

**When the Known World Dissolves:  
Representations of the white male on the South African  
stage in the transitional years (1980–2000)**

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## **Declaration**

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## Opsomming

Hierdie studie bekyk die uitbeelding van die wit man as 'n karakter in verskeie Suid-Afrikaanse toneelstukke gedurende die jare 1980 tot 2000. In hierdie tyd het Suid-Afrika drastiese veranderings ondergaan as gevolg van die val van die apartheidsstaat en die ontstaan van 'n demokratiese, 'vrye' land. In die studie word dan, in die lig van toepaslike filosofiese en sosiologiese teorieë (soos bv 20ste eeuse westerse konsepte van manlikheid en witheid) meer spesifiek ondersoek ingestel na die impak van sodanige ekstreme politieke en sosiale omwentelings in 'n land op die lewe en realiteit van die individuele wit man, en sy respons daarop. In die proses word daar verder ook gefokus op die wisselwerking tussen kollektiewe en persoonlike identiteite in die raamwerk van 'n veranderende Suid-Afrika en hoe hierdie wisselwerking selfs 'n sekere kulturele of etniese groepering se fundamente kan laat wankel.

Die ondersoek word onderneem aan die hand van ontledings van enkele toepaslike toneelstukke van Paul Slabolepszy, Greig Coetzee, André P. Brink en Deon Opperman, en daar word spesifiek gekyk na drie oorheersende temas wat in die stukke geïdentifiseer is: **herkenning** ("recognition"), **gevaarlike onsekerheid** ("dangerous insecurity" of "*ressentiment*") en die **altyd teenwoordige verlede** ("ever-present past").

Hierdie temas word gebruik om die psige van 'n spesifieke kulturele groep (asook sy individue) te illustreer gedurende 'n spesifieke tydperk in die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis en om tot 'n sekere mate sy identiteit te help her-definieer. Hierdie karakters (en selfs dramaturge) probeer sin maak uit hul onstuimige verlede, komplekse hede en onseker toekoms en hul eie bydrae tot en plek daarin.

Die gevolgtrekking word bereik dat die Suid-Afrikaanse wit man wat hier uitgebeeld word 'n tipe kollektiewe eksistensiële krisis ervaar het (of steeds ervaar?) waarin hulle moes aanvaar dat hulle die minderheid was en ook op hierdie manier alleen is in hulle krisis. Hulle word geforseer om hul kollektiewe wese (=identiteit) te probeer wysig om in te pas by die nuwe realiteit waarin hulle hulself bevind. Dit word geïllustreer deur hul soeke na (nuwe) persoonlike identiteite. 'n Finale gevolgtrekking is dat hierdie proses 'n aanhoudende een is, soos gedemonstreer deur heelwat nuwe werke wat te sien is op hedendaagse kunste feeste.

## Abstract

This study explores the representation of the white male character in various South African plays from the period 1980–2000, a time when South Africa was experiencing severe changes and upheavals as a result of the crumbling of the apartheid state and the dawning of a new, democratic and ‘free’ South Africa. Taking into account a number of appropriate philosophical and sociological theories (for example 20<sup>th</sup> century western concepts of whiteness and masculinity), the thesis looks at the way in which such an enormous social and political transformation was able to influence the life and reality of the individual white man and his reactions to it. By considering the interaction of collective and personal identity within the framework of a changing South Africa, the study explores some of the ways in which such interactions may create insecurity and threaten the foundations of a particular cultural or ethnic group. .

The focus of the study is an analysis of selected works by playwrights Paul Slabolepszy, Greig Coetzee, André P. Brink and Deon Opperman, and focusses specifically on three predominant themes identified in the plays, namely: **recognition, dangerous insecurity** (*ressentiment*) and the **ever-present past**.

These themes are used to explore and illustrate a particular cultural group’s psyche (as well that of its individuals members) during a specific period in South African history and, to a certain extent, their attempts to redefine their identities. These are characters (and thus, one may infer, playwrights) who were all trying to make sense of a tumultuous past, an insecure present and an uncertain future, and trying to understand their own contribution to and place in it.

The final conclusion is that the South African white male was going (is going?) through a form of collective, existential, “mid-life crisis”, one in which they needed to accept that they had become outnumbered and were in a sense alone in their crisis. They were forced to compromise their collective identity in this new reality, a situation epitomised by the way they seek to construct (new) personal identities in order to adapt. A final conclusion is that this is an ongoing process clearly displayed by the new work on offer at contemporary arts festivals.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

How d'you tell your kids that it's all been a mistake? That you shouldn't even ... be here ...? That you have no right to be here ...? How do you try to get them to ... try to understand when even you don't ... understand?  
(Elvis in *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie*, p. 316)

the purpose of playing ... at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.  
(Hamlet to the Players, *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 2)

Theatre and its descendants (film, television) are perhaps one of humankind's most comprehensive attempts to capture the immediacy of the human condition and the interrelationships between people – to serve, in Hamlet's much-debated metaphor, as a mirror to society. What was true of Elizabethan England is equally true of the theatre since – and most assuredly so of the South African theatre in the period of transition from a British colony and apartheid enclave to a democracy. And a key social issue in the period of transition that the theatre has reflected – as the excerpt from Paul Slabolepszy's play above suggests – has been the radical shift in power structures, not only politically and economically – but also socially in the 'new' South Africa.

The late twentieth century was a period of tumultuous change throughout the world, a time in which, alongside the radical shifts in political and economic realities, we saw some of the most basic assumptions of humankind challenged and at times overturned. Key among the latter changes was the rethinking of entrenched ideas concerning social structures and power relationships, and issues of race, creed and gender. And naturally, as the winds of change swept through Africa, these issues began to have an impact on South Africa, challenging all the most fundamental assumptions underlying colonialism and apartheid.

Besides all the other effects, these changes brought a major shift in ideas about and a realignment of the role of the male in society. In South Africa this perhaps came a little later than in Europe and America, but it also became part of the struggle against

apartheid and its aftermath, and was hence even more complex. It has now become entwined with issues of redress, involving not only gender, but also race, creed, language, political affiliation and sexual orientation. Ultimately, therefore, the role of white (heterosexual) men was, to a certain extent, redefined in the last century, and they currently find themselves in uncharted territory, surveying the unfamiliar terrain they tread. Their reality has become simultaneously one of displacement and entrapment, in which the past has become ambiguous and the future uncertain. The definitions of Western masculinity that had been their shelter have been turned against them and it would seem that only by revisiting their own history and transforming their understanding of the past can they be set free to engage with their future.

It is the intention of this dissertation to explore the way in which the theatre of the transition period in South Africa (1980–2000) has reflected and engaged with these issues.

## 1.1 Theoretical context

Although the study will mainly focus on specifically chosen plays and their representation of Western masculinity and whiteness on the South African stage, I shall be referring to and using various appropriate philosophical, literary, and sociological theories and contextualising discussions of the plays and characters in terms of South African history.

Some of these theories will be introduced below, starting with a brief introduction to the theory of masculinity and whiteness of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, while the relevance of these theories in the global context and local society will be considered. Because the dissertation is to be a study of South African *theatre* and not a sociological study of this phenomenon in the broader South African context, these theories are therefore used to illuminate the discussions and to explore the extent to which South African theatre can be said to reflect and illustrate theories of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century masculinity and whiteness. Thus, the emphasis in the ensuing discussion will largely be on Western ideas of masculinity, since this study focuses on the representation of the *white* male in a post-colonial (in its general sense)

setting, and more specifically what one could call the “pre-post-apartheid” (the late 1980/early 1990s) and post-apartheid (post-1994) periods – an era that will be referred to generally as the “transformation years” in the discussion. The rest of this chapter will then briefly discuss how these theories are echoed and can perhaps be traced back to specific areas of South African theatre during the crumbling, fall and aftermath of apartheid (roughly 1980–2000), and will conclude by proposing specific themes that have emerged from the study.

### **1.1.1 Writings on the ‘masculine’**

Recorded writings on the ‘masculine’ date back to 3000 BCE (Wikipedia: Masculinities). This is evident in “what was expected by men in laws”, as well as in myths involving gods and heroes (Wikipedia: Masculinities). One early reference to the masculine is in the Hebrew Bible (c.1000 BCE) in which King David of Israel tells his son to “Be strong, and be a man” on his death (Wikipedia: Masculinities). These early depictions of masculinity seem to be largely focused on men’s physical capabilities and their position of power in society. In ancient Greek philosophy, just as he believed that the Greeks were superior to the barbarians, Aristotle considered men to be morally, intellectually and physically superior to women (Wikipedia: Patriarchy). He believed that in society women’s roles were to serve men and produce offspring, for, he argued, this was the natural order of things and part of human nature (Arnhart 1994: 390).

Western masculinity has been associated with Western power, dominance and oppression in the world. Western men did not (and many still do not) necessarily *consciously* associate this power with an aspect of masculinity, but seemed to see it as the natural order of things in accordance with universal political thinking.

Twentieth century writings in post-colonialism, critical postmodernism and feminism, however, began to “open up ways of ‘giving voice to those denizens of the world who will no longer acquiesce in the uncritical celebration of nationalism and empire-building’” (Steyn 2001: xxviii). These writings confronted the Western man with a vastly different perspective on the colonial past. It also forced society to question the nature of nationalism. The past and present perceptions of the ‘masculine’ can

therefore be interpreted as a “part of a political power structure, rather than a simple question of identity” (Steyn 2001: xxviii; see also Horrocks 1994: 8).

When looking at more recent Western history, the formal study of the ‘masculine’ became much more prominent due to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s initiated by American writers and theorists, a movement that also introduced the concept of ‘masculinities’ to the general debate when the term was coined by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell in the 1980s and her influential *Masculinities* appeared in 1995 (Horrocks 1994: 5; Morrell et al. 2013: 4). Feminists started writing about and studying “the peculiar situation of the male” from a different perspective and at times more acutely than men had done previously. By pointing out the wrongs of the patriarchal system, feminists indirectly revealed the male condition of the time and triggered formal research on novel aspects of the ‘masculine’. Horrocks (1994: 6) summarises the situation as follows: “One of the central difficulties in writing about masculinity, is that *as a topic*, it did not really exist until feminist began to attack the presuppositions of traditional political and social theory.”

Further, the feminist view of the male gender was not a very flattering one. Many feminists have criticised Aristotle as being sexist and believe that patriarchy is not part of human nature, but a social and political construct (Arnhart 1994: 390). Feminist fundamentalists further associated men with violence, “male sexuality (often seen as inherently oppressive), the male use of pornography, the institutionalisation of male power in the state and in the professions, the dominance of fathers in families, male homophobia, the concept of ‘manliness’, and machismo” (Horrocks 1994: 12). They focused more on the “evils” of men in Western society rather than “the riddles of ‘masculinity’” (Horrocks 1994: 8, 9). According to Mara (2003: 739), “Fundamentalisms construct and demonise ‘others’ who threaten the goods that fundamentalists treasure”. This is ironic, because women were regarded as a version of the ‘other’ in terms of patriarchy. Feminists also ran (or run) the risk of unfairly demonising men as an ‘other’ according to the overarching concept of patriarchy rather than considering individuality.

Apart from the feminist writers exploring the male psyche, “men have been relatively silent .... There has not been much of a debate or argument about these issues” (Horrocks 1994: 1). As Simone de Beauvoir said almost sixty years ago: “A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male” (quoted by Horrocks 1994: 5). Although the field has recently expanded and men have begun to engage with such issues, this was not yet generally the case during the 1980s and 1990s. With the feminist wave, sexual liberation and the newfound openness to homosexuality that began to emerge during the 1960s, it is safe to say that “gender [had become] an important topic” in various research fields (Horrocks 1994: 1–2). To put it simply, feminism had “lifted [men and manhood] out of a deep unconsciousness” (Horrocks 1994: 8, 9).

Although formal study and research in terms of the ‘masculine’ constitute a relatively recent notion in the academic field, the male or ‘masculine’ condition has been examined in literature and the arts for many centuries. Western man have only recently become truly *self-aware* of their ‘masculinity’, but writers and philosophers have actually been dissecting it for a long time, just in a “more unconscious way” (Horrocks 1994: 6).

Perhaps one of the most profound writers to have explored ideas regarding the human condition is William Shakespeare. As this study will be focusing mainly on *playtexts* in analysing the ‘masculine’ condition, Shakespeare is a very apposite historical example of the playwright as social observer and analyst. Although his work is embedded in the Renaissance world he lived in, many of his male characters grapple with the same fundamental and existential issues regarding the ‘self’ and its relation to its inner and exterior world that we find in contemporary work (Witmore 2012: 419).

Shakespeare is, of course, not the only playwright in history who challenged gender theories at an earlier stage. Playwrights such as Racine, Molière, J.M. Synge, Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg are all regarded as writers who to some extent challenged the gender and social norms of their times and explored male and female identity. They in turn became the precursors for some of the the major playwrights of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including such male writers as Eugene O’Neill, Arthur Miller,

Tennessee Williams, John Osborne, David Mamet and Stephen Berkoff, who all in one way or another would challenge the stereotypes and core assumptions of the male existence in contemporary society. Indeed, thinking of their theatrical manifestation, one might agree with Horrocks's (1994: 7) "sweeping claim that [interpretations of] ... men and masculinity have been in [flux] for at least three hundred years".

There are many theories and philosophies about gender and it is not this study's intention to investigate them all. However, the "critique of gender" is very important in the "struggle against traditional masculine conditioning" in global and local society (Horrocks 1994: 3), e.g. the stereotypical conditioning of men to accept "that feelings properly belong to women and that men are rational (if violent) creatures" (Horrocks 1994: 3). It is, however, possible to say that the contemporary Western man had at least "[begun] to articulate [his] ideas and feelings" and consider his own masculinity, which had until recently possibly been "a comfort, a prison, a buttress, a poison, or whatever" (Horrocks 1994: 2).

### **1.1.2 Constructing white South African masculinity**

The representation and interpretation of white, Western masculinity in the context of South Africa from 1980 to 1996 underwent radical transformation. The transition from the old South Africa to the new was a time of tremendous change, unrest and uncertainty. Many South Africans experienced extreme "interpersonal and institutional violence" during these transitional years (Epstein 1998: 50). Clashes between cultural groups and individuals were prominent during this time and resulted in a climate of insecurity and political uncertainty. Apart from numerous female groups (the African National Congress Women's League, the Black Sash, etc.) and individuals who were at the forefront of the struggle for change, the most prominent and influential individuals and decision makers according to popular and collective memory were men. South African society, especially at the time, cherished patriarchal ideals and hegemonic masculinity (Morrel et al. 2013). It is important to note that a "single national hegemony ... [was not] evident and, to the contrary ... hegemony has been forcibly contested for many years on grounds primarily of race and class, but also of ethnicity" (Morrel et al. 2013: 7). The men (and people) from

the various and contrasting contexts in South Africa had been shaped by their tumultuous history and society and needed to redefine their expectations and perceptions of what lay ahead of them. It is possible to make the observation that “(f)ormations of new versions of masculinity are, therefore, a key part of reshaping South Africa” (Epstein 1998: 50). White men had to start redefining their position in the South African society and make sense of this changing reality. New versions of masculinity were needed to allow for a nuanced and layered understanding of a changing South Africa and the white male’s position in it.

Furthermore, in South Africa, with its vast array of cultures and contexts, there is, however, not what Epstein (1998: 52) calls “one monolithic version of white masculinity”. The definitions of masculinity and whiteness are fluid and changing and very much a matter of context. This will also be clear in the textual study below where various white male writers from different contexts have created a variety of diverse male characters.

### **1.1.3 Whiteness studies**

Like the concept of gender and masculinity, there are many varying opinions on the notion of race and whiteness. As mentioned above, some researchers believe that *whiteness* and *race* are also among the “worst cultural fictions ever perpetuated”. ‘Whiteness’ as a term and concept is, however, a signifier that the present study will use. Because of South Africa’s colonial past, its history of apartheid and its extremely racially aware society, in a study such as this it is necessary to use this specific signifier. It is not the researcher’s intention to “breathe stale life into a belief system that ought to have been consigned to the twentieth century” (De Klerk 2010: 56). It is merely a practicality in referring to the white male’s psyche and perception of himself during a particular era in South African history. The term ‘whiteness’ as used in this study refers to a conscious (and sometimes unconscious) state of being in a multicultural society based on external physical characteristics and representation: “The point of looking at whiteness is to dislodge it from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it (and much less, to make a show of reinstating it, when, like male power, it doesn’t actually need reinstating)” (Richard Dyer in White 1997: 10).

Like Western masculinity, whiteness studies have also been a relatively new area of research. According to Melissa Steyn (2005: 120), an academic concerned with South African post-colonial whiteness studies, “a growing body of literature” of whiteness studies or “white studies” had been noted in contemporary research fields and early work is believed to have commenced in the early nineties. With Richard Dyer’s 1988 publication of the representation of whiteness in Western visual culture, *White*, the notion of whiteness studies started spreading through academia (Steyn 2004: 144). The era of this study’s context also correlates with the time masculinity and whiteness had become more prominent areas of research.

From the perspective of Western humanity, whiteness has been seen as an unconscious part of Western existence. Steyn argues that “race and ethnicity have been studied as social categorizations that affect ‘others’”, but the ways in which these “categorisations” have shaped white identities and lives have been left “relatively unexamined” (Steyn 2001: xxvi). South Africa’s culturally and racially aware past, which was determined by the apartheid government, included treating people from various ethnic backgrounds differently. However, when one looks at the pettiness of legislation regarding the segregation of, for example, beaches, park benches and hospitals, it is evident that this “ethnically aware society” eventually boiled down to mere skin colour. The apartheid legislation only recognised four racial groups namely “black”, “white”, “coloured” and “Indian/Asian” and laws and regulations tended to favour people with visibly white skin, while the many other individual ethnicities were all labelled “non-whites”. The collective ‘othering’ of the rest of the country by the predominantly white government and the country’s colonial past illustrates why whiteness has been left relatively unexamined. Despite the visible role whiteness has played in South Africa’s apartheid past and “in the colonial context”, the concept of whiteness has not been a prominent field of recent study (López 2005: 2).

For many centuries, whiteness was perceived by the West as being the norm. In South Africa this was also the case, and the colonial era epitomised this. “As the privileged group, whites have tended to take their identity as the standard by which everyone else is measured” (Steyn 2001: xxvi). However, whiteness has now been

challenged by a growing literature dealing with postmodernism, post-colonialism, cultural studies and critical race studies (Steyn 2001: xxv). By consciously analysing the concept of whiteness and making it visible, the very “normalcy” of whiteness (perceived predominantly by the Western world) had “been placed in question” (Epstein 1998: 54).

The Western world has dominated race studies throughout recorded history. The colonial movement and Atlantic slave trade “necessitated race as the most salient mechanism of human categorisation” (Hall 2005: 1959). Race had been a way of categorising inferiority as if one were studying different species (Hall 2005: 1959). The West’s discovery of continents such as Africa created a perception that race was based on skin colour and constructed the “belief that the only significant elements of humanity are members of Caucasian race groups” (Hall 2005: 1959). The West considered its perception of the world as the standard on which all significant theories and philosophies had to be based. The concept of race is therefore a Western construction and presumptions such as racial inferiority were a byproduct of this process. Studies of the concept of whiteness forced Westerners to become conscious of their whiteness. The concept of race in the global social, cultural and political society was now being redefined (the concept of Western masculinity also needed to be redefined as it had been challenged by the feminist movement). The study of whiteness as a concept ultimately created increasingly more balanced and objective views on race as it was not just the so-called ‘other’ who was solely under scrutiny anymore.

#### **1.1.4 Post-colonial whiteness**

What qualifies as ‘post-colonial’ is a very complex issue. The term has been “rendered useful in ... a variety of historical and cultural contexts” and has therefore acquired a sense of “flexibility” (López 2005: 7). This study will roughly refer to the South African post-colonial era suggested by Hauptfleisch (1997) in *Theatre and Society in South Africa: Reflections in a Fractured Mirror*. Hauptfleisch (1997: 12) deems the post-colonial period to be the era in South Africa after 1990, which is “the period of democratization”. This time frame is also the era that the study will be referring to as the ‘post-apartheid’ period. The first democratic elections in South

Africa were held in 1994 and marked the official end to apartheid in the country. This study, however, will refer to post-apartheid as the era roughly between 1980 and 2000. Apartheid steadily started crumbling during the 1980s with revolts and uprisings increasing in intensity, as activists in black townships had “risen up in an unprecedented manner to delegitimize and challenge the apartheid state” (Sinwell 2011: 359). Things were changing in South Africa and people became increasingly aware of it. A play such as *Saturday Night at the Palace* by Paul Slabolepszy was written and first performed in 1982 and is an excellent example of how individuals in the society of South Africa at the time were becoming aware of the looming change. The society was edging towards the unknown and – especially among the white population - a sense of fear prevailed.

Whiteness in the post-colonial era needed to be re-evaluated after the fall of the British Empire and the end of colonialism. In South Africa, with the fall of apartheid, whites had to further reconsider their whiteness and evaluate their place in this new society. Because whites in the country were the dominant group for such a long time, suddenly being the minority seemed to have a profound effect on their perception of themselves and their reality.

### **1.1.5 South African whiteness and change**

Although whiteness as an academic concept was only formally introduced near the end of colonialism, whiteness had to be constantly re-evaluated (consciously and unconsciously) throughout South African history. White South Africans have been living in Africa for over three hundred years and although they are not “aboriginal”, they are “sociologically indigenous” and (especially Afrikaners) “held little attachment to the countries of their origin” (Steyn 2001: xxiv). White South Africans therefore seemed to have constantly needed to secure their position in the country.

Apartheid was an ideology applied by white South Africans to protect their advantageous position in society in terms of which they kept different racial groups separate from each other. They were politically, economically, militarily and culturally in charge of the country (Steyn 2001: xxiii). The struggle efforts of the majority of the country’s population and international sanctions against apartheid led to the first

democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994 (Steyn 2001: xxiii). This led to a further “level of post coloniality as cultural, racial, and political identities are reframed internally” and now in “different political and psychological terms” (Steyn 2001: xxiii).

This enormous change in South Africa required a major psychological adjustment by all the peoples of the country (Steyn 2005: 119). The apartheid society had been “structured by race, by gender and by class” and “over-determined the interconnectedness” of these (Epstein 1998: 51–52). Apartheid focused obsessively and fundamentally on these aspects of society and humanity. This caused individuals (especially whites) to wholly rely on these structures as a means of validating and assuring their existence. The fall of these structures therefore brought enormous change to all South Africans.

