Valley Song Study Guide

Valley Song by Athol Fugard

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Introduction

Athol Fugard's *Valley Song* premiered in Johannesburg, South Africa in August, 1995. The playwright himself directed the production and played two of the play's three characters: The Author, a figure modeled on Fugard himself, and Abraam Jonkers, the elderly "coloured" farmer who represents the "old" South Africa. Fugard repeated this theatrical tour de force when the play reached America, in a production by the Manhattan Theatre Club at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey in October, 1995. Both performances were warmly received by audiences and critics, several of whom expressed gratitude that Fugard was still writing intense, meaningful dramas about the lives of ordinary South Africans, even in the post-apartheid era.

Since the playwright had built his career over four decades of writing about the injustices of apartheid and state-mandated racial segregation, there was some concern when apartheid officially ended in 1992, and Nelson Mandela, a black leader, was elected president in 1994, that Fugard may have run out of things to say. However, as Jack Barbera observed in the *Nation,* "*Valley Song* is as timeless as it is timely, a story of the old fearful of change and the young with their hopes and impatience, and of a teller of stories."

Like most of Fugard's plays, the plot of *Valley Song* is quite simple, and less important than the secrets it reveals about its characters are the themes it presents its audience. The play contains two stories woven into one. In the first, a young, black South African girl decides to leave her elderly grandfather behind on their farm in the Sneeuberg Valley so she can escape to the city and pursue her dreams of becoming a famous singer. The other story concerns an aging white South African playwright who is prepared to leave behind the "artifi- cial" world of the theater and urban life and move himself back to his origins in the farmland of the Karoo. His days of planning and dreaming about the "Glorious Future" are nearing an end just as the young girl's are beginning, and *Valley Song* is really the tale of the torch of hope passing from one generation to the next□a bold and magnifi- cent gesture by a man whom many critics have dubbed one of the greatest living English-language playwrights.

Author Biography

Athol Harold Lannigan Fugard was born June 11, 1932 in Middelburg, a small village in the semidesert Karoo region of South Africa. His mother, Elizabeth Magdalena Potgieter Fugard, was an Afrikaner who could trace her ancestry back to the earliest Dutch settlers of 1652. His father, Harold David Fugard, was a South African with English and Irish roots. At his grandmother's request, the boy who would one day become his country's most famous playwright was named Athol after a former British governor of South Africa, the Earl of Athlone.

When he was three years old, Fugard's family moved to Port Elizabeth, where the playwright has since spent most of his life. In his introduction to *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays*, published in 1978, Fugard describes his adopted hometown as "an almost featureless industrial port on the Indian Ocean. . .assaulted throughout the year by strong southwesterly and easterly winds." Port Elizabeth, Fugard explains, is a city of hundreds of thousands of people□blacks, whites, Indians, Chinese and "Coloured" (mixed race) citizens who represent every socioeconomic level. Growing up, Fugard witnessed almost daily the injustice of racial segregation under South Africa's cruel policy of apartheid. Despite its featurelessness, harsh weather, and culture clashes, however, Fugard proudly claims, "I cannot conceive of myself as separate from it," and several of his plays are set in and around Port Elizabeth.

Fugard's father, a musician who led a number of jazz bands, had lost a leg in a childhood accident. Shortly after the family relocated, a lifetime of depression and physical ailments overtook him. In Port Elizabeth, the elder Fugard spent much of his time either drinking heavily or sick in bed. Elizabeth Fugard, meanwhile, operated the St. George's Park Tearoom. Fugard described his father in a 1982 interview for *New Yorker* magazine as a man "full of pointless, unthought-out prejudices." He considered his mother, on the other hand, to be completely color-blind. At the Tearoom, she hired a number of black waiters, and one of them, Sam Semela, became Fugard's closest childhood friend and one of the greatest influences on his life and later career.

One night when his mother was away, Fugard received a call from the nearby Central Hotel. His father was passed out drunk on the floor of the hotel's bar. Young Athol asked Sam for his help, and the two went to the hotel to collect his father. The boy had to ask permission for Sam to enter the whites-only bar, and was humiliated as he walked out past the staring eyes of strangers with his drunken father on Sam's back. The incident, along with Sam's kind treatment of Fugard as an innocent white child in a world that abused its black citizens, became the basis for Fugard's 1982 play *Master Harold. . .and the Boys*.

Though Fugard read constantly and wrote occasionally as a boy, he did not become an artist early in life. After elementary school he studied automobile mechanics on a scholarship at Port Elizabeth Technical College, and later attended the University of Cape Town, majoring in philosophy and social anthropology. He dropped out of school before finishing his degree, hitchhiked the length of the African continent, then,

penniless, took a position onboard the *S.S. Graigaur* as an apprentice seaman. Two years later Fugard came ashore back home in Port Elizabeth, determined to become a writer. He worked for a while as a journalist, then met and married Sheila Meiring, an actress working in Cape Town.

Fugard and his new wife founded a theater company, the Circle Players in 1957, then moved to Johannesburg in 1958, where he took a job as a clerk in the Fordsburg Native Commissioner's Court. In the Court, Fugard helped process blacks accused of violating South Africa's "Pass Laws" and witnessed firsthand the terrible atrocities of apartheid. Fugard lamented to the *New Yorker,* "It was just so awful and ugly. We literally disposed of people at the rate of one every two minutes. There was no question of defense□the evidence was rigged. It was like a sausage machine."

Abandoning his clerk's job, Fugard became a stage manager for South Africa's National Theatre Organization and began writing plays in earnest. His first real success was *The Blood Knot* (1961), a play about two South African half-brothers, one black, the other coloured but able to pass for white. Fugard himself starred in the production, something he has done almost continuously ever since.

The Blood Knot set the stage for nearly all of Fugard's later work. Most of his plays are intimate, personal portrayals of tragic events in the lives of two or three characters. Very often his plays contain mixed casts (black, white, and mixed-race characters), and they are all set against the difficult social and political environment of his native South Africa. Plays such as *Hello and Goodbye* (1965), *Boesman and Lena* (1969), *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972), *A Lesson From Aloes* (1978), *Master Harold. . .and the Boys* (1982), and *My Children! My Africa!* (1989) have won Fugard awards and worldwide recognition and have earned him respect as, in the words of Stephen Gray in *New Theatre Quarterly,* "the greatest active playwright in English."

Because the backdrop, if not the subject, of Fugard's plays for so many years was his country's divisive policies of apartheid, many critics wondered what his future as a playwright would hold once apartheid was abolished and steps were taken toward racial equality. White South African President F. W. de Klerk began the process of dismantling apartheid in 1990 when he ended the ban on the African National Congress, and began releasing political prisoners and repealing the many segregation laws that separated whites and blacks. A few years later, in 1994, Nelson Mandela, the black former leader of the African National Congress who was jailed by the white South African government for twenty-seven years, was inaugurated as South Africa's president, and the long struggle for racial equality in the troubled country began a new chapter.

For his part, Fugard did not end his career as a dramatist when the door finally closed on apartheid. With the help of five young South African women, he assembled a collaborative piece called *My Life* (1996) which revealed their experiences, desires, and fears about the new South Africa. He followed *My Life* with *Valley Song* (1996), a frankly autobiographical play that prompted critics to realize that Fugard's talent extended well beyond political boundaries. As Jack Barbera reported in a review of the play for the

Nation, "He tells stories, and if the new South Africa has altered the nature of people's problems, it only means there are new challenges, new stories to tell."

Plot Summary

Valley Song opens with The Author, a white man in his sixties representing Fugard himself, showing the audience a handful of "genuine Karoo pumpkin seeds," describing the beauty and richness of the land in the Sneeuberg Mountains of South Africa's great Karoo region, and inviting the onlookers to imagine Abraam Jonkers, a "coloured" (mixedrace) tenant farmer now in his seventies, planting the seeds in the fresh spring earth just after a rain. The images in The Author's opening monologue seeds, earth, rain, mountains and valleys are important not only to the setting of *Valley Song*, but to the personalities of the characters and the larger themes at work in the play.

As The Author talks, he turns into Abraam Jonkers, known to everyone in the village of Nieu- Bethesda as "old Buks." Old Buks has lived in the village his entire life, working as a tenant farmer on the same piece of land his father worked on when he was a boy. While the land has been owned by a white family, the Landmans, for generations, Abraam Jonkers and his family have only been allowed to live on the edge of it and farm a few acres. Old Buks has raised the crops for the Landmans, and his wife, before she died, cleaned their house and scrubbed their floors. Now the Landmans are gone, and the property is for sale.

As Buks sings fragments of an old song he once knew and plants pumpkin seeds in the damp soil, his granddaughter, Veronica, arrives with his lunch. She is black, seventeen, filled with youthful energy and tender devotion toward her grandfather, whom she calls "Oupa." As Veronica lays out their lunch bread with jam and a thermos of tea Buks tells her he is concerned about a white man who visited that morning looking to buy the house and property. Because Buks does not own the land on which he lives and farms, the owner could tell him to leave, a fate worse than death for the old man. Veronica does not want to see her Oupa displaced, but losing the land, to her, might mean opportunity instead of tragedy. She complains that nothing ever happens in the small valley village, and what she is really seeking now is "Adventure and Romance!"

More than anything, Veronica wants to be a famous singer. She has a lovely natural voice, and constantly makes up songs to sing to entertain herself and old Buks. She sings him a song she made up that morning called "Railway Bus O Railway Bus," which is about her desire to jump on a fast bus and travel the world, seeing all of the big cities and strange places she has only heard about. The song reminds old Buks of painful memories and prompts him to finally tell Veronica about her mother and her past.

