

# **The English Theatre of Hamburg**

*Established 1976*

Presents

# **APOLOGIA**

**by Alexi Kaye Campbell**

**STUDY GUIDE**

**Premiere on 13 February, 2020**

**Preview Performances at reduced prices on 10, 11 and 12 February**

**Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours**

**Matinee Performances Tuesdays and Fridays at 11.30 Hours  
beginning 18 February**

**The English Theatre of Hamburg**

**Lerchenfeld 14**

**22081 Hamburg**

**TICKETS:**

**(040) 2277089 (24 hour hotline)**

or [et-bo@englishtheatre.de](mailto:et-bo@englishtheatre.de)

or online: [www.englishtheatre.de](http://www.englishtheatre.de)

# The English Theatre of Hamburg

*Established in 1976*

The English Theatre will premiere **APOLOGIA** on 13 February, 2020, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 10, 11 and 12 February. You can use the cover of this publication to advertise the play in your school or workplace. Bookings have already started. The text of the play may be obtained at [theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk](mailto:theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk) or amazon.com. Teachers interested in being invited to a dress rehearsal of the play on 9 February at 19:30 should contact [marketing@englishtheatre.de](mailto:marketing@englishtheatre.de)

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## ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

Alexi Kaye Campbell was born in Athens in 1966 as Alexi Komondouros, to a Greek father and a British mother. Having spent his childhood in Greece he went to America as a young man, graduating from Boston University in English and American Studies. He spent a year in New York, waiting tables and taking acting lessons while working unpaid for an off-Broadway stage group. After moving to London he graduated in acting from the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Arts. For fifteen years he was a jobbing actor, appearing with the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court and the Shared Experience Theatre Group. On television he played roles in mystery dramas like **POIROT** and **A TOUCH OF FROST**. Alexi Kaye Campbell's debut play **THE PRIDE**, reflecting gay themes, was staged at the Royal Court Theatre in London, to critical acclaim, winning an Olivier award, before transferring to Broadway. In addition to **APOLOGIA** (Bush Theatre, 2009), his other plays include **THE FAITH MACHINE** (Royal Court Theatre, 2011) and **BRACKEN MOOR** (Shared Experience at the Tricycle Theatre, 2013). For over a decade Alexi has lived in London with his partner, the stage director Dominic Cooke, along with a cat named Wilbur. They describe themselves as leading "not very theatre-y lives."

## ***ABOUT THE PLAY***

**APOLOGIA** was recently a big hit in New York and London. In the play Kristin Miller, a renowned art historian, has invited her two sons and their girlfriends to her home to celebrate her birthday and the publication of her memoir called **APOLOGIA**, which she describes as a formal, written defense of one's opinions or conduct, not to be confused with the word "apology." She also invites her old friend Hugh, with whom Kristin participated in many political demonstrations in the 1960s and early 1970s. Kristin has remained a dedicated idealist and humanist. She has always endeavored to make life better for humanity and has little patience for those who do not share her views. Her husband, she claims, went along with her beliefs until he no longer had the stamina and dedication to keep up with her. He divorced Kristin and took with him their two sons, Peter and Simon, at ages nine and seven. After that, the boys were only allowed to visit their mother occasionally; and as adults they are still bitterly resentful that Kristin did not play a more important role in their lives. Kristin is appalled by her older son Peter's obsession with making money and, as a confirmed atheist, she is impatient with his girlfriend's religious beliefs. She cannot stand Simon's girlfriend, Claire, who is materialistic and makes big money on television as a soap opera star. In Kristin's mind they are "takers", not "givers." Interestingly, she seems to favor Simon, her younger son, who has failed to keep a job, and is coping with a mental breakdown. Kristin's friend Hugh understands her better than her sons do, but he also understands the resentment that they feel toward her. He does what he can to keep the celebration cordial, but with so many diverse views about the way of life they have each chosen, the evening turns into high drama.

## Summary of APOLOGIA

Time: The present

Setting: The kitchen of Kristin's cottage in the English countryside

### Act I, Scene 1

Kristin Miller, a renowned art historian, has invited her two sons, Peter and Simon and their girlfriends, Trudi and Claire, to her house for a celebration. She has also asked Hugh, an old friend, to join them. Kristin wants them to celebrate her birthday with her, but more important than that, she wants to celebrate the publication of her highly praised memoir, "Apologia."

Kristin feels strongly that for a life to be worthwhile, people should contribute something of value to the world. In her youth she and her good friend Hugh took part in political demonstrations, and she chose an active life of studying historical art in different parts of the world and bringing her knowledge to the public by writing books.

