

# **Reza de Wet (1952-2012): Life and Works**

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## Declaration

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December 2019

Signed: Daniël Botha Stander

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## Table of Contents

Declaration	3
Abstract	6
Opsomming	7
Acknowledgments	8
List of figures	9
Chapter 1 “My plays are my diaries”: Situating a Biocritical Research Project on Reza de Wet in a Broader Literary Life Writing Discourse	13
Chapter 2 “My biographer will have fun”: Devising a Methodology for Reading De Wet’s Work in Relation to Her Life	47
Chapter 3 “I am deeply indebted to Jung”: De Wet's Idiosyncratic 'Jungian' Poetics	82
Chapter 4 “I am a period piece”: De Wet's Chronotopes and Her Symbolisation of Theatre as Child's Play	111
Chapter 5 “The place where children play”: The Child as Hermaphrodite in De Wet's Plays	147

Chapter 6 “More than either of them”: De Wet's Acting Training and its Link with Metadrama in Her Plays	186
Conclusion “I refuse to be a figurehead”: De Wet’s Canon Position in South African and International Literary Historical Discourse	192
Addendum	203
Works Cited	207

## Abstract

Reza Wet, one of South Africa's most awarded playwrights, reputed, both locally and internationally, for her prodigious body of work, passed away in 2012 and yet her life as a writer, actress, director and scholar is sparsely documented and under researched. Apart from Erika Terblanche's writer's profile on the website *Litnet*, no serious attempt has been made to properly document De Wet's upbringing, education and career as an actress, academic scholar, lecturer, and theatre professional and no study has been made at all of the thriving afterlife of her works abroad. This exemplifies J.C. Kannemeyer's observation that biographies of South African authors are remarkably rare (83). This thesis aims to map De Wet's intellectual and artistic development within the context of South African theatre and literary studies and history and to analyse her work's unique position within these fields. It places a special emphasis on De Wet's idiosyncratic Jungian psychoanalytic poetics and reads her oeuvre as an expression of a psyche in search of greater self-knowledge. To this end it relies on a combination of close reading and archival research to conduct an encompassing life-works analysis by which De Wet's life history is the favoured source underpinning an interpretation of the works, while the work remains the central focus of the thesis at large. This project will hopefully contribute to the expansion of South African theatre and literary auto/biographical archives.

## Opsomming

Reza de Wet, een van Suid-Afrika se mees bekroonde dramaturge, is in 2012 oorlede. Sy is plaaslik en internasionaal bekend vir die omvang van haar skrywersloopbaan, maar tog is haar lewe as skrywer, aktrise en navorser nog yl gedokumenteer. Buiten Erika Terblanche se skrywersprofiel op die webtuiste *Litnet* is daar nog geen noemenswaardige poging aangewend om De Wet se opbrengs, opvoeding en loopbaan as aktrise, akademikus, dosent en professionele teatermaker te boekstaaf nie en geen studie is al van haar werk se bloeiende nalewe in ander lande gemaak nie. Hierdie gegewe staaf J.C. Kannemeyer se opmerking dat Suid-Afrikaanse skrywersbiografieë besonders skaars is (83). Hierdie tesis poog om De Wet se intellektuele en artistieke ontwikkeling binne die konteks van Suid-Afrikaanse teater- en literêre studies en -geskiedenis te karteer as ook haar werk se unieke posisie binne die konteks van hierdie velde. Ek beklemtoon De Wet se eiesoortige Jungiaanse psigo-analitiese skrywersbenadering en ek interpreteer haar oeuvre as 'n uitdrukking van 'n psige opsoek na 'n verdiepte selfkennis. Met hierdie doel voor oë berus my navorsing op 'n kombinasie van stipleesgebaseerde en argiefnavorsing om 'n omvattende lewe-en-werke-analise te behartig waardeur De Wet se lewensgeskiedenis as die belangrikste voedbron dien, terwyl die werk self die sentrale fokus van die tesis in geheel bly. Hierdie projek sal hopelik 'n bydra lewer tot die uitbou van Suid-Afrikaanse teater- en literêre auto/biografiese argiewe.

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and to my dear parents, who loved me into being and believe me into success.

**Figure 1:** “Reza de Wet (1952-2012)”, Creator: Rob Cooper, Donated by Nina van Schoor.

**Figure 2:** “Photograph of Reza de Wet’s autograph”, Creator: Author photograph, 2017.

**Figure 3:** “De Wet’s grandmother’s house in Senekal”, Creator: Unknown, Donated by June van Eyssen.

**Figure 4:** “Hendrik Francois de Wet at his house in Bloemfontein”, Creator: Unknown, 1994, NALN-fotoversameling.

**Figures 5 and 6:** “Hendrik Francois de Wet in the 1960s and 1990s”, Creators: Unknown, Donated by June van Eyssen; 1994, NALN fotoversameling.

**Figures 7 and 8:** “Hendrik Francois de Wet with his daughter”, Creators: Unknown, Donated by June van Eyssen.

**Figure 9:** “De Wet as a child”, Creator: Unknown, Donated by June van Eyssen.

**Figure 10:** “De Wet’s bedside table in Grahamstown”, Creator: Author photograph, 2015.

**Figure 11:** “De Wet’s antique toy collection”, Creator: Author photograph, 2015.

**Figures 12 and 13:** “Interiors of De Wet’s parents’ house in Bloemfontein”, Unknown, 1994, NALN-fotoversameling.

**Figure 14:** “Oranje National Christian Girls’ School’s annual march to the Women’s Monument in 1969”, Creator: Unknown, *Oranje Meisieskool Jaarblad 1969*, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figure 15:** “De Wet costumed in *fin de siècle* wear in 1967”, Creator: Unknown, *Oranje Meisieskool Jaarblad 1969*, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figures 16 and 17:** “The bust of Eugène Marais and the hut in which it was placed”: Creators: Unknown, 1994, NALN-fotoversameling; June van Eyssen.

**Figure 18:** “De Wet’s dolls”: Creator: Unknown, 1994, NALN-fotoversameling.

**Figure 19:** “The cast of *Diepe Grond*’s professional premiere on the Free State farm Jubilee”: Creator: Ruphin Goudyzer, *Diepe Grond* Programme Note, 1985, Donated by Ryno Eksteen.

**Figure 20:** “De Wet as a child, play-acting with her friend, Geta Finlayson née Geldenhuys”: Unknown, Donated by June van Eyssen.

**Figure 21:** “De Wet’s writing room in Grahamstown”: Creator: Author photograph, 2015.

**Figures 22 and 23:** “De Wet in her mother’s furs”: Creator: Rob Cooper, Donated by Rachel Breytenbach and Nina van Schoor.

**Figure 24:** “De Wet and a female friend play-acting a grown-up heterosexual couple as children”: Creator: Unknown, Donated by Carla Haviland and June van Eyssen.

**Figure 25:** “De Wet’s maternal grandmother’s house in Senekal”: Creator: Unknown, Donated by Carla Haviland and June van Eyssen.

**Figures 26 and 27:** “Gérard (Charles Gerhardus) Marais and his second wife, Frederica née van Eyssen”: Creators: Unknown, Donated by Carla Haviland and June van Eyssen.

**Figures 28, 29 and 30:** “Tawtie (Elizabeth Mary) de Wet née Marais”: Creators: Unknown, Donated by Carla Haviland and June van Eyssen.

**Figures 31, 32 and 33:** “De Wet’s divertive gaze in school photographs”: Creator: Unknown, Oranje Meisieskool Jaarblad 1969, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figure 34:** “Reza de Wet and Lindsay Reardon”: Creator: Rob Cooper, Donated by Nina van Schoor.

**Figure 35:** “De Wet and her daughter Nina van Schoor née Reardon, age 6”: Creator: Rob Cooper, Donated by Nina van Schoor.

**Figures 36 and 37:** “Photographs of De Wet and Van Schoor taken in 1986”: Creator: Rob Cooper.

**Figure 38:** “Evan van Eyssen and Reza de Wet as children”: Creator: Unknown, Donated by June van Eyssen

**Figure 39:** “De Wet in a school play”: Creator: Unknown, Donated: Nina van Schoor.

**Figure 40:** “Souvenir Programme of the Winburg Voortrekker Monument’s inauguration in 1968”, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figure 41:** “De Wet’s drama teacher, M. Liggett”, Creator: Unknown, Oranje Meisieskool Jaarblad 1969, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figure 42:** “Liggett and the cast of *Arms and the Man*”, Creator: Unknown, *Oranje Meisieskool Jaarblad 1969*, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figure 43:** “De Wet in *Quality Street*”, Creator: Unknown, *Oranje Meisieskool Jaarblad 1969*, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figures 44, 45 and 46:** “De Wet as Viola/Cesario in *Twelfth Night*”, Creator: Unknown, *Oranje Meisieskool Jaarblad 1969*, Oranje Meisieskool School Archive.

**Figure 47:** “De Wet as Vrou in Die See”, Creator: Roekeloos.co.za

**Figure 48:** “De Wet as Cassandra in *The Trojan Women*”, Unknown, Donated by Rina Nienaber.



**Figure 1: Reza de Wet (1952-2012)**

## Chapter 1

### “My plays are my diaries”:

#### Situating a Biocritical Research Project on Reza de Wet in a Broader Literary Life Writing Discourse

“I think one’s work grows out of what you are and how you experience things.”<sup>12</sup>

Reza de Wet in an interview with Una Nieuwoudt (3)

“I always found it [writing] a way of expressing myself.”

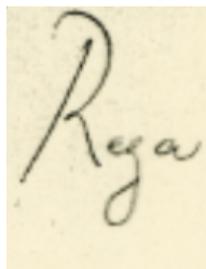
Reza de Wet in an interview with Juanita Finestone and Anja  
Huismans (89)

“If there is something of the magical, the mysterious, and an apparent concern with an imaginative reality in some of my work, this merely reflects the way I see things.”

Reza de Wet in an interview with Patricia Handley (n.p.).

“My plays are my diaries.”

Reza de Wet in an interview with Marcia Blumberg (49).



**Figure 2: Photograph of Reza de Wet’s autograph<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The original quote in Afrikaans: “Ek dink ’n mens se werk groei maar uit wat jy is en hoe jy dinge ervaar.” (De Wet in Nieuwoudt 3)

<sup>2</sup> Where I have translated a quote by De Wet, or merely referred to a statement she had made, I will provide the complete original quote in a footnote for comparison. Where I repeatedly cite the same statement by De Wet in one chapter, I will however, only provide the full quote and its translation in footnote form the first time. English translations of titles will be included in block brackets after the initial mentioning of an Afrikaans title.

<sup>3</sup> From letter from Reza de Wet to Marietjie Coetzee written May 1, 1987

In an interview conducted in 1996, Reza de Wet responded to Marcia Blumberg's question whether she keeps a diary. "My plays are my diaries," she answered, without elaboration (49). To the scholar interested in the interplay between the writer's life and works, or what Nadine Gordimer calls "the mysterious incest between life and art" (263),<sup>4</sup> this brisk avowal is inviting. The author is no longer "dead", in the poststructuralist sense. In De Wet's case, with her disdain for deconstruction (in De Villiers 47<sup>5</sup>), the text is not, in Roland Barthes's words, "that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost" ("Death" 142). Instead, the text is precisely where she wants to be found. But what does "finding" her entail on her terms? If diaries enclose their author's "deepest feelings" – as De Wet herself had stated – (in Huisman and Finestone 94) as the ultimate form of autobiography, how do her plays, fifteen of which are published, all of which have been staged publicly, perform this role? As "diaries", they are cryptic and De Wet's description of them as such is sly. They are almost always historicised, often set in other countries, haunted by the supernatural, and never close in style to kitchen sink realism. In these plays, De Wet's self-portrait is hard to find with certainty. Known by some as "the Emily Dickinson of Grahamstown" (Int. Gregg), De Wet was intensely private and, commenting on her propensity for seclusion, she said in an interview with Riaan de Villiers, "I lead a small existence, like a mole" (47).<sup>6</sup> So too, she exists as a subterranean presence in her plays from which theatre critic Sergio Ben finds it "very difficult to glean a psychological profile" of De Wet (16). Paul Boekkooi had in fact ascribed her strength as a playwright thereto that her own voice is not audible behind the mask of any of her characters ("Kundig" 2).<sup>7</sup> The play as genre after all "screens out" its creator "more effectively" through "the live dialogue and physical action" than in other literary forms, as Michael Benton remarks (*Literary* 75), echoing a similar point made by C.S. Lewis (in Tillyard and Lewis 8).<sup>9</sup> That is

<sup>4</sup> Comparatively William Amos describes it as an "incestuous, literary self-cloning" (xviii).

<sup>5</sup> In this 1987 interview with De Villiers, De Wet expresses her view that the "new trends in literature, such as deconstruction and metafiction, the attempts to prove that the human subject is nothing but an accumulation of reflection and layers of social conditioning that can be peeled off, is a rather frightening symptom of an obsession with analysing things externally and declaring it nullified." ["Die nuwe neigings in die letterkunde, byvoorbeeld, die dekonstruksie en die meta-fiksie; die pogings om te bewys dat die mens net 'n bondel reflekse is, of lae sosiale kondisionering wat afgeskil kan word, is nogal vir my 'n verskriklike simptome van hierdie obsessie met dinge van buite af uitmekaarhaal, tot niet verklaar."] (in De Villiers 47)

<sup>6</sup> The quote in Afrikaans is: "Ek leef op 'n klein, mollerige manier." [I live in a small way, like a mole.] (De Wet in De Villiers 47)

<sup>7</sup> The quote in Afrikaans is: "Die stem van die dramaturg is nie agter enige masker hoorbaar nie." [The voice of the playwright is not audible behind the mask] ("Kundig" 2)

<sup>8</sup> W.H. Auden suggests that the "greater the writer's sense of genre and the more he understands his characters, the greater this disparity becomes" (158).

<sup>9</sup> In his case against biographical criticism C.S. Lewis remarks: "The Drama is, in fact, the strongest witness for my contention. Even my convinced opponents would falter in dealing with the Drama, for there the poet is

what De Wet enjoyed about playwriting, as she said to Rolf Solberg: “You can actually be there [in the theatre] and you don’t have to be seen” (177). Still, her voice rings clear as one of the strangest and strongest expressions from South Africa in world theatre, since her debut as a playwright with *Diepe Grond* [Deep Ground]<sup>1011</sup> in 1985 until now [2019], more than seven years since her death in 2012. She is one of South Africa’s most awarded playwrights and her dramas are staged in Europe, the UK, the USA, and East Asia, and translated in 11 languages. Under what conditions was this voice conceived – what has shaped it and how do the works through which it echoes reflect and express its author’s subjectivity? These are the questions this study poses.

This thesis explores and theorises the nature of the connection between De Wet’s life and works. This endeavour is incited by her confirmation, in paratexts,<sup>12</sup> of her oeuvre as self-expressive and her view of her writing as an attempt at self-definition (Greeff 94;<sup>13</sup> Nieuwoudt 3;<sup>14</sup> Handley n.p.<sup>15</sup>). Through the abundance of self-conscious metatextual devices employed in her writing, De Wet stages a subject in search of greater self-knowledge and of an augmented measure of personal agency. It is this aspect of her works that has intrigued me most since my first encounter with it in 2001. I am inquisitive of the conditions that have impelled her to express herself in writing – specifically in the modes, forms and genres that she had chosen to work in. Aided by biographical research, I will consider the

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manifestly out of sight, and we attend not to him but to his creations. How far any of them may resemble him is, no doubt, an interesting question; but to ask that question, still more to answer it, is clear to have turned from imaginative apprehension to later and unpoetical reflection. The objective or impersonal theory of poetry which I am defending finds its easiest application in the drama and the epic.” (Lewis in Tillyard and Lewis 8)

<sup>10</sup> In my Master’s thesis I point out that the “first English version [of *Diepe Grond*] was staged by Robert Shore in 1991 at the Tiffany Theatre in Los Angeles as *Deep Ground*, followed by a revised translation staged by Greg King at the Kwasuka Theatre, Durban, South Africa as *Unto Ground*, before it was finally published as *African Gothic* in *Plays Two* in 2005. A revised version was published with *Op Dees Aarde* and *Nag, Generaal* as *Vrystaat-trilogie* in 1990” (Stander *Channelling* 3).

<sup>11</sup> I quote here from my Master’s thesis to explain my omission of bracketed dates when referring to De Wet’s texts: “Dating De Wet’s plays is complicated for a number of reasons: most of the plays were staged prior to their publication, many were eventually published in groups under different titles, some were published before they were staged, and many remain unpublished. For this reason, dates are not included in text. I have instead attached an addendum (Addendum A) in which De Wet’s entire oeuvre, published and unpublished, prose and plays, are listed, first alphabetically, then chronologically according to publication and/or performance dates” (Stander *Channelling* 6).

<sup>12</sup> I will define and unpack this term coined by Gerard Genette later in the chapter at significant length.

<sup>13</sup> De Wet described her plays as “a bridge between her and her surrounding world” [’n brug tussen haar en die wêreld rondom] (in Greeff 94).

<sup>14</sup> In an interview with Una Nieuwoudt De Wet reflected: “I think one’s work grows out of what you are and how you experience things.” [Ek dink ’n mens se werk groei maar uit wat jy is en hoe jy dinge ervaar] (De Wet in Nieuwoudt 3).

<sup>15</sup> In an interview with Handley she suggests that if “there is something of the magical, the mysterious, and an apparent concern with an imaginative reality in some of my work, this merely reflects the way I see things” (De Wet in Handley n.p.).

implications and effects of these creative acts, and the public broadcasting thereof, on the subject that it was invented to articulate. I will investigate not only the expressive, but also the transformative capacities of the literary media De Wet employs. In view of these outlines, I do not attempt (in the frame of this thesis) the writing of a full-length biography which traditionally simulates the Bildungsroman, although, overwhelmingly much of my conceptual lens is devised from writing and theory on the (especially literary) biography. Instead, this project aims to produce a life and works study that foregrounds De Wet's writing, contextualised by biographical research, in service of a rather narrowly defined aspect of the author's life – her life as a writer, however difficult it is to extract it from the so-called “life otherwise”. It is for this reason that I have chosen a topical approach for the chapter layout, rather than a chronological narrative structure, although the analysis in each chapter follows a broadly sequential line of inquiry that bears the resemblance of a plot. The analytic approach will rely, as Patricia Spacks puts it, not only on the “specific belief in the connection between the individual subject and [...] her work but also on the general faith in the intimate connection of life and art” (14), occupying, in Benton's words, “an uncomfortable position between factual and fictional truth” (*Literary* xvi). But by what means, with what methodology, does the scholar decode these plays, and her single novella, to uncover the self-impression De Wet insisted are placed in it and how should the discoveries procured from such an investigation amplify the reader's understanding of her oeuvre?

*From One Golden Age to Another: The Rise, Fall and Revival of Biocritical Approaches to Literary Analysis in the West*

The use of biography in literary analysis has been a point of deliberation in twentieth-century literary theory largely since the 1910s, but this is preceded by a peaceful and productive marriage between the two practices, dating back to at least the Enlightenment. In the absence of significant formal literary biographical theory prior to “the Age of Criticism” – as the twentieth century has been called (Edel *Writing* 27; Saintsbury) – literary biographers have practised biographical readings of their subjects' works as an essential component of their narration in a relatively unselfconscious manner. This is demonstrated in the fact that the pretexts which contemporary biographers, literary biographers and literary biographical critics generally turn to for canonical foundations are indeed literary biographies: Samuel Johnson's *The Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) and James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson*

(1791), considered together as the two “father figures” of the modern biography (Holroyd “Literary” 5; Stannard 34). Retrospectively, the practice is seen as expressive of its own theory. So, for instance, Johnson’s *Lives* is generally considered “the first thorough-going exercise in biographical criticism” (Saintsbury). This co-incident conception of the two disciplines testifies to a moment in the Anglo-European history of ideas when the individual comes into being as the protagonist in the writing of history and the self-understanding of the Western subject. Gary Giddens, in conversation with Hermione Lee, remarks that it is fascinating

that the pre-Johnsonian era of biography going back to Plutarch [was concerned with] generals and military people and not poets unless they were also military people, but once you have *The Lives of the Poets* and Boswell’s *Johnson*, literary biography dominates [the genre]. (CUNY)<sup>16</sup>

Lee affirms this and comments that the eighteenth century is “the point at which the interior life becomes the subject of a narrative – and what a fantastic thing that is” (CUNY). As Virginia Woolf’s most celebrated biographer, Lee may have taken her cue from her subject who, in “The Art of Biography” (1945) had suggested that “[i]nterest in our selves and in other people’s selves is a late development of the human mind. Not until the eighteenth century in England did that curiosity express itself in writing the lives of private people” (221). The Enlightenment is indeed the pivotal moment for the emergence of the individual as “the primary social unit in the west” (Culler 18; Karl 9; Mandell 1; Schoppa 31). It is at this stage in literary history that Rousseau writes his *Confessions*, which Jonathan Culler suggests, “inaugurates the notion of the self as an ‘inner’ reality unknown to society” (18). This individualistic concept of the self is reflected in the eighteenth-century advent of the Bildungsroman – partly pioneered by Rousseau’s *Émile, or On Education* (1762) (Barney 308; Carlson 1; Palmeri 167) – and the Realist novel which in its depictive mode, reflects “a much larger movement of the post-Renaissance view of man as individualised” (Karl 9).

The wide impact of this worldview through literature was ensured by the promotion of literacy and the establishment of a middle class reading public most notably through the instituting and growth of circulating libraries since the late 1740s (Allan 121; Battles 121; Karl 35). Readers’ internalisation of the figure of the individual was not solely achieved by its representation in fiction but also, as Walter Benjamin suggests, by the very medium of the novel form, which at the time was gradually gaining prominence. Just as “the novelist has

isolated himself” and the “birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual”, Benjamin argues, the reader of a novel “is isolated, more so than any other reader” (87; 100) and thus increasingly conscious of her/his individuality in the reading act. This provides one plausible explanation for the increased popularity of such a personalised form of historiography as the biography, which, like its fictional counterpart, the novel, at the time, narrates the history of a single person rather than of a nation or any other social or societal group. It is this side of the biography’s historiographic appeal that underlies Kaplan’s regard of the manner in which it “shapes the way we frame experience through narrative and character, the way we look at history and other people” (2).

It was at this stage also that the author was for the first time “individualised” and “valorised” and biographers, as Foucault argues, “began to recount the lives of authors rather than of heroes, and [...] [the] fundamental category of ‘the-man-and-his-work criticism’ began” (“Author” 205). This is partly due to the establishment of copyright laws. Laura Mandell points to how the “notions we have of the author as a genius and a great man were devised [...] not by authors themselves but by publishers (‘booksellers’) who wanted to make money by owning copyright” in the eighteenth century (1). In this way, the commodification of individual literary style resulted in the establishment of the view of a specific author’s work as expressive of their distinct selfhood as commonsensical, a notion later developed and refined by E.M.W. Tillyard in *The Personal Heresy* (35).<sup>17</sup> It is this fact also that has moved Barthes to describe the rise to prominence of the author’s life in literary criticism as “the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology” (“Death” 143). Consequently, the Western subject has become “accustomed to seeing [her/himself] as an individual modelled in some way like an original author whose selfhood is expressed in his or her works” (Mandell 1).<sup>18</sup> By these means the figure of the writer became a celebrated paragon and representative of individuality.

No wonder then, as Giddens remarks, that the most canonised and “influential biographies are literary biographies and biographies of biographers” (CUNY), starting of course in what Kaplan calls the “golden age of English-language biography” (2), with Johnson’s *Lives*<sup>19</sup> and

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<sup>17</sup> He defines “style” as “the mental pattern of the author, the personality in words” (35).

<sup>18</sup> Gerome Truk formulates this notion by explaining that “it is by being a character of the story of one’s own life that one constructs oneself as an individual, endowed with a specifically individual, not a merely social, identity” (157).

<sup>19</sup> Apart from being considered by the likes of Lee Morrisey to be “the most important English literary critic of the eighteenth century” (4), Cudden regards Johnson as “one of the most accomplished and influential of biographers” (84).

Boswell's *Johnson*; the latter being generally considered "the supreme example" (Cudden 84) and the "blueprint for the genre" (Giddens in CUNY). Subsequent examples of writers' lives that have redefined the biography at large include John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-4), Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1875), George D. Painter's *Proust* (1959; 1965), Leon Edel's *Henry James: A Biography* (1953–1972), Michael Holroyd's *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* (1967; 1969), Richard Holmes's *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1976),<sup>20</sup> Peter Ackroyd's *Dickens* (1990) and Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf* (1996).

Due to the historical popularity of biography and the status of the literary biography as its most dominant subgenre, the life-works connection and the presumed detectability thereof for the life writer and her/his readers have been established and maintained for more than a century as self-evident (Barthes "Death" 143; Foucault "Author" 205; Lewis in Tillyard and Lewis 3d; Wimsatt and Beardsley "Intentional" 468). This is possibly the single most contested assumption in literary theoretical discourse throughout the twentieth century to the present. It is in the challenge of the author's "tyranny" in literary scholarship – as Barthes phrases it ("Death" 143) – that theorists of this field have generated some of the concepts and vocabulary most foundational to its present state. Examples include "the death of the author", "intentionality", "persona", "second self" and "speaker". The most prominent progenitors hereof are the New Critics, although it is crucial to note that not all theorists associated with this movement were convinced of the "impersonal" nature of the literary text. Cleanth Brooks and John Crowe Ransom – to whose book *The New Criticism* (1941) this movement owes its name – are important exceptions to the rule.<sup>21</sup> But the criticism of T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, C.S. Lewis, W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and M.C. Beardsley are fundamental in this regard.<sup>22</sup>

The first two of these theorists, Eliot and Richards are often represented as the pioneers of "the exclusion of the author from literary analysis" (Jefferson 84; Tillyard in Tillyard and Lewis 32), but I suggest they are largely misunderstood. Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) conceives of the writer's "extinction of personality" in his work

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<sup>20</sup> Midge Gillies, a Cambridge life writing specialist, refers to Holmes's book as "mould-breaking" in the field (9).

<sup>21</sup> T.S. Eliot had remarked in 1957 already, in "The Frontiers of Criticism", that the "term 'New Criticism' is often employed by people without realising what a variety it comprehends" (103).

<sup>22</sup> While the twentieth century surfaces the most intensive concentration of these debates, it did not originate without at least a Victorian foreshadowing. Ernest and in Oscar Wilde's "The Critic as Artist" (1891) debate such a point; Ernest maintains that "great artists work unconsciously" and that "they are wiser than they know", thus establishing a foundation for reader-centred criticism, but Gilbert contends that all "imaginative work is self-conscious and deliberate" (355).

and the critic's appreciation as necessarily "directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry" (28). He was however an advocate of the literary biography, as he demonstrates in "The Frontiers of Criticism" (1956). He maintains that there is no "reason why biographies of poets should not be written" and in fact, he goes as far as to suggest that "any critic seriously concerned with a man's work should be expected to know something about the man's life" (111).<sup>23</sup> He has himself even been accused of conducting dogmatically biocritical analyses of Dante and Shakespeare (Lewis in Tillyard and Lewis 3). Still, "Tradition" has become instrumental to the formulation of arguments against biographical criticism (Cuddon 421; Kannemeyer "Biografiese" 87-8; Tillyard in Tillyard and Lewis 32). Conversely, Richards's design of close reading methods in *Practical Criticism* (1929) has consolidated a prevalent approach of analysing the text as a self-enclosed unit at the cost of "an interest in the mind and personality of the poet" (Cuddon 544). He had "made the experiment of issuing" poems without revealing the authorship, encouraging the participants of this experiment "to comment freely in writing upon them" (Richards 3). Although, like Eliot, Richards had not yet gone as far as insisting on the complete denial of poetry's autobiographical dimensions, the design of his experiment is still celebrated for its effective disciplining of scholarship to direct focus on the text's formal features, unhindered by foreknowledge of the poet's philosophical standpoints or biographical background. After Eliot and Richards, however, the annulment of biographical methodologies becomes ever more explicit and urgent, most notably in the works of Lewis, Wimsatt and Beardsley.

C.S. Lewis and E.M.W. Tillyard's polemical *The Personal Heresy* (1939) raises the debate about the presumed expressive nature of literature to prominence in twentieth-century criticism. Lewis responds to what he saw as the "steadily increasing role of biography in literary studies" at the time (1). He resists what he interprets as Tillyard's ideas that "all poetry is *about* the poet's state of mind" (2), that poetry is the "expression of personality" (1), and that "to read poetry well is to have a true idea of the poet, while to read it ill is to have a false idea of him" (4). He sees these suppositions as literary critical "dogma[s]" (3); in fact, he terms it "the personal dogma" (25). Lewis thus maintains that "when we read poetry as poetry should be read", replacing one dogma with another, "we have before us no representation which claims to be the poet, and frequently no representation of a *man*, a *character*, or a *personality* at all" (4). He contends that the reader "can have poetic

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<sup>23</sup> This statement is ironic considering Eliot's insistence in his will that "I do not wish my executors to facilitate or countenance the writing of a biography of me" (in Christianson 36).

experience which does not consist in sharing the ‘personality’ of a poet” (16). The valuable legacy of Lewis’s theory of impersonality can be found in the commonly used literary notions and terms, for instance Wayne Booth’s idea of the author’s “second self” (“Point 92), Gerard Genette’s distinction between “the narrating situation” and the “situation of writing” (*Narrative* 214), and Philippe Lejeune’s differentiation between the author’s name as denoting “a person” and “a person who writes and publishes” (11).

But while in *The Personal Heresy* no consensus is reached in the dialogue of essays between Lewis and Tillyard, leaving their public with a neat formulation of two distinct schools of reading to choose from or to synthesise, W.K. Wimsatt Jnr. and M.C. Beardsley collaborate with a firm and uncompromising adherence to and propagation of Lewis’s viewpoint in ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ (1946) and “The Affective Fallacy” (1949)<sup>24</sup> in which they generate a powerful lexicon for “the erasure of authorship” in ensuing debates (Cuddon 422; Sharpe and Zwicker v). They develop Lewis’s argument, by not only focusing on the question surrounding the text’s autobiographical elements, but on the debate about the possibility/necessity of framing interpretation as the detection of an author’s intent. They found their case on the argument “that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (Wimsatt and Beardsley “Intentional” 496). Herewith they inaugurate a significant shift from biocritical forms of literary analysis, producing concepts that have even become absorbed into major twentieth-century historiographic theory (Munslow 141-3). In literary scholarship, however, it moves criticism to reader-centred ideas of literary studies most forcefully expressed and confirmed by the poststructuralists.

Almost twenty years after the publication of “The Intentional Fallacy”, the final blow to biographical criticism (before its revival towards the millennial turn) was given by Barthes with “The Death of the Author” (1967), followed by Foucault with “What is an Author?” (1969), both which appropriate Emile Benveniste’s notion in *Problems in General Linguistics* (1966) that “language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’” (40). Benveniste argues that “it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject, because language alone

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<sup>24</sup> The legacy (if not acknowledged) of “The Affective Fallacy” is particularly visible in certain strands of feminist reading theory. Judith Fetterley in *The Resisting Reader* (1978) as well as Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (1997) combat what they see as the reliance of reader response theorists such as Peter Brooks, Norman Holland, David Bleich and Wolfgang Iser, on the concept of “a universalised abstraction called ‘the reader’” that does not consider the reader’s gender “as a potential influence upon ‘the reader’s’ experience” (Warhol and Herndl 561).

establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in its reality which is that of the being” (40). Barthes then adopts this idea in his own theory on literature by refuting the conceit that it is through the “transparent allegory of the fiction [that] the voice of a single person, the author ‘confid[es]’ in us” (“Death” 143). He describes the “reign” of the author “in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, [...] diaries and memoirs”, as “tyrannical” (143). Instead, he proposes that, properly understood, “writing begins” when “the voice loses its origin, [and] the author enters into his own death” (142). Echoing Barthes’s description of the text as an “oblique space where our subject slips away” (142), Foucault posits a view of writing in which “the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor [...] to pin a subject within language”, understanding it, rather, as “a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (“Author” 206).<sup>25</sup> Derrida confirms Barthes’s view of the author’s metaphoric death in language when in his lecture on *différance* in 1968 he defines language as a centreless structure, incapable of producing universal meaning (“Différance” 87-92), Foucault further points to the insecure bases of both the concepts “author” and “works”. He unpacks, respectively, the various and contradictory ways in which the name of the author functions and to the complexities of drawing a neat line of distinction between the writer’s literary/public writing and the non-literary/private writing. In a way then, Foucault implicitly not only affirms Barthes’s declaration of the author’s death but also announces the annihilation of the concept “work”. Given Foucault’s authority in the critical theoretical arena, his deconstructive notions of authorship and oeuvre, together with those of Barthes and Derrida, crippled the scholarly development of literary biography and any life-works research for decades to come.

This temporary decline of biographical criticism as an acceptable form of critique has ensured the consequent exclusion of the biography from mainstream literary theoretical scholarship. Yet, in the broader field of life writing, the biography of a writer need in and of itself not be dramatically affected by these developments in literary theory. Although the fields of literary criticism and life writing, as they stand at present in the West, share a geo-historical moment of gestation, they are still respective fields with fundamentally different concerns. Thus, a biography of an author can be written without any analysis (biocritical or otherwise) of the author’s work (however “work” be defined after Foucault) and indeed, it is not uncommon. Jeffrey Meyers points to a “school of life writing” which rejects the

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<sup>25</sup> Foucault’s essay is probably written in direct response to Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” (1967), written two years earlier.

“traditional aim of the literary biographer – to discover and depict the mind as well as the life of the artist” by presenting, instead, “an external view through an encyclopaedic accumulation of facts” (2).<sup>26</sup> A local example hereof is Petrovna Metelerkamp’s fragmentary *Ingrid Jonker – Beeld van ’n Digterslewe* (2007) which presents a montage of letters, photographs and other archival documents compiled in such a way as to present a life free of the scholar’s commentary. Alan Elms suggests that the writing of a life (even if it is a writer’s) “can be an important goal, with no necessity to justify it by reference to other ends” (16) and J.C. Kannemeyer in his preface to his life of J.M. Coetzee suggests that the value of his biography need not reside in the light it sheds on the work, as much as in the documentation of a remarkable life in its own right (*Coetzee* 11). Peter Millard points out that this difference “between ‘pure biography’ – the record of a living being [...] written for itself, for its own intrinsic interest – and ‘the prefatory life’, [which] owed its existence merely to the need to give some sort of authority to the works it preceded” is a historical one dating to Johnson, whose lives of the poets falls in the latter category (14). Gail Porter Mandell similarly distinguishes between the biographer as “‘chronicler’ – who, although using texts perhaps, scrutinises actions or events, of which human personality explains only a part”, and the biographer for whom the text serves as a “way into the mind, and through the mind into the life and world of his or her subject” (3). But even considering the frequency of these type of projects the scholar cannot ignore Western biographical theory’s similarly troubled history since its initial boom from the 1920s to ’50s until a fairly recent revival.

Meryle Secrest jests that “[t]here are three rules for writing biography, but, unfortunately, no one knows what they are” (in Salwak xi) and Virginia Woolf, while asking at one point, “My God, how does one write a biography?”, eventually concedes that its “method still remains to be discovered” (“New” 235). These remarks summarise the twentieth century’s futile search for a thorough-going theory for biography in the West,<sup>27</sup> a quest with a most detectable origin

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<sup>26</sup> Milton Lomask vehemently opposes “this school of thought which argues [...] that unless the hero explains his actions, the biographer should limit his report to what the hero said and did, leaving the reader to calculate the motives” (85). He suggests that “to present only the façade of an individual is to present only half an individual” (85).

<sup>27</sup> Although Gale E. Christianson describes the biography as a practice with “no rules or regulations, no axioms or diktats, no paradigms or universal principles, [...] [or] ‘how-to guides’” (Christianson xii), it has certainly attracted numerous attempts at handbook-writing and taxonomising of genres. Taxonomers include Leon Edel, Michael Holroyd, Margaretha Jolly, Hermionee Lee, Milton Lomask and Jeffrey Meyers and to the list of “how-to-guides” can be added, Leon Edel’s *Writing Lives* (1984) and Milton Lomask’s *The Biographer’s Craft* (1984). I provide a more comprehensive list of titles later in this chapter. Even though they focus primarily on autobiography, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s “Sixty Genres of Life Narrative” (253-86) and “Twenty-four strategies for Reading Life Narratives” (235-252) from *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001) is also noteworthy.

in the 1910s and '20s. It was ironically during the period when Eliot wrote "Tradition", that the first significant wave of twentieth-century Anglophone and Continental biographical criticism was produced by the Bloomsbury group, to which he belonged.<sup>28</sup> In this critically fertile context, there are several major figures who contributed both to the biographical canon (especially that of the literary biography) and to the theorisation of the craft. The most notable figures include Edmund Gosse (strictly speaking a precursor of the Bloomsburies),<sup>29</sup> André Maurois,<sup>30</sup> Harold Nicholson,<sup>31</sup> Arthur Symons<sup>32</sup> and Emil Ludwig.<sup>33</sup> But it is Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf who are generally deemed the inventors of the so-called "New Biography" (Edel *Literary* xii; Moulin 7), a form of life writing shaped by developments in psychoanalysis and which in its approach resisted the valorising conventions of the Victorians (Woolf "New" 230),<sup>34</sup> and in this regard the legacy of the New Biography is still felt in contemporary life writing in scholarly fields.

Shirley Lecky deems Strachey the rescuer of "modern biography from the didacticism into which it had fallen during the Victorian era" with his *Eminent Victorians* (1918), *Queen Victoria* (1921), *Books and Characters* (1922), *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928) and *Portraits in Miniature* (1931) in which he "used Freudian concepts to identify the hidden drives behind individual acts" (2-3). It was not only Strachey's critically informed method in writing the lives of the famous, but also his reflections on his own approach that proved influential.<sup>35</sup> Benton remarks that Strachey's preface to *Eminent Victorians* "has become a manifesto for later biographers" (*Literary* 6). In it he defines the "duty of the biographer" firstly to exclude "everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant" and secondly "to maintain his

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<sup>28</sup> Hermione Lee remarks in the chapter "Bloomsbury" of *Virginia Woolf*, that the "three words 'the Bloomsbury group' have been so much used as to become almost unusable" and that those "who 'belonged' to it said that it was a figment, or that it was too diverse to be categorisable, or that by the time it came to be named it had ceased to exist" (262). She also points out that, contrary to common assumption, "[n]o one was elected (as the Apostles were); there was no manifesto (as for the Vorticists or the Imagists); there was no subscription (as for the Labour Party)" and that, in this light, identifications "of the 'membership' of the circle are variable considerable, depending on who draws up the lists" (263). Thus, although Eliot is considered by some as "distinctly not 'Bloomsbury'" (263), his close friendship with Virginia Woolf qualifies my statement.

<sup>29</sup> Gosse had had written essays on the genre, an autobiography and the life of Swinburne.

<sup>30</sup> Maurois wrote *Aspects of the Biography* (1929) and the lives of Goethe, Balzac, Shelley, Byron, Kipling, Disraeli, Dickens, Victor Hugo, Proust, and the Dumas.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholson had written *The Development of English Biography* (1927), and had, apart from his political biographies, also written the literary lives of Verlaine, Tennyson, Swinburne, Byron, and Sainte-Beuve.

<sup>32</sup> Symons had written a fictional account of a biographer at work, *The Quest for Corvo* (1934), which deals fictionally with key concerns of biographical criticism.

<sup>33</sup> Ludwig's critical work, *The Art of Biography* (1936), published in German, possibly inspired Virginia Woolf's similarly titled essay.

<sup>34</sup> Woolf suggests that in the New Biography, metaphorically, all "the draperies and decencies of the biography fall to the ground" ("New" 230).

<sup>35</sup> Leon Edel identifies Lord David Cecil as one of Strachey's most distinguished immediate torchbearers (*Writing* 38).

own freedom of spirit”, uncompelled “to be complimentary” so that he can “lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them” (viii-ix). Woolf in “The Art of Biography” (1942) praises Strachey for his disregard for the biographical subject’s proverbial “widow and friend[s]” appeal to “[c]over up” and “omit” unflattering truths, which she suggests results in portrayals resembling “wax figures [...] that have only a smooth, superficial likeness to” the original (222). Strachey’s work helped to establish the life writer’s ideal to project an “objective” portrayal of the subject informed by “scientific” theory such as psychology. Although the achievability of any of these objectives have subsequently been vigorously debated and questioned, a complete negation thereof has not yet been effectively attained.

Apart from *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940) and her unfinished memoir ‘Sketch of the Past’ (1939-41), Woolf is remembered for her theorisation of auto/biography rather than as a master thereof. Her ideas on life writing are most eloquently expressed in her published journals, her essays “A Talk about Memoirs” (1920), “The Lives of the Obscure” (1925), “The New Biography” (1927), “I am Christina Rossetti” (1935), “The Art of Biography” (1942), and her mock-biographies, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906), *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and *Flush: A Biography* (1933). While Strachey is celebrated for leading in the “age of candour” (Shilling 121-9), Woolf is most remembered for her interest in the writing of the lives of subaltern and ostracised subjects, especially of women and queer subjectivities and that of the working class. As the daughter of Leslie Stephen who had written the first encyclopaedic *Dictionary of National Biography*, Woolf’s appeal to women and other marginalised groups to write themselves into history, through auto/biography and, in fact, to reshape the genre, discarding the hetero-normative mould with which it had established itself, is still influential in current debates and experiments in life writing (Lee Woolf 13).

Yet, despite the initial rigour with which biography was theorised and reconceptualised in the first half of the twentieth century in the West, it soon became a much-problematized genre, and was quickly demoted and “accorded a secondary place in literary studies” (Edel *Writing* 27) as the “Cinderella figure” of academia (Benton *Literary* 1), quite ironically since, as Gail Porter Mandell remarks, “many biographies originate in the academic world, where publishing is paramount” (9),<sup>36</sup> and as such Paul Mariani “finds this a ‘curious phenomenon’ in an age that ‘prides itself on the critical act’” (in Mandell 14). While the dismissal of

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<sup>36</sup> Even so, Mandell remarks that “biographies are rarely included on course syllabi; as a genre, biography has not yet become a subject that is regularly taught in departments of literature or history” (9).

biography is, however, not a twentieth-century phenomenon – it dates to at least Samuel Johnson’s defence of it in 1750 (Benton *Towards* 6)<sup>37</sup> – its scholarly status wanes after the 1950s in a rather dramatic manner considering the effort and excitement with which it was founded by the Bloomsburies. Mentionable theoretical initiatives have not been generated since the modernists, until fairly recently (Benton *Towards* 1; Edel *Literary* xii; Moulin 1). Sharpe and Zwicker point out in 2008 that the “biography has been the genre least inflected by the theoretical preoccupations and critical innovations of the last two or three decades” (v), a statement echoed by several life writing theorists preceding and proceeding from them (Benton *Literary* xiii; Benton *Towards* 1; Depkat 39; Edel *Literary* xii; Kannemeyer “Biografie” 88; Mandell 9; Moulin 1).

Part of the biography’s scholarly neglect and stigmatisation stems from its interdisciplinary nature which, as Spacks suggests, renders it generically tough to categorise (125), so much so that Milton Lomask calls the biographer “a bizarre, ambidextrous creature” (1) a point reaffirmed by Arnold Rampersad (in Christianson 50)<sup>38</sup> and by Christianson (13).<sup>39</sup> Benton elaborates this dilemma when he writes that “[n]owhere has an overarching theory of biography emerged or seems likely to do so” because “biography is not a discrete discipline with its own insulated and customised principles and rules but an empirical discipline, a field of study that draws upon knowledge and insights from a range of academic areas” (*Towards* 4); after all, no single discursive field “offers a ready-made foundational theory” (2). Since, as Volker Depkat confirms, the “very complexity of the phenomenon biography calls for interdisciplinarity” (41), it has been suggested that the biographer, (especially the literary biographer) “must be, in this enterprise, aesthetician, novelist, linguist, philosopher, literary critic, historian, psychologist; minimally, the final three” (Karl “Conrad” 69). The fusion of historiography and literary critique has been effected in successfully influential ways, most notably through New Historicism, but the synthesis of psychology and history as well as psychology and biography (“psychohistory”) have been spurned as fields “conceived in sin” (Elms 257), an ironic view, since Freud, the father of modern psychology, had himself suggested to G.C. Jung that psychoanalysis must “take hold of biography” (in McGuire

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<sup>37</sup> Benton suggests that “Johnson’s famous essay in ‘The Rambler, No. 60’ 21 is the first defence of biography as a genre – and, in Johnson’s view, it needed defending since the form had been either sanitised into panegyric, bastardised into scandalous memoir or trivialised by its inept selection of details” (Benton *Towards* 6).

<sup>38</sup> Arnold Rampersad points out that it is “certainly as interdisciplinary as all good history should be”, and that while “not every discipline is involved in every biography, [...] the basic ones of history, sociology, literature and psychology are definitely involved” (in Christianson 50).

<sup>39</sup> Gayle Christianson notes that it is “a commonplace that biography as a genre resists systematic study because of its hybrid nature” (in Mandell 13).

255).<sup>40</sup> There seems to be something about biography that resists assimilation into other fields.

The failure of the psychobiography can serve perhaps as the most telling example of what may have been a productive cross-fertilisation of the disciplines of history and psychology (and literary studies, in the case of the literary biographer); while it has been broadly received with resistance in the academic arena. Edel remarks in 1984 that biography “to this date has been fearful and often disrespectful of psychology” (*Writing* 142).<sup>41</sup> Alan C. Elms talks about “the uneasy alliance of biography and psychology” (i), and Lomask compares it to “a troubled marriage” (123). Shirley Leckie relates the suspicion with which psychobiographers (such as Strachey<sup>42</sup>, Edel, Painter and Gamaliel Bradford, and even Freud himself<sup>43</sup>) have been treated, to the fact that they are very seldom trained in historiography or (with the exception of Freud, of course,) the behavioural sciences (3), a point echoed by Natasha Spender (“Private” 102).<sup>44</sup> For this reason they have garnered inventive pejoratives such as “amateur-psychologists” (Mariani in Mandell 40), “pseudoanalysts” (Elms 4), and “psychoplagiarists” (Nabokov in White *Genet* xlii). They have been criticised for “shov[ing] famous people into pathological pigeonholes” (Elms 4),<sup>45</sup> for treating their subjects “merely as the confirmation of an ideological framework” (Ramsland 94),<sup>46,47,48</sup> and of conducting “a condescending and reductive parlour psychoanalysis” (Lazarre 222) or “dime store

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<sup>40</sup>A remark by Milton Lomask on the bond between psychoanalysis adds to this irony: “That many writers have found their psychological ‘underpinnings’ in the science of man fathered by Freud is understandable. Psychoanalysis focuses forcefully on motives and emotions. So does biography. The marriage of the two, although unsteady and troubled as many marriages are, would seem to have been made in heaven.” (123). Lomask furthermore suggests that of “all the questions impinging on the biographer, the one requiring the most persistent attention is ‘Why?’ Why did the hero say this? Why did the hero do that?” (85). This affinity between psychology and biography, he argues, may stem from the conception exemplified in a quote by André Malraux, that “Man is not what we think he is; man is what he hides” (85).

<sup>41</sup> Edel hypothesises that “its resistance is part of the universal resistance Freud encountered” (*Writing* 143).

<sup>42</sup> Edel regards Strachey as “the father of the ‘psychobiography’” (*Writing* 143).

<sup>43</sup> Lomask considers Freud’s *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910) as “the first pure example of the genre” of psychobiography (123).

<sup>44</sup> Spender notes that unlike “lawyers and psychiatrists, whose years of training and varied clinical experience serve as corrective to unconscious biases, [...] [the biographer’s] choice of subject, and selection from available evidence, may be unconsciously directed by his own inner conflicts or unfulfilled aspirations” (Spender “Private” 102).

<sup>45</sup> Freud’s assertion of the biography’s importance based on its use for “psychological study” (in Edel *Writing* 142) adds substance to this prejudice.

<sup>46</sup> Alan Elms point out that sometimes “a psychobiographer chooses a specific biographical subject with the idea that this subject may be especially useful in teasing out the strands of a new theoretical understanding”, exemplifying Freud’s choice of Leonardo da Vinci “as a subject partly so he could work on his theories about homosexuality” (15).

<sup>47</sup> Some combat the very notion of a theoretically informed psychobiography with the notion of a so-called “common-sense psychology – the understanding of human nature that comes from living” (Lomask 121)

<sup>48</sup> Mandell suggests that “psychobiography is highly deterministic, depriving the subject of much of his freedom of action, not to mention the storyteller his art” (47).

psychoanalysis” (Christianson 37). So too Freud’s term “pathography” has been reapplied to biographies that present their subjects primarily as victims or patients (Kaplan 7-8) and its regular “reductions of an adult personality to the child’s earliest and crudest motives” (Elms 4) have caused Eric Erikson to christen it “originology” (in Elms 98), a concern also voiced by Barbara Tuchman (144)<sup>49</sup> and Christianson (35).<sup>50</sup>

Still, the life writer cannot ignore other disciplines and if it is impossible to master all the various domains that intersect with it, two broad study fields are unquestionably pertinent. Considering the biography’s central concern, conventionally, with one, the analysis and portrayal of individual subjects and (or by means of) two, the chronicling of a life narrative against a historical background, historiography and identity theory (especially in psychology, psychoanalysis<sup>51</sup> and socio-anthropology) are reasonably the fundamental ambits from which biographers should cite their conceptual approaches and in which they must be formally trained.<sup>52</sup> Life writing, after all, entails “portraying or revealing character through event” (Shulman 8). But even if biographers can achieve professional expertise both as historians and (for instance) psychologists, the radical late twentieth century revolutions in historiography and poststructuralist conceptions of self and subjectivity (notions firmly rooted in psychoanalysis) have unsettled the stable discursive horizons on which lives have previously been written.

Much like the antecedents of the psychobiography believed in the scientific legitimisation that the use of psychological theory would bring to their projects, many life writers have presented their work as forms of historiography, hoping to garner some of the latter’s intellectual respect (Ambrosius vii; Depkat 40; Edel *Writing* 14; Holroyd *Strachey* xii;

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<sup>49</sup> Tuchman asks rhetorically: “Do we really have to know of some famous person that he wet his pants at age six and practiced oral sex at sixty?” (44).

<sup>50</sup> Mandell, though positive about psychoanalytic approaches to biography, agrees with Tuchman, remarking that “Shakespeare, after all, would still be Shakespeare and Hamlet a vacillating prince even if we had knowledge that such were the bard’s excretory and amatory propensities” (35).

<sup>51</sup> Christianson suggests that the “illumination of the inner life of the subject is a peculiarly contemporary aim of the biography, indebted ultimately to psychoanalytic theory” (7).

<sup>52</sup> Modernist scholars of biography, Woolf and Strachey, identifies these two legs of biography only to stress the importance of one – the analysis and portrayal of personality. Woolf in “The New Biography” declares that we “no longer maintain that life consists in actions only or in works” (230) and Strachey asserts that “[h]uman beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past” (vii). Woolf also talks about the tension between a stress on “act” and on “personality” (“New” 234), the former representing history and the latter psychology.

Kannemeyer “Biografiese 74; Leckie 23; Moulin 2-3; Rampersad in Mandell 50<sup>53</sup>).<sup>54</sup> In fact, biography is deemed by some as a favoured form of historiography in a post-renaissance world where the past narrated by using individual historical figures as protagonists is received as more compelling (Ambrosius x;<sup>55</sup> Emerson 10;<sup>56</sup> Lee *Biography* 24;<sup>57</sup> Moulin 1;<sup>58</sup> Yeats 397<sup>59</sup>). Benton notes, however, that although historiography is one of the key “areas from which biographical writing draws its character and appeal”, the life writer’s academic status suffers due to the “theoretical battles [that are] constantly waged” in this discipline (*Towards* i), and its evolution after 1960 is instrumental in the mutations that biographical perspectives have undergone since.

While constructivist perspectives on historiography and the conceptualisation of the past as textualised and thus inaccessible in fundamental ways are not unique to the latter half of twentieth-century historiographic theory (Jay 35),<sup>60</sup> these have certainly dominated thinking at this moment in critical theory (Culler 19; Hutcheon “Historiographic”3; Munslow x; Stott 48; Robinson *Narrating* 3). Alan Munslow summarises the issues at stake in historiographic debates since especially the 1960s as follows:

The result has been to ask serious questions about the discipline’s empirical foundations, the nature and functioning of evidence, the role of the historian and his/her use of social theory, the significance of narrative as a form or mode of explanation, and the more radical post-empiricist idea that history is as much an invention of the past as a discovery of it. This has also raised other questions about objectivity and truth in historical study, the methodology required to guarantee them, and the impact of the form of representation in which its conclusions are described. (x)

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<sup>53</sup> Arnold Rampersad maintains that “biography is simply the history of an individual. People worry about definitions for biography, but I think it’s very simple: the history of an individual. It’s a branch of history. Nothing else, really” (in Mandell 50).

<sup>54</sup> Historiographers such as G.M. Trevelyan had similarly “wanted history to be removed from the discipline of literature and humanities and treated as a science” (Holroyd “Literary” 18).

<sup>55</sup> Lloyd Ambrosius in the preface to his edited collection of essays *Writing Biography: Historians and Their Craft* (2004) writes that the six scholars that have contributed to that publication notwithstanding their diversity, agreed on “where does quote start? these three points: that “biography and historical analysis are inextricably intertwined”, that “biographical studies offer a way to analyse important historical questions”, and that “biographers must use the best historical methodologies, utilizing all available primary sources and interpreting them in creative ways, to reveal the life stories of subaltern as well as prominent and powerful women and men” (x).

<sup>56</sup> In his essay “History” Emerson contends: “There is properly no history, only biography” (10).

<sup>57</sup> Plutarch has been quoted for pronouncing: “I am not writing history but biography” (in Lee *Biography* 24)

<sup>58</sup> “We do not however write histories, but Lives” (Plutarch in Moulin 1)

<sup>59</sup> W.B. Yeats in “Introduction to The Resurrection” writes that “nothing exists but a stream of souls, that all knowledge is biography” (397).

<sup>60</sup> Paul Jay points to Nietzsche’s *The Use and Abuse of History* (1873) in which “the ‘historical’ is an aesthetic creation whose truth is dramatic rather than objective” (Jay 35).

One of the most significant forerunners of this approach is R.G. Collingwood with his “The Historical Imagination” in his posthumously published *The Idea of History* (1946). Written in a context where many historiographers were concerned with establishing their discipline as a science (Robinson *Narrating* 8), much like literary critics and leaders of other fields in the humanities, “The Historical Imagination” stresses the interpretive dimensions of historiography, unpacking, particularly, the functioning of historical inference (90-3). Building on Collingwood’s ideas, Christopher Dawson’s “The Problem of Metahistory” (1951) initiates most explicitly the notion that “all historiography is [...] pervaded by metahistorical influences,” (“Dynamics” 283), one of which is the selective implications discussed at length in Claude Lévi-Straus’s *The Savage Mind* (1966) (257-60). But most influential perhaps is Hayden White’s *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973)<sup>61</sup> in which he calls into question traditional Continental historiographic paradigms which postulate it as an explanatory tool. Signalling “history’s linguistic turn” (Munslow ix), he shows how these approaches are in service of hegemonic mind-sets and stresses the narrative dimension of historiography, spearheading a host of theory in this field based on the notion of history as, on some level at least, essentially fictional. This includes historiographic constructionism and deconstructionism (Robinson *Narrating* 8-9). He denies a view of a value-neutral narrative structure and similarly rejects the notion of “narrative-in-general” in favour of particularised and taxonomised narratives based not on what is inherited in the historical data, but rather by the agenda of the historian.<sup>62</sup>

The linguistic turn, as an epistemology, questions whether there are “facts to be discovered and captured outside language” (Munslow 151), and by extension narratives (Jefferson 86), which Beniviste and Derrida, again, voice most influentially in the late sixties, shortly before White revolutionised historiographic critique with *Metahistory*. In the linguistic turn’s wake, historiographic viewpoints scale from an absolutely postmodernist view of historiography as fiction, nothing more than “that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation” (Barnes in Benton *Towards* 9), to a more

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<sup>61</sup> Louis Mink described *Metahistory*, upon its publication, as “the book around which all reflective historians must reorganise their thoughts on history” and forty years later F.R. Anckersmith maintains that “contemporary philosophy of history is mainly what [Hayden] White has made it.” (in Doran “Choosing” 1).

<sup>62</sup> This evokes Milton Lomask’s remark on epistemology in relation to the life writer’s research: “Facts do not speak for themselves. You have to find a voice for them, and the key word in that admonition is ‘find’. No biographer intent on doing justice to his subject imposes a theme on facts. What he does do – and should – is let the facts impose a theme on him.” (54)

nuanced scepticism about the complete reliability of sources, and methods of presenting an objective, accurate, irrefutable and complete version of past events.

