

**Reza de Wet's Channelling of the Long Nineteenth Century
on Post-1994 South African Stages**



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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on Reza de Wet's channelling of the long nineteenth century on post-1994 stages. I conceptualise her adaptation and appropriation of nineteenth-century British and European literature as well as her performance of colonial history as a theatrical séance by which she revives the past to comment on contemporary white South African cultural identity. The Gothic, which is a central element of De Wet's work, informs my conceptual lens alongside two theoretical notions engaged with nineteenth-century rewrites: the neo-Chekhovian and the neo-Victorian. I use "neo-Chekhovian" to describe De Wet's transformation of Anton Chekhov's plays, *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) in *A Russian Trilogy* (*Three Sisters Two*, *Yelena* and *On the Lake*). I draw on specifically neo-Victorian notions such as revision and biofiction to analyse her reworking of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) into the unpublished play *Heathcliff Goes Home*. Lastly, I refer to theatre theorist Freddy Rokem's notion of performing history to discuss De Wet's neo-Victorian dramatisation of British colonial history in *A Worm in the Bud* and *Two Plays: Fever and Concealment*. The neo-Victorian is a relatively new field in South Africa and the theatre theoretical dimension thereof is still under-explored. My analysis of De Wet's work within this intellectual context will branch out its inquiries to contemporary South African theatre studies.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis fokus op Reza de Wet se “oproep” van die lang negentiende eeu op post-1994 verhoë. Ek konseptualiseer haar verwerking en aanpassing van negentiende-eeuse Britse en Engelse letterkunde so wel as haar vertolking van koloniale geskiedenis, as ’n teatrale séance wat die opwekking van die verlede behels ten einde kommentaar te lewer op kontemporêre wit Suid-Afrikaanse kulturele identiteit. Die Gotiese, wat ’n sentrale element is van De Wet se werk, voed my konseptuele lens en ek bring dit in verband met twee teoretiese begrippe wat gemoeid is met die herskrywing van negentiende-eeuse tekste: die neo-Chekhoviaanse en die neo-Victoriaanse. Ek “gebruik” die term “neo-Chekhoviaans” ten einde De Wet se transformasie van Anton Chekhov se dramas, *Die Seemeeu* (1896), *Oom Wanja* (1897), *Drie Susters* (1901) and *Die Kersieboord* (1904), in *A Russian Trilogy* (*Three Sisters Two*, *Yelena* and *On the Lake*) te ontleed. Ek ontleen ook van spesifieke neo-Victoriaanse begrippe “revision” en “biofiksie” om haar verwerking van Emily Brontë se roman *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in haar ongepubliseerde drama, *Heathcliff Goes Home*, te analiseer. Laastens verwys ek na teater teoretikus, Freddy Rokem, se konsep, “performing history” om De Wet se neo-Victoriaanse dramatisering van Britse koloniale geskiedenis te bespreek in *A Worm in the Bud* en *Two Plays: Fever and Concealment*. Die neo-Victoriaanse is a relatief nuwe veld in Suid-Afrika en die teater-teoretiese dimensie daarvan is nog onderontgin. My analise van De Wet se werk binne hierdie intellektuele konteks sal dit uitbrei tot ondersoeke in kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse teater studies.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1994, the year that marks South Africa's transition to democracy, playwright Reza de Wet noted her interest in the "reinvention of the past for purposes of the present" in an interview about her involvement as playwright and performer in the First Physical Theatre Company's dance play *The Unspeakable Story* (in Booysen 47). The play was inspired by the Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte's refusal to acknowledge that it was the corpse of his mother that had been found on the banks of the River Thames, her face unrecognisably marred. In De Wet's script for the play, a female narrator remarks: "The story that Magritte told his friend about his mother [that her nightgown had covered her face] was a fantasy" because "what actually happened was the unspeakable fact that she was faceless when they pulled her out of the river" (75). *The Unspeakable Story* thus resurfaces this "unspeakable fact" by focussing on the body that had resurfaced from the river in which Regina Magritte had sought her death and it unmask her son's euphemistic description of her corpse, while imagining the private history behind the suicide of this famous artist's mother. De Wet introduces Regina's ghost as a character who co-narrates the play, a role De Wet herself performed in the play's segment "The River". This gothic staging of the past is a central feature of De Wet's oeuvre, but, in this thesis, I will focus on De Wet's turn to the nineteenth century in her staging of South African settler colonial history and in her recasting of the works of canonical nineteenth-century writers Anton Chekhov and Emily Brontë, which I here consider within the framework of current studies in neo-Chekhovian and neo-Victorian rewrites. I begin by reading De Wet's *A Russian Trilogy* (*Three Sisters Two*, *Yelena* and *On the Lake*) in which she appropriates and rewrites aspects of Chekhov's four great plays, *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), after which I discuss her reworking of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) into the

unpublished play *Heathcliff Goes Home*.¹ Lastly, I extend my analysis to De Wet's more broadly historical plays *A Worm in the Bud* and *Two Plays: Fever and Concealment*.²

De Wet had written a play, earlier in 1994, *Crossing*, which anticipates and dramatises her special interest in the gothic staging of the past in her plays for purposes of exploring gender relations in South Africa at the time. *Crossing* is set in the strange household of two spinster sisters, Hermien and Sussie, who live in a large haunted Victorian "house on the banks of a river in the north of South Africa" near a drift that travellers attempt to cross when the river is in flood, despite the sisters' warnings (De Wet, *Plays One* 63).³ When they drown, as often happens, Hermien and Sussie give them a "decent burial with their Christian names on a cross" to prevent their spirits from haunting the house (70). There is, however, one ghost whose full Christian names the sisters are unable to determine, a ghost known by the nickname Ezmerelda. Hermien wishes not to "remember her" because, like Regina Magritte, Ezmerelda "had been too long under the water" by the time her corpse was found (67). But on the night the play is set, Ezmerelda's ghost threatens to disturb the peace of the sisters' guests and they decide to conduct a séance by which they hope to find out what Ezmerelda's full Christian names are and thus to lay her ghost to rest. During the séance, the ghost reveals that Ezmerelda is the stage name of Maria Elisabet, who was bought from her mother by a hypnotist called Maestro. Typical of the conventions of the Gothic, the ghost functions as a voice for repressed histories. *Crossing* exemplifies De Wet's obsession with the revival by means of the Gothic of marginal histories, especially those of women, but it also anticipates her special interest in nineteenth-century literature. The two ghosts that are channelled in the play are implicitly inspired by characters in Victorian novels: Maestro evokes Svengali in George du Maurier's novel *Trilby* (1895) and Ezmerelda resembles the street performer Esmeralda in Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831). It is, however, from 1996 onwards, that De Wet's work becomes more explicitly engaged with nineteenth-century history and literature, a strategy she uses to portray and critique the patriarchal family

¹ I am grateful to Shaun Acker for providing me with a copy of the script, Robert Haxton for the loan of his recording of its performance and Lindsay Reardon for graciously allowing me to refer to this and other unpublished plays by De Wet in this thesis.

² Since much of *Heathcliff Goes Home* is set in the late eighteenth century and Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and *Three Sisters* in the early 1900s, I will employ Eric Hobsbawm's notion of the long nineteenth century which covers the era from the French Revolution in 1789 until the beginning of the First World War in 1914 (1).

³ The Afrikaans version, *Trits*, was published in 1993 and its translation, *Plays One*, was published in 2000. De Wet herself translated *Mirakel* into *Miracle*, Steven Stead translated *Mis* into *Missing* and they co-translated *Drif* into *Crossing*. Unlike the English version of *Vrystaat-trilogie* (1990), *Plays Two*, *Plays One* follows the Afrikaans version strictly, and I will therefore quote from the English translation. It is also for this reason that I will quote from *Vrystaat-trilogie* instead of *Plays Two*, paraphrasing the quotes in English, while presenting the Afrikaans quote, where necessary, in square brackets.

as a site of constraint in English and Dutch settler colonial cultures during this period of South African history, aspects of which still remain present in current gender relationships. This preoccupation with the nineteenth century in her plays emerges in two distinct but related projects, the neo-Chekhovian and the neo-Victorian, both informed by the Gothic, an element already present in both Chekhov's and Brontë's writing, to dramatise her view of gender repression and attempts of liberation and self-realisation through creative expression.

Critics, scholars and reviewers frequently refer to the gothic elements in De Wet's plays (Barnard 34, Buys 50-63, Duncan 1-8, Greig 13, Hough 39; Kannemeyer 685). She repeatedly expressed her admiration of gothic literature for its "focus on the ghosts of the past and the proverbial skeletons in the closets", as confirmed in the final title of her translation of *Diepe Grond* as *African Gothic* (2005) (in Barnard 34).⁴ She had also noted that there is something inherently gothic about Afrikaner culture, the subject of most of her writing, particularly the strong Calvinistic underpinnings of traditional Afrikaner culture, for example, the belief in original sin and the visitation of the sins of the fathers upon their children. As John Fletcher points out, the idea of "the sins of the fathers' [...] is encrypted at the heart of all Gothic fiction and might be said to constitute its problematic as a genre: its concern with lineage, heritage, patrimony and the transmission of dark secrets, history as nightmare" (117-8).

This central concern of the Gothic is symbolised by the haunted house, which, according to Chris Baldick, coincides "with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space" (in Fletcher 119). Feminist scholars Kate Ferguson Ellis and Patricia Heiland have, in turn, argued that this claustrophobia is thematically central to the Gothic since its inception in the late eighteenth century, a period when, as Heiland notes, "there was a shift in the organization of family structures, as men were drawn into the workplace, women were increasingly confined to the home, and gender roles were insistently codified" (3). For Heiland, then, "gothic novels are all about patriarchies, about how they function, what threatens them, what keeps them going", and she argues that, "from their origin in the eighteenth century, gothic novels explored the workings of patriarchal politics through an aesthetic based on the subjective realities of sensibility and the sublime" (5; 10). Ferguson Ellis, in *The Contested Castle*,

⁴ The first English version 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 (*Beeld* 8; *De Wet Plays Two* 18).

moreover identifies a distinctive “female gothic” mode characterised by a protagonist’s entrapment in a haunted house (119). She describes this mode as “pertinent to the social confinement of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries within the family and the ideology of the domestic sphere, and their disempowerment as independent economic and political agents” (119).

It is within this tradition of gothic narratives about the entrapment and exploitation of female protagonists within patriarchal family structures symbolised by the gothic house that De Wet writes her plays. In *Diepe Grond*, Soekie and Frikkie ritualistically re-enact, with grotesque distortion, scenes from their childhood, eventually revealing to the visiting attorney Grové that they have killed their parents and buried them under the floorboards of their decaying farm house, just as he is about to follow a similar fate (54, 56). This concern with reviving the dead and reliving the past persists in her second play, *Op Dees Aarde*, in which the Roos family is visited annually by the ghost of the youngest daughter, Bybie, who died twelve years earlier in child birth after eloping with Gys, her eldest sister Sophie’s fiancé, (*Vrystaat* 87). What these gothic disruptions reveal in each play is De Wet’s critique of Afrikaner repressions. The scandals that the family in each play attempts to cover up are exposed as courageous acts rather than awful transgressions. Frikkie and Soekie’s decision to kill their parents is portrayed as a result of the cruel severity with which they were raised. Sophie tries to convince Minnie and Tokkie of Bybie’s corrupt nature, but Bybie’s return reveals her to be a kind, naïve spirit and her decision to elope as a brave, admirable decision. De Wet’s oeuvre constantly dramatises the return of a past that is unsuccessfully repressed in the present, a return that exposes and unsettles the governing norms of the patriarchal mandate by which the protagonist’s home is governed.

Sigmund Freud’s 1919 essay “The ‘Uncanny’” has gained significant currency in literary studies to articulate the operations of the Gothic, especially since, as Hogle points out, gothic fiction “became the basis for Sigmund Freud’s fin de siècle sense of the unconscious as a deep repository of very old, infantile, and repressed memories or impulses, the archaic underworld of the self” (3). The uncanniness of the Gothic is perhaps best captured in the definition that “something which ought to have remained hidden [...] has come to light” and the feeling of unease this generates (Jensch in Freud 634). Freud describes this “special core of feeling” as that which “fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression” and, more precisely, “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (620; 634). In my

analysis of De Wet's plays, the patriarchal household and the repressions by which it is sustained serve as the narrative representation of the rational mind whereas the transgressive female protagonist embodies the repressed which returns to her former home and family. In this space, she threatens to disrupt the status quo. In Chapter 2, I discuss a character type in *A Russian Trilogy* who in each play returns to her former household and, by doing so, "precipitates a crisis" which serves as the inciting incident in the plot (De Wet "Introduction" *Russian*). This discussion is informed by my exploration of the way in which De Wet models the Russian aristocratic families in *A Russian Trilogy* on upper- and middle-class Afrikaner patriarchal family structures as she had experienced them, a project I term as neo-Chekhovian.

The term neo-Chekhovian has not yet been formalised as a fixed critical concept in literary or theatre studies, although it is commonly used by reviewers and scholars in reference to contemporary versions and revisions of Chekhov's plays (Lawson 4; Taylor 2; Canby 6; Feingold 5). The definition of the term "Chekhovian" is, however, a concern that J. Douglas Clayton addresses in *Adapting Chekhov: The Text and Its Mutations*. Clayton remarks that productions and reworked versions of Chekhov's plays are frequently criticised by reviewers and scholars for not being properly "Chekhovian", without being held accountable for what they mean by this claim, because there appears to be an unquestioned universal consensus about what it means for an adaptation to be "Chekhovian" (7). For the purposes of this thesis I will use the term neo-Chekhovian as descriptive of contemporary revisions of Chekhov's plays which transform the source text with the intention to relate it to the playwright's cultural context. As a neo-Chekhovian playwright, then, De Wet finds Chekhov's depiction of Russian patriarchal households during the *fin-de-siècle*, a time of tremendous social and political unrest in Russia, useful to explore the transitions Afrikaners had to face under the new political dispensation after 1994, as she explained in a 1998 interview on her play *Three Sisters Two*, saying that "[t]oday the Afrikaner is living Chekhov" in "having to go through a very painful process of renouncing the identity that they had been given" (in Blumberg 244).⁵ *A Russian Trilogy* is constructed as neo-Chekhovian sequels to Chekhov's plays: *Three Sisters Two* is set in 1920, three years after the occurrence of the Russian Revolution and

⁵ 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.

nineteen years after the conclusion of the events in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*; *Yelena* is set in 1905, eight years after the conclusion of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*; and *On the Lake* is set in 1910, fourteen years after the ending of Chekhov's *The Seagull* (in *Russian* 19; 97; 171).⁶ According to André Stolz, a close friend of De Wet, she had planned to write a sequel to Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* as well (in Stander "Interview 11").⁷ This idea never materialised, but De Wet incorporated elements from *The Cherry Orchard* – such as references to characters from this play – in *Three Sisters Two* and *On the Lake*. In this trilogy, she portrays Chekhov's characters as "standing on the threshold of far-reaching socio-political change", their sense of "their existence [a]s precarious and morally flawed" as that of Afrikaners in post-apartheid South Africa (De Wet, "Introduction" *Russian* 7). In each play of *A Russian Trilogy*, De Wet uses the pivotal figure of a transgressive female protagonist who returns after an extended period of absence to her family and disrupts the patriarchal order, thus revealing the corrupt values upon which it is built.

De Wet was not the only white South African playwright to engage in the neo-Chekhovian in the immediate wake of the 1994 elections. Charles Fourie and Janet Suzman both transformed Chekhov plays to present a dystopic impression of the Afrikaner's position in South Africa after 1994. With Charles Fourie's *Die Eend* [The Duck] he rewrites *The Seagull* to comment on the transitional situation in which Afrikaner actors and theatre makers found themselves with the demise of state-funded theatre companies and the rise of television culture in South Africa. Janet Suzman was more interested in the effects of land reform on Afrikaner farmers in her South African version of *The Cherry Orchard*, titled *The Free State*. But these playwrights, unlike De Wet, transposed the source texts from Chekhov's *fin de siècle* Russia to a present South African context. De Wet's plays are set in Russia with no explicit allusions to her immediate reality. It might be argued that *A Russian Trilogy* "puzzled" audiences in the same way J.M. Coetzee's 1994 biofictional novel about Dostoevsky, *The Master of Petersburg* "with its arcane topic, and geo-political distance from South Africa" "puzzled its readership", as noted by Monica Popescu, who asks:

⁶ 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.

⁷ I will throughout the thesis quote from interviews I have conducted with family, friends, colleagues and students of the playwright as well as with actors, directors, producers and editors who had been involved in the staging of premiere productions of her plays. These interviews are currently being edited for publication.

What ghostly dimension do [nineteenth-century Russians] summon up in South Africa close to the turn of the millennium? [...] [W]hat are the gains of a fictional glide into the latter half of the previous century and into an unrelated culture, when more burning issues (democracy, equal rights, poverty and AIDS) deserve attention? (2)

In response to these questions, Popescu suggests that “[there] are, of course, general similarities in terms of the socio-political situation in Russia of the 1860s and South Africa of the early 1990s”, such as the comparison of “FW de Klerk’s repeal of most of the laws on which segregationist politics was built” with “the demise of serfdom in Russia in 1861” (6). But, responding to the “heated debate on the status of the arts in relation to historical contingency that had been brewing in South Africa” during the interregnum, Popescu argues “for a reading that considers the similarities between the positions of the writers in relation to the field of political forces in their countries, and the authors’ ethical freedom to represent the chosen material” (4).

De Wet’s admiration for both Coetzee and Dostoevsky, in addition to her fascination with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian history, may have played a part in her decision to set her Chekhov appropriations in the source text’s milieu, but her focus in these appropriations is early twentieth-century and not so much late nineteenth-century Russia (De Wet in Norval 18; De Wet in Solberg 179). Yet, she had mentioned how Chekhov’s nineteenth-century characters had spoken to her own sense of socio-cultural dislocation. They are, after all, the creations of a child of the late nineteenth century who had lived through an especially transitional stage in Russian history. De Wet attempted in *Three Sisters Two* to express her insecurity as an Afrikaner in a post-apartheid context by portraying Chekhov’s characters in a post-Revolution Russia (De Wet, “Introduction” *Russian 7*; in Blumberg 242; in Norval 18). This parallel has been explored in Hester Rossly van der Wal’s thesis *Vroue Figure in Reza de Wet se Drama-Oeuvre*, by Edwin Charlton in his thesis *The African Maid – Reza de Wet’s Dusting Off: A Deconstruction of the Afrikaner Identity* and in Marissa Keuris’s paper “Found in Translation: Chekhov Revisited by Reza de Wet and Janet Suzman”. This correspondence between the national future that Chekhov’s characters had anticipated and the present De Wet’s Afrikaner contemporaries had experienced was also recognised by Afrikaans reviewers of the play’s premiere production in South Africa (Botma 2; Du Plessis 6; Greg 1; Hough 19; Olivier 5). However, little attention has been paid to the entire *A Russian Trilogy* as an interrogation of Afrikaner identity, perhaps because *Yelena* and *On the Lake* do not share *Three Sisters Two*’s post-Revolution setting to match De Wet’s

post-apartheid reality. In Chapter 2 I will consider these links De Wet makes by means of neo-Chekhovian adaptation and appropriation – terms that are crucial to the understanding of how neo-Chekhovian plays operate in relation to their source texts.

Critics are often at a loss to assess adaptations, since there is a pervasive tendency of playing the adaptation off against the source text. Fanie Olivier, in his review of *Three Sisters Two* in *Rapport*, points out that “[t]o try to write in imitation of Chekhov and in addition also write a sequel is a risk”, and that it is one De Wet fails to pull off (6).⁸ Similarly, John Peter’s *Sunday Times* review of the play’s British debut at the Orange Tree Theatre in London (2002) dismisses it as “an endless piece of respectful pastiche” (16). While both these critics recognise *Three Sisters Two* as an “adaptation”, their remarks exemplify what Linda Hutcheon describes in *A Theory of Adaptation* as a tendency in “both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing” to regard adaptations “as secondary, derivative, belated, middlebrow and culturally inferior” (2). In response, she attempts to restore due status to adaptations as texts that are as deserving of serious critical recognition as their source texts (2). She ascribes the failure to appreciate these texts’ status as “autonomous works that can be interpreted and valued as such” to the misrecognition of their “double nature”, which is evident in their “overt relationship to another work or works” (6). De Wet herself had made the point that the style in which she had written her sequels to Chekhov was not “Chekhovian” at all:

I didn’t want to emulate Chekhov – no one can ever do that, because, I believe, his reality was so peculiarly his own and he never compromised. To write this play truthfully, [...] I had to listen to my own music, my own depths, to find my own truth. Then the play happened. (242)

Reading De Wet’s adaptations similarly entails for the scholar of her work listening to her truth, rather than Chekhov’s.

In theatre studies, a distinction must be made between “intermedial” and “intramedial” adaptation of theatre texts (Clayton and Meerzon 2). Yana Meerzon distinguishes between “page to page” adaptation (intramedial) and “page to performance” (intermedial) adaptations (2). In the broadest sense, all theatrical productions of a script can to some extent be described as intermedial adaptations, but the term is specifically used to refer to the staging of a text in which no alterations are made to the dialogue, while the choice of décor and costume deliberately does not adhere to the norms and conventions of the period and cultural setting

⁸ *Three Sisters Two* was originally published in Afrikaans by Human & Rousseau as *Drie Susters Twee*. De Wet’s own translation of it was published six years later with *Yelena* and *On the Lake* as *A Russian Trilogy* by the London-based publishing house Oberon, which is the version from which I quote.

of the play. My analysis is restricted to De Wet's intramedial adaptation of Chekhov's plays as my lack of access to archival footage of the plays' premier performances prevents me from analysing the productions. I thus focus on the intermedial adaptation performed in *A Russian Trilogy*, and in addition also, its features as an "appropriation", relying on Julie Sanders's definition of the term.

Sanders, in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, extends Hutcheon's overarching term "adaptation" into two main categories: "adaptation" and "appropriation". She defines "adaptation" as "a transpositional practise, casting a specific genre into another generic mode", while "appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural [...] domain" (18; 26). De Wet's Chekhov sequels are therefore more properly regarded as intramedial *appropriations* for the way in which she transforms his plays to articulate Afrikaner anxieties. At the same time, Sanders seems to suggest that all appropriations are in the first place adaptations before they depart from the source text decisively enough to be regarded as appropriation. In this way, for instance, *Heathcliff Goes Home* is an adaptation as it transmutes Brontë's novel into a play, but it is also an appropriation in its magnification of certain themes from the novel, its exclusion of certain characters, its introduction of new ones and its narrative expansion of it as a prequel. I will thus rely on the term "appropriation" as defined by Sanders throughout this thesis to refer to De Wet's channelling of Chekhov's and Brontë's writing in her contemporary South Africa.

While *Heathcliff Goes Home*, similar to *A Russian Trilogy*, is an appropriation of a nineteenth-century source text, it demonstrates a more universal exploration of "different forms of entrapment and exploitation and the yearning for release and self-realization" (De Wet in Van Niekerk 4). However, De Wet suggested that these themes find a particular expression in an Afrikaner context, which she portrays in *Plays One* (in Finestone and Huisman 89). She noted that *Heathcliff Goes Home* "informs almost all of" this trilogy, which was originally staged for and about the Afrikaner (Finestone and Huisman 89). In this way, *Heathcliff Goes Home* sheds a sharper light on the Victorian influences that shaped her understanding of self-realisation within the restrictions of cultural identity. In this prequel to *Wuthering Heights*, De Wet applies what she calls her own preoccupation with "liberation from within" and she appropriates the antagonist Svengali from George du Maurier's novel *Trilby* as "Strengali", the antagonist in her own drama of liberation and self-realisation (De Wet in De Villiers 47). While in *Trilby* the mesmerist represents entrapment and

enslavement, in De Wet's appropriation this character performs a more ambiguous role in the entrapped characters' individuation. Her revival of these Victorian texts thus implies not merely a celebratory impulse, an insinuation that these texts provide solutions to present cultural traps, but a more complex process of appropriating to what has become known as the neo-Victorian.