Whiteness was being challenged and although this process had started in many parts of the world, during the transformation years in South Africa it was acutely intense (Steyn 2005: 199-20).

### **1.1.6 South African whiteness and masculinity in crisis**

When one looks back at South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past, whiteness and masculinity studies have many parallels. As we have noted earlier, whiteness and masculinity as research topics have both only recently become prominent fields of study. Also, if one accepts that gender and race are socially constructed phenomena, one can draw a parallel between “racialized identity” and Butler’s “gender performativity” (De Klerk 2010: 41).

In South Africa’s and the world’s colonial past it can be noted that “men have oppressed women and children and other men for thousands of years by virtue of *being men*” (Horrocks 1994: 25) – and by virtue of being white. To belong to the male gender has been “a qualification in itself for many privileged positions” (Horrocks 1994: 25). This becomes overtly clear when one looks back at recorded, general Western history (and of course in terms of South African history).

But accepted gender and racial systems have come into question and perceptions of these systems are slowly starting to crumble. Western white men have also started questioning and re-evaluating these systems. In South Africa, these systems have strongly come into question after the fall of colonialism and apartheid.

The fact that many white South Africans had been living in the country for over three hundred years and that it can be said that they had become “sociologically indigenous” means that one can understand that a huge sense of panic and uncertainty would prevail after an enormous change in society such as the collapse of apartheid. The fact that they were part of a South African minority group fueled this panic further. All South Africans had to start reshaping their identities during this “historical process where change [was] so far-reaching” and “accelerated” (Steyn 2001: xxii). The reshaping of identity, specifically in terms of white men, it seems, became an attempt to “provide bearings in previously uncharted waters” (Steyn 2001: xxii). The fall of a system such as apartheid had resulted in the people of South Africa entering “uncharted” territory. The fear of the unknown must have caused immense cultural and personal insecurity. It can be said, therefore, that white men had entered an era of internal ‘crisis’ or flux and therefore had to reshape their perception of their masculinity and whiteness.

White South African men also had “taken-for-granted privileges” during their colonial and apartheid past and had to come to terms with the loss of these privileges (Steyn and Foster 2008: 25). One factor that encapsulates and symbolises this crisis is the uncertainty of a financial future through employment. It also symbolises the male’s perception of their effectiveness and presence in society. The patriarchal system stereotypically considers masculinity to be synonymous with financial and professional success. Jung argues that society’s “prizes” are given “for achievement” and that “we are forced to limit ourselves to the attainable” (Jung 1989: 28). Men’s perception of their masculinity is therefore akin to “attainable” societal factors like jobs and financial gain. Further, “achievement, usefulness and so forth are the ideals that seem to point the way out of the confusions of the problematical state” (Jung 1989: 28). White South African men’s certainty of attaining “achievement” and “usefulness” became insecure with the fall of apartheid (“the problematical state”) and systems such as affirmative action threatened this even further. The instability of

the post-apartheid era therefore asks for new and “different versions of masculinity” (Epstein 1998: 58). This era in South African history also possibly illustrates how “gender divisions [could] hurt men” and how the pressures and expectations of patriarchy can in fact “[disempower] men” (Horrocks 1994: 3). South African white people had also become “acutely aware [and self-conscious] of their whiteness” and needed to reconsider this social perception as well (De Klerk 2010: 41).

It can be said that white South Africans (and specifically men) had started experiencing a sense of “loss”. According to Steyn (2001: 158–60), some of these losses could possibly include loss of autonomy and control; loss of a sense of personal honour; loss of face; loss of a sense of relevance; and loss of guaranteed legitimacy. The familiar comfort and security they had become accustomed to had now fallen away and this drastically changed their realities (Steyn 2001: 156).

South African whites had effectively been “evicted from paradise” and their cultural identities were now, according to Steyn (2005: 127), “on the edge” and “off-center”. Steyn argues that South African whites had started creating their own narratives to make sense of this change. Only within these narratives can one start to understand how South African whites had experienced this change at an individual level. Narratives that are possible to use are those that are illustrated in the arts and specifically in South African texts and theatre-making.

## **1.2 Whiteness and masculinity in South African theatre: Trends during transformation**

Art is an intrinsic part of human nature. It illustrates the various stages in the development of humanity, as well as a society’s psyche in a specific time and context. For example, in the work of William Shakespeare themes and plots in a number of the plays correlate with actual historical, political events and notions (e.g. *Richard III* or *Henry VI*). Shakespeare’s plays also mirror the changes in ideas and philosophies of humanity during the Renaissance period. It is possible to say that South Africa’s social, political and ethical state during the crumbling, fall and aftermath of apartheid would at times have been mirrored by the trends of the theatre scene at the time. The theatre is often described as “a mirror reflecting the

society it invites to fill the auditorium and to observe images of itself in the glare of the footlights” (Van Heerden 2008: 151). Hauptfleisch (1997: 2) asserts that artists display aspects of their times and environment, and the way in which they have been shaped by a particular society is part of their nature as human beings. Theatre and art do not therefore necessarily illustrate historical facts, but reflect and interpret the human experience in a particular era of history.

The South African theatre scene before the fall of apartheid was inevitably focused on protest theatre and ‘struggle plays’ in which there was an aggressive demand for change. After an “easily identifiable enemy like apartheid, South African theatre in the 1990s tended to fragment into a multitude of *individual* issues” (Van Heerden 2008: 94). After apartheid the country was, as Zakes Mda once said, “no longer just black and white”, but there were now “shades of grey” (Van Heerden 2008: 94), and as a result there were now “complexities and ambiguities” that needed interpretation (Van Heerden 2008: 94). Therefore trends in the theatre after apartheid were not as clear as during the apartheid era. Renowned South African playwright Athol Fugard had even gone as far as to suggest that the South African theatre movement faced a crisis: “[Theatre] is in danger of losing its central dynamo. How do we move beyond the reactive apartheid critique ... and begin to formulate a comprehensive cultural response to the times?” (Quoted in Van Heerden 2008: 93).

One of the individual cultural responses that had developed during the fall and aftermath of apartheid is possibly that of the white male character in certain South African plays of the time. The complex nature and crisis (if you will) of the white male character during the period of tremendous change in South Africa can possibly be seen as one of the grey areas in South African story telling.

Stories and narratives we tell “ourselves and others ... about our changing versions of the past, present and future” are “key way[s] of making sense of oneself and of the world” (Epstein 1998: 53). These narratives are echoed in an art form such as theatre-making. Narratives that tried to make sense of “whiteness in a situation of political uncertainty” were one of the concerns of theatre during the transitional years in South Africa (Steyn 2001: xxxviii). This is evident when one looks at the work of writers such as Athol Fugard, Pieter Fourie, Paul Slabolepszy, Deon Opperman,

Greig Coetzee, and directors such as Marthinus Basson, Barney Simon, and many others.

As discussed above, the collapse of the white apartheid regime and the reshuffling of power had fragmented whiteness in South Africa, and “[d]ifferent narratives of what it means to be white [were] vying for legitimisation in the hearts and minds of white South Africans” (Steyn 2001: xxxi). Many white theatre-makers of the time had begun to create work that investigated individual whiteness. Various white Afrikaans playwrights, for example, had started focusing on themes such as ‘white guilt’ (see, for example, *Die Jogger* (1997) by André P. Brink). Other Afrikaner theatre-makers of the time, such as Deon Opperman (*Môre Is ’n Lang Dag*, 1983), Marthinus Basson and Pieter Fourie (*Boetman Is die Bliksem In!*, 2000), confronted the atrocities of the border war and “the hypocrisy of leaders and the mental claustrophobia of Christian nationalism” (Van Heerden 2008: 115). Opperman later also tried to make sense of the Afrikaner’s past and present with his five-hour play *Donkerland* (1996). The plot covers the period from 1838 to 1996 and interprets the Afrikaner’s history and development from Opperman’s individual viewpoint. This includes interpretations of the apartheid era, events such as the border war and the years of transformation. In fact, the memory of the border war inspired many works, ranging from poetry to theatre, film, etc.

White English playwrights also interpreted these issues from their own perspective. Besides the works of the prolific Athol Fugard and Paul Slabolepszy, we have the plays of Greig Coetzee (e.g. *White Men with Weapons*, 1996; *Seeing Red*, 2001; and *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny*, 2004) and Anthony Akerman (*Somewhere on the Border*, 1983), which all in some way address the issues and problems of white male characters from the era of transformation who find themselves stuck in a rut, unable to free themselves from either their past or their present reality.

These are all attempts to use the theatre to come to terms with being white in a changing society and are predominantly focused on making sense of the white male’s situation during the years of transformation in South Africa. They are thus all part of the struggle for meaning and ways of constituting a sense of reality in the changing world of the 1980s and 1990s (Steyn 2001: xxxviii).

Each one of the plays discussed can, of course, only illustrate a few aspects of the psyche and life of the South African white male, because each narrative is derived from and/or set in a different context, for the period under discussion was a very fragmented and complex time in South African history (Hauptfleisch 1997: 2). And this is not only true of society, but also the theatre system, as Hauptfleisch (1997: 21) remarks:

For not only is our society fragmented – and it will be so for some time I fear – but the mirror itself is a fractured instrument, reflecting skewed and partial images, from odd angles at times – or bleary and obscure ones, if any at all.

The new South African theatre-makers therefore started producing plays that dealt with minority groups, which Van Heerden (2008: 132) claims “seemed to indicate a need to secure an equal claim for such groups in a new landscape of democracy, equality and majority rule”. The white people of South Africa are part of one of these minority groups who have tried to “secure an equal claim” in this new landscape. White theatre-makers – and even those who had originally created plays that protested against the apartheid regime – started fearing the consequences of the collapse of apartheid, notably loss of identity; perceived illegitimacy in a world where they were the minority; and ultimately, perhaps, redundancy. This was clearly evident in the job market, where white men gradually came to fear becoming retrenched because of affirmative action. Athol Fugard, who had written some of the most influential protest plays during the apartheid period, remarked in an interview: “Am I about to become the new South Africa’s first redundancy?” (Van Heerden 2008: 93).

### **1.3 The aims of the study**

Against this background, the present study aims to explore the representation of Western masculinity and the concept of whiteness in South African theatre by looking at selected texts created in the turbulent context described above. The next three chapters will study a range of white male characters created by four South African playwrights. The central focus will be on the individual and collective cultural

identity of the white South African male as portrayed in these plays, concentrating on three major sub-themes, which will be discussed in the three main chapters (2–4).

### 1.3.1 Themes

It is evident that there are many different themes related to the white male in post-apartheid South Africa. One main theme is very clear from even a superficial reading of the literature: a sense of panic, insecurity and loss during the transformation years. But there are, of course, many different aspects of the white male's insecurity and 'crisis' during this time. This study will be investigating three major themes I have identified regarding the representation of the white male character in a variety of South African plays. These themes are, of course, quite generalised and I am not claiming that every white South African male went through these experiences during the transformation years. They are merely themes that were prominent in the specific South African plays I have studied.

#### (a) The desire for recognition

The first theme we will look at (Chapter 2) is the notion of recognition in the representation of the white South African male during the transformation years. We will look at how this is illustrated in various post-apartheid plays and their white male characters. Not only is the desire for recognition illustrated in the issues surrounding unemployment and financial insecurity, but also in complex interpretations of recognition in terms of masculinity, identity and whiteness. McLaughlin (2012) argues that recognition is "akin to a primal need" and essential to the realisation of the self. It is therefore essential in every individual's perception of (in the case of this study) himself and his identity. The main focus of the chapter is the notion of intersubjective recognition. Because the chapter focuses largely on the individual and his interaction with his surroundings, this is appropriate. Recognition of oneself is also only possible when there is another subject to recognise one.

The chapter explores the notion of the desire for recognition in *Die Jogger* (1997) by André P. Brink; *Abnormal Load* (1988) by Paul Slabolepszy and *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny* (2004) by Greig Coetzee.

### **(b) Dangerous insecurity**

The theme of 'dangerous insecurity' (Chapter 3) takes the concept of intersubjective recognition a step further to investigate notions of entrapment and retaliation. The various characters I have chosen illustrate a state of insecurity, which is demonstrated in their aggressive behaviour and their relationship with society and the people in it. They are trapped in their respective realities, which causes them to react violently and destructively. The chapter looks at how the notion of *ressentiment* influences this aggressive and dangerous behaviour and how their threatening behaviour is a desperate attempt at demonstrating their (perceptions of) masculinity.

The plays *Saturday Night at the Palace* (1985); *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie* (1985); *Abnormal Load* and *Over the Hill* (1989) by Paul Slabolepszy; and *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny* by Greig Coetzee are used to discuss the notion of dangerous insecurity.

### **(c) The ever-present past**

Lastly (Chapter 4) will look at how the South African white male character's past has influenced his life in the transformation years, in order to understand the white male's psyche at the time. The concepts of the past and memory are extensively explored in this chapter. Memory and the past are very elusive concepts and their fluid natures are illustrated through the plays chosen. The chapter will also look at the impact events such as the border war and apartheid might have had on the male characters and further consider the notions of subjective and collective memory.

The plays considered in this chapter are *Die Jogger* by André P. Brink and *Donkerland* by Deon Opperman.

### **1.3.2 Procedure**

In the next three chapters I shall be exploring all these ideas in greater detail, by looking at a selection of white male characters created by Paul Slabolepszy, Deon Opperman, André P. Brink and Greig Coetzee. Each chapter will begin with a brief look at relevant theoretical issues relating to the focus of the chapter, followed by a discussion of these issues in the various plays.

Two final points of procedure:

Firstly, the plays discussed are in Afrikaans or English (or at times in both languages). Since this thesis has been written for examination at an Afrikaans institution, excerpts from the Afrikaans texts are not translated into English, under the assumption that most South African readers will know the language well enough to follow the reasoning.

Secondly, to facilitate understanding and not take up space in the main text, the basic information about each of the plays discussed (including a brief summary of the plot), is provided in the Appendix.

## Chapter 2: The desire for recognition

As noted in the Introduction, the whites of South Africa had been politically, economically and socially dominant until the fall of apartheid, but currently make up a mere 8.9% of the total voting population (Wikipedia: South Africa). After the first democratic elections in 1994 whites thus had to reconsider their own identities and perceptions in a world where they were now a distinct minority. During the era of transformation South Africa was coming to recognise and accept the existence of an array of cultural identities as it changed into a country that would ultimately have 11 official languages and even more different, newly recognised cultural and social groupings.

The theatre has always offered useful (mediated) reflections of social conditions in various countries, and in the plays to be discussed we will be analysing the way in which the abovementioned social and cultural context was reflected in the theatre of what I would call the transition years (1980–2000).

The chapter begins with a brief outline of general recognition theory and then turns to the plays to explore the way in which the link between recognition and identity, and the notions of intersubjective recognition and misrecognition are dealt with by the playwrights.

### 2.1 A brief background

the desire for recognition is akin to a primal need, a universal constant throughout history, one that is so fundamental to individual self-realization that its pursuit is the primary motivating force behind social developments (McLaughlin 2012: Introduction).

As Kenneth McLaughlin suggests, the desire for recognition is a vast topic, since it is such a fundamental and very complex element of human nature. He explores Axel Honneth's theory that the desire for recognition is intrinsically woven into the human psychological make-up, has been present for a very long time and is what the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel identified as "the primary motor of human history" (McLaughlin 2012: 36). Discussing this issue, Honneth (2002: 44) points out that people whose actions were considered socially acceptable (i.e. 'recognised' by the people) in the polis of ancient Greece were the only ones who

could lead a “good life” (i.e. a moral life). This notion played a dominant role in constructing ancient Greek ethics. Similarly, Scottish moral philosophy was “guided by the idea that public recognition or disapproval constitutes a social mechanism which guides the individual towards the acquisition of desirable virtues” (Honneth 2002: 44), while Emmanuel Kant considered the concept of ‘respect’ as the “highest principle of all morality”.

McLaughlin also makes the important point that if “recognition is a vital human need, it is also a historically specific one” (2012: 128), defined by the context in which the need occurs. He suggests that “changes in the material world ... [such as] loss of authority and cultural meaning attached to the institutions and ideologies of modernity” and “changing political attachments” (McLaughlin 2012: 128) can materially influence the nature of the recognition required in particular circumstances – which, of course, is precisely what was occurring in South Africa during the transformation years (1980–2000).

In an intersubjective context, recognition is more than merely ‘seeing’ another individual or group, but is instead a process of aiming to establish true respect for, acknowledgment of or understanding of other identities. Having established this, it can also idealistically be seen as a step towards true equality in a society, because every culture is recognised in its totality. Pieterse (2002: 219) is of the opinion that “recognition ... stretches or revalues social boundaries but does not transgress them”. Therefore recognition does not necessarily *eliminate* social boundaries between cultures and individuals (which would make true equality possible), but highlights the layers that form social and cultural identity.

### **2.1.1 Recognition and identity**

The politics surrounding identity (race, gender, culture) finds its actual “expression in the increasing demands for recognition made by various social groups” (Kenny 2004: 148). This idea is brought to life in the plays by observing that the characters’ identities are largely constructed according to their desire for recognition. They demonstrate a desire to be recognised as individual entities, but also to belong to and be part of a collective identity. The present chapter as a whole aims to investigate this. In studying the personal desire for recognition of the selected white male characters, it is possible to ‘characterise’ a collective identity and accentuate

the hypothesis of this dissertation. But according to A.O. Rorty (2008: 152), it has become increasingly clear that “characterising the ‘identity’ of a culture is itself a politically and ideologically charged issue”. To fully comprehend individual or cultural identity, we need to locate the many external and internal factors that could influence our perceptions of identity. This is further influenced by emotional and subjective recognition of oneself and other cultures. This can turn into a fairly dubious exercise. It is therefore difficult to truly characterise a cultural entity. But by studying representations of individuals in a society one can attempt to characterise a collective cultural identity, even if this results in a fairly condensed version of that identity. This idea is central to my study.

A means to investigate at least an aspect of personal and cultural identity is by using the theory of recognition. According to O’Neill (2002: 77), “identity politics ... now represents a main thrust in the politics of recognition”. In considering the interaction of identity and recognition, it is clear that the theory of recognition is an important and necessary area of inquiry in this study.

It is ironic, however, that by recognising social or cultural identity, one can possibly deny individual recognition. The characters I have selected represent individuals from a particular society or culture. Although the various playwrights often – sometimes subconsciously – utilise their own personal identities when constructing a character, the characters are essentially products of a collective consciousness. One can say they rather represent an aspect of a particular *cultural* identity, as opposed to a specific *individual* identity. The playwright creates the characters according to his/her own *perceptions* of specific individuals in a society (or even of themselves), and these perceptions are constructed by the society and context the writers inhabit. This is quite a contentious claim, because the possibilities in a fictional world are essentially endless. The specific characters and plays I have selected, however, accord with this idea. For example, André P. Brink created Killian according to his own perception of an Afrikaans male patriarch of the 1990s (see Appendix). Stereotypical characteristics are also often used to better communicate an idea to a reader or audience.

Even though the characters are cultural representations, we can interpret their desire for recognition in the same way that we would interpret an individual’s desire.

Individuals' identities and consciousness construct the framework of society and collective consciousness. The characters can be seen as representative of their various cultures and contexts (Afrikaans/English of varying socio-economic statuses), but together they form a representation of the collective white male identity in a changing South Africa. The characters will need to be considered as individuals to better understand their constructions as collective representations.

There is thus definite interplay between collective and individual identities in society, which the theory suggests leads to the conclusion that recognition is only possible when one entity (or subject) recognises another. As McLaughlin (2012: 7) suggests: "(i)t is necessary not only for the individual to recognise others, but also for them in turn to be recognised by others". This leads us to the notion of intersubjectivity.

### **2.1.2 Intersubjective recognition**

The definition of yourself lies in the way others see you and how you would like to be seen. This refers to what one could also perhaps call the "mirror theory", in which people often feel they can only be that which they become in the eyes of others. This is a fundamental aspect of recognition theory and a main theme in the plays I will be discussing. Yar (2002: 60) elaborates on this:

It is in the look of the other, in being-seen-by-the-other, that 'I am possessed by the Other .... By virtue of consciousness the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes 'there to be' a being which is my being.

One can speculate that human consciousness can only be confirmed through intersubjective interaction between people. By studying human consciousness in such a way one could in essence say a person would cease to "be" without the other. In other words, a large portion of a person's identity, sense of self or conscious 'being' relies on intersubjectivity. A considerable feature of intersubjectivity is the notion of recognition. Recognition of one's presence and 'being' by an 'other' confirms to us who or what we are. One of the main ways in which the characters attempt to establish "enduring personal identities" is by being recognised by others: "freedom also and crucially consists in establishing for ourselves enduring personal

identities which are constantly affirmed in our encounters with others” (Honneth 1995: 163–65).

But all human beings have their own view of the world they inhabit, as well as their own unique concept of reality. They also have their own subjective idea of how they think people see and experience them. Recognition as a theory is very complex, because the aspects of ourselves that are recognised by others are not the ones we think we are being recognised for. Therefore, a desire to be recognised in a way that contradicts what one projects to the world assumes the ability to participate in a very intricate and difficult inter-active process. This notion is explored with regard to characters such as Gregory de Witt in Paul Slabolepszy’s *Abnormal Load* (1988) (see Appendix). Greg has a certain perception of what he thinks it means to be a ‘man’. He desperately wants to be recognised as such a man and indirectly compares himself to stereotypical images of masculinity. However, in the discussion of the play it becomes clear that his image of himself is not necessarily what he projects to the society in which he resides.

One can also explore the notion of the “impossibility of recognition” (Lash & Featherstone 2002: 5). An individual’s or group’s social presence in a society depends solely on intersubjective interaction. In brief: if your presence is *not* recognised by another you are *not* part of what constitutes that specific society; hence, in that society you would essentially not exist. A society is built on various individuals’ and groups’ intersubjective interactions and recognition. If we do not accept this notion, we would be assuming that society in fact does not exist. Thus one can say that the construction of a social and cultural identity is essentially based on intersubjective interaction and recognition. This brings us back to the interplay of the collective and individual identity in society.

