everything on his body. She turns away from Boesman and goes to the old man's body to say goodbye. Lena returns to Boesman and takes up her share of their belongings. Boesman tells her the real order of the places they have been. She tells Boesman to walk slowly and that the next time he hits her, he should hit her hard enough to kill.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

Boesman and Lena has only three characters: Boesman, Lena, and Outa, an old African. The stage remains empty until Boesman lumbers in, burdened with belongings such as an old mattress and blanket, a blackened paraffin tin, an apple box, a few cooking utensils and a few articles of clothing. He also drags a piece of corrugated iron in one hand. He is barefoot and wears shapeless grey trousers rolled up to his knees, an old shirt, a faded blazer and a cap on his head. He looks around the barren area and drops his bundles, himself falling to the ground.

Almost immediately, Lena appears, burdened much the same as Boesman, but without a mattress. She has a load of firewood under her arm, but she carries the rest of her bundle rigidly on her head. She, too, is barefoot and clothed in a baggy, lifeless dress. Lena and Boesman are each close to 50 years old.

Boesman looks at Lena with an unforgiving eye and a disdain that no one could miss. They have been walking for several hours, and although they are exhausted, they still have enough energy to blame each other for their predicament. Lena challenges Boesman as to why he had to push them so hard to get to such a miserable spot. Tomorrow will be equally as bad, so there really is no need to rush.

Lena drops to the ground with her bundles and begins absentmindedly picking the day's mud from between her toes. Then, she begins to survey her surroundings for the first time, noticing particularly the birds flying overhead. She is envious of their slow, gliding movements and wonders what it must feel like to be so free that even your shadow, being too heavy to carry along, you leave it on the ground. Boesman continues to watch Lena with unabashed hatred.

She tells him not to blame her for his unhappiness. Blame the white man and his bulldozers. Lena attempts to show the humor in this morning's scattering of people who were trying to save their possessions from the annihilation of the big machines. Boesman laughed at them earlier in the day, but he is not laughing now. According to Lena, all Boesman can think of now is how to build one more lean-to for their night's shelter.

Lena thinks only of the endless shanties and temporary shelters from too many nights. She also thinks of too many days of walking forward, backward and going nowhere. She feels as if she has had to put her whole life on her head and walked along with all her burdens upon her shoulders. She knows that she must have passed the ghost of her younger self on the roads many times before.

Lena suffers a fatigue so deep that she almost does not know who she is anymore. She is weary beyond words, emotionally and physically, and feels like an overused

commodity. She feels like an old pot that leaks, a blanket that cannot even keep the fleas warm, anything, really, that is of no use anymore and needs to be thrown away. Lena wonders how a person would be able to dispose of her self once she has been used up. Her confusion is only exacerbated by the physical abuse she suffers from Boesman's fists, in addition to his verbal cruelty and indifference. He had hit her earlier this morning because she accidentally dropped three bottles that were intended for deposit, their only source of income. She tells him that she had met three boys and asked if their Mama needed help in the house. She tried to leave and work for this white woman, and he wonders why she did not go. Her shame increases even more when she tells him that the woman did not want her. Boesman does not want her either.

Lena cannot allow this insult to go unanswered, so she questions him again about their life and his choices. She asks why they have to stay in this place where they have been so many times before. Nothing good comes at this place, especially being so close to the river. She would rather go to any of the many other places they have been: Coega Veeplaas, Missionvale, Redhouse or Korsten. Lena continues to talk incessantly, and Boesman ignores her, continuing to build their shelter. Suddenly she realizes that maybe it will help if they have a drink, but Boesman will not rest until the shelter is prepared.

Changing quickly again she says that she is warm and happy, that she has been running all the way from Redhouse, to the next place, to the next place. She says that she is not as old as he thinks she is, and what really matters is that she is with him. However, no energetic teasing will coax Boesman out of his bad mood. He thinks she has been drinking and skeptically examines their two bottles of wine to see that they are still full.

Lena may as well be talking to herself as Boesman continues to be indifferent to her, and she falls into a reverie of all the places she has been, all the roads, all the mud between her toes and all the hungry nights. She wants to be someone else. Perhaps her name would have been different with a name like Rosie, Rose or Maria. If she were someone else, she would certainly leave Boesman. Boesman tells Lena that the only way she will leave is if he beats her, and he reminds her that the police will not do anything about it, just like the last time. They know how it is with people like them. Lena contends the police would care about his beating her if her name were Mary. She cautions him that he will go too far one day and end up swinging from a rope for what he will do to her.

Lena's daydream continues, and she cannot help but remember other times that were better. She remembers when Boesman had a job chopping wood for a Chinaman, and they lived in a room in his backyard—a real room with a real door. Boesman tells her to forget it, because now is the only time that matters anymore. Lena is angry, as she thinks, "I want my life. Where's it?"

Boesman tells Lena that her life is in the mud, where she is, now. It will be there in the mud tomorrow, the next day and the next. If she is still alive when he has had enough of it, she will still load up her things and walk to somewhere else.

Lena counts all her hardships aloud and continues to rage. There is never enough wine to let them sleep through the night. They wake up in the dark. The fire is out. This kind of life always feels empty. Even when he is awake, Boesman is not there for her. When she calls him, he never answers.

Boesman again challenges Lena to leave, when suddenly Lena sees a man in the bushes. Lena calls out to the man to join them despite Boesman's protests. Boesman does not want any trouble. An old black man comes out of the bushes and mutters something in the Xhosa dialect. They do not understand and ask if he speaks English or Afrikaans. He does not respond, and Lena encourages him to move closer to sit on the apple box to warm him by the fire.