Veronica's mother, Caroline, was Buks' only daughter. When she was still a young girl, she ran away to Johannesburg with her troublemaking boyfriend. A year went by before Buks and his wife, Betty, received a phone call from a hospital in the city. Caroline was quite sick, so Betty went to be with her. When she returned on the "railway bus" she brought Veronica, a newborn baby. Caroline had died. Old Buks and Betty raised Veronica, their granddaughter, as if she were their own child. Now Buks' life is changing. Betty died when Veronica was only a few years old, and now, it seems, Veronica wants

to run away to the city like her mother did before her. To make matters worse, a white man is asking questions about his land, and he faces an uncertain future.

Later that night, Veronica sneaks off to the village. She is standing on an apple box, pretending she is on TV singing for thousands of people, when The Author steps out of the shadows and surprises her. After an initial fright, Veronica tells The Author about her fantasy of being a famous performer. He warns her about the danger of dreams that are impossible to achieve, but she insists that if people dream "properly" and believe hard enough, they can make a dream come true.

The next day Veronica and old Buks receive the news: the white man they have seen around town is going to buy the land on which they live and farm. Veronica suggests they fight against losing their home, perhaps by taking a petition to the government, but Buks is resigned to the situation. He is used to deferring to the white people who own most of the land, and plans to talk to the white man to convince him to let Buks and Veronica stay on to tend the land and clean his house, as their family has done for years.

Buks' suggestion leads to a major confrontation between him and his granddaughter. While Buks is perfectly content to live his few remaining years growing vegetables on the small patch of earth he calls home, with Veronica working as a servant for a new white boss, she has different ideas. She believes there are better opportunities available to her in the new South Africa, now that blacks have equal access to the jobs whites have and can live in the cities like anyone else. Buks, however, interprets Veronica's ambition as ingratitude and a rejection of all of the values he holds dear. For the first time in their lives, he is angry with her, and his anger brings her to tears.

The next Sunday, Buks catches The Author just before he leaves town to return to the city for awhile. He offers the white man a wheelbarrow full of vegetables, and pleads with him to let him stay on the land, and maybe to let his granddaughter keep his house clean. To The Author, who is looking to buy the land as a place to escape from the "makebelieve world of theatre," this gesture makes the sale. The character, really Fugard himself in disguise, tells the audience about his desire to get away from the "nonsense from actors and producers and critics," and live for a while in the "real" world. He stops himself short, however, when he realizes the significance of the land to old Buks. Although The Author has the means to simply write out a check and pick up a Title Deed to the property, it is Buks and his family who have worked the soil and grown up with the land for at least two generations. It is only because of South Africa's terrible history of denying equality to its black citizens that Buks must now beg the white man for what may rightfully be his.

As The Author considers the guilt he is feeling, Veronica joins him, and reveals to the audience her hatred for the land the two men love so much. "It gives us food," she says, "but it takes our lives." She thinks of her beloved Oupa as a slave to the land, and is convinced it is fear of being trapped by the land that drove her mother away. Once again the Author tries to warn Veronica about the danger of dreaming too big, but she

stubbornly resists him and insists, "You will never see me on my knees scrubbing a white man's floor."

Veronica and Buks' next confrontation arrives with the mail. Although Buks cannot read, he opened a letter Veronica received from a friend in Johannesburg and had a friend read it to him. From its contents, he learned that Veronica is planning to leave the valley and find work in the city so she can pursue her singing career. Faced with the letter, Veronica admits to the plan, and shows Buks some money she has saved by singing for white people on the street in the village. Buks calls her meager savings "Devil's money" and hurls it out into the field. That Sunday, Veronica will not sing in church. The joy in her voice has been crushed by old Buks' treatment of her dreams.

Months pass, and in the middle of winter Veronica comes to her Oupa to tell him that he must let her go. Like the pumpkin seeds he plants and tends so carefully, she tells him she, too, has grown up. She explains to him that her singing is her life, and she must tend it the way old Buks tends his vegetables. He warns her that it is a bad world outside of their little valley, but she insists that he has helped to make her strong, and the time for her to leave is now. Finally, old Buks gives Veronica his blessing, and she leaves him with a song about the valley that she loves.

On her way out of town, Veronica encounters The Author for the last time. He admits that he understands the ambitions that are driving her onward, and was only testing her resolve earlier when he questioned the seriousness of her dreams. Both of them, the author and the singer, are artists who answer to a mysterious higher calling. They both go where their dreams lead them. The Author, who is nearing the end of his life, is running out of dreams about the "Glorious Future," and in a touching symbolic gesture, he tells Veronica, "The future belongs to you now." Because The Author is actually Fugard, the playwright, the line has a deeper meaning. Fugard has spent his career on the stage "dreaming" about a brighter future for his country. Now, late in life, he is seeing some changes occur, but knows he will not be around to see them reach fruition. It will be up to new artists, black and white, to dream new dreams.

Veronica runs off to the city, leaving behind The Author and old Buks. To keep from ending the play with old Buks "slumped in defeat and misery," however, The Author reaches out to him and entices him back to life in the only way he understands: through the land. The Author tells Buks about the new spring rain that fell the night before, and offers him a handful of pumpkin seeds so he can plant his field and draw new life from the earth once more.

Summary

Valley Song is Athol Fugard's one-act play about love and generation differences between an old man and his granddaughter in modern day South Africa.

The play opens with The Author, a man in his sixties, who addresses the audience to tell them about the value of the pumpkin seeds he holds in his hands. The seeds are from pumpkins The Author had grown in his land in the Karoo region in the Sneeuberg Mountains of South Africa. The Author describes the growing cycle in his country and the people who live there and plant seeds such as the pumpkin seeds he holds. One of the people from The Author's village is an old man named Abraam Jonkers, more often known as Buks, who is a "Coloured" man in his seventies. Buks plants his pumpkin seeds with the same precision with which he served in the military many years ago. As The Author attempts to sing one of Buks' songs from his days in the army, The Author transitions into the character of Buks.

As Buks continues to plant seeds, his granddaughter, Veronica, enters with Buks' lunch. Veronica is a seventeen-year-old Black girl who loves to sing and adores her grandfather, whom she calls Oupa. Buks and Veronica engage in their familiar game of her saluting and marching in humorous reference to Buks' time in the military. Buks enjoys the lunch Veronica has brought but mentions that the tea and everything in life does not seem to be sweet enough anymore. Buks is concerned because another white man has been looking at the main house on whose land Buks makes his living as a farmer. Buks works the land as did his father before him but does not own it, which makes his position very vulnerable.

Veronica attempts to calm Buks' fears and give him a positive view on the situation by reminding him that many people have looked at the main house over the years but no one has ever purchased it. Veronica changes the subject to get Buks' mind on something else and tells her grandfather that she is becoming bored with life on the farm and longs for some romance and adventure. Buks, attempting to squelch Veronica's wanderlust, shows her a handful of pumpkin seeds and explains how the miracle that occurs from one growing seed is all the mystery and adventure one person ever needs.

Veronica grows tired of hearing yet one more story related to farming and begins to sing a song she has written about going away on a railway bus. Buks is instantly upset by the lyrics and demands that Veronica cease her singing. The song has brought back painful memories to Buks whose only daughter, Caroline, ran away to Johannesburg when she was a young woman with her no-good boyfriend, and died soon after giving birth to Veronica. Buks' now-deceased wife, Betty, brought the infant Veronica back to the village after Betty received a call from a hospital in Johannesburg informing Betty that Caroline had died and left a newborn.

Veronica promises not to sing the railroad car song again because it upsets Buks and she leaves to prepare for dinner. Buks talks to the invisible Betty and asks if he is

raising Veronica properly because she wants to leave for the city just as Caroline did. Buks also shares with Betty his fears about someone buying the main house and his vulnerability about his own future. Buks ends the conversation by asking for Betty's intercession for a good pumpkin crop.

The action transitions to Veronica who addresses the audience and shares her love for her grandfather who remains a simple, uneducated farmer. Veronica has bigger dreams for her own life and tells the audience that, after her grandfather has fallen asleep each night, she sneaks out of the house to watch entertainers on the television screen through the window of a neighbor named Mrs. Jooste.

The appearance of The Author startles Veronica who tells him of her desire to be a famous singer. Even though The Author cautions Veronica that her dream may be too big to attain, she is fixed on her idea of becoming a singing star. Veronica feels that people who do not attain their dreams do not dedicate enough positive thought to make the dreams a reality.

Buks and Veronica soon learn that the rumors about a white man buying the main house are true and Buks is understandably concerned. Veronica suggests that they fight the situation by petitioning the government, but Buks feels that it is best to establish a good rapport with the new owner instead. Buks also suggests that he will tell the new owner that his granddaughter is available for domestic work in the home. Veronica is instantly outraged at this idea and tells Buks that she does not intend to live her life in service to white men like her grandparents did. Buks is upset by Veronica's rejection of the family's heritage and way of life and his character transitions into The Author once more.

The Author tells the audience that he had not decided to buy the main house until he had encountered Buks one Sunday morning offering The Author a wheelbarrow full of fresh vegetables. The Author had been so moved by Buks' generosity and sincerity that The Author decided to buy the house and leave his life in the theatre behind in the city.

Veronica speaks again to the audience, and tells about her love and hate for the land that provides a simple life but drains the spirits of people who long for more creative fulfillment. Veronica begins to understand the parallels between herself and her mother whom Veronica assumes left the area for the excitement of Johannesburg. The Author tells Veronica that Mrs. Jooste has died and Veronica will probably have to give up on her dream to be a singer because she will not be able to view the television anymore. Veronica's intensity is not mitigated even after The Author cautions her about the emotional crash, which follows the death of a long-cherished dream.