Spearheading what has by now become the interdisciplinary field of neo-Victorian studies, Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich asks, in the introduction to their edited collection of essays *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*, "how [...] the cultural critic [should] confront the recent explosion of postmodern Victoriana", which they ascribe to the "intense historiographic curiosity [...] [that] drove 1980s and 1990s Victorian revivals and located the Victorian age as historically central to late-century postmodern consciousness" (x-xi). Responding to this proposition, Mark Llewellyn, in his editorial essay to the first edition of the journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, defines postmodernism as "a period in search of its past" (168). Sanders theorises this cross-periodical affinity by suggesting that

the Victorian era proves ripe for appropriation because it throws into sharp relief many of the overriding concerns of the postmodern era: questions of identity; of environmental and genetic conditioning; repressed modes of sexuality; criminality and violence; the urban phenomenon; the operations of law and authority; science and religion; the postcolonial legacies of the empire. (128)

It is during this phase (from 1985 onwards) that Reza de Wet launched her career as a playwright. British theatre critic Michael Billington, in his review of her play *Miracle*, refers to her as a playwright "clearly enslaved by the past" and the historical period she favours is the Victorian era, as she demonstrates with *Heathcliff Goes Home*, *A Worm in the Bud*, *Fever* and *Concealment* (1). Although De Wet is not primarily a neo-Victorian writer (some of her plays are set in the 1920s, 1930s and 1950s), she finds her voice as a playwright in this postmodern moment in which identities are forged with self-consciousness about the past. As a bilingual Afrikaner woman in South Africa, retrospection is especially important, considering the socio-political transitions the country underwent at the time. De Wet extends her own retrospection as far back as the nineteenth century, the century of the 1820 settlers, the Great Trek and the First South African War, defining moments in the formation of South African English and Afrikaner identities (De Wet 'Author's Note' *Two Plays* 6; De Wet in Solberg 196; De Wet in Greeff 94).

In *Heathcliff Goes Home* De Wet emphasises the role of artistic expression in her protagonist's quest for freedom and finds a literary predecessor in Emily Brontë, whose novel *Wuthering Heights* portrays the destructive effects of Victorian gender ideology on the individual who stands at odds with it. In *Heathcliff Goes Home*, De Wet explores her own preoccupation with social strictures, a thematic she similarly dramatised in *Plays One*, as pointed out before (De Wet in Van Niekerk 4). *Heathcliff Goes Home* combines a biofictional portrayal of Emily and Charlotte Brontë with a revisionary neo-Victorian appropriation of *Wuthering Heights*. The stage as a place of returns is emphasised in this play by the metatheatrical elements of carnival performance by Heathcliff's family, and my analysis emphasises De Wet's use of the set to centralise this aspect of the play. In Chapter 3 I will consider the way in which De Wet returns Emily Brontë to the present, using the stage as a medium which channels voices from the past. This is a concept familiar in neo-Victorian criticism, although theatre is an under researched domain in this field.

Alexia L. Bowler and Jessica Cox argue that neo-Victorian writers' "sustained engagement with the past signals [their] continued attempts to make sense of the contemporary moment", elaborating that,

[w]hile adaptation(s) can be thought of as inhabited by literary and cultural 'ghosts', this echoing of voices and ideas performs an intertextual weaving with the present moment and exhibits a simultaneous recognition of and departure from that past, allowing us the space in which to grapple with the renewed crises we face in negotiating our (post)modern identities. (Bowler and Cox 3)

Channelling is widely used by neo-Victorian scholars for the way in which these texts revive the nineteenth century. Rosario Arias and Patricia Pullham, in the introduction to their edited collection of essays, *Hauntings and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*, argue that the way in which "writers resurrect and talk with the Victorian dead [reflects] the channelling of Spiritualist beliefs and the reanimation of Victorian genres" (xx).

Channelling is a potent metaphor to illustrate De Wet's theatrical strategies, not only in relation to the neo-Victorian and the neo-Chekhovian, but also to her more general portrayal of history.

My use of the term 'channelling' to describe De Wet's adaptations and appropriations of Chekhov's and Brontë's work is inspired by the language she herself used to describe the importance of the past and the dead in her creative process. In a *De Kat* interview, she called herself a "mystic", explaining that she had inherited the gift of clairvoyance from her mother

and grandmother (in Leroux 50). She maintained that she felt “very connected to the dead”, a statement her theatre designer Roux Engelbrecht confirmed as he recalled the “strange certainty with which she spoke of people from the ‘Other World’, her mother, her grandmother, Chekhov and Allan Bates” (in Van Biljon 1; in Luyt 13). De Wet’s sense of the presence of the dead, whether family, canonical authors or celebrities, provides a useful metaphor for the work her plays do: she exploits the potential of theatre as a “memory machine”, a term introduced by Marvin Carlson in his book *The Haunted Stage*, to revive the themes and concerns voiced by characters and authors of nineteenth-century literature that relate to contemporary debates and discourses. Carlson points to Herbert Blau’s observation that “one of the universals of performance, both East and West, is its ghostliness, its sense of return, the uncanny but inescapable impression imposed upon its spectators that ‘we are seeing what we saw before’” (in Carlson 1). De Wet writes almost exclusively for theatre, realising its charged status as a place of returns, layering Carlson’s theory of the stage as a place where histories return, even more by setting her plays in the past and adapting the works of canonical writers. She aligns their preoccupations in response to her present concerns, a key feature of the historical and particularly the neo-Victorian novel, which has similarly been theorised as a form of literary séance.

The metaphor of spirit mediumship as a description of the historical author’s practice is explored in Helena Davies’s *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* in which she draws on the work of literary scholars and historians specifically from a feminist revisionary point of view. Davies conceives of the Victorian spirit medium as an artist for the way in which she recreates the voices of the dead, a notion shared by Diana Wallace who, in *The Woman’s Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900–2000*, argues that “the female medium becomes a suggestive figure of the historical novelist herself, ventriloquizing the voices of the past” (Davies 14; Wallace 202). Thus Wallace and Davies both view the author of historical fiction as being actively engaged in the project of reanimating the dead through fiction in an attempt to make sense of their present moment. A historical precedent is found for this comparison in Alex Owen’s *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in late Victorian England*, in which he argues that, “[d]espite this ostensible submissiveness, the medium does not completely lose her own voice as she must direct the messages that she receives and offer them to the séance participants” and, in this way, “[t]he medium, posing as a mere dummy for the voices of others, potentially produces a spectrum of voices and is therefore performing the roles of both

‘dummy’ and ventriloquist” (125). Owen thus emphasises the role of the spirit medium, not as a mere re-presenter but as an active mediator between the past and a present audience (125). The historical novelist, like the medium, reanimates the past and simultaneously voices the concern of its medium. Wallace’s and Davies’ metaphor of the historical author as medium is useful for an inquiry into the manner in which the past functions in De Wet’s plays.

De Wet’s oeuvre is rich with portrayals of dialogues between the living and the dead and the liberating effect they have on the participants. In *Crossing*, Hermien channels Ezmerelda’s spirit for Sussie to speak to in order to lay her ghost to rest.⁹ As a result, Sussie comes to see her life with Hermien as a trap and finds the courage to escape. The ghost’s liberating function is also found in *Op Dees Aarde* in which Bybie’s ghost is invited back into the Roos house in an attempt to drive her out for good. However, her return helps her brother Tokkie to see their eldest sister Sophie for the tyrant she is, and Bybie helps him to process and accept their mother’s death. Channelling in De Wet’s oeuvre points metatheatrically to the way it brings back histories and uses it to interrogate contemporary issues of gendered national identity formation. Her plays are predominantly set in the past and those that are not are still thematically concerned with the effect of the past on the present. Even in the few plays set in De Wet’s present, like *Diepe Grond* and *Verleiding*, the protagonists are obsessed with the resurrection of the dead. In *Diepe Grond*, Soekie and Frikkie dress up in their dead parents’ clothes to re-enact scenes from their childhood and in *Verleiding*, Lizelle van Breda claims to court the ghost of Eugène Marais, an early Afrikaans writer and language activist.¹⁰ The pasts in De Wet’s plays are thus as much haunted by the present because her characters are obsessed with the dead, another gothic element that has been remarked on by theorists of the historical novel, specifically in reference to the reader.

Allan Robinson, like Wallace, compares this genre with the practice of séance but, unlike Wallace who theorises the work of the writer as a form of spirit mediumship, he emphasises the agency of the reader. In *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel*, he argues against the widely used phrase “spectral haunting” in favour

⁹ *Crossing* is the final translation of *Drif* (staged in 1994), which was published in 1993 together with *Mirakel* (staged in 1992) and *Mis* (staged in 1993). *Drif* is the first of De Wet’s plays to have been staged only after its publication. It opened in 1994 in the Nico Arena Theatre, Cape Town, followed by the first English translation, *Drift*, which premiered in the same venue the following year.

¹⁰ I am indebted to Marthinus Basson for lending me his copy of *Verleiding*’s unpublished script.

of “resurrection” or “spiritualism” as “more appropriate” to describe the historical novel’s function (53). For him, it “indicate[s] the intervention of present human agency in recalling the past” and “the reader’s performative reanimation of what is embodied in the text” (53). Whereas my use of “channelling” coincides with Robinson’s use of “spiritualism” in its description of literature’s ability to revive the past, his application of the term (as is the case with Wallace) is restricted to the novel genre. The process that he describes as the “performative reanimation of what is embodied in the text” is, in the case of a dramatic text, mediated by its performance as a live theatre production. It is on this crucial distinction between prose and theatre that De Wet frequently commented.

Although she had published a novel, *Stil Mathilda* (1995), she saw herself as a playwright and “theatre person” rather than a novelist (in Van Biljon 1; in Luyt 6; in Burger 3). As an actress, director, drama teacher and theatre scholar, she was intensely aware of the idiosyncrasies of the genre in which she worked. She spoke about this art form in almost religious terms, revering the stage as “a place of transmutation, and a crucible of mysterious forces [...] capable of changing your chemical make-up, changing you biologically in some mysterious way” (in Solberg 187). From her commentary on the themes of her unpublished play *In a Different Light*, it is evident that what she described as theatre’s mysteriously transformative properties derive from this medium’s capacity to present the past to an audience who witnesses its reinvention on stage collectively and immediately.¹¹ In a *Die Vrye Weekblad* interview shortly before the opening of *In a Different Light*, she explained that this play “is a commentary on the confusion of the past” and that it “deals with the intense changes of perspective that occur in human communication” (in du Plessis 5). She refers, notably, to theatre as an act of “ritualistic communication with an audience” and she seeks to show “how people’s personality structures change, depending on the people with whom they are confronted”, specifically when they are confronted with people from their pasts (5).

In a Different Light is a play that dramatises this philosophy. It is set in a decaying house where the sisters Sara and Alice were raised. It is now the house where the severely depressed Sara lives with her husband, Jan. Sara awaits Alice’s and her husband James’s return for their mother’s funeral. Upon their arrival, all the characters see each other and themselves, as the title suggests, “in a different light”. It triggers a series of emotionally

¹¹ I am grateful to Dawid Minnaar, who performed the role of Jan in *In a Different Light*’s premier production, for lending me his copy of the unpublished script.

violent exchanges between the sisters, the brothers in law, the former lovers (Sara and James) and the two couples. There is a link between Sara's healing confrontation with her own past when Alice and James return and the way in which theatre resurrects the past for an audience. During the scenes in which Sara spends time alone with Alice and James respectively, she initiates certain rituals they associate with their shared childhood, for example by serving Alice tea in the cups from which they used to drink as children, thus inadvertently compelling them to confront and resolve the painful grudges they hold against each other since that time. The play dramatises the cathartic effect of these ritualistic invocations of childhood memories on Sara, the protagonist, which, on a metatheatrical level, could also be read as an illustration of De Wet's view that theatre's preoccupation with the past makes it "a ritualistic cleansing process" (in De Villiers 47).

De Wet argued that theatre's function in society "– both in the East and the West and in an African context – has always evolved from ritual invocations" and that contemporary theatre is "still linked to magical thinking, to transformation, to exorcism, and to heightened states of consciousness" (in Jamal 171). She expressed her admiration of Noh plays by pointing to "the way in which they invoke the past to bring about a transition in the present" (in Huismans and Finestone 93). W. B. Worthon's work on Noh theatre is pertinent here, because he points out that, in Noh plays, the past is re-visited (the *waki* re-visits a historical site) and historical figures (the *shite*) are summoned to make sense of history's impact on the present state of affairs (128). However, as Carlson, points out, "[a]ll theatrical cultures have recognized, in some form or another, this ghostly quality, this sense of something coming back in the theatre, and so the relationships between theatre and cultural memory are deep and complex" (2).

In De Wet's plays, this "something coming back" is frequently a historical moment that is restaged in theatre as a historical parallel to the present. In *Nag, Generaal*, set in the summer of 1902 when the Boers were losing the war against the British, the severely wounded and unnamed Boer general of the title is hiding with his wife, Magda, in a cowshed on a deserted farm (119). Magda nurses him while he sings war anthems in a pathetic state of delusion. De Wet explained that the General's "wound is central in the play as it [facilitates] a complex parallel between the past and the South African situation today", while it also emphasises the effects of nationalism coupled with Afrikaner hyper-masculinity (in Leroux 9). De Wet wrote and staged this play, as Marthinus Basson, the director of most of her plays' premiers, points out, when "[y]oung [...] men were expected to pass into manhood and citizenship by a two-

year rite of passage, fighting a senseless and indefensible terrorist war on our borders” (in De Wet, “Introduction” *Plays Two* 7). Magda reveals during the play’s climax that their son did not die a heroic death on the battlefield as she had made her husband believe, but that he is alive, traumatised and disengaged from his surroundings. In this way, the play speaks to the traumas of contemporary Afrikaner families, using a crucial moment in their history to comment on their current socio-political situation.

In theatre studies, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* has been the example most frequently referred to in discussions of the return of the past in the present. Freddie Rokem, in *Performing History*, interprets Marcellus’s question in *Hamlet* – “What, has this thing appeared again tonight?” – as “profoundly evocative of the operations of theatre itself” (6). While the characters in *Nag, Generaal* are not historical figures, they are placed in a specific historical setting De Wet’s Afrikaans target audience would have recognised because the “thing that appear[s] again” here is a reminder of the Boer War, a painful moment in the history of the Afrikaner.

Theatre’s potential to revive the past is further explored in my reading of *A Worm in the Bud*, its revision *Fever* and specifically *Concealment*, all set in South Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century. Unlike *A Russian Trilogy* and *Heathcliff Goes Home*, these plays do not adapt and appropriate specific nineteenth-century texts, but interrogate Victorian gender constructions in a South African settler colonial context. De Wet continues her gothicised portrayal of the patriarch and the female protagonist’s attempts to escape, but in these plays the action is set in African colonial outposts where the Victorian woman’s propriety is both more strictly tried and policed. In Chapter 4 I will consider these plays as forming part of De Wet’s project to uncover an overlooked history of English settler women and their traumas, a history directly related to her own ancestry.

Throughout her career, De Wet had in public interviews expressed a complex and nuanced understanding of her rootedness in a mixed lineage of English and Afrikaner families. On her father’s side, she was related to the South African War General Christiaan de Wet, while her great grandmother on her mother’s side “was the daughter of a Settler family of Welsh descent” (De Wet in Van Zyl 4, De Wet, *Two Plays* “Author’s Note” 7). Both her maternal and paternal lineages consist of English and Afrikaner families. De Wet’s Welsh great-grandmother married an Afrikaner man, the senator Charles Marais, whose youngest brother was the Afrikaans author and language activist Eugène Marais (De Wet, *Two Plays* “Author’s Note” 7, De Wet *Verleiding* 3; Rousseau 5). Her great-grandmother on her father’s side was

raised by Anglophile Afrikaner parents, who, “[w]hen she reached sixteen”, had sent her “to finishing schools in England and Switzerland” with the hope that “she would become a completely English lady” (De Wet, *Two Plays* “Author’s Note” 9). As descendants of such culturally mixed lineages, De Wet’s parents had raised her bilingually (De Wet in Burger 18). She maintained that English was her “alternative language” and not her “second language” (De Wet in Norval 18). She felt equally comfortable in English and Afrikaans, while her everyday speech was described as a mixture of both languages (De Wet in Burger 18, Greeff 94, Brümmer 4). She definitely saw herself as an Afrikaner, but she “refuse[d] to be taken up as a symbol of nationalism” or to be made into a “figurehead” of Afrikanerdom (in Blumberg 245, in Botha 6, in Burger 3, in Solberg 184, in De Villiers 48, in Solberg 181). De Wet’s deliberate investment in qualifying her cultural affiliations is specifically symptomatic of the shifting socio-political and artistic landscapes in South Africa after 1994.

The period following South Africa’s first democratic elections is characterised by a national culture of retrospection particularly related to cultural identity as shaped by the traumas of the past century. This period is defined by cultural reassessment. Whether it was the catalyst or merely the most telling example of this narrative, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) established in December 1995 became the prime example of what Devarakshanam Betty Govinden calls “a time of memory”, a suitable label for an era defined by the TRC’s “major formula” of “forgiving but not forgetting” (Govinden 9; Solberg 3). Literary and theatre scholars alike recognise the undeniable impact of the TRC on the retrospective trends in the arts in South Africa after 1994 (Barnard 658, Graham 9, Solberg 3, Krueger 4, Kruger 565, VanZanten 146, Viljoen 464). Even the TRC’s main initiator, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, comments in his foreword to Govinden’s book *A Time of Memory: Reflections on Recent South African Writings* on the “continuation” of “the formal work of the TRC” in South African literature and theatre (8). This link between the work of the arts and the TRC may stem from the inherent creative nature of the project. Rita Barnard goes as far as viewing the TRC’s modus operandi as “essentially literary”, as she quotes Njabulo Ndebele’s description of it as “a living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative” (658).

But if the TRC was literary by virtue of the questions it raised around narrative agency in the negotiation of both individual and cultural identities, it was also essentially theatrical. Shane Graham’s description of the TRC as a “staging [of] a public drama about private traumas” expresses this dimension (3). Understandably, the literary legacy of theatre makers at the time

exhibits what Loren Kruger calls a phase of “recovery”, a term that “refers to post-apartheid performance of local and regional histories suppressed by apartheid” (565). Considering that during this period there were “more theatres open in South Africa than at any time since theatre’s Fifty’s heyday”, South African theatres became important platforms on which to practice this form of redemptive retrospection (Solberg 5). William Kentridge’s *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is exemplary of this moment.

Afrikaner identity was arguable more radically scrutinised during this phase than other South African national identities were, if only in relation to the TRC, as it was per definition the investigation of “human rights violations that occurred after 1960 when the ANC and other extra-parliamentary organizations were banned” by the Afrikaner government (Giliomee 648). Hermann Giliomee points out, in *The Afrikaners: A Biography of a People* that, despite Nelson Mandela’s commitment to the public reassurance of Afrikaners regarding their role in the new regime, the group “fell from its position of temporary grace” when the TRC was established (648). The Afrikaner had shifted from “the centre of South African identity” to the scrapheap”, as Courtney Jung remarks in *Then I Was Black: South African Political Identities in Transition* (87). The new phase in Afrikaans literature, “which starts in 1990, sees Afrikaans literature repositioning itself in various ways with regards to the changing political and social landscape”, as Louise Viljoen argues. (463). She identifies “the revisiting of history” and “the appearance of a body of texts representing dystopic views on post-apartheid South Africa” as “most prominent trends in the [Afrikaans] literature of the period” (463).

Within an Afrikaans theatre context, the manifestation of this trend is most obviously found in Deon Opperman’s Herzog Prize-winning play *Donkerland* which depicts a family drama spanning across two centuries since the founding of the De Wit’s family farm in 1838 and their loss of it to the government’s land redistribution policy. The play references and alludes to several nationalistic Great Trek and South African War plays of the early twentieth century by N.P. van Wyk Louw, Gerhardt J Beukes, Uys Krige and Totius. De Wet had anticipated this historical impulse of post-apartheid Afrikaner playwrights since most of her plays between 1986 and 1996 were historically set and, like Opperman, she too made use of intertextual references to challenge nationalist myths about the Afrikaner. From 1996 onwards, however, her intertextual strategies intensified markedly with her explicit appropriation of Anton Chekhov’s plays in *A Russian Trilogy* and of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Notably, for the first time, she began to write plays that were not set in

South Africa but in the countries in which the source texts are set, while English became her primary medium and she proceeded to translate her earlier work for publication abroad. She was as concerned with the cultural restrictions that she had written against before, but she explored these concerns in a broader context, paralleling her present concerns with the resonances she had found in the works of Chekhov and Brontë. De Wet's primary use of English after 1994 (with the exception of *Broers*, *Blou Uur* and her last play *Die See*), as well as her experimentation with appropriating Chekhov's and Brontë's work, registers what Anton Krueger describes in *Experiments in Freedom: Explorations of Identity in New South African Drama* as a "'free' individuality" which characterises post-apartheid cultural identity formation. He comments extensively on the complexities and potentially problematic struggle of theatre makers to reassess cultural identity by means of theatre that imagines and reimagines ethnic histories:

Many [...] are still holding on to categories of identity previously established under apartheid, while others are trying to patch in a sense of fracture by positing an essentially 'free' individuality as the basis for a universal identity. Whatever the case may be, the unity of self in South African society is certainly problematic, which is perhaps why the issue of identity has become such a prominent concern for so many. (4)

De Wet's nuanced definition of her individual sense of being a bilingual Afrikaner is perhaps a telling example of such a "'free' individuality". She strongly identified as an Afrikaner playwright while writing in English and appropriating Chekhov's and Brontë's work in a period when Afrikaans novelist Etienne van Heerden suggested that the

central concern of the Afrikaner writer is whether we can find this space in Africa as Afrikaner writers, whether we can find a new identity. We are still looking at Europe and America, but if the borders open up, we will have to ask ourselves to what extent we belong to Africa. (Van Heerden in Van Zanten 146)

Contributing to this widespread feeling of un-belonging is the sense that Afrikaans is losing "its privileged status as one of only two official languages" and the "state support that aided the growth of Afrikaans literature in the early years of Afrikaans nationalist reign" (Viljoen "Afrikaans Literature" 463). De Wet's bilingualism and her exposure to world literature as a child had enlarged her sense of herself as a world citizen. It prepared and empowered her to think and rethink her position in a transforming society vicariously through the worlds and works of nineteenth-century British and Russian writers without having this strategy be a "looking at Europe" as an ultimate *Heimat* or colonial parent, as Van Heerden suggests.

In De Wet's channelling of Chekhov and Brontë, her preoccupation with white South African cultural identity becomes less apparent. Her appropriative works demand a high level of sophistication from audiences and readers to identify the connections between the reality of white South Africans after 1994 and the characters inhabiting her portrayal of early twentieth-century Russia and Victorian England. While it is precisely these resonances that this thesis examines, De Wet had insisted on the universal nature of her plays' central themes. She was convinced that her plays "do not [need] to be understood only in the context of the Afrikaner experience" and are "well-equipped to travel to new places", where they will "arrive at their new destinations with their frail accoutrements intact" (De Wet "Author's Note" *Plays One* 9). One such theme that resonated with both local and international audiences is De Wet's depiction of female characters' survival strategies (both physical and psychological) within oppressive patriarchal cultures. It was especially this aspect, she suggested, Afrikaners, English South Africans, the Victorians and Russian turn-of-the-century aristocracy had in common.

It is this concern with the lives and experiences of women in relation to repression and freedom within various historical contexts that led to what Temple Hauptfleisch considers to have been De Wet's pioneering contribution of an abundance of female roles to an otherwise male-dominated Afrikaans drama canon (in Luyt 1). Marthinus Basson, in his obituary for her, similarly expressed his gratitude to De Wet for creating work for actresses through her contribution of plays to Afrikaans literature (in Pople 14). These roles are also demanding because of De Wet's harrowing depictions of the violence inflicted on female psyches by narrowly constructed gender identities in white South African households ever since her creation (both as playwright and actress) of Soekie, the shape-shifting female protagonist in her first play *Diepe Grond*. The exploration of white South African female subjectivity in her plays since her premier has been the central focus of Barbara Bosch's article "Powerspeak in Reza de Wet's *Diepe Grond*" and at least two Master's theses: Jaqui Smuts' *Die Destabilisering van Binêre Geslagsopposisies by Wyse van Magiese Realisme in Reza de Wet se Drama 'Breathing In'* and Hester Rossly van der Wal's *Vroue Figure in Reza de Wet se Drama-Oeuvre*. Both consider the consistencies of the feminist impulses in De Wet's plays throughout her oeuvre.

