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Shakespearean Hypotexts in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*: Rewriting Renaissance Texts for the “New South Africa”’s Stage?

Mathilde Rogez

Introduction: Shakespeare in South(ern) Africa?

- 1 This article cannot hope to renew the studies of Shakespeare in Southern Africa, the title of a yearly publication devoted to the productions, reception and possible rewritings of the Bard’s plays in the southern part of the continent. The debate around their place in the syllabus of South African schools continues unabated, in a country that has a peculiar history in its relation to Shakespeare. On the one hand, his work is not taught alongside its rewritings as is the case in several other African countries (with Césaire’s *Une tempête*, for instance), and it is still often associated with condescending white liberals (see for example Thurman 2015 and 2017). But on the other hand, it also evokes “The Robben Island Bible,” the name given to a copy of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* confiscated from political prisoner Sonny Venkatrathnam but smuggled back into the cells by being passed off as a Hindu prayer book covered in Deepavali greeting cards and much cherished by the inmates (Desai 2014, 13; Hahn 2017). Not to forget, of course, Sol Plaatje’s masterly translations in the early 20th century (see Willan 1996).
- 2 Rather, this piece seeks to prolong a reflection offered by J. Coplen Rose in his article in the recently published anniversary issue of *Shakespeare en devenir*, on the “decolonisation” of two of Shakespeare’s plays by South African satirist Pieter Dirk Uys and their “redeployment” to satirise the political crises of his time in South Africa (Coplen Rose 2017). If we follow Coplen Rose’s argument, when the situation is so beyond satire’s means to amend it that satire itself as a genre is celebrated as artist of

the year (at the 2015 National Arts Festival), what can such borrowings from Shakespeare's plays tell us about the state of contemporary drama in South Africa? What further light does the Renaissance intertext shed on the reception of plays by South African audiences?¹ The focus of the analysis will be another, earlier but equally acclaimed, satirical take on *Macbeth*: Jane Taylor's 1997 play *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Taylor 2015a). It borrows from an intermediary hypotext, Jarry's student farcical jape, although we shall also see how the play is interspersed with a multitude of other references to Shakespeare which make its nature more complex to grasp. Twenty odd years before Uys, at the time of the birth of the "new South Africa" and of the (often dramatic) hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this adaptation and rewriting of Renaissance texts leads us to ponder on the definition of theatrical genres and the relation between them, as well as on the power of the theatre itself, between iteration and the singular nature of the theatrical performance. Ultimately, it questions the relation of performance to the confessional mode – also shedding light on specific South African issues – and, perhaps, its cathartic or healing powers. Could recycling Renaissance texts pave the way for a form of (tentative) rebirth, the other meaning of "Renaissance"?

Layers of intertexts: decoding the play

- 3 The title of Jane Taylor's play obviously foregrounds two main and intertwined hypotexts: Jarry's student farce *Ubu roi* (first performed in 1896) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Taylor incorporated in her script the testimonies of victims at the TRC hearings from the preceding months,² on which Afrikaans-speaking poetess and journalist Antjie Krog, who was then reporting for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) on the TRC, provided guidance. Robyn Orlin supervised the choreography, as the play stages several dances between the two main actors and several puppets, with for instance the actress playing Ma Ubu also being one of the puppeteers as well as playing the part of a translator at the TRC. The puppets were created by the Handspring Puppet Company, in collaboration with the visual artist William Kentridge who, besides contributing the setting and the drawings projected on screen, directed and produced the play. It was not Kentridge's first attempt at grappling with Alfred Jarry's character: as early as 1975, when still a student, he acted in *Ubu Rex*, an adaptation of Jarry's *Ubu roi* performed at several theatres in Johannesburg in particular, and in 1996-1997 he exhibited a series of etchings and films as part of the celebration of the centenary of the first performance of Jarry's play, *Ubu +/- 101* (Doepel 1997), some of which were then incorporated in the play *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.
- 4 There are therefore multiple layers in the play: it rewrites several texts by Shakespeare, and borrows from Jarry as an intermediary hypotext that also includes several references to Shakespeare; this string of references needs disentangling. Jarry's main and most easily recognisable hypotext is indeed *Macbeth*: Mère Ubu convinces her husband, Père Ubu, to kill the king and usurp power; there is a banquet and a ghost (though not quite in the same places as in the original play) and even a (real) bear in the last fight. However, one can notice a more general influence of Shakespeare's texts, of Elizabethan theatre, and of English itself as a language in Jarry's work and in this particular play and its conception, as demonstrated by Yves Simon, among others.

