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**Meditations on culture, land, and memory
in the drama of the new South Africa**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____

Date: 16 November 2010

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Abstract

This work deals with the current state of the South African theatre; it focuses primarily on “white” theatre: scripted plays with a single author produced for mainstream South African and international theatres. This study examines the historical, political, and social forces that have brought about a period of pronounced turmoil in the post-apartheid South African theatre; it then explores how particular playwrights have engaged with key crisis points in their society. This dissertation focuses on four plays, one from the late 1980s—Pieter-Dirk Uys’ *Just Like Home*—and three from the first decade of the 21st century: Lara Foot’s *Reach*, Craig Higginson’s *Dream of the Dog*, and John Kani’s *Nothing But the Truth*. Other plays are drawn on briefly for comparison.

The theme of the study is “places” of whiteness, as it explores how, in the new South Africa, identities are shaped by different ideas of place: temporal, cultural, and physical. Key questions arise from each of these places. Debates about land, public versus private identities, the right to belong, guilt and forgiveness, and reconciliation across cultural boundaries are addressed, if not fully resolved, in all of the plays under discussion.

The study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides historical background for the works under discussion, highlighting the debates currently taking place about the state of South African arts and culture. It then lays out theoretical frameworks that will be useful for analyzing these plays, in particular Peter Brook’s discussion of the deadly theatre, Bertolt Brecht’s aesthetic models, and Raymond Williams’ analysis of subjunctive dramaturgy. The second chapter compares Uys’ play, which displays the exhaustion of struggle theatre aesthetics, with Foot’s work, which seeks to find a new, post-apartheid “aesthetic of the ordinary.” By doing so, Foot’s work posits a model of reconciliation through care that, although flawed, is nonetheless worthy of analysis. The third chapter turns to Higginson’s and Kani’s plays. Drawing parallels with the work of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, this chapter explores questions of guilt, memory, and forgiveness; this provides a foundation for a further exploration of the redefining of identities in the new South Africa. The final chapter highlights the strengths and weaknesses of all four plays, each of which is only partially successful as a dramatic work. While emphasizing the contributions of all four plays to the task of building the new South Africa, this chapter also outlines the work that remains to be done in the South African theatre and suggests possible ways forward for later generations of theatre artists.

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CHAPTER 1
States of Emergency:
South African Theatre, 1994-2010

“Theatre is always a self-destructive art, and it is always written on the wind” (Brook 18).

The theatre is, by nature, perpetually in crisis. The nature of the crisis may change, just as the art form itself evolves swiftly in response to a combination of social, political, and artistic forces: “life is moving, influences are playing on actor and audience, and other plays, other arts, the cinema, television, current events, join in the constant re-writing of history and the amending of daily truth” (Brook 19). The aesthetics of the theatre evolve continually as we imagine and re-imagine ourselves and our society. Simultaneously, the sense of the theatre as a threatened space—an art form of which the status and purpose are questionable, with its very existence tenuous and contested—remains constant. The fluidity of the form and its capacity for constant reinvention are at once the foremost strengths and the Achilles heels of live theatre.

Brook writes in response to one particular crisis: the dominance of “deadly theatre” in England and America in the mid-twentieth century. This “deadly theatre” is a stagnant one, created by a combination of economic pressures, structural constraints, and artistic complacency. Brook suggests various strategies for rejuvenating the deadly theatre but ultimately concludes that no book can present a prescriptive “solution” for all time. Rather, constant searching, invention, and reinvention must be the work of the dedicated theatre artist.

Historical parallels

Ironically, the roots of Brook’s deadly theatre can be found in a period of particularly fruitful crisis and reinvention in the English theatre, the Restoration. Restoration drama emerged from an era of political and social turmoil; under Oliver Cromwell, the Puritan government of the Protectorate had closed down the thriving theatres of the pre-war era—the

theatre that witnessed the birth of modern English literary drama in the works of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and their contemporaries. With the monarchy restored, the ban on theatrical entertainments was lifted. While this 18-year closure of the public theatres did not represent a complete break in the theatrical tradition (particularly as private performances did occur during the interregnum), a number of practical changes instituted by the government of King Charles II spurred a period of rapid change and creative fervour (Hume 7).¹ Rather than a liability, the fact of emerging from and existing in a state of crisis proved to be the source of this theatre's strength.

While socially liminal, the Restoration theatre was very productive artistically. The creation of a patent monopoly—with patents granted to two impresarios—and the limitations imposed by a relatively small potential audience spurred competition and creativity (Hume 17). This made the Restoration stage a fertile place for artistic experimentation. As the social and artistic purposes of the theatre had not yet been firmly fixed in the national imagination, the stage became an interstitial space in which competing moralities, political systems, and social constructs collided with one another. The resulting fluidity allowed musicians, dancers, actors, writers, and designers to explore new relationships between music, text, and spectacle, resulting in the production of at least one unique genre—the semi-opera—as perfected by Dryden and Purcell in *King Arthur* and other works.

In addition to re-shaping genres, the crisis of the Restoration prompted a thorough reinvention of the aesthetics of the theatre. The destruction and repurposing of the round pre-war theatres under the Commonwealth government allowed Restoration dramatists to re-imagine the architecture of the theatre itself, which resulted in the development of the modern proscenium theatre. This new design was, in part, the result of the introduction of the elaborate moveable scenery formerly used in court masques—an innovation pioneered by William Davenant, one of the two patent holders (Hume 21). These developments led to an

increasing reliance on visual spectacle and illusion, while distancing the audience from the action on stage. As a result, the relationship between actor and audience became far less intimate.

The political and social upheaval that reordered the space of the stage also became material for the drama of the period, which wove discussions of key social crisis points into the fabric of public spectacle. Gender was one of these contested areas. During the Restoration, women appeared on the stage for the first time in English history, a shift which—combined with the distancing effect of the proscenium arch—resulted in an increased sexualisation of actors and a growing cult of celebrity.² While the dramas of Shakespeare have provided one of the pillars of the English literary cannon, the Restoration—rather than the Elizabethan—theatre was the crucible in which the modern Anglo-American stage was formed. Many of the characteristics which Brook identifies with the “deadly” modern English and American theatre first appeared in this period, including the use of rectangular proscenium theatres, an emphasis on visual spectacle and “realistic” illusion, and the glamorization of actors.³

Different time, different place, similar problems

I begin with this discussion of Peter Brook and the Restoration theatre not to distract from the topic at hand—which is contemporary South African theatre—but to emphasize the fact that this theatre is not alone in its sense of existing in a perpetual state of crisis. Like the Restoration theatre, the contemporary South African stage is the product of a discontinuous tradition scarred by political and social strife. As Chris Dunton notes in his 1999 review of recent developments in South African theatre:

Theatre in South Africa has always been extremely heterogeneous and subject to drastic breaks in continuity... In other words, fragility and volatility have historically long been written into the fortunes of theatre in this country (121).

As in the Restoration theatre, recent political and social turmoil have exacerbated the sense of fragility and crisis always inherent in theatre as an art form, so that the inherent heterogeneity of South African theatre—a reflection of the country’s mix of languages and cultures—has never been more pronounced than in the theatre of the post-apartheid era. In the aftermath of the most drastic and celebrated socio-political transformation in the country’s history, South African theatre has entered a period of profound economic and artistic crisis. In contrast to the current theatre, the theatre of the 1960s-80s appears strikingly stable.

On the one hand, the advent of democracy promised new opportunities for South African artists. The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology⁴ celebrated this promise in its White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage, noting that “for the first time in the history of our country, all arts and culture practitioners have the right to participate in creating public policy and structures which directly affect their lives and livelihood” (South Africa, “White Paper”). Developed in consultation with a broad representation of South African artists, the White Paper sought to reaffirm the central role of the arts in the life of the new South Africa, in which “access to, participation in, and enjoyment of the arts, cultural expression, and the preservation of one’s heritage are basic human rights” (South Africa, “White Paper”). Building on this premise, the White Paper laid out an ambitious plan for the transformation and renewal of arts-related infrastructure.

This promise had degenerated to disappointment a decade later. In the introduction to his 2003 volume of interviews with leading South African theatre practitioners (a follow-up to a 1996 interview collection), Rolf Solberg notes that a “prevailing attitude in theatre circles is disappointment with the miserly funding of theatre by the Ministry of Arts and Culture” (6). John Kani, at the time director of the National Arts Council (NAC), attributes this failure to the fact that “there is no serious thinking at the highest level of government about the role of arts and culture” (Kani, Interview 203). Of the limited funding available to the department,

a large share continues to go to the established urban institutions like the ARTSCAPE Theatre in the Cape Town and the State Theatre in Pretoria, both of which are former parastatals of the Apartheid era. As a result, the NAC is left with a budget of only R25 million, although it receives R200-300 million in requests for funding (Kani, Interview 194). This, combined with dwindling audiences and competition from film and TV, has produced a financial crisis for theatre practitioners in both mainstream and alternative venues.

A crisis of purpose

The crisis in funding of the post-apartheid years has gone hand-in-hand with a crisis in purpose. The vibrant “struggle” theatre of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s was predominantly focused on combating a single enemy—the apartheid regime—by bearing witness to its atrocities, conscientising the masses, and inciting resistance.⁵ With this enemy defeated, “the moral conviction that sustained several generations of theatre activists and cultural workers ... has given way to a variety of not-quite-compatible political persuasions and cultural practices. [As a result,] theatre in South Africa is now more diverse but also more conflicted” (Kruger, *Drama of SA* 21).

Lack of money, failures of government funding, and incomplete institutional transformation are core issues cited by almost every practitioner and academic interviewed in Solberg’s collection; while theatre professionals seem to agree that the current situation is untenable, they offer widely divergent suggestions as to potential ways forward. Dramatist and educator Fatima Dike believes, first and foremost, in the need “to put theatre back into our communities—by hook or by crook” (Dike 77). In contrast, Thuleni Mtshali argues that, in fact, “there is quite a lot happening at the grass-roots level;” unfortunately, this work does not receive adequate publicity because large institutions like the Market Theatre and the NAC continue to monopolize public attention (Mtshali 159). Others, among them Reza De Wet and Roy Sargeant, see the crisis primarily as an aesthetic—rather than political or economic—

problem; De Wet, for example, explains that she is primarily concerned with “the re-enchantment of theatre, which has become very terrible and very pedantic” (De Wet, Interview 178). Depending on background, training, and experience, practitioners call for more or less engagement with politics; request lesser or greater amounts of government intervention; and lament either the failures of large-scale transformation or the inability of individual artists to take responsibility for their livelihoods. Ideas regarding the nature and purpose of theatre in a democratic South Africa are as diverse as the cultural composition of the society itself.

Art and culture as instruments of nation-building

The crisis of purpose in the contemporary South African theatre is one manifestation of a larger debate regarding the nature and function of cultural production in a young democracy. The arts, as defined in the White Paper, are “all forms and traditions... which serve as a means for individual and collective creativity and expression;” the arts comprise one domain of culture, which “refers to the dynamic totality of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features which characterize a society or group” (South Africa, “White Paper”). According to the White Paper, “cultural expression and identity” are among the “most pressing issues” facing the new South Africa; as an instrument of cultural expression, art thus becomes a contested space, in which competing ideas of the “new” South Africa collide with one another.

Towards the end of 1989, as the promise of a democratic South Africa first appeared on the horizon, Albie Sachs ignited a fierce debate—“on the threshold of expression anyway” (de Kok, *Spring* 11)—about the nature and purpose of post-apartheid art in his address “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines,” given at an ANC cultural seminar.⁶ The speech begins with a meditation on the future of South African nationhood:

We all know where South Africa is, but we do not yet know what it is. Ours is the privileged generation that will make that discovery, if the apertures in our eyes are wide enough. The problem is whether we have sufficient cultural imagination to grasp the rich texture of the free and united South Africa that we have done so much to bring about; can we say that we have begun to grasp the full dimensions of the new country that is struggling to give birth to itself, or are we still trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination? (Sachs 187).

It is time, he argued, to begin imagining a new, free, and unified South Africa. In order to move towards this goal, the idea of art as a “weapon of struggle” must be relinquished; instead, art must become a means of reinforcing a common humanity. “What are we fighting for,” he asks, “if not the right to express our humanity in all its forms, including our sense of fun and our capacity for love and tenderness and our appreciation of the beauty of the world?” (Sachs 188). This is a shared but not homogenous humanity. Sachs emphasizes the diversity of South African culture: “the dance, the cuisine, the poetry, the dress, the songs and riddles and folk-tales belong to each group, but also belong to all of us” (Sachs 191). Unity-in-diversity, rooted in a shared national pride, must become the foundation for the new national identity.

While it provoked divisive arguments, the paper also “promoted direct conversation between people within the broad cultural community who had hitherto had limited interchange,” so that it “has had a unifying effect even as polarities...become starker” (de Kok, *Spring* 11). All would agree that the fall of apartheid, which radically reshaped South African culture, necessitated a re-thinking of the place of art within this culture. As is apparent from this debate, ideas of what this place should be are diverse and often incompatible with one another.

Ensuing developments in South African art and letters indicate that these conflicting voices have not yet come together in the process of answering this question; Sachs’ ideal of unity-in-diversity remains an elusive goal. Consequently, the role that theatre can and should play in shaping the new South Africa is still a highly contested issue.

Theatre as a social art

Theatre, more so than any other genre in the fine arts, is comprised of communally produced forms; it is an art created for and by a community within a defined social space at a discrete moment in the history of the group. In contrast, the subject of the novel is the interiority and formation of the individual. According to Lukács, the novel “comprises the essence of its totality between the beginning and the end, and thereby raises an individual to the infinite heights of one who must create an entire world through his experience” (83). The novel is a complete cultural artefact whose production and content are located within easily defined boundaries; created and experienced primarily by solitary individuals, the novel may deal with epic sweeps of history and social development but is given final shape by the subjectivity of a solitary creator and reader. In the world of the novel, the individual is both exemplar and creator of his social condition.

A drama, in contrast, may evoke the “poetics of loneliness” but nonetheless requires “a high degree of communion among these solitaries” (Lukács 45). A play is a cultural artefact with highly permeable boundaries, as the written play text itself—if there even is one—is only the starting point or trigger for a complex process of cultural production. In his study *Reflections in a Fractured Mirror: Theatre and Society in South Africa*, Temple Hauptfleisch illustrates the complexities of this process in the diagram with which he opens his analysis. Drawing in part on models from communication theory, he uses a large and detailed flow chart to indicate the multiple levels of input into each stage of the production process, from script development to final performance. Any performance will necessarily reflect the subjectivities of a diverse array of individuals. In this analysis, theatre is a social mirror in which we are reflected back to ourselves: “the artist, the medium, the artwork and the receiver of the artwork... may all be said to display aspects of their time and their environment in their work, for they have each been shaped by that particular society”

(Hauptfleisch 2-3). A play, then, is the product of complex communal negotiations, in which diverse individual understandings of a time, place, and society are brought to bear on the shaping of a single work. In contrast to the novel, the central subject of theatre is the formation and expression of group, rather than individual, identities; the communal experience of live theatre allows visions of a particular society to be shared between actors and audience members.

The subjunctive power of theatre

The theatre is a space in which we can come to see and know ourselves as we, as a society, truly are. Yet theatre does more than reflect the conditions of its making, complex as they may be. Theatre also possesses a “subjunctive power:” the ability to imagine ourselves as we could, should, or would like to be. Loren Kruger, in the introduction to her thorough account of modern South African theatre history, *The Drama of South Africa*, provides a succinct illustration of the twin powers of theatre to reflect social reality and to imagine social possibility. She begins with an account of the inauguration of Nelson Mandela on 10 May 1994:

At the center of the proceedings was the swearing in of the president who took the oath of office “in the presence of all those assembled here” while standing in a small pavilion...the official enactment of the new state and its representative actors in the privileged space was, however, framed by performances outside, which preceded, succeeded, and accompanied the act of inauguration itself.

The other performances may have lacked the indicative force of law of the act of inauguration but carried nonetheless the subjunctive power of prayer, prophecy, play, or occasionally doubt about the resolution of conflict in this drama of South Africa (Kruger, *Drama of SA* 1).

The official moment of inauguration marks the actual transferral of power; it is a reflection of concrete political change. Reproducing this moment on the stage reinforces this important historical moment in the collective consciousness of the country. In contrast to this concrete enactment, the surrounding pageant presents a myriad of imagined versions of the nation, in

which desires and fears are enacted in the hope that they will be realized or averted. The swearing in is an indicative representation, while the surrounding pageant presents subjunctive enactments.

Kruger's definition of the subjunctive mode of realist drama originates in the work of Raymond Williams. In his analysis of Brecht, Williams posits the realist-subjunctive as a practical strategy for the representation of seemingly insoluble social problems. "A drama which is indicative... may have to represent a social situation in which at one level or another all roads [to solutions] have been blocked," (Williams 218) in which case the subjunctive mode offers a means of exploring potential solutions. The result is "not realist in the indicative sense of recording contemporary reality, but in the subjunctive sense of supposing a possible sequence of actions beyond it" (Williams 218-9).

In the works of Brecht, a single event may be played more than once, with different results ensuing after each iteration. In the course of repeating the action, the representation "allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar;" these effects are "designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today" (Brecht 192). These devices are implemented in the hope that, by "making the audience take stock of the elements in a situation, the theatre was serving the purpose of leading its audience to a juster understanding of the society in which it lived, and so to learning in what ways that society was capable of change" (Brook 82). It is through this mechanism—alienation and self-reflection—that a play in the subjunctive mode achieves an indicative power.

In the subjunctive mode, a play originates in the present but extends to imagine one (or several) potential future(s). The play in the subjunctive mode has the driving force of "prophecy or prayer"; at the same time, the disconnect between the desired future produced on stage and the actual social reality known to the audience—a form of alienation effect—

should ideally inspire critical examination in those watching the play. This could in turn spur those present to work towards implementing the desired social changes.

The subjunctive mode in South African theatre

The ideas of Brecht, Brook, Williams and other Marxist critics have had a dominant influence on South African theatre practice and criticism. Three of the handful of book-length studies on recent South African theatre—Loren Kruger’s *The Drama of South Africa*, Martin Orkin’s *Drama and the South African State*, and Robert Kavanagh’s *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*—are either heavily influenced by Marxist theory or explicitly Marxist in stance. The use of Brechtian devices is also readily apparent in South African struggle theatre and its descendants; Athol Fugard, for one, was heavily influenced by the work of Brecht.⁷

The permeating influence of subjunctive dramaturgy on South African performance in the past and present is readily seen in the public pageants and festivals that have marked transitional moments in South African nationhood, from the 1952 Jan Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Celebrations to Mandela’s inauguration and the 1995 Rugby World Cup. In her insightful analysis of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1995 World Cup, Jacqueline Maingard traces the ways in which these internationally televised celebrations sought to represent the “‘imagined community’ of a ‘new’ South African nation” (16). The confused and at times conflicting images from these ceremonies came closer to the subjunctive force of “a mythic enactment of a collective identity that has yet to be realized” than to an indicative representation of actual South African nationhood (Maingard 28). While pleasant, this idealized image of a South African unity-in-diversity threatened to reduce the “complex and sometimes incompatible experiences of South African-ness to representations of cultural, ethnic, racial, and occupational diversity, manageable within the broad framework of the definition of South Africa as a ‘rainbow nation’” (Maingard 17). An enactment of a viable

and realistic South African future—one with the potential to transition from the realm of the subjunctive to the indicative—would need to account for the complexities of and conflicts between the many different South African identities. It is in this area that the South African theatre has a potentially crucial role to play.

Divergent traditions

In his address, Albie Sachs called upon South Africans to imagine a new and unified future; he emphasized that any unity would arise from a fundamental recognition of the nation's heterogeneity rather than a false, homogenizing multiculturalism. In creating a subjunctive imagining of South Africa's future, theatre practitioners will need to account for South Africa's diverse presents. It is for this reason that Temple Hauptfleisch refers to the South African theatre as a "fractured mirror," in that each work's "glimpse of reality [is] partial and skewed" by the particular cultural situation of the community creating it (Hauptfleisch 168). The divisive history of Apartheid has exacerbated the divisions between communities in South Africa, making the fractures in the mirror more pronounced. Today, the "paranoia of uncertainty facing the country is eloquently conveyed by a theatre system in disarray" (Hauptfleisch 169).