To illustrate this notion we can look at how it is prevalent in the changing South Africa of the 1990s and how it is portrayed in plays like André P. Brink’s *Die Jogger* (1997). Because of the decline and fall of apartheid, issues and differences regarding culture became much more visible in South African social life. One of the main areas where one can observe this is the way in which people from different cultures began interacting and living alongside each other. Social and cultural groups were now basically forced to recognise each other as equally significant entities. The

country's constitution now stated that all South Africans were equal before the law and that discrimination on grounds of race and social and ethnic origin was prohibited (Internet: South African Government Information). It can be assumed that people were forced not only to start recognising other cultural *groups*, but also their own and others' individual, personal identities. The public realm of the individual (in the form of political and cultural attachments) started flowing into the private realm. The private realm consequently became more visible and therefore possible to recognise. And this in turn has become one of the strong themes in South African playwriting.

*Die Jogger* centres on this theme. The characters in the play are in search of their own personal identities amid the social and cultural identities of their surroundings. Their perceptions of themselves and others need to adapt to a changing and expanding environment. The characters' desperate desire for recognition is largely illustrated by their longing to be heard.

### **2.1.3 Misrecognition**

A notion that links with intersubjective recognition is *misrecognition*. The characters selected for discussion deal with misrecognition in varying ways. Misrecognition refers to the depreciation of personal identity because of external societal factors or the dominance of another culture (Fraser 2002: 23–24). This notion can be explored in terms of the white male's position during the immense upheaval of a changing South Africa. The white population of South Africa was now confronted by the fact that they were no longer the dominant culture. They were scattered among the many other cultures of the country that were now also demanding recognition and acknowledgment. Not only were they made acutely aware of the fact that they were a minority, but they now needed to fend for themselves, as the protective cocoon their culture's position of power had ensured them was now falling apart. Fraser (2002: 23–24) observes that this facet of intersubjectivity can lead to "damage to group members' sense of self". In being misrecognised by the other, one will struggle to realise a sense of self. According to Kenny (2004: 151), misrecognition can also cause "moral, as well as psychological, injuries". It not only reminds one of a character such as Killian in *Die Jogger*, but also of Johnny in *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny* (see Appendix), who deals with misrecognition in another way. He is

a soldier who had returned to a South Africa he hardly knew. McLaughlin (2012: 39) remarks that “misrecognition can ‘inflict a grievous wound saddling its victims with a crippling self hatred’”. The character of Johnny illustrates this.

## 2.2 The plays

### 2.2.1 *Die Jogger*

The issue of recognition is a powerful theme in Brink’s play *Die Jogger* (1997). The play opened during the year of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings in South Africa. Brink uses the TRC as central theme in the play. Some of the aims for the TRC hearings were for victims of human rights violations to recount their experiences of life under apartheid legislation and for perpetrators to request amnesty from civil and criminal prosecution. The hearings created a space where people could be heard. The focus now shifted to the private realm, as opposed to the collective cultural and political realm.

One of the play’s central themes, strongly linking to the notion of recognition, is the characters’ “inability to be heard” (Van Heerden 2008: 113). This is ironic, because the TRC stood for exactly the opposite – specifically for the formerly unrecognised to come forward and be recognised. During apartheid the majority of the country’s cultural groups were neither recognised nor acknowledged as part of the larger society. The new South Africa was geared towards changing this. The TRC was implemented as a means to usher in this new era and bury the demons of the past. The complex and contentious nature of these notions is explored in *Die Jogger*.

Killian had to commit unspeakable atrocities during apartheid. One of the main incidents that had driven him to insanity and haunts him in his nightmares and hallucinations was the interrogation of Vusi. It is not made clear for what specific reason he had to interrogate Vusi, but Vusi is identified as some sort of terrorist and Killian had to torture him for answers. Throughout the play Killian’s memories of Vusi revisit him.

One of these memories is of him cutting out Vusi’s tongue, which Killian keeps in a jar beside his bed. When Noni (his nurse) asks him what it is, he says: “Vir al wat jy weet, is dit Napoleon se piel” (Brink 1997: 13). The tongue becomes a metaphor for the penis and the cutting out of it can be compared to castration. The tongue is

synonymous with being heard and cutting it out inevitably silences the victim. The social structure during apartheid in South Africa was defined by race, with whites being the dominant group. The whites wanted to essentially 'silence' other races in order to maintain this dominance, and the cutting out of the tongue can be seen as the equivalent of the "castration" of Vusi's humanity and therefore the rejection of his recognition as a man and human being. Killian does not recognise Vusi's subjective individuality and humanity. He regards Vusi as part of a socio-cultural group that he does not recognise as equal to his. This was the norm for the apartheid ideology of the time. For intersubjective recognition to take place, "the subject must recognise the other as an autonomous, rational, valuable, fully conscious human being, before he himself can be similarly recognised by that other" (Yar 2002: 67).

The scene in which Vusi is sentenced to death is an explicit example of a heightened form of misrecognition. Killian insists to the judge that Vusi had cut out his own tongue in a desperate attempt to conceal his guilt: "As 'n skuldige man desperaat is, dan is hy tot enigiets in staat" (Brink 1997: 60). The scene is tinged with a light, humorous quality emphasising the blatant disregard for individuals and the discrimination that the political system perpetuated towards certain individuals during apartheid. In lying about Vusi's admission of guilt, Killian asks the judge: "Vra hom self. (*Kug*) Ekskuus, U Edele, ek het 'n oomblik vergeet", and when asked about the organ on his desk, he replies: "Dit is wyle keiser Napoleon se penis, U Edele" (Brink 1997: 60–61). The implausible nature of his claims implies that the scene is most probably a combination of memory and a fevered hallucination, and yet, it also suggests that Vusi must have been sentenced to death under somewhat dubious circumstances. Vusi's trial is naturally a strong reminder of the controversy surrounding Steve Biko's death. Biko died in police captivity, a trial was held and no one was prosecuted because of a lack of evidence (Wikipedia: Steve Biko). In other words, Biko had been eternally silenced before he could tell his story. This is a situation where the social structure of a particular time causes the "desires and ends of some ... [to] be imposed upon defeated others ... whose own self-conceptions [their idea of their own humanity] would be denied any social realisation" (Yar 2002: 66). Brink is possibly challenging the somewhat idealistic intentions of the TRC and the new South Africa. He is asking whether recognition is truly possible when so

many victims like Vusi and Biko have been eternally silenced. Their stories will never be told and they are left misrecognised.

However, the fact that Killian cannot forget and has constant hallucinations about Vusi implies that even though these victims are left misrecognised and silenced, they live on in the conscience of the ones responsible for their deaths. In a strange way they are “recognised” by their persecutors. In another hallucination, Vusi says: “Waar jy ook al gaan, sal ek bly praat in jou ore” (Brink 1997: 69).

One could view Killian himself as a victim of misrecognition. When Killian was asked by “Sy Edele” to personally ‘handle’ the situation regarding Vusi, the secretary who delivers this ‘order’ merely insinuates what needs to be done:

SEKRETARIS: Die druk op Sy Edele is baie groot, Kolonel. U sal beseef ... Sy Edele het gevra dat ek by u moet aandring – en dit kom van Heel Bo af, u begryp – dat die skuldiges so gou moontlik vasgetrek word. Anders kan die situasie baie gevaarlik word .... As die saak nie baie gou afgehandel word nie

...

KILLIAN: Ek verstaan.

...

SEKRETARIS: En Sy Edele het gevra dat u die versekering gee ... (*Vertroulik nader*). Hy het begrip daarvoor – en die kabinet steun dit eenparig – as u dalk ... sal ons sê, onkonvensionele metodes moet gebruik

(Brink 1997: 21).

The secretary clearly avoids saying what he actually means, never explicitly ordering Killian to kill Vusi. This effectively negates any actual evidence that Killian was forced to do what he had done. Since this scene is a hallucinatory memory, it appears to be a subconscious attempt by Killian to work out whether he *is* in fact solely responsible for Vusi’s death. At the start of Act 2 Killian listens to a radio broadcast where a voice, presumably that of “Sy Edele”, says: “...wil ek dit bo alle twyfel duidelik stel dat volgens my wete ons nooit sluipmoord, moord, foltering, verkragting, aanranding of enigiets dergeliks goedgekeur het nie” (Brink 1997: 49). Brink is implying that the collective institution of the apartheid government is shifting blame to the individual. “Sy Edele” also never personally orders Killian to carry out these instructions, but sends his secretary. Because the orders had gone through so many channels, assigning responsibility becomes almost impossible. It seems that the ones who are

left responsible (and having to deal with effectively being murderers) are those who were expected to physically perform the deeds. Brink is using this particular murder as an extreme example, but could also have referred to the many other crimes committed in the name of apartheid. He is also later notified by the secretary that “Sy Edele” cannot admit to any involvement in the killing of Vusi. Killian is left deserted and misrecognised by the system he so fervently fought for.

One can say that “striving for recognition entailed a threat [to the patriarchal] political order” (Honneth 2002: 46). Killian’s (and Vusi’s) knowledge of the crimes committed by the apartheid government poses a threat to this order. The fact that Killian has to deal with this guilt alone becomes an impetus for his own ‘castration’ and drives him to insanity.

Killian’s character is the epitome of the stereotypical powerful white Afrikaner male of the apartheid era. He is a member of the fifth generation of his family living in South Africa: “My Oupa Renier was al die derde geslag” (Brink 1997: 16). He is fervently patriotic: “Soos Oupa gesê het: ‘My kind, onthou net een ding: jy’s ‘n Boer. En teen ‘n uitlander verloor ‘n Boer nié’” (Brink 1997: 18). He is family oriented and believes in the Christian God. He was also once a highly regarded and celebrated colonel. He strove to keep the old South Africa ‘pure’ and this was a way to uphold the patriarchal ideals of his people: “of die patriarg nou letterlik ‘n vader was of die geïnstitusioneerde Vader Minister en sy trawante [was]” (Wassermann 1997: 4). During that time, many Afrikaners saw the father as the head of the household, a structure echoed in the apartheid government: the governmental hierarchy effectively became the collective ‘family’ of the Afrikaner nation. “Sy Edele” can be seen as a “father” figure to Killian, someone whom he needs to impress and be recognised by. Killian obediently accepts all his instructions without asking questions. When the secretary brings instructions regarding Vusi, Killian obediently says: “Ek sal doen wat nodig is, meneer” (Brink 1997: 20). The secretary also repeatedly makes Killian feel important by saying that the minister is “counting” on him and that he said he specifically wanted Killian for the job. This reminds one of a father talking to his son and affirming how important and ‘special’ he is. It is quite ominous in this case because Killian’s ‘father’ wants him to commit a horrific deed for him and keep it a secret. Killian can be compared to a little boy who is expected to keep his father’s dirty secret. Keeping this secret ultimately drives Killian to insanity and he is locked

up in a mental institution. He has been abandoned. Although Killian's tongue is not literally cut out, he has now been silenced by the changing political times (and by his own people). He is locked up and isolated from his family, friends and the outside world. The family man, father and leader he once was have been invalidated and silenced by history. The very things he was once celebrated and recognised for become the reason he has been silenced. "Hoe gevaarlik hy was in die apartheidsjare, hoe weerloos, byna pateties paranoïes hy nou in 'n gestig lê, met die gestalte van 'n slagoffer wat hom dag en nag agtervolg" (Wassermann 1997: 4). He yearns for the past by reliving his memories. The world where he was once recognised and heard has crippled and 'castrated' him. The past had become his burden. (This notion will be expanded on in Chapter 4.)

The fall of this patriarchal ideal can further be seen in Killian's interaction with Noni. Recognition is a "historically variable factor" where a "concept loses its timelessness as it ... becomes dependent upon a given present that cannot be transcended" (Honneth 2002: 51). This is an integral part of recognition theory and key to the study of *Die Jogger*. Recognition is largely based on context. This is evident when considering the changing political order of South Africa. In the context of apartheid, some social and cultural groups were recognised and favoured over others. Killian was part of the favoured group of people. The new South African constitution aimed at changing this. Theoretically, according to the constitution, recognition was no longer based on race, culture or ethnic origin. The new South Africa therefore would now hypothetically recognise every social and cultural group and the individuals in them. A character such as Noni could now be recognised. A specific historical context therefore greatly influences recognition. But it must be said that the concept of recognition is constantly in flux and depends on each intersubjective context and each changing moment.

Brink introduces the character Noni not only to give Killian a sounding board for his diatribes, but also to underline the fall of the patriarchal ideal. During the course of the play Killian desperately and repeatedly insists that Noni must refer to him as colonel. He tries to hold on to the sense of the authority he once had by giving orders to Noni. He wants to be recognised by Noni as her superior; Noni, however, has become his superior. She has the power to refuse him certain things:

NONI: What you need is a straitjacket.

KILLIAN: Dis nie die bleddie Middeleeue nie!

NONI: If you can't behave yourself I'll have to knock you out. (*Haal 'n spuitnaald uit haar uniform sak.*)

KILLIAN: Vat weg daardie ding. Jy wil my dood hê.

NONI: It's either this or the jacket. Before you hurt yourself.

KILLIAN: Julle vat nie aan my nie.

NONI: It's your choice. (*Hou die spuitnaald na hom toe uit.*)

KILLIAN: Ek laat my nie spuit nie.

NONI: (*Aan die naaste HELPER.*) Get me the jacket

(Brink 1997: 24).

In the context of the mental hospital Noni is thus recognised as a more sound and reliable entity than Killian, for she is a nurse and Killian is considered a mentally unstable patient. Killian's behaviour reminds one of a little child who does not get his way. Noni becomes a 'mother'-like figure who needs to control him. The straitjacket underlines this loss of control. Noni is black, a woman, she speaks English, and she is now in control of Killian's actions and choices. This emphasises the 'castration' and loss of control of the white, male, Afrikaans figure in the new South Africa, as represented by Killian. By comparing the context of the mental institution and the historically variable factors affecting change in South Africa, one can draw the conclusion that she essentially symbolises the fall of the patriarchal society that Killian so fiercely protected.

Brink further elaborates on contextual recognition when considering Noni's desire for individual recognition, as opposed to collective cultural recognition. Noni and Killian tend to talk past each other and there are many instances where they ask whether the other one is listening:

KILLIAN: Luister na my!

NONI: Listen to you! Every time you open your mouth you expect me to jump. Who ever listens to **me**?

(Brink 1997: 28).

Even though Noni is now culturally recognised in the new South Africa, she still feels unrecognised. At one stage in the play Noni repeatedly says: "Listen to me! ... Listen to me!" and then "For once you're going to listen to **me**" (Brink 1997: 43). She tells a

story about a girl who had been raped by a farmer's son. The details of her story imply that she is referring to herself, but there was no way of proving that it had actually happened and she only had her own experience to remember it by. It seems Brink is again commenting on the many victims who have been left unrecognised throughout the ages. He could also be referring to how long it took for Western civilisation to recognise women as equal to men and how in some ways women still seem to be overpowered by men.

This latter point is explicitly illustrated by the issue of rape, which is a reality for a great number of South African women – for it is a daily occurrence in the country. This can be considered in terms of the task of reconstruction of the TRC. Brink is again challenging the premise of the TRC and what it attempted to achieve. He is posing the question: what justifies recognition and who deserves it more? In the desperate desire of every individual or culture to be recognised there is no one left to do the recognising. Intersubjective recognition is therefore impossible.

The only living and present human being Killian talks to is Noni. Although Noni and Killian do not recognise each other at first, Noni eventually becomes the only person who seems to recognise him as a human being:

NONI What's the matter?

KILLIAN (*Gestures to the mirror*) Ek is nie daar nie. Kyk self. Daar's niks in die spieël nie. [*I'm not there. Look. There's nothing in the mirror*]

NONI Don't be ridiculous.

KILLIAN Ek is nie meer daar nie. Sien jy? [*I'm not there anymore. Do you see?*] (*In a panic he snatches the mirror from the wall, moves downstage and shows it to the audience.*) Kyk self! [*Look!*] Ek is nie daar nie. Kan julle my sien? [*I'm not there. Can you see me?*] (*Bewildered, frightened*) Is daar **iemand**? [*Is there anyone?*]

NONI (*Goes to him, takes the mirror, comforting*) Come on, give it to me

(Brink 1997: 80).

Killian does not even recognise himself anymore. As Yar (2002: 59) says,

the formation of one's being as a human being with particular characteristics, traits, qualities and features, in short the establishment of one's self-understanding (one's 'idea-of-self' or 'subjective self-certainty') is inextricably dependent on recognition or affirmation on the parts of others.

If he is not being recognised by the people he once recognised and loved, Killian loses his “idea of self” and is left powerless and insecure. Noni is now the only one left who recognises him – which is also ironic, because Noni is a black woman. She is one of the subjects of a race he did not recognise and now she is the only one left to comfort him.

During this scene in the play Noni is helping Killian shave, and thus shaving becomes a symbol of Killian’s masculinity. By helping him shave, Noni is recognising Killian as a man again. Shaving can be seen as a metaphor for a fresh start. She is thus not recognising him for the man he once was, but the man he is now and can become. Yar (2002: 67) notes that a man “can [only] be satisfied by recognition from one whom he recognises as worthy of recognising him”. There is a tragic element to the case of Killian and Noni, for though he does not necessarily recognise Noni as one worthy of being recognised or of recognising him, she is, nevertheless, the only one who does.

At the end of the play Killian also tries to give back Vusi’s tongue after he tries to speak to the minister in another hallucination. His speech is incoherent and he seems confused and bewildered. The minister evidently does not hear him as he is not there. He says to Vusi: “Vusi. Vat dit. Dis joune. Praat. Miskien luister hulle na jou” (Brink 1997: 84). He is depicted as utterly helpless and hopeless by the end of the play. As a white Afrikaans man who was once recognised, he is ultimately left alone and is redundant. The new generation and order have taken over. The return of Vusi’s tongue can now be seen as the symbol of Killian’s “castration”, his loss of his past self.

### **2.2.2 *Abnormal Load and The Return of Elvis du Pisanie***

Paul Slabolepszy’s explorations of the white man’s loss of masculine identity and recognition take a different tack to Brink’s politically explicit work, being rooted in the lives of characters struggling to survive on the fringes of the economy. For example, unlike Killian, the character Gregory de Witt from the monologue *Abnormal Load* (1988) was never a publicly recognised figure, nor had he ever been an influential man in society. His desire for recognition is, however, no less acute than that of Killian.

He starts off his narrative with a story of how he wanted to buy a ticket for a film. He explains how there was not one film he wanted to see:

I say, what – you mean to tell me there’s no one movie with either Clint Eastwood or Jack Nicholson or Robert de Niro on the whole bladdy circuit!? She says no. I say – OK, what about Rambo? No. Schwarzenegger? No. Charles Bronson? No. Now, I’m getting really pissed off now, because this is getting ridiculous now

(Slabolepszy, 1988: 2).

At this stage in film history (mid 1980s) these actors and characters refer to popular action films of the time that all perpetuated a very stereotypical and clichéd idea of masculinity, even what one may call a form of hyper-masculinity, defined by a heightened sense of virility and chauvinism. By telling this story, Gregory wants to seem as though he identifies with these stereotypical ‘macho’ characters. It seems Slabolepszy is poking fun at the white South African male’s perception of himself by referring to male pop culture heroes of the time. This seemingly light start to the play sets the scene. Gregory wants to project a certain identity and image to the world, but the way in which the world interprets and recognises him is not necessarily as he would like.

Closer to the end of the monologue, in a drunken, desperate attempt to re-emphasise his idea of the action-figure male, Gregory reveals to the (off-stage) stranger a “newly purchased pistol” (Slabolepszy 1988: 7). The initial, seemingly innocent, fascination with the action figure male is turned on its head as the tone of the monologue becomes dark and threatening. Just before he reveals the gun, he explains that his wife is seeing another man and that he is not allowed to see his son. He then quotes (or drunkenly misquotes) lyrics from a song by Bles Bridges: “Bles. Bles says it better than anybody – ‘You gotta fight for your’ – ‘You got to fight for what’s yours’” (Slabolepszy 1988: 7).

The words are reminiscent of the clichéd sentiments an action character in a film might be expected to express: he needs to fight for what is rightfully his. After seeing the gun, the stranger leaves, obviously frightened by a drunken man irresponsibly waving a gun around. Instead of looking like one of his pop culture heroes, he looks like a deranged drunk who is about to kill his family. This is tragic, because Gregory

initially comes across as quite a warm and good-natured man merely looking for a friend to talk to.

He constantly offers the stranger a drink: “Fuck it. Let’s fix you up here ... (SHOUTING) Eddie ...!! You wanna soft-drink? Something soft ...?”

He doesn’t seem to harbour prejudice towards other cultures: “Japs. Ja, well – I s’pose if they all look the same to us, we must all look the same to them – not so?” (Slabolepszy 1988: 4).

And he loves his child: “(HE HOLDS THE WALLET OUT FRONT, REVEALING THE PHOTO OF A YOUNG KID) Howzat? My little Markie. You watch – one day, this little oke’s a Springbok .... Hey, there’s daddy’s big boy. I love this kid” (Slabolepszy 1988: 7).

Gregory’s desperate attempt at being recognised as something he is not results in a pathetic image of a very lonely, misguided man, whose perception of how he thinks he is presenting himself to the stranger has become warped. The masculine, macho ideal appears to be inaccessible to Gregory, because it is not who he really is, or who he is perceived to be. He is misguided by his own preconceived ideas of how he should be according to the patriarchal ideal. Gregory is consequently recognised for an entirely different aspect of himself than that which he desires to be recognised for.

As Gregory becomes drunk and his defences break down in the presence of the “Other”, the possibility of misrecognition becomes more apparent. The stranger initially goes along with Gregory’s seemingly meaningless stories, but as he leaves Gregory comes to a point where he experiences a sense of shame:

Orraight, go ...! You can go. You wanna go – go. You gotta go to work in the morning – fine – I understand that. Some of us should be so lucky ... but ... please bear me out here ... you ask anyone about Gregory de Witt – they tell you. They say ja, they know him. Great bloke ... I’m a nice bloke. I’m a fine upstanding citizen and I’m proud of it. I’m proud a’ my country. The truth is, I wouldn’t harm a fly and that’s my fucken’ word of honour

(Slabolepszy 1988: 8).

In this situation Gregory feels ashamed and tries to justify himself. Such shame, Honneth reminds us, comes “because the gaze of the other reminds [him] that [his]

actions are transgressive of a moral understanding about right or decent behaviour that they [he and the other] already share as part of a common structure of meanings” (Honneth 1995: 163). Gregory is struggling with society’s ideals and cannot seem to keep up with them. In all his desperate attempts to convince the stranger of the man he wants him to think he is, he achieves the opposite effect. It is in the experience of this shame that he could “become aware that ‘[he is] indeed that object that the Other is looking at and judging’ and in which ‘my freedom escapes me’” (Yar 2002: 60). He is stuck in a rut and in the end the only means to freedom seems to be through death.