Whether consciously or unconsciously adopting these trends in critical theory, scholars of and commentators on biography and life writing after the sixties increasingly drew attention to its fictive dimensions, stressing its kinship with the realist novel – antagonistically so. Barthes calls the biography “the novel that dare not speak its name” (in Kaplan 6) and John Updike dubs it nothing more than “novels with indexes” (in Lee *Biography* 7). Kenneth Silverman’s remark that “by craft or instinct, many biographers use [...] dramatic techniques [...] derived from nineteenth-century realism” (112) is backed up by Martin Stannard who considers the twentieth-century biography, in light of the miasmatic structures of modernist and postmodernist literature, as the reincarnation of the nineteenth-century realist novel, in terms of its frequent use of that genre and the Bildungsroman’s narrative template (33). The most traceable origin of the biography as it is broadly characterised at present, emerges in the eighteenth century alongside and cross-fertilised with the novel (Benton *Literary* 5). Biography may indeed resemble, intentionally or not, the realist novel and Bildungsroman. It may consequently be accused of contorting the course of a subject’s often chaotic, incoherent, randomly lived life into a reductive, preconceived and simplifying narrative mould (Aristotle 33<sup>63</sup>; Benton *Literary* 42, 167; Bourdieu 297; Edel *Writing* 15, 78; Leckie 1; Lomask 38), as Holroyd puts it: “to tailor existence into some sort of well-fitting straight-jacket” (“Literary” 19). These blueprints have been described by many, sometimes accusingly, sometimes celebratory, as “explanatory tools”, in a similar vein to White’s conceptualisation of narrative in historiography (Benton *Literary* xix; Depkat 40; Jay 37; Kaplan 65; Leckie 1; MacCarthy in Holroyd “Literary” 22;<sup>64</sup> Rader 11<sup>65</sup>). But as Katherine Ramsland states, the life writer cannot avoid making “decisions about the aesthetic coherence and organization of their material” to prevent it from becoming “excessively digressive or chaotic” (93), “just a muddle” (Mott in Mandell 96), or an “amorphous mass”, a point Woolf particularly muses on in “The New Biography” (229, 231).<sup>66</sup> Lomask similarly reasons that

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<sup>63</sup> Even Aristotle in the *Poetics* contends that “infinitely various are the incidents in one man’s life, which cannot be reduced to unity” (33).

<sup>64</sup> Desmond MacCarthy describes the biographer as “the artist under oath” (in Holroyd “Literary” 22).

<sup>65</sup> In his chapter “Literary Form in Factual Narrative: The Example of Boswell’s Johnson” Ralph W. Rader distinguishes between what he terms “an explanatory narrative” and an “emotive narrative” – the former referring to history and biography, the latter to literature and it is as an example of “emotive narrative” that he discusses James Boswell’s *A Life of Samuel Johnson* (11).

<sup>66</sup> Woolf suggests that “in order for the light of personality to shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet, in the process, they must never lose their integrity” (229).

“if we could always understand the confusions of life, we would have no need for biographies” and he suggests that one of “the purposes of a biography is to impose on those confusions some form – and consequently some meaning; and to this end the literary conventions are indispensable” (38). And so, as Benton remarks, “the focus of and interest in [...] biography” much like history, after 1960, “has mainly centred on the tension between writing history and writing fiction” (*Towards* 3).

The most fatal attack on biography’s claim to empiricism, in view of its narrative substructure, was made by Pierre Bourdieu in “The Biographical Illusion” (1987) in which he presents narrativisation not only as a futile attempt at creating “a rhetorical illusion” in its presentation of a coherent life story, but also of a stable subjective identity (299). Thus, the chronicling of a life is considered the fictionalisation thereof; much like the portrayal of the subject’s self is regarded as its literary re-creation instead of an objective representation. Therefore, the fictive foundations of the frameworks by which the personalities of individual historical figures are presented in especially biographies, have similarly been troubled by poststructuralist conceptions of human subjectivity. By the turn of the millennium the destabilising effect of deconstructive theory on the very word identity has warranted such publications as Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman’s edited collection of essays *Identity: A Reader* (2000). In its introductory essay, they observe that

‘identity’ has achieved its contemporary centrality both theoretically and substantively because that to which it has held to refer – whether the ‘it’ in question is, for example, the category ‘man’, ‘black’, ‘work’, ‘nation’ or ‘community’ – is regarded in some sense as being more contingent, fragile and incomplete and thus more amenable to reconstitution than was previously thought possible. (2)

Sharpe and Zwicker point to “the emphasis on the self as a site of fracture rather than coherence” as one of the major “theoretical dogmas” by which the biography has suffered exclusion from academia (6). This, according to Brian Morris is the result of “postmodernist culture in theory, with its emphasis on multiplicity, pastiche, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy, and its rejection of the ‘modern subject’ – the Cartesian rational ego – in favour of some ‘fragmented subject’” (667). Joanny Moulin homes this in to the implications it bears on biographical theory, suggesting that

the crux of the matter is the difficult and much debated concept of the ‘self’, or of the ‘subject’. In a post-Derridaean world, as Michel Foucault has demonstrated, the subject is ‘dead’ – that is, the transcendental subject, which one must admit has indeed done its time in the history of ideas. (5)

In its most distilled form, poststructuralist views of life writing emphasise the inventive nature of biographical representation. These arguments have been disquieting to many biographers, but the notion of the self as un-representable due to the limitations of language and other semiotic systems have been foreshadowed in aphorisms and even in literature itself long before the formal construction of it in critical theory after 1960. Some examples include Nietzsche's suggestion in *Will to Power* (1901) that the subject is "something added and invented and projected behind what there is" (267). and Mark Twain's poetic description of biography as "the clothes and buttons of the man," while "the real biography of a man is lived in his head twenty-four hours a day, and *that you can never know*" (in Salwak ix). In the height of poststructuralist thought in the 1980s, Richard Rorty most plainly puts it that "when we think that we are rediscovering the mighty dead we are just inventing imaginary playmates" (in Kaplan 7) and so, Benton relates this realisation's impact on biography by remarking on how contemporary biographers, especially of the scholarly kind, tend to veer away from the presumption to portray "the essential, unitary personality of the subject", by settling "instead for a provisional and inevitably partial representation" (11). But this compromise has done little to revive the academic attention it has earned in the era of the Bloomsburies.

If the philosophical reign of poststructuralism and the linguistic turn in critical theory, with its propagated "crisis of representation" and "epistemological turmoil" (Morris 669), have made it nearly impossible for scholars to produce biographies without committing "academic suicide" as Deirdre Bair puts it (in Moulin 3), several scholarly biographers have delighted in their so called liberation from the burdens of working within explicated theoretical frameworks that have increasingly become impossible to serve their biographical aims (Benton *Towards* 1; Kannemeyer 88; Mariani in Mandell 39; Moulin 3). Mariani calls theory the biographical subject's "procrustean bed" (in Mandell 39) and Moulin remarks that "in some quarters" it has led to a "reactionary 'anti-theory' backlash" (3), so much so that Park Honan has suggested that biographers "as a rule are not concerned with theory" (in Benton *Poetics* 4). A fictional expression of this theoretical disdain is found in A.S. Byatt's novel *The Biographer's Tale* (2001) in which the protagonist, Phineas Nanson, a postgraduate student of literature, confides in one of his lecturers, Ormerod Goode, that he has "decided to give it all up" as he realised he did not "want to be a postmodern literary theorist"; instead he wants "a life full of things" and "facts" (23). Goode suggests Nanson directs his scholarly attention to biography, an "art" (as he calls it) which he believes to be "despised [...] because

it is an art of things, of facts, of arranged facts” (23). A non-fictional example can be found in Phyllis Rose who writes that

at a time when literary criticism in the academy insisted that attention to anything outside the text itself was illegitimate, biography gave me the permission to invoke a context for literary works. It was as though I had been given a Pass Go Free card. I could bypass New Criticism. I could bypass deconstruction, I could bypass theory. I had no temperamental affinity for the various orthodoxies which have prevailed in English Departments for the past twenty-five years, and biography was my excuse for avoiding them. Biography, in fact, saved my professional life. (Rose in Kannemeyer 43)

Milton Lomask quotes from the *Newsweek* of October 29, 1984 a remark that resembles Rose’s attitude strikingly:

At a time when critics talk of ‘deconstruction’, historians plumb the uneventful and novelists delight in fragmentary and episodic, biographies and autobiographies offer an edifying oasis: the dramatic spectacle of life lived whole. [...] Above all, biography, even in its most sceptical form, remains a preserve of old-fashioned story telling. Readers weary of postmodernist culture understandably crave tales with a beginning and an end. (in Lomask 65)

Rose and Lomask exemplify a general tendency amongst scholarly biographers to reject the currents in mainstream critical theory, when writing literary lives, and slighting what they perceive as over-theorised academic biographies. Alluding to Disraeli’s description of biography as the “life without theory” Elizabeth Longford suggests in 1996 that “in certain quarters biography has become theory without life” (149). John Halperin praises and encourages writers like Longford’s purposely anti-academic approach remarking scornfully that many theorists “appear to believe that the only significant literary *genre* of our day is criticism” (153). Many scholarly biographers’ exodus from academia did, however, in no way hamper the genre’s development and success outside of it.

Jeffrey Meyers notes that “[b]iography has become one of the major literary genres of the twentieth century” (1) and Depkat suggests that even in the 2010s it is still “one of the most popular genres of non-fiction” (39), a point echoed by Halperin (161). The current “age of memoir” (Eakin), our “age of archive” (*Writing* 101), our present “culture of biography” (Kaplan 1-11), which is undergoing its second “golden age” (Mandell 1), is traceable to at least what Mandell terms the “big boom” of the biography’s commercial success in the 1950s (66), the genre’s “peak” (Meyers 2), when it “has burgeoned, and biography has become a major publishing industry” (Cuddon 85). The literary biography in particular “has become immensely popular” (Cuddon 85; Kannemeyer “Biografie” 44) since then, and Anthony

Curtis refers to “the appearance of the first edition of Michael Holroyd’s biography of Lytton Strachey in 1967” as the genre’s “Big Bang” (“Shilling” 127). This has been propelled partly by the mass media explosion of this “confessional age”, in which, in Edel’s words, “poets themselves in popular readings of their works, facing enraptured audiences, have found it expedient to talk of their art, their thoughts, their divorces, their children” (*Writing* 28). Much has been written to rationalise this mid-twentieth-century commercial revival (Edel *Writing* 24; Mandell; Ruddick;), though I myself will not commit to any of these theories.<sup>67</sup> Sharpe and Zwicker confirm this when they observe that while “it is clear that criticism and biography have both flourished, they have not much engaged in conversation, the methods and approaches of criticism and theory scarcely informing the premises or arts of biography” (v). However, the biography was not doomed to remain outside the courts of critical theory indefinitely.

The sheer popularity of the genre not only from the time of its inception, but especially since the 1950s when, ironically, its scholarly status began to wane against the background of poststructuralism’s success in academia, has made it increasingly difficult for scholars of the humanities to ignore, despite the problems supposedly caused by the linguistic turn. This theoretical draught is, however, rectified by what Moulin calls in 2015 “the biographical turn”, that is: “the renewed interest in biography and biographic approaches that has been taking place over the last decades, converging from several disciplines of the humanities” (1). This turn has already been observed in the mid-1980s by Edel who noted that “we are now putting the poet back into his poem after trying to remove him or drown him in floods of critical explication” (28), and in the early 1990s by Ascher, De Salvo and Ruddick who remark that for ten years leading up to that moment, critics “have thought more than we ever predicted about the problems of doing biography and criticism” (xxv). Quite ironically, in fact, major intellectual traditions inspired precisely by some of the key figures in poststructuralism would eventually become the vehicles by which it re-entered the scholarly

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<sup>67</sup> Christianson suggests that, the contemporary biographer’s profession is rooted in “that ancient and honourable company of wise men of the tribe – of gregarious bards and storytellers and wandering minstrels, of soothsayers and priests and epic poets to whom was entrusted the collective wisdom, both human and divine” (73). The question remains what makes it appealing to post-WWII and millennial readerships, so that Mandell remarks that it suits “the temper of our individualistic age just as the drama suited the spirit of Elizabethan age and the many-volumed novel satisfied the Victorian taste” (1-2). Antithetically, Edel argues against individuality, proposing that “caught up in a technological society, man tends to feel himself increasingly dehumanised; thus he once more reaches for the lives of others to assure himself of the commonalities of existence” (*Writing* 24) and that the “world’s curiosity asks more insistently than ever for the humanity of the lived life” (28).

sphere. Undoubtedly the democratisation of all cultural products and practices as objects of critical interest is greatly indebted to the emergence of New Historicism and Cultural Studies.

Halperin remarks in 1996 that it “would seem that historical and biographical approaches to literature are making a comeback or sorts in the 1990s as the purely textual schools of criticism become increasingly discredited” (165). One such manifestation is New Historicism, in the way it salvaged literary studies from a too reader-centred and contextualised interpretive approach. It had simultaneously redefined its uses; it levelled the theorist’s inquiry into the literary text to that of just about any other form of cultural expression, attracting much critique for watering down complex texts to polemical sources. Harold Aram Veenser in his introductory essay to *The New Historicism* (1989), – the publication that consolidates and formalises this movement – posits that the new historical approach “challenges the norm of disembodied objectivity to which humanists have increasingly aspired” (5).<sup>68</sup> It “brackets together literature, ethnography, anthropology, art history, and other disciplines and sciences, hard and soft” (xi), rejecting both “totalizing or atomizing methods” of literary historical modes of analyses (xii), an approach obviously appealing and encouraging to the biographer for whom interdisciplinarity is non-negotiable if previously it was seen as problematic. It is perhaps ironic then that it is particularly the philosophy of Foucault, associated earlier in this chapter with poststructuralism (he had however, distanced himself from this movement), which strongly informs most manifestations of New Historicism.

The other poststructuralist, whose theories are tokenised in strawmen arguments against the linguistic turn in the wide-ranging anti-theorist backlash, is Barthes, the generally charged Killer of the Author. His writing, which explicates “the latent meanings (the myths and codes) that inform such diverse cultural phenomena as guide books, steak and chips, electoral photography, all-in wrestling, margarine, and the Eiffel tower” (Longhurst 29) was in fact “particularly influential in the early development of cultural studies” (96), another field that alongside New Historicism helped establish an intellectual atmosphere that would welcome the literary biography back into the academic arena. Cultural Studies seek to produce theoretical points of connection between “anthropology, history, literary studies, human geography and sociology”, taking the cue from each of these fields’ “disciplinary concerns to

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<sup>68</sup> This confirms Halperin’s remark that (what he sees as) the Derridean notion of “a writing without presence, without history, without cause, which does not connect with anything, which has no subject and no theme and no purpose” is waning (165).

the study of culture” (1). Cultural Studies’ focus on, like New Historicism, the collaborative and interconnected way in which various texts across disciplines and media cooperate in revealing socio-historical mentalities and ideologies, speaks to literary biographers who similarly level their readings of their subjects’ letters, diary entries, fashion sense, speech patterns, recreational activities and the like in order to gain a holistic sense of her/his personality.

The discipline that would, however, provide the most effective springboard for a revival in biographical (and especially literary biographical) theory, is sociology. Moulin points to how Marcel Mauss’s ideas of the “phenomenology of the individual”, “via the participative methods of the Chicago School and Mass Observation”, have brought about the methodological use of “*récits de vie*” (life writing) in various sociological subfields, leading on a development of this interdisciplinary procedure’s expansion into a discipline in its own right (2).<sup>69</sup> While in its sociological origin life writing is “far less interested in elaborating a theory of (auto-)biographic writing than in using it as a medium of academic production” (2), its morphing into a separate field has led to the coining of the term Life Writing “to cover the protean forms of contemporary personal narrative, including interviews, profiles, ethnographies, case studies, diaries, Web pages and so on” (Eakin *Ethics* 1).<sup>70</sup> An Australian life writing journal was launched in 2004 by Sally Morgan and John Eakin

to incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives, since we recognise that the growing field of auto/biography is one in which anthropology, cultural studies, history, literature, philosophy, psychology, sociology and visual studies are all contributing exciting and revisionary scholarship. (Eakin and Morgan “Description” 1)

While the literary biography’s interdisciplinarity has previously marked it as a dilettante genre with an identity crisis, – “a literary form of ambiguous nature and uncertain status” as Benton calls it (*Literary ivx*) – the celebration and embrace of interdisciplinary methods of knowledge production, accumulatively in New Historicism, Cultural Studies and Life Writing, has successfully erected a convivial infrastructure for the literary biography’s return

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<sup>69</sup> While I suggest with Moulin that biographical criticism re-entered literary studies on the flag ship of Life Writing in Sociology, eminent Woolf biographer and critic Kathryn Hughs, in the *Guardian* of December 29, 2007, suggests that Virginia Woolf “all but coined” the term “Life Writing” (in Gillies 23).

<sup>70</sup> More recently, the term “Life Narrative Studies” is gradually phased in and might eventually replace the term “Life Writing”.

to its academic incubator. Scholars have become comfortable with the limitation of the life writer's truth claims, or what Edel calls "an educated guess" (*Writing* 24). This moment marks what he describes as "the belated wedding of biography and criticism" (27), or what I would suggest is a reunification of the nuptial bliss it enjoyed until the twentieth century.

While in 1984 Edel complains that there "is a book called *The Craft of Fiction*, but not such useful book exists for biography" (23), he is swiftly answered by two separate publications, both perchance by the same title: Milton Lomask's (1984) and Jeffrey Meyers's (1985) *The Craft of Literary Biography*. In the same spirit Richard Holmes writes his self-reflexive *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (1985). These biographer-scholars usher in an explosion of publications that seeks to present writing on biography that is backed up by experience in its craft, such as Stephen Oates's *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on Their Art* (1986). They were, though, departing from the springboards of Mark Patchter's *Telling Lives: The Biographer's Art* (1979), Linda Wagner-Martin's *Telling Women's Lives: The New Biography* (1980), Anthony M. Friedson's *New Directions in Biography* (1981) and James F. Veninga's *The Biographer's Gift: Life Histories and Humanism* (1983). The 1990s yield titles such as Gail Porter Mandell's *Life into Art: Conversations with Seven Contemporary Biographers* (1991); Marlene Kadar's *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (1992); Gale E. Christianson's *Writing Lives is the Devil!: Essays of a Biographer at Work* (1993); Carol Ascher, Louise De Salvo and Sara Ruddick's *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Teachers and Artists Write about Their Work on Women* (1993); Alan C. Elms's *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography with Psychology* (1994); Dale Salwack's *The Literary Biography: Problems and Solutions* (1996). The 2000s follow with Lloyd E. Ambrosius's *Writing Biography: Historians and Their Craft* (2004); Mark Bostridge's *Lives for Sale: Biographers' Tales* (2004); Jeffrey Meyers's *The Biographer's Art* (2006); Hermione Lee's *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (2009). Other publications attesting to this restoration of the literary biography to the scholarly domain include Midge Gillies's *Writing Lives: Literary Biography* (2009), which forms part of Cambridge University's *Contexts in Literature* edited by Adrian Barlow "intended for both self-study and guided learning". Since the turn of the 2010s: Michael Benton's *Literary Biography: An Introduction* (2009), and his *Towards a Poetics of Literary Biography* (2015); Ryan Claycomb's *Lives in Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage* (2014); James Atlas's *The Shadow in the Garden: A Biographer's Tale* (2017). All these publications extol the remarriage of the biography with literary critique,

reframing it from either an art or a form of criticism to a phenomenon that walks on the legs of theory and practice, as Alix Kate Shulman puts it (4).

The question remains, however, how the life writer (in exchange of the stigmatised title “biographer”) confronts what Moulin calls the inhibiting “poststructuralist superego, a fantastic academic Cerberus, whose main three heads are” Barthes, Foucault and Bourdieu (6). Theorists of and commentators on the (literary) biography have responded with acidulous delight to what they saw as the demise and failure of poststructuralism to keep up with the literary biography’s commercial success and eventual academic redemption via life writing (Moulin 7; Sharpe and Zwicker v). Sharpe and Zwicker suggest that the “dominance of [poststructuralist] theory in the academy has diminished, some would say passed” and that in this light “rumours of the death of the author and the end of literature now seem rather exaggerated” (v). In 1996 Halperin points to what he sees as Derrida, Barthes and Foucault’s failure to effectively kill the author (150) and their attempt to “abolish” literary biography (161). He triumphantly declares that there “was life before Derrida, and there will be life after Derrida” (152). Halperin conceives of the literary biography’s successful persistence as a genre which expands its methods and attracts ever greater readership as “the biographer’s revenge” (149-66) on poststructuralism, which he describes as “an expiring system” (156). I do not agree with Halperin that “deconstruction is fascism” (153), an “absurdist terrorism”, and a “rush to de-mean meaning” (155), characterised in Lisa Ruddick’s words with “meanness” as it “masks a second-order complex that is all about the thrill of destruction” (1). The aim of formalist schools of literary critique was never to prove that the text is, in Edel’s words, “a rootless flower” (*Writing* 135; Wimsatt and Beardsley).

I associate with Moulin, Sharpe and Zwicker’s nuanced optimism about the linguistic turn’s intellectual legacy and current theoretical usefulness for the (literary) biographer. Moulin sees “no reason why biography theory should imply a rupture with the poststructuralist period of the humanities; quite the contrary, it results from it as a next logical step” (7). I similarly agree with Sharpe and Swicker that in its wake

important insights have emerged, still more, new questions have been asked about the ways in which we interrogate and appreciate literature. It occurred to us that such enquiry, rather than threaten, might enhance and extend the biographical archive and project. (Sharpe and Zwicker v)

Theory has not killed biography and life writing is not killing theory. This brings to mind Hermione Lee's remark that whenever she hears another pronouncement of the "death of biography" she suspects that it merely signals the genre's self-reinvention (CUNY).<sup>71</sup>

I do agree that an overly narrow application of some of its ideas in which biocritical readings are considered sacrilegious per se, have hindered, inhibited and discouraged scholarly life writers and have contributed to the side-lining of such projects in academia – an arena in which it could sooner have found a rich infrastructure for experimentation and expansion. But conversely, formalist schools of textual analysis have benefitted literary biographical research by developing a richly useful critical lexicon, pointing out important blind-spots, enhancing a much-needed measure of self-consciousness, challenged a well-deserved theorisation and an expansion of such critical endeavours.

My own analyses to follow will reflect my reliance on formalist and poststructuralist terms and interpretive techniques; for instance, the way I will describe a text's ability to achieve certain things, rather than the author – as such, not denying the text's origin in the author's mind, but, instead of casting the author as a tyrant (in Barthes' words) or a superego (Moulin), rather as yet another important participant in the text's meaning production – a notion De Wet certainly had embraced. And, so, even though De Wet, as I have remarked in the very first paragraph of this chapter, had dismissed deconstruction, (much like Foucault and Barthes, two of this very movement's progenitors, have done) her work and much of her commentary on her work is deeply deconstructive. As a friend, colleague and former student of hers had remarked in a letter to me that De Wet had perceived herself as a modernist in a postmodern world (Lossgott). Much has been written on modernism and postmodernism as not entirely mutually exclusive: Samuel Beckett, one of De Wet's literary heroes, inhabits such an amphibian position, just as Barthes embodies such a liminality in critical theory, starting out as a self-identifying structuralist, and then, in one of his essays on structuralism, follows certain premises of literary structuralism through to its own logical conclusion, and, unconsciously perhaps, produces some of the most important notions on literary deconstruction. So, I wonder to what extent there is at present a dialectical tendency in biocritical literary scholarship in which this project partakes, that synthesises structuralism with poststructuralism, textual and contextual approaches, each revising its own foundations through that of the other, with exciting mutual benefits?

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<sup>71</sup> This speaks to Peter Ackroyd's aphorism that "[e]very biography is a prisoner of its time" (in Gillies 7).

Edel declares in 1984 that after the biography “has suffered through three centuries, from a lack of method”, its proponents “have reached a moment in literary history when time and circumstance summon biography to declare itself and its principles” (*Writing* 23). The most remarkable result has been the characterisation of current life-works projects as acutely self-reflexive (Benton *Literary* 7; Holmes *Footsteps* 27; Viljoen xxvi<sup>72</sup>). Contemporary trends in historiographic critique testify to this shift to the researcher’s self-consciousness and the perspective on life writing as a form of historiography can benefit from these changes. In 2013 Robert Doran, a historiographic philosopher, reformulates White and his contemporaries’ work on metahistory. He reminds that

according to both Dawson and White, the distinction between so-called ‘straight’ history and metahistory is really a distinction between a conformist and a radical-revolutionary approach to history, with ‘metahistory’ (used pejoratively) referring to a radical-revolutionary approach that had either failed or simply been abandoned. (Doran “Choosing” 6)

Doran concludes that “straight history, then, was successful metahistory” (6). The after-effect of the linguistic turn on historiographic and biographic theory alike is the constant resistance by historiographers to present their work as “straight history”. Benton, who himself questions this distinction between “straight biography” and its supposed opposite states that biography, like historiography, “is not only thriving but is thoughtfully interrogating itself” (*Literary* 7) and Meyers upholds that “[t]here is now considerable interest not only in the history of life writing but also in how a biography comes into being, how the biographer captures the essence of an artist’s inner life” (1). In 1996 already, Kaplan remarks that along

with a torrent of new and reprinted biography published each year there’s been a remarkable proliferation of books, lectures, symposia, academic conferences, essays, and literary journals *about* biography – its theory, practice, history and generic self-awareness. (3)

One way in which this “generic self-awareness”, which acknowledges the impossibility of “straight” narration, manifests itself is how a life writer as Halperin states, can find “intrusion into her/[his] own narrative inevitable” (159). It is here also where I, as the writer of this thesis, self-reflexively enter my writing – that is, casting myself – as a subject (briefly) alongside De Wet.

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<sup>72</sup> Shaun Viljoen remarks that “[l]ate twentieth century and early twenty-first century work on biography (Paula Backscheider, Michael Holroyd, Hermoine Lee and, in a South African context, Mark Gevisser, John Hyslop and Roger Field, among others) reveals a much greater degree of self-consciousness about its project than earlier work from the late nineteenth century onwards, which reflected more confident, unquestioned assumptions about epistemology and objectivity” (xxxvi).

During the sitting of the admissions committee for the approval of this doctoral project, in November 2016, one of the panel members, Prof Louise Viljoen, was interested as to the measure to which I plan to insert myself into the writing; how explicitly reflective I will be about the research and writing process. She remarked that, she herself is often curious about the life writer's quest, always mindful, when reading a biography (for instance), of moments in which the researcher comments on her/his work. Yet, as a reviewer and critic, she had become convinced of the reading public's general disinterest in life writers' procedure. Their presence in the text can be an interruption, an intrusion or an annoyance. Yet, biography – and by extension, related forms of life research – has been considered as inherently a form of thinly veiled autobiography (Christianson 3; Elms 51; Kaplan 8;<sup>73</sup> Lee *Biography*, Maurois 111; Mandell 7; Woolf "New" 233<sup>74</sup>),<sup>75</sup> this often being its supposed weakness as a form of scholarship (Spender "Private" 102;<sup>76</sup> Edel *Writing* 68<sup>77</sup>). For maintainers of this view, this is merely a question of how apparent life writers make their motivations to do so.

There is a history behind the conception of the implicitness/explicitness of life writers' personal voice in the lives they narrate, dating back to the eighteenth century. Stannard points to Michael Holroyd's distinction between a "Johnsonian" or "scholarly" tradition and a "Boswellian" one: Johnsonian biographers realise that "[i]nvariably, like a portrait painter, you put a little of yourself in the portrait", while they still attempt to "retain a historical perspective and independence of judgement" (Holroyd in Stannard 34). Conversely, the vitality of a Boswellian biography "depends upon [the biographer's] presence" in the text (Stanner 34). The one is "rigorously academic", the other, "passionate and subjective" (34). Of course, a strict and satisfactory criterion of distinction is practically undecidable, (and in view of poststructuralist denials of objectivity, a myth,) apart from the specific biographer's said resolve.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Kaplan illustrates the necessity of drawing on the self in the biographical practice: "to write biography you need [...] the capacity to feed on your own blood when other sources run dry" (8).

<sup>74</sup> Woolf in her essay on the New Biography suggests that "by the end of the book we realise that the figure which has been most completely and most subtly displayed is that of the author" (233).

<sup>75</sup> John Eakin posits that "it is precisely the latent life writer in ourselves that motivates our reading of others' lives" (*Ethics* 14).

<sup>76</sup> Natasha Spender contends that the biographer's "choice of subject, and selection from available evidence, may be unconsciously directed by his own inner conflicts or unfulfilled aspirations" ("Private" 102).

<sup>77</sup> Edel uses the Freudian term "transference" to describe the life writer's over-identification with the subject, warning that the product will result in "autobiography disguised as biography" (*Writing* 86).

<sup>78</sup> Michael Mott reflects: "I think the whole thing depends on a certain magical distance – that magical distance any portrait painter strives for. If you're too close, a lot of things get blurred. If you're too distant, well, what's the point of the thing, anyway? That's very difficult, finding the right distance" (in Mandell 97).

Despite Boswell's colossally canonical position in the history of Western life writing, his approach has attracted much resistance. Theorist-practitioners such as Edel remark that although

[i]n his quest [the life writer leads a life] which yields its own stories and adventures, [...] [t]he private biographical triumphs are 'the story of the story' and one wishes more biographers would make separate books of these, or write their autobiographies rather than allow them to intrude in their particular narrative of the life they have researched. (*Writing* 110)

To some, Boswellianism seems narcissistic, and researchers are accused of stealing their subjects' thunder, or parasitically drawing significance and recognition from writing their lives (Edel *Writing* 13;<sup>79</sup> Wilson 39-40), attracting the pejorative of vampires (Spurling 68). In this regard Kaplan suggests that the life writer "might be described as a hermit crab inhabiting the shell of another's life<sup>80</sup> or as a jockey who takes credit for his horse's speed and mettle" (7); his project can be seen as "self-seeking, a kind of aesthetic [and in my context, academic,] masturbation" (Stannard 33). Boswell himself has been accused of masking in the guise of hero worship "an unconscious wish to cut Johnson down in size and establish, in the end, the superiority of Boswell" (Hibbert 7-8), a theory also reasoned by Johnsonian scholar Donald Greene (12). Edel deems this type of "drive to power" as common to the biographical enterprise (*Writing* 63), but for Silverman the most common fate awaiting the life writers "who have spotlighted themselves" is that they "have exposed someone with little personality and nothing to say" (116).

Yet, after Derrida and after White, the Boswellian approach seems most sensible for its resistance to assuming an objective or in Benton's and Doran's words, "straight" viewpoint, since there are always "an unconscious process behind [the life writer's] conscious decisions" (Edel *Writing* 73). Much has been written in support of this style. Some see the Boswellian life writer as the more honest of the two, in the sense that even the Johnsonian biography is unconsciously autobiographical and that even the prototypical "biography of Johnson will in the end be also a biography of Boswell" (*Writing* 48). Laura Mandell suggests that "although narrative detachment may be a widely accepted convention of contemporary biography, neither scholarship nor elegance of style requires it" (12). Edel, whose position on this matter, in *Writing Lives: Biographia Principia* is ambivalent and almost contradictory at

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<sup>79</sup> Edel asserts that "[all] biographers understandably seek a measure of fame for themselves" (*Writing* 13).

<sup>80</sup> Edel suggests that "biographers are individuals who somehow complete their own lives by writing the lives of others" (*Writing* 21).

times, describes the “impersonal biography” (his version of the Johnsonian life), as “tasteless and without character, force or authority”, favouring rather, a life “fashioned by a determining personality” (17).

One Boswellian strategy by postmodern life writers is to explicitly and self-defensively, jeopardise the work’s empirical truth claims. Stannard points, for instance to Peter Ackroyd’s fictionalised dialogues with his subject in *Dickens* and Alan Judd’s fantasy of meeting Maddox Ford’s spirit in *Ford Maddox Ford*. To Stannard’s examples I may add Edmund Morris’s controversial biography of Ronald Reagan in which he portrays himself as his subject’s friend, and factualising the life writer’s imaginative sense of intimacy with her/his subject. In an academic scholarly context, this approach is hardly feasible.<sup>81</sup>

But one may almost go as far as theorising the academic thesis as a genre with inherent Boswellian dimensions. It is explicitly self-conscious in the way the scholar makes, as a rule, overt distinctions between his own and borrowed opinions, in the way that a theoretical lens is constructed in the first chapter and in the reflective dimensions of the last. In some way, the very overview of biographical criticism and of biographical theory that leads up to this moment in this thesis, registers the project’s theoretical and methodological self-consciousness. From that perspective the Boswellian approach is inescapable for me.

In a scholarly context then, and by the nature of the tenuousness of objective truth claims in life writing, the accusation against the Boswellian scholar can be reversed in a case for this approach as a sign of humility: the scholar’s constant intrusion acts as an intentional reminder of her/his and the work’s limits, especially where the text pioneers the writing of a yet uncharted life. I cannot but be overly aware of Ted Morgan’s reflection that upon the life writer’s “work depends the way that person will be remembered” (xx). Clair Harman comparably suggests that the first life writer of a subject “forms the story, establishes the shape of the life” and moreover, with “a subject who is recently dead, you also generate material through the soliciting of reminiscences and opinions” (201). While this thesis is not a biography in the strictest sense, and while the public afterlife of it is in no way guaranteed, in terms of generating and integrating biographical information about De Wet into an

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<sup>81</sup> I have been tempted to conduct a meta-biofictional project on De Wet, in which I would try to emulate her magic realist style, honouring her own insistence on her use of magic realism as reflective of her own fantastical experience of life and the world. I settle instead, for a study that tries to map her life and works in a trajectory as closely as is possible to my mind, to a factual history, with analysis firmly based in established critical, literary and historiographic critique. This may serve as a scholarly basis for the writing of both a more conventional biography, resembling in its form, the realist novel and bildungsroman, or even a biofictional novel, short story cycle or play.

encompassing study on her entire body of work in relation to her life, it appears to be the most comprehensive life-works project on her to present. William Carlos Williams's biographer, after all, talks about the first publication on a writer's life as an act of canonisation (in Mandell 22-3).

The accusations targeted at Boswellian life writers, and the corresponding defences, centres around the issue of the scholar's imagined relationship with the subject (especially those who are deceased). Halperin asserts that there "is always some sort of relationship, friendly or unfriendly, rarely neutral, between the biographer and his subject" (159), and Edel suggests that the "relation of the biographer to the subject is the very core of the biographical enterprise" (*Writing* 13). It entails for most, to some measure at least, some form of identification, empathy, and psychological mimicry to the end of rationalising the subject's behaviour. Edmund Morris's publisher comments on Morris's controversial decision to insert a "fictionalised version of himself into what was expected to be a thoroughly conventional biography of Ronald Reagan" by claiming that "[a]ll biographers become *döppelgangers* of their subjects, vicariously living the very lives they tell" (Publisher's note, in Morris 1999). With this, of courses, comes the problem of transference. Richard Holmes admits that during his research on Shelley, the "pursuit became so intense, so demanding of my own emotions that it continuously threatened to get out of hand" (*Footsteps* 143). Edel describes what he calls the life writer's "dilemma" as such: "he must appraise the life of another by becoming that other person; and he must be scrupulously careful that in the process the other person is not refashioned in his own image" (in Meyers 11).

If, through the Boswellian approach, the life writer, as Edel puts it "totally immerses his Self in the Self of his subject" (*Writing* 21), Kaplan's image of the researcher as a hermit crab could be exchanged, appropriately in my case, where my subject is an actress-playwright, with the metaphor of life writing as acting. Holroyd reflects on the influence of his life writing role model, the actor-biographer Hesketh Pearson, on his own style:

Pearson *acted* his subjects. On the stage, where he had understudied Sir George Alexander, his performances had been remarkably erratic – very good when a subject suited (that is *resembled*) him, and extraordinarily bad when it didn't. In principle, the same is true of biographical performances: only by that time his instinct had sharpened, and he could choose whom he acted on the page. To some extent he 'Pearsonified' his characters; they tended to express themselves in explosive Pearsonese. (14-5)

Ryan Claycomb who, in *Lives into Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage* (2014), theorises staged feminist life writing, similarly notes important cross points between life writing and theatre:

the act of biography is itself a performance [...]. [L]ives in history are already deeply mediated and textualized, even prior to the mediation and textualization of playwrighting. The idea of performing biography as performance already lends a certain element of metadramatic tension to [...] biography plays. (Claycomb 138)

Claycomb's focus differs from mine in that this thesis is not a (literally) theatricalised chronicling of a subject's life, but it gives added weight to Holroyd's symbolisation of the life writer as a performer. It is with the commitment of an actor who assumes the responsibility of re-presenting a historical subject with empathy, and yet without the loss of rehearsed control and the proper perspective of his own interpretive interventions that I approach this thesis.

Following this introductory chapter in which I have now situated this research project in a history and a discursive context of auto/biographical theory, I will proceed in Chapter Two to define my analytical approach, drawing on other life writer's methodologies (especially those of literary biographers) and on De Wet's elaborations on her understanding of the way her work relates to her life. In Chapter Three I attempt to delineate De Wet's personalised Jung-informed psychoanalytic biocritique, paying specific attention to her version of the animus and her portrayal of father figures, followed by a similarly Jung-based narratological analysis in Chapter Four of De Wet's chronotopes and its connection with her thematisation of the theatre as a metaphorical playroom. Chapter Five examines De Wet's theorisation of the child's psyche as hermaphroditic and I analyse her depiction of the childlike protagonists' escape strategies from a castrating parent figure. In Chapter Six I consider a selection of plays De Wet had identified as seminal in her training and brief acting career. Metadrama plays a crucial part in all these texts and I bring it to bear on plays by De Wet in which the protagonists use metadrama as tools of liberation. In the concluding chapter I consider De Wet's canon position and in a way its "biography" since her debut as a playwright until now, and the ways in which a biocritical project such as this one can alter it.

## Chapter 2

### “My biographer will have fun”:

#### Devising a Methodology for Reading De Wet’s Work in Relation to Her Life

“My biographer will have fun.”

Reza de Wet in conversation with Marthinus Basson (Int. 3)

“There are 5 000 000 ways to tell a story.”

Henry James (in Stevick 883)

Chapter One’s Boswellian self-reflection – the researcher’s autobiographical presence in his writing – mirrors the dialectic that I explore in the thesis, the connection between De Wet’s life and personality to her works. Whatever the devised methodology of the literary life writer, this link between factual existence and literary expression stands central. There are probably as many approaches to literary biographical research as there are literary lives,<sup>82</sup> and just as every “historian is in some sense a philosopher of history” as Doran contends (“Choosing” 5), so too, every biocritical project embodies in its construction a distinctive theory of its own creation. But these varying methods can be arranged on a scale suspended between an emphasis on the delineation of a writer’s individual subjectivity and its development, the oeuvre serving as a source amongst other types of archive, to an opposite extreme where biographical information is generated and presented to provide special insight into the work (Clifford 73).<sup>83</sup> In short – the literary biography oscillates between reading the life as “the key to the works” or conversely, the works “as the key to the life” (Aird 41; Benton *Literary* xvi; Bryson 34; Elms 106; Karl “Conrad” 69; Spacks 141).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> One is reminded of Henry James’s aphorism that there are “5 000 000 ways to tell a story”, as the epigraph gestures (in Stevick 88).

<sup>83</sup> This is ironic since Wordsworths’ *The Prelude* (1799, 1805, 1850) is considered a “seminal” work of “literary autobiography” (Benton *Literary* 133) and as one of the most exemplary articulations of the Romantic notion of “self” (Hinz 197).

<sup>84</sup> Gary Scharnhorst points to what he describes as “a standard caveat in literary biography that no reader should infer anything about the life of an author from the writings. We may study the life to understand the work, the argument goes, but not vice-versa” (1).

A perfect synthesis of these objectives is often upheld as an ideal (Benton *Literary* xv<sup>85</sup>; Elms 106<sup>86</sup>). Such a balanced dialectic can be most effectively forged in cases of writers of whom a fairly equal weight of literary and non-literary archives are available. Writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Henry James, Virginia Woolf and Anais Nin are as famous for their comprehensive well-preserved egodocuments,<sup>87</sup> as for their fictional works, so that a sense of their character and inner lives need not be primarily inferred from their literature,<sup>88</sup> but through what Benton calls “the asymmetrical timelines of life narratives and literary narratives” (xvi) that serve, in Shaun Viljoen’s words, as “distorting echo chambers of each other” (xxiv). It is this idea that underlies Silverman’s remark that “good diary-keepers make good subjects” (111). But it is precisely because of the frequent imbalance in the accessibility of one or the other body of evidence that causes the researcher to lean to one or the other pole.

The scholar who favours their subject’s oeuvre as the most valuable source of insight into the life and personality is generally driven by one of two problems. Firstly, the subject may have left scant biographical traces, as with canonical figures (in both literature and literary biography) like Homer<sup>90</sup> and Shakespeare<sup>91</sup> who are survived by none or few non-literary documents. When the subject’s literature incites the reader’s interest in its author’s life or personality, the absence or sparseness of non-fictional writing necessitates the reader to scan the literary texts for biographical clues “powered by the twin engines of inference and imagination” (Benton *Literary* 67). Shakespeare biographer Russell Fraser writes about the mysterious way in which the Bard has “soaked up the world like litmus paper but left no pH

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<sup>85</sup> Benton upholds that “[m]aintaining a steady, discriminating course which acknowledges the importance of both bodies of evidence, without being subsumed by either, is the special skill demanded of the literary biographer” (*Literary* xv).

<sup>86</sup> Elms sees the work of the literary biographer as investigating the way in which the “life feeds into art and art into life, to create an organic relationship between the writer and the work” (106.)

<sup>87</sup> On the web page for the “Center for the Study of Egodocuments and History”, the term “egodocuments”, coined by Jacques Presser, is defined as “autobiographical writing, such as memoirs, diaries, letters and travel accounts [...] in which the ‘I’, the writer, is continuously present in the text as the writing and describing subject” (1).

<sup>88</sup> Silverman reflects on the problematic of the biographer’s attempt “to keep [his subject’s] consciousness present during narration” (111). He then remarks on the simultaneous need for and futility of diaries, letters and autobiographical writing of the subject: “Other things being equal, good diary-keepers make good subjects. Autobiographical accounts are an exception, being usually more trouble than their worth. Their (great) value lies in showing how the subject, at a certain time in his life, felt about himself” (111).

<sup>89</sup> Elms reminds that in “a number of prominent instances – Freud, Darwin, Byron, Lewis Carroll, for starters – vast amounts of such primary biographical materials have already been published under careful scholarly editorship” (22).

<sup>90</sup> Neither the birthplace nor the exact years of Homer’s lifespan are certain, and his authorship of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* is disputed to date (Jones xxxviii-ix).

<sup>91</sup> Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding, in reference to Shakespeare, observe that “[r]arely has so much been written about a man about whom so little is known” (9).

to say how it struck him” apart from what seems evident in his plays and poetry (62). Thus he is frequently regarded by biographers – and even by De Wet – as the model of some of the protagonists in his plays such as the title character in *Hamlet* (Dunton-Downer and Riding 13, 333) and Prospero in *The Tempest* (13). Similarly, the sonnets and the soliloquies are often viewed as dramatised diaries (Bryson 34). By comparison to most of her contemporaries and equals in stature on the South African theatre scene, De Wet was remarkably absent from the public arena, but an overwhelming amount of archives and sources containing biographical data are open to my research, enabling me to lean my approach more strongly towards the life-centred pole on the life-works scale, even though I do not entirely exclude the scrutiny of the works for clues to the subject’s mental existence outside of it.

A works-based research project can be endeavoured also in the case of a meticulously archived life. The history of biography (and of celebrity studies in general) offer countless examples of publically, even exhibitionistically, lived lives full of silences, puzzling information, and behaviour that seem out of line with the subject’s character. In fact, some biographers argue that the proliferation of biographical facts often tend to increase the mysteries and paradoxes, rather than diminishing it (Bryson 157). In such cases the subject is often believed to have confessed, expressed and explained, consciously or unconsciously these conundrums under the thin veil of fiction (Elms 108; Halperin 162; Wilde “Critic” 69; Morgan i-x; Woolf *Orlando* 499), which the life writer undertakes to lift (Morgan i-x), frequently through psychoanalytic methods of literary critique (Elms 108; Karl “Conrad” 69).

There are two main types of data that a researcher may wish to extract from the literary work: factual, objective information about external happenings, and subjective, autobiographical insight into the psychological impact of these outer occurrences on the subject. Antony Alpers’s biography of Katherine Mansfield presents an example of a negotiation with the fiction to generate factual knowledge. He reads Mansfield’s “A Birthday” as a story *à clef* about the goings-on surrounding the author’s birth and he quotes passages from it in which he replaces the fictional characters’ names with those of historical figures (3). Holroyd criticises this literary biographical approach as “intent on reducing all that is imaginative, all that is creative in literature, to pedestrian autobiography” (“Case” 3). Considering the historicised and peculiarly magical milieus of De Wet’s plays, such a paint-by-numbers approach is obviously out of the question, so that, if I peruse the work to form an impression of her life outside of it, it will have to entail an attention reserved to the subtler thematic undercurrents

which should supposedly shed light on her personality, philosophical position and psychological state at the time of its production.

The possibility hereof is the hypothesis of most biocritical studies. More so, some scholars suppose that the subject's fiction contains a sharper impression of her inner world than her personal outpourings in egodocuments (Elms 106; Halperin 164; Wilde "Critic" 69; Woolf *Orlando* 499). Halperin, for instance, reasons that in "letters, diaries, notebooks, in any conscious form of autobiography, there will be some holding back by the writer" either through distortion or omission, while fiction, he argues "never lies; it reveals the writer totally" (162). He adopts this notion from Oscar Wilde who writes in "The Critic as Artist" that "[m]an is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" ("Critic" 69).

The problem with any approach relying on this notion is the question of methodology; that is to say, where and how exactly to draw the line between the mask and the face, to use Wilde's metaphors. This blur is remarkably pertinent in De Wet's case, who has been described by some, as "prone to embellishment" (Int. Haviland), by herself, as someone reluctant to distinguish between myth and fact (in Boekkooi "Tweede" 5; Du Plessis "Diepe" 50; in Solberg 183-4), and who, at times, especially when she was preparing for a role as an actress, the directing of a production, or the writing of a fictional text, often (in her own words) confused reality with fiction, fantasy with fact (De Wet in Barnard 20, De Wet in Blumberg 241; De Wet in Coetzee 14, Int. Basson). In fact, Elms suggests that "writers of science fiction and fantasy" make more enticing subjects than writers of "realistic or semi-realistic fiction", since "the work of such writers often appears so remote from 'real life'", which makes the deciphering an exciting exercise (106). But in researching De Wet's life, the idiom that "the truth is stranger than fiction" has never rung more true to me. The fantastic dimensions of her plays, in a certain sense, did not seem that "far removed" from her "real life", a term that seems dubious in reference to De Wet.

There is a remarkable frequency at which the word "ethereal" features in interviews when De Wet is described by those who knew or encountered her (Int. Cronje; Int. Prinsloo; Int. Snyman). She was, by all accounts, no conventional person at face value. She is fabled for her beliefs in the supernatural – most commonly for her purported paranormal interactions with Anton Chekhov (1860-1904 (Int. Basson; Int. McGarry; Int. Van Schoor), her experimentation with magic (Int. Acker; Int. Breytenbach), alchemy (De Wet in De Villiers

47; Int. McGarry; Int. Otto; Int. Van Schoor), spiritualism (Int. McGarry; Int. Otto; Int. Stolz), divination (De Wet in Du Plessis “Diepe” 49), Eastern mysticism and for her flamboyance when making rare public appearances (Int. Breytenbach; Int. Gardini; Int. Huisamen). Consequently, my expectation upon interviewing her spouse, Lindsay Reardon, her daughter Nina van Schoor, and her extended family and close acquaintances, was that a more prosaic De Wet would surface upon closer scrutiny. The inverse is true.

De Wet’s house, one of her first transtextual expressions that Van Schoor felt crucial to introduce me to (Int. Reardon; Int. Van Schoor), reveals a writer who had lived in a domestic sphere closely resembling in character and ambiance the worlds she had depicted in her plays. In this nineteenth-century blockhouse which was originally built as a fever hospital (De Wet in *Two Plays* 7), I could hardly detect any piece of furniture or decoration manufactured after 1960. Just as all her plays, with the exception of two (*Diepe Grond* and *Verleiding*), were set in the distant past (the set periods spanning from the late 1700s to the 1950s), and are magic realistic in style, entering her house felt like stepping into a different time frame and into a world governed by alternative laws of “reality”. She had ascribed specific symbolic significance to the various rooms (Int. McGarry; Int. Van Schoor; Int. Volks), choosing for instance, to live in the right side of the blockhouse and renting out the left side because of the spiritual associations she connected to that section of the building (Int. McGarry). The walls are decorated with circus posters, mandalas, Tarot cards, Renaissance images and pre-Raphaelite prints depicting Victorianised mythical figures.

Interviews with acquaintances both close and superficial testify to De Wet’s self-proclaimed communication with spirits in her house during guest’s visits (Int. Breytenbach; Int. McGarry; Int. Stolz). A particular chair was reserved for the ghost of Carl Gustav Jung and a bust of Eugène Marais<sup>92</sup> too had a special place (Int. Lossgott; Int. McGarry; Int. Otto). Her alleged conversations with Chekhov’s spirit was often conducted in her specially built writing room (Int. Reardon) and at some point, the spectre of his brother, Alexander, was said to have moved in with him, engaged in a fierce sibling rivalry (Int. Basson; Int. Butler). This “accommodation” of and interaction with the dead in her house – and at times in coffee shops (Int. Stolz), in lecture halls and the theatre (Int. De Wet) – stand in line with the literal presence of ghosts in for instance *Op Dees Aarde*, *Good Heavens*, *Drif*, *Crossing*. *The Unspeakable Story*, *On the Lake*, *Blou Uur* and *Heathcliff Goes Home*.

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<sup>92</sup> Marais was a South African poet, short story writer, journalist and Afrikaans language activist.

There is a sense in which this strange reality was shared by many of her closest friends and family. Some interviewees have treated me with initial distrust fearing my dismissal or mockery of this side of De Wet (Int. Lossgott; Int. Van Schoor).<sup>93</sup> Part of her withdrawal from the public scene was ascribed by herself and others precisely to her fear of being branded as insane (De Wet in Du Plessis “Diepe” 50; Int. Lossgott), especially for her so-called failure or refusal to distinguish between reality and illusion (Int. Lossgott). Interviews conducted at later stages of her career, however, reveal an eventual public embrace and flaunting of this facet of her self-actualisation (Burger “Geraamtes” 18). Thus, when De Wet told Patricia Handley that if “there is something of the magical, the mysterious, and an apparent concern with an imaginative reality in some of my work, this merely reflects the way I see things” (n.p.), there is a lifestyle and a host of witnesses backing up this statement.

From a sceptics’ point of view De Wet may appear “theatrical” – a word that seems apt considering her history as an actress and her career in theatre and dramatic pedagogy. Even Van Schoor and Reardon were, at the time of my interviewing them, not in complete agreement about the exact extent to which De Wet’s references to the supernatural were literal or “performed” (Int. Reardon; Int. Van Schoor). Van Schoor insisted that contrary to common perception, “nothing was ever contrived” regarding De Wet’s eccentricities, but, while Reardon admitted his experience of De Wet’s uncanny intuition, he ascribed her references to paranormal contact with Chekhov, for instance, as a form of intense vicarious living, and identification, which, to his mind, she had found necessary in the writing procedure (Int. Reardon). One person’s doubt in particular raises significant questions, considering De Wet’s regard of his insight into her dramas (De Wet in Brümmer “Agter” 52; De Wet in Nieuwoudt 3; De Wet in Willoughby 12; Dickerson L. 2004/08/10): her preferred director Marthinus Basson.

Basson, a self-confessed rationalist with little interest in the paranormal or supernatural outside the parameters of socio-anthropology (Int.) finds De Wet’s plays *Blou Uur* and *Breathing In* particularly telling in relation to her reverence of the mystical dimensions of human experience (Int.). Both these plays contain characters that, in his view, fake their exercise of their “sixth sense” at the cost of the other characters as a manipulative tool (Int.). He speculates that in this regard, De Wet may have exposed herself as being, in fact, far more

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<sup>93</sup> Biographers of subjects who are controversial for their belief in the supernatural may feel obliged to establish their own position in this debate. Arthur Conan Doyle’s biographer, Daniel Stashower, contends that any “writer who would address this delicate topic must first declare a position on the paranormal” and he describes himself “a cordial disbeliever” (xiii). I consider myself a cordial agnostic.

ambiguous in her references to the supernatural (Int.). To further substantiate his view, he points to the frequent appearance of trickster figures in her plays that use tales of the weird and wonderful to advance their aims of deception, such as the Constable in *Mis* and *Missing* and Maestro in *Drif* and *Crossing*. Johnson wrote in his *Lives* about “the life that belies the work” (33), in reference to poets whose lifestyles did not match the ideals propagated in their writing. What Basson suggests here, however, is an oeuvre that belies the life – the life as it has been fabled, that is.

Accumulatively I am presented with a discrepancy in point of view between three crucial figures in De Wet’s life and writing career, her life partner, her daughter and the director she described as “the paramount interpreter of her work” (Dickerson L. 2004/08/10). But even so, with regards to the nature of her commitment to mysticism, these different positions have a common denominator – De Wet’s extreme expressiveness and her behaviour which, regardless of its underlying nature, matches the heightened style and extraordinary settings of her plays. She was indeed *theatrical*, so far as she appeared to all who knew her, as larger than life, in line with her work which was never aimed at social realism. This highlights the complexities of distinguishing, in De Wet’s case, between the mask that Wilde defines as the fiction, and the other social masks the subject wears. And it is this agility of discernment that the biocritical scholar is expected to possess.

My proclivity to connect De Wet’s personal charisma to the style of her plays stems from my understanding of the narrative theories of Lewis, Tillyard, Booth and Henry James on author-personality and its expression in fiction. In *The Personal Heresy* Lewis formulates his idea that “the personality with which the reader achieves contact [with the narrative voice in the text] is not the poet’s normal personality but a heightened, temporary, perhaps alien, personality” (Tillyard and Lewis 34). It follows that the “personal heresy consists in the reader’s seeing the poet’s normal personality in his poetry, and in focusing his eyes on that personality” (34). Years later Booth makes a comparable point on the distilled nature of what Henry James calls the narrative text’s “centre of consciousness” (*Portrait* 35). Booth recuperates if only superficially, the hypothesis of the personalised narrative voice, which indirectly brings the reader in contact with the character of a particular author. His premise starts with his denial of the idea of a depersonalised narrative voice, describing it as the author’s second self: “Even the novel in which no narrator is dramatised creates an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage-manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently pairing his fingernails (“Point” 92).

Even though Booth is referring to the novel, his use of theatre metaphors (evoking Thackeray's preface to *Vanity Fair*) is inviting in the development of his theory to an application on the play as genre. Lewis has however remarked that in the play "the poet is manifestly out of sight, and we attend not to him but to his creations" (Lewis in Tillyard and Lewis 8), but the reader/audience is still aware, based on the consistency in style, of the mind behind the work, as Booth suggests. In De Wet's plays, for instance, the didascalia plays an unusually significant role, so much so that an entire thesis has been written about it and directors often remark on the limited measure of manoeuvring space the detail of her stage instructions afford them (Int. Basson).

Booth's phrasing of this concept as the author's second self brings to mind Lewis's opponent in *The Personal Heresy*, Tillyard, who holds a subtler view of the way in which this heightened voice connects to the author. He maintains that readers read a specific poet's work "in some measure because his poetry gives a version of a remarkable personality of which another version is his life" and while the "two versions are not the same [...] they are analogous" (35). He equates "style" with "the mental pattern of the author, the personality in words" (35). Many features of De Wet's writing style is reflected in descriptions of her personality by those who know her: her anachronistic disengagement with present reality (De Wet in Brümmer 4; De Wet in Terblanche "Reza de Wet" 17; De Wet in Van Biljon 1), her macabre sense of humour (De Wet in Burger "Geraamtes" 18; De Wet in Perez 13; De Wet in Nieuwoudt 3; De Wet in Pople "Galgehumor" 3), her fascination with death (De Wet in Burger "Geraamtes" 18), and magic and the supernatural (De Wet in Botha "Meisie" 6; De Wet in Burger "Geraamtes" 18; De Wet in Du Plessis "Diepe" 50 ).

This view of De Wet's writing style as expressive of her personality makes it difficult to see it as a mask hiding the extra-literary self. After all, what purpose is there in creating a guise that so closely resembles the real face? To the biocritical researcher Basson's interpretive strategy of identifying of a specific character as the author's mask, seems more feasible, especially to the reader who practices a predominantly works-based analysis to solve mysteries emerging from the non-literary archive. Basson's intuitive sense of which characters resemble De Wet, is powered by his first-hand acquaintance with her. This can also be said of Reardon who saw much of De Wet in the protagonists of *Mis* and *Drif* (Int.) and of Van Schoor who recognised imprints of both her parents in Soekie and Frikkie in *Diepe Grond* (Int.).