The next day, Veronica and Buks have another disagreement when Veronica realizes that Buks has opened a letter that is addressed to Veronica from her friend, Priscilla, who now lives in Johannesburg. Veronica determines that Buks has enlisted the help of someone else to read the letter's contents since Buks is unable to read. Priscilla has responded positively to Veronica's earlier letter inquiring about the job situation in

Johannesburg and that Veronica is welcome to stay with Priscilla's family should Veronica decide to come to the city.

Buks is devastated that Veronica has taken the initiative to make plans to leave just like Caroline did. Veronica has been singing on the streets of the village for money and has collected half the fare for the trip and Buks is outraged that his granddaughter has engaged in such an endeavor, calling the coins the Devil's money. Buks forbids Veronica to leave and vows to send the police after her should she sneak away to Johannesburg.

After church the following Sunday, Buks questions Veronica about her silence during the service and she tells Buks that he has killed her spirit and she no longer feels like singing or praying.

The Author once again addresses the audience and tells of Buks now walking the roads on the moonlit winter nights, contemplating what he has done wrong to lose all the people he has loved in his life. Buks has tried to live according to his father's teachings about love for the land and for his family but the plan has not worked out for Buks who is brokenhearted in his old age.

The Author transitions into the character of Buks who is approached by Veronica whom Buks mistakes for his deceased daughter, Caroline. Veronica begins to sing so that her grandfather will recognize her for who she is. Veronica explains to Buks that just like he cannot explain the miracle that allows his pumpkin seeds to sprout and grow, Veronica cannot explain the miracle of her singing. Veronica knows only that she must give her talent a place to grow so that she may fully realize her potential.

Buks still cautions Veronica about the evils in the big city but Veronica tries to calm his anxiety by reassuring Buks that he has raised her well and that she is strong enough to find her own way. Veronica and Buks part after Buks gives his blessing.

The Author meets Veronica again and she shares her excitement about her new adventure and is fixed on her decision in spite of The Author's attempts to persuade Veronica to stay home. The Author does not want to see Veronica leave but confides to her that he always knew that she would go. The Author also tells Veronica that he is envious of Veronica's youth and the potential to create a new future as his own life is diminishing. Veronica leaves with The Author's best wishes for a great future.

As the play ends, The Author tells of finding Buks depressed and dejected in his little house but how Buks rouses, encouraged by the approach of another Spring and the opportunity to plant pumpkin seeds once again.

Analysis

The play is set in modern day South Africa where there are still class divisions of "White," "Colored," "Black," and "Asian" people. This is the basis for Buks' vulnerability because he is a "Colored" man who rents the land of a "White" landowner. Even at his

advanced age, Buks is still at the mercy of "White" men just as his father before him had been. Fugard is a prolific playwright and this is another example of his work writing about the inequities and injustices in life in South Africa.

Fugard also inserts some South African language and expressions into the play to add authenticity. Veronica tells her grandfather that she has "Glenryck Maalvis Chilli-chilli en Sneeuberge aartappel en wortels" for dinner, and when Veronica tells The Author how she furtively watches Mrs. Jooste's television, she says that the old woman likes music, "hop skip en jump, Boeremulik, tickie-draii..."

The most important theme in the play is the pursuit of a dream and Veronica embodies all the youthful energy symbolic of a creative young person anxious to follow her own path in spite of the emotional and physical roadblocks. Buks is in a melancholy state because his dreams have all died with his family and he clings to the past and the land as his only glimmers of the potential he once saw for his life. The Author has realized two dreams in his lifetime, both the creative dream of being a playwright, and the new vision of living on the land when he acquires the main house. Fugard wants the reader to understand the dynamic nature of dreams and of life that vacillate throughout the course of a person's lifetime.

Fugard uses much creative imagery in the play and utilizes the technique of irony regarding the pivotal point where The Author makes his decision to buy the main house. Buks has been concerned for years that a new White man will buy the abandoned main house, forcing Buks and Veronica out of their little house, so it is ironic that The Author decides to buy the house after a pleasant encounter with Buks and his overflowing wheelbarrow changes his previous decision not to purchase. "That wheelbarrow load of vegetables did it. I mean, come on now, how could I pass up the chance to own a piece of my native Karoo earth that would allow me to brag and boast about 'my own pumpkins,' 'my own beetroot,' 'my own potatoes.'"

The significance of the play's title comes not only from the obvious fact of Veronica's singing but also from the more subtle act of gratitude and appreciation for miracles which Buks enjoys as he cultivates the valley's earth each year. Each person in his own way "sings" his own life and the pattern of rebirth and creativity is the only constant in an ever-changing world.

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Characters

The Author

The Author in *Valley Song* is just that: Athol Fugard himself, appearing as a character in his own play. He is a white man in his sixties, a successful and prosperous playwright who was born in the Karoo region of South Africa, but has lived most of his life in Port Elizabeth and traveled the cities of the world. Like the real-life Fugard, The Author has devoted his career to writing hopeful plays about the future of his country, but is now "sick and tired of the madness and desperate scramble of my life in the make-believe world of theatre."

What he wants now is to live in the "real" world, so he has chosen to return to the Karoo and purchase a small house on a piece of farmland, where he can live out the rest of his days writing *prose* ("no more nonsense from actors and producers and critics"), smelling the rich, fertile land, and eating the vegetables that grow in his own patch of the earth. His conscience, however, causes him to be troubled at the plight of Abraam Jonkers, the poor old black man who has lived his entire life on the land The Author is buying, but because of South Africa's racial discrimination, has never been able to own any of it for himself.

The Author also comes to know Jonkers' granddaughter, Veronica. Though he initially seems to challenge Veronica's dreams of one day becoming a famous singer, The Author actually understands the mysterious force that drives the young girl toward her goal, and recognizes that now that his days are coming to an end, the future belongs to her and to her generation.

Abraam Jonkers

Abraam Jonkers is a "Coloured" (mixed-race) South African man in his seventies. Called "old Buks" by everyone in his village and "Oupa" by his granddaughter, Veronica, Abraam has lived his entire life in Nieu-Bethesda, a small village in the Sneeuberg Mountains of South Africa's great Karoo region, except for his short service as a prison guard in the Transvaal during World War II. Both he and his father, Jaap Jonkers, have been tenant farmers on the property of the Landmans, a white family. When he was a boy, his father explained to him that if he grew up to be a good man, then God would make his days sweet as the grapes that grew in their valley. To be a good man, he explained, Abraam must work hard on the land, love everyone who lives in his home and village, and have faith and worship God in the village church.

Since that time, old Buks has tried to live his life just as his father directed. He has experienced many disappointments over the years. He lost his daughter to the city when she ran away to Johannesburg seeking adventure and opportunity and died there, still a young girl. He lost his beloved wife to old age, and buried her beneath the earth

he loves so dearly. Now, near death himself, he is afraid of losing the only person he has left, his granddaughter Veronica, to her dreams of becoming a famous singer.

Abraam Jonkers represents the "old" South Africa in the play. He is painfully aware of his racial status and what it has represented in his world□no education, little opportunity, and a constant fear of white society and its dangers. Because he has lived through the worst his country has to offer, he is not as optimistic as Veronica about her chances in the world outside their valley.

Veronica Jonkers

Veronica is a seventeen-year-old black teenager. Though she was born in Johannesburg, her mother died shortly afterward, and she was brought back to Nieu-Bethesda in the Sneeuberg Mountain valley by her grandmother, Betty Jonkers. A few years later, her grandmother also died, and she has been raised since then by her grandfather, Abraam, whom she calls "Oupa." Unlike her grandfather, she barely remembers the injustices and atrocities of apartheid in the "old" South Africa. Because of this, she is freer to dream and to think about life outside the valley than her Oupa seems to be.

Veronica's big dream is to become a famous singer and appear on television. She has a naturally beautiful voice□even old Buks remembers her "singing" when she was just a baby□but her grandfather cannot stand the thought of her leaving him and their farm, so she must choose between the love of her Oupa and the life she has known, or the uncertainty of the world outside and the possibility that her dream might not come true.

Initially The Author challenges her, warning her that unrealistic dreams can lead to bitterness and resentment. Later, though, it is apparent that the old white man and the young black girl are a lot alike, but at different stages in their lives. The Author was once a starry-eyed dreamer, with high hopes for his country, but his days of dreaming are nearing an end. Veronica, on the other hand, is just beginning. She now represents the hopes and dreams of South Africa's future.

Themes

Dreams

Everyone in *Valley Song* is pursuing a dream, and it is the nature of the characters' dreams and how far they are willing to go to achieve them that really defines who they are in the world of the play.

Abraam Jonkers' dream is the simplest of the three. It was handed to him by his father when he was just a young boy. While working in the fields one day, his father explained to him that if he grew up to be a good man, then God would make his days as sweet as the grapes that grew in their valley. To be a good man, he explained, Abraam must work hard on the land, love everyone who lives in his home and village, and have faith and worship God in the village church. Since that time, everything Abraam has done has been an attempt to live up to his father's directions. He has dedicated himself to the same patch of land, his "akkers," that his father farmed, and is inseparable from the earth, even though he can never own it himself. He has cared for everyone in his home□his daughter, Caroline; his wife, Betty; and now his granddaughter, Veronica□ even as they have left him one at a time. And he is devoted to his faith in God, despite the fact that his days have not always been as sweet as the grapes of his valley.

