

**THEATRE OF THE CONTACT ZONE: A QUEST FOR A MEANS TO  
NURSE SPLIT PSYCHIC SPACES IN PUBLIC SPHERES THROUGH THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF DRAMATIC TEXTS INTO PERFORMANCE  
TEXTS.**

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award  
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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 and quotation in this dissertation from the work, or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## Dedication

To the memories of

**VaMhandara, Anna Shope Chimoga**

My link to non-ordinary states of consciousness

## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This study is a theoretical explication of an idea of a theatre called Theatre of the Contact Zone. Its main feature is the collaboration between the playwright and the director in the transformation of dramatic texts into performance texts. Within the pragmatics of this theatre the playwright's initial task is to provide a working script. It is only a foundation, the basis, without which the director has nothing to begin coordinating the collaborative process of theatre making. The writing of the script continues through out rehearsals. The final script is compiled after the production incorporating changes made in the course of its transformation into a performance, as well as insights gained through watching the production. The first experiment was through a play called *An African Syzygy* which I wrote and was directed by Sanjin Muftic (a fellow postgraduate student whose orientation in theatre studies is directing) In this explication, a second play which I wrote and was again directed by Mr. Muftic called *A Wound in the Thigh* will be used to illustrate the theoretical and practical features of Theatre of the Contact Zone.

Chapter one presents an explanation of the notion of 'Contact Zone' in this theatre as well as presenting its principles and features. Chapter Two unpacks the art and craft behind the creation of *A Wound in the Thigh*. Chapter Three charts the process of transformation from page to stage. All this is intended to illuminate and exemplify the theory and practice of Theatre of the Contact Zone.

Playwriting was the orientation of my studies. The first play *An African Syzygy* represented UCT Drama Department at Grahamstown theatre festival 2006. *A Wound in the Thigh* was performed in the Arena Theatre of Hiddingh Campus late November/early December 2006.

## INTRODUCTION

This explication seeks to outline and elucidate the principles, features and operational structures of an idea of a theatre, which in the course of my studies I have termed Theatre of the Contact Zone. The central inspiration behind the creation of this theatre arose specifically out of a personal psychological tension, a long time haunting dilemma which at one point I was so ashamed of it, but now have discovered, can be converted into a significant creative force. I reveal this as an attempt to frame the context within which the essence of both the dramatic text (*A Wound in the Thigh*) and this explication can best be comprehended. The creation of this theatre was also necessitated by my long nursed ambition to write plays that would amalgamate different dramatic elements borrowed from various independent dramatic genres. I had always hoped that such an approach would mould plays whose scripts and performances may register or reawaken in the audience an awareness of the fertility and abundance of theatrical history and knowledge, backdating to the establishment of theatre in ancient Greece. Coupled with this, it has always been my dream to create domestic stories that can reflect and echo universal human experience and concerns, stories that can transcend the confinements of geography, culture and time.

The dilemma which I sought to address through the notion of Theatre of the Contact Zone is the apparent conflict between tradition and modernity in many contemporary African societies, added to this, is the quest for Identity. With specific reference to my Zimbabwean community, the predicament has been grossly aggravated by the current economic rupture whose aftermath is rampant social depression and disillusionment. Ironically, the turbulent external reality has forcefully lodged itself in the psychic spaces of the majority of the citizens. The effect manifests itself through symptoms of potential schizophrenia. Frantz Fanon (1958) coined the phrase 'Black skin White masks' for people in such quandaries. Citizens become fragmented personalities, feeling torn apart and precariously unstable most of the time. In line with the observation made by psychoanalyst Steiner (1993) schizophrenics 'often feel persecuted from within and without,' (1993:23). Theatre analyst Green (1969) stated: 'There is a mysterious bond between psycho-analysis and theatre' (1969:51) hence my idea of Theatre of the Contact Zone.

In the course of my studies I came to realize that a direct confrontation with this psychic state through writing dramatic texts, following them as they are transformed into performances as well as watching the performances is ameliorative and curative. It is within this context that I coined title of this explication: A quest for a means to nurse split psychic spaces in public spheres through the transformation of dramatic texts into performances.

Having realized that my intended theatre grapples with the issue of identity and how best one can live a complete meaningful life in the aftermath of colonization and the current widening net of globalization, I found family as an institution to be the ideal locus for my plays since it is in the family where identity is primarily formed, where personality is developed, where status is assigned and where basic values and norms are learned. Family is therefore the theoretical ground of exploration in all scripts of Theatre of the Contact Zone.

The idea of Theatre of the Contact Zone is born out of frustration, frustration rooted in the 'post-colonial' socio-political atmosphere in Africa, with special reference to Zimbabwe. When the scripts are well written and performances well directed, the idea of this theatre seeks to delve into serious issues of soul searching and the attainment of self consciousness. The suffering that the majority of Africans have gone through because of internally and externally induced causes should give them more profound insight into the dynamics of life. Elements of tragedy are therefore embedded in Theatre of the Contact Zone echoing the inevitable self-awareness that is rooted in the synthesis of pessimism and optimism. The language of this theatre should tally with its serious subject matters.

I consciously and painstakingly stylize and heighten its linguistic dimension so as to convey and register within readers and viewers its sombre tone and painful concerns. The language is crafted to enhance the engagement of emotions and register multiple levels of psychological violence and torture. Theatre of the Contact Zone seeks to reach the recipients primarily through their feelings rather than thoughts.

A strong influence of English literature will be evident in my scripts. This is one after-effect of my vast exposure to European literature through my predominantly British

oriented education which was imposed on me by imperial missionary work and European colonization. British colonial education with its assimilative agendas left strong psychological imprints on my life. This I can not deny. As a playwright I have come to realize that it is therapeutic to boldly accept the aftermath of this personality splitting education and complement it with my theatrical knowledge when writing scripts that I can bring order into my fragmented psyche. I hope my scripts and their performances will ring and reawaken in both readers and audience the richness created in blending literature and theatre.

In its performance structure, Theatre of the Contact Zone seeks to operate along the format outlined by Edgar (1999). Edgar said 'plays are written and theatre is made.' He elaborates in these words:

Plays are written... usually by a single person in possession of an idiosyncratic style and point of view. Collaboration is necessary in the creation of theatre.  
(1999: 17)

Therefore a written script is not theatre and theatre is not a written script. I am a playwright-theatre maker not only a playwright. Collaboration between the playwright and the director is a crucial distinctive feature of this theatre. It is a period when the director, the playwright and the cast are working together in the transformation of the script into a performance, with the director leading the team in mounting the production. However, for the playwright the process would have begun earlier. He is at one time a solitary academic researcher, then a solitary literary writer after which now as he works with the director he is transformed into a writer-theatre maker as the script transforms into a performance.

It is within this context that *A Wound in the Thigh*, a play which I wrote and was directed by Sanjin Muftic and performed in late November/early December 2006 came to its realization. An explication and analysis of the process of creating the script, the script's transformation into a performance text and the performance itself, is the scope which this explication encompasses. Perhaps by the same token it is the scope within which this explication should be best received and read.

I have already highlighted that the orientation of my studies was playwriting. Again since the script continued to change during and after the performance, I put before the

explication a copy of the script which incorporates the practical contributions of the director, the performers, our post production discussions as well as changes I made after watching the performance for four days. It is the final script of *A Wound in the Thigh*. At the end of the script is a list of texts I referred to, in its creation.

# A WOUND IN THE THIGH

## SCENE ONE

*Two beams of torchlight.*

*Enter Sergeant Hirriam and Doctor Theophillus.*

**Hirriam:** Shame! I repeat. Shame!!

**Theo:** You sound so affected Sgt Hirriam. *(Pause)*

Put morality aside lest we mar our professions.

**Hirriam:** Morality or professions. Shame! *(Pause)* Dr Theophillus, whoever performed such a sordid act, is a rotten scoundrel of decadent morals.

**Theo:** It's death Hirriam. People die daily. People are born daily.

**Hirriam:** Human blood, Theo, is a sacred tissue. These bodies,

*Firmly places his hand on Theo's shoulder*

are temples of the lord. Only He should strike us when it befits his divine purposes. No human hand should destroy—

*Stumbles*

Ooh! *(Pause)* My toe! Ooh!

**Theo:** Did you misstep?

**Hirriam:** I hit a stone. These night duties will leave us hurt all over.

**Theo:** Sorry. I hope you did not hurt your toes. *(Pause)* Sorry Hirriam!

**Hirriam:** It's only that I'm bound by duty. Had it not been so, I should have returned home now.

**Theo:** Why such a strong assertion?

**Hirriam:** This is an ill-omen Theophillus. *(Pause)* Again, forget not, this mission is a mission of death. However, direct your torch ahead. Move.

**Theo:** This night is too dark.

**Hirriam:** I'm doubly pained Theo. *(Pause)* Today my wife has joined me in marriage. Here I am. Stumbling and almost kissing stones while Sedna is counting the rafters of my roof like an abandoned widow. Unfair! Unfair!

**Theo:** Hirriam! You think too much over things of little worth. Women need nothing from us save being turned on and off like light-switches.

**Hirriam:** I'm not a boy Theophillus. If being a medical doctor has made you reduce women to their anatomy, I pray revisit your conscience.

**Theo:** I would rather pledge my emotions to my profession than to a woman. Women!

**Hirriam:** Halt! *(Pause)* These tall blades of grass conceal a precarious protrusion of the river bank here. Put your hand in my palm and faithfully, follow my footsteps.

**Theo:** What's producing those weird shrieks in the distance?

**Hirriam:** It's night. Remember we're moving in the shadow of a huge mountain, following the banks of a big river. Wait! *(Listening)* That solitary persistent shriek should be a she-leopard calling her kittens.

**Theo:** Africa!

**Hirriam:** Keep your torch on. Wild animals don't risk where there is fire.

**Theo:** Uurh!

**Hirriam:** Well. We've arrived. *(Pause)* This is the pool. Black-Water-Pool!  
Direct the beam of your torch this side. *(Pause)* Thank you. Here is the  
body. It's me who covered it with that grey blanket in the afternoon.  
Geckos and lizards were licking his lips. Ants had filled his mouth and  
anus.

**Theo:** Shame!! *(Pause)* Has anyone as yet claimed kinship with this man?

**Hirriam:** Ah! None till now!

**Theo:** Oh! Terrible!

**Hirriam:** Since your duties bring you face to face with many people, lower the  
blanket to his shoulders. Perhaps you may assist us to answer to your  
question.

*Theo bends*

No. Not that end. Those are his feet. This side!

**Theo:** Ooh. This face is swollen Sgt Hirriam. Immediate identification is  
impossible.

**Hirriam:** I thought those two black marks on either side of his nose-bridge  
indicate a long time bespectacled fellow.

**Theo:** Indeed. The stands of our glasses usually corrode the declivities of our  
noses.

**Hirriam:** Look. *(Pause)* These two contour lines across his brow are familiar  
facial features of humble men of deep meditation and responsibility.

**Theo:** Even in his silent state he strikes me like a man of royal blood.

**Hirriam:** Theophillus. This body belongs to a Man. A real man has been  
murdered in our midst.

**Theo:** Shame!

*(Pause)*

**Hirriam:** When could he have breathed last?

**Theo:** This stench hitting our noses suggests internal decomposition. Five or  
more days have passed.

**Hirriam:** Is this death natural or human induced?

**Theo:** Virtual certainty will asserted through post-mortem. But this collar-  
bone is dislocated, a sign of strangling.

**Hirriam:** Oh!

**Theo:** Ah! The skull Hirriam! The skull has deep holes.

**Hirriam:** G B H! *(Pause)* This man died the death of a wild animal cornered by  
hungry hunters.

*(Pause)*

**Theo:** Could it be that he was pursuing some local woman?

**Hirriam:** Why such a thought Theophillus? *(Pause)* This man can't be some  
dubious fellow who met his death wandering in search of some  
immoral pleasures. Why think him so low?

**Theo:** Men Hirriam. Men and sexual gratifications! Women!

**Hirriam:** Again women of this valley value their bodies and conscience. They  
are not—

**Theo:** Ooooh Sgt Hirriam what hell is this before us?

**Hirriam:** Why shouting so high in this darkness? *(Pause)* Why retreating?

**Theo:** See! See for yourself. Draw closer to the body and see!

**Hirriam:** Inspect the body while I inspect the ground for any left items of  
evidence.

**Theo:** No! Hirriam. This man was double murdered. *(Pause)* The furry bag and its two stones were ripped off.

**Hirriam:** The bag? The stones! Where are we?

**Theo:** Go there. The wound is open, red and bleeding. *(Pause)* The satchel! His scrotum Hirriam is missing.

**Hirriam:** Oh my—  
*Hirriam falls down.*

**Theo:** Hirriam. What struck you? Hirriam! *(Pause)* Why the hand on you knee?

**Hirriam:** My knee Theo. My knee! My right knee! Oo---  
*Tremors of pain begin to register in his voice.*  
An object Theo! *(Pause)* An object hit me in this darkness. *(Pause)* A round hard object like a nut hit my knee. Help! Theophillus. Help! Aah!

**Theo:** Oh Gods! Why do you strike us when our services are needed most?

**Hirriam:** Ah Theo. Help. My knee--- *(His voice trails off.)*

**Theo:** Lie down. Flat against the ground! Breathe! Breathe!  
No! Just lie flat facing the sky. *(To himself)* I hope I have some pain soothing tablets in my pockets. *(Pause)* Hirriam. Open your mouth. Chew. Swallow. *(Pause)* Lick your teeth. Swallow everything! Use your saliva as water.

**Hirriam:** Help me sit up.

**Theo:** How do you feel now?

**Hirriam:** Waves of coldness go up my spinal cord. But the pain here subsides.

**Theo:** I hear a sound. *(Listens)* That's our hospital Range Rover. We're taking this body to Summerland. May I lift you to the road since the truck can't reach these banks?

**Hirriam:** No. I'll manage. *(Pause)* Why are you taking this man to Summerland?

**Theo:** Post-mortem Hirriam. Again refrigerated morgues are in Summerland.

**Hirriam:** Lift him and go. Take him. I'll wait here for our truck. If they delay, alone I'll find my way home. Yes! Lift him and go.

**Theo:** I can't leave you.

**Hirriam:** In lifting him you have lifted me. Go! Go with him. Farewell!  
*Exit Theophillus with the dead body in his hands*

**Hirriam:** Balance. Balance is what I need most. These misfortunes that befall us in old age usually haunt us till death. *(Pause)* How cruel times remind us of the importance of our wives. Oh heavens, be with Sedna as lonely she longs me lying safely in her arms. *(Pause)* This darkness thickens. Soon it will rain. Let me stagger home.

*On standing up Hirriam falls down with a thud*  
Oh my knee! *(Pause)* Why did it ever befall me to be attached to this death on the day of my marriage! *(Pause)* Now left alone! And they! *(Pause)* They! Gone with him to Summerland! *(Pause)* They! No! Bad thoughts want to enter my mind. *(Hits his head)* Leave my mind evil thoughts. *(Pause)* I'll crawl. On four I'll get home. Ooh! My knee!

*Exit Hirriam crawling*

## Scene One (a)

*Enter Theophilus*

**Theo:** I hope my writing is legible enough for them all to see the names of the diseases whose drugs we should order. *(Pause)* Why is my pen so faint? *(Examines his pen)* Probably I'm not pressing hard enough against this clipboard!