This "disarray" or "fracturing" is evident in current trends in the South African theatre. "Identity" or "issues" plays—in which the concerns of a particular group or community are enacted on the stage—continue to proliferate. A striking 86% of straight theatre works presented at the 2010 Grahamstown National Arts Festival Fringe used original South African scripts (or workshop pieces); a further 6% were the result of South African "re-imaginings" of foreign scripts. Out of these plays, 64% dealt primarily with contemporary South African issues, including gender, race, HIV/AIDS, crime, corruption, poverty, and the soccer World Cup. Although Grahamstown is primarily an English-language festival, 52% of

plays used another South African language as well as English, with eight official languages and two unofficial languages represented in total (“National Arts Festival Booking Kit”).⁸

The sheer diversity present at the festival—and in South African theatre in general—makes a comprehensive summary or definition of a “current South African theatre” nearly impossible; there are as many South African theatres as there are South African identities or South African histories. Although at times overwhelming, this splintering of purpose and focus is both positive and necessary. While contemporary South African theatre may lack the political purpose that unified struggle theatre, contemporary practitioners are beginning to use their hard-won freedom to explore a wide array of personal, political, and social questions—beginning “to grasp the rich texture of the free and united South Africa.” The heterogeneity and “confusion” of the contemporary theatre is a necessary phase in the development of both a new South African aesthetic and a new definition of South African nationhood.

This being said, there is a fine line between productive heterogeneity and a fatal splintering into segregated identity groups—the “multiple ghettos of the Apartheid imagination.” A central point of contention is the divide between “Afrocentric” and “Eurocentric” cultural practices, a recurring theme in commentary on South African theatre. Discussing the work of his company, Theatre for Africa, Nicholas Ellenbogen remarks that the company is Eurocentric “in discipline...but our work process is very African. We are workshoppers” (Ellenbogen 95). The Eurocentric theatre is portrayed as organized, efficient, and disciplined; the Afrocentric theatre is, by implication, chaotic. The Afrocentric theatre relies more on communal and collaborative approaches to creation, while the Eurocentric theatre favors the single author and the well-made script.

These descriptions are based on flawed essentialist premises. On the one hand, neocolonial essentialism “diminishes African theatrical practices by finding them incompatible with European ideas of the theatre;” at the same time, this “has provoked in

some Africanist circles an equally tenacious ‘ontologization’ of an essential Africanness” (Jeyifo 37) which “reverses but does not radically challenge neocolonial essentialism” (Kruger 16). As William Kentridge points out, these “categories become very difficult and very problematic,” as processes of cultural hybridization are unavoidable: “by now... playing the cello is as much an African birthright as playing the marimba” (Kentridge 242-3).

To posit that there are essentially “European” and “African” theatres within South Africa ignores the hybridity of the South African experience, in which the production of culture “takes place between and within practices, forms, and institutions variously and contentiously associated with Europe, Africa, America, and—to complicate the standard oppositions—African America” (Kruger 17).

These essentialist divisions between incompatible polarities do more harm than good; at the same time, the idea of a “single” South African theatre is as simplistic a concept as that of the “rainbow nation.” South African theatre may be neither Eurocentric nor Afrocentric, but divisions between “black” and “white” theatre remain firmly imprinted in the minds of practitioners. This distinction becomes clear in debates over authenticity, as authors struggle to decide who has the authority to tell which story in the new South Africa. In discussing the work of Brett Bailey, Duma ka Ndlovu remarks that whites “should work in close collaboration with blacks if they are going to tell black stories;” otherwise, the resulting artwork will lack authenticity (ka Ndlovu 274). All South Africans may take pride in one another’s cultures—they “belong to all of us”—but only members of a particular culture possess the authority to tell the stories of that culture. How, then, can theatre artists reconcile a need for unity with an equally necessary recognition of diversity? As John Kani suggests, the ultimate goal of South African theatre practitioners should be to imagine themselves as rooted in a specific culture that is also part of a national identity; South African theatre should

make people “begin to say I am a South African first, and then I’m Xhosa, I speak Xhosa, I have a Xhosa culture” (Kani, Interview 198).

In an art form that thrives on constant reinvention, periods of pronounced turmoil and uncertainty can prove uniquely productive ones. Like the English Restoration theatre, the strength of the new South African theatre—defined primarily by its fluidity, heterogeneity, and crisis of purpose—lies in its weaknesses. Paradoxically, the very lack of purpose and liminal status that many practitioners lament in fact gives South African artists a unique freedom to invent and reinvent ideas of themselves, their theatre, and their country while exploring some of the most troubling points of crisis and contention in their society.

“White” theatre and social crisis

One of these crisis points is the place of white South Africans in the new South Africa and the role that formerly-white institutions should play in the political and artistic life of the country. For the South African theatre, this crisis manifests itself not only in a continued dissatisfaction with the distribution of resources to former parastatal theatres but also in the content and form of plays written by white South Africans.

This thesis will focus primarily on investigating one particular vein within the modern South African drama: “white” theatre, or published plays, often by South African authors of European descent, designed for performance in mainstream theatres. Four representative works—three from the past decade and one from the late 1980s—will be discussed: Pieter-Dirk Uys’s *Just Like Home* (1988), Lara Foot Newton’s *Reach* (2007), Craig Higginson’s *Dream of the Dog* (2007), and John Kani’s *Nothing But the Truth* (2002). Additionally, works such as Reza De Wet’s *African Gothic (Diepe Grond)* and Nicholas Spagnoletti’s *London Road* will be drawn on for comparison. These works, in theme and structure, interrogate the place of a European heritage in the new South Africa and explore the insecurity and instability underlying formations of identity in the new South Africa.

Places of whiteness

The social crisis points which these plays reflect—and which some, exercising a subjunctive power, attempt to work through—fall roughly into three categories. The first area of concern is the nature of remembering and the impact of historical events on the present. Several of these plays probe the limits of what can and should be remembered, investigating ideas of collective and individual memory and guilt. These histories and memories have, in turn, helped to shore up cultural divides. Exploring ways to bridge divides between European and African modes of being and to reach across deeply ingrained social barriers are preoccupations of all of these works. Thirdly, questions regarding land arise in several of these plays. As a source of power and status, land is a focal point for debates about national transformation and the transfer of resources. Land is also an important source of self-definition, with the authentic South African identity being rooted in the physical expanses of the country itself. In his inaugural address, Nelson Mandela dwelt extensively on ideas of the land as a unifying force for South Africans of diverse backgrounds: “each one of us [South Africans] is intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country...each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal” (Mandela). At the same time, the White Paper on Arts and Culture identifies “access to land” as one “of the most pressing issues of our time,” along with cultural expression and language rights; all three of these issues are closely linked (South Africa, “White Paper”). Debates about land—as well as the change, distortion, and perversion of relationships to land—figure strongly in these plays as metaphors for the social and individual identities of white (and black) protagonists.

The subject of this study is the “place” of whiteness; each of these thematic areas can be defined as a different kind of place: temporal, cultural, or physical. The project of all of but one of these plays is, at least in part, how to relocate a “white” identity—grounded in a historically powerful Western paradigm—within a context in which this paradigm is no

longer the dominant one. This problem is further complicated by the fact that the claims to cultural superiority and moral rectitude that historically formed the foundation of this identity have now been fatally undermined. The subjunctive futures enacted in response to this crisis point are often at best ambivalent.

John Kani's *Nothing But the Truth* is an exception to this rule, in that it offers a more positive and hopeful conclusion. While white identity is not an overt theme in the play, it is included in this discussion for several reasons. First, it is an influential play, seen by many critics as a work that provided a new direction for South African theatre (Wintersteen 364). Second, the play can be said to be "white" in form, if not in content. Third, the play shares several thematic concerns with the others under discussion, including a preoccupation with truth and memory and a portrayal of tensions between African and European values and identities. Finally, this play offers a contrasting vision to the largely pessimistic conclusions drawn by the other works discussed here and thus provides a useful illustration of the divergent possibilities alive within the South African theatre today.

The second chapter of this study, "Crossing Borders, Crossing Boundaries: Pieter-Dirk Uys's *Just Like Home* and Lara Foot-Newton's *Reach*," explores the links between physical place, personal history and national identity. In this chapter, the influence of national borders on the formation of identity—and the impact of crossing these borders—raises important questions of authenticity and belonging in pre- and post-Apartheid South Africa. Although divergent in theme from Lara Foot's work, Dirk-Uys' play is an important predecessor to all of the works in this study, as it displays the exhaustion of struggle theatre aesthetics that inspired critics and practitioners to search for a "new" theatre in the years following democracy. *Reach*, in which imagination and care are explored as possible sources of reconciliation, is one result of this search. Foot's play also raises important questions about land ownership, identity, belonging, guilt, and forgiveness.

The third chapter, “Memories, Truths, and Dreams: Craig Higginson’s *Dream of the Dog* and John Kani’s *Nothing But the Truth*,” investigates questions of truth, trauma, and reconciliation. These concerns are interwoven with an exploration of the nature of memory: both how memory is linked to the formation of individual identity and how collective memories—and from these, collective histories—are formed. In both works, the collision of competing memories and histories brings about a final catharsis, although this process is left partially unresolved in Higginson’s play. In these plays, the excavation of memory is closely linked to the preservation and invention of rites of mourning. In Higginson’s play, questions of memory and guilt are written into the landscape itself, provoking an important discussion of the future of South African landscapes. Both works also build on the ideals and aesthetics of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to explore the life of the past in the present and the limits of confession and forgiveness as sources of healing.

Chapter four returns to the key questions raised in this chapter: what is an “authentic” South African identity that can bind together South Africans of diverse backgrounds and cultures? What role should theatre play in shaping this identity? What is the place of a “white” identity within South Africa’s national identity? This chapter explores the steps these plays have taken towards answering these questions while also highlighting the equally important shortcomings of all four works.

Like the English Restoration theatre, South African theatre exists in a state of emergency, undergoing a profound period of crisis as it struggles to reinvent its aesthetics and redefine its purpose. For this reason, although often unsatisfying, the contemporary theatre in South Africa has the potential to become an artistically vibrant and innovative place. The four plays discussed in this study illustrate both the possibilities and the pitfalls of this theatre. In their choice of subject, these playwrights tackle the challenges of the transition to a post-apartheid South Africa and highlight the issues that will remain focal points for the

country well into the 21st century. Yet none of the works is as successful or as innovative a drama as it could be. Rather than exemplary models, these plays represent transitional experiments that, in their shortcomings as much as their successes, indicate the many paths open to South African theatre artists today and the many subjunctive futures available for exploration.

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CHAPTER 2
Crossing Borders, Crossing Boundaries:
Pieter-Dirk Uys's *Just Like Home* and Lara Foot's *Reach*.

The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society...for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated...a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt, and revenge...there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimisation (South Africa, Epilogue 5).

How to achieve such reconciliation and heal, in little more than a decade, the wounds of several hundred years of conflict? For South Africa's government, the answer was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC or Truth Commission hereafter), born from this epilogue to the interim constitution; despite on-going debates about its processes and results, the TRC has provided a wealth of material—in terms of both content and structure—for South African theatre artists seeking to address the concerns of reconciliation in their own works.

In the words of Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, South Africans must “embark upon the journey from the past, through the transition and into a new future” (South Africa, “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission” 6). To achieve reconciliation, one must begin with an understanding of the past from which the present and future will emerge. Understanding the past is itself a project of constructing and describing identity, “because who we are is fundamentally linked to memory” (Mda, Introduction viii). For this reason, this chapter begins with a discussion of history and identity, a necessary prelude to further discussions of guilt, confession, and reconciliation. An analysis of Pieter-Dirk Uys' play *Just Like Home* highlights some of the troubled contradictions in South African identities and ideas of home. This play also provides a useful illustration of the artistic crisis from which contemporary South African theatre is struggling to emerge. The overly theatrical spectacle of this work displays the exhaustion and sterility of struggle theatre aesthetics, an exhaustion that resulted

in part from the exportation and ensuing commercialization of this genre. Ironically, Uys ridicules such commercialization and exploitation in his play.

Njabulo Ndebele's analysis of South African arts and letters explains the causes of this exhaustion. Writing in the years immediately prior to the transition to democracy, Ndebele suggests a way forward through the "rediscovery of the ordinary." Lara Foot, in her play *Reach*, moves towards such an "aesthetics of the ordinary." Like *Just Like Home*, *Reach* deals with questions of identity, alienation, and belonging. While *Reach* does explore similar themes, it provides a necessary antidote to the exhaustion and cynicism represented by Uys' play. Its subject matter—the interracial friendship between an ageing white woman and a younger black man—locates this work within a larger body of South African writings. Yet *Reach* is more than a mere "genre" play; for the most part avoiding cliché, it offers a nuanced and thoughtful analysis of the role that care can play in promoting healing and reconciliation, while touching on key concerns of land, cultural barriers, trauma, and guilt.

Satire and alienation in *Just Like Home*

Although best known for his work as his satirical alter-ego, Evita Bezuidenhout, Pieter-Dirk Uys has also written a number of plays that use humour and satire to produce pointed political commentary. *Just Like Home*, written in 1988 during the State of Emergency, presents a comic narrative about unlikely friendships formed between South Africans of different ages and races living in exile; in this work, the experience of foreignness, which brings about a temporary reprieve from the social and political structures of apartheid-era South Africa, allows unlikely confrontations between different South African "types" to take place. In their interactions, the play's three South African characters explore ideas of alienation and belonging, as each pits his or her idea of "home" against the others' conceptions.

Just Like Home is set in the apartment of Cathy September, a coloured woman from Cape Town who, after years of working in London, is preparing to return home. Her apartment holds a magnetic attraction for three other exiles: Hector, a white South African escaping conscription in the South African armed forces; Gupta, an Indian immigrant and Cathy's upstairs neighbour; and Trevor, Cathy's nephew, an ANC cadre fleeing the South African Police. The two young South Africans both see themselves as "political" exiles. Hector, a conscientious objector of sorts, claims to have been tortured by the army. Trevor, thought by his family to be dead, has undergone an arduous seven-month journey through Africa to reach Cathy's apartment. Hector finds his way to Cathy through nostalgia: he enjoys a South African curry she makes at Gupta's Indian restaurant and comes into the kitchen to express his thanks. Trevor, on the other hand, bursts into Cathy's apartment at the end of Act I out of necessity, alone and impoverished in a foreign country.

The contrast between the two young men highlights one of Uys' central questions: what is the "reality" of the South African situation, and who has the authority to define this truth? Uys poses this question in the opening scene of the play, during which a young white man (Hector) appears to be interrogating a bound prisoner:

Black bastard! Four innocent people you killed! A little girl whose birthday was going to be tomorrow, won't be...because of you, you terrorist animal!
(Uys 185).

The interrogation quickly veers into the grotesque:

Two old ladies were out buying food for their cat and an old dog called Rambo, who will now not be fed or stroked again because of you, you communist murderer! (Uys 185).

With the name "Rambo," the first hint of comedy emerges in what could otherwise be a brutal "documentary" scene of apartheid South Africa. The interrogation unravels, as Hector has to check his lines with his script, and Cathy, complaining about being uncomfortable, becomes unwilling to continue the charade. What appears at first to be a brutal interrogation turns out to be no more than a young and inept actor practicing a poorly written script.

In this opening scene, Uys sets up the expectation that this will be another “real-life” story of South African horrors, like many popular South African plays exported during the 80s. He then immediately disappoints this expectation, undermining the brutality of the scene with a comic reality. Here, Uys employs Brecht’s alienation effect: “cutting, interrupting, holding something up to the light, making us look again” (Brook 81). While our initial reaction to this violent scene is horror, Uys’ “mockery destroys our first response” so that truth and validity “are both put into question...and at the same time our own easy sentimentality is exposed” (Brook 81).

In theory, this device should create “an appeal to the spectator to work for himself, so as to become more and more responsible for accepting what he sees only if it is convincing to him in an adult way” (Brook 81). While the alienation effect at the beginning of *Just Like Home* offers an initial humorous shock, the following play does not offer material that is “convincing...in an adult way” (Brook 81).

Uys gestures to the idea that his audience should reconsider their own conceptions of what a “South African play” is and should be. Indeed, many of the plays’ characters are openly critical of the foreign media’s voyeuristic depictions of violence and brutality in South Africa. While he ridicules the trite conventions of such “documentary” drama, Uys presents no viable alternative; instead, his work becomes mired in the very clichés and “spectacular” aesthetics that it seems, on the surface, to criticize. In style, Uys’ play mirrors Brook’s “rough theatre,” which is at once popular and sharply critical of social norms; in the latter area, Uys falls short. By not rigorously interrogating his aesthetic choices, Uys fails to produce the vital, down-to-earth and sharply irreverent social commentary that Brook locates in this type of theatre.

Authenticity and narrative authority

The alienation device of the opening scene is replayed later, during a confrontation between Hector and Trevor, in which Trevor rewrites Hector's script to create an "authentic" torture scene. Their interactions prior to and during this scene highlight one of the play's central questions: what is the "authentic" South African story and who has the authority to speak on such a subject?

When Trevor arrives, Hector, applying for political asylum himself, is anxious to establish his credibility as a moral, politically motivated exile. Trevor is equally defensive in his attempts to undermine Hector's assertions of similarity:

TREVOR: Ah, another one dodging the call-up?

HECTOR: Political exile. It's okay, we're on the same side.

TREVOR: How come?

Pause.

HECTOR: Because of what they did to me in the Army. Eh, ask Cathy. I'm anti-apartheid, aren't I, Cathy?

TREVOR: 'Anti-apartheid'? Hell, I wish I'd thought of that—when my parents were treated like shit by you whites; when your family and friends aimed their guns at my family and friends and fired—even then I wasn't 'anti-apartheid'; I was just scared, man, fucking terrified! (Uys 215).

Trevor's scathing commentary reduces Hector's principled political stance to a mere verbal smokescreen; Hector uses the label "anti-apartheid" to avoid guilt and responsibility. Hector, who sees himself as a principled victim, is now recast as the privileged oppressor. In Trevor's eyes, Hector is no better than the wealthy white South African exiles for whom Cathy formerly worked. Cathy's opinion of her former employers is scathing:

Everybody here is a so-called refugee who nearly brought down the government back home...I never thought I'd meet so many people here who fought apartheid there. Pity they didn't stay at home and do it properly (Uys 189).

Having left South Africa behind, each "so-called refugee" tries to re-invent his identity in order to avoid the burden of guilt. Unfortunately, the presence of alternative perspectives undermines these attempts to re-write their identities.

Within apartheid South Africa, racial and political identities were sharply defined by government policy; in the diaspora, these identities suddenly became far more fluid. Having left behind apartheid norms, South Africans in exile were forced to reinvent their ideas of themselves, their relationships to one another, and their attitude towards “home.” As Hector recognizes in pleading with Trevor, identity is constructed through the view point of others, so that “without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition” (Hall 8). The desire to reinforce a “South African” identity binds exiles together; hence, Cathy, homesick and nostalgic, indulges Hector’s whims rather than criticizing him for the same flaws she sees in her former employers.

For exiles, “identity is always a question of producing in the future an account of the past, that is to say it is always about narrative, the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and where they came from” (Hall 5). In the case of the South African diaspora, this “narrative” is complicated by the fact that different groups offer competing stories. Hector believes that “there’s a new South Africa” (Uys 216). Trevor contradicts him, saying that the war has just begun; now it is time for “house-burning raids into your nice white suburbs to remind you people of democracy” (Uys 216). Cathy refuses to see the violence at all; instead, she clings to a nostalgic image of the past. In local documentaries on Cape Town, she sees “Table Mountain and us coloured people in Adderley Street selling flowers and all talking like my family and friends” (Uys 189). Behind the “barricades over the road,” she notices “where our dog Phyllis used to sleep in the sun and stop the bus,” lamenting that the “rioting must’ve messed up so many pretty little gardens, with kids jumping over the walls to hide from other kids” (Uys 195-6). While Hector and Trevor debate different versions of a “new” South Africa, Cathy remains firmly rooted in the past; none of these competing visions emerges as a clear “truth.” Gupta, an exile of different origin, provides an outsider’s perspective on the debates between the three South Africans, emphasizing that South Africa

is not the only country to undergo such struggles. Taken together, these four characters illustrate how the crossing of borders, which eliminates the pressure of an “official” narrative, allows a range of competing narratives to proliferate.

