

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### The poetics of exile

### a critical examination of an author's creative writings (1988-2010) as performative acts of political and psychic survival

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**THE POETICS OF EXILE: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF AN  
AUTHOR'S CREATIVE WRITINGS (1988-2010) AS PERFORMATIVE  
ACTS OF POLITICAL AND PSYCHIC SURVIVAL**

**by**

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**An essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD  
by Published Works**

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## Contents

### A. THE PORTFOLIO

Submitted published plays	5
Submitted published short stories	6

### B. THE SUPPORTING STATEMENT

<b>Introduction</b>	7
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#### *Part 1. Influences: a narrative account of the development of the submitted plays and short stories*

##### *Plays*

Imbibing the influence of Athol Fugard and Bertolt Brecht	10
The influence of 80s and 90s London fringe theatre	16
The influence of the exile Eugene Ionesco's absurdist and surrealist theatre texts	24
The influence of Samuel Beckett's plays expressing exile as a state of 'not quite being there'	30

##### *Short Stories*

The influence of the modernist short story on the theme of exile	34
Grace Paley and 'the sound of writing exile'	35
Nadine Gordimer and writing the politics of the 'disjunctive scraps of everyday life'	38
Leonora Carrington: surrealism in relation to the writing of 'Post Human' – exile, revolt and the expression of the uncanny	41

#### *Part 2. An examination of the motif of exile in relationship to language, through the work of Julia Kristeva and Homi Bhabha*

Julia Kristeva: Poetic writing, exile and the True/Real	44
The semiotic and the symbolic – language, meaning and identity	46
'Negativity: Rejection'	48

Writing the trauma of loss	49
Identity, creative writing and the female exile	51
The split self – ‘the stranger within us’	52
The wounded exile	53
The other side of narcissism: the True/Real	55
‘Herethics’	56
‘Women’s Time’	58
Homi Bhabha: Transgressive political/cultural writing of the alien	60
The uncanny ‘double’	62
<b><i>Part 3. Exile and language – reading my work through the critical lenses of Kristeva and Bhabha</i></b>	
The language of revolt in ‘Taking Tea in Africa’ and ‘Tiekkiedraai’	64
Strangeness and narcissism in <i>Louis/lui</i> and ‘Something Chronic’	68
The expression of the True/Real in <i>The Crystal Den</i> and ‘Something Chronic’	71
A ‘forked tongue’ from a ‘third space’	76
The discourse of motherhood and mother/daughter relations	81
<b>Concluding thoughts</b>	88
<b>Coda: towards the future</b>	89
<b>References</b>	90

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**A. THE PORTFOLIO:**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SUBMITTED WORK (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)**

All performed play texts are in the British Library Theatre Archives Project, Department of English, Sheffield University.

**Submitted published plays**

1. *Louis/lui* (1998)

Arts Council Commission and Options Award 1995

Brighton Festival 1998

Sonja Linden and Marion Baraitser (eds.) *Bottled Notes from Underground:*

*Contemporary Plays by Jewish Writers*, London: Loki Books, 1998.

2. *The Story of an African Farm* (2000)

Royal National Theatre Studio presentation, 1995

Reading with Soho Theatre Company, 1997

BBC Radio 4, 1997

Young Vic, 2000

3. *The Crystal Den* (2002)

Jewish Book Council Grant

New End Theatre, London, Oberon Modern Plays, 2002

**Submitted published short stories**1. **'Post Human'** (1996)

'Post Human', in *Metropolitan: New Urban Fiction*, 6: 32-4.

2. **'Something Chronic'** (2004)

'Something Chronic', in *Mordecai's First Brush with Love*, eds. Laura Phillips and Marion Baraitser, London: Loki Books, 214-219.

3. **'Taking Tea in Africa'** (2008)

'Taking Tea in Africa', in *If Salt has Memory: Jewish Writing in Exile*, ed. Jennifer Langer, Nottingham: Five Leaves, 97-103.

4. **'Tiekiedraai'** (2010)

'Tiekiedraai', in *Exiled Ink*, vol. 13, eds. Jennifer Langer and Esther Lipton, London: Exiled Writers Ink, 13-14.

## **B. THE SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

### *An essay in support of the creative work submitted for the award of PhD by Published Works*

#### **Introduction**

This essay concerns the theme of exile, both political and personal, as it emerges in the submitted published plays and short stories. It draws out notions of the split identities within nation, race, religion and gender that define exile. The essay reveals how my creative writing gradually progressed by imbibing the ideas of influential writers who had themselves experienced forms of exile as estrangement, dislocation, fragmentation of the self and identity. Having established the influences on my work, it aims to read my literary creative output through a feminist psychoanalytic and postcolonial lens in order to situate it historically, and theorise the theme of exilic identity, and the notion of the self as a 'subject-in-process' that runs through the submitted works. In doing so, both the political and personal aspects of exile, and their relation to the process and practice of creative writing, are understood more fully.

Part 1 presents an account of the emergence of my submitted creative works. It encompasses my young years in South Africa where I encountered the plays of Bertolt Brecht and Athol Fugard and the modernist short stories of Nadine Gordimer. These early influences enabled me to begin to see a relation between political and internal exile, and the way writing might function to hold this relation in tension. In later years, in the 70s, I came to London as a journalist and teacher not only as a political exile but also as a woman in exile, with a growing sense of the meaning of the personal being political as a lived experience, and the kinds of internal fragmentation that patriarchy could lead to. I was opened to a dynamic and inclusive world of writers, philosophers, and organisations



that were new to me, and whose work externalized and expressed my own sense of self-estrangement and dislocation. Part 1 charts my engagement with Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Caryl Churchill, and their influence on my playwriting. It also shows the development of the submitted short stories, as I came under the influence of modernist short story writers, in particular Nadine Gordimer, Grace Paley and Leonora Carrington. The first section of the essay therefore traces the ways these literary figures shaped the form, composition, characterisation, technique and subject matter of my published work.

In Part 2 I turn to theories of exile and related motifs of split identities in relation to nation, race, religion and gender, in the work of Julia Kristeva and Homi Bhabha, together with references to Jacques Lacan, Christopher Bollas, and Alain Badiou. I present Kristeva's argument that the subversion of the masculine Law can occur when the semiotic aspects of language break into the symbolic, and that art or literature can act as a transformative space that subverts the Law of the Father, using difference and disruption, so that the wounded exile can move beyond narcissism. Kristeva theorises that writing (as well as motherhood and psychoanalysis) is a privileged site for what she names as 'the subject-in-process/on trial'. She also argues for changing the way the exiled female subject gradually comprehends time as linked to a sense of the political and monumental, rather than only time as linked to the cyclical time of birth.

I develop Kristeva's theory of the subject through an engagement with Homi K. Bhabha's work on the exile's position of writing with 'a forked tongue', in which he theorises that the ambivalent and fractured state of identity as formed by conditions of exile, stimulates a form of symbolic/metaphorical writing arising from the space between the subject's past cultural and political position, and their present one. This allows for a more culturally and socially located subject to emerge. I further elaborate the subject-in-process through Alain Badiou's notion of the theatre (rather than politics) as an actualisation of truth, and

the psychoanalyst and critic Christopher Bollas's discussion of narcissism as a state in which the loving self is split off and destroyed by the narcissistic self.

Part 3 is an examination of the submitted texts through the lens of the theories of exile elaborated in Part 2. It shows how the theorizations of internal and external exile, together with the understanding of literary styles such as formalism, absurdism and surrealism allow me to make new sense of my literary output – its structures, languages, characters and scenes. Kristeva's notion that writing is a privileged site for the exiled subject-in-process allows me to track the disruptive moments in the short-stories in which inchoate and split-off aspects of the self, break into the specific symbolic scenes of apartheid South Africa, Jewish family life, and mother-daughter relations. This compels the forging of an original, personal language of resistance. I examine my choices to write about marginalized female historical figures and their struggles to signify within the patriarchal structures within which they are living: the fate of Althusser's Jewish wife at the hands of her alienated husband; Eleanor Marx's choosing to take her own life despite her forgiveness of her husband's secret betrayal of her; the defiant choice of Olive Schreiner's heroine to remain exiled and independent of a man she cannot love. I track the implications of both Beckett and Ionesco's narrative logic of absurdist structure in relation to the formalism of the structure of the plays. Part 3, therefore, concerns a feminist, psychoanalytic and post-colonial analysis of the creative work itself. It demonstrates how the exile's experience of split identity is transformed into artistic expression.

## *Part 1*

### *Influences: A narrative account of the development of the submitted plays and short stories*

#### *Plays*

##### **Imbibing the influence of Athol Fugard and Bertolt Brecht**

In a lecture given as Humanitas Visiting Professor at Oxford University, Athol Fugard summed up the attraction of writing plays: not only are they written as part of a dynamic team, but ‘plays really happen – they’re dangerous...electrifying’ (Fugard, 2014, n.p). Theatre allows ‘the flesh and blood...the actual substance of life...the living moment,’ in which we share in ‘the transience of all words’ (2014, n.p). As a young person growing up in Johannesburg, I knew of the work of the Market Theatre in the 1950s and 60s and of Barney Simon’s legendary early productions of Athol Fugard’s plays. These were devised with black actors drawn from a small, raw community who were making a form of experimental political theatre using improvised texts and Brechtian theatre techniques for the collaborative expression of personal and political protest against the suffocation of their rights to an identity.

I became an exile who sought a means to articulate my own marginalisation, not only as a white South African who had opposed apartheid and had lived as a political exile within my own country, but as a migrant who felt a sense of difference living in London, and as a Jewish woman exiled by both patriarchal and religious attitudes dominant within my society. Having imbibed Fugard’s Brechtian theatre, in coming to London I immersed myself in other forms of theatre that guided my unresolved, ‘unworded’ self as an exile, to discover a language, both poetical and ethical that allowed my ‘other’ to come into

being. Though it was the plays of Fugard I knew of in South Africa that first gave me a taste of the power of theatre to change myself and others, it was only when I settled as an exile in London that I could witness plays like *Sizwi Banzi is Dead* (Space Theatre, 1972), Barney Simon's electrifying and revolutionary production of *Woza Albert!* (Market Theatre, 1981) with Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema. *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* is a play that powerfully explores a form of exile so complete that if a black man's police pass was missing in the apartheid system of South Africa, his identity was wiped out – he ceased to exist in the eyes of the state. The play expressed, in an extreme and horrific way, my own sense of fragmented identity as an exile. *Woza Albert!* was part of Protest Theatre, as two black actors and one white actor dared to be together on stage for the first time in South Africa, facing audiences with the cruelty of apartheid that exiled a *whole people* as 'inferior'. Seeing the production in London alerted me to Louis Althusser's Marxist position that demanded sacrifice of the individual for the sake of forging a social position, a view that, in my reading, cut him off from his emotions and led to the sacrifice of his wife to his political blindness. Later, I was able to see in London, under Peter Brook's direction, the adaptation of Can Themba's novel *The Suit* (Market Theatre, 1990) by Mthobi Mutloatse and Barney Simon. This play demonstrated the use of mime, sparse props and music as theatrical devices. It also alerted me to the necessity of forgiveness that surfaced as a theme in *The Crystal Den*. *The Suit* is set in the black township of Sophiatown, Johannesburg, in the 1950s, and concerns a husband's cruel alienation of his wife, forcing her to treat her lover's suit (which the lover left behind when caught in bed with his wife) as an 'honoured guest', so cruelly forcing her to become the perfect wife, until she breaks down and takes her own life, because of his inability to forgive. The husband's behaviour ironically mirrors the ruthless apartheid system that finally exiles a

whole community by forced removal, bulldozing their houses and forcing them into exile in the wilderness.

These plays, together with the performances of Brecht's plays that extended Fugard's influence, encouraged me for the first time, to attempt the writing of a forerunner to *Louis/lui* (a play entitled *Winnie* (Soho Poly, 1981)), a Brechtian piece about the exile and suffering of black women activists who were resisting authority, and with whom I identified.<sup>1</sup> This empathy with the 'other', with the marginalised, became a driving force in my work. I pencilled my thoughts on the back page of my copy of Athol Fugard's published play-script *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (Fugard, 1980). My instructions to myself as a writer were: 'Bare room, only props change, use mime'. In the introduction to his play collection in which I first wrote these thoughts, Fugard writes about 'the actor and the stage, the actor *on* the stage.... Around him is space, to be filled by movement and gesture... words and sounds to make an immediate and direct connection with the audience' – alerting me to direct ways of involving an audience in the immediacy of theatre as a medium. I began to question realism as an approach to writing theatre texts about the complexity of the exiled subject-in-process, a state of being that needed to be encompassed by the imaginary.

These experiences led to the writing of the earliest submitted play *Louis/lui* (Brighton Festival, 1999), with Louis Althusser as its central character. I had come across the French Marxist philosopher's autobiography, *The Future Lasts a Long Time* (Althusser, 1994) which presented him as living in a permanent state of exile from his true self, as his mother had foisted upon him the identity of her lost lover, which split his identity, making him, in Kristeva's terms, a stranger to himself. I wanted not only to explore how a

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that the play surfaced as runner-up for the Verity Bargate Award was a direct result of the Women's Theatre Group's influence, and this kind of encouragement was vital to a new playwright trying to surface in a world dominated by male writers and directors.

position of exile drove this exceptional leader and thinker to the point of murdering his wife, but also to discover his wife's narrative as a Jewish woman alienated from the Communist Party, and betrayed and eventually murdered by her husband. I wrote in the preface to the published play:

It is a life that speaks for our century. The book's obsessive exploration of the nature of identity and of selfhood, or the lack of it, led to the play's themes, which ask what it means to be a stranger to oneself – 'to be lost in translation'. These questions concern me as a woman living in the late twentieth century, and as a Jew... I wanted to explore the identity not only of Althusser, but of his Jewish wife.

(Baraitser, 1998: 69)

Elizabeth Wright, writing on the aesthetics of early Brecht suggest that 'the plays are an attack on our assumptions of stable identity, our own and that of others. [...] The early plays are blatantly anti-narrative in form [...] they disrupt normal modes of perception, merely pointing to happenings, postures and processes' (Wright, 1989: 38). She notes further that Brecht dealt with characters who were 'split subjects [...] experiencing the random shocks of life' (97). These thoughts reflect something of Kristeva's viewpoint on the instability of identity that Brecht wanted to use in the presentation of character on stage. Further, I learned from John Willett's *Brecht on Theatre* that includes a 1926 interview with Bernard Guillemin in which Brecht defined epic theatre: 'The continuity of the ego is a myth. A man is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew. We have to show things as they are' (Willett, 1964: 15). He notes that plays should be presented 'coldly [...] for they are not matter for empathy: they are there to be understood' by an audience (15).

Brecht's alienation techniques, as outlined in his essay 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre' in John Willett's *Brecht on Theatre* (Willett, 1964), made seminal changes to theatre writing which served as guidelines for the writing of *Louis/lui*. This essay was written for actors outlining the idea of the Brechtian *gestus* that aims at alienating the audience, enabling them to think about the *social* situation being presented by the play. In his essay on epic theatre, Brecht presented a revolutionary approach that emphasised that the aim of theatre is to show our development of our identity as a process, and that our social being determines our thoughts. In addition, the plot was to become a narrative that does not wish to draw in an audience through emotional identification, but rather presents actions that provoke judgements; the spectator was to be an observer of characters presented coldly and objectively as they are. The play interrogates the reality of changeable human beings who break up and form themselves anew; each scene stands on its own – *montage* was to be used rather than development or growth of a plot; the play's structure should move in curves, not the lines of a plot. This approach also empowers the audience to link the disparate elements rather than rely on a plot alone.

To this effect I began by entitling the play *Louis/lui*, revealing that the character of Louis Althusser presented two contradictory sides that I came to call 'Louis' and 'lui' (him), emphasising that 'Louis' is alienated or split from 'lui' – his 'other' dangerous and uncontrollable unconscious self who 'speaks'. For example, in the play I show the character of Louis bizarrely scribbling, then holding up a placard for his wife (and for the audience) that reads: 'Do not disturb. Temporarily absent', giving them his own shocking realisation of an underlying sense that he is 'an imposter.... I am not truly myself, you see' (Baraitser, 1998: 99). This holding up of a placard stating his confusion about his psychological absence from his 'other' is a Brechtian *gestus* that places the audience in the position of an objective observer of a character as a process, a fluctuating reality.

In the essay, Brecht also suggested a formal structure of a ‘curve’, rather than showing a straight-line plot. An example of this is the ‘curve’ I construct in several linked scenes to show ‘Louis’s’ discovery of his sexual identity. In the first scene, ‘The Red R(W)omb Sequence, Variation 1’, I demonstrate to the audience the character Louis as an old man in his dressing gown on a winter morning in 1980 caressing his wife. I then show the audience ‘Louis’ as a child, standing outside time as he intuits a scene of his father raping his mother when he takes her virginity; I then move the audience to Louis’s initial clumsy and lewd desire for a girl on a beach at the late age of 24; I then show his young wife’s patient initiation of him into sex, and I finally show the audience Louis as an old man taking to bed a young student procured for him by his wife. The end of the curve of these events is the ‘Repetition with Variation’ scene with which the play begins, in which the narcissistic ‘*lui*,’ lays his wife in bed once more, and in his alienated state, his final strokes of sexual love become agitated, uncontrolled and confused, so that these gestures of love become those of death, thus completing the curve.

