

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL VISION IN
FOUR SELECTED PLAYS BY ATHOL FUGARD**

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Ph.D. 000305/112/04803

**A PH.D THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN LITERATURE OF
MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY**

APRIL 2014

ABSTRACT

This study springs from the premises that when an artist writes, he or she does so for an audience in a certain environment not only for that time but also for the future. At that particular time however, what he/she has are the current issues at hand but the same issues may be used to address others later as they may recur in other forms. The study's main objective is to examine the vision, artistic judgment in four plays written by the leading South African playwright, Athol Fugard. The plays under study are: *Hallo and Goodbye* (1965); *The Island* (1972); *Master Harold and the Boys* (1982) and *Blood Knot* (1987). The texts have been examined in relation to the playwright's social vision as revealed through his characters and style in the four texts. The study is grounded in the semiotics theory. This broader theory presupposes that literary works are artistically crafted based on certain signifiers that are meant to communicate the signified. Thus situations and the characters in Fugard's plays are treated as symbolic signifiers that communicate the playwright's concerns and artistic vision. The study's rationale lies in the realization that many critics who have studied Fugard's plays have concentrated on thematic studies mainly. This current study is invaluable for it introduces a new approach to studying Fugard's drama and thus benefits readers of African drama and more specifically South African literature. Our findings indicate that by use of different dramatic techniques Fugard is able to make artistic judgment on socio-political issues that affected different races in South Africa during the apartheid regime. His vision is communicated through the techniques of characterization, controlled experiment and others. The techniques allow him to communicate his vision of a better South Africa in terms of social mobility and human relationship; respect of human beings irrespective of skin colour. The findings also reveal that Athol Fugard deliberately places his characters in confined settings so as to explore their inner impressions; feelings that arise out of the warped system of apartheid. The study concludes that the playwright does not only aim at showing the physical and psychological effects of the apartheid ideals and values on South Africans but more significantly reveals his artistic judgment, his social vision through the exposition, complication and the denouement of the dramatic action. The researcher recommends more comprehensive studies on Fugard's dramatic techniques and also comparative studies with other African playwrights.