Lena is still full of her day's trauma, and even though the old man does not understand her, she tells him that they were kicked out of their shanty home just this morning, that life is hard for brown people too. The old man mumbles in his language, which Lena does not understand. However, she continues to talk to him as if he did. Boesman leaves to scavenge for more materials as Lena launches into a diatribe about her life, when it was good, and when it was bad, mostly bad.

Boesman returns, learning that Lena has offered the old man a place to sleep with them for the night. Boesman wants the old man to leave and certainly does not want to share his shelter. Lena is adamant, though, and she takes her blanket and her food to share with the old man. Boesman watches them from the front of the shelter, refusing to eat or drink.

Act 1 Analysis

The mix of English and Afrikaan languages add to the stark reality of this play. Boesman and Lena are caught between two worlds. They are not white, nor are they black like the tribesman of the country. They have no gainful employment, yet they struggle to live in the city, even in a shanty. They are trapped between earth and sky where the mud sucks at them and the birds overhead mock them with their easy gliding.

However, for some reason they are still together. Somehow, something keeps them together in this bleak. If there is a fine line between love and hate, it is drawn between Boesman and Lena. For some reason, she wants to incur Boesman's jealousy by inviting the old man to share her food and blanket for the night. Of course, she is not interested in this old tribesman. The old tribesman's presence symbolizes a validation of her existence.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

In this act, we begin to understand Boesman's perspective on the endless journey. Having drunk both bottles of wine, he forces Lena to recall the morning's events in Korsten by dancing and mimicking her voice as their world crumbled. She begs him to stop, but he is unmoved by her pleas.

Boesman describes the bulldozer as it chewed away the shantytown, its jawbone to the ground. All the people crawled out of those holes like worms, trying to save their rubbish. When it was all over, all they could do was stand and stare in disbelief. Boesman says that when it was all razed and burned, it was not just the shanties that were rotten; they were rotten

Boesman wanted to tell Lena that he had gone back to the place where they had lived, and it was gone. He had wanted to call out for her to see it. He wanted to tell her that where they had crawled in and out, as baboons, sat like them, ate like them--it was all gone. Then he realized that there was something new in its place: Freedom. The world suddenly opened. It was big with new ways and new places, and he was drunk with happiness for it all.

Lena wonders why they have to keep searching for Boesman's freedom in all the back and forth miles they have walked over the years. Surely if it were coming, it would have found them by now.

Boesman ignores her and continues to say that he has it all figured out. He says that they are the white man's rubbish. That is why the white man is so obsessed with destroying them and people like them. The white man cannot ever get rid of his garbage. The white man throws it away, and they pick it up, wear it, eat it or sleep in it.

Lena is even wearier now and wants Boesman to stop talking. She is tired and cold and wants him to stop bothering her and the old man. Boesman accuses her of trying to cheat on him with the old man under the blanket and just waiting for him to go to sleep so they can continue.

Boesman tells Lena that she is never welcome in his shack ever again and she turns her attention to the old man who is non-responsive. She tries to warm him, throws the last piece of wood on the fire, and talks of happier, warmer days, including all the Christmas days, dances and birthdays. She begins to dance and whirl in her excitement remembering these past times.

Just as suddenly as Lena had begun dancing, she stops at Boesman's next comment. He admits that he was the one who had dropped the three empty bottles earlier that day. In all the confusion during the bulldozing, he had dropped them. Yet, he blamed her for it and beat her. She wonders why he bothers telling her that now, when she has just

come through a day that God could take back if it were up to her. In her dazed and confused weariness, she does not even rage at being beaten unjustly over the breaking of three bottles.

Wanting to change the subject, they try to engage the old man in conversation, but they realize that he is dead. They cannot believe how suddenly he has died. He was holding Lena's hand only a few minutes ago. There was no noise. He did not cry or make any sounds. Lena offers that maybe it just was not worth the effort to make any sounds.

The old man must be buried, but Boesman refuses to help. According to him, Lena invited the man to their fire, and she can take care of the body as well. He retreats to the shelter but will not let the issue drop. Boesman pleads for Lena to take care of the burial, because dead men are dangerous. The police will question them. This can mean nothing but trouble, and Boesman does not want any more trouble. His rage and frustration take over, and he beats on the dead man, telling him to go die with his own kind. Lena simply tells him that he should not have done that because now his fingerprints are all over the body and the police will get him for something that he did not do. Then, at least, he would know what it would feel like to be punished for something he did not do, and she wonders if that might be a good thing.

Panic overtakes Boesman, and he begins to gather their things frantically. Lena declares that she is not going with him, and that she is finished. After he has gone, she will crawl into the shanty and sleep. This is more than he can take, and he methodically destroys the structure that has taken him the entire evening to build. Lena says that he is now the bulldozer as she stands back to watch his destruction.

Boesman assumes his burden again and continues loading himself up with their belongings. Because he is in a hurry, it is difficult for him to gather everything, though he finally manages to get it all on his back and under his arms. He stands before her, completely overburdened. She tells him to be on his way, because he has a long way to go. Then she addresses the dead man, asking him why he had to die so soon. There was much more that she wanted to tell him. Her life is still happening, even before his dead eyes.. She realizes that she cannot throw herself away before the right time. Even the old tribesman had to wait for his time.