The “truth” of South Africa

As Gayatri Spivak notes in an interview discussion of authenticity and tokenization in diasporic groups, the real “problem” is a “question of representation, self-representation, representing others” (63). In battling over definitions of themselves as South Africans, Hector and Trevor return to the same questions of alienation and narrative authority raised by the opening scenes of the play:

TREVOR: You can stand in front of the Embassy with a banner and then go for a safe beer. Where I come from, where he came from, banners mean jail, blood not beer.

HECTOR: I’d say it must be hard work having to act up a good riot for every TV camera that points your way (Uys 215).

In this exchange, they criticize one another’s “selling out” to foreign conceptions of South Africa in an attempt to undermine each other’s claims to authenticity. Each argues that the other is presenting a false, theatrical image in order to garner international attention by “telling the world all the usual shit that makes people’s mouths water for more,” thereby turning the plight of millions of South Africans into voyeuristic entertainment (Uys 217).

When he “re-writes” the torture scene in Hector’s script, Trevor asserts that he offers the “truth” of what the situation in South Africa is “really like,” as opposed to the watered-down theatrical version in which Hector participates.

TREVOR: You think this is torture?

HECTOR: This is torture!

TREVOR: This is just chatting, man! You want me to show you torture?

HECTOR: No!

TREVOR: But then you know what it’s really like...after what they did to you?

HECTOR: After what they did to me...yes... (Uys 231).

Hector's hesitation reveals that Trevor has succeeded in undermining Hector's claims to "authentic" South Africa persecution. Shaken, Hector later confesses to Cathy that "it wasn't that terrible" (Uys 238).

While Trevor's analysis is accurate, the overall narrative, in which the true-spirited revolutionary illuminates the hypocrisy of the guilty white liberal, is presented in too simplistic a fashion in Uys' play. The zeal with which Trevor preaches "equality in hatred and violence" seems oddly childish and shallow. This lack of depth becomes clear in his exchanges with Hector, which are full of contrived wit:

TREVOR: No buts. We suffer, you suffer. We die, you die.

HECTOR: Fifty years of Beirut.

TREVOR: Victims and victors.

HECTOR: Me and you.

TREVOR: Or you and me. Anything can happen when there's equality in hatred and violence (Uys 216).

Their banter continues, revealing that both are strikingly immature. While Trevor seems to "win" at the end of the play, particularly as Cathy decides to stay in London in order to take care of him, Trevor's analysis of South Africa and its future is not any more convincing than Hector's; rather, Uys relies on a hollow revolutionary rhetoric to reinforce Trevor's claims to authenticity. While Cathy highlights Trevor's immaturity when she remarks that he's "got a schoolchild's taste in junk food" (Uys 223), Uys does not offer any further criticism of Trevor's position; Uys refuses to pick apart Trevor's weaknesses with the same rigor with which he attacks Hector's attitudes. By shying away from more thorough criticism and instead relying on angry rhetoric and clever word play, Uys undermines the strength and durability of his argument.

Metaphors of home

In contrast to Hector and Trevor, Cathy offers a view of South Africa that is based more on a idealized vision of "home" than on the brutal "reality" that Hector and Trevor debate. The mountain, the flower sellers, the trees and gardens of Athlone: these are images

of the past; in the present, this place is now a setting for violence. Cathy's nostalgia for this past shapes her understanding of her self. Unfortunately, "identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed" (Hall 14); by founding her idea of home on a lost past, Cathy stifles any possibility of imagining a viable future. Instead, she imagines a "home" that will miraculously be transformed into a peaceful home for all.

Any sadness, horror, or loss has been expunged from her image of the past. While she makes a long and somewhat preachy speech on her family's forced relocations, her words are strangely devoid of bitterness, anger, or sorrow. Her speech is cleverly knit together—a recurring image of a cardboard box ties her past together with her present—but oddly hollow. With its over-literary construction, it reads more as a token gesture to the suffering of the "disadvantaged" than as an actual character history.

Cathy's South Africa is a defining idea rather than an actual place; in this respect, it is like the Africa imagined by the African diaspora in the Americas, which served as "a metaphor for where they were" (Hall 13). In Hall's analysis, such a metaphor of "home" should allow members of a diaspora "to find a language in which they could re-tell and appropriate their own histories" (13). Cathy's failure to re-appropriate her own history in her narrative is striking. Rather, her family history is used to present a voyeuristic depiction of South African suffering that is little better than the images of the international media that are decried throughout the play.

An "ideal" place

Cathy longs not for an actual place but for a fixed and unchanging idea of herself, as embodied in a lost but imagined version of her country's past. She seems unable to exist fully outside this static construct; despite years in London, she remains literally suffocated by the foreign environment, gasping and wheezing with asthma throughout the play.

In the programme notes for the original 1988 production of the play, Uys included the following statement: “you always have a perfect picture of somewhere you thought you were once happy...somewhere it’s always perfect and quiet and warm, because you’re not there” (Gray 181). South Africa, for Cathy, is just such an imaginary home, and it is the idea of return rather than an actual potential future that gives her strength. She does not realize this return, nor does she need to. Return does not yet seem possible for any of the exiles in the play, given the political conditions in the country.

As Michael Echeruo notes in his study of the formations of diaspora, exiles are united by a claim to the right of return; the binding power of this idea “lies in the principle of it: that a return is possible forever, whenever, if ever” (14). In an inversion of this idea, authenticity for Uys’ “political” South African exiles lies in the fact of *not* being able to return. According to Trevor, Hector would “be welcomed at the airport like a long-lost son of the Volk” (Uys 217). The idea of such a “disgraceful” return is a source of division rather than unity. The “true” South African patriot is necessarily stateless; “home” is a place to which you can’t go back.

Without a solid ground in which to anchor their sense of themselves, Hector and Trevor remain in a state of arrested development. Both are extremely immature, unable or unwilling to grow up. Uys’ vision of South Africa’s present and future seems grim. Mired in either nostalgia or revolutionary rhetoric, his characters are unfit to construct a new idea of South Africa. Their personal failings illustrate larger failings of the society that shaped them. While the play offers a scathing indictment of the South Africa of its day, such an analysis becomes dated in light of later developments in post-apartheid South Africa. The future Uys envisions in *Just Like Home* is bleak; South Africa’s actual future was not so grim, nor does it need to become so as the country moves forward into the 21st century. Furthermore, all characters in the play are more or less caricatures: humorous but ultimately flat types. The

dialogue between characters is often trite and uninspired, and their interactions lack depth and richness. As a result, the play is an amusing but not a moving work.

In *Just Like Home*, the crossing of national boundaries creates a space in which South Africans of different ages, races, and backgrounds can interact on equal terms. In such a space, meaningful and illuminating debates could take place; unfortunately, these debates never happen. The use of alienation devices and overly theatrical rhetoric, the fact of insufficient character development, and the presence of several extraneous and contrived plot devices, such as Gupta's being beaten by a gang of racist thugs near the end of the play, produce a drama that is little more than clichéd and cynical representation of a brutal and sterile South African reality.

The spectacular and the ordinary

The ideological and dramatic failings of the play are the result of aesthetic exhaustion. In his insightful analysis of South African literature in the late 1980s, Njabulo Ndebele points out that, while once necessary and vital, the aesthetic developed for struggle literature had outlived its usefulness by the end of the decade. In much struggle literature, "a highly dramatic, highly demonstrative form of literary representation" was developed in order to highlight the "overwhelmingly oppressive South African social formation" (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 31). This aesthetic provided an effective way to explore the "spectacle of social absurdity" that was Apartheid government policy, which was striking in its "triteness and barrenness of thought" and "almost deliberate waste of intellectual energy on trivialities" (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 33).

The "spectacular" aesthetic of struggle literature evolved in response to the banal cruelty of the apartheid government. The spectacular aesthetic "documents; it indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details" (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 41). Ndebele

acknowledges the usefulness and necessity of the spectacular, which “is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness” (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 41). Yet this aesthetic is not a lasting one; it outlives its usefulness because “its tendency either to devalue or to ignore interiority has placed it firmly in that aspect of South African society that constitutes its fundamental weakness,” namely the aggressively public nature of this society, in which individual interiority is too often sacrificed to exterior pressures (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 42).

Just Like Home, with its contrived plot and lack of rich interior development, illustrates the failings of this aesthetic. Uys’ play is aggressively outspoken on the “right” issues but ignores the subtleties of its characters’ lives. He produces political diatribes that are loud but not insightful. While the aesthetics of the spectacular served well to empower the powerless, Uys is not a member of “the powerless,” nor does his play provide the kind of illumination that Ndebele calls for. Instead, Uys uses this aesthetic to give his play the surface appeal of political right-thinking at the expense of richer and more nuanced commentary.

Moving Forward

As Ndebele notes, the spectacular had outlived its usefulness by the end of the 1980s. In place of this sterile and problematic aesthetic, Ndebele calls for a “rediscovery of the ordinary,” through which the subtleties and complexities of “everyday” experience can be rigorously interrogated. The aesthetic of the ordinary is not apolitical; rather, it offers a way of approaching political concerns through a personal lens. The ordinary “is sobering rationality; it is the forcing of attention on necessary detail” (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 46). By ignoring such detail, which should constitute the fabric of his characters’ lives, Uys displays an artistic immaturity on par with Trevor’s and Hector’s emotional and political naïveté. *Just Like Home* illustrates the flatness, sterility, and artistic bad faith that helped to provoke the

sense of crisis in the post-apartheid theatre. In contrast to Uys' work, the three plays discussed in the remainder of this study represent, with varying degrees of success, attempts to "rediscover the ordinary." While none of these works is free of artistic flaws, all three offer far more acute and relevant social commentary than that found in *Just Like Home*.

Written almost twenty years after *Just Like Home*, *Reach* explores new ways to heal the wounds left by a continued legacy of violence. In this play, Lara Foot offers a vision of reconciliation rooted in the particulars of the interactions between two precisely drawn characters. While the crossing of national borders provided characters with a shared sense of alienation in *Just Like Home*, in *Reach*, two individuals who have been alienated from their own communities must find a way to address one another across cultural divides. Their ability to cross these boundaries through acts of caring catalyzes a process of reconciliation.

***Reach* and its genre**

Marion Banning, the protagonist of *Reach*, is one manifestation of a recurring archetype in South African literature: the solitary, ageing white woman (or man) who has been abandoned by her children and must now confront a chaotic, changing, and often violent society. Examples of such protagonists abound in the literature of the late- and post-apartheid years, appearing in works as different in tone and intent as J.M. Coetzee's novels and Nicholas Spagnoletti's popular play *London Road*, winner of the 2010 National Arts Festival Standard Bank Gold Ovation Award for theatre. Both *Reach* and *London Road* incorporate several of the same conventions: long-distance communication with émigré children is often used in place of internal monologue; the proximity of violence threatens the security of the home, while encroaching illness offers a parallel threat to the sanctity of the body; and an unlikely relationship with a younger, non-white man or woman, across boundaries of class as well as race offers the possibility of healing and renewal. The larger problems of

reconciliation and healing in the new South Africa are represented in microcosm in the interactions between these characters.

In terms of seriousness and substance, *London Road* is a far cry from *Reach*. In contrast to the cynicism of *Just Like Home*, *London Road* offers a saccharine celebration of the “rainbow nation.” While Uys’ characters have no home to return to, Spagnoletti’s South Africa offers a picturesque home for all. *Reach* lies somewhere in between these two works, offering neither the feel-good celebration of *London Road* nor the pessimism of *Just Like Home*. Read in dialogue with these works, *Reach* appears as a nuanced, thought-provoking, and ultimately optimistic meditation on cultural divides, history, truth, and reconciliation.

London Road: World Cup fever and the rainbow nation

London Road presents a sentimental and celebratory vision of the “rainbow nation” at its best. In this respect, it is reminiscent of much World Cup advertising, such as the BP television advertisements which featured different South African stereotypes battling it out on a soccer field under the slogan “Beyond 2010 there’s a nation united.”⁹ The humorous parodies of familiar South African types and a deeper message of unity-in-diversity made these advertisements very popular. *London Road* presents an only slightly more sophisticated portrayal of interactions between two radically different characters living in a Sea Point apartment block: Rosa, an ailing Jewish widow from Hillbrow, and Stella, a young, HIV-positive Nigerian drug dealer who has been abandoned by her unfaithful boyfriend.

As this description may suggest, Stella is closer to a clichéd African sob story than a real character. As one critic noted of the 2010 Grahamstown Festival production, “although [Ntombi] Makhutshi gives a fine, nuanced and well-judged performance [as Stella], [Robyn] Scott tends to dominate [as Rosa], mostly because the script is unbalanced; Rosa is far more realised as a role” (Meersman). On stage, Stella acts primarily as a foil for Rosa. Through their interactions, the veneer of Rosa’s initial preoccupation with petty middle class concerns

is stripped away to reveal a surprising tolerance and fashionably modern open mind. Stella, although initially hostile towards and suspicious of Rosa's attention, comes to love and take care of her aging friend. The play offers an idealized depiction of a new South Africa in which there is room for everyone, including groups whose "belonging" remains precarious under the new dispensation: foreigners, the HIV-positive, white liberals, and Jews. The play reinforces the founding myth of the Rainbow Nation, making only a handful of concessions to accommodate the many disappointments, frustrations, and tragedies of the new South Africa (*London Road*).

***London Road* as deadly theatre**

The popularity of this production is indicative of the appeal this genre holds for (white) South Africans. Marianne Thamm of the *Sunday Times* calls the Kalk Bay Theatre production of the play "a tender, moving and often funny theatre experience" (Thamm). In *The Next 48 Hours*, Peter Tromp assures readers that they "will not find as emotionally enveloping and rewarding a play as *London Road* anywhere at the moment" (Tromp). In review after review, the play is described as "gentle," "humorous," "accurate" and "engaging." While clearly appealing, the saccharine conclusion of the play is too easily won; it caricatures cross-cultural barriers and misunderstandings without delving deeper into the complexities of these divides. By writing Stella as a foreign woman rather than a black South African, Spagnoletti avoids the long history of conflict, oppression, and misunderstanding that so often divides South Africans of different races.

Reflecting on the problem of the deadly theatre (a theatre that is stagnant, alienating, and ineffective), Peter Brook concludes that

a stable and harmonious society might need only to look for ways of reflecting and reaffirming its harmony in its theatres. Such theatres could set out to unite cast and audience in a mutual 'yes.' But a shifting, chaotic world often must choose between a playhouse that offers a spurious 'yes' or a provocation so strong that it splinters its audience into fragments of vivid 'nos' (Brook 44).

By ignoring many of the deep wounds and fissures in contemporary South Africa, *London Road* offers audience and critics the opportunity to join in a unified chorus of “yes.” Yet South African society today is hardly “stable and harmonious.” A simple message of “love thy neighbor” is enough to bring characters together in *London Road*; this sentiment seems laughably insufficient for dealing with the contemporary South African reality. In such a reality, the theatre cannot simply smooth over rifts and wounds with easy sentiment; it must either transport or challenge its audience.

Instead of pushing viewers to engage critically with key issues, *London Road* panders to its audience’s desire for an easy “solution” to the widespread social problems around them. It is not theatre as pure entertainment, which would offer the chance to escape these problems entirely; nor is it theatre as meaningful social commentary. Instead, it is a work of deadly theatre that perpetuates a white liberal attitude in which all is easily “forgiven and forgotten;” the play offers nothing but the “condescending platitudes” that constitute a spiritual prison for those who are subjected to their definitions (Ndebele, “Memory, Metaphor” 27). The result is both bad politics and bad theatre. While *Just Like Home* illustrates the exhaustion of the spectacular aesthetic, *London Road* provides an example of the pitfalls of the often shallow and celebratory “theatre for reconciliation” of the new South Africa.

Reach: a viable middle ground

This is not to say that theatre in South Africa must champion aggressive political agendas or portray the relentless brutality of the harshest contemporary realities. There is as much a place for humour, love, tenderness, and joy in the South African theatre as there is anywhere. As Albie Sachs noted, the need for these things is even greater when immense acts of reconciliation must be achieved. In proposing an aesthetics of the ordinary, Njabulo Ndebele offers a practical means of combining critical social commentary with a celebration of everyday trials and joys. Any potential “new society” in South Africa will necessarily “be

based on a direct concern with the way people actually live” (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 52). Literature will play an important role in this work, charged with the need “to provide an occasion within which vistas of inner capacity are opened up” (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 52). An exploration of the nuances of individual lives and interpersonal interactions offers hope for a richer and more complex literature; this is also, in Ndebele’s eyes, the means by which the new South Africa may be built.

In *Reach*, Lara Foot explores a timely political question—the nature and possibility of reconciliation—through a detailed and accurate presentation of “ordinary” interactions between two well-developed characters. The rich and believable characterizations and accurate dialogue allow Foot to present a thoughtful account of the roles care and (mis)understanding play in the drama of reconciliation. Of the plays discussed in this chapter, *Reach* comes closest to achieving a successful and vital “aesthetics of the ordinary.”

Although compared by critics to *London Road*, *Reach* is, in tone and content, a much richer work. Like *London Road*, *Reach* centres around the protagonists’ mutual revelations of their personal histories; in both plays, these personal histories intersect in a moment of violence, while the interior lives and thoughts of the protagonists are revealed through letters and phone calls.

Reach opens with Marion writing a letter to her daughter in Australia. She begins with a description of the landscape around her:

Things are the same here. The mountain still cuts the sky in half and it still has its many colours of orange, pink, purple, and grey. Still no rain and still major power cuts (Foot 32).

The situation is neither better nor worse; the beauty and the frustration remain, side by side. In saying that “things are the same,” Marion also implies that she is the same: still stubbornly rooted in this place, unwilling to move. As becomes clear later in the play, Marion and her daughter have fought over Marion’s unwillingness to leave South Africa. Marion, hesitant

about mentioning this issue at the beginning of her letter, instead provides a quiet reminder of the unchanging landscape and thus, by implication, her unchanged relationship to this landscape.

The beloved country: identity and belonging

Like Cathy in *Just Like Home*, Marion feels defined by her home in South Africa. As she later tells Solomon Xaba, the grandson of her former domestic worker Thozama, “my life has been full here. Painful but full!” (Foot 40). Her memories, and therefore her identity, are bound to the land. The land embodies her past and gives meaning to her present; to leave would mean that her “life had been worth absolutely nothing” (Foot 40). Her body itself is rooted in South African soil, so that there is “nothing lonelier, more frightening” than the thought of being buried in foreign soil (Foot 40). Nonetheless, Marion’s physical environment is also a source of fear. Describing a recent walk to her daughter, Marion says that she “came across a dead mossie all covered in goggas. It made me feel quite nauseous— why do they always have to do that?” (Foot 33). Solomon later reveals that the sight of the dead mossie caused Marion to sit down and cry.

The death and decay which are inescapable parts of the landscape terrify and sadden Marion. She tries to reject this aspect of her environment, displaying the first hints of a deliberate “blindness” that proves deeply problematic within the play. In much white South African writing, “a tension exists between versions of the land as something one can divide and own on the one hand, and on the other the view of land as something that denies the viewer (and owner) access— perhaps because of the guilt associated with the position of the white viewer” (Nuttall and Coetzee, 14). Marion deliberately ignores these issues, refusing to interrogate the vague sense of terror and loss produced by with the sight of the dead mossie.

Political debates around land and land restitution enter early in the play when Solomon arrives. At first, he seems to have come to warn her that she is not safe in her house.

When told by Solomon that “they [the protesters] are talking about giving it [her land] back to its real owners,” Marion replies only:

Real owners? I’m not even sure that one can own land. A history? Maybe. A past? Certainly. But land? That’s different. I know about all this stuff. The government has already made me an offer. It’s not that I believe they shouldn’t have it, you understand? It’s just—where would I go? They must hang on for a while...a few more years, at most (Foot 40-41).

She takes a sceptical view of both sides by refusing to endorse the very idea of ownership upon which such a debate is founded. Her attitude is neither moral nor political; she does not point out nor seek to atone for her privilege. Instead, her view is a practical and personal one, as she asks to keep this place—which embodies the things she does own, her history and her past—only until her time is up.