To me, who had never met De Wet, emulating this approach would be nonsensical if not presumptuous. As mentioned earlier, my advantage lies in the extensive non-literary archives I have been able to consult and generate, containing, amongst other insights, a significant amount of commentary by De Wet herself, her editors and creative writing students, on her writing methods and the manner in which she herself understood her plays as “diaries”. This leads me then to conduct this works-centred analysis undergirded by predominantly life-based research, an approach not void of its own hermeneutic complications.

The most defensible motivation for a life-based analysis of a writer’s oeuvre is probably exemplified in the case where a writer’s work may be peculiarly cryptic and hermitic in the absence of biographical data. August Strindberg’s dense expressionistic “dream plays”, are at times hardly decipherable without foreknowledge of his interest and participation in the occult and his personally constructed mythology. In my view, De Wet’s plays rarely require esoteric knowledge of for instance Hinduism, Taoism, Tarot, Spiritualism, astrology, the I Ching and Jungian psychology to sufficiently detect the texts’ central themes, although the influence of these philosophies on her writing is undeniable. Yet, the study of her turn to these worldviews and her subtle and playful incorporation of its symbols into her work brings exciting perspectives on the complex metaphysical substructures of her seemingly simple plots with its caricature-like figures, and the way in which the supernatural functions in her dramas.

The more common incentive for this approach is formulated by Eliot in “The Frontiers of Criticism” (1956) in which he reasons that biographical research can effectively ensure the prevention of misreadings where author’s intent is detectable in paratexts and made available to the reader through biocritical study (111). In poststructuralist critique this stance has of course been de-popularised in favour of a more reader-centred view of analysis, and in fact, many writers welcome interpretations of their works that contradict their own intentions behind it. Basson noted De Wet’s astonishing trust in his interpretation of her plays even when she had claimed that his understanding of it brought meanings to it she never consciously intended (Int.). Other directors who have conversed with her while working on her plays have made similar remarks (Int. Reardon; Int. Reedman; Int. Rothschild; Int. Smith) and De Wet herself had delighted in the way she felt directors like Basson and Reardon had enriched her perspective on her own work (De Wet in De Beer “Garden” 4; De Wet L. 1996/12/12; De Wet in Van Biljon 1). In the spirit of such a democratised landscape of literary reception in which the author’s authority is almost levelled to the reader’s, I adopt

Holroyd's defence of biocritical projects: that the literary life need not be understood as a dogmatic erasure of formalist schools of critique, but merely as a type of research that may enrich the range of possible readings. It seeks to expand the understanding of a writer's oeuvre rather than to limit it.

If, in the context of this thesis then, the "life" is the favoured source for interpreting the work, the poststructural view of history and the self as textualised is once again evoked. Silverman points out that in any form of biographical research the project constructs "not really a narrative of the life but of the available documents, because the subject survives only in and through his and his contemporaries' letters, diaries, writings, photographs" (113). And, if as such, the life is already aligned on a textual basis with the works, it follows that a confusingly similar means of interpretation is employed in examining both the author and her works, at least on some level. To prevent such a simplified configuration, the first important classification to make is of the subject's literary and non-literary writing.

The binary of the writer-subject's literary and non-literary expressions, especially as embodied in her "work" and her commentary on it, whether in public domains or in private writing made public to or by the researcher, has not been left untroubled, especially by poststructuralist literary critique. In "What is an Author?" Foucault questions the possibility of defining the "work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death", pointing, for instance, to scribbling in untidy manuscripts where the difference between the literary and non-literary in terms of author's intent is often blurred (208). Gerard Genette's formulations of the different forms of transtextuality is useful in this regard, especially his classification of the paratextual which is further subcategorised into peritextual and epitextual transtextuality. Genette conceives the term peritextual to discuss "elements that we might not normally consider part of the text itself: for example, the title, front and back cover, chapter titles, epigraphs, forewords, after-words, 'about the author' prefaces, footnotes, endnotes, type-faces and illustrations" (Genette *Paratexts* 5; Smith *Postmodern* 15) in distinction to the epitextual, which designates "the halo of texts that surround a text and orient the reader towards it in meaningful ways, texts such as author interviews, reviews and criticism" (Genette *Paratexts* 3; Smith *Postmodern* 15). If Genette's terminology can assist me in pinning down a working definition of De Wet's oeuvre from the overwhelming number of published and unpublished drafts, manuscripts, sound and video recordings availed to me, I need to supply his definition of the paratext with two extra classificatory dimensions: one that entails authorship; another that considers audience. In other words, I must first establish

exactly to which texts I can ascribe De Wet's authorship and under what conditions, before I can determine which of it she had intended for publication, or at least, public performance/broadcasting. The combination of these two qualifications constitutes my definition of De Wet's oeuvre.

The history of literary biography is rich with controversies surrounding certain texts' and entire oeuvres' authorship. Homer and Shakespeare serve, again, as eminent examples. In Homer's case, speculative scholarship has been produced that ascribes *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* respectively to different writers, women writers and groups of writers (Jones xxxviii-ix). More controversially, Shakespeare's authorship has been credited, variously, to Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, and Edward de Vere (Dunton-Downer and Riding 36). My own research has uncovered no foundation for any such extreme questioning of De Wet's authorship of any of her plays, published or unpublished. Rather, my inquiry into authorial credit ranges from insightful discoveries of the editorial interventions respectively of De Wet's directors and publishers to works she has produced in more explicitly collaborative circumstances.

The discovery of editorial input, especially in the context of theatre, where the published script is usually the residue of a long pre- and post-productive performance process, should hardly raise eyebrows. De Wet, in fact, had made a point, epitextually, in public interviews and speeches, especially upon the reception of prizes and awards, to remind her audiences and readers of the inherently collaborative nature of theatre (De Wet in Erasmus 1; De Wet in Pople "Galgehumor" 3; De Wet in Welman 81). She appreciated the ATKV Campus Drama Competition (where she had first come to public recognition as a playwright) for its emphasis on the development of scripts in the context of a production company (in Greeff 96). She never felt comfortable publishing a play before it had been "tested in performance", valuing not only the director, but also the actors' feedback (De Wet in Van Zyl 4; De Wet in Norval "Drif" 4). For this reason, she used the infrastructure of Rhodes University where she lectured to organise student-readings of her plays that were not produced professionally before its due date of publication (De Wet in Van Zyl 4).<sup>94</sup> In the published texts she acknowledged, peritextually, the contributions made by her directors, Denys Webb (who had "unearthed" her first published play) (De Wet in *Vrystaat* 8), Lucille Gillwald (the first professional director of her dramas) (8), Marthinus Basson (her most acclaimed and valued

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<sup>94</sup> These plays include *Drif* and *Drie Susters Twee*.

director) (*Trits* 22; *Blou* xxii), Lindsay Reardon, Sandra Kotze and James Blanckenberg, (all of whom had made significant suggestions to the refinement of her scripts) (*Vrydraat* 62). Her correspondences with Basson reveal epitextually, her courteous request for permission from her directors to include post-dramatic elements in the didascalia (L. ND). In all these instances however, De Wet remains the creative consciousness responsible for the final decisions as to what was included in print or on the stage. If the pre- and post-productive archival sources reveal much of the external role-players' contribution to the published texts, it exposes just as much about what was rejected by De Wet.

To some degree, my epitextual study of the scripts' production which, in their performances, were rarely video-recorded, mirror some of the complexities of biographical research; it also entails the study of inconcrete processes.<sup>95</sup> In the absence of audio-visual records, I attempt, with my interviews conducted with the directors, cast and crew, and selected audience members, to archive something of an impression of the plays as they have been staged, before it was distilled into published scripts. In this way I honour and agree with De Wet's sense that plays should primarily not be read, but seen (in Blumberg 242; in Solberg 178) while I am also conscious of the fallibility of my informants' memory. Costume designs, production photos and reviews are of infinite worth as supplications to the interviews. De Wet's supervision of all her plays' professional productions enables me to include these elements into the category of her authorship. But it is often not only the extra-scriptural dimensions that, in its performative ephemerality, complicate study; even some of her scripts do not exist in a finalised version. At least two of her plays' public performances have not been consolidated by the publication of the scripts: *In a Different Light* and *Heathcliff Goes Home*. It is worth mentioning perhaps that, in a sense, a final copy of *In a Different Light* will never exist.

Having established the grounds on which I identify, for the purposes of this life-works study, De Wet's oeuvre amid the complications surrounding collaborative and editorial input and distinguishing it from its pre-productive peritextual versions, two further classifications remain that require critical consideration: a distinction between De Wet's and other's public

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<sup>95</sup> Anita Anan explains the title of a panel discussion at the ZEE Jaipur Literary Festival, "Shadow Play": "Very often authors who are trying to bring to life somebody either that you don't know, or somebody who is long dead, having to deal with and grapple with shadows, things intangible, things hidden in boxes and dusty notes, or archives, or even reading in between the lines of letters and diaries, so it is really like trying to get as many shadows as you can to build them into something substantial" (JLF 2015).

and private epitextual commentary on her work, and the problems involved in using these utterances to illuminate the works biocritically.

At my disposal there are two types of epitextual sources produced by De Wet: published and unpublished. The published texts include radio- newspaper-, journal- and magazine interviews, author's notes to some of her plays and translations, programme notes to certain of her plays' performances, and some surviving academic writing; the unpublished texts comprise letters, proposals, and acquaintances' recollections of conversations she had with them about the plays, shared with me in interviews. Some, like biographer Leah Blatt Glasser, invests unpublished egodocuments (especially letters) with a greater truth value, as containing the "hidden life", in contrast to public utterances (192). But since what has been coined as the "Performative Turn" in the Humanities, the existence of any unselfconscious, unguarded, unselectively honest expression has become sharply disputed. The works of Kenneth Burke, Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, John Austin and Judith Butler have founded a standard approach in socio-anthropology, psychology, psycho-analysis, theatre and performance studies, and Literature and English studies, in which human behaviour and discourse are regarded as performances regardless of what- or whoever the context or audience may be. Some like Lisa Ruddick and Helen Pluckrose, may see this emphasis as exaggerated (1-12), but the relevance of these ideas is undoubtedly pertinent when the subject is a public figure, more so when she is an actress and even more, when she is a writer. Alix Kate Shulman postulates the idea of reading "innocently" as opposed to reading "with a writer's eye" (6-7). For her the distinction between the two came when she had first conceived of herself as a writer – suddenly she had read everything differently (7).<sup>96</sup> Eric Jacobs proposes a similar change occurring in the subject's writing when s/he becomes a published writer; when there is no longer a thing such as "innocent" writing. He suggests that

written evidence presents problems [...] of interpretation [...] when the author of the evidence is a writer himself. For a writer [...] is always deliberate and considered in what he puts down on paper, as much in his private letters and diaries as his novels and poems. He never, ever pours unto the page bouts of spontaneous gut feeling unfiltered or unvarnished by craft. The writer is always aware of his audience – friend, lover, fan, the public – and addresses each one in whatever form he thinks appropriate. The problem for the biographer is to disentangle these different forms of address, to gauge as best

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<sup>96</sup> Here I consider how the incentive to conduct a biocritical project in my case came from experiences installed by an "innocent reading" of De Wet's works. I wonder how much my current writing reflects my innocent reading and how much (re)reading her work with "a writer's eye" has expanded on or changed my focus.

he can the various angles and distances at which the writer speaks to his diverse audiences. (135)

So the danger here, especially when the biocritical scholar who is presented with a proficient amount of egodocuments, is what Jenny Uglow marks as that of becoming “a mere ventriloquist” instead of an analyst (JLF 2015). Thus, even if Foucault’s poststructuralism is side-stepped with Genette’s formalist literary terminology,<sup>97</sup> someone like Jacobs calls into question the assumed authority of the writer’s (or any critic’s) paratextual commentary on their work; the structuralist view of criticism as what Barthes phrases as “a form of ‘metalanguage’ a language about another language which rises above its object to a point from which it can peer down and disinterestedly examine it” (119).

No writer stands neutral, honest, and objective to their own work or creative impulses in any context, whether it be private or public, and it follows that an acceptance of their commentary on their work as the “final word”, so to speak, is problematic for various reasons. But the author need not be “killed” poststructurally altogether in a biocritical project like this one. Like the oeuvre, the paratext, equally requires interpretation, a type which as Jacobs points out, considers the context of its utterance, a context which the life writer seeks to research, map out, and read. The subject’s epitextual commentary should be treated much like the autobiography: as representations of “the subject’s attempt at that moment to explain how [s/]he came to be what [s/]he is” (Silverman 111). There is a mentionable incident relating De Wet’s epitextual commentary on her work in this regard. She was asked in a newspaper interview about *Heathcliff Goes Home* what “a Brontë” is (Int. Otto). Baffled by the question, she ensued on an ironic tangent making statements she felt was obviously sarcastic (Int. Otto). Realising, eventually, the journalist’s ignorance, she requested this refraction to be kept off the record, whereupon the journalist refused, stating that in newspaper interviews “nothing is off the record” (Inr. Otto). This anecdote highlights the risks involved both in a blind trust in the quoted author’s sincerity and in the reporter’s reliability. The abundance of trickster figures and deceivers in De Wet’s plays also attunes the researcher to scepticism. But even if the integrity of both De Wet and the interviewers in other contexts can be relied upon, De Wet had herself acknowledged, more than once, her propensity for changing her mind, and in fact doing it constantly (in Du Plessis “Diepe” 50; in Huisman and Finestone 92; in Nieuwoudt 3). A study of a lifetime’s interviews, as few as there are, reveal a

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<sup>97</sup> Robert Scholes writes in his foreword to Jane E. Lewin’s translation of Genette’s *The Architext: An Introduction* that “[a]fter poststructuralism, even after deconstruction, the formal core of structuralist studies – which a rash critic once called the ‘low structuralism’ of Genette – remains” (vii).

significant number of contradictions. Still, contextual research may illuminate these mutable points of view and the consequent stylistic and thematic development in De Wet's oeuvre.

Writers are often considered poor critics of their own work, rendering their commentary on it fairly inadequate to the researcher, due to their close proximity to it. De Wet had herself firmly doubted her capability to illuminate her plays critically. She preferred to see herself as yet another interpreter with her audiences and critics (in De Beer "Garden" 4). She even described herself, twice at least, as completely unequipped to explain what she intended with it (in Botha "Meisie 6; in Grütter 9). These claims appear coy or deflective, considering that she had earned a Master's in English Studies with distinction, and that she had taught literature both at Rhodes University's English and Drama Departments. Optimistically viewed, these qualifications may assure me of her interpretive credibility, and when she denies her own competence, I may feel justified to adopt that agency. Still, I invest her paratextual commentary with a special right, read in context of course, since she, of all interpreters, stands closest to her work and the aim of the project is, after all, dually, to read the subject with the purpose of generating greater biographical insight into the work; and, tautologically, to scrutinise her understanding of her own comprehension of her work's relationship to herself. This is why Spacks's use of the words "faith" and "belief" is so operative in her definition of biocritical research (14). This type of study remains the work of a soft science.

In a final word on epitextual sources, I must note that, based on De Wet's authority as the subject, I will pay special attention to those whose understanding of her work she had greatly regarded. This includes the directors of whose works she had made special note (Gillwald, Reardon, Blanckenberg, Basson, Gordon and André Stolz), literary scholars whose writing on her work she appreciated (Ian Ferguson and Tim Huisman), her editor Marietjie Coetzee, and two reviewers whose criticism she singled out (Robert Gregg and Adrienne Sichel). In addition to these names, I will also bring to bear the recollections of De Wet's family and close acquaintances on her claims about the extent and manner in which her plays are self-expressive, having, above all, De Wet's own epitextual commentary as a guide.

The first instance to my knowledge where De Wet had platformed self-reflection on her creative process, with a special emphasis on her understanding of her texts' autobiographical capacities, was in the wake of *Diepe Grond's* premiere in 1985, her first professionally staged play. Apart from the play's immediate critical success – Sichel prophetically called it an

instant Afrikaans classic – (in L. W. n.p.), it also attracted significant controversy, casting De Wet in a legal dispute with Alba Boucher, the author of the children’s novels from which De Wet appropriated the characters and setting of her play. Throughout the course of her writing career De Wet’s minimising of published interviews earned her the nickname, the “skaam, skugter blom” [a shy and timid flower] (in Botha 1), but faced with the threat of a lawsuit she was compelled to give a public explication of how she understood her use of another writers’ autobiographical characters in her own experimentation with theatrical self-expression. This, fortunately, provides me with a framework with which to comprehend De Wet’s understanding of her plays as “diaries”.

In its original form *Diepe Grond* was an adaptation of Boucher’s children’s novels *Stories van Rivierplaas* [Stories of River Farm] (1956) and *Nuwe Stories van Rivierplaas* [New Stories of River Farm] (1957) (De Wet in De Villiers 45-7; Van Reenen 56). In these stories Boucher presents fictionalised recollections of her childhood on a Free State farm in episodic form. The main characters are Alie (explicitly based on Alba Boucher) (De Wet in De Villiers 45; Terblanche “Alba Boucher” 1; Van Reenen 56), Hennie (Alie’s brother) and Ou Melitie, a Sotho servant. De Wet, born in 1952, loved Boucher’s novels as a child (De Wet in De Villiers 45). She had spent much of her formative years on her grandmother’s farm near Senekal in the Eastern Free State (46), and her mother’s Sotho servant Bettie, had played a vital maternal role in De Wet’s life (De Wet in Blumberg 245; De Wet in Solberg 183; De Wet in De Villiers 48). With De Wet and Boucher’s shared frame of reference, although a generation apart, De Wet had identified with Alie’s pastoral experiences narrated in *Rivierplaas* when she had first read it (De Wet in De Villiers 45). Eventually she had come to question what she described as the “rural idyll” and the “good race relationships” portrayed in it, as she gradually realised by what violence this “Afrikaner myth” was established and maintained (45-7).<sup>98</sup> Following this disillusionment, she deconstructs *Rivierplaas* in *Diepe Grond* (45, 47). Alie and Hennie rebelliously invert the order of the world in which they were raised; they kill their parents, live incestuously as a couple, adopt Melitie as their mother, sleep by day and work by night. De Wet claimed that she did not realise the autobiographical

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<sup>98</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “In elk geval; hul [Boucher’s characters’] lewens was so idillies en die rasseverhoudinge was so pragtig. [...] Dis net dat wat ek as kind gelees het, wat vir my so geheel en al waar was, soos ek grootgeword het in die teenoorgestelde verander het. Ek het ingesien wat agter die mite geskui het – die landelike idille, die goeie rasseverhoudings. [...] Mens is dan nie bewus van die strominge nie; die aggressie, dat daar so baie onreg gepleeg word, en dat daar so baie mense is wat hierdie rol van die *sweet, subservient domestics* moet vervul om hierdie mite aan die gang te hou nie. Hulle móét hierdie rol vervul vir die mite om te kan voortbestaan. Maar ek het net nie besef dat hulle in hierdie rol ingedruk is, en wat daarmee saamgegaan het nie” (in De Villiers 45-6).

nature of Boucher's novels (45), a fact that caused a controversy which had prevented her from staging and publishing *Diepe Grond* for another year and a half (45).

Boucher had learned from her journalist friend Rykie van Reenen about De Wet's *Rivierplaas*-adaptation (Van Reenen 55) and its success at the ATKV Campus Drama Festival – it won first prize, ensuring its publication and a professional run at the Market Theatre (De Wet in De Villiers 45). Indignant and infuriated by De Wet's portrayal of her characters (and by implication, of her), Boucher incited her publisher Tafelberg, to make a case of *crimen injuria* against De Wet if she was to publish the play in its original form (45). De Wet eventually conceded to change the characters' names under the dual pressure of Boucher's attorneys and the Market's producers (45). Alie became Soekie, Hennie changed to Frikkie and Melitie was redubbed Ou Alina. Boucher's case against De Wet cuts to the core of this thesis' inquiry into literature as explicit or cloaked autobiographical expression. It highlights two writers' very different understandings of the self-dramatising dimensions of their and each other's' work. For Boucher, the autobiographical nature of her novels is literal and therefore she treats the interpretation of her characters with special reverence. With De Wet it is more layered.

In the first place, while emphasising, in her defence, that *Diepe Grond* had far more to do with herself than with Boucher or Boucher's characters (45, 47), it is fascinating that she makes use of another writer's creations to express her personal concerns vicariously. This form of textual appropriation has been described in theatrical terms by scholars of postmodernist fiction (Davies 1; Heilmann and Llewellyn 35; Sauders 3). Wilde's metaphor of the mask is also evoked again and becomes tempting to use as an analogy for De Wet's textual ventriloquizing of an older writer's characters on the stage of her own text. The centrality of roleplaying as a dramatic device in *Diepe Grond* enhances the significance of this performative use of intertext.

If Boucher's reaction to *Diepe Grond* seems exaggerated, the possible psychoanalytic implications of the metadramatic devices could explain another aspect in which Boucher may have been offended, not for being misrepresented as "Alie", but for being presumably attacked by De Wet's use of Alie as a literary mask. The protagonist's imitation in *Diepe Grond* of her mother whom she had murdered years before (*Diepe* 52; *Vrystaat* 57) could have been read, by Boucher, as De Wet's staging of herself (De Wet), the young premiering writer, in an attempt at effacing an older, established writer through a parodic vandalizing of

her oeuvre. This possibility is most comically articulated when Alie/Soekie and Hennie/Frikkie literally dress up in their parents' 1950s clothes which still do not fit them although they are both fully grown (*Diepe* 14-5; *Vrystaat* 18-9). Such a reading of De Wet's intertextual gesturing is strengthened when it is considered that she herself had performed the part of Alie, De Wet's parody of Bouver's literary avatar. The matricidal dimensions are extended by the new writer supplanting, in her performance of *Diepe Grond* the older writer's person and work.

This reading skims over complexities regarding the way in which metadrama functions in De Wet's play. Alie is not the only character imitating a parent. Hennie also mimics his father mockingly, a figure who has no obvious non-fictional referent outside the parameters of the text in relation to the actor. Bruce Fields, who had performed the original part as a student, had no textual input in the script (Int. Fields), and thus, unlike De Wet's presence on stage as both actress and playwright, his theatrical function, as an actor, was one-dimensional. To read a metadramatic Electra complex, or a dramatisation of Bloom's anxiety of influence, selectively into De Wet's scriptural creation and embodied performance of Alie, focuses an unbalanced amount of biocritical attention on one character.

Secondly, in Alie/Soekie's roleplaying, it is not exclusively the mother-persona being ridiculed through exaggerated performance, but also that of the daughter. In actual fact, Alie/Soekie enacts the little-girl part far more consistently throughout the course of the drama as her go-to role. If Alie/Soekie's matricide is read as De Wet's attack on the ideology of an older Afrikaner<sup>99</sup> generation, embodied by Bouver and *Rivierplaas*, she does not cast herself and her own generation in a more flattering light. Soekie and Frikkie seem unable to rebuild a world from the ruins of the one they destroyed, and the open-endedness of the plot makes it uncertain whether they will ever take responsibility for themselves since their parents' death. The compulsiveness with which they remind themselves of their past through narration and ritual roleplaying raises questions about their complete belief in the justification of the murder. Soekie, in fact, seems unable ever to articulate herself through any other voice than that of her childhood-self and her mother's, and while they re-enact several scenarios that

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<sup>99</sup> Hermann Giliomee, in *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, uses "burgher" as a term of designation for white people of Dutch descent for "the period 1652 to approximately 1875" and "Afrikaner" for the period that follows, even though "it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the term was reserved only for white Afrikaans speakers", but in "the 1980s the term started to become radically inclusive" (xix). For the purposes of this thesis, the term Afrikaner will be reserved for white Afrikaans speakers, according to De Wet's use of the word.

have clearly traumatised them as children, the siblings often reminisce about and romanticise certain aspects of the time before their revolt. This makes it possible to read *Diepe Grond* as at least equally critical of De Wet's own generation as it is of her parents' and Bouwer's, if not more so.

Beyond the self-critical dimensions of the play, there is a level on which De Wet not only takes her generation to task, but also puts herself and her acquaintances at personal reputational risk. While Bouwer's objection to the potential damage De Wet's appropriation of her characters may have inflicted on her public image seemed debatable at the time (if only by Bouwer's attorneys), De Wet's transference of much of her own household and familial history into the text and onto the stage had made herself and her family far more vulnerable in the almost enclosed context in which the play was originally created and expected to remain. Reardon, Van Schoor and a friend, Anna-Karien Otto, claimed to have detected the persons outside of the text whom she had partially impersonated in her conception, in performance, of Soekie's child and mother persona's: De Wet's own mother and daughter (Int. Otto; Int. Reardon; Int. Van Schoor). Some who have worked with her on her plays recall her insistence at times on using specific family heirlooms as props and decor (Int. Basson), which testifies to the private, familial significance with which she had invested her fiction. De Wet's claim that she had originally conceived the play as a "private, ritual" (De Wet in De Villiers 45), may suggest that these detections speak of a personal level of reference on which *Diepe Grond* functions above the more obvious, literary intertextual plain. Two of the original actors, Fields and Malcolm Hacksley, confirm De Wet's claim that the cast and crew were convinced of the play's doom to failure at the ATKV partly since its self-referential weight which caused them to doubt its prospective for a professional afterlife (De Wet in De Villiers 45; Int. Fields; Int. Hacksley). From this point of view, De Wet's involvement in a polemic with a public figure whom she had never met before, seems like the last risk she may have considered when she deliberately built in references to non-fictional persons into the play.

Even to the reader unfamiliar with Bouwer or De Wet's lives and works, a trigger to biocritical curiosity is sparked by the metadramatic role-playing of the protagonists. If metatheatrical features invariably draw the reader's/audience's attention to the play's construction (Stott 45), both Soekie and Frikkie's creation and performance of infantile alter-ego's (the child personas) and personified super-ego's (the impersonations of their parents) point to the very impulse behind the writing and production of *Diepe Grond*. De Wet

confirms this epitextually by commenting that the crafting of the play entailed a similar kind of game to the protagonists' in the text – just as Soekie and Frikkie enact these parts in order to exorcize the influences they associate with it, she had fashioned these characters as personified facets of her own psyche which she felt required dramatised expression (De Wet in De Villiers 47).

Informed by her understanding of Jungian psychology, De Wet explains that, having first registered the protagonists as recurring dream-figures (Coetzee “Bekendstelling” 1; De Wet in De Villiers 47; De Wet in Knox 79; De Wet in Luyt), she had come to interpret them as symbols of psychological features. She viewed these “forces”, as she called them, as inherently androgynous (Huismans and Finestone 91), although her particular Afrikaner upbringing had codified it as male and female (De Wet in De Villiers 47). Thus, she asserts her reliance on the hermaphrodite as a symbol of self-knowledge and psychological wholeness to expound her motivation to have Soekie and Frikkie engage in an incestuous mock-marriage (47).

De Wet was prone to creating caricatures, and types, inspired by archetypes, rather than well-rounded characters. She was annoyed with what she generalised as South African playwrights' preoccupation with realism and naturalism, which she suggested, tends to “ignore the mythical underground of the human psyche” (Botha “Meisie” 6). She coyly spoke of her plays' “fairytale simplicity” (Huismans and Finestone 92) and subtitled *Op Dees Aarde*, as “’n Plattelandse Sprokie” [a Fairytale of the Countryside] (*Vrystaat* 1). A review of *Diepe Grond*'s ATKV-premiere suggests that she had also peritextually labelled it “a fairytale” (Olivier “Nuwe” 15). De Wet had identified her five years of undergoing Jungian therapy as instrumental in shaping her understanding of her propensity for creating characters that represent distillations of psychological principles, as archetypes in fairytales, according to Jung, rather than figures essentially based intertextually on other writers' characters or on non-fictional persons (Botha “Meisie” 6; Huismans and Finestone 91). Instead, she invites a type of psychoanalytic interpretation of her work in which the different characters, the plot and chronotope, symbolise aspects of and developments in her own mind.

By doing so, De Wet smashes Lewis's contention that even his most “convinced opponents” in the debate about the legitimacy of biocritical analysis, “would falter in dealing with the Drama, for there the poet is manifestly out of sight, and we attend not to him but to his creations” (Lewis in Tillyard and Lewis 8). He admits however, that the question as to “how

far any of [the characters] may resemble him is [...] an interesting question” (8). Artist figures in fiction are often read as avatars of the author and as providing clues “to understanding [the subject’s] artistic struggles” (Glasser 116). But the method of analysis De Wet models in her explication of how she had written *Diepe Grond* circumvents such an obvious approach.

Elms theorises, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that a

work of fiction may provide the writer with disguised satisfactions of strong unconscious urges – hostile, sexual, or whatever [...]. The writer may be able to tolerate the continued existence of an unconscious conflict by expressing both sides of it in fiction, even though a permanent solution to the conflict remains elusive. (108)

Bell Gale Chevigny similarly conjectures that if the biocritical scholar “read[s] the fiction as we do a dream, treating all the protagonists as aspects of [the subject] herself. [...] it both acknowledges a self, divided against itself [...] and builds a fantasy that makes the self a whole” (366). Glasser conducts such a reading of Mary Wilkens Freeman’s story “Sister Liddy” in which she interprets the protagonists Liddy and Poddy as embodiments of two conflicting ideals in Freeman’s psyche. Liddy represents “conventional bliss” and Poddy “rebellion and violence” (207). Glasser contends that even “as Freeman expressed her anger through Sally, her longing to be the acceptable Liddy remained” and she comes to view “Freeman’s work as a fascinating interweaving of Liddys and Poddy’s” (208). While Reardon was ready to identify much of De Wet’s transmutation of personality traits of her friends, family and herself into her plays for purposes of characterisation, he also insisted on the symbolism of the characters as representing psycho-social impulses (Int.). So, for instance, he commented on my question about the re-emergence in her plays, of two sister figures, one conventional; the other rebellious (a bit like Freeman’s Liddy and Poddy), considering her own background as an only child. He interprets it as a dramatisation of her own inner conflict with social conformity and individual integrity (Int.).

The question remains why De Wet would turn to *Rivierplaas*, a text Bouver felt was so peculiarly referential to her upbringing, to articulate concerns De Wet experienced as dramatised in her own subconscious in such an abstracted form. Bouver may not have realised to what extent *Rivierplaas* had become mythologised by an entire generation as Van Reenen and Terblanche point out (Terblanche “Reza de Wet” 5; Van Reenen 55-6). The commonality of the novels’ chronotropic setting to the children of an Afrikaner readership, rooted in a feudal agricultural history, had contributed to its popular success and establishment as a classic in Afrikaans fiction. Van Reenen comments on how to thousands

of Afrikaners raised with *Stories van Rivierplaas*, Hennie and Alie was fashioned into imaginary siblings, and how Melitje was associated with the black nanny so many Afrikaans children experience as their primary caregiver up until a certain age (Van Reenen 55-6). In a broader context, the Afrikaner farm in South African literature has been theorised as a mythscape, established in the 1930s already, so that *Rivierplaas* develops in the wake of a powerfully popular tradition (Coetzee *White* 63; Olivier “Dertigers” 308). Without even having to conduct a Jungian literary analysis of *Rivierplaas*, it is possible to see how an imaginative consciousness like De Wet’s may have internalised, during her formative years, these characters who inhabit a milieu so evocative of her own, incorporated them into a personal mythology, and refashioned them, with the irreverence of a child, to fit her own experiences. The process of appropriation, which Boucher had perceived as so threatening, had probably already begun in De Wet’s childhood.<sup>100</sup>

From a Jungian psychoanalytic perspective, archetypes often assume the resemblances of both/either fictional and non-fictional persons in the subject’s memory, in accordance to those figure’s likeness, from the child’s point of view, to the archetype’s function (Jung *Four* 2; 18; 110). If De Wet, in her explanation of her writing methods, relies on a Jungian theoretical basis, she is suggesting that her subconscious mind had spontaneously linked Hennie, Alina and Melitje to particular archetypes. Although I will not pursue an in-depth psychoanalytical reading of *Diepe Grond* here, De Wet’s remark on the redemption of the oppositely gendered psychological facets dramatised in Soekie and Frikkie’s sexual relationship signals both her reliance on Jungian psychology and her adaptation thereof.

Regardless of how strictly or casually my analysis adheres to any form of psychoanalytic school of interpretation, the approach primarily depends on the assumption that no single character represents De Wet or any other non-fictional entity outside her plays, even in texts where she explicitly borrows figures, by name, from history and canon literature. The different characters act as divergent aspects of De Wet’s divided self as she experiences and dramatises it in narrative form. While, by the rules of this approach, Soekie is not De Wet’s fictional double, her divisive and performative methods of self-representation is usefully analogous of her author’s strategy of self-expression and self-definition. Soekie never exhibits a personalised representation of the controlling consciousness behind her two

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<sup>100</sup> An obvious manner in which she has personalised the characters was by transposing Soekie and Frikkie to a different period. If she remained faithful to Boucher’s novels, the childhood world they reference would have been the twenties, not the fifties. But De Wet makes Hennie and Alie about herself, and she was a toddler in the fifties.

personas. She chooses only ever to express herself by mouth of either her impersonation of her obnoxious six-year-old self, or through her portrayal of her mother – a caricature of a staunch Afrikaner *volksmoeder*. Her doll acts as a symbol of the constant deference of a stable meaningful self. When she mimics her mother, the doll represents Soekie (*Diepe* 23; *Vrystaat* 27); when she plays her child-self, it signals her performance of the toddler (*Diepe* 10; *Vrystaat* 14), since she (both Soekie and De Wet at the time) is, in fact, in her thirties (*Diepe* 8; *Vrystaat* 12). The constant onstage presence of the doll thus indicates Soekie’s continuous state of play-acting, a self relentlessly mediated through explicit performance, and projected polyphonically.

Polyphony as a literary analytic term is primarily applied to prose, especially the novel. It emerges from Mikhail Bakhtin’s Russian formalism, most eloquently conveyed in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. He defines polyphony against what he calls the “monologic” text in which a character’s discourse [can] be exhausted by the usual functions of characterization and plot development,” in its service “as a vehicle for the author’s own ideological position” (7). In such a text the author seems to “squeeze” her/his “plurality of consciousnesses into the systemically monologic framework of a single worldview,” either through “antinomy or dialectics” (9). In other words, if De Wet’s texts were read as monologic, a single character would serve as her Wildean “mask” or a ventriloquist’s puppet to voice her concerns or ideas and a single antagonist would serve as a straw man figure to contrast the protagonist’s stance. In the polyphonic text, by contrast, the author’s ideological position is less obviously detectable. A diversity of stances amongst the characters complicates any investigation into a metanarrative seemingly favoured by the text and embodied in one or a group of characters.

This conjecture may be debatable in the framework of one text, but De Wet preferred publishing her plays in triplets and cycles, precisely with the purpose of “present[ing] constantly shifting perspectives” (in Perez 7). It is the privilege of the biocritical scholar to read the entire oeuvre almost as a single text, following the assumption made by Eliot when, writing about Shakespeare, he suggests “that fully to understand any of him, we must read all of his work as a single complex Work” (Eliot in Kenner 11). Such a comprehensively comparative analysis reveals the extent to which De Wet recycled plot structures and narrative motifs, and she was conscious of recurring figures in her writing, such as the strict matriarch oppressing a younger Cinderella figure. It brings to mind Hugh Kenner’s comment

from a bird's eye view on Samuel Beckett's oeuvre (which De Wet identified as one of her most important influences) that

similarity strikes us before diversity does. Since the story, to assign one reason, is frequently of secondary importance, he will often use and re-use a story, or a motif, until we are apt to suppose that we are re-reading versions of the same work. If we read with attention though, we shall be surprised how very different one work is from another, how completely fresh he addresses himself to each new project. (Kenner 12)

This repetitive yet transformative approach to writing evokes Elms's psychoanalytic theory that "writing plays serves a defensive function, the writer must return again and again to the underlying issues, addressing them in new fictions, expending more energy to keep the struggle going, rather than resolving the issues" (Elms 108). De Wet was self-admittedly not in the business of solving problems or arriving at answers to socio-political or psychological concerns in her writing (in Du Plessis "Diepe" 50; in Greeff 94; in Huisman and Finestone 95; in Luyt; in Norval "Feesviering" 2; in Pople "Galgehumor" 3; in Solberf 178-9, 187). Therefore, an easy reduction of certain types to "goodies" or "baddies" in an extended monologic text is futile. The roles of these types change from one play to the next. So, for instance, Konstabel the mesmerist in *Mis* functions as a liberator for the beautiful young Meisie, a prisoner of her mother's overly strict household, but in *Drif* the similarly nomadic Maestro, a traveling hypnotist, who visits the comparably conservative and fatherless home of Hermien and Sussie, is a cruel, Byronic tyrant who exploits the weak personality of Ezmerelda, his assistant whom he had bought from her mother years before. Recurring types take turns at fulfilling protagonistic, antagonistic and tritagonistic functions from play to play. This, De Wet suggests, reflected the constant shifting of archetypal forces in her own psyche (Huisman and Finestone 92).

There is one piece, however, in which De Wet explicitly enters the text, as herself, undisguised and unmediated through the performance of an actor: *Verleiding* [Seduction] (2005). It is the only text that she deliberately did not call a play, but a multimedia site-specific lecture performance (in Brand 14). In its form and structure it is the most radical departure from both her plays and the cycle of scripts she had written for First Physical. This therefore is the one text which requires a slightly different methodology of biocritical analysis. She features as a marginal character and the protagonists are fictional, confusing the audience as to the way in which they should interpret the version of De Wet they encounter in the text. This given already highlights the thematic preoccupations of *Verleiding*: it is

fundamentally concerned with life writing, particularly with literary biographical research and this enables a plausible inference of De Wet's view on both the ethics and limits of biographical criticism which must, in turn, affect the way in which her depiction of herself in this case is understood.

*Verleiding*'s plot is premised on the strange occurrences relating to a disastrous (fictional) biographical research project on the Afrikaans writer Eugène Marais.<sup>101</sup> It is conducted by Leatitia de Swart, a (fictional) professor of Afrikaans literature who specialises in Marais's writing (De Wet *Verleiding* 1),<sup>102</sup> and by her student, colleague and friend, Lizelle van Breda (also fictional), who had written a biocritical thesis on Marais's poetry (1). Their journey begins in Grahamstown where they track down the reclusive Reza de Wet<sup>103</sup> (4-5) who reluctantly engages in a video-interview on her familial connection with Marais (5). De Wet was the great-granddaughter of Marais's elder brother. The researchers prompt Reza to provide them with previously unpublished information about their subject, especially about the period during which he was rehabilitated from his morphine addiction in Reza's great grandparents' house in Boshof (5). In reference to her anecdotes, Reza points to her grandmother's house in Senekal, which at the time is uninhabited, and contains a host of sources related to Marais (5-6). Reza does not give Leatitia and Lizelle the address of the house and forbids them to mention the name of the town in their scholarship (6).<sup>104105</sup> Ignoring Reza's bans, Lizelle persuades Leatitia to travel with her to Senekal, to find the house (6), and eventually to help her break in and to remove a great number of documents (8). When Leatitia finally withdraws her assistance (19), Lizelle returns independently twice, and goes missing the second time. Before her final departure she claims to have been visited by Marais's spirit in her dreams, and he told her that he had haunted the Senekal house until then, but that, since her discoveries, he had gained closure and was ready to proceed to another realm (20). He allegedly urged Lizelle to collect a gift at the house before his parting

<sup>101</sup> Marais was, however, educated in English and wrote his first poetry in English.

<sup>102</sup> I am indebted to Basson for lending me the unpublished script.

<sup>103</sup> To distinguish between the fictionalised/theatricalised version of De Wet in the play and the De Wet outside the text, I will refer to the Reza de Wet in the play simply as "Reza" and to the playwright otherwise as "De Wet".

<sup>104</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Die dorp waarin Reza de Wet se familiehuus staan mag glo glad nie genoem word nie. Daar is waardevolle dinge in die huis, moes ek verneem, en die huis is ook onbewoon, [...] Ek is selfs met die hof gedreig. Privaatskending of so iets. Daarom, wanneer die naam van die dorp genoem word, is daar 'n uiters irriterende piepgeluid." (De Wet *Verleiding* 5)

<sup>105</sup> Although Reza in *Verleiding* instructs Leatitia and Lizelle to censor the name of the town in the recordings, and to refer to it as "X" otherwise (De Wet *Verleiding* 6), she had by the time *Verleiding* was produced, referred to her maternal grandmother's house in Senekal in several published interviews by then (Barnard 18; Blumberg 248; Greeff 94, 96; Pople "Galgehumeur" 3).

(20). When Leatitia detects Lizelle’s absence, she summons the police to the Senekal-house where they find Lizelle’s traveling bag and the sum of her research in one of the rooms – the room containing the bed in which Marais used to sleep (21). Lizelle had vanished but had left a note in which she requested the publication of her research. *Verleiding* then assumes the form of a seminar presented by Leatitia, with the dual objective of honouring Lizelle’s wish and to set the record straight in light of the rumours surrounding her disappearance. However, the nature of Leatitia’s involvement in the project compromises her integrity both as the editor of Lizelle’s research and as the chronicler of the process by which it was conducted. She is also clearly traumatised by the events and her emotional instability cripples her deliverance of her story so that it lacks clear narrative closure, or a coherent impression of Marais, despite her resolution at the start of the lecture to provide this.

*Verleiding* can be read as a satirical dramatisation of the wide interest in Marais when it was written, especially among the Afrikaans literary public, a phenomenon that Desmond Painter called “a Marais season” (1). The play was commissioned by Dorothea van Zyl, a professor of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch University at the time and the then CEO of the Woordfees, an annual Afrikaans literary festival. The year 2005, when *Verleiding* was staged, marked the centenary of Marais’s publication of “Winternag”, which is considered by many to be the first published Afrikaans poem. A two-volume edition of Marais’s complete works and collected poetry had just been reprinted as was his books, *The Soul of the Ape*, *The Soul of the White Ant* and *Dwaalstories*. The republication of Marais’s entire oeuvre had understandably coincided with a renewed attention to his life. Leon Rousseau’s biography of Marais *Die Groot Verlange* (1974) was reissued in 2005 and translated as *The Dark Stream*. The poet, Johan Marais had published a series of speculative articles on Eugène Marais’s final years and the historian Sandra Swart, in the wake of her doctoral thesis, *The Construction of Eugène Marais as an Afrikaner Hero*, had published widely on the same topic. Swart reveals the shifting significance of Marais for Afrikaners during the twentieth century, as respectively “the ‘father of Afrikaans poetry’”, “one of the most canonised” and “lionised writers in Afrikaans”, an “Afrikaner nationalist”, and, oppositely, a “dissident iconoclast, an Afrikaner rebel” (Swart 1). In less than a century, history was left with what she calls “the fractured meaning of Marais today” (1). Marais was perhaps the paramount Afrikaans (literary) biographical subject when De Wet was asked to write a play about him.<sup>106</sup> In a

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<sup>106</sup> The prolific Afrikaans literary biographer, J.C. Kannemeyer considers Marais’s first biographer Leon Rousseau, the pioneer in the field of Afrikaans literary biography (“Biografiese” 45), and as such Marais can also be considered the prototypical Afrikaans literary biographical subject.

literary context where he is recuperated as a cult figure and fresh perspectives forged on him, she contributes to the assembly of first-hand information (which she includes in *Verleiding*) in the search for the so called “real” Marais, while, at the same time she undermines this endeavour by having the discoveries made by two fictional and unreliable researchers. De Wet’s Marais thus ultimately escapes sure comprehension.

De Wet’s wish to broadcast her view of the ultimate inscrutability of the biographical subject (De Wet in Brand 14)<sup>107</sup> was probably the driving force behind her acceptance of Van Zyl’s commission. Marais was her maternal great grandfather’s brother and she “was brought up on [his] poetry and [...] short stories” (De Wet in Finestone and Huismans 89) in a household where there was much talk about him (De Wet in Brand 14).<sup>108</sup> Still, she maintained that although all people are essentially unknowable, it is even more so with Eugène Marais (14).<sup>109</sup> Leatitia and Lizelle’s consultation of Reza, to some extent, mirrors Van Zyl’s coaxing of De Wet in writing a play about Marais for the Woordfees, with the foreknowledge of De Wet’s familial connection with him. It was obviously expected that her portrayal of him as a relative would be informed by a special intimacy with the subject’s life story that would enrich an interested public’s understanding of him. De Wet responds to the assignment eagerly with her inclusion of original biographical data in *Verleiding* but, while conceding to the literary life writer’s appeal, De Wet highlights, with this text, several key notions involving literary biographical research: the possessiveness of biographers and experts about certain authors and their works, the act of biography as an act of betrayal, biographical research as a form of invasion, the life writer as a thief, and life writing as a reduction of the subject’s complexity, and, by inserting herself as a character into the script, she aligns herself morally with the two transgressive scholars.

Leatitia and Lizelle, the only two fictional characters in this documentary-type play, seem to represent two conflicting impulses in De Wet’s psyche responding to Van Zyl’s commission and her own use of unpublished documentation entrusted to her by her ancestors: the inclination to adhere to socially acceptable (Johnsonian) means of scholarly research represented by Leatitia, and the more daring, exhibitionistic (Boswellian) approach, embodied by Lizelle, that requires the transgression of ethical and empirical parameters. This conjecture is based on De Wet’s epitextual alignment of herself with all who futilely attempt

<sup>107</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “My stuk [...] gaan oor Marais se onpeilbaarheid” (De Wet in Marais 14).

<sup>108</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “daar was ’n atmosfeer van baie oor hom praat” (De Wet in Brand 14)

<sup>109</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Elke mens is natuurlik onpeilbaar, maar Marais nog meer so.” (De Wet in Brand 14)

to comprehend Marais in all his complexity (in Brand 14) and on De Wet's identification of the conflicting propensities in her work, for obedience to and rebellion against social strictures (in Huismand and Finestone 92). This reading is lastly enforced by De Wet's position as an academic scholar and lecturer like Leatitia's and her reputation as a published and awarded writer of literature like Lizelle. Between the two protagonists, however, Lizelle's approach is more seductive (hence the title) and the Johnsonian Leatitia gradually succumbs to the charm of her student's Boswellian passion and means of researching the ever-seductive literary subject; an approach characterised by possessiveness, betrayal, invasion, theft and reduction.

The possessiveness of biographers and experts about particular literary figures is fabled, to the extent that it has been immortalised in fiction by the likes of A.S. Byatt in her novel *Possession* (1990). In it, the most celebrated biographer of the fictional Victorian poet, Randolph Henry Ash is driven to near-insanity upon the realisation of a major discovery by another scholar of an essential aspect of Ash's personal life, so much so that, evoking Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, he even digs up his subject's grave in the hope of procuring an important document confirming this unearthing before anyone else does. Holroyd embodies a non-fictional example of a literary biographer ready to admit his extreme possessiveness of a subject when working on a biography (in Benton *Towards* 67), and both Lee and Holmes propose the psychological necessity of this impulse for the biographical project (Holmes *Footsteps* 14; CUNY). When, in *Verleiding*, the seductive Lizelle persuades Leatitia to assist her not only in travelling to Senekal against De Wet's demands, but also in breaking into the house, photograph and steal material, Leatitia appeals to the notion of Marais's cultural significance as a basis on which to accuse De Wet of possessiveness (15). She suggests, for instance, that De Wet's keeping of Marais's only bust from public display speaks of an unjustifiable sense of entitlement considering his importance as a figure in South African history (15). De Wet may have created Lizelle as a counter-voice to her impulse to keep this portrayal of Marais and all the other information she has on him from the public arena. Of course, Leatitia's accusation merely covers up Lizelle's self-appointed claim to Marais' apocryphal traces, the broadcasting of which will serve her scholarly career. Lizelle then represents De Wet's proclivity to draw significance from her possession of inaccessible relics and knowledge of Marais.

Attached to De Wet's dramatised inner conflict regarding her possessiveness of her private Marais archive is the question of betrayal: if she keeps the information to herself, she betrays

Marais and his post-mortem following by disabling a fuller understanding of him, but from another perspective, she betrays her relatives by corrupting a mutual agreement that the information and sources are reserved to the private knowledge of the family. While Reza in the script complies to the latter position, the protagonists betray her trust, mostly under Lizelle's influence, of course. But the sheer presence of De Wet's metatextual self-portrayal reminds the audience that even though she depicts herself as reserved on Marais, she remains the other characters' author and it is through them that Marais' world is invaded and broadcasted. The De Wet outside the fictional framework of the script is as self-consciously treacherous as Leatitia and Lizelle.

De Wet's part in this betrayal is temporarily upstaged by Lizelle's breaking into the house in Senekal. At this point the two protagonists have already transgressed several boundaries for instance, entering De Wet's house in Grahamstown despite her active avoidance of their calls, and travelling to Senekal against her prohibitions. This nocturnal raid dramatises De Wet's sense of biographical inquiry as inherently invasive. This perspective has earned biographers (of deceased subjects) the pejoratives: "professional burglars" (Malcolm), grave robbers (Holroyd 1) and "necrophiles" (Stannard 34). Biographers often reflect on their own sense of feeling intrusive in their research process. Apt to this discussion, both Lee and Holmes recollect their visit to their subject's house and their sense of themselves as literally and metaphorically peering into a world deliberately hidden from public view, so that they regrettably realise the illegitimacy of their project (Holmes *Footsteps* 143; Lee *Virginia* 772).<sup>110</sup> This feeling of invasiveness is augmented by their being treated as threatening meddlers by the subject's friends, family, and acquaintances. It is the implication of the relatives, consociates and their descendants into the life narrative of the subject that makes them what Woolf phrases, "the hard taskmasters" of the life writer ("Art" 222). Natasha Spender empathises with persons "who value privacy, and whose histories bear no relations to the public interest" but are yet dismayed by "the prospect of impending biographies in which they will be portrayed as minor figures" in the life history of a writer (101). She reflects on how they "have to face the world with" what they may experience as "a false

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<sup>110</sup> Richard Holmes, who early in his book *Footsteps* makes the figurative connection between the literal broken bridge he encounters on a pilgrimage and the impenetrability of the past, later also uses the image of the past, and particularly the life of the biographical subject as an inaccessible house: "Indeed I came to suspect that there is something frequently comic about the trailing figure of the biographer: a sort of tramp permanently knocking at the kitchen window and secretly hoping he might be invited in for supper. How many of Shelley's houses I stood outside, knocking and knocking." (143). On the last page of Lee's *Virginia Woolf* she recalls her visit to Woolf's Talland house "feeling like a biographer, a tourist, an intruder" (7772).

persona imposed, like a grotesque mask plastered over one's natural face" (103). In Marais' case, the "secondary characters" as Silverman calls them (112) are, like Marais, long dead, but they are related to Reza who feels a post-mortem obligation to protect their honour.

There is a biographical foundation for this in an anecdote by Marais' biographer Leon Rousseau, in reference to his research process for the biography. In a chapter "Synchronimse", he relates a series of uncanny occurrences that had almost led him to believe that the ghost of Marais was trying to prohibit him from writing his life. One of the incidents involves De Wet. Rousseau recalls a time when she, as a twenty-year-old student, was staying with his children in his house while he was away. She did not know about his research on Marais but was overcome, one day, with an instant and intense anger, and with an inexplicable urge to enter his study and destroy the documents on the desk ("Dowwe" 112). Years later De Wet was convinced that she had unconsciously become a medium of Marais' spirit whom, she believes, disapproved of Rousseau's biographical enterprise ("Dowwe" 114). Whatever psychological or scientific truth may underlie this sketch, it essentially points to De Wet's sense of biographical inquiry as a form of invasion. Van Schoor's relation that De Wet was "in the habit of throw[ing] [...] things out when she was getting ill" shortly before her death (Int.), brings to mind remarks by theorists and historians of the literary biography that the "the landscape of [...] literature is partially obscured by the smoke rising from [...] archival pyres" (Kaplan 6) and that the "field of literary biography is strewn with the ashes of burned letters" (Scharnhorst 1). Read with these anecdotes in mind, the Reza-as-hard-task-master in *Verleiding*, is, as a writer of stature herself, empathetic to Marais and instead of burning his archive – like Miss Tita does in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers* to sabotage a biographical endeavour – she deliberately instils doubt around the credibility of the new material (which she had provided herself) by means of a number of metafictional devices.

*Verleiding* is in many ways similar, in its postmodern metafictional exploration of literary biography and its methods, to the texts that Cornelia Stott analyses in her book *The Sound of Truth: Constructed and Reconstructed Lives in English Novels Since Julian Barnes's Flaubert's Parrot* (2005). This includes (among others) Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, Byatt's *Possession* and *The Biographer's Tale*, and Peter Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. She points to how a widespread "constructivist scepticism of the knowability of historical truths increasingly manifests itself" in contemporary literature through narratives of "protagonists on a quest to reclaim the 'truth' about a third party (or even about themselves)

from history” narrated in “deconstructed chunks” to trouble “traditional notions of life descriptions, chronology and record, while at the same time creating new contexts for the historical knowledge society regards as secure” (10). Stott engages Patricia Waugh’s and Mark Currie’s work on metafiction to construct a theory of postmodern metafictional life writing. She underlines metafiction’s propensity to “explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction” and its “self-critical tendency” by which it presents itself as “a borderline discourse, a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, which takes the border as its subject” (45). She then reapplies these definitions to biographical theory. The way in which the novels she study “draw attention to their status as works of art to ask questions about the genre of the novel” evoke questions about the empirical grounds of biography and these texts “thus also move in the borderline areas between at least those two genres” (45). The consequence as she sees it embodied in Byatt’s, Barnes’s and Ackroyd’s novels is a subversion of “conventions to present ‘reality’” by portraying it rather

as a highly suspect concept, flaunting and exaggerating foundations of their instability, and displaying reflexivity (the dimension present in all literary texts and also central to all literary analysis, a function which enables the reader to understand the processes by which he or she reads the world as a text). (Stott 46)

If De Wet already creates a dizzying Droste-effect by inserting a video-clip of herself into *Verleiding* in which she functions as a character, unaware of the fictional frame surrounding the text, Lizelle’s claim of being visited by Marais’ ghost and the insinuation that he beckoned her to her death by leading her into quicksand next to a river near the Senekal house, is hard to establish either as a delusion or a fact within the reality framework of the text. But the more important insight to draw from this plot twist may be that, metaphorically speaking, Lizelle, despite her conviction of being intimately acquainted with Marais, is unable to unearth him, and becomes, instead, literally and figuratively absorbed and consumed by her research on him. Despite Leatitia’s professional Johnsonian stance, she too gets drawn into Lizelle’s obsession, due to her own obsession with Lizelle and becomes herself, also almost swallowed into the same quicksand as she traces her student’s movements to the river. Read in this light, *Verleiding* suggests that this is what happens, symbolically, to readers of biographies and this is part of the danger of biography: we are frequently seduced into getting immersed into another reader’s a fantasy of a life.

Another strategy of demonstrating Marais' inscrutability is De Wet's emulation, in part, of Marais's writing by mimicking his crime, detective and mystery stories. Lizelle and Leatitia's research brings to mind the undertakings of Roubaix – a gentleman detective in the tradition of Edgar Allen Poe, Sir Arthur Doyle and Henry James. In stories like “Die Huis van die Vier Winde” [The House of the Four Winds], “Die Vlieënde Hollander” [The Flying Dutchman], “Diep Rivier” [Deep River], and “Klaas Slyk” a recurring protagonist, Dr Roubaix, (among others,) as an Auguste Dupin or Sherlock Holmes figure, engages in a quest of solving a mystery, whether it be the search of a hidden family fortune (“Klaas Slyk”), the disappearance of a girl (“Die Verdwyng van Sannie”) [The Disappearance of Sannie], a murder (“Die Spook Bul”) [The Ghost Bull], the detection of a serial killer (“Diep Rivier”), or the rationalisation of a paranormal occurrence (“Die Huis van Vier Winde” and “Die Vlieënde Hollander” list the stories about dreams). Time and again Roubaix, with his delight in everything mysterious, is seduced into a detective endeavour. In Afrikaans the words “verleiding” (seduction) and “leidraad” (clue) share the root, “lei” (lead). It also brings to mind “aflei” (infer), “herlei” (allude), and “mislei” (mislead).

Detective fiction always contains an element of biography: lives are written, anecdotes and facts are compiled and organised in chronological order, and speech, writing and other forms of behaviour are deciphered and interpreted. Conversely biography, especially literary biography, is often compared to detective work (Alpers “Biography” 17; Byatt *Biographer's* 13; Kannemeyer “Biografiese” 45; Lee *Biography* 1; Lewis 137; Longford 147) and similarly the historian more generally has been compared to the “hero of a detective novel” by historiographic theorists such as R.G. Collingwood (93). In *Verleiding* all the narratives and information contained within the framing narrative is presented in an attempt to solve the mystery of Lizelle's disappearance. The through-line in this miasma of plotlines within the framing narrative is Lizelle's biographical research on Marais. Thus the framing narrative and the primary framed narrative both contain elements of detective fiction as well as of life writing.

