

Performing Whately in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatrical and Public Life. By Megan Lewis. Studies in Theatre History and Culture. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016; pp. xv + 246, 29 illustrations. \$55.00 paper, \$55.00 e-book.

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Reviewed by April Sizemore-Barber, *Georgetown University*

A timely take on whiteness in South African theatre and performance, Megan Lewis's *Performing Whately in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatre and Public Life* offers readers a new perspective on a notoriously challenging topic. Whiteness, as an unmarked universalized norm, shapes our cultural and political realities; yet scholarship that treats whiteness as a monolithic identity risks paradoxically shoring up its power to define (and further displace) its "Others." Lewis destabilizes the familiar narrative of Euro-American whiteness by highlighting the performative construction of South Africa's Dutch-descended Afrikaners, a minority group whose potent narrative of racial superiority and ethnic victimhood resulted in nearly fifty years of racist apartheid. Rather than focusing on performing "whiteness"—a monolithic imagined or idealized identity—Lewis documents the varied ways Afrikaner theatre makers, performance artists, and musicians have performed whately, which she defines as "describ[ing] the gerund state of being, the *doing* of actions or the *performing* of self" (10). Ultimately, Lewis demonstrates that performing whately—doing whiteness—is, in the postcolony as elsewhere, always accompanied by an undoing.

Lewis anchors her diverse constellation of sites to the recurring metaphor of the *laager*, the protective encirclement of ox wagons that has long served as an iconic touchstone in Afrikaner cultural mythology. A self-protective yet claustrophobic formation, the *laager* ensured the survival of nineteenth-century Afrikaner families as they ventured into the South African interior. Metonymically, the *laager* functions as a bastion for civilization; consecrated by an angry Calvinist god, it shields the white nation from a savage black continent. Throughout the apartheid era and continuing to the present, the *laager* was used to justify colonial expansion and white supremacy. It is a profoundly gendered metaphor, populated by hardy, intrepid men (*trekboere*) who patrol its boundaries and safeguard the vulnerable, stoic women (*volksmoeders*) who reproduce the Afrikaner culture and progeny from within.

Following a Preface and Introduction, the first three numbered chapters of *Performing Whately in the Postcolony* detail the performative history of this mythology, outlining the construction and maintenance of Afrikaner whiteness across three centuries. Chapter 1 sets up the gendered myth of the *laager* through insightful readings of early film, the national pageantry of the 1938 *Eeufees* (Great Trek Centenary) celebrations, and symbolic commemorative architecture. Lewis then traces how shame from the loss of the (Second) Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) impacted the Afrikaner psyche, and analyzes instances where the war has since been theatrically reenacted and reimagined. Chapter 3 highlights the work of Deon Opperman, the most prolific contemporary dramatist writing in

Afrikaans, whose epic *Les Mis*-style historical musicals often bring full houses to tears. While acknowledging Opperman's tendency toward uncritical nostalgia, Lewis positions his plays as windows into the existential postapartheid questions that she poses in her Introduction: "how might performance and theatre . . . be ways of knowledge-making that allow us to better see the construction of whiteness and work towards its dismantling? And if we seek to dismantle whiteness, then what are the options for white subjects in the postcolony?" (13).

The second half of *Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony* explores these questions in focused accounts of contemporary Afrikaner performers who subvert the *laager* mythos. Drag artist Pieter-Dirk Uys uses parody, satire, punning, and inversion to queer the image of the *volksmoeder* with his primary persona, Evita Bezuidenhout. Performance artist Peter van Heerden deconstructs *trekboer* masculinity via durational, abject manipulations of his body. The book concludes with a speculative reading of music videos by Afrikaans hip-hop groups Die Antwoord and Jack Parow, whose emergent *zef* (deliberately white-trash) and kitsch cultures simultaneously degrade and reinvent African whiteness. By tracking contemporary performances by white artists who explode the raced and gendered logic of the *laager*, Lewis contends that, much like whiteness, the *laager* was always a "Janus-faced metaphor" inviting "potential transgressions, unspoken crossings, and external threats" (28).