Thus, *La Clochette ou Shadow's Home et Death-Castle*, one of Jarry's early plays dating back to 1886, borrows from *Hamlet* as well as from several of Shakespeare's comedies (Simon 1981, 184–85). In *César-Antéchrist*, a later play which partly explains the origins of *Ubu roi*, when Ubu asks in the second act who will be king, the answer is written on stage using the archaic spelling of the second-person pronoun ("toy"), which as a result also spells out the real nature of Ubu's reign as a "toy-king," in a direct echo of Macbeth's "All is but toys" (Act II, scene 3, l. 90; Shakespeare 1997, 2582; Simon 1981, 187). *Ubu roi* itself, besides *Macbeth*, also refers to *The Tempest*, the last scene of *Ubu roi* being reminiscent of *The Tempest*'s opening scene, while also including a reference to *Hamlet*'s Elsenaur.

- 5 In Taylor's play, Jarry's *Ubu roi* is clearly identified in the title or through the characters of Pa and Ma Ubu and their idiosyncratic language, but also in the other modes of representation used on stage, with Kentridge giving up his familiar animations of charcoal drawings for white chalk ones closer to Jarry's own drawings (Davis 2000, 175). The play ends similarly with Pa and Ma Ubu sailing away into the sunset, after staging a banquet with a puppet in the middle of the stage evoking the ghost of Banquo (Act II, scene 5; Taylor 2015a, 25–31). There is, it is to be noticed, no bear; instead, one finds a crocodile, a three-headed dog and a vulture. The nature of those animals, as will be further analysed, actually invites the audience to reflect on the issue of re-writing what is a representation, a figuration on stage of something on the page, articulated in the interplay between the literal and the figurative. The bear which was figurative in *Macbeth* and became literal in Jarry is thus displaced, to borrow the phrase used by Shane Graham to refer to the whole play (2009, 40), and represented by literal figures of yet other animals. However, they also happen to stand for something else: for instance, Pa Ubu's dog is a dog, but also a suitcase,³ and the play further toys with the various denotations and connotations of the word, sometimes questioning who is behaving like a dog. In fact, Jarry's hypotext works in such a way as to draw our attention to the presence of forms of rewriting and displacement of other Shakespearean intertexts in Taylor's play, which adds layers of meaning to it, turning it into a mixture of farce and tragedy, as do those very same dogs. The three-headed dog, a figure of Cerberus called Brutus in the play, is indeed referred to as "dogs-of-war" (Taylor 2015a, 7), a phrase coined by Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*, which appears in Mark Antony's pivotal speech in Act III, whereas it is displaced by Taylor, occurring as early as Act I in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. This right away adds ambiguity, and even an underlying violence, to the initially comical scene.⁴
- 6 There are other such displacements throughout the play: like Jarry, Taylor borrows from *Macbeth* as well as from *The Tempest*, yet Pa Ubu does not try to usurp power like Macbeth, but to keep it. The plot differs, with Ubu already an agent of the secret police, but refusing to give up power as apartheid is dismantled and the TRC set up. White supremacy, it is implied, is usurpation of power. Moreover, while the play ends on the whole like *Ubu roi*, this time Pa Ubu is shouting orders to man the ship (which is not the case in Jarry), thus raising questions by way of Jarry's hypotext and its own intertexts: if Pa Ubu is on the ship, is he Alonso, the usurper in *The Tempest*? Or a sailor mixed with the figure of Prospero uttering new spells? In a previous scene, he rather looked like Caliban, haunted by the ghost-like voice and figure of Ma Ubu as she testifies on TV, projected on stage in shifting places, as if surrounding Pa Ubu. Similarly, one notices references to *Hamlet*, but again Taylor makes them work differently as at some point Pa Ubu seems to be hiding like Polonius – in more grotesque and carnivalesque fashion,