Edgar Allen Poe's three stories, featuring C. Auguste Dupin, are widely considered the most significant forerunners of the detective story – Poe's hero serving as a model, in particular, for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Peter Thomas in “Poe's Dupin and the Power of Detection”, points out that Dupin and the narrator's first encounter with each other in a library in their mutual search “for a hidden text, serves as a metaphor for detection” (12). Henry James too realises the detective story's inherent preoccupation with the process of

interpretation, especially of the connection of a criminal's work with his character. He then appropriates the popular detective story in two of his novellas, *The Figure in the Carpet* (1896) and *The Aspern Papers* (1888), establishing the mystery in both cases as the link between a writer's subjectivity and his writing, the "detectives" in both cases, being literati. Leatitia and Lizelle, created in this tradition, operate as detectives (biographer as detective), in search of hidden biographical facts about Marais. Their detection is also associated with books – a clue in Rousseau's biography of Marais and, of course, Marais's entire oeuvre. But then, their detection becomes a motif in a larger detective story – it is a detective story about a detective story. Two lives become the objects of detective work – Marais's and Lizelle's.

There is a curious moment however, when in a slide show presentation, Leatitia points to Lizelle's discovery of a mixture of occultic signs and Egyptian hieroglyphs in Marais's Bible which Lizelle was not as much unable as strangely unwilling to decipher – the features that most obviously signify the work of the detective as a decoder. Neither Leatitia nor Lizelle attempts to interpret these signs, and like several other loose ends in the plot, it passes on a measure of interpretive agency to the audience, by, at least triggering the curiosity about these un-pursued clues. Just as Leatitia (like Roubaix in Marais's stories) is seduced into the detective endeavour, the activation of the audience into the role of literary detective is a form of seduction. Stott refers to Ommundeson's uses of the metaphor of "the detective or researcher as a model for the reader's activity" when confronted with a work of metafiction (in Stott 44). She also describes postmodern biofictional texts as written "for an active and decoding reader who will have a more rewarding reading experience if he is interested in solving puzzles, making connections and using his knowledge of the world to understand a literary text" (43). Goodman quotes S.E. Sweeney who suggests that "the detective story [...] dramatises the act of narration [...] In other words, the detective story reflects reading itself" (193). Even Derrida in "The Purveyor of Truth", in reference to Poe's "The Purloined Letter", asks:

[W]hat occurs in the [...] deciphering of a text when the deciphered (text) [...] also inscribes in itself the scene of deciphering? [...] What happens [...] when a text, [of] [...] literary fiction [...] stages [...] analytical reading, assigns the analyst his position, shows him in search of truth, and even finding it, holding a discourse about the truth of the text and then pronouncing in general terms the discourse of truth, the truth of truth? ("Purveyor" 32)

Derrida's translator Allen Bass, comments in a footnote to this paragraph:

The term ‘scene’ is used by Derrida to emphasize the theatricality of literary representation. We have followed Jeffrey Mehlman's suggestion to translate ‘scene’ as scene when there is emphasis on visibility and as stage. (Bass in Derrida “Purveyor” 32)

*Verleiding* resembles James’s break from the detective fiction formula by leaving the mystery unsolved unless the audience may resolve it. P.D. James points to how the traditional detective novel’s promise of closure “reaffirms our belief – or our hope – that we live in a moral and comprehensible universe in which problems can be solved by human intelligence” (in Lewis “Sharing” 139), H.R F. Keating suggests that detective fiction “can make a temporary map for the readers out of the chaos of their surroundings” (3) and John G. Cawelti proposes that “the classical detective formula is perhaps the most effective fictional structure yet devised for creating the illusion of rational control over the mysteries of life” (137). Through *Verleiding*’s ultimate lack of narrative closure De Wet makes peace with the ineluctability of biocritical research, with or without her assistance, as a central human impulse, and she sets herself and Marais free.

The analysis that this particular text elicits makes it seem unfit for me not to give it a concluding Boswellian edge. If in its construction *Verleiding* engages the audience in questioning the reliability of any life-account, it does so even more to the life writer, more so to the biocritical literary scholar and most so to a biocritical scholar of Reza de Wet herself. Towards the end of my first year into the preceding Master’s project to this thesis, which was primarily works-based, I have already done an extensive amount of biographical research on De Wet. The irony was that the more I uncovered, the more I became aware of De Wet’s strong sense of privacy, and the quest for a fuller impression of the writer whose works I was analysing seemed increasingly counterintuitive. I could not proceed without mixed feelings. Like Lizelle and many biocritical scholars, I often dream of my subject. One speaks pertinently to this project. Two dreams stand out that have given me temporal psychological closure.

I dreamt De Wet was leading me across wetlands. Although by all accounts she was rather short, in this dream she was much taller than me, possibly signalling my sense of myself as falling short of being able ever capturing De Wet in all her scope. We were walking in silence and I was terrified of her, but I constantly dared looking up to her face, and each time, she was a different age; now young, then old, then much younger etc. I recall that at the time when I was dreaming this dream, I was collecting photographs of De Wet and tried to arrange it chronologically. The De Wet created by my subconscious was actively subverting my

endeavour. I narrate the fragment of that dream (it was much longer) not as a prophetic dictation of my approach at structuring this thesis, but rather, as an illustration thereof. Gordimer writes that “each of us lives a thousand lives and a novel gives a character only one, for the sake of the form” (Short” 168). While Gordimer wrote this in her reflection on the limits of the novel, the statement’s relevance to life writing is articulated in Benton’s remark that “historiography and fiction have been entwined since the beginnings of modern biography in the eighteenth century” (*Poetics* 2). One of the various concerns arising from the biography’s traditional narrative framework which closely resembles and has developed alongside that of the bildungsroman is precisely Gordimer’s comment on what she sees as the failure to map various “lives” and “selves” of a single individual. Holmes similarly expresses his frustration, during his research on Gérard de Nerval, with the conventional expectations of the life writer to “integrate the facets of his subject” instead of writing the separate lives of one person” (264). For her magisterial biography of Virginia Woolf, Lee had, however, rejected these assumptions and “decided to point up the artifice of the biographical narrative, and to concentrate on particular aspects of the life, on different Selves” (Lee *Biography* 122). In my thesis on Reza de Wet, I will adopt a similar approach which will consider various aspects of De Wet’s character shaped by her background and manifest in her writing.

### Chapter 3

#### **“I am deeply indebted to Jung”:**

#### **De Wet’s Idiosyncratic ‘Jungian’ Poetics**

“I am a ridiculous mixture – I have this grandiose side coupled with an enormous sense of insecurity. [...] It is a central issue in my life and I use psychotherapy to help and resolve this conflict.”

Reza de Wet in a 1988 interview with Di Paice (75).

“I am deeply indebted to Jung. I was in Jungian therapy for five years.”

Reza de Wet in a 1995 interview with Anja Huisman and Juanita Finestone (93).

“If I want to write something, if I want to exorcise some or other problem, then that is how it [the play] manifests. I mean that is how my psyche ... how *I* work.”

Reza de Wet in a 1987 interview with Riaan de Villiers (47)

De Wet had stressed the importance of Jungian psychoanalytic theory, both in her writing and in her worldview at large. As hinted to previously, her re-articulation of Jung’s ideas is idiosyncratic. In order to sensibly analyse her application of this strand of depth psychology in her creative writing, I will examine as much as possible of her paratextual elaborations on her ideas on this topic. This I will undertake by my perusal of the writing of Roger Brooke, her former Jungian psychologist, and interviews with a selection of her acquaintances. In order to explain De Wet’s individualised version of the Jungian model of the psyche, I will analyse the manifestation of one specific Jung-inspired archetype in her work, the animus, theorising the nature of its depiction by De Wet as it derives from her biographical reality. My use of De Wet’s own peculiar version of archetypal depth psychology to systematise my analysis of her work entails a use of psychoanalysis that requires qualification in view of its application, historically, on the two legs of biocritical scholarship: the analysis of a life, and the study of a literary oeuvre. In the previous chapters I allude both to rife debates

surrounding the empirical and hermeneutic legitimacy of the psychobiography as genre, and of the problems arising from the use of a strict Jungian literary analysis on De Wet's work. I here refine these points by delineating my own tenuous grasp of psychoanalysis in literary criticism, combined with the unavoidability of it in a project centring on a subject for whom psychoanalysis served as a cornerstone in her personal worldview and her writing

Psychotherapy was an integral facet of the greater part of De Wet's life (De Wet in Paice 75; Reardon Int. 1). Intensely introspective as she was, she not only prioritised regular psychological assessment, but she often combined her teaching with the deliverance of psychological advice. Several of her former students recall with appreciation the uniquely therapeutic benefits of receiving acting training, directing and even academic supervision from De Wet, remarking on her sharp perception of their insecurities and her habit of directing them through psychological blockages to reach the outcomes of their dramatic and academic studies (Int. Harrison; Int. Haxton; Int. Volks). It should come as no surprise then that psychoanalysis strongly informed De Wet's comprehension of her own writing. She often drew her readers' and audiences' attention, paratextually, to the psychoanalytical substructures of her narratives (De Wet in Botha "Meisie" 6; in De Villiers 47; in Huismans and Finestone 93-4; in Van Zyl 4) and of the role she understood her writing to have played for her in the cultivation of her own psychological health and growth (in De Villiers 47; in Hough "Daar" 14; in Huismans and Finestone 90-1; in Knox 79; in Paice 75; Van Biljon 1). This cuts to the core of biocritical scholarship and the role of psychoanalytic theory in both the interpretation of a life and of reading that life into a literary work – an endeavour that is debated again in the Humanities since the late nineties.

In this discourse two main concerns are contested – the way in which psychoanalytic modes of inquiry are applied in literary critique and the validity of psychoanalysis altogether. Leon Edel stresses the difference between the psychoanalyst and the life writer in terms of the work they do and the material to their disposal: firstly, the life writer deals with "inert data" while the psychoanalyst works with "the living subject" (146), and secondly, the life writer "is not a therapist" (146-7); her/his mandate is not to assess the subject's psychic health or to influence her/his behaviour. Edel, however, does not campaign for the erasure of psychoanalysis from literary studies, but rather, as a reckoned psychobiographer himself, for a responsible reformulation of its terminology in literary studies.

More radically, in 2012 Lisa Ruddick points to what she sees as an alarming imbalance between the application of psychoanalytic theory in the teaching of poststructuralist literary critique, and the developments in psychoanalytic practice since especially the 1980s (33). She considers the use of these frameworks as interpretive tools in literary criticism absurd in view of its low currency in the heterogeneous contemporary practical domain (33). Although comparably in the field of life writing Hermione Lee does not support what she sees as the dated bases of the psychobiography, she points to the unavoidable legacy of the psychoanalytic lexicon in the absorption of terms such as “complex”, “intro-” and “extroverted”, “Oedipal”, “anal”, and the “unconscious” into everyday speech. Even opponents as strident as Richard Webster in *Why Freud was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis* (1995) maintain that “psychoanalysis has every claim to be regarded as richer than any other intellectual tradition in the twentieth century” (14). Laura Mandell encapsulates his concession aphoristically when she writes that “the battle over whether to employ [Freud’s/psychoanalytic] techniques may be over, but the victory is yet to be sealed” (47).

One way of dealing with the founding psychoanalytic canon is to treat it as an influential genre (or a cluster of genres) of literature. Harold Bloom predicts in 1994 that Freud “will survive as a great essayist like Montaigne or Emerson, not as the founder of therapy” (*Western* 3), evoking to some degree Barthes’s demythification of the idea of metalanguages. Bloom’s statement may be exaggerated, but in accordance with a poststructuralist logic that psychoanalysis has partly inspired in the first place, the order by which discursive authority is allocated to literature and its criticism in relation to each other has in fact been updated. This entails not merely an inversion of discursive authority such as conducting “a Shakespearean reading of Freud” instead of a “Freudian reading of Shakespeare” as Bloom suggests (*Western* 8). Rather, Susan Rowland addresses this result, explaining that the “poststructuralist dissection of the authoritative claims of discourses has enabled a critical experimentation in which conventional priorities are swapped to allow literature to be read as illuminating, and even contesting, the precepts of Freudian theory” – and by implication psychoanalytic theory at large (1). But instead of declaring the ultimate redundancy of psychoanalysis in literary critique, she optimistically describes a resultant dialectic which “constructs a more complex and intimate bond between the literary corpus and the discourse of psychoanalysis” (1). Ruth Parker-Gounelas in *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (1999) makes a similar point when she suggests that if

in a sense the two (the psychic and the cultural) can be seen as different languages, which when transposed the one into the other must incur the loss involved in all translation, the gain from the conjunction must be not merely a change in the status of each individually, the way each discipline is prepared to re-define itself in relation to the other, but the production of a new discourse (xiv)

I have already pointed in Chapter Two to De Wet's adaptation rather than her formulaic application of Jungian theory in her writing, the nature of which I will further unpack below. In that light her work demands precisely the sort of dialectic approach that Rowland and Parker-Gounelas propose. While I will favour Jung as a supreme philosophical (and in fact, *aesthetic*) influence on her writing, I will do so from my understanding of De Wet as his irreverent and heretical disciple, quite favourably so, if I underwrite Bloom's suggestion that "[a]ny strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts" (8).

This still leaves me to declare and define my use of psychoanalysis in reading De Wet's life. By the nature of this project I am automatically assuming the expertise of the depth psychologist with every interpretation I make of each of De Wet's actions, earning the pejorative of the biocritical scholar as "amateur psychologist" (Korf 6). Firstly, I emphasise that I will not be using Jungian theory to read De Wet's life beyond my regard of his ideas as influential on her worldview, lifestyle and her writing. In fact, I will not consciously be committed to any psychoanalytic school of thought. This avoidance on my part stems not from a disdain of the field, but from the fact that I myself am not formally trained in the behavioural sciences. I have close-read most of Jung, but as Edel asserts, a life writer "learns next to nothing about psychoanalysis by getting it out of books" (*Writing* 144). My undergraduate and postgraduate education entailed training in dramatic arts and literary studies in which psychoanalytic theory is used in a filtered form, and rarely taught by certified psychoanalysts. I will however regard the productive potentials of my laymanship, considering my naïve approach as capable of generating insights that may have been overlooked through overly dogmatic conceptual lenses. On the other hand, the research generated by this thesis, made available in the public domain, is inevitably rendered subject to revision by future researchers more thoroughly qualified in psychology and psychoanalysis.

An examination of De Wet's personalisation of Jungian theory demands a survey of her understanding of creative writing's connection with her subconscious and the role it played in

relation to the therapy she received. On the one hand she pathologised her writing impulse. To Roline Norval she described it as a “slumbering disease” that re-emerges unpredictably from time to time (in Norval “Reza se Vriend” 6). This she suggested stemmed from a psychologically troubled time in her youth that to her mind partially coincided with her birth as a writer (in Hough “Kleintyd” 2; Knox 77; Luyt). She told Cathy Knox of *Fair Lady* that she “was a troubled little girl and adolescent, tortured by dreams, unconscious fears and terrors, and a chaotic tangle of intuitions”, resulting in frequent “nervous breakdowns” (77). These collapses, she said, lead to bouts of “automatic writing” (in Hough “Kleintyd” 2). Friends of De Wet relate her recollections of writing, compulsively and vandalistically on her bedroom’s walls and other household surfaces during these fits she suffered in her late teens (Int. McGarry; Int. Otto). The close link she drew between this loss of a sense of psychic balance and the impulse to write persisted in her description of her creative process in her later life. It often manifested in her literal personification of inspiration, by suggesting that she was driven by spirits to write (Int. Basson 3. Int. Eliot). During such times she experienced writing as a torturous process (Int. Cronje; Int. Scholtz), accompanied by anxiety (De Wet in Welman “Reza se Nuwe” 82; L.RdW-MM 1988ND; Int. Cronje), insomnia (De Wet in Welman “Reza se Nuwe” 82; L.RdW-MM 1988ND) and an inability, at times, to distinguish between the imagined world of her fiction and that outside of it (in Horn 17).

On the other hand, she saw this spur to write as an instinctual form of remedy for the imbalances that she understood these mental states symptomized. Most generally, De Wet emphasised the therapeutically expressive capacities of making fiction (in Huisman and Finestone 89; in Paice 75) and often described her creative acts (especially dramaturgy) as a form of auto-exorcism (in De Villiers 47; in Hough “Daar” 14; in Knox 79; Van Biljon 1). She interpreted her drive to write as an organic edificatory impulse, one that would gain a more studied dimension through her introduction to Jungian therapy in her early twenties (in Knox 79).

It seems only natural that De Wet, with her fascination with myth, fairy tales, folklore, ritual, dreams and the paranormal, would gravitate to Jung who hardly distinguished between his study of the human mind and his taxonomisation of religious, mystical and paranormal experiences on an almost encyclopaedic scale. His theories would be instrumental in De Wet’s quest to regain a sense of psychic coherence. It accommodates experiences of the supernatural and encourages the impetus of the psyche drawn to the mystical dimensions of human expression. Unlike the rationalising outcomes of Freudian-based psychoanalysis, the

school of Jungian theory De Wet was exposed to in therapy does not entail a negation of her propensity to magical thinking, but a systematisation of it that seemed to have assisted her in navigating her mind through her so-called “chaotic tangle of intuitions”. Jung, after all, as De Wet’s therapist Roger Brooke points out, “was concerned to address the phenomena of psychological life ‘on their own terms,’ in ways that did not violate the integrity of experience” (*Pathways* 1).<sup>111</sup> Post-Jungian theorist Susan Rowland similarly reminds that “Jung remains a boon to artists who want to take spiritual experience seriously” and “[e]ssentially, Jung’s autonomous psyche offers a wider canvas for competing forms of reality to be represented” (13). This take on Jung is not shared by all his followers, as asserted in the works of Richard P. Sugg, Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen, but it may derive from his proclamation in *Man and His Symbols* that

modern man does not understand how much his rationalism (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numinous symbols and ideas) has put him at the mercy of the psychic ‘underworld’. He has freed him from ‘superstition’, but in the process his moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated and he is now paying the price for this break-up in the world-wide disorientation and dissociation. (94)<sup>112</sup>

Jung goes as far as suggesting that for “the sake of mental stability and even physiological health, the unconscious and the conscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines” and that if “they are split apart or ‘dissociated,’ psychological disturbance follows” (49).

De Wet’s reference to archetypal psychology early in her Master’s thesis substantiates this particular motivation to undergo Jungian therapy. Completed in 1978, at the age of 26, seven years before she debuted as a playwright, she flags her interest in “the dichotomy between conscious and unconscious aspects of the modern man’s psyche” which she understands as resultant “partly from the fragmentation of a unifying myth” (11). She quotes Jean Charon

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<sup>111</sup> He further emphasised that Jung insisted “that the phenomena of experience be accepted on their own terms – spirituality, for example, should be accepted as such and should not be reduced to the vicissitudes of Oedipal sexuality; his search always for the meaning of phenomena rather than, say, their supposed antecedent causes; his insistence that the meaning of psychological phenomena (e.g. symbols in a dream) are latencies within the manifest phenomena themselves, so that, in other words, phenomena are not merely signs pointing to something substantively different; his respect for the telos of psychological life; his explicitly hermeneutic method; and his acknowledgement that all psychology, even his own, is perspectival, a ‘subjective confession,’ and that there is no privileged arbitrator who can decide between competing points of view” (Brooke 9).

<sup>112</sup> At another point Jung similarly reasons that “whether you believe in a demon of the air or in a factor in the unconscious that plays diabolical tricks on you is all one to me. The fact that man’s imagined unity is menaced by alien powers remains the same in either case. Theologians would do better to account for once ?? quoted correctly? these psychological facts than to go on ‘demythologizing’ them with rationalistic explanations that are a hundred years behind time.” (43)

from his *Man in Search of Himself* (1967) in which he conceptualises religion as “the continual quest of man for a better equivalence between the conscious symbols and unconscious archetypes” (102) and aligns it with Jung’s suggestion in *Man and His Symbols* that humankind’s “organs of assimilation” between different regions of his psyche have always been “numinous symbols, held holy by common consent” (94). She sees “symbol and myth” as constitutive “of man’s quest for formulating and structuring archetypal unconscious experience” and as such De Wet suggests that

the disintegration of a prevailing living myth caused man’s radical alienation from the deeper, irrational regions of his consciousness and his ‘advanced consciousness’ has deprived itself of the means by which the auxiliary contributions of the instincts and the unconscious can be assimilated.  
 (“Predicament” 12)

Jung provides with his theories of the collective unconscious and the process of individuation – “the *raison d’être* of the Self” (in Stevens 61) –, exactly such a unifying (meta-) myth, – the *unus mundus*” / “the unitary world”, as he called it (*Man* 57), that affirms and accommodates the “irrational”, “superstitious” and numinous phenomena that have affected De Wet so deeply. Even so he does not fail to maintain a measure of open-endedness regarding much of his fundamental hypotheses, a factor De Wet would undoubtedly find enticing with her general disregard of fundamentalism. She makes this Jungian theory of the self-destructive rise of secularism in the West during the twentieth century the premise of her thesis. She refers to it as the Western subject’s central “predicament”, hence the title *The Predicament of Contemporary Man as Exemplified in Six Modern Dramas*. De Wet’s thesis brings the works of six playwrights in conversation with Jung, resulting in a work of scholarship that is at the same time an early manifesto of her aesthetic philosophy and a personal poetics.

Jung’s valuation of symbolic expression, the equal merit he grants the irrational and the affective next to the rational and analytic, and his esteem of magical thinking, makes him an obviously pertinent figure in twentieth-century aesthetic philosophy for a study of the psychological and sublime in the arts. His theories elevate artistic expression to the level of the mystical and the cosmic, much like Susan Sontag’s reasoning in “The Aesthetics of Silence” (1967) and Kristeva’s reformulation of Barthes and Lacan’s theories of the affect in artistic appreciation in *Desire in Language* (1980). These notions informed a channelling of the view of the artist as mystic from both ancient Greek poetics and Romanticism into the 1960s and 1970s during the emergence of the New Age movement (Arp 780). In a socio-historical context that has lost what Jung sees as a crucial trust in the experience of the

numinous, the arts create a psychological space in which even the most rational subject can freely explore its irrational dimensions reverently, even if it excludes the compromise of reason altogether; it creates through the required willing suspension of disbelief (a phrase I consciously borrow from Coleridge in this discussion of a neo-Romanticism) an access of the experiential fields that logos deny through rationalisation.

On these terms Jungian therapy must have impacted De Wet's sense of creative writing profoundly as being a vital part of her psychological survival. It became an important tool in expressing and engaging with the sometimes-unsettling mystical impressions arising from her unconscious (in Dyll 3). Consequently, she was uncompromising about her writing habits and unashamed of what may have appeared as indulgences such as taking off from work when she felt inspired, refusing to see anyone in the morning before 11:00 am (in Du Plessis "Diepe" 50; Welman "Ma's" 36), and while she was working on a draft, being very harsh on her neighbours if she considered them rowdy (in Du Plessis "Diepe" 50; in Nieuwoudt 3).

But it was not first and foremost as a professional writer that De Wet would have found this Jungian perspective on artistic expression liberating. She claimed that writing has been "a way of life" long before she had made it "a public thing" (Huismand and Finestone 89) and Reardon stressed that even by the time they had married (the year when she had finished her Master's thesis) there was still no sense that she had taken her pet ambition to become a novelist (in Hough "Meer" 14; Ross 14) seriously (in Minervini "Partners" 8). And even though she had studied drama and enjoyed a short but successful career as a stage actress, she was a lecturer in literary studies before she debuted as a playwright and became a special professor of drama. Literature, writing and the arts at large all had an indiscriminately crucial psycho-social value for De Wet. But later, she had broadcasted, again and again, her views of the special capacities of theatre as genre to reinstall the wider consciousness that she had believed, with Jung, the Western subject had lost.

De Wet founds this view on the fact that the performing arts with its oral tradition originated before scripted literature and she reminds that "drama has been linked to the gestation and birth of our culture" (*Predicament* iii). As such she had seen theatre as "a sacred precinct" for its unique reliance on "ritual" resulting in "transformative ecstasy" or catharsis (in Solberg 187-8). She described it as a "liberating ritual connected to the unconscious" (in Greeff 94)<sup>113</sup> which enables it to stimulate a "heightened consciousness", which she describes in her

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<sup>113</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "teater is 'n bevrydende ritueel wat in die onderbewuste fungeer" (in Greeff 94).

typically impassioned vocabulary as “capable of changing your chemical make-up, changing you biologically in some mysterious way” (in Solberg 187). She believed theatre “could bring back the sense of awe and mystery” (in Solberg 187) which she supposed the Western subject has lost. She reminds that the drama’s origin lies in the religious (in Botha “Meisie” 6)<sup>114</sup>; that it has in its original form it is “been closely concerned with man’s relationship to the divine” (*Predicament* iii), which to Jung was synonymous to the collective unconscious. Therefore, she argued that

theatre – both in the East and the West and in an African context – has always evolved from *ritual invocations of the unknowable*, the ‘truth’ of theatre is still linked to magical thinking, to transformation, to exorcism, and to heightened states of consciousness. (De Wet in Jamal in Krueger 171, emphasis added)

It is this ritualistic dimension of theatre that makes it more intensely facilitative of cathartic experiences in the audience member than for the reader or the spectator of other genres. Ritual entails both the immediacy of actual bodies in a space and the dynamic unpredictable nuances of performance; at one point when she explains her wished response in the audience she refers to the play as an “event” (in Huisman and Finestone 94). Theatrical performance occasions an inimitable intensity of propinquity and tactility that sharpens and implicates the whole range of the audience’s senses. It is this temporal and corporeal dimension of the theatrical experience that De Wet emphasised when in an interview with Rolf Solberg she mused that theatre has the

profound function of transforming. To enlighten or to inform is deadly. Transformation is radiant. To inform does nothing. It only goes into your mind. The other, [...] goes into your whole body – the snake that lies on the ground, when someone plays the drums it resounds through the whole body. That is what is needed, desperately needed!” (in Solberg 188-9).

This dynamic and bodily dimension of the theatrical experience involves and enforces the audience’s libidinal and intuitive tools of perception. Bodies respond subconsciously, affectively, un-cerebrally to other bodies in a shared space. This communal dimension then formed part of the qualities of theatre that for De Wet renders it redemptive to a society that she sees as repressive of intuition. She proclaimed that “[n]othing moves her more deeply than the ‘mystical union between actors, writer and audience’” (Campbell 25), describing theatre as a “communicative ritualistic experience between actors and audience” (in Du Plessis “Ander

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<sup>114</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Die drama se oorsprong lê immers in die religieuse.” (Botha “Meisie” 6)

Lig” 5; in Botha “Meisie” 6) and as a “sensational event that involves everyone, beyond culture and language” (in Solberg 187).

Ultimately, she stated that “it is the kinetic energy of theatre that attracted” her; the fact that a “production must always be in flux, always in becoming” (in Greeff 94).<sup>115</sup> This description stands in line with a crucial element of De Wet’s identity conception. She felt strongly about the idea of the self as fluid and constantly under construction (in Nieuwoudt 3). She delighted in the possibilities of the subject to redefine itself and she identified this belief as something she actively taught her students (3).<sup>116</sup> Thus, for De Wet there is a crucial link between the drama as form and the psyche for and by which it is created to express and engage.<sup>117</sup> In this way, the capricious aspects of theatrical performance reflect what she described as a “volatile situation”, namely the “constant shifting energies within me” (in Huismans and Finestone 90-1). This evokes Jung’s implicit comparison of the process of individuation to theatre, when he described it as a “process [which] runs a dramatic course” (*Four* 3).

But it was not just this unpredictable nature of theatrical performance that made it apt for De Wet to express her psyche; it was the symbiosis between these dynamic elements and the rigidities that contain it. She relates this to the interplay in the psyche between the structuring consciousness and the freer and playful unconscious. For her

theatre is an embodiment of [...] [the psyche]. It is a medium with a masculine framework, with hard restrictions; restrictions of movement, space and time. You cannot hear what the characters think, only what they say. There is a circumscribed space, there is an audience. But if something happens in contrast to those parameters, when freedom acquires wings within that framework, the impact is so much greater. (in Botha “Meisie” 6)<sup>118</sup>

De Wet’s use of the term “masculine” again, is archetypal. She claimed to have sensed “masculine presences within myself,” and “feminine presences as well” (in Huismans and

<sup>115</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Dis die kinetiese energie van teater wat haar aantrek. ’n Produksie, praat sy, moet vloeiend bly. Altyd in wording.” (Greeff 94)

<sup>116</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Sy leer haar studente om hul los te maak van die idee dat ’n mens getipeer kan word en dat elke mens noodwendig ’n bepaalde identiteit het. ‘Ek dink ’n mens kry ’n klomp goed uit jou verlede bymekaar en dink dan dit is wie jy is. Maar dis nie so nie. Jy ondergaan gedurig transformasies. Ek wil nie aan myself as ’n spesifieke mens dink nie. Ek wil so ‘oop’ moontlik wees vir my is elke oomblik van die dag sinoniem met nuwe moontlikhede” (Nieuwoudt 3)

<sup>117</sup> For this reason De Wet had a special reverence for dramatic genres that explicate the form’s relationship with the subconscious, such as Strindberg’s expressionistic dream plays, Maeterlinck’s symbolist dramas, and plays with a ritual structure ranging from traditional forms such as Noh theatre, medieval liturgical dramas, Chewa masques and modernist metatheatre such as Genette’s *The Maids*.

<sup>118</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Vir my is die teater daarvan ’n versinnebeelding. Dis ’n medium met ’n manlike raam, met harde beperkings. Beperkings op beweging, plek, tyd. Jy kan nie hoor wat die karakters dink nie, net wat hulle sê. Daar is ’n omskrewe ruimte, daar is ’n gehoor. Maar as iets in teenstelling met daardie grense gebeur, as die vryheid binne daardie raamwerk vlerke kry, is dit des te treffender” (in Botha “Meisie” 6)

Finestone 91) and “feeling torn between a dominant male side and a fragile female side” (in Paice 74). Her adaptation of archetypal theory entails, essentially, a conflation of Jung’s distinction between the rational and irrational in the individual psyche, and the archetypes of the animus and the anima that help structure the collective unconscious. While archetypes, as Jungian scholar Anthony Stevens explains, “combine the universal with the individual” (50), Jung’s contention is that the “contents of the personal unconscious are chiefly the feeling-toned complexes” while the “contents of the collective unconscious, [...] are known as archetypes” (*Four* 2), which are “universally present in the preconscious makeup of the human psyche” (*Man* 110). They “are the link between the rational world of consciousness and the world of instinct” (Jung *Man* 48), not the personifications of these opposing registers.<sup>119</sup>

In De Wet’s mythology this conceptualisation of the individual and the collective unconscious is thus more symmetrical – the singular psyche is equally plural in its composition to the collective one. But she clearly retains in her rendition of Jung his view of “the structure of the psyche as an ‘energetic system [...] dependent on the tension of opposites’” (Jung *Four* 36; Rowland 20), and she translates this into archetypal terms. Her conception of the anima and animus, as coexistent in the single individual psyche, seems to be an alteration of Jung’s “division of the world into objective and subjective categories (scientific and personal, rational and irrational)”, a self-division he made between his “so-called No. 1 and No. 2 personalities”, the No. 1 personality being “rational, scientific, and public” balanced by his “No. 2 personality”, which is “intuitive, spiritual, and private – and [...] more intimately real” (Brooke *Pathways* 12).

Through her merging of two mutually exclusive Jungian concepts De Wet seem to be taming Jung’s theory from uncomfortably essentialist leanings to a version that provides more potential to especially the female subject. Rowland remarks that Jung’s

theory is possessed by an ambiguous treatment of essentialism. It refuses essentialism in locating the feminine in the psyches of males and yet betrays a cultural slippage into essentialism when he generalises from his concept of his own masculine subjectivity. In the masculine psyche the feminine is unconscious and, therefore, by projecting from this, women are condemned as innately more unconscious than men. (16)

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<sup>119</sup> Stevens reminds that “Jung never made a clear distinction between the terms ‘ego’ and ‘consciousness’” (62).

In this way, she shows how “Jungian writings contain a powerful misogynistic drive to collapse women into animas” as they become “doubly marginalised, first as animas and then because animas are valued only when resident in the masculine unconscious” (16). Thus, regardless of the hermeneutic soundness of De Wet’s feminist sanitisation of Jung’s gender construction, it is a vital dualism in her worldview fashioned from his work and built into her rationalisation of her own. To register De Wet’s synthesis of Jung’s No 1. and No. 2 personalities of the individual psyche into the anima and animus of the collective one, I will use her terms for it which is more explicitly gendered: the Masculine and Feminine principles – capitalised to mark its “De Wetean” inflection.

From various epitextual comments, De Wet’s nuanced definition of the two principles can be assembled here. She connects the Masculine principle with the hunger for “power and control” (in Botha “Meisie” 6), “legalism” (Van Zyl 4), “restrictions” and “strictures” (6), “order and structure” (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in Huismans and Finestone 90), “imposing a particular order on others” (in Huismans and Finestone 91), “categorising” people (90), “things being clearly circumscribed” (91), a fixation with “parameters” (in Botha “Meisie” 6), a need to “define” (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in Huismans and Finestone 90), and “separate” (in Huismans and Finestone 90), an exaggerated emphasis on “divisions” (90), “didacticism” (in Van Zyl 4), an accent on the “rational”, on “consciousness”, and expressed in symbols such as “linear[ity]” and “daylight” (in Huismans and Finestone 91). She defines the Feminine principle, oppositely, by “greater freedom” (91), especially “psychological” and “emotional” freedom (in Van Zyl 4), “endless possibilities”, unending “evolution”, “receptiveness and passivity” (in Botha “Meisie” 6), “creativity”, “eroticism” (in Huismans and Finestone 91), “intuition” (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in Huismans and Finestone 90-1; in Van Zyl 4), “intuitive observations and powers” (in Van Zyl 4), “mysticism” (in Botha “Meisie” 6), and symbolised by the “night” (in Finestone and Huismans 91). De Wet’s ideal of juggling these principles in a single psyche (whereas in their Jungian overtones they find distinctive expression in the different sexes) evokes initial feminist celebrations of Jungian psychology for its provision of a framework with which to imagine psychic androgyny. This point, however, requires a consideration of De Wet’s positioning of herself in relation to feminist rhetoric.

De Wet had firmly asserted that she was “not a feminist” (in Pretorius n.p.) and that she has “never consciously regarded feminism as informing anything I have written” (in Huismans

and Finestone 90). Even so, several of her claims and concerns with regards to gender are fundamentally feministic. This includes her hostility to patriarchy (in Burger “Nag” 3),<sup>120</sup> her insistence on artistic androgyny (in Huismans and Finestone 90),<sup>121</sup> her contradictory aversion to male literary ventriloquism (in Burger “Nag” 3),<sup>122</sup> and her concern with normative societal systems that marginalise female artists as “mad” (Int. De Wet; Int. Lossgott)<sup>123</sup> aligned with major brands of feminism, from both a literary and more broadly

<sup>120</sup> In an interview with Pretorius, De Wet reflected on the influence of her childhood on her writing saying that “I was overwhelmed as a child by a patriarchal system, the masculine dominated way of thought. It’s a constant form of censorship, concerning the responses to anything that tries to go the other way” (n.p.). To Kobus Burger she expressed her view that “patriarchy does not work anymore and to Barrie Hough in an interview on *Diepe Grond* De Wet describes patriarchy as a “destructive” system (“Kleintyd” 2). The whole world is plagued by it. It is a sort of disease” [“Patriargie werk net nie meer nie. Die hele wêreld word daardeur geteister. Dit is ’n soort siekte.”] (“Nag” 3). Feminism is largely defined as arising “in resistance to the gender binary enforced by the patriarchy almost always defined directly in relation to patriarchy” (Richards 143). A key text in this regard in feminist critique is Gerda Lerner’s *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1987).

<sup>121</sup> Anja Huismans and Juanita Finestone’s asked De Wet how she felt about being labelled a “woman writer” (90). Bartho Smit, to whom she had first dedicated *Diepe Grond*, had initially discouraged De Wet to write plays, since he saw poetry more suitable for women, but had deemed her the best female playwright after he had seen *Diepe Grond*. De Wet the dedicated the play to him as a homage, since he succumbed to cancer the following year.

Yvette Hutchison and Kole Omotoso suggest, for instance, in their introduction to *Open Space: Six Contemporary Plays from South Africa*, that De Wet’s subject position as “as a woman playwright writing in Afrikaans” influenced the “unusual perspective” her plays shed “on Afrikaner culture in South Africa” (1). De Wet responded that “[c]ategorising male and female [...] has never been [...] a primary concern” for her, as she strove to “become psychically androgynous” and “this categorising seems to work against it” since an acceptance of such “divisions” in her view, means “accepting those structures” (in Huismans and Finestone 90). De Wet’s stance is, in feminist debate, wittingly or unwittingly, dual. On the one hand she is positioning herself against gynocriticism, the study of “the female author and character [which] develops theories and methodologies based on female experience, the touchstone of authenticity” (Eagleton *Feminist* 9). This idea is proposed most distinctly by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and by Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) – she coins the term in her essay “A Criticism of Our Own”. On the other hand, De Wet also opposes the less biologist notion of an *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) which denotes “a writing which is typically, characteristically feminine in style, language, and feeling and completely different from (and opposed to) male language and discourse”, based “not on biological determinism so much as on social and economic factors and their psychological consequences” (Cuddon 248; 316). As such the *écriture féminine* is often described as “a writing effect” as it “asserts not the sexuality of the text but the textuality of the sex” (10). The most significant proponents hereof are Hélène Cixoux in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), Luce Irigaray in *This Sex which is not One* (1977), Julia Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984). In contrast to these “essentialist” stances in feminist literary critique (whether sexually or textually) De Wet’s view is what Cuddon would call “relativist” (316).

<sup>122</sup> De Wet voiced her own confliction with speaking as a woman on behalf of Chekhov in her biofictional *The Brothers and Broers* saying that “I feel comfortable to talk about women. It is more familiar to me. It drives me crazy when a male author writes in the first person as a woman or vice versa. One must respect it” [“Ek voel gemaklik om oor vrouens te praat. Dit is meer aan my bekend. Dit maak my mal as ’n manlike skrywer in die eerste persoon oor ’n vrou skryf, en omgekeerd. ’n Mens moet dit maar respekteer.”] (in Burger “Nag” 3). This issue is expounded at great length by Elizabeth D. Harvey in *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (1992) and by Helena Davies in *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (2012).

<sup>123</sup> A former student of De Wet, Emma de Wet, recalls: “Reza supervised a paper I wrote on hysteria and the representation of female insanity on stage. She was brilliantly incisive in her feedback, such a keen academic. She was absolutely fascinated by women, women in difficult situations, women misunderstood because of their gifts, because of the times in which they lived.” (Int.). The manner in which women’s deviation from patriarchal ideals have been effectively repressed by constructing it as symptoms of madness has been thoroughly theorised, particularly in second wave feminism, by Phyllis Chesler in *Women and Madness* (1972), Barbara

political perspective. She also quotes feminist theorists in her Master's thesis and she taught feminist plays such as Carol Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and Susan Glasspell's *Trifles*. This makes it challenging in a scholarly project to ignore her views' resonance with notions generated in critical theory from relevant feminist domains.

This paradoxical relationship to feminism is not unusual. Feminist theorist Margaret Walters remarks on how often "we hear women anxiously asserting 'I'm not a feminist but...' as they go on to make claims that depend upon, and would be impossible without, a feminist groundwork" (3), something gender activist Sharon Heywood admits to have done before she grew comfortable with the term (100). Publisher Lennie Goodings similarly comments that "it is not an unusual phenomenon when someone from a group represented as a minority raises their head above the parapet" (79). While on the one hand Walters points to a long history of the use of the word "feminism" as a pejorative, dating back to its earliest appearance in the Oxford English Dictionary, she posits research that demonstrates women's fear of being deemed misandristic (3), fundamentalist (4), and as committed "not simply to ideas, but to a generalized ideology" (5). bell hooks, Sharon Haywood and Bidisha SK Mamata have ascribed this aversion to the success of a misogynistic media industry that has done "a fine job" during and since the emergence of second wave feminism "of depicting feminists as militant, hairy and angry" (in Haywood 100), suggesting that "most people learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media" (in Haywood 129).

Whether such impressions of feminism were visited upon De Wet is unclear, but she demonstrated in epitextual commentary a strong resistance to being claimed as a playwright, by any political group. She "refuse[d] to be taken up as a symbol" or "the figurehead of something or other" (in Solberg 181). Always stressing her ideal of creating cathartic, transcendental, theatre for theatre's sake (in Norval "Feesviering" 2), she felt repulsed by didacticism (in Pople "Galgehumor" 3; in Huismans and Finestone 95), political statements, and agitprop (in Campbell 25; in Du Plessis "Lig" 5; Duvenhage 39;<sup>124</sup> in Greeff 94; in Huismans and Finestone 95; in Jamal "Between" 35; in Luyt; in Solberg 187). De Wet conceded that ideas "emerge from plays" organically (Luyt) and that none of her plays are

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Ehrenreich and Deirdre English in *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (1973), Luce Iregaray's *Speculum de l'autre femme* (1974), Shoshana Felman in *Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy* (1975), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) and Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1987).

<sup>124</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Ek dink mense is moeg om oor en oor dieselfde skuld gevoelens in die teater te moet beleef. Daar moenie te veel klem op sosiale kommentaar wees nie" (Duvenhage 39).

completely void of identity politics – “issues with capital letters”, as she called it (in Botha “Meisie” 6).<sup>125</sup> But she both resisted being represented by activists and representing political ideologies. Therefore, she emphasised her delight in constantly changing her mind on these stances (in Nieuwoudt 3). If she claimed not to be a feminist, she did not discredit a belief in gender equality; rather, she was detaching herself from conscious political activism. She did not want to appear as if her ideas on equality were mere regurgitations of a specific philosophy so that her writing could be read reductively as mouthpieces of a cause.

Feminism has of course long been debunked as “a monolithic, conformist stance that is singular” as Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl point out in the preface to the 1997 edition of their aptly titled *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary and Theoretical Criticism* (x). There is “no one kind of feminism and no one kind of feminist” (Appignanesi, Holmes and Orbach 4); rather, as Mary Eagleton puts it, feminist theory “is a broad church with a number of co-operating and competing approaches” (2). Controversially, yet influentially, Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) not only unsettles the categories of “feminism”, and “woman” but also of “gender” (7-9)<sup>126</sup> – a logical consequence of the linguistic and performative turns of the 1960s and 1970s. Since there is now “space for lots of different ‘shades’ of feminism, femaleness and femininity”, Goodings argues that women averse to feminist representation can find solace in the fact that “one of us does not stand for all of us” (79). From this wide, pluralistic field, a rich lexicon is generated that articulate many of the themes central to De Wet’s writing. While sensitive to her ambivalences about women’s rights activism, I will nevertheless adopt and apply concepts generated by, for instance, Julia Kristeva<sup>127</sup> and Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick amongst others where it can effectively elucidate the complex gender relations played out in De Wet’s works, which in its entirety, according to Basson, can be seen as an attack on patriarchy (“Introduction” *Plays One* 18). I will also

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<sup>125</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Eintlik skryf sy ook glad nie oor onderwerpe met hoofletters nie. Die Geskiedenis. Die Land. Die Afrikaner. Die Politiek. ‘Ek skryf maar oor dinge wat by my spook. Maar ek is mos ’n Afrikaner. Dis alles deel van die hele besigheid!” (Botha “Meisie” 6).

<sup>126</sup> Butler posits the instability of the category feminism by suggesting that if “a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal” (7-8). This entails the questioning of an assumption that gender is merely the cultural “interpretation of sex” since, taken “to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders” (9). It also involves an acknowledgement of “a history of how the duality of sex was established, a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a variable construction” (9).

<sup>127</sup> Kristeva uses the phrase ‘subject in process’ to convey how ‘our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled.’ Following this interpretation, Moi considers Woolf’s exploration of multiple selves [in *A Room of One’s Own*] not as a loss of integrity, but as an interrogation of humanism’s obsession with the individual, and an opening up of subjectivity to change” (Eagleton *Feminist* 11).

not refrain from describing certain dramatic and narrative strategies she employs as “feminist”.

Gender occupies an indisputably central position in De Wet’s writing, and while she stressed the inherently androgynous nature of the Feminine and Masculine principles in her definition of it (in Huisman s and Finestone 90),<sup>128</sup> she still related the disruption of this balanced binary to the gendering drives in both her family and her broader (highly gendered) cultural context. Retrospectively, De Wet had coloured her lived experiences of two spaces between which she regularly commuted during her formative years – Bloemfontein, the capital of the Free State, and Senekal, a small town in the eastern region of that province – in terms of the Feminine/Masculine binary. Senekal was the birth town of her mother and the hometown of her maternal grandmother, while Bloemfontein was the workplace of her father and the location of her alma mater, Oranje Christian National Girl’s School. In public interviews De Wet had favoured Senekal above Bloemfontein (in De Villiers 47; in Luyt). Like her mother, she was also born in Senekal (in Greeff 94; Luyt) and had spent all her holidays there (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in De Villiers 47; in Luyt; in Pople “Galgehumor” 3). Due to what she deemed as an unconventionally liberal upbringing by her mother and grandmother (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in Ross 14), both whom she described as aesthetes, voracious readers, enthusiasts of the arts and as profoundly in touch with their intuitions (in Blumberg 248; Knox 77; Brümmer “Vrou” 4; Handley n.p.; in Huisman s and Finestone 89; in Luyt; Nieuwoudt 3; Welman “Ma’s” 36; Ross 14), she recalled her life in Senekal as more colourful (in Botha “Meisie” 6), more “intimate and intuitive” (in Barnard 18), and “wider and borderless” (in De Villiers 47).

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<sup>128</sup> De Wet maintained that “Masculinity and Femininity” in her terms “are not sexual categories” (in Huisman s and Finestone 90).



**Figure 3: De Wet's grandmother's house in Senekal<sup>129</sup>**

Bloemfontein, in contrast, was for De Wet, the “heartland” of the Afrikanerdom (Greeff 94), associating the institutions that regulated her life there with “a narrow-minded form of” this culture (in Greeff 98; in Barnard 18); she called her alma mater an “embodiment of a rational Calvinistic life order of rules, traditions and conventional structures of authority” (in Barnard 18). Bloemfontein is also South Africa's legal capital which, together with the Dutch reformed Church and the public school system, typically formed the three-headed patriarchal super-ego of girls of De Wet's demography.



**Figure 4: Hendrik Francois de Wet at his house in Bloemfontein**

<sup>129</sup> This photograph was taken in front of Reza's grandmother's house in Senekal. Reza is far right, next to her friend “Bessie” (surname unknown) and her cousin Cheryl van Eyssen far left. Photograph provided by June van Eyssen.

De Wet's narration of a dream she had when she was "about seventeen or eighteen" (Pretorius n.p.), the age she associated with her psychological collapse and birth as a writer (in Hough "Kleintyd" 2; Knox 77), demonstrates both her connection of the Feminine and Masculine principles with her experience of gendering in her family, and of her favouring of the Feminine principle in her own development:

I had a dream that my paternal grandfather had died and we all had to go to the funeral. I never knew my paternal grandmother, but I can see some jewellery that she left my mother: amethysts and beautiful earrings. And everyone went off to my paternal grandfather's funeral but as we approached, the stench of the decaying corpse became overwhelming, so I turned back home, and I found my unknown paternal grandmother sitting who said, 'Don't go there, you don't belong there, you belong with me.' So, she showed me even more of the jewels, saying, 'These are for you, you must inherit these.' And that dream really stayed with me very strongly. So that is, I suppose, what I've been trying to find, my own way in the cycle." (Pretorius n.p.)

Epitextually, De Wet had expressed a strong sense of the role that heritage and inheritance (spiritual, material, and genetics) had played in shaping her always evolving present identity. This dream simultaneously articulates her experience of inheritance as a burden and as something enriching, something to rediscover – the latter being connected to the female ancestor. The facet of her inheritance that repulses her is that which is public, formal, regimented and masculine; the opposite is private, intimate, individualised and feminine.

The dream's dramatization of the maternal and paternal genealogical figures competing for De Wet's allegiance acquires a special significance considering the background against which she had related it. The interview with Pretorius was conducted in 2001 in the context of *On the Lake's* production. *On the Lake* is centrally concerned with patriarchal exploitation of women. It functions as a feminist revision of and a postmodern sequel to Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1896), but De Wet keeps the male characters off-stage. Moreover, her father, aged 81 at the time, was already on his death bed. He passed away later that year. In this interview she mentions his profession as "a judge" who "enforc[ed] the law", in the same breath as her recollection of being "overwhelmed as a child by a patriarchal system, the masculine dominated way of thought" which she experienced as "a constant form of censorship, concerning the responses to anything that tries to go the other way" (n.p.). This account may easily frame De Wet as psychologically patricidal.

Patriarchs are seldom onstage presences in De Wet's plays, and when they are, they are even less often benevolent. In *Yelena*, *The Brothers* and *Concealment* they are portrayed as abusive alcoholics. Often, they are uninvolved in their family's emotional welfare, buried in their work, as in *Mirakel*, *Stil Mathilda*, *Yelena*, *Fever* and *Blou Uur*, or just absent due to depression (*Mis*), illness and injury (*Nag*, *Generaal* and *Breathing In*), or death (*Op Dees Aarde*, *In a Different Light*, *Drif*, *Drie Susters Twee* and *In a Different Light*). In *Diepe Grond*, *African Gothic*, *Nag*, *Generaal* and *Breathing In* they are killed by the protagonists. It is the relationship of especially *Diepe Grond* and *Nag*, *Generaal* to De Wet's life that potentially undermines her denial of her plays' autobiographical dimensions. Grové, De Wet's first antagonist, is killed in a roleplaying ritual that entails him being cast (involuntarily) as the two protagonists' father. He is also a lawyer from Bloemfontein which evokes De Wet's father's legal career. She then dedicates the equally patricidal *Nag*, *Generaal* which with *Diepe Grond* and *Op Dees Aarde* comprise *Vrystaat-trilogie*, to her father; this dedication explicitly draws attention to her association of the subject matter with him. Tracing the connections between these two patriarchal characters in her first trilogy (the patriarch is absent in *Op Dees Aarde*) and her father, could begin more broadly by considering the connection of her paternal lineage and the socio-cultural context during her school years with the world of the South African War<sup>130</sup> (the General in *Nag*, *Generaal*) and that of the law (Grové in *Diepe Grond*).

The Nationalist mythologising of Boer War history formed an essential component of Afrikaner school curricula when De Wet was raised, a point she remarked on in an interview with Rachelle Greeff. Her alma mater's specific platforming of the South African war's importance is exemplified by the school's annual march to the Women's Monument which commemorates especially Afrikaner women's role in this history. But De Wet was also made intensely aware of direct familial links to this moment in South Africa's past. The then much valorised Boer General, Christiaan de Wet, was Reza de Wet's paternal great-grandfather's cousin (in Van Zyl 4). A formidable statue of him stands in Bloemfontein. His horse is erect on its hind legs and the General has his whip raised militantly above his head. Christiaan de Wet was famously described in 1900 by a British journalist as "the greatest guerrilla commander that the world had seen" until then and due to his reputation, he and this

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<sup>130</sup> This war is often referred to as the "Boer War", "Anglo-Boer War" or "the Freedom War", but South Africa's multi-ethnic participation in this war has been acknowledged in the standardisation of the term "South African War".

monument in Bloemfontein had become emblematic of the Boer War itself – that is, of the Afrikaner at war. This is in the same city home to the South African War museum and the Women’s Monument. On a more personal and domestic level, De Wet’s parents treasured several heirlooms associated with General de Wet, including his writing desk (Int. Reardon), his baptismal gown (Int. Basson) and a shawl he made during his imprisonment in Ceylon (De Wet in Van Zyl 4).<sup>131</sup> As a virtually deified figure, an archetype almost, an Afrikaner Nationalist animus, General De Wet was omnipresent in Reza’s world, genealogically, domestically, and culturally, a point that may shed a sharper light on Reza de Wet’s creation of an ailing Boer General in *Nag, Generaal*, a title that sets him to bed and to his grave – after all, it translates as “Good Night, General”.

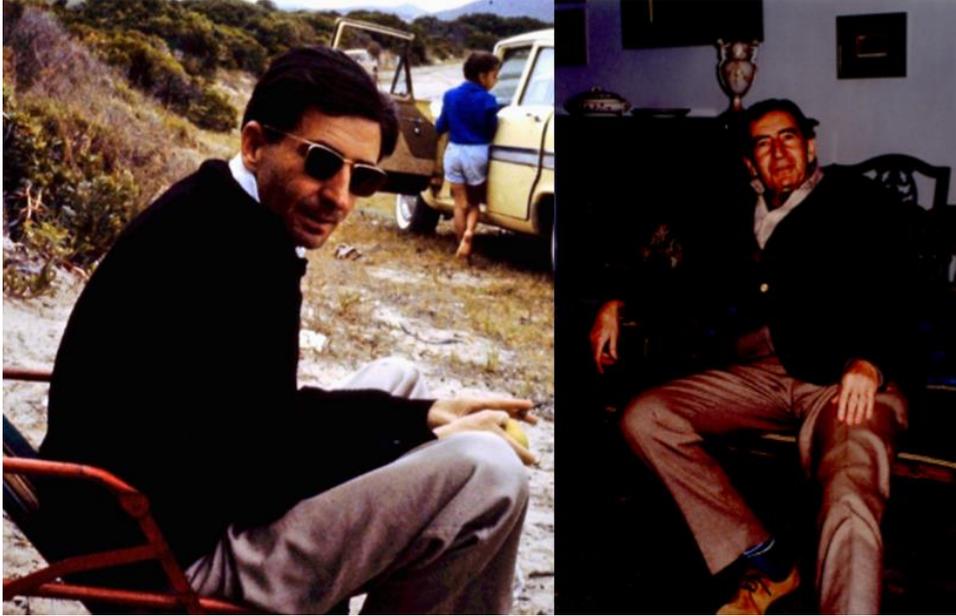
Christiaan de Wet’s statue not only emblematised an Afrikaner Nationalist sense of bravery and commitment to sovereign rule; it also symbolised the harsh legalism that should sustain it. In a documentary on Christiaan de Wet, historian M.C.E. van Schoor stands next to a marquette of the statue, holding Christiaan de Wet’s original “sjambok” [whip] in his own hands. He remarks that De Wet and his sjambok were inseparable, and that the burgers used to say that the Free State did not have a council of war – “De Wet and his sjambok *is* the war council”.<sup>132</sup> Van Schoor relates an anecdote about General de Wet viciously rebuking one of his subjects with his sjambok, explaining afterwards: “Dis nie ek, De Wet, wat jou slaan nie. Dis dié Wet”. It translates directly as: “It is not me, De Wet, hitting you, it is the law.” In the proto-Afrikaans Dutch that Christiaan de Wet and his Boer contemporaries spoke, the surname De Wet, which according to its French etymology, means “Jowett”, the Normandic version of “Julius”, acquires homonymically a double meaning: “the law”. It is then perhaps no coincidence that Christiaan de Wet’s monument is erected in South Africa’s legal capital, or that, historically, the De Wet family, was associated with the legal system. The De Wet’s common ancestor, Jacobus de Wet, served as the secretary of the “Hof van klein zake” for the Dutch East Indian Company (Pama 97). His son, Olof Gottlieb de Wet, became the president

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<sup>131</sup> General de Wet had given this shawl to Reza de Wet’s maternal grandmother, Hester (née Odendaal), when she visited him in Ceylon (De Wet in Van Zyl 4). Hester “was die eerste gevangene van die Vrystaat”, and legend has it, that a character named “Hessie” and her white horse in an Afrikaans folk song, refers to this woman, who famously blackened her much desired white mare and hid it in her pantry to prevent British soldiers from appropriating it (Int. Howard). De Wet had identified Hester as a significant inspiration for the writing of *A Worm in the Bud*, *Fever*, *Concealment*, *Nag, Generaal*, *Breathing In* and *A Russian Trilogy*.

<sup>132</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Generaal De Wet en sy sambok was onafskeidlik – en wee hom wat nie sy bevel gehoorsaam het nie – Die burgers het altyd gesê die Vrystaat het nie ’n krygsraad nie. Hulle krygsraad is De Wet en sy sambok.”

of the Supreme Court in 1806 (Redelinghuys 296),<sup>133</sup> and Reza de Wet’s paternal grandfather and her own father were judges. If the patriarchs in her first trilogy did not resemble her own father personally, his standing, genealogically and professionally, at least, tempts a reading that interprets them as metonymic of his person on some level.