In this thesis, I trace the trajectory of De Wet's post-1994 gothic exploration of entrapped female subjectivity vicariously performed through nineteenth-century figures, first by means of her neo-Chekhovian appropriation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya* and *The*

Seagull, then with her neo-Victorian biofictional portrayal of Emily Brontë and her revisionary adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* and, finally, by re-writing the colonial histories of Victorian settler women in *Concealment*.

Chapter 2

Chekhovian Returns in De Wet's *A Russian Trilogy*

For De Wet, the recurrent return to a place of origin was a personal priority and a motif central to *Three Sisters Two*, *Yelena* and *On the Lake* in *A Russian Trilogy*, her neo-Chekhovian appropriation of Anton Chekhov's plays *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya* and *The Seagull*. In each play a female character from the source text becomes the protagonist who returns after an extended period of absence to a place of origin and its constraints. De Wet had herself frequently visited her grandmother's house in Senekal in the Free State which she had kept intact after her grandmother's death (De Wet in Du Plessis 18). In an interview, she explained that her mother had been born in this house and had taken her there immediately after her birth, as she, too, had taken her own daughter, Nina (De Wet in Greeff 96). She visited the house often, she said, "to reaffirm my place in the world, my origins, as well as that which I am in my very being", describing every visit as "a private, personal quest" and as "a retreat to childhood" (96). During these visits, "the sharp and free experience of the child [was] awakened" for her, but she also relived "the anxiety of childhood: the rules and regulations imposed on the child" (96). This ambivalence is likewise apparent in her perception of Afrikaner culture in the rural Free State. From 1982 until her death in 2012 De Wet had lived in Grahamstown, a town in the Eastern Cape with strong English settler colonial roots and heritage, which she liked for its distinctive "English mood" and the lack of pressure to express her Afrikaner identity in a prescribed way (De Wet in Botha 6).¹² While she still had "a strong attachment to the Free State", she expressed a "definite" sense of "conflict" with "its people" because she felt that they "exist according to [...] norms" with which she could not identify (in Du Plessis 48). De Wet described the Free State as the "heartland of the Afrikaner" and it was "the repressions specific to that culture" that she consistently exposed and addressed in her oeuvre (in Greeff 97). Afrikaner culture as

¹² Grahamstown was founded in 1812 as a military outpost by Lieutenant-Colonel John Graham as part of the effort to secure the eastern frontier of British influence in the then Cape Colony against the Xhosa, whose lands lay just to the east. In an attempt "to maintain peace on the border between the Fish and Sundays Rivers" in the Cape Colony, Lord Somerset, British governor in South Africa, encouraged aspiring British emigrants to settle in, what is now known as, the Eastern Cape, where Grahamstown was initially established as a garrison town. Attractive conditions, such as "free land were offered and 90 000 applications, of which only 4 000 were approved" were stressed in the promotion of this migration (Hunt and Bryer 1). The first of these settlers arrived in Table Bay on 17 March 1820 and hence they are called the 1820 settlers (i).

fundamentally repressive of “women’s sensuality and sexuality”, and thus crippling to the individual’s potential for self-realisation, is a theme that is central to *A Russian Trilogy* (in Finestone and Huismans 92). De Wet’s use of the Gothic to stage her sense of a too strict adherence to traditional Afrikaner family values as a trap will be discussed with reference to Freud’s essay “The ‘Uncanny’” by reading the protagonist in each play as the agent of the uncanny as she triggers the repressed secrets of the patriarchal household, de-familiarising it for those who have remained behind in it.

This estrangement from the familiar is already manifested metatheatrically in the way that the plays in *A Russian Trilogy*, as neo-Chekhovian appropriations, dramatise a return to the canonical Russian playwright’s work and unsettles an audience’s perception of the source text. Targeted firstly at Afrikaans theatre goers, *A Russian Trilogy* relies on its audience’s familiarity with Chekhov’s work, which, for many, would have formed part of their upbringing. Since the publication of Carl-Hein Mostert’s Afrikaans translation of a volume of selected short stories by Chekhov, *Vyande en Ander Verhale*, in 1939, Chekhov’s oeuvre has been quickly and firmly established as essential material for Afrikaans students of literature and theatre. An extensive variety of his stories is included in *Wêreldletterkunde: ’n Bloemlesing Verteenwoordigend vir die Kortverhaal* published by Die Kinderkultuur-Vereniging. *Wêreldletterkunde* is a multivolume anthology of short stories representative of this genre from world literature. Since the 1960s, translators employed by the state-subsidised regional committees of performing arts added their translations of Chekhov’s plays to an already established repertoire of translated world drama. This includes Karel Schoeman’s translation of *Uncle Vanya* (tr. 1968) and *The Cherry Orchard* (tr. 1975), André P. Brink’s translation of *The Seagull* (tr. 1973) and Robert Mohre’s translation of *Three Sisters* (tr. 1977). During this period a culture of training actors and theatre makers with Chekhov plays was established especially by Robert Mohre and Rosalee van der Gught (Stander “Interview 4, 8, 3, and 9”). De Wet was trained as an actress during the early 1970s, with Robert Mohre as her mentor. He called her “a born Chekhovian actress” and thus ensured her lifelong obsession with the Russian playwright whom she had called “the master of contemporary dramatists” (in Solberg 78). Remarking on her appropriation of Chekhov’s plays, she said that she felt the need to return to “the Master”, “to immerse myself in that world”, “trying to understand the roots of contemporary classical drama and how they can be transformed and transmuted” (78). De Wet’s versions of Chekhov’s plays, which have become canonised by and for the Afrikaner, seek to unsettle the audience’s perception of this canon by uncovering

and extending its implicit concern with the repression of sexuality and desire which De Wet sees mirrored in Afrikaner patriarchy.

Chekhov embarked on his career as a playwright in 1881 during an era when the woman question was prominent in mainstream European theatre, as was interest in the rise of the so-called New Woman. In their introduction to *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis explain that in “the second half of the nineteenth century the social and economic position of women underwent accelerated change” (5). This brought about the emergence of the New Woman, characterised by “her perceived newness, her autonomous self-definition and her determination to set her own agenda in developing an alternative vision of the future”, a figure most notably portrayed in fiction by Henry James, for instance, Henrietta Stackpole in *The Portrait of a Lady* (12). In theatre the New Woman rose to prominence in the plays of Henrik Ibsen; as Sally Ledger argues, it “would be an exaggeration – but only a small one – to claim that Ibsen invented the New Woman” in European theatre, with strong female protagonists such as Nora in *The Doll’s House* and Mrs Elving in *Ghosts* (79).¹³ While Chekhov followed Ibsen’s career, his regard for his Norwegian contemporary’s work was ambivalent, as Donald Rayfield points out, because he found it too didactic in its political agenda (127). Whether Chekhov was more subtle in his treatment of contemporary social concerns is debatable, but he certainly shared Ibsen’s interest in women’s position in a male-dominated society.

Chekhov’s writing, both personal and public, reveals a keen awareness of women’s vulnerability within the Russia he knew. In a letter written on 2 January 1889 to his brother Aleksandr, for instance, he reproaches him for his mistreatment of his wife Natalia:

On my first visit to you, what wrenched us apart was your appalling treatment of Natalia Alexandrovna and your cook. Forgive me, but to treat women in such a manner, whoever they may be, is unworthy of a decent, caring human being. What heavenly or earthly power granted you the right to make them your slaves? Constant bad language of the most filthy kind, raising your voice to them, criticizing them, capricious demands at lunch and dinner, endless complaints about how your life is nothing but penal servitude and accursed drudgery – is not all that the mark of a coarse bully and despot? (in Loehlin 6)

Chekhov himself was raised by an alcoholic father who was notorious for the abuse of his wife and children, a pattern that Chekhov seemed to have feared was being repeated in

¹³ De Wet revered the works of both Ibsen and of Henry James (in Finestone and Huisman 90). She had even embarked on writing a doctoral thesis on James’s last three novels *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl* and *The Ivory Tower* (Stander “Interview 15”).

Aleksandr's marriage. He had cherished a lifelong aversion to marriage before settling in the last three years of his life for a long-distance marriage with the actress Olga Knipper (Rayfield 14). His extended bachelorhood and frequent involvement in triangulated relationships has caused him a reputation as a womaniser and a misogynist (Bloom *Chekhov* 13; Bruford 41; Simmons 62), but it seems rather to have been the institution of marriage itself and not the women by which Chekhov felt threatened. In a letter to Aleksandr, dated 23 March 1895, he expressed his preference for a wife to be "like the moon" as it does "not appear in my sky every day", adding that "[h]aving a wife won't make me write any better" (in Loehlin 7). Chekhov apparently regarded marriage and domestic duties as a potential hindrance to his writing and he must have been aware of the advantages he had as a man to be able to afford the freedom of bachelorhood.

Chekhov's involvement in theatre as a playwright also confronted him with the vocational limitations imposed on Russian women as artists and performers. In another letter to Aleksandr, written on 18 April 1883, Chekhov noted that, in "the history of man and woman", "[w]oman is everywhere passive", that is, pacified by the strictures of a patriarchal society (Chekhov in Heldt 166). As James Loehlin points out,

Chekhov's Russia was a patriarchal society – quite literally, in that religious life was under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow, the leading figure of the Russian Orthodox Church, and all civil authority derived from the autocratic ruler, the tsar. Russian family life also centred on the father. (19)

This form of patriarchy, as elsewhere in Europe, had cast the middle-class married man as the father and breadwinner with a public vocation and his wife, as a mother, relegated to the domestic sphere. This meant that a woman trained as a performing artist did not normally enjoy the opportunity of combining married life with her profession. For the nineteenth-century married woman, "womanhood was a vocation in itself", as Elaine Showalter remarks, and a career as a performing artist thus "required a genuine transcendence of female identity" – that is, the role of a wife and mother (21). In *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov subtly portrays this silencing of women in marriage, a repression of female creativity which also coincides with expression of sexuality and desire. Masha from *Three Sisters* and Yelena from *Uncle Vanya* had been trained as pianists before they had married, but their husbands consistently deflect other characters' appeals to Masha or Yelena to entertain them with music (Chekhov 96; 122). Masha complains to Vershinin that her education and musical training are a "useless encumbrance" in the provincial town in which they live (103). The

futility of this training is confirmed when in Act Three the soldiers visiting the Prozorovs prompt Masha to entertain them with piano playing, but her husband, Koolyghin, objects to it as he finds it improper – an objection which is understandable considering the fact that piano playing in public signified availability on the so-called marriage market (152). Even so, Masha expresses her hidden longings and desires through music in the form of whistling and singing. Throughout the play, she and Vershinin whistle and hum tunes to each other when they are not alone, thus giving surreptitious expression to their mutual affection without admitting their transgressive love affair (111; 136; 149). As Vershinin bids Masha farewell in the last scene and Olga urges her not to show her devastation in Koolyghin's company, she sings a song of a forlorn tree by the sea, a song that, with its cryptic imagery, expresses her feeling of abandonment (164). This impulse to make music as an expression of intense but repressed emotion is also found in Yelena in *Uncle Vanya*. Yelena admits to her stepdaughter, Sonya, that she feels “tiresome” and “of no importance” in many ways, including her “music studies, in [her] home life, in [her] husband's house, in all [her] romantic affairs” (121). Overwhelmed and surprised by her own confession, Yelena expresses the need to “play something now”, but when Sonya asks her father's permission, he refuses and the second act ends with Sonya's solemn announcement that “[y]ou mustn't”, as if Chekhov deliberately emphasises the tragedy of Yelena's silencing with the drop of the curtain after this line (122). As a dramatic device, piano playing and the prohibition thereof in these two plays poignantly portray Chekhov's view of patriarchy's repression of female creativity.

Chekhov's heroines, one might argue, are characterised by failure: Yelena and Masha are both admittedly unhappy in their respective marriages and both succumb in some way to their attractions to other men – Yelena to Astrov and Masha to Vershinin – but neither has the courage to chase their affections to the point of elopement. Even Nina in *The Seagull* who, unlike Masha and Yelena, refuses conventional life when she runs away from her parents' house with Trigorin, a playwright, to chase her dreams of becoming an actress, fails miserably. Loehlin explains that “[a]ctresses living the kind of itinerant provincial life Nina describes were often reduced to poverty and prostitution, and Chekhov certainly knew such women” (122). He refers to two of Chekhov's short stories containing female characters whose “careers [as actresses] lead to disgrace and bereavement: Katya in ‘A Boring Story’ and the daughter in ‘Panikhida’” (122). Chekhov's plays and stories reveal a lucid social awareness of the vulnerability and social limitations of women in his contemporary Russian

society. It is exactly his portrayal of women with thwarted ambitions that inspired De Wet's invention of these characters' afterlives.

She develops this theme in *A Russian Trilogy*, especially within the context of the middle- and upper-class families in Chekhov's plays, and she does so effectively through her employment of the Gothic, a mode that already manifests itself subtly in both Ibsen and Chekhov. Jerrold E. Hogle notes that, from "the start, [...] the oppression and 'othering' of the female seen from her point of view has been a principle gothic subject", using as illustration Ann Radcliff's development, during the early nineteenth century, of "the primal Gothic scene of a woman confined" and her turning of it "into a journey of a woman coming into some power and property by their own and other feminine agency, albeit within a still-antiquated and male-dominated world full of terrors for every female" (10). This return of the repressed, dramatised in gothic literature, is theorised psychoanalytically in Freud's essay on "The Uncanny", an essay that is in itself a seminal work of gothic literary criticism (Freud does a psychoanalytic reading of E.T.A. Hoffman's story "The Sandman"), as well as a crucial text in the theorisation of gothic literature. Freud describes the uncanny as a mode of experience that describes the frightening sense of unsettlement and the alienation from the familiar which arise when something comes to light which "ought to have remained hidden", and which "has long been forgotten" (416). In *A Russian Trilogy*, female characters that transgress the sexual standards of their class position feature as such embodiments of the repressed that return to the homes where they were raised. Typical of the conventions of Gothic literature, in these homes "are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story" (Hogle 2). By making the female character's return a pivotal plot device in her sequels to Chekhov's plays, De Wet exposes the secrets and silences that she suspects the characters are maintaining in the source texts, revealing in the process injustices of patriarchy through the excessive disruptions caused by this particular character's actions, a character type that I shall refer to as the returning female figure.

The protagonists in *A Russian Trilogy* consistently return at the start of the play to a household which is governed by norms with which they feel themselves at odds. De Wet explained that her creation of Masha in *Three Sisters Two* was informed by Luiba Ranevskaya in Chekhov's last play, *The Cherry Orchard*. Both Masha in *Three Sisters Two* and Luiba "have become sophisticated city dwellers involved in illicit affairs" and both "precipitate a crisis" in their arrival at the start of the play (9). These crises "threaten to

disrupt and destroy their old way of life” and “the subsequent action unfolds in relation” to this (8). What De Wet does not explicitly point out here is that this pattern is repeated throughout the trilogy. In *Yelena*, the title character returns from St Petersburg to her deceased husband’s country estate, despite its inhabitants’ inability to sustain her. Sonya and Vanya are struggling to make ends meet after the previous year’s harvest has rotted due to early spring rain, causing them to make a troubling amount of debt. Yelena hopes that the help of her son-in-law, Astrov, a country doctor, may save her further medical expenses, but Astrov’s apparent attraction to Yelena makes her a threat for Sonya and for the stability of the household on the estate. Nina’s return to her late parents’ country house in *On the Lake* similarly threatens Arkadina, who lives nearby. Nina had been involved in a love affair with Arkadina’s lover Trigorin, and her arrival causes anxiety among the surviving friends and family of the late Kostia: Arkadina’s servants Polina and Masha fear that Nina will sell her parents’ house which they hoped would be their refuge when Arkadina dies, and Arkadina is afraid that Nina will excite Trigorin’s affections again. Like the return of the repressed in the gothic uncanny, the returning female figure in each play goes back as a stranger to the norms of her family. As a disruptive influence, she is seen as threatening to the household stability. Conversely, she is threatened by the home from which she had originally fled as she faces the risk of being re-absorbed into the old norms which she had rejected.

De Wet’s gothicised families in her neo-Chekhovian plays build on Chekhov’s own preoccupation with familial relationships in his works which exemplify the nineteenth-century family drama, especially as innovated by August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen. According to Roland Shiderer, their primary concern with the effects of social change on upper and middle-class families also typically questions the legitimate authority of the father as “head of the house” by interrogating the implications of the codified gender roles of patriarchal families on its most vulnerable members (277). Of the Chekhov plays De Wet appropriates in *A Russian Trilogy*, *Three Sisters* which most clearly exhibits the features of the family. The title of the play already stresses the importance of the family in the play by foregrounding the main characters as siblings. Moreover, the fact that only the sisters are named, and not their brother, reveals Chekhov’s focus on women’s position in male-dominated families.

The play opens with the oldest sister of the Prozorov siblings, Olga, reflecting on the death of their father, a year earlier (118). They have been motherless much longer and, now, their brother Andrey naturally inhabits the position of the patriarch (121). Their father had moved

the family to the unnamed country town in which the play is set and, even at the time of the play's opening, the Prozorov siblings have still not adapted to country life (118). The sisters therefore put their hope in Andrey, the new patriarch, an aspiring academic, to achieve scholarly success at a university in Moscow and to move the family back to their former home in the city (126). Ironically, the play dramatises the ways in which the sisters are thwarted by Andrey's neglect of his duties and by his mismanagement of their inheritance. He marries a coquettish country girl, but Natasha, soon realises his mistake, starts taking compulsively to alcohol and gambling, and ends up mortgaging his sisters' shares of the house (132). By the end of the play, it is clear that the Prozorovs will most likely never return to Moscow (151). Moreover, Natasha, who resents the sisters for their abrasiveness during her and Andrey's courtship, takes over the management of the house, furnishing and arranging the rooms as it suits her and her children, at the cost and inconvenience of the sisters. The defencelessness of women against patriarchal mismanagement is central to Chekhov's concern in *Three Sisters*. It comes as no surprise, then, that De Wet selects Masha, the most rebellious of the three sisters, as the protagonist of her own play to challenge the moral conventions of her family's household through her transgressions and repudiation of conventional family values dramatised in *Three Sisters Two*.

Masha, as she is presented in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, already contravenes the basic rules of conventional matrimony. She is married off at eighteen to a schoolmaster, Koolyghin, whom she soon comes to consider her intellectual inferior (129). When Vershinin, a major of a battery newly stationed in town, introduces himself to the Prozorovs, her interest is immediately excited. She responds to his refinement and especially to his philosophical alacrity (127). They engage in passionate debates on the nature of life and existence and, despite his status as a married man, they are soon involved in a romantic affair. To Masha's devastation, the battery is finally moved to another town. De Wet intervenes with *Three Sisters Two* by presenting Masha with a new lover, Marovsky, a Red Army officer. In this revisionist sequel to Chekhov's play, Masha gathers the courage to revolt against the norms that entrap her in the country town and she elopes with the revolutionary Marovsky to Moscow. Marovsky uses his influence to ensure the Prozorovs' protection against revolutionaries, but when he falls out of favour with Lenin in 1917, Masha is forced to return to them and warn them to flee as soon as possible (68).

Her return disturbs the familiarity and security of the Prozorovs' home, which De Wet portrays as a gothic space because it contains a family secret that undercuts the propriety its

inhabitants seek to maintain. The focal cause of estrangement and terror in *Three Sisters Two* is not Masha's announcement of Marovsky's failure and the consequent danger in which they find themselves, but rather Masha's assertion to Andrey that it was a known fact in their neighbourhood that Irena is the illegitimate child of their mother and Chebutykin (68, 71). With this revelation, she smashes the sense of security the Prozorovs derived from their idealised recollections of their childhood in Moscow. While the Russian Revolution in 1905 brought about the traumatic downfall of the Prozorovs' economic security and social stature, it had caused them to romanticise their way of life prior to the Revolution and prior to the death of their parents. De Wet illustrates this by making all the action of the play take place "in the old nursery on the first floor of the Prozorovs' house" which is decorated with prints depicting "scenes from fairy tales", illustrating the Prozorovs' desperate harking back to an idealised past in which they feel protected and nurtured, a past as unreal in its perfection as the fairy tales represented on the walls (De Wet *Russian* 19). Anfisa, the first character to appear on stage, feels settled there as her amnesia keeps her estranged from the present, understanding herself to be the nanny still of the Prozorov children. She does not recognise them as adults and she mistakes Masha for her former mistress (21; 31). Anfisa's amnesia represents the Prozorovs' inability to adapt to the present and to foresee a sensible future for themselves in their country. Andrey reads the same report in the same newspaper that Ferapont reads in *Three Sisters* as if it is about current affairs (De Wet 27; Chekhov 323). When Olga falls and her glasses break, leaving her hardly able to "see where [she] is going", it symbolises her inability to imagine their fate, and the underlying fear she expresses when she says that "these days [...] everything is so uncertain", that they are "living on the edge of a precipice" (De Wet 25). Anfisa, who for a long time functions as a surrogate mother to the Prozorovs, feeds their nostalgia with her amnesia as she speaks to them as if they are still children (23). She thus secures them to a past world in which they feel safe. It is this last vestige of solace that Masha destroys with her announcement of their mother's adultery, but it is also the trigger which gives the Prozorovs their incentive to let go of the past. In doing so, they forget about Anfisa and, callously, abandon her in the empty house as they finally depart for Moscow.

The Prozorovs' idealisation of the past within the context of a new political regime corresponds to certain Afrikaner discourses arising after 1994. Courtney Jung points out that, with a sudden loss of a ruling party, many Afrikaners were invested in recuperating less contested aspects of their cultural identity, focusing on traditional family values, establishing

family as the site of the culture's sustenance (81). This entailed the reassertion of the gender norms that De Wet critiques in *Three Sisters Two*. Her portrayal of Russian aristocratic and landed gentry family values as portrayed in Chekhov's plays is a mediated critique of the persistent reliance on patriarchy by Afrikaners in the new democracy. This link becomes apparent when *Three Sisters Two* is read comparatively with her earlier play *Good Heavens*. In *Three Sisters Two*, De Wet recycles the plot structure of *Good Heavens* to re-evaluate the same concerns of Afrikaner conservatism as articulated in the family unit. Both *Three Sisters Two* and *Good Heavens* are set in a 1920s rural town, with plots structured around the intrigues of a family of siblings, three daughters and one son. The catalyst of the action in both plays is the return of a daughter who had years before run off with a man who was either engaged (as in *Good Heavens*) or married (as in *Three Sisters Two*). As types, each family member in *Good Heavens* is clearly mirrored in *Three Sisters Two*: the sexually transgressive and highly sensual Ma and Baby of *Good Heavens* as Baryana and Masha in *Three Sisters Two*, the dominating and repressive oldest sister, Sophie, in *Good Heavens* as Olga in *Three Sisters Two* and the overpowered and sexually frustrated Minnie in *Good Heavens* as Irena in *Three Sisters Two*. It is through this mirroring of plot and character types that *Three Sisters Two* can best be understood as De Wet's re-examination of Afrikaner family dynamics after 1994.

De Wet had described *Vrystaat-trilogie*, of which *Good Heavens* forms part, as an examin[ation of] the politics of violence and oppression within the family" (De Wet *Russian* 7). This is further borne out by her explanation, in an interview, that this trilogy "was concerned with liberation from a particular cultural environment that [she had] grown up in", which was a "Calvinistic" and "specifically [...] Afrikaans environment", with "repressions [that] are very specific to that culture" (De Wet in Finestone and Huisman 90). The most important dimension of De Wet's commentary on Afrikaner family values in *Three Sisters Two*, which surfaces from this comparison with *Good Heavens*, is her use of the Gothic. Her more overtly gothic portrayal of a traditional Afrikaner family in *Good Heavens* also reveals the gothic underpinnings in *Three Sisters Two*, most importantly for the fact that Masha's counterpart in *Good Heavens*, Bybie, is a ghost.