with his buttocks sticking out from below a chair – but also feigning madness like Hamlet. Yet he is the one to call out “rats,” but that is so that the truth does *not* come out, so as *not* to testify. One is led to wonder if Taylor’s play relies on the device of the embedded play, like the *Mouse-Trap* in *Hamlet* – but if so, whose guilt does it expose? Such a question is also raised by yet another allusion, not to be found in Jarry, to *The Merchant of Venice*:⁵ in Act V, scene 4, Ubu is called forth as a witness, but the scene looks like some sort of political speech, which then turns into a plea (again differing from Jarry’s play) reminiscent of Shylock’s – and partly delivered on stage in the voice of former President de Klerk (Davis 2003, 342)!

Theatricality and language: lability and performativity

- 7 We are reminded in this scene of the importance of theatricality itself: on stage, language is performed, and the interplay between signifier and signified is made all the more versatile and labile, as a number of other scenes further bring to the fore. Act II, scene 1, thus opens with testimonies of victims at the TRC, with Ma Ubu playing the role of one of the translators: she is the only one identified as such in the stage directions, and is lit up in such a way on stage as to have her reflection projected on the glass walls of the booth, better to highlight the duplicity seemingly inherent in her character, and more broadly, the instability of signs in the theatre. Indeed, the previous act had closed with Pa Ubu taking a shower in the very same cubicle, while on the screen a drawing by Kentridge is used as a projection: Pa Ubu showers, like Lady Macbeth (another displacement) trying to wash away the blood on his hands, with the projection of bits and pieces of bodies running from the water taps. A caption on the screen initially reading “The Smell of Blood and Dynamite” turns in the next act and scene into “A Bath. [...] A Bloodbath” (Taylor 2015a, 11). Yet another layer is added to it as the figure in the drawing looks rather like Kentridge himself, “enveloped by the much more corpulent white chalk outline figure of Ubu” (Davis 2000, 175) which the audience recognizes from Jarry’s own drawings. It is the hypertextual and multimodal – and in that sense, as shall be seen, meta-theatrical – performance of the play, which helps to reveal everyone’s duplicitous game, including the possible complicity of the artist himself. Later on, the play literalises the way in which Ubu feeds lies first to Niles, and later to the TRC: he hides evidence in the crocodile (Act II, scene 8; Taylor 2015a, 33–35), which is Pa’s personal adviser, but also a representation of “die Groot Krokodil” – “the great crocodile,” the nickname given to P.W. Botha, the last Prime Minister from 1978 to 1984 and the first executive State President from 1984 to 1989, who pointedly refused to testify before the TRC. The crocodile is also one of the puppeteer’s former army kit (xviii), as well as a handbag – in which Ma Ubu therefore later finds all the papers incriminating Pa Ubu, when she opens the prop now reverted back to figuring a literal handbag stuffed with paper. “As Ma Ubu spreads these out, piece by piece, images fill the screen and sounds fill the auditorium,” (Act III, scene 2, 37) just as screenshots of the images fill the pages of the published script, with Pa Ubu emerging on stage as if in another time frame and making a statement before the TRC, translated by Ma Ubu. Eventually, it is the interplay of intertexts and modes of representation, of the literal and the figurative, which performs the truth.
- 8 Yet, this seems to happen in another time frame indeed: “At the end of” act III and of “the sequence of evidence, we return to Ma Ubu” (Taylor 2015a, 45) and to the original,