Marion’s stance is believable, to an extent; she has found a way to reconcile her personal needs with larger political and social demands, at least in her own mind. As she tells Solomon at one point, she was “even a little involved in the struggle. Not bravely so, but involved” (Foot 40). The naïveté of such a remark makes it seem unintentionally comic; her attitude is reminiscent of Cathy’s employers’ in *Just Like Home*. Yet Solomon does not challenge Marion’s statement, nor is her attitude towards the land claims or her role in struggle history ever explored further. Instead, this brief discussion provides an easy way to eliminate the problematic question of Marion’s own guilt and historical complicity. The land debate, a potentially rich topic, is quickly dropped as irrelevant to the actual trajectory of the play; an opportunity for more interesting commentary on this subject is lost. Instead, *Reach* focuses on an exploration of connection and reconciliation across boundaries of culture and loss; in this area, the play offers precise and rich commentary.

Isolation and grief

In structure, the play is an extended conversation between Marion and Solomon punctuated by Marion's brief asides to her daughter. Divided by race, class, and age, Marion and Solomon are linked by a shared history and their respective states of isolation. In spite of these links, the divides between them are real, significant, and, in some cases, irreconcilable, unlike the largely cosmetic differences overcome in *London Road*. Marion may be sensitive and thoughtful, but she is by no means immune to prejudice, unlike her miraculously progressive counterpart in *London Road*. When Solomon enters, uninvited, Marion at first assumes he is a criminal: "If you are here to murder me, just hurry up and get on with it" (Foot 33). Even as their relationship develops further, Marion remains suspicious of Solomon's motives, repeatedly asking him why he has come and who has sent him:

MARION: Was it your grandmother who sent you? Or is it those protestors? The ones who want my land. Have they put you up to this?

SOLOMON: No.

MARION: Maybe you are painting the house for them?

SOLOMON: No.

MARION: Then they can have the rice-paper house.

SOLOMON: No (Foot 49).

Solomon's reluctance to yield information speaks to his own wariness in approaching Marion. Marion's sharp inquisitiveness and Solomon's terse responses create a tense environment loaded with both silent and partially spoken accusations. As with much of the dialogue in the play, this exchange is well-paced and accurate; it allows a clear picture of both characters and their relationship to emerge organically.

While such mutual suspicion and mild hostility should drive Marion and Solomon apart, their loneliness and shared history draw them together. In their first encounter, Marion softens to Solomon when she realizes that she knew him as a child: "My goodness! You're not little Solomon! Ha! You used to play in the fishpond while I pruned my icebergs! Terrorised the tadpoles! Captured them in jam jars" (Foot 33). Initially suspicious of an

unknown black man entering her house, Marion becomes more welcoming when she realizes that she knew Solomon as a child.

As in *Just Like Home*, a shared sense of alienation helps to unite these two unlikely friends; in *Reach*, this alienation is produced by social boundaries rather than international borders. Solomon, having lost his parents to HIV/AIDS, suffers the rejection of his community: “the people in our village were all gossiping—they said it was AIDS. Some would not come near our house” (Foot 47). Marion, in contrast, rejects her own community after the murder of her son, as she is sickened by the portrayal of his death in the media:

The newspapers. The television. The photos of my boy on the front page. Lying naked in the scrap yard. The speculation: was he gay? Was he involved in drugs? Anything to make it not arbitrary. Anything to substantiate why he was asking for it.

Are they all fucking blind? This country has been breeding murderers for the past century. Isn't that clear? There doesn't need to be a reason. Anger, despair! That's the reason! (Foot 62).

She feels alienated by her society's deliberate blindness and refusal to grasp the situation around them. The voyeuristic exploitation of Marion's personal grief—the intrusion of the public into the private—further drives a wedge between Marion and her community. She withdraws into the isolation and safety of her own pain: “it's mine. No one else's. I need it to be mine” (Foot 63). This ownership comes to define but also to limit her. It destroys her marriage and alienates her daughter, who accuses her of choosing to “stay with a dead son rather than leave with a healthy daughter” (Foot 65). As Solomon points out, she has ended up utterly estranged from her surroundings, “in-between...not in town...not in the township” (Foot 41).

Rejection of the other

Marion's long isolation makes her receptive to Solomon's repeated intrusions into her life. “At first I was suspicious,” she tells her daughter, “...but now I think that he, like me, just needs a little company” (Foot 55). Ironically, immediately after writing these words, Marion

comes close to using her longstanding grief over the loss of her son to drive Solomon away.

When Solomon accidentally puts on an old shirt of Jonathan's, Marion flies into a rage:

Take it off!...How dare you! You think you can come into my house and fucking well take over my life. Fucking well wear my son's clothes. Who the hell do you think you are?...You thought nothing! This is my shirt! My Jonathan's shirt and now you've gone and ruined it. Made it dirty. It's filthy
(Foot 55).

Solomon intrudes into the solitude of Marion's grief, a domain she has vigorously protected over the years. In response, Marion immediately asserts her ownership of her grief, the source of her self-imposed isolation. She does this by emphasizing the boundaries of her domestic space; whereas earlier she questioned ideas of ownership, she now lists her possessions: "my" house, "my" life, "my" shirt.

As Gail Ching-Liang Low notes, "clothes function as the privileged sites of racial and cultural difference...the magic of costume lies in its ability to substitute a part for a whole" (202). By appearing in Jonathan's shirt, Solomon threatens to replace her dead son, thereby dishonouring Marion's own grief. Although previously considered a friend, Solomon now comes too close. Marion suddenly draws on deeply rooted ideas of cultural and racial difference in order to push him away.

By rejecting Solomon for being "dirty" and presumptuous in coming into her home, Marion uses colonial rhetoric, in which "metaphors of disease and disorder" define and wall-off a threatening other, whether the "internal other" of the urban poor or the "external other" of the colonial subject (Low 15). Marion attempts to reassert control over the boundaries of her house and the body of her dead son by excluding Solomon not only from her own life but from an idea of the nation as a whole, for which house and body are potent metaphors.¹⁰

Seeking a way to "reach"

Marion's inability to cope with her loss effectively has long prevented her from healing. While the outburst over Jonathan's shirt could easily produce a final estrangement between Marion and Solomon, it instead lays the foundation for the play's final scenes of reconciliation. In her outburst at the sight of the shirt, Marion illustrates the failing that has slowly destroyed many of her relationships: the inability to "reach" beyond her grief, across the boundaries that divide her from others around her, in order to find peace and to reconcile herself with her loss. She recognizes this failing as the source of her solitude:

You learn to keep it [grief] a secret...I could have reached out, I suppose, to Frank [her husband]—and he could have to me. That was the problem; we didn't know how to reach one another. A lifetime together and no way of reaching (Foot 63).

Their marriage quickly fell apart after Jonathan's death, in large part because Marion, unable to reach beyond her own suffering, refused to grant Frank an equal partnership in her grief.

At this point in the play, Marion begins to recognize and reckon with this failing. Immediately after attacking Solomon for wearing Jonathan's shirt, she relents and tries to make amends; she reaches out to Solomon by asking him to tell her one of the stories that he enjoys sharing with the orphan children he works with. Instead, Solomon narrates a dream he often has, and Marion reciprocates by sharing one of her dreams. Both dreams illuminate Solomon and Marion's shared fear of loss and death, so that their interactions in this scene end with an exchange of care and intimacy.

As this scene illustrates, such intimacy is born as much from misunderstandings as from shared experiences. In the opening scenes of the play, Solomon fails to grasp Marion's attachment to her home; instead, he encourages her to leave her house, as it is not safe. Marion rebukes him by asserting that she is through and through South African: "I was born here and I intend to die here!" (Foot 41). Solomon then disputes Marion's claim to belonging:

SOLOMON: Yes, you were born here, but you are racist like the rest of them...All the time, you call me 'my boy,' just like your father called my father.

MARION: Oh, for fuck's sakes! 'My boy' is not only a racist term. 'My boy' is what I called my son. 'My boy' can just as well be a term of endearment (Foot 41).

Solomon is quick to identify Marion as being "like the rest of them" and, therefore, unworthy of his trust; here, *Reach* reiterates the same debates about belonging and identity that were dealt with unsatisfactorily in *Just Like Home*. *Reach* develops these debates further, as Marion and Solomon's exchange continues:

SOLOMON: Endearment?

MARION: Of care. Of caring.

SOLOMON: Are you saying that you care for me?

MARION: I'm not sure what I'm saying. I think you should go now; I'm feeling quite exhausted.

SOLOMON: *Nyana wam*. 'My boy.' It's what my grandmother called me when she was alive (Foot 41).

Suddenly, a cause of offense becomes a potential source of intimacy. Solomon admits that he has misinterpreted Marion's intent; he relents and draws a parallel between Marion and his grandmother, recognizing a likeness where formerly he saw a hostile difference. He also admits that his grandmother has died, the first time he has acknowledged this fact to Marion. This signals the beginning of a series of revelations which culminates in Solomon's telling Marion of his witnessing the death of her son.

Recognition of difference as a source of intimacy

The path to this final exposition of truth and test of intimacy is paved by a number of smaller misunderstandings that hint at the deep cultural divides between Solomon and Marion. These divides are exemplified by both characters' attitudes toward food. When Marion tells Solomon she has no food in the house, he responds, surprised, that he "thought all white people had groceries" (Foot 39). Marion laughs, and a small misunderstanding is dispelled. Not all cultural differences are so easily put aside. Solomon, concerned about Marion's eating habits, leaves chicken feet on her door step. Marion promptly throws them

away and later tells Solomon that “there is a certain point...at which cultures will never coincide. My line in the sand is chicken feet” (Foot 38). This cultural divide, though minor, is insurmountable. Solomon and Marion navigate their way around this divide and others through the use of humour, as they turn mutual misconceptions about one another’s cultures into a joke:

SOLOMON: I once at the eye of the cat.

MARION: Really?

SOLOMON [laughs]: We might be savage, but we are not that bad (Foot 38).

The discussions of food in the play illustrate the fact that certain differences cannot be negated; recognizing these differences enables a productive exchange to occur across cultural boundaries.

Such minor exchanges, through which an intimacy develops between Marion and Solomon, lay the groundwork for Solomon’s climactic revelation and the play’s final scene of reconciliation. After revealing that he witnessed her son’s death and relating her son’s final words, Solomon tells Marion:

In my culture the last person to see someone alive is supposed to speak at the funeral. You are supposed to tell the listeners what you saw and what you heard so that the living can be at peace with the whole story, with the truth about the death. I’ve been coming here for years, watching you—trying to find the right time. Carrying this thing with me. Walking with it. If you do not do this then you can become sick, you can be cursed with bad memories and bad dreams. I think that is why I got sick (Foot 63).

Like Marion, Solomon’s life has been derailed by this act of violence; both have carried the burden of Jonathan’s death alone within them for years. Solomon has waited to reveal this truth to Marion until he could “find the right time;” this suggests that, in his mind, the revelation of truth could not come without intimacy. He needed to establish a relationship of trust with Marion, so that he would be assured she would understand the story he had to tell and why he must tell it. He begins his explanation of this decision with the phrase “in my

culture,” indicating to Marion that he is reaching across boundaries to share this with her and that, to receive this gift, she must also reach.

At this moment, Marion fails to reach in return, as she misinterprets Solomon’s intentions. She thinks he has come in search of an easy absolution:

MARION: So you are a man? You can go! Mission accomplished.

SOLOMON: Yes, Mies Marion. I have delivered the message.

MARION: Good. Then off you go, Solomon (Foot 65).

She rejects Solomon’s revelation as a way of easily relinquishing his burden of grief.

Although Solomon is reluctant to leave, Marion continues to push him away. In place of an offer of friendship, she sees his visits as no more than preparation for delivering his message. Having interpreted his actions in this way, Marion refuses to return Solomon’s gesture of care. Instead of sharing and coping with her grief, as Solomon has tried to encourage her to do, she collapses into a near fatal depression, ending up trapped on her couch in a catatonic state.

Truth, reconciliation, and care

Commenting on the application of principles of truth and reconciliation to work in the theatre, Rustom Bharucha remarks that the actors with whom he worked passed “from a rather painful exposition of individual truths to a reconciliation as to how we could relate to each through an acknowledgment of difference” (Bharucha 3766). This transition from truth to reconciliation was neither easy nor certain. “Between the exposition of truth and the possibility of reconciliation,” Bharucha explains, “there needs to be a modulation of energies, whereby the listeners and interlocutors of truth, including the perpetrators, assume a collective responsibility in caring for the future of the victims. The keyword here is ‘care’” (3768). Without a commitment to care for another, the witnesses and expositors of truth cannot achieve reconciliation. A failure to do this, Bharucha claims, is a central problem in

the design of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which “the very idea of 'caring' is obliterated within the mechanisms of justice” (3768).

While the TRC was “not asked to achieve reconciliation but to *promote* it” (Doxtader and Salazar xiii), Bharucha argues that the lack of care and compensation for victims prematurely stifled the development of any larger, nationwide movement of reconciliation (Bharucha 3768). This is one instance of the many failures of South African transformation. As Freund and Padayachee observe in their analysis of post-apartheid patterns, “the moral drama of the TRC is diminished by the socio-economic stage on which it is performed, a stage on which South Africa's long-standing theatre of social and economic injustice and inequality continues to play pretty much as always” (1177-8). These persistent injustices in turn fuel the continued spread of violence in contemporary South Africa; as Marion remarks, “if we can't distribute the wealth, then at least we have succeeded in the equal distribution of violence” (Foot 63).

Mourning the other, caring for one another

How, then, to move past this violence to achieve peace and unity through reconciliation? In its final scene, *Reach* offers one possible way forward. As Mark Sanders notes, one of the legacies of apartheid is “a bar against the mourning of the other” (62). Thus, one aim of the TRC, which heard repeated calls for the location of remains in order to enable proper funeral rites, was to undo this “systematic prohibition on mourning and a withholding of condolence” (Sanders 72). In sharing Jonathan's final words with Marion, Solomon attempts to complete what, in the eyes of his culture, would have been unsatisfactory rites of mourning for Jonathan's death. Solomon translates the acts of mourning and condolence across cultures in an attempt to bring peace to Marion and to end their entrapment in prolonged states of grief and guilt.

As Marion fails to grasp his intent, in the end it is Solomon who must bring about reconciliation by fulfilling his obligation to care for Marion. In the final scene, he rouses Marion from her catatonic state when he returns with a television set so that they can watch the upcoming World Cup, a powerful symbol of South African unity. He demonstrates their newfound understanding of one another, when, upon Marion telling him of a planned visit to Australia, he says it will be okay “as long as you don’t die there;” with these words, he recognizes that she belongs to South Africa (Foot 67). In *Reach*, there is still a place for white South Africans in the new South Africa; in contrast, in *Just Like Home* Trevor refuses to extend the privilege of belonging to Hector and his family.

Weak and contrite, Marion at last accepts Solomon’s offer of care. In the final lines of the play, they engage in an echo of their earlier dialogue, this time with the roles reversed:

MARION: Solomon, my boy, do you have to continually use that old subservient term, Mies Marion? It’s what your grandmother called me.

SOLOMON: Mies is not always a subservient term, Mies Marion. Mies can also be a term of...of care. Of caring.

MARION: What, Solomon? Are you saying you care about me?

SOLOMON: I’m not sure what I’m saying, Mies Marion.

MARION: Solomon?

SOLOMON: Yes, Mies Marion.

MARION: Thank you! (Foot 67).

In her final words, Marion accepts Solomon’s gift and, with this mutual admission of care and the need to be cared for, they together accomplish a final reconciliation (Foot 67).

Although lovely, this inversion of the earlier message is a bit too easy, from a dramatic point of view. Until the final scene, the play’s pace is fairly slow. As a result, this final reconciliation seems to come too quickly. There is no time for Marion’s attitude to change or develop between her penultimate confrontation with Solomon and this short final exchange. The bridge between these two scenes, in which Marion continues her letter to her daughter, provides only an unsatisfying review of Solomon’s revelation and a half-hearted apology from Marion to her daughter. While the theoretical message of this scene is

interesting, the emotional impact of Marion and Solomon's reconciliation is diminished by this incomplete character development and rushed transition.

A contrasting message: the original production

In the original version of the play, performed at the 2007 Grahamstown Festival, the plot was slightly different. The play opened not with Marion's address to her daughter, but with Solomon approaching Marion's house and "asking himself why he bothers with this old woman" (Kruger, "Review: National Arts Festival" 119). He is a more vocal but less willing caretaker than the enigmatic Solomon who silently creeps through Marion's door in the published version of the play. He is also more perpetrator than witness. In this iteration of the work, he "confesses to having distracted Jonathan to allow his accomplices to abduct, torment, and kill him and asserts that he has returned to tell her Jonathan's last words so as to clear his conscience" (Kruger, "Review: National Arts Festival" 119). This complicity in the crime casts Solomon in a radically different light. As a perpetrator, he requires forgiveness; therefore, his care for Marion seems less generous and more necessary. In the earlier version, he is atoning for a crime by revealing the truth.

The published version is far more effective. In part, this is because it relies more on dialogue than the original, which used "disjointed monologues" in which characters spoke "past, rather than with, each other" to "evoke the South African condition of miscommunication" (Kruger, "Review: National Arts Festival" 119). In the revised text, these miscommunications are often tackled and defused head-on, while the construction of the dialogue itself is taut and elegant.

In the published version, neither Marion nor Solomon is entirely guilty nor entirely innocent. While Solomon's need to fulfil his responsibility as a witness is well-developed, Marion's own sense of guilt and complicity is not dealt with as effectively as it could be, which is a significant lost opportunity within the play. When Marion is confronted with the

knowledge that she did not lend Thozama money to aid Solomon's dying mother, she pauses for a moment but then sweeps this knowledge aside. The fact that both characters do bear a burden of guilt and grief, even if this is not developed as fully as it could be, nonetheless makes the final moment of reconciliation and care far more powerful in the published play than in the original version.

The nuances of truth, the ambiguity of reconciliation

The ambiguity, mutual misunderstandings, and recognition of irreconcilable differences in Solomon and Marion's relationship make the play both more compelling and more "true" than *London Road*. With its thoughtful exploration of the nuanced interactions between two well-developed characters, *Reach* is a more interesting and engaging play than *Just Like Home*. Of these three plays, *Reach* comes closest to Peter Brook's "immediate theatre:" "true drama" which speaks "about true issues shared by all present in the only manner that can make these issues really come to life" (Brook 149). In such a theatre, as in *Reach*, "divisions between positive and negative experience, between optimism and pessimism...become meaningless" (Brook 150). Such a work may begin from a place of torment; indeed, it seems necessary that it take as its subject pertinent social problems. Starting from a place of suffering does not mean that the work cannot transcend "the multiple ghettos of the Apartheid imagination" through joy and humour (Sachs 187). Instead, participants in such a theatre "all share a wish to be helped to emerge from their anguish, even if they don't know what this help may be, or what form it could take" (Brook 149). South Africans, today confronted by a host of seemingly insoluble social issues, are surely united in such a wish.

In *Reach*, Lara Foot describes the process by which two characters help one another to deal with past trauma; in doing so, they develop a strong bond across divides of race and class. This narrative illustrates how the work of care, hand-in-hand with a desire for

reconciliation and an ability to reach across boundaries, can help to move South Africans forward into a less perfect, but perhaps more realistic, “new” South Africa. While compelling, this vision of reconciliation fails to deal with several key issues, in particular the complicated questions surrounding land, memory, and guilt. The following chapter will focus on two works which offer richer explorations of the aesthetics of the ordinary while also delving deeper into several of the key issues glossed over in *Reach*.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 3
Memories, Truths, and Dreams:
Craig Higginson's *Dream of the Dog* and John Kani's *Nothing But the Truth*

At the first victim hearing, the Head of the TRC, Archbishop Tutu said: "We pray that all those people who have been injured in either body or spirit may receive healing through the work of this commission... We are charged to unearth the truth about our dark past. To lay the ghosts of that past to rest, so that they will not return to haunt us and that we will hereby contribute to the healing of a traumatized and wounded people. For all of us in South Africa are a wounded people" (Field 32).