I adapted, too, Brecht’s use of props. In his great plays, such as *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Zurich Schauspielhaus, 1941) and *Galileo* (Zurich Schauspielhaus, 1948), Brecht does not entirely abandon realism. He notes: ‘The illusion created by the theatre must be a partial one, in order that it may be recognised as an illusion’ (Willett, 1964: 219). In his essay ‘The Mother Courage Model’ (1952), quoted in Willett, he mentions inserting the smallest details of reality in *Mother Courage* like a chopping block and a fireplace, in contrast to the white lighting that continuously washes the stage to simultaneously destroy the illusion of reality (Willett, 1964: 218). In view of these comments, the stage set in ‘The Red R(W)omb Sequence Variation 1’ in *Louis/lui* includes specific objects – piles of books, a giant rolled red flag, a water jug, medicine bottles, and a telephone on an untidy desk, which are details that summarise Louis’s life



events and complex identity, even though the scene is set in a strange symbolic red womb-like space that ‘stages’ his uncertain identity.

The play therefore emerged out of the initial influences of Fugard, who understood the precise mechanisms of apartheid South Africa on the splitting of the self, but ultimately took me to Brecht in order to construct a play that could not just describe this splitting, but perform it through the play’s construction.

### **The influence of 80s and 90s London fringe theatre.**

David Edgar writes in ‘The Playwright’s Still the Thing’ that the theatre world of the 70s and 80s in London emphasised fringe companies devising plays using physical/performance theatre (including circus and street art) – rather than naturalistic, text-based plays – as a way of making theatre pieces (2015, n.p). Its roots lay in Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble’s earlier epic theatre performances in London in 1956, Joan Littlewood’s revolutionary Theatre Workshop productions, and Peter Brook’s *Marat/Sade* (1964). These plays used performance art techniques that Styan writes, drew on Meyerhold’s work on physical gestures expressing feeling, and Artaud’s ‘theatre of cruelty’ in which the director uses ‘shock-tactics’ that expose the audience ‘to its own secret crimes and obsessions and hostilities, using sound, images, music, dance, colour, light and costume’ (Styan, 1981:108). Exposure to this theatre work reinforced the ‘shock tactics’ I was experimenting with in *Louis/lui* – the character of Louis knocks the telephone out of his wife’s hands, threatens her with a gun, strangles her on stage. He holds up placards as if in a puppet show, his father crawls under a bed and shouts ‘Wallow, wallow, wallow’ at his wife, and his first girlfriend lifts her leg and lets sand trickle from her pants as a sexual gesture.

In addition to the influence of performance theatre on the writing of the submitted plays, in the 90s I attended David Mamet's sessions for Paines Plough Theatre Company, a series of organised talks by established playwrights. Mamet described the setting up of two rhythms of action in a theatre piece – one in the 'real' world and one in the 'shadow' world of the unconscious from which images can break loose and connect with the 'real' world of the play. The talks included further insights on how to allow form to create the subject, rather than the other way around, and the need to concentrate on changing texture rather than events – stillness can be followed by a moment of violence, and monologues can give a different texture within dialogue. The talks discuss theatre structure as being concerned with the perception of how time and space work on stage – action can be presented in the same time and the same place, or in the same place, but in a different time, or in a different time and place, or several places and one time. The talks demonstrated the art of constructing each scene: the necessity of an arresting opening visual image that is mysterious and menacing that plays with the motivations of the characters and the audience's expectations; the use of a sub-text that allows tension to explode and move into a situation embodying complex horror that has its own logic; the focus on reasons why characters come and go in a scene. Above all the talks instilled in me that plays are not written but re-written.

The first lesson on juxtaposing the rhythms of the 'real' world with an unconscious 'shadow' one can be seen reflected in the writing of *The Crystal Den* (Baraitser, 2002). In the play the 'shadow' world I create is that of the character of Edward Aveling, Eleanor Marx's common-law husband, a character who lives by his unconscious narcissistic needs in a subterranean world that allows him to flit in and out of Eleanor's life, cheating on her, and using her savings to marry his secret lover. The 'real' world is the one in which Eleanor Marx works and lives. It is one of poverty and self-sacrifice – her 'crystal den' is

lit, for the first time in Eleanor's life, by 'real' electric lights. It is her own private space in which she can translate her father's books, prepare lectures for socialist organisations, and write and act plays with her friends.

Her friend Olive Schreiner alerts the audience to Eleanor's 'real' life:

And Eleanor? Penniless, scatty, worn – quite lovely – typing on her new typewriter for a pittance –gas workers' letters, translations. Or devilling in the library for some writer, to pay the bills. (18)

But it is when Eleanor's 'real' world unexpectedly collides with her husband's 'shadow' one in the climactic performance of a play-within-a-play in Eleanor's 'den', that Eleanor comes to finally understand the submerged 'shadow' in which Aveling lives.

In my adaptation of *The Story of an African Farm* (Baraitser, 2000) I was able to use Mamet's insights on creating texture in plays, by having a still moment followed by a violent one. The play's first scene is set in the 1860s at sundown in the remote stillness of the semi-desert of a South African Little Karoo farm run by the misguided and punishing farm manager, Tant' Sannie. The orphaned and alienated English girl Lyndall, aged eight, is reading a book, while the German twelve-year old orphaned boy, Waldo, cracks open nuts, and Em, Tant' Sannie's daughter, nurses her doll. Immediately following this quiet scene, we witness a terrifying and violent one in which young Lyndall rages against Tant' Sannie's 'God' and is punished by a visit from a terrifying 'Masked Man', half seductive, half threatening, who warns her of '[a] gap. As huge as the universe – moving between you and the rest – until you are – nothing' (9). Lyndall wants '[t]o fly. But my heart is a sandbag. A dustbin' (10). The abrupt movement between the moment of stillness of the first scene, and the moment of terrifying violence as the young girl acts out her fury,

helplessness and death-wish gives the play its varied texture, one that continues throughout the writing of it.

Elaine Aston's perspective on 'woman as playwright' in the 80s and 90s encouraged my writing of theatre texts:

At the threshold of the twenty-first century the stories women tell may be dark and uncertain, but [they contain] the possibility, albeit a fragile possibility, of a [...] future that is less oppressive and combative, more progressive and democratic [moving] outside past histories, 'fixed' categories of gender, race or sexuality. At which point 'woman' as playwright may, finally, be 'subject' to erasure. (Aston, 2003: 173)

I began to see the possibilities in April de Angelis's assertion that 'women can feel as able as men to write about the wider world in theatre' (de Angelis, 1994: 5). In the London of the 80s and 90s I found myself drawn to writing feminist plays that, in the playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker's words, 'resisted patriarchal exclusion as part of an explosion of writing from women, in small theatres [...] This writing was often blatantly feminist' (Edgar, 1999: 75). As Jane Milling describes the situation, women playwrights were 'facing square-on the challenge of politics fragmenting beyond class into the complexities of identity' (Milling, 2012: 59).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hannah Ellis-Petersen reports of a study undertaken by Tonic Theatre which was set up in 2011 to show that 'among the writers of new plays produced in leading theatres... only 24% were female... in 11 of Britain's most influential theatres only 29% of plays were directed by women ... in organisations receiving Arts Council subsidy this final 24% are female (3). A further study of 'straight theatre' undertaken by Dan Rebellato with David Edgar and David Brownlee for the British Theatre Consortium showed that in 2013 new work had overtaken revivals, but it also demonstrated that the number of plays written by women had hardly changed – only 31% of productions were by women but also had shorter runs in smaller theatres (Rebellato, 2013). This led to a commitment to implement a 50/50 gender balance in commissioning plays by Headlong Theatre (Morrison, 2015).

To write both *The Story of an African Farm* and *The Crystal Den* there were resources at the time to turn to for encouragement and support as a woman playwright in London. The Women's Theatre Group (later renamed The Sphinx) ran an annual 'Glass Ceiling' conference to discuss women's place in the theatre and the arts, and Jules Wright's The Women's Playwright's Trust (WPT) established in 1978, provided opportunities for women playwrights to submit their work. There were performances of Caryl Churchill's innovative socialist-feminist plays such as *Cloud Nine* (Joint Stock Theatre Group, 1978) and *Top Girls* (Royal Court Theatre, 1982). In the former, I was struck by the hilarious role reversals in which each colonial character plays and embodies their suppressed sexual identity – the wife of the white colonialist dresses as a man because that is her perception of her identity, which led me to include the cross-dressing scene of the Englishman who loves Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*. I was influenced by Churchill's theme that we warp our identities if we conform to what is unnatural in ourselves, and her critique of the inequalities produced by capitalism and patriarchy, the politics of power and social control, and the commitment to the possibility of social change. In *The Story of an African Farm*, the heroine Lyndall defies patriarchal attitudes towards marriage. In *The Crystal Den* the characters of Olive Schreiner and Eleanor Marx both show the courage to radically change socio-political conditions for women at the turn of the century. The character of Eleanor Marx identifies with the immigrant Jewish seamstresses in the East End of London. In the play, I have both women speak out against the imprisonment of prostitutes and the need to transfer responsibility to the men who use them. In so doing I hoped to change the attitudes of audiences by showing the deep unfairness of the personal and political exile of women, and the cost of this to society.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf wrote of the playwright Aphra Behn: 'All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, for it was she

who earned them the right to speak their minds' (Woolf, 1929: 69). When Jules Wright of The Women's Playhouse Trust staged the seventeenth century playwright Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (Drury Lane, 1686) for the first time in 250 years, the production led me to explore the work of Behn, described by Lizbeth Goodman as the first professional female playwright to write and publish plays that showed women as characters on stage standing up for themselves (Goodman, 1998: 110).<sup>3</sup> Behn set an example of creating female characters who fought for their position and made audiences of the time aware of the role of the courtesan as positive, and the idea of marriage as a compromise rather than an ideal. In her play *The Rover* (Dorset Garden Theatre, 1677), the courtesan Angelica threatens to kill Willmore (the 'rover' of the piece), who is the only man she has loved, and who, after cheating her, tries to buy her off. Angelica allows him to live because she is utterly contemptuous of him. Hellena, Willmore's young mistress cross-dresses to catch him out, and despite his roaming, she declares her love for him with characteristic wit: 'Faith, brother, my business is the same with all living creatures of my age, to love, and be beloved; and here's the man' (Behn, 1995: 83). Behn's comedies ridiculed the Law of the Father which allowed only arranged marriages under parental authority, using strong, raunchy female characters to make a case for their sexual desire and the freedom to express it.<sup>4</sup> This encouraged me to write *The Crystal Den* in which Olive Schreiner and Eleanor Marx are both exiled from the values of the society of their time by their feminist stance, which they, too, declare with the spirited wit that echoes Aphra Behn's. The character of Olive Schreiner alerts the audience early on to her dislike and mistrust of Eleanor's scoundrel husband in a monologue:

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<sup>3</sup> I was also aware of Behn's novel *Oroonoko* set in Surinam (where her father was appointed Lieutenant-General) which was the first novel about the brutality of slavery

<sup>4</sup> This was something Aphra Behn knew about as she took for one of her lovers the fast-living, bisexual young lawyer John Hoyle (Todd 1998, 72).

OLIVE How we talked! Who we were sleeping with. What it felt like. How much we wanted it. You fornicate – but do men take you seriously? [...] You know, this... Edward...is exceedingly charismatic and a tremendous socialist, but I think he is a – where's my chloral? (Baraitser, 2002: 17-18)

A further source of inspiration from women playwrights at the time came from the texts that comprise *Plays by Mediterranean Women* (Baraitser, 1994), a collection of plays by women writers from countries geographically linked but politically divided, who had faced either exile or censorship and repression, for taking a stand on their position as women living in patriarchal societies. These included the Egyptian writer Nawal el Saadawi (a medical doctor writing against female circumcision and imprisoned by Sadat in 1980 for doing so), and Dacia Maraini (founder of Teatro della Maddalena in the early 70s), who wrote many provocative plays about the position of women in Italian society.

These varied influences led me to write the adaptation of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*. The novel has been recognised as a major contribution to early feminist thought. Nadine Gordimer describes Schreiner as a 'Founding Mother of women's liberation in Britain' (Gordimer, 1987: 221), and Doris Lessing, in her introduction to *The Story of an African Farm*, calls the work 'a rare book [...] which is on the frontier of the human mind [expressing] the deepest pulse of human beings [that] became part of me' (Lessing, 1968: vii-viii). The feminist critic Elaine Showalter comments: 'Schreiner's Lyndall is the first wholly serious feminist heroine in the English novel. [...] Through Lyndall's monologues, Schreiner analyzes the connections between sex-role, conditioning, narcissism, parasitism, and frustration' (Showalter, 1978: 199). These aspirations formed the basis for the themes of *The Story of an African Farm*. Schreiner's early treatise *Woman and Labour* (1911) underpins her novel, and my play. The novel

reflects Kristeva's ideas expressed in 'Women's Time' (Kristeva, 1979) that women needed to campaign for a change in social attitudes which would allow them to unite within their lives monumental, political and, finally, maternal time. Schreiner argued for society's laws to include the imperative of women's education, not only in order to qualify women to raise children better, but so that they could work as equals with men. As a pioneering feminist, Schreiner was concerned that women who worked and held political views, though liberated, were divided and still helpless and exiled, because they continued to be dependent on men. By bringing Schreiner's radical novel to the stage, I too, through an act of cultural translation, rewrote my own cultural difference as a South African Jewish woman working from within my adopted culture. As my *alter ego*, I give Olive Schreiner a place, too, as a character in *The Crystal Den* as Eleanor's out-spoken and eccentric female confidante who shared radical feminist ideas with her.

*The Story of an African Farm* describes the cultural and political isolation and melancholy of a young woman Lyndall, who, in Julia Kristeva's terms, is a foreigner not only to herself but to her society when she refuses marriage in defiance of the Victorian Law of the Father, by enacting a new identity that she forges alone and exiled in a world that does not yet understand her. Lyndall reveals the shocking truth that, as a modern woman, sexually and otherwise disappointed by a husband she has deserted, she realises that she is strong enough within herself, to be able to stand alone, no matter how harsh her circumstances of exile:

Through the flower garden and out at the gate and up the footpath and into the *kloof*. Under a rock and the birds coming close and making love... Nothing like it – the secret pleasure. That's where he positioned me. Only there. But did he know when he was touching my body he was putting his fingers in my brain.? I know



now I am better than he. I don't need him. Sometimes I feel more man than a woman. (Baraitser, 2000: 67)

This expresses the play's theme – an exploration of the complexities and disappointments of male/female relationships confined within patriarchal attitudes. Despite the love of the self-deprecating character Waldo, a young idealist to in whose modesty Lyndall finds no answering call, and despite the devotion of Gregory, whose shallowness is so at odds with her depth of being, Lyndall's final choice is personal and political exile. The next play I shall consider, *Louis/lui*, expresses the same theme through the lens of surrealism.

### **The influence of the exiled Eugene Ionesco's absurdist and surrealist theatre texts**

The forerunner to the writing of *Louis/lui* was my absurdist theatre piece, *Elephant in a Rhubarb Tree* that the theatre critic Carol Woddis described as 'Ionesco let loose in the veldt,' adding that 'what makes the play arresting is its style, zigzagging through absurdism and the surreal, as if wrapped in a hallucinatory dream' (Woddis, 1993, n.p).

I used Ionesco's absurdist approach to writing theatre in sections of *Louis/lui* in order to demonstrate the disturbed mind of the character of Louis Althusser, who is thrust into the absurd position of being cheated of his true selfhood, so the audience realises that he has come to inhabit his own world in which he has little notion of reality. For example, recurring through the play are two surreal black and white two-minute films: one shows a worm emerging from the top of a cupboard, and the other shows a large, naked woman taking a boy onto her lap, both absurdist images that suggest to the audience the unconscious fears and desires of the character of Louis: the giant white worm emerging from the bourgeois cupboard symbolises Louis's unconscious fears that he is worthless,

and the large, naked woman taking a boy on her lap implies his desire to return to the womb.

Ionesco's notion that bourgeois language is empty and therefore absurd is symbolised in the French/English tapes of a beginner's language course that are played as background to the happenings on stage in *Louis/lui*, as they do in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (Théâtre des Noctambules, 1950). The tapes are a parody of a primer for learning English used as a banal, clichéd, absurd social commentary that alerts the audience and separates it from the anguish of the tragedy taking place onstage:

*The TIME is 1980, when Louis is an old man in his dressing gown, 'caressing or attacking' for a full three minutes, gasping with the effort, an old woman (Helly, his wife). There is a subliminal sound of pealing church-bells.*

'FRENCH/ENGLISH TAPES. (These are spoken as if read from a language manual.)