supposedly real time frame of the play, as if the testimony had only happened in Ma's imagination. When later Pa Ubu is, in the main time frame, represented as testifying, what he seems to confess is actually something which, the stage directions point out, "we have heard him rehearse earlier" (Act V, scene 4, 69; emphasis added) – the phrasing of the stage directions somehow drawing attention to the audience's complicit knowledge or need to be cautious. The interplay of intertexts, rewritten and displaced, highlights what is the performance of a performance: the hypertextual play clearly becomes meta-theatrical. This is all the truer as the passage actually refers to yet another hypotext and another performance: the words uttered by Ubu on stage (Act IV, scene 5, 57 and Act V, scene 4, 69) correspond to the very words used by the former commandant of the secret unit Vlakplaas, Dirk Coetzee, who leaked information to the South African judges before the end of the regime, more or less in exchange for amnesty, while his lieutenant Eugene de Kock, like one of the three-headed dogs does in Taylor's play, was sentenced to 212 years in prison, when he spoke to the press before he testified to the TRC (SABC 1996, 6'08–6'23).⁶ The performance of this almost endless series of hypotexts and plays within the play thus exposes a form of truth, shedding a dubious light on the real motives of Dirk Coetzee and questioning whether his was not a rehearsed testimony. As such, it also raises the question of the iterability of a confession: as Mark Sanders (2000, 75), using Derrida (1998, 48–49), noticed, a testimony may be reiterated, and should lend itself to possible repetition; a confession, on the other hand, is performative and, as analysed by J.M. Coetzee (1992), it cannot be repeated if it is to retain its authenticity; otherwise, it merely doubles back on itself, possibly endlessly. Yet, besides "the possibility of fiction *and* of lie" (Derrida 1998, 49) inherent in the testimony's very iterability, Sanders (2002, 17) also points to the very nature of literature, which is to advocate, to give voice to and repeat, the testimonies of others, but experienced uniquely each time by each audience. This is particularly the case in this play which stages puppets of victims but uses their real testimonies, so as not to seem to appropriate them, and yet is also meant to be rehearsed and performed again on stages across the world.

- 9 Therefore, the play does not just rewrite and displace hypotexts to expose duplicity, but also reflects on the very powers and essence of the theatre. Pa Ubu's staged confession is followed by his attempt to sing a purgatory hymn borrowing from religious imagery which is, however, completely undermined by the projection on the screen of crowds of people singing *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, another hymn written by Xhosa poet and preacher Enoch Sontonga in 1897, adopted as the African National Congress's official song by the mid-1920s, and which, two years before the first performance of the play, had become the first half of the new national anthem. Pa's lame hymn is further damned by its intertextual association with Jarry's Ubu's song, "La Chanson du décervelage" ("the decerebration song"), an extremely gruesome piece performed at the end of the play, so that the lamb's blood evoked by this hypertextual Ubu is tainted by the bloody song of his hypotextual model, as well as by his previous stuttering and swearing on stage when evoking his "bloody... bloody... bloody good units" (Act V, scene 4; Taylor 2015a, 69). Hypotexts, hypertexts, the literal and the figurative converge to undermine Pa's attempt, and indeed nobody picks up the chorus. Yet again, the Renaissance intertext further invites us to go back to that period's use of *imitatio* and to see how Taylor here also rewrites the *kommos* – in Greek tragedy, a lamenting song mingling the voice of the chorus and of the tragic hero. The play shifts between farce, comedy and tragedy, switching genres unexpectedly, and Ubu becomes both a

tragic hero and a figure of fun, a “toy-king” removed from the stage as if he had turned into a disposable statue representing times past (69–70), and he is superseded by the crowds incidentally toying-toying on the screen (69–70 and Act IV, 53, when Ubu first rehearses his plea): given Kentridge’s deep knowledge of Jarry’s *Ubu*, the multilingual pun across hypo- and hyper-texts may well be intended.

Multimodality: re-staging and reworking Shakespeare in a post-TRC South Africa?