J.C. Kannemeyer has remarked on how, in *Good Heavens*, De Wet draws on the conventions of the traditional Afrikaans ghost stories popularised by C.J. Langenhoven and Eugène Marais, only to subvert the very meaning of ghosts within Calvinist Afrikaner folklore (*Afrikaanse Letterkunde* 685). While the ghost is typically a regretful spirit of a deceased

criminal or an unacknowledged victim of injustice, Bybie is happier and freer as a spirit than her siblings who live according to conventional Afrikaner values. Bybie had run off with Gys, her sister Sophie's fiancé, causing the Roos family's stigmatisation as an immoral household, but she returns as a ghost to prepare her mother to die peacefully and to assist Tommy to process her death. Within the world of *Good Heavens*, the disembodied spirit represents the ultimate state of emancipation from social constraints. If transgression means social death, De Wet presents it as liberating. Bybie's double in *Three Sisters Two*, Masha, is not literally dead but her social death resulting from her elopement with Marovsky facilitates her emancipation from the rules of her family (91, 26). Her return, like that of a ghost, unsettles her family who fears that they might "die" to their dignity as well, but, like Bybie, Masha functions as an agent of liberation for the rest of the family. Hogle points out that "the frequent goal of that journey in the Gothic" of the entrapped heroine is "the recovery of a lost or hidden maternal origin by both women and men" and that in "this motif a patriarchal lineage and house turns out to be explicitly dependent on and rooted in the unpredictable possibilities of a forgotten, but finally uncovered womanhood" (2). Both Bybie and Masha remind their families of their own as well as their mothers' sexual transgressions and, in doing so, insist on a freer, more complex femininity than that prescribed by the gender constructions of their culture prescribe.

While Hogle's description of the female gothic casts the patriarch as the antagonist to the heroine's development, De Wet's female antagonist in both *Good Heavens* and *Three Sisters Two* perpetuates the systems and values that give patriarchy its power. In the absence of parent figures who uphold the standards of their culture, Olga in *Three Sisters Two* and Sophie in *Good Heavens* assume this role. De Wet had elaborated on her tendency of creating female characters who "act in a very masculine way" in terms of patriarchal Afrikaner gender constructions (Finestone and Huismans 91). As Anja Huismans and Juanita Finestone note, in the absence of the patriarch, "it is [frequently] women that oppress women most successfully in [her] plays" (92). In response to this observation, De Wet commented that she was fascinated by this behavioural pattern as she found it "more treacherous because they are oppressing other women" on behalf of the patriarch (92). She saw this social phenomenon as demonstrating a more effective application of patriarchy because this oppressive character type "can get closer to the other female characters" and operates as "a disguised enemy in the camp" (92). De Wet had given this explanation a year before the publication of *Three Sisters Two*, but it is apparent how she continues the portrayal of this character type in her

appropriation of Olga in *Three Sisters Two*. Although Andrey, as the patriarchal replacement of his father, is not literally absent like the father figures in De Wet's plays prior to *Three Sisters Two*, he is passive, as he never intervenes on behalf of his sisters' welfare when his wife exploits her privileges at their cost. Olga takes charge and adopts this position, but instead of campaigning for a less restrictive expression of femininity, she ironically perpetuates the conservatism with which she was raised. De Wet's creation of a character like Olga after 1994 gives credence to what sociologist Christy van der Westhuizen calls a post-apartheid Afrikaner "femininity [as] invested in the restoration of Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity" (ii). Olga and Sophie impose this type of Afrikaner femininity on their younger sister, but De Wet's portrayal of this last character type exhibits her view of this value system as repressive and in the long run crippling to the individual's process of self-realisation.

What De Wet then stages with *Three Sisters Two* is the manner in which patriarchy as a system can reach a level of sophistication that enables it to be no longer solely maintained by male figures of authority, but to become absorbed in a culture to such an extent that its victims, women, are often its key agents. She also noted that she was "drawn to writing" trilogies because the plays "in conjunction can present constantly shifting perspectives", the perspective in this case shifting from that of a female figure who returns to bring salvation to one who return in search thereof. Unlike Masha, whose arrival provides the potential of deliverance for herself and the other characters, Yelena's return leads to a temporary re-engulfment by a family from which she had sought to escape. In *Yelena*, the male embodiment of the patriarch, Astrov, is not passive as Andrey is in *Three Sisters Two*, but actively exerts control over Yelena's body and manages to become a subject of sexual obsession in his victim's mind. De Wet thus continues her exploration of the woman's internalisation of patriarchal values, but she examines this process specifically by foregrounding the role that eroticised authority can play in its course. This fetishising of male erotic power in *Yelena* relies on the vulnerability of the title character in relation to a male character that resembles a *fin de siècle* gothic type: the exploitative medical doctor.

As a trope which registers women's anxieties under patriarchal rule, the Gothic, in its re-emergence towards the end of the nineteenth-century in, for instance, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Susan Grand's new woman novel *The Heavenly Twins*, "drew on contemporary medical discourse in order to explore the socio-sexual power relations between doctor and woman patient", as Pamela K. Gilbert suggests in "Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context" (29). The dramatisation of this relationship in these texts

illustrates how, as Ann Heilman argues, “the lack of intellectual and professional opportunities, compounded by forms of personal oppression, [...] impair[ed] women’s physical and mental health” (30). The antagonists in “The Yellow Wallpaper” and *The Heavenly Twins* derive the power they exert over their female subjects from both their positions as medical doctors (an exclusively male profession at the time) and as patriarchs. De Wet appropriates Chekov’s Astrov to exemplify this gothic type, illustrating the extent of his power over Yelena’s body as well as the allure he achieves even when she finally becomes financially independent of him.

Initially, it seems that Yelena’s dependency on Astrov extends no further than her economic and physical vulnerability. There is no indication, either in *Uncle Vanya* or in *Yelena*, that Yelena has any living family besides Astrov, Sonya and Vanya. She returns out of sheer destitution when, after Serebryakov dies, she is left penniless. She had not completed her studies at the St Petersburg conservatory because of her marriage to him and hence cannot support herself (206). Furthermore, her poor health makes her in constant need of medical care and her medical expenses begin to outweigh the allowance provided by Sonya and Vanya on the farm. Eventually, she is left with little choice but to return to the farm so that Astrov, the country doctor and the farm’s new owner, might take care of her. He is thus correct in his observation when he tells Yelena that she returned not for emotional support but for the “need [of] fresh air and a doctor who doesn’t cost anything” (115). But he also realises that she has postponed this return because of her forbidden attraction to him, which she admitted to years before.

Yelena and Astrov had eight years before expressed their mutual attraction towards each other. In *Uncle Vanya*, Yelena admits to her stepdaughter Sonya that, although she is married to Serebryakov, she is attracted to Astrov (Chekhov 131). She even kisses Astrov when he makes romantic advances and before she and Serebryakov depart for St Petersburg, she confesses to Astrov that he did “turn [her] head a little” (141). However, as a married woman she feels herself unable to fully respond to Astrov’s advances, especially because she knows that Vanya saw the kiss. Unlike Masha, Yelena’s incentive to depart towards the end of Chekov’s play is not to chase a forbidden desire. Rather, it is to escape further temptation to do so. Now that she is widowed she might be able to rekindle her romantic connection with Astrov, but in the meantime he had married Sonya, replacing Serebryakov as the new patriarch on the farm. As such, he warns Yelena to “be careful”, for if she “throw[s] [her]self at [his] mercy, [he] might take advantage of” her, which is precisely what he does for the rest

of the play (De Wet 115). As the only member of the household with sufficient medical knowledge, he exploits his expertise by convincing everyone of Yelena's need for rest and his medical treatment. As soon as she comes under his care, she becomes his prisoner. In this way, Yelena is victimised not just economically by a patriarchal system, but also physically and sexually by the married patriarch himself.

Astrov's stance in relation to the form of patriarchy sustained in *Yelena*'s context is ambivalent. By the standards of this system he is, as a married man, transgressive in his sexual obsession with Yelena, and should for that reason be seen as an antagonist to its strictures. At the same time, he exploits and manipulates the rules of patriarchy to achieve his desires. He understands that patriarchy is on some essential level invested in the pacification of women and he finds this aspect erotically appealing. Realising that death is the ultimate form of pacification, he tells Vanya of how he has "often thought how a lovely woman, in her death agonies, sometimes seems to be in the transports of erotic pleasure", reminding the reader of Edgar Allan Poe's gothic contention that the "death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (131). Consequently, it becomes Astrov's objective to pacify Yelena on various levels. By the means of his medical authority he prevents her from leaving the farm; he manipulates Yelena's engagement with Vanya as it further consolidates her presence on the farm, ensuring her familial bond and thus her proximity and dependency on him. However, his manipulation of Yelena differs markedly from his control over his wife, Sonya.

It is evident that De Wet's obsession with Victorian literature informs her appropriation of Chekhov's characters in *Yelena* because they embody Victorian gender ideologies. Sonya, for instance, closely resembles the typical "angel in the house" whose "gender was constructed around an elaboration of 'natural' maternal and nurturing instinct into the guardianship at home, of morality generally, and sexual purity in particular" (Ingham 22). Patricia Ingham further describes this social type as characterised by "extreme emotional sensitivity, weakness of intellect, unlimited selfishness, and, crucially, a lack of animal passion" (23). In *Uncle Vanya*, it is established that Sonya is plain, a quality that seems to suggest her sexlessness in contrast to Yelena's beauty and her sexually available response to Astrov's advances (De Wet 131). Chekhov's Sonya reacts passionately against Vanya's drinking habits and she can recite Astrov's deliberations on the value of forestry off by heart (Chekhov 99). She is more than qualified to become the docile angel of the house despite Astrov's failure to notice her. In *Yelena*, however, they are married and she proves herself a domestic goddess.

She darns his socks, waits up anxiously every night until he comes home, demonstrates her support and admiration of his work by reciting his explanations of his treatment of cholera (De Wet 127). However, she is aware of the fact that Astrov does not find her sexually attractive (121). Despite her devotion, he treats her with irritation from the start of the play. The sterility of their marriage is literalised when Sonya tells Yelena about her stillborn child and Astrov's response that it is better so as he believes that their world is not a place for a child to grow up in (121). The sterility of their marriage is furthermore reflected in the dry and desolate farm with its failed crops (108). Ironically, when Yelena is successfully re-established as part of the household through Astrov's manipulation, Sonya falls pregnant again (142).

Astrov exhibits a number of masculine features idealised in the nineteenth-century which qualify him for the market place and for marriage, such as "self-interest, aggressi[on] [and] a strong procreative instinct", but his reason and intellect, which should typically enable him to transcend "the fact of his embodiment", are not directed towards the interests of his wife or household (Hurley 121, Ingham 22). They are, instead, oriented towards the gratifications of his transgressive desire for a woman other than his wife, a woman who, in his view, represents a significantly different type of womanhood. In both *Uncle Vanya* and in *Yelena*, the image of Yelena as an embodiment of the domestic angel's wild opposite is inscribed in Astrov's and Vanya's comparisons of her to animals and monstrous creatures. Insisting on her projected sexual energy, Astrov (in both *Uncle Vanya* and *Yelena*) describes her as "a furry animal" (Chekhov 145; De Wet 127). Vanya emphasises her seductiveness, as he sees it, when he contends that she has "mermaid blood in her veins", the mermaid being a symbol of dangerously alluring female sexuality, and Astrov compares her to a vampire (Chekhov 131; De Wet 127). All these images create an impression of Yelena as a woman with hazardous, if attractive, sexual charisma, standing in contrast to her daughter-in-law, Sonya. In reality, Yelena does not exhibit sexual aggression or unbridled passion in *Uncle Vanya*, besides yielding briefly to Astrov's advances after much resistance (131). In *Yelena*, moreover, Astrov's manoeuvrings to keep her on the farm against her will drives her to histrionic expressions of resistance (212). When Astrov announces that she is too unwell to leave the farm, she goes as far as to offer her hand in marriage to Vanya, if he will assist her to escape (213). It is only then that Vanya remarks with reasonable substantiation that he did not really think of her as "such a woman" (213).

Although Yelena is not portrayed as an embodiment of the nineteenth-century view of sexualised women as monstrous, as she is to some extent conceived of by the male characters, she is shown to be fiercely resistant to becoming like the domesticated Sonya. In the very first conversation between the two women in *Yelena*, Yelena aggressively refuses to be pitied by Sonya, whose description of Vanya's mother found dead "[s]itting in [a] chair" with her eyes "wide open" with pamphlets of women's emancipation "on the floor all around her" is unsettlingly foreboding (109). Thus, when Yelena complains in the second act that she is pestered by flies that "sit on her eyelids when she sleeps", refusing to take sedatives, she fears that she is following the fate of Vanya's mother (122). Yelena repeatedly proclaims that she "mustn't sleep", even as she realises that Astrov has tricked her into drinking "something that will make [her] sleep" (130). When Astrov tells her that she is not fit to travel, she pleads with him that she has "to go away" because she is convinced that "something terrible will happen" if she does not leave soon (127). She moans that she does not "want to die [...] in this miserable place" (128). However, her fate seems to be sealed when Vanya has his "mother's engagement ring made smaller" for her (136). Yelena sees the life of domestic servility that Sonya leads as a form of living death – a familiar gothic trope – and she fears that her dependence on her relatives might transform her into becoming exactly like that. As Kelly Hurley points out:

[The] nineteenth-century perception of women as 'the sex' – fully constrained within a sexualized identity, and so both corporeal and animalistic – stands in sharp contradistinction to Victorian celebrations of woman as a domestic angel, an essentially disembodied creature. Thus, as any number of cultural critics have noted, Victorian representations of women tend to polar extremes: women are saintly or demonic, spiritual or bodily, asexual or ravenously sexed, guardians of domestic happiness or unnatural monsters. (121)

This conventionally dual view of women expressed in nineteenth-century literature as either an angel or a monster, which is also the basis of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, underpins De Wet's critical portrayal of Sonya and Yelena. The sharp contrast between the types of nineteenth-century femininity that Yelena and Sonya respectively represent is established at the opening of the play: Sonya sits darning a sock while Yelena reclines indolently on a divan (101). Gilbert and Gubar examine a strong tradition of women writers who have struggled, particularly since the nineteenth century, to redefine themselves outside this binary. De Wet hauntingly illustrates Yelena's confrontation of these injunctions, enforced by Astrov, by doubling Sonya and Yelena with two off-stage female serf characters.

Sonya's double is Marina, who is referred to as 'Nanny' by other characters and resembles Anfisa in *Three Sisters*. In *Uncle Vanya* she functions as a mother figure, nurturing and consoling whoever needs such treatment, while in *Yelena* she is transformed into an aged and ailing elderly woman. So too, Sonya becomes ever more emotionally penurious in *Yelena*. Yelena's double in *Yelena* is Telegin's wife, who returns to the farm a week before Yelena does (105). Her transgressive sexuality is common knowledge because she had years before run off with her lover Ilich, despite her marriage to Telegin (Chekhov 96; De Wet 113). After her lover's death, she is returned to Telegin, but her amnesia disables her from recognising him as her husband and she addresses him as 'Illych' (De Wet 113). Like ghosts that the audience never sees, Marina and Telegin's wife haunt the play with their off-stage presence as ominous, threatening embodiments of the tragic feminine type to which Yelena might end up being reduced.

However, empowered by the discovery of royalties on Serebryakov's work insured in her favour, she decides, in a surprising turn of events, to invite Astrov to elope with her (133). The months of entrapment and exploitation to which he had subjected her evidently had not destroyed her passion for him. Instead, she tells him that the past months' sustained and intimate contact had intensified her attraction to him (133). Yelena thus seems to be won over by Astrov's manipulation of patriarchy. In this development of the plot, *Yelena* reveals De Wet's experimentation with a theme she noted in Edward Albee's *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. In her Master's thesis, De Wet argues that "towards the end of [Albee's] play there emerges a parallel between *Virginia Woolf* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of a Shrew* which suggests that, like *The Taming of a Shrew*, *Virginia Woolf* presents us with an elemental struggle for dominance, leading through tribulation, humiliation and pain, to purification and union" (101). She adds that, "[l]ike Kate, Martha is led through humiliation and suffering, to a new awareness of her own reality and transformed by this experience, until, as Petruchio says at the end of *The Taming of a Shrew*, 'she is changed as she had never been'" (102). De Wet quotes Alexander Legatt who argues that "Petruchio and Kate have a special vision, an awareness of life as a play or game; [...] they have a sense of convention and therefore, a power to manipulate convention to create experience rather than experience forced upon them" (103). The comparison between *Yelena* and these two plays with regards to the question of gender conventions and their strictures is feasible in so far as Yelena and Astrov recognise in each other a mutual discomfort with such constraints. Yelena's ready forgiveness of Astrov despite the torture he had inflicted on her,

once she gains the means to escape the farm, seemingly undercuts the agenda of the play in its critique of women's victimisation by men.

This theme of a woman's persistent emotional dependency on the patriarch after she had gained economic independence from him is a one that De Wet explores further in the third play of *A Russian Trilogy*, *On the Lake*. Here, De Wet portrays sexual obsession as a form of psychological entrapment that is, arguably, more damaging than the socio-economic restrictions the female characters face in *Three Sisters* *Two* and *Yelena*. Nina, although poor and unsuccessful as an actress, has achieved a fair degree of financial independence from the men in her life by sustaining herself as an actress, the occupation she had dreamt of pursuing since childhood. Even so, at the start of *On the Lake*, she is still unable to free herself from her emotional dependence on Trigorin, the man who had, as she describes it in Chekov's *The Seagull*, "destroy[ed]" her life "just to pass the time" during a phase when she was still as "free as a seagull" (57, 87). She returns to her (now deceased) parents' house during a stopover of the travelling acting company for which she works. This house is haunted by the ghost of her mother who had committed suicide after she too had experienced the rejection of her beloved, and it is in this house that Nina confronts her past in an attempt to free herself from its incapacitating influence. De Wet presents her view of artistic expression in this emancipation process by showing how Nina's capacities as an actress enable her to redefine and transform herself into an individual who is not reliant on an external authority to claim her sense of being. Nina derives her impetus to free herself from her dependence on Trigorin in the first place from her re-encounter with her mother's ghost, the play's most obvious marker as a gothic text.

The central role that the ghost and the motif of haunting play in *On the Lake* makes it De Wet's most explicitly gothic appropriation of Chekhov's plays. Furthermore, the fact that the ghost in *On the Lake* haunts because of the pain inflicted on her by the patriarch foregrounds De Wet's concern with women's entrapment throughout the trilogy. De Wet's creation of Nina's mother, a character that in the source text is only briefly alluded to, is her most important contribution to *The Seagull* in *On the Lake*. All that the audience can conjecture of Nina's mother from *The Seagull* is that she had "left all her enormous fortune to her husband" so that Nina "has nothing, as her father has already made a will in favour of his second wife" (Chekhov 40). It is not even certain under what conditions Nina's father had remarried: whether he had properly divorced Nina's mother before he was widowed and whether his relationship with the woman who was to become his second wife had originated with an

extramarital affair. All that is certain is that his first wife died, leaving him the wealth which he then invested as an inheritance for his second wife. De Wet's development of Nina's mother from *The Seagull* into a character who tells her own history in *On the Lake* is a clear example of what Louise Viljoen describes as the propensity of Afrikaans feminist writers "to write back the marginalised into the dominant discourse" ("Afrikaans Postcolonial" 7). De Wet magnifies in *On the Lake* this peripheral element in *The Seagull* in service of her own focus on women's vulnerability in a male-dominated world.

Mother's ghost acts as a frightening double for Nina; Nina and Mother both suffer the rejection of their beloveds in favour of other women. Mother haunts the house in which she had discovered her husband's infidelity and in which Nina herself had suffered the ordeal of Trigorin falling "out of love with her" and returning "to his former attachments", despite the sacrifices she had made to elope with him (De Wet 176, Chekhov 78). Mother's ghost frightens Nina because it confronts her with the most extreme consequence of a woman's overwhelming emotional dependence on a lover who then betrays her: suicide. Moreover, it is an ominous reminder for Nina of her own failure to free herself from the obsession which binds her to the beloved who had rejected her. Mother tells Nina that she had desperately begged her husband to give up his extramarital relationship the night she decided to drown herself (De Wet 177). Comparably, Nina, in the final act of *The Seagull*, just before she exits Kostia's room, admits that she "still love[s] him more than before, [...] passionately" and "desperately" (Chekhov 88). The presence of Mother's ghost, who complains of being "[t]rapped in this gloomy house", threatens Nina's hope to overcome the pangs of rejection and the psychological entrapment caused by her obsession with the man who had left her (176). Gradually, however, Nina learns that the setting she inhabits in the play is a dreamscape, the most important realisation in her process of liberation and self-realisation. To dramatise this psychological development in Nina's journey, De Wet combines the gothic with *fin de siècle* Symbolism, a forerunner of surrealism in theatre.

The stylistic choices De Wet makes in *On the Lake* is greatly influenced by the Symbolists, a movement described as a *fin de siècle* revival of the early nineteenth-century Romantic movement. Symbolism in European theatre was spear-headed by August Strindberg with his "Dream Play Cycle": *A Dream Play* (1901), *To Damascus* (1904) and *Ghost Sonata* (1907). De Wet's subtitle to *On the Lake*, *A Tragic-Comic Dream Play*, explicitly acknowledges her indebtedness to Strindberg's work, which also influenced Chekov, as is already evident in *The Seagull* when Kostia, an aspiring playwright, contends that "[w]e don't have to depict

life as it is, or as it ought to be, but as we see it in our dreams” and, at the start of his site-specific play-within-a-play, he thus summons the “venerable shades of ancient days, [to] lull [the audience] to sleep and bring [them] dreams” (34).

John R. Milton, in “The Aesthetic Fault of Strindberg’s ‘Dream Plays’”, points to the difficulty of establishing who precisely Strindberg suggests the “dreamer” is in these plays: the playwright, the protagonist or the audience, since, he argues, the “‘dreamer’ is not properly established as an element *within* the play” (115). In De Wet’s appropriation of the text, she clearly identifies the protagonist, Nina, as the “dreamer” and in doing so she aligns herself with one particular interpretation of Strindberg’s concept. Not only does Nina identify herself as “the dreamer” who has control over all, but, in an interview with Juanita Perez, De Wet alerts her readers and audience to the way in which she portrays the scenes in the play from Nina’s “distorted” perspective (12). The house in which Nina finds herself could therefore be seen to represent the psychological state in which she fears she might become trapped like the ghost of her mother is. While the gothic house traditionally represents patriarchal lineage as an actual building in which the female protagonist finds herself imprisoned, in *A Dream Play* it represents the haunted psychic space of a betrayed and abandoned woman who is initially unable to free herself from her obsession with the man who rejected her.

De Wet’s symbolic use of space as a dramatisation of a character’s mind is found throughout her oeuvre and it is especially informed by her reading of the works of Harold Pinter and Arthur Miller. Gary Gordon describes in *Experiments in Physical Theatre* how in her biofictional play about the writer Bessie Head, *Bessie’s Head*, the audience is

drawn into Bessie’s Head through the set which is a large construction of a head – big enough to move in. In moments throughout the work, it becomes a metaphorical locale for the performers – they literally become Bessie’s thoughts. At the back of the stage hang three shrouded heads which are grotesque, mask-like visions. At the end of the work these collapse and crack open, an image that is echoed throughout the work. (174)

While *Bessie’s Head* exemplifies a rather literal conception of the stage as representing a mental space in De Wet’s work, her reading of Miller’s and Pinter’s plays reveal a more nuanced understanding of this concept. In her Master’s dissertation, De Wet interprets Willy Loman’s house in Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* as “an objectified projection of his psyche” and, commenting on Pinter’s recurrent use of the room setting as a dramatic device, she argues that it should be “[r]ecognised as more than merely an architectural feature,” but

should rather “be seen as an externalised projection of the theme of passivity and withdrawal” (39; 64). Such is the setting of *On the Lake* as well. Nina is presented throughout sitting passively in her room as Mother, Arkadina, Polina and Masha enter and confront her in the various scenes. One of these visits is, however, not portrayed on stage: Trigorin’s. It is this visit that unveils the nature of Nina’s “sleep”.