Therefore, she resigns herself to her life with Boesman, picks up her pail and her other belongings and begins the litany of the names of all the places they have been: Redhouse, Missionvale, Kleinskool, Veeplaas, Bethelsdorp and Korsten.

Act 2 Analysis

Act 2 becomes Boesman's voice. His fury, which is normally exhibited by alternately beating Lena and then ignoring her, is somewhat explained. Freedom motivates him, though it is continually beyond his grasp. The only thing he can hold onto is rage. He cannot even touch Lena with an outstretched palm anymore. However, she wisely

surmises that, even though it is not what she wants, his fists are at least a connection for them. They each feel the same pain of their nomadic lives.

Boesman demonstrates at least a minute amount of humanity as he admits to dropping and breaking the three bottles earlier in the day. He had beaten Lena for something he had done, and at least feels some remorse for his behavior. Clearly, they have seen better days in their lives and in their marriage, but we get the feeling that there is more to the relationship than what we see on the surface. In spite of all the roads they have been forced to walk, they are walk the same road together. Though they live in a far from perfect world, they choose to live side by side in ultimate support of each other.

Characters

Boesman

Boesman is a middle-aged "colored" man (in South Africa, this means that he has the blood of both Europeans and Africans). He is downtrodden and poor, carrying all his possessions on his back. He has been with Lena for many years and is abusive towards her in many ways. He beats her regularly with his fists. He also abuses her verbally, taunting her and making her doubt herself. For example, he makes Lena believe that she broke three bottles they were going to sell at an exchange when in fact he broke them.

Boesman does not want Lena to invite the old man, Outa, to their camp. He cannot understand why Lena would give up her part of the wine for the company of the old man. There are a number of explanations for Boesman's behavior, most related to the oppressive atmosphere the white minority have created for the blacks in South Africa. The immediate source of stress is the recent bulldozing of Boesman and Lena's shanty. Unable to look toward the future, Boesman is only concerned with the present.

Lena

Lena is Boesman's woman. Like him, she is also "colored," middle-aged, and poor. She carries her possessions on her head and is gaunt. Lena is covered with bruises from the beatings that Boesman has given her. She says she wants to leave him going so far as to ask some white children if their mother needed a maid while Boesman was selling the bottlesbut she never does.

Lena tries to get a grasp on where she has been before and who she is, but her efforts are always undermined by Boesman. Unlike Boesman, Lena feels sympathy. She invites the old man over to the fire and talks to him in a way that Boesman does not approve of. She tells him that she and Boesman had many children born dead, except for one that lived for six months. While revealing herself to the old man, Lena uses Outa as her only weapon to fight Boesman's hold over her. She uses the old man to make Boesman doubt himself, and she nearly leaves him in the end.

Old Man

See Outa

Outa

Outa is a very old African man who only speaks the tribal Xhosa language. Lena sees him wandering on the mudflats and brings him to the campfire. Though he does not

understand Lena's language, he is a sounding board, someone to whom she can talk. She likes Outa because his presence annoys Boesman. Lena is delighted when he learns her name. Outa gratefully takes the water she offers him.

When Outa tries to leave, however, Lena will not let him. He allows her to cover him with a blanket and share her food with him. In Act II, Outa dies while holding Lena's hand. Following his death, Boesman takes out his rage on the old man's body, kicking and beating the body. Because Outa's death and bruises could be interpreted by the authorities as a crime, Boesman and Lena leave the mudflats.

Themes

Violence and Cruelty

Acts of violence and cruelty underlie much of the action and character motivation in *Boesman & Lena*. Boesman acts out his frustrations, which are caused by his substandard place in South African society, by beating Lena. She is covered in bruises from such beatings. Boesman is also mentally cruel to Lena. He neglects and ignores her, refusing to talk to her at their campsite. He tells her several times that he wishes she would make good on her threats to leave him. When Lena tries to figure out where they have been, Boesman deliberately confuses her.

Lena cannot physically match Boesman, but she can return his mental cruelty. To cure her loneliness, she calls over Outa, an old African man wandering the flats. Lena uses the old man to make Boesman doubt his power over her. She gives up her ration of wine in exchange for the old man's presence in their camp, an act which Boesman cannot understand and which enrages him. After the Old Man dies, Boesman rails against Lena, but she turns the tables and makes Boesman doubt that the Old Man is really dead. To prove it to himself, Boesman kicks the body, then starts to beat on it. After Boesman is through, Lena points out that it now looks as though Boesman murdered the old man. These taunts play upon Boesman's fears and are as cutting as his fists. These words are Lena's only means of expressing her rage, of fighting against the oppression she suffers at his hands□and the white society at large.

Race and Racism

Boesman & Lena focuses on two "colored" people. In South Africa, this term refers specifically to people who have both African and white blood in them (a mix often referred to as mulatto in America). In this period (the 1960s) in South Africa, dark-skinned people were denied certain rights and forced to live in certain areas□predominantly ghettos and lower class projects. Boesman and Lena are essentially homeless, though they did live in a shanty town until bulldozers destroyed their home and forced them on the journey that led to the mudflats. The oppressiveness of racial separatism also fuels Boesman's anger, which he often takes out on Lena. At one point, Boesman refers to himself and Lena as trash discarded by white men.

Despite being the victim of such practices, Boesman also expresses racial prejudice. When Lena calls over the old man, Outa, Boesman does not want him to stay because he is black, an African. When Lena wants to give him water, just as other black people have previously done for the couple, Boesman does not want her to, in part because Outa is black and not brown. Lena does not share this racism and gives the old man water when Boesman's back is turned. Boesman treats the old man as white people have treated him. Despite her mistreatment at Boesman's hands, Lena identifies with humanity as a whole, separate from racial boundaries.