The basic logic behind South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, summarized succinctly in Archbishop Tutu's statement, is that knowing the truth about the past will neutralize its haunting power; the act of revelation is the source of both individual healing and communal reconciliation. Archbishop Tutu extends the privilege of such healing to victims and perpetrators alike, eliding the processes of confession and forgiveness. The language of his statement is telling. Healing the body and spirit of the individual is equated with the healing of the community as a whole; individual and collective acts of mourning are made one, much in the same way that the dramatic hearings of the commission made the experience of private, individual grief part of a public, national narrative. In speaking of "unearthing" the truth, Archbishop Tutu both indicates the difficulty of locating truth in memory—the verb suggests archaeology more readily than revelation—and gestures to the literal "ghosts" buried in South Africa's land. His words are prophetic of the public exhumations that would become an unintended symbol of the Truth Commission's work.

Literature and the Truth Commission

The easy parallel between public and private mourning and individual and national healing masks the difficulties and disruptions inherent in the process of healing the traumatic wounds of South Africa's past. In a critique of the Truth Commission, Sean Field indicates that, despite the rhetoric of the Commission, "the legal or political closure desired by lawyers and politicians is not equivalent to the ongoing struggles of trauma survivors to at least reach

a symbolic emotional closure” (34). The past, as ensconced in the memory of the individual, cannot, and perhaps should not, be sealed away in a “closed” realm; survivors face the challenge of learning “to tolerate and integrate memories of traumatic events” in their present lives (Field 34).

The memory of trauma is not easily “closed,” because, like all memory, both individual and collective, it is the wellspring of identity; memory “provides individuals and collectives with a cognitive map, helping orient who they are, why they are here and where they are going” (Eyerman 161). The processing of memory and trauma is both a collective and an individual act. When a group experiences “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning,” the resulting “cultural trauma must be understood, explained and made coherent through public reflection and discourse” (Eyerman 160). The TRC was South Africa’s official public venue for understanding and explaining the profound cultural traumas that scar the memory of the nation.

The individual must negotiate both private and public realms in attempting to deal with memories of trauma and to reconstruct damaged personal and collective identities. For this reason, the theatre—in which the private and personal can be made a public and communal experience—has a significant role to play in shaping public memory and encouraging private healing and reconciliation. Through the telling of stories, South Africans can find the “place between public resistance and private healing and between private resistance and public healing” from which new post-apartheid identities can emerge (Nuttall 76). The past can never be “closed” or “put behind one,” nor should it be; it is important that the past be continually explored, excavated and remembered so that one does not “remain trapped in that past but [uses] it to build new identities in the post-apartheid future” (Graham 8).

Common themes: the TRC and South African plays

Chapter 2 of this study explored conflicting identities and the possibilities of reconciliation; it further investigated boundaries of difference, alienation, trauma, and guilt. This chapter also discussed the exhaustion of the “spectacular” aesthetic of anti-apartheid theatre and identified the “rediscovery of the ordinary” as a viable alternative for the post-apartheid era. Through an analysis of two plays firmly grounded in the “ordinary,” Chapter 3 now explores the role the past plays in shaping present lives and identities. It further investigates the questions of memory, truth, guilt, forgiveness, and mourning that are raised by explorations of this past. These areas are focal points for both Craig Higginson’s *Dream of the Dog* and John Kani’s *Nothing But the Truth*, although Higginson’s play focuses more on the inscription of memories on the land while Kani’s work is preoccupied with the invention and disruption of rites of mourning.

First raised by the work of the TRC, these themes are key areas of concern that have been taken up in recent South African literature of all genres. This literature, like the two plays under discussion, “exhibits a collective sense of loss, mourning, and elegy” (Graham 1-2). How to rescue and honour what has been lost—persons, places, and aspects of one’s self and one’s culture—is a central question in both plays. Characters in these plays struggle with a “sense of disorientation amid rapid changes in the physical and social landscape” (Graham 1-2). In attempting to grapple with these transformations, they enact a range of subjunctive futures for South Africa.

Dream and Truth: a brief comparison

In Higginson’s work, questions of land are central. The collective loss of land experienced by black South Africans is a trauma not adequately dealt with by the TRC. As a result, questions of land ownership, linked to identities forged through “belonging” to the

land, remain key issues. These issues are complicated by the fact that “the racial legacy of apartheid is perpetuated by the remains of its built environment...and [that] the production of space and the inscription of social memory on that space is problematised and contested by the forces of economic globalization and neo-liberalism” (Graham 2). In Higginson’s play, memory and history are embedded in a landscape shaped both by the forces of the past (apartheid and institutionalized white privilege) and the future (neoliberal capitalism and development). For South Africans to achieve greater agency in shaping this future, they will need “literature that excavates forgotten traces of the past, and which...also develops new modes of mapping space and archiving the past and present” (Graham 4). By exploring the linkages between land, memory, and the individual body, Higginson’s work attempts to answer this call.

While also preoccupied by memory and distortions of memory, Kani’s play is far more concerned with the links between mourning, ritual, and healing. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the legacies of apartheid was a “ban on mourning the other.” South Africa’s history of colonialism and oppression has disrupted rites of mourning within communities as well as in the nation as a whole. While “funerals and associated rites of mourning are often thought of as one of the most traditional ties of community,” mourning rites in fact “often reflect the instability and adaptability of colonised cultures, especially where communities are responding to new forms of death and dying” (Durrant 441). The disruption and destruction of rites of mourning was a central concern for the TRC, with numerous victims asking that the remains of their loved ones be located so that “proper” burial rites could be carried out. Kani’s play both explicitly speaks of these disruptions and, particularly in the film version of this work, seeks to develop new hybrid rites of mourning that take the current fluctuations in South African identity into account. Drawing on accounts of the role played by traditional healers and rituals in post-independence Zimbabwe, Ingrid de Kok notes that “purposive

ritual interventions may be essential for healing and for the development of normalized social exchange in South Africa too” (“Cracked Heirlooms” 60). In conjunction with his exploration of the nature of memory, Kani gestures to possible rituals and acts of mourning that can promote healing and help communities to move forward.

In plot, both plays follow a similar pattern: loss and transition provoke the intrusion of an estranged family member or surrogate family member. The resulting dialogues between relatives bring about the revelation of a traumatic and contested history. This narrative pattern highlights the key questions of memory, guilt, and forgiveness raised by the TRC. In Kani’s play, the link to the TRC is made explicit, and the work of the commission itself is interrogated. In contrast, in Higginson’s play, these themes are embedded in a discussion of white guilt and interracial reconciliation. While Kani’s play ends with a suggestion of ways to transcend past traumas, Higginson’s conclusion is troubled and troubling, in that it offers partial solutions but, in its final scene, undermines the validity of the answers it has posed. Both authors admit that sometimes forgiveness is not possible, and that, while memories of trauma may become integrated into the present self, their melancholy effects may never be thoroughly neutralized. In spite of this, one must carry on; this “is what people are doing every day” (Higginson 177).

Rotting house, rotting mind

Dream of the Dog opens with a scene of decay. The initial set description evokes a place in which better days have come and gone:

The sitting room of a farmhouse... There are piles of boxes everywhere and framed pictures stacked against the walls and boxes. Pale rectangles mark the places where the pictures once hung... There is an armchair and a side table, on which lie some apples and a knife. A prominent mantelpiece testifies to a rather grander past than is evidenced here. Faded Persian rugs and animal skins are scattered over the floor. The room has a desolate, abandoned look—there are mysterious, cloudy damp stains on the walls and spider’s web is gathering dust in the corners. Yellow flystrips, covered in dead flies, hang from the ceiling (Higginson 142).

Images of death and rot abound; the scenery suggests a place neglected for a long time, although the boxes indicate that its inhabitants are only now moving away. The sole life-giving object in the room—the pile of apples—is paired with a symbol of destruction, the knife; the deliberate peeling and eating of the apples becomes a potent symbol of power over life and death later in the play.

The setting also suggests a deliberate amnesia. The pictures, evocative of memories, are no longer displayed. They have been purposefully put aside, leaving only yellowed scars to mark where they once hung. This disintegration of memory foreshadows the character of Richard, the ageing owner of the farm. He enters shortly after Patricia, his wife, and the following exchange ensues:

RICHARD: Who told you to buy new furniture?

PATRICIA: That's not new furniture, Richard.

RICHARD: I'm not sure I like these animal skins lying about. It's unhygienic.

PATRICIA: Then you shouldn't have shot the animals.

RICHARD: I shot those? (Higginson 142).

Richard is losing his memory; this loss has in turn eroded his former self. Once an avid hunter, he now looks askance at his trophies, unwilling to believe that he could have actually killed those animals. Although Patricia confirms this is true, Richard continues to eye the skins sceptically (Higginson 142).

With its memory disintegrating, his mind occupies an intermediate space between the world of the living and the dead. He tells Patricia that he has spoken with his father. When she reminds him that his father has been dead for twenty years, he haughtily replies: "that is extremely unlikely. I saw him only yesterday. We shared a cigarette. Do you think I was addressing his ghost?" (Higginson 143). He continues to reverse distinctions between the living and the dead. He tells Patricia that, when he was a child, his "whole family went away," except for his mother, who stayed behind (Higginson 144). Patricia corrects him,

reminding him that his mother died when he was three, while the rest of his family survived.

He is no longer sure if he himself is alive or dead:

RICHARD: Are we dead yet?

PATRICIA: No, we are not dead.

RICHARD: You will tell me when we're dead?

PATRICIA: Yes, Roo, of course I will (Higginson 144).

Without memory, which “acts as the connecting tissue between the body and the physical places it has occupied” (Graham 2), he loses his sense both of physical and temporal place.

While he no longer remembers his own house, the scars of old trauma emerge fresh into the present. He tells Patricia that the ambulances are coming to fetch them, along with the two dead children. With this statement, he gestures to a secret—his murder of his black mistress and her unborn child—that will not be revealed until the end of the play. His guilt-ridden and rotted mind allows these past crimes and losses—the murder, the death of his parents—to edge in and out of the present. He remains, to the end of the play, a miserable, tortured presence.

Identity, land, and decay: *Dream of the Dog* in historical context

These images of decay present a striking inversion of earlier tropes in white South African, particularly Afrikaans, theatre. In the first half of the twentieth century, rural locations—in particular the family farm—were privileged as key sources of cultural definition for both Afrikaans and English speaking whites. In a reversal of the typical modern paradigm, in which the city represents progress and civilization in contrast to “backwards” rural communities, the growing urban centres in South Africa began “to signify the threat of barbarism” (Kruger, “Country and City” 566). As the National Party grew in power, the “Afrikaner Nationalists (and their English fellow-travellers) proposed a counter-civitas, a perverse modernity defined, not by urban civility, but by purification and isolation on the land” (Kruger, “Country and City” 566).

This ideology can be seen clearly in South African drama of the mid-twentieth century. W.A. de Klerk's play *Die Jaar van die Vuuros*, first performed at the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tri-centenary celebrations, provides a striking illustration of the interweaving of ideals of family, land, and patriarchy in constructions of white South African identity. The play takes as its premise an inverted reading of the Group Areas Act of 1951, which allocated residential and business areas to different racial groups. As a result, the Van Niekerk family farm in South West Africa has been reassigned for African settlement. The men in the Van Niekerk family oppose this, seeking to retain their claim to the farm.

In *Die Jaar van die Vuuros*, the family's claim to the land "rests on the myth of Afrikaner identity forged through transformation of the land" (Kruger, *Drama of SA* 82). The resulting identity construct draws both on modern ideas of "civilization" as a purifying and ordering force and on a pre-modern emphasis on the primacy of blood ties to land and family. Although on the surface a family drama, the play resonates with larger national issues; "the tensions among family members in *Vuuros* are closely connected to the land dispute and to the constitutive contradiction of the pre-modern postcolonial: simultaneously native to Africa and avatar of European civilization" (Kruger, "Country and City" 572). The patriarchal structures of this family remain unquestioned, with the ageing father continuing to dominate family politics and the women taking on subservient roles. The continuation of life on the farm, the marriage of the next generation, and the return of a prodigal son from the city all offer images of an "ideal" South African future, in which the intact patriarchal family maintains the purity of land and culture.

This celebration of a life on the land was subverted and distorted by later generations of Afrikaans playwrights, from Bartho Smit to Reza De Wet and Deon Opperman. De Wet's early play *Diepe Grond (African Gothic)* presents a chilling perversion of the family ideals of *Die Jaar van die Vuuros*.¹¹ In De Wet's play, the orphaned siblings Frikkie and Sussie

together preside over a decaying family farm that, neglected, has become “acres and acres...of bone dry, scorched earth” (De Wet, *African Gothic* 29). Instead of diligently improving the farm, the siblings spend their days asleep and work through the nights in a vain attempt to dig a well beneath their house.

Although in their thirties, they retain a child-like sensibility, constantly “playing” at being adults. In their “games,” they take on the roles of their deceased parents, strict Calvinists, as they interrogate, punish, and console one another, combining parental tenderness with the cruelty of a rigid and repressive morality. When a lawyer arrives to investigate their situation, they attempt to draw him into their games. He refuses, and the play ends with their favourite game:

SUSSIE: ‘Boetie and Sussie put Ma and Pa away.’ We play it almost every day. It’s our best game. (*Confiding.*) Ma used to say this was a vale of sorrows. We sent them to a better place.

GROVÉ: (*Shocked.*) You’re really going too far. This game is in very poor taste (De Wet, *African Gothic* 69).

Authority—first in the form of the parents and then the lawyer—must be killed; however, the children do not grow into adults to replace those they have done away with. Instead, they remain trapped in a cruel and dangerous childhood, warped by their parents’ ideals of purity and hard work. The putative adults, meanwhile, remain in a state of wilful ignorance; Grové, his sensibilities offended, fails to grasp the severity of his situation until he is being beaten to death with a sjambok. His attitude represents the deliberate blind complicity for which English-speaking South African liberals are often criticized. The combination of corrupted identities and, on the part of Grové, a naive refusal to understand the situation he is dealing with, illustrate the pitfalls of mid-century English and Afrikaans identities. The reversal and distortion of the themes of celebratory works like *Vuuros* presents a disturbing picture of a decayed culture, rotting from the inside out.

Like De Wet, Higginson plays with the decay and transformation of rural homes and landscapes, albeit in a subtler and less allegorical fashion. Richard, Higginson's patriarch, is an impotent and ineffectual figure. It is his wife, Patricia, who dominates the drama. At the end of the play, she tells Beauty that, knowing the extent of her husband's crimes, she "must put him in a home" (Higginson 177). Once the dominating patriarch, Richard has lost all agency. He is an unsightly relic: a criminal from a past age who must be consigned to a home, reviled by those closest to him.

Guilt and the shifting ground of memory

Following the introduction of the decaying farm and its senile patriarch, Look Smart arrives to ignite the central drama of the play. Look Smart is a former resident of the farm, the child of farm workers. Lacking children of her own, Patricia took Look Smart under her wing and eventually paid for his schooling. While they were once close, he left the farm in anger as a young man and has not returned until this night.

Look Smart is immediately antagonistic toward Patricia, as he attempts to assert his dominance over the couple:

PATRICIA: Goodness. And how well you look.

LOOK SMART: I am a different man.

PATRICIA: You certainly seem different. You're wearing a suit.

LOOK SMART: This is what I'm like these days, Madam. I wear a suit.

PATRICIA: How extraordinary. Times have changed, haven't they?

LOOK SMART: Oh yes. But I see you are still here where I left you.

Although smaller than I remember you. Do you know, I had to look up to you once? (Higginson 147).

His final line suggests not only physical height but also a fixed power relationship; in the old order, he was forced to acknowledge Patricia and Richard as his superiors. Now that "times have changed," he has come to put them in their place as faded relics from the past that have no power in the present.

He drives this point home by taking up one of the apples and the knife and slowly peeling the fruit as he speaks. Richard has carried out a similar action in the previous scene.

By taking the apple, Look Smart demonstrates to Patricia that he is replacing Richard by taking control of the farm, and with it, the power over life and death once held by Richard. Look Smart's use of the knife makes Patricia nervous; according to the stage directions, "Look Smart is aware of this, is almost enjoying it" (Higginson 152). Look Smart uses this as a further opportunity to remind Patricia that, as a white woman, she is complicit in past crimes: "Ja. You're afraid. Like the rest of them, you live in a constant state of fear" (Higginson 152). He believes that she has now finally emerged from her delusional sense of being above or apart from her environment; he tells her that he is "glad the truth of this place has finally reached [her]" (Higginson 152).

Earlier in their encounter, Patricia seeks to distance herself from the farm they are leaving. "I'm going back to where I grew up," she tells Look Smart, "I'm a Durban girl at heart" (Higginson 149). Look Smart refuses to allow her to dissociate herself from this place and the crimes interred in its soil so easily. "Come, come, Madam, you're joking," he replies, using the term "madam" in a biting, ironic way, "in my head, I can't separate you from this farm" (Higginson 149). He refuses to grant Patricia the power of self-definition; instead, he seeks to project his own definitions onto Patricia, the farm, and their shared past.

Their conversation is primarily focused on the contestation of shared memories. At the beginning of their exchange, Patricia attempts to re-establish intimacy by reminding Look Smart of a fishing trip they took together when he was a child. She claims that, upon catching a fish, he found it so beautiful that he wanted to return it to the water, which he then did. Look Smart disagrees: "If I remember myself correctly, I would have wanted to eat the fish" (Higginson 148). He asserts that Patricia does not and did not know or understand him. He refuses to allow her to re-kindle their closeness, as he believes their relationship was essentially unequal and flawed.

Later, Look Smart tells Patricia that, in his memory, she forced him to bash the fish's head in with a rock. In place of the tenderness and beauty of which Patricia speaks, he remembers cruelty and an unfair assertion of power. "You never knew me, Madam," he reminds Patricia; "you don't even know my name" (Higginson 155). Patricia tells him that she was present at his birth and his naming. He responds with a violent outburst, his first loss of composure during their interactions:

My name is Phiwayinkosi! Phiwayinkosi Ndlovu! That is the name my parents gave me. But only after you had left. Look Smart? That is the name they gave in order to please you (Higginson 156).

Patricia did not—and could not—ever have had access to the intimate spaces of Look Smart's life and identity. Their entire previous relationship was founded on lies and deceptions, which Look Smart now intends to confront.

Their discussion takes the form of an excavation, in which Look Smart interrogates Patricia in order to force her to see and admit the truth about the past. At last, he reveals the reason for his coming: he intends to claim justice for Richard's raping and then killing Grace, his fiancée, by setting a dog on her. At first, when questioned, Patricia feigns amnesia. "I don't know anything about that," she tells Look Smart; "it happened a long time ago" (Higginson 156). Look Smart, "a more effective fisherman now," refuses to let her off the hook (Higginson 151). He recounts the incident as it initially appeared to him and Patricia: Grace came running from the dairy followed by the dog, which then attacked Grace until Patricia pulled the dog away. According to Patricia, Richard said that Grace had "been taunting it [the dog], throwing stones at it, and that it pulled itself free" (Higginson 158). Look Smart now claims to reveal what they did not see; as she was dying, Grace told him that Richard had raped her and then set the dog on her deliberately.

Initially, Patricia reacts in disbelief: "I don't believe one word" (Higginson 159). Look Smart follows with further accusations, claiming that Patricia at first refused to carry

Grace to the hospital in her car because she didn't want to stain her seats with blood. As a result, Look Smart has not come to reckon with Richard, but rather with Patricia, whose betrayal, in his mind, was greater:

I thought you cared. But you didn't. I thought I meant something. But I didn't.
All you cared about was protecting your seats (Higginson 161).

Look Smart says that he saw the truth of their relationship on that day. He has now come to force Patricia to recognize this truth herself.

In this, he is successful, although the impact this success has on him is ambiguous:

PATRICIA: I owe you an apology.

LOOK SMART: It still seems too easy.

PATRICIA: None of this is easy, Look Smart. But I can't undo what happened. What Richard has done, he has done. And I will never be able to take back that terrible thought I had when that young girl lay bleeding.

LOOK SMART: But are you sorry?

PATRICIA: Will that one word be enough? Will it help you to go away and become someone new? I suppose I'm asking about hope (Higginson 163).

Patricia accepts Look Smart's accusations but does not know what to offer in return. She asks for Look Smart to be healed, but he refuses to let go of his desire for revenge.