The notion of intersubjective recognition is also illustrated in the structure of the monologue. Gregory is interacting with an off-stage, invisible ‘other’ by telling stories in which it seems he needs answers and affirmations. It is also explored in the misrecognition of Gregory. The stranger’s presence is a comfort to Gregory, but at the same time Gregory is made acutely aware of himself. This is a way of acquiring recognition and a sense of ‘being’ through the eyes of another. It is, however, necessary to consider how self-aware Gregory truly is. Recognition is greatly influenced by “human subjectivity” and the “struggle to attain self-consciousness” (Lash & Featherstone 2002: 5). By considering how Gregory presents himself in terms of his abilities and employment, one can consider whether Slabolepszy is questioning the notion of recognition.

Many of Slabolepszy’s characters are affected by the loss of a job, and this enhances a desire for intersubjective recognition. Gregory is one of them. An area of intersubjective recognition is being recognised by others for one’s abilities. These abilities are often affirmed and recognised through employment. During the transformation years in South African history, white – especially middle-aged – men were retrenched because of affirmative action. This made way for younger – invariably black – men to replace them. Gregory tries to create a picture of himself as a dependable and hard-working salesman who was once admired to by his colleagues. He is selling himself to the stranger:

If you ever in the market, just gimme a shout. I fix you up – no problem. They all know me down there. I click my fingers, they run – know what I mean? I may not be around anymore, but Gregory de Witt still carries some clout

(Slabolepszy 1988: 4).

It seems he needs to convince both himself and the stranger that he had not lost his job because of a lack of ability. He comments on how quickly he could get a job done: "I could crack Nelspruit in under three hours. 'Strue's the Living God" (Slabolepszy 1988: 3). He also comments on how he "headed the sales force" and "supplied all the centres" (Slabolepszy 1988: 3). He feels he must prove himself to the stranger. This is peculiar, because the stranger is merely a stranger and is not necessarily someone who could give Gregory a job. Gregory just needs the affirmation.

In boasting about his expertise in the sales field he tries to create a picture of success. This picture, however, starts to crumble as the monologue progresses. After trying to impress the stranger, Gregory subtly tries to suggest that the two of them work together: "Because you never know. If the two of us ever worked together one day – who knows? Hypothetical" (Slabolepszy 1988: 5). He eventually gets so inebriated that he literally begs the man to give him a job:

I guarantee you won't be disappointed. In fact, it would be the best bladdy move you made all year ...! (*Quickly*) Hey, man – where you going? No, come on, man – look at this – (*Indicating the table*). We haven't made a dent yet. Nobody leaves till this is all finish here

(Slabolepszy 1988: 5).

Gregory is thrown into crisis as his self-determination and self-respect start to deteriorate. The fact that he repeatedly tells the stranger with such bravado about his capabilities as salesman illustrates a wounded masculine identity (Coetzee 1988: 3). Gregory desperately boasts, thinking that this will convince the stranger that he is a successful businessman. Throughout the monologue, however, one suspects that this is merely talk. This is confirmed when he reveals that he is unemployed. Gregory struggles to hide this desperation and it becomes increasingly more difficult as he gets drunker. Slabolepszy is again commenting on how a character such as Gregory can be completely unaware of how he is presenting himself to the world. Gregory still wants to be recognised in terms of the stereotypical perception he has of masculinity, but his situation (a failed marriage and career) indicates otherwise. This influences his self-awareness in that he initially does not want to reveal his situation to the stranger, but it inevitably comes out. Through a character such as Gregory, Slabolepszy is observing that recognition is a contentious notion, because one does

not truly know how others perceive or interpret one. Intersubjective recognition thus seems impossible.

Eddie in Slabolepszy's *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie* (1994) is another example of failed intersubjective recognition.

He has been retrenched from his job because his boss tells him that they are "looking for youngsters" (Slabolepszy 1994: 305). This is possibly the result of post-apartheid affirmative action. He is confronted with the fact that he is not recognised as an able-bodied young man anymore. He desperately tries to convince his boss otherwise: "No-no, hey – that's fine, that's okay, that's cool – I'm a youngster. I'm a youngster at heart ...! See? Look! Two arms. Two legs. I gotta brain" (Slabolepszy 1994: 308).

The repetition and rhythm in this quotation create a feeling of desperation, hidden under the guise of keenness. He initially only says "I'm a youngster" and then quickly realises that his boss will clearly see he is not by following up with: "I'm a youngster at heart." He suggests that while he might not look young, his body is still able to do the work, and in this way, by adding "I gotta brain", he tries to convince his boss (and possibly himself) of his worth. Despite this desperate plea, his boss smiles at him and still says: "Thanks, but No Thanks" (Slabolepszy 1994: 308). He has clearly become superfluous in the new system.

In *Abnormal Load*, Gregory follows up his "bragging" to the stranger in the bar with stories about his wife and son, indicating that he has lost his sense of virility (Campbell 1988: 92). Like Killian, Gregory emphasises his role as patriarch and stresses that he is entitled to get it back. He keeps emphasising: "I'm their father and they must know this. I mean – you must listen to your father, not so?" (Slabolepszy 1988: 7). An additional source of anger is the fact that his wife had left him for another man. He exemplifies his feelings about this by quoting a Wayne Fontana song:

'The purpose of a man is to love a woman, and the purpose of a woman is to love her man ...' Not a man or the man, but her man. 'The purpose of a woman is to love her man ...!' That's what he sang. I sung it myself. I still sing it

(Slabolepszy 1988: 7).

The patriarchal identity he desires for himself has clearly fallen apart, and it is interesting to note in this context that he displays very stereotypical cultural and social ideas about being a successful and respected man, one in which he emphasises that a woman needs to love “her” man and not that a man needs to love “his” woman, which suggests a very male-oriented perspective. He needs to be recognised as a loved and respected husband and father by his wife and children, yet his wife left him for another man and his children do not seem to listen to him anymore, which presents a picture of a man who has been metaphorically ‘castrated’, for he has lost his role as the patriarch and has become redundant. He is not in control anymore – if, of course, he ever was.

By the end of the monologue Gregory does not seem to care about recognition or proving himself to anyone anymore. This is revealed when he clumsily begs the man for a job. This might be a symptom of being drunk, or one can speculate that he has given up even before the conversation with the stranger started. Whatever it is, at the end of the monologue Gregory commits suicide. He is left alienated, rejected and frustrated, and this has “left him feeling as if he no longer has a choice” (Coetzee 1988: 14). This takes the theme of loss of masculinity to another level. He, like Killian, does not recognise himself anymore, so much so that he has given up on life altogether.

By contrast, in *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie* Slabolepszy creates a modicum of hope, with Eddie’s monologue seen as a cathartic process in which *he himself* recognises and acknowledges his own worth once again:

*All is quiet. It is as if a huge load has been lifted off his shoulders. For a while, absolutely nothing happens. As he walks beneath the lamppost, looking up into the light, it is as if he is walking on air.... He takes the suicide note out of his pocket and slowly rips it to shreds. The pieces flutter to the ground ... EDDIE stands centre stage, looking out and smiling* (Slabolepszy 1994: 333).

*Abnormal Load* was written in 1988 and *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie* in 1994.

Where the former seems to predict a dire and hopeless future, the latter depicts hope, in its way reflecting the changing political atmosphere in South Africa and the perception of the white male during this time. As change had become imminent, the insecure future of the white man seemed doomed. But because change happened

(the first democratic elections in 1994 explicitly reflected this), and peacefully so, Slabolepszy sees hope.

Gregory and Eddie are, like Killian, examples of the white man's anxiety and paranoia about what the future holds in a period of great social, cultural, political and economic change. The metaphor of travel in *Abnormal Load* also reinforces this. The white man is forced to move forward and away from the recognisable towards the unknown: "Slabolepszy catches [his white male characters] balanced on sharp-edged hinges in their lives, between a vanishing reality and one that is vaguely threatening, though by no means apparent" (Greig 1994: xiii). Noni recognises Killian as a new man, but instead of feeling confident and empowered, he feels unsure and hopeless. The unknown future cripples them. The representation of these men illustrates the overwhelming vulnerability of the white man and his struggle to accept this.

### **2.2.3 Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny**

In Greig Coetzee's one-man show *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny* (2004), Johnny's situation is different from that of Greg or Eddie, because he illustrates the experience of an ex-soldier who fought during the border war in South-West Africa and Angola, (1966–89). An extensive amount of so-called border war literature came out of the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa. Many theatre texts were also inspired by this conflict, among them plays like Deon Opperman's *Môre Is 'n Lang Dag* (1983), Anthony Akerman's *Somewhere on the Border* (1983) and Coetzee's play *White Men with Weapons* (1996). *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny* is similarly inspired by Coetzee's own experiences of the army, the war and its aftermath. The army and the war during those years had an immense influence on the psyche of many white male South Africans. As Coetzee (2009) describes him, Johnny is a representation of those ex-soldiers who are "forever stuck in limbo between the old and new South Africa" (Coetzee, 2009: p. 2).

Feinstein (2011: 7) suggests that many soldiers who return from war tend to have to redefine their identities in society and everything seems to be tainted by the horrific experiences they underwent during their time in the army, and in the play we see how Johnny also delves into his personal history in an attempt to make sense of his

life now. He does this in order to reconstruct his individual identity, which had been damaged by army life.

In the play Johnny recounts his early days as a young man in the army and explains how no one had a choice in the matter of joining up. Individual choice was not an option, particularly not once you were in the army, where it was not recognised. Everyone simply had to do what they were told, which is contrary to human nature, for as Honneth suggests, “everyone needs their distinctiveness recognised in order to develop self-esteem, which (along with self-confidence and self-respect) is an essential ingredient of an undistorted identity” (quoted in Fraser 1995: 32). From Johnny’s narrative it soon becomes clear that his “distinctiveness” was not at all recognised in the army.

In one scene he relates how he told the Major that he would like to settle down, find a job and have a family (all the stereotypical, simple desires of any so-called ordinary human being), whereupon the Major replies: “Boskak, you poephol. You’ve got two chances: niks nie en fokol”, following it up later by “you gotta kill or be killed” (Coetzee, 2009: p.11). In other words, a soldier is part of a unit in the army and this creates a group mentality: “Boskak, with me you don’t fuck, don’t fuck with me, this is the infanterie ... you either with us or against us. Are you with us or against us?” (Coetzee, 2009: p.12).

It is clear that by painting a very grim picture of what lies ahead of him, the Major has set out to destroy Johnny’s individual self-esteem, confidence and any hope of one day living the life he wants, thus seeking to turn him into one of the like-minded troop of soldiers whose only loyalty is the army.

In this context it is ironic that Johnny’s personal desires were originally formed by the very same society that is controlling his destiny, forcing him to go to war, which in a very real sense is perhaps an illustration of Yar’s almost poetical statement:

I am possessed by the Other .... By virtue of consciousness the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes ‘there to be’ a being which is my being (Yar 2002: 60).

However, despite the attempts to turn him into a fighting machine with no fear, the reality of war is different for Johnny, who at one point says “my guts are all runny, ek probeer, maar ek kan nie and I’m feeling funny” (Coetzee, 2009: p.12). This

revelation echoes the anxieties and insecurities of many other soldiers over the years, contrasting agonisingly with the clichéd idea of how fearless and confident men in battle should be. And even more, it affects his life as a whole from then on. The life he wanted was not recognised and he is left with fear, anger, and a warped sense of himself and his identity. He seems to have had a specific idea of how and for what he would have liked to be recognised – as a husband, a father and a contributing member of society. But after his identity becomes distorted by the experience of war, the life he leads is somewhat different, based on the skills and attitudes he acquired during the army years.

As McLaughlin (2012: 30) points out, an individual's stance on morals and ethics is "inseparable from [his/her] specific socio-cultural conditions, social contracts and interaction". Personal morals and ethics are, to a large extent, regulated by the specific society the individual finds him-/herself in. Given that he/she is recognised as normal and mentally healthy within the context of a specific society/community, it can be said that a person's identity and the way in which he/she relates to other people and his/her surroundings are influenced by the moral perspectives of that community. For the argument in this chapter, this becomes particularly important, because "the various meanings given to 'recognition' are in each case tied to a specific moral perspective" (Honneth 2002: 46).

In the war Johnny was evidently surrounded by violence and death, in which he - and other conscripts - perpetuated this destructive environment. But this was the moral and ethical stance of the army, hence it was acceptable. However, the moral stance during war was far removed from the moral and ethical position of the world 'outside', the world he had left behind. As a result, he could no longer recognise his own moral stance: "I was totally fucked in the ways they harked me, till my brain was all sucked in. I became a weapon of mass destruction" (Coetzee, 2009: p.12).

On his return he thus began leading a life of chaos and destruction, with no sense of purpose or goal, with an identity that seemed askew and distorted. Living by his own laws, one day at a time, he becomes a homeless wanderer, constantly moving and looking for his next fix. This is either in the form of a prostitute, alcohol or "dope" (p. 26). There is no apparent plan for the future and he resorts to violence when he is threatened – and eventually kills a man at the end of the play.

The assumption that his identity and the recognition thereof have become distorted is further illustrated in Johnny's meeting with Eve. The dreams of settling down with a wife are reiterated, only the picture has somewhat changed. And Coetzee reinforces this fantasy element strongly by his choice of verbal medium: The play is written in rhyming couplets and this adds a mock heroic tone to the text – a quasi-romantic vision which is especially evident in his meeting and subsequent relationship with Eve.

Eve is described as being very much like Johnny himself. Her hair is dyed in two tones with her roots starting to show; she has chewed off blue-green painted nails and scars on her knees. Johnny also meets her in a bar, where she is busying flirting with the customers. She is a woman of the streets. What we can derive from this is that she is probably homeless, has on occasion accepted money for sex and frequently finds herself in dangerous situations (she for instance steals a man's car and he comes after her). Johnny, however, sees her as she walks through the door of the bar and considers her to be "the one" (Coetzee, 2009: p.17). He describes the meeting like a fairy tale: "When she walks through the door, I know she's the one" and is swept away by this fantasy (Coetzee, 2009: p.17). He says: "a chick like Eve is once in a lifetime, put away the knife time" (p. 23). He seems to be considering her as the wife he had wanted to have before his life had been turned upside down by war. The feelings he had for her might have reminded him of the kind of social identity he had previously wanted. His meeting with Eve, however, can be recognised as a distorted view of that identity. He does not want to settle down with her and find a so-called respectable job as before. Instead, he wants them to live this wild life together: "Should Johnny get a job working for a slob? Should Eve get a purse? Nothing could be worse. A job and a purse is (*sic*) worse than a hearse. Put down some roots? Hang up the boots? No chance" (Coetzee, 2009: p.51). This is sharply in contrast with the predictable and recognisable identity he wanted before. It seems he is now choosing the opposite of what society stereotypically expects of him. He does not care how he is recognised anymore. The only person he wants recognition from is Eve: "She makes me ten foot tall, she makes the universe small. Apart from Eve, my China, there's sweet fokol" (Coetzee, 2009: p.20). This echoes Killian's and Gregory's desire to be recognised as the men they once were.

Johnny's return from war and the way in which his friends now look at him could also lead to misrecognition. "You scheme its home-time but really it's alone time. You spot your old Chinas when you waai back possie but you check in their eyes they all reckon you bossies" (Coetzee, 2009: p.13). "Bossies" (literally translated to "little bushes") was a term used referring to what is now known as *post-traumatic stress syndrome* many soldiers experienced on coming back from the border war – or what was sometimes referred to as the "bush war". This disorder had not yet been identified as a psychiatric condition at the time the soldiers came back from the border war (Blake 2010: 222). The fact that he defines "home-time" as "alone-time" indicates that his friends avoided him, an attitude which alienates Johnny from society and his place in it. The "internalising [of this] hostile attitude as a consequence of non-recognition [or misrecognition] leads to low self-esteem and a damaged identity" (McLaughlin 2012: 39). Coming home from war is known to be a very difficult process. The soldiers often feel as if they do not quite fit into society anymore, feeling alien in the familiar world, "ontuis in die bekende" as Feinstein (2011: 7) phrases it. The fact that Johnny's friends avoid him effectively negates intersubjective recognition. Therefore if Johnny is not recognised by anyone, he cannot recognise his own individual identity, or his sense of self as before.

The different characters I have discussed thus far are so desperately holding on to recognisable social and cultural identities that they fail to recognise themselves as individuals. The intersubjective recognition (or lack thereof) that is illustrated in their interaction with others shows how they have lost their sense of self. Although the characters are all different according to their social background and experiences, there are many correlations in their experiences as white men in a changing South African society.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

By looking at the characters in the different plays I have discussed it is apparent that a desire for recognition is a timeless constant, but is influenced by a specific socio-historical context. The fact that the characters are white men at a time of massive transformation in South Africa also influences both their desire for recognition and their achievement of such recognition. It seems to be evident that "the politics of recognition, in interaction with the wider political and social change, has become

heavily focused on the fragility of self, inherent vulnerability and susceptibility to psychological and physical harm” (McLaughlin 2012: 129). The various representations of the white male figure illustrate the fragility and vulnerability in the identity of white men at the time. The transition of recognition from the overtly public to the personal realm illustrates that South Africans’ individual identity was in flux at the time.

## Chapter 3: Dangerous insecurity

### 3.1 Introduction

#### 3.1.1 *Ressentiment*

As we have seen in the plays discussed thus far, many white males experienced a sense of groundlessness and powerlessness – what can be seen as an apparent loss of identity as white South Africans – during the transformation years in South Africa. And many still feel that way. In Chapter 2 we looked at the way in which the characters grapple with identity issues related to their masculinity, manifesting reactions seemingly rooted in self-esteem issues and vulnerabilities affected by the way in which they *think* (other) people perceive them. They are expressing a strong desire for recognition *in the eyes of others* as being contributing members of society as well as father figures.

A predominant feature of this desire for *recognition* is thus what I have referred to as *intersubjective recognition*, a factor I will be exploring further in this chapter by looking at the way the white male characters in selected plays *react* to the way the “Other” makes *them* feel, and how this interaction – what Taylor (2004: 135) refers to as the intersubjective “give-and-take” between subjects – can culminate in confrontation. Bauman expands on this idea, saying that “(c)oexistence [or intersubjective interaction] comes in many shapes and colours”, as can be seen in the “confrontation and strife” between individuals, for “(c)onflict is the birth-act of coexistence ... conflict means engagement” (Bauman 2002: 137).

I shall investigate some examples of such potentially confrontational intersubjective interaction between characters in four plays by Paul Slabolepszy and a play by Greig Coetzee. These responses to the South African context of the transition years can lead to feelings of entrapment and *ressentiment* (see below), a situation that can at times become dangerous, not only posing a threat to the “Other”, but also to the subject himself.

The potentially threatening reactions by the white male characters are rooted in many of their latent areas of insecurity, as discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, as has been mentioned in the Chapter 1, masculinity has often in the past been associated with domination and violence. The male characters in virtually all the

plays discussed in this chapter at times display a clear tendency towards destructive and aggressive behaviour, which is made manifest in their dialogue and actions. What one finds expressed are feelings of anger, hurt and powerlessness, extreme low self-esteem, and “damaged feelings of personal value” and “injured ‘honour’” (Scheler 1961: 49).

The plays give one some indication of their potential reactions to such feelings. As Robert Greig (1994: xiii) explains it in his introduction to a collection of plays by Paul Slabolepszy, such characters are cornered and caught on “sharp hinges in their lives, between a vanishing reality and one that is vaguely threatening”, and thus display an anxiety and uneasiness about their circumstances and what the future holds for them. This uneasiness and anxiety may lead to feelings of hopelessness, a point where their natural defensive strategies for escaping from stressful or overwhelming situations are blocked by circumstances or their own sense of defeat. This may thus result in a sense of entrapment, a feeling that is particularly associated with “life events or circumstances that are particularly chronic and ongoing” (Taylor et al. 2011: 393). Entrapment clearly does not merely refer to being physically trapped, but “also involves psychological processes, relating to an individual’s subjective perception of his or her circumstances as being uncontrollable, unremitting, and inescapable” (Taylor et al. 2011: 393). As will be seen from the discussion, this sense of entrapment is particularly acute in the characters Vince and Forsie in Slabolepszy’s *Saturday Night at the Palace* and Eddie in his *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie*.

Another concept relevant to the question of entrapment and the discussion to follow is *ressentiment*, a term widely used in psychology and existentialist philosophy. It was first introduced by Søren Kierkegaard and then later independently expanded on by Friedrich Nietzsche as key to his ideas regarding the ‘master-slave’ question (Wikipedia: Ressentiment). The term basically refers to a sense of hostility felt towards the perceived source of one’s frustrations, with the resultant sense of weakness and inferiority causing the individual to create a moral system that justifies this sense of hostility and blame, and the ego to create an enemy that allows it to protect “itself from culpability” (Wikipedia: Ressentiment).

Max Scheler (1961: 45–46), one of the prominent writers on *ressentiment*, sees it as associated with the way in which the individual experiences his surroundings and other individuals, and he regards the notion as “a self-poisoning of the mind”. Brudholm (2008: 173–74) see it as associated with “an irrational or disturbed understanding of the social reality” and notes that it is “characterized by an excessive self-concern” and “spiteful and malicious envy” of others, for the individual finds himself in a situation where he believes that someone has committed a moral wrong against him. The repression of his initial reaction to the wrong leads to general negativism, and when this repression is complete it results in what Scheler (1961: 70) describes as a “sudden, violent, seemingly unsystematic and unfounded rejection of things, situations, or natural objects”. Frequently, the original cause of the hatred has been lost and the feeling merely results in general negative, envious, vengeful and jealous behaviour, i.e. the individual demonstrates *ressentiment*. In this chapter we will be looking at characters in the work of Slabolepszy and Coetzee that display the features of *ressentiment*. They experience feelings of anger, aggression and depression, but do not know who or what to blame. They tend to blame people and society for the areas in their lives that are falling apart, and particularly apt examples from Slabolepszy’s work are Vince in *Saturday Night at the Palace* and Greg in *Abnormal Load*, who both share a seemingly skewed understanding of the social realities of their lives and therefore experience strong feelings of anger, aggression and depression, but do not know who or what to blame. The result is that they tend to resort to *ressentiment*. In this regard they are clearly intended to be representative of the white South African male during the transformation years, providing a means to explore a collective social anger and *ressentiment* in a situation where the actual source of their anger is unseen and unrecognised.