Insofar as Abraam's dream of a simple, honest life on the land is productive and not harmful to others, it seems admirable, but his dream comes with complications as well. It interferes with the aspirations of his daughter and granddaughter, who don't share his love for the land. Abraam's simple dream also seems narrow and outdated with the prospect of a "new" South Africa, where everyone□ black, white, and coloured alike□is free to dream bigger dreams.

Veronica represents the spirit of this new South Africa. She has lofty dreams of leaving the valley village and heading off to the big city where she can become a famous singer and one day appear on television. Because she is too young to have experienced the worst of apartheid in the old regime, she does not share the fears of her grandfather that the white world will close the door of opportunity that leads to the fulfillment of her dream. Her energy, enthusiasm, and passion for her dream are enviable and exciting, but they, too, carry danger. As The Author warns her more than once, if dreams are too big they may not come true, and dashed dreams can lead to disappointment and bitterness.

For his part, The Author has had his share of both passionate dreaming with some success and unrealistic dreaming with disappointing results. In his sixty-plus years he has achieved some of the fame and fortune as an artist that Veronica is seeking, but the struggle has taken a toll on him. Where he once had grand dreams about a "Glorious Future" for his country, he now dreams only of escaping the artificial world of cities and the theater and living out his days in the "real" world of the Karoo farmland. He tells

Veronica, "The future belongs to you now," and symbolically passes the torch of hope, the ability to keep on dreaming, from his generation to the next.

Cycle of Life

Valley Song begins and ends with The Author presenting the audience with a symbol of fertility: a handful of pumpkin seeds. The seeds represent the cycle of life, an idea that is central to the play and its characters. Just as the seeds are planted in the ground, sprout with the sunshine and rain, grow into vines and "Flat White Boer" pumpkins, then return new seeds to the earth, the characters and the society they live in experience birth, growth, death, and renewal.

Each of the three characters that appear in the play is somehow tied to the land, and therefore directly affected by nature's cycle of life. For Abraam Jonkers, the land has been both his life and his living since he was a boy. Every year he plants the seeds in the earth, tends the sprouts and vines, harvests the vegetables, then retreats indoors for the winter while the land lies dormant. He has been a witness to the complete cycle of life of his daughter, who ran away and died in the city, and his wife, who grew old and died on their farm. In the end, faced with the loss of his granddaughter as well, it is the land that saves Abraam. Instead of allowing him to be left "slumped in defeat and misery," The Author presents him with another handful of pumpkin seeds, and they are the key to Abraam's rejuvenation. Once more old Buks tramps into the fields to plant again, suggesting that the cycle of death and rebirth will continue. Like the pumpkin fields, old Buks will once again come to life.

For Veronica, the land is a trap. She, too, has experienced the cycle of seasons, the planting and harvesting of crops, and feels the rhythm of life in their small village in the valley. But she is part of a new generation that is not satisfied with the life its grandparents and parents led. She requires a different sort of nurturing□a tending of the soul□in order to thrive. At one point she pleads with old Buks, "I am also a living thing, you know. I also want to grow." Her growth, she is convinced, can only occur outside the valley, where new opportunities await young blacks in the cities that once turned them away. "My singing is my life," she tells her grandfather. "I must look after it the way Oupa looks after his vegetables. I know that if I stay here in the Valley it will die."

For The Author, the land is his dream for his twilight years. His cycle of life, like old Abraam's, is nearing an end, and like the seeds in his hand, he wants to return to the earth of the countryside where he was born. For many years he has waited for the world outside, the world of cities he has lived in, to change. He has been desperate for his country to evolve out of its ignorant, blind prejudices and into a free society. Now that the change he has waited for so long is starting to take place, he is ready for others to pick up where he is leaving off. He wants to slow down the pace of his life and live in the valley that is "the unspoilt, innocent little world it was when I first discovered it."

Signs that The Author's dream of a free South Africa is coming true appear throughout *Valley Song*. The country, like its characters, is growing and changing. When old Buks

fears losing his "akkers" to the white man who is planning to buy all the land, Veronica urges him to appeal to the government, which has been "taking the land and giving it back to the people," in an attempt to right some of the wrongs committed by the apartheid-era government. As a sign that what she says is true, Veronica relates an experience she had at the post office, when Mrs. Oliphant, the black postal worker, turned away the town's white Brigadier at closing time, telling the infuriated man, "This is no longer the old South Africa, Brigadier." When Veronica's friend, Priscilla, writes her from Johannesburg, she assures her that there are plenty of jobs available, and lots for them to do, a very different situation from the one black South Africans faced only a few years before. In the cycle of life, the playwright seems to be suggesting, his work is nearing an end, and the work of the new generation, rebuilding the country, is just beginning.

Style

Point of View

Every story told has a "point of view," a perspective through which the events of the plot take on additional meaning, depending on who is telling the tale. *Valley Song* presents its audience with three different points of view at different times in the play. Abraam Jonkers, a "Coloured" South African in his seventies; Veronica Jonkers, his seventeen-year-old black granddaughter; and The Author, Fugard himself at sixty, each address the audience directly on occasion, or speak to unseen figures on the stage, and share their individual views of the play's events. Because of the characters' "soliloquies" throughout the play, they reveal more about themselves than they might have in dialogues with other characters. Taken together, they also represent three different voices on a single theme: What is the future of the "new" South Africa?

When Abraam is by himself, he talks to his dead wife, Betty, and tries to work through conflicts he is experiencing. By listening to him describe the anguish he is feeling at seeing his granddaughter grow apart from him, and worrying about what the white man who is going to buy his land might do with him, the audience gains a deeper sympathy for this sometimes stubborn old man. Having lived through the entire apartheid era and seen its devastating effects on his country, Abraam is not as optimistic about the future as Veronica, and far less trusting than she of white society. Abraam's point of view is that of a coloured man from the old South Africa: poor, undereducated, and used to being subservient to whites, but kind-hearted, well-intentioned, and supportive of his family.

Veronica actually addresses the audience directly, and everything about her manner when she does so suggests that she is much stronger and more independent than the quiet, devoted granddaughter image she presents to her "Oupa." She says things she would never say to her grandfather for fear of hurting him. "He's like a slave now to that little piece of land," she raves. "That's all he lives for, and it's not even his. He talks about nothing else, worries about nothing else, prays for nothing else." Hers is the point of view of youth in South Africa. Too young to remember the terrible past, and tired of seeing the weight of it bear down on their parents and grandparents, young black South Africans, Fugard seems to suggest, are ready to offer new hope for the future and demand a role in creating it.

The point of view of The Author, while not necessarily the most important, is certainly the most prominent in the play. Unlike Abraam and Veronica, who are voices from South Africa's historically oppressed and marginalized coloured and black population, The Author speaks from the point of view of privilege. As a white male, he has enjoyed the benefits of a good education, quality housing, access to good employment, and a share in running the government and the economy. In his direct address to the audience, he reveals the guilt he feels at being able to buy old Buks' land out from under him, and he regrets that all of the dreams he had for a changed South Africa will not come true in his

lifetime. The Author's point of view is similar to that of many whites at the time of South Africa's radical transformation from a racially segregated society into a free and open democracy: part fear, part exhilaration, and a little bit of guilt and regret along with a sense of pride and accomplishment. As an old, white South African moving out of the way so the next generation of young, black South Africans can build the future, The Author suffers from a sense of nostalgia for the way the world was, but is equally eager to see it evolve into the way he always hoped it would be.

Setting

The setting of a play has a tremendous influence on the effectiveness of its plot, themes, and characters. The location of the action, the time period in which it occurs, and the cultural characteristics of the society in which its characters live all contribute to the full impact a drama has on its audience.

Valley Song is set in the present day in and around Nieu-Bethesda, a small village tucked into a valley of the Sneeuberg Mountains in South Africa's great semi-desert Karoo region. Fugard explains in a prefatory note to his play that, like most rural South African villages, "Nieu-Bethesda is still essentially divided into two areas: the white town and the outlying 'location' populated by coloreds and blacks." In this particular rural village, there are 950 "coloured" (mixed-race) people, and only 65 whites. Despite the great changes that have been overtaking South Africa since the last apartheid laws were officially revoked in 1992, the rich, fertile farmland in the valley is still all owned by whites.

Fugard takes great care in the preface to his play to ensure readers understand that, although the Karoo region is almost entirely desert, and the sun beats down on the hot earth day after day without rain, it is nevertheless breathtaking in its beauty. He quotes Carolyn Slaughter, who said, "This is the Karoo. And for those who have lost their hearts to it, no other place on earth can compare." Seemingly, it is this contrast between nature at its cruelest and tantalizing beauty that both attracts and repels the characters in the play. The Author refers to "a glorious Karoo spring day" just after a rain, when the earth smells rich and alive with the fragrance of roses and pine trees. Although he has lived most of his life at a distance from nature, it is this promise of rebirth and renewal that has brought him back to the "real" world, to a natural setting.

Even in the countryside, however, the characters cannot escape the *time* that they live in, which is as important as the location is to the plot of the play. In the few short years that have passed since South Africa ended apartheid and declared itself a free society, many things seem to have changed. There is the promise of opportunity for blacks in the cities, and recourse to the government and the law for wrongs committed in the name of racial prejudice. Still, the playing field has not been leveled. The Author is able to drive into Nieu-Bethesda and casually write a check for the land Abraam Jonkers has tended his entire life, but will never be able to own.