**Figures 5 and 6: Hendrik Francois de Wet in the 1960s and 1990s**

This theory could be substantiated by recollections by some who knew him in the context of his family life. None of my research reveals any suggestions of H.F. de Wet being prone to alcohol abuse or acting violently towards his daughter, as some of the patriarchs in her plays do, but his aloofness, intimidating to some, has been stressed by several interviewees. Ellen Botha, a friend since childhood, related the origin of De Wet’s father’s nickname “Gannie”. The name derives from a contraction of two Afrikaans words, “gaan” [to go] and “nie” [not], which combined means “not going”. He has earned this name for his frequent refusal to join his wife and daughter on their excursions to the theatre (in Luyt).<sup>134</sup> This withdrawal from social activities with his family extended at times to the domestic realm. An actor-friend Neels Coetzee recalled De Wet’s statement that, given her father’s responsibilities as a hanging judge, he used to isolate himself severely when he was busy with a case, to such a

<sup>133</sup> J. H. Redelinghuys in his 1955 *Die Afrikaner-Familienaamboek*: “Op die gebied van studie, administrasie en in byna elke werkring en geleerde beroep, is daar vandag De Wets wat onderskeiding verwerf.” (297)

<sup>134</sup> The quote by Ellen Botha: “We used to call him ‘Oom Gannie’, because he always said he ‘won’t go’ along to the plays and performances.” [“Ons het hom ‘Oom Gannie’ genoem, want hy’t altyd gesê hy ‘gannie’ saam met hulle na uitvoerings en opvoerings nie.”] (in Luyt).

degree that she remembered being practically fatherless during such times (Int. Coetzee).<sup>135</sup> Another childhood friend, Rina Streeders, recalls H.F. de Wet being extremely private and prohibiting his wife from attending his court cases (Int. Streeders),<sup>136</sup> and Reardon mentioned the fearfulness with which De Wet regarded her father's work during her childhood years (Int. Reardon). De Wet's own voice filtered through those of Reardon and Coetzee reveals a particular discomfort with her father's work, but not necessarily with him.

Although rarely referring to her father in public interviews, De Wet always did so with affection and respect, as if she realised the misconception her plays might incite about her regard of him. In a 1992 interview with Madeleen Welman, she extolled her father, whom she described as "a logical person", for his "quiet strength and stability [which] have given me counterweight" ("Ma's" 37). While in paratexts she spoke far more often about the spiritual impartations of her mother and grandmother, she remarked in an interview with Cathy Knox in 1986 that her childhood would have been "simplified by a few straightforward rules" (75), and even when she points to the redemptive first encounter with Jungian therapy in her early twenties, she added that "I'm sure a more rational male influence [in my childhood] would have helped" (77). If her father's reserved, legalistic temperament had suited his profession, De Wet did not resent him for it; she appreciated it.

Some interviewees have read political complexities into De Wet's father's status as a judge in the context of the apartheid regime, linking this to her plays' seemingly patricidal drive. Some speculate that he was a member of the Broederbond (Int. Havilant). Others go so far as to suggest that he was the judge in charge of the Rivonia Trials (Int. Temmingh). Both these conjectures are erroneous. The list of Broederbond members published in Ivor Wilkins's *The Super Afrikaners* does not contain his name, and the judge responsible for Nelson Mandela's sentence is Quartus de Wet (1899-1980). De Wet herself proudly insisted that her family "was very opposed to" the apartheid regime, and that she "grew up" in an environment "with a lot of those discussions" (in Solberg 182). She reflected that a "lot of my Afrikaans friends

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<sup>135</sup> The quote by Neels Coetzee: "I also remember what she told me about Judge De Wet. In those days capital punishment was still legal, and when he was busy with a case, she said, they would not have a father in the house – he was isolated in this case. It had a great influence on Reza's way of growing up – she had exposure to this frightening side of the world." ["Ek onthou ook wat sy my van haar pa, Regter De Wet, vertel het. In daardie tyd was die doodstraf nog geldig en as hy besig was met 'n saak, het sy gesê, dan het hulle nie 'n pa in die huis gehad nie – hy was net afgesonder in hierdie saak. Dit het 'n groot invloed gehad op Reza se manier van grootword – sy het blootstelling gehad aan hierdie vreesaanjaende sy van die wêreld."]

<sup>136</sup> The quote by Rina Streeders: "He was strictly private about his work and he forbade his wife from attending his court cases." ["Hy was streng privaat oor sy werk en het sy vrou verbied om sy hofsittings by te woon."]

were embedded in it until they were say – 16, 17 years [of age], when they were shocked out of it”, while, due to her upbringing, she claimed, she “always knew that there was a double reality going on: *this*, which was *supposedly* so, and *that* which was *really* so” (182). She described her family (her father included), as “not mainstream” (in Paice 76), “not hyper-Afrikaans” (in Hough “Daar” 14), as “exotic” (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in Knox 77), as “a bit eccentric”, “not Afrikaans in the usual way” (in Dyll 3) and, in actual fact, as “decadent, in terms of Afrikanerdom” (in Hough “Daar” 14).

She also flagged her father’s support and assistance to Bram Fischer, her mother’s cousin (Solberg 182). Furthermore, she exemplified her father’s fifteen year-long campaign against what he saw as an imperial imposition of death penalty on Sotho ritual killings, which he regarded “as a cultural phenomenon and not as murder” (182). De Wet’s cousin Evan van Eyssen recalled the De Wet-family’s conviction that H.F. de Wet was denied the position of judge-president precisely because of his political affinities and that it had caused him to concede to an early retirement (Int.) which was effected in 1986 (Kruger “Bekende” n.p.).

De Wet also suggested that her father’s antipathy to the arts, from which his nickname derives, did not extend to her writing. She signals this in her dedication of her only novella, *Stil Mathilda*, to her father “for his loving interest in my work” (iii). In a rare and brief interview with H.F. de Wet about his daughter, he not only proudly points to prominent artist figures in the De Wet lineage, (including the De Wet’s common ancestor Jacobus de Wet, who was a painter in the British court), but goes as far as identifying with her as a writer by jocosely describing the dramatic dimensions of the court room and the literary facets of writing decrees (in Horn 18).



Figures 7 and 8: Hendrik Francois de Wet with his daughter

Still, dedicating *Nag, Generaal* to her father six years earlier seems rather violent. A distant relative also foregrounded the warm and intimate relationship he observed between De Wet and her father, added that Hendrik Francois de Wet admitted his loss at comprehending her work and relying on the evaluation of literati's assessment that she is a "good" writer (Int.). If *Nag, Generaal* was not intended to be perceived as an attack on him, De Wet appears strangely naïve. Just two years earlier, her career-launch as a playwright was shrouded in the controversy of an experienced writer reading her own life into De Wet's work. How much more might her father, a self-professed layman with regards to literature, not read his daughter's portrayal of a dying patriarch, which she then publically dedicates to him, as a death wish (if only psychologically)? Read in this light, De Wet's dedication of *Stil Mathilda* to him as well could be interpreted as her continuation of representing, in peritextual gestures, a dialogue with her father through her work to her readership.

*Stil Mathilda* is unique in De Wet's oeuvre, not just as her only attempt at writing prose, but also as the only work that presents a sympathetic portrayal of a patriarch, Gerhardus Bam, the father of the protagonist, Mathilda. De Wet achieves this in the portrayal of his interior life by narrating large sections of the plot from his perspective, using free-indirect discourse. She remarked on the depictional limitations of theatre, which normally restricts the audience from "hear[ing] what the characters think" as opposed to what "they say" (in Botha "Meisie" 6),

much like E.M. Forster does in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).<sup>137</sup> De Wet exploits the depictive potential of prose by creating characters whose inner lives contrast the demeanours they project, “to reveal” in Forster’s words “the hidden life at its source” (56). Written in stream-of-consciousness style, *Stil Mathilda* is richer in inner monologue than in spoken dialogue, demonstrating De Wet’s indulgence in the genre’s capacity to explicate subtext. Her application of this depictive dualism on the character of Gerhardus manifests in his externalised behaviour and dialogue being consistently and severely strict, while his carefully hidden mental and emotive reactions to his own and other’s behaviour is revealed by the third person narrative voice reflecting Gerhardus’s more tender nature.

This contrast between interiority and exteriority in De Wet’s portrayal of Gerhardus is at its starkest during the novella’s exposition. He first features externally from Mathilda’s point of view when he wakes her in the morning, gives her household instructions and admonishes her sternly for minor mistakes. When, after breakfast, he withdraws into his study, he retrieves a little photograph of his wife, Alida, from his desk’s left bottom drawer. This incites a flashback, from his perspective, of the day she abandoned him by running away with a trapeze artist in a circus. In the narration of the incidents leading up to Alida’s elopement, she is shown to be starved from physical and emotional intimacy with her husband. She is persistently portrayed touching and caressing herself. One description shows her sleeping in as he dresses for work. Gerhardus constantly resists his urges to touch his wife when he is in his work uniform, but in this moment he yields to his impulses and kisses her on the cheek, followed immediately by a sense of having transgressed. When she rises and the morning sun renders her nightgown translucent, he diverts his gaze embarrassed, concealing his desire. Alida follows him into his office and pushes her breasts seductively against his back, as she requests some money to buy a new dress to wear to the circus that evening. Unable to demonstrate his arousal he withdraws from her and deflectively provides the money. When she poses for him in the new dress, he curtly compliments her, and the narrator intrudes in parenthesis:

If Gerhardus Bam did then what he would have liked to do so much; if he had stroked her white shoulders, lifted her up and carried her to the broad bed,

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<sup>137</sup> Forster distinguishes between the historian and the novelist of historical fiction, in that the historian “deals with actions, and with the characters of men only so far as he can deduce them from their actions. [...] The hidden life is, by definition, hidden. [...] And it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source” (55-6).

took the combs from her hair, and kissed her thoroughly on her full, soft mouth, everything might have turned out differently. (17)<sup>138</sup>

This intrusion of the narrator not merely moralises the events, but, through the constant depiction of his inner conflict, tunes the reader to the possibility of sympathy. Gerhardus's emotional and sexual inaccessibility clearly underwrites Alida's decision to run away, but he is also shown to be a victim of his own upbringing as this aloofness partly stems from his inculturation into Calvinist Afrikanerdom. He only makes himself sexually vulnerable at night, when it is dark, when it does not infringe his professional duties. In this way, De Wet humanises the recurring figure of the patriarch which by then, ten years into her writing career, she has depicted, (if only from the perspective of some of her reviewers) as one-dimensional (Boekkooi "De Wet Woel" 4; Hough "Koordloper" 24; Eveleigh 5; Sichel 14; Willoughby "De Wet Plays" 4), and she does this in a text that she dedicates to her own father.

It is equally important to bear in mind that with *Stil Mathilda* De Wet not only experiments with a different form, but also with style in terms of character depiction. Speaking of her plays, she related to Kate Dyall that she portrayed "little characters, not complex ones who move in a certain direction" (3). But in *Stil Mathilda* she evidently alters her strategy by creating complex and dynamic inner lives for the main cast – Mathilda, Gerhardus, and Madeleine – and puts them in relief against the caricaturesque social world of the small town in which they live. The narrator rarely introduces the secondary characters without doing it through the filtered perspective of the main three. This effects that the characters that most clearly resemble the ones in her plays, are the townsfolk, who as a collective become the antagonist, rather than one scape-goated patriarch.

While still not suggesting that Gerhardus (or any of the patriarchs in *Stil Mathilda*) is modelled directly on De Wet's own father, her portrayal of him as a person psychologically tortured by his sense of social duty that compromises his individual conscience and sensuality, reflects the terms in which she described her own father. Cal Volks, a former

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<sup>138</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "As Gerhardus Bam toe gedoen het wat hy so graag wou doen; as hy haar wit skouers gestreel het, haar opgetel het en na die breë bed geneem gedra het, die kamme uit haar hare gehaal het, en haar ordentlik gesoen het op haar sagte, vol mond, kon alles dalk so anders gewees het." (17)

student of De Wet, recalls De Wet reflecting on the impact of her father's profession on his personal life:

It haunted her father that he sentenced people who were sort of doomed. And she said that he would wake up with these nightmares where he'd sit in that court room. He'd have all this respect and he applied the law, but then at night there would be this other part; this other consequence. And that struck her a lot – that there were these two sides, this day and night. And she spoke about that a lot; about how that nightmarish world, that other world, gets shut out by some people. (Int. Volks.)

Without equating strict fathering with the work of a hanging judge, this reported description of H.F. de Wet by his daughter illuminates the difference in her use of archetypal psychology between structuring her novella and her plays. This portrayal of her father's inner turmoil with solar and lunar symbols reflects the narration of Gerhardus's resistance of Alida's advances, as he has been raised to reserve sensual and intimate contact with his wife to the night. The nocturnal and diurnal obviously then signals the tension between the Feminine and Masculine principles in the individual psyche of the patriarchs – the fictional Gerhardus Bam and the non-fictional H.F. de Wet. The plays, in contrast, dramatise this battle by casting the various characters as embodiments of the principles. If the patriarchs in De Wet's plays are seen as fictional shadows of De Wet's father, the reader collapses De Wet's perception of him into an embodiment of the Masculine principle, which De Wet only ever does with characters – never with non-fictional persons.

Revisiting *Nag, Generaal* in this light enables a reading of it that sees the confliction of the protagonist, Magda, between her dying husband, the unnamed Boer General, and the intuitive herbalist, Naas, as a projection of a conflict in a single psyche between two ways of being, rather than as an insult by De Wet to her own father. As such, her dedication of it to him requires a more complicated interpretation. The death-wish expressed by the protagonist, on the dying patriarch, signifies a reaction to a psychic tyranny of the Masculine principle, of which De Wet also understood her father to be a victim of, and in *Nag, Generaal* it assumes the likeness of a Boer General during the South African War – a legalistic, jingoist, sexist – an embodiment of central features associated with hegemonic culture under the Afrikaner Nationalist regime of the time. But three points are important to consider before the manifestation of this principle in De Wet's work is further examined: the Masculine principle

was not an inherently negative force in her worldview, it was not exclusively represented by Afrikaner patriarchy, and she did not denounce her Afrikaner identity altogether. Talking about the character type that embodies the Feminine principle in *Trits*, for instance, she explained: “[I]t is the interaction among them all that is really more important. I never saw them in isolation but immediately in relation to other characters. All the characters complete each other” (93-4).

De Wet suggested that the “Masculine presences” that she sensed “within myself” are both “constructive and destructive” (in Huismans and Finestone 90, 94). She stressed the virtuous manner of the Masculine principle to lay down what she saw as healthy parameters. While she maintained that to “repress something [...] will shatter” and “destroy” the individual subject, (94) she still suggested that “[o]ne cannot possibly express everything one feels, without becoming anarchic and your whole personality falling apart”, and that, “[i]n order to remain intact as an integral being with a particular identity, one has to repress all kinds of things, like fantasies of complete dissolution, of complete merging and so on” (91). Just as for Jung the archetypes were always dual in their potential to edify or obfuscate, always capable of expressing itself in threatening or benevolent guises (Jung *Four* 30; *Man* 18), the Masculine principle, her version of the animus, had pros and cons for her.

De Wet insisted that the depiction of Afrikaner patriarchy and Calvinism in *Vrystaat-trilogie* does not reflect her general perception of Afrikaner culture. Although she explained that *Vrystaat-trilogie* was reactionary and written in anger (in Botha “Meisie” 6), concerned with liberation from “a particular cultural environment that I have grown up in” which she described as “patriarchal”, “Calvinistic”, with “repressions [...] specific to that culture” (in Huismans and Finestone 91), a narrowmindedness that suppresses spontaneity and sexuality<sup>139</sup> (in Botha “Meisie” 6), and which also entailed racism and bigotry (in De Villiers 47), she still refused to deny this culture’s complexity (in De Villiers 47).<sup>140</sup> She reflected that while she experienced certain facets of growing up as an Afrikaner as “sultry” and “narrow”, other dimensions of it was “heavenly” (6)<sup>141</sup> and “enchanting” (in Huismans and Finestone 93). This confirms Basson’s remark in his preface to *Plays One* that “right from the beginning” of

<sup>139</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Teen die benouing van ’n uitkyk wat alle spontaneïteit en seksualiteit wil onderdruk.”

<sup>140</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “’n verloëning van die Afrikaner se kompleksiteit” (De Wet in De Villiers 47)

<sup>141</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: „Maar hoe kompleks is ’n mens se reaksie op dinge nie, gee sy toe. Want naas die benouende engheid van die “Vrystaat-ervaring” was juis Senekal vir haar ook soos die hemel. (Botha 6)

her career as a playwright “she proved to be able to [...] min[e] both gold and puss from a festering Afrikaner psyche” (in *Plays Two* 7). After all, she reminded her audiences in an interview with Willem du Plessis that neither Afrikanerdom nor Calvinism was a primary concern for her besides these phenomena being examples of mechanisms of entrapment (De Villiers 47<sup>142</sup>; Du Plessis “Diepe” 51).<sup>143</sup>

This view on De Wet’s characterisation of the animus, as the Masculine Principle, in her work complicates a reductive reading of her as a writer defined by her resistance to Afrikaner patriarchy, even if its first and most prominent manifestation in her work casts the archetype in that guise. It heeds against a reading of her oeuvre that simplifies it to narrow formulas and it consequently acknowledges the dynamic and thus often contradictory psyche that it was meant to express. It also serves as a steppingstone into a discussion of De Wet’s adaptations and applications of other facets of Jungian narrative theory such as his definition of the function of the chronotope, a dimension I seek to explore in the following chapter.

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<sup>142</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “dis nie ’n sosiologiese kommentaar op Afrikanerskap of iets nie” (De Wet in De Villiers 47)

<sup>143</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “‘Calvinisme is nie vir my ’n probleem nie [...] [e]n ek het nie ’n belangstelling in die Afrikaner nie.’ Vir haar is dit eerder ’n metafoor. Dit is ’n werkswyse om te bereik waarna sy strew. ‘Die bevryding van die spirit is waaroor dit my gaan. The journey of the soul’” (Du Plessis “Diepe” 51)

## Chapter 4

### “I am a period piece”:

#### De Wet’s Chronotopes and her Symbolisation of Theatre as Child’s Play

“I am not very comfortable with contemporary society. I [...] think of myself as a period piece”

Reza de Wet in a 2011 interview with Willemien Brümmer  
 (“Vrou” 4)<sup>144</sup>

“I grew up in old houses.”

Reza de Wet in an interview with Ina Duvenhage (39)<sup>145</sup>

“Why the little girl on stage? It is because I longed back to that part of me. I began seeing things through my childhood’s eyes. [...] I had to sell my grandmother’s house in the countryside. It felt like death.”

Reza de Wet in a 2008 interview with Kobus Burger about *Blou Uur* (8)<sup>146</sup>

““theatre is *spel* [a word that in Afrikaans homonymically means ‘child’s play’, ‘gaming’, ‘acting’ and ‘sorcery’]; therefore, the concepts ‘freedom’ and ‘childlikeness’ cannot be extracted from it”.<sup>147</sup>

Reza de Wet in an interview with Rachelle Greeff in 1988 (94)

“The play [*Diepe Grond*] has helped me a lot, because I was playing this game to exorcise this world.”<sup>148</sup>

Reza de Wet in an interview with Riaan de Villiers (47)

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<sup>144</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ek is nie baie gemaklik met die moderne samelewing nie. Ek [...] dink ek is ’n period piece.” (De Wet in Brümmer “Vrou” 4)

<sup>145</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ek het in ou huise grootgeword.” (De Wet in Duvenhage “Ma’s” 39)

<sup>146</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Hoekom die meisietjie op die verhoog? Dis omdat ek so terugverlang het, veral na daardie deel van my. Ek het dinge begin sien deur die oë van myself as ’n kind. Ek verlang na my kinderjare. [...] Ek moes my oma se huis op die platteland verkoop. Dit was vir my soos die dood.” (De Wet in Burger “Geraantes” 8).

<sup>147</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “toneel is spel: daarom kan die begrippe: vryheid en kinderlikheid nooit daarvan losgemaak word nie.” (De Wet in Greeff 94)

<sup>148</sup> The quote in Afrikaans is: “Die stuk het my eintlik baie gehelp. Want hier het ek nou die speletjie van my gespeel om hierdie wêreld te besweer.” (in Villiers 47)



**Figure 9: De Wet as a child**

In the previous chapter I sought not to contradict but to complicate and expand previous interpretations of father figures in Reza de Wet's dramas and prose by reading them through her morally nuanced re-conceptualisation of the Jungian map of the psyche. In doing so I hoped to map significant conceptual terrain of my understanding of De Wet's peculiar adaptation of Jung's theories in her work. Character types are however not the sole elements of Jungian narratology – chronotopes are as essential, and if De Wet had redefined Jung's archetypes in her dramas, she did so too with the symbolic application of time-place loci. While De Wet's plays have succeeded as canonised texts with her readers' and audiences' limited knowledge of the author's life and personal iconography, this chapter offers biographical information as possible clues into reading De Wet's chronotopes psychoanalytically. In keeping with psychoanalysis's typical emphasis on childhood and De Wet's own, romantic celebration thereof, I show how her chronotopes hint at the concept of childhood and how it relates, almost metadramatically, to her own definition of theatre.

If I have amply verified my rejection of a simplified biocritical analysis that casts the antagonist-patriarch as a veiled depiction of De Wet's own father, in favour of a psychoanalytic reading that sees him as an archetype, embodying with his fellow cast of characters particular drives in an individual psyche, the specifically historicised rural Afrikaner-centred Free State settings of the plays in *Vrystaat-trilogie* still require explication as to how they can be linked with De Wet's biographical reality at the time of their production. An overview of the remarkably mixed and puzzled critical response to *Nag, Generaal* (the closing play of the first cycle) may serve as a discursive gateway into decoding

De Wet's approach of portraying the Afrikaner nationalist situation in her work. The nearly forty reviews of *Nag, Generaal's* premier I have managed to source to date mirrors as a whole my own initial inner debate as to the hermeneutic premises on which to unravel what De Wet had herself described as "the fairy tale simplicity" of her plots (in Huismans and Finestone 92) – a simplicity that functions as Marthinus Basson symbolised it, like a "slow poison" in his consciousness, so that what had seemed obvious to him with his first readings of her work, would resurface uncannily, days later as affectively disturbing conundrums (Int. 3). Just so, the conflicting certainties expressed in many of these reviews, combined with the ostensible and even frustrated *uncertainties* in others, almost holds Basson's experience as a more generalised one.

Given my psychoanalytic interpretive approach, the most easily dispensable strand of criticism is that which links *Nag, Generaal's* characters to specific persons and groups in the then contemporary South African political landscape. Rina Minervini remarks that it "can't be accidental that he [the General] sometimes reminds one of a fervent Afrikaner politician at full roar" (12) and Di Paice reflects that "[e]xtraordinarily, the audience read both P.W. Botha and Eugène Terre'Blanche into the general" (74). Nushin Elahi proposes that the General's antagonism towards British soldiers mirrors the National Party's then fear of communism (8). Magda, the protagonist, was read by some as symbolising the revival of feminist activism on the South African political front (Coetzee "Nag" 12; Gillwald in Willoughby "Gillwald" 4; Muller "Waar" 5), but a *Sunday Times* reviewer reads her as "the South African people, who are still in the habit of respecting and tending the dying old bulk, [...] [although] they have lost their patience" (22). These interpretive tendencies are not surprising in view of many iconic South African playwrights' inclination by this time to encode their resistance against the censorious apartheid regime in the form of allegories, such as Bartho Smit's *Putsonderwater* [Well Without Water] (1962), *Bacchus in die Boland* [Bacchus in the Boland] (1974) and *Die Keiser* [The Emperor] (1977); John Khani's, Winston Ntshona's and Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973); Percy Mtwa's, Mbongeni Ngema's and Barney Simon's *Woza Albert!* (1981), and Pieter Fourie's *Ek, Anna van Wyk* [I, Anna van Wyk] (1986).

*Nag, Generaal's* "allegorical component in relation to contemporary [late 1980s] South Africa" (*Daily Dispatch* 3), particularly of "Afrikaans corruption and decay" (Willoughby "De Wet Plays" 4), were suggested by most reviewers; some hailed this as contributing to the play's artistic merit and political relevance (*Daily Dispatch* 3; Elahi "Hoop" 2; Elahi

“Walglieke” 8; Eveleigh 5; Minervini 12; *Sunday Times* 22), while others found its application too obvious (Boekkooi “De Wet Woel” 40; Daniels 17; Sichel 14; Willoughby “De Wet Plays” 4). As transparent as it may have seemed to the latter group, – Raeford Daniels talks about “the all too obvious symbolism” (17), – the interpretation of this parallel differs significantly from review to review, testifying to the symbolic ambiguity of the images and motifs De Wet employs. The General is at once an archetypal embodiment of power lust (Boekkooi “De Wet Woel” 40; Elahi “Walglieke” 8),<sup>149</sup> and a representation of a dying order (Gillwald in Willoughby “Gillwald” 4<sup>150</sup>; Hough “Koordloper” 24), identified respectively as the Afrikaner, as white supremacy at large, (Coulson 12; Michel 8;<sup>151</sup> Minervini 12; Sichel 14; *Sunday Times* 22), and more broadly, as patriarchy in South Africa (Elahi “Hoop” 2; Gillwald in Willoughby “Gillwald” 4; Muller “Waar” 5). The incestuous sexual tension between Magda and Naas, the illegitimate mixed raced child born out of her husband’s rape of a black servant,<sup>152</sup> is read on the one hand as an “African Messiah” (Elahi “Hoop” 2; Hough “Koordloper” 24), making *Nag, Generaal* a deconstructed nativity play (Hough “Koordloper” 24);<sup>153154</sup> while on the other hand, the General embodies for certain critics “the hope for a redeemed future, born like himself of the passionate union of different races” (*Cape Times* 8; *Sunday Times* 22; Willoughby “De Wet Plays” 4).

While most of the reviews addressed above focused on the symbolism of the family structure formed by the *dramatis personae*, several critics had special interest in *Nag, Generaal*’s historicised chronotope. Barrie Hough and Rina Minervini identify the use of historicising as a trend amongst De Wet’s contemporary Afrikaans playwrights at the time, as well as their direct predecessors (Hough “Koordloper” 24; Minervini 12).<sup>155</sup> They may be referring to P.G.

<sup>149</sup> Paul Boekkooi suggests that “De Wet draws parallels between this situation being played out in the cow shed and the present time frame where in a stress situation various forms of power lust is triggered.” [“De Wet trek parallele tussen dié situasie wat hom in ’n koeistal afspeel en die huidige tydsgewrig waar daar binne ’n spanningsituasie verskillende vorms van magswellustigheid aangehits word.”] (“De Wet Woel” 40)

<sup>150</sup> Lucille Gillwald, the play’s original director, relayed to Guy Willoughby her sense, at the time, of the play’s prophetic message: “The system is crumbling all around us, look at the electricity, look at the telephones. It’s all breaking – I mean it” (Gillwald in Willoughby “Gillwald” 4). There is poetic irony in her statement, since it was made before the opening, and a number of critics complained in their reviews about the hindering effect of power failures on the production.

<sup>151</sup> John Michel considers *Nag, Generaal* as “one of the most ruthless and cruel depictions of a besieged nation ever presented on the South African stage” (6).

<sup>152</sup> This plot twist was not included in the final published script. The version in *Vrystaat-trilogie* contains no suggestion of Naas being mixed raced or the General’s son.

<sup>153</sup> The play’s working title was *Krip* [Manger], a fact that might give some substance to this reading.

<sup>154</sup> Anita de Kock finds the portrayal of a mixed raced character by a white actor Dawid Minnaar “unacceptable” (20) as does Corné Coetzee (“Nag” 12).

<sup>155</sup> Interestingly enough, there was at the same time a tendency among Afrikaans playwrights to set their dramas in the future; this includes P.G. du Plessis’s *Plaston DNS-Kind* [Plaston DNA Child] (1973), the first Afrikaans science fiction play; Pieter Fourie’s *Die Plaasvervangers* [The Substitutes] (1978), a play oscillating between

du Plessis's *Vereeniging, Vereniging* [Trans.] (1984)<sup>156</sup> and Pieter Fourie's *Die Proponentjie* [The Young Probationer] (1987), and to, although a bit more than a decade earlier, Fourie's *Tjaka* [Shaka] (1976), *Die Joiner* [The Joiner] (1976), and *Die Plaasvervangers* [Trans.] (1978). Theorists of historical fiction frequently remark on the improbability of randomly motivated periodisation in literature; novelists and playwrights tend to choose the historical backdrops for their plots carefully to comment on the present (Robinson "Narrating" xii,<sup>157</sup> 51-2; Sanders 139, 142<sup>158</sup>). This was the assumption in most of *Nag, Generaal*'s reviews, although, again, the conclusions were divided. A review in *The New Nation* suggests that one "can easily dismiss the play [*Nag, Generaal*] as some relic designed to feed the Afrikaner's ego about his heroic past" (*The New Nation* 11), an accusation more applicable to and perhaps stemming from a familiarity with Afrikaans nationalist history plays such as Uys Krige's *Magdalena Retief* (1938), and N.P. van Wyk Louw's *Die Dieper Reg* [The Deeper Right / The Deeper Justice] (1938) *Dias* (1952), *Die Vonnis* [The Verdict] (1966), *Die Eerste Voortrek* [The First Pioneering Trek] (1966), *Berei in die Woestyn* [Prepare in the Wilderness] (1968), *Kruger Breek die Pad Oop* [Kruger Prepares the Way] (1972), and *Die Pluimsaad Waai Ver* [The Dandelion Seed Flies Far] (1972). But the *New Nation* review of De Wet's use of Boer War history does not reflect the more general response. Some supportive of the establishment reacted defensively that a "Boer general is a *dignified* person, not this caricature" (in Paice 74), while more liberally inclined critics like Braam Muller, Adrienne Sichel, Hough and Minervini celebrated De Wet's demythologisation of the Boer

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the Boer War-past and a then imagined post-apartheid future, and *Tienuur Maak die Deure Oop* [The Doors Open at Ten O'Clock] (1986).

<sup>156</sup> This play, although set in the present of its production, entails constant flashbacks to the Anglo Boer War.

<sup>157</sup> In *Narrating the Past* (2011) Alan Robinson employs the term "present past" to describe "a mental representation of what, from our present perspective, is now taken to have been the nature of the past" (x) and he argues that a constructed present past is always "shaped by their historical moment of production" (xii). Thus, even if unintentionally so, the creation of historical fiction always utilises a historical moment as a tool to at least express present concerns, if not to comment on it.

<sup>158</sup> In Julie Sanders's chapter in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2009) on the appropriation of historical facts in fictional texts, or as she calls it, the "forging [of] history into fiction" (142), she briefly discusses a selection of texts in which a "historical event is depicted and deployed both for its own rich literary and imaginative content and for the parallels and comparisons it evokes with more contemporary or topical concerns" (139).

hero (Muller “Waar” 5<sup>159</sup>; Hough “Koordloper”<sup>24</sup>; Minervini 12<sup>160</sup>) and of the volksmoeder” (an Afrikaans mother of the nation) (Muller “Waar” 5<sup>161</sup>; Sichel 14<sup>162</sup>).

From this overview of the critical response to *Nag, Generaal* two main interpretive questions mirror my own: how to read the allegorical pattern embodied in the peculiar family formation staged in this play, and how to relate it to the chronotope in which it is set, especially from a psychoanalytic biocritical angle. Since I use *Nag, Generaal* and its critical reception here as a touchstone for an analysis of the entire *Vrystaat-trilogie*, which in many ways reflects the style of De Wet’s whole oeuvre, it is apt to remark that these two points of inquiry signal two features essential to almost all her dramas: the familial-domestic and historical setting.

Towards the turn of the millennium, analyses of historicisation in literary texts usually entail speculations about historical fiction’s revisionary capacities, as expounded by for instance Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich in *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000) and the interdisciplinary field of neo-Victorian studies it has incited, and Diana Wallace’s *The Woman’s Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900–2000* (2004). It also explores postmodern historical fiction’s challenging of the tenuous distinctions between historiography and creative writing such as Linda Hutcheon’s theorisation of historiographic metafiction in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), Alan Robinson’s *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel* (2011) and Michael Lackey’s article ‘The Rise of the Biographical Novel and the Fall of the Historical Novel’.<sup>163</sup> In view of De Wet’s peculiar

<sup>159</sup> Muller remarks in his review titled “Waar is die Boere-Helde Heen?” [“Where Have the Boere Heroes Gone?”] that this play does not portray “the world of Boer heroes that one is used to.” [“Dit is nie die wêreld van Boere-helde soos mens gewoon is nie.”] (5).

<sup>160</sup> Minervini suggests that De Wet has “created a savage symbol of Afrikanerdom” by representing “the traditional hero as literally rotten to the core” (12).

<sup>161</sup> Muller points to how De Wet is creating “a different image of the Afrikaner woman” [“’n ander beeld van die Afrikaner-vrou”], namely “the woman who takes up the weapon of the word to exorcise her frustrations, her loneliness and misery; she is no longer the quiet fighter in the background who nurtures lovingly while mourning the death of her family – she revolts against her husband, against war and against death.” [“die vrou wat die wapen opneem, die wapen van die woord – om haar frustrasies, eensaamheid en ellende te besweer. Sy is nie meer die stille vegter in die agtergrond wat liefdevol vertroetel nie en huil oor haar gestorwe gesin nie. Sy kom in opstand teen haar man, teen oorlog en teen die dood”] (5).

<sup>162</sup> Sichel describes Magda as De Wet’s “searing portrayal of a sexually deprived, utterly desperate woman who braves the destruction of everything prescribed to her to take up an option disbarred to her as a *ware* [true] Afrikaner” (14).

<sup>163</sup> Lackey summarises his argument as follows: “The biographical novel has supplanted the classical historical novel. What has caused this is a shift in our contemporary theories of consciousness, which radically impact the way we understand and do history. Traditional historical novelists have a positivist approach to history, so they picture the external factors that objectively shape and determine consciousness and thereby make historical collisions possible. Biographical novelists believe that there is a surreal dimension to consciousness, so they shift the focus from the objective external world to the subjective internal world in order to picture the forces that have given birth to major historical collisions” (11).

autopsychoanalytic rationalisations of the past in her plays, I do not apply the above approaches in my biocritical study of her dramas. Responding to Ashraf Jamal's inquiry, for instance, about her choice of the 1930s setting of *Mis*, De Wet claimed to have, in the writing process, set the "master narrative of History [...] aside for the modest, inferential, seductive world" (in Jamal "Between" 35) of her plays and to Johann Botha she claimed not to write *about* "subject matters with capital letters" such as "History" (in Botha "Meisie" 6), as previously mentioned.<sup>164</sup>

Instead, I suggest the sheer fact that De Wet tends to historicise her plays (regardless of the specified period in question) must first be related, psychoanalytically, to the very concept of the past as a symbol of the unconscious, and her understanding of her work as surfacing from her own and the collective unconscious (in Botha "Meisie" 6; in Campbell 25; in De Villiers 45; in Hough "Kleintyd" 2; Luyt), a concept that Jung defines, in the first place in terms of *memory* and *archive*. The unconscious is seen in this regard (from a De Wetean-Jungian perspective) as a store of both the individual psyche's history and of the human race's collective memories. South African Jungian folklorist David Julian points to how fairy tales' typical opening lines, "Once upon a time", or "A long time ago", precisely reveals this function of the story, within a Jungian paradigm (11). Thus, even before the choice of specific period is considered, De Wet's self-confessed intention to mimic the plots of the Grimm Brothers' and Sotho fairy tales (in Botha "Meisie" 6; in Brümmer "Vrou" 4; in Huisman and Finestone 92; in Jamal "Between" 35; in Luyt; in *Mis* 27; in *Missing* 14; in *Op Dees Aarde* 66; in Pople "Galgehumor" 3) already marks this device as forming part of an approach that focuses these plays not necessarily on the specified spatiotemporal backdrop as much as on what they signify, subconsciously, to the psyche through which it is filtered, the one under discussion identifying strongly (yet individualistically) as an (eccentric) Afrikaner Woman.

Juxtaposed with this Jungian conception of fairy tales as products of the collective unconscious, the culturally historical settings of De Wet's plays trigger a re-conceptualisation of an almost standardised Jungian analytic approach in literary studies. Marina Warner in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1994) cautions against archetypal readings of fairy tales that universalises culturally specific traits of the plots (xii, xviii-xix). So, for instance, monarchies and monogamy, which are fundamental bases of plot

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<sup>164</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Eintlik skryf sy ook glad nie oor onderwerpe met hoofletters nie. Die Geskiedenis." (in Botha "Meisie" 6)

catalysts in tales canonised by Grimm and Charles Perrault, require complex translation strategies both in the comparison of these folk tales to those from non-monogamous and non-monarchical cultures and to the psychical patterns of subjects from non-European societies. This realisation however does not imply the necessary invalidation altogether of an archetypal psychoanalytic approach. Susan Rowland in *C.G. Jung and Literary Critique* (1999), also identifies this tendency in a tradition of Jungian criticism but considers, optimistically, revisionist possibilities. She suggests that

traditional Jungian critics tend not to make a rigid distinction between the unrealisable archetype and the culturally influenced derivative, the archetypal image. By characterising powerful literary symbols as archetypes, it enables critics to postulate a constant human essence free of historical determinism, although most critics would acknowledge a minor effect of local cultural inscription. (3)

Rowland devotes an entire study to a poststructuralist reformulation of Jung to negate this universalising tendency. Although De Wet's comparable recognition of this inclination is not (yet) available to me paratextually, the plays themselves embody it. There are no kings or princesses in her plots, for instance, but there are farmers, generals, dissident daughters and resentful wives. These cultural inscriptions figure most strikingly in relief against the much-mythologised (historiographically and literary) backdrops of, for instance, the Boer War in *Nag, Generaal*, the 1930s Afrikaner small town experience in *Op Dees Aarde*, and the 1950s pastoral world in *Diepe Grond*. But, paratextually, there is a statement that conveys yet another dimension of De Wet's personalisation of Jung in early interviews, especially with Marianne Thamm in 1986, Di Paice in the same year, Riaan de Villiers in 1987, and John Campbell in 1988.

Both De Villiers and Campbell probed De Wet about the genesis of her breakthrough drama, *Diepe Grond* first staged in 1985, and her rationalisation of its wide resonance amongst its targeted public. De Wet remarked to De Villiers that she was shocked by the strong response, and alluded to audience members' (whom she keeps anonymous) suggestion that she had managed to stage the Afrikaner's "collective psyche" (45).<sup>165</sup> Hinting, in tone, an ambivalence about this response, she relates that "if there *is* something of a collective psyche [represented] in the play, it stems from a spontaneous reaction from my side towards these

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<sup>165</sup> De Wet's quote in Afrikaans is: "Ek onthou, mense het na my toe gekom [...] en gesê ek het die Afrikaner se kollektiewe psige blootgelê" (in De Villiers 45).

things”, that is, the culturally specific taboos it addresses (45).<sup>166</sup> To Campbell she maintained that she writes about her “own psyche” since she believed that “universal truths can only evolve out of chiefly personal experiences”, and as such she writes “as an Afrikaner” (25); similarly to Di Paice in 1986 she maintains that her plays “grow from deep and private needs[;] [t]he more personal I feel about things, the more political they become” and as “an Afrikaner my personal concerns come out” (75). In that same year she suggests to Thamm that *Diepe Grond* “emerged from a sort of collective *new* Afrikaner consciousness” (“Reza” 7; italics mine). Comparably, in 1995, almost a decade later, Patricia Handley asks De Wet about the “peculiarly rural, Afrikaner milieu of the past [which] pervades the playwright’s work”, and De Wet, as if rehearsed in earlier interviews, explains that she had found this “an exciting milieu to work in [...] because being so specific, you can be more universal” (10). By this mid-1990s interview it seems that De Wet had digested and adopted this concept of a collective and evolving Afrikaner psyche. The notion of a shared cultural mentality and consciousness is not unique to Jungian, or any psychosocial theory, but considering De Wet’s personal and intellectual immersion in it, a phrase such as “collective psyche”, cannot but evoke Jung’s model for individual and collective consciousness and De Wet’s adaptation of it.

These paratextual disclosures, however, reveal an even more specific Jungian informed conceptual initiative on De Wet’s part, as well as a potentially problematic assumption that underlies it. Through her innovation of a specifically Afrikaner collective psyche (with its implied collective unconscious), her reformation of Jung transcends his universalising inclinations, while it may still expose an essentialisation of the Afrikaner as a collective on De Wet’s part.<sup>167</sup> But from my survey of De Wet’s paratextual commentary on Afrikanerdom, a complex, sometimes paradoxical sense of this precarious cultural character (much like her stance on feminism) surfaces, and I highlight three aspects of it here: her sense of Afrikaner nationalism’s constructedness, her parents’ and her own rejection of this

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<sup>166</sup> De Wet’s quote in Afrikaans is: “As daar iets van ’n kollektiewe psige in die stuk is, dan is dit omdat dit ’n baie spontane reaksie van my kant teenoor hierdie dinge was” (in De Villiers 45).

<sup>167</sup> Franz Fanon argued that Jung’s “model of psychic economy is compromised by being predicated on a racial schema” (Moore-Gilbert xix); Farhad Dalal’s work explores “the racist core of Jungian Psychology” (263), and Helen Morgan and Jane Johnson note critique of Jung’s thinking, saying it “becomes racist when he equates primitive states of mind (unconscious process) with so called ‘primitive’ people, seeing the psyches of black people as less developed and inferior to those of white people” (1). I thank my friend and colleague Dr Mathilda Slabbert for pointing this out and guiding me to the work referenced above.

politicised and institutionalised articulation of it, and her own implied replacement of it with yet another essentialised version.

In 1997 former nationalist state president P.W. Botha declared on a televised interview that he will not apologise for being “an Afrikaner Boer” (in De Beer “Afrikaner” 9). This declaration had sparked a belligerent debate amongst self-identifying Afrikaner politicians and celebrities about the representational politics, being spoken on behalf of that is, by a leader of the previous regime in the context of a newfound democracy where white Afrikaans speakers *en masse* endeavour to destigmatise themselves in public perception. It also reignited a deliberation about the definition of Afrikanerdom. De Wet quipped in response to Botha’s assertion that the term “‘Afrikaner Boer’ sounds like a type of ox, like a strange kind of cross-bred animal; or like cattle that are being inbred” (9). Her sardonic subversion of Botha’s asserted pride in a nationalist expression of Afrikanerdom in a post-apartheid context may reflect a fashionable and a retrospectively convenient hostility, at the time, to the paragons of the previous regime. But De Wet’s audible resistance to the apartheid government and the hegemonic brand of Afrikanerdom it had promoted (although she had never seemed eager to claim struggle credentials), dates to at least the mid to late 1980s in the early interviews on her first plays.

In a 1985-interview with Barrie Hough on *Diepe Grond*, days after its premier performance, she remarks that “something had gone wrong with the Afrikaner” (“Uit” 2)<sup>168</sup>. It is this type of Afrikanerdom that she had described to Thamm a year later as “new” (“Reza” 7), suggesting it to be a perversion, a deviation from an earlier, if not less nefarious, at least more complex and heterogeneous expression of it. In this same interview she suggests that she had become convinced that what she described as its “evil values – isolation and domination –” are not inherent to the culture, but “embedded in the Afrikaner’s education” at the time, and that it was “time we turned around and rejected them”, which was what she had resolved to do through *Diepe Grond* (7). She explicated this sense on her part of the Afrikaner’s psyche’s change in the Campbell-interview when she described it as “a consciousness in metamorphosis” that she can “feel [...] happening”, and that her “plays reflect a need for wholeness and integration and, in that way, reflect the crisis.” (25). In the 1987 De Villiers-interview she identifies these “evils”, (again using the same intensely moralistic term), as resistant and repressive of sensuality, sexuality, spontaneity and intuition – in short, the

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<sup>168</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Iets het verkeerd geloop met die Afrikaner” (in Hough “Uit” 2).

Feminine Principle (48), and she upholds that this tendency did not form part of this aboriginal Afrikanerdom that she relies on as a concept to critique the more recent (twentieth-century) phenomenon (48). She saw it as a distortion of what Afrikanerdom used to be (48).<sup>169</sup> As such, she emphasises, again, the role of state education to instil this type of repressive Afrikanerdom, pointing to the parent figures in *Diepe Grond* as personifications of the education systems that imprint these values on the young (47).

De Wet deemed herself able to perceive this collapse of a culture (as she understood it) into an invented identity, an imagined community as it were, of a strategic government, from her position of having been raised in a household that was opposed to it (in Solberg 182), and as such, was “not mainstream” (in Paice 76), “not hyper-Afrikaans” (in Hough “Daar” 14), but “exotic” (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in Knox 77), “a bit eccentric”, “not Afrikaans in the usual way” (in Dyll 3)<sup>170</sup> and, in fact, “decadent, in terms of Afrikanerdom” (in Hough “Daar” 14). However, she had eventually, especially since the mid-1990s, suggested this peculiarity of her family to be more authentic, to have been more aligned with an older version of Afrikanerdom (Boekkooi “Gesiedenis” 5; in Blumberg 245; Burger “Nag” 3). This is an Afrikanerdom that, she imagined, was (and is where it survives) in fact sensual, spontaneous and comfortable with its cultural exchanges with its cohabiting ethnicities.

In one of the several descriptions of her family’s peculiar difference from nationalist Afrikanerdom, De Wet compares them to (what she saw as) the passionate and expressive characters in Anton Chekhov’s plays (Boekkooi “Gesiedenis” 5).<sup>171</sup> In the same breath, however, she flagged her conviction that “there are strong resemblances between the

<sup>169</sup> De Wet said to De Villiers: “I reject it, or rather, that part of it that had become distorted.” [Ek verwerp dit, of daardie deel daarvan, die deel wat verwronge geraak het.] (in De Villiers 48).

<sup>170</sup> To Heather Ross De Wet insisted that it “was the small-town environment and my schooling at the Christelike Nasionale Meisieskool [Christian National Girls’ School] in Bloemfontein that inspired my writing,” and not what she saw as her liberal domestic environment (14); and to Barrie Hough she related, comparably, that “it was more the people that lived around us with whom I came in contact with, that have given me my Afrikaans foundation.” [“Dit is meer die mense wat om ons gewoon het en met wie ek in aanraking gekom het wat my die Afrikaanse onderbou gegee het.”] (“Uit” 14)

<sup>171</sup> De Wet explained to Paul Boekkooi: “*Drie Susters Twee* was created in a far freer way, and I had felt more engaged with the characters than in my previous plays. The reason is because I grew up in a family who were as uproarious as Chekhov characters. I have always thought that if I would place my own family types in my Afrikaans plays, no one would believe it; their temperament would not have been convincing within an Afrikaans milieu.” [“*Drie Susters Twee*, [...] is op ’n veel vryer manier geskep, maar tog het [ek] meer betrokke gevoel by die karakters as by dié in haar vorige dramas. Die rede [...] is omdat [ek] in ’n familie groot geword het wat eerder soos Tsjehof-karakters te kere gaan as dié wat sy in haar Afrikaanse stukke gebruik. [...] Ek het altyd gedink dat as ek my familietipes in my Afrikaanse stukke sou sit, sal niemand dit glo nie: hul temperament sou nie geloofwaardig wees binne ’n Afrikaanse milieu nie.”] (Boekkooi “Gesiedenis” 5)

earthiness of the Russians and that of the Afrikaners” (5),<sup>172</sup> a point she had also made in an interview with Di Paice (75).<sup>173</sup> In conversation with Kobus Burger she reflected on rewriting *The Brothers*, her biofictional drama about Anton and Alexander Chekhov as *Broers*, that she felt that the characters came more strongly into their own in Afrikaans, since, in her view, Afrikaners and Russians share a characteristic “passion and spontaneity” (Burger “Nag” 3),<sup>174</sup> the features, that she felt nationalist Afrikanerdom discourages and that she had reacted against with *Vrystaat-trilogie* (in Botha “Meisie” 6). To Anja Huismans and Juanita Finestone she explained that her Afrikaans protagonists in *Vrystaat-trilogie* and *Trits* are, although initially repressed, “open and inviting” to the sexual liberation of the *deus ex machina* in the dramas (94). She also suggests a stronger filial bond between this pre-modern Afrikaner and indigenous cultures of non-European descent, than what is generally acknowledged (in Blumberg 245). She even goes as far as suggesting that on “a very deep level, many Afrikaners have a black psyche” (245), since, to her mind the “Afrikaner and the black people have always been terribly close” which to her explains how “the bloodless revolution [...] could happen” (245).

The political, philosophical and historiographical problems arising from this accumulation of statements from which to derive De Wet’s conception of a romanticised, idealised, essentialised, aboriginal Afrikanerdom, preceding the version of it constructed by apartheid hegemony, are obviously multiple. But again, it is crucial to note De Wet’s insistence, throughout her career as a writer, that she was not, as a *playwright*, interested in the propagation of an exact expression of Afrikanerdom, or any cultural identity for that matter, (in De Villers 47; in Du Plessis “Diepe” 51; in Coetzee “Kitsch” 13), even if she held specific, strong or (if you may) politically problematic notions of what exactly an “authentic” or “prelapsarian” Afrikaner identity entails. I suggest that the chief inference to draw from De

<sup>172</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Tog is De Wet saam met sovele ander daarvan oortuig dat daar sterk ooreenkomste is tussen die aardsheid van Russe en Afrikaners.” (5)

<sup>173</sup> De Wet described the Afrikaners and Russians as comparably “earthbound” and “primitive” (in Paice 75).

<sup>174</sup> De Wet related to Kobus Burger: “Instead of translating, I have rewritten *The Brothers* entirely in Afrikaans. The moment I had rewritten it, it felt like the characters were happier in Afrikaans. I felt that the Chekhov family were happier. There is something between Russians and Afrikaners, the passion and spontaneity ... Do you realise that there were 8 000 Russians who had fought with the Boers in the Boer War? I have met a few Russians in my life and had resonated with them to an unusual degree. We had spoken for hours. I don’t know what it is.” [Pleks van vertaal, het [ek] *The Brothers* heeltemal herskryf in Afrikaans. Die oomblik toe ek dit oorskryf, het dit gevoel of die karakters gelukkiger is in Afrikaans. Ek het gevoel asof die Tsjechov-familie gelukkig voel. Daar is iets tussen Russies en Afrikaans, die passie, die spontaneiteit ... Jy weet daar was 8 000 Russe wat saam met die Boere in die Boereoorlog kom veg het? Ek het al ’n paar Russe in my lewe teëgekom en ek het nie op die gewone manier by hulle aanklank gevind nie. Ons het land en sand gesels. Ek weet nie wat dit is nie] (“Nag” 3).

Wet's binary between a pre-apartheid- (pre-officiated) and apartheid- (officiated) Afrikanerdom is her projection of an ethnocultural way of being that accommodates her sense of a balance between her conceptualised Feminine and Masculine Principles. Even if her idea of a pre-apartheid Afrikanerdom is nothing more than yet another imagined community, that had led a "pre-Eden existence", as she calls it (in Blumberg), it represents the liberated future alternative beyond the limiting status quo that she felt hegemonic Afrikanerdom in the cultural environment of her youth afforded her. Whether this freer version ever existed, a collective hunger, if not by all Afrikaners, then by many of her self-identifying Afrikaner audience members were "proven" to De Wet by what some of her fiercest critics saw as an undeservedly fanatic response to *Diepe Grond* (Brink "Talentvolle" 12; Le Roux "Kunsmatige" 8) – even on the platform provided by the ATKV – ironically so, as Basson suggests ("Introduction" 8).<sup>175</sup> For De Wet this was a therapeutic realisation – that despite what she had believed, to be frustrated with nationalist Afrikanerdom unique to her and her unconventional familial background, was in fact a concern shared by many (in De Villiers 47; in Campbell 25). This moment then, seemed to have led her into theorising a distinctly collective Afrikaner psyche with an over-active animus represented by the apartheid government.

This theory of a collective Afrikaner consciousness must then be aligned with De Wet's re-appropriation of Jung's definition of the individual and the collective psyche. As I have explicated in the previous chapter, she deviates from Jung most drastically by conflating his distinction between the rational (ego-consciousness) and irrational (sub- and unconscious) dimensions of the individual mind, and the archetypes of the animus and the anima that form part of the collective unconscious. This mapping of De Wet's psychosocial worldview steers this analysis back towards the connection of her use of periodisation in *Vrystaat-trilogie* with her understanding of the way in which the individual psyche is structured in relation to the cultural collective from which, in her view, it cannot be easily extracted. If, as I argue earlier, the very concept of the past functions as a symbol of the unconscious, it follows that there are at least two competing types of histories that De Wet draws on as the chronotopes for her plays, which she had described as fruits of her unconscious, both of which she maintains are mythologised: history as dramatised in Afrikaner nationalist discourse, and the past as

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<sup>175</sup> Basson, in his "Introduction" to *Plays Two*, described *Diepe Grond* as a "play that clearly overturned every single rule and moral principle that upheld society and were accepted as the norm by the very people that set up the Campus Drama Festival" (9).

fetishised by less conventional Afrikaners such as her family. Through a biocritical lens, I infer that De Wet had embodied, performed perhaps, with sustained commitment, this focus on these two pasts in her private, domestic sphere in a way that cultivated her negotiation with it in her plays.

If a British theatre critic describes De Wet as “a playwright clearly enslaved by the past” (Billington 1), it stems from her passion for history that surpassed her passion for theatre. She self-mockingly expressed her discomfort with “modern society” by describing herself as “a period piece” (in Brümmer “Vrou” 4). When she allowed interviewers into her home, she was often asked about her profuse collection of antiques. Various she responded that “I love my house and my old things” (in Duvenhage 39),<sup>176</sup> flaunted her tendency to “hoard” (in Van Biljon 1)<sup>177</sup> and to “clutter” (in Welman “Ma’s” 36),<sup>178</sup> even if it puzzled, intrigued, or even repulsed acquaintances. I insert a short collage of quotes containing descriptions of her house’s interior:

Her half cousin Carla Haviland, who regularly visited De Wet for extended periods of time recalled with jocose appreciation: “If you look at that house, [...] [i]t had old corsets hanging over the chairs and a broken Dresden doll because someone gave it to her ... As my daughter said, ‘I don’t know why anyone goes to a museum in Grahamstown, they should all go to that house.’” (Int.)

Anna-Karien Otto, a friend of De Wet: “If you walked into her house, you couldn’t believe it. It was like a Victorian house. It was a Victorian house, but its interior was entirely Victorian. [...] [It] was great [as a child] playing with all these wonderful things because everything they had was old. And that was something I really resonated with because I’m the same. I love old things and Victoriana. She for instance, introduced me to wonderful antiques.” (Int. 1)

Mannie Mannim, the theatre producer who had given De Wet her first role as an actress and who had first produced *Diepe Grond* professionally: “I used to visit Reza whenever I went to Grahamstown, [...] and we would have this, almost ceremonial, cup of tea in the study. It looked like a bit of a Chekhov set with these beautiful old antiques.” (Int.)

Willemien Brümmer, one of the last journalists to interview De Wet: “It might as well have been a set for a Reza de Wet drama. Outside the garden

<sup>176</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ek is lief vir my huis en vir my ou goed.” (in Duvenhage 38)

<sup>177</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “[Ek] is ’n vergaarder.” (in Van Biljon 1)

<sup>178</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ek is dol op my *clutter*.” (in Welman “Ma’s” 36)

resembles a dark fairy tale forest; inside patina clings to centuries old furniture” (in “Vrou” 26)<sup>179</sup>



**Figure 10: De Wet’s bedside table in Grahamstown<sup>180</sup>**

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<sup>179</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Dit kon net sowel die stel vir ’n Reza de Wet-drama gewees het. Buite is die tuin soos ’n donker sprokieswoud; binne kleef die patina van eeue aan die meubels.” (in “Vrou” 26)

<sup>180</sup> A photograph of De Wet’s bedside table is included here as exemplary of her delight in “hoarding” and “cluttering” antiques and heirlooms.



**Figure 11: De Wet's antique toy collection<sup>181</sup>**

De Wet traced this passion for all things old-fashioned to her upbringing. She explained that she had grown up in old houses (in Duvenhage 39),<sup>182</sup> and that her mother and grandmother were lovers and collectors of antiques, which De Wet had inherited and treasured (Van Biljon 1).<sup>183</sup> Marijke Echeverria, an amateur actress who had played the part of Ma in the premiere student production of *Op Dees Aarde* opposite De Wet herself, recalls a cast visit to De Wet's grandmother's house in Senekal that rather mirrors the above mentioned (and my own) impressions of De Wet's house in Grahamstown:

Walking into the coolness of the home after a hot morning in the van was like stepping into a 'theatre' of memories, atmospheres and intrigue. Pictures and old photographs lined the walls; little damask bits of lace work, long-loved furniture and a desk where Reza said she liked to come away and write. Truly like a movie set but so genuine and such an authentic bit of 'time warp'; one could just imagine some *tannie* walking in with her long, black dress and hair in a bun. So much 'atmosphere' of the 1920s and 1930s, still around, I remember wondering whether this little house inspired her to write *Op Dees Aarde*? (Int.)