*Writing*

Gentlemen and ladies! Below is a list of diseases whose drugs we need to order in similar quantities as last year—pneumonia, meningitis, tetanus, measles, leukaemia, breast ca...

*Enter Perdita*

**Perdita:** I approach you Doctor while you're busy. Apologies for my intrusion!

**Theo:** Welcome Perdita. What brings you to Summerland?

**Sedna:** This baby is ill. His tongue is withdrawing into his throat blocking his breathing. I've been holding it out of his mouth till he slept. I fear on waking up, he may die.

**Theo:** Nurses in the out patient ward there, deal with such issues.

**Perdita:** I spoke to them. They ordered me to pay first.

**Theo:** Correct. Pay first. They will swiftly attend to your baby.

**Perdita:** Surely. If I could I would. But, I don't have that with which to pay.

**Theo:** So!

**Perdita:** They referred me to you.

**Theo:** We only attend to patients after payment.

**Perdita:** ----- *(stares at the doctor)* Doctor!

**Theo:** Drugs don't come into hospitals like hair to our heads. Pay!

**Perdita:** Doctor. This baby is surely ill. He is the only treasure I have in my life. On my knees I beg. *(Kneels)* Help him!

**Theo:** Hospitals are not synagogues or charity organizations.

**Perdita:** Theophilus. Soften your heart.

**Theo:** I thought you would understand. You found me busy. Farewell.

*Exit Theo.*

**Perdita:** Lord. Give me the strength to face the truth. *(Up)*

*Exit Perdita*

## Scene One (b)

*Enter Sedna in dull apparel*

**Sedna:** The River of time always carries us forward.

But the bitter question is; when I turn around, look back over my shoulders and ask; *(Pause)* what did I leave behind to mark that I was here yesterday?

As each day comes to its close, I close my eyes, but behold a bleak picture appears before my eye-lids—I see wild green grass growing on my grave. *(Pause)* I ask myself. When will this bosom bulge with the grain that I'll leave behind to mark that a woman was here on earth yesterday?

Oh! Holy Mary—the Soul of Womanhood, on my knees *(Kneels)* I beg. When will these scorching sulphurous-flames tossing in my womb cease torturing me? *(Pause)* Ah! I raise my hands in honour of your son— My Savior, Christ of Nazareth— The Pillar of Endurance. He

who for three days was in death but did not die! Lord! Teach me the art of abiding by death without myself dying. *(Pause)* You saw me since the day I gave my hand in marriage. Many, many seasons have rolled by. Now I look like an ancient girl.

*(Pause)*

Many times you've seen me alone lying down. *(Lies down)*

Always, my arm my pillow!

My eyes towards your heavenly throne! Between these lips only two words 'Hirriam! *(Pause)* God! *(Pause)* Hirriam! *(Pause)* God...' Why have you robbed me of that which make all women mothers? Is not marriage a union to bring forth fruits?

*Gets up*

No! This is night. Eavesdroppers may hear my plight. No!

*Hums a self-soothing hymn*

## SCENE TWO

*Enter Perdita*

**Perdita:** Remove this shit of Argos from my hands.

**Sedna:** Perdita! Have you sold your soul to Satan?

**Perdita:** Remove this shit from my—

*Sedna quickly takes off the baby*

**Sedna:** Ah! Peddy. This baby is ill. The body is hot.

**Perdita:** Where is Sergeant Hirriam? Argos should be arrested. Argos should perish in prison.

**Sedna:** Hold the baby. I should get some medicine.

**Perdita:** Throw that shit on the floor.

**Sedna:** What has come over you Perdita? Stop hitting your brow.

**Perdita:** This dream Sedna. This dream sister! Every night!

**Sedna:** Peace Peddy! Peace. Be calm!

**Perdita:** There is tension in my intestines. Where is the room of relief-room in this house?

**Sedna:** Sit down Perdita. Anger and grief are not grains to be cast in toilet chambers.

**Perdita:** This dream sister.

**Sedna:** Say it out. Stop scratching your head. Soon you'll bleed.

**Perdita:** Every night! Every night! Aah!

**Sedna:** Speak!

**Perdita:** There in the garden of a priest. Every night a huge black dog is raping a pigeon. Sedna. A dog on top of a bird!

**Sedna:** Oh! Armageddon! A dog pounding a pigeon! Perdita why blocking your nose?

**Perdita:** My nostrils burn! Seddy. Please awaken the fan of this house.

**Sedna:** Breathe well. Are you a horse? *(To herself)* Oh Holy Mary. Where are your eyes when young girls suffer thus?

**Perdita:** See those wet eyes of the pinned pigeon.

**Sedna:** Be still Perddy. You're narrating a dream. Behave!

**Perdita:** Persuade Sgt Hirriam to arrest Argos. Who is this? Ah! The priest! The priest advances towards the garden. A lit lamp in his left hand!

*Holding her down*

**Sedna:** Remain seated!

**Perdita:** An iron rod in his right hand. He advances.

**Sedna:** So salvation comes to your pigeon.

**Perdita:** No sister. He strikes. He strikes the neck of the pigeon. The dog! The dog vibrates in sexual pleasure.

**Sedna:** Why would he strike a bird whose behind is already being burnt? Is he a true prophet?

**Perdita:** Not a prophet Seddy. A priest! Ah! The bird fails to breathe Seddy. *(Pause)* A man and a dog have done it. Seddy, see! See Seddy, those wet eyes pleading for pity. Ah! Seddy The pigeon dies. Sister, the bird, the bird is dyi...Se... *(Grief chokes her voice)*

**Sedna:** It is a dream Peddy.

*(Pause)*

Perdita! Peddy! *(Pause)* You now pain us more by crying in the presence of your ill baby.

*To the Baby*

Argo! Argos. Talk to your mother. Argo! Tell her dreams of dogs and birds should not tear us into tears. Ah! Argos. *(Pause)* Drink this medicine. Yes drink! Argos, why are people driven to tears by imaginations?

*A heavy heave from Perdita*

**Perdita:** Sister, why do we dream what we dream?

**Sedna:** No more talks of dreams and dreaming in my house.

**Perdita:** Is there any medicine to prevent us from thinking what we don't want to think while we are thinking?

**Sedna:** Why such a question?

**Perdita:** Why did Argos, Argos, do this to me? A mere township bumpkin picked on verandas in Summerland! Brought here by father to herd our cattle!

**Sedna:** He did to you what a man can do to a woman. You gave him what a woman can give to a man. Here is the result. Your baby! This baby! Our baby! Celebrate you've something.

**Perdita:** At the back of a moving truck. Our blue Mazda truck! Our brother, Gradino driving! After Argos had bought me brandy in Summerland. Sister, in that drunken state! Argos—

**Sedna:** Babies are created anywhere. In forests! In bath-rooms! In offices! Anywhere where there is space. You made yours in a moving car. Your brother driving! Here he is. Celebrate you've something.

**Perdita:** I'll throw this shit in a pigsty.

**Sedna:** Babies are our greatest treasures on earth.

**Perdita:** I wish to meet him again.

**Sedna:** Revenge is for God.

**Perdita:** It burns me sister. It pierces me here.

*Places her hand on her heart*

**Sedna:** You're learned Perdita. You went to school. *(Pause)* Scars are beacons on our paths to maturity. *(Pause)* Unwounded bodies belong to babies. By now this you should know. You went to school.

**Perdita:** -----

**Sedna:** I've given the baby some medicine. Take the baby. Go. Sleep. It is rest you need most.

*Tries to hand over the baby to Perdita*

**Perdita:** Pooph! Phooph! (*Spits on the baby*)

**Sedna:** Ah! Ah! Your stupid fury has maddened you! Put your childish silliness to a standstill now. Never! Never! Do it again. Why did you ever do it if you wanted to die a mule? Why invite a curse upon this house? Be warned. Do it again!

**Perdita:** I'm sorry sister. Forgive me. I apologize.

**Sedna:** Take our baby. (*Pause*)It is dark. Mind your steps. Hold him firmly. Farewell.

*Exit Perdita*

Oh! Heavens guide her steps in this darkness. Stitch up her broken heart. Mend her conscience. You know her. You know her stories.

*Sings*

*What a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear,  
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer  
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness take it the Lord in prayer.*

### SCENE THREE

*Enter Sgt Hirriam limping.*

**Hirriam:** Why such a sorrowful song at this odd hour of the night?

**Sedna:** Nothing!

**Hirriam:** Why still awake so late at night?

**Sedna:** Nothing!

**Hirriam:** Home ceases to be homely Sedna, if on greeting you; you give me such dry answers.

**Sedna:** If you detect seeds of sadness in my voice it is because of you. (*Pause*) You're old enough. You should know.

**Hirriam:** Am I wrong in asking why you sing such a dark song so late at night.

**Sedna:** -----.

**Hirriam:** May I have a blanket? I need to lie down close to the fire

**Sedna:** Already on it! You come home to sleep close to the fire.

**Hirriam:** Sedna. May I have a blanket? Let me lie down. I'm cold and my knee is—

**Sedna:** I did not leave my parents to come here and gaze at you coiling on the floor like a snail. (*Pause*) Hirriam. Let's talk. Our marriage is shameful.

**Hirriam:** I hope you have no intentions of brewing a quarrel.

**Sedna:** Hirriam. For how have we been married? Now I'm ashamed to walk in the company of other women of my age.

**Hirriam:** Why do you go to where they gather? May I have a blank—

**Sedna:** If it is so, I thank you. You have wasted my time in this house. I thought through marrying you I would become a full woman! I've gained nothing save shame and suffering. I know I have troubled you enough with my requests. I apologize. I hope never, ever to trouble you again. Farewell.

**Hirriam:** Sedna!

**Sedna:** And above all I wish you –

**Hirriam:** Seddy!

**Sedna:** Stop blocking my way.

**Hirriam:** Don't allow emotions to override reason! Sedna—

**Sedna:** Your wish is to sleep. Now that I leave you, you've more space to sleep. Sleep, sleep and sleep. Off my way and leave my hand!

*Powerfully pulls her hand off making Hirriam almost stumble*

**Hirriam:** Oh! My knee! Sedna why?

**Sedna:** (*mimicking*) 'My knee, my knee for how long? Always devising tactics to evade duties! (*Pause*) Soon you'll nurse your knee in perpetual solitude.

**Hirriam:** Why have you turned your heart against me?

**Sedna:** Where did you hide my Identity Particulars? (*Pause*) Why did you hide my birth and school certificates? (*Pause*) To make me rot in this morgue of your house! Trying to ruin my knowledge-ha! I need my documents now. Come!

**Hirriam:** Stop pulling me. (*Pause*) What has stolen your soul Sedna? Haven't we lived till today without children?

**Sedna:** Reserve your verbal tricks and ancient morality for scholars and church goers. (*Pause*)Hirriam, the pain in this body is past tricks of rhetorical soft soaping. Come. Return to me my certificates as I pack my clothes.

**Hirriam:** Oh! My knee! Wait. (*Pause*) Did I say I'm running away?

**Sedna:** Patience and loyalty belong to children and dogs. (*Pause*) I can't stick around this mortuary anymore. (*Pause*)How come you sit down?

**Hirriam:** Sedna. I'm in pain. I fear your anger is advancing into abusing me.

**Sedna:** Who is abusing who?

**Hirriam:** I came home to you. Hoping you and only you would warm some water. Add some salt and press gently the muscles of this knee.

**Sedna:** Did I leave my family to come and press people's swollen tissues? Up! (*Pause*) Stop squinting eyes in faked pain. I need my documents. Come.

**Hirriam:** Stop twisting my arm. I'm not running away.

**Sedna:** Your delays are burning me.

**Hirriam:** Sedna—

**Sedna:** Soon it rains. Look out Hirriam. The horizon is heavy with pregnant clouds. I want to be rained as I walk away from you. Away from this house! Away—

**Hirriam:** Why such a sad determination Sedna?

**Sedna:** Should I die here breastfeeding wind? (*Pause*) Should dry grass grow on these laps?

**Hirriam:** The night is terrible. Where would you go in this darkness?

**Sedna:** To the mountains and forests! Along river banks and around hills! (*Pause*)When tired I'll find a cave. Yes I'll find a dark cave. And when the sun of tomorrow shines, these two legs will lift me to a river. (*Pause*) There I'll rest telling my sordid tale to frogs and fish. Yes I'll feed them with the sorrows of this heart. (*Pause*) When the sun scorches I'll bath singing loudly in utter nudity the same song you found me singing. On wearing my clothes, I'll shout loudly—'Sedna.'

And afresh I'll start my life. *(Pause)* But, Hirriam! Why? *(Pause)* Was I wrong in giving you my hand in marriage?

**Hirriam:** Patience Sedna! Patience and persistence! *(Pause)* The darkest hour, my wife, is just before dawn.

**Sedna:** For how long Hirriam? Till when—

**Hirriam:** We have walked together for long in this valley of death. The biting pain of emptiness piercing your soul pricks me as well. It burns. I know. Turning your heart against me! But Sedna, Seddy, should worldly tribulations separate us! *(Pause)* One day Sedna, one day we will —

**Sedna:** When Hirriam? My blood boils. Feel! Feel the violence in my nerves. *Lodges herself between Hirriam's arms*

Lest you think I hate you for nothing. *(Pause)* For your sake, let me leave. As I walk people see your failures on me. My presence forces them curse you in your absence

Hirriam: Aah! Sedna, your sobs tear my heart. You turn his house into a house of misery.

**Sedna:** I know *(Sob)* my demands, persecute you more.

**Hirriam:** No Seddy you have the right to. Let's to our room! In a private corner cool your emotions. Come. Walk Seddy!

*Exit Hirriam limping, embracing Sedna*

#### SCENE FOUR

*A path towards the river*

*Enter Perdita*

**Perdita:** I should never delay for I may find him awake and crying. *(Pause)* I hold tight my soap till I reach the river. My towel should shelter my head from the sun.

*Ties the towel around her head*

Ah! Who is that moving towards me?

*From a different direction enter Theophillus.*

**Theo:** Morning Perdita.

**Perdita:** Ah! What brings the people of Summerland to The Valley?

**Theo:** Duty. Is Sgt Hirriam at home?

**Perdita:** I hope so.

**Theo:** I'll give you his message. Please pass it over.

**Perdita:** No. Proceed. He is at home. From taking a bath I'm going to our traditional healer. I'll only meet Sgt Hirriam two days from today.

**Theo:** That's not too late. On seeing him tell him the Hospital authority wants his corpse to be removed from the morgue.

**Perdita:** Ah! Doctor! Why say his corpse as if it's Hirriam lying in the mortuary.

**Theo:** No Perdita. I have no intentions of offending you or Him. When no person came forward to claim kinship to the dead man, the mortuary attendant, with Hirriam's consent of course, recorded his name against the corpse. Again it's him investigating the case, so everybody calls it, 'the corpse of Sgt Hirriam.' It's only for identification.

**Perdita:** Oh! *(Pause)* But why would you cancel your mission here while you are only a stone's throw from his compound?

**Theo:** This is no coincidence Perdita. I was also your visitor today.

**Perdita:** Ah! What brings Eurozzitte of Summerland to Perdita's place?

**Theo:** Peddy, my heart has always admired you from a distance. Now that I'm close to you, I've already said it in proximity.

**Perdita:** Theophillus. Are you out to say, you have abandoned your journey because you have seen a woman and you love that woman?