Search for Identity

Lena tries to understand her life and where she has come from in *Boesman & Lena*. She often looks to the past, especially in Act I, though Boesman repeatedly tells her she should be concerned with the present. One of Lena's first dilemmas is trying to figure out how she arrived in the mudflats. That is, she wants to know, in the correct order, where they have lived before now. Boesman tries to subvert these efforts when Lena comes up with a list by naming other possible areas, but by the end of the play, he relents and tells the exact order.

Lena also tries to quantify her existence by counting her bruises. Each has a story. Lena repeats one story several times. Boesman beat her that morning because he says she dropped three bottles they were trying to sell. Lena believes that this is the truth (because she has forgotten how to question the validity of what Boesman says) until the end of the play, when Boesman admits he broke the bottles, blaming her for his mistake.

Through Lena's "conversations" with the old man, she uses him as a sounding board to reconstruct her life. She recalls the stillborn children she has borne, the dog that she tried to keep, and the times when life with Boesman was not as hate filled. These recollections, which occur mostly in Act I, fuel Lena's actions in Act II, when she gains some power in her relationship with Boesman and nearly breaks away from him.

Style

Setting

Boesman & Lena is a drama set in contemporary South Africa. Specifically the action takes place in the Swartkops mudflats outside of the city of Port Elizabeth. Only owning possessions that they can carry with them, the characters are exposed to the elements. In order to survive in such a homeless state, Boesman builds a shelter out of scrap iron and other found materials. Yet once it is built, only he enters the shelter. Lena tends the fire and sits outside of it for the duration of the play. These desperate, temporary circumstances emphasize Boesman and Lena's precarious place in the world, but even they seem to have it better than the old man, Outa, who wanders in from the flats with nothing but the clothes he wears.

Language and Dialogue

In the standard English translation of *Boesman & Lena*, Afrikaan phrases pepper the text. (Afrikaan is South Africa's official language, a derivation of Dutch.) This emphasizes the setting of the play and the background of the characters. It also works as a contrast when Outa appears. He speaks Xhosa, a tribal language, when he says anything at all. The language difference underscores the fact that the old man is an outsider to even Boesman and Lena, themselves outcasts from mainstream (predominantly white) South African culture. It also allows Lena to use Outa as a sounding board; she can talk at him and interpret his responses to suit her own purposes.

Monologue

A monologue is defined as a long speech in a drama, spoken by one character. It can be used in the context of one person monopolizing a conversation or a character speaking more or less directly to the audience. Monologues can be used as a form of exposition to quickly relate dramatic events that the playwright may not wish to stage. A form of this is also called interior monologue□so named because it relates what a person is thinking by saying it aloud. William Shakespeare used such a device to great effect in his plays. Also known as a soliloquy, Shakespeare employed this technique to relate the emotions and inner thought processes of his characters; a famous Shakespearean soliloquy is the "To be or not to be" speech spoken by the title character in *Hamlet*.

Both of *Boesman & Lena's* primary characters reveal their innermost thoughts and feelings via monologues. Lena has the majority of the monologues in the text. Most of her monologues occur in Act I and essentially relate what has transpired in the time leading up to the start of the play's action. Because Boesman will not talk with her, Lena talks at him□and to herself□while he is unpacking and building the shelter. Later, Lena

talks at Outa, who does not speak her language. In both circumstances, Lena talks about herself: where she has been, what has happened to her in the past (her dead children, the dog that followed her), and the circumstances of her life (the reason why Boesman beats her). Lena's monologues serve to orient her and the audience in time and place.

In Act II, Boesman has several monologues. His monologues are more angry than Lena's and often derisively make fun of something she has said. He describes such things as the white man's bulldozer that destroyed their home, the so-called "freedom" the incident gave them, and how they are the white man's rubbish and no longer people. Boesman's monologues give insight into how he perceives the world, a stark contrast to Lena's world view.

Symbolism

Boesman and Lena, as well as their actions, can be interpreted as symbols. Boesman's violence towards Lena represents the violence white South Africans inflict on citizens of color. Lena represents hope and life: despite her setbacks and hardships, she marches forward, believing the future holds better times for her. She retains a sense of compassion, as her actions with the old man indicate. Boesman acts on his most bitter and jealous instincts, trying to destroy the hope and life inside of Lena. Also, Lena carries all her possessions on her head. Her baggage does not impair her ability to still see the world around her; it is also symbolic of the way she reflects on life with her mind. In contrast, Boesman carries everything on his back, hunched over and barely able to look up to the sky, symbolic of manner in which oppression has affected him.

Historical Context

In the late-1960s, as it had been for many years before, South Africa was controlled by its white citizens, Dutch settlers who colonized the country and displaced the indigenous black people. People of color were not allowed the same rights as these whites under the policies of apartheid. Apartheid stipulated that races be strictly segregated so that the white minority (only about 14% of the population) could maintain its hold on power. People of color did not have access to the same kinds of education and social services afforded the whites, and their movements within the country were strictly limited□while white children had to attend school from ages seven to sixteen, compulsory education for African children was *limited* to ages seven to eleven. Colored and black people were forced to live in specifically designated "homelands," "townships," and "national states" that were often overcrowded and without basic amenities. Jobs were also scarce, and many lived in poverty while the white minority grew more wealthy. People of color were also not represented in the South African Parliament.