## **3.2. The plays**

### **3.2.1 Dangerously trapped: *Saturday Night at the Palace***

Many of the characters in Slabolepszy’s plays are characterised by a sense of entrapment, which they often try to counter by harbouring false dreams of escape.

For example, the entire setting of *Saturday Night at the Palace* (1985) can be seen as a metaphor for entrapment. It is night time and the audience only sees the roadhouse on stage. The only three characters are two white men and one black

man: Vince, Forsie and September, respectively. A roadhouse is a tavern, inn, or club on a country road. It is isolated from any other buildings or places where other people might be. Vince also reiterates this: "There's no boss down the road! There's no house for miles around here, man!" (Slabolepszy1985: 47). The roadhouse is like an island in the dark abyss of time and space. Besides the fact that the roadhouse becomes a metaphor for the changing country in the 1980s, it is also a metaphor for the entrapment – and subsequent *ressentiment* - of the white male. He has nowhere else to go and his immediate surroundings are unknown and dark. This can be compared to his future, which is uncertain; to quote Greig once more (1994: xii): "Slabolepszy catches them on sharp-edged hinges in their lives, between a vanishing reality and one that is vaguely threatening, though by no means apparent." It seems that in this claustrophobic setting the white man becomes like a caged animal, seething, desperate and ready to attack.

Vince is an abrasive, unemployed and ultimately ineffectual white man who appears to be in total denial about the realities of his economic and social life: he has been kicked out of the soccer club, he has no job, he is behind in his rent, and so on, yet he clings to his escapist dreams of becoming a soccer star, despite the fact that he only plays for his local club and not professionally. Ignoring this, he keeps on waiting for "one good break" through which he believes he will be sky-rocketed to fame and fortune. He sees himself being spotted by American scouts and leaving South Africa to play for the Minnesota Kicks or Fort Lauderdale Strikers:

One day it's going to happen. I know it. I can feel it right here. Ou Joe Frickleton's going to come along from the Highlands holding out this contract. 'Sign along the dotted line, sonny boy. You on the Mean Machine!'

(Slabolepszy1985: p. 54).

In fact, throughout the play there are constant references to the fantasy of escaping to another better and more exciting place. Earlier on in the play there is a conversation between Vince and Forsie where Vince fantasises about going to America:

FORSIE: Would you ever go?

VINCE: To the moon?

FORSIE: No man, overseas.

VINCE: What d'you think? I wouldn't mind America.

...

FORSIE: But you got to go. That's where you get in. By the Statue of Liberty.

VINCE: I'd go check where they buried Elvis.

FORSIE: Hollywood.

VINCE: Memphis.

FORSIE: Huh?

VINCE (*irritated*): Memphis where Elvis is buried, man.

FORSIE: No, I was just saying Hollywood. That's where I would go. I go say hello to Clint Eastwood.

VINCE: Forget it.

FORSIE: Why?

VINCE: You scheme it's so easy?

FORSIE: That's where he lives.

VINCE: You can't just walk up to him.

FORSIE: Who said?

(Slabolepszy1985: p. 31).

Their daydreams about Elvis and meeting Clint Eastwood are clear indications of the emptiness of their hopes. The naïve Forsie seems almost endearing in his pathetic belief that anything is possible and that he could actually meet Clint Eastwood. This fantasy-driven state of mind is emphasised later when Forsie argues that Eastwood would definitely know where Johannesburg is and says: "Are you mad! He knows Jo'burg. Everybody knows Jo'burg. It's the Golden City" (Slabolepszy1985: p. 32). However, the daydreaming and the desire to escape are not always so benign, for they can become desperate at times, and lead on to more aggressive responses to particular situations. As Greig (1994: xiii) puts it: "The white characters [in Slabolepszy's plays] tend to be in cul-de-sacs and, cornered, tend to attack each other ... or self-destruct." This ignorance, coupled with these unrealistic dreams, contributes to a sense of entrapment and immobility that eventually leads to violence – initially towards each other, and finally finding its outlet in violent behaviour towards the other person in the play.

Vince and Forsie seem to be envious of the world "out there". This is quite literally illustrated in their conversation about the moon:

VINCE: To think okes have been there already. I can't look at the moon any more without thinking ous have been walking around up there. Driving tractors. Hitting golf balls.

FORSIE [*sceptical*]: Onna moon?

...

VINCE: Yassas, Forsie. People have been whizzing around up there the last twenty years. Okes like you and me, we haven't even been overseas

(Slabolepszy1985: pp. 30–31).

They yearn to be part of another world, but this makes them vulnerable to a sense of inferiority. For instance, when Forsie tires of Vince's delusions and says: "They dropped you, man. You not even playing on Saturday" (Slabolepszy1985: p. 52), it sets up a confrontation between the two friends. Vince initially acts as though he has not heard him and keeps day dreaming about his soccer career. It is only when Forsie points out that Vince has also been kicked out of the house that they have been renting together that his sense of inferiority finally kicks in and ultimately drives him to aggressive action. He has reached the end of his tether. Vince's *ressentiment* towards Forsie has clearly a great deal to do with issues of masculinity. Forsie has a job (which Vince also ridicules) and he is not being kicked out of the house. He is essentially socially and economically superior to Vince. This causes Vince to want to prove his masculinity in a number of clichéd ways notably physical violence.

Vince is clearly hypersensitive about any critique of himself and of his current financial position, and he even displays some sense of shame for the criminal acts he has committed in the past. When Forsie goes on to warn him not try and steal the roadhouse's daily takings, Vince reacts erratically and aggressively:

FORSIE: Don't do it Vince. One more time – and it's twelve months – minimum!

VINCE [*spins around angrily. He grabs Forsie by the lapels*]: Hey – you shut up about that!!

FORSIE: Remember what they said to you last time –

VINCE: I said shut up! I told you not to talk about that. Ever!

FORSIE: I'm just trying to tell you what the magistrate –

VINCE [*exploding*]: I said shut up! [*Doing his best to make light of it*] I was only joking. You think I need to bust this joint? Bit of a jol, man. I don't need to hit this place. [*He watches Forsie carefully; then turns and sits on the Coke box*] I can get a graft any day of the week.

*There is a silence. Forsie decides he has had enough*

(Slabolepszy1985: p. 48).

Vince does not want to be reminded of the past and what he has done, factors that have contributed to his low self-esteem. As Beck (1999: 52) notes, “many people who ‘fly off the handle’ easily or have a ‘short fuse’ actually have a shaky self-esteem” (Beck 1999: 52). Hence Vince’s response is instantaneous:

VINCE: Four – five nights a week. Collar and tie. Any time I want it – I got it –

FORSIE: Ja, I know –

VINCE: What do you mean ‘Ja I know’? You scheme I’m shooting shit? No, come on, tell me. I can see it in your face. Tell me.

*Forsie puts the bike back on its stand and turns to face Vince.*

FORSIE: [*firmly*]: How many times haven’t we been through this before, Vince? You must face up to things, man. Get yourself a job

(Slabolepszy1985: p. 49).

Vince’s past in terms of his job and memories of the crimes he has committed have contributed to his low self-esteem, making him almost overly sensitive about whether Forsie believes his (more than likely false) claims of being offered a job or not. Forsie’s expression of doubt (“How many times haven’t we been through this before, Vince?”) points to a perpetual cycle of rejection, which Vince cannot seem to escape. He has lost confidence in himself and this seems to inhibit him in moving forward and out of his dire situation: And, as Honneth (2002: 50) says, “without the assumption of a certain measure of self-confidence ... and of a belief in one’s ability, it is impossible to imagine a successful process of self-realization, meaning here the unforced pursuit of freely chosen aims in life”. Vince, inhibited by his past failures, low self-esteem and his own perceptions of his current reality, cannot “freely” choose to get a job or set any realistic goals for himself beyond his unrealistic fantasies of becoming a soccer star. He is thus trapped in this negative perception of himself and his reality – a situation that usually conspires to trigger a strong emotional response of anger and anxiety in people, as Beck (1999: 50) has pointed out.

Furthermore, he refuses to admit that his current situation is largely because of his own doing. This is characteristic of *ressentiment*. He refuses to admit that he is too old to play soccer, he is being kicked out of the house because of his own doing and

he does not want to be reminded of his criminal past. *Ressentiment* causes him to be trapped in a cycle which prevents him from moving forward.

Vince, in a desperate attempt to reassert himself, ultimately turns his aggression on the one person who seems to be in control and have a steady job: September, the black manager of the diner. This is in line with Nietzsche's argument that "those suffering implied inferiority 'externalize[d]' their pain in the form of anger at the successful: *ressentiment*" (Leach & Spears 2008: 1385). Ultimately, feeling "cornered" by this feeling of inferiority, he retaliates by trashing the roadhouse, threatening September and trying to steal money:

"Huh? Don't push your luck, china. Come. I'm not going to ask you again. Where you hiding the takings, man?! Talk to me, chief. Don't make me do it ...  
*Suddenly Vince lashes out with the knobkierie, smashing one of the roadhouse windows*

(Slabolepszy1985: p. 66).

Of course, in the late apartheid setting of the play Vince's feelings of inferiority are exacerbated by the fact that it is specifically the *black* waiter, who he would feel is socially inferior to him, who is the economically more successful person in this situation – a point made by the playwright by Vince's automatic although implied assumption that September must be skimming money, and later in the scene where Vince goes through September's things, commenting on and taunting him with the contents: "Jeez – forty-five rand! Not much of a holiday bonus, hey chief? ... Savings book?! Good boy. Look to the future" (Slabolepszy1985: p. 68). The pain of being confronted by his own inferiority thus leads Vince directly to externalised anger or *ressentiment*. This *ressentiment* is clearly directed at issues regarding Vince's whiteness in the changing times. September, representative of the black man in the changing South Africa, is moving up in the world. He is not only a waiter, but has in fact been promoted to manager of the diner. Vince's *ressentiment* towards him, even though he is most likely not consciously aware of it, is shaped by this fact. He has a subconscious panic of being left behind (this is also applicable to his *ressentiment* towards Forsie). Vince becomes symbolic of the aggressive panic and uncertainty of the white male in a changing South Africa.

Vince's ultimate response has not necessarily only been sparked by his envy of September, for *ressentiment* is not merely a man raging against something or

someone external that makes him feel inferior, but also – possibly more profoundly – against “the very character of (his) existence ... [and the] suffering which existence generates” (Lamb 2013: 132).

In the play Slabolepszy adds an agonisingly ironic twist to Vince’s violent form of *ressentiment*, for while the gentler Forsie is constantly trying to get Vince to calm down and leave the waiter alone, he accidentally, without entirely knowing what he is doing, shoves a screwdriver into Vince’s chest, killing him. In his own form of bizarre response, he runs away and leaves the innocent September tied to the motor bike, the obvious candidate to be arrested as the murderer.

Clearly Vince, immobilised by *ressentiment*, had paved the way to his own demise with false dreams, irrational choices and violent reactions. Yet, although his aggressive and desperate attempt to escape his reality backfired, one could also say that his death finally sets him free from the suffering caused by his seemingly inconsequential existence – while markedly altering and complicating the future lives of Forsie and September.

### **3.2.2 Dangerously trapped: *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie***

Eddie in *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie* (1992) is another example of a Slabolepszy character who is entrapped by the “limitations of [his] dreams” (Greig 1994: xiii). Eddie has had a child-like obsession with Elvis Presley since he was a young boy, and believes Elvis still exists and communicates with him.

In one of his stories he recounts the evening his entire family (except him) had been murdered by his father. His father had fought in the Second World War and had come home with serious post-traumatic stress disorder: “It’s only later we realised something had happened to him out there in the desert ... Dad’s nightmares and freak-outs were getting worse and worse” (Slabolepszy 1994: 316–17). On the day of the killing Eddie hears Elvis was apparently spotted at the Carlton bioscope singing “One Night” as he was walking. Eddie believes Elvis was calling him because of the specific song he was singing. He asks the lady who had presumably seen him:

'He was singing a song, wasn't he?' She stops sweeping. 'He was singing 'One Night'? 'One Night With You? That's all I'm dreaming of ... call my name, I'll be there ...' She looks up at me... and I know it. He's calling me. He's gotta be calling me ...!!

(Slabolepszy 1994: 332).

That night he sneaks out of his home and goes looking for Elvis. He waits until one o'clock in the morning, does not find him and heads back home, only to find his entire family dead. The fact that Eddie was the only one who was spared that night haunts him. He had not done anything particularly impressive in his life. He is a retrenched under-floor heating installer who fantasises about Elvis and another life: "Why didn't you call Nigel ...!? Nigel coulda' sold underfloor heating ...! Nigel coulda' done something with his life...! Why me, man – why me ...!?" (Slabolepszy 1994: 332). He has an immense feeling of guilt about the fact that he was the only one who did not get killed (or who got "called", as he says). He seems to resent the fact that he survived. He creates an existential object in the form of Elvis. Eddie reveals *ressentiment* towards his entire existence in finding comfort by holding onto the idea of a universal object. Elvis is an applicable example of a universal object, because he is, according to Elahi (1992: 23), "a common denominator to so many people".

Van Deventer (2000: 125) remarks: "one is able to *identify* with Eddie's pain, his child-like adulation of Elvis, his sincere belief that it is Elvis himself who has interfered in his life, and his almost petulant insistence that the 'King' owes him an explanation." He feels a moral wrong has been committed in the interference in his life.

Slabolepszy uses Elvis as symbol of Eddie's fate, since the singer seems to be in control of it: he had been "called" the night his family had died and again "called" by an Elvis song the night he tries to kill himself. Scheler (1961: 50) comments that *ressentiment* is "directed against lasting situations which are felt to be 'injurious' but beyond one's control – in other words the more the injury is experienced as a destiny". This can manifest in a desire for revenge where "the very fact and quality of [the person's] existence calls for" it (Scheler 1961: 50).

His feelings of guilt confine and consume him and his eventual reaction is drastic: "Eddie, like other Slabolepszy characters, is trapped, and like them, has also expressed his sense of entrapment with aggression and fantasies of violence" (Greig

1994: xvii). Eddie's reaction and desire for revenge is not as outwardly violent as Vince's, who visibly causes destruction around him. Early in the monologue Eddie reveals that he had attempted to kill himself hours before. This illustrates that Eddie's destructiveness had instead turned "inwards and suicidal", as opposed to "outwards to murder" like his father (as well as Forsie, eventually) (Greig 1994: xiii). His suicide attempt could be seen as a kind of existential revenge in which he takes control of his life rather than a supposed external "force". Although his fantasy about Elvis had in fact saved his life, the memory and guilt connected to this fantasy had tainted the rest of his life. He never recovered from that fateful night and the monologue reveals that he could never truly move on.

### **3.2.3 Angrily powerless: *Abnormal Load***

The violent and aggressive actions and reactions of the characters such as Vince can be attributed to a sense of entrapment caused by their social and economic circumstances, and the inevitable underlying feelings of frustration and anger this generates. However, this anger can be hugely intensified by the gaze of the "Other", i.e. by the feeling of pain and hurtfulness experienced when their humiliation is perceived by outsiders, leading to a feeling of powerlessness. Like the desire for recognition, the "Other" thus makes them feel inferior and very aware of their own faults and this culminates in to anger and reactive behaviour (Beck 1999: 58).

Slabolepszy's character Greg in *Abnormal Load* is a case in point. Greg's wife has left him for another man and refuses to let him see his children. He uses belligerent language when referring to his wife: "Bitch won't let me see him, can you believe that? Bitch locks me out of my bladdy house" (Slabolepszy 1988: 6). It is evident in his speech that the mere fact that she tells him whether or not he is allowed to see his children ignites his feeling of anger. This makes him feel that she is in control of a part of his life, a feeling intensified by the fact that there is another man in his house: "You know, I hear along the grapevine she's been seeing some bloke. She's been letting him into the house. My house. My fridge. My lounge. My ... My Black and Decker bladdy Power Drill ...!" (Slabolepszy 1988: 6).

Greg is very adamant that his wife and her new man are taking what is rightfully his and that he is the one being wronged in this situation, which makes him feel angry yet powerless. Greg does not reveal *why* his wife has kicked him out or why she

does not want him to see his children, but it is evident he sees the situation as unjustified, and according to Beck (1999: 42), this is enough, for “whether or not we become angry depends on whether we judge that we have been wronged or victimised: we are likely to become angry if we believe the other person was unjustified”.

In a drunken stupor, Greg misquotes a song by Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders to illustrate his opinion: “The purpose of a woman is to love her man ...’ Not a man or *the* man, but *her* man”, adding later: “I mean – you must listen to your father, not so? A wife must listen to her husband, not so?” (Slabolepszy 1988: 7). To him the natural order of things has been disturbed: the man must be the centre of the household and in control.

As we have seen, this shifting of the blame is of course a characteristic of someone in the grips of *ressentiment*. As Brudholm (2008: 173) points out, such a person feels a “moral wrong has been committed” and what is at “stake are a cluster of deeply ethical concerns about dignity, moral acknowledgment and repair”. He does not feel that his viewpoint is being acknowledged, which makes him feel powerless, and this in turn ignites an urge for revenge. And in a violent man, this can be particularly dangerous, as Beck (1999: 125) states: “The offender’s sense of personal vulnerability is reflected in a hypersensitivity to specific kinds of social confrontations, such as domination or disparagement ... the violent offender sees himself as the victim and the others as victimizers.”

Greg, now in a desperate state of vulnerability and confronted by what he considers to be a totally unreasonable situation, retaliates by forming a dangerous plan of action to set things straight. He insinuates that he has plans to kill his family:

This time she has pushed her luck far enough because I phoned her tonight. Did I tell you that? You know what I said to her – to my own bladdy wife ...? (GURGLING WITH DRUNKEN GLEE) She shat herself – she bladdy – she ... “Till Death Do Us Part ...” She said it. I said it. We both said it. I mean I can do it – strue’s the Living God. I can go down there and – him – her – the lota’ them. I got a license – I gotta – I got it today – (STARTING TO SLIP HIS HAND BEHIND HIS BACK, BENEATH HIS JACKET) Look. Look at this. You haven’t seen this, hey? This doesn’t go beyond this room – (HE PRODUCES A NEWLY PURCHASED PISTOL AND WAVES IT ABOUT)

(Slabolepszy 1988: 6–7).

Greg's feelings of vulnerability and pain have been transformed into violent fantasies, in which the pistol, a clichéd symbol of power and masculinity, is purchased to help reinstate a feeling of power in him. For, as Beck (1999: 45) has pointed out, an "angry feeling, while still distressing, [is] far more acceptable than ... hurt and [replaces a] sense of vulnerability with a sense of power".

Slabolepszy's model here is, of course, that all too ubiquitous figure that Robert Greig (1994: xiii) has typified as the "Sunday family murderer: authoritarian, disappointed, inarticulate who, with a couple of beers under his belt, beats up the wife then shoots her, the children and himself". Like all those before him, Greg's belligerence, feelings of being wronged and violent fantasies are a way for him to "mask his wounds" and illustrate "a man for whom the world has turned sour" (Coetzee 1988: 14) – and, under the right circumstances, will drive him to violent action.

### 3.2.4 Angrily powerless: *Over the Hill*

Charlie in Slabolepszy's *Over the Hill* (1994) is another character on the brink of turning fantasy revenge into reality – the source of the anger being Charlie's belief that his wife might be being unfaithful to him:

CHARLIE: Charmaine tried the same trick on me. Three weeks she doesn't talk to me. All of a sudden she's going to pottery. Pottery classes, huh! When I ask to see her pots there's no pots because it turns out there's no classes either. We both at home – the phone rings – I pick it up, there's no one there. All that kind of crap.

STEVE: You thinks she was having a bit of a ...?

CHARLIE: How must I know?

STEVE: You didn't ask her?

CHARLIE: Fuck that! I must sink so low?

(Slabolepszy 1994: 65).

The hypocrisy of this attitude is not lost on the audience, of course, for he had earlier urged Steve to "grab us a coupla nurses" and go back to the hotel, adding "forget about the wife, you on tour now, man" (Slabolepszy 1994: 63). Clearly he feels his unfaithful actions are justified, but his wife's are not. Charlie's inconsistent moral attitude, which can be seen as a very prominent aspect of stereotypical (and

feminist) views of masculinity, could of course indicate a desire to maintain a form of superiority over his wife, but it is more likely that the fact that he does not know what his wife is doing frustrates him and leaves him feeling out of control. For, as Beck (1999: 58) has commented: “Our reactions are based less on the true intent of the other person than on how that behaviour makes us ‘feel’: controlled, used, rejected. The feelings are an expression of the meaning we attach to the event.” The fact that he also says that he would not “sink so low” as to ask his wife whether she is in fact being unfaithful to him is another way in which he is trying to justify himself. He wants to be regarded as someone with dignity and self-respect.

Naturally, this can also be a way of avoiding the pain of actually confirming that she *is* having an affair. So, instead of experiencing the hurt and embarrassment of being the victim or confirming rejection, he can rather retaliate with anger. A flash of anger is a way in which “an individual ... may ‘solve’ the problem by attacking the cause of his pain – namely the other person – rather than trying to clarify the other’s true intent” (Beck 1999: 52).

Charlie’s retelling of the way in which he had sought to reassume power and control in his relationship with his wife is chilling:

CHARLIE: I kept my cool. All I did was one night I just casually brought out the gun ... to clean it. Made sure the kid was there too. Okay, you haven’t got a kid. You got a kid, it helps. She sees you, she sees the kid, she sees the gun ... She thinks ... She doesn’t try it again

(Slabolepszy 1994: 65).

This idea of taking revenge is a sign of *ressentiment* in the character, for ‘taking revenge’ is characteristic of the condition. Scheler (1961: 46) comments that revenge can particularly be a trait of a weak person: “Thus even revenge as such, based as it is upon an experience of impotence, is always primarily a matter of those who are ‘weak’ in some respect.” By instilling fear and implying the possibility of revenge he feels he has overcome his impotent and weak position. Again this hints at the “Sunday family murderer” type of scenario prevalent in Slabolepszy’s plays. By the suggestion that he may commit a very violent and brutal act, Charlie persuades himself that he has reassumed power.