Historical Context

The most significant historical event surrounding the creation of Fugard's *Valley Song* was the dismantling of apartheid and South Africa's rebirth as a free society just as the play was being produced. "Apartheid," which means "separateness" in the Afrikaans language, was the set of laws used by the white, ruling National Party between 1948 and 1992 to segregate the races in South Africa and provide different rights and privileges to each. Under the apartheid system, there were four official races: white, black, "Coloured" (mixed-race), and Asian. Only whites had complete freedom to travel and work anywhere they chose, a quality education, and the right to vote. The other races were restricted by "Pass Laws" that required them to live in specially designated "homelands" in townships at the edges of white cities, provided them with minimum education, and few opportunities for employment and improvement of their standard of living.

Apartheid came to an end when F. W. de Klerk succeeded P. W. Botha as South African President in 1989. De Klerk lifted the ban on the African National Congress (ANC), a black rights organization, in 1990, released many longtime political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, a black ANC leader who had been imprisoned for 27 years, and repealed all of the laws supporting apartheid. In 1993, de Klerk and Mandela were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for successfully negotiating South Africa's transition to a nondiscriminatory democracy, and in 1994 Mandela himself won an open election to his country's presidency.

Despite the victory of South Africa's majority black population over the unjust system of apartheid, living conditions for most nonwhite citizens of the country at the time that Fugard wrote *Valley Song* were still far from equal to those enjoyed by the former ruling white class. Relatively few nonwhites owned property. Because they had been given a poor education, the blacks and coloureds of South Africa were unable to compete for new jobs, even once they were eligible to apply for them. To complicate matters further, different political factions arose among the nonwhite groups in the country, with each fearing what the other might do if it were to win an election and rewrite the country's constitution.

In the 1994 election, 20 million votes were cast, with 63 percent in favor of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress Party. Even though it was associated with fifty years of tyranny, the National Party still managed to secure 20 percent of the votes and retain some authority in the new government. When Mandela took over as president, he faced the daunting task of trying to unite South Africa's quarreling racial parties, restructure the entire economy, provide housing and health bene- fits to millions of people, unite and improve the country's educational system, and provide new employment opportunities and economic benefits to people who had known only poverty and despair.

One of the new government's most difficult tasks, however, was trying to uncover and report all of the human rights violations that had occurred during the terrible apartheid

years. In April 1996, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was formed to investigate allegations of crimes ranging from theft and assault to rape, torture, and murder. The Commission's intent was to consider amnesty for those, both black and white, who confessed their crimes, and to provide recommendations for reparations to the victims. At the same time that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was meeting, just after *Valley Song* was first produced, South Africa adopted a new constitution that does not allow any form of discrimination based on race, gender, age, or sexual orientation, and attempts to ensure the rights of all of its citizens to a representative voice in government.

The country has a long way to go to recover from years of mishandling. Unemployment remains extremely high□approximately 40 percent of the workforce. The crime rate is terrible□about 57 in every 100,000 citizens are murdered each year, compared to 7 of every 100,000 in the United States. Millions of blacks still do not have adequate housing and, despite merging fourteen separate education departments into one unified, nondiscriminatory system, South Africa still faces a terrible shortage of teachers, textbooks, and classroom space, and a severe lack of funding to pay for improvements. Thabo Mbeki, the new head of the ANC who succeeded Nelson Mandela as president in the 1999 elections, hopes to pick up where his predecessor left off and continue reforming the troubled country.

Literary Heritage

South Africa is inhabited by a broad range of cultures including Dutch, German and English white settlers, black Africans from many different tribes across the continent, "coloreds" (people of mixed descent) and Asian people (mainly people from India and Pakistan). White colonists were first attracted to the South African coast in the eighteenth century for its abundant resources. Since their arrival, the white minority population has sought to control the black majority population of the region.

When Fugard wrote his play *Boesman and Lena* in 1969, all major black African political organizations had been banned, and blacks in the country were segregated and assigned to Bantustans ("homelands"), restricted from travelling outside these areas (except to work for whites in very limited circumstances). The minority white population by this time controlled over eighty percent of the land, all the government, and the vast majority of natural resources, though black African uprisings against white control were frequent throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The state of the arts, in particular the theater, were hazardous during this time. Although stage dramas were often less censored than were novels, television and movies (which were often banned before their public release), the laws regarding apartheid made theater production increasingly dif- ficult. Rising international protest against South Africa's apartheid policies caused many countries and playwrights to shun South Africa. At the same time (1965), new apartheid laws were passed prohibiting mixed-race casts and segregating audiences by race. By 1966, British Equity would not allow its performers to act in these conditions. As a consequence, South Africa faced a dearth of plays, performers, and touring companies. While the South African government did provide limited funding for the arts, access to these funds required adherence to the strict apartheid policies governing public per formances; because of these restrictions, many artists worked outside subsidized theater.

Some artists, such as Gibson Kent, created allblack touring groups and performed only for black audiences. Other companies (i.e., the Space Theatre and the Market Theatre) devised ways of circumventing the apartheid laws and created works with mixed race casts and occasionally mixed audiences. The segregation laws regarding casts and audiences were not repealed until 1977, during which time several notable playwrights, performers, and writers (including Fugard) had emerged against the turbulent political background. These performers are often credited with helping to raise national and international awareness of South Africa's apartheid policies.

Athol Fugard, who began (and continued) his writing career while South Africa's apartheid policies were in place, was considered by the South African government to be a "political risk." He was often censored and occasionally prevented from travel from and return to his home country. Today, Fugard is recognized in both his own country and internationally as one of the greatest living playwrights in the English language, and is credited with helping to dismantle the unjust system of apartheid through his drama. Fugard's works are characterized by his personal portrayals of tragic events in the lives

of two or three characters, often utilizing casts of mixed race characters set against difficult political, social, and economic backgrounds of South Africa. His dramas depict the devastating effects of apartheid, and represent a microcosm of South Africa as a whole.

Critical Overview

Athol Fugard has always been a multitalented theatrical artist, often acting in and occasionally directing his own plays. Never before *Valley Song*, however, did the playwright write so much of his own life into one of his plays, then choose to act two of the parts and direct himself and his co-performer. *Valley Song* premiered in Johannesburg, South Africa in August, 1995 with Fugard directing and playing the parts of The Author and Abraam Jonkers, and Esmeralda Bihl portraying Veronica Jonkers. Several months later, in October, 1995, the play opened in the U.S. at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. This production, staged in association with the Manhattan Theatre Club, also listed Fugard in the multiple roles of author, director, and actor of two parts, with Lisa Gay Hamilton as Veronica.

Fugard has long been respected by American audiences and critics as an outspoken voice against his country's unjust apartheid segregation policies, and as the author of several poetic, poignant dramas set against South Africa's tumultuous political scene over the past forty years. His accomplishments, coupled with his tour de force performance in *Valley Song*, earned him praise both at home and abroad. As Robert King reported in the *North American Review,* "He received entrance applause at its American premiere in Princeton's McCarter Theatre, a tribute to his life as well as to his art." Because Fugard the man was obviously the inspiration for The Author in his play, King noted, he received additional response from his audience when he expressed regret at leaving "the real world of the Karoo" for the "make believe world of the theatre."

Beyond Fugard's unique accomplishments as both creator and interpreter of his play, however, critics mostly expressed appreciation for his continued ability to capture the history and mood of his entire country within the struggles of a handful of people. The plight of Veronica and old Buks led several reviewers to draw comparisons between their intergenerational family struggle and the larger conflicts facing the newly liberated and unified South Africa. Reviewing the Arizona Theatre Company's 1997 production for *Arizona Arts Review Online,* Mark Turvin noted, "The transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa seems to have been a smooth one, but the subsequent new travails for blacks there are only now being discovered. With freedom comes dreams, and with dreams comes responsibility, and some of those dreams may remain unfulfilled. Mr. Fugard has brought these problems across with a positive spirit that gives the work a punctuation to all of his pieces." Critic John Bemrose optimistically wrote in *Maclean's,* "Veronica's troubled longing for the future is also South Africa's. If its determination for a better future is anything as strong as hers, it may well get there yet."

Perhaps most importantly, *Valley Song* seemed to answer a question that ran through the minds of many critics and scholars when F. W. de Klerk ended apartheid between 1990 and 1992 and black leader Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa in 1994: What would Fugard write about? He had, after all, built a career around plays that directly or indirectly attacked his country's government and policies. Not to worry. John Bemrose reported in *Maclean's,* "*Valley Song* is a watershed play for Fugard□his

first since the collapse of apartheid two years ago. Throughout his 40-year career, Fugard has drawn on his outrage at South Africa's institutionalized racism to help power such dramas as *The Road to Mecca* and *My Children! My Africa!* But the mood in *Valley Song* is different. Gone is the shadow of the police state. Freedom is in the air."

Jack Barbera, reviewing the play for the *Nation,* suggested, "Now we have *Valley Song* to demonstrate the truth of Fugard's claim that the end of apartheid would not put him out of business. He tells stories, and if the new South Africa has altered the nature of people's problems, it only means there are new challenges, new stories to tell."

The significance of placing himself, a successful white male author, in the center of this particular play's story also led critics to reflect on what the playwright may be thinking about his new role in the new South Africa. King noted, "He suggests a poignant, personal truth□that with a new day dawning for south African blacks, his day may be coming to an end." The end, however, is not meant to be final or disheartening. King continues, "It's time, *Valley Song* argues, for the white male, surely Fugard himself, to step aside, to let the black woman sing her song to the world. That song will be all the more winning for being born on native soil."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Lane A. Glenn has a Ph. D. specializing in theater history and literature. In this essay he considers Athol Fugard's exploration of what it means to be an artist in Valley Song*.*

At an early age, Athol Fugard knew he would one day be an artist. In a 1989 interview with director Lloyd Richards in the *Paris Review,* Fugard remembered the importance of music and storytelling in his family. His father was a jazz musician, as well as an avid reader and storyteller, and Fugard recalled dreaming about becoming a composer or concert pianist and writing short stories of his own as a boy. "By eighteen, by the time I went to university, I knew that somehow my life was going to be about putting words on paper," he told Richards.