Controlled by the all-white Nationalist Party, the South African government tried to insure the continued practice of apartheid in many ways. In 1969, the Bureau of State Security was formed. Among other things, this organization controlled the admission of evidence in courts. Thus there was no public control over their actions, and those in power consequently had a more restrictive grasp on society. White power in South Africa was also increased in 1969 when a new political party, the Reconstituted National Party of South Africa, was formed. This organization favored even more restrictive and repressive apartheid policies.

Not all whites in South Africa agreed with apartheid. When the government restricted membership in political parties to whites in 1968, the Liberal party disbanded rather than comply. The South African Council of Churches declared their nonsupport of apartheid in 1969. Despite protests from legal scholars and the world press, the South African government, led by B.J. Vorster, passed the General Law Amendment Act which prohibited cabinet members from giving evidence if it would be prejudicial to the interests of the public or state security. They also could not reveal, under punishment of law, any matter the Bureau of State Security was handling. These kinds of restrictions insured secrecy among those in power and a greater hold on the populace.

Despite such ominous security measures, there were forces moving against apartheid within South Africa. One such organization was the African National Congress (ANC), which was formed in 1912. With members of color, both radical and moderate, the ANC countered apartheid using both political and terrorist tactics. The South African government outlawed the ANC in 1960, and its leader, Nelson Mandela, was imprisoned in 1964. Still, these organizations had problems organizing resistance or protest against the repressive policies because interracial contact was so difficult under the law.

The policy of apartheid was routinely condemned by most countries in the world, including the United States. African-American leaders, their own battles for civil rights still fresh in their minds, were outspoken in their opposition to such policies.

Critical Overview

From its first productions, critics praised *Boesman & Lena* for its powerful insights into the affects of apartheid as well as the human condition. Of the original Off-Broadway production, Harold Clurman in the *Nation* wrote, "Surely *Boesman & Lena* could not have been written by anyone who was not wholly immersed in the tortured realm of apartheid. Yet it is something more than a black play. It is about a man and woman, husband and wife, on a path of life beset by constant adversity." Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic* saw the deeper elements at work. "The play's epic quality derives from the wide and simple arch of its compass: shelter, food, fire, children, quarrels, dependence, ego needs, death, endless pilgrimage. The rubbish that this pair gathers is the detritus of experience."

Many critics saw deep meaning in Lena and Boesman, and how the play draws unexpected parallels between them and the rest of the world. Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* wrote, "It is a powerful image□these two tattered, feral figures, like creatures neither human nor animal, hunched over with chronic fear and exhaustion, lurching and clattering through a wasteland that is neither nature nor civilization. The play in a sense is like a dramatic poem in which nothing much happens except the deepening of this basic image to a point of utmost terror and pathos."

Kauffmann concurred with Kroll, arguing that "Fugard makes very clear that, within the circumference of their lives, they represent the larger world. He is not saying that racial injustices do not signify; he is saying that those injustices are an extremity of the cruelty in all men. The reason that his play achieves towering height□as in the main it does□is because it *includes* the agony of *apartheid* and shows that *apartheid* is not devil-inflicted but man-made, and that Boesman is a man, too."

Several critics believed that one aspect of the play did not work: they found *Boesman & Lena* to be too literary. Kroll summarized these comments when he wrote, "Fugard's plays are filled with understanding and compassion, and written with power and eloquence. But somehow, they bear that faint taint of 'literature' in which the eloquence and power seem to struggle unsuccessfully to break out of a self-regarding void and into that mysterious realm in which art has its radical effect and becomes primary rather than secondary experience. And this is true of... *Boesman & Lena*." Kroll added later in his review, "For all its strength and authentic feeling, the play seems to beat its fists against its own eloquence."

A few critics found *Boesman & Lena* to be unwatchable. Among them was T. E. Kalem of *Time*, who wrote, "It may sound odd, but misery needs to be entertaining. Appalling calamities befall some people; yet they manage to make them sound drab and boring. Others possess the gift of making a minor mishap vividly compelling. Unfortunately, *Boesman & Lena* is one of those accounts of unlimited woe that try the playgoer's patience." Several critics agreed with this assessment; despite their praise for the play, they found its pace "challenging."

In 1992, Fugard directed a production of *Boesman & Lena* at the Manhattan Theater Club in New York City. Despite the twenty-three year gap since its debut, critics still found the play to be relevant, though the situation in South Africa had changed and apartheid polices had grown less oppressive. John Simon in *New York* wrote, "This is an important play, no less so since conditions in South Africa have somewhat improved: The misery may now be as much existential as social. Outside oppressors add to it, but we carry oppression within us."

Frank Rich, writing in the *New York Times*, agreed that in the two odd decades since its debut, the play's depths stood the test of time. "Even at the time of its premiere *Boesman & Lena* was recognized as a universal work that might speak to audiences long after apartheid had collapsed." Later in the review, Rich added, "Their [Boesman and Lena's] shared life, alternately a refuge and a brutal prison, is above all a marriage, observed by the author at a microscopic range Strindberg might have admired and as elemental and timeless a the primitive campsite where the play's single evening of action takes place."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso discusses the evolution of Lena's character and why she decides to stay with her abusive mate, Boesman, at the end of Fugard's play.

In Athol Fugard's *Boesman & Lena*, the title characters, de facto husband and wife, seem to have an adversarial relationship. Though they are a couple, Boesman and Lena have no love lost between them. Boesman is impatient with Lena and often threatens her. He beats her regularly, and she has the bruises to prove it. Yet Lena stays with Boesman despite this mistreatment. During the play, however, Lena undergoes a transformation that shows she is more than an object for Boesman's fists. By looking at Lena's nature and clues to her evolution, the reasons for her decision to stay with Boesman become much clearer.

