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Book Review

Kruger, Loren. *A Century of South African Theatre*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2020. 273+xi pages. ISBN: 978-1-3500-0800-7 (hbk); 978-1-3500-0801-4 (pbk); 978-1-3500-0803-8 (ePDF); 978-1-3500-0802-1 (eBook). £24.99

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Writing about theatre from South Africa is always compartmentalized: it is either focused as a book of protest plays, a report on the Township musicals, post-Apartheid theatre, specialised books on participatory theatre in South Africa, or a collection of plays. Even as recent as 1996, Antony Sher and Gregory Doran brought out a book on experimentation with Shakespeare in South Africa (*Woza Shakespeare: Titus Andronicus in South Africa*). It is therefore intellectually stimulating and educationally challenging to come across a book on South African theatre that interweaves historical and political forms and styles over a period of one hundred years of theatrical engagement. Loren Kruger's cultural history of theatre and performance is one such book.

This is a text that embraces and analyses theatre ranging from traditional performances, where 'Theatre' is not an accepted part of the living vocabulary but life itself, to modern and popular entertainment forms in physical and imagined spaces. And the performances of theatre in English, Afrikaans, and several of the other major languages in South Africa, to operas, musicals, concerts, pageants, sketches, and workshops, from private spaces to the public consciousness.

Divided into eight chapters, with a comprehensive Introduction and a Coda, this book builds on forty years of personal observations by the author as well as on published research about South African theatre to demonstrate the impact of theatre and other performances. The book covers African responses to British and pro-British pageants, such as the Emancipation Centenary of the abolition of British colonial slavery in

1934, discussed extensively in chapter one, to the rise of the African National Dramatic Movement and the works of Griffiths Motsieloa and Herbert Dhlomo. Chapter Three explores African National Theatres and Transnational Modernity as well as dramas from the 1950s that were staged to evoke a New South Africa, including such dramas as *Dingane* by Dhlomo, performed in Natal in 1954, and *King Kong* (1959). Subsequent chapters include 'Dry White Seasons: Advance and Retreat of the Afrikaner Ascendancy'; 'Dramas of Black Solidarity: Black Consciousness Movement and Beyond'; 'Spaces and Markets: Theatre as Testimony and Performance against Apartheid', which interrogates the role of the performing spaces under Apartheid; and 'Spring is Rebellious: Prospects and Retrospects in Post Anti-Apartheid Theatre'.

Chapter eight, the final chapter in this book, exposes the paradox and the importance of the unique South African constitution (1996) and its role in affording the performance of controversial plays and musicals that are critical of the government, such as workshops on HIV/Aids at the time of government's denial of its impact on South Africans, to the musical, *Marikana*, written and directed by Aubrey Sekhabi in 2014 to criticise the government's role in the massacre of thirty-four mineworkers at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana – all funded by the State, ironically, and staged at the State Theatre. The performance of *Marikana – the musical* is compared to that of Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali* in terms of relevance and political impact.

In conclusion, the author draws our attention to the historical connection between the genres of performance, the importance of languages and legacies in the development of South African theatre, the primal position of music, the high relevance of audiences, especially in the participatory nature of some of the genres of performance, and the fertile source that South Africa has proven to be for the development of world theatres.

The book ends with twenty-five pages of notes that supplement the already rich text. Highly recommended for students and scholars of South African theatre but also for the general lover of theatre, its writing, performances, and reception.