Peter and Trudi arrive an hour early and, although Kristin is upset because she has not had time to dress properly, she offers the couple some wine. An intellectual and an atheist, Kristin has little patience with Peter's girlfriend Trudi who has strong Christian beliefs; and she is disappointed in her son Peter because she feels his high paying job in a bank is totally self-centered. Strangely, she seems more sympathetic towards her son Simon (not yet present) who has tried his hand at writing, but has become addicted to drugs and alcohol and repeatedly tries but fails to free himself of their hold on him.

Kristin's large kitchen is full of interesting and beautiful objects that she has collected on her travels. It is in here that she plans for her guests to sit at an extra-long dining table and enjoy a roasted chicken and vegetable dinner. They end up, however, calling out for Chinese food because the faulty oven is not heating properly.

Trudi presents Kristin with a gift and wishes her a happy birthday. The gift is an African tribal mask that Trudi fell in love with when she and Peter were in Liberia. Its long face and broad forehead are both beautiful and disturbing. Trudi says she bought it for Kristin because she knows she likes beautiful objects of art. She points out that it is the real thing, not like the ones they sell at the airport.

Kristin finds the mask impressive but, as an art historian, wants to know its "significance, history, function and its life." She tells Trudi that its original purpose was definitely not decorative, so it seems disrespectful for it to be in her house as a decorative object. Peter gives his mother a disapproving look because Trudi's feelings are being hurt, so Kristin tones down her rhetoric and expresses her thanks for the unusual gift, adding that she has a book on African tribal art that might have information about the mask.

When Trudi excuses herself to go to the bathroom, Peter tells Kristin he thinks Trudi is the right one for him. He is

angered when his mother's only reaction is that she approves of his choice because Trudi is of childbearing age. She asks her son if his bank is still raping the Third World. Peter tells his mother to stop moralizing because she knows nothing about his work. Kristin replies that she knows that he is with the "takers" and not the "givers" and that she wishes he would find something to do that would make her proud of him. When Peter asks about his brother Simon, Kristin admits that he has left his job and is having a serious mental breakdown. She blames Simon's mental state on his girlfriend Claire, a television "soap actress," who has "something missing in her."

Trudi returns and tells Kristin how much she loves her house because it is so artistic. Later, when Kristin is out of earshot, Trudi tells Peter that his mother is very glamorous, but Peter says, "She's a bloody nightmare" and that she is "opinionated, didactic and dictatorial."

When Kristin returns to the kitchen she asks Peter to go and perform a household task that she cannot do herself. He leaves the room and the two women set the table. Trudi tells Kristin that she met Peter at a Christian prayer meeting. She adds that Peter had come just to see what it was like. Kristin is appalled because she thought she had raised her sons not to have faith in "obsolete and patriarchal myths."

When Trudi asks what Peter's deceased father was like, Kristin replies that he was "irascible, moody and manipulative." She goes on to say that he was very, very lucky because he had a massive stroke and the "bastard" died in a matter of seconds. Trudi concludes that Kristin is still very angry with him, but Kristin says she used to be but she let it go because it was killing her. Trudi advises Kristin that forgiveness might help her, that it can be very liberating.

Peter returns and Kristin tells him they have been talking about his prayer meetings. She says the word "prayer" is bad enough but the expression "prayer meeting" is absolutely terrifying.

Trudi asks Kristin what the meaning is of the title of her book, Apologia. Kristin answers that it means a formal, written defense of one's opinions or conduct, not to be confused with the word "apology."

### Act I, Scene 2 (An hour later)

Peter and Trudi have been joined in the kitchen by the new arrivals: Claire, Simon's girlfriend, and Hugh, Kristin's old friend. Simon is the only one still missing, and Kristin is in her bedroom changing her clothes.

When Trudi asks Claire about the TV soap opera she performs in, Claire tells her that it is not really a soap opera. "It's more of a serialized drama that follows various people's lives." She proudly announces that her contract has been renewed for another year. She did have to think twice about continuing to work on television because it has forced her to turn down some good theatre work, but she decided to stay with the lucrative job on

television.

Hugh asks how Simon is doing and Claire replies, "Not good." She is concerned because when he finished reading his mother's memoir that morning, and realized that he and his brother were not mentioned in it, he threw it against the wall and exclaimed, "Why the fuck did she have children?" Kristin returns to the kitchen, having showered and dressed. She hears the last part of what Claire has said and asks, "Why did who have children?" To protect his good friend's feelings, Hugh says quickly, "Anna Karenina." Claire supports the lie by saying, "We were talking about books." Hugh tells Kristin that Chinese food has been ordered so she needn't worry about the meal.