After trying his hand at poetry and considering a novel, Fugard found his calling in the theater at the age of twenty-five, and since that time he has understood that his purpose in life is to create art through drama, to touch people and occasionally effect change through the living art of playwriting. "I have some sort of creative energy," the author revealed in a 1993 speech transcribed in *Twentieth Century Literature.* "I know that I am propelled, obsessed, driven to make things. That is all I understand in terms of creative energy. I think that every human being on God's earth has got a spark of that energy. Some people have great big conflagrations and furnaces burning away."

Glimpses of Fugard's own creative furnace his life and identity as an artist in South Africa can be found in several of his plays, most notably *Master Harold. . .and the Boys* (1982), a frankly autobiographical work about a family event from his teenage years. Fugard has often appeared onstage in performances of his plays, portraying the lightskinned half-brother Morris in *The Blood Knot* (1961), the angry Coloured outcast Boesman in *Boesman and Lena* (1969), and several more of his creations over the years. But never until *Valley Song* (1995) did the playwright literally insert himself into one of his plays as a character, interacting with and even seeming to control his fictional counterparts.

Like all of Fugard's previous plays, *Valley Song* presents its audience with important ideas about love, loyalty, the beauty of the land, and the importance of dreams. But the appearance of the playwright himself in the form of The Author adds a unique new dimension to the work and allows Fugard to raise whole new questions about art and those who create it. *Valley Song* asks, how is an artist made? What obligation does an artist have to his or her art? What is the value of art to society? What does an artist do when he has outlived his usefulness; when he is running out of creative energy? Through the characters of The Author, an aging white man, and Veronica, a black teenage girl, Fugard contemplates these questions and examines what it means to be an artist in a world that does not always understand the artist's craft.

As The Author, Fugard has spent a lifetime living in Port Elizabeth, South Africa and presenting his make-believe stories about real life to audiences in cities around the world. Now, past sixty years old, he has returned to the land of his birth, South Africa's

great Karoo region, to buy a piece of land and experience the "real" world for a change. He tells the audience, "A vision of a new life unfolded before me. I could see myself sitting on my stoop after a good day of writing□all prose now, no more nonsense from actors and producers and critics□sitting there on my stoop watching the sun set and admiring my land, finally at peace with myself."

Like Fugard himself, The Author is a somewhat self-satisfied white South African male, who has achieved a degree of fame writing plays that criticize the way white society has treated the non-white majority in his country. His success has given him a measure of financial comfort, and he could, if he chose, now turn his back on the troubles of the world. But he has an artist's sensitivity to the plight of other human beings. In his interview with Lloyd Richards, Fugard suggested, "If you are a true artist, you will have a very finely tuned moral mechanism." The Author's moral mechanism causes him to feel guilt at his ability to drive into the little village of Nieu-Bethesda and casually write a check for the land old Abraam Jonkers has spent his life farming, but will never be able to own because of the color of his skin. It is a dilemma he did not expect to face in the "new," post-apartheid South Africa, and it gives him pause. How successful can he really have been as an artist if society has changed so little in his lifetime?

That question has certainly bothered Fugard himself from time to time. Because his plays have always had a political undertone to them, audiences and critics have come to expect him to write dramas that are meant to change the world□a daunting task for anyone, artist or not. He maintains, however, that art continually contributes to the world around us. "Art has a role," he told Richards. "Art is at work in South Africa. But art works subterraneanly. It's never the striking, superficial cause and effect people would like to see. Art goes underground into people's dreams and surfaces months later in strange, unexpected actions."

Besides not expecting to face a moral challenge over an issue of race in Nieu-Bethesda, The Author also did not seem to count on discovering a kindred spirit□another artist□in this sleepy town in the Sneeuberg Mountain valley. Veronica Jonkers, a black teenager, has been a singer since the day she was born. Her grandfather, Abraam, remembers that as a baby she did not even cry so much as she opened her eyes wide, stretched her little mouth open and sang out loud. He tells Veronica, "Your Ouma always used to say to me: If that child ever stops singing, Abraam Yonkers, then you must know there is something wrong with the world."

And, sure enough, Veronica has been singing ever since. Like the "creative energy" that drives Fugard to write plays, Veronica sings her way through each day, and feels compelled to do whatever it takes to achieve her dream of becoming a famous performer, even though her grandfather doesn't understand why she would want to leave home and face the dangers of the world outside their valley. Veronica experiences the same initial resistance felt by many budding artists. She has a sense of purpose, and a plan for her life is beginning to unfold, but she must convince those around her who do not share her artistic sensibilities that she can overcome the odds and succeed at her craft. She pleads with her grandfather, "All I know is that when I sing, I'm alive.

My singing is my life. I must look after it the way Oupa looks after his vegetables. I know that if I stay here in the Valley it will die."

Veronica, like The Author and Fugard himself, has been given the artist's *mission:* to go forth into the world, overcome terrible obstacles, and produce the art she is uniquely gifted to create. Her gift is song, while Fugard's, and therefore The Author's, is stories. "My essential sense of myself is that of a storyteller," he revealed in *Twentieth Century Literature.* "The only safe place I have ever known is when I am in the middle of a story as its teller."

Of course, in *Valley Song* Fugard is quite literally in the middle of his story, which gives him the opportunity to express his fear that his usefulness as an artist may be nearing an end, even though all his hopes for the future have not yet been realized. "A lot of my dreams didn't come true and I saw them very clearly," The Author warns Veronica when she shares her dream of stardom with him. But she is unshakable and committed to her dream. Her artistic powers also seem stronger than his. While he is torn between the life he knew in the theater and turning to writing "simple prose," and not doing either one effectively at the moment, she is focused on her most singular talent. With a simple song she is able to bring her old grandfather back to the present when his mind starts to wander and he thinks he is talking to his long-dead wife.

The difference between The Author and Veronica is striking. The Author believes he has "just about used up all of the 'Glorious Future'" that he once had, but Veronica's future, like the future of young blacks across South Africa in the 1990s, is just beginning. As Robert King noted in the *North American Review,* "He suggests a poignant, personal truth□that with a new day dawning for South African blacks, his day may be coming to an end."

Watching your talents fade or your technique become obsolete is not easy for an artist, and, though he has admitted to fearing the day when his "appointment book is empty" and he cannot write any more, Fugard's unquenchable optimism keeps him constantly vigilant for the next opportunity his world might have to find redemption through creation. Over the years, he reported in *Twentieth Century Literature,* he has been surprised again and again by the strength of character and the resiliency of South Africa's young blacks, even in the face of terrible treatment under apartheid. "I have been moved to see the many young men and women who, with an innate instinct for decency and justice which every human being is born with. . .fight free of that system," he reported. "I have had the most unbelievably inspiring encounters over the years, with young men and women who have had every reason to hate, to resent, to be hell-bent on destruction, and who instead turn out to be individuals of love and tolerance and forgiveness."

So, like any good artist, Fugard borrowed from his surroundings and turned his life into his art. *Valley Song* becomes, in effect, the gesture of The Author, Fugard, the artist, passing the torch from his generation to the next, with every expectation that progress will be made. "The future belongs to you now," The Author tells Veronica, and with those few simple words, the world changes. As King observed, "It's time, *Valley Song* argues,

for the white male, surely Fugard himself, to step aside, to let the black woman sing her song to the world. That song will be all the more winning for being born in native soil."

Source: Lane A. Glenn, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following review of the Washington, D.C. production of Athol Fugard's play Valley Song*, Nelson Pressley overviews the play's plotline and calls it a provocative and "often elusive" politically-edged performance, characteristic of Fugard's works.*

South African playwright Athol Fugard, author of *Master Harold . . . and the Boys, Sizwe Banzi Is Dead, Statements After An arrest Under the Immorality Act* and other plays protesting racial conditions in his homeland, doesn't have apartheid to kick around anymore.

Still, *Valley Song* now at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater in a production directed by and starring the playwright, is typical of Mr. Fugard's works: It is topical, earnest and sometimes movingly lyrical. It is still informed by racial oppression□ things don't change overnight, after all. Spiritual repression, the theme of his incandescent *The Road to Mecca,* plays a big part here, too.

But the chief theme is change. At its most basic level, *Valley Song* is about a 17-year-old black girl named Veronica and her grandfather; the young girl is striding toward the future, while the old man is mired in the past.

Veronica is a free spirit who aspires to make it big as a singer. Veronica is a boisterous, fearless, funny character, and Lisa Gay Hamilton gives a very entertaining performance as she banters with the grandfather. Miss Hamilton sings with unembellished joy; her body twists with delight and her arms wave and flutter like twin flags in a happy breeze. Her Veronica comes so alive in her music that it is easy to read her as a sweet emblem of liberation.

In *Valley Song,* it isn't the government that crushes Veronica's dreams. It is Abraam "Buks" Jonkers, her grandfather, played by Mr. Fugard. For Buks, apartheid hasn't ended. He still tills the ground on land he doesn't own, and when a white writer□called the Author in the play and also played by Mr. Fugard□comes around to the property where Buks has lived and worked all his life, Buks goes hat in hand to beg to keep his place.