**Theo:** You've said it better than me.

**Perdita:** Please. Off my way.

**Theo:** Wait Perdita!

**Perdita:** I beg, don't be a stumbling block upon my path! Off!

**Theo:** Wait Perdita. Don't rush to push me off. Hear first why I said what I said.

**Perdita:** -----.

**Theo:** I thought since you are already a parent I would not waste your time wooing you with details as if I'm proposing to little innocent school girl.

**Perdita:** Ah! *(Pause)* Ah! Are you on an expedition to tell me that because I mothered and I stay alone, I'm not innocent? Off my way! A Eurozzite of shrunken morals! Off

**Theo:** But mothers—

**Perdita:** Are you arguing that because I'm a single parent I am a prostitute?

**Theo:** Not at all Perdita. Not a slight hint to that. *(Pause)* I only thought that, since you once gave birth—

**Perdita:** Away from me. A leaf full of lust! *(Pause)* You propose to women while in your lower region your puff-adder is already charging! *(Pause)* Confusing lust for love! You think I'm a source of relief to all wandering strangers? Out of my way Satan! *(Pushes him off)*

**Theo:** Perdita, why—

**Perdita:** If I obey my emotions. Right now I can remove all your teeth with this soap.

*Powerfully threatens to throw the soap into Theo's face*

**Theo:** Oh! *(Hides his face)*

**Perdita:** Away! An Argos! Argos. You're Argos. *(Pause)* Oh! But why always me, meeting these weird boys of shrivelled morals. Argos! You should be arrested. No I'll go and ask his son. Today the son shall answer for the father. Why fight this wanderer? Argos! Argos!

*Exit the way she entered.*

**Theo:** Ah! Patients who succumb to such rages usually narrate tales of inhumane traumas. *(Pause)* But what is that Argos? When she calls it, her fury fuels!

Aah! Now I can't go to Hirriam's place for she may find me there. *(Pause)* Who ever knows when will women convert their verbal threats into performances?

*Moment*

From here I go straight to drop the letter in the container of mail. *(Pause)* Only when my brother has read it, let him be my fairest judge. Oh! Which pocket?

*Pulls out a folded letter*

One final reading! Then I seal it forever.

*Reading.*

Dear Demetrius.

You're my young brother, but I know you possess a heart found in few grown up men. I reveal to you what I dare not reveal to any living being. It was night Demetrius. We were on duty, my friend, Hirriam by name and myself. In the course of executing our duties, Hirriam got injured. He groaned in pain before me. I had two sachets of tablets in my pocket. It was night brother. I thought best to administer a pain soothing tablet to him. Remember it was night. I later discovered I gave him a tablet that causes temporary sterility. After some time the same tablet will bring a period marked by acute inability to sustain an erection! I got the tablet from the island of Lemnos intending to do research on a farmer friend's horses here in Summerland. The strength of the tablet is however measured to have an effect in the body of a horse for exactly 365 days. But now in a man, who knows for how long. On the final day, the horse is supposed to experience an intense sexual desire and in that state, the first seven acts of intercourse produce the best breed in the world. The fastest horses! I can't reveal this to him. He is a grown up man and a true African. You're a Christian brother. Pray that God may give him patience and more days to live.

Your Brother Theophillus Terentius.

*Exit Theo in the direction he came from*

## SCENE FIVE

*Hirriam's Compound*

*Enter Sedna*

**Sedna:** Tell me Hirriam. Tell me! What did you do wherever you were to come home frozen?

*Enter Hirriam*

You were sporting and you come home spent.

**Hirriam:** You accuse me of things I never did.

**Sedna:** Then where has your power gone? Heh! Why is your cock cold?  
Hirriam. Why is your dick dead?

**Hirriam:** I wish I knew. Sedna, I feel paralyzed. My spinal cord is freezing.

**Sedna:** Yah! Those are real signs of sleeping with witches. *(Pause)* Women in that business are known for arresting non-payers by their seed!  
Witches even castrate men in their absence. Ligature! Now your dick is a toy. Return. Plead guilty. Pay! Lest you perish a picture!

**Hirriam:** You accuse me of things I never did.

**Sedna:** Then why is this thing hibernating in its blanket instead of forging forward?

**Hirriam:** Lower your voice Sedna. By-passers may know the reputation of this house is at stake.

**Sedna:** Whose reputation? So I should pretend to be married yet some weird woman has turned you into a corpse.

**Hirriam:** Sedna—

**Sedna:** For how long did I lie beneath you? All you do is groan on top of me.

*Mimicks Hirriam*

'Sorry Sedna. Wait! Be patient. Ooh! What's wrong?' Suffocating me with your dirty smells and bruising my left ribs with your injured knee.

*(Pause)* Do I lie down facing the sky to receive ‘patience and apologies?’ I wish diseases of promiscuity would chew that sleeping worm into a shapeless tube. Go away and clean your stinking parts.

*Pushes Hirriam who almost falls*

**Hirriam:** Oh my knee! Sedna—

**Sedna:** ‘My knee! My Knee!’ You were doing it on hard rocks. *(Pause)* Hitting your knees on stones forgetting you will need to walk. *(Pause)* You thought you had entered heaven. *(Pause)* Hirriam. By where our scars are, the public can read our favourite sports. Women who over do it have no hair here, here at the back of their heads. Men are seen by limping.

**Hirriam:** When you are outside the walls of pain, it is easy to give lessons to sufferers.

**Sedna:** Speak in simple speech as one speaking to his wife. If you knew philosophy why did you sport with witches? Shame! An old man who wants to die a boy! Pooph! *(Spits on the ground)*

**Hirriam:** Ah! I’m not seeing any iron- belt binding you to me. The door is there. Open. Your legs are even stronger than mine. Let them carry you far, far away from me.

**Sedna:** Indeed! Soon! I’ll walk to the riverbank to collect clay soil. On finding it I’ll mould a thing the size and shape of your bewitched root.

**Hirriam:** Be wherever you wish to be. Go!

**Sedna:** I’ll stick it here. On my forehead! Here! *(Pause)* And walk in the entire village. When men come towards me! I put my clay between my lips. As I they greet me, I lick it. Yes! I lick it!

**Hirriam:** Go. Find your clay. Create your object. The door is open. Out!

**Sedna:** Out, out, because I’ve reminded you that I’m your wife?

**Hirriam:** You wish to parade yourself before other men. Out! Many Women derive pleasure in self-exposure. Go! I’m not shaken by such trifles.

**Sedna:** Think well Hirriam. Your wound is infecting your faculties. *(Pause)* Is it an offence to tell you in this state, you’re dead?

**Hirriam:** You were striking me with your tongue.

**Sedna:** We’ve been locked in this childless marriage for long. Now we have fallen further. I seek to know why. You blubber before me like a teaser bull.

**Hirriam:** You strike me more Seddy. *(Pause)* Remember our marriage day! Do you earnestly think I wished to see you suffer thus? Sedna. Where else can I find grace save from your heart? Who can console me in this state?

**Sedna:** Hirriam. A man with a wound should be humble before nurses.

*(Pause)* I apologize. I overreacted. Let’s return to our room. Come!

*Exit Sedna leading Hirriam by his hand*

## SCENE SIX

*Enter Perdita*

**Perdita:** *(Calling)* Sedna! Seddy!

*Enter Sedna*

**Sedna:** Welcome Peddy! What news since we last met?

**Perdita:** I hate what my ears gathered in Summerland. Eurozzittes and Aphrozzittes of Summerland are broadcasting vile rumours about this compound. Where is Sgt Hirriam?

**Sedna:** He is –

*Enter Hirriam.*

**Perdita:** Ah! Ah! Ah! Women gossip and men lie. No! Women said nothing. Men are liars.

**Hirriam:** Warm greetings Peddy.

**Perdita:** Ah! Even greeting me thus you've proved men are shameless liars. Old men lying while the sun was shining, ah! Ah! Ah!

**Sedna:** You burn us with anxiety. Speak!

**Perdita:** I had news before seeing Hirriam. There he is. My mission is over. Farewell!

*Moves to leave*

**Sedna:** You've set us up. You can't leave us hanging.

**Hirriam:** Where were you when you heard what you heard?

**Perdita:** In Summerland.

**Hirriam:** Summerland. *(Pause)* Speak Peddy! Lies help us to know our enemies. To act better or to change our courses!

**Perdita:** Some lies are better left unknown than known. What people are saying in Summerland may shatter your hearts.

**Hirriam:** We're old. Speak!

**Perdita:** People are saying Hirriam has a toothache.

**Sedna:** Toothache! **Hirriam:** Toothache!

**Perdita:** They're saying your tooth is broken. *(Pause)* You're hungry but you can't eat.

**Hirriam:** Ooh!

**Perdita:** Sedna. Is he feeding? *(Pause)* Sister is Sgt eating?

**Sedna:** -----.

**Sedna:** What more came out of their mouths?

**Perdita:** They said Hirriam is a policeman. but he is not performing his duties.

**Hirriam:** Who are these people? Where are my handcuffs Seddy?

**Sedna:** Be calm Hirriam. You can only handcuff arms. Not mouths and minds.

**Perdita:** Leave him to arrest them and soon they'll know he can perform his duties. *(Pause)* Sgt, when last did you perform your duties?

**Hirriam:** -----.

**Perdita:** Sister when last did he go to work. Is he performing his—?

**Sedna:** Shh! Did their mouths say more?

**Perdita:** I suspect some pre-planned campaign to spread their malice. For suddenly they raised a picture of a man whose body is hideously tattered! Below it written your husband's name! I snatched it. Yes. I snatched it. Here it is.

*Pulls the paper from her handbag*

Come Sedna. Come. See this butchered body!

*Sedna draws closer*

A man with false horns for ears! A rope around his neck! Look! His bottom wrapped in a skirt!

*Hirriam draws closer*

revealing a wound in the thigh!

**Hirriam:** Oh!

*Hirriam falls*

**Perdita:** Sgt has fallen sister! Attend. Here behind us. Did one of us hit him?  
**Sedna:** No! His knee—  
**Perdita:** He sweats sister. Fan him! Why? He struggles to speak. No sister. Beckoning thus means he wants some object. Put your ear on his mouth for his lips move without sound.  
**Sedna:** Rest Hirriam. Lie flat. *(Pause)* You think too much. Lie down.  
**Hirriam:** Give me my pistol Sedna! I need all guns in this house! I'll shoot them all.  
**Sedna:** Lie down my lord.  
**Perdita:** It's anger sister. It fuels us all into futile attempts. Relax Sgt! Sedna, does his gun have bullets?  
**Sedna:** -----.  
**Perdita:** When last did he shoot?  
**Hirriam:** *(still on the floor)* who wrote my name beneath that picture Perdita? Am I the picture Sedna? I'll kill them all.  
**Sedna:** Brutal violence will never outweigh the virtues of humility in the face of chaos. *(Pause)* Tame your anger Hirriam. Be flat on the floor.  
**Perdita:** It pains him sister. He is a man. It pains. Even me I was grieved when they were marching in streets raising his picture like this. Like this! Singing in discord!

*She sings*

*He is hungry but he can't eat  
He carries an axe yet he can't cut.  
Hirriam is hungry but he can't eat*

**Hirriam:** Oh!  
**Sedna:** Hey! Hey stop your song. He fails to breathe! Stop your song.  
**Perdita:** What choked him? His eyes stare with blinking. *(Pause)* Sister, bear him to your bedroom and there attend tenderly to his knee.

*Exit Sedna balancing Hirriam*

Even there in Summerland I told them. Their dramas are evil. Is this not wishing our husband's death? *(Pause)* But there should be something more that he sees alone on this picture. *(Pause)* My sister hides something from me. Her husband is either epileptic or asthmatic. 'My Knee, My knee!' Soon I'll devise a means to bring him to my room test his knee. My Knee, My knee Ah—

*Exit Perdita*

## SCENE SEVEN

*Enter Hirriam*

**Hirriam:** Sedna saying that to me? A woman! A mere woman! Sedna! A creature with a stomach and a small intestine! A creature that farts discreetly in an elevator! Sedna insulting me thus! Me! *(Pause)* Never! Never! Never! A woman! A thing that can sits in a gathering singing and laughing yet her lower fissure is spitting dirt blood. *(Pause)* Seriously she thinks a man of my status can be ruled by that perpendicular puncture between her legs? Me! *(Pause)* Never! Away!

Away!! Sparrows and storks have been known to abandon their places of abode when cruel weather sets in. Brothers forsake brothers when lives boil. A woman betraying her husband is common stuff in tales of all ages. Away! *(Pause)* Alone, alone I'll nurse the death of my state. *(Pause)* Go to the Eurozzittes. Join the Aphrozzittes and compose your bleak ballads of a man with an unhealing wound. Even little poor boys of no beard, and young miserable girls of plain chests, whom I sent to school in Summerland, today seek self-recognition by composing songs and writing dark dramas praying for my death. *(Pause)* Dogs! Dogs that I raised from dust! Now that they've tasted morsels of mustard from Eurozzittes bark at me. *(Pause)* Bark! Bark and Bark! I won't bend because of barkers. *(Pause)* God be with them for they know not what they are doing. *(Pause)* Oh! Holy heavens, touch, touch these shoulders with your right righteous hand of benediction and bravely I'll bear the blows of my fate. *(Pause)* Help me keep the contents of this heart *(Places his palm on his heart)* from darkening my brains. My mind *(Hits his head)* from blocking my sight, for it is sight, sight that I need most. Oh! I'll wander around in these hills. Protect my toes from kicking stones. My ankles from snakes! I'll walk and only rest when my feet are swollen. I walk and walk. That way, my soul shall solace find.

*As Hirriam leaves enter Perdita from a different direction.*

*Enter Hirriam*

**Perdita:** *(Imitating God)* Adam! Adam! Where are you? Adam! Adam!

**Hirriam:** Away from me. You gossip gatherer on two feet of perdition. Today to the Eurozzittes! Tomorrow to the Aphrozzittes! A hunter of evil news! Out of my garden!

**Perdita:** Your anger shows shortage of womanly comforts Hirriam. Why raging like a starving bachelor? Does my presence upset you?

**Hirriam:** Away! Leave me alone. I've suffered enough from you people!

**Perdita:** She is Sedna. I'm Perdita. Why hate me for insults you received from my sister? How many times have I begged you to visit me? I know you are a man you need a different smell and a different pair of eyes to at least remind you of your youthful days. We are alone Hirriam. Inside a walled garden! The sun soon sets. If my approach upset you! Here I am. Find on me what befits you most to cool your anger.

*She draws closer to Hirriam.*

**Hirriam:** Apologies Perdita. I thought you had come to watch my plight or share yours with me.

**Perdita:** Warm evening Hirriam.

**Hirriam:** Same to you. Where are you from?

**Perdita:** Summerland. To buy laces, ribbons and this dress! What are your words over my choice?

*Pulls out and reveals a dress from her handbag.*

**Hirriam:** Beautiful!

**Perdita:** Feel the texture.

**Hirriam:** Soft.

**Perdita:** It's my wish to see its length from a distance. The shops of the Eurozzittes have no fitting-rooms. Hirriam may I see it worn by you?

**Hirriam:** This is a dress. I'm a man.  
**Perdita:** Ah! Wearing dresses does not make men women. Hirriam. Remember we're alone. Inside a walled garden!  
**Hirriam:** Take it to your sister. When she wears it, see on her that which you want to see through me.  
**Perdita:** This is our moment. Why talk of Sedna as if with me you can never be happy? This is my first request to you in the whole of my life. Find fun it in.  
**Hirriam:** It's difficult Perdita to trust anyone anymore when everyone thinks me a ground for them to experiment. *(Pause)* Hand it over. I hope it only as fun.