- 10 In this dizzying combination of layers of texts and modes of representation, the use of multimodality and the interplay of levels of performance, as they operate for instance in the passage analysed above, require further investigation, to shed yet more light on the way in which Jarry’s text and, through him, Shakespeare and Elizabethan stage practices, can help us consider the possibilities open for the re-staging of Shakespeare, and for the theatre in general, in a post-TRC South Africa. The collaboration between Kentridge, Taylor, Orlin and the Handspring Puppet Company indeed seems to create on stage the “magic of performance” which Thurman wished for to rekindle Shakespeare’s spirit in classrooms and on stages in the “new South Africa” (Thurman 2015). What Thurman is seeking is not so different from the attention Kentridge pays to the interaction between levels of performance, as developed for instance in his foreword to the published play, in which he details how meaning was born through the juxtaposition of *Ubu*, played by a real actor, and the puppets standing for TRC witnesses (Taylor 2015a, xiv). When *Ubu* is straddling his dog as if it were a diminutive and grotesque horse, its triple heads stretched before him like ridiculous extensions coming out of the mere singlet and underwear he is wearing, he may look different from Jarry’s *Ubu*, but he embodies the same kind of comically hyperbolic and brutal virility,⁷ which is further debunked when other puppets, microphones this time, later insist on escaping his grasp and preventing him from delivering his speech. And he still has his pshitabrush, which, sadly, is not his only weapon in Taylor’s version of Jarry’s play. Pa *Ubu* looks even closer to Jarry’s figure when, in Act IV, he is visited by the puppet-like figure of Jarry’s *Ubu* taking shape on stage, life-size and clad like a member of the Ku Klux Klan but as black as Caliban, and talking to *Ubu* as if the latter were *his* puppet (Taylor 2015b, 50). Multimodality thus creates further links with the play’s hypotext, but also “generate[s] a whole series of [...] meanings that bec[o]me central to the play” (Taylor 2015a, xiii) as a rewriting and even a “reworking” (Homann 2015, 109) of Jarry and Shakespeare on a South African stage at the time of the TRC. This rewriting can be general (the *Ubu*-like shadow projected onto the screen behind Pa *Ubu* reveals his intrinsically violent nature) or denounce more topical South African targets (the projection of Vorster Square, the police headquarters in Johannesburg, illustrates very clearly what Ma *Ubu* is reading about when she finds the evidence incriminating Pa *Ubu* and refers to specific South African issues).
- 11 Kentridge speaks of it as “practical theatre work,” advocating “[a] faith in a practical epistemology in the theatre – trusting in and using the artifices and techniques of theatre to generate meaning” (Taylor 2015a, xiv). However, my contention is that the type of theatre work one watches with *Ubu and the Truth Commission* actually also goes back to the roots of Jarry’s text, which used puppetry (Béhar 2003, 215),⁸ as well as to the origins of Jarry’s own interest in Shakespeare, since he discovered several of his

plays at *Le Théâtre de l'Œuvre*, which often used puppets (Schuh 2008, 464). In fact, this further goes back to the roots of Renaissance theatre itself: it was not a theatre of verisimilitude or illusion (as we understand those terms nowadays) but of contrived codes and conventions,⁹ using all the dimensions in the theatre – horizontal and vertical, the proscenium and the back wall – just as can be seen in Kentridge's production of the play. The audience momentarily suspending their disbelief, it is acceptable that Niles is at the same time a former army kit, a handbag, a personal adviser, a crocodile puppet able to swim and catch up with Pa and Ma Ubu's boat, and a satire of Botha. Or that the squawks of the vulture and the projection on screen either explain what is happening on stage or contradict what is being said, or sometimes just cryptically challenge the audience, "somehow sage, resonant, while remaining curiously foreign" (Taylor 2015b, 49), in a rather Brechtian fashion (Davis 2000, 175).