That prompts Veronica to call her grandfather a "useless old coloured". Buks can't understand why Veronica wouldn't want to be a domestic for the white Author□it's a living wage, after all, he argues□and their argument crystallizes a generational dispute that is complicated by the new freedoms in South Africa. Buks, whose fears are intensified by family tragedies in the not-too-distant past, simply doesn't think the way Veronica does.

"What's the use of a little dream, eh?" she asks at one point. That statement defines her, but big dreams terrify Buks. He wants to stick to the narrow world he knows, no matter how precarious it is.

The performances are exquisite. Miss Hamilton's Veronica is radiant, and it's painful to see her light dimmed by Buks. Mr. Fugard is a different sort of actor than the fluid and utterly believable Miss Hamilton. Acting with a storyteller's wily cunning, he switches from playing the Author to Buks by donning a wool cap, slowing his step and pitching his voice slightly higher.

There is a whiff of deliberate artifice to Mr. Fugard's performance that is in keeping with Susan Hilferty's set design, which features an askew curtain behind a largely barren stage.

Having one actor play both parts□the white Author and the black Buks□gives *Valley Song* a provocative and often elusive political edge. Sometimes it goads you to see how close the concerns of the two men are□their feelings for the valley are almost identical□yet there is something subversive about hearing the white man recount the black man's servile appeal to him, stocked as it is with humble, smiling "Master"s.

At such moments, the lovely, moving "Valley Song" takes on a teasing complexity that is wonderful to behold.

Source: Nelson Pressly, "Play paints picture of pain dreams emerging from 'Valley' of apartheid," in *The Washington Times,* May 5, 1997, p. 11.

Critical Essay #3

In the following review of the New York production of Athol Fugard's play Valley Song*, Jack Barbera overviews the play's plotline and examines the various ways in which the playwright is categorized by reviewers and critical essayists.*

What is clear from Athol Fugard's new play, *Valley Song*, held over at the Manhattan Theatre Club through January 21, is that the only box in which the playwright's work belongs is the stage itself, especially if the set is designed by Susan Hilferty, who has been working with Fugard for fifteen years. She has marked off a rectangular arena for the conflicts in *Valley Song* and painted it the colors of the semiarid Karoo, where the story takes place. Curtains hanging from horizontal rods at the rear are the same colors, suggesting a low line of hills in the distance and the endless vistas of the region, Where earth and sky seem of a piece. A diagonal rod flashes across the backdrop, suggesting both the divisions between the characters and also the fact that Abraam Jonkers's life is winding down at the same time his granddaughter Veronica's life is starting to take off.

But what about the boxes in which critics and scholars try to place Fugard? Is he a "regional author"? Not in the sense sometimes implied, a category in which authors are put who are mainly of interest because of the region they write about. The fascination, early in Fugard's career, with this brave voice coming out of South Africa obscured to some extent the fact that his work was powerful in its art, and not only in its subject matter. Is he a "political playwright"? Fugard's plays have often depicted life under apartheid, but they are not political pamphlets. The tight sense of Fugard as a political playwright was implied, for example, when reporters in 1990 began peppering him with variations on the question, "Haven't de Klerk and Nelson Mandela put you out of business?"

A different historical coffin in which to bury Fugard was suggested a few years ago by a scholar who concluded that it is the playwright's early collaborative work with black performers that de- fines his value in the new South Africa, "because it shows how he found the voice of the voiceless," a task presumably no longer needed now that all are free to speak for themselves. No sooner was Fugard placed in that box than South African theatergoers were viewing *My Life,* which he put together with five young South African women of different racial and social backgrounds, helping them to express their experiences, hopes and fears. Critics in South Africa praised him for this "new beginning," but, as Mark Gevisser has pointed out, some considered Fugard's recognition that "he couldn't find his own words for South Africa's new reality" an evasion. Now we have *Valley Song* to demonstrate the truth of Fugard's claim that the end of apartheid would not put him out of business. He tells stories, and if the new South Africa has altered the nature of people's problems, it only means there are new challenges, new stories to tell. By nature Fugard is a minimalist. He said recently, "I need to stay on a very specific focus and trust that the dreaded word "universal" will look after itself." For him, like Faulkner, the universal does look after itself; his characters have a resonance that makes them who they are and more.

Fugard has said that the only safe place in his life is in the middle of a story, because then he knows who he is and why he is. In *Valley Song* he has put himself in the middle of his story as a third character, The Author, who tells us about Jonkers and his granddaughter, and who interacts with each. The Author is a playwright who buys a home in the Karoo, as Fugard has done. He envisions himself at a future time sitting on his porch after a good day of writing□all prose, he says, "no more nonsense from actors and producers and critics." Fugard, too, has expressed a weariness of late with the business of playwriting, and recently published in South Africa a prose work, *Cousins*, which seems to be part of an autobiography in progress. In that memoir Fugard looks back at the influence two cousins had on his development as a playwright. The mysterious and sinister Garth one day delivered to him a confession that explained the "dark aberrations" of his character. That is my real territory as a dramatist," Fugard noted, "the world of secrets, with their powerful effect on human behaviour and the trauma of their revelation." The moment of revelation in his new play comes when Abraam admits he has opened his granddaughter's letter, and Veronica confesses her desire to move to Johannesburg, where she can take singing lessons and pursue her dream of fame. Fugard's other cousin, Johnnie, had been an accomplished piano player. On lazy Sunday afternoons as he played, images would come to Athol, who would turn diem into stories. "I have come to believe," Fugard wrote, "that those sessions with Johnnie were the first formative experiences that led to my career as a dramatist." Fugard's passion for music is evident in *Valley Song*. He wrote the lyrics of the simple songs that Lisa Gay Hamilton, as Veronica, sings a cappella. (The engaging tunes for those songs were written by a young Afrikaner musician, Didi Kriel.). Hamilton brings to her role all the expressiveness and vitality it requires, along with physical beauty and a lovely voice. Fugard's love of music is also evident in the Afrikaans hymns in the play, and in the majestic King James English of two psalms he recites simply and stirringly as The Author (Fugard also plays the Coloured Abraam).

But the importance of Fugard's having created musical stories with cousin Johnnie is not really about the incorporation of music into his plays, or his feel for the rhythms of language. The importance, Fugard noted, has to do with the ability he developed to organize and control the emotional event of a story in the way a musical composition organizes and controls the flow of thought and feeling in time. Consider, again, *Valley Song*. It opens with The Author showing the audience some Karoo pumpkin seeds and inviting us to imagine them in the hands of old Abraam Jonkers, planting them in, the soil. The Author begins to enact what he describes, and he soon becomes the old man in repartee with his granddaughter about his time as a corporal in the military.

We see their love for each other and Abraam's delight in the simple songs she makes up□but not the song about the railway bus. Years before, the bus had taken Veronica's mother to Johannesburg, where she soon died. But Veronica sees the new South Africa as a world of possibility, where Coloureds can dream big and will not have to beg menial jobs from whites, while Abraam fears the changing future and considers Veronica's singing for money to be begging from whites.

Eventually Veronica leaves. Abraam, who cannot understand her need, is devastated. His daughter died when she left home, his wife has died, he is old and now he will be

alone. And yet the ending is surprisingly upbeat, and it is a perfectly believable surprise. Fugard orchestrated it from the start with those seeds. Abraam will not be left "slumped in defeat and misery," The Author tells us. That would be "a dishonourable discharge from life," and Abraam is "an honourable old soldier." His love for the land tempts him to go and plant again, and his rebirth is like the everyday miracle of a dry, hard seed bursting into life.

The conflicts between Abraam and his granddaughter are not a matter of right and wrong but of different perspectives. There is reason to be concerned for Veronica's future: An unrealistically big dream can lead to bitterness. But if she does not pursue her dream she may suffer a death of the spirit. South Africa today is a country filled with people whose situations mirror those of Veronica and Abraam, and whites like The Author, who fears he will become one of the "pale, frightened white faces looking out on a world that doesn't belong to them anymore." The future offers promise and danger. But *Valley Song* is as timeless as it is timely, a story of the old fearful of change and the young with their hopes and impatience, and of a teller of stories, "that most ancient of all the arts," as Fugard notes in *Cousins*. *Valley Song* is a story without a right or wrong, but it has a point of view in seeing its characters with love. That loving gaze, that celebratory presentation, is pure Fugard.

Source: Jack Barbera, "Valley Song," (theatre review) in *The Nation,* Vol. 262, No. 4, January 29, 1996, p. 35.

Critical Essay #4

In the following review of the production of Athol Fugard's play Valley Song*, Robert L. King, in outlining the plotline, writes that he sees the plot as an allegory for Fugard's own writing career, diminishing now as his role the need for his work decreases.*

Athol Fugard gets four credits in the program for his new play, *Valley Song*-he wrote it, directed it and played two of the three parts. He received entrance applause at its American premiere in Princeton's McCarter Theatre, a tribute to his life as well as to his art. The play, despite Fugard's personal involvement and commitment, ultimately submerges the author's self in an allegory, one in which he passes the creative torch to the first generation to mature after the formal end of apartheid in South Africa. Fugard plays "The Author, a White man" and Abraam Jonkers (or Buks) "an old Coloured tenant farmer"; both men have deep attachments to the land and both see it as fecund, literally so to the farmer and metaphorically to the creative writer. In the latter role, Fugard provoked appreciative chuckles when he said that he left "the real world of the Karoo" where there is no "nonsense" for the "make believe world of the theatre." Throughout his career, Fugard has worked the resources of that make believe to question and undermine the appearances of civility that authorize discrimination. In his collaborations with John Kani and Winston Ntshona (*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*), in *The Blood Knot* and in *Master Harold*, Fugard displays, through theatrical convention, costume and role-playing, the socially acquired nature of racism, its conventional behavior. Whites learn how to dominate; blacks to accommodate, sometimes preserving a measure of dignity with irony. In *Valley Song*, however, digging, saluting, dancing and other actions are performed more to illustrate the acts themselves than to invite questions about their deeper significance. Similarly, speeches of simple exposition are delivered straight out to the audience. On a basic level of creativity, Fugard forsakes subtlety for clarity while on a higher level, he suggests a poignant, personal truth□that with a new day dawning for South African blacks, his day may be coming to an end.