*Hirriam wears the dress*

**Perdita:** What else can it be? Mind these buttons. This way! *(Pause)* Be steady. I won't hit your knee. *(Pause)* Oh! True. Clothes make us new people. Hirriam. If God had seen in this dress even Mary would not be the mother of Jesus.  
**Hirriam:** I hate such comparisons.  
**Perdita:** Fun Hirriam. Have you lost your sense of humour? Turn around! Oooh! Would you come tonight to my room and we two will dance in dresses while burning red candles?  
**Hirriam:** Why in dresses?  
**Perdita:** Many times I requested you to come in trousers. You did not. So I thought you detest doing that which makes women know you're a man.  
**Hirriam:** Can a man hate being a man?  
**Perdita:** Some do. By not putting to proper use that which they possess! That which if women had also possessed they would be men.

*Removes the dress*

**Hirriam:** Here is your dress. The gate is open. Goodbye!  
**Perdita:** Did my words upset you?  
**Hirriam:** Perdita. Take this cloth and leave me alone.  
**Perdita:** How can you be so fickle? If my truth has upset you, then let that dress be a sign of who you are. If I'm wrong bring it tonight to my bedroom. There I'll ask for forgiveness.

*Perdita moves towards the garden gate*

**Hirriam:** Pick your dress and leave me alone.  
**Perdita:** Bring it to my house tonight or I will cry foul against you before my sister.

*Exit Perdita*

*Hirriam picks the dress*

**Hirriam:** Perdita! Peddy! *(Pause)* Women! Women are born tricksters. Quickly I should burn this. If Sedna moves here!

*Reexamines the dress*

But it's a gown of value. There is a shrub there. No I removed it. Let me dig a trench and bury it. There used to be a hoe here. Who took it? Ha! A hoe was here, now it hides. *(Calling aloud)* Hoe! Hoe! Who created these dumb objects that don't answer back when called? Hoe! *(Pause)* No! I'll hide it. But surely not within the walls of this garden! *(Pause)* Women! Hungry women! True! Before women all men are children. *(Pause)* But me! Her own sister's husband! Sedna should never—!

*Enter Sedna*

**Sedna:** Why such rapidity in your pace?

**Hirriam:** Oh! Your arrival has lessened my labour. You heard me shouting your name. Homeward, I was coming to look for you.

**Sedna:** You look troubled Hirriam. Your face is a pale mirror of fright. Why?

**Hirriam:** It's hot.

**Sedna:** What colourful cloth is that?

**Hirriam:** You heard me talking alone and aloud. I made my confession to the birds of the air. I shouted 'Ho! Ho!' I meant, 'enough! Enough' Ho! No more.

**Sedna:** What's enough?

**Hirriam:** From today I wear dresses. This dress I bought today. With it I will cover this body daily. That way, my wife I mark to the whole world a man who has failed to walk the pathways of manhood.

**Sedna:** Hirriam—

**Hirriam:** Shh! Allow me to finish. In me now see your sister. Call me sister Hirriam. I'll answer sister Sedna. Cut my beard. Or on it see only a replica of your pubic hair.

**Sedna:** Ah! Hirriam! You afflict your conscience more. Don't lower yourself so low. It's our fate.

**Hirriam:** I've made you suffer. It is enough. Here before you I confess on my knees

**Sedna:** It's my life at stake Hirriam. Not yours. What's a woman, my Lord without a husband?

**Hirriam:** Oh Seddy! What a wretched tissue is a man who cannot bring happiness to his wife? Henceforth, I wear dresses.

*Attempts to put on the dress*

**Sedna:** No! Cast away from your mind such a determination to disgrace us. If my demands have driven you this far I beg for forgiveness. On my knees I beg. *(Kneels down)*

**Hirriam:** No. You shall not kneel. Sedna.

**Sedna:** No. Why not if I have driven my husband so down? Many women lived many years without children. Why not me? *(Pause)* Today, I vow before you my husband. Never, ever to insult you over this plight of children! In this position, with my eyes closed, choose, Hirriam. Choose from my hair two strands of your choice, pluck them off and let them be with you daily to mark in my absence, my love for my lord.

**Hirriam:** Sedna why—

**Sedna:** No! Abide by my word. Remove I need to feel the pain.

*Hirriam obeys*

**Hirriam:** It is done my wife. Up! Let this day be recorded in heavenly calendars.

**Sedna:** Truly I say, I'll repeat what I have said on my judgment day.

**Hirriam:** Walk home as I close the garden gate.

**Sedna:** Come home soon.

*Exit Sedna*

**Hirriam:** In certain moments we begin issues as tricks that later reveal who we are. My wife posses what few wives have! A woman agreeing to live thus! For the sake of a husband! Oh God when will you return to me the strength I need most? For how long should other people suffer because of my death? *Exit Hirriam*

## SCENE EIGHT

*Funeral music, Enter four men carrying a coffin.*

*Enter Theophillus, followed by Perdita and Sedna with flowers*

*Enter Hirriam*

**Hirriam:** Put the coffin on the ground. *(Pause)* Here by the skirts of this church graveyard we'll call upon the name of the Almighty God, our creator. Yes lay him down gently. *(Pause)* Come forward and put your flowers on his chest.

*As she advances towards the coffin*

**Sedna:** Doctor Theophillus may you put off your machine of pictures?

**Theo:** Photographing does not block burial Mrs. Hirriam.

**Hirriam:** No Theo. We can not trivialize death. Put your machine off. And may you stop smoking.

**Theo:** But my cigarette does not—

**Hirriam:** Reverence Doctor! Reverence! Death should be honoured. Reverence!

*Theo puts off his cigarette*

Again remove from your face, those big black plastic glasses of the sun.

*Theo removes his shades*

**Theo:** As for the camera Sgt Hirriam! Let me take pictures. These pictures can be used in death adverts or sell fast in Hollywood.

**Perdita:** Here in The Valley, death is not a commercial entity. *(Pause)* Sgt, proceed.

**Theo:** I came here for pictures. No photographing. Farewell!

*Exit Theo*

**Hirriam:** Theo! Dr Theophillus! Theo.

**Sedna:** Leave him to leave. This man was even rejected by his own kinsmen.

**Hirriam:** May we all bow our heads and close our eyes in prayer. *(Pause)* Our Dear Heavenly father, I raise my right hand towards your throne to acknowledge your everlasting greatness and to plead for your presence here this evening. Lord you know why we are assembled here, few as we are. In humility, I implore you our heavenly father to grant eternal rest to this your servant. A stranger to us all! Whom we returning to you; unpitied! unfriended and unwept. Our only hope, Dear father is in your holy word, in this book. Through it we know, although the world has rejected him, he is your son created in your image. Return unto him the crown of your blessed glory. Alleluia!

**All:** Amen!

**Hirriam:** Be with him till your final trumpet rings to close all ages. And as the dead

rise to join the living singing 'Hossana, Hossana,' we wish to be with him again as we come home to rest forever and ever. In the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour we pray.

**All:** Amen.

*Throwing two handfuls of soil on the coffin*

**Hirriam:** Dust to dust. *(Throws)* Ashes to ashes! *(Throws)* May his soul and all the souls of the departed rest in peace!

**All:** Amen.

*(Pause)* Now we take him into his resting place.  
*With music, they start filing out. More music*  
*All Exit. Voices of wailing women, more funeral music*

## SCENE NINE

*Enter Theophillus and Sedna*

**Theo:** No Sedna. In medical psychology we call it 'Projection'

**Sedna:** Elaborate!

**Theo:** When you have a crack in your character or behaviour which you despise you push it out onto another person. Now that you have distanced it, your conscience gains freedom.

**Sedna:** Exemplify!

**Theo:** Understand this. Many married men justify their extra marital affairs by blaming their wives for being cold and unsatisfying in beds till the wife thinks she is a rigid cold-dead-duck?

**Sedna:** I'm listening!

**Theo:** Understand this. The truth is. *(Pause)* It is the husband who is weak and is fully aware of his weakness. But he skilfully projects onto his wife his inadequacies until the wife begins to see those shortfalls in herself. That way the weak has weakened the stronger gaining psychological superiority. *(Pause)* Men only want to feel they're in control. That is the way it is and so runs the world.

**Sedna:** Can the out side world read the plight of women passing through that plight?

**Theo:** Easily. Quite easily! Understand this. In Med Psychology we have what we call 'Feminine Unconscious Symptoms of Dissatisfaction.' Sexually starved women show it in their eyes.

**Sedna:** How?

**Theo:** Look at me. *(Pause)* No, look directly into my eyes. *(Pause)* Directly!

**Sedna:** Ah! Theo!

**Theo:** Sedna, a married woman's control of her eyes in the presence of other men is the barometer through which her husband's sexual performance is rated by the public. *(Pause)* Satisfied women have the audacity to gaze directly into any man's eyes rolling their eyes slowly with dignity.

**Sedna:** Doctors are fountains of knowledge.

**Theo:** Put you palm here against mine. From it I will tell if your blood is calm or raging.

*From a distance Enter Hirriam unseen to Sedna and Theophillus*

**Hirriam:** Ah! Ah! Ah! *(Pause)* Few months she made me the steward of her hair. Making me keep her hair yet the body she gives to another man. Me the keeper of hairs! Ah! Ah! I'll squat behind this boulder and watch them fishing.

**Theo:** Be steady! These subtle fidgets reveal over bottled emotions! Wait. *(Pause)*

If I'm correct soon you feel waves of electricity flooding your body.  
No! Look at me.

**Hirriam:** .....

**Sedna:** No! No! Theo...

*Theo kisses Sedna's hand passionately.*

**Theo:** Notice how a single kiss on your hand has made you breathe deeply. Come closer. Closer!

**Hirriam:** .....

**Sedna:** Oh! This should be stopped. No! Your arms are too hard against my back. Wait! You're now forcing me.

*Hirriam arrives*

**Hirriam:** Peace. Peace! Order! May you disentangle? Disentangle without fear.  
(Pause)

Flesh! Flesh! Sedna. Desires of flesh fail our spiritual convictions. Desire! (Pause) No Theo, Don't kneel. Let nothing in both of you trouble your conscience. (Pause) Flesh Sedna. You're a woman. It is not for me to judge you.

**Sedna:** Hirria—

**Hirriam:** Shh!

**Theo:** I've wronged you Hirriam. It's me who caused—

**Hirriam:** Up Theo. (Pause) Why kneeling? I saw it all. (Pause) Brother, have you forgotten the suffering of Joseph before the wife of Potifar. The wife of Governor Potifar!

**Sedna:** Allow him to—

**Hirriam:** Shh! Woman! (Pause) Remember Delilah! (Pause) Delilah and the fall of Samson before the Philistines! Women!

**Sedna:** I told you to stop Theophillus. Oh! Oh! God!

**Hirriam:** Even me I heard you say stop. But Sedna, Acts! Deeds! We are known by our actions as fruits are known by their---

**Sedna:** -----!

**Hirriam:** (To Theo) it was through you Theophillus that I came face to face with the immensity of my wife's hunger. Today, not with a grieving heart, or under anyone's compulsion, I grant you freedom to proceed and on my behalf satisfy my wife's worldly desires. As for me I remain her husband by word of mouth. You two respect me for I have honoured you. Find pleasure. Live life to its totality!

**Sedna:** Hirriam—

**Hirriam:** Woman! Be content.

**Theo:** Hirriam make your charges. I'll pay. How can we live thus?

**Hirriam:** Through those words you begin to betray me Theophillus. (Pause) A man on crutches can't climb up a ladder alone. (Pause) Assist! I plead. Help.

**Theo:** You decide out of anger Hirriam.

**Hirriam:** I saw it all. You did nothing to raise anger within me. But look back over your shoulder and see what stands behind you. (Pause) A woman! (Pause) That woman there! (Pause) A true woman in our midst! Help! Theo, Help! (Pause) Here friend are the keys of this house.

*Handing over the keys*

No! Take! I give you with my heart. Let's learn to live like brothers. And let her be our bond. (Pause) Thank you. This is now your house. But I implore. Always visit us in the shadow of the night. People have eyes and mouths. Go in. You two go!

*Exit Theophillus*

**Sedna:** Hirriam, why treat me so? Surely you wish to exchange me like a mug of beer between drunkards? *(Pause)* In your eyes I'm a creature that any man can drag to his bed? *(Pause)* Look at me. *(Pause)* I'm Sedna Gradino. A true African woman! Stumbling I may have stumbled. But I'm neither a rag nor a bitch. *(Pause)* You can't loosen me so low to the level of a lavatory path trodden even by dirty beggars? Not Sedna. Not me! Never! The next step I'm taking with these legs from here is towards my late father's compound. *(Pause)* Shake me! Shake me as I bid you farewell.

*Stretches out her hand*

You're a man. A real man before women! Shake this hand and goodbye.

**Hirriam:** Sedna! Sedna!! Sedna! *(Pause)* See! See the contents of this heart!

*Places his hand on his heart*

Read my wishes and see why I act thus. I may have spoken hard, but you know how we two are living.

**Sedna:** Your heart is full of evil. *(Pause)* Recall the bride price you paid for me. Recall the wounds on your body as you fought to get me from other men. Recall Hirriam recall. You can't initiate to lose me so easily. Your heart breeds evil.

**Hirriam:** Rip apart this ribcage Seddy and read what's at the centre of my heart. *(Pause)* Love! Sedna Love!! *(Pause)* For your sake Seddy! For my sake! For our sake Sedna! *(Pause)* Should we two die living like cursed shadows on earth? Should you abandon me out of hunger while someone in our midst can save us? Doing it within our walls, on this-

*Powerfully stamps the ground with his foot*

This, our soil Sedna, here in our house!

**Sedna:** No Hirriam, we can't conquer defeat by defeat. Think Hirriam! Think deep. Open those eyes. Look ahead. Weigh the gravity of your action. Hirriam, you're not thinking. Think!

**Hirriam:** Ah! Seddy, I thought I had thought. But if in my thought you see more folly than wisdom --ah, I leave it to your heart. *(Pause)* But if you are the Sedna that I married! The Sedna whom I love! The obedient Sedna whom I know! I beg. Abide by my decision.

**Sedna:** -----

**Hirriam:** Come for I should feel you last against my chest. From here

*Gently hits his chest*

walk and join him. *(Pause)* I know, one day, we two will sing and dance celebrating the fruits of this decision.

**Hirriam:** *(calling)* Theo! Theophillus. Come. Come brother. Come.

*Enter Theo*

Go! You two go.

