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| **Your article** |
| **Fugard, Athol (1932- present)** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Athol Fugard has been a novelist and memoirist[[1]](#endnote-1) (of sorts), but is best known for his pioneering political work in the theatre as writer, director, and actor. He was often all three at once, as in the case of *Blood Knot* (1961, 1987), upon which extensive revisions to his original script emerged during his time as one of the play’s leads. A South African by birth, Fugard focused many of his most famous works on the meanings and consequences of Apartheid. These political explorations owe a debt to Bertolt Brecht in both form and desired effect. |
| Athol Fugard[[2]](#endnote-2) has been a novelist and memoirist[[3]](#endnote-3) (of sorts), but is best known for his pioneering political[[4]](#endnote-4) work in the theatre as writer, director, and actor[[5]](#endnote-5). He was often all three at once, as in the case of *Blood Knot[[6]](#endnote-6)* (1961, 1987), upon which extensive revisions to his original script emerged during his time as one of the play’s leads. A South African[[7]](#endnote-7) by birth, Fugard focused many of his most famous works on the meanings and consequences[[8]](#endnote-8) of Apartheid. These political explorations owe a debt to Bertolt Brecht[[9]](#endnote-9) in both form and desired effect.  Fugard’s very Brechtian modernism returns its focus again and again to performance (often race as performance) and language (particularly the material nature of language). Characters in his plays frequently become play actors themselves, with their stacked performances aimed at opening a Brechtian rift (or eliciting a modernist shock) that forces audience interrogation[[10]](#endnote-10) of the very ideas of reality and performance. *The Island* (1972) features two political prisoners performing *Antigone* and debating whether costumes[[11]](#endnote-11) work to entrance or estrange. Even *“Master Harold”…and the boys[[12]](#endnote-12)* (1982)—a largely autobiographical work—examines the shifting dance of personal, professional and power relationships alongside the preparation of a performance for a dance contest[[13]](#endnote-13). *Blood Knot* premiered the same year as Samuel Beckett’s *Happy Days[[14]](#endnote-14).* Like that play, it makes a performance of daily life, utilising the same intrusive ringing (physically represented as an alarm clock) to structure and cue movement, moments or scenes of the day and the beginnings and ends of playacting and elaborate fantasy. The character Morris specifically cites whiteness as a performance, rooted in more than the mere costume of white skin:  Look, Zach, what I’m trying to say is this. The clothes will help, but only  help. They don’t maketh the white man. It’s that white something inside you, that special meaning and manner of whiteness. I know what I’m talking about because … I’ll be honest with you now, Zach … I’ve thought about it for a long time. And the first fruit of my thought, Zach, is that this whiteness of theirs is not just in the skin, otherwise … well, I mean … I’d be one of them, wouldn’t I? Because, let me tell you, Zach, I seen them that’s darker than me. (103)  The play itself centres on Zachariah’s linguistic performance of whiteness through letters[[15]](#endnote-15) he exchanges with a white woman, but this leads to a confrontation between Zach and his brother Morris about their radically different skin tones and what performances are available only to the light-skinned Morris.  It is perhaps this play that most closely ties Fugard’s Brechtian attention to performance to the attention to language more frequently associated with modernist prose and poetry. Critics like Dennis Walder draw attention to Fugard’s modernist “theatrical language”: “Words are only part of what Fugard defines—in terms borrowed from Ezra Pound—as his crucial ‘image’: the ‘presentation of a psychological and emotional complex in a moment of time.’ Movement, gesture, the ‘sub-textual’ penumbra of dialogue: all contribute to a theatrical language often most eloquent when it is silent” (*ix*-*x*). But we would be selling Fugard short to ignore his specific attention to language itself. *Blood Knot* explores language’s role as vehicle of performance, but also as material object capable of expressing physically as much as symbolically:  Zachariah: *Ja*. They call a man a boy. You got a word for that, Morris?  Morris: Long or short?  Zachariah: Squashed, like it didn’t fit the mouth.  Morris: I know the one you mean.  Zachariah: *Ja*, then say it.  Morris: Prejudice.  Zachariah: Pre-ja-dis.  Morris: Injustice!  Zachariah: That’s all out of shape as well. (74) Selected Plays *Blood Knot* (1961)  *The Island*, with John Kani and Winston Ntshona (1972).  *“Master Harold”…and the boys[[16]](#endnote-16)* (1982).  *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*, with Kani and Ntshona (1972). |
| Further reading:  (Shelley)  (Walder)  (Wertheim) |

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/oct/31/once-upon-a-life-athol-fugard> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.uiowa.edu/~fyi/issues/issues1999_v37/02182000/images/Web-200/Athol%20Fugard.jpg> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/oct/31/once-upon-a-life-athol-fugard> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/30/fugard-attacks-modern-dramatists [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.juilliard.edu/live/index.php and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzd9nxX0e9E [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. http://theater2.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=9406E2D9173BF932A25751C1A963948260 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.npr.org/2012/08/02/157732975/playwright-fugard-bucked-south-africas-racist-ideas [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturevideo/stagevideo/8110409/Athol-Fugard-why-I-wrote-The-Train-Driver.html [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertolt\_Brecht [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/theatre/2012/02/27/120227crth\_theatre\_als [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.iainfisher.com/fugard/athol-fugard-island-4.jpg [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. http://theater2.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=9504E6DC1738F936A35756C0A964948260 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. http://turbula.net/2003-winter/images/theater\_year\_twelve.jpg [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. http://ta.thet.net:16080/~Chapin/HumanNaturePage/StudentWebPages/Beckett%20Page/Pics/billie%238.jpg [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. http://www.bloomberg.com/photo/-blood-knot-/152257.html [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. http://www.theaterscene.net/ts/articles.nsf/0/6f5350df974b671f85256d3a00537284/Body/M2?OpenElement [↑](#endnote-ref-16)