During one of the linking pantomime sequences, Nina “is holding a pocket watch by its chain, [...] swinging it slowly from side to side, watching it mesmerised,” before she puts it down on the table (200). Eventually, when Arkadina picks up the watch, reading its inscription, it is revealed to the audience as Trigorin’s (206). The pocket watch has become stereotypically associated with hypnosis, which itself has become associated with control. The presence of Trigorin’s pocket watch in Nina’s room then symbolises Trigorin’s power over Nina’s mind and her battle to release herself from it.

Nina tells Mother that when “Trigorin came to see her [...] [she] was so afraid that it would give [her] pain” and that she “might start loving him again as desperately as [she] used to” (213). However, when she sees him again, “he seemed like a stranger” and she “could not imagine that [she] ever had feelings for him” (213). This final meeting empowers Nina to take charge of her mind. An early unpublished draft of the play includes a passage in this scene in which Nina speaks of herself in the third person.¹⁴ She refers to herself as “the actress” and as she applies stage make-up in front of the mirror she realises that

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)

This description of self-fashioning illustrates Nina’s development into a woman who takes charge of her own identity. She stops seeing herself through Trigorin’s eyes and embarks on a creative journey of recreating herself, symbolised in the dreaming of a dream. In the final published version of the play, no description is made of Nina applying make-up. Rather, she is visited by Kostia in a dream and he tells her that she is the dreamer of the dream, “the single consciousness that holds sway over all” (208). As a playwright, he gives her creative agency to take charge of her life and she does so, ironically by destroying his stage. As if to free herself from the need to return to the stage he had erected years before for the play he

¹⁴ I am grateful to Marthinus Basson for graciously lending me this early version of the play. De Wet initially wanted Basson to direct *On the Lake*, before she finally decided to direct it herself.

wrote for her, she makes the stage fly away (208). With *On the Lake*, De Wet explicitly foregrounds the importance of creativity and the imagination for women in freeing themselves from the internalisation of patriarchy. In this, she seems to endorse the necessity of what Adrienne Rich identifies as that moment “when women can stop being haunted, not only by ‘convention and propriety’ but by internalized fears of being and saying themselves”, resulting from their growing awareness of the “assumptions in which [they] are drenched, [...] how [they] have been led to imagine [them]selves, how [...] language has trapped as well as liberated [them]; and how [they] can begin to see – and therefore live – afresh” (18).

A Russian Trilogy stages the motif of returning on various levels: as a neo-Chekhovian adaptation and appropriation of Chekhov’s plays it returns to the source texts and in its gothic dimension it dramatises the return of the repressed, which she conceives of as the sexual and creative potential of the female protagonist in the text. This return facilitates a channelling of the nineteenth-century Russian author’s characters onto twentieth-century post-apartheid stages for predominantly Afrikaans audiences who, De Wet was confident, would be able to recognise and identify with them. In the following chapter, I will consider De Wet’s use of a similar strategy in *Heathcliff Goes Home*, De Wet’s neo-Victorian play based on Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights*.

Chapter 3

Heathcliff Goes Home: De Wet's Neo-Victorian Staging of Emily Brontë's

Wuthering Heights

While the returning female figure in De Wet's neo-Chekhovian *A Russian Trilogy* revisits the patriarchal household, experienced as un-homely because of its repressive demands from which she had fled before, in her neo-Victorian appropriation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, titled *Heathcliff Goes Home*, escape from the patriarchal family in pursuit of self-realisation is achieved through the protagonist's ability to transform herself imaginatively. In this play, De Wet continues the exploration of the power of artistic expression in the process of emancipation she began in *On the Lake* by depicting her female protagonist, the Victorian writer Emily Brontë, as entrapped in a setting characterised by restrictions similarly imposed on her characters Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. De Wet has described *Heathcliff Goes Home* as an exploration of "different forms of entrapment and exploitation and the yearning for release and self-realisation" (in Van Niekerk 4). It is the final reworked version of "the first play [she] ever wrote", *Heathcliff and the Dancing Bear*, which, she explained, "informs almost all of" *Plays One: Missing, Crossing, Miracle* (89). She described the "thematic link" between the plays in this trilogy as the "desire to escape the oppressive confines of a too narrowly defined reality in order to enter a more fluid, magical realm" (Author's Note, *Plays One* 9). Although she insisted that this thematic preoccupation finds "expression in both [her] Afrikaans and English writing", the "narrowly defined reality" from which the characters in *Plays One* "desire to escape" is "still embedded in an Afrikaner milieu" (Author's Note, *Plays One* 9; in Finestone and Huisman 90). This chapter focuses on De Wet's appropriation of the Victorian novel to stage her critique of Afrikaner Calvinism. She performs what Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn describe as the central neo-Victorian drive "to transport our modern selves into alien situations" – in this case, Brontë's Victorian context – "which allow us to highlight, by contrast, our own values and assumptions" (10). De Wet utilises the stage, which she insisted holds the potential to "invoke the past to bring about a transition in the present", to bring Emily Brontë back to life in order to show how Brontë, a writer like herself, achieved inner freedom through writing (in Huisman and Finestone 93). *Heathcliff Goes Home*, with its biofictional depiction of an unconventional Victorian writer's inner life and its revisionary portrayal of a character from this Victorian author's novel, exemplifies neo-Victorianism's preoccupation with the

marginal, expressed in De Wet's creation of a family history for Heathcliff which in *Wuthering Heights* remains obscure. She creates for him a family of travelling fairground performers, thus extending her view of the liberating capacities of writing and of theatrical performance, the two mediums which she had herself employed to escape the cultural restrictions imposed on her during her upbringing in Bloemfontein.

De Wet had in various interviews articulated her frustration with the social strictures arising from Afrikaner patriarchy by contrasting her school career from 1957 to 1969 in Bloemfontein with what she considered to have been a more liberal upbringing in Senekal in her grandmother's house. She referred to Bloemfontein, the capital city of the Free State, as the "heartland" of the Afrikaner, and associated it with "a narrow-minded form of Afrikanerdom" that she encountered in the Christian National Girls' School (in Greeff 98; in Barnard 18). She described this institution at the time as an "embodiment of a rational Calvinistic life order of rules, traditions and conventional structures of authority" (in Barnard 18). In contrast, she remembered the life she led during holidays in the small rural town of Senekal as more "intimate and intuitive", "wider and borderless" (in Barnard 18; in Terblanch 1; in De Villiers 47). Senekal was the hometown of her maternal grandmother, Frederica Rousseau, a woman De Wet described as "exotic", as someone with an "intuitive understanding of life", "a great lover of all art forms" and "an overall nonconformist with a strong aversion to anything that was considered merely the norm" (in Botha 6; in Barnard 18; in Terblanch 1; in Blumberg 248). She taught her, above all things, "the importance of being an individual" (in Terblanch 1). De Wet described her grandmother's house as spiritually "rich and nourishing" and as "an enchanting place"; it was in her private library that De Wet first encountered Victorian literature as a child, which she insisted had a more formative influence on her dramatic oeuvre than Afrikaans children's fiction (in Blumberg 248; in Barnard 18; in Du Plessis 51). *Heathcliff Goes Home* is the most explicit proof of this claim. Her identification of self-realisation as this play's central theme reflects her association of Brontë's novel with her grandmother, for whom individuality was paramount.

Heathcliff, the protagonist in *Wuthering Heights*, is a stranger to the social norms that govern *Wuthering Heights* after the patriarch, Mr Earnshaw, who had been his surrogate father and protector, had died, and he remains at odds with them until his death (Brontë 112). It therefore comes as no surprise that De Wet had "always been fascinated with Heathcliff", as her daughter, Nina van Schoor, recalled in an interview (in Stander "Interview 15"). De Wet's belief in the vital role of creativity and artistry in the quest for freedom from social

strictures was, however, embodied by his creator, Emily Brontë, an eccentric in terms of Victorian standards of femininity. De Wet, who described herself as “decadent with regards to the ideals of Afrikanerdom”, thus found literary predecessors in both Emily Brontë and her maladjusted Heathcliff (De Wet in Terblanch 1). In an interview, Emma de Wet, who performed the part of Emily in *Heathcliff Goes Home* in a student production under De Wet’s direction, noted this strong identification, describing her as looking “deeply affected” with “tears coming into her eyes when she gave the cast her retelling of Brontë’s story” (in “Stander Interview 5”). One might argue that De Wet’s aversion to Bloemfontein and the restrictions she associated with her school education are comparable to Emily Brontë’s inability to adapt to the school system in Brussels where she and Charlotte had gone to further their education (Chitham 47). Reflecting on Emily’s failure to remain in Brussels, Charlotte said that “liberty was the breath of [Emily’s] nostrils”, pointing to Haworth parsonage where she was granted more freedom than was customary for a woman of her class (in Gérin 103). Winifred Gérin, in *A Life of Emily Brontë*, remarks on how Patrick Brontë liberally allowed his daughters to wander the moors unaccompanied and she emphasises the importance of their access to his library which contained much that was not considered proper material for middle-class Victorian women (143). Emily Brontë’s admiration of writers such as Byron, who challenged the foundations of English morality and propriety, is similar to De Wet’s own esteem of and identification with Emily Brontë and her character Heathcliff – an admiration that finds its fullest expression in her portrayal of Brontë and of Heathcliff as the protagonists in *Heathcliff Goes Home*.

The two major neo-Victorian interventions, the biofictional and the re-visionary, performed in *Heathcliff Goes Home* are clearly demarcated in the layout of the set. There are two marginal stage areas stage left and stage right, the left one relating to the right one as a figment of the imagination of Emily, who features there. The stage right area is reserved for two characters based on historical figures: Emily and Charlotte Brontë, representing the biofictional dimension of the play; the stage left area is reserved for two characters adapted from *Wuthering Heights*: Heathcliff and Nelly. Heathcliff’s relation to the third area represents the revisionary dimension of the play: the third dimension is the central dimension, the furthest outside the novel because it is a new invention by De Wet in which Heathcliff’s narration of his own history supplants Nelly’s narration in *Wuthering Heights*.

De Wet depicts Emily Brontë’s writing of *Wuthering Heights* as a creative strategy which enlarges her world and gives expression to her own sense of alienation by Victorian domestic

gender norms. In its portrayal of an historical writer at work, *Heathcliff Goes Home* is an example of neo-Victorian biofiction, which, as Celia Wallhead defines it, “deals with real historical figures while inventing some of the contexts in which they find themselves and supplementing the facts already known about them” (144). In her refinement of the term’s definition, Marie-Luise Kohlke “proposes three descriptive modes to analyse neo-Victorian life-writing: ‘celebrity biofiction’, ‘biofiction of marginalised subjects’ and ‘appropriated biofiction’” (“Biofiction”⁴). As a work of neo-Victorian celebrity biofiction, *Heathcliff Goes Home* “speculates” in ways similar to texts like Colm Toibin’s *The Master* and A. S. Byatt’s *Angels and Insects*

about the inner lives, secret desires, traumas, and illicit pursuits of high-profile public figures, most often writers, poets, and artists, that may have been left out of surviving records, including subjects’ own self-representations, for example in letters, diaries, or memoirs. (7)

In *Heathcliff Goes Home*, Emily Brontë is the celebrity subject of the text and the female counterpart to the male protagonist of the play, Heathcliff, a character as mysterious and elusive as its author. Because Brontë, as Lucasta Miller puts it, “bequeathed her biographers very little [...] apart from her single novel and her surviving poetry”, she has triggered the imagination of biographers and authors alike, including De Wet, who presents her as an entrapped and unfulfilled Victorian woman for whom the creative process holds the promise of escape from her restrictive social context and the possibility of self-realisation through the creation of a character who inhabits a carnival world associated with performance and experimentation (Miller 170).

The identification of neo-Victorian authors with their biographical subjects as writers is a central feature of neo-Victorian biofiction. Comparable to other recent biofictional portrayals of Emily Brontë in theatre – for example, Poly Teale’s *Brontë* and Blake Morrison’s *We Are Three Sisters* – *Heathcliff Goes Home* presents the audience with a writer’s biofictional portrayal of another writer, adhering to the neo-Victorian trend of “writers, poets and artists” as the most common subjects of neo-Victorian biofiction, as Kohlke points out (7). The large body of biofictional portrayals of the Brontë family is discussed in Lucasta Miller’s *The Brontë Myth* in which she addresses the widespread impact of Brontë’s story on writers and film makers. Miller critically investigates the role of biographies and biofiction in

mythologising this literary family. She contends that, since Emily “was notoriously reserved in life” and has “bequeathed her biographers very little”, it is “no coincidence that Emily has inspired” a vast amount of biofictional works (7). She refers to Charlotte’s description of Emily in the introduction to the second edition of *Wuthering Heights* as a Romantic genius, a solitary artist, who operated as a vessel of mysterious external forces as the source of this myth of Emily as the most consistent version in biofictional portrayals, one that De Wet certainly emulates in *Heathcliff Goes Home*.

De Wet uses this view of Emily as a Romantic visionary in *Heathcliff Goes Home* by situating Heathcliff’s history – which is absent from the novel – as a dream, which also refers to the important role that dreams play in *Wuthering Heights*. When, in Chapter 3 of the novel, Lockwood tells Heathcliff his dream that Catherine’s ghost wanted to enter the house through the window, Lockwood recollects in his diary how Heathcliff, clearly believing in the reality of the dream, “got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears” as he called to Catherine and begged her to enter (Brontë 30). Catherine also treats dreams as important agents in her psychological growth. In Chapter 9 she tells Nelly that she has “dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they’ve gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind” (83). She values the meaning of her dreams so much that, when she is faced with the most important decision of her life – whether she should accept Edgar Linton’s marriage proposal – she tells Nelly of the dream she had of going to heaven and, finding Heathcliff was not there, weeping so much that “the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy” (84). She obviously believes that this dream contains the answer to her confusion. In *Heathcliff Goes Home*, it is in a dream that Heathcliff is reminded of his past which he narrates to Nelly and it is this narration of an untold history that represents the re-visionary dimension of the neo-Victorian in this play.

Heilmann and Llewellyn observe that “one of the most abiding and recurring plots in neo-Victorianism is the dealing with a misplaced, hidden or disrupted legacy” (35):

Loss, mourning and regeneration are prototypical preoccupations of the neo-Victorian novel, which often revolves around the re(dis)covery of a personal and/or collective history and the reinstatement of a family inheritance through the reconstruction of fragmented, fabricated, or repressed memories: a retracing and piecing together of the protagonist’s roots which reflects,

metafictionally, on the literary ‘origins’ of the neo-Victorian genre and the narratological traditions it seeks to reshape. (34)

They point to how neo-Victorian texts strategically mimic the “narrative devices, structures, and collage techniques of nineteenth-century and Victorian realist and Gothic literature”, listing specifically *Wuthering Heights* amongst other examples (34). In *Heathcliff Goes Home* there is no material inheritance that Heathcliff reclaims as he reasserts his origin in a family of Irish Travellers, but his narration of his history prior to his abduction and adoption into the Earnshaw household certainly proceeds from this quintessentially neo-Victorian drive that Heilman and Llewellyn identify. Heathcliff’s return “home” which De Wet alludes to in the title of the play is pertinent to Heilman and Llewellyn’s discussion about the way in which neo-Victorian literature restores disinherited or displaced characters, often marginalised characters from a Victorian source text, to their home. They remark on how the house, which they describe as “that material testimonial to the family’s past, its idiosyncrasies, sorrows, and secrets – has its spiritual counterpart in the library [...] which safeguards familial records” (36). If the re-visionary neo-Victorian text typically becomes the spiritual home for the disinherited or marginalised character of the Victorian source text, the library is, however, not an apt metaphor for the manner in which *Heathcliff Goes Home* functions as such. The house to which De Wet restores Heathcliff is performative. It is noteworthy, for instance, that De Wet had made no attempt to publish *Heathcliff Goes Home*, and that she stated in the programme note that the play, with all its elements of non-literary theatre forms, “celebrate[s] the sheer theatricality of theatre” (in Van Zyl 4). She clearly wanted this play to be performed, and watched, not read as a written text. Heilmann and Llewellyn, in their discussion of four neo-Victorian re-visionary novels, do not refer to a Victorian play – the genre having been significantly under-explored in the field – although their vocabulary is nevertheless rich in reference to theatre-specific concepts such as “re-enactment” and “catharsis” (36-7):

The reconstruction of the past through reading, writing, and re-narration assumes not only part of the life of the hero/ine, who attains a deeper level of self-knowledge through and in the story s/he records, and through which s/he confronts the demons in her or his own life: a metaphoric re-enactment of the neo-Victorian novel’s self-constitution through its Victorian referents. (36)

This operation is dramatised in *Heathcliff Goes Home* by the narration of his childhood and by Emily and Nelly “bearing witness”, thus enacting what Heilman and Llewellyn describe as “acts of catharsis which redeem the past and, by releasing the family ghosts and salvaging the

haunted house for literature, bring about a profound transformation of the protagonist's lives” (37)

This initiative to create histories for marginalised characters in canonical Victorian novels is a key feature of neo-Victorian revisions, which typically expand subplots from Victorian source texts and centralise marginal and/or marginalised characters. Bruce Woodcock, for instance, comments on the way that both Peter Carey's novel *Jack Maggs* and Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* “rewrite elements of a canonical text from the heart of the English literary tradition to reveal the hidden alternative history that cultural hegemony has effaced or suppressed”, as quintessential examples of the work that neo-Victorian literature does (in Sanders 130-1). While De Wet comparably creates a backstory for a character that is marginalised in the world depicted in the source text, her agenda is not so much the correction of an oversight on Brontë's part. She clearly reveres Brontë's work and identifies with her as a writer. Rather, as an admirer of Brontë, she expands *Wuthering Heights* in *Heathcliff Goes Home* to stage her interpretation of it as a novel concerned with the role of creativity in the liberation of the individual from her/his restrictive cultural context.

De Wet creates this untold history through Heathcliff's retelling of his youth before his first arrival at Wuthering Heights. Speculation on Heathcliff's origin is already present in *Wuthering Heights*. When Catherine humiliates Heathcliff in Chapter 7, Nelly tries to console him by suggesting that he seems “fit for a prince in disguise”, guessing that his “father was an Emperor of China, and [his] mother an Indian queen” (Brontë 61). Years later, as she watches him sleep, she wonders where “he came from” and finds herself “imagining some fit parentage for him” (273). De Wet imagines, like Nelly, “a fit parentage for him” and simultaneously makes him tell it. She sets this retelling and the dramatisation thereof in the world of Emily's dreams, a decision that reveals De Wet's close identification with Brontë as a writer and thus participating in a tradition of biofictional portrayals of this Victorian author.

It is significant that Lockwood and Nelly, the two framing narrators of *Wuthering Heights*, refuse to acknowledge the value of these dreams: Lockwood ascribes the cause of his nightmare to “the effects of bad tea and bad temper” (24) and Nelly tells Catherine that she “won't hearken to [her] dreams” (83) because people are “dismal enough without conjuring up ghosts and visions to perplex us” (84). Much has been written on Nelly's and Lockwood's flaws as narrators. Pointing to Dorothy van Ghent's reading of Nelly as “limited in imagination and provincial in her sympathies”, Thomas Moser suggests that Lockwood and

Nelly “are obtuse [as] they misinterpret the action” and John Macovsky proposes that their “interpretive valuations [...] distort almost every episode of the story we hear – thereby implicating the reader as the last in a succession of interpreters” (Van Ghent 21; Moser 182; Macovsky 101). Their unreliability as narrators serves itself a narrative purpose, as Alison Case and Harry Shaw suggest in their discussion of the novel’s “two layers of mediation”: Lockwood’s narrative being “the outer layer” framing Nelly’s narrative that “in turn recounts stories told to her by other characters, which themselves report dialogue with or speeches by others” (Case and Shaw 51). They consequently describe *Wuthering Heights* as a novel “deeply concerned with the dynamics and implications of reading, hearing and telling stories” (Case and Shaw 51). The novel thus purposefully engages the reader’s participation in imagining the truth that lies beyond the narrators’ flawed accounts, a feature that Peter Garrett identifies as quintessential to the Victorian first-person narrative and epistolary novel (3).

Garrett argues that the first-person mode “solicit[s] our participation in” the narrator’s experience, while it simultaneously “allow[s] and sometimes require[s] us to adopt different, even opposing perspectives”, so that the reader must “try to construct a more probable alternative” (3). The construction of such opposing alternatives is central to neo-Victorian re-writing of Victorian plots and characters. De Wet does so by casting the events in *Wuthering Heights* in an entirely different generic mode by turning it into a play, which during the Victorian era was displaced by the novel as the dominant genre and which, David Skilton suggests, “hardly exist[ed] as an intellectual influence” (1). As rare as framing narrators are in plays, they are seldom as intrusive as they are in novels as the events play themselves out on stage without significant disruption. It is this capacity of theatre that De Wet exploits in creating a history for Heathcliff in a play form.

As a stage adaptation, *Heathcliff Goes Home* breaks out of the parameters that the novel’s narrators impose on Heathcliff’s history, relying on an assumption that challenges Dorothy van Ghent’s postulation that, “if the story [in *Wuthering Heights*] had been dramatised immediately in the here-and-now and not at a temporal remove and through a dispassioned intermediary, it is doubtful that it would resonate emotionally for us or carry any conviction” (21). De Wet instead sees an immediate dramatisation as the best solution to “restore” Heathcliff’s reputation because she sees theatre as “a world where the supremacy of the text does not fatally intrude” (in Van Zyl 4). She appears to be referring to Lockwood’s journal as the text that locks Heathcliff in and she thus excludes Lockwood from *Heathcliff Goes Home*

altogether. Nelly, the other narrator in the novel, features in *Heathcliff Goes Home* primarily as an interlocutor for Heathcliff, who De Wet makes the teller of his own tale.

De Wet's intervention in *Heathcliff Goes Home* is not a corrective one (which is typical of neo-Victorian revisions) because there is no overt suggestion that Brontë marginalises gypsies in *Wuthering Heights*. The narrative mediation by which his history is masked in the novel is clearly a device which, as established, draws attention to the flaws of the narrating characters and which deliberately mystifies Heathcliff's origins. De Wet's response to *Wuthering Heights* with her adaptation thereof is precisely what Garrett sees as the response which the nineteenth-century first-person novel aims to trigger in the reader, namely the construction of a counter-narrative. She stages the counter-narrative she had constructed as a reader by imagining the origins of this mysterious character who enters *Wuthering Heights* and empowers the female protagonist, Catherine, by affirming her unconventional sense of herself as a child, even though she fails to sustain it in adulthood. De Wet is thus interested in the context in which Heathcliff's sense of himself was shaped. Instead of banishing narrative mediation from her adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* altogether, she responds to the central role of storytelling in Brontë's novel by giving him primary narrative agency, which in plays differs from the way it functions in prose.