Instead, he tells Patricia: "I wish for your guilt. Darkness! I don't want you to leave this place without a backwards glance" (Higginson 164). He demands that Patricia remain in a continued state of remorse. Such guilt "is itself a form of memory which consists of our being haunted by the distinctive presence of whomever it is we have wronged" (Holiday 44). Guilt can be a necessary grounds for forgiveness. Look Smart refuses to grant such forgiveness, which would be "a way of forgetting...which severs the remorseful tie fettering authors of evil to those they have harmed, so that the latter no longer haunt the former" (Holiday 44). Look Smart cannot allow this; he wants Patricia "to remember that dog like I remember that dog...to feel like I feel, and be haunted and...and decayed away by it!" (Higginson 164).

Here, Look Smart highlights an essential flaw in the idea that confession will lead directly to healing and forgiveness. The criminal is not the only one haunted by the crime. The survivor, too, is polluted by the guilt and evil of the crime committed. As Patricia tells Looks Smart:

That dog was trying to please us. It had learned to do that, to hate like that, from the country. My husband. Me. It's a poison we have, we grow up with. Now it's been passed on to you. The dream of the dog, the dream of the dog doing its dark work, destroying everything (Higginson 161).

Evil has leached into the country, so that the land is as much a source of hatred and pollution as its inhabitants. The pervasiveness of such hatred forecloses any possibility of forgiveness or absolution, a process through which “past evils [come to] no longer exert a claim on us or those who have visited evil on us” (Holiday 44).

The changing landscape: burials, excavations, and developments

These past evils, according to Patricia, are embedded in the land. Through an excavation of the sorrows and losses written into this land, a partial catharsis may be achieved. Patricia reveals that the land and what it holds already haunt her, as Look Smart desires. Buried in the farm is the body of her sole, stillborn child, Rachel, whose death heralded the collapse of her marriage. Following this loss, Richard distanced himself, a “lame dog...[a] coward,” hiding himself in the farm, much as he would later use the power and privilege ownership of the farm bestowed upon him to hide his murder of Grace (Higginson 166).

Patricia, barren and alone, remained a silent and decaying presence on the farm. In Look Smart, she saw a surrogate child, but, upon his returning from boarding school, he “started to judge...with a terrible contempt” (Higginson 166). When he left the farm after Grace's death, he became, to Patricia, “another dead child,” the memory of whom would haunt her (Higginson 166). Patricia has not allowed herself to forget these buried memories. As she and Look Smart speak, Richard is supposed to be disinterring the body of their

stillborn child, which Patricia intends to rebury near their new home in Durban. The past must be brought up out of the ground and carried with them; neither grief nor guilt can ever be left behind.

Her narrative has a strong impact on Look Smart, who becomes “visibly disturbed and upset” (Higginson 166). Following this exchange, he relents somewhat and allows their conversation to take on a gentler and more personal tone. He reveals to Patricia that the farm has been bought by the company he works for. He has come back “not to reclaim the land that was taken from my people...but to establish a gated community. For the newly rich” (Higginson 167). Both he and Patricia fervently desire the destruction of the farm. Patricia tells him that she hopes “they knock it [the house] down, brick by brick” (Higginson 167). Look Smart then describes the complete transformation of the farm and its buildings that will take place:

The hills I know so well, they will be buried in pine plantations. The wetlands will be turned into dams for farming trout. All those birds that surrounded me as a boy, that rainbow that always twittered, it will slowly fade. And one morning there will be silence...The hut I was born in, that will go too (Higginson 168).

The land, fatally polluted, cannot be reclaimed or restored. Instead, it must be irrevocably altered and partially destroyed. Look Smart took part in the deal because of his desire “to cut it up, cut up all the things I’ve never spoken about” (Higginson 168). The “fundamental rethinking of the relationships of people to land and space” required to address the “baleful legacy of dispossession and of domination through control of the land” will never happen, at least in the vision of this play (Graham 140). It is too late; “progress,” in the form of capitalism and development, will erase the history of the land before it can be healed.

Mourning together, moving on alone

A glimmer of hope remains. Look Smart admits that his visit has, in some ways, changed his relationship to his own past. When Patricia tells him that he will now “be able to

clear [himself] of everything that's dead," he responds that "now that I'm here I feel different about it. At one point, you know, I think I loved you" (Higginson 168). Like Marion and Solomon, Patricia and Look Smart have shared parallel experiences of lives haunted by death and loss. The presence of death in their daily lives produces a sense of unity "not by an exclusionary appeal to sameness of race, nationality or class, but by an appeal to [their] own otherness, to [their] own difference from [them]selves" (Durrant 446). The realization of the ways in which these hauntings have estranged them from themselves brings about a long-postponed moment of intimacy, in which they accept that they have shaped and been shaped by one another; as Look Smart tells Patricia, "I am where I am because of you. For better, and for worse" (Higginson 169).

Patricia invites Look Smart to visit again. He was, after all, "like [her] son," and she "will be lonely there, in [her] house by the sea" (Higginson 170). She admits her own need and weakness, offering Look Smart a position of strength and compassion. Where she might once have condescended to take care of him, she now invites him to take care of her, establishing a new and more equitable relationship. While much of the past may be polluted, some goodness remains. "The roses," Patricia asks, "what will happen to them after I've gone?" (Higginson 170) In the garden, the one part of the farm she loved, she had once taught Look Smart how to take care of these roses; she and Look Smart now recover part of this earlier relationship:

LOOK SMART: I will make sure we keep the roses. The bulldozers will not dig them up.

PATRICIA: Good. Don't forget to deadhead them.

LOOK SMART: And prune them every July. Ja, I remember. You have to cut them right down.

PATRICIA: You have to be quite brutal (Higginson 170).

Through this strained metaphor, Patricia and Look Smart suggest that the brutal revelations of their previous interaction were necessary in order to restore some semblance of care between them. What is evil and past must, as far as possible, be cut away. By the time that Richard

returns, Look Smart and Patricia are united in opposition to him. In his interactions with Richard, Look Smart remains “strangely buoyant,” demonstrating that Richard “no longer has any power over him” (Higginson 171).

The final message is mixed. The past cannot be escaped, and forgiveness and healing are not possible for all. Yet, through an excavation of the wounds of the past, some good may be recovered. In the play, the acts of burial, interrogation, and unearthing stand in for larger processes of social healing; the exploration of such “excavations, holes, caves and wounds become multilayered tropes for the ways in which loss and traumatic memory are registered in the social consciousness” (Graham 136). Probing these old wounds produces truths that provide a partial healing, which is the best one can hope for.

Broken truths

This message is complicated by the play’s closing scene. In the play’s final exchange, Patricia questions Beauty, her long-time domestic worker, Grace’s sister, and sole witness to Richard’s crime. Beauty explains that Look Smart’s “memory” is not entirely accurate. Grace was being paid for sex by Richard and had become pregnant with his child. Richard killed Grace because she refused to abort the child she was carrying. Furthermore, Grace did not love Look Smart and confessed to her mother that she did not want to marry him. Beauty has kept silent, as “Look Smart would not be able to hear something like that” (Higginson 176); it would destroy the central myth on which his identity has been built. Because memory shapes our selves, we choose to remember things according to how we want to see them and who we want to become. When Patricia asks Beauty why she, Patricia, should believe this new story, Beauty responds that “you must find the truth for yourself” (Higginson 176). In that moment, Patricia decides that she must put Richard in a home; the time has come for her to reclaim a long-abdicated responsibility for herself and her life.

In this final exchange, Higginson highlights, but does not resolve, some of the central issues troubling the relationship between truth and memory. While some may argue “that memory is a key way in which a sense of continuity and unity can be restored in South Africa,” Higginson shows that the destruction of the landscapes and structures in which these memories are embedded, along with the subjective nature of memory, makes it “hard to imagine how these links can be made again” (Nuttall and Coetzee 14). The challenge is “to keep multiple versions of the past alive and not to privilege, as has so often been done, a few master narratives that offer a sense of unity at the cost of ignoring the fracture and dissonance” (Nuttall and Coetzee 14).

Look Smart’s blindness to all but his own “master” narrative, which has shaped his entire idea of himself, proves the source of his continued dissatisfaction with himself and his life. Patricia, on the other hand, confronts these dissonances but remains unsure of how to live with them; she asks Beauty, “how do I carry on?” (Higginson 177). Beauty provides the answer: “it is what people are doing every day” (Higginson 177). There can be no final healing or reconciliation, perhaps even no final truth. To accept this, one must also have the courage to “carry on” and to carry knowledge of these limitations within the self.

Higginson effectively dramatizes the complexity of these problems but offers no solution for the future. Richard is a one-dimensional character who is conveniently put aside in the end, rather than being dealt with in a meaningful way. The fact that he is little more than “a simple villain” is the greatest weakness in the play’s treatment of the past (Kruger, “Review: National Arts Festival” 119). By making Richard a one-dimensional scapegoat, the play, like *Reach*, too easily glosses over more complex questions of guilt and responsibility.

Originally written for radio, *Dream of the Dog* has been criticized for relying too much on fast-paced dialogue (Kruger, “Review: National Arts Festival” 119). This is the play’s central failing. While the dialogue is well-written and the characters are engaging and

well-developed, the lack of substantive action in the play weighs down the drama itself, which at times becomes too preachy and contrived. Many of the symbolic and metaphorical gestures, from the over-decorated set of the original production to Patricia and Look Smart's exchange about the roses, come across in performance as too heavy-handed. The play is intriguing and worthy of analysis but not fully satisfying as a piece of theatre. Greater subtlety, nuance, and ambiguity would serve the script well, as would well-placed silences or actions in place of words.

Beauty, who "keeps herself to herself," is by far the most compelling character in the work; her silences, gestures, and comments, few in number but rich in resonance, speak far louder than the debates that rage around her (Higginson 155). She alone of all the characters seems able to survive and transcend the tortured past of the farm. Of the other characters, Patricia comes the closest to healing, but, barren, childless, and ageing, she represents the last gasp of an old world and not the beginning of a new one. Look Smart, who could have offered a new beginning, seems hopelessly tainted by the past. While Beauty herself offers a "solution" of sorts, her silence masks her interior life, thus rendering her solution opaque and inexplicable. For replicable solutions—both practical and theoretical—to the complex problems raised by shifting memories and the need for healing and forgiveness, we must now turn to John Kani's *Nothing But the Truth*.

Brother, hero, opportunist, adulterer: competing histories in *Nothing But the Truth*

Like *Dream of the Dog*, *Nothing But the Truth*—which premiered at the National Arts Festival in 2002, five years before Higginson's play—presents an extended conversation between three South Africans: a father, Sipho, his daughter, Thando, and his niece, Mandisa. Their conversation takes the form of questions, revelations, and debates about the recent past; as in Higginson's play, controversy is sparked by the arrival of an outsider: Mandisa, the child of Sipho's struggle hero brother Temba, who has grown up in London with her exile

father and West Indian mother. Both a foreigner and a family member, her unsettling presence causes unpleasant truths to surface.

Like *Dream of the Dog, Nothing But the Truth* has been criticized for being “overly talkative,” which is indeed the case (Wetmore 272). Many of the most significant events and interactions in the play happen off stage. The play’s second scene opens just after Siphon has discovered that his brother has been cremated; the following scene deals with the aftermath, rather than the substance, of the conflict. This is an effective way of simplifying the work’s dramaturgy while enforcing its central theme—the present consequences of past trauma. Yet this lack of action can make the play seem overly static and too didactic. Most scenes rely on a similar structure, in which long monologues by one character or another, usually Siphon, are punctuated by anxious questions or exclamations from the other characters. In performance, the play seems repetitive, as it drills its important but not always moving ideas into its audience.

This problem was partially resolved in the film version of the play, released in 2008, which I will discuss in conjunction with the play in this section. In the film, many of the crisis points left absent in the play are vividly dramatized. Additionally, long stretches of dialogue occur alongside more active sequences; shots of Siphon attempting to rearrange his brother’s funeral are interspersed with portions of Thando and Mandisa’s initial conversation. While the presence of a larger community and the depiction of Themba’s funeral rites greatly enrich the film, this version still retains some of the issues of the original. Some scenes, particularly several flashbacks, seem to have been included solely for the purpose of adding action and visual richness to a play constructed entirely around verbal debates (*Nothing But the Truth*).

Although generally well developed, characters in the play can also come across as too one-dimensional. Thando often seems to be little more than a foil for Mandisa and Siphon; her presence serves mainly to allow them to continue their debates. Mandisa, on the other hand,

is more abrasive in the film. Her crass and bratty foreignness is played up to the point where she is no longer a believable or sympathetic character. This significantly decreases the audience's emotional investment in the drama.

Although it has weaknesses as a dramatic work, the play has had a significant impact on post-apartheid theatre. As Kevin Wetmore notes, despite the fact that “not a huge amount actually happens,” the play “does engage many if not all of the major issues facing post-apartheid South Africa” (272). The primary debate in the play centres around Themba, Siphos recently deceased brother; his death is the occasion for Mandisa's first visit to South Africa, as she fulfils her father's wishes by bringing his body (which has, unbeknownst to the other characters, been cremated) home to South Africa to be buried alongside Themba's parents.

According to his daughter and much of the New Brighton community, Themba was a struggle hero who went into exile to avoid being killed by the police. Siphos believes he knows a different “truth” about his brother but is reticent to reveal it. When Thando questions him about Themba in the opening scene of the play, Siphos refuses to provide more information:

SIPHO: I've told you everything there is to know.

THANDO: Were you close?

SIPHO: With whom?

THANDO: Uncle Themba.

SIPHO: He is dead.

THANDO: I mean, before he left.

SIPHO: He is my brother (Kani, *Truth* 5).

Siphos oblique, evasive answers are literally true, but they do not provide the “truth” that Thando's questions are intended to elicit. The process of questioning must continue throughout the play, with deeper and deeper layers of truth revealed.

Hints of the dissonance between Themba's public image and Siphos private knowledge of him emerge early in the play:

THANDO: Why did Uncle Themba go into exile?

SIPHO: HE LEFT THE COUNTRY! Leave it at that (Kani, *Truth* 5).

Sipho immediately and angrily re-words Thando's statement. He refuses to grant Themba the status of political exile, redefining him instead as one who "left," i.e. fled the country for motives other than political ones.

Mandisa's arrival triggers a private crisis within the family. First, she brings not a body, as Sipho expected, but ashes, disrupting Sipho's plans for the funeral and throwing his community into disarray. Thando says that she has "never seen Mr. Khahla [the undertaker] so confused" (Kani, *Truth* 15). Furthermore, Mandisa, although "happy to be home" in South Africa, has trouble respecting and adhering to the mores of her South African family. She encourages Thando to visit Johannesburg with her. When Thando refuses, saying her father would not approve, Mandisa mocks Thando's dependence on her father: "Girl! 'He won't allow you!'" (Kani, *Truth* 19). Thando must remind Mandisa that "things are different here. This is not London," a point that Mandisa often seems to forget (Kani, *Truth* 19). Thando—who sees Mandisa as the "sister" she grew up without—remains caught between the appeal of her glamorous urban cousin and her loyalty to her father.

This tension helps to provoke some of the final revelations of the play. Mandisa demands that Thando ask her father for permission to go to Johannesburg. When Sipho refuses without first consulting Thando, Thando herself becomes irate and briefly sides with Mandisa: "I think Mandisa is right. You should ask me if I want to go" (Kani, *Truth* 42). Thando's sudden assertion of her right to decide for herself feeds into Sipho's fear that, even after death, his brother "is still taking from [him]" (Kani, *Truth* 45). This cryptic statement prompts further heated questioning from Thando, who finally demands the truth about her mother. Mandisa, eager for more information about her father, joins in: "what did my father do to you? What happened between the two of you?" (Kani, *Truth* 49). Sipho is then forced

to reveal his deepest secret: that Themba fled the country after Siphso discovered him sleeping with his wife and that Themba may in fact be Thando's biological father.

This revelation is the culmination of a series of narrative confessions that are triggered not only by these private tensions but by a larger public crisis. At the beginning of the play, Siphso, after a lifetime of service as the Assistant Chief Librarian at the Port Elizabeth Library, expects to be promoted to Chief Librarian now that apartheid bans on his appointment have been lifted. Just before Act II begins, he discovers that he has not received the job, as, at sixty-three, he is considered too old. Instead, the job goes to "a young person from Johannesburg" whose only qualifications are that "he is from exile or something" (Kani, *Truth* 31-2). Siphso feels as though he has again been deprived of what is rightfully his, although this time the drama is a political rather than a personal one. Throughout his career, he has maintained that "if this country was free...I would be chief librarian" (Kani, *Truth* 51). Once the country finally is free, he finds that he is "not too old to put them in power but then suddenly...too old to be empowered" (Kani, *Truth* 51).

This deep disappointment prompts the first round of Siphso's revelations, in which he tells Mandisa and Thando of the many things his brother has stolen from him over the years, from a blazer and a toy car to an opportunity to go to university and the life of his only son, Luvuyo. In his anger and sorrow, he conflates the disappointments caused by Themba, a hero of the struggle, with the deprivations visited upon him by the current government, so that private and public grievances meld into one.

Speaking to Mandisa, Siphso re-writes Themba's heroic history as one of selfishness and cowardice. Themba was a struggle "hero" who called for "stay-aways when he himself was unemployed...proposed rent boycotts when he did not have a house" (Kani, *Truth* 47). Themba "went to these gatherings [political rallies] because they were his hunting ground for other people's wives" (Kani, *Truth* 47). Mandisa, who has grown up with an image of her

father as an iconic hero, bitterly contests Sipho's version of the truth, saying that she doesn't "believe a word of it" (Kani, *Truth* 34). She attempts to neutralize Sipho's statements by claiming that Sipho is "jealous because [her] father was a hero of the struggle" (Kani, *Truth* 45). Her statements bait Sipho, who plunges deeper into his narrative of the "truth." His final revelation—of Themba's adulterous relationship with his wife—succeeds in shattering Mandisa's image of her father, who, accepting Sipho's word as truth, takes on her father's guilt: "For what it's worth, Uncle Sipho, I am sorry for what my father did to you, to our family" (Kani, *Truth* 57).

History and controversy

This destabilizing exchange dramatizes, on a personal and private level, questions about how history and memory should be constructed in the new South Africa. Kani's portrayal of an imaginary struggle hero in a negative light prompted some of the play's most bitter criticism. The extent of this debate can be seen in a 2009 blog post by Sandile Memela for *Mail & Guardian Online*; in his review, Memela praised Kani's ability as an artist but questioned Kani's ethical standards. While Memela "accepts that Kani has no business to be a propagandist, whatever that is, and is free to capture and portray the character of struggle heroes anyway he likes," he continues to say that Kani's play might "assassinate the integrity of struggle heroes" by depicting an (imaginary) icon of the struggle in an extremely negative light (Memela). Memela raises a number of pertinent questions about the roles and responsibilities of theatre, particularly as a new generation grows up largely unaware of the history of the struggle; in times like these, Memela asks, "when most people have forgotten Robert Sobukwe or Steve Biko, then what should be the role of theatre practitioners?" (Memela). Memela calls for a more positive and celebratory approach to the treatment of history, saying that "there surely must be a positive and balanced way to highlight and celebrate the work of men like Nelson Mandela, Sobukwe, Biko and ... Themba" (Memela).

Memela insists that the role of theatre, in dealing with the past, should be to memorialize, so that the heroes of yesterday may continue to be a source of pride today.

The range and number of comments made in response to this post indicate that the role of theatre in shaping the present and present understandings of the past remains a highly contested topic. Some commenters readily take sides with Memela, while others vehemently disagree. “Kelo” sums up the dissenting views eloquently: “if theatre was good enough to speak against authority under apartheid it should still be good enough to speak against it now...Our beauty as a people will be very visible if our deficiencies are dealt with. And exposing them, as the play does, is the beginning of dealing with them” (Memela). Delving into the darker parts of history can be a way of strengthening one’s community rather than undermining it; theatre must continually reinvent the ways and means by which it critiques authority and inspires social change.

The controversy raised in this article and elsewhere emphasize the richness of Kani’s work. His subject matter is such contested spaces in history, and he allows competing narratives—Themba as struggle icon, Themba as selfish brother, etc.—to exist side by side in the text. These narratives have then generated further criticism, in which competing ideas of the nature and purpose of history and memory are pitted against one another. As Njabulo Ndebele has pointed out, the unraveling of the oppressive master narrative of Apartheid is sure to generate a “search for meanings that may trigger off more narratives” (Ndebele, “Memory, Metaphor” 21). Over time, “the resulting narratives may have less and less to do with facts themselves and with their recall than with the revelation of meaning through the imaginative combination of those facts;” in the end, “facts will be the building blocks of metaphor” (Ndebele, “Memory, Metaphor” 21). “Truths,” elusive and contradictory, are only the starting point; what is important is how these truths are used to construct narratives that give purpose and direction to one’s life in the present. Art must reach beyond the immediate

or literal meaning—such as the idea that one negative portrayal of an imaginary hero taints all South African struggle leaders—to carry out a larger task of imagination, through which a new way of being, suitable for the present and future, can be constructed from knowledge of the past.