### 3.2.5 Angrily powerless: *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny*

Greig Coetzee's *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny* (2004) looks at the white male character who is 'angrily powerless' from another perspective. Johnny was forced to go to war and therefore forced to kill people; an experience which has tainted the rest of his life. Coetzee is here considering the violent influence of the Border war on the white male's psyche. Like Vince and Eddie, he cannot let go of his past and this has prevented him from moving forward. It has left him trapped and consequently powerless. He lives a life on the road and has no future plans for his life except to physically keep moving from one place to the next. The metaphor of travelling is indicative of a man running away from the violent deeds of his past. Ironically, this causes him to be trapped in a world of violence which he fails to transcend.

By his own admission, the violence he experienced during the war has made him a "weapon of mass destruction" (Coetzee 2009: 12), someone for whom violence is an accepted part of his everyday life. Johnny tells the audience how he eventually meets Eve, a girl he falls madly in love with and kills the man who is after her. Eve is to Johnny a light in his otherwise dark world:

You start to believe  
that wheel has spun  
and fuck the odds, Johnny has won

(Coetzee 2009: 23).

Johnny briefly thinks he has been saved by Eve: "you fucking resurrect me" and there is glimmer of a new horizon that could have meant happiness in his otherwise destructive and grim world: "I'm parking off checking the sunset in Eve's eyes" (Coetzee 2009: 51). However, Johnny's destructive world eventually implodes on itself as Eve gets killed and Johnny, overcome with rage, kills the man with his own army boots – a singularly messy and brutal death.

It seems Johnny is fated to lead a life of devastation and death. This provides an interesting angle in terms of *ressentiment*, because Johnny is technically responsible for the dangerous reality he had chosen to adopt, but he also seems to have little control of this reality. Throughout the play, Johnny appears to blame war, but also himself. This is a clear commentary on the dichotomy of war, in which individuals

ultimately decide whether they are going to kill an individual, but at the same time they are expected to do it for the sake of their country.

A fine example of the theatrical use of symbolism occurs when Johnny uses his *army* boots to kill the man in the final scene, a detail which clearly refers back to the army and comments on how it has created Johnny Boskak: a violent human being for whom violence is now a language and a means of reacting to life situations. Johnny reacts to violence with violence, for violence and destruction have taken control of his life and it seems he will never be able to escape them. This emphasises the fact that *ressentiment* is not merely a man raging against something or someone external that makes him feel inferior (like the consequences of the army and war), but also – possibly more profoundly – against “the very character of (his) existence ... [and the] suffering which existence generates” (Lamb 2013: 132).

### **3.3 Conclusion: Existential *ressentiment***

It is evident that the characters I have discussed in this chapter all reveal varying degrees of existential *ressentiment* and are all prone to the feelings of revenge, malice, spite and hatred commonly associated with the condition. The violent actions and anger displayed by the characters because of these feelings cannot necessarily be assigned to a specific *cause*, but seem to reveal a common state that they are all in – some kind of commonly shared “existential determinant” that governs their lives. One can merely speculate, as I have done, why the characters are as aggressive and ready to attack as they are. Insecurities regarding their families, the economic situation and social position are reasons that brush the surface, but it seems that the white male characters in specifically Slabolepszy’s plays share a common thread. All of those that I have discussed seem to illustrate an inherent form of *ressentiment* and anger at their condition in life. This links with the study’s hypothesis regarding the representation of the white male in South Africa during the transformation years.

In terms of this response to the new developments in the country, there is an interesting evolutionary development in Slabolepszy’s work over the years. *Saturday Night at the Palace* (first performed in 1982) is set in the 1980s before change had officially been implemented, and Vince displays violent tendencies that manifest externally and culminate in his perpetrating acts of destruction and eventually getting killed. Charlie in *Over the Hill* (first performed in 1985 and set in the same period)

also acts threateningly, but one does not get the sense that he will necessarily follow through on this. Greg in *Abnormal Load* (first performed in 1987) poses a threat to people in his immediate surroundings, for he is a drunken, damaged man with a gun, but eventually he turns the violence on himself. Finally, Eddie in *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie* (first performed in 1992) shows a gentler demeanour, but it seems to be a result of surrendering to his hopeless situation. In a sense these plays may be seen to represent the 'evolution' of the white male's psyche during the time of immense transformation and change in South Africa. Where Vince still feels 'entitled' to take out his problems on someone else, Eddie reaches a point where his feelings of powerlessness and failure are so all-consuming that he even fails to kill himself.

The characters seem to have adopted an "existential envy" of the people and situations surrounding them (Scheler 1961: 53). A character like Vince, for example, envies an unobtainable life in another place that is far removed from his reality in the changing South Africa. Eddie envisions a life as another being in another time. Their envy of others illustrates a fear of and uncertainty regarding the future, and this emotionally cripples them. This fear creates a "fight-or-flight" reaction within them. Because the characters are trapped in their respective situations, the only way for them to combat this fear is to fight – whether in fantasy or in reality.

## Chapter 4: The ever-present past

Memory and the past play a prominent role in the various the plays I have selected for discussion. The notion of “the past” also plays a significant role in the study of cultural and personal meaning. I will be using the term “the past” as an encapsulating concept referring to certain issues surrounding the past relevant to the chapter. The past is also a significant feature of the previous discussions in Chapters 2 and 3. For example, Brudholm (2008: 174) states that the notion of *ressentiment* is “an inability to let go of the past”, which relates to memory and history in a complex way.

### 4.1 Introduction

It is very clear that the notion of “the past” is a very significant factor in any discussion of cultural and personal meaning, as we shall see below. Therefore this chapter will look at the way in which playwrights use the past, *inter alia* as a means whereby one may make sense of the present. “The past” is in fact part of “the present” – or at least, our *responses* to the present – and, conversely, the past can be defined in terms of the present.

The concept of “the past” is a very complex one, for human memory is elusive and each person’s experiences of the world are different, because he/she is influenced by a number of diverse factors. These may include aspects such as social, cultural and political groupings; the notion of ‘collective’ memory; intersubjective remembering; individuality; perceptions of reality at the time of an event; present perceptions while recollecting an experience; how interaction with the past and present influences an individual; and so forth.

Indeed, many sociologists believe that memory is shaped by the society one inhabits, although there are many theories regarding this notion, based on the extent to which it seems to influence personal memory (Sutton 2008: 23). Sutton (2008: 27) elaborates on this, stating that different contexts, societies, cultures, histories and individuality influence theories of personal memory, since “memory in practice cannot be isolated from emotion, action, or language ... [and thus] a great variety of history-carrying operators – linguistic and gestural, specialist and idiosyncratic – draw on and influence our history-carrying schemas”.

In a very general sense we can thus assume that there is an interaction between personal memory and a kind of “collective” memory that is influenced and formed by various history-carrying operators. Useful as the concept may be, “collective” memory is a highly disputed phenomenon, because it is an aspect of “one of the fundamental – and somehow unsolved – problems of social psychology: the relationship between mind and society” (Tateo & Iannaccone 2012: 58).

Nevertheless, for our purposes in this discussion one can perhaps refer to it broadly as the memories of a culture or society that are shared by its individuals. The presence of the collective memory of a society can be situated in virtually every cultural product, process and artefact – including history books, fiction, art, cultural artefacts, aesthetic trends, story-telling, and so on, all of which can help to shape and contribute to the identity and psyche of a culture. Collective memory “creates from generation to generation that tie or feeling of common belonging that constitutes cultural unity ... [and make] it possible to overcome the limits of the individual memory” (Tateo & Iannaccone 2012: 60).

A key factor in this argument is language, which has a fundamental influence on the human experience, for it not only enables communication between individuals, but also encapsulates many aspects of cultural meaning. In this regard Brown and Middleton (2005: 86) argue that language is the “principal means via which collective remembering is organised and coordinated”, while linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs (2012: 143) adds that “Experience no sooner comes into consciousness than it becomes penetrated by linguistic forms”. A part of human consciousness is thus governed by language, because it enables one to make sense of one’s reality in a tangible and recognisable way. “It is precisely such saturated entanglement of experience and language that has fuelled anthropological discussion of the extent of language’s grip on how people think, feel, and act in the world” (Ochs 2012: 143).

The above argument leads one to the conclusion that language is a cultural construction, one that influences human consciousness, and hence an individual’s interpretation of meaning and perceptions of his/her reality are tightly knit with his/her particular culture and can therefore be assumed to also be a signifier of meaning.

Not all theorists agree with this point of view, of course,<sup>1</sup> but for the purposes of this study I will accept the general argument outlined above and consider language to be a mode of representation for (and bearer of) cultural and personal meaning.

As mentioned above, language is a cultural construction, one which influences human consciousness, and hence an individual's interpretation of meaning and perceptions of his/her reality are tightly knit with his/her particular culture. However the term 'language' can have a much wider meaning than its strict linguistic use suggests.

For instance, there are written, spoken, gestural and other forms of language (gestures, dance, pictures, etc.), along with objects such as cultural monuments and symbols, which can all be considered "collective representations ... mental products which are created by a community of human life ... inexplicable in terms merely of individual consciousness, since they presuppose the reciprocal action of many" (Tateo & Iannaccone 2012: 60). These constructions represent collective cultural memory and enable individuals to access their culture and their society's past, and are a means of understanding not only their own cultural identity, but also other cultural and social groups, and thus affect individual thinking – which, in Cattaneo's words, is "the most social act of men" (cited by Tateo & Iannaccone 2011: 61). Such collective representations thus create continuity in a specific culture, because information about the past can be passed on from generation to generation. Tateo and Iannaccone (2012: 60) consider writing to be representative of "the point of contact between individual mind and culture", a point Wundt (1916: 486) had made much earlier: "In this wise, the material aspects of the world culture exerted an influence upon the mental aspects, whose direct expressions are speech and writing."

As is mentioned above, while language can be seen as only one of a number of possible channels along which human beings experience reality, it is perhaps the

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<sup>1</sup> In Ruthrof Nietzsche, for example, said "our representations, such as language, about the world are no more than a series of metaphors and similar figures of speech" (2000: 187), while other theorists say that language's contribution to meaning is non-existent (Ruthrof 2000: 187).

most prominent and public. Ochs (2012: 142) is of the opinion that “ordinary enactments of language, i.e. utterances, are themselves modes of experiencing the world”. Humans can connect their interior reality with their exterior reality by, in general terms, sharing their experiences with each other in a language (or metaphoric system) that the subjects concerned can understand, for language is not only interpreted through the mode of the spoken word, but all modes that enable people to communicate and connect with each other. And the theatre is, of course, one such mode.

Which brings us to the notion that, in the very process of communication people’s realities and perceptions are also shaped and modified. The way in which memories are recalled is an intersubjective act and therefore “in many circumstances in society, remembering is a social event” (Roediger, Bergman and Meade, 2000: 1290). Most of characters in the plays I have chosen to discuss are constantly referring back to the past and do this by talking about or re-enacting past events. In this interaction the characters reveal their perceptions of the past and how it has evolved and been influenced – and in turn show how it influences – the present.

Of course, the verbal interaction between subjects through language cannot be accepted as conveying the whole “truth” of the human being’s experience or perceptions. Language as a system of communication merely skims the surface of the human experience: “What we take for truth is no more than the immanent consistency that we have built into our systemic network of such metaphoric terms” (Ruthrof 2000: 187 See also footnote 1). Therefore the meaning of the interaction between subjects does not merely lie in the interaction. Bourdieu (1990: 291) notes that

Contrary to all forms of the occasionalist (sic) illusion which inclines one to relate practices directly to properties inscribed in the situation, it has to be pointed out that the 'interpersonal' relations are only apparently person-to-person relations and that the truth of the interaction never lies entirely in the interaction.

The character’s fictional interactions can also be seen as representational of what happens in society. The many interactions between different individuals in a society create a ripple effect and this continuously shape the social and cultural milieu. The

intersubjective recalling between individuals is the “link between the individual mind and society ... established through the collective process of culture elaboration, which develops within recurrent social interactions” (Tateo & Iannaccone 2012: 58).

As we have seen thus far, many factors influence meaning in memories and in the act of recollecting the past. History-carrying processes such as language and the written text offer a representation of the past of a particular culture or society. The social and personal factors that influence our memory therefore make the notion of the past a very elusive object. As Leyden (1961: 72) suggests, if the things that we

perceive are all coloured in accordance with our individual interests, interpretations, and powers of perception, our recollections must all be in a sense and to some extent delusive, at any rate in comparison with what might be called a sober, scientific account of past happenings.

Hence the past is, as mentioned, influenced – even shaped – by the fact that humans are creative and imaginative living beings.

If this is so, then fictional works in general can be considered immensely influential in the construction of cultural meaning, and the fictional and creative mode of the written and performed play is a particularly useful source for analysing the different nuances of the past. Although the characters in a play are not ‘real’ (i.e. actual living and breathing human beings), they are created by a real person (or persons), played by real people, and, as mentioned, *represent* and embody real people.

However, the texts to be discussed are then obviously not to be seen as factually accurate historical documents, but rather as *interpretations and representations of meaning* by various individual white males (the playwrights) from specific cultural groups, based on on their memories/reconstruction of the past. As Rosaldo (1980: Introduction) has pointed out: “Through ‘interpretation’, cultural meanings are transformed. And through ‘embodiment’, collective symbols acquire power, tension, relevance, and sense emerging from our individuated histories .... Histories of experience, and so of affect, are essential to all thought.”

### 4.1.1 Representation in stereotypes

In theatre cultural stereotypes are often used to create recognisable representations of society and the past, so that viewers can identify with the characters and with the meaning and/or message the piece is trying to convey. Saro (2008: 310) argues that “plays (especially classics) and actors are the main sources for the preservation and creation of stereotypes”, adding that the mode of the theatre also perpetuates stereotypes in terms of the “spatial (theatre buildings), dramaturgic (plays), material (primarily actors) and the level of reception”.

The plays represent a particular perception of the South African white male during the transformation years. By using these representations (or “embodiments”) of the South African white male, playwrights are perpetuating the stereotype. Stereotypes can also be regarded as history-carrying products, because one individual person does not construct stereotypes, but “instead they are passed on from one person, group or generation to another through education and life practice” (Saro 2008: 310). They can be seen as a collective construction of a particular group of people or culture and this in turn is used to construct cultural meaning. Burke (2003:48) notes that

Consequently, theatrical performances can become rituals of remembering – reproductions of the past, acts of recollection, which are at the same time attempts to impose interpretations on the past and to sculpt the mind, and through this to shape social identity.

The written text is an encapsulating mode illustrating the interaction between collective and personal memory. Through cultural constructions and history carriers such as language and stereotyping an individual’s past and present perceptions are formed. Through writing and fiction “histories of experience” can be passed on and a society and its inhabitants can make sense of their present.

## 4.2 The plays

### 4.2.1 *Die Jogger*

*Die Jogger* explores the subjectivity of memory and the past by placing its leading character, Killian, in the social milieu of a mental institution. Killian spends the entire play in a kind of limbo, reliving the past both by recollecting memories of the past and by grappling with the realities of the horrific deeds he had been required to do.

The action of the play is largely Killian's experience and perceptions of reality. Most of the scenes are enactments of his fevered hallucinations and reliving of his past experiences. Brown and Middleton (2005: 6) argue that remembering is a "social practice", but at the same time "an intensely personal committing of oneself to the past as recalled". Humans are, in varying degrees emotional, intelligent and imaginative living beings and their experience of life is influenced by these characteristics (Chodorow 1999: 71–72). Killian is further regarded as mentally unstable and the reliability of his version of reality is therefore questionable. His interactions with Noni seem to be the only tangible reality of the play and here one can observe his skewed perception of the situation:

KILLIAN: (*staar 'n oomblik verbyster om hom rond*). Waar is ek? Watse plek is dit dié?

NONI: (*paaierend maar met 'n ondertoon van ongeduld*). You're still in the hospital.

KILLIAN: Ek is nie siek nie.

...

KILLIAN: As julle my nie met die nodige respek behandel nie, sal my dogter my kom haal.

NONI: (*nadruklik*). It was your daughter who had you committed. Have you forgotten then?

(Brink 1997: 11, 14).

In the scene he seems to have lost his grip on reality. The re-enactments of the past can be seen as a mixture of Killian's memories and hallucinations. This is made clear in his recollections of Vusi's court trial, a scene in which Brink suggests that the actor who plays the secretary now plays the judge and the actress who plays Noni plays a barrister. This device is used to illustrate how Killian's present reality and various memories are flowing into one another, emphasising his disordered state of mind and questioning the dependability of memory and his perceptions of the past. To quote Leyden (1961: 72), "if what we remember are past perceptions, there *must* be a subjective or individual element in every memory". Through Killian, Brink illustrates a heightened version of this. Killian's mental instability influences his perceptions of his past. One cannot solely (or possibly at all) rely on his memories for the 'truth' (within the fictional reality of the play), but they form *his* reality. His memories and the

emotions he experiences in remembering them are real to *him*. This can be said of any individual in society, whether one is considered sane or not. An individual's interpretation of his/her past is unique and subjective. Brink expands on this by commenting on how collective memory is constructed. Collective memory, like identity, is, after all, constructed by various individual memories.

Killian is an Afrikaner whose family were some of the first whites to settle in South Africa. This is revealed in one of the first scenes where he explains to his daughter the importance and relevance of "Oupa Renier se plaas". He nostalgically remembers the stories his father had told him of the past and what it took for them to be where they are now. He recounts the memories of his forefathers as if they were his own memories. Killian sentimentally and nostalgically "remembers" life on the farm in descriptive and beautiful detail:

Voordag kry die voëls al lewe. Die vinke. Die mossies. Glasogies. Geelgatte. Muisvoëls. En jy hoor die bome wakker word. Huilboerboon en wildesering, raasblaar en knoppiesdoring en apiesdoring, tambotie, boekenhout, kafferwag-'n-bietjie, papierbas-kanniedood. Jy hoor die grond asemhaal, van die ponder uit waar net die donkerste wortels bykom. Oupa Renier se plaas. Die Killian's s'n. Beesmis wat stoom op 'n wintersmôre. Pis op jou voete om hulle warm te maak

(Brink 1997: 38).

In another scene, however, Ilse reveals that he had never actually lived on "Oupa Renier's" farm.

ILSE: Waarheen gaan ons wegloop?

KILLIAN: Plaas toe. Oupa Renier se plaas.

ILSE: Ag nee, man. Ek moes dit geweet het. As Pa nou gesê het Parys of New York, dán was dit 'n deal.

KILLIAN: As ons nog daar gewoon het.

ILSE: (*hou dit lig*) Ag jirre tog, los nou die plek. Ons woon nie daar nie, ons het nooit daar gewoon nie en ons gáán ook nooit daar woon nie. Dit was nooit ons plaas gewees nie

(Brink 1997: 16).

Killian's father and grandfather had evidently passed on the beautiful memories of the farm to him. He becomes quite emotional and sentimental in "remembering" the farm. Brink is commenting on how the collective history of a family is constructed by

memories and emotional sentiments passed on from one generation to the next. Killian's somewhat romantic description of the farm had thus been constructed by stories he had heard from his elders. They are not based on his own personal experiences, but the "memories" have become so vivid in his imagination that they seem real to him. This is equivalent to the way in which memory is passed on to create a collective cultural past. Memories can be modified, reinforced, reinterpreted, or completely eliminated by a later generation. In Killian's case it seems he has reinforced collective sentiments of the past as inspiration for his fervently patriotic spirit. Killian recalls his grandfather saying:

Soos Oupa gesê het: 'My kind, onthou net een ding: jy's 'n Boer. En teen 'n uitlander verloor 'n Boer nie .... Ons Afrikaners, ons moet altyd dubbel soveel uithaal om daardie een treetjie voor te bly. Anders is ons in ons moer'

(Brink, 1997: 18).

Brink is observing that the subjective reinforcement and reinterpretation of cultural sentiments and memories influence the construction of a cultural collective memory of a time. He also notes the dangers of this.

Killian's grandfather was a farmer, but was then forced to work in the city and mines in Bez Valley along with the "uitlanders" (Brink 2008: 16). The history of Killian's family can be seen as a representation of the history of the white Afrikaner in South Africa. They are Afrikaners who were some of the first to own land in the country, then became share-croppers ("bywoners") and now work in government (or run the country). According to Conradie (1997: 31), this is the golden thread of "Afrikanerskap". Killian believes that the work of his forefathers is constantly recognised, admired and remembered. Killian's 'memory' of his family's past mainly focuses on the bravery and tenacity of the white Afrikaner throughout history. When it seems as though Ilse is tired of Killian's constant references to the past, he then emphasises the importance of remembering: "Dis die een ding wat jy sal moet leer, Ilse: dis nooit verby nie. As ons dit die dag vergeet, kan hulle ons maar onder die langboompies loop inspit" (Brink 1997: 17).

Brink, through Killian as a social representation, is looking at the way in which the perpetual cycle of reinforcing collective memory had shaped the Afrikaner nation to what it had become. One can say, like Killian, that they had become fanatically

obsessed with preserving their past and legacy – so much so that in some ways they were “living” in the past. Afrikaners considered (or still consider) themselves to be “boere” because they regarded themselves as the first farmers of the land. The term has become quite stereotypical in referring to an Afrikaner and nowadays it is regarded as being offensive to many. Killian insistently uses the term “boer” to refer to himself and his nation, even though he and many other Afrikaners had never actually been farmers. Brink is observing that Afrikaners like Killian had so desperately been holding on to their past, refusing to modify and adapt, that they had in actual fact considered themselves as something they no longer were. Killian becomes symbolic of how the cycle of reinforcing old sentiments and memories and adamantly refusing to change has produced a culture that has essentially gone “mad”. This “madness” can be observed in how it incited some to commit horrific crimes.

As we have seen, through the course of the play Killian is constantly recollecting the deeds he committed as a colonel in the security forces, and the one central and inescapable memory is the killing of Vusi. He believes he had to do what was necessary to preserve the Afrikaner patriarchy and culture and it was done for the sake of the so-called “volk en vaderland” (Pople 1997: 2). He says at one point:

Ons is 'n bedreigde spesie soos die swartrenoster. (*Êrens op die agtergrond, skaars hoorbaar, slaan 'n horlosie*) ... Dokter Malan het gesê, die dag by Monumentkoppie: 'Glo in jou God, glo in jou volk, glo in jouself.' Mens is nooit alleen nie, jy dra 'n hele geskiedenis met jou saam. (*Pouse. Staan op.*) Daar is werk om te doen

(Brink 1997: 46–47).