Kristin asks Claire where Simon is, and Claire says he "might" be joining them later. This does not satisfy Kristin. She wants to know why Claire, who knows the condition Simon is in, did not bring him in her car. Claire blurts out that she is his girlfriend, not his baby sitter! But hoping to keep the atmosphere calm, Claire offers Kristin a gift and wishes her a happy birthday. Kristin opens the gift to find a face cream called "Transformative Rejuvenation." Claire claims it works miracles and that it is affective on even the toughest skin. Kristin is not impressed.

Hugh gets a bottle of champagne from the fridge and opens it. When everyone's glass is filled, Hugh delivers a long toast, almost a eulogy, to his dear friend Kristin. He then gives Kristin a framed photograph of the two of them at a political demonstration in their youth. Everyone crowds around to look at the picture. Hugh says, "I suppose we just wanted to change the world." Claire regards the photo and makes the mistake of saying it's "hilarious." Kristin asks her what it is about the demonstrations in the early 70s that she finds so hilarious. Unaware she is asking for trouble, Claire remarks about "the clothes, the hair, and the raging idealism" of the time. Kristin is deeply disturbed by Claire's making light of a time when she and Hugh were seriously trying to make the world a better place.

Claire quickly adds that she knows that Kristin was the real thing back in the 70s and that all her life she has given everything she has, but she can't help mentioning that a lot of the demonstrators were just having fun and today claim that they brought civil rights to America. Claire is digging herself into a deep hole with her remarks, but Kristin is saving her ammunition for later. Right now she is primarily concerned about Simon, worried that he might get drunk and try to drive his car to join them.

The doorbell rings and Kristin and Hugh go to collect the Chinese food. While they are gone Claire takes the opportunity to express her feeling that it is scandalous that there is no mention of Kristin's two sons in her memoir. Peter is also irate about the absence of their names.

Kristin and Hugh return to the kitchen and Kristin takes

the cartons of food out of the bags and puts them on the table. Trudi gets serving spoons and everyone sits. Peter gets more wine and fills all the glasses. Trudi compliments Claire on her beautiful designer dress. Kristin, who does not appreciate people who waste big money on material things, presses Claire to tell them how much it cost. Claire finally admits that it cost seven hundred pounds. After a hard week of television work she decided to "splash out" and buy herself something nice.

Trudi asks Kristin if she has ever watched Claire in the serialized drama. When Kristin realizes that Trudi means the soap, she admits to having seen it once and couldn't understand why people watch it. She surmises that it is just about making money because there is no substance to the program. She asks Claire sarcastically if she does the work because she is "trying to communicate something which will improve the world." Or if it is "simply that you enjoy having all eyes on you a great deal of the time?" Kristin, a devout feminist, adds that the one time she saw Claire in a real play, Ibsen's "The Doll House," she appreciated her work because the play questioned what it meant to be a woman at that particular point in time. When Claire claims that she is an artist, Kristin disagrees and protests that real artists are the instigators of social change. It's those voices, she maintains, that save us from the rampant stupidity of religion on the one hand and vacuous consumerism on the other.

Trudi stands up during the heated conversation and accidentally knocks over a bottle of red wine on Claire's seven hundred pound designer dress. Trudi is distraught. She apologizes profusely and pours water on the dress using a napkin to try to rub out the stain. But it is no use, the dress is ruined. Kristin remarks coldly, "I bet you now wish you'd invested the seven hundred pounds in a slightly wiser way."

Trudi is terribly sorry about staining the beautiful dress, but Claire magnanimously tells her not to worry. She knows it was just an accident and no one is to blame. Then she turns on Kristin and says, "How dare you criticize my choices? How dare you sit there in judgement of me? Kristin replies, "I only do it because I expect more from you." Claire retorts by saying, "You are a fucking dinosaur, Kristin." But this doesn't stop Kristin, who goes on to complain that Claire is not only inadequate in her choice of work but also in her lack of attention to her boyfriend Simon. She blames her for Simon's mental breakdown.

Peter interrupts, saying that he doesn't believe that Claire's choice of work is the real problem at present. Instead, it is the question that he and his brother Simon both have of Kristin: Why did she make no mention of them in her memoir? Kristin protests that it is a work memoir, not a family memoir, but that does not satisfy Peter. He and Simon have been deeply hurt by the omission of their names, as if they didn't even exist in what is supposed to be their mother's life story. Kristin replies that she is sorry if the book neglected him in some way. Peter is outraged by this. He protests that he wasn't just

“neglected in some way.” He and Simon were not even mentioned!