When Lena and Boesman make their entrance in Act I, Fugard writes in the stage directions that "She has been reduced to a dumb, animal-like submission." Lena trails behind Boesman, though she once, a long time ago, walked beside him. Boesman tries to ignore her as much as possible. When she starts complaining about their walk and the loss of their home that morning to bulldozers run by white men, he threatens to leave her behind next time. He says, "It's useless to talk to you," though he never says much to her. She is there to share the burden that is life and provide a convenient whipping post for his anger and frustration. Boesman regularly tries to erase Lena's humanity. Early in Act I, he accuses her of faking her need to rest so she could look for a dog that she had been feeding.

But Lena wants more. What emerges in Act I is Lena's need for an individual, human identity. She needs to know who and where she is. She wants her humanity back. One way she achieves this goal is physical appearance. Her bruises, markers of Boesman's beatings, prove to her that she is flesh and blood. Each bruise also has a past. They are reminders of where she has been and what she has done. By counting them, as Lena does several times in the course of the play, she can recount something about her past.

Lena also affirms her existence by talking aloud, mostly to herself since Boesman refuses to communicate with her for most of Act I. This practice allows her to remember the past, something Boesman wants to forget. Unlike Lena, Boesman does not have to think about where he is. In Lena's early monologues, she tries to orient herself in place. She recounts the places they have lived and attempts to reconstruct their chronological order. When she thinks she has gotten a segment of it correct, Boesman makes her doubt herself, first feigning disinterest in her triumph, then making her mix-up the cities. Boesman goes on to say that someday Lena will not remember who she is, but Lena turns the tables when she asks him, "Who are you?" Self-examination throws Boesman off completely.

The incidents that fully forge Lena's identity and humanity in the play involve an old African man she invites to their camp. His presence highlights the contrast in Lena and Boesman's attitudes. After she threatens to leave Boesman, Lena sees this old man,

whom she dubs "Outa," wandering in the mudflats. Lena wants to help him, while Boesman says "We got no help." Later, after the old man has joined them, Lena wants to give the old man some of their precious water supply, as other black people have given them water in the past. Boesman will have none of it. He says, "He's not brown people, he's black people." Lena points out, "They got feelings too." By acknowledging another's human-ness, her own identity grows stronger.

Even though the old man only speaks Xhosa, a language that Lena is unfamiliar with, she can talk *at* him. He manages to learn her name, which means she is a person with an individual identity. At the moment he learns her name, Lena decides the old man is truly her ally, her link to her humanity. She gives him water, and they talk at each other. The old man listens to Lena reconstruct her past, which acknowledges that she is alive. She tells him more of her story, and when she believes she has told him most everything, she says, "That all? *Ja*. Only a few words I know, but a long story if you lived it."

Lena's sense of self becomes nearly complete when she sacrifices everything she values to keep the old man in camp. Boesman will not let her cut their bread and tea into three parts, so she shares her food with the old man. Boesman throws his bread away and dumps his tea on the ground. Lena gives up her share of their wine in exchange for Boesman allowing the old man to stay with them. This is important because Boesman has previously called Lena "a drunk." When Boesman will not let the old man sleep inside the shelter he has built, Lena stays outside, huddled under her blanket with the old man. By sacrificing for another, she has become human. She says, "I'm on this earth, not in it." Boesman cannot understand this at all.

But Lena is also violent towards the old man. When he arrives in their camp, she yells at him to sit in an angry tone. When she first tries to talk to him, he can only respond in Xhosa, which frustrates her. She shows him her bruises, and expects him to laugh at the story behind one of them just as some white men did earlier in the day. When the old man does not, she lets her exasperation show. When he tries to leave, she pushes him down and makes him stay. She needs, in some measure, to control Outa, the only sympathetic human contact she has received in a long time. She tells the old man at one point, "You can't just go, walk away like you didn't hear."

Lena's relationship with the old man confuses Boesman. He cannot leave them alone, especially once Lena has decided that she will give up her wine to keep the old man there. He tries to humiliate them at the beginning of Act II, making them say submissive words and mocking Lena, but it does no good. Lena's power has already grown beyond Boesman's comprehension. She questions his claims of freedom and is able to ask him questions like why he hurts her and why he hits her. Boesman tells her it is because "You cry." In other words, this is the only way he knows he is alive. All Boesman has is Lena.

Lena never lets the old man go. The old man's death makes Lena's human identity complete. She was holding his hand when he died and felt him slip away. Lena now knows the physical difference between life and death, self and nothingness. Lena is

more than Boesman thinks she is. After the old man has died, Lena can finally trick Boesman. Lena makes Boesman doubt the moment he is living in. She convinces him the authorities could question the old man's death as suspicious and he could be implicated in it. As Boesman's anger grows, he comes close to attacking Lena, but she says' *'Ja,* got to be careful now. There's one already." She goads him into beating up the body by pointing out that he could still be alive. Lena then makes Boesman believe that the bruises could further implicate him. She has reclaimed her life from Boesman and now has power over him.

During *Boesman & Lena*, Lena talks about leaving Boesman several times. While Boesman sold the bottles, Lena asked some white children if their mother needed a maid. She was rejected but swears she would have gone had a position been available. Lena was trying to leave Boesman again when she saw the old man wandering the flats. Finding him made Lena change her mind. But at the end of the play, Lena stays with Boesman. This happens only after he admits that he broke the bottles he accused her of breaking and after he tells her the order of places they have lived. These admissions acknowledge Lena's new identity, that of an equal to Boesman.