<sup>181</sup> De Wet's collection of antique toys evoking Otto's nostalgia of spending much of her childhood in De Wet's house.

<sup>182</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Ek het in ou huise grootgeword." (in Duvenhage 39)

<sup>183</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "terwyl sy baie van haar moeder se versameling oudhede geërf het." (Van Biljon 1)

De Wet's maternal cousin Cheryl van Eyssen reflected in a letter to her sister June about their childhood in Senekal:

Our Senekal was the Senekal house[; it] was, an emotional anchor to our lives and long after the deaths of the 'adults' we still visited there ... and each time it was like stepping back in time ... almost as if nothing had changed ... the rich and stylish interiors kept as they were by Gloris Motsemai'(Int.)

De Wet's daughter Nina van Schoor gives an impression from her childhood of Reza's parents' house in Bloemfontein, comparable in descriptive content and affective response to Echeverria's and Van Eyssens's portrayal of the Senekal house:

[W]hen [...] [my grandparents] were distracted and [...] [my grandmother] wasn't playing with me, [...] I [...] would wander [...] around, and the house was really huge. And these rooms ... Each room was like a whole world, so you'd walk into one room and it would be this big, cold, very formal room with lots of very formal antiques and these huge pictures, and the one was a picture of my grandmother, looking really terrifying. [...] For me it was really just like going from one realm to another. It was like that. So, if I imagine [...] [my grandmother] as I knew her [...] and [my mother as a little girl], sort of just being left with this impression of that particular house – [...] I can't imagine her being anything else than a writer after that. (Int. 2)



**Figures 12 and 13: Interiors of De Wet's parents' house in Bloemfontein<sup>184</sup>**

<sup>184</sup> Photographs taken at De Wet's parents' house in Bloemfontein in 1994, shortly after she had won the Herzog Prize for the first time. The photographer is unknown. The photos are stored in NALN.

These homely spaces, adapted as anachronistic time capsules by the three generations of women, evoke the house in one of De Wet's favourite films (Int. Van Schoor 2), Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001). Early in it the photophobic protagonist Grace explains to her new housekeeper, Bertha Mills, that the house is like a ship, and the light (symbolising modernity and change, possibly) like water, that needs to be kept out at all cost.<sup>185</sup>

While De Wet had regarded the extent to which the past was channelled and kept alive by her mother and grandmother in these households she also remarked on what she saw as even the more conventional Afrikaner's inherent preoccupation with its past. In reference to *Nag, Generaal* and *Breathing In* she said to Dorothea van Zyl in 2004 that she had been fascinated with the Boer War long before the then recently revived interest in it, because most Afrikaners she knew had stories to tell about it concerning their ancestors (in Van Zyl "Bekeks" 4).<sup>186</sup> She also recognised the nationalism that propelled performances of Great Trek and Boer War history in twentieth-century South Africa through the erection of monuments and state subsidised ceremonies and rituals since the 1930s and during the boom of the phenomenon in the 1960s. She especially reflected on the emphasis laid on this cultural propagation in her school education (in Barnard 18;<sup>187</sup> in Greeff 94<sup>188</sup>), and I have already described, in the previous chapter, the special concentration of Afrikaner nationalist memorialisation in Bloemfontein during her formative years.

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<sup>185</sup> Grace tells Bertha that "[t]he only thing that moves here is the light .... but it changes everything ...", and later when she is convinced that the servants have left a door unlocked out of negligence, she exclaims that "[t]his house is like a ship; the light must be contained as it were water by opening and closing the doors!".

<sup>186</sup> She told Dorothea van Zyl that "I have been fascinated with the Anglo Boer War long before the current revival in interest in it. It gripped me in the late 1980s that Afrikaners all have a story from this history. For me it was connected to Afrikaner nationalism and with what, from the past, was considered morally acceptable and what not." [Ek het in die Anglo-Boereoorlog belang gestel lank voor die onlangse oplewing in belangstelling. Dit het my in die laat 80's geboei dat mense wat Afrikaans is, almal 'n storie uit die verlede het. Vir my het dit toe aangesluit by Afrikaner-nasionalisme, by wat uit die verlede moreel aanvaarbaar was en wat nie.] (in Van Zyl 4)

<sup>187</sup> De Wet said to Tercia Barnard that during her "school years, a fixation with Afrikaner nationalism and the Anglo Boer War set the tone in Bloemfontein." [Tydens my "skooljare het Afrikanernasionalisme en 'n behepthed met die Anglo-Boereoorlg die bo-toon gevoer in Bloemfontein] (18).

<sup>188</sup> De Wet informed Rachell Greeff that "the Boer War were continually emphasised" in her school education [die Boere-oorlog deurentyd beklemtoon is] (94)



**Figure 14: Oranje National Christian Girls' School's annual march to the Women's Monument in 1969<sup>189</sup>**

But although De Wet recalls the world of her childhood as one in which history was anachronistically and overwhelmingly present both in the public and in her private spheres, the tone in which she described the channelling of these respective domains once again suggests the binary of the Masculine and Feminine Principles, obviously connecting the public, nationalistic conjuring of the past with the Masculine, and her mother and grandmother's channelling of it, with the Feminine.

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<sup>189</sup> A of photograph Oranje National Christian Girls' School's archive depicting the 1969 conducting of the school's annual march to the Women's Monument where women's role in the Boer War was commemorated.



**Figure 15: De Wet costumed in *fin de siècle* wear in 1967<sup>190</sup>**

The past that De Wet and her maternal ancestors had cultivated (and of course, reimagined and reconstructed), drew its conservationist value for them from the enigmatic ancestral figures that inhabit it – personalities who, for De Wet, seemed to have embodied the Feminine Principle. This includes Eugène Marais whom she commemorates in *Verleiding*. With her portrayal of him she emphasises his sensuality, sexual dissidence, artistry and proclivity for all things mystical. In the same play, she portrays her grandmother, Freddie, as sharing these personality traits by foregrounding her artistic temperament, sexual charisma, and clairvoyance (*Verleiding* 18). *Verleiding* then chronicles the tilting of Freddie’s intense association with Marais, her [Freddie’s] uncle, into a transgressive and unrequited romantic obsession: she commissions the sculpting of his bust, as well as the construction of a little hut outside her house in which to keep it with all her other memorabilia of him – yet another time capsule, in which the word “romantic” gains a double meaning. With *Verleiding* De Wet insinuates that Freddie had forged a lifelong transmortem courtship with Marais after his

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<sup>190</sup> This photograph of De Wet, aged 14/15, costumed in *fin de siècle* wear is published in Oranje National Christian Girls’ School’s yearbook of 1967. It is captioned “Fashion from Oranje’s Past” (58). It exemplifies both the school as a public institution’s commitment to the commemoration of history, and to De Wet’s own passion for it. It is one of De Wet’s only school pictures available in Oranje’s archive, in which she smiles and atypically and gazes directly into the camera lens.

death and arguably, this becomes an indirect way in which De Wet stages her own attempt at tracing a genealogical origin of her propensity for favouring the Feminine Principle in her own psyche. *Verleiding* then demonstrates the way in which her mother and grandmother, from her perspective, had used the past to validate and enforce their expression of Afrikanerdom. Marais after all, was considered, by contrast, in the paradigm of apartheid hegemony, as a nationalist hero, as Sandra Swart points out (1). But, while he was valorised and claimed in the public arena as a paragon of Afrikaner nationalism, De Wet was raised to understand an overlooked version of him, and to value the unconventional qualities that attend this way of being.



**Figures 16 and 17: The bust of Eugène Marais and the hut in which it was placed<sup>191</sup>**

De Wet and her family were not unique in their emphasis on this “other” Marais. Swart identifies two intellectual traditions in Marais scholarship: one, powered by the National Press’s hagiography of him “both during his life and after his death,” which emphasises the perception of him as the “father of Afrikaans poetry” and as an invaluable role player in “the Afrikaner nationalist movement”; while the other strand “remembers him as a dissident iconoclast, an Afrikaner rebel” (1). A minute example of the latter tradition is found Hennie Aucamp’s published letter to Elize Botha, in which he asserts that Marais “must be considered more closely as decadent, as an Art Nouveau phenomenon” (73). Swart suggests that it was precisely Marais’s “intellectually heterodox, socially liminal and culturally innovative” identity that makes him such a symbolically pliable historical figure so that the conflicting ways in which he “has been remembered” becomes “a question worth consideration by historians of nationalism, particularly those interested in the creation of Afrikaner identity” (1). The two traditions that Swart identifies resemble De Wet’s bifurcated

<sup>191</sup> A photograph taken in 1994 of the Marais bust, then stored in De Wet’s father’s house in Bloemfontein.

psychosocial view of the Afrikaner and as such the example of Marais effectively illustrates the distinct and opposing expressions of nostalgia and anachronism by De Wet's family and what De Wet saw as mainstream Afrikanerdom during her youth.

Thus, De Wet's childhood does not only represent her individual past; it is a past that for her was deliberately shaped and characterised by an intense dialogue with specific histories, an entire milieu in which she commuted, daily, between spaces where conflicting, and contesting versions of the same pasts were constantly broadcasted to install particular present ways of being an Afrikaner. It was only after the staged production of *Nag, Generaal* that De Wet, in 1989, with her unpublished play *In a Different Light*, was ready to write a play in English, set in the present, in an urban and mixed cultural context, that she felt rid of, what she called, the "Afrikaner-heaviness" that had burdened her first three plays (in Van Biljon 1). Inextricably linked to De Wet's sprouting as a professional, published playwright was her mission of finding her voice, through the militant negation of an imposed cultural identity which, she had felt, denied her the complexities of what she experienced as an identity uncontaminated by the imprints of her hegemonic social order culture (in Solberg 183);<sup>192</sup> a notion as problematic and hermeneutically unsound as it stands at present would have been provided to De Wet by Jungian theory and its ahistorical premises.

While De Wet's childhood household represented for her, retrospectively, a refuge against Afrikaner nationalist dogmas, the inescapable realities of schooling, for instance, was regulated and regimented by its metanarratives and its guiding repressions. She had written *Vrystaat-triologie* while living in Grahamstown, a town she had enjoyed for its "English mood" and its lack of pressure to perform her Afrikanerdom in a specific way (in Barnard 25;<sup>193</sup> Van Biljon 1<sup>194</sup>). By then she had also lived in Cape Town while completing her postgraduate diploma in acting and an honours degree in English literature, interrupted and followed by her brief career as an actress in Johannesburg. De Wet was 32 by the time *Diepe*

<sup>192</sup> To Rolf Solberg De Wet said, in reference to her sense of her perception in the Afrikaans public: "I am totally foreign. I might as well be – not Russian, but maybe South American" (in Solberg 183).

<sup>193</sup> De Wet suggested that the "Grahamstown environment is free from the Afrikaans insulation"; that there is "a more intuitive life" and that "here in this untouched nature, African wildness and English Victorian culture merge in surprising harmony" that she was able to "give birth to a series of dramas" [ "[Die] Grahamstad-omgewing [is] vry van [...] die Afrikaanse benoudheid [;] [...] [hier] en geld [...] 'n meer natuurlike en intuitiewe bestaan. Dit is hiërdie milieu, ongerepte natuur, Afrika-wildheid en Engels-Victoriaanse kultuur in verrassende harmonie vervloei, dat [...] geboorte kon gee aan 'n reeks dramas." ] (in Barnard 25)

<sup>194</sup> De Wet described Grahamstown as an "extremely seductive sort of town" since "no one expects anything of her"; she liked "the English mood, the lack of a specific Afrikaans presence" and that she can "be Afrikaans without pressure." [ "[Grahamstad is] 'n vreeslik verleidelike soort dorp. Niemand verwag iets van jou nie. Ek hou van die Engelse mood, die gebrek aan 'n spesifieke Afrikaanse 'presence'. Ek kan daar Afrikaans wees sonder druk" ] (De Wet in Van Biljon 1)

*Grond* was first staged and 38 by the publication of *Vrystaat-trilogie* in 1990. She had left Bloemfontein, the Free State, at the age of 21. By that time, she had not lived in Bloemfontein, “the heartland of the Afrikanerdom”, as she called it (in Greeff 94), for more than a decade. The pressures and constrictions she had associated with it had, by then, formed part of her personal past. The Free State as geo-cultural space thus represents her formative years, her first two decades, her personal pre-authorial history at that point in her development. The Free State and the history that the nationalist government had propagated through the education systems, monuments and nationally institutionalised historical commemorations, had shaped the atmosphere, the backdrop, the spatiotemporal flavour of her core memories and thus, as she would understand it, much of the cultural inscription of the archetypal images of her unconscious.

In this light, the spatial dimensions of De Wet’s Free State experience surfaces as it is locked up in the temporal ones to form a chronotope. With *Vrystaat-trilogie* and her paratextual commentary on it, the Free State, as a theatricalised chronotope, becomes the past spatialised; space and time becomes subsumed into each other; the Free State becomes the “foreign country” which the past is, in L.P. Hartley’s famous aphorism in *The Go-Between* (1953). The consequence is an uncanny doubling of the “Once upon a time in a far of land” lead-in to the fairy tale in the Jungian sense. There is an ambiguity stemming from the rival understandings and claims of the literal and figurative territories. The titles of the trilogy and these three plays designate on its literal plane the “national territory” claimed by the apartheid government. The “grond” in *Diepe Grond*, implies “land” as in the farm that the play for instance centres on. It evokes nationalist Afrikanerdom’s emphasis on being an essentially agricultural nation who, by an early Dutch Reformed version of the Exodus myth, is characterised as the chosen people for whom this land is reserved. The “Free State” in *Vrystaat-trilogie* gives this “promised land”, so to speak, a more specified meaning as one of the two former Boer Republics to have been defended by the burgers, as a state free of British imperial rule, during the South African War, which the “Generaal” [General] then, in *Nag, Generaal*, is connected to. But each title implies an ironic double meaning. *Diepe Grond*’s title alludes to the Afrikaans proverb, “Stille waters, diepe grond, onder draai die duiwel rond” [Still waters, deep ground, underneath, the devil stirs]. This use of the proverb signals the trilogy’s dramatisation of De Wet’s sense that apartheid Afrikanerdom’s projection of a firm rootedness in a consecrated terrain is underlied by insidious undercurrents. “Free State” acquires a double meaning as not merely representing the name of a province, but also De

Wet's more personal urge to achieve a state of freedom from the psychological restraints she connoted with nationalist Afrikanerdom,<sup>195</sup> and, as mentioned earlier, the "Nag" in *Nag, Generaal* implies a sardonic rejection of the figure of the republican patriarch as the primary authority seat, by wishing him a "good" (and eternal) night's rest.

The geographically particularised State in these plays is a psychological site of war (more than an ideological one, for instance). The ground, the earth, the territory in each drama is laid claim to by conflicting parties: in *Diepe Grond* the terrain at stake is a farm, in *Op Dees Aarde* it is the hereditary rights to a family's town house and in *Nag, Generaal* an entire Boer republic, the ground of which represents the mysterious foundations of De Wet's own psyche, and by extension, in her Jungian coloured view, all Afrikaners. If in *Vrystaat-trilogie* De Wet is reclaiming the Free State and its histories through the triumphs of her protagonists, it signifies her regaining of the autonomous management of the grounds of her psyche that was discouraged by the conventional strands of her upbringing. She travels to the space of her childhood, literally when at times she retreated to the Free State to write, as Echeverria points out earlier, and imaginatively through the texts; she time travels, haunting her own childhood and the pasts that she experienced as vehicles of psychological oppression in her upbringing and education. Reflecting on her frequent visits to her grandmother's house in Senekal for this purpose, long after her grandmother's death, she relates in an interview with Rachelle Greeff in 1988:

Each return is also a retreat to childhood, in the spiritual sense of the word. On the one hand the crisp and free experience of the child is awakened anew. It is wonderful. But on the other hand, I also relive the anxiety of constraint one experiences in childhood: the rules and regulations that are imposed on the child. Here I go, time and again to find my place in the world, and to reconfirm that which I am in my being. It is a private, personal quest. Each play speaks of such a spiritual journey. (in Greeff 96)<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> In Antjie Krog's poem "a one-dimensional song of the northern free-state", as translated by Denis Hirson, the poet-speaker repeatedly calls this province, where she had also grown up "most beloved state of heart" (263-4). Krog was born, like De Wet, in 1952.

<sup>196</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Elke teruggaan, is ook 'n terugtree na kind wees, in die geestelike sin van die woord. Aan die een kant word die skerp en vry ervaring van die kind opnuut aangewakker. Dis wonderlik. Maar daarteenoor ervaar ek weer die bevangenheid van kind wees: die reëls en regulasies wat aan jou as kind opgedwing word. Hierheen gaan [ek] keer op keer terug om [my] plek in die wêreld, [my] oorsprong en dit wat [ek] in wese is, te herbevestig. Dis 'n private, persoonlike tog. Elke toneelstuk spreek van 'n soortgelyke – geestelike – reis." (in Greeff 96)

De Wet had conveyed this complex and mixed association with the Free State in other interviews as well (in Botha “Meisie” 6; in De Villiers 48). In her plays this internal conflict is personified by the characters in relationally volatile families, and this aspect moves this chapter to the second point so sharply focused on by *Nag, Generaal*’s reviewers. The plays that comprise *Vrystaat-trilogie*, like most of De Wet’s dramas, are all centred on families, all claustrophically set in strict and constrictive household spaces. Given De Wet’s immersion in Jung, it may be inferred that the family units represent the active and dynamic forces in the psyche, as opposed to the passive chronotope. In the fairy tales selected by Jung and many of his theorists and explicators (most notably Marie-Luise von Franz and David Julian), the psyche is characterised by a family, a royal household mostly, whereby, in their analyses, the king represents the ego-consciousness and the youngest child (usually a son and mostly the youngest of three children) being the centre of consciousness, transformative and nomadic. The pattern I detect in especially *Diepe Grond* and *Nag, Generaal*, as prototypical of and most pervasive in De Wet’s plays, is that of an antagonist and protagonist in a single family unit and a liberating tritagonist siding with the latter. In De Wet’s dramatised psychological cosmos, the protagonist, I argue, is the centre of consciousness, the antagonist, normally a tyrannical authority figure, embodying the Masculine Principle, and the tritagonist, the stabilising Feminine Principle. Thus, when De Wet describes her plays as “fragile protests” (in Willoughby “Sucking” 2) while yet distinguishing her work from a South African theatre culture of political protest and agitprop (in Finestone and Huisman 95; in Norval “Feesviering” 2; in Solberg 187), she asserts her artistic intention not to stir an external political revolution, but her endeavour rather, to achieve a personal individual cleansing, an exorcism of internalised socio-political metanarratives (in De Villiers 47; in Hough “Daar” 14; in Knox 79).

With De Wet’s psychoanalytic allegorical poetics then, true to her typically respectful irreverence towards Jung, she creates characters that are neither one-dimensional nor naturalistically well-rounded, and as such, resists traditional Jungian analysis on yet another level. Literary texts animated by what E.M. Forster would term as “flat” characters (*Aspects* 73-81), tend to attract Jungian readings more readily than a Freudian approach since, as J.A. Cuddon points out, “in the Freudian method a literary character is treated as if a living human being” (332) and not as a personified archetype or allegorical symbol. There are of course exceptions such as Slavoj Žižek’s film criticism, although he relies more strongly on Jacques

Lacan's reformulation of Freud than on Freud's own modelling of literary analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Theme of the Three Caskets* (1913), *Some Character Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work* (1915) and *Delusion and Dream* (1917). Characters that lend themselves to Freudian critique usually display complex, dynamic and developing subjectivities often manifested in the depiction of their dream lives or experiments in narrative point of view that rely on dichotomies of characters' psychological interiority and socialised exterior personas. It is in this way that De Wet's characters are liminal in terms of mental complexity in depiction and function. On the one hand she herself insisted on them as "types" (in Huisman and Finestone 93-4), as embodiments of archetypes (in Van Zyl 4) and as "little characters, not complex ones who move in a certain direction" (in Dyll 3); on the other hand, the protagonists do undergo rapid spiritual transformation, engage in complex ways with their dream worlds and subconscious, and at times entire plays are platformed on the subconscious or a mediated memory world of a single character (as in *On the Lake*, *Bessie's Head*, *Op Dees Aarde* and *Blou Uur*). De Wet's own alchemical fusion, in her Master's dissertation, of Freudian and Jungian theory to construct an analytic lens of the dramas she studies in it, speaks of the amphibian psychoanalytic position that has shaped her own poetics. Her characters are not entirely "flat" or "round" in Forster's narratological sense. She expressed her understanding of her own work as hovering on a "stylistic axis" and "between parameters", so that it can neither be performed like a naturalistic Chekhov drama, nor like a fairy tale or pantomime (in Botha "Meisie" 6);<sup>197</sup> thus she described her characters as "half puppet, half human, Kabuki-like" (in Jamal "Between" 35). This was on par with her view of theatre's proper position in terms of its claims to verisimilitude; she insisted that it "is not the place where things really happen" but "another place", "a third reality, where non-reality and reality intersect and form this special shape" (in Solberg 179).

Parenthetically, it might be useful to reference an interview with Wilna Snyman, one of De Wet's preferred actresses that have performed in four of her plays, each time under the guidance of Basson. Although three of the characters Snyman had played, Miem in *Mis*, Hermien in *Drif*, and Olga in *Drie Susters Twee*, are all female embodiments of the Masculine Principle, Snyman insisted:

I never felt that I was playing the same part. Each of her characters comes with its own branches and characteristics in which one can delve. She provides you

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<sup>197</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "stilisties op 'n mespunt. Dit kan nie soos 'n Tsjechov-stuk gespeel word nie, maar ook nie soos 'n sprokie of pantomime nie. Dit huiwer op grense." (in Botha "Meisie" 6)

with the opportunity to explore the character yourself, because the dialogue is there to create a full character in its own right. (Int. Snyman)<sup>198</sup>

But this stylistic hybridity is not so much applicable on all her characters, as it is in the consideration of the *dramatis personae* as a whole in each drama. Talking about the character type that embodies the Feminine Principle in *Trits*, De Wet explained that “it is the interaction among [...] all [the characters] that is really more important. I never saw them in isolation but immediately in relation to other characters. All the characters complete each other” (93-4).

I suggest that there are grades and shades of depictional complexity from figure to figure within the composition of each character cast. Relying on this assumption I argue that even though no one character in a De Wet play acts single-handedly as a masked self-portrait, the protagonist-as-centre-of-consciousness in each drama is invested with a larger measure of psychological complexity than the rest, and is more pliable, more impressionable than the other characters who are more consistent in their behaviour. And even though these other characters also represent for De Wet elements of her psyche, they embody the essences that do not alter in themselves the way that the protagonists do. The capriciousness of the protagonists in her plays casts them as surer clues to the shape of their author’s mentality and psychological concerns at the time of their writing and it comes as no surprise than that De Wet often, having already denied their status as her fictional avatars, expressed an intense identification with them.

The most telling example, perhaps, is the instance in the De Villiers-interview where De Wet compares Soekie and Frikkie’s roleplaying in *Diepe Grond* with her own creation of them:

For me it was a similar type of ritual to that which the children perform in the play. Just like they attempt to exorcise their parents and their oppressive and repressive influence, so the play was also a kind of exorcism of my own issues that have impacted it. (in De Villiers 47)<sup>199</sup>

De Wet thus suggests that the strongest autobiographical element invested in *Diepe Grond*’s two protagonists is the reduplication of the self *in* the self that creates and recreates through imitation, mimicry, and performance. Noteworthy also, is that this occurs in *Diepe Grond* in

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<sup>198</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ek het nooit gevoel dat ek dieselfde karakter speel nie. Elkeen van haar karakters kom met sy eie vertakkinge van karaktertrekke waarin jy delf. Sy gee jou altyd die geleentheid om te delf in die karakter. Want die dialoog is daar om ’n volwaardige volle karakter te maak.”

<sup>199</sup> Die quote in Afrikaans: “Dit was vir my dieselfde soort spel as wat die kinders in die stuk speel. Net soos hulle hul ouers en hul onderdrukkende invloed wou besweer, was die stuk ook ’n soort beswering – van my eie dinge wat op my ingewerk het en my klaustrofobies gemaak het; wat vir my skrikwekkend en onderdrukkend was.” (in De Villiers 47)

the spirit of child's play, even in view of the fact that Soekie and Frikkie are both adults. Elsewhere De Wet had identified this form of metadrama that connects theatre as genre with children's games as central to her view of what theatre should be. To Greeff she remarked that "theatre is *spel* [a word that in Afrikaans homonymically means "gaming", "acting" and "sorcery"]; therefore, the concepts 'freedom' and 'childlikeness' cannot be extracted from it" (in Greeff 94).<sup>200</sup> De Wet then achieves her spiritual liberation, as she suggests, through a retreat to childhood, and so, before I steer my analysis through the necessary critical and theoretical domains of theatre studies and literary critique, for an acquisition of an effective analytic glossary, I follow De Wet's cue in tracing her own and others' pilgrimages to the time-space where she had sought to unearth a lost psychological Eden, and to memories of her family and peers of De Wet's own childhood propensities for subversive adult mimicry.

In my interview with Kelly Oates who with Ecchevaria, quoted earlier, played opposite De Wet in the student premiere of *Op Dees Aarde* in 1986, recalled travelling with the play, and stopping over at De Wet's parents' house in Bloemfontein where De Wet insisted, as a crucial requirement for her preparation for the play, "to stay in her childhood bedroom" (Int.). That same year, the first professional production of *Diepe Grond* was staged and the cast, all of which I managed to interview save for the late Doris Sihula, reflected on a pilgrimage they too had made, initiated by De Wet to her parents' house and to one of her grandmother's farms near Senekal. I include fragments from the interviews below:

Dawid Minnaar (who played Frikkie): We drove down to the Free State, just to spend some time on a farm and to climb on windmills ... the old farm houses and verandas ... to get a feeling of a farm house and of open plains and so on ... just to get a sensual feeling of what the play is about. And then we also paid a visit to her grandmother's house in Senekal.<sup>201</sup>

Susan Coetzer (who played Soekie): We met *boervroue* [homonymically denoting "farmer women" and "Afrikaner women"] – the visit helped me to get under Soekie's skin and of the [Free State's] people and the earth.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "toneel is spel: daarom kan die begrippe: vryheid en kinderlikheid nooit daarvan losgemaak word nie." (Greeff 94)

<sup>201</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Ons het afgery Vrystaat toe en sommer op 'n plaas 'n bietjie tyd deurgebring en op windpompe rondgeklim ... die ou plaashuise en stoepe ... om daai gevoel te kry van 'n plaashuis en oop vlaktes en so aan ... net om 'n sensuele gevoel te kry van waaroor die stuk gaan. En toe was ons ook by haar ouma se huis op Senekal."

<sup>202</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Ons het boervroue ontmoet – die besoek het gehelp om die aarde en die mense en dan ook Soekie eerstehands onder my vel te beleef."

Gys de Villiers (who played Grové): We met Reza's mother and I know it had helped Susan who had played Soekie.<sup>203</sup>

Susan Coetzer: I spent a night in [Reza's] parents' house in her old bedroom full of dolls when we performed in Bloemfontein – very special.<sup>204</sup>



Figure 18: De Wet's dolls<sup>205</sup>



Figure 19: The cast of *Diepe Grond's* professional premiere on the Free State farm Jubilee<sup>206</sup>

<sup>203</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ons het haar moeder ontmoet en ek weet dit het baie vir Susan Coetzer gehelp wat Soekie gespeel het.”

<sup>204</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ek het by haar ouers in haar ou kinder slaapkamer vol poppe gebly toe ons in Bloem gespeel het – baie spesiaal.”

<sup>205</sup> This photograph was taken at her parents' house in 1994.

<sup>206</sup> Photographs taken by Ruphin Goudyzer of *Diepe Grond's* first professional cast in costume and in character, exploring De Wet's maternal grandmother's farm near Senekal on De Wet and Gillwald's suggestion.

These memories serve as remarkable illustrations of the extent to which De Wet was convinced of the ability to transfer a spirit of place and time-past, captured both in the countryside's typical anachronistic belatedness and the time-warp that her mother's house was described as, through such a literal visitation by the actors and via them to the audience.

In addition to these exterior impressions elicited by this geo-spatial retreat, a special layer of insight is garnered through the memories of family and friends who had shared De Wet's childhood. An anonymous school friend of hers narrated an incident when, during a certain religious ceremony, entailing Oranje pupils visiting the mother church in Bloemfontein, De Wet was asked to pray out loud, and she launched into a deliberately theatrical imitation of a stereotypical Dutch Reformed minister, to the visible amusement of her peers and consequently to the effect of her own punishment. From a letter by a cousin, Cheryl van Eyssen, it seems that the abovementioned episode is no isolated case. Van Eyssen relates:

Reza had a keen sense of observing people in shops as well as the shopkeepers and would often play-act out their curiosities. She particularly liked mimicking Mrs Kriek *met die skewe mond* [with the skew mouth] who owned the dress shop on Malan Street and who, she said, had that 'skew' expression as she 'pulled that face' when the Moeder Kerk [mother church] church bell struck twelve. We were told to be forewarned that we should be careful what we do when the clock strikes twelve, and so we did always nervously wait for the striking of the church clock.



**Figure 20: De Wet as a child play-acting with her friend Geta Finlayson née Geldenhuys**

This anecdote may exemplify De Wet's early conclusion of the dangers of stagnation that maturation and conventional socialisation (and an adherence to dogmas, of course, symbolised by that Mother Church Clock) seemed to entail for her. Another cousin, Evan van Eyssen, for whom De Wet was like a brother (in Knox 46), recollected:

At the age of about ten we observed grownups in conversation one evening and made a pact that we would never become grownups. This meant to us *playing* throughout our lives. She kept true to this and so did I. We used to often re-commit to this pact throughout our lives together.

Perhaps there is a confirmation of this pact in a sketch by her half-cousin Carla Haviland:

When Peter, my second husband, met Reza for the first time, we took them [Reza and Lindsay] to a restaurant and she said to Peter, ‘I see you’re wearing a watch.’ She didn’t have a watch. Time was irrelevant. She said, ‘You got to have to wind a watch every day, that’s why I don’t have one, because if I had one, I’d have to wind it.’ He thought she was joking. I said, ‘Reza, you don’t wind watches anymore.’ She said she wouldn’t know what to do with a watch.

While this connection between the two stories entailing a clock may have escaped De Wet herself, together they speak reams about her disdain of the rat-race of modernised responsibility and its alienating dangers. And again, it would be absurd to link all anecdotes entailing De Wet and clocks to each other, but there is poetic irony in this regard that she had mentioned her first role in a play, in her first school year, as the Mouse in a dramatisation of the nursery rhyme “Hickory Dickory Dock”, in which the Mouse flees from the striking Clock (in Brümmer “Vrou” 4). Her daughter, Van Schoor, reconfirmed her mother’s resistance to the demands of socialised behaviour that is considered “mature”, in her own interpretation of *Diepe Grond* and her recollection of De Wet’s performance in it:

I suppose my mom was playing herself in a way. That play was a combination of her childhood and my childhood, (to *Lindsay Reardon*), because those two [the protagonists, Soekie and Frikkie] were you and her in a way, playing out your parents’ roles, the dark side of marriage and having children, [...] it was also very much about her relationship with you as an adult; that she never entirely grew up, and very few people do. There’s a kind of hellish element in – that if you never entirely mature, and you end up in a relationship, it’s a kind of hell.

Two letters by De Wet to Basson, one written on 19 February 1996, and another on the 12th of December that same year, not only authorises something of Van Schoor’s sense of the degree to which De Wet had communicated a kind of Peter Pan syndrome through her plays, but also of the way in which her dramaturgy expressed and cultivated this impulse. In both letters De Wet describes, in her fragmented, stream-of-consciousness letter-writing style, punctuated with Dickensonian dashes, her envisaging of the set. In the first she writes:

The set as I see it – [...] Beatrix Potter colours – oatmeal crème, faded blue and green – faded wallpaper – lyrical backcloth seen through large windows – a self-enclosed nursery world – an idyll but also a faded idyll – the self-

enclosed and secure world of the box set – [...] Nursery cupboard against the right-side wall with fairy tale pictures against the walls...<sup>207</sup>

In the second letter De Wet responds to a conversation she had with Basson the previous day, in which he had pitched his idea – as she recalls it in the letter – of a set that is aesthetically “stripped” and “elegant” (L. RdW-MB 1996/12/12). She gently, apologetically, yet assertively, rejects this proposal and re-describes her conception of the set more elaborately:

The World of the play works for me in many ways – but *a la* Chekhov – it is for me the central metaphor of the play. Therefore, it is a *nursery*. The playroom forms a sharp contrast with the stark, stripped reality outside. It explains the childlike regressive quality of almost all the characters – arrested development, because they refuse to confront pain. That is why this nursery world is so Beatrix Potter – so absolutely intense. It evokes all lost childhood innocence – it reeks of time past – children’s farts – faded – soft – children’s food. The play room *is* time past – generations – all forgotten, worn – faded – soft – charming – dolls’ house – charming – music box. And the empty nursery at the end and Anfisa’s world – the poignant contrast of lost innocence and the little, little nursery world and the Outside – *this* I feel is the heart of the play. – Oh, I apologise for raving like this, but I think it has to do with the essence of the play and I had lived a year in that nursery. I can smell it – children’s’ rooms have a certain smell, doesn’t it? And the place where children play is the seed from which everything had germinated<sup>208</sup>

De Wet’s claim to have “lived a year in that nursery” is noteworthy. By the publication of *Drie Susters Twee* towards the end of 1996, about a year had passed since the publication of her previous work, *Stil Mathilda* in 1995. While “living” in the “nursery” is obviously De Wet’s symbolising of writing the play, her decoration of her specially built writing room, as shown in the photo below, underwrites her sense of playwriting as a form of child’s play and a retreat to childhood, an act that similarly entails the shutting out of “the Outside” as she puts it.

<sup>207</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Die stel – soos ek dit sien – [...] Beatrix Potter kleure – *oatmeal creme, faded* blou en groen – *faded* muurpapier – *lyrical backcloth gesien* deur groot venster – *self-enclosed nursery world* – Idylle maar *faded* ook *idylle self-enclosed* en *secure* wêreld van die box set – [...] *Nursery cupboard* teen regter muur, feë verhaal prente teen die mure.”

<sup>208</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “*The World of the play* werk op baie maniere – maar *a la* Tjekhoff – is dit vir my die sentrale metafoor van die *play*. Daarom is dit ’n *nursery*. Die speelkamer vorm ’n skreiende kontras met die *stark* – ‘*stripped*’ *reality* daarbuite. Dit verduidelik ook die kinderlike *regressive* kwaliteit van amper al die karakters – *arrested development, because they refuse to confront pain*. Daarom is hierdie *nursery* wêreld so Beatrix Potter – *so absoluut intense. Evokes all lost childhood innocence* – *Reeks of Time Past* – Kinder-poepe – Kinder-kos. Die speelkamer is *time past* – *generations* – alles vergete, afgeslyt – *faded* – sag – *charming* – *Dolls-house* – *charming* – *music box*. En die leë *nursery* aan die einde en Anfisa se wêreld – *The poignant contrast of lost innocence and the little, little nursery world and the Outside* – Dit voel ek is die hart van die *play*. – Ag ek is jammer ek *rave* nou so, maar ek dink dit het met die *essence* van die *play* te doen en ek het vir ’n jaar in daai *nursery* gebly. Ek kan dit ruik – Kinders se Kamers het mos ’n soort reuk en die plek waar kinders speel was die saad waaruit alles gegroei het.”

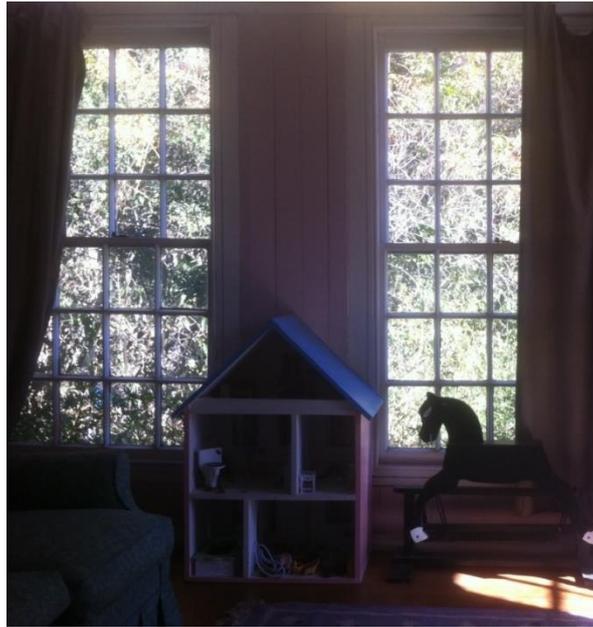


Figure 21: De Wet's writing room in Grahamstown<sup>209</sup>

This literalisation of a creative space as a nursery is also evoked in a letter by Evan van Eyssen about his and De Wet's shared childhood:

Reza and myself spent nearly every school holiday together. In fact, my first visit to aunt Freddie (Reza's grandmother who's house we went to every holiday) was at the age of about three. Thereafter we spent nearly every school holiday or time we could together until matric, always with the most imaginative play, whether it being painting or making things or acting out imaginary (but to us very true) experiences. We actually could see our play vividly. Creativity was a very important part of our lives together, not that we were obsessed with it as it just came naturally in our playing. On one occasion Reza wanted bricks and mortar for her birthday. I had convinced her that I could build her a house. Together we built this house that never was completed, but the play was so wonderful and real. There were seldom any conventional toys involved in our lives other than imagination. From a very early age she used to read me bedtime stories or make up the most incredible stories herself. Reza had such an ability to take on the many different characters in the stories she read or told. She was probably about six years old when she fluently acted her reading or storytelling in many different voices. We of course did not have television, but with her abilities everything became totally alive. Reza could not have been more than six years old when this storytelling and reading started.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>209</sup> De Wet's specially built writing room in her Grahamstown house. This doll's house and rocking horse are two of the few pieces of furniture in this otherwise almost empty room, and the doll's house particularly resembles the colours of *Drie Susters Twee's* set as De Wet describes it in her letters to Basson. Although not clear in this picture, the walls of the room itself are also painted a faded pink.

<sup>210</sup> There is a poignant parallel between Van Eyssens's recollection of his childhood with De Wet and Otto's relaying of her childhood friendship with De Wet's daughter, Van Schoor: "I became friends with Nina, Reza's daughter [at the age of two], and we were best friends all our lives. We used to play these amazing imaginative

Van Eyssen's narration moves from his description of the literal house that he and De Wet started building together which was never materially completed, to an exposition of her storytelling habits, suggesting, it seems, that their shared "house", the "nursery" in which they remained children for the rest of their lives, ended up being the House of Fiction, to borrow a phrase by Henry James, one of De Wet's literary heroes. Her first Master's student, Cal Volks, recalls consulting De Wet at her house just as her writing room was completed:

I remember the first time I went to visit her, she had just built the study upstairs. She was in absolute delight – she did this action with her hands when she said, 'I'm rising above it all!' and then she giggled to herself. What it meant for her to climb the stairs and sit at her desk to write – it felt so visceral to me. Prior to that she was almost not even aware of where she was writing. It came straight from sleep and onto the page when she was in her writing mode.

The literal elevation that this room upstairs enabled was also figurative in the sense that she managed to install a space in which to write, to play, a room of her own, so to speak. It coincides with several types of transcendence at this point in De Wet's life. Volks was De Wet's student from 1988 to 1993 (under- and postgraduate years included). Volks' Master's studies would have started roughly in 1991 shortly after the publication of *Vrystaat-trilogie*. She was De Wet's first Master's student since De Wet had only recently shifted from lecturing at Rhodes' department of English to the Drama department, where she was appointed as special professor based on her merit as playwright since 1985. She was finally released from the burden of having to complete a doctoral dissertation – she considered it "sinful" to make "work" of Henry James, her thesis's subject (in Greeff 94)<sup>211</sup> – and she was able to afford the building of this writing room. De Wet had achieved this success on her own terms, without having to fully compromise her commitment to Evan to delay adulthood through *playing*; through plays that she had written as a private form of child's play (in De Villiers 46), as she described it, she managed to achieve material and spiritual freedom.

If the abovementioned childhood imitation and parodying of "grown-ups", and by extension of normative standards of "maturity", serve as present clues to De Wet's germination of the

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games in her garden. There was one very intricate one; it was called 'The Valley of Fun'. It started off as an actual children's TV show. So, you'll be in front of the camera with you as the presenter. And then you'll become the child who goes into this world. It was amazing. [...] [And] I [...] remember during that time, Reza sitting in a deck chair with this giant hat on, writing, and then even reading some of the lines out too." (Int. Otto

1)

<sup>211</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "om van hom werk te maak is sonde" (94).

actress-playwright she had become as an “adult”, her professionalisation of her alacrity to “act” and “play” did not change her propensity for it in her everyday and personal lifestyle. De Wet’s sense of her world as a stage was followed through, once again, in the way that the past preserved in her own house, became both a play place and a theatre, much like a doll’s house or any nursery is for a child. She grasped the theatricality of child’s play, and as such the antiques in her house became both toys and the props, décor and costumes in her commitment to never stop “playing”. To Marijke van Biljon she said, while delighting in her wealth of heirlooms, that she is not a “glass cabinet person” and as such “I use everything I have” (1).<sup>212</sup> So for instance she often wore her grandmother’s 1920s straw hat (in Welman “Ma’s” 36) and typed the initial copies of her handwritten drafts on her grandmother’s typewriter (in Van Biljon 1). The tone of such conveyances speaks of the glee with which she regarded the layered significance of these possessions as utensils, talismans, toys and props in the theatre that she understood her life to be. Most theatrical is Van Schoor’s explication of De Wet’s friendship with photographer Rob Cooper. She reflected that De Wet

grew up in a strange, dark environment [...] and I think her way of dealing with it was ... she wrote plays, and also, especially because [this darkness] was hidden, her mom hid it ... so [my mom] needed to get that out more. And with [...] my parents it was more conscious – they *played* it more. My mom had pictures taken of her in black furs. Well, she didn’t kind of *play* it – it was real and staged and she was writing plays about it. So, it was ... I guess ... in a way, less terrifying but in another way more all-consuming – there was no sort of façade – there was just that.

The furs Van Schoor refers to were De Wet’s mother’s, as Reardon pointed out in their joint interview (Int. Reardon and Van Schoor 2).

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<sup>212</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Ek gebruik alles wat ek het. Ek is nie ’n glaskas-persoonlikheid nie.” (Van Biljon 1)



**Figures 22 and 23: De Wet in her mother's furs<sup>213</sup>**

For De Wet then, children are the original actors, and the 'once upon time in a far of place' as chronotope is their stage cum play place. The kind of theatre she endeavoured to stage was one that would simultaneously express something of her own childhood experience, invite her audiences to share in it and/or to achieve an awakening for them of their own inner child, a concept I will further explore in the following chapter.

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<sup>213</sup> Two portraits, both by Rob Cooper, of De Wet "playing dress-up" in her mother's furs. The first photograph was provided by Nina van Schoor and the second by Rachel Breytenbach.

## Chapter 5

### “the place where children play”:

#### The Child as Hermaphrodite in De Wet’s Plays

“And the place where children play is the seed from which everything had germinated.”

Reza de Wet in a letter to Marthinus Basson, 12 December 1996

“What probably stuck in my consciousness was the idea of the hermaphrodite, the man-woman, as a symbol of self-knowledge and of psychological wholeness – to acknowledge one’s archetypal androgyny and to cope with it. These roles are, of course, segregated amongst the Afrikaners; the men do *this*, and the women do *that*.”<sup>214</sup>

Reza de Wet in a 1987 interview with Riaan De Villiers (47)



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<sup>214</sup> The quote in Afrikaans is: “Wat seker in my kop vasgesteek het was die feit dat die hermafrodiet, die man/vrou, die simbool van self-kennis en van psigiese heelheid – om jou tweesalgtigheid te erken en daarmee te *cope*. Hierdie rolle word natuurlik so verskriklik geskei onder die Afrikaners; die manne doen dit en die vroue doen dat” (in De Villiers 47).

**Figure 24: De Wet and a female friend play-acting a grown-up heterosexual couple  
as children**

Building on the previous chapter's exposition of De Wet's conception of theatre as a nursery and the child as the quintessential actor-playwright, this chapter explores the concept of the child as psychologically hermaphroditic, based on both De Wet's paratextual and Jung's psychoanalytic definitions. I read De Wet's literary "first child", *Vrystaat-trilogie* as a dramatisation of her Jung-inflected sense that socialisation into conventionally defined maturity in her society entails a form of psychological castration. I examine these plays with a special focus on child and parent figures, juxtaposing it to biographical information on De Wet's own childhood (favouring her own recollections) testing as such the limits of reading a life as an echo of the work. With the chapter's focus on the notion of children as actors in view of their parodic engagement with social structures in improvised role playing, it also introduces the concepts of metadrama.

In a 1995 *South African Theatre Journal* interview with Anja Huismans and Juanita Finestone, De Wet is asked about the female antagonists in her second trilogy *Trits: Mis, Miralel, Drif* (1993) who "oppress" female characters "more successfully" than male characters (92). De Wet confirms this observation and elaborates on her application of archetypal psychology in her poetics. She stresses the symbolic use of gender in her characterisation tactics (92). As she does in several interviews, she highlights the fissures between her characters' sex, their gender roles, and the gendered archetypes they enact. By now I have established my understanding of De Wet's plays as dramatising the dynamics of her own individual psyche, which she defines as inherently androgynous, constitutive of an anima as well as of an animus, archetypes which although, culturally codified as male and female, in De Wet's view, do not connote essentialist classifications of sex or gender, or of good and evil, and are engaged in a perpetual battle for dominance. In a typical Jungian reading of a fairy tale or a dream, a personification of an animus is exclusively male and an anima as exclusively female. In De Wet's plays, as she explains in this interview, it is not necessarily (and sometimes even deliberately *not*) the case. Often, as she demonstrates (in Huismans and Finestone 92), there is an intentional inversion of sex, and the (from a Jungian viewpoint) gender encoded archetype; in De Wet's plays a female character may embody the animus and the other way around. Hereby, De Wet attaches the performance of a traditional gender role to its associated archetype in Jungian theory while separating it from the character's sex. I suggest that what she dramatises herewith is her view of the intrinsic

theatricality of gender constructions in the cultural context she sets it in. This is compounded by her descriptions of female characters who embody the Masculine Principle (De Wet's version of the animus) and mostly display its destructive features, the "women that oppress other women most successfully", as "disguised enem[ies] in the camp" (Huisman en 92). This phrase is charged with implications of pretence, performance, posturing, and costume and it evokes the proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing.<sup>215</sup> I propose that this inversive theatricalisation of Afrikaner gender roles already features prominently in De Wet's first published trilogy, *Vrystaat-trilogie* and in this chapter I explore De Wet's complex and multi-layered use of metadrama that she applies to this end.

Premised on biographical research, I suggest De Wet's emphasis on the elements of performance and meta-performance in her writing (especially with regards to Afrikaner nationalist gender norms) stem from her experience of a bifurcated reality during her formative years. If, as Richard Hornby theorises, metadrama and -theatre attempt "to attack [cultural] system[s] in some way [...] not to reaffirm the social order but to hold it up for examination" (23–25), it would follow that De Wet saw herself as inhabiting (to some degree at least) a privileged marginal position in relation to the cultural systems critically staged in her dramas through self-conscious and self-referential dramatic techniques. In interviews De Wet had consistently asserted her view of her upbringing as having been unconventional by Afrikaner nationalist standards in the 1950s and 1960s. This opinion of the De Wets' parenting style had been confirmed to me in interviews with family members and acquaintances of De Wet and her parents. While De Wet maintained that *Vrystaat-trilogie* "harks back to observations in my childhood" in the Free State,<sup>216</sup> the claustrophically narrow-minded facets of her "Free State experience"<sup>217</sup> were balanced out by aspects that she found "heavenly" (in Botha "Meisie" 6).<sup>218</sup> One such aspect she constantly identified is her maternal grandmother's house, which she and her mother visited during long weekends and holidays. Within the Free State which she had pejoratively called, "the heartland of the Afrikanerdom" (in Greeff 94),<sup>219</sup> and by implication, the nationalist Afrikaner, her own

<sup>215</sup> This is derived from the Aesop fable and which corresponds to a South African Jackal and Wolf tale (featuring both in Afrikaner and Sotho folk story canons) by which Jackal persuades Wolf to steal sheep by this means of camouflage.

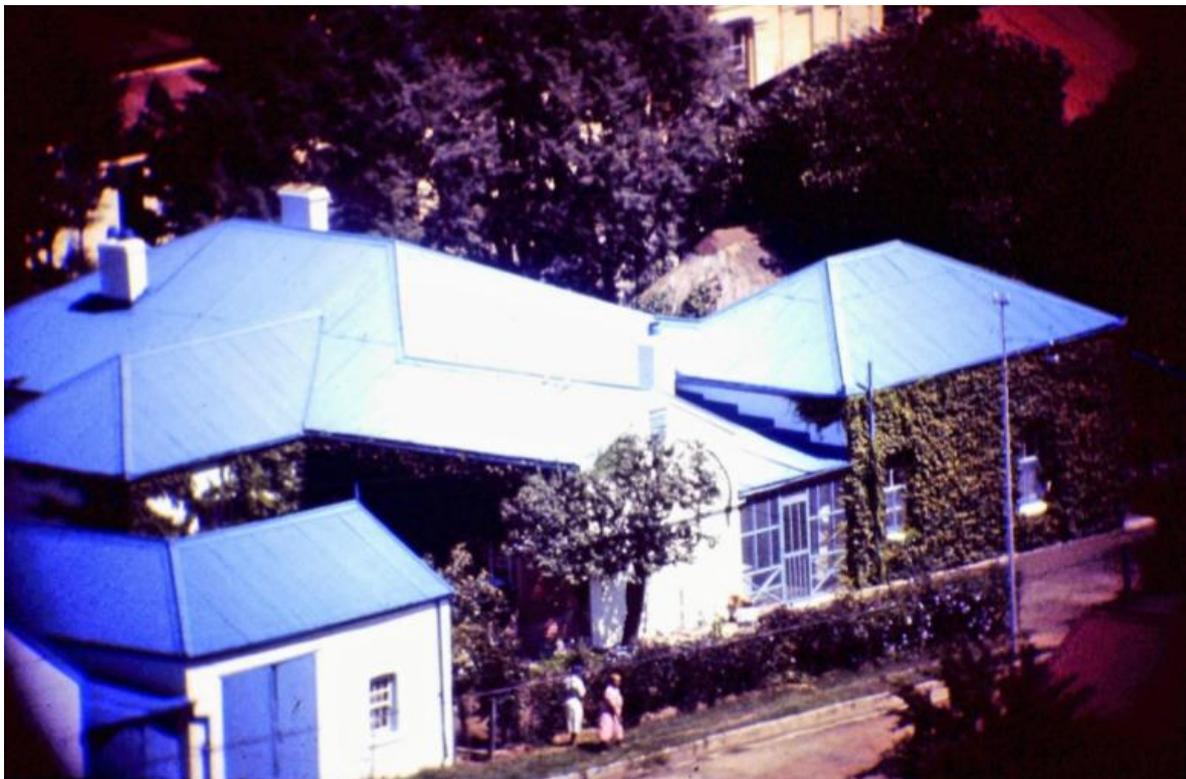
<sup>216</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Haar eerste drie Afrikaanse stukke *Diepe Grond, Op dees Aarde en Nag, Generaal*, saam gebundel as *Vrystaat-Trilogie* gryp nogal terug na waarnemings uit haar grootworddae [...] in die Vrystaat, erken sy." (Botha "Meisie" 6)

<sup>217</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "naas die benouende engheid van die 'Vrystaat-ervaring'" (Botha "Meisie" 6)

<sup>218</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "was juis Senekal vir haar ook soos die hemel" (Botha "Meisie" 6)

<sup>219</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "my ouma-hulle was glad nie eng nie. My ouma was nogal eksoties!" (Botha "Meisie" 6)

personal “heartland” as she phrases it in a different interview “was always her grandmother’s house in Senekal” (in Knox 77). A maternal cousin, Cheryl Stevens, reflects in a letter that “for us as children this ‘estate’ [as they called their grandmother’s property] was our total world [and it] even influenced our worldview; the property itself *was* our Senekal and the rest of the town less important” (Int.). She proceeded by describing it as “unlike other houses on single erven – an island in this early part of town” (Int.). Apart from the architectural isolation of the house, De Wet and her cousins described the household and the norms that sustained it, as embodying a parallel reality that formed a stark contrast with its surrounding community.



**Figure 25: De Wet’s maternal grandmother’s house in Senekal**

This side of De Wet’s family was from the get-go ‘different’ in Senekal. De Wet’s maternal grandfather, Gérard (Charles Gerhardus) Marais, was the youngest child and only son of Charles, the poet Eugène Marais’s oldest brother. He studied medicine in Edinburgh and was notably anglicised, marked by, as De Wet had been told, a “sophisticated cosmopolitanism” by the time he returned to South Africa and established a practice in Senekal (De Wet *Verleiding* 10). According to De Wet’s cousin Carla Haviland, Gérard was the first person in the district to own a car and a fridge” (Int.); he had founded a small hospital there that was

named after him and in which De Wet herself was eventually born (De Wet in Greeff 94). By the time De Wet's grandmother, Frederica van Eyssen, had met him "during a holiday in Senekal", he was already widowed and the father of two children (Knox 77) and she was more than twenty years his junior (De Wet in *Verleiding* 10). De Wet was insistent that neither her grandfather nor her grandmother was "at all narrowminded" (De Wet in *Verleiding* 10; Botha "Meisie" 6), but "rather exotic" (in Botha "Meisie" 6; in Knox 77) and she compared her grandmother to a "gypsy" (*Verleiding* 18). One example she mentioned to support this was her family's affinity with a local prostitute (in Botha "Meisie" 6).<sup>220</sup> Rina Streeders, a neighbour to whom De Wet dedicates *Op Dees Aarde*, recalled the Van Eyssen-De Wets hosting the sex worker on Christmas days, an obviously unusual gesture given the milieu (Int. Streeders).<sup>221</sup> There is a noteworthy appreciation of the prostitute's perceived theatricality that coincides with her then-taboo vocation in the reports by both De Wet and Streeders. De Wet recalls this woman's pronounced social defiance, relaying her public "exhibition of her organs and her challenging drumming on her stomach as she bragged: 'Look! I'm hollow!'" (6), and Streeders mentioned the general astonishment at her exaggerated application of facial cosmetics (Int.).<sup>222</sup>



<sup>220</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Daar was mense op die platteland wat miskien glad nie in die stad sou kon oorleef nie. Soos die hoer van die dorp." (De Wet in Botha "Meisie" 6)

<sup>221</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Van die hoer was ek wel deeglik bewus [...]. Weet wel dat ant Freddie hulle haar een kersfees vir ete genooi het."

<sup>222</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Sy kon haar gesig baie swaar 'opmaak' (grimeer)."

**Figures 26 and 27: Gérard (Charles Gerhardus) Marais and his second wife, Frederica (née) van Eyssen**

De Wet's family's appreciation for social outsiders and the theatricality that often characterises such figures' demeanour extended to their support of artists. Streeders remarks:

Reza's grandmother had certainly contributed to her artistry [...] Our house was the house where I grew up, but aunt Freddie's was my place of inspiration. There I was introduced to classical musicians, poets, writers, and in general, artistic souls. Other people would have described them as weird, but for me everything was normal and at the same time like a fairy tale. (Int.).<sup>223</sup>

De Wet herself recalled her grandmother's proclivity to host and entertain writers, artists, and musicians, describing her domestic set-up as "a true salon – a place where people sang and read" (in Welman "Ma's" 36).<sup>224</sup> By all accounts Frederica was herself a keen and naturally gifted singer. De Wet elaborated:

I often saw her singing. She underwent a wonderful transformation: at first, she is my grandmother and then suddenly she stands there, beautifully dressed and this inexplicable voice emanates from her. And sometimes she would even sing in Italian, so it would even be a different language. (in Luyt)<sup>225</sup>

De Wet also insisted on Frederica's successful impartation of this love for and hospitality towards artists to her daughter, Tawtie (Elizabeth Mary), De Wet's mother.



<sup>223</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Reza se ma en ouma het beslis bygedra tot haar kunssinnigheid. [...] Ons huis was waar ek groot geword het maar ant Freddie se huis was my plek van inspirasie. Daar het ek kennis gemaak met klassieke musikante, digters, skrywers en gewoon artistieke siele. Ander mense sou hulle seker beskryf as *weird*. Vir my was alles normaal en soort van 'n sprokie."