*Exit Theo and Sedna.*

**Hirriam:** I'll wander in the nearby hills as he heals her wounds.

*Exit Hirriam limping*

## SCENE TEN

*Enter Perdita*

Argo! Argo my son! Sleep wants to steal my baby away. Argo! Today you've turned two. *(Pause)* Your mother has neither gold nor silver but with her heart she gives you

all that she has. *(Pause)* This pen Argo! *(Pause)* A mere pen, is what your mother marks your second birthday with. Later, put it to proper use in your life. You'll go to greater heights. *(Pause)* But, when you are up there, don't treat women the way your father treated me. *(Pause)* One day, my son you'll enter school. Respect your schoolmasters. Men and women dedicated to direct you to springs of knowledge. *(Pause)* Honor them. Read. Read and read. Great leaders of the world were great readers at school. Ah! Argo! Heavy sleep sits on the eyelids, my son. Sleep why rob me of my son? Argo, my last word! Soon you'll be a big boy. Never lodge this body between the arms of a prostitute. *(Pause)* Many men and boys perish in pursuit of their sweet-bitter pools of perdition. Avoid, Argo avoid! When you marry teach your wife, mother should always eat. *(Pause)* Argos, above all I pray honor your ancestors and God, from them you get wisdom. *(Pause)* Ah! You've slept. How in your sleep I see your father! I'll lay you in the shade there as look for more herbs in the forest.  
*Exit Perdita.*

*Enter Hirriam*

**Hirriam:** Sedna! Sedna! I come home. Seddy. *(Pause)* Where is my wife? It resurrected. Seddy. Hunger is over. *(Pause)* Has she gone to river? Seddy. I know she likes bathing at midday. Bathe Seddy! Clean the body for your husband has resurrected. In the garden I resurrected. Three times I shouted- Sedna! Sedna! Sedna! *(Pause)* Then I said 'Be patient she is at home. The queen waits in hunger.' Come home my wife, for your husband is back. No more strangers to reside in this house. An opportunist draining your nectar! A rugged philanthropist! A designer of my miseries! Come and lead us into our house Sedna. Soon we two will swim in the sweet tastes of paradise. Surely today you'll shout "shit" yet you mean thank you Hirriam!' 'Jesus! Jesus, yet not praying.' Seddy I've resurrected. *(Pause)* Oh! Let me follow her. If I meet her where there is a bush, then Bush is the name of our first child.

*Exit Hirriam.*

## SCENE ELVEN

*Enter Sedna and Hirriam*

**Theo:** Are you strong hearted?  
**Sedna:** Read the life I live and judge if I'm chicken hearted.  
**Theo:** I've a reason Sedna. What I should reveal to you I only revealed only to my brother Demetrius. Are you strong hearted?  
**Sedna:** I live in death yet I smile daily.  
**Theo:** Take an oath of everlasting silence. Then I reveal.  
**Sedna:** Why such conditions? Is it an issue of graves?  
**Theo:** It's serious Sedna.  
**Sedna:** Is there more trouble than myself?  
**Theo:** Days draw to their end. I know. Something soon will happen.  
**Sedna:** You sound you have been following calendars. Did you set traps?  
**Theo:** Take a vow with your hand wielding a sharp object.  
**Sedna:** Theophillus. Before that, let this be known to you.  
**Theo:** What?  
**Sedna:** For two months I did not follow my monthly circle—  
**Theo:** -----.

**Sedna:** I'm pregnant. .  
**Theo:** Oh!  
**Sedna:** You sound stabbed. I thought you would celebrate.  
**Theo:** -----.  
**Sedna:** Speak.  
**Theo:** Sedna.  
**Sedna:** You look pale. Did my news hit you? Why stepping backwards? What did you want to tell me about numbered days?  
**Theo:** No. Nothing! Farewell Sedna. Live well with Hirriam. I'm going back to the cool regions of my ancestors. Live well with Hirriam.  
**Sedna:** How dare you? Your seed breathes inside me.  
**Hirriam:** Live well with Hirriam. Farewell.

*Exit Theophilus*

**Sedna:** God. Another bastard in this house! *(Pause)* Another Argos! *(Pause)* Argos. *(Pause)* But I'm a woman. Breeding bastards is better than barrenness. But why is Hirriam's house the brewery for bastards?

*Enter Hirriam.*

**Hirriam:** Sedna. Sedna. I'm a man. Let's celebrate. Sedna I have returned home! Why look so weary?  
**Sedna:** Evening Hirriam.  
**Hirriam:** Seddy! Dress yourself with a jovial mood. I have returned home. Lead us into our room. Hunger is over.  
**Sedna:** A moment Hirriam.  
**Hirriam:** Reserve words for later times. I want to sing first.  
**Sedna:** A moment Hirriam.  
**Hirriam:** Why remain so grey?  
**Sedna:** -----.  
**Hirriam:** Why avoiding my eyes?  
**Sedna:** I'm looking at you Hirriam.  
**Hirriam:** But why this heaviness. Why speak in such a gloomy tone?  
**Sedna:** My tone surprises you—ha? It is a tone of your wife. Your wife at the verge of making a confession! A confession whose aftermath I shudder to imagine.  
**Hirriam:** Seddy. Nothing from your lips can topple me. I travelled a rocky road. *(Pause)* Speak. I'm Iron-nerved!  
**Sedna:** Draw closer Hirriam. Place your palm on my belly. *(Pause)* Down. Over the navel! Yes.  
**Hirriam:** The stomach is smooth and tender.  
**Sedna:** It might be too early Hirriam. But, you should feel some change of shape.  
**Hirriam:** Oh! *(Pause)*, if I feel well your stomach has some central hardness.  
**Sedna:** It's true Hirriam. For the two months I have not followed my monthly circle

*A moment*

**Hirriam:** Ah! *(Pause)* Your news brings gladness to my heart. *(Pause)* Why keeping such a soul soothing message for so long to yourself? You are cruel my dear wife! Soon! Sedna. Soon we'll have a reason to live. Gods and Angels have answered your prayer.  
**Sedna:** Our prayer Hirriam and your wish.

**Hirriam:** Indeed! *(Pause)* Come! My wife! Let my lips grease your cheeks to mark this triumph.

**Sedna:** Enough Hirriam! Enough!

**Hirriam:** No! Listen! I hear from above choral music oozing from heavenly choirs.

*Music*

Give me your hand. Dance. Dance with me. Dance Sedna. And may that which is inside you leap with joy. *(Pause)* Heavens more music!

**Sedna:** Enough Hirriam. Enough!

**Hirriam:** Look. Look now your husband dances for you.

*More music and Hirriam dances ecstatically.*

**Sedna:** Rest Hirriam. Rest!

**Hirriam:** Enough! Enough! Find me late in the garden.

**Sedna:** Where my lord?

**Hirriam:** In the garden. Under the Oak tree! Farewell.

*Exit Hirriam.*

*Moment*

**Sedna:** .....

*Enter Perdita*

**Perdita:** Sister, What sight left you so troubled?

**Sedna:** Why carry the baby in your hands while he is asleep?

**Perdita:** I asked answer me. You look frightful.

**Sedna:** It's Hot. *(Pause)* Why carry the baby in your hands while he is asleep?

**Perdita:** I wish to leave him with you. I need to collect a bundle of firewood from the garden.

*Gives the baby to Sedna*

But sister why this bleakness?

**Sedna:** Life. Sedna. Be swift in your pace. Return soon. I have news for you...

*Exit Perdita*

*Moment*

**Sedna:** Sleep! Sleep well Argos. Soon you'll have a playmate. Argo! *(Pause)* Should I not have revealed to him? Would I ever be free if I had kept this a secret? Argos, why do old men dance? You're a man teach me.  
Ar-

**Perdita v/o** Sedna! Sedna!

*Enter Perdita*

**Sedna:** Why such a raw voice?

**Perdita:** Sedna! Sedna! Rush to the garden. Under the Oak tree! Sedna!

**Sedna:** .....

**Perdita:** Rush Sedna Hirriam! Hirriam! Oh! Oh! Oh!

**Sedna:** Peddy!

**Perdita:** Hirriam! Benath the oak tree! With his own belt! Hirriam has ended his life. Rush Sedna Hirriam is no more.

**Sedna:** Oh...

**E N D**

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# THE EXPLICATION

## CHAPTER ONE

This chapter seeks to explain the idea of the 'contact zone' in Theatre of the Contact Zone. Furthermore it is a presentation of the principles and features of this theatre, the distinctive elements that I thought could be realized in both the script and through the performance.

### 1.1 What is the 'Contact Zone' in Theatre of the Contact Zone?

The article: 'Arts of the Contact Zone' by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Writing and Transculturation* (1999) greatly influenced the inception and focus of my study. In it she talked of cultural 'contact zones' as

Geographical and psychological spaces of complex inter-mixing and fusion, adaptation, conflict and tension: a result of biological, cultural, linguistic, social and economic different expectations which is created when more than one community comes to live in proximity. A space where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived in many parts of the world today. (1999: 76)

Having realized that her idea of a contact zone points to a sphere resided in by people torn between conflicting philosophies and world views I found it an appropriate umbrella to pursue my investigations under. I held to it. Close to her notion was Chinua Achebe (2002)'s concept of 'Occult Zones' which he articulates in his *Straight from the Heart* as:

...zones where two things meet, where it is neither one nor the other, where hard and fast rules of dogma can't be applied, where it is neither black nor white. (2002:10)

Both scholars gave me some insight, but, I still felt there was no transformative value implied in their angles of perception, yet in my view as a theatre maker transformation is the essence of both story and theatre. On this regard, their scope fell

short of comprehensively encompassing what I envisaged as the purpose of my dream theatre.

My discovery of Joseph Campbell (1949)'s *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* was a boon moment for the contextualization of my theatrical vision. In his analysis of the Hero's journey, he talks of the hero descending to:

those casual zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case, (i.e., give battle to the nursery demons of his local culture) and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation of universal knowledge (1949:pp17-18)

This aptly summed up what I sought to explore. The contact zone therefore is an internal region of psychic death and rebirth. Death is brought about by physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological suffering. Birth, by insights gained in the process. The metaphorical journey of descending into this zone of suffering is ameliorative and curative, though not self initiated. The mark of having been to the contact zone is self transformation evident through the attainment of a higher self consciousness.

The contact zone is therefore an everlasting realm that is within everybody but reached through suffering. More precisely it is the attainment of 'The Transparent Transcendence' the 'void where inhabitants begin to realize that, you live the divine life within you' as described by the Germany psychiatrist Graf Durkheim, in Stuart (1990:34). The Gnostics in Clarissa Estes Pinkola (1992) had called it 'a fullness: where you are past the pair of opposites (1992:56). The Contact Zone is therefore a physical, spiritual, emotional and psychical state achieved through endurance, designed to sharpen insight bringing more knowledge and wisdom to confront the blows of one's fate. Diagrammatically it is a beginning, a journey, a destination and a return all happening in one's spiritual and psychological realms though physically represented on stage.

## 1.2 Principles and Features of Theatre of the Contact Zone

### Family Drama

Family as an institution represents the theoretical framework within which Theatre of the Contact Zone plays are located. As a playwright I decided to explore the dynamics of family relationships for very specific reasons. Primarily I chose the family because, as an institution, it constitutes an integral part of the structural arrangements of any society. The relationships within a family must to some extent be congruent with the demands that a community makes upon its members. The family is precisely the primary representative of the organisation of the society. Its social, moral, legal and economic rights and obligations reflect the wider society. Aristotle, in his *Politics* (1498) wrote: 'Household management is state management on a small scale.' (1498:14) In his analyses of Heinrich Von Kleist's dramas of social decadence, theatre critic Stephens (1994) observed that, 'family enables explorations of different structures, since the dynamics of family, wider social milieu and state frequently mirror each other' (1994: 26). Apart from this, my selection of family was prompted by my desire to write plays that would reflect and echo universal human experience and concerns. I'm fully aware that it is rather simplistic to conclude that a family is a universal institution as there are as diverse family structures as there are cultures within which families are embedded. However as a playwright I'm more interested in family features that stand out universally, that is the family as a mechanism of intergenerational support, as a mechanism for intergenerational transfer and family as a mechanism for intergenerational solidarity. These functions of assisting to place individuals into a patterned network of interweaving social relationships achieved by its roles of regulating social alliances between members and by acting as a vehicle for social placement of the new members into the society are what will be intensely explored in Theatre of the Contact Zone. A family has always been the first universal mediator of social values from the wider social environment into its members and vice versa. This should heighten verisimilitude in my plays and widen the play's appeal and identifiableness by audience of different socio-cultural backgrounds. Thus by locating the plays in very specific and domestic locations and

interrogating very domestic, realistic, conventional and down to earth subject matter, it is hoped that these plays should have greater chances of attaining elements of universality.

Through exploring the dynamics of family relations, the institution of marriage is also interrogated. Marriage enables me as a playwright, the explorations of intimate relations. Marriage affords to most individuals opportunities to express in any mature and honourable sense their emotional and sexual needs. These male-female relations enable people to show who they are more clearly and unashamedly as compared to behaviours they assume in public spheres.

I also settled for the family because the plays that have greatly influenced me are set in family circles. Again from a purely entertainment perspective, which I believe drama should incorporate, I chose the family because it is a locus of love and violence, which are good thematic choices for drama.

### **Language**

If Theatre of the Contact Zone grapples with family issues its language should reflect this. In dramatic writing, emphasis is put on action. Body movements and gestures usually dominate interpersonal family communication and verbal utterances are usually resorted to when the body is no longer sufficient. Family language incorporates physical text.

Again where verbal utterances are used, the family has its own linguistic patterns which if not considered, both the text and performance lack verisimilitude. The language I strive for is neither overtly vulgar nor obscene. Even in moments of extreme distancing, language reflects societal expectations, social status and age.

Conscious linguistic stylization is another distinctive feature of the language of Theatre of the Contact Zone plays. Linguistic structures are crafted so that both the text and the performance can descend deep, deep into the emotions, moods, intuition, insights and psychomotor thinking of readers and viewers. As a playwright I have a conviction that, if a story does not move or disturb an audience via the senses and primal emotions, a significant portion of its meaning is lost. A language which

incorporates poetry and prose and is highly metaphoric does this, for it carries both meaning and feeling. I metaphorize the speech, the action, the songs, the characters and even the setting. I'm influenced by Antonio Damasio (1958)'s observation that 'metaphors return us to our consciousness, thoughts and feelings.'(1958: 31) Theatre of the Contact Zone seeks to reawaken its audience's consciousness primarily through feelings. When writing I'm convinced that the feeling dimension of art and its transference of emotions is the essence of good art as Richard Courtney (1993) pointed when he said 'in drama we are *knowers* through feelings.'(1993:17). When metaphors are clothed within poetry, they are charged with feelings. They are also privileged in that they convey more kinds of meanings through their connotations as compared to the ordinary functional daily language. Apart from the evocation of individual images in separate speeches, the entire play is raised into a single complex metaphor, a phenomenon that defies easy analysis.

Complementing the metaphoric dimension of this predominantly poetic language in my script is consciously inserted rhyme. Rhyme is the coincidence of two different ideas in two phonetically congruous words. This linguistic embellishment should bring a combination of aesthetics, pleasure and meaning to the speeches. Rhyme adds sound patterning to poetry—the likeness of sounds and the unlikeness of meaning. This apparent similarity and contradiction also sparks imagination in the minds of listeners and gives the performance a rhythmic sound patterning, a pleasure to the passages of the audience's ears.

From a writing perspective, I hoped that the use of metaphor and poetry would encourage even a lazy actor to be serious with his lines and role for he may see that the playwright painstakingly arranged the text word for word. He would thus be invited to interrogate himself and the text to find the substance of his role so as to express his felt meaning. In so doing he might discover that the script has given him some possible symbolic dimension; hence his performance assumes some more intensified feeling power. It is that feeling power of the dramatic metaphor that creates self consciousness, first and foremost in the actor and then it is hoped that it will be transmitted to the audience during performance. Re-awakening self consciousness in the audience is the major objective of Theatre of the Contact Zone plays.