*This is him – Louis*

*This is her – Helly*

*Louis and Helly are preparing for bed*

*Louis has brushed his teeth.*

(Baraitser, 1998: 73)

In writing these comic absurdities, I was directly influenced by Ionesco's *Notes and Counter-notes* in which he asserts that the playwright's language needs to convey something eternal and universal to show the *anguish of the absurdity* of the human position, an anguish that alienated Ionesco from society. Ionesco uses language to free the unconscious from the 'straightjacket of logic' (Ionesco, 1964: 237). Martin Esslin describes how Ionesco maintained that he invented a language of clichés to ridicule meaningless social interchange. His characters speak such nonsensical clichés that they

‘disintegrate altogether,’ turning language into theatrical material (Esslin, 1975: 192). Susan Sontag, despite her critical response to Ionesco’s work, writes that he accomplished a ‘discovery of the poetry of banality [...] of meaninglessness’ by treating language as a thing (Sontag, 1961: 118). In an interview, Ionesco notes: ‘with Beckett and myself [...] and Camus of *L’Etranger* [...] there were no longer words being spoken but images being visualised [...] we achieved it all by the dislocation of language’ (Guppy, 1984: 2). He writes that his first play, *The Bald Soprano* (2007b), ‘contains a criticism of ready-made, automatized language, which is in fact, a sort of sub-language [...] there comes a point when these clichés go berserk’ (137). He did this for *comic* effect as ‘the comic is the intuition of the absurd [...] the comic alone is capable of giving us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence’ (112). Ionesco used his chance encounter with the nonsensical clichés from an Assimil primer for learning English that suddenly seemed to him to be ‘as stupefying as they were indisputably true’ (Ionesco, 1958: 3). Ionesco used this idea to write parodies of the kind of comic bourgeois communication that holds for him a horrifying emptiness that exacerbates his sense of alienation (6).

Martin Esslin describes the absurd as ‘the fruits of [...] man’s descent into the depths of his personality, his dreams, fantasies and nightmares. [...] It is a theatre of situation as against a theatre of events in sequence’ (Esslin, 2008: 402). Referring to Beckett’s absurdist *Waiting for Godot* (Théâtre de Babylone, 1953), Esslin writes: ‘The whole play is a complex poetic image made up of a complicated pattern of subsidiary images and themes which are interwoven like the themes of a musical composition’ (403). These ideas suggested ways to structure *Louis/lui* in which the character of Louis descends into his ‘fantasies and nightmares as ‘Louis’ loses control of himself and becomes ‘lui’:

LOUIS (*batting the telephone out of her hands.*) I feel good. I feel wonderful. I'm walking on the moon... I'll visit the Pope! Come... Sit down... We'll start on the new article... Spinoza's idea of the body... Come here! (Baraitser, 1998: 87)

The structure of the play is that of a musical composition with repetition and variations of sequences, actions, substitutions, lighting changes, and changes of spaces, set one next to the other so that the play's composition narrates the disintegration of 'Louis' into 'lui, through a complicated pattern of images and scenes that form a 'theatre of events in sequence' so that the audience meaningfully connects them.

This kind of composition was resisted in the late 50s, by *The Observer's* theatre critic Kenneth Tynan who challenged Ionesco's work as 'anti-theatre' in what came to be called 'The London Controversy' – an exchange of views between Tynan and Ionesco on the purpose and techniques of writing plays. Tynan maintained that Ionesco was ruining the future of theatre as an art form because, unlike Brecht's social realist theatre, Ionesco's work had no *raison d'être*. In his article 'Ionesco: Man of Destiny?' first published in *The Observer* (1958) Tynan described Ionesco's plays as 'isolated robots, conversing in cartoon-strip balloons of dialogue' (91). Tynan argued that a play of Ionesco's was perilous 'when it is held up for general emulation as the gateway to the theatre of the future, that bleak new world from which the humanist heresies of faith in logic and belief in man will forever be banished' (92). Ionesco replied that this was merely left-wing conformism: 'A playwright simply writes plays in which he can offer only a testimony, not a didactic message', insisting that a work of art has nothing to do with doctrine (Ionesco, 1958: 93). He believed that society itself is based on political ideologies that separate us from one another, writing that '[t]he true society, the authentic

human community is extra-social, a wider, deeper society which is revealed by our common anxieties, our desires, our secret nostalgias' (94).<sup>5</sup>

It is with this 'deeper' society that Ionesco taught me to engage when writing *Louis/lui*. In Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* an entire community adopts the fascist state of mind. Bérenger, the main character, is an exile from himself and his society – a melancholic who harbours a death-wish, a drifter turning to drink to lighten the heaviness of this loss, an outsider to a *petit bourgeois* society in which, as far as Bérenger (and the audience) is concerned, no one thinks straight, least of all the town's Logician. Bérenger's one belief in life stems from his love for his fellow worker Daisy, until she abandons him to join the crowd of town folk who turn into rhinoceroses. Bérenger alone remains human, though the audience is left wondering if he will be strong enough to hold out against an overwhelmingly absurd situation.

In *Louis/lui*, I use something of the tone of this absurd interchange in the dialogue between Louis, whose extreme Marxism places him as socially dubious and blind, and Helly, whose deeper more humane values place her in Ionesco's 'authentic, human society':

LOUIS Leave my analyst alone!

HELLY You don't own me.

LOUIS You're mine!

HELLY I'm leaving.

LOUIS (*lowering gun*) You wouldn't.

(Baraitser, 1998: 100)

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<sup>5</sup> Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* is regarded by some as having social content, as the central character Bérenger's individualism counterpoints the crowd who become rampaging rhinoceroses in the play.

In addition to the stylistic influences that Ionesco's plays had on my work, his formative position as an exiled writer who watched the rise of the Nazis in his home country Romania that led to the writing of *Rhinoceros*, informed my own exile and subsequent writing. In *Fragments of a Journal* Ionesco describes how he eventually settled with his wife in Paris during World War II. His parents moved from Bucharest to France soon after he was born, but when he was thirteen, he was moved back to Romania by his father, a lawyer who wrested Ionesco from his mother under false legal pleading, so Ionesco's adolescence was spent with a punishing father and an unwelcoming step-mother, in exile, and split between the cultures of two countries. As a young man in Romania, Ionesco watched in horror the insidious rise of Nazism, and though not Jewish himself, he was taken for a Jew because he pronounced his 'r's in the French way and was bullied. In his journal, he wrote: 'I am moved to indignation and of course I want revenge, I become the Jew' (Ionesco, 1987: 17). Claude Bonnefoy in his *Conversations with Eugene Ionesco* tells us that Ionesco wrote *Rhinoceros* (Schauspielhaus, Dusseldorf, 1959) in response to his increasing horror at witnessing 'some of the teachers at Bucharest who had become Nazified.' He observed that 'a certain number of friends [...] turned to Fascism. [...] The rift was there [...] you have a whole movement against you' (Bonnefoy, 1970: 19).<sup>6</sup> There was much in Ionesco's experiences that reflected my own in South Africa that led to exile and the position of writing from that position. Witnessing productions of *The Chairs* (1997) and *Rhinoceros* (2007a) changed the way in which I wrote drama, influenced by Ionesco's understanding of humankind's tragicomic

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<sup>6</sup> Like Ionesco, I had encountered the fascist mind. When I posted my play *Winnie* from London to Winnie Mandela in South Africa for her approval to tour it, the South African police confiscated the text, tapped my phone, and infiltrated my London Adult Education class, an example of the absurdity and terror of an attempt by a state to control and appropriate creativity. Using Ionesco's take on language that attacks the absurdity of 'reality' as defined by the authoritarian mind, allowed me to free-up ways of expressing my own anguish at the political threat I faced.

attempts to counter the absurdity of life, and his use of absurdist and surrealist theatre techniques, including language, with which to do so.

### **The influence of Samuel Beckett's plays expressing exile as a state of 'not quite being there'**

My interest in the state of exile led me to the discovery of Samuel Beckett's definition of exile as that of 'not being quite there' and 'never been born entirely'. Beckett realised the dramatic potential of the exiled traumatised fragmented self 'speaking' when he attended Jung's lectures in 1935, in which he described a complex as 'associations [...] of traumatic character' that has 'a body of its own [...] a little personality of itself' (Jung, 1968: 79). Jung added that these embodied complexes 'are like voices of definite people' (79) and he talked of how the artist 'has the capacity to dramatize and personify his own [...] fragmentary personalities' (81).

I listened to Beckett's radio play *All That Fall* (BBC Third Programme, 1957), which illustrates his striking use of the fragmented fluctuations of a disturbed mind in the character of Mrs Rooney. Martin Esslin describes how, in *All That Fall*, Maddy Rooney's mind is 'of a character to whom objective reality itself is a kind of perpetual nightmare' (Esslin, 1975: 41). I found this insight useful in depicting the character of the Louis Althusser in *Louis/lui* as it closely resembled the position of the character's sense of 'not quite being there' that Beckett had discovered in himself. At the play's end, when the character Louis finally finds himself, numb and alienated, in a hospital bed in an asylum, because his split self never heals, he remains 'not quite there', or 'never born entirely'. To demonstrate this state of being, the lighting separates Louis's head (or mind) from his body, so that the audience *sees* the character's fragmentation. Two surreal film sequences are shown simultaneously:

*Film Sequence 1: White worm comes out of cupboard.*

NURSE Leg.

*Film sequence 2: Naked fat woman takes him on her lap and counts his body parts.*

LOUIS Careful!

NURSE Feet.

LOUIS Do you know. For a while I thought I was losing my body parts – it happened to me when I was a boy ...

*(Lighting: We see only LOUIS'S head.)*

(Baraitser, 1998: 109)

James Knowlson describes how in the discussion after the lecture attended by Beckett, Jung spoke of a girl who died young as having ‘never been born entirely’ (Knowlson, 1996: 107). Mrs Rooney in *All That Fall* (1986), tells of a ‘little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways...’ to which her husband Dan replies that the ‘trouble with her was she had never been born’ (Beckett, 1986: 195). Billie Whitelaw wrote on her script of *Footfalls* (Royal Court Theatre, 1975) during rehearsals of the play with Beckett: ‘She (May) was never properly born’ and that Beckett was ‘trying to convey something in his head [...] something ghostly, mystical, *not quite there*, that is, a person who is alienated, turned in on herself’ (Whitelaw, 1995: 144).

The fractured, poetic voice of each of Beckett’s haunting female exiled characters, influenced the writing of those in my plays. Beckett’s female characters, whose ‘voices’ enunciate their stark position facing the void from separate entombed bodies, bring to mind Kristeva’s female subjects-in-progress searching for an individual language in which to express their fractured exiled identities. In *Happy Days* (1986), Winnie is embedded in a mound up to her waist, then up to her neck, facing with courage, and with



her outpourings of memories, the infinity of the void. In *Rockaby* (Buffalo, New York, 1981) an old woman faces death confined to a rocking chair, accompanied only by her inner voice that rhythmically speaks her position. In *Not I* (Forum Theatre Lincoln Centre, 1972), Knowlson points out that scholars have associated the female character of Mouth, with a ‘disconnected psychological state (that) is related to a failure to achieve a coherent sense of an individual self’ (Knowlson, 1996: 815). Linda Ben-Zvi writes that in *Not I*, because the action of ‘the mouth’ is the only visible thing on stage, Beckett ‘concretizes [...] the connection linking language, self and gender’ (Ben-Zvi, 1992: 244). Sarah Gendron points out that *Not I* is narrated by an old woman who has imbibed her father’s patriarchal voice that *demotes* her *female identity*, casting her into a form of exile from her true self (Gendron, 2004: 49).<sup>7</sup> Thus the old woman’s rhythmic, interrupted, jagged half-sentences that actualise Mouth’s inner world is a continuing and inescapable stream of memories and commentaries that hold terror, horror and self-doubt as ‘she’ faces the void by telling herself of ‘her’, which is her other self, the demoted woman – a character who, in fact, is ‘not quite there’:

MOUTH ... this other thought then... oh long after... sudden flash... very foolish really but so like her... in a way... that she might do well to groan... never got the message... or powerless to respond... like numbed... couldn’t make the sound... not any sound... no sound of any kind... no scream...[*Screams*]. (Beckett, 1986: 2)

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Ben-Zvi notes that the outpourings of Mouth could be seen as displacing male rational discourse by refusing to play the patriarchal rules of language – Beckett’s assertion of the emergence of repressed femininity (244). However, Christopher Murray, in Dermot Moran’s *Samuel Beckett: 100 Years* demonstrates that Beckett’s demanding and precise use of the actress in his plays was often so gruelling that, under Beckett’s direction, she was sometimes pushed beyond endurance (73). So the drama re-enacts the female subjugation it re-presents.

This extreme inward sense of female exile and the desperate need to escape it by expressing it, I give to the character of Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*, whose self-hate has hints of that of the character of Mouth:

LYNDALL ‘... for the spirit fails.’ (*To herself.*) Yes. Fails. A purpose to living and dying? In this dirty little world?

*She continues digging the penknife into the tree trunk, then suddenly starts making small digs into her own wrist...*

Channels. Minute channels. What are they for? Why don’t I know what they are for? Why don’t I know anything? I must know. I must.

(Baraitser, 2000: 30)

Lyndall differs from Mouth in that she represents the ways in which a character can use performative action of political and psychic survival when, though finally exiled, she grows to understand the necessity of standing by her values and surviving on her own terms.

To sum up, according to Jung, characters in Beckett’s plays such as Mouth in *Not I* dramatise or speak aloud or personify Beckett’s own projected exiled traumatised self that he thought of as ‘not quite being born’. This is true of the characters in my own plays, who, through their often violent outbursts in poetic language reflect my own sense of Kristeva’s split identity of the exile, both in the character of Lyndall, the female exiled by patriarchal attitudes in *The Story of an African Farm*, and the character of Louis in *Louis/lui*, whose ‘double’ identity symbolised at the end of the play as a ‘head’ separated from a ‘body’. At the same time, these characters also speak from Bhabha’s politicised in-between cultural ‘third space’. The disconcerting fragmented nature of the material of my

plays expressing the trauma of exile thus finds the most suitable expression in the realms of the absurd and the surreal expressed in the plays of Ionesco.

## ***Short Stories***

### **The Influence of the modernist short story on the theme of exile**

My interest in the genre of the short story to express my split identity as an exile, began as far back as my grandparents (on both sides of the family) who fled to South Africa from pogroms in Lithuania in the 1890s, becoming part of a small exiled Jewish community in Johannesburg. My great-uncle Richard Feldman wrote a collection of short stories, *Schvarts un Vays (Black and White)* (Feldman, 1957), about poor working class people, black and white, black migrant mine workers and immigrant Jews, involving ‘the crucial problem of race relations [...] all losers, victims of an unjust system’ (Berman, 2003: 45). Of his past, Feldman wrote:

My first written works in English were stimulated by yearning for the Lithuanian fields and forests and for the snow-white winters [...] I recall [...] fetching milk at the Count’s courtyard where we used to go in the summer ... [which] was a kind of journey to a land of Lords and palaces, but the difficult days, the most tragic were the days when we expected a pogrom in Rokiskis. (Feldman, 1957: 88)

These stories gave me a sense of living between worlds and made me aware of the shadow and violence of the past linked to my family’s earlier exile from Europe to South Africa, and to my own exile from South Africa back to Europe.

### Grace Paley and ‘the sound of writing exile’

Dominic Head (1992) describes the characteristics of modernism as reflected in the form of the short story: the narrative voice is de-authorised, so the character ‘speaks’ to the reader as the story’s dissonant and ambiguous narrator; the evolving feeling within a character shapes the story, rather than plot – which must be left to the reader; the figured language of each story involves patterns of symbols and metaphors that is part of its formalism; the ending is deliberately ambiguous (the structure is sometimes circular) and presents the fragmented view of each identity of a character within each story.

In writing ‘Something Chronic’, I turned to the late short stories of Grace Paley, the 60s and 70s Jewish anti-war, anti-racist, anti-apartheid, feminist housewife, mother and writer. She was the child of Russian Jewish political prisoners freed when Czar Nicholas II had a son. They fled to America, giving their feisty daughter a life-long sense of exile and a commitment to socialist politics. She describes her encounters with the impoverished Jewish, Irish, Polish and Italian immigrants of Coney Island and the Bronx. I immediately recognised, and came to use in my own short fiction, the vernacular and rhythms of her language – the agitated, politicising, *kvetching* and wry energy of her voice, as if the *sound* of the story comes first (she spoke the three languages of my kith and kin: Russian at home, Yiddish in the streets and English at large). I also recognised the formalism of her work as being part of the modernist movement, with its ambiguous narration and fragmentation of character. This approach to writing was reinforced by my attendance at City Lit writing classes given by the 70s modernist novelist Alan Burns, who though British, wrote from a European viewpoint that incorporated a sense of alienation and disintegration suitable to my fragmented position as an exile. Reading his short novels was like looking at a Duchamp painting – he used found material from newspapers and magazines that he cut-up and re-shuffled, then varied and extended,

creating a *montage* of fragmented images that constructed an alienated world, setting up contradictions, ambiguities and reversals in the characters peopling it. This opened my eyes to possible alternative ways to write.