Unstable identities

A breaking down proceeds such a building up. In terms of historical narrative, this breaking down occurs when Sipho reveals his own alternative history; from the fragments left behind after his revelation is complete, a new history must be constructed by the members of the family. The same processes occur in relation to individual ideas of identity. The events of the play profoundly unsettle each character's conception of his or her self, so that new identities must be forged by the end of the play.

For Mandisa, the disruption of identity occurs both through a literal movement into a familiar-yet-alien culture and through Sipho's dismantling of her idea of her father. Mandisa has been told by her father that "England is not your home, it's just where you live...Port Elizabeth. That's where your home is" (Kani, *Truth* 16). Yet Mandisa is in many ways more English than South African. She cannot speak Xhosa and mispronounces her family's praise name. Her own last name has been Anglicized, changed from "Makhaya" to "McKay," to "help [her] fit in" (Kani, *Truth* 16). While not at home in Port Elizabeth, she also feels that she is an outsider in England, a fact she reveals when she describes the failure of a relationship with a white Englishman in large part because her father and community felt she must "marry a South African black man" from within a community that "was almost incestuous" (Kani, *Truth* 23). She is at "home" neither in South Africa nor in England. Her combination of familiarity with and foreignness in her South African "home" is further highlighted in the film version of the play. In one scene, Mandisa recognizes a shebeen her father described (Figure 1). She then insists upon going inside in direct affront to Thando's

insistence that doing so is not appropriate on the eve of the funeral (*Nothing But the Truth*). Mandisa's headstrong decision to go inside anyway illustrates both a lack of respect for her South African family and an incomplete understanding of their culture and mores.

Themba's descriptions of South Africa as an imagined-yet-tangible home provide the strongest anchor for Mandisa's identity. She speaks continually of her father's view of things, from a description of "the good smell of the township" (Kani, *Truth* 18) to the fact that Siphos has "no sense of humour" (Kani, *Truth* 44); all of her experiences of South Africa are mediated by her father's memories. Her perspective is shaken when Siphos destroys her father's moral authority. She responds first with denial—"I don't believe you!"—and then with anguish, "sobbing openly" according to the stage directions (Kani, *Truth* 49).

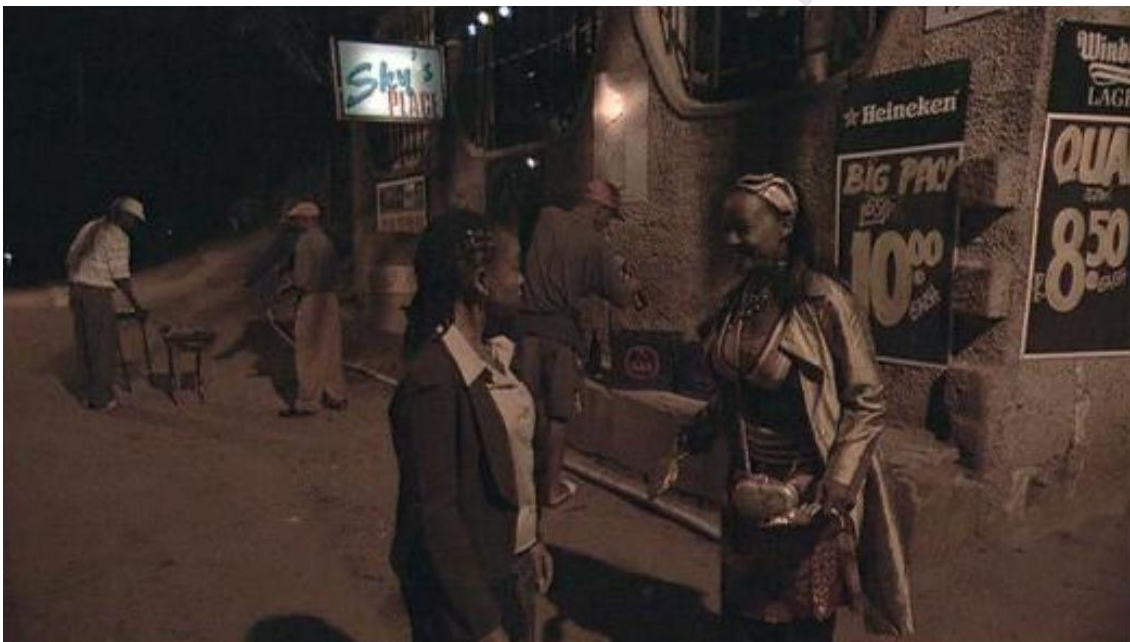


Figure 1: "Oh, Sky's Place! Daddy always used to talk about it!"

Thando's own sense of herself is also unravelled by Mandisa's arrival and her father's revelations. At Mandisa's urging, Thando announces that she will defy her father and go to Johannesburg, a decision she would never have made without Mandisa's goading. Headstrong with this newfound independence, Thando insists that her father reveal the truth about her mother. The resulting knowledge—that she might not actually be her father's

biological child—shatters her. She is overwhelmed, exclaiming, “tell me it is not so! I can’t take this anymore,” before exiting in tears (Kani, *Truth* 51).

Sipho has lived with these difficult truths for a long time. His sense of self is shaken not by these revelations, but rather by the loss of his promotion. Becoming Chief Librarian was his great yearning in a lifetime of disappointment. Lacking the money to attend university after high school, he took a job as a law clerk, hoping that this would enable him to do his articles. When his white employers reneged on their promise to allow him to do so after three years of work, he instead took the job at the library. He excelled at his work and bided his time, serving as Assistant Chief Librarian through six promotion cycles. As Thando says, it is a job he has “waited for all [his] life” (Kani, *Truth* 32). In his final failure to secure this position, he sees his brother’s negative definition of him triumph over his own idea of himself. “So you win again Themba,” he says to his absent brother, “I am still dull. Nothing good is for me” (Kani, *Truth* 51). In this moment, Sipho concedes all that matters to him; this is a final giving up after a lifetime of losses: first his father, wife, and son; now, his daughter and his own sense of self. Yet this sense of complete devastation does not last long; instead, the unsettling of identity makes room for the growth of new possibilities, as the characters find potential for healing and regeneration at the end of the play.

Public versus private: disrupted mourning

The public drama of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which are being held in Port Elizabeth as the play occurs, provides an apt backdrop for this private family drama. Thando is serving as an interpreter for the Commission, and she takes Mandisa with her to one of the hearings held regarding the killing of the Cradock Four. After their visit, Thando and Mandisa have a fierce argument about the granting of amnesty to Craig Williamson. In their debate, many of the issues raised in their private family quarrels are recapitulated in a political context; such issues include whether or not revelation of the truth

can bring about reconciliation and who has the authority to decide the narrative of history and memory. Thando reprimands Mandisa, saying that Mandisa's status as a foreigner and outsider renders her unable to comment. In the film, actual footage of the TRC hearings and recreations of these hearings are woven into the plot, with the slogan "the truth will set us free" displayed prominently on a banner in the background. Thando's assessment of Mandisa is dramatized in the film to the point of hyperbole; Mandisa appears to be confused and ill-prepared at the actual hearings, but then, upon the news of Craig Williamson's amnesty reaching the room, runs outside to toyi-toyi with a group of protesters (*Nothing But the Truth*).

With this backdrop for contrast, the drama of Siphos family appears as a potent metaphor for the "gaps" left by the TRC process, which "forgot that there is a dire need for reconciliation among the blacks themselves" (Mda viii). The need to address internal rifts within communities, as well as those between cultures, is often a striking absence in literature on reconciliation; this is, in part, because such concerns inconveniently straddle both "public" and "private" realms, in the same way that the conflict between Themba's "public" and "private" images is a source of grief and confusion for his family.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the private concerns of care and mourning were, in the TRC undertaking, often overlooked or overwhelmed by larger political and judicial processes. This disruption of necessary rights of grief and mourning is vividly illustrated by Siphos story of his fathers funeral, which, at "Comrade Themba's wishes...[was turned] into a political rally" by the UDF (Kani, *Truth* 46). Siphos "not even the first to throw soil on the coffin" (Kani, *Truth* 46). His mourning for his father is not so much destroyed as deferred; as Sam Durrant notes, "the 'little time' of personal grief is outrun by the temporality of political resistance, so that Siphos is always doomed to arrive too late at the coffin, too late to claim the rights and rites of the next of kin" (444).

Unable to grieve for his father, Siphso now feels he cannot properly mourn his brother. The play opens with an address to his brother that is also an apostrophe to all he has lost and cannot regain. "All I wanted was a little time," he tells Themba; "there are things I wanted to talk to you about...But no. Themba doesn't arrive" (Kani, *Truth* 3). Deprived of a reconciliation in life, he seeks peace in his ability to mourn his brother in death, looking forward to seeing his brother's face once more when the body arrives.

This hope is destroyed when Mandisa arrives with an urn containing her father's ashes, disrupting Siphso's plans for an elaborate traditional funeral. Siphso responds with disbelief, confusion, and accusation: "what are we going to do? What about the night vigil? Reverend Haya is coming soon to conduct a small service for the arrival of Themba's body. What body? How could you do this to me?" (Kani, *Truth* 13). Siphso has carefully arranged traditional rites for his brother; by doing so, he hoped to recover the time of grief stolen from him at his father's death and to reconcile with his memories of his brother. The sudden intrusion of foreignness in the form of a cremated body disrupts these plans, once again depriving Siphso of the time of personal grief. In the film version of the play, these disruptions are vividly illustrated by the presence of a group of uninvited young ANC supporters at the vigil held for Themba's (absent) body, whose chants threaten to drown out the church choir Siphso has brought to the ceremony (*Nothing But the Truth*). Despite these initial setbacks, Siphso and his family find alternative ways to mourn for Themba and, by doing so, bring about a long overdue reconciliation between the two sides of the family.

Reinventing tradition

In calling for the "rediscovery of the ordinary" in South African literature, Ndebele emphasizes the flexibility of culture and tradition. He notes that people are resilient, "always trying and struggling to maintain a semblance of normal social order. They will attempt to apply tradition and custom to manage their day to day family problems...They apply systems

of values that they know” (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 49). In response to stress and upheaval, these value systems change and evolve; it is this transformation that “constitutes the essential drama in the lives of ordinary people” (Ndebele, *Rediscovery* 49).

The recovery of such stories of “ordinary people” from the shadow of myth, history, and politics comprises the central drama of *Nothing But the Truth*. The play dramatizes Sipho’s struggle to develop new, hybrid ways in which to hold a fitting funeral for his absent brother. In this way, the play fulfils a key task required of post-apartheid literature, namely that it be “a crucial site not simply for the recovery of communal traditions of remembrance but for the reinvention of memorial practices and thus the reinvention of community” (Durrant 441). Kani accomplishes this by seamlessly blending private and public in a way that allows his characters to reinvent broken and disrupted traditions of mourning. Kani unites public and private on a meta-textual level as well. The play itself is rooted in Kani’s private life; “in so far as it also works through Kani’s grief at the death of his own son at a political rally...the play is both intensely private and, by virtue of the fact that it is performed, public” (Durrant 444).¹² The work enacts a public performance of the private task of recovering the lost time of personal grief.

Despite his initial reservations, Sipho comes to reinvent traditions of mourning in order to achieve reconciliation with his lost brother. At the beginning of the play, he is enraged and embarrassed by the idea of having his brother’s ashes “scattered beside his Mom and Dad’s grave” (Kani, *Truth* 14). While Thando tries to remedy the situation by pointing out that “some black people here are also going in for cremation these days,” Sipho refuses to accept any deviation from tradition (Kani, *Truth* 14).

By the end of the play, his attitude has changed. His disappointments and revelations prove to him that, without reconciliation and forgiveness, he will be left alone and empty-handed, with “nothing but the truth” (Kani, *Truth* 49). When Mandisa apologizes to him, he

offers her forgiveness but regrets he cannot extend the same to his brother, now that his brother has died. Thando steps in to remind him that he has always told her that “the dead are among us all the time. We can talk to them whenever we want” (Kani, *Truth* 56). When Siphso agrees with this statement, Thando then points to the urn and asks “what are you waiting for?” (Kani, *Truth* 56). Although at first reluctant to accept the ashes as a surrogate for his brother’s body, choosing instead to hold the barrier of exile and cultural difference against Mandisa and her father, he relents at last, telling his niece and daughter that they will be “burying my brother next to my mother’s and father’s graves” (Kani, *Truth* 59). He extends further forgiveness and understanding by allowing Thando to go to Johannesburg. Having forgiven his brother, Siphso no longer sees Themba and his family as a significant threat. Now that his relationship with Thando has survived a revelation of the truth, he need no longer jealously guard against further loss.

The movie provides a more thorough illustration of the way in which rites of mourning are reinvented in the drama. In an early scene, Siphso and the undertaker, Mr. Khahla, together decide to bring an empty coffin to the vigil for Themba’s body; to account for the weight of the absent body, they improvise and place Mandisa’s suitcases inside the coffin. Later, the movie traces Siphso’s progressive negotiations for his brother’s funeral, in which he discusses his dilemma first with the priest, then with his uncles, and finally with a sangoma. In the film, Siphso places great emphasis on the fact that he has bought an ox to be slaughtered for the funeral; the arrival and tethering of the ox provide a backdrop for several scenes of dialogue. In the compromise reached between his family, the priest, and the sangoma, the ox comes to stand in for the body of his absent brother. In the penultimate scene in which he forgives his brother, he addresses these sentiments to the ox itself. The ox then becomes the centrepiece of an improvised burial ritual, in which the ashes are scattered inside the skin of the ox, which is then folded and placed in the coffin (Figure 2).



Figure 2: "Here are the ashes of Themba...we are here today to honour him."

Through this modified ritual, traditional practices and modern disruptions are seamlessly reconciled with one another. The film's penultimate scene takes place at the cemetery itself, echoing earlier images of the funeral of Siphos father (*Nothing But the Truth*). While this earlier funeral is disrupted by the police, the latter is peaceful (Figure 3). Siphos is the first to throw dirt on his brother's coffin, a right he was denied at his father's funeral (Figure 4). By dramatizing both funerals, the movie emphasizes the fact that Siphos is now able to complete the rites of mourning disrupted long ago (*Nothing But the Truth*).



Figure 3: "They fired tear gas, right there at the funeral."



Figure 4: “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

The fallibility of memory and the limits of forgiveness

While images of reconciliation permeate the play’s final scene, Kani also emphasizes that there are limits to forgiveness. Siphos asks “if I can forgive all the white people for what they did to us in this country, how can I not forgive my own brother?” (Kani, *Truth* 56). He can do this, he claims, because he believes that “a man is much more than the worst thing he’s ever done” (Kani, *Truth* 56). When Mandisa criticizes the amnesty process of the TRC as “giving in too easily,” he bursts in to contradict her, saying that it is, in truth, “called African humanity, ubuntu, not generosity” (Kani, *Truth* 30).

While he is able to offer a broad public forgiveness to whites as a group, he cannot bring himself to extend the same private forgiveness that he grants his brother to the man who killed his son. He asks that the policeman be tried for the murder of his son, found guilty, and imprisoned; only then will it be right for the policeman to be granted amnesty. Siphos draws a clear distinction between amnesty and forgiveness; while the policeman will have “disclosed all” after being imprisoned, thereby meeting the conditions for amnesty, Siphos will still not forgive him. When Thando again, after the processes of mourning and healing have taken place, asks him if he can forgive his son’s killer, Siphos responds only with silence. Like

Higginson in *Dream of the Dog*, Kani argues that forgiveness can be too much like forgetting to be palatable or possible for those who remain haunted by the past. While he may forgive his brother, when it comes to his son and the work of the TRC, Siphon “must settle for amnesty without justice or forgiveness—nothing but the truth, as the title suggests” (Wetmore 271). The consolation that may be had in private, and within one’s community, does not extend to the public arena.

“Disclosing all” and uncovering the truth is not by itself enough to heal. While “the integration of the past into the present may be one stage in a process of healing, or in the making of memory,” healing and remembering also require that one “find the freedom to ask more questions, to let the unspeakable, then and now, filter in, to disturb, to open out consciousness” (Nuttall 85). No truth is absolute or final; one must accept not only one’s memories but also the fallibility of these memories. An excavation of memory requires an acknowledgement of the silences and often terrifying dark spaces that haunt the narrative. In healing, one comes to see “that one has not located the truth about the past, but only an ongoing narrative of self—to see the subjectivity of the versions of the past one has offered to oneself...to guard against the void of meaning and understanding which one most fears” (Nuttall 85).

To complete the process of healing, Siphon must admit that the truths he has disclosed are only part of a fractured whole. By taking on the burden of a fallible and partial memory, he brings about a restoration of his own identity and the identities of his daughter and niece as well. First, having rejected Thando in a previous exchange, he asserts that, no matter what her “real” parentage is, “she is the one thing you cannot take away from me...Thando is mine” (Kani, *Truth* 52). Thando overhears this statement and immediately resumes the identity that was, for her, profoundly shaken: “Yes, I am your daughter. Nothing is going to change that” (Kani, *Truth* 52). Siphon then admits the subjectivity of the “truth” he has

revealed about Themba. Upon being questioned again by Mandisa, Siphso relents and says that his narrative was coloured by the fact that he was “very jealous” of his brother (Kani, *Truth* 57). He restores at least part of Mandisa’s vision of her heroic father, confirming that Themba “was a political activist...[and] a hero of the Struggle. If he had stayed the police would have killed him” (Kani, *Truth* 57). With these words, he grants Themba the status of honoured exile, taking back his earlier statement that Themba merely “left the country.” Mandisa, grateful for this admission, brings Siphso a recent picture of Themba, fulfilling Siphso’s opening wish to see his brother one last time and thereby completing the reinvented rites of mourning.

While *Dream of the Dog* raises powerful but unanswered questions about the excavation of memory and the processes of guilt and forgiveness, *Nothing But the Truth* suggests practical and partial, though perhaps not wholly satisfying, solutions to some of these questions. The play ends with an image of hope. Siphso, resuming the address to his brother begun at the play’s opening, concludes with the statement that, having lost the position at the library, he will create a new post for himself by founding the first African public library in New Brighton. In this library, his beloved collection of African literature will no longer be sidelined on a few dusty shelves but will instead appear in the main library. As a lifelong custodian of books and stories, Siphso now commits himself to placing his own narrative and the narratives of his culture front and centre as he claims, for the first time in his life, power over the course of his own destiny. Through the speaking and processing of memory, the reinvention and completion of rites of mourning, and the acceptance of his own fractured memory, Siphso enables himself to assert a new identity and to move forward into the future.

Of course, his dream remains just that: an as-yet-unfulfilled desire; the end of the play enacts a subjunctive future. Kani suggests that one must tell the story of the past in order to

recover agency over the present, much as he has undertaken to process his own loss through the writing and performance of the play. The restorative power of narrative is a partial one; while “the acts of telling and sharing memories contain regenerative possibilities,” this regeneration “will leave new silences and issues to be confronted in the future” (Field 41). Sipho’s refusal to say whether or not he could forgive his son’s killer illustrates such a potent silence. Higginson’s and Kani’s plays both gesture to these issues but leave ample room for future exploration and commentary. Both plays recognize the limits of forgiveness; how to move forward in spite of these limitations is an issue neither play adequately deals with. How can Sipho and his son’s killer exist side by side as South Africans? What kind of national identity could accommodate both of these figures? What future will Look Smart have if he cannot let go of the past—and what future will he bequeath to his children? How can one honour the histories embedded in the land while also re-thinking one’s relationship to this land? Such questions, raised by these plays, would be potent topics for future works. The final chapter will deal briefly with the potential futures of South African theatre.

CHAPTER 4
Where To From Here?
Talking about the past, acting in the future

“In order to create theatre, it is necessary to leave it behind” (Gatti 71).