Throughout the book Lewis optimizes her insider-outsider status as a white South African American with dual citizenship. She intuits linguistic and cultural nuances in the Afrikaans performances that might be lost to an outside researcher, yet is equally invested in reading whiteness cross-culturally. She begins the book by drawing parallels between apartheid state killings of her youth and the targeting of black bodies by police in contemporary America. Able to speak to these parallels in the first person, Lewis positions her book as explicitly transnational, focusing on "the racialized dynamics of these global choreographies, from South to North" (xii). In this geographic reversal, she shifts the presumption of the Global South as a receptacle for or object of Western knowledge, and instead provocatively poses the question of what South Africa might teach America about its own relationship to whiteness.

Megan Lewis's *Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony* makes a series of compelling contributions to theatre and performance scholarship. Her standout interpretations on the underresearched work of Uys and van Heerden—among the book's most vital offerings—extend and update earlier conversations on whiteness by South African theatre scholar Loren Kruger, among others. The book also adds a much-needed transnational dimension to recent theatre scholarship on whiteness and can be read in productive dialogue with texts such as Faedra Chatard Carpenter's *Coloring Whiteness* (2014) and Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence* (2011). While maintaining a tight focus on Afrikaner whiteness, *Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony* implicitly marks out areas ripe for future scholarship. The knotty relationship between the white Afrikaner and the mixed-race Coloured communities, for instance, is mentioned only in passing. Yet this incomplete gesture draws attention to what would be a fascinating project in its own right: the rich cross-cultural performances resulting from a shared common language and

divergent racial histories. By separating whiteness from its (whitely) enactments and detaching it from its conventional geographies, Lewis opens up space to challenge her readers' "white-sighted[ness]" (13), in the process providing a compelling roadmap for future research at the intersection of theatre and critical race studies.

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Stanislavsky and Yoga. By Sergei Tcherkasski. Translated by Vreneli Farber. Routledge Icarus. New York: Routledge, 2016; pp. 126. \$95 cloth, \$24.95 paper, \$24.95 e-book.

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The name Stanislavsky has long been associated with the systematized teaching of acting begun in the early twentieth century. Wildly varying interpretations, translations, and disciples of this work have made their way into actor training in the United States and other Western countries. Yoga is commonly accepted as a small part of the Stanislavsky's "system," but has been relegated to a sidenote or footnote in the vast reams of writing on his method. In *Stanislavsky and Yoga*, Sergei Tcherkasski presents an evidence-based argument that nearly 40 percent of Stanislavsky's basic exercises are founded on the practice of Yoga—indeed, much more than a footnote.

Tcherkasski presents a vast number of meticulously annotated examples of references to Yoga in the writings of Stanislavsky himself as well as those of his numerous students and colleagues over the years. The book is divided into three main chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, "Yoga in the Theatre Practice of Stanislavsky," is divided into five sections. The first explains evidence of Stanislavsky's earliest acquaintance with Yoga. In her memoirs of the summer of 1911, Russian actress Nadeshda Smirnova writes of a young medical student recommending the books *Hatha Yoga* and *Raja Yoga* by Ramacharaka, both of which Tcherkasski found preserved in the museum of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) with Stanislavsky's own copious notes. There is also reference to perhaps earlier exposure to Yoga through the influence of Lev Tolstoy, who corresponded for years with Mahatma Gandhi. The second section of the chapter delves into the references to Stanislavsky's use of Yoga in the First Studio of the MAT. Extensive records from the exercises of the First Studio are described, with examples of quotations that directly reflect back on the words of Ramacharaka's books, as well as a letter in which he indicates that *Hatha Yoga* was required reading by the students. The next three sections of the chapter explore Stanislavsky's latter work with the MAT, the Second Studio, and the Opera Studio. Numerous instances are cited, particularly of the use and development of *prana* (a Yogic term for "life force" or "energy"), which forms the basis of much of Ramacharaka's work.

In Chapter 2, which explores "Yoga in the Literary Heritage of Stanislavsky," Tcherkasski argues that "many of Stanislavsky's pages are virtually permeated with yogic ideas" (55). In the section titled "Yoga of the Twentieth Century and Its Ancient Roots," one of the most startling and interesting revelations of the book