It was in ‘A Conversation with my Father’ in *The Collected Stories* (1994) that I learned something of Paley’s approach to writing short stories – not only how she abandoned the use of plot, but how stories, though hopeful, should end on a note of ambiguity. In the above story, her 86 year-old bed-ridden father, tells her he would like to know how to write a short story, ‘the kind Maupassant wrote, or Chekhov, the kind you used to write’ (237). She understands that he expects her to describe the use of plot in her work, but admits to herself that she dislikes plot, not for literary reasons, but because it makes ‘an absolute line between two points [...] it takes all hope away. Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life’ (237). In ‘The Art of Fiction’ in *The Paris Review* (1992) she states: ‘Plot is simply a timeline [...] One thing happens, then another thing happens’ (Paley, 1994: 242). In her story, Paley refers to how she structures this genre in relation to its ending. She explains to her father, who wants the story she has invented for him ‘to end. The end. The end. You were right to put that down. The end’ (Paley, 1994: 242). The daughter/writer responds: ‘Well, it is not necessarily the end, Pa [...] [My character] could change [...] I’m sorry for her’ (Paley, 1994: 242). With a comic touch, Paley has the narrator’s father invent his own tragic end to the story, as he has a right to his own desires and understanding.

In Paley’s short story *The Long-Distance Runner* in which the narrator ‘speaks aloud’ in the voice of a middle-aged housewife who takes up long-distance running as a hidden act of resistance to her position: ‘I had spent a lot of life lying down or standing and staring. I had decided to run’ (Paley, 1994: 248) – aware that she is a comic figure in silk shorts down to her fat knees, literally running out on her ‘nearly grown-up’ boys and her

boyfriend who has run out on her, as a hidden act of resistance. The narrator finds herself in the poverty-stricken district of her childhood, once lived in by Jews, taken over by black people. After an angry crowd of black people taunts her, she is forced to take refuge in an apartment once lived in by her best friend, (now married to the capitalist owner of JoMar Plastics, another hidden political comment). The narrator shelters with a black tenant and her children, swopping stories on men: '[...] did think they were bringing a rare gift, whereas it was just sex, which is common like bread, though essential' (Paley, 1994: 259), until she is firmly told to leave as she has overstayed her welcome, and returns home to the news that her boyfriend is in Chile, and her boys have a new vacuum cleaner. The story ends on an ambiguous note: 'A woman finds the steamy energy of middle age, runs and runs... She learns as though she was still a child what in the world is coming next' (265).

My submitted short story 'Something Chronic' (Baraitser, 2004) was written in the shadow of what I learned from reading Paley's story: the reader hears 'spoken aloud' the comic Jewish voice of an ordinary young taxi-driver, who is moving through city traffic to take to synagogue Malka, a married woman he met at the local book club and with whom he has fallen in love: 'You just need to look into Malka's velvet eyes and her soul is coming up in them like great sad moons' (216). The timid Malka, exiled in her own home by her managerial husband Colin who 'didn't marry Malka for her eyes: he married her for her father, a *ganser* big *makher* in the medical profession' (216). Her bossy, wealthy mother Gittle regards her daughter as inadequate and herself as 'an organiser': 'When Gittle's behind the driving wheel she thinks she's Jesus Christ. She tells me: 'If I had another life, I'd be a taxi-driver'.' (214). There is little plot to the story, rather, as Paley prescribes it, a sense of 'one thing happening after another, which is connected by time', and it is *feeling* that shapes the structure of the story. When Malka's husband

brings home an attractive colleague, the reader hears Malka 'voice' her feelings: 'My face is gorgeous already, flushed with Clinique Beige... My hairspray would stop a hurricane...' (218). Malka's pet cat knocks over a flower pot and the infuriated Colin floors his wife with a blow to the head. The ending concerns Malka in synagogue thanking God because her husband, on visiting her in hospital, burst into tears, giving Malka, for the first time, a new feeling: 'I am feeling... happy!... Because he is crying for me! (219). The reader understands that Malka's position at the story's end will be uncertain, as a woman in her position of dependence and exile within a home that is patriarchal, but the listener also realises that the husband has moved towards a position of remorse that exonerates him.

### **Nadine Gordimer and writing the politics of the 'disjunctive scraps of everyday life'**

Homi Bhabha describes Nadine Gordimer's short novel *My Son's Story*, written in 1990, as symbolising the 'disjunctive, displaced everyday life of the liberation struggle' (Bhabha, 1994: 19). Nadine Gordimer describes the socio-political position of a white writer separated from the 'any-coloured' surrounding her. She writes of

the special loneliness of South African life, the loneliness of all of us, black and white and any-coloured, in our society which is not homogenous, not-integrated, where the whites are de-Europeanized and the blacks are detribalized, both are cut off from each other. (Gordimer, 1973: 46)

She describes herself as one of the first writers to take for her subject matter 'the gaps and uncertainties and ambiguities of being a South African' (46), whose task, as a political writer, was to expose the reality of South African apartheid conditions for all South

Africans, a position, she notes, in *Telling Times: Writing and Living, 1954- 2008*, that by 1961 led to the banning of her work and cemented her sense of exile in her own country.

Gordimer's formulation of the short story is one that allows 'the quality of human life where contact is [...] like the flash of fireflies [...] in darkness. Short story writers see by the light of the flash [that is] the art of the present moment' (quoted in Head, 1992: 190).<sup>8</sup>

Gordimer defines the subject matter of the short story genre as being an 'event, mental state, mood, appearance [...] manifest in a single situation [...] [It is] a fragmented and restless form [that] suits modern consciousness' (Gordimer, 2010: 171). She discovered that this narrative form is more able than others to capture the instability and episodic quality of life that reflects the psychological state of a story's protagonist, that is also political (190).

In her short story 'Loot' in the collection of the same name, Gordimer uses a symbolic 'moment' of a sea change of the political imagination: a large-scale earthquake causes the sea to draw back, revealing the most secret level of the seabed where lies half-buried in the sand, a great and varied store of ancient treasure. The local populace, whose looting in times of political uprising was not successful, scrambles to loot the remains of the treasure entangled in seaweed and lying among fragments of human bones at 'the most secret level of our world' (Gordimer, 2004: 33). There is one exception – a retired man who keeps apart, an educated man, who has known a life of comfort, working as part of a regime that dropped political prisoners from planes over the sea so they would 'disappear'. This man, unlike the looters, seeks and finds one object among the remains of skeletons and treasure that is important to him – a mirror. He finds it, but it has lost its glass, and the sea roars from it and carries him off.

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<sup>8</sup>Dominic Head in 'The Modernist Short Story' gives us Frederic Jameson's comments that our present post modern forms reflecting this, lead also to a degree of disintegration, so that 'stylistic innovation is no longer possible' for innovation has been supplanted by contemporary discourses that are non-judgemental (204).



My submitted short story ‘Tiekiedraai’ (Baraitser, 2011) concerns a moment of truth both personal and political, experienced by a young girl alienated by her mother’s jealousy and her father’s indifference. The narrator, the thirteen-year-old daughter of the house, ‘speaks’ to the reader who deconstructs her actions to uncover the hidden political ‘truths’ of family relationships, and of her society:

My father Wolf, doesn’t worship Johannesburg, he worships London, England.

My mother Binkie says he even thinks he looks like the English Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan... My father worships Harold, and Binkie worships Wolf.

Maybe she believes Wolf *is* the English Prime Minister... (Baraitser, 2011: 13).

Here the reader deciphers beneath the innocent tone of the narrator, the god-like vanity of the father Wolf, underpinned by Binkie’s worship of him – a position that excludes their daughter who is given the role of minor worshipper.

In *Tales of Love* (1987) Kristeva brings in Freud’s idea that narcissism dominates psychic life as a defence against the emptiness of separation from the mother, in contrast to the development necessary within the psyche that enables love for ‘an-other’ (137). The daughter/narrator in my story is confused by her mother’s narcissism, a state of being that leads to her refusal to buy her daughter a pair of dancing shoes for a family wedding. As the girl dances with her father, she becomes aware of the clumsiness of her brown school shoes that she has been forced to wear by her mother. This causes the girl to falter and the dance with her father to cease. The daughter later goes to Binkie’s cupboard and counts thirty pairs of shoes there. The mother’s furious response is to lock her daughter in the shoe cupboard and leave her there, with devastating effects that draws on the Red Room in *Jane Eyre* – another tale of an exiled, abandoned child:

I could not draw breath in that dreadful dark place that pressed in on me. I tried to scream, but I only made a rasping sound. The bodiless weight of my mother's clothes in the dark was suffocating me... the smell of her sweat mixed with her perfume and the strong smell of leather... I lay there like a dog smelling my own vomit. (Baraitser, 2011: 14)

The epiphany, the dark flash of momentary insight of the young girl who narrates the story as she is locked in the shoe cupboard, lies in the realisation of her helplessness in the face of her mother's power. The black maid defies her subservient position by rescuing the girl from the cupboard.

The daughter's description of her traumatic imprisonment is made inwardly as a form of psychic survival, whereas the black maid's dramatic rescue of the white child of the house is a performed act that endangers her political survival, but one that suggests a future when such acts will unite the child and the maid, personally and politically.

### **Leonora Carrington: surrealism in relation to the writing of 'Post Human' – exile, revolt and the expression of the uncanny**

Freud's notion that the unconscious is tied to the imagination and could be expressed in language as a means of accessing the uncanny 'other' unconscious self, was a revolutionary idea taken up by Kristeva, and one that encouraged the Surrealists to explore the irrational, the poetic, the dream-world, and the revolutionary in their work. In writing 'Post Human' (Baraitser, 1996), I drew on the short stories of Leonora Carrington for their combination of surreal imagery and structure, that expressed something of the uncanny that accompanies the exiled subject-in-progress's alienation.

The life of the Anglo-Irish writer, painter and feminist Leonora Carrington, is one of extraordinary exile and survival. A solitary girl raised in an isolated gothic mansion by a French governess, Carrington never fitted into her *nouveau riche* family, but withdrew by drawing/writing her own private universe. She was expelled from two Catholic schools, studied art, connected with the Surrealist's world of dreaming and the imagination, married Max Ernst as a nineteen-year-old, and felt in harmony with his social group's revolution against the bourgeoisie (though she had to withstand their scoffing male view of woman painters). She suffered a nervous breakdown when the Nazis incarcerated Ernst, and her father secretly arranged for her to be imprisoned in an antiquated and terrifying asylum – an experience that made her realise her aloneness. She became part of the group of intellectual immigrants who had fled the Nazis for Mexico City. She finally found peace there, marrying the Hungarian surrealist photographer Csizi Weisz, befriending Frida Kahlo and raising a family, once more creating in her writings and paintings her own surreal world.

Her short story 'The Debutante' (1975) is a fantasy couched in a matter-of-fact tone – a tale that warps reality, disunifies time and dispenses with form. Carrington parodies the wealthy English country-house life style where she felt herself to be a foreigner, and against which she rebelled. In her story, a young debutante befriends a female hyena at the zoo, learns her language so that she can teach the hyena to impersonate her to replace her at a ball that she is loath to attend. The debutante murders her maid to obtain her face that is grafted on to the disguised hyena. The debutante's mother finally approaches her daughter:

My mother entered pale with rage. 'We were coming to seat ourselves at the table,' she said, 'when the thing that was in your place rose and cried: 'I smell a little strong, eh? Well as for me, I do not eat cake.' With these words she

removed her face and ate it. A great leap and she disappeared out of the window’  
(Carrington, 1975: 7).

Thus the alienated daughter revenges herself on a mother whose moneyed pretensions had suffocated her true identity.

This story influenced the writing of ‘Post Human’. The title suggests an other-worldly situation describing a future in which modern technology dehumanises and exiles humanity in a ‘post-human’ world. The self-absorbed young girl on roller skates wearing head-phones, skates down a highway next to a beach, while two older women catch sight of her from a beach flat, as they perform gymnastics under the hidden gaze of a male observer. The performers could be mysteriously connected as they exist in the same surreal, uncanny realm. The blithe young girl skater is unaware that her ‘buttocks, as taut as a horse’s, shows a neat ‘V’ of dark sweat’ (Baraitser, 1996: 1) as she is tailed by a car, while one of the female gymnasts, deliberately performs for the male gaze, allowing him ‘a good squint of what looks like a long ropey tail’ (1), while the camera eyes the older gymnast’s silicone breasts and ‘blue-tinted unblinking eyes, the marble eyes of a space-woman in a wax museum’, as she holds a yoga position (2). The two sets of female performers never reach each other.

The story’s dream-like surrealism reflects that of Carrington’s story, with its underlying dry comic tone, while describing disjointed bizarre images of identity suggesting the force of the uncanny beneath the surface of reality.

Part 1 concerns the writers who influenced my work both as a playwright and short story writer. It is an overview of my early encounters in Johannesburg with Athol Fugard’s collaborative theatre improvisations expressing political protest, which led me in turn to absorb Brecht’s epic theatre techniques and formal structures that encourage an audience

to respond objectively rather than emotionally to a play's themes. Moving to London in the 70s, enabled me to make contact initially with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop productions, Peter Brook's production of Weiss' *Marat/Sade*, together with the work of Meyerhold and Artaud. In the 80s and 90s I was able to experience the seminal plays of women playwrights such as Aphra Behn and Caryl Churchill. My attendance at David Mamet's talks for Paines Plough Theatre Company brought to my attention invaluable theatre writing techniques, such as juxtaposing a 'real' and a 'shadow' world on stage, which I adopted. The stage performances of the comic and anti-didactic surreal work of Ionesco made a deep impression on my work, despite Kenneth Tynan's labelling of them as cartoon strips about isolated robots, as did the work of Beckett, particularly his plays in which exiled female characters spoke in poetic language the anguish of their split identities, such as Mouth in *Not I*.

In the genre of the short story, Grace Paley's comic Jewish voice 'speaking aloud' gave me the impetus to write the submitted short stories dealing with my Jewishness and feminism, Nadine Gordimer's inclusion in her stories of the personal scraps of everyday life as encompassing the political, inspired me to make this a major aim in writing short fiction, and Leonora Carrington's surrealism tied in with that of Ionesco's, to mark my work with a sense of the absurd and the other-worldly.

These were the major writers of theatre and short fiction who inspired and moved me to incorporate their techniques within my own work.

## ***Part 2***

***An examination of the motif of exile in relationship to language, through the work of Julia Kristeva and Homi Bhabha***

In this section I lay out a theoretical framework that makes use of the philosophy of Julia Kristeva and Homi Bhabha for a critical reading of my own work, which will follow in part 3.

I include an examination of Kristeva's psychoanalytic ideas on exile and its relation to language. She argues that language holds the semiotic poetic *chora* – the unconscious primary process of language associated with the sounds and rhythms of the maternal body that is restrained by the symbolic that structures the *chora* and makes it intelligible. This is reactivated in the poetic language of Art that breaks the social constraint of the Law of the Father. Kristeva argues further that negativity and disruption, originating in maternal rejection, lies behind the violent poetic language that expresses the trauma of loss of the mother. This is linked to the melancholy felt by the exiled subject who suffers not only the secondary loss of the mother, but also the loss of the motherland. I present Kristeva's extension of this thought to the dissonant excluded female exile whose position is further complicated by the complex rivalry with the mother from whom she must separate, though this can be used as a creative response in language that counters her position. I also examine Kristeva's concept that that identity is split so that the uncanny stranger within us, the unconscious, makes us all exiled foreigners to ourselves.

I include Christopher Bollas's theory, which draws on Kristeva's ideas on narcissism as a state of being in which hate becomes a means of self-preservation. This leads on to Kristeva's concept that 'truth' is tied to 'reality' when an exiled subject-in-process forges an individual language to approach the True/Real that is ethical. I include Badiou's idea that this is best expressed in the art of writing for the theatre. I also present Kristeva's ideas on the experience of birth/motherhood as a socio-cultural force that is transformative, and the experience of mother/daughter relations that must include both

love and hate, and leads to separation, 'undeath' and love. I include her thoughts from the essay 'Women's Time' that show how the female subject-in-process is linked to both cyclical and monumental time and from 'Herethics' in which Kristeva argues that maternity disturbs identity by forcing a new ethics of love.

I then turn to Bhabha's ideas on the power of *social* articulation of exile, and *cultural difference*. He examines the idea of the exile's language as arising from an in-between 'Third Space' which contains the pedagogical (the tradition of the people) and the personal (the fragments of everyday reality) expressed in the 'forked tongue' of language that leads to an ongoing revolutionary change. Bhabha describes the female exile's identity as 'border', as it has an ambivalent narrative of the pedagogical (which includes historical time) and the performative (which concerns the female's loss of identity in cultural time).

### **The semiotic and the symbolic – language, meaning and identity**

Lacan brought linguistics to Freudian psychoanalytic theory by holding that the unconscious is structured like a language and that unconscious processes can be interpreted in terms of syntax and semantics. Julia Kristeva, in the combined role of linguist and psychoanalyst, takes Saussure's notion that language operates by separation and difference, and applies it to her theory that structures of separation and difference operate in the *body* before the infant begins to use language. She asks 'Why do we speak?' addressing the 'relationship of meaning to language, the relationship of meaning to life, and the relationship of language to life (Oliver, 2002: xiv). In 'Desire in Language' Kristeva, writing against Husserl's idea of the transcendental ego, argues that the theory of language is the theory of a subject-in-process (Kristeva, 1980: 135). Kristeva postulates that body and language are not distinct as Husserl believed, but that

subjectivity is formed in conjunction with language that requires separation from the maternal body – a tragic loss that the infant fills with the consolation of language. This leads Kristeva to focus on the place where self-identity breaks down, thus acknowledging the fine balance between feelings and words. The subject's ability to change through the interplay within language of the interaction of bodily drives with the structures of language, enables the subject/writer to *articulate* the problem of self-image as drives that are discharged into language via the semiotic part of signification: 'Drives move between *soma* and *psyche* and the evidence of this movement is manifest in signification' that is fluid and made in relation to 'an other', and to others (Oliver, 2002, xvi).