<sup>224</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Daar was A.D. Keet, Eugène Marais, Toon van den Heever, akteurs, kunstenaars en musici. In ware salon-styl is daar gesing en gelees." (Welman "Ma's" 36)

<sup>225</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "En ek het haar baie keer sien sing. En sy het so 'n wonderlike transformasie ondergaan: eers is sy my ouma en dan skielik staan sy daar pragtig aangetrek en hierdie onverklaarbare stem kom uit haar uit. En as sy soms in Italiaans gesing het was dit sommer 'n ander taal ook." (in Luyt)

**Figures 28, 29 and 30: Tawtie (Elizabeth Mary) de Wet née Marais<sup>226</sup>**

De Wet's life partner, Lindsay Reardon, described Tawtie as "a pretty bright person" with "quite a strong personality" (Int.), and De Wet's daughter, Nina van Schoor, recalls her as "larger than life" and "very much like a glamorous movie star; a very powerful figure" (Int.). Streeders recalls that "Aunt Tawtie was involved in all art forms" and that De Wet was also "exposed to it all in Bloemfontein" as "many artists visited their [De Wet's parents'] house and often stayed over there" (Int).<sup>227</sup> De Wet herself confirmed that in her mother's house she was introduced to the arts, since her childhood, and credited her mother's "intuitive appreciation and love of all art forms", remarking that "there were always artists and musicians at our house" (Welman "Ma's" 36).<sup>228</sup> Like Frederica, Tawtie was also an avid amateur singer, and De Wet had identified one of Tawtie's performances in an operetta as one of her first and most seminal encounters with theatre at the age of three (Handley n.p.; Luyt; Nieuwoudt 3), along with a production of Uys Krige's allegorical *Die Goue Kring* [The Golden Circle] for which Tawtie acted as a props mistress and stage manager (De Wet in Huismans and Finestone 89; in Luyt). She also mentioned her mother's habit of reading aloud the fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm and the gothic narrative poems of Eugène Marais, taking her to the circus, and delighting in her (De Wet's) frightful response to the clowns (in Brümmer "Vrou" 4; in Handley n.p.; in Luyt). In an interview with Willemien Brümmer De Wet goes as far as expressing her wish to elicit a similar response in her audience to her own when her mother deliberately scared her with folk and fairy tales ("Vrou" 4). De Wet was unambiguous in her appreciation of her mother's role in imparting an appreciation of the theatrical aspects of life.

It is easy to slip into a hagiographical trap when, as a life writer, one relies on respectful witnesses' reports. Yet, even good intentions reveal the contradictions that comprise us all. Haviland, for instance, recalls admiringly that De Wet has a "strange background because they [Tawtie and Frederica] were free-thinking and well-read *Boere tannies* [boer/Afrikaner women] in the Free State" who "were most certainly not *kaalvoet* [bare foot], pregnant and in the kitchen", not "sit[ting] at home baking cake and *pannekoek* [pancake] and so on", as she

<sup>226</sup> A picture taken at Tawtie's (Elizabeth Mary) half-sister's wedding.

<sup>227</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Ant Tawtie was baie betrokke by alle kunsvorms maar na my wete nooit deelgeneem aan enige nie. Sy het ook deur Ant Freddie natuurlik toegang gehad tot al die kunstige siele. In Bloemfontein was Reza ook blootgestel aan dit alles. Vele kunstenaars het by hulle aan huis gekom of selfs dalk oorgebly."

<sup>228</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Ook in haar ouerhuis is Reza van kleins af blootgestel aan die kunste. 'My ma het 'n intuitiewe begrip en liefde vir alle kunsvorme. Daar was altyd kuns- en musiekemense by ons.'" (Welman "Ma's" 36)

remembered them, rather, “sit[ting] on the *stoep* [veranda] and read[ing]” (Int.). De Wet was firm in also reminding interviewers that her upbringing, even in the Bloemfontein household, was far more liberal and permissive than those of her peers, so that she was raised to understand that, in terms of Afrikaner nationalist culture and politics, “there was a double reality going on: this, which was supposedly so, and that which was really so”, a realisation that she proposed a “lot of my Afrikaans friends were embedded in until they were say – 16, 17 years [of age], when they were shocked out of it” (182). However, Reardon and Van Schoor’s recollections, charged with an equal measure of respect and admiration, highlight a radically different perception of Tawtie’s personality and the Bloemfontein household. In my conjoined interview with Reardon and Van Schoor, Reardon reminds Van Schoor that Tawtie encouraged her (who is now a music teacher), “to play” the piano (Int. Reardon-Van Schoor 2), to which Van Schoor responded:

Not in Bloemfontein – which was a weird thing, because I couldn’t understand why my grandmother’s husband would have a house there and wouldn’t get his wife a piano to play [on]. [...] [My grandmother] played very well but when she lived with her husband there was no piano in the house; the piano stayed at her mother’s house. I kept thinking ‘How can you live in a house when you enjoy playing the piano with no piano in the house?’ (Int. Reardon-Van Schoor 2)

Reardon recalls that

Reza’s mother’s response to Nina was more conservative [than Reza’s]. [...] She played more the conservative [part] – and when I say ‘played’, she tended to *play* rather than *be* – she struggled to *be*. She had a very charming social side – in social situations she was very charming – alive and very witty, very attractive. But she could also be this shuffling, dark creature, that’s playing games. Reza could be amazing socially, but she could also be this shuffling dark creature. (Int. Reardon-Van Schoor 2)

Van Schoor and Reardon present a Tawtie, who, to some degree engendered the “double reality” that De Wet spoke about, having to “*play* rather than *be*” when she was in Bloemfontein, where she seemed to have *played* the part of the conservative angel in the house more readily, especially in the absence of the piano. It seems as though they were emphasising Tawtie’s role in installing a sense of conventional gendering as a type of performance in De Wet. As Streeders reflects: “One could not grow up in the presence of people like Frederica and Tawtie without developing into one of them” (Int).<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Mens kon nie in hulle teenwoordigheid grootword sonder om te ontwikkel in een van hulle nie.”

Bloemfontein was a city of Afrikaner nationalist normativity for De Wet. It is the legal capital, which she was reminded of daily through her father's profession as a judge, and it was where she went to school. De Wet had described her school years in Bloemfontein as "synonymous with a narrowminded Afrikanerdom", and she called Bloemfontein the "embodiment of a rational Calvinist life order of rules, traditions and conventional structures of authority" (in Barnard 18).<sup>230</sup> I find De Wet's parents' decision to send their daughter to Oranje Christian National Girls' School rather puzzling in view of Tawtie's clearly embattled relationship with this institution. (They could have enrolled her at Eunice Girls High School, Bloemfontein High School or Bloemfontein South High School amongst others). Haviland relayed that De Wet was absent from school so often that the Department of Education had issued a letter to remind the De Wets of their legal duty to ensure De Wet's due school attendance (Int.) She elaborated that Tawtie had sheltered her daughter from the school's cultural influences to such a degree that she visited her daughter daily during break hours. One of De Wet's school friends, Clarabelle van Niekerk confirms this as she recalls jocosely:

Reza had [basically] no school friends and during break times Tawtie came to Oranje so that Reza would have someone to socialise with. The driver would bring Tawtie to school in a big black car. He would then park the car at the school gate and me and Reza moved into the back seat and drank tea from a flask and ate sandwiches and talked endlessly. Reza was very shielded by Tawtie, as if she had built an iron cage around Reza to keep everyone out – no one could come near Reza, but I was like a wild bird that flew in with flapping wings – we were soulmates – we understood each other from a deep place. We used to nearly die of laughter – you know how fucking funny she was.<sup>231</sup> (Int.)

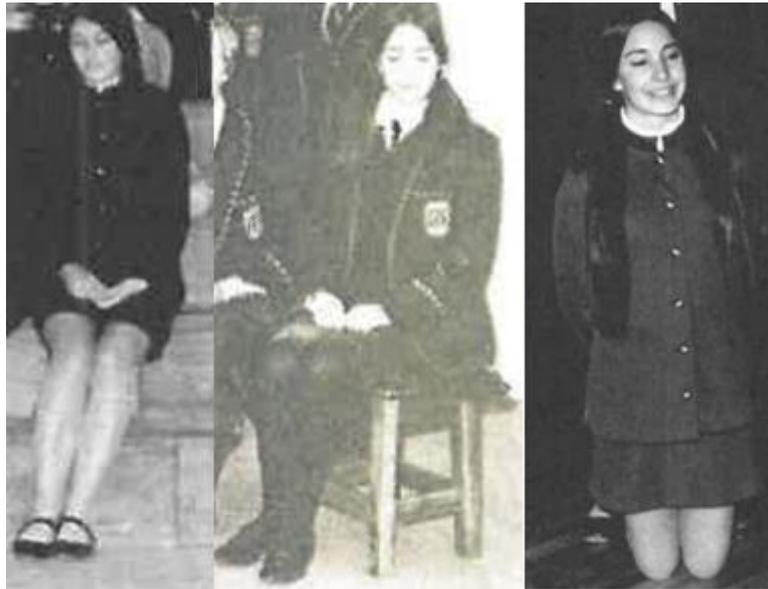
Although Oranje still celebrates De Wet having been an alumnus, they acknowledge, respectfully, De Wet's dislike of the school. A former school principal and classmate of De Wet, Mariettha Matthee, admitted frequently on public platforms (and also to me, during my visit to the school archive) that De Wet was "an individualist who did not quite like school".

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<sup>230</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Vir Reza de Wet was die skooljare op Bloemfontein sinoniem met 'n enge Afrikanerdom. [...] "Bloemfontein was vir De Wet die beliggaming van 'n rasionele Calvinistiese bestaansorde van reëls, tradisies en konvensionele gesagstrukture." (in Barnard 18)

<sup>231</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Reza het geen vriende op skool gehad nie, en gedurende pouses by die skool het Tawtie (haar ma) na Oranje gekom sodat Reza iemand gehad het om mee te kuier. Die drywer het vir Tawtee in n groot swart kar skool toe gebring. Dan het hy die kar by die skoolhek parkeer en ek en Reza het op die agterste sitplek ingeskuif en tee van die flask gedrink en toebroodjies geëet en land en sand aanmekaar gepraat. Reza was baie 'shielded' deur Tawtee – asof sy n ysterhok om haar en Reza gebou het om almal buite te hou - niemand kon naby Reza kom nie, maar ek was soos 'n wilde voël wat met wapperende vlerke in Reza se hart ingevlieg het – ons was sielsgenote – het mekaar van 'n diep plek verstaan. En ons kon ons vreklaag – jy onthou tog hoe fokieng snaaks sy was."

It is noteworthy how in almost all of the few official photographs of De Wet, traceable in Oranje's archive, she avoids direct eye contact with the camera. Only in the photographs taken of her performing in school plays (included in the next chapter), does she avail her countenance, as if she feels guarded behind the "mask" of a performance. This divertive glance seems to communicate a subtle refusal to conform.



**Figures 31, 32 and 33: De Wet's divertive gaze in school photographs**

In these photographs De Wet appears as alien as she said to have felt. She claimed in an interview with Barrie Hough that it was mostly through people beyond her household that she had been given a sense of what it means to be a "real" – that is, conventional, Afrikaner:

I was not really raised in a hyper-Afrikaans way. My family was not hyper Afrikaans. I have an idiosyncratic family. It is rather our neighbours and the broader community which I encountered that have given me an Afrikaner foundation. I actually come from a rather apostate, decadent family in terms of Afrikanerdom. I was never forced to go to church. There was actually a lot of freedom. (in Hough "Daar" 14)<sup>232</sup>

Undoubtedly Oranje would have played a crucial part in this, and even though gendering is a decisive dimension of Afrikaner nationalist inculturation, this element was obviously exceptionally emphasised in the framework of a single gender school. As mentioned in the

<sup>232</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Ek het eintlik nie hiper-Afrikaans grootgeword nie. My familie is nie hiper-Afrikaans nie. Ek het 'n eienaardige familie. Dit is meer die mense wat om ons gewoon het en met wie ek in aanraking gekom het wat my die Afrikaanse onderbou gegee het. Ek kom eintlik uit 'n effense vervalde, dekadente familie as 'n mens praat van Afrikanerdom. Ek is nooit kerk toe gesleep nie. Daar was eintlik baie Vryheid." (in Hough "Daar" 14)

previous chapter, De Wet was acutely conscious of the ways in which history served as a tool with which to inculcate certain cultural identity ideals. It comes as no surprise that moments of war and battle were particularly stressed, such as the Anglo-Boer War and the Great Trek, since it highlighted the nationalist Afrikaner's gender arrangements around military and defensive functions. De Wet expressed her discomfort with the visitations of these imperatives on her, considering the contrasting "freedom" she had experienced in her household upbringing with regards to her body, her sexuality, her individuality (14). A fundamental aspect of the "double reality" De Wet spoke about would have entailed the demarcation of such gender norms. The constructedness of Afrikaner nationalist gender ideals would have been apparent to De Wet in at least two ways: the friction between the norms availed to her domestically (since I do not suggest the complete absence of gender constructions there), and those propagated at school (in tandem with the wider Bloemfontein Afrikaner community); and the school's sheer emphasis on gendered pedagogy – the "making" of a woman (or often, the making of a 'lady') that serve as a slogan in such schools. If a woman (or man/'gentleman') is made, on what and whose terms?

I will investigate De Wet's staging in *Vrystaat-trilogie* of her view of Afrikaner nationalist gender roles' constructedness by first examining her depictions of the antagonists-as-parent-figures who impart these gender-ideals on those they are parentally in charge of: the gendering process in each case is exhibited clearly, especially in *Nag, Generaal* where it operates chiefly through discipline and punishment. While De Wet refused to demonise the Masculine Principle, it features, at this early stage in her writing career, exclusively as personified by antagonists, always as advocates of hegemonic convention in the plays' historicised cultural settings. In De Wet's dramas with their peculiarly Austenian and Brontëan disregard of conventionality as morality, the child(-like)-protagonist, as she herself has put it, is presented as amoral and accordingly, pre-socialised in terms of gendered binaries (De Villiers 47; Hough "Daar" 4), and as such she seems to rely on a pre-/proto-Romantic Rousseauan conception of the child. More so, it reveals her immersion in Jung's theories.

For Jung the child archetype is "the most precious fruit of Mother Nature herself, the most pregnant with the future" (103). In his essay "The Psychology of the Child Archetype" he writes:

It [the child archetype] is a personification of vital forces quite outside the limited range of our conscious mind; of ways and possibilities of which our

one-sided conscious mind knows nothing; a wholeness which embraces the very depths of nature. It represents the strongest, most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realize itself. (106)

The statement above resonates with De Wet's remark that children think "larger than life". The boundlessness of the child's imagination in De Wet's view seems to stem from her understanding of the child as an hermaphrodite in terms of its pre-socialised ignorance of gender roles, a notion she clearly derives from Jung who specifically writes about the "hermaphroditism of childhood" (110). Basing much of his psychological theory in mythological research he notes that it "is a remarkable fact that perhaps the majority of cosmogonic gods are of a bisexual nature" (110). Jung's colleague and co-theorist of archetypal depth psychology C. Kerényi in fact reminds that Hermaphroditos in Greek mythology represents the divine unity between the male Hermes and the female Aphrodite (64). For Jung then the hermaphrodite embodies "a union of the strongest and most striking opposites", a synthesis that he considers a most "creative" one, casting the child archetype as a "subduer of conflicts and a bringer of healing" (110) and "a symbol of the unity of personality, a symbol of the self, where the war of opposites finds peace" (112).

*Vrystaat-trilogie* is more than just a trilogy of childhood in terms of physical and psychological age. It is also about the cultural mechanisms by which the concept of childhood is construed through the parent-child axis. De Wet emphasised the role her childhood memories have inspired its writing (Botha "Meisie" 6) and she identified the trilogy's thematic focus on family and parents (in Perez 8; in De Villiers 47). As in English, the Afrikaans word for "child" ("kind") can homonymically both indicate age and familial relation. In English, however, this does not hold for the word "parent" – which etymologically stems from the Latin "parere", meaning "bringing forth" – whereas the Afrikaans word "ouer" can mean both the noun "parent" and the adjective "older" (which is also semantically related to the noun "elder"), thus indicating a conflated measuring and regulation of psycho-biological maturity through familial kinship. The family type in question is Afrikaner nationalist and thus patriarchal, heteronormative and monogamous in nature. As such, sex and gender play a crucial part in the conception of maturity in this cultural paradigm.

Afrikaans gendered pronouns, (more so than in English, for instance), signify gendered and sexual maturity, marital status and familial relation. In Afrikaans there are no separate gendered nouns denoting "wife" and "husband"; "vrou" can mean both "wife" and "woman"

and “man” can mean “man” and “husband”. As in English however, the gendered nouns meaning “woman” and “man” (“vrou” and “man”) also designate gendered maturity as opposed to “girl” and “boy” (“dogter”<sup>233</sup> and “seun”). It implies that gender maturity acts as the supreme marker of adulthood and that such maturation is consolidated through (an obviously heterosexual) marriage. This connection between age, gender and marital status is further exemplified in the Afrikaans words for “spinster” and “bachelor”: “oujongnooi” and “oujongkêrel”, which translate, literally as “old-young-maiden” and “old-young-suitor”. These words in a way intimate that the unmarried adult never fully matures, a punitive stigma for failing to contribute to the continuing of a lineage.<sup>234235</sup> The emphasis on parenting that attends the maturing incentive of marriage is enhanced in the common terms of endearment amongst married couples “Mamma” and “Pappa” [spelled similarly in English].

This emphasis on the procreative family unit is further shown in pronouns ascribed to and used by children. Apart from denoting “girl” and “boy”, “dogter” and “seun” in Afrikaans also mean “daughter” and “son”. Thus, just as the words that designate gender-maturity is conflated with those denoting marital status, the words that label children’s genders are subsumed in that which signifies familial relation. The implication here is that children in Afrikaner cultures (as in many black South African cultures) are raised not only in individual family units but by the community. This translates into the common form of address by children of adults as “aunt” and “uncle” (“tannie” and “oom”), instead of the more formal titular “mevrou/juffrou” [“ma’m/miss”] or “meneer” [“sir”/“mister”], usually reserved to the classroom or workplace. An archaic extension of this phenomenon is found in the salutation of any person of more or less the same generation as “nig” (female cousin) and “neef” (male cousin).<sup>236</sup>

I suggest that *Vrystaat-trilogie* thematises the yearning for a more fluid subject position (hinted at through the double meaning of the title) from the gender strictures and age-inflected power structures explicated in this linguistic map of standard Afrikaans, as it relates

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<sup>233</sup> The word “dogter”, is sometimes used synonymously with “meisie”, but the latter translates more appropriately as “girlfriend” or “maiden” and it does not appear or function as such in *Diepe Grond*.

<sup>234</sup> It is a common phenomenon in Afrikaans for a spinster to be referred to as a “meisie”, the diminutive of “maiden”.

<sup>235</sup> This is not only true for the Afrikaans language. Etymologically “bachelor” derives from the eleventh-century French variant *bachelor*, *bachelor*, *bachelier* denoting “a young squire in training for knighthood” or “a young, unmarried man”. An earlier Latin version, *baccalarius* designates “adult serf without a landholding”. The etymological origins of the word “spinster” contain no such stigmas regarding maturity, but in Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar’s essay on Emily Dickinson’s poetics in *The Madwoman and the Attic* elaborates at great length on the particular cultural stigmas the word’s etymological roots still attract in Anglophone cultures.

<sup>236</sup> This is still customary among the Voortrekkers.

to normative gender arrangements along the lines of marriage and parenting.<sup>237</sup> De Wet had made no public objection to the institution of heterosexual monogamy at the time of writing *Vrystaat-trilogie*. Commenting on her own marriage in a 1988 interview with Di Piaice, she expressed her feeling “more secure being married” and her need to “go through some bonding ritual” describing it as “an ancient and primitive desire” (76). The De Wet-Reardon’s domestic arrangement was unusual by the standards of her own upbringing, especially with regards to parenting. While both De Wet and Reardon had professional careers, Reardon acted more frequently as the primary caregiver and took pride in it (Int. Volks). Furthermore, De Wet’s mothering of Van Schoor evidenced a disdain of normative authoritarian parent-child hierarchies. Van Schoor recalls De Wet deliberately exposing her to age restricted films at the age of three, when she considered it crucial to Van Schoor’s spiritual enrichment. Drawing a parallel between De Wet and her own mother’s relationship, Reardon commented on De Wet and Van Schoor’s interaction that

[t]here was something of a sisterly relationship between [De Wet] and her mother [...] [a]nd she had a sisterly [relationship] with Nina as well. She was introduced to all these films at an early age because there was more of a sisterly thing going on than a motherly thing.

Cal Volks, a friend and former student of De Wet from 1988-93, a period that marks Van Schoor’s transition from childhood to early adolescence, recalls that when she “visited their home”, she found “Reza and Lindsay’s relationship with Nina [...] extraordinary to watch” since it seemed to her “incredibly much like they were talking to a friend or a colleague” (Int.).

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<sup>237</sup> This seems to contribute to her decision also to write this trilogy in Afrikaans, since she mentions to Una Nieuwoudt that, as a fully bilingual writer, she chooses to write in a language associated with the cultural ideology she explores.



**Figure 34: Reza de Wet and Lindsay Reardon**



**Figure 35: De Wet and her daughter Nina van Schoor (née Reardon), age 6**

The De Wet-Reardon household then, presents a near identical perpetuation of the one in which De Wet was raised, an augmentation of the non-normative values that she saw inhered in it. From a biocritical perspective this becomes pertinent given that De Wet begins to write *Vrystaat-trilogie* while she is a young mother, seven years into her marriage. The time span since *Diepe Grond*'s first amateur student production in 1985 until the trilogy's publication in 1990 charts Van Schoor's first five primary school years. As De Wet said in a letter to Basson: "the place where children play is the seed from which everything [her poetic vision and playwriting] had germinated". Some of De Wet's most striking epitextual commentary on her daughter, parenting and childhood, surface in 1988-interviews, during and after the first professional productions of *Vrystaat-trilogie*'s closing play, *Nag, Generaal* – a drama fundamentally about parenting. To Rachelle Greeff of *De Kat* De Wet generalised that "unlike as is [often] the case with creative women, I do not find mothering burdensome"<sup>238</sup> (96). To Di Paice of *Femina* she expressed experiencing the novelty of motherhood as being constantly "enthralled with the child" (76). Notably, in this instance, she first talks in abstractions about children and parents, before eventually she personalises it with direct references to herself and Van Schoor later in the interview, indicating her view of certain universals about the topic. The mothering experience had clearly evoked much of what she valued from her recollection of her own childhood self, especially what she appreciates as the child's ability to think "larger than life"<sup>239</sup> (Botha "Meisie" 6). The pact she had made with her cousin Evan van Eyssen to never become a grownup comes to mind again. As if reminded of her own difficulties with adapting to the institutional strictures of her alma mater, De Wet was as reluctant to send Van Schoor to school, as her own mother was with her (Int. Breytenbach). Like De Wet, Van Schoor attended a girl's school, and De Wet would most likely have feared that a similar fate awaited her daughter in terms of hindering the child from thinking "larger than life". De Wet for instance, recalled the trauma of having to "kill" an imaginary friend whom she wanted to take with on her first school day. In this vein she elaborates to Paice about raising her own daughter:

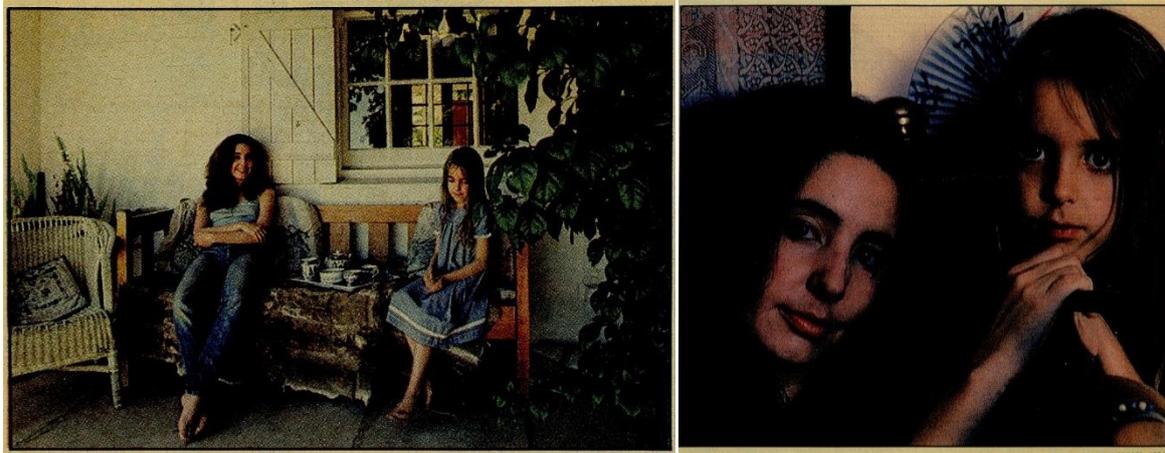
As the child gets older you have more physical time, but the emotional commitment is still there. You have to be constantly watchful, anticipating her psychological needs. Children are so receptive, and to stamp anything negative on that psyche is much more terrifying than inflicting evil on an adult. I don't

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<sup>238</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Anders as dikwels die geval met skeppende vroue, was moederskap vir Reza nie 'n beklemmende ervaring nie. The quote in Afrikaans: "My kind was 'n band tussen my en die wêreld. Sy het my binnewêreld gedwing om te skakel met die wêreld daarbuite, die werklikheid." (Greeff 96)

<sup>239</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "'n Kind dink mos groter as die lewe" (Botha "Meisie" 6).

want Nina ever to be alone and vulnerable to that, but of course I know I can't always be there. (Paice 76)



**Figures 36 and 37: Photographs of De Wet and Van Schoor taken in 1986**

I propose that De Wet's voiced protectiveness of her own daughter at this point in her own psychological progress correlates with her guarding, nurturing and strengthening of her archetypal inner child and that this is centralised in her artistic first born, *Vrystaat-trilogie*.<sup>240</sup> When De Wet's opinions on gender and parenting are juxtaposed with her Jung-informed symbolisation of the psyche as a family unit, she seems to convey a view that the individual subject tends to pattern its archetypal plurality instinctually, in a structure that mirrors the normative family arrangements that characterises the dominant culture in which it finds itself embedded. In De Wet's case, it is that of the nationalist Afrikaner. As a patriarchal heteronormative monogamous culture then, the Feminine and Masculine Principles are personified as maternal and parental figures, and the child, as psychologically hermaphroditic and pre-gendered, with the paternal figure (regardless of the character's sex) aggressively seeking to castrate the child into a limiting social role.

Expressing her admiration for the Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker, De Wet relayed Jonker's alleged statement that her (Jonker's) former lover, the writer André Brink, would "not become an artist until he finds the Ingrid Jonker within himself" (Pretorius n.p.). De Wet makes this reference to claim a wider resonance with her view of psychological wholeness (and artistic success) that depend on the achievement of acknowledging the Feminine and

<sup>240</sup> De Wet and her publisher, Marietjie Coetzee notably referred to her books as their children.

Masculine Principles of the psyche – the Jonker in Brink representing his repressed Feminine Principle and vice versa. It seems more than telling that De Wet cites Jonker, who has been described as “a poet of childhood”, with her poetic persona’s distinctive childlike voice and allusions to fairy tales. An iconic poem, “Puberty”, deals with the symbolic death of the inner child:

The child in me died silently  
neglected, blind and fetter-free  
  
sunken slowly in a little pond  
drowned somewhere in the dark beyond  
  
while you oblivious as a beast  
with mirth continued at your feast.  
  
Not with crude gesture did you warn  
of death or danger in the morn  
  
but in my sleep I see small fingers  
the flare of your teeth at night still lingers:  
  
repeatedly I shiver and wonder  
did you kill the child, put it asunder? (Trans. Maya on Mar)

This poem is widely understood as addressed by the poet-speaker to her father, her only parent, and with poems like “Ontvlugting” [Escape] as her prediction of her eventual suicide – she drowned herself at sea in 1965 at the age of 32. De Wet communicated her opinion that Jonker “killed herself because the men around her, the people around her, were denying her

Femininity. They realised the fact that she was an artist, [with a] very profound sense that the Masculine is so dangerous to its opposite” (Pretorius n.p.). De Wet seems to insist on the coincidence of the “dangerous femininity” that Jonker embodied and the childlikeness celebrated in her poetry. De Wet is however not conflating the Feminine Principle with childlikeness, although femininity as expressed conventionally in the cultural context that De Wet reacts to, is often infantilised. She insinuates, rather, that, unlike Brink – whom De Wet had publically denounced as a failed artist in an interview with Rolf Solberg – , Jonker was in fact able to discover and unleash her inner “Brink”, her latent Masculine Principle. In the Platonic sense then, De Wet links the child with the hermaphrodite and the child’s death with its castration that the socialisation into a narrowly defined gender role entails.

In *Nag, Generaal* De Wet literalises this Jonkeresque death of the inner child psycho-allegorically with the corpse of a sixteen-year-old boy onstage. Against the backdrop of the Anglo-Boer War, with military action taking place off-stage, and a thunderstorm with its elemental clash of water and fire, heaven and earth, the struggle between Femininity and Masculinity is played out on the foreground personified, in the literal sense, by the dying General and his wife Magda. Their conflict centres largely on their differences about the appropriate parenting of their son, the two of them mutually accusing each other of causing his death, whether it be by Magda’s influence that supposedly weakened him, or by the General’s severe hyper-masculine disciplining. *Nag, Generaal* is the only play in this trilogy in which the parent-figure representing the Masculine Principle is embodied, onstage, by a male character with his sex matching that of the child that he tries to raise into a rigid social role. To my mind, this makes this play the clearest exhibition of De Wet’s view on the castrating nature that conventional parenting entails in the milieu she critiques. It might be her least complicated antagonisation of this socialising drive.

By setting the play in a Boer War context, and by making the antagonist a general, De Wet raises the stakes attending the parenting endeavour. The war setting charges the gendered dimensions more urgently and as a leader of his nation, the General’s failure to impart his own gender expression to his child jeopardises his personal pride as much as it does the entire nation building enterprise. The most consistent accusation inflicted on the son relates to his articulation of culturally feminised behavioural codes. The General blames Magda for sheltering the child against the toughening dimensions of fathering, talking to him about “women’s things” [“vroumensgoed”], and rendering him weak, pale, and lazy (126). He scolds the child for being a useless war asset, for hiding behind his mother, and being spoilt

(135).<sup>241</sup> At one point the General feebly resists Magda's nursing of his wound, fearing that she wants to weaken him as well, "like a girl" (126). Being badly injured and in a sustained delirious state, the General's dialogue fluctuates between the extremes of firing insults and accusations at his wife and son on the one hand, and fabricating graphically violent fantasies of his child's heroic death (122-3; 126; 133; 135; 138; 141; 14-7), concluding eventually that "it is better to die as a man than to ...",<sup>242</sup> without finishing his sentence, or having to do so (141). In both the first and the last of these soliloquies, he calls his child, affectionately, "my manhaftige seun" [my brave child] (122; 147). Of all the available Afrikaans synonyms for "brave" (including two with a shared suffix, "heldhaftig" and "krygshaftig"), the General uses the androcentric gendered one, which could etymologically translate as "eagerly masculine". In this way, De Wet manages not only to characterise the violent dimensions of nationalist gendered parenting, but also of the male centred sexism it contains. For De Wet this however supersedes the problematics that feminisms of all kinds seek to a-/redress. For her it points to the denial of the subject's gender-transcending archetypal hermaphroditism. It is for this reason, I speculate, that De Wet finds it necessary to cast the child in this play as male, without ever qualifying his sexual orientation, for instance. All she needs the audience to realise is that he failed to live up to his prescribed gender role.

By this logic, it would be as problematic for De Wet when the Feminine Principle reigns sovereignly in the psyche, but in *Vrystaat-trilogie* this never occurs, even in the absence of male embodied patriarchs in *Op Dees Aarde* and in *Diepe Grond*. Yet, De Wet never depicts a family where a mother and a father cooperate in harmony; closure is rather achieved through children. Twice, in the first two plays in her first trilogy, De Wet creates a set of siblings, each consisting of a girl and a boy, who function as the protagonist-couples of the plays: Soekie and Frikkie in *Diepe Grond* and Bybie and Tokkie in *Op Dees Aarde*. Childlikeness and the failure/refusal to mature by their broader societies' standards is the common denominator of each couple. Soekie and Frikkie, although biologically mature (Frikkie is 25 and Soekie 30), speak and behave like children. They have killed their parents during their childhood when, upon the discovery of their incestuous child'splay, their parents

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<sup>241</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "vat sommer die niksnuts van 'n seun van my saam ... Dit sal hom goed doen ... Hy kruip mos agter sy ma se rokspante weg. Ja, hy moet sy kant bring. Want hier by die huis word hy net opgepiep" (135).

<sup>242</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Dit is ... beter ... om te sterf ... soos 'n ... man ... as ---... om ..." (141).

threatened to separate them by sending them to boarding school. In *Op Dees Aarde* Tokkie is 30 years old but described as “spontaneous”, “childlike” and “naive” and his beloved sister Bybie is a sixteen-year-old ghost who died in labour, innocent enough not to even have realised that she is pregnant (66). In fact, Bybie does not even seem to realise that she is dead – she is a blithe spirit and described in the stage directions, despite her status as a ghost, as “lewendslustig”, that is, as a character with a zest for life (66). Death could not conquer her or her relationship with Tokkie. De Wet comments in reference to the recurring theme of incest in her plays in an interview with Di Paice: “What can be more self-renewing than what comes from within yourself? [...] That kind of taboo doesn’t exist at a very deep level. My impulse comes from a deep source, and I try to keep it intact and not question it too much” (76). In an interview with Cathy Knox De Wet relays that she “has always been obsessed with the idea of twinning”, connecting it then to the notion that “wholeness comes only when the bright masculine yan joins the dark feminine yin” (77) a clear resonance of Jungian psychology.

It is interesting that De Wet does not literalise hermaphroditism on stage through the presence of an intersexual child, but through hetero-incestuous siblings. In the spirit of archetypal psychology one can of course evoke a host of mythological sibling couples such as Isis and Osiris, Rhea and Cronus, Hera and Zeus, and Signy and Sigmund, to translate Jung’s theory of the hermaphroditic child into that of the incestuous one. Furthermore, in reference to her fascination with “twinning” De Wet refers to what she calls her “brother-cousin” (Evan van Eyssen) with whom she shared what she calls “a magical empathy” and with whom as a child she she learnt “the power of games and took the first steps along the road to the deeply serious grown-up games and rituals of theatre” (77).



**Figure 38: Evan van Eyssen and Reza de Wet as children**

I do not propose that Soekie and Frikkie's literal incest reflects De Wet and Van Eyssen's relationship at all, especially in view of De Wet's emphasis on her intuitive connection with her cousin rather than her physical dependence on him. I do suggest, however, that, long prior to her introduction to Jung the lived reality of an intimate relationship with a male relative and a kindred spirit, devoid of hegemonic gender codes, charged her creative and philosophical vision with a power that brought her work to the prominent position that it currently still enjoys.

This chapter began with an exposition of the bifurcated worlds in which De Wet conceived of her childhood. This I suggested installed a double consciousness that enabled her to guard her against the castrating influences from normative institutions and forces. Like the characters in her dramas who survive their childhood by overcoming it through roleplaying, De Wet expressed a sense of her triumph over conventional adulthood through theatre. The next chapter examines De Wet's literal, professional embarkment into theatre and how this too is reflected in her most explicitly metadramatic plays.

## Chapter 6

### “More than either of them”:

#### De Wet’s Acting Training and its Link with Metadrama in Her Plays

“I think I know now, Kostia, that what matters in our work – whether you act on the stage or write stories – what really matters is [...] knowing how to endure things. How to bear one’s cross and have faith. I have faith now and when I think of my vocation I’m not afraid of life” (181)

Nina Mikhailovna in Anton Chekhov’s *The Seagull*

“Now she knew she was no longer the young girl living on the edge of the magical lake. Nor the pale, tired woman ... glowing so strangely ... in the depths of the mirror. (*Pause*) She was ... more than either of them. (*Pause. Mysterious smile*) She was the dreamer ... (*Pause*) of the dream. (*Suddenly her face becomes cold and inscrutable*) And she ... could dream ... anything.” (52)

Nina Mikhailovna in Reza de Wet’s *On the Lake*



Figure 39: De Wet in a school play

Anna-Karien Otto, a close friend of De Wet and her daughter Nina, related this memory from her and Nina's childhood:

We used to play these amazing imaginative games in [Reza's] garden. There was one very intricate one, it was called 'The Valley of Fun'. It started off as an actual children's TV show. So, you'll be in front of the camera with you as the presenter. And then you'll become the child who goes into this world. It was amazing. [...] I do remember during that time, [Reza] sitting in a deck chair with this giant hat on, writing, and then even reading some of the lines out too.

On the one hand this portrayal of De Wet in the act of playwriting and acting out lines from the drafts, with her child nearby, entering imagined worlds with a friend, consolidates my emphasis in the previous chapters on De Wet's linking of her poetics with childhood and child's play. On the other hand, the children's play-acting as both narrators (TV-presenters) and characters (that enter the presented world through frame-breaking) connects it to one of De Wet's favoured dramatic devices – metadrama. In the previous chapter I have focused on her view of children's psyches as archetypally hermaphroditic but that their socialisation into adulthood in heteronormative cultures entails a kind of psychological castration that her protagonists resist through a childlike, playful, parodic engagement with the gender roles they are expected to fulfil. I have analysed De Wet's theatricalization of specifically Afrikaner nationalist identity-constructions in her debut trilogy *Vrystaat-trilogie* (1990). In this chapter I take my cue from her suggestion that all the plays she ever performed in during her training and work as an actress have shaped her as a playwright. Thus, I will close read a selection of key texts I have managed to establish she had performed in. These texts, represent various stages of her practical theatre training, mainly her school years and her under- and postgraduate studies at the University of the Free State and the University of Cape Town. As alluded to in Chapter One, De Wet's life narrative, as I script it, already appears metatextual in it being the story of a playwright. It thus strikes me how the majority of the plays seminal to her theatre education are deeply metadramatic in nature, which seems to explain her own tendency to apply this dramatic device in her own writing and wrested me with clues to the philosophy that underpins metadrama in her plays by reading it as rooted in the outcomes of these texts.

Within Ryan Claycomb's category of metadrama (as distinguished from metatheatre) I propose two subcategories. While Lionel Abel, who coined the term "metaplay", applies it indiscriminately to plays containing any form of impersonation, disguise and assumptions of

false identities as a central plot device, I suggest a necessary differentiation between the study of performances by characters who happen to be (amateur *or* professional) actors as opposed to less formalised types of performed behaviour such as plays staging characters that either masquerade in the guises of other characters, or forge their professions, class positions, nationalities, age, genders etc. I describe the first kind as *direct* metadrama and the second kind as *indirect* metadrama. My definition of direct metadrama is closer in nature to the broader and more thoroughly theorised concept of metatextuality for the way in which the play as text draws attention to its constructedness and as such comments on art and artistry, whereas indirect metadrama's thematic focus is aimed more obviously to the performed nature of the lives and identities that, to the playwright, characterises the target audience's culture and society. The two types of metadrama, of course, often concur in a single play, and as the distinction between them relies on the themes they emphasize rather than on ideas they essentially denote, their dramatic function is not mutually exclusive. Direct metadrama can for instance include indirect metadrama's symbolisation of the world outside theatre as comparable to a theatre stage as expressed most famously by Juvenal in his "Satire 3", Petronius in his aphorism "quod fere totus mundus exercet histrionem" ("because almost the whole world are actors"), Richard Edwards in *Damon and Pythias* (1571), and by Shakespeare's characters in *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*.

Indirect metadrama features in practically all De Wet's plays which to me is unsurprising given her history as an actress, which in its turn stemmed from an already theatrical personality – someone who refused to "outgrow" her childhood propensity to act-out her fantasies in her everyday life to a degree that frequently stunned her acquaintances. Often when her characters narrate experiences the didascaly relay that they not merely *tell* but *relive* the observations that impressed them so (*Mirakel; Mis; Breathing In*).<sup>243</sup> In *Diepe Grond* and in *Nag, Generaal*, as discussed in the previous chapter, characters both impersonate other characters and embody personas of the (to their senses) grotesquely simplified social types they are expected to reduce their complex and transgressive subjectivities to. In some cases, characters forge their professions as Konstable does in *Mis*, their nationalities and race as the on-stage characters do in *Die See*, and their names as in *Mirakel, Die See* and *Drif*. De Wet's entire oeuvre protests against social roles that constrict individual self-expression and -actualisation and as such she presents a view on her society as theatricalised in numerous ways, destructively and constructively. At times performance is frighteningly mandatory

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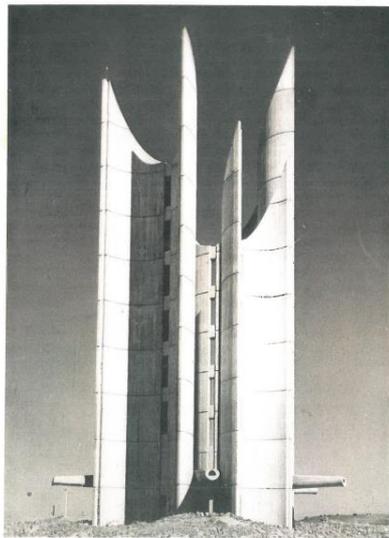
<sup>243</sup> This includes Gertie's, Meisie's and Konstabel's tales in *Mis*, Anna's in *Breathing In*

when individuals are expected to suppress spontaneity in their embodiment of socially imposed roles; at other times, acting out fantasies of alternative identity expressions is precisely a means of freeing instincts and intuitions masked by social pressures (De Wet in Huismans and Finestone 90)

. De Wet saw her profession as an actress and a playwright as merely the “mak[ing]” of a “public thing” of what she claimed to have always been a way of living (De Wet in Huismans and Finestone 91), whether it entailed “acting” as conforming to social rules or as a means of transcending it. As such I treat her metadramatic portrayal of theatre productions in *Mirakel* and *On the Lake* both as a clue to her view on and approach to the creative process in playwriting and as analogous of society as a theatre.

I have by now discussed De Wet’s identification of her education at Oranje National Christian Girls’ School as her most formative encounter with then normative Afrikaner identity. In this regard she stressed the emblems, monuments, rituals, and ceremonies through which a hegemonic version of South African history was constantly staged to create a unified cultural character to which she did not feel akin. This ceremonial theatricalisation of Afrikaner nationalism is perhaps most literally exemplified by the performance of N.P. van Wyk Louw’s allegorical verse play *Die Dieper Reg* [The Deeper Right/The Deeper Right Justice] during the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in Winburg near Bloemfontein in 1968, in which Oranje partook and in which De Wet herself had performed a part. The play was originally written for the inauguration of the official Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria thirty years earlier. *Die Dieper Reg*’s 1938 premiere formed part of the concluding ceremonies of the Great Trek’s centenary that entailed a nationwide re-enactment of it with participants dressing up as trekkers and following their ancestor’s routes, per ox wagon. While this play does not involve noteworthy metadramatic devices, it emblematises through its original performance context the performativity of apartheid Afrikaner identity.

SOUVENIR PROGRAMME  
VOORTREKKER MONUMENT WINBURG



INAUGURATION  
10th OCTOBER 1968

8

*Die Dieper Reg*

N. P. van Wyk Louw

and symbolic inauguration of Piet Retief

Presented by PACOFS  
Directed by MARGARETHA SPIES  
and SOPHIE COETZEE

CAST:

SPEECH CHORUSES	Oranje Girls High School and Central High School
ADVOCATE	Johan Botha
PROSECUTOR	Mees Xteen
MAN	Neels Coetzee
WOMAN	Rentia Human
YOUTH	Bennie Janeke
GIRL	Reza de Wet
BOY	Nicol Kriel
VOICE OF JUSTICE	Japle Kriel
RETIEF	Raymond Davies
ERASMUS SMIT	C. van Ee
MATABELES	Grey College
VOORTREKKER WOMEN	Excelsior Volkspede Group
DECOR.	Kasimir Dubinski Constructed by PACOFS Workshop
COSTUMES	PACOFS Garderobe under the supervision of Ann Dubinski and Alta Miller
SOUND AND MUSIC EFFECTS	Prof. M. C. E. van Schoor
STAGE MANAGER	Paul Eilers

**Figure 40: Souvenir Programme of the Winburg Voortrekker Monument's inauguration in 1968**

*Die Dieper Reg* dramatises the Afrikaner, personified by a single heteronormative family consisting of a father, mother, son and daughter – the latter played by De Wet. They are in a celestial court, bound to defend their unchristian transgressions during the Trek, such as disobedience to their government and the violation and killing of their neighbours in battle. The play concludes with the annulment of their guilt based on a god-ordained “deeper justice” derived from their divinely sanctioned “right” to sovereign rule, comparable to that of Israel in the Exodus myth. Louw uses the allegorical play as genre for its historical basis in liturgical didacticism. Its most canonised example of course is the late fifteenth-century morality drama *Everyman*, wherein which the title character who symbolises all of humanity is summoned by Death to God’s court. Part of this genre’s rhetorical power resides in its simplification of complex concepts in service of politicised religious doctrine. It originates in a pre-Renaissance world in which the individual has not yet been established as the primary social unit. This narrative reliance on an essentialised and transcendental subject that ignores its historicity and hybridity is useful in a nation-building context. It effectively stages the roles that individuals are taught to perform in the cosmogony the play depicts. De Wet’s performance in *Die Dieper Reg* as an archetypal Afrikaner poetically reflects her everyday performance at school of a self she felt at odds with.

This staging of *Die Dieper Reg* was, however, not initiated or directed by Oranje's then designated drama teacher. The school was approached and involved by the state-sanctioned Performing Arts Council of Transvaal. De Wet had by then earned a reputation as an exceptional actress in school plays that were, by contrast to *Die Dieper Reg*, light and satirical in nature. She had identified a certain Miss Liggett, as one of the few teachers she loved and respected. Liggett taught English and was responsible for Oranje's drama productions. De Wet had described her as off-beat and rather daring both for her play selections and for involving the English boys' school, St. Andrews, in its staging. The plays De Wet performed in under Liggett's direction include George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894), J.M. Barry's *Quality Street* (1901), and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1602). The educational value of these particular plays seems obvious: all three are romantic comedies that satirise the pretensions, posturing and etiquette attending heterosexual courtship, a relevant theme for adolescents in single gendered schools. A central source of comedy in each play stems from indirect metadrama: camouflaging as a citizen of an enemy nation in *Arms and the Man*, costuming as someone much younger and salacious in *Quality Street* and gender bending in *Twelfth Night*. Although tame enough to qualify for school productions these plays are deeply critical of patriarchal gendering, gendered maturity and nationalism, drives that in De Wet's experience defined her alma mater's ethos and to which she had reacted against in her own writing.



**Figure 41:** De Wet's drama teacher, M. Liggett

Of the three plays *Arms and the Man* contrasts *Die Dieper Reg* perhaps most radically with its pacifist sentiments and its mockery of nationalism. Shaw after all established himself as a controversial figure with the publication of his pacifist tract *Common Sense About the War* in 1914. The play's title derives from the opening lines of Virgil's narration of the Trojan War in the *Aeneid*: "Of arms and the man I sing". Set against the Serbo-Bulgarian War, the protagonist Raina Petkoff, played by De Wet, awaits the return of her fiancé Sergius Saranoff. She idealises war and fantasises about his heroism, enjoying of course, the status she gains from his victories. During the opening scene Captain Bluntschli a Swiss mercenary soldier in the Serbian army, breaks into her bedroom and threatens to kill her if she exposes him. The feisty and indignant Raina refuses to be intimidated and Bluntschli, surprisingly, concedes to rather turn himself in than to harm her. Raina, despite Bluntschli's impudence, decides to hide him when the house is inspected by Russian and Bulgarian troops and even lends him her father's coat to disguise himself as a Bulgarian when he departs. In this same scene Bluntschli puzzles Raina with his cynical views on war, and his description of most soldiers' cowardice. This effect of this meeting on Raina manifests in her loss of interest in Sergius upon his return despite her initial struggles to admit this. Shaw exhibits the absurdity of the nationalist prejudices the characters express in the first scene when, after the signing of the Serbo-Bulgarian peace treaty, Bluntschli is welcomed into the Petkoff household when he returns the coat. Even his eventual marriage proposal to Raina is met with no significant resistance based on his national status. *Arms and the Man* satirises the essentialisation of national identities, especially when it forms out of political enmity.



Figure 42: Liggett and the cast of *Arms and the Man*<sup>244</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Liggett is middle centre and De Wet in the bottom row, far right.

So much of Afrikaner nationalist identity formation depended on the commemoration of wars and battles with British and indigenous nations in their competing claims for territory, especially the Great Trek and the Boer War. Nationalist historiographers stressed the clashes between the Boers and the British in their writings on these two moments. In 1961, seven years before the Winburg Monument's inauguration, South Africa obtained formal independence from British rule, thereby becoming a republic. While white South Africans regardless of their identified language communities benefited equally from the apartheid regime, a general cultural distrust between white Afrikaans and English-speaking South Africans was still tangible in the milieu of De Wet's youth. This is symptomised by her regard of her marriage to the English-speaking Lindsay Reardon as unusual by the standards of the community she was raised in, although she excluded her parents from this generalisation. In a context where the martial feats and sacrifices of Boer pioneers and warriors were celebrated on a large scale, Liggett's delicate school production of *Arms and the Man* stages an unusual yet understated resistance to a more common idealisation of war, much like De Wet later would as playwright with *Nag*, *Generaal* and *Breathing In*.

Dating from the same era of British *fin de siècle* comedy, *Quality Street* is also a romance played out against the background of a nation at war, but the lovers' obstacle in this case is not their differing nationalities, but rather the war itself. Set in the fictional town of Quality Street in Regency Era England, the protagonist, Phoebe Throssel, loses hope to marry her love interest Valentine Brown when he announces his conscription to participate in the war against Napoleon. Valentine returns a decade later, by which time Phoebe sees herself as aged beyond attractiveness. Desperate to achieve some measure of romantic intimacy with Valentine, she decides to disguise herself as the kind of girl she recalls herself to have been when she had met him: she creates the persona of Vinny, ten years her junior, who is confident, spontaneous and sexually charismatic. Ironically though, Phoebe finds the Vinnie-persona both liberating and restrictive: camouflaged as much younger, she feels free to relive the youth she feels robbed off by her spinster status, but she also fears that her seduction of Valentine, as Vinnie, will jeopardise any semblance of a hope she had harboured to earn his affection as the aged Phoebe. Consequently, she both enjoys and resents her success at winning (in Vinnie's guise) Valentine's attention during a ball. She is flattered by the discovery that she had not lost her courtship skills, but she is offended by the seeming confirmation of her fears that her age has made her vulnerable to the advantage of younger women's vying of Valentine's interest. To her surprise, however, Valentine admits to her

Vinnie-persona that he is still in love with Phoebe, all the more so for the dignity with which she had matured. This causes Phoebe to suspect that, whether as Vinnie, or as Phoebe, she will never keep Valentine's interest if she does not mask one of these sides to her personality. She will always be compelled to "act" her age, so to speak. However bleak this realisation, the play concludes with a series of pranks Phoebe plays on Valentine as punishment for his fickleness and conservatism. Barry's commentary on courtship seems twofold: it exposes the theatrical dimensions of age and gender norms, and the way in which the two coincide.



Figure 32: De Wet in *Quality Street*

Phoebe's ideal is both radical by the age and gender norms of the Regency Era in which it is set, Victorian England, and in which it was written, and then also in apartheid South Africa wherein which Liggett restaged it at Oranje. From almost any feminist perspective, *Quality Street* is however a complicated text. Phoebe, for instance, does not find it liberating to work and earn her keep, and her self-esteem is entirely dependent on the sexual approval of men and on her marriageability. At the same time her recognition of this unfair categorisation of women as either sexualised or domesticized, and that their sexual spontaneity is expected to be outgrown, is radical. Notably, *Quality Street* directly precedes *Peter Pan*, Barry's other masterpiece, that fantasises a Neverland in which eternal youth is afforded, a paradise lost that De Wet would regain for herself through the playfulness of playwriting.

This form of indirect metadrama that Phoebe's courtship tactics exemplify is to some extent echoed in the third and final romantic comedy De Wet had played in under Liggett's guidance: *Twelfth Night*, a text that W.H. Auden ironically described as "not a comedy for schoolchildren" (152). Literary critical readings of *Twelfth Night*'s metadramatic significance is largely reserved to the play's deployment of the performance of gender as illustrative of

gender performativity, not least considering Elizabethan labour divisions by which the entire cast of the play's original production would have consisted of men, so that Viola, the female protagonist, who disguises her for the greater part of the play as Orsino's manservant, would have been played by a male actor. But the play's broader focus on performed behaviour in everyday life is highlighted in a subplot. Olivia's steward, Malvolio, is tricked into believing that she is in love with him. He is presented a forged letter in which Olivia supposedly expresses her attraction to him, depending on ridiculous preferences of fashion and behaviour. Charmed and encouraged by this clue, Malvolio dresses himself and acts according to what he thinks are Olivia's fetishes but obviously only succeeds in shocking and repelling her. While this prank is cruel, Malvolio's eagerness to assume a false demeanour for love's sake, is of course unwise, somewhat like Phoebe's in *Quality Street*. It is this form of human behaviour – acting out of character for social acceptance, or for survival's sake – that the play critiques through comedy.



Figures 44, 45 and 46: De Wet as Viola/Cesario in *Twelfth Night*

*Twelfth Night's* critique of gender is basically dual. It firstly questions Elizabethan gender-based labour division: Viola, disguised as a man, easily earns Orsino's favour as a manservant, with no formal training or experience. Secondly, her performance of conventional masculinity ideals is so successful, that she attracts the desires of the androphilic Olivia, thereby denaturalising the instinctive premise of heterosexuality. Western society is still deeply heteronormative, making *Twelfth Night* as relevant now as it was during its original production, and all the more so in the late 1960s in a single-gendered Afrikaans girls' school in apartheid South Africa. These implications could not have escaped Liggett

whose motivation behind this selection of plays was obviously educational. In her cultural and historical context, the staging of *Twelfth Night* is acutely countercultural, but like *Quality Street* and *Arms and the Man*, the play's genre classification as a comedy, and its canonical status (which casts it in the lay-reader's mind as refined and morally uplifting), enabled her to expose her learners to worldviews severely transgressive in the paradigms otherwise propagated at school.

This preoccupation with social constructions and metadramatic performances of gender, age and nationality that De Wet was exposed to in her earliest practical induction into world theatre at school is reflected in the last play she had written in her life, *Die See*, in which she had also made her swan song as an actress. The play's exposure of the performed aspects of these identity features already appears in De Wet's naming of the onstage characters, two retired courtesans and one in training: they are called Vrou [Woman], Ou Vrou [Old Woman] and Meisie [Girl/Maiden]. Not even the off-stage characters are given proper names; they are merely referred to as the Beskermheer [Patron] and the Hofdame [Lady in Waiting]. While this could tempt a reading of *Die See* as allegorical, there are spatio-temporal specifics that free the drama from universalising abstractions: it is set in the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town, in 1775, the night of the British inquisition of the Cape, (although the three protagonists have no knowledge of this), and Meisie's proper name is revealed to be Marie, (even if it evokes a string of mythical and historical figures that have come to symbolise the archetypal aspects of womanhood in Western society).<sup>245</sup> Juxtaposed with this major political shift occurring (literally) above their heads, the women undergo more personal, existential life transitions: Vrou is retrenched at the start of the play and Meisie is being groomed to start her life as a courtesan by day break, just after Ou Vrou exhales her last breath. Essentially the three protagonists are not meant to be read as mere symbols. Rather, they are historicised individuals that have been reduced to the culturally established markers of their gender, age and nationality. This holds true for the off-stage characters as well: the dialogue of the Hofdame do not represent the words of an individual but of a part, a role. It is most likely not the same person that has trained both Ou Vrou, Vrou and who is training Meisie at the play's set time. The Beskermheer in turn is cast as the protagonists' *raison d'être* as expressed in Vrou's exclamation: "He is a Nobleman! A Hero! A Patriot! A God!" (44).<sup>246</sup>

<sup>245</sup> This includes the Biblical Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, and the British and French monarchs.

<sup>246</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Hy is 'n Edelman! 'n Held! 'n Patriot! 'n God!" (44).