Although the language is stylized through the use of the above mentioned features, it is also highly moderated so as to remain demotic, pedestrian and base—understandable even by people of very minimal literary education. I incorporate no complex linguistic structures like compound and complex sentences. The language is poetically heightened, but does not incorporate intellectual linguistic sophistications characteristic of academic writings. Its demotic thrust is brought in by the application of the ‘Socratic Dialogic Degradations’ which Bakhtin (1981) refers to as:

An entire system of metaphors and comparisons borrowed from the lower Spheres of life...from trades people...from everyday life, to bring the world Closer and familiarize it in order to investigate it fearlessly and freely (Bakhtin (1981:103)

Ritual and religious allusions and inferences are features of this language. In line with this, elements of innuendo and ambiguity, and contrasting levels of seriousness and lightness are other components of this language. On reflection, having sat in the auditorium watching two plays I have so far written within this linguistic framework, I have discovered that all these features when amalgamated into a script, produce a distinctively ‘archaic’ language, which however is easily comprehended by the majority of the audience. That has, therefore, become the overarching feature of Theatre of the Contact Zone’s linguistic dimension. It is my ambition to keep it thus.

### **Themes and Characters**

It is my nursed ambition as a playwright that the themes of the plays I write should reflect and echo universal human experiences and concerns. They should transcend geographical, historical and cultural confinements. Apart from seeking to achieve this aim through locating them within family circles, the choice of my subject matters and dramatic techniques should also enhance this.

In my thematic selection, I’m greatly guided by Richard Courtney’s (1973) concept of ‘root metaphors,’ which in his words are: ‘the basic world paradigms or hypotheses.’ (1973: 54) Using this concept as my yardstick it ensures me that:

- No play is written to address a public issue or problem e.g. theft in the community of youths and Aids.
- No play is rooted in an idea or some rational political agenda e.g. socialism is better than capitalism or globalization is another form of imperialism.
- No play suggests or prescribes an answer or a solution e.g. lets rise against our employers or how best to change governments, i.e. no didactic purpose.

These three considerations guide me away from writing 'Problem plays' as argued by David Mammet (1994). A problem play in his view is a play written in response to an identified community problem e.g. drug abuse or prostitution. Usually it seeks to provide the solution. Apart from failing to reach a wider audience, when the problem is solved the script is thrown into archives.

Within the frame of world paradigms I write plays whose concerns are aligned with questions such as: Why do human beings commit sin while they know it is evil? Can one remain moral in the face of starvation? What makes a parent a parent? and so forth. As a playwright it is difficult to articulate what exactly my plays will be thematically dealing with, for ideas to write come after different observations. However they will all be exploring family relations.

By virtue of these plays being set in a family location, the characters are the conventional family members of ordinary families. There are no heroes, villains, clowns and caricatures. Characters are real human beings full of contradictions, inner conflicts, hopes and despairs. They are low and lofty in status, ridiculous in one situation and serious in another moment. None is fixed, straight or permanently crooked. As drama (life) unfolds all are evolving, either deteriorating or developing. No matter how much the action of the plot may be related to social conditions or political-economic events, the real aspect under investigation is the individuality of characters. The crux is that although the individual works out his destiny through social institutions and through material things, it is he/her and not the conditions, at the center of gravity in the problem of values.

#### **Situational Drama (Spinning many balls)**

A family is an institution not an individual. Each member is a complete entity, a full system within a system of systems, like a human body with parts yet not separated but

part of a whole. Everybody has particular purposes to fulfill, particular duties to accomplish and particular needs and desires—socially, spiritually and psychologically. Plays that want to recreate an authentic verisimilitude of such a setting can not focus on one above the rest, for all are striving within their specified frames to fulfill certain individual and family expectations where competition is non-applicable. A husband is not necessarily a hero in the eyes of his wife. Fathers may not claim heroism before their children. A family can never be wholly represented by a single individual. Although I acknowledge and appreciate the influence of Shakespeare in my writing, here I differ from a number of his plots, for my plays will not be framed along the dominance of a single character such as Hamlet in *Hamlet*, Lear in *King Lear*, Othello in *Othello*. Theatre of the Contact Zone plays, have no single towering character and will not be named after a single character. Like a family, they are situational dramas, giving no dominance to plot and character. Plot and characters are only agents for the realization of the situation. In line with this, the plays are not built towards any ultimate climax, but a series of crises whose intensity and complexity increase as drama unfolds. It is when characters (family members) are situated in such moments of pressure that the depth of their character is revealed. The audience will judge the characters' qualities of decisiveness and maturity in relation to his family position and expected responsibility, age, level of education and the pressures (inner as well as outer conflicts) that he has been subjected to within the dramatic action.

Having so far written two plays within this frame of situational drama, I have come to realize that this technique allows complexity of plot, depth of characterization and prevents predictability of events in the unfolding of drama. However, focus and plotting are very crucial, for the play can easily float in the air without anchorage or can easily become too dense for audience's consumption in a single viewing, rather becoming more of a novel than a play. It is my hope that my plays should be dramas first before they become literature. Again another inherent pitfall in situational drama is leaving sub-plots unresolved. According to Gooch (1994) many playwrights shun situational drama because its demands are too vast in the mind of a single person, both the playwright and the audience. This may be true. However it is my wish to continue practicing writing situational dramas.

## Setting

Having a clear physical geographical setting for the play is an inevitable element in the process of writing a play. Playwrights, however, have different opinions about the quantity of geographical information they give to the directors. Bearing in mind that Theatre of the Contact Zone plays are heavily influenced by African mythical storytelling structures, non-specificity in geographical location is one of their prominent characteristic features. African myths and fairytales usually begin:

‘Once upon a time, in a very far kingdom, there lived a one eyed king who ...’

The name and specific location of the said kingdom are never revealed but the audience is gripped by the aural and visual images inserted in the tale to create an authentic atmosphere. It is my hope that the very minimal stage directions I write, the themes of the play, and the visual and aural images I implant in the text to conjure up the mood, tone and the sense of the world of the play, would suffice for the director and set designers to infer a specific world for which they can design the stage set. I also settled for non-specific settings because as a playwright I’m influenced by the religious idea of the whole world as the theatre of God and the old wisdom expressed in ‘All the world’s a stage’ by Shakespeare in *As You Like it*. It is my intention to create a world in which no single character fully understands the forces at work in his life. It is only the audience who are in an advantaged position to see fully and judge the influence and repercussions of the tensions in this created world, as none of the inhabitants of it can do. After all who understands all the forces at work in our lives?

## Multiple Dramatic Elements

It has always been my ambition as a playwright-theatre maker to create scripts that would remind both the readers and audience, of the existence of other dramatic forms of theatre in my spirit of collaboration and inclusiveness. Therefore, dramatic elements borrowed from other heterogeneous dramatic genres are heavily embedded in Theatre of the Contact Zone scripts. In creating the script *A Wound in the Thigh* I borrowed dramatic elements from the Greek classical tragedy, the Elizabethan-Shakespearean drama, the traditional and contemporary African folkloric drama,

Heinrich Von Kleist's dramas of social decadence, Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty, Howard Barker's theatre of catastrophe as well as from novel and film genres.

However, upon entering the realms of Theatre of the Contact Zone, the dramatic elements from these heterogeneous dramatic genres are combined to form a single, solidified, structured, artistic form with all elements subordinated to the higher unique stylistic unity of the play as a whole, a unity that can no longer be identified with any single one of the unities brought into it. When harnessed into a single play, with themes grounded within typical family circles, the borrowed dramatic elements should mutually delimit and mutually complement each other in forming and preserving this idea of Theatre of the Contact Zone which I hope will produce plays that transcend geographical, historical and cultural confinements. Through adopting this approach, I hope these scripts and their performances will also reawaken in the audience awareness of the fertility and abundance of theatrical history and knowledge backdating to the establishment of theatre in ancient Greece, all however realized through distinctively African subject matters and themes.

## CHAPTER TWO: CREATIVE PROCESS *A WOUND IN THE THIGH*

Through this chapter an attempt is made to address the following issues:

- The motivation behind writing this play.
- Why the play is called *A Wound in the Thigh*.
- Why does it have the dramatic structure it has.

It is hoped through the articulation of these concerns; the themes of the play will be illuminated. Bakhtin said 'In narrative genres form and content are closely related' (1981:53)

### 2.1 Motivation

The core idea behind the writing of this play arose specifically out of a personal quest to address some personal psychic wounds. The process of writing, working with the director, watching the performance and even its analysis in this explication were designed to be therapeutic.

As a playwright I am a product of a community which still nurses and honors some strong remnant elements of the traditional African beliefs, values, norms and practices. Chief amongst these is the communal-collective spirit in dealing with all societal issues. Old male elders (whom I revere so much) seek very much the preservation of this family structure with its traditional basis and hierarchy. It has been awarding them economic dominance as it gave them control over land and cattle, the major assets for subsistence and survival. This made their patriarchal authority unquestionable, leaving their wives and children with little choice save to adhere to their moral and social dictates. Contrary to this, the influence of colonization and industrialization has brought in a new family structure (which I greatly admire) in which emphasis shifts to the values of individualism, nuclear-conjugal family values, private material acquisition and ownership, formal education and democracy, for example. It is within such delicate terrain where everyone is faced with the questions: 'Who am I. Where do I belong?' that *A Wound in the Thigh* is set. Precisely it is a soul searching play. *A Wound in the Thigh* was thus written with a strong conviction that, it is through a bold interrogation of my unstable background and seeking to put it to creative use, that I can bring some order to my unstable consciousness.

## 2.2. The Title: *A Wound in the Thigh*.

*A Wound in the Thigh* was not my working title as I wrote the play. In the process of writing I wanted a title that would arouse in me the feeling I had about the subject before I started writing: a title that would keep me focused on the nub of the play. I had three working titles: *When Father is not enough*, *The House of Job* and *The Valley of Perdition*.

The title *A Wound in the Thigh* ensued in the process of reflecting on Philoctetes' plight after reading it in Lacy Andrew (1907)'s *Tales of Troy and Greece*. As a result of his badly smelling wounds, the Greeks going to the Trojan War left Philoctetes at the Island of Lemnos, however later his fellow soldiers had to come back and take him because the oracle said retrieving him was the only way to win the battle. From this I understood that the wounded man knows something or represents something.

A wound literally suggests a punctured body, a body with a missing piece, but metaphorically it signifies deficiency, vulnerability and pain. Having grown up in a family where we are subsistence farmers by trade, I have often seen how wounded animals become defenseless and helpless. In the play I wanted a wound to be a metaphor for the condition of Hirriam, Sedna and Perdita and the world they live in. To Hirriam the wound is symbolically in the genital area, but, I thought most about it as a deep psychic wound found in all characters except Theophyllus. Perdita is emotionally wounded through rejection and betrayal by Argos, Sedna is spiritually and physically wounded through her lack of self-fulfillment as a married woman and mother. Her wound is deepened when her own husband hands her over in marriage to another man who is not even his brother. As if this is not enough, both abandon her when she reveals to them her pregnancy. Hirriam is wounded through sexual impotency. Through this imposed failure his household crumbles. All are wounded—emotionally, spiritually, physically and psychologically. It is therefore a house of wounds. On this level I thought probably through this title I was attuning the readers/viewers' minds towards the tragic experiences of the play.

On a positive note a wound also metaphorically means the damage to that part of yourself which you care most about- the focus of your attention. Some wounds are not

shameful because as an old adage states 'Where a man's wound is, there lies his genius.' As a playwright I have realized that a wound may be a forward propelling force for drama. Those with no wounds are the unluckiest. Our wounds inspire us into creativity. It was necessary for Hirriam to be wounded first so as to know what it means to live an unfulfilled life. A wound should increase the tolerance for suffering and through suffering new insights and wisdom come into life.

So the title could be read as a precursor of some tragic experiences or a source of inspiration and celebration. This ambiguity is deliberate. I want the readers of *A Wound in the Thigh* to be left with that ambiguity. However, in a performance the director's interpretation of the script and the concept that he then decides and uses to capture the meaning of the play would channel how he wants the audience to receive his interpretation. As a theatre maker I believe if the audience is left utterly wondering how the director wanted them to receive his play either the playwright did not supply adequately embedded signs in the script or the director's concept lacked focus or he did not have a sufficiently formulated and precise concept.

Apart from the title I also attempted to register this idea of a synthesis of tragedy and the birth of insight and wisdom through the dramatic structure, themes, setting and language.

### **2.3. Synopsis**

The play begins late at night. Sergeant Hirriam and his friend, Theophillus, an Italian medical doctor working in Africa, are on their way to Black Water Pool to inspect and collect a dead body that was found floating in the pool. While inspecting the body Hirriam's knee is injured. Theophillus gives him a 'pain soothing tablet.' Time passes. There is no procreation in Hirriam's marriage. Sedna, his wife is now persistently threatening to break up their marriage. Hirriam deteriorates into acute sexual impotence.

Perdita, Sedna's young sister a single mother staying at Hirriam's homestead has an ailing baby boy, whom she is threatening to abandon. She wants Sgt Hirriam to arrest the boy who impregnated and abandoned her. The boy's (Argos's) whereabouts are not known.

Theophillus reveals to his brother that, the night they were at Black Water Pool inspecting the dead body, he mistakenly administered to Hirriam a tablet that causes temporary sterility and sexual impotence, thinking it was a pain soothing tablet.

Perdita thinks it may be her sister who is barren. She tricks Hirriam to come to her bedroom so that they can have sex and most probably a baby. Hirriam refuses.

One late afternoon Theophillus visits Hirriam and finds his wife alone at home. He begins to seduce her. On arrival Hirriam sees them in 'compromising positions.' He orders them to continue with their affair. Two months later Sedna is pregnant. On revealing her state to Theophillus, Theophillus runs away. Soon Hirriam regains his sexual prowess and is ready to resume his husbandly duties. Sedna reveals to him that she is pregnant. Hirriam is later found hanging beneath an oak tree in his garden.

#### **2.4. The Play: Analysis**

##### **Setting the agenda and creating a sense of the world of the play**

What is the first experience I want the audience to have? Why and how should they experience it? Were the questions I grappled with as wrote scene1. I sought to achieve among other things the following:

- set the tone of the story,
- conjure up a sense of the world of the play,
- establish what's at stake
- present to the audience a mass of information they need to know so as to understand the characters and the story as early as possible without slowing the pace.

No prologue is used. The play begins right in the middle of action. It is at night. My minimal stage directions are:

*Two beams of torch light*  
*Enter Sergeant Hirriam and Doctor Theophillus*

The first line of dialogue is:

Hirriam:       Shame! I repeat. Shame!!

Beginning the play at night I thought I would evoke in the audience's mind the feeling of insecurity, danger and vulnerability associated with darkness. Dark nights again are favorable environments for the enactment of evil deeds: murder, rape, robbery, bestiality and so forth. Furthermore night, when compared to daylight, signifies a time of hardships, just like winter when compared to summer. By repeating the word 'shame' I wanted to emphasize the idea of disgrace and humiliation, issues that are quite central in the play. I thought if said thoughtfully, and maturely echoing the wisdom of the circumstances and experience that has made Hirriam say it, (which the actor is privileged to know before the audience for he is familiar with the whole play) these words 'Shame! I repeat. Shame!' would register the depth and stateliness of Hirriam's character, echoing his personal inclination towards morality and dignified behavior. To augment the solemn tone of the play and the bleak atmosphere that I intended, I wanted the audience to register the diction of the text. The first twenty lines of the play incorporate these words: Sordid, rotten, scoundrel, decadent, death, die, blood, strike, destroy, night, hurt, ill-omen, death etc.