Let us return, for a moment, to the idea of the theatre in crisis. By crisis, I mean not the general “crisis” in which theatre can always be said to exist, but rather the specific sense of “emergency” that characterizes the English theatre of the Restoration and contemporary South African theatre. What is the legacy of such a theatre?

While over five hundred new plays were performed in London between 1660 and 1710, only a handful of the most famous Restoration plays are performed today, and those themselves are seldom seen (Hume ix). Critical attention to the field is limited, aside from a small number of specialists; indeed, even “among its [Restoration drama’s] most distinguished students, few seem truly to have delighted in it” (Hume ix). Although an influential and prolific period in the theatre, the works of this era are largely neglected today.

There are several reasons for this. Moral judgments of earlier eras often dismissed these plays, particularly the comedies, as bawdy, coarse, and amoral. Outside of moral qualms, “these plays usually seem insufficiently serious or profound. Anyone who brings expectations based on Shakespeare...will indeed find it [this drama] trivial, gross, and dull” (Hume ix). The drama of the Restoration does not appeal to a modern sensibility that desires “serious,” “relevant,” or socially critical drama. Furthermore, much of the humour is too topical to translate for a contemporary audience; Restoration comedy and drama “are primarily theatre of entertainment...designed to appeal to contemporary popular taste” (Hume x). This theatre was intended to delight and transport its immediate audience; it was never intended to speak to universal themes across generations.

While there is, justifiably, little space for Restoration drama on the contemporary stage, a study of these works is useful in several ways. First, it provides insight into the

origins of trends and aesthetics that would help to shape the modern Anglophone theatre. Second, this drama provides a keen insight into the mores and ideals of its society. Finally, with crises of waning popularity and shrinking audiences in theatres from America to South Africa, the lessons offered by a theatre that was, first and foremost, a popular one, should not be too easily dismissed. While the plays themselves may not be enduring works of art, the lessons they offer about how a theatre evolves during a period of turmoil and the consequences of this evolution are still valid today.

South African theatre: similar problems

Although lacking the same historical perspective, a review of the plays included in this study suggests that similar conclusions may be drawn in regards to the institutional, “white” drama in contemporary South Africa. In trying to adapt a traditional idea of a “well-made” play by a single playwright to the resolution of very particular contemporary and local issues, the plays represent one vein in the continued evolution of South African theatre during a tumultuous period in which “theatre and society...are not yet post-apartheid but rather tentatively post-anti-apartheid” (Kruger, *Drama of SA* 191). An analysis of these works yields interesting insights into evolving ideas about South African identities and other key post-Apartheid issues. These plays readily engage with the problem of nation building and offer insightful analyses of the problems South Africans face in confronting the past. They illustrate why it remains difficult to convince all South Africans to say that they are “South African first,” and only secondarily black, white, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Sotho, English, etc.

The necessities of nation-building

The political pressures on such a theatre in the aftermath of South Africa’s negotiated transformation are enormous; “since the past had to meet the present through settlement, not revolution, it needed an accompanying rhetoric about how to process the future: and that process was divined as the act of nation building” (de Kok, “Cracked Heirlooms” 57). As the

White Paper demonstrates, the arts were seen as an integral tool in this work of nation building.

As a result, “memory and representation were thus of necessity put to work early for reconstruction purposes” (de Kok 57). Theatre practitioners in all arenas were burdened with an immense political and social task in addition to the challenges of institutional transformation. This burden came at a time when the theatre was struggling to redefine itself artistically. With the “spectacular” aesthetics of protest theatre exhausted, the theatre became possessed of a political task but lacked an artistic sense of self. Any sense of a cohesive tradition was also lost, as is seen in the fact that this study has defined “white theatre” as one of many “veins” or sub-traditions within the South African theatre.

It is not surprising that the three post-apartheid plays in this study present well-developed social commentary, unlike the flawed and cynical perspective of *Just Like Home*. At the same time, none of the four plays offers significant artistic innovation. Instead, the three post-apartheid plays take up the more pressing task of nation-building, in the hope that space for artistic rejuvenation will then follow. All three plays comment on several key themes central to the work of reconstruction: the healing power of confession; the problems of dealing with trauma and history; the nature and difficulties of the reconciliation process; and evolving identities in the new South Africa.

Confession, truth, and trauma

As de Kok notes, the “rhetoric of ‘national catharsis’” played a central role, not only in the Truth Commission itself, but also in the popular imagination (“Cracked Heirlooms” 59). This rhetoric celebrates the idea that “promoting confession, or some version of ‘reliving’ ... will purge the perpetrators and restore the dignity of the victims” (de Kok, “Cracked Heirlooms” 59). All three plays subscribe, to an extent, to this idea; all are structured around processes of interrogation that build to a climactic revelation. In *Reach*, this

revelation is only one small part of a larger process of reconciliation, while in *Dream of the Dog*, it is mutual revelations that help to reunite Patricia and Look Smart, albeit in a partial and problematic way. *Nothing But the Truth* explores the idea of catharsis through confession most fully; it offers a mixed conclusion, in which the “truth” can disrupt identity but also promote renewal of this identity. Knowing the truth can bring about some reconciliations, but other evils, no matter what their truth, are too great to be forgiven, an idea also present in *Dream of the Dog*.

The questions of confession and catharsis are closely linked to the problems of dealing with history, particularly a traumatic history like South Africa’s. The contemporary theatre faces “the disconcerting challenge of having to compete with the exaggerations and passions of real life, of unfolding history and the violence, poverty, and injustice” (Brink 174). Processing these traumatic memories is a necessary task of the theatre, which offers an important intersection between public and private concerns. In all three plays, private and domestic traumas stand in for larger national disruptions. The small scale of the traumas discussed makes it possible for the individual to relate to the issues at hand, whereas the immense scale of “violence, poverty, and injustice” in the country as a whole can make an attempt to grasp these issues on a public level alienating and overwhelming.

Larger political and social events form a backdrop for these private explorations. In *Reach*, this background, in the form of land debates, is forced into the play artificially and is not fully developed. *Dream of the Dog*, by writing these larger debates as another form of private quarrel, in which Look Smart himself is an agent of the re-development of land, is more successful in its treatment of the same issues regarding the use and distribution of land. In *Nothing But the Truth*, this political backdrop is made obvious and overt. While this produces interesting debates about the Truth Commission, the parallel can seem strained, as the plot of the play is at times forced to mirror the processes of the Truth Commission rather

than being allowed to arise organically from the intersecting lives and personalities of its characters. The political commentary that results is interesting, but this commentary is too often offered at the expense of dramatic integrity.

The processing of trauma and acts of confession set the stage for moments of reconciliation and the (re)defining of identities in all three plays. In these plays, loss is a significant fact for the protagonists. Absence becomes a vital presence, as Sipho, Marion, and Patricia all make apostrophes to those who are not there: Sipho's dead brother, Marion's émigré daughter, and Patricia's stillborn child. These absent figures, along with the rites through which their absence is mourned, embody "grief that remains unexpressed," and by doing so, enable "an act of imaginative identification that gestures towards the possibility of community" (Durrant 448). The shared experience of loss—be it the loss of community and the death of Jonathan in *Reach*, the loss of a fiancée and a child in *Dream of the Dog*, or a profound loss of identity in *Nothing But the Truth*—moves previously antagonistic characters towards some form of reconciliation.

The process of reconciliation also involves a rediscovery of identity. That South Africans must reinvent themselves in the light of immense political transition is clear. Such a reinvention must go beyond the easy rhetoric of the "Rainbow Nation," as "without the binding force of a common enemy, discrepancies in economic and social conditions opened too wide to permit easy appeals to a united national culture" (Kruger, *Drama of SA* 191). Furthermore, as all three of these plays illustrate, these reinventions must take place on multiple levels. In each play, both black and white characters, both the victims and the guilty, are asked to reconsider both who they are and what their relation to their society is. These processes are not always carried far enough; neither Marion nor Patricia is asked to rethink her sense of self and their relationship to history as fully as they should be. They represent the flaws of the present convincingly but do not offer possibilities for the future. *Nothing But the*

Truth carries out a more thorough exploration of responsibility and guilt. Sipho's profoundly altered vision of himself and his destiny offers a more hopeful gesture towards a new future than any idea present in the other two plays.

Repetition and reinvention

In essence, each of these plays takes similar themes and scenarios and develops them to a different conclusion. While this may seem to indicate a lack of originality in the contemporary theatre, it is in fact a necessary step in the working out of individual, national, and artistic identities. One of the strengths of theatre as an agent of social change is the fact that it can admit "the existence of the many potential versions enclosed in any given individual, or people, or country, or experience, or epoch" in a way that "empower[s] us to recreate ourselves, to refashion our own lives, to rediscover those flickerings of imagination that, in the final analysis, make us human beings" (Brink 175).

While all three plays raise key questions surrounding the formations of "new" identities in 21st-century South Africa, only *Nothing But the Truth* ends with true discoveries of new identities. Marion and Patricia may move towards a re-making of self, but, ageing and childless, they hardly gesture towards the future. *Reach* and *Dream of the Dog* indicate key problems inherent in re-thinking the place of whiteness and a European heritage in South Africa. Questions of ownership and belonging and the corrosive effects of fear are elegantly posed; characters must deal with guilt and complicity in oppression. They must also negotiate past trauma while finding ways to relate to those of different races who were, in the past, an unapproachable "other." Yet the plays do not explain how to negotiate the issues of guilt, complicity in injustice, and responsibility for the past in a satisfying way. An idea as to how to relocate "whiteness" for a new generation is never found, as, in Higginson and Foot's plays, there is no new generation to shape. One of several possible conclusions can be drawn from this failure: the playwrights do not believe there is a place for white identities in South

Africa's future; they are taking a first and necessarily partial step towards such a rediscovery of the place of whiteness; or, they are more concerned with highlighting what is and isn't happening now and lamenting what was and could have been than they are with re-shaping identities and forms for the future.

A necessary failure of imagination

Given the structures of these plays, the third analysis seems most believable. All of the plays under discussion are based on a European idea of a "well-made script:" an authoritative text with a single author, designed to be performed in a traditional theatre venue by a cast of professional actors. This is a Western model which has been applied to South African concerns in these plays. None of these playwrights has sought ways to modify or develop this structure to accommodate "African" as well as "European" norms. The hybrid nature of South African culture, be it black or white, is ignored in the structures of these plays.

The playwrights cannot reinvent these forms because they have not left the established theatre far enough behind. Weighed down by political concerns, they do not address artistic ones fully enough. This accounts for the failure of imagination in the messages of the plays as well as in their form. In these plays, the playwrights pose pertinent questions but cannot fully answer them, because they themselves have not yet rethought the relationship of their chosen form to its environment.

The current crisis in the South African theatre makes this a potentially fruitful period. South African theatre artists have a striking freedom to invent and re-invent forms and genres, as well as the definition of theatre itself. An entirely new theatre could emerge from such radical reinvention. Are theatre artists making the most of these opportunities? In institutional theatres, they do not appear to be doing so.

A vital South African theatre would seek to discover a unified idea of South Africa while recognizing the country's diverse cultures and identities. Works in such a theatre would be hybrid in form, drawing on models from the range of cultures that have influenced South Africa's development: European, African, American, and African-American. In such works, protagonists of different races and backgrounds could coexist on stage in equal richness, each as fully developed a character as the other, so that the resulting work could not be said to tell a "white" story, as *Dream of the Dog* or *Reach* does, nor a "black" story, as in *Nothing But the Truth*. Instead, a work hybrid in form and content could accurately portray an encounter between two different cultures and modes of being in which each is given equal strength.

Is such a work possible? I believe it is, although in shaping such a work, the problem of authenticity naturally arises. The question of who has the authority to tell which story and use which forms remains a vexed and vexing one; it is perhaps fear of over-stepping the bounds of their authority that holds some of these playwrights back from creating such hybrid works. While perhaps this will change in South Africa's future, for now the solution seems to lie in collaborations in which artists of different backgrounds can together draw on a range of stories and forms to create, together, hybrid scripts. This need not be a workshop process, although this is a possibility; such collaborations could also bring about a re-thinking of the idea of the well-made script and a re-shaping of this model to better reflect South Africa's hybrid culture.

Of course, there are other viable and innovative traditions alive within South African theatre. As Loren Kruger notes, "the production of new work and new ways of doing theatre for new audiences has in the 1990s more often happened on the festival circuit or outside theatre altogether, than on the main stages of subsidized theatre" (*Drama of SA* 195). Physical theatre, a very well-developed genre in South Africa, has produced a number of innovative works in recent years. Other forms of "alternative" theatre, particularly community theatre

and theatre for development, also offer great potential for innovation. The fluidity of genre, form, venue, and audience in these areas of theatre “makes possible the revision of the axioms of anti-apartheid theatre and the renegotiation of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, form and function, subjunctive enactment in the theatre and indicative action in streets and houses” (Kruger, *Drama of SA* 204). Perhaps the greatest potential for reinvention occurs when one “takes theatre practice out of the institution...breaching the disciplinary boundaries around theatre as such” (Kruger, *Drama of SA* 210).¹³

The discoveries that result from moving outside of the established theatre must then be reintegrated into theatre institutions to ensure the widespread dissemination of these innovations. There is still a place for “white theatre” in South Africa as much as there is a place for white identities and European traditions. A European heritage has been, for better or worse, an inextricable aspect of the country’s history and will continue to be an inescapable fact of its future. The re-orientation of places of whiteness within the national imagination is a necessary task within the larger project of nation building. The plays discussed in this study raise key questions about the nature and formation of South African identities and gesture to subjunctive futures for South African society. By doing so, they indicate some of the problems that future generations of theatre artists will need to take up as they seek the uniquely South African forms that will help to transform subjunctive enactments of new South African identities into indicative realities.

Notes

1. For a more detailed account of the persistence of drama in the Commonwealth, see Harbage 215-236.
2. Restoration diarist Samuel Pepys remarks on the shocking disparity between the glamour of the stage and the reality of the actors' bodies: "But Lord, to see how they were painted would make a man mad and did make me loath them...and yet what a show they make on the stage by candle-light" (Pepys 260).
3. The contemporary American film industry is a direct heir to many of the values and aesthetics of the Restoration theatre. An emphasis on comedy, music, and spectacle; fetishisation of actors as sex objects; intense faddishness; and a cult of celebrity can be said to characterize both the Hollywood blockbusters of recent years and the English theatre of 1660-1700.
4. On 1 August 2002, the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) was split into two departments: the Department of Arts and Culture and the Department of Science and Technology.
5. Additionally known as protest theatre (particularly in its early incarnations in the 1960s) and the theatre of resistance. Precise definitions of these terms vary between critics. For convenience, "struggle theatre" will be used as an umbrella term to describe the anti-apartheid theatre of 1960-1990 associated with testimony, protest, struggle, Black Consciousness, and resistance. For a brief summary of these distinctions in terminology, see Solberg 4-5; for a more nuanced discussion, see Kruger, *Drama of SA* 155. For a discussion of the problems inherent in defining critical language in post-apartheid South Africa, see Steadman 80-1.
6. See de Kok and Press for a comprehensive collection of responses to Sachs' lecture.
7. For a more thorough account of Brecht's influence on South African theatre, see Kruger, *Post-Imperial Brecht*.
8. See Appendix for a detailed summary of these findings.
9. Adverts featured matches such as "Boytjies vs. Car Guards," "Mamas vs. Café Owners," and "Divas vs. Taxi Drivers." For recordings of these adverts, see Bloomfield.
10. For an interesting discussion of the formation of attitudes linking the health and cleanliness of the home and body to the vitality of the nation, see Low 13-21.
11. De Wet's play was published in English translation in 2005 under the title *African Gothic*. I refer to the English version in this discussion.
12. While Durrant's analysis is acute and insightful, the play is in fact dedicated to Xolile Kani, John Kani's younger brother, who is memorialized in the character of Luvuyo, Siphosane's son. According to Kani, the play is "a tribute to my younger brother who was a poet of the struggle against apartheid, and was shot by the police in 1985 while reciting one of his poems at the funeral of a nine-year-old girl who was killed during the so called

riots...I wrote this play, *Nothing But the Truth*, to bring closure in my heart to the death of my brother, Xolile Kani, to whom this play is dedicated. I wanted to remember him with fondness and a sense of gratitude for the ultimate price that he paid so that I could be free in a free, democratic South Africa” (“Sydney Opera House”).

13. There is a great deal of interesting literature on “alternative” theatres in post-Apartheid South Africa. For an introduction to this topic, see the final chapter of Kruger, *Drama of SA* and Mda, *When People Play People*.

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Appendix
2010 Grahamstown National Arts Festival
Fringe Theatre Statistical Summary*

COMPOSITION	Professional	Semi-professional	Student	Community
	54 [65%]	11 [13%]	8 [10%]	10 [12%]
PERFORMANCE HISTORY	Premiere	Previously Performed		
	26 [31%]	57 [69%]		
ORIGIN OF SCRIPT	South African	SA/Foreign Collaboration	Foreign	
	71 [86%]	6 [7%]	6 [7%]	
CONTENT	Issues-based	Other		
<i>SA and SA/Foreign only</i>	49 [64%]	28 [36%]		
LANGUAGE	English	English w/ SA Language(s)	English w/ Foreign Language	Other SA Language
	30 [36%]	43 [52%]	4 [5%]	6 [7%]
	Official SA Languages	Unofficial SA Languages	Foreign Languages	
	8	2	2	

**Excludes comedy, musical theatre, and physical theatre*

Content and Language: Detailed Summary

ISSUES COVERED		LANGUAGES	
Crime and Justice	12	English	30
Poverty	7	English w/ Xhosa	18
HIV/AIDS	3	English w/ Zulu	3
Heritage and Tradition	4	English w/ Afrikaans	4
Gender	11	English w/ Setswana	6
Gay Rights	1	English w/ SA Languages	3
Corruption and Politics	7	English w/ Xhosa & Afrikaans	2
Race and Identity	5	English w/ Northern Sotho	1
Xenophobia	3	English w/ Sepedi	2
Children and Youth	6	English w/ Sesotho	1
Apartheid and SA History	8	English w/ Afrikaans & Setswana	1
2010 Soccer World Cup	2	English w/ Zulu & Sesotho	1
Environment	2	English w/ Fanakalo	1
Ubuntu	1	English w/ German	3
		English w/ Croatian	1
		Afrikaans	3
		Cape Afrikaans	1
		Afrikaans w/ German	1
		Setwsana w/ Zulu	1

Figure 1: Composition of performing companies

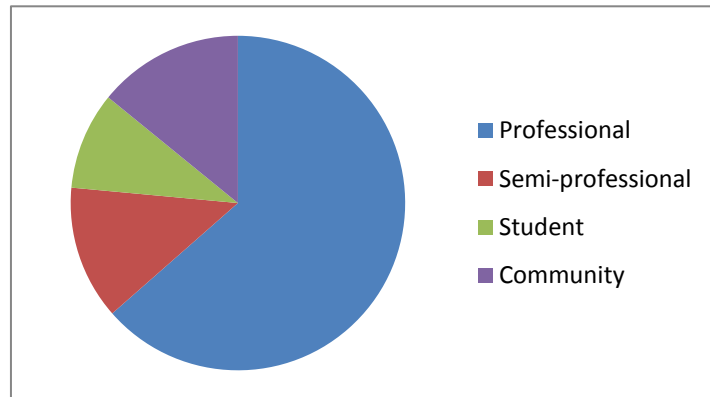


Figure 2: Language choices

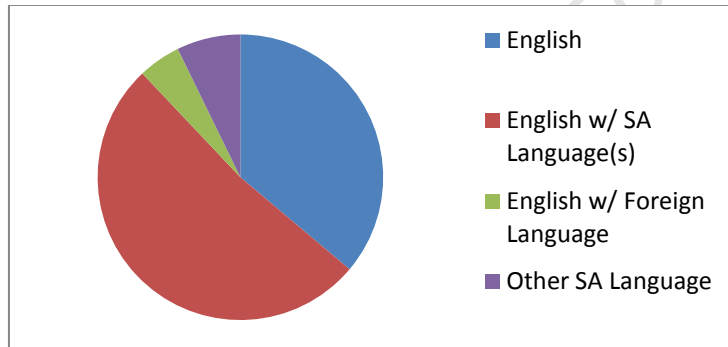


Figure 3: Content: issues covered