Killian has taken it upon himself to help preserve his culture's legacy. His perception had evolved out of the collective memory of the Afrikaner culture: “jy dra 'n hele geskiedenis met jou saam.” The Afrikaners' perception and interpretation of their collective past, and the society it resulted in, had turned Killian from a patriot and cultural hero to a murderer. He is eventually left impotent, mentally unstable, confused and guilt-ridden.

Killian's disjointed and confused last speech is a rambling attempt to explain and motivate the Afrikaner's past: “Ek staan vandag voor u ... in 'n diepe bewustheid van my verantwoordelikheid in die opheldering en motivering van ons gemeenskaplike

verlede” (Brink 1997: 83). Conradie (1997: 31) regards Killian at this point in the play as “iemand wat stamel oor sy bestaan, wie se geskiedenis aan flarde geruk is deur mites”. He seems to consider the possibility that the collective past he had so faithfully trusted had been a myth. This realisation makes him feel alone and deserted: “Almal is teen my. Ek wil dit bo alle twyfel duidelik stel. Die hele wêreld het teen my gedraai. Die geskiedenis het my verraai” (Brink 1997: 83).

The play suggests that the white Afrikaners had been misguided by their perception of their past. Killian feels his perceptions of his culture’s collective past have “betrayed” him. It was, however, Killian and his nation who had reinterpreted this past to fit into the mould of a particular era. *Die Jogger* can be seen as an attempt to confront the demons of the white Afrikaner past by acknowledging that holding onto the past could inhibit positive growth and progress.

When the act of remembering takes place, the past is recalled in an active way – readjusting and modifying it according to the present. Killian and the white Afrikaner culture are now *forced* to modify these collective memories because of the new political and social order. Chodorow (1999: 44) terms this active and constant shifting nature of the past in the act of remembering as “transference”, which she explains as a “living relationship in which there is constant movement and change” and refers to the “alive past” (Chodorow 1999: 44). She also comments that the understanding of the present can only be achieved when one considers the past as “alive and actual” (Chodorow 1999: 44). Brown and Middleton (2005: 37; emphasis added) agree:

When we recollect the past, we do not *passively* open ourselves up to some previously forgotten image, which appears to us as ‘ready formed’, but, rather, *refashion* the past on the basis of our current concerns and needs. As Halbwachs (1992: 40) puts it, ‘in reality the past does not recur as such ... everything seems to indicate that the past is not *preserved* but is *reconstructed* on the basis of the *present*’.

Darrel Bristow-Bovey (1997: 21), in a review of the play in 1997, wrote that the play had produced “a curious sense of déjà vu, but I could not be sure whether the feeling was of attending theatre in the eighties, or of watching the eight o’clock news the night before”. The themes that are explored in *Die Jogger* remind one of a 1980s

protest play. In “protest play” style Brink creates a stereotypical character that can be seen as a parody of the state of the Afrikaner culture (especially during the transition years). Killian is a fallen Afrikaans patriarchal figure who has lost his mind.

As mentioned, *Die Jogger* opened during the second year of the TRC hearings in South Africa. Brink is essentially protesting against the idealistic concept of the TRC specifically in terms of the Afrikaner. He seems to insinuate that the faults of the past cannot be repaired by a mere confession, but that Afrikaners need a complete overhaul of their culture. And this can only be made possible by, ironically, revisiting the past. But instead of reinforcing past ideals, they need to reinterpret them.

In the last image of the play Brink uses the symbol of the “jogger” to insinuate that the Afrikaner now swiftly needs to accept this notion or he will, like Killian, be left behind:

*Dan kom die JOGGER weer van R na L verbygedraf. Dit is asof 'n sesde sintuig KILLIAN laat agterkom dat hy daar is. Hy lig hom orent. Hy huil. Maar deurdie trane skreeu hy so hard as hy kan:*

KILLIAN: Hol, boeta, hol ...!

BLACKOUT

(Brink 1997: 85)

As seen above, Chodorow (2005: 37) refers to the active nature of the past as having a “living relationship” with the present and vice versa. The perceptions of the past are also influenced by the interactive nature of the act of remembering. This can be seen in the individual’s relationships and interactions with other individuals, society, history-carrying products such as language and writing, the theatre, etc. The act of remembering and consequent sense-making of the past is, according to Brown and Middleton (2005: 14), “profoundly shaped by ‘what has been shared with others’”. The two plays I have selected explore the past and memories thereof in an attempt to make sense of the present social and political environment. *Die Jogger* illustrates Brown and Middleton’s (2005: 14) idea that “what is remembered is always a ‘memory of an inter-subjective past, of past time lived in relation to other people’” and that this “inter-subjective memory is forged ... by means of social processes such as language, rituals and other commemorative practices”.

The ritual of theatre can be seen as a means of interacting with the past by keeping various conversations between past and present alive. Theatre is essentially intersubjective communication. Brink emphasises the importance of “interacting” with the past by reinterpreting collective memories as a means to move forward.

#### **4.2.2 *Donkerland***

*Donkerland* by Deon Opperman offers us another such conversation between the past and present.

Though *Donkerland* was quite a popular play among Afrikaans audiences (see Appendix), some critics considered it an extremely one-sided depiction of the Afrikaans culture’s past and the Afrikaner psyche. It was seen as too overtly male oriented, since, the play revolves around the patriarch Pieter de Witt’s and his legacy, for which his sons so passionately fight. One critic wrote for example, that “(i)f the revival of Afrikaans culture is to be determined by plays like *Donkerland*, we’re certainly not moving forward... [it is] ... testimony to the fact that a large portion of Afrikanerdom is unable to employ any real self-analysis when reviewing the journey this culture has travelled” (Wilson 1996: 30). However, Opperman seems to display an awareness of the way in which the collective memory of a culture is constructed and the dangers of accepting it as a foundation for a cultural-political creed. In the prologue to the play the narrator explicitly states:

Hulle sê daar’s g’n plek in die heelal nie waar mens ver genoeg kan terugstaan sodat jy jou storie kan vertel en met die vertel kan sê: hier is die waarheid, presies soos dit gebeur het. Die geheue is ‘n snaakse dier – hy onthou wat hy wil en die res val van hom af soos vrot vrugte van ‘n boom. Dit is nou maar ‘n feit: ‘n storie loop gebuk onder die las van al die stukkies wat bygelieg en bygedroom word, en vermink deur alles wat vergete is

(Opperman 1996: 3).

*Donkerland* is admittedly a subjective, fictional piece of writing, in which Opperman employs the mode of fiction to illustrate the fluid and subjective nature of the notion of the “past”. He uses the fictional journey of the De Witts to illustrate what the Afrikaners’ “road” *might* have looked like. (In this respect the name De Witt is significant, given the racial ideology associated with the Afrikaner.)

By looking at the contribution of each individual generation of the De Witt family, he illustrates how every individual’s presence and contribution to the “journey”

influences the eventual “destination” of the group. Every single past perception, misinterpretation, lie, forgotten memory and so forth paves the “road” that this collective culture has travelled. In Opperman’s version thus the various “stories” (fictional or personal) of the past, are used to construct an *interpretation* of the psyche of a particular culture.

As mentioned, the patriarchs and the men of the various generations who follow them seem to have largely determined the family’s journey. Throughout the play, it is the male characters who illustrate a strong will to preserve the Afrikaans patriarchal ideology.

The text constantly refers to this ideology and particularly its biblical foundation. At the beginning of the play Opperman quotes the Christian Bible:

*En Ik zal ulieden brengen in dat land,  
waarover Ik mijne hand opgeheven heb, dat  
Ik het Abraham, Isaäk en Jakob geven zoude;  
en Ik het ulieden geven tot een erfdeel,  
Ik de Heere.  
(And I bring you into the land  
which I have raised my hand,  
that I, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob  
would give, and give it you for  
an heritage: I am the Lord)*

Eksodus 6:7  
(Opperman 1996: 5)

Pieter de Witt is searching for “die pad na Kanaän” (Opperman 1996:4), and the extract is clearly used as a symbolic demonstration of the Afrikaner belief that they are part of an ancient lineage, directly descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom God has ordained a piece of land in Africa. It also emphasises the fact that the De Witts are deeply religious and live their lives according to how they interpret the Christian Bible. Their family Bible is a hundred and fifty years old and every birth and death is written in it. They regard the book as holy and as a compass in their lives. They therefore cherish the old patriarchal sentiments of the Bible and this belief informs much of what is to follow in the play, contextualising the strong religious and patriarchal attitudes of the male characters throughout the various eras covered by the drama.

Pieter de Witt believes that the Afrikaner in South Africa needs to stand his ground otherwise he will disappear “soos ‘n graf in die gras, ingesuig in die boesem van Afrika” (Opperman 1996: 9). He believes that the survival of the Afrikaner is a constant struggle that needs to be fought. This struggle had taken the form of wars (The Anglo Boer Wars and the First World War) and political processes (apartheid). The piece of land he calls *Donkerland* becomes the family’s identifying symbol. Every generation’s patriarch fights fervently to keep it. At the thought of selling the farm Ouboet answers:

Hierdie plaas behoort al meer as ‘n honderd jaar aan die De Witt-familie, en nou wil jy hom opnsy en stuk vir stuk verkoop?! Nooit! Hoor jy my? Nooit! Hierdie grond bly De Witt-grond totdat daar nie meer een van ons op die aarde is om dit te bewerk nie. Die dag as ek my laaste asem uitblaas, sal Piet-Jan die plaas vat. Van vader na seun. Só was dit deur die jare, en só sal dit bly

(Opperman 1996: 121).

The De Witt family’s farm is taken away from them in 1996, presumably as part of the redistribution of land in South Africa. The fact that Ouboet explicitly states that the farm will be passed on from *father to son* repeats the extreme patriarchal stance held by the men in the family (and echoes the biblical extract earlier). Ouboet refuses to let go of the land as well as the tradition and his perceptions of ‘how things ought to be’ or were. Yet it is precisely these perceptions that need to change in the new South Africa and so the staunch fight to preserve the farm, family name and patriarchy could not withstand the changes wrought by time.

The De Witt family is clearly intended to represent the Afrikaans nation during the time of great change. Van Tonder, Arnold’s lawyer, tells him: “tye het verander”, to which he reacts: “Niks het verander nie. Dit was ‘n stryd toe die eerste wit man sy voet hier neergesit het en dit is ‘n stryd nog steeds. Veg of verdwyn” (Opperman 1996: 155). He, however, does not have a choice and must sign the document transferring ownership of his land to others, in a scene symbolic of the fall of the Afrikaner patriarch as the seat of power and ownership was taken away from them.

Another interpretation could be that Opperman is also exploring a more existential idea about culture and the passing of time, suggesting that since the dawn of human consciousness people, families, cultures, and civilisations have come and gone and that, like many others before them, the incumbancy and dominance of the De Witts

has run its course, as has that of the the Afrikaners. A point made when the last patriarch concludes:

ARNOLD: Watter toekoms? Watse kans het 'n paar druppels wit verf in 'n hele emmer swart?

(Opperman 1996: 156).

It seems the only way for the Afrikaner individual to survive in South Africa is to accept change and start anew:

MARIAAN: lewers moet dit ophou. Iemand moes eerste ophou. Arnold .... Kyk na my! (*Hy kyk onwillig na haar.*) Dis nie net die einde nie ... dis ook die begin

(Opperman 1996: 156).

Interestingly thus, Opperman uses a woman, Mariaan, to verbalise the growing realization that perhaps the Afrikaner's future lies in letting go of the past and uniting with others. But the patriarchal dream apparently will not die immediately, nor will the message be accepted without struggle. In the end the narrator rather nihilistically concludes the play with the words: "ééndag sal daar net 'n verbrokkelde stapeltjie klippe oorbly, getuienis van 'n klein strepie mensdom, verlore in die gras van Donkerland" (Opperman 1996: 157).

The play had quite an impact (it won the prestigious Hertzog Prize and a television series of it was broadcast in 2013) can perhaps be attributed to the fact that, as we have seen, the white Afrikaner male's psyche was (and/or is) going through a time of major transformation and insecurity. The foregoing chapters have emphasised that Afrikaner men have been required to redefine themselves in terms of the "new" South Africa. Many were possibly "unable to employ any real self-analysis" (as Wilson averred), because they were (are) in the process of making sense of their new position in society. Social and cultural interactions also influence this self-analysis and a play such as *Donkerland*, by providing a social representation of their dilemma, could have created a kind of cultural rallying point and a sense of cohesion for white Afrikaans-speaking individuals. Saro (2008: 311) notes that these social representations "on the level of personal and collective identity ... define and reinforce the (subjects') identity, guarantee an inter-group homogeneity and solidarity, and in the end produce a feeling of security for both the individual and

society". This was a history they recognised and understood, even though it was a subjective one.

### 4.3 Conclusion: Past and present identity

Brown and Middleton (2005: 13) comment that there are "deep conceptual links between the persistence of the past into the present" and this in turn influences our "idea of selfhood". In considering past and present perceptions we construct our identities and who we are. This is an extremely subjective process because every person has his/her own individual and unique experiences of the world. Brown and Middleton (2005: 54) contend that although we

feel that our unique and unchanging character structures our personal experiences, our thoughts and passions ... in fact, they emerge by virtue of the varying currents of the *social milieu* in which we dwell and that rise up within us.

In addition, these perceptions emerge out of various "interpersonal contexts" and come into contact with various people (Chodorow 1999: 71–72). This can be deduced from the plays discussed in this chapter. In both plays the characters emerge from staunch Afrikaans patriarchal contexts. The characters have also been created by individuals who emerge from a particular Afrikaans context. According to Chodorow (1999: 133), some sociologists "insist that individuality is not relevant". However, by considering the notions regarding the plays I have discussed, I tend towards Chodorow's (1999: 130) opinion "that to fully understand cultural meaning in general, and cultural selves and feelings in particular" one needs to "theorize and investigate personal meaning". Or to quote Leyden (1961: 72), "if what we remember are past perceptions, there *must* be a subjective or individual element in every memory" (as Killian so acutely illustrates). Even though cultural milieu and collective consciousness influence individuals' perceptions to a large degree, our various individual perceptions inevitably construct the collective. Brown and Middleton (2005: 39) argue that "it is memory which seems to be holding together groups, rather than groups determining memory processes". Memories are constructed in the minds of individuals and if we accept Brown and Middleton's argument, the subjective nature of memory plays an enormous role in the construction of collective identity.

By means of representation, these two plays assist in interpreting a particular culture's psyche at a particular time. The plays are also inevitably based on personal perceptions of the authors regarding the past and the Afrikaner culture. The fact that fictional texts are history-carrying devices reinforces the idea that the notion of the "past" is a fluid and subjective one, open to interpretation and revisionary reading. One can consider a culture's collective past as a collection of personal 'fictions' that are constantly being reinterpreted and changed.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

I would now like to return to my comment at the beginning of the thesis: the identity and masculinity of the white South African male constitute a vast and complex field of study, and indeed an extremely contentious one – which is and will remain ever-changing. In addition notions of social, cultural and personal identity are immensely multifaceted, a goldmine for sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, philosophers and so on (hence also my reliance on psychological and social theory in the study). However, I have sought to enter this field in what is perhaps a slightly unorthodox fashion, by employing the insights of some of the more perceptive chroniclers of our social lives: i.e. by analysing the work of a select number of playwrights and playmakers whose plays and characters appear to me to illustrate the psyche of a particular group of white male characters during the transformation years in South Africa most clearly. These are characters (and thus, one may infer, playwrights) who were all trying to make sense of a tumultuous past, an insecure present and an uncertain future, and their own contribution to and place in it.

The plays studied illustrate that the South African white male went through a type of collective existential “mid-life crisis”. At the same time they needed to accept that they had become outnumbered and were in a sense alone. Their collective identity was forced to compromise in the new reality they faced. And this is epitomised in how they started constructing their personal identities in order to adapt.

White males had entered a new stage in the post-colonial era where their personal identities had to be realigned. The concept of whiteness was changing, and acutely so in Africa. The fields of feminist research had opened new areas of discourse in masculinity writings. The plays are essentially a recollection of a particular mindset during a particular era in South African history. To have explored masculinity, whiteness and identity alongside the creative mode of the performing arts has proved to be immensely valuable, because the characters and themes embody and represent the consciousness of a particular group at a particular time. As mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation, art “reflects the complex and divisive social, political and ethical state of a civilisation” (Hauptfleisch 1997: 1). Art can also reflect the many personal interpretations of a particular period. The characters in these

plays mirror or embody at least a portion of the white male consciousness and interpretations of the transformation years.

The characters and plays I chose to discuss each represent a specific demographic of the white male population in South Africa: the Afrikaans patriarch, the redundant employee, the ex-army man – all emerging from different economic and social backgrounds. The representations give at least an indication of the collective white male experience in a changing South Africa. This is not to say that the representations embody the entire truth, but rather serve to to some extent to illustrate the way in which the white male perceives himself or thinks he is being perceived during the era of transformation. The texts I had chosen are all, after all, written by white South African men.

It is, however, evident today that the issues regarding male identity and whiteness, specifically in the South African context, are ongoing. A number of the plays I have discussed (as well as others that were part of my readings) have very recently been revived. *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie* was translated into Afrikaans and performed at the 2013 Woordfees in Stellenbosch. *Somewhere on the Border* (1985) by Anthony Akerman enjoyed a run at the Market Theatre in 2012. *White Men with Weapons* (1996) was translated and performed in Afrikaans as *Wit Manne se Wapens* (2013) by Gys de Villiers and at various Afrikaans festivals in 2013. Greig Coetzee still performs *Johnny Boskak Is Feeling Funny*, most recently in the United Kingdom. The play *Donkerland* has been filmed and is screening as a series on KykNET at present (October 2013). It seems there is still an urge to explore these specific notions of masculinity and whiteness in present-day South Africa.

This perception is reinforced by the new work on show at the various festivals. A good recent example was *Balbesit*, by Saartjie Botha (directed by Jaco Bouwer), which premiered at KKNK in 2013, is a new play that explores notions of masculinity in South Africa by using the mode of sport. The actors wore costumes that represented rugby uniforms and the play's choreography represented a rugby game. The play did not have a specific narrative and was instead made up of opinions and perceptions regarding social and cultural concerns in South Africa, in which the white male identity was extensively explored.

In the meanwhile, a new wave of whiteness studies has also emerged among South African youth. Music groups such as Jack Parow and Die Antwoord illustrate interesting and novel ideas regarding whiteness in South Africa. Clearly the exploration of white identity in South Africa is therefore alive and well.

A rather disconcerting realization has been that some of the dominant themes identified in this dissertation, seem to be emerging once more (or are simply still very alive) in one could almost call the “post-post-apartheid” South African social life. For example, the self-assigned religious leader Angus Buchan and his beliefs in terms of the man’s role in society and family life are worth considering. He and his followers illustrate a new wave of the notion of the desire for recognition by some South African males (predominantly white Christian males). He hosts enormous gatherings (200 000–300 000 men attended his last gathering), which are aptly named “Mighty Men” conferences in which he preaches exclusively to men (Internet: <http://www.karoommc.co.za/about/the-mighty-men-conferences>). Buchan preaches somewhat patriarchal sentiments and reaffirms the importance of the male in society to his followers. It seems that they yearn back to a time where these ideals were recognised and admired. These conferences are very popular among Christian South African men. The website boasts that men regarded the conferences as life-changing and humbling by seeing “grown men cry” (Internet: <http://www.karoommc.co.za/about/the-mighty-men-conferences>).

Male acts of violence, reminding one of a character such as Greg in *Abnormal Load*, have also emerged in the recent news. A case in point is the Afrikaans white man from Johannesburg, Paul Nothnagel, who shot and killed his two daughters, injured his ex-wife and then killed himself (Internet: <http://www.beeld.com/nuus/2013-07-22-gesinstragedie-pa-laai-instruksies-agter>). This incident reminds one of Robert Greig’s reference to “Sunday family murderers”. Even though every situation like this is unique to the particular individuals involved, Slabolepszy shows that Greg felt undervalued and unrecognised by his family and therefore threatened to kill them in retaliation. Nothnagel can be seen as a type of Greg, but one who followed through with his plans.

Another sensational and notorious incident is the case of paralympic Oscar Pistorius, who shot and killed his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp. He claims that he thought she

was an intruder and hence international news agencies tend to attribute the incident to South Africa's culture of violence (*Time* magazine ran a cover story on this). The vulnerability many men (and citizens of South Africa) experience in terms of crime and violence in the country has an influence here. *Time* reported that "Steenkamp was the tragic victim of a racially splintered society in which fear and distrust are so pervasive that citizens shoot first and ask questions later" (Internet: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2137420,00.html>). The case is still being investigated and only time will tell whether it was a premeditated act or an accident. Pistorius's story is a very particular one because he is an acclaimed paralympic athlete and has a disability, which set him at a disadvantage. The incident, however, adds to the image and representation of the collective psyche of the white male in South Africa where seemingly irrational states of extreme violence rear their head.

These examples from South African social life illustrate the possible impact of a white male psyche in crisis. Such a crisis is, of course, not to be seen as a characteristic of all white men today, but the incidents add to one's perception of the state of the white male's psyche. The themes of recognition, dangerous insecurity and yearning back to the past are all relevant here.

It would seem that the current prevalence and representation of such themes in South African theatre may be an indication that South African white males still need to explore these notions in an attempt to make sense of their social and cultural milieu. Perhaps one can say that the "transformation years" have not yet ended.

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## Appendix

### ***Basic details and summaries of the plays discussed***

#### **Plays by Paul Slabolepszy**

##### ***Abnormal Load***

##### **Date of writing**

1987

##### **Publication details**

One part of two inter-linked unpublished one act plays named *Travelling Shots*.

Copyright (first draft): Paul Slabolepszy, Johannesburg.

##### **Production details**

Monologue for a man. James Borthwick played the role of Gregory in the first performance of the piece. 1987. PACT.

##### **Theme and context**

The *Travelling Shots* series deals with people 'on the move' in South Africa. Gregory is an ex travelling salesman. The monologue is a tragic-comedy with many themes that correspond with those of *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie*. The themes include: recognition; *ressentiment*; hyper-masculinity; loneliness; nostalgia; depression; change; redundancy; family murder; misdirected aggression and racism; entrapment; perceptions of patriarchy; volatile behaviour; dangerous insecurity and desperation.