Then Peter comes to the big question that he and his brother want their mother to answer: Why did Kristin “have children if she wasn’t prepared to do the job properly?” Kristin wants to postpone their dispute until there is more time to discuss it at length. However, she does admit to Peter that from his perspective it is right that she has failed him in every possible way. But she is appalled that he never used his imagination to understand how she felt when their father took her two boys away from her without even telling her.

Claire’s mobile rings. Kristin, thinking it is hers, picks up the phone by mistake. She listens, and then hands the phone to Claire. She tells Claire that the caller said, “...he’s booked the room for Thursday night and he can’t wait to fuck you up the ass.” Then she leaves the room. Claire tries, but fails to make an excuse for what the caller said. It is clear she is cheating on her boyfriend Simon and perhaps has had enough of him. Terribly embarrassed now, she leaves the room, taking her phone with her. Sickened by all he has heard, Hugh rushes to the bathroom because he feels he may have to throw up.

Peter and Trudi are left alone. She soon begins to quietly cry. All the talk has overwhelmed her. She says that she started thinking about Jesus while people were going after each other, and she wonders if she loves Jesus “just because he makes life simpler.” She runs out of the room in tears, and Peter runs after her. The kitchen is now empty.

Simon enters the house. His right hand is bleeding and he has wrapped a handkerchief around it. He looks around, wondering where everyone is. Then he sits at the kitchen table.

### **Act II, Scene 1**

It is the middle of the night. Kristin has joined Simon at the kitchen table. She is looking at the wounded palm of his hand. Simon explains that on his way to the house he fell and put his hand on some broken glass on the ground as he was trying to break his fall. Kristin dabs disinfectant onto his palm and removes the shards of glass one by one. She tells him they had a heated discussion in his absence and it was primarily about what is important in life. He already knows what happened, he tells her, because Claire phoned and told him all about it.

Simon says he is not surprised that Peter’s girlfriend, Trudi, is a Christian because religion is something that his mother rejects. It is also no wonder that he, himself, is with Claire, someone who is comfortable living a life that has brought her commercial success, another thing that his mother despises. He adds that because of his mother’s absence in his life he has always been disturbed and felt a lack of “self-worth.” He accuses Kristin of abandoning him when he was seven years old. She claims that she didn’t abandon him, that his father took him away from her. But he points out that she never came for him and Peter. She stopped being their mother and became some-

one that they just spent holidays with. Added to that, Kristin was always so completely absorbed her art history work that she ignored her responsibility as a mother even when her children visited her.

As Kristin continues to remove shards of glass from Simon’s hand, he explains that Peter rebelled by choosing a money making profession that his mother would obviously disapprove of. He himself, the weaker of the two, became “broken” and dependent on alcohol and drugs. He, like Peter, wants to know why Kristin had children if she was not prepared to care for them, and they are both distraught that she didn’t even mention them in her memoir. Kristin finds it hard to believe that her life of hard work and dedication to the highest principles could have been in some way immoral. She takes the last piece of glass out of his hand and covers the wound with a plaster. Then she says she is tired and goes to her bedroom.

Simon remains at the table and stares at the photograph of his mother and Hugh when they were young and demonstrating to make the world a better place.

### **Act II, Scene 2**

The next morning everyone is preparing to leave. Claire tells Trudi she thinks she is lucky to have her faith. Hugh agrees that faith must help in a time when dictators and populists are on the rise. Sounding more and more like Kristin now, Trudi goes on to say that when people look back in five hundred years and “excavate or whatever, all they’ll find is a few swimming pools and a whole lot of expensive clothes.” They’ll be amazed at the wealth they find, but they’ll wonder what people did, “what the legacy of all that phenomenal wealth was.”

Peter comes in and asks Trudi to help him find his toothbrush. As they leave the kitchen, Kristin comes in and asks if Simon is still in bed. Claire replies that Simon left the house early in the morning. She adds that they spent the whole night discussing their relationship and made the decision to separate.

Hugh goes to his bedroom to look for his car keys, and Claire and Kristin are left alone in the kitchen. Claire tells Kristin that Simon said that the only reason he was attracted to her was that she was the “polar opposite” of Kristin. She tells Kristin about her childhood, that her father went bankrupt and eventually left her and her mother to live on social benefits. She believes that that experience might have led to her pursuit of commercial success in television. To some extent she admires Kristin for the way she holds onto what she believes in, but she thinks Kristin’s “idealism has turned into hardness.” Kristin brushes Claire off by saying, “so much for pop psychology.”