For Lena, it seems, the known is more scary than the unknown. She has found what she was looking for and to push her luck would not bring any discernable benefits. More importantly, Boesman is the only discernable link to her past. If she wants to continue her journey of self-exploration, she needs Boesman. Also, Lena has held the hand of death and emerged alive. She is not afraid, but Boesman fears the old man's death and what it could say about him. She ends the play with more than she began. Her sense of self has grown while Boesman's has diminished. In her last speech of the play, Lena tells Boesman, "You still got a chance. Don't lose it." Lena took her chances and has more than survived.

Source: A. Petrusso, for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Disch reviews a 1992 New York production of Boesman and Lena, *directed by Fugard himself. The critic lauds the playwright's work for its powerful depiction of "the horror of homelessness and vagrancy so tellingly."*

At the same time that the Manhattan Theatre Club is offering Sight Unseen in its Stage II space, the larger Stage I is offering a revival of *Boesman and Lena,* which is directed by its author, Athol Fugard. The two acts are presented without intermission, and for once this practice seems justified by the resulting tautness. Too often, eliminating intermission is simply a way to prevent the audience from escaping.

Boesman and Lena, which premiered in South Africa in 1969, presents one desolate night in the life of its title characters, who have just witnessed the destruction of the shantytown they'd lived in and have no other home than a featureless wasteland, represented in this production by a dead tree trunk. I know of no other play that depicts the horror of homelessness and vagrancy so tellingly, and surely the reason for this is that homelessness is not really Fugard's theme. The extremity of the situation in which Boesman and Lena find themselves is like Lear's heath or the desert with its single dead tree in *Waiting for Godot*. Boesman and Lena's straits are presented as emblematic of the human condition and hence not to be protested□only, if possible, endured.

Very little happens in Act I. Once they've set down their bundled possessions, Lena starts a fire and Boesman scavenges junk, from which he constructs a crude hut. In his absence Lena talks to herself, and in his presence she continues to talk to herself. The arrival of a derelict who speaks a language neither of them understands triggers a battle between them, as Lena resists Boesman's efforts to evict the intruder from "their" space. In the second act Fugard has two such effective *coups de theater* that it would be sinful for a reviewer to say what happens, even though this play has already acquired the status of a classic. Keith David as Boesman has the more difficult role, since he must somehow win our sympathy while glowering through most of Act I. He does, and when his glower finally explodes into speech he is tremendous. Come to think of it, it may be that the role of Lena is the more demanding, since she must keep the audience attentive to at least an hour's worth of nattering complaint before the tension mounts perceptibly. Lynne Thigpen turns these soliloquies into arias. Tsepo Mokone as the catalytic intruder should get this year's award for best performance in a foreign language. Score one more for the Manhattan Theatre Club.

Source: Thomas M. Disch, review of *Boesman and Lena* in the *Nation Vol. 254, no. 8, March 2, 1992, p. 283.*

Critical Essay #3

In this favorable review, Oliver praises the 1992 revival production of Fugard'splay. She notes that it positively recalls the original production.

The revival of Athol Fugard's ''*Boesman & Lena*," at the Manhattan Theater Club, as directed by Mr. Fugard himself, is by far the most openly emotional of the three productions I've seen. This time, Keith David and Lynne Thigpen are the couple□the Cape Coloureds□who trudge the mud flats of the Swartkops River, in South Africa, escaping time after time from the white man's bulldozer, which destroys their shanties. When they enter, Miss Thigpen's face is filthy, her clothes are slovenly and ragged, and her bare feet are covered with mud. There are bruises on her face and arms from recent beatings. Boesman and Lena are carrying all their possessions on their backs, and silently, sullenly, they set up camp. Their work in this place is digging worms for fishermen. What is acted out on the stage is one evening and night of their life□an evening and night in which they come to realize that they are not human rubbish but a man and a woman of some identity. Lena has found and, over Boesman's protests, insists on sheltering at their fire (which she has built in a large metal container) a feeble old black man, a Bantu speaker, who is in very bad shape. The old man eventually dies, and, the rules of apartheid being what they were, Boesman and Lena are in such danger that they must now move on with all possible speed, one step ahead of the police. This time, however, both of them realize as they load up that something has changed forever: they have connected in a way that they never have before. They know who they are and what binds them together.

Miss Thigpen and Mr. David and their play are spellbinding for all its hundred and five unbroken minutes. For me, the performance was haunted□ pleasantly so□by Ruby Dee, of the original New York production; by Frances Foster, of the first revival I saw; by James Earl Jones; and, above all, by the late Robert Christian, who was profound and indelible. Mr. David, much of the time silently on the boil, and Miss Thigpen, her hurt and defiance almost spilling over, are worthy of their predecessors, and so is Tsepo Mokone, as the black African. The dramatic setting□a backdrop strip of hot oranges and yellows□and the costumes were designed by Susan Hilferty, who was also the associate director. Lighting by Dennis Parichy.

Source: Edith Oliver, "Stopover" in the New Yorker, Vol. LXVII, no. 51, February 10, 1992 , p. 76.

Critical Essay #4

Calling Boesman and Lena *"Athol Fugard's profoundest play," Simon lauds the playwright for his probing examination of the injustices of Apartheid. Despite his respect for the text, however, the critic offers only mixed praise for the cast of this 1992 revival production*.