I sought through them to verbally conjure up a bleak mood and a poignant tone for the play. This was aimed at creating an atmospherical metaphor that will prepare the audience to experience the tragic events to follow.

The first visual image in the script is Hirriam stumbling after kicking a pathway stone. To Theophillus who is not familiar with the African world of superstition he says:

Hirriam:           This is an ill-omen Theophillus.

The next visual image is the dead body beside Black-water Pool. It is mutilated. The skull is punctured, the scrotum ripped out. It smells. No one has come forward to claim it for burial. As a chronological development from his 'stumbling' now Hirriam injured by an invisible object and fully falls down adjacent to the dead body. When in the performance, the director made Hirriam and the dead body lie parallel to each other I realized that he had also registered out what I sought to communicate. I hoped that gradually the audience would find out that Hirriam and the corpse in the play are a reflection of each other. The ripped off scrotum prefigures Hirriam's impending incapacity to execute his husbandly duties. It might have been too early for the audience to make that connection but I dropped more clues as the play progressed. When left alone beside Black Water Pool he says 'these misfortunes that befall us in old age usually haunt us till death.' Before giving Sedna to Theophillus, Hirriam

officiates at the burial of the unclaimed corpse, thus symbolically burying himself. His physical death at the end of the play is an affirmation of what the audience had since seen—his spiritual death. *A Wound in the Thigh* begins with its end and the rest of the play is an enactment of this central image in the exposition—Hirriam is the corpse at Black Water Pool. I tried to apply David Mmet (1998)'s technique of burying the end of the play in its beginning. He said 'Although it is difficult profound plays begin with their endings.' (1998:27) Even Sedna's fate of being abandoned at the end of the play is hinted at in the exposition. Hirriam talks of his separation from her on their first day of their marriage in these words:

Hirriam: I'm doubly pained Theo. (*Pause*) Today my wife has joined me in marriage. Here I am. Stumbling and almost kissing the ground while Sedna is counting the rafters of my roof like some abandoned widow. Unfair! Unfair!

Referring to Sedna as an 'abandoned figure,' is an implicit pre-figuring of her real widowhood status at the end of the play. Throughout the play, I inserted indications that Sedna begins to feel she is a widow. In her monologue in Scene one she says 'now I look like an ancient girl.' Although I realized through the performance that the relationship between Hirriam and the corpse was registered quite early, I was puzzled whether the final plight of Sedna did not come as a surprise to the audience yet I carefully placed clues in the play.

An issue which I later realized may not have been clear for the audience during performance is the reason why Hirriam commits suicide. As a playwright, I wanted the reason for his death to remain ambiguous to readers. Some may blame him for cowardice or may read his death as an act of sacrifice, thus making him a hero. In the performance text, it is for the director as he interprets the script and formulates the concept for the production to guide the audience towards the way he wants them to receive Hirriam's death. As a playwright I have no intention of writing plays in which I overtly spell out how they should be received. I leave interpretation to the director and audience. Although it was not clear even to me why in the performance Hirriam commits suicide, I have decided to leave it open to multiple interpretations hoping in another production or in the hands of another director another possible interpretation will be more amplified than others.

For the audience to be involved in the unfolding of the story and to care about the characters they have to know what's at stake, and the higher and the clearer the stakes are to the audience, the more they become attuned to the drama. One major issue that I sought to establish quite early, were the social tensions between Summerland and The Valley; between the Eurozzittes and Aphrozzittes of Summerland and the people of The Valley. Summerland and The Valley are not just names. They metaphorically represent the major contending forces in the world of the play: the tension between tradition and modernity. The Eurozzittes and Aphrozzittes live in Summerland. The Eurozzittes have shops. There are hospitals with modern refrigerated morgues. There are better schools than in The Valley. People there are concerned with luxury as evidenced by ribbons, laces and the quality of dress Perdita brings from Summerland in Scene 9. In contrast to this The Valley is presented as a simple country settlement. In scene one as Hirriam and Theophillus are going down the river, they hear sounds of wild animals which are living in mountains very close to people's homesteads. People still live in compounds. In scene three Perdita goes to bathe in a river. Again by simply calling the area, The Valley I wanted to create in the audience's mind a picture of natural green geographical valley where nature has not been disturbed by human technology. My question was then, if these people are living in a valley, what is threatening their peace and harmony? What causes the fall of Hirriam's house? Are they internal or external forces? The only outsiders talked of are the Eurozzittes and Aphrozzittes of Summerland. I thought I had set indicators for audience to associate 'civilization' with Summerland and rural simplicity with The Valley, so that the entire play would enact a dramatization of the effect of uncritical amalgamation of the values of these two worlds.

In scene one Hirriam expresses his revulsion when the dead body is taken to Summerland for postmortem. However, since the only hospital with refrigerated morgue is in Summerland, the body is taken there. At the same hospital where the dead body is accommodated, Perdita's ailing baby is denied access to medical treatment because she can't afford to pay. Theophillus, the doctor from Summerland's hospital is responsible for bringing sterility and temporary impotence to Hirriam which causes the disintegration of his family. Again because of his floating morals, Theophillus seduces Sedna, impregnates her and abandons her.

I sought to dramatize the relations between Summerland and The Valley very much through Perdita. She is the youngest in the play; however she already has an illegitimate baby from a boy of Summerland. Amongst the residents of Hirriam's compound she is the only one who goes to Summerland. Throughout the play she visits Summerland three times. The first time she appears in the play she is at a hospital in Summerland seeking treatment for her ailing baby. Through that scene I wanted to show how the people of The Valley are treated in Summerland. By placing the scene adjacent to the first scene where a dead body from The Valley was taken to Summerland, I thought I would register the irony in giving accommodation to a corpse of an old man while denying treatment to a young baby. The dead from The Valley are welcomed but the living are left to die.

Perdita also reveals that she was seduced and impregnated after consuming brandy bought by Argos while they were in Summerland. I thought all this would reveal what happens when one attempts to embrace both the values of Summerland and the values of The Valley uncritically.

In scene five Perdita comes back from Summerland with the news of how Hirriam's impotence has been turned into satiric and malicious songs and dramas by the residents of Summerland. In an attempt to visually present the attitude of the people of Summerland to Hirriam I used the technique of 'a play within a play.' I sought to make even the other characters see with an audience's eye how crucial the issue of impotence is to Hirriam while in Summerland they have converted it into entertainment.

Although Summerland is hurting people of The Valley, I was attempting to suggest that it is impossible to de-link or to adopt a separatist stance. Perdita as the representative of the young educated African elite should serve to illustrate the difficulties encountered in trying to embrace tradition and modernity. Throughout the play she shows how she is psychically split between the values of Summerland and the world view of the people of the Valley. I thought that through her the audience would realise the dilemma of post-colonial schizophrenic characters.

In spite of this, I wanted it to only gradually surface to the audience that the difference between the two is not so far apart: a civilized human heart is lacking in Summerland

while infrastructure and 'modernity' is backward in The Valley. It is no heaven and hell as such, but each overlaps the other ideologically. As an audience member I think the social tension between Summerland and the Valley was not registered enough through the performance. They remained mere names of places with no social and historical connotative meanings. I believe (as I will elaborate later) it was so because the collaboration between the director and the playwright was not sufficiently developed. The cultural, social and historical connotations of the play are peculiarly African hence distanced from Muftic, a European student director. As I watched the performance, I thought perhaps I should have attempted to register the differences with more visual images than aural ones in the writing.

Having created a world characterized by two spheres with different views, I wanted to have characters that expose these tensions.

#### **Characterization:**

Whether the characters are victims of forces beyond their control, or are active initiators and participants in the disintegration of Hirriam's family is a question that I wanted the audience to wrestle with as drama unfolds. Is Hirriam's giving over of his wife to his friend a noble and justifiable decision? Is his death an act of cowardice or a heroic deed of sacrifice? Is Sedna a victim of Hirriam's malice, or a recipient of what she justifiably needs? Is Theophillus an innocent medical doctor? and many more such questions guided my construction and development of the characters.

Hirriam is chosen to be on duty the very night of his marriage. He has been separated from his wife at a time he wanted her most. I hoped I was suggesting that fate is against him. The same night he is injured. His own friend, a trained doctor, mistakenly gives him the tablets which directly set in motion the collapse of his family. His wife Sedna loses patience because of their childless marriage. Hirriam deteriorates into acute sexual impotence. I revealed quite early to the audience (scene three) that it was Theophillus who gave Hirriam the tablets which in my mind are 'the seeds of failure' hoping the audience would identify and empathize with Hirriam. Many times he begs his wife to stay:

Hirriam: Sedna, please abandon me not at this terrible hour! Should worldly tribulations separate us?

Despite her verbal vows of obedience and faithfulness, Sedna 'betrays' Hirriam. As a writer I perceived Sedna's acceptance of Theophillus's 'proposals' as a betrayal of her husband. Readers and audiences may not agree. From an African world view, especially within traditional values and structures, what Sedna does with Theophillus is utterly unacceptable. Again I had given her a strong Christian background. She is the daughter of a Seventh Day Adventist pastor. In her monologue and conversations with both Perdita and Hirriam she speaks as the epitome of Christianity, wisdom and as a custodian of African culture. However, she chooses to close her eyes while her palm is in another man's hand and even lets Theophillus kiss the back of her palm. She knows in her world, kissing is as intimate as sexual intercourse. She is grown up, married thus fully aware of this. Having shown other ways through which Hirriam has been victimized, I thought this was his greatest ordeal - his betrayal by his 'virtuous' wife, the self acclaimed Seventh Day Adventist. The slow and heavy rhythm which the director gave to this moment of Sedna's fall allowed the actress to show the mature experience and wisdom of the action the character was passing through—emotionally, physically and spiritually. As an audience member I could sense the tension between her spiritual and emotional dimensions. It was clear Sedna knew her whole life was at stake, yet still she chose to betray Hirriam. Hirriam emphatically confirms this through his words: 'flesh, flesh, Sedna. The desires of our flesh fail our spiritual convictions.' In her failure to remain a faithful wife, Sedna has given Hirriam an unbearable cultural blow. Hirriam is a husband with a traditional African patriarchal mentality where women are possessions like other pieces of property. Sedna's promiscuity is a sharp sword that deflates his inflated ego, doubly clouding him with shame, humiliation and hurt in the eyes of his collective community. Her act is more disgraceful to him than to herself. What I thought would make the audience identify and empathize more with Hirriam is that he again is betrayed by his own friend Theophillus and his wife together.

What I think was not clear either in the performance is that Theophillus is metaphorically a channel through which the forces and values of Summerland are encroaching into The Valley. He is not only a Theophillus but a representative of what Summerland does if allowed entry in the Valley. The characters and the location

represent similar tensions! Even when in scene one, Hirriam expresses his anger over why the dead body is taken to Summerland, the fear, suspicion and hatred that makes Hirriam say so did not register in the words of the actor. I thought the actor needed to historically contextualize Hirriam's anger. It is also problematic to me that, inasmuch as I wish to write plays with symbolic meanings, I strongly wished not to write an allegorical play. The problem then is that some of my historical-cultural inferences may not be familiar to both the director and the actor. For example the anger in Hirriam's words: '...and now they! They! *(Pause)* They have taken him to Summerland.' They as opposed to 'us' is referring to the white men within the colonial dichotomies of 'Them and Us.' 'Them' the oppressors and 'us' the oppressed! This may not have been clear to the actor and the director yet I also hoped not to state it overtly. However, this is why I opted for collaborative theatre making so as to assist each other in interpreting the script.

Having pursued the downfall of Hirriam to this crisis, I wanted him to heroically deal with his plight. He gives his beloved wife to his 'friend' emphasizing that it is out of love.

Hirriam: Rip apart this ribcage Seddy and read what's at the centre of my heart. *(Pause)* Love! Sedna Love!! *(Pause)* For your sake Seddy! For my sake! For our sake! *(Pause)* Should we two die living like cursed shadows on earth? Should you abandon me out of hunger while someone in our midst can save us? Doing it within our walls, on this-

*Powerfully stamps the ground with his foot*

This, our soil, Sedna here in our house!

Within my writing lens Hirriam is acting from a strong moral conviction. He has seen the suffering his sexual failure has brought upon Sedna. I presented him from line 1 scene one as a very strong religious man. His knowledge of the bible surpasses any other characters'. Even his suicide at the end of the play is not an escape to offer a spiritual solution to a physical, emotional and psychological problem. I thought his three major acts namely, sacrificing to bury an unclaimed corpse; giving over his wife

to a friend: and committing suicide were three chronological progressions in the process of attaining higher self consciousness. What could he have done within the given circumstances? To confirm that Hirriam has really given value to his wife and the need for her to live within the situation that he himself has initiated, even after regaining his sexual prowess and Sedna reveals her pregnancy, Hirriam upholds his position of wanting Sedna and Theophillus to live life fully (sexually, domestically and socially) as evidenced by his self initiated death. As a playwright, I allowed him to commit suicide to prove that he was not an opportunist who only wanted his friend to bail him out in a single moment. Hirriam upheld his conviction till he died.

On reflection I, however, realized that my intention of giving heroic status to Hirriam through his death was not as clear to the audience as it was in my mind. His death may have reached the audience as an act of cowardice or as caused by impulse rather than thought.

However, I still uphold that if his religious life had been explored enough throughout the play and that if the director had organic knowledge of the social and political environment and the real historical figure that Hirriam represented, his final hanging beneath the oak tree might have re-echoed in the minds of many viewers, the image of Christ hanging at the hill of Golgotha. This did not happen. As I watched the performances I thought perhaps a monologue revealing the real reason why he hangs himself was necessary. I, however, realized that it is not my intention to write plays where the meaning is stated explicitly for the audience. I have thus decided to leave the final script with its possible interpretations, hoping in the hands of another director Hirriam's sacrifice and the reception of a heroic status will end the play. Hirriam is a victim who conquers defeat by self sacrifice. He died to facilitate the amalgamation of Summerland and The Valley.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE 'COLLABORATIVE' CREATIVE PROCESS: FROM PAGE TO STAGE.

Presenting the practical framework within which *A Wound in the Thigh* was transformed from a dramatic script into a performance script is the scope for this chapter. In it I also wish to articulate my discoveries as my tasks shifted from being those of a solitary explorer of imagination into a 'hands-on' Playwright-theatre making practitioner as I worked with the director. It is also a revelation of the insights I gained from watching the play both as playwright-analyst and as an ordinary audience member.

#### 3.1 Preproduction Exchange

On the sixth of November I gave the working script to Sanjin Muftic. It was my fourth draft. However, I still felt I needed two more re-writes to deepen characterization and tighten the dramatic structure. The play was difficult for me to capture in my mind all at one time, so it was hard for me to notice if there was fluidity of events and whether I had raised the stakes high and clear. Again, due to its poetic thrust it was tough to see if characters had individual voices. However, knowing that the process of writing the script would continue even during rehearsals, I was pleased that the director had the foundation with which to begin the collaborative process of theatre making.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November we met for our pre-production meeting. Muftic had read the script. His first impression was that, as compared to *An African Syzygy*, *A Wound in the Thigh* offered deeper psychological and spiritual explorations. He asked me to unpack what I sought to communicate through the title: *A Wound in the Thigh*. I attempted to explain what drove me to write this play (as I have already described in the first chapter.) Muftic then pointed out that he had some suggestions for the dramatic structure. We agreed to discuss there.