Kristeva finds the signifying process (language) of a subject-on-trial contains two inseparable, interdependent modalities – the semiotic *chora* associated with maternal drives and the symbolic syntax associated with judgement linked by Lacan to the patriarchal Name of the Father (Kristeva, 1974a). For Kristeva, the *chora* is the space in which the drives, structured around the mother's body, enter language, setting up signification that prefigures Lacan's concept of identity occurring at the mirror stage (Kristeva, 1974c: 54). Kristeva states that the *chora* is the unconscious, uncertain, indeterminate and intuitive primary process in 'language' associated with the sounds and rhythms of the maternal body that are *reactivated* in poetic language. These are the unfettered vocal and gestural elements that precede and rupture language, which Plato called 'maternal', Mallarmé called 'mysterious' (Kristeva, 1974a: 38), and Kristeva describes as psychoanalytic, theatrical or novelistic 'poetic language [...] that sets in motion what dogma represses', that which concerns the emotions and holds the soul (49). For Kristeva, the *symbolic* in this context, refers to the restraining grammar or syntax, the body of the word, which signifies reason, and makes the *chora* intelligible (Kristeva, 1974c: 54). The semiotic signifies drives and feelings in language she calls the genotext



and defines as a process, whereas the symbolic is that part of language that she calls the phenotext and defines as static, which signifies through grammar and structure (55).

*Poetic* language is the process by which meaning is possible through the movement between the semiotic and the symbolic. It occurs when the semiotic ‘explodes’ in the symbolic (55), so that the artist/writer introduces into the symbolic order an ‘asocial drive’ that subverts mimesis – it occurs when ‘art takes on murder and moves through it’ (56) – Kristeva sees the living body as transfused into language as a form of violence, negation or force that shatters the image. Kristeva describes how the semiotic unsettles the identity of meaning and of the questionable speaking subject to the point of ‘transcendence’ (Kristeva, 1980: 94), a place where the restraint of the social code is both at first destroyed and then renewed so that revolution in language is analogous to social revolution (101). As an example of poetic writing in ‘Desire in Language’ she cites Beckett’s play *Not I* in which the character of the old woman in his play ‘speaks’ in *choric*, poetic text of ‘elided sentences and floating phrases, of the impossibility of God’s existence for a speaking subject lacking any object of signification and/or love’ (109).

I was encouraged by Kristeva’s idea of the writer being able to release in violent *choric* language, a character’s self-expression of revolt. In such texts lies the repressed unconscious self, sentences that include and allow the body and its rhythms – text that not only breaks the social code so that a reader can take heart from it, but text that transforms the writer’s sense of self that is a form of healing.

### **‘Negativity: Rejection’**

In ‘Negativity: Rejection’ in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva compares her semiotic/symbolic dialectic with Hegel’s dialectic of negativity/stasis (Kristeva, 1974b: 70). However, Kristeva replaces Hegel’s term *negativity* with the psychoanalytic term *rejection*, which connects it to bodily drives (Oliver, 2002: xv). For Kristeva, negativity is never cancelled, nor is the difference between the semiotic and the symbolic overcome. Kristeva emphasises the Kleinian idea of the importance of the rejection drive that comes before the unity of the ego – Klein’s ‘so-called schizophrenic phase, which precede the depressive phase that generates symbolism and language’ (Kristeva, 1974: 442). She writes of how, in certain texts ‘rejection’ inscribes ‘negativity, difference and disruption’, which characterises the mobile, unfixed subversive writing of the subject-in-process (87). Using Freud’s notion of repression in negativity, she asks: ‘What is the negativity of the *text*?’ [my emphasis] (87). She argues it involves the understanding that if the subject’s repressions can be placed in language outside the symbolic order, it frees repressed emotions – in psychoanalysis, through transference the subject succeeds in conquering negation but not repression, but *art* (the term includes poetic language), ‘*marks signifying material with the repressed*’ (88, emphasis in original) – the poetic writing works in the place of the symbolic, so that language takes on a double articulation of signifier and signified (89).

As a woman and as a writer I am, like all of us, a subject-in-process/on trial. Kristeva’s encouraging idea is that, as such, the language of my writing must include rejection/negation of the Law of the Father that resides in social language, disrupting and revolting against its suppression in my texts, so that I am free to move towards what Kristeva would call ‘love’.

### **Writing the trauma of loss**

In *Black Sun*, Kristeva holds that writing has meaning when it springs from the depth of sadness (Kristeva, 1989: 180), and that writing melancholia and the trauma of loss expresses the abjection of the *excluded exile* – ‘the stray’, face turned to the lost motherland. The deep sorrow of melancholia (rather than the lesser neurosis of depression) is part of the emptiness of the wounded and incomplete self, deprived of an unnameable good (184). The resulting anger towards this loss can be turned against the self, so that it splits, or, as Kristeva expresses it, ‘it falls into pieces’ (190). For a woman, identifying with the mother from whom she must also break, means that she locks up within her this hatred as a ‘mood’ of bitterness and sadness, though there is the possibility that this can find expression only in literature (198). In a passage entitled ‘Is Mood a Language?’ Kristeva differentiates literary creation from mood, for in the former, the semiotic and the symbolic become the ‘communicable imprints of an affective reality’ for the audience/reader who is opened to artifice and symbol, which the author tries to harmonize with the experience of reality (193).

Kristeva goes on to describe the exile as abject, one whose self is ‘beside himself’, overwhelmed by the meaningless, violent loss, leaving him excluded, empty and wordless (230). This is the position of the exile who separates himself and asks: ‘Where am I?’ rather than ‘Who am I?’ from a space that is divided and catastrophic, a space from which he becomes ‘a deviser of territories, languages, works... on a continuing never-ending night journey’ (235). As soon as the exile writes this condition, it triggers perceptions, words and memories that destroy repression and judgements, so transforming the death drive into new life and a new way of writing (241).

*Black Sun* is Kristeva’s meditation on the melancholy, wounded split self as ‘deprived of an unnameable supreme good’ (Kristeva, 1989: 187) or meaning, and the violence this produces can only be projected in ‘gestures, spasms or shouts’ of literary creation (188),

which relate to my own poetics of disruption. This ‘transposes affect into rhythms, signs, forms’ (193) in ‘a dedication to the lost mother’ (194).

I discovered from Kristeva that as an ‘outsider’ experiencing a sense of loss both as a woman fighting exclusion and as an exile from a country of origin, through writing that is metaphoric and symbolic, I could unmask self-repression, and allow a new grasp of the ‘real’ and the ‘true’ that involves the ethical. I chose to write about Eleanor Marx’s life as an exceptional woman, driven into exile from her true self to the point that she takes her own life due to her common law husband’s manipulation of her person and her resources. What changes her negativity and death-drive is her final understanding, her grasp of the ‘real’ and the ‘true’ which allows her, in her suicide note, the ethical gesture of forgiving her husband.

### **Identity, creative writing and the female exile**

Kristeva names four types of exiled dissidents: the political rebel, the psychoanalyst who sees the contest between death and language, the writer who experiments with the limits of identity, and finally, *the female exile*. Kristeva describes the dissonant female exile as one who is ‘concerned with political law represented by the laws of reproduction’ (Kristeva, 1986: 295). She represents ‘the fragmentation, the drive, the unnameable’, the ‘Daemon’ trapped in her body and the laws of reproduction, exiled by the powers of clichés and generalisation in language (296). This position is complicated for a woman who creates art (poetic writing), for she must feed on ‘identification, or rivalry with the mother’, who is also herself, (297), yet her situation demands that she writes in a language of dissidence (298). Kristeva concludes that, like all dissonant exiles, the female exile always ‘muffles a cry’ (298). However, Kristeva believes that to be exiled is a state of being which evokes, even demands, *a countering response that is creative*, one that

forces us to make ourselves anew, to re-write our narratives as a resistance to exile, which becomes a celebration of it (Lechte, 1990: 53). For example, the writer Jeanette Winterson, in her autobiography *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* writes of the mentally unstable mother-figure who adopted and alienated her: 'I had been damaged and a very important part of me had been destroyed – that was my reality' (Winterson, 2012: 221). However, as Winterson tells us, she moves forwards when she comes to understand that she was no longer an exiled, lost young woman as long as she had words for her feelings. As I discovered in my exilic writing, language becomes a re-embodiment of self that can articulate the void.

### **The split self – 'the stranger within us'**

Kristeva tells us that the split subject-in-process is one who speaks from a dialogical relationship of 'I' and 'you' that includes an unconscious sense of negativity and of loss (Kristeva, 1974a). In 'Strangers to Ourselves', Kristeva states that the 'foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners' (Kristeva, 1989: 289). Kristeva writes of her own double experience of being both a foreigner who left Bulgaria for Paris, as well as being a stranger to herself (264). She states that the foreigner living within us 'is the hidden face of our identity' and is one who experiences Freud's 'uncanny strangeness' (282) and knows that 'the other is [...] my unconscious' (283). This encounter with the 'other', leaves us separate, incoherent, unstable and always in process/on trial (286). Kristeva extends this idea by arguing that the foreigner who lives within us is aware of 'difference' (264), the one who, experiencing loss, knows, while masking the self and the accompanying melancholia, that the subject must assimilate the new culture in which he finds himself. Thus he lives between two 'languages', a situation that creates a silence within, that paradoxically forces the subject-in-process to 'jostle words at the edge of the

idea and the mouth' (276). Kristeva emphasises that the exile is orphaned – his parents are invisible, unmentionable and buried in another language. The exile, at the same time, is their 'murderer who must speak', or say nothing (281). According to Kristeva the exile encapsulates Freud's state of 'uncanny strangeness', in which the familiar is tainted by the unconscious that holds strange, frightening secrets emerging from the past (283). Kristeva alludes to Freud's idea of the early narcissistic, endangered self, making an alien uncanny 'double' as a defence against the frightening return of the repressed, which is structured by language (286). It is the encounter with the shocking 'other' within us, the foreigner who leaves us strange, separate and incoherent that releases the forces dealt with by the artifice of art, of fairy tales – an encounter that can also include humour (289).

Like Kristeva, I am continually forced to face the unstable 'stranger within me', my uncanny hidden 'other' that is part of identity. It releases in me the forces of art within language.

### **The wounded exile**

In 'Tales of Love' Kristeva notes Freud's idea that narcissism dominates psychic life as a defence against the wounding emptiness of separation from the idealised mother (Kristeva, 1987: 137). This is a necessary psychic space that can allow *love* of 'an-other' to take place, or results in the *abyss* where our identities, images and words can be engulfed as part of the death drive, a state in which hate becomes the means of self-preservation (154). The ego frozen in a state of narcissism cannot develop the imaginary and symbolic abilities to protect it against the sense of chaotic emptiness that deadens the process of the imagination that is the discourse of love (139). Kristeva believes that one who remains in a state of narcissism is in love with his own reflection as he is deprived of

his inner space, and he ‘loves nothing because he is nothing [...] merely an image of himself’, a state of being that leads to his death wish and suicide (174). ‘When love is not possible, we lose part of ourselves; we begin to die’ (Lechte, 1990: 184).

In the section entitled ‘Not I’ in ‘Tales of Love’, Kristeva describes woman/mother as being bordered on the one side by the imaginary father, and on the other side by a ‘not I’ – ‘and it is out of this ‘not I’ (as in Beckett’s play of that title) that an Ego painfully tries to come into being’ (Kristeva, 1987: 153). For Kristeva the poetic writing in Beckett’s *Not I* is an example of abstract writing that breaks the image, which is ‘a sort of elaboration of the *narcissistic* and pre-narcissistic dynamic [...] the semiotic variety of meaning’ that refers to the ‘split object’ (336).

Christopher Bollas in ‘The Fascist Mind’, argues that if the ability to love is not achieved, the unresolved, narcissistic self finds expression only in destruction of its ‘other’, and hence, in the destruction of others (Bollas, 2011b: 84). Bollas describes the state of mind of unresolved narcissism as one in which ‘the mind is denuded of its representative constituents (instincts, memories, needs, anxieties, and object responses)’ (81). He quotes Herbert Rosenfeld as saying that various self-capacities like empathy and forgiveness have been removed from the self. Rosenfeld refers to ‘an aggressive aspect of the narcissistic self achieved by killing [the] loving dependent self and identifying ... with a sense of superiority and self-admiration’ (82). Bollas describes this as a form of narcissism in which the subject must find a victim on which ‘to project its dead core’ (85). The philosopher and writer Iris Murdoch posits the idea that ‘sado-masochism’ or self-will constantly leads attention and energy back into the narcissistic self a form of identity that exiles the selfhood from both the self and society (Murdoch, 1970: 68). Murdoch believes that the self, which she describes as the place where we live, is an

illusion, and that ‘virtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is’, which she regarded as an almost unobtainable position (93). She suggests that the self is a kind of prison construct of self-preserving perception, which is a form of narcissism.

Kristeva, Bollas and Murdoch point out that if the split self does not move through narcissism to the formation of the ego, empathy is lost. In all of my writing, I explore the theme of the tragedy of people in this position, and the harm they cause. To be unable to move towards love is, for me as a writer, the ultimate human tragedy.

### **The other side of narcissism: the ‘True-Real’**

In ‘Desire in Language’, Kristeva writes: ‘Against knowing thought, poetic language pursues an effect of singular truth’ (Kristeva, 1980: 114). As a psychoanalyst Kristeva sees the ‘true’ as being part of reality, as well as the signifier. Both art (as poetic language or painting) and psychoanalysis (an exploration of the unconscious) produce subjects free to construct worded works of art or imaginary fantasies that allow the subject to find a way of situating themselves in relation to the Law of the Father.

In her introduction to ‘The True-Real’ Toril Moi emphasises that for Kristeva, art is the privileged place of transformation (Moi, 1986: 16). In this sense, the exiled subject as a subject-in-process, is coming into being through an original language, which they are forging for themselves, and helps to form an identity that approaches a sense of what is true and real (17-18).

Kristeva contends that the subject-in-progress discovers ‘truth’ through the creative use of language, in order to successfully negate and move beyond the realm of the mother and integrate into a social linguistics (incorporating the problematic of the Law of the Father).



Lacan acknowledges that ‘truth’ in terms of selfhood, is a path towards completion and inclusiveness of the persona (the opposite of the narcissistic personhood). Like Kristeva, he believes that truth is derived from the unconscious and is ‘founded on the fact that it speaks and that it has no other way of achieving this’ (Bowie,1991: 119).

Kristeva emphasises that literature and art arise from the exile’s need to express their trauma. The philosopher and playwright Alain Badiou echoes the point that, haunted by the fear of the abyss, the artist uses the procedures of truth that produce new methods of thought and language usage (Gibson, 2007: 102). Further, Bruno Bosteels, in his introduction to Badiou’s *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, demonstrates Badiou’s concept that the discovery of truth is possible in *the art of writing for the theatre* [my italics]. Bosteels quotes Badiou’s insight that ‘theatre thinks [...]. The idea arises in and by the performance, through the act of theatrical representation [...] [and is] the psychoanalyst’s accomplice’ (Badiou, 2013: xvii). Gibson points out Badiou’s argument that ‘truth’ underlies the multiplicity of difference as a *sameness*, and that in the practice of making art there is a multiplicity of truths that are infinite, each produced by an individual encounter or ‘event’ that includes the ‘other’, that is a form of love (Gibson, 2007: 68-69). Gibson argues that, for Badiou, art has a different truth from philosophy (he refers to the writing of poetry in particular) – the work of art is an actualisation of truth that comes about when politics has failed. In relation to Kristeva’s suggestion that the analytic process is an ethical gesture based on love that encourages a subject to self-expression in language, Alain Badiou’s commentaries in his *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, are relevant, as they debate the nature of truth and ethics within the realm of literature, and in particular, the realm of theatre writing (Badiou, 2013: 102). Kristeva asserts that the subject-in-process makes art through ‘speaking’ the truth as a form of self-identity.