With the house lights up, Fugard entered carrying pumpkin seeds; he mimed the digging and planting of Buks, the tenant farmer and his alter ego. As Buks, he spoke of hearing the valley sing in its springtime promise of new life. His granddaughter's singing is also a *valley song*; her voice fills the theater several times in the play. She, Veronica, wants to leave the valley to become a singer in Johannesburg; she does not want the job that Buks would have her take, doing housework for the White Author. She hopes for a better future after apartheid: "Isn't it supposed to be different now?" So far, though, everything is "just the same," and the young woman's talent is frustrated: "I am also a living thing, you know. I also want to grow." As this kind of clarity is delivered, it completely occupies our attention, while on reflection such lines can be heard in a larger context which deepens their meaning. Fugard himself had blacks technically listed as his house workers so that they could write, act and "grow." As White Author, Fugard would "own a piece of the Karoo" even though the tenant farmer has worked that land with his hands and can probably make a stronger moral claim to it. One has title from "a piece of paper"; the other has the legacy from a father who structured his life on land, house and Church. At the end, the white man invites Buks to plant pumpkin seeds with

him; to him, the Karoo's creative potential is sensual and immediate it smells and feels better than a woman. Now, after apartheid, the two older men are joined by a common enterprise for the first time and can find fulfillment in the Karoo. Veronica, reminiscent of the young Fugard, is being pulled away from it so that she can flourish artistically: "I'll die if I have to live my whole life here." In an echo of The Master Builder, the young woman's enthusiasm prompts the old artist to say that he once had a dream of his own.

At one point, Buks can't quite sing an aria he learned while guarding an Italian prisoner of war; at others, he has no problem with hymns learned in Church. In contrast, Lisa Gay Hamilton sings Veronica's new songs with an exuberance and sincerity that refute the heritage of an imposed culture. It's time, *Valley Song* argues, for the white male, surely Fugard himself, to step aside, to let the black woman sing her song to the world. That song will be all the more winning for being born in native soil.

Source: Robert L. King, "Valley Song," (theatre review) in *The North American Review,* Vol. 281, No. 2, March-April, 1996, p. 45.

Topics for Further Study

Athol Fugard has spent much of his career as a playwright creating dramas that tell powerful stories about the lives of individual people, while at the same time criticizing South Africa's unjust system of apartheid. Read a Fugard play written before 1990, during the apartheid era, such as *Master Harold . . . and the Boys* or *My Children! My Africa!* How is Fugard's work from this time different from *Valley Song*, a play written for the "new" South Africa? How are the two plays similar? Consider such things as each play's setting, characters, and dominant themes.

In literature, a *symbol* is something that represents something else, and is often used to communicate deeper levels of meaning. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous novel *The Scarlet Letter,* for example, the red letter "A" worn by Hester Prynne is a symbol not only of her supposed crime (adultery), but also of her neighbors' bigotry and her own courageous pride. Like many playwrights who write about important *ideas,* Fugard relies on many symbols in his work to communicate deeper levels of meaning to his audiences. In *Valley Song*, one of the more important symbols is the land in the Sneeuberg Mountain valley where Abraam and Veronica Jonkers live, and where The Author has chosen to retreat in his old age. Examine all the ways the land is viewed by the characters, and explain how it becomes an important symbol in the play.

The word "apartheid" means "separateness" in the Afrikaans, or Cape Dutch, language of South Africa. Apartheid was used as a social and political tool by the ruling National Party from 1948 to 1994 to divide the races in South Africa and provide separate treatment for each. Research apartheid and how it affected the lives of blacks, whites, "Coloureds," and Asians living in South Africa. How might this system have affected Abraam Jonkers' lot in life as a rural coloured man? What benefits might The Author have received as an urban white man? What challenges is Veronica likely to face in Johannesburg as a young black girl, even though apartheid has officially ended?

Dreams are important in one way or another to each of the characters in *Valley Song*. What do each of the characters dream about? How does each character try to achieve his or her dream? How likely is each characters' dream to come true?

What are some of the ways *age* and *youth* are important to *Valley Song*? Consider such things as how the young and old characters view things differently, the importance of the past to the events of the play, and how the passage of time is affecting racial politics in South Africa.

What Do I Read Next?

Fugard has written nearly two dozen plays. All of them are set in his native South Africa, and many share some of the same qualities: intimate, small-cast, poetic dramas set against the beauty of the South African countryside and the tragedy of its politics. Fugard's first big success, *The Blood Knot* (1961), is about two half-brothers, one black, the other nearly white but technically "colored," and the effects of apartheid on their lives. In *Master Harold. . .and the Boys* (1982), a young white South African boy learns some lessons about family, love, and dignity from the two black servants in his parents' café. *My Children! My Africa!* (1989) explores the devastating effects of anti-apartheid demonstrations and township riots on a black teacher and two of his students, one black, the other white.

August Wilson's 1985 Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Fences* is set in Pittsburgh in the 1950s, before the Civil Rights movement in the United States provided African Americans greater equality in education, employment, and standards of living. Like *Valley Song*, *Fences* depicts an intergenerational conflict that is rooted in the past and revolves around issues of family loyalty and racial divisions. Troy, a former baseball player in America's "Negro League," refuses to let his son, Cory, take advantage of a college football scholarship, because he doesn't believe white society will give him the opportunity to actually play.

Susan Glaspell's 1916 play *Trifles* is a murder mystery with a twist. A farmer in rural New England has been strangled to death in his sleep, and the local sheriff and attorney are convinced his wife did it, but they cannot find a motive. While the men poke around the farmhouse looking for clues to the crime, the women remember the wife, Minnie, as she used to be: a pretty young girl who loved people and especially loved to sing. Her husband changed her by keeping her at home, in a cold farmhouse set back off the road away from people. Like Veronica in *Valley Song*, Minnie had a spirit that would not be beaten by people who did not believe in her, and could not be contained in a world that would not let her sing.

Novelist James A. Michener has written several books of historical fiction, including *Hawaii*, *Alaska*, and *Mexico*. In *The Covenant* (1980), Michener explores the tortuous history of South Africa from the arrival of the first European immigrants in the fifteenth century through the creation of the modern South African nation and the tragedy of apartheid. The saga combines fact with fiction and focuses on Willem van Doorn and ten generations of his descendants as they struggle through the country's colonization, the Great Trek, the Boer War, and other important, defining events in South Africa's history.

Norman Silver's 1993 collection of stories *An Eye for Color* is narrated by Basil, a Jewish teenager living in Capetown, South Africa. Basil's tales reflect the world around him, organized by apartheid, where common events take on new meaning because of the rigid class structure system and race laws governing his country. In one story, Basil tells his girlfriend about a beating he saw two blacks endure, and she responds that

they must have provoked it. Basil sees a young girl get reclassified from being white, with all its attendant privileges, to being black, which means she must move from their neighborhood and attend another school. This collection is particularly aimed at teenage readers.

Further Study

Brockett, Oscar G., *History of the Theatre*, 8th ed., Allyn and Bacon, 1998.

Brockett's *History of the Theatre* is a comprehensive volume, covering more than 2,000 years of worldwide theatrical tradition. Of special interest, however, is "The Theatre of Africa," a new chapter the author added with the seventh edition of this highly respected theater sourcebook. In this chapter, Brockett covers the history and performance traditions of Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zaire, and countries all across the African continent, including the Republic of South Africa.

Fugard, Athol, *Notebooks 1960-1977*, A. D. Donker, 1983.

Fugard began keeping notebooks of his thoughts and experiences in 1959 when he and his wife traveled to Europe. His first entries became the basis for his 1960 play *The Blood Knot*, and ever since the brief sketches and ideas he has recorded in his notebooks have provided him with the characters, plots, and themes of his plays. This collection of Fugard's notebooks covers the first half of his career, from the creation of *The Blood Knot* through a production of *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1977.

Gray, Stephen, ed., *Athol Fugard*, McGraw-Hill, 1982.

This collection of scholarship about Athol Fugard is part of the "South African Literature Series" and contains a chronology of events in the playwright's life, reviews of his plays, critical essays, interviews with the author, and an extensive bibliography suggesting additional resources for study.

Thompson, Leonard, *A History of South Africa*, Yale University Press, 1996.

Thompson writes about the entire history of South Africa, from its earliest known inhabitants through the present day, with an emphasis on the black majority population.

Waldmeir, Patti, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa*, W. W. Norton, 1997.

Waldmeir is a journalist who became acquainted with Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk, the two men primarily responsible for the dismantling of apartheid, and witnessed the events leading up to the integration of South African society and restoration of political power to that country's black majority. In *Anatomy of a Miracle* she uses interviews and eyewitness accounts to tell the story of the end of apartheid from the unrest of the early 1980s through Mandela's release from prison and inauguration as president in 1994.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) 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, LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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

LDNfS 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 Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS 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 Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS 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.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS, 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 Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS, 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 Literature of Developing Nations 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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