De Wet's consistent use of narration in her plays reveals a sustained interest in the power and implications of storytelling, especially in her use of characters' narration of incidents from their childhood and explanations of how their memories have shaped them. In her first play, *Diepe Grond*, storytelling plays an important role in the developing of plot and character. Soekie and Frikkie gradually reveal to Grové the circumstances in which they were raised by re-enacting scenes from their childhood until they finally involve him (against his will) in the re-enactment of their patricide, casting him as their father. A less dramatic example of storytelling in her plays is found in *Missing* in which Constable's narration of the events that led to his blinding and of his aunt's visits during his youth affect the other characters tremendously, awakening certain repressions in them and moving them to act on it. But apart from the use of storytelling as a dramatic device, De Wet frequently utilises framing narrators, possibly drawing on Tennessee Williams's use thereof in, for instance, *The Glass Menagerie*.¹⁵

¹⁵ De Wet had expressed her admiration of Tennessee Williams in an interview with Anja Huysmans and Juanita Finestone (89). She analysed his *A Streetcar Named Desire* with reference to many of his other plays in her

In *The Glass Menagerie* Williams makes use of his protagonist, Tom, as a framing narrator and he does so by suggesting an “exterior wall” at the start of the play with a gauze screen which presents the set and two of its characters in a slightly faded light, emphasising the incidents about to be staged as presented through Tom’s memory of it (Williams 3). According to Harold Bloom, this device highlights the play’s concern with “the interior or internal – the realm of memory, pain, and emotion” (28). Tom explicitly reminds the audience (addressing them directly), as the gauze screen lifts, “that the play is about memory”, introducing himself “as narrator and as a character in the re-enactments of his own memory” (Williams 5; Bloom *Tennessee Williams* 28). Framing narrators are common in De Wet’s plays, as J.C. Kannemeyer and Johan Coetser point out (Kannemeyer 685; Coetser 397). There is, for instance, Hermien in *Crossing* who, as she channels the spirit of Ezmerelda, imaginatively transports Sussie, the interlocutor, back to the events that took place ten years earlier, which are then staged for most of the rest of the play. The more deliberate examples are perhaps Tokkie in *Op Dees Aarde* and Verteller (Narrator) in *Blou Uur*. Both of them enter the stage at the start of each play as elderly characters, with the set demarcated with a gauze screen, much as in *Glass Menagerie*, to establish the action of the play to be seen as merely the version of their memories of actions that took place in their childhood. The narration of these events is prompted in both *Op Dees Aarde* and *Blou Uur* by the visitation of the spirits of the characters described in these events in the narrating character’s dreams. This device is also found in *Heathcliff Goes Home*. Heathcliff dreams of an incident from his childhood and this moves him to tell Nelly about his youth before he was brought to Wuthering Heights. As he starts his narration, the gauze screen, which had been placed before the area where the characters from his childhood are positioned, lifts (5). De Wet uses a moment in *Wuthering Heights* where dreams and memories of childhood play a defining role in the development of plot as the start of *Heathcliff Goes Home*.

As the premise for this scene, De Wet uses a section in *Wuthering Heights* where Nelly describes Heathcliff as undergoing a transformation which calms him and makes him less aggressive during the last days before his death. De Wet was clearly moved to imagine that this transformation was catalysed by dreams he had of his childhood; dreams which were, in turn, prompted by an incident in Chapter 33. In *Heathcliff Goes Home* he tells Nelly: “There is a strange change approaching; I’m in its shadow at present” (30). De Wet is quoting from

Master’s thesis and taught a module on his work at Rhodes University’s Drama Department. She also supervised a Master’s thesis committed entirely to Williams’s work, written by Paul Tousio.

Chapter 33 of *Wuthering Heights* when Heathcliff speaks these words, a point at which he starts to undergo change when he suddenly recognises his and Catherine's features in those of his son Hareton's and Catherine's daughter Cathy's. Nelly first observes this when, just as Heathcliff "seemed ready to tear Cathy in pieces" when she challenges his authority, his fingers suddenly relaxed, "he shifted his grasp from her head to her arm, and gazed intently in her face", looking at her with "an assumed calmness" (Brontë 340; 333). Later, he explains to Nelly how Cathy, with her resemblance to her mother, "invokes maddening sensations" and that "Hareton seemed a personification of my youth", describing him as "the ghost of my immortal love; of my wild endeavours to hold my right; my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish" (340-1). In the days following this sudden realisation, Nelly particularly comments on Heathcliff's sleep-walking and on the softening of his features when he sleeps.

From this point onwards Nelly expresses an intense interest in Heathcliff's interiority and it is this that De Wet explores in *Heathcliff Goes Home*. In *Wuthering Heights* Nelly is both intrigued and disturbed by Heathcliff's behaviour at this point in the novel as it seems as if he sees and communicates with people she herself cannot see. She particularly recalls how he appeared to gaze out of his room window "at something within two yards' distance":

And whatever it was, it communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain in exquisite extremes: at least the anguished, yet raptured, expression of his countenance suggested that idea. The fancied object was not fixed, either: his eyes pursued it with unwearied diligence, and, even in speaking to me, were never weaned away. (349)

She describes how he "muttered detached words" and how he had "spoken as one would speak to a person present; low and earnest, and wrung from the depth of his soul" (350). In *Wuthering Heights* Nelly never manages to determine what Heathcliff is undergoing, besides him telling her that he has "nearly attained my heaven" which he seemed to have attained in death as Nelly describes his corpse's "life-like gaze" (348; 352). De Wet imagines in *Heathcliff* the subplot behind Heathcliff's mysterious behaviour in his last days; she identifies the cause of his growing inner peace, what it is that he is looking for as he gazes across the moors and what the nature of his heaven is by making him tell Nelly of a dream he had.

While in *Wuthering Heights* Nelly never gains insight into Heathcliff's interiority during his last days, in *Heathcliff Goes Home* he tells Nelly of his childhood returning to him in his dreams during this period. He tells her in Scene 5: "Tonight, quite suddenly, it all came back

to me. As if I've woken from a dream. All seemed real to me until that moment! But it's not!" (De Wet 6). He fears that "they [will] end [his] part" before he can "reveal the truth" of his origin, namely, that he was "snatched [...] from the bosom of his family", "[d]eprived of [his] name", "captured" like a "bird" and "brought [...] [t]o this foreboding house [...] [a]gainst [his will]" (5, 6, 45). As he tells her of his original family of Irish Travellers, the "full stage [which] is used by the Claunie family" is lit to reveal their caravan with a small platform in front, a fortune telling booth, and two poles with a suspended trapeze walking rope (2; 9).

The use of dreams as the means by which the framing narrator is reminded of his childhood is crucial in relation to De Wet's view of theatre's relation to the past and her view of theatre's resemblance to the operations of the unconscious, which links to the notion of theatre as a haunted house and as a "memory machine" (Carlson 1). Marvin Carlson, for example, argues that "the images of the dead continue to work their power on the living, of the past reappearing unexpectedly and uncannily in the midst of the present" through plays (1). He points to a "popular saying among students of Ibsen [...] that 'all his plays could be called *Ghosts*'", which in the original is "*Gengagere*, meaning literally 'those that come back'", arguing from this that "every play might be called ghosts" and theatre "a haunted house" (1, 2). As I have shown in Chapter 1, haunted houses abound in De Wet's plays, but there is, above and beyond her use of the Gothic, another symbolic layer to the meaning of these houses that supersedes the Gothic: the surreal.

De Wet had postulated in her Master's thesis that the home, represented by a play's set, can be read as a symbol of the protagonist's psyche (39; 64). In *On the Lake*, for instance, De Wet portrays on the stage, which is already a haunted space, another haunted space: Nina's house, which, simultaneously, represents her unconscious. Here, she is troubled by her memory of other characters and the crippling power that these memories hold over her. De Wet's view of theatre as always having been "a medium of [...] invocation" thus aptly coincides with her other assertion that theatre should be "purely dreamlike", a phrase that reminds of Kostia's assertion in Chekhov's *The Seagull* (which De Wet appropriates in *On the Lake*) that playwrights should not "depict life as it is, or as it ought to be, but as we see it in our dreams" (in Jamal 205; in Norval 17, Chekhov 32). Carlson also points to this link between the notion of the theatre as a haunted house and theatre as dream when he argues that:

A parallel process can be seen in dreaming, which, as many dream theorists have observed, has distinct similarities in the private experience to the public experience of theatre. [...] The waking dream of theatre, like dreaming itself, is particularly well suited to this strange but apparently essential process. Both recycle past and experience in imaginary configurations that, although different, are powerfully haunted by a sense of repetition and involve the whole range of human activity and its context. (3)

Carlson is here describing the features that all plays inherently share with dreams, which is also evident in De Wet's special interest in Strindberg's Dream Play Cycle and her gothic appropriation of this theatrical subgenre, first in *On the Lake* and then *Heathcliff Goes Home*. Dreams are important dramatic devices in nearly all of De Wet's plays, but these two plays are almost entirely set in the protagonist's dream state, a state in which the dead return and interact with the dreamer. In *Heathcliff Goes Home*, however, this is complicated by the fact that Heathcliff, who appears in Emily's dreams, is not dead but a figment of Emily's imagination. Yet, he is also visited in his dreams by his long-dead family and this visitation enables his liberation as well as Emily's who also perceives it in her dreams. De Wet quoted from August Strindberg's preface to *A Dream Play* to inform the reader of the published script of *On the Lake* of this dramatic strategy:

Anything can happen: everything is possible and probable. On a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, absurdities and improvisations, But a single consciousness holds sway over them all – that of the dreamer. (in De Wet 168)

This quote is subtly alluded to in the last scene when Nina tells her mother's ghost that she dreamt that Kostia told her: “*You are the dreamer of the dream. And you can dream anything*” (De Wet 214). Kostia is thus reminding Nina of the power of her imagination to master her “memories” and “experiences” as she is the dreamer whose “consciousness holds sway over them all” (168). She takes charge of her nightmare by making Kostia's stage, on which she has made her debut as an actress, “spread its wings ... and fly away” (215). With this act she frees herself from her self-image as the naïve young woman who, after her debut, met the playwright Trigorin, the man who destroyed her, cathartically cleansing her mind from the power he has over it. Considering De Wet's insistence on the importance of catharsis, Aristotle's original use of the term which, directly translated from Greek, means “purging” or “cleansing”, is important here (De Wet in Greeff 94; Aristotle 56). As Nina purges herself, she also transforms herself, with her imaginative skills as an actress, into a new person. This moment in *On the Lake* illustrates De Wet's definition of theatre as “linked to magical thinking [and] to transformation”, as “a place of transmutation, and a crucible of mysterious

forces, [...] capable of changing your chemical make-up, changing you biologically in some mysterious way” (in Jamal 171; in Solberg 187). In *Heathcliff Goes Home* De Wet takes this dramatisation of a protagonist’s liberation through imagination even further by making the protagonist, Emily Brontë, cohabit the stage with her character Heathcliff and, as the two achieve their respective liberations, mirroring each other in the process, she demonstrates how the creative process renews and transforms the artist, a process she had herself described as “entirely intuitive”, as “a process of loss and change”, as “a means of freeing oneself of certain things” and one which could “almost change [one’s] chemical composition” (in Handley 1; in Van Biljon; in Du Plessis 50).

De Wet creates a dramatisation of Brontë at work to resemble her own experience of the creative process, as outlined above. She said that the first play she wrote was inspired by characters that haunted her and that she could only silence this haunting by listing and watching and writing it down (in Luyt 12). A friend of hers, Brink Scholtz, noted De Wet’s metaphoric description of inspiration was as a ghost that would not let her go until she was done writing a play (in Stander “Interview 10”). The writing process of *Heathcliff Goes Home* was no exception. De Wet told Emma de Wet that “an old photocopy [of a poem by Emily Brontë], made and forgotten years before, had slipped out of an overcrowded cupboard of hers” (in Stander “Interview 5”). She described this incident as a “visit” by Brontë, whom she suggested “had made sure that her voice was heard” (3). These visitations, as in the play, enable liberation from a restrictive domestic environment into a freer otherworldly one which would effect internal change. Considering the fact that Haworth Parsonage was a place that afforded Emily the freedom to write, Reza de Wet had to create an antagonist, a hindrance to that freedom, and she managed this with her portrayal of Emily’s sister Charlotte.

De Wet depicts Charlotte as embodying the conventional Victorian domestic ideal of the angel in the house, a perception of Charlotte which Miller suggests in *The Brontë Myth* was first established by Elizabeth Gaskell in her *A Life of Charlotte Brontë* (2). When Emily tells Charlotte in Scene 4 that she is about to finish writing *Wuthering Heights* and that it pains her to write the chapter in which Heathcliff dies, Charlotte trivialises Emily’s writing by rushing her to “hurry up and kill him off” before she exits to attend to the rhubarb pie she is making (9). Emily, on the other hand, insists that she “cannot live without” Heathcliff because she “love[s] him just as much as Cathy did”, to which Charlotte remarks that “it is not good for” her to “be so fanciful” (9).

De Wet's portrayal of Emily suggests that Catherine is modelled on Emily herself. In both Catherine's and Lockwood's dreams in *Wuthering Heights* Catherine's disembodied spirit yearns to return home, to Wuthering Heights, the household where she had the liberty of roaming the moors outside with Heathcliff, before she was socialised into conventional femininity by the Lintons, alienated her from herself and from Heathcliff, her freedom to roam now curtailed by the demands of domesticity and the role she has to fulfil as a woman on the point of marriage. In *Heathcliff Goes Home* Emily is not confronted with this prospect of marriage but Charlotte's overwhelming presence and her failure to answer Emily's needs hinder her writing. She is isolated and her full creative potential is frustrated. Earlier in the scene Emily recites her poem "High waving heather", in which the speaker describes a storm during which her "spirit" is sent "away from its dreary dungeon, [...] [b]ursting the fetters and breaking the bars" (87). De Wet's identification of Catherine as modelled on her author is especially apparent in Charlotte's description of Emily's death. She tells a guest that Emily "didn't ... die in her bed"; "[s]he wanted ... to be lifted up ... and to be taken to an open window where she looked across the moors "with a strange and terrible longing ... until" she drew her last breath – echoes Nelly's account of Catherine's death in *Wuthering Heights* – she wanted Nelly to "[o]pen the window again wide", regardless of Nelly's warning that it will give her her "death of cold" (De Wet 51; Brontë 116). Emily's and Catherine's obsession with escape dramatises Gilbert and Gubar's observation that "anxieties about space sometimes seem to dominate the literature of both nineteenth-century women and their twentieth-century descendants", pointing specifically to "Emily Brontë's coffin-shaped beds" in *Wuthering Heights* as an example of an author who employs "imagery of enclosure [which] reflects the woman writer's own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places" (84). Because she finds herself misunderstood, De Wet's Emily creates a kindred spirit in Heathcliff whom Catherine describes as "more myself than I am", as sharing a spiritual substance (Brontë 83). Like Emily, he is an outsider in his world and feels himself also spiritually entrapped.

To effectively portray this mirroring of character and author De Wet situates "Heathcliff's area" directly opposite to Emily's on "stage extreme left front" with the décor also resembling that of Haworth's set. It consists (like the set representing Emily's room) "a table with a candle burning on it", "a single chair for him to sit on" and in addition, only "a small stool where Nelly sits" (2). Heathcliff's household situation in the weeks before his death is significantly different to that of Emily. He has effectively achieved the ownership of both

Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange; he has certainly accomplished a far greater measure of autonomy and independence than Emily. Still, he shares Emily's sense of estrangement from the social norms of the domestic world he inhabits and he too is profoundly isolated and misunderstood. Unlike Emily, he is not a writer, but he shares her serious concern with dreams. When Charlotte tries to console Emily when she wakes up screaming, she reassures her that it "was just a dream", but Emily insists that it "didn't seem like that" (14).

De Wet's portrayal of Heathcliff's place of origin – folk theatre and carnival, as she creates a history for him as the son of a family of traveling Irish gypsies – undermines the conventional Victorian notion of home and family which in *Wuthering Heights* is represented by the landed gentry, the Earnshaws and the Lintons. The home Heathcliff yearns back to reflects neither the domestic norms of the landed gentry nor the typical lifestyle of Victorian actors. Instead, it is not bound to a place but embodied by his family of Irish Travellers, the Cluanies: his grandmother, Old Mother, who is a soothsayer; his father Cluanie, the ring leader; his mother Birdy, a trapeze artist; and his brother Ferdinand, a conjurer. The family leads a nomadic lifestyle, traveling from fair to fair, and thus inhabiting no formal class position as they are not land bound, being Travellers, or Irish gypsies, as they are frequently referred to.

In *Wuthering Heights* Lockwood describes Heathcliff, with his foreign demeanour, as "a dark skinned gypsy" (Brontë 3). Heathcliff's mysterious heritage has caused diverse scholarly speculation on his ethnicity. Most notably, perhaps, is Christopher Heywood's reading of Heathcliff as a former slave in his introduction to *Wuthering Heights* and Terry Eagleton's suggestion that Heathcliff may have been Irish in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*. De Wet's script contains no physical description of Heathcliff but she instructs in the didascalia that the Cluanies should speak "with an Irish lilt" which suggests that she portrays them as Irish Travellers. They are often called Tinkers or Gypsies, but they generally prefer Traveller, just as the European Roma also prefer not to be referred to as gypsies. The term "gypsy" will, however, be used when it emerges from secondary sources, although I will stick to "Traveller" as far as it makes sense.

The Cluanies' caravan is placed centre stage throughout the play and contrasts sharply with the Victorian domestic interior sets inhabited by Emily and Charlotte, stage left, and the elderly Heathcliff and Nelly, stage right. De Wet's fascination with the unorthodox lifestyle

of travelling troupes of performers was also instilled in her by her grandmother Frederica and by her mother Tawty who, according to De Wet, resembled Frederica very much in her eccentricity (in Terblanch 3). Tawty took De Wet to the circus every year and De Wet recalled a travelling troupe of actors visiting Senekal when she was very small (in Brümmer 6). Tawty was herself also briefly involved in the Afrikaans actor André Huegenet's travelling theatre company and she loved telling De Wet stories about her working experiences under his authority (in Botha 3). Huegenet, one of the innovators of professional Afrikaans theatre, remarks in his memoir, *Applous*, on the stigmatisation suffered by Afrikaans actors who joined a company of actors and recalls how his cousin's failure to succeed as an actor was held up to him as a cautionary tale when he began to show interest in acting as a vocation (43; 47). Actors, with their unstable income and reluctance to settle in traditional family units, were stereotyped as promiscuous and their arrival in small towns was seen as a threat to Afrikaner parents who feared their children would be seduced into joining the companies. Huegenet explains that it was for this reason that actors exchanged their real names for foreign sounding ones as soon as they joined the company in order to distinguish themselves culturally from their audience (53). Huegenet's mentor, the Dutch actor Paul de Groot, believed that Afrikaners at the time were only willing to respect actors as strangers as they had a peculiar reverence for all things European (53). De Groot therefore also trained his actors to perform in an artificially Dutch-inflected Afrikaans accent that would assert a reassuring distance between the audience and the actors (53). De Wet's portrayal of a company of six actors in *Miracle*, set in a small 1930s rural Free State town, presents her view of the travelling troupe as a liberating alternative to the suffocating constraints of traditional Afrikaner domesticity. Anna, the antagonist, tries to seduce her former husband Abel into leaving the company and reunite with her. Abel is expected to return to his stable and comfortable life as the husband of a wealthy Afrikaner woman, but he chooses instead to continue his career as a struggling actor which he finds less restrictive and more fulfilling. In *Heathcliff Goes Home*, De Wet reconfigures this dynamic in the tension between the Victorian household and the travelling troupe of "gypsy" performers.

In her article on "Gypsy Women in English Life and Literature", Celia Esplugas points to the gypsy's ambiguous significance in Victorian literature as foreigners and travelling entertainers. Their "freedom to roam the world" and their "provocative sensuality and sexuality" inspired idealised portrayals such as that of the Queen of the Gypsies in Robert Browning's "The Flight of the Duchess" (151). The same characteristics are referred to in

unfavourable comparisons of Victorian women with gypsies, such as Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, because, as Esplugas points out, her "half wild" behaviour was frequent (151). The folk song "Raggle-Taggle Gypsy", first published in 1808 in Robert Burns' *Reliques* and popularised during the nineteenth century, tells of an aristocratic lady who elopes with a gypsy man, preferring the "wide open field" to her "goose feather bed" and "a kiss from the yellow gypsy's lip" to her "house", "land" and "money" (73). A comparably mysterious and sensual figure features in Brontë's poem "In Summer's Mellow Midnight", in which the speaker hears the consoling song of a "wanderer" through the "open parlour window" and their exchange ends with a "kiss [that] grew warmer still" (43). The gypsy thus represents a seductive and disruptive lifestyle in relation to the world that Catherine Earnshaw inhabits in *Wuthering Heights*.

Heathcliff, associated with such a gypsy figure, is an example of a character type that consistently re-emerges in De Wet's plays as a guide that enables liberation into a more imaginative, experimental way of life. She described him as "the presiding artistic consciousness" who "understand[s] things like ritual" and who "embod[ies] the imagination, transformation and endless possibility" (in Huismans and Finestone 93). In each play of *Plays One*, for instance, an entrapped character is lured from her/his restrictive environment into an unknown but presumably less confining existence towards the end of the play. De Wet thus seeks to show the liberating potential locked up in the recognition of the "extraordinary" as a brooding presence "in the midst of the ordinary", and suggests that the key to this "extraordinary" world is "the imagination" in its provision of "other ways of being" (Author's Note *Plays One* 9; in Huismans and Finestone 91). In *Heathcliff Goes Home* this prosaic "ordinary" way of life is represented by Charlotte and by Nelly while the figures haunting Emily and Heathcliff in their dreams provide the possibility of transcending the confines of the everyday.

Apart from the fact that the Cluanies, as Travellers, contrast the conventional domestic lifestyle of the Victorian landed gentry, their status as performers is also crucial to consider regarding their function in the play as the representatives of freedom. In *Heathcliff Goes Home* the literary dimensions of the novel are superseded by the performance-driven fairground acts, all of which carry special symbolic meaning to the dreamers' (Emily's and Heathcliff's) desire for self-realisation. The Cluanies are invested in the creation of illusions and function as liberators: Old Mother's soothsaying should give her clients greater insight

and reassurance into the course of their lives and the decisions they are to make; Ferdinand conjures birds and roses from fairgoers' sleeves, symbolically making them aware of their hidden potentials; Cluanie can speak to animals, reminding the audience of their animal instincts and Birdy, as a trapeze artist, creates the illusion of flying, embodying every individual's wish for transcendence from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Birdy's trick is the least convincing; she is obviously not flying, but performing a balancing act. In this section of the play, Birdy is the outsider, the entrapped character longing for freedom. She is mute, but her story is told in Scene 8 as Cluanie explains to his children how Birdy has become his wife.

Cluanie tells his children one night during supper how Birdy had, while working for Strengali a travelling hypnotist, lived her life shackled in a cage (26). Her current freedom is, however, rendered doubtful when Cluanie admits that he kidnapped her and Strengali's bear while she was lying in her cage in a hypnotic state when, during one of these shows, Strengali had negligently left the cage door open (28). Old Mother was able to wake her up by treating her with herbal medicine, but, like Hans Anderson's Little Mermaid, Birdy is only able to speak or sing under her former master's control (28). Even her name is most probably a stage name associated with the beautiful song of the "buried lark" Cluanie tells his family she used to sing under the hypnotic control of her former master, Strengali, the darker manifestation of the same character type that Heathcliff embodies (26).

De Wet has acknowledged that this liberating character type who frees the protagonist's artistic potential and sexuality can also perform a destructive role (in Finestone and Huysmans 90). This figure with his magnetic charisma appears in *A Russian Trilogy* as Astrov in *Yelena* who unlocks Yelena's transgressive sexual yearnings and as Trigorin in *On the Lake* who inspires Nina to escape her domestic confines. Yet, Yelena and Nina are ironically imprisoned by their liberator: Astrov sedates Yelena with laudanum, exploiting his rights as a medical doctor and thus keeping her under his control when she wants to escape from his farm. Trigorin abandons Nina as soon as she falls pregnant with his child, but she is unable to rid herself from her sexual obsession with him. As I have shown in Chapter 2, De Wet illustrates Trigorin's psychological power over Nina when he forgets his pocket watch on her table. The pocket watch is stereotypically associated with the hypnotist who is able to overpower his patient both mentally and physically. De Wet shows how Nina experiences her obsession with Trigorin as a complete loss of self-control, as if under the control of a hypnotist. A play in which De Wet dramatises this control literally is *Crossing* in which a

travelling hypnotist, who calls himself Maestro, buys a girl named Maria Elisabet from her mother, buying her freedom supposedly, but taking control of her as she becomes his assistant who avails her body sexually to paying audience members. The literary inspiration for Maestro is made apparent in *Heathcliff Goes Home* where the antagonist, also a travelling hypnotist with a female assistant performing under his directions, is called Strengali – clearly alluding to the antagonist in George du Maurier’s novel in *Trilby* (1894), Svengali. Svengali makes a working class orphan, Trilby, entirely reliant on him and then exploits her as his protégé when she sings under his hypnotic control. This darker manifestation of the artist figure that guides the protagonist from her domestic environment into his nomadic world stems from De Wet’s contention that this character type is “the embodiment” of the entrapped character’s “wish-fulfilment”, but these wishes are shaped by the character’s initial confinement (in Huismans and Finestone 93).