Boesman and Lena, when it comes off, is Athol Fugard's profoundest play. Almost nothing happens□as in Beckett□yet all the injustices of the world are encapsulated in it. Two South African Coloureds□neither black nor white but in between□ are wandering about the mud flats with their few belongings on their backs. They'll hunt for prawns in the riverbed in the morning, but tonight they'll pitch their makeshift tent, eat a little, drink, sleep, and maybe forget. Instead, they argue. Because Boesman relieves misery by beating his woman, and she, smarter and more verbal, relieves it with taunts. They fight, therefore they are.

Then a third person, even lower than they, is latched on to by Lena: Outa, a stray, decrepit Kaffir, who speaks Xhosa, not even Afrikaans, and with whom Lena can communicate only as with a child or dog. But she has someone now to witness her being and suffering, to corroborate the bruises Boesman and life have imprinted on her. She feeds Outa; Boesman bullies him. The old man dies, and Lena uses his death to scare Boesman. They flee. Prawnless and hopeless, the two trudge on into their daily drudgery. That is all, but it's enough. Enough for Fugard to convey that "both are... victims of a ... shared predicament, and of each other. Which ... makes it some sort of love story. They are each other's fate."

This is an important play, no less so since conditions in South Africa have somewhat improved: The misery may now be as much existential as social. Outside oppressors add to it, but we carry oppression within us. Unfortunately, no one in the cast is wholly right. Keith David, a black American, cannot, good actor though he is, quite convey a South African Coloured in looks and furtiveness. Ditto Lynne Thigpen, a fine actress, but one too robust and powerful. In the original American production (1970), the delicate yet resilient Ruby Dee was a more moving Lena. And though Tsepo Mokone gets across the dazed marginality of Outa, he lacks the unearthly fragility that Zakes Mokae brought to the part. None of this, though, is a serious blemish on a production that the author has directed with his customary unblinking honesty.

Source: John Simon, "Benoit & Marcelle & Henri & Angelique" in *New York*, Vol. 25, no. 6, February 10, 1992, pp. 86-87.

Adaptations

Boesman & Lena was adapted as a film in 1974. It was directed by Ross Devinish.

Topics for Further Study

Compare and contrast *Boesman & Lena* with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Why do you feel the characters in *Boesman & Lena* change while those in *Waiting for Godot* do not?

Research the psychological phenomenon of battered woman syndrome. Does this apply to Lena in *Boesman & Lena?*

Compare and contrast *Boesman & Lena* with Fugard's play *Blood Knot*, which is also about familial opposites existing in a small space. Why does Boesman's violence explode while Zach's does not?

Research the writings of Albert Camus, a French existentialist philosopher and playwright who influenced Fugard. How does Camus's philosophy play into the themes of *Boesman & Lena?*

Compare and Contrast

1969: The titular head of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela, has been imprisoned by the South African government for five years.

Today: Nelson Mandela has been the President of South Africa since 1994, when Dutch president F. W. de Clerk abolished apartheid, stepped down from his office, and helped to organize the popular elections that resulted in Mandela's rise to power.

1969: Interracial marriage is banned in South Africa (the practice is not socially acceptable in many areas of the United States). Only .007% (310,000) of marriages in the United States are interracial.

Today: The ban on interracial marriage was lifted in South Africa in 1978. In 1995, the percentage of interracial marriages in the United States was .025% (1,392,000).

1969: The South African government segregates living areas, limiting people of color to certain areas. In the United States, President Nixon tries to delay efforts to desegregate schools.

Today: In South Africa, laws are enacted to fairly redistribute land among its citizens of color. In the United States, there is a controversial movement to end busing students to aid in the desegregation of schools.

1969: Under apartheid, education among people of color is only compulsory between ages seven and eleven and is not readily enforced.

Today: Education for people of color is compulsory for students through age sixteen. Approximately 94% of school age children are enrolled in schools.

What Do I Read Next?

Hello and Goodbye, a play by Athol Fugard written in 1965, is a drama that explores the lives and conflicts of a white brother and sister also living in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-95 is a book published in 1998 and edited by Derek Attrige and Rosemary Jolly. Exploring how apartheid is portrayed in various forms of literature, the book includes original writings on the subject.

Lifetimes under Apartheid is a book published in 1986 which contains both non-fiction and fiction writing as well as photographs by Nadine Gordimer and David Goldblatt. The book explores how people lived under the restrictions of apartheid.

The Smell of Apples, a novel by Mark Behr published in 1995, explores life under apartheid in South Africa, highlighting events of 1961.

Further Study

Davenport, T. R. H. *South Africa: A Modern History*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

This book covers South African history, focusing on the nineteen and twentieth centuries.

Fugard, Athol. *Cousins: A Memoir*, Theatre Communications Group, 1997.

In this autobiography, the author discusses his life, focusing primarily on his childhood.

Fugard, Athol. *Notebooks,* 1960-1977, Knopf, 1983.

This book contains the playwrights notes on many of his plays written in this time period, including *Boesman & Lena*.

Richards, Lloyd. "The Art of Theater VIII: Athol Fugard" in *Paris Review*, Summer, 1989, p. 128.

This interview with Fugard includes information on his inspirations and the mechanics of writing his plays, including *Boesman & Lena*.

Vandenbroucke, Russell. *Truths the Hand Can Touch: The Theatre of Athol Fugard*, Donker, 1986.

This book discusses Fugard's background and work in depth, including *Boesman & Lena*.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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