## ‘Herethics’

At a time of her own experience of motherhood, Kristeva considers the way the idea of the maternal has been elaborated in the West by means of the Virgin Mary (Kristeva, 1976: 179). She tells us that there has been sparse commentary on motherhood because of the demise of religion and the cult of the Virgin Mary, together with Freud’s absent commentary on motherhood – ‘the only thing Freud tells us concerning motherhood is that the desire for a child is a transformation of penis envy’ (178). This has left motherhood defined as an idealised ‘fantasy [...] of lost territory’ (161), the maternal being appropriated by the masculine (163). She discusses the Virgin Mary as a cult mother figure in the West – her ‘milk and tears’ being the metaphors of *non-speech* [my italics] of a semiotics that represents the repressed in art (painting and writing) (174). Kristeva suggests it is time for a new discourse on motherhood that turns away from religion, and moves towards encompassing the mother’s body and childbirth, the mother-daughter relationship, and the female foreclosure of masculinity, all three constituting *Herethics*: ‘a woman as mother turns culture into nature, the speaking into biology [...] that gives her the possibility [...] of reaching out to the other, the ethical’ (182). Kristeva’s ‘Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini’ suggests a split identity occurs in motherhood, as maternity ‘happens but I’m not there’ (Kristeva, 1975: 301). Lisa Baraitser in *Maternal Encounters* comments that, as in psychoanalysis and poetic language, *maternity* disturbs *identity*, and forces ‘a reconsideration of relations between self and other that can allow for ‘difference’ that allows a new ethics that is expressed in love (Baraitser, 2009: 100). Kristeva writes that a mother giving birth is like the poetic writer, through the split symbolisation of the symbolic and the semiotic, ‘first in a biological, and finally a social teleology [...] the language of art [...] follows maternal jouissance [...] the artist speaks from a place where she is not [...] through and across

secondary repression (founding of signs), aesthetic practice touches on primal repression' (Kristeva, 1975: 308).

My work explores the tensions between maternity as social control and poetic narrative as disruption of such control. Kristeva's ideas encouraged me to examine (particularly in my short stories) my own experience of how birth, as a transformative experience, mirrors that of forging the poetic writing that forms part of my work – an experience in which you are both there and 'beside yourself'. Kristeva writes that one of the subjects left out in the modern discussion of maternity is the war between mother and daughter (Moi, 1985: 183). A mother encountering her daughter, experiences both love and hate, forcing her to differentiate between herself as a woman and her daughter as one (184). Kristeva argues that 'Herethics' will give ethics 'flesh, language and *jouissance* [...] an Herethics [...] that is undeath [...] love' – a love that is unconditional and that moves towards separation (188).

### **'Women's Time'**

Kristeva's classic essay 'Woman's Time' links the socio-cultural understanding of female subjectivity/identity within the problematics of the working of time. She sees the female identity as a 'double problematic [...] *identity* constituted by history [...] and [...] loss of identity' (Kristeva, 1979: 189). She traces how, from the perspective of motherhood and reproduction (rather than that of the domain of economy and politics) women conceptualise time, arguing for a multiplicity of female expressions and identities as subjects (189). Kristeva sees female subjectivity as linked to both cyclical time (birth/repetition) and monumental time (eternity), whereas the time of history she sees as linear (192). She differentiates two generations of feminists: the first (bound by motherhood) demanded their rights to a place in linear time as having equal rights with

men, and the second (after 1968), emphasised women's difference to men, demanding to remain outside linear time (i.e. history and politics). She then perceived a third, new generation of feminists reconciling maternal time (motherhood) with linear time (the political/historical). The space of body/mind for women thus intermingled all three concepts of feminine time within the same historical moment, which allowed individual difference within economic, political, professional and sexual contexts within the symbolic social contract of power, language and meaning (196). Part of this free play of difference involves the dissident use of what Kristeva calls 'women's language'. This shatters the code to discover a discourse closer to the body and feelings, and to the 'unnameable repressed' of the social contract which the new generation of women see as revolt (200). It is tied to the problem of female separation from the mother seen by society as a subversive force (204). Kristeva sees this reflected in literary creation that will affirm women – a literature that reveals knowledge and truth by exposing the unsaid, the uncanny – Flaubert's, 'c'est moi' (207). Examples of these feminist literary revolutions are Virginia Woolf's declaration in *A Room of One's Own* that women needed to have their own kind of sentences: 'The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike [a woman's] own' (Woolf, 1929: 114); Cixous' vision of the 'mother's milk as the ink of female writing' (Todd, 1988: 57), and Irigaray's association of women with near mysticism in which loss of subjecthood was a form of cultural escape (Todd, 1988: 58). These views intensified the feminist focus on language to express the female sense of exile from a society ruled by the Law of the Father. Although she did not approve of a uniquely feminist language, Kristeva's idea that a change of the socio-political position of marginalised women must occur in language, changed the critical approach to the theme of female exile and the imperative to express it.

I do not aim to forge a specific form of ‘woman’s writing’. Rather I strive to write themes that connect maternal time with political time, which are reflected in both subject and metaphoric text. From Kristeva’s psychoanalytic work, I established a way of understanding the exile as a subject-in-process who turns to the violence of poetic language to subvert the Law of the Father, and about the tragic formation of a narcissistic identity that is unable to separate and cannot love another.

However, as Kristeva occludes the political values of racism in her concept of the stranger within, in order to read my own writing critically, I supplemented Kristeva’s thought with that of Bhabha’s, as it emerges from a particular historical juncture that deeply concerns racism. In Part 3, these ideas will be explored through a critical analysis of my own work.

***Homi Bhabha: transgressive political/cultural writing of the alien***

In ‘Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences’ Bhabha asks what is a subject’s *cultural* identity and how does a subject produce meaning in cultural terms (Bhabha 2008: 156). Returning to the work of Fanon, he asks how the human world can *live* its difference’ (91, italics added). Bhabha sees cultural systems as constructed *not* by a unifying ‘Western’ narrative, but rather, by systems that are constructed in the contradictory ambivalent ‘Third Space’ of hybrid identity. The subject’s split or double identity of the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ reflects the subject’s cultural place of utterance crossed by the difference of language and symbolisation that holds ‘difference’ and meaning, which is performative, unconscious, ambivalent and disruptive that leads to revolutionary cultural change (158), through a modern relation with the ethics of self-construction (344). Bhabha holds that if identity, the origin of self, is negated by colonial attitudes, it is the space of *writing* that ‘interrogates the third dimension that gives profundity to the representation of Self and

Other' [...] in which sign becomes symbol [...] which gives a measure of me', a product that is never finished (68).

Bhabha emphasises that in world literature there is a new emphasis on transnational histories of the estranged – migrants, the colonised or political refugees – rather than national traditions (Bhabha, 2004). He debates how the socially and politically marginalised can encounter the past that introduces an 'otherness' into the present, via discourse that includes the 'in-betweens' of image and sign. He defines the exile's position as one of split identity, a form of 'doubleness' (71), enacted in language that is privileged because it is created with 'a forked tongue' (that is, it includes languages 'lived' and languages 'learned'), which is projected from a 'Third Space in-between', that is, one that lies between the exile's country of birth and the adopted one. Thus the exile's writing is resourced by the power of tradition that is *re-inscribed* in a double-edged 'in-between' that includes time and reality, linking 'home to history in an act of *cultural translation* that is a *performed identity* that speaks (19). This is a 'moment' of signification poised between shadow and reality, yet is one that incorporates desire, culture and politics (69-71). It is a *social* articulation of difference or dissidence by minorities who desire recognition – women and the colonised on the periphery of power and privilege – which leads to creative intervention (10). Bhabha writes of the terror of the sense of the 'unhomely' moment (which occurs in domestic spaces that are often the sites of the most complex invasions). This forms the basis for my own work, both in theatre and in short fiction that 'writes' the power of cultural differences, so that traumatic ambivalences of a personal history can connect to the wider experience of political existence. Bhabha states: 'Shifting the frame of identity from 'seeing' to the space of writing interrogates the third dimension that gives profundity to the representation of Self and Other' (68). Bhabha calls this the 'Third Space' of the subject's

enunciation where meaning is ambiguous, strange and contradictory in contrast to the fixed, integrated symbols of a national culture (54). Bhabha acknowledges the position of feminism in mapping the ‘unhomely moment’ within ‘the world-in-the-home’ that is redrawn in literary language, which allows memory to speak from the domestic space that holds patriarchal, gendered society (15).

This resonates with my own sense of feminism that appears in my work. Also, my plays and stories are written from the position of the exile. As Bhabha argues, this position gives the advantage of writing in the space between my two cultures – the traditional space/values of my memories and experiences of a terrifying, racist South Africa, and the space of the rough, informal lived ‘performed’ and unhomely moments of everyday life in London.

### **The uncanny ‘double’**

Bhabha refers to Julia Kristeva’s notion that by becoming a stranger to one’s own country, language, sex and identity, a subject may come to benefit from a split identity because they are forced to forge a personal language with which to express their state of exile (Bhabha, 2004: 202). Bhabha considers Freud’s notion of ‘the double’ as being part of the ‘uncanny’ associated with a divided selfhood that occurs when the archaic, invasive nationalism emerges into the complex and fluid contemporaneous (206). He explores the problem of the contest set up in the writing exiled subject of the ‘*pedagogical*’ (that narrates the tradition of ‘the people’), and the inner ‘*performative*’ (the ‘scraps, patches and rags of daily life’ which articulate cultural differences that split from the lived historical memory of nationhood) (211). In relation to a discussion of the pedagogical and the performative in exploring political time and meaning in relation to women, Bhabha quotes Kristeva’s *Women’s Time* as arguing that female gender identity is a ‘border’ one

that contains a double sense of time, and hence an ambivalent double narrative of the pedagogical and the performative – the female identity narrative is constructed from both a sense of historical time (the pedagogical), and from the loss of identity signified in the process of cultural time (the performative) that confronts the former (219).

The narrative of my identity of ‘difference’ as an exile places me in the position of Bhabha’s ‘border’ space of continual slippage and double narrative. As a South African, a woman and a Jew, I write both from my pedagogical sense of the past archaic tradition of fixity of the nation *and* from the present, personal performative moments of a subject-in-process, which are the ‘scraps, patches and rags of daily life’ that aim to speak my ‘revolt’ as an exile in order to effect political and social change. Through the work of Kristeva, Bhabha and others, I gained a theoretical way of understanding the relation between exile and language through my work.



### *Part 3*

#### *Exile and language – reading my work through the critical lenses of Kristeva and Bhabha*

##### **The language of revolt in ‘Taking Tea in Africa’ and ‘Tiekiedraai’**

Kristeva’s work on the language of a subject-in-process/on trial as uncertain, intuitive, primary process provides a way to read the passages in ‘Taking Tea in Africa’ (Baraitser, 2008) and ‘Tiekiedraai’ (Baraitser, 2010) that concern rhythmic and unfettered vocal and gestural elements that rupture language. Literary creation can be an inner battle projected into words as a symbolic ‘collapse’ that comes close to catharsis, and ‘poetic language’ is a place where a destructive social code can be destroyed allowing a new one to arise. I shall examine in ‘Taking Tea in Africa’ this unfixed, subversive expression in language of the exiled subject-in-process/on-trial that posits a sense of *difference through disruption* and shall demonstrate how poetic language goes beyond dogma to ‘speak’ to, move, and even to change a reader/audience.

In ‘Taking Tea in Africa’, Miriam, a middle-aged woman living in exile in London, returns to visit her mother Rose in Johannesburg. Miriam experiences an epiphanic, climactic ‘moment’ when, for the first time in her life, her spoilt narcissistic mother makes her daughter a cup of tea, instead of ordering the black maid Stephena to do so. This seemingly unimportant moment is a turning point for Miriam, as it releases in her the enormity of the realisation of her mother’s narcissism and neglect of her – a moment she releases in poetic language that breaks with her mother’s social code. Instead she identifies with the black maid Stephena’s gesture of cool defiance when, at the height of the uprising, Stephena suddenly and unexpectedly sits down in her madam’s armchair, an

unprecedented act/gesture symbolising her realisation that resistance to white supremacy which has exiled her as ‘different’, is necessary and possible.

In the beginning of the story lies its end, for the day’s action begins with the servant Stephena bringing a breakfast tray to Miriam’s mother Rose, who is still in bed. Rose insultingly neglects to offer her daughter a cup of tea from the breakfast tray, so, by the day’s end, when Rose, thrown out of her role by events outside finally makes her daughter a cup of tea, Miriam breaks out in a subversive, theatrical and revolutionary piece of poetic language that expresses her repressed sense of loss, together with a sense of horror at the power of her mother’s self-centred personal and political code:

Fluids pour from her, tears and snot, and sweat and blood, bathing her in salt and slime. Gales course through her and break from her arse, her throat, her nose. She collapses inwards like a black hole. Her body changes into the body of a starving child. She metamorphoses into the maid Stephena. Somewhere inside the black churning fluids in her head, words try to form themselves. She bites her tongue so that they don’t slip from her wide slavering mouth. (103)

The story’s ending is ambiguous as the reader becomes aware that Rose has also undergone a moment of change by the very making of this singular cup of tea for her daughter, an act of attention that Miriam accepts as if receiving a chalice that she has sought and never found before. This initiates the story’s turning point, for Miriam finds, in her sudden and profound moment of change, that she can only ‘speak’ the revolution it signifies *inwardly*, as an imaginary, violent bodily disruption in the form of words, which symbolises Miriam’s sudden understanding of the harsh truth of a rejecting mother. Miriam’s inner violent outbreak of choric language expresses her sense of her difference to her mother, and her identification instead with the black maid, and the depth of loss

this entails. The piece is written in the present tense, as the protagonist Miriam's epiphany is a sudden and immediate moment of change, and the language used is violent, imaginary and unfettered.

The daughter strongly identifies with Stephena's helpless position of servitude imagining that her body has metamorphosed into Stephena's, and then into the body of a starving black child. Both images reflect her guilt as a returning privileged white visitor witnessing the cause and effects of a corrupt political regime which she has fled. This literary, artistic discourse contains the disordered ambiguity of meaning of a subject's unconscious that 'speaks' to the audience/reader and allows subjectivity to be formed through the writing. The writing encompasses Miriam's sudden and immediately overwhelming realisation of the painful loss of multiple exile from herself, her mother, her home, and her country.

The imaginary return of the repressed as expressed in language of the body, also occurs in my short story 'Tiekiedraai', in which a jealous mother, Binkie, locks her daughter (who remains symbolically nameless) in a shoe cupboard because she dares to point out to her mother that she owns thirty pairs of her shoes that line the cupboard walls, yet has refused her daughter Binkie a single new pair to wear to a family wedding dance. The narrator's voice is that of the young daughter of the house, through whose innocent eyes the story is told, allowing the reader to deconstruct the reality of the family situation. The structure builds on a parallel event concerning disturbance using the symbolic fairy-tale image of shoes, to run through the story as a connecting device. For example, the protagonist sees her older brother Benjy and his friend, in Binkie's shoe cupboard, dressing up in her clothes and high-heeled shoes, and using her lipstick. The daughter innocently relates this to her father Wolf, a psychologist who believes in shock treatment to discipline gay

behaviour, linking this menacing response with Binkie's punishment of her daughter by locking her in the shoe cupboard. The daughter understands, for the first time, the horror of her helplessness in the face of her mother's untrustworthy social values, repeated in her father's homophobia. The daughter is a subject-in-process/on-trial who is suddenly and painfully made aware of her 'difference' that exiles her from her family and their 'dogma'. This is expressed in poetic language, in the sense that Kristeva means, that describes her deep unconscious emotions of fear and horror: her brother's face is seen as a desiccated insect shell with red lips, a sign of his 'guilt' in breaking the Law of the Father; the father is imaged as an incanting witch doctor:

I fell into a strange place. It was neither dark nor light. Just empty, and there was no sound except for a high howling from a distance... Pictures floated through my mind: Benjy's face shrunken like an old insect shell with wicked slits of lights for his eyes and lips wide with red; Wolf moving round and round him on his knees like a witchdoctor saying 'Tiekiedraai', 'Tiekiedraai', 'Tiekiedraai'; the beggar's face like an old brown shoe, begging for his life under the policeman's hand in the supermarket' (14).

The protagonist is rescued by the black maid, whose position is put in jeopardy by her action, but she takes pity on the daughter of the house, identifying with the girl's helplessness in the face of the cruelty of a personal and political situation that parallels her own. They are united by their 'difference' from the family, and in their common position of exile that the daughter expresses in her imaginary and unfettered symbolic language.

These two stories can be read through Kristeva's notion that the human psyche can release itself from narcissism and take up love of the 'other. In 'Taking Tea in Africa' the

daughter learns to break from her mother's unjust social code in a final gesture of inner defiance. In 'Tiekiedraai', the reader is left with the notion that the daughter will learn from the maid's gesture which embodies both resilience and hope in eventual social and political change.

### **Strangeness and narcissism in *Louis/lui* and 'Something Chronic'**

Kristeva's explanation of the deep sense of bewilderment and loss described in 'Strangers to Ourselves' allows us to understand the effects of exile that lie *within the psyche* that occurs when the 'I' of a split subject-on-trial, faces the uncanny hidden, unconscious 'you', the split resulting in a sense of negativity, loss, separateness and incoherence.

*Louis/Lui* 'enacts' this theory of the threatened subject on-trial who has remained in a state of unexpressed narcissism through the creation of the 'double' character of 'Louis' as split from 'lui'. The play shows how this frozen persona destroyed his wife Helly.