Birdy’s origin prior to her life with Strengali is unknown, but even as part of the Cluanie family it is problematic to speak of Cluanies’ act as a rescue, compelling the audience to suspect at least some exaggeration in his account of the harsh conditions under which Birdy lived, considering that he kidnapped her from Strengali’s tent. In this way, Birdy mirrors Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* whom Mr Earnshaw claims to have saved from a “starving” and “houseless” existence in Liverpool where “[n]ot a soul knew to whom [he] belonged” (Brontë 45). But, unlike Birdy, who, as a mute, is unable to do so, Heathcliff in De Wet’s play liberates himself from the “part” he is expected to play in the novel by telling Nelly his real name, Ferdinand, as he begins narrating his recollection of the events that led to his abduction by Mr Earnshaw (9).

Both protagonists achieve their freedom in the final scene of the play where Heathcliff/Ferdinand and Emily join the Cluanies on the moor. Birdy is taken back to the Cluanies by a dying Strengali and she is gradually learning to speak again. Heathcliff is rapidly able to forget his miserable past at the Heights and Emily resolves to exchange her domestic life at the parsonage for that of a Traveller. The moment of liberation for Heathcliff and for Emily is achieved when they have succeeded in telling their stories. Heathcliff has told the tale of his heritage and Emily has completed her novel. This liberating transformation is achieved in *Heathcliff Goes Home*, as it is in *On the Lake*, at the moment when the protagonist ceases to be a passive observer of the returns in her dreams, but enters it and takes charge. It is the dreamer’s realisation, as pronounced in the Strindberg quote that De Wet’s uses for the epigraph to *On the Lake*, that in a dream (and by extension in his *Dream Play*) “a

single consciousness holds sway over all” leading to the protagonist’s appropriation of that control (111). Emily imagines Heathcliff as achieving his freedom in this manner and as he does this, she follows his example, also escaping through her window into the world his family inhabits. This is staged in the play as Emily’s and Heathcliff’s areas are darkened and they enter the larger play area where the Cluanies are positioned.

De Wet’s interest in Brontë, an unconventional Victorian woman writer, is clearly rooted in her own conviction of artistic expression as crucial in a woman’s liberation from patriarchal constraints. It is a theme she explores prior to *Heathcliff Goes Home* in *A Russian Trilogy* and it is a theme she foregrounded in another neo-Victorian play, *Concealment*, discussed in the next chapter. In both *A Russian Trilogy* and *Heathcliff Goes Home*, however, De Wet handles this theme through a direct engagement with nineteenth-century canonical texts with her appropriations thereof set in the countries of the source text. In *Concealment* the period is Victorian, and she makes use of character types of Victorian Gothic literature, but the setting is colonial South Africa, which she channels on stage at the turn of the new millennium.

Chapter 4:

Performing Colonial History

in De Wet's Neo-Victorian *Concealment*

In *Concealment*, written and staged in 2004, De Wet extends her revisions of the nineteenth century by turning to British colonial history in Africa at the turn of the nineteenth-century. Here she returns to a historical moment rather than a text or an author and she sets the action of the play in Africa, concerning herself with the legacy of British colonial history on this continent during the *fin-de-siècle*. Nineteenth-century constructions of femininity are central to the themes of *A Russian Trilogy* and *Heathcliff Goes Home*, but in *Concealment* she focuses on Victorian constructions of middle-class femininity in a South African colonial context. The Gothic is once again crucial to this exploration and it manifests in her gothicised portrayal of the colonial power invested in the patriarch. The quintessentially gothic motif of a woman entrapped in a patriarchal world, her body possessed and abused by an exploitative patriarchal figure, gains allegorical meaning within the colonial context in which *Concealment* is set, as it brings to light an overlooked history of the English woman's experiences in colonial South Africa. *Concealment*, together with *A Worm in the Bud* and *Fever*, forms part of a cluster of related plays which centres on the figure of an English woman travelling to a colonial outpost in Africa in the early 1900s. I will consider these plays in the sequence in which they were written to map De Wet's development of these gothic types, reading *Concealment* as a culmination of the explorations in the two plays preceding its composition. Freddy Rokem's notion of "performing history", which entails the theatrical (re)production of historical moments to challenge and enlarge contemporary assumptions of the past, will inform the neo-Victorian gothic lens with which I read De Wet's channelling of Victorian colonial history in *Concealment*, ten years into South Africa's new democracy.

Concealment was written for the Rhodes University Centenary Celebrations in 2004. Ten years after South Africa's transition to democracy, the commemoration of the university's establishment in 1904 under British imperial rule would have been a precarious task since both Rhodes University and the town in which it is situated, Grahamstown, are named after

prominent colonial figures, Cecil John Rhodes and John Graham.¹⁶ The practice of centenary celebrations in multicultural societies is an issue that Edmund Burke addresses in his chapter “Co-memoration – Performing the Past”. He particularly points to the nationalistic origin of centenaries in Europe, describing it as the “‘nationalisation’ of the past”, and how it aims to form and reiterate collective identities, uniting groups of people with shared histories (105). De Wet was no stranger to the Afrikaner’s nationalistic performances of the past during apartheid. Actor Neels Coetzee recalls his first encounter with her as a cast member in a production of Gerhard J. Beukes’s play *Langs Die Steiltes* (in Stander “Interview 3”). This play, which charts South Africa’s history from a Christian Nationalist Afrikaner perspective, was performed in 1968 during the opening of the Great Trek monument near Winburg in the Free State to commemorate the 150 years since the arrival of Boer pioneers in the district. De Wet was a matric learner at the time at the Christian National Girl’s School in Bloemfontein. Years later she recalled the sense of alienation she experienced during annual commemorations held at the school such as Founder’s Day (De Wet in Greeff 98). Burke addresses this discomfort De Wet described by comparing the participants of such celebrations to the actors in a play, who perform “the dramatis personae in the theatre of memory”, and he remarks that the question necessarily arises on such occasions who are “excluded from the memory community” and “whether everyone (rich and poor, male and female, old and young) tell the same story” (108). He suggests that, while commemorative public rituals “may well be attempts to achieve consensus, identifying with the past and attempting to annihilate or deny distance or disagreement, [...] these collective performances of memory often reveal cracks or even fissures in the community” (108). This provokes the construction and performance of what he calls “counter memories” (108). In a sense, *Concealment* is a performance of such a counter narrative because it performs a concealed history which involves the domestic lives of English settler women in Africa during the early 1900s.

If, with *Concealment*, De Wet aims to invent a counter memory, she does so not through the portrayal of major historical figures; rather, she writes a domestic drama set against a historical backdrop which does not take place during an important historical event. Rokem wonders how “the life of an individual [is] transcended in order to become included in that

¹⁶ Rhodes University was founded in 1904 through a grant from the Rhodes Trust, established in 1902 under the terms and conditions of the will of Cecil Rhodes, the British imperialist and Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 onwards. Grahamstown was founded in 1812 as a military outpost by Lieutenant-Colonel John Graham as part of the effort to protect the eastern region of British ruled Cape Colony against the Xhosa.

form of continuous linear ‘eternity’ we call history” and he analyses the processes that elevate certain individuals (as opposed to or at the cost of others) to be worthy of historical recognition (xi). More specifically, he focuses on the role that theatre plays in this process by pointing out that playwrights of historical theatre are conventionally drawn to, for instance, the “theatricality of revolutions and the ways in which revolutionary situations lead to different kinds of ‘spectacles’” (15). The colonial history of the Eastern Cape, where Grahamstown was founded, has similarly been described as theatrical by historians like Keith Hunt and Lynne Bryer, who contend that this district was, for many years “a stage where players met in the opening acts of what was to become a familiar South African drama”, namely, the battle for land ownership (9). The traumas related to this drama still echoed in debates and disputes around land restitution and affirmative action in 2004 when *Concealment* was staged, as they still do at present. While the public role players in this drama were men, De Wet was interested in the household lives of women during the time of these events, as she is in all her historically set plays. In the programme note for *Breathing In*, a play set against the background of the South African War, she writes that, “in a world where men destroy each other and the landscape, women have to survive by craftier means” (in Van Zyl 4). *Breathing In* portrays the household lives of an Afrikaner witch, Anna, and her daughter, Annie, who hide from the English while, at the same time, they undermine their own people, offering healthcare for Boer soldiers when, in actual fact, they poison them. Anna and Annie are not based on historical figures, just as May and Amy in *Concealment* do not have actual historical counterparts. The play is interested in creative potential of the playwright of historical theatre to invention of histories for the marginalised.

Rokem points to a long history of theatre viewed as a practice invented essentially for purposes of re-imagining the past. He refers to Aristotle’s distinction in the *Poetics* between the historian and the playwright, namely, “one tells of what has happened, the other of things that might [have] happen[ed]” (9). He suggests that the creative potential of historical theatre resides in the hybridity of the concept “performing history”, because it creates “a bridge between performance and history” and that, “at times, it moves closer to the fictional and even allegorical pole” (7). This “allegorization” of the past in theatre, as he terms it, “reflects complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities, subjectivities and power structures, and can, in some cases, be seen as a wilful resistance to and critique of established or hegemonic” mentalities, such as patriarchy (9). He moves on to argue that theatre’s creative performance of history “can no doubt be seen as an attempt to create

restorative energies in the sense of recreating something which has been irretrievably lost” (14). *Concealment* performs history in Rokem’s terms by staging a private history of a settler woman. It brings to mind Diana Wallace’s argument that women’s exclusion from “traditional historical narratives [...] offers one particularly crucial reason why women writers have turned to the historical novel as a discourse in which women can be made central” (x). Victorian women’s histories are similarly made central in neo-Victorian fiction, which Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben argue, characteristically gives “historical non-subjects a future by restoring their traumatic pasts to cultural memory” (in MacDonald and Goggin 1-2).

Living in Grahamstown, a town with a strong English colonial history, De Wet “was constantly reminded of [her] two” settler great grandmothers of whom she knew very little, apart from the tragic impression she formed of them from anecdotes, newspaper clippings, photographs and diaries (in Burger 18, in Blumberg 247, “Author’s Note”, *Two Plays* 9). Moreover, De Wet found her house, in which she lived since 1982, an important inspiration for *A Worm in the Bud* and *Two Plays: Concealment and Fever*. It was originally a nineteenth-century isolation hospital for the 1820 settlers and their descendants in a time during which, as she pointed out, “there were fewer blockhouses than asylums in the Eastern Cape” (De Wet, “Authors’ Note”, *Two Plays* 7). This house, as a former hospital for traumatised settlers, reminded her of two maternal ancestors, one who was English, the other Afrikaans (but anglicised), both of whom had suffered a form of mental collapse (De Wet, “Authors’ Note”, *Two Plays* 7; De Wet in Blumberg 247). De Wet interpreted these “break downs” as resulting from their sense of dislocation in South Africa because they were both culturally removed from Afrikaner and African people (“Authors’ Note”, *Two Plays* 8; in Blumberg 247). De Wet claimed to have “transposed” many of the anecdotes related to her great grandmother, Emily, and her grandmother, Frederica, in *Two Plays* and *A Worm in the Bud*, but she was careful not to villainise the protagonists, despite their imperial attitudes (in Blumberg 247). Instead, she tried to show how their “colonial heritage [...] made them feel displaced and entirely separate from [the] vivid life” of South Africa and to sympathetically represent the anguish of “constantly resisting the power and beauty of this country” (“Authors’ Note”, *Two Plays* 9). De Wet argued that her maternal ancestors’ “tragic misconception” of Europe as “the real world [...] was visited upon them by a deeply patriarchal colonial system” by which their “femininity, their sexuality, their fecundity, was carefully kept in check” to prevent the “civilised mask” from slipping in Africa, sending its

wearer on a “dark journey into madness” (10). The agents of this oppressive ideology in these plays are the colonial patriarchs who shape and embody the fears of the female protagonists.

A crucial reason for this obsession with what De Wet describes as the patriarchal surveillance of her ancestors’ sexuality is the fear of miscegenation, a fear that Anton Krueger suggests runs deep as a theme in many of De Wet’s plays. A pure English ethnicity was to be preserved at all cost in the British colonies, an ethnicity which was, essentially, an imperial construct. Robert Young points out that “Englishness was created for the diaspora – an ethnic identity designed for those who were precisely not English, but rather of English descent – the peoples of the English diaspora moving around the world” (1). Women had a procreative role to play in the expansion of the British Empire. Landowners consolidated their position in the colonies through the reproduction of their race. To ensure the purity of the English race, a fear of the foreigner was instilled in women. The non-English were viewed as degenerate and the mixing with ‘other’ races was seen as dangerous, as it undermined the colonist’s imperial agenda. In *A Worm in the Bud*, the first in the series of De Wet’s plays set in colonial South Africa in the early 1900s, she portrays the destructive effects of this instilled fear of the colonial other on an English governess, Emma Burnett, who becomes sexually attracted to an Afrikaner farmer whose children she is paid to school. Emma narrates her traumas in her diaries by using the Victorian gothic motifs of a hostile household space inhabited by a menacing monster to portray Mr Brand, her Afrikaner employer, in the farm house where she stays during her employment; the place where her “civilised mask” slips.

A Worm in the Bud opens in 1904, two years after the ending of the South African War. Realising the importance of an English education with South Africa having now been subjected to British colonial rule, Mr Brand advertises for an English governess to teach his children. By the time of her arrival, Emma has evidently been taught to perceive the Afrikaner as a degenerate race. She remarks that in “some respects, in spite of their European origins, these people seem to have gone completely native” (15). Not only is Brand part of a nation conquered by the English; he is, from Emma’s point of view, a frightening embodiment of a hybrid race: half civilised, half savage. Edward Charlton, in his Master’s thesis, “The African Maid: Reza de Wet’s *Dusting Off*”, argues that “Emma attempts to characterize and ‘know’ the ‘heathen souls’ of South Africa and its ‘savage’ environment through the recognizable images of English literature” by, for instance, animating the mosquitoes as “rivals to ‘Count Dracula, Bram Stoker’s monstrous creation’” and “Mr Brand’s ‘bestial’ influence, as the colonial other, threatens to overpower Emma’s chaste,

Western disposition” (22). Against her expectations, Emma becomes sexually attracted to Brand, and because she is afraid of this desire, realising that if she yields to it, she will undergo a transformation that will alienate her irredeemably from her mother country, she perceives him, as Charlton suggests, as a gothic monster. Emma’s description of Brand’s “large white homestead surrounded by many trees with a shady garden in front [with] the family graveyard [...] border[ing] the garden [...] strangely close to the house” resembles the typical gothic antiquated space inhabited by a dark and dangerous character (7). Emma casts Mr Brand as such a figure and gradually, as her desire increases, she attributes extra-human qualities to him, as one would have to a vampire or a werewolf. She describes him, for instance, eating “like an animal” and “when he speaks that language [Afrikaans] in his gruff voice – it seems more like growling, grunting, snarling – yes! than ordinary speech” (13, 15). Emma demonises desire and thus she presents Brand as a demon of sorts.

This gothic notion of a violent, infective penetration exerted by a monstrous character on a beautiful young woman that will bring about a regressive bodily transformation is developed throughout the play. This enables Emma to admit her yielding to her desires, as it exempts her from the guilt she was raised to feel in response to these desires. She can confess her feelings only so far as these “thoughts” are not understood as her own but as “forces of darkness” that were “being perpetrated upon” her, “influenc[ing]”, “[p]ollut[ing]” and “defil[ing]” her (21). Therefore she frames herself as the helpless victim of a monster’s lust, insisting that her dreams of Brand’s nocturnal visits to her room were actual occurrences and that the red marks all over her body prove his sexual abuse of her in her sleep (17, 21).

Unable to embrace these subconscious wish fulfilments, Emma is overwhelmed with a sense of claustrophobia: she has chosen to become a governess in Africa, escaping England precisely because she did not want to marry. Thus, when sexual feelings are so intensely aroused, and by the likes of someone from a different race at that, she feels psychologically entrapped. She dramatises this urge to escape these threatening desires by claiming that one night, when Brand was not on the farm, his disembodied voice called her to his room, but just as she was about to enter, she resisted and ran out “into the garden” and finally fell “to the ground” in the graveyard where she was suddenly reminded of Mrs Dante Gabriel Rossetti whose “flame coloured hair” was found to have “grown ... filling the coffin with its radiance” when “they opened her grave to retrieve his poems” (26). Emma’s surname, Burnett, and her employer’s, Brand, enhances the meaning of the proliferating flaming red

hair – a symbol of Emma’s burning desire that she sought to bury but which breaks through the surface at this point.

This break thwarts Emma’s attempt to recreate a little England in South Africa. She gradually yields to her sensuality which climaxes in a suggested sexual intercourse with Brand. It cannot be determined whether he had raped her, as she suggests, whether it was consensual, or whether it was entirely imagined in her feverish state of delirium. But she asserts that suicide is “the only way” to prevent herself from “succumbing to the pernicious influence of those around” her as she suspects the possibility of “malignant growth [that] might even now be festering in [her] womb [...], [a] monstrous conjunction of [her] noble, Aryan lineage and that ... that mongrel!” (29). The unborn child is presented as the impersonation of “the worm in the bud”. The flower is, after all, the sexual organ of the plant and although Emma resolves to remain a “bud” as a celibate, she is not immune to the forces of nature, embodied in Brand, to which she sought to shut herself out.

If, in *A Worm in the Bud*, Emma presents Brand as her colonial other, De Wet points out that it was “the paternal eye that brought about the calamity in the first place” (in Finestone and Huisamen 94). She did not elaborate much on this statement, apart from pointing to the fact that the play is mostly a dramatisation of Emma’s diaries which her sister, Katy, presents to the Society of the Prevention of Inequality of Women and to their father (the paternal eye), although he never appears on stage. De Wet is drawing her audience’s attention to the source of the upbringing which has instilled the type of repression that brought about the downfall Emma undergoes. This was probably why De Wet had rewritten *A Worm in the Bud* as *Fever* to be published with *Concealment*: to emphasise the destructive role of the English patriarch and the ideology he represents. While in *A Worm in the Bud* Emma’s repressive mentality is her actual enemy and not Mr Brand, De Wet explores in *Fever* the educator of that mentality and the means by which he manipulates, withholds, conceals and abuses knowledge in service of his own interest and at the cost of his female subjects.

In *Fever* there are two sets of male antagonists, resembling two distinct Victorian gothic types. While Katy reads Emma’s account of being overpowered by the beastly Mr Brand, she finds herself entrapped by the insidious manoeuvrings of her father and husband, both of whom are doctors. While Emma presents herself as plagued by the advances of a wild, uneducated brute in Africa, the gothic antagonist in *Fever* is English and highly educated. De Wet recuperates a late Victorian gothic type: the exploitative medical doctor, an antagonist

who, like Astrov in *Yelena*, derives his authority both from his profession and from his position as a patriarch. As such *Fever* shares the *fin de siècle* medical gothic features of *Yelena* and is, at the same time, strongly evocative of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's medical gothic story, "The Yellow Wall-Paper", in which the narrator is aware of her powerlessness in relation to her husband's double authority as "both physician of high standing" and as her husband (1). The settings of *Fever* are culturally more complex: the medical doctor and one of his daughters are confronted with rural colonial South African via his other daughter who, during her stay in the colony, turns out to have severely transgressed the norms of Victorian femininity under the influence of a South African. Katy's father performs his antagonism by attempting to conceal Emma's fatal history from Katy in order to prevent any stimulation the reading of these diaries may cause. The inciting incident in *Fever* is Katy's transgressive persistence to penetrate this concealed history in her search for closure.

By changing the framing plot of *A Worm in the Bud* in *Fever*, De Wet dramatises not only the mechanisms by which colonial patriarchy instilled repressive sexual value systems in the female subject, but also the repression of history in service of British colonial ideals. In *A Worm in the Bud* Katy's father insists that she should read Emma's diary to him; in *Fever*, he receives the diary before she does and withholds it from her, fearing obviously the stimulating potential of the content. Katy asks her father's permission to read Emma's diary "but he said that those were [her] private thoughts [and] that it would be unseemly to read it" (99). "[D]riven by sheer desperation" Katy "force[s] open the locked drawer" of her father's desk, steals a gold pocket watch and ten gold sovereigns to make it appear like a burglary, and hides the diary in her and Emma's "secret place" (99). The portrayal of Katy as rebellious is De Wet's most prominent alteration of *A Worm in the Bud* in *Fever*. In *Fever*, as opposed to *A Worm in the Bud*, there is one assumed audience to whom Katy reads Emma's letters and diary entries: neither the father nor an English public, but the deceased Emma. Emma's death moves Katy to rebel against her father's authority.

Even though Katy succeeds in overcoming her father's attempt at keeping her in the dark with regard to the history of her sister's death, his control over her body as her doctor finally overpowers her and necessitates her to surrender her protests. He diagnoses her passionate outburst of grief which she describes as "tears [that] seemed to come from somewhere else" as it came "upon [her] suddenly", being "helpless to resist", as a "form of hysteria" and her husband, Edward, decides to isolate her in a house near the sea with a nurse to take care of her until she recovers (88). Katy realises, however, that her nurse is instructed to recover the

diary. She gives Katy a regular “concoction of opium and aromatic chalk” to “look through [her] things when [she’s] sleeping” (111). Katy’s rebellion does not last, and it cannot. She is practically drugged into submission. In her closing monologue it becomes apparent that they have successfully regained their control: she expresses her gratitude for her father and Edward’s care and she resolves to burn the diary as her father suggests that “Emma would have wanted that” (121). She promises also “to take [her] medicine”, as it will “keep [her] calm” (121). It is at this point only that he is revealed to be a doctor. Katy’s father regains control of her body, taming it, feeding it, and regulating its processes, doing what he must to prevent the seeds of disruptive thoughts to take root in her mind.

De Wet’s neo-Victorian development in *A Worm in the Bud* and *Fever* of these Victorian gothic types – the exploitative medical doctor and the eroticized South African whose influence threatens to estrange the protagonist from her mother country – culminates in *Concealment*. For the first time, however, De Wet creates a protagonist who liberates herself (temporarily, at least) from her controlling family and repressive upbringing. In *Concealment*, May, the protagonist, embraces the influence of the African character in the play, Samuel, and instead of antagonising him as a gothic monster, he is presented as an antithetical embodiment of the threats that the colonial patriarch represents. But May’s freedom from her father, Dr Frost, is only temporary; he travels to Africa with his other daughter, Amy, intent on returning May to England and to re-domesticate her into his household. May fears and resists this endeavour, not only because she has become accustomed to her independence, but also because of the incestuous abuse her father had inflicted on her since childhood. By centring her drama on May’s attempts to free herself and remain free from her father’s sexual exploitation, De Wet allegorises in *Concealment* what she sees as a concealed history of settler women in South Africa, who, as the property of the colonial patriarch have lived lives of imprisonment and subjection to the ideals and drives of the men who had shaped the history commemorated at the time of the play’s performance.

De Wet gothicises Frost’s impact on May’s inner life through the latter’s description of his presence in her house during his visit as a threatening presence like that of a ghost. Three times in the play, May wakes Amy at night, complaining that, since their father returned from England, she finds it hard to sleep and is frightened by the house interiors. She imagines hearing John, her dead husband, breathing and “moving about the house” (66). She experiences the presence of a man who functions as a patriarch as a threat to her freedom and thus the proximity of her father is perceived as that of a ghost or a gothic monster. For May,

Frost's house and her own house are haunted by the memories of her husband, whom she remembers for his policing of her maintenance of a traditional Victorian femininity, a gender role she failed to perform successfully.

May had married John solely to escape her father, but, much like the protagonists in De Wet's other plays such as *Missing* and *Crossing*, and like Birdy in *Heathcliff Goes Home*, the liberation from one repressive milieu is replaced with yet another restrictive realm: for May, her marriage to John is another trap, as he pressures her to perform a social role she is unable to perform. Although John is dead by the time the play starts and thus never features on stage, it becomes apparent that May's marriage to him was not fulfilling, due to her failure to live up to the standards of conventional Victorian femininity since their emigration to Africa. May tells Amy how John "always" used to "watch" her, and how he would criticise her for "letting [her]self go", to such an extent that he claimed not to "know [her] anymore"; he even "pushed [her] in front of the mirror" at one point, remarking that she was "starting to look like one of *them*", that is, like an African (43). It is for this reason that May admits to Amy that, instead of grief, she experienced "a dizzying, vast and complete relief" after John's death (42). But Frost's return threatens to result for May in a re-engulfment by the structure that had jeopardised her freedom before.