The director suggested that some plot structural changes could be made to tighten the formal structure of play. First of all he proposed that, to clarify the sterility and the

subsequent impotency of Hirriam, it would be better if the play starts on the day of his marriage. the day he formally receives his wife from her parents, which within African traditional norms is supposed to be the day of first consummation. In my initial working script, Hirriam and Sedna had been married for three years before he was given the tablets that caused impotency. However, still their marriage was childless. The effect of the tablet was supposed to be a second stage in the deterioration of his sexual life. Muftic suggested that the impact of Theophillus's error would be more effective if both Hirriam's sterility and impotency are caused by the tablet he gives him. The script and the performance, however, would need to show that the immediate effect of the tablet was sterility and then later the same tablet brings a period marked by failure to sustain an erection. From a rural African perspective I found Muftic's idea of a particular isolated day as the day of marriage, difficult to accept, because it is extremely difficult to pin down a single day and mark it as the day of marriage. I was afraid his contribution would distort the verisimilitude of the play's social world view. However, his input was more in line with my initial position that Theophillus (the white Italian doctor) is responsible for the disintegration of Hirriam's family. As a scholar and playwright, I realized that his contribution had unconsciously amplified my strongly upheld notion that Western philosophies, ideologies and policies (represented in the play by Theophillus and Summerland) are the root causes of African economic backwardness, social depression and political turmoil. I thought it better to slightly sacrifice social verisimilitude and heighten my thematic concerns simultaneously accepting my fellow's structural contribution. I accepted it.

Having raised this, the director left me to find how best I could incorporate it into the script. This is how the play came to begin with Hirriam's marriage! I also added Theophillus's letter to his brother Demetrius in scene five where he reveals that it's he who gave Hirriam the fateful tablet. I inserted it between the scenes where Sedna fumes over Hirriam's sterility and when she rages over his impotence to suggest the passage of time.

I thought it would be better to reveal this to the audience quite early so that there is both suspense and empathy. The audience would empathize with Hirriam seeing that his plight is a result of his friend's mistake. The audience would also empathize with

him as Sedna constantly humiliates him over his sexual incapacities. The suspense would be generated by the fact that the tablets will lose their effect in 365 days, so, how will Hirriam behave within this period?

The director's input was enormous in reworking the last scenes of the play. Endings as observed by Playwright-lecturer Janet Neirpris (2005) in her book: *To be a Playwright*, are usually the most problematic parts of storytelling. With *A Wound in the Thigh* I was, however, quite clear with my ending: Hirriam was going to commit suicide by hanging himself. But I wanted to leave his death open to various possible interpretations and meanings. It is in the creation of this ambiguity at the end of the play that the director greatly assisted me, although in retrospect I think some of our intentions did not come across through the staging of the play. He suggested the incorporation of dramatic irony, a technique which conceals a lot of information and knowledge from the characters while the audience is fully aware of what is happening. Firstly as Theophillus had already revealed to the audience that it was he who gave Hirriam the fateful tablets, the director saw it fit that he should not reveal this to Sedna as I initially had it in the script. He, however, comes in with the intention to reveal and even asks Sedna to take a vow of silence, (this was already in the script), but as soon as Sedna reveals that she is pregnant Theophilus, knowing that Hirriam's days of impotence are coming to an end, runs away. When I asked Muftic why he suggests that Theophillus should treat Sedna so cruelly, he said 'it is characteristic of the white men to run away after messing up things.' His suggestion was thus thematically in line with some of my views of how the colonial white men treated African women. I incorporated his idea for its historical truthfulness. Sedna does not reveal to Hirriam that Theophillus has fled from the country. Hirriam as well does not show any signs of contemplating committing suicide except through his exuberant dancing and shouting 'farewell.' These changes were not made in a single meeting for we would debate on any possible alterations that we sought to make throughout the course of rehearsals.

9<sup>th</sup> of November we met the cast for the first read through of the play. The actors found a lot of humor in the script and generated fun in reading it. They enjoyed very much the poetic language of the play. The laughter that came up throughout the reading did not please me. I wondered whether within the remaining three weeks, the

young actors would realize that this play is not a comedy. Privately I told the director of my fear and he assured me that as they re-read the script and begin to descend to the subtext they would realize the gravity of the subject matter. There were no changes that we made to the script as input from the cast.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> (seven days before the closed performance) Muftic called me to see the first run-through of the play. After the run through, we had a meeting. We both agreed that actors performing the roles of Perdita and Theophillus were not rising to the linguistic demands of the text. I thought of moderating the language for the actors' sake so as to save the performance. Again as a playwright I felt the run-through depicted some slavish allegiance to the script. Furthermore, although we were left with only seven days before the opening night, the run-through I had watched had not taken me through an emotional journey. Having seen his direction of *An African Syzygy*, I knew Muftic could add value to the play. Through *An African Syzygy*, Muftic had produced and conveyed a more complex layered vision of the narrative, transforming the script into something surprising and revelatory, making the whole performance an overwhelming transformative event. I was confident he could do that and even better with, *A Wound in the Thigh*. After the meeting, I wrote and send him the following ten points beginning this way:

Dear Sanjin

Find attached a list of ten points that remained clear in my mind after watching the Run-through. Some are as obvious as we discussed them later. Some are things that will be added later as rehearsals progress. Some are idealistic imaginations of a playwright. What I say, however, comes with an understanding of the constraints within which you are working.

1. The actors still need to find the meaning of what they are doing on stage.
2. I hope you'll make the performance an overwhelming transformative experience. I'm hazarding to suggest that, a great performance is more than its narrative as contained in the dramatic text.
3. *A Wound in the Thigh* is a tragedy. Will this come out despite its humorous language and funny activities?
4. Actors need to find the relationship between the internal visceral spheres within themselves and between themselves.

5. I appreciate Yvonne Banning's suggestions for the exposition and will be sending them to you soon. See if I got her correctly.
6. Linguistically the actors need to be raised to the demands of this theatre or else they lower it to people. It is located in heightened theatrical spaces. Mastery of language and the manner of its delivery is one avenue to enter this heightened territory. This needs to be brought in.
7. Actors said their lines too fast and many things were lost between the stage and the auditorium.
8. As we saw it, it is not yet a single unity that is to be consumed in one viewing.
9. The director will hopefully give the performance the uniqueness of his personal signature just as the dramatic text has my personal touch as writer.
10. The play is still plain.

In response Muftic indicated that number 9 was problematic, however he understood what I meant and stated that he will strive to achieve that.

However, as I watched the performance for three days in the Arena Theatre, it did not register the transformative value of theatre that I had anticipated this play would do. Even the director shared the same sentiments when he said 'I was not satisfied with the process and outcome of *A Wound in the Thigh* because I sold myself short as a creative person.'

Although there were serious constraints on the director (as I will articulate later) I discovered that still Muftic brought in a variety of directorial elements for the visualization of the performance.

### 3.2 Visual Images

#### The Coffin under the Bed

In scene one, as Hirriam and Theophillus are walking down the river towards Black Water Pool to inspect the dead body, Hirriam said to Theophillus 'Remember this mission is a mission of death.' Contrary to this in his following line he reveals that, that very day his wife has joined him in marriage. Marriage, the ordained institution of procreation without which life is extinct is juxtaposed with death. At the end of the play, Hirriam hangs himself; Sedna is left holding a two year old baby and in her womb, there is a two months old foetus. This co-existence of life and death in Hirriam's homestead was an issue I sought to convey clearly. Muftic heightened this on stage through the presence of the coffin underneath the bed and this became the central working image of the play. As a playwright I found it even squarely sat within my idea of raising Hirriam into hero through self sacrifice, because although there

was a coffin in the room, it was under the bed not on top. The bed, the space of procreation, although adjacent to death, is conquering. Likewise before Hirriam goes to his death, he hears 'heavenly choruses', dances with his wife, then he walks to his death after saying 'Farewell.' When someone goes to his death that way, he goes to his eternal life. This means although his family is passing through transitional vicissitudes, it is not a dying family. Hirriam's disappearance which the coffin had always pre-figured is like the burying of the seed in the ground. Seed should die first for new life to come up. My analogy may not have reached the audience as they watched the play, but the inclusion of this visual by the director indicated for me how directors can add value, revelation and meaning to a script through performance.

### **Sex-Plant-Scenes**

*A Wound in the Thigh* is a family play, embedded with strong African values as well as Christian influences. Within such a context sex is a highly revered subject and taboo, hardly talked about. Contrary to this, the play is built on showing how a family disintegrates when this basic force of sustenance is missing. Should it therefore be staged as a vulgar, obscene play if this sexual impotence is to come across vividly to the audience? Having worked together in *An African Syzygy*, Muftic knew very well that as a playwright it is not my intention whatsoever to produce overtly obscene scripts, yet I imply very much mature sexual encounters when I write these family plays. He thus visualized a highly decent, symbolic and revealing technique of presenting sex scenes on stage. Talking about the inclusion of 'Sex-Plant-Scenes' as he preferred to call them, Sanjin Muftic said:

Sex-plant scenes illustrated the failing sexual activity of the two main characters, compared to the successful one between the protagonist's wife and the foreign doctor (which results in a plant being revealed in the following scene). The addition of the scenes, I would argue, demonstrated a passage of time and helped to clarify the sense, mood, and nature of the play. The scenes were not written into the text, but I feel that they were implied (in general I feel that Mr. Chimoga's text imply a lot more than what is written) Muftic: Post Production Reflections 08/02/07).

Apart from serving this symbolic function, the sex-plant scenes were simultaneously technically manipulated to be scene transitional devices. This gave the performance an unfolding rhythmic fluidity which as an audience member kept me glued to the

events on stage, especially that they were usually accompanied by some background music. On reflection, I however thought more melancholic tunes could have amplified the gloomy atmosphere that the dramatic action sought to register. As I was writing I would always hear in my mind the tunes of the late Zimbabwean musician Leonard Dembo, and that assisted me to visualize quite dark happenings on stage. I'm not hazarding to suggest that Muftic should have used this music, though I think if we had worked in a more collaborative set up I would have suggested the use of Leonard Dembo's music.

However, although Muftic brought these additions they were moments and issues which after watching the performance and listening to other audiences' comments brought more light to me as regards the playwrights and director's operational parameters.

### 3.3 Contextual factors and issues

It is important to contextualize how the Drama Department framed our collaborative theatre making on this and the other earlier project. Our relationship as Playwright and director had its genesis in 2005 when I submitted a production proposal for Grahamstown Theatre Festival June—July 2006. The Department chose my story and identified Muftic Sanjin to be the director. My symbolic-realist writing and Muftic's directorial notions of heightened theatrical spaces had a lot in common especially the demands on the performers. Perhaps this was why the Department brought us together. Precisely the reasons were never stated to us both.

The same scenario surfaced again with *A Wound in the Thigh*. Even Sanjin Muftic in his post production reflections had the following to say:

'I was asked by the department to direct the script which was written by Tichaona Chimoga... While working on *An African Syzygy* I was not aware that the play had academic ramifications until the last week of rehearsals which left me to focus on the play. With *A Wound in the Thigh*, after Tichaona Chimoga had outlined his theater in his second seminar paper and being aware that this was his thesis production, I was worried about the production capturing and serving Mr. Chimoga's vision... I was hinted by the department that I should involve Mr. Chimoga. For future productions; I would argue that it is absolutely necessary to identify the working parameters of the project, not simply between the two people involved, but also the department... I think the

blame for what I feel, is the relative failure of this project should be shared between the two of us together with the department'

(Muftic: Post productions reflections 08/02/07)

By inference I thought the department wanted us to put to in practice the insights we had gained from the first project. However, not revealing to us the reasons limited the extent to which we explored the purpose of our relationship professionally. Apart from lack of clarity as regards our working parameters, time for rehearsals of *A Wound in the Thigh* was very limited.

From the first read through to the opening night, Muftic had only three weeks. Though it may be argued that such a condensed nature of events is common in the professional world, I would strongly argue that, Muftic did not have adequate time to prepare for the production. Actors needed more time to inhabit the text. This came to me clearly as I watched the performance because all actors (especially Jansen/Perdita) had not yet mastered their lines. Logically, if the actors had problems with just the delivery of their lines, how much more could one expect them to convey the subtext? Again, as a script, *A Wound in the Thigh* has a peculiar linguistic idiosyncratic style and if the actor forgets his/her lines and adlibs with some conventional wording, an apparent disturbing jaggedness is aurally registered in the ears of the audiences. This lack of consistence in linguistic patterns happened numerous times giving the performance an irritating lack of uniformity. As regards the absence of meaning in the actor's speeches, the scene that clearly exemplified that for me was Sedna's monologue in scene one (b) which begins 'the river of time always carries us forward...' The actress said her lines mechanically and they did not I think draw the audience inside her visceral sphere. Although she spoke poetically, she could not register the plight of a tormented woman as I had heard Sedna narrating her story to me before writing the monologue. Even her gestures, facial expressions and inflections were not infused with the ripeness and wisdom of the experience expected from the dramatic action she was involved in. In Mudford (2000)'s words 'the audience did not see what lies within her' which made her as many actors do, 'simply shout too much' (2000:17). However as a playwright I knew how many times I had encountered this character and knew the actor needed a lot more time to inhabit her circumstances than the rehearsal schedule allowed her. But, I took note of the dignity with which she entered the scene and moved towards the bed as well as her posture of

lying on the bed facing the rafters. I realized that as regards movement and picturization the director had created quite relevant visual images. Since I was not always in the rehearsal venue it is beyond my knowledge whether the director had assisted actors to inhabit the text, but the performance showed that all of them had not yet risen orally to match the verbal dexterity required in the delivery of the lines in *A Wound in the Thigh*.

### 3.3 Conclusion

All in all, arguments and misgivings can be raised, but, the script and performance of *A Wound in the Thigh* are products of a 'collaborative' process between Sanjin Muftic and myself. I had the leading role in the creation of the script and Muftic in the creation of the performance. The process and the product made me realize another possible channel through which a Theatre of the Contact Zone's dramatic text can be transformed into a performance text. The process gave me profound insight into how my mental imaginations as a playwright can be visually amplified through the medium of theatre through the eyes of another theatre practitioner with my minimal intervention. I came to realize and appreciate that my initial task within the kind of theatre that I want to practice is to provide a script, which does not claim any dominance. It is only a foundation, the basis, a blue print, without which the director has nothing to begin coordinating the collaborative enterprise of theatre making. It is my conviction that if the playwright and the director have a mutual and transparent relationship, Collaborative Theatre Making can yield more satisfying and beneficial results than the performances of a playwright who wants to write and direct his own scripts. However, misconceptions and suspicions should be maturely dealt with for in our case it was this that probably hampered the process and quality of our product. This was also amplified by the department's non-interventionist stance, which left us uninformed explorers on a terrain which they know is very delicate. What was probably over worrying me was that the play was my thesis production and thought it should capture very much the ideological vision of my dream theatre. Specifically, both the process and the outcome of *A Wound in the Thigh* should best be viewed as experiments in the exploration of this idea of Theatre of the Contact Zone and were not satisfactory to both practitioners. Thus, till now, our other project, *An African Syzygy* remains the closest representational beacon for my anticipated theatre. I however will continue to explore the idea of working with directors hoping in

different contexts and with professionalism and maturity in directors and myself as the playwright, the processes and products will show benefits of my experience of *A Wound in the Thigh*.

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