The theme of the play concerns an event that takes place in the character of the young Louis's formative years. His attempt to separate from his mother Lucy is fraught because she thrusts upon her son a *foreign identity* – that of her lover Louis, a young pilot recently killed in war whose loss she cannot sustain. This means that her young son 'Louis' has formed within him the uncanny foreign identity forced on him by his mother, that is separate from 'lui', his true suppressed 'other' self, a split that cannot heal, leaving his identity in a state of narcissism:

LOUIS (Boy) Look at me Mother... Do you know who I am?... Why did you have to call me Louis? Lui? I don't want to be Uncle Louis... I want to be Pierre Berger. Or Pierre Fermier! Like granddad! ... Mother? Mother! Look at me! ... I don't want to be him.

LUCY (*still looking behind LOUIS (Boy)*) Never leave me Louis, not for an instant... (Baraitser, 1998: 79).

In the play, this suffocation of the boy's identity by his mother eventually translates into the suffocation by the character 'Louis' of his Jewish wife Helly, in his confused state caused by the loss of his true identity and the formation of a narcissistic one. This state of being is responsible, too, for Louis's narrative as a radical Marxist, one that demands that he suppress personal feeling in order to implement strict Marxist policy, which leads to his cold, brutal and false betrayal of Helly to a Marxist investigation of her activities and her suspension from the Party. Further, in the name of his ideological commitment to Marxism, the family must be sacrificed – 'Louis' refuses to have a child with Helly, ignoring her need to do so. At times, Louis is aware of his tragic position which he expresses to Helly:

LOUIS I'm so ashamed! The terror of it! Having no real identity. Belonging in limbo. No man's land. Do you understand me? (99)

The play's structure reflects the protagonist's uncertain, disturbed and disjointed psyche as he fluctuates between the 'I' and 'you' of his split being. The narrative is told through the device of a central scene that runs through the play set in present time, structured as 'Repetition with Variations', each variation disrupting for the audience the certainty of the protagonist's action towards his wife as she lies in bed. 'Louis/lui' swings between the emotions of love and hate, either caressing or throttling her, so the audience is unsure if they are witnessing a comedy or a tragedy. In between this repeated central action, episodic scenes move back and forth in time periods of the 1920s, 1940's, late 1960's and 1980s, that allow the audience to witness graphic, jagged and formative events in Louis's

life from the moment his identity is split by his mother's needs, moving through his increasing narcissism, and the effects this has on the 'other', Helly.

The changing interior of Louis's mind-set is encompassed by three imaginary, symbolic places: The Red R(Womb,) a dark-red interior with door, a bed but no wall, containing props that symbolise Louis's life – books, a figure of Christ (signifying his mother's Catholicism which he finally adopts), a rifle which his father wanted him to use, and a Communist flag symbolising the Marxism that dominates his psyche; there is also the White (R)oom, a small bare hospital or child's room where 'Louis' is incarcerated, and the Yellow Outdoors, a beach or a cornfield where 'Louis' experiences sex relatively late in his life. Each time/space is structured by symbolic lighting, and sound effects including ongoing French/English language tapes that satirise the action performed. The visual projections of hanging figures that change from his mother Lucy to Christ, and two brief black-and-white film sequences project Louis's fluctuating fantasies. These metaphoric scenes swing back and forth in rapid succession, so that the audience may piece together the protagonist's past (and thus his future – a hospital bed, then a prison), in relation to his bullying and uncomprehending brutish father's behaviour, an obsessive manipulative mother, and his long-suffering wife. The structure leads the audience to piece together the nature of a fractured psyche, moving them to pity and terror, and to understand what led him to the final act of murder is his inability to see Helly as anything but an extension of himself, just as his mother could not 'see' him. At the end of the play, trapped in a hospital bed, the character Louis tells his nurse: 'I killed off myself so he could live. *Lui*. You know. (*Pause.*) What's-his-name?' (110). Though he has a moment of hope and revelation when he defines love as 'being attentive to others' (111), this is transient and he remains exiled, not only as a subject-in-process/on trial who has remained split and unable to love, but as an exile from society where he is viewed as having escaped a prison

sentence only because of his past fame. Trying to enter his old flat, he is refused by a workman who bricks up the door. This demonstrates his position of being unable to revisit his past so that he remains in a position of internal and external exile.

At the play's end 'Louis/lui' is a broken man 'lying under a tombstone' (110). He calls out to a passing student, a young woman holding both books and a baby, imagining she is Helly (a last hint of his realisation of what he refused). The young woman symbolises the future, the new world order, but for 'Louis', 'the future...lasts... a long time' – a quote from Machiavelli that holds both the idea that he will be remembered, and the sense of the finality of his death so even his vision of the future is obscured by his narcissism (112).

Through characterization in *Louis/lui*, the full effects of the horror of the destructive effects of narcissism can be felt.

### **The 'True/Real in 'The Crystal Den' and 'Something Chronic'**

A reading of Kristeva's 'Desire in Language' underscores the position of the exiled subject-on-trial as one whose unconscious may 'speak' as a *transformative* means of learning to know the 'True-Real' which integrates the subject into social linguistics (Kristeva, 1980: 114). As we saw in part 2, Badiou argues that the procedures of 'truth' used by the artist produce new ways of thinking and writing, *particularly in the writing for theatre*. This is because theatre presents, within a marked space, *the truth as performed* and that this procedure is transformative and identifies an *ethics* that lies in a commitment to absolute fidelity and vigilance in the writing. This underscores my choice of writing theatre texts rather than novels, for, as Badiou asserts, there is such a thing as a '*theatre-truth*, which has no other place except the scene' (Gibson, 2007:101). Badiou



describes theatre performance as a unique way of actualising ‘the truth’ in which eternity and the ‘moment’ encounter one another within artificial time and is thus the accomplice to the psychoanalyst. He adds that theatre is also essentially public and organises a *collective* summoning of the idea and that a theatrical event clarifies and amplifies our existence. In this sense, my plays are written to alert an audience to the *difference* between the ethics of a character grasping the ‘True/Real’, and one who is defined by the destructive self-interest of the narcissist.

The structure of *The Crystal Den* (Baraitser, 2002) begins with a prologue that deliberately sets the audience a formal and thematic puzzle. Eleanor Marx is shown silently ‘performing’ a ritual: the audience witnesses her sorting documents, dressing herself in white, picking up a small package, placing a note on the mantelpiece, then turning out the lights of her ‘crystal den’. Her stout old friend Olive Schreiner interrupts the silent performance with a set of personal and political monologues that puncture the play’s action as a distancing commentary and fracture the play’s tension with wry humour. She remarks, for example: ‘The British Museum Reading Room. Our informal club – tea and radicalism, sex and fruit cake’ (17), which informs the audience of her and Eleanor’s unbuttoned feisty socialism and feminism that break the social rules of the time – taking drugs, protecting prostitutes and ignoring religion – which they throw in the face of the moneyed, class-obsessed Victorian society. The only words spoken by Eleanor in the Prologue are ‘As always dear... Love’ (18), thus ensuring that the audience takes note of their significance to the play’s theme. Thus when Eleanor *repeats* her ‘performance’ in Act 3 the audience finally understands the meaning of the Prologue’s action – the pity and horror of the fact that Eleanor’s dressing in white is a ritual attempt at purification, that the parcel she holds is poison, and the note she writes is her suicide note addressed to Edward Aveling, her common-law husband. The audience is made aware of the graphic

physical details of the agony of the death to come, as Eleanor stands stock still and ‘performs’ her fate symbolising a form of physical breakdown that is an exile from herself: ‘Drops of sweat oozed from her bluish face.... she began to scream horribly...’ (76). However, there *is* an essential additional comment on this action that is a note of hope: not only does the ending remind the audience that Eleanor’s final word in the Prologue is ‘Love’ – the word repeated when the audience sees her take the package, lie down, and ‘become very still’ – but the play finally ends on another, different note of love – Eleanor’s maid and her previously unidentified half-brother Harry, by Marx’s housekeeper, decide to marry and raise a family in the name of their love – as Harry symbolically suggests in the words: ‘Give you a hand’ (82). For the audience, after witnessing the play’s three acts that build the tragic circumstances of Eleanor life under her narcissistic husband Edward, this act of love allows the maid and Harry to display another kind of love that can inform a marriage that is the embodiment of hope and transformation

The body of the play allows us to witness Eleanor’s essential grasp of the ‘True/Real’ in her own manner, through her work as a socialist with the East End Jewish seamstresses, and her loving friendship with her soul mate, the maverick and outspoken novelist Olive Schreiner. These two free thinking, free living women fight together for the rights of all women who are abandoned by a Victorian society governed by male privilege and the Law of the Father. Eleanor’s Jewish self also enjoys a rich and true/real friendship with the famous Jewish novelist of the time, the witty Israel Zangwill.

In direct contrast to the action in the Prologue, in Act 1 Scene 1, the audience sees Eleanor’s husband Edward seducing his young mistress Eva. She matches him in self-interest which she dispatches with a cruel wit equal to Edward’s – she insists on marriage to him because she is ‘petrified I’ll bear your little bastard, while you swan off’ (20). Her

married status will no longer allow society to call her ‘a whore... because some old director (*Prodding him*) – my arse – manager... calls me to the privilege of his bed’ (20).

The commercialism of Eva’s career as an actress contrasts with Eleanor’s genuine love of acting which surfaces when she performs the part of Nora in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* in the safety of her ‘crystal den’ for an audience of friends. In contrast, Edward is trying to direct an ‘operetta’ in which Eva will star, and, as he prides himself on never having worked for money, he plans to borrow from Eleanor to pay for his and Eva’s secret honeymoon, lying to Eleanor that the money is for health reasons.

Running through *The Crystal Den* is a debate on the function and value of theatre to society – the play-within-the-play in *The Crystal Den* provides its turning point, the dramatic moment of revelation in Act 2, scene 3, when Eleanor is made aware of Aveling’s subversive marriage to Eva. The play-within-the-play is Eleanor’s and Israel Zangwill’s re-write of their own comic version of Ibsen’s play, for the benefit of their friends, in which they have changed the ending, so that the character of Nora obediently chooses to remain with her controlling husband. Eleanor’s intention is to allow her enlightened socialist audience to mock the idea of a woman who chooses to remain trapped in a patriarchal position of obedience and servitude. For the audience in the auditorium (not the audience onstage), this is an ironic comment on *Eleanor’s* ‘true’ position. At the same time, the play-within-a-play becomes the turning-point of *The Crystal Den*, in which Edward, who is playing Helmer, encrypts in their performed text, his revelation, directed at Eleanor (playing Nora), of his secret marriage to Eva. The dramatic irony in this scene lies in the fact that Edward is unwittingly ‘performing’ the role of the patriarch, which is the actual role he plays in life. Though the audience of their friends on stage are unaware of this, the audience in the theatre *is* conscious of Edward’s unwitting self-revelation:

EDWARD: (*As Helmer, serious here.*) You resorted to tricks and dodges to conceal from me that you had worked to earn money, that you saved my life in an unwomanly manner. It has corrupted you... (*glances at Eve for approval*)... That's why I am leaving you now. (60)

Edward's behaviour shocks the *actual* audience, as he denigrates Eleanor's father Marx's incompetence with money, which Edward, ironically, is unable to recognise as his own weakness: 'Your mother's scepticism, like your father's loose idea of finance, are in your blood' (61). He rebukes Eleanor, within his 'performance' as Helmer, stating that, in his belief in himself as a 'true man', he is obliged to trade his 'love' for his independence: 'No true man sacrifices his independence even for the woman he loves' (61). By his own actions, the audience judges him as 'untrue'. Thus he indirectly 'unmans' himself with his own words.

This cruel and self-centred action of Edward can be understood through Kristeva's idea of the danger of a character whose ego is frozen in a state of self-love. On the other hand, the audience witnesses how Eleanor, in touch with the 'True/ Real', finally is able to understand and accept her 'difference' from him. This is underlined by her surprise discovery that she is tied to her beloved father Marx through her 'friend' Freddy, who turns out to be her half-brother. She is able to comfort herself with the words: 'We are the same' (70). At the play's end, the audience is moved by the knowledge that Eleanor's forgiveness of her husband in the name of 'love', is a final *ethical* gesture.

In my short story 'Something Chronic' (Baraitser, 2004), I show the conversion of a narcissistic husband, moved by the hurt he has caused, and transformed into a person in touch, for a moment, with the 'True/Real'. A caring young taxi driver is in love with a homely housewife. The story's tragic-comic climax occurs when the housewife Malka's

pet cat, an animal abhorred by her husband Colin, knocks a pot plant out of Colin's hand as he comes through the door with a pretty woman, a potential buyer of his goods. In his fury, he attacks and floors his wife, causing her brain damage. The taxi driver quietly listens to the exiled wife Malka's outpourings when he visits her in hospital. She expresses her wonderment at the overturning of the Law of the Father, for her husband shows her that he regrets his action:

As God is my witness, I am not telling you a lie, the tears are dripping through his fingers...And I'm not losing my marbles. This isn't a test... I'm watching the tears run over my husband's hands and wetting the sheets. And something happens to me ... I'm feeling so... yes, that's it... Happy! ... Because he's crying for me! (218-219)

The story shows the deep, amazed 'moment' of happiness felt by a woman who has only known her husband as a narcissist, who is moved to tears when he can, for once, see her as the 'other'. The story illustrates the psychological movement of her husband, which is a form of miracle, from narcissism to compassion.

The above analysis of *The Crystal Den* and 'Something Chronic' indicates the relevance of Kristeva's concept of the subject-on-trial as one whose unconscious may 'speak' as a *transformative* means of learning to know the 'True-Real'. In *The Crystal Den*, Eleanor's husband Edward Aveling, the subject-on-trial, remains in a state of narcissism, while in *Something Chronic*, Malka's husband Colin, also a subject-on-trial grasps Kristeva's idea of the True/Real, and becomes able to love another.

**Speaking with a 'forked tongue' from a 'third space'**

Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* writes: ‘In another’s country that is also your own, your person divides [...] you encounter yourself in a double movement [...] once as a stranger, and then as a friend’ (Bhabha, 2004: xxv). Bhabha’s work allows us to bear witness to the dissonant histories and voices of the marginalised ‘other’ including my own as a Jew, woman, mother, and foreigner forced to leave ‘home’. His notions of the ‘third space’ and the ‘forked tongue,’ not only allow us to understand more fully the particular exilic experience of the characters of Eleanor Marx and Israel Zangwill in *The Crystal Den*, but they allow me to theorize my own mode of writing from a ‘third space’ and with a ‘forked tongue’ that transfigure and renew my past, but also innovate and interrupt it with the performance of my present. Bhabha’s writings illustrate the power of ‘tradition [...] to be reinscribed through [...] contingency and contradictoriness’ (3), so that, in an act of cultural translation, my experience of the present can be re-described in an identity that ‘speaks’ and recreates the self (10).

The character of Eleanor’s friend, the Jewish novelist Israel Zangwill, known in the London of his times as ‘the Jewish Dickens’, speaks with a divided tongue as a Jew, who, though a prominent London novelist, was brought up in poverty – he exiles himself from London socialites ‘who drive carriages and sleep between satin sheets’ (Baraitser, 2002: 32) because he is a Cockney – his father was ‘a talented pedlar – lemons’ (31). Zangwill was celebrated in his time for writing about the poverty of the newly arrived Jewish Russian exiles ‘in this foreign place ‘*Engeland* ... the land with no elbow room’ (41), with whom he and Eleanor identify. Eleanor understands that she, too, is ‘... a refugee. Second generation... We must stick together’ (38). The newly arrived refugees are ‘Tailoresses. Eight years old. Eighteen, workers standing in eight yards’ (39). Zangwill represents in the play the refugee who speaks as a ‘double’, uniting his Yiddish ‘tongue’ with his London one so that he ‘speaks’ from the gap between them which is Bhabha’s

‘third space’, one in which Zangwill can perform the inner ‘scraps’ of his daily political and personal circumstances.

As a mark of their being ‘foreign’ within their society, Eleanor and Zangwill nurture the Yiddish language – Zangwill teaches Eleanor Yiddish in order to be able to communicate better with the refugee seamstresses whose rights she is promoting for a shorter working day.

They both love the Yiddish theatre:

ZANGWILL There’s a play in Yiddish about Dreyfus – in the East End.

ELEANOR At least it isn’t Marlowe boiling us in oil – in the West End (37).

Zangwill admits to being ‘consistently inconsistent’: he is a misogynist, yet he admits that his ‘zig’ has found his ‘zigzag’, and he is to marry a young student who is a non-Jew. Yet, he tells Eleanor that ‘I think your English self should talk to your Jewish one’. When Eleanor asks him: ‘Will you be English or Jewish, then?’ he replies ‘Both.’ (54-55).

As a Jewish woman the character of Eleanor identifies with the newly arrived poverty-stricken refugees, the ‘outsiders’ – the newly arrived ‘greeners’<sup>9</sup> who worked for a pittance as seamstresses in dire conditions for long hours, and for whose rights Eleanor vociferously fights: ‘My dear *greener*. My sister. I followed you to the hidden *shul*. You are the part cut from me so long ago – my shadow, the terror of my lost people. But now is our chance... Be proud – to be a Jew is an art’ (75). Eleanor is an outsider not only as a Jewish socialist and as a Marxist, but as a woman whose marriage is only common law and is a childless one.