- 12 If this rewriting and reworking of Jarry's play thus truly revives Renaissance practices, it simultaneously goes back to "the workshop tradition of play making" (Homann *et al.* 2015, 1; Crow 1996, 15), mixed with more Western traditions (if only through its intertextual references) in what is akin to what Hauptfleisch calls "hybrid" theatre (1997, 49; see as well Balme 1996, 65–67). Combining an elaborate *mise en scène* with a form of makeshift simplicity, it is therefore also literally hybrid (see scenographer Gerhard Marx's phrase, quoted by Homann 2015, 114). It is again reminiscent of workshop plays which had to make do with minimal subsidies and means, and seems apt to address issues in a South Africa where informal settlements have unfortunately proliferated. If workshop plays, often illegally involving racial collaborations, were then "ironically" (Homann *et al.* 2015, 3) "a successful strategy of overcoming one of the factors of apartheid" (Kentridge 1996, 145), it may be hoped that in twenty-first-century South Africa this revived, recycled way of performing Renaissance texts and other hypotexts – including South African practices – helps to build bridges between the arts on stage and the handicraft of road-sellers, and to denounce and redress remaining inequalities or, like junk artist Willie Bester's own "dogs of war" (2001), which look so similar to Brutus in the play, the violence still pervasive in society (see as well Mark Lewis (2021) and the recent Reclaiming Waste programme (IFAS, 2020)). Could recycling be seen as a form of rebirth?

The monster and the mirror: catharsis and/through scatology?

- 13 Such hopes may be undermined by the conspicuous absence of the word "Reconciliation" in the title of Taylor's play: it differs from Jarry's in that Ubu seems to plead guilty and almost asks for forgiveness in the last act, but it is no different in that he escapes scot-free. "In the burlesque mode that Jarry invents," Taylor writes, "there is no place for consequence" (2015a, II). Davis concurs, pointing out that "[t]he end of [Taylor's] play brings neither truth [...] nor reconciliation. There is, as Kentridge has said, 'no correct epiphany'" (Davis 2000, 176). Many have read this as a questioning of what the TRC could achieve; rather, I would contend that it can be read as a way of entering the process of "dialogic truth" called for by the TRC (later in its report, 1998, 110–14), as Taylor herself underlines in her introduction to the published play (2015a, III). The way in which it does so, however, remains intrinsically concerned with what the theatre can do as such, and in particular with the notion of catharsis. There are

thus plenty of images on the projection screen training attention onto the risk of exposure for *Ubu*, but also reflecting (mirror like) on the role of the audience, who are privy to scenes of alternating close intimacy and violent arguments between Pa and Ma *Ubu*, and to evocations of violence. The play questions whether spectators may want to look at that violence or wish for it to be represented in a more graphic and realistic way, as suggested when other, visual hypotexts are evoked, from Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* to Alex's eye in *A Clockwork Orange*. Many have thus commented on the "disturbing" (Blumberg and Walder 1999, 13) effect of a "theatre of displacement" (Graham 2009, 40) which "reflects the instability of any concept of truth" (Gilbert 2001, 27) and above all, seems "to rais[e] questions, refus[e] solutions, and insis[t] on spectatorial confrontation" (Blumberg and Walder 1999, 13). Despite its very scripted nature (the play was performed in more or less exactly the same way, down to the very cast, almost twenty years apart), Ralph Yarrow reads it as "not 'improvisatio[n]' in the most common sense" but "in the zone of the improvisatory[;] [it] take[s] us to places where we cannot quite put a name to what we experience" (2020, 161) – and his point is valid in so far as the "experience" of the performance of the play is concerned. In the way it uses layers of recycled hypotexts and revives modes of staging plays, it becomes itself almost a play within the play, and indeed it is this hyper-textuality, this hyper- and meta-theatricality, which exposes *Ubu* as a monster, like Hamlet's *Mouse-Trap*. Because *Ubu* is played by a real actor, and thanks to the play's multimodality (in particular Kentridge's drawing of himself as *Ubu* on the back screen), *Ubu* is also an embodiment of the banality of evil, while each spectator figures as a voyeur and as a "little perpetrator" who must accept his/her share of responsibility (Sanders 2002, 17).