Trudi, Peter and Hugh return to the kitchen. As they all prepare to leave, Claire surprises Kristen by giving her a kiss on the cheek. Then Trudi tells everyone she wants to share a secret with them: she and Peter are engaged to be married! She adds that they will go to the Middle East on their honeymoon and visit places such as the Holy Land.

Kristin, a confirmed atheist, is not impressed by what she refers to as a “religious” holiday. Nevertheless, Kristin congratulates the couple.

Before they leave, Trudi asks Kristin if she can have a look at her library. Happy to show her the place where she writes her books, Kristin takes Trudi to her study. While they are gone, Hugh takes a moment to chastise Peter for treating his own mother so viciously the previous evening. Hugh understands that he and Simon have a right to reproach their mother for what happened in the past. But he says he was with her when they were demonstrating for a better world and he saw in Kristin’s eyes that she was a genuine “visionary.” He doubts that Peter believes that people like his mother actually exist, “people who care in a particular way,” who are intensely determined to develop their talents and use them for the good of mankind. He explains that Kristin is not able to understand people like Peter and Simon who can only complain and not see the bigger picture.

When Kristin and Trudi return, Peter goes to get his and Trudi’s overnight bag. Trudi tells Kristin how impressed she is by her many beautiful books, and she wants to thank her for all the work she has done in her life for women’s rights and everything else. Hugh is delighted to hear that Trudi sees Kristin the way he sees her, and he is hopeful that she will influence Peter in such a way that he will come around to understanding his mother as she does. Hugh says good-bye and leaves.

Kristin has been leafing through a book on African masks that she brought from her library. She comes upon a picture of a mask that is similar to the one that Trudi gave

her. It is also from Liberia and represents the social and political interests of women. She is pleased to read that the wearers of this mask were people who believed that the well-being of the individual depends on the well-being of the entire community.

Trudi believes she understands now why Kristin couldn’t put the names of her sons in the memoir. It was because of her inconsolable feelings over the loss of her sons, she says. Kristin doesn’t respond. Peter returns and attempts to apologize for his behavior toward his mother, but Kristin tells him that he needn’t bother because he said what he had to say and she can take it. But she feels the need to tell them the heartbreaking story of the day that her husband took her sons away without any notice. When she discovered her sons were missing, she “ran around the streets like some mad woman” looking for them. She believes that her husband took the boys and divorced her because he found her independent voice threatening.

Peter and Trudi depart on fairly good terms with Kristin, but Trudi runs back to speak to her once more. Trudi explains that when she spoke about forgiveness the night before, she wasn’t talking about Kristin forgiving her sons’ father. After she says this Kristin is silent, but Trudi waits until she feels that Kristin understands that she was talking about the need for Kristin to forgive herself. When she feels that Kristin has understood this, Trudi embraces her, but Kristin stands there as if frozen. Trudi joins Peter outside, and Kristin is left alone. After a long silence she opens her mouth and moans like an animal in distress. She trembles, then slowly calms down and clutches the mask against her chest as she stares ahead.

### TRUE/FALSE EXERCISE

1. In the 60s and early 70s, Kristin took part in political demonstrations to make the world a better place.
2. Kristin is now a successful art historian.
3. Her sons, Peter and Simon, are furious with Kristin because she did not invite them to her birthday party.
4. Kristin’s husband divorced her and took their sons away with him when they were 9 and 7 years old.
5. Trudi, Peter’s girlfriend, gives Kristin a portrait of Jesus.
6. Kristin is impatient with Trudi’s strong Christian beliefs.
7. Simon’s girlfriend, Claire, annoys Kristin due to her materialistic attitude.
8. Peter and Simon resent their mother for neglecting them while she pursued her own political ideals and career.
9. Kristin believes that her son Peter and the bank he works for are benefiting the Third World.
10. Simon is convinced his emotional problems and dependence on alcohol and drugs are the result of his mother’s absence in his life.

#### Answer Key

1. True. 2. True. 3. False (They are furious because she did not mention them in her memoir). 4. True. 5. False (She gives Kristin an African tribal mask). 6. True. 7. True. 8. True. 9. False (She believes they are robbing the Third World). 10. True.

### INTERPRETIVE EXERCISE

1. Do you think Peter and Simon are completely justified in their criticism of Kristin’s choices and conduct in life? Is she able to adequately defend herself?
2. Describe the problems of dealing with a professional and private life at the same time.
3. Would you choose self-development over responsibility to spouse and family as Kristin did? Why or why not?