

## “In This Place, at This Time”: Staging Female Bodies and Representing Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa - **Mathilde Rogez** (Université de Toulouse)

In Coetzee's first post-apartheid novel, whose background is coterminous with the first stage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's hearings in South Africa, Lucy refuses to let the truth out, in the public, about what has happened to her at the hands of thugs on her farm in the Eastern Cape, despite her father's insistence: "in this place, at this time, it is (...) my business, mine alone"<sup>1</sup>. Why should Looksmart, the son of a former domestic worker on Patricia and Richard Wiley's farm on the slopes of the Drakensberg this time, come to "make it [his] business"<sup>2</sup> that the truth be revealed about the death of Grace, his fiancée at the time, years after the event, to his elderly foster mother of a kind and her now senile husband? What should be made of other male characters' involvement in getting the truth out, and why should playwrights like Higginson still go back to such events more than a decade into the new democracy?

Higginson's play, entirely set in the sitting room of a farm about to be sold to land developers, further questions the very notion of a suitable site for the revelation of the truth literally to *take place*, playing as it does on the interaction between private matters and national reconciliation, a private space and a more public one – which may also be that of the theatre room or what lies in the wings of the stage or beyond the doors of the amphitheatre. This is even more the case given his novelistic adaptations of two of his plays which both include his characters going to watch a play which, in a metatextual twist, seems to be about themselves and their secrets.

The theatrical stage seems indeed still to play a key role in helping the country heal its possibly still festering wounds. Thus, in Mike van Graan's play *Green Man Flashing*,<sup>3</sup> by comparison,

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<sup>1</sup> Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace*. London: Vintage, 2000: 113.

<sup>2</sup> Higginson, Craig. *Dream of the Dog*. London: Oberon, 2010: 39.

<sup>3</sup> Van Graan, Mike. *Green Man Flashing*. Cape Town, Junkets Publishing, 2010.

the two time periods become juxtaposed and interlaced on stage through the use of spliced staging as another woman's testimony about her rape by a public political figure in the "New South Africa" is compared on stage to revelations at the time of the TRC about the absent body of yet another woman.

This paper will thus seek to explore what those theatrical forays back into the country's darkest past tell us about the situation in a supposedly post-apartheid, post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission South Africa, as well as about the possibilities offered by the stage for the truth to be exposed, and the role female bodies may play, or be made to play, as a site of articulation of personal and national truths.