- 14 Among those "artifices and techniques" pointed out by Kentridge, as quoted above (Taylor 2015a, xiv), what should be further highlighted is the very way in which the play does not just project what is hidden in *Ubu*'s mind, or use multimodality to reveal his misdeeds, but goes back as well to Jarry's scatological hypotext – itself no different from what one can find in Shakespeare (Béhar 2003, 55) – to debunk the character: in that sense, the play's hyper-textuality, multimodality and meta-theatricality can be compared to the obscene. It figuratively (through swearwords, for instance, or grotesque posturing) as well as literally puts forward what is normally hidden (*ob-scenus*), what may jolt the audience out of complacency because it breaks away from social norms as well as from standard theatrical conventions. Yet, as Jean-Christophe Abramovici underlines, the obscene itself may help "facilitat[e] these debates around the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Taylor 2015a, iii), as it is ultimately a type of representation which stresses the importance of finding a language in order to share anew this experience through speech: "To imagine its disappearance may be a way to keep up dreams of a return to grace of language, of shared words, of a possible restoration of our lost communities" (2006, 13; my translation).¹⁰

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NOTES

1. This article uses the notion of hypertextuality and its correlates as defined by Genette (1982).
2. The first workshops which led to the creation of the play were held at the end of 1996 (Taylor 2015a, vi); the play was first showcased at The Laboratory, The Market Theatre, on 26 May 1997 (xxi). The TRC had held its first hearings in April 1996.
3. It was made out of a suitcase given to Kentridge's father, a lawyer, by Bram Fischer at the Rivonia Trial, a suitcase being also "an ideal place for Pa Ubu to plant incriminating evidence when the time comes for him to distance himself from their actions" (Taylor 2015a, xviii).
4. It could be added that *Julius Caesar* is a Roman play whereas Taylor's play could be seen as a historical play of a kind, reporting on momentous events for the history of South Africa and the works of the TRC: the play certainly combines, questions, and rewrites genres.
5. *The Merchant of Venice* itself is certainly seen by post-colonial studies as a highly problematic play; see for instance Singh 2020, 24 and 41–46.
6. Taylor mentions having used a collage of a number of testimonies of perpetrators, without identifying them (Taylor 2015b, 50), but this piece clearly stands out.
7. Taylor alludes to the interest Kohler and Jones, the founders of the Handspring Puppet Company, had "as 'out' gay men [...] in exploring the staging of violent masculinities such as had dominated South African military culture" (Taylor 2015b, 47), and scenes such as the one analysed here obviously highlight these issues.
8. Even though Béhar and Schuh point out that Jarry was not necessarily advocating puppetry as such but an "abstract" kind of acting (Schuh 2008, 13) which resembled that of puppets, so that people would focus on the character rather than on the actor (Béhar 2003, 60; Schuh 2008, 469–71), as well as so as to reinforce comical effects by performing, as it were, Bergson's view that the comical derives from the automatic and mechanical aspect of what should be living ("something mechanical encrusted on the living," Bergson 2005, 18; see Béhar 2003, 216).
9. Jarry wrote an essay on his conception of the stage set in the theatre ("De l'inutilité au théâtre," n.d.), in which he refers to its connection with the Elizabethan stage tradition – or what he knew of it (for instance Jarry 1978, 317; Béhar 2003, 59).
10. "Penser sa disparition est peut-être une manière d'entretenir le rêve d'un retour en grâce du langage, d'une parole partagée, d'une restauration possible de nos communautés perdues."

ABSTRACTS

Ubu and the Truth Commission (Taylor 2015a) satirically rewrites *Macbeth*, yet also borrows more problematically from Jarry's farce and other Shakespearean texts. Coterminous with the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this rewriting of Renaissance texts leads us to

examine the relation between theatrical genres, the power of the theatre – between iteration and the singular nature of the theatrical performance – and its relation to the confessional mode.

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Keywords: Ubu and the Truth Commission, Alfred Jarry, Jane Taylor, William Shakespeare, rewriting

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