The action takes place in a 'Jo'burg pub'. South Africa is starting to change as the end of apartheid is looming and the uncertain fate of the white male South African becomes increasingly apparent.

##### **Brief plot outline**

The play is a short monologue for one male actor. The character's name is Gregory de Witt (Greg). The time is 1988. The suggested set simply comprises of a small, circular bar-table on which bottles, glasses (empty, half-empty) and an ashtray are randomly located. Greg sits at the table relaxed after a few drinks. He is in his late-

thirties-early forties. His 'business' suit is a trifle crumpled and his tie has "perhaps one or two grease-spots too many" (Slabolepszy 1988: 1).

Gregory is talking to an unseen stranger. We find him mid-conversation initially telling seemingly meaningless stories of his life. He starts with a story about the day he wanted to buy tickets to see Bles Bridges in concert. When there aren't any he recalls how he wanted her to look for any films in which typical macho and masculine actors star in. The story ends with the window of the ticket office being broken and Greg running away with no tickets. He concludes the story saying one should not try to buy tickets on a Saturday. He carries on with his stories and starts selling himself to the stranger. He somewhat unconvincingly boasts how important he was at his old firm, how experienced he is and that the stranger can consider him for any job. He becomes increasingly inebriated as the monologue progresses. He eventually talks about his family and how his wife is attempting to replace him with another man. He becomes aggressive when the stranger wants to leave. Eventually Greg reveals a newly purchased gun and implies that he is planning on going to his old home and killing someone (he could be either referring to the new man or his family). The stranger eventually leaves after Greg pops the gun into his mouth and holds it up to his temple to show that its safety is on. Greg, completely inebriated, eventually begs the man to give him a job and tries to convince him that he is a good person. He ends the monologue by singing Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders' (according to the script) song "The purpose of a man is to love a woman". He then kills himself.

### **Evaluation of Impact**

The monologue was presumably the inspiration of the full-length play *The Return of Elvis du Pisanie*.

### ***Over the Hill***

#### **Date of Writing:**

1985

#### **Publication Details:**

Published in *Mooi Street and other Moves*, 1994, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg. It was earlier published in *South Africa Plays*, edited by Stephen Gray and published in London by Nick Hern Books and in South Africa by Heinemann-Centaur.

### **Production Details:**

First performed at the Standard Bank Grahamstown Festival of the Arts in July 1985 as part of a double bill with *Under the Oaks*, after which it toured nationally. Jonathan Rands played Steve, James Borthwick, Charlie and Kate Edwards, Lynette. Directed by Paul Slabolepszy.

### **Theme and Context**

The play is set in 1985, South Africa. The action takes place in the dressing rooms of a sports club after a rugby match in Nelspruit. The rooms are quite crummy and dirty. Empty beer cans, orange peels and dirty clothes lie scattered.

Themes include: Rugby; masculinity; insecurity; the *platteland*; disillusionment; delusion; fantasy; being stuck.

### **Brief Plot Outline**

Steve and Charlie play for the same team, the *Blesbokke*. Steve sits in the dressing room, clearly depressed. Charlie is retiring from the team and off-stage one hears speeches being made, singing and cheering. He enters the dressing room where Steve is sitting, drinking a beer. Charlie has received a 'gold' (presumably fake) clock as a retirement gift. Charlie seems proud of the clock but at the same time one senses that he does not take it seriously. We find out Steve has punched someone during the game and swore at the coach. He thinks he is going to be kicked off the team. Charlie tries to cheer him up with stories of his past and forcing him to sing the team's anthem. They have a bit of a good-natured wrestle and Lynette arrives. Lynette McAllister is looking for Charlie. She wants to know if he is going to take her photo as he promised. We find out Charlie met her the previous time they played in Nelspruit and told her he owns a modelling agency in Alberton. She's an ex-beauty queen. Charlie wants Steve and him to find some girls to take back to the hotel. Steve says he no longer cheats on his wife. She had almost left him. Charlie says he

suspected his own wife of cheating. He says he brought out his gun one night and cleaned it in front of his wife and child as a warning. They talk about a competition Charlie wants to win collecting Disney figurines. Steve asks Charlie to tell him truthfully what he thought of his game. Charlie eventually tells Steve he has an attitude problem. We find out Charlie is being let go because of 'politics' not his age. He also tells how he does not know how he is going to get a job as he has no experience. Lynette returns and Charlie gets away. Steve is left talking to her. Lynette has quit her job at the building society to become a full-time model (as Charlie had ensured her). She was the Citrus Queen three years ago. Steve eventually escapes. Lynette dances the routine she had prepared for Charlie as the play ends.

### **Evaluation of Impact**

The play was written at the height of Slabolepszy's career. It won the DALRO Best Play Award in 1985. It was well received and a film version was eventually made starring Jamie Bartlett as Charlie. The film was called *Swansong for Charlie*.

### ***Saturday Night at the Palace***

#### **Date of Writing**

1982

#### **Publication Details**

Published by AD Donker in 1985, Jeppestown, Johannesburg.

#### **Production Details**

First performed Upstairs at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg on Thursday 6 May 1982. It was directed by Bobby Heaney and featured Fats Dibeco as September, Bill Flynn as Forsie and Paul Slabolepszy as Vince.

#### **Theme and Context**

The play is set in 1982. Change in South Africa is imminent. The action takes place at a drive-in roadhouse.

Change; ignorance; fantasy; false dreams; dangerous insecurity; aggression; recognition; holding on to the past; isolation;

### **Brief Plot Outline**

September is the manager of the roadhouse. He is busy cleaning and packing up after the day's work. Forsie and Vince abruptly arrive. Vince is clearly drunk. He is passionately talking about a soccer game he had played in which he had got aggressive and caused a fight. He has been dropped from the team. Forsie's bike (their only means of transport) has broken down and they need to call someone for help. They meet September as Vince kicks the public telephone since it keeps cutting him off. September tells Vince to stop. They talk about the night's party and Forsie tries to tell Vince something important. Vince keeps cutting Forsie off. Forsie gives him a letter which says OFFICIAL/AMPTELIK. He thinks it is the army that is calling him up for service. A discussion of the army ensues. September comes to talk to Forsie and says he wants to buy his bike. Forsie and September eventually do a gumboot dancing routine together. Vince and Forsie continue talking about girls, going overseas, the moon landing etc. Vince steals a packet of chips. Vince enters the roadhouse where September is and steals his keys. He terrorises September and says he will return the keys if he brings them food. Forsie eventually reveals that Vince is being kicked out of the house they both are sharing with other men. Vince is livid and takes it out on September. He eventually wants to steal the roadhouse's takings. September gets cuffed to the motorbike. Vince trashes the roadhouse and throws September's suitcase contents around. At the end of Forsie's tether, Vince says he slept with the girl Forsie likes. Forsie ends up accidentally killing Vince with a screwdriver. He leaves September cuffed to the bike and runs away.

### **Evaluation of Impact**

Winner of Amstel, Vita and Fleur du Cap Best Play. A film was made in 1987 starring Paul Slabolepszy as Vince, Bill Flynn as Forsie, John Kani as September, Arnold Vosloo as Dougie and Joanna Weinberg as Sally.

## ***The Return of Elvis du Pisanie***

### **Date of writing**

1992

### **Publication details**

Published in *Mooi Street and other Moves*, 1994, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg.

### **Production details**

First performed at the Great Hall, Grahamstown Festival Fringe in July 1992. The play toured nationally for almost a year. Slabolepszy was invited to perform the piece in Chicago, Illinois and Alexandria, Virginia, in the United States. The production was directed by Lara Foot. The piece was 75 minutes long.

### **Theme and context**

The play is a tragi-comedy with themes such as: confrontation of pain; Elvis Presley; suicide; family murder; nostalgia; memory; fantasy; perceptions of masculinity; existentialism and features of *ressentiment*. The play is set in a changing South Africa in the 90's. The set details proposed by Slabolepszy are images of decay and remembrance.

### **Brief Plot Outline**

The play is a monologue written for one actor. The character's name is Edward Cedric du Pisanie (Eddie). The time is 1992. The suggested set comprises merely of a solitary lamppost with 'Union Crescent' stencilled on it, a plastic milk crate to one-side and a stick. Eddie wears a dark, crumpled business suit, blue shirt, tie, slip-on black shoes and white socks. He has slightly over-long hair swept back in a style that is somewhat out-of-date. He is a middle-class ex-salesman with a wife and children.

The piece starts off with Eddie at a lamppost quietly singing an Elvis Presley song. We quickly find out that Eddie was planning on killing himself earlier in the evening. He turns on the radio, hears an Elvis Presley song, considers this as a sign and it prevents him from killing himself. Elvis is a through line in the play and it later

becomes evident why he considers the song as a sign. He returns to his home town in the middle of the night and this where the action of the play happens. He starts recollecting and re-enacting his memories of his past in a one-way conversation with the audience. He tells stories of his childhood in small towns in South Africa, first Modderfontein and later Witbank. He later implies that his father was possibly depressed and psychologically affected by fighting in the North African Campaign in World War II. He subsequently kills his family one night except for Eddie. Eddie had heard Elvis had presumably been spotted and snuck out of the house on that fateful night in an attempt to find him. Elvis had thus 'rescued' him from death twice in his life. The play ends with Eddie singing 'One Night' by Elvis Presley and smiling.

### **Evaluation of Impact**

The play had an enormous impact on the theatre scene at the time winning, according to Wikipedia, the most national awards for a South African play ever (Internet: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Slabolepszy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Slabolepszy)). The play is considered to be his most successful play. His first run also received rave reviews.

### **Plays by Greig Coetzee**

#### ***Johnny Boskak is Feeling Funny***

#### **Date of writing**

2004

#### **Publication details**

Published in *Johnny Boskak is Feeling Funny and other plays* by Greig Coetzee in 2009 in Scottsville, South Africa by KwaZulu-Natal Press.

#### **Production details**

First performed by Greig Coetzee at the Grahamstown Festival in July 2004. Directed by Genna Lewis. Original soundtrack composed by Syd Kitchen. Original artwork for projections by Michelle Coetzee.

#### **Theme and context**

The play is set in 2004. The Border War had ended several years earlier and mandatory army service had been abolished. Many ex-soldiers had moved on from their army days but there were a number who had not (Coetzee 2009: 2). According to Coetzee there were some who “left the SADF but never took off their boots” and “forever stuck in limbo between the old and new South Africa” (Coetzee 2009: 2).

Themes include: change; Border War; South African army life; travelling; white trash; *ressentiment*; trauma; misrecognition; poverty; fantasy, myths and ‘fairy tales’; death and the notion of the after-life; resurrection; Christian Bible analogies and the Christian faith; hell; post-apocalyptic; decay; the ‘new’ South Africa; the products and aftermath of the ‘old’ South Africa; morality; ‘ever-present past’; mortality; masculinity; love and sex; rejection; crime. The play is written in rhyming couplets which contribute to the mock heroic tone of the piece.

### **Brief Plot Outline**

The piece is a solo piece with one actor switching between the various characters and narrator mode. The narrator’s name is Johnny Boskak and he is a white trash South African in his late thirties. Coetzee suggests the play can aim to be a “road-movie for the stage”.

Johnny starts the play by introducing himself and setting the scene. We come to know that he is a homeless wanderer travelling from one place to the next. He also has very little money for food and sleeps in places like roadside petrol stations’ toilet cubicles. Johnny has lost all faith in the Christian God. The play has a mythical quality to the play in which Johnny uses Christian images and symbols to tell his story. He reveals his backstory of being an ex-soldier, fighting for something he didn’t understand or believe in and having experienced violence and death at a very young age. He is now left feeling rejected by the “larnes” in a changing South Africa. He feels like a “white trash apartheid abomination” (Coetzee 2009: 10). He is consequently left rejected and psychologically unhinged because of his past in fighting for the ‘old’ South Africa. When he has finished the story neither the Devil nor Jesus takes him seriously and asks him to leave. He gets back “on the road”. He meets a man in a bar in Secunda and he tells Johnny about a woman who had left him for someone else and stole his car. The woman (named Eve) enters the bar and Johnny is immediately in love. He sees a ‘sign’ in his urine as he relieves himself in

the toilet. They consequently leave together and flee the man in the bar. Eve reveals to Johnny that he will have to kill the man who is after them. They book in a dingy motel and have sex. Eve encourages Johnny to face his demons in “Elandspoes” (presumably referring to a small town in South Africa). They arrive at a bar in town. Eve flirts and makes bets with the men inside and she and Johnny eventually robs them all. From there they live a life of crime, stealing cars and money. They eventually end up in Hillbrow, Johannesburg looking for two of Johnny’s black friends to help them devise a plan to kill the truck driver Eve initially stole from. Sparkplug Majozi and Tshabalala Two-stroke tell Johnny that he needs to kill the “beast” to deliver him and Eve from evil. He eventually finds the truck driver on the top of “Van Reenen’s Pass” and gets into his truck. Johnny reveals that the man is merely an “oke who ran out of luck”. When the truck driver realises who Johnny is, he crashes the truck. The driver almost dies in the accident but Johnny decides he had enough of death and leaves the man to his own devices. Johnny and Eve head towards Durban. They stop at a roadhouse there and buy something to eat. The driver finds them and shoots Eve in the head. Johnny kills him with his boots.

### **Evaluation of Impact**

The play is still regularly been performed by Coetzee abroad. It won the Edinburgh Fringe First Award in 2006.

### **Play by André P. Brink**

#### ***Die Jogger***

#### **Date of writing**

1997

#### **Publication details**

Published in 1997 by Human & Rousseau (Edms.) Bpk. in Cape Town, South Africa.

#### **Production details**

The first production of *Die Jogger* was produced by CAPAB for the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK). It was directed by Ilse van Hemert, designed by Peter Cazelet and lighting by Kobus Rossouw. The cast was as follows:

Killian – Chris van Niekerk

Noni - Nandi Nyembe

Vusi – Tony Kgoroge

Ilse – Anthea Thompson

Nico – Chris Vorster

Sekretaris, Jogger, Helpers – Jan Ellis and Gerrit Snyman

### **Theme and context**

The play is set in the middle of the 90's in a changing South Africa during the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There is however various instances in the play where the past is revisited.

Themes include:

South African politics; Truth and Reconciliation Commission; patriarchy; the 'past'; military; psychiatry; apartheid violence and crimes; Afrikaner nostalgia and sentiment; bureaucracy; recognition; a changing South Africa; being alone and desertion; sins of the fathers; paranoia; betrayal; the state versus the individual; personal histories; family; change; lost dreams; acknowledgement.

### **Brief plot outline**

Killian is an ex-colonel of the South African military. He was celebrated during his time in office. The play begins with a scene in which it seems someone is being tortured by Killian and helpers. He is tortured because it seems he doesn't want to tell them what they want to hear. His name is Vusi. At the end of the scene, Vusi still refuses to talk. Killian then takes a knife and cuts out Vusi's tongue. After this scene the play jumps into the present and Killian is thrashing about in his bed in a psychiatric hospital. The entire play is made up of scenes in which Killian's memories and hallucinations are being acted out. The stage directions indicate that certain spaces need to illustrate this. The set becomes the representation of Killian's mind. Noni, Killian's nurse, enters and calms Killian down. She finds a flask in which some kind of human organ is stored in. Killian says it's Napoleon's penis. Noni reveals that

Killian's daughter, Ilse had him committed. The stage directions suggest that Killian move into another space in which a memory of Killian and his daughter is illustrated. An 18 year-old Ilse is about to leave for University. Killian is sad that Ilse is leaving. He recollects stories of his Afrikaner family and how far they have come. Ilse leaves. A jogger, unnoticed by Killian, comes running past behind the set. Killian proceeds to call someone. In the conversation he orders someone to kill, presumably, political prisoners. The next scene illustrates a visit from a "secretary" in which he implies that these people are to be killed on a "minister's" orders. In the next scene the play is back in the present. Killian is hallucinating about Vusi and Noni is trying to calm him. The play jumps back into the past and illustrates Ilse and Killian talking on the phone about political protests that Ilse is presumably involved in. In the next scene Killian is bribing an old friend's son, Nico, to spy on Ilse at University. Killian hallucinates again and sees Vusi. The hallucination of Vusi stays with Killian throughout most of the rest of the play. Killian and Noni tell each other briefly about their respective family's histories. At the end of the first act, Nico agrees to spy on Ilse for Killian. The jogger runs past again.

At the beginning of act 2 Killian is listening to the radio. It reminds one of F.W. de Klerk talking before the TRC denying any orders given by the government to kill political prisoners (youTube: TRC episode 48 part 3). Killian desperately wants to set up a meeting with the minister. Noni is busy cleaning and reminds him that the phone isn't working. He presumably hallucinates and makes an appointment. It could also be a mixture of a memory and a hallucination. Killian says to Noni that his daughter will come and fetch him. She reminds him that Ilse said she doesn't want to see Killian ever again. The next scene depicts an older Ilse packing to go back to University after the holidays. It is then revealed that she has been involved in liberal movements on campus that insist on the dismantling of the political and social order of the time. Killian tries to explain to her that the agents are just using her for their own gain. In the next scene Killian and Noni are back in the hospital room. Killian's hallucination of Vusi for the first time involves Vusi speaking, even though his tongue is cut out. The next scene is a court scene in which Noni plays a lawyer and the secretary is a judge. It is Vusi's trial after his tongue had been cut out. Killian insists that Vusi had cut out his own tongue. Vusi is found guilty because he can not defend himself as his tongue is cut out. He receives a death sentence. Vusi keeps

threatening Killian. Nico arrives and tells Killian he does not want to be a spy anymore and he has fallen in love with Ilse. They are thinking about getting married. Nico and Killian agree to never tell Ilse about the spying. Noni and Killian talk again and agree that paying alone for what happened in the past is unfair. Vusi describes his last night alive before he is hanged. Then Vusi asks Killian whether the Minister insisted on cutting out his tongue. He then reminds Killian that there must have been a moment he had made a choice to cut out Vusi's tongue. Ilse calls Killian and gives him the news that he is going to be a grandfather. The scene illustrates how Ilse is now completely out of Killian's control. Nico then visits Killian and says that he is going to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and admit to the deeds he had committed as a spy. Killian thinks it is a bad idea. Killian then arrives at the Minister's office and the secretary tells him the Minister is busy and can not see him. Killian reminds him that he had an appointment. The secretary then tells Killian that he can not make any further contact with the Minister. Ilse then comes to see Killian and is furious. Nico had gone to the newspapers with his story. The scene ends where Killian hits Ilse and eventually tries to suffocate her. She calls him a monster and says she never wants to see him again. In the next scene Noni shaves Killian. He looks in the mirror and says that he is no longer there. The play ends with another presumed hallucination of Killian in which he somewhat incoherently tries to explain why he did what he did. The jogger comes running past one last time and Killian sees him. Killian eggs him on to run faster.

### **Evaluation of Impact**

The play received a lot of attention as it was André P. Brink's long awaited return to the theatre. The play received varying responses. Brink won the prestigious Hertzog prize in 2000 for the play.

## **Play by Deon Opperman**

### ***Donkerland***

#### **Date of Writing:**

1996

#### **Publication Details:**

Cape Town

#### **Production Details:**

First performed on 1 April 1996. Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, Oudtshoorn. TRUK, ATKV and Nasionale Pers sponsored the play. The ensemble of actors were: André Odendaal, Eric Nobbs, Petru Wessels, Samson Khumalo, David Clatworthy, Hannes Muller, Nomhle Nkunyeni, Shadrack Keorapetse, Petro-Nelise Trichardt, Seipati Montsho and Retief Lubbe. Directed by Deon Opperman, lighting by Paul Pamboukian and set and costume design by James Macnamara. The piece was 5 hours long.

#### **Theme and Context**

Themes include: The Afrikaner boer; culture; collective and subjective memory; cultural memory; selective memory; the elusive 'past'; misinterpretation; passing of time; personal and cultural fictions; freedom; catharsis; entitlement; Christianity; patriarchy; masculinity; whiteness; race relations; racism; moving on.

The play spans over the lives of six generations of one Afrikaans family between 1836 and 1996 in South Africa. Therefore the historical context of the play is ever-changing. The entire play is set on the De Witt family farm.

#### **Brief plot outline**

Pieter de Witt is a tenacious Afrikaner who is travelling northwards in search of a piece of land for him and his descendants. It is 1838, the time of the Groot Trek. On his travels he meets his wife and his first servant. He finally takes a piece of land by the traditional Boer measurement of walking a half an hour from a central point on each of the four directions and calls it Donkerland. The play moves through the

various chapters of the family, considering every generation's outlook on their time as well as their perspectives on times gone by. The De Witt's story is paralleled with the story of a Zulu family whose lives are intertwined with theirs. Information and memories of the past are continuously reinterpreted and misinterpreted.

The ten episodes of the family encapsulate many of the significant chapters in Afrikaner history: the trek of the Afrikaners from the Cape, the first and second Anglo-Boer wars, the lure of the cities for the impoverished Afrikaners, the 1948 victory of the Nationalists, the "border war" of the seventies, and the victory of the ANC. The effects these events have on the family are illustrated in each episode. The aspects and experiences of these events are however selectively passed on. Every generation keeps these selective memories alive. The past is at times re-imagined or denied and this is illustrated very well in the scene in which Piet-Jan (the family's patriarch in 1976) asks Arnold to swear on the Bible that he is not the father of one of the farm worker's bastard son. Arnold asks his father to deny his own youthful fornications with the 'native' people. Piet-Jan tells Arnold not to tell his mother and he agrees. The patriarch is preserved. Eventually Arnold is the only person who stays behind on the farm and fervently fights for it. He eventually loses the farm because of land redistribution.

The play is held together by a narrator commenting on the family's experience and fills some gaps of the family's history. Every sub-chapter starts with quotes from either Exodus, Horace, Jan Smuts, or well-known Afrikaans poets.

### **Evaluation of Impact**

The play was much publicised specifically for its highly sensitive cultural content. As mentioned, it premiered in 1996 during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the time of serious change in South Africa. Johann Botha wrote in *Die Burger*: "Dit verdwerg veel van wat die afgelope tien, twintig jaar in die Afrikaanse toneel vermag is. Jy wil dit meet aan D.J. Opperman, N.P. van Wyk Louw" (Opperman 1996: on the cover). He eventually won the prestigious Afrikaans literary award, the Hertzog prize. Many critics were also angered by it saying he sells the audience the "very same myths" that led to "apartheid in the first place" (Wilson 1996: 30).