Figure 47: De Wet as Vrou in *Die See*<sup>247</sup>

Of all De Wet's plays *Die See* is perhaps the text that exemplifies Judith Butler's conception of gender performativity most clearly through metadrama. It shows how the performance of gender can symbolise/symptomise the operations of performativity. Butler heeds against the confusion of the performance of gender with performativity, the former a concept applicable on any culturally defined trait, but the latter describing it as repetitional discourse that produces ontological effects. Responding to accusations of somatophobia, Butler explains that in gender performativity the body is not denied or constructed but contoured by culturally produced conceptions of both gender and sex and how these models are discursively naturalised as such. Through the course of *Die See*, *Ou Vrou* and *Vrou* recall and, at times, impersonate the Hofdame (lady-in-waiting) who had trained them both at Meisie's age. While this form of play-acting is, formally, not much different to, for instance, Soekie and Frikkie's impressions of their parents in *Diepe Grond*, the instructions itself charge these instances with stronger metadramatic weight: the Hofdame teaches them to *act*, to *perform* the part of their master's sexually available and submissive sex partner.

Before the courtesans begin their education in etiquette they undergo a transformation of appearance both through dress and through diet. The play highlights the hypocrisies of hegemonic beauty standards and gender ideals when *Vrou* impersonates Hofdame's statement that the *Beskermheer* prefers his sex partner "[a]u naturelle", exuberating an air of "innocence" (33).<sup>248</sup> Yet, to achieve this effect the trainee courtesans are expected to alter and mask their body types and skin colour. The courtesan's most precious possession is her

<sup>247</sup> De Wet as *Vrou* in *Die See*'s premiere production in May 2011, about 5 months before she was diagnosed with leukaemia and 8 months before her death.

<sup>248</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Net gou 'n bietjie rouge. Maar nie te veel nie. Hy hou van onskuld. Au naturelle" (33).

mirror and a closet filled with clothes and accessories (22; 31) that are especially selected to make her appear virginal and thus desirable (33) and to protect her skin against direct sunlight (52). Ou Vrou remembers the Hofdame criticising her in her younger years for being too stocky since the Beskermheer prefers someone with a fuller figure (30).<sup>249</sup> Grooming begins, as each protagonist recalls, with the application of make-up (15; 23). Vrou claims to even wear make-up and a wig when she sleeps (23) and the protagonists repeatedly remind each other not to cry since it causes the eyes to swell and the nose to change colour (27<sup>250</sup>; 37<sup>251</sup>). Vrou even warns Meisie that the tears will wash off the powder to reveal her “horrible” dark skin, so that even the courtesan’s original racial identity is denied.<sup>252</sup> This performance of ethnicity coincides with the assumption of a counterfeit politically fetishized national identity reflected in the courtesan’s re-christening with a name specific to the new ruler’s language (33).

The second dimension of the courtesan’s training entails the refinement of their postures and mannerisms and building on this, ritualised sex through roleplaying games. Vrou and Ou Vrou recall through re-enactment the training they received of how to move, to walk, to gaze – to act timid and coy (30-1). Ou Vrou tells Vrou that she was the Beskermheer’s “first ... possession” and “toy” (26)<sup>253</sup> and when Meisie resolves to escape, Vrou insists: “You will never go out again! [...] Not while you are ... attractive for him. So that you are there when he wants you [...] Dolled up and ready for him” (56).<sup>254</sup> This objectification translates in various instructions to assume a passive demeanour that suggests an almost necrophillic fetish of the Beskermheer. Vrou (as Hofdame) instructs Meisie to pretend that she sleeps when he comes to her and fondles her (15; 38), reminiscent of the (dead) Snow White in the Grimm tale. Vrou warns however that the Beskermheer might get bored with her and advises Meisie to combat this by narrating an elaborate sequence by which Meisie should arouse her Master’s jealous ire for entertaining a fantasy for another man to remind him of her capacity

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<sup>249</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Jy’t vleis op jou bene nodig. Jou skouertjies is so skerp soos hoendervlerkies. Jou armpies is veels te dun. ’n Sagte ronding ... Dit is waarvan hy hou” (29-30).

<sup>250</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Moet tog net nie weer huil nie. Jou oë swel op en jou neus word rooi” (27).

<sup>251</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Huil jy nog? Jou oë sal sal rooi word en jou neus opswel” (37).

<sup>252</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “En hou op huil! Hou op! Die trane was jou poeier af! Kyk net na jou! Met jou blas vel. Afskuwelik!” (33).

<sup>253</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Aaklig soos ek nou is, was ek sy eerste een. Voor jou. Sy eerste ... besitting. Speelding” (26).

<sup>254</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Jy sal nooit weer daar uitkom nie! [...] Nie terwyl jy vir hom ... aanloklik is nie. Sodat jy daar is as hy jou wil hê [...] opgepop en reg vir hom” (56).

for arousal, but begging for his forgiveness and protection (38-42). The resemblances between the courtesan's training and profession with that of an actress is striking.

When Vrou is done with her impersonation of Hofdame's lessons and instructions she concludes that "only a real woman can know these things" (38).<sup>255</sup> This statement has a twofold implication. It firstly hints at the Beauvoirean aphorism that a woman is not born but made, and secondly that the female sex worker as the professional/ordained performer of the female gender role, serves, through her vocation, as the purest model of women's function in a patriarchal regime: bought with money, made into a commodity, and wrested with sexuality as her sole power currency. *Die See* achieves its critique of patriarchy through a metadramatic inversion of the "real" and the "performed", but unlike Butler's use of the drag queen in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) to do so, De Wet does it by casting the courtesan who is supposedly the "fake" wife, as hyperreal for her realisation of performance as the only mode of being. The various embedded performances in *Die See* – the reliving of past experiences, extended narration, impersonations – emphasise this theme, and Vrou's pride in herself as an accomplished woman, is implied in her pride in her skills as an illusionist.

*Die See*'s master illusionist, however, is Ou Vrou: for the greater part of the play, she manages to manipulate Meisie and Vrou into misreading the nature of their identities and destinies; she convinces Meisie of a secret key that will enable her to escape, and she plays into Vrou's misconception that she is the Beskermheer's only courtesan. Essentially, she indulges both character's greatest fantasies, much like the courtesan is expected to do with her master's. If there is a character that embodies the play's centre of consciousness, it is Ou Vrou, since Vrou and Meisie only ever direct their dialogue towards each other and to Ou Vrou, while Ou Vrou constantly talks to herself and, in effect, to the audience, about herself, the other characters, and the situation. Meisie desperately and futilely resists her role as a professional performer. Vrou, oppositely, delights in and commits to it, forgetting in the process who she was before. Unlike either of them Ou Vrou transcends both states of being: she seems to find solace in her ability to comprehend her world order that consists of various performance levels and to shapeshift in and out of it. But she gradually also manages to remind both Meisie and Vrou of their lives prior to their entrance into the castle. Ou Vrou teaches them to cultivate (a sense at least of) two states of being – one that plays the part

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<sup>255</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: "Net 'n regte vrou kan hierdie dinge weet." (38).

necessary for survival, and another that connects the guiding consciousness to its understood place of origin. The actress must remember that she is acting, and that she extracts her sense of self not from the parts she plays, but from the self she is by the time she assumes these roles. The accomplished actress is the one who is not imprisoned or enslaved by her socially imposed roles but exercises a constant form of doublethink.

*Die See*, with its metadramatic symbolisation of the woman in a patriarchal regime as an actress-cum-sex slave, evokes another canonical drama that formed part of De Wet's practical theatre training. Euripides's *The Trojan Women* (415 BC) in which she, as a third-year drama student at the University of the Free state, had played in 1971 with the inauguration of the Skyna Theare in Bloemfontein. In terms of the distinction I draw between direct and indirect metadrama, *The Trojan Women* inhabits a hybrid position: there is indeed an assumption of a false identity, but the characters are well aware of it, so that it is not done in service of trickery or deception. Yet, it is not performed as a piece of formalised theatre, although it entails much of theatre's features: characterisation, heightened dialogue and social commentary. The character as actress in question is Cassandra, coincidentally, and perhaps prophetically, played by De Wet.



**Figure 48:** De Wet as Cassandra in *The Trojan Women*

To a large degree Cassandra's entire life story is punctuated by attacks on and abuse of her sex, beauty, virginity, and marriageability. She is described as the most beautiful woman in Troy and Apollo, after making her a prophetess, punishes her for refusing him sex, with a curse that her predictions will not be heeded but taken as the rants of a madwoman (Aeschylus). As such, Cassandra is both blocked to expose his misconduct and to prevent Troy's downfall, as no one believes her forecast. As the Trojan armies wane during their war against Greece, Cassandra's father, King Priam, offers her as a prize, first for the esteemed Mysian warrior Eurypylus, then to Othryoneus of Cabeos to aid Troy in battle, but, to Cassandra's relief, they perish. Eventually, she accepts a marriage proposal by Coroebus, a Phrygian prince, but before she can finally yield her (by then much threatened) virginity willingly, Coroebus is killed while she is raped by the Greek warrior Ajax the Lesser as she feebly clings to the statue of Athena (Euripedes 33), the Virgin Goddess. Afterwards she is taken to Greece as the Mycenaean King Agamemnon's concubine where, under his wife Clytemnestra's instructions, she is killed with her master, by Clytemnestra's lover Aegisthus (Aeschylus). Euripides presents Cassandra in *The Trojan Women* at the moment before she is taken to Greece. As she enters, she swings two wedding torches and sings a puzzlingly joyful song that celebrates her "marriage" to Agamemnon. It is, of course meant ironically and as a piece of metadrama it is a deeply subversive comment on the inherently contradictory expectations imposed on women in Hellenist society in virgin marriage and in war.

In Cassandra's urgency to be understood and believed despite Apollo's curse that prevents her to manage this, she purposely builds the topic of truth and falsehood, madness and reason, ecstasy and self-control into her speech. When the Chorus pathologises her as "giddy at your own calamities, / [b]rightly singing what your song keeps dark" she appeals self-analytically that "I may be mad, / [g]od-seized, but I will stand outside my madness / [e]nough to show you [...] [o]ur [...] lot" (44-5). The two distinct mental states Cassandra identifies here entail a god-inspired ("[g]od-seized") trance in which she unambiguously prophesies the downfall of Agamemnon's house, preceded by a more rationally controlled ironic double speak (by which she "stand[s] outside [her] madness") assuming the persona of an amorous virgin bride. In both states she seems deranged; firstly, for representing, as a prophetess, a godly logic that surpasses human reason, and secondly as an actress for embodying a person that she is not. Both positions entail (to Cassandra's on-stage audience) an unnerving process of bringing, in Emily Brontë's words, "the unreal world too strangely near" (198) precisely because in both instances, she "stands outside" her "self" as her family and acquaintances

know her. Through Cassandra's self-scripted and self-performed piece of theatre *The Trojan Women* gains metadramatic depth, and as such provides both clues to Euripides' view on the artists' social role and on the impact of the play on De Wet, for whom the performance of Cassandra as a drama student contributed to her eventual awakening and emergence as a playwright.

In N.P. van Wyk Louw's Afrikaans translation of *The Trojan Women*, used in the production De Wet performed in, he footnotes the Hellenistic Greeks' understanding of the prophet and poet as synonymous, both acting as mouthpieces of the gods (124). An early formulation of this belief is found in *Phaedrus* (370 BC) wherein Plato records Socrates' definition of divine madness. Socrates insists on the inherent "prophetic" nature of "the soul" which he claims shows itself to all people occasionally through intuitive premonitions (459). Socrates himself claims to be possessed by such a madness, acknowledging the "tuneful Muses['] [...] aid" in conveying his message convincingly (443) and warns that due to their inspiration he "often seem[s] to be in a frenzy" and as "uttering dithyrambs" (447). Cassandra can be read as a metatextual metonymy of the Greek playwright – one that comments on the injustices of her world. By Cassandra's assuming the persona of an ardent and grateful bride in the face of being shipped to Greece as a sex slave she not only taunts the Greeks who intend her indignation, but comments also on the expectations imposed on actual brides who are expected to rejoice in decisions made on their behalf – postulating herewith the metaphors of marriage as slavery. While her mother Hecuba laments that she "never dreamed" that Cassandra would be "forced into marriage" (43), Cassandra had in fact had to prepare herself twice before, under her father's instruction no less, for an arranged marriage to a stranger she did not choose. Thus, when in the first strophe she claims to "lift", "wave", and "whirl" the two wedding torches she carries as a sign of her "flar[ing]" "reverence for this sacred / [p]recinct" (41), she is in fact voicing, through ironic double speak, her utter disdain of the marriage institution in Troy as well as Greece. Whether as princess or as slave, her nuptial fate was never in her hands. Cassandra thus ignores Hecuba's orders to "hurl down your holy laurel branches, / [a]nd strip your body of the sacred wreaths you wear" (39), since her awaited union with Agamemnon is to her little different to those with Eurypylos and Othryoneus. She thus spurs the "Trojan daughters" to "celebrate [...] [w]ith blessed chants / [a]nd clapping hands [...] for the husband Fate has chosen I lie down beside" (42-3).

Her song is false in several ways: she is not a virgin, she did not lose her virginity in the act of love-making, she is not in love with Agamemnon, and she is not an actual bride. Crudely put, as war booty Cassandra is spoilt goods, but by the logic of the customs that made her a concubine, Agamemnon, his marriage and the sexual conventions attending both marriage and war are deeply contradictory and corrupt. Agamemnon does not return to Clytemnestra as a loyal husband, as much as she does not await him as a devoted wife. Cassandra actually implies sympathy with Clytemnestra when she remarks on the Trojans' fortune for at least being united as families during the ten-year war while the Greek warriors and soldiers left their wives and children for a decade to defend the honour of Helen, "a woman who wasn't taken off by force / [b]ut went freely" (44). Why would Clytemnestra welcome her husband home after a ten-year absence, especially when he returns with a younger, prettier concubine? If Cassandra's assumption of a religious, amorous, virgin bride's identity is, as Hecuba suggests, "[c]razed and delirious" (36), then so are all assumptions that Agamemnon's actual marriage is truly love-based or at least sensible. She draws her consolation from this when shy, unambiguously proclaims: "By marrying, / I'll kill the very ones I hate the most" (45).

In Cassandra De Wet encounters a female figure who dares to transcend her status, as women, as prophet, as poet and as actress. Tragically, Cassandra only reaches Euripides's audience through dramatic irony, not her own on-stage spectators, and like *Ou Vrou* in *Die See*, her performance and transcendence of her social roles do not ultimately save her life. In *On the Lake*, however, De Wet creates a character who as an actual, professional actress does succeed in redeeming herself mortally and psychologically, and she manages to do so when she dares to regard herself as more than an actress but also as a playwright, more than a character in the world she lives in, but as the author of her own life. *On the Lake* functions as a sequel to Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1896) and De Wet casts Chekhov's character Nina as the protagonist in her play, based on her own experience of performing this part in a student production of Chekhov's play during her postgraduate diploma in acting at the University of Cape Town. I suggest that *On the Lake* through direct metadrama, sheds light on De Wet's own emergence as a playwright from her initial embarking on an acting career, but that, unlike the plays discussed above, she uses playwriting as a metaphor for a more personal sense of liberation from not only sociocultural roles, but from an individual hesitance towards a pursuit of self-definition, one that she herself had partially achieved through dramaturgy.

In view of *The Seagull's* metadramatic traits Nina is actually the play's title character and as such makes her psychological development arguably its prime focus. *The Seagull's* plot centres largely on the tensions between two couples, each composed of an actress (Arkadina and Nina) and a writer (Trigorin and Kostya), the former acting as the latter's muse. The two female leads compete to be Trigorin's lover-cum-inspiration as he is more renowned than Kostya, while the two male protagonists contend for Nina's attention, the less accomplished of the two actresses but the younger, more attractive one. The central plot developments are predicated on the ways in which Nina succeeds in acting as the two writers' inspiration. Even so her success in doing so is ultimately to her own detriment. Act One climaxes with the disastrous staging of Kostya's symbolist drama in which Nina performs a part written specially for her. In Act Two Trigorin impresses Nina with an account of his writing process and poetics. He notes a dead seagull that Kostia had shot for Nina as a love token and regards it as an idea for a story: "A young girl lives all her life on the shore of a lake. She loves the lake, like a seagull, and she's happy and free, like a seagull. But a man arrives by chance, and when he sees her, he destroys her out of sheer boredom. Like this seagull" (147). Flattered by Trigorin's hint that her life feeds his writing, Nina in Act Three gives him a medallion inscribed with a line from one of his novels: "If you ever need my life, come and take it". Kostia leaves Arkadina for Nina, but as soon as she falls pregnant with his child he abandons her and returns to Arkadina and, traumatised by these upheavals, Nina's work as an actress starts suffering from her inability to focus. In the last act she returns to the lake house where she had met Trigorin and she confides in Kostia a personal epiphany in one of the most famous monologues in European theatre:

I'm a seagull ... No, that's not it. I'm an actress. [...] [Trigorin] did not believe in theatre, he was always laughing at my dreams, and so gradually I ceased to believe, too, and lost heart ... And then I became so preoccupied with love and jealousy, and a constant fear for my baby ... I became petty and common, when I acted I did it so stupidly [...] I'm a seagull. No, that's not it again. [...] What was I talking about? ... Yes, about the stage. I'm not like that now ... Now I am a real actress, I act with intense enjoyment, with enthusiasm; on the stage I am intoxicated and I feel beautiful. But now, while I'm living here, I go for walks a lot. ... I keep walking and thinking ... thinking and feeling that I am growing stronger in spirit with every day that passes ... I think I know now, Kostia, that what matters in our work – whether you act on the stage or write stories – what really matters is not fame, or glamour, not the things I used to dream about – but knowing how to endure things. How to bear one's cross and have faith. I have faith now and when I think of my vocation, I'm not afraid of life (181)

This monologue's canonical status is partly indebted to its metadramatic concern making it a favourite among theatre makers with its commentary on the actor's profession. On the other hand, it expresses a sense of individuation that relies not on the individual's dependence on social approval, but on a sense of one's own experiential realities and the manner in which one handles hardship. Nina has come to realise that she had allowed Trigorin and Kostia to script her life for her – literally and figuratively. She had played the parts she inspired them to write in the first place, and it has fuelled her ego, but it has also caused much psychological harm as she had lived a life as a vessel of another's dream. *The Seagull's* metadramatic commentary thus does not centre so much on sociocultural roles in specific societies, but on the nature of artistry itself as much as it investigates the ways in which individuals risk the loss of their spiritual autonomy when they draw a sense of existential significance from their supportive roles in other's lives, especially those of their beloveds'.

In her extension of Chekhov's play. De Wet seems to follow up on Nina's identification as an actress with Kostia as a writer in this monologue. In a certain sense, Chekhov portrays, in this moment, Nina's transcendence from her role as an actress, an imitator, to that of a writer, an inventor of stories, and more importantly, as the teller and author of her own life narrative. *On the Lake* opens with Nina, narrating her own arrival and return to her father's house on the lake, in third person.<sup>256</sup>

Upon Nina's arrival she finds Arkadina and Trigorin involved in a commemorative restaging of Kostia's symbolist play that in Act One of *The Seagull* failed so miserably, due to Arkadina's disruptive heckling. Blaming Kostya's death on Nina, Arkadina requests Nina not to attend the performance. Towards the play's climax however, Nina dreams that she is visited by Kostya who reminds her, intertextually, of her monologue in *The Seagull*, that she is the dreamer of the dream, and that she "can dream anything". When she awakes, she gazes out of the window and decides then to "dream" the little stage's destruction by conjuring a strong wind that blows it away during the play's performance. *On the Lake* concludes with another monologue by Nina in third person:

The actress [...] went back to the station and returned to Yellietz where nobody had noticed her absence. After that ... in the endless succession of dingy dressing rooms ... she would put on her mask of rouge, of grease paint and of rice-powder and look at her own reflection. Now she knew she was no longer the young girl living on the edge of the magical lake. Nor the pale, tired

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<sup>256</sup> I refer to the first unpublished draft of the script. The third-person narrated sections do not feature in the final version published by Oberon.

woman ... glowing so strangely ... in the depths of the mirror. (Pause) She was ... *more* than either of them. (Pause. Mysterious smile) She was the dreamer ... (Pause) of the dream. (Suddenly her face becomes cold and inscrutable) And she ... could dream ... anything.” (52)

De Wet described her own performance as Nina in Chekhov’s *The Seagull* as one of the most defining moments in her experiences as an actress. She recalls her theatre professor Robert Mohr calling her a true Chekhovian actress and that he allowed her to perform a Chekhov monologue for her audition for PACT, something he prohibited his students to do. She verbalised her experience of playing Nina as more than a mere performance, but as a “total manifestation”. She named her daughter after this character and dedicated it to her as well. Brink Scholtz who played Nina Mikhailovna in *On the Lake*, under De Wet’s direction, expressed her suspicion that De Wet had cast her in this part as she strikingly resembled De Wet’s daughter, the character’s namesake, whom Scholtz also happened to have befriended. De Wet’s daughter, in turn, bears a clear resemblance to her, and suggested to me that De Wet had dedicated *On the Lake* to her out of a sense of admiration and relief for the ways in which Nina had cultivated her individuality for better than she was able to at her age.



**Figures 49, 50 and 51: Reza de Wet, Nina van Schoor and Brink Scholtz<sup>257</sup>**

Interestingly the other play that De Wet had dedicated to Nina, years before *On the Lake* is *Mirakel* (1992), a play that also involves a protagonist who is an actor and who, like Nina Mikhailova, had run away from home in his youth in pursuit of a life as an actor, only to suffer radical personal losses that shapes and transforms him into an individual who no longer defines himself by either his traditional domestic background or by his profession or status as an actor.

<sup>257</sup> Figure 49 is a publicity photo of Reza de Wet as a young actress; Figure 50 portrays her daughter Nina van Schoor whom she named after Nina in Anton Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (1897); Figure 51 is a photograph of Brink Scholtz who played the part of Nina in *On the Lake* (2001) De Wet’s sequel to Chekhov’s *The Seagull*.

*Mirakel* opens in the third week of August 1936, in an abandoned Roman Catholic Church building in an unnamed Free State country town. A travelling acting troupe arrives and decides to convert the space into a performance space for a production of *Everyman*. The cast consist of the troupe's leader Dante du Pre, his lover and prima donna Salome, a former music teacher Antoine, and a young couple, Abel and Lenie – Abel being *Mirakel*'s protagonist. The play is set in Abel's town of birth where his wife, Anna Vermaak still lives, a much older, wealthy and charismatic society woman. Abel claims to have been sold to her during the outbreak of the Great Depression and when Dante's troupe visited the town, he decided to elope with them. Anna pays the troupe a visit, surprising them with a feast of traditional Afrikaner cuisine, offers them accommodation and ensures the attendance of a large crowd that evening. Sneakily, however, she kills Lenie (who would have played the part of Death) and offers to replace her on one condition – the troupe fires Abel and he returns to her. To Abel's devastation Dante concedes, but when Anna leaves to advertise the play amongst the townsfolk, he announces that his betrayal was a mere ploy to test Abel's dedication to the art of acting. He rewards Abel by making him his successor as troupe leader and the cast of characters sneaks out of the church, embarking on their journey to another town.

Earlier in this chapter I have discussed De Wet's performance in *Die Dieper Reg*, which as I have also pointed out draws so clearly on *Everyman*, as an archetypal Afrikaner poetically reflects her everyday performance at school of a self she felt at odds with. In *Mirakel* De Wet portrays Anna as exactly such a social actress. Her surname is Vermaak, which translates as "entertain". When she first enters, she places her basket with traditional treats on the actor's props' table, remarking, ambiguously, that, in a certain sense, she belongs here. Anna's hospitality and generosity reminds Dante, Salome and Antoine of their own parents' and they are struck with a sudden nostalgia. Through Anna's rituals and manners, her performance, De Wet again stages not only the theatricality of conventionality, but also its seductiveness. Unbeknownst to the other characters, Dante is aware of this. Abel warns them constantly not to be fooled by her act, but Dante realises that Abel is also still not an actor for what he considers the "right" reason. When Lenie dies he consoles Abel with the following speech:

My dear friend, believe me when I say that I feel your pain. Fate can be cruel. And pain lacerates the heart. Only time will heal this terrible wound. But in your grief, try and remember this: we are the servants of a sacred art. (*On the stairs of the 'stage'.*) No matter how great our sorrow, it is small in comparison with that of Phaedra, Medea or Oedipus. (*On the 'stage'.*)

Agamemnon has been dying for centuries. Every day, he is murdered. Over and over and over again. And like an avenging angel, Cassandra still waits for his anguished cries. For hundreds of years, Hamlet has been betrayed, winged to rest by a poisoned sword. (*Turning back to ABEL.*) That is the Truth ... and everything here is ... ephemeral ... (157)

When Dante accepts Anna's proposal to sell Abel to her in exchange for a successful performance of *Everyman*, Abel asks rhetorically why he would do this for their sake to which Dante responds:

Not just for us! But for Everyman! (*Passionately.*) He has survived for centuries and centuries. In hundreds of languages and hundreds of countries. And tonight he could be *herd*. And *these* people will see him! Not Abel! Abel, the mortal. Abel the weakling. But Everyman! And then ... (*He looks at him, lifts his arms up, majestic.*) ... something extraordinary could happen. (187)

Dante manages to install a sense in Abel of the transcendental function of art: that like the Greek poet/actor who as a vessel lives a life of sacrifice in service of the enlightenment of humankind through art, dies to himself and his own needs:

Look at him, He has been through deep waters. His beloved has died. He has lost a child. We have betrayed him, abandoned him and sold him back into the power of a cruel, clever woman. He is broken. But still he puts on Everyman's jirken, Buckles on Everyman's sword and says, 'Yes, I'm ready.' Abel was a man. And an actor. But in that moment he became an artist. (169)

Abel's triumph, like Nina's, is that he is more than an actor – socially or literally. Dante has managed to persuade Abel to not escape the troupe or his wife, that is to say, the role he fled from and the one he pursued. Instead he dies to the selves that were ontologically defined by social or professional roles, much like De Wet's Nina revels in her newfound identity as neither "the young girl" nor "the tired woman" (52). In a sense then, Dante resembles *Die See*'s Ou Vrou who initiates Vrou and Meisie into a new way of being, one that, within their sense of themselves as slaves and prisoners, regain a sense of themselves as freer agents derived from the enlarged and multilayered consciousness of an actor. Perhaps Dante's name is intended to evoke the *Divine Comedy* in which an older poet leads the young entrapped persecuted poet through a dystopic vision of the latter's world, installing a catharsis and an empowering transcendent understanding of his social cosmos. This comparison

enforces the reading of *Mirakel* as a play that from a biocritical perspective promises insight into De Wet's acting training and experience as informing her writing career and personal philosophy.

Vrou in *Die See*, Nina in *On the Lake* and Abel in *Mirakel* have this in common: they are performers by vocation who come to see their social worlds as intrinsically performed and performative and they awaken to their autonomy as both authors of and actors in their own life scripts. This notion echoes a point made in my discourse analysis in Chapter One. When I mapped a history of Western literary biography and biocriticism in literary studies, I noted the coincident rise of post-Renaissance individualism and the biography, especially the literary biography, stemming from the writer figure's (still widely prevalent) status as the paragon and personification of the individual. Western subjects are still raised to understand themselves as the plotters of their own lives and M. Bradbury calls literary biographies the "plots of the lives of plotters" (139). In this chapter I studied De Wet's dramatisation of actors, playwrights and, indeed actor-playwrights and I read them, biocritically with special attention to the fact that they were written by an actress-playwright. While this chapter deals most explicitly with De Wet's metaphors of theatre and playwriting which she employs in what she herself had asserted as her oeuvre's central concern, "the liberation of the spirit" (in Du Plessis "Diepe"), this approach underpins the entire thesis to this point. Right at the start, until the very end, De Wet's life is re-membered as a writer-performer.

Dylan McGarry told me of De Wet's recollection that as an infant she was anally retentive. During potty training her mother tried to relax and distract her by making up little rhymes and De Wet, with a precocious alacrity for language, began to complete the rhymes with her own inventions. Three decades later she debuted as a playwright, acting the part of the female protagonist in a play that opens with her squatting on a chamber pot. Less than a year before her death she performed the lead in her last play. Yet this thematisation of De Wet is, like any biographical endeavour, reductive of the complex person she was, and I would like to believe that, while this project adds to the already existing discourse on her life and works (to be discussed in the following concluding chapter) it will not pin her down and that she, like Abel, Nina and Vrou, retains her complex, independent autonomy, even after her mortal conclusion on 27 January in 2012; she will remain more than a writer-playwright.

### **Conclusion:**

**“I refuse to be a figurehead”:**

## **De Wet’s Canon Position in South African and International Literary Historical Discourse**

“I refuse to be taken up as a symbol [or] the figurehead of something or other.”

De Wet in a 2003 interview with Rolf Solberg (181)

“I am concerned about the television culture that seeped into theatre and the ‘star system.’”<sup>258</sup>

De Wet in a 2007 interview with Willemien Brümmer (“Agter” 52)

“Publishers are mad about prizes and anyway, if it happens [if I win the Herzog Prize], I wouldn’t mind the money and the fleeting glory.”<sup>259</sup>

De Wet in a letter to Marthinus Basson written in 1994

In this concluding chapter I would like to return to Reed Whittenire’s remark I have referenced in Chapter One: that the act of biography is an act of canonisation (in Mandell 22-3). However, biography and this biocritical thesis are certainly not the sole canonising tools in the establishment of Reza de Wet’s life and works in public and literary critical consciousness. As much as I have generated previously unscripted data on her life and works,

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<sup>258</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “[Ek] voel ook beklemd oor die televisiekultuur wat ingespyel het in die teater, en oor die ‘sterstelsel’.”

<sup>259</sup> The quote in Afrikaans: “Uitgewers is mal oor pryse en anyway, as dit gebeur sal ek nie omgee vir die geld en die fleeting glory nie.”

I did not “discover” her literary and biographical traces in obscure archives; rather, her stellar stature as a South African playwright and novelist have made her an impossible presence to miss for me, an enthusiast of theatre and literature. De Wet is already a figurehead in the South African literary ambit, a fact on which my research relies and essays to augment. As mentioned before, I partially view this thesis as the groundwork for a book publication on De Wet’s life and works, which, if it materialises, will not introduce her to a local and international public so much as it might assist in the consolidation of her significance as a remarkable contributor to world literature from a South African vantage point. Furthermore, this project might enrich, complicate and expand current views on this writer, who time and again is noted for her elusiveness as a public figure and the categorical slipperiness of her body of work. This conclusion has a four-part incentive: it seeks to identify the most prominent canonising tools by which De Wet’s life and works have been publicised by now; it will survey the guiding and sometimes contradictory acuties it offers on De Wet and her writing; I will reflect on the specific canonising contributions this research can potentially offer to the vibrant and continuous public dialogue on De Wet’s artistry and the personal and historical contexts from which it had emerged. Lastly it will consider instances where De Wet had voiced her combined delight in and discomfort with these broadcasting mechanisms. I will attempt to imagine De Wet’s model audience from her paratextual commentary and weigh this up against the general reception her work has received, especially by anthologising critics.

Archives are politicised for representing what the cultures that construct them deem memorable. The Greek morpheme “arkhē” does not simply denote “root” or “origin” and thus connote things historical; it also implies, as in the case of archives, cultural and empirical supremacy. Canons are similarly politicised: they, like archives, entail favour, selection and exclusion and do so with reference to the past, or at least that which is considered valuable from a literary past, for a literary present. Texts grouped together in curricula and in influential anthologies, for instance, function as archives in safeguarding certain texts (and their wedded oeuvres and contexts) against mass amnesia by implicitly elevating them to a superior position, especially in relation to their contemporaries. In canons, selection equals election. This recalls the application of the word “canonisation” in the context of Roman Catholic tradition where saints, and thus *lives*, are “canonised” (Scholes in Morrisey 279). This is analogous to biographical canonisation in secular domains.

Often (to the horror of many a historiographer), through its shared medium of words, narrative and emplotment, history is said to share some fundamental empirical bases with literature as canonised lives, like canonised literary works, are to some extent textualized phenomena, thus implying the cultural superiority of those figures. This connection between literary and biographical canons is compounded by the biographically canonising agency that an already canonised work or oeuvre affords its author. An author's prominence in the canon, in turn, shapes the nature and importance of the archive of her life. For example, the most extensive online archive of a South African author is *The Olive Schreiner Letters Online*. Schreiner's position in the South African English literary canon as the author of the first authentic South African novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), as well as her international position as feminist writer of *Woman and Labour* (1911), awards her archive considerable (inter)national importance, which ensured international funding for digitisation.

The example of Schreiner further demonstrates how archives and canons affect each other – canons, sometimes prior to archives, suggest whose lives and works are worthy of archiving and vice versa. Robert Scholes discusses this dialectically complex relationship of authors' biographical reputation with canonical works (279). For instance, he points to the function of William Shakespeare's and Daniel Defoe's names as categorising agents in the insurance of canonicity for texts with questionable authorship (279). Thus, even where works and bodies of works surpass their author's biographical recognition (unlike the case of Schreiner), Western ideology rarely de-authorises works entirely, even from dogmatically formalist and poststructuralist viewpoints. It seems indisputable then that a discussion of canonicity should attend a discussion of archives when the archives under discussion involve the lives of writers. As such, Malcolm Bradbury's suggestion in 1988 still holds true: “[W]e seem to live in two ages at once: the age of the Literary Life and the age of the Death of the Author”.

However as life-canonising agents, literary canons compete with more powerful life-canonising tools such as dictionaries of national biography, encyclopaedias, histories of nations and countries, especially in the educational ambit. A survey of these mechanisms reveals that for the greater part of Western history, literary lives have been generally marginalised, unless they were regarded as being of socio-political, or military importance. South African history and history writing is no different. Women and marginalised peoples were especially ignored in the above-mentioned life-canonising tools, until such time as the Marxist Revisionist historians of the 1970s addressed these paucities. From the domains of historiography, the genre of biography has often been dismissed as a lower form of history, despite the insistence

of giants such as Plutarch and Thomas Carlyle in the historiographic canon (as it were), that historiography is a discipline *inherently concerned with* biography.

I suggest that scholarly biographers, especially those of writers, are at least partially indebted to second wave feminism's deliberate reliance on biographical historiography as a tool employed in critical literary analysis, for the survival of the biography in the literary critical sphere. The most obvious (and indeed 'canonical' in literary critical theory) texts to exemplify this are Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). In line with trends from the Global North, South African feminist literary critics such as Judith Lütge Coullie, Devi Sarinjeive, Dorothy Driver, Margaret Daymon, Annemarie van Niekerk and Margaret Lenta focused on women's lives and writing in their critical work.

At the height of poststructuralism when Emile Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* (1966), Roland Barthes *The Death of the Author* (1967), Jacques Derrida's lecture on *difference* (1968), and Michel Foucault's *What is an Author?* (1969) were gaining currency in Francophone and Anglophone literary departments, inspiring a 'demotion' of the biography to the position of "the Cinderella figure of academia" (Benton 1), biography remained the lifeblood of feminist projects in search of a recuperation of erased, denied or ignored woman's literary traditions. This remained the case at least until the theorisation of autobiography as a literary genre meriting critical and literary investigation. Some prominent theorists championing this project include James Olney, George Gusdorf, Carolyn Heilbrun and Bart Gilbert-Moore's work on postcolonial life writing. Along with Cultural Studies and New Historicism, Second Wave Feminist Literary Critique helped usher auto/biographical archiving as a scholarly art and literary genre into the academic arena.

I suggest that South African literary archives have a symbiotic relationship with literary canons. The archives of public figures or writers are more likely to be investigated by scholars than the archives of the unknown or those whose names carry little or no public recognition. Citation for the contemporary scholar equates to recognition; a canon position for the writer prevents obscurity. Archives have limited space and resources, and yet, a canonised position in South African literature almost guarantees a writer a few boxes in literary museums and university library Document Centres. Few lives are as textualized as that of the professional writer, especially in South African scholarship. Almost every Afrikaans author obtains a canon

position and can be researched in an archive or literary museum. Genre writers though might not be grouped with authors' work considered as 'literature', but will still be canonised. In contrast to international scholarship, Afrikaans literary histories, writer profiles and autobiographies have always been prominent in the literary arena, but according to Kannemeyer, biographies only gained literary import since the publication of Leon Rousseau's biography of Eugène N. Marais in 1970 (42).

Afrikaans is not a world language and is still young, having only been recognised as an official language in 1925. Although English scholars are debating South African canons and literature, the market for Afrikaans literary canons remains strong and vibrant. In relation to other languages, the relatively small and therefore manageable amount of published Afrikaans literature ensures that the writing, maintaining, updating and theorising of Afrikaans literature is achievable. Hennie van Coller, quoting Helize van Vuuren, also notes in his overview of recently published South African literary canons that in their reading of Afrikaans literature, English speaking scholars have a tendency to "[create] a caricature of Afrikaans literature 'as written by arch-conservatives, oppressors, pretentious producers of high art and imported concepts [who] seem as a group to collectively suffer from Calvinist guilt and agonising soul-searching'" (159).<sup>260</sup> The canonisation and interpretation of Afrikaans literature written in English, by English-speaking scholars, is markedly different from its Afrikaans counterpart, a point we return to in our conclusion.

As an Afrikaans-speaking researcher of life writing, women and the archives, utilising English as my chosen medium, I am aware of the above mentioned biases against Afrikaans literature and the polemic surrounding the understanding of Afrikaans literature, culture and history. I aim to make De Wet's Afrikaans literature accessible to South African and international scholars and to contribute to and reinterpret existing perceptions of the Afrikaans authors we examine from the archives.

Adjectives that accrue in interviews I conduct with those who knew and worked with Reza de Wet, include "shy", "ethereal", "enigmatic", "mysterious" and "otherworldly". Her eccentricities are fabled – her ditzy absentmindedness (though brilliance) as a drama student and lecturer, her dark sense of humour, extreme reclusiveness, purported clairvoyance and

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<sup>260</sup> Jeanne-Marie Jackson in her section dedicated to De Wet's work "Retreating Reality: Chekhov's South African Afterlives" in *South African Literature's Russian Soul: Narrative Forms of Global Isolation* (2015) as a refreshingly nuanced exception.

alleged paranormal friendships with historical figures such as Anton Chekhov and Carl Gustav Jung. In contrast to this impression of an introverted and off-beat artist, the Reza de Wet available in published archives is, for the most part, that of an outspoken Afrikaans feminist, anti-apartheid writer-activist who makes the rural white Afrikaner the subject of aggressive dramaturgical criticism (Euba 671-2; Graver 103-109; Sassen). De Wet contrastingly, self-identified as bilingual to the extent of not having a mother tongue, while appreciating her Afrikaner upbringing, proclaimed not to have been a feminist, and abhorred politically oriented theatre. How does such a dissonance arise between the brands by which she is canonised and the way she had perceived her work – the fissure between her ideal reader/audience and the one created by the forces that ensure her oeuvre’s afterlife? This chapter surveys this biographical image of De Wet that appears most strikingly and consistently in published archives. I assess this version of her presented to the public in comparison to unpublished archives that I consult, generate and compile in my own research on De Wet’s life and works. I propose that the public portrait of De Wet stems from mainly two canonical systems – one by which certain of her plays have been brought to prominence in South African and international theatre canons, and the way in which her work has been marketed, and in response to this, my research expresses an urge for a reassessment of De Wet’s canon position, one that strongly considers her turn to Jungian psychology to inform her worldview and personal poetics.

If the internet is the penultimate public information base in what Leon Edel calls our current “age of archive” (101), the biographical article on De Wet in the online encyclopaedia *Wikipedia*, “the world’s most widely used reference source” by lay scholars and general members of the public, epitomizes some of the major problems with regards to her archiving in published canons. *Wikipedia* relays that, she “had written 12 plays in 15 years (five in English and seven in Afrikaans),” a “fact” that is repeated in several online (and other) reference guides. De Wet’s professional writing career actually spans from 1985 to 2011, a period in which she had written eleven Afrikaans plays<sup>261</sup> and nine English plays,<sup>262</sup> excluding the six unpublished English scripts she had devised for a physical theatre company.<sup>263</sup> The selection of English plays I refer to does not include the English versions of her first two Afrikaans trilogies – *Vrystaat-trilogie* [Free State Trilogy] (1990) as *Plays Two* (2005) and

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<sup>261</sup> *Diepe Grond* (1985), *Op Dees Aarde* (1986), *Nag, Generaal* (1988), *Mirakel* (1992), *Mis* (1993), *Drif* (1993), *Drie Susters Twee* (1996), *Verleiding* (2005), *Broers* (2006), *Blou Uur* (2007), *Die See* (2011)

<sup>262</sup> *In a Different Light* (1988), *A Worm in the Bud* (1990), *Yelena* (1998), *On the Lake* (2001), *Breathing In* (2005), *Concealment* (2005), *The Brothers* (2006), *Fever* (2007), *Heathcliff Goes Home* (2007)

<sup>263</sup> *Dialogue* (1994), *The Unspeakable Story* (1995), *Death: A Slight History of One Called Ivan* (1996), *Lilith* (1998), *Bessie’s Head* (2000).

*Trits* (1993) as *Plays One* (2000) –, even though *Plays One* and *Two* I suggest, should be understood as entirely new versions, as plays in their own right, rather than as mere translations.<sup>264</sup> The English plays, if the physical theatre scripts are counted together, thus outnumber her Afrikaans works. How is it then, that De Wet is primarily known as an Afrikaans playwright?<sup>265</sup>

One factor is the canonising systems of publication and prestige. In a letter to Marthinus Basson, written in 1993, De Wet complains about being pressured by her publisher HAUM-literêr, to have *Trits* published by the end of that year, even though its final play, *Drif*, has not yet been “tested” in performance, adding disdainfully that publishers are “mad about” prizes, while simultaneously admitting that she would not mind the money and the “fleeting glory”. The “glory” was all but “fleeting”. HAUM wanted the publication ready to qualify her for the Hertzog Prize, which she won the following year and then again four years later. De Wet’s writing career is marked, right from the start, by this close co-incident of playwriting, publication and the achievement of awards. Her break-through play *Diepe Grond* [Deep Ground] won the first place in a national Afrikaans student playwriting competition that was launched specifically to counter a dearth in the publication of Afrikaans drama. The winning script was published by HAUM and the first professional production thereof yielded seven prestigious South African theatre awards, consolidating De Wet’s presence in the South African literary and theatre scene. HAUM was a newly founded Afrikaans publishing house, and De Wet was a rising star. As such her Afrikaans writing was encouraged and nurtured. HAUM provided De Wet with the publication and promotion of her work and thus her English writing slipped under the radar.

De Wet’s advent as a mammoth figure in Afrikaans literature and theatre during the 1980s eclipsed her bilingualism and grounding in English language literature from the public view. Her mother’s side of the family was mostly English speaking, and she maintained that her literary diet as a child consisted largely of Victorian fiction. As such, her first play (still unpublished) was a combination of a prequel and sequel to *Wuthering Heights* and a bioplay on Emily Brontë. While she held a bachelor’s degree and a postgraduate diploma in drama and acting, her Master’s thesis was obtained in English Studies. At the time of her debut as a professional dramatist De Wet was a lecturer and PhD student at Rhodes University’s English

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<sup>264</sup> Often when I relay my thesis topic to someone familiar with De Wet’s work, I am probed as to why and how I manage to do this in an English Studies department.

<sup>265</sup> De Wet’s life partner was English speaking and they raised their daughter in English.

Department in Grahamstown. She had in fact conceived *Diepe Grond* as an English novel, before she became convinced of the play as a more suitable genre for the narrative and of Afrikaans as a more apt language to express the concerns it dramatises. The success of her Afrikaans writing did not, however, mute her English writing entirely. Although Ronel Gouws arranges De Wet's oeuvre into three phases, categorising her better-known English plays in the second phase (xi), such a neat division overlooks the dovetailing of two English plays written between the production and publication of the first Afrikaans trilogy. *In a Different Light* was produced in 1989, and *A Worm in the Bud* in 1990 before its publication in an anthology of African plays. Just as De Wet was known for mixing English and Afrikaans in her everyday vernacular and private correspondence, her dramaturgy too is marked by a constant alternation between these languages. Still, it was her Afrikaans plays that were published more quickly and attracted the most favourable critical attention locally.

In South Africa De Wet's most canonised (published, awarded and prescribed in schools and universities) plays are mostly set in historicised (early twentieth-century) Afrikaner rural milieus with mostly all white casts consisting of mostly female characters. De Wet in South African literary consciousness is a white female Afrikaner writing about the repressions and anxieties of white Afrikaner women. Not surprisingly then it is these plays rather than her English work, that were pitched by South African actor-director Steven Stead to British literary agent, Gordon Dickerson in 2000, which ushered in a season for De Wet of translating and revising her earlier work. If De Wet's local canonisation (even tokenisation) as a playwright representing Afrikaner concerns served her well in South Africa, my generated archives (especially interviews with overseas directors, actors and agents) indicate that it created significant challenges for her works' entrance into the international theatre arena. Dickerson recalled the initial "excitement" and "great interest in this writer that was unknown, who had such powerful characters and ideas", met with the disappointing realisation that, despite the "assumption" and "the hope" that she was black, she was in fact white, as is most of her characters. South African born actress Janet Kimmel who performed in *Crossing's* British debut relayed her sense that the British public "then knew very little about Afrikaners apart from our previous government being the leaders of apartheid". *Crossing's* producer Vanessa Mildenberg remarks that "[a]t the time it was the height of fashion here in London to do South African plays – but not Afrikaans plays. They were almost shunned". Tamsin Rothschild, director of *African Gothic's* first Australian production similarly remembers her surprise at the plays' good reception in Sydney, as she experienced it as "an interesting time because South

Africans were not that well received as a culture in Australia” due to what she saw as South Africa’s representation then in Australian mass media. Christel Smith, who produced and played in the Los Angeles production, remarked, “It’s interesting how people’s ‘apartheid red flag’ was raised when they knew the work came from South Africa”.<sup>266</sup>

One counter-reactive consequence of this demographical stereotyping is the promotion of De Wet’s works on the grounds of its said political relevance and political correctness. Upon the first productions of *Diepe Grond*, long before her turn to international producers, De Wet was dubbed by some, “the female Fugard”, a description that clung to her, even in obituaries. One consequence of this comparison is the alignment of De Wet’s thematic concerns with that of Fugard’s anti-apartheid activist dramas. This tendency is most explicit in Gabriel Bologna’s contextualisation of De Wet in the press release of his American film adaptation of *African Gothic* in 2013, in which he describes her “legacy in her native country”, fallaciously, as the leader of a movement, “Theatre of the Struggle”, insisting that *Diepe Grond* “was an instrumental weapon in the literary war that toppled apartheid”. To compound the image of De Wet as an anti-apartheid “struggle” playwright, her Afrikaner identity is often “excused” on grounds of her being a feminist playwright, in a struggle against Afrikaner patriarchy (Basson 10).

De Wet’s responses to these labels are almost comically provocative. Despite her voiced antagonism to patriarchy, she firmly asserted that she was “not a feminist” (in Pretorius n.p.), ‘claimed’ to be not at all interested in the Afrikaner, suggesting at times that she does not really see herself as an Afrikaner, and that, she seeks not to make any political statements with her plays. She demonstrated in epitextual commentary a strong resistance to being claimed as a playwright, by any political group. She “refuse[d] to be taken up as a symbol” or “the figurehead of something or other”. Always stressing her ideal of creating cathartic, transcendental, theatre for theatre’s sake, she felt repulsed by didacticism, political statements, and agitprop. De Wet conceded that ideas “emerge from plays” organically and that none of her plays are completely void of identity politics – “issues with capital letters”, as she called it. Therefore, she emphasised her delight in constantly changing her mind on these stances a point I return to below. If she claimed not to be a feminist, she did not discredit a belief in gender equality; rather, she was detaching herself from conscious political activism. She did not want

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<sup>266</sup> These premier productions of *Crossing* and *Missing* and Smit’s *African Gothic* had actors perform in Afrikaans accents while Rothschild discouraged this and Linnie Reedman attempted to purge *Miracle* from what she calls its “Afrikanerisms” to make it more accessible to a British audience.

to appear as if her ideas on equality were mere regurgitations of a specific philosophy so that her writing could be read simplistically as mouthpieces of a cause.

The extent to which my biographical archival research on De Wet complicates and expands, possible understandings of her oeuvre are obviously vast and I often feel daunted by the seemingly innumerable interpretive methodologies that new sources engender. But one framework seems consistently important to De Wet – her reliance on Jungian psychoanalysis, as elucidated to me by several of her friends, family members, and two of her psychologists. De Wet saw her characters, narrative motifs and chronotopes as archetypal in nature. Central thus to any biocritical reading of De Wet’s work is to consider the fictional content not merely as veiled (or allegorical) portrayals of historical figures, or forces, such as for instance (as critics often suggest) a political party, a regime, the author’s parents, or a single protagonist as the author’s Self. De Wet saw all her characters and even the settings as symbolised components of her own psyche – the antagonists as well as the protagonists. She herself said (as rarely acknowledged) that she was dramatizing internal psychical conflicts that were at times contextually coloured (in Botha “Meisie” 6). Yes, periodically it was the 1930s rural Free State, as it is in her most canonised works, but in other instances it was *fin de siècle* Russia, Victorian England, Edwardian France, Georgian Cape Town, 1940s Botswana and the Kabbalah Garden of Eden. Even where historical literary figures such as Anton Chekhov, the Brontës, Eugène Marais and Bessie Head occur, I read these reimaginations of them as personifications of psychological forces. While De Wet was not apolitical as a person, she felt strongly about her work as not functioning as socio-political theses, but rather as articulations of her conflicted and dynamic inner life. She felt no need to express a coherent selfhood, therefore publishing her works often in trilogies in which recurring character types take turns to function as protagonists and antagonists. “Do I contradict myself?” asks the speaker in Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, only to conclude that, “I am large, I contain multitudes”, a disclaimer De Wet herself may have regurgitated along psychoanalytic lines in reference both to her writing and her commentary on it. She referred to her plays as her “diaries”, implying possibly the analogous inconsistency of the self of which an egodocument is a testament.

I conclude on a Boswellian note with another dream I had about De Wet. I found myself in a large exhibition hall, walking with Marthinus Basson, perusing various displays. The last exhibition was an appropriative staging of the freak show which Gertie describes in *Mis*. It consisted of six freaks although I can only recall the appearance of the first four. The first performer was costumed as a cross-dressing mermaid in a tank, his tale decorated with

intricately camp sequenced patterns; the second was a bald yet bearded and muscled tattooed man (in the tradition of Victorian freaks), sitting at a small table, embroidering delicate little mandalas; the third was a little person and next to him an unusually tall man. The other two escape my memory. Basson (in the dream) asked me what I thought this meant. I pointed to all the forms of social and bodily inversions, which illustrate the nature of the carnival.

Marthinus: “Yes, but what does it *mean*?”

Danie: “What do you *mean*, ‘What does it *mean*?’?”

Marthinus: “I mean exactly what I ask.”

Danie: “Well, it clearly alludes to the freak show in *Mis*.”

Marthinus: “Yes, but what are they trying to *say*?”

Danie: “Well, I don’t know. But I guess they are actually making it obvious that they are not ‘real’ ‘freaks’, so whatever the installation *says*, it is clearly a performance *of* a performance.”

Marthinus: “Ah...”

At that point the merman/-maid turned to the other freaks:

Merman/-maid: “They are *interpreting* us. How *strange!*”

And all the freaks laughed.

As I wrote down the dream, I remembered that one of my first questions to Basson about his work on De Wet’s plays was whether he believed her when she insisted, with her epitextually expressed aversion to analyses of her plays, that she had written intuitively, not cerebrally. He recollected his first visit to De Wet during which he pitched his reading of *Mis* and recalled, in particular her stunned response to his interpretation of Gertie’s circus story. She claimed not to have thought of any symbolic implications of the freaks when she wrote that monologue but embraced his reading of it. My memory of this conversation must have been the seed of the dream. But the psychological consolation I draw from it is this: the performers in the dream laughed at us – Basson, an eminent interpreter of her work, and me an ambitious interpreter of her life in relation to her work, – and it gave me the peace of mind that no amount of interpretation can ever reduce De Wet or her work to anyone’s reading of it. Woolf remarks that the researcher “must be prepared to admit contradictory versions of the same

face”, and that “from all this diversity it will bring out a riot of confusion”, but she argues optimistically that the product need not be miasmatic but the achievement of “a richer unity” (“Art” 226). The life writer must also humbly grant that his own depiction of the subject will merely “enlarge [the] scope” of the manifold versions of her/him (226). The subject, after all, as Middlebrook (and numerous other biographers’) remarks, will always “retain a life of her own” (90). I have no doubt that De Wet’s work in particular will serve as an ongoing reminder of the unwritable richness of the psyche from which it had sprung, a complexity that will entice more than one biographical endeavours and a long conversation about the woman who in her own words wanted to live like a mole, but still speaks from the grave through the many voices of her strange and delightful characters.

## Addendum A

## A list of Reza de Wet's oeuvre with premier and performance dates

Chronological

<b>Play / Text</b>	<b>Premier</b>	<b>Publication</b>
<i>Diepe Grond</i>	1985 (sp); 1986 (pp)	1986 (fpv); 1991 (spv) <sup>17</sup>
<i>Op Dees Aarde</i>	1986 (sp); 1987 (pp)	1991
<i>Nag, Generaal</i>	1988	1991
<i>In a Different Light</i>	1988	Unpublished
<i>Vrystaat-trilogie</i>	Published	1990
<i>A Worm in the Bud</i>	1990	1995
<i>Deep Ground</i>	1991	Unpublished
<i>Mirakel</i>	1992	1993
<i>Mis</i>	1993	1993
<i>Drif</i>	1994	1993
<i>Dialogue</i>	1994	Unpublished
<i>Stil Mathilda</i>	Novel	1995
<i>The Unspeakable Story</i>	1995	Unpublished
<i>Drift</i>	1995	Published as <i>Crossing</i>
<i>Drie Susters Twee</i>	1996	1997
<i>Dead: a Slight History of a Man Called Ivan</i>	1996	Unpublished
<i>Yelena</i>	1998	2002
<i>Lilith</i>	1998	Unpublished
<i>Plays One</i>	Published	2000
<i>Crossing</i>	2000	2000
<i>Bessie's Head</i>	2000	Unpublished
<i>On the Lake</i>	2001	2002
<i>Lake Beneath the Surface</i>	2001	Unpublished
<i>Three Sisters Two</i>	2002	2002
<i>A Russian Trilogy</i>	Published	2002
<i>Notes for the Curious</i>	2003	Unpublished

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<sup>17</sup> sp: student production; pp: professional premiere; fpv: first published version; spv: second published version

<i>African Gothic</i>	2003	2005
<i>Breathing In</i>	2004	2005
<i>The Brothers</i>	2004	2006
<i>Concealment</i>	2005	2007
<i>Verleiding</i>	2005	Unpublished
<i>Broers</i>	2006	Unpublished
<i>Heathcliff Goes Home</i>	2007	Unpublished
<i>Fever</i>	None	2007
<i>Two Plays</i>	Published	2007
<i>Blou Ur</i>	2008	2009
<i>Die See</i>	2011	2011

**Alphabetical**

<b>Play / Text</b>	<b>Premier</b>	<b>Publication</b>
<i>A Russian Trilogy</i>	Published	2002
<i>A Worm in the Bud</i>	1990	1995
<i>African Gothic</i>	2003	2005
<i>Bessie's Head</i>	2000	Unpublished
<i>Blou Ur</i>	2008	2009
<i>Breathing In</i>	2004	2005
<i>Broers</i>	2006	Unpublished
<i>Concealment</i>	2005	2007
<i>Crossing</i>	2000	2000
<i>Dead: a Slight History of a Man Called Ivan</i>	1996	Unpublished
<i>Deep Ground</i>	1991	Unpublished
<i>Dialogue</i>	1994	Unpublished
<i>Die See</i>	2011	2011
<i>Diepe Grond</i>	1985 (sp); 1986 (pp)	1986 (fv); 1991
<i>Drie Susters Twee</i>	1996	1997
<i>Drif</i>	1994	1993
<i>Drift</i>	1995	Published as <i>Crossing</i>
<i>Fever</i>	2007	2007
<i>Heathcliff and the Dancing Bear</i>	None	Unpublished
<i>Heathcliff Goes Home</i>	2007	Unpublished
<i>In a Different Light</i>	1988	Unpublished
<i>Lake Beneath the Surface</i>	2001	Unpublished
<i>Lilith</i>	1998	Unpublished
<i>Mirakel</i>	1992	1993
<i>Mis</i>	1993	1993
<i>Nag, Generaal</i>	1988	1991
<i>Notes for the Curious</i>	2003	Unpublished
<i>On the Lake</i>	2001	2002
<i>Op Dees Aarde</i>	1986 (sp); 1987 (pp)	1991
<i>Plays One</i>		2000

<i>Stil Mathilda</i>	Novel	1995
<i>The Brothers</i>	2004	2006
<i>The Unspeakable Story</i>	1995	Unpublished
<i>Three Sisters Two</i>	2002	2002
<i>Two Plays</i>		2007
<i>Verleiding</i>	2005	Unpublished
<i>Vrystaat-trilogie</i>	Published	1990
<i>Yelena</i>	1998	2002

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