

Beyond the Text: Relational Memory and Breyten Breytenbach's Living Cultural Ecosystem

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Abstract

For many South Africans who came of age during the final years of apartheid, the name Breyten Breytenbach was seldom encountered solely through literature. Rather, it emerged within a broader socio-political landscape shaped by tension, artistic resistance and generational memory. Engagements with his work therefore extend beyond the written text into lived cultural spaces where memory, art and place intersect.

This paper explores Breytenbach's continuing presence through the concept of relational memory, examining how literary legacies are sustained within networks of people, artistic responses and cultural institutions. Drawing selectively on the African Story Pot ("driepootpot") model (De Beer, 2020), elements of this framework are applied as an interpretive lens to consider the dynamic interaction between relationships, place and socio-cultural processes.

The study is informed by relational encounters with Breytenbach's legacy, including personal engagements, conversations with individuals closely connected to him, and artistic reinterpretations inspired by his work. Particular attention is given to the Breytenbach Centre in Wellington as a living cultural environment. Here, the phrase #altydbreyten signals not only remembrance, but an ongoing presence experienced within the immediacy of the space. The centre emerges as a house of possibilities where creative practice, dialogue and cultural exchange continue to generate new meaning.

Within this context, Breytenbach's legacy persists not as static memory, but as a living cultural ecosystem sustained through relationships, artistic expression and shared cultural space.

Keywords

Breyten Breytenbach; relational memory; cultural ecosystems; living legacy; storytelling; Breytenbach Centre; African Story Pot model; cultural heritage