Frost's return is frightening for May considering the fact that she never loved John the way a wife should, but married him only to escape the control of her father and because John was the only suitor that Frost approved of, always "jealously guarding [her] virtue" (28). Thus, when Frost returns, he brings with him the social pressures from which she believed she was emancipated with John's death. More so than in *A Russian Trilogy* and *Heathcliff Goes Home*, the patriarch in *Concealment* polices the female protagonist's adherence to a particular gender identity. Frost's journey to May's house in Africa is motivated by his wish to re-domesticate her. Upon his arrival, he almost refuses to recognise the "completely dishevelled" looking woman in the garden as his daughter because she "doesn't have a complexion" and looks to him like, what he calls, "a half-breed" (21). This shocking transformation moves him to urge May to "remember who [she is] and where [she] come[s] from, even when [she is] away from home", reminding her of her of her "breeding and refinement" (39, 45). He retrospectively resents May's marriage to John, remarking that "[w]ith her looks and vivacity she could have made a brilliant marriage" (18). With this pronouncement Frost exhibits his view of a woman's sole purpose as becoming a wife and a mother. For this reason, he finds her isolated lifestyle in Africa upsetting. He tells her that, to

“stay in this wilderness, [...] a white woman alone” with “no other company”, is “not only dangerous”, but also “indecent” (57). For Frost, May’s preference to act and live so unconventionally by Victorian standards of propriety is unthinkable and it frightens him as it undermines his sovereign authority as a father.

May is able to resist Frost’s demands since the inheritance of her husband’s property makes her a landowner and independent of her father’s patronage. This is made apparent when Frost reminds Amy, who is dependent on him, that, “[w]hile [she is] under [his] protection” and “while [he has] to provide for all [her] material needs, [...] [she] will do as [he] say[s]” (62). That is precisely what causes May to refuse Frost’s invitation to go home to England. She insists that it is his home and not hers, with his voice “that fills every corner of the house, [...] [l]eaving not even the smallest space” for her (57). Frost finds it humiliating when his widowed daughter, economically independent of him, refuses to submit to him. He even admits to her that “[p]leading with [his] own daughter” is “[d]emeaning” to him (57).

Frost consequently relies on his authority as a medical doctor to regain control over May, much like Emma’s and Katy’s father does in *Fever*. He reminds her that he is “not only a father” but “a doctor as well” (46). He pathologises May’s transformation from a respectable Victorian lady to an independent colonial widow as regressive, caused by the climate and what he considers to be a hostile natural environment. He tells May that Amy’s “health is suffering grievously”, for example, because the climate “is affecting her very badly” and he suggests May’s “nervousness” and “hysterical outbursts” are caused by this as well (57). He concludes that “the time has come” for him to “insist” that she gets her “affairs in order” so that they can “leave” Africa, “forbid[ding] [her] to stay [t]here” (57). But May is less naïve than Katy in *Fever* is. She challenges his medical explanation when she reminds him of how he used to molest her as a child (58). While Frost admits to having “touched suppurating ulcers and weeping rashes and boils”, that he has “probed into the most intimate recesses”, but only “to relieve suffering [...] and in the interests of science”, May is not convinced by this explanation (58). She tells him that “ever since [she] knew what [he] did with” his hands, she realised why he is always “washing” and “scrubbing” them with “carbolic soap” (58)

To prevent May’s accusations from influencing Amy, Frost declares May mentally unstable, diagnosing her as “severely delusional”, showing all the signs of [...] this mental derangement” including “depression, disturbed sleep, restlessness, no appetite” and showing convictions that “there are enemies [...] who threaten [her] with violence or, as in this case,

[...] attempting to poison [her] [e]ven [...] by members of [her] own family” (70). With this diagnosis he effectively prevents any resistance from her, but, even so, he also “start[s] administering [a] sedative [...] gradually into her tea” until she becomes “completely quiescent” and he resolves to “put her in the care of the very best doctor” as soon as they arrive in England (72). With Frost De Wet thus stages, allegorically, her view of the repressive, pacifying and silencing power of the colonial patriarch during this period, a historical silence she seeks to break in *Concealment*.

De Wet juxtaposes May with her sister Amy, who Frost had already successfully fashioned into a paragon of a Victorian angel in the house, an ideal which May is expected to aspire to. Amy is completely overpowered and controlled by him; throughout the play he gives excessive prescriptions of sedatives for Amy to repress what he calls her “uncharacteristic outbursts” and he instructs her to “moderate [her] voice at all times”, remarking that “[t]his is what culture has done: [...] to do everything in moderation” (18, 55, 20, 37). Moderation becomes a cover for repression and control, a form of deception that Amy falls victim to, becoming what De Wet has called “an enemy in the camp” (Huisman and Finestone 91). Like Olga in *Three Sisters Two*, Amy acts on behalf of the patriarch and is in this way more effective as a tool for enforcing oppressive patriarchal norms because she is closer to the other female characters in the play. May has, however, been removed long enough from her family to have realised that Amy represents her father’s ideals and Amy realises, to her surprise, that May has grown more intimate with and reliant on her gardener, Samuel, a character whom Amy and Frost perceive as a dangerous, degenerate influence.

Samuel is not an Afrikaner like Brand, but, as a South African, he embodies for Frost and Amy similar anxieties to those that Emma projects onto Brand. His sexuality seems particularly threatening to them. As May’s servant, “the gardener”, “the cook” and the one who “does everything for her”, even “the most intimate things”, like washing “her underwear”, he lives in close proximity to her, which to Amy’s mind is dangerous because he is “half dressed” (54, 52). Amy is horrified when her fears that he transgresses the boundaries between mistress and servant are confirmed when, one night, he peers through the window of the room where May “usually sleeps”, calling her by her name and prompting her to go outside (54). Interestingly, Samuel never features on stage, and he is only ever gestured to when the characters act in a specific play area centre stage, an area that functions to some extent like the centre stage play area in *Heathcliff Goes Home*.

Samuel thus embodies a character type that leads the protagonist through a liberating process and this transformation, as in *Heathcliff Goes Home*, is associated with a specifically allocated play area, for which, in *Concealment*, De Wet assigns an area consisting of one third of the set, downstage, representing May's garden. When action takes place in this area, two screens separate it from the rest of the set and "two gobos of green, long-leafed exotic plants are projected onto the screens" (15). The garden is thus only suggested through lighting effects; the plants are not present on stage as props or décor. Although this absence might be the result of a practical consideration, it is notable that De Wet similarly keeps Samuel off-stage. By doing this, De Wet makes the garden a mysterious space, as opposed to the clearly and thoroughly furnished areas representing the house's interior: May's and Amy's bedrooms and the dining room. She makes a stark distinction between the conventional domestic Victorian world in which May was raised which is represented by Frost and Amy. This is a patriarchal world that relegates women to the domestic interior. May's lifestyle in Africa inverts this order, with her spending most of her time outside, and by implication with Samuel, gardening mostly at night, a time of day that held a special significance for De Wet. De Wet established that she was inclined to use the sun and daylight as symbols of the "clearly circumscribed" rationality of patriarchy, while she often used the moon and night time as symbols of the less clearly defined aspects of the human soul, as the world of the imagination, where continual transformation is possible (in Huisman and Finestone 89). The night is an alluring symbol in this regard, because the absence of sunlight makes things less clear. It is also conventionally the time of sleep and thus of dreams and the awakening of the unconscious. In the exterior space thus created, Samuel assists May in her gradual awakening to new ways of being, that is, living a freer, independent life in another country away from the incestuous control of the colonial patriarch.

The nurturing and cultivation of this alternative sense of herself in Africa is most powerfully articulated with water symbols in the play. When Amy and Frost first arrive at May's house, they see her "[i]n the garden [...] [c]arrying the water can", and, later, Amy wants to know how May has "managed" to make "[s]uch a lovely garden in this dry and desolate place" (21, 26). May's explanation that it is Samuel who had shown her where to find a borehole with "[e]ndless water bubbling out of it" (26) makes his role in the making of this garden and in unlocking her hidden potential, explicit. When Samuel shows her the borehole, he is symbolically bringing her into contact with a concealed life-giving source in her psyche which she needs. The psychological nourishment she receives is then symbolically expressed

by the garden she manages to cultivate with the water. Water also symbolises the possibility of cleansing oneself from one's restrictive upbringing and transforming into a more fulfilled individual. May tells Amy that "[a]fter a time [...] [she] seemed to be changing, [...] [a]s if [she] was becoming [...] someone [...] quite different" to who she was before (23). She also tells Amy that she feels this transformative "influence" "[n]ear the river" (22), which made her feel like she was "becoming someone else. Someone quite different" (23).

If gardening itself was a conventional female hobby, May's specific garden garden is thus a liberating space in which the transgressive becomes a possibility for her. Here she works unbonneted, dressed improperly by Victorian standards and interacting on unfittingly equal terms with her African servant. Gardening itself was however, a conventional female Victorian hobby, but May's specific appropriation of this practice reveals her deviation from the norm and her transformation into an unconventional settler woman. Judith Farr points to "the nineteenth-century explosion of gardening periodicals" and the publication of such books as Jane Loudon's *Gardening for Ladies* and John T. C. Clark's *The Amateurs' Guide and Flower-Garden Directory*, and explains how "women were encouraged to garden and even to learn the principles of botany in order to beautify their homes, inspire spirituality in their children, and improve their health" (Farr 177; 123). Female gardening, as Bill Bryson points out in *At Home: A History of Private Life*, emerged during the Victorian era as an important feature of domestic life for "women of elevated classes" in England (290). Within this context it gained special meaning as a woman's expression of her cultivation of her soul, as Penelope Hobhouse explains in *The History of Gardening* (Hobhouse 251). She suggests that "Victorian gardening emphasized the triumph of art over nature" and by implication also her own nature (251). This domestic practice in British colonies signified the English settler's success at sustaining her Englishness despite the temptation to compromise the standards of their upbringing. Young writes in *The Idea of English Ethnicity* that with Britain's imperial expansion in the nineteenth century, Englishness was translated [...] into a diasporic identity beyond any geographic boundaries" so "England was no longer attached to a particular place, but rather to imaginative identifications such as the countryside, Shakespeare or sport – an England that can always be recreated elsewhere" (231). De Wet clearly saw her great grandmother Emily's garden as such a recreated England and she uses this image of Victorian woman gardening as a symbol with which to explore the experience of settler colonial women who attempted to transplant themselves in South Africa. May's garden comparably

expresses her process of transplantation in Africa, but instead of embodying her sustenance of an English identity, it expresses her adaptation and transformation into a new way of being.

May's adaptation in Africa is most obviously expressed in her garden's mixture of indigenous and English flowers. Frost and Amy try to reach out to May by "reading" her garden. The only flower they recognise is the rose, the emblem of England. It reminds Frost of his late wife's rose garden and he refers to the roses to remind May that she used to be a proper English rose (45). The roses are, however, planted among other strange indigenous flowers, some of which look like birds to Amy (34). Likewise, May is transplanted in Africa among what Frost sees as wilder, stranger people. The roses in May's garden, therefore, signify the resemblances she still bears to her mother, and the Englishness of her identity that she will never entirely negate. Even so, May has opened her African garden to new influences, to the company of other plants. Here in Africa, free of her father and husband's control, and with the assistance of Samuel, she is gaining her equilibrium. What appals Frost and Amy is the hybridity that the garden expresses and the concealed fear that May might be engaged in miscegenation with Samuel. Krueger identifies the fear of the hybrid as a central theme in *Concealment* and it is so for Frost, not just because it breaks a Victorian colonial taboo, but more so, as it undermines his sovereign position as his daughter's father if she rejects him for an African. This moves him to forcefully recapture May and return her to England where he plans to commit her to an asylum. Frost's annihilation of May's relationship with Samuel, then, allegorically dramatises the thwarted lives led by many settler women in Africa at the time of Rhodes University's establishment.

Concealment's neo-Victorian performance of British colonial history uncovers, by means of the Gothic, various strategies by which the autonomy of settler women may have been jeopardised during this British colonial period in South African history. During a time of remembrance De Wet imagines the traumas ensuing from the repressions accompanying Victorian patriarchal gender ideals within a colonial context and she brings to light an often overlooked dimension of South Africa's past. *Concealment* centralises the theme of repression, not only as a reflection on the Victorian colonial context which it recovers, but also as a metatheatrical motif to stage a repressed history. De Wet's neo-Victorian Gothic performance of a counter-history during the commemoration of Rhode's University's establishment at a troubling moment in South African history when many subjects were denied recognition in a history that was to haunt this country until the present.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In the plays discussed in this thesis, all of which were written after 1994, Reza de Wet channels, by means of the neo-Chekhovian and neo-Victorian, Chekhov's and Brontë's work as well as Victorian colonial history to explore the resonances between patriarchal gender constructions in upper- and middle-class families and those of white South Africans in the immediate wake of South Africa's first democratic elections. More than twenty years after 1994 the allure of the long nineteenth-century in South Africa is still tangible. A widespread interest in South African War history has emerged, particularly amongst Afrikaners. This is manifested in the proliferation of historical projects conducted on this topic, in fine arts, literature, film, and even in popular music. Alongside the Afrikaner's recuperations of the past, British colonial history is also resurfaced in public discourse. Founded at the University of Cape Town (UCT), the Rhodes Must Fall movement is invested in what it sees as the decolonisation of UCT, and has drawn attention to nineteenth-century colonial history in South Africa, centralising debates about current perspectives of this era and its impact on the present. At the moment, interest in the nineteenth century is cultivated in various ways, – whether it be in the hero-worship of the South African War General, Koos De La Rey, in Bok van Blerk's popular song, "De La Rey", or by the fall of Cecil John Rhodes' statue at UCT campus on 9 April this year – the nineteenth century matters. It is being recycled, revised, rewritten and re-appropriated for present purposes, as South Africans increasingly acknowledge its impact on their lives. It comes as no surprise then that De Wet's neo-Chekhovian and neo-Victorian projects of adaptation and appropriation, re-vision, biofiction and the performance of history have become popular strategies amongst South African theatre makers who are increasingly drawn to an influential canon of nineteenth-century European plays. Moreover, De Wet's focus on gender relations in the nineteenth-century texts she appropriated is shared and continued by several contemporary playwrights in their adaptation and appropriation of, for instance, Strindberg's, Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays, making her *A Russian Trilogy* a pioneering work in the emergence of South African appropriations of late nineteenth-century plays to explore the shifting dynamics of contemporary South African subjectivities.

De Wet's affinity with Strindberg's and Ibsen's works is not as thoroughly discussed in this thesis as her neo-Chekhovian engagement with Chekhov's four great plays, but she was significantly influenced by these two nineteenth-century Scandinavian playwrights' oeuvre in her appropriation of Chekhov's plays, because she found in their writing an equal measure of resonance with her post-1994 experience of Afrikanerdom. She told Rolf Solberg that it was particularly Ibsen's portrayal of repression, "domestic incarceration" and the "tension between the sexes" that she was drawn to and that it was these aspects of his writing that she built into *A Russian Trilogy* (in Solberg 78). South African playwrights increasingly seem to recognise the relevance of Ibsen's and Strindberg's work to Afrikaners' experience of patriarchy at present. André Gerber's play, *Van Ons Vaders*, which had made its professional debut in 2015, while not an adaptation or appropriation of a nineteenth-century play, came into being as the by-product of a Master's dissertation in which he explored, scholarly and artistically, the resonances between the anxieties addressed in Ibsen's and Strindberg's family dramas and his own experience of growing up in a strict and conservative Afrikaner family in post-apartheid South Africa. Gerber suggests that Ibsen's and Strindberg's use of the family drama as medium "to examine the family unit's relationship to the patriarch, seemed to be addressing religious concerns that are still prevalent in contemporary Afrikaner culture [...] as they are concerned with addressing a culture in crisis, owing to a sudden decline in religious beliefs" (8). Responding to his analysis of Strindberg's *Easter* and Ibsen's *Ghosts* as family dramas, Gerber attempts to imitate in his own play the conventions of the family drama as it was innovated by these two nineteenth-century Scandinavian playwrights, modelling it structurally on their style as he understands it. He does this to stage a semi-biographical drama which, he suggests, could not be as effectively performed in another mode. Gerber's preoccupation with the family drama relates to De Wet's scrutiny of the family dynamics in Chekhov's plays and its expression of post-1994 anxieties manifesting in a domestic sphere where traditional gender norms are fiercely reasserted.

However masked, De Wet saw the potential in Chekhov's work to perform certain aspects of racial tension within the Afrikaner domestic context as well. She alluded to the similarities between the relationship of Afrikaners with their non-white servants, and the Russian landed gentry with the peasants in Chekhov's plays, stressing the precariousness of the servants' and masters' power relations towards each other. A gendered dimension of this theme in a South African context is explored in Yael Farber's internationally acclaimed adaptation of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, *Mies Julie*. Farber sets the play in contemporary South Africa,

making Jean, the valet, a Xhosa farm worker, John, and casting Julie as the daughter of his mother's Afrikaner employer. Farber asserted that, with this adaptation of *Miss Julie* she "was less interested in reigniting the fire of Strindberg's ideas than in discovering an arresting depiction of her homeland" (1). She explained that she considered at first, how this play must have "shocked, or worked with great charge, inside the contemporary society" before she went "about forensically working out what that charge would be in a current context", so that, through the lens of Strindberg's plot, a South African audience could "understand [them]selves better in a contemporary context" (1). The shock value in Farber's play is locked up in the complex race-class sexual dynamics played out in John and Julie's conflict in the play, tapping into the collective fears of a society that is still recovering from the violence arising from a centuries-old racially demarcated socio-economic structure. Farber's explicit re-contextualisation of Strindberg's play, however, differs from De Wet's subtler strategy of keeping the settings of her source texts consistent in her appropriations.

De Wet's fascination with marriage dynamics, sexual obsession and psychological entrapment in *Yelena* and *On the Lake* is related to Ilse van Hemert's focus in her contemporary Afrikaans adaptation of Strindberg's *Die Skuldeiser*, produced in 2015. Like De Wet, Van Hemert recognises the relevance of Strindberg's commentary on traditional matrimony for contemporary Afrikaners, describing him as "way ahead of his time", and his "modern" ideas about a "woman's need for her independence" and the "issue of what a man and a woman 'owe' one another in marriage" as still pertinent to the Afrikaner. These themes are perhaps more relevant after 1994 as many Afrikaners are moving away from the doctrine of the Dutch Reformed Church which had provided their moral compass, while also functioning as a mouthpiece for the apartheid government (1). Van Hemert's production, like De Wet's neo-Chekhovian plays, expresses the moral insecurities of Afrikaners after 1994 in a domestic context.

De Wet's specific focus on South African women's entrapment in patriarchal marriages thus remains a salient thematic interest in theatre, as is confirmed by the critical and commercial success of Christiaan Olwagen's 2015 adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Olwagen, like De Wet, finds *fin-de-siècle* plays especially apt for this exploration, expressing his interest in "how we still slip backwards, how plays that were written for their time can still be applied today with just a little dusting and polishing" (3). One adaptive strategy of "dusting" and "polishing" Ibsen's play, so to speak, was the extensive use of Scandinavian pop music. Olwagen's intramedial adaptation of Ibsen's play is minimal, but with this intervention of

using pop music he reaches out to his own generation of middle-class South Africans whose sensibilities were shaped by Scandinavian pop, as he sees it, to communicate a timeless theme of gender oppression. Along with Van Hemert and Farber, Olwagen's re-contextualisation of the canonical text he adapts departs from De Wet's strategy to set the appropriation in its original context. This registers an interesting tug-of-war relationship that his generation has with the nineteenth century: while they find an expression of their contemporary social concerns in these nineteenth-century texts, they nevertheless find it necessary to appropriate these plays by transposing them completely into the here and now to achieve the overt local relevance De Wet's plays largely left implicit.

More so than in the case of Ibsen and Strindberg, De Wet's realisation of Chekhov's South African relevance after 1994 seems prophetic in hindsight, as the neo-Chekhovian is rapidly gaining momentum at present. Recent productions include Sandra Temmingh's 2013 adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*, Graham Wear's 2014 season of Chekhov's farces *The Bear* and *The Proposal* and Olwagen's 2015 adaptation of *The Seagull*. Andre Stolz contributes richly to this revival of Chekhov's work in South Africa with his annual Chekhov festival in Johannesburg, begun in 2004. This festival has inspired numerous South African adaptations of Chekhov's works, including *Oppad*, Alice Smith's play adaptation of Chekhov's story, "On the Road". De Wet's biotheatrical play, *The Brothers* – in which Chekhov himself is the biographical subject – had also premiered during this festival's first season. With *The Brothers* De Wet incorporates the biofictional which she had previously only applied in a neo-Victorian play. Here, too, her work remains unique amongst other South African neo-Chekhovian interventions for not transposing the source text or the biographical subject to a contemporary South African setting. Only with her performance of Victorian colonial history in her neo-Victorian *A Worm in the Bud, Fever and Concealment* De Wet sets her plays in South Africa.

De Wet's plays also continue to have an international presence. Her use of a South African setting juxtaposed with an English one in *Fever* made it an obvious choice for a run in 2014 at the London-based Jeremy Street Theatre. Alan Franks, for example, remarked on the significance of this South African season, hosted twenty years after South Africa's first democratic elections, describing it as "a good cue for staging plays by some of that nation's best authors", specifically authors dealing with the "past" and with "repression" (7). The festival's director noted that the performance of De Wet's *Fever* during this festival was this play's "first major international production" and that the play seemed apt because of its dual

setting: Victorian England and British colonial South Africa. The play both bridges the trans-continental histories of South Africa and England as well as channelling the historical moment during which it is set, beyond the context in which it was written into an international setting in which it was then performed.

One of the most widespread current performances of the long nineteenth century in South Africa is that of the South African War (Anglo-Boer War), emerging as a popular interest among historians, authors, film producers and pop singers. Louise Viljoen identifies this movement's manifestation in Afrikaans literature as "a return to the archive", reading it in relation to the Afrikaner's disenfranchisement and as a way of recuperating and reclaiming a less contested history prior to 1948 ("Afrikaans Literature" 643). De Wet was aware of this Boer War revival when, in an interview about *Breathing In*, she insisted that her interest in this history preceded the current widespread interest in it (in Van Zyl 4). Evidently, her decision to set two of her plays, *Nag Generaal* and *Breathing In*, in the context of the Boer War was not informed by cultural or nationalistic sentiments. The female protagonists in these two plays are both hostile towards British and Boer soldiers, working violently at the achievement and maintenance of their independence. Nicola Hanekom's 2013 play *Land van Skedels* is perhaps the only theatrical performance of Boer War history which, like De Wet's plays, centralises the role of women in this era and, again like De Wet, her use of ghosts registers the pertinence of the gothic to the channelling of otherwise repressed histories.

Reza de Wet's gothic staging of white South African female identity by means of the neo-Chekhovian and the neo-Victorian remains unique amongst the work of subsequently emerging theatre makers who similarly engage with the nineteenth century. She had cultivated an interest amongst South African audiences in this era as well as its authors with her innovation of the neo-Chekhovian in South Africa and her experimentation with neo-Victorian revision, biofiction and the performance of history. Her obsession with theatre and with the long nineteenth century resulted in a body of work which dramatises the distinctive potential of the neo-Chekhovian and the neo-Victorian to stage complex negotiations of South African subjectivities in transition.

Addendum A**A list of Reza de Wet's oeuvre with premier and performance dates****Chronological**

Play / Text	Premier	Publication
<i>Diepe Grond</i>	1985 (sp); 1986 (pp)	1986 (fpv); 1991 (spv) ¹⁷
<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

¹⁷ 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 Uur</i>	2008	2009
<i>Die See</i>	2011	2011

Alphabetical

Play / Text	Premier	Publication
<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 Uur</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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