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<sup>9</sup> This term refers to a Jewish garment worker new to the community of Jewish refugees in the East End in the late nineteenth century.

Similarly, in *Louis/lui* the character of Louis/lui's wife Helly is Jewish. She fights her position with steely wit and honesty:

HELLY I was in the Resistance you know. In charge - took decisions on the torture of prisoners... Russians, too. (*Smiling.*) I have a splinter of ice in my heart.

Louis Oh?

HELLY But I'm a Jew.

LOUIS A Jew and a Communist. That's good.

HELLY And you?

LOUIS I don't know.

HELLY You don't know who you are? Well! Catholic, Communist – it's all the same to you.

(Baraitser, 1998: 92)

Throughout the play, the audience is endeared to Helly because she continues to love him, to administer to his needs, and to believe in his political aspirations, despite his cold-blooded betrayal of her to the Marxist system. However, Helly comes to realise that she is entrapped in the nightmare of his incoherent state of mind. He betrays her to the Party as a Polish Jew (that he claims he 'picked out of the gutter'), accusing her of being a Nazi spy who betrayed Russian communists, when they both know this to be untrue. It becomes obvious to the audience that the characterization of Althusser's personal responses is interlaced with his political ideas of extremism, and that Helly is administering to Louis's needs, as she delivers pretty students to his bed. Helly finally perceives that she cannot escape the suffocation of her Jewishness and her womanhood by 'Louis'/'lui'. Worn down and wearied by his exile of her through his unstable persona that cannot incorporate her 'otherness', she tragically loses her will to resist his final act of destruction:



*LOUIS throws her back on the bed.*

HELLY Let me out! This bloody womb...

LOUIS I had a dream... Such a terrible dream last night... I dreamt I had to kill my sister – but she had to agree to it.

HELLY Your sister....

LOUIS Marry me. Marry me now.

*LOUIS pulls a curtain ring from the rail at the window. He places it on her fourth finger and makes the sign of the cross.*

HELLY (*Laughs.*) That's it. Do what you've always wanted to do.

LOUIS You're mine now.

(Baraitser, 1998: 104)

The scene is set in the place of The Red R(W)omb that symbolically represents Louis' college room where he works as a Marxist, but also represents the inside of his mind as representing the 'womb' of his mother from which, symbolically, he has never escaped, underlining for the audience Helly's awareness of her own womb made barren by 'Louis'. Helly's final plea that he finds his true 'self' ('lui') falls on deaf ears. The audience witnesses how, in the blind state of his 'otherness', Louis finally 'owns' her – not only in a mock marriage, but in taking her life.

Bhabha's idea of the power of 'tradition [...] to be reinscribed through [...] contingency and contradictoriness' (2004: 3), so that, in an act of cultural translation, describes how the experience of the present can be re-described in an identity that speaks and recreates the self (10). I have demonstrated this through an analysis of the exiled Jew in *The Crystal Den* that includes the characters of Eleanor Marx and Israel Zangwill, and through the character of Louis/lui's Jewish wife Helly in *Louis/lui*.

### **The discourse of motherhood and mother/daughter relations**

Kristeva describes how the dissonant *female* exile (as opposed to the political rebel and the psychoanalyst) is concerned with the Daemon trapped in her body, which is the ‘political’ law of reproduction. This led to Kristeva’s interest in arousing a new discourse on motherhood and mother/daughter relations. I was struck by her statement that when the female dissident creates art, her language of dissonance always ‘muffles a cry’, as it feeds on either rivalry or identification with the mother (1987: 297). Kristeva demonstrates that the *exiled daughter* demands a countering creative force of renewal of identity within the complex, ambivalent mother/daughter relations, from which the daughter must separate herself. Kristeva adds that this separation takes place in language, as the narrative of *resistance* to exile also *celebrates* the separation from the mother. Though maternity disturbs the identity of the daughter, it disturbs the *exiled mother* enough for the possibility of her reconsideration of ‘difference’ that gives birth to a new ethics that is expressed in love of the ‘other’. In ‘Stabat Mater’, Kristeva points out that from the mother’s perspective, ‘Herethics’ can occur in the mother/daughter ‘war’ when the mother differentiates between herself as a woman, and her daughter as one, that culminates in the ‘ethics of love’ (Kristeva, 1976: 188). I shall demonstrate my application of these ideas through an analysis of two very different approaches to motherhood and mother/daughter relations in the theme and characters of *The Story of an African Farm* and ‘Post Human’.

Olive Schreiner’s grandmother was Jewish. Her life and work was a beacon for me as a Jewish girl growing up in South Africa. She campaigned for the rights of both African and Jewish women well ahead of her time. She gave me the example of a writer and feminist living and writing from the gap between two countries – South Africa and Britain. I was deeply moved, when I first read Schreiner’s fractured poetic novel *The*

*Story of an African Farm*, written in 1883 under the male pseudonym Ralph Iron, as one written by the *first* generation of feminists that demanded equal rights with men.<sup>10</sup> I wrote my adaptation of the novel for theatre in 1995 in London, as part of a *third* generation of feminists intent on reconciling maternal time (motherhood) with work, i.e. linear (political and historical) time.

I had to make it intelligible for a modern audience, which meant paring down the language so that it became hard and sharp as small pebbles. The structure has only two acts, broken into several scenes differing in texture, ranging from melodrama to tragedy, from comic scenes that turn the characters into Victorian puppet-like performers, to scenes concentrating on choric writing. I needed to write a ‘rag-bag’ of scenes placed one next to the other that allowed the movement from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood of the two very different exiled main characters in the novel – Lyndall and Waldo.

I chose to adapt Olive Schreiner’s novel because it was so far ahead of its time, and I could identify with the revolutionary political feminist ideas sown within it. In addition, I realised the novel was also about my position as an exile – the two main characters in the novel are both orphans growing up as exiles in the 1860s on a remote farm in the South African outback – Waldo, the dreamer and lover, is German, and Lyndall, the intellectual young woman who falls pregnant, is English. The story concerns the thwarted attempts by these two young outsiders to understand the ‘foreign’ world in which they find themselves: Waldo is driven to find purposeful work in a harsh and soulless world full of ‘strangeness’ and the uncanny; Lyndall must suffer a troubled relationship with her punishing step-mother, but also the anguish and loss when exiled within a failed

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<sup>10</sup> Schreiner wrote the novel as a young governess in the semi-desert of the Little Karoo in a hut that leaked so badly when it rained that she wrote holding up an umbrella. She brought the novel to London aged twenty-two, in 1883. Meredith published it and she was feted.

relationship with a ‘stranger’ who cannot recognise her true self, or the ‘True/Real’. She chooses rather the ‘undeath’ of a life of independence, in what Bhabha describes as ‘the ethics of self-enactment’ (2004: 351). She and her new-born daughter die, exiled and alone, a choice indicating her independence from the Law of the Father at a time when this was regarded as scandalous. It was a novel far ahead of its time that changed readers’ attitudes towards the acceptance of a woman’s right to independence of choice.

The plot concerns Lyndall’s dream of an education, while being brought up on her isolated farm by an ignorant, foolish and religious widow, her Dutch aunt Tant’ Sannie. Tant’ Sannie’s gentle daughter Em, will inherit the farm. Waldo is the son of the German overseer of the farm who has died, leaving him orphaned, exiled and vulnerable to Tant’ Sannie and her cruel and manipulative Irish mountebank suitor. He beats Waldo cruelly, is caught making love to another woman, and is banished.

The mother/daughter theme concerns Lyndall who is disliked by her mother-figure Tant’ Sannie for being English in a Dutch household, and for her obstinacy and intelligence. Lyndall becomes aware of how women are humiliated in life and how this must be resisted. A ‘stranger’ arrives, wants to marry her. Despite finding him lacking, he provides an escape which she seizes. She chooses to travel with him unmarried, until she discovers that he lacks moral courage, though she falls pregnant by him. They quarrel and she is left alone and ill. She and her baby die, but Waldo cannot bear to live without her – he repairs a chair as a symbol of possible resilience but lies out on the ground with his last thought: ‘All dreams and lies. The glorious blue. Blood into sand’, suggesting that he takes his own life.<sup>11</sup> Em marries an Englishman visiting the farm, who hides his love for Lyndall. Tant’ Sannie marries and flourishes.

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<sup>11</sup> This is a touch I stole from Edward Bond’s play *Saved* set in the 60s (Royal Court Theatre, 1965)

Enfolded in the story is a complex mother/daughter relationship between the exiled Lyndall and Tant' Sannie, who is responsible for raising her. Lyndall knows her aunt will give her no income for an education: 'I must look out for myself', she states, despite her dreams of 'wearing diamonds in her hair' and being as powerful as Bonaparte (14). She is driven by guilt to 'work, work, work', and her hunger for knowledge, wildly climbing the hills in the sun without her bonnet, riddled with guilt as she finds she cannot believe in God, despite Tant' Sannie's hypocritical worship of Him.

Her first moral confrontation with her mother-figure comes when, taking Em with her, she refuses to attend the 'school' of the ignorant, lying and scheming visitor, Bonaparte, who has his eye on Tant' Sannie's farm via marriage to her. Tant' Sannie molests her own daughter Em, for joining Lyndall in turning her back on Bonaparte's teachings. Lyndall physically attacks her aunt who locks them in a dark room. For the first time, Lyndall defies her mother-figure by smashing the window of the room with a metal knob she prises from the bed. Unfettered by the patriarchal attitudes of her aunt that have cowed Em, Lyndall refuses to cry, and tends to the terrified Em's wounds (26):

EM We can't do anything.

LYDALL I'll burn it down if I have to.

*She lights a candle.*

LYNDALL I don't care.

EM Will it not be very, very wicked?

LYNDALL Yes...

EM Mama – let us out, let us out. I'll be good.

LYNDALL I'm going to sleep. (27)

Her second confrontation with her 'mother' comes after she witnesses her watching approvingly as Bonaparte relishes severely beating the boy Waldo for being 'ungodly' –

‘Got the shivers, hey’, she remarks approvingly. The audience and Lyndall understand that they are facing a sadistic mother substitute. Lyndall’s responds with moral courage: she brings Waldo food and comfort: ‘One day we’ll be grown up and I won’t let anyone suffer, even if its wicked’ (28) [...] There must be something else’ (30). Lyndall, desperate for schooling, confronts her shrewd money-minded substitute mother, who wants her to stay and help with the house, with a plan that amounts to the beginning of a separation from her mother figure who remains in the position of the narcissist who cannot proceed to love. Lyndall who struggles to understand the purpose of ‘this dirty little world’, reaches a turning point that enables her to be a subject-in-process/on-trial who begins to understand the ‘other, by thanking her aunt for listening to her plea:

LYNDALL My uncle promised. He left money for it, Aunt. To go to the boarding school for girls in Craddock.

TANT’ SANNIE ... The Redeemer rest his soul. If your father saw you now, stamping your foot...

LYNDALL His ghost won’t rest if you don’t keep your promise to him.

TANT’ SANNIE (*Crossing herself*) Oh! Wicked!

LYHDALL Here I saved my pocket money... There’s enough for material for the uniform ...

TANT’SANNIE Would I ever cheat you, would I?

LYNDALL; No Aunt. And I thank you for it... No young man around here would have me. I have no inheritance.

TANT SANNIE If a woman’s got a baby and a husband she’s got the best things the Lord can give her. ... As for a husband, it’s very much the same who one has...

LYNDALL I won't beg. All I ask is the chance to go to school. (31)

Their relationship takes an even greater turn for the better when her aunt tells Lyndall she caught Bonaparte making love to another woman, turned a barrel of sheep's heads over him and dismissed him.

When Lyndall returns from school to attend Em's wedding, 'quite like the lady in Tant' Sannie's magazine picture on the wall', she admits that her schooling was 'a torture machine to crush human souls... A bunch of thin-lipped woman – no culture, no largesse' (37). She runs away, and when she is left alone and ill, a *true* form of mothering enters Lyndall's life. Em's husband Gregory, who realises he can only love Lyndall, cross-dresses, *disguising himself as a female nurse* by growing his hair, wearing a nurse's uniform in order to find Lyndall as would a mother, and care for in her illness, loneliness and mourning for her lost baby. He refuses money for his 'services', 'performing' the role of the mother Lyndall has never had, comforting her despite her belief that 'life is a series of abortions', giving her unstinting care when she is most in need of it, though Lyndall will never know the true identity of her mother/nurse. He is the last person to speak to her. This refers back to Kristeva's 'heretical ethics' in 'Tales of Love' (1987: 297) in which she alludes to the necessity of a re-conception of the maternal experience as an understanding of the 'True/Real' that is ethical.

As a piece of 'poetic writing' my surreal short story 'Post Human' (Baraitser, 1996) has many possible interpretations, one of which concerns the mother/daughter relationship as one of mutual exile. The reader moves between two theatrical performance spaces that define the unspoken 'differences' that lie between a 'mother' and a 'daughter. In Judith Butler's theory of the performance of identity (1988), their actions are seen as a *social performance* which makes social laws explicit, so that political and cultural structures are

enacted as subjective experience, though the distinction between the public and the private remains. This ‘performance’ as socio-cultural representation of selfhood of both mother and daughter figures is contained within the story.

In ‘Post Human’, a teenage daughter is roller-skating home through a seaside town dressed in a tight body suit and briefs, plugged in to her ear-phones so that she remains unaware that she is being tailed by a motorcar. Her aging self-absorbed mother and her friend, perform yoga to a man concealed behind a camera, their carefully exercised bodies signalling their vanity. In a surreal epiphanic ‘moment’ the mother’s friend develops an animal’s tail which she displays in a sexual gesture to camera, while the ‘mother figure’ performs a yoga pose so she becomes ‘a space-woman in a wax museum’ – an image underlying her distance from the life of her approaching lively roller-skating daughter. The mother finally thanks the camera operator for enabling her to concentrate on ‘re-inventing’ herself as ‘post-human’ (3), her perfect body containing the possibility of life eternal. Her daughter, the unaware young girl skater, her ‘buttocks as taught as a horse’s’, skates towards a mother whose only purpose is to attend to the perfection of her body.

There is no delineated plot or character in the story, but rather the existence of ‘actors’ using gestures that are ‘performances’ of the complexities of the narcissism within a mother and daughter relationship. The audience brings to the story their own interpretations of the performances of the characters.

What emerges from this analysis of *The Story of an African Farm* and ‘Post Human’ is the importance of Kristeva’s statement that when the female dissident creates art, her language of complex dissonance feeds on either rivalry with, or identification with the mother.



### **Concluding thoughts**

Writing this thesis gave me the rare opportunity of standing back and assessing for myself and for others, the submitted work, to show how it came to be made, and what drove me to explore the theme of writing exile as a performative act of political and psychic survival as expressed in the language of art. The thesis enabled me to demonstrate my reasons for adopting the ideas, strategies, and writing techniques of revered writers, teachers and philosophers that guided me in the making of the work. It gave me the chance not only to discover and to understand the recurring themes running through my body of work, but to grasp, for the first time, its progression, and the manner in which each work examines the theme from a variety of angles, learning to use the different structures of a theatre text and of a short story.

I wrote to survive exile. I came to understand that *internally*, we are all exiles, strangers to ourselves. Freud writes that our identities are split between 'I', and the 'you' that is our uncanny repressed unconscious self. Kristeva argues that this occurs when we mourn the separation from the mother. It is not until then that we 'speak' the separation in poetic language that disrupts, shatters the image, and lets us grow towards the acceptance of 'an other' and love, less we fall into the danger of a narcissistic frozen identity in which hate becomes the means of self-preservation. These thoughts helped me to understand why I was drawn to Ionesco's Béranger who loves his sweetheart Daisy despite the fact she can love no one but the symbolic 'rhinoceroses' who represent the Nazis, and why I wanted to write about Louis Althusser's Jewish wife Helly, who loves 'Louis' yet is murdered by him in his state of narcissism, as well as my choice in writing about the life of Eleanor Marx because of her forgiveness of a husband who deserted her, causing her to take her own life.

Through my reading of Bhabha on the writings of minorities such as women and migrants, I also came to understand exile as an *external*, cultural exclusion that needed to be articulated. From a hybrid ‘third space’, I could still ‘speak’ (i.e. ‘perform’) my identity so that the personal (‘a measure of me’) became the political, using a disruptive symbolic language that held my difference as a woman, a Jew and a South African.

Bhabha describes the ‘terror’ of the ‘unhomely moment’ in *domestic spaces*, a subject which Kristeva felt should be explored more fully, which resonated with me, as many of my short stories explore the complex and frightening subject of mother/daughter relations, which is neglected as subject matter, but that I could learn about from studying the short stories of Leonora Carrington, Grace Paley, and Nadine Gordimer.

The submitted work was written in the hope that audiences, readers and students would be as surprised, moved, even as changed as I was, by knowing and understanding more fully the complex hidden circumstances of the condition of exile and its effects, and the expression of them in poetic writing.

### **Coda: towards the future**

A collection of postmodern short stories linked by the theme of ‘Mothers and Daughters’ is in preparation, several of which have been discussed in the thesis.

The story ‘Taking Tea in Africa’ has become the basis of a novel – the tale of the coming of age of a girl growing up in a dysfunctional family